

Wisconsin's Interchurch Relations in the Early Years

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[In the fall of 1975 one of the topics treated at the Seminary Pastors' institute was "Wisconsin's Interchurch Relations." This article is the first of five lectures by the author on that topic.]

Apart from the natural interest in historical subjects engendered by a larger observance of a synodical anniversary, this topic, "Wisconsin's Interchurch Relations," deserves consideration in its own right. An illumination of past developments in this area of concern will not only provide a fuller and clearer view of our church body's past century and a quarter as a whole but could also yield special insights useful in the projects and problems of today and tomorrow.

The reach beyond the borders of the little world and the relations with the larger world encountered out there can be most instructive for those endeavoring to understand fully what makes the little world itself tick. This is as true of a church body as it is of an earthly nation.

The bicentennial of this country of ours, for instance, will not be adequately appreciated nor knowledgeably celebrated if the point of view does not enlarge to embrace the concept of the early American advantages found in Europe's disadvantages. Likewise it is only the foreign relations setting that can supply a rationalization for the dubious conduct of New England or the strange policy of the South in well-known war situations in U.S. history.

So in church history, especially the American and Lutheran variety. When finally the books are written that treat of the decline and fall of what was once the most exemplary church body on the American Lutheran scene, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, it is a likely surmise that major attention will be given to the role that intersynodical dealings played in paving the way to the ecclesiastical Missouri compromise.

In the history of our country and of this country's Lutheranism there is abundant evidence to suggest that one can easily come to deep pitfalls and great grief, in "some corner of a foreign field." Nations and church bodies heavily engaged in external affairs encounter a double set of problems and require a double portion of prudence.

Such considerations suggest that the present time and the near future may well prove to be a very crucial era in the Wisconsin Synod story. The end of fellowship relations with the Missouri Synod brought with it an end also of the leadership and domination of intersynodical relations of the Synodical Conference that the larger body quite naturally provided. At the same time, that body relinquished its role of major spokesman on behalf of the conservative and confessional cause of the Synodical Conference and bequeathed it to us and a few others.

We are being called upon to stand on our own feet in dealings with other church bodies and the dealings seem to be increasing year by year in quantity, complexity, and consequence. For our own sake and the sake of others we do well to call on past experience for guidance in present and future assignments. Very much in place is the assigned study of the Wisconsin Synod's interchurch relations.

To indicate the scope and trend of all five lectures, a brief outline is supplied at this point.¹

Part One: *Wisconsin's Interchurch Relations in the Early Years*

I. Overseas Relations

A. The Original Prussian Union Connection

1. Aid from Langenberg and Berlin
2. Requirements and Returns

B. Other Ties

1. Basel

¹ The titles of this and subsequent articles in the series are *italicized*.

- 2. Hermannsburg
- C. Break with the Union
 - 1. The Collection and Mounting Problems
 - 2. Parting of the Ways
- II. Relations in This Country
 - A. Eastern Lutherans
 - 1. Pennsylvania
 - 2. Others
 - B. “Old Lutherans”
 - 1. Buffalo
 - 2. Missouri
 - C. Other Lutheran Neighbors
 - 1. To the South and East: Ohio, Michigan, Illinois
 - 2. To the North and West: Minnesota and Iowa

Part Two: *Wisconsin's First Federation Memberships*

- I. Larger Associations
 - A. The General Council Membership
 - 1. Affiliation
 - 2. Withdrawal
 - B. Synodical Conference Formation
 - 1. Missouri Fellowship Declared
 - 2. Fellowship with Other Conference Members
 - C. The First Decade of Synodical Conference Membership
 - 1. State Synod Proposal
 - 2. Election Controversy
- II. The Federated Synod of 1892
 - A. Relations with Minnesota
 - 1. Strained Relations
 - 2. Improved Relations
 - B. Relations with Michigan
 - 1. Fellowship Broken
 - 2. Fellowship Renewed
 - C. Relations with Nebraska
 - 1. First Contacts
 - 2. Association

Part Three: *Interchurch Relations in the First Third of this Century*

- I. The Larger Lutheran Scene
 - A. Intersynodical Discussions in the First Decade
 - 1. Conversion and Election
 - 2. Other Issues
 - B. The “Chicago Theses” Endeavor
 - 1. Grassroots Beginnings
 - 2. On the Intersynodical Level
 - C. Lutheran Discussions in the 1930's
 - 1. Response to the UCLA Overture
 - 2. Wisconsin and the ALC
- II. Closer to Home

- A. The Merger in 1917–1918
 - 1. Preparation
 - 2. Consummation
- B. Protestants
 - 1. The Break
 - 2. Ineffectual Peace Efforts
- C. Church and Ministry
 - 1. Origins of the Controversy
 - 2. Dealings with Missouri

Part Four: *The Great Debate with Missouri*

- I. Before 1955 and Beyond
 - A. Earliest Protests
 - 1. Missouri-ALC Relations
 - 2. Other Problems
 - B. Sharper Synodical Confrontations
 - 1. Common Confession
 - 2. Publications
 - C. Synodical Conference Dealings
 - 1. First Failures
 - 2. The 1954 Effort
- II. During and After 1955
 - A. To the Brink of a Break
 - 1. Wisconsin's 1955 Convention
 - 2. Wisconsin's 1956 and 1957 Conventions
 - B. Last Ditch Efforts
 - 1. Intersynodical Doctrinal Statements
 - 2. Overseas Brethren
 - C. End of Fellowship
 - 1. The Impasse
 - 2. The Break

