

WHY OUR SEMINARY MOVED FROM WAUWATOSA TO THIENSVILLE (MEQUON)

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Our Theological Seminary was growing out of its skin. The year was 1919. In 1892 we received the Pabst property in Wauwatosa for the price of \$1. This was under the stipulation that the property be used only for educational purposes. We were in reality only renting the place and did not have outright possession.

By the year 1919 the place was becoming more and more inadequate. At this point there was talk of expanding those facilities there at what is now 60th and Vliet. To do this it would have been necessary to purchase some additional land to the West. This we were unable to do.

There was also the possibility of obtaining some of the other part of the Pabst farm which was called Washington Highlands. This was just to the South. However we were unable to obtain clear title to that land. It was also already plotted out and would have given much difficulty with city and county development and assessments.

It soon became evident that expansion at the present location would be impossible. Besides being unable to obtain additional land the Industrial Commission would not let us fix up that building to where we wanted it.

So there were just too many problems to be faced. It would have cost too much to do anything with property that we in fact didn't even own. There was no room for expansion and expected growth. The faculty showed a great concern for room for the students to develop physically as well as mentally and

spiritually. They also wanted their Seminary to be surrounded by natural beauty.

These last two concerns impressed me very much in my reading of the things taken into consideration. The Committee wanted beauty, an openness, and peace surrounding the school. It was very important for them to have the students live in the natural glory of God's Creation.

This roominess was also a consideration for the professors themselves. They felt that all of them should live on campus. At least a lot of them felt this way. Why? Two reasons. First of all it would help build interest in the school. Secondly, it would be conducive to faculty unity and concern of purpose. These things could not be achieved at the Wauwatosa site.

The Seminary would have to be relocated. In November of 1919 several sites were visited. Most of these were quickly rejected due to obvious inabilities to meet our needs for the money we would be able to spend. The premier site visited was the Bues Farm located on Beloit Rd. just South of Greenfield Ave.

This plot of land was then purchased. Yet building did not begin immediately. Reflecting the many serious considerations the Committee asked the membership to keep looking for suitable sites. This was requested at a special meeting held in Watertown July of 1920.

Nothing much developed then until 1922. During these years the collections for the building fund were taken. This was very much publicized Synod wide and every one looked eagerly

to the day construction would be begun.

By 1922 then other sites were to be considered. Several locations around St. Paul, Minn. were considered but rejected particularly because of location too far from Milwaukee. The cities of LaCrosse and Fond Du Lac were also considered. There was also land near where UWM is today. This last place was rejected, a retired pastor told me, because Koehler thought the beach and lakefront too romantic for his students and the fog too dense and unhealthy!

There were two outstanding possibilities. One of these was the Van Dyke Estate located just South of Washington Heights. It was a beautiful piece of 30 acres set high on a hill. The other was an 80 acre tract out in the "sticks" of Thiensville. This was 15 miles from Milwaukee City Hall to the North.

After some consideration the Bues and Van Dyke properties were rejected. It was feared that the development of streets and zoning and so forth would chop up the property. Also, it was felt, no special treatment would be given those who wanted to avoid this, as we would, to keep the land in one unit.

The Bues place was sold. The money received went into the Seminary building fund. The Thiensville site was rejected as being too far away and too out of reach.

After some deliberation with the proper authorities we were told that no through street would divide the Van Dyke Estate. So with the greatest objection removed we bought the 30 acres for \$40,000. It was also near the car lines for easy access.

Why did the Van Dyke Estate fit the bill? It simply had all the solutions to all our needs. It was a beautiful setting high on a hill. It was easily accessible as was mentioned. It was close to Milwaukee and to a couple of our churches. It had all the modern conveniences such as water, sewer, gas and electric light.

John Brenner, writing in the Northwestern Lutheran of 1923 echoed the thoughts of all on this location: "For once our city will be set on a hill." "It shall be an edifice erected as a lasting monument of thanksgiving and answer for all time to come the purpose which a Lutheran Seminary is to serve; to give the final training to young men, who have consecrated their life's service to our Savior and His Church."

