

Louis Sievert: Portrait of an Early W.E.L.S. Schoolteacher

First of all, I must apologize for the title. I realize that for most of Louis Sievert's teaching days, the church body in which he labored was not known as the W.E.L.S. Since, however, that church body is now called the W.E.L.S., I will refer to it by that name in this paper. I hope the reader will pardon the anachronistic use of this acronym.

Then I must add a few words about the choice of topic. Why write about Louis Sievert? Mr. Sievert didn't found a synod. He didn't found a congregation. He wasn't a key player in any major controversies. The most important position he rose to was principal of a grade school and head of his own family.

Well, the family part is where I come in. Louis Sievert is my great-grandfather, so, even though I never knew him, he had no small influence on my life, and I admit that influenced my choice of topic for this assignment. My major sources for this paper are interviews I conducted with my great Aunt, Ada Sievert (which include some comments by her sister Hertha), and with my grandfather, Richard Sievert. Those pieces of information in this paper which aren't documented with footnotes are from these interviews. In many cases, I did provide footnote references to those interviews.)

But I also think that teacher of a Christian day school is a more important calling than we give it credit for. One of the most distinctive things about the W.E.L.S. is its continued use of the Christian day school. It's hard to imagine what the W.E.L.S. would be like, or if there would still be a W.E.L.S., if God hadn't been using the teachers of our grade schools to teach children the truths of the Bible and give them an example of Christian living during the children's formative years. And so I think it is worthwhile to take a look at one of those people who are for the most part unsung, but

very influential in making the W.E.L.S. what it is today, an early W.E.L.S. schoolteacher.

I. Birth and Childhood

Louis Carl Sievert was born on the 30th of July in the year of our Lord 1874, in Ludwigslust, Mecklenburg, Germany. Ludwig, as he was called on that side of the Atlantic, was the youngest child of Johann Sievert and Dorothea nee Peters. I was not able to find the name of the church where Louis was baptized.

Johann worked as the servant of a landowner in the village of Guestrow. Louis and his brothers (he had no sisters) attended school, and herded cattle, sheep and geese. [1]

Johann had stayed behind in Germany when his parents, Carl and Maria Siebert, and his brothers and sisters emigrated to LeSueur County, Minnesota, after the Civil War. Louis' brother Henry dodged the draft into the Prussian army by emigrating to Minnesota in 1882, and in 1884 the Minnesota relatives sent enough money for the rest of the family to follow them to Minnesota. [2] Only Louis' oldest brother, Friederich Peters, who was already in the Prussian army, remained in Germany. [3]

Johann found work in railroad construction for a time, and the older brothers found farm work. Louis attended a country public school near Cleveland, Minnesota. In a few years, and with the help of a loan from a nearby rich farmer, the family was able to purchase land from a railroad and start their own farm in Moltke Township, north of Gibbon, Minnesota. The family joined St. Peters Ev. Luth. Church (now L.C.M.S.). I assume Louis was confirmed there. I have not had a chance to verify this.

II. Education

In the fall of 1890 Louis enrolled in the Sexta class of the Gymnasium course at Dr. Martin Luther College in nearby New Ulm. I don't know if he already wanted to be a teacher at this point. The Gymnasium course was similar to, but not identical with the Normal division. The D.M.L.C. Catalogue for that year lists the Normal division as a 5 year teacher training course which ran parallel to, not following upon the Gymnasium course. Judging by enrollment recorded in the catalogue, it was a much more normal thing to enroll in the Gymnasium than in the Normal division. At any rate, young Louis was not interested in being a farmer like his father and brothers, and the new school in New Ulm offered a way to a different career. Louis' somewhat frail health at this time may have contributed to his disinterest in farming.

The school which Louis entered in the fall of 1890 was in some ways very different from the single-purpose institution that stands on the hill now. In addition to the Gymnasium and the Normal division, there was a three year pastoral seminary course, a Real division which offered a four-year general education course, and a Commercial department of one year which was basically the first year of Real plus bookkeeping. About half the classes were taught in German. The physical plant consisted of 1 building, Old Main, which was classroom, dormitory, cafeteria, and whatever else was necessary. A faculty of six men- Director O. Hoyer, Inspector B. Reichenbecher, G. Burk, A. Reim, J. Hoeness, and J. Schaller- conducted the classes necessary for all these divisions, with some assistance from founder C. J. Albrecht in the pastoral seminary. (I looked at the faculty workload for a later year, 1896-7. Each man taught about 11 different classes several times a week for a total of about 35 class hours per week!) Besides the many students from the New Ulm

area, not a few listed their hometown as Lodz, Russia. [4]

In other ways, the education Louis received at New Ulm is similar to the education students received at our synodical schools today. The Gymnasium years included courses in religion, Latin, German, English, History, Geography, and various branches of math and science. German, of course, was not learning a foreign language, but grammar, composition and literature in a language the students already knew. Religion included catechism, Bible history and hymn memorization. Dorm life was lived according to rules similar to, but somewhat stricter than rules found in synodical prep school handbooks today. According to the 1991-92 Catalogue, there were morning and evening devotions.

Louis did fairly well in his first year of school. His Latin and German grades were average. His religion grade moved from the low end in the first session to one of the highest grades in the third session (D.M.L.C. at that time operated on a three session school year). His English grades were rather poor, which isn't surprising, since he lived his first ten years in Germany. His math and penmanship grades were at the top of his class. The latter may be of interest to those multitudes of W.E.L.S. teachers who struggled to live up to the high penmanship standards of his son, Prof. Erich Sievert. Louis also got high marks for attendance, diligence and behavior. [5]

The second year at New Ulm started out much like the first, but Louis left school at the end of the first term of the 1891-2 school year, and didn't return until the second term of the 1893-4 school year. The reason was his health. In the words of his daughter Ada Sievert, "He grew very tall much too fast, and that weakened him to the point where had to quit New Ulm for a year." [6] (Louis grew to about 6'2".) There was also scarlet fever in New Ulm around that time, [7] although I don't know that that had anything to do

with keeping Louis out of school.

