



Christianity and Lutheranism among the Last of the Mohicans:

**A short history of Christian missions to the Stockbridge Indians
with special emphasis on Lutheran involvement**

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James Fenimore Cooper's famous 1826 novel, "The Last of Mohicans," has left many readers (and now moviegoers) with the impression that these native Americans of the New England area are now extinct. But, in fact, they still survive to this day, most of them under the name of the Stockbridge Indians, officially now the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans. About half of their registered number of 1500 members reside today on their reservation in Shawano County, Wisconsin, about 45 miles northwest of Green Bay. And of special interest to us, many of these Mohicans have been Christians going back to the late 1600s and early 1700s. A good number, too, have been Lutherans, beginning at the turn of the ^{20th} 19th century when Rev. Francis J. Uplegger of the Wisconsin Synod and Rev. Theodore Nickel of the Missouri Synod came into contact with the tribe. This paper will offer a short history of God's work among these native Americans through the gospel of Jesus Christ and focusing especially on the establishment of Lutheran missions among them.

The gospel comes first through Puritan missionaries

The story of the Stockbridge Indians contains some themes that sound typical of every tribe of American Indians. European settlers unconscionably disturbed these natives' land and way of life, pushing them west again and again. The Stockbridge, too, were victims of broken treaties and European vices. For a time, these evils were all the white pioneers offered their new neighbors. "Of the great gifts of God for the souls of men none were brought to those Indians by those newcomers from across the ocean," Uplegger writes in his short history of the Christian tribe in *The Apache Scout*.¹ However, this would not remain the case for long. Puritan missionaries would quickly reach out to this tribe with the gospel, as many other Christian groups would reach out to many other tribes.² So we may say that the missionaries' part in the history of the Stockbridge is not a completely unique

¹ Uplegger, Francis J. "A Short History of the Christian Mohican Indians." *The Apache Scout*, Vol. III, No. 6, February 1926, pp. 2.

one. However, as one historian notes, the Stockbridge mission "was from many points of view the most successful of the New England missions."³ From our point of view, the Christian history of the Stockbridge tribe is unique because it includes a direct Lutheran mission to them beginning in 1898 that continues to this day.

The Mohican tribe (also spelled Mahican, but not to be confused with the Mohegan tribe of eastern Connecticut) traditionally is said to have come from the northwestern portion of North America looking for a place where the waters are never still. They found such a place on either side of the modern Hudson River. They called it the Muh-he-ka-ne-ok, which means "the never quiet waters, or the murmuring, rushing waters," and took their name from it. They are one of what are commonly called the Woodland or Algonquian tribes. Their language was of the Algonquian family, though they have long spoken entirely English. Their lands in New England stretched from Manhattan Island to Lake Champlain, from the Berkshire Hills in western Massachusetts to the Catskill Mountains in eastern New York state.⁴ This is area basically straddles today's New York state line as it touches Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont. In the 1740s, the Mohican name became almost synonymous with Stockbridge, the name of their first "reservation" in Massachusetts. Historically, they have had especially close ties with the Munsees (as their modern name indicates), the Brotherton or Brothertown Indians, and the Oneida – in all cases, mostly because of their common Christian faith.

The Mohicans were once a large nation. That started to change with the coming of European settlers. Their first white contacts occurred in the early 1600s with Dutch fur traders. In 1609, they met Henry Hudson's ship, "Half Moon," as it arrived at the place later to be named Manhattan. "Manhattan" in their tongue meant "the place where we got

² One modern historian somewhat annoyedly notes that "few Indians could escape the information provided by Christians, even if they were deep in the forests and far from the missions." (Mason, Carol I. *Introduction to Wisconsin Indians: Prehistory to Statehood*. Salem, WI: Sheffield, 1988. p. 243)

³ Beaver, R. Pierce, ed. *Pioneers in Mission: The Early Missionary Ordination Sermons, Charges, and Instructions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966. p. 75.

drunk," which is not a surprising revelation considering the subsequent history of the tribe's relations with the settlers, as we will see. ^{Such} Contacts with the "white heathen," as they came to call them, were not the only ones they received for long though.

In 1646, missionary John Eliot, a Puritan educated at Cambridge, began work with a side tribe of Mohicans in Massachusetts.⁵ This gifted man translated the Bible into their language and used Luther's Small Catechism in Lenni Lenape, a related Algonquian language.

Meanwhile, over the next 75 years or so, the tribe as a whole shrunk from many thousands to a few hundred due to war, sickness, and habits of heavy drinking that the white settlers had helped them get into.⁶ In the 1720s, a gifted and admirable chief among the Mohicans named Konkapot wished to improve their conditions. He was open to Christianity, perhaps because of the improvements he saw it bring to other tribes, and worked to invite a missionary to come among them. He held a great tribal meeting in what is now Great Barrington, Massachusetts, for four days to propose that his people request a missionary. Although the Dutch traders who had become accustomed to furnish the Indians with liquor naturally opposed this move, Chief Konkapot succeeded "with his warm-hearted and convincing speeches."⁷

About a decade later, their request was fulfilled. In 1734, John Sergeant, a graduate of Yale College, which was a Presbyterian school, accepted this call to serve these Indians. He had a strong personal feelings for the work to be done among them and had ability to match.⁸ It seems that Sergeant was sponsored at least in part by "the honorable society in

⁴ Boettcher, Otto W.C. "The Last of the Mohicans, 60 Years of Indian Missions." *The Lutheran Witness*, Vol. LXXVIII, No. 3, February 10, 1959. p. 8.

