

The History of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary from 1863 to 1903

[This history appeared in the seminary's first *Catalog* in 1903, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the reestablishment of the seminary. The author is probably Dr. Adolf Hoenecke, although the account is unsigned. The translation from the German original is by the editor, Wilbert R. Gawrisch.]

I. The seminary at Watertown until 1868

The idea of having a seminary was actually a main feature in our synod's life from the very beginning. As early as 1860, when the synod had only 21 pastors, the need for pastors and the training of young men for the ministry were discussed at the synod convention in Fond du Lac. As a purely temporary measure to relieve the need, the proposal was made to establish ties with the educational institutions of other church bodies. Although it had the establishment of its own seminary continually and firmly in mind, the synod at its meeting in Watertown, May 25–31, 1861, nevertheless had to give up the idea. It had to be satisfied with training available young men at Gettysburg.ⁱ

The synod convention in Columbus, June 14–18, 1862, which received Pastor Eduard Moldehnke into membership, moved closer toward establishing a seminary. A specially appointed committee recommended the immediate establishment of a seminary. In the subsequent discussion of the committee report everyone recognized the need and feasibility of establishing a seminary. A prospective site (Watertown) was also considered.

A final decision to establish the school was made at the convention in Watertown, May 28–June 3, 1863. The synod at that time had 31 members. A number of pastors applied for membership. Among them were C. G. Reim of Green Bay, A. Lange of Lebanon, A. Hoenecke of Farmington and Ph. Brenner of Kenosha. All of them were accepted into membership. In his annual report the president [Johannes Bading] strongly urged that the seminary be started. The report of the committee that reviewed the president's report wholeheartedly endorsed his recommendation, and the committee on its part also recommended such action. A resolution to that effect was then adopted.

Pastor E. Moldehnke was recommended as head of the seminary and Watertown as the site. Since Pastor Bading had agreed to make a trip to Germany to raise money for the seminary and college, it was resolved to ask Pastor Hoenecke to serve as his substitute in his Watertown congregation. So, with the most important matters settled, the decision to establish the school was made.

At the convention in Watertown, May 27–31, 1864, there was a brief discussion about the person to head the seminary. The question was whether Pastor E. Moldehnke or Pastor E. Giese, who in the meantime had joined the synod, should be called. But it was decided to stay with the choice of Pastor Moldehnke. The synod now had 32 members. Among a larger number of pastors received into membership were J. Brockmann of Ahnapee [Algoma], E. Giese of Town Herman [rural Hartford], G. Vorberg of West Bend, G. Thiele of Ripon and E. Mayerhoff. A committee named to review student applications consisted of Pastors A. Hoenecke, Ph. Koehler and E. Mayerhoff. Eleven students were accepted, including H. Hoffmann, who, after passing an examination, was ordained in 1865 and sent to Portage.

The 1865 convention of the synod was held in Watertown from June 22 to 25. The synod now had 40 pastors. The newly received members included Pastors Th. Jaekel, L. Genske, H. Hoffmann and Teacher Hoyer of Watertown. The convention occupied itself especially with the dedication and opening of the seminary building that was under construction and the calling of a director for the college. Prof. Adam Martin from Hartwick Seminary was called.ⁱⁱ September 14, 1865, was set as the day of dedication.

At this convention the need for a preseminary was also discussed. The hope was that in this way young people might be gained for a so-called practical-theoretical education. The students from the time of the 1865 to the 1866 convention numbered eleven. The new students were A. Schmidt, L. Junker, Grotheer and A. Siegler. Four were in the school: Achilles, Horwinsky, Schwarting, Denke. Attending the college in preparation for the seminary were Dahlke, Denninger and Gamm. Five were dismissed, some temporarily, some permanently.

The synod convention in Fond du Lac, May 7–13, 1866, recognized the necessity of appointing an inspector [dean] for the seminary. Pastor A. Hoenecke was elected. Prof. Moldehnke thereupon resigned, and Pastor Hoenecke took over all the work in the seminary.

This state of affairs was acknowledged at the synod convention held in St. John's church in Milwaukee, June 20–27, 1867. The seminary professor was relieved of teaching responsibilities in the college. The preseminary seemed closer to becoming a reality by the resolution to enter into dealings with Dr. [Johann Hinrich] Wichernⁱⁱⁱ in Germany in the interest of such a school. Inasmuch as the synod had, however, in the meantime passed the well-known resolutions rejecting the Union [between the Lutherans and Reformed in Germany], Dr. Wichern broke off all further negotiations.