Part Five: *Interchurch Relations in Recent Years*

- I. In This Country
 - A. Relations with the Brethren
 - 1. ELS
 - 2. FAL
 - B. Relations with Former Synodical Brethren
 - 1. CLC
 - 2. Protestants
 - C. Other Relations
 - 1. Former Synodical Conference Brethren
 - 2. Farther Afield
- II. In Other Countries
 - A. Germany
 - 1. Before the Merger
 - 2. Since the Merger
 - B. Sweden
 - 1. Friendship

- 2. Fellowship
- C. Other Areas
 - 1. Complications and Disappointments
 - 2. Continuing Efforts

One other introductory item that deserves mention at this point is the matter of bibliographical suggestions. Little needs to be said, for the topic has not been all that extensively treated in the past. The major source for information is the synodical record itself, the Proceedings and other official reports.² Koehler provides helpful material for the first three of the five sections of the discussion.³

When other major sources play a significant role in determining the account, they will receive spot mention. Almost all will be of the prime variety.

For the first section, titled “Wisconsin’s Interchurch Relations in the Early Years,” the bulk of the material is supplied by official Proceedings, some *Gemeinde-Blatt* accounts, and Koehler’s extensive treatment in his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*.

I. Interchurch Relations Overseas

In the subdivision of the first section that deals with the overseas side of the story the one all-important factor is the original and congenital Prussian Union connection. Wisconsin’s founding was an enterprise of three Langenberg missionaries aided by one Barmen and one Basel reject. The umbilical cord was not severed until the second decade was nearly completed. Of the 90 pastors that served in the Wisconsin Synod in those two decades almost half, forty-three to be exact, came to us with a Langenberg or Berlin blessing or background.⁴ Three of the first four presidents, Muehlhaeuser, Bading, and Reim, are included in this group.

In its second year Wisconsin established a more or less official connection with Langenberg. The 1851 convention instructed President Muehlhaeuser “to send as soon as possible a plea to the German-Protestant Society in Barmen with the earnest request that it might especially think of Wisconsin when it next sends out pastors.”⁵ From that time on Langenberg definitely regarded the Wisconsin Synod as its special charge and sent it over twenty pastors.

Perhaps the explanation is in place that for the mission society in question a number of designations are used, quite interchangeably. The term *Rhine Mission Society* points to the larger association of several local societies in that area. Barmen, one of these, was the location of the mission school that served the whole area. Inside the larger association was the Langenberg Society that specialized in North American missions and is consequently featured in the account of Wisconsin’s origins and early years.

In that account the Berlin Society stands alongside Langenberg as a generous patron of the infant synod in the new midwestern state. Langenberg is the big name in the first decade but Berlin comes to the fore in the mid 1860’s when the arrangement was worked out whereby university men could count service in Wisconsin in establishing seniority and when Bading undertook the European fund raising for the school at Watertown.

² The early Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, *Verhandlungen der Versammlung der Evangel.-Lutherischen Synode von Wisconsin*, from 1849–1857 are available in a photostatic reproduction of a printing of the original manuscripts in volume XXXIX of Northwestern College’s *Black and Red* and are published in one volume with the Proceedings of 1858–1869. Translations from these records, as well as from others, are by the essayist, unless otherwise indicated. Subsequent references will be given as *Wisconsin Proceedings*, with date and location.

³ J.P. Koehler wrote *Geschichte der Allgemeinen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Wisconsin und andern Staaten* (Milwaukee, 1925). This is the first volume in German of the revised and completed English *History of the Wisconsin Synod* carried in *Faith-Life* from February 1938 to January 1944 and published by the Protestant Conference at St. Cloud, Minn., in 1970. When the latter publication is cited, the reference will be Koehler, *History*.

⁴ The record shows that Langenberg sent nineteen mission school men, two university theologians, Mohldenke and Meumann, one Watertown student, and one via Missouri. Among these were Presidents Muehlhaeuser, Bading, and Reim. Berlin supplied nine mission school men, nine university theologians, among them Hoenecke, and one student for the Watertown school.

⁵ *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1852.

Both Berlin and Langenberg bear the stamp of Prussian Union religiosity. Support is drawn from and extended to both Lutherans and Reformed. Even when one confession is permitted to dominate in a given situation, it isn't entirely free from the larger entangling alliance. Wisconsin's early overseas relations are marked and marred by the Prussian Union connection.

It is possible, however, to overrate the significance of this connection and to assign to it a larger role in Wisconsin's history than it ever actually filled. Half the Wisconsin men had this Prussian Union background and could not help being influenced by it as individuals and as a group. Yet one can well imagine that when it was a matter of carrying out day-to-day assignments on the busy mission frontier, the remote Berlin or Barmen background and association, never all that specifically spelled out in the first place, could recede in importance and significance. This is especially the case because the societies in ordinary circumstances made minimum demands and could even stress a measure of Lutheran confessionalism with a man like Wallmann in charge.

Koehler in his first sketch of Wisconsin's history that he wrote for the *Gemeinde-Blatt* at the time of the golden anniversary in 1900 sums up the Langenberg connection in the following way:

This was, first of all, a relationship of a purely private nature. The Society expected of those it sent out nothing more than that they submit reports from time to time. In return it sent them the annual reports which the Society issued. Thus through this very formal and tenuous tie the Langenberg missionaries remained in a definite association among themselves and with the Society.

