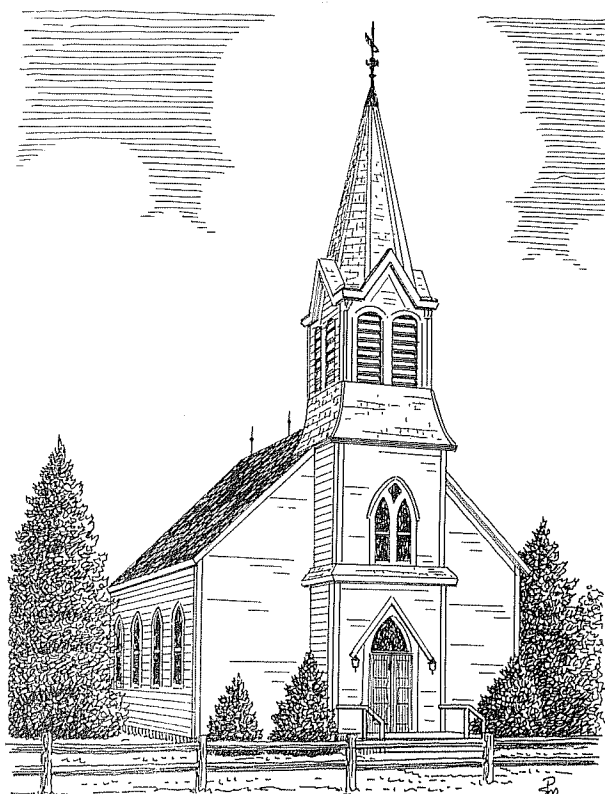


THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
IN CANNON FALLS, MINNESOTA



St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church -- Cannon Falls, MN

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The intention of this paper is not to provide a detailed, comprehensive history of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Cannon Falls, Minnesota. An in depth account of the first twenty years of this congregation's history has already been written by Philip Buck, a son of the congregation. In addition, the years following Mr. Buck's paper have been adequately chronicled in a beautiful journal given as a gift to St. Paul's church by Mrs. Helen M. Buck. The purpose of this study will be to describe the early, somewhat vague, history of the quest for Confessional Lutheranism in Cannon Falls, Minnesota. This quest culminated in the establishment of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church of our W.E.L.S. Hopefully this paper will help the members of St. Paul's appreciate the struggle for Confessional Lutheranism in their community and encourage them to continue their efforts to spread the gospel to friends and neighbors in and around Cannon Falls. It was, and remains, God's will that a Confessional Lutheran church be established in Cannon Falls, Minnesota and that that church continue to be a light in its community to shine forth the saving truth of God's Word.

The story of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Cannon Falls is the story of how God worked through many different men and their respective church bodies to eventually establish a Confessional Lutheran church in this southern Minnesota community. This struggle began as early as 1856. The earliest reference to Confessional Lutheranism in Cannon Falls that I was able to come up with is recorded in Theodore Graebner's little volume, Church Bells in the Forest. The book tells the account of Lutheran pioneer work on the Michigan frontier; work sponsored and supported by J.K. William

Loeche of Neuendettelsau, Germany. Loeche's missionaries to the Saginaw Valley of Michigan began the famous Francken-colonies: Frankenmuth (1845, by Rev. F.A. Graemer); Frankentrost (1847, by Rev. J.H.Ph. Graebner); Frankenlust (1848, by G.E.C. Ferdinand Sievers, pastor); and Frankenhilf (1850, by pastors H. Kuehn and J. Deindoerfer). It is Pastor Ferdinand Sievers who first served the German Lutherans of the Cannon Valley in Minnesota:

The missionary fervor of Rev. Ferdinand Sievers carried him to the State of Minnesota, then Minnesota Territory. He preached to Lutherans in Minneapolis as early as 1856 and extended his endeavors to Henderson, Le Seur, Faribault, Cannon Falls, and Red Wing.<sup>1</sup>

I discovered no information as to what became of these Cannon Falls Lutherans who received the ministrations of the great missionary Ferdinand Sievers. He remained the pastor at Frankenlust, Michigan until his death on September 9, 1893.<sup>2</sup> As a pastor in the Missouri Synod, "His incessant appeals in behalf of Foreign Missions resulted in the founding of the Missouri Synod's Foreign Missions in 1893."<sup>3</sup> Confessional Lutheranism in Cannon Falls was begun by a very able, energetic and renowned missionary!

