

CHAPTER FIVE: LUTHERAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

When a newly formed American Lutheran synod wanted to establish a true and lasting identity among its own members, among Lutherans of other synods, and even non-Lutherans, it often took steps to establish its first worker training institution. An educational institution supported by all of the synod's congregations, attended by its future pastors and teachers, with accompanying sentiment and traditions, could provide an esprit de corps for a fledgling Lutheran synod like nothing else could, even more than a church periodical. This treatise now will examine how various Lutheran educational institutions fared during the American Civil War years.

Beyond question, the Lutheran educational institution that played the most significant role in the Civil War was the Gettysburg Seminary of the General Synod. It was on and near the grounds of the Gettysburg

Seminary that the largest and bloodiest battle on the North American continent was fought, the Battle of Gettysburg, July 1-3, 1863. The Gettysburg Seminary had been founded in September of 1826 by the General Synod.¹ By the time the Army of North Virginia and the Army of the Potomac arrived near the seminary grounds for one of the most decisive battles of the war, the seminary was nearly 37 years old. The seminary's founder and most prominent professor was Dr. Samuel Simon Schmucker, the founder of "American Lutheranism." Dr. Schmucker was an ardent abolitionist and had helped make Gettysburg, Pennsylvania a station for the "underground railroad" for runaway slaves.²

The seminary was first housed in the Adams County Academy, but in 1832, an impressive structure of its own was erected, on a modest ridge on the western end of Gettysburg, which eventually became known as the famous Seminary Ridge of Civil War fame. The students moved out of their private quarters in town, and with the seminary library, moved to the new building, which contained a dormitory, refectory, lecture halls, library, and

¹ A. Roger Gobbel, Donald N. Matthews, and Elaine C. Matthews, On the Glorious Hill, "A Short History in Word and Picture of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg," (Gettysburg: Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1976), p. 7.

² Abdel Ross Wentz, History of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary, 1826-1926, (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1926), p. 111.

"Missionary Hall" or assembly hall. The newly formed Pennsylvania College, now called Gettysburg College, took over the Adams County Academy buildings.³

The new Gettysburg Seminary had an impressive but graceful cupola on its roof which gave a commanding view of both the Gettysburg town and the surrounding countryside, the Blue Ridge Mountains being clearly seen nine miles to the west.⁴ This cupola was used as both a Federal and later Confederate observation post during the battle by Union generals Buford and Reynolds and by General Lee and his Confederate staff and signal officers.

The beautiful Gettysburg campus became the focal point of the fighting on the first day of the battle, July 1, 1863. When Lee's army invaded southern Pennsylvania in June of 1863, many of the students at the seminary and the college joined Pennsylvania militia units to help in repelling the invaders. One group of students were mustered into the service of the Federal government and was designated "Company A, 26th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Militia."⁵ The unit

³Wentz, History of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary, p. 149.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Wentz, History of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary, p. 195.

saw service around Gettysburg before the battle, and was mustered out at Fort Washington, near Harrisburg on July 30, 1863.⁶

During the last week of June, 1863, units of the Confederate army had passed through Gettysburg, pillaging for food, supplies, and shoes. On June 30, a division of Confederate Major General A. P. Hill's III Corps heard there was an ample supply of shoes in the prosperous farming community of Gettysburg, where twelve roads met. General Hill authorized Major General Harry Heth's division, supported by another III Corps division, to march at dawn from their bivouacs near Cashtown, Pennsylvania to Gettysburg, to get those shoes.⁷

When Heth's soldiers approached Gettysburg and its Lutheran seminary in the early morning mist on July 1, 1863, they encountered two rude surprises. Instead of finding only pickets and untrained state militiamen, they ran into two full cavalry brigades of the Union Army of the Potomac waiting for them. These blue horsemen belonged to Brigadier John Buford's cavalry division.⁸ These troopers were the vanguard of the Army of the Potomac which was rapidly marching into southern

⁶Wentz, History of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary, p. 196.

⁷James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, p. 653.

⁸Ibid.

