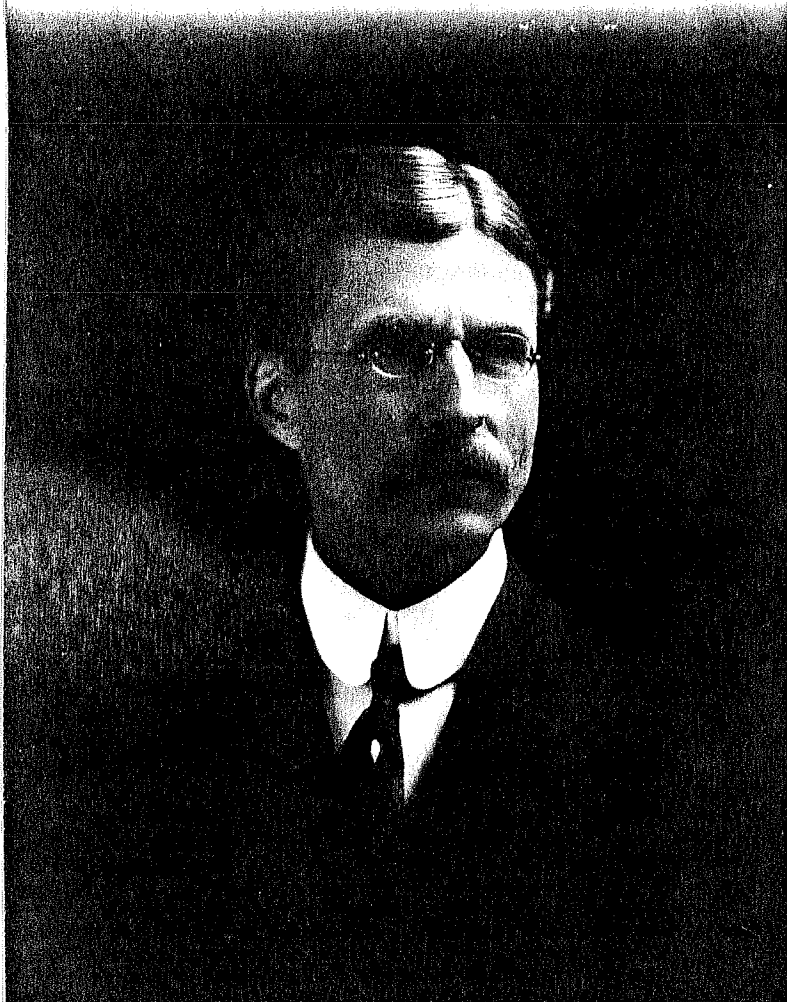


The Collector
Rich Siegler

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by Phil Paustian

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The Collector
Rich Siegler



R. H. Siegler

Pastor Richard H. Siegler was born in the year 1859, just nine years after the birth of our synod, and it was during a depression when our synod was first beginning to feel concerns about where it was going to find the money it would need. Pastor Siegler died in the year 1941, just 3 years before we would be out of debt for the first time since the initial years of our synod. His story is the story of the synod's growth and the story of its debts.

As soon as you start to talk about contributing people start to shut their ears. Many feel we're only interested in taking their money, but the synod must have money to

carry on the work of the Lord, and it is important that the members of the church recognize their responsibility and learn the opportunities they have to use the prosperity God has given them to prosper the church.

In the founding days of the Wisconsin Synod it was difficult for people to see the need to send money to synod. The immigrant Germans were accustomed to a state church, paid for with their taxes. They could see the need to support their pastor and local church, but there was no concept ^{of} the synod and its work.

At the first synod meetings it was decided that churches should take one collection each year for the synod, but the first recorded collection, in 1855, only amounted to \$78.01.¹ Eventually the collections picked up, but they always fell short of expenses. By 1904 the synod was in debt \$27,620. You only need to compare that figure with the total budget for that year of \$46,052 to see that this was a very serious situation. In addition it was decided at the synod convention that year that the new dormitory to be built in Watertown would require \$50,000.²

Something had to be done. The synod at this convention called a collector who would serve for the next 30 years. He would work through years of growth and change, through the merger of the Joint Synod in 1917, through the costly building phase of the '20's, and into the hard years of the Great Depression. But as his work was being concluded he not only had never accomplished his purpose of eliminating the debt, but the debt ~~was~~ at the highest point in the history of the Wisconsin Synod.

That does not make Richard Siegler a failure. His collections supported the early growth of the synod and brought to many congregations a lasting recognition of their responsibilities. He himself never saw

his work as chiefly dealing with money. In his report to the synod in 1925 he states,

Indem ich hiermit der Allgemeinen Synode meinen Bericht über meine Arbeit im vergangenen Biennium unterbreite, sei es mir gestattet, daran zu erinnern, dass all meine Arbeit dem mir zugestellten Berufe gemäss, stets pastorale Tätigkeit gewesen ist, ein Dienst am Wort, wöimmer ich dazu eingeladen oder beauftragt wurde, und darum nicht allein nach den Geldsummen beurteilt werden sollte, die dadurch der Synode zugewandt worden sind; der eigentliche und grössere Segen ist doch ein anderer und lässt sich mit Zahlen nicht angeben.³

Richard Siegler's work was a service of the Word. Although he never accomplished his goal of eliminating the debt, through the Lord's blessing his work had many great fruits. Dr. Hoermann's history of Northwestern College says of Rev. Siegler,

In all this time there has rarely been a Sunday on which he was not found in some pulpit preaching the Word as it applies to the need of Christian charity in providing messengers of the Gospel. He has continued his practice of house-to-house canvassing and there is hardly a house where his visit did not mean an enlarged understanding of the great possession and responsibility Christians have in their higher institutions of learning; many erroneous views were corrected in these heart-to-heart talks and many a promising student has been encouraged to make a beginning at the college in preparing to work for the Kingdom of the Lord.⁴

With all of the successes the Lord granted Rich Siegler, the one that eluded him was the elimination of the synod's large debt. The final total of all his collections would come close to \$400,000 but with the great growth of the synod, particularly in the merger of 1917, the time ended when one man could fulfill this task. New approaches and methods had to be developed in the 30's and 40's before our synod could finally rise out of debt. It would take a lot of cutting back and an effort on the part of the whole synod to get out from under the burden. The days of the collector were over.

