

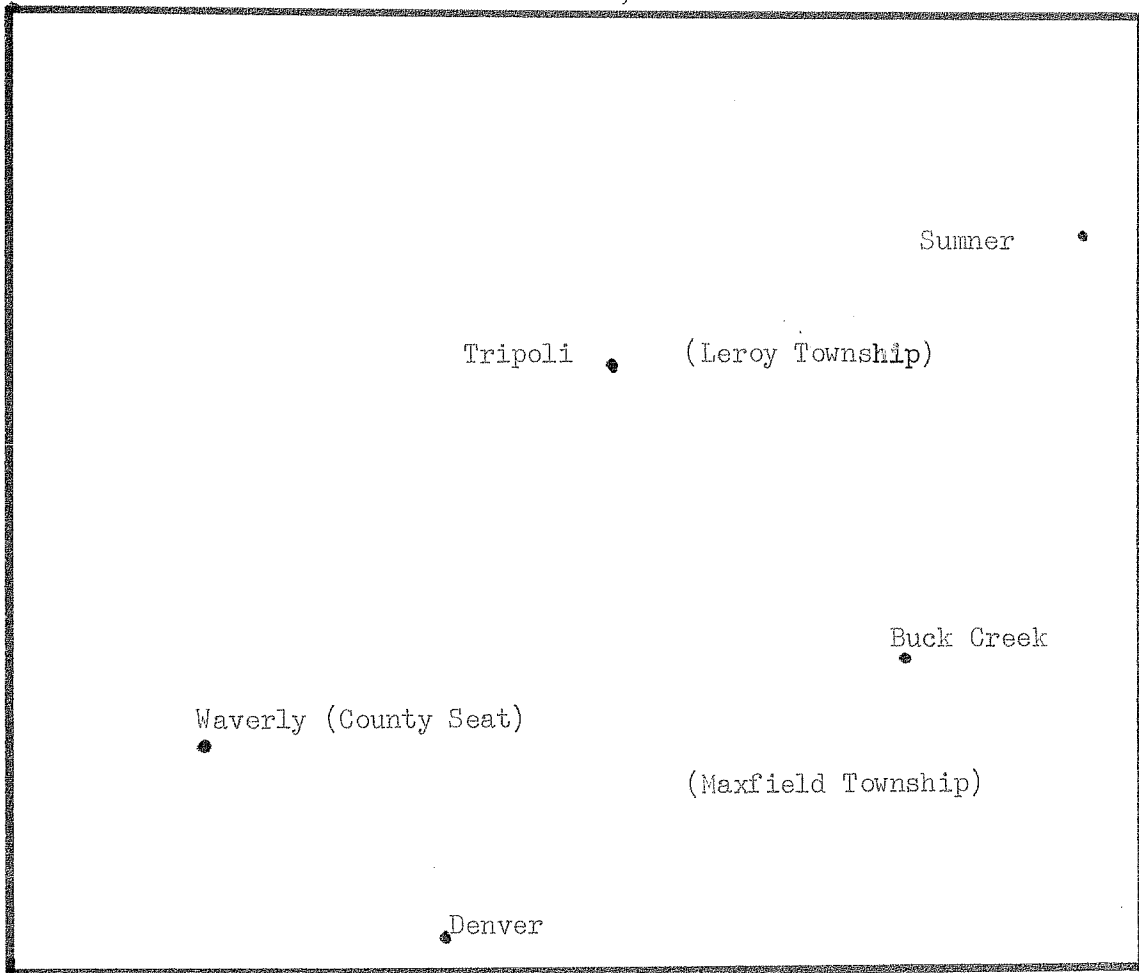
A FORGOTTEN BATTLEFIELD

( A report of certain incidents between the  
Missouri and Iowa Synods in Bremer County,  
Iowa, from 1872 to 1877)

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BREMER COUNTY, IOWA



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## Introduction

While researching my family history in Iowa, I came across an interesting incident between the Missouri and Iowa Synods in Buck Creek, Iowa. The congregation my great-grand father belonged to had a stormy beginning. This aroused my curiosity to investigate the events surrounding that incident. I did not realize at the time that I had come across just one portion of a larger event that took place from about 1872 to 1877 in Bremer County, Iowa.

