

**St. John's Evangelical Lutheran  
Church**

**Newburg, Wisconsin**

**A Historical Overview of the First Twenty-five  
Years**

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**Senior Church History Thesis**

**Professor Korthals**

Through the pen of the apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit reminds us, the members of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Newburg, Wisconsin, of our current status before God. "You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Eph. 2:19). We praise the Lord for making us members of God's family and household. Only God could love sinners enough to want us to be part of his household. Only God could express that love by giving his one and only Son to die for us. Only God's love could move a congregation of individuals to live as a family under God for so many years.

1998 marks the 139th anniversary of my home congregation, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Newburg, Wisconsin. For 139 years God has poured out his grace upon St. John's and the community of Newburg through his Word and Sacraments. St. John's is a wonderful blessing. This blessing would not be possible without the faithful handful of believers who relied upon God to help them establish a church in Newburg. We owe our heritage to them. In an effort not to forget this heritage, the following thesis explores the founding and first twenty-five years of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Newburg, Wisconsin.

#### NEWBURG, VILLAGE OF OPPORTUNITY

Barton Salisbury is credited with the founding of the village of Newburg in the spring of 1848, shortly after he had founded the village of Barton (West Bend area). Salisbury engineered the building of the dam and constructed several of the businesses in Newburg. He is credited for building a sawmill, a gristmill, an ashery - for the manufacture of pearl ash out of potash -, and the Webster House, Newburg's first hotel.

During the construction of the Webster House, a rafter gave way while Salisbury was working on the roof. Salisbury fell, fatally injuring himself. He died soon after the fall at the age

of 36.<sup>1</sup> Despite Salisbury's death, Newburg was off to a good start. German immigrants began moving into the area, settling the village and countryside.

### OUR FOUNDING FATHERS

The very beginning of St. John's congregation dates back to 1850. At this time only a few German Lutheran families had settled in the Newburg area. The settlers came first. Their churches followed later. The Lutheran Church was in its infancy in the state of Wisconsin. There was not enough manpower or money to serve all of the scattered settlers. Our own Wisconsin Synod was only just being organized in 1850. False preachers came through the Newburg area from time to time, misleading some of the settlers away from their Lutheran heritage. The Methodists seem to have been the most active of several different denominations working among the Lutheran settlers at this time.<sup>2</sup>

Even though some settlers left their Lutheran faith, a faithful nucleus remained steadfast to the word and could not be enticed away. The German history of St. John's list the names of several settlers who formed this nucleus of believers. These settlers were Johann Bruns, Jacob Bloecher, Michael Geidel, Herman Jahr, Jacob Schmidt, Fredrich Seidemann, Heinrich Wilkens, Carl Merklein, and Johann Fuchs.<sup>3</sup>

In the years prior to the founding of St. John's congregation, these men and their families were not completely without the Word and Sacrament at their disposal. They called on pastors

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<sup>1</sup>"Newburg plans 150th anniversary party", Daily News, West Bend, WI. Wednesday, March 18, 1998.

<sup>2</sup>St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church Centennial Booklet, 1859-1959. p. 3

<sup>3</sup>Pastor Hoyer, "History of the Ev. Lutheran, St. Johannes Congregation of Newburgh, Washington Co. Wis." Pastor Hoyer, Aug. 13, 1887, p.1.

from Milwaukee to serve them now and then. Services were held infrequently with large intervals of time between them. Pastor Kluegel served the Lutherans in the town of Farmington meeting at the home of Mr. Geidel. Pastor Dietrich served the Lutherans in Newburg and the town of Saukville holding services at the schoolhouse in Newburg.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE BIRTH OF ST. JOHN'S CONGREGATION

By the late 1850's the Wisconsin Synod began efforts to send out traveling missionaries in the hope of finding places to found congregations. Pastor J. H. Roell carried out one such mission effort. In 1858, Pastor Roell came from Port Richmond, New Jersey, where he had held a pastorate. Dr. Pohlmann, president of the New York Synod recommended him to the Wisconsin Synod.<sup>5</sup> He was soon accepted into the Wisconsin Synod and stationed at Port Washington, Wisconsin for only a very brief time. From Port Washington, Roell moved west into the Washington County area. Also in 1858, we know he organized three congregations, Emmanuel, town of Trenton, St. John's in West Bend, and St. Peter's, town of Addison. All three of these congregations were formally accepted into the membership of the Wisconsin Synod at the Synod convention held in Racine, Wisconsin, June 18-24, 1859.<sup>6</sup> In the proceedings of this same convention, Roell is listed as residing in West Bend, serving seven congregations with a combined communicant membership of 487.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Pastor Petermann, "A Short History of the Ev. Luth. St. John's Congregation at Newburg, Wash. Co. Wis." Aug. 29, 1926, p.1.

