

WEST GRANDVILLE-  
AN INFANT CHURCH LACKING GUIDANCE

SUBJECT MATTER: A history of the first 13 years of Salem congregation, in an attempt to understand how a Presbyterian church spun off from a Evangelical Lutheran Church.

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\*OUTLINE\*

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Today, March 1978, when we look at our WELS and its congregations we can be impressed by its confessional unity and strength. This was not always so. Today when we look at Salem congregation we see a church under a faithful Shepherd, Pastor W.B. Nommensen. He is a man with a constant awareness of the heart and core of the Bible, that is the proper distinction between law and gospel. We see Salem's school also enjoying good leadership and growth as it has for over twenty years under the capable guidance of Gerald Berger. But we recognize the real strength, the real leadership of Salem today lies in the seed that was planted by the Pastor and teachers, <sup>and</sup> has now sprung up into trees that bear good fruit. The laity at Salem are today involved in every aspect of the Church's ministry. This strength and leadership has not always been at Salem. The early story of Salem is not altogether a happy story in that they did not always do God's Will, because they did not know God's Will. Still it is a happy story to see the struggle in those infant years and how God in His Grace lead them to a higher plateau of Lutheran confession-  
alism.

This paper will deal with the time period between the founding of the church in 1847, up till November 25, 1860, when the official church records take notice of the fact that the reformed minded people from the midst had organized their own church. ~~The purpose had organized their own church.~~ The purpose of writing this paper is not to deflate some people's notion that their church, their synod could do no wrong, could never be confessionally shaky. The purpose is to show how God in His Grace had taken

very weak kneed and confessionally shaky people and built of them His Church.

This church was uniquely made up of Germans from two distinct backgrounds and cultures. One group was first generation immigrants from Germany. The other group was second and third generation Germans from Pennsylvania. Koehler<sup>p. 40</sup>, mentions this group to be larger. To understand each of their different backgrounds is to understand why this church would need strong and steady leadership.

The Germans came to America because of conditions at home. The political liberalism was spreading throughout Europe in the wake of the American and French Revolutions. But for many people in Europe, changes were too slow and too painful in coming. It was with longing eyes that they looked to America. In Germany the Industrial Revolution was in full swing and individual craftsman could not compete with the English, while farmers could not keep up. So instead of fighting it they used its steamboats to come to America.

The third condition in Germany that enabled them to leave was that the State Church's hold on them had been broken. The State Church had been strongly infiltrated with pietism. Pietism broke the hold of orthodoxy. It produced an attitude and disposition which minimized doctrinal differences between churches which were not Catholic, and stressed the unity of religious experience. Now people did not have to remain in German to be served by a pastor. Anyone who wasn't a Catholic and was pious would do.

Now once the people had cause to leave Germany and come to

America, they became constantly exposed to articles like W. Dames' entitled, "Wie sieht es in Wisconsin aus?" or K. Kennan's propaganda for the old Wisconsin Central Railroad. The Germans emigrated. This was the background of many Germans who came to Milwaukee and soon settled the outlying districts. Granville Township was just such an outlying district just 5 miles North West of Milwaukee, with just such a people.

The other group in the congregation came from Pennsylvania. They were led by Samuel Wambold and his wife. Samuel died on July 12, 1849 at the age of 40, only a few days after he had seen the church he helped build dedicated. But the Wambold name is everywhere in Salem's early records. Besides Samuel we have the signatures of Elias, Harvey and Abraham Wambold on the constitution of West Granville's new church. There also appears in the one communion registration of 1849 these additional Wambolds. Shabrina, Elisabeth, Susanna, Mrs. Samuel Wambold, Hernos Wambold and Frau. These many names of older sons and daughter, husbands and wives seem to indicate that the Pennsylvania delegation was a formidable one.

The Pennsylvania environment for a German was much different. By 1775 Muhlenberg observed that young German people in Philadelphia "gradually become ashamed of the German language and waver between the two (German and English) until the old people are out of the way." Nelson p. 42. In some places a compromise was worked out, the German language was used for religion and English for everything else. English was the principal language and people were made to feel un-English if they did not use it. These second and third generation Germans must have been much more comfortable

with English than with German.

The Pennsylvanian group differed from the first generation immigrants also in that they had been exposed to many more religions than the German Church State religion. They were exposed to: "Lutherans, Reformed, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Catholics, Quakers, Dunkers, Mennonites, Sabbatarians, Seventh-Day Baptists, Separatists, Boehmists, Schwenkfelders, Tuchfelders, Well-wishers, Jews, heathens, etc." Nelson p.29. This exposure without strong confessional leadership would surely lead them to feel comfortable with any church group that came close to their beliefs.

