

# Evangelisch Luthertische Paul's Kirche und Schule

Angeänderter Augsburgischer Confession

St. Paul's Lutheran Evangelical Church and School  
Unaltered Augsburg Confession

## History Part I – 1863–1903

*You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told. Ps. 40:5*

October 2023 marks the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church. Each week during this month of celebration, we will present a 40-year segment of the history of our church and school at St. Paul, Bonduel. We will attempt to recount God's "wondrous deeds," though they truly are more than can be told! Today, in our first installment, we go back to the very beginning, the 1860s.

The Church is more than beautiful buildings and steeples. It is people. God's people. Forgiven people. People brought to faith by God in Holy Baptism, people who by His grace believe in Christ as their one and only Savior from sin, death and hell. People whose faith God sustains by His Word and Sacraments. The people we will meet in our journey through St. Paul's early history were devout German Lutheran immigrants who founded a tiny church in the Wisconsin wilderness. We are grateful to God for the faith and courage He gave to these families who emigrated from the Old World to America and brought with them the Scriptures, the teachings of Martin Luther, and their God-wrought unshakable faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

German immigrants had initially settled in southern Wisconsin. When the Homestead Act of 1862 offered land at low costs, they were encouraged to move northward, eventually settling in the Town of Hartland. Near the center of the township was a small valley, rich with virgin timber, fertile soil, and a fresh flowing water supply. There was no "Bonduel." Just wilderness.

Enter Burmeister, Zernicke, Manthei, Kallies and Stern. It almost sounds like the name of a big-city law firm, but we know them as the five families who laid the groundwork for what would one day become St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church. These families settled in the Town of Hartland, cleared the land, built their homes and cultivated the soil. No sooner had they arrived than they began to gather together for worship services in the Heinrich Burmeister home. The leader would read from a book of sermons and prayers called the "postil." Though they had no pastor, they could hear of and celebrate the birth, death, and resurrection of their Savior.

Faith in Jesus Christ for their forgiveness and salvation was preeminent in the lives of these early Lutherans. Led by the Lord, they immediately recognized the need for a school where God's Word and the teachings of Martin Luther were taught along with the usual academic subjects. Almost simultaneously with the beginning of their worship gatherings, the settlers organized a school for their children. There was no school house and no trained teacher. Classes were taught in both German and English by Heinrich Burmeister and, like the worship services, were conducted in his home.

In 1863, in the Town of Belle Plaine, the Rev. P. H. Dicke, a pastor from Frankentrost MI, had accepted the divine call to St. Martin Lutheran Church. He traveled to the Hartland area and, upon finding these families, organized them into a congregation. Pastor Dicke was serving four other churches at this time and conducted services in the Burmeister home whenever he was able. The members of the newly formed congregation chose their own name and thus, in October "in the year of our Lord" 1863, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church was born. One month later, the first St. Paul children were baptized into the Name of the Triune God by Rev. Dicke: Maria Ulricke Elisabeth Manthei, daughter of Gottlieb and Minnie Manthei, and Wilhelm Friedrich Sumnicht, son of Carl and Auguste Sumnicht.



Families from Germany continued to settle in the area and join the small group of Lutherans worshiping in the Burmeister home - families whose names to this day are familiar to St. Paul members: Brodhagen, Brusewitz, Zuehlsdorf, Busch, Boettcher, Luecke, Westphal, Krause. By God's grace, descendants of these families are still sitting in the St. Paul pews, a testimony