

The Helenville Forty-eighters and their Neighbors

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by Edward C. Fredrich

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By time-honored custom the opening paragraphs of essays of this sort present personal remarks of the essayist offering special explanations, private confessions, necessary apologies, humble disclaimers and the like. This writing is no exception.

The first necessary introductory explanation has to do with the wording of the title, especially the term *Forty-eighters*. It isn't that the year date 1848 is in any way in question. St. Peter Lutheran Church at Helenville was founded through the signing of a constitution by twenty-six members in October 1848, just 140 years ago. The WELS Historical Society is eminently correct when it assembles in this place at this time to note the 140th anniversary of the founding of this oldest congregation of the Central Conference and the Western Wisconsin District, and one of the very oldest in the whole synod.¹ Synodical congregations older than St. Peter at Helenville can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

The problem with *Forty-eighters* is the special connotation the term usually has in immigration literature. By that definition not every immigrant of 1848 is to be so named. A state history puts it this way:

Carl Scharz was typical of one group of immigrants, the Acht und Vierzigers or "Forty Eighters," refugees from the reaction which followed the unsuccessful liberal movement of 1848 in Germany.

These immigrants, mainly intellectuals of unorthodox political and religious ideals, were less numerous than their more conservative countrymen but because of usually superior education wielded influence out of proportion to their numbers.²

The title employs the term *Forty-eighters* in order to emphasize the anniversary date but does not want it to be misunderstood. For a time thought was given to the possibility of adding some explanatory adjective to avoid the pitfall, but the adjectives that came to mind always

seemed to have negative connotations. It just didn't seem appropriate to speak of "Helenville's Lowbrow Forty-eighters."

In any event, think of the St. Peter pioneers as founding their congregation in 1848 but not as intellectuals and radicals. These pioneers were devout believers and tillers of the soil God has provided in this area. They do not have to be thought of as inferior to any other immigrant group.

Those in the audience who have merit badges for steady attendance at these semi-annual meetings may well recall one gathering at Mequon several years ago when this essayist made a solemn promise never again to present a paper to the WELS Historical Society. Since then he has broken the promise on a previous occasion and is now in the process of breaking it again. It isn't necessarily that you are hearing a person who plays fast and loose with solemn promises but rather because of special circumstances prompting the breaches of promise.

On the earlier occasion a topic went begging. Nobody was interested in presenting a paper on a group called "Protestants," until one obliging person was found and pressed into service. In this particular case the topic was so attractive that it proved irresistible to the essayist despite any previous pledges to the contrary. And that leads into a final disclaimer.

This essayist is a native son. He was born here at Helenville 71 years ago. He was baptized and confirmed in this church. He received his first formal education in the school below the hill on the west side. That parsonage was his home through boyhood and to adulthood. Anyone born and bred to these fair horizon would not want to shun the opportunity to participate in these anniversary festivities.

All these personal remarks of the essayist add up to serious warning to the hearer. There is danger that some biased history may be presented that does not meet the discipline's standards of historical objectivity. You are hearing from a Helenville and St. Peter Church and School partisan. Take what you hear with the proverbial grain or two of salt. The essayist knows enough about history work that he understands the need for historical objectivity. He can promise he will try to be objective in the presentation to follow, but he probably will not succeed. At least we can be totally objective in the first part of the discussion of "Helenville's Forty-eighters and Their Neighbors." This first section has the heading:

I. Helenville, Hub of the Synod a Century and a Quarter Ago

It may strain the imagination to realize that the lane leading from the street up the hill to its top was the counterpart of the Wisconsin Synod's 3624 North Avenue of a few years ago and a reasonable facsimile of today's 2929 Mayfair Road. But that is the way it was 125 years ago. From 1863 to 1865 Wisconsin Synod history, much important synod history, played itself out in the parsonage that stood at the foot of this hill in those days. In the parsonage was the office of the third synodical president, Gottlieb Reim.

