

THE WISCONSIN SYNOD EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM --

ELEVEN YEARS LATER

Senior Church History  
Prepared for:  
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There is an old saying that sometimes one can stand so close to the object of his intentions that he overlooks the object itself, like not seeing the forest because of all the trees in the way. Perhaps that is the difficulty in writing a paper on the proposed topic at this point in time. We are still so close to the date of the Wisconsin Synod's severance of fellowship with the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church that it is almost impossible to evaluate what effects, if any, that action has had upon the educational system of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod.

In other areas of the Wisconsin Synod's affairs perhaps a more definite effect has been felt as a result of the break with Missouri. In the area of foreign mission work, as well as on the home mission front, the Wisconsin Synod has had to stand on its own and assume the leadership role for historic and confessional Lutheranism. In this the Synod is succeeding. But what about in the Christian Day Schools and area high schools, the worker training schools and in its educational system as a whole, has the Synod succeeded here? Has this new responsibility, that of defending and promoting biblical and confessional Lutheranism, been carried out here? Or has the suspension of fellowship with the Missouri Synod and the withdrawal from the Synodical Conference eleven years ago had a detrimental and disastrous effect upon the educational system of the Wisconsin Synod? Let's try to evaluate the situation, eleven years later.

Although a straight-forward answer could be given to the

proposed question, such a reply would not reveal certain insights that the research for this paper have revealed to the writer, nor would a simple 'no' sufficiently handle everything. While there have been some noticeable effects, there have been and will be in the future also some tangible results. Therefore I would prefer to first observe the general picture of the Wisconsin Synod's educational system through means of comparisons with the Missouri Synod's own educational system, and with that of other Protestant denominations. And secondly, I will relate certain changes that have been a direct result of the break in relations with Missouri, and finally, state my own conclusions of the whole matter.

#### I.

##### The Wisconsin Synod School System Yesterday and Today:

The decade of the 1960's has been a most history making period of time in Lutheranism throughout the United States. It has been a time of change, of unionistic practices, and of new liberal attitudes as a whole. While these changes have been outwardly visible in the three large Lutheran bodies, the same decade has brought more subtle changes within our own church body. In the past decade the enrollments in our schools have increased, and in some cases, such as at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and at Doctor Martin Luther College, have doubled. In 1950 the Synod had a total of one hundred eighty-four elementary schools with a total enrollment of 15,270. Ten years later, just prior to the break, this total enrollment figure had increased to 24,082, and the number of schools to two hundred and eighteen. Today, 1972, the latest figures show a total of two hundred and forty-four elementary schools with a

total enrollment of 26,070. And just as significant as this outward growth is the fact that not once in these twenty-two years has a decrease in the number of schools or the enrollment been shown.

At the same time the elementary school systems of the Missouri Synod and of Protestantism as a whole have not had such outstanding success. In 1960 the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod had 1,293 elementary schools with 149,201 students enrolled. In 1965 these totals had grown to 1,374 and 161,357, respectively. But since that time a steady decrease in the number of schools and the size of the enrollments has been noted. The latest figures, from 1971, show a total of 1,236 elementary schools and 152,343 students. While a great number of factors may be involved in evaluating what has happened, it is perhaps best summed up by Mr. Adolph Fehlauer's article appearing in the May 26th issue of the 1968 Northwestern Lutheran. Noting the downward trend in most parochial-schools, he attributed this to such causes as declining birth rates, the cost of school construction, a shift in the population to areas without parochial schools, and above all, the growing apathy toward Christian Day School education.

