

Medina to Dale, WI.

The Story of the Organization of a Church and its Eventual
Relocation

Senior Church History

Roger A. Grosnick

April 10, 1978

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

The official organization of the village known as Medina, Wisconsin is registered as 1850 when the first post office was established there. Prior to that date however, settlers had been coming to that area for at least ten years. By 1850, when the township of Dale was carved out of the previously existing Hortonia township to the north and Medina officially organized, there were already a large number of farmers and trappers living there with their families. (Originally Medina had been known as Young's Corners, after one of the first settlers)

It is commonly thought that the first church in the Dale-Medina area was organized under the leadership of the Wisconsin Synod Lutheran, Pastor Gottlieb Fachtmann. This however does not seem to be completely true. It is true that the first Lutheran church in this area was organized in 1859 by Pastor Fachtmann, but Outagamie County records show that as early as November, 1849 religious services and instruction were conducted there by a Reverend John Rinehart.¹

Little is known about Reverend Rinehart other than that he was a pioneer preacher who moved (for what reason we do not know) from Ohio to the Medina area of Wisconsin. His particular religious affiliation is not known, although it seems fairly certain that he was of Reformed or some

sort of evangelical^{background,} since the people of the Medina area were primarily of Pennsylvania Dutch background (at least the earliest settlers) and it is doubtful that they would have accepted a man whose beliefs were too far distant from their own. Although over the years much has been forgotten about this first clergyman to come to the pioneer settlement of Medina, he is remembered as having been well received by the residents and was acknowledged by them as their spiritual leader. Reverend Rinehart (who made his residence in Medina) is credited as being instrumental in the development of the settlement through his preaching and teaching and religious influence.

The first church organization of any kind then was begun by a man of Reformed background. In 1853 Rinehart left Medina for a church^{which} some believe^{was} in the western part of Wisconsin. Little is known of Rinehart after this point, and there^{is} little known about the church organization in Medina between the years 1853 and 1858 when the Lutheran church was organized there by Pastor Fachtmann. It is uncertain, but the early organization of a Reformed body as the sole church in that area could be a reason for the later ties which the Reformed and Lutheran churches had there.

In 1858-59, when Pastor Fachtmann organized St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Medina, both groups made use of the same meeting place for their services (at first a school just south of the present village and then a church directly

south of the present Union Cemetery).² One can see several possible reasons for this cooperation. First, it was just more economically and practically feasible since both groups were made up of settlers who^{were} limited in their resources. Since wealth was not a commodity that was present in any great abundance in those days, the most reasonable solution to the problem at hand was to share the resources available. And since sharing seems to have been a commonplace and necessary means of^{existence} in pioneer life, it would only be natural for these people to come to the conclusion that a joint effort at acquiring and maintaining a place of worship made the most sense. Tied to this was the realization that the small number of people which each group represented made it a fiscal necessity to join forces to establish a meeting place, at least at the beginning.

Another reason is more speculative than the above mentioned factors; however, it seems to this writer that the seed sown from the earlier association with the Reformed remained. This is not to say that Reformed practices were instituted in or carried over to the Lutheran Church when it was formed; however, the affinity which existed between the people expressed itself in a desire to maintain an association between the two groups which was realized in the sharing of the same house of worship.

From 1859 (when St. Paul's Lutheran Church was

organized) to 1888 the Reformed and Lutheran groups continued to share the same place of worship.³ It was in 1888 that the Reformed Church decided to move their church to Dale, selling their interest in the church building in Medina to St. Paul's Lutheran Church. From this point to the present the two groups have had their own houses of worship independent of each other. Any affinity which may have existed between the two groups has disappeared since the separation.

But what caused the Reformed to relocate in 1888? It would be profitable to look into some of the reasons behind that move since later some of these same reasons would play a part in the decision of St. Paul's also to relocate in Dale, but for them not until 1908.

By 1888 many settlers had moved into the area. As the area became more inhabited, it naturally followed that the number of people belonging to the churches also grew until the old church building was no longer large enough to meet the needs of the two groups. The Reformed, as we have said, were the first to decide that a move would best serve the needs of their growing congregation.

