

NEW SALEM EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH:
AN EXAMPLE OF THE GOODNESS OF GOD!

(Sebewaing, MI.)

Church History 376

Professor Edward Fredrich

1990

David Birsching

NEW SALEM EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH:
AN EXAMPLE OF THE GOODNESS OF GOD!

While no Christian congregation exists in this world apart from the grace and goodness of God, perhaps in few congregations is this truth more evident than in the history of New Salem Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Sebewaing, Michigan. When the actions of men or the minds of men might have doomed the congregation countless times, the grace of our loving God preserved it, even as He preserves it still today nearly 140 years later. Let the writer and the reader constantly bear in mind the positive influence of the goodness of God, even as we are occasionally forced to consider some of the less positive aspects present in the congregation's past. After all, humans are sinful, but God was, is, and always will be GOOD.

Before we can delve into New Salem's personal history, some introductory information would be beneficial. We need to begin with Michigan's very first Lutheran pastor, Pastor Friedrich Schmid. Schmid arrived near Ann Arbor in 1833 fresh from the Mission House in Basel, Switzerland. He organized Salem Congregation there in Scio Township from where he reached into the rest of Michigan with the Word of God. He was a dedicated, hard-working man with a deep-rooted concern for the scattered German settlers in the New Land. In fact, he organized over twenty churches throughout Michigan to serve these pioneers. Schmid's zeal and self-sacrifice were hardly peculiar for the early pastors in the land. What set Pastor Schmid apart from the rest, however, was his dream of teaching "the poor Indians who are living without God and without hope".¹ In his letters to his beloved Basel Mission House, Schmid wrote often of these "poor heathen", commenting that Christ is "the Savior of Sinners, and, of course, the Savior of the Indians",² and how "it is, therefore, our duty to direct our attention earnestly toward the heathen Indians in order to come to their help with the Gospel."³

The Lord blessed Schmid's visionary dream. "In the early years of the forties, when two more Lutheran preachers joined him, he founded the first Evangelical Lutheran Synod [the first Michigan Synod]. He named it "Mission Synod," because he as well as his congregation had in mind to carry on a heathen [Heiden] mission among the Indians of Michigan."⁴ The initial step had been taken; now all that was lacking were the missionaries. To answer the need, Schmid himself began training bright young men from his Scio congregation. When Johann Simon Dumser arrived in Ann Arbor on June 6, 1845 from the Basel Institute, Schmid commissioned him along with Johann J.F. Auch and Georg Sinke to preach the Gospel to the Indians. "Among the Lutheran missionaries in this field, they were the first, landing on the shores of Saginaw Bay at Sebewaing on June 16, 1845. There they pioneered among the Chippewa Indian tribes at Wishkawking [Unionville], Seebewaying [Sebewaing], Shebahyonk [Wildfowl Bay], and numerous other points along Saginaw Bay."⁵ There was an abundant harvest to be won when these men arrived; Seebewaying, meaning "Crooked River", numbered approximately 100 Indians,

Shebahyonk numbered about 80, and Wishkawking nearly 60.⁶

Initially, the missionaries experienced blessing in their work among the Red Man, especially with the children who attended their school. Eventually, however, several factors began to hinder the pioneers' mission. It is recorded that the Indians were "misled by unscrupulous white agents"⁷ to turn away from the missionaries. Possibly the agents only confirmed a gripe the Indians already had; there were too many blue-eyed Indians walking around. Apparently Old Auchie liked the Indian maidens, which made it difficult for the Indians to accept the missionaries sincerity in regard to Christian morality. Furthermore, as more and more white immigrants arrived in the area and began clearing the forest, the Indians were gradually forced to abandon the region in search of more prolific hunting grounds. To attempt to follow the wandering, splintered tribes through the trackless forest would have been very nearly an effort in futility. Consequently, when the white congregation at Sebewaing (Immanuel) formally extended a call to Pastor Auch in their first annual meeting on February 16, 1852 he accepted it. At their second annual meeting, Immanuel voted to join the Missouri Synod.

Meanwhile, Pastor Schmid had assisted Pastor William Loehe of Bavaria by locating fertile areas for settlement. Pastor Loehe shared in Schmid's burning desire to bring light to the aborigines who were currently lost in utter spiritual darkness. His approach differed from Schmid's in that he felt the outreach could be best accomplished from entire missionary settlements instead of only isolated missionaries. In 1845, the first of four such Bavarian settlements was founded on the Cass River and was called Frankenmuth.

Loehe happened to be a staunch conservative Lutheran from top-to-toes. He originally supported Schmid's synod and missions under the delusion that the synod was staunchly conservative Lutheran. It soon became apparent, however, that Schmid's dedication to the Book of Concord was only on paper. Under him "the administration of Holy Communion according to the Reformed practice was permitted" in the congregations, and missionary Dumser, "who refused to accept the Lutheran Confessions", was sent among the Indians.⁸ Pfarrer Schmid himself wrote to Basel, "If the godly truth is proclaimed in a godly and powerful manner and the pastor lives in the strength of the gospel, then the truth-loving and the truth-seeking people of both confessions can get together through the strength of the Word."⁹

When there is doctrinal disagreement something has to give, and something did. Schmid refused to sign a "loyalty oath to all of the Lutheran symbolical books as demanded by the new missionaries"¹⁰ and his Mission Synod dissolved. "Now the work which he had begun at Sebewaing was taken over by the missionaries of Wilhelm Loehe and was incorporated into the Indian mission of the Missouri Synod."¹¹ Concerning this development, Schmid wrote to Basel dejectedly, "That we have erected a mission here and that we have already worked a year

among the Indians with blessing in this state is already known, and that our missionaries joined the Old-Lutherans and that they demanded from us what we couldn't do, you probably know also; thus nothing else remained for us except to turn over the mission with its missionaries to the Old-Lutherans, and thus our mission endeavor is restricted." ¹²

This is significant in New Salem's history because when Pastor Schmid encouraged another group of settlers to relocate in the Sebewaing area, he urged them not to join Auch's church. Schmid obviously disfavored the missionary he had trained but who had since severed himself from Schmid's unionistic tendencies. Perhaps word of Auch's fornication strengthened the spiritual father's conviction. At any rate, Schmid hoped that Peter Schairer, John Baur, Philip Schlemmer, John Strieter and their families would form their own congregation.

In order for these settlers to reach their destination, they somehow had to traverse approximately one-hundred miles of wilderness. Michigan was still, for the most part, vast virgin forest interrupted occasionally by swampland, and, even less occasionally, by a settlement. Because bridges over creeks and rivers were virtually non-existent, journeyers forded waterflows. The few roads that had been cut were in deplorable condition year round - the only variance being in the amount of deplorability caused by current weather conditions. For these reasons, most of the Ann Arborites who traveled to Sebewaing in the early years opted to conclude their trip via Saginaw Bay, either by boat in warm seasons or across the ice in the Winter. Very likely Schairer and his group were no exception to this rule.

Shortly after they had established themselves, a sizeable group of families from Tiffin, Ohio arrived on the scene. Included in these migrants were Konrad Zimmer, Nicolas Zimmer, Frederick Armbruster, Mathias Armbruster, Valentine Wagner, Theobald Becker, and Frederick Ziegler, among others. The nucleus the new church required was present and in the fall of 1853 the second church in the "thumb" of Michigan was organized. Its first Church Council consisted of Peter Schairer, John Baur, and John Strieter. As Pastor Miller wrote so beautifully, "The newly-organized congregation was given the name New Salem in honor of its mother-church in Scio Township, but above all, to serve them as a continual reminder of the New Jerusalem or New Salem above, the city fair and high, the goal of their earthly pilgrimage, where they expected to find sweet repose following their trials, temptations and battles of this earthly life. Thus New Salem of Sebewaing, active and full of much spiritual life, became a true daughter congregation of Salem at Scio." ¹³

This early congregation had two very evident problems; it had no church in which to worship and it had no shepherd to lead the worship. The first problem was relatively easy to solve; "For want of a church they assembled themselves in a private house, [the home of Peter Schairer, which still stands on the corner of Caro Road and McAlpine Road, though in disrepair], and edified themselves from the foundation of the prophets and

apostles that Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone." ¹⁴ Lacking a minister was a slightly larger obstacle to hurdle. When they approached the overloaded Pastor Schmid with their dilemma, he traveled the great distance himself in order to administer the Word and Sacraments to his fledgling congregation. Schmid's devotion to former members can perhaps best be understood when one reads these words written by the man himself: "There are frequently Germans settling here in the wilderness who have a difficult time for several years to acquire the necessary means to support themselves and their families, during which time they suffer many sad hours, and if they were deprived of the comfort of God, what else would they have? For that reason I must proclaim the Gospel to them, whether they can give or not." ¹⁵ This he did to the tiny congregation at Sebewaing whenever he had opportunity until a closer man could be procured.

Incidentally, 1853, the year New Salem Congregation was organized, happened also to be the year Auchville was officially organized into a township. Being the small community it was, the men from New Salem were very involved in the township's birth. In that first meeting, Peter Schairer and Jacob Armbruster were elected as Justices, Jacob Strieter became a Highway Commissioner, and Friedrich Ziegler was one of the three constables. Four years later, interestingly, the township's name was changed to Sebewaing. Perhaps we owe it to the influence of our church's forefathers that New Salem is now located in the town of Sebewaing and not Auchville.

By 1854 Pastor Schmid was able to offer the congregation closer help in the person of Christian Volz, a former trainee of his. Christian Volz was a pastor at St. Pauls in Saginaw who traveled throughout the Saginaw Valley as a missionary. On his journeys he saw to it that New Salem was not neglected. Reverend Christian Volz had only served the budding congregation in Sebewaing a half-year before he accepted a call to Lansing, whereupon he was replaced in Saginaw by his younger brother Conrad on November 14, 1854.

Pastor Conrad Volz, also a pupil of Schmid's, wasted no time in making his way to Sebewaing. Only eight days after his arrival he was stepping out of the warmth of his new home in Saginaw to walk the 45 chilling November miles to Peter Schairer's house. Similarly he made this trek about once a month for over a year until a permanent man could be secured for New Salem. Of these walks it is recorded that, "Far and wide there was neither road nor bridge. Directions were indicated by certain signs hewn by the lumberman's ax into the trees, but it was an easy matter to lose one's way. Father Volz, however, a stout stick in his hand, made his way through the forest, traversing the swamps by jumping from one stump or log to the other. Now and then he missed his footing and landed in the water, but he kept up his good humor in spite of such hardships. In later years he told many an interesting tale of 'roughing it' in the early days and humorously referred to his practical missionary boots, which were so full of holes that the

accumulated water ran off freely." ¹⁶

Through Conrad Volz, arrangements were made in the spring of 1854 for the congregation to purchase twenty acres of land from Conrad Kull of Saginaw. This parcel would be on present day Caro Road where New Salem's cemetery still occupies a portion of the original plot. Already the goodness of the Lord was becoming evident to the tender flock.

Oh, the rejoicing, when in 1855 the members received word that they were to be blessed with their first residential pastor! A fair amount of scurrying was also occasioned as the congregation had no parsonage in which to house him. They gathered together on their newly purchased acreage and constructed New Salem's first building, a log cabin parsonage. This was hardly a one or two man job. The trees, most of which were hard wood, had to be manually felled with a cross-cut saw and cut to length with gang saws. Someone would then stand on the logs and scour-hack the round edges off. Subsequently, a man who was handy with a broadax would square one side, measure, snap a chalk line, and square the other side. Naturally, the lumber had to be rolled or carried from where it landed to the immediate building site and mortises and tenons had to be chiseled into the ends to secure them in place. Finally, it was time to set the logs in place. They were lifted as high as possible by hand while men on the other side of the framework hoisted with ropes. Then pikes, (poles with a sharp hook imbedded in the end), pushed them into the proper position. After the log walls were standing, heavy clay was used to plaster the crevices of the home both internally and externally. Two-and-a-half foot shakes were split out of cedar or pine to shingle the roof. Any furniture would have been hand-crafted. The floor was made of dirt. Crude though it may seem to us, New Salem's first parsonage was certainly as good as or better than any of the first homes of the parishioners. This was simply the way people lived in primitive Michigan.

