

THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE OF A WELS WOMAN, IDA AUGUSTA OBERMANN

by James R. Sonnemann



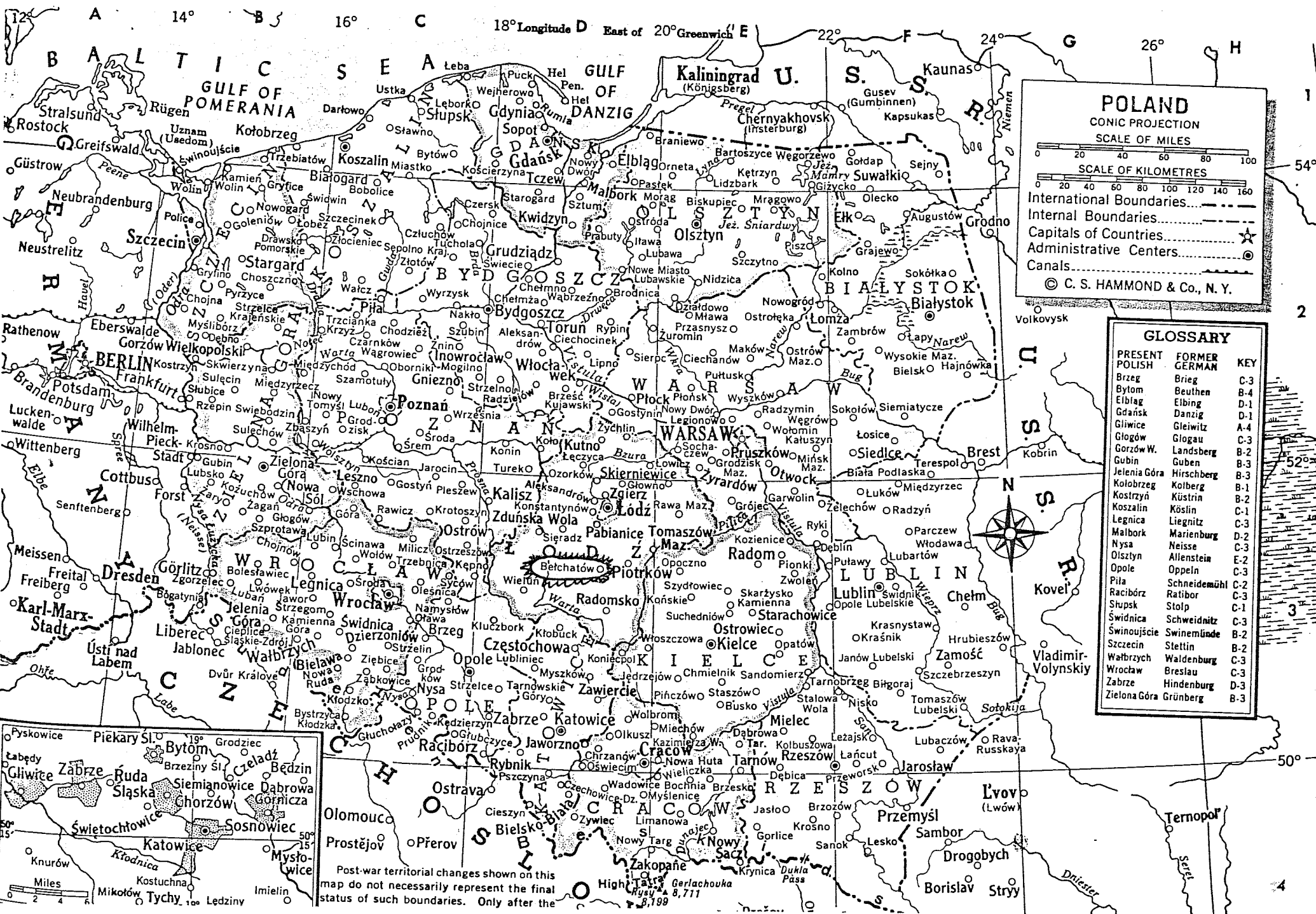
Ida Augusta Obermann (l)
with the writer (r), 1946.

for Professor E.C. Fredrich
Senior Church History
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
May 10, 1990

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library

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Madison, Wisconsin



POLAND
 CONIC PROJECTION
 SCALE OF MILES
 0 20 40 60 80 100
 SCALE OF KILOMETRES
 0 20 40 60 80 100 120 140 160

International Boundaries.....
 Internal Boundaries.....
 Capitals of Countries.....
 Administrative Centers.....
 Canals.....

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GLOSSARY

PRESENT POLISH	FORMER GERMAN	KEY
Brzeg	Brieg	C-3
Bytom	Beuthen	B-4
Elbląg	Elbing	D-1
Gdańsk	Danzig	D-1
Gliwice	Gleiwitz	A-4
Głogów	Glogau	C-3
Gorzów W.	Landsberg	B-2
Gubin	Guben	B-3
Jelenia Góra	Hirschberg	B-3
Kolobrzeg	Kolberg	B-1
Kostrzyn	Küstrin	B-2
Koszalin	Köslin	C-1
Legnica	Liegnitz	C-3
Malbork	Marienburg	D-2
Nysa	Neisse	C-3
Olsztyn	Allenstein	E-2
Opole	Oppeln	C-3
Pila	Schneidemühl	C-2
Racibórz	Ratibor	C-3
Stupsk	Stolp	C-1
Świdnica	Schweidnitz	C-3
Świnoujście	Swinemünde	B-2
Szczecin	Stettin	B-2
Wałbrzych	Waldenburg	C-3
Wrocław	Breslau	C-3
Zabrze	Hindenburg	D-3
Zielona Góra	Grünberg	B-3



Post-war territorial changes shown on this map do not necessarily represent the final status of such boundaries. Only after the

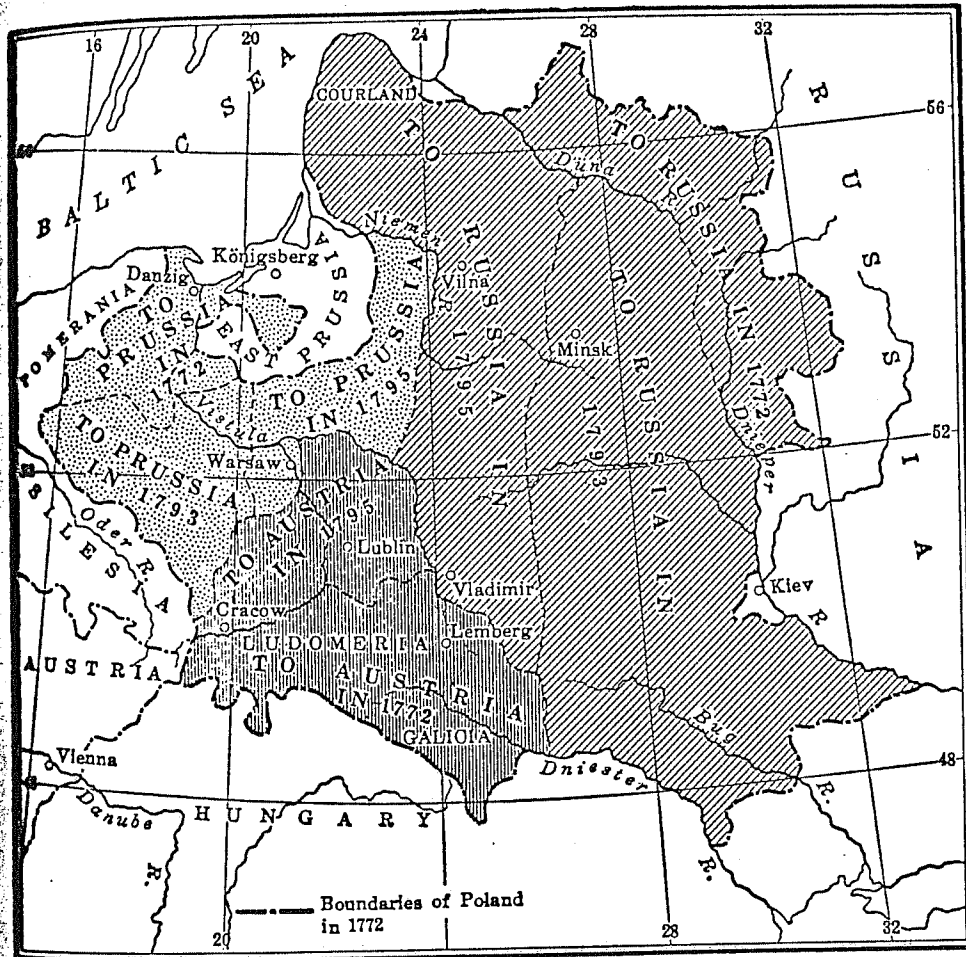
THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE OF A WELS WOMAN, IDA AUGUSTA OBERMANN

Introduction: The history of the Wisconsin Synod is made up, in large part, of the individual stories of its pastors, professors, presidents, congregations, institutions, controversies, and achievements. That this is true is assured by the bulk of the senior church history papers now on file in the seminary library. But the history of the synod is told also in the lives of the individual Christians, the constituency of the synod, who have supported it and who have been served by it. Without them, all the rest would have no purpose. Their names are not widely known. But their stories are every bit as fascinating. Their contributions deserve not to be ignored. Their stories ought to be told to keep us mindful of the way we became who we are.

The story of Ida Augusta (Vogel) Obermann is such a story. Born into a loosely confessional Evangelical European church, she was raised a staunch Lutheran. Her life was one of uninterrupted hardship, but even more, of exemplary faith in a very personal Savior, Jesus Christ. She was pious, but no pietist. Her earthiness is reminiscent of Luther's own, no doubt because her roots are sunk into the same Saxon soil.

The immigrant experience is still not too distant a memory in the majority of our WELS families. This story is probably typical, in many respects, of a large number of our family histories. But it offers a profound illustration of the obvious thesis: WELS IMMIGRANTS, BY COMING TO THE UNITED STATES, IMPROVED THEIR LOT SPIRITUALLY AND MATERIALLY.

In Belchatow, Poland: Ida Augusta Vogel (1884-1968) married Edmund Gustav Obermann on June 29, 1901, in the "Ev. St. Johannis="



Partitions of Poland, 1772, 1793, 1795

Robert Ergang, *Europe from the Renaissance to Waterloo*, Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co., 1967. p. 545.

(see explanation of extent of Russian control in Poland between the formal partitions in "Poland," *The Encyclopedia Britannica*. Note also the reference to Russian citizenship on the naturalization papers for Edmund Obermann.)

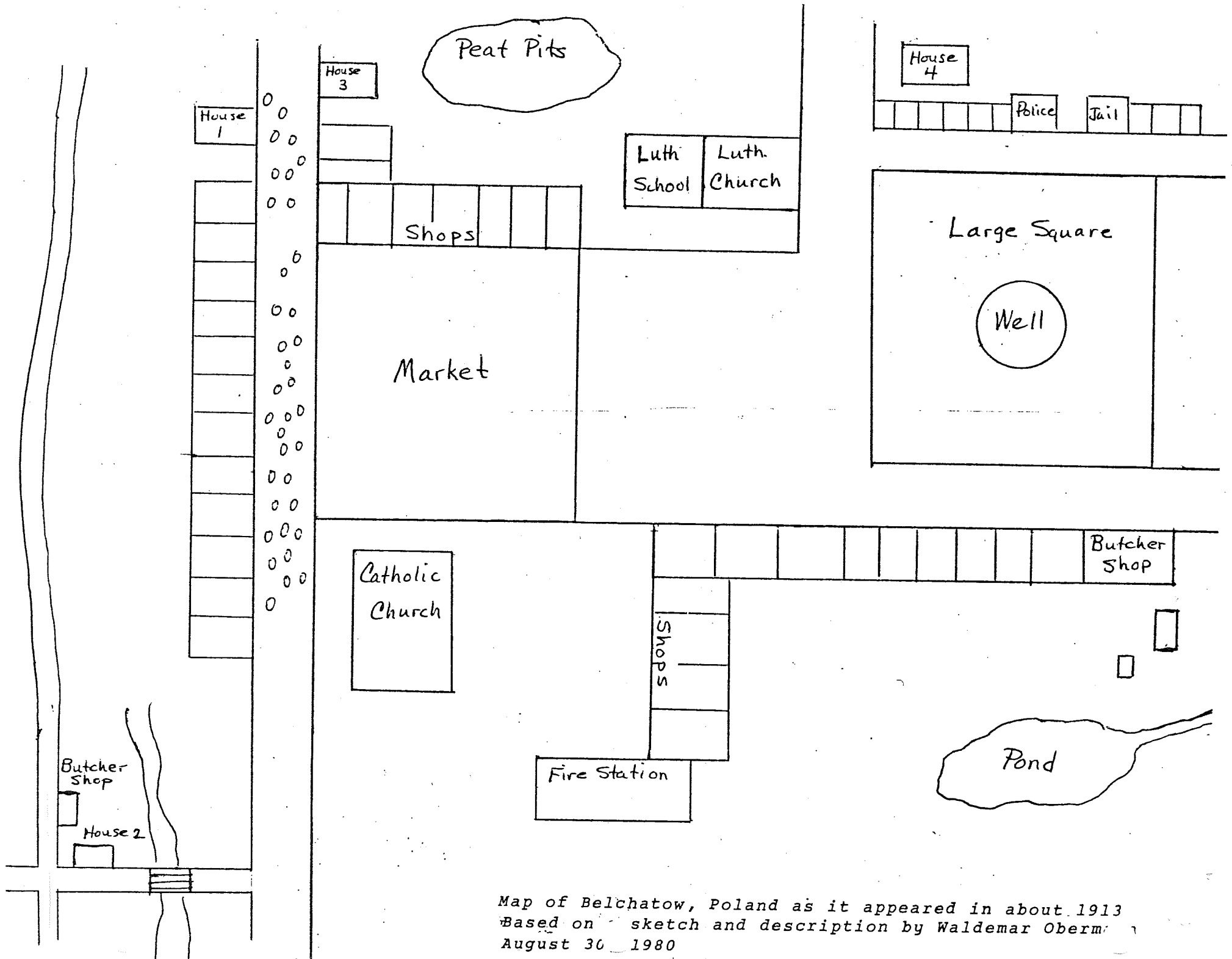
gemeinde" in Belchatow, Poland, with the parish pastor, Ernst Behse, officiating. She was 16, he was 25. Their marriage was blessed by God with nine children, five born in Belchatow, and four born in Milwaukee.

The family's oral tradition of the Vogel family's migration into Poland sets the date in the closing half decade of the 18th century. This corresponds with the third partition of Poland in 1795 among Prussia, Russia, and Austria. At this time the Russian Empire assumed control of that portion of Poland in which the village of Belchatow lies.¹ Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, a German princess who had maneuvered her way to the Russian throne, extended a general invitation to skilled Germans to settle in Russian Poland. An article by Otto Engel on the Wisconsin Synod's mission effort in Poland describes the economic and social conditions in early 19th century Germany that made Catherine's invitation an opportunity not to be ignored:²

Migrations to Poland

Under these adverse conditions prevailing in Germany it was only to be expected that more and more people, realizing that they could never expect to get ahead in their own country, would begin to look elsewhere for a place to live and an opportunity to improve their lot in life. In Poland about 50 miles southwest of the capital city of Warsaw a textile industry was developing in a town called Lodz. In order to attract workers for the industry, the Polish government promised all immigrants large grants of land, good working conditions and the guarantee that no one would ever interfere in matters of language or religion. The government even promised them that it would help them to build churches and parsonages. Many Germans, dazzled by the promises, streamed into the city from all parts of Germany. It was not long before the city of Lodz developed into a large city for the manufacture of textiles. That is how a large colony of Germans came to settle in Lodz and many smaller colonies in the villages surrounding the city.

Pastor Engel described the hardships of the migration, a journey made by many on foot, but then concludes: "Here in their new home-



Map of Belchatow, Poland as it appeared in about 1913
 Based on sketch and description by Waldemar Oberm...
 August 30 1980

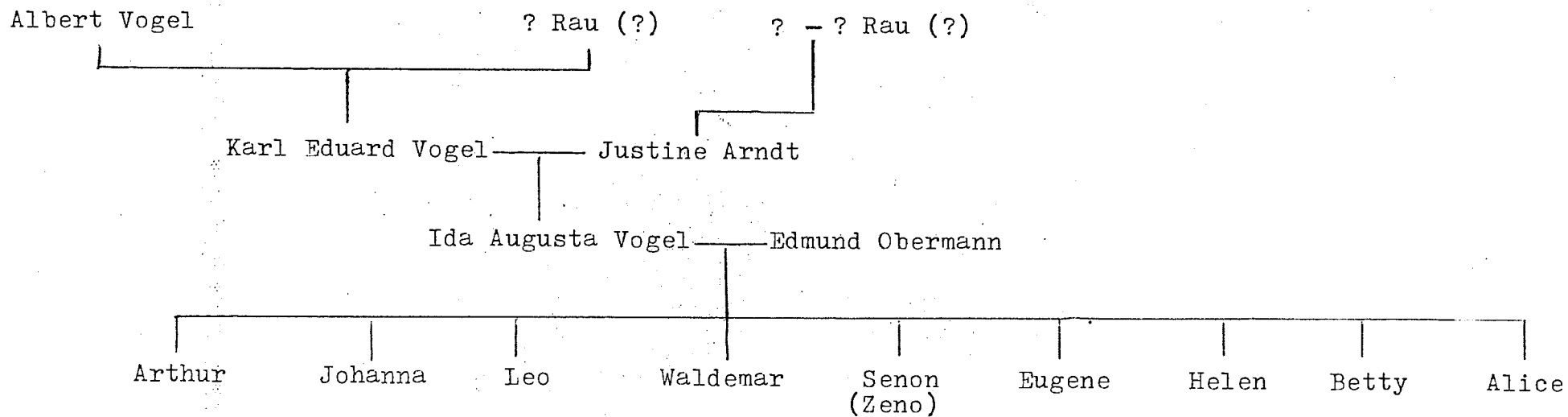
land they found much improved conditions and soon prospered."

Ida's family had come in the migration to Poland from Saxony. Her mother, Justine Arndt, reflected ancestral origins at Wittenberg in her speech. Ida's father, Karl Eduard Vogel, spoke a Saxon dialect noticeably different from the Wittenberger. The Arndt branch of the family is said to have owned a farm at Wittenberg, and generations later, continued to speculate that they might still have some claim to it.³

The Arndts had apparently been Lutheran for many generations, already in Saxony. A story relates the circumstances of the Vogels' "conversion" from Catholicism in Belchatow. Karl Eduard's family attended the large Catholic church at Belchatow where Karl served as an altar boy. He and some friends were discovered one day raiding the priest's orchard, for which the priest administered a caning. The Vogel family thereafter transferred its allegiance to the St. John's parish of the Augsburg Church, to which the Arndts also belonged. The report that close relatives of the Vogels in nearby Lippe, the Gottwalds, remained in the Catholic Church, seems to verify Karl Eduard's "conversion experience."⁴

Like many others, Ida's ancestors were attracted into Poland by the opportunities opening in the textile industry. Her grandfather, Albert Vogel, is said to have been a skilled worker in textiles. The trade was not passed on to the sons, apparently. Karl Eduard Vogel, Ida's father, built wagons in Belchatow, in a shop adjacent to a blacksmith shop. Ida joined her husband, Edmund Obermann, in the butcher's trade - the trade that had apparently occupied several generations of his family.⁵

How much conditions had really improved in a material sense



Family of Ida Augusta Obermann

for the family in their adopted country is questionable. Ida's parents lost 6 of their 12 children to scarlet fever in a short time.⁶ The Poles seemed intent upon visiting Catherine's disdain for them⁷ upon the German minority she had invited into the country. The ever-changing political situation in Poland had undermined the generous guarantees that had attracted the Germans.

