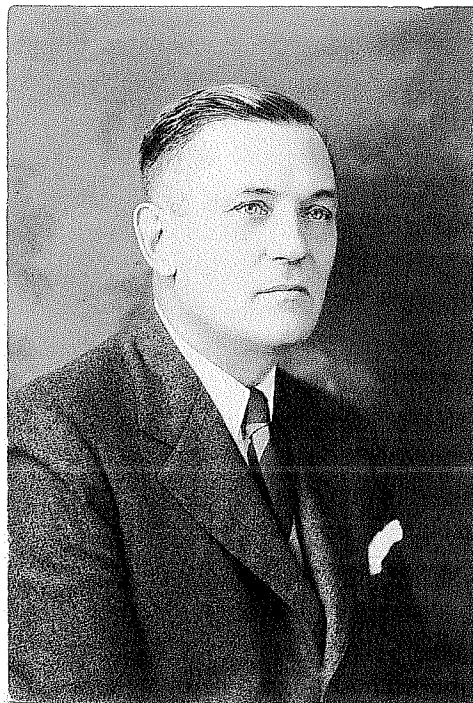


Professor Walter A. Schumann: A Passionate Servant of the Lord



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It is often the case that people die and are forgotten. Nothing is written to preserve the events of their lives, their accomplishments and failures, their joys and sorrows, the lives they touched. The faint memories of those who knew them are often all that remain, and within a generation or two, these also are forgotten. This is a sad fact when we recognize how much these people must have influenced our own lives, though perhaps we are unaware of the precise ways in which we have been influenced by them.

This underscores for us the importance of history. How much better off we are when we can consider the lives of those who have gone before us, learning from their mistakes, marveling at their successes, and praising God for the way he used their lives for the good of his kingdom (as God uses every person's life, believer or not). This thesis strikes one small blow at the awful concept of a world without history by seeking to preserve the memories that remain of one man nearly lost to memory – Professor Walter A. Schumann.

The writings by and about this man are sparse, to say the least. So it is that the bulk of the information this writer was able to gather about him comes from people who knew him – former students and colleagues, and especially family. As can be expected when dealing with people, memories are fuzzy and perceptions slanted. What this writer has tried to accomplish is to find some truth that can be found in this sea of memory. Reduced to a single kernel, that truth, with which all who remember him would likely agree, is this: Walter Schumann was a passionate servant of the Lord.

Passion for Learning

We begin discussing the great passion of this man by looking at his desire for learning. Throughout his life, with the exception of his earliest and final years, he devoted himself to

knowing more about the world around him, and about his ancestry as well. We begin now with a short look at the origins of this man.

Walter August William Schumann was born to August and Emilie Schumann on June 17, 1892, in Watertown, WI. His forebears had come over from Pomerania in Germany on a ship christened the "Suevia." They were led by William Frederic John Schumann and his wife, Caroline Justina Frederika Schumann (nee Ott, though there is no known relation to the later Professor Ott of Northwestern College). These would have been Walter's grandparents. Their ship landed them in New York on April 12, 1877, and from there they set out for Wisconsin, likely because of other relatives who had already made the trip and settled there. At the time, August, William's son, was almost eighteen years old. They settled first in Watertown, but eventually moved to Lowell to buy some land they could farm. August later returned to Watertown, learned the trade of masonry, and began working for the railroad, building stations. He became a foreman for the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad, a job he held for about forty years. During his time in Watertown he courted and married Emilie Neumann, whose family had also come over from Pomerania, though she had been born in the United States. They were married on December 14, 1884. Their first son, Walter, was born eight years later. A second son, Harold, was born in 1894.¹

Not much is known about Walter's childhood. During his free time he and his brother would often take the ten-mile walk from Watertown to Lowell to visit with some of their relatives who had stayed there when August moved to Watertown. They would set out on a direct path, walking through the fields between them and their destination, and pausing only to

¹ Robert Schumann, interview by author, digital recording, New Ulm, MN, November 25, 2009. The credit for the details about Prof. Schumann's ancestry is given to Prof. Schumann himself, who wrote down the information in notes and handed them down to his son Robert.

fish in the Crawfish River not far from Lowell. Once there, they could visit with relatives for a while and perhaps overnight there before having to make the hike back to Watertown.²

Walter attended St. Mark's grade school in Watertown for first through sixth grades. His final two years of grade school were completed at School No. 4, which later became known as Webster School. His love for learning seems to have begun at St. Mark's under the tutelage of Mr. Louis Pingel, about whom he often spoke favorably.³ Walter "...really [took] to education. It was just what he was hungry for."⁴ This hunger for learning would not be satisfied at any point throughout his life.

On April 8, 1906, near the end of his eighth grade year, Walter was confirmed by Pastor Klingmann at St. Mark's. With his grade school education behind him, he looked forward to high school and college. He attended Northwestern College, probably for a number of reasons. First of all, its nearby location made it a logical choice. Another reason was his mother, Emilie. According to her obituary, she was a "...deeply religious woman, with the finest characteristics of motherhood and womanhood..."⁵ She had a great love for the church and bestowed that love upon her son. It was unfortunate that she never had the chance of seeing her son in his role as pastor or professor—after suffering from Bright's Disease for two and a half months, she died before her time in 1915, just one year before Walter's graduation from the seminary in Wauwatosa. Walter must have demonstrated well his capacity for learning, because he was given the honor of delivering the Latin speech on his college graduation day, the theme of which was "De vi et natura historiae" (Concerning the Power and Nature of History).⁶

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Obituary quoted by Robert Schumann from Watertown newspaper dated April 10th, 1915.

