

# Forward In Christ Planting The Seed 150 Years Ago

## I. The Beginnings

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The arrival of the year 2000 has spawned an endless series of articles about the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian Era and what the 21st century has in store for us. All the talk about the dangers and the possibilities can quickly make us callous and unappreciative of the challenges and the opportunities, which are ahead of us. The same thing can happen whenever we are urged to look back and "count our blessings." Anniversaries can quickly deteriorate into a "ho-hum" recitation of long-forgotten people, places, and events. Anniversaries can become mere excuses to celebrate when the reason for the celebration is given little attention.

The year 2000 marks the 150th anniversary of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. If anyone has reason to celebrate, we, the members of the WELS, do. Our celebration, however, dare not degenerate into self-praise and self-centeredness. My grandmother always said, "Eigenlob stinkt"—"self-praise smells." That certainly would be the case if our celebration revolved around us and what we have accomplished. Our celebration is an expression of what God has done for his people and through his people.

To truly appreciate what God has done, we need to look back. As we survey 150 years of history (better "his story"), we are reminded that only the grace of God has brought us to this point and made us what we are. "To God be the glory, great things he has done!"

## I. The Beginnings

### The Soil into which the Seed was Planted

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 established the terms for statehood in the lands "north and west of the Ohio River." The Second Treaty of Paris in 1783 not only ended the Revolutionary War with the British; it deeded to the United States of America the extensive territories between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. Ohio was the first territory in the Northwest to join the Union as a state in 1803. Indiana followed in 1816 and Illinois in 1818. In 1836 when Michigan was on the verge of statehood, the United States Congress created the Wisconsin Territory.

Although Wisconsin was supposed to have stretched from the foot of Lake Michigan to the shores of Lake Superior, its northern and southern borders were redefined when Illinois and Michigan adjusted their territorial boundaries. Wisconsin emerged with its parameters neatly defined by Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River. Even without roads travel was possible from the lake to the river on the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, transferring from one to the other at Portage.

Wisconsin's waterways allowed permanent settlers to gain access to this new frontier. In the 1820s, Southerners came up the Mississippi River to mine the lead deposits of southwestern Wisconsin, where they lived in the hillsides like that native mammal, the badger. The 1830s brought Yankees from New York and New England to develop the port communities of Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha on the shore of Lake Michigan.

When Wisconsin became a territory in 1836, the lead-mining region of the southwest and the lakeshore of the southeast enjoyed almost equal political clout. Madison, which was little more than a dot on the map, became the compromise territorial capital between the territory's two population centers. In 1840 Wisconsin's total population was 30,945. Ten years later some 305,391 people called it home.

The Wisconsin Territory had achieved the minimum population for statehood, 60,000, in the early 1840s, but public indifference and political squabbling delayed the quest for statehood. The territorial legislature's first attempt at a constitution was rejected in 1846, but in March 1848 the voters approved a

constitution 16,759 to 6,384. On 29 May 1848 President James Polk signed the legislation which established Wisconsin as the 30th state in the Union.

Although Wisconsin had enjoyed substantial growth as a territory, statehood marked the beginning of large-scale German immigration. The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, connecting the Hudson River with Lake Erie, had given new immigrants to the United States access to the country's interior. In the intervening years steamships had made it possible to travel further into the expanses of the Old Northwest Territory on the Great Lakes. Milwaukee, with its natural harbor and aided by aggressive promotion in Europe, became the gateway for the new waves of immigrants.

By 1846, Milwaukee had almost 10,000 residents and gained a charter as Wisconsin's first city. War and poverty in Europe, coupled with the cheap land and seemingly endless opportunities in Wisconsin, joined to funnel tens of thousands of new residents into the state in its early years. Many of them settled in Milwaukee. Even more passed through the city on the way to their frontier farms. Because the majority of the immigrants came from German states, Milwaukee reflected the German language, culture, and religion.

In 1851 Milwaukee resident Samuel Freeman published *The Emigrant's Handbook and Guide to Wisconsin*. It was one of many guidebooks printed to persuade Europeans to settle in the new state. At that time portions of western and central Europe had experienced crop failures, political unrest, and the consolidation of farmland. Although the lure of the California gold fields would siphon off some 50,000 people from the state, Wisconsin's fertile land attracted large numbers of new residents.

### **Weinmann, Muelhaeuser and Wrede Arrive and Begin their Work**

Frontier mentality is one of survival. People forget about many things and concentrate on doing whatever is necessary to provide shelter and food for themselves and their families. The need for physical survival meant there were few educational opportunities on the frontier. Some were able to provide home schooling; others were not so fortunate. Since many of the new immigrants lived on virtually self-sufficient farms, they tended to be isolated and lonely.