Unionism was in the air in both Pennsylvania and back in Germany when on the 300th Anniversary of the Reformation King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia made up a new word, "Evangelical". Actually the word was old, it now just took on a new meaning. This is mentioned here because this word appears in the first given name of that West Granville church. The meaning our early church fathers understood by 'Evangelical' was not the way we take it now, to mean 'gospel-oriented', 'good news preachers!'. They understood it to convey an umbrellic, unionistic abandonment of Lutheran and Reformed differences. The main difference of course, was in the Lord's Supper. The Evangelical Lutheran minister would no longer say, "Take, eat, this is the true body of our Lord Jesus Christ." Instead the minister would say, "Jesus Christ says 'This is my body'." The effect was to "leave the interpretation of Christ's presence in the sacrament up to the individual believer." Nelson p. 132.

This was the climate in which the Germans and the Pennsylvanians met to start a church. They came from different back-

grounds with different ideas, but they all seemed to have a Christian attitude, one that bows to God's Will. Their basic problem was just knowing what God's Will was.

We can see their confusion on this matter in their founding meeting. It was on Christmas day in 1847 in a house that is still standing and has since been made a historical landmark. The original scrape of paper on which is written the first paragraph to be entered into the church ledger contains the words "Evangelical" and "Lutheran", but not the words 'Reformed'. The name 'Reformed' is also absent from the title of the ledger. The first paragraph as it appears in the church ledger starts, "On the 25th day of December of the year 1847, our Evangelical Lutheran church was founded in Granville Township Milwaukee county, and plans were laid for a new church building." Latter a ~~carot~~ was added and the words "Reformed" were incerted after "Lutheran". This incer<sup>ing</sup> the word "Reform" after the fact also appears in the constitution of the West ~~Granville~~ congregation. It is easy to see it was added latter because it is really just crammed in. The 100 year centennial booklet does not take note that the word Lutheran is in the original title and that Reformed was ~~caroted~~ in latter. In Salem's 110 year celebration booklet they call the congregation, "Die Deutsch-English Ev. Lutherisch und Reforniert Salem's Gemeinde". The original writings of 1847, do not have, 'Salem' or 'English' even in the title. It is my opinion that the congregation was not even called Salem--Peace, until at least the building of the new church in 1863, or even latter.

All this talk about the title was just to show how unsure the congregation was as to their identity. They tried to cover

all the bases. They would have appreciated good strong leadership. This leadership they just didn't have as they had no pastor for the first seven month of their existence. The sixty-three men that signed the original constitution and their families probably worshiped with the help of Luther's Haus Postille as was the custom of those days.

Finally Pastor H.L. Dulitz, a Langenberg missionary who was the pastor at a United congregation between third and fourth streets in Milwaukee was extended a call. For some reason the call was only for six month. Maybe the members were wondering if Pastor Dulitz could handle both churches. Maybe they were leary because he was a pastor of a Lutheran and Reformed congregation and they really considered themselves more "evangelically"lutheran than Reformed. Maybe they had heard of Dulitz's attempts to get into the Missouri Synod and thought if they only called him for a short term, he would be more likely to accept. For whatever reason, they qualified their call and the result was he accepted.

Now here was a pastor that could have provided good spiritual leadership, but he didn't. He was a qualified man who showed his confessional stand by trying to get into the very conservative Missouri Synod through Pastor Keyl of Trinity. It seems from the church records that Pastor Dulitz didn't take his call to West Granville very seriously. He couldn't have been around much. He left no record of Baptisms, Confirmations, Communions, Weddings, or Deaths. But this seems to be indicative of the man. Koehler p. 39 records that since his congregation in Milwaukee was not turning out the way he had hoped, he just up and left for Chicago. This was toward the end of 1848, while he still was theoretically the pastor at West Granville. The Granville



congregation which was desperately in need of a strong confessional unifying spirit, did not get it from Dulitz.

This only left them all the more vulnerable to the next pastor, Paulus Meiss. Actually when this enthusiastic youth started to serve the congregation he was not a pastor. He had been a cobbler in Germany who took the teachers course. In 1846 he was rejected by the Langenberge Mission Society as unable to handle the responsibility involved. Not easily discouraged, he payed his own fare to America and attempted to get in the ranks of the Reformed in New York. Schmidt in New York recommended him to our man Dulitz in Milwaukee to be trained as a pastor. Dulitz agreed, but before Meiss had finished his course of training, the Granville people were willing to accept his services.