Even more than Lutheranism, the other Protestant churches seem to be suffering from this apathy toward parochial education. In 1960 the other Protestant denominations maintained 2,051 elementary schools with an enrollment of 149,201. Today the number of schools has dropped to 1,765 while the enrollment figure has increased to 188,357. But most of the increase in the enrollment has been seen in the more conservative and fundamental church bodies such as the Baptists. And again a number of causes could be pointed out for such growth

or lack of growth. But it is my own personal conclusion that a great deal of the cause must be laid at the door of the new liberalism and ecumenism that has invaded some of these church bodies. As a result there seems to be a noticeable decline in the educational system, not only in the number of schools and in the enrollment figures, but visible in the number of teachers available and the decrease in workers being trained for future positions in the parochial school systems. Perhaps another type of cause that may underlie the apathy of the people in these church bodies would be a lack of confidence in a church whose recent changes have turned past values and doctrines around in order to climb on the band wagon. Why else should only conservative church bodies show a growth during the same period of time? And why else should a Synod that was suddenly very much alone continue to gain and grow even during the turbulent times that followed the 1961 break with the Missouri Synod? Indeed, the Lord has continued to bless those who would follow Him and His Word faithfully. At the same time the trends within these other church bodies that have resulted in decreased enrollments could well be warnings to them from the Lord.

I realize, of course, that statistics prove very little, and perhaps even less when comparing a much smaller unit with one that is four or five times its size. But at the same time the statistics are encouraging for the future of the Wisconsin Synod's educational system. They show that we are not standing still, even if the growth seems to be minimal at times. May God continue to shower His blessings upon our schools as He has done in the past.

## II.

Some results of the break with Missouri:

Earlier I mentioned that there have been some very tangible results within the Wisconsin Synod's educational system since the suspension of fellowship with Missouri. Most of these results are noticeable in the publications and materials used within our schools. In the years before the break with Missouri, our Synod used materials in the classroom that were for the greater percent from Missouri's publishing house, Concordia. However, recent publications from that source have revealed that the liberalism that has invaded their seminaries has also affected their publications. We can no longer trust Concordia's publications, especially in the matters of Biblical teaching and doctrine. Therefore our own Synod's publishing house, Northwestern, has had to grow and assume more of the responsibility for publishing acceptable and useable materials for our schools than ever before. Let's briefly see what some of these new publications include.

After interviewing the editor of the Northwestern Publishing House, Pastor H. Wicke, I learned the following: One of the most recent works, and one that will continue in series form, is entitled "Truth Unchanging." This series already includes a series on the authority and inspiration of Scripture. In the future, such subjects as the youth culture, eschatology, E.S.P. and the occult, and several others will be included. It is the aim of these series to provide, in a very easily read manner, material for our people, children and teachers included, that will deepen their understanding and faith.

Although still in the very infant planning stages, a dogmatics book for classroom use is being prepared. At the present time it has not yet been decided whether this book will be more suited for the teacher's college or for the seminary

level of students. The book will replace Koehler's Christian Dogmatics, another work that Concordia Publishing House is discontinuing, and will have more of an emphasis on the Church and Ministry than Koehler's work. Again this is typical of the new work that our publishing house must take over. No one else is going to assume this responsibility for us.

Heartwarming also is the news that subscriptions have increased to the "Northwestern Lutheran", and to "Meditations." In addition, our Sunday School materials have received many inquiries since Missouri's heretical "Mission Life" materials were published. It has become increasingly evident that in Missouri's materials for teaching children, Bible stories have been put on a par with individual experiences. The teacher is encouraged to make up fictitious stories to teach a truth. In their attempts to make the presentations more relevant to the students, they have departed from Scripture as a source, the source, for illustrations and for teaching God's Word.

On the other hand progress in the materials of the Wisconsin Synod can be reported. A new vacation Bible school course on the Ten Commandments will be available for use this summer. Recently a revision of the manuscript for a primary Bible History was completed. And it is hoped that by fall of this year a timely series for teenagers, written by Prof. J. Gerlach of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, will also be made available. The latter will include a teacher's manual to aid the instructor of such a class.