Unfortunately, the frontier often leaves religion behind too. Sometimes this is a conscious effort—European "free thinkers" did not want to have religion in their new communities. Often, however, new settlers had little opportunity to put the religion of their forefathers into practice. Scattered as they were on farms and in small communities, the newcomers found that religious services were informal and irregular by comparison to what they had known in the Old World. While it is true that some settlers came over en masse and brought pastors with them—the Trinity congregation of Freistadt (Ozaukee County) in 1839 and the David's Star congregation of Kirchhayn (Washington County) in 1843, for example—the fact remains that smaller groups and individual families did not have this luxury. Sometimes circuit riding pastors served them. Too often these men were poorly trained pastors who had no future in Europe or were individuals who were simply untrained pretenders. Given the paucity of spiritual opportunity, the frontier people were in danger of slipping back into paganism.

European Christians were not unaware of the needs of their countrymen who had emigrated to America. In the early 19th century a number of European mission societies had been formed "to protect the distant brethren and sisters from falling from the faith and to lead the erring upon the way of truth, to supply them with the Word of Life, and to gather them into congregations, in order that to them and their descendants the possession of the treasure of doctrine might be assured."<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Europeans also saw in the New World the opportunity to do "pure" mission work among its non-Christian natives.

In 1835 Johannes Muehlhaeuser<sup>2</sup> enrolled in the Barmen Mission School. He wanted to be a missionary to either Africa or Asia. School authorities, however, believed that he would have trouble learning native

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<sup>1</sup> *Continuing in His Word*, p 12.

<sup>2</sup> Muehlhaeuser was born on 9 August 1804 in Notzigen, Wuerttemberg. He was a baker by profession, but in 1829 he had volunteered to serve the Basel Mission Society as a "pilgrim missionary." In this capacity he traveled into Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia. He supported himself by his trade and shared his faith. Early in 1832 he was imprisoned in Bohemia, charged with proselytizing and

languages at his age, so he was recommended for work in North America. When the Rhenish Mission Society turned the work in North America over to the Langenberg Society, Muehlhaeuser was one of the first candidates secured for this work. Along with another candidate by the name of Oertel,<sup>3</sup> Muehlhaeuser was shipped across the Atlantic Ocean. He landed in New York City on 3 October 1837 and began to work there as a teacher of the Catechism.

As his mission society teachers had feared, Muehlhaeuser had difficulties with the new language, English. This was the language which parents in New York City preferred for the instruction of their children. As a result, Muehlhaeuser soon moved to Rochester, New York, where he could work in German. Here he was licensed as a pastor and then ordained in 1838 by the New York Ministerium, serving faithfully for ten years.

In May 1848 Muehlhaeuser resigned his call in Rochester after he received reports about the needs of the German immigrants in Wisconsin. Since he had no call from a congregation and needing some means to support himself, he decided to take a position as a colporteur, a seller of Bibles and religious tracts, for a New York society. Arriving in Milwaukee on 27 June 1848, Muehlhaeuser began to work with the Germans in the city.

By October 1848 Muehlhaeuser had already founded an evangelical church in Milwaukee. Originally named Trinity, the congregation changed its name to Grace at the time of its official organization (13 May 1849) because the Missouri Synod already had a congregation by the name of Trinity in the city.

The man who had appealed to Muehlhaeuser for help was Johannes Weinmann. He too was a graduate of the Barmen Mission School, having enrolled there in 1843. In 1846 the Langenberg Mission Society sent him to the Milwaukee area in response to an appeal for a pastor which had come from Ehrenfried Seebach who lived in Town Oakwood. When Weinmann arrived in New York, Muehlhaeuser met him and took him to Rochester. From there Weinmann set off for Milwaukee, stopping in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he was ordained by Friedrich Schmid who had been there since 1833.

Weinmann's work rapidly expanded from his base in Oakwood to include Caledonia, Greenfield, and New Berlin. Faced with more opportunities to spread the gospel than he had time, he sent his reports concerning the Milwaukee area and its great needs to Muehlhaeuser. As already pointed out, Muehlhaeuser took it upon himself to help in this great endeavor.

A third member of the Barmen Mission School to serve in the Milwaukee area was Wilhelm Wrede, originally from the Magdeburg area of Germany. Barmen commissioned him as a missionary to America. Arriving in 1846 with Weinmann,<sup>4</sup> he initially went to Callicoon, New York, but in 1849 Wrede moved to a congregation in Granville, Wisconsin, about five miles northwest of Milwaukee.

Although Muehlhaeuser, Weinmann, and Wrede had never gone to school together, they had a similar background and similar experiences. It is not surprising that they were drawn together in an attempt to organize the work that tended to overwhelm them in Milwaukee and vicinity.

On 8 December 1849, Muehlhaeuser, Weinmann, and Wrede met at Grace Church in Milwaukee and decided to form the "First Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin." Muehlhaeuser was elected president of the fledgling group. Weinmann served as secretary, with Wrede as treasurer. The first task before this little organization was the drafting of an official constitution. This document came before the new synod for adoption when it held its first official meeting at Salem Church in Granville on 26 May 1850. This meeting marks the establishment of what is known to us as the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

In 1850, however, the organization was more of a ministerium than it was a synod. The constitution made that clear in its opening paragraph: "We call this our gathering: Das Deutsche Evangelische Ministerium

organizing a secret society. After a six-month imprisonment he was able to escape and determined there must be a better way to serve his Lord. Ultimately he was led to enter the Barmen Mission School.