Koehler then hastens to add:

It is in place to take this opportunity to point out what magnificent charity these people exercised who sent their monies and their missionaries into a distant place without raising the claim of control or of recompense through collections.⁶

We all might well bear in mind this demonstration of gratitude on the part of the writer, and of generosity on the part of those written about, when we feel called upon to score and scorn the early Prussian Union connection.

How little was required in return for overseas assistance is also indicated by the fact that as late as 1867 it was argued on the Wisconsin convention floor that the mission societies "had never demanded any *Uniertwerden* of Wisconsin Synod members."⁷ At the same time, the record shows that in the second decade the Prussian Union connection became more complicated as the assistance needed and requested revolved around such items as library, salary for a *Reiseprediger*, and building funds. Before turning to that part of the story, it is in place to mention several other mission societies that play a part in early Wisconsin Synod history.

Since Muehlhaeuser had received the first phase of his training at Basel, it was natural that the enterprising president would use this contact in augmenting the slim supply of pastors at his disposal. At least eleven of the first ninety pastors had been trained by either the Basel society itself or by the neighboring *Sankt Chrischona Pilgermission*. The third president, G. Reim, studied at Basel and the fourth president, W. Streissguth, was sent out from there to New Glarus.

One of the five founders at Granville, Pluess, was a Basel reject. In one year alone, 1863, four men trained at *Sankt Chrischona* joined the Wisconsin pastors. Basel was also a major source of supply for the Michigan Synod, sending it, among others, Schmid, Eberhart, and Klingmann. The *Pilgermission* supplied many of Minnesota's first pastors, including C.J. Albrecht.

One other mission society merits mention. This is Hermannsburg. Bading received most of his training there, although a clash with Director Harms brought it about that Bading finished at Barmen and came to Wisconsin instead of Africa, where most of the early Hermannsburg graduates labored. Other Hermannsburg men in Wisconsin were Brockmann and the former African missionaries, Liefeld and Wiese.

⁶ J.P. Koehler, "Geschichte der Synode von Wisconsin u.a. Staaten," *Gemeinde-Blatt*, XXXV (June 15, 1900), 90.

⁷ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1867*, p 23.

After the rupture with Langenberg and Berlin in the late 1860's it was to Hermannsburg that Bading especially looked for overseas help in augmenting the pastoral supply that was beginning to come from the Watertown school. At the 1869 convention Bading has this to report in his presidential address:

Favorable outcomes can be reported about the ties being established with Pastor Harms in Hermannsburg. After he expressed his joy over both the definitely Lutheran character of the Synod, as well as the relationship with the Missouri Synod, he gave the assurance in several letters that he would gladly join forces with us and send candidates to us from his mission school in return for which we would have to direct our mission offerings to the Hermannsburg Society. This was promised him on our part, since already for years most of our mission offerings by agreement have been going to this mission.⁸

Almost immediately seven Hermannsburg candidates came to Wisconsin and ten students were sent to Watertown.

A sad sequel can be added. When in the 1880's Wisconsin began to plan seriously to enlarge its foreign mission endeavors, a committee was instructed to seek out an existing orthodox mission society to which we could conscientiously channel our mission offerings. None such could be found.⁹ Thus, Wisconsin was forced to launch out independently. The eventual result was the Apache Mission.

This was not, however, the first discouraging experience with foreign mission societies. As previously stated, the Prussian Union connection had to be broken for conscience' and confession's sake. The story is familiar and can be condensed to the essentials in this discussion.

Two major developments in Wisconsin's history, occurring simultaneously, made the break inevitable. For one thing, by the time it entered its second decade the Wisconsin Synod was becoming serious in its efforts to put its confessional house in order and to eliminate unionistic practices on the part of its pastors and congregations. Admittedly, there were impulses and examples for this improved confessional stand coming from neighboring synods, whose contributions will be noted when this study turns in their direction. Yet it should be stressed at this point, if not extensively treated for obvious reasons, that Wisconsin's turn to the right in doctrinal and confessional stance was at least as much, if not more, a matter of inner growth and internal development, with such confessionally minded pastors as Bading and Koehler taking the lead.

At that very time the Wisconsin Synod was experiencing growth and, with the growth, enlarged needs that caused it to become more deeply involved with the Union societies. The development of a synodical library to facilitate the training of pastors caused no problems, since aid could be on a one-time and on an individual basis. It was another matter, however, when a *Reiseprediger* was salaried and when building and endowment funds for educational purposes were solicited.

Since the *Reiseprediger* would have no home congregation to provide his salary and the synodical treasuries seemed too small to be drawn on for such a purpose, it was arranged that the European support would be forthcoming in the amount of \$200 annually. As Koehler reports, within three years of the inception of the program the Langenberg directors were adding to other complaints about Wisconsin's confessionalism this charge:

A third reason that has aroused our misgivings, finally, is the *Reisepredigt*...and (we) must rather expect of a traveling missionary whom we support that in accordance with the intentions of the societies that commission him he, in his travels, look up the Protestant Germans settled there, scattered and so far under no regular spiritual care, serve them with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the holy Sacraments and faithful pastoral care, also exert himself to bring them together in a church organization. In regard to this last phase of his work, we will

⁸ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1869*, p 11.

