

1862 The beginning of Eleven Years of Trouble at St. Peter's

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*S. 8<sup>th</sup> + W. Scott  
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### Introduction and Background

The early mission societies played an important role in the founding of our Synod. It is only natural then as we study the history of the pioneer congregations of the Wisconsin Synod that their early roots and pastors can be traced back to such mission societies. This is true also of St. Peter's Luth. Church Milwaukee.

St. Peter's founding father was the same as that of our Synod, Muehlhaeuser. Muehlhaeuser was from the "Baseler <sup>+ Barmen</sup> Missionsgesellschaft." Muehlhaeuser's early training influenced the early course of our Synod and many of the congregations he helped to start as early mission outposts. In particular he laid greater stress on numbers of souls than on confessional stands. That our Synod changed its course and became a more confessional church body was due more to the convictions of the Lutherans which settled in this part of the country and latter strong theological leaders.

Another early mission society which influenced the beginnings of the Wisconsin Synod as well as St. Peter's was the Barmen mission society. Rauschenbusch, Wrede and Winman were all from Barmen. St. Peter's first Pastor William Dammann was also from the Mission Institute in Barmen. He as well as the others no doubt had the privilege of studying under Johann Christian Wallmann who was a strong leader at Barmen since 1848. He was especially strong in Lutheran practice, and very strong in confessional Lutheranism. Wallmann's strong influence on his

pupils, many of which latter ended up in the Wisconsin Synod could only mean a firm base for confessional Lutheranism in latter years. St. Peter's was fortunate to have such a strong leader from Barmen as we shall see.

### Beginnings

St. Peter's was organized on Feb. 14, 1860, one year before the Civil War. This was only fourteen years after the city of Milwaukee was incorporated, that year being 1846. At that time the city was made up of three distinct sections: first, Juneautown, founded by Solomon Juneau whose house and trading post stood on what is now the intersection of East Wisconsin Ave. and North Water Street, and comprising the district east of the Milwaukee River; second, Kilbourntown, west of the Milwaukee River, founded by Byron Kilbourn; and, thirdly, Walker's Point, south of the Menomonic River, founded by a German, George H. Walker.

Before St. Peter's was founded, four other Lutheran congregations had been organized in Milwaukee, namely, Grace Congregation in Juneautown (1849), Trinity (1847) and St. John's (1848) in Kilbourntown, and St. Stephen's (1854), in Walker's Point.

In 1860 thirty-four members under the guidance of Pastor Muehlhaeuser then Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church met in a Norwegian church on the South Side to found a new congregation which they called St. Peter's. They drew up Incorporation Papers and a Constitution and elected a council. The first church

council consisted of: William Waegner, chairman, John Hupfer, Henry Kohlauer, Michael Ambacker, Fred Meinke, secretary and William Eilers. Services were held quite irregularly in the afternoon in that Norwegian church and were served at times by Pastor William Streissguth and on other occasions by Pastor Muehlhaeuser. Soon the congregation realized that they would need a building of their own. An opportunity presented itself to purchase a small church building from a Congregational group for the sum of \$2000. A lot was purchased on the northwest corner of S. 8th and W. Scott Streets. for \$600 and the frame church was moved to that location.

St. Peter's began as a mission. And for many years it was known as the South side mission. It was started to serve members of Grace and St. John's that lived in that area. Apparently there were some excommunicated members of St. Stephen's that were also early members of St. Peter's also.

#### Pastor William Dammann (1861-1873)

Now the congregation needed a pastor. An initial call was extended to a pastor ~~Reim~~ but he declined it. AT the suggestion of Muehlhaeuser Pastor William Dammann was called. He had recently come from Germany and was stationed at Town Addison, Washington County, Wisconsin. He accepted the call as the following letter clearly states: "I have received your call and will accept it. I shall come as soon as possible. However, I cannot state the exact time of my arrival, since I cannot just walk out on my present congregation. God must first supply the man who is to take my place. He is on his way from Germany

and is expected to arrive soon."