While many of these items mentioned go beyond the Christian Day School, I felt that they should be noted since they are a part of the Synod's educational programs. The changes that have been a direct result of the suspension of fellow-

ship with the Missouri Synod are minimal in some cases, and perhaps most notable in the area of publications and materials as pointed out. Perhaps in another ten or eleven years such a survey will reveal far more profound effects of that momentous decision of the summer of 1961. As for now, yes, there have been some important changes. The responsibilities that face the Wisconsin Synod are immense, and her faithfulness in meeting those responsibilities will determine the future of her educational system as well. And yet without the break the Synod might be at this very same point today, but I doubt it.

*Theodore D. Lambert*



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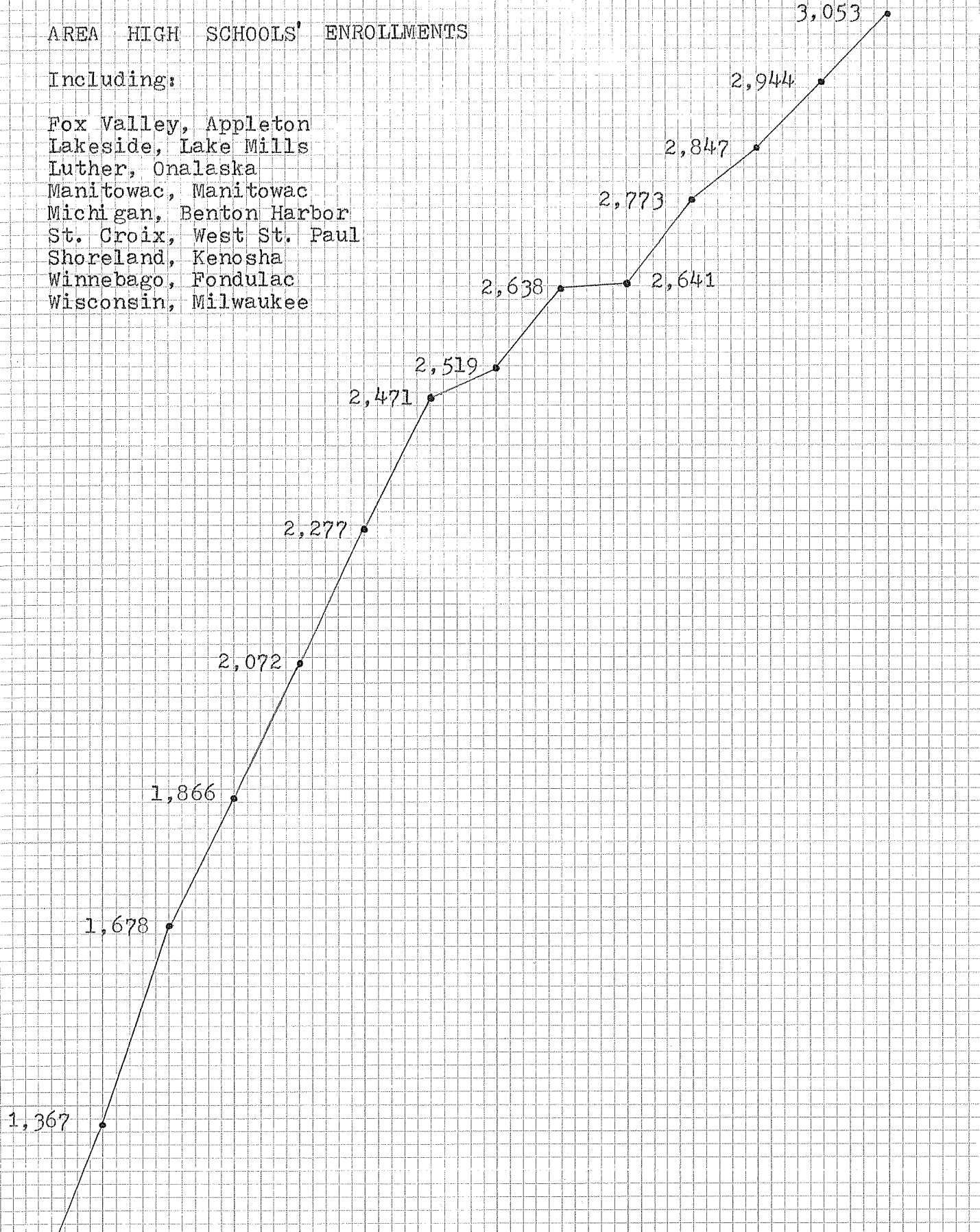
AREA HIGH SCHOOLS' ENROLLMENTS