When Louis came back to D.M.L.C. in 1893-4 to complete his quinta year, it was no longer the do-everything school of the Minnesota Synod; it was now the teacher training seminary of the Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Synode von Wisconsin, Minnesota, und Michigan. The number of departments went down to three, a three year prep course, which was a prelude to a two year teacher training course, and an academic department, which ran parallel to the prep course. The enrollment and faculty size also went down. The prep course that Louis was now enrolled in was basically the same as the first three years of the Gymnasium course which he had been enrolled in, with the difference that music was now a regular and important part of the curriculum. [8]

There was now no tuition for the prep and teacher training course, since students in these courses were preparing themselves for the work of the synod. Room and board was \$60 per year, payable in three installments, and there was a \$1.50 fee for light and some services, and a \$1.00 dorm deposit. Academic course students had to pay \$80 for room and board, and an additional \$34.25 in tuition, so you get some idea of how much the synod was subsidizing the education of its future workers. [9] Lest the reader long too much for the "good old days" of cheap education, remember that a typical pastor or teacher salary for that time period was \$450 per year. [10]

Louis completed his quarta year in the spring of 1895 as part of a class of 6, and so was considered ready to go on to the Lehrer-Seminar course. A couple tidbits that are interesting to compare with prep courses today: Louis' third and final year of prep included his third and final year of Latin, which covered portions of Ceasar's Gallic Wars. Music included violin, as well as piano instruction. [11]

In the fall of 1895 Louis began his first year of Lehrer-Seminar

(college) as part of a class of 12 men. D.M.L.C. now had a five man faculty consisting of Pres. J. Schaller, Inspector J. G. Mohr, G. Burk, A. Reim and A. Ackermann. (Ackermann was not teaching any of the college level classes at this time.)

The two-year college curriculum included courses in religion, German, English, various fields of math and science, pedagogics, catechetics, psychology, government, geography and music.

The religion classes included Bible history, Bibelkunde (isagogics), catechism, memorization of hymns, and church history. In German classes, Louis studied great German literature, including some Luther, was required to memorize a number of poems, and was given many writing assignments. English consisted of reading great English literature, studying rhetoric (which included composition), and partaking in drills in orthoepy (i.e., correct pronunciation). In the first year of pedagogics Schaller taught the students the history of pedagogics, and then they observed and joined in discussing practice lessons taught by the second year students. In the second year Mohr taught the class from Leutz' Lehrbuch der Erziehung und des Unterrichts, and on Wednesday afternoons the students went down to the two classroom school at St. Paul's for practice teaching. The first year of Mohr's catechetics class covered the history and content of catechetics, and the catechetical method. In the second year the students reviewed the previous year's material, and then were expected to produce "Entwuerfen zu praktischen Lektionen," (i.e., lesson plans and practice lessons). Schaller taught his first year psychology students important psychological principles from the same Leutz textbook Mohr used in second year catechetics, and but in the second year, Schaller taught from Dr. G. A. Lindners' Manual of Empirical Psychology. Burk's music classes included organ, violin, harmonics, and singing in various sized groups. The

math classes split each year between Mohr and Reim. Mohr's half of each year included instruction in teaching math. [12]

There was one other interesting development during Louis' years on campus. Lillie Mohr, the daughter of Inspector Mohr, became the first woman in the teacher training course. [13] She was a year behind Louis when he graduated. I don't know what Louis thought about this at the time, but some years later he had no misgivings about sending his daughters to D.M.L.C.

At any rate, there was another young lady who must have been more in Louis' mind than Miss Mohr. Through Young People's Society, Louis had become close to a young lady named Emily Gronke. Emily's parents, August and Henrietta, had come over from Pomerania, Germany, and were now farmers near Gibbon. Emily had a brother who died of diptheria in 1888, a sister, and a first cousin, Albert Wandersee, who was raised with the family as her brother. (Albert remained a close friend, and later on the Louis and Emily Sievert family would often receive a visit from "Uncle Albert.") Emily received a public school education. Emily was a year older than Louis (born April 7 1873), but that was not an obstacle to their romance. That is all the information I have about Emily at this time of her life.

In the spring of 1897, Louis graduated as part of a class of 12 men. (The catalogue lists 14 in the class, but two men had taken time out to assist in teaching work part of the year and were to reenter the same class next year.) [14]

III. Watertown and a Wife

Louis' first call was to St. Mark's, Watertown, Wisconsin. St. Mark's had a well established day school; they had called their first teacher in 1855, a year after the founding of the congregation. When Louis began

teaching in the fall of 1897, St. Mark's had a two-story school building with four classrooms. Louis taught the third class, which was equivalent to second and third grades. (Each of the four classes at St. Marks was divided into upper and lower divisions, to make up all eight grades.) There were typically 50 to 60 children per classroom at St. Marks at this time. (In 1904, two years after Louis left St. Marks, there were 54 students in the third class.)

[15] Because of the number of students per room, (which was typical of W.E.L.S. day schools in those times), strict discipline was necessary. All the religion classes and many of the other subjects were taught in German.

Louis' coworkers at St. Marks were Pastor Johannes Brockmann; Gustav Groth, the principal and upper grade teacher; Richard Albrecht, and later, L. Pingel, teacher of the second class; and a Miss Schlieve, who taught the fourth class, the youngest children. Incidentally, St. Mark's was one of the first congregations in our Synod to employ lady teachers. [16] As far as I know, the pastor and teachers at St. Mark's got along with each other fairly well.

