

MISSION ZEAL OF THE INFANT WISCONSIN SYNOD, 1850-1893

Senior Church History

Professor Fredrich

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prepared by

Eric Hartzell

Complimentary remarks concerning the early mission work of the Wisconsin Synod are few and far between. Perhaps there is some justification for this. There were, to be sure, no rancy, flashy mission happenings within the Synod in its early years. The Apache Missions in 1893 mark the beginning of self-supported, self-undertaken mission work on a foreign scale. (Even this undertaking hardly fell into the "rancy, flashy" mission category.) Perhaps it is because our eyes search for the sensational that we fail to see what really was present. There definitely was real mission work and mission awareness present in the adolescent Wisconsin Synod. It didn't make it big in the history books, but it was very much a part of the Synod's history, nevertheless. The mission story of the early Wisconsin Synod is an interesting story. It tells us that although our forefathers in faith may not have been rancy or flashy, they really did reel and live the Lord's command to spread the Gospel in all the world.

Before beginning a discussion of the Wisconsin Synod's mission work from its beginning in 1850 until the Apache Mission in 1893, one fact should be established. The Wisconsin Synod was itself a mission at its start. Its pastors came from German missionary societies, notably those at Langenberg and Barmen. The majority of any financial support came from Germany. It is understandable then that the over-

riding concern in the early Wisconsin Synod was the training of its own pastors and teachers. That was a costly, time-consuming, manpower-consuming aspiration, but all knew from the start that only if this was accomplished could the Wisconsin Synod ever really prosper and succeed in the work of spreading the Gospel. (If we keep in mind the Synod's early status as a mission, we will not be so quick to point out its every fault and lack with regard to its own mission work.)

Even though this desire to establish a synodical independence syphoned off a great deal of the already meager resources, mission work was done both at home and abroad from the very start. Although the various evidences of mission concern will be dealt with in greater length, they are summarized in the following manifestation of mission work: the work of the "Reisepredigt"; the support of the Immigrant Mission in Castle Garden, New York and others like it; large contributions sent to Theodore Harms in Hermannsburg; concern shown for work among the Jews; aid and contribution for the Missouri Synod's work among the Negroes of the South; the reports of many mission festivals among the home congregations; and the abundance of mission related articles found in the "Gemeindeblatt."

Pastor G. Fachtmann is an excellent example of a missionary. He arrived from Germany in the summer of 1857 and was assigned the Richmond and Town Polk congregations in Washington County.¹

He was not content to just serve these congregations, however. Koehler mentions it was characteristic in the early development of the Synod, "that the congregations at new locations were not gathered by ministers but that the people themselves banded together in order to procure preachers and teachers."²

Fachtmann became aware of these pastorless groups. In October of 1857 he hiked from Milwaukee to Sheboygan via Port Washington. He continued on to Calumet, Chilton, and Fond du Lac. From Fond du Lac he proceeded up the Wolf and Rat Rivers to Menasha, Neenah, Hortonville, and Berlin. The following year, in 1858, he concentrated in the Beaver Dam, Horicon, Columbus area but continued also to visit his former circuit of congregations. In 1859 he was called by the vacant La Crosse congregation. Using this as a home base, he proceeded to establish an extensive preaching circuit both on the Minnesota and Wisconsin sides. His ambition and drive eventually carried him to St. Paul and to the presidency of the Minnesota Synod.

Fachtmann was an independent missionary going wherever he saw an opening to preach. His work had not been initiated by the Synod, although they did endorse it and authorize its continuance in 1858. Pastor Fachtmann proved without any doubt that he was wonderfully suited to be our Synod's traveling missionary, and he was adopted as such. It was at this same time that Streissguth was planning a trip to Germany to solicit further help from the mission societies for this work of

"Reisepredigt".³ Not all members within the Synod, however, were satisfied with this arrangement. Koehler wrote from Manitowac on July 24, 1859, "I do not believe that a missionary employed by a unionistic society can work in agreement with a Lutheran synod. And then I hold that the missionary-at-large certainly must be in the employ of our Synod. Otherwise harm to our Lutheran Synod might easily grow out of it..."⁴

Session 7 of the Synodical Proceedings of 1860 marks the inception of our own "Reisepredigt". It was resolved that the president and the senior of the Synod set the matter of the "Reisepredigt" into motion. Although the "Reisepredigt" was now officially our own work, the mission societies of Langenberg and Berlin each promised \$200.00 a year support for this work. In addition, they supplied our first "Reiseprediger". He was Pastor Mohldehnke, a man already ordained and ready for the work. In 1863 he set up home base in the town of Germany near Ft. Atkinson. From there he served Whitewater, Waupun (both the city and the prison), Almond, Stevenspoint, Wausau, Stettin, Berlin, Green Bay, Kewaunee, Carlton, Forestville, Sandy Bay, Algoma, Portage City, Lewistown, Caledonia, and the vacant Synod congregations of Theresa, Lomira, Fond du Lac, Forrest, and Eldorado. (See b in appended material.). In that year, 14 new congregations were founded and a total of 22 served by the "Reiseprediger". In 1864 there were 23 stations served. Sunday schools and reading services were set up where-

ever possible. Seventy children were baptized. Seventy-nine adults were communed.

