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# WELS Historical Institute Journal

FALL 1988



WELS Historical Institute  
**Journal**

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2 • FALL 1988

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The *WELS Historical Institute Journal* is the official publication of the WELS Historical Institute, 2929 N. Mayfair Road, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53222-4398. The *Journal* is published semi-annually in spring and fall, and is distributed to members upon receipt of the annual dues or by an annual subscription of \$10.00 (see membership application on page 47). Printed by Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Copyright 1988 by WELS Historical Institute.

Cover photographs:

Two views of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary dedication, Sunday, August 18, 1929.



*The seal of the WELS Historical Institute depicts Salem Lutheran Landmark Church, built in 1863 on the site of the "birthplace of the Wisconsin Synod." (Salem now serves as the museum of the Wisconsin Synod.) In 1850 the Wisconsin Synod was born; in 1981 the WELS Historical Institute officially came into being. The German inscription is a reminder of the Synod's German roots. The words mean "Remember the former time." The cross reminds us of Jesus Christ, the Lord of all history.*

## The President's Report

ONE OF THE WELS HISTORICAL INSTITUTE'S key functions is to hold at least one meeting a year in which to conduct its business and offer presentations of historical interest.

Since its initial meeting in October 1981 the institute has held thirteen more meetings (two each year except 1986). These gatherings have taken place at various sites — in Minnesota and Michigan, as well as in Wisconsin. Many of the presentations given have appeared in the journal. (The two from the spring 1988 meeting are in this issue.) Attendance at the meetings has averaged 94.

The fall 1988 meeting was held on October 23 at St. Peter Lutheran Church, Helenville, Wisconsin, in conjunction with that church's 140th anniversary. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Prof. Edward C. Fredrich II, a son of the Helenville congregation, delivered a paper entitled "The Helenville Forty-Eighters and Their Neighbors." Attendance was 56.

The meeting included election of officers to the institute board of directors. Dr. Arnold Lehmann was reelected and Miss Charlotte Sampe was elected for a first term. A special thanks is due Mrs. Margaret Lehninger who served on the board as secretary since 1981. During the past seven years she donated many hours for mailings, letters, keeping up the membership list and numerous other jobs. Margaret chose not to run for reelection this fall.

The annual treasurer's report showed a balance of \$17,875 in the operating account. There is an additional \$3,780 in a museum furnishings account and almost \$10,000 has been collected for the archives project (over and above the \$75,940 that came from special grants). This still leaves us with a shortfall of about \$20,000 for the archives. Until we can make it up we have borrowed the money from the synod.

Archival material is now on the shelving in the new archives. Archivist Martin Westerhaus is in the process of taking inventory and indexing the material. There is plenty of room for much more material. At a bare minimum the archives should have records (dedication, anniversary booklets, etc.) from every WELS congregation. I look forward to the day when the archives will be a treasure house of synodical history.

Archival material, financial support and awareness of the WELS Historical Institute depend on *you*. Please continue to support the institute. Introduce others to it, perhaps with a gift membership. Pastors, promote an interest in WELS history and the institute in your congregations. Teachers, do the same in your schools. Have you considered a tour of Salem Lutheran Landmark Church for your church or school organization?

One other item to report: The spring 1989 meeting will be held on Sunday, May 7, 2:30 P.M. at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin. Dr. August R. Suelflow of the Concordia Historical Institute will speak on the significance of archives in the life and work of the church. The meeting will include the official dedication of the synod archives.

Thank you for supporting the institute, and thanks be to God for his blessings upon this vital agency!

In Christ, the Lord of history,  
Roland Cap Ehlke

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# The Seminary's Mequon Site Before 1928

Daniel N. Balge

THIS ARTICLE DEALS WITH THE HISTORY of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's 80-acre campus up to 1928, when the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States purchased the property. It is largely an adaptation of a 1985 seminary senior church history paper entitled, "A Brief Pre-Seminary History of the Western Half of the Northeastern Quarter of Section 22, Town of Mequon." Some bits of information gleaned at the State Historical Society in Madison and from recent correspondence with Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Wille have supplemented that 1985 paper. This article, as did the 1985 effort, claims only tangential connection with serious church history, but it is hoped that this presentation will be of interest to those who now, or once did, study here, teach here, live here, work here, visit here and who love those 80 acres.

## I. Indians

The history of the seminary land before Columbus would be but common sense speculation based on general accounts of Indian life in Wisconsin if it had not been for an archeological dig conducted within three stones' throw of the campus. The March 1958 dig revealed history that is not only before Columbus, but also before Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The preliminary digging was done by three children, Lois, Bonnie and Peter Blume, as they played in a sand pit behind the house of their grandfather, Carl Blume, at 401 Main Street, just north of the former A & W restaurant, now a Chinese restaurant. The children discovered skeletal remains and drew immediate newspaper attention. The Milwaukee Public Museum commissioned a dig under the direction of Robert E. Ritzenthaler. Ritzenthaler described his project in the June 1958 issue of *The Wisconsin Archeologist*.<sup>2</sup>

He found the site much disturbed by the activity of the children. Nevertheless, the work, done just east of the interurban right of way, provided insight into the lives of people who lived in the seminary area so long ago. Three graves were uncovered along with numerous artifacts. Only one of the three was not already opened by the time the museum crew arrived. They lay three feet down in a sandy ridge, which had been

trimmed some four feet by earlier bulldozing. Original burial depth then had been about seven feet. Understandably, there was no evidence that a mound had been there.

What made the Thiensville dig particularly interesting to the archeologists was the use of red ocher, an oxide of iron called hematite, in the burial process. The bones and artifacts of the site were covered with the red ocher, though much of it had been washed off before the museum crew began its work. The ocher had stained the bones deep red. At the time red ocher burials had been reported at fewer than a dozen sites in Wisconsin. Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Ontario have also known examples of Red Ocher culture, but these aborigines seem to have operated mainly in the area of southern Lake Michigan from southeastern Wisconsin to southwestern Michigan. Historians and archeologists place the period of the Red Ocher culture between 1500 B.C. and 100 B.C. Radiocarbon dating of the Thiensville material put those artifacts into a time frame between 1000 B.C. and 100 B.C.<sup>3</sup>

The two disturbed graves were those of two males about whom little could be learned because only partial skeletons were recovered. The third, however, was that of a woman about 18 years old (her wisdom teeth had nearly erupted). Her skull was especially interesting because it was extremely wide with a cephalic index of 88.<sup>4</sup> (Cephalic index is the ratio of the greatest width of a skull to the greatest length multiplied by 100.) All the bones were excellently preserved both by the good drainage of the sand ridge and by the preservative quality of the red ocher.

The Thiensville artifacts, along with the evidence from elsewhere, offer some insight into the life style of these people who walked and worked the seminary land more than 2000 years ago. Ritzenthaler's crew discovered many stone points and scraper knives, five distinctive "turkey-tail" blades, copper awls and beads and flat marine shell beads and enough tubular shell beads for two or three necklaces.<sup>5</sup> Scholars piece together a picture of the Red Ocher Indians as people who lived in small groups maintaining an economy based on hunting. Apparently they traveled or at least traded widely, for their arrowheads and blades were generally made of hornstone from southern Indiana. They used shell beads from either the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean and they obtained copper from the Lake Superior region.

Some speculate that these first known residents of the seminary area were part of a transitional group between the Late Archaic and Early Woodland eras in Wisconsin History. This speculation is based on the presumed relative primitiveness of a culture from which no pottery has been found, whose burials were usually in sand (easier digging for people without a lot of tools), and whose highest form of craftsmanship was the turkey-tail blade, so called because of its resemblance at the haft end of dressed domestic fowl<sup>6</sup>.

Indians lived in this area from the time of the Red Ocher people until the first whites moved into the area. All were of Algonquin stock — the Sac and Fox, the Chippewa and the Ottawa. Apparently the Menomonees dominated the region between Lake Michigan and the Milwaukee River and the Potawatomi used the territory west of the river.<sup>7</sup> Solomon Juneau, often credited with founding Milwaukee, seems to have moved among and traded with the Indians of this vicinity. His activity from 1818 into the 1830s did much to foster good relations between the Indians and the whites who began to encroach in the 1830s.<sup>8</sup>

In Juneau's era the Potawatomi occupied the land on which Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary now stands. Among the Mequon-Thiensville archives at the Weyenberg Library are notes for a history of the area which record the Potawatomi as living along the banks of Pigeon Creek, the Mequon-sissippi, amid a dense hardwood forest, especially in the area where the gravel pits presently are, north of Freistadt Road.<sup>9</sup> Removing the unnatural boundary of Freistadt Road one can easily extend the Potawatomi habitation onto seminary land. The northern, low end of the campus is similar in terrain to the gravel pits area and is barely 100 yards from the southern edge of the pits.

Various topographical features afford the opportunity to speculate as to why the locale was advantageous to a Potawatomi settlement, perhaps also for the Red Ocher people. The ridge which crosses the seminary campus from east to west and which then veers north just west of the property, continues for more than a mile before declining north of Highland Road. It still provides shelter from the southerly and westerly winds. There is occasionally a noticeable difference in weather between the top of seminary hill and the lagoon area. The ridge's slopes are still home to much wildlife.

Pigeon Creek hugs the base of the ridge on seminary land and for a third of a mile upstream from the seminary. Ample water was available, supplemented by numerous springs which still flow. The modern annual runs of sucker and northern pike which still occur in Pigeon Creek each spring are apparently only a vague hint of the spawning migrations that used to happen in the Milwaukee River system. Early settlers along the Milwaukee used to catch fish by the wagon load.<sup>10</sup> The Indian village nestled in the crook of the L-shaped ridge was very close to the trail which ran between Chicago and Green Bay and later became the present Green Bay Road. Swifter transportation was readily available on the river.

That Indians used the present seminary land is beyond doubt. Edgar Wille, who was born and raised on these eighty acres, in 1985 recalled finding occasional arrowheads and the like as a boy. (He also remembered his father, Charles, first on the land in 1871, reminiscing about Indians in the area.) In the fall of 1981 seminary maintenance workers dug up a water-smoothed igneous rock which had been partially chipped into what appears to have been an attempt at an ax or hatchet head. The discovery was incidental to drain tile work being done along Seminary Drive on the eastern side of the hill about 30 yards uphill from the lagoon and about ten yards below the present elm tree. In late summer 1984 seminary workers came across what appears to have been a scraping tool while "picking rock" on the seminary's southeastern corner across Buntrock Avenue. Occasional filling and grading on the hill and much plowing and planting in the field may have moved the artifacts from their original resting places.

East of the river the Menomonees gave up their lands by treaty on February 8, 1831. The Potawatomi ceded their region in a treaty made September 26, 1833, reserving occupancy for three more years. The agreement was not ratified, however, until February 21, 1835 and Potawatomi rights continued until February 21, 1838. The tribal units moved west then, though individuals continued to live in the area for many years.<sup>11</sup>

## II. Willet Ownership

The early 1830s saw the first survey of roads in the area. In 1839 the Chicago-Green Bay Indian trail was hacked wider into a thoroughfare two rods wide. By 1836 settlers had put up shanties where the Green Bay Trail crossed the Mequon-sissippi, close to the present stoplights in downtown Thiensville.<sup>12</sup> A historian of Mequon's early history describes the region this way:

This whole territory, particularly from the high hills to our west to Lake Michigan, was covered with heavy growth of timber. This was particularly true of the Town of Mequon. On the high ground the timber consisted of oak, maple, birch, beech, elm, basswood and butternut, with occasional clusters of poplar, ironwood, ash and sumac, and bordering the streams and ponds there were alders, willows and creeping water vines. Many of the swamps contained tamarack and cedar. Wild grapes grew profusely and in sections which had been invaded by fire or severe winds blackberries and raspberries abounded.

This territory had much game and the rivers and streams were full of fish. The game consisted of deer, bear, gray squirrels, occasionally a black squirrel, foxes, wildcats, raccoon, partridge, ducks and other wild fowl and pigeons. At certain seasons of the year the pigeons were so thick that they darkened the sun and their numbers were such that in some instances they broke down the limbs of trees. There were also wild bees, mink, muskrats and beaver.