The first year at St. Mark's must have been a hectic one for Louis. He not only had to adjust to being on the teacher's side of the desk, with 50 or 60 students on the other side; he also had to adjust to married life. On his Christmas vacation, Louis went back to New Ulm, and on either December 27 or 28 he married Emily Gronke. [17]

Louis and his new bride lived in a rented house [I believe the congregation paid the rent] on 6th street, across from the Moravian church. They lived on a salary that was supposed to be about \$40 per month. [18] That compared to a price of 10 cents for a quart sized crock of butter, and \$.50 to \$2.95 for a men's flannel shirt or \$1.95 for ladies' patent leather lace shoes

from Sears. [19] The problem was, Louis and Emily couldn't count on that full amount. The teachers weren't payed from the regular congregational coffers. They were supported by Schulgeld, a fee which parents of schoolchildren were expected to pay. When there wasn't enough Schulgeld to pay all the teachers what they were supposed to get, they simply divided what Schulgeld there was among them, and that was their full pay. Sometimes this amounted to very little.

With God's help, however, Louis and Emily not only survived on their share of the Schulgeld, but were soon multiplying. Son Karl arrived on February 26, 1899. Daughter Leonita was born on May 6, 1900, and ended her short stay when the Lord used spinal meningitis to call her home on September 11, 1901. Daughter Ada entered the world on the 14th of July, 1902, while a German band happened to be playing across the street.

IV. New Ulm and Family Life

In 1902, Louis accepted a call to St. Paul's congregation in New Ulm, Minnesota. The venerable C. J. Albrecht was still pastor here, and would be for quite some time yet. Although there were already two experienced male teachers there, F. W. Blauert and W. F. Muesing, the younger Louis was called to teach upper grades and serve as principal. This situation may have caused a little tension at times between the teachers.

In 1900, St. Paul's had built a new brick four-classroom schoolhouse, which measured 40' by 70'. [20] Reportedly, the school building came complete with a conservation minded next door neighbor who, whenever a teacher opened a classroom window in wintertime, would come over to the school and say, "Do you expect the congregation to pay for that cold that you are wasting?" [21] In this building classes similar in size to those at St. Mark's Watertown were

taught in both English and German. The New Ulm public school also taught classes in both English and German at this time.

English was also just starting to make its appearance in the Sunday services. From 1907 on, the choirs would sing an occasional English anthem in the service. Louis would have participated in this development as a member of Prof. Reim's Maennerchor.

There is an interesting sidelight about New Ulm at the time. Not only was it very German; the Masonic lodge was also very strong. In fact, the school board would escort Pastor Albrecht home from evening meetings out of fear that the Masons might otherwise waylay him. [22]

Louis' and Emily's family continued to grow at New Ulm. Rudolph was born on March 1, 1904. Esther followed on November 11, 1906, but the Lord saw fit to call her home several days later. Louis and Emily were consoled by the arrival of daughter Hertha on the 16th of October, 1907.

The growing family lived in a frame house on Broadway, which Louis owned. Louis supplemented his teachers income by working for his brothers at their farms. The salary from St. Paul's, as was typical for parochial schoolteachers in those days, was "from hand to mouth," but the children never felt poverty stricken; they were happy and had everything they needed. [23]

This was due in large part to Emily, who proved herself "more precious than rubies" to Louis as she washed, cooked, sewed, mended and knitted with great diligence and efficiency. The girls never had a store-bought dress during their childhood. Emily made all their dresses, or remade them from other people's hand-me-downs. Yet Emily did such a good job that later on [at Weyauwega] a member asked Emily how she could afford to dress her children up so well. [24] Louis tended the family's garden.

Louis himself wore a suit and tie at all times. Emily made sure that he purchased one new suit a year. The old suit became his classroom attire; the new suit was for church and formal occasions. When the suits became too worn for Louis to wear, Emily used the material from them to make outfits for the boys. Emily laundered Louis' suits herself.

The family also saved money by keeping doctor bills to a minimum. Emily, like many mothers of the time, had home remedies for all the common childhood diseases. A fried onion poultice on the chest was deemed appropriate treatment for a chest cold. The one main exception to the home remedy rule was childbirth. For that, a doctor was called to the house.

Emily had a lot of willpower, but she was very patient. This no doubt served her well in raising a large family. She was also discreet. Women in Pigeon, where Louis served later, would come to her with their problems because they knew she wouldn't repeat what she heard. Another aspect of her personality was her love of beauty. Although she wasn't an artist or musician, she loved listening to music and looking at beautiful things, especially the beauties of God's creation. Daughter Ada remembers her often saying in the evening, "Oh, let's not put on the light yet. Let's look at that beautiful sunset!"

V. Pigeon, a Day of School, and Teaching Methods

In 1908 Louis accepted the call to be the principal and sole teacher at the day school of St. John's Ev. Luth. Church, Pigeon (Berne), Michigan. Louis was the first New Ulm graduate to serve here. The previous teachers were from an Ohio Synod teacher's seminary in Woodville, Ohio. There was a year long vacancy before Louis arrived, during which the Pastor, G. F. Wacker, taught the school. Until 1898, when the school enrollment got up between 70

and 80, Pastor Wacker had been both pastor and teacher. [25]

The move to Pigeon was made by train. Louis and Emily had to discard some of their books and other things in order to fit everything on the either whole or half freight car they had rented. Dishes were packed in old barrels from stores. The children found the experience of moving exciting. They loved it.

The parents were not so excited to find that the teacherage had been standing empty for a year. The first order of business upon arrival was a thorough cleaning of the house and the overgrown yard.

St. John's provided Louis with \$450 a year and the teacherage. [26] Numerous sausages, hams, baskets of fruit and other gifts of food from congregation members helped the salary stretch a little farther. [Stories went around in those days about teachers who would assign for penmanship practice such sentences as, "Des Lehrers Wurst ist aus."] The family also had a large garden.

