

The Story Of God's Grace in Northern Wisconsin, 1850-1917

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Introduction

Muelhauser, Fachtmann, Goldammer, Bading, Koehler: These were some of the names that came to my mind when beginning this history of outreach in northern Wisconsin.

Loren Schaller: That name came to mind as well. Pastor Schaller was principle of Manitowoc Lutheran High School when yours truly attended there. Upon assignment of this paper, I thought of his freshman history class. The notes from his class are yellowed by the 30 years since he distributed them. But one point made in that class is as fresh as when he first raised it. He said, "The study of history is the study of *History*."

History is always *God's* story. It is the story of God carrying out the mission objectives he outlined through his Son Jesus Christ. "Therefore go," he said, "and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

History is *God's* story. It is the story of God's grace rippling out beyond the walls of Jerusalem, lapping at the boundaries of Judea, cresting into Samaria, and then surging down the shipping lanes and Roman roads traveled by Barnabas, Paul, Silas, John Mark, and so many others. History is the story of God's grace stretching down the corridors of time to Nicea, Chalcedon, Wittenberg, Granville. It is the story of God's grace at work in the German Missionary Societies of the 1800s – Basel, St. Chrischona, and the Langenberger Verein at Barmen – societies that trained and sent the missionaries so desperately needed by the "Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin" in its first two decades.¹ It is the story of God's grace that moved the earliest missionaries of our synod to walk on foot or ride ox cart, horse or train, as they served five, ten, or more preaching stations. They worshiped in log cabins and slept under the stars, all because they were consumed by the mission vision our Savior outlined at the time of his ascension. "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Not that the pastors were the only ones making sacrifices for the gospel. God's people, the laity, sacrificed as well. Early settlers were mostly poor. Living conditions were harsh. Nevertheless, they rejoiced to gather around Word and sacrament, and they sacrificed a lot to do it. At times, "men carried their wives on their backs through the marshes...to attend worship."² They came by boat up the rivers or on foot through the dense forests. They readily sacrificed the hours it would take to get to church and home again. When needed they opened their homes for the worship service. In a few cases this arrangement lasted for years, even decades! But usually, as soon as possible, God's people sacrificed so that their first church buildings could sprout from the soil where once virgin timber had stood. One-room log or stone churches with simple wooden spires might seem humble by 21st Century standards, but they represented the sweat, the blood, and the love of those first pioneers.

What follows are a few stories of those heroic efforts, a few stories of grace from *History*.

The Story of *Der Reiseprediger*

Last year a brother in the ministry quipped, “The WELS hasn’t done any mission work yet. We’re just getting started.” Now, I know he was being facetious in part. And in part, he was merely underscoring the tremendous mission opportunities yet before us. Nevertheless, the comment struck a nerve. I suspect it did so because a similar charge has often been leveled at the WELS – that we aren’t much for mission work. Some would argue we didn’t do any mission work until forced to – by the dissolution of the Synodical Conference and our painful fellowship break with the LC–MS. But I don’t buy that, not for a moment.

Instead, I agree wholeheartedly with Professor Fredrich who offers these comments about the earliest years of the Wisconsin Synod:

The names of the synod’s pastors on the list also point to heroic efforts in evangelism and home missions. Actually, all pastors were pastors and missionaries. They would begin work at their assigned post but in short order would be establishing preaching stations in the surrounding area... Evangelism efforts did not begin in the Wisconsin Synod two decades or so ago. They built the Wisconsin Synod in its early years.³

Heroic efforts: I couldn’t coin a better term to describe the work done by the earliest missionaries of the Wisconsin Synod in the area that would, decades later, become our Northern Wisconsin District. Since moving to the Copper Country in the fall of 1996, I have consistently joked our District Mission Board about the necessity of me having a synodically-provided 4x4 to handle the rigors of Keweenaw Peninsula winters. I don’t seem to be getting too far. But then, I doubt that men like Boding, Goldammer or Fachtmann would be overly sympathetic to my pleas either, especially if they had sampled the modern delights of a horseless carriage complete with automatic transmission, cruise control, power windows, power seats, tilt steering wheel, heat/air-conditioning and AM/FM/stereo/cassette! Travel for the first missionaries in our area was arduous. The Chicago and Northwestern railroad extended from Chicago to Green Bay.⁴ However, timely connections were sometimes hard to come by. Then, too, there was the expense. Besides the railroad, other travel options were limited. There were few roads, and they were primitive. Perhaps treacherous would be a more accurate term, especially during the spring thaw.

And as for a horse, or horse and buggy? Such amenities were rare in the earliest years of our synod. If a horse were available, what pastor could afford to buy it? Even borrowing one could prove harrowing, as the following anecdote by Koehler proves.