At last, in October of that year, Pastor Friedrich Nuffer arrived. The congregation blossomed. In fact, it became necessary to build a church because Peter Schairer's house could no longer accommodate the increasing membership. So, in 1856, work was begun on a small and humble worship facility. That same year the log church was dedicated with great joy to the one true God, to the God of grace and goodness.

While the people of New Salem finally had a minister in their midst to ease their spiritual hardships, the physical difficulties of frontier life still remained. The people of Sebewaing today are so far removed from the severity of those early pioneers that we cannot fathom what they endured as daily routine. "Most of them arrived here [in Sebewaing] without funds. They did not have to starve exactly. There was an abundance of fish and game. The maples furnished sugar aplenty. And yet it frequently happened that the settlers did not see any bread on their tables for weeks and had to subsist on potatoes and cucumbers." ¹⁷ Of course, in season wild blackberries could

be found in clearings, and Indian corn and other grains were harvested between the stumps. Since few of the early cabins were equipped with a fireplace, the cooking had to be done outside with a kettle on a tripod. Bread was baked on flat rocks in homemade ovens.

Few of the forefathers escaped malaria due to the tremendous hatch of misquitoses in the swamps; none of them escaped the terror of the wild animals of the dense forest. "There was the bear, the lynx (wild cat), and above all, the timber wolf. During cold winter nights the wolves would howl around the cabins. Often their front feet were on the window sill as they looked in. Their dreadful howls could be heard for many miles. However, the pioneer had his door well braced from the inside, and people did not venture out after dark without carrying a torch made of hickory bark tied to a green stick. Years later wolves would still destroy entire flocks of sheep in a single night and the settlers would then track down their hideouts and destroy the animals. The bear was troublesome too. Bears were fond of pigs and it would take a strong pen to shut the bear out."¹⁹ Such was frontier life in the Thumb of Michigan.

Gradually, however, the dark forest in the area was cleared by the rush of immigrants. The poverty in Europe caused by the Napoleonic Wars, the prospect of inexpensive, fertile ground, and the chance to "start over" brought large numbers of German pioneers to Michigan. The authors of an American history book penned this somewhat humorous description of these immigrants: "Seeking to preserve their language and culture, they sometimes settled in compact 'colonies' and kept aloof from the surrounding community. Accustomed to the 'Continental Sunday' and uncurbed by Puritan tradition, they made merry on the Sabbath and drank huge quantities of an amber beverage called Bier (beer), which dates its real popularity in America to their coming."¹⁹

An interesting, and probably typical, example of a German settler in the Sebewaing area is Friederich Jedele. He left Durweiler, Germany in 1830 at the age of five. He resided in Scio Township with his parents "until 1855 when he purchased near Sebewaing 160 acres of State land for \$250.00 [about \$1.50 per acre]. The property at the time was all woodland, traversed only by Indian trails. -- He was the first farmer in that vicinity to own a team of horses, having walked to Ann Arbor, a distance of more than 125 miles, to purchase them. He also had the first frame barn, which is still standing although it has been rebuilt. He helped organize the New Salem Church, and was the first man to be buried in the New Salem Cemetary [in 1868]."²⁰ With all these migrants and immigrants relocating in the Sebewaing area, New Salem's congregation steadily grew.

Then in 1859 Pastor Nuffer left the congregation. Later, Pastor Binhammer described the transfer as "stepping over to the Missouri Synod."²¹ Perhaps because of this "stepping over", but certainly because the congregation wished to respect their founder's wishes of avoiding the "Old-Lutherans", the next year they sent a delegate to a very important meeting. On December 10

and 11 of 1860, John G. Baur became a part of history when he was one of eleven men, and one of two laymen, to found the second Michigan Synod. It was in the Detroit study of Pastor P. Mueller under the auspices of Friedrich Schmid that the new synod was organized and put into effect. New Salem "resolved unanimously"²² to join it.

Only a few months prior to this important meeting, New Salem had received a new pastor by the name of H. Steinecke. Pastor Steinecke incorporated the recording of decisions into their meetings, written of course in German. These minutes provide much insight into the affairs of the young church. For instance, in the first meeting under his direction held on October 4, 1860 the following decisions are recorded: 1) the pastor is to be paid quarterly, 2) a pulpit is to be built by May of 1862, and 3) the good wood which is recovered from the clearing of the congregational land is to be used for heating purposes.

These early meetings varied considerably from our church meetings today. First of all, the annual meeting was held on a weekday, probably a Monday, and was an all day affair. The body recessed for lunch, but resumed an hour later. The goal was to conclude business before evening chores, but I imagine this was difficult to achieve at times with all those full-blooded Germans squabbling back and forth. Generally, the pastor was elected chairman for the day. More importantly, however, the congregation needed to provide itself with a janitor and grave digger who lived relatively close to the church property. The grave digger had to be a hearty man for he only needed to dig thirty inches or so in the New Salem cemetery before hitting heavy, yellow clay. Of course, if the funeral was held in the winter, the digger would have to resort to the pickaxe even sooner. Often in the early years the same man was elected to fulfill both functions, as was the case when George Wagner was elected to the dual position for 1865. His remuneration was to be \$2.00 a year for janitorial work, \$0.75 per child's grave and \$1.50 for anyone over fourteen.²³ Speaking of money, those early churchmen avoided debt at all costs. If there happened to be a congregational deficit at the annual meeting, the attenders dipped into their pockets and wiped it out on the spot.

Another difference between then and now is evident in the way the church was governed. Matters tended to be handled much more legalistically in the eighteen-hundreds at New Salem than modern members are accustomed. A heavy emphasis was placed on fulfilling "the obligations of membership" and on "abiding by the Church Regulations" or else individual's names would be "stricken from the membership list."²⁴ It was frowned upon and rarely allowed for members to send their school-aged children to any other school than the New Salem Church/School. Membership privileges included individuals chipping in a certain amount of money to put the congregational books in the black. At the annual meeting of 1868, for instance, it was decided that each member was to pay \$0.25 to liquidate the church debt. A year

later \$0.50 dues were assessed. It was also decreed that each member who plants was to supply the pastor with one bushel of grain.²⁵ As the congregational land was cleared and became farmable, the members were counted on to work it. When church-related projects needed to be done, absenteeism undoubtedly demanded a healthy excuse. Members were also expected to provide the pastor, church and school with firewood. Another obligation of membership, albeit an unspoken one, provided the pastor's family with fresh meat whenever parishioners were butchering.

It is interesting that already in 1861 mention is made of New Salem Church School and by 1864 a School Board was being elected. The pioneers had the option of sending their children to Immanuel's well-established school, yet they chose instead to have Pastor Steinecke teach them in the tiny church. This he did, as did all of the pioneer pastors to serve the congregation. At the time, it was generally understood that the reverend's job description included all of the preacher tasks -- and all the teacher tasks as well.

In 1864, after nearly four years of service, Pastor Steinecke left New Salem. He was replaced by a man named Robert Wiese. Little is known of Pastor Wiese except that he ministered to the congregation the duration of only six months. Apparently there were some serious problems under his care and the congregation nearly collapsed. Many members left the group and joined "a neighboring congregation."²⁶ In fact, even what remained of the congregation was standing in question. On March 9, 1865 the shaky condition of the congregation is evident by the first resolution of the day; "resolved that the congregation should continue to exist."²⁷ Another significant development of this meeting was the decision that, in the future, only wafers were to be used for Holy Communion, [instead of bread as was the Reformed or Unionistic custom]. Was Pastor Wiese expounding more Reformed doctrines than many of the members of early New Salem cared to tolerate? We will probably never know for certain. If indeed that was the case, then he did the congregation a great service, for New Salem took a serious step toward conservative Lutheranism.

It is interesting to note that shortly after New Salem edged away from Reformed Communion practice, the new Michigan Synod began to embrace a purer Lutheranism as well. "The presidency was in this year [1867] transferred from Pastor Schmid to Pastor Klingmann, who had just moved to Scio. With the exit of Pastor Schmid as president, a cycle of Lutheranism begins which was marked by greater awareness of and a greater fidelity to the Confessions. Up to now a great deal of unionistic leaven had managed furtively to penetrate."²⁸ Only a year later in 1868 the synod resolved unanimously to condemn millennialism and the Secret Societies, and to consider Holy Communion and the exchange of pulpits with those of another faith as intolerable. The Michigan Synod, with New Salem firmly entrenched in its care, began a gradual drift toward conservative confessionalism. After Wiese's departure from the congregation, a long and trying

vacancy followed. Repeated requests were made of the synod's aging president, Pastor Schmid, for another shepherd. In the meantime the flock tried to nourish itself and keep its lambs from straying. Undoubtedly nearby pastors would periodically administer the Word and Sacraments to them, but any sense of consistency was lacking. Finally, in the fall of 1867, Pastor Henry Gangnuss moved into the Sebewaing parsonage. What a burden must have been removed from the shoulders of every member of New Salem when Reverend W. Reuter of Bay City installed their next resident pastor. Their new minister was to receive the whopping salary of \$300.00 a year for ministerial duties, and \$50.00 more for teaching.²⁹

The Lord in His goodness blessed the work of Pastor Gangnuss at New Salem. The fact that he remained in Sebewaing nearly seventeen years was a blessing in and of itself for he provided the splintered congregation with stability. "He especially promoted the educational system which had fallen into decay."³⁰ From the first of November until the first of May, school was held Monday through Thursday from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon with an hour recess for lunch. Two of the days of the week, Pastor Gangnuss would dismiss the younger children an hour early in order to hold Confirmation Instructions. Summer school met from May first to November first on Mondays and Tuesdays. Pfarrer Gangnuss is reputed to have been a fantastic teacher who even taught the children algebra in the old log church. "He was anything but a dummy,"³¹ when it came to teaching.

Apparently he wasn't a half-bad pastor either. "He had those guys on the step!"³² Under Pastor Gangnuss, the Lord in His goodness caused the congregation to grow and prosper once more. According to the annual statistics of the Michigan Synod, by 1875 the number of communicants at New Salem had soared to well over two hundred.³³ Through the grace of God, New Salem blossomed to such a degree that an extensive building program was undertaken. The first addition to the church property was a frame barn twenty-eight feet wide by thirty-eight feet long.³⁴ This would enable storage of farm equipment for working the church land and of feed for any livestock or poultry the pastor might own.

A short two years afterwards on May 15, 1873, the groundbreaking and cornerstone laying for a new church took place. Soon, under the direction of carpenters Henning and Matthias Birsching, the building arose just North of where the old log church stood. Naturally, the work was all done by hand, though by now the buildings took on a more finished appearance. This time, boards and siding were even purchased, very likely from the Kunderling mill in Kilmanagh. This church even had steps up to a special entryway with provisions to hang up coats. It was an entirely separate room which extended to the edge of the balcony. If one were to sit in the balcony, he wouldn't even walk into the church proper; the steps were in the entryway. The congregation added two bells in the belltower and an organ to

complete their house of worship.

On the tenth of October of that same year, twenty years after its organization, the congregation dedicated its new worship facility to "the service of the Triune God."³⁵ It was a day of great jubilation. Pastor Miller reported that, "after a short service in the old log church, -- the doors of the new church were unlocked and the congregation and guests from neighboring congregations entered."³⁶ Services were held in the morning and afternoon with Reverends Christoph Eberhardt of Saginaw City, William Reuther of Bay City, and William Kramer of Zilwaukee sharing speaking honors with Pastor Gangnuss. The entry into the minutes on the occasion concludes with the statement that, "Members of neighboring congregations attended in large numbers."³⁷ Today, nearly 120 years later, the members of New Salem still assemble in that same structure, though the church has been raised and renovated considerably since then.