In Pigeon the Louis Sievert family reached its full size. Daughter Alma made her appearance on September 16, 1909. Emily's parents, the Gronke's, came for Alma's birth and lived with the family from then on. The twins, Richard and Erich, arrived on the 8th of August, 1912. Gertrude, the youngest, was born on February 4, 1914. Karl was sent to Michigan Lutheran Seminary to begin training to be a pastor.

Polio was rampant at the time, and daughter Hertha came down with it. She became too weak to walk by herself. There was no medical treatment at the time. Louis and Emily came up with a regimen of massaging Hertha's legs every day and holding her up while she placed her feet in front of each other in a walking motion. By God's grace Hertha recovered completely and suffered no lasting ill effects.

Classes were held in a brick school building that had been built for \$600 in 1896. The building was cheaply made [A new brick parsonage cost \$2500 to build in 1914.] and already in bad shape.[27] Louis would take the children outside when it got stormy for fear the building might collapse on them. There were usually 40-50 students in school during Louis' years at Pigeon.

To convey an idea of what it was like to teach in one of our schools back then, I have tried to piece together a typical school day at Pigeon.

School began at 9:00 A.M. Almost all the children walked to school, some of them quite a distance. Before school began Louis would have had to get the stove going to heat up the classroom. There was no central heat.

The school day began with a devotion, which was in German. Mr. Sievert would read either from the Bible or from a devotion book. Devotion closed with the Lord's prayer or Luther's morning prayer.

Bible History followed the devotion. I will cover that in more detail later. The eighth graders went out into the hall every day for confirmation class with Pastor Wacker. On Fridays Mr. Sievert taught hymnology. He explained the meaning of the hymns, often by using Bible stories to illustrate them. The children then memorized the hymns.

Next on the agenda were the reading classes. Students learned both German and English. The Fibel, a little book with a word, a picture and a sentence for each sound in the highly phonetic German language, was used for teaching children to read German. (Northwestern Publishing House published Fibels around this time.) There were Lesebuecher for more advanced students. Pastor Wacker helped out by teaching one of the Lesebuecher.

Mr. Sievert also taught English phonetically. He was, in the words of his children, an excellent English teacher, and he taught English grammar very thoroughly. Whenever he could find an extra five minutes he would have the

students open up their readers, parse sentences from the readers, then analyze the grammatical construction of the sentences. He also frequently had them diagram sentences. Students read from the McGuffey readers. There was no school library, not even a shelf of books in the room.

There was a 15 minute recess at 10:30. Mr. Sievert would be out on the playground with the children, and often joined in the games.

Math was taught at regular grade levels, although some of the lower grades were put together. There were numerous story problems in addition to the regular operations. At Pigeon Mr. Sievert used older students to tutor the younger students in their multiplication tables and other math facts. He also had some of his more gifted students working independently. For example, there was a group of two students to whom he would give the math textbook and tell them to work ahead until they came to a problem they couldn't figure out. They would then go to Mr. Sievert for help and he would explain what they couldn't figure out on their own.

Mr. Sievert had older students help the younger ones in most of the subjects. For example, older students would often take younger ones out in the hall to hear them recite their memory work for Bible history, or to hear them read. This was not only good for the students; it was a necessity when one teacher was expected to teach so many subjects to so many students in all eight grades.

Geography was taught to the upper graders. They learned countries, states, capitals, large cities, occupations and natural resources. Sometimes if there was extra time a student would be allowed to name a place which was on the map and call on another child to go to the map and identify it.

Lunch break was an hour, from noon until 1:00 P.M.

Mr. Sievert taught history to the whole room at once, by sitting at his



Johann Sievert and Dorothea Peters
in America about 1890
Henry, Karl, Friederich, Ludwig
Father, Mother, Fritz

WEYAUWEGA

SCHOOLHOUSE



The Second School



LOUIS AND EMILY IN OWOSSO

LOUIS AND EMILY - WEDDING PHOTO



BACK ROW: KARL, ADA, ALBERT AND MRS. WANDERSEE AND CHILD
 MIDDLE ROW: GERTRUDE, EMILY, AUGUST GRONKE, RUDOLPH, HENRIETTA GRONKE
 LOUIS WITH TWINS ERICH AND RICHARD ON LAP
 FRONT ROW: ALMA, HERTHA, DAUGHTER OF WANDERSEES. - AT PIGEON

desk in front of the room, and telling it as a story.

Singing was taught by rote. Mr. Sievert did not try to teach the children how to read music. The children, however, by looking at the music of a song to which they had memorized the parts, could get an idea of how to read music. When the children sang in church, they usually sang in two parts.

Science was not taught as a separate subject. When something in the field of science came up in history or reading, Mr. Sievert would take some time to explain it.

The students practiced penmanship at the blackboards, on their slates, or with pen and ink in their copybooks. The copybooks, just as the McGuffey readers did, attempted to teach some moral lessons along with the skill exercises. One sentence the students would practice their handwriting on was, "Ein gutes Gewissen macht ein sanftes Ruhe=kissen." ("A good conscience makes a soft sleeping-pillow.") [28]

There was another 15 minute recess at 2:00 P.M.

Spelling assignments included using the words in a sentence.

School ended at 4 P.M. with a closing hymn verse or prayer.

Mr. Sievert's teaching methodology was based on Herbart's five steps: preparation; presentation; comparison; generalization; and application. This was considered the scientific method of teaching. Bible history in particular always followed these steps. I will use a Bible history lesson as an example of how this method worked.

The first step, preparation, is what we might call the introduction. The purpose of this step was to motivate the students to learn the lesson, give them necessary background information, and indicate the aim of the lesson. For the Bible story, "Joseph in Potiphar's House," the preparation might start with the presentation of the aim, perhaps, "Today we will see how Joseph

showed what it means to fear the Lord." The teacher would then motivate the students to hear the lesson with a summary of Joseph's life up to that point and a "What happens next?" The motivation could also be a point of connection with the children's lives today. For example, a teacher might introduce the story "Jesus Changes Water into Wine," by asking, "Do any of your fathers make wine at home?"