A farmer of a country congregation offered the use of the horse he owned to the pastor for his Sunday afternoon trip to the subcharge. There was trouble at once when he tried to mount; the farmer had to hold the unruly equine by main strength at the head. Then the journey proceeded as far as the farmer’s home, where the horse turned right into the yard and barn, oblivious to all the aids by which the rider, not a practiced horseman at that, tried to communicate his contrary will to the mount. The farmer had not as yet caught up with them, so the pastor after all had to continue on foot, a doubly arduous task now because of the straining of his

leg muscles by the unwonted ride. The following Sunday the farmer staid [sic] close behind with a stick and rendered effective, if not scientific, aid in making the horse pass the home farmyard.⁵

Carl Frederich Goldammer

Despite these hurdles, gospel outreach continued, and congregations in the northern Wisconsin area mushroomed. They did so because of the heroic efforts of pastors like Carl Frederich Goldammer. He arrived in Milwaukee in 1850 to join the founding fathers of the Wisconsin Synod. Once licensed to preach, he was sent to Newtonburg, Manitowoc County, to serve. In 1851 he was ordained and admitted into synodical membership. However, Goldammer's decision to go to Newtonburg wasn't quite as cut and dried as these bare facts would seem to indicate. In a letter written from Milwaukee, Goldammer explains how the Lord led him to Newtonburg.

Until now I have traveled about the country, preached here and there and could not decide in a hurry what I should choose. Experienced much which was disheartening, was forced to leave large fields where either shoemakers or sectarians are gaining entrance. Oh, it is a pity that no one cares about our German people. Last Monday I accepted a call to Manitowoc. They have organized a Lutheran congregation because of me. Because I couldn't reach a decision, I sent two letters, one of acceptance, the other refusing. They, however, didn't want to take the chance, but sent me another letter, in which they begged me more fervently than before to come to them. In the name of God I have decided to accept...⁶

Once in Newtonburg, Pastor Goldammer set about the work of proclaiming the gospel. However, he wasn't satisfied to serve only the twenty or so families who became St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church (1851). Instead this "father of home missions" reached out to the west into the town of Liberty. There he founded Trinity Lutheran Church in 1853. His mission zeal also carried him on foot the five miles to the village of Manitowoc. Here he served a small group of settlers in worship services held on alternate Tuesday evenings. After a year of this, Pastor Goldammer was able to purchase a horse, an Indian pony. Later a little buggy was added. Now Goldammer could conduct services in Manitowoc every Sunday evening.

In 1855, Pastor Goldammer began to serve Manitowoc as its first resident pastor. The "German Evangelical Lutheran Church," was incorporated on April 9, 1855, and the church flourished. A church building was completed in the spring of 1856. Every Sunday worship services and the teaching of a school (held in the front hall of the church) were more than enough to keep this faithful shepherd busy.

At least they should have been. However, Goldammer's heroic efforts for the gospel kept pushing him farther and farther into the dense Wisconsin woods. He ventured north to Shoto, where he conducted worship services as early as 1855. From there he headed west to Reedsville, where nine heads of families gathered in the home of Martin Braats for the first public worship service held on December 8, 1857. For two years the members worshiped in the parlors of private homes. Rough-hewn boards served as benches. And during all this time, Pastor Goldammer followed the Indian trail out from Manitowoc to serve them. With his Indian pony and little buggy, the trip took three to four hours!

Still Pastor Goldammer wasn't finished. In a public school on Cemetery Hill, he conducted the first worship service in Mishicot (St. Peter, organized May 20, 1861). As the timber industry pushed back the dense forests, Goldammer also pressed on. He went as far as Two Creeks, twelve miles north of Two Rivers.

Pastors Bading and Koehler

Heroic efforts: these also marked the labors of Pastors Bading and Koehler when they undertook an early (1856) mission exploration trip from West Bend to Algoma. Their travels took them through New Holstein and on to Calumet, where they met "four Latin farmers, men who in Germany had held high professional rank: a university teacher from Kiel, a gymnasium teacher; a jurist, and a former councillor of jurisprudence."⁷ After visiting with these men a few days, Bading and Koehler were ready to resume their journey. The hosts insisted on providing transportation: an oxcart. I should like to have seen the two missionaries on that oxcart, for the wheels were slabs of solid wood cut from trees, and that particular model oxcart boasted no Monroematic shock absorbers. Then, too, the engine's horsepower was provided by that ox, tail swishing side to side, flies abuzzing, the clop-clop of the hooves interrupted by an occasional plop. And all of this on roads described as "corduroy," made of tree trunks laid in the marshy grass. At the earliest opportunity, Bading and Koehler were only too eager to send the cart back with the farmers and continue on foot.

Thence the two hoofed it all the way to Manitowoc where they visited Pastor Goldammer. From there they went on to Two Rivers, then to Two Creeks, Kewaunee, and Algoma. Because of this successful mission exploration trip, Pastor Goldammer's mission field expanded north of Two Rivers.

Missionary trips like this one explained why, since 1851, Muelhauser and others in the Wisconsin Synod had been praying and pushing for a *Reisepredigt* program. Those prayers were answered, at least for a brief time, in the person of Ernst August Gottlieb Fachtmann.