Other factors seem to have been equal in prominence to the former, in the minds of those people. When the township of Dale was organized in 1850, Medina was also organized as the first and only official town in the immediate area (the nearest town, Hortonville, was one German mile - $4\frac{1}{2}$ of ours - away).⁴ As the first official settlement of the township, Medina began to grow and prosper.

A post office was established in 1850, at the same time the town was organized, and this helped to make Medina more of an important center to the community right from the start. A statement from the Appleton Crescent of 1868 calls Medina "the outstanding settlement of Outagamie County." ⁵ The village continued to grow. In 1872 the Central Wisconsin railroad (the present Soo Line) was built through Dale (the neighboring settlement two miles to the west) but the depot was established just south of Medina.

The year 1872 was the beginning of the end of the prosperity and prominence which Medina had enjoyed for nearly a quarter of a century. Although Medina did have the railroad depot to its credit, it was inevitable that it would not stay forever since the line was built directly through Dale.

The railroad was only an evidence of a further problem which Medina was experiencing. Medina was growing and doing well during this period, but while Medina was growing Dale was growing faster. Therefore, it came as no great surprise when the railroad announced in 1876 that it was moving its depot into Dale. Now Dale had both the railroad and depot while Medina was left out in cold, as it were. As a result of the railroad coming through, Dale began to increase in size while the population of Medina remained the same.

The motivation behind the Reformed Church's decision to relocate was then primarily the thriving and growing condition of Dale over against the increasingly stagnating

condition of Medina.

In 1888, St. Paul's also considered relocation to Dale for the very same reasons as mentioned in reference to the Reformed Church. St. Paul's, however, decided against the move at that time since they had just acquired the sole ownership of the Medina church as a result of the move of Reformed group and subsequent sale of their share in that building.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church remained and prospered at its location across from the Union Cemetery. Everything was going well at that location, and they probably would have never moved unless nature had interceded in 1908 forcing the decision which had been delayed for twenty years.

May 11, 1908, was a milestone in the history of the St. Paul's congregation. A cyclone and windstorm moving through the area struck the church, tore down the steeple, moved the church partially from the foundation and completely destroyed the wagon shed. This brought the long debated issue as to whether or not the church should be moved to Dale, to a climax,.... Now with the partial destruction of the church, the matter was settled. In the minutes of that meeting in May the secretary wrote as follows: "It was moved and seconded that since the rebuilding of the church at Medina would cost \$1350, while the moving and building in Dale would be only \$2049.24, and since there is more opportunity for growth in Dale than in Medina, that therefore we relocate our church and rebuild in Dale." 6

The motion passed by a majority vote and the relocation process was begun. Five months later the new St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Dale, Wisconsin was dedicated on September 27, 1908. 7

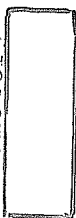
Although the immediate motivation for the relocation was the result of a natural disaster, the advantages of a growing community played at least an equal role in helping those people make the final decision. Therefore the Lutheran church of the Dale - Medina area which its beginnings as a pioneer church sharing the local school house with the Reformed Church finally had its own new church in a new town.

