

THE CHURCH ON THE HILL
1861 - 1872

A Study of the Early History
of St. Paul's, Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin,
That Led to Membership in the Wisconsin Synod

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INTRODUCTION

"A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." (Mt. 5:14)

When I made one of my first shut-in calls during my vicar year at St. Paul's in Fort Atkinson, the old gentleman I was talking to kept referring to the "Hill Church". It certainly wasn't the last time I heard St. Paul's called "The Church on the Hill". These words appear on the church letterhead and have come to be a sort of trademark for the congregation. The present building towers over the city and can be seen for miles in every direction. The tower clock and bells proclaim to the community that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever". (Heb. 13:8)

When I first decided to study the history of "the Church on the Hill," I had a strong interest in the era of 1920-1940. The class assignment, however, specified the early era from 1850-1869. The amount of material that I found surprised me a great deal, and I'm sure that much remains undiscovered. My intention in this report is to trace the history of St. Paul's from its beginning in 1861 until 1872 when it joined the Wisconsin Synod. I will attempt to cite incidents that affected the course of congregational history and show how God's gracious hand guided the course of events.

A word needs to be said about some of the statements in this paper. The German Lutherans in Fort Atkinson did not make much

effort to record history, only to make it. The sources are few and scattered. Many of the ideas expressed were obtained by "reading between the lines," putting specific facts together with trends of the time and personal feelings. Although some of the specific facts may be questioned, I feel that the implications drawn from the facts are valid.

Several "thank you's" must be expressed for help given to me in preparing this paper. Thanks to St. Paul's Congregation and Pastor Donald F. Bitter for the use of early church records. Thanks also to Mrs. Hannah Swart of the Fort Atkinson Historical Society for spending the better part of a morning with me researching family and personal histories. Thanks to my wife, Sharon, for transcribing the necessary congregational minutes into legible writing and to Stephen Smith, a classmate, for help with the German. Without the help of these and other people, this paper would never have gotten "off the ground."

David W. Laabs

May 8, 1978

I. ROOTS

"Get thee out of thy country, and from they kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee."(Gn.5:1)

Imagine the faith that it took on Abraham's part to obey this command of God. Leave behind the familiar and the comfortable, go far away, start a new life. These are many of the same prospects, the same fears -- the same faith that occupied the German Lutheran immigrants who came to America in the 19th century. They didn't receive the personal order from God to leave, but they felt as great a need to leave as Abraham could have.

The Germans who made up the German Lutheran congregation in Fort Atkinson cannot be traced back to a common source as can many German communities that emigrated en masse. Neither can the reasons for the individual families coming to America be traced. Note can be taken, however, of the conditions in Germany in the first half of the 19th century that made confessional Lutheran Germans want to leave. The reasons can be traced back to the Reformation, the first time when the established church in Germany was really challenged. The late 16th and 17th centuries saw Lutheran and Reformed doctrine crystalize, but the problems in church - state relationships raged. Power swayed between Lutherans and Reformed and Catholics. Amazingly, through all of this turmoil, the state church setup in Germany has existed until

this very day.

The early 1800's saw a change in German thinking. By 1815, Napoleon and his imperialism were gone, and the Congress of Vienna had re-divided Europe. Peace brought new thinking. Nationalism, a group feeling for a unified and powerful nation, swept Germany. Unity in all things was the most important issue to many Germans. Against political thinking like this, a Reformed -- Lutheran -- Catholic division was bound to clash. Political leaders attempted to "help" some of this separation by forcing Reformed and Lutherans to worship together. One of the best known of these leaders was King Frederick William III of Prussia. He declared that on October 31, 1517, the Lutherans and Reformed would hold a joint service to honor the 300th anniversary of the Reformation.

This, very simply, was the start of what became known to history as the Prussian Union. Many Lutherans and Reformed people accepted this arrangement. But some, especially "confessional" Lutherans, those who believe and teach exclusively the doctrines of Scripture as found in the Lutheran Confessions, opposed it. These "confessional" or "Old Lutherans", not only chafed under the Union, but were actively persecuted and imprisoned. As a result of this problem, many confessional Lutherans left Germany between 1820 and 1860. Many of them came to America.

We cannot be sure that the German Lutherans who began the congregation in Fort Atkinson had left Germany for confessional reasons. Since the majority were middle class handcraftsmen¹, one might suspect that there was financial motivation behind their

emigration. A large number of the early members of the congregation trace their roots back to Prussia, especially the provinces of Pommerania and Posen.² Although we cannot prove that it was the Prussian Union that caused them to come to America, there are later signs that show reaction against a politically dominated church.

While a majority of the German Lutherans in Fort Atkinson were from Prussia, there was representation in the early congregation from most parts of Germany. There was a number of families from Mecklenberg in northwest Germany. There was representation from northcentral Germany, Brandenburg, and there also were some families that originated from the south in Baden and Bavaria.³ Most of the cities and villages from which these people emigrated must have been small because few of them can be located on common German maps. Although some families have successfully traced their roots to a particular city and church,⁴ the general statement can be made that the German Lutheran congregation that formed in Fort Atkinson in 1861 was a collection of scattered German emigrants who happened to come together at a particular time and place.

II. THE FOUNDING FATHERS

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Mt. 18:20)

Our Lord has given us this promise, that wherever believers are assembled around the Word, there the church will be. It isn't the building, the altar, or the preacher that makes the church. The church is the gathering of believers "in Jesus' name". There was a desire on the part of the German Lutherans in Fort Atkinson to share the blessings of the Means of Grace together. It was this desire guided by the Holy Ghost that eventually brought about the organization of the congregation known today as St. Paul's.

Some very good things can be said about the founding fathers of the German Lutheran church in Fort Atkinson. The congregation was self-starting. Even in 1978, this is a rare occurrence because most new congregations are started by a mission venture of an existing church. The normal way to start a Lutheran congregation in 1860 was to have a pastor circulate and form a congregation around himself. In outlying areas the Reiseprediger, or traveling missionary, would seek out the prospects and organize a congregation before moving on. In Fort, the people organized themselves and then looked for a pastor.

Since the character of a congregation could probably be defined as the sum of the personalities of the members, it would be profitable to look at some of the individual founders of the Fort Atkinson congregation. There is no known list of the complete group of families at the time the congregation was founded. There are a few names, however, that repeatedly appear in congregational minutes and who would qualify as the founding fathers.

The most prominent name to appear in congregational records in the first 10 years is that of John Wandschneider. The organizational meeting of the congregation was held in his home on November 23, 1861.⁵ Wandschneider was immediately elected president by the group and also served as the treasurer during the first months. His name repeatedly appeared on important committees. He seemed to have a particular interest in Christian education. Although St. Paul's members can thank God for the strength in this man in establishing the congregation, his name will appear later in a much less pleasant chapter of the congregation's history. He is not to be confused with another John Wandschneider who served on the building committee of the new church in 1900.⁶

The first officers of the congregation would certainly qualify as founding fathers. The first secretary of the congregation was John C. Widman. Widman was another person whose name appears and reappears in the early history of the congregation. He came from Brandenburg in Germany, probably from the small town of Liebenau, about 50 miles west of Wittenburg.⁷ He served on the building committee for the first church in 1863, and he also served as secretary until 1865.

Another important group of men who would certainly qualify as founding fathers was the first board of elders. The elders of that day could be compared to the church council of today. The first elders were Ferdinand Langholff, George Warnhoefer, and John Becker. Warnhoefer was the least known of the three. He did serve on the committee to build the first church building in 1863, but his name does not appear after that time.

The other two elders were better known in the community. John Becker was a well-known stone mason and brick layer in Fort Atkinson. Many of the brick houses built during this era in the city were built by Becker. The Becker family home is located on West Sherman Avenue near the intersection with Riverside Drive.⁸ His skill in the building trade was put to good use when he served on the church building committee in 1863 and the school building committee in 1869. The later chapters of congregational history will show that he too, had some unpleasant associations with the other members.

The founding father whose history is easy to trace is Ferdinand Langholff. Extensive work has been done on the Langholff family history, and it provides an interesting sidelight to the congregation's history.⁹ The story of the Langholff emigration to America could be judged as a rather typical example of how the Fort Atkinson German Lutherans happened to come together. The Langholffs who are members of St. Paul's in 1978 are related to this original group of emigrants.

Peter Langholff had died shortly before the family left Kolmar in Ratti county, Prussia, in 1848. He left his wife

Charlotte with 9 children, 7 sons and 2 daughters. The economic vacuum of Germany in 1848 was too much for the family, so they traveled to America, having heard from previous emigrants of the government land available in the new state of Wisconsin. They settled on government land in Hebron township, Jefferson county, just east of Fort Atkinson. From the family farm, the family branched out. They were strong Lutherans, and family members were instrumental in founding German Lutheran congregations in Helenville (1848), Jefferson (1851), Rome, and Fort Atkinson (1861). Ferdinand was the Langholff who had a hand in establishing the Fort Atkinson congregation. He moved to Fort to practice his trade as blacksmith. He held various offices in the congregation during the early years.

Two other names appear in the early records of congregational life. Philipp Eckhart served on the building committee for the first church in 1863. Another name, that of William Lohmueller appears on the list of members who served as the building committee for the school in 1868. Lohmueller was a successful businessman in the community. His name also appears in a place that sets the stage for later controversy. He was among the charter members of the Hahnemann Lodge No. 180, of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, in 1870.¹⁰

The founding fathers of St. Paul's had a variety of backgrounds and social positions. But they did have some very important things in common. They had a desire to hear the Word of God taught and preached in the German language. They also had a desire for fellowship with fellow German Lutherans. Just

as their backgrounds were different, so was their feelings toward confessional Lutheranism. As the years unfolded, this particular difference proved painful and nearly fatal to the congregation. But still the congregation, confessional Lutheranism, and the Word of God in truth and purity, lived on in Fort Atkinson -- by the pure grace of God.

III. GETTING STARTED

"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47)

There will probably never be a success story of the founding of a congregation that could top the one that took place in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Ever since that day the church has grown in the way the Lord has seen fit. Sometimes it grows in spectacular proportion. Sometimes growth is painfully slow. But whatever the growth rate in a given area, it is the Lord who gives the increase.

Although the start of the German Lutheran congregation in Fort Atkinson was not spectacular, it was unique. The character and location of the city itself seemed to have contributed to this character. Fort Atkinson was settled mainly by English speaking people. Names like Jones, Foster, Hoard, Rockwell, and Barrie dominated the early history of the city. The Methodist Episcopal Church began already in 1840, and the Congregational Church, which claimed the most influential residents as members, began in 1841. When one compares these starting dates and some of the beginnings of Lutheran congregations in Helenville, Jefferson, and Watertown with the Fort Atkinson Lutheran congregation, its 1861 starting date is relatively late.

The fact that the Fort Atkinson Germans were in the minority is probably quite closely related to the fact that there seemed to be a Lutheran vacuum in the city. Watertown and the surrounding area was a hotbed for Lutheranism, both the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods. To the west of the city in the Koshkonong area, the Norwegian Lutherans were establishing themselves. There was even a Wisconsin Synod congregation at Germany (present day St. John's Community Church) when the Fort Atkinson congregation was founded in 1861.

The account of the congregations founding in the minutes of the congregation is quite brief. The group of German Lutherans in and around the city assembled in the home of John Wandschneider on November 23, 1861.¹¹ The unique aspect of this meeting is that there was not a pastor present. Usually congregations at that time formed around a pastor, but these men felt the need for the Word and Sacraments despite the lack of a pastor. First officers were John Wandschneider, president and treasurer; John Widman, secretary; and Ferdinand Langholff, George Warnhoefer, and John Becker, elders.

The usual problems that face an organized nucleus of Lutherans in 1978 are a cite to worship and a pastor to serve them. These are the exact same problems that presented themselves to the Fort Atkinson congregation in 1861. The cite of the early worship services was "the public school on the north side of the river".¹² This was an earlier school on the same cite of the present Caswell School, which was remodeled into an apartment building in 1977. This building is located on the corner of North Third Street and Jefferson Street, which in 1860 was on the

main road into town from the northeast. ¹³

The problem of a pastor was solved surprisingly easily in the winter of 1861. Earlier that year Pastor Edward Moldehnke had come to America from Germany to serve as the traveling missionary of the Wisconsin Synod. He chose Germany, west of Fort Atkinson (today the town of Oakland, St. John's Community Church) as his home and headquarters for his work. Since winter prevented any extensive mission travel, Moldehnke agreed to serve the Fort Atkinson group every two weeks for the winter months. He reported serving 26 members at two week intervals. ¹⁴

The acquisition of Pastor Moldehnke's services almost led to an interesting association. In the same resolution that Pastor Moldehnke's services be requested, the president of the congregation was directed to approach the Germany congregation about the possibility of merger. ¹⁵ He was directed to report to the group at the next meeting, but there is no record of a report. The idea was obviously scrapped.

Pastor Moldehnke's service was an important step in the final affiliation with the Wisconsin Synod. The congregation obviously felt no desire to affiliate with a larger body in 1861, but their contact with the synod through Pastor Moldehnke was at least an introduction. It would be six long and troubled years before another Wisconsin Synod pastor served the congregation.

A big issue in the founding of any congregation is its naming. The Fort Atkinson congregation was incorporated in 1862 under the name, "The First German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Fort Atkinson."¹⁶ That name remained until the new and present

church building was dedicated in 1901.¹⁷

Another important step in a congregation's life is the purchase of land and its first building. In 1863, the congregation purchased two lots on the highest hill in town from Mr. G.P. Marston.¹⁸ The building committee for the first church consisted of John Widman, Philipp Eckhart, John Becker, George Warnhoefer, and Pastor Kienow. The building was a white frame structure that could probably seat about 150-200 people. The building costs were about \$1600, \$400 more than the congregation had planned to spend.¹⁹ From the time it was completed in the fall of 1863, it has towered over the city as "The Church on the Hill".

The early history of The First German Ev. Lutheran Church in Fort Atkinson reads almost like the development of a mission in the 1970's. The same steps, many of the same problems, many of the same joys and frustrations existed then as they do today. Most importantly, however, it was the same Word of God, the same Sacraments, around which this congregation organized. Congregations may change drastically, synods may change, church buildings are replaced, but the true church, the gathering of believers, never changes.

IV. PASTORAL PROBLEMS

"... and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14)

These words of St. Paul are often quoted at mission festivals to stress the importance of manpower to spread the Gospel. The lack of manpower was certainly acute in the early years of Lutheranism in America. This same problem existed in the early years of "The First German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Fort Atkinson." It is safe to say that the majority of the congregation's problems in the first 10 years were related to the pastors, or the lack of them. It would be very helpful for understanding these early years to look briefly at the history of St. Paul's early pastors.

As was previously stated, the first pastor to serve the congregation was Rev. Edward Moldehnke. He was trained at the University of Halle in Germany.²⁰ Although he was sent to America, Wisconsin in particular, as a traveling missionary, he was an educator at heart. He was the head of German gymnasium, a school which combined the education that we know as high school and college. He spent only about 1½ years in his position as traveling missionary, although the impact he had on the growth of the Wisconsin Synod cannot be forgotten. He traveled, preached the Gospel, and organized congregations in the territory which falls mainly in today's Western Wisconsin District of W.E.L.S. In 1863,

Moldehnke became the first president of the Wisconsin Synod Seminary, then in Watertown. This was closer to his first love, education. But after a few years in that position, he returned to his native Germany.

Moldehnke's influence on the Fort Atkinson congregation was probably quite limited. He served them and preached during the winter of 1861-62 on a bi-weekly basis. Once the weather improved, however, he left Germany (town of Oakland) and did his traveling mission work. For the rest of that year he only reported one more visit to Fort Atkinson.²¹ The benefit of his ministry, however, may lie in the fact that he at least exposed the Fort Atkinson group to the Wisconsin Synod. Although membership was far down the road, they knew the synod and the neighboring congregations were there.

Having a part-time pastor, especially one who is gone for months at a time, is not particularly helpful to congregational stability. There is no mention of another preacher during the first half of 1862, but the congregation was probably looking desperately for a pastor who could live in their midst. There is no record of calling or hiring a pastor, but in the fall of 1862, the name of Pastor C.(Christ²ian) Kienow appears in the congregational records. He was the first resident pastor.

Pastor Kienow might well be known as the congregation's "mystery pastor". No one today seems to know who he was, where he came from, or what happened to him after he left Fort Atkinson in 1865. It is quite unlikely that he was even Lutheran, because his name does not appear on any list of Lutheran pastors in

existence.²² If this were true that he was not a Lutheran, it can be assumed that the doctrinal position of the congregation was resting on shakey ground. One possibility is that Pastor Kienow was a German Evangelical because it is obvious that he had to be German.

Some good and some bad history was made during Pastor Kienow's pastorate. The most noteworthy event during his stay was the building of the first church building. It is still true today that once a congregation has a permanent worship facility, the growth rate usually increases. The congregation continued to grow, although no growth statistics of the era are available.

Despite these good happenings during Pastor Kienow's pastorate, his stay brought to light a problem that plagued the congregation throughout its early years. The German state church paid its pastors through the government by way of taxes. These German Lutherans were not ready to begin to pay their pastors directly. The one point of business that appears and reappears throughout Pastor Kienow's stay was the pastor's salary. The usual procedure was this: The pastor would request a salary increase. The congregation would refer it to a committee, and then committee and congregation would promptly forget about it. This little game of cat and mouse finally ended in the fall of 1865 when Pastor Kienow served notice that he needed a salary increase from \$150 to \$500.²³ The congregation's response was that it was impossible to raise the salary this much. The result was that Pastor Kienow left.²⁴

It was not a one-sided controversy that led to Pastor Kienow's departure. Each side was partly to blame. As was implied before, the congregation's stewardship of treasure left something to be desired. Pastor Kienow's salary was \$150 per year, not including a parsonage because the congregation didn't own one. Most men in comparable situations in 1865 were receiving between \$300 - \$400 per year with a parsonage provided. There certainly was reason for concern on the pastor's part. His method, however, of obtaining a raise in 1865, was less than ethical. He threatened the congregation with the prospect of leaving for a more lucrative field, thus trying to get more pay. The congregation refused to be blackmailed; Pastor Kienow couldn't live on his salary, so he left.

As the winter of 1865 set in, the congregation was faced with a vacancy. They were served during this time by Pastor Huber from the Germany congregation (Wisconsin Synod).²⁵ There is no record of an overture by the congregation to the Wisconsin Synod to get a pastor, but other events show that the congregation was looking for a church body to supply a pastor for them. Even if they had approached the Wisconsin Synod at this time, the chances of getting a resident pastor were slim because of Wisconsin's rapid growth and pastoral shortage. The Fort Atkinson congregation was spotted in the fall of 1865 as a prospective mission venture by the Iowa Synod, which had advanced as far as Deerfield, about half way between Fort Atkinson and Madison.²⁶ The whole story of this relationship with the Iowa Synod will be discussed in the next chapter.

As a result of the overtures of the Iowa Synod and the eagerness of the Fort Atkinson congregation to be served by a resident pastor, Pastor Johannes Hoerlein became the second resident pastor of the congregation. Hoerlein came to Fort after ^{several} 1 year's pastorate in the Deerfield congregation. His stay in Fort Atkinson was around a year. It was, for one reason or another, a bad year all around for the pastor and congregation. The report of the year in Fort Atkinson was covered in Pastor Hoerlein's obituary with these words:

Er arbeitete in Fort Atkinson, und zwar zuletzt unter sehr ungunstigen, drückenden Verhältnissen, bis zum Herbst 1867.

Roughly translated:

He labored in Fort Atkinson under very unfavorable and oppressive conditions until the fall of 1867.²⁷

Pastor Hoerlein had a rather interesting background. He was a native of Bavaria and received all of his theological training under Wilhelm Loehe at Neuendettelsau, graduating in 1859 and immigrating to America the same year. He served for three years in Elkport, Iowa; four years at Cottage Grove, Wisconsin; one year in Fort Atkinson; returning to Elkport, Iowa for two years. He served the 1869 - 1870 school year as collector for Synodical Educational Institutions. He served the congregation in Iowa City, Iowa, from 1870 until his death, and also served the last three years of his life as editor of the Kirchenblatt, the official Iowa Synod paper. He was a member of the Iowa Synod his entire ministry and served, with the exception of Fort Atkinson, Iowa Synod congregations.

Pastor Hoerlein's ministry appears to have been a mixed blessing to the congregation. Since he was a Loehe-trained man and a strong Iowa Synod supporter, one can assume he was capable and equipped to preach the Gospel. His ministry in Fort Atkinson, however, was anything but pleasant. By the time he left in the fall of 1867, there had already been four votes to put him out of office.²⁸ One effect of his ministry, however, seems to have been to turn the eyes of the congregation toward the Wisconsin Synod in their search for a new pastor.

After Hoerlein left in the fall of 1867, the congregation had a pastoral vacancy for almost a year. They were served during this time period by a Pastor Ernst from Whitewater. During this time, the congregation sought a pastor who could again provide them with the Word and Sacrament without the political pressure that had been exerted by the last pastor. By God's grace they received a man as pastor who led the congregation from spiritual infancy to a new measure of maturity. His name was Johannes Brockmann.

Pastor Brockmann was a highly capable and Gospel motivated pastor, a man who could lead them out of past trouble, through the trouble that lay ahead when he took over the pastorate, to a new level of Christian maturity and congregational stability. He served the congregation from 1868 until 1875, when he went to Watertown to serve St. Mark's congregation for 29 years. In Pastor Brockmann's obituary, President Ernst of Northwestern College characterized his ministry in the following way:

He was an earnest and faithful man, imbued with a high regard for his calling. He was of a retiring nature, although at the same time firm in his own convictions. The congregation grew and flourished during his pastorate.²⁹

Brockmann was a member of the Wisconsin Synod for his entire ministry. Like many Wisconsin Synod pastors at his time, he was born and trained in Germany. He received his training at the mission house at Herrmannsburg, the same school that trained President Bading. He was specifically trained for African mission work, but was then sent to America by Louis Harms. He served for six years at Algoma, Wisconsin, before going to Fort Atkinson. He took over the congregation at the age of 35.³⁰ He played a vital role in leading the congregation through the lodge controversy in 1870, a happening which will be discussed in a later chapter.

As a sidelight, a word can be said about the method of choosing pastors in these years. The congregation was not affiliated with a synod who could train and supply pastors as they do today. The methods of hiring pastors in those days was comparable to hiring a person for any other position. Especially in the case of Pastor Hoerlein, even such things as trial sermons were involved.³¹ The usual reference in the minutes of a meeting was that the pastor was elected, not called. It may have been simple ignorance on the part of the secretary, but at least in the case of Pastor Hoerlein, this was certainly not a way to choose the pastor. Wherever people try to take the job away from the Holy Spirit, they soon find that things don't always work out as they planned.

It is obvious that all of the pastors who served St. Paul's during the first ten years were of different abilities and, to a certain extent, had different views of confessional Lutheranism. Looking back it is easy to criticize, but one thing needs to be said for all of the pastors during this early era -- they preached God's Word. Despite preoccupation, in some cases, with other matters, the Word was still planted in the hearts of the members. That is always the most important job that any pastor can do.

V. RELATIONS WITH THE IOWA SYNOD

Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore oppressed,
By scisms rent asunder,
By heresies distressed,
Yet saints their watch are keeping;
Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.

T.L.H. 473 v. 4

It is always more sensational and "exciting" to write about the scandels of history. We seem to enjoy looking back on the mistakes of others and sneering at them. It wouldn't be too difficult to find events in the past history of St. Paul's to ridicule, if that were our purpose. Rather, we can look at two particularly dark events in the congregation's past history and see the hand of God guiding the congregation down the road to confessional Lutheranism.

The first unfortunate chapter of the congregation's history deals with its relationship with the Iowa Synod. The main reason these two groups ever met is that the Fort Atkinson congregation was seriously looking for a resident pastor after Pastor Kienow left in the fall of 1865. There was a serious shortage of pastors in Wisconsin. At the same time, the Iowa Synod was trying to push its influence further into Wisconsin.

This mutual interest on the parts of the Iowa Synod and the Fort Atkinson German Lutherans was really a result of the times. The late 1860's was a time when Lutherans were looking toward new areas for fellowship.

In the East the constituent synods of the General Council in 1866 broke away from the utter laxity of the General Synod; in the Middle West the confessional bodies ultimately found much to be desired with the Council's stand, and in 1872 the Synodical Conference here came into being ...^{32.}

At the same time the Iowa Synod and Wisconsin Synod were holding conferences and attending each others synod conventions to determine one another's doctrinal positions. Although there is not time to list differences between Wisconsin and Iowa, it is interesting to speculate that the same reasons that separated the two synods may have driven the Fort Atkinson congregation away from the Iowa Synod.

The story began in the winter of 1865-66 in Deerfield, Wisconsin, where Pastor Johannes Hoerlein heard of the vacancy in Fort Atkinson and the people's desire to have a pastor. Pastor Hoerlein came to town to preach, bringing both the Gospel and greetings from the Iowa Synod. The congregation was impressed. They sent a request to the president of the Iowa Synod, through Pastor Hoerlein, that they might receive an Iowa Synod pastor to serve them.^{33.}

The Iowa Synod was initially as excited about coming to Fort Atkinson as the people were about having them. The August 1866 issue of the Kirchenblatt carried a glowing report of the prospects in the city.^{34.} The praesidium decided to send Hoerlein

as the pastor they requested. He preached two trial sermons in the spring of 1866, and was elected as pastor.³⁵ The Kirchenblatt reported that Hoerlein was installed by Pastor List of the Iowa Synod in Madison and felt that the congregation was friendly and treated him well.³⁶

But something happened during Hoerlein's pastorate in Fort Atkinson. The minutes of September 9, 1867, reported that Pastor Hoerlein had already received several dismissal notices by this time. The Kirchenblatt suddenly became silent about the activity in Fort Atkinson. Pastor Hoerlein returned to Iowa after his dismissal and served faithfully in the Iowa Synod until his death in 1873. Although it is difficult to know the impact that this dismissal had on the congregation, it can be seen in the dealings with the succeeding pastor that it did not endear some members to pastors.

No one will probably ever know the cause of the dispute between Pastor Hoerlein and the congregation. Maybe he already attempted to tackle the lodge problem that Pastor Brockmann tackled head-on in 1870. Maybe some of Iowa's doctrinal weakness bothered the members, although all indications are that the congregation was not too sound doctrinally. Maybe it was a matter of a personality conflict. Regardless of the causes, the effects are more clear. This unfortunate incident with the Iowa Synod drove the congregation to a synod that was closer to home, growing doctrinally more sound each year, and getting a more adequate supply of pastors. It is undoubtedly true that the Lord fulfilled His promise in this unfortunate happening, "All things work together for good to them that love God."

VI. AFFILIATION WITH THE WISCONSIN SYNOD

"But by the grace of God I am what I am ..." (I Cor. 15:10)

Paul knew when he spoke these words that it was only by the grace of God that he could be a believer in Christ and an heir of eternal life. In fact he would probably have been willing to expand these words to cover anything good that had ever happened to him -- it was by the pure grace of God. St. Paul's members need to humbly utter this prayer with Paul, for it is only by God's pure grace that the congregation is what it is today, a congregation that teaches the "whole counsel of God", based on the only source of God's revelation, His infallible Word.

Certainly a giant step in the process that led St. Paul's to confessional Lutheranism was taken when the congregation joined the Wisconsin Synod at the 1872 synod convention. There was a very dark chapter of history, however, that immediately preceded this step. But in this dark hour, God provided the instrument, His servant, Pastor Johannes Brockmann, to turn the evil into good.

When Pastor Brockmann took over the pastorate of the Fort Atkinson congregation in 1868, he must have inherited a multitude of problems. It seems impossible to imagine that such large problems could arise in the two years between his arrival and the outbreak of the lodge problem in 1870. There are two foreseeable possibilities. Either the previous two pastors had permitted the

lodge members to be members of the congregation, or else their attempts to deal with the problem were reasons for their abrupt leaving. Another remote possibility is that the lodges in Fort Atkinson made a sudden surge or membership drive toward the German Lutherans in 1870.

The background to this lodge controversy in 1870 seems all too simple. Pastor Brockmann recognized that the lodges, in this case the Oddfellows, were indeed promoters of religious belief and dictated worship of a Christless, deistic God. He heeded the Scriptural principle to "mark and avoid" these false prophets, and taught the congregation that believers in Christ would avoid such organizations.³⁷ There were some members of the congregation who did belong to lodges. After repeated admonition, Pastor Brockmann and the congregation put these men under church discipline.

When the congregation met on August 7, 1870, the heat of summer couldn't come close to the heat of the meeting going on in the school.³⁸ The first issue was to answer a series of questions brought by those congregational members who were lodge members. They dealt with the following problems:

- Reasons the constitution forbade voting membership to lodge members.
- Reasons lodge members were refused communion.
- Questions about the application of Mt. 18: 15-18 to lodge members.
- Stand of Scripture, Luther's Small Catechism, and the other Lutheran Confessions on lodge membership.
- A question about one of the congregational by-laws that dealt with lodge membership.³⁹

The discussion was lengthy, but even Pastor Brockmann with his knowledge of Scripture and evangelical manner was ^{not} able to con-

vince the lodge members of error in the heat of passion. The meeting was adjourned until the following evening, but not before the resignation of a prominent member and founding father, Philipp Eckhart, was accepted.⁴⁰

The drama at the meeting on the following evening was even greater than the first night. At this meeting two of the founding fathers and most influential members took a stand against the pastor and against Scripture. John Becker and John Wandschneider accused Pastor Brockmann of acting against the wishes of the congregation in practicing discipline on lodge members.⁴¹ They demanded the keys for the church from him and ordered him out of the parsonage. The whole issue came down to a vote whether or not to support these two elders in their demands. In the vote that followed, Becker and Wandschneider were removed as elders and were replaced by J. Boldt, J.T. Müller, and E. Rutzen.⁴² In addition to this, Wandschneider and Becker forfeited their rights as congregational members and were publicly reprimanded and admonished to try and understand this whole matter in the light of Scripture. The secretary was ordered to publicly announce their removal.⁴³ In addition, J. Groth and William Lohmueller requested that their names be removed from the congregational records.

The battle was over, but the casualties were heavy. If Pastor Brockmann's light shown brightly as a staunch supporter of Scripture in the battle, it shown even more brightly as an evangelical peace maker after the smoke had cleared. He didn't dwell on the past, but looked to the future. In 1872 Pastor Brockmann attempted to avoid further lodge problems in his own

and other congregations by publishing a little book called Christian und Ernst. This book was a conversation staged between Christian, who was considering joining the Odd Fellows Lodge, and Ernst, who encourages his joining. As they talk, Christian begins to realize that the lodge teaches things contrary to Scripture. The book is mainly instructional, but also makes quite enjoyable reading. It was immediately translated into English and published in both English and German.

The most obvious result of Pastor Brockmann's strong, Gospel-centered leadership was the congregation's decision to join the Wisconsin Synod in 1872.⁴⁴ These Lutherans had avoided synodical affiliation for over eleven years, probably due to their background in the German state church and Prussian Union. They treasured their independence. But apparently they were impressed with Pastor Brockmann's leadership and his personal affiliation with the Wisconsin Synod. They applied at the 1872 convention of the synod and were accepted immediately.

It is only by God's grace that this episode in the congregation's history can contain the most negative and positive notes. By the end of Pastor Brockmann's pastorate the congregation was much more stable and much more doctrinally sound than when he arrived. Certainly the Lord used Pastor Brockmann as an instrument in His plan.

CONCLUSION

"Lo, I am with you alway . . ." (Mt. 28:20)

The Lord make this promise to the entire church on earth. His actions, His showering of grace on the church bear witness to His keeping the promise. The Lord's presence was obvious in the early years of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, and that same presence has been obvious in the years that have followed. Another promise also remains in effect until this day: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Although some of the points made in this paper are purely speculation, the facts that do exist would qualify that speculation as "informed." Any attempts to fill in missing facts were done only in the interest of supporting existing facts, not sensationalizing. The hope is that the facts uncovered and reassembled here may serve to let more people appreciate their heritage as confessional Lutherans -- to appreciate the grace that God shows to those who are His redeemed.

ENDNOTES

1. J. List. "Kirchliche Nachricht aus Wisconsin." Kirchenblatt, vol. 9, no. 8, August, 1866, p. 60.
2. Noted from birthplaces in marriage, baptism, and death records of the congregation.
3. Ibid.
4. See the next chapter.
5. Congregational minutes. Nov. 23, 1861.
6. "A Century of Grace." 1861-1961. p. 17.
7. Congregational death records. Liselse Widman, married to J. C. Widman, died May 21, 1872.
8. Becker family file. Fort Atkinson Historical Society.
9. Langholff family file. Fort Atkinson Historical Society.
10. John Henry Ott. Jefferson Co., Wisconsin and its People. (Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1917) p. 254.
11. Congregational minutes, Nov. 23, 1861.
12. Congregational minutes, August 24, 1862.
13. Map of Fort Atkinson in 1860. Fort Atkinson Historical Society.
14. Edward Moldehnke. "Reiserbericht." 1862.
15. Congregational minutes, Nov. 23, 1861.
16. "A Century of Grace." op. cit. p. 11.
17. Ibid. p. 18.
18. Congregational minutes, July 7, 1863.
19. "A Century of Grace." op. cit. p. 11
20. J. P. Koehler. The History of the Wisconsin Synod. (St. Cloud: Sentinel) 1970.
21. Moldehnke. op. cit.
22. Correspondence with Robert C. Wiederaenders, ALC archivist, and August R. Suelflow, Concordia Historical Institute.
23. Congregational minutes, Oct. 2, 1865.

24. Ibid.
25. Congregational minutes, March 18, 1866.
26. "Kurzer Lebenslauf des seligen Herrn Pastors Hoerlein."
Kirchenblatt. vol. 16 no. 22, Nov. 15, 1873.
27. Ibid.
28. Congregational minutes, Sept. 9, 1867.
29. "A Century with Christ." St. Mark's, Watertown, 1854-1954.
30. Ibid.
31. Congregational minutes, March 18, 1866.
32. Koehler. op. cit. p. 128.
33. Congregational minutes. March 18, 1866.
34. List. op. cit. p. 60.
35. Congregational minutes, March 18, 1866.
36. List. op. cit.
37. J. H. Brockmann. Oddfellowship, etc. Translation of
Christian und Ernst. (Milwaukee: Des Forges, Lawrence,
and Co., Printers) 1874.
38. Congregational minutes, August 7, 1870.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid. August 8, 1870.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid. 1872.

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