... This whole country was said to have been honeycombed with underground water courses which gushed out of the ground in then never failing springs on every hand.<sup>13</sup>

This was the wilderness that greeted the first white man to own the land now occupied by Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. His name was John Willet (Willet or Willit). He was 34 years old, married to Margaret, age 32, and they had a daughter, Mary, age three. Willet came from New York and appears to have been part of the Yankee migration to Wisconsin. Margaret had been born in Nova Scotia; Mary in New York. In the Register of Deeds office at Port Washington is the August 14, 1839 record of Willet's early land transactions in this area. On March 13, 1839 he bought the northwestern corner of section 26, Town of Mequon, 146 20/100 acres. This is the area bounded to the north by modern-day Mequon Road and to the west (roughly) by present-day Cedarburg Road. Presumably the river's bisecting the property kept it from being a pure quarter section.

Willet paid \$182.75 at the government's standard rate of \$1.25 per acre. Within a few months he had sold it to William Ferdinand Opitz for \$750. Also recorded on August 14, 1839 was that Willet had bought from the government 80 acres, the eastern half of the northeastern quarter of section 22, the 80 acres directly east of the seminary campus encompassing the present Orchard Street subdivision, St. Cecilia's property, the Williamsburg apartments and the area between and including the railroad tracks and Main Street. He quickly sold this land to Separts F. Weber for \$145.



Apparently Willet had his eye on the 80 acres immediately west of the Weber land. On May 13, 1840 the Register of Deeds recorded that John Willet had purchased the western half of the northeastern quarter of section 22, the present seminary land. It seems he paid the standard government price. Judging from the previous description of Mequon at that time, Willet had his work cut out for him as he turned forest into farm.

Willet seems to have taken part in community affairs. He attended the first organizational meeting of Washington County on August 13, 1840. At that time Washington County included all of the present-day Washington and Ozaukee Counties, but was populated by only 343 inhabitants. In March 1842 Willet was sending Mary to school and was himself a trustee of school district number 3.<sup>14</sup>

It was very much a frontier existence at this time. October 3, 1842 a \$3 bounty was paid to a local resident for a wolf scalp. A history of early Mequon quotes the autobiography of Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice William H. Timlin who was born to an Irish family one-half mile west of the Willet farm in 1852, and describes life in the area this way:

There was plenty to eat, plenty of fuel and shelter, but wearing apparel, books, tools, ornaments and weapons were difficult to get. People made their own clothes and shoes. One-twentieth or more of the settlers had looms. The women made the clothing. A surprising number of settlers could make shoes for themselves and family. The provision market was always glutted. Forest products were almost unsalable. Everyone made maple sugar. Wages were about \$6 to \$12 a month and board was ordinary compensation for labor. Beer did not make its appearance until about 1857. Settlers were very expert in the use of the axe. They could build a house, put on a roof, put in windows and make furniture with an axe and an auger.<sup>15</sup>

While John and Margaret Willet lived on the future seminary property, a son, Aaron, was born to them in 1844 and a daughter, Margaret, on May 12, 1850. Aaron Willet apparently served with the 1st Cavalry from the Town of Grafton in the Civil War.<sup>16</sup> It appears that Willet had made something of his land by the time he sold it in 1855. Provisions for the sale make mention of buildings, pasture and fields for planting. He had carved a farm out of the wilderness.

### III. Mooney Ownership

On October 26, 1855 Lawrence Mooney bought the Willet farm for \$3000. Written into the deed were the following provisions: that the Willets retain full possession of the buildings on the premises until April 1 of the next year, that the Willets be permitted to pasture their cattle on the land wherever there had not been fall planting, that until April 1 the Willets be permitted to gather necessary firewood from fallen timber and that the part of the land leased to Frederick van Alten by the Willets be leased to him by the Mooneys.

Lawrence Mooney was 56 when he came to Town of Mequon. He was born in Ireland in 1799, apparently emigrated to Canada where he married Bridget Roddy and entered the United States at Detroit in October (probably) 1855. (The brief notecard of his immigration in Port Washington lists the

year as 185\_ .) The 1860 federal census listed these residents of the future seminary hill: Lawrence, age 60; Canadian-born Bridget, age 60; their Canadian-born children, Michael, 19, Lawrence, 17, and Elise, 21; Irish-born Ellen Barns, age 110 (sic); and also Wisconsin-born Ann Timlin, age 12, the sister of the future judge. Their father, Edward Timlin, had apparently deserted the family<sup>17</sup> and it's not improbable that the Mooneys took her in as help.

Also in 1856 (January 24) Lawrence Mooney purchased land adjacent to the present seminary land, 40 acres in a narrow strip running from the north end of the western lotline west along modern Freistadt Road to modern Wauwatosa Road. This marked the only time when the seminary parcel was part of a larger piece of land owned by one man. This 120-acre unit remained one piece until 1868.

Another son, Richard Mooney, age 26, and his young family lived, worked and paid taxes on the 40-acre strip from 1857 to 1864. (Lawrence, Sr. paid them from 1865 to '68.) Many of the Richard Mooney clan are buried in St. Francis Cemetery on Pioneer Road just west of Wauwatosa Road. Edward Mooney, probably another son of Lawrence, Sr., bought the 40-acre strip on October 22, 1868 for only \$800 (Lawrence, Sr. had paid \$1800 in 1856) and sold it in less than a year for \$2800.

The 1860 census offers a glimpse into the lives of the people who lived on seminary hill at that time. At the time 70 acres were listed as improved, ten as unimproved. Very likely these portions correspond to 70 acres of crop and pasture land south of the stream and ten acres of swampy, perhaps wooded, land on the north side of the creek. On his land Lawrence Mooney raised 450 bushels of wheat, 100 of Indian corn, 360 of oats, 100 of Irish potatoes and eight tons of hay. The Mooneys also made 100 pounds of maple sugar. (One huge maple in the northwestern corner of the seminary property may be a remnant of the maples the Mooneys tapped.) They reported also ten gallons of molasses that year. The Mooney farm was a typical general farm. There were four horses, six milk cows, two working oxen, two "other cattle," five sheep, eight swine and one assumes, chickens and perhaps other fowl. In addition to their muscle power, the animals produced 12 pounds of wool and 450 of butter as well as \$75 worth of meat.

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary students are not the first residents of their hill to be affected by events in New Ulm, Minnesota. In September 1862 a panic seized southeastern Wisconsin, an Indian scare prompted by massacres in Sleepy Eye and New Ulm. Riders dashed from farmhouse to farmhouse warning residents to flee. As a history of Mequon describes it:

A scout on horseback traveled north from Milwaukee giving warning. When he reached the neighborhood of Thiensville he was told that Cedarburg had been set on fire by the Indians and he turned about and fled.

Women and children were thrown into wagons and dashed to Milwaukee. A scene near Brown Deer is described: "As far as the eye could see north and south there was a string of galloping horses drawing wagons so close that the heads of one team almost touched the rear of the wagon ahead. There were maimed horses and broken wagons." Milwaukee hotels were filled to overflowing and hundreds slept on the sidewalks.<sup>18</sup>

One wonders whether the Mooneys joined the flight to Milwaukee or assisted the few who remained in Thiensville and organized a defense anchored by an old cannon stuffed with gun powder and large spikes. The scare blew over in a day or so.<sup>19</sup>

In any case, 1862 had its share of excitement for area residents. Besides events of the Civil War, the river flooded, taking out every bridge from here to Milwaukee and inundating Thiensville. Earlier in the year, January 1, there was an extraordinary cold snap. Many people froze to death. Many cattle also died and the ones who survived were known by short tails and cropped ears for half a dozen years after. On that terrible day the stage came into Thiensville with the driver frozen dead in his seat.<sup>20</sup>

On May 31, 1869 Lawrence Mooney, Jr. bought his father's farm for \$4000. He and his wife, Dorothea, did not stay long as operators of this farm. March 9, 1871 they sold it for \$2700 and the assumption of the mortgage (\$2500) by the new owner.

#### IV. Wille Ownership

Wilhelm Wille (also as William Will) was the new owner. The 1850 census had listed him as a Prussian-born laborer living in Milwaukee with his wife, 30 years old, Fredericke and infant son Charles (Carl). His tombstone in the cemetery of Trinity, Freistadt, gives his birthdate as June 1, 1820. When he purchased the Mequon farm he was 50 years old. His second wife, also named Fredericke, was 30. His son Carl was 21. Two other sons, August and William, were 15 and ten. He had a daughter, Johanna, age three. The name Wille or Will pops up in accounts of Trinity's early history and Captain Heinrich von Rohr's Saxon emigration,<sup>21</sup> but Edgar Wille says his people are not related to those Wills or Willes.

On Christmas Eve, 1879, Carl Wille took over the farm, paying his father \$3300. On October 3 of the next year he married German-born Caroline Koepf at Trinity, Freistadt. Their marriage was blessed with six children, five girls and one boy. Magdalene, the eldest, was born in 1881. Edgar, the youngest, was born in 1902. In between were Emma, Margaretha, Hermine and Dorothea. Their grandfather Wilhelm died February 19, 1890.

To cope with his growing family Carl Wille built a new farmhouse. It had a living room, parlor, kitchen and two bedrooms downstairs and four bedrooms upstairs. At first it was heated by the kitchen stove; later a pipeless furnace was added. It had no plumbing and electricity wasn't installed until 1927. Edgar Wille stated in 1985 that the barn and outbuildings were there when his family took over the farm. It's not unlikely that the buildings dated back to the Willet occupation of the farm. Tax records show no change in land use and production over the Willet-Mooney years, nor does there seem to have been increased need for wagon or carriage space. But the Mooney-Willet house did become too old and small for the Carl Wille family.

The old farmhouse was located east of present Seminary Drive perhaps 40 or so yards north of the present Schuetze residence. It is still faintly visible today amid an old orchard. Edgar Wille, who is 86, has no memory of the older house, though it apparently stood in disuse for some time. He does recall that his family used the foundation as a place to dump garbage. The house may have stood on an unnaturally smooth plot of ground just where the hill really begins to pitch. This is just uphill from a cluster of young

spruce trees. The new farmhouse stood about 50 yards northwest of the present Schuetze residence. The 38 by 86 foot barn stood southwest of the new farmhouse between Schuetzes and the chapel.

Carl Wille seems to have begun the transition from general farming to dairy-only farming. By 1886 the pigs were gone almost for good. The last sheep grazed seminary land in 1905. Dairy herd figures show a steady increase during those years. By Carl Wille's death in 1924, the land supported 20 cows. (The barn had 18 stalls.)

Carl Wille was buried in the cemetery of Trinity, Freistadt. His wife survived him until 1943 and was buried at his side. His will, dated June 27, 1919 and filed in Port Washington on May 23, 1924, left everything he had to his children and thus Edgar Wille took over the farm. One assumes that Edgar Wille was already handling many responsibilities, given his father's age (in his mid-60s when Edgar reached his teens). When asked in 1985 to describe the things that occupied him in childhood, he responded by speaking of chores.

Edgar Wille recalls that there were fish in Pigeon Creek, though he wasn't much interested in catching the bass, bullheads or carp. Suckers ran annually then as now. The driveway up the hill was subject to periodic wash-outs, including a big one in August 1924. Then as now there were wet spots on the hill, one so wet that the Willes turned it into a cow tank, perhaps the present "Jacob's Well." Apparently the well at the top of the hill did not always provide sufficient water for the cows, as Wille recalls driving the cows out of the barn in the cold of winter down the hill to a hole he had cut in Pigeon Creek's ice. Then as now the hill afforded opportunity for sledding. In Wille's boyhood there was no woods with which to break one's speed, toboggan or neck; the present seminary woods was all pasture, except for a few trees lining the stream banks and some maples on the property's northwest corner.

The Wille farm continued to prosper under his direction. Horses provided muscle and transportation, until in 1918 the Willes bought a Dodge of the same year. With the help of his sisters, Edgar Wille raised corn, hay and oats to feed his growing herd of Holstein and Guernsey cows. He sold milk to Luick dairy of Thiensville. Much as Willet and Mooney apparently did, Wille planted the level southern three-fourths of his land with crops and used the hill as pasture supplemented by whatever could be foraged from the wetter northern extreme across the creek. In 1924 Wille bought a tractor and in 1927, the last full year the Willes were on their farm, the herd reached its peak at 24 cows.