Rich Siegler was not the first collector used by our synod. Other men had been given the responsibility of solving our financial difficulties

since its earliest days. That original hope, that expenses could be covered by one collection from every congregation each year, was never fulfilled. When the country entered a depression in the years 1857-1859, help came, but not from our own congregations. President Muehlhauser began receiving aid from several Eastern sources. The Pennsylvania Synod sent \$200 to \$400 a year, and we also got help from the Anglicans. These offerings more than doubled the collections brought in by our own congregations.⁵

A number of reasons have been set forth for the poor offerings of these first years. Our members were immigrants from Germany who were accustomed to a state church supported by taxes. They had no concept of loyalty to one particular synod in a country where you could choose from any number of church bodies. They didn't know what a synod was for or why they should send money to a bunch of people they didn't know. Then, too, our members didn't have much money left after traveling to Wisconsin and buying what land they could. Their economy was mainly the barter of goods and services; they rarely saw any money to send to synod. They were willing to support their own pastor with food and they put their muscles together to build a church or parsonage, but why in the world should they send money to synod?

In fact, our synod did not have many needs in those days. The collections were taken for just 4 funds, Heathen Missions, Home Missions, Preacher Widows' Fund, and the Synod Fund which paid for a few expenses of our officials and the printing of the Parochial Report.⁶

The second decade saw increased responsibilities, and of course increased financial needs. It started with the founding of Northwestern University and the Seminary in Watertown in 1863, and here difficulties set in. How could a synod taking in a couple hundred dollars a year

pay the \$10,000 needed to build the campus? Synod officials tried to present the need to the synod's churches, and show how this school would benefit everyone, by sending circulars to all the homes, but the main portion of this fund could only come from outside.

It was for this purpose that the synod in 1863 requested President Bading "to give up his pastorate and devote his entire time to travel in the interest of the synodical institutions and to make use of his practical gifts and talents for the soliciting of funds."⁷ He traveled through Germany and Russia and carried out a very successful collection, sending back \$10,215. Another \$7500 to \$10,000 was held back by the Prussian Union because of dissatisfaction with the Wisconsin Synod's growing confessionalism.⁸ This collection only paid the cost of building the school; the yearly expense of running it would fall to synod collections. That expense resulted in the first building up of a substantial debt.

Our synod began then to make use of a number of men to meet the needs of the Synod among our own people. Our members needed to be taught a sense of synod responsibility and to have awakened in them the desire to give joyfully for the work that could be accomplished by our synod. Several collectors began visiting congregations. Bading visited churches in the Jefferson area, Dr. Moldehnke toured the Manitowoc-Green Bay territory, Pastor Goldammer worked in Racine and Kenosha, and Pastor J.H. Sieker covered the Town of Hermann and Theresa.⁸ The total of synod's collections that year was \$2707.02.⁹

In the following years other men would take over the role of collector, beginning with August Gamm of Watertown. He was followed in the year 1880 by Pastor Dowidat, who quickly collected \$9150. By this time, however, the debt was already up to \$19,662 and the situation was getting

worse.¹⁰ Pastor Dowidat was succeeded the following year by Pastor Jaeger of Gibson. He worked in this capacity for several years, but it was reported that he was not very successful.¹¹

At the turn of the century, hoping to be rid of this debt by the time of the 50th anniversary of the Wisconsin Synod, our synod established an Agitation Committee, consisting in Pastors H. Knuth, and H. Bergmann, and laymen O. Griebeling and Wm. Graebner. They were to organize a collection by sending out a circular and urging the individual congregations to gather this collection. The debt was now \$15,586. This committee raised \$18,600 in its first year. However, when it concluded its work in 1902 the synod was still in debt.¹²

The last of the individual collectors, and the one who would work in this position the longest, was called in the year 1904. This was Richard Siegler. Before I proceed to discuss this work of his it is time to tell you about R.H. Siegler.

Rich Siegler was born in Wollin, Pomerania on July 20, 1859. His family made the trip to America 4 years later. His older brother, Albert, had been about to begin a career in teaching, but in the new country he hooked up with the Wisconsin Synod and entered the Seminary that was opening that same year. He was one of the 2 students the school had its first year and he became its only student a short time later when the other student, named Engelhardt, was dismissed for disciplinary reasons.¹³ Richard went to St. Mark's grade school, where he happened to be a schoolmate of August Pieper, who was three years ahead of him.¹⁴ Richard followed in the footsteps of Albert, graduating from the Sem in 1884. His first call was to Ellington, WI, where he remained until the year 1886.

In 1886 Rev. Siegler took the call to St. John's, Barre Mills, WI., for a salary of \$450 a year. The following year he undertook the building of this congregation's second church. He himself was the architect of the building, which was described at its dedication as "wohl die schönste Landkirche im Bereich unsrer Synode."¹⁵

Already there were perhaps signs of his ability in motivating contributions in the progress of this small congregation raising the money for this building. It was said that in one day \$4000 was raised.¹⁶ The total cost was \$10,000, although with all the work that was done by members its original value was estimated at \$30,000. The story is told of the scare this church had when lightning struck the steeple while it was being built.¹⁷ Fortunately, only minimal damage resulted. Incidentally, the steeple that survived the lightning bolt was destroyed by a windstorm in 1953 while my father was pastor at St. John's.

Rich Siegler was a great advocate of education for our children. In 1889, St. John's began their own dayschool in the midst of our synod's fight against Wisconsin's Bennett Law, which threatened to regulate some church schools out of existence and put undue restrictions on others.¹⁸ Indeed, there was some opposition to this dayschool among some of the members of St. John's, and so Rev. Siegler organized a "Schulverein" among those members who supported the school. They paid its costs the first year; by the second year the whole church was behind the school and took over its running.

Rich Siegler had a number of talents besides architecture and collecting money. He was a skilled violinist who played for services to start the school day in the days before the congregation could afford a piano or organ. He also organized the church choir. It just happens

that he also built the first radio of anyone in Barre Mills, but maybe he had one advantage there--he strung his radio antenna up the church steeple for better reception. As an architect he also remodeled the parsonage in 1898 and built an addition, which seemed a little unusual since Rich remained a lifelong bachelor. The story is told that he was engaged to be married once when his fiance died suddenly, and so he never married.