## Background

No man is an island and no incident in history stands by itself. The Missouri and Iowa Synods had one factor in common which also ended up in being their point of difference, Pastor Loehe of Neuendettelsau, Bavaria. Loehe was an energetic man who through his mission school had a tremendous impact on Lutheranism in America. Considering his intense desire for mission work in America, it seemed only natural that he would seek out, as even American Lutherans <sup>were</sup> sought him out, an association with Lutheran Synods in America, among which was the Missouri Synod. It was a good working partnership. Many of Loehe's students that came over soon joined the Missouri Synod with Loehe even giving control of a training school over to Missouri at Ft. Wayne, Indiana. This splendid relationship, however, was not to last.

Pastor Grabau at the head of the Buffalo Synod was having difficulty in getting pastors to serve his congregations. As a result, laymen started conducting services in some Buffalo Synod churches. In an open pastoral letter which Grabau sent to Missouri Leaders, Grabau made it clear that he regarded such action on the part of the laity as a violation of the doctrine of the ministry. He contended that laymen could not perform ministerial functions since they were not ordained.

Ordination according to him was a divine ordinance which must be conferred by a properly instituted church body or authority. Only properly ordained pastors could perform valid pastoral rites and congregations were bound to follow their pastors in all matters which had not been explicitly forbidden in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Previously Missouri and Buffalo had hoped to have friendly relations. But with this incident, the Missouri Synod felt that in no way could it give ground to Grabau's stand on the office of the ministry. This feeling had been deeply ingrained from their early history when they were virtually forced to make a clear statement on the powers of the local congregation. Also, Missouri found itself in a position where it had to react <sup>to</sup> Grabau's stand because disenchanted Buffalo Synod members were joining Missouri Synod churches.

In between the Missouri and Buffalo Synods stood Loehe in a deadly crossfire. He took a moderating position between the two views as to whether the congregation derives from the ministry (Buffalo) or the ministry from the congregation (Missouri). In Loehe's view, ordination was more than a ceremony. It established the call, conferred the office and imparted special spiritual gifts. For Loehe it was not through the local congregation, but through the Church, the congregation and the clergy, the Lord calls and ordains men for the ministry.<sup>2</sup>

"In our days when it is desired to make every high place low and to place all will and command in the decision of the masses, it is not to be wondered at when one hears statements as the following: 'Truth and liberty are the pillars of the church.' Many congregations also feel that way. They want to elect their own pastors. Nothing is more sure than that the ministerial office is an independent institution of our divine Redeemer...<sup>3</sup> The office originates from Him, not from the congregation."

The Missouri Synod could of course not agree with Loehe in this matter. Even after a personal visit from Walther, the old partnership

could not be mended. Loehe considered the relation of church and ministry and certain questions of eschatology to be open questions which were not divisive of fellowship. But Missouri was compelled by their stand on Lutheran confessionalism to make a break with Loehe. In 1852, the Missouri Synod requested Walther to make the break final by publishing his book on "The Church and Ministry."<sup>4</sup>

Shortly before the break in 1852, Loehe had started another venture in Saginaw, Michigan, in 1850. He first established a hostel for German immigrants, but was changed into a teacher's seminary. The events that took place naturally affected the congregations located there. There Pastor Grossman who championed Loehe's view found himself overwhelmed by the situation. By Loehe's advice, Pastors Grossman and Deindoerfer, two students, and some others left the colony in Michigan in September, 1853. They established a new colony at St. Sebald and reestablished the seminary at Dubuque, Iowa. On August 24, 1854, the Iowa Synod was organized by four men: Pastors G. Grossman, J. Deindoerfer, S. Fritschel and Candidate M. Schueller.<sup>5</sup> Loehe felt that in this move there would be an understanding that Iowa was a place the Missouri Synod had as not yet done any work and so there would be no conflict of interest in Iowa. This proved to be a misunderstanding. The Missouri Synod had its first two congregations with pastors in Iowa while the Iowa Synod was in its infant stages. However, both of these congregations were lost to the Missouri Synod. One of these congregations was served by Pastor H. Graetzel starting in 1856 in Bremer County, Iowa.<sup>6</sup> Graetzel remained in Iowa for less than a year and the congregation went to the Iowa Synod.<sup>7</sup>

