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George Brumder

A Layman's Effort in Social and
Early Synod Publishing

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Introduction:

When one approaches the broad subject of Church History, the individuals who usually receive the greater amount of attention are the pastors and teachers who have left their mark on this subject. No doubt various controversies and individual congregations have also proved themselves as important subjects to be explored and studied as well. Somewhat overlooked at times, though, is the everyday layman, the person who may not occupy many lines in history books, but yet certainly has an interesting and important story to be told. For it is the laity who makes up the larger portion of the church body and who's leadership and voice is certainly instrumental in carrying out the church's work to the glory of the Savior.

The Lord has certainly blessed us all with various gifts and talents. For some, their talents are best utilized in the preaching and teaching ministry. For others, their talents may point them to different occupations which are fulfilled in the secular world. People certainly have different kinds of gifts and, in turn, use them in different kinds of service. The Christian layman will recognize that these gifts and talents come from and are used to the glory of the one and only Lord! George Brumder, a layman from Grace Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, possessed a special talent; a talent which led him into the printing and publishing business. This paper will examine George Brumder and a layman's efforts in social and early Wisconsin Synod publishing.

The first part of this paper will focus on his publishing of the Milwaukee German newspaper, the Germania. The second part of this paper will examine his publishing of the Synod's first hymnal, the Gesangbuch.

I.

Having held numerous jobs, George Brumder decided to enter the printing and publishing world when he opened his first bookstore in the spring of 1864. The bookstore was located at 306 W. Water Street, where it remained until 1876 when it was then moved to 236 W. Water Street. Brumder's bookstore catered mainly to immigrant Germans of the Protestant faith. In the beginning, his printing was confined mainly to Lutheran Church books, such as bibles, hymnbooks and catechisms and such books printed late in 1864 show George Brumder as publisher. No doubt, all these books were published in German in order to satisfy the need and appetite of the German speaking population.

In order to understand the cultural environment in cities such as Milwaukee, one must remember that in 1848 there was quite a religious upheaval in Germany. A large number of its people, owing to their republican ideals, their religious beliefs or for their personal safety, emigrated to the United States and settled in such cities as Milwaukee. To serve the inflowing European population, newspapers, in the German language sprang up quickly. The growth of German newspapers served their destiny in promoting religious and American political knowledge and acquainting the German immigrants with American institutions and ideals, while giving them, in the only language with which they were conversant,

news items of their former home and of the world at large.

Among these immigrants, there were, of course, many religious, well educated and highly intellectual Germans. To provide a newspaper in their language and to protect the sensibilities of those immigrants who maintained their adherence to the Protestant Church, a number of influential Protestants of Milwaukee, among them many ministers of German Lutheran Churches, gathered together in 1873 to organize the German Protestant Printing Association and to publish a daily and weekly newspaper for which they selected the name "Germania".¹ The Germania made its first appearance on June 18, 1873 as a weekly, then later in the year a daily Germania was published which was first printed on November 10.

Article 4, outlining the policy of the paper, read as follows:
"In regard to its political tendency, the paper to be published by the Company shall take a strictly independent position. It shall be edited in a truly Christian spirit in accordance with positive Christian principles and shall not contain anything that goes against the fundamental doctrines and truths of the Holy Scriptures. On the contrary, shall it in general defend Christianity, when and where necessary, but at the same time strictly avoid all confessional controversy".²
The Articles of Association of the German Protestant Printing Association were filed with the Secretary of State in Madison, Wisconsin on April 11, 1873. The organizers were H.O.R. Siefert, John Esch and Wm. G.A. Kellner.

The officers of this Association were Charles Eissfeldt, President, George Schmidt, Vice President, H.O.R. Siefert, Secretary and W. Petermann, Treasurer. All four men were members of the Board of Directors and all were ministers of various Lutheran Synods, as were most of the other eleven members of the Board. The synods represented by these ministers were Missouri, Wisconsin, Buffalo, Reformed Congregation and the Evangelical Synod of the West and one member of the Board was a minister of the Methodist Church. ³

George Koeppen was the first and the longest managing editor of the Germania. In the very first issue of the paper he writes as follows: "The object of the paper is to maintain the religious principles handed down to the Germans in America by the forefathers that religion is the spring of life and that devotion to God is a precious heritage of the Germans and that it shall be the primary goal of this paper to preserve this heritage for their children and children's children". And that, "The Germania is not a church paper, but is to represent all Evangelical Christians", and that "it was also to be an independent political newspaper". ⁴

As was stated earlier, the organizers of the Association did not want the paper to become involved in the ever continuing doctrinal disputes among the various Lutheran synods; but with growing confessional controversies, the paper had a difficult time following its policy of "defending Christianity and the truths of God's Word", and "avoiding

all confessional controversy". George Brumder's role in this Association was strictly that of being a stockholder. He took no active part in the management of the business. Oddly enough, some of the papers published by the Association were printed on Brumder's presses. The Association's office and presses were also located in this building.

