

Why wasn't the "Founding" Layman of the Wisconsin Synod Buried by a German Lutheran (Wisconsin Synod) Church?

A Study of Ehrenfried Seebach from 1845-1897

[Senior Church History, April 12, 1976]

by: John May



(This opening article is taken from the August, 1975 issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran*)

In the Beginning—A Layman

By: L. Ristow

In 1783, the year in which our American Revolution came to its official end by the signing of the Treaty of Paris, a girl was born in Wesel, Germany, a city on the Rhine River. She was baptized Marie Timmermann. In 1807 she married John Seebach. On February 18, 1808, a son was born to the John Seebachs. They named him Ehrenfried.

The lad was born into a warring world. In France the Revolution had come and gone, and the age of Napoleon had begun. Ehrenfried grew up amid the military scenes of Napoleon's occupation of the northwest corner of Germany, including his own hometown. The young boy attended school in Wesel, and later became an apprentice to his father, a coppersmith. In 1829, when he was 21, he entered the Prussian army and served three years.

In 1832 Ehrenfried Seebach married Maria Christiana Cruz. The young couple moved to a town named Starkod, where Ehrenfried became foreman in the iron works. Here he helped assemble the first locomotive to travel the rails in Germany and directed the building of ship's engines and gas meters. After seven years, the family moved back to Wesel and Mr. Seebach

again took up the coppersmith's trade. Six years later, when the doctor advised him to go on a farm, he chose to come to America to engage in farming.

To America

Mr. and Mrs. Seebach, their three sons, Heinrich, Ehrenfried, Jr., and Lute and their daughter Katharina arrived in Milwaukee in 1845 and purchased a farm in Oakwood, 12 miles south of Milwaukee on the old Kilbourn Road. An energetic worker, Mr. Seebach cut the timber, cleared the land and built a log cabin. Farming brought him blessings, and he soon owned 140 acres.

These were the years of growing pains for the area now comprising Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. Immigrants, most of them German, came swarming in by the thousands. Many of them were Lutherans. So were the Seebachs. But unlike the Saxons in Missouri, most of these immigrant Lutherans did not come in groups and thus did bring with them their spiritual shepherds. Being hungry to hear God's Word, they were often not too careful and sometimes were fleeced by wolves in sheep's clothing. Spiritually, the situation was a critical one.

Prof. E. Kowalke, in his *Centennial Story*, states: "By 1850, when the Wisconsin Synod was founded, there were 38,061 German-born people living in Wisconsin By 1860 there were 123,879 German-born in Wisconsin alone To appreciate the great need for pastors among the thousands of Germans who were coming into Wisconsin by 1850 and in the years following, it must be remembered that there were very few settled communities in the state by that time. Outside of the somewhat larger concentrations of immigrants in Racine, Milwaukee, and Sheboygan, the Germans were living scattered in the woods or in very small communities. Milwaukee, the largest town, was not incorporated as a city until 1846. The first settler did not arrive in the Watertown area until 1836. In 1842 Madison was only three years old. It did indeed have a capitol building with a tin dome, about 40 dwelling houses, and a population of 300." The first Germans to come to the Oakwood area arrived in 1836.

Among the immigrants settling in Wisconsin were Catholics, Lutherans, Reformed, a liberal sprinkling of freethinkers, Turners, and revolutionaries of 1848 from various areas in Germany. Some were highly intellectual men, but very few were qualified to serve as pastors. In fact, the Germans in Oakwood had a number of rather sad experiences. In 1840 a pastor from Chicago contacted them, but tried to win them for Methodism. Later they received spasmodic services from a Pastor Schmidt who hailed from New York State. He preached in their midst every few months and instructed their children. In October, 1843 some 24 families founded St. John's Church in Oakwood and immediately proceeded to build a log church. On the day of dedication Pastor Schmidt informed them that he would no longer serve them as he intended to go farther west and look up other Germans scattered throughout Wisconsin. So when the Seebachs joined St. John's in 1845, the congregation again was without the services of a pastor.

