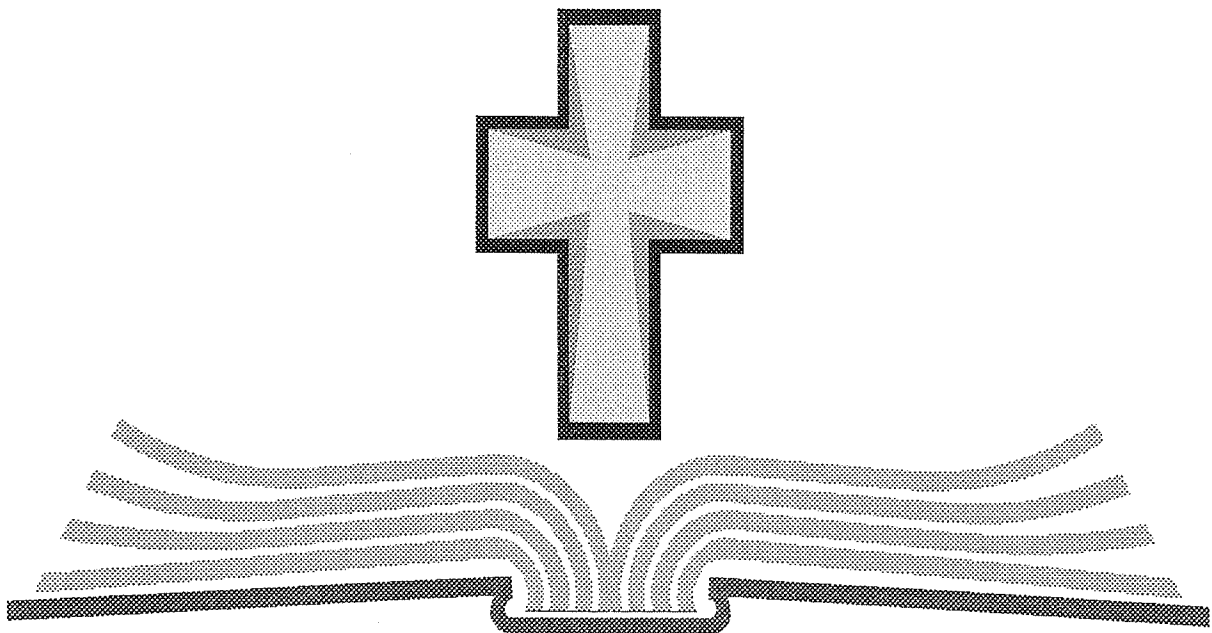


# History: The Story Of God's Grace in Missions of the Northern Wisconsin District

District Pastoral Conference,  
October 25-26, 1999

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Houghton, MI





## Introduction:

Muelhauser, Fachtmann, Goldammer, Bading, Koehler: these were some of the names that came to my mind when beginning this history of missions in our Northern Wisconsin District.

Schroeder, Pagel, Skaates, Dorn: these names also came to mind, reminding me that progression of outreach in our district continues to this day. Lord willing, it will not stop until He returns.

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) In case there was any doubt about the geographic extent of His mission vision, our Lord said again, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

So 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 1800's--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.<sup>1</sup> It is the story of God's grace that moved the earliest missionaries of our Synod and our district to walk on foot or ride ox cart, horse or train, as they served 5, 10 or more preaching stations.

"**The History And Progression of Outreach in the NWD**" is ultimately **History**. It is also the story of every congregation and school in our district today. In many cases it is the story of our families, our neighbors, our friends. It is your story. . .and mine. The writing of such a history would indeed be a daunting and time-consuming task. Thankfully, however, the same letter that brought me the assignment for this paper brought a much-appreciated escape clause. I quote, "*You can approach the topic in any way you choose. You can even feel free to change the focus of the presentation any way you choose.*"<sup>2</sup> I propose to change the focus in this way. What follows will not be the definitive history of mission outreach in the Northern Wisconsin District of the Wisconsin Synod. Instead, in the time remaining, I offer a few interesting (I hope) stories that will illustrate God's grace at work in our midst.