<sup>3</sup> Pastor Oertel had a problem with unionism. By 1840 he was a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>4</sup> A Pastor Rauschenbusch was the third member of this 1846 traveling party. He was a Tuebingen graduate and had already been ordained as a pastor. Although he came from a long line of Lutheran pastors, in America he switched his affiliation to the Baptists. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. In this case, however, we need not lament the loss too much. His son, Walter, later became a leading promoter of the social gospel.

von Wisconsin [the German Evangelical Ministerium of Wisconsin] and our meeting a ministerial assembly and our gathering with delegates of the congregations assembled with us a synodical assembly."<sup>5</sup> As originally constituted, this new group was primarily an alliance of pastors and only secondly an association of congregations, represented by delegates at an annual meeting.

In addition to the three founding fathers, two other pastors attended this initial assembly of the Wisconsin Synod. Paul Meiss had been rejected by Barmen for service in America. Meiss had paid his own way to the Midwest and had briefly served the Granville church before moving on to a congregation in Schlesingerville, present day Slinger. He was joined at this meeting by Kaspar Pluess of Sheboygan who was also a European pastoral reject from the Basel Mission School. Both Meiss and Pluess were licensed candidates who sought to associate themselves with the new body. Finally, Jacob Conrad also attended. He was a colporteur who presented himself to the ministerium as a possible candidate for ministry. Without a convenient theological school available, Pastor Wrede was assigned the job of giving Conrad the necessary instruction in theology to prepare him for ordination.

The five pastors on the initial roster of the Wisconsin Synod represented eighteen congregations in 1850. Muehlhaeuser served two congregations. Weinmann served two; Wrede three; Meiss seven and Pluess served four congregations.

According to its constitution the "First Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin" sounded confessional. In the Fourth Section of the constitution each candidate for ordination was required to pledge himself to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and to the other confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Likewise in the third paragraph of the Fifth Section all congregational arrangements were prescribed to be "in harmony with the pure Word of the Bible and the Confessions of our Evangelical Lutheran Church." Later these references to the confessions in the manuscript copy of the constitution were crossed out and replaced with "pure Bible Christianity" and "pure Bible Word." This change was unofficial, but it points to a problem the church faced in the first decade of its existence. Was the Wisconsin Synod "Old" Lutheran or was it "New" Lutheran? Was it Lutheran or was it Evangelical?

## **II. Establishing an Identity**

### **Wisconsin's Search for Its Identity**

Although we do not know with certainty who was responsible for the attempted constitutional revision, it seems most likely that Muehlhaeuser himself was the man.<sup>6</sup> As president, Muehlhaeuser had the constitution in his possession. More damaging, however, are Muehlhaeuser's views on what it meant to be a Lutheran. The distinction between "Old" and "New" Lutherans had developed in Europe. The "Old" Lutherans were those congregations and individuals who were dead set against the Prussian Union of 1817. The German Kaiser, Frederick William III, had attempted to unify his people religiously by ordering the Lutherans and the Reformed churches to come together. Originally he was able to effect this merger only in the military chapels, but by the 1830s he was pressuring all the churches to amalgamate. The "Old" Lutherans had responded by establishing free churches, which existed outside of state control. When they continued to face pressure to comply with the Union, many of them left for America.

The "New" Lutherans held the view that they could put up with the union situation, as long as no doctrinal compromise was involved. Of course, there was a difference of opinion as to what a doctrinal compromise was. They did not recognize the Union as just such a compromise.

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *Continuing in His Word*, pp 14,15.

<sup>6</sup> In the minutes of the 1850 convention it was reported: "Then the constitution drafted by the president was read and discussed chapter by chapter and after several changes adopted unanimously." These "changes" might indicate the source of the crossed out words. It should be noted, however, that Weinmann as secretary wrote out the constitution after it had been adopted and therefore one would conclude that the written edition includes whatever changes were made on the floor of the convention. Furthermore, the insertions, i.e. the changes in the constitution, are not in Weinmann's hand.

In the Rhineland "Evangelical," that is, Lutheran and Reformed, unions had existed even before the Prussian Union of 1817. The "New" Lutheranism found it easier to operate in this atmosphere. Furthermore, it was here that many mission societies and schools operated. With so much work to be done in Africa, Asia, and America and with so much support needed to make this work possible, they asked, "Why not join Lutheran and Reformed forces in a united effort with each denomination retaining its own integrity?" As one might expect, the doctrinal positions espoused by these organizations tended to fall to the lowest common denominator.

By the middle of the 19th century two types of mission societies were at work. The societies at Basel, Barmen, and Berlin were "evangelical" in their outlook, while those at Neuendettelsau and Hermannsburg<sup>7</sup> were attempting to be more thoroughly Lutheran. Both sides wanted to be called Lutheran. Both sides wanted the rights to the "brand" name of Lutheran, but they disagreed greatly on how pure the ingredients of the product needed to be. The "New" Lutherans contended that what they had to offer was better than liberal, rationalist Lutheranism. The "Old" Lutherans rejected that view and fought for an unconditional subscription to the Lutheran Confessions.