A story from the family's history will illustrate the ethnic friction. Anton Gottwald, Karl E. Vogel's cousin, and Pastor Leo May, who also served at St. John's in Belchatow, uncovered a plot, an intended pogrom, on the part of the Poles against the German settlers. At an appointed time the Poles involved would sweep without warning through Belchatow and the surrounding villages and kill the Germans. May and Gottwald warned Karl and Justine to remove their family to safety. Olga, Ida's sister, recalled that her father replied that he could defend himself. Her father and mother, she recalled, went to the Russian magistrate in their district who alerted the Russian forces. A Cossack cavalry moved into the area and prevented the slaughter.⁸ More than 60 years after their immigration, Olga, and Ida's son Arthur would respond angrily to any question about Polish-German relations in the homeland. It is impossible to imagine how tense the situation must have been, unless reference is made, perhaps, to the racial turmoil in our cities in the late 60's.

Conditions surely deteriorated, until, in 1913, with war looming on the horizon, the family made its first move to settle in the United States. After less than a century and a half, Belchatow was no longer home. Edmund, with his sister-in-law Olga and other members of the Vogel family, entered the United States



Family of Edmund and Ida Obermann, photographed in
Belchatow, 1913, prior to Edmund's departure
for the U.S. Children, l to r: Johanna Stephanie,
Senca (Zeno), Leo Theodore, Arthur Bruno, Waldemar.

via Canada at Emmerson, ND on June 14, 1913, and settled in Milwaukee.⁹

Ida stayed behind with the 5 children. Her plan was to join her husband when house and employment were secured. That would be 8 years later. World War I had broken out. The empires that had partitioned Poland now used it as a battleground, Russia among the allies and Germany and Austria, the Central Powers. Reports indicate that Belchatow was controlled at one time by one side, at another, by the other side. The necessities of life were scarce.^{9a} Ethnic hostilities were played out by whoever happened to be the reigning bully. Jews were terrorized by the Russian armies. The naturalized Germans in Poland weren't spared by the Germans and Austrians. The situation of Ida's family deteriorated. Her son Waldemar recalls living in 4 different houses in the village. At one house they were forced to board 30 German troops. At another time, Austrian gunfire was so heavy that the feather beds had to be used over the windows to keep bullets out.¹⁰ Waldemar (perhaps 8 years old) recalled the food shortage. Here is an excerpt from his paraphrased account:¹¹

The Merwitz (relatives on his father's side) butcher shop was near a row of Jewish shops, including bakeries, near the large square. The butcher shop had several outbuildings for slaughtering and smoking. The place was run by W's aunt and her sons. When everyone else was without food, they had plenty of meat, but wouldn't give any to the relatives. W. recalled standing around the house waiting for the "old lady" to throw away the bread crusts that she cut off when making her meals.

Under these conditions, Ida maintained her family while awaiting her embarkation date.

Religious life for the Vogel/Obermann family was centered

in the St. Johannisgemeinde of the Evangelische Augsburgische Kirche. Professor Westerhaus said that this church body was the successor of the Prussian Union church which was organized to serve the German settlers in this once-Prussian territory. His recollection was that it was established in 1918. The name, lacking the adjective "lutherische" would seem to verify its origin. Pastor Engel's article hints that the Augsburg Church had been around for quite a long time. He speaks of Pastor W.P. Angerstein's call to the St. John congregation (a constituent of the Ev. Luth Free Church) after his graduation from the seminary at Erlangen in 1884. Later, he says, "It was he who later began to point out where the Augsburg Church, under whose jurisdiction these churches were operating, was out of harmony with scriptural teaching and the Lutheran Confessions."¹²

The Augsburg Church was the tax-supported monopoly, the concession to the German Lutheran settlers. Pastor W. G. Bodamer, who served the WELS mission to Poland from 1929-1939, described the conditions in the Augsburg Church in the Northwestern Lutheran on September 16, 1934:

The Evangelical population belongs mostly to the Evangelical Augsburgian Church, a kind of Evangelical state church. This church calls itself Lutheran, but is very far from being truly Lutheran. There is no uniformity of teaching in this church. Being a state church, modern liberal theology has as much right as the Lutheran doctrine. There is no church discipline, neither as regards the the teaching nor the morals. There is pulpit fellowship with all denominations and nobody says anything about it. The faculty at the University at Warsaw, where the ministers for the Evangelical Augsburgian Church are trained, is very pronounced in its liberalism and sees its task in introducing the students into science, not into the Scriptures. It is not even nominally Lutheran, but trains ministers for the Reformed churches as well as for the Augsburgian

Church.¹³

Pastor Engel stated this as the reason for the beginning of the WELS work in Poland. When Pastor Engel, our first man in Poland arrived in 1924,

he found that a beginning had already been made. A man by the name of Gustav Maliszewski had been a parochial school teacher and later an evangelist in the city of Lodz. Here he observed the pitiable conditions in the Augsburg Church. He was convinced that the state-supported Augsburg Church would lose its Lutheran character altogether if something were not done. There was only one solution: the founding of a strictly confessional free church.¹⁴

These evaluations are supported, at least circumstantially, by this excerpt from the obituary of Pastor Ernst Behse, the last pastor to serve the family at St. John's in Belchatow before their departure for the United States. There is a reference to firmness of conviction, but a hint of ecumenicity, as well.¹⁵

(He) was faithful and courageous in his convictions - (he) had but one goal before his eyes: to do yet more good. As a result, he was greatly beloved for the boldness of his thoroughly German spirit by Catholics and Poles as well. For this reason, beside the members of his congregation, multitudes of Catholics and Jews, and one must say, the entire city of Belchatow, took part in the solemnities of his burial, and offered the most eloquent eulogies. Therefore we mourn him heartily, and our Church laments the loss, in him, of a servant who stood strong in the faith, never wavering.

Is this ecumenicity? Ambiguity? There is no strong evidence for an opinion concerning St. John's in Belchatow. Most likely, by God's grace and design, the family benefited by the ambiguity of which Pastor Bodamer wrote. Family members have always

No. 11740

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

DECLARATION OF INTENTION

Invalid for all purposes seven years after the date hereof

State of Wisconsin, }
Milwaukee County, } ss:

In the Circuit Court of Milwaukee County.

I, Edmund Obermann, aged 44 years,
occupation carpenter, do declare on oath that my personal
description is: Color white, complexion fair, height 5 feet 6 inches,
weight 165 pounds, color of hair blond, color of eyes gray,
other visible distinctive marks crippled left arm.
I was born in Selshatow, Poland, Russia
on the 27th day of February, anno Domini 1876; I now reside
at 1583- 3rd St. MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin.

(Give number, street, and city or town)

emigrated to the United States of America from Poland, Russia
on the vessel Holland, to Quebec Canada; my last
(If the alien arrived otherwise than by vessel, the character of conveyance or name of transportation company should be given)
foreign residence was Selshatow, Russia; I am un married; the name
of my wife is Augusta; she was born at RUSSIA
and now resides at RUSSIA

It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign
prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to THE REPUBLIC OF RUSSIA AND
Russia or any independent state within the

boundaries of the Russian Empire, of whom I am now a subject;
I arrived at the port of Emmerson, in the
State of North Dakota, on or about the 14th day
of June, anno Domini 1913; I am not an anarchist; I am not a
polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith
to become a citizen of the United States of America and to permanently reside therein:
SO HELP ME GOD.

Edmund Obermann
(Original signature of declarant)

Subscribed and sworn to before me in the office of the Clerk of said Court
at Milwaukee, Wis., this 2nd day of August
anno Domini 1913

[SEAL]

Wm. L. Bremer
Clerk of the Circuit Court.

By John G. Voight, Deputy Clerk.

spoken of the Belchatow parish as Lutheran. The Lutheran rites and Sacraments were administered.¹⁶ Ida's religious life in the United States was thoroughly Lutheran, with no hint of compromise.

St. John's in Belchatow offered Christian training in its parish school which adjoined the sanctuary. Waldemar relates,

Behind the Lutheran church was the Lutheran school which held classes through grade 6. Religion, reading, writing, arithmetic, German, and Polish were taught.¹⁷

Worship in the parish was apparently an inspiration. Waldemar said:

The Lutheran church was a red brick building with a big steeple. It had a pipe organ. Trumpets played beautiful music before the service began.¹⁸

Other insights into the worship practices of St. John's in Belchatow may be gleaned from Pastor Behse's obituary in the Appendix.

Ida sought a similar setting for the Christian life of her family in the Wisconsin Synod when she arrived in Milwaukee.

In Milwaukee, USA: Edmund Obermann entered the United States in 1913 and settled in Milwaukee. Members of the Vogel family, including his sister-in-law, Ida's sister Olga, also came on the Vaderland, which made port in Quebec.

Edmund's address was listed on his "Declaration of Intention" of 1913 as 1583 Third Street (old house-numbering system), and he also lived with his sister Wanda and her husband on Bremen Street. The 1913 Milwaukee City Directory lists his trade as "carpenter." Edmund Obermann was apparently a man of many talents. His son Waldemar had said that he worked as a butcher, the family trade. In addition to his carpentry, he was also a skilled mason. Waldemar recalls that his father had been employed in Poland in the



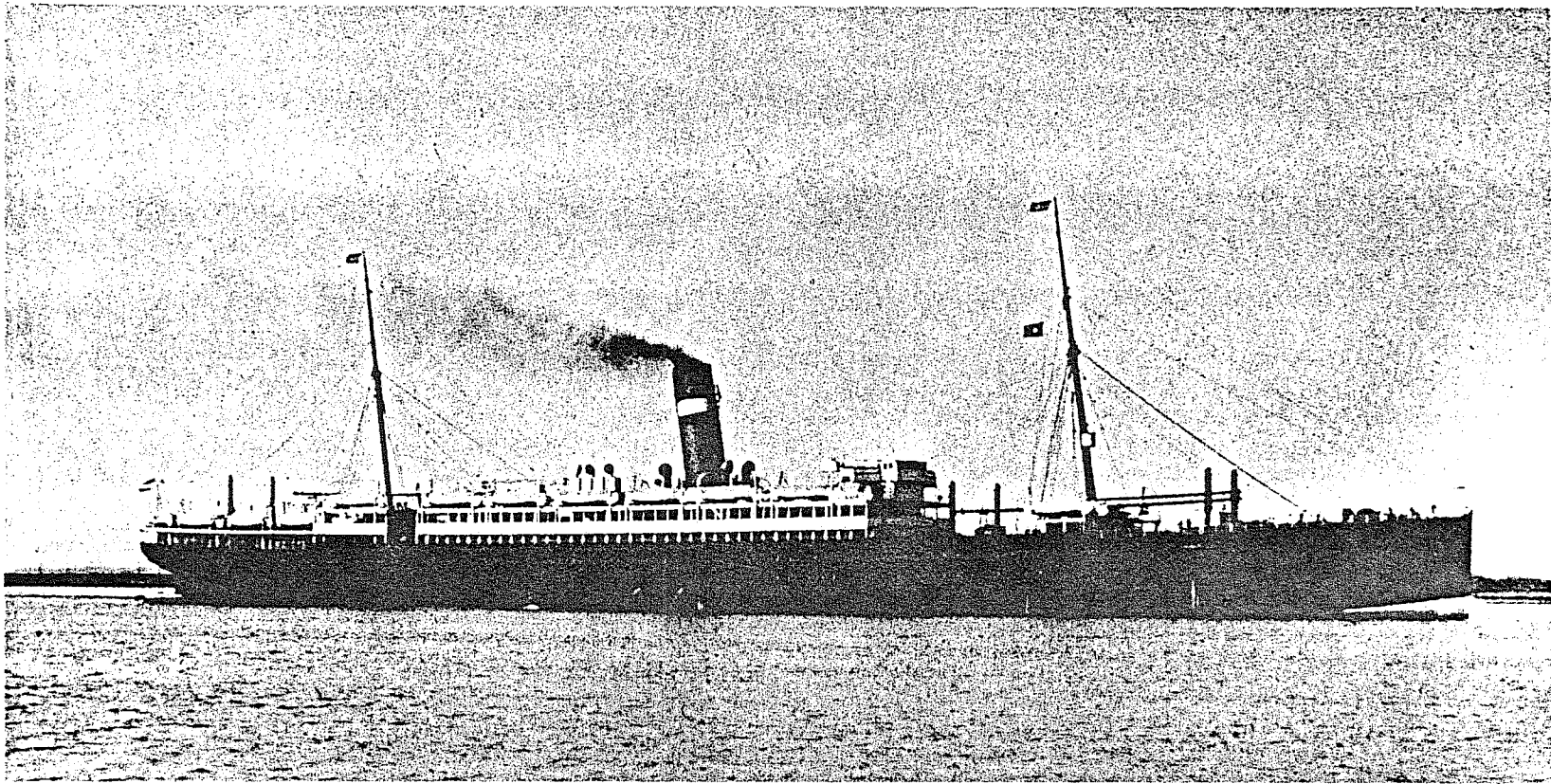
Ida Obermann, captured by a street photographer, Plankinton at Wisconsin, Milwaukee. 1940's.



Immigrants being examined by Public Health officers at Ellis Island.

building of "large (floor-to-ceiling), beautiful ceramic stoves. He built one in one of the houses" they had occupied in Belchatow.¹⁹ Edmund's younger daughters recall that sausages were stuffed and beer was brewed in the family basement on Tenth Street in Milwaukee.

Edmund's construction skills were put to good use in the preparations for receiving the family. He bought a small house (present number 3836) on North Tenth Street, in the block south of Capitol Drive. With the house he purchased a lot and a half. He built a full basement in the middle of the plot. The house was moved onto it, then a large addition was put on the rear. An attic story was built. A full porch was added to the front. Typically European decorations were added - a hipped roof at the front, a sunburst above the front attic windows, and later, a German burger's face (well-fleshed and very jolly, with a stocking cap) was placed on a front porch pillar. It had been carved by son-in-law Al Kunde, who eventually carved Edmund and Ida's grave stone. The plat books in the Local History Room of the Milwaukee Public Library (central) show Edmund's new house actually to be the oldest on the block, perhaps a farm house, surrounded by open fields. The neighborhood would soon become a settlement for many German immigrants. Very attractive homes would soon fill the empty lots, and a brisk business district was developing on Green Bay Avenue at Keefe. The northern terminal of the Green Bay Avenue/Third Street streetcar line provided easy access to all the main east-west thoroughfares of the city and their streetcar lines between Keefe Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue. This was an idyllic situation, even without comparison to Belchatow! Edmund and many others eventually found employment in railroad-related industries, particularly at United Refrigerator Transit.



RIJNDAM

Builder: Harland & Wolff Ltd, Belfast, Ireland.

Completed: October 1901.

Gross tonnage: 12535.

Dimensions: 565ft×62ft. Depth 42ft.

Engines: Two three-cylinder, triple expansion.

Screws: Twin.

Watertight bulkheads: Ten.

Decks: Four.

Normal speed: 15 knots.

Passenger accommodation: 286 first, 192 second and 1500 steerage.

Maiden voyage: Rotterdam—New York on October 10, 1901.

Engaged in the Rotterdam—New York service until 1917 when she was laid up after being damaged by a mine in the North Sea. Taken over by the United States in 1918 while she lay at the port of New York and utilised as a transport. Returned to the Holland-America Line in the autumn of 1919.

In 1923 her itinerary was Rotterdam—Boulogne—Southampton—New York with a call at Plymouth and Boulogne homeward. Sold to Dutch ship-breakers in January 1929.

Sister ships: *Noordam* and *Potsdam*.

Nicholas T. Cairis, Passenger Liners of the World Since 1893.
NY: Bonanza Books, 1979. p. 96.

In the years immediately following World War I, Ida concluded the family's business and made preparations to leave. There is, unfortunately, no correspondence remaining from this period. But Waldemar described their latter living conditions in Belchatow. Before the departure, Ida and four of the children had moved into an apartment building. Waldemar's account describes the hardships there. Ida and Edmund's oldest son, Arthur, had found employment on a farm near Goslar. He would join the family in Milwaukee in 1923.

Ida and the children traveled by rail from Belchatow to Danzig. From Danzig they booked passage on a Baltic passenger liner to Rotterdam. After a delay for emigration processing, the family boarded the Rijndam for New York. Because Ida was fluent in German, Polish, Yiddish, and Russian, she was recruited to serve as an interpreter aboard the Rijndam. The hardships of that voyage, its adventures and misadventures, are related in Waldemar's account in the Appendix. These are some of the most entertaining of the stories in the family's oral tradition. At New York the family was processed through Ellis Island. They took a train bound for Chicago and transferred to the Milwaukee Road for the last leg of the journey to Milwaukee. They arrived at the Milwaukee Road Station (just south of Zeidler Park in downtown Milwaukee, on Michigan Street, just behind the Electric Company's Interurban terminal). The long hard move to Milwaukee, which had begun in 1913, came to an end on August 5, 1921. With Ida's reunion with Edmund, 3836 N. 10th Street became the family's new home. Four more children were born.

The family took membership at Jerusalem Lutheran Church at Holton and Chambers. Zebaoth and Holy Ghost were nearer, but Jerusalem had a school, which the last 4 children attended.

Surviving children tell about the family's strict upbringing, the piety in the home, and about countless good times. The neighborhood had all the amenities of urban living. Small shops were operated by men and women with heavy European accents, parks, plenty of employment in the industries growing up on this northern fringe of the city. The growing neighborhood was distinctively German. Churches and church institutions marked the skyline. The bells of Zebaoth floated across the warm summer evenings while neighbors greeted each other from front porches. Fruit venders, scissors grinders with their two-wheeled carts, and ragmen driving open wagons pulled by a single horse visited the neighborhood. Anything that was needed could be had within walking distance. ²⁰

Edmund Obermann died at home in 1931. Again, Ida provided for her family alone. She may have done some work outside of her home, but some speak of her taking work into her home, and of boarders who stayed in the attic room. Her sons and sons-in-law served in World War II, and those born in Europe had already settled into their own homes. The younger set of 4 children lived with Ida in her home until they were able to afford their own homes. Her youngest daughter and her family remained in the home to take care of Ida in her old age. From a child's point of view, these were exciting years with so many aunts, uncles and cousins under one roof. The children had a great deal of freedom - they were not even excluded from the room when the doctor came to deliver a baby! This pattern of living was certainly repeated many times in immigrant families.

As she reached retirement age, Ida went to work outside of her home. She was employed as a cleaning woman at the Nash Ramb-

ler plant probably a mile away. She walked regularly, even during the harshest winter weather.

In her last years Ida was served by Pastor Toepel of Jerusalem in her home. The memory of her personal devotions, and her well-worn Arndt's Gebetbuch, Liederbuch, and her Bibel remain silent witnesses to a burning faith in Jesus Christ. She expressed a lust for life in many ways, but never by complaining. She loved boxing and baseball, and excelled in domestic arts. She was a notable cook. Her lavish family dinners are still remembered, and her recipes (also part of the oral tradition - never written down) are still used. Certainly, the inspired portrait of the Godly woman in Proverbs 31 brings to mind vivid memories of Ida Augsuta Obermann.

It is well said that the end of a persons' life may tell as much as all the preceding years. The last few years of Ida's life were no different from the rest. She suffered. The ravages of old age robbed her of physical comfort. Her death certificate lists the disorders that brought her into Columbia Hospital for the last time: "intestinal bleeding, duodenal ulcer, gangrene of the left leg." Her daughter Alice had provided well for her at home, but as the end approached, Pastor Toepel visited her with the comfort that could not be taken away from her - the gospel of her salvation in Jesus Christ. Pastor Toepel saw her last. As he left her hospital room, he heard her singing,

"Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit..."