Pennsylvania to confront the rebel invaders. To the dismay of Heth's division, these Yankee horsemen were armed with newly issued, Spencer repeating carbines. Fighting dismounted about a mile northwest of Gettysburg Seminary, on high ground, Buford's cavalry held off three times their number for two hours, until Major General John Reynold's Union I Corps came up from the south to engage the approaching Confederates.⁹

While General Reynolds and his I Corps were holding off advancing Confederates north of town, a Lutheran college professor was busy pointing out to a Union staff officer the importance of Cemetery Hill in regard to its strategic position. Professor Michael Jacobs pointed out that Cemetery Hill, south of town, was an important site since from its summit, a military commander could command a view of the entire countryside for miles. This information was then quickly relayed to Major General Oliver Howard, commander of the Army of the Potomac's XI Corps, who ordered one of his divisions to occupy Cemetery Hill and act as a reserve.¹⁰The Federal

⁹McPherson, pp. 653-654.

¹⁰Heathcote, p. 112.

seizure of Cemetery Hill and nearby Little Round Top was a major reason for the North's military victory at Gettysburg. Professor Jacob's observation took place in the college cupola, with an interested Union signal officer who knew good military advice, albeit from a civilian, when he heard it. ¹¹

Within an hour and a half after arriving on the grounds of Gettysburg Seminary, in the van of his I Corps, General John Reynolds was killed by a Confederate sharpshooter. One of the best corps commanders in the Army of the Potomac was thus killed at the outset of most important battle of the war. In the afternoon of the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg, the Confederate army was able to bring more forces on to the battlefield than the widely scattered Federal army. In the afternoon, both XI Corps north of town and the I Corps northwest of town were forced to retreat through the town of Gettysburg and to the refuge of Cemetery Hill. The first day of the Battle of Gettysburg ended with a victory for the Confederacy. ¹²

The Confederate army overran and occupied the

¹¹Wentz, History of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary, p. 199.

¹²McPherson, p. 654.

buildings and grounds of Gettysburg Seminary for a better part of three days. During that time, General Robert E. Lee set up his headquarters tent in an orchard a few hundred yards to the northwest of the seminary grounds. All of Seminary Ridge, the seminary building and Dr. Schmucker's and Dr. Krauth's homes were occupied by Confederate forces.¹³

The terrible Battle of Gettysburg waged for three hot and bloody days. When it was all over, combined casualties total 51,000 Americans. Lee himself lost a third of his army in killed, wounded, captured or missing. The second day of the battle saw the Confederates attacking both flanks of the Union "fishhook" line. Casualties were enormous on both sides, but the Federal lines held firm. The third and climatic day at Gettysburg saw inconsequential fighting in the morning and the grand, glorious, and tragic "Pickett's Charge" in the afternoon, which by and large ended the battle. The next day, Lee and his defeated and despondent Confederates turned south toward the safety of the Virginia side of the Potomac River, the hopes of the Confederacy ending on the slopes of Cemetery Ridge. General Meade and his battered Army of the Potomac all but let Lee escape into Virginia, much to the consternation of President Abraham Lincoln.

¹³Wentz, History of Gettysburg Theological Seminary, p. 199.

A Lutheran seminary, Gettysburg Lutheran Theological Seminary, had witnessed the bloodiest battle ever fought in the Western Hemisphere. The seminary experienced moderate physical damage, since it was part of the Confederate line, it was a frequent target for Federal battery fire. The seminary's cupola was the chief Confederate signal station during the battle.¹⁴ After the battle, the seminary buildings were used as hospitals for the wounded of both armies. Two wounded Confederate generals, Kemper and Trimble, were for a time hospitalized on the seminary grounds. The last wounded were taken to other hospitals in late August, and Dr. Schmucker, the faculty, and student body, finally had their school of the prophets back.¹⁵ Dr. Schmucker wrote a lengthy description of the effect the battle had on the seminary. He described how the seminary was hit repeatedly by cannon fire, how the fences around the grounds were leveled to the ground, some being used for breastworks, some for firewood.¹⁶

¹⁴Wentz, History of Gettysburg Theological Seminary, p. 200.

¹⁵Wentz, History of Gettysburg Theological Seminary, pp. 203-204.

¹⁶Wentz, History of Gettysburg Theological Seminary, p. 201.

The dead of both armies were buried on the grounds of both Pennsylvania College, the preparatory school of Gettysburg Seminary, and the seminary itself. Most of these dead, but not all, were later disinterred and buried in cemeteries elsewhere, many of them in the national cemetery on the Gettysburg battlefield.¹⁷

Dr. Krauth's home was not seriously damaged, but Dr. Schmucker's home and personal possessions bore the full brunt of Confederate pillaging. There however seemed to be little wanton destruction in the other buildings. After the college and seminary were vacated as hospitals, the faculties of the two institutions issued a joint appeal for contributions for repairs. The response was gratifying and the seminary and college were able to open in September for the fall term of classes. All of the faculty and students of the seminary had fled Gettysburg as the Confederate army approached the town, so no student or professor was in harms's way during the actual battle.¹⁸ Pennsylvania College had its library used as a makeshift field hospital, the Confederates using the books of the

¹⁷ Heathcote, p. 113.