## The Story of *Der Reiseprediger*:

Earlier this year, a brother in 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 LCMS. 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."<sup>3</sup>*

**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 Bading, 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.<sup>4</sup> However, timely connections were sometimes hard to come by. Then, too, there was the expense. Besides that, 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, how could the pastor afford to buy it? And 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 close behind with a stick and rendered effective, if not scientific, aid in making the horse pass the home farmyard."<sup>5</sup>*

Just as typical were the problems encountered by 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."<sup>6</sup> 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 (LCMS). Fachtmann must have been impressed by his tour of the bustling boomtown by the lake and of Steinbach's congregation and school of 2 teachers and 150 children. 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 15-20 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. Fachtmann<sup>8</sup>*

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 Reisprediger 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."<sup>9</sup>*

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 14 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 50 members would be present for the organizational meeting, he requested 20 copies of the synod-approved congregation constitution for the



group to study.<sup>10</sup> 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<sup>th</sup>, 1862.<sup>11</sup>

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.

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. One year later, Moldenke received the call to become the instructor for the new seminary-college at Watertown. So we won't pursue his history further, although he certainly filed some colorful reports!<sup>13</sup>

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 <sup>FIRST</sup> 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 our 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 20 times on this trip, in several places, twice, all in all at 12 or 13 different places. I distributed holy communion at two places, I baptized 24 children. I visited about 100 families in their homes. I gathered about 50 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 24 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 Reisedprediger 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. Thiele<sup>14</sup>*

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 Reisedprediger was terminated. This also brought to a close the earliest efforts of the Reisedprediger 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 Reisedpredigt program of the past synodical year has proved itself effective and filled with blessings. The following stations were served by the Reisedprediger: Germany, Fort Atkinson,*



*Whitewater, Waupun--city and prison--Almond, Stevens Point, Wausau, Town of Stettin, Town of Berlin, Green Bay, Kewaunee, town of Carlton, 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 14 new stations were established in western Wisconsin, so that altogether 22 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."<sup>15</sup>*

Some 60 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 Synod was requested to commission one pastor to serve as a part-time Reiseprediger.<sup>16</sup> 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 3 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 17 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 1880's, 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 20 wolves.*"<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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."*<sup>19</sup>

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."*<sup>20</sup>

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 1900's a study committee recommended that the office of mission. . .

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*"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 fields; that is to say, the district presidents are to get in touch and consult with him in the matter of such supply and service. . ."*<sup>21</sup>

Nothing would come of this proposal for over 50 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. Communicants (something which, unfortunately, is no longer emphasized much on mission-report forms) grew from 28,345 to 74,754.<sup>22</sup> By 1894, the Synod could list five congregations over 2000 communicants and 18 between 1000-1999!<sup>23</sup> God's grace was working miracles. **History** was being written.

## **Other Mission Fields Up 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.<sup>24</sup> 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 (8 stations); Rhinelander (8 stations).<sup>25</sup>

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 14 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 200 services at 15 preaching stations, instruction of 55 children at 4 different locations, and 64 children baptized.<sup>26</sup> Keep in mind he did all of this traveling by rail, horse, or foot (no 4X4). Today, the territory he covered includes 15 congregations served by 10 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 4 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 by way 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 35 years when he left Crandon, that would make him between 50 to 60 years old when he served his field of nine congregations and preaching stations including Crandon and Wabeno."<sup>27</sup>*

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 6 grueling years!