Including:

- Fox Valley, Appleton
- Lakeside, Lake Mills
- Luther, Onalaska
- Manitowac, Manitowac
- Michigan, Benton Harbor
- St. Croix, West St. Paul
- Shoreland, Kenosha
- Winnebago, Fondulac
- Wisconsin, Milwaukee

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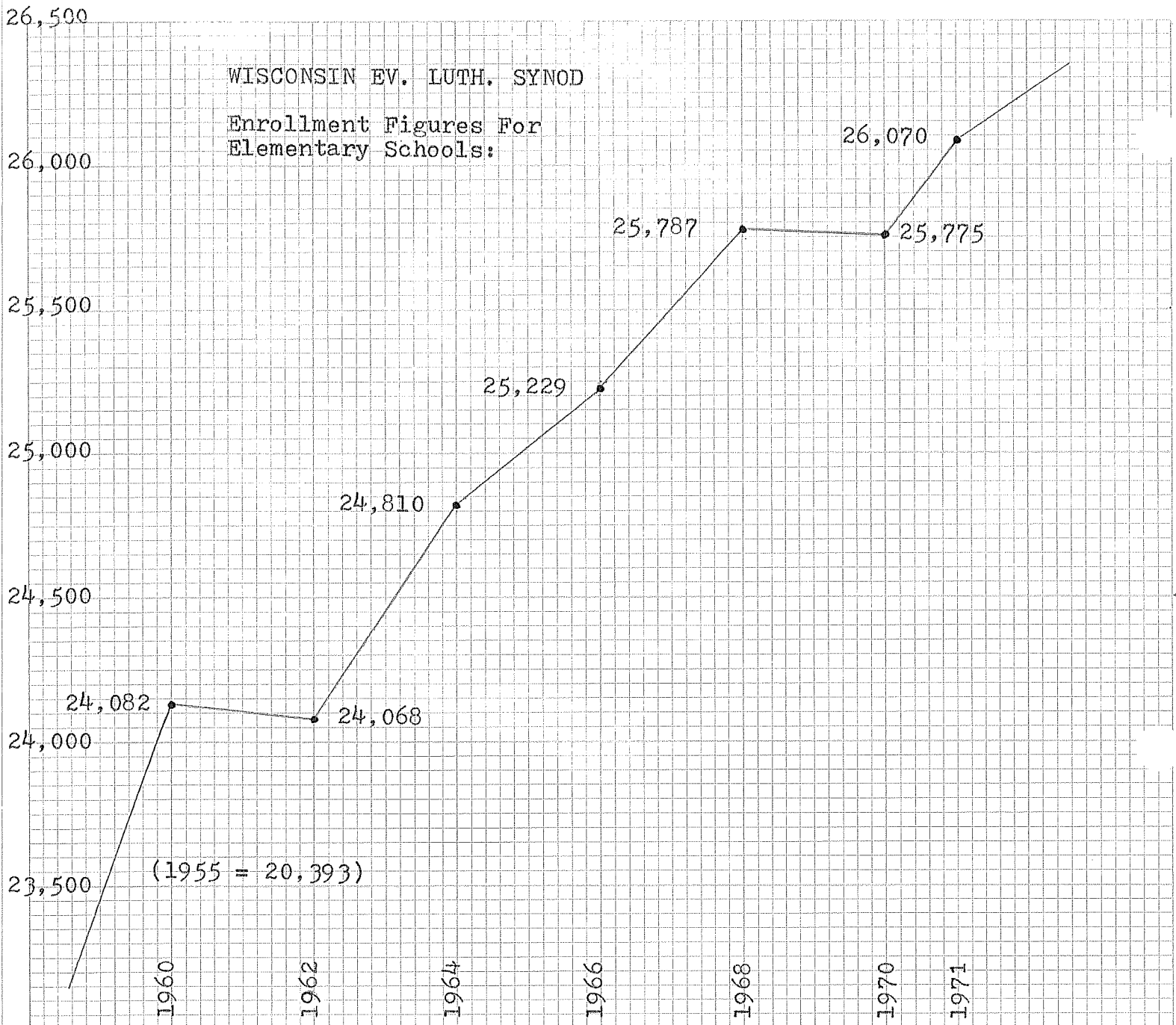
'55, '56, '57, '58, '59, '60, '61, '62, '63, '64, '65, '66, '67, '68, '69, '70, '71, '72, '73