⁶ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

Walter began his seminary training in 1913 and quickly gained a liking for Professor J.P. Koehler, whose teaching style has been described as airy—he was so intelligent that he often taught in terms that went over people’s heads.⁷ His style contrasted starkly with August Pieper’s, who, though also brilliant, was a very dramatic teacher and connected more with the students on their level.⁸ That Walter preferred Koehler to Pieper says something about his appreciation for high-level thinking and all things intellectual. Another reason for his preference seems to have been that he considered Pieper rather harsh (which is interesting, considering how students would later characterize Prof. Schumann), not only with students, but also in his dealings with Koehler. When he later recalled one such incident to his son, Robert, he said, “I couldn’t take that if he said that to me.”⁹

Walter eventually graduated from the seminary in 1916, but that was not to be the end of his passion for learning. The hunger remained, and he continued to feed it. Throughout his years as pastor and professor he accumulated and read hundreds, if not thousands, of books. An article from the *Black and Red* written by a student who interviewed him demonstrates this:

He (Walter) led me into his study, a room, I noticed, that was packed with books from the floor to the ceiling...As he returned to the study, he caught me marveling at the countless volumes of books once more. He looked at me and said, “Ja, what am I going to do with all this junk?” He showed the books that were hidden in the cabinets and then mentioned the fact that he still had 15 boxes of them somewhere else. Junk? Possibly, but nonetheless mute testimony to 52 [*sic*] years of devoted service and genuine dedication.¹⁰

These books didn’t just take up space, either. Though he acknowledged the value of a book, he didn’t believe in having them if they weren’t going to be used. A former student of his recalls his professor’s advice about books: “He stressed the importance of having an adequate library as a

⁷ Paraphrase of comments made by Professor Brenner in his class, Lutheranism in America, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, WI, Fall 2009.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

¹⁰ Douglas Engelbrecht, “Ave atque Vale,” *Black and Red* 71, no. 1, (1967), 14.

pastor but not to overdo it. I believe he was the one who said, ‘Don’t get too much book furniture.’ I assumed that he meant to be careful not to buy books that you would never read. They would just fill up the room like furniture.”¹¹ Whenever Walter would give his son Robert one or more of his books, the latter would always notice how the books would be filled with marks and notes his father had made in the margins.¹² He read his books, and apparently had a gift for reading quickly and retaining what he had read.

One final example of his desire to grow in knowledge can be seen from his early years as a professor. His call entrusted to him the teaching of Greek and history, and for whatever reason, he seemed to feel that his knowledge was not at the level it should be to teach those subjects. Thus he entered into a graduate program at the University of Madison, where he did the required work to attain an M.A. in history. He did his graduate work during the summers, taking four 9-week sessions between the years 1928-1931. There can be no doubt that this degree reflects his great appreciation and desire for learning.

Passion for Souls

Walter Schumann loved learning not so much for its own sake (though he no doubt very much enjoyed the process), but because that learning could be tapped and channeled to benefit others as well. He went into the ministry not simply to learn at the feet of theological giants like Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller, but to use that learning in service to the Lord and his people. His desire was to reach out to and strengthen the souls of sinners and saints. For him, there was no better work one could do, as a future student would remark, “On many an occasion he would let us know that we were being prepared for the greatest activity on earth that anyone could

¹¹ Richard Warnke, email message to author, November 30, 2009.

¹² Robert Schumann, interview by author.

enjoy.”¹³ Let us now direct our attention to Walter’s years of service as a parish pastor and his passion for souls.

Though Walter had graduated from the seminary in 1916, he was not ordained until one year later. This was due to a year of service at Northwestern College as a tutor. Apparently, in those days tutors were not ordained. After that year of service, he received a call to serve as pastor at St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in North Fond du Lac, WI. After accepting this call, he decided to be ordained at his home congregation, St. Mark’s in Watertown. The service took place on September 16, 1917, with Pastor Julius Klingmann presiding and Prof. John Schaller preaching (who was there to preach for Mission Festival Sunday). One week later, he was installed as pastor at his first parish. The installation was performed by Prof. Huth of Northwestern College. Relatives and friends were present for the happy occasion, with the sad exception of his mother, who had died almost two years before.¹⁴

During Walter’s years of service at St. Paul’s, the congregation was in a period of transition. According to an anniversary booklet published by the congregation, it was at this time that the congregation voted to allow instruction at the school in English in addition to German, and the constitution of the congregation was also translated and printed in English.¹⁵ During Pastor Schumann’s time of service there, worship services were still conducted in German for the most part (there was one English service a month), but not long after he left the transition to English continued to progress.¹⁶ The parsonage and church buildings also received some updates

¹³ Carl Voss, email to author, November 26, 2009.

¹⁴ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

¹⁵ “100 Years of Unchanging Grace: The 100th Anniversary of the Organization of St. Paul’s Ev. Lutheran Church, North Fond du Lac, WI,” available from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Archives, Mequon, WI, 2001.

¹⁶ The progression from German to English in that congregation is as follows:

January 14, 1914 – one English service each month, English Sunday School department

June 11, 1922 – two English services each month, on the second and last Sundays

November 4, 1923 – German and English services every Sunday

January, 1949 – one German service each month

during these years. By 1920 telephone service was connected to the parsonage, and modern plumbing was installed in the church basement.¹⁷

Walter's work in North Fond du Lac was not just to serve the members of the congregation as their pastor, but also to serve in various other ways, one of which was to educate their children. As noted above, he was installed in late September, and thus the school year had already begun. In need of a teacher until the new pastor would be available, the congregation had asked a Miss Hencke of Eldorado to fill in, and this she did. After he arrived, Walter took over this job (though it appears that his new wife, Irma, may have assisted him in this work). It seems that he would have done this willingly and without any complaint, as students later quoted his advice on serving in a parish, "He also instructed us to be willing janitors of the church building if that was expected by the congregation...I concluded that he had experienced this early in his ministry. No doubt, there were other examples he gave to impress upon us the need to have a servant mentality and avoid thinking of ourselves as the lord of the congregation,"¹⁸ and, as another student recalled him saying, "He also impressed on us that we would be servants, always ready to help, or do, also the menial tasks in our parish. An expression he liked to use in that connection was, 'you will be the cheese, the whole cheese, and nothing but a cheese.'"¹⁹ Walter no doubt considered teaching a better use of his time than janitorial work, yet he considered no work as being below him. He had a true servant attitude towards God's people, wanting to reflect in his life the love that Christ had for them.

The time eventually came when Pastor Schumann received another call, this one from St. John's Evangelical Church in Markesan, WI. He received it on August 30, 1921, and decided to return it. Apparently, the people in Markesan thought he had made the wrong decision, because

¹⁷ "100 Years of Unchanging Grace."

¹⁸ David Neumann, email to author, November 27, 2009.

¹⁹ Marvin Putz, letter to author, undated.

less than one month later, on September 26, they sent him the call a second time! This time Walter accepted it. The reason for his change of mind is unknown, though perhaps he saw this second call as a nudge from the Holy Spirit that he really wanted Walter to go there. In any case, he was given a peaceful release from St. Paul's in North Fond du Lac on October 2, 1921. He was not installed at St. John's until a couple months later, however, because it was decided that he should remain teaching at the school until the new pastor, Leonard Koeninger, arrived to take over those duties. This he did, and was finally installed as pastor of St. John's on December 4.