In its meeting in Racine, June 11–17, 1868, the synod renewed its efforts to get students for the seminary from Germany or to get a pretheological school in Germany. It resolved to enter into negotiations with Pastor L. Harms^{iv} and with the Lutheran Conference of Minden-Ravensberg about sending students, as well as with the pastoral association in Mecklenburg-Schwerin concerning a preseminary. Negotiations were also undertaken with Dr. [K.K.] Muenkel^v about accepting a theological professorship and the editorship of the *Gemeindeblatt*. None of these negotiations had the desired outcome.

According to the president's report for the year June 1867 to June 1868, twenty young people were preparing themselves at the school to enter college.^{vi} Among the eight new enrollees were A. Schroedel and C. Oppen. One seminary student was readmitted. Two students, L. Junker and C. Dowidat, were given permission to take their examinations. Both passed them successfully and were ordained in September 1868.

Prof. Hoenecke's seminary report for the school year 1867–1868 states that there were four students in the seminary. Attending the college in preparation for the seminary were Dahlke, Gamin, Bauernfeind, O. Hoyer, E. Hoyer, J. Denninger, C. Oppen, Otto, Buetow, [E.] Oberdosten (preparing to become a teacher), Goldammer and Pankow.

The year 1868 brought a sudden change for the seminary in October. The discussions conducted at that time with the honorable Missouri Synod led to the decision to combine our seminary with the one in St. Louis. This brings to an end the first period in the history of our seminary.

II. The seminary in conjunction with the St. Louis seminary, 1869–1877

After the synod resolved that the theological professor together with the theological students should move to St. Louis, our six students at once entered the practical seminary in St. Louis. Prof. Hoenecke's move to St. Louis could not, however, take place. Eventually, a number of students who had still been trained in Watertown entered the holy ministry after passing their examinations. They were [C.] Zuberbier, [H.] Haack, C. Jaeger, [H.] Kleinhans and W. Schimpf.

In 1870 Prof. Hoenecke accepted a call as pastor of St. Matthew congregation in Milwaukee. He served this congregation from July 1870 to December 1890. Since a thorough upgrading of the *gymnasium* [combination high school and college] in Watertown was now an unavoidable necessity, on September 10, 1872, Prof. Dr. W. Notz and shortly thereafter Prof. A. Graebner were called to Watertown.

In the second half of the 1870s, voices were again raised for the reestablishment of our seminary as an independent institution in our midst. At the synod convention in Watertown, May 31 to June 6, 1877, discussion of a joint seminary for the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods resulted in a decision to decline the joint seminary on the part of the Wisconsin Synod and to call a special synod convention to be held in Oshkosh in August of the same year for the purpose of considering the reestablishment of our seminary.^{vii} The convention was held beginning August 14 and resolved to reopen Wisconsin's own seminary in September 1878. This concluded the period in which our seminary was combined with the seminary of the honorable Missouri Synod in St. Louis.

III. The seminary since its reestablishment, first in Milwaukee and then in Wauwatosa, 1878–1903

The synod convention held at St. Matthew in Milwaukee, June 20–26, 1878, ratified the Oshkosh resolutions. On September 4, 1878, the three professors, A. Hoenecke, E. Notz and A. Graebner were installed. Lectures began in a rented house with six students. As early as 1879 it was decided, however, to buy the so-called Eimermann's Park for \$7000 and to enlarge the building in the park to serve the purposes of the seminary. In September 1879 the dedication of the building and occupancy by the inspector [dean] and students could take place.

The quiet development of the seminary with a steady increase in the number of students was interrupted in the fall of 1887 when Prof. A. Graebner left the faculty and accepted a call to the theological seminary of the honorable Missouri Synod in St. Louis. Pastor G. Thiele was called to take his place. He accepted the call and took over the courses previously taught by Prof. Graebner. He was installed on the twenty-second Sunday after Trinity, 1887. In this way with the Lord's help the regular operation of the seminary was again taken care of.

In the following years there were many reasons for rejoicing, namely, that the number of students at times grew so large that the necessary room could hardly be found in the old seminary building. Thanks be to God, there were no outbreaks of serious illness, which, under the circumstances, could have had the most tragic consequences.

Things that had a disturbing effect were not lacking, however. In 1889 Prof. Hoenecke was forced to submit his resignation to the board of control because of poor health. He did not have the strength to serve both his large congregation and the seminary properly. A further cause of concern was the very unfavorable finding by the state authorities on the condition of the seminary building and the order that all problems be corrected.