The stage was set for this development at the synodical convention of 1863 held May 29 to June 3 at Grace Church, Milwaukee, founded one year after St. Peter by Pastor Muehlhaeuser, synodical founder and first president. The 1863 synodical convention passed the significant resolution to begin a worker training school at Watertown that very fall in temporary quarters. A man was chosen to begin the teaching. This was Edward Moldehnke, a Halle University graduate recently come to this country as an emissary of the mission societies at Berlin and Lagenberg. That much was relatively easy. What was harder was to plan for the erection of the permanent plant that would soon be needed.³

In those days the synodical budget was small. The 1863 report shows \$417.67 for mission purposes, \$24.80 for student support and \$394.27 for other synodical purposes, a grand total of \$836.74. This was a pittance compared to the \$10,000 needed for the first school building. In this difficulty the synod resolved to send President Bading overseas to gather funds among Lutherans in the Old Country. Bading's congregation would be cared for by Professor Moldehnke and by the Farmington pastor, Adolph Hoenecke. But what about Bading's responsibility as synod president? The body had up to that time seen no need for a vice-president.

In this situation, although it was not an even-numbered year when synodical elections normally were held, a special vice-presidential election was resolved. Gottlieb Reim was chosen to act in the presidential office for the year that remained in Bading's second term. When Bading could not complete the collection by the time of the 1864 Manitowoc convention, Reim was chosen as president for the two-year term, 1864-1866, with his brother-in-law, William Streissguth, as his vice-president and Adolph Hoenecke as synodical secretary. Helenville, with an assist from Farmington, was to be the seat of synodical administration from 1863 to 1866. Actually this situation prevailed only to 1865 but that is another story to be told later.

Gottlieb Reim, acting synod president from 1863 to 1864 and elected president in 1864, had come to serve the Helenville congregation in February 1858. Pastor Reim, a Wuertemberg cobbler by trade, had at age 22 enrolled in the Basel Mission School and completed a five-year course of study in 1855. In that year he came to America, presented himself to President Muehlhaeuser and was assigned to the Ashford field in Dodge County. His special gifts were soon recognized by the brethren and he was elected chairman of the Northwestern Conference, the original grouping out of which the present-day Central Conference was carved. Then came the call to Helenville and the beginning of a pastorate here that would last until 1865. From 1860 to 1862 he served as synodical secretary and readied himself thereby for a larger office that he would soon be called to fill.

The two years of work as the synodical officer from 1863 to 1865, one as acting and the second as elected president were not just a stand-by, fill-in service for a president who was temporarily on leave for a European fundraising junket. The Reim years in the synodical presidency loom large in the whole history despite the relative brevity of the term of office.

The vice-presidential report that Gottlieb Reim presented to the 1864 Manitowoc synod that elected him to a full two year presidential term points to large and important synod business, much of it carried out in the Helenville parsonage.

For the first item, Reim could report that six men were being presented to the synod as new pastoral workers: E. Giese, A. Opitz, G. Vorberg, G. Thiele who became a seminary professor in 1878, J. Zwolanek, who could not be admitted to the synod because a release from his former church body was not at hand, and E. Mayerhoff. J. Brockmann, who had arrived in Wisconsin the previous year, could also be admitted to the synod's pastoral ranks in 1864.

These considerable gains for a church body that had less than 40 pastors were to a certain extent offset by losses. Gottlieb Reim had to report the death of a "dear brother and coworker," C. Koester, a synodical veteran ranking in seniority behind only J. Muehlhaeuser and C. Goldammer of Jefferson. As painful for Reim to report were disciplinary actions that had to be taken against three of the pastors on the synodical roll. The report of the committee on the president's report recommending endorsement of these disciplinary actions was accepted with some reluctance in the case of Pastor Leupp.⁴

The “Implementing Last Year’s Synodical Resolutions” section of the presidential report points to several major undertakings that Reim had to oversee. At this point in time, one of them, the organization’s legal incorporation, may seem nothing more than a routine business item. That it was more than that is indicated by the very special thanks Reim expresses in this connection to Mr. Struve of Farmington and Mr. Bingham, the former for initiating the matter and the latter for seeing to its enactment in the legislative body. In addition, the convention expressed concern that the charter covered the whole synodical body and not just the school’s board of governors.

What had made the charter necessary was the worker-training school. That school, Reim could happily report to the Manitowoc convention, had operated during the 1863-1864, even if the enrollment total was one.

