

REV. ERDMAN PANKOW

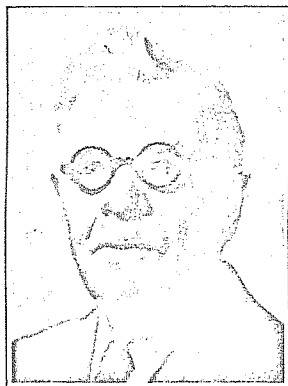
1818 - 1907

BY ADOLPH G. PANKOW

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

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ADOLPH G. PANKOW

My FATHER, the Reverend Erdman Pankow, was born September 5, 1818, in Wirzitz, the Province of Posen, Germany. His parents, Michael and Eva Pankow, who were both subjects of Germany, came from very poor ancestry and in those years of their life the chances to improve their lot in that part of the German Empire were very slim. His father was a straw roof thatcher and while at work on a job fell off the roof of a building, severely injuring his back, therefore making

him incapable for future work and providing for his wife, son and small daughter, Wilhelmine. Not many months after this accident, the raging cholera struck that part of Germany, robbing the two young children of both their parents and leaving them in destitute circumstances. My father then being a trifle over eight and his sister six years old.

His father, being fairly schooled, also having had musical training in his youth, took it upon himself to assist and teach his son as much as possible in those branches of learning. The chances of attending school in those years was very remote since there were no schools at all in that neighborhood. Even after his father was incapable to continue the teaching personally, a friendly neighboring cobbler, who had some talents along those lines, called daily and carried on the studies with the boy which his father had up to then conducted quite successfully. After both parents, who owned a very small house in the village, were dead, and there being no other relatives known by the children, it was up to my father to eke out an existence for himself and his little sister. What was he, just being an undersized little fellow, to do, to satisfy their hungry stomachs? It was his violin which had to help him provide the necessary nourishment for their existence.

It was some months after both parents had passed away, my father was playing his violin on a street corner of the village for the purpose of entertaining the village folk, as also to gather in a few pennies for personal subsistence, that a rich landowner from a neighboring province, a Herr von Buelow, drove up to him and asked him to come to his carriage. He handed him a coin, praising his fine playing and asking him different questions. One of them was, after he ascertained under what circumstances he and his little sister were eking out a living, whether he would be interested to make a change in his existence. Well, it did not take him long to agree to the proposition von Buelow made, namely that the boy and his sister should come to live with the Buelow's as companions of their children, as also to share their schooling with them.

Here at the von Buelow large estate my father and his sister made their home for more than seven years, received the best kind of training and education in company with the landowner's children by a very efficient private teacher. Besides getting a very thorough education in religion and all other branches of schooling, my father did not miss out on the musical end of learning either, while he was with the Buelow family.

After father was 15, confirmed and out of school age, he too, under the German law, had to take up the matter of learning a trade, so he selected tailoring, which compelled him a few years later to become a journeyman tailor. In that capacity he traveled over large parts of Germany and finally landed in the province of Brandenburg. Here in the Oderbruch, he formed a wide acquaintance in Lutheran circles, and as this was the time from 1830-43 when, under the Prussian King Frederick Wilhelm III, the order was issued to unite the protestant church under one head, namely the Union Church of Germany, it was a very hard blow to old Evangelical Lutherans throughout their country. Among these were the Lutherans from the Oderbruch, who fought bitterly against oppression and unionism and therefore had to undergo many tribulations and persecutions. A large number of these

Brandenburgers finally decided to emigrate to America, where freedom of religious doctrine was prevalent. Secret meetings were held, information for the contemplated trip gathered, and property of those, that intended to make the trip, disposed of.

Before these Brandenburgers, among them my father who was now 25 years old and one of the strongest opponents of unionism, left the old fatherland, he went back to the old town of Wirzitz in Posen to dispose of the small house property which he and his sister still owned. On his way back to the Oderbruch he met his sister, Wilhelmine, and took her with him for the trip to America. But before the trip was undertaken, father was married to Miss Sophia C. Moldenhauer and with her and 150 other Brandenburger families, on May 28, 1843, started their voyage to Hamburg. Here they were delayed a couple of days to make ready for the sailing. And, as has been customary by these religious people during their stay here, they held daily church services at places which were available to them. At one of these gatherings, Herman Grube, a Hamburg business man who after forming an acquaintance with these people from the Oderbruch, was very much taken up with their cause, and being a strong anti-unionist, disposed of his property in his home city and on June 19 joined them on the trip to America. The trip was made in sailboats to New York where the party landed August 5th. On the trip over to this country, Mr. Grube, being a young unmarried man, formed the acquaintance of my father's sister and shortly after their arrival here was married to her. Grube took up land adjacent to Watertown, where he and his young wife settled down to farming. In later years he became quite prominent socially and politically in his town and county and was a person well thought of. His family consisted of four children, Erdman, Luther, Marie and Herman.

To come back to our Oderbrucher again, they spent a few days in New York and from there proceeded to Milwaukee, which trip was partially made by boat and railway, where they landed September 6. About one half of the emigrants stayed in and near Milwaukee, settling at Cedarburg, Kirchayn and Freistadt, while 78 families made their way to Watertown, where homsteads were acquired from the government east of the city, now called Lebanon and Sugar Island.