Two Summers later the congregation built Pastor Gangnuss a new home. It was thirty feet long, twenty feet wide, and sixteen feet wide and was situated South of the churches and East of the barn.³⁸ In style, the house resembled the typical two-story farmhouse so prevalent in the area. This was only appropriate, however, since in those days the parsonage actually was a farmhouse -- the pastor serving as both parson and farmer. As a final finishing touch, Pastor Gangnuss planted a row of locust trees in front of the house paralleling the road. New Salem Lutheran Church could now witness visibly the extent of the bounteous goodness of the God they worshiped. The old parsonage can still be seen today in its original location South of the New Salem Cemetary. One almost wishes the house could play back the countless German catechism lessons which bounced off its walls or reproduce the spirit of the faithful men who dwelt under its roof. The building proper may no longer belong to New Salem, but a portion of New Salem will always belong to the building. From then on, the old log church sandwiched between the new parsonage and the new church was used as a schoolhouse. It continued to serve New Salem in that capacity for ten more years.

In the Spring of 1885, Pastor Gangnuss received a call to St. George Congregation in Genoa, Michigan. When it became evident that he would be leaving, the voters appealed to President Christoph Eberhardt of the Michigan Synod to suggest a replacement pastor. He replied with the name of Reverend A. Moussa but, for some reason, New Salem unanimously opted to call Pastor Wilhelm Kramer instead. According to the church minutes, Reverend Kramer arrived an amazing six days later. He was a tall, heavy-set man with long sideburns and round spectacles.

Under him, the congregation employed the carpentry talents of Matthias Birsching once again. This time he was to construct a schoolhouse twenty-four feet in width, forty-two feet in length, fourteen feet in height, and add a kitchen to the parsonage as well.³⁹ On August 29, 1886, President Eberhardt preached the schoolhouse dedication sermon. With the smell of sawdust and fresh paint, the children began the school year in a

brand new schoolhouse.

That December the voters elected George Strieter as delegate to a very special synodical meeting in Lansing. The topic to be discussed was the transfer of the newly established Michigan Lutheran Seminary from Manchester to another city. Originally it had been decided to erect the school in Adrian, Michigan. Yet, at this significant meeting the site was changed to Saginaw for a considerable savings. Already New Salem was deeply involved in the synod's pastor training school and it continued to support the seminary avidly throughout its existence. The members had experienced the difficulties of long vacancies, consequently they wanted to avoid that problem in the future, both for themselves and for their sister congregations in the Michigan Synod.

In retrospect, it is perhaps unfortunate that New Salem called Pastor Kramer instead of the pastor that the synodical president had suggested, and perhaps equally as unfortunate that Pastor Kramer responded so swiftly. It seems that the German settlers in Sebawaing tended to be rather opinionated and bull-headed at times. Couple these virtues with the German tendency to hold grudges and one has the ingredients of trouble. This would prove to be true numerous times in New Salem's history, even as it did here. Apparently some sort of rub developed between members and pastor. Suddenly Pastor Kramer began to experience unexplainable phenomena such as buckets tied to the horns of his cattle. When he received a call to Kalamazoo in December of 1887, he accepted it and never looked back.

Pastor Metzger arrived next. He wasn't even in Sebawaing two years when he began to develop problems as he preached. His voice became very "scratchy"⁴⁰ and coughing often interrupted his sermons. When he was diagnosed with throat cancer, he retired from the ministry and moved into Unionville, though he remained a member at New Salem until he died.

January 1891 brought a new spiritual leader to New Salem, namely, Pastor G. Stern. Only a year later the congregation dove into a major remodeling project. It was decided to raise the church foundation by eighteen inches and to hire Matthias Birsching to elevate the side walls of the church to eighteen feet.⁴¹ A sacristy was to be added on the South side, the balcony was to be enlarged, and the interior was slated for plastering and painting. Also, the pews which had previously butted up to the wall were to be repositioned away from the wall, thereby creating three aisles instead of only one in the center.

In 1894, the final major structure was built on the church property in the form of several long rows of buggy sheds. The sheds shared a common roof and were partitioned off with dividing walls so that the horses couldn't kick at each other. Each member who lived further than walking distance from church would maintain his own shed. Then, whenever there were doings at church, he would lead his horse or team into his stall, cover the animal or animals with blankets in cold weather, and go about his business. If you were able to scan the church land from North to South in 1894 following this addition, this is what you would

see: the cemetery -- the church -- the parsonage -- the barn in the background -- the school -- the rows of sheds. God in His goodness had blessed New Salem significantly.

While New Salem was undergoing change, significant developments in the Michigan Synod brought change on the synodical level as well. The idea of a merger between the Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota Synods was being addressed by the parties involved. On May 22, 1892, a resolution worthy of mention was passed by New Salem Lutheran Church. The minutes read: "The congregation declares itself completely in accord with the joining of the three synods, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, with the understanding that she not be denied her rights as a congregation."⁴² The voters also elected Peter Schairer as delegate to the upcoming synod meeting.

At this historical gathering of the Michigan Synod, two major decisions were made by the men in attendance. First of all, the synod resolved to make application for membership to the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference which was established to unite confessionally minded Lutherans throughout America. The second decision of the assembly was to "concur in a merger with the synods of Wisconsin and Minnesota."⁴³ The result of these resolutions was that the Michigan Synod was accepted into the Synodical Conference and the merger between the three synods took place in October of 1892. Because it seemed quite practical, the Michigan Synod agreed to convert its seminary in Saginaw into a preparatory school. No one could have seen the repercussions within the boundaries of Michigan which would follow this concession. Simon Baur of New Salem attended a conference in Saginaw which met in the hope that reconciliation could be achieved between opponents. This was not to be. Bitter contention finally resulted in a temporary split within the synod, dissolved the ties with the Synodical Conference and the Wisconsin Federation, dragged the seminary into disarray, and even filtered animosity into individual congregations.

New Salem may have been one of the congregations hit hardest. Note the words recorded from a March 8 meeting in 1896. "This meeting was called to discuss a collection for the seminary in Saginaw, Michigan. -- After it was pointed out what the object of this collection was, namely, to bring the quarrels within the synod into the congregation, it was left to each member to give whatever he wanted to give with the matter being settled in this way; that Peter Schairer be asked to receive the gifts to see that they are delivered to the seminary."⁴⁴ In subsequent meetings tensions mounted between pastor and members and accusations flew. Then on June 28, the voters gathered again. These are the words from the minutes of that meeting: "This meeting was held to discuss a letter addressed to Elder August Armbruster from Pastor C.F. Boehner, President of the Michigan Synod. In the letter the question was asked of the elders whether it was necessary to have a visitation since from certain sources the Synod and members of the same and the professors at the seminary have been slandered and efforts have

been made to get the congregation to join another synod. After some discussion a motion was made and supported to suspend membership with the Michigan Synod until the quarrel within Synod has been settled."⁴⁵ The motion was passed by a nineteen to fifteen⁴⁶ vote and suddenly New Salem found itself outside the synod.

This independence didn't keep Sebewaing from being intimately involved in Synod affairs, however. "The Michigan Minority [opposed to the Seminary transition] that had been suspended by the announcement that appeared in the July 1896 Synodal-Freund, immediately assembled at Sebewaing with the intent of carrying its case to the August 12-17 meeting of the Synodical Conference at Evansville, Indiana."⁴⁷ The Sebewaing convention adamantly condemned President Boehner and those who held with him.

Yet, only a month later while the Evansville Conference was in session, New Salem's official stand flip-flopped. On August 15 the motion to withdraw from the Michigan Synod was rescinded by the close vote of seventeen to fifteen. Because Pastor Stern could not agree with the decision, the minutes state that he⁴⁸ was removed from office with a twenty-five to sixteen decision. Some contend that he was not "removed" by the congregation, but rather that he resigned of his own accord. Regardless, New Salem Congregation once again lacked a pastor. Not quite a month later on September 11 the assembly gathered again in the schoolhouse, and, as Secretary Simon Baur writes, "an extraordinary congregational meeting was held."⁴⁹ One can readily realize why he chose the word "extraordinary" to describe the events that occurred that day. Pastor Stern's suspension was reaffirmed and the resignations in the August meeting of two elders and two trustees were accepted. The mortgages and other papers were to be retrieved from the former trustees and the old lock on the church was to be replaced. Furthermore, Pastor Binhammer was unanimously elected to be called as the next pastor, with Pastors Merz of Saginaw and Wacker of Berne being asked to serve as vacancy pastors.

One final effort was made to restore unity. Some of the members who were sympathetic with Pastor G. Stern presented a protest before the voters assembly. They declared their willingness to remain members of New Salem provided that these conditions were met: "1. We ask that our up to now opposers agree to a God pleasing and orderly way as our Church Constitution states in that they in a wrong manner removed Pastor G. Stern as our Pastor who was called in an orderly congregational meeting and that they rescind this motion. As soon as Pastor Stern receives an orderly call we are prepared to release him in peace, however we want a pastor from the Synodical Conference. 2. Further we are prepared to join the Michigan Synod of which Pastor F. Klingman is president. If it will help to restore peace we are also willing to hold an orderly congregational meeting at which representatives of both Michigan Synods are present. However, we declare for once and for all times that we

will have nothing to do with the old Michigan Synod. However, if our present opposers cannot agree to these terms and continue as they have started and have resolved, we can no longer conscience bound remain with them and hereby declare our severing of membership." The letter was written by Pastor Stern and endorsed by nineteen men.⁵⁰ "The congregation resolved unanimously not to accept the protest, to accept the severing of membership by the opposers and to send the call to the elected Pastor C. Binhammer as soon as possible."⁵¹ Concerning this action, the following addendum was penned by the secretary, "We feel sorry with all our heart that we have to accept the severing of our opposers and pray to God that they will see that they are wrong and in a peaceful manner return to our congregation."⁵²

Pastor G. Stern left the service of New Salem and he left the Michigan Synod, but he took approximately a third of the congregation with him. Not only were the members who followed him a sizeable bunch, but, almost to a person, they were young people - people who could have expanded and solidified the core of New Salem for years to follow. Pastor Stern and his followers formed a congregation they named "Zion Lutheran", holding services in Immanuel Lutheran Church's old country school. Zion existed until Pastor Umbach arrived at Immanuel. He persuaded them, since they were "so few", to join his congregation. Many have maintained since that if its members would have remained on their own, Zion could have been a flourishing congregation.

During all this scuffling, an important man entered and exited New Salem's membership without a mention. The first teacher was called for the 1895 school year. His name was F.W. Vogelwohl and, not surprisingly, he resigned at the end of the 95-96 school year. Another teacher would not be called for twenty-eight years, consequently, the ministers resumed the role of educating the children.

So ends a sad chapter in New Salem's history. Yet, by the grace and goodness of our loving God, a much more pleasant chapter began with the installation of Pastor Binhammer on November 9, 1896. Pastor Binhammer was a short, round man; a picture of him with a confirmation class shows him to be outflanked by the thirteen and fourteen year-olds. He wore a bushy, dark mustache and round spectacles and tended to exude a lot of nervous energy - "his feet were always going."⁵³ Concerning him, Edgar Hoenicke wrote, "One of the frequent victims of [the Michigan Synod pastors'] practical jokes was a short, rotund, florid-faced pastor, Carl Binhammer of Sebawaing up in Michigan's 'thumb.' His colleagues always called him just 'Kalli.' Our father said he was a very intelligent man with an impressive knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, but he was also somewhat naive and far too trusting of his long-time friends. Among these was his neighbor, Pastor George Wacker from Pigeon, whom he called 'Tchortsch.' He was the very counterpart of Binhammer, tall and lanky, with a long, chiseled face. -- Another classmate, a man with a keen sense of humor, Pastor Fritz Krauss of Lansing, often conspired with Wacker in playing these

pranks on 'Kalli,' who could always be depended on to explode with voluble indignation, but also to cool down just as quickly and to join the others in laughing at his own gullibility. He knew very well that the joke had been played on him in the spirit of the German adage, 'Was sich liebt, das neckt sich.' (They who tease one another, love one another.)"⁵⁴

Although he was a short man and perhaps naive with his colleagues, he was a strict teacher and authoritative disciplinarian in church matters on the home front. After New Salem had been severely rocked, God provided a rock of a man. After the congregation had been racked with instability, God provided stability. Pastor Binhammer served New Salem faithfully for twenty-five years.