Reim’s 1865 presidential report could contain this news about the Watertown school: “In a few weeks it will be possible to occupy the building begun last year. As soon as that happens, the college could and should be opened.” It must have been a great joy for Reim to see the synod’s first worker-training school building take shape in time for the 1865-1866 school year.

Much less enjoyable was the task of serving as chief officer for a church body that was not of one mind and one spirit regarding its basic theological position. The lax Lutheranism that had characterized the founding was giving way to a stronger confessionalism. Ties with the union mission societies still existed, however, and President Bading was in fact at that very time collecting funds for the Watertown school within the congregations of the Prussian Union. The issue was coming to a head during Reim’s years as synod president.

Many expected the 1864 convention to be a battleground on which to fight out the basic difference. The new synod secretary, Adolph Hoenecke of Farmington, introduced his convention account with the words: “As much as substantial differences had been feared here and there, one thing that was confirmed in the meeting by convincing and strong evidence was that the whole synod is obviously committed to the path leading to a determined position.”

Despite the secretary’s optimism, the differences could flare during and between conventions. Nobody wanted to compromise doctrine or espouse out-and-out unionism, but there were variations in the form in which this viewpoint expressed itself. Pastor Phillipp Koehler headed a group that took a hard line; others wanted to tread more softly so as not to jeopardize relations with the union societies and the collection in progress. Reim, as president, was caught in the middle. Actually he was in the middle. The combination of strong doctrinal views and a mild personal disposition made him a good leader in this critical time in the young church body’s development.

His leadership at the 1864 Manitowoc convention may well have been the main human factor in preventing what many had feared would happen there. This was the only convention at which Reim filled the chair. His term was to run until 1866 but by the time of the 1865 convention Reim had resigned both the presidency and his synodical membership and had moved from Helenville to Beaver Dam.

This surprising, actually shocking, development was not a synodical but a local congregational problem. Thorough investigation on the congregational and the synodical level completely exonerated Pastor Reim of any improper action and recognized that he was a victim of slander that a woman in the congregation had spread.⁵

Minutes of a March 2, 1865, church council meeting report:

On this day the church council of the Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, meeting because of the—writing, in and after a long and difficult investigation...ascertain that [the

congregational member] had spread lies and has deceived the children of our school. Her father—himself was eventually present as the meeting drew to a close and personally heard that she had broadcast lies and slandered Reverend Reim, our pastor, grievously.

We the council members of this congregation herewith declare that Pastor Reim is innocent in this matter and declare further that Mrs.—must present a public apology. To this the council members attest. George Pfeifer.

The apology was tendered in the presence of the church council before the worship service on March 5. (Dated, March 6).

Despite the complete vindication Pastor Reim must have been disturbed by the unfortunate happening to the point of questioning his ability to serve effectively at Helenville. When soon after a call came from Beaver Dam, he accepted.

The congregational record states of the April 9, 1865, call meeting:

At this meeting Pastor Reim, because of various circumstances, asked to be released of his duties as pastor of this congregation. A ballot vote was taken: 56 voted to have him stay and 4 to release him. The congregation then expressed its thanks to Pastor Reim for his love and loyalty in all the tasks of his work as pastor here, as well as his exemplary conduct...Pastor Reim then asked the congregation to release him, since he felt compelled to accept his new call. If circumstances allow in the future, however, he would be glad to return and again serve here. He also promised to do all he could to help in getting a good man here in his place.

When Pastor Reim left Helenville on May 28 a large number of members saw him off by traveling the first leg of the trip to Beaver Dam as far as Jefferson and there bid him a sad farewell. In June Reim carried the resigning two steps farther. On June 4 he wrote his brother-in-law, Vice-President William Streissguth, that he was resigning the synodical presidency and on June 9 he followed that with a letter requesting a “temporary release” from the synod.⁶

When the convention reacted to this request for a resignation, it once more thoroughly investigated the sorry affair and discussed it at both a ministerial meeting and a full convention session. The result once again was a declaration of Reim’s innocence and upright behavior, even if it employs the wording of a Scotch verdict, namely that “it could not convince itself of guilt of Pastor Reim” and trusted that in his omniscience God would “in his time shed light on this clouded matter.”