In 1865 President Reim stated that the work of our "Reiseprediger" had to be temporarily curtailed. "Reiseprediger" Mohldehnke became Professor Mohldehnke at our seminary at Watertown. It was more pressing that he serve there. The work was really not picked up again in earnest for 15 years. During those 15 years the refrain rings out time and again in the Proceedings that we had no man we could spare from our already overworked pastorate. There was some shuffling done to try and cover the work. President Streissguth in 1867 relieved Pastor Thiele of his duties in Ripon to function as our "Reiseprediger". In President Streissguth's words, "I don't know of another field within our activity in which the work is so pressing, the fruits so rewarding, and the success so obvious as this of the "Reisepredigt". The more an organization pursues and professes to have pure teaching, the more zealously she should strive to keep her companions in the faith in the correct faith, and the more inexcusable and incomprehensible is her neglecting of such a lofty demand of love and Samaritan service to her companions in the faith." ⁵ Pastor Thiele's service lasted just a short while, and he was called to fill a vacancy in Racine. There just were no men. Students were already pegged before they graduated. In 1872 students Bergholz, Althof, and Hodtwalker were eyed up by the authorities

to fill the gap in the Peshtigo area---if they passed their exams! It is understandable why the "Reisepredigt" had to wait. We were not able to supply pastors to churches we already had. However regrettable it may have been, it would have been folly to search out yet more pastorless groups of Christians.

During this period of relative inactivity in the "Reisepredigt" there was an interesting interlude. A Pastor C. Dreves from Hannover offered his services to our Synod as "Reiseprediger". We were interested in Indian work already at this time. That interest had been aroused in part by a Pastor Matter from the Iowa Synod who related his Synod's experience with the Indians. That work had been forced to a stop by the bitter feelings the Indians had toward all white people because of the exploitation and avarice of a few. Dreves' assignment was to traverse the span of the Pacific Railroad and learn as much about Indians as he could to help us later in our hopeful endeavor. As a sideline he would offer his services as pastor to any German Lutherans he found along the way. Bad news followed the next year. President Bading's terse statement was, "The Indian mission and 'Reisepredigt' was short-lived."⁶ Dreves had gone west to California. He concentrated on the Germans there. He reported war conditions and a hopeless situation for mission work among the Indians. (Wounded Knee was not until 1890, this was 1877!) The work among the Californians was not supported. The feeling was that work in California at this time

would be spreading our resources too thin. We weren't coming close to meeting all of our obligations at home.

In 1879 Pastor Mayerhoff was put in charge of the "Reisepredigt". Under his able leadership the effort began once more to prosper. A Pastor Hillemann was asked to go to the Dakotas, but the effort was given up because of prohibitive traveling costs. Watertown, S.D. was momentarily turned over to our counterparts in the Minnesota Synod. This policy of our Synod to stay close to home and establish a firm base is expressed clearly by President Bading in 1883. He maintained, "The pressing opportunity the Lord has given us is known. Every year thousands upon thousands of our people and brothers in faith spread out over the parts of this land in a mighty stream. Most settle down far from Lutheran congregations. Filled with their preoccupation for physical advancement, they neglect their spiritual needs. We have a holy and important mission and work to fulfill among these people which we will not be able to finish in our whole lives. The more zealously we strive to fulfill this mission, the more we will be working in the spirit of Luther and the more we will be following the admonition of the Apostle, 'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially unto them which are of the household of faith.'"

The work of "Reisepredigt" continued to grow during the 80's. In late 1883 Pastor Monhardt took up the post of

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"Reisepredigt". In the 1884 Synodical Proceedings he was able to record that in about six months time, he had served each one of his 17 stations in the upper peninsula of Michigan at least once a month, some twice. He had traveled 3012 miles by train, 508 miles by coach and wagon, 175 miles on foot, 102 miles on boat. He had baptized 24 children, confirmed 10, married 7 couples, and had one burial.⁸ In his 1885 report, Pastor Monhardt gave his opinion of the Synod's traveling mission work. "It is very spread out, but if we had the strength to do the work, new areas could be taken on. We should exert ourselves so that the sects and the raise brethern do not beat us to^{the} work." He adds, "This expansion of our work must happen without neglecting our present obligation."⁹ By 1889 the Synod's work of "Reisepredigt" was carried on in the areas shown on the map. (See c in appended material.) Strictly speaking the "Reisepredigt" was not foreign mission work. (This fact was recognized by the Synod in 1877 when the motion to take the funds for the "Reisepredigt" from "Heidenmission" was voted down. The people were not to be misled when they gave money they thought was going to a foreign field.) Yet in the 1860's, a trip to Minnesota or Michigan offered more terrors than any foreign mission field today with the exception perhaps of places in South America. Virgin forest still covered the land. The best roads were corduroy, and there were few of them. Huge swarms of mosquitoes

had never seen a white man before and happily welcomed the change of provender. President Bading recalled one of his trips. He tells of wading across streams chest deep to find a way to get his horse across safely. As late as 1885 in the Escanaba area of upper Michigan, our "Reiseprediger" met with conditions which sound like Mark Twain's description of gold-rush California. There was a potpourri of races present---Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Irish, English, Indians (equipped with bows and arrows), Indian-French halfbreeds. The report in the Synodical Proceedings also mentions the "Bier" and "Schnapshallen" and the kind of life revolving around such places in mining camps. These areas in which we worked as an early Synod were not foreign in our sense of the word, but they were just as challenging and hard to reach and serve as our foreign fields today.