<sup>5</sup>"The History of the Wisconsin Synod", J.P. Koelher, Sentinel Printing Company, Sauk Rapids, Minn. 1981, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup>Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1859, p.15.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, p.11.

Due to the close proximity of Pastor Roell's ministry, the Lutherans in Newburg came under his influence. On April 2, 1859, the Lutherans of Newburg and the immediate vicinity organized their own congregation. The official name of the congregation was the "Deutsche Evangelische Lutherische St. Johannis-Gemeinde." The first elders elected were Johann Bruns, Carl Merklein, and Johann Fuchs. The Articles of Incorporation are recorded in the courthouse of Washington county, West Bend, in Vol. A., Record of Religious Societies, on page 37 and 38.<sup>8</sup> In the following year 1860, St. John's was accepted into the membership of the Wisconsin Synod at the Synod convention held in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.<sup>9</sup> In the proceedings of this same convention, Roell is listed as residing in Richfield, Wisconsin, serving five congregations with a combined communicant membership of 378.

1860 turned out to be a busy year for the new congregation in Newburg. The decision to build a church was first on the agenda. Pastor Hoyer in his German History reflects upon the economic position of the congregation as a whole. "They were still poor in earthly goods, but God gave them believing and willing hearts. This gift from God (the building of a church) did more to build his kingdom than money and goods."<sup>10</sup> Relying upon the Lord, the members of St. John's went forward with their building project. Five members were elected to the building committee: J. Bruns, H. Wilkens, H. Jahr, Jacob Bloecher, and Gottfried Zinke.

The decision to buy land came next. Two lots were purchased for \$150.00 from Simon H. Van der Cook, in the Van der Cook Addition to the Village of Newburg. The deed to this

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<sup>8</sup>St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church Centennial Booklet, 1859-1959, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1860, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>Pastor Hoyer, "History of the Ev. Luth., St. Johannes Cong. of Newburg, Wash., Co. WI, Aug. 13, 1887, p. 2.

land contained some interesting provisions.

Provided always, that said lot shall be used only for the purpose of erecting thereon a Church and such buildings requirable for the congregation of said society. Provided also, that said Trustees and their successors in office shall have no power of selling said lots or part thereof, neither to lease them, nor the buildings which shall hereafter be erected thereon, without the consent of each and every one and singular member of said society, so that a veto of one member shall make such sale or lease null and void. And if said society shall be dissolved, then said lots and the buildings thereon shall belong to the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and adjoining States, and for that purpose only to be used by any other society of the same name and kind.<sup>11</sup>

On June 20, 1862, the Wisconsin Synod issued a document relinquishing all its rights under the provisions of this deed.<sup>12</sup>

With all the preparations in order, building began on these two lots. The corner stone was laid on June 18, 1861. On this special occasion, Pastor Muehlhaeuser, former president of the Wisconsin Synod, and Pastor Meumann were on hand to partake in the festivities. A detailed summary of the days events, including a detailed list of all the items deposited in the corner stone are available in Appendix A. It is interesting to note the commentary on the state of the nation concerning the Civil War. There is also special concern over the severe drought, which was effecting the area and would effect the economic position of this agricultural congregation.

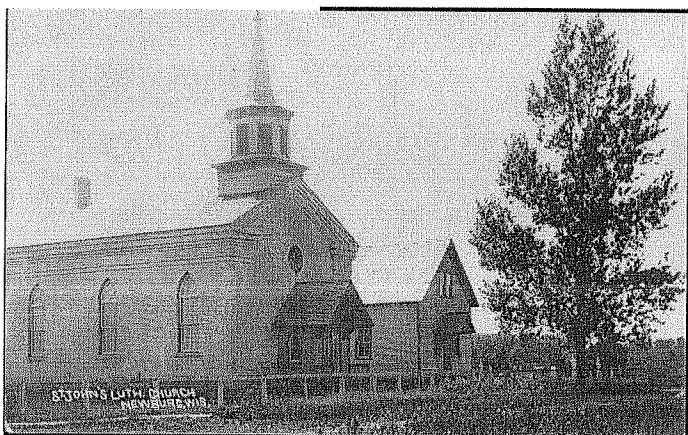
The church building proper measured 32x44x20 feet. The outside structure was not fully completed until January 1, 1862. The congregation started using the building for worship at this time even without inside furnishings. During the spring and summer of this year an altar, a pulpit, a baptismal font, and pews were obtained for the church. A formal dedication of the church was then held on August 13, 1862. Pastor Philip Koelher and Pastor Jacob Conrad