These first years at Barre were not all smooth sailing for the congregation. Richard Siegler faced the brunt of the attacks of the Freethinkers of Bostwick Valley. These vehement opponents of Christianity had been around since before the founding of St. John's, when they vowed that no Christian church would ever be built in the valley. When St. John's built its first church in 1872, a small simple building without steeple or altar niche, one Freethinker donated to that group the land next door to the church and they built their own "Freidenkerhalle" modeled after the church.¹⁹ They did whatever they could to disrupt church services. They had noisy demonstrations on Sunday mornings, sometimes with band music, in front of the church. They held dances at the same time as evening services and brought in famous lecturers on Sunday afternoons.²⁰

Rich Siegler came to Barre Mills at the time of the Freethinkers' greatest popularity. But it is clear evidence of the gracious working of the Lord that St. John's continued to grow throughout these years, averaging 40 baptisms a year during Siegler's service, a number that possibly surpassed the highest membership the Freethinkers ever reached.²¹ By 1895 the Freethinkers were dying out and were described as "einem verschwindend kleinen Häuflein."²² They disbanded in 1916.

In the meantime, the church continued to grow. St. John's quickly established a couple of daughter congregations. In 1887, Rev. Siegler began holding services in West Salem, and at the end of 1888 in Bangor. Around this time he also began services in Portland. Bangor Lutheran Church was organized in 1890 and continued to be served by Rev. Siegler until 1895. Christ Lutheran of West Salem was organized in 1902.

In 1904, the Wisconsin Synod called Richard Siegler to be "General Collector" for the building of a new dorm in Watertown and to liquidate the synod's debt. I will discuss this work of his in the next section of my paper. While he was busy with synod work Pastor John Mittelstadt was called as assistant pastor. Rich Siegler finished his work and returned to Barre in 1907 when Rev. Mittelstaedt accepted a call to Christ Lutheran in West Salem. Rich Siegler then left again in 1910 when he accepted the call to the full-time position of "Representative of Institutions and Missions." He was replaced at Barre by J.H. Paustian, thus establishing a family dynasty that would last some 77 years. John Paustian was married to one of Albert Siegler's daughters; as a matter of fact, so was John Mittelstaedt. H.E. Paustian came to Barre as assistant pastor in 1946 when J.H. Paustian became seriously ill, and he became full-time pastor the following year when his father died. He stayed until 1963 when he came to Watertown and ended the dynasty.

Richard Siegler's work for the synod ended in 1935 and he retired from the ministry. He died suddenly in 1941, on Nov. 6. My father's recollections of his great-uncle include the fact that he was a vegetarian during his last years. He was a very careful, meticulous, fussy man. Once when he bought a new Studebaker, he decided to Simonize it, but would not let anyone help because they would not do a good enough job.

He then rubbed it so thoroughly that he rubbed all the black paint off the hood. With his poor eyesight and wild driving, it might have been better if he had left cars to other people. Among the people Rich Siegler convinced to go to Northwestern is my own father. Henry Paustian received a music scholarship to UWM, but Rich Siegler said he would pay for my father's schooling if he went to NWC. Rich Siegler then died in 1941, and my father never received any of that money.

Gemeinden.

† Pastor Richard Siegler. †

Es hat dem Herrn über Leben und Tod gefallen, unsern langjährigen Freund und Amtsbruder, Pastor Richard Siegler, aus dieser Zeit in die selige Ewigkeit abzurufen. Er starb am 6. November in der Frühe in Milwaukee, wohin er sich am Tage vorher begeben hatte, um Linderung gegen eine Herzschwäche zu finden, die sich infolge seines Alters gebildet hatte.

Das Begräbnis fand statt am Sonntag nachmittag, dem 9. November, in Watertown, Wis., vom Hause seines Neffen F. Siegler nach der St. Markus-Kirche und von da zum lutherischen Kirchhof. Pastor Siegler's Eltern und andere Verwandte von ihm ruhen auf diesem Kirchhof. Beim Begräbnis dienten sechs Professoren unseres Northwestern College in Watertown als Träger, Pastor W. Eggert von der St. Markus-Kirche versah den ganzen Dienst im Hause, in der Kirche und am Grabe bis auf die Predigt, die von Pastor W. Goenecke, einem langjährigen Freund des Entschlafenen, auf Grund von Daniel 12, 3 gehalten wurde.

Pastor Siegler war ein Sohn von Karl Ludwig Siegler und dessen Ehefrau Wilhelmine, geb., Behnen. Er wurde in Wollin, Kreis Stolp, Pommern, am 20. Juli 1859 geboren und erreichte somit ein Alter von 82 Jahren, 3 Monaten und 16 Tagen. In seinem Geburtsort empfing er die heilige Taufe. Seine Eltern wanderten im Jahre 1863 nach Amerika aus und ließen sich in Watertown nieder. So kam R. Siegler nach Watertown, wo er zuerst die Gemeindegemeinschaft besuchte und nach seiner Konfirmation in der St. Markus-Kirche im Jahre 1873 unser Northwestern College in Watertown. Zugleich mit ihm wurden, wie die Kirchenbücher der St. Markus-Gemeinde angeben, unter anderen auch Prof. A. Pieper und Pastor Aug. Wendler konfirmiert.

Nach Absolvierung des Kurses in unserm College bezog Siegler unser Seminar in Milwaukee, studierte dort unter Dr. A. Goenecke, den er zeitlebens verehrt hat, und trat nach Vollendung des Kurses im Seminar im Jahre 1884 in das Predigtamt ein.

Pastor Siegler's erster Ruf führte ihn nach Ellington, Wis.; von dort kam er an die St. Johannes-Gemeinde in Barre Mills, Wis., der er 25 Jahre diente. Unsere Synode berief ihn damals zum Vertreter der Anstalten. Als solcher kollektierte er in unseren Gemeinden für unsere Synode mit großem Erfolg; er besaß die Gabe, unsere Christen in recht evangelischer Weise zum Geben willig zu machen. Nachdem diese Sammlung war beendet worden, diente Siegler unserer Synode längere Jahre als Vakanzprediger, dazu tat er viel im Interesse unserer Kirchbaukasse. Er war auch eine Zeitlang Mitglied des Verwaltungsrates unseres Northwestern College. Für diese unsere Anstalt, was nur wenigen bekannt sein dürfte, stiftete der nun Entschlafene noch bei seinen Lebzeiten einen Fonds von \$5,000.00, dessen Zinsen bestimmt sind, arme Studenten während ihrer Studienzeit zu unterstützen.