An Important Letter

Mr Seebach decided to do some thing about it. He consented to conduct reading services and began instructing the children. And then he did one other important thing: he wrote a letter to the mission committee in Wesel, Germany, his birth place. When this plea arrived at Wesel, it was immediately forwarded to the Langenberg Society, a missionary group in Germany that concerned itself especially with the Germans in America. This mission society, and others like it,

saw to it that men were trained for the mission fields. The men they chose had to be willing and able to work amid the most adverse conditions.

Again we note what Professor Kowalke states on this matter: “Volunteers who offered their services to the Langenberg Society were usually mature young men who had been learning a trade and who more or less by accident came into contact with one of those sincere groups of simple Christians who were trying to keep alive the faith of the fathers. Muehlhaeuser, the founder of the Wisconsin Synod, had been a baker; Reim, a shoemaker’s apprentice; Koehler, a weaver; Bading, a wheelwright. When such a newly converted candidate showed interest in mission work, he would be sent for intensive schooling to one of the mission houses, to Barmen or Hermannsburg.

When he was considered ready to be sent overseas to begin his work, the Langenberg Society would make arrangements for his transportation and would send him to a field in America that had appealed for help. That’s how St. John’s in Town Oakwood finally received its first resident pastor.

Pastor Weinmann

When the Seebach letter reached the Langenberg Society, three missionaries were already on their way across the Atlantic on a slow sailing vessel. The Langenberg Society immediately sent a letter by steamer mail to a Pastor Schmidt in West Leyden, New York, notifying him of the coming of these three missionaries and requesting that he send one of the three to the congregation in Town Oakwood. Another member of the Oakwood congregation had in the meantime also contacted Pastor Schmidt. On landing in New York, the three men were met by another Langenberger, Pastor Johannes Muehlhaeuser of Rochester, New York. Of the three, John Weinmann accompanied Pastor Muehlhaeuser to Rochester and then set out for Wisconsin to serve St. John’s Congregation. A few years later, he was part of that small group that formed the Wisconsin Synod.

The Wisconsin Synod

Do you see how God made use of a consecrated layman to set His work in motion? Humanly speaking, they Wisconsin Synod would never have been organized except for the letter written by Ehrenfried Seebach. The letter read in part: “There is a great field here for Christian missions, and splendid congregations might soon, under a good shepherd, prosper and become mission centers for other localities; for there is a desire among a great many for the Word of God. But how shall they believe if it isn’t preached to them?”

An Interesting Life

Mr. Seebach’s subsequent story is also interesting. He not only had the good of his congregation and fellow Germans at heart, but also the welfare of his new country. Since he believed that slavery was wrong, he joined the Republican Party when it was organized in Wisconsin in 1854 specifically to oppose the extension of slavery to the western territories. When the Civil War broke out in 1863, Mr. Seebach acted on his convictions and, though 55 years of age, decided to join the army together with one of his sons. When the recruiting officer told him he was too old for military service, Seebach challenged the officer to a fencing match and won it in short order. The surprised officer assigned him to the 1st Wisconsin Heavy Artillery.

After the War, in 1871, the Seebachs moved to a farm near Zumbrota, Minnesota. Five years later, Mr. Seebach retired and moved to Red Wing. His wife Maria died in 1878, after 46 years of marriage. Thereupon Mr. Seebach decided to go to California to live, but after a short stay returned to his Red Wing home.

The Seebachs had nine children, three of whom preceded their father in death. He himself died suddenly at the age of almost 90 while returning from a visit to a sick relative. His death took place on May 1, 1897, and his body lies buried in St. John's Cemetery at Red Wing, Minnesota. Descendants of Mr. Seebach are still living in that area and elsewhere.

In the beginning, a concerned layman. Then, God's blessings. May it always be thus!

Why Wasn't the "Founding" Layman of the Wisconsin Synod Buried by a German Lutheran (Wisconsin Synod) Church?