With respect to Prof. Hoenecke's resignation, the board of control resolved to recommend to the synod that the professor be called to work exclusively at the seminary. Upon receiving a peaceful release from St. Matthew congregation, Prof. Hoenecke accepted the call and from that time on dedicated his strength and efforts entirely to the seminary.

With respect to the condition of the seminary building and the question of erecting a new building, either on the old site or somewhere else, it was agreed 1) that a committee be appointed to gather specific information concerning a new building and the site; 2) that the committee publish its findings by September in the *Gemeindeblatt*; and 3) that a pastoral conference be held in October to make final decisions. Since the majority of votes was cast in favor of the present [Wauwatosa] site, the board of control announced at the convention in Winona, June 16–21, 1892, that in collaboration with the building committee it was having the necessary plans and alternates for the building drawn up and would present them to the synod for approval. The committee that considered the report of the board of control thereupon recommended that the synod proceed with the construction of the new building.

After lengthy debate the synod, trusting in God's help, resolved to erect a seminary building and two professorages on the selected site at a total cost of \$40,000. By the time of the synod convention at St. Matthew in Milwaukee, June 22–28, 1893, the construction, including the interior work, was nearing completion. For compelling reasons it was decided at the same convention to erect a third professor's residence.

With joyful thanksgiving to God the new seminary building was dedicated on September 17, 1893. It was a happy day for the synod. A large crowd of people from far and near attended the celebration.

At the opening of the school year 31 students were enrolled in three classes. At that time there was still also a so-called practical division. Even though, to be sure, dedicated workers were also sent out from this practical division, the synod nevertheless for weighty reasons decided in 1897 to terminate this division. In 1897 a gratifying addition to the faculty was also made by calling Pastor R. Adelberg on a temporary basis to an English professorship.

The 1899–1900 school year brought part of the faculty a greatly increased workload. At Easter Prof. G. Thiele left the faculty. To avoid interrupting the lectures, Professors Hoenecke and Notz took over the main lectures of their former colleague. Prof. J. Koehler of Watertown was called as his replacement. He began his work at the opening of the school year on September 4, 1900, taking over Prof. Thiele's courses. Unfortunately, for health reasons Prof. Koehler had to take a year's leave of absence. That again left his courses without an

instructor. Once again his two colleagues took over these courses for the year. Pastor J. Jenny very willingly took care of the English lectures.^{viii}

When the seminary in this way survived the difficulties of this year, the summer of 1902 brought a new and shocking sorrow. Everyone still remembers it: the terrible fall our professor and inspector [dean], E. Notz, had and his subsequent tragic suffering. The Lord helped him to bear it and on February 5, 1903, delivered him from all his troubles by granting him a peaceful departure out of this life.

To meet the need, the board of control in the summer of 1902 called Prof. August Pieper as the fourth professor. He took up his duties at the beginning of the school year in September 1902, taking over the courses taught by Prof. Notz. The director of the seminary temporarily took over the deanship. In this way the seminary could once again go about its work with God's blessing. This is all due to God's infinite goodness!

With this we close this brief survey of the history of the seminary as we anticipate the anniversary God is granting and in sincere faith say:

Thanks be to God for everything!

Editor's Endnotes

ⁱ This was the seminary of the General Synod. The synod was established in 1820 and the seminary in 1826.

ⁱⁱ Hartwick Seminary was the first Lutheran theological seminary in America. Located in Otsego County near Cooperstown, New York, it traced its beginning to 1797. It was named after John Christopher Hartwick, a pioneer missionary, who provided in his will for the establishment of a seminary. The first professor was John Christopher Kunze. After moving to Brooklyn and then Manhattan, Hartwick Seminary passed out of existence in 1941 after 144 years of service.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wichern (1808–1881), the founder of *das Rauhe Haus*, a home for neglected and delinquent children in Hamburg, was the promoter of so-called inner mission work among the poor and disadvantaged in Prussia.

^{iv} Ludwig or Louis Harms (1808–1865) was the founder and director of the famous Hermannsburger Mission.

^v Muenkel (1809–1888) was a pastor in the Hannoverian state church who was known as an outstanding preacher.

^{vi} According to the convention *Proceedings*, the report of President Bading makes reference to the report of the board of control for details (pp 6, 20).

^{vii} Actually it was a pastoral conference, which was given the authority to act by the synod (*Proceedings*, 1877, p 30).

^{viii} An 1881 graduate of the seminary, Jenny was pastor of St. Jacobi congregation in Milwaukee since 1893.