Pastor Siegler war ein sehr einfacher Mann, bescheiden und genügsam. In allen seinen Berufen aber war er ungemessen fleißig, gewissenhaft und tüchtig. Er war ein eifriger, begabter Schüler der Heiligen Schrift und allem, was sonst mit der Theologie verbunden ist. Immer regsam und lernbegierig, blieb er bis an sein Ende ein Student. In seinen Predigten und Konferenzarbeiten, durchweg evangelisch, war alles gründlich durchdacht. Der Wahrheit treu, konnte er nichts leiden, das der Wahrheit zuwider war. Er konnte dann in scharfer Weise auftreten.

Es überleben ihn ein Bruder, Elkhorn, Wis., eine Anzahl Neffen und Nichten und andere Verwandte. Pastor Siegler war nie verheiratet. W. Eggert.

Richard Siegler's work as "Generalkollektor" began in 1904. As was mentioned previously the synod debt was reaching alarming levels, and new responsibilities, such as the much needed dorm in Watertown, threatened to make that debt skyrocket. The resolution to call a collector reads,

Wir halten dafür, dass unser Anstaltswesen in Watertown von solcher Wichtigkeit und Bedeutung für das gedeihliche Fortbestehen unserer Synode resp. des Reiches Gottes unter uns ist, dass wir zur Förderung desselben zu den grössten Opfern mit Freuden bereit sein sollten. Wir empfehlen darum, indem wir zugleich unsere Freude aussprechen, dass eine Anzahl Gemeinden in so nachahmenswerter Weise ihre Opferwilligkeit durch Darreichung namhafter Gaben bezeugt hat, dass mit der begonnenen Hauskollekte für Neubau und Schulden tilgung in geeigneter Weise fortgeföhren werde und zwar mit dem Ziel, die ganze für Neubau und Schulden tilgung erforderliche Summe im Laufe dieser nächsten Jahre durch Subskriptionen aufzubringen. Im Anschluss an die hervorgehobenen Worte wurde beschlossen, dass Herr Pastor R. Siegler ersucht werde, sich im nächsten Jahre der Synode ganzlich als Generalkollektor zur Verfügung zu stellen, da er sich in diesem Amte so herrlich bewährt hat und dass seine Gemeinde ersucht werde, ihrem Pastor zu diesem Zweck für ein Jahr Urlaub zu geben...²³

It seems that Richard Siegler was not eager to take on this full-time work of the synod. However, he showed himself very suited to this work. Dr. Hoermann states,

The Rev. Richard Siegler was the man asked to bring this sacrifice, for that it was, and we have since found that he stands alone as a person suited to undertake this task. He has the gift of presenting the needs of the college so vividly and truthfully that few members of congregations he has visited have failed to show their awakened interest by substantial contributions. Repeatedly urged by the Synod to accept this arduous work, he finally consented to allow an assistant pastor to take charge of his parish and to devote his entire time to the work assigned. He then proceeded to visit congregation after congregation, and in each congregation he personally visited the homes of all members and aroused the individual Christians to realize the responsibility for their institutions.²⁴

The collection methods used by Richard Siegler often included the house-to-house canvass mentioned by Dr. Hoermann, spending a couple weeks at each of the congregations that invited him. At other times he moved more quickly, visiting 2 churches every Sunday, preaching and helping

the local pastor to set up the collection.

The collection was very successful. That first year he collected \$35,389. And the Lord continued to bless his work so that by the time West Hall was dedicated on the Northwestern campus on October 15, 1905, the entire cost of \$50,000 had been collected.²⁵ Although he was originally requested to serve only one year, because of his great success he was asked to continue until the collection was complete. The collections of the next two years were almost as good, \$23,465 in 1906 and \$19,836 in 1907. In 1908 he finished up this work with a collection of \$2831 and returned to Barre Mills.

In his report to the synod in 1907 he joyfully reports his experiences collecting, that even congregations which were so small they could not support themselves, congregations which he had visited earlier, and congregations that hadn't given anything for synod for many years all took part in this collection with joy. And he points out that there was no basis to the fear that this collection would lessen other collections or that the subscriptions would not be paid.²⁶

In all of Rich Siegler's collections, most of the money was used for buildings at Northwestern and elsewhere. But because those buildings were absolutely necessary, and because they were part of the synod's budget, all of his collections also helped indirectly to reduce the debt. That is the reason why the debt does not seem to drop dramatically during these years when the collections were so successful (see Appendix).

Rich Siegler was finished with his collection, but the synod was not finished with him. In 1909, the synod asked him to return to this work on a permanent basis. He declined. Another man accepted the call, A.C. Haase of Peshtigo, but his church only granted him a six-month leave of absence. Rev. Haase collected \$5345, and then the call returned

to Rich Siegler. St. John's had never really liked the idea of giving up their pastor. "His congregation showed great reluctance to give up its beloved pastor, but extended arguments finally convinced them of the necessity for the work and of their pastor's particular fitness for it."²⁷ And Richard Siegler accepted the full-time call.

At this point the question was raised whether or not this call was appropriate. The opposition was not against Rev. Siegler but against the concept of a divine call without a congregation. Kowalke points out that it would be very difficult to abolish the office and return this person back into the ministry.²⁸ Koehler in his history of the Wisconsin Synod seems more firmly convinced that this move was a mistake:

The principles underlying the objection were the same that later were applied to the proposition of a "praeses without a pastorate", to wit: that an office in which the administrative work is divorced from the personal pastoring of souls is not a benefit to the incumbent or the body; that with the growing size of the body it may become a direct menace; and that the administration of an organization on earth is of merit only in the measure that the least member in the large organism functions properly, that is to say, is moved by the right spirit which should govern the whole body...The right conceptions can very well be arrived at by doctrinal reasoning, but the fact remains that you learn by experience...Officialdom first had to come into being and launch the imperialism that had the depression in its wake.²⁹

Also at this time it was decided that the title "Collector" sounded too much like money was all he was concerned about, and so he received a new title, "Vertreter der Anstalten."³⁰ Later on that would be expanded to "Vertreter der Missionen und Anstalten." That is in keeping with the recommendation in 1910 that he also be active in the field of "Reisepredigt" in association with the Mission Commission.³¹ Siegler's salary in this position was \$1200. He finished out the year begun by Haase with a collection of \$7098.