The farm was not up for sale in 1927. Edgar Wille was single, 25 years old, and the owner-operator of a good dairy farm. In the same year a committee for a new building from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Wauwatosa was scouting the neighborhood. John Brenner, G. J. Sengbusch and Ernst von Briesen liked what they saw in the Wille farm. They made contact with Edgar Wille to whom it had not occurred to sell the land on which his family had been for 56 years. The committee explained why they wanted to purchase it. Edgar Wille says that after hearing why they wanted to buy, he was thrilled to sell it. And so a young man, about the age of a typical seminarian, made a very important decision for his family and enabled generations of





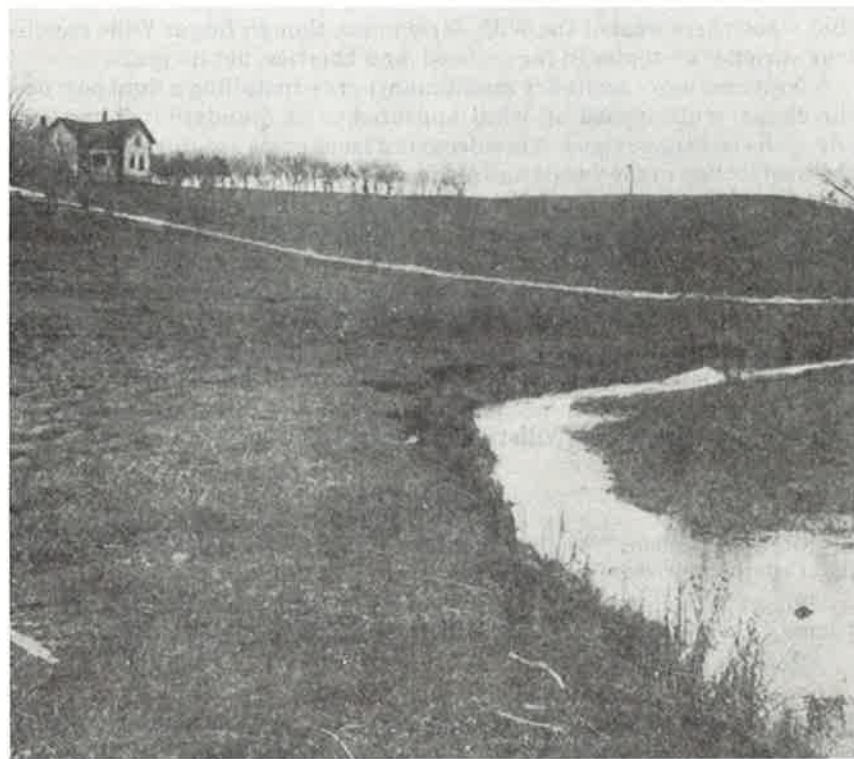
View from Freistadt Road, looking south,  
taken around 1900 by a traveling photographer.



Looking uphill from the present lagoon site.  
The woman is Edgar Wille's sister, Hermine.



Looking north from the Wille house.



The spring-fed brook running through the farm.



theological students to benefit from the marvelous land and facilities which are now Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

In the Ozaukee County Register of Deeds office entry was made March 9, 1928 that the Wille farm had been sold to John Brenner, G. J. Sengbusch and Ernst von Briesen for \$25,000. On December 18, 1930 the three sold the parcel to the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States for one dollar. Subtracted from the 80 acres was land appropriated by local government for roadway (present Buntrock Avenue). The purchase arrangements seem to have involved trusteeship.

Edgar Wille moved his family operation to a slightly smaller parcel on the western side of Wauwatosa Road, about a half mile north of Freistadt Road. He married in 1941. He and his wife retired to Thiensville in 1972 where they still live.

### V. Vestiges of Former Occupants

A few vestiges of former occupations remain on seminary land. In the fall of 1984 drain tile work turned up several heavy pottery shards, a couple pieces of table china, two iron rings perhaps from a harness, an old glass bottle neck, and an old, obviously used, whetstone. This was just east of Seminary Drive below the elm. The two old horse chestnut trees east of the drive at the top of the hill seem to have stood next to the Wille farmhouse. Just west of them are two pear trees that may have been part of the orchard that stood there west of the Wille farmhouse, though Edgar Wille recalled four varieties of apples in the orchard, and cherries, but no pears.

A few years ago a seminary maintenance crew installing a light post near the chapel walk turned up what appeared to be foundation stones near where the barn once stood. A few decaying fence posts are still present along the west lot line in the woods and old fence lines are marked by rocks cleared from the fields. A few ancient maples still stand in the northwest corner of the property and one almost surely saw John Willet's arrival.

But the most visible remnant of the old farm is Seminary Drive. Edgar Wille still refers to it as the driveway, for that's what it was. The old driveway ended at sheds near the present Schuetze yard. The seminary incorporated it into its road plans. Underneath the bridge over Pigeon Creek is visible what seems to be the sides of the farm bridge. The seminary apparently widened it to accommodate Seminary Drive. In a sense the seminary still uses John Willet's 149-year-old driveway.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gretchen B. Mohr, "The Thiensville Dig," *History of Thiensville*, News Graphic, Inc., Cedarburg, Wisconsin, 1976, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Ritzenthaler and Arthur Niehoff, "A Red Ochre Burial in Ozaukee County," *The Wisconsin Archeologist*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (June, 1958), pp 115-120.

<sup>3</sup>Mohr, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>4</sup>Ritzenthaler and Niehoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 116.

<sup>5</sup>Arthur Niehoff, "Beads From a Red Ochre Burial in Ozaukee County," *The Wisconsin Archeologist*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (March, 1959), pp 25-27.

<sup>6</sup>Ritzenthaler and Niehoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120.

<sup>7</sup>Walter D. Corrigan, Sr., *History of the Town of Mequon*, Mequon Club, 1951, pp. 5, 7-8

<sup>8</sup>Robert W. Wells, *This is Milwaukee*, Renaissance Books, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1970, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup>Weyenberg Library Vertical File, Folder entitled "Mequon-Thiensville History."

<sup>10</sup>Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup>Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>Weyenberg Library Vertical File, Folder entitled "Mequon-Thiensville History."

<sup>15</sup>Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup>*History of Washington and Ozaukee Counties*, Western History Company, Chicago, 1881, *passim*.

<sup>17</sup>Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup>Donald O. Miller, "The General Store," *History of Thiensville*, p. 32

<sup>20</sup>Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup>Leroy Boehlke, *By the Grace of God* (A publication by Trinity, Freistadt on their 125th anniversary), Vol. 2, 1964, p. 51.

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# The Seminary's Move to Mequon

Martin O. Westerhaus

SIXTY YEARS AGO THIS SPRING a well-drilling rig and excavating equipment moved onto what is now the campus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, but at the time was known in the area as the "Wille Farm." Construction was about to begin on a new plant for the theological seminary of the Wisconsin Synod. By June of 1929 construction had progressed sufficiently so that furniture, equipment and books could be moved from the old building in Wauwatosa to what was then referred to as Thiensville. The students did most of the work of moving before they scattered for their summer vacations. On August 18, 1929, in connection with the synod convention of that year, the new plant could be dedicated to the glory of God and the task of "Training Shepherds for Christ's Flock."

For almost 60 years now that vital work has been carried on quietly on this campus and in these buildings. For all of us who belong to the Wisconsin Synod this is a special, a very important place because of the work that goes on here. As the WELS Historical Institute in this meeting joins the seminary in observing the 125th anniversary of the seminary's founding, I think it is appropriate to go back and examine the decisions and efforts that gave us this attractive and serviceable plant 60 years ago.

## I. The Need for a New Plant

When the seminary faculty, students and staff moved from Wauwatosa to Mequon the old plant in Wauwatosa was just 36 years old. One would think it would have been simpler just to add on or rebuild in Wauwatosa. There were two main reasons for a new plant in a new location. One was the property, or more specifically, the title to the property. Captain Frederick Pabst, the famous Milwaukee brewer, had donated the land on which the Wauwatosa plant was erected. The plot comprised about four acres as it was first marked off. It measured 300 x 598 feet. This plot comprised the northeast corner of the south half of what was referred to as the Pabst Farm. It was located on the southwest corner of Sixtieth and Lloyd Streets — at the time they were known as Spring Avenue and Washington Street — in Wauwatosa.

It certainly was generous of Capt. Pabst to present the gift of this land to the Wisconsin Synod on which to build its seminary. But there was a fly in the ointment — or to use a more appropriate metaphor — there were some flaws in the mouth of this gift horse. First, the plot was quite small. Of the

300 x 598 feet mentioned above a 60-foot strip along the west side and along the south side were platted for streets. The streets were never built, but the land couldn't be used for buildings. Without these 60-foot strips the lot measured only 240 x 538, about three acres. The residences of Professors Pieper and Koehler were located on the southeast and southwest corners of the tract. Professor Hoenecke, Professor Schaller, and then Professor Henkel in turn occupied the third professorage on the northwest corner facing Lloyd Street, behind the main seminary building. Tennis courts measuring 80 x 150 feet were located between the main building and the two professorages to the south. They comprised the only facility for exercise and recreation provided for the students on the grounds. If the seminary was to remain on the Pabst Farm more land would have to be acquired to permit expansion. There was another problem. Captain Pabst had written a condition into the deed transferring title of the seminary land, a condition which provided that if this land should cease to be used for educational purposes it would revert to the Pabst family.

The building at 60th and Lloyd also presented an obstacle to remaining at the old location. After a good generation of service it was just barely large enough to house the students. In the fall of 1919 Director Schaller reported that 62 students were enrolled, 57 of whom found housing in the seminary building. There were just enough study rooms for this number, but to provide adequate sleeping quarters a previously unused hall on the second floor had been pressed into service. Prof. Schaller commented: "This crowding causes some slight discomforts, which, however, as we cannot remedy them, must be borne with equanimity" (*Northwestern Lutheran*, November 2, 1919, p. 176). The seminary board in 1919 requested authorization to have the seminary building connected to the city gas lines — not for cooking or heating purposes primarily, but for lighting, to eliminate the fire hazard posed by the gasoline lamps the students had used for studying until then. About this time, too, the board reported that it had not had the building hooked up to the city water mains because it considered the costs too high.

When the question of possibly remodeling or enlarging the old building was investigated by the synod building committee, it learned that the State Industrial Commission would refuse to issue any permits for such remodeling or enlarging. No reason is given in our synodical records. But the building was of a wood frame construction with brick veneer and apparently such buildings no longer were considered adequate as schools by the Industrial Commission. In the years since 1893 construction technology and standards had been raised considerably, especially for schools. The building was outdated.

Already before 1919 the seminary board had realized that the Wauwatosa plant would need some kind of enlargement or replacement soon and had begun to negotiate with representatives of the Pabst family. Those negotiations had been complicated by the fact that Capt. Pabst had died and his estate was in probate. The family lawyers were not inclined to remove the "strings" Capt. Pabst had attached to his gift of land in 1892.

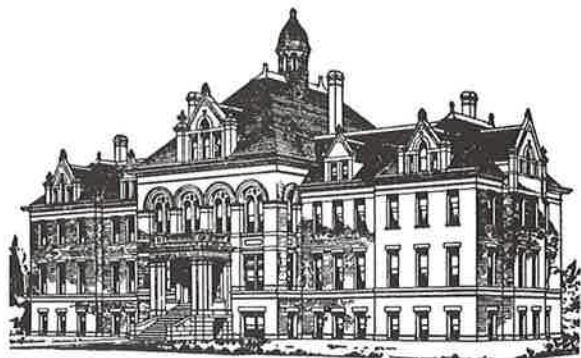
One more factor must be mentioned which proved to be the most effective in getting the synod to take action and seek a building site elsewhere. In 1918 or early 1919 a real estate company began laying out and selling lots on



The first home of the seminary was the Gardner House in Watertown, Wisconsin from 1863 to 1865.



First home of the seminary in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at 13th and Vine Streets from 1879 to 1893.



The seminary building on the Wauwatosa site from 1893 to 1929.

the old Pabst Farm. This included all the land from 60th to 68th Street and from Vliet Street up to Lloyd Street. This new subdivision was called Washington Highlands. A German landscape architect, a Dr. Hegemann, did a very artistic job of laying out the streets and lots to follow the natural contours of the land. Water mains and sewers, gas mains and electric lines were laid, streets and sidewalks were laid out and paved, all with a serious effort to disturb the natural drainage and the trees and other vegetation in the subdivision as little as possible. As a result Washington Highlands was considered one of the finest new residential areas in Milwaukee. Lots began selling. If the seminary was going to expand its plant at 60th and Lloyd it would have to move quickly. The real estate company recognized the potential customer and offered the seminary 13 lots, about four acres of land adjacent in part to the seminary property for \$37,705. No bargain basement prices in Washington Highlands! The seminary was given until September 15, 1919 to take up the option.