To Hortonville



St. Paul's Lutheran Church today

Union Cemetery



DALE

Present Railroad Depot

First Dale-Medina Church

MEDINA

To Appleton

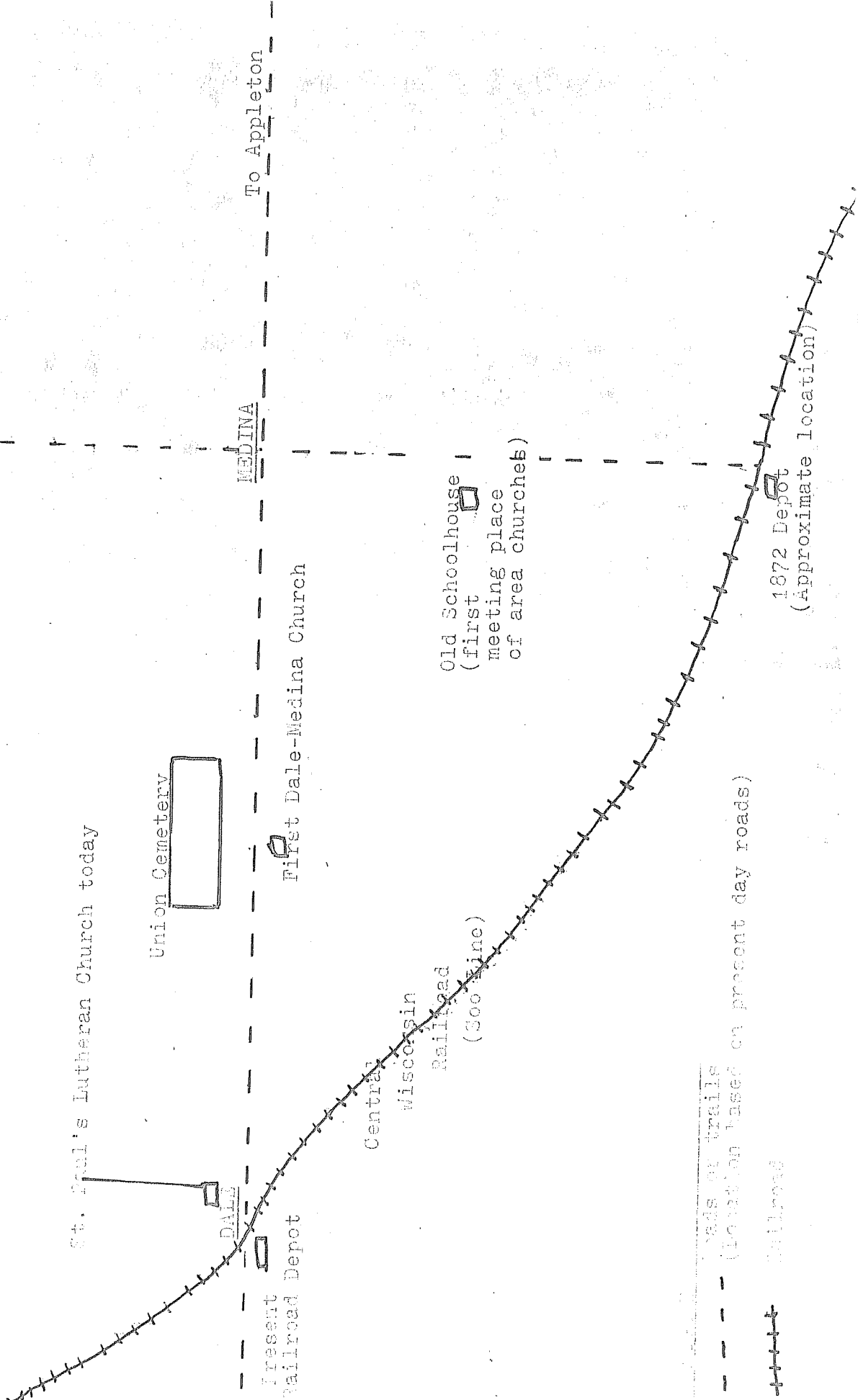
Central Wisconsin Railroad (See Line)

Old Schoolhouse (first meeting place of area churches)

1872 Depot (Approximate location)

--- Roads or trails (Location based on present day roads)

--- Railroad



NOTES

- 1 , A History of Outagamie County Wisconsin, (Appleton, WI; Outagamie Historical Society, No date), p 1333.
- 2 , The Appleton Post - Crescent, "Copper was Discovered near Dale in 1868," by Mrs. Weid Zehner, Dec. 21, 1953.
- 3 , The Appleton Post - Crescent, "First settlers came to Dale over trails made by Indians," July 16, 1923
- 4 , "100 Years in Christ," (Centennial Booklet published by St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Dale, Wis., 1959), 4th page.
- 5 , The Appleton Crescent, September 27, 1868.
- 6 , "100 Years in Christ", 9th page.
- 7 , "100 Years in Christ," 9th page.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Besides the references listed above, which were invaluable in the writing of this paper, it was my privilege, through conversations with several members of St. Paul's congregation and residents of the Dale area, to acquire special insights into the history of that church - particularly in regard to the Reformed affiliation. Special thanks, therefore, must be given to Mr. Adolph Selle, Mr. Walter Selle, Mrs. Walter Grosnick and my father, Mr. Erwin Grosnick, along with several others who have expressed the desire to remain anonymous, without whose help this paper could not have been written.