The next Confessional Lutheran pastor to serve in Cannon Falls was ~~the~~<sup>the</sup> Wisconsin Synod's own Rev. Jacob Schadegg, "a young graduate of the well-known Pilger-Mission Institute Saint Chrischonia,"<sup>4</sup> in Basel, Switzerland. After serving congregations in Chicago and Monsee, Illinois Pastor Schadegg was called to serve Trinity Lutheran Church, Oak Grove Twp. just east of Prescott, Wisconsin. This area had been settled by "Lutheran families, many from the Wuerttemberg, Germany area . . . in the late 1840's."<sup>5</sup> Beginning in 1860 records show several Minnesota pastors serving the area.

congregation from a distance.<sup>6</sup> When Rev. Schadegg arrived as the first resident pastor he showed himself to be both mission minded and true to the Confessions. The Wuertembergers were unionistic in spirit and practice and some of the pastors who served them prior to Schadegg's arrival were of the same bent. His position on this issue is clear from the following quotation:

Dissension shook the young Trinity congregation in 1874 on the question, whether a strict Lutheran or more unionistic confession should be maintained. The congregation split, the Lutheran party following Rev. Schadegg and joining the already thriving congregation (founded by Schadegg) in Prescott.<sup>7</sup>

The remaining unionistic members formed the Evangelical Church of Oak Grove. In their constitution they expressly stated their unionistic stance in "a single statement that was underlined, 'Diese Gemeinde soll nicht 'alt-lutheranische' sein!'"<sup>8</sup>

As the pastor at Prescott, Wisconsin Rev. Schadegg served as a circuit rider in neighboring Minnesota and founded the W.E.L.S. congregation at Hastings. I came across this reference to his work in Cannon Falls:

At "Kennon Falls" a sizeable congregation was gathered; the first recorded communion service (July 7, 1878) lists 24 as having communed. The congregation did not formally organize at this early date, had no building of its own, and gradually was absorbed into existing congregations.<sup>9</sup>

Confessional Lutheranism in Cannon Falls, began by such able missionaries as Ferdinand Sievers and Jacob Schadegg, would not return in an organized form for another sixty years.

The question as to what became of the "sizeable congregation" in Cannon Falls remains unanswered. Pastor Richard R. Durow, currently serving St. Paul's of Prescott, WI, informed me that

"the church still does have the records of Rev. Schadegg. They are written in his own personal handwriting in German script."<sup>10</sup> I regret the fact that I was unable to study these records for a possible clue as to what became of the group in Cannon Falls. A former pastor of both the congregations, in Prescott and Cannon Falls, wrote at an earlier date that Rev. Schadegg's records were extremely "meticulous and complete"<sup>11</sup> so they might well contain some hint about the dissolution of the Cannon Falls church. Rev. Schadegg's records indicate that he did perform baptisms and perhaps two communion services in Cannon Falls during this period.<sup>12</sup> Pastor Stephen Valleskey, the pastor referred to above, proposed an interesting study to determine the fate of these Lutherans in Cannon Falls:

to take the names from these communion registers as well as the names that appear in connection with baptisms Schadegg performed in the Cannon Falls area, look up their old homesteads . . . and see what happened to these people spiritually since ultimately German Lutheran pastoral service to the area failed. Did they turn to the Scandinavian churches? Were they finally lost to the church? Did the sectarians gain them? If you look on a map to see where the German Lutheran churches became established, I think you have to go down to Zumbrota on the south, over to Goodhue, and then up to Hastings, which leaves a large vacuum in the center around Cannon Falls where German-speaking Lutherans had nowhere to go.<sup>13</sup>

While this would make an interesting study time did not permit me to carry out the in-depth investigation that would be needed in order to complete the project.

It seems to me that during this period in the history of American Lutheranism it would have been unusual for the Germans to have joined the Scandinavian Lutheran churches in their area, primarily because of the language barrier but perhaps also because

of nationalistic and ethnic differences. It seems most likely that if they were going to learn another language it would have been English, since English was fast becoming the common tongue of America already at this time. On the other hand, the Germans might well have preferred to attend a Scandinavian Lutheran church rather than an English-speaking sectarian church because of their religious convictions. I checked the yearbooks of the Scandinavian Lutheran church bodies and discovered that the old Augustana Synod had already established two congregations in Cannon Falls by this time; St. Ansgar's (1869) and Evangelical Lutheran Spring Green (1858).<sup>14</sup> Since the Augustana Synod showed itself to be increasingly Confessional during this period it is entirely possible that the Germans from Cannon Falls were assimilated into these two churches. If the same German surnames found in Schadegg's records were found in the early records of these congregations, the mystery as to what became of the German Lutherans in Cannon Falls might well be solved. At this time the point remains mute.