⁵ From this time and until about 1900, long after the Mohicans (Stockbridge) had settled in Wisconsin, they were served mostly by Puritan missionaries, who were either of a Congregationalist or Presbyterian bent, with more or less of a revivalist spirit. In my readings, strict Calvinist theology was certainly espoused by some of their missionaries, though I cannot say that all of them were strict Calvinists.

⁶ Uplegger, Vol. III, No. 6, p. 2.

⁷ Uplegger, Vol. III, No. 6, p. 3; cf. also Biegener, E.M. "History of the Stockbridge Indians and Our Missions Among Them." *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, Vol. III, p. 14.

⁸ Beaver, 76.

Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge."⁹ This mission society would sporadically support mission work to the tribe also during their time in New York and later Wisconsin. Sergeant's mission was first established at Great Barrington. Under his leadership, they erected and opened a school the year he arrived, where Mohicans and also Indians of other nearby tribes came to attend.

Along with his efforts in bringing the gospel message, he seems to have put much work into improving behavior and living conditions among the tribe. He worked against the local liquor-sellers. In December, 1735, the tribe passed a resolution to have "no trading in rum." Sergeant also convinced chief Konkapot to formally marry his partner of many years and got money from the mission society to purchase more modern agricultural tools for the Indians. Soon he had many of them living in frame houses rather than the "miserable huts" and "bark wigwams" he found them in. No longer were they "much dispersed and often moving from place to place."¹⁰

As previously alluded to, war with other tribes and also the French had contributed to their decline in numbers. Soon after Sergeant came, they ceded most of their land to colonists, and in 1736, a 6-square mile town called Stockbridge in Massachusetts was laid out for the tribe. In 1739, the town was incorporated. This is where the Mohicans took on the name "Stockbridge," and we will now refer to them as such.

In the years 1743 and 1744, the famous Indian missionary David Brainerd also worked among the Stockbridge and learned their language from John Sergeant. But on July 17, 1749, Sergeant died.

During his 15 years among the Mohican Stockbridge, he baptized 180 of them, 129 of which were still there when he died, with 42 communicant members. This is quite a significant portion of the tribe – their population at the time was only 218 (or 53 families). Sergeant's accomplishments amounted to much more than numbers though. He put the

⁹ Biegner, Vol. III, p. 14.

¹⁰ Biegner, Vol. III, pp. 17, 19.

Mohican language to writing and is said to have known it better than the Indians themselves. He translated nearly the entire New Testament and a large part of the Old Testament for them, as well as prayers, a catechism, and a marriage service. He preached four sermons a week, two in English and two in Mohican, and ran a Sunday School at the same time.¹¹ He encouraged their love of singing and was ahead of his time as far as his education techniques with the Indians went. In addition, much of this work went on with threats of war all around. E.M. Biegener, who wrote a short history of the Stockbridge tribe, has high praise for Sergeant's ministry among them: "We have good reason to believe that but for the unifying work of its mission the Stockbridge nation would long ago have been extinct."¹² His work of teaching them to read and then giving them the Scriptures to read was certainly a notable factor in their spiritual growth as well.

In July 1751, Jonathan Edwards took over the mission work at Stockbridge. He was a Yale graduate like Sergeant, and a revivalist Congregationalist who held strongly to the tenets of Calvin. Biegener notes that he was ^{ci}_A contemplative man, a "metaphysician," and that such a personality fit well into the quiet Stockbridge setting.¹³ He quotes the following few lines from John Greenleaf Whittier's poem, *The Preacher*, in support:

In the church of the wilderness Edwards wrought,
 Shaping his creed at the forge of thought,
 And with Thor's own hammer welded and bent
 The iron links of his argument,
 Which strove to grasp in its mighty span
 The purpose of God and the fate of man.
 Yet faithful still in his daily round
 To the weak and the poor and the sin-sick found,
 The schoolman's lore and the casuist's art
 Drew warmth and life from his fervent heart.
 Had he not seeⁿ in the solitudes
 Of his deep and dark Northampton woods
 A vision of love about him fall?

¹¹ Biegener, Vol. III, p. 17.

¹² Biegener, Vol. III, p. 19.

¹³ Biegener, Vol. III, pp. 57-59.

Many historians have speculated that Edwards did not have much of a real interest in the Stockbridge mission, but only went there out of necessity after his previous congregation at Northampton dissolved.¹⁴ The fact that he never preached in the Mohican language as Sergeant did may also give that impression. However, the Stockbridge were by this time mostly, if not completely, English speakers. The fact that he stayed on faithfully at the height of the French and Indian War and weathered some serious inter-tribal dissention at the school would also speak more in his favor.