With Richard Siegler's 1911 collection of \$13,187, we hear that

he has reached a total of \$100,000 collected. Koehler's comment here is, "which note to the knowing was no sign of progress at all."³² When you look at the chart in the Appendix which shows the debt, it does appear to be going down steadily. However, I believe that these figures, which I took from the yearly Synodal-Berichte, refer to the "Old Debt," a figure that was apparently consolidated at some time before this. Collections were then applied to this "Old Debt" to reduce it quickly, while new yearly deficits were continuing to build up. I could not determine this for certain, but beginning in 1913 the reports speak about an old debt of \$9750 in addition to this year's deficit and a deficit of previous years for that year's total indebtedness of \$32,449.³³ That would suggest that the debt listed in 1911 is not the whole figure.

In answer to Koehler's comment that no progress was being made, it is true that the synod was not winning the battle against the deficit; the complaint was made in 1909 that although the synod was growing and its work increasing the gifts are not.³⁴ Yet progress was being made, in building projects such as West Hall, and in carrying out the Lord's work among more and more people.

The year 1912 brought Richard Siegler into a different area of work in the Lord's service. There was an incident in the State of Washington that demanded immediate attention. President Bergemann received a "night letter" from Pastor Krug in North Yakima, Wash., stating that the congregation was hard pressed and there was the danger that the whole congregation might be lost unless immediate action were taken. Pres. Bergemann sent Richard Siegler to begin an investigation.

It seems that the Missouri Synod pastor in Yakima was accusing the Wisconsin Synod congregation of being an opposition church. He managed to alienate a number of our members from our church, and there

was the possibility that the whole congregation would decide to unite with the Missouri Synod church. Richard Siegler set up an investigation with members from both synods. This investigation eventually sided with the Wisconsin Synod pastor and both sides settled down somewhat.³⁵ While he was in Washington Rich Siegler learned about a number of Lutheran families in various cities that had no church. He found several new preaching locations and helped to organize new congregations in three cities; Lewiston, Idaho, and Ellensburg and Kennewick, Washington.³⁶ Each of these congregations called a Seminary graduate that year.

Because of the time taken up by the Washington incident, Siegler's collection in 1912 was only \$4854. The next year was also a small collection, \$8911, this time because he was making visits for the Mission Commission to the mission fields in Northwest Wisconsin, Arizona, and California, a trip of over 5000 miles.³⁷

The reports of the next few years only give the totals of his collections (see Appendix). We are told in 1917 that his collections for Neubau und Schuldentilgungen had reached a total of \$200,000.

The year 1917 marked the great merger of the Joint Synod. When all the facts are finally reported at the convention in 1919, we see that the new synod absorbed the debts of the individual synods for a grand total of \$101,667 in debt. The Wisconsin Synod share of that debt was \$14,249 (this is why I have 1917 listed twice in the charts in the Appendix. The first is Wisconsin Synod debt; the second is Joint Synod debt).

In 1921 we find that the collection is now just shy of \$300,000. It is also reported that all of the old debts of the individual synods is paid, all in all a pretty good year.

In 1923 the bad news hits that the debt has jumped to \$289,508.

The interest alone is up to \$15,000 a year. People are beginning to look forward to the next big building project of the synod, the building of the new seminary. It was decided at the '23 Convention that this "Old Debt" of \$289,000 must be paid off and the funds for the seminary must be collected before building could begin. At the next convention the cost of an administration building for DMLC was added to the Seminary Fund, so that they had a goal of \$750,000. When this fund was closed in 1933 it was still \$100,000 short of that goal.³⁸

Richard Siegler had a very good collection to report in 1925, but by this time it was becoming apparent that the synod was too large to be served by the collections of one man. He would make his last collection in the year 1929. During the last half of the Roaring Twenties, his work was chiefly mission work. His report in 1929 says that he was "engaged principally in doing extraordinarily mission work, occasioned by the defection of a number of congregations which were formerly members of our Synod."³⁹ For the remaining years of his service his work consisted mainly in serving vacancies and doing organizational work for the Church Extension Fund and the Every Member Canvass Collection. In 1935 he refused to accept his pay for the year because he had not had enough work to do. He retired having collected a total of \$381,331.97.

As Siegler's work came to a close other methods of collecting began to be developed. Already in 1916 the Envelope System was created, sending each congregation 3 envelopes per communicant for synod collections. Then the Quota System came into use in 1920. This meant that the synod informed each congregation what its share of the synod expenses amounted to according to the number of communicants.⁴⁰ Neither of these plans was well received among the congregations.

Perhaps the most ambitious plan for reducing the debt our synod

has ever followed was the Sinking Fund plan of 1927. The synod borrowed \$650,000 in order to consolidate all of its debts, in addition to adding more funds to the Church Extension Fund and obtaining the rest of the money needed for its current building projects. It was then hoped that this \$650,000 could be paid off in 10 years by simply including one-tenth of it in each year's budget. This plan could not work because the synod was already unable to meet its budget and it could not handle that much of an increase.