¹⁸ Wentz, History of Gettysburg Theological Seminary, pp. 201, 207.

old German theologians as pillows for their wounded.¹⁹

Perhaps the story of Gettysburg Seminary's role in the battle of Gettysburg can end with a touching vignette. During the battle, a pious Confederate surgeon took it upon himself to write in the front cover page of a copy of the minutes of the General Synod of 1859. It reads:

Oh! This horrible war--it has saddened the hearts of so many both in the U.S. and C.S. O!(sic) Thou who controlleth the destiny of nations and individuals, give us peace and independence. Would that the North would stop this cruel war and let all parties return to their quiet homes and worship God under their own vine and fig tree. Surgeon C.S.A.²⁰

Gettysburg Seminary was not the only Lutheran seminary that was physically affected by the Civil War. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis of the Missouri Synod was in a precarious position, being in the largest city of a hotly (and bloodily) contested border state. The most famous story of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and the Civil War appears to be no story at all, just a canard, pure apocryphal. This is the often repeated story that a Confederate flag flew over the seminary building until it was taken down at the prompting of Federal cannon trained on the seminary.²¹ Dr. Ludwig

¹⁹Wentz, History of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary, p. 207.

²⁰Wentz, History of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary, p. 206.

²¹Carl S. Meyer, Log Cabin to Luther Tower, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), p. 40.

Fuerbringer, a venerable professor at the seminary, went to great length to dispel this legend in his autobiographical sketch, "Eighty Eventful Years." He suggests that anxious Union soldiers, when warned of Confederate soldiers approaching St. Louis, turned their cannon in such a way as to give the impression that they were aiming at Concordia Seminary for some reason.

Dr. Fuerbringer also noted that the vast majority of students at Concordia were from the Northern states, and it would seem very peculiar indeed for them to raise the Confederate Stars and Bars. In fact, when the city of St. Louis was threatened by the Confederate General Price, the seminary students took it upon themselves to engage in military drill, the mayor of St. Louis commending them for their patriotism.²²

At the outset of the war, in April of 1861, Walther found it necessary to close the school and to send the preparatory boys and young men at the seminary home, for reasons of safety.²³ Later, during the summer of 1861, the seminary students returned to St. Louis.

²²Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer, Eighty Eventful Years, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), pp. 223-227.

²³Meyer, p. 40.

Earlier, the Missouri Synod had decided, despite Loehe's reservations, to move the practical seminary from Fort Wayne to St. Louis. The outbreak of the Civil War made the move all the more urgent. Missouri had a law which gave exemptions from military service to theological students, while the state of Indiana had no law.

Moreover, it was thought with the coming of civil strife that the young boys in the St. Louis Gymnasium would be safer in the Midwest than a simmering border state.

President Friedrich Craemer and his students were packed up and sent to St. Louis, arriving on September 1, 1861.²⁴

The preparatory students in Fort Wayne had some difficult days ahead in their new home in Indiana. The president of the Missouri Synod, the Rev. F. C. D. Wyneken reported that soon after classes began at Fort Wayne, the institution was besieged by a "virulent and protracted sickness," which affected thirty students at one time. President Wyneken also lamented that the departure of the older students for St. Louis, because "of that important moral influence which the older students, especially those of a higher class, which is animated by a good spirit, exert on the younger students."²⁵

²⁴Erich H. Heintzen, Prairie School of the Prophets, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), pp. 54-56.

²⁵Missouri Synod Proceedings, 1863, p. 19., cited in Carl S. Meyer, "Fort Wayne's Concordia During the Civil War," Concordia Institute Journal, vol. XXXVI, no. 2., (July 1963), p. 42.

The Wisconsin Synod's seminary, today known as Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, was founded in 1863, during the Civil War. Former President Muelhaeuser and his allies wanted a worker training school in Milwaukee, while President Johannes Bading and his cohorts wanted the new school in Watertown, nearer the geographical center of the fledging synod.²⁶ Already at the 1861 synod convention, Pastor Bading and lay delegate Daniel Kusel spoke out for establishing a college and seminary to meet the crying need for pastors and teachers, and suggested Watertown as the location. The centennial book of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Watertown, Wisconsin sadly reported however, "in view of the situation created by the outbreak of the Civil War, the synod was not ready to take this step."²⁷

At the 1863 synod convention, the vote was taken where to locate the new worker training school. By a decisive vote of 45-19, the new school, later to be known as Northwestern College, was located in Watertown. A miniscule seminary began in a rented house in Watertown in 1863, Professor Edward Moldenhke being the first and for a time, the only professor. One student

²⁶ Edward C. Fredrich, The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), p. 15.