I wish to state here that these 150 Brandenburger families can really be called one big religious family, working harmoniously without malice or jealousy to do good for their brothers in Christ. Not only on the long trip over to this

country, but after the settlement here was established, did the wealthier ones of the emigrants give their financial assistance to those that were not blessed with the means to carry on. Their motto simply stood out in bold relief letters: "Help, where help is needed."

Of those that made the trip from the Oderbruch to Watertown and vicinity with my father I just want to mention a few: Woltmanns, Moldenhauers, Wagners, Schwefels, Dornfelds, Setzkorns, Hartmanns, Krubsacks, Freierts, Hildemanns, Kronitz, Steinborns, Bochows, Schoenickes, Voigts and others. All of these and others settled in the wild woods of Lebanon and on Sugar Island. After certain preliminaries and some weeks time in locating their claims, log houses were constructed, acres of wood chopped down, land cleared and prepared for the next year's crop. After a few log houses had been completed, religious services were held by them. Rev. Kindermann, who was one of the emigrants, but stayed with those that settled near Milwaukee, came out to the settlement every two weeks now to conduct services.

Although my father also had taken up a government claim on Sugar Island when he landed in Watertown with his fellow Brandenburgers, he did not move onto his possession until the spring of '45, but stayed in Watertown working there at his tailor trade. After a small log house, with the help of willing neighbors, had been erected on his claim and a little clearing perfected, father, his wife, a little daughter, Wilhelmine, who was born to them at Watertown, moved onto the land. But this job of farming for my father was not to be for long duration, because shortly after he moved to Sugar Island, all the settlers formed a regular organized congregation, built a log church and a combination log school and living house for the teacher and then selected him as their regular teacher. But before this all had been done, our Brandenburgers associated themselves with a large number of Pomeranians, who had migrated to the town of Lebanon at another time, and with them organized the first Evangelical Lutheran church congregation in Lebanon. Before they had a regular pastor my father was given his appointment as a Lutheran teacher with the proviso to conduct Sunday and holiday services until a regular pastor could be called and installed. A year later the congregation made application to the Missouri Synod at St. Louis for a pastor and the young Rev. L. Geyer, who had just finished the Theological Seminary studies, was recommended to them, received the call and conducted his first service November 24, 1846.

After the church was now regularly organized, teacher and pastor at its service, the congregation grew and prospered in the best of harmony for a few years. Then by and by the social and conventional feeling between the Brandenburger and Pomeranian members began to show slight signs of coolness, which in course of time increased to such dimensions so as to create a controversy among the members, which finally ended up between the pastor and the teacher and caused a split of the congregation. While Lutheran churches have split before and after this Lebanon occurrence on account of different causes, I believe that this case of separation really can be put down as a very exceptional one. Although, as in many other congregations, different little wrangles and disputes came up and were peacefully adjusted, nevertheless here a feeling of dissatisfaction started which could not be adjusted. But the real cause for starting the exodus of our good Brandenburgers out of their place of worship this time was my father's violin.

As I stated before, father was quite efficient as a musician and quite frequently used his violin not only as an instrument to teach children of his school in the singing lessons, but also often played other music at his home. It so happened, when friends would call at his home he would pick up his violin and play some of the more classic music such as Straus waltzes, polkas, etc., too. The latter seems to have brought up an argument between father and the pastor. The pastor claiming that it does not become a Lutheran teacher to play sinful and ungodly music on the violin, and my father holding that there was no sin in playing any kind of good music on any kind of an instrument as long as it was not done for a sinful purpose. In this manner of argument the pastor and teacher continued for some time without getting any nearer settling the question.

But then, like lightning out of the blue sky, came the straw that broke the camel's back. One day my father, being at home, took up his violin and played a very charming piece of music. It might have been a waltz, polka or what not tempo, this had not been verified by a later investigation, but what has been asserted for a true fact is, that three members of the congregation were at work that day near the school building in digging a well, and while two of these men were at the bottom of the well, the alluring, charming tunes from my father's violin affected them in such a manner that both, good christians too, really could not restrain themselves from dancing to the tune. When this occurrence became known to pastor Geyer and his church elders it was pronounced as

sacrilege and was to be taken up at a special church meeting to which the teacher was invited.

The meeting was held as announced and on the pastor's accusation that father had been playing worldly, sinful music on his ungodly violin, the accused answered that he did not consider a violin nor music ungodly only in the purpose it may serve and he believed that he had not played the instrument nor used the music for any secular or shameful purpose that could or would influence any good Christians to fall into abysmal sin. The arguments were discussed to and fro for some time and the ultimate result was the separation of the Brandenburger and Pomeranian members. The Pomeranians, by overwhelming numbers, held that it does not become a Christian Schoolmaster to play music which may incite people to dance lust, and the Brandenburgers, virtually to a man, claiming nothing unholy in any kind of good music, especially of such nature as their teacher is liable and used to play.