The need to expand the seminary land and buildings was presented by the board to the delegates of the 1919 synod convention. After due discussion, especially of the "strings" on the old property, the delegates voted to appoint a committee of seven, first to make a final effort to obtain a clear deed to the present property and to negotiate with the real estate company for removal of building restrictions on the offered 13 lots. If the committee was successful it was authorized to instruct the board of trustees to purchase the additional lots. If it was not, the committee was instructed to look for and recommend to the next synod convention a new site for the seminary. Pastor John Brenner was appointed chairman, Pastor John Gauss of Jenera, Ohio, secretary, a Mr. F. W. Gamm of Watertown, Wisconsin, treasurer. In addition there were two laymen from Milwaukee and one each from Red Wing, Minnesota and Norfolk, Nebraska.

## II. The Selection of a New Site

The November 2, 1919 *Northwestern Lutheran* carried a brief notice that there would be an open meeting on November 12th regarding a new site for the seminary. One could conclude from this that negotiations with the Pabst estate and real estate company had failed. The Committee of Seven was moving on to other options. Authorized to select a new site if the aforementioned negotiations failed, the Committee of Seven set to work with great energy and diligence. An advisory committee consisting of a pastor and layman from each district was formed. Several open meetings were held to which synod and district presidents were specifically invited and at which any other interested synod members were welcome. Suggestions, advice and criticisms were invited from all interested parties.

What criteria did the committee use in making a choice? To start with, the synod in 1919 had made it clear: *there must be a clear title* to the land on which we build this time. Although the committee was told in 1919 that it had a completely free hand in making a choice, preference was expressed in 1921 for a site "*in or near Milwaukee.*" The building committee did apparently make a trip to St. Paul in 1927 to investigate several sites which had been suggested there, but nothing came of that trip. *A fair or reasonable price for the land* was another condition more or less taken for granted. This



condition would bring a surprise development in 1927, send the committee back to "Start" and to a completely new search for land long after everyone had assumed that the question of site had been settled. Another criterion that played a large role was *accessibility*. Nearness to city streetcar lines, railroad depots and, in the case of the final choice, to a concrete highway and a new "interurban" or electric railroad line station played a strong role in the committee's choice. Another condition was *accessibility to a Wisconsin Synod church* (both for students and faculty and their families.) Another was adequacy of land or space to build all needed professorages on the property. The fourth and fifth professor at Wauwatosa had to be provided housing off campus. It is interesting to note that the Building Committee was itself not united on this point. Some members were of the opinion that it would make for better relations if the faculty members did not all live together on the seminary property. But the majority of the committee held the opposite opinion and prevailed. Finally, an *attractive natural setting* also was considered essential. I must confess that I was surprised to note the strong emphasis this point received in one *Northwestern Lutheran* article informing synod members about seminary building plans:

We certainly should be glad to provide them (the students) with adequate facilities for bodily exercise, as we cannot afford to neglect their physical well-being.

But there are things to be rated higher than the sports. Among these a sense for nature is by no means the least. It serves the recreation of the mind no less than do the sports, though in a different manner. In the great transitional periods of the history of the world, an awakening of the joy in nature has again and again by Divine Providence become the means to restore the enervated mind to health for a time, at least, and thus to prosper also the preaching of the Gospel.

An institution of this kind requires sufficiently large grounds and grounds of such a character that they give students pleasure, so that they are not compelled to rely on walking the streets of a large city or on systematic physical exercise for their recreation" (*NL*, February 11, 1923, p. 38).

Given all of the above conditions, what kind of properties did the Committee of Seven and its successor after 1921, the permanent Building Committee, come up with? Of approximately 100 sites suggested to and/or investigated by the committee less than a half dozen met enough of the above criteria to merit serious considerations.

The first property to receive favorable attention was the so-called "Bues Farm." Readers of the *Northwestern Lutheran* must surely have gotten the impression that the selection of a new seminary building site was indeed a simple matter. Under the heading: "Announcement," the *NL* of November 30, 1919, reported on the November 12 open meeting held by the "Committee of Seven." Among the several sites visited that day the "Bues Farm" apparently made the best impression. This land was located in West Milwaukee, about between 50th and 55 streets, just south of National Avenue and across the road from what was then the Veterans' Home Farm and now is the site of

the large Veterans Hospital. The plot, part of which was wooded, extended south to Beloit Road and comprised 33 acres. A large frame home of Victorian vintage and a barn stood on the property. The price of the Bues farm was \$35,000.

The Building Committee voted on the spot to recommend to the Board of Trustees, who also were present, to purchase this property. The Board of Trustees did just that. "All present thought the site beautiful and the price low," building committee chairman and *NL* editor John Brenner commented (*NL*, November 30, 1919, p 190).

From our perspective its location on what now are busy streets and its proximity to factories in West Milwaukee and West Allis make this site seem less than highly desirable. And the Building Committee itself must have been less than completely convinced that the Bues farm was the best site available because they continued to look at other properties.

A second property which received considerable favorable attention might be called the "Mystery Property." At one point an option was taken on this property. It is described as being located "near Mequon on the lake." Does that put the land in question in Shorewood, Fox Point or Bayside? We don't know. The committee finally decided that the new seminary building should not be built here because there was no Wisconsin Synod church within reasonable distance. Also there was a lack of public transportation. The plot in question also was outside the Milwaukee City limits — and apparently some distance beyond any streetcar lines. As an attractive natural setting the shore of Lake Michigan would seem to have a considerable edge on the seminary pond. But the North Shore doesn't seem like the most appropriate place for a Wisconsin Synod seminary.

Property number three was known as the Van Dyke property. It was located in Wauwatosa south of Milwaukee Avenue (Vliet Street) and extended from 60th Street west to about 65th Street. It comprised 32 acres located just across Milwaukee Avenue from the Washington Highlands subdivision. At the time the Vliet Street streetcar provided public transportation, as did the Milwaukee Road whose Wauwatosa depot was a bit over a half mile away. It was within walking distance of St. John in Wauwatosa and of the new St. James mission across the street from the old seminary. The price of \$40,000 compared very favorably with the \$35,705 asked for the four acres comprising the 13 lots which had been offered for sale to the seminary in Washington Highlands. For a time this property was almost eliminated from consideration because the City of Wauwatosa had platted a street through the property which if laid out would have interfered with the building plans of the architect. Consultation with the City Council of Wauwatosa, however, brought the assurance that the street did not have to be built.

The property is marked by a creek which, rising in Butler, flows south through the Washington Highlands and then the Van Dyke property to empty into the Menomonee River just south of the property. The creek has cut a fairly deep ravine through the property. The property as a whole overlooks the Menomonee Valley, the highest portions are some 100 feet above the valley. For the Building Committee the ravine cutting from the north to the south throughout the property was both the strength and the

weakness of the site. The ravine was known in local parlance as "Indian Valley" and had been visited for years by seminary students as well as many other nature lovers in the area because of the scenic beauty, specifically the many large trees and the wild crab apples in spring. But the ravine greatly reduced the amount of level land available for buildings. Apparently the architects planned to place the main complex on the largest flat area in the southwest part of the property. Where the architects planned to place the professorages is not indicated. The property was purchased early in 1923. For four years this was the "future site of the Wisconsin Synod Seminary." One enthusiastic and a bit imaginative *Northwestern Lutheran* article spoke of future generations of Wisconsin Synod people coming into Milwaukee on the Milwaukee Road trains or driving along Watertown Plank Road (State Street) and looking up excitedly and exclaiming: "There's our seminary." The writer thought this would: "mean much for the future interest in the institution and the life of synod" (*NL*, April 22, 1923, p. 123).

But no one ever saw the Wisconsin Synod Seminary from State Street or from the Milwaukee Road tracks running beside it. Two things happened. First, the land values in Wauwatosa rose rapidly in the mid 1920s. By early 1927 someone offered the synod \$95,000 for the Van Dyke property. The members of the Building Committee began asking whether the Van Dyke land was not too high priced for the Wisconsin Synod to be building on. Secondly, electric railroads, "Rapid Transits" or "Interurbans" were built in the teens and twenties from Milwaukee to Chicago, Beloit, Watertown and Sheboygan. With fewer stops than streetcars they made for fast travel. It was possible to go from downtown Milwaukee to Hales Corners in 24 minutes, to Waukesha in 35. The Building Committee informed 1927 synod delegates one could build a seminary building within 20 miles of the heart of downtown Milwaukee and reach the center of the city as rapidly as one could from the present seminary site on street cars. Sale of the Van Dyke property and selection of a replacement farther out along an "Interurban" track were authorized.

By September 18, 1927, readers of the *Northwestern Lutheran* learned that the Van Dyke property had been sold for \$107,500, a tidy profit of \$67,500 for the building fund. Among the new sites considered was one 26 miles to the west apparently in the Oconomowoc area. But that was not to be the new seminary site. The *NL* of November 13, 1927 featured a lengthy article with four photographs describing the new site which had been selected for the seminary. It was identified as the "Wille Farm," an 80-acre property in the Town of Mequon, Ozaukee County, abutting the Village of Thiensville on the east and fronting on Freistadt Road on the north. It had been purchased for \$25,000. It was about 15 miles from downtown Milwaukee. But the "Interurban" which stopped at a station in Thiensville just three blocks from the property could get you downtown in 35 minutes. You also had options of taking a Milwaukee Road train if it happened to fit your schedule better, or the concrete highway that ran through Thiensville and provided all-weather transportation for those equipped for "motoring."

Pastor Bast's Trinity Church of West Mequon, it was reported, provided Wisconsin Synod church services just a half mile away (if you felt up to

trudging across the farmer's fields which intervened). The 80 acres would provide the largest campus by far in the synod and a fine location for building now as well as growing room for the foreseeable future and beyond. Spring-fed Pigeon Creek which could be dammed to form a pond and the slopes which ran down to it all across the north end of the property provided natural interest and variety and beauty. Finally the proper place to build the new seminary had been found. It was time to move on to:

### III. Architects, Plans and Construction

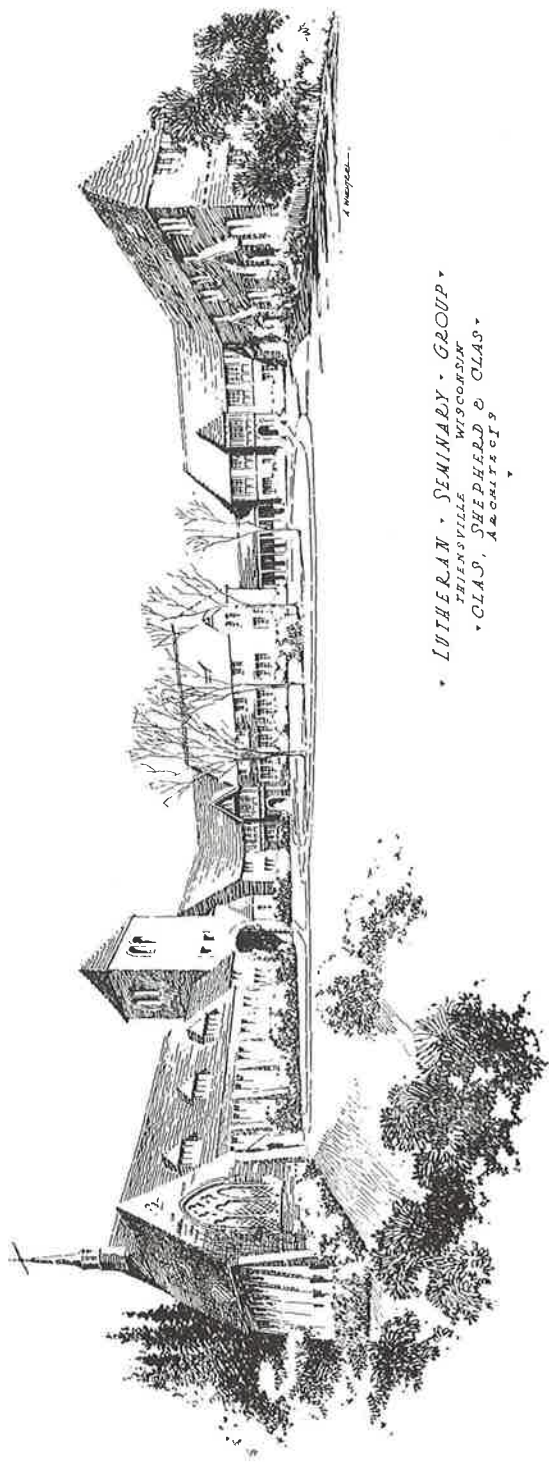
Actually much of the next step had already been taken care of by 1927. The February 11, 1923 *NL* had reported that the architectural firm of Clas, Shepherd, and Clas, Inc., had been engaged to design the new seminary buildings. It had been thought desirable to hire a Milwaukee firm for better supervising of the building. This firm was highly thought of in Milwaukee and the state. Alfred C. Clas, the senior member, had designed such major buildings as the Milwaukee Public Library, the Milwaukee Auditorium, the Northwestern Life Insurance building, the State Historical Society building in Madison and several University of Wisconsin buildings in Madison. He also served as landscape architect for Milwaukee County Parks. Apparently preliminary sketches and early plans were drawn at the beginning of 1923, although none of these seem to have been preserved. The decision made at the 1923 synod convention to require that the synod's "old debts" be paid and the total cost of the new buildings be raised before actual construction could begin, brought the planning for the seminary buildings to a complete halt. Nothing more was done for four years. Not until 1927, when convention delegates finally authorized the Building Committee to begin construction whenever it saw fit, could the work go on.