Johannes Muehlhaeuser was a "New" Lutheran. Remember that he, along with Weinmann and Wrede, had been sent to America by the Langenberg Mission Society.<sup>8</sup> It is not surprising then that Muehlhaeuser clashed with the pastors of the Missouri Synod over the matter of the Lutheran Confessions. He referred to these confessions as "paper fences" which prevented him from serving the Reformed and the Evangelicals at the same time that he served the Lutherans. Given this inauspicious beginning, one can only marvel at God's goodness as he gradually turned the infant Wisconsin Synod in a new, confessional direction.

### **New Men and New Ideas**

During its first decade the Wisconsin Synod remained dependent upon the European mission societies for new workers. The new synod was habitually short of pastors. New areas of Wisconsin were opening up for settlement and the new immigrants were requesting worship services from the Synod. Men continued to come from Europe, but some men never intended to stay. They came to America to serve only until they were able to secure a permanent position back in Germany or a position in the eastern United States. In 1853 Johannes Weinmann accepted a call to a Lutheran congregation in Baltimore. After serving there for five years he returned to Germany and never came back. Weinmann planned to return to his American work but his ship, the *Austria*, burned at sea on Weinmann's return voyage. In 1855, moreover, Wilhelm Wrede returned to Germany to serve there.

Other men, who were European trained and came to Wisconsin, were never able to acclimate themselves to the primitive conditions on the frontier. The hard work and self-sacrifice which pioneer ministry demanded soon persuaded them to return home. Among the immigrants there were also those who had been misfits in Germany and who saw the ministry as an opportunity to make a living without too many demands being placed upon them. Although a few of these untrained men were able to successfully serve as pastors, most were soon discovered to be incompetent hypocrites. Furthermore, the Synod was forced to remove some men from office because of their dishonesty or their problems with excessive drinking. Still other men were never able to overcome their own indifference to confessional doctrine which they had picked up at their European training schools.

In spite of the difficulties, new men slowly did take their permanent places in the Wisconsin Ministerium. The 1854 Proceedings of the Wisconsin Synod's annual convention lists 10 pastors. Included for

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<sup>7</sup> The Neuendettelsau Missionary Society was founded in 1849 by Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe. This society concerned itself first of all with serving German immigrants in American and American Indians. Later it sent missionaries to other parts of the world.

The Hermannsburg Missionary Society was also established in 1849. Its founder was Ludwig Harms. Its candidates were given religious and vocational training. Its most important field was Africa.

<sup>8</sup> The Langenberg Society was founded on 27 July, 1837. Its constitution originally indicated that this organization would provide missionaries for work among the heathen only. Very quickly, however, it became the "Evangelical Lutheran Association for the Protestant Germans in North America."

the first time on the rolls of the ministerium was Johannes Bading. Bading had trained at the staunchly Lutheran school at Hermannsburg. After four years of preparation it appeared that Bading was set to become a member of the first graduating class in 1852. Commencement, however, came and Bading was not a graduate, having been designated as "unfaithful." Along with another individual, Bading had been released from school "because earthly work became too much for them."<sup>9</sup> The clash between Bading and the school authorities did not involve doctrine, but his unwillingness to participate fully in the school's work program. Shut out of Hermannsburg, he applied and was accepted by the Langenberg Society. One year later, May 1853, Bading was ready for assignment. In July he was sent to America.

It quickly becomes apparent that this young man—he was not yet 30—also had a strong will when it came to doctrinal matters. Although he had been sent to America by the Langenberg Society, he still retained the "Old" Lutheran doctrinal perspective he had learned at Hermannsburg. This new candidate for ministry was assigned to the Wisconsin Synod congregation in Calumet, Wisconsin. There he clashed with President Muehlhaeuser at his ordination on 6 October 1853. Disregarding Muehlhaeuser's disapproval, Bading at his ordination wanted to subscribe himself unconditionally to the Lutheran Confessions. After referring once again to the confessions as "paper fences," Muehlhaeuser gave in. Bading underscored his personal commitment to orthodoxy, at the same time tweaking the nose of President Muehlhaeuser, by preaching his introductory sermon that same day on the importance of the Lutheran Confessions.

In 1855 Bading accepted a call from Calumet, Wisconsin to Theresa. There he joined Philipp Koehler, Gottlieb Reim, and Elias Sauer as a member of the old Northwestern Conference, which quickly gained the reputation as the Synod's most confessional conference. In 1860 when Muehlhaeuser stepped down from the presidency of the Wisconsin Synod, Bading was elected to that position at the age of 35. Under his tenure the Wisconsin Synod would move in a different direction and would take on a confessional tone. The arrival of Adolph Hoenecke in 1863 would give further impetus to this change of direction which would lead to fellowship with the Missouri Synod.