The next step was the presentation. Mr. Sievert would tell the story, then retell it, a part at a time, asking fact questions and using questions to draw an inference after each part. Mr. Sievert taught Bible history to all the children at once, so there had to be quite a broad range of levels of difficulty in his questions. Inferences would be written on the board.

The next step was comparison. The Bible story of the day would be compared with other Bible stories that had a similar message, such as "Daniel in the Lions' Den" or "The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace."

From the comparison of these lessons with the lesson of the day, the generalization would be drawn. For "Joseph in Potiphar's House," it might be, "Fearing the Lord means fleeing from sin." If possible, the teacher would use the exact wording of a Bible passage, catechism sentence or hymn line as the generalization. Generalization was the fourth step.

The last step was application. The students were to come up with the applications. Mr. Sievert might ask, "Have any of you ever been tempted to sin, like Joseph was?"

Mr. Sievert would assign memory work with each lesson. Usually this was a Bible passage from the story or one which had been used as a generalization, or a Catechism section which fit the story.

Mr. Sievert did not give tests in Bible history. His work with the students and their performance in class gave him enough information to give

them a grade. One thing Mr. Sievert did do every day, sometimes as part of the presentation step, sometimes after the application, was reviewing the Bible story by having students get up before the class and tell it. He would have one person start, then stop that student and have another continue the story from that point.

Mr. Sievert prepared his Bible history lessons by reading the lesson in the Bible, and then using some other works, such as Stoeckhardt's Bibliche Geschichte and Dr. Ernst's Bible history, as commentaries. He would then write out the lesson plan according to the five steps. According to his son Richard, Louis kept on fully preparing and writing out Bible History lessons according to the five steps all the way through his teaching career.

Mr. Sievert had a number of tools for keeping the students in line. His arsenal included, in addition to the his "teacher's look" and the word of admonition, a soft blackboard eraser, which was thrown with a considerable degree of accuracy at students who were misbehaving, while Mr. Sievert kept on teaching without missing a beat. Students who giggled or talked too much might end up sitting on the Katheder, the elevated platform on which the teacher's desk stood. If a student had earned it, he might receive a slap across the palm of the hand with a ruler, or in severe cases, a boy might receive a whipping with a three foot length of old, soft rubber hose, which Mr. Sievert kept on his desk. [29] Standing in the corner was a more common punishment. One unique punishment for the big boys was to have them hold a piece of chalk or an eraser in their hand with their arm extended as long as they could. I suppose they learned they weren't so big after all when their strength was defeated by a little piece of chalk.

Let the reader not get the idea, however, that the main feature of Mr. Sievert's classroom was physical punishment. Teachers at that time simply had

more methods of punishment available to them, due to the smaller number of lawyers. There was one time when a student behaved most disrespectfully, by using foul language and smarting off at Mr. Sievert when he tried to talk to him. In this instance Mr. Sievert didn't give the young man a whipping, but instead went back into the classroom with tears in his eyes, and then explained to the students why he was crying. He was sad that the young man was sinning in such a terrible way.

In Pigeon, the relationship between the Wackers and the Sieverts was excellent. Pastor Wacker and Louis were like brothers. The families did all sorts of things together, including making apple butter every year. The wives would come over to each other's house when there was a baby on the way. The children of the two families were around the same age, and naturally were friends and playmates.

One other note about Pigeon. The Gnadenwahlstreit made an appearance here. Pastor Wacker and Mr. Sievert stayed up meeting with a certain congregation member until midnight one night, trying to show him the error of the Ohio position. Although they didn't convince that man, the election controversy did not cause major split in the congregation at this time.

VI. Weyauwega, World War, and Students' Memories

In 1914, as the clouds of war were gathering over Europe, Louis and his family were heading for Wisconsin. Louis had been called to be principal and sole teacher of the grade school of St. Peter's congregation in Weyauwega.

The family took a boat across Lake Michigan from Ludington to Milwaukee; a train carried from there to the station a mile from Weyauwega, where some congregation members met them with automobiles.

According to Louis' daughter Ada, the school at Weyauwega only had grades 4-8 when Louis arrived, but he worked to build support for the school in the congregation, and built the school up to all 8 grades. Even when the school did have all 8 grades, there were many students who came only for a couple years in the upper grades. Weyauwega was a farming community, and many farmers started their children a couple years late in school so the children would be big enough to handle the long walk in. Many farmers' children went to tiny one room public schools in the countryside until it was time for confirmation class. They then attended St. Peter's school during the two years of confirmation instruction, and often quit after confirmation, or went to public school after confirmation, even though they often were not done with all 8 grades. To these children, their little country schools were "English school," and St. Peter's was "German school." [30]

I was able to talk to a number of people from Weyawega who had Mr. Sievert as a teacher, in addition to Mr. Sievert's children. [31] In comparing the recollections of these people, it seems St. Peter's school usually had 30-40 students while Mr. Sievert was there, but that enrollment increased beyond that in his last years there. Two years after Mr. Sievert left, St. Peter's expanded to two teachers, something Mr. Sievert had already been pushing for while he was there.

The First World War had a great impact on St. Peter's congregation and school. One student recalled that by the end of Mr. Sievert's stay there, the school had switched to mostly English instruction. Several students recalled that the children of St. Peter's school were required to learn and sing pro-war songs, such as "We're Going to Hang the Kaiser on a Sour Apple Tree." One student remembered, "Mr. Sievert was not against the war against the Germans. [He] was very careful [in] what he said and what he told the kids to say."

[32] Louis' son Rudy was the goat in a parade float entitled, "We're going to get the Kaiser's goat."