What made the Granville people so eager was not as Koehler pointed out, because Meiss ingratiated himself with the congregation (p. 40), but in my opinion, because Dulitz had left Granville high and dry. We should be clear in pointing out that Meiss' errors grew out of Dulitz's failures. There was a leadership vacuum in Dulitz and because of it an enthusiastic, misdirected, youth was about to be turned loose on a weak congregation.

In the twelve months that Pastor Paul Meiss served at Granville he saw the congregation members with the leadership of their founder Samuel Wambold unite and build a log church at a cost of \$108.78. Their attitude was to do God's Will. Pastor Meiss also saw a congregation fall apart right in front of his eyes. The congregation was sharply divided when on March 8, 1849 Pastor Meiss probably as a kick off campaign for the new church held a "revival" and baptised 25 adults.

This was poor leadership to bring matters so abruptly to a

head, even before the congregation had a chance to jointly worship in their new building, enjoy their fellowship, be patiently instructed. Here was a weak congregation and they were shown no Christian concern. If not for this discussing occurrence, given a faithful, concerned, confessional pastor, the problem between the Lutherans and the Reformed in this congregation would never have materialized, even though we had noticed tendencies in their respective backgrounds. It was not long before the strength of the congregation rose up and agreed that they had made an error in calling a preacher who was not ordained and licensed.

For awhile it looked as if Meiss would come around. He attended the organizing meeting of the First German Ev. Lutheran Synod of WI at Grace in Milwaukee on December 8, 1949. On May 26, 1850, Meiss was back at Granville as one of five pastors representing seven congregations. Meiss was working out of Schlesingerville up to West Bend. Then he fell into "disreputable ways". p. 42 Koehler. Pres. Muehlhaeuser wanted to oust him from office. When his congregations pledged to handle the situation, the President demanded an account of Meiss at the next synod meeting. Meiss never showed up, but wrote an "abominable letter" announcing his withdrawal from Synod. He died of yellow fever in the South in 1859.

The Granville congregation after Meiss' exit was in an uproar. By God's Grace Pastor Wrede was called and "contention ceased and the congregation was privileged to hear sound Lutheran doctrine from the pulpit." Centennial booklet. Pastor Wrede apparently provided good strong leadership to the congregation for

two and a half years. That first year, 1850, Wrede carried on an active and faithful ministry working to unite the congregation. 24 infants were baptized, 27 people were confirmed, communion was held 5 times that year with a total attendance of 232 guests. Pastor Wrede married 3 couples and buried 10 people. It is interesting to note that the first wedding Wrede performed in 1850 was on May 14th, which saw Wilhelemine Henschel united to Paulus Meiss. This was Granville's former pastor being married by its present pastor. It is quite evident from these records that Pastor Wrede, although he had three congregations, served Granville well.

Pastor Wrede also served Granville well by helping form "Die erst Deutsch Evang-Lutheran Synode von Wisconsin". He attended the first organizing meeting held in the hall of the Gnaden-Gemeinde in Milwaukee on December 8, 1849. Here he was elected treasurer. At this meeting it was decided that the newly elected President draw up a constitution "in accordance with the confessions" p. 40. Koehler, and present it to the new Synod at their first Synod meeting on May 26, 1850, to be held at Granville. Pastor Wrede did Granville and the Synod a big favor when he remembered the guidance Walther gave him and Rauschenbusch when they first arrived in New York in 1846. Walther quoted them Heb 13:9, "Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings" Walther was trying to safe-guard them against unionism. These words must have been in the back of Wrede's mind because he took a hand in strengthening the confessional stand Article 5 of the new Synod's constitution. This in the very face of opposition from President Muehlhauser who wrote Article 5. We thank him for this and his service to Granville, which lasted until he took the call to

Racine in July of 1853.

Wredes short  $2\frac{1}{2}$  year term of service had seen a disrupted congregation feed and united around the true Word of God. Now came a shift. Pastor Buehre's seven years of service should have stabilized the congregation, but because doctrinal purity was lacking, so was the congregation's unity. Granville's congregation proves again the thinking of the Formula of Concord to be correct that it isn't watering down of doctrine that unites, but purity of doctrine.

The reason to suspect Buehren's doctrinal stand is because he was a former Methodist preacher in Indiana up until 1852, when he applied for membership in the new Synod. It seems doubtful and very unlikely that he would leave all his Methodist attitudes behind. Just the fact that he had been a Methodist minister must have awakened the latent Reformed tendencies we have already noted in the congregation. They probably thought they would get a sympathetic ear and Buehren was caught in a bind.