By: John May

It was toward the end of my vicar year in Red Wing in early August of 1975, when I first became interested in the man Ehrenfried Seebach. At that time an article appeared in *The Northwestern Lutheran* (August 10, 1975) on this man; it was entitled "In the Beginning - A Layman." This article tells of the efforts and success of this man in securing a minister for the Oak Creek area of Milwaukee, who later joined to form the Wisconsin Synod. At the end of this character sketch the statement is made that, he "lies buried in St. John's Cemetery in Red Wing." The question struck me then, "Well, how did he ever get located up here?" I heard at that time that even though he was buried in St. John's Cemetery, that church did not bury him, I wondered why. I remembered the name and the article. This winter when the name came up again in a church history class discussion, it rang a bell. I determined to try to find out the answer to this question: Why wasn't the "founding" layman of the Wisconsin Synod buried by a German Lutheran (Wisconsin Synod) Church? Or stated somewhat similarly: Why didn't the "founding" layman of the Wisconsin Synod remain in the Lutheran Church all of his days? I must say at the outset that this paper I was in no way undertaken with any intentions of "debunking" this man, nor are there any desires on my part to minimize him. I was just truly intrigued by Ehrenfried Seebach and by the search of his life. As can be gathered, this paper will be told from a narrative point of view, I hope this will reveal the excitement I felt as I proceeded and followed up my hunches.

The first leg of my journey took me back to Red Wing. I wanted to find out about his life in the Red Wing area. I thought the answer to my question would be found there. The first question I wanted to answer was did Seebach ever join a Lutheran Church or any Methodist church around the Zumbrota area? Ehrenfried Seebach and his family moved from the Oak Creek area to rural Zumbrota in 1871. He was 63 years old. Here he bought a farm and farmed until 1876, when he retired and moved into the city of Red Wing. Now Zumbrota is about twenty-five miles southwest of Red Wing. About halfway between the two is the small village of Goodhue. I found that Seebach's farm was located about halfway between Goodhue and Zumbrota, right off Highway 58. The only church that was available to Seebach in the town of Zumbrota was the Congregational church, which was established in 1862. He definitely did not go there, because that was an English-speaking church. The next church that Zumbrota could claim didn't happen until 1898, when Christ Evangelical Lutheran (ours) was dedicated. So the family did not go to Zumbrota for worship purposes.

My next theory was to explore the Lutheran churches in Goodhue and outside of that village. But St. John's of Minneola township and St. John's of rural Goodhue both didn't start until 1875. As far as I could determine, there were no Methodist churches within a radius of at least ten miles. (I refer only to Lutheran and Methodist Churches because they were the only ones that had German services. I was told often that Seebach cared little for English services, and so would naturally go to a church which used the German language.) This left but one possibility, tiny Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of rural Goodhue, which had been formed by seven families in 1870. In that same year they built a small church.¹ They were served from 1870-1879 by Pastor Christian Bender, whose main charge was St. John's of Red Wing. Ehrenfried Seebach's farm was about 2 ½-3 miles from Grace. Pastor Horn of St. John's and I went through all the old record books at St. John's.

We found two that were very helpful. They included all the ministrations of Pastor Bender at St. John's of Red Wing, at Grace of rural Goodhue, and at St. John's of Frontenac, which he also served. We found that all the Seebachs had made Grace Church their home, all, that is, but Ehrenfried, Sr. Having gone through all the baptism and communion records, I found only two entries that possibly could have been "Papa" Seebach. They were as a "*taufzeugnis*" for his son Gottlieb's infant son in 1871, and for his son Frederick's infant son in 1875. All the other references to "Ehrenfried Seebach" must mean his son, junior, since he is always mentioned with his wife, whose name was "Sophia, *geb. Luhring*." It will be recalled that Ehrenfried Sr.'s wife was Maria, "*geb. Cruz*." Another very interesting item was the communion records. The sons were always listed with their "*fraus*," and usually after "Ehrenfried Seebach (Jr.) and frau" there appears "Mutter Seebach." The "Mutter" appears as a communion guest on July 9, 1872 and on Pentecost Monday in 1873 at Grace. Then she appears under the "St. John's Red Wing" heading (they moved there in 1876) on Easter Sunday in 1876 and on July 19, 1879.² So to the question of whether or not Seebach joined a Lutheran Church or any other (Methodist) church around the Zumbrota and Goodhue area, from 1871-1876, I would definitely answer, no. Perhaps he attended Grace with his family, but I doubt if it was a very regular attendance.