One could go on and on speculating about “the clouded matter” but to what avail. The conclusion reached in a research paper on the subject provides a good summary and conclusion. Lynn Wiedmann writes:

Concern for tender consciences, a sincere desire that the ministry be not blamed, and a hope that time would heal and that distance would soothe may have led Pastor Reim to ask for this temporary dismissal from the presidency and from synodical membership...Pastor Reim was more concerned with the souls and consciences of people than with the right and fame of his name. He sacrificed a promising career in the Wisconsin Synod and left a congregation that he loved so that the ministry and his Savior would not be blamed.

A few facts can round out this section.⁷ A five-year pastorate in Beaver Dam put Reim in the middle of a big lodge battle. He then accepted a call to New Ulm and served there faithfully from 1870 to 1882 when he died from a fall from a wagon while hurrying to a parishioner’s sickbed.

After Reim left Helenville the close relation between synodical and congregational history that existed from 1863 to 1865 was to a great extent diminished. It did, however, have a resurgence of sorts four years later. The minutes of the 1868 convention close with this notation: "After the minutes were read and approved the synod adjourned until the Thursday after the Trinity Festival 1869 at 9:00 A.M. when, God willing it will assemble in the midst of the congregation at Helenville." God willed it and the 1869 synodical convention is the Helenville Convention.

What Churchill once said comes to mind: "Never have so many owed so much to so few!" The little village played host to a major synodical convention, in some respects the most important of all its conventions, a convention that would chart the church body's path way for over 90 years.

On May 28, 1869, 46 of the synod's 49 pastors descended on the village and the old church that was built during Reims pastorate. There were 23 congregational delegates and 11 registered guests, among them official delegates from the Missouri, Minnesota and Iowa Synods. President Bading, who was elected in 1868 and served until 1889, presided at the sessions. Senior among the pastors was C. F. Goldammer who attained that rank when John Muehlhaeuser died in 1867. The local pastor, Reim's replacement was T. Gensicke.

Local legend has it that one morning session was delayed for a considerable time. It seems that the pastor slated to hold forth that morning was quite tardy because he had gotten interested in helping his host with his morning chores and the host neglected to call the attention of his guest and helping hand to the lateness of the hour.

The major essay on the church was presented by Pastor T. Jaekel, Muehlhaeuser's successor at Milwaukee's Grace Church and long-time synod treasurer. The convention held six score years ago discussed an item that will again appear on the agenda of the 1989 convention. It passed resolutions that made possible the publication of the revised and improved and enlarged hymnal in 1870.

The most noteworthy agenda items, however, were in the interchurch relations area. The last fellowship ties with former partners were ended. Relations with the General Council were severed because of the body's weak confessional stand. Last claims on Prussian Union monies collected by Bading were yielded. The synod was grateful for all the help it had received from that direction from its founding on but had grown confessionally and distanced itself from the Union way of life.

Because these old associations were completely ended, a new fellowship could be declared at the 1869 convention by the ratification of an agreement reached the previous fall by representatives of the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. The ratified agreement stated, among other points: "Both synods joyfully recognize one another as orthodox Lutheran church bodies and there will be pulpit and altar fellowship between the synods."

Because Missouri in 1869 did at Ft. Wayne what Wisconsin did the same year at Helenville, a long and strong association blossomed. It was a harbinger of the formation of the Synodical Conference three years later and would endure as a blessing to Missouri, Wisconsin and many others until 1961.

Not so important and not so long-lasting was a worker-training agreement between the synods that the 1869 Helenville convention also ratified. For a decade Missouri had students and one professor at the Watertown school while Wisconsin transferred its seminary operation to St. Louis. It was not possible for Wisconsin to send a professor to St. Louis and the arrangement soon ceased. The fellowship ties with Missouri, however, flourished and led to mutual gains in

doctrine and in missions. That is why the 1869 Helenville synod convention has such an honored place in the church body's annals.