Ernst August Gottlieb Fachtmann

Fachtmann, a university graduate, came to this country in 1857. His credentials were impressive enough that President Muelhauser assigned him to begin work with two congregations, Richfield and Town Polk, northwest of Milwaukee. However, Fachtmann seems to have had a *Wanderlust* akin to that of the Apostle Paul. No sooner was he settled in at his new calling, than he asked permission to go on an extensive mission tour.

He headed on foot for Port Washington. He had only the pack on his back, a few religious books, and communion ware. And money? We'll get to that in a moment.

Traveling through Port Washington, Fachtmann came to Sheboygan and the congregation of Pastor F. Steinbach (LC-MS). Fachtmann must have been impressed by his tour of the bustling boomtown by the lake and of Steinbach's congregation and school of two teachers and 150 children.⁸ From there Fachtmann also visited a parish in Plymouth.

But then he was on the road again. He headed back to the Calumet Village and those Latin farmers with their tree-trunk-wheeled oxcarts. Attempts at beginning a confessional congregation there had floundered, yet the group that remained wanted to join the Wisconsin Synod. Fachtmann, speaking for the synod, refused. His reason? They refused to accept the Augsburg Confession without reservation.

So Fachtmann journeyed on. But why don't we allow this early missionary to describe his journey in his own words? In a letter sent from Oshkosh, dated October 2, 1857, Fachtmann reported to President Muelhauser.

From Calumet I went to Chilton where I had to remain an extra day in order to set up an evening service. Chilton is a village and a county seat. No German preacher has yet been there. I baptized six children, and had a full schoolhouse; there are about fifteen to twenty Evangelical families there, among them a homeopathic physician, with whom Yankees and Catholics had met in the evening. I was begged to come again from time to time.

I next went to New Holstein, to the declared German town. There are about 150 Lutheran families there, about 1,000 Germans, who represent Germany in customs and culture in such a manner that one believes himself to be in the fatherland. Madam Ostenfeld, recommended by Goldammer, received me very hospitably. One evening I attended a meeting in which an Evangelical preacher was called; in the meeting, a Catholic, Mr. Hachet (Hachez), elected by the Protestants to the council of the Lutheran congregation, was the president and showed the greatest interest for the church. On the following evening I preached to a large gathering. I was thanked most sincerely and the wish was expressed that I might take over the congregation, which I of course had to decline; but I did promise to help them with might and main wherever and how much I could. On the following Sunday I preached twice in Fond du Lac, had a good crowd in the afternoon, went to Red River, held on Tuesday of last week two communion services in which 60-70 persons partook of communion, traveled to New London on Thursday, held a communion service there in which 40-50 persons partook of communion. In the evening I confirmed a boy after an examination and on Friday at Wolf River a communion service in the house of a certain Krehnke, a Pommeranian, and am now on the way to Menasha and Neenah, where I will preach tomorrow and conduct a holy communion service, then at mid-week to Hardenville (Hortonville) and after that up the Fox River to Berlin.

Up till now I have baptized 63 children and I think I preached about 30 times in the months of August and September...

The beautiful weather has very much lightened my heavy schedule, and the Lord has sent his blessings upon me, an unworthy servant, beyond expectation.

This again is the result: Preachers, preachers, preachers. May the Lord of the church show mercy in due time also in this regard...

Your humble brother

G. Fachtmann⁹

Quite a lot of mission work accomplished by a man who received no synodical subsidy, no salary, and no official support from the Wisconsin Synod (not even a 4-wheel drive ox cart)! How could this be? Remember, this first missionary journey of Pastor Fachtmann was his own idea. He was not officially a *Reiseprediger* of the Wisconsin Synod at this time. Well, that's an

understatement. He wasn't even a member of the WELS. He would not be accepted into synodical membership until the synod convention of 1858! So how did this young bachelor support himself? In another report to President Muehlhauser, this one dated September 1, 1858, the missionary shares with us his secret.

My pocketbook is like the barrel of meal of the widow of Sarepta, always low, but it never gives out. It's the baptismal fees which keep me on my feet, although one-third of the parents of these baptized children are too poor to pay. I have always just enough to keep going.¹⁰

Fachtmann's work was enthusiastically received by Muehlhauser and the Wisconsin Synod. In the 1858 synod convention, the last day of May, Fachtmann was admitted into the synod. The following day, Muehlhauser asked him to make an oral report about his missionary journeys. The day after that, the synod endorsed Fachtmann's work and called him to continue as the part-time "missionary-at-large" of the Wisconsin Synod. Fachtmann made the most of the opportunity.

In an August 9, 1858, letter, Fachtmann could already report that he had been on the road for fourteen days. In that brief time, he had visited Horicon, Waupun (the penitentiary), and Oshkosh. Also, he had had contact with a congregation to be established in Fond du Lac. Noting that some fifty members would be present for the organizational meeting, he requested twenty copies of the synod-approved congregation constitution for the group to study.¹¹ Those copies weren't wasted. Under the leadership of two prominent families, the Findeisens and Grommes, a meeting was held with Fachtmann. The date was August 15, 1858. The result? St. Peter's Lutheran Church. In the same meeting, the congregation resolved to join the Wisconsin Synod.