So, in 1876 Ehrenfried retired from farming, and he and Maria moved to Red Wing. The next question I searched for an answer to was: Did he ever join St. John's German Lutheran Church in Red Wing? Looking through the newspapers of that era, I came across the weekly listing of the churches in Red Wing and their various times of services. In the *Red Wing Argus* of Thursday, Dec. 26, 1878, the "Church Directory" lists fifteen different churches in the city. A person certainly had a wide variety to choose from! But only two of these would have interested Ehrenfried Seebach: The "German Lutheran," served by Pastor Christian Bender, and The "German Methodist-Episcopal." From the above mentioned church records, it was clear that his children and his wife, Maria, joined and were active at St. John's. But no mention is made of Ehrenfried. He apparently did not join St. John's. I'm convinced that he had many opportunities to do so, but that he just was not interested in the Lutheran Church any longer. It has always been accepted knowledge that his wife Maria died in 1878. But that did not seem to jive, since she was still partaking of Communion on July 19, 1879! I subsequently discovered that in Ehrenfried's obituary of May 3, 1897, in the *Red Wing Daily Republican*, that when they reported that his wife departed in 1878, the type-setter inadvertently interchanged the last two digits. She really died in 1887, on February 15. When I found this out, I went through the *Red Wing Daily Republicans* for 1887, until I came across Maria's obituary. There, two significant statements are recorded: "...died of general debility," and "she has been ailing for some time, and for the past six years has been afflicted with blindness."³ That would put her blindness as occurring

around 1880. When Pastor Bender made his shut-in visits, he must surely have come into contact with Ehrenfried. If Pastor Bender made any efforts to invite him, they were not successful. Or perhaps Ehrenfried was already going to the German Methodist-Episcopal Church.

While searching his obituary (which gives a detailed biographical sketch of his life) in the *Red Wing Daily Republican* of Monday, May 3, 1897, I came across this note: "he was an active member of A.E. Welch Post No. 75, G.A.R., and a regular attendant at their meetings." From another source I found that this organization headed the long list of fraternities under the heading "Red Wing Fraternities."⁴ Of the following twenty-three organizations, nineteen were lodges. So the thought occurred to me, "Did he perhaps try to join St. John's congregation, and was he then denied because he was a member of an organization which had "lodge" tendencies?" This seemed to be a very plausible explanation of why he might never have become a member of St. John's, in light of the sad experience that congregation had had with its Pastor C.H. Bleeken in 1866. It will be recalled that he was a Free mason, who had the ecumenical proverb emblazoned on the altar wall of St. John's, which stated:

Come, Jew, Christian, Mohammedan,
Come, Catholic and Protestant,
Join hands in loving fellowship;
Away with persecution, mania, and scorn,
We all believe in the same God."⁵

I thought St. John's and Pastor Bender, who seems to have been very conservative, would have reacted negatively against anything that gave the slightest whiff of lodge! But two subsequent discoveries made me realize that Ehrenfried Sr. was not prevented from joining St. John's, because of his membership in the G.A.R. The first was that this post was not organized until March 15, 1884.⁶ So for eight years (from 1876) he wasn't even a member of this organization. The second reason was found from a trip to the Goodhue County Museum in Red Wing. There Ehrenfried's third son, Frederick, was pictured as a very prominent member of Post No. 75. Fred was also a very active member at St. John's, serving as treasurer there for many years.

I just want to add what I found as I kept searching the papers after his obituary. Since Memorial Day observances were coming up at the end of that month, I found a sample of what he as a regular attendant of the G.A.R. functions was subjected to in the line of ecumenical, deistic preaching. We think that such thinking of churches and church men is new today. The same ideas were exalted in those days too. Had Ehrenfried lived he probably would have heard the Rev. Rollit of Christ Episcopal Church deliver the Memorial Day address on Sunday morning, May 30, 1897. His opening line was: "There is no Free Masonry in the world, take it, which is equal to that which binds men together that have fought for a common cause." He goes on to speak of America and of her destiny to uphold republicanism. He ends up by quoting "that great prophet on the battle field of Gettysburg."⁷ Mr. Seebach would also have been expected to attend the annual Memorial Evening sermon, that Sunday night, which was given specifically to the members of A.E. Welch Post, No. 75, G.A.R. The service that year was at the Baptist Church, with Rev. William E. Barker, the pastor, preaching. The closest thing to any comfort (some little comfort!) came in the last paragraph of his sermon:

Old soldiers of the Grand Army of the Republic, your ranks are being thinned; it will not be very long before you must go; soon you will answer the roll call. I pray that you may realize that there are grander things than the Grand Army of the Republic; and that is the army of God. It will be worth everything to sit with God at His throne. May God grant that this be your privilege.⁸

Is this the kind of preachers and preaching that appealed to him? It is hard to say. But since this organization seemed to be a prime concern of his, one can see a definite hint of Reformed and unionistic tendencies coming through.