Up to this point attention has been given to Helenville's place in the Wisconsin Synod. Sufficient evidence has been presented to validate the thesis that Helenville was once the hub of the synodical wheel, a place of importance ranking then just behind Watertown and Milwaukee. Much as this seems and sounds like civic pride and blind partisanship, it has the backing of the historical record. The next section of the paper puts Helenville in its local, its conference setting as it describes:

II. The Joint Mission Festival at Helenville in 1872

What follows is a translation of a *Gemeinde-Blatt* article that appeared in the August 1, 1872, issue under the title, "Mission Festival." It is an eye-witness description by a participant, Pastor B. Ungrodt of Jefferson. The report running over two pages follows:

On the seventh Sunday after Trinity the four Lutheran congregations at Farmington, Jefferson, Fort Atkinson and Helenville celebrated their joint mission festival in a grove located near the last-named church. Pastor Schneider of the Missouri Synod at Concord with most of his congregation had also joined the festival in response to a friendly invitation. Already by 8:00 a.m. there appeared, coming from all directions, an almost unbroken procession of buggies, carriages and wagons, enveloped in thick dust clouds and crowded with festival participants dripping sweat in the almost tropical heat, yearning for the inviting shade of the festival grove and then seating themselves on the prepared benches.

At 9:30 the festival service began with the singing of "All Glory be to God on High." After the liturgical service, led by the pastor of the host congregation, Pastor Schneider mounted the pulpit and read the glorious mission prophecy that the Lord proclaims in the first part of the Prophet Isaiah's Chapter 60 and showed, following the passage point for point, how all men are by nature blind and dead in trespasses and sins; how God, however, has let the glory of his grace in Christ Jesus come over them, first the Jews and then the Gentiles, through the gospel; and how he intends further to glorify himself by gathering the Gentiles into his kingdom of grace until the end of the world and the last of the days.

The undersigned was to present the historical address. On the basis of Genesis 40:14 he—by referring to slavery, the humiliation and dishonor of the female sex, the social and religious customs of the African tribes in so far as they are known—sought to depict their deep misery, from which the cry for help reaches out to the hearts of Christians: "When all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness." Then he pointed out how, just as the chief cupbearer had forgotten the imprisoned Joseph for a time but then aware of his sin, sought to make good the neglect, so most Christians for a long time forgot the miserable, enslaved heathen and it is now time to acknowledge the sin, regret it in sincere repentance and by heartfelt intercession and faithful labor try to make up in some way for the neglect so that the imprisonment of the heathen can be ended.

Since time for the noon meal had come, a two-hour break occurred during which the present guests were refreshed bountifully with food and drink by the Helenville

congregation and pastor. For this I herewith express a friendly thanks in the name of all the guests.

Shortly after 2:00 p.m. the afternoon service began. After the singing of a mission hymn, Pastor Opitz preached on the Lord's command, "Go into all the world," recorded in Mark 16:15-16...Finally Pastor Brockmann showed in a down-to-earth and moving way on the basis of the Judges 7 story of Gideon's conflicts and conquests how mission work, both within one's own church and without among heathen nations, is just such a story of conflicts and conquests in which the Lord through paltry and unpretentious means and weapons accomplishes what is great and glorious...This was also applied to our synodical schools at Watertown and they were recommended to the caring love of the festival gathering.

Between the festival sermons several edifying chorales were sung by the Jefferson choir that added their bit in enhancing the festival joy.

This edifying mission festival closed with prayer, a brief final word by Pastor Gensicke, in which he in his own impressive way made the festival collection a special concern of the celebrants, and the Lord's blessing...

The collection at the festival service was about \$90.00. This sum was raised to \$115.00 by late offerings from members of the Helenville congregation who were not able to attend the festival.

The Lord be praised for everything! B. Ungrodt

It would be unneighborly not to include at least a brief sketch of the early histories of these good neighbors of Helenville: Farmington, Jefferson and Fort Atkinson. All three have put out anniversary histories that supply the following material.

The golden anniversary picture history of the Western Wisconsin District supplies this caption for Immanuel: "To the east of Johnson Creek in Farmington is Immanuel congregation. This rural church has about 500 communicants. It was founded by Dr. Adolph Hoenecke." To have such a founder would be an honor for any WELS congregation. The only problem for Immanuel in Farmington, just a stone's throw north of here, is that the booklet is in error. Immanuel was already four years old when Adolph Hoenecke came to Wisconsin and the congregation became his first charge in 1863.