Pastor William Dammann was born at Erfurt, Germany, on August 6, 1829. He received his training for the ministry at the Mission Institute in Barmen. He wanted to become a missionary to the heathen in Africa. But because of the sorry situation of those Germans who had left their homeland in great numbers for the Americas and who now desperately needed spiritual care, he was prevailed upon with other graduates of the Mission Institute to look after the spiritual interests of his countrymen in North America. His first assignment was at Town Addison, in Washington County, Wisconsin where he remained until he was called by St. Peter's to be their first resident pastor. Pastor Dammann was installed by Pastors Muehlhaeuser and Streissguth on Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 1861. He was at St. Peter's through the troublesome founding years which seem to plague many new churches.

#### Troublesome Years

Under Pastor Dammann the congregation began to grow. Not the greatest care was taken in the reception of new members, however, and as a result an undesirable element came into the church which caused the pastor a whole lot of trouble. One member was deprived of his vote for six months as a disciplinary measure. Some of this lack of care in gaining new members might be attributed to Muehlhaeuser. Since as we said earlier he seemed to be at times more interested in numbers than in quality.

One other item that might be inserted here is the tendency of St. Peter's from its founding to be in debt. In 1864 the church dues had to be raised to \$4.00 per year for a family and \$2.00 for women. In 1866 the congregation employed collectors to kill the debts. These men got \$1.75 per day and they were successful.

The year 1862 marks the beginning of great storms which swept over the congregation during the following eleven years. The first disputes may seem minor but they were no doubt hotly contested issues brought about often times by an undesirable element in the congregation. For instance an issue which quite severely divided the congregation was the question whether to stand or kneel while receiving the Lord's supper. The dissention in the congregation became so great and the feeling toward the pastor, who pursued the right course, so vehement that the president of Synod John Bading and another Pastor Goldammer of Burlington, were called in to settle the case. Out of this came a compromise where the Lord's Supper was received while standing and the confession was to be made by kneeling.

Since St. Peter's was a mission and because of its location it received many members from different churches. As it often happens people get used to doing things a particular way and become allergic to change. This is especially true when synod's cross lines. We know for instance that some people who had a disagreement with St. Stephens and were excommunicated were members of St. Peter's. Usually people who have trouble getting along in one church are going to have trouble in another

church. There is often times a lack of love in such people which prohibits them from giving in to their fellow christians. on non-doctrinal matters for the sake of peace and harmony in the congregation. Such must have been the case at St. Peter's, because when we look at the record of history we will find no doctrinal debates in the church but mostly things which we call adiaphoron seemed to cause trouble.

The fall of 1863 brought some more of this kind of trouble. A reed organ costing \$100 was ordered from a firm in Watertown. When the delivery of the organ was delayed, certain members made ugly accusations against the pastor. Apparently he was not in favor of that kind of money out-lay at this time and also thought it wise to look for a better deal. When the organ was delayed for legitimate reasons some who were always against the pastor anyway used this as a wedge to cause division.

In a meeting presided over by Pastor Streissguth, Pasor Dammann was cleared of all suspicion and several of the trouble makers were expelled from the congregation. Again that these members got into the congregation at all must have been due to carelessness in receiving members. It just seems that there was a certain group that got their fun out of life by worrying the pastor. After the air had been cleared the congregation passed a resolution to exercise greater care in reception of members.

It is apparent in the history of St. Peter's that they usually tried to do the right thing but weren't always

susseful. Already at this time the congregation discussed the lodge question and took the stand which we hold today, that lodge members can not be nor remain members of the congregation.

In 1864 one of the members who thought he knew more than the Pastor, a Mr. Brueggemann caused a disturbance. He tried to talk against the Pastor behind his back and get people to follow his ideas. He was a real busy body. But pride comes before the fall. This man was found guilty of taking some things which belonged to the church school, when he was called to face these charges it was learned that he had taken \$3000 also of the church's money and left town. He was never found.

Because St. Peter's was having trouble as usual collecting money, the congregation took the rather questionable step of purchasing a wheel-of-fortune which seems to have been in use for many years. In the year 1864, 3000 lottery or chance tickets were printed to be used at a fair which was held in connection with the children's picnic and which had been advertised in the Milwaukee newspapers. That this was a money making affair can be seen from the fact that the picnic treasure had to furnish a bond for \$1000. These picnics and fairs became an annual institution for many years. Other congregations held them, too. But after years they were recognized as public nuisances and the congregations wisely discontinued them. It was a good thing they were discontinued too, since some of the South side churches were getting the reputation that some of the Catholic churches of today have for BINGO.



