

CIRCUIT RIDERS AROUND THE
VILLAGE OF LOWELL, *WI.*
BEFORE SALEM'S ORGANIZATION IN 1869

Senior Church History

Anthony Straseske

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library

11831 N. Seminary Drive. 65W

Mequon, Wisconsin

"By 1840 Dodge County had a population of 67; two years later it had reached 239. A rapid influx in the middle 40's brought the count up to 7,787 in 1846."¹ Settlers came from the southeast portion of the state. From Lake Michigan 50 miles east settlers headed toward an area that would later become Dodge County, named after the first governor of Wisconsin.

The earliest white settlers were English. The first family to arrive in the county was the Brower Family. They located north of Fox Lake in March, 1838. The History of Dodge County before 1880 lists Luther Cole, John Cole and Amasa Hyland as the first settlers, taking up land for a short time in Emmet. As with most legends, these claims are questionable. In March 1839 a Seymour Wilcox, John Ackerman and Hiram Walk located south of Waupun.²

Soon communities popped up everywhere. Beaver Dam, Oak Grove and Hustisford began in 1841. Columbus, on the county line between Columbia and Dodge Counties, raised its first cabin in 1840. Lowell started in 1842. 1844 saw John Gibson settle Gibson Corners, and Grove Prairie Corners. In 1845 Dodge County bore three better known metropolises- Horicon, Mayville and Reeseville.³ As the various names reveal, Englishmen started the cities, towns and villages that now make up Dodge County.

They immigrated to the wilderness for different reasons.

1. Centennial Bulletin on Dodge County: Walter Bussewitz, p.13

2. History of Dodge County (1880): C. W. Butterfield

3. Centennial Bulletin on Dodge County: Walter Bussewitz

The English followed the moving frontier looking for choice farmland. These Yankee Farmers came from Green Bay, where the Government Land Office was located, after they had selected choice territory. Most just came with the flow to this new land after bending around Lake Michigan.

The Germans followed them immediately. They had other reasons for coming. They came because of religious persecution, a bad harvest in 1846, the uncertain political scene, the favorable reports of America, the urge to seek out new horizons. Some came to get away from it all, others because America was the 'in' place to go.

Scandinavians, Irish, Welsh, Polish and hollanders all appeared and lived in the county. A variety of entangled domestic problems brought about their departure from the old country. The natural beauty may have led these and other to Dodge County. "Game fish were very plentiful in the day of the early settlers. Shortly after the dam was built in Horicon, people scooped up the fish in bushel baskets; Deer and bear were plentiful and a good hunter had no trouble in shooting three or four deer in a day."⁴ Easy access to an old problem, the lack of food, brought settlers in.

Germans made up the greatest percentage of newcomers. "Possibly 25,000 Germans settled here before 1860."⁵ The path from Germany to the Midwest passed right through the eastern

⁴. Ibid., p.15

⁵. Ibid., p.14

United States. "They (the Germans) were the leading edge of a wave of immigrants who would create and shape the great Mid-western cities of St. Louis, Chicago, and Milwaukee."⁶ In Wisconsin, Southport, Manitowac, Sheboygan and Port Washington all swelled with incoming Germans, but the most popular spot to get off the boat was Milwaukee. Tracing the path to Dodge County in the 40's and 50's grows even more detailed. "Of the Protestants the Lutheran Pommern and Brandenburger came in great numbers in 1840 and 1843; they went on from Milwaukee to Watertown and settled Dodge County."⁷ They quickly outnumbered the other nationalities in the county. The area around Lowell was no different. "In 1890 it was estimated that the county was 65% German descent."⁸

Along with their belongings, many, not all brought their religion. For the English, that meant Methodism. The followers of Wesley claim the first church structure in Dodge County. "the first church building in the county was a frame one erected by the Beaver Dam Methodists in 1847."⁹ That the Methodists built the first building in Dodge County may surprise some because the county is so Lutheran and Catholic. The Lutherans and Catholics were not far behind and soon the Lutherans would boast a handful of congregations.

