

The Journey of a Protestant Mission Station
to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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Church History

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Muskego, Tess Corners, or Hales Corners can all be used in defining the home of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church. How this small congregation formed by German immigrants grew into the largest Wisconsin Synod congregation in the metropolitan Milwaukee area (according to the number of souls listed in the 1976 Synod Statistical Report) is a history similar to many other congregations. Yet there are some unique points in its history, together with some unanswered questions that seem to have been lost along with the past generations.

Already in the early nineteenth century, Muskego had earned a reputation as a famous Norwegian settlement; in fact, Muskego can boast a number of firsts in Norwegian-American history. The founders of Muskego were strict Haugeans who established the first Norwegian Lutheran congregation in America, the first Norwegian church in the United States, and also the first strictly Norwegian newspaper in America.

However, in the midst of this group of distinctively Scandinavian people was the nucleus of a German community. Some of these German families had come to the area already in 1800, and more followed during the ensuing half-century. In 1857, twelve German families started St. Paul's as a Protestant mission station with the help of St. John's congregation from Root Creek and that congregation's pastor. Even though it was under the guidance of this Lutheran congregation, and shared its pastors, St. Paul's remained a Protestant congregation for nearly twenty years. St. John's of Root Creek had been started as a Union congregation (Reformed-Lutheran), patterned after the Landeskirche

of Germany; so it is possible that St. Paul's was set up on the same basis. It is evident that many people at this time did not really differentiate between Protestants. There was proof of this in the History of Waukesha County: 1880, published in 1894. In this volume were biographical sketches of some of the early pioneers in the county. Included were some of the founders of St. Paul's congregation, who were described as members of the Evangelical Lutheran church, or merely, the Lutheran church; where most sources gave St. Paul's the general label of Protestant.

Special arrangements, which will be discussed later, had to be made between St. Paul's and St. John's. Pastor Koester was the first to serve St. Paul's; he conducted services in the homes of the twelve families, probably once a month. In 1858, according to the deed registered with Waukesha County, two acres were sold to "the first Protestant Church of the Town of Muskego;" this was to be used for church and cemetery purposes. The first church building was erected that same year. As an aside, St. Paul's centennial booklet described the arrangement of the first cemetery. This may have been common at that time, but the adults were buried in the order of their deaths, while infants and children were buried in a separate place. Pastor Koester served St. Paul's and St. John's until 1859 when he resigned from the ministry because of ill health.

The two congregations were next served by Pastor L. Nietmann. Nietmann had been a parochial school teacher in St. John's congregation; and after taking a short course in theology, was ordained as pastor. Here is where a discrepancy occurs. According to St. Paul's historical notes, Nietmann was listed as pastor beginning in 1859, while St. John's centennial booklet states that he began serving St. Paul's in 1860.

At any rate, he served as pastor until 1861. Services were probably still held only once each month. It was during this time that unionistic and Lutheran elements clashed again at St. John's congregation; but a circular letter gave evidence that the great majority was inclined to remain Lutheran. There is no information as to whether this clash affected St. Paul's in any way. Pastor Nietmann accepted a call to another congregation in 1861.

The year 1861 brought some confusion that came about as a result of the before-mentioned arrangements made between St. Paul's and St. John's. Facts indicate that the two congregations had made a contract that they would share a pastor; but apparently it was also necessary for the pastor from Root Creek to make his own contract with St. Paul's. All of this came into play when Pastor Nietmann left; and it also helps explain why St. Paul's records show two pastors during 1861 - pastors Huber and Kilian. St. John's had called J. F. Kilian, who happened to be a Moravian, to be pastor in 1861. When Kilian assumed his duties at Root Creek on October 27, 1861, he discovered that St. Paul's in Muskego already had another pastor, namely, T. D. Huber. An elder from St. Paul's had apparently told Huber that the congregation had had obligations with Pastor Nietmann, but since he was no longer there the congregation was free to make a contract with Huber. The elder, of course, was mistaken. Either he was ignorant of, or had disregarded, the contract that St. Paul's had with St. John's concerning the sharing of pastors.

Pastor Kilian did not waste any time. On November 8, 1861, he sent an elder from Root Creek to Huber at Muskego in order to explain the contract that the two congregations had with each other. The pastor-congregation contract was a formal written document; and Huber's contract was already finalized when the mistake was shown him. Huber must have

been a Christian gentleman, because when the situation was explained to him, he understood, and tore up his contract. There is no evidence as to whether Huber actually did any preaching at St. Paul's; he may have just given a "test sermon" which was common at that time. According to St. Paul's records, the only official acts that Huber performed were three baptisms - two on September 15, and one on October 20, 1861.

When Huber had left, Kilian made his own contract with St. Paul's. According to a personal letter of Kilian's, dated October 9, 1861, St. John's paid him \$180 a year and St. Paul's paid \$40 a year. There is no information if this contract remained the same during Kilian's entire stay, or if the amounts changed. Pastor Kilian served both congregations from 1861 to 1868, with the exception of November, 1864 to June, 1865 when he served as an army chaplain in the Civil War.