In 1903, New Salem geared up for its fifty year anniversary. It was decided to make the following improvements on the church interior: stenciling was to be done by Hover and Son, the pews were to be painted, a basement was to be dug and a new furnace installed there. The exterior of the church was not neglected either; it was painted and reroofed. Then on August 23, a tremendous jubilee took place as the anniversary was celebrated in conjunction with both mission festival and Synod Convention, which was held in Sebewaing that year. Pastors Bodamer, Krauss, and Heidenreich addressed the throng and the choir from St. Johns, Berne edified the services. Amazingly, eight of the founding members were present yet to witness the special day. They were Peter Schairer, Phillip Schlemmer, John Sting, Nicolaus Miller, Konrad Zimmer, John Baur, Theobald Becker, and John Armbruster. These men must have realized to a special degree just how good God had been to the congregation they had started fifty years earlier.

Sixteen months later in January of 1905, an interesting meeting took place in the church. Because the congregation was still in debt from their remodeling, the congregation resolved in earnest to ammend the situation. First of all, they decided to take a special collection for the treasury on a quarterly basis. Secondly, as was the precedent, each member was to be charged \$1.50 to liquidate the debt. (When it was necessary, the trustees would go on collection drives on Sunday afternoons. Typically, "they didn't get far because they would talk to everyone."⁵⁵) It was also decided at this meeting that the congregation would have nothing to do with farming the church land, therefore Pastor Binhammer's salary was raised from \$350.00 to \$450.00 to reimburse him for his time and expense.⁵⁶ He would now officially wear three hats: pastor, teacher, and farmer. One other resolution was passed which had bearing on a wider scene. "Resolved to instruct our delegate to the Synod Convention (Adam Zimmer) to vote for the rejoining of our Synod with the Synodical Conference."⁵⁷ The winds of change and the breezes of healing and forgiveness were blowing in Michigan. In a few short years, the severed Michigan Synod would be reunited and regain membership with Wisconsin and Minnesota in the Joint Synod.

Back at New Salem, exactly two years later, the voters

determined to observe Mission Festival annually. Mission Festival had become the highlight of the year for the country congregation on Caro Road. In fact, current members of New Salem who were privileged to attend these festivals still beam when they speak of the gatherings in "the grove." The grove was situated in the Southwest corner of the congregation's property and could be reached by means of a lane on the South side of the buggy sheds. Here in the grove the entire congregation gathered, along with numerous members from the surrounding Lutheran congregations (Sebewaing, Unionville, Pigeon, Bach, Kilmanagh), for an entire day of Christian fellowship. People even came from as far as Bay City and Saginaw, for the trains, which normally sat idle on Sundays, specially steamed into a town where a Mission Festival was taking place.

At New Salem, services were held in the morning and in the afternoon with guest preachers addressing the gathering from a tiny, raised platform. Out in the open-air the ministers had to really boom it out, especially on a windy day, or they would not be heard in the back. Their listeners would be scattered everywhere, some sitting on planks set on posts under the canvass, some leaning against a tree, and some, primarily the young men, standing in the back. At the concession shed between services, an attendee could purchase pop or lemonade (kept cold in a water tank full of ice), candy bars, ice cream, cake made by the ladies, hot dogs, or even cigars. Also available was an all you can eat meal prepared by the ladies of the congregation on oil-burners in the kitchen shed. One can readily understand why this day was eagerly anticipated then and fondly remembered now.

January of 1909 brought another problem to New Salem; Pastor Binhammer had received a call to Bay City. The problem was solved when the men of New Salem voted unanimously not to release him. While this seems strange to us who are used to the pastor making his own decision, in the earlier decades of this century congregations tended to make the decision for the pastor. Either they instructed him to leave, or they prohibited it. From the church records it is evident that New Salem did not hesitate to resort to this measure to keep a man. In fact, they employed it often, especially where Pastor Binhammer and Pastor Schmelzer were concerned. Consequently, the two men combined back-to-back for a total of 49 years in New Salem's midst.

An interesting annotation in the church minutes from June 20, 1915 deserves some discussion. "The Chairman [Binhammer] opened the discussion of the question of having liturgical church services and emphasized the beautifying and enhancing of the church worship service by the use of the liturgy is voluntary. It is not demanded by God's Word nor is it forbidden, however, it would enrich the church worship service of the congregation if it were adopted. It was further explained what is meant by the liturgy." ⁵⁸ As it turned out, the voters tabled the issue until the annual meeting at which point it was dropped. Only after four years had passed was the congregation ready to give the liturgy a six month trial run. Six months later, June 1919, the

liturgy was discontinued; the members preferred the old order of service.

Perhaps a look at the services of New Salem in "the old days" would be appropriate here. The bells signaling the start of the service would ring at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning. If it happened to be a communion Sunday, however, the communicants would gather at church a half-hour before the service for "Beichte,"³⁷ or confession, in order to prepare themselves properly for reception of the Lord's Supper. As the members assembled inside the church, families divided to take their respective places. The men always sat in the pews on the left side of the church and the women sat to the right of the center aisle. If one held an elected position, however, he took his proper place in the front pew with the rest of the officers.

In the service proper, there was little congregational involvement other than the singing of a few hymns. (While the organist accompanied the congregation, "Old Man Wiemers" would place two fingers on the wheel on the side of the organ and crank air into the bellows to provide volume. Frequently, however, he gave organists fits as he began to doze off in his chair, causing the volume to tail off sharply.) The pastor talked "auf Deutsch," of course, and the congregation was expected to listen attentively. This could prove to be extremely difficult, especially on particularly warm days, for the pastors "liked to hear themselves talk."⁴⁰ Hour-long sermons were the rule rather than the exception. Originally, collections were not taken during the service; members dropped their contributions into a little box mounted in the entryway. In time, it was taken pew by pew by means of "Klingelbeutel"s, which were long poles with a little pouch mounted on the end. The ushers would walk down both sides of the pews and reach across to the halfway point. Apparently it was not unheard of for the pouch to be held in front of a member until a willing gift was given. When a contribution was made, the bell sewn into the bottom of the pouch announced it to all. Finally, an hour and a half or two hours after the service began, the congregation was released.

Church played a significant role in our ancestors lives. Not only was it the period of the week they spent with their Lord, but it was the social event around which the rest of the week hinged. After the service it was not uncommon for families, especially those who lived a considerable distance from church, to be invited to share a meal and the afternoon with a family who lived closer. In some cases, families had a regular stop every Sunday where they would discuss church affairs and concerns of the day.

One topic that must have occupied considerable attention in such discussions was the impending entrance of the United States into World War I. On April 23 in 1916, a special congregational meeting was held. This is what Albert Baur recorded on that day: "After the church service, the chairman [Binhammer] announced the reason for this meeting in a few short words; if it is our responsibility to do our duty toward the state and the land in

which we live, then now is the time to do so with all our strength. Our president with his last memorandum to Germany has brought our country to the brink of war. We as Christians and citizens of the United States should earnestly protest that our country not become involved in the war. Should this protest as well as the earlier petitions have no influence in Washington, then we at least have done our duty and will have a clear conscience in case war is declared by our country against Germany. We do not want to be responsible for this crime since it would be a crime to wage war with Germany for the reasons given. Therefore it was resolved to send the following protest to President Wilson and our three congressmen: We, the Evangelical Lutheran New Salem Congregation, emphatically protest against any act that would involve our land in a war with Germany. As loyal citizens of our country we ask our representatives in Congress to use their influence so that our country will not be drawn into a war against Germany." ⁶¹ New Salem's feelings on war with the "homeland" are quite clear. The congregation issued another formal protest against war in February 1917. Interestingly, after war was declared, New Salem contributed \$50.00 to the treasurer of the army and navy. ⁶²

Another deep concern which must have been bounced back and forth excitedly in conversation among members in 1920 was a proposal to close the parochial schools in Michigan. The particulars of the proposed "School Ammendmant" ⁶³ are unclear. Perhaps it was because anti-German sentiment still flowed freely as a result of the war and because many of the parochial schools taught in German that this movement against the parochial schools arose. How much of a threat and how seriously the opposition planned to pursue the matter is questionable. Regardless, the members of New Salem took the threat seriously and formally protested the proposal several times. It is ironic that at the very time the congregation was up in arms over the mandatory closing of parochial schools, they closed their own voluntarily. Exactly why they closed it is, and probably always will be, a mystery.

A differant problem soon faced New Salem. At the voters meeting on January 3, 1921 Pastor Binhammer informed the congregation that he had received a call to Allegan, Michigan. Before they could respond, he requested a peaceful release. This was subsequently granted him and Pastor Binhammer's stay in Sebewaing came to an end after all of twenty-five years. By the goodness of God, Binhammer had steered the congregation through some murky and riled rapids. The souls of the small Sebewaing parish owed him a debt of gratitude and would certainly remember him fondly as long as God granted them life in this world.

On June 5, 1921 the congregation extended a call to Pastor Gustav A. Schmelzer of Detroit but he returned it. A strange incident followed. Instead of calling another man, the voters revised the call and sent it back to him. This time Pastor Schmelzer accepted. He and his family arrived in Sebewaing in July of that same year.

Pastor Schmelzer was rather tall and heavy-set with a bald head and spectacles. Those who knew him describe him as "the most common man that ever walked the face of the earth. He could even associate with a begger on the street."⁶⁴ "Even the old German-Hungarian Catholics in the area spoke highly of him."⁶⁵ He was every bit the farmer that his parishioners were. On the church grounds during his stay could be found milk cows, chickens, pigeons in the loft of the chicken-coop, rabbits in hutches, and beehives in the apple and pear orchard behind the parsonage. It was not uncommon either for wild game to find its way to the Schmelzer's dinner table for Pastor Schmelzer loved to hunt. On pleasant days he would frequently walk into the surrounding countryside to visit members, despite the fact that he owned a car. Paul Bolzman recalls Pastor Schmelzer arriving on foot at his father, Walter's, home four-and-a-half miles distant from church. After dinner, Walter would drive him home again. Regarding his preaching, it was said that he "put on a long sermon," preaching a healthy hour, long with an "ersten," "zweiten," "dretten," and conclusion.⁶⁶

One of the first actions of New Salem's new minister was to lobby for the reopening of the gradeschool. In the August voters meeting he stated, "It is very important that the school be opened again since it is the nursary of a Christian congregation."⁶⁷ His wish was granted. After a year of silence in the schoolyard, the children's voices were again heard at New Salem Lutheran School in the fall of 1921. The children who entered the school doors initially did so under the jurisdiction of Schmelzer himself. He taught for three years until the congregation brought in Miss Erna Hinz as teacher in 1924.

School in that one-room country schoolhouse was a unique and special experience unable to be paralleled today. The school day began for the children with the walk to school. Some lived relatively close, but others lived quite a distance away. Paul Bolzman, for instance, walked four-and-a-half miles to school, (sometimes backwards to avoid a cold Northwest wind), and the August Gaeth children walked all the way from Unionville. Clemence Baur said that he lived three-and-a-half miles from school but, whenever possible, he biked the distance. Attendance was approximately thirty to thirty-five children generally, although at least one year Erna Hinz taught nearly fifty - an amazing feat and a mammoth task.⁶⁸ Of necessity the older students helped the younger ones learn.