In a subsequent letter, Fachtmann mentioned that he had visited congregations in Menasha, Appleton, and Calumet. Tireless, he also managed to visit Green Bay, where he found a thriving Lutheran parish, a faithful pastor and an assistant, as well as a school. So he went on to Algoma (Ahnapee), where Fachtmann's early efforts resulted in the founding of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, December 10, 1862.¹²

But it was to Fond du lac where Fachtmann returned yet again. This time he came at the call of the newly-founded congregation, St. Peter's. He took the call with the understanding that he could continue his missionary travels. Continue them he did. Less than a year later, Ernst August Gottlieb Fachtmann accepted a call to La Crosse and a new mission field. There he continued his whirlwind missionary activities, this time on behalf of the fledgling Minnesota Synod. God's grace continued to go out through him. But that story belongs to another district.

Eduard Moldenke

The *Reiseprediger* program continued in the WELS. Finding a suitable man, however, and funding him remained a problem. It must have been a joy for the synod in convention, 1862, to learn that two German mission societies, Langenberger and Berlin, each pledged \$100 per year to help implement a full-time *Reiseprediger* position. More than that, the societies already had a candidate to send, Pastor Eduard Moldenke. Pastor Moldenke operated, for the most part, in what is today the Western Wisconsin District. Nevertheless, his second "Travel Report," filed from Fort Atkinson on August 27, 1862, shows a definite Northern Wisconsin District connection. Moldenke reports...

Monday, July 28, I went to Manitowoc on a rather bad road, and also made a side trip to Mishicot and Saxonburg. The people were at haymaking and were quite discourteous to me. I couldn't preach there, but did say that I wanted to return after the harvest when they would have more time. I arrived late that evening at Brother Koehler's in Manitowoc. Tuesday I went via Two Rivers and Two Creeks to Sandy Bay where I arranged a service for Friday. I then went three miles farther, but the endless tree-limb bridges, the roots and stumps affected my horse and wagon in such a manner that I had to leave them behind in Forest Hill with a German hotel keeper. On the next day I continued my trip on foot...to Kewaunee, a small place on Lake Michigan. Ten Lutheran families and a Lutheran woman live there. I invited all of them, preached that evening, baptized a child and established a Lutheran congregation. Now the area Methodist preacher has no hold there anymore. About thirty Lutheran families should be living in the area.¹³

One year later, Moldenke received the call to become the instructor for the new seminary-college at Watertown. Therefore we won't pursue his history further. (His reports, however, are too colorful to ignore altogether!)¹⁴

Although it seems that the fledgling synod's determination to begin a worker-training school at Watertown as well as a more steady supply of pastors derailed the *Reiseprediger* program for a while, another man was soon to enter the scene. His name? Pastor G. Thiele of Ripon.

G. Thiele

Although Thiele's tenure as *Reiseprediger* was very brief (in January, 1867 he accepted a call to Racine), he visited many places which are now a part of the Northern Wisconsin District. Excerpts from a letter sent to President Streissguth illustrate Thiele's zeal for the work.

After I returned yesterday, God be praised, safe and sound from my first tour as *Reiseprediger*, I take it upon myself to give you a brief report after which you may judge how well I followed your instructions to be diligent. The length of time of my absence was exactly six weeks; the scene of my activity was the northeastern part of the state; only once did I cross the border itself and go into Michigan staying in this neighboring state only one half day. I traveled in all 700 miles, of which 270 were on foot. I preached twenty times on this trip, in several places twice, all in all at twelve or thirteen different places. I distributed holy communion at two places, I baptized 24 children. I visited about 100 families in their homes. I gathered about fifty subscriptions for the *Gemeindeblatt*. Thus far with my statistics... The report about Ahnapee (Algoma) I gave to you in part from Kewaunee, and also about Kewaunee itself. As a result of the letter received from our brother secretary, the people in Kewaunee turned to Pastor Kleinert to try to get him to become their pastor...

From Kewaunee I made a trip to Two Creeks... About twenty-four families could form a congregation, the center of which would be Two Creeks. Most of these are Christians who hold God's word dear, and who are also ready to make sacrifices.

Farther into the country in Town Mishicot there are about as many families who are at building a church and organizing a congregation. It would be worth the trouble to place a pastor there; but because of the lack of pastors the people in Two Creeks itself are satisfied at least temporarily with periodic services on the part of the pastor from Kewaunee... – On the way to Green Bay from the congregation in Town Montpelier I came upon a Schleswig settlement which for quite a while was a preaching station of a Buffalo Synod pastor, who is supposed to have drunk himself to death. – From Green Bay I took an exploratory trip along the west coast of the bay. The result is that a preacher for this territory is of the utmost necessity.

Peshtigo has a Mecklenburger settlement of good circumstances where a pastor could work with blessed results. Oconto would form a hoped for joint congregation in that also here there is a group that longs for the fine services to the Lord. In Menominee on the other hand, a place which lies half in Wisconsin and half in Michigan, there are indeed also some evangelical families but they have all sunk into unbelief.