A good number of her descendants continue in the same confession.

Jerusalem church was well filled on the day of her funeral in September, 1968. Despite her age (84 years) and the assurance

of her faith in Jesus, family and friends were definitely reluctant to release her. Her grandsons were her pallbearers. Her procession from Jerusalem to Evergreen Cemetery was the longest I had ever seen until then. This was a suitable tribute to a Christian lady whose only glory in life was her radiant faith in Jesus!

Conclusion: WELS IMMIGRANTS, BY COMING TO THE UNITED STATES, IMPROVED THEIR LOT SPIRITUALLY AND MATERIALLY. The material security is apparent. A large house in a pleasant neighborhood, steady work and a plentiful food supply are obvious blessings from God. No longer did the family have to wait for bread crusts to be thrown from a window, or carry firewood home on their backs. The spiritual situation, likewise, was improved immeasurably. Jerusalem provided a church home that was strongly confessional and Scripture-based. It provided that and all the positive things the family had found in their parish in Belchatow. The material blessings were secure, and provided, at last, a peaceful setting in which God's gracious spiritual blessings could be enjoyed.

NOTES:

1. Robert Ergang, p. 543.
2. Otto Engel, p. 38.
3. Interview with Olga Stelzer, July 14, 1977.
4. Interview with Olga Stelzer, July 14, 1977
5. Interview with Waldemar Obermann, August 30, 1980
6. Interview with Olga Stelzer. June 29, 1980.
7. Alexander, 129.
8. Interview with Olga Stelzer, July 14, 1977
9. Edmund Obermann, "Declaration of Intention" 14 June, 1913.
- 9a. Interview with Waldemar Obermann, August 30, 1980.
10. Interview with Waldemar Obermann, August 30, 1980.
11. Interview with Waldemar Obermann, August 30, 1980.
12. Otto Engel, p. 40.
13. Bodamer, NWL, p. 294.
14. Otto Engel, p. 42.
15. R. Schmidt, p. 102.
16. Interview with Arthur Obermann, Christmas, 1973.
17. Interview with Waldemar Obermann, August 30, 1980.
18. Interview with Waldemar Obermann, August 30, 1980.
19. Interview with Waldemar Obermann, August 30, 1980.
20. This, and most of what follows lows, from the writer's recollections.

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APPENDIX

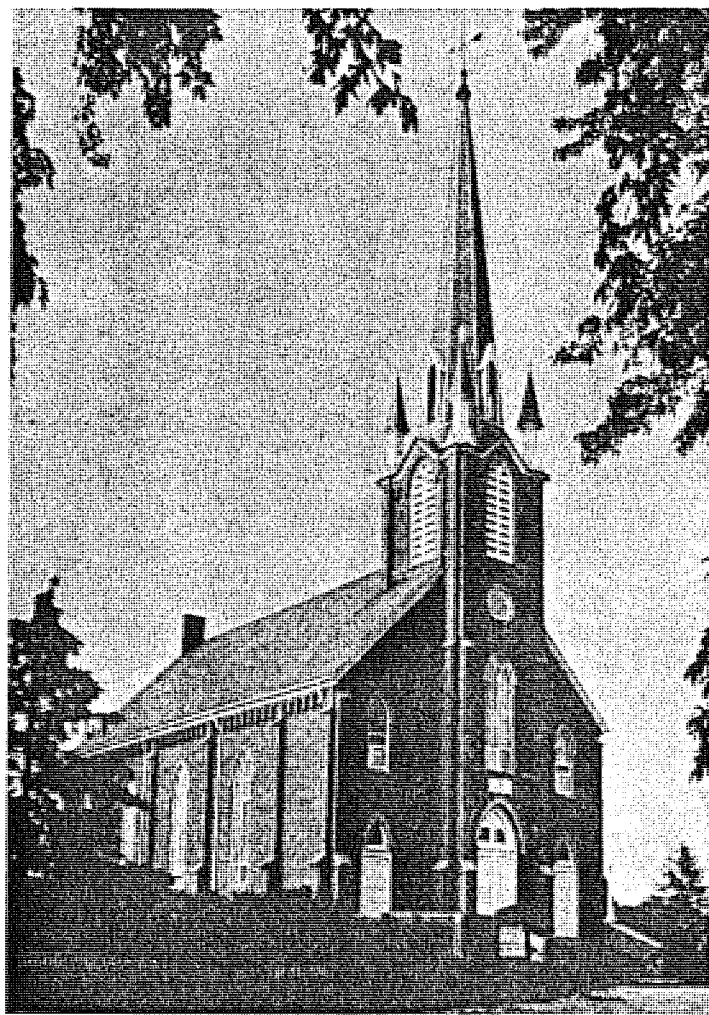
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WELS Historical Institute

Journal

SPRING 1984



Salem Lutheran Church
Scio Township, Ann Arbor, Michigan

Our Synod's First Mission Overseas

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WHEN REQUESTED TO LOOK into some mission topic of historical interest for presentation here, it was suggested that "Our Synod's First Mission Overseas" might be worthy of special interest. It's a story that hasn't received much publicity in the past, and I assumed one of the purposes of a historical society is to dig into crevices, nooks and crannies where sufficient dust has gathered to make one curious about what lies underneath. At least whenever I see in the seminary library one of my colleagues noted for his historical expertise, he's usually digging around in ancient, leather-bound volumes which nobody else has looked at in years.

The story of this mission, moreover, is that of a church body which we can observe from its inception practically to its very end. It's like a book we can open, peruse its contents, close, and then muse over for awhile to see if it has left us with any noteworthy impressions. Like a coal of fire this mission came into life, flared up brightly at times in spite of elements which threatened to extinguish it, and then gradually diminished in intensity so that only a few embers remain, glowing silently in a darkened surrounding.

One might question whether or not this mission was a mission at all in the accepted sense. No doubt it would be better to call it an effort on the part of our Synod to support true Lutheran confessionalism in another area of the world — and perhaps that's a mission as important as any other these days. Whatever the case, it presents to us a story which becomes more and more compelling as we get into it, often a tragic story as we see our fellow Christians up against odds which seem all but insurmountable at times, a story with an unusual and an ironic twist as it nears its close.

Time of Formation in Poland

Germany, as we were reminded so frequently last year (Luther's 500th anniversary year), is known as "the cradle of the Lutheran reformation." As a result German Protestants the world over have usually been identified as "German Lutherans." Unfortunately the "Lutheranism" which they have come to profess after a lapse of nearly 500 years is often distant from that which the Great Reformer professed.

This was especially true of many of the Germans scattered throughout Poland after World War I. A certain Lutheran consciousness, perhaps, was preserved. Staunch Lutheran confessionalism, however, was rare. Pastors trained in state-controlled universities were greatly influenced by the rationalistic and liberalistic trends of the times. As a result many of the poorer

people sought a religious outlet in self-organized meetings led by people with little theological training. Although the Lutheran Church of Poland called itself the "Augsburg Church," its state-controlled practices tended to serve the interests of the rich rather than the poor. Armin Schlender, a pastor in our Polish mission, describes the situation:

The care for souls (in the Augsburg Church) among the common people left much to be desired. In addition to spiritual indifference the social differences so prevalent in the land were reflected in church life. Pews for Sunday attendance were rented to the more opulent. Tariffs were introduced for baptisms, weddings and burials. This practice of favoring the wealthy aroused much restlessness among the common people, who turned to their own prayer meetings and assembled in private homes to find spiritual help (*Durch Kreuz zur Krone*, April 1974).

One such group began to meet in the city of Lodz under the guidance of Gustav Maliszewski, a schoolteacher and evangelist in the Augsburg Church, who somehow had acquired books and periodicals from Dr. C. F. W. Walther and from the Saxon Free Church in Germany. Further contacts led to Maliszewski's enrollment in the Theological Seminary of the Saxon Free Church, located in Zehlendorf, Germany. He writes of this experience:

In Zehlendorf I soon became aware that the Holy Spirit was in charge, and that its theology was rooted in the Holy Scriptures, a theology which I had never before been privileged to learn. Although I had studied sufficiently to serve as a licensed preacher, I was never fully satisfied with my theological studies. A doctrine of conversion which depended upon a person's own will or lack of it, a teaching of predestination which led to despair, teachings relating to baptism and Lord's Supper which failed to satisfy, and then especially matters pertaining to the last things and the millennium confused me to such an extent that I longed fervently to escape this labyrinth. Zehlendorf gave me what my heart desired (*Ibid.*).

Having enjoyed a "Zehlendorf experience" of my own shortly before World War II, I can appreciate Maliszewski's words. I studied under one of the same teachers who influenced Maliszewski, Rector Martin Willkomm, a man whom I shall always treasure as one of the great church leaders and theologians of our time.

Returning to Lodz in June 1, 1923 after completing his studies in Zehlendorf, Maliszewski undertook to rent a hall in order to found a Lutheran Free Church. Since the government denied him the right to hold public services, he resorted to meeting in private homes in Lodz and in Andrespol, gathering small groups of people and instructing them in the teachings of the Bible on the basis of Luther's catechism. His appeals for help in founding a Lutheran Free Church, directed toward the Saxon Free Church in Germany, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod resulted in a response from our Synod, which promised to assist in this work.

That our Synod became directly involved came as a result of a visit to Poland by Pastor Otto Engel of Randolph, Wisconsin, who was authorized by the Synod to go to Poland and investigate requests for help coming out of this country. Pastor Engel reported personally to the 1923 convention of our

Synod, stating that the situation in Poland was "very sad" (*sehr traurig*), that "thousands upon thousands were without a shepherd," and that "the hunger for the Word was great." The convention responded by resolving to assist the work in Poland "with utmost energy" (*energisch*), and voted the sum of \$10,000 annually for its support (cf. *Proceedings*, 17th Convention, 1923).

In the meantime Maliszewski was granted permission by the Polish Ministry of Culture to hold public services, and the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Poland was organized on May 11, 1924 in the home of family Edward Gnauck in Lodz, in the presence of 35 adults. Since Director J. P. Koehler of our Wauwatosa Seminary and his son Pastor Karl Koehler were planning a trip to Germany in the summer of 1924, our General Board for Missions requested them to study further the free church situation in Poland with Pastor Engel. The Koehlers agreed with Pastor Engel's evaluation, and the three men from our Synod participated in the first large public service held in Lodz by the Lutheran Free Church on August 3, 1924, a service in which Pastor Maliszewski was officially ordained and installed as the pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church.

During the course of the next 15 years (1924-1939) this little group in Poland spread out into various places in and around Lodz and Warsaw. Twelve congregations and 14 preaching stations were established, gathering in nearly 3,000 souls and 2,000 communicants. Ten congregations erected modest places of worship; others met in rented halls or private rooms. Pastors who served during these years were Gustav Maliszewski, Heinrich Mueller, August Lerle, Ernst Lerle, Leopold Zielke, Karl Patzer, Armin Schlender, Edward Lelke, Helmut Schlender, Alfons Wagner, Alfred Reit and Arthur Napp. Most of these men were trained at the Zehlendorf Seminary of the Saxon Free Church. August Lerle came to the church by way of colloquy, following doctrinal differences in Neuendettelsau, where he had received his first theological training.

Pastors from our Wisconsin Synod who represented us and supervised the work in our behalf during these years were Otto Engel (1924-1925), Adolf Dasler (1926-1928) and Wilhelm Bodamer (1929-1939). Pastor Engel did much traveling, seeking to gain students to study for the work of the ministry. Pastor Dasler concentrated on inner growth and on the organization of pastoral conferences. Pastor Bodamer served the longest of the three and is described by Pastor Maliszewski in these words:

With the arrival of Pastor Bodamer our young church achieved its real growth, both inwardly and outwardly. All his many God-given gifts, his time and his energy were devoted to the work of our church. Wherever a need existed he jumped in. Work was his desire and his joy. He preached often and willingly. His sermons were deeply grounded in God's Word, accompanied with an inner warmth and deep conviction which one could recognize immediately. He understood how to place the truths of Scripture upon the hearts of his hearers in simple words. Under his leadership our work prospered and took on a real significance both for pastors and congregations (*Durch Kreuz zur Krone*, May 1974).

This is not to say that this mission in Poland had an easy time of it during these years of growth. The greatest opponents of the free church movement came from people within the territorial state church, who tried in every possible way to hinder its progress. According to Polish law only Polish citizens could serve as pastors. Only acts performed in territorial state churches were granted official recognition. State church taxes were demanded of every citizen. Our congregations were sometimes refused the right to build their own churches. Others were padlocked after they were built. The only public cemeteries in existence were controlled by state churches. Although the existence of our mission was seemingly suffered in some places by local authorities, in other areas situations arose where state church members and pastors tried to harass the work in every possible way. A funeral procession, for example, was refused admission into a cemetery and the body had to be abandoned at the cemetery gate. A newly built chapel was padlocked on the day when it was to be dedicated and remained so for nearly three years. A confirmation service was interrupted by a state official and the pastor was told that he had no right to officiate in a robe. Usually these incidents arose as a result of some complaint issued by a member of the state church. At one time it seemed that Pastor Bodamer's visa to reside in Poland would not be renewed, and it was only through the mediation of our U.S. embassy upon the request of our Synod that his visa was extended.

In spite of these difficulties the work progressed. A monthly church paper, *Die Evangelisch — Lutherische Freikirche in Polen*, appeared in 1930 with Pastor Bodamer serving as editor. In 1937 the "Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Free church in Poland, UAC" was formally constituted. An arrangement was worked out between Poland's Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Culture whereby local authorities were directed to accept records of official acts performed in organized congregations of our Polish Free Church. During these years our Wisconsin Synod's support for this mission was renewed annually to the extent of nearly \$11,000, and in addition to this a number of loans were granted to make it possible for congregations in Poland to erect modest chapels and parsonages. This in spite of our Synod's "depression woes," when according to a report from the chairman of the Synod's General Mission Board cries were heard to "drop the mission in Poland."

It seemed that in 1938 and going into the summer of 1939 our mission in Poland had arrived at a point where it could look forward to a more settled existence, comparatively free from the struggles and harassments of its formative years. This was my own year of study in Berlin-Zehlendorf, a year brought to a close with the end of the summer semester in early August, 1939. I was able to visit with Pastor Bodamer as he stopped by in Zehlendorf on his return to the U.S., where he again was to report to the 1939 convention of our Synod. Of all the students at Zehlendorf I appreciated most of all my friendship with Alfred Reit and Arthur Napp, and as they returned to their homeland I returned to mine, late in August of that year. Although there were strange rumblings and occasional incidents on the border between Poland and Germany, and although the verbal hostilities between the Goebbel's propaganda machine and the Polish press were heating up considerably, none of us could have predicted the events which began September 1, 1939. On that day Germany declared war on Poland and our

mission in that country was to be uprooted violently and transported into Germany following the war.

The Interim — World War II

With the beginning of World War II it was as though an impenetrable curtain had been drawn between the mother church in America and its adopted offspring which it had nurtured in Poland. Synodical *Proceedings* from the years 1941, 1943 and 1945 offer scant information. Director Bodamer, who had come to America to report to the 1939 convention, was not permitted to return to Poland. Because of rigid censorship mail service between the U.S. and Poland (renamed "Warthegau" by the German army of occupation) was practically nonexistent. Funds requisitioned for the support of workers could not be processed. After the U.S. entered the war following Pearl Harbor there was the added danger that communications from our country would place those addressed in Warthegau into even greater jeopardy. All that could be done on this side was to pray — and await developments.

From those in Warthegau itself who experienced the years which followed — and who somehow survived — we now know what happened. Pastor Armin Schlender, who came through it all and later succeeded Pastor Maliszewski as leader of the refugees who reassembled in Germany, gives us a vivid description of these years in a series of articles appearing in the church paper *Durch Kreuz zur Krone* (April through September, 1974). From his report we shall bring excerpts of this interim phase in the church's history, a phase which can be divided into three parts: the time of Polish persecution, the time of German occupation, and the flight to the West from the Russians and the regrouping in Germany itself.

The Polish Persecution

One can imagine the parlous situation experienced by German residents in Poland after Germany's declaration of war upon that country. Armin Schlender describes them as "days of terror, of extreme unrest, of indescribable suspense, unheard of spiritual misery." Polish excesses led to "lowliest bloodlust, satanic evil, devilish sadism and deeds of bestiality." A time of "open season" was declared upon all Germans, who tried to hide in every possible place of refuge. Hordes of released criminals swarmed over their villages, plundered their homes, terrorized their women. The Poles were, according to his description, like a people possessed, driven by instincts so low that one cannot even imagine it. "Kill the German spies," was the cry as the remains of martyred Germans were recognizable only through remnants of their clothing as their cries for help filled the countryside. People from our own congregations were not spared. According to official reports, over 60,000 Germans were murdered as they were in the process of being deported elsewhere. It seems that in subsequent years much has been publicized about the Jewish holocaust, but very little of what went on in Poland.

By virtue of the German blitzkrieg this time of persecution was mercifully ended in a matter of weeks, only to be replaced by another time of extreme uncertainty, the German occupation.

The German Occupation

Although a measure of order came with the German takeover, the spirit of National Socialism was not favorably disposed toward church activities. Special permission for holding church services had to be obtained from police authorities. No offerings could be gathered for the support of the church; no official church papers could be printed; no contact with churches or organizations outside of Poland could be established.

On the other hand, Schlender reports that thousands of German refugees began to filter into the area, from the Baltic zone, parts of Russia, Bessarabia and Czechoslovakia. Many of these were attracted to the prayer meetings and services organized by our mission. In fact, many new preaching stations were begun, and after a time Schlender reports that "we were able to preach the gospel unhindered, administer the sacraments, hold instruction classes, make home visitations and provide pastoral care" (*Durch Kreuz zur Krone*, August 1974). The overall work grew to a total of 2,500 souls, 15 congregations and 30 preaching stations. Pastors could not be salaried and lived from whatever help their members could provide in gifts of food and clothing. It seemed for awhile that out of the horrible confusion following the declaration of war a time of great blessing was emerging.

And then from the Eastern front in Russia came reports of a German retreat and a massive Russian offensive. Schlender writes:

In a spirit of fearful anticipation we still celebrated Christmas and New Year, 1945, when the great offensive struck and brought the entire Eastern front into a state of flux. Millions of Germans either upon their own initiative or by way of official order fled and sought refuge in the West. Among these were most of our people. Therewith also our church in the East ceased to exist, this after two decades of visible blessings of the Lord in the activities of his church (*Durch Kreuz zur Krone*, August 1974).

The Regrouping in Germany

During the course of the year 1945 after what Schlender describes as a "grueling never-to-be-forgotten journey" — time and again under the fire of advancing and retreating armies — the stream of refugees flowed into Germany. In this devastated land they lived as unwelcome guests. Our own people were scattered throughout the four zones of military occupation, as one report has it, "ragged, emaciated and unwelcome beggars" (*Proceedings*, 1947).

Five of the surviving pastors from Poland — Maliszewski, Lerle, Mueller, Zielke and A. Schlender — managed to find each other in Zwickau, Saxony, where the Ev. Lutheran Free Church of Saxony had its publishing house. Since many of the pastors of the Saxon Free Church were in German military service, our pastors were prevailed upon to serve this church in the emergency. This they did gladly.

After the war finally came to an end, Maliszewski managed to invite the remaining pastors from our former Polish Free Church to a conference in Memmingen, Germany, which met there in February 1946. They decided to search out their people who had fled into Germany and in a subsequent meeting in June resolved to become re-established as the Evangelical Lutheran Refugee Mission.

The following summer, 1947, Bodamer and Executive Secretary A. Maas were finally granted permission to travel to Germany and re-establish the ties which had been severed by the war over a period of eight years.