²⁰He had faithfully served St. Paul's of North Fond du Lac for four years.

Not too much is known about Walter's time in Markesan, aside from some memories passed down that it was a happy time. His son Robert recalls,

Oh, they spoke of that as a place of prosperity in later years. They were treated very well there. And I think people, especially in the way of food, would bring in food, you know. There wasn't much cash in those days, but they would supply your pantry for you with good items. Otherwise, I don't remember them talking much about it. But I remember my dad or my mother was..., something must have gone short at home, food or money or whatever it was, and my dad interrupted, "We should have stayed at Markesan. When we had prosperity, we didn't stay long enough," or something like that. So it must have been pleasant years...²¹

In a history of the congregation, the only notable event recorded during Walter Schumann's term of service there is this: "In 1922, Bethlehem Lutheran Church at Centerhouse, which had been served by Pastors of St. John's, was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. The church was not rebuilt. The Congregation [*sic*] decided to disband, and most of the families affiliated with St. John's."²² This probably had little impact on Walter's workload, since as the source

²⁰ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "The Blessings of God over a Period of 75 Years from 1882 to 1957: A History of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Markesan, Wisconsin," available from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Archives, Mequon, WI, 1957.

states, he was already serving the people of that congregation. After four years of service to St. John's, Walter received another call—this time to serve at Northwestern College as a professor. The congregation granted him a release in the spring of 1925.

During his years at the college, Walter still managed to stay involved in parish life by doing a lot of “supply preaching.”²³ During the week he would teach, and on the weekends he would travel somewhere to preach. There were two places especially where he did this. One was Winona, Minnesota. He preached for a friend of his there who had become ill. This went on for a couple of months. Eventually that pastor died, a new pastor was called, and Walter no longer went to Winona. However, about that time, a pastor in La Crosse, Wisconsin, also got sick. The people there had heard how Prof. Schumann had been willing to fill in at Winona, so they asked if he would do the same for them. This he also gladly did. So, Saturday after Saturday, Walter would hop on the train up to La Crosse, stay overnight, preach in the morning, and take the train back to Watertown, returning at about 5:30 in the afternoon.²⁴ Somehow he then managed to prepare for his classes the next day as well.

Eventually the pastor in La Crosse who had taken ill retired, and the congregation was faced with the decision of calling a man to replace him. Having already gotten to know Prof. Schumann from his weekly visits, they extended the call to him on July 11, 1939, and he accepted. Knowing that he later returned to the college, some have wondered why he left in the first place. Though it is probably not possible to be certain about his reasons, Prof. Schumann's eldest son, Walter, provided one that seems to make good sense:

This is the conclusion I came to in my mind, that my dad got a taste during these vacancy periods, got a taste of that warmth that exists between a pastor and his congregation, and I think that's something he missed teaching. You know, in the classroom every year, he stood in front of a new batch of students, and he was an

²³ Walter Schumann, interview by author, digital recording, Watertown, WI, October 31, 2009.

²⁴ Ibid.

excellent teacher, but every year the faces changed. The continuity wasn't there, although he loved to see them go on into the ministry. But I think he just had a taste of that warmth and love that a congregation develops for its pastor. He yearned for more and I think that's the reason, probably, why he went back into the [parish] ministry.²⁵

This is highlighted by the fact that Walter had received a number of calls in recent years. In 1938 he received a call from the Winona congregation where he had been helping with preaching. Again in 1938 he received a call from a congregation in West Bend, Wisconsin.²⁶ After declining both of these he received the call to La Crosse. One could see how the number of calls he received in a relatively short amount of time would have reminded him again and again of the joys of parish ministry.

On September 3, 1939, Pastor Schumann was installed at "The German Evangelical Lutheran Church of La Crosse," renamed "First Evangelical Lutheran Church" in 1942. As described by a history of the congregation, he served at a time of growth and expansion, dubbed by the people a time of "strengthening the stakes."²⁷ This was to be true not only in education and programs, but also in the spiritual strength of the congregation.

During the former pastor's time of service, laxity towards the Masonic Lodge was the pervasive attitude in the congregation. It seems that Walter learned about this problem before he accepted the call, and that also may have played a part in his acceptance of that call. Once he arrived, he began tackling the problem by writing about the issue in bulletins and preaching against the work-righteous attitude that the Lodge espoused. In the course of this campaign he came across one member of the congregation who held a high position in the Lodge. After talking with him, the man repented and quit his high position. As might be expected, this did not

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

²⁷ "125th Anniversary Booklet of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church, La Crosse, Wisconsin," available from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Archives, 1984.

sit too well with the other members of the Lodge, and they showed their displeasure to Pastor Schumann. His son Robert relates how when his dad buried this man who had a high position in the lodge, some other lodge members cornered him at the funeral home and shoved him a bit with their elbows, bullying him in an attempt to get even. Walter just took it, and then kept up his anti-Lodge campaign.²⁸

Eventually, people decided it would be smarter if they were not so public about their Lodge membership. When they kept quiet, this created another problem. When these people died, the pastor would bury them, and later, when the obituaries were published, right there would be an announcement stating that these people were members of the Lodge! Pastor Schumann's son Walter recounts an event that shows how serious this problem became:

I remember my dad saying that shortly after he got there he had a funeral, and the man was listed as a member of First Lutheran, and he buried him. And shortly afterward, somebody came to him and said, "Pastor, do you know that so-and-so whom you buried was a Lodge member?" And my dad was kind of speechless!...And at the next church council member meeting, he looked at the council members seated around the table, and he said, "Now I want to tip you birds off," he was a very plain-spoken man, "I want to tip you off, if you die, the first question I'm going to ask your widow is, 'Did he belong to the Lodge?'"²⁹

Fortunately for Pastor Schumann, it turned out that none of his council members were Lodge members, nor were they sympathetic to that cause. They were behind him one hundred percent. Together they decided on a date by which people had to discuss their Lodge membership with the pastor, and if they did not, they would not receive a Christian burial when they died. The notice was taken seriously, but eventually it did happen that a Lodge member died who had not talked to the pastor. Robert Schumann relates the story:

She [the widow] told my dad, "But Pastor, before he died, he said, 'Tell Pastor Schumann that I'm going to leave the Lodge.' She told my dad that. But my dad didn't feel he could give in on that because who knows who else would try that

²⁸ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

²⁹ Walter Schumann, interview by author.

same thing. He believed her. But years later he told me, “Now I have regrets that I didn’t go ahead with that funeral because I kind of had the hunch she was telling me the truth, and if he had left the Lodge then that settles it. But he didn’t. And he regretted that one.”³⁰

This battle with the Masonic Lodge shows how far Walter was willing to go to defend Scripture and the faith of that congregation in La Crosse. Though he may have later regretted his decision not to bury the man Robert mentions, he was right not to give in. Had he agreed, he may very well have created more problems for himself. Others might have been emboldened to try using the same argument, whether they had really decided to leave the Lodge or not. This in turn would have contributed to the further weakening of the congregation. By standing firm, Pastor Schumann showed his passion for souls.