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<sup>11</sup>St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church Centennial Booklet, 1859-1959, p.4.

assisted Pastor Roell at the dedication. Pastor Koelher preached a German sermon, followed by Pastor Conrad preaching an English sermon.<sup>13</sup>

This first church building served the congregation for sixty-four years. According to the congregation's records and various histories the building cost was \$2,200.00. However, this seems to be a discrepancy. There are four receipts concerning the payment of this first church. All these receipts which read "on payment of church contract" were signed by T. E. Van der Cook totaling \$5,097.26.<sup>14</sup> There is nothing in the history records that might suggest any animosity over this discrepancy.



**Picture of the First Church  
Building with the Second Schoolhouse.**

Unfortunately, a "heavy jolt", as Pastor Petermann puts it in his history, hit the congregation in the following year of 1863. It became known that Pastor Roell was leading "an immoral life". Most of what is recorded about the situation only focuses on Roell's sin against the Sixth Commandment. But the complete charge against Roell concerned two matters, his marriage problems and the embezzlement of \$100.00. These charges are contained in a letter from the Church council in West Bend to Pastor Reim, August 24, 1863. This information was obtained from old German

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid, p.5.

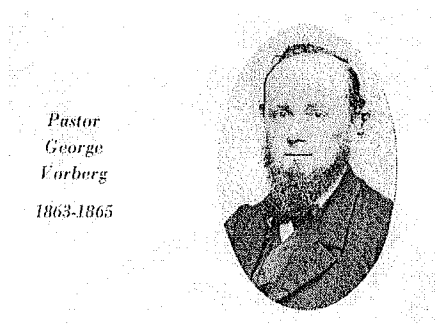
<sup>13</sup>Pastor Hoyer, "History of the Ev. Luth., St. Johannes Cong. of Newburg, Wash. Co. WI." Aug. 13, 1887, p.2.

<sup>14</sup>St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church Centennial Booklet, 1859-1959, p.5.

letters collected by J. P. Koehler previously found in the NWC Archives and compiled for our congregation by Arnold Lehmann. According to Lehmann's letter of August 5, 1987, Roell was sent to jail for embezzlement. Roell's marriage problems are more difficult to figure out.

Lehmann thinks that the woman at the center of this controversy was Louise Roell, the widow of Pastor Roell's brother. Pastor Roell maintained his innocence throughout the rest of his life. All the various congregations being served by Roell relieved him of his call and he was expelled from the Wisconsin Synod.<sup>15</sup> According to Pastor Hoyer's German history President Bading in 1883 received a letter from a Pastor Holke, in which Bading was advised that Pastor Roell repented of his sin on his deathbed.

#### THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA



Many things changed after the departure of Pastor Roell. There was a small falling out among the membership resulting in some members leaving the congregation. God provided St. John's with a faithful servant in the person of Pastor G. Vorberg. He was installed as the Pastor of St. John's, Newburg, on December 22, 1863. Pastor Vorberg lived in West Bend as Pastor Roell did and served four different congregations with a total of 262 communicant members.<sup>16</sup>

For whatever reason Pastor Roell was not an effective record keeper. In fact, most of the records were missing when Pastor Vorberg arrived. The congregational meeting minutes from Roell's entire era were taken in his own German shorthand. For the most part, they are

<sup>15</sup>Arnold O. Lehmann, Personal Letter, August 5, 1987.