### **III. The Start of a Worker Training System**

#### **The Watertown Institution**

Although the German mission societies continued to send pastors to the Wisconsin Synod, there were never enough workers to meet the needs of the expanding mission fields in Wisconsin. In the earliest years of the synod, individual pastors had finished the training of men who came from Europe. When Jacob Conrad arrived in America, he had already received some formal training in Europe. When he offered his services to the Wisconsin Synod, he was assigned to Pastor Wrede who was to coach him in theology. After a short period of instruction he was licensed to preach under the supervision of experienced pastors. After two years of this "vicarship," he and a few other men who had received similar training were ordained and assigned to congregations.

After the initial experience, this "theological training by apprenticeship" was given to the men of the Northwestern Conference—Bading, Koehler, Reim, and Sauer. They provided the limited theological training that was available for ministerial candidates until the Synod had a formal training program. Because of the unreliability of European candidates, both in numbers and in confessional quality, the Synod knew it had to play a larger role in training workers.

From 1859 to 1863 a major topic of discussion at the synodical conventions was the worker shortage and what to do about it. During the 1860 convention there were five separate sessions attended only by the pastors. At these meetings they interviewed candidates for the ministry, heard test sermons, and conducted examinations. Those men who had potential for ministry, but who needed additional training, were given the

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<sup>9</sup> *Hermannsburg Missionblatt*, 1 (January 1854), p 6. Quoted in Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, p 30.

opportunity to receive further instruction. The men who were able to deliver an acceptable sermon were licensed and given congregations.

The resolutions passed at the conventions from 1859 to 1862 demonstrate a continuing dependency upon the European mission societies for supplying even more pastors and teachers. One such resolution in 1859 thanked the Langenberg and Berlin Societies for past help and immediately asked them for more assistance in procuring manpower.

The 1859 convention also resolved to seek the support of the European mission societies in acquiring a synodical library. This collection of materials would assist designated pastors in the training of candidates. Two years later it was reported that 500 volumes had been provided by individual and group donations. Training pastors via apprenticeships with veteran pastors, however, did not prove to be a viable long-term solution to the problem. The pastors were already too busy and had little time to train new men.

Other approaches to the worker shortage were tried. John Henry Sieker, a Wisconsin Synod member, was trained at Gettysburg Seminary of the Pennsylvania Synod, but he was the only one to graduate from this institution. For a brief time in 1859 consideration was given to a joint effort at Illinois University. According to the proposal the joint seminary would provide English-speaking pastors for Illinois, Swedish and Norwegian pastors for Illinois and Iowa, and German-speaking pastors for Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Synod could have joined this effort of the Illinois and Northern Illinois Synods, if it would have supplied the German theological professor for the institution. The language barriers and the inability to agree on which men should serve on the faculty caused a reevaluation of the project. Since the confessional position of the two Illinois synods was also at odds with continuing developments in the Wisconsin Synod, this proposal was finally rejected when it was submitted to all the congregations of the Wisconsin Synod for their discussion and vote.

From the very beginning the Synod had recognized the need to train its own workers. If the Synod was to survive and grow, it had to educate young men as pastors and teachers. By the 1860s the need for a Wisconsin Synod worker training institution had been widely accepted. How soon this could be done and where the school should be located—these were difficult questions. These questions, however, had to be faced. The question of "how soon" was answered with "as soon as possible." The question of "where" generated harsh debate. In 1863 there were two locations being considered by the Synod: Milwaukee and Watertown.

Former President Muehlhaeuser, who was still active as a parish pastor in Milwaukee, promoted his hometown. As the headquarters of the Synod and as a larger city with many cultural and educational opportunities, some considered Milwaukee to be the logical spot for the school. Others pointed to the temptations in a big city, in particular the looser lifestyle that could be found there. Why not protect our students by placing them in a more conservative, rural environment? Moreover, Watertown was more centrally located to the Synod's congregations and now President Bading served a congregation there. In the 1863 convention Watertown was selected by the delegates on a 45-19 vote. Watertown would be the site of the Synod's first worker training institution.

While President Bading was sent overseas to raise money in Germany and Russia for the Watertown institution, a portion of the school opened its doors. Eduard Moldehnke, the Synod's traveling missionary, was called as the first professor of the seminary. He and his family lived in a rented home in Watertown, which also served as the "dormitory" and "classroom" for the one seminary student. The first student was dismissed in October, but another student enrolled in November. After a difficult first year, the enrollment improved. During the 1864-1865 school year, eleven students were training at the Watertown seminary.

In the fall of 1865 the Synod dedicated its own school building on a large tract of land in Watertown. With the completion of this building the "Watertown Institution," as the synodical proceedings often referred to the school, opened a college and a preparatory department to feed students into the seminary. Although the school was not well-endowed financially, the Wisconsin Synod had addressed one of its biggest headaches and was now training its own future pastors and teachers.

Unfortunately, the first president of the college and preparatory school thought of his institution as more than a school to educate German-speaking church workers. President Adam Martin, educated at Hartwick Seminary in New York, dreamed of establishing an elite English-oriented school in Watertown, a "Harvard of

the West" as he envisioned it. Since the school was to be a theological seminary, college, academy, and teacher-training facility and since it was located in Wisconsin, it seemed logical to Martin to advertise the institution as "Wisconsin University."<sup>10</sup> He announced that the school would prepare its students for any career and would grant those degrees which American colleges normally gave their students. The German-speaking parishioners of the Wisconsin Synod were hesitant to support Martin's institution. Many of Martin's first students were interested in an education but not in serving in the ministerium of the Wisconsin Synod. Not until Martin resigned for doctrinal reasons and Professor August Ernst took charge of the school in 1871 did the Watertown Institution become a real "synodical" school.