The work of "Reisepredigt" was strenuous, taxing work. It was mission work. The men who carried it out were missionaries who faced monumental hardship to preach the Gospel. They left us some modest reports of their activities. Pastor Monhardt tells how easy it was to lose the way in Michigan forests and have to proceed for miles over a tangled mass of fallen trees. In summer, travel was often undertaken on foot with only a blazing sun and a backpack for company. In winter, travel was by horse and sleigh. On the trip from Escanaba to Fayette it was common for

travelers to have to be carried into the halfway house because they were so cold. The 60 miles to Manistique were often covered in temperatures of -40 degrees. The roads were wilderness roads through uninhabited country punctuated only occasionally by lone Indian wigwams. The sleigh drivers were always armed because of the wolves. A woodchopper was reduced to scattered bones just a quarter of a mile from his camp, and a parishioner spent the night in a tree surrounded by 20 wolves. Railroad travel was hard too. Trains derailed because of the snow. One time everyone was forced to climb on the engine and complete the journey on it. Everyone made it to the station safely with the exception of some who had been forced to sit on the cowcatcher. They had frozen ears, but that was understandable. It was -44 degrees!!¹⁰ Pastor Johannes Ziebell in 1888 wrote the hair raising report of his trip on the ice to Fayette to visit a dying man. The ice on Lake Michigan was 5" thick and because it was so much closer he went that way as travelers did in winter. The ice was clear. He could see the water under the horses hoofs. He came to cracks in the ice over which he would make his horse jump. As the sleigh passed over, the ice would crack and crash into the water behind him. (He mentioned the presence of goose bumps. We understand.) On his return trip the next morning, he got lost and had to return the 14 miles back to Fayette.

A snowstorm came that night and covered up the cracks and consequently made any hopes of a safe return on the ice out of the question. In order to get back to Escanaba to preach, he had to make an 81 mile trip over snowy terrain. He left at 9 A.M. in the morning and arrived in Escanaba at 11:45 P.M. At 7 A.M. the next morning he was on his way in a blinding snowstorm to preach at Ford River. It was 8 miles there and 8 miles back again. ¹¹ Such was the life of our "Reiseprediger". Who would dare to throw stones at their missionary zeal?!

A second expression of mission awareness in our Synod was the support of the Immigrant Mission in Castle Garden, New York. Initially there were many immigrant missions. In the very first year of the "Gemeindeblatt" (Oct. 1, 1865) mention is made of a contribution to the Immigrant Mission in New York. In 1867 Pastor Ebert laid the matter of the Immigrant Mission upon the hearts of those in attendance at the mission festival of Sheboygan, Mosel, and Centerville. In this same year President Streissguth appealed to the Synod to support the Immigrant Mission of Pennsylvania and New York.

It was in the early 1870's that the Synodical Conference took over the work of the Immigrant Mission. Our funds then supported this venture. In April 15, 1872 the "Gemeindeblatt" ran the following article, "Unsere Emigranten Mission."

The article stressed the Immigrant Mission to be our mission, not only because it worked for us but because it worked according to our spirit. The work of the Immigrant Mission was to aid the poor, the defenseless, the ignorant, and the naive who suffered at the hands of frauds and quacks on the docks of New York. The Immigrant Mission helped the immigrants physically, but it also pointed to their more pressing need, their spiritual care. It helped reestablish confessional Lutherans from the old country with confessional Lutheran congregations in the new. The names of solid Lutheran pastors and congregations were given to the departing emigrants. The Immigrant Mission was also a valuable aid in directing pastors from Germany to their new wilderness churches. Many of our early pastors came by this route. It was a sophisticated operation having connections in points of departure in Germany. A man by the name of Zieger, who had himself gone through the Immigrant Mission in Castle Garden, was sent back to Bremen to provide both physical and spiritual guidance for the departing. 144 Russians from Odessa were happy to be directed by him to services in Bremen.¹² The Immigrant Mission was also a strong mission arm. In 1885, at about the time the flow of immigrants was slowing down, the report was that during the year 2600 Synod Calendars had been distributed, 5000 tracts, about 6000 of the "Lutheran Kinderblatt", plus a large number of Canadian

Lutheran magazines, "Lutheran Volksblatt" and "Lutheran Anzeiger".

Real foreign mission work in the strict sense of the word was carried on by others whom we supported. There is an acknowledgement in the May 1, 1866 "Gemeindeblatt" of a small gift to Hermannsburg. At this same time we were closely tied to the mission societies of Langenberg and Berlin. That relationship, however, was dissolved by unionism in 1868. Our hope for future pastors and for a foreign mission operation to support lay in Theodore Harms at Hermannsburg. We promised him our foreign mission money; he promised us pastors. In 1869 he reported having received \$300.00 from our Synod, in 1870 it was \$466.00, and in 1872 \$564.00. In this way our mission money was channeled into the work in India, Australia, South Africa. He received our mission money every year from 1869-1875. In 1876 this contribution was cut off to support our own man Dreves on his Indian mission venture. As was said before, this effort never materialized. After the mission project of Dreves was given up, this part of the Synod's contributions was kept within the Synod. A committee was set up to look for some foreign mission work we could support. The foreign mission fund was borrowed from to help support our educational facilities. During the last part of the 1880's some of this money also went for the support of students Flocher and Adascheck and later Mayerhoff who were studying to be mission-

aries at Northwestern.

There was yet a third way in which a feeling for missions was manifested. In March 15, 1873 in the "Gemeindeblatt" a Pastor J.F.N. Wolf in Jackson City, Michigan points up a mission concern of early Lutherans which we seem to have neglected today. In his article, "A Word Concerning the Jewish Mission," he stressed the need for work among the Jews of the world as well as among the Gentiles. In this article he related cases of Jews who had been converted to Christianity. He also maintained Jews had to be approached differently with the Gospel than other prospects. The approach had to be one that strove to get behind the barrier they had erected against Christianity from their childhood. The "Gemeindeblatt" reveals an interest in the Jews by now and then including an article which related something about the Jewish situation in the world. Evidently the writers and readers of the "Gemeindeblatt" were interested in knowing something about the Jews. The following information, for instance, is given in the March 1, 1868 "Gemeindeblatt". There were supposedly 20,000 converted Jews on the European mainland, more than 3000 in England. Of those in England, 100 were officials in the church. Mention was also made of 28 converted Jewish professors on the faculty of the University of Berlin. The May 15, 1885 edition has a short report on the Lutheran Jewish Mission in New York. The

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August 15, 1886 issue contains an estimate of Jewish population in various countries throughout the world. The total number of Jews in the world was estimated at 6,300,000. There was more than just a casual interest in the Jews. The "Juden" Mission became an object of Synod support from 1873 on through the 1893 date. Acknowledgement of contributions can be seen in both the "Gemeindeblatt" and the Synodical Proceedings.