/Vertical = hundreds. (12= 1200 etc.)

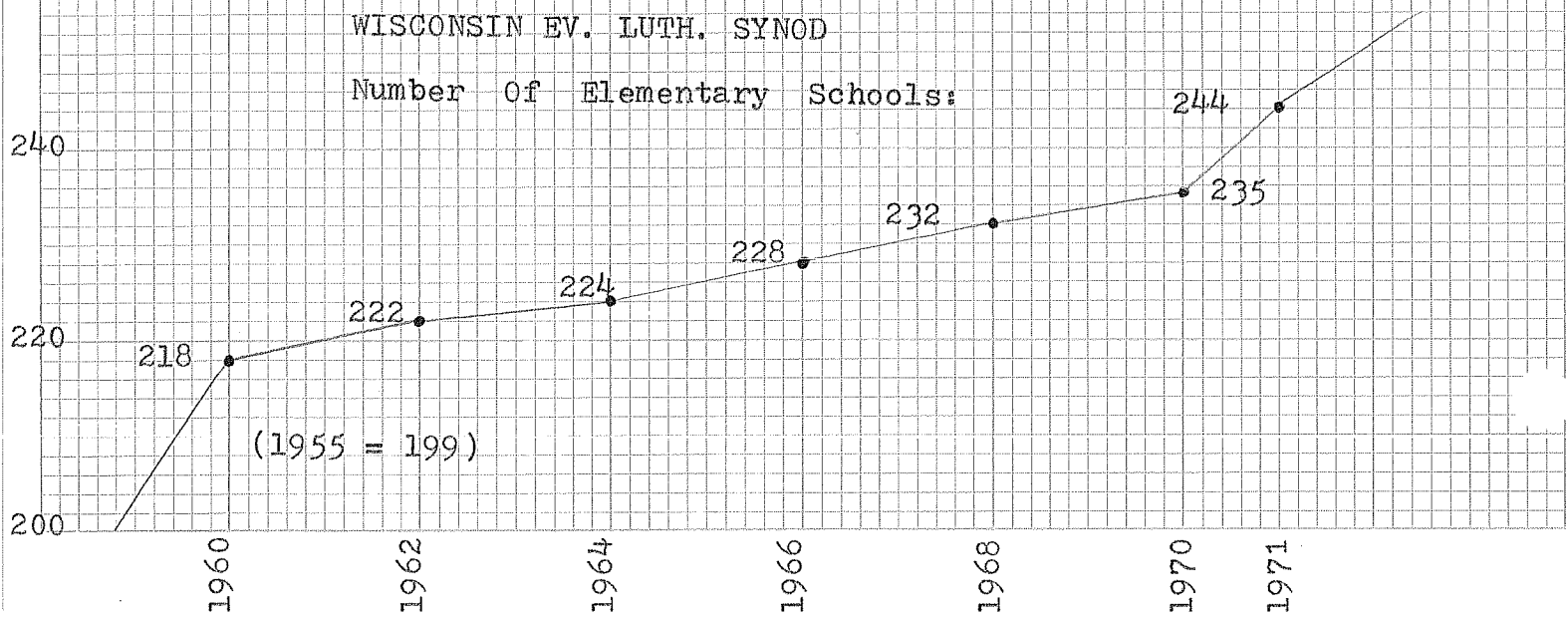