It was also in another issue around the same time compared to an high mountain, Mt. Olivet or Seminary heights.

"A heights again was talked of, the new Seminary Heights. They too are serving who stand and wait, stand and believe. My simple faith beholds the glorious Savior on the crest of the beautiful Seminary Heights. With Him our hopes are even now realized, the great work completed, in operation. Every succeeding year at high summer a new little band of chosen ones wending their way up to Seminary Heights, and as the seasons roll on, their number increases."

All systems seemed go to build on the Van Dyke Estate property. Some Seminary students were assigned the task of cleaning up the location. They chopped brush and picked up stray wood and debris to make it more presentable for visitors.

The plant was to be very similar to the one we have at present. The plans were drawn up by Alfred C. Clas. He also was the architect for the Milwaukee Public Library and Museum, the Milwaukee Auditorium and several buildings on the U. of W. campus in Madison.

The style was to reflect our Lutheranism. An article put out concerning the future building put it this way; "It was no more than natural that we should borrow our forms from buildings of the Reformation and especially in the life of Luther. Among these are the Wartburg, the Castle of Coburg, the buildings of the cities of Nuernberg, Rotenburg ob der Tauber, and others." Prof. Koehler at first drew up the design and plans. These were however rejected as too expensive.

After some further considerations these plans were all dropped and the Van Dyke property was sold. It brought \$107,500. The profit of \$67,500 was added to the Building Fund. This together with the \$330,000 on hand met the resolution of the 1923 Convention not to build till the place could be paid for. Now there was enough money and immediately they began looking for a new site.

What they now wanted was a combination. They wanted somewhat of rural living. This would satisfy that stated need and desire for room and beautiful, natural surroundings. And yet they wanted to remain within easy traveling distance of Milwaukee. It came down to two sites. The one was on the lake in Oconomowoc. The other along HWY 57 in Thiensville.

The site in Oconomowoc was a property that was a school for something. It already had buildings available for use. It was rejected though due to cost and a too rural location. I was told that Koehler was disappointed that this place wasn't to be the one. It seemed there was a very nice boat house conveniently located right on the property on the lake's edge.

And so the Synod purchased the Wille Farm upon which our present Theological Seminary is located. The purchase price was a steal at \$25,000. Building was begun in in 1928. Again the Lutheran motif was used by Clas. The new Seminary was dedicated August 18, 1929, the Sunday of the Synodical Convention.

There were many things that made this location the ideal. It was very easy to get to with a main highway, railroad and electric. The publishing house was only 35 min. away. Not much different today with the traffic.

It was a developing town with a bank, post office and several stores. The people were kind to us and seemingly we would enjoy a happy growth together, which we did. It was the perfect compromise between city and rural living.

It was also close to our churches and had adequate fire protection and sewer. In other words Thiensville fit the bill in everything that we had been looking for.

Today the correctness of such a selection is quite evident. There was not complete unity or agreement to such at the time of the purchase itself. Some felt that Thiensville was pretty far into the "boondocks". We have been blessed with the fact that even today we don't have many of the complexities of

big city living.

I have drawn a couple of conclusions and observations in reading up on the move from Wauwatosa to what is now Mequon. First of all, and of greatest importance, is that the goal is the same. What J. Brenner said decades ago still holds true. Our purpose of the Seminary is still to give men the training to preach the Gospel and serve their Savior and their Church.

At the time there was much indecision and confusion. No doubt there often were times when both the Building Committee and members of Synod had their problems in figuring out what to do or where to go. The Lord certainly guided their decision. They wanted a Seminary where the students had lots of room to grow physically, mentally and spiritually. They have one. They wanted a beautiful place to enjoy God's beautiful Creation. They have one. They wanted a place where the faculty members not only worked together but also live and share. They have one.

The move itself was not one of the biggest events in the history of our Synod. I feel that the importance of all this is that the goals and ideals are still the same. While the buildings in which we learn are built on different land, our faith continues to be built upon the sure Foundation, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And also, as things have worked out for us in Mequon, ^{we knew} that He guides our decisions and cares for our needs. May we always continue ~~thus~~ if we ever have to move again.

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