The students were taught exclusively in German, at least in the early twenties. Seating also differed considerably from today as the children sat two to a bench. Writing was done on slates, but students were also equipped with bottles of ink and pieces of wood with a writing tip stuck in the end. This is reputed to have been a "slobbery mess."⁶⁹ Occasionally the daily routine was altered and the children would have opportunity to display their prowess in special spelling matches. Two upper-graders would chose teams, each trying to corral the more gifted spellers, until every student was on one side or the other. The

team with the last standing speller won the match. Another variance in the usual schedule would occur when there was a funeral at church, at which times the children would file into the church balcony and sing a song.

After full-time teachers took over in the school, Pastor Schmelzer held confirmation instructions in the parsonage. Following the morning devotion in the schoolhouse, the sixth and seventh graders (children were generally confirmed after seventh grade) assembled in his living room. Occasionally Pastor Schmelzer would arrive a bit late from his milking, but the children would sit patiently in their chairs and wait for him. Then, to the ding-a-ling-a-ling of the cream separator in the kitchen, Pastor Schmelzer thoroughly taught them their catechisms. Those present set their minds to learning the truths of the Bible and to their memory work because they knew very well that, after confirmation, they would be involved in Schmelzer's "Christenlehre." ⁷⁰ Christenlehre was the special privilege of recent confirmands to sit in the front left pew and answer questions or recite memory work every Sunday during the church service. Understandably, it was a day of great rejoicing when a student, after two years of faithful service, would be released from the Christenlehre duty.

The children attending New Salem School eagerly looked forward to their recesses, especially the hour long noon recess, the same as any schoolchild does. After the children were released for that noon recess, Miss Hinz would walk over to the Schmelzers for lunch. At this time the older girls were expected to fill a ten or twelve quart granite pail with water from the hand pump on the South side of the school. Meanwhile the boys were to restock the firewood supply in the furnace room. The annoying part of their job was that the entrance to the school was on the East end of the building and the furnace was on the West end, forty-two feet away. One day one of the boys had the brainstorm to simply open the furnace room window and toss in the wood instead of walking all that way. All that remained of the job then was to stack the wood inside. When Miss Hinz noticed all the scuff marks on the floor one day, however, she secretly watched the boys. That was the end of throwing wood in the window.

After the children had eaten their lunches and done their chores, they were free to use the rest of the recess as they pleased. The boys of the 1920s were every bit as much boys as the boys of today; things were never dull around the New Salem schoolhouse. On one occasion Alan Gaeth forgot his report card at home where, as was the custom, his parents had signed it. So he asked George Schwenk, an older boy who had driven to school with his father's horse and buggy for catechism instructions, to drive him home to retrieve it. George agreed and, much to the horse's consternation, the two boys directed him to turn the opposite direction of the Schwenk's residence. Consequently when the horse hit the edge of the pavement at Beck Road, (which, by the way, is still there - one of the oldest pieces of cement road

in the area), the horse broke into a full gallop. George abandoned the buggy and Alan, both of which ended up in the ditch after the hitch broke. Another time the boys were jumping down from the haymow in the barn when Frederick Gaeth missed a rung on the way up. He landed on the floor below, severely breaking his arm. Another day someone accidentally knocked out the blocks replacing the missing stove leg and the furnace, blazing fiercely, toppled over. There was also a time when one of the boys took an axe and smashed the organ because he didn't like to sing.

Activities were plentiful on the corner of Beck and Caro Roads. There was an clearing South of the buggy sheds where the children could play ball or other games. In the Winter, the Sebewaing River which flowed just East of Caro Road offered ice skating. Another Winter option might be sledding down the hill on the Schmidt land which was situated a short walk to the North of the church land on the East side of Caro Road. Kindly Mrs. Schmidt even loaned the children a toboggan. Springtime had its own special allure. The church grove burst into bloom with wildflowers prime for picking by a pretty fraulein. The nearby creek, meanwhile, hosted scores of spawning fish - a schoolboy's dream come true. With a bent safety pin, some old twine, a piece of brush, and a few earthworms, the boys were in business. Believe it or not, they were successful! Once Ed Loeffler had hung his fresh catch of perch under his bench for safekeeping when Pastor Schmelzer spied them. The fish became his donation to the Schmelzer family. The nearby water served another purpose for the boys; after a warm May rain had raised the river, they would deposit their clothing on the bank and go swimming. Sadly, those school days in New Salem's one-room country schoolhouse can never be recaptured, but, thanks to memory of some members, they can always be treasured.

One other facet of the gradeschool deserves mention - the annual children's Christmas Eve service. Before the congregation arrived, some of the men would mount a tremendous cedar tree in the church - one which reached the ceiling. As was the ancient custom, candles on candle-holders were clamped to the branches. Then, previous to the service, the candles were lit by means of a burning candle fastened to a long pole. The effect was marvelous indeed! The one drawback of this custom was that the tree had a tendency to catch fire. As the children delivered their verses, the elders or school board members stood ready with a wet sponge or rag attached to another long pole in order to douse any flare-ups. They must have done a credible job at this since New Salem Church is still standing. It would be necessary also, since it was an evening service, to light the ten or twelve kerosene lamps on each of the two chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. Heat on this December evening was supplied by the furnace downstairs which poured warmth into the church through one register in the center aisle in the front of the church.

Regarding church matters, the voters passed a significant resolution on August 20, 1921. They ushered in an English

service to be regularly held on the fourth Sunday of the month. It would be a considerable extent of time before the language of the New World would replace the language of the Old World in the worship lives of the Germans at Sebewaing, but the first baby-step toward that end had now been taken. Two years later the congregation decided to adopt the use of "the small" English hymnals.⁷¹

Perhaps now is the time to share with the reader a few gems written by long-time Secretary Albert Baur. Every once in a while Albert would record a very serious decision in a rather humorous way. Regarding the resolutions of the January 8, 1924 meeting, he informs us that Fred Armbruster was to be paid \$.50 for phone use and that a new kitchen was to be built in the grove. "Further, that a new pulpit be built and a new toilet in the Northwest corner of the grove."⁷² Why they needed a pulpit on or in an outhouse in the Northwest corner of the grove is puzzling indeed. Six years later, also at the January meeting, the following was decided. "The triangle [cemetery] is to be laid out in lots, and every congregation member who chooses has the right to pick a lot, with the responsibility to fill it himself."⁷³ Quite probably Albert was referring to the responsibility of leveling off the lot, but maybe there was a concern that some people would shift the responsibility of filling their lot to someone else?

Meanwhile, changes were taking place at New Salem. When the pulpit was built originally, the traditional height was "the higher the better" so undoubtedly the architects of New Salem built it the "best" they could. In 1924, the pulpit was lowered. Then, in 1926, the parsonage was raised three blocks and the Southern side was excavated to increase the size of the basement.⁷⁴ On July 4 of that same year perhaps the most significant decision of all was made, at least the Schmelzer family must have thought so. "After considerable discussion it was voted to hook up to the line to light the parsonage with electricity."⁷⁵ What a change that must have brought to the home!

An interesting development occurred in the Fall of 1926; St. Paul's of Unionville confronted New Salem about receiving their members without a release. New Salem actually admitted that it was at fault and apologized to St. Paul's. Apparently, the Unionville congregation was looking for more than an apology, however, for in July of that year the minutes record that a complaint was filed with Michigan District officials. In fact, Pastor Wilkenning from St. Paul's and District President Schinnerer approached Pastor Schmelzer demanding suspension of John Strieter, who declined to return to St. Paul's. True to form, the hard-headed New Salemites refused to nuzzle under even to a District President. They could see no reason to suspend John Strieter, so they didn't. Finally, after much jousting, the issue was dropped by St. Paul's.

1928 marked another anniversary of New Salem. God in His goodness had preserved the congregation for seventy-five years.

Little is known or remembered of that special jubilee except it was celebrated in conjunction with Mission Festival on the last Sunday in August. As usual, three services were held that day. A tremendous turnout must have been expected because one thousand programs were ordered.⁷⁵ While plans were being formulated, Pastor Schmelzer received a call to Tawas City, but the congregation avoided any difficulties by voting not to release him.

October 29, 1929 brought the American economy to its knees. The farmers in the thumb of Michigan were not unaffected. In 1932 New Salem congregation asked Teacher Norma Meister if she would be willing to take a pay cut from \$90.00 to \$70.00 per month.⁷⁷ In fact, by 1934, the decision to close the school was being seriously considered. (Finally, after much discussion, the school was retained.) At the first church meeting of 1933 it was decided to hold a drive to liquidate the congregational debt. By April of that year, New Salem still had a deficit of \$680.00 and St. Johns of Sebawaing owed \$650.00.⁷⁸ Consequently, talk of merging the two congregations began in earnest.

St. John's Congregation was an independant Lutheran congregation organized by Pastor Deichman from Linkville. The church building itself had served a number of denominations previously. Originally it had been a Catholic church located by the Catholic cemetary until the Baptists bought it and moved it to New Salem's current lot. Eventually the Lutherans took it over and St. John's congregation was established. Size-wise, the building was considerably smaller than New Salem. It boasted three rectangular windows per side and an ungainly entryway/belltower bearing a striking resemblance to a turret tower on an ancient castle. In 1913, however, the people of St. John's faced a dilemma when Pastor K. Ziegler left them. They decided to approach Pastor Binhammer of New Salem to serve them. This request was granted them and from that time on New Salem's pastor had two services on Sunday morning - the early one being at St. John's. In January, 1921 a noteworthy decision was reached at the annual meeting of New Salem. A committee of six men from St. John's was to attend meetings at New Salem with complete speaking and voting privelages. Already that same year the topic of merging was addressed, but no decision was reached. The seed of amalgamation was planted, but it took over a decade for it to officially take root.

Throughout the Spring of 1933 a series of special joint meetings between the congregations were held to hash out the details. At these meetings, it was determined that: 1) there would be joint ownership of the property of both congregations, 2) both congregations were accountable for the joint deficit, 3) the merged congregations would be called New Salem, 4) the school would remain where it was as long as the congregation owned the property, 5) the larger country church would be moved to the city cite, 6) the cemetary would remain at the original location, 7) the two bells of New Salem and the one bell of St. Johns would all be used, and 8) the German hymnal of the Wisconsin Synod and

St. John's English hymnal would be used. When the vote was finally taken, nearly all of St. John's and New Salem were in favor of the merger.

Concerning the moving of the larger rural church to the city cite, there was more grumbling in the ranks. While most were in favor, or at least not opposed to the move, some members did leave New Salem due to the extra distance the move occasioned. Regardless, in October of 1934 the congregation resolved to use the \$1585.00 of designated subscriptions to move the church into the city. Herman Wagner, Adolph Baur, Fred Armbruster, and Albert Baur were placed in charge of the arrangements. When the former St. John's church was sold to Walter Neumann in February 1935, plans could proceed.

The two churches were to be moved simultaneously on a Saturday in that very month. Van Haren Movers were contracted to move New Salem into Sebewaing while Neumann employed Louis Janke for St. Johns. The St. Johns building was to be moved only a few blocks to the South-West corner of 5th and Zimmer Streets where it became, and still is, a residence. Even before Van Haren Movers began moving New Salem, the steeple of St. Johns had been removed and the church was loaded and ready to go.

Back on Caro Road, meanwhile, someone from New Salem congregation expressed so much concern that the church couldn't be transferred with its steeple and bells intact that the Van Haren brothers became annoyed. They took the worried parishioner into the church, placed a full glass of water on the altar, and promised a free move if it was empty upon arrival. Then, using a Dodge truck, the men proceeded to slide the church through the fields over greased planks. When the building reached the end of the boards, everything halted until planks were repositioned properly. An eyewitness recounted how, every time the building was winched ahead, the steeple would jerk severely. The movers quite naturally followed the shortest route possible to their destination; they crossed the Beck fields East of the Birsching farm, met up with M-25 where present-day Lukes stands, followed the highway a short distance, then cut across the open fields to what was then the end of 5th Street.