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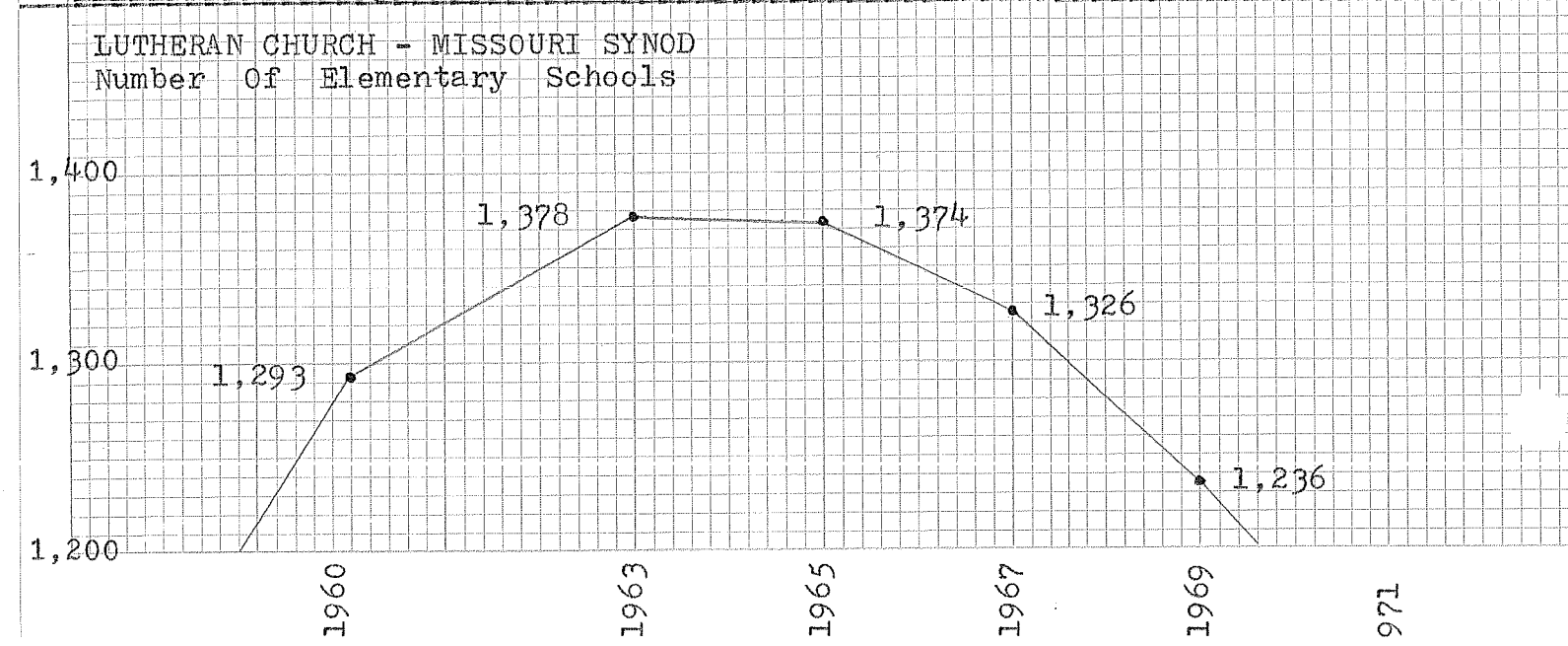