<sup>16</sup>Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1864, p.9.



unintelligible. Pastor Vorberg was very much the opposite of Roell on the matter of keeping records. One of his first official acts was to purchase a church record book.<sup>17</sup> He is credited with introducing a system of keeping records concerning all official acts of the congregation, such as baptisms, confirmation, communion, marriages, and burials. Pastor Vorberg also recorded of all these same acts which had taken place under Pastor Roell and had not been recorded by him. At the February 1, 1864 congregational meeting, Pastor Vorberg advised an addition to the constitution that the pastor's salary is given voluntarily. No mention is made as to how much this salary was to be. This motion was carried and the old by-laws were burned.<sup>18</sup>

#### FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

After two years of ministry at St. John's congregation, Pastor Vorberg received and accepted a call to St. Matthew's congregation in Milwaukee, WI. Pastor Vorberg was well liked and missed by St. John's. In his departure, Pastor Vorberg recommended Pastor Carl Gausewitz of Port Washington to be the next pastor of his various congregations. The West Bend congregations and St. John's promptly called Gausewitz as their next pastor.

#### **Picture of Pastor Carl Gausewitz 1865-1872**

Pastor Gausewitz began his ministry on the last Thursday of 1865. His pastorate lasted for six and quarter years. The minutes to the congregational meetings held by him are said to only contain routine regular business, but this fact can not be checked for the minutes are unobtainable. Pastor Gausewitz lived in West Bend like his predecessors and served only three different congregations with a total of 525




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<sup>17</sup>St. John's Congregational Meeting Minutes, 29 Nov. 1863.

<sup>18</sup>St. John's Congregational Meeting Minutes, 1 Feb. 1864.

communicant members.<sup>19</sup> The men listed as serving on his church council were G. Becker, Herman Kratzsch, Heinrich Wilkens, J. D. Bruns, George Neuholz, John Schaefer, Herman Jahr, Friedrich Seidemann, Jacob Bloecher, Ch. Kelk, and F. W. Pose. Pastor Gauswitz received a call in 1872 to the Lutheran congregation in the Town of Herman, Dodge Co., which he accepted.<sup>20</sup>

After a vacancy of three months, St. John's was blessed with their fourth pastor, Ernst Mayerhoff. Pastor Gausewitz came back to install Pastor Mayerhoff as his successor on the 11th Sunday after Trinity, 1872. Pastor Mayerhoff also lived in West Bend. In the 1878 Synod proceedings, Pastor Mayerhoff reported that he was serving three congregations with a total of 525 communicant members.<sup>21</sup> **Picture of Pastor Mayerhoff 1872-1883**



During Pastor Mayerhoff's ministry the congregation acquired several noteworthy items. In 1874 the congregation purchased a bell from the John Stuckstede & Bro. Foundry of St. Louis, Mo., at the cost of \$320.90. Jacob Bloecher is mentioned as the person most involved with purchasing the bell. The bell was installed in the church during the week of December 14, 1874. Five years later the bell cracked and the congregation sent it back to the foundry to be recast. The cost of recasting was \$38.53. The Frauenverein (Ladies Aid) covered this cost.<sup>22</sup> As it turns out this was money well spent. Since its recasting in 1880, the bell has served our church for 118 years.

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<sup>19</sup>Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1866, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup>St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church Centennial Booklet, 1859-1959, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup>Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1878, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup>St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church Centennial Booklet, 1859-1959, p. 7.

The next major purchase of St. John's congregation under Pastor Mayerhoff was the church cemetery. In 1882, Traugott Seidemann purchased one acre of land lying northwest of the church property and adjacent to it for the sum total of \$125.00. The minutes to the congregational meeting of February 17, 1882 states exactly how the new cemetery was to be operated and maintained. The method of burial was as follows: graves should be made in rows in the order in which deaths occur, there should be separate rows for adults and children. There is also a note in the margin of the page explaining that it was later decided that married persons could reserve a grave next to the deceased spouse. The cemetery was fenced in with 75 fence posts and 1500 fence boards.<sup>23</sup>

The last major item purchased during the pastorate of Mayerhoff was a church organ. The full cost of the organ, together with a Choralbook, and a book of interludes was \$118.06. The Ladies Aid also volunteered to cover the full cost. Mrs. D. Poggenburg is credited with practicing the melodies of several church hymns with the members, succeeding in improving the singing of the congregation.<sup>24</sup>

In the fall of 1883, Pastor Mayerhoff received and accepted a call to Forest, Wisconsin, near Fond du Lac. To fill the vacancy St. John's and the congregations in West Bend called Pastor Hoyer from Platville, Wisconsin. Pastor Hoyer accepted the call. He was installed on the 24th Sunday after Trinity, 1883. Pastor Hoyer lived in West Bend and served St. John's from there. He reported to the Synod in 1884 that he was serving two congregations at this time with

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<sup>23</sup>St. John's Congregational Meeting Minutes, 17 Feb. 1882.