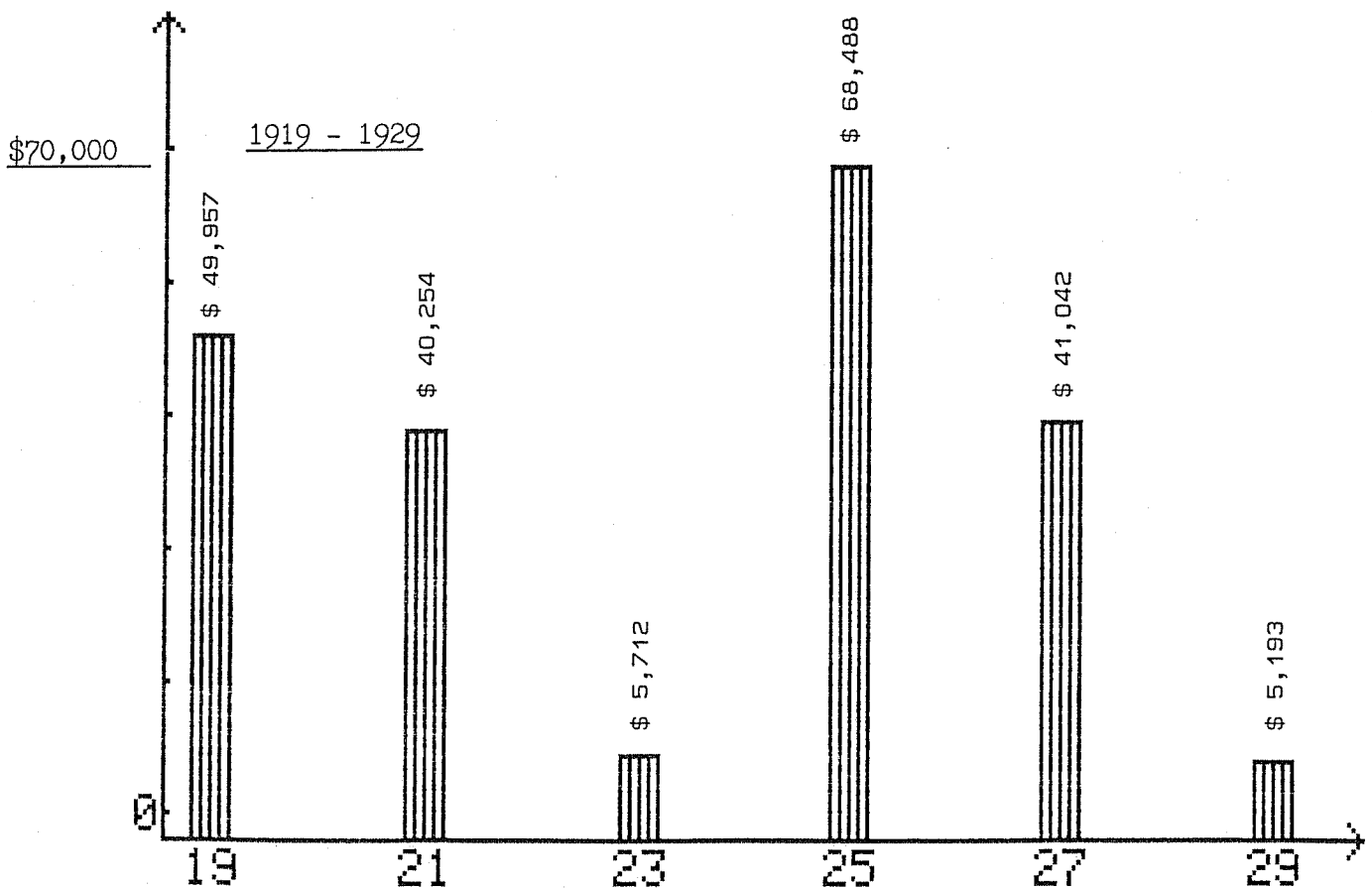
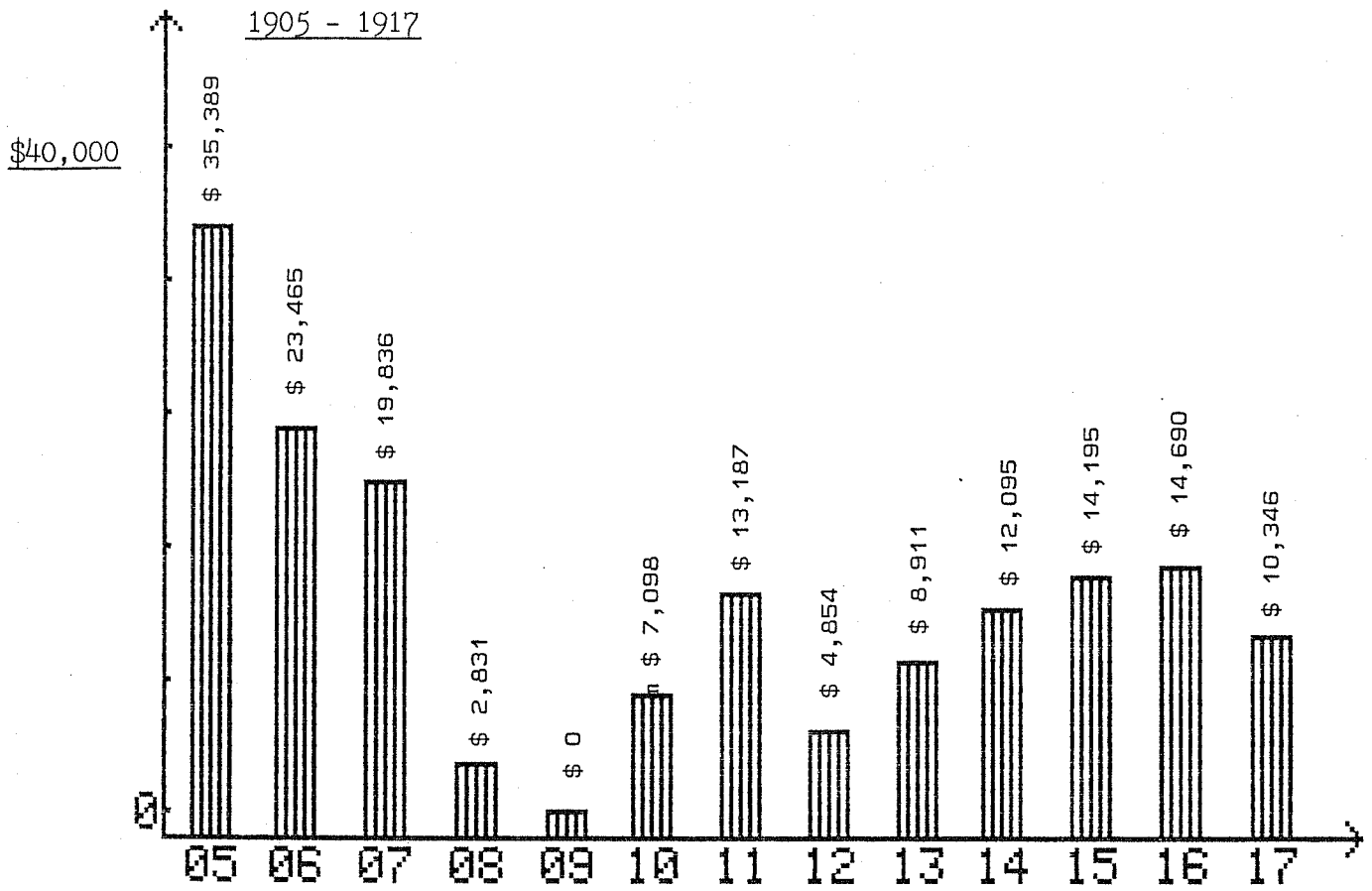
The Crash came in 1929, and our synod met its roughest years. The CEF was frozen because no churches could pay back their loans, and the synod was stuck with paying interest on \$200,000 that had been added to the CEF by the Sinking Fund plan. The synod also lost a number of investments it had made.⁴¹

In 1932 an Every Member Canvass collection was set up, which raised \$255,824.⁴² But this collection seemed to cut down on regular collections. At this point the synod was forced to take some very painful steps. Salaries were cut back twice, a total of 30% to 40%. No new missions were opened.