Through a letter...I came to town Woodville, ten miles east of Appleton. Here there is quite a large group of Germans among whom the Methodists have begun to peddle their wares...I counseled the people to turn to Pastor Kluge as the Lutheran pastor who lives closest to them. In Appleton...there is much unbelief and indifference, but along with that there is a small group of God's people that could be taken care of from Neenah, and which according to my humble opinion is a place that should be first in line for the placement of a shepherd. The people are worthy of this, that we show them the consideration: a fine congregation, whose church is near completion. Pastor Jaekel, whom I visited for two days, wishes the early takeover by Neenah as being urgent for him, so that he could give up a part of his very large mission area. To serve nine or ten congregations exceeds the strength of a man. Therefore five men are necessary for the small area which I visited on this journey...

I do not know how filled the treasury is from which the *Reiseprediger* receives his salary, but should there be a sufficient amount of money on hand in order to pay my salary for October, I ask respectfully for the sending of the same...

G. Thiele¹⁵

A few comments about Thiele's letter are in order. The missionary's untiring zeal for his work and his selflessness in that work are evident in almost every sentence. Note, too, the optimistic tone in this report. We hear much about opportunities for kingdom work. We hear little about terrible traveling conditions, difficult people, or disappointments. Finally, consider this. After all Thiele had done, after all the places he had visited and the people he had served, this man rather humbly asks whether his salary check for the month past could be sent! Incredible. Surely God's grace went out through this faithful servant.

When Thiele accepted a call to Racine (it was deemed an emergency), his call as *Reiseprediger* was terminated. This also brought to a close the earliest efforts of the

Reiseprediger in the Wisconsin Synod, because the position was unable to be filled by another man.

Did the program bring blessings to the synod? Certainly President Bading thought so. In 1863, he offered this report to the synod in convention:

The *Reisepredigt* program of the past synodical year has proved itself effective and filled with blessings. The following stations were served by the *Reiseprediger*: Germany, Fort Atkinson, Whitewater, Waupun – city and prison – Almond, Stevens Point, Wausau, Town of Stettin, Town of Berlin, Green Bay, Kewaunee, town of Canton, Forestville, Sandy Bay, Ahnapee, Portage City, Lewistown, Caledonia and the vacant synod congregations in Theresa, Lomira, Fond du Lac, Forest and Eldorado. We were able to place men in most of the congregations during the course of the year; the others are still awaiting preachers, but are from time to time served by the *Reiseprediger*.

During the course of spring, journeys were also made in Minnesota and four stations were visited. Furthermore fourteen new stations were established in western Wisconsin, so that altogether twenty-two stations in Wisconsin and Minnesota are being served by the *Reiseprediger*. Reading services and Sunday schools were inaugurated by him wherever possible. Since most of the stations are so situated that several of them could be served by one preacher, and since it has been indicated that new preachers will be sent to us, we certainly hope that most of these positions can be filled during the course of this summer.¹⁶

Some sixty congregations joined the Wisconsin Synod during this period of time! More than a few were numbered among the stops made by Fachtmann, Moldenke, and Thiele. God's grace surely went out through the efforts of the *Reiseprediger*! But then, how could it be otherwise? God made a promise: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth, and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth; It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10-11). Baptisms performed by E. Fachtmann did more than keep a coating of coin in his otherwise empty purse. Those baptisms worked the miracle of God's grace in the hearts of tiny infants, and the angels in heaven rejoiced over each lost soul brought to repentance! Sermons delivered and classes taught changed minds and hearts for time and eternity.

With the synod's efforts in beginning a worker training school in Watertown, the synod-wide *Reiseprediger* program fell to the wayside. But our forefather's zeal for mission work did not wane. By 1878, each conference in the synod was requested to commission one pastor to serve as a part-time *Reiseprediger*.¹⁷ And in 1879, the synod elected its first superintendent of missions. His name? E. Mayerhoff. He served until 1894, when he had to resign for health reasons. The scope of his calling appears to have mirrored that of our modern-day Mission Counselor.

With a burgeoning population and larger congregations, the part-time *Reiseprediger* program proved inadequate. Therefore a special synod missionary was to be appointed again. Pastor Thiele resumed his duties in October, 1880. He labored for three years before he resigned to the strenuousness of the work. Nevertheless, in that brief time Thiele had established twelve preaching stations in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, worked in the Marshfield area, in

Marathon county, Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls. Following Thiele's resignation, another man entered the field as *Reiseprediger*. His name? Pastor P. Monhardt.

P. Monhardt

Perhaps it bears testimony to the rugged individualism of the Wisconsin Synod, that even though Mission Superintendent Mayerhoff did not favor mission work to the north (beyond the limits of German expansion), Mayerhoff's *Reiseprediger*, P. Monhardt, went north anyway. In a circle radiating out from Escanaba, Monhardt served seventeen stations! As reported in the 1884 *Synodical Proceedings*, Monhardt logged 3,012 miles by train, 508 miles by coach and wagon, 175 miles on foot, and 102 miles on boat. And much of that travel was (to borrow a recurring word from Eduard Moldenke's reports) "terrible."