## **Administrative Changes**

Serving the lost sheep of "the German household of faith:" that philosophy dominated our mission outreach in the earliest decades of our Synod. But that thinking began to change toward the end of the first half of this century. Already in 1941, Chairman W. Roepke of the General Mission Board told the synod in convention:

*"Let us free ourselves from the thought that our Home Mission work is done with the same kind of people that were available a generation ago. Then this type of mission work was done almost exclusively around those of the household of faith. Today it is different."<sup>28</sup>*

To prove his point, Pastor Roepke cited confirmation statistics from the Dakota Montana district. They showed adult and children confirmations to be almost equal. The rest of the synod showed a 40/60 percentage relationship.

In the middle decades of this century, Synodical structure for missions also changed dramatically. In 1939, a general missionary was called to Arizona, another to Colorado. Shortly thereafter, another general



missionary was called to Michigan. Their efforts and the efforts of many other faithful workers were richly blessed. From 1941 to 1945 alone, eighty-eight new missions were opened by the Wisconsin Synod!

This burgeoning growth led to the next development in mission administration: the "mission districts." In 1942, Arizona (part of the Southeastern Wisconsin District) became a mission district operating with its own board.

By 1955, the General Mission Board of the Synod divided into separate home and world mission boards. In 1963, the first full-time executive secretary for the General Board for Home Missions was called. His name? Raymond Wiechmann. And the same 1963 convention that called for a full-time executive secretary also divided the whole country into areas of mission responsibility which were assigned to District Boards. Fast forward in time another two decades (1984), and the position of Mission Counselor was begun with Pastor Robert Hartman accepting the call to serve as the "Midwest Mission Counselor." His job description, inspired in part by the early Reisepredigers of our Synod, stated:

*"Purpose: It shall be the purpose of the Mission Counselor to assist the respective district mission boards in enabling the mission groups and missionaries to make the most effective use of human and financial resources for mission outreach.*

"Objectives

- A. *It is the primary objective of the Mission Counselor to assist the district mission board in counseling and training mission groups and missionaries to enable them, under God, to attain their full potential in Gospel outreach and spiritual nurture.*
- B. *It is the secondary objective of the Mission Counselor in a limited capacity to assist the district mission board in all other administrative functions of the home mission program of the respective district.*<sup>129</sup>

Bob Hartman's annual report for 1986 also emphasizes the parallels between his work and that of the Reiseprediger.

*"Days in the field -- 180 days (46 overnights)*

*Preached -- 23 times*

*Activities (author's note: we list only those activities performed in our district)*

*Northern Wisconsin*

*7 DMB meetings*

*7 Inservice*

*1 Survey. . .*

*Travel: . . .*

*Total Business miles 27,780*

*Air flights - 6*

*Duluth, Houghton, Marquette, Minneapolis (3), Grand Rapids, St. Louis.*<sup>30</sup>

A lot of travel to be sure! However, Pastor Hartman did get to use a car or a plane (no oxcarts). What's more, I found no records indicating that he ever had to share a bed with his host!



## Blessings in the "Modern Era"

While administrative structure for mission work was developing and growing, story after story of God's grace continued to be written in the mission fields. That becomes evident when pouring over District Mission Board reports of the late 1970s. In a report offered to our District in 1978, for example, these fields of labor were listed: Antigo, Bruce Crossing -- Phelps, Canada -- Sault Ste. Marie, Cedarville, MI, Little Chute, WI, Marquette, MI, Plymouth, WI, Stambaugh -- Tipler, Suamico, WI, Tomahawk, WI, Waupun, WI, "New Area -- Bellevue," Houghton, MI (Campus Ministry), Oshkosh, WI (Campus Ministry).

What brought us to so many different areas? Typically, it was because someone had issued the request of the Macedonian: "Come over. . .and help us." (Acts 16:9) Many times these requests came in the form of letters written to the Northern Wisconsin District Mission Board, letters like this one addressed to Carl Popke, Green Bay. Dated September 17, 1977, the letter states in part. . .