It was in 1878 the Synodical Conference met in Fort Wayne and decided to begin work among the Negroes in the South. The work actually began by the Missouri Synod in that same year. Our Synodical Proceedings record a contribution in that first year of \$100.00. In 1886 the sum came to \$229.05. We contributed regularly through the 1893 date. By 1886 there were three established congregations in the Negro missions---New Orleans, Little Rock, and Meherrin, Va. In 1886 the report to the Synodical Conference, which was included in our Proceedings, was that if the church in New Orleans had access to the same funds that the sects did, they could drive the sectarian churches from New Orleans in short order. Success was especially great among the youth. Schools had more applications than they could handle. There were 215 souls in the Negro missions, 112 communicants, 30 had been baptized that year. There were in addition 363 children in the parochial schools and 305 in the Sunday schools.

Perhaps the very best indication that mission work was a real interest and concern of our forefathers is brought out in the mission festival. The custom of mission festivals was brought over from Germany. "B" in his article in the "Gemeindeblatt", "Our Mission Festivals," says, "Mission festivals are celebrated among us not because God commands them but because we are driven to it by our love to the heathen and our thankfulness to God."¹⁵ Even in the very early history of our Synod, a number of mission festivals were celebrated. Maybe this isn't strange in view of the fact that a number of our early pastors had been missionaries in foreign countries before coming here. Pastor Ungroth in Jefferson spent 12 years in South Africa. The mission work there was dear to his heart. He was a favorite speaker at mission festivals even after his health made it necessary for him to give up the ministry. Pastor Liefeld had also come here from South Africa in 1866. The town of Morrison called a Pastor C. Roeck from India. In 1885 at the mission festival of St. Paul's in Forrest, Wisconsin, Pastor Martin Denniger preached on his personal mission experiences. Pastor Denniger had been a missionary in Borneo until the work there was wiped out by a blood bath. From there he had gone to Nias on the coast of Sumatra.¹⁶ It was natural for these men to have informed their people of the work being carried on in other parts of the world.

Mission festivals were big occasions in these early rural congregations. A good example of one of these occurrences would be the gathering in Oshkosh on the 8th Sunday after Trinity, 1874. The congregations from Fond du Lac, Nikime, Ripon, and Neenah, along with Trinity of the Missouri Synod, celebrated their mission festival in the woods of an American farmer by the name of Smith. Pastor Strassen from Watertown preached on Acts 4:1-20. He pointed out that the statement, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard," holds true today. After the offering and the singing of some hymns by the congregation, Pastor Neumann preached on the withered fig tree---Mark 11:13-23. Dinner followed, and when it was over, the people sang again before the next sermon. Pastor Gensicke preached on the good Samaritan. His thoughts were that Christians must have an open eye for the spiritual needs of the heathen and the backsliden Christian; Christians must have a sympathetic heart which can't bear to pass up the need; and Christians must have an open hand to give that God's Kingdom may be built. Pastor Hoops from Nikime closed the day on Matt. 9:35-38's description of the ripe field of missions. He quoted the statistics that at that time there were 600 million heathen and only 200 million Christians in the world. How necessary for us to speak! The total collection for the day was \$211.40.¹⁷ This is not the only instance of a mission festival. The yellowed pages of

the "Gemeindeblatt" contain many, many such reports. (The October 1, 1886 number of the "Gemeindeblatt" alone records 14 mission festivals!)

The basic reason for mission festivals in our early history was the same as our reason for mission festivals today. It is true that then there was the added social attraction of a get-together which has lost some of its attraction today, but the basic appeal and message was the same. The sermon themes and parts sound surprisingly contemporary. At the 1867 Sheboygan, Mosel, and Centerville mission festival, Pastor Kluge showed from Rom. 10:11-17 the correct way to carry on mission work, the means, and the goal. Pastor Ungroth's closing remarks, based on Isaiah 35, pointed toward heathen mission work, especially among the Namaquas and Bushmen of Africa. On the 9th Sunday after Trinity, 1870, at Farmington, Pastor Ungroth preached on the South African missions where he had been. Pastor Gensicke preached on Acts 4:12. His theme---"There is salvation in none other." The parts were 1) Do you believe that?, 2) What does your faith accomplish for mission? The August 1, 1872 "Gemeindeblatt" records Pastor Schneider's appeal for the suffering, needy Blacks in Africa ("soweit dieselber bekannt sind"), especially in light of their recent slavery.

The report of the mission festival usually contained the amount of the contribution given. The following quotes from

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Koehler provide us with some idea of the setting in which these contributions were given. "The first Germans faced hard work in establishing their homesteads and clearing them of the encumbrances, physical and financial. Cash money was a rare article.... During the whole time of the immigration tide from Germany, up to the 90's, the German farmers in America were mortgaged to the hilt during the arduous years of clearing their land, and after that they slaved again as long to clear the acquired property of the mortgage." ¹⁸ With that in mind some of the mission festival contributions take on added significance. The following are some of the contributions listed in the "Gemeindeblatt": Oct. 1, 1865, Fort Madison, Lee County Iowa Mission Festival---\$65.00 total; Aug. 1, 1870, congregations of Sheboygan, Centerville, Town Hermann, and Mosel at Sheboygan---\$77.17 total; Aug. 15, 1870, Jefferson, Hellenville, and Farmington at Farmington---\$115.07 total; Oct. 15, 1885, St. John's Ridgeville---\$58.00 total; Sept. 1, 1886, St. Paul's, Forrest---\$33.60 total (Pastor E. MaCyerhorf writes that the \$33.60 was \$10.00 less than the previous year due to extensive hail and drought in the area.); Sept. 15, 1886, Cedarburg, Granville at Kirchhayn---\$122.00 total.