#### The Prelude to Bremer County - The Milwaukee Colloquy of 1867

From 1854 to 1867, things were relatively calm between the Iowa and Missouri Synods. The Iowa Synod felt moved after this time to have a colloquy with the Missouri Synod to see if any basis for fellowship

existed. The Missouri Synod was agreeable to this and a colloquy was held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from November 13th to 18th in 1867.<sup>8</sup> From the Missouri Synod, Pastor Walther, three other pastors, and four laymen were appointed. The official representatives of the Iowa Synod~~s~~ were President Grossman, Sigmund and Gottfried Fritschel, and a layman.<sup>9</sup> The two sides failed to come to any agreement on the main question of what is necessary for Church fellowship and unity. Iowa would not admit that the doctrines as to observance of Sunday (whether or not a certain day was commanded), as to the interpretation of Revelation 20, and as to the Antichrist, whether they~~y~~ must be considered symbolically fixed in the Lutheran Church and classed as articles of faith.<sup>10</sup> The Iowa Synod considered some of these to be open questions to which Missouri felt bound not to treat as open questions according to their confession of faith. The summation really was that Loehe was still the point of difference. The Iowa Synod reacted to the colloquy on an optimistic note and hoped for further discussions. But the Missouri Synod left wondering if the Iowa Synod was even truly Lutheran.<sup>11</sup>

The Missouri Synod felt compelled to warn other Lutherans against the false teachings of the Iowa Synod, probably with a zeal that amounted to overkill. Articles started appearing in the "Lutheraner" which the Iowa Synod considered rather abrasive. Herman Fritschel in his biography of Sigmund and Gottfried Fritschel says:

"The 'Lutheraner,' the official church paper of the (Missouri) Synod, incessantly attacked the Iowa Synod and the Fritschel brothers, seeking to annihilate both. In its pulpits, preachers waged warfare, especially where Iowa congregations were nearby; in parochial schools children were warned from those false teachers, prayer fellowship with them was sinful, even social intercourse was to be avoided. Discord was spread in congregations, even among families, by fanatics."<sup>12</sup>

Rev. Fladland, the present day pastor of St. John's Lutheran of

Buck Creek, Iowa, said that in days past blood had run hot between the Missouri and Iowa Synods in the area. Whenever a member of a family would marry into a different synod family, the member was completely ostracized from his family. With this as the setting, the scene is now ready for Bremer County, Iowa, from 1872 to 1877.

Pastor Paul Bredow

In 1872, Pastor Paul Bredow became the pastor at St. John's of Maxfield Township in Bremer County, Iowa. This was the same congregation that Pastor Graetzel of the Missouri Synod had in 1856. Bredow was born in Guelzon, Russia, in 1839 and trained in the Mission School at Neuendetelsau under Loehe.<sup>13</sup> In April, 1861, Bredow came over to America with four fellow students commissioned to serve the Iowa Synod. He served in many congregations in Wisconsin and Iowa before coming to Maxfield.

Shortly after his arrival in Maxfield, Bredow began to feel undue pressure from Pastor J.L. Craemer of the Missouri Synod who resided in Waverly. In the "Lutheraner," Craemer made indirect references to the Iowa Synod as being a false Lutheran Synod, at least according to Bredow.<sup>14</sup> Craemer established two congregations in Maxfield, one to the northwest and one to the southeast of Bredow's congregation. This made Bredow even more apprehensive with the feeling that Craemer had intentions of taking over Maxfield for the Missouri Synod. Then in 1873, Craemer managed to bring another pastor into the county to handle the Missouri Maxfield congregations.

"Herr Pastor W. Kanning, fruher in Decatur, Illinois, herauf  
von der neubildetern Gemeinde in Maxfield, Bremer County, Iowa  
eingefuehrt den 19 Oct 1873, als am 19ten Sonntag nach Trinta-  
tis durch die Pastoren L. Craemer und Studt."<sup>15</sup>

Bredow probably felt even more convinced of his fears when he read in the "Lutheraner" that Craemer wrote that Kanning was one who would defend true

Lutheranism in the face of those who oppose and even deny true Lutheranism.<sup>16</sup> His fears proved to have real substance.

#### Waverly

The first incident apparently took place in Waverly concerning the Iowa Synod congregation there. A Pastor M. Gerlach came to serve the congregation fresh out of Wartburg Seminary. Bredow performed the ordination ceremony on the eighth Sunday after Trinity.<sup>17</sup> After about a year's time, Gerlach decided that it would be a good idea to hold a church picnic and a church dance. The idea showed the inexperience of an uninitiated seminary graduate to the realities of the practical ministry. Part of the congregation objected strongly to the church dance, especially those who seemed inclined to the Missouri Synod. Although Kanning, had not been in the county long, he took the opportunity to appear on the scene. Kanning spoke to the disenchanted faction concerning the differences between the Iowa and Missouri Synods as pointed out by the theological faculty of the Missouri Synod in St. Louis.<sup>18</sup> Among things discussed was the wrong view of the Iowa Synod on the millennium. This particular point came to play in an issue of money concerning the Missouri faction when they split from the Iowa Synod congregation. Before the actual split occurred, a widow died who left behind a \$300 inheritance. Since she had no children, the money would go to the church, but which faction would receive it was another question. Before her death she showed unity with the Missouri faction because she could not agree with the Iowa Synod on the view of the millennium.<sup>19</sup> The case went to court with the judge deciding in favor of the Missouri faction and with the fight leaving a bitter taste in everyone's mouth. In 1875, the Missouri faction received its first pastor after Kanning.