Re-establishment in Germany

In the ensuing years, 1947-1975, a new free church gradually developed, with the remnants from Poland serving as nuclei. The first years were a matter of relocating our scattered people, finding facilities for holding services, and concentrating on centers where most of the refugees could be assembled. At first it seemed that a new era of unprecedented growth was in store for this refugee mission. The 1949 Convention *Proceedings* of our Synod reports a total of 10,000 souls assembled in the Western zones alone, and the 1951 *Proceedings* gives the figures of 3,000 souls gathered in 14 congregations and 110 (!) preaching stations in the Russian zone, served by five pastors and 24 lay teachers. In the Western zones 18,000 souls gathered in 11 congregations and 100 (!) preaching stations, served by 11 pastors. Additional pastors came to this mission from the Saxon Free Church, from graduation at the seminary re-established at Oberursel, by cooperating free churches and by colloquy.

One has to marvel at these figures, also wondering in the light of subsequent developments whether or not they were grossly exaggerated. At the time they seemed no doubt to be realistic. Refugees flocked together in this time of mutual need, receiving the physical aid which was extended to them so bountifully by relief agencies. Our own Synod's relief committee reported in 1951 that it had within the past few years shipped the following amounts either through Lutheran World Relief or directly: 25,000 CARE packages, 80,000 pounds of flour, 300,000 pounds of clothing, 1,000 pairs of eyeglasses, and countless Bibles and hymnals. For many refugees, however, the situation was temporary. Many emigrated to Canada, the U.S., and South America. Others were scattered throughout Germany, and as they became more permanently established returned to the more familiar atmosphere of a territorial church rather than to remain classified as free church adherents. Still others, no doubt, lost much of their religiosity as their need for help diminished. Much of this handout type of Christianity simply went the way of all flesh.

As our refugee mission took on signs of greater permanence in those places which were served by pastors, a reorganization took place during the 1950s in which the church was renamed "The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Confession in the Dispersion" (*Ev. Luth. Bekenntniskirche in der Diaspora*) and eventually "The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Confession" (*Ev. Luth. Bekenntniskirche*). Pastor Alfred Maas of Sodus, Michigan served as the church's nonresident director. Pastor Armin Schlender succeeded G. Maliszewski as president. Through aid from our Synod most of the established congregations gradually acquired modest chapels and parsonages at a cost of approximately \$5,000 per unit. Church membership settled down to a total figure of about 3,000 souls and 2,000 communicants in West Germany and about half that amount in East Germany. The annual cost to our Synod for the support of this venture came to about \$75,000, most of which went to subsidize the salaries of the ten pastors in the West and the five pastors in the East.

It was in the mid-1950s that I became personally involved with this mission as a member of the Board for World Missions and the executive committee in charge of the work in Germany. My chief qualification, it seems, was that I was conversant with German, an ability that was severely put to the test in a number of personal visits to this mission between the years 1955 to 1960. A number of experiences on these visits left a lasting impression.

On my first visit I attended a pastoral conference which almost ended in a serious split within the church. Several pastors accused Pastor A. Wagner of having transgressed fellowship principles when his new chapel in Varel was dedicated, since some pastors there were not in fellowship with us. Pastor Wagner protested that these pastors participated without his foreknowledge, and was so upset that his sound practice as a pastor should be questioned that he abruptly left the meeting in a huff. A big argument resulted, and it was only through the tearful mediation and fervent appeals of President Schlender that peace was restored. I'll always remember a comment made by Pastor H. Forchheim at this occasion: "Wir ersticken uns in unserer eigenen Atmosphäre!" (We are suffocating ourselves in our own atmosphere).

On my next visit I presented a paper to the conference on how they ought to strive more energetically toward self-support rather than to rely on our Wisconsin Synod to pay their salaries. A lovely topic! I can remember old Pastor Maliszewski standing up and declaring: "Ihre Worte sind mir gerade durchs Herz gedrungen!" I never quite understood what he meant by that. In any case my zealous exhortation didn't seem to do very much good. They still continued to bring generous offerings toward unnecessary bell-towers for their chapels rather than pay off the debt on the chapels themselves.

Perhaps my most difficult task was to try to explain to Dr. Ernst Lerle that his use of Wilhelm Moeller from the territorial church to teach his theological students at Leipzig didn't agree with our fellowship theses. The full impact of this discussion I'll probably never know. Two weeks after our Berlin meeting the Russians built that detestable wall, and all further direct contact with our men on the other side became all but impossible.

An unforgettable character at those Berlin meetings was old "Opa" Lerle, venerable pastor from the days in Poland, who was still serving numerous congregations and preaching stations in spite of his advanced age and almost total blindness. When asked how he could still manage to get around on a bicycle he simply declared, "When they see me coming they should have sense enough to get out of the way!" At one meeting he related how the Berlin border official insisted on going through all his "documents." His Bible was his only "document," and he told the official, "Go ahead, read! I'll sit here all day if you want to study the whole thing!"

Other memories are vivid: preaching in a home where there was scarcely enough room to stand and where people were straining their ears while standing on the outside near the windows. . . . Visiting all the church councils in the congregations in an all-out effort to encourage them to be more mission-minded, knowing all the while that if the pastor wasn't going to get out of his study during the week and do more visiting, my appeals would be fruitless. . . . Somehow through it all having the feeling that the hearts of many of these people were still in the old Polish homeland (*die alte*



Pastor "Opa" Lerle
in his pulpit
at Christmas
(confer page 41)

Heimat), and that the struggle of becoming established in this new Germany was a losing battle.

In my own report to the 1957 Synod Convention I expressed some of the problems in these words:

Everything in Western Germany is bustling with activity. Cities which ten years ago were a mass of rubble have been rebuilt to such an extent that the traces of war are scarcely in evidence. . . . But the average German has again lapsed into a materialistic way of life. . . . Church attendance in the Evangelical Landeskirche is lamentably weak. Parishes with memberships reaching into the thousands have less than one hundred people in attendance at a service. Still the average individual considers himself a member in good standing. . . . Surrounded by this depressing atmosphere of spiritual darkness and indifference is our mission, with its 12 pastors and 3,000 souls. Opportunities for doing intensive mission work are restricted by the fact that most people in Germany already consider themselves to be church members. The appeal of our mission must be made primarily to refugees, and the surge of refugees is diminishing rapidly. Thus the outward growth of our mission is practically at a standstill. If anything, there is a slight decrease in membership (1957 *Proceedings*).

In 1962 I left for Africa and was spared the depressing experience of having to see a church body go through a period of relentless and inevitable decline. While reports from the 1960s and into the 1970s show that the Bekenntniskirche was making strides toward reducing subsidy from our

Synod, its membership continued to decline rather rapidly so that by 1973 both East and West listed slightly over a thousand souls in each zone. The absorption of our people by other free churches in Germany, effected in 1975, was but a step away. The way in which this amalgamation took place deserves a closer, final look.

The Absorption by SELK

The history of our Synod's first mission overseas tells of ups and downs, surges of optimism when sudden growth seemed to be in prospect, followed by crushing disappointments when these hopes were suddenly dashed. When the wave of refugee prospects in West Germany began to vanish during the 1950s, synodical reports pertaining to our Bekenntniskirche began to take on a much more somber look. As the "Care-Package Lutherans" became absorbed in new interests and defected to other areas, and as efforts to interest German nationals in a conservative Lutheran free church became increasingly difficult, real concern for continued stability and even future existence began to make itself felt among pastors and people. Church membership was diminishing instead of growing. Nostalgic ties with the former homeland were becoming less important. Other Lutheran free church organizations in Germany were experiencing similar difficulties and were taking steps toward amalgamation in order to avoid duplication of effort in certain localities and also to strengthen one another in a common cause for Lutheran confessionalism. It was only natural that our Bekenntniskirche should also be interested in pursuing the possibility of closer ties with other free churches as a way of self-preservation.

Already in 1957 three other Lutheran free churches began to take steps toward a closer working agreement (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*). They were the Ev. Lutheran Free Church in Germany (*Saechsische Freikirche*), the Old Lutheran Church of Breslau (*Alllutherische Kirche*), and the Independent Lutheran Church of Germany (*Selbstaendige Kirche*). Our Bekenntniskirche was in fellowship with the Saxons and with Breslau, but protested the position of the Independent Church on the doctrine of verbal inspiration and on its unionistic practices with the Territorial Church of Germany. It should be mentioned in this connection that our people whom we supported in East Germany could only receive their support from us as a district of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church of Germany, this because of governmental regulations in East Germany.

This whole situation was further complicated when our Synod discontinued fellowship relations with the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod in 1961, since Missouri was supporting the Ev. Lutheran Free Church and Wisconsin was supporting the Bekenntniskirche.

On the one hand efforts toward clarifying our Wisconsin Synod's fellowship relations with the Lutheran free churches in Germany were intensified. On the other hand our people and the Saxons were being brought closer together through little flocks in the same community. Why two churches and two pastors? The future of our mission in Europe, as reports indicate, was becoming more a matter of concern for our Commission in Doctrinal Matters than for the Executive Committee for Germany. When in 1969 our Commission on Doctrinal Matters reported favorably on meetings with Breslau and the Saxons and also accepted an invitation to meet with the

Independent Church, our Synod in convention resolved "that we encourage and urge the Church of the Ev. Lutheran Confession in Germany, in consultation with the Commission on Doctrinal Matters and the Board for World Missions, to strive for closer relationships and eventual amalgamation with other Lutheran Free Churches in Germany and other European countries" (*Proceedings*, 1969). Our congregation in Oldenburg, it seems, took this resolution very seriously and soon after merged with the Independent Church in that city.

In 1973 the three other Lutheran Free Churches mentioned previously joined in a church body known as the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (SELK), and in June of that year our Commission on Doctrinal Matters met at Mequon with representatives of this newlyformed church body. Discussions at this meeting were extremely propitious. It seemed that agreement had been reached on all points of doctrine that had been in question. Unfortunately this agreement between representatives at this Mequon meeting, as it later developed, was not shared by members of SELK's leadership in Germany, who later on refused to endorse and even repudiated the agreement which had been reached.

But affairs in our Bekenntniskirche's efforts toward a merger with SELK had in the meantime progressed to a point where our people no longer felt that they wished to withdraw. At Hohnhorst in June of 1975 the Bekenntniskirche unanimously resolved to declare fellowship and organic union with SELK. That is certainly a strange, perhaps tragic twist in this denouement. Through an unfortunate combination of unusual circumstances a fellowship, which we helped nurture for 30 years for confessional reasons, came to an end rather abruptly, through actions which were taken in good faith but which took on another direction.

Statements which have been subsequently issued by SELK's leadership and by its church periodicals continue to indicate that we are still not agreed on the doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures and on matters relating to church fellowship.

There still remains the group of pastors in East Germany, behind the iron curtain, who are reportedly still struggling with issues relating to SELK and who want to study the doctrinal differences which prevent our Commission on Inter-Church Relations from recommending fellowship with SELK. Further discussions with these men from the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Germany are still pending, and we are still sending them our financial support. This group consists of possibly seven pastors and about 1,000 communicants.

Concluding Observations

A historical survey of this kind leads to a few closing observations:

- Our Synod's first mission venture overseas followed an appeal for help, a "Macedonian call" if you will, at the same time a call strongly confessional in character. The fact that we entered this field in response to a call was stressed in many later reports justifying our involvement in this work. Most of our subsequent ventures overseas have followed a similar pattern (Jonathan Ekong and Edet Eshiett to Nigeria; Martinus Adam to Indonesia; Peter Chang to Hong Kong; Orea Luna to Mexico; Seth Erlandsson to Sweden; Luiz Rauter to Brazil). Work in Japan, Puerto Rico, Central Africa,

and Colombia began on our own initiative and on the basis of our own preliminary study.

- From beginning to end our prime motivation for helping this mission was deeply confessional in nature. This was our "Existenzberechtigung" (justification for existence). Although a greater promise for evangelism and in-gathering opportunities through this mission seemed to present itself at times, these quickly vanished and the confessional tone of our work again became the chief emphasis. In one synodical report Karl Krauss emphasized: "The Church of the Ev. Lutheran Confession is not strictly a mission. . . . It is a subsidized church" (*Proceedings*, 1963). It is ironic, therefore, that a venture which began out of confessional conviction had to be separated from us for confessional reasons and because of an amalgamation which we at first may have encouraged.

- The designation for this mission's official church periodical, *Durch Kreuz zur Krone* (Through Cross to Crown), aptly describes its existence. Severe crosses and tribulations were a part of its lot from the very beginning and continued throughout most of its history. One must marvel at the trials which its members were called upon to sustain again and again. The phrase "in the Diaspora" attached to its name for a time reminds one of the Epistles of Peter, also written to suffering Christians, yet "God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1).

- Because of its lack of outward success and at times considerable expenditure in funds (as high as \$75,000 annually) this venture met with much criticism. Voices were frequently heard to abandon it and "spend the money more profitably elsewhere." No one, however, who became personally involved with those who were supported by this effort could help feeling deeply sympathetic with their cause. It was a work of Christian love in a very real sense, regardless of what some critics might have said.

- My own service on the Board for World Missions as a member of the executive committee in charge of the work in Germany was also my introduction to direct participation in world mission work. Sitting in World Board meetings at the feet of Edgar Hoenecke, one could easily become infected by a world mission spirit which was both compelling and irresistible. And so when my call to Africa came along in 1962, how could it be declined?

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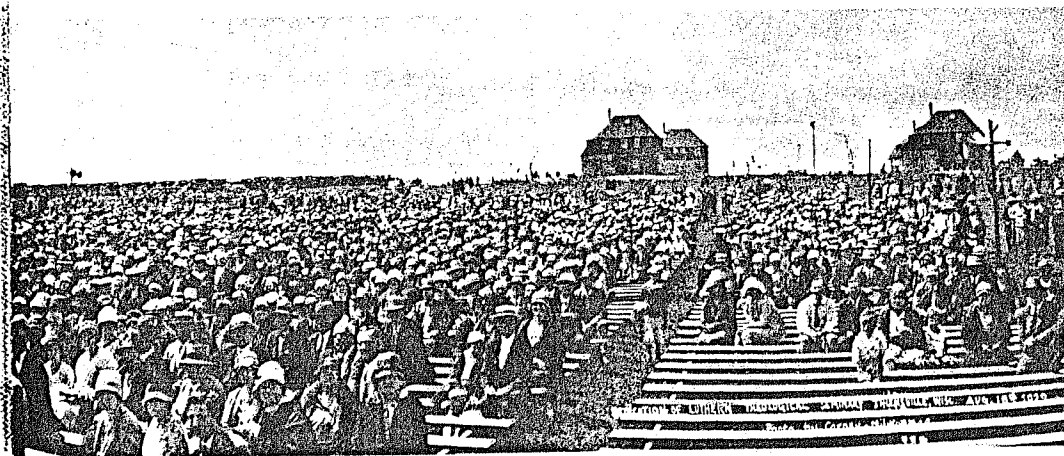
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Durch Kreuz zur Krone, by Armin Schlender, May to September 1974 (Official Publication of the Ev. Lutheran Bekenntniskirche)

This essay was presented at the spring meeting of the WELS Historical Institute on May 1, 1983. Prof. Wendland teaches homiletics and Old Testament at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin.

WELS Historical Institute
Journal

FALL 1988



The Wisconsin Synod Mission in Poland

Otto Engel

WHY DID MY ANCESTORS leave their settled homes in Germany and migrate to a country that was very much unsettled in far-off Poland? My forebears were all of pure German stock. Why would they want to move to a land where not only the language but also the customs were far different from those they were used to? In order to understand more clearly why some Germans would want to leave their country, it is necessary to know something about the political and religious, the social and economic conditions as they obtained in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century.

Political and Religious Conditions

The king of Prussia at this time was Friedrich Wilhelm III who ruled from 1797-1840. He will be remembered as the king who in 1817, the 300th anniversary of the Reformation, issued a decree that the Lutherans in his land should be joined in a union with the Reformed in a church that thenceforth was to be known as the Evangelical Church of Germany. It is true that the decree was not enforced rigorously until a few years later, but still the strict Lutherans living in his kingdom at the time must have feared for the future and wondered how this would affect their religious freedom if the liturgy they were to use in their churches, the church they were to attend and even their pastor were fixed by law.

In 1806 Napoleon had invaded Germany and caused many changes in the political situation. He dealt the Prussian army a crushing defeat with the result that one territory after another fell to him so that in a short time the whole country was in his hands. After that war, a huge indemnity was levied on the land resulting in much economic and personal hardship.

Social and Economic Conditions

The conditions in Germany after Napoleon, however, were not all negative. Instead the regime was spurred into a thoroughgoing reconstruction of the state machinery. A number of reforms were worked out by two outstanding statesmen of that time, Karl vom Stein and Karl August von Hardenberg. Included in these reforms were such liberal measures as the abolition of serfdom. For hundreds of years the farmlands and the huge estates were owned and controlled by the *Landgutsbesitzer* or the land-holding class. The

work on the large estates was performed by the serfs who also supplied the landowners with produce and rent but remained bound to the land. Once they were freed they could now have their own little farms, bought from the landowner with great difficulty. But at least now they had a place they could call their own.

There was another class of serfs who had no landed property. But as a result of the Stein-Hardenberg reforms they were now free to leave the landed estates. The result was that many of them flocked to the cities where they joined a class that was known as *Handwerker* or the laboring class. Since industry had not as yet developed sufficiently to absorb this large influx of people, unemployment and extreme poverty were the result. While they were still living on the large estates they had been assured of fuel for their homes and a meager living. But now in the cities they were on their own. Much hardship followed and there was general dissatisfaction with their lot.

One more class that was affected by the new reforms was that of the craftsmen, those who practiced a skilled trade. A workman who had learned a trade had to stay with that trade even though there was no work to be had. Often he was hindered by law from moving from one place to another. All that changed with the reforms that had been inaugurated. Now anyone was free to call himself a craftsman even though he lacked the skill required by that craft. The result was that the field soon became overcrowded. And again there was much bitter poverty and many families were brought to the brink of starvation.

A last class must still be mentioned. As long as they were serfs they were not permitted to marry without special permission of the *Landgutsbesitzer*. In this way the population was kept under control. But once they became free, this restriction was dropped. There followed a rapid increase in population. The result was that in about two more decades people were beginning to talk of emigrating to America and even to Australia.

Migrations to Poland

Under these adverse conditions prevailing in Germany it was only to be expected that more and more people, realizing that they could never expect to get ahead in their own country, would begin to look elsewhere for a place to live and an opportunity to improve their lot in life. In Poland about 50 miles southwest of the capital city of Warsaw a textile industry was developing in a town called Lodz. In order to attract workers for the industry, the Polish government promised all immigrants large grants of land, good working conditions and the guarantee that no one would ever interfere in matters of language or religion. The government even promised them that it would help them to build churches and parsonages. Many Germans, dazzled by the promises, streamed into the city from all parts of Germany. It was not long before the city of Lodz developed into a large city for the manufacture of textiles. That is how a large colony of Germans came to settle in Lodz and many smaller colonies in the villages surrounding the city.

The Migration to Alexandrow

At this time a group of weavers and clothmakers, mostly from Schlesien and Posen, who had seen hard times, left their native Germany by way of

Ostrowo and started for Poland. The distance was 100 or more miles. With all their goods and possessions loaded on wagons they made the journey to Poland. It must have taken them several weeks. Instead of moving into the city of Lodz itself they chose to settle in a little village in the vicinity of Lodz which had been founded two years before in the year 1817 and been given the name Alexandrow. Among these immigrants were the three sons of Daniel Gottlieb Engel: Johan Carl, Friedrich Leopold and Wilhelm Ernst. Here they carried on their weaver's trade. Later a stocking factory was started in their village where many of the immigrants found employment. But until that time their homes actually were small factories where each child had a weaver's chair and was working for the business. Here in their new homeland they found much improved conditions and soon prospered.