Immanuel's first pastor was K. Kienow a teacher at Watertown. In the sporadic early records of the congregation the first entry of a pastoral act is the burial notice of Christian Fritz dated on November 17, 1859. In 1860 the first property was acquired and a log church was built. When Kienow accepted the call to be the first resident pastor at St. Paul in Fort Atkinson, the vacancy was filled, as stated, by Adolph Hoenecke.

Hoenecke only served Farmington three years but during that brief time began to be recognized as one of the synod's most talented pastors. He was elected synod secretary in 1864, the same year that G. Reim was elected president. When touchy correspondence had to be carried on with the mission societies it was Hoenecke who aided Reim by drafting the letters. In 1866 a second seminary teacher, who would also serve as dean, was needed at the infant seminary at Watertown, the synod almost automatically and unanimously wanted Hoenecke to fill that post. Almost overnight, because of Edward Moldehnke's resignation and return to Germany, Adolph Hoenecke became the sole theological teacher of the synod.

Farmington was served by three pastors from 1866-1874. In 1868 a larger church had to be erected to accommodate the growing congregation. In 1874 A. Denninger began a longer

twelve year pastorate. During his tenure the big election—conversion controversy broke out. Unfortunately, Immanuel opted for election *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith) and as a consequence terminated its membership in the Wisconsin Synod which it had held since 1864. How strange that among the very few congregations that left our synod in this controversy, one should be included that had been nurtured by Hoenecke who led the synod in achieving a correct grasp of the Bible's teaching that we are elected in view of God's mercy and Christ's merits and not in view of our faith.

The essayist vividly recalls a Sunday in the spring of 1939 when he preached his first sermon. It was at Farmington. Along with the usual jitters that predominate at such a first venture, the rookie preacher was having trouble grasping the intricacies of some uncommon liturgical practices. The local pastor tried to explain by saying, "We have those differences in our order of service at Immanuel because we were served for a long time by Iowa Synod pastors."

The local pastor was August Paap, who came to Farmington in 1917 and served the congregation longer than anyone else on the pastoral roster. In the first half of this century he was among that group of Central Conference pastors who through long service at their posts became almost inseparably associated with their congregations.

Farmington was a sister congregation of St. Peter at Helenville, younger by 11 years. St. John at Jefferson stood between the two, older than Immanuel by 8 years and younger than St. Peter by 3. The Jefferson founding was in the spring of 1851. The original church site was the *Christberg* on the road between Jefferson and Helenville.⁸ The first church in Jefferson proper was dedicated in 1861.

Although there were 64 families involved in the 1851 founding, it took until 1858 before the group had a resident pastor. During those seven years pastors at Helenville helped out as much as they could. A teacher, E. Ruppnow, came in 1858 and served until 1863. He was followed by the synod's veteran home missionary, C. Goldammer. In 1870 came the former African missionary and Milwaukee pastor. B. Ungrodt, whose mission festival account was just read.

The longest pastorate in the congregation's history, that of H. Vogel, began in 1881 and lasted into the next century to 1910, a period, of exactly 29 years from installation to burial. In 1895 the still very serviceable present church was dedicated.

The first resident pastors devoted a good share of their time to teaching in the congregation's school. During Ungrodt's years the first full-time teacher was called and a school was erected that would serve its purpose for over 70 years. Then finally in 1951 the larger present school building was dedicated. Only 13 years later additional rooms had to be supplied when the pupil count had reached 272 and the teaching staff 9. On this staff was O. W. Jungkuntz who had begun his work at Jefferson in 1922 and was still serving St. John in various functions until his retirement just a few years ago.

Of the four congregations that joined in the 1872 mission festival at Helenville, Fort Atkinson was the youngest. It was organized on November 23, 1861. The first pastoral service was supplied by the synod's traveling missionary, E. Moldehnke who had set up his headquarters near Fort Atkinson at Germany. The first resident pastor was K. Kienow who came in 1862, as we have already heard, after serving the Farmington Lutherans. There were several short pastorates and longer vacancies from the time of Kienow's leaving in 1865 and Pastor J. Brockmann's coming in 1868.