I also came across an "In Memoriam" prepared by a committee of Post No. 75 in honor of "Comrade Seebach," which appeared in the *Red Wing Daily Republican* on Saturday, May 22, 1897. This committee had this to say about him:

By the universal testimony of all men who knew him, we are convinced that our late comrade lived an honest, upright, straightforward, moral, industrious, meritorious life... he died after discharging all the duties of life after a commendable and justifiable manner.

So again, I would say he wasn't prevented from joining St. John's because of his membership in the G.A.R. But did his religious beliefs prevent him from joining St. John's? It could be possible.

Just a final word on Rev. Christian Bender. He was born in Germany in 1838. In 1860 he entered the Mission College at Basel.⁹ His grandson told me he also went to The Pilgermission of St. Chrischona.¹⁰ He graduated in 1866, was ordained in Wittenberg, and preached about one year in Germany. He felt the desire to come to America to work among the pioneers from his homeland. In 1867, he came to Minneapolis: After spending a week there, he went to Red Wing. There he was appointed pastor of St. John's and served until his death in 1901, a period of 34 years. I got the impression that he had both feet firmly planted on the ground when it came to conservative Lutheranism. As was pointed out before, he most likely had contacts with Ehrenfried Seebach, first from 1871-1876 when the family attended Grace, and from then until 1887, when Maria Seebach died; but if he tried to, he did not gain Ehrenfried as a member. One other note about him. He never preached an English sermon in his life, only German!¹¹ English services were first held at St. John's on November 16, 1901, by his successor, Rev. J.R. Baumann.¹² Some of the relatives theorized that "since St. John's stopped having German services, Ehrenfried had no place to go but the German Methodist-Episcopal Church." This was not the case.

In his obituary, it is stated that Ehrenfried Seebach "attended services regularly" at the German Methodist-Episcopal Church. It is my guess that shortly after they moved to Red Wing, he began going to church there. He certainly was a devout person and would hardly have starved himself spiritually from 1876-1890. However, perhaps he waited, out of respect to his wife ("a staunch Lutheran"), and did not join the German Methodist-Episcopal Church while she lived. After his wife died, he had decided to spend the rest of his days in Southern California. After staying there for a short time, he returned, in 1888 or 1889. While in Red Wing, I contacted the one remaining Methodist Church there. They had the records of the old German Methodist-Episcopal Church. "Ehrenfried Seebach" appears on the "Probationer's Record" as having been received into probationary membership on November 2, 1890, and as "received into

full membership” on January 31, 1892, Under “remarks” his death date is recorded. So, officially, he was a member of the German Methodist-Episcopal Church for the last six years of his life. Officiating at his funeral was Rev. J. Durbann, pastor of the German Methodist-Episcopal Church, Rev. W.E. Barker, pastor of the First -Baptist Church, and Rev. J.H. Sammis, pastor of the Presbyterian Church.¹³ However, he was laid to rest in St. John’s Church Cemetery, next to his wife.

So, that is the answer to my original first question of why he wasn’t buried by a German Lutheran Church. Simply, because he was not a member of one. Also, I’m convinced that Seebach never did attempt to join the Lutheran Church in Minnesota. The reason for this most likely was not because of anything personal between him and Bender. But really this is only a partial answer to my question. Now I wondered more than ever why he didn’t remain a Lutheran. The answer to this question must lie hidden in Oak Creek.