⁹ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1883*, p 54, and 1884, p 58.

once more emphasize that we by no means expect of him to add other than Lutheran congregations to the Synod.¹⁰

The final sentences in the quotation seem to imply that congregations not in membership in the Synod were to be organized by the *Reiseprediger* and that they would be Reformed or United. When the synodical secretary replied, he rejected the implication and insisted that “this *Reiseprediger* not be required to found also Reformed and United congregations.”¹¹

The growing involvement of the mission societies in Wisconsin affairs is indicated by two agenda items before the 1862 synodical convention.¹² In one the Berlin Society wanted to know why Wisconsin had not joined the General Synod. There was also the Berlin request that Wisconsin “might enter in a closer relationship with this society” which was answered by the resolution that each conference would submit an annual report to Berlin through the office of the synodical president.

When Wisconsin exercised proper discipline over against unionistic pastors and congregations, the societies expressed their displeasure. Instances are the banning of Union Lord’s Supper forms and Reformed catechisms in congregations served by the Wisconsin Synod pastors.¹³

Meantime Bading’s European collection was progressing. Sufficient monies were made available to get the Watertown school established. This first effort netted \$12,000. Eventually a Prussian collection was also allowed, which would set up endowments for pre-seminary training in Germany of young men destined for the ministry of the Wisconsin Synod. As the amount of money involved in Wisconsin support grew larger, so the Berlin and Langenberg concerns about Wisconsin confessionalism increased.

There was a brief period when Wisconsin tried its best to avoid offending the European benefactors. Koehler once even refused to provide the secretarial signature to a report he claimed was misrepresenting Wisconsin’s true stand in the interest of appeasement.¹⁴ The Lord of the Church, however, put the brief indecision to an end by the challenge of a series of events.

In 1867 Streissguth yielded the presidential chair to Bading and his aggressive leadership. The convention felt that the proposed membership in the new General Council and the continuing charges of unionistic overseas associations coming from the “Old Lutheran” camp made a specific synodical statement on the matter of Union and unionism imperative, even though no new practical problems had arisen. A convention committee chaired by Hoenecke brought in majority and minority reports on the question: What is the Wisconsin Synod’s position on the Union?¹⁵

A union that merged doctrinal differences was denounced in both reports. The majority report also rejected organizational union in the absence of doctrinal unity. The one-man, or possibly two-man, minority opinion, which the Synod adopted, spoke against a blanket condemnation of those Lutherans in the Union under pressure and protest. Both the mild minority report and the unadopted majority reports were published so that “the synodical stand on the Union in all respects might come to full expression.”

The reaction from Germany could have been predicted. Even the minority report went beyond what Berlin and Langenberg espoused. They sent word that the flow of men and monies from overseas would have to be terminated, if Wisconsin would not back off from its expressed disavowal of the Union. Wisconsin stood firm in the 1868 convention.¹⁶ In the following year it renounced all claims to the impounded funds that had been gathered in Prussia.¹⁷

This signaled the final and irrevocable break in the old Prussian Union connection. One might be tempted to invoke the old maxims, “Good riddance to bad rubbish” or “*Ende gut, alles gut,*” and simply declare,

¹⁰ Koehler, *History*, p 101.

¹¹ Koehler, *History*, p 104.

¹² *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1862*, pp 28–29.

¹³ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1862*, p 21, and 1863, p 27.

¹⁴ Koehler’s *History* treats this confessional stand of the author’s father on pp 95–97.

¹⁵ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1867*, pp 22–23.

¹⁶ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1868*, p 26.

¹⁷ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1869*, p 14.

“The rest is silence.” However, some summary statements on this most significant interchurch relationship are certainly in place.

Heading the list are expressions of gratitude for the goodness of the Lord of the Church who guided the events and gave the resources that made a remarkable about-face in theological position possible and for the firm stand of a few fathers whose conscience would not let them drift with the prevailing current and dream with the predominant crowd.

Secondly, the evaluation is advanced that our hindsight view has tended to picture the early era as worse than it actually was. Given the background of the majority of the Wisconsin pastors, much worse could have been expected. The vacillations and hesitations of the 1860’s are less the product of premeditated unionism than they are of a temporary unclarity in a body that is moving in the right direction but not yet at the goal. When the time came to stand and be counted in 1868 at Racine, all but four of some fifty pastors cast their lot with confessional Lutheranism and one of the four reversed himself later.¹⁸

Another conclusion to be drawn from the record of a two-decade overseas entanglement is the incompatibility of confessional Lutheranism and the Union or Reformed approach. There may be good will, the best of intentions, sincere commitment to a common goal, an honest effort to avoid infringing on conscience and conviction and confession, but the built-in clash is inevitable, the parting of the ways is reached later, if not sooner, by Lutheran confessionalism. The parting of the ways can be avoided only if the confessionalism has ceased to be.

Finally, it may be noted that in this early period of trial and training for our church body the chief doctrinal issue was fellowship. A lesson was being taught, a truth impressed that would be of importance again and again in the history of the church body. The arguments at Racine in 1868 would be repeated almost word for word four score and seven years later at Saginaw.

II. Interchurch Relations in This Country

Wisconsin’s first two decades also bring abundant evidence of a lively, multifaceted interchurch relationship in this country. These were definitely not times of rigid isolation and rugged individualism.