In 1758, Edwards rather unwillingly accepted a call to serve as president at Princeton, where he promptly died on March 22 of a fever brought on by a small pox vaccination. Dr. Stephen West succeeded Edwards. In the years that followed, the white population exceeded that of the Indians in Stockbridge, and West seems to have neglected their needs. It is probably reasonable to conclude that West was not very interested in the Indian mission, and he handed the duties over completely to John Sergeant, Jr. in 1775.¹⁵

Other very significant changes affected the tribe in the 1770s. The Stockbridge fought on the American side in the Revolutionary War and lost a good number of their young men in it. Biegener, who wrote in the 1930s and 1950s, said that they never really recovered from the effects of these losses: "We should remember this if we are inclined to think of its [the tribe's] present condition with contempt. Nor should we forget that too often then, as in later years, drunkenness was made easy for them... many of those who survived the dangers of war fell victim to the habits of idleness and intemperance."¹⁶ The effects of these conditions also led to debt and a loss of land to such a degree that they had to move.

Between 1783 and 1788, the tribe moved from their Stockbridge settlement in Massachusetts to some land they purchased from the Oneida, another largely Christian tribe, near today's Utica, New York. This settlement they named New Stockbridge and in

¹⁴ Beaver, 78-79.

¹⁵ Beaver, 79; Biegener, Vol. III, p. 59.

1785, a new congregation was formed there. John Sergeant, Jr. followed hesitantly in 1786 but found Samson Occum, a Mohegan, already serving them there. Occum had been converted during the "Great Awakening," received an education in theology, and was ordained as a Presbyterian minister. At the time, he was a member of another nearby Christian tribe called the Brotherton or Brothertown Indians, made up of a smattering of New England Algonquians, and the Stockbridge immensely enjoyed having him serve among them.¹⁷ In fact, Sergeant, Jr. seems to have been rather overshadowed by him until Occum died in New Stockbridge in 1792.

During Sergeant, Jr.'s subsequent leadership of the tribe, his major efforts included a promotion of temperance. In 1796, under persecution from the "white heathen," he was influential in the passing of a law by the Legislature of New York that forbade the sale of liquor to the Stockbridge. At this time, it can be seen that Sabbath observance (beginning on Saturday evening) was common among them as well, a custom among New England Puritans that would follow them all the way to Wisconsin.

It seems that in the late 1700s at New Stockbridge a Moravian presence also appeared among the tribe. Uplegger tells a story about a Moravian missionary named Heinrich Rauch, who lived nearby, who offered to serve them as a "teacher to teach them the way of salvation." He was accepted, as the Indians admitted, "Yes, we are bad and miserable people." A Stockbridge leader named Tshoop later told the following story about Rauch, which, if it is true, is a wonderful testament to the power of gospel-centered preaching over law-based preaching:

"Brethren, I have been a heathen and grown old among heathens; I know how it is with heathen. Once there came a preacher who would prove

¹⁶ Biegner, Vol. III, p. 60.

¹⁷ Samson Occum became rather famous. Methodist-Revivalist George Whitefield chose him out of all the Christian Indians to go on a great mission funding tour in England as a motivating example that the American Indians could indeed be converted. Occum became a powerful preacher and a great organizer of the Brotherton. He also started a school in New Hampshire that focused on educating missionaries to Indians, which eventually became Dartmouth College. Occum was also a hymn-writer, and one of his hymn appeared in The Lutheran Hymnal of 1941, number 538 called "Now the Shades of Night are Gone." (See Blankenbuehler, Lorenz F., ed. "Christian Hymns." *The Lutheran Witness*, Vol. LXXVIII, No. 3, February 10, 1959. p. 64)

to us that there is a God. We said, 'Do you think we don't know that? Go where you came from.' Another said, 'You must not steal, not drink, not lie.' We replied, 'Fool, do you think we don't know that? Learn it yourself, and teach those of your people! Who drinks, lies, steals, more than they?' Then came Christian Heinrich Rauch. He came into my wigwam, sat down beside me, and said, 'I have come to you in the name of the Maker and Lord of heaven and earth. He lets you know that He fain would save you. For that reason He became a man, laid down His life and shed his blood for you.' Then the messenger lay down on the bed and fell asleep, for he was tired from his journey. 'What kind of man is this?' I then thought: 'there he lies and sleeps quietly! I could kill him and fling him out into the woods. But he is without fear.' And I could not forget his word. Even when I slept I saw the wonderful blood. 'That is something different from what I heard before,' I thought, and I interpreted it to the others. Thus the awakening to the new life came about. Therefore I say: Preach to the heathen Christ and His death, if you would bring about a blessing."¹⁸

Another outsider arrived at New Stockbridge in 1798, but this time it was a member of the Munsee tribe, another related Algonquian tribe. He came "seeking the knowledge of the true God" among them and seems to have been the first Munsee to live among the Stockbridge.¹⁹ Other Munsee would join the Stockbridge later and at different times, perhaps in both Indiana and Wisconsin. Though it doesn't seem that great numbers of Munsee joined the tribe, they have gained some recognition within it today, since the tribe now includes "Munsee" in their official name.