Founding of the Churches in Lodz

Coming from a background of strict orthodox Lutheranism in their native Germany and wishing to preserve this precious heritage it was only natural that they wanted a pastor in their midst as soon as possible. We look first in the city of Lodz where the largest colony of Germans had located. As early as 1829 Trinity Church in the city of Lodz had been founded. The beginning was small. But with more and more immigrants streaming in, this church saw such phenomenal growth that by the year 1870 it had grown to 20,000 souls. The pastor in 1870 was a man by the name of Clemens Bertold Rondthaler.

To serve such a large group was too much for one man, but because of the lack of pastors most of the time he was without an assistant. To get an idea how strenuous and burdensome the work must have been we need but look at the statistics for one year. In one year the church records show that there were 1,145 baptisms, 642 funerals, sometimes as many as six or eight in one day. The number of communicants for that year is listed at 7,609. Because holy communion was celebrated only several times a year the number of people coming to communion at one time oftentimes numbered in the thousands. We are told that Rondthaler after administering communion for several hours finally distributed the elements by sitting in a chair. It was due to the tremendous energy of this man and his utmost faithfulness that as much was accomplished as there was.

With so many services to conduct and so much administration, it was a human impossibility for him to do any mission work or pastoral work in the congregation. But here is where dedicated layworkers came to his assistance. They conducted reading services in different parts of the city in rented quarters and in this way took care of the spiritual needs of the people and kept the congregation together. Serving in this capacity as lay evangelist the name of Leopold Engel is mentioned. It was in this Trinity Church in Lodz that my father, Julius Engel, Jr., was confirmed by Pastor Clemens Bertold Rondthaler on April 7, 1884.

When a few years later the Trinity congregation had increased to 40,000 souls, it was decided to found another church in another part of the city. In 1884 St. John church was dedicated, and a year later Pastor W. P. Angerstein was called to be its pastor. He was a graduate of the Erlanger Theological Seminary in Germany with which he remained in contact throughout

arrived in New York in time to enroll in the seminary for the next school year. Many of these men later became pastors in the old Minnesota Synod and may be considered as a kind of firstfruits of the confessional brand of Lutheranism that they had learned to know in the Lutheran churches of Poland.

Poland During and After World War I

And now there came change to the congregations that up until now had been able to live and carry on their work with the favor of the state church and the protection of the government. World War I broke out in Europe. The Russians, who were allied with France and England in the Triple Entente, crossed and re-crossed Poland on their way to and from the war zone. All of this changed in 1918 when the Bolshevik Revolution broke out and the Russians were forced to focus their attention on their internal problems. Poland was now subjected to all the horrors of war and very often mistreated by the Russians. The result was that Poland after the war was left devastated. The peace constituted Poland as an independent nation once again.

The Engel family had immigrated to America in 1896 and all during World War I naturally were wondering how their relatives in Poland had fared. After the war a lively correspondence was carried on with them by Pastor Otto Engel — I am his namesake and nephew — who at that time was the pastor at Randolph, Wisconsin. Hearing firsthand about the sad conditions existing in Poland he with others started a drive to gather clothing and money for the war-torn areas of Poland. Having received a leave of absence from his congregation in Randolph, Pastor Engel in 1923 was sent to Europe to supervise the distribution of the gifts.

While in Poland Pastor Engel also had an opportunity to observe firsthand the spiritual life in the Lutheran church. What he found was tragic. Many of the pastors came from the universities and brought with them much of the rationalism and the liberalism that was in vogue in the university seminaries at that time. When Pastor Engel reported personally to the 1923 synod convention, he reported that the situation in Poland was "tragic" (*traurig*). He said that earnest Christians sensed a danger for their souls and for those of their children if conditions continued. They were looking for ways to bring back the true gospel to their church. The convention responded by resolving to assist the work in Poland "with utmost energy" and voted the sum of \$10,000 to support it.

The Formation of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church

Pastor Engel was sent to supervise the work there. When he arrived in Poland in 1924, he found that a beginning had already been made. A man by the name of Gustav Maliszewski had been a parochial school teacher and later an evangelist in the city of Lodz. Here he observed the pitiable conditions in the Augsburg Church. He was convinced that the state-supported Augsburg church would shortly lose its Lutheran character altogether if something were not done. There was only one solution: the founding of a strictly confessional free church.

On the advice of Pastor W. P. Angerstein of Lodz, this former school-teacher had enrolled in the seminary of the Saxon Free Church at Berlin-

Zehlendorf in order to study theology. Upon his return to Lodz, he soon gathered a considerable following in spite of sharp opposition. Engel agreed with Maliszewski's evaluation of the situation in Poland: conditions were such in the state church as to warrant the withdrawal of conscientious Lutherans. Prof. John P. Koehler, who was spending a year in Germany and was asked by the mission board to visit the field and study the conditions firsthand, agreed. In the meantime the Wisconsin Synod mission board received calls from two congregations stating that they wished to be served by Wisconsin Synod pastors. On the basis of this, the mission board formally issued a call to Pastor Maliszewski as did his Lodz congregation. Maliszewski was formally ordained by Pastor Engel in the Lodz congregation with Prof. Koehler and his son, Pastor Karl Koehler, assisting. This occasion in 1924 is generally considered the date of the founding of the Ev. Lutheran Free Church of Poland.

During the next 15 years (1924-1939) this little group in Poland spread out into various places in and around Lodz and Warsaw. Twelve congregations and 14 preaching places were established, gathering in nearly 3,000 souls and 2,000 communicants. Ten congregations erected modest places of worship. Others worshiped in rented halls or private homes. Pastors who served during these years were: Gustav Maliszewski, Heinrich Mueller, August Lerle, Ernst Lerle, Leopold Zielke, Karl Patzer, Armin Schlender, Edward Lelke, Helmut Schlender, Alfons Wager, Alfred Reit and Arthur Napp. Most of these men were trained at the Berlin Zehlendorf Seminary of the Saxon Free Church.

Pastors of the Wisconsin Synod, who supervised the work on our behalf during these years, were: Otto Engel (1924-1925), Adolf Dassler (1926-1929) and Wilhelm Bodamer (1929-1939). Engel did much traveling, seeking to recruit students to study for the ministry. Dassler concentrated on inner growth and on the organization of pastoral conferences. Bodamer served the longest and under his able leadership the work prospered and took on new dimensions both for pastors and congregations.

Opposition from the Polish Government and the Augsburg Church

The mission in Poland did not have an easy time during these years of growth. At home voices were heard to say that this field was too far removed and contact hard to maintain. There were those who said that the mission should be dropped altogether and the money needed to support the mission applied elsewhere. Then after World War I with Poland established as a sovereign state, it meant the revoking of the old guarantees of freedom in matters of language and religion that we spoke of earlier. The new government undertook to establish its sovereignty also over the Augsburg church. The greatest opposition to the free church movement, however, came from the people within the Augsburg church who tried in every possible way to hinder its progress.

According to Polish law only Polish citizens could serve as pastors. Both Engel and Dassler had been born in Poland and had no trouble with the government in this respect. Only ministerial acts performed in territorial churches were granted official recognition. State taxes were demanded of

every citizen. Our congregations were sometimes refused the right to build their own churches. Others were padlocked after they were built. The only public cemeteries in existence were controlled by the state churches. A funeral procession, for example, was refused admission into a cemetery and the body had to be abandoned at the cemetery gate. A newly-built chapel was padlocked on the day it was to be dedicated and remained so for nearly three years. A confirmation service was interrupted by a state official and the pastor told that he had no right to officiate in a robe. Usually these incidents arose as the result of some complaint issued by a member of the state church. At one time it seemed as if Pastor Bodamer's visa to reside in Poland would not be renewed since he was not a Polish citizen. It was only through the mediation of the U.S. embassy upon the request of our synod that his visa was renewed.

World War II and the Flight from Poland

In spite of all these difficulties the work in Poland progressed and it seemed as though our mission had arrived at a point where it could look forward to a more settled existence, free from the struggles and harassments of the formative years. Then came September 1, 1939, the day Germany declared war. Poland was the first country to experience Hitler's new form of warfare, the Blitzkrieg. In a few short weeks the Polish armies had been routed, resistance crushed and Poland itself added to the Reich as an occupied country.

With the beginning of World War II it was as if an impenetrable curtain was drawn between the mother church in America and its adopted offspring. Bodamer, who had come to America to report to the 1939 convention, was not permitted to return to Poland. Because of a rigid censorship, mail service between the U.S. and Poland ceased. All that could be done on this side was to pray and wait for developments.

It was not until after the war in 1947 that we were able to reestablish the ties that had been severed by the war. Pastor Armin Schlender, who succeeded Pastor Maliszewski as president, has given us a description of the war-time era in a series of articles published in the church paper, *Durch Kreuz Zur Krone* (Through Cross to Crown). One can imagine, he says, the perilous situation that the German residents of Poland experienced after Germany's declaration of war upon that country. Pastor Armin Schlender describes them as "days of terror, of extreme unrest, of indescribable suspense and unheard of spiritual misery." "Open season" was declared upon all Germans, who tried to hide in every possible place of refuge. Hordes of released criminals swarmed over their villages, plundered their homes, terrorized their women. "Kill the German spies!" was the cry that could be heard on every hand. The Polish were like people possessed. People from our congregations were not spared.

By virtue of the German Blitzkrieg, he says, this time of persecution was mercifully ended in a matter of weeks, only to be followed by the German occupation, another time of extreme uncertainty. Although order came with the German takeover, the Nazi spirit was not favorably disposed toward church activities. Special permission for holding services had to be obtained from the police authorities. No offerings could be gathered for the support of

the church. No official church papers could be printed. No contact with churches or organizations outside Poland could be established.

On the other hand, Pastor Schlender reports, thousands of German refugees began to filter into the area, from the Baltic zone, parts of Russia, Bessarabia and Czechoslovakia, so that the Polish mission grew to a total of 2,500 souls, 15 congregations and 30 preaching stations. Pastors could not be salaried and had to live from whatever help the members could provide in gifts of food and clothing.

And then from the Eastern front in Russia came reports of a German retreat and a massive Russian offensive. Millions of Germans were forced to flee and seek refuge in the West. The flight from Poland was not a matter of personal choice, but by command of the retreating German army, which apparently was determined to leave as little as possible for the use of the advancing Russian troops. People were compelled, frequently at the point of a gun, to leave everything behind. So disorderly was the retreat that it was impossible for kindred groups like a congregation to remain together. Often even the members of a single family were separated, sometimes never to meet again. Nor was there any way of telling where they might eventually be permitted to stay. Therewith also our Polish mission, our church in the East, ceased to exist, after two decades of visible blessings of the Lord.

Concluding Observations

And this also brings to a close the early history of our mission in Poland. But a historical survey of this kind leads to a few final observations. The mission in Poland, it is true, ceased to exist. But that was not the end of it. When the Lord of the church closes one door, he often opens another. In this case it is the founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Refugee Mission in Germany which forms another chapter in the history of our Wisconsin Synod missions.

The designation of this mission's official periodical, *Durch Kreuz Zur Krone*, aptly describes its existence. Severe crosses and tribulations were to be its lot from the very beginning and continued throughout most of its history. This little group was trained in a hard school. But throughout it all, they remained true to their confessional heritage and found ways to keep it even in a strange land and among a different people.

Finally, one cannot help but see the wisdom of the policy of our Board for World Missions in seeking to build an indigenous church in our foreign mission fields. Who knows when the old evil foe will again stir up the hatred in our world mission fields, compelling our missionaries to leave. Even that will not be the end of our work or the end of that mission. The work will be continued by those whom we have trained for just such an eventuality so that we can say with Luther:

Let these all be gone
They yet have nothing won
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

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Otto Engel is a retired pastor living in New Ulm, Minnesota.

Poland, Land of Faith, Has Tiny Lutheran Church

New York — (From the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A.) — One of the strongest images to emerge from the recent strikes in Poland was the picture of workers praying at an improvised shrine in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk.

Among the flowers and the pictures of the Virgin Mary and the pope, the world saw — once again — evidence of the Polish people's deep faith — a faith that has endured through more than three decades of rule by a government that is officially atheist.

Although most of the 35 million Poles are Roman Catholic — estimates run as high as 93 per cent — among the other organized churches in Poland is the tiny Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. Its 75,000 members are gathered into 122 congregations and served by around 100 pastors, led by Bishop Janusz Narzynski of Warsaw.

It is the remnant of a strong

Lutheran church that all but perished in the wake of World War II. In 1940, the church, composed mostly of ethnic Germans, numbered about one million. During the Nazi occupation, Polish members of the Lutheran church were badly mistreated and the native church leadership was severely diminished by imprisonment and execution.

With the Potsdam Agreement of 1945, in which Poland's boundaries were moved westward, most of the German population left or was expelled from the Polish territories, leaving only about 270,000 to carry on the Lutheran tradition.

Further migration diminished the number of Lutherans, so that by the 1960s they numbered 120,000 and by the end of the 70s, they had decreased to about 75,000. They are concentrated in the Teschen-Silesia region, but smaller groups are scattered throughout other areas.

The church is a member of the Polish Ecumenical Council, a non-

Roman Catholic body that also includes the Polish Catholics, Reformed, Methodists, United Evangelicals, Orthodox and Mariavites.

Lately, Polish Lutherans have been under pressure to give up some of their unused church buildings in the face of an increase in the Roman Catholic population. Last year, Roman Catholics forcibly took over Lutheran churches in Spychow and Baranow, in the Province of Masuria. They said their members had to travel many kilometers to the nearest church, while nearby Lutheran buildings were seldom used. Roman Catholic population of Masuria was estimated at 1,225,000 while the Lutherans number approximately 3,500.

Negotiations are underway for the sale of eight Lutheran buildings to Roman Catholics.

There is also a small Polish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Exile served by eight pastors, including Bishop W. Fierla. It is headquartered in London.

Biblical Plants Flourish in Israel

By Joel Epstein

(From The Consulate General of Israel, Information Department).

Neot Kedumim — The Biblical patriarchy, the world's first ecologist, counted their wealth with carob seeds and airconditioned their tents with tamarisk trees.

So says Helen Frenkley, who, as part of a unique team of modern day ecologists, is growing all the plants mentioned in the Bible and Talmudic literature in a garden network halfway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

At Neot Kedumim, or "The Gardens of Israel," grow those exotic plants people have read about in the Bible but have never seen — balm and ladanum, hyssop and caper. The gardens are still being planted and won't be open to the public for two years, but they are already a focus of interest for Jews and for Christian scholars.

THE BIBLE AS A GUIDE TO PLANTING

"The Bible is a chronicle of the Jews' love and care for the land of Israel," says Miss Frenkley, director of Neot Kedumim. For her, the Bible is not only a book of morality and history, but also a practical guide on how to plant a field or build a terrace.

"Here we are growing a vineyard exactly according to the description of the Prophet Isaiah," she says,

BIBLICAL AIR CONDITIONING

Not far from the carob is a grove of tamarisk saplings, which the Patriarch Abraham planted in Beersheba. "The leaves of the tamarisk exude salt," she explains. "The salt absorbs the moisture in the night air, and releases it in the heat of the day. Since the major climatic problem in a desert like the Negev is dryness, adding moisture to the air cools and humidifies, significantly lowering the temperature."

The Neot Kedumim team of workers had to move tons of earth to build irrigation reservoirs and

then bring that soil to the many barren slopes. "Thousands of years of neglect and erosion left these once fertile hills denuded of all plants and with little or no soil," she says. "We hauled soil back up the hills and rebuilt the stone terraces using the remnants of 3,000-year-old terraces as blueprints."

At one point they came across a deep stone cistern, perched on the shoulder of a hill. "The terrain had been changed by erosion," she said. "When we recontoured the land, the water from the first winter rains funneled down into the mouth of the cistern as it had done thousands of years ago, and the cistern refilled. We use it today."



Harvesting Grapes near Zichron Yaakov, Israel.



A Grove of Date Palms in the Araba, near Ein Gedi, Israel.

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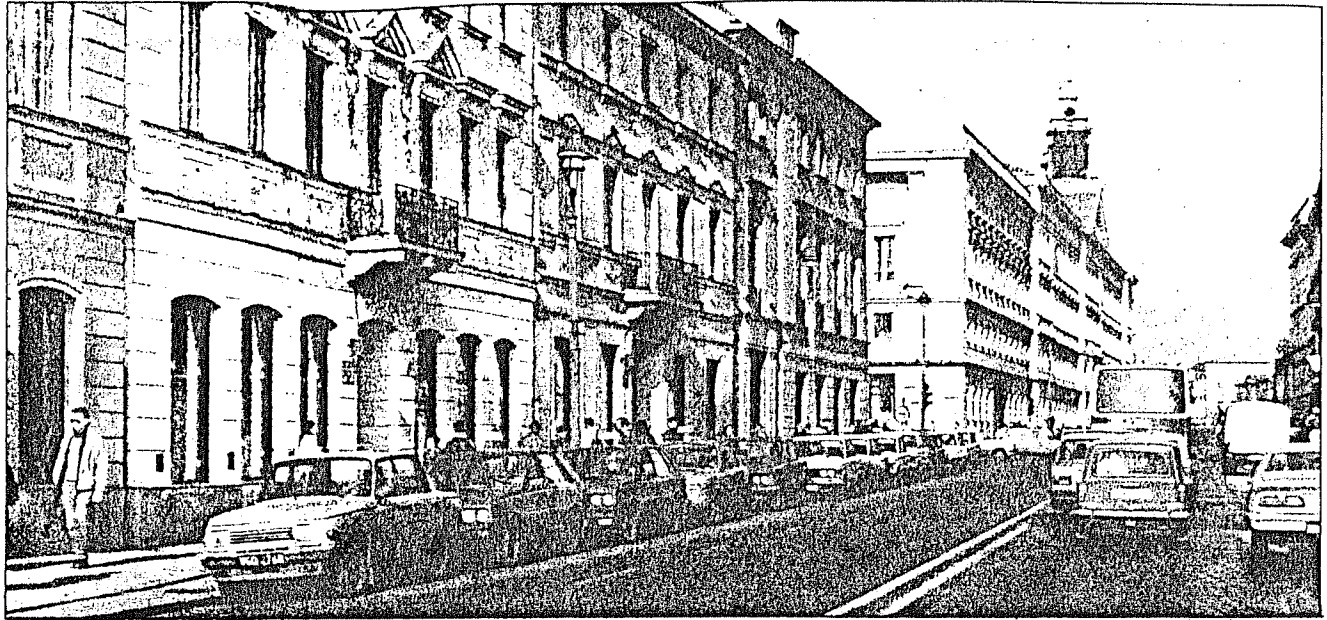
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And with his wounds we are healed



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A LINE of taxis flanks Warsaw's main train station. With the rise of capitalistic practices in Poland there has been a marked increase in the quantity of consumer goods and services.

Testing a tough church

*Beset by economic hardship and religious rivalry,
Polish Lutherans contend for a place in a new society*

■ BY BILL YODER ■

Polish Lutherans have long been caught between Marxist ideology and a popular Roman Catholicism that has been able to gain special freedoms for itself. **Marxism's power is largely gone.** But the suffocating power of Catholicism and a crushing economic situation continue to test a church that has long known suffering and national tragedy.