Muehlhaeuser’s friendly ties with Lutherans in the East were not broken when he came to Wisconsin from Rochester. Almost from the start Wisconsin was favored by the “mother” synod, the Pennsylvania Ministerium. This was the time when Pennsylvania was in the process of re-entering the General Synod, but had grown so conservative that it would only re-enter with the now famous “escape clause” that required its delegates to withdraw from General Synod sessions if violence was done to the cause of true Lutheranism.¹⁹

Pennsylvania regularly granted \$200 to \$400 for distribution by Presidents Muehlhaeuser or Bading to pastors whose salaries were inadequate.²⁰ In return nothing else but reporting was required. When finally Wisconsin found one of its own sons willing to study for the ministry, it naturally turned to Pennsylvania for aid in the undertaking. One of Pennsylvania’s men at Gettysburg Seminary, C.F. Schaeffer, arranged to look out for the student, J.H. Sieker. Sieker, later pastor at Granville, president of the Minnesota Synod, and eventually a Missouri pastor at old St. Matthew’s in New York, was given a full free ride at Gettysburg through the courtesy of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, although there is no record of any special athletic ability possessed or service rendered.

A fellow student, H.E. Jacobs, has provided in his *Memoirs* a description of Sieker as a student that is highly unflattering to the subject but gives a clear insight into differences between East and West that prevailed even when the twain were linked by friendship as was the case with Pennsylvania and Wisconsin in those days. Jacob says:

¹⁸ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1869*, p 17.

¹⁹ R.C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* (Philadelphia, 1966), pp 92–93.

²⁰ J.L. Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America* (Burlington, Ia., 1916), p 324.

In 1869 at Lancaster my old school-mate, Rev. J.H. Sieker of the Minnesota Synod, who even when in the Preparation Department at Gettysburg took delight in absorbing the time of his class by disputing with the tutor concerning the interpretation of Virgil, had certain exceptions to offer to the Declarations just adopted. Sieker, I may remark, was so superior to the rest of us that, at one bound, he had vaulted from the Preparation Department to the Gettysburg Seminary, leaving the rest of us to plod along in the regular college course. If the leaders of the General Council had known their man better, they would not, it is probable, have paid so much attention to his criticism. He was a crude, conceited German, of large build, carrying himself, when a Preparatorian, with the bearing of an Archbishop, and wearing a coat with remarkably long tails, which he accused my cousin, Luther Jacobs, whether rightly or wrongly I will not say, of fastening to the bench at Prayer Meeting so that when he tried to kneel, he nearly lost his train...The sanctimonious air which had survived his earlier period made his presence somewhat imposing. And so the questions propounded by this very inexperienced delegate from Minnesota were deemed worthy of the attention of a committee consisting of Drs. Seiss, Krauth and C.W. Schaeffer, and convulsed the entire church.²¹

The Gettysburg background to the incident just described calls to mind another illustration of the close, even if informal, relationship that existed between Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. For a while it seemed almost as though men whose names loom large in our early history were playing a game of musical chairs with the Gettysburg German Chair, endowed by the Pennsylvania Ministerium. To that German Chair A.F. Ernst was called when it fell vacant in the 1860's. He declined because of the needs of the congregation he was serving. In the 1868–1869 school year Dr. F.W.A. Notz filled the chair before moving on to Muehlenberg College from where he was called to Watertown. Coincident with the 1869 vacancy in the Gettysburg German post was the departure of President Martin from the Watertown school. Martin then became Gettysburg's German professor and remained that for three decades.

Association with Pennsylvania in the above instances was also with the General Synod. Several additional points on that subject can be added here. Wisconsin refrained from joining the larger federation of Lutheran synods that existed in Wisconsin's earliest years. Heyer took his Minnesota Synod into the General Synod in 1864 but when the 1862 Wisconsin convention had to deal with the Berlin question: "Whether and why the Wisconsin Synod does not join the General Synod?" the praesidium was instructed to reply intelligently and conscientiously. The reply, as the extant response from Berlin indicates, stressed the General Synod's lack of confessionalism as a barrier to membership.²²

Wisconsin was even more emphatic in its rejection of the more liberal element in the General Synod, that in the mid 1850's espoused a so-called "American Lutheranism" in the "Definite Platform" of Schmucker, Kurtz, and Sprecher. In its reaction the 1856 Wisconsin convention emphatically declared:

The newly fabricated so-called Definite Platform is definitely rejected by us, the Evangelical Lutheran Wisconsin Synod, because it recognized 1) that the UAC is grounded in God's Word, 2) that accepting the so-called Platform amounts to nothing less than a definite suicide of the Lutheran Church.²³

This resolution should not be utilized too energetically as a proof of Wisconsin's soundness in the early years. After all, the "Definite Platform" only gained full endorsement from three Ohio minisynods, all under the spiritual thumb of Sprecher at Wittenberg and partial endorsement from a few others.

²¹ Henry E. Horn, ed., *Memoirs of Henry Eyster Jacob* (Published by ed., 1974), II, 191. Hereafter cited as *Memoirs of Jacobs*.

²² Koehler, *History*, p 85, and *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1862*, p 29.

²³ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1856*, p 3.

Brief mention can be made of other Wisconsin contacts with Eastern Lutherans. In a list of Muehlhaeuser's correspondents, Koehler mentions Stohlmann in New York.²⁴ The association with Passavant of the Pittsburgh Synod is well known. It involved Muehlhaeuser in a hospital building venture that some thought was a good reason to keep Wisconsin's college and seminary out of Milwaukee. Among others who came to Wisconsin from the East special mention can be made of Ernst and Adelberg of the New York Ministerium and Martin of the Hartwick Synod.

A very different kind of relationship developed between Wisconsin and those among its midwest neighbors commonly called "Old Lutherans," specifically Buffalo and Missouri. Here coldness, misunderstanding, rivalry, and strife too often prevailed. There are very basic reasons for these difficulties.