In the time that New Salem had journeyed the distance from its country setting, Louis Janke with his horses and rollers still hadn't been able to back the former St. John's edifice out and transfer it the two blocks to its new cite. Consequently, the New Salem church was forced to wait at the end of the street until the path was clear. Since they had the time, some of the Van Haren men entertained themselves by pestering old Louis Janke. Now Louis Janke happened to be somewhat of a hot-head, and they soon had him throwing around axes and sledges and whatever else was handy. Eventually, however, St. John's was removed, and the New Salem church took its place. Van Haren may have worked faster, but by the time New Salem was in position, the clutch in the Dodge truck had been burned out.

With all the remodeling that was slated to take place in the church, it was temporarily necessary for the congregation to

gather for worship in the schoolhouse. There, in the school benches, the men, women, and children were instructed in the Word of God. Regarding changes in the building, a new front entry was added and the St. John's bell was mounted. St. John's old pipe organ that Otto Eberlein had purchased in Lansing back in 1915 or so was overhauled, reconditioned, and installed in the front of New Salem. The motor for the electric ballast was fixed in the basement and its pipes and blower were positioned in the room which is now the church office. Behind them was a tiny storage room in which the communion ware was kept. The manuals faced the wall, so the organist would sit with his or her back to the congregation. Of necessity, mirrors were mounted so that the organist would be able to observe the pastors movements around the corner. Also St. John's pews replaced New Salems old ones (which were divided in the middle by railings) and are still being used today.

The basement was also dug out by hand. The first two-and-a-half feet of sand were relatively easy to shovel; it was the clay underneath that caused problems. The diggers were all thankful that Norman Baur was there with his team of horses and his "slush scraper."¹⁰ Norman had made a big trench on the West side of the church in which the shovelers would pile the dirt. Then he would pull his team over the pile, scoop it up, and drag it away. By the time he returned, another pile was waiting for him. Finally, the entire basement was cleared by hand and by hoof.

Worthy of mention is the cornerstone laying on April 7, 1935. Two services were held on that day. Pastor Schmelzer preached in English at one and Pastor Wacker delivered a German message at the other. In 1977, when the new entrance to the church was built, this old cornerstone was opened one morning by Arnold Jedele and Hugo Hoppe, with a few members and the fifth through eighth graders present. Our ancestors had enclosed some coins of the year, a German hymnbook, and a copy of the Gemeingeblatt for posterity. Unfortunately, the paper was severely damaged by moisture through the years. On June 2, 1935, the "new" New Salem in its new location was dedicated with three services.

The final chapter of the move into town was written in the early months of 1938 when the farm property on Caro Road was sold for \$2500.00.¹¹ This necessitated that the school be moved into town. It was placed on the West side of the church where it still stands today. At that time, the house to the West of the school which is now the teacherage was used as the parsonage. The small teacherage, on the other hand, was situated South of the church where the parking lot is today. When the congregation was able to purchase the old Rydell house South of the teacherage in 1945 or so, it became the parsonage, the old parsonage became the teacherage, and Dorothy Yachim moved the former teacherage to where it stands still today. The entire applecourt was upset; even Pastor Schmelzer's bees were moved to Fred Gall's place. Yet, through the goodness of God, a major change had been weathered. And through the goodness of God, New Salem

Evangelical Lutheran Church and School still stand there today.

With all the discussion about the merging of the congregations, a sad event was temporarily set aside. Sometime in the early 30s, a large group of German-Russian members who lived South of Wisner caused a stir in the congregation. Apparently they would attend services at New Salem on Sunday mornings, then would gather again in the afternoon at the Wisner Township Hall, or the Gleaner Hall as it was called, for prayer services. What bothered some of the other New Salem people was that Pastor Schmelzer was not present at these meetings. Tensions rose. The "Gebettbruders"⁸² were mistreated by some at Sebewaing and instructed to stop meeting separately, consequently a vast majority of the Wisner people joined St. Paul's Lutheran or the Moravian Church in Unionville. Once again, a sizeable group of committed members were driven away from New Salem by the hard-headed domineering of a few.

Also the arrival of Teacher William Arras in 1934 received no mention. He was the first man teacher since Vogelpohl in 1896 and followed on the heels of four lady teachers. He deserves a paragraph due to the fact that he remained in New Salem's service for six years, longer than any other teacher for the decade preceeding him or the two decades to follow. He was the man who had to adjust himself and his students to a completely new school setting. To this day, he is still remembered as an outstanding teacher. In fact, he was so good that in 1936 his salary was upped to \$600.00, or about \$65.00 a month for nine months. That same year, Teacher Arras requested permission to organize what was very likely the first Young People's Society. Permission was granted. Then, in 1940, shortly after his call was changed from a nine month to a permanent one with two weeks vacation, he received a call to Bethel Congregation in Bay City and was granted a peaceful release. He was replaced by Roland Bode.

While the world was gearing up for another war, New Salem was undergoing major exterior changes. At the same time, major interior change was also creeping into the worship life. At the first voters' meeting of 1940, it was resolved to introduce a liturgy in both German and English. Pastor Schmelzer and Teacher Arras were to draw up the design and present it to the Church Council for approval. Upon approval, the liturgy was to be printed into pamphlets for congregational use. It was also determined that day to hold English services on the first and third services of the month, with German at the others. A year and a half later, the purchase of two-hundred English hymnals was affirmed⁸³ and, in April, 1942, it was decided to follow the liturgy of these new hymnals. By 1943, even the church minutes were written in English. Soon, as the war with Germany progressed, the switch to all English services took place, although it wasn't until 1980 that special German services were completely abandoned. Another significant development around the time of World War II took place when the segregation by sexes in the services came to an end. Families could now worship together the God that had been so good to them in the language that was

most commonly spoken.

July 9, 1943 brought quite another change to New Salem Lutheran Church. That evening, after dark but before midnight, a fierce lightning storm unleashed its fury over the little town of Sebawaing. Suddenly, a thunderous crash exploded through the night air, followed by the wail of fire engines. Bill Birsching burst into his younger brothers' room and commented to them excitedly, "I'll bet it struck the church steeple." Amazingly, that is exactly what had happened, except the bolt missed the lightning rod stationed on the top. Fortunately, the fire was checked nearly immediately by the fire department. In fact, only a few supporting beams were splintered. These could have been easily repaired by spiking two-by-fours on either side of the beams, but instead, the towering thirty-foot steeple was shortened significantly. Never again would the steeple reach its previous height, yet God in his mercy had spared the church itself so it could continue to point sinners to the heights.

The following schoolyear brought another fire. While Teacher W. Huber was conducting classes, some of the older children in the back of the room noticed smoke seeping up through the cracks in the floor. When Mr. Huber investigated, he discovered flames and promptly directed the children out of the front door of the building. With the children safely removed, he ran home to call the fire department. By the time the fire was extinguished, it had damaged the furnace room and much of the back wall of the school. The blower control on the old coal furnace had been faulty, consequently the furnace kept putting out heat with no blower to dissipate it. Until the wall could be repaired and replastered, the school desks were transferred to the church basement and classes held there. Once more, the goodness of the Lord was evident.

Shortly thereafter, an event occurred which spelled the beginning of the end for Pastor Schmelzer. It seems a son of one of the prominent families in the congregation died an alcoholic. Pressure was put on Schmelzer to bury the man, but he declined because he had tried repeatedly to work with him to no avail. Some of the big-wigs in the congregation told him that he "would" bury the deceased, so Schmelzer stood up in the pulpit and told the gathered people that, "I can't give you any comfort that this man went to heaven." From that day on, some members did everything possible to make Schmelzer's life miserable. Finally he received a call to Hale, Michigan and gladly accepted it. For twenty-four years, Pastor Schmelzer labored in love at New Salem. How sad that he should have had to leave under such negative circumstances when he had done so much for the congregation. God is always good; man is not always so. This truth would be demonstrated numerous times in the years to follow as a few high-handed members caused countless grief to New Salem's called workers.

Nathaniel Luetke moved into the parsonage next. He was a younger, taller man with a dark complexion, dark hair and glasses. While he didn't preach as long as some of his

predecessors, his style of delivery is remembered as "differant."⁹⁵ Sometimes his listeners would have to bite their tongues to keep from bursting into laughter. For example, in one sermon on Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, he had Abraham commanding his servants to, "Go and throw a saddle on my ass."⁹⁶ Luetke butted heads with some of New Salem's hard heads and moved on less than two years after his arrival. A year-long vacancy followed. New Salem had developed somewhat of a reputation for itself within Synod; it was a congregation that many called workers wanted to avoid.

Finally in mid-May, 1948, Pastor Carl Miller arrived. Though he tended to preach forty-five minute sermons, he is remembered as being a very fine preacher. When he spoke, he did so very deliberately so that one could not miss anything. Under him, affairs flowed rather smoothly for awhile as the congregation geared up for its centennial celebration in 1953, (the same year Sebewaing observed its one-hundredth birthday). By September 20 and 27 when the thanksgiving services were held, New Salem had undergone numerous changes. The former white altar which had been built by August Kastorff for \$75.00⁹⁷ was transferred to Trinity Lutheran Church in Elkton. A new blond altar and pulpit replaced those removed and are still in use at New Salem. New altarware was also purchased and is still visible today in front of the church. The altar was flanked by a United States flag on one side and a flag with Luther's seal on the other. Fresh black and beige (?) tiles were laid under the pews. Other new additions included carpeting, lights, a hymnboard, awnings, and shrubs.

If one were to view the front of the church from the balcony, he or she would notice a rounded arch over the chancel. Painted directly above the arch was a cross with a German inscribed banner draped over it. (No one seems to remember exactly what the German phrase was.) The banner stretched across the entire front of the church and was held up by an angel at each end. Underneath the angel on the East side was painted a huge portrait of Martin Luther; under the other angel stood the pulpit. Just West of the pulpit was painted a smaller portrait of a white-bearded man in a black robe holding a scroll. Who he was is another mystery. Certainly the new altar and pulpit stood out. The casual viewer would have to admit that the church was beautifully redecorated.

Yet, things were not as they should be. Though an affable fellow, a few members disliked Pastor Miller, (some of the same ones who disliked the previous pastors who would not bow to their wishes), and tensions rose. Eventually Pastor Miller refused to give communion to some members. Apparently, steps were even being taken to excommunicate some due to unrepentance. One threatened member went straight to District President Press and brought in the big guns against Miller. Pastor Miller had confided in an associate pastor who in turn revealed what was said to Press himself. The day of the meeting, Press drove to the church, parked his car, and, without a word to Miller, waited

for meeting time in his vehicle with the accused. When the meeting was to begin, he strolled into the building with his big guns loaded. Press made it clear in no uncertain terms that if the man under church discipline were excommunicated, he would excommunicate the entire congregation. That stilled the congregation. Then, when Pastor Miller could not come to the terms that Press demanded, he turned in his resignation. That stilled Miller. It seems there was fault on both sides; at least, the fault was by no means completely one-sided. Regardless, the incident demonstrates the type of underhanded, heavy-handed tactics that were common at New Salem at the time. In this case, a minister's career was brought to an early demise.

Not surprising, a lengthy vacancy followed again. Finally, Pastor Karl Neumann accepted the call to New Salem in 1956. In order to bring him to Sebewaing, however, the congregation had to move him all the way from California. That in itself cost the congregation handsomely, but in the first congregational meeting the tall, blond pastor inquired how much debt the congregation carried. When he was told, "None!" he responded, "We're going to change that,"⁸⁸ and he did. In 1957 a new Allen organ was purchased and installed, and the old organ chamber was converted into the church office. No sooner was the new organ in place when the energetic pastor began to promote an addition to the school. Work for this began in early April of 1958 and was completed by the start of school in September. Included in the new building were the classroom for the younger grades, the library/office, the girl's and boy's bathrooms, the new furnace room, and the janitor room. These additions were dedicated on January 18, 1959. Pastor Neumann is reported to have been "good on the pulpit."⁸⁹ He must have been inspiring if he could encourage New Salem to incur two hefty expenditures such as a new organ and a massive building project on the school within the three years of his tenure!