The migration of Germans to Wisconsin led to the well-

6. The Lutherans in America: E. Clifford Nelson, p.125

7. History of the Wisconsin Synod: J. P. Koehler, p.38

8. Centennial Bulletin on Dodge County: Walter Bussewitz, p.14

9. Ibid.,

documented founding of the 'German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Wisconsin. Organized in Milwaukee, the synod naturally spread north along the Lake, east to Watertown, as well as to the northwest where the good farming land was. "At first the founding of congregations proceeded northward in the direction of Fond du Lac and Port Washington, along the latter line as far as Manitowac; westward to Watertown, southward along the lake to Kenosha."¹⁰

Among the immigrants, few clergy kept up with the shifting frontier. Many Lutherans lived shepherdless. The small Wisconsin Synod recognized the problem early. Already at the third synod convention in 1851, the men took action. "The synodical meeting realized the need of a traveling missionary, but since such an appointment was not yet feasible, the pastors were urged to cover as much territory in their vicinity as possible."¹¹ The fields were white for harvest, the laborers were lacking. With little official clergy, intruders and fakes led many of the congregations that did form astray. The synod itself was in the ditch for a while on the straight and narrow road of confessional Lutheranism.

By the mid 1850's, various circuit riders served the German Lutheran congregations that had formed in Dodge County. Not all congregations and not all preachers held to the same ground of Lutheranism. The 'Old' Lutherans didn't care for the soft-

¹⁰. History of the Wisconsin Synod: J. P. Koehler, p.42

¹¹. Ibid.,

notorious for. The progressive leaders of the Wisconsin Synod didn't care for the stiffness of the 'old' Lutherans either.

One of the first Lutheran circuit riders in Dodge County was the colorful founder of St. Mark's in Watertown, Rev. Chris-



Pastor Christian Sans

tian Sans. He arrived in Watertown in the summer of 1854, by October he founded a congregation. The centennial history of St. Mark's states, "Sans was also active in mission work gathering the German immigrants into congregations, preaching in various schoolhouses around Watertown, traveling even as

far as Columbus to found congregations."¹² I was not able to locate other congregations he founded.

In all likelihood Pastor Sans did work in Lowell. He may have passed through the village on his way to the Columbus preaching station. The trip to Columbus from Watertown has two different routes. The northern route, what is now Highway 16, was an indian trail. "He (Amasa Hyland) plowed a furrow from Beaver Dam to Watertown in 1844, following an Indian trail, making the first road in the county."¹³ Sans, when exiting Watertown, may have taken the left turn off that road, just north of Clyman, and gone right through the village of Lowell. The other route would have been an extension of the coming "Watertown Plank Road, present day Highway 19, from Watertown to Waterloo. What is now Highway 89 would have carried him from Waterloo to Columbus. He certainly didn't take the railroad.

12. A Century in Christ: St. Mark's Ev. Luth. Church, p.13

13. Centennial Bulletin on Dodge County: Walter Bussewitz, p.11

It hadn't come that far yet. "The first train actually arrived (in Watertown) in 1855, business boomed, and rosy dreams filled the imagination of the people."¹⁴

Evidence does exist that Sans did work in the town of Lowell. Here is the "Old" Lutheran side of the famous race to Reeseville. "opportunities existed in great number in neighboring communities for him (the pastor of St. John's in Watertown) to gather together the ever increasing numbers of German immigrants into congregations. This was particularly true in the neighborhood of Reeseville, town of Lowell, where there was a community made up largely of immigrants of Bavarian descent. Clergymen of various persuasions attempted to form a congregation in this area. One of the most successful was a non-confessional pastor from Watertown, the Rev. C. Sans, who regularly held services on Sunday afternoon in a public school in this community. The Lutherans of the community, however, felt dissatisfied with his avoidance of any clear-cut statement on the Bible doctrine, and asked Pastor Wagner to serve them. In order to be absolutely neutral, the Board of the School District decided that the pastor who arrived first could conduct the services in the public school on that day. Naturally, the trips to Town Lowell frequently amounted to a race. The pastor would drive or ride horseback to Mud Lake, where he would be met by one of the members in a row-boat. It frequently happened, of course, that Pastor Wagner would arrive later than Pastor Sans. Then the Lutherans would leave the school house and go to the home of one of the neighbors. Several pieces of fire-wood would

^{14.} Watertown Remembered: Elmer C. Kiessling, p.147

be taken into the kitchen, planks laid across them, and the improvised church was ready. Toward the end of his ministry at Watertown, Pastor Wagner was instrumental in forming this nucleus into a congregation. It was in 1858 that Trinity Church of Town Lowell was organized. It was served by the Pastors of St. John's church."¹⁵ Trinity- town Lowell serves the area south of Reeseville as a staunchly conservative Lutheran church. The congregation belongs to the Missouri Synod. This author's great grandparents and great- great grandparents are buried in its cemetery. Pastor Sans, rejected by these good Lutherans, may have had hearers a few miles north in the Town of Lowell.