Therefore, I began the second leg of my journey in the quest for the historical Seebach! I tried to find out all I could about his life in Oak Creek. After arriving in Oak Creek from Germany in 1845 and getting settled on his farm, he consented to conduct reading services at St. John’s Lutheran Church on the corner of Oakwood Road and Highway 41, or 27th Street (old Kilbourne Road). He also instructed the children here. He did this because at the time their recently organized and built church was without the services of a pastor. He seems to have conscientiously and faithfully carried out these services until Pastor Weinmann arrived some time in 1847, It was a letter of Seebach’s that reached the Langenberg Mission Society, which in turn designated Pastor Schmidt of New York to send one of the three missionaries that were on their way to New York, to the Oak Creek area south of Milwaukee. The one chosen was Weinmann.

From one of my correspondences, I received a rather enlightening piece of information of how Seebach reacted to the new Pastor Weinmann. This quote is from a letter from Pastor Norman F. Seebach, who is a grandson of Ehrenfried Seebach:

My father (his father was John, the youngest son of Ehrenfried) told me that after the congregation received a pastor in response to the letter that grandfather wrote to the mission committee in Wesel, grandfather considered himself a rather important cog in that congregation. After the first Lord’s Supper service that the congregation had with their new pastor (Weinmann) grandfather told the pastor that he did everything all right except one thing. When the pastor asked what that was, grandfather told him that he did not break the bread as the Savior did when He instituted the sacrament. The pastor assured him that next time he would break the bread for him. So the next service with Holy Communion, the pastor broke the wafer before handing one half of it to grandfather. The other communicants all received a whole wafer. After that service, grandfather spoke to the pastor again and told him that he would also like a whole wafer at future in which the congregation would receive the Sacrament of the Altar.¹⁴

I think this anecdote tells us something about the man personally and about his religious views. Some might call this a drastic and rash judgment, but I think he was a proud, insistent person. I’ll say more later about his religious views.

Pastor Weinmann stayed at St. John’s for two and one-half years, until 1849. He took a call then to First Ev. Lutheran in Racine. His successor was a Pastor Gustav Rausch. He was a real rationalistic rascal, and after serving there for approximately two years, the congregation

split on doctrinal matters. In 1851, Pastor Rausch and his followers, about half of the Oakwood congregation, left St. John's and founded and built the chapel known as The First Christian Free Church of the Towns of Franklin and Oak Creek (The Free-Thinkers). The location of this chapel was also known as Paynesville (in honor of Thomas Paine, I was told). Rausch did not stay there long, for that congregation soon dismissed him. Later he went to Iowa as a Methodist minister.¹⁵ Seebach and his family were one of the 16 families that remained at St. John's. In 1852 Pastor Conrad Koester came to St. John's, and faithfully served there until his death in 1864.. He soon built his congregation back up, and also founded and served St. John's of Root Creek (S. 68th and West Forest Home) , St. Paul's of Franklin (S. 51st and Rawson Ave.), and Trinity of Caledonia (W. Nicholson Rd.).

Through Pastor Harold Wicke, who served as vacancy pastor last year at St. John's, I had access to the communion records and membership records of that early period. The communion records show "Ehrnfried Seebach und frau" last attending communion together in 1853. In 1854 and thereafter his name no longer appears on the communion records. In 1854, his sons Heinrich and Ehrenfried "jun." appear. On the membership records the members appear by families. Ehrenfried Seebach is listed and then on the opposite page, under the third column headed "*Austritt aus der Gemeinde*" ("withdrawal from the congregation"), the comment is made, "*trat aus, die Familie blieb,*" "he stepped out, the family remained." Under a fifth column, headed "*Sonstige Bemerkungen,*" "Further Remarks," the comment is made "*ist ausgeschlossen,*" "was put out, excommunicated." No reason is given. Pastor Wicke made a study of all the minutes of the congregation, as he wanted to find out the reason why, when he was getting the article on Seebach ready for The Northwestern Lutheran, but he could find no other mention of Seebach or of this incident. So somewhere in 1853-1854, the break between Ehrenfried Seebach and St. John's came. Was Pastor Koester just too conservative theologically for Seebach's taste? Or was it just a personal clash between the two, Koester in effect telling Seebach, "you are not going to tell me as pastor what to do!?" I tend to lean more towards the former.

Ehrenfried might have been characteristically a "proud, stubborn old German," yet theologically he was not a Lutheran. As Peter Berg wrote two years ago in his study of his relatives "Although his grandfather was Lutheran, it appears that Ehrenfried was raised in the Reformed Church."¹⁶ Since he was "put out," I believe it must have been over some doctrinal disagreement arising from his Reformed background.