The congregation was now getting quite big and another church was needed. In Jan. 1866 the congregation voted to build a bigger church. There was much help given by other churches in the area and the cornerstone was laid in the summer of that same year.

It should be mentioned here that St. Peter's has always been a loyal supporter of the Synod. They regularly sent delegates to its conventions and gave as much money as could be expected in those days. On festival days collections were taken for synodical purposes.

In 1868, the pastor brought the good news that a colloquy had taken place at Helenville, Wis, between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods on Oct. 21 and 22 with the result that they acknowledged each other to be orthodox church bodies.

This, however, brought new trouble to St. Peter's. As was stated before some of St. Peter's members were excommunicated members of St. Stephens. There were also early members which just left St. Stephens to join St. Peter's. Because of this there was a long standing dissension existing between St. Peter's and Pastor Steinback of St. Stephen's. This dissention was now brought out in the open and made a matter of investigation. Both factions agreed to place their differences before an impartial arbitration committee. This committee consisted of President Walther of the Missouri Synod and President Bading of the Wisconsin Synod. The out come of this meeting was that the pastor of

of St. Stephen's church lifted the ban which he had placed upon the members of St. Peter's who had originally left St. Stephen's Church and joined St. Peter's when it was founded. In token of the peace which was established joint advent and later on lenten services were held on Wednesday evenings, alternating between the two churches.

The worst and last storm was yet to come. And it came in 1873. Serious criticism of the pastor began which called for an investigation by synodical officials. Just what this was is not possible to tell anymore. Pastor Paul Eckert the present pastor of St. Jacobi's says, "The cause apparently was contrariness and antagonisms over against the pastor on the part of some members, antagonisms which apparently were met at first with some irritation and delay in trying to settle matters." Apparently Pastor Dammann had become involved or associated with some evil of the day which hindered his work at St. Peter's. The congregation asked the Synod to step in. President Bading and Pastor Adolf Hoenecke were present in a congregational meeting when a vote was taken to decide whether in the opinion of the congregation the pastor could continue to work in blessing in St. Peter's church. The vote stood 98 to 38 for removal. Efforts were made by Prof. Ernst, Pastor Hoenecke, Pastor Koehler, and Pastor Jaeckel to save the situation, but to no avail. A synodical committee consisting of Pastor's Bading, Hoenecke, Brenner, Waldt, Hoffmann, Lucas, Koehler, Denninger, Popp, Jaeckel and Prof. Ernst came in with a report that the congregation was justified in the

action taken. This controversy even made the presidents address of the synodical proceeding of 1873. Here the situation is described as something unseemly which Pastor Dammann apparently did not deal with with the utmost care of his calling and he became tainted so that the congregation was justified in asking him to leave.

In some respects this might have been the best thing that ever happened to both pastor and congregation. Pastor Dammann in dealing with the many problems and factions which arose in the congregation in its first 13 years no doubt had to step on many toes. After a period of years there seemed to be a certain group of people in the congregation which was simply against the Pastor. The reverse of this might have been true too. It is not as though Pastor Dammann was not a good Pastor, he was, however, he had lost his effectiveness in that congregation. That he was still an able Pastor is brought out by his fruitful ministry for the remaining years (21) of his life at St. Jacobi's, a church which he founded.

So in conclusion we can say that St. Peter's had a stormy beginning. It also had an able Pastor to lead them through the hardships which beset them at first. Unfortunately, in his efforts to do the right thing Pastor Dammann made enemies and mistakes. Both of which were sufficient to cause his release from a congregation which he had labored hard in for 13 years.

Finally it is interesting to note that St. Peter's began as a mission post. Through its history St. Peter's became one of the largest churches in the Wisconsin Synod with 2000 plus members. Today, however, it has returned to its former status of a South Side mission. What is in the future history of St. Peter's only the Lord of History knows.

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Material for this paper has been taken largely from the church year books and from personal interviews of Pastor A. Schupmann and Pastor Paul Eckert.