Another anecdote shows Walter’s passion for souls and the work ethic he displayed. One Sunday morning he felt a bit woozy because he had the flu, but decided that he would try making it through the service. That was a mistake. Before he finished his sermon, he collapsed in the pulpit. The congregation then demanded that he take a week’s rest. So Pastor Schumann and his wife took a week’s vacation at a relaxation camp in Wautoma, WI.³¹ Upon his return, it was decided that since there was plenty of work to go around they would call an assistant pastor.³² The first man to serve in this capacity was Karl Gurgel, father of the former synod president.³³

Another event worth mentioning from Pastor Schumann’s time in La Crosse is the purchase of property. As the congregational history states, the people of the congregation were looking to expand and grow, and one of the ways they were looking to do that was by increasing the capacity of their school. In 1940 the congregation purchased a plot of land called the Leidl

³⁰ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

³¹ Ibid.

³² This began a long-standing program within the congregation. Each man stayed for only a couple of years, and at times there were gaps between service periods (according to the congregation’s anniversary booklet), so it seems that this was not a position equal to the associate pastor of today, but may have been more like a glorified vicar.

³³ Walter Schumann, interview by author.

property, just south of the school. This property would become the site of a new school building in 1951, after Walter accepted a call back to Northwestern College.

Pastor Schumann's time in the parish ministry underscores the importance he placed on education (teaching at the school in North Fond du Lac and preparing to expand the school in La Crosse) and true Scriptural doctrine (his struggle against the Masonic Lodge in La Crosse). He used his learning to defend and uphold the souls of those under his care and considered this the greatest work any man could do.

Passion for Teaching

As much as Walter loved and honored the parish ministry, he would always be drawn to teaching. In his 51 years of ministry, only 14 of those were spent in the parish. The rest he devoted to teaching at Northwestern College. One could even argue that it was his passion for souls that fueled his passion for teaching, since it was the very men he was teaching who would be caring for the souls of people wherever the Lord sent them. This may also have been the reason that he accepted the call back to Northwestern in 1946. It has been suggested that, after the incident with the Lodge in La Crosse, he felt a responsibility to make sure the students at Northwestern were solid enough in their understanding of Scripture that things like that would not happen again.³⁴ In any case, he certainly took the job of training future ministers of the gospel seriously, and he did the job well. He had a passion for teaching.

Walter actually served Northwestern during six different times of his life. After graduating from the college in 1912, he was asked to serve as an instructor for one year. This was due to the fact that Professor Kuhn of the faculty died during the summer of that year. So it was that Walter was given the responsibility of instructing the Septima class, a section which

³⁴ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

existed at that time, probably as a “catch-up year” for students who had not had enough of an education to enroll in Sexta (farmers’ children, for example).³⁵ During that year he taught arithmetic, geography, English, and even penmanship.³⁶

His second period of service at the college is so short that it is easily overlooked. During the summer of 1915, still before his graduation from the seminary in Wauwatosa, he was asked to serve as inspector in the dormitory for about a month because Professor Eickmann had died.³⁷ After his graduation from the seminary came his third period of service, this time as a tutor, along with two others, Carl Schweppe and William Hartwig. He served in this capacity during the 1916-1917 school year, teaching in the business department that existed at that time at the college. He taught the “Commercial Correspondence” course, which dealt with writing letters in the business world.³⁸

He returned to the college for his fourth term of service after nearly eight years in the parish ministry, beginning his responsibilities in the spring of 1925. When he first arrived, he began teaching English.³⁹ In 1928 he first taught the subjects for which he would become known and respected, Greek and History.⁴⁰ He left the college for the parish once again, as noted above, in 1939. He accepted the call back to the college near the end of 1946, and when he returned in January of 1947 for the fifth time, he picked up right where he left off, teaching Greek and History. Finally, after his retirement in 1967, he was asked to stay on part-time through January of 1968 because Professor Scharf had gone to Vietnam.⁴¹ This, then, could be called his sixth term of service.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Douglas Engelbrecht, “Ave atque Vale,” 14.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Northwestern College Faculty Meeting Minutes, August 25, 1916.

³⁹ Northwestern College Catalog, 1925.

⁴⁰ Northwestern College Catalog, 1928.

⁴¹ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

When in the classroom, Professor Schumann was in his element. It was clear to everyone who was in charge. One of his former students relates his experience of sitting in his class for the first time: “He was impressive, a bit intimidating, and he lived up to his nickname, ‘Bull,’ with his deep bass voice and his stocky build.”⁴² Another student characterized him this way: “Prof. Schumann was an authoritative figure. He expected, even demanded, and also received respect and cooperative behavior.”⁴³ Some clearly saw the man as someone to be feared, someone whose bad side they did not want to be on. Some, however, saw him differently: “I was very favorably impressed with Prof. Schumann when I first sat in his classes. He was a dignified and likeable prof. [*sic*] from my first and lasting impression.”⁴⁴

In his zeal to prepare well-trained and responsible ministers of the gospel, Professor Schumann may have gotten a bit carried away at times.

Prof. Schumann would say to us that it was his job to “weed ‘em out.” By that he meant that he would do what he could to make sure those students who were not good candidates for the ministry would eventually quit Northwestern. Our class of ’59 began in 1951 with 67 Sextaners. On college graduation day June 11, 1959, only 12 of the 23 graduates were of the original Sexta class of 67, a mortality of 82%.⁴⁵

It would be quite a stretch to say that Professor Schumann was solely responsible for the attrition in that class, yet the point made by Pastor Hermann is clear—Professor Schumann was serious about having the highest quality ministers possible. It did not seem to bother him if some fell by the wayside. He saw the responsibility that was to be given them as too serious a thing to be entrusted to just anyone who enrolled at the college. In support of that view, former Professor Plitzuweit comments, “He seemed to hold to the position that a student should not ‘slide through’ to become a pastor. A student needed to show a work ethic already in college. I support that

⁴² Gerhardt Haag, email to author, November 23, 2009.