Another known Lutheran missionary in the vicinity of Lowell was the Wisconsin Synod's first official Reiseprediger, Gottlieb Fachtmann. Arriving in the badger state in the summer of 1857, he received his assignment to congregations in Richfield and Town Polk. "That same fall he was authorized, with the permission of his congregation, to undertake a mission journey. Evidently, his natural bent was in that direction: a love of nature and of travel, the ability to mix with strangers and to size up men and conditions, and in this special sphere the urge to spread the Gospel."¹⁶

Fachtmann's first journey led him to the Fox Valley. Here, two pastors of the Northwest Conference, had investigated the area a year earlier. Fachtmann's work proved successful. The density of Wisconsin Synod congregations in the valley reflects

15. Through a Century with Christ: St. John's Evan. Luth. Church
p.12

16. History of the Wisconsin Synod: J. P. Koehler, p.53

his work. "Fachtmann proved to be an able, sober-minded man, alert to the church situation in the strange land, and he put his observations on record in many carefully composed reports to the president of the Synod."¹⁷ Unfortunately, those carefully composed reports are probably lost.

The next year finds Fachtmann in Dodge County. "Early in 1858 he came to Horicon, Beaver Dam, and Columbus, a large territory without preachers, settled by Bayern, Pommern, Mecklenburger, and Brandenburger in great numbers and among them many firm Lutherans."¹⁸ The synod proceedings from the same year tell the story. "Pastor Fachtmann gave an oral report of a mission trip undertaken by himself, from which he proved, that he found in and around Horicon, Beaver Dam and Mayville, etc., a great number of neglected members of the Lutheran church, which were willing to allow themselves to be served temporarily or permanently, by our synod. Pastor Fachtmann asked to devote himself to this area for a few Sundays. In relation to Beaver Dam and the surrounding area, New Leipzig, Waupun, etc., Pastor Zeim would still complete this report through a confirmed communication."¹⁹ Two interesting notes here. Fachtmann worked in Waupun. He likely broke ground or at least carried on work as the first prison chaplain. The state located its prison in Waupun in 1851. He also carried on work at New Leipzig. A look

¹⁷. Ibid.,

¹⁸. Ibid.,

¹⁹. Wisconsin Synod Proceedings (1858) p.10

at the map shows that Leipsig, as it known today, is only about five miles north of Lowell. Highway G, connecting the two burgs runs along the Beaver Dam River. Travelers probably followed the dirt track along the river from Beaver Dam through Leipsig to Lowell. Pastor Fachtmann could have easily journeyed the few miles south to conduct services in Lowell. At one time, Leipsig numbered 150 people. Now the city is only a country bar. The only church at Leipsig, to my knowledge, was a Presbyterian church that closed in the 1940's.

Pastor Fachtmann produced fruit from his Dodge County journeys. The Missouri Synod churches in Mayville and Horicon claim him as the founding pastor. He sowed the seeds for churches in Waupun, Hustisford, around Columbus, and Beaver Dam- his so-called headquarters.

No conclusive facts support Fachtmann's ever preaching the Word in the village of Lowell. The closest we come to any evidence is the 1858 Synod convention. Concerning it Koehler says "Of the fields, that he visited and called Synod's attention to the territory between Columbus and Watertown, twenty miles east, and Beaver Dam, twenty miles north, is noted."²⁰ Where that is noted, we will never know. The center of that triangle lies directly in the Lowell township of Lowell, just south of the village.

The synod endorsed Fachtmann's escapades in 1858, but in fall of the same year he received and accepted a call to St. Peter's, Fond du Lac, another congregation he helped form. He

20. History of the Wisconsin Synod: J. P. Koehler, p.53



still did mission work until July of 1858. At that time a Lutheran congregation in La Crosse called him to serve as their permanent pastor. He took this call and no longer worked in Dodge County, but attempted to cement relations between the Minnesota and Wisconsin Synods by working up the Mississippi River. He gradually faded out of the Wisconsin Synod & eventually met a sad fate. "In the end, Fachtmann was to be disowned by the body and stigmatized in a way that is not warranted by the records it has left. The 1871 Minnesota synodical report tells about Fachtmann's expulsion and denounces him as a unionist, a liar, and as one who misused his office as traveling missionary to attempt the founding of another synod. Fachtmann's record as a unionist has become familiar to us, but it seems strange to a real student of history that the historical work, from which some of our data have been gained, omits to offer the proof for the other two charges, and offers no information as to the further history of the man who, after all, had done yeoman's service in the Wisconsin and Minnesota Synod's."²¹