In 1874, the story of the Germania changed for the better. Brumder entered into a partnership with Gustav Wallaeger and Charles Eissfeldt, by which they organized the German Publishing Company. This newly formed company took over the assets of the German Protestant Printing Association, agreeing to pay \$6,000 for its physical assets and to assume the Association's liabilities amounting to \$5,075.79 in payment of all other assets.⁵ On November 30, 1875, Brumder bought out his partners and became the sole owner of the Germania. For the next eleven years, the paper was printed as a weekly newspaper.

On October 15, 1889, however, George Brumder changed the Germania weekly which was issued every Wednesday, to a semi-weekly which was issued every Tuesday and Friday. This move resulted in a very substantial increase in the paper's circulation and also its voice in community and political affairs. What happened in this year proved the Germania's strength.

In 1889, the Republican Governor of Wisconsin, Wm. Dempster Huard, had the Republican controlled legislature pass the famous "Bennet Law". This law required the 3 r's and American History to be taught in

English in all Wisconsin schools. At the same time, they affirmed as sacred the "rights of worship according to individual preferences".⁶ Since practically all of the Lutheran and Catholic parochial schools were still conducted in the German language, this Bennet Law was considered an attempt to destroy these schools.

Brumder's Germania had faithfully supported the Republican party and helped to keep the party in office for many years. In 1890, however, he vigorously opposed the Republicans and wholeheartedly supported the Democrat nomination for governor, George Peck, who promised to repeal the Bennet Law. Peck was carried into office on an aroused wave of resentment formented by the Germania.⁷ The law was promptly repealed and Brumder considered it a great victory.

Having become successful in the weekly field and with five competitive German language dailies being issued in Milwaukee, George decided to re-enter this field and so on September 15, 1891, he again issued the evening daily Germania which became a huge success. In a very short time, it was recognized as the largest German language daily in Milwaukee; however, the semi-weekly Germania remained, by far, the largest and most influential of Brumder's publications.

Riding the wave of success, Brumder built the Germania (Brumder) Building on the south side of Wells Street. Here are some statistics which show the growth of the Germania's circulation:

1888 - 94,500 readers

1910 - 300,000 weeklies

32,000 daily Germania ⁸

At this time, Brumder owned the most extensive line of German language newspapers in America. October 1, 1932 ended 58 years of Brumder newspaper publishing.

II.

George Brumder and his wife, Henrietta, were extremely religious in their Lutheran faith. They took great interest in the building up of Grace Lutheran Church in Milwaukee. This was the church where they met, where they were married and which remained their church throughout their lives. George served as financial chairman and Henrietta served as head of the Frauenverein (Women's Society). During the Brumders' lifetime, the pastors of the church were Rev. Johannis Muelhaeuser, Rev. Theodore Jaekel and Rev. Carl Gausewitz. All three ministers were intimate friends and they spent many happy hours in each other's company.

George had strong Wisconsin Synod ties through marriages in his family. George's sister, Maria Eva, married Rev. William Streissguth, who served as the Synod's President from 1865-1867. In 1868, George, together with his brother-in-law, Rev. Streissguth, engaged in the publication of a small German language magazine type weekly called, "Der Familienfreund" (The Family Friend). Another sister of George's,

Anna Maria, married Rev. Gottlieb Reim, who served as the Synod's President from 1863 - 1865.

The General Council, of which the Wisconsin Synod had been a member since 1866, had as a long standing project, the plans for a new hymnbook. This may well have been one of the Wisconsin Synod's primary reasons for joining this organization. The Council did proceed with such a project, thus making a new hymnal appear likely for the Wisconsin Synod in the near future. However, the Council's stand "in regard to the lodge question and unionistic altar and pulpit fellowship" led the Wisconsin Synod, as well as a number of other conservative Synods, to leave the General Council in 1869.⁹ Therefore, the General Council's new hymnal would never be used by the Wisconsin Synod since it broke off with that organization.