In 1849 the Brandenburger members of the congregation, with a few exceptions, withdrew from the organized congregation and with my father formed their own independent organization, calling themselves the Evangelical Lutheran St. Pauls Church. They elected church elders and trustees out of their midst and had my father again conduct school and church service in the same manner as he had done before these members had joined up with their Pomeranian neighbors. This system went on for some time and once more the social spirit and harmony was uppermost and at home among our good Brandenburgers. This was the case for a number of months, when during one of their meetings of this newly organized church body, the question of getting a pastor was coming up for discussion. As my father had done so well in conducting the services of the church up to now, and he had been discussed among the members for some time as a person who would be very capable and well qualified to fill the position as their pastor, he was at this meeting elected unanimously for this post.

So it was, that July 20, 1849 he became pastor of St. Paul's Ev. Luth. Church at Lebanon and delivered his first sermon on that day. He served his Brandenburger associates and friends in that capacity for more than 55 years. In the year 1854 the congregation received, as a donation, a plot of ground from Martin Moldenbauer and Ferdinand Wagner on which a nice little brick church was erected and which served the congregation for more than fifty years, and until my father discontinued his services as pastor. It may be stated

here, that before father gave up his pastorate, there was only one person to survive, Mrs. Fred Dornfeld, besides himself, of all those companions of his who came over to America with him in 1843, and that it had been his solemn duty to conduct most of the services at the funerals of his many intimate friends.

After my father was selected as pastor of his congregation and the church built, he bought a forty acre farm a mile northwest of the church property, which served as the real home of the Pankow family for 55 years and has been the gathering place for many a social affair, wherein not only his own family, but the majority of the congregation and guests from Watertown, Milwaukee and other nearby places often participated. At all these gatherings, my father, whether he liked it or not, it was always thrust upon him to play his renowned violin. Even pastors, professors of theology and a later pastor of the Geyer congregation, who called frequently at our home, often asked father to play on his violin. You see, that at these social gatherings, although quite often religiously inspired, the sinful violin of yore received its just dues and absolution.

Besides the Lebanon and Sugar Island congregations my father also served smaller congregations at Cedarburg, Kirchayn and Freistadt, near Milwaukee, and later conducted a church near Mayville for some years until his age and health compelled the discontinuance.

When father moved his family to the house on the forty acres which he purchased in 1849 and which constituted the real family home after that, he did not sell his 80 acre possession on Sugar Island but conducted both farms until, in 1893, he sold the same to his son, Oswald. That farm on Sugar Island, with the fine stand of maple timber on it, did much later on, to enable him to finance the schooling of his sons and prepare them for the ministry, as also to carry on the expense of bringing up such a large family. In all, our family consisted of eighteen children. Father was married twice his first wife died August 28, 1859, leaving him six children: Wilhelmine, Herman J., Erdman A., Michael H., Sophia and John N.; Henry Michael and Augustine died in infancy. A short time after his first wife had passed away, he was married for the second time to Mrs. Louise Dambach-Michels, my mother, a widow with one daughter, Louise, through which marriage the following children were born: Augustine Marie, Albert Ph., Adolph G., Anna, Oswald, Eva, Pauline, Agnes and Angela. After father married mother, he adopted her child of her first husband, Louise, as one of the family.

Of his sons three, Erdman, Michael and Albert, followed him into the ministry as also did 5 grandsons and two of the grandsons became Lutheran school teachers, likewise, one granddaughter, Erna Sitz, who later was married to Professor Binhammer of Watertown.

But before I close this biography, I feel it my duty to mention one of my father's main hobbies beside his religious profession, and that is his extensive study of astronomy. Although only being an amateur in that line, through his nightly observations of the movements of the stars and planets in the heavenly fields, he acquired a great knowledge in that respect so that he quite often in his observations had been useful to regular observatories in pointing out to them in what stellation or field a certain comet was to be located. I just wish to mention one instance where an Eastern observatory had offered a prize of \$500 for the discovery of a certain comet, some years ago. This comet, according to astronomy, makes its appearance every 200 years and since this was the year for it to show up, the above offer was made. After weeks of diligent observation by my father with his home made telescope he discovered the comet and notified the observatory in the East through the Milwaukee Sentinel in what stellation and field he discovered the same. But alas, word came back to him that he was the one who made the discovery all right, but since he was not a professional but an amateur astronomer, they could not, under the offer, award the prize to him. Whether this incident dampened his astronomical enthusiasm to any extent was not noticeable for he kept up his observations of the heavenly orbit the same as before.

I recall quite well, when I and my brother, Albert, were boys, that even after he had been turned down on that prize money, we still had to turn the old grindstone for hours at the time for him so he could grind the lenses for his telescope of which he was still making use.

When, after father had resigned from his services to the church, infirmities and old age calamities made their appearance to him and mother, they decided to leave the old family home at Lebanon and go to Marshfield, Wisconsin, to live with their daughter Louise's family, Herman Petrick.

After a year's residence here, followed by a brief sickness, father was called to his heavenly reward, March 27, 1907, bringing his age up to 88 years, 6 months and 22 days. My mother, who has been his companionable aid during happy and sad times of his life for nearly 48 years followed him in death January 29, 1913, at the age of 82.