<sup>16</sup>Herr Pastor M. Stephan, fruher in Chester, Illinois, berufen von der Gemeinde bei Waverly, Bremer County, Iowa, wurde an trinitatissonntage, den 23 Mai 1875, durch herrn Pastor



W. Kanning eingefuehrt."20

Buck Creek

At Buck Creek, Bredow would find out for himself what an encounter with Kanning was like. Bredow first went to Buck Creek in February, 1873. A pastor of the Reformed - Lutheran Union had a preaching station there and had left a vacancy. Bredow offered to conduct worship services for the congregation. The former Union pastor had promised another Union man and the congregation was waiting for him. Bredow graciously offered to conduct services until his arrival, although Bredow had strong doubts about the Union pastor coming through on his promise.

For over a year he conducted services at Buck Creek every two weeks, when several members of the Missouri congregation in Maxfield relocated at Buck Creek. These Missouri members also started attending Bredow's services. But Kanning took this as his opportunity to gain a foothold as Bredow was just really acting as a vacancy preacher to an independent congregation. Bredow did not think too much of Kanning's actions.

"Pastor Kanning operated with these (Missouri members) and planned to set himself in the nest I had prepared. For this purpose he announced services in the same school in which I had preached. By various means he was able to gain a following."21

In the meantime, Bredow, chose another school house nearby to ~~near-~~ by ~~to~~ conduct services to avoid a quarrel. But in a short time Pastor Kanning placed an advertisement in the German paper in Waverly that the "Evangelical Lutheran Congregation at Buck Creek" was taking bids on lumber to construct a church. This stirred up different members as to make a decision to which Synod they should go with. One long time resident of Buck Creek took it upon himself to visit the members and get the matter settled. Bredow relates the following account.

"Then I learned the following facts. Mr. F.M. (possibly Fredrick Moehlis) had visited all the German Lutherans that were interested in a church and had come to an agreement that on a certain day they would assemble in the Marsh school and discuss the question: 'Do we want to establish a congregation of the Missouri Synod, or the Iowa Synod?' But neither Pastor Kanning nor I were to be invited to the meeting so that the decision would be without the influence of either pastor. For this reason I had no knowledge of the meeting. But Pastor Kanning was notified by his friends and arrived in due time. He believed that the decision could only be in favor of his synod and declared everyone a 'fool' who would not accept the decision. Great care was exercised in voting. A voting roster was set up and the number of votes cast compared with the number on the roster. This tallied. But when the votes were counted there were two more votes for the Iowa Synod than for the Missouri Synod. When the result was announced, Pastor Kanning jumped on the school bench and thundered (Remember, he who had previously branded everyone fool who could not side with the majority) with a loud voice against the 'false Iowa Synod,' adjured all present for the sake of the salvation of their souls to guard against the 'false prophets of the Iowa Synod' and declared emphatically that he and his adherents would not agree to the decision. The excitement was so great, that, as a faithful friend told me, it almost came to physical violence in which Pastor Kanning would have been the main object. The Lord, however, did not let it come to such an outbreak of the flesh."<sup>22</sup>

The Buck Creek congregation split into its two factions each building its own church. The Iowa Synod congregation took out Articles of Incorporation and a constitution was drawn up and signed by three men in 1874: Fred Poehler, G. Wolff, and Louis Buhr.<sup>23</sup> The Missouri faction later called Candidate T. Haenschfe to serve as pastor, who also later served the Missouri congregation in Leroy Township.

"Herr Candidat Theod. Haenschfe, berufen von der Gemeinde an der Buck Creek, Bremer County, Iowa, ordiniert und eingefuehrt am 9ten Sonntag nach Trinitatis 1876, durch Pastor W. Kanning."<sup>24</sup>

#### Leroy Township

In 1874, twenty German Lutheran had become settled in Leroy Township to the east of Tripoli.<sup>25</sup> Bredow preached to them on one occasion, but it was Pastor Kuethe of the Iowa Synod from Tripoli that began

preaching on a regular basis there in the Leroy Schoolhouse. But it wasn't long afterwards that Pastor Kanning approached these people. He offered to provide for a price, a church building at 10% down and see to it that a Missouri pastor would serve them. Apparently the congregation took him up on his offer sometime after September, 1875 and before December, 1877.<sup>25</sup> However, the first church built was destroyed by a tornado and another had to be built.