During Pastor Neumann's stay, a new man teacher spent a few months in Sebewaing. While New Salem was blessed with many excellent teachers before him and after him, this man occupies a place of special distinction in our history. His name was Arthur Hackbarth and he wasn't even supposed to come to Sebewaing. He was a volunteer student who was sent to Ohio, but he switched calls with the man assigned to New Salem so he would be closer to his girlfriend who was teaching in the Lansing area. (Apparently he was completely flipped over this girl.) In the classroom, his students shuddered if they were threatened with disciplinary measures because he would have them sit on the piano bench to shell and eat peanuts as punishment. Outside of the classroom, Mr. Hackbarth tended to do a lot of things on his own without consulting anyone. For example, he left for Christmas vacation without a word to the Church Council or the Board of Education and the hot water furnace in the school froze up. When he returned, it was inoperable. Then, since he didn't want to teach anymore, he hired a woman teacher without a word to the Board of Education. When he did mention it to Rollie Brenner, whom he was

staying with at the time, Rollie answered that the teachers are hired by the congregation. "Well, I'm quitting,"⁷⁰ was Arthur's response. Consequently, the Neumanns finished the school year, Mrs. Lorraine Neumann teaching the younger grades and Pastor overseeing the older children. From this time on, New Salem school would be divided into two rooms. (The now-married Mr. Hackbarth is still a teacher in our synod, and, I'm sure, is much matured from his initial experience at New Salem.)

By the 57-58 school year, Allan Treichel had arrived on the scene. He remained at New Salem for six years, the longest stay of any teacher since William Arras in the 1930s. He is remembered as a fine teacher, but some also remember him fondly for the twelve voice men's acappella choir he organized.

In 1959, Pastor Neumann accepted a call. During New Salem's vacancy, Pastor Schroeder from Berne provided the congregation with the Word and Sacraments until Pastor Voss arrived in 1960. Pastor Voss was a taller, balding man with horn-rimmed glasses and large hands. He was almost sixty years old when he began his ministry in the small congregation in the thumb of Michigan. Despite his age, "he still had a lot of git in him,"⁷¹ and he still was thoroughly German. He continued to hold special German services several times a year as long as he was in Sebewaing. When he first arrived, the fellowship issue was boiling between Wisconsin and Missouri Synod. After church, Pastor Voss would read the literature distributed by our synod in order to keep the congregation informed. Then, in 1961 when Synod voted to split from Missouri, they needed ratification from the individual congregations. When a show of hands at New Salem was called for, the members responded with 100% backing.⁷²

Things went rather well for the first five years or so of his ministry in New Salem. Gradually, understandably, he began to slow down somewhat. He frequently slipped into religious cliches and repetition in his sermons and the church records slipped as well. He was a socializer, however, and was generally well-liked and appreciated by the congregational members.

Perhaps the biggest headaches he faced in New Salem rose out of school affairs. First, at the end of the 1963 school year, the congregation was losing both its teachers. Allan Treichel had accepted a call to teach in a highschool in Wisconsin and Ruth Gieschen/Birsching was pregnant with the writer. Consequently, Pastor Voss and the congregation needed not one, but two graduates from New Ulm. Fortunately for the congregation, they were sent a husband and wife team by the names of George and Ann Rausch. It was a unique situation in that both teachers could live in one teacherage.

Principle Rausch inherited a school with declining attendance in a congregation with declining support for their school. Where the number of students had never dipped below ³¹₇₃ for years and years, the 1963-64 year⁷⁴ began with 21 children. Only 19 attended the following year⁷⁴ and talk of closing the school began circulating among the congregation. Strangely, the wholehearted, unanimous backing one would expect among all the

parents with school-age children was lacking. Concern that the children didn't have all the opportunities that the public school students had influenced some to keep their children out of tiny New Salem. Apparently the fact that their children weren't able to receive daily instruction in the Word of God was not a concern.

Certainly the haphazard situation in the younger grades classroom in the 1964-65 schoolyear did not help the matter. Pastor Voss was informed that a new teacher would be needed for the younger grades because Ann Rausch was pregnant. Either he was unable to locate a replacement, or he dragged his feet in the process, so Ann Rausch started the year. A month later, she gave birth to daughter Sheryl [my wife] and Ruth Birsching took over. The problem with that arrangement was that she was also pregnant [with my brother]. As her due date approached, it became necessary to scramble for another teacher. Finally, Miss Marilyn Zabell from Bay City was hired to finish the year.

When the attendance projection for the 1965-66 year revealed only 12 students,⁷³ the death knell for the gradeschool was sounded. At the voters meeting the topic received considerable debate. Most advocated that the cost of the school did not balance with the low numbers of students projected. They claimed that the school was impractical. The minority maintained that no price could be placed on a soul and that in a few years the attendance would rise again. When the vote was taken, the motion to close the school passed by a mere one or two votes over the required 2/3s majority.⁷⁴ Six years after a brand new addition was built, the school doors were closed to the children of New Salem. Instead, the building was rented to the public school for its use. The following year, the talents of George Rausch were put to use in St. Matthews, Benton Harbor.

While the closing of the gradeschool grieved George Rausch, Pastor Voss certainly felt some grief as well. To his credit, he exhorted the congregation on the importance of bolstering their Sunday School program with the day school no longer available. The congregation took his words to heart; attendance at Sunday School skyrocketed to seventy-five children that very year.⁷⁷ Since it was not smiled upon in Synod to allow a parochial gradeschool to close, Pastor Voss received his share of flack from his superiors. He was informed that, due to the excess of teachers at the time, Synod could provide New Salem with an experienced man with the special title of Christian Education Advisor. Enter Mr. Martin Roehler in 1969. He had taken a reprieve from teaching due to health problems, but his spunk was healthy as ever. His call included playing the organ, directing the choir, organizing a youth group, and overseeing the Sunday School program. He was a very capable man, teaching even the Adult Catechism Classes once a week. When he arrived at New Salem, he arrived with every intention of reopening the school. The Board of Education agreed wholeheartedly, yet the men dare not push too hard to quickly - the school issue was a touchy subject. Gradually, the attitude in the congregation began to

change, or perhaps the parents began to change. Still, it would take a while before New Salem Lutheran School would be back in business.

1967 revealed the goodness of God anew; the church was remodeled. The dull, rolled tin which covered the interior of the church was covered with the handsome walnut paneling that still lines the walls today. The visible beams were darkly laminated and a white, tectum ceiling was installed around them. New lights were mounted, along with a new hymnboard, and the organ speakers were recessed. Red carpeting was laid and fresh paint applied. When the congregation gathered on June 11 for the special service of praise, they gathered in a gorgeous worship facility. The members of New Salem had much for which to praise their Lord!

By the Summer of 1972, Pastor Voss was ready to retire. For eleven years, he had served his congregation faithfully. His row had contained its share of weeds, as does every row, but through it all Pastor Voss had kept hoeing, had kept cultivating and nurturing, so that the enemy could not destroy the crop. Pastor Struck served the congregation as vacancy pastor while New Salem called from the field. Amazingly, the first man they contacted accepted the call.

In September of that same year, Pastor Phillip Huebner and his family moved into the parsonage. When he first arrived and before he began an extensive exercise routine, he was quite heavysset. He wore an extremely short-cropped haircut and glasses. For a few years, things went well under his guidance. A year after his arrival, on October 14, the congregation held an anniversary service to commemorate 120 years of existence and 100 years in the same church building. The church was painted for the occasion, tile floors were pieced into the church and school basement, and the parking lot was established.

The following year, 1974, Mr. Roehler and numerous other individuals' goal was realized; New Salem Lutheran School reopened. The attitude among the congregation had slowly wavered back in favor of Christian Education. Numerous families were car-pooling all the way to St. Johns School in Pigeon in order to have their children taught the joyous truths of Christianity on a daily basis. At one time, as many as eight children representing four families from Sebewaing were attending the Pigeon school. The backing was present, the school building was available, and the principal was poised in the blocks for a running start. The final details were taken care of, including the arrival of Miss Louis Lindke as the lower room teacher. When the first day of school began, thirty children tried to get themselves comfortable in the desks at New Salem Lutheran School.

Mr. Roehler was quite an elderly man when he took the helm of a dayschool again, yet there was still a spring to his step, a thunder to his voice, and a steel-trap mind to boot. There wasn't a trick he hadn't seen, but the boys tried anyways. To attempt to be excused to the washroom with the usual hand gesture more than once was to tempt fate. A spit-ball war resulted in a

loss for both sides when he set the terms of the truce. Playing hookey was terminated after one day with a call to the parents. The firecracker-in-the-bathroom stunt brought heat of quite another sort.

Regarding discipline, he functioned in the new school with old school techniques. If Mr. Roehler threatened to "pin your ears back" or "box your ears", the student took him seriously and considered himself fortunate to have received a warning. The less fortunate were "cuffed" on the spot. And when Mr. Roehler cuffed you, you were cuffed in a big way; love taps were not his style. Needless to say, his four grade classroom was always orderly. The students respected him because he kept them in line and because he was an excellent teacher.

Two incidents involving Martin Roehler stand out in the writer's mind. The first is the day that the dreaded calisthenics which he led in the school basement was livened up considerably because his zipper was open. Many were unable to function due to a sudden attack of the giggles. The second is the day he joined several of his students for an early morning duckhunt decked out in blaze orange. Not only did every duck in the state avoid us by miles, but not a few hunters avoided us as well. The hunters went home with as many ducks as they began with, and nearly as many shells as well.

While the school prospered, circumstances in the congregation as a whole did not fare as well. Difficulties arose between Pastor Huebner and his parishioners. Unfortunately he had the knack of alienating his people, both in the pulpit and in person, and several long-time members transferred out of New Salem. Some simply dropped out of the church altogether. Membership at New Salem was in a steady decline and so was the morale; even the spirituality of the congregation suffered. The problems involved are too entangled and extensive, and much too recent in New Salem's history, to deal with here. But finally, one Sunday in early Summer of 1982, after District President Zarling's assistance had been sought, Pastor Huebner preached his farewell sermon. Not the congregation, not his children, apparently not even his own wife, knew it was coming. Upon his resignation, he and his family moved to Wisconsin and New Salem found itself with a vacancy again.

A few matters that occurred during Pastor Huebner's tenure deserve mention here. First of all, one Sunday morning's church service in 1978 (?) has the dubious distinction of beginning with a bang. As long-time bell-ringer Arnold Jedele pulled alternately on the three bell ropes in the balcony to signal the beginning of worship, a ominous crash sounded directly over his head. One of the bell-hammers had let loose and dropped to the ceiling tiles above him. When asked about the incident he responded, "This old bird, he heard what it was and I was looking! I thought that maybe she'd come through, but then afterwards, when it didn't, I knew I was safe." ⁸⁸ Arnie just kept pulling the ropes and ringing the bells. From then on, however, the sound of one of the bells was conspicuous by its absence.

Also of significance was the building of a brand new parsonage in 1980 by the members themselves. That same year it was dedicated to the Lord's service. Amazingly, the congregation paid off the parsonage debt a mere six years later. God's goodness was still present and visible in New Salem despite the problems it faced at the time. 1980 marked another noteworthy event; the last German services were held. Pastor Huebner had continued the fine custom of preaching in German several times a year, just as his predecessors had. While he couldn't write and preach German as Pastor Voss could, he would read German sermons to the gathered people. When attendance dwindled to fifteen people or so, it was decided to discontinue them. Still, German had been maintained as a part of New Salem for an incredible 127 years!

Speaking of German, Pastor Struck again served as vacancy pastor after Pastor Huebner's departure. He provided the congregation with this advice, "Forget the troubles of the past. Don't focus on the problems, but focus on the good." Those are words to live by, and that's exactly what Pastor Jon Stern did. From the moment of his arrival in 1982 to the time he left, he promoted Christian love and cooperation. Ironically, while the congregation split under his great-grandfather in 1896, under Jon Stern the congregation became closer-knit than perhaps it ever had been before in its history. So much could be said of Pastor Stern, but let this simple phrase suffice: God blessed the congregation richly through his ministry. The Lord in his love had provided New Salem with the boost that they needed after some very trying times.