### **Addendum: Other Beginnings**

#### **The Beginnings in Michigan**

Today the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod also includes hundreds of congregations in the states of Michigan and Minnesota. Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin form the "heartland" of the Wisconsin Synod. Originally, however, both Michigan and Minnesota had their own independent Lutheran synods. Neither group existed when the Wisconsin Synod was founded in 1850, but within a decade the two state synods had been established. In December 1860 "the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Michigan and Other States" was founded and in July 1860 "the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Minnesota" became a reality.

In 1831 a group of Germans from Wuerttemberg settled in Washtenaw County near Ann Arbor, Michigan. In response to their appeal for a pastor, the Basel Mission Society sent Friedrich Schmid<sup>11</sup> to this mission field after he graduated in 1833. Two days after his ordination on 8 April 1833 he began the journey which brought him to Detroit in the Michigan Territory on 16 August. There on 18 August the first German Lutheran pastor in Michigan held the first two German Lutheran services-in the carpenter shop of John Hais and in the barn of a Mrs. Feldbacher.

Friedrich Schmid finally arrived in Ann Arbor on Tuesday, 20 August 1833. The following Sunday he held the first service in his new parish at a schoolhouse about four miles west of the town. This group in Scio Township was soon organized into Salem congregation.

Although Ann Arbor was to remain his base of operation, Schmid's boundless energy did not allow him to ignore other opportunities for service. In his early years much of Lower Michigan was his field of work. In addition to preaching in Detroit, he also worked in Monroe, Lansing, Marshall, Grand Rapids, and Sebawaing. Altogether Schmid organized nearly 20 congregations in what would soon become the state of Michigan.

In a report from the mission field back to the Basel Mission Society, dated 25 November 1833, Schmid also spent a considerable amount of space describing the physical appearance and spiritual state of the Indians in Michigan. Although he overestimated the Indian population as "hundreds of thousands," he understood the opportunity they represented.

Pastor Schmid's love for his Lord and his love for souls cannot be questioned. He did, however, have a problem. He wanted to be a Lutheran, but he didn't know how to be a confessional one. His experience was in the "mild" or "moderate" Lutheranism of his homeland and his training was at the feet of the unionistic mission society at Basel. Like Johannes Muehlhaeuser of the Wisconsin Synod, he did not like doctrinal controversy because he thought it hindered mission work.

In 1834 Basel sent Pastor G. W. Metzger to Michigan, but he soon went to Ohio. Soon thereafter Basel sent a Pastor Ries, but again he was called away to work in Illinois. In 1836 a Pastor Schwabe arrived from

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<sup>10</sup> The name "Wisconsin University" was never the official name of the Watertown Institution. It did express the ambitious plans which President Martin had for the new institution. When a name was officially adopted, "Northwestern University" still displayed the dream that the school would grow into an American-style institution. It was not until 1909 that the name was changed to "Northwestern College." The dream had finally been replaced by reality.

<sup>11</sup> Schmid was the son of a blacksmith. Born on 6 September 1807 in Waldorf, Wuerttemberg, he had entered the institute of the Basel Mission Society in March 1828.



Basel, but he served the congregation in Detroit for only six months before he died. Given the number of workers, it seems somewhat presumptuous that when a Pastor Schaad arrived in Michigan in 1837 the two pastors would begin plans for a synod. Their goal in such an undertaking was simple—to preserve their independence from the Ohioans. In the early 1840s, perhaps late 1842 or early 1843, Pastors Schmid and Metzger, along with newly arrived Pastor G. Kronenwett, discussed the organization of a synod so they could ordain preachers according to the laws of the land.

At this time Schmid stated it was necessary in this country to have a clear confession. He emphasized that he and his colleagues intended to "adhere as true Lutherans to the Scriptures and to the confessions."<sup>12</sup> He was upset by the deception of the German branch of the Methodists, known as the "Albrechtsbrueder," among the immigrant settlers, and he was equally upset by the ignorance of the German-speakers from Pennsylvania who had forgotten much of their Lutheranism.