I really tried to find out the reason why he left or "was put out." But I just couldn't find it. The next question I tried to answer was: What did Ehrenfried Seebach do for the next seventeen years of his life (1854-1871), to satisfy his soul's hunger? I checked out all of our other Lutheran churches in that area and all of them were negative. Ehrenfried Seebach did not join them. That is understandable since Pastor Koester served all three of them. After much digging around, I found that there was one other German church in the area, the "*Evangelische Gemeinschaft*" or Evangelical Association. This was a German Reformed Church serving German immigrants of this area. The original location of it was about four miles north of St. John's and even less from the Seebach farm. The direct descendant of this church today is the Oak Creek Community Methodist Church, which is about one mile south of the original structure. The only remnant of the "*Evangelische Gemeinschaft*" today is the church cemetery. The congregation was begun in 1840, but they did not have their first building until 1858, when Salem Evangelical was built.¹⁷ Being that this church was German, and only around three miles from the Seebach farm, I thought I was really onto something. But I was disappointed to find that the second structure which Salem built, which contained all the old records, burned to the ground in the early 1950's.

The one elderly woman I talked to, who is a member of the present church and knows much of Salem's history, could not recall ever having heard the name Seebach. Perhaps Ehrenfried never went there; perhaps he did.

To my way of thinking, Ehrenfried Seebach was definitely a Christian. He was concerned that his children receive a Christian education and continue in the Christian faith. I think that was also his concern for himself and all his fellowmen. He was never out to put down the Lutheran Church. Whatever happened in that mysterious time period of 1853-1854 still lies hidden in St. John's cemetery in Red Wing and in the forgotten past of Oak Creek. So how do I finally answer the question "Why didn't the 'founding' layman of the Wisconsin Synod remain in the Lutheran Church all of his days?" I believe he found St. John's to be too doctrinal and conservative for him, and this precipitated some sort of doctrinal clash with Pastor Koester, and he consequently was asked to leave. He was by nature reformed, and that's where he ended up. To me this must be the reason he was put out, because he could have joined the German Lutheran Church in Goodhue and Red Wing where no personality clashes existed, where he could have started afresh, if he still really held to Lutheran beliefs. After Seebach was put out from St. John's Oak Creek, it could have followed that Seebach was then soured on any future dealings with the Lutheran Church. To him Methodists were just as Christian as Lutherans; to him denominations meant little. But the Lutheran Church was to be avoided. He was satisfied being a Methodist. He didn't remain a Lutheran all his days because theologically he wasn't one; he was Reformed.

¹ *Golden Jubilee History of the Minnesota District, 1918-1968*. Copyright: 1969 by The Minnesota District of the WELS, Minneapolis, Ad Art Advertising Co.

² "Official Records of Ministrations of St. John's Lutheran Church, Red Wing, Minnesota," Book I.

³ *Red Wing Daily Republican*, Wed., Feb. 16, 1887.

⁴ Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, *History of Goodhue County, Minnesota*. (Chicago: H.C. Cooper, Jr. and Co., 1909), pp. 605-612.

⁵ John Philipp Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*. (St. Cloud: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970), p. 128.

⁶ Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, p. 605.

⁷ *Red Wing Daily Republican*, Mon., May 31, 1897..

⁸ *Ibid.*, Tuesday, June 1, 1897.

⁹ Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, p. 425.

¹⁰ Adolph C. Bender, Member of St. John's, Red Wing.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Franklyn Curtiss-Wedge, pp. 381-2.

¹³ *Red Wing Argus* of Tuesday, May 6, 1897.

¹⁴ Letter from Pastor N.F. Seebach of Odebolt, Iowa (Missouri Synod).

¹⁵ St. John's Eb. Lutheran Church, booklet commemorating their 125th anniversary in 1968. Compiled by Pastor Molkentin. Printed by Le Mann and Associates of Skokie, IL pp. 4-5.

¹⁶ Peter Berg's Church History Paper of two years ago, p. 1. Title unknown.

¹⁷ Mrs. Alfred J. Meyer, *History of the Oak Creek Township* (Oak Creek: herself), p. 13.