Perhaps one place where God's goodness is especially evident in recent years is New Salem Lutheran School. The congregation has been blessed with diligent, dedicated teachers - teachers who instruct the children in the four "R's", but much more importantly, in the Word of God. How wonderful, too, that the parents in the congregation realize how beneficial Christian education is! Principal David Lecker will tell you that for years the percentage of school-aged children to attend the gradeschool was 100%. The percentage is still in the nineties.

During Pastor Stern's stay, much work on congregational property took place. In 1983, vinyl siding was applied to the original school building. The following year the teacherage was remodeled and the parking lot resurfaced. Next, in 1985, the church basement and kitchen were remodeled, finishing work was done in the parsonage basement, and the church grounds were landscaped. After a year off, the school interior was painted in 1987 and, in 1988, the church bathrooms were remodeled. God blessed New Salem over and over again.

When Pastor Stern left New Salem after eight years of service to serve the Lord as an associate pastor in Manitowac, Wisconsin, he was sent on his way with countless tears. He was much loved, and always will be by many. It must be remembered, however, that our gracious God has a reason and purpose for everything; he had it all worked out before the world even

existed. He will continue to bless New Salem in the future, just as He has in the past. That is a certain and sure hope. When one considers everything that New Salem has endured through the years, (and there is so much more behind the scenes that never entered this work), one cannot help but draw the conclusion that New Salem exists today solely by the goodness of our gracious God.

And how good He has been to New Salem! The written words of some of New Salem's former pastors will serve as a fitting conclusion to our history.

"The congregation possesses a beautiful debt-free property, yet the best and most delicious thing is that they have God's Word, pure and clear, and that the unadulterated sacraments are administered in their midst. May the merciful God of love preserve New Salem Congregation always with his Word and the confession of the Lutheran Church." (Carl Binhammer).¹⁰⁰

"And so God has been with us in His Word, making of New Salem an instrument of His, which has served Him and His Kingdom and the countless souls it has taken under the shadow of its wings from the cradle to the grave and the countless others who have always been welcome to be guests, by dispensing the Means of Grace, namely the Word and the Sacraments. Many are they who have been baptized, confirmed, taught and instructed in Christian Doctrine, married and visited and buried since New Salem Congregation was born. Many labored, who can tell how much, giving of their money, time and efforts for New Salem's welfare and best interests. -- May we be blessed with many such faithful and loyal members in years to come so that our children and children's children may call us blessed.

Yes, may God remain with New Salem and bless it and keep it in His grace for years to come with love for Him and our fellow men, peace and zeal to do the Lord's work, courage to face the future trusting in the Almighty and strong faith, faith unwavering in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for the salvation of precious, blood-bought souls." (Carl Miller).¹⁰¹

"Without the Triune God, there would be no Christian congregation by the name of New Salem in Sebewaing, Michigan. Without God's help there would have been no pastors to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments, nor teachers to instruct the lambs of New Salem. In fact, without God's help there would have been no Christians to make up this congregation. So, do you see how totally dependant we are upon God? For [all these years] God has been our Help." (Jon Stern).¹⁰²

Amen! God be praised for all His goodnesses to New Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church!

ENDNOTES

1. Emerson Hutzell, "Selected Letters of Friedrich Schmid," in Michigan Memories: Things Our Fathers Have Told Us, (1985), p.93.
2. Hutzell, p.85.
3. Hutzell, p.113.
4. Gerhard Struck, "A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Michigan and Other States," Michigan Memories: Things Our Fathers Have Told Us, (1985), p.160.
5. Charles F. Luckhard, Faith in the Forest, (Sebewaing: C.F. Luckhard), p.14.
6. Theodore Graebner, Church Bells in the Forest, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), p.62.
7. Graebner, p.26.
8. Struck, pp.160 & 161.
9. Hutzell, p.133.
10. T.W. Menzel, "Friedrich Schmid: Pioneer Missionary to the Germans in Michigan," in Bulletin Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 25, No. 4, (1954), p.4.
11. Edgar H. Hoenecke, "The Michigan Spirit," in Michigan Memories: Things Our Fathers Have Told Us, (1985), p.276.
12. Hutzell, pp.134 & 135.
13. Carl Miller, "History of New Salem Lutheran Church of Sebewaing, Michigan," (1953), p.2.
14. Carl Binhammer, "Neu Salems Gemeinde zu Sebewaing, Huron Co., Michigan," in Geschichte der Michigan - Synode und deren Gemeinden, (Saginaw: F. and C. Reitter Co.), p.90.

15. Hutzel, p.92.
16. Graebner, p.78.
17. Graebner, p.79.
18. Luckhard, pp.82 & 83.
19. Thomas A. Bailey and David M. Kennedy, The American Pageant, 7th ed., (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1983), p.300.
20. Emerson E. Hutzel, A History of the Jedele Family, (St. Louis, 1945), p.30.
21. Binhammer, p.92.
22. Binhammer, p.92.
23. Milton Baur and Gerhard Struck, New Salem Lutheran - The Minutes:1860-1942, (a translation).
24. church minutes.
25. church minutes,
26. Binhammer, p.92.
27. church minutes.
28. Struck, p.176.
29. church minutes.
30. Binhammer, p.92.

31. Arnold Jedele.
32. Arnold Jedele.
33. Bericht der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Michigan und andern Staaten, 1875.
34. church minutes.
35. church minutes.
36. Miller, p.4,
37. church minutes.
38. church minutes.
39. church minutes.
40. Arnold Jedele.
41. Arnold Jedele,
42. church minutes.
43. Karl F. Krause, "History of the Michigan District," (1968), p.4,
44. church minutes.
45. church minutes.
46. church minutes.

47. E.C. Fredrich, "Haste Makes Waste in the Story of the Michigan Synod's Division. in Michigan Memories: Things Our Fathers Have Told Us, (1985), p.231.

48. church minutes.

49. church minutes.

50. church minutes.

51. church minutes.

52. church minutes.

53. Arnold Jedele,

54. Hoenicke, pp. 269 & 270.

55. Paul Bolzman.

56. church minutes.

57. church minutes.

58. church minutes.

59. Norm Gaeth.

60. Vic Armbruster.

61. church minutes.

62. church minutes.

63. church minutes.

64. Paul Bolzman.
65. Arnold Jedele.
66. Paul Bolzman.
67. church minutes.
68. Paul Bolzman.
69. Paul Bolzman.
70. Paul Bolzman.
71. church minutes.
72. church minutes.
73. church minutes.
74. church minutes.
75. church minutes.
76. church minutes.
77. church minutes.
78. church minutes.
79. church minutes.
80. Paul Bolzman.

81. church minutes.
82. Paul Bolzman.
83. church minutes.
84. Arnold Jedele.
85. Vic Armbruster.
86. Harley Birsching.
87. Arnold Jedele.
88. Vic Armbruster.
89. Vic Armbruster.
90. Rollie Brenner.
91. Vic Armbruster.
92. Rollie Brenner.
93. Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1963.
94. Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1964.
95. George Rausch.
96. Rollie Brenner.

97. Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1965.

98. Arnold Jedele.

99. Rollie Brenner.

100. Binhammer, p. 93.

101. Miller, p. 7.

102. 130 Years of Grace, 1988.

NEW SALEM PASTORS

Friedrich Schmid - 1853
 Christian Volz - 1854
 Conrad Volz - 1854-55
 Friedrich Nuffer - 1855-59
 H. Steinecke - 1860-64
 Robert Wiese - 1864
 {vacancy} - 1865-67
 Henry Gangnuss - 1868-85
 Wilhelm Kramer - 1885-87
 Chr. Metzger - 1888-90
 G. Stern - 1890-96

 Carl Binhammer - 1896-1921
 Gustav Schmelzer - 1921-45

Nathaniel Luetke - 1945-47
 {vacancy} - 1947-48
 Carl Miller - 1948-55

 {vacancy} - 1955-56
 Karl Neumann - 1956-59

Walter Voss - 1960-72

Phillip Huebner - 1972-82

Jonathan Stern - 1982-89

TEACHERS

*
 * (?)

 *
 *
 *
 *
 1896 F.W. Vogelpohl
 *
 *
 1924-29 Erna Hinz
 1925-26 Esther Bucholz
 1929-30 Norma Meister
 1930-34 Irene Zarling
 1934-40 William Arras
 1940-43 Roland Bode
 1943-45 W. Huber
 1945-47 Elizabeth Wagner

 1947-49 Don Zimmerman
 1949-50 Glenn Wiechmann
 1950-54 Gerald Berger
 1954-56 Reuben Kramer
 1956-57 Arthur Hackbarth
 *
 1956-57 Lorraine Neumann
 1957-63 # Allen Treichel
 1957-58 Marian Treichel
 1958-60 Kathryn Daubert
 1960-63 Ruth Gieschen
 1963-65 # George Rausch
 1963-64 Ann Rausch
 1964-65 Ann Rausch/Ruth
 Birsching/
 Marilyn Zabell

 1969-79 # Martin Roehler
 1974-77 Louis Lindke
 1977-79 Kathryn Fillner
 1979-81 # Alan Greschner
 1979-80 Lori Greschner
 1981-83 # David Popp
 1980-82 Carol Rusch
 1982-85 Shirleen Maertz
 1983-? # David Lecker
 1985-86 Carol Bredemann
 1986-90 Corin Biga/
 Einhardt

[* = pastor-teacher # = principal]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bailey, Thomas A., and David M. Kennedy. The American Pageant. 7th ed. Lexington: D.C.Heath and Company, 1983.
- Baur, Milton, and Gerhard Struck. "New Salem Lutheran - The Minutes; 1860 - 1942." (a translation).
- Bericht der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synode von Michigan und andern Staaten, 1875.
- Binhammer, Carl. "Neu Salems Gemeinde zu Sebewaing, Huron Co., Michigan." Geschichte der Michigan-Synode und deren Gemeinden. Saginaw: F.& C. Reitter Co.
- Fredrich, E.C. "Haste Makes Waste in the Story of the Michigan Synod's Division." Michigan Memories: Things Our Fathers Have Told Us, 1985.
- Graebner, Theodore. Church Bells in the Forest. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944.
- Hoenecke, Edgar H. "The Michigan Spirit." Michigan Memories: Things Our Fathers Have Told Us, 1985.
- Hutzel, Emerson E. A History of the Jedele Family, St. Louis, 1945.
- Hutzel, Emerson. "Selected Letters of Friedrich Schmid." Michigan Memories: Things Our Fathers Have Told Us, 1985.
- Koehler, John Philipp. The History of the Wisconsin Synod. 2nd ed. Sauk Rapids: Sentinel Printing Company, 1981.
- Krauss, Karl F. "History of the Michigan District," 1968.
- Luckhard, Charles F. Faith in the Forest. Sebewaing: C.F.Luckhard, 1952.
- Menzel, T.W. "Friedrich Schmid: Pioneer Missionary to the Germans in Michigan." Bulletin Theological Seminary of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, 25, No. 4 (1954).
- Miller, Carl. History of New Salem Lutheran Church of Sebewaing, Michigan, 1953.
- Nelson, E. Clifford. The Lutherans in North America. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.
- 130 Years of Grace, 1983.
- 135 Years of Grace, 1988.

Statistical Report of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod,
1963, 1964, 1965.

Struck, Gerhard. "A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran
Synod of Michigan and Other States." Michigan Memories:
Things Our Fathers Have Told Us, 1985.

"INTERVIEWS"

Vic Armbruster

Clemence Baur

Harley Birsching

Joel Birsching

Roland Bode

Paul Bolzman

Rollie and Charlotte Brenner

Norm Gaeth

Ruth (Gieschen) Birsching

Arnold Jedele

David Lecker

Gerald and Leroy Loeffler

George and Ann Rausch