By 1802, the population of the tribe was 300, and "none were professed pagans, though only about 30 were members of the church."²⁰ The Stockbridge's own missionary spirit clearly manifested itself at this time, as it endeavored to send a delegation to the Delawares in the New Jersey area. The gospel, among other proposals, was presented and accepted "with both hands," according to their chief Tatepahsect. Uplegger says he was later martyred in Shawano County after being slandered among the tribe by an Indian witchdoctor there.²¹

Starting also in the early 1800s, a man of the tribe named John Metoxen became an influential leader. He, along with tribal members Solomon Hendrick and Austin E. Quinney,

¹⁸ Uplegger, Vol. IV, No. 1, pp. 4-5.

¹⁹ Biegener, Vol. III, p. 61.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Uplegger, Vol. IV, No. 1, p. 5.

proposed another move due to bad white influences around them. They proposed a move to an area in Indiana on the White River, which a tribe called the Miamis had bequeathed to them and the Delawares 100 years earlier. Some 800 Delaware had already been there for many years. Uplegger summarizes their motives more completely: "The Mohican Christians hoped farther toward the setting of the sun to obtain for themselves as a people of God, untroubled by eastern unchristian people, but also to lead other Indians into the church of the Savior Jesus Christ."²²

Even under a cloud of rumours that the land in Indiana had been sold, about ¼ of the tribe move with Metoxen to Indiana, including 11 of the 30 or so church members, in 1818. The others would follow later, but this group formed a new congregation. It was the first Congregational/Presbyterian congregation in Indiana (and also in Wisconsin, when they moved there a few years later).²³ Uplegger describes them in their move "like an Israel, wandering with their belongings, with their leader like an Indian Moses, and with an ark of the covenant." And they actually did have an ark! It was an oaken chest in which they carried a two-volume, thirty-nine pound English Bible that had been presented to the Mohican church in Stockbridge in 1745 by the secretary of the Prince of Wales.²⁴

On the way to Indiana, these poor wanderers received news that the Delaware had indeed been forced to sell all the land. Some of them turned back to New Stockbridge immediately, but Metoxen and about 40 others kept on to Ohio and Indiana, where they made their home for about 5 years. This group continued to meet on Sundays (their Sabbath) and read out of Scott's Commentary in lieu of a preacher's sermon. Occasionally they did receive a visit and a sermon from a nearby Presbyterian pastor.

Soon after they arrived in Indiana, since they really had no land, the Stockbridge started looking for a place to settle near some other Algonquian tribes around Green Bay, Wisconsin. In 1820, a man named Dr. Jedidah Morse, a Congregational minister from

²² Ibid.

²³ Biegner, Vol. III, p. 67.

Connecticut who was a friend of the Mohicans, went to Wisconsin under the commission of John C. Calhoun, U.S. Secretary of War, and also on behalf of the Northern Missionary Society of New York, to find a home for the Stockbridge there. He also preached the first Protestant sermon in Wisconsin at Fort Howard on July 9. Up until that time, apparently, only the French Jesuits had done mission work in Wisconsin.

In 1822, the United States government stepped in to negotiate with the Menominee and Winnebago for some land for the Stockbridge in eastern Wisconsin. They succeeded, and in the fall of 1822, the Stockbridge moved to the vicinity of Green Bay, actually to a place called Grand Kaukaulin, which today is south Kaukauna, on the Fox River. Their area was also called Statesburg. Wisconsin now had its first Protestant church. It started out under the guidance of John Metoxen, who shows ^{himself} ~~his mind~~ to be a *Christian* leader among them in a letter he wrote at that time to John Sergeant back in New York:

"Our brethren appear to be quite different from what they were when I first saw them. I trust that some of them are choosing God for their portion, remembering that He is the only Source of true happiness for the immortal soul and grieving because they had forsaken the only King of the universe. It is true indeed that the soul was made for God; it came from God and can never be happy but in returning to him again. Thus we may have reason to believe that the Spirit of the Lord is moving upon them, saying: 'Arise, ye and depart, for this is not your rest. If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.'"²⁵

Even though they had no minister at the time, the Stockbridge were blessed to have Christian leaders like Metoxen and others with them. The first thing they resolved to do was to build a Christian school at Statesburg. This school was also a first – the first *free* Christian school in the state.

During the years 1822 to 1829, the rest of tribe was gathered to the Statesburg settlement from New York by a tribal leader named John Quinney. The United Domestic Missionary Society (later called the American Home Missionary Society), a Presbyterian mission society, gave aid for the tribe's move to Wisconsin. John Sergeant Jr. had died in

²⁴ Uplegger, Vol. IV, No. 1, p. 5.

New York, and the tribe there had been served by Rev. Jesse Miner. Miner came along to Wisconsin in July 1827 and was the first pastor presiding over an organized Protestant church in Wisconsin. Under his leadership, then, they erected the first Protestant church building in the state. Miner died rather soon afterwards, in March 1829, but he was loved by the Indians. They had given him the name Wah-nuh-wah-meet ('very true man') and inscribed this Scriptural thought found in Psalm 147:2 and Isaiah 11:12 and 56:8: 'He shall gather the outcasts of Israel together.'²⁶ Miner was also a translator of many hymns for the tribe to sing, as they loved to do.

During the school year of 1829-30, the congregation was served by Mr. Jedidiah Dwight Stevens as teacher and probably as pastor until the arrival of Rev. Cutting Marsh in May, 1830.