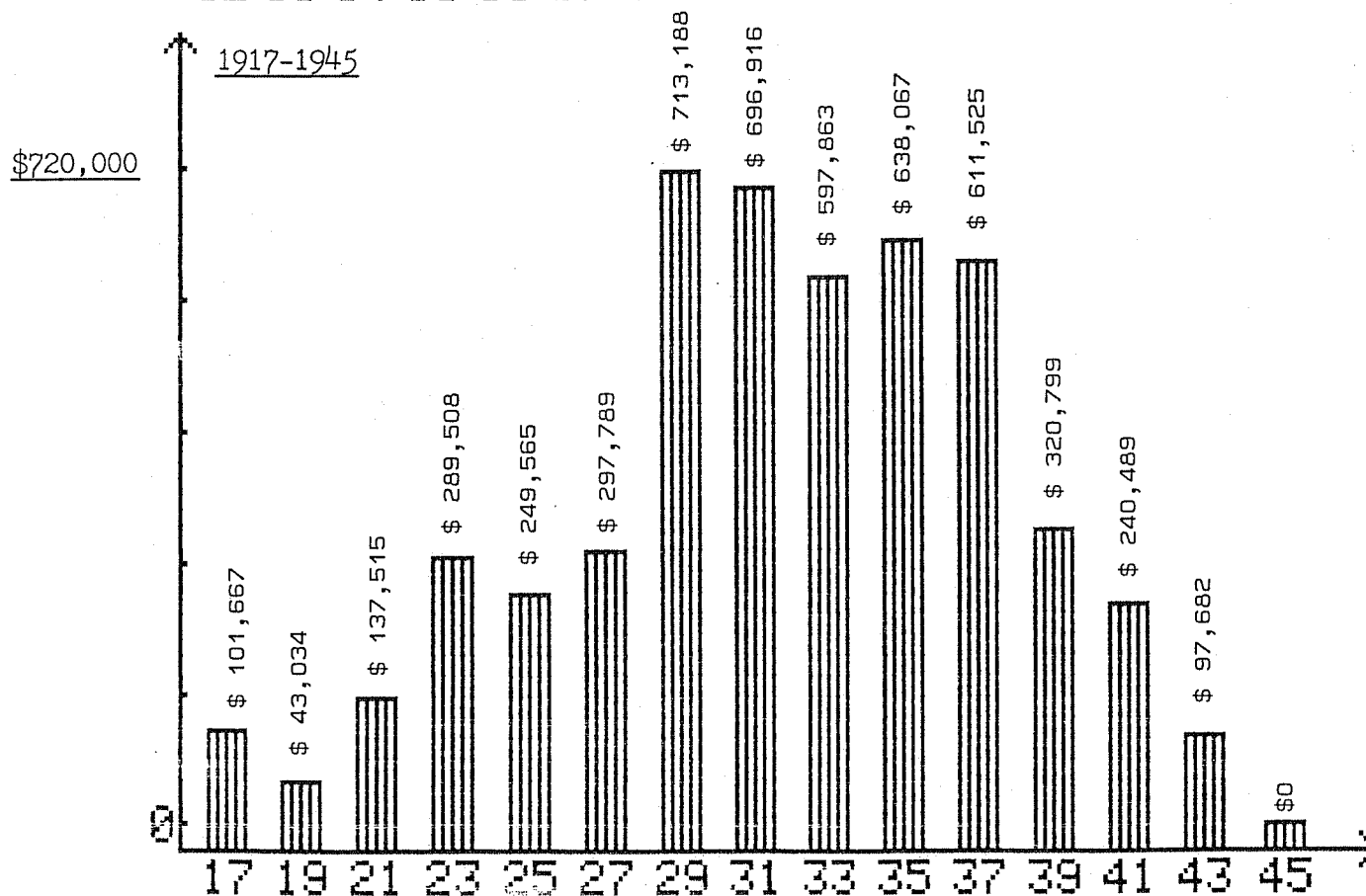
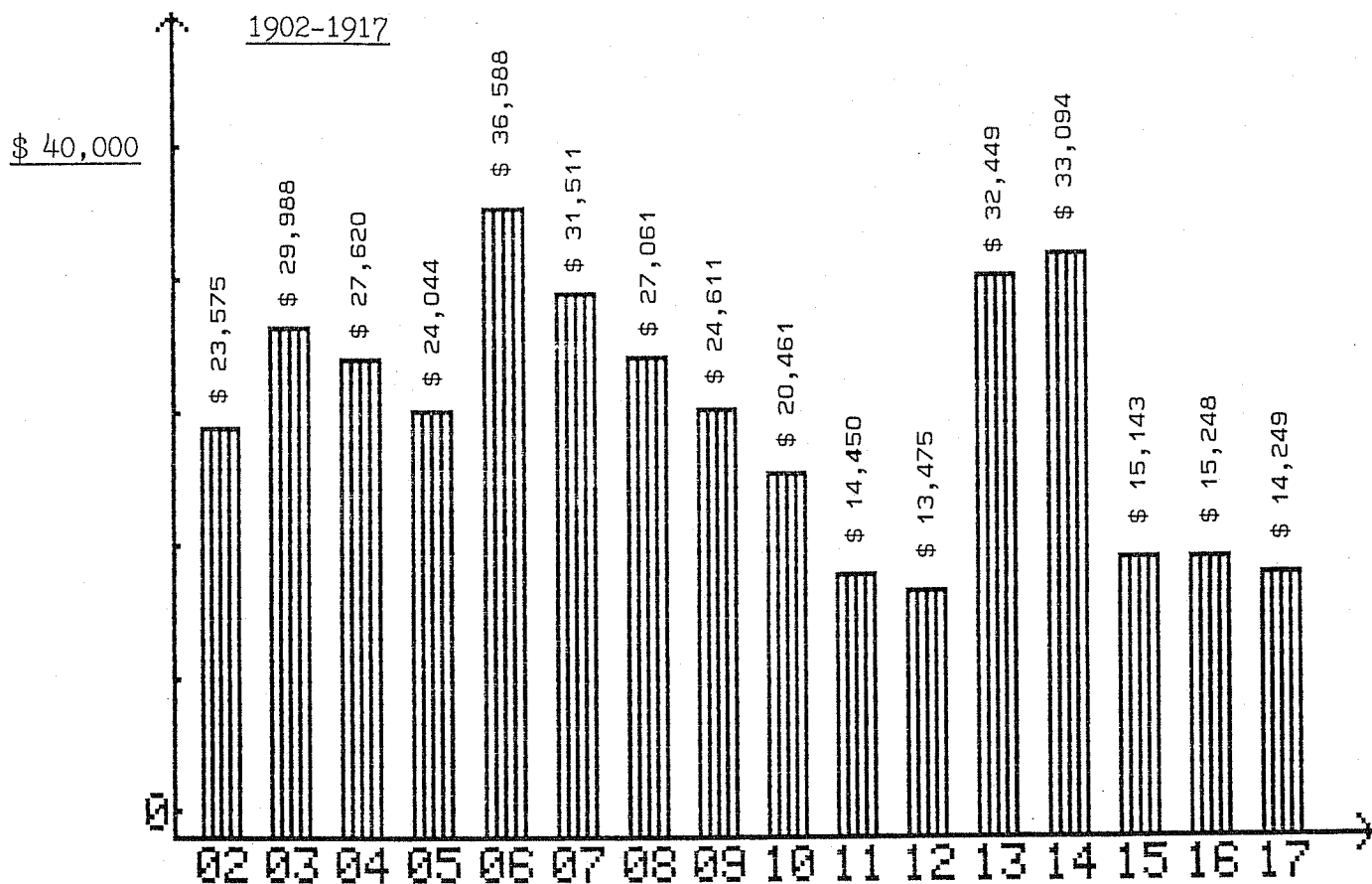
Together with drastic cuts in the budget, the synod adopted the Michigan Plan, a series of placards to get information to the people about the synod and its work.⁴³ These measures would gradually bring the debt down from its peak of \$752,000 in Dec., 1931, until the synod finally paid off its debt in full on November 26, 1944.⁴⁴