⁴³ Doug Bode, email to author, November 25, 2009.

⁴⁴ John Chworowsky, email to author, November 24, 2009.

⁴⁵ John Hermann, email to author, December 1, 2009.

approach in the preparation of pastors. A congregation suffers when it receives a pastor who lacks initiative and drive.”⁴⁶ If his methods and classroom manner seemed harsh to students at the time, some later recognized the “why” of it all. Here is just one more quote to illustrate the point:

He could be quite harsh with students who did not do their work or were inattentive in the classroom, but he had only their best interests at heart. You may have heard of Len Umnus, the coach and athletic director. He could be harsh and demanding, especially as a football coach. Preps generally feared him, but one soon learned to know his interest was not so much winning games, but preparing young men for the rigors of the ministry. That was “Bull” Schumann. In history classes it became evident he was seeing his students as future ministers and wanted to do everything to get them ready. I am sure that we as students often lacked his vision, and it may have taken many years to “get it.” He may not have been the prof I would have gone to with a problem, but I have remembered him long after forgetting others.⁴⁷

As the above quotes demonstrate, Professor Schumann was often referred to by the nickname, “Bull.” It seems that this nickname came into common use during the years after his return to the college from La Crosse.⁴⁸ The name seems to have reflected a few things about him, such as his physical appearance and personality: “My guess is that it may have referred to a number of things, his size for one. He had the build of a Packer linebacker. In addition there was a certain gruffness that characterized his demeanor in the classroom.”⁴⁹ Another possibility is that the name referred to his tendency to charge through classroom material: “He went ahead with the subject and wanted you to follow. He plowed ahead like a bull.”⁵⁰ There is also an infamous incident that suggests the name could have stemmed from his short fuse: “The scuttlebutt was that a student in the class ahead of ours was inattentive and ‘Bull’ came up to him, grabbed him by the shoulders, and set him down hard in the seat, which split. Bull was

⁴⁶ Jerald Plitzuweit, email to author, December 2, 2009.

⁴⁷ Leroy Dobberstein, email to author, November 28, 2009.

⁴⁸ Walter Schumann, interview by author.

⁴⁹ Joel Gerlach, email to author, November 24, 2009.

⁵⁰ Keith Haag, email to author, November 24, 2009.

supposed to have said, ‘And you’ll pay for the desk, too!’”⁵¹ In spite of his occasional bursts of anger, some students still respected and even loved him as a teacher:

He could rage on occasion. When he did so, we deserved it...I remember him raging, well nigh out of control, at the boy sitting in the row next to me. I accepted it as the slip of a passionate man more determined that we should learn than some of us were determined to let ourselves be taught. I happen to have been one who loved to learn from him.⁵²

Which class a student had Prof. Schumann for may have been a factor in how much that student enjoyed the class. Professor Bivens of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary saw a distinction between the first year Greek classes and the electives which upper-classmen were able to take.

By reputation and from personal experience there were two Bull Schumanns...he was not comfortable in larger classes. The more people there, and the less they wanted to be there (in other words, it was just part of the curriculum and they had to be there), they, as well as he, did not enjoy that nearly as much...But, in an elective, where I had the privilege of being a student of his, he understood that the people in those classes wanted to be there. They were invariably a smaller group, maybe only a dozen or something like that, and quite frankly, he was brilliant. He not only had such a mastery of the Greek language, but he had a deep and obvious, almost contagious, love for Greek poetry and the Greek culture, and that came through beautifully.⁵³

Of course, the material likely had something to do with it as well. It would seem much easier to get excited about stories and poetry than beginning Greek grammar and syntax.

The professor’s classroom manner also left room for humor. His lectures were often full of side comments prefaced with the phrase, “By the way...” Students would count the number of times he used this phrase, which did not go unnoticed by their teacher: “Some of us used to count how many ‘by the ways’ he would speak during class, and with a wry sense of humor he purposely added extra ones to add to our totals.”⁵⁴

Other common phrases his students still remember include, “A student without a pencil is

⁵¹ Paul Siegler, email to author, November 24, 2009.

⁵² Darwin Raddatz, email to author, November 23, 2009.

⁵³ Professor Forrest Bivens, interview by author, digital recording, Mequon, WI, November 23, 2009.

⁵⁴ Daniel Buske, email to author, December 1, 2009.

like a soldier without a gun,”⁵⁵ “Repititio mater studiorum,”⁵⁶ “Number your sheet of paper 1-25 on the obverse, 26-50 on the reverse,”⁵⁷ and his favorite threat, “I’m going to throw you through the window without benefit of clergy.”⁵⁸

Professor Schumann served at a time when professors and students did not have much of a relationship outside of the classroom. Still, there were some interactions, and they show that he did care for his students, even if he sometimes showed that care in a humorous way. For example, he would often spend time watching athletic events at the college, football especially, and would then comment to players about their performance on the field. One player remembers “...how one day in class, in an attempt to motivate me to apply myself more diligently to the study of Greek, [Professor Schumann] told me to ‘give as much effort in tackling my Greek assignments as I did in tackling my opponents on the football field.’”⁵⁹

He also showed care for his students outside the classroom when they needed help in their school work. One student recalls how the class was overwhelmed by a coming test in which they would have to write every Greek vocable they had learned that year. In an act of desperation, a few of the students went to Professor Schumann at his home to ask him for a list of those vocables, and this he gladly gave them. The class appreciated the gesture greatly.⁶⁰

Another student recalls a time when he was sick and had to make up his work:

In my senior year I was sick for a time with chicken pox and missed some classes and a test. I went to him to talk about making up the work. But he told me I would soon graduate and I wouldn’t need to make up the test. I think that showed me his sense of ministry—the purpose of our training was not just academic but to produce ministers of the gospel.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Robert Sievert, email to author, November 23, 2009.

⁵⁶ Roger Zehms, email to author, December 1, 2009.

⁵⁷ David Rutschow, email to author, November 24, 2009.

⁵⁸ Daniel Deutschlander, email to author, November 24, 2009.

⁵⁹ Robert Mueller, email to author, November 24, 2009.

⁶⁰ John Meyer, letter to author, undated.

⁶¹ Ron Uhlhorn, email to author, November 27, 2009.