At about this time, a Rev. Calvin Colton, later a professor at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, was traveling through Wisconsin as he was writing a book called *Tour of the American Lakes*. There he makes these comments about the Stockbridge:

"[They] have probably made greater attainments in the English language and manners and in the useful arts of civilized life and also in the Christian religion than any other tribe of the aborigines on the continent; except that the Brotherton Indians have so long used the English language as to have lost their mother tongue. But in the moral state of society and in general improvement the Brothertons are far behind the Stockbridge."²⁷

Colton also admired their sturdy log church/school building, which held about 300 people, their Sunday School manned by Indian teachers, and their civilized yet culturally-mixed dress. He praised their singing highly. He also noted their good order and attentiveness,

²⁵ Biegner, Vol. III, p. 64.

²⁶ Perhaps what Beaver notes in his essay "The Churches and the Indians: Consequences of 350 Years of Missions" about Puritan mission focus is illustrated by this epitaph: "But it was the Puritans who were most influential and who first took action [in mission work among the native Americans]. The main dynamic for mission was eschatology. The settlers of Massachusetts (and New England generally) viewed their occupation of the new continent as 'an errand into the wilderness' to make it blossom as the rose through these servants of God entering into his purpose to bring history to its grand fulfillment in his Kingdom. Bringing the lost Indians home to God was seen in this context." (Beaver, R. Pierce, Ed. *American Missions in Bicentennial Perspective*. South Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1977. p. 286)

²⁷ Biegner, Vol. III, p. 75.

which no doubt was aided by the ten-foot long switch that one of the ushers wielded to punish rowdy children or to waken sleepy adults.

The tribe's population was about 225 at this time, with 42 being full-fledged members of the church. They continued to follow their old custom of Sabbath observance. And, in 1832, we see an example of what seems to be a practice of free altar and pulpit fellowship between denominations. Colton reports that "on the last Sabbath in January, 1832, Rev. Richard F. Cadle, superintendent of the Episcopal mission at Green Bay, administered the Sacrament."²⁸

By 1833 already, the Stockbridge's Statesburg land on the Fox River had become "desirable property for white expansion." In the face of yet another move, it is inspiring to see that the tribal congregation still had a mind towards doing mission work. This is an excerpt from a letter written to a sponsoring mission board by John Metoxen and a few other notable church leaders from the tribe, including Austin Quinney and his son John Quinney, who was later to write up a constitution for the tribe, and Samuel A. Miller:

"We wish to tell you that our hearts are glad, -- that we are thankful, first to God for giving us the Gospel, the Bible, and teachers, and next to you for sending them to us. The good people beyond the great waters first found us when we were blind and ignorant and wicked. We had no teachers, no Bible, no God, no Christ. We worshiped the bad spirit. they sent us the good Book and teachers about one hundred years ago... But we were very dull to learn; many of us followed after strong drink... As a tribe we were nigh to ruin. Then we came to this country... Here you kindly sent us teachers, who have done so much for us... Nearly the whole tribe has become temperate and far more industrious than before... Until recently it has never been believed by us that the whole tribe could be converted to Christianity, but now we are fully convinced and do firmly believe that the whole tribe cannot only be fully civilized, but brought to embrace the Christian religion... We expect soon to leave our present settlement... and again to commence anew in the wilderness. Hard as this is, we have endeavored to reconcile our minds to it... Still we cannot avoid feeling much solicitude on the subject.

The Sac and Fox and Delaware tribes of Indians are our friends and relatives, and a delegation from our people intend visiting them next season. Can we not tell them the great benefits we have received from being taught the Gospel? Can we not tell them that your society is ready to send them teachers if they are willing to receive us? Can you not appoint a missionary to accompany us? Fathers, if you think there is any way we can do good in

²⁸ Biegner, Vol. III, p. 76.

our visit to our poor brethren beyond the Mississippi, we wish you would give us some instructions."²⁹

Whether the mission society actually sent any aid or not, Rev. Marsh, along with Metoxen and four other Stockbridge leaders, went on their missionary journey across the Mississippi to the Sac and Fox. In the end, they considered the trip unsuccessful but they did leave a favorable impression on the Sac and their chief. They also witnessed along the way to whites.³⁰

In 1834, the Stockbridge were forced to move once again. This time it was a shorter one to a settlement about 20 miles south of Kaukauna on the eastern shore of Lake Winnebago. There they founded another town they called Stockbridge and one called Quinney. The Brotherton also moved near them at the same time, settling just a few miles down the road to the south. These three towns are still there today.

An observer/administrator of the mission board named Chauncey Hall had written a report on the state of the tribe in July, just before the move:

"The condition of the Indians among whom we dwell presents much that is truly encouraging to the missionary, and methinks a view of them as they collect together for the worship of God or talk of His love in their dwellings would make the heart of one destined to labor among the uncivilized Indians, where no Gospel has extended its benign influence, to rejoice in view of what the Lord has done and encourage him to pursue his labors assured that He who has done so much for these Indians is able also to extend the work and will do it through the instrumentality of His children. The church among the Stockbridge consists of sixty or seventy members. Most of them adorn their profession. Several who had wandered from the path of duty have recently returned with apparent penitence, and as far as I know, their lives give evidence that it is sincere. The church is a temperance church, agreeing to abstain from the use of all strong drink, not excepting wine, strong beer, and cider..."³¹

Hall's tune changed somewhat after the move. He reported to the mission board later in September:

²⁹ Biegner, Vol. III, p. 78.