The December 25, 1927 *NL* for the first time gave synod members an idea of what the new buildings would look like. The very next issue of the *NL*, dated January 8, 1928, presented a statement by the architects of what they were trying to accomplish. It bears repeating here:

The architects have attempted to express a feeling of sturdy construction, truthfulness, economy, and sympathetic adaptation to the site and rural locality. It seemed desirable to adopt a style which would not demand expensive materials or detail, and yet one which would be in keeping with Lutheran principles and the use for which the seminary is intended. It was their thought that simplicity and charm together with economy and permanence could be no better obtained than by using the salmon colored brick burned in rural localities of Wisconsin for the walls; a rugged variegated slate for the roof, and Waukesha County stone from Lannon for all such details as demand its use (*NL*, January 8, 1928, p. 6).

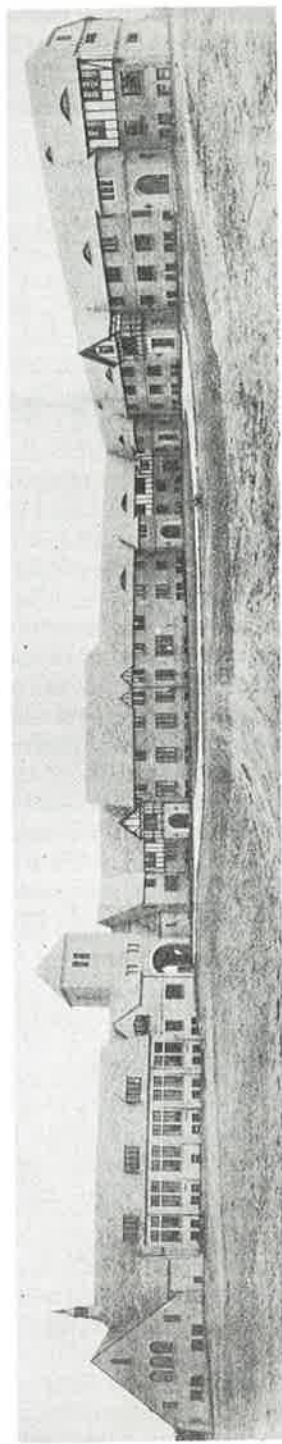
It seems to me that the architects effectively suggest a German castle such as the Wartburg by such means as the massive tower, the *Fachwerk* or timbering used in a few places and the arrangement of the buildings in a form suggesting a complete enclosure. And yet this is no romantic imitation of a medieval structure. There is no English Gothic here or a copying of an Oxford college. All of the elements of the complex are practical, functioning





LUTHERAN SEMINARY GROUP  
 TRIENSVILLE WISCONSIN  
 CLASS, SHEPHERD & CLAS ARCHITECTS

Architect's design in 1927 of the new seminary.



Church  
 Gymnasium  
 Library  
 Lecture Rooms  
 Editorial  
 Rooms  
 Reception  
 Committee  
 Rooms  
 Faculty  
 Room  
 Director's  
 Residence  
 and Office  
 Hospital  
 Garage  
 Dining  
 Kitchen  
 Steward's  
 Suite  
 Male  
 Rooms  
 Kitchen  
 Dormitory  
 Units

An inner courtyard view of the seminary shortly before its dedication.



Front view of the seminary in 1929.



Front view of the seminary today.



parts of a contemporary school, even the tower, which was intended to hold the seminary's water tank. There is truthfulness, economy and adaptation to the site and rural locality. There is a permanence in the best sense. The buildings don't look 60 years old. There is a certain timelessness to them because of the traditional materials used. And they are practical. Notice, for instance, details such as the three original classrooms with their large windows all facing north. No glare, no heat from the sun. Another detail: In the days before forced-air ventilation all the original dormitory bedrooms have ample cross ventilation.

In addition to all of what is said above, the architects managed to build a considerable amount of architectural beauty or eye appeal into our buildings. Good proportions, interesting combinations of symmetry and variety, different masses and planes, varied textures of slate, stone, brick and timber combine to provide visual delight.

The actual construction began on May 14, 1928, without any formal ground-breaking ceremony. I could find no records of who the various contractors were. The evidence at hand after 60 years strongly suggests that they did a thorough job.

#### IV. Cornerstone Laying and Dedication

Members of the synod had a fine chance to see progress on the buildings on Sunday, July 22, 1928, when all members were invited to attend the festive cornerstone laying service. Rev. A. C. Haase of St. Paul, Minneosta preached the German sermon, Rev. August F. Zich of Green Bay, Wisconsin, president of the Northern Wisconsin District, delivered the English sermon. Rev. H. Knuth of Milwaukee, chairman of the seminary board at the time, conducted the liturgy and synod president, G. E. Bergemann, presided at the actual laying of the cornerstone. A mass choir of almost 300 voices provided sacred anthems in English and German and led in the *a capella* singing of the hymns. An estimated 5000 people showed their interest in the project by their attendance.

The work of construction continued smoothly into the next year, as far as we know, so that, as we noted earlier, seminary students could do most of the work of moving furniture, equipment and books from Wauwatosa to Mequon before going their separate ways for the summer of 1929. The day of dedication, August 18, 1929, was truly a festive day, a memorable day in the history of the Wisconsin Synod. Their new seminary about which synod members had been hearing for 10 years, and toward which they had been contributing for six years, was finished. The Lord provided beautiful summer weather and over 15,000 members turned out to join in celebrating and to inspect the new school. On the day when the new seminary was dedicated to God's service and the task of training shepherds for Christ's flock, Milwaukee area churches were asked to drop their morning services.

Surely this was one of the largest if not *the* largest gathering of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans in our history. Two festive services were held with two sermons in each. In the morning service synod president, G. E. Bergemann, delivered the German sermon and Western Wisconsin president, J. G. Glaeser, the English sermon. In the afternoon service Nebraska District president, John Witt, preached in German and Minnesota District vice-

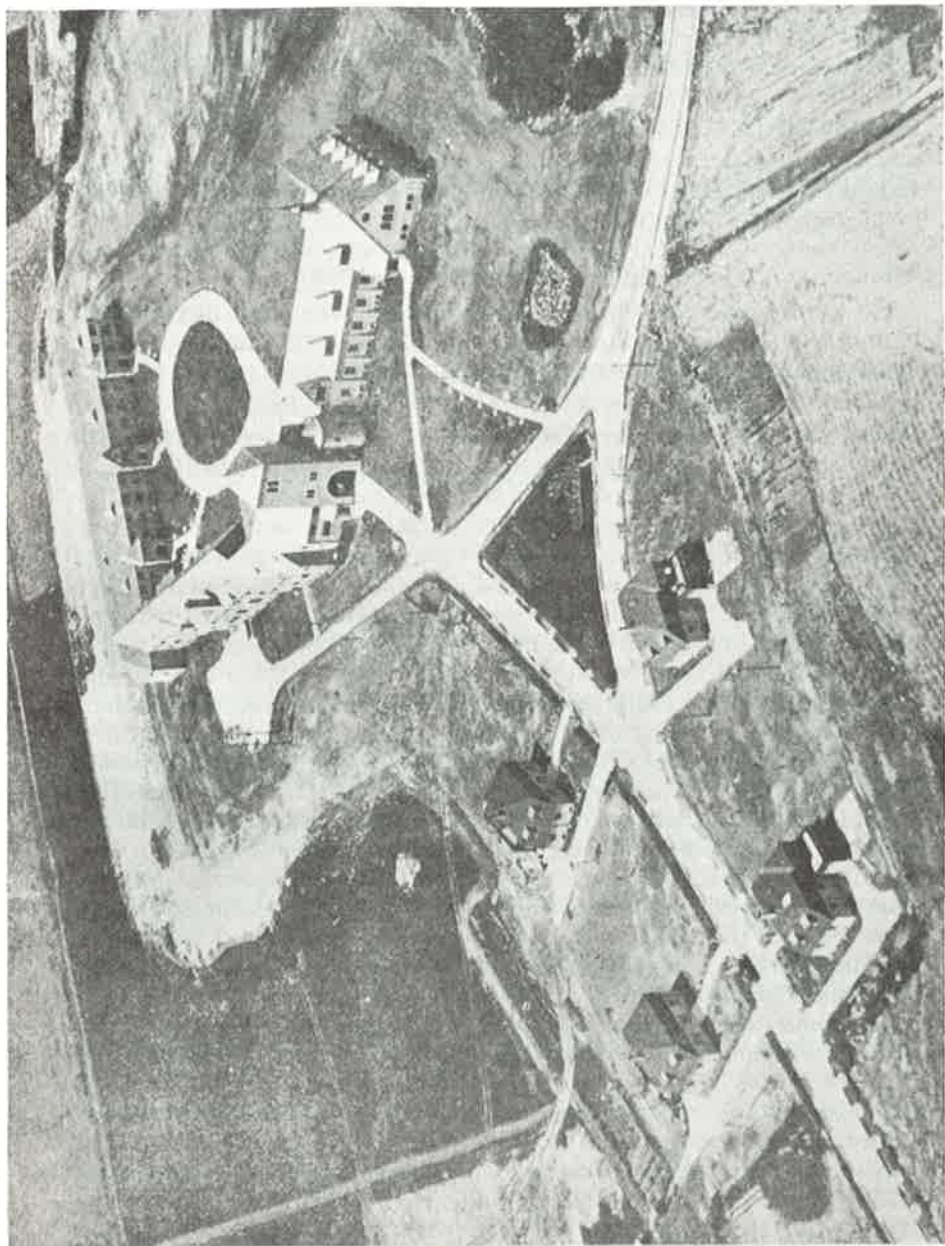
president, E. Birkholz, in English. A mass choir of over 500 voices, under the direction of Teacher A. Maas, added the beauties of sacred choral music to those services. Wisconsin Synod people certainly had great reason to rejoice. After long preparation and effort they had a seminary plant that could adequately serve their needs for many years to come. One sad and ironic note undercut the general joy of that day. Prof. J. P. Koehler, who had been on the faculty for 30 years and president for nine years, and had been deeply involved in the planning of the new seminary buildings and who was already living in the president's quarters in the buildings, was suspended from office just a day or two before because of his differences with other faculty members over the handling of the Protestant controversy.

#### V. Costs, Fund-Raising, Debts

There were other dark clouds on the synodical horizon beside those piled up by the Protestant Controversy, a controversy that had been growing since 1924. Sunday, August 18, 1929 was a bright and sunny day both physically and emotionally for the synod. But Black Friday, the October, 1929 day that brought the great stock market crash and ushered in the Great Depression of the 1930s was less than two months off and the Wisconsin Synod was poorly prepared indeed to face the depression. It entered the Depression with debts of almost \$700,000. It was not until 1945 that the debts were paid off. Meanwhile many a program and project of the synod was kept on hold; growth was stymied. Dark and difficult days indeed lay ahead. Somehow the new seminary building was associated with and blamed for the synod debt in the minds of many, even though unjustly.

So the finances involved in the seminary building project merit some closer attention. The 1921 synod delegates approved the recommendations of the Committee of Seven to build a new seminary plant on a new site and to select an architect and have plans drawn, but to wait with actual building until two thirds of the necessary funds had been collected. This seems like a sensible procedure. Between the 1921 and 1923 conventions the permanent Building Committee, again chaired by John Brenner, with Prof. J. P. Koehler, Pastor H. K. Moussa, and laymen F. Gamm, Ernst von Briesen, Gustav Sengbusch, and synod treasurer T. H. Buuck carried on the preparations voted. By the 1923 convention the Van Dyke site had been selected, the architectural firm, Clas, Shepherd, and Clas, had been engaged, and preliminary plans had been drawn.