The professor even took the time to privately tutor a student who was having trouble with his Greek studies, meeting with him three times a week in his home.⁶² There were even times when he acted as spiritual encourager. Pastor Karl Gurgel, the former synod president, relates this story:

Early in my first year at Northwestern Prep in 1956 one evening after chapel, he was waiting for me at the chapel door. He asked me to come with him, taking me home with him. He had been asked by my father to inform me that my younger brother, Robert, had come down with polio and was in the hospital...His manner was like that of a kindly grandfather, concerned about me.”⁶³

In spite of his sometimes gruff exterior, Professor Schumann definitely displayed care for his students and desired their success.

While determined to raise his students to a higher academic level, he always kept in mind what the goal was—training ministers of the gospel—and he made sure to remind his students of that as well.

In spite of his claim to be the fellow to weed out the incompetent, he would interrupt class regularly to describe the joys of serving the Lord and His flock in the pastoral ministry. There was usually a story to illustrate his point. He was the one who, more than others, held before us the future for which the Lord was preparing us.⁶⁴

In these digressions, he would often speak to the students about the importance of being pastors, not scholars, “[He emphasized] that we were not at school to become brainy scholars, but to train to be competent spiritual guides and leaders of the sheep the Lord would call us to serve.”⁶⁵ He also emphasized the importance of preaching Scripture, not the opinions of the day:

I recall that in my original Greek Bible inside the cover I had written a quote: “Let me never hear that you are a popular preacher” – Prof. Walter Schumann. I have

⁶² Northwestern College Faculty Meeting Minutes, September 9, 1957.

⁶³ Karl Gurgel, email to author, December 4, 2009.

⁶⁴ Paul Siegler, email to author.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

pondered many times what he might have meant by “popular” preacher. He probably meant a preacher, who preaches just what people like to hear.⁶⁶

In all this he displayed his desire that his students become faithful stewards of the mysteries of God.

In his years of teaching, Professor Schumann made some noteworthy additions to the study of Greek. One student remembers having heard that it was he who came up “with the helpful illustration of the ‘accent triangle’ to teach the rules for Greek accents.”⁶⁷ Class after class of prospective pastors has benefited from this diagram, this author among them. Though it may be difficult to prove the former example, the next is beyond doubt. Professor Schumann managed to become published by Harvard University. He often used for his classes Smyth’s *A Greek Grammar for Colleges*, an earlier version of the current Smyth’s *Greek Grammar*. Robert, his son, showed me the book which he used for class, filled with markings. As much as Walter appreciated the book, one thing irritated him—the book had no index for the numerous quotations it referenced from Greek literature. When he made this comment to one of his classes, the students volunteered to help him create the index. This project succeeded and was eventually submitted to Harvard, where it was published in 1961 as a companion book to the grammar with the title, “Index of passages cited in Herbert Weir Smyth, Greek grammar.” Apparently, it is still extensively used at that university.⁶⁸

Beyond this major accomplishment, it has been difficult to find much at all that Professor Schumann wrote. According to his son Walter, he wrote essays regularly for conferences and synod conventions.⁶⁹ Of these, this author has found just two, an essay on fellowship and another

⁶⁶ Dennis Kempf, email to author, November 28, 2009.

⁶⁷ Paul Siegler, email to author.

⁶⁸ Robert Schumann, interview by author. Unfortunately, attempts thus far to identify which class helped Professor Schumann on this project have failed.

⁶⁹ Walter Schumann, interview by author.

on the Keys. It seems odd that so little would remain from his pen, but it may very well be that the professor would have preferred it this way. Professor Westendorf of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary recalls from his days as a student that, as forceful as Prof. Schumann could be in the classroom, he was quite humble outside it: "...I always got the impression that he never really put himself forward much at the college. He did his task, but he was always in the background."⁷⁰ This humility may be the reason for the scarcity of his own writings.

Even other written sources describing him are scarce. The most extensive piece on his life this author has found is a short interview done by *The Black and Red* in 1967, quoted previously. Even congregational histories have no more than a short blurb describing his years of service there. The only other source worth mentioning is former President Kowalke's history, *Centennial Story*. In this book he relates the story of a nearly disastrous fire in the gymnasium:

A fire that might have caused very serious loss was started by faulty insulation of an electric wire in a metal conduit. If Professor Schumann had not felt the need of a book from the library that night late in August, the gymnasium might well have gone up in flames. Again there were no students on the grounds and but for the studious habits of the professor, who had to pass the gymnasium on his way to the library, the fire would have had a disastrous start before being discovered.⁷¹

Kowalke also mentions that Prof. Schumann was head of the alumni society.⁷² If Prof. Westendorf's comment above is correct, then Prof. Schumann likely preferred to have as little written about him as possible, which makes one curious as to how he would have reacted to this paper.

During his final years at the college (1959-67), Prof. Schumann also served as that institution's vice president. This author is not aware of all the duties that position would have

⁷⁰ Professor James Westendorf, interview by author, digital recording, Mequon, WI, November 20, 2009.

⁷¹ Erwin Ernst Kowalke, *Centennial Story*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1965), 103.

⁷² *Ibid*, 246.

entailed, but former Professor Armin Panning, who succeeded him in that office, had this to say about his own duties:

“...in my day it was a rather low-key job—basically covering for the school’s president. In that capacity I chaired some faculty meetings in the president’s absence, gave the NWC report at some conferences, attended some meetings for him...The vice-presidency did also carry with it membership on some standing committees, notably the curriculum committee and scholarship committee.”⁷³

It is reasonable to assume that Professor Schumann’s duties were fairly close, if not equivalent to those of Professor Panning.

After he accepted the call to Northwestern in 1946, Walter received two more calls, both to other institutions of learning. One, extended in 1949, was to Michigan Lutheran Seminary to be its director. The other was to the seminary at Thiensville, extended in 1953. Both were returned.⁷⁴ Reasons were not stated, but it seems that his heart was at the college, and so that is where he stayed. He loved Northwestern. He loved to teach her students, and even though some students never saw through the bullish exterior to his warm and caring interior, others did, and their testimony proves that it existed. In the end, most students will at least acknowledge what Pastor Robert Mueller gratefully says, “Prof. Schumann’s greatest contribution to our ministerial education system was to adequately prepare us for a doctrinally sound preaching of the truth of God’s Word. I would not have been qualified to enter the privileged office of the holy ministry without the solid training and encouraging direction of Prof. Walter Schumann.”⁷⁵ He taught with passion, a passion that came from his faith and the knowledge that he was training others to carry the object of his faith to sinners the world over.

⁷³ Armin Panning, email to author, November 30, 2009.

⁷⁴ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

⁷⁵ Robert Mueller, email to author.