³⁰ Uplegger, Vol. IV, No. 2, p. 6.

³¹ Biegner, Vol. III, pp. 78-79.

"During the past year the Indians of this band have continued in nearly the same unsettled state in which they were last year; and being sometimes on their old lands and sometimes on their new, they have enjoyed but irregularly the advantage of Christian instruction or of the school... Intoxicating drinks have been introduced among these Indians in great quantities, and oftentimes urged upon them gratuitously, for the sole purpose, apparently, of enticing them to sin. Many of the irreligious Indians have given themselves up to drinking, and its consequences, quarreling and fighting, have prevailed to a lamentable extent. Some of the church-members also have fallen into sin under similar temptation, while many others hold on their way and give increasing evidence that they are sealed with the Holy Spirit..."³²

In the few years following this move to Lake Winnebago, more "unsettling" events occurred for the tribe. There was intra-tribal wrangling over another proposed move west and over a U.S. citizenship debate. At some point in the 1840s, a man from their own tribe, Jeremiah Slingerland, arrived and started working among them. He was a graduate of Bangor Theological Seminary, a Congregationalist seminary, but Rev. Marsh had no confidence in him and soon resigned. Apparently, some of the other tribal leaders shared his feelings. Then, in 1848, their Presbyterian mission board quit supporting them. On top of that, there was an unwelcome appearance in their midst by a Methodist pastor named W.G. Miller. This passage from his autobiography seems to reek of sheep-stealing: "There had been a Congregational mission among the Stockbridge nation for many years, but its condition was not very promising."³³

In the years 1853 to 1856, they were served again by Presbyterian pastors, O.P. Clinton and J.P. Jones, but these men held joint services with the whites. This move almost extinguished the Indian church. But to avoid more of the troubles they were facing at that settlement, the tribe sold their land. In 1856, they planned another move, this time a final one. The federal government had negotiated with the Menominee in northern Wisconsin for some land for the Stockbridge and the few Munsee and Brotherton who were with them. They had obtained 50,000 acres for them in Shawano county, about 45 miles northwest of

³² Biegener, Vol. IV, pp. 8-9. Notice the Calvinist statement at the end!

³³ Biegener, Vol. IV, pp. 12-13.

Green Bay, and the move was made. This reservation also became known as Stockbridge, and its main town was called Red Springs.

On April 8, 1858, John Metoxen, who must have been an old man by this time, died, having remained at the Stockbridge town on Lake Winnebago. Uplegger eulogizes this tribally and spiritually influential leader: "John Metoxen went to the heavenly home on April 8, 1858, eighty-seven years of age, at Stockbridge, Wis., where his body was laid to rest, for the resurrection in glory. He was honored by his people as a king; he was an elder and deacon in the Christian congregation, a Bible Christian of the red people of the Mohikaonok [Mohican tribe]."³⁴

A few years later, the Civil War ^{began} was on and 38 men of the tribe, no less than 10% of its total population, were called away. This certainly slowed the development of their new settlement. Their old church organization crumbled at this time and was replaced by a Methodist one, with which Slingerland worked unhappily for a time. He reorganized a Presbyterian church in 1867 to which he ministered until his death in 1884.

When Jeremiah Slingerland died, no Presbyterian minister replaced him and the ministry of the gospel among the Stockbridge was neglected. As a result many of the Christian relapsed into their old immorality and the drunkenness of the "white heathen."³⁵ Three years later, their old Presbyterian mission board took some actions to minister to them, but only provided pastors intermittently during the years 1887 to 1892. At the end of this time, finally, a door was opened for some Lutheran pastors to work among the Stockbridge Indians.

The Lutheran connection and establishment

In 1891, Pastor Francis J. Uplegger, who was to become a great Wisconsin Synod missionary to the Apache Indians of Arizona, was given his first assignment at St. John,

³⁴ Uplegger, Vol. IV, No. 2, p. 6.

³⁵ Boettcher, 8.

Hermansfort, in Shawano County, about five miles south of the Stockbridge reservation. in 1891. His contact with the Indians walked right up to his door in May 1892. On Ascension day, a Stockbridge man named Henry Sprague came to him with an important matter to discuss. First, he attended church with Pastor Uplegger, but afterwards Sprague presented his plight:

"I have often passed by this place. So have others of my people. We have noticed how the white people of this district attend church and send their children to your church school. We see these people enjoy great blessings from God. We want such blessings for our people also. Wouldn't you come and preach the Word to us also and instruct our children too?"

"I'm glad to hear of your desire for the blessings through God's Word. But, I thought you had a church among you?"

"We have now nobody among us who could, or would, lead us older people on in the way of the Truth and instruct our young people as it ought to be done."

Then he explained some conditions among the Mohicans, and urged the writer to make haste coming to them with the word of the Gospel, pointing to the fact that a Roman Catholic church had been built on the reservation of his people also.

"What danger is there in that?"

"Well," replied the Mohican, surprised at the question addressed to him, "You—don't you know the Pope? And the ways of him?"

"What do you know about him?"