In 1869, it was moved that the Wisconsin Synod proceed with the final steps to print its first hymnal. George Brumder was given a thirty-year contract for the printing of this book. The Synod was to receive "a payment of five cents for every copy sold by the firm. The proceeds ... were used by the Synod for the support of our 'schools of higher learning'".¹⁰

As the date came closer for the hymnbook to be printed, some pastors raised objections to a few texts. As an example, two hymns that were to be included in the book "Eine Heerde und ein Hirt" and "Ihr Kinder des Höchsten wie steht's um die Liebe" were cited as undesirable hymns for

an orthodox Lutheran hymnbook. The former was noted for exhibiting chiliastic and unionistic doctrines, whereas the latter contained casual rationalistic references and "sheer nonsense". Another committee, boasting the membership of Bading, Hoenecke and Koehler, was assigned to examine the contents of the book. After an exhaustive investigation, the revised hymnbook was finally published.¹¹

The new hymnbook wasn't exactly received with open arms by every congregation. Some congregations had, perhaps, recently purchased new hymnals from German publishing houses or from another synod, while others were simply unwilling to give up the old for the new. Nevertheless, by the early twentieth century, a majority of congregations in the Wisconsin Synod had obtained and were using the "Evany. - Lutherisches Gesangbuch".

For other reasons, the first hymnal was not an immediate success with the Synod's churches. Some Wisconsin Synod churches on the geographical outer edges of the Synod, or existing in areas where the concentration of other Lutheran bodies was greater, never made use of the "Evang. - Lutherisches Gesangbuch". Rather, for them, one of the printings of the Missouri Synod's "Kirchen Gesangbuch fur Evangelisch - Lutherische Gemeinden was their first taste of an orthodox American Lutheran hymnbook.¹² Churches that followed this route included: Trinity of Crete, Illinois; St. Paul's of Grant Park, Illinois;

St. Paul's of Monroe, Michigan; First of Green Bay, Wisconsin; and Trinity of Mequon, Wisconsin. ¹³

Although it did not result in the production of a new hymnbook by the Wisconsin Synod, an event that took place in 1890 deserves mentioning. In the Synod convention, George Brumder "appeared on the floor of the Synod convention in the matter of the fat hymnbook contract which to Synod yielded only pitiful royalties ..." Brumder yielded up the printing contract to the Synod long before its expiration date had arrived. Brumder may have been coerced into relinquishing the contract. In rather questionable fashion, he was referred to as a "donor" and was "honored by a rising vote of thanks." ¹⁴

Four years later, however, Brumder cancelled the agreement whereby he had restored the publication rights of the Gesangbuch on the grounds that the contract for payment of the hymnal's printing costs had not been lived up to. The Publishing House commission was exonerated by Synod for the reason that it had not been informed of the state of affairs by Mr. Brumder or the manager. ¹⁵

An accurate accounting of the number of Gesangbuchs published is not available in the Synodical reports due to omissions in the reports from the Publishing House. The royalties which Brumder proposed to pay that year amounted to \$59.85. At a nickel per copy royalty, the figure

arrived at between Brumder and the Synod, there were apparently 1,197 Gesangbuchs sold in that year alone. Brumder paid the amount of the old royalties and resumed the printing work.

Brumder continued to publish the Evang. - Lutherisches Gesangbuch for the next six years until the remainder of his original contract had expired. The original edition of the Gesangbuch had contained typographical mistakes that were not rectified until the Synod's Northwestern Publishing House assumed the printing work in 1900. ¹⁶

The end of George Brumder's business life occurred suddenly on the ninth of May, 1910. Fitting tributes to his achievements and the feeling loss to the community were given expression in many of the country's newspapers, in notes of condolence from President Taft and many leading officials and citizens of this nation and by the flag at half mast on City Hall.

And finally, as stated in the "History of German Newspapers in Milwaukee", "Who can dispute the truthfulness when, in summary, it is said that Milwaukee, the State of Wisconsin, and, in fact, the Northwestern part of this country were made better places in which to live, produced better citizens of German Descent and enjoyed happier homes because George Brumder, for many years, published German material which preached deep religious principles, glorified the sanctity of the home and stressed the privileges and responsibilities inherent in true American citizenship". ¹⁷

ENDNOTES

1. Brunder, Herbert. p. 38
2. Ibid, p.38
3. Ibid, p.39
4. Oehlert, James. p.110
5. Brunder, Herbert. p.49
6. Still, Bayrd. p.296
7. Brunder, Herbert. p.53
8. Rowell, George. p.492
9. Koehler, John. p. 164
10. Continuing in His Word, p.261
11. Synodal-Bericht. p.31
12. Koehler, John. p.113
13. Survey. April 30, 1979.
14. Koehler, John. p.185
15. Ibid, p.229
16. Ibid, p.229
17. Oehlert, James. p. 111

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