Passion for Family

There is no question that Walter's dedication to the ministry dominated his life. One has to wonder how he found time, in the midst of preparing for classes and preaching on weekends, to devote to his family. Yet there can be no doubt that he loved his family and valued what time he did spend with them. Even his students caught on to this: "He spoke very highly of his wife and encouraged us to find a good Christian spouse and to treat her with honor and care. I believe that he saw that what we were learning in the classroom was secondary to how we lived toward wife and family...Even though he taught some very academic courses, he never lost sight of the importance of a pastor's personal relationships, especially those that related to wife and children."⁷⁶ These statements demonstrate that there can be no doubt that Walter also had a passion for family.

It was not until Walter arrived at his parish in North Fond du Lac that he found an opportunity to start a family of his own. One of the members there was a young woman named Irma Schulz. How the relationship began is not quite clear. Their son Robert chuckles when he remembers asking his dad about how they met:

He said to me one day, "She was going by on a streetcar and I was standing on the corner and she winked at me." I laughed and thought, "He's kidding me," see? But she didn't say anything. I asked her then, "Did you wink at him one time?" She said, "That's not your business!"⁷⁷

True or not, something sparked an interest between the two. Robert also explained that Irma's mother was a very hospitable member of the church and would often invite Pastor Schumann over for meals, so it may be that they got to know each other in that way. Robert's older brother, Walter, also had some things to say about his parents' budding relationship. Irma worked in the post office, a place Walter would often be required to visit for church business. While he was

⁷⁶ John Chworowsky, email to author.

⁷⁷ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

there, he cleverly used their initials on one of the forms to write, “WAS loves IS, does IS love WAS?” and passed it to her. He later received a form back which read, “IS loves WAS.”⁷⁸

Apparently, it was love at first write.

Walter eventually proposed, and the two of them were married on New Year’s Day, 1919, in Milwaukee, WI, at the parsonage of Pastor John Brenner Sr. of St. John’s Ev. Lutheran Church.⁷⁹ Not everyone was pleased with this, however. According to an older lady with whom Robert spoke, there had been a man from St. Paul’s congregation in North Fond du Lac who had picked out Irma as a bride for his son, and when he found out that his pastor had gone and married her, he was mad!⁸⁰ As far as can be seen, though, this did not seem to impact Walter’s ministry at the congregation in any way.

Three children were born to the marriage. Walter was born on March 21, 1920 in North Fond du Lac (at the parsonage!). A few years later Robert was born on May 24, 1925 at St. Agnes Hospital in Fond du Lac. Then on December 5, 1927, Gena, was born, and the brothers had a sister. This time the hospital was St. Mary’s in Watertown.⁸¹

The oldest son, Walter, recalls his dad as a loving father, but not the buddy type, because of all the work he had to do.⁸² One of his most vivid memories of his father when he was a child occurred when the family lived in Markesan:

...my earliest memory is at Christmas time. Apparently the folks had bought one of these toy cars for me with the peddles; you sit in them and then you could drive around...And it always awakens a warm feeling in my heart, because my mother’s home was in Fond du Lac, and they drove in, mother and dad, taking me along, to Fond du Lac, and this is just before Christmas and they wanted to buy this toy car and they couldn’t because I was along. So they drove back to Markesan and my dad dropped my mother and me off and he turned around and

⁷⁸ Conversation with Walter Schumann, November 29, 2009.

⁷⁹ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Walter Schumann, interview by author.

drove all the way back to Fond du Lac and picked up the car. Now that, I thought, was real nice.⁸³

Another father and son moment that still sticks out in Walter's mind happened before his departure out to North Dakota to his first parish. His father took him down to the train depot in La Crosse to see him off, and as they waited for the train to come to the platform, he said, "I am kind of sorry for you today." When his son, who thought that was a strange thing to say to a man heading into the ministry, looked at him questioningly, he continued, "Let me explain. When I went out into the ministry, all those years back, there were a lot of problems that we faced. But you, going out today, are going to face a lot more problems than I ever did. That's why I'm sorry for you."⁸⁴ With that somber conversation, his father helped prepare Walter for the hardships he would face.

Robert, who spent more time at home than Walter did, remembers his dad for other things. When his dad was finished with class at the college, they would often play catch on the campus, something they referred to as, "swatting flies." His dad would get a ball and bat and hit the ball with good enough accuracy that his son could catch it. That was something that always impressed Robert.⁸⁵ Another fond memory of his comes from the days that his father would travel on the weekends to preach at the congregation in Winona or La Crosse.

He knew we liked funny papers. So, Sunday, when he came back, the [train] car would be maybe half empty and so on with people getting off. He'd go up and down as far as they'd let him go, picking up fun comics to bring home to us. I caught up on a lot of comics, from Chicago papers and Milwaukee papers. We'd meet him at the station and he'd come off with those things. It was a happy day.⁸⁶

Robert also remembers his dad for the loving concern he would show. Robert often got sick when he was a young boy, and inevitably, his father would be there at his side to comfort

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

him. “Every winter I came down with strep throat, and I’d get terrific ear aches. And I remember one year the terrific pain I had and I was sobbing in bed and he came and sat by me and he talked to me for a while too, but I just was in such misery. He had folded his hands with his head down and he was praying, see, and I never forgot that.”⁸⁷

These memories of his children demonstrate that Walter did have a great love for his family.⁸⁸ In spite of his busy schedule he found ways to connect with his children, and he was there for them in their time of need.

One more memory shows Walter’s desire to please his family, though his best-laid plans veered off course...literally. This is an event that both brothers have firmly stamped in their minds. It happened one summer while they were living in La Crosse. The congregation gave Walter two weeks off, and he decided to take the family on a first-time vacation to Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming. So they set out in the car, the three men in the front seat (Robert in the middle and his dad driving), and the two ladies in the back. Once they got to Rapid City, they stopped to pick up some groceries, which at the time were stored in glass containers. These could not fit in the trunk because of their luggage, so they were tucked in the backseat instead. As they approached Yellowstone, they had to drive through what was called Ten Sleep Canyon, near Worland, WY. It was a typical mountain road, with a steep down grade, plenty of hairpin turns, and no guardrails on the side. All of a sudden, Walter began pulling the hand brake, saying that the brakes had failed. This was not enough to slow down the car, though, and the family could see the next hairpin turn coming up. At the speed they were going, they could never make the turn. Just before they shot off the road, Walter cried out, “God help us!” Help them he did. It turned out that they were very near the bottom of the canyon. The point at which they flew off