"I know that his teaching and his acting are contrary to the Gospel of Christ. The Pope is anti-Christ. I know what Paul writes, 2 Thessalonians 2, about him who sitteth in the temple of God and acts as if he were God?"

Then he quoted the passage, word for word as it stands in 2 Thessalonians 2. He quoted many a Bible word. And the writer, surprized [sic], was filled with the wish that all white church people might know the Bible as well as did this Mohican Indian.

As the Presbyterians had formerly conducted mission work among the Mohicans and might still have regarded it their field. [sic] We went to Shawano in order to speak with the Presbyterian pastor there [Rev. Hughes], and had for that purpose Pastor Theo. Nickle [sic], of our Lutheran church there [of the Missouri Synod], join us. The Presbyterians did not object to the beginning of Lutheran mission work in the field to which the Indians themselves had called us."³⁶

Uplegger already had two congregations and a school to teach, so he asked Pastor Nickel to step up to this opportunity. Pastor Nickel was a well-trained pastor as a graduate of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. But he came from a strongly German background. He was born in Germany, and his call at Shawano was to entirely German speakers. He had

never preached in English before. But that did not stop him from accepting this call to serve the Stockbridge. Soon after that first contact with Henry Sprague, Pastor Nickel began his work there on the occasion of a funeral. Afterwards, he agreed to serve them as best as he could without giving up his Shawano congregation.³⁷

In April, 1898, Nickel held the first Lutheran service in the government schoolhouse at Red Springs. The biweekly services he offered there were well attended. Some soon asked to be baptized and to receive adult instruction.

Pastor Nickel, with his commanding personality and deep spirituality, gained the confidence of the Indians. His evangelical, biblical, and Lutheran approach certainly played no small part there either. E.M. Biegener reports as an example of this one of Nickel's funeral sermons. It was based on John 11 and was entitled "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Other stories of him visiting the sick and the dying, sharing Scripture and great Lutheran hymns with them to their comfort, show his ability and concern to care for the people's souls. His winter trips to Red Springs from Shawano definitely prove his commitment to them. More than once, Biegener says, Pastor Nickel drove 34 miles at 34 degrees below and not have one person show up for church.³⁸

In 1916, years after Pastor Nickel was no longer serving at the Shawano congregation, he returned for a visit and reminisced with member William C. Davids, who shared some of his thoughts on why he loved being a Lutheran rather than a Puritan, as the former pastors had been. He said they had forbidden ball playing on Sunday and other pastimes, while the Lutherans did not. He also thought that the lengthy Puritan sermons not as effective as the shorter Lutheran ones.³⁹

³⁶ Uplegger, Vol. IV, No. 3, p. 4.

³⁷ Putnam, Thelma. *Christian Religion Among the Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohican Indians*. (n.p.) (n.d.). p. 6; Boettcher 8.

³⁸ Biegener, Vol. V, pp. 63-66.

³⁹ Putnam 12.

Pastor Nickel served the Stockbridge for about a year until 1899, when the Missouri Synod took the reservation on as an official mission at Nickel's request. Nickel himself, along with H. Erck and P.H. Dicke, *P. em.*, were elected as the first Mission Board for Indian Missions. The synod called a candidate from its Springfield seminary named J. David Larsen, who was first resident Lutheran pastor there. He was ordained on September 3, 1899 and lived in a newly erected parish house which also served as the church at Red Springs. However, Larsen resigned after about nine months of faithful service due to health problems. (He and his wife would return, however, to serve the mission in different capacities, as pastor and teacher, for many years afterward.)

So in 1900, the St. Louis seminary sent a one-year emergency pastor to the Stockbridge named Emil M. Biegener. He had only completed two years of seminary at that point, so he was assisted by Pastor Nickel, who was still serving in Shawano. Biegener resided in Shawano with Pastor Nickel, except during Lent when he boarded with a Stockbridge named Benjamin Yoccum in Red Springs.

In his short history of the Stockbridge Christians, Biegener relates his memories of the year he worked among the tribe, which gives a good taste of what the mission was like. Some of the details are amusing, like he and Nickel calling the reservation lake "Galilee," Biegener's nightmares about drunken Indians invading his bedroom, or his several fishing and hunting trips on the reservation. Other stories former vicars and pastors will find especially humorous, like his story of getting lost in the woods and showing up for church at noon with the congregation waiting patiently for him at church, or the time he unknowingly drove three miles on unstable ice on the Wolf River. Other details, though, reveal his apt ability and concern to give sound spiritual care to the Stockbridge people – his first sermon, on Romans 1:16 entitled "The Power of the Gospel of Christ," the spiritual brotherhood he appreciated with his Indian host Benjamin Yoccum, or his observance of spiritual growth there during Lent: "The attendance grew from day to day, so that our house was full. There was much Bible reading in the homes, and spiritual conversation, especially on the topics of

sin, grace, and justification. The singing of our classical Passion hymns, which were practiced after services in choral fashion, made a deep impression."⁴⁰

During Biegener's "emergency year" in Shawano county, Pastor Nickel took a call to Australia. At his farewell service, 36 Stockbridge were baptized, including a man named Cornelius Aaron, who would later graduate from the St. Louis seminary and serve in the pastoral ministry of the Missouri Synod. Pastor Nickel's farewell was a tearful one for many of the Stockbridge Christians.⁴¹ But after a short period of vacancy, on July 14, 1901, a new church building was dedicated at Red Springs, with Prof. G.W. Mueller of Concordia College, Milwaukee, as guest speaker, and their new pastor was installed that same day. The mission board was present, along with a Rev. Utlaff and also Pastor Uplegger.⁴² The new pastor's name was Rev. Robert Kretzmann, and he remained until 1909. Thirteen adults were confirmed in 1901, and these became ^{the} nucleus of the first full-fledged Lutheran congregation there, which was organized in 1902.