Pastor Kilian was succeeded by a Pastor Baartz who served St. Paul's until 1869, but served St. John's until 1871. There must have been some temporary change in the contract between the two congregations, because Pastor P. Lucas served St. Paul's from 1869-1874, while Pastor J. Koehler served St. John's from 1871-1874. Under Pastor Lucas, St. Paul's now conducted services every two weeks. There is also a note in St. Paul's historical information that the congregation had quite a large debt at this time.

St. Paul's and St. John's again shared a pastor, Pastor Karl Thurow, from 1874-1890. (There is an apparent mistake in St. Paul's historical information - it lists Gotthold Thurow as their pastor during this period of time. Gotthold was Karl's son; and since Gotthold was not born until 1879, he could hardly have been the pastor. Also, St. John's centennial booklet lists Karl as the pastor of St. Paul's for this time period.) It was under Pastor Thurow that a congregational landmark

was reached - the congregation became truly Lutheran in principle and practice. In 1878 the first constitution of the congregation was registered in Waukesha. There is no information for the size of the congregation at this point, but there were 122 communicants in 1889.

Pastor Thurow served St. Paul's until 1890, when it became independent. At this time, St. Paul's received its first resident pastor - John Karrer, a new graduate from the seminary. Pastor Karrer served as both preacher and teacher, receiving a yearly salary of \$500. Parochial classes were held three days a week (Monday - Wednesday). Pastor Karrer served until 1892.

St. Paul's may have become Lutheran in 1878, and received its own pastor in 1890, but it was still several years and several pastors away from joining the Wisconsin Synod. Pastor Glaus served from 1892-1894; Pastor L. B. Mielke served from 1894-1909, and was succeeded by Pastor Gustav Schoewe. During Pastor Mielke's stay, a new church was erected in 1905 (this is the church building presently in use). But there is also an unanswered question associated with this. The historical information made reference to the fact that the erection of the new church was delayed because of internal problems resulting in the establishment of another congregation at Durham Hill at the turn of the century. No details of the problem were given.

It was under Pastor Schoewe that St. Paul's joined the Wisconsin Synod. ^{in 1911} In some of the historical research done by Miss Diane Hahs (a member of the congregation), it was stated that St. Paul's chose the Wisconsin Synod over the Missouri Synod because "it appeared to be stricter and higher in its ideals, and it seemed to hold closer to Christ's standards." This may be a valid reason, or it may be a memory that has been colored by the present-day differences between the Wisconsin Synod and the Missouri Synod. But for whatever the reason, 54 years

after its founding, St. Paul's became a member of the Wisconsin Synod.

In the years since 1911, there have been some other interesting items concerning the congregation. In 1917, the congregation was \$800 in debt, so a dues system was set up. And in 1921 it was decided to have classes of members according to how much they would pay in dues. Miss Karen Pellman, a member of the congregation, wrote a historical article for the New Berlin-Muskego Post newspaper in July, 1976, and gave the following information about the dues system. Each member would decide which class he would like to be in; but in order to vote, a man would have to pay \$5. The classes were: Class A - \$15, Class B - \$12, Class C - \$10, Class D - \$8, Class E - ?. Confirmands would pay from \$2-\$5. The dues system was not abolished until 1964.

As with most Wisconsin Synod congregations, there was a gradual change from the German language to the English, and a change in other old customs. It was in 1911 that an English service was scheduled once every four weeks; and it was not until 1937 that an English service was held every Sunday. The last German service was held on Maundy Thursday, 1949. In 1905, members of the congregation formed a band which played for all of the services (and picnics) in the place of an organ - there is no indication how long this was done. The practice of having the men and women sit on separate sides of the church ended in 1950 when families were united in sitting together during the service, and in receiving the Lord's Supper. The reestablishment of a Christian Day school was generally opposed by the congregation until the late 1960's when a school was started. In the years since then, it has enjoyed tremendous congregational support, and has grown to about 260 students with a staff of ten teachers.

Today St. Paul's is somewhat unique in that it is an old and established congregation, but is continuing to grow and flourish. The

dedication of a new house of worship is scheduled for June, 1978.

St. Paul's is situated in a continually expanding community, and has proven to be the church-home for those people looking for a confessional congregation built upon the entire message of God's Word. God has truly guided and blessed this congregation!

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Bibliographical Notes

Some of the attempts to find information were not fruitful at all; these included: The Synod Archives; the Muskego Historical Society; and Muskego's local newspaper whose records did not go back far enough. The volumes of the Synod Proceedings and the Gemeindeblatt did not yield possible information because of my inability to translate German. The books containing general historical background for Muskego and Waukesha County were found at the Muskego Public Library. The paper by Miss Hahs, and the article by Miss Pellman included information gleaned from interviewing older members of St. Paul's congregation.