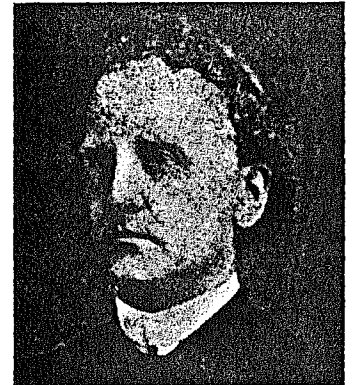
For two years the synod went without an 'official' Reise-prediger. That situation change in 1861. "In the fall of 1861 Moldehnke, designated by the German societies for the position of traveling missionary, reached Wisconsin with his wife and child."²² Muehlhauser appointed Fachtmann as traveling missionary. The synod endorsed his work, seeing the fruit. The replacement to Fachtmann, Moldehnke, thought he had another

²¹. Ibid., p.128

²². Ibid., p.78

authority. "Moldehnke... was under the impression that he must govern himself by the wishes of the German societies, even in outward matters."²³ That question as to supervision would later create strife.

In the Columbus convention of 1862, the synod agreed on Moldehnke's work. "At the 1862 Columbus synod Bading reported in regard to Moldehnke: 'Since he already had received the ordination of the church in the old country, he could at once enter into the work here. As headquarters for his mission journeys he first chose Watertown, then Germany near Fort Atkinson, where he now lives. His first detailed travel report was circulated by me in Synod, another is now at hand. On his experiences, desires, plans and the like, he may, being present himself, report to the honorable synod at the proper time.' The synodical report then makes no further mention of the matter. But the two extant and quite extensive manuscript reports of Moldehnke's afford the opportunity to strike a comparison with the reports of Fachtmann on partly the same territory and indicate the new drift that the deliberations in these matters were taking."²⁴ I did not locate those two extant and extensive manuscripts.



REV. E. MOLDEHNKE

Moldehnke may have done work in 1861. He certainly did work in 1862 before the convention. There is no naming of cities

²³. Ibid.,

²⁴. Ibid.,

in the 1862 report. Perhaps some of the cities listed in the next convention were some of those places visited. The traveling preacher's report at the 1863 convention goes like this: "The institution of the circuit rider in the last synod year has proved beneficial with a high degree of success. The following stations were served by the circuit preacher: Germany, Fort Atkinson, Whitewater, Waupun (city and prison), Almond, Stevens Point, Wausau, Town of Stettin, Town of Berlin, Green Bay, Kewaunee, Town of Carlton, Forrestville, Sandybay, Ahnapee, Portage City, Lewiston, Caledonia and the vacant synod congregations Theresa, Lomira, Fond du Lac, Forrest and Eldorado. Most of these stations can be permanently occupied by us in the course of this year, pending still another wait for a preacher, but all the same, their service is through the circuit rider now and then."²⁵

Another itinerary of Moldehnke's journeying is given by Koehler. "Proceeding from Germany, Moldehnke journeyed via Waupun, Berlin, Almond, and Stevens Point as far as Wausau. On the return trip, the Wisconsin missionary, after a side trip to Kilbourn City, returned to Fort Atkinson. On his second journey he made Lake Mills, New Ville (Waterloo), Kilbourn City; thence he swung back over Portage, Lewiston, Jefferson, Whitewater, Golden Lake, and Helenville. And now he bought himself a horse and vehicle and made another round trip, over Watertown and Beaver Dam. At the latter place he scored a victory for Synod over Al-

²⁵. Wisconsin Synod Proceedings (1863) p.14

brechtsbrueder and Presbyterians in acquiring the field."²⁶ His victory in the field could explain the later closing of the Presbyterian church outside of Leipsig, referred to in the section about Pastor Fachtmann.

Obviously, Moldehnke moved around. Nothing states that he stopped and visited the village of Lowell. Yet Lowell, not far from the second largest city in the state, Watertown, may have heard him preach the Gospel in 1861, 1863. If a person wished to they could read between the lines of the last report and claim Moldehnke really did work just north of the village, later causing the Presbyterian church to close. Many Lutherans still do live around Leipsig.