In the mid-1880s, the Escanaba area of the Upper Peninsula was still covered by acre after acre of imposing, dense virgin forests. Roads were few and poor. Getting lost was only too easy, with the result that the weary traveler would have to pick his way through downed trees while fighting off a continuous swarm of starved mosquitoes. Nevertheless, in summer Monhardt normally made his way on foot with nothing but a backpack to hold his earthly possessions. In winter, he traveled by horse and sleigh, and with every trip he risked his life. Winter weather conditions could be so severe, that on the trip from Escanaba to Fayette it was common for travelers to have to be carried to a halfway house. Why? They practically froze to death. On top of weather-related complications, there were those barren, isolated wilderness roads. Indians with bow and arrow still roamed the woods. And there were wolves. The story is told of a woodchopper "reduced to scattered bones just a quarter of a mile from his camp, and a parishioner [who] spent the night in a tree surrounded by twenty wolves."¹⁸ Because of the dangers, sleigh drivers typically were armed.

Of course, there were alternative modes of travel. One could take the train, but that didn't mean an uneventful trip. Trains often derailed because of the deep snows. One time everyone was forced to climb on the engine and complete the rest of the journey that way! What a sight that must have been: passengers hanging from rails and perched on walkways. Nevertheless, everyone made it to the station. Only those who had been forced to sit on the cowcatcher were injured. They had frostbite on the ears. I'm surprised the frostbite hadn't progressed lower. It was, after all, 44 below.

Despite the difficulties and the dangers, the work of the *Reiseprediger* continued, and it continued to be managed ably – first by Mayerhoff, then in 1884, by Reinhold Pieper of Manitowoc who became superintendent of missions. Mayerhoff was elected treasurer of church extension work. Mission work multiplied. In 1886 five new mission fields were opened. One of them covered the territory between Lake Winnebago and Lake Michigan. In the period from 1889 to 1895 mission expansion had reached Eagle River, Arbor Vita, Woodruff, Ontonagon and Marquette in the Upper Peninsula, Manistique, and Door County.¹⁹

During this time, mission administration structure also changed. The change was occasioned by the advent of the federation in 1892. *Wisconsin Synod Proceedings* from that year state:

Home missions is at present to be the assignment of the district synods but is to be under the supervision of the federation, which will allocate men and monies for this purpose.²⁰

The 1892 constitution added these details:

All missions are under the direction and supervision of the federation, which is to elect for this purpose a superintendent and which is to allocate men and monies available for this purpose. Home missions is at the present the assignment of the district synods. World missions on the other hand should be the province of the federation.²¹

By 1895, the “Superintendent of Church Extension,” Pastor A. Bendler, was given four assistants: A. Hoyer, Eickmann, Dornfeld, Spiering. By the grace of God the work of outreach had outstripped the capabilities of one man. A General Mission Board had been born. By the early 1900s a study committee recommended that the office of mission...

1) Superintendent be combined with the Praesidium. 2) That the incumbent of these two offices have no congregation of his own but only these offices; he is to be in the service of and salaried by Synod in these offices. 3) His office is to be the clearing-house for the supply and service of the self-supporting congregations as well as the mission fells; that is to say, the district presidents are to get in touch and consult with him in the matter of such supply and service...²²

Nothing would come of this proposal for over fifty years.

Though Wisconsin Synod preaching stations and new congregations were beginning to dot the Midwest countryside, there were limits to the mission vision of Mayerhoff and the missionaries of that era. Mayerhoff quoted Matthew 10:5-6 as rationale for limiting precious manpower and mission money to gathering the scattered sheep of the German people. For the most part, the loggers and the miners of the Upper Peninsula, mostly Scandinavians, Finns, Poles, Bohemians, French, French Canadian, and Cornish, would have to wait.

Nevertheless, these early years marked remarkable growth for the Wisconsin Synod. Whereas the synod boasted only 64 pastors in 1875, there were 150 by 1891. The number of congregations grew from 119 to 252. The number of those partaking of holy communion grew from 28,345 to 74,754.²³ By 1894, the synod could list five congregations over 2000 communicants and eighteen between 1000-1999!²⁴ God’s grace was working miracles. *History* was being written.

Other Mission Fields go North

Logging and mining brought settlers deep into the north woods of Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Roads were few, rutted, muddy, and treacherous. But the railroads came as well – the Milwaukee, the Lake Shore, and Western Railroads. However, the railroads didn’t bring Wisconsin Synod missionaries – not at first. Because of Mayerhoff’s emphasis on outreach to the German household of faith, the synod changed the direction of its mission thrust for a time. Evangelism efforts were concentrated in the cities – Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, Waukegan and south. Bible support for this “city evangelism” was found in the mission efforts of the apostle Paul. For didn’t Paul concentrate on the large cities of Asia Minor and Greece for strategic reasons? Whether we agree with this mission rationale or not, it has cycled in and out of vogue in the WELS ever since.

