

JOHANNES FRANZ KILIAN
MORAVIAN MISSIONARY TURNED LUTHERAN.

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March 27, 1978
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Johannes Franz Kilian

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Johannes Franz Kilian was born in Bremen, Germany on June 24, 1828. What his early years were like we cannot say. We do know that through mission tracts of the Moravian Church, Kilian decided to become a servant of the Lord doing mission work in the Moravian Church. Again, we don't know what training he received for this work, but by 1853 he was ready to be placed in a Moravian mission field. It was in that same year that he came to the United States and served as a mission pastor in Hartford, Conneticut.

It was during his pastorate in Hartford that he met and, in 1854, married the former Glothilda Gaebler. They had three childre, Maria, Magdelena and Hermann. Hermann became a pastor in the Wisconsin Synod but resigned for some reason a year later.

In 1856 Kilian received a call to help establish a Moravian congregation in Lake Mills, Jefferson County, Wisconsin (about 15 miles SW of Watertown). Kilian relates the circumstances of that call and his arrival in Wisconsin in the church records of the Moravian Church of Lake Mills as follows:

Already several years Br. Kaltenbrun had been in the town of Oakland and Waterloo, Wisconsin, until his work spread so far that he could no longer take care of all the places where he was requested to preach the Word of God, and had repeatedly written to Bethlehem, (Pa., the Moravian Church in America headquarters), for help in his work-- when a call was given to me-- Br. Kilian, in Hartford, Conneticut,

asking me if I would go to Wisconsin. I took this to be a call from our Lord, and I gladly accepted the call. After a journey of three days and three nights I arrived in Watertown on the 24th of May, 1856.

The first few days in Watertown, Kilian spent getting acquainted with the situation and the area. On June 1, he began the task of finding a suitable location for a Moravian mission congregation. He writes in the church records:

On June 1, I drove with Br. Kaltenbrun to Town of Oakland and Waterloo and preached at both places, and after the services, looked around to see where it would be expedient for me to reside as the people wanted me to live among them. As Lake Mills is located between these two preaching places, and as it seemed likely that many German families might locate near Lake Mills, although at the time there were but a few- and because in the neighborhood a goodly number of young people were working on farms, and also because Mrs. Bruns and Joeckel, who already lived in Lake Mills wished that we might do so- we decided, in the name of the Lord, to live in Lake Mills, and also to select Lake Mills for a new preaching place. On June 13, I moved with my wife and mother-in-law to Lake Mills. The text in the Daily Text Book for that day was Ps 51:20 which reads: "Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion, build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

It seems Kilian was quite well accepted by the people in the Lake Mills area. His work as a Moravian missionary flourished from the beginning. He seemed to be a minister who was conscious of the fact that he worked for the Lord. His talents don't seem to have been extraordinary, but he faithfully

used what God gave him. We can follow some of his work in the church record book:

On June 22, I preached the first time here in Lake Mills in the school house where the Evangelical Church is located. It was the first German service here, and which, to our surprise, was attended by about forty people. My text was Luke 5:1-11-- about the miraculous draft of fishes. At the close of the service, I announced that church services would now be conducted every Sunday at 10 O'clock, for which many people expressed great pleasure. Sunday afternoons I preached alternately in Oakland (called Germany) ten miles south east from here and Town Waterloo, five miles north east from here.

The first official act which was performed was the baptism of Caroline Strassburg- daughter of Joachim Strassburg on June 29, 1856.

On September 14, we celebrated our First Communion, and we felt the nearness of our Lord and Master. 30 persons attended. The Congregational Church loaned us their Communion Service.

On November 30, a business meeting was held, and three trustees, a secretary and a treasurer were elected, one for one year, one for two years, and one for three years. Br. Kilian was asked to suggest names, which he did, namely- Henry Overbeck, for one year; J.H. Bruns for two years, and August Rosenberg for three years. For Secretary- Emil C. Gaebler (Kilian's brother-in-law who came along to Wisconsin. He was a speech and music teacher for children in Connecticut. He was also an organ builder and set up a business in the Lake Mills-Watertown area. When St. Mark's Lutheran Church was founded in 1858 in Watertown, he joined and was the first choir director and organist. His turning Lutheran may have played a part in Kilian's turning Lutheran in 1861.), (parentheses mine), for treasurer- Br. Andrew Joeckel-- these were elected. It was decided that on every first Thursday of the months of December, March, June, and September, a meeting was to be held by these officers.