Pastor Brockmann, a Hermannsburg missionary before coming to this country, was instructed in his call to teach at least four days a week. This was the beginning of the St. Paul school. A building was erected in 1869 between the church, dedicated in 1863, and the parsonage, built during the Hoerlein pastorate, 1865-1867. In just six years the young congregation provided a full plant, even though these were Civil War and immediate post-war years.

During Pastor Dowidat's time (1875-1881) the first full-time teacher was called. When Pastor John Sprengling's one-year service was cut short by death, Julius Haase was called. During his years congregational growth forced an enlargement of the church building.

In 1894 A. F. Nicolaus began one of those long pastorates that were becoming the rule instead of the exception in the Central Conference. Pastor Nicolaus retired in 1926 after 32 years of service at St. Pauls. On December 8, 1901, the present church had been dedicated.

By the time of Nicolaus' retirement the Fort Atkinson congregation had become involved in a distressing conflict between the pastor and two women teachers. The suspension of the teachers became a *cause celebre* in what would become known as the Protestant Controversy. This premature reappearance in the ranks of synod's teachers so upset St. Paul's that for a brief time it relinquished the synodical membership it had held since 1872.

All this, however, takes us well beyond the turn of the century that was quite arbitrarily chosen as a time parameter for this writing. What remains after these glimpses at Helenville in the synodical and then its area setting is a return to the original subject, the congregation being especially celebrated on the 140th anniversary of its founding. Our focus is on additional

III. Highlights from Helenville's History in the 1800s

In the year that the Wisconsin area went from the territorial stage to statehood Lutherans in the Helenville area, mostly from Bavaria and Wuerttemberg, took steps to found St. Peter congregation. In the spring of 1848 the pioneers, encouraged by an influx of new settlers in the area, reached the decision to form a congregation, draft a constitution and build a log church. This resolution was signed by 26 members. In October the first constitution was formally adopted and work on the building was begun on land donated by Bernard Keller.

In the true sense, there had been a church in Helenville before 1848. For some years Lutherans, who began to come into the area around the middle years of the 1840s, had gathered in one another's homes on Sunday mornings to join in singing hymns, saying prayers and hearing God's Word. This was church, even though many of the ecclesiastical formalities were not yet in place. The 1948 congregational history, in listing the pioneers who gathered for such worship, mentions such family names as Bullwinkel, Glaesel, Haag, Heine, Horn, Keller, Koepfel, Martin, Maurer and Weber. The first name, Bullwinkel, used to be the place name for the village on old maps. We can be glad today for the change from family name to that of the pioneer's wife.

Early problems and conflicts about the confessional Lutheran character of the young congregation are hinted at in a letter written by a member, John Conrad Haug [Haag?], to Synod President Muehlhaeuser in 1857. The letter in part reads:

We are still without a pastor... The most unruly group in our Helenville congregation want a preacher who has no synodical ties. The better part, however, is of a different opinion, since a year ago we adopted a Lutheran constitution, which we would be reluctant to have rejected now. After all, Pastor Sinke had a lot of trouble getting it adopted. Please do not disregard the earnest request I am making.⁹

In response to the request Pastor G. Reim eventually came in February 1858 to begin the significant service that lasted, until 1865 and that has already been described in some detail.

The previous pastor had been the Pastor Sinke, mentioned in that letter as one concerned about Lutheran confessionalism. He died in December 1857 and is buried in the Helenville cemetery. Pastor Sinke had been preceded by the first resident shepherd, Pastor Kleineges who came in 1849 and is no doubt the P. Kleinegees mentioned in the 1851 synodical proceedings as closing the ministerial session with prayer. In 1854 he left Helenville, apparently after some discord.

The “apparently” is necessary because of confusion and gaps in the early records. Some of the records were burned by a pastor for some reason or another. Even Pastor Reim did not know all the answers. In the St. Peter *Kirchenbuch I* on the inside corner he wrote: “A listing of the pastoral acts of previous pastors (Kleineges, Biel and Sinke) is simply not available.”¹⁰

From G. Reim to the end of the century these are the Helenville pastors: Traugott Gensicke (1865-1874), Candidate H. Eckelman (1874-1875), George Reinsch (1875-1880), John Koerner (1880-1891), Theodore Hartwig (1891-1895) and John Himmler (1895-1903). In that year a pastorate began that would extend to 1946 and that is more properly described by others.