By definition "Old Lutherans" are those who resisted the deterioration of confessionalism in the Prussian Union or in other state churches and strove for denominational independence. They avoided contamination either by going to prison, by winning out to a free church status, or by setting out for Australia or America.

Looking down on "New Lutherans" for making an easy accommodation back in Germany, these staunch battlers were even less sympathetic when in this free land people who claimed to be true Lutherans acted like "New Lutherans" by maintaining unionistic ties with the state churches in Europe. By the same token, the men in Wisconsin were inclined by background and training to see in the Buffalo and Missouri enterprise an overabundance of rigidity and lovelessness.

Neither Buffalo nor Missouri could have been pleased when Muehlhaeuser in 1850 founded a new synod in territory in which both were represented. Buffalo, which had a number of congregations in the Milwaukee-Watertown area, obviously would regard this as an invasion that would make the practice of their peculiar form of church management and church discipline that much more difficult. Missouri, with its strong sense of parochial boundaries and with Lochner established in Milwaukee, was just as offended.

In the Buffalo periodical there appear early denunciations of "New Lutheranism" on the part of Muehlhaeuser and his synod.²⁵ Yet as things developed, there was little contact between Buffalo and Wisconsin on any kind of official basis. The Buffalo malcontents would obviously desire to establish relations, not with Wisconsin, but with Missouri, and consequently the major clash that developed was one that involved Buffalo with Missouri. For friendship and alliance Buffalo turned temporarily to Iowa.

Not until the Buffalo break-up in 1866 does that name receive mention in our official records. In 1867 two Buffalo men, Pastors Graetz and Grabau, Jr., visited the Wisconsin convention. There followed the request that friendly overtures be made to Buffalo, but the matter was tabled for a year because, as the minutes say, "the present development of both synods is still so much in flux."²⁶ In 1869 Graetz is again listed as a guest and advisory member of the Wisconsin convention. Philipp von Rohr, who in 1874 inherited the leadership of the Buffalo group that would not stay with Grabau or go with Hochstetter into Missouri, dissolved the group and in 1877 joined Wisconsin, becoming its president in 1889.

In the case of Missouri much more could be reported in the way of parish conflicts and periodical battles. The story, however, is relatively familiar and has been given extensive treatment in Koehler.²⁷ A broad sketch can suffice here, with a larger portion of the space reserved for more general suggestions and conclusions.

The story begins with both young synods taking stances of opposition toward the other. Muehlhaeuser personally repudiated the Missouri type of "Old Lutheranism."²⁸ Missouri disapproved of what it called

²⁴ The citation is the same as in note 6, but on p 91.

²⁵ An example is W. Wier in "*Huelferuf aus Wisconsin*," *Kirchliches Informatorium* II (July 15, 1852), 6.

²⁶ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1868*, pp 31-32.

²⁷ In Koehler's *History* the sections dealing specifically with the early Missouri-Wisconsin story are "Inter-synodical Relations" (p.p. 56-60) and "Increased Friction with Missouri" (p.p. 79-86).

²⁸ Koehler's *History* quotes Muehlhaeuser's letter to Pastor Weitbrecht on p 43 in which Muehlhaeuser says, "Just because I am not strictly (Lutheran) or Old-Lutheran, I am in a position to offer every child of God and servant of Christ the hand of fellowship over the ecclesiastical fence."

Wisconsin's "New Lutheranism."²⁹ As Wisconsin's energetic missionaries extended its holdings in the state and as Missouri's Northern District grew rapidly in the same area, some bitter parish clashes developed. Watertown and Racine and Burlington are examples. In Watertown Bading began to serve a new congregation made up in part of former Missouri members who resented an insistence on private confession. At Racine and Burlington the conflict revolved around territorial claims and charges of opposition ministries.³⁰

Missouri's attacks on Wisconsin did not diminish appreciably in the early 1860's when Bading was beginning to lead the way to a firmer confessional position; they intensified, in fact, as Wisconsin became more dependent on European aid. It appears that Missouri was more adept at finding fault than noting betterment.

Those considerations inevitably raise the issue of the extent to which Missouri aided the Wisconsin turn to confessionalism in the 1860's. That aid was supplied by Missouri, Dr. Walther, *Lehre und Wehre*, and *Der Lutheraner* is admitted and emphasized at the outset. The evaluation is added, however, that there has been a tendency to exaggerate the Missouri role in Wisconsin's improvement. This was especially the case a quarter of a century ago when Wisconsin admonitions to Missouri for liberal and unionistic tendencies were so often and so emphatically prefaced by the assertion that Wisconsin in 1955 was only trying to repay what Missouri had provided Wisconsin a century earlier. That approach was overplayed.

The look backward across a century suggests that it was much less the polemical writing in the Missouri periodicals, often given to exaggeration and based on misinformation, and much more the personal and brotherly example and encouragement of a good Missouri neighbor that helped Wisconsin make its doctrinal and confessional turn to the right.³¹ President Fuerbringer of Missouri's Northern District, for example, might have persuaded Bading to join Missouri when the latter came to him for consultation after discouraging experiences in the Calumet parish and with the synodical praesidium. Fuerbringer, however, urged Bading to remain in Wisconsin where his confessionalism was more needed than in orthodox Missouri.³² It was such face-to-face brotherly dealing that would eventually make possible a recognition of the fellowship that had naturally been created between Missouri and an improved Wisconsin. But more on this point will be presented in the discussion of the creation of the Synodical Conference in Part Two.