#### Maxfield Township

With evidences of a battle circling around Bredow's Maxfield congregation, it would hardly seem possible for them to remain unscathed. Bredow was able to only subdue tensions for awhile before his congregation suffered also. Tensions first mounted with the actions of Pastor J.L. Craemer in his indirect cutting remarks in the "Lutheraner." But in 1876, he moved to Fort Dodge, Iowa, to later become the first president of the Iowa District of the Missouri Synod in 1879.<sup>27</sup> Pastor Kanning, however, was more than able to keep Bredow on his guard on all sides. Besides taking portions of many independent congregations in the area from the Iowa Synod, Kanning also had a colloquy with Pastor Johann Sessler of the Iowa Synod from Hampton, Iowa, and brought him into the Missouri Synod in 1876.<sup>28</sup>

Strangely enough, the force that finally took twenty members from Bredow's congregation were religious printed articles. It seems that Bredow's congregation regularly read religious newspapers such as the "Lutheraner," especially those who were favorably inclined to their Missouri Synod roots of 1856. Tensions began to climax when Pastor Klindworth of the Iowa Synod threatened to split the Synod. Klindworth was a respected pastor in the eyes of the Maxfield congregation since he had visited there many times, being a friend of Bredow.<sup>29</sup> Klindworth

accused Professor Sigmund Fritschel of misusing funds, getting rich at the cost of the Synod and giving up the doctrine to which he subscribed to in Neuendettlesau. At the 1875 Madison convention of the Synod, Bredow was asked by Klindworth's following to act as moderator, but it was to no avail. Bredow must have been at great loss to lose his friend Klindworth from the Iowa Synod and see at the same time what great tensions it caused among his own members.

The straw that broke the camel's back was the articles written by Professor Schmidt in the "Lutheraner" in 1875. As Ludwig Fuerbringer says concerning Professor Schmidt:

"In those days he wrote very ably against the doctrinal standpoint of the old Iowa Synod under the title: 'The Iowaan Misunderstandings and Camouflages,' (Schmidt's articles: "Ein Beitrag zur Pruefung der sogenannten 'Missverstaendnisse' zwischen Missouri und Iowa." Lutheraner, 30 (1874), pp. 65, 81, 89, 113. - "Zur Beleuchtung der neuesten Iowaischen Bemagtelungsversuche." Lutheraner, 31 (1875), pp. 49, 57, 65, 75).<sup>30</sup>

After these articles appeared in the "Lutheraner" twenty members left Bredow's congregation in 1876 for Kannings congregation.<sup>31</sup> It would probably be safe to say that Bredow felt like he had hit a low spot in his ministry. But the fierce battle came to an abrupt end in 1877 when Pastor Kanning died.

#### Conclusion

After such a story it would be easy to label the Missouri Synod the bad guys and the Iowa Synod the good guys. But things are not black and white in history as their are different shades of grey. Pastor Bredow and the Iowa Synod could be credited with a better practice of brotherly love than the Missouri Synod. But still brotherly love cannot replace the absolute truth of the precious Gospel. In concern for brotherly love, the Iowa Synod gave up truths of the Gospel and the Lutheran Confessions, a

far too high of a price to pay. The Missouri Synod on the other hand can be credited with remaining with the truth of the Gospel and the Lutheran confessions. But as in the case of Pastor Kanning to win souls for the truth, in his zeal he probably frightened as many people away from the Gospel as he gained for it.

Besides the higher theological implications, one must always remember that it is the laity in the end that bear the brunt of theological warfare. Souls are at stake and that is a very precious commodity in the sight of God. A lesson can be learned from this event in church history. If we use the Gospel as a club, we may do just as much damage as those people who oppose the truth of the Gospel. In the end, we can defeat our purpose of bringing people to believe in the whole truth of the Gospel. We must always remember that the Gospel is the ministry of healing. The physician comes to heal those who are sick, the man of God to seek and to save that which are lost.

Parochial Berichte des Westlichen District der deutschen ev.-luth. Synode  
 von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten.