From the very first the "Gemeindeblatt" carried articles of mission interest. There were of course the reports on mission work affiliated in some way to our Synod. There were

also, however, reports and articles on mission work carried on by others. These articles spanned a wide range of interest in the field of missions. In all likelihood our forefathers were better informed on the general progress and history of Christian mission work in the world than we are. A sketchy listing of some of the articles will perhaps make the point. In the Jan. 15, 1867 "Gemeindeblatt" the work of the London Mission Society among the Papuas of Australia was described. Jan. 1, 1868 brought an article, "Eighteen Years in Eastern India." It was the story of a missionary who had worked there. May 15, 1868 ran an article describing Abyssynia and mission attempts there. The yearly mission reports of Hermannsburg, Leipzig, and other mission societies were regularly printed. The Dec. 1, 1869 issue tells of hopes in the Hermannsburg Mission to do work among the Chinese in California. Aug. 15, 1869 describes work among the Cherokees, Choctaws, Dakotas, Omahas, and Creeks in this country. Nov. 1, 1872 brings the story of Franz Heinrich Kleinschmidt, a missionary in South Africa. Four issues in 1873 were devoted to the Lutheran mission in India. In the 1880's "Heiden und Heidenchristen" became a regular feature of the "Gemeindeblatt". A whole host of mission fields were reported on at length in this series of articles---Madagascar, New Zealand, India, Greenland, the Sandwich Islands, Tahiti, and China to name some.

The chance to speak with the fathers of the Wisconsin

Synod about mission work has passed. Their voices have ceased forever, but some of their words and thoughts still remain. They did not leave us extensive witness to their feelings nor complete answers to our questions. Were our pastors concerned about mission work? Certainly some of the evidence given so far proves they were, at least some of them. Professor Ernst preached on I Pet. 2:9 at a mission festival in Burlington in 1871. His thoughts on that day were that even if we are not missionaries or preachers, we have the obligation to carry out mission work. We do that by supporting those who can go with God's Word in our places. Professor Ernst's admonition was to give! Give that these people have no justifiable grounds to accuse us of being stingy in our support of the great work of the Lord. Perhaps this feeling of Professor Ernst is reflected in his happy report on Jan. 1, 1872 in the "Gemeindeblatt". "A student at Northwestern, a Norwegian, who has already completed several years of theological training, wants to dedicate himself to be a missionary to the heathen world, probably to the island of Madagascar." Were our forefathers concerned about mission work? In July 1, 1884 "B" in "Unsere Missionsfeste" claims that the many instances of mission festivals were proof that mission awareness had not died out. He proceeded with words which sound so familiar even to an attender of mission festivals today: "The one who has found the true God is happy even in the greatest misfortune, but

there are so many millions of people who don't know God. Are we going to calmly look on as these people all come to eternal grief while we have the means to save them laid into our hands by God and the command we should bring it to them? Are we going to excuse ourselves and say we can't take part in foreign mission work because we have too much to do in our own country? Is this excuse going to hold water before God? Pray God that He increase our faith and love and also that He open doors for us through which we can penetrate into the broad dark world of the heathen with our mission work."

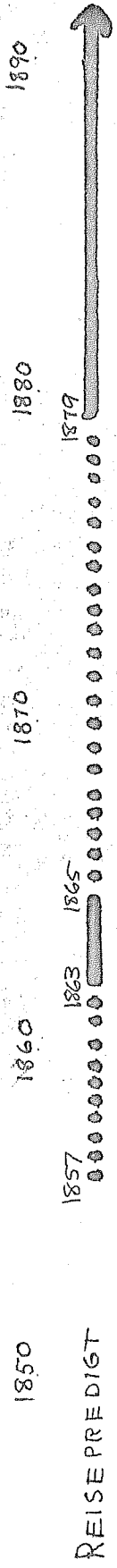
Our forefathers were not afraid to ask themselves and their constituents penetrating, searching questions concerning their mission efforts. They were not unaware of failings nor were they above self-criticism. Pastor T. Gensicke aired some very pointed and maybe painful questions. In Nov. 15, 1871 he wrote an article entitled, "Why is there so little interest for the expansion of God's Kingdom?" His question is, "Why does it happen that in our Lutheran congregations so much unconcern prevails for mission work?" He puts his finger on the eternal reason for nonchalance in this matter when he says that people aren't concerned about mission work because they really haven't tasted and seen for themselves how wonderful the Lord is. In the following year, Jan. 15, 1872, this same man wrote, "Why should we help expand God's Kingdom?" He answered his own question in three basic ways: one, there

is the crying need both to save people from the sects and enthusiasts in this country and to save the heathen from the prince of darkness in other countries; two, we help spread God's Kingdom because we are thankful for what He did for us and our forerathers who were heathen of the rankest sort; and three, we help spread God's Kingdom because the Lord Himself commanded us to do it. In Sept. 15, 1874 in the article "Innere Mission" the statement is made; "If you aren't involved in missions as you should be, then you don't fully appreciate the happiness and blessedness you yourself possess in the Word and Sacrament. You haven't, therefore, seen the need of your brother and sister and taken it to heart. Gather eternal riches in the forms of men's souls!" Pastor Gensicke asks the question of the readers of the "Gemeindeblatt", "Can we then ever be allowed to say, 'What responsibility do we have to those unknown people who live so far away?'" This same sort of questioning is carried on in July 15, 1887 by the article entitled "Is the command of our Lord, 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every living creature,' also given to us, or is this command completely fulfilled and thus negated?" The author refutes the saying that was evidently floating around at that time, "What would result only in drops in a foreign country, produces bucketsful at home." God wants each one of us to do His work until every soul in the whole world has heard the Gospel. That was this writer's conviction.