These were very difficult and trying days. Besides the exact and complete church records concerning baptism, confirmations, communions, weddings and deaths, there are only a couple of notes written about this period. The shortest and the most startling is a one line entree dated Nov. 25, 1860 stating that the Reformed that were with us organized. This note was probably made at a church council meeting because it is not the official organization date given by the Presbyterian Church which in April 9th, 1860.

What cause these people to walk out of the Lutheran church? As we have said the records do not tell us, but it would be wrong to think that there was a Reformed body within the church that now was big enough to go it along. It would also be wrong to think

that it was just one event at one point in time that made them leave. It was not a split so much as it was a one-by one wandering away from the church for one reason or another.

There are members of Salem and others today who think that there were two groups in that first church, a Lutheran and Reformed group. They think that after Pastor Meiss left the church in an uproar, the Reformed and Lutheran factions worshiped seperately in the church. They believe that they worshiped seperately until 1860 when they split over a doctrinal question. This position I find completely untenable.

First of all because the rucous in the church was caused before the church building was even being built, therefore if they did not like the situation they would have left and build their own church then. Secondly, remember when the original constitution was signed a year before the incident even though the Pennsylvanian delegation was in the majority, 'Reformed' wasn't even in the name of the church, just "Evangelical" and "Lutheran". "Reformed" was cramped in latter. Thirdly, Pastor Wrede was too strong confessionally to serve one congregation of Lutherans one hour and another hour a congregation of Reformed. He also was too good a record keeper to not record it if this were the case or if another pastor was serving them or whatever. Fourthly, if they were going to leave over a doctrinal principle they would have left under Wrede, not seven years latter.

It wasn't just one event that caused them to leave. Again, we have no records, but we do have a record of something that might have percipitated a one by one exodus. This one by one exodus the original church membership list would support because the word

"gezogan" dismissed<sup>is</sup> written behind names with both pen and pencil in different hands.

This event happened in the year that Muehlhouser sent Buehre to La Crosse, 1856, to preach and raise money for land acquisition there. This event was a series of six motions passed by the Granville church council at their Jan. 21 meeting. We would have to label these motions high-handed and legalistic. The first motion was that no one can be a member who doesn't contribute from one to five dollars to the church treasure a year. And right on the heels of this motion, to really put the squeeze on people they said #2. no one can receive Holy Communion if not a congregation member. The list of motions doesn't stop. They also had to #3. provide vittles #4. make all their contributions on time. #5. No one can remain a member unless they also provide for the maintenance of the church. To insure that the people didn't get away with anything they passed #6. which states that communicants have to announce ahead of time so that the church council would have time to prepare to see if they could take communion or not.

It is not really all that surprising that the congregation only celebrated the Lord's Supper two times that year and only once the next year. But we have to be shocked that then, for three years up until 1861, we have no record of communion even taking place at Granville. What kind of a pastor would legalistically take away the means of Grace, to cause the Sacrament to cease in his congregation? Here is an example of not only poor leadership, but no Lutheran leadership at all.

There was also poor leadership in accommodation the people in the congregation that were more at home with English than German.

The West Granville Presbyterian Church remembers this as a reason in their leaving, although we have no record of this d<sup>e</sup>scontentment. The Germans viewed the use of English in much the same way people today view the use of new English translations, a giving in to liberalism. Good leadership and instruction is required today, and it was required then. Because they never got it, twenty-nine people went looking else<sup>~</sup>where. A committee representing the Presbytery of Milwaukee met with them on April 9, 1860, in the home of Mr. R. Wason. They organized a new church, and elected Mr. Mahlon Keeler, an original member of Granville who never was "gezogen", as their first elder, and called the church West Granville Presbyterian Church.

In addition to these points of contention they also must have been personality clashes. Maybe they didn't like being ~~COM-~~manded by an "Evangelical" church, a "Lutheran" church to produce such and such an amount of good works. Maybe they didn't like communion wielded as a sledge hammer or held out as a reward. Maybe they didn't like being told they couldn't praise their God in their every day tongue.

Whatever it was it surely can not be labeled "doctrinal" reasons to make us come out smelling like a rose. We didn't give them the warmth of the gospel, so they had a longing for the "fleshpots of Egypt", a superficial warmth they had observed in the Reformed bodies, and that is where they went.

In 1863 the congregation was growing again, and had built a new house of worship under the leadership of Pastor J. H. Sieker, the first full-time resident pastor. Today this church does not have a very long name, but a name that fits this congregation to a

tee. This church is now called-----SALM-----PEACE.

This story teaches us about the word 'Grace. It is pure Grace that we enjoy the blessings of doctrinal purity. It is pure Grace that in our difficult seasons, God has always after showing our weakness, revealed his strength. Thank you Heavenly Father for your Patience and Grace.