Schmid and his two colleagues formed the first Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Michigan. It was known as "the Mission Synod of the West" because Schmid had in mind to do mission work among the Michigan Indians, as well as among the German-speaking settlers. In 1844 the new Michigan Synod also received word that the Franconian colonists who had been sent to America by J. K. Wilhelm Loehe were willing to help with the work among the Indians. The Loehe missionaries even placed their own Indian mission under the Synod's supervision. The pastors whom Loehe sent to Michigan included: Georg Hattstaedt at Monroe, Philipp Trautmann at Adrian, Friedrich Lochner at Toledo, and Friedrich Craemer at Frankenmuth. They all joined the Michigan Synod. They were confessional Lutherans and believed that they had found a home in Schmid's group. Schmid had specifically told the Franconians that "no missionary is to be sent to the heathen who does not subscribe to the Book of Concord of the Lutheran Church." He also assured them that "the members of our Synod are firmly committed to the Symbols of our church and pledge their missionaries to them."<sup>13</sup>

It quickly became apparent, however, that the Michigan Synod's practice differed from its confession. Basel in 1845 sent as missionary to Michigan a Pastor Dumser, who rejected the Lutheran Confessions. Schmid decided to use him in his mission effort among the Indians. That was not the only problem, however. Schmid also permitted mixed congregations of Reformed and Lutheran members, and he allowed the celebration of the Lord's Supper according to the Reformed practice. The Loehe men left the Michigan Synod in 1846 for confessional reasons and helped to found the Missouri Synod in 1847. The remaining members disbanded this initial synodical effort in 1848, either joining the Ohio Synod or becoming independents. The first Michigan Synod survived for only five years.

For a short time following the demise of his first Michigan Synod, Friedrich Schmid joined the Ohio Synod. For most of the time between 1848 and 1860, however, he was an independent pastor. His lack of denominational affiliation did not slow his efforts to gather congregations in the state of Michigan. He continued to ask the Basel Mission Society to send additional pastors. He also attempted to alleviate the worker shortage by personally training some men as pastors.

Schmid's desire to form another synod received a boost in 1860 when Basel sent two missionaries to help him. Since both Stephan Klingmann and Christoph Ludwig Eberhardt were very able men, it seemed that this was the right time for another attempt at forming a Michigan Synod. Schmid's dream became a reality on 10 and 11 December 1860 when there was a meeting "in the small study of Pastor Mueller in Detroit of eight pastors<sup>14</sup> and three laymen who united to organize the Ev. Lutheran Synod of Michigan and Other States."<sup>15</sup> Of the pastors who founded the Synod only Pastors Schmid, Eberhardt, and Klingmann remained members until their deaths. The other five soon disappeared from the synodical roster.

It comes as a surprise that a strong confessional influence is evident in the first constitution of this new body.

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<sup>12</sup> Koehler, p 26.

<sup>13</sup> "Brief History," pp 160,161.

<sup>14</sup> F. Schmid of Ann Arbor, S. Klingmann of Adrian, C. L. Eberhardt of Hopkins, H. Steinicke of Freedom, F. T. Henniecke of Marshall, P. Mueller of Detroit, C. Mutschel of Monroe, and C. Volz of Saginaw were the pastors who founded the Michigan Synod.

<sup>15</sup> Brief History," pp 161,162.

The Ev. Lutheran Synod of Michigan and Other States acknowledges and pledges itself to all of the canonical books of the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, as the only rule and guide of its faith and life, and to all the symbolical books of the Ev. Lutheran Churches as the correct conception of the Scriptures.<sup>16</sup>

Since Schmid had already demonstrated that he was not interested in such a "stiff" confession and in light of later developments, it becomes apparent that the credit for this sound Lutheran confession must go to the young pastors Eberhardt and Klingmann.

Eberhardt, along with Stephan Klingmann, graduated from the institute of the Basel Mission Society in 1860. The two men left Bremen together and arrived at the home of Pastor Schmid in Ann Arbor on 27 September 1860. There were two vacant parishes under Schmid's jurisdiction at the time. One was the established congregation in Adrian; the other was a mission station in Allegan County of western Michigan. In one of those stories passed down from generation to generation, the two men supposedly reached agreement among themselves as to their assignment. Eberhardt is reported to have told Klingmann: "Do you know what we are going to do? I am strong and healthy and better able to endure hardship than you are. I will become the traveling missionary, while you go to Adrian."<sup>17</sup>

Within two months of his arrival in Allegan County, Eberhardt had established 16 different preaching stations. This circuit covered some 360 miles. Furthermore, Eberhardt was no circuit "rider." He walked most of the route and managed to serve his people on a three-week rotation. Serving approximately 150 families spread out over such a large area would seem to guarantee exhaustion when he continued to cover his stations every three weeks.

In addition, Eberhardt reported, "On June 18, 1861, I began my missionary journey to Lake Superior."<sup>18</sup> Covering much of the shoreline of the Upper Peninsula, he discovered dozens of families and scores of individuals who were interested in the gospel. Yet there was not a single Protestant preacher resident in the area. Given his love for souls, it is not surprising that Pastor Eberhardt would appeal to the Synod to serve the people of the Lake Superior region.