This evaluation of early Missouri-Wisconsin relations actually dares to conclude with the suggestion that there may well have been minus factors for Wisconsin and plus factors for Missouri in those relationships. There was a tendency for Missouri pastors and officials in their concern for orthodoxy to drive to extremes in matters of practice.

A case in point is the insistence on private confession that cropped up in numerous places. Closely involved as the new Watertown pastor and Wisconsin president, Bading in the 1861 presidential address to the convention puts the point in clear focus when he says:

Friends and foes can and should realize that we have no intention of encouraging so-called "Beichtstuermer," but at the same time have as little intention to impose on the necks of the disciples the free institution of private confession as a matter of compulsion and thereby to tear congregations apart and to bring them to ruin. I trust that the Wisconsin Synod will not ever get into that kind of regrettable pathway it has learned to know from the practice of others in its neighborhood; that it will always, on the contrary, be ready to safeguard the Christian freedom of the several congregations and also give consideration to the consciences of individuals.³³

²⁹ A typical *Lutheraner* article with this charge is found in XVI (Dec. 27, 1859), 78.

³⁰ The Burlington affair is described in *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1868*, pp 27–28. Lochner airs Missouri grievances regarding the Racine case in "Wisconsinische Angriffe auf vermeintliche Eingriffe," *Lutheraner* XIX (Nov. 12 and Dec. 10, 1862), 41 and 59.

³¹ Typical examples of misguided Missouri polemics are the "Hercules" item in *Lehre und Wehre* issue of March 1868, p 93, and the Lord's Supper accusations in Missouri's *Northern District Report of 1867*, p 52. Hoenecke replied to the latter in the Nov. 15, 1867, *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Gemeinde-Blatt*.

³² Koehler, *History*, p 45.

³³ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1861*, p 11.

Pastors in the lecturer's age bracket will be able to recall how their earliest conferences could get bogged down on endless discussions of *Schwagerehe*, a dubious legacy of *Lehre und Wehre* to Synodical Conference members. Koehler describes how this item was already agitating the 1862 Wisconsin convention.³⁴

Even Walther's *Wucherlehre* may have been a disturbing factor in early Wisconsin history, especially that revolving around the shaky beginnings of the Watertown school. In the recently published *Memoirs of Henry Eyster Jacobs* there is this description of Northwestern's first president, whom Bading dismissed in 1869 and who became a colleague of Jacobs on the Gettysburg College faculty:

Prof. Martin always thought and acted like an utter stranger. He was always on the outside. A graduate of Hamilton College, he had been President of North Western University at Watertown, Wis., where his experience with the Missouri element had taught him a severe lesson. Part of the endowment he had collected had been restored to the donors because of scruples concerning loaning out funds at interest. He had lived in constant conflict with the extremists on one side, only to come to Gettysburg and be associated with those on the other.³⁵

Whatever information Jacobs had about Watertown endowments obviously came from Martin. One wonders whether this was the sour grapes and invented excuse of the loser or whether Wisconsin was inclining toward, or being pressured by, Walther's abhorrence of interest rates fixed in advance of the outcome of the venture for which funds were borrowed. No such explanation appears in what Wisconsin has recorded about the ill-fated Watertown endowments.

The outstanding instance of Missouri extremism is of course the drive for state synods but this is part of the Synodical Conference story and will be discussed as part of the second section of these lectures.

What remains of this section is a brief sketch of Wisconsin's relations with other neighbors. One might expect to hear the name "Ohio" mentioned frequently, since this was an old and large synod in the area. Koehler puts it this way:

With which [Ohio] Wisconsin curiously seems to have had no contact excepting by its several inquiries to Ohio regarding the hymn book and *Agenda*, which were not even always answered.³⁶

In 1857 Wisconsin resolved to "endorse the resolution of the Ohio Synod, according to which it would request the honored Synod of Pennsylvania at the time of the next edition of the agenda to make provision for a thorough revision."³⁷ Apart from this matter and an occasional transfer of a pastor one way or the other and chance reports from that direction, nothing is heard regarding Ohio until its momentous 1870 proposal that led to the founding of the Synodical Conference.

A similar situation prevailed regarding Michigan. Although the pioneer missionary there, F. Schmid of Basel, knew Muehlhaeuser and had ordained Weinmann, there is little in the nature of any intersynodical relations beyond the occasional recommendation of a pastor or candidate.

With the Northern Illinois and the Illinois Synods there were considerable dealings, especially involving a proposed joint educational endeavor. Already in 1854 Wisconsin responded favorably to an overture for close association from the Illinois Synod. The result was that some years later Wisconsin seriously considered joining the Illinois State University venture. In 1857 Dr. Harkey was called to this Springfield school and began efforts to build it into the seminary to serve all Lutherans in the neighboring area. The Northern Illinois Synod and its Scandinavian members cooperated. Wisconsin, still without a school, was encouraged to supply a German professor.

³⁴ Koehler, *History*, p 84.

³⁵ *Memoirs of Jacobs* II, 142.

³⁶ Koehler, *History*, p 142.

³⁷ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1857*, p 4.