*"Gentlemen:*

*In various discussions with residents of the Town of Bellevue, the matter has come up about beginning a Mission Church in the Bellevue area and I was appointed spokesman for the group to contact your Board.*

*Many of these residents are presently going to church at St. Paul or St. Mark's and they feel that a church would be advantageous to the Town of Bellevue.*

*. . . There would be approximately five (5) families from St. Paul, two (2) families from St. Mark, and four (4) families from various churches who would be interested in starting the mission. These eleven families are all from or near the area of Fleet Farm on Hwy. 141 and does not include the two (2) trailer courts (approx. 600 persons) or the many new subdivisions being developed in the Town of Bellevue.*

*In my capacity as Town Clerk of Bellevue, I am well aware that this is one of the fastest growing areas in the Green Bay area. Census estimates show that the present population of Bellevue is 4,000 persons, but by the year 1990, the population will grow to in excess of 20,000 due to the new Hwy. 143.*

*Therefore, we wish to have your Board consider the possibility of establishing a mission church in the Town of Bellevue and we would be willing to assist you in any way possible. . .*

*Sincerely,*

*Douglas J. Voigt*

*Rt. 6, Green Way, Wis. 54301<sup>31</sup>*

Exciting, isn't it, to see the mission vision behind this letter? Although Mr. Voigt does mention the nucleus available for starting the mission, he spends equal time aptly analyzing the field and it's tremendous potential for growth! Here was a dedicated layman who saw the fields "white unto harvest." He wasn't the only one. In a number of letters written from 1969 to 1983, Dr. J. Michael Skaates of Hancock, Michigan, wrote the mission board concerning mission opportunities in Houghton, Marquette (Shiras Hills where we located a mission with a portable chapel unit), "Depere -- west of the river," "Green Bay -- southeast side," and "Sheboygan (2<sup>nd</sup> congregation)." "In addition," Skaates remarked, "our needy congregation in Iron Mountain requires help to realize the mission potential in that area. A full-time man in Iron Mountain should be a high priority." Then to add punch to his plea, Dr. Skaates concluded with this remark: "I hope that our Northern Wisconsin District can once again take the initiative in starting new missions. Certainly our Synod's rush to



the 'sun-belt' should not preclude the orderly expansion of WELS home mission activity in other areas of our country."<sup>32</sup> Dr. Skaates' pleas were well-reasoned and compelling. And thanks to his own selfless efforts, a Lutheran Collegian Campus Ministry was formed on the Michigan Technological University Campus, Houghton, Michigan. That organization is currently celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> year of God's grace.

Other letters directed to the District Mission Board stressed other reasons for starting a mission. To illustrate, we offer a few excerpts from a letter dated April 3, 1976, sent to Rev. Marvin Radtke, Chm., Northern Wis. Mission Board, Eagle River, WI.

*"Dear Pastor Radtke:*

*I am a member of St. John's congregation in Jefferson, Pastor R.E. Lauersdorf, and am writing to you at his suggestion regarding the establishment of a WELS mission congregation in Plymouth, Wis.*

*My interest in this undertaking arises from the fact that my niece and Godchild, Cynthia Mueller, is now living in Plymouth. Three years ago she was married to a young Catholic, James Flanagan, by our Pastor Lauersdorf. Her membership was transferred to a WELS church in Millersville, I believe, near Sheboygan Falls. In 1975 the young couple's first child was born and was baptized here in Jefferson by Pastor Lauersdorf; I am the little girl's Godmother also.*

*Both Cynthia and the rest of our family find the other Lutheran churches in Plymouth very unsatisfactory--extremely liberal in their approach to the inerrancy of the Scriptures. We have been praying that a WELS church be established in Plymouth for the sake of her spiritual welfare and the eventual Christian education of the young daughter as well as of other Lutheran Christians in the area. . .*

*In every issue of the Northwestern Lutheran we read of new missions being established or exploratory services being conducted in locations all over the state and the nation except in Plymouth--a rather substantial small city located in a rich agricultural area only an hour's drive north of our Seminary! To say the least, this situation seemed very strange. . .*