Nevertheless the pull to the north came. The roots of agriculture began to be planted in an area once dominated by virgin forests. With agriculture came the Germans. And so also came the Wisconsin Synod missionaries – Mayerhoff, Koehler, Haese, Jaeger, Eberhardt, and others. Of this group, Christian Eberhardt of the old Michigan Synod was by far the earliest to make a missionary tour of the Upper Peninsula. Already in 1861 he preached in Marquette, Portage Lake region, Cliff Mine, Minnesota Mine, and Ontonagon.²⁵ Other exploratory work in the north began somewhat later (1885). It led to what was known as “The Lake Shore – Rhinelander Mission Field.” By 1887 this field was ready to be divided up into three geographical areas: Florence (five stations); Tomahawk (eight stations); Rhinelander (eight stations).²⁶

The story I’d like to pursue involves the Rhinelander field. From it such far-flung locations as Pelican, Monico, Three Lakes and Eagle River were served. As the years passed, the field widened to include Elcho, Crandon, Argonne, Florence, and Crystal Falls, Stambaugh, Waterfield, and Watersmeet, Michigan. All those fields didn’t just start by themselves. They required the “heroic efforts” of dedicated men of God determined to share God’s grace.

One such man was Pastor J. Dejung, Sr. who served as Pastor at Zion, Rhinelander, beginning in 1889. Pastor Dejung served not only Zion but fourteen other preaching stations as well! It took him one month to make the rounds of his circuit. Services were held at his own church every other week. Services in most of the other churches/preaching stations were, of course, held on weekdays. In one year alone, this dedicated missionary recorded two-hundred services at fifteen preaching stations, instruction of fifty-five children at four different locations, and sixty-four children baptized.²⁷ Keep in mind he did all of this traveling by rail, horse, or foot (no 4x4). Today, the territory he covered includes fifteen congregations served by ten called workers! It’s no wonder that Pastor Dejung, Sr. wore out under the demands of such a grueling schedule. He was given an assistant to help make the rounds of this circuit – his son, Pastor J. Dejung, Jr., who was ordained and installed in a service held at Rhinelander, July 13, 1896.

Pastor Dejung, Sr. wasn’t the only one whose health was ruined by the overly strenuous demands of a wide-flung mission field. In 1904, Pastor William Weber was installed at Crandon. His call involved serving a mission field that included Crandon, North Crandon (Argonne), Pelican Lake, Elcho, Enterprise, Parrish, Monico, Three Lakes, Wabeno and Laona. Typically, Weber was to make his rounds using the rail, but even before the days of Amtrak, there could be problems with connections. For example, the train only stopped in Wabeno on Wednesdays and Fridays. Making a trip from Crandon to North Crandon, then through Laona Junction down to Laona and thence to Wabeno took four days! The solution?

In order to save time, Pastor Weber walked, at first from Laona back to Crandon, later even from Crandon to Wabeno and back. On the days when he was to preach at Trinity he arose early and walked here byway of Roberts Lake and arrived on time for the 10:00 AM services. It should also be added that Pastor Weber was not a young man. He had been in the ministry thirty-five years when he left Crandon, that would make him between fifty to sixty years old when he served his field of nine congregations and preaching stations including Crandon and Wabeno.²⁸

No 4.0 liter SUV. No cruise control. No air conditioning or interior heat. Just a burning desire to share God’s grace with his people. That’s what guided Pastor Weber around his circuit for six grueling years!

Conclusion

I could add other stories of God's grace in Northern Wisconsin – stories like the one of Marie Anderson, an adult confirmand of the late 1860s who “canvassed the whole village of Winneconne and the surrounding neighborhood and gathered twenty Lutheran families who were willing to organize a congregation”;²⁹ stories like that of Pastor Johannes Ziebell who, in 1888, first risked his life on a dangerous sleigh ride over thin Lake Michigan ice in order to minister to a dying man...then that same Pastor Ziebell was forced to make a return trip of eighty-one miles over treacherous and snowy terrain in order to preach the next morning back in Escanaba, Michigan.³⁰ (The return trip took almost fifteen hours!) I could tell you more stories of triumph – and some of failure. I could tell you so many stories.

And if I were to write *the definitive history* of outreach in northern Wisconsin, I would have to tell more stories – many, many more stories. For the study of outreach and mission in the Northern Wisconsin District is the study of every congregation in the district. Each congregation is, in a very real sense, a mission. But I won't write that history. I don't need to. Instead the called workers of the District have already written those congregational histories. The district's “Forward in Christ” History Committee is organizing their work. We pray to see their efforts published in the next few months. In the meantime, I pray the few stories shared today have reminded you...

“The study of history is the study of *History*.”