The committee also had organized the necessary fund raising drive, which it was hoped would have the gathering of the necessary funds completed in not too long a time. This fund drive proposed to raise \$750,000 to meet the cost of the new seminary and pay off the synod's debts. The synod at the time numbered not quite 150,000 communicants. It was estimated that roughly one third were wage earners who brought home an average wage of \$1,000 per year. If each of these approximately 50,000 wage earners would give \$15.00, one and one half percent of their annual wages, for this once in-a-life-time undertaking, the necessary funds would be gathered. The committee prepared two brochures, one of which detailed the shortcomings of the Wauwatosa property and building, and the other which gave information on the planned new building which was to be erected on the



Aerial view of the seminary in 1929.



Aerial view of the seminary in 1987.



Van Dyke site. These brochures were sent to all synod pastors in numbers sufficient for distribution to all members. The *Northwestern Lutheran* carried a series of articles informing its readers in detail about the needs for and procedures for carrying out the building program. The collection began in April, 1923. It continued, I'm sure, far longer than any of the members of the committee imagined.

The July 1, 1923 *NL* carried the list of the first pastors who had sent in funds and the amounts remitted, totaling \$19,000. These lists in rather large type became a regular feature of the *NL*, as did editorials by Pastor Brenner encouraging, and admonishing, pastors and members to carry on and complete the work of the collection. Especially those who had not yet contributed were called on to do their fair share, and not to add to the burden of others.

The 1923 convention raised the fiscal requirements to be reached before building could begin. All of the cost of building was to be raised and the old debt was to be paid off in full before construction could get under way. The 1925 convention upheld that position. And the collection went on, and on, and on. By August, 1925 gifts reached \$305,000. By December, 1926, \$410,000. By convention time in 1927 the total stood at \$450,000.

But fiscal conservatives had lost control or undergone a change of heart. This convention finally authorized the Building Committee to begin construction when it considered it prudent to do so. The synod also adopted the Von Briesen memorial which recommended that synod issue notes worth \$650,000 paying five percent to amortize its capital debts. Payments of the interest and one tenth of the principal were to be included in the regular budget. The 1927 synod also authorized a \$330,000 building project at New Ulm. By the time the new buildings here at Mequon were dedicated the collection had brought in \$563,000. The committee was instructed to continue its work, and it did until 1933. That summer it reported that offerings had reached the sum of \$642,582.13. Two hundred ninety-two congregations had reached the set goal which now was stated in the per communicant figure of \$5.41. At this point the collection (finally) was declared closed, the committee members were thanked for their faithful efforts and long service and the committee released. (Chairman Brenner was elected synod president that year.)

The cost of the building project here at Mequon, including land and improvements, construction and equipment, totaled \$388,000. That was paid in full. The collection also fell only \$35,000 short of meeting the other goal of paying off the "old debt."

So why, in August, 1929, did synod have a debt of almost \$700,000? There were a number of contributing factors. First, as already mentioned, the 1927 convention approved a major building project at New Ulm including a new classroom building, a heating plant, and remodeling of the old main building and music hall. Cost: \$328,000. Only part was covered by funding projects. There were other smaller building projects during the 1920s: A men's dorm addition in New Ulm cost \$45,000; a dining hall at Saginaw, \$25,000; a new building at East Fork, \$25,000; chapels in Poland, \$12,000. An eighth year had been added at Watertown, a sixth at New Ulm, with a seventh proposed for 1930. There was a new campus ministry at Madison to

support. And the 1920s had seen a lot of home mission activity. Almost \$200,000 had been borrowed by the synod to expand the CEF and build new chapels and schools.

One more factor must be mentioned. Without interruption, year after year from 1919 to 1929, the synod had shown a significant deficit in its operating budget. Contributions just weren't adequate to support the work being done. Lest this statement be interpreted to mean that our people were unable or at least unwilling to grow in their support of the work of the Lord, it should be added that the synodical budget more than doubled from 1919 to 1929, going from \$532,000 to \$1,100,000. In a sense the problem in 1929 might be described as rather severe growing pains. Enough of costs, fund raising and debts. Let's close by briefly taking a look back.

## VI. After Sixty Years

After 60 years there's a lot to like and appreciate and enjoy here at Mequon. A man once stopped at our door and asked if any of the houses in the neighborhood were for sale. He said he'd like to live here. I don't blame him. It is a joy and a privilege to live on our beautiful campus. And it is a joy and a privilege to be a part of the seminary family. After 60 years the site had been changed from a very bare, working farm into a most attractive park and campus — especially attractive at this time of year when the flowering shrubs are in bloom. Pastor Heinz Hartwig of Hartland drew the original landscaping plans. Students did the work. Plantings were donated for the most part or dug up in the woods. Faculty members were responsible for decorating their own yards. Mrs. John Jeske tells that her grandfather, Prof. August Pieper, dug up trees in the woods at David's Star, Kirchhayn, to plant around his yard. The efforts may have been by amateurs but the results surely are masterful.

Three major additions have been made to the central complex. A roomy and attractive auditorium-gymnasium has recently been added. The residences now number not 4 but 17. And still there is room, room for more growth, room for athletic fields and lots of room to enjoy the wonderful works of God in the woods and field and stream that comprise our campus. With well-designed remodelings and additions and an original plant that is very well maintained we have a complex that serves its purpose as well as or better than when it was new.

After 60 years we have much cause to be grateful for the site selection, the building design and construction done then and since. Grateful to the men who did these things and to the Lord who has blessed all their efforts. May we find inspiration and motivation in the examples of men like John Brenner (whose name surely should be indelibly connected with the building of this seminary) and J. P. Koehler and their companions who put in countless hours for much of 10 years to give the Wisconsin Synod a fitting "School of the Prophets" and to complete their assigned task. May we, regardless of our station and calling in life, be moved to try to imitate more fully in our daily life, as they did, him who came not to be served, but to serve, and who invited us to follow him.

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# A WELS Historical Profile

## Chronological Sketches of Our Synod's Past: 1910-1920

Arnold J. Koelpin

**T**HE DECADE OF WORLD WAR I proved to be especially difficult for German Lutheran congregations in the United States. As the war fervor increased, anti-German sentiments mounted. Patriotic zealots paint-bombed churches where German services were being held and harassed pastors who preached in the German language.

The Wisconsin Synod used the occasion to restructure and to move into even closer unity. The federated synods merged into one unified body and made legal and linguistic adjustments to foster their unity. New boards and publications appeared as part of the restructuring process. The Allgemeine Ev. Luth. Synode von Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan und anderen Staaten received its official English name, "Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States." In 1917 the merger was made final and the so-called Wisconsin Synod was ready to move into the post-war era with a renewed sense of mission.

### 1910-1920

- 1910 On January 25-27, pastors of the Michigan District Synod and pastors of the old Michigan Synod meet at Plymouth, Michigan, to iron out differences. A number of dissident pastors and their congregations ask for a release from the Michigan Synod in view of the impending reunion with the Joint Synod of Wisconsin. They apply to the Missouri Synod. In May the two former factions within the Michigan Synod reunite.
- 1910 The faculty of the Wauwatosa Seminary begins to thresh out the doctrine of church and ministry, especially as it applies to the call of Christian teachers. There is general agreement that a Christian teacher's work in the school merits the same appreciation of having a divine call as that of a pastor because the Christian teacher's entire work is governed by the word of God.
- 1910 The Minnesota Synod celebrates its 50th anniversary, commemorated by an official history.
- 1910 The first organized pastoral conference in the Pacific Northwest is held in November, four pastors in attendance.
- 1911 The Joint Synod of Wisconsin meets at Mankato, Minnesota. President Soll reports on the reopening of Michigan Lutheran

Seminary at Saginaw as a preparatory school. The school, closed since 1907, is reopened with five students under the directorship of Otto J. R. Hoenecke, former pastor of Bethel church in Milwaukee. Director Hoenecke is the sole teacher.

- 1911 The Wauwatosa Seminary choir, under the directorship of Professor Koehler, makes its first public appearance. The choir is organized specifically to clarify ideas about church music.
- 1911 E. E. Guenther is called from the seminary graduating class to serve in the Apache Mission at East Fork, Arizona. Six years later he is appointed superintendent of the Apache Mission.
- 1911 The Joint Synod of Wisconsin expands its work in Arizona. Tucson gets its first resident pastor, and one year later work is started in Warren, Arizona.
- 1912 Professor August Pieper publishes an article in the *Quartalschrift* (The Quarterly of the Wauwatosa faculty) on "The Voice of Our Church in the Question of Church and the Office of the Ministry," as a contribution to the Walther centennial celebration that had taken place the previous year.
- 1912 The Michigan District Synod authorizes monies for a new dormitory. The three-floor boy's dorm is to be connected to the Dean's residence and includes a "cracker-box" gymnasium. It is dedicated on September 14 of the next year.
- 1913 A Lay Movement (Laienbewegung) is organized to bring about a union of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synod congregations in the state of Wisconsin. The sponsors are laymen from the Racine and Milwaukee areas under the leadership of August C. Franck of First Evang. Lutheran Church in Racine and John Franck, the first president of the Milwaukee Lutheran High School Society and founder of the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music in Milwaukee. The movement is sidetracked by later developments in the Intersynodical Movement.
- 1913 John Bading, long-time president of the old Wisconsin Synod and guiding spirit of this synod in its first generation, dies. Up until 1912 he still serves as chairman of the Northwestern College board.
- 1913 The Joint Synod of Wisconsin, in session at Green Bay from August 20-26, adopts the following resolutions:
- 1) That the now existing synods unite to form one synod by transferring all rights to the Joint Synod, which shall then divide itself into districts.
  - 2) We recommend that this Joint Synod be divided into geographic districts and that the now existing synodical boundaries need not be considered in the new division.
  - 3) All institutions, as well as all other property of the individual synods, shall be transferred to the Joint Synod.
  - 4) We hold that each synod is responsible for its present indebtedness and should liquidate the same.

- Pastor C. Gausewitz is elected president of the Joint Synod from 1913-1917.
- 1914 At the Synodical Conference, in session at Milwaukee, representatives of the Missouri Synod discuss the issues church and ministry with the Wauwatosa seminary faculty.
- 1914 The first issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran*, the English counterpart of the *Gemeindeblatt* (Congregational News) comes off the press.
- 1915 Pastors of the Synodical Conference in Sibley County, Minnesota, discuss unity in doctrine and foster a movement which eventually becomes the Intersynodical Committee. Represented on this committee are the Wisconsin, Missouri, Ohio, Iowa and Buffalo Synods. Its purpose is to heal wounds caused by the split in the old Synodical Conference during the Election Controversy in the 1880s.
- 1915 The Joint Synod of Wisconsin meets at Saginaw, Michigan at the end of August. On August 24 the new constitution of the synod is unanimously adopted. The former Allgemeine Ev. Luth. Synode von Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, und anderen Staaten receives its official English name: Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States (hereafter referred to as the Wisconsin Synod).
- 1915 Professor Hermann Meyer is added as a fourth member of the Wauwatosa faculty.
- 1917 The Minnesota Synod holds its last meeting (June 14-20) under this name. In the next year it becomes the Minnesota District of the newly organized Wisconsin Synod. In its final session the Minnesota Synod hears a report on the legal steps being taken in transferring Northwestern College to the new synod.
- 1917 The constitution of the new synod undergoes its final revision. It embraces six districts: Northern Wisconsin, Southeastern Wisconsin, Western Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Nebraska and assumes its new name. Pastor G. E. Bergemann is elected president (1917-1933).
- The Joint Synod creates a School Commission to study the entire educational structure of the Wisconsin Synod. On their recommendation a school visitor is called in 1920.
- 1917 President Bergemann appoints Director Schaller and Professor Hermann Meyer of the Wauwatosa Seminary as representatives to the Intersynodical Committee for discussion of doctrinal unity. Upon the sudden death of these professors, they are replaced in 1919 by Professors Koehler and John Meyer.
- 1917 Because the book supply from Germany has been cut off by the war, Professor J. P. Koehler begins preparation of a full-fledged church history for his seminary classes.
- 1917 Superintendent Gustav Harders of the Apache Mission dies. From 1914-1919 several stalwarts of the Apache Mission are installed, namely, Missionary A. Uplegger and Henry Rosin. In 1920 Franz

- Uplegger, former director of the Milwaukee Lutheran High School, transfers to the Mission. He serves the tribes by reducing the Apache language to its modern written form.
- 1918 President Ackermann of Dr. Martin Luther College resigns his position because of his activities in anti-war protests. Pastor John P. Meyer of Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, a former instructor at the college, accepts the call to replace Ackermann as president.
- 1918 The first of the Intersynodical Committee meetings is held to try to establish unity between the Ohio, Buffalo, Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin Synods.
- 1918 The Wisconsin Synod, through the services of the Northwestern Publishing House, begins publication of the *Junior Northwestern* for young people in the synod.
- 1918 In July pastors and delegates in the Pacific Northwest convene at North Yakima to organize the Pacific Northwest as a district of the Wisconsin Synod.
- 1918 The Minnesota District Synod celebrates its anniversary by meeting for the first time as the Minnesota District of the newly formed Joint Synod. The meeting takes place at Trinity church in St. Paul, the oldest of the district's congregations.
- 1919 In the wake of World War I anti-German feelings, the Nebraska State legislature passes two laws against private and Christian schools:
- 1) The Simian Law forbids teaching any subject in any other language than English to children under ninth grade.
  - 2) All teachers in public, private and parochial schools of the state are required to gain a teacher's certificate from the proper state or county authorities.
- The Nebraska language law is later tested in the Supreme Court and declared unconstitutional. The synod's teachers and teaching pastors comply with the certification law by obtaining a certificate after an eleven week course of study.
- 1919 At a meeting in New Ulm, Minnesota, the revised constitution of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States is given its final reading and adoption. Professor August Pieper of the Wauwatosa Seminary stirs the synod convention to new zeal in mission work with an essay, "The True Reconstruction of the Church."
- The New Ulm convention concludes that it is necessary to move the Wauwatosa Seminary to new grounds because of overcrowding and the nature of the lease.
- The recommendation is adopted to expand the preparatory department at Dr. Martin Luther College from a three-year preparatory department into a four-year academy. Therefore the teachers' course at the Normal School is extended to six years. In 1918 there are 51 students in the college "normal" program and 26 students in the preparatory department. A recommendation to move the Normal School from New Ulm to Watertown, Wisconsin, comes to nothing.