*Therefore I am addressing this letter to you in order to convey my strong feelings about the necessity for and utility of a WELS church in Plymouth. I sincerely pray that the missionary's efforts will be blessed and that services can soon be held in the city.*

*If the Lord wills that this be done, I would like to help the fledgling congregation in a monetary way and perhaps provide necessary altar furnishings, etc.*

*Please feel free to send copies of this letter to any other officials in the "hierarchy" who might be concerned with this mission project.*

*Respectfully yours,*

*Barbara R. Mueller<sup>33</sup>*

These are the words, not only of a loving and devoted Godmother, but also of a faithful and dedicated Christian woman (a modern-day Lydia) willing to back her bold request for a mission with her own financial resources! More than that, we see the insightful doctrinal concerns of a woman who is well aware of the deterioration evident in other Lutheran Church bodies. And it was often doctrinal concerns that called us to new mission fields in the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's.



Though missionaries at the end of this century don't labor under the primitive and harsh conditions of the previous century, the District Mission Board files also contain the stories of the sacrifices and frustrations of missionaries on the front lines. One pastor, laboring in a remote Synodical outpost, lamented about being called a "Yank" and never being accepted by the locals. Even worse, he complained that his congregation remained "aloof" and even "antagonistic" to him and his family. Needless to say the missionary didn't last long. Sadly, neither did the congregation.

My own congregation, Peace, Houghton, "boasts" a short but colorful history. The group's even been sued! This happened when the Campus Ministry in Houghton wanted to build its first permanent worship facility. Property was purchased (our current location) in early 1976. Plans for building a Millcraft home, which would serve as student center on the upper level and chapel on the ground level, went ahead. Mr. Gary Loss, a graduate student in Civil Engineering, had been working at the site, doing perc tests and locating the surveyor's monuments marking the property. Neighbors, pretending friendliness, asked questions about the project. Within a few months, a suit was filed to stop the building of the church. It seems the suit was instigated by an LCA minister who was assistant to the president of Suomi College (Hancock, MI), a member of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (LCA) of Houghton, and a potential neighbor for the new church. This pastor had riled up the neighbors with charges that the WELS was a "fly-by-night" outfit. Another neighbor was incensed at the idea of a student center with all those "motorcycles" parked outside.

Plans for the student center/chapel were put on hold. The lawsuit dragged on. But then on December 8, 1976, the LCA clergyman suddenly withdrew from the litigation. Others, like dominoes, followed, and the lawsuit was dropped in April of 1977. Why the change? There are a few guesses -- most involving a local businessman who apparently informed Suomi College he was cutting them out of his will unless this lawsuit was dropped. Since the LCA clergyman put his house up for sale that spring, and since he was "transferred" to Midland College, Fremont, Nebraska, that same summer, one has to wonder whether "money talked."<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion:

I could add other stories--stories like the one of Marie Anderson, an adult confirmand of the late 1860's who "canvassed the whole village of Winneconne and the surrounding neighborhood and gathered 20 Lutheran families who were willing to organize a congregation;"<sup>35</sup> stories of pastors like Paul Kante and Tom Trapp who braved Upper Peninsula winters driving from Stambaugh, Michigan to Houghton to serve the Campus Ministry there every Sunday afternoon; stories of Pastor Robert Diener and his struggles in the formative years of the Oshkosh Campus Ministry; stories of Pastor Robert Raasch and the unbelievable blessings seen during his ministry in Houghton; stories of Al Klessig and Tom Schnick in Marquette; stories of Pastor Fred Bergfeld who labored in Bruce Crossing for 44 years and 31 years in Phelps. I could tell you more stories of triumph--and more of failure. I could tell you so many stories.