These few quotes dispel any feeling that all our early pastors were content and satisfied with our mission work as a Synod. They realized that not enough was being done. They yearned to be doing more. Their words certainly show that. That brings us once more to the question, "Why was there so little mission work done in the early Wisconsin Synod?" It has been the object of this paper to show that there was mission work done in those early years. It has also been attempted to find valid, justifiable reasons why dedicated, mission-minded men did not accomplish more.

As stated at the beginning, the establishment of pastor and teacher training facilities was of over-riding concern and importance to the early Wisconsin Synod. Who can say what kind of mission program would have been in existence if there had not been this terrible drain on the synodical system. The fact remains that however much the early pastors wished to do mission work and however much we would have liked to see them do mission work, they were working under severe limitations. Some of the limitations have been discussed already. In closing, the following information is given to the as yet unconvinced critic. In the 1880 Synodical Proceedings on page 70, this little bit of information is written: "In outstanding debts and notes on our institutions we owe a total of \$18,825.00. In addition we have borrowed \$837.91 from the mission treasury. The total debt is \$19,662.91."

The salary of a "Reiseprediger" in 1886 was \$300.00 a year. The ratio of \$300.00 to \$20,000.00 compared to a comparable pastor's salary today would give a sum of about half a million dollars as the debt owed in terms of money today. In order for this to be a truly comparable figure, the half a million dollars must be multiplied by the number of times larger the Wisconsin Synod is today than it was in 1880. If these figures will be allowed to stand, then the Wisconsin Synod of 1880 was laboring under a load of millions of dollars in our money. In view of just that fact alone who would dare or care to ask why there was not more flashy mission endeavor?