²⁷ A Century with Christ, 1854-1954, centennial booklet, St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Watertown, Wisconsin, p. 18.

was enrolled at first, but by the 1864-1865 year, there were eleven students. Thus, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, now located in Mequon, Wisconsin, had its humble beginnings right after the Battle of Gettysburg, in 1863. Northwestern College in Watertown was not founded until after the Civil War was over, in September of 1865. All of the other schools in the Wisconsin Synod's worker training system were founded several years after the Civil War.²⁸

One other Midwestern Lutheran college could be noted in regard to the role it played in the Civil War. Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio, saw a good portion of its student body enlist in the Union Army. Dr. Heathcote reports that on June 30, 1863, 52 of Wittenberg's students were in Federal military service. Wittenberg's alumni association also actively supported President Lincoln's administration.²⁹

As can be expected, the Lutheran institutions in the South were not spared the depredations of the Civil War. Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia was founded in 1853. In 1861, the student body numbered 118. The vast majority of students of military age laid aside their books and volunteered for Confederate service, some never

²⁸Fredrich, p. 16. ²⁹Heathcote, p. 118.

to return home. Several of the faculty members, however, did not join the military, but instead, tried to keep the college going. Their valiant efforts were rewarded. Roanoke College was one of the few colleges in the state of Virginia to continue classes throughout the war. Each war year there were over 100 students enrolled, a remarkable achievement in view of the intensity of fighting in the Old Dominion. After 1862, until 1866 no degrees were awarded, since the courses were of a preparatory nature.³⁰

Newberry College in Newberry, South Carolina, ^d has been founded by the South Carolina Synod in ¹⁸⁵⁹ ~~1865~~. During the war years, it faced declining enrollment, until all classes and operations ended. The institution was both a liberal arts college and a Lutheran seminary. One of its students, Thomas W. Sligh, was killed carrying his regimental colors at Gettysburg. Finally, in 1865, Newberry College saw its buildings and grounds occupied by Federal troops, under whose occupation the buildings deteriorated rapidly. In 1866, the college resumed operations, and it still exists today.³¹

³⁰Heathcote, pp. 119-120.

³¹Fritz et al., pp. 295, 299.

It can be said without reservation that the Civil War made its mark on several Lutheran educational institutions, and in turn, Lutheran education institutions made their mark on the Civil War. A Lutheran seminary in Gettysburg will go down in world history as the place where the most decisive battle in the Western Hemisphere was begun. For this reason alone, the role of Lutheranism in the Civil War must continue to be told to each new generation of Americans.

CONCLUSION

The American Civil War lasted four full years, and cost over 600,000 Americans their lives. When it was over, the black slaves had won their freedom, and the question was forever put to rest whether or not a state had a right to succeed from the Union. Lutherans from the North, South, East, and West were involved in supporting their respective regions when war came, from start to finish. Lutheran young men by the thousands joined the ranks of both the Southern and Northern armies, and fought valiantly for what they believed in, and they certainly bore their share of battle and disease casualties.

On the home front, Lutheran lay people, clergy, and congregations did what they could to support their respective war efforts. While most Lutherans in both the North and the South did not actively support slavery,

most Lutherans, as stated previously, did not become vehement abolitionists either. Most Lutherans, with the exception of many Scandinavian Lutherans, took the position of Abraham Lincoln and tried to work initially for the slow and gradual end of slavery.

In concluding this master's thesis on American Lutheranism and the Civil War, Lutherans living in this country before, during and after the Civil War, demonstrated their patriotism by supporting the cause of their government, as it was torn apart by civil war. The Lutherans living in the South, from a Northerner's point of view, put their hope in a truly lost cause, yet they believed that they were fighting for a country and not participating in a rebellion, and for that they must be admired. Lutherans during the Civil War demonstrated that they were now Americans, willing to support a country and a government, that many of them had only recently adopted and immigrated to its shores. Let their fine examples be an inspiration to all Lutherans and all Americans of this generation and future generations as they strive to support both the church and state.

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