And if I were to write **the definitive history** of mission development in our District, I would have to tell more stories: **your** story, **your** congregation's story. For the study of mission development in our district is the study of every congregation in our district. Each congregation is, in a very real sense, a mission. But I won't write that history. I don't need to. You already have--you and all your brothers in the Northern Wisconsin District. Our Forward in Christ History Committee is organizing your work. We pray to see their efforts in the summer of 2,000. In the meantime, I pray the few stories shared today have reminded you. . .

"The Study of history if the study of **H**istory."



### Endnotes

1. E.C. Fredrich, The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, (Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), pgs 3-4.
2. D.J. Engelbrecht, in a letter outlining this assignment, February 2, 1999.
3. Fredrich, op cit., pg. 14.
4. J.P. Koehler, The History of the Wisconsin Synod, (Faith-Life, the Protestant Conference, 1970), pg. 42).
5. Ibid., pg. 68.
6. Ibid., pg. 51.
7. Armin Engel, "Ernst August Gottlieb Fackmann WELS First Traveling Missionary," WELS Historical Institute Journal, Fall, 1983, (WELS Historical Institute, Milwaukee, WI), pg 9.
8. Arnold O. Lehmann, translator, "The First Mission Reports by a Wisconsin Synod Pastor," WELS Historical Institute Journal, April, 1993, pgs. 36-37.
9. Engel, op. cit., pg 12.
10. Arnold Lehman, "Wisconsin Synod Reiseipredigt Program," WELS Historical Institute Journal, Spring, 1988, pg. 26.
11. Engel, op.cit., pgs. 12-13.
12. Arnold Lehman, "Wisconsin Synod Reiseipredigt Program," WELS Historical Institute Journal, Spring, 1988, pg. 32
13. Though much of Pastor Moldenke's work lies outside the scope of this paper, we find some of his Reiseipredigt 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 18 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 24<sup>th</sup> wanted to go on, but I missed the train and at 9 a.m. started on foot in terribly hot weather. I was to preach in Theresa on the 24<sup>th</sup>. I walked the 18 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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, pgs. 32, 33, 36.

14. Arnold Lehman, "Wisconsin Synod Reisepredigt Program," WELS Historical Institute Journal, Spring, 1988, pgs. 39-40.
15. Ibid, pgs. 35-36.
16. Robert C. Hartman, "The Growth of the WELS Through the Years," WELS Historical Institute Journal, Volume 8, Number 2, pg. 32.
17. Eric Hartzell, "Mission Zeal of the Infant Wisconsin Synod, 1850-1893," Wisconsin Historical Institute Journal, Volume 9, Numbers 1-2, pg. 26.
18. J.P. Koehler, op. cit., pg 195.
19. Fredrich, op cit., pgs. 96.
20. Fredrich, op cit., pgs. 96.
21. J.P. Koehler, op. cit., pg. 197.
22. Fredrich, op cit., pgs. 78-79.
23. Robert C. Hartman, op.cit., pg. 33.
24. "Back to School Newsletter," University Lutheran Chapel, Michigan Tech, 1973.
25. "The Lake Shore--Rhineland Mission Field," undated paper, pg. 1.
26. Ibid., pg. 1.
27. Craig Korth, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Wabeno, Wisconsin, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary History & Congregation Directory, 1999, pg. 5.
28. Fredrich, op cit., pg. 210.
29. "Mission Counselor Job Description," NWD District Mission Board Files, pg. 1.
30. "Midwest Mission Counselor Program - Annual Report for 1986," NWD District Mission Board Files.
31. Douglas J. Voigt, September 17, 1977, letter. NWD District Mission Board Files.
32. Dr. J. Michael Skaates, April 24, 1983, letter. NWD District Mission Board Files.
33. Barbara R. Mueller, April 3, 1976, letter. NWD District Mission Board Files.
34. Dr. J. Michael Skaates, "Memoirs of the Copper Country," Hancock, MI, October, 1985, pg. 43.
35. Armin Engel, "An American Lydia," WELS Historical Institute Journal, Spring, 1983, pg 22.