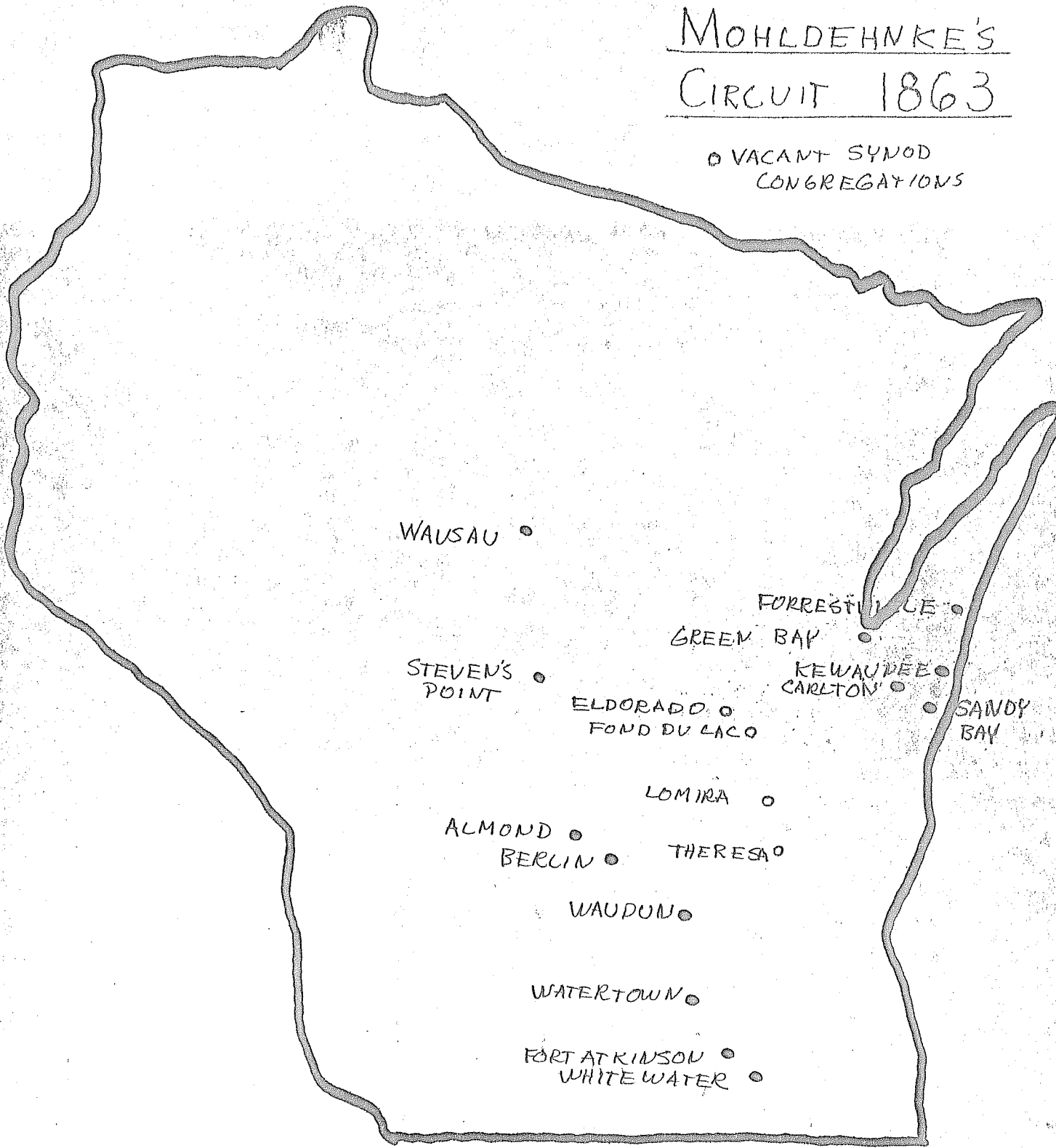
KEY ○○○○○○ CONTRIBUTIONS RECORDED — OFFICIAL SYNOD SUPPORT

WISCONSIN SYNOD MISSION SUPPORT AND ACTIVITY 1850-92

* REPRESENTS FOREIGN MISSION CONTRIBUTIONS BY SYNOD

MOHLDEHNKE'S
CIRCUIT 1863

○ VACANT SYNOD
CONGREGATIONS



WAUSAU ○

STEVEN'S
POINT ○

ELDORADO ○
FOND DU LAC

ALMOND ○
BERLIN ○

WAUDUN ○

WATER TOWN ○

FORT ATKINSON ○
WHITE WATER ○

LOMIRA ○

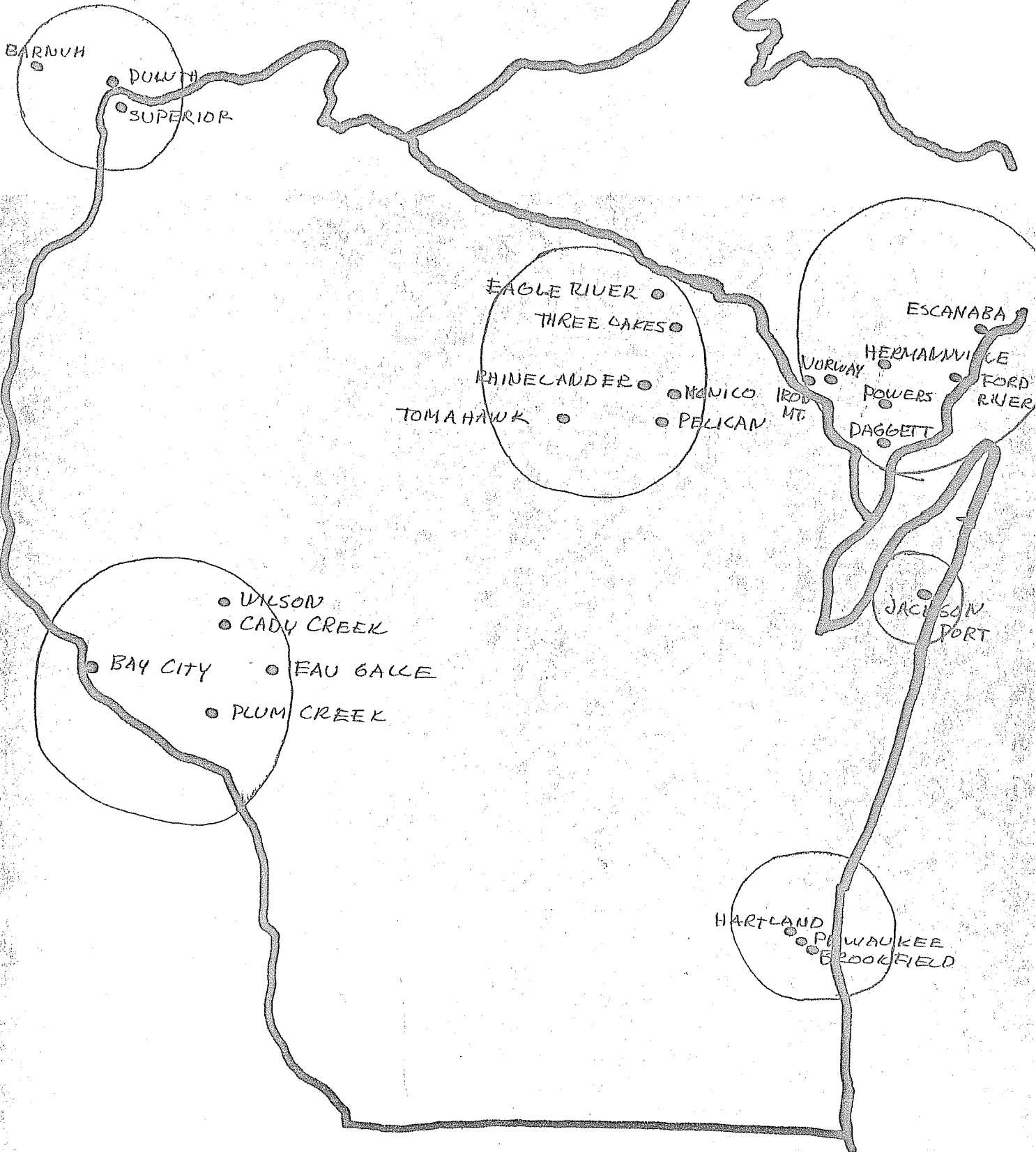
THERESA ○

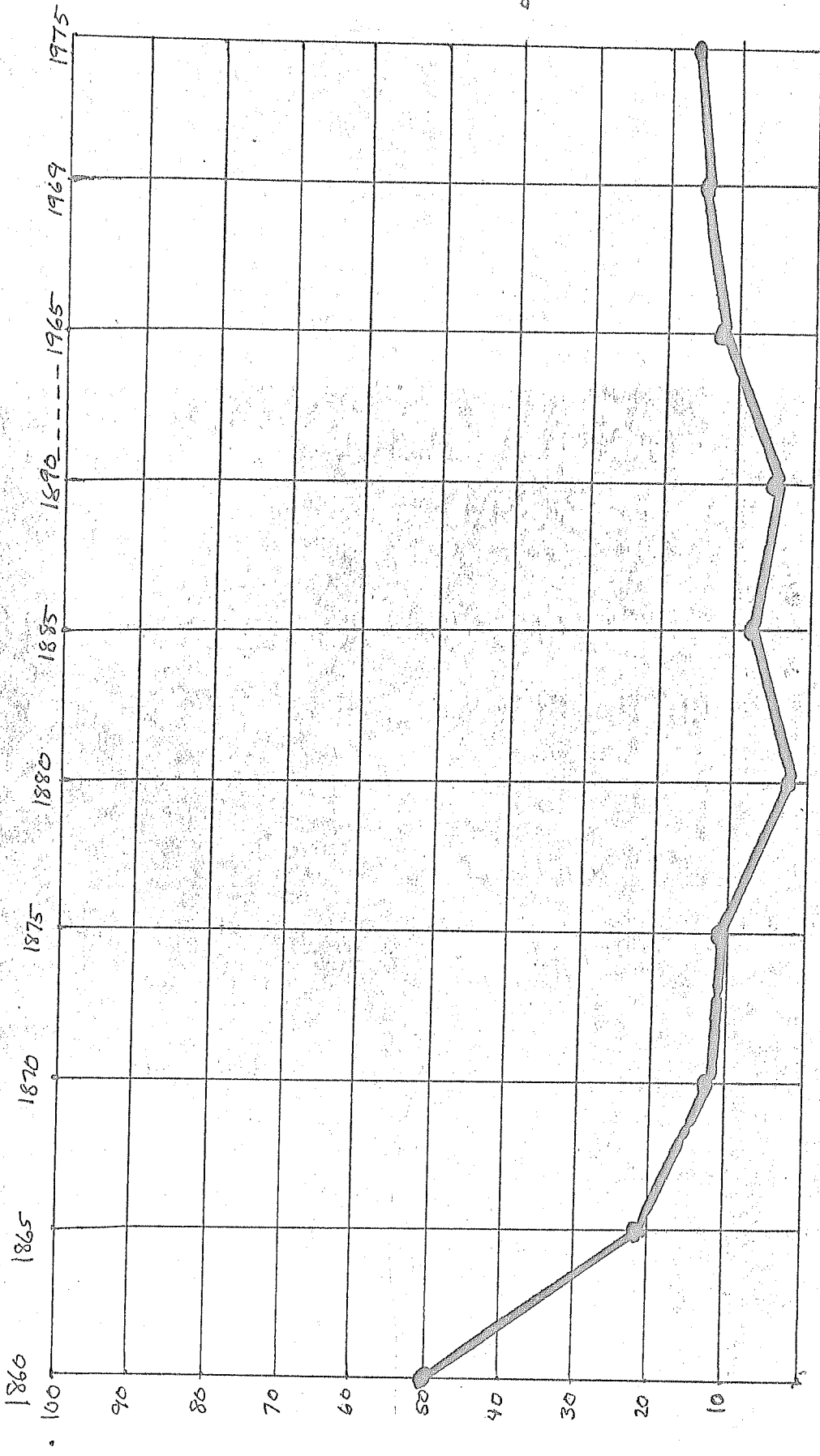
FORRESTVILLE ○
GREEN BAY ○

KEWAUNEE ○
CARLTON ○

SANDY
BAY ○

REISEPREDIGT ——— 1889





1860 - 50% - \$181.06
 1865 - 22% - \$585.54
 1870 - 13% - \$478.42
 1875 - 11% - \$505.86
 1880 - 3% - \$228.72
 1885 - 7% - \$507.71
 1890 - 5% - \$517.77
 1965 - 13% - \$460,717.12
 1969 - 14% - \$689,739.00
 1975 - 16% - \$1,205,427.00

FOREIGN MISSION % FROM TOTAL INCOME

Footnotes:

- 1) John Phillip Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod (St. Cloud, Minnesota: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970), p. 53.
- 2) Ibid., p. 64.
- 3) Ibid., p. 63.