Had this come to pass, who knows how long the independent Watertown school venture would have been delayed. But by 1860 the situation had changed drastically. The Scandinavians had withdrawn from the Northern Illinois Synod, one reason being its connection with the General Synod that had just received into membership the pro-Definite Platform Melancthon Synod. The 1860 Wisconsin convention resolved to break off dealings with the Illinois synods and to refrain from using the school because of confessional developments in the synods and the school.³⁸ The eventual outcome was a school of its own for Wisconsin and a campus for a Missouri practical seminary established at Ft. Wayne and transferred from St. Louis, but now moved back to Ft. Wayne.

With Iowa there were some very close contacts. An Iowa historian puts it this way:

For a time a friendly relationship existed between the Iowa and the Wisconsin Synods. And Iowa's influence had more than a little to do with the fact that a more determined stance developed.³⁹

Iowa had problems with millennialism and "open questions" but in the matter of relations with the Reformed knew what proper Lutheran practice was. It joined Buffalo and Missouri in rebuking Wisconsin and may well be credited with them for supplying aid to a body that the Iowa president, Deindoerfer, characterized as *dick uniert*.⁴⁰

Synodical pathways touched at Platteville, where Fritschel founded a congregation served later by Wisconsin's Pastor Starck. There was also some consideration given to using the Iowa seminary at St. Sebald, but in 1862 Wisconsin declared that it was unwilling to use either the Missouri or Iowa seminaries because it did not approve of their "exclusive tendency."⁴¹

At the Reading and Ft. Wayne meetings to form the General Council there were friendly contacts between Iowa and Wisconsin delegates. Wisconsin supported the Iowa and Ohio effort to nail down a definite position on lodgery and pulpit and altar fellowship. Even earlier in June 1866 the Wisconsin convention was informed that several meetings with Iowa officials and pastors had been held. President Streissguth, Professors Moldehnke and Martin, and Pastor Bading were Wisconsin representatives. It is reported that misunderstandings on both sides were corrected.⁴²

In 1867 an imposing group of ten Iowa men, including the two Fritschels, Grossmann, and Schieferdecker, descended on the Wisconsin convention to sell it Iowa's approach to the Confessions. Wisconsin devoted a morning session to hearing the Fritschels push for "open questions" and mild millennialism but was evidently unconvinced.⁴³

Even though relations were close enough at this time to allow for a convention sermon on election by S. Fritschel, the situation was changed radically by the subsequent colloquy between Missouri and Iowa that fall. Prof. S. Fritschel attended Wisconsin's 1868 and 1869 conventions, bringing Pastor Vogel with him in 1868. But the fraternal relations that had peaked in 1867 quickly cooled as Wisconsin turned in the Missouri direction.

Relations with Minnesota, founded in 1860 under "Father" Heyer's leadership, have an unpromising beginning.⁴⁴ The first mention of Minnesota in Wisconsin minutes is in 1862, where it is stated:

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Minnesota consists of only eight pastors, of which only 2 or 3 are in full-time service, the others are farmers from Pennsylvania who upon special requests hold services in houses in the English language.⁴⁵

³⁸ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1860*, p 14.

³⁹ G. Fritschel, *Geschichte der Lutherischen Kirche in Amerika* (Gutersloh, 1896) II, 412.

⁴⁰ *Kirchliche Mittheilungen aus und ueber Nord-Amerika* XIX (October 1861), 74.

⁴¹ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1862*, p 17.

⁴² *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1866*, p 9.

⁴³ *Wisconsin Proceedings, 1867*, pp 13–15.

⁴⁴ For subsequent material heavy use is made of the essayist's *The Minnesota District's First Fifty Years* and its section, "Wisconsin Relations" (pp 11–15). This 1968 Minnesota District essay was printed privately in pamphlet form.

In 1863 Heyer attended the Wisconsin convention at Milwaukee and, on behalf of the Minnesota Synod, requested the establishment of closer relations between the two bodies. The Wisconsin Synod resolved to send its president to the next Minnesota convention.⁴⁶

In 1864 Wisconsin heard the report that *Reiseprediger* Moldehnke's travels had reached into Minnesota. It released Fachmann to Minnesota and reacted favorably to the Minnesota request that President Heyer collect for the Watertown school in the East in exchange for the privilege of sending Minnesota students to Watertown.⁴⁷

Eventually these first friendly gestures led to the desire for closer ties. In 1868, Pastor Sieker, who had just moved from Wisconsin to Minnesota, came to the Wisconsin convention bearing his new synod's resolution that expressed the wish to join with Wisconsin in forming one church body. Wisconsin declared its pleasure and intention to do all in its power to bring the desire to reality.⁴⁸

When President Bading and Professor Hoenecke attended the 1869 Minnesota convention, they offered for discussion a proposal for federation of the two bodies and, upon request, drew up in writing a simple five point plan. The fifth point, calling for meetings of doctrinal commissions to achieve mutual certainty of unity, was adopted by the convention.⁴⁹ Implementation came in a fall LaCrosse meeting attended by Presidents Bading and Sieker, Professor Hoenecke and Minnesota pastors Emmel, Kuhn, and Reitz. The delegations declared that doctrinal unity existed. Before formal ties could be declared, however, difficulty arose over Minnesota's continuing General Council membership. Discussion of details is deferred until that matter is treated in the next installment.

⁴⁵ *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1862, p 17.

⁴⁶ *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1863, p 32.

⁴⁷ *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1864, pp 7, 11, and 14.

⁴⁸ *Wisconsin Proceedings*, 1868, p 18.

⁴⁹ A. Kuhn, Sr., et. al., *Geschichte der Minnesota Synode und ihrer einzelnen Gemeinden* (St Louis, 1910), pp 13–14.