Another indication Moldehnke worked in or at least close to Lowell is the 1866 convention report. The Absence of Preachers section gives this little highlight. "The congregations in and around Columbus, as far as their continuing vacancies, are served by Professor Moldehnke."²⁶ The small village of Lowell, only an 8 mile trip from Columbus, would start a Lutheran church in 3 years, served by the pastor at Columbus. The vacancy pastor, Moldehnke, most certainly conducted services sometime before the actual founding.

Also at the 1866 convention, the traveling preacher/professor resigned his call for various reasons. When he departed, so did the synod's official traveling preacher institution. "The work of the Synod's first traveling missionaries in the 60's, Facht-

²⁶. Wisconsin Synod Proceedings (1866) p.6

mann and Moldehnke, has been accounted for. When the latter left, the rapprochement with Missouri engaged Synod to such an extent that the traveling missionary matter receded into the background; ... Moldehnke was not given a successor."²⁷ The synod allowed the office of traveling preacher to die. Yet much mission work was still carried on. The typical parish pastor was himself a traveling missionary, serving the scattered groups of German Lutherans around his area.

In this scenario, Salem Lutheran Church in Lowell began. Traveling preachers served the congregations needs as best they could, bringing the Gospel intermittently to Christians. Lowell had another advantage for spiritual growth referred to earlier. The closeness of Lowell to Watertown led the country folk to send their children to Northwestern. "From round about Watertown, as far as Hustisford, Juneau, Waterloo, Lowell, Johnsons Creek, Farmington Helenville, Ixonia, that is to say, within a radius of fifteen miles, the young sons of the soil came, some of them already bearded, to prepare, as they expressed it, "for the higher professions."²⁸ The last town of those listed to form a Wisconsin Synod congregation was Lowell. One hopes the early professors at Northwestern not only increased the worldly knowledge of their students, but also worked or strengthened faith.

Some of the students of fathers of the students at Northwestern may have been among those to organize. "It was in the

²⁷. History of the Wisconsin Synod: J. P. Koehler, p.194

²⁸. Ibid., p.123

year 1869 when the following seven persons: Fredrick Schoenwetter, Christian Meckelburg, John Meckelburg, Christian Huebner, John Huebner, Karl Brucks and Fredrick Bussewitz organized Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church here at Lowell, Wisconsin, and purchased property where the church still stands."²⁹ These men purchased a church structure vacated by a baptist denomination some years before. Fredrick Schoenwetter is the only one of these 7 who was listed in the History of Dodge County before 1880. He was the village Postmaster.

"The congregation was first served by a Pastor Oppen, who was pastor of the congregation at Columbus at that time.(Zion) During the year 1871 and part of 1872 the congregation was served by Pastor Philip Sprengling, who had a pastorate in Beaver Dam.(First Lutheran) In the year 1872 the congregation called its first resident pastor in the person of Pastor Philip Lange, who accepted the call and served the congregation for six years!"³⁰ With the coming of Philip Lange as Salem Lowell's first resident pastor, an era ended. For perhaps the last 20 years German Lutherans had God's Word preached to them on an irregular basis. Since 1872, The Lord has blessed Salem by always providing men to fill its pulpit, not intermittently, as with the circuit riders, but regularly.

29. One Hundred Years of Grace: Salem Evan. Luth. Church

30. Ibid.,

A List of pastors who have served Salem-Lowell

Karl Oppen	1869-70	From Zion-Columbus
Philip Sprengling	1871-72	From First Lutheran-BD
Philip Lange	1872-78	Resident
Lucas and Probst	1878	From St. Stephen's-BD & ?
William Hass	1878-1883	Resident
Muehlhaser	1883	From St. Stephen's-BD
Karl Machmueller	1883-91	Resident
August Kirchner	1891-1911	Resident
O. H. Koch	1911	From Zion-Columbus
William Eggert	1911-21	Resident
O. W. Koch	1922-58	Resident
E. Wendland	1958	From Northwestern-Wttn
Leonard Pankow	1958-70	Resident
Gerhard Cares	1970-71	From Zion-Columbus
J. Babler	1971-84	Resident
Gerhard Cares	1984	From Zion-Columbus
Bruce Wietzke	1984-	Resident