On December 21, 1856 we celebrated Holy Communion, at which time the first thirteen Brothers and ten Sisters, besides minister and his wife, were received

into the membership of the church. Of these, only four had formerly been members of a Moravian Church, namely Br. and Sister Andrew Joeckel and Br. and Sister John Henry Bruns. The others were:

Fredericka Gaebler (mother-in-law of Rev. Kilian)
 Henry Overbeck and wife Hannah Fredericke
 August Rosenberg and wife Elise
 Emil Gaebler and wife Bertha
 Carl Zapernick
 Carl Wollin
 Carl Wegener and wife Caroline
 Gotfried Wegner
 Joachim Strassberg and wife Caroline
 Christian Zimmerman and wife Sophia
 Michael Zimmerman
 Henry Brandt-Henrietta Brandt
 Rev. Kilian and wife Clotilda Silvia

December 25, 1856 the Church service was held in the Congregational Church, at which service several beautiful anthems were sung by the choir under the direction of Br. Gaebler. A goodly number attended the service.

On January 7, 1857 the first evening service was held, and after that every Wednesday evening at eight o'clock. On January 5, we had our first "Missions Stunde" (Mission hour)- which was well attended. As we were given trouble by the "Americans" (probably refers to English speaking people) when we conducted services in the School house, (having been falsely accused of having damaged the wall black board, and torn books) we conducted services in the homes, but there we were disturbed by rapping on doors and windows (apparently because they were not pleased with our increasing membership).

On February 1, 1857 the baptism of Clara Amanda Joeckel and Anna B.C. Draeger (Strauss) was recorded.

Holy week services were held, but because of bad weather and roads, the attendance was small, also on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. On March 8, a Methodist minister from Waterloo was sent here hoping to establish a church here, but after several more services, attended by only 6-8 persons, he did not come any more.

On April 12, the small daughter of the Brunses (named Maria) passed away. This presented a new problem as there was no Moravian Cemetery, so we asked for a block in a cemetery already started in Lake Mills,- this block comprised 6 lots, large enough

for 15-18 graves, and which we hoped to purchase later on so that we would have our own "God's Acre." On April 14 the little girl was laid to rest, and the plot was dedicated- with the Scripture verse in Isaiah 26:19, "The dead shall live together, with my dead body shall they arise."

At an officer's meeting in November it was announced this block could be bought for \$55.00 and a year would be allowed for payment. They decided to buy it, and it was to be for burial of church members only. They decided to divide the plot into four rows- in the first row the graves of the brothers (men), in the second row the sisters (ladies), and the price of each grave to be \$1.00. The third row was to be for the children ages 7-14, and the price of each grave \$.75. The fourth row was to be for children under seven years of age and to sell for \$.50 each.

On July 5 we celebrated Holy Communion at which we used the newly purchased Communion Service, which consisted of a cup, a plate, and a pitcher- all in silver. The price was \$15.00.

On NewYear's Eve (1857-58), from 8 PM to midnight we had a church service passing the time by singing and visiting and reviewing the past year. Texts were drawn for the church and for each individual. At midnight we sang "Now Praise We All Our God." The attendance was small, due to a heavy snow storm.

On the morning of Palm Sunday (1858) three girls were confirmed in the Lake Mills church. In the afternoon six boys and seven girls were confirmed in Newville after having given them catechetical instruction. Many people attended both services.

Perhaps the biggest project for any mission congregation is that of constructing a church building. Early in the fall of 1856 plans were made for a church building. Though the building was not large by any means, delays and a change in plans set in which made the building take well over a year to complete. It is interesting to follow the history of the church building:

As houses were scarce, and rents high and as many people wished to have me teach their children in school

and in religion, and the house, in which we are living is too small, we began to wish and plan for building a dwelling-school, and for which then Misters Atwood and Cook gave us a lot- size $82\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide and 165 feet deep- on Fremont Street. Then we asked permission of the Brethren in Bethlehem to build, and also asked permission of the Brethren to borrow \$300 from them for an indefinite period, hoping with this and with the limited help our friends here could give, we could build a frame house. The brethren in Bethlehem expressed their love and confidence and agreed to send us the \$300 and we agreed to give them the deed for the lot and building as soon as we received it.

On September 1, 1856 we began to clear the lot.

On September 11, a Br. Martin, who had been with our Indian Mission in Kansas for a short time, came to Lake Mills, and we engaged him to dig a well for us. However, on September 26 he moved away unexpectedly. We experienced much difficulty in the digging of the well, as it needed to be 40-50 feet deep- help was hard to get, and, as the work was not started right, we wasted much time and money; and as we could find no one who really understood how to dig a well, we had to give up for the present.

As we further discussed the building of the school-dwelling, we decided, because it would last longer, and would be more practical, to build a brick building. (This building is still a part of the church.) Br. Volkman of Watertown, who had built Br. Kaltenbrun's Church, undertook the mason work, and began on October 27 to build, after a basement had been dug. We bought 25,000 brick which cost \$4.75, most of which were hauled to the lot by friends. As the winter weather began early, we had to stop building by November 21.