By God's grace Confessional Lutheranism did return to the town of Cannon Falls some sixty years later. "In the early 1940's conservative Missouri and Wisconsin Synod Lutherans in Cannon Falls made a strong bid for a church of their confession though two sizeable LCA congregations were already established in town."<sup>15</sup> In fact, according to the ALC and LCA yearbooks, there were five Scandinavian Lutheran churches in and around Cannon Falls at this time. There were plenty of Lutheran churches to choose from but the former LCMS and WELS believers wanted to establish a Confessional Lutheran church in Cannon Falls. Consequently, they contacted the Missouri Synod for assistance in their endeavor. "The

Missouri Synod responded to the cry for help and sent pastors first from Northfield, then Farmington and Redwing, and worship services were held regularly in the Episcopal Guild Hall from 1943 until 1952.<sup>16</sup> A study of the LCMS Statistical Yearbooks during this period yielded these facts on the little group in Cannon Falls:<sup>17</sup>

Year	Pastor/City	Members: Bapt./Comm.	S.S./Teachers	\$: Home/Syn.
1943	Vehling/Farm.	--/--	--/--	\$99/
1944	" "	--/--	6/3	157/
1945	" "	23/13	5/3	182/61
1946	" "	16/7	7/1	257/141
1947	" "	19/11	5/3	148/
1948	" "	19/11	14/3	296/
1949	Hinrichs/Redwing	27/12	12/3	296/
1950	" "	32/12	16/3	400/30
1951	Beltz/Nfld.? or	" "	" "	" "
1952	Reuter/Farm.?	" "	" "	" "
1952	Sylvester/Redwing	" "	" "	" "

There are some interesting and disturbing facts in these statistics. The ever-increasing membership and Sunday School attendance are the most encouraging signs. The figures from 1946 are puzzling because they indicate a sharp decline in membership and yet a noticeable increase in offerings. Perhaps the end of WW II had something to do with this. It also seems odd that the statistics for the years 1959-1952 are exactly the same. Maybe the 1950 numbers were the last accurate records available and the Yearbook simply used those figures for 1951 and 1952 also. At any rate, "although the group was small they remained steadfast"<sup>18</sup>--steadfast to God's Word and to their commitment to once again establish a Confessional Lutheran congregation in Cannon Falls. In 1952 the Missouri Synod "felt it could no longer support the work. For the faithful it once again meant frustration and travelling long



miles to worship in a church of their faith."<sup>19</sup> And so another chapter in the quest for a Confessional Lutheran church in Cannon Falls came to a close.

The people were dissatisfied but not despondent. "The good Lord was not to let their labor be in vain. The disintegrating congregation turned to the Mission Board of the Wisconsin Synod for pastoral service and, when it was granted, was given new life."<sup>20</sup> This new beginning came almost one hundred years after Pastor Ferdinand Sievers first preached among the German Lutherans of Cannon Falls! The arrival of W.E.L.S. pastoral services was welcomed by the Confessional Lutherans who had already labored for a decade in the hopes of establishing a church of their faith. Early members of the group characterized the W.E.L.S. clergymen that would follow as being "dedicated pastors eager for growth" who "worked side-by-side" with the members of the congregation in the particular projects they undertook.<sup>21</sup> The first such pastor to be called by the newly formed congregation was Rev. Kenneth H. Roever, who served from 1954 to 1956 from his mission in Shakopee, Minnesota. "The first service of the 're-born' congregation was held at the Legion Hall on February 28, 1954, with 72 in attendance."<sup>22</sup> The attendance during the first year averaged 42.<sup>23</sup>

As in the foundation of any new congregation, many "house-keeping" details had to be attended to before the congregation could get into full swing. Even these seemingly mundane matters are exciting to a group of believers which has struggled for its existence and autonomy for a long, trying period of time. "On May 19, 1954, a constitution was adopted, and the congregation was formally organized under the name 'St. Paul's Evangelical

Lutheran Church," as a member of the Wisconsin Synod."<sup>24</sup> The first church officers were:<sup>25</sup>