- 1919 Dr. A. F. Ernst resigns as president of Northwestern College at age 78. Professor E. E. Kowalke becomes acting president and succeeds to the presidency the following year.  
An eighth year is added to the Northwestern College curriculum making it a full college. Since 1920 it offers a four-year high school course and a four-year college course. The college introduces a general education course for young people who do not intend to prepare for the ministry.
- 1920 The decision to relocate the Wauwatosa Seminary is made, but it would be eight years before building operations are begun on 80 acres adjoining the city of Thiensville, 15 miles north of downtown Milwaukee.
- 1920 The deaths of Professors Schaller and Hermann Meyer leave two vacancies at the Wauwatosa seminary. Professor John Meyer, brother of Hermann, is called to teach dogmatics in the place of Professor Schaller. His place at New Ulm is taken by Professor Edmund Bliefernicht. Professor William Henkel of Northwestern College succeeds Professor Hermann Meyer after the latter falls victim to a flu epidemic. Professor John P. Koehler becomes director of the seminary.
- 1920 The Dakota-Montana District of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin is organized.
- 1920 Upon recommendation of the School Commission, the Wisconsin Synod calls its first school visitor, a position which later becomes the administrator of the Board for Parish Education. First to serve in the new position is Claus Gieschen.

The post-war years were to bring new trials to the newly-restructured Wisconsin Synod. The Depression years caused untold hardship in the nation and in the church. But a controversy over the use of official authority in the church was to cause an even greater hurt in synodical circles.

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## The Wisconsin Synod Mission in Poland

Otto Engel

**W**HY DID MY ANCESTORS leave their settled homes in Germany and migrate to a country that was very much unsettled in far-off Poland? My forebears were all of pure German stock. Why would they want to move to a land where not only the language but also the customs were far different from those they were used to? In order to understand more clearly why some Germans would want to leave their country, it is necessary to know something about the political and religious, the social and economic conditions as they obtained in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century.

### Political and Religious Conditions

The king of Prussia at this time was Friedrich Wilhelm III who ruled from 1797-1840. He will be remembered as the king who in 1817, the 300th anniversary of the Reformation, issued a decree that the Lutherans in his land should be joined in a union with the Reformed in a church that thenceforth was to be known as the Evangelical Church of Germany. It is true that the decree was not enforced rigorously until a few years later, but still the strict Lutherans living in his kingdom at the time must have feared for the future and wondered how this would affect their religious freedom if the liturgy they were to use in their churches, the church they were to attend and even their pastor were fixed by law.

In 1806 Napoleon had invaded Germany and caused many changes in the political situation. He dealt the Prussian army a crushing defeat with the result that one territory after another fell to him so that in a short time the whole country was in his hands. After that war, a huge indemnity was levied on the land resulting in much economic and personal hardship.

### Social and Economic Conditions

The conditions in Germany after Napoleon, however, were not all negative. Instead the regime was spurred into a thoroughgoing reconstruction of the state machinery. A number of reforms were worked out by two outstanding statesmen of that time, Karl vom Stein and Karl August von Hardenberg. Included in these reforms were such liberal measures as the abolition of serfdom. For hundreds of years the farmlands and the huge estates were owned and controlled by the *Landgutsbesitzer* or the land-holding class. The

work on the large estates was performed by the serfs who also supplied the landowners with produce and rent but remained bound to the land. Once they were freed they could now have their own little farms, bought from the landowner with great difficulty. But at least now they had a place they could call their own.

There was another class of serfs who had no landed property. But as a result of the Stein-Hardenberg reforms they were now free to leave the landed estates. The result was that many of them flocked to the cities where they joined a class that was known as *Handwerker* or the laboring class. Since industry had not as yet developed sufficiently to absorb this large influx of people, unemployment and extreme poverty were the result. While they were still living on the large estates they had been assured of fuel for their homes and a meager living. But now in the cities they were on their own. Much hardship followed and there was general dissatisfaction with their lot.

One more class that was affected by the new reforms was that of the craftsmen, those who practiced a skilled trade. A workman who had learned a trade had to stay with that trade even though there was no work to be had. Often he was hindered by law from moving from one place to another. All that changed with the reforms that had been inaugurated. Now anyone was free to call himself a craftsman even though he lacked the skill required by that craft. The result was that the field soon became overcrowded. And again there was much bitter poverty and many families were brought to the brink of starvation.

A last class must still be mentioned. As long as they were serfs they were not permitted to marry without special permission of the *Landgutsbesitzer*. In this way the population was kept under control. But once they became free, this restriction was dropped. There followed a rapid increase in population. The result was that in about two more decades people were beginning to talk of emigrating to America and even to Australia.

### Migrations to Poland

Under these adverse conditions prevailing in Germany it was only to be expected that more and more people, realizing that they could never expect to get ahead in their own country, would begin to look elsewhere for a place to live and an opportunity to improve their lot in life. In Poland about 50 miles southwest of the capital city of Warsaw a textile industry was developing in a town called Lodz. In order to attract workers for the industry, the Polish government promised all immigrants large grants of land, good working conditions and the guarantee that no one would ever interfere in matters of language or religion. The government even promised them that it would help them to build churches and parsonages. Many Germans, dazzled by the promises, streamed into the city from all parts of Germany. It was not long before the city of Lodz developed into a large city for the manufacture of textiles. That is how a large colony of Germans came to settle in Lodz and many smaller colonies in the villages surrounding the city.

### The Migration to Alexandrow

At this time a group of weavers and clothmakers, mostly from Schlesien and Posen, who had seen hard times, left their native Germany by way of

Ostrowo and started for Poland. The distance was 100 or more miles. With all their goods and possessions loaded on wagons they made the journey to Poland. It must have taken them several weeks. Instead of moving into the city of Lodz itself they chose to settle in a little village in the vicinity of Lodz which had been founded two years before in the year 1817 and been given the name Alexandrow. Among these immigrants were the three sons of Daniel Gottlieb Engel: Johan Carl, Friedrich Leopold and Wilhelm Ernst. Here they carried on their weaver's trade. Later a stocking factory was started in their village where many of the immigrants found employment. But until that time their homes actually were small factories where each child had a weaver's chair and was working for the business. Here in their new homeland they found much improved conditions and soon prospered.

### Founding of the Churches in Lodz

Coming from a background of strict orthodox Lutheranism in their native Germany and wishing to preserve this precious heritage it was only natural that they wanted a pastor in their midst as soon as possible. We look first in the city of Lodz where the largest colony of Germans had located. As early as 1829 Trinity Church in the city of Lodz had been founded. The beginning was small. But with more and more immigrants streaming in, this church saw such phenomenal growth that by the year 1870 it had grown to 20,000 souls. The pastor in 1870 was a man by the name of Clemens Bertold Rondthaler.

To serve such a large group was too much for one man, but because of the lack of pastors most of the time he was without an assistant. To get an idea how strenuous and burdensome the work must have been we need but look at the statistics for one year. In one year the church records show that there were 1,145 baptisms, 642 funerals, sometimes as many as six or eight in one day. The number of communicants for that year is listed at 7,609. Because holy communion was celebrated only several times a year the number of people coming to communion at one time oftentimes numbered in the thousands. We are told that Rondthaler after administering communion for several hours finally distributed the elements by sitting in a chair. It was due to the tremendous energy of this man and his utmost faithfulness that as much was accomplished as there was.

With so many services to conduct and so much administration, it was a human impossibility for him to do any mission work or pastoral work in the congregation. But here is where dedicated layworkers came to his assistance. They conducted reading services in different parts of the city in rented quarters and in this way took care of the spiritual needs of the people and kept the congregation together. Serving in this capacity as lay evangelist the name of Leopold Engel is mentioned. It was in this Trinity Church in Lodz that my father, Julius Engel, Jr., was confirmed by Pastor Clemens Bertold Rondthaler on April 7, 1884.

When a few years later the Trinity congregation had increased to 40,000 souls, it was decided to found another church in another part of the city. In 1884 St. John church was dedicated, and a year later Pastor W. P. Angerstein was called to be its pastor. He was a graduate of the Erlanger Theological Seminary in Germany with which he remained in contact throughout



his ministry in Poland. He was noted for his conservatism. Soon after he became the pastor of St. John he began to publish a church paper which was read by many of the church members around Lodz. In this way he did much to bring and keep these scattered Lutherans together.

It was he who later began to point out where the Augsburg Church, under whose jurisdiction these churches were operating, was out of harmony with scriptural teaching and the Lutheran Confessions. He advised those who wanted to prepare for the ministry that, instead of studying at some of the universities of Europe which were becoming more liberal and rationalistic, they attend the conservative Lutheran seminary of the Saxon Free Church at Berlin-Zehlendorf. He also was instrumental in founding a third church in another part of the city which received the name St. Matthew. Serving as assistant pastor at St. John church the name of Eugen Engel is mentioned.

### Founding of the Church in Alexandrow

We now return to the small village of Alexandrow where the little colony of weavers and clothmakers, whom we referred to earlier, had settled. They too wanted to preserve the precious religious heritage they had brought with them from Germany. Their religious life had always been a vigorous one. When they migrated to Poland they brought with them their Bible, hymn books and catechisms. When they first moved into this area a congregation already existed in the country in a place called Ruda. Here they attended the Sunday services and were happy to find a pastor who could look after their spiritual needs.

But it was not long before they took steps to form a congregation of their own. In 1823 they organized themselves into a congregation and in 1828 they were able to dedicate a church of their own in Alexandrow. According to the church records, two men who played a prominent role in the organizing and building of this church were Carl Leopold and Friedrich Engel.

The first pastor who served the Alexandrow congregation was Pastor P. Rauh. He was installed in July 1838 and served the congregation faithfully until 1871. He was a school man who saw to it that the youth of the church received thorough instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian religion. The congregation at Alexandrow was not as large as the two congregations at Lodz. It consisted of 1,060 families and 6,000 souls. Under Rauh's ministry the church enjoyed a healthy growth. The church services and the communion services were well attended. The Bible and devotional books were to be found in practically every home. A popular book among these staunch and sincere Christians was Arndt's *Wahres Christentum* (*True Christianity*). In addition to the Sunday services prayer meetings or *Betstunden* were held in rented quarters every Sunday afternoon where sermons and other Christian literature were read and discussed.

A leader at these meetings for 46 years was Friedrich Wilhelm Engel who because of his devout, saintly nature was dubbed "Der fromme Engel." Besides being a staunch supporter and helper of his pastor in the home congregation, he helped him in other ways. He often conducted prayer meetings in small towns nearby where they had no minister or the village schoolmaster or "Kantor," as he was called, who often served in this capacity. He was well-known in the community and widened his reputation so that

he was often invited to conduct reading services in Lodz. These meetings were edifying and well attended. As one of the elders of the Lodz congregation put it: "*Wann damals der alte Engel aus Alexandrow in seinen langen Stiefeln hier die Versammlung abhielt, da liefen die Menschen herbei.*" (Whenever old Engel from Alexandrow with his long boots led the gathering, the people flocked together.)