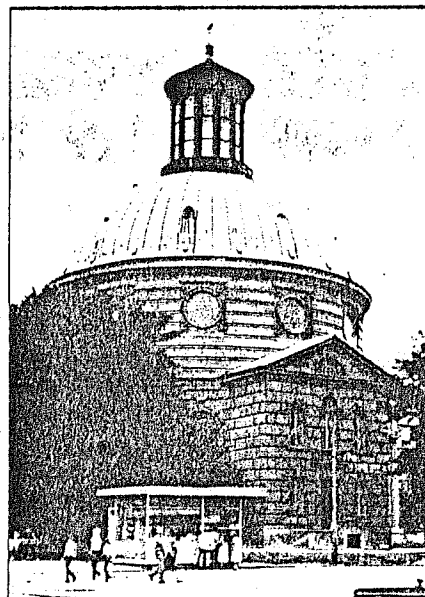
With the arrival of political freedom, capitalism is showing its face. The main train station in Warsaw, Poland, is draped with Western billboards. Long lines of taxis surround the station. During the socialist era, customers waited on taxis, not vice versa.

The Poles are more relaxed about their recent past than their East German neighbors. The Communists have retained the office of national president, and the propaganda placards of a bygone socialist era have not met a violent end. The job of removing the signs from the national landscape has been left to the wind and rain.

The government has accepted the once-illegal free market exchange rate for the Polish *zloty* as the official rate, which means a local taxi ride rarely

costs more than a dollar. But that amount is nearly unpayable for most Poles. And there lies a major problem not only for individuals but for institu-

Bill Yoder, a free-lance writer, lives in Evanston, Ill. He is currently working on a book about the revolution in Eastern Europe.



TRINITY Lutheran Church in Warsaw.

tions seeking to rejuvenate themselves.

Roaring inflation

Estimates of the 1989 inflation rate for this country of 38 million run from 600 percent to 1,000 percent. This has created a critical question for the Polish Lutheran church—how to get the cash needed to carry out its ministry and pay its 100 pastors? The pastors serve 120 congregations and more than 200 preaching points.

A Lutheran clergyman (there are no women pastors) earns 240,000 *zloty* per month, to be upped to 400,000 shortly. This is far less than the monthly salary of the average Pole—600,000 *zloty* or \$60. Even this is so low that many Poles make 300-mile treks to West Berlin to buy contraband consumer items, which they resell in Poland at a profit of about \$20.

As roaring inflation limits believers' ability to donate, Polish Protestant churches have become incapable of paying their day-to-day expenses. Soaring costs of heating oil and coal have moved the Polish Ecumenical Council, representing eight of Poland's 34 Christian denominations, to plead with the government to discount fuel prices for heating church-owned buildings. The



JERZY GRYNIAKOW

cost of paper has shrunk the Lutheran monthly, *Zwiastun*, to eight pages.

The Rev. Jerzy Gryniakow, the portly and charming Lutheran rector of Warsaw's ecumenical Christian Theological Academy, unabashedly suggested, "It would be good if each congregation found a [Western] sponsor. That way, we could at least guarantee the pastor's salary."

The government has agreed to return all church property taken over by the Communist regime after World War II. But the Rev. Jan Walter, superintendent of the Warsaw diocese, conceded that Lutheran schools and hospitals can be revived only when—and if—there is a major influx of Western money.

"We have a committee which has attempted for years to initiate new businesses. Such firms could generate the capital we need to rebuild our church institutions," Walter said.

Despite Poland's economic woes, the new government set up last August retains astounding support. Nostalgia for the best years under Edward Gierk, when Western loans created an artificial economic boom, appears minimal. Gierk, a former Communist party leader, was deposed in 1980.

Protestant theology students said that although those times were more placid, they certainly weren't better. The students reflect the sense that although the light at the end of the tunnel has not yet appeared, it is coming. This hope feeds a gritty endurance among the Polish people.

A minority situation

Hope for an improved economic situation is but one of the fervent desires of Polish Lutherans. Barbara Engholc-Narzynska, director of the Polish Bible Society and wife of the Lutheran bishop, the Rev. Janusz Narzynski, expressed deep appreciation for the recent



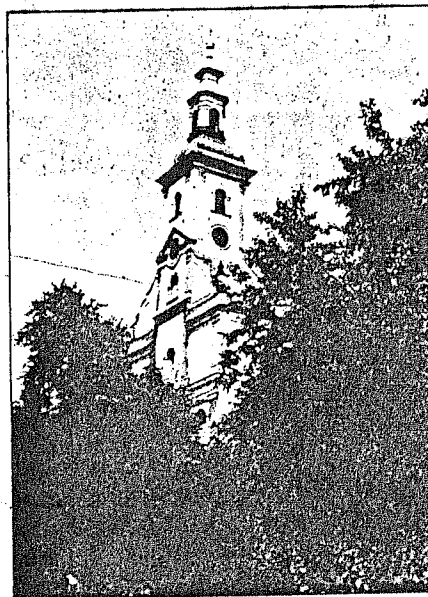
JAN WALTER

'It would be good if each [Polish] congregation found a [Western] sponsor'

visit of a Lutheran pastor from Illinois. Engholc-Narzynska's appreciation involved far more than economics.

"There would be a lot of possibilities to increase this relationship," she said, "maybe from family to family, from child to child, or between partner churches. Living in a minority situation, we need strong support from American Lutherans to feel that we have some good brothers and sisters in other parts of the world."

The need for good brothers and sisters may increase if the exodus of Polish Lutherans to the Federal Republic



JESUS LUTHERAN CHURCH in Cieszyn, a traditional stronghold of Lutheran pietism.



BARBARA ENGHOLC-NARZYNSKA

of [West] Germany continues.

The Rev. Andrzej Hauptman, a Lutheran pastor from Zabrze in south-central Poland, said, "It's strange that 10 years ago fewer [of my parishioners] considered themselves to be Germans than today. Those who have remained in Upper Silesia until now had been content with the situation. The difficult economic situation has given them the idea that they will be given the right to emigrate if they regard themselves as Germans."

Gierk put it in more cynical terms: the Silesians (residents of southwest and south-central Poland) "regard themselves to be Poles when times are good and as Germans when times are bad."

Lutheran churches in Silesia, where 80 percent of all Polish Lutherans live, have been hardest hit by the exodus westward. Hauptman's 850-member congregation had 1,840 members 20 years ago. Poland has 74,000 Lutherans, down from 500,000 right before World War II and 270,000 in the late 1940s.

One-half of all Polish Lutherans live in hilly, picturesque Cieszyn Silesia on the Czech border. The area remains the stronghold of pietistic, ethnic Polish Lutheranism that it has been for centuries.

Lutheran-Catholic tensions

Non-Catholic Poles have long suffered from Poland's liberal blending of confession and nationality. Folk wisdom still maintains that the true Pole is a Catholic, the Orthodox a Russian, the Lutheran a German, and the Baptist or Methodist a North American. The Jew is, or was, seen as a nationless "cosmopolitan."

Ninety-three percent of all Poles are Catholics. The Solidarity-run government has the reputation for being mostly Catholic. Gryniakow said the present government is not a clerical one,

but that danger has by no means been banned. "That would be a swing from one extreme to another," he said.

Engholc-Narzynska agrees. "We now are enjoying great political pluralism, but we have not yet experienced confessional pluralism," she said.

The three church laws passed by the Polish *Seym* on May 17, 1989, are a clear example of Catholic predominance. The laws decreed state neutrality in matters of religious faith. But negotiations that led to them, begun nine years before, involved solely Catholics and Communist government officials. Non-Catholics were not given access to the proposals until 1989.

One of the laws, "Regarding the Securing of Freedom of Conscience and Faith," needed to be signed by the non-Catholic churches less than 48 hours after they received the document. A law regulating the return of property holdings to the Catholic church was shown to outside parties only after it had been signed.

"We're concerned about the principle of the matter," Gryniakow said. "One should either make all churches equal or stop talking as if they were. It would be more upright if the government would recognize affairs as they were described in the constitution of 1921, which stated that the Catholic church was 'the first among equals.' That was at least being honest." Only Catholics can legally demand the return of their property under present laws.

Polish Protestants appear to have some allies in the struggle against a Catholic, clerical state. Reformed Bishop Zdzislaw Tranda proudly

Only the Catholic church can legally demand the return of its property, according to present laws

pointed out that one of the numerous Catholic "Clubs of the Intelligentsia" has promised to support Protestant efforts for a confessionally pluralistic state. Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a "progressive" Catholic, is also regarded as a political ally. Lutherans were pleased that their bishop, Narzynski, was a participant in top-level roundtable talks last year.

Historically, the Polish Lutheran church has had little help in its struggle for recognition.

Differences in tactics remain today. Of the denominations active in the Polish Ecumenical Council, only the Lutherans refused to sign last year's church legislation created by the Catholics, an act Tranda called "overly defensive behavior."

Occupied church buildings

In January two Orthodox churches in eastern Poland were taken over by Catholic and Uniate congregations. In response, the Orthodox metropolitan of Warsaw refused to receive Cardinal Jozef Glemp, the Catholic Primate of Poland. (The Uniate are Catholic believers who use the Greek-Orthodox liturgy. Their denomination, most ac-

tive in the Ukraine, was forcibly united with the Moscow-led Orthodox Church during Joseph Stalin's rule.)

Engholc-Narzynska applauded the metropolitan's response. Tranda did not. "That was a mistake of the Orthodox," Tranda said. "We should speak more with one another. This problem is very complex because the United were taken over by the Orthodox in an improper manner."

Engholc-Narzynska's ire is understandable. Lutherans have long tangled with Catholics over illegally occupied church buildings. Only last year, the Jesuits agreed to pay for a church in Lodz in which they had been "squatters" for nearly 45 years.

During the early postwar years, Lutherans lost about 2,000 buildings that were taken over, it is said, for other purposes. Many were taken over by Catholic congregations.

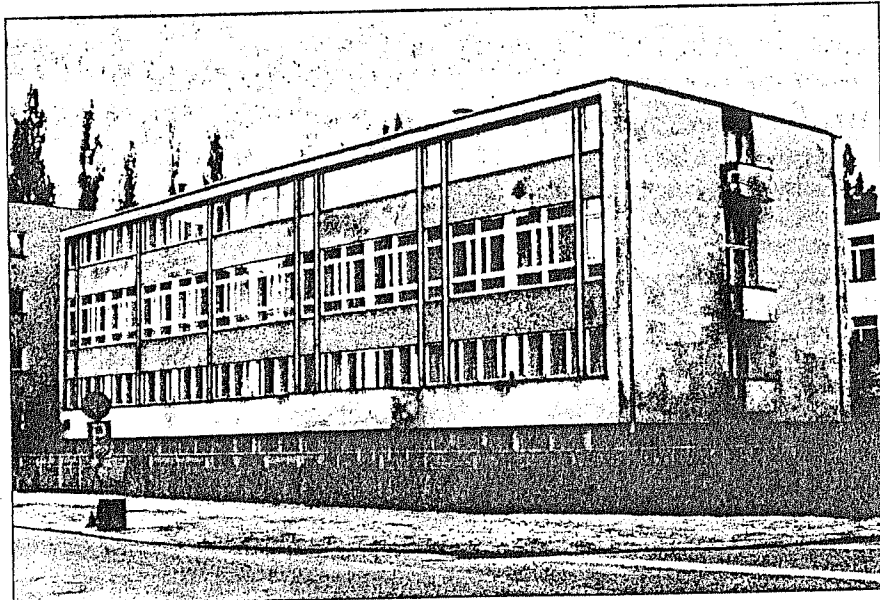
Hauptman described a recent case in Legnica (western Poland), in which local authorities made excessive restoration demands. They threatened to give the building to the Catholics if the church's owners did not respond properly.

But even as these struggles go on, both Catholics and Protestants face what may be an even greater force from outside the religious community—secularism. Engholc-Narzynska fears Polish churches are ill-prepared for this challenge. "We now have a new kind of secularism," she said. "The old challenge had been the communist state; now it is the Western style of life, the consumer society.

"We are doing everything to have things, but little in order to be."



THE ONLY STATUE of Martin Luther in Poland at the Lutheran church in Bielsko-Biala.



THE HEADQUARTERS (consistorium), in Warsaw, of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland.

Belchatow is a very old town; a small country village. W. O. said he remembers it clearly and could tell about it for hours.

There were very hard times and a strong military presence. At various times Polish, Russian (Cossack), German, and Austrian forces were present.

People would glean the grain left from the harvest to make coffee. At one time, coffee had to be made acorns because nothing else was available. People gathered sticks for firewood, which they carried home in large bundles on their backs. Peat was cut in nearby pits for fuel.

W's father was at one time employed in masonry work, especially the construction of large (floor-to-ceiling), beautiful ceramic stoves. He built one in a house they occupied.

The village was surrounded by forests, fields, peat bogs, and ponds. The countryside around was criss-crossed with creeks and with roads leading in all directions to neighboring villages. Gypsies frequently camped at a pond on the edge of the village.

There were two market squares in the center of the village, surrounded by buildings built side-by-side. One square was the location of the town well. People who wanted water might have to carry it on a yoke a distance of as much as 1½ miles. Another square was the market where Jews sold their vegetables and carp. The larger square had the jail and police station. A fire station was located elsewhere in the village. The firemen used steam engines and hand pumps. They would take hoses from the farmers to use in fighting fires. The farmhouses had roofs of thatch. Whenever there was a thunderstorm, burning houses could be seen in all directions.

There was a large Polish church in town, "like a cathedral." The Lutheran church was a red brick building with a big steeple. It had a pipe organ. Trumpets played beautiful music before the services began. Behind the Lutheran church was the Lutheran school which held classes through grade 6. Religion, reading, writing, arithmetic, German, and Polish were taught.

The family lived in four different houses in Belchatow. The first was on a cobblestone street lined with shops, some Jewish. The Jews owned many shops on a road that led to a neighboring village. The second house was outside of town, over a bridge, near a crossroad. Here W's father also had a butcher shop. Because times were hard, they couldn't "keep these buildings going," so they moved into a third house, which was near the first house. The third house was a large building made partly out of logs and partly out of other kinds of wood. "There were bedbugs all over." It was probably here that W's Grandmother Obermann lived with the family. Here, also, Ida Obermann had to board 30 German soldiers. "They slept everywhere - even on the floors."

LIFE IN BELCHATOW, POLAND, AS DESCRIBED BY WALDEMAR OBERMANN
ON AUGUST 30, 1980

The fourth house was actually an apartment building about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from the well. The family rented an apartment here in the time before they left for America. The building was divided into four apartments. The hall between the apartments had a large oven that everyone had to use. The family's apartment was on the same floor with that of the woman who owned the building. The floor in the apartment was made of white sand. There was one large room with no dividing walls.

One incident W. remembered was that the son of a Jew in the building sold his father's boots. The father stripped his son, tied him to a bench, carried him outside, and started whipping him. When this man's daughter died, he built a box of boards. He broke a pot and put the pieces over her eyes and nose, wrapped the boards with strips of cloth to hold them together, then carried her on his back to the cemetery.

The Merwitz butcher shop was near a row of Jewish shops, including bakeries, near the large square. The butcher shop had several outbuildings for slaughtering and smoking. The place was run by W's aunt and her sons. When everyone else was without food, they had plenty of meat, but wouldn't give any to the relatives. W. recalled standing around the house waiting for the "old lady" to throw away the bread crusts that she cut off when making her meals.

The Cossack soldiers that patrolled the area were very impressive as they rode horses into town. They wore plumed helmets and carried large spears.

At one time, the Polish army came into town, rounded up everyone who was standing in the large square, and took them for the military service.

The Russians hated the Jews, and on occasion would come into town and destroy the property owned by the Jews. The Poles came in once and smashed all the shops in the row near the third house.

When the Austrians came through the town, the family put the large feather pillows into the windows and ducked to the floor. Bullets flew through all over.

The family decided to leave for the United States because "there was no food. There was nothing to do. Why should we stay there?"

James R. Sonnemann
234 Washington Street
Brillion, Wisconsin 54110

THE JOURNEY FROM BELCHATOW TO MILWAUKEE, AUGUST, 1921, AS
DESCRIBED BY WALDEMAR OBERMANN ON AUGUST 30, 1980

The family¹ traveled by rail from Belchatow to Danzig. On the train they saw bananas for the first time, bought some from a peddler, and ate them - peel and all. When they arrived in Danzig, they boarded a ship which carried them to Amsterdam². The voyage over the Baltic was extremely rough; W. recalled that a Jewish woman became seasick and vomited on him.

From Amsterdam the family sailed aboard the Rotterdam³ to New York. The departure from Amsterdam was delayed by the processing of the emigrants. The family stayed in a barracks with many other families. There was no privacy. People slept on bunks padded with straw. Meals were served in a large mess hall.

The Atlantic voyage aboard the Rotterdam was smoother. The families had rooms aboard. Meals were brought to the rooms. W. remembers finding large green bugs in his peas.

In passage in the English Channel they saw the Cliffs of Dover "painted white by the birds."

Children aboard passed the time by letting cans on strings into the sea to bring up water.

The family entered the United States at Ellis Island, New York. After the examinations and the other processing were completed, they left by train for Chicago, then transferred to another train for Milwaukee. They arrived August 5 at the train station near the interurban terminal in Milwaukee.⁴

James R. Sonnemann
234 Washington Street
Brillion, Wisconsin 54110
May 19, 1980

-
1. Edmund Obermann had emigrated in 1913. The family on this journey consisted of Ida Augusta Obermann and children: Johanna, Waldemar, Leo, and Zeno.
 2. It is not absolutely certain that Amsterdam was the layover after the Baltic trip.
 3. Ida Obermann and Arthur Obermann stated that the name of the ship was Rijndam.
 4. This was the Milwaukee Road Depot which was located near the Electric Company.

OUTLINE OF OBERMANN-VOGEL FAMILY HISTORY
Belchatow, Poland/Milwaukee, Wisconsin

- I. Origins in Saxony (Vogel)
 - A. Location between Wittenberg and Leipzig
 - B. Occupations
 - 1. Farming
 - 2. Textile industry
 - C. Two Saxon dialects spoken in family
- II. Move to Belchatow, Poland, ca. 1795
 - A. Poland part of Russian Empire
 - B. German immigration encouraged by Catherine the Great in order to industrialize Poland
 - C. Textile industry developed in Lodz/Belchatow area
- III. Life in Belchatow
 - A. Frequent conflict between ethnic groups
 - B. Several houses in succession on outskirts of village occupied by family
 - C. Occupations
 - 1. Butcher shop
 - 2. Wagon construction
 - 3. Ceramic stove construction
 - D. Church life
 - 1. Vogel membership in Catholic Church
 - 2. Membership in Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession
 - a. Membership in St. Johannismgemeinde, Belchatow
 - b. Education in the church school
 - c. Served by Pastors May and Behse
 - E. Hardships during World War I
 - F. Possible contact with Wisconsin Synod missionary at Lodz, Poland, 1921
- IV. The move to Milwaukee, 1913-1923
 - A. 1913 - some family members enter U.S. via Canada and North Dakota
 - B. Seven-year separation during World War I and preparation of the house on 10th Street
 - C. 1921 - arrivals via Danzig, the Netherlands, and Ellis Island
 - D. 1923 - Arthur Obermann arrives from Goslar
 - E. Family life on 10th Street
 - F. Jerusalem Lutheran Church and School
 - G. World War II - marriages, military service, children
 - H. Burials in Evergreen Cemetery

The outline is based on narratives by Ida Obermann, Olga Stelzer, Arthur Obermann, Waldemar Obermann, Gerhard Vogel, Helen Sonnemann, and Alice Stenglein.

Prepared by James R. Sonnemann, Brillion, Wisconsin,
February 22, 1981

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ORIGINAL
TO BE GIVEN TO
THE PERSON NATURALIZED

No. 5805601



Petition No. 22599

Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization: Age 58 years, sex Female, color white, complexion fair, color of eyes brown, color of hair gray, height 5 feet 5 inches, weight 165 pounds, visible distinctive marks none. Marital status Widow, former nationality Poland.

I certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.