President--Victor Parduhn  
Secretary--Alfred Scheer  
Treasurer--Henry Kuhlman  
Ushers--Reinhardt Brummond

Building Committee:  
Victor Parduhn  
Alfred Scheer  
Henry Kuhlman  
Emil Schultz

An examination of the 1954 Synodical Reports of the Minnesota District yielded this report on Cannon Falls under the Home Missions section:

The District Mission Board had intended to have this new station with an average church attendance of 52 served as an affiliate of one of the neighboring congregations. When this proved impossible and in view of the commitments made, General Chairman Gurgel permitted the use of the Shakopee missionary Roeber, subject to General Mission Board approval.<sup>26</sup>

At the 1954 District Convention in New Ulm, St. Paul's constitution was approved, making it the southern most church of the St. Croix Conference of the Minnesota District.

The next two decades were a period of intense activity for the members of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Cannon Falls. A detailed account of this period in the congregation's history was written by Philip Buck and has been referred to in the introduction of this paper as well as being cited throughout this study. His history warrants reading for an understanding of this exciting period of growth in the development of St. Paul's Lutheran church. The decade following Mr. Buck's paper is the story of the congregation's struggle for a Christian day school to help train their children in the Word of God on a full-time basis. This story, too, gives a clear picture of the determination of the Confessional Lutherans in Cannon Falls to carry out their Savior's Great

Commission.

St. Paul's Lutheran church of Cannon Falls stands at a crossroads today. (literally and figuratively!). Once again the congregation has voted to move forward in faith and love--this time to consolidate the church and the school into one facility dedicated to the praise and glory of God. It will lose its prominent location in town at the intersection of two major highways, but it is my sincere hope and prayer that it never lose its position in Cannon Falls as the only Confessional, evangelical, Lutheran church. Yes, it certainly was the Lord's will that a church of this kind be established in Cannon Falls, Minnesota. The members of St. Paul's have quite a rich heritage from the Lord for which to thank Him. For well over a century He used dedicated lay people and ministers to carry out His will in Cannon Falls. He still does that to this day. The present pastor of St. Paul's, Rev. Mark Schwartfagger, is very optimistic about the congregation's mission in Cannon Falls. He even believes that there is a possibility that within the next decade St. Paul's might begin a daughter congregation in nearby Northfield--something it had attempted to do previously. Northfield, not unlike Cannon Falls, is a hotbed for ecumenical, non-Confessional Lutheranism. By God's grace it too could use a Confessional Lutheran church dedicated to proclaiming the pure Word of God in its midst. It remains to be seen whether it is the Lord's will to accomplish in Northfield what He in His mercy has accomplished in Cannon Falls.

ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Theodore Graebner, Church Bells In The Forest (St.Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>Erwin L. Lueker, ed. in chief, Lutheran Cyclopedia (St.Louis: Concordia, 1954), p. 976.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>P.R. Hanke, et.al., Golden Jubilee History of the Minnesota District of the W.E.L.S. and its Member Congregations 1918-1968 (Minneapolis: Ad Art Advertising Co., 1969), p. ?

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>David P. Rosenow, Why Lutheran? 1980 Senior Church History paper, W.L.S.

<sup>9</sup>Hanke, p. 88.

<sup>10</sup>Rev. Richard R. Durow, current pastor of St.Paul's Ev. Lutheran church, Prescott, WI, letter of January 26, 1987.

<sup>11</sup>Rosenow, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Stephen P. Valleskey, former pastor of St.Paul's Ev. Lutheran church, Cannon Falls, MN, letter of January 24, 1987.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Report of the Seventy-eighth Annual Convention of the Evan. Luth. Augustana Synod of North America held at Immanuel Deaconess Institute, Omaha, Nebraska, June 15-20, 1937.

<sup>15</sup>Hanke, p. 89.

<sup>17</sup>The Lutheran Annual, statistical yearbook of the L.C.M.S., (St.Louis: Concordia, 1943-1952.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Philip Buck, A History of Saint Paul's Ev. Luth. Church of Cannon Falls, Minnesota, 1976, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Hanke, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Interview with long-time members of St.Paul's Lutheran church.

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<sup>22</sup>Hanke, p. 89.

<sup>23</sup>Buck, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>Hanke, p. 89.

<sup>25</sup>Buck, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Synodical Reports, Minnesota District (WELS), proceedings from the Nineteenth Biennial Convention assembled as D.M.L.C., New Ulm, MN, June 21-25, 1954, p. 70.

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