For Kanning, P. W./ Pastor in: Denver, Iowa /Postamt: Denver, Bremer Co., Iowa

|                           | <u>1873</u> | <u>1874</u> | <u>1875</u> | <u>1876</u> | <u>1877</u> |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Gemeinden                 |             |             |             |             |             |
| nicht zur Synode gehorend | 3           | 1           | 2           | 3           | 1           |
| zur Synode gehorend       | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           |
| Gemeindeglieder           |             |             |             |             |             |
| Seelenzahl                | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           |
| Stimmberrechtigte         | 88          | 42          | 65          | 100         | 55          |
| Beitragende               | 0           | 1           | 15          | 15          | 5           |
| Schulen                   | 1           | 1           | 1           | 3           | 1           |
| Schulfinder               |             |             |             |             |             |
| einheimische              | 0           | 50          | 50          | 0           | 0           |
| fremde                    | 0           | 0           | 4           | 0           | 0           |
| total                     | 50          | 50          | 54          | 100         | 64          |
| Confirmirte               | 0           | 0           | 10          | 13          | 17          |
| Communicirte              |             |             |             |             |             |
| zur allgemeinen Beichte   | 0           | 0           | 500         | 550         | 0           |
| zur private Beichte       | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           | 0           |
| total                     | 200         | 170         | 500         | 550         | 300         |
| Getaufte                  |             |             |             |             |             |
| einheimische              | 0           | 3           | 8           | 0           | 0           |
| fremde                    | 0           | 0           | 21          | 0           | 0           |
| total                     | 0           | 3           | 29          | 30          | 25          |
| Copul. Paare              |             |             |             |             |             |
| einheimische              | 0           | 0           | 2           | 0           | 0           |
| fremde                    | 0           | 0           | 2           | 0           | 0           |
| total                     | 3           | 0           | 4           | 2           | 1           |
| Begrabene                 | 0           | 0           | 10          | 3           | 3           |

( Some zeroes may be a failure to make an entry.)

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## Footnotes

- 1 Heintzen, "Love Leaves Home," Concordia Pub. House, 1973, p. 55.
- 2 Dau, "Ebenezer," Concordia Pub. House, 1922, p. 164.
- 3 Heintzen, p. 57.
- 4 Dau, p. 152.
- 5 Dau, pp. 160-161.
- 6 Suelflow, "The Heart of Missouri," Concordia Pub. House, 1954, p. 54.
- 7 Bredow, "Erinnerungen aus dem Leben und Wirken eines amerikanisch lutherischen Pastors," 1904, p. 99.
- 8 Dau, p. 167.
- 9 Fritschel, "Biography of Drs. Sigmund and Gottfried Fritschel," Privately Printed 1951, p. 72.
- 10 Dau, p. 167.
- 11 Fritschel, p. 72.
- 12 Fritschel, p. 76.
- 13 The Centennial Story of St. John's Luth. Church, 1875 to 1975, Buck Creek, IA., p. 1.
- 14 Bredow, pp. 93-94.
- 15 Synodal Bericht of the Western District of the Missouri Synod 1874, p. 23.
- 16 Lutheraner, "Kirchweihe und Einfuehrung," by J.L. Craemer, den 1 Januer 1874, No. 1.
- 17 Bredow, p. 103.
- 18 Bredow, p. 104.
- 19 Bredow, p. 105.
- 20 Synodal Bericht of the Western District of the MO. Synod 1875, p. 17.



Footnotes Continued

- 21 The Centennial, St. John's Lutheran Church, p. 1.
- 22 The Centennial, St. John's Lutheran Church, p. 2.
- 23 The Centennial, St. John's Lutheran Church, p. 3.
- 24 Synodal Bericht of the Western District of the MO. Synod 1877, p. 13.
- 25 Bredow, p130.
- 26 On Sept. 12, 1875, Pastor Kuethe of the Iowa Synod performed a marriage for Gottfried Wolff ( a signer of the Iowa Synod Buck Creek Constitution) to Mathilda Koch in the Leroy Public School-house. According to the Statistical Report of the Western District 1877, Pastor Haendschfe of the Missouri Buck Creek congregation listed 2 preaching posts and Leroy Township as his mailing address.
- 27 Synodal Bericht of the Iowa District 1879, German Ev. Luth. Missouri, Ohio and other States, p. 1.
- 28 Synodal Bericht of the Western District 1876 of the MO. Synod, p. 5.
- 29 Bredow, p. 95.
- 30 Fuerbringer, "Persons and Events," Concordia Pub. House, 1947, p. 152.
- 31 Bredow, p. 96.