- 4) Ibid.
- 5) Synodal Bericht, 1862, p. 9.
- 6) Ibid., 1877, p. 12.
- 7) Ibid., 1883, pp. 13-14.
- 8) Ibid., 1884, p. 54.
- 9) Gemeindeblatt, "Bericht ueber unsre Reisesmission" (Mar. 1, 1885), pp. 101-102.
- 10) Ibid.
- 11) Ibid., "Aus dem Gebiete der Reisepredigt in Obermichigan" (Feb. 1, 1888), pp. 85-86.
- 12) Ibid., (May 15, 1874), p. 7.
- 13) Ibid., "Unsere Emigrantenmission Im Jahre 1884" (Feb. 15, 1885), p. 92.
- 14) Ibid., "Bericht ueber die Negermission" (July 1, 1886), pp. 165-167.
- 15) Ibid., "Unsre Missionsfeste" (July 1, 1884), pp. 167-168.
- 16) Ibid., "Missionsfest" (Sept. 15, 1885), p. 16.
- 17) Ibid., "Missionsfest in Oshkosh" (Aug. 15, 1874), pp. 6-7.
- 18) Koehler, op.cit., p. 66.

Bibliography:

Gemeindeblatt. 1865-1892 (Because of a lack of time, the 1875-1885 editions were not read as thoroughly as the others.)

Koehler, John Phillip. The History of the Wisconsin Synod. St. Cloud, Minnesota: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970.

Synodal Bericht. (All available reports in the 1850-1893 time period)