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ The author regrets that he has not talked with Walter’s daughter, Gena. No doubt she would be able to provide more information and a unique perspective on her father. Perhaps in the future a visit can be arranged.

the road was the last hairpin turn. The car first landed on a very large boulder, then went off the boulder and flipped end over end a couple of times before coming to a stop. Miraculously, no one was seriously hurt. Irma had gotten some severe cuts from the glass containers in the backseat which had broken, and Robert's shins were scraped clean of skin, probably because his legs had been underneath the dashboard, and the crash threw him into the backseat. The rest of them escaped with only minor cuts and bruises. By the grace of God, the accident happened near the town of Worland, and some workers from the local fish hatchery heard the accident and came to help. The family ended up spending the rest of the week in the hospital, and then traveled back home. The event strengthened the family's belief in the protection of their God through guardian angels. It also had a drastic effect on the way Walter and Irma would live from that point on—he never drove a car again, and she could never ride behind the driver, lest she be reminded of this traumatic incident.⁸⁹

Conclusion – An Everlasting Passion

In his later years of life, after retirement, Walter began to deteriorate. He and Irma would play cards, and he would go for walks to the downtown area of Watertown. On one such walk, he suddenly could not remember who he was or why he was downtown. Someone else eventually spotted him and helped him home. Doctors said that he had experienced a minor stroke. Eventually it got difficult for Irma to take care of him at home. His memory was going downhill, and he would get up in the middle of the night and get dressed to go on a walk. Finally the decision was made to put Walter into a skilled care center. It saddened Irma to be separated from him, and eventually she, too, was admitted to this center, where she was overjoyed to be able to be by her husband's side once again. In 1975, not long after her arrival there, she died of

⁸⁹ A compilation from the interviews of brothers Walter and Robert Schumann.

a pulmonary embolism. Two short years later, on November 14, 1977, Walter also died. The cause of death in his case was the same as his wife's, a pulmonary embolism.⁹⁰ His funeral service was conducted three days later on November 17, 1977, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Watertown. He was buried in the Lutheran Cemetery in Watertown.⁹¹

Thus ended the earthly life of this great man, at the age of 85 years. He served his Lord and the Lord's people well. His passion to be a servant of the Lord came through beautifully in the work he did as pastor, professor, husband, and father. Though dust is all that remains of his body now, his passion lives on. It still lives on, of course, in him, as he serves his Lord with perfect zeal in the courts of heaven. It also lives on in his students, in members of his parishes, and in his family members. It exists as an undying desire to remain true to the Word of our God, to pass that Word on to others, and to serve the Lord with all of one's life. Inevitably, the life and accomplishments of Walter A. W. Schumann will be forgotten to history, as are so many lives and accomplishments. Even if they are, however, his passion for service in the Lord's kingdom never will be, because the Lord has used him to pass that passion on to others, others who will pass it on yet again, and on and on until our gracious Lord comes again. That is the legacy of Walter and of so many other men like him who have handed down the responsibility of proclaiming the Word to another generation. It is a legacy born not of himself or the actions he took, but of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, and as such it will never die. To God be the glory for the life and work of this man!

⁹⁰ Robert Schumann, interview by author.

⁹¹ Funeral Service Bulletin, Trinity Lutheran Church, Watertown, WI, November 17, 1977.

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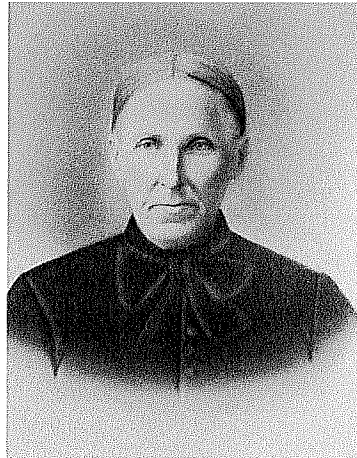
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Appendix: Photos



William Frederic John Schumann



Caroline Justina Frederika Schumann
(nee Ott)



Site of the old Schumann family
homestead near Lowell, WI



Emilie Schumann (nee Neumann),
Walter's mother



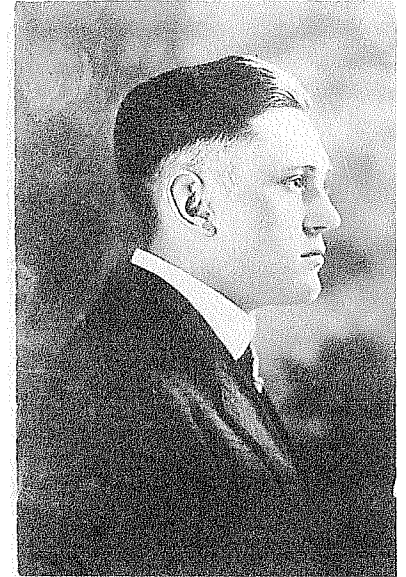
August Schumann (3rd from right)
Walter's father



Walter August William Schumann
Baptism photo



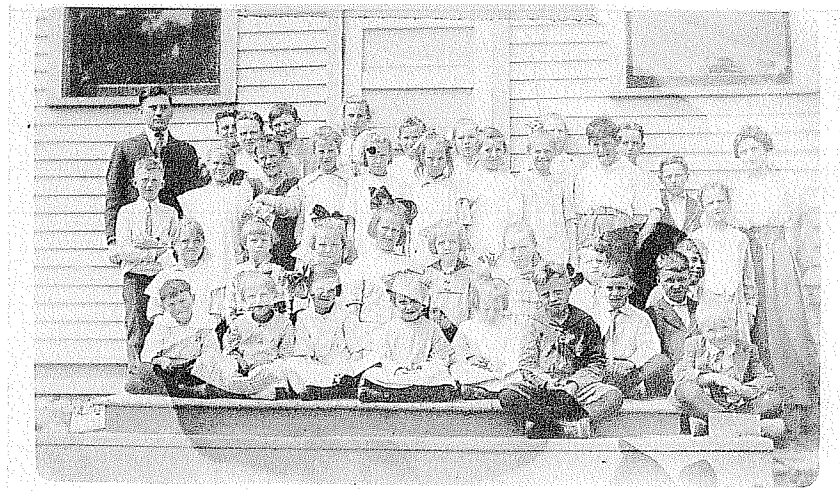
Walter August William Schumann
Confirmation photo



Walter August William Schumann
Seminary graduation photo



Walter and Irma Schumann
Wedding photo



Walter and Irma Schumann with the schoolchildren
St. Paul's, North Fond du Lac, WI