Ida Augusta Obermann



Ida

Ida Augusta Obermann
(Complete and true signature of holder)

Be it known that at a term of the Court of

held pursuant to law at May 26, 1943

the Court having found that IDA AUGUSTA OBERMANN

then residing at 3836 N. 10 St., Milwaukee, Wis. intends to reside permanently in the United States (when so required by the Naturalization Laws of the United States), had in all other respects complied with the applicable provisions of such naturalization laws, and was entitled to be admitted to citizenship, thereupon ordered that such person be and she was admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

In testimony whereof the seal of the court is hereunto affixed this 26th day of May in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and forty-three and of our Independence the one hundred and sixty-seventh.

B. H. WESTFAHL
Clerk of the Court

By M. J. Janssen Deputy Clerk

It is a violation of the U.S. Code (and punishable as such) to copy, print, photograph, or otherwise illegally use this certificate.

STATE OF WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
DIVISION OF HEALTH

LOCAL FILE NUMBER

ORIGINAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

For Instructions Refer to The Physician's, Funeral Director's, and Medical Examiner's/Coroner's Handbook

Usual Residence Where Deceased Lived. If Death Occurred in Institution, Give Residence Before Admission

DECEASED--NAME 1. IDA OBERMANN		SEX 2. Female	DATE OF DEATH 3. September 8, 1968
RACE--White, Negro, American Indian, Etc. 4. White	Age Last Birthday 5a. 84	Under One Year 5b. Months	Under One Day 5c. Hours Minutes
NAME OF CITY, VILLAGE (Location of Death) 7b. Milwaukee		DATE OF BIRTH 6. August 29 1884	COUNTY OF DEATH 7a. Milwaukee
STATE OF BIRTH (If Not in U.S.A., Name Country) 8. Poland		CITIZEN of What Country 9. USA	HOSPITAL OR OTHER INSTITUTION--NAME (If Not in Either Give Street and Number or Location) 7d. Columbia Hospital
SOCIAL SECURITY NO. 12. None		USUAL OCCUPATION Give Kind of Work During Most of Working Life Even if Retired 13a. House Work	SURVIVING SPOUSE (If Wife, Give Maiden Name) 11. None
RESIDENCE: STATE 14a. Wisconsin	COUNTY 14b. Milwaukee	NAME OF CITY, VILLAGE (If Neither, Name Township) 14c. Milwaukee	MAILING ADDRESS (Home Address at Time of Death) 14e. 3836 No. 10th St.
FATHER--NAME 15. Edward Vogel		MOTHER--MAIDEN NAME 16. Justine Arndt	
INFORMANT--NAME 17a. Eugene Obermann		MAILING ADDRESS Street or R.F.D. No. City or Village State Zip 17b. 402 W. Armour Ave; Milwaukee, Wisc.	WAS DECEASED EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? (If Yes, Give War or Dates of Service) 17c. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown
18. PART I DEATH WAS CAUSED BY -- Enter Only One Cause Per Line For (A), (B), and (C) Conditions, If Any, Which Gave Rise to Immediate Cause (A) Stating the Underlying Cause Lost. A. Immediate Cause: Due to, or as a consequence of: Strained Bleeding - Arterial Neck B. Consequence of: Due to, or as a consequence of: Pneumonia of Leg C. Consequence of: Due to, or as a consequence of: Chronic Venous Stenosis			Approximate Interval Between Onset and Death 3 days
PART II OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS: Conditions Contributing to Death but not Related to Cause Given in Part I (A) Chronic Venous Stenosis		AUTOPSY (Specify) 19a. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	WERE FINDINGS CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING CAUSE OF DEATH? 19b. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> ACCIDENT		DATE OF Month Day Year	HOW INJURY OCCURRED (Enter Nature of Injury in Part I or Part II, Item 18)

State of Wisconsin, }
City of Milwaukee. } ss.

I, E. R. Krumbiegel, M. D., Registrar of Vital Statistics in and for the city aforesaid, do hereby certify the accompanying certificate to be a copy of a report of the **Death** of **Ida Obermann** as the same appears from the files and records in my office remaining.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of my office at Milwaukee.

this **10th** day of **September**, A. D., 19 **68**

E. R. Krumbiegel M. D. Registrar of Vital Statistics.

By **Dorcas A. Kruppel** Deputy.

Hausfreund Volkskalender, 1924, The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Warsaw, Poland.

+ + +

The following translation was made from an article in the 1924 edition of the Hausfreund Volkskalender published for an association of Lutheran congregations of the Evangelische-Augsburgische Kirche in Poland in the area of Lodz. The church body has its headquarters in Warsaw; its district offices in Lodz. Belchatow is about 25 miles from Lodz; the family held membership in the Evangelische St. Johannisgemeinde in Belchatow.

This copy of the Volkskalender has a remarkable history of its own which parallels the history of our family in this century. The history of this little book therefore sheds light on the history of our family.

In the early 1920's the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (at that time the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States), Milwaukee, Wisconsin, sent a missionary to provide for the spiritual welfare of the German Lutheran colonists near Lodz, Poland, and to supervise a program of relief for those who were left destitute by World War I. This missionary was Pastor Otto Engel, whose immediate ancestors had come to the United States from the area of Lodz, Poland. Books brought to this country by the Engels were published for use in the congregations of the Augsburgische Kirche. Pastor Armin Engel wrote the following in a letter dated November 19, 1980:

"You see, the Engels were advocates of strict orthodox Lutheranism when they reached Poland. They brought famous prayer, hymn and sermon books with them from Germany in which they were well schooled. This created the real Lutheran atmosphere among the German settlers. When the church was organized in Alexandrow the Engel influence was keenly felt. My information bearing out the validity of this story is taken from the Alexandrow church records, where Pastor Arthur Schmidt, writes; 'The name Engel is very closely connected with the founding of the Alexandrow congregation. The Engel brothers must have originated out of a devout family, for they had more devotional books at their disposal, which they also used. In their old home they had attended school because they read and write fluently. ...' Fr. L. Engel already sent his 6-year old son for proper schooling, simply an exception in those times."

Pastor Otto Engel was, then, called to serve people in an area with which he was somewhat familiar, and in which he probably still had relatives. The immediate concern of the mission program was to serve those Lutherans who could not tolerate the liberalism of the Augsburg Church. Articles in the Northwestern Lutheran (back issues available at the library of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin) contemporary with the WELS Polish mission effort charge that the Augsburg Church had become Lutheran in name only. It is difficult to detect signs of heresy when browsing through the published material of the Augsburg Church, but the article below mentions "the very sad condition of our Church, particularly the disagreeable struggles within the Church." The schism in the Augsburg Church may well have been a struggle between the forces of orthodox Lutheranism and liberalism. The article translated below hints that the congregation at Belchatow may have been tainted by the ecumenical spirit.

How did our family decide to leave Poland, and how were they attracted to membership in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (Jerusalem Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin)? This copy of the Volkskalender, together with many books and photographs showing conditions in the Lodz area of Poland, were brought to the United States by Pastor Otto Engel when his work in Poland was completed. Pastor Engel used these items in his mission lectures presented in Wisconsin Synod churches to illustrate the nature of his work in Poland. The photographs illustrate why it was necessary for people to leave Poland after the War. The conditions can be described simply as dreadful. Pastor Engel's pictures show ragged people standing in long soup lines. One picture shows the result of political turmoil: a firing squad about to do its work. Waldemar Obermann summarized the situation when he said (August, 1980), "There was no food. There was nothing to do. Why should we stay?" Conditions before the War provided sufficient cause for migration, for we find members of the family in Milwaukee by 1914, including Edmund Obermann, Olga Stelzer (nee Vogel), and Wanda Gutknecht (nee Obermann). Edmund Obermann's reunion with wife and children was delayed seven years by the War. The family was compelled to leave Poland by the unbearable conditions which existed before, during, and after the War; Helen Sonnemann and Alice Stenglein have verified that concern for a pure Lutheran faith resulted in the family's membership in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (in conversation, November, 1980). There were not many months during which the Wisconsin Synod missionary could have influenced the family: the mission work began early in 1921; the family left toward the end of that summer. But news of the Wisconsin Synod's concern for spiritual care and of its relief program may have reached Belchatow in some form during those months.

The materials collected by Pastor Otto Engel were eventually received by his nephew, Pastor Armin Engel, who has retired from the ministry in 1980 to devote his time to historical research in the development of Lutheranism in the United States. On August 28, 1980, I received a letter from Pastor Armin Engel, inviting me to come to his parsonage at Maribel, Wisconsin, to look at the materials he planned to discard from his library, since he would move the next day to his retirement home in Jefferson, Wisconsin. He knew of my interest in our family's past in Poland, and he had found background information for me on previous occasions. We had discussed the area and the mission work a number of times. He pointed out a pile of materials relating to the Polish mission work on his stack of discards bound for the flames, and there was found this 1924 Volkskalender.

The article of interest to us is the obituary of Pastor Ernst Behse, shepherd of the Evangelische St. Johanniskirche, Belchatow, the congregation to which our family belonged. Pastor Behse served the congregation from 1913-1923; the family from 1913-1921. The article is found on pages 101-104 of the Volkskalender. Pastor Behse's signature appears on the marriage certificate of Edmund Gustav Obermann and Ida Augusta Vogel. The certificate was apparently prepared 20 years after the marriage as a document necessary for entry into the United States. Ida Obermann brought the certificate with her in 1921; it is now with other papers from her estate in the possession of Eugene Obermann. Arthur Obermann stated (ca. 1972) that it was Pastor Behse who instructed and confirmed him; he surely served the family in many ways between 1913 and 1921.

Gerhard Vogel said (December, 1980) that he recalled seeing copies of the Volkskalender in use in the home of his family.

With the Volkskalender, a copy of the Augsburg Church Gesangbuch was received from Pastor Armin Engel. It was printed in 1883 and brought to the United States by Julius Engel, and used by him at Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, in 1888. It is probably safe to assume that the same kind of hymnal was used by our family at Belchatow.

The following article, translated from the Volkskalender, provides a brief glimpse of community and church life in Belchatow, shortly after our family left.

James R. Sonnemann,
Brillion, Wisconsin
November 8, 1980
(revised, February 20, 1981).

The introduction was proofread by Pastor Armin Engel. The translation was corrected by Mrs. Diane (Helmuth) Gerlach of Appleton, Wisconsin, and by Pastor Armin Engel.

Neu! Reichslieder. Posaunen-Ausgabe. Neu!

Den lieben Lesern seien folgende Zeitschriften beste empfohlen:

Der Friedensbote

Evang.-lutherische Wochenschrift in Polen.
Erscheint einmal wöchentlich. Bei 10 Exempl. 1 Freixempl.

Der Kinderfreund

Die einzige in Polen erscheinende Zeitschrift für unsere Jugend.
Erscheint zweimal monatlich. Bei 15 Exempl. 1 Freixempl.

Herausgeber und Schriftleiter beider Zeitschriften:

Pastor J. Dietrich.

Bestellungen nimmt entgegen die Redaktion des Friedensboten, Łódź, ul. Piotrkowska Nr. 281/283 und die Buchhandlung W. Mietke in Warschau, Wspólna Nr. 10.

In deutscher Sprache erscheint noch folgendes Wochenblatt:

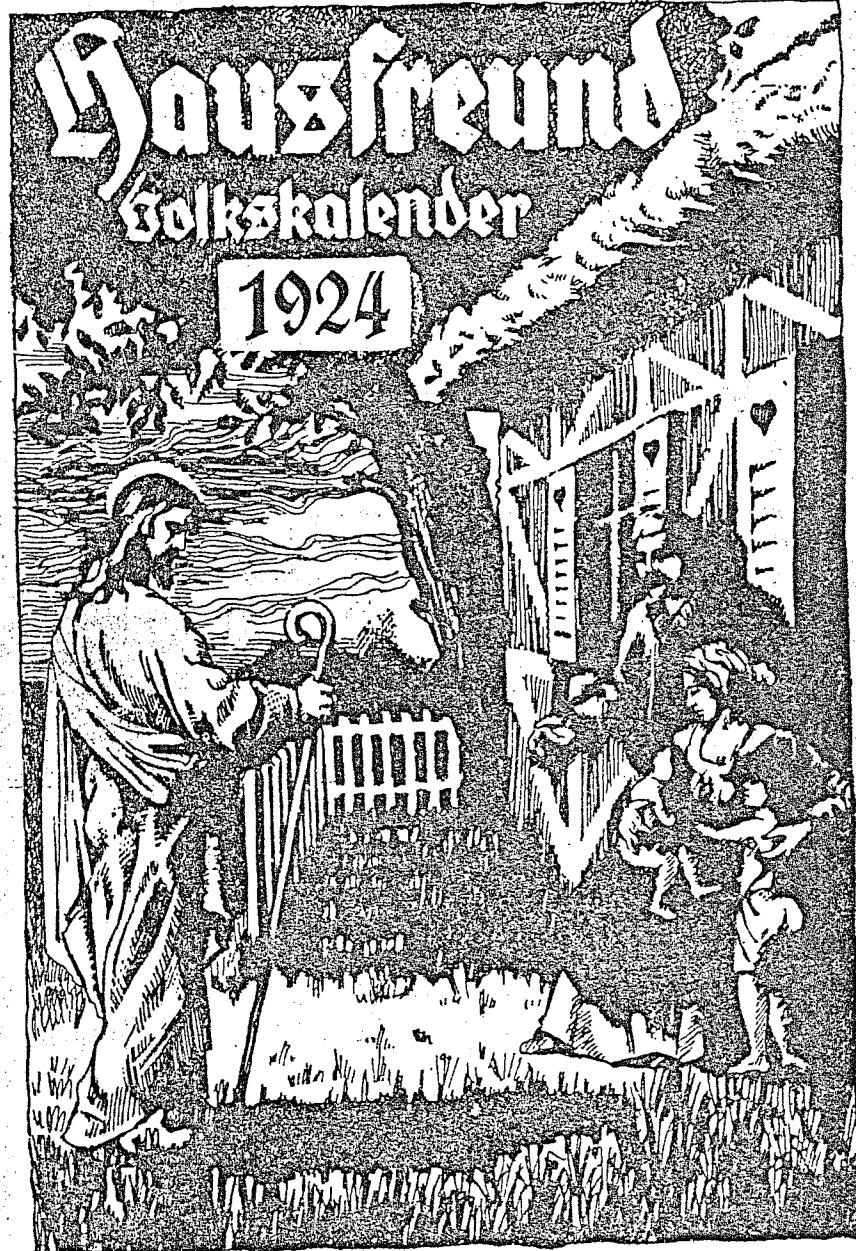
Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt

Herausgeber: Pastor Dr. Th. Zöckler in Stanislaw.

Man adressiere: Stanisławów, Małopolska.

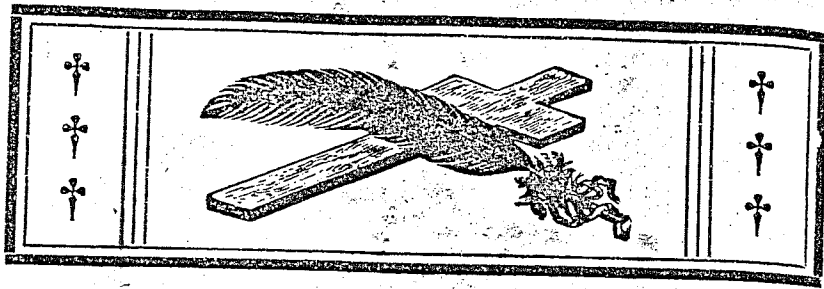
Es wird hiermit auf die Schriften von Pastor R. Schmidt aufmerksam gemacht:

1. Das vom Ministerium für Volksaufklärung zum Gebrauch beim Religionsunterricht empfohlene
 - a) Konfirmandenbüchlein für evangelisch-lutherische Gemeinden größere und kleinere Ausgabe;
 - b) Schulkatechismus.
2. Apologetik, oder Verteidigung des christlichen Glaubens. Zum Gebrauch beim Religionsunterricht in den höheren Klassen der Gymnasien und Seminaristen.
3. Für den überall einzuführenden Kindergottesdienst seien besonders noch empfohlen: Lehret sie halten alles, was ich euch befohlen habe, Bd. I, 59 Katechesen für Sonntagsschullehrer; Bd. II, 58 Katechesen.
4. Als Weihnachtsgeschenk eignet sich das Predigtbuch: „Schauet Jesu Herrlichkeit“, 64 Predigten über die neuen Evangelien.
5. Bist du glücklich?
6. Die lutherische Kindertaufe ist doch biblisch! Ein Schutzwort wider die Baptisten.
7. Freude.
8. Ihr Knaben, schadet euch das Rauchen nicht?
9. O Christenheit, bete ernstlicher zu Gott!
10. Was macht uns am unglücklichsten auf Erden?
11. Wie kann man des Daseins Gottes gewiß werden?



Verlag der Buchhandlung von W. Mietke, Warschau
Wspólna-Straße Nr. 10

In Łódź bei S. Mietke, Sienkiewicza-Straße Nr. 71.



Totenschau.

Pastor Hermann Wohlgemuth.



Weiland Pastor Hermann Wohlgemuth.

Am 30. Septbr. 1922 durfte der Pastor der evang.-lutherischen Gemeinde Thorn eingehen zu seines Herrn Freude im Alter von erst 57 Jahren. Man hätte wohl meinen sollen, der treue, fleißige Arbeiter im Weinberge des Herrn wäre hienieden noch so nötig gewesen. Der Herr, dessen Rat unausforschlich ist, hat andere Gedanken gehabt. In der Ewigkeit werden wir es erkennen, was wir jetzt glauben, aber noch nicht verstehen, daß es Gedanken des Friedens und nicht des Leides waren. — Pastor Hermann Wohlgemuth war aus einem frommen lutherischen Hause in Berlin hervorgegangen. Seine allererste Schulbildung erhielt er in der Volksschule der Berliner luth. Gemeinde. Auf Anraten des Direktors derselben führten ihn seine Eltern dann dem Gymnasium zu, wo er bald den ersten Platz in der Klasse errang, den er auch während der ganzen Gymnasialzeit behauptete. In diese Zeit fiel der Heimgang seiner Mutter, welcher er lebenslang in Liebe und Dankbarkeit gedachte. Nicht minder war in seinem Herzen seiner zweiten Mutter ein dankbares Gedächtnis bereitet. Auf dem Gymnasium schon mußte er durch manchen Zweifel hindurch. Der Darwinismus und philosophische Probleme

machten dem zu schaffen, der sein ganzes Leben hindurch von einem ernstesten Wahrheitsfinn besetzt war. In solchem Zustande legte er das Abiturientenexamen glänzend ab. Nicht gerade eigener Neigung folgend, sondern auf den Rat seines Vaters erwählte er das Studium der Theologie. Zunächst bezog er die Universität Breslau, wo er neben den Vorlesungen der Herren Universitätsprofessoren auch das theologische Seminar der lutherischen Kirche besuchte. Das ist ihm ein großer Segen geworden. Als man hier den Römerbrief las, da ging ihm groß und gemaltig das Verständnis auf für Sünde und Gnade. Und als er beim Studium des 2. Thessalonierbriefes die Stelle las: „Gott hat uns nicht gesetzt zum Zorn, sondern die Seligkeit zu besitzen durch unsern Herrn Jesum Christum“, da jubelte seine Seele. Dieser Spruch ist sein Lieblingspruch geblieben. Er hat ihn auch zum Texte seiner Leichenpredigt bestimmt. Sein weiterer Studiengang führte ihn dann nach Leipzig und Berlin und zuletzt wieder nach Breslau. Hier machte er auch sein erstes theologisches Examen und nach einer Hilfspredigerzeit in Berlin und Stettin das zweite theologische Examen. Nach seiner Ordination am 31. Oktober 1890 übernahm er das Pfarramt in dem kleinen Kirchenwerder im Oderbruch und verheiratete sich mit Jungfrau Marie Boh aus Stettin. Im Jahre 1901 führte ihn der liebe Gott nach Thorn. Hier hatte er ein großes Arbeitsfeld. Die weit zerstreute Parochie forderte große Kraft. Und Pastor Wohlgemuth hat sie geopfert. Wie gern hätte er in Thorn ein neues Gotteshaus gebaut! Das jetzige war damals zu klein geworden. Da zeigte es sich, daß der Arbeit doch zu viel gewesen war. Mitten in seinen Baugedanken überfiel ihn das böse Gallensteinleiden, welches auch die Ursache seines frühen Todes geworden ist. Trotz seiner reichen Amtsarbeit fand er doch noch Zeit zu wissenschaftlicher Weiterbildung. Und trotz seines Leidens unterhielt er im Kriege einen regen Verkehr mit seinen im Felde stehenden Gemeindegliedern, diente seinen Amtsbrüdern mit manchem Referate bei deren Synoden, richtete auch die Hauptkirchenkasse der Diözese ein, welcher er angehörte, und verwaltete sie, war zudem noch Gymnasiallehrer. Dazu kam auch die Trauer um so viele wegziehende treue Gemeindeglieder. Nun ruht er von all seiner Arbeit, und seine Seele darf den schauen, den er geliebt hat, und dessen Gnade und Wahrheit er verkündigt hat. Seine Gemeinde aber darf es nie vergessen, welche Gabe ihr der Herr seiner Kirche in dem Pastor Hermann Wohlgemuth geschenkt hatte. Sie soll sein Andenken dadurch ehren, daß sie treulich im Glauben bleibt bei dem Herrn, zu dem sie durch ihren heimgegangenen Seelsorger gewiesen ist.