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

Centennial Bulletin on Dodge County; Walter Bussewitz, 1948

A Century in Christ: Centennial Booklet of St. John's Ev. Luth.
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History of the Wisconsin Synod; J. P. Koehler, 1981-reprinted;
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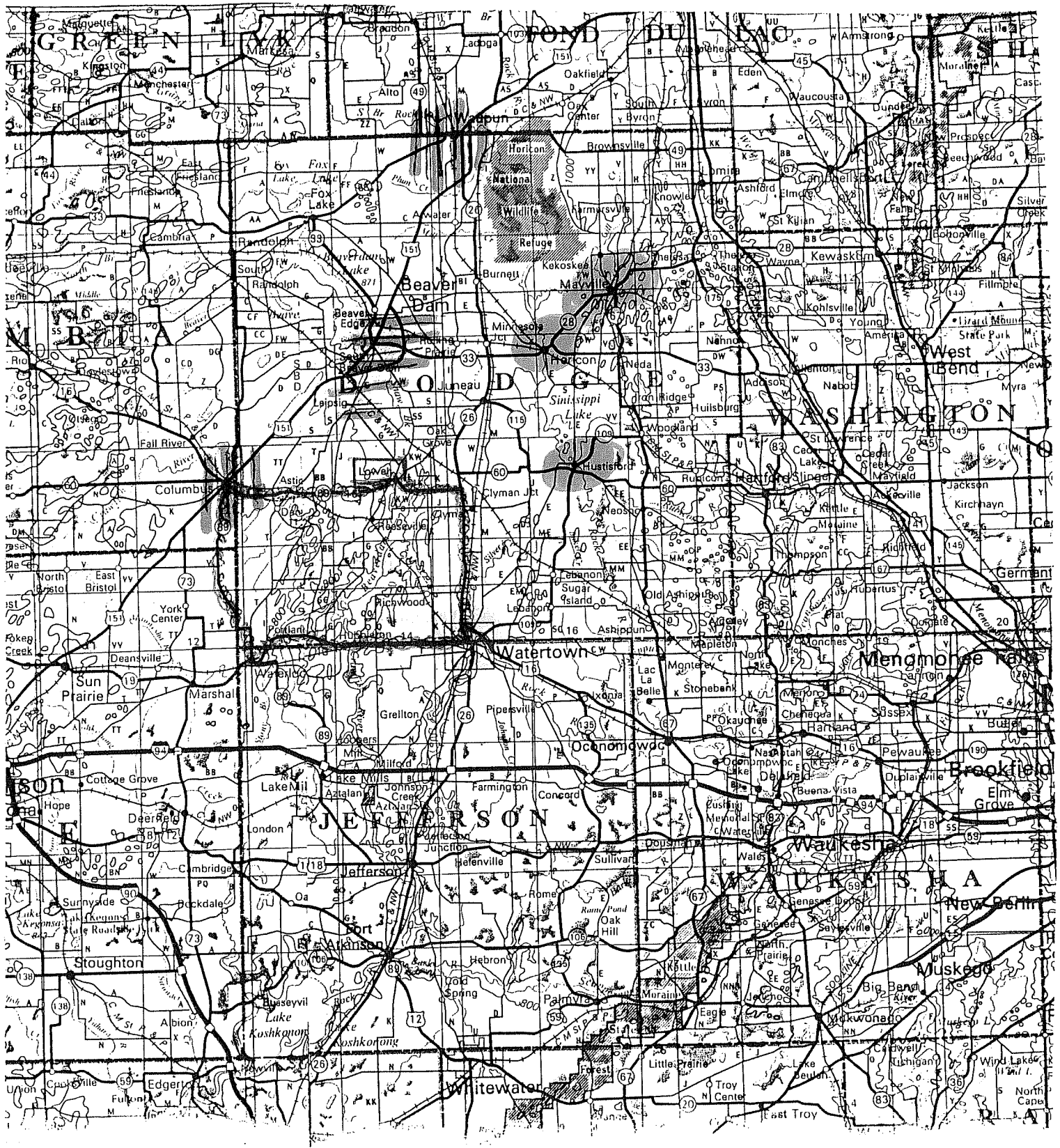
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Wisconsin Synod Proceedings- 1858, 1863, 1866



Sans' Possible Routes to Columbus *(with scribbled lines)*

Fachtmann's area of work *(with shaded area)*

Moldehnke's area of work

Lowell

Fachtmann & Moldehnke's *(with scribbled lines)*