<sup>24</sup>St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church Centennial Booklet, 1859-1959, p. 8.

at total of 763 communicant members.<sup>25</sup> 1884 marks the dissolving of Emmanuel Congregation, Town of Trenton. Most of its membership joined St. John's Congregation, West Bend.<sup>26</sup>

Up to this time all the confirmation classes were being held in the church. Two winters



*Pastor Eduard Hoyer*  
1883 - 1920

stand out as the exception, when Herman Koenig and Dietrich Poggenburg opened up their homes for the conducting of confirmation classes. Apparently, the congregation was having problems heating the church during the classes. At the January 8, 1884, congregational meeting it was decided to purchase a wood-burning stove for the specific use of the confirmation classroom. It was also further resolved that the next summer a new school was to be built.<sup>27</sup> This new

schoolhouse was completed in the fall of 1884 at the cost of \$219.88. The school was to be used for confirmation instruction and Sunday school. Students taught the following three years school in July and August in the German language from our colleges.<sup>28</sup>

This concludes the history of the founding and first twenty-five years of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Newburg, Wisconsin. Throughout these twenty-five years St. John's did not have a resident pastor and was served by pastors from the West Bend area. St. John's did not become self-supporting until 1904. Since our congregation's early pastors were serving several congregations at the same time, their work time was limited traveling from place

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<sup>25</sup>Wisconsin Synod Proceedings, 1884, p. 69.

<sup>26</sup>"The First One Hundred Years", St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church, West Bend, WI, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup>St. John's Congregational Meeting Minutes, 8 Jan. 1884.

<sup>28</sup>St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church Centennial Booklet, 1859-1959, p. 8.

to place. The maintaining of records and history during this era belonged solely to the pastor. Considering this factor, we can understand why there are some gaps in the written history.

The pages of this history thesis retell the beginning years of St. John's Congregation, as we know it. There were several bumps and even a pothole or two in the road along the way. Today, each member of St. John's can thank God for protecting and preserving our founding fathers as they established this congregation. Through their efforts, God has blessed us today with a confessional congregation that clings to God's Word and Sacrament. We are confident that God will continue to pour out upon us his grace through our Savior, Jesus Christ. God grant us all the blessings, both spiritual and physical, that we need as a congregation and as individuals. We leave the future in the Lord's hands.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Special thanks to Clarence Bretschneider, who helped with the translating of several German sources for this thesis.

APPENDIX A

In the name of the highly praised Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That future generations may know that today, as on the 18th day of June in the year of grace, 1861, the corner-stone of this church was laid. The church carries this name; German Evangelical Lutheran St. John's Church of the unchanged Augsburg Confession. The celebration of the corner-stone laying started in the forenoon at 11:00. After singing of the hymn, "Gott, Vater aller Dinge Grund", Pastor Dr. Meumann, h.t. pastor in Addison gave the opening address on Isaiah 28:16. After this Pastor Mulhauser from Milwaukee performed the act of laying the corner-stone, and Pastor Roell closed with prayer and blessing.

Elders of the congregation at this time were Johann Diedrich Bruns, Heinrich Wilkens, Carl Marklein, Friedrich Fritsche, Johann Jost Petri, and Jacob Blocher. The builder was F. E. Vander Cook. Belonging to the building committee were John D. Bruns, H. Wilkens, H. Yahr, F. Zinke, and J. Blocher.

Items deposited in the corner-stone are:

1. This same record.
2. The title to the church property.
3. Record of mortgage release.
4. Congregation's act of incorporation.
5. A synodical report of Wisconsin Synod of the year 1858, as also the constitution of the congregation.
6. A copy of the Lutheran Herald of June 1, 1861.
7. A copy of the English county paper.
8. A 10 cent, a 5 cent, and a 1 cent piece.

The president of the United States at this time is Abraham Lincoln. At this time the North is at war with the South. May God, the Ruler, so conclude this civil war, that it may further His kingdom, and may He grant victory to this just cause. A severe drought prevailed at this time, and we pray to God for a blessed harvest.

To all those who may read this in the future, grace and peace in Christ Jesus.

John Mulhauser  
Senior of Synod and Pastor of  
Grace Ev. Luth. Church in Milwaukee

J. H. Roell, local Pastor  
Dr. of Phil.  
Theo. Meumann, Pastor at Addison

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