Pastor Ernst Behse.

Einer der ältesten Pastoren unserer Kirche ist uns am 4. Juli 1923 durch den Tod entrissen worden. War es im vorigen Jahr Konsistorialrat Pastor Gundlach, den wir mit Recht als einen „der Großen in Israel“ bezeichneten, der unserer Kirche gewiß bis ans Ende der

Tage unvergesslich bleiben wird, so ist es jetzt ein Mann, der wohl in einer kleineren Gemeinde nur gewirkt, aber dort doch auch treu und mannhaft für seine Ueberzeugungen eingetreten ist und stets nur ein Ziel vor Augen hatte: anderen Gutes zu tun. Daher war er denn trotz seiner ferndeutschen Gesinnung doch auch bei Katholiken und Polen sehr beliebt, wofür sein Begräbniß, an welchem außer seinen Gemeindegliedern Scharen von Katholiken und Juden, man möchte sagen, die ganze Stadt Belchatow teilnahm, das bedeutendste Zeugnis abgelegt hat. Daher betrauern wir ihn herzlich und unsere Kirche beklagt in ihm einen der Diener, welcher fest im Glauben derselben stand und darin niemals wankte.

Lassen wir sein Leben an unserem geistigen Auge vorüberziehen:



Weiland Pastor Ernst Behse. Belchatow.

Pastor Ernst Behse wurde am 14. Dezember 1857 in Helmat in Livland geboren. Sein Vater, Ernst Behse, war einer der bekanntesten und tüchtigsten Pastoren Livlands; seine Mutter hieß Marie geb. Mishaud. Er besuchte das Gymnasium in Bernau. Als er dasselbe absolvierte, bezog er die Universität Dorpat. Im Jahre 1890 wurde er in Biakystok zum hl. Predigtämte geweiht und bei Propst Reuchel als Hilfsprediger angestellt. Dann siedelte er in unseren Warschauer Konsistorialbezirk über und wurde vom Konsistorium zum Administrator der Plower Gemeinde ernannt, wo er etwa 1 1/2 Jahre

wirkte. Darnach wählte ihn die Gemeinde Wyszogrod an der Weichsel zu ihrem Seelsorger. Ihr widmete er — 22 Jahre dort amtierend — die besten Jahre seines Lebens. Dort gründete er seinen Hausstand, indem er mit Frl. Liesa Severin in den Ehestand trat. Die ersten Jahre seiner Wirksamkeit in Wyszogrod waren die schönsten und glücklichsten Jahre seines ganzen Lebens. Gott segnete diese Ehe mit drei Kindern, einem Sohne, der schon als Kind den Eltern durch den Tod entzissen wurde und zwei Töchtern, welche zur Freude der Eltern heranwuchsen, und sich dann glücklich verheiratet haben.

Da die Eltern in Wyszogrod nicht die Möglichkeit hatten, ihre Kinder in höheren Schulen unterrichten zu lassen, so sehnten sie sich

fort von dort. Wie sehr freuten sie sich, als, nachdem Pastor Behse in Belchatow zum Pastor der Gemeinde gewählt worden war, eine in der Nähe der Stadt Lodz gelegene Gemeinde ihnen ihre Pforten öffnete. Ein schöner Freudentag war es für den nun Vermögten, als er — im Jahre 1913 — von Herrn Generalsuperintendenten Bursche in sein Amt daselbst feierlich eingeführt wurde, und der zweite Freudentag, der zu den Höhepunkten seines Lebens gehörte, war sein 25 jähriges Amtsjubiläum im Jahre 1915.

Doch lag im allgemeinen nur wenig warmer Sonnenschein auf seinem Leben. Die langjährige Krankheit seiner Gattin, die er innig liebte und mit welcher er 32 Jahre lang in glücklichster Ehe lebte, warf tiefe Schatten auf das ganze weitere Leben der Ehegatten. Und doch hat sie ihn, trotzdem er ein lebenskräftiger Mann war, in dessen Brust, wie man hoffen konnte, noch Leben für viele Jahre war, überlebt. Als er aus Seczmin, einem großen Dorfe seiner früheren Parochie, woselbst er an der Grundsteinlegung zu einer dort zu erbauenden Kirche teilgenommen, zurückgekommen war, legte er sich, sich unwohl fühlend, zu Bett, und entschlief, nachdem er nur einige Stunden gelitten, im Alter von 65 Jahren. Sein Tod überfiel ihn aber nicht unerwartet wie ein gewappneter Feind, denn er hatte in der letzten Zeit oft und gern an sein Sterben gedacht, weil er in Folge der so traurigen Lage unserer Kirche, besonders der so unerquicklichen Kämpfe in derselben, lebensmüde war und sich daher auf die Ewigkeit, wo kein Leid und kein Schmerz mehr sein wird, freute und darnach sehnte.

Bei der Ueberführung der Leiche des Verewigten in die Kirche rief der langjährige Freund desselben, Pastor R. Schmidt, der trauernden Familie die Trostworte zu: „Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit, aber Ich will euch wiedersehen und euer Herz soll sich freuen und eure Freude soll niemand von euch nehmen“ (Joh. 16, 22) und: „Fürchte dich nicht, denn Ich bin mit dir; weiche nicht, denn Ich bin dein Gott; Ich stärke dich, Ich helfe dir auch, Ich erhalte dich durch die rechte Hand meiner Gerechtigkeit“. (Jes. 41, 10.) Nachdem die Leiche in der Kirche aufgebahrt worden war, hielt derselbe die erste Trauerrede am Sarge des Heimgegangenen über das Wort Jesu: „Wo ich bin, da soll auch mein Diener sein“. Am darauffolgenden Sonntag versammelte sich seine Gemeinde zum letzten Male beim Hauptgottesdienst um ihren geliebten, nun schon entschlafenen Hirten in der Kirche. Dort lag er aufgebahrt vor dem Altar, in einem Meer von Blumen und Kränzen, umstrahlt von Lichtern, tief betrauert von seiner Gemeinde.

Den Hauptgottesdienst hielt Herr Pastor Diem aus Kleszczów. Am Nachmittag um 5 Uhr versammelten sich noch größere Menschenmassen als am Vormittage zum Begräbniß des allgemein beliebten Seelsorgers. Als erster bestieg Herr Pastor Kreuz aus Pabianice die Kanzel und hielt die erste Leichenpredigt über Off. 2, 19: „Ich weiß deine Worte und deine Liebe und deinen Dienst und deinen Glauben und deine Geduld“, des Verstorbenen Leben im Dienste

der Gemeinde und Familie feiernd. In der zweiten Rede, die Herr Pastor Nahrgang, der sein Nachfolger in Wyszogrod geworden ist, hielt, wurde dem Verstorbenen in Anknüpfung an Luk. 2, 29: „Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener in Frieden fahren“, ein herzlich Nachruf gewidmet. Ein ungeheurer Begräbniszug bewegte sich dann zum Kirchhof hin, wo zuerst Herr Pastor Otto-Petrifau in deutscher Sprache über 1. Mos. 24, 56: „Haltet mich nicht auf, denn der Herr hat Gnade zu meiner Reise gegeben“ und Herr Pastor Kreuz in polnischer Sprache über Spr. 10, 7: „Das Gedächtnis der Gerechten bleibet in Segen“, hielt.

Pastor R. Schmidt.

Pastor Dr. Artur Schmidt.

Einer der bedeutendsten Pastoren Österreichisch-Schlesiens, ein Mann, der weit über die Grenzen seines Heimatlandes als ein geistiger Reichsgottesarbeiter ersten Ranges, als ein äußerst tüchtiger Organisator, und als ein Vorkämpfer des Deutschtums bekannt war, ist Pastor Dr. Artur Schmidt in Bielitz gewesen.



Weiland Pastor Dr. Artur Schmidt,
Bielitz.

Dr. Artur Schmidt wurde am 30. März 1866 in Teschen geboren und besuchte dort das Gymnasium. Von 1884 bis 1888 studierte er Theologie und Philosophie in Wien, Jena und Heidelberg. Nach Absolvierung seiner Studien war er zuerst Vikar in Troppau, dann Pfarrer in Gablonz in Deutsch-Böhmen, vom Jahre 1894 ab, also 29 Jahre hindurch, Pfarrer in Bielitz. Es war eine Riesenarbeit, die er dort zu bewältigen hatte; und stets hat er aber in jeder Stellung, die er auch neben seinem Pfarramt bekleidete, seinen ganzen Mann gestanden. Die Bielitzer Gemeinde ist eine lebendige Gemeinde. Was ist dort nicht alles im Laufe der letzten drei Jahrzehnte, nachdem er dorthin gekommen, geschaffen worden.

An allen evangelischen Schöpfungen in der Gemeinde aber hat Pastor Dr. Schmidt hervorragenden Anteil genommen. Bielitz ist eine Schulstadt. Wie viel und wie treu hat er da als Obmann des städtischen Bezirksschulrates und des deutschen Schulvereins mitgearbeitet, ja, das ganze Schulwesen geleitet! Die größte Mühe

hat er sich gegeben, die auch dort existierende ev. Lehrerbildungsanstalt trotz aller Schwierigkeiten seiner Heimat zu erhalten. In dem dort bestehenden Kandidatenhaus, in welchem junge Theologen fürs Amt weitergebildet werden, war er als Lehrer des Kirchenrechts tätig. Seine so gründliche Kenntnis des Kirchenrechts und seine so reichen Erfahrungen auf diesem Gebiete sind denn auch unserer ev.-luther. Kirche in Kongresspolen zugute gekommen: als es galt, für unsere Kirche eine neue Kirchenverfassung zu schaffen, da hat er als Mitglied des für diesen Zweck gewählten Synodalausschusses an den Arbeiten desselben in Warchau tätigen Anteil genommen. Er hat ferner auch an der Spitze des schon vor ihm gegründeten Schlesienschen Schwesternhauses gestanden. Wie viel Mühe hat es ihn gekostet, für diese Anstalt die zu ihrem Unterhalt notwendigen Geldmittel zu beschaffen, und auch für dieselbe Schwestern zu werben und auszubilden! Aber sein Wirkungskreis erstreckte sich noch weit über seine Gemeinde hinaus. Er war nicht bloß Schriftführer des Schlesienschen Gustav Adolf-Zweigvereins, sondern auch seit 1910 stellvertretender Superintendent der ehemaligen mährisch-schlesischen Diözese, wie auch Prüfungskommissär bei der Superintendatur in Biala. Nicht unerwähnt dürfen wir auch die große Arbeit lassen, die ihm die Herausgabe der von ihm allein redigierten und jetzt mit ihm zu Grabe gehenden, monatlich erscheinenden größten „Evangelischen Kirchenzeitung“ Österreichs gemacht. Seiner wissenschaftlichen Tätigkeit hat er auch den Titel eines Doktors der Theologie zu verdanken.

Die so riesigen, im Dienste der Mitmenschen vollbrachten Arbeitsleistungen des verewigten Dr. Artur Schmidt übersteigen weit die Kräfte anderer geistiger Arbeiter und erregen die Bewunderung aller, die davon hören. „Selbst seine Freunde und Mitarbeiter“, so heißt es in dem dem Verklärten gewidmeten Nachruf, „stehen ergriffen und ehrfurchtsvoll vor seinem Lebenswerk, das nun in seiner bewunderungswürdigen Fülle und Mannigfaltigkeit abgeschlossen erscheint, das wie eine große Symphonie, reich an Tönen und mächtig in seiner Wirkung vorübergerauscht ist.“

Ja, sein Leben wirkt erhebend wie ein Kunstwerk, das ein großer Künstler geschaffen. Darum ist es um so schmerzlicher, daß er seiner Kirche so früh durch den Tod entrissen worden ist. Nachdem er acht Monate lang schwer gekrankt, und am Sonntag vor seinem Tode seiner Gemeinde noch die letzten Grüße entboten, ist er im Alter von erst 57 Lebensjahren am 29. August 1923 von Gott in die selbige Ewigkeit abgerufen worden. Sein Begräbnis gestaltete sich zu einer großartigen Trauerkundgebung. Die so mächtige Pfarrkirche in Bielitz konnte die Menge der zum Begräbnis Erschienenen nicht fassen. Die Begräbnisrede hielt ihm Herr Superintendent Dr. Fritsche über das Schriftwort Off. 2, 19: „Ich weiß deine Werke und deine Liebe und deinen Dienst und deinen Glauben und deine Geduld.“ 18 Pastoren haben an seinem Begräbnis teilgenommen. Sein Gedächtnis wird lange im Segen bleiben.

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Hausfreund Volkskalender, 1924, The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Warsaw, Poland.

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Death Notice.
Pastor Ernst Behse.

One of the oldest pastors of our Church has been called away from us through death on 4 July, 1923. Just as last year in the case of Consistory Pastor Gundlach, whom we rightly with one accord recognized as "a great one in Israel" - who will remain unforgotten in our Church until the end of days - so it is with yet another man who worked with only a small congregation, but who was faithful and courageous in his convictions - who had but one goal before his eyes: to do yet more good. As a result, he was greatly beloved for the boldness of his thoroughly German spirit by Catholics and Poles as well. For this reason, beside the members of his congregation, multitudes of Catholics and Jews, and one must say, the entire city of Belchatow, took part in the solemnities of his burial, and offered the most eloquent eulogies. Therefore we mourn him heartily, and our Church laments the loss, in him, of a servant who stood strong in the faith, never wavering.

With our minds' eyes, let us review his life:

Pastor Ernst Behse was born on 14 December, 1857, in Helmat in Livland. His father, Ernst Behse, was one of the best-known and most capable pastors in Livland; his mother was Marie, nee Mishaud. He attended the Gymnasium at Pernau. When he had completed that course, he entered the University at Dorpat. In 1890 in Bialystok he was ordained in the Office of the Holy Ministry by Provost Keuchel, and installed as assistant pastor. He then moved into the area of our Warsaw Consistory, and was named by the Consistory as administrator of the Tlower Congregation, where he served 1½ years. Thereafter he became spiritual leader of the congregation at Wyszogrod on the Weichsel. Here, officiating for 22 years, he gave the best years of his life. Here he established his own household by entering into matrimony with Fräulein Liesa Severin. The first year of his work at Wyszogrod was the best and happiest year of his entire life. God blessed this marriage with three children: one son, who, while yet a child, was called away from his parents in death; and two daughters who thrived, to the joy of their parents, and who, joyfully, have been married.

In Wyszogrod these parents had no means of enrolling their children in a higher school, so they began to consider moving from there. How joyful it made them when doors were opened and Pastor Behse was called as pastor to the congregation in Belchatow, a congregation in the area of the city of Lodz. It was a day of joy for him when he, in 1913, was festively inaugurated into his office by General Superintendent Bursche. The second great day of joy, the high point of his life, was the 25th anniversary jubilee of his ordination in 1915.

Nevertheless, there was but little more warm sunshine in his life. The years-long illness of his wife, whom he deeply loved, and with whom he lived for 32 long years in happy marriage, cast deep shadows over the rest of their married life. And yet she survived him, despite his being a robust man, in whose breast, as one could have hoped, there remained many years of life. When he returned from Seczymin, a large village, his former parish, to which he had gone to participate in a cornerstone laying for a church being built there, he went, not feeling well, to bed, fell asleep, and was called away after only a few hours of suffering, in the 65th year of his age. His death did not fall upon him unawaited like an armed enemy, because he had meditated often and joyfully upon his death in his last years; for he was troubled by the very sad condition of our Church, particularly the disagreeable struggles within the Church, and was weary of life. He was comforted by the prospect of eternal life, in which he would experience no sorrow or suffering, and he yearned for it.

While the body of the deceased was conducted into the church, his long-time friend, Pastor R. Schmidt, proclaimed these words of comfort to the bereaved family:

"And ye now therefore have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:22); and:

"Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (Isaiah 41:10).

When the body had been placed upon the bier in the church, Pastor Schmidt delivered the first message at the casket of the departed, based on the words of Jesus: "Where I am, there also shall my servant be." On the following Sunday, the congregation assembled in the church for their last worship service with their beloved shepherd, now fallen asleep. There, he lay on the bier before the altar in a sea of flowers and wreaths, illuminated with lights, deeply mourned by his congregation.

The chief service was conducted by Pastor Diem from Kleszczow. As in the morning, a large throng of people assembled at 5 in the afternoon to pay tribute to the unanimously revered spiritual leader. First, Pastor Kreutz from Pabrianice entered the pulpit and presented the initial funeral sermon based on the words of Revelation 2:19:

"I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience,"

eulogizing the service the deceased rendered to congregation and family. In the second exhortation Pastor Nahrgang, Pastor Behse's successor at Wyszogrod, preached a hearty farewell for the deceased based on Luke 2:29:

"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace."

A great burial procession then made its way to the church yard, where first, Pastor Otto-Petrikau spoke in the German language on the basis of Genesis 24:56:

"Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way"

and Pastor Kreutz spoke in the Polish language on the basis of Proverbs 10:7:

"The memory of the just is blessed."

Pastor R. Schmidt.

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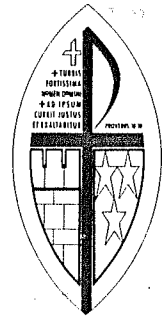
James R. Sonnemann, November 10, 1980, Brillion, Wisconsin.

LUTHERAN COUNCIL IN THE USA

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New York, NY 10010
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November 19, 1980



James P. Sonnemann
234 Washington St.
Brillion WI 54110

Dear Mr. Sonnemann:

Here is some of the information you requested in your letter of November 9.

1) The address of Bishop Janusz Narzynski is ul. Miodowa 20, 00-246 Warsaw, Poland. He should be able to furnish you with Pastor Belchatow's address, which we do not have.

2) The address of Bishop W. Fierla, Polish Evangelical Lutheran Church in Exile, is 2 Leinster Road N 10 3AN, England.

I hope you will be able to make contact with some of your relatives.

Tom Dorris
Director
News Bureau

TD:jrs