Richard Siegler didn't live to see that day. He died in November, 1941. But he had given this synod a great deal of help in finally coming to that day. He had taught much of this synod's membership, on a one-to-one basis, the great importance of its work and the great joy of giving for that work.

Richard Siegler's Collections



Wisconsin Synod Debt



Endnotes

- ¹Edward Schuppe. A History of the Stewardship of the Monies of the Wisconsin Synod. 1975. p. 4.
- ²Ibid. p. 26.
- ³Synodal-Bericht. 1925. p. 113.
- ⁴Arthur Hoermann. Unser Northwestern College; Sein Werden und Wachsen. English Edition. Milwaukee: NPH. 1915. p. 66.
- ⁵Schuppe. op. cit. p. 6.
- ⁶Ibid. p. 7-8.
- ⁷Hoermann. op. cit. p. 65.
- ⁸Schuppe. op. cit. p. 11.
- ⁹Ibid. p. 12.
- ¹⁰J.P. Koehler. The History of the Wisconsin Synod. St. Cloud, MN: Sentinel Publishing Company. 1970. p. 229.
- ¹¹Schuppe. op. cit. p. 21.
- ¹²Koehler. op. cit.
- ¹³Erwin Kowalke. Centennial Story. Milwaukee: NPH. 1965. p. 26.
- ¹⁴Gemeinde-Blatt. Vol. 77 (Nov. 15, 1941), p. 379.
- ¹⁵Ibid. Vol. 23 (Dec. 15, 1887), p. 63.
- ¹⁶St. John's 90th Anniversary Booklet. 1960. p. 6.
- ¹⁷St. John's 85th Anniversary Booklet. 1955. p. 21.
- ¹⁸Koehler. op. cit. p. 184.
- ¹⁹James Tauscher. A Half Century of Wheat and Tares in Bostwick Valley. 1976, p. 11.
- ²⁰St. John's 85th Anniversary Booklet. p. 5.
- ²¹Tauscher. op. cit. p. 19.
- ²²"Jubiläum der St. John's-Gemeinde in Barre Mills, Wisconsin," Gemeinde Blatt. Vol. 30 (June 15, 1895), p. 95.
- ²³Synodal-Bericht. 1904, p. 91-92.
- ²⁴Hoermann. op. cit. p. 62.

- ²⁵Elmer Kiessling. Centennial Memoir. Milwaukee: NPH. 1979. p.33.
- ²⁶Synodal-Bericht. 1907. p. 90.
- ²⁷Hoermann. op. cit. p. 66.
- ²⁸Kowalke. op. cit. p. 143.
- ²⁹Koehler. op. vit. p. 230.
- ³⁰Ibid. p. 230.
- ³¹Synodal-Bericht. 1910. p. 46.
- ³²Koehler. loc. cit.
- ³³Synodal-Bericht. 1913. p. 122.
- ³⁴Ibid. 1909. p. 103.
- ³⁵Ibid. 1912, p.18-19, and 1914, p.22.
- ³⁶William Lueckel. History of the Pacific Northwest District. 1968. p.7.
- ³⁷Synodal-Bericht. 1913. p. 111.
- ³⁸Synodal-Bericht. 1933. p.37.
- ³⁹Synodal-Bericht. 1929. p. 27.
- ⁴⁰Schuppe. op. cit. p. 29.
- ⁴¹Ibid. p. 42.
- ⁴²Synodal-Bericht. 1933. p. 22.
- ⁴³Dan Jensen. The Debt of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States during America's Great Derpression. 1975. p. 6.
- ⁴⁴Schuppe. op. cit. p. 64.

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