The school children sometimes sang their songs at war rallies. At one of these war rallies, a speaker was invited from the Madison newspaper, the "Capital Times." This speaker, in his effort to arouse anti-German feeling, complained about a German pastor in the community who couldn't say a blessing for the war rally because he didn't know enough English. The Pastor was Pastor Oehlert, of St. Peter's. The real reason he wouldn't speak a blessing or lead a prayer for the rally was that this would violate the Bible's teaching on religious fellowship. In this instance, the efforts of the man from Madison backfired. A prominent townsman got up and publicly apologized for what the Madison man had said, and spoke well of Pastor Oehlert, and of the German community, which repeatedly bought more than their quota of war bonds. The man from Madison had to be escorted to the train station and quickly put on a train out of town to avoid being tarred and feathered by the townspeople. [33]

This does not mean that there was no anti-German sentiment in the area. The public high school burned all their German books. A town committee regularly checked to see that St. Peter's school was flying the American flag. One morning Mr. Sievert forgot to put the flag up. Fortunately, Alma Oehlert, Pastor Oehlert's daughter, spied the committee on its way, and was able to warn Mr. Sievert, so that by the time the committee arrived at the school, the flag was up and fluttering merrily in the breeze. [34]

In spite of the war, regular school life also went on. I asked the students from Weyauwega what they remembered about Mr. Sievert. There were two basic things they remembered about him. First of all, he was a good teacher. He made sure the children learned their lessons. He was very

precise and thorough in his teaching method. Second, they all remembered that Mr. Sievert was very strict. In particular, they remember the piece of rubber hose. A couple people remembered that some students didn't like Mr. Sievert because he was so strict. One person I interviewed had himself quit St. Peter's School for that reason, and remembered that several other young men had done the same. Others gave a more positive picture. Said one person, "He had the students' respect; he made them mind." Said another, "I never had any problem with him." Third remembered "You really had to do something bad" to get whipped with the rubber hose." The students recalled that teachers at St. Peter's before and after Mr. Sievert were similarly strict, and used similar methods of punishment. [35]

Some of the students at St. Peter's could be quite rough themselves. One person recalled a certain class with a lot of big, older boys, who were always getting into fights at recess. Another remembered that a student under Mr. Oswald, a later teacher, didn't want to get a whipping, so he picked up Mr. Oswald and dumped him in the woodbox, then ran home. [36]

I also asked the Weyauwega students and Mr. Sievert's children about the classroom at Weyauwega. The school building was a wood frame structure built in 1900. It had a classroom and an adjoining hall, which sometimes served as a second classroom. A pot-bellied stove heated the room. A metal wall around the stove kept the children from burning themselves on it. The windows provided light. There were gas lights in the room, but they were too dangerous and too few to provide light for classes. Sometimes classes were let out early in winter because of darkness. [It was during Mr. Sievert's tenure that electric light came to Weyauwega.] Students sat two to a desk in double width desks which had inkwells in the middle. In the front of the room were a couple of benches, to which younger students migrated when Mr. Sievert

was teaching a class to their grade. Mr. Sievert's desk was in the front of the room on top of a raised platform about a foot high which had the German name, "Katheder." There was no indoor plumbing. Students used outhouses. A pail of water was kept in the room for drinking. It often froze over in winter. The pail had a dipper, which students used to fill their individual collapsible metal cups. Filling the pail from the pump outside was a task Mr. Sievert delegated to students. Younger students had slates, which they usually cleaned by spitting on them and wiping them with their shirtsleeves. When the slates got to smell too bad, they would wash them with water. Mr. Sievert would engrave penmanship lines on new slates with a stylus. The room had slate blackboards on the wall, which were in almost constant use. Mr. Sievert also used maps and charts. There was no classroom library. A reed organ was used to accompany hymns. It was more common to have a reed organ than a piano in a classroom in those days, according to Ada Sievert. The school had no athletic equipment to speak of. Students brought their own bats and balls for recess, and a congregation member who lived near the school sometimes provided bats and balls. [37]

As is indicated by the lack of athletic equipment, St. Peter's had no interscholastic athletics, so Mr. Sievert didn't have to serve as coach, in addition to teacher of Grades 1-8 and principal. He did have other duties. In Weyauwega, as in Pigeon before and in Marinette and Owassa afterwards, Mr. Sievert was the organist and the choir director. St. Peter's had a tracker-action pipe organ which demanded someone to man the bellows. Louis often gave this task to his sons Erich and Richard.

There were two big events in the school year that Mr. Sievert prepared the students for ahead of time. One was the Christmas Eve childrens service. All the school children and some preschoolers took part in the service with

their songs and memorized passages. Practices were held several times a week for several weeks before the service. The trees were decorated with homemade beeswax candles.

The other big event was the program at the end of the school year, held outdoors in the fairgrounds. The students gave recitations and sang songs. Sometimes they performed a few dramatic skits. There were also three-legged races and other such games.

The Weyauwega years were happy years for the Sievert family. Louis and Emily lived in a fairly large teacherage, which had a barn on the lot. The Gronke's, Emily's parents, lived with them here until they died, she in 1919, he in 1922. The family supplemented Louis' teacher's income by keeping a cow, chickens, and sometimes hogs, on their property, and by tending a large garden. Louis would often get some work with local farmers during the summer months, and he and son Karl got a number of painting jobs.

The extra income was needed to help pay for the education of the children. During the Weyauwega years Karl completed his pastoral training, Ada went through college at New Ulm, Rudy spent some time in the commercial course at Northwestern College in Watertown, and Hertha began her New Ulm years partway through high school, after the Weyauwega public high school burned down.

Louis and Emily did not go on vacations; their family was their life, and what time was not spent in school and in church, or visiting with church members, was spent at home with the family. When the school day ended, Louis went right home to tend the animals and take care of the garden until suppertime. Suppertime always included the family devotion, which Louis would read, sometimes from a devotion book, sometimes from the Bible.