Endnotes

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- ¹ E.C. Fredrich. *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*. (Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), p. 3-4.
- ² “St. Peter Ev. Lutheran Church History,” (Larsen, Wisconsin, 2000).
- ³ Fredrich, op. cit., p. 14.
- ⁴ J.P. Koehler. *The History of the Wisconsin Synod. (Faith-Life, the Protestant Conference, 1970)*, p. 42.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 68.
- ⁶ Armin Engel. “Walking Wisconsin Woods With Eminent Pioneers.” September, 1984.
- ⁷ Koehler, op cit., pg. 51.
- ⁸ Armin Engel. “Ernst August Gottlieb Fackmann WELS First Traveling Missionary.” *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Fall, 1983, (WELS Historical Institute, Milwaukee, WI), p. 9.
- ⁹ Arnold O. Lehmann, translator. “The First Mission Reports by a Wisconsin Synod Pastor.” *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, April, 1993, p. 36-37.
- ¹⁰ Engel, op. cit., p. 12.
- ¹¹ Arnold Lehman. “Wisconsin Synod *Reisepredigt* Program.” *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Spring, 1988, p. 26.
- ¹² Engel, op.cit., p. 12-13.
- ¹³ Arnold Lehman, translator. “Eduard Moldehnke’s Second *Reisebericht*.” *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, April, 1992, p. 32.
- ¹⁴ Though much of Pastor Moldenke’s work lies outside the scope of this paper, we find some of his *Reisepredigt* reports too interesting to ignore altogether. We offer a few excerpts from a lengthy letter that Moldenke wrote Bading, December 2, 1861.

On Sunday, September 29, I conducted a confessional service in Wausau, preached, confirmed both girls, and communed eighteen persons, baptized a child and went that afternoon on a miserable road to Town Berlin, seven miles out, where a very large group awaited me in the schoolhouse...I stayed overnight with a farmer, Joh. Bartelt, and with him in bed – a terrible situation. After a sleepless night I went on September 30 on an indescribably bad road nine miles farther into Town Berlin, where I encountered very frightening experiences. In that corner several Old Lutherans live, difficult and religious, if both can exist together. After several consultations the people gave me permission to preach, but they would not give me the text until that evening. Treated in this unfriendly manner, I sat around until evening, but did instruct children. In the evening I received as a text a blank piece of paper, preached on that, namely, that a person is nothing in his own thoughts, etc., without God. I was tormented with many insidious questions and finally went to a terrible room for sleep. In the morning, October 1, again irksome debates about confession, etc. – I gladly left there in the rain on the worst possible road for three miles to those who had earlier invited me...

In other letter, dated June 5, 1862, Moldenke had this to report:

In May I bought myself a horse and buggy in which to travel more comfortably and cheaply...In Stevens Point an English school teacher was asked for the use of the school for holding German services. He said, “I would rather give you \$2.00 to find another place for yourselves” ...On Wednesday I took the stage coach to Stevens Point. On the way near Mosinee the horses shied; I looked out and saw a drunken squaw lying in the road who did not move off. With great difficulty we were able to pass. A Young Indian ran towards us. He wanted to ride along but the driver urged his horses to run fast. What could that Indian have thought of the whites?

In another letter, dated August 27, 1862, Moldenke shared these experiences.

On June 23 I went to Watertown and on the 24th wanted to go on, but I missed the train and at 9 AM started on foot in terribly hot weather. I was to preach in Theresa on the 24th. I walked the eighteen miles to Hustisford. I was very much exhausted, but fortunately I met a mason from Maysville who took me to Theresa for \$2.00. It would not have taken much more for me to have suffered a sunstroke on that day...On July 15th I went to Portage where I preached that evening. Before the service I had to baptize a child. The wife said to her husband, "Go, sit next to a woman, you love the women so much." I am sorry that I performed the baptism. Children of that kind of people I will not baptize in the future. None of these came to the service that evening.

Arnold Lehman. "Wisconsin Synod *Reisepredigt* Program." *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Spring 1988, p. 32, 33, 36.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1988, p. 39-40.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 35-36.

¹⁷ Robert C. Hartman. "The Growth of the WELS Through the Years." *WELS Historical Institute Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 32.

¹⁸ Eric Hartzell. "Mission Zeal of the Infant Wisconsin Synod, 1850-1893." *Wisconsin Historical Institute Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1-2, p. 26.

¹⁹ J.P. Koehler, op. cit., p. 195.

²⁰ Fredrich, op. cit., p. 96.

²¹ Fredrich, op. cit., p. 96.

²² Fredrich, op. cit., p. 96.

²³ Fredrich, op. cit., p. 78-79.

²⁴ Robert C. Hartman, op. cit., p. 33.

²⁵ "Back to School Newsletter." University Lutheran Chapel, Michigan Tech, 1973.

²⁶ "The Lake Shore-Rhineland Mission Field." Undated paper, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

²⁸ Craig Korth. Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Wabeno, Wisconsin, 100th Anniversary History & Congregation Directory, 1999, p. 5.

²⁹ Armin Engel. "An American Lydia." *WELS Historical Institute Journal*. Spring, 1983, p. 22.

³⁰ Hartzell, op. cit., p. 26.