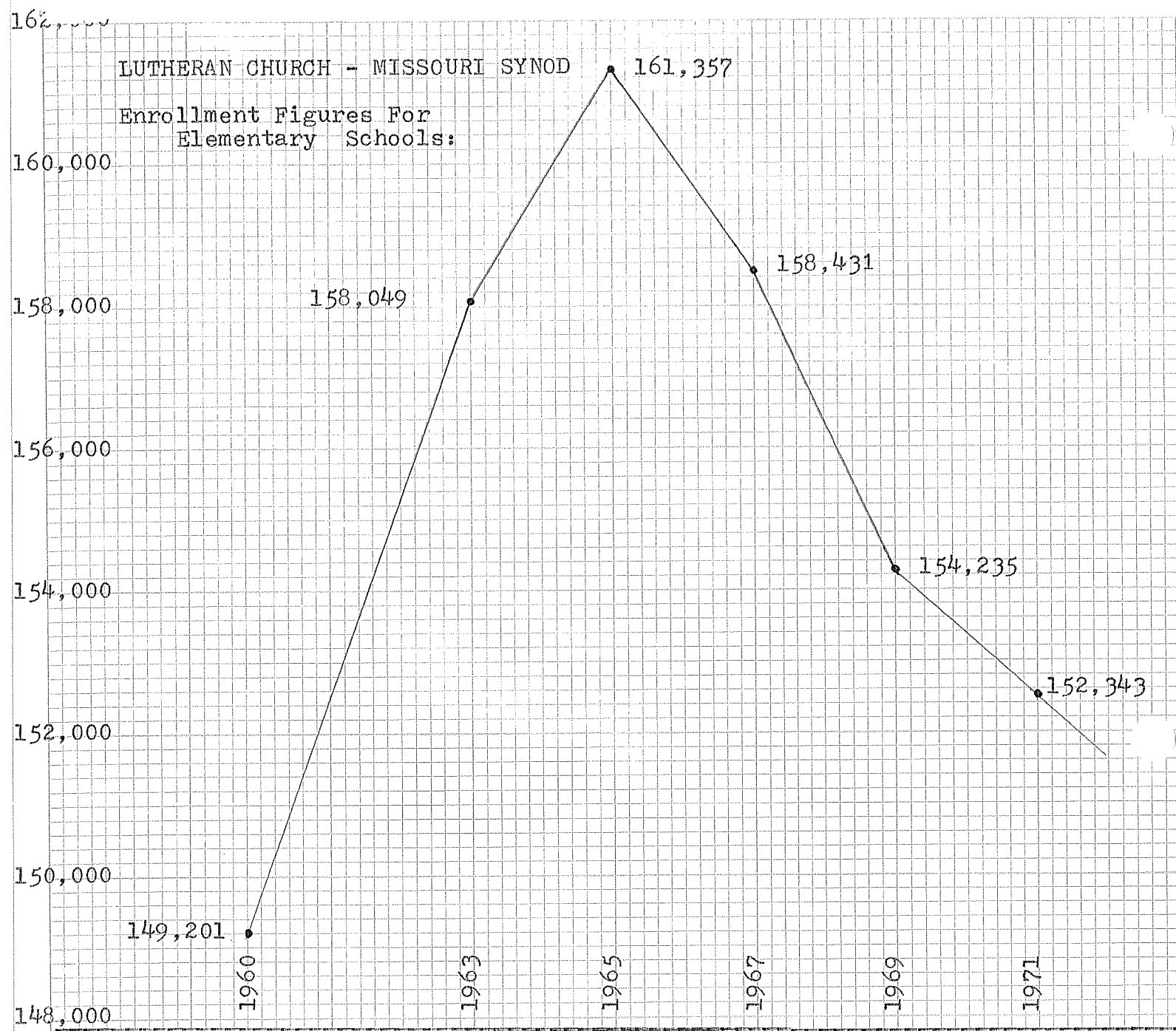
Enrollment Figures For  
Elementary Schools:



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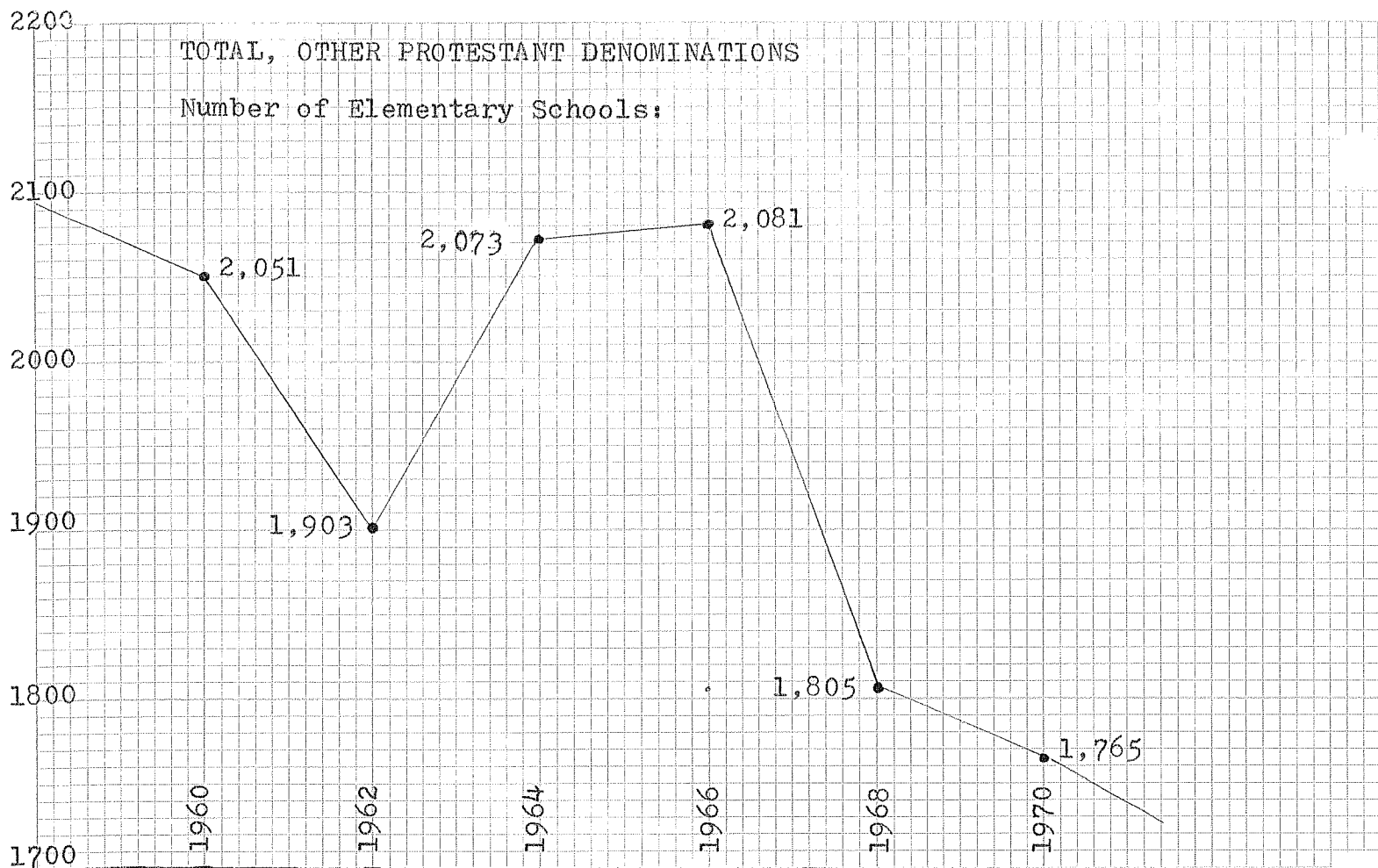
Number Of Elementary Schools:





TOTAL, OTHER PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS

Number of Elementary Schools:



TOTAL, OTHER PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS

Number of Secondary Schools:

