In This Sign You Shall Conquer

The Story of Louis Harms, the Hermannsburg Mission Society, and Their Contributions to the Wisconsin Synod

By Daron J. Lindemann

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In 1849 the early pioneers of the Wisconsin Synod pondered the possibility of an organization that would both preserve and proclaim God's truth. Half a planet away the Lord of the church sowed similar seeds of interest in the soul of another Lutheran pioneer named Ludwig "Louis" Harms, who founded the Hermannsburg mission society in that same year. The two would soon cross paths.

As a matter of fact, the Wisconsin Synod would engage in a relationship with Hermannsburg that would outlast its relationship with the other German mission societies. Though, in its first thirty years, the Wisconsin Synod would receive only seventeen men from Hermannsburg, there is much more to be said that numbers cannot tell. It has to do with a Wisconsin Synod president shaped at Hermannsburg, and a visionary pastor whose burning love for souls at home and abroad sparked an ordinary congregation to accomplish extraordinary feats, and a mission ship inspired by Noah's ark, and a German-American clash in culture and confession, and most of all a loving Lord who wants all people to be saved. Here is the story.

In the 1850s congregations of "church conscious" German Lutherans in southeastern Wisconsin, "beset by the Methodists, who had camped on the trail of the Germans all the way from the East, ... got in touch with the German synod that went by the name of the state and asked for help."[i] The Wisconsin Synod, at that time, did not have a seminary to provide congregations with pastoral candidates. The pastors supplied to the congregations came from a number of different backgrounds and training institutions. Most of the pastors were trained by the German mission societies and sent to America to care for the German immigrants, some were laymen or teachers who were personally trained by an experienced pastor, and still others came from different church bodies.

Vacillations End

During its early years, the Wisconsin Synod primarily looked to the German mission societies to provide capably trained pastors. The two major contributors were the mission societies at Langenberg and Berlin, yet the Basel, St. Chrischona, and Hermannsburg schools also provided men from time to time. Relations between the Wisconsin Synod and these German societies continued into the 1860s, nurtured by the fact that the synod's first three men, Muehlhaeuser, Weinmann, and Wrede, all were trained at Langenberg. At the 1862 convention, the Central Conference of pastors officially proposed that President Johannes Bading, a product of both Hermannsburg and Langenberg, seek his connections with the German societies to supply missionaries. That he did on a personal trip to Germany (also for the purpose of soliciting support and advice for a seminary), and at the 1864 synod convention President Gottlieb Reim reported,

> I make mention in general that our relationship with the societies in Germany, just as with the venerable synod of Pennsylvania, has remained the same as before. They have also strongly supported us this year and their earnest desire for our advancement always becomes greater. The sending of a larger number of workers has already been announced. But it is especially our seminary to which they give their attention through friendly advice and earnest support …[ii]

Unfortunately, the essence of this friendly relationship began to deteriorate over the next few years because of the Wisconsin Synod's strong move toward confessionalism and the German societies' fellowship with and support of the heterodox Prussian state church. The synod convention in 1867 passed a report with a unanimous vote thanking the societies in Germany for their many years of support, but dissenting to their "unionistic practices."[iii] During this time, the synod struggled to agree on an appropriate response to the unionism of these societies. It was not simply a matter of one day breaking relations with institutions thousands of miles overseas and the next day beginning to look for pastors elsewhere. Friendships, family ties, a bond of heritage, a spirit of gratitude, and other such matters tugged at the hearts of the men in America faced with this dilemma. President Bading, in his opening address to the 1868 synod convention, expressed the difficulty with these words:

> One other important and momentous experience of the now completed synodical year concerns the relationship of the synod to the unionistic societies within the Prussian state church … It is true, for a long time our position was a wavering one.
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> On the one side, the open confession to all the confessional writings of the Lutheran church, as this synod has firmly pronounced all the years; on the other side the relation to the societies, which stand in the unionistic church and consider the union as something good. On the one side, may I say, love for our dear church and her symbols, on the other side the feeling of gratitude toward friends who helped us in our need and made us what we are through the sending of good strong men: the synod which has often appeared in a light that friend and foe have not been able to understand.
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> Specifically, the feeling of gratitude has held the synod back … The vacillations, venerable brothers in the faith and brothers in the ministry, must have an end.[iv]

Those vacillations did have an end. That very convention resolved to discontinue relations between the Wisconsin Synod and the unionistic German mission societies. But now what? Where would the synod receive confessionally solid and spiritually strong pastors? Who would continue the financial and advisory support for the synod's own seminary program? What kind of thanks would this be for the many years of faithful service the societies had provided? The contemplated answers to these questions undoubtedly caused many pastors great distress and at the same time stirred them to greater faith. There they stood in the boldness of a confessionally strong decision for the sake of the pure gospel revealed in Scripture and pronounced in the Lutheran Confessions. Sacred yet scared. This scary leap of sacred faith, however, landed on solid ground. The Lord of the church saw to it that his sprouting German Lutheran church body did not fail. Even though he had guided the 1868 convention to break relations with the societies, he further guided them to bolster relations with the Missouri Synod. At the same time he also continued to provide the synod with strong, spiritual men perhaps even more capable and certainly more confessional, because the next year our synod tasted the fruit of the seminary program in Watertown, where four men graduated and were ordained into the ministry: Christoph Dowidat, E. Louis Junker, Carl Oppen and Albert F. Siegler, More than that, another blessing came out of the severed relations with the unionistic societies. It was the synod's association with the Hermannsburg mission house and its leader, Theodore Harms. Yes, Hermannsburg was a German mission society, but unlike Berlin, Langenberg and the others it did not condone the unionistic practices of the state church and it stood firm in its commitment to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Therefore, the Southern Conference of pastors in the 1868 convention proposed the following:

> Since the source of supply for pastors and teachers, which we had open until now in the unionistic societies in Berlin and Langenberg, is closed for us from now on, together with the lack of spiritually strong men, it is necessary to make different associations which are appropriate to remedy this shortage as much as possible. The Southern Conference has given

> attention in one of the synod's proposed memorials to an association with Pastor Harms. May this be a way toward richly blessed results.[v]

Until this time Hermannsburg had provided four men for the Wisconsin Synod, but not directly. August Wiese came to America in 1868 after having served the Zulus in Africa for ten years,[vi] Albert Liefeld was a Prussian who served the Zulus for four years before arriving in 1866,[vii] and Johannes Broekmann left Africa in 1864 for the Wisconsin Synod. The fourth, John Bading, one of the first twelve students at Hermannsburg in 1849, was being trained there for service in Africa. Shortly after completing his courses and before graduation, however, he had a disagreement with the founder of the school, Louis Harms. Consequently, he left Hermannsburg and entered the Langenberg society, from which he was sent to America in 1853.[viii]

As a result of the strengthened ties between the Wisconsin Synod and the Hermannsburg mission society, the synod received over ten Hermannsburg-trained men within the next six years. The tremendous blessing that these "Hermannsburgers" became to a synod in dire need of qualified pastors and a church body seeking to unify itself on a firm foundation of confessionalism is obvious in some ways, but not in others. To instill in us a deeper appreciation for the Hermannsburg mission society and its obvious and not so obvious contributions to our synod, we will trace its history and development, in some ways parallel to the biography of its founder.

Ludwig "Louis" Harms

George Ludwig Detlef Theodore Harms (aka Louis) was born May 5, 1808 in Waldsrode, Germany, as the second oldest of ten children.[ix] His mother was Lucy Dorothy Fredericke Heinze, characterized as a strong woman with excellent domestic qualities. His father, Hartwig Christian Harms, as a boy had his eyes set on becoming a soldier but his parents wanted him to study theology. So much so that his punishment for misbehavior often consisted of memorizing portions of Scripture – he once was forced to memorize and recite the entire 119th Psalm.[x] In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, Hartwig did eventually study theology and became a pastor. Ludwig, or "Louis" as they called him, was blessed to be born into a Christian uprightness that characterized his family throughout many generations.

The Harms children grew up just like all other children, spending time at school, then playing in the afternoon, then doing homework before going to bed. Not only was Louis a fine athlete but he proved himself to be very intellectually capable, possessing a fine intellect, enormous memory, and a keen perception. Study was the very delight of his heart.[xi] Louis' brother, Theodore, mentioned in his funeral sermon for Louis that "in his younger years he could, after reading a poem of twenty pages but once, repeat it verbatim."[xii]

When Louis was a boy, his father started a private school in which his own children could be taught at a small expense. Louis easily moved far ahead of the other students and became the leader and head of his class, even able to fluently read Latin before he ever entered high school.

However, his intellectual growth seemed to outpace his spiritual growth. He was confirmed by his father at age fourteen, and "although he stood at the head of his class, it seems to have been with him more a matter of the head than of the heart."[xiii] Young Louis attended church services and instructions on Sunday with a heavy sense of duty, but the Spirit certainly kept puffing on his smoldering wick.

After graduating from a two-year high school course at Celle with honors, Harms enrolled at the University of Goettingen in the spring of 1827 to study theology. There he became very proficient in languages and learned to speak Latin like a native tongue. Because of his amazing abilities in the Greek and Hebrew languages he would sometimes write in Greek what someone would be reciting in Hebrew.[xiv] Immersed in rationalism, however, his human reason vied for its rule over God's Word in Louis' heart. Intellectual advancement, rather than spiritual growth, became his number one concern and he fell into denying the very existence of God.[xv] Regarding this deplorable stage in Louis' life, his brother Theodore lamented,

> The rankest infidelity prevailed at this university and the young man himself without faith, hungering after knowledge, repelled by science so falsely called, pursued his own way and determined, if possible, to master every branch of human knowledge in order to satisfy the emptiness of his heart.[xvi]

At one time while home on vacation Louis felt he had to be straightforward about this situation, so he told his father that he could not continue studying for the ministry because he simply did not believe what he was supposed to preach and teach. His father patiently encouraged him to go back to the university, reminding him that there is much in God's Word that human reason simply cannot comprehend. So he went back upon his earthly father's advice and under his heavenly Father's attention and committed himself to an even deeper study of the sciences on his own in the library.[xvii]

Toward the end of his two years at Goettingen, Harms was reading the high priestly prayer of Jesus in the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John. The third verse especially caught his attention, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Louis' Savior had not deserted him, and spoke powerfully and meaningfully through these words. The faith kindled in his heart at baptism burned brightly once again.[xviii] Even the evil inroads of rationalism could not hinder the power of the gospel. He endeavored on a life renewed by the study of Scripture and fervent prayer, and his commitment to the ministry was reborn.

Louis now applied himself as faithfully to the study of God's Word as he had previously to intellectual advancement. After he completed his studies, however, he could find no available positions in the church, as was often the case. So he accepted temporary employment as a private tutor for a family in Lauenburg. During the nine years he spent in Lauenburg in the 1830s Harms learned many practical skills of the ministry from two faithful pastors there who apparently became very influential to him and shepherded him toward a clear, confessional stand in the Lutheran faith. His faith grew during this time as well as his desire for spreading the gospel. This was evidenced by his enrollment in a small mission society that studied and discussed the work of missions, read the reports of missionaries, engaged in prayer for the spread of the gospel, and gathered contributions for mission work.[xix] The group, however, had some Pietistic tendencies that not only broadened his understanding but tested his faith.

After nine years in Lauenburg, when the children he taught had all left home, Harms returned to his parents' home in Hermannsburg. Shortly afterwards he accepted another position as a private tutor, this time in Lueneburg. He had opportunity to exercise the practical skills of the ministry by preaching frequently at St. John's church, where the people came and filled the pews.[xx]

In 1841 he received a call to New York from Rev. Friedrich Wynecken, who had visited Germany for the sake of confessional Lutheranism in America.[xxi] After seriously contemplating the call, sickness and the request of his father led him to turn it down. The 36-year-old Harms returned to Hermannsburg in 1844 and was at that time ordained in Hanover (the Consistory who called him was there) into the ministry and installed as pastor of the Hermannsburg congregation to assist his aged and sick father.[xxii] By this time he held a reputation as an inspirational preacher and a man of exemplary faith and passion. His presence in Hermannsburg permeated the entire congregation as well as other congregations in the area, and he became well loved especially because of his preaching. Harms understood how to reach the people through simple and clear sermons, not homiletically artistic (he often repeated important ideas and themes) yet thoroughly exegetical and faithful to law and gospel. The people loved to listen to him because he often spoke in their Low-German dialect and captivated them with his fine story telling. Harms' preaching style, along with his "reawakening," give reason enough for *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* to compare him to Martin Luther.[xxiii]

A Sign for Mission Work

Louis Harms' passionate faith shone through not only in his sermons but also in his prayers. The people respected him as a man of faith and saw his bold confidence when he prayed. Here's bold: a sick child was presented for baptism in the Sunday service. It was customary to baptize after the second Scripture lesson, but this child was sick to the point of dying so Pastor Harms was asked to baptize at the beginning of the service. He told the people that the Lord would sustain the life of the child long enough to be baptized, calmly proceeded through the regular order of service, and baptized the child after the second reading. The child died before the service ended.[xxiv]

His passionate faith, his previous experience in his own life trifling with the grace of God, and what he was learning from people and circumstances pushed Harms toward his favorite theme: mission work. He was always ready with stories from history or from his personal knowledge about the spread of the gospel to other lands.

The heart of Louis Harms was constantly burning with a desire to help lost souls, and that burning desire inflamed his congregation, as well. Their generous offerings for the spread of the gospel were phenomenal. At the same time, many men were not only compelled to give their money, but also themselves. A number of young men from the Hermannsburg congregation wanted to become directly involved in the mission work of preaching the gospel to the heathen, even if it meant leaving their families and traveling overseas. As a result, these men and many others entered the various mission training schools in existence at that time, schools which were soon filled to capacity. Rather than deflate these men and their desire for mission work, turning them away from the mission schools, Louis Harms founded his own mission school in Hermannsburg to train missionaries for foreign service to the heathen. Harms had petitioned God with many sincere prayers and pondered heavily the possibility for a Lutheran missionary training school. But he hadn't performed a SWOT analysis, and "previously he had asked no Consistory for permission, turned over no expenses or taking of risks to it. In prayer he had considered the whole matter with the Lord of the church and mission, and had become certain that his mission command is valid here and today. Obedience had been demanded; everything else the Lord would arrange."[xxv] It didn't take too long before Harms, with the support of the Hermannsburg church, purchased ten acres of farmland across the Oertze from the church for four thousand gold imperial dollars. The land was occupied by a usable farmhouse, along with a garden, fruit orchard, and arable land. Louis' brother Theodore agreed to act as superintendent, and on October 12, 1849 the mission house was dedicated.[xxvi] At the same time, twelve young men who wanted to be trained as missionaries to the heathen were consecrated. Theodore later recalled his first days in the mission house:

> Thus on Monday I went there with fear and trembling, but took along the Lord Jesus and knelt with the twelve students in the room, which under limited circumstances was at the same time a classroom, dining room, living room, and work room … We had to work as day laborers and study as students, and I must speak well of my dear students – not to their, but to the Lord's glory – that they did both with great faithfulness and without complaint.
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> I also had the assignment to instruct the students in the Scripture, the confession of the church, and the subjects which serve the understanding of the Scripture, and with that to change off their studies with physical labor so that they remain healthy and could help themselves in the heathen country.
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> Many [observers] shook their heads over that and said what will our stupid farm boys accomplish as missionaries? But we didn't let ourselves be confused, we trusted in the living God and knew our Lueneburg farm boys.[xxvii]

From that time on, young peasants or artisans between the ages of 22 and 25 came to the Hermannsburg mission house, free of military duty and with parental consent, to receive four years of training there in

preparation for mission work. They came from Saxony and Thuringia, from Mecklenburg and Holstein, from the Alsace, from Norway and Brazil. They came from villages and cities, from farms and military service, and from deacon calls. They brought with them skills from farmer to millwright to violin maker.

Each man who applied for enrollment was asked first to live in Hermannsburg a year or two and be active in the Hermannsburg church before being admitted so that the Harms brothers could get to know each one personally and refuse a man's application if his conduct so deserved.[xxviii] A twofold training structure (unique among mission schools at that time) was developed to give attention to both the theoretical and the practical. At Hermannsburg, "the practical example rather than theoretical instruction very likely enlisted the interest of students."[xxix] Harms wanted men to graduate with a complete knowledge gained from books and instructors, but also to be equipped with skills of different trades and occupations. This was not only for survival's sake, but to enable a group of missionaries to colonize as a group and be independent.[xxx]

The curriculum of the full four-year course included Religion, Bible, Exegesis, Introduction to the Old Testament, Introduction to the New Testament, Catechetics, Dogmatics, Church History, Kerytics (preaching), English, Music and Missions. Moreover, the schedule for the day was quite challenging. The day began at 6:00 a.m. with morning devotions then the students spent three hours, from 8:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m., in classroom instruction. After the noon meal they labored in the garden or field, or in another work place until 4:00 p.m. when classroom instruction would reconvene and continue after supper from 8:30 to 10:00 p.m.[xxxi]

Life in the mission house was by no means luxurious, and it wasn't meant to be, because neither would be the work of a missionary among the heathen. Missionary work would require vigor and vigilance, aptitudes bestowed upon these young men at Hermannsburg as shown by what they drew above the door of the house. They fashioned a cross and wrote on it: *in hoc signes*, "in this sign you shall conquer." "In the might of their crucified Savior they can and will overcome all inside and outside enemies, and from the mission house go out into the heathen world, there to conquer Satan and heathendom, to save the poor heathen from his power, and to spread the kingdom of heaven to the ends of the world."[xxxii] This sign, in no small way an inheritance of fervent faith to them from the school's founder, would soon become the official emblem of the students at the Hermannsburg mission house, as it even remains to this day.

Upon completion of their studies at Hermannsburg, candidates for the ministry were first asked to complete an examination supervised by the proper authorities, and only upon the recommendation of the authorities would the candidates be ordained. The examination was divided into an oral exam and a written exam. The oral examination included questions on the Bible, Explanation of Scripture, Symbolics, Church History, Dogmatics and Pastoral Theology. Below is an example of a written examination as it was given to the first graduating class, and it is likely that this written examination did not change dramatically in format over the years.

1. Give the essential difference between the heathen religions and that of revelation, also of the Old Testament from the Christian religion.
2. Give the chief errors and abuses of the Romish church against which Dr. Luther contended.
3. What, according to Biblical doctrine, is the use of the Law after a man has come to faith?
4. What is a sacrament? Why does the Lutheran Church accept only two? In what relation do Baptism and the Holy Supper stand to each other?
5. Give the missionary principles taken from the missionary travels of St. Paul.[xxxiii]

On September 16, 1853 the first graduating class passed the examinations with ease and was ordained into the holy ministry. The eight young men were Struve, Schuetze, Schroeder, Karl Hohls, Meyer, Kohrs, Heinrich Hohls and Mueller.[xxxiv] Conspicuous by his absence was Johannes Bading, whose last minute parting of ways with Louis Harms after training at Hermannsburg for four years led him to the Langenburg society, from which he

came to America (had he graduated from Hermannsburg, he would have been commissioned to Africa). On October 20 the Hermannsburg church proudly and excitedly sponsored the commissioning service, ready to send their sons to serve the Lord. The spacious building was overflowing with congregational members who looked upon these men as their personal representatives in mission work, visiting pastors eager to support these fellow brothers in the ministry, and family and friends saddened but delighted to say good bye. Theodore Harms gave the farewell address based on 1 Timothy 4:16, "Watch your life and your doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."[xxxv] Louis Harms then gave a commissioning exhortation to his young students and they were ready to do the mission work for which they had been called. There remained only one problem. How would they get to their overseas destination?

The Treasury of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians

Louis Harms had hoped to find passage for his missionaries on merchant vessels, but he searched in vain. He also had the idea that they could travel on board with the other mission societies, but they refused. When all hopes of foreign mission work seemed dashed a Christian sailor named Lange suggested that Harms just build a ship. Now, at first Harms thought this would be too much of an undertaking, but the more he prayed about it and pondered it, the more he became convinced that it was the thing to do. He remarked that God once commanded Noah to build a ship 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide and 30 cubits high and "if God could accomplish that through Noah, who had only his three sons as helpers, then I do not see why God cannot let us build a ship to his glory and the salvation of the heathen which will be only one fifth as large as Noah's ark."[xxxvi]

Many friends of the Hermannsburg mission society and of Louis Harms questioned the cost (estimated $13,000) and practicality of this venture. More than any other of his visions, this seemed to cause the most commotion and offense among the people. But Harms endured the repeated and outspoken opposition. After all, the advantages were simply too attractive. Not only would the mission society save on the cost of travel in the long term (at the price asked by passenger lines, the Hermannsburg ship would pay for itself in two or three trips), but they could stay in direct contact with the missions, and they could also set sail at their own convenience to their own locations.

Surprisingly, even though no promotion about or collection for this ship had commenced to this point, Harms gained $19,000 for the building of the ship from the congregation and from friends of the mission society![xxxvii] Due to miscalculations in the estimated cost, however, all of the money had to be used. And so this giant vessel of the gospel was constructed at Harburg on the river. She was donned the name "The Candace" in honor of Queen Candace, ruler of the Ethiopians, mentioned in the mission story of Philip and the eunuch, and in light of the fact that the ship was to sail for Ethiopia.[xxxviii]

Soon after *The Candace* was commissioned she was packed with cargo and crew, as well as missionaries, and she set sail for the land of the Gallas in East Africa on October 28, 1853. The Gallas were a wild and powerful war-like people who lived in the northern part of East Africa. Harms found out about them from a German missionary named Dr. Krapf who had visited Africa nine years earlier. It is interesting that when Krapf recommended the Gallas to Harms as prime for the gospel, he compared their characteristics to those of the German people.[xxxix]

When *The Candace* arrived at Cape Town, however, the anxious anticipation of the missionaries must have turned to disappointment when they were not allowed to land. The area they selected had been take over by Mohammedan influence. Though their hopes may have been dashed, however, they didn't miss a beat in turning their ship toward Natal. They had seen this port on their way around the Cape and after soon landing there were welcomed. There they purchased land for the first mission colony, called New Hermannsburg, and concentrated their efforts on the Zulus of Natal, thereafter establishing a string of missions through Zululand.[xl]

The Candace returned safely in June of 1855, proving to be a reliable and seaworthy vessel. Over the next twenty years she made fifteen voyages in all and was then sold in 1875 for $5,000. A model of this

treasured ship is positioned above the pulpit in the Hermannsburg church, reminding the people of their fathers' passion for spreading the gospel overseas. *The Candace* also occupies a central position in the emblem of the Hermannsburg mission society to this day.

Embodied in *The Candace* we can see the remarkable faith and accompanying mission zeal of Louis Harms. He would let nothing stand in the way of his desire to see heathen lands Christianized. Such heartfelt desire became the core of the Hermannsburg mission society and also roused the interest of many mission-minded people. Those people, interested in the work of Louis Harms and his Hermannsburg mission society, numbered in the thousands. They were friends and family of Harms and of the students, members of the Hermannsburg congregation, state leaders and officials, missionaries themselves and many others. Because of the large number of supporters and the generosity of their support Harms felt inclined to keep them informed about the work of the Hermannsburg mission society. Consequently, in January of 1854 Louis Harms published the first *Hermannsburger Missionsblatt,* the official mission paper of the Hermannsburg mission society.

Staying in Touch

Harms himself gives the background of the paper in the first issue:

> The love of Christ compelled me. Since the founding of our mission house four years ago I have been so urgently requested to publish a Hermannsburg mission paper and have always shaken the dust off the requests as one shakes the rain drops off of his mantle. But no matter how much one shakes, if the rain continues you will soon get soaked to the skin. This was my experience; and to stop the rain I am publishing the *Missionsblatt* because I have a deep conviction that by avoiding this work and putting it off I would offend the love of the dear people who have encouraged me.
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> They love the mission house; they love the ones who live in it; they love the ones who have been commissioned from it and are now sailing on the seas – and this love is from the Lord Jesus Christ. They are eager to know how everything is going, what those in the mission house are doing, how those on the ship are doing and so on, and this is perfectly natural. I would do the same thing.
>
> And therefore I would not love the Lord Jesus and the people who ask for this information if I hesitated any longer. So we begin in God's name. May the faithful God say "yeah" and "Amen" to our undertaking and give us new strength for the new work.[xli]

First printed in 1854 with 2,500 copies circulated to friends, families, missionaries and officials, the *Missionsblatt* circulation rocketed to 16,000 by 1862 and the demand became so great for the paper that second and third editions had to be printed. Not only did people read and enjoy it, but they kept it for future reference.

The paper naturally focused on the mission work of Hermannsburg, and was always most spiritual in content. It offered firsthand reports from the mission fields in Africa and eventually India, Australia, and America. Harms also continually reported on any new happenings or progress in the Hermannsburg mission house, and also highlighted various sermons and special events from the Hermannsburg congregation's mission festivals. It goes without saying that this paper was a splendid tool of communication between the missionaries, the training school, and all the supporters and friends, serving to inform and inspire everyone who read it. Volumes from 1854-1871 can be located in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library and served as firsthand source material for this essay. The entire collection is housed in the Hermannsburg mission society archives still today. So encouraging was the reception of the *Missionsblatt* that in 1856, two years after the first printing of the paper, Louis Harms decided to establish a printing house at Hermannsburg, as well. Apparently his decision was influenced by a gift of $2,000 from a friend for that specific purpose. More than that, the language of native Africans was being put into writing and the overseas mission desperately needed Bibles, hymnals, catechisms,

schoolbooks, and other materials. Soon the printing house was constructed as a building connected to the mission house and it was dedicated on June 25, 1856.

Over the years the printing house served the Lord's kingdom voluminously. Not only was the *Missionsblatt* printed there regularly but thousands of pieces of Christian literature were published at its presses. Perhaps the most favorite publications were the sermons of Louis Harms, evidenced by the 78,000 copies of his sermons on the Gospels printed up to 1910. Finally, Harms made it well known that this was not a money-making venture. Therefore all profit from the publishing house flowed into the treasury of the mission house.

It is obvious from the Hermannsburg school's history that the Lord showered his blessings upon their faith, zeal, and hard work. It grew from a small school in an old farmhouse with twelve students in 1849 to a school with two mission houses and 54 students,[xlii] its own ship, a publishing house, and thousands of supporters fifteen years later.

After only a decade of work in Africa, Hermannsburg had established 24 permanent mission stations and some tentative ones[xliii] – the more prominent ones included missions among the Zulus and inhabitants of Bechuana. In 1864 a missionary was sent to India, and then three more the following year. The July 1869 issue of the *Missionsblatt* reports 37 mission stations in Africa, five in India and one in Australia (eventually four missionaries were sent to Australia and they even branched out into New Zealand). By 1892 Hermannsburg had opened 58 chief mission stations in Natal, Zululand and the Transvaal in Africa, and many more secondary ones, with 59 missionaries and 360 native helpers being responsible for gospel outreach as well as the spiritual care of 18,284 baptized souls.[xliv]

The Home Front

While these exciting adventures of a mission house, a mission ship, and missions overseas were unfolding, Louis Harms continued to share his passionate faith and ministry with the Hermannsburg congregation. Since mission work remained his greatest passion, he began to hold mission festivals annually in the congregation beginning in 1851. These were no ordinary mission festivals attended only by a few faithful congregation members. People from the surrounding country and congregations, and even visitors from quite a distance made the pilgrimage to be part of this experience. The mission festival would last two days. On the first day the congregation would welcome the guests to town early in the morning, and the mission house band would burst forth with jubilant music. It all created quite a festive tone. Prayer and singing could be heard all over town when services began in the church at 10:00 a.m. Louis Harms would preach a sermon, then after a noon break there would be another service and Harms would give the report of the mission house for the past year. The second day consisted of an open-air celebration. There the assembly would journey in a procession on foot and in wagons, complete with banners and a band, from the church to an open meadow outside of town. The morning would be filled with Scripture readings and prayer, but the highlight of the morning would be another sermon by Louis Harms. In his usual fashion Harms included plenty of gospel, but also stressed the urgency and need for mission work. His stories of persecutions in the early church and during the Reformation kept the people riveted to the cause at hand. After a picnic lunch the group would hear short addresses by visiting pastors and then Harms would usually speak in Low-German. The mission festival would end with prayers and the benediction.[xlv] The people always emptied their pockets with generous gifts at these mission festivals, even though Harms never passed the plate. Whoever felt like giving would most often bring the gift to Pastor Harms personally. But money was never a main object of interest for him. He once remarked to his people:

> Money does not run the mission, prayer runs the mission, then God runs the mission and the money comes of itself. But where the order is reversed and money is made the chief thing, where men are continually crying: "Give money!" there men are running the mission and it will soon

> fail. The mission, which is to convert the heathen and rescue them from the power of Satan, is a miraculous work of God. Therefore if you love our mission I beg you pray for our mission, pray in faith, pray with reconciled hearts, then our mission cannot perish as certainly as God's Word cannot perish.[xlvi]

"The great object of the mission festival was not to raise money, but to impart information, to get the facts before the people and to stimulate interest and zeal in this greatest work in the world.[xlvii] For more information on the history and development of the congregation in Hermannsburg, readers can refer to the 100th anniversary booklet of the congregation, found in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library and referenced in this bibliography. Louis Harms served the congregation in Hermannsburg devotedly for twenty years, though later in his career he was often afflicted with attacks of rheumatism, as well as heart trouble, dropsy, and a number of physical infirmities. He eventually had to be wheeled to church in a cart, but he never missed the opportunity to preach to his people on Sunday morning, and in fact the only Sunday he was not able to preach to them was the Sunday before his death. Pastor Louis Harms left this life on November 14, 1865 at the age of 57 years, and was taken up to a heavenly place where he would worry about mission work no more except to worship in the everlasting with those trophies of his earthly labors, and more significantly with his Savior God. In his 1999 book, "*Die vergessenen Soehne Hermannsburgs in Nordamerika*," Dr. Reinhart Mueller, a former director of the Hermannsburg mission society, pays sesquicentennial tribute to Harms:

> 150 years later we are inclined to marvel at the faith-courage of Louis Harms, which called a small, poor, average, pious village congregation to an assignment that demanded too much of its strengths and possibilities and its imagination. But those are false standards. In obedience of faith and in a literal understanding and serious acceptance of the Scripture lie the roots of his decision; and in childlike, stubborn trust that God would lead to a good conclusion a matter that he himself had commanded. The reaction of those who heard of it (this assignment) ranged from spirited acceptance to sharp refusal, mockery, and disdain. But the mission work grew and grew.[xlviii]

Louis Harms is a man who himself was rescued by the gospel of a searching Savior, more than once, and thus lived in gratitude to his God and a commitment to rescue the lost. He worked in a tireless manner, but let God do the work. While most seminary professors today would not encourage pastoral candidates to imitate the boldness and expediency with which Harms pursued many of his "outside the box" projects launched without a ministry plan or voters meeting – Harms himself might argue that it wasn't so much boldness as faith, it wasn't so much him but God, and it wasn't so much his zeal as it was the greater need to save lost souls. Who can stand idle? Who can let others stand idle?

The acts of faith, the spirit of excitement for the work of the gospel, the generous support of mission work, the tireless and creative efforts for the kingdom, and the unity of purpose at Hermannsburg are all exemplary characteristics for a congregation, seminary, and synod today. But perhaps the most distinguishing trait of the Hermannsburg church, its pastors, and its mission society was their confessionalism in a land being taken over by compromise to the Word of God. Before observing a confessional partnership between the Hermannsburg mission society and the Wisconsin Synod, let's track the course of confessionalism in the life of Louis Harms and his mission house.

Contending for the Truth

A compromise of Scripture confronted Louis Harms even from the beginning of his study of theology. At the University of Goettingen rationalism succeeded in causing him to compromise Scriptural fact and spiritual faith for human reason. In the small mission circle he joined in Lauenburg Pietism serenaded him with

its attractive emphasis of sanctification at the expense of justification. When he initially founded the Hermannsburg school he was under the auspices of the unionistic North German Mission Society. Yet the Lord used these influences to rouse the soul and mind of Louis Harms to contend for the truth – the absolute truth of God's Word without compromise. Theodore Harms testified to such an arousal in the obituary of his brother Louis, reminding the people that "by severe struggles he had to free himself from pietism and unionism and attain Lutheran clearness and simplicity of faith.[xlix] The Holy Spirit sprung Harms from the deep thinking of rationalism, set him free from the bondage of Pietism, and revealed to him the indifference of unionism. So he could be called "the advocate of a strong, Lutheran confessional direction in his congregation"[l] at Hermannsburg. Likewise, he also sought to insure the strong confessional character of the mission fields by requiring the founding of a strong Christian colony first, and then other mission stations to be formed proceeding from the mother colony in a close connection.[li]

Harms, however, was only one person among a larger group of Lutherans concerned about strong confessionalism. During the Prussian Union confessional consciousness heightened, especially in the province of Hanover, which contained Hermannsburg. Therefore, many friends of Harms and of the Hermannsburg mission watched the rationalistic and unionistic practices of the Lutheran state church with growing anxiety. Their refusal to take part in the practices of the state church was a true confession in itself. Harms dissented to the state church, as well, citing its use of force in making people pay, its laws ruling over congregations, and the controversy and turmoil within its own body.[lii] His reaction to the gathering of the state churches in Germany (which he calls a "synod") is this: "A true Lutheran may only then enter a synod if the confession of the Lutheran church is acknowledged by the synod from the very start, and if the members of the synod declare that the Lutheran doctrine and the Lutheran confession, addressed as such in the confessional writings of our church, are acknowledged as binding and valid also for the synod.[liii]

Four months after Harms stated such, he and a considerably large group of friends and supporters of the Hermannsburg mission publicly professed and signed their response to the unionistic movement in "The Three Points." This confessional statement, drawn up at one of the Hermannsburg congregation's mission festivals, would be published in the July 1863 issue of the *Missionsblatt*. The third point deals mostly with church lands and the intent of these Lutherans to prohibit the state church from acquiring them, but the first two points are sound confessional statements very worthy of print.

Signatures to the three points expressed at the Mission Festival and publicly announced in the *Missionsblatt*

1.

We wish to hold true and steadfast to the confession of the Lutheran church as it is explained on the basis of Holy Scripture in the Augsburg Confession delivered on June 25, 1530, and all the rest of the confessional writings of the church; we can only recognize that church body as a Lutheran one in which this confession stands as right and has exclusive validity, and our confidence is on God's Word that this confession, since it is upheld by God's Word and power, can be impaired and encroached upon by no worldly or spiritual power on earth. For the exclusive and unmingled value of this confession in our dear Lutheran church we want to pledge what we are and have.

2.

We condemn and reject with strong aversion all value of the majority of votes in matters of faith. In matters of faith only God's Word and the confession of our church is of value. And if among 1,000 votes 999 decide upon a decree against the Word of God and the confession of our church, then this decree would be null and void, and whoever submits to such a decree would stigmatize his conscience. As no rule can bind the conscience by coercion, so also no synod by a majority of votes. We are also willing to fight for it with all strength and

> legal means, that such unchristian value of majority of votes in matters of faith be prevented, as we ourselves will never submit to the same.[liv]

To add further clarity and confession, Harms was not merely satisfied with printing "The Three Points," but in the last four issues of the *Missionsblatt* that year (September to December, 1863) he printed extensive presentations on the doctrine of every article in the Augsburg Confession. This strong commitment to God's Word formed men of great conviction and confession at the Hermannsburg mission society, uniquely qualifying the Hermannsburg missionaries among their contemporary counterparts from the other institutions and positively attracting the attention of a small, confessional Lutheran church body in America, the Missouri Synod. In 1866 Prof. Brauer wrote to Hermannsburg from the Missouri Synod seminary in St. Louis:

> Two congregations in Missouri, who quite recently organized themselves at least so far that they formed a resolution to stand together as members of the Lutheran church and to jointly call a pastor so that they did not fall as prey to the constant persecution of the sects, have sent a pressing request for a preacher from Harms. The people have heard about our *Reiseprediger*, that they have also come to us from the Hermannsburg missionaries, and they now want to have one of the same. But now, however, both beloved brothers Sapper and Wuebben are already in office and under God's help are working with blessing. If we would now have in our Seminary such a man who would be so qualified that he could serve a congregation, then we would have held this request back from you in order to provoke no inconvenience in your previously established order regarding the completion of the teaching course.
>
> We have already done our best with the last appointment of our students to help the need of the congregations as much as possible, even though eight calls must still be taken into consideration. Now we turn these congregations over to you, however straightforward and blunt that might be, because they expressly want a pastor from Harms. They are in great danger. The entanglement of the sects is extraordinarily strong in local opposition – German Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, United and New Lutherans get their ways going and have already misled many Lutherans ... [lv]

Pastor Sapper and Pastor Wuebben, mentioned above, were 1866 graduates from Hermannsburg already established in their ministries when Brauer wrote to Theodore Harms (who had taken over in 1865 after Louis' death) for more men. Hermannsburg documents refer to these two pastors as the "firstborn," since they were the first Hermannsburgers to be commissioned directly to America. Pastor Wuebben later joined the Wisconsin Synod in 1874. But to the question – did Theodore Harms respond by sending droves of Hermannsburgers to America to serve in fraternally confessional church bodies like the Missouri and Wisconsin synods? And another question – why had Hermannsburg not earlier sent more of its men to America, especially since the Wisconsin Synod made such a request in 1862 and even sent its president, John Bading, on a personal crusade for such to Germany and even Hermannsburg?

Land of the Free

From 1846 to 1859 over one million Germans emigrated to America. After a short interruption during the American Civil War, another million arrived before 1873.[lvi] Most of these Germans brought across the Atlantic not only dreams of pockets filled with gold, but desires for religious freedom. Unfortunately for many, that meant freedom from the confessional church, and at worst freedom from all things heavenly. Undoubtedly Louis Harms, whose ears were to walls of churches around the world, heard this disappointing news. It wasn't until after his death that the Hermannsburgers commissioned to America would send their alarming reports. Like a letter from Sapper in 1867, "Really here one hundred times more are lost than are gained in the heathen

world. In addition, they are our German brothers, especially our north German brothers, who indeed were Christians, who here become blind and wild heathen or fall into the hands of the sects. For that reason then help us as much as you possibly can."[lvii] "How far the ungodliness and godlessness goes here." Lorenz Menge reports, "The greatest enemies are saloonkeepers. It isn't any better here than among the heathen."[lviii] And it wasn't much better among the spiritual shepherds. One call for help from a pastor in California stated, "Of seven Protestant preachers four call themselves Lutheran, but the most loved, a Braunschweiger, on request baptizes with beer or brandy."[lix] Should the Lutherans back in Germany feel a disgust in their stomachs, or a desire to help? Even without such reports of spiritual betrayal, those who remained in Germany felt more than a little jilted by those who culturally betrayed their "fatherland" for a new world. Theodore Harms writes in the 1866 *Missionsblatt,*

> It is a precious matter about the fatherland, where we were born, where we have learned to know our Savior, and where our ancestors rest in graves, and a rascal is he who does not cherish it and willingly gives up his life for it, if that must be the case. But there is on earth another fatherland, that is, the spiritual, our beloved church, the outer court of heaven, our real fatherland, and he is twofold a rascal who does not love this spiritual fatherland if he knows it and is not doubly willing to die for the same, if that must be the case.
>
> This in America have arrived millions of Germans, who are not particularly lovers of church and school, order and discipline, and now in the dreamed of paradise America gradually become reasonable again and realize that without church and school they are most wretched people.[lx]

So, how about a big "we told you so!" and simply snubbing the traitors who fled Germany for the good life in America that wasn't turning out to be so good after all, at least spiritually speaking? Why send them missionaries from Hermannsburg if they have already had Christ preached to them and were now trampling on the Son of God despite knowing better? The heathen, after all, didn't know any better. If you think this is what you are reading between the lines of Theodore Harms' message above then consider that he is not sharing his personal disdain but echoing what he hears among mission supporters only in order to counter it with the real, compassionate, faithful mission zeal of a Harms brother and a Hermannsburger. He further explains in the same *Missionsblatt* article as above,

> In America the government is not at all concerned about the church. There state and church are separated; the state or the government, is concerned only about the earthly affairs. The people want to have churches, which they may build themselves … There each one can believe what he wants and if he even does not believe at all he has just as much a right as each of the others. So the people there grow up without baptism, without Catechism, without communion, and become pure heathen if the church of the poor people is not accepted. The Germans go to America in order to run away from the church and school, therefore the church must go after them in order to snatch them from heathendom. Therefore, the work among our wandering fellow countrymen becomes mission work.
>
> For years already numerous prayers and requests have poured out from America to my brother to send them a preacher, because they can no longer stand it there without spiritual care and the pure means of grace, and my brother seriously pondered the matter before God and in his true heart. But the Lutheran church was built different in America than it was in Germany, at least externally since the true structure of the church is overall the same, namely through Word and Sacrament. Here the sovereign rule is the protector of the church, there the govermnent is concerned with no church …
>
> In America the single congregations bind themselves together into synods and rule themselves and organize themselves however they want and no one has to talk them into it …

> Besides the eight Lutheran types there is one synod, the Missouri Synod, which has its seat in St. Louis, even though there may also be eight other Lutheran synods there (America) where we will send our missionaries, yet without excluding the remaining eight Lutheran synods, so after Easter two missionaries will set sail there as the first ones, as the Lord wills … If the Scriptures say: "Let us do good to everyone, but especially to fellow believers," then we should also therein be obedient and the Lord will not refuse us his grace. Amen.

Did the Hermannsburg mission society turn its nose at the rampant sin among fellow Germans now living the high life in America? Perhaps only in their sinful flesh, but that's all. They bravely responded with Christ-like concern for those Germans in America now termed by some as "baptized heathen" and "new heathen." This use of the term "heathen" indicates yet another insight into Hermannsburg commissioning priorities.

To Africa With Love, to America With Concern

In 1862 Louis Harms had reported for the first time in the *Missiohsblatt* about the request for missionaries in America. His words reflect that the Hermannsburg students were allowed a degree of input about their final assignment, at least those interested in America.

> Also we have directed our eyes on the unfortunate America. From there many letters have come here, and especially a letter from Minnesota with the request, might we send them 10, 12, 20 missionaries who would preach the gospel there among the poor Germans. Soon thereafter two people announced themselves, who wanted to go there and we have accepted after a full learning course to send them over there, and consider also to expand that program. May God bless it.[lxi]

Harms found himself now torn between two loves, taking care of his fellow Germans lapsing in America from the Christian faith they knew, and bringing the gospel to heathen peoples on other continents who had never known Christ. But he didn't play the either/or game. He instead opted for the both/and conclusion. In a letter discovered in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary archives, Louis Harms writes in 1865 to American brothers, apparently in the Wisconsin Synod, with a passionate understanding of their need for more "workers in the Lord's vineyard."[lxii] The Hermannsburg mission society sought to fill that need. Students were allowed to announce their intent to train as missionaries for America, and more than that, if some of the students who trained for mission work among the heathen on other continents could not be placed there, they were sent to America, as Theodore Harms explains.

> The dear mission friends dare not wonder, if besides the young people who here let themselves be educated expressly for America, also from the students who in the mission house educate themselves for service among the heathen, some will be sent to America. Our mission remains a heathen mission. Only if the many brothers who go out every two years in our mission field find no work and the Lord does not open new mission fields will they be assigned to America for service in the Lutheran churches in America, where the need is so great. Then every true mission friend will have to give me the right, that the workers at the time available will be used better in the kingdom of the Lord in America than that they will not be used in the heathen world and stand idle in the marketplace in Europe. The Lord wants to have workers in his harvest."[lxiii]

So, Harms' response to the need for missionaries in America was 1) giving the option to students to train for America and be sent there at their request, and 2) redirecting any students who train for missionary work in foreign lands, but find none, to minister to the "new heathen" in America. This balanced response on

the part of the Hermannsburg mission society is even more heroic when we consider two other issues. To be fair, Africa was Hermannsburg's first love. This is where *The Candace* set sail on her maiden voyage and where true heathens lived who had never heard the gospel, and the work there was going well. More than that, Hermannsburg mission work was spreading also to India and Australia and needed more workers. Secondly, considering the struggle that Hermannsburg had with the state church, imagine how they pictured the Lutheran bodies in America, called "synods," the same term used for the assembly of the state church in Germany. They had to be at the very least suspicious. Despite this fact, already in 1863 Louis Harms spoke very positively about Hermannsburg's program for providing missionaries to America "being blessed," and mentioned, "To our joy this work for America also always receives more participation, and also the contributions for it increase in a pleasing way."[lxiv]

It becomes apparent, however, that the most difficult challenge for Hermarmsburg in the dilemma of where to send the missionaries who don't have a personal preference for their final destination was not the bureaucracy of a "synod" that brought pictures of the state church to their minds, not the godlessness of Lutherans in America who should know better, not the desertion of fellow Germans who wandered from their homeland, and not the difficulty of the American task. Rather it was their great love for heathen mission work in Africa, India, and Australia, and their many prayers and planning for such success. One more missionary sent to America is one less missionary in the heathen lands. Perceptive readers, however, will conclude that Louis and Theodore Harms left this also in the Lord's hands as much as all other Hermannsburg ventures.

Because of this love for Africa and the African people, Louis Harms did not look favorably upon the American slavery issue and the ensuing Civil War. In another letter discovered in the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary library, he wrote to "my dear son," likely a Hermannsburg missionary in America, in September of 1865. He disagrees with an the American understanding that Africans should be inferior slaves in America, and writes with concern about the American "treatment of the colored race."[lxv]

To the degree that Louis and Theodore had a hand in selecting which students would be sent to America and which students to heathen lands, they seem to have preferred that the brightest and best be sent to heathen lands. Due to the great number of "baptized heathen" in America and the difficult work, "firstborn" Hermannsburger Sapper requests from America in 1867 that Theodore Harms think over again the mission society's priorities.[lxvi] Many joined him in wondering aloud whether Hermannsburg could send the very talented and versatile men to America and the less talented to Africa. This plea, however, did not carry much weight with the administration in Hermannsburg, mostly due to their wisdom and insight, and perhaps slightly because of a first love for heathen missions. Wolgang Bienert, a former director of the Hermannsburg mission society who penned the preface to Mueller's sesquicentennial book, makes this judgment about the Hermannsburg society's regard of its missionaries sent to America:

> For their assignment was not mission work among the heathen, but care of the souls among emigrants, at any rate mission work among "new heathen." As a mission field North America was never regarded in Hermannsburg – somewhat in contrast to South Africa and India. They were *Seelsorger* among German emigrants, and as such one did not consider them among missionaries. For that reason they also fell into oblivion – in spite of their comparatively large number – because for themselves and their families that had to build up a new existence in North America, and as a rule attached themselves to the churches there.[lxvii]

To be fair, the Hermannsburg position on their men and their work was not official disregard, but simply an unintentional comparison to the heathen work for which the mission house had originally been founded. Considering the challenges, the Harms brothers gave astounding consideration to the need in America, yet hesitated to make it equal with the heathen mission. One cannot, however, fault them when looking at some of the statistics for Hermannsburg's contribution to Lutheranism in America. In 1867 Hermannsburg sent 11 missionaries to America, 8 were sent the next year, 16 in 1869 and 14 in 1870.[lxviii] At a mission festival in 1873

Theodore Harms reported, “In America we now have a large number of brothers; if I can make an estimate, might be 50 or 60. They are highly regarded, thank God, and cause Hermannsburg no shame. Also they work under God’s blessing.”[lxix] Beyond reports as these, over the course of the years many Hermannsburgers who had difficulties in heathen missions were reassigned to America, among them Johannes Brockman, who in 1864 left Africa and joined the Wisconsin Synod. It is also interesting to note that, based on statistics reported previously, Hermannsburg had about the same number of men in Africa in 1892 that it had in America already in 1873! And need there yet be a concern about the quality of these men sent to America, as somehow inferior to those in Africa? Often times a human judgment of “inferiority” is nothing other than an acknowledgement that one individual has what it takes to step toe-to-toe with a challenging job nobody else wants. More than that, with full confidence in the Lord of the church and his ability to put the right men in the right place even despite the misplaced sincerity of human intervention, Dr. Mueller notes,

> What pertains to the selection criteria of the mission administration, thus the impression forces itself upon me, it had allocated beforehand students who during their training had become casual, also such who offended against house rules or the betrothal paragraphs (which forbade an engagement during the time at the seminary), in short, had sent is difficult people to America, while the gifted and those who conformed were sent into the mission societies. If that is true, then they had come upon the correct selection, without wanting to do so, for independence, joy in making decisions, and a portion of the contrary spirit were no bad prerequisites for service in North America.[lxx]

Without embarrassment, therefore, Bienert concludes his preface to Mueller’s book, commenting on the “forgotten sons of Hermannsburg” in America: “this group, which had to work under difficult external conditions and for the most part without any support from the homeland, nevertheless worked remarkably in missionary and pastoral fashion, as well a part of the history of the Hermannsburg mission as also one of the roots of North American Lutheranism.”[lxxi] Let us now explore those roots, especially as the Lord implanted them into the fertile soil of the Wisconsin Synod.

Hermannsburg Relations with the Wisconsin Synod

When considering the relations of the Hermannsburg mission society with the Wisconsin, the previous explanation of Hermannsburg’s relationship with America needs to be kept in mind, as the Wisconsin Synod is certainly American. Furthermore, Hermannsburg’s relationship with other Lutheran synods in America, particularly those that share the Wisconsin Synod’s confession, is paralleled in Wisconsin. Also to be remembered is the strong confessionalism for which Hermannsburg stood and strove from the founding of the mission house in 1849, the same year the pioneers of the Wisconsin Synod first met. For the same reason that the Wisconsin Synod was often called “unionistic” in its early years, in no small part due to the tendencies of its first president, so the strongly confessional Hermannsburg mission society and its founder did not find themselves attracted to support this little, growing synod. And the statistics reflect it. The first Hermannsburger commissioned directly into the Wisconsin Synod, Albert Liefeld, came in 1866, seventeen years after the synod and the Hermannsburg mission society were founded.

As the Wisconsin Synod, under the leadership of President John Bading, pursued a more officially solid confessionalism beginning in the late 1850s, one wonders if the previous personal conflict between Bading and Louis Harms played a role in further Hermannsburg disinterest. Koehler makes the remark that after Bading left Hermannsburg, the Langenberg society to which he applied “investigated and settled his differences with Harms”[lxxii] before allowing him to enroll. Ten years later at the synod convention Bading read from a letter that he had received from Louis Harms, “Surely, I faithfully have at heart American spiritual conditions and will do for them whatever is in my power. I assure you that I will keep you in mind when we send our preachers from our mission house here, as long as you and your synod stand on wholly Lutheran ground and are not given to

strife and contention, that never yet has profited anything."[lxxiii] Bading also had opportunity to speak personally with Harms on his trip to Germany in 1864. He mentioned in a letter to synod President Gottlieb Reim, "The good terms I am on with Pastor Harms and his good opinion of us …"[lxxiv] As a fruit of Bading's trip, Koehler also informs us that "Bading's personal work, too, resulted in further accessions to synod's personnel, especially from Hermannsburg."[lxxv] These accessions don't seem to be immediate, however, due to the schedule of Hermannsburg and the American Civil War. The first, mentioned above, is Albert Liefeld sent from Hermannsburg to the Wisconsin Synod in 1866, then August Wiese in 1868, then ten more men in five years.

This is an indication that Bading and the Wisconsin Synod enjoyed the favor of Theodore Harms, who took over leadership of the Hermannsburg society after Louis' death in 1865. As a matter of fact, Mueller mentions that Bading "had a very close relationship with Theodore Harms."[lxxvi] A search of Wisconsin Synod convention proceedings through 1880 shows that after these ten men came to Wisconsin from Hermannsburg during a five year period (technically Wuebben was Hermannsburg trained and come to Wisconsin from Missouri in 1874), Hermannsburg sent no other candidates. A combination of Hermannsburg's need to send their men to heathen lands, and also the growing abilities of the Wisconsin and Missouri seminaries along with Hermannsburg's insistence that American men begin to fill them up, contributed to this decline. Another factor had been developing in the relationship between the Wisconsin Synod and the Hermannsburg mission society that soon concluded with a greater degree of finality: the election controversy. In 1875, Prof. Siehler of the Missouri Synod brought into question publicly the orthodoxy of Louis Harms, and engaged brotherly exchange of letters between Prof. Brauer at St. Louis and Theodore Harms in Hermannsburg. Discussions about election continued between Lutheran synods in America, and they included the Hermannsburg mission society. Finally, in 1883 Theodore Harms wrote in the *Missionsblatt*,

> Since the Missouri-Calvinistic doctrine of election has evoked such a difficult controversy in the Lutheran synods of North America, that the Missouri influence which has threatened to withdraw almost entirely the helping love from our mission, for a large part was broken, the love of the synods who stand against Missouri has again switched to Hermannsburg, which for a long time publicly has declared itself against the Missouri errors, to our mission. The Ohio Synod, which almost alone of all the synods of North America had never completely forsaken Hermannsburg, has declared unanimously through a synodical resolution to switch all gifts for the heathen mission solely to our mission, and requested to supply them with Hermannsburg students as earlier.[lxxvii]

Albert Liefeld, the Hermannsburger sent to the Wisconsin Synod in 1866, left it for the Ohio Synod in 1883 to embrace the *intuitu fidei* position opposed by Wisconsin. And so the Hermannsburg mission society followed. Mueller quotes some of the statistics of how many men Hermannsburg sent to each of the synods: Missouri Synod – 44 (most of them before the mid 1870s), Ohio Synod – 69, Canada Synod – 3, Minnesota Synod – 3, Buffalo Synod – 3, Iowa Synod – 14, Michigan Synod – 3. A small number of others were sent in different capacities, or joined non-Lutheran organizations. Interestingly, Mueller comments at the end of his endnotes to that chapter, "Strange to say there is in the archive [at Hermannsburg] no file with correspondence Hermannsburg-Wisconsin Synod."[lxxviii]

This author's personal search of synod convention proceedings shows that between 1854 and 1880 seventeen men with Hermannsburg training served as pastors in the Wisconsin Synod: Johannes Bading, Johannes Broclcmann, Albert Liefeld, August Wiese, Carl Adolph Zuberbier, H.J. Haack, Heinrich August Kleinhaus, Heinrich Christoph Dagegoerde, John Meyer, Heinrich Wilhelm Hagedorn, von Schlottheim, Julius Haase, G. Hoelzel, Peter Lange, Wuebben, H. Proehl, and F. Ave-Lallemant. Of these pastors ten were commissioned directly to the Wisconsin Synod from Herrmannsburg. Notable among them is John Meyer, sent in 1871, the father of later Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor J.P. Meyer. A chart record of this research is attached to this essay in the seminary library file.

Profile of a Hermannsburger

Though it concluded with doctrinal disagreement, we can rejoice in the friendly relationship the Wisconsin Synod enjoyed with the Hermannsburg mission society, prompted by a mutual zeal for the spread of the gospel and a concern for confessionalism. Without a doubt the Lord of the church directed this relationship to solidify at a pivotal time in our synod when we were seeking men who were confessionally Lutheran, theologically sound, spiritually strong, and professionally qualified to lead a congregation. Men we could have found elsewhere only with extreme difficulty. The men from Hermannsburg came equipped with those highly esteemed traits. Now is a good time to rejoice in the Christian character and mission-minded aptitude developed in the men who came to us from Hermannsburg.

To be sure, their greatest strength became, in America, a difficult weakness. The brotherhood at Hermannsburg that developed through labor, study, and prayer bonded these men fraternally. At the same time they remained very loyal to their mission society in Hermannsburg, as well as to Louis and Theodore Harms, whom they often addressed in letters as "father." Mission offerings in the American church of a Hermannsburger would rarely be routed anywhere other than the Hermannsburg mission society. An amazing abundance of correspondence between the Hermannsburgers in the field and Louis and Theodore Harms can be read in the mission society archives today. But far removed from the Hermannsburg mission house, and more so far removed from any fraternal fellowship (this was not the case with missionaries to the heathen, who had more immediate contact with other missionaries and mission superintendents), the American Hermannsburgers felt a sense of being forgotten and neglected. Certainly the priority of the mission house to heathen lands played a part in this as much as subjective feelings of isolation.

In addition many Hermannsburgers were trained for mission work to the heathen with no knowledge of God and now they found themselves ministering to the "new heathen" Germans who had set aside their faith. Beyond that, the Lutheran synods in America often changed their attitude toward the Herrmannsburg mission society. So it is not surprising that this became a recipe for interest on the part of some Hermannsburgers in America to create their own little synod under the leadership of Hermannsburg. But "the mission leadership in Hermannsburg denied itself this desire and quite consciously thereupon renounced to expand the multiplicity of Lutheran churches in North America through a Hermannsburg church."[lxxix]

So it was work as usual for the Hermannsburgers, who found need to confront yet another challenge, this time not their perception but that of the Americans. As stated by Hermannsburger Haack in a letter to Theodore Harms, "Here one always likes to consider the Hermannsburgers as dumbbells, therefore I would like to demonstrate otherwise."[lxxx] The Hermannsburg mission was called a "farmers mission" both in America and in Germany, and gladly received that title. It expressed its roots in a farm village of the Lueneburger Heide, and also that the majority of its students and the orientation of its supporting congregations were rural. But backwardness and inflexibility, conservative clinging to the old and rejecting the new, quaint is how the Hermannsburgers were often perceived, only because of the "farmers mission." To whatever degree they carried such characteristics with them, the Hermannsburgers displayed other farmer-like qualities in their ministry that any congregation would envy in its pastor. A tireless work ethic. A persistent and patient faithfulness to every good cause. A human to human understanding of people and their problems. A childlike faith combined with a warrior's resolve. In response to difficult trials little complaining and lots of rejoicing. Hermannsburger C.W. Lembke describes the conditions in America to his brother, Carl, who had inquired about serving there someday himself. After speaking of the conditions, he makes a stronger point about one's own spirituality in the ministry.

> Self-denial is a difficult virtue to practice, but the Lord demands it of everyone who wants to follow him. He will grant you the strength for that. Without difficult hours holy ministry does not take place. There is much trouble and work and sleepless nights. Your and the congregation's sins burden the heart. But there one really becomes aware that one has a living

> God, a Savior who helps. The work often is very hard and burdensome, but indescribable is the joy if one sees one, even if only a small result … Now, dear brother, forward with God, praying faithfully, working diligently, that gives a happy heart …[lxxxi]

This firm resolve in spiritual matters showed itself in a Hermannsburger's handling of God's truths. Those in America quickly noticed the Hermannsburg men, in the situation of confessional plurality, as dedicated to the true Word of God with conviction and without compromise. In this they gained great trust. And they also exhibited a high interest in getting God's Word to people, on personal visitation and in the worship services and classes. Learning to sing in harmony from Theodore Harms at the mission house, as well as participate in mandatory music lessons, the Hermannsburg men helped instill a beauty into the worship services through choirs, instruments, and singing. A fine partner in presiding over a beautiful worship service was the inspirational preaching of Hermannsburgers, no doubt echoing the preaching of Louis Harms for those who heard him at the mission house and Hermannsburg church.

To that end, the men of the Hermannsburg mission society lived out in their congregations in America the spirit and zeal of the Hermannsburg founder, Louis Harms. In a biography about him, his brother Theodore writes about his response to the new mission house in 1849 and its students, "To work with all might, to pray with all earnestness, was his life and his joy, and he rejoiced very much that in this the young mission house imitated him."[lxxxii] And they continued to imitate him many years removed and many lands away.

Hermannsburg Today

Further developments in the Hermannsburg mission society after 1880 do not so much involve the Wisconsin Synod but remain interesting to note. Theodore Harms died in 1885 and his son, Egmont Harms, took over as mission director until 1916 when he took a trip to Africa and died there. Upon his appointment, the education program at the mission house was increased to five years in 1886, and required students to learn Greek, and the gifted students to learn Hebrew. At a mission festival in 1914 the Hermannsburg congregation received a report that 189 pastors from the mission society have gone to North America, most of them to the Ohio Synod.

A web page with information about the Hermannsburg mission society explains further developments,

> After World War 2 the structure of the Hermannsburg Missionary Society was changed from an independent society to one integrated into the Lutheran Church in Germany. It is supported by three churches viz. the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hannover, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brunswick and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Schaumburg-Lippe. The HMS was renamed the "Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony" to indicate the wider association. At this state the HMS also took over some responsibilities of the Leipzig Mission which found itself constrained by the communist regime in East Germany.[lxxxiii]

Today, the Hermannsburg mission society, now known as the ELM, is still involved in sixteen countries on the three continents of South America, Africa, and Asia. Further information about the ELM is available through two websites, the official ELM website at www.elm-mission.net and www.geocities.com/Heartland/Meadows/7589/hmiss_en.html, an informational site about the mission society. This author's personal attempts to correspond with the society about current doctrinal position have not yet produced results, but he stands ready to be commissioned by the WELS Historical Institute or any other organization for a research trip to Hannover for further inquiry. For now, we in the Wisconsin Synod rejoice that the paths of our two institutions crossed not by chance, but by the good will of a gracious and loving God who wants all men to be saved. The words of our sainted brother, Louis Harms, say it even better, as he explains the meaning of the Hermannsburg mission school's motto, "*in diesem Zeichen wirst du siegen*," (in this sign you will conquer). "With this cross on which the Lamb of God bled to death, the missionaries shall

conquer the heathen together with their king, the devil, and under this cross our mission house shall stand against the gates of hell."[lxxxiv] With this a spirit of faith and confidence in our Savior, we join in a pledge of mission zeal as also written by Louis Harms, encouraging his mission supporters in 1864, "In Europe we sit, in Africa we work, an emissary is on his way to Asia, next year we want to go to America, but Australia dare not be left behind … Lord, therefore I would only request this of you, give us the whole world, so that we carry your Word and Sacrament into all five parts of the world."[lxxxv]

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Synod archives at Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Synodical proceedings of the Wisconsin Synod, 1850 through 1880.

Appendix A

Pastoral Membership: The First Thirty Years

Below is a list of the pastors in the Wisconsin Synod from its founding until 1880. Also listed are the year in which each became a member of the Synod (the year of their admittance by Synod convention) and their place of training or background. Of special interest here are the various German mission societies which provided men for the work of the gospel in America.

Sources for this document are J.P. Koehler's *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, E.G. Fredrich's *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, and the corresponding Synodical Proceedings of each year.

NA means the pastor was Not Admitted to the synod.

John Muehlhaeuser	1850	Langenberg
John Weinmann	1850	Langenberg
Wilhelm Wrede	1850	Langenberg
Karl Friedrich Goldammer	1851	Langenberg
K. Pleuss	1851	Basel
Conrad Koester	1852	Langenberg
W. Buehren	1853	Methodist pastor
Jacob Conrad	1853	Trained by Wrede
John Bading	1854	Hermannsburg/Langenberg
Joseph Daniel Huber	1854	Roman priest
Gotthilf Weitbrecht	1854	Basel/Tuebingen
Phillipp Koehler	1855	Langenberg
J.J. Elias Sauer	1855	Teaching Background
Gottlieb Reim	1856	Basel
Christian Starck	1856	Basel
Wilhelm Streissguth	1856	Basel
G. Diehlmann	1857	Basel
F Hennicke	1857	Trained by Pastor Sumser
Philipp Sprengling	1857	Langenberg
G. Fachtmann	1858	German University
J. Roell	1858	New Jersey Pastor
C. Braun	1859	Berlin
H. Duborg	1859	Norwegian
Julius Hoffman	1859	Berlin
A. Rueter	1859	Ohio Synod
Fr. Woldt	1859	St. Chrischona
Carl Friedrich Boehner	1860	Basel

L. Nietmann	1860	Teacher in Greenfield
C. Gausewitz	1860	Langenberg
E. Strube	NA	Langenberg
von Schmidt	NA	Langenberg/Gettysburg
F. Hass	1861	Teacher in Watertown
Wilhelm Dammann	1861	Langenberg
Theodore Meumann	1861	Langenberg
H. Quehl	1861	North Illinois Synod
H. Warnke	NA	North Illinois Synod
Josias Ritter	NA	North Illinois Synod
J. Kern	NA	North Illinois Synod
H. Sieker	1862	Gettysburg
M. Ewert	1862	Congregational leader
J. Kylian	1862	Former Moravian
F. Moldehnke	1862	Halle/Langenberg/Berlin
A. Denninger	1863	Berlin
A. Lange	1863	Missouri Synod
C. Titze	1863	Berlin
C.G. Reim	1863	Langenberg
Waldmann	1863	Langenberg
Philipp Brenner	1863?	Langenberg
A.F. Meyer	1863	St. Chrischona
P. Andreas Luepp	1863	St. Chrischona
L. Ebert	1863	St. Chrischona
H. Hilpert	1863	St. Chrisahona
H. Bartelt	1863	Berlin?
Adolf Hoenecke	1863	Berlin
Johannes Brockmann	1864	Hermannsburg
F. Giese	1864	German University/Berlin
A. Opitz	1864	Berlin
G. Vorberg	1864	German University/Berlin
G. Thiele	1864	Halle?/Berlin
Mayerhoff	1864	Halle/Berlin
Traugott Gensike	1865	Berlin
F. Kleinert	1865	German University/Berlin
G. Bachmann	1865	German University/Berlin
Theodor Jaekel	1865	German University/Berlin
W. Staerkel	1865	Illinois Synod?
August Zernecke	1865	German University/Berlin
E. Otto	1865	German University/Berlin
H. Hoffmann	NA	Berlin
I.A. Hoyer	1866	Berlin

Hermann Kittel	1866	Berlin
Albert Liefeld	1866	Hermannsburg
Paul Lukas	1867	Langenberg
Rudolph Baarts	1867	Berlin
Otter Ebert	1867	Berlin
Bernhard Ungrodt	1867	Langenberg
Ludwig Ebert	NA	Minnesota Synod
August Wiese	1868	Hermannsburg
A. Kluge	1868	Iowa Synod
Friedrich Schug	1869	University at Erlangen
E. Louis Junker	1869	Watertown
Christoph Dowidat	1869	Watertown
Albert F. Siegler	1869	Watertown
Carl Oppen	1869	Watertown
Carl Adolph M. Zuberbier	1870	Hermannsburg/Watertown
H.J. Haack	1870	Hermannsburg/Watertown
Heinrich August Ph. Kleinhaus	1870	Hermannsburg/Watertown
Heinrich Christoph Dagefoerde	1870	Hermannsburg/Watertown
G. Denninger	1870	Watertown
Jaeger	1870	Sem in Frieberg/Watertown
Otto Spehr	1870	Halle/Breslau
Chr. Reichenberger	1870	New York Ministerium
Friedrich Guenther	1871	Berlin
Wilhelm Schimpf	1871	Watertown
Carl Friedrich Huebner	1871	Pommern
John Meyer	1871	Herrmannsburg
Heinrich Wilhelm Hagedorn	1871	Hermannsburg
von Schlottheim	NA	Hermannsburg
Heinrich Hoops	1872	Watertown/St. Louis
Julius Haase	1872	Herrmannsburg/Watertown
John Koehler	1872	Watertown?
Edward Jonas	1872	Watertown
Conrad Diehlmann	1872	?
C. Popp	1872	Missouri Synod
J. Hodtwalker	1873	Watertown/St. Louis
Althof	1873	Watertown/St. Louis
G. Hoe1zel	1873	Hermannsburg
Peter Lange	1873	Hermannsburg
Wilhelm Bergholz	1874	St. Louis
Johannes J. Meyer	1874	Synod of the West

Wuebben	1874	Hermannsburg/Missouri Synod
H.B. Heinrichs	NA	Missouri Synod
C. Thurow	1874	Missouri Synod
J.C. Lieb	1874	Missouri Synod?
H. Eckelmann	1874	Germany/St. Louis
Stoeffler	NA	?
A. Toepel	1875	St. Louis
W. Hinnenthal	1875	St. Louis
Martin Denninger	1875	St. Louis
G. Reinsch	1876	Missouri Synod
Erdmann A. Pankow	1876	St. Louis
Franz Pieper	1876	St. Louis
Otto Hoyer	1876	St. Louis
H. Vogel	1876	Iowa Synod
Andreas Rehn	1876	Iowa Synod
W. Buehring	1876	Iowa Synod
J.H. Westenberger	1876	Iowa Synod
J. Vollmar	1876	Iowa Synod
J. Dejung	1876	Iowa Synod
Ph. von Rohr	1877	Buffalo Synod
H. Haese	1877	?
W. Jaeger	1877	St. Louis
A. Schroedel	1877	St. Louis
Edward Hoyer	1877	St. Louis
A. Petri	1877	St. Louis
B.P. Nommensen	1877	St. Louis
Reinhold Pieper	1877	St. Louis
Philipp Hoelzel	1878	Missouri Synod
J.M. Johannes	1878	Missouri Synod
Eugene Notz	1878	St. Louis
Chr. Probst	1878	Iowa Synod
J. Klindworth	1878	?
B.P. Kleinlein	1878	?
Chr. Roeck	1878	Missionary in India
C. Zlomke	1878	?
J. Hacker	1878	?
J.G. Oehlert	1879	Iowa Synod
F.H. Fruechternicht	1879	Synod of the West
A.H. Koch	1879	Springfield, IL.
A.W. Keibel.	1879	?
J.G.M. Hillemann	1879	Buffalo Synod
H. Hillemann, Jr.	1879	?
H. Proehl	1879	Hermannsburg?/Missouri Synod

August Pieper	1880	St. Louis
F. Ave-Lallemant	1880	Hermannsburg?/Ohio Synod
G.W. Albrecht	1880	Iowa Synod

(Not included are Watertown professors R. Adelberg, A. Ernst, Theodore Brohm, Dr. W. Notz, A. Graebner, A. Preller, and T. Snyder)

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