November 21, 1856. To our great sorrow and loss, our hopes for completing the building had to be given up. I prayed- "Dear God, Thou alone knowest why the building must be hindered so long. Did we not plan this for Thy honor and glory? Forgive us where we have failed, and increase, Lord, our faith."

We decided in a business meeting on March 22, 1857 to build a church out of the school-home building which had been started, and in which the school could also be held. This, of course, would cost more money than

the proposed school-home building, so the brethren subscribed \$117 more. Also, it was decided to make out a list for subscriptions for the church and minister's salary.

On April 1, 1857 the masons again resumed work on the church building.

From May 19 to June 19, the carpenters worked at the church building, but, because the boards for the floor and benches which the brethren in Ebenezer presented to us, had not been sawed yet, work on the church had to be stopped.

October 18, 1857 was a happy day for our church members as by the grace of God we were able to dedicate our new church to the service of Our Lord. On Saturday evening as we were still busy decorating the church with wreaths and garlands, Br. Kaltenbrun arrived with gifts from our brethren in Ebenezer, white curtains for the windows and a garland of hand made flowers to decorate the altar table.

On Sunday morning guests came from Germany, Ebenezer, and Watertown, so the church was filled to overflowing. Many stood in the doorway and at the windows, and many left who found no room. At 10 o'clock the service began with the words of the Psalmist, "Our beginning and our help is in the Lord, Who made Heaven and earth."

Br. Kaltenbrun prayed the church Litany- this was followed by the hymn *Lebet den Herrn*, (Praise ye the Lord." The men's choir, under the direction of Br. Gaebler sang an anthem, then I (Br. Kilian) prayed the prayer of dedication, followed by the sermon- text was Mt 9:1-8. Then a prayer by Br. Kaltenbrun was followed by an anthem by the Ebenezer men's choir. The offering was beyond expectation- \$41.18. The morning service closed with a prayer by Br. Kaltenbrun and a hymn by the congregation. At noon to our regret, it began to rain, and continued all afternoon, so many people who were outside had to leave. At 1:30 PM Br. Kaltenbrun preached the sermon text on 1Pt 2:5, after which we celebrated the Holy Communion. It was a blessed day, and we praised God for all He had done for us.

Kilian, however, did not limit himself to preaching in Lake

Mills. He was also active in Newville, five miles from Lake Mills, (three miles south of Waterloo on County Hwy O). Sometime in 1856 Kilian began preaching there on Sunday afternoons. Most of the people he ministered there were originally Lutherans. After much hesitation the Newville Church identified itself with the Lutheran Church, and eventually entered the Wisconsin Synod. The experience Kilian had with these Lutherans may also have influenced his decision to enter the Wisconsin Synod in 1861.

In the summer of 1858 Kilian became discouraged. Late that spring, the Evangelical Association commenced a series of revival meetings in Lake Mills. The Evangelical Association was a sect of German Methodists who stressed experiential religion (when you have it, you know it, and you show it). A considerable number of Moravians from Lake Mills, Watertown and the area were won over, which is what discouraged Kilian. In August of 1858 he resigned his pastorate in Lake Mills to do mission work in Clayton County, Iowa.

Kilian served several congregations there. None of them were originally Moravian though. The congregations never did join the Moravian Church. They may, again, have been Lutheran and decided to remain Lutheran, which again may have influenced Kilian's decision to join the Wisconsin Synod.

Sometime in the spring or summer of 1861 Kilian was given a peaceful release from the Moravian Church. He then sought to enter the Wisconsin ^{Synod}. After meeting with President Bading, Kilian was recommended as a pastor for the Wisconsin Synod. In the Synod's convention report of 1861 Bading said that after discussing

Lutheran doctrine with Kilian he had no qualms about his entering the synod. This may mean that Kilian needed no further indoctrination, he was already a sound enough Lutheran for the Wisconsin Synod in the early 1860's.

Pastor Kilian became a faithful Lutheran pastor for the synod, serving parishes in Greenfield-Tess Corners and then in Theresa and Lomira Wisconsin. In 1903 he partially retired from the ministry for health reasons. He fully retired in 1914 because of a continuous throat problem. He died Tuesday January 23, 1917 at home in Theresa, Wisconsin. He is buried in St. Paul Lutheran Cemetery in Theresa.

P.S. In this paper I wanted to look closely at Kilian's Moravian background, training and work in Connecticut and Iowa as well as Lake Mills, Wisconsin. In particular, I wanted to find the circumstances underlying Kilian's joining the Wisconsin Synod in 1861. I requested information from the Moravian Church Archives in Bethlehem, Pa. As of the writing of this paper I had received nothing from them. So, I had to abandon the indepth look I wanted to present. Should I receive information from Bethlehem in the future, I will give it to the Seminary Librarian to be filed with this and other papers on Kilian for someone else to use.

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