At 7P.M. Louis would whistle from the porch, which meant it was time for

Richard and Erich to come in and study. They did this under the supervision of their father, who also spread out his books on the kitchen table and prepared for the next day's work. During the summer, the family would often spend time together on the front porch.

One diversion Mr. Sievert did enjoy was getting together with some congregation members to play cards.

Around 1917-1918 an influenza epidemic struck Weyauwega. Louis and Emily tried to protect their children by spraying their mouths and throats with some spray that was supposed to prevent infection. The church itself took the precaution of having services in smaller groups, which met in the schoolhouse, instead of having services in the church building. Even the Christmas Eve service was not held in church that year. [38]

The Sieverts enjoyed excellent relations with Pastor Oehlert and his family. Louis was like a son to the Oehlerts. Louis, a tall man, and Pastor Oehlert, who was barely over 5 feet, made an interesting pair as they often walked downtown together to pick up the mail. Relations were also pretty good with Pastor Hensel, who took the call to St. Peter's after Pastor Oehlert retired in 1921.

VII. Marinette and More

1923 saw the Sieverts moving on again, this time to Marinette, Wisconsin. Here Louis was to be principal and teacher of grades 5-8 in Trinity congregation's two-room school. The classroom building was a former church that had been remodeled to serve as a classroom. By this time the classes were all taught in English.

Mr. Sievert had more time to spend on each subject that he taught here, since he only taught the upper grades, and he was able to give each pupil more

attention. Louis' son Richard recalls that he and his brother Erich enjoyed the school at Marinette very much.

Louis enjoyed a good working relationship with his fellow teacher at Marinette. [39] A young lady named Gertrude Karpinski was the lower grade teacher at Marinette from 1921-1926. [40]

During the Marinette years, Louis and Emily's daughter Alma, and then the twins, Richard and Erich, after going to the local public high school, went away to D.M.L.C. One of the noteworthy things about the Louis Sievert family is how many of their children served as teachers in our Synod's schools for so many years [41]. It's interesting that the twins, Richard and Erich, did not originally want to be teachers, and their father did not originally want them to be teachers. Mr. Sievert had planned to send the twins to Northwestern for high school and college. He wanted them to be pastors. But there were some complications. The twins had skipped a year of school, so when they graduated from grade school, they still had a year to go before confirmation. E. E. Kowalke of Northwestern advised Mr. Sievert that it would be better for the twins to be confirmed before they came to Watertown, and that in addition, this was not a good time to send the twins to Northwestern, because of the stealing incidents, which were turning into the Protes'tant controversy. Louis followed Kowalke's advice and kept the twins at Marinette for the time being. Later, he decided to send them to New Ulm for the last year of high school and college. The twins didn't want to go; they wanted to stay in Marinette. To this Louis replied, "I'm paying for your education. If I'm paying for it, you're going to go where I tell you to go." So they went to New Ulm, and fell in love with the place. [42]

Although things went well enough in the classroom, the Marinette years were difficult years for Mr. Sievert. There was tension between the

congregation and the pastor, and there came to be tension between the pastor and the teacher. This situation resulted in a great deal of stress for Mr. Sievert, who made friends easily, and was used to getting along well with the pastors he had worked with before. The situation did not improve, and the stress began to affect Mr. Sievert's health. Louis and Emily no doubt also got lonely for their children. When Alma and then the twins went away to New Ulm, only one of the eight children was left at home. In 1926-27, Mr. Sievert felt he could no longer continue in this situation, and he resigned from his teaching position at Marinette. [43]

After Mr. Sievert left, the school was closed until 1935. [44] The pastor, Herman Westphal, broke with the congregation in 1928 and founded First Trinity Lutheran Church of Marinette, which he served until his death ten years later. [45]

Louis and Emily moved back to New Ulm, where they rented a house. The children who were at D.M.L.C. moved out of the dorm and became town students. Some of the children who were out teaching sent money to help pay for the education of the younger children. Louis taught as a substitute in a number of places, including Lake City, Minnesota and Owosso, Michigan.

VIII. Owosso to the End

When the teacher for whom Mr. Sievert was substituting in Owosso, a Mr. Rudow, resigned in January of 1930, Salem congregation called Mr. Sievert to take his place. Mr. Sievert was principal and upper grade teacher. He worked with Fritz Bartels, who taught the lower grades until Mr. Sievert retired in 1939. [46]

These were the years of the great Depression. Teachers wages in general were cut back. Two of Louis' children, who were out on there own teaching at

the time, remembered that their own wages were cut by \$10 per month, which was over 10% of their salary at the time. Son Richard recalls that his father was in a similar situation, with a salary of around \$80 per month. [47] Louis and his youngest daughter, Gertrude, took over the janitor job at the school to help supplement their income.

The school building was a two story frame building erected in 1901. It had two classrooms on the upper floor and an auditorium on the second floor. [48]

The Sievert family lived in a brick teacherage which was built for \$7000 in 1925. [49] During the school year, the house must have been quite empty, but a number of the children would come home for summer. A. W. Hueschen, the Pastor of Salem until 1936, would often stop in for a friendly visit.

Pastor Walter Voss succeeded Pastor Hueschen in September of 1936. By this time Louis' health was starting to give out. Although he didn't talk about his health problems, he was probably already feeling the effects of stomach cancer. In June of 1939 Louis retired. Fritz Bartels succeeded him as principal.

Louis and Emily moved to Watertown, where they shared a house with daughters Ada, Hertha, and Gertrude. Louis did some substitute teaching during his retirement. He spent some time helping his son Karl at the Academy in Mobridge, but I have not yet been able to confirm whether this was during his final retirement or during the years between Marinette and Owosso. Louis' retirement was not long. The stomach cancer progressed, and on April 21, 1942, the Lord called Louis Carl Sievert to his eternal home. Louis had lived 67 years. His funeral was held at St. Mark's, Watertown, where he had begun his teaching ministry 45 years earlier. [50]

Emily continued to live with her daughters in Watertown until the Lord

called her home on November 18, 1954.