Some notable congregational events in the last half of the previous century that should not be passed by without mention are:

- Membership in the Wisconsin Synod—1859
- Building of the second church—1861
- Building of the second parsonage—1862
- Building of the first school—1868
- Introduction of the new hymnal—1872
- Collections for the new Rome congregation—1887
- Building of the new parsonage—1896
- Dedication of the new church—1902

The fourth item in the previous list of events is “Building of the first school—1868.” It introduces an anniversary subject that the essayist, who is a graduate of the St. Peter Lutheran School, is most ready and eager to treat. The year 1868 should not be taken to mean that in that year the history of the congregation’s school began. On the contrary, already in 1851 the annual meeting went on record as calling for Christian education for the children of the congregation by the pastor. The erection of the school building simply meant that the teaching which previously had been conducted in the church now had its own building.

By 1882 St. Peter could call a full-time teacher to serve in the school. This was Philip Becker who remained until 1889. The line that Becker began 106 years ago has continued unbroken to this time. In that line occur such names as Carl Bolle (1895-1896) who later headed Northwestern College’s music department for many years, Henry Wicke (1899-1911), Ewald Kuester (1912-1928) from whom I learned my A-B-Cs and a lot of other things, Adolph Fehlauer (1930-1938), later long-time executive officer of synod’s educational board, and Ervin Humann (1938-1946), the last of the teachers I knew as a Helenville neighbor.

In 1914 a “new” school was built. It still stands across the road from the parsonage. No doubt, the present school building is its superior in every way and no doubt more than a one-room school became a necessity but you will not chide some of us for having a softer spot in our hearts for that one-room school and the excellent education imparted there.

The final outline item reads “The Empty Parsonage Office.”

The reference is to the previous parsonage replaced in 1896. The time is the fall of 1892. The Helenville pastor is on temporary leave in Arizona Territory hunting for Indians as prospective targets for a mission effort the Wisconsin Synod wanted to launch. Pastor Hartwig and Pastor Koch of Columbus had been commissioned to find a virgin Indian mission field. They found it in Apacheland and soon work was underway that still continues. Once again the Helenville congregation did its bit for the synodical cause and for the ongoing work of missions.

This is a good place to break off. We are back where we began—with Helenville in its synodical setting. So much remains to be said. It will have to remain unsaid. If there is one blot on the 140 year record still worth mentioning, it is that so few have gone from Helenville into the pastoral ranks, while so many pastors have come to serve. There is reason and time to remedy that situation.

If there is one more word of thanks and praise to be said, let it be said to the Lord of the Church, the Lord Jesus, the one hero in this long story of seven score years. To him and to his sustaining Word be all the praise and all the glory.

If there is a final anniversary prayer to be said as the future years are faced, let it be: “Abide, O dearest Jesus, among us with Thy grace and with Thy Word.”

¹ Among them are Pastor Schmid’s plantings in Michigan from 1833 on and several in the Milwaukee area.

² H. Russell Austin, *The Wisconsin Story* (Milwaukee: Journal Company, 1948) pp 115-116.

³ See the 1863 *Wisconsin Proceedings* for these and subsequent details.

⁴ The 1864 *Wisconsin Proceedings* has Reim's report on pp 4-8.

⁵ The subject was thoroughly investigated by Lynn Wiedmann as a student at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. His writing “The Helenville Problem” is in the essay file of the schools library and supplies documentation from the congregation's records. Its conclusion is quoted in a subsequent paragraph.

⁶ See Streissguth's synodical report on p 7 of the 1965 *Wisconsin Proceedings*. The synodical action is recorded on p 16.

⁷ More material on the subject is supplied in “Two Forgotten Wisconsin Presidents: Reim and Streissguth” in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* LXXV (July 1978), 188-198.

⁸ *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1851.

⁹ From the files of early synod correspondence and records that J. P. Koehler set in order and that are preserved at the Northwestern College Library. The translation team of Lehman—Schroeder—Sullivan is in the process of putting them into English. Dr. Lehmann supplied the essayist with this translated letter.

¹⁰ A similar problem exists with minutes of congregational meetings from August 1866 to May 1872.