Lutheran congregations among the Stockbridge

A Lutheran presence was established among the Stockbridge Indians in 1902 and it remains to this day. That same year, Pastor Kretzmann opened a Christian school at Red Springs that would last for over 50 years. He would also open three new Indian mission stations before he would leave in 1909. One was at Morgan Siding, about four miles west of Red Springs, which would eventually become an independent congregation in 1931. Another was at Keshena, on the Menominee reservation to the north. He also began a third mission and a school among the Menominee at a place called Waiaskesit, 18 miles

⁴⁰ Biegener, Vol. XXVI, p. 163.

⁴¹ Nickel remained there from 1901-23, most of it as president of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia. In 1923, he was called to be a pastor in Wittenberg, Germany, and later in Hamburg. He served there as president of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church in Germany until 1931. In 1935, he returned to Albury, New South Wales, Australia and died on November 27, 1953. (Biegener, Vol. XXVI, p. 165)

⁴² Putnam 8.

northwest of Red Springs. He named it Zoar. However, the conditions there were so difficult that the project was abandoned a few years later.⁴³

In 1910, the Missouri Synod converted the school into a boarding school where students were fed and clothed. It was apparently a great success. Its dorm was intended for 50 children, but it soon housed 90. After a new dorm was built with a capacity of 90, it was soon overcrowded again, housing at times up to 130 children. Some children also attended the school from other tribes in area, like the Oneida and Chippewa.⁴⁴ During the Depression of the 1930s, the boarding school had to close, but the day school continued until 1958.⁴⁵

From 1910 to 1960, many men carried on the ministry at Red Springs and the other mission stations among the Stockbridge:

Rev. Carl Guenther of the Wisconsin Synod (1914-1915),

Rev. Otis Lang, a graduate out of Concordia, St. Louis (1915-1918),

Rev. H.M. Tjernagel, transferring into Missouri out of the ALC (1918-1923),

Rev. Otto Boettcher, during whose time a new Stockbridge congregation formed at Bowler, an expansion of the reservation (1923-1942),

Rev. Louis Dau, who was called to assist Pastor Boettcher (1930-1938),

Rev. William J. Chellew (1942-1953),

Rev. Edgar Barg, served what was by his time a three-congregation parish (1953-1955),

Rev. Donald Becker, (1955-1958),

and Rev. Tiovo Miettinen (1958-1960).⁴⁶

⁴³ Boettcher 9.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Putnam 20.

⁴⁶ Putnam 17-26.

In 1959, these statistics were published for the three congregations: Immanuel, the original Red Springs congregation, had about 130 souls and 90 communicants still worshipping in the 1901 building. Our Savior, organized in 1931 at Morgan Siding, had 95 souls and 60 communicants. The Lutheran Church in the Wilderness, named in memory of first mission church at Stockbridge, Massachusetts, organized in 1937, dedicating a building in 1955, had 161 souls and 117 communicants, the largest of the three congregations.

Other pastors who have served one, two, or all three of these congregations between 1960 and 1978 are Rev. Wagner, Rev. J. Zuberbier, Rev. Adelbert Stoehr, Rev. Wiesener, Rev. G.M. Krueger, Rev. Walter Kreger, Rev. Clifford Kessen, Rev. Theodore Krenzke, Rev. Michael Ernst, Rev. John Ehlke, and Rev. Jonathan Schedler.⁴⁷ These men may have graduated from either the Concordia or Seminex Seminaries of St. Louis.

Today, all three congregations still exist. Immanuel and Our Savior remain Lutheran churches of the Missouri Synod. Immanuel has 237 baptized members and 210 communicants. Our Savior has 70 baptized members and 55 communicants. The Lutheran Church of the Wilderness is currently a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and has 261 members.

Conclusion

The symbol of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans, which appears on the cover of this paper, is called "Many Trails." The symbol certainly reflects the many times in the tribe's history that it has been forced to pick up and move to a new settlement. It is said to symbolize the strength, hope, and endurance of the Mohican people. We may praise our gracious Triune God today, though, that apart from the many earthly trials the Stockbridge have had to endure and apart from the many trails the tribe has been pushed down, he has revealed to them the one trail to forgiveness of sins and eternal life in the gospel of Jesus Christ, brought to them by many Christian missionaries over the past three

and a half centuries. We may praise our God, too, that at least for a time, he blessed the Stockbridge with the pure message of free forgiveness and eternal life by faith alone in Christ through the missionaries and pastors he sent to serve them since 1892. May he continue to grant them that pure message today and until he returns to take his people home.

⁴⁷ Putnam 26-27.

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