Unfortunately, the Michigan Synod had no one to send and Eberhardt himself could not return. It appears that Eberhardt's body could not keep up with his heart. When he returned from his Lake Superior trip, he became gravely ill and was unable to perform his duties for a number of months. It was soon after his recovery that he accepted the call to St. Paul's Church and moved to Saginaw. That did not immediately end his traveling, however. For a time he continued to serve all his old congregations and preaching stations. At the same time he served St. Pains and did exploratory work in Mittelfranken, Frankentrost, St. Charles, Chesaning, and West Bay City.<sup>19</sup>

On the basis of the growth experienced by the Michigan Synod in its first three years, we would anticipate that it would quickly become a very large body. This, unfortunately, was not the case. The sad fact was the Michigan Synod founded many but kept few congregations in its fellowship. The Synod's pastors actually founded more congregations and preaching stations than they could realistically serve. When groups grew tired for waiting for the regular services of a pastor, they began to look elsewhere. At the heart of Michigan's problem was an irregular supply of additional pastors. The pastoral supply was irregular both in regard to the timeliness of its arrival and its quality. The Michigan Synod did not have its own worker training institution. It had to depend upon pastors who offered their services to the Synod and upon those graduates of the European mission societies who were sent to the Synod. The "volunteer" pastors were often castoffs from other denominations whose training and motivation were suspect. The European missionaries often displayed the unionistic tendencies of their alma maters. Neither group appreciated membership in a confessional body.

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<sup>16</sup> *Continuing in His Word*, p 85.

<sup>17</sup> "Brief History," p 163.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p 165.

<sup>19</sup> *Continuing in His Word*, p 87.

Although President Schmid had not been a strong proponent of confessionalism, the Michigan Synod moved in that direction during his presidency. When Schmid retired from his leadership position in 1867, he was succeeded by Pastor Stephan Klingmann who promoted the Michigan Synod as an adherent of the Lutheran Confessions.

In the first dozen years of its existence about one-third of the Synod's ministerium had switched to the United Evangelicals. As a result the growth of the Michigan Synod was slow and its total membership was small.

### **The Beginnings in Minnesota**

The first Lutheran pastor arrived in Minnesota in 1849. Claus Clausen, a Danish Lutheran minister, did exploratory work at that time in the area we today know as the Twin Cities. In 1854 three Scandinavian Lutheran congregations were organized in the Minnesota Territory, two Swedish congregations at St. Paul and Chisako Lake and a Norwegian group in Fillmore County. Pastor E. W. Wier,<sup>20</sup> a member of the Buffalo Synod, in 1855 began to gather a German congregation in St. Paul, which became Trinity Church. He also gathered a group that took the name St. John's Church in Stillwater. In 1856 William Passavant came from Pennsylvania to provide for English-speaking Lutherans in the Twin Cities. In the spring of 1856 Pastor L. F. C. Krause, also a member of the Buffalo Synod, founded St. Martin's congregation in Winona. When he left the next year, Albrecht Brandt, a licensed preacher in the Indianapolis Synod, served until Krause returned in 1861. He left again in 1864, but beginning in 1866 the congregation would enjoy more than forty years of stability under Philipp von Rohr.

To these early pastors we must also add J. C. F. Heyer. He came to begin an English-speaking mission in the Twin Cities in 1857. Already a veteran of almost forty years of service on the world and home mission fields, Heyer also served the German Lutherans that Pastor Wier had left alone at Trinity Church when he moved to the Stillwater area. It was Heyer who, along with Passavant, promoted the idea of gathering Lutherans together. Initially he wanted to have a joint Scandinavian-German synod, but the Scandinavians formed their own body, the Augustana Synod. Heyer then formed Germans and English-speakers into the Minnesota Synod in July 1860. The initial meeting was held in St. Paul with Heyer, Brandt, Wier, A. Blumer, W. Thomson, and W. Mallinson on the Synod's initial roster.

Although these six pastors founded the Minnesota Synod, only Heyer remained in the new organization for more than a short time. Heyer wanted to retire, however, since he was almost 70 years old. When he left St. Paul, the congregation in Red Wing asked him to continue to serve—which he did for a time.

In 1862 Gottlieb Fachtmann of the Wisconsin Synod became Heyer's successor at Trinity in St. Paul. He became the virtual head of the Minnesota Synod for the next five years. Although he was charged with laxity in doctrine and practice, he did preside over substantial growth in the Synod. By 1867 the Minnesota Synod numbered 22 pastors, 53 congregations and 3000 communicants.

As had happened in Wisconsin and Michigan, finding a supply of pastors for its congregations and preaching stations was a critical problem. At first the mission society at St. Chrischona supplied most of the manpower, sixteen pastors in all. Then Minnesota established an informal working agreement with the Wisconsin Synod in 1864. Minnesota would use the seminary at Watertown for worker training, and President Heyer would raise funds for the school back in Pennsylvania. Although this initial joint effort was short-lived, it did pave the way for a working relationship in the future.

The Minnesota Synod, as was the case with both the Wisconsin and Michigan Synods, faced a doctrinal challenge. Initially it associated itself with a "mild" form of Lutheranism. It too would develop a stronger confessional stance with the passage of years. In future years these three state synods would grow into confessional organizations, taking their stand firmly on the Lutheran Confessions.

When the Lord of the Church plants the seed and waters with his Word, there will be lasting results.

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<sup>20</sup> Wier had followed Muehlhaeuser at Rochester, New York, in 1849. In 1852 he moved to Martinsville near Buffalo and became a member of Grabau's Buffalo Synod. When relationships with Grabau cooled, Wier moved to St. Paul.

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