And so we have a glimpse of the life of one early W.E.L.S. schoolteacher.

It is difficult to measure Louis Sievert's impact on church history. I guess the best way to do it is for the reader to ask himself, "Whom did God use to teach me about the wonderful things Jesus did? Whom did God use to make me commit to memory the Bible passages and hymn verses that still comfort and direct me today? Who, besides my parents, or maybe including my parents, did the most to bring me up in the training and instruction of the Lord?" For many of us in the W.E.L.S., it was our Christian day school teachers.

That task was not an easy one for Louis Sievert and his colleagues. I think especially of the large number of students and grades that one teacher was so often expected to teach. But it's no easy task today either. Although our teachers today may have fewer students in the classroom, they also have fewer disciplinary tools at their disposal to keep order, and they have a much greater proportion of students who come from broken homes. Louis Sievert and his colleagues received little financial reward for their labors. Our teachers today are wealthier, as are all of us, but their income status relative to the rest of society is probably similar to that of Louis Sievert and his colleagues. The importance of the Christian day school teacher's task has not changed. Jesus wanted his lambs to be fed on the pure milk of his Word in the days of Louis Sievert, and he wants his lambs fed now. Thanks be to our Savior Jesus Christ, for giving Louis Sievert, and many others like him, to give year after year of faithful service feeding Jesus' lambs, as W.E.L.S. schoolteachers.

ENDNOTES

1. Martha Hedine, Sievert Family History, (Winthrop, MN: 1978).
2. Ibid., but cf. Ada Sievert, who recalls (Feb. 22, 1991 interview) that it was in 1883, and Louis was 11 at the time.
3. Martha Hedine, op. cit.
4. D.M.L.C. Catalogues, 1890-1897.
5. D.M.L.C. records, grading reports for 1890-1 through 1893-4, supplied by Registrar, Dr. G. Barnes.
6. Ada Sievert, 2/22/91 interview.
7. Berichte der Minnesota Synod, 1893 Convention in Milwaukee, pp. 88-90.
8. D.M.L.C. Catalogue, 1893-4.
9. D.M.L.C. Catalogues, esp. for 1896-7 school year.
10. Paul G. Press, The History of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Pigeon (Berne), Michigan, 1878-1978 (Mequon, WI: 1980 Church History paper), lists the pastor's salary as \$400 a year plus firewood and parsonage in 1895, increased to \$500 a year in 1898.
Diamond Jubilee- St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Pigeon (Berne) Michigan 1878-1953 (Booklet, anonymous) lists the 1908 teacher's salary as \$450 a year plus a rent free home.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1883-1983 (Booklet, anonymous) lists the 1888 teacher's salary as \$450 for 11 months.
11. 1894 Circular of Information, (D.M.L.C. Catalogue), p. 5 for class size; p. 12 for curriculum.
12. This and previous paragraphs, D.M.L.C. Catalogues, 1893-4 through 1896-7.
13. D.M.L.C. Catalogue, 1896-7, and Morton Schroeder, A Time to Remember, p. 40.
14. D.M.L.C. Catalogue, 1896-7.
15. Zur Jubel Feier der Ev. Luth. St. Markus Gemeinde, 1854-1904.
16. Morton Schroeder, op. cit., p. 39, and Ada Sievert, 2/22/91 interview.
17. Alma Sievert, Sievert Family Record, (Private, handwritten) lists it as the 27th. R. A. Sievert, The Louis Sievert Family (Private, mimeo) also lists it as the 27th. J. Klingman, in The Northwestern Lutheran, 1942, p. 188, lists it as the 28th.

18. A Century with Christ, 1854-1954, St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Watertown, p. 22.

19. Butter price from Ada Sievert, 2/22/91 interview. Sears prices from Morton Schroeder's A Time to Remember.

20. 1885-1935 - To the Glory of God and In Memory of His Abiding Blessing for Fifty Years - St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran School, New Ulm, Minnesota. (Anniversary Booklet)

21. Ada Sievert, 2/22/91 interview.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ada Sievert, 4/24/91 interview.

25. Diamond Jubilee...

26. Ibid.

27. Press, op. cit.

28. Ada Sievert, 4/24/91; also for the rest of this section of the paper.

29. Richard Sievert, 5/1/91 interview; and Weyauwega students of Mr. Sievert: Louis and Esther Stroschein, Hubert Doede, Martin Vey, Walter Hirte, and Irmgard Behn (wife of former student Eldor Behn), 5/12/91 interview.

30. Weyauwega students, 5/21/91 interview.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ada Sievert, 4/24/91 interview; and Richard Sievert, 5/1/91 interview.

34. Ibid.

35. Weyauwega students, 5/21/91 interview.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.; and Ada Sievert, 4/24/91 interview; and Richard Sievert, 5/1/91 interview.

38. Richard Sievert, 5/1/91 interview.

39. Ada Sievert, 4/24/91 interview; and Richard Sievert, 5/1/91 interview.

40. Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church - 1883-1983, p. 13.
41. cf. The Northwestern Lutheran, 1/1/83 "A Notable Record: 350 Years."
42. Richard Sievert, 5/1/91 interview.
43. Ibid.
44. Trinity Evangelical...., p. 12.
45. Ibid., p. 8.
46. A Century of Grace and Blessing - 1869-1969, Salem Lutheran Church, Owosso, Michigan.
47. Ada Sievert, 4/22/91 interview; Richard Sievert, 5/1/91 interview.
48. A Century of Grace and Blessing...
49. Ibid.
50. The Northwestern Lutheran, 1942, p. 188- reported by J. Klingmann.

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