It should be noted here that after my grandfather, Julius Engel, Sr., had finished the local *Elementarschule*, Pastor Rauh gave private instructions to him to prepare him for the teaching profession. At Grabiniece in one of the *Kantoratschulen*, referred to above, he now taught school for thirteen and one-half years. Here at Grabiniece my father, Julius Engel, Jr., was born on April 24, 1869. Here he attended school with his father as teacher until he was eight years old.

### The Teachers Seminary at Warsaw

As we have seen, the faithful work of the pastors resulted in a vigorous, healthy church life in the congregation at Alexandrow. At that time there was at Warsaw a seminary for the training of teachers. Those who wanted to prepare themselves for the teaching profession were directed to this school. Warsaw also was the seat of the consistory that had jurisdiction over the state church, the Evangelical Augsburg Church, and was headed by the general superintendent. A number of students from the Lodz congregations were enrolled here, when in 1884 Dr. Martin Luther College was opened at New Ulm, Minn., U.S.A.

Because Dr. Martin Luther College had been founded to furnish ministerial candidates for the old Minnesota Synod, a theological department was started in 1885. Since the need for pastors was great in the synod and the course of study took so long, the New Ulm school called for advanced students for its seminary. Pastor C. J. Albrecht's plea for such students found a favorable reception in such far-off places as Lodz. A certain Pastor E. Voelter, who knew Pastor C. J. Albrecht, acting president of the school, personally, promised him that he would help him to supply students for the seminary. When Herman Nitschke, who had been a *Webermeister* (master weaver) contacted Voelter and told him that he had a son who desired to become a missionary in Africa he referred him to the school at New Ulm. Thus the first contact with New Ulm had been made. Herman Nitschke's son, also called Herman, was among the nine students enrolled at the seminary at New Ulm for the 1886-1887 school year.

August Agather, who had been a *Vorleser* (layreader) in the Trinity Church in Lodz, had a son who was a student at the Warsaw Seminary. He wanted to become a pastor. When he found out that there was a school at New Ulm where advanced students could prepare for the ministry, he was willing to send his son there. Thus August Agather, Jr., went to America and was the next one to enter the seminary at New Ulm. Agather liked the school and wrote to his friends in Warsaw to induce them to come to America. Pastor Albrecht encouraged him to write to prospective students who would be willing to do missionary work in the West. Prompted by this, two others soon followed: A. Dassler and F. Sattelmeier. In the fall of 1888 my father, accompanied by his friend, Julius Dysterheft, sailed for America and

arrived in New Ulm in time to enroll in the seminary for the next school year. Many of these men later became pastors in the old Minnesota Synod and may be considered as a kind of firstfruits of the confessional brand of Lutheranism that they had learned to know in the Lutheran churches of Poland.

### Poland During and After World War I

And now there came change to the congregations that up until now had been able to live and carry on their work with the favor of the state church and the protection of the government. World War I broke out in Europe. The Russians, who were allied with France and England in the Triple Entente, crossed and re-crossed Poland on their way to and from the war zone. All of this changed in 1918 when the Bolshevik Revolution broke out and the Russians were forced to focus their attention on their internal problems. Poland was now subjected to all the horrors of war and very often mistreated by the Russians. The result was that Poland after the war was left devastated. The peace constituted Poland as an independent nation once again.

The Engel family had immigrated to America in 1896 and all during World War I naturally were wondering how their relatives in Poland had fared. After the war a lively correspondence was carried on with them by Pastor Otto Engel — I am his namesake and nephew — who at that time was the pastor at Randolph, Wisconsin. Hearing firsthand about the sad conditions existing in Poland he with others started a drive to gather clothing and money for the war-torn areas of Poland. Having received a leave of absence from his congregation in Randolph, Pastor Engel in 1923 was sent to Europe to supervise the distribution of the gifts.

While in Poland Pastor Engel also had an opportunity to observe firsthand the spiritual life in the Lutheran church. What he found was tragic. Many of the pastors came from the universities and brought with them much of the rationalism and the liberalism that was in vogue in the university seminaries at that time. When Pastor Engel reported personally to the 1923 synod convention, he reported that the situation in Poland was "tragic" (*traurig*). He said that earnest Christians sensed a danger for their souls and for those of their children if conditions continued. They were looking for ways to bring back the true gospel to their church. The convention responded by resolving to assist the work in Poland "with utmost energy" and voted the sum of \$10,000 to support it.

### The Formation of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church

Pastor Engel was sent to supervise the work there. When he arrived in Poland in 1924, he found that a beginning had already been made. A man by the name of Gustav Maliszewski had been a parochial school teacher and later an evangelist in the city of Lodz. Here he observed the pitiable conditions in the Augsburg Church. He was convinced that the state-supported Augsburg church would shortly lose its Lutheran character altogether if something were not done. There was only one solution: the founding of a strictly confessional free church.

On the advice of Pastor W. P. Angerstein of Lodz, this former school-teacher had enrolled in the seminary of the Saxon Free Church at Berlin-

Zehlendorf in order to study theology. Upon his return to Lodz he soon gathered a considerable following in spite of sharp opposition. Engel agreed with Maliszewski's evaluation of the situation in Poland: conditions were such in the state church as to warrant the withdrawal of conscientious Lutherans. Prof. John P. Koehler, who was spending a year in Germany and was asked by the mission board to visit the field and study the conditions firsthand, agreed. In the meantime the Wisconsin Synod mission board received calls from two congregations stating that they wished to be served by Wisconsin Synod pastors. On the basis of this, the mission board formally issued a call to Pastor Maliszewski as did his Lodz congregation. Maliszewski was formally ordained by Pastor Engel in the Lodz congregation with Prof. Koehler and his son, Pastor Karl Koehler, assisting. This occasion in 1924 is generally considered the date of the founding of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church of Poland.

During the next 15 years (1924-1939) this little group in Poland spread out into various places in and around Lodz and Warsaw. Twelve congregations and 14 preaching places were established, gathering in nearly 3,000 souls and 2,000 communicants. Ten congregations erected modest places of worship. Others worshiped in rented halls or private homes. Pastors who served during these years were: Gustav Maliszewski, Heinrich Mueller, August Lerle, Ernst Lerle, Leopold Zielke, Karl Patzer, Armin Schlender, Edward Lelke, Helmut Schlender, Alfons Wager, Alfred Reit and Arthur Napp. Most of these men were trained at the Berlin Zehlendorf Seminary of the Saxon Free Church.

Pastors of the Wisconsin Synod, who supervised the work on our behalf during these years, were: Otto Engel (1924-1925), Adolf Dassler (1926-1929) and Wilhelm Bodamer (1929-1939). Engel did much traveling, seeking to recruit students to study for the ministry. Dassler concentrated on inner growth and on the organization of pastoral conferences. Bodamer served the longest and under his able leadership the work prospered and took on new dimensions both for pastors and congregations.

### Opposition from the Polish Government and the Augsburg Church

The mission in Poland did not have an easy time during these years of growth. At home voices were heard to say that this field was too far removed and contact hard to maintain. There were those who said that the mission should be dropped altogether and the money needed to support the mission applied elsewhere. Then after World War I with Poland established as a sovereign state, it meant the revoking of the old guarantees of freedom in matters of language and religion that we spoke of earlier. The new government undertook to establish its sovereignty also over the Augsburg church. The greatest opposition to the free church movement, however, came from the people within the Augsburg church who tried in every possible way to hinder its progress.

According to Polish law only Polish citizens could serve as pastors. Both Engel and Dassler had been born in Poland and had no trouble with the government in this respect. Only ministerial acts performed in territorial churches were granted official recognition. State taxes were demanded of



every citizen. Our congregations were sometimes refused the right to build their own churches. Others were padlocked after they were built. The only public cemeteries in existence were controlled by the state churches. A funeral procession, for example, was refused admission into a cemetery and the body had to be abandoned at the cemetery gate. A newly-built chapel was padlocked on the day it was to be dedicated and remained so for nearly three years. A confirmation service was interrupted by a state official and the pastor told that he had no right to officiate in a robe. Usually these incidents arose as the result of some complaint issued by a member of the state church. At one time it seemed as if Pastor Bodamer's visa to reside in Poland would not be renewed since he was not a Polish citizen. It was only through the mediation of the U.S. embassy upon the request of our synod that his visa was renewed.

### World War II and the Flight from Poland

In spite of all these difficulties the work in Poland progressed and it seemed as though our mission had arrived at a point where it could look forward to a more settled existence, free from the struggles and harassments of the formative years. Then came September 1, 1939, the day Germany declared war. Poland was the first country to experience Hitler's new form of warfare, the Blitzkrieg. In a few short weeks the Polish armies had been routed, resistance crushed and Poland itself added to the Reich as an occupied country.

With the beginning of World War II it was as if an impenetrable curtain was drawn between the mother church in America and its adopted offspring. Bodamer, who had come to America to report to the 1939 convention, was not permitted to return to Poland. Because of a rigid censorship, mail service between the U.S. and Poland ceased. All that could be done on this side was to pray and wait for developments.

It was not until after the war in 1947 that we were able to reestablish the ties that had been severed by the war. Pastor Armin Schlender, who succeeded Pastor Maliszewski as president, has given us a description of the war-time era in a series of articles published in the church paper, *Durch Kreuz Zur Krone* (Through Cross to Crown). One can imagine, he says, the perilous situation that the German residents of Poland experienced after Germany's declaration of war upon that country. Pastor Armin Schlender describes them as "days of terror, of extreme unrest, of indescribable suspense and unheard of spiritual misery." "Open season" was declared upon all Germans, who tried to hide in every possible place of refuge. Hordes of released criminals swarmed over their villages, plundered their homes, terrorized their women. "Kill the German spies!" was the cry that could be heard on every hand. The Polish were like people possessed. People from our congregations were not spared.

By virtue of the German Blitzkrieg, he says, this time of persecution was mercifully ended in a matter of weeks, only to be followed by the German occupation, another time of extreme uncertainty. Although order came with the German takeover, the Nazi spirit was not favorably disposed toward church activities. Special permission for holding services had to be obtained from the police authorities. No offerings could be gathered for the support of

the church. No official church papers could be printed. No contact with churches or organizations outside Poland could be established.

On the other hand, Pastor Schlender reports, thousands of German refugees began to filter into the area, from the Baltic zone, parts of Russia, Bessarabia and Czechoslovakia, so that the Polish mission grew to a total of 2,500 souls, 15 congregations and 30 preaching stations. Pastors could not be salaried and had to live from whatever help the members could provide in gifts of food and clothing.

And then from the Eastern front in Russia came reports of a German retreat and a massive Russian offensive. Millions of Germans were forced to flee and seek refuge in the West. The flight from Poland was not a matter of personal choice, but by command of the retreating German army, which apparently was determined to leave as little as possible for the use of the advancing Russian troops. People were compelled, frequently at the point of a gun, to leave everything behind. So disorderly was the retreat that it was impossible for kindred groups like a congregation to remain together. Often even the members of a single family were separated, sometimes never to meet again. Nor was there any way of telling where they might eventually be permitted to stay. Therewith also our Polish mission, our church in the East, ceased to exist, after two decades of visible blessings of the Lord.

### Concluding Observations

And this also brings to a close the early history of our mission in Poland. But a historical survey of this kind leads to a few final observations. The mission in Poland, it is true, ceased to exist. But that was not the end of it. When the Lord of the church closes one door, he often opens another. In this case it is the founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Refugee Mission in Germany which forms another chapter in the history of our Wisconsin Synod missions.

The designation of this mission's official periodical, *Durch Kreuz Zur Krone*, aptly describes its existence. Severe crosses and tribulations were to be its lot from the very beginning and continued throughout most of its history. This little group was trained in a hard school. But throughout it all, they remained true to their confessional heritage and found ways to keep it even in a strange land and among a different people.

Finally, one cannot help but see the wisdom of the policy of our Board for World Missions in seeking to build an indigenous church in our foreign mission fields. Who knows when the old evil foe will again stir up the hatred in our world mission fields, compelling our missionaries to leave. Even that will not be the end of our work or the end of that mission. The work will be continued by those whom we have trained for just such an eventuality so that we can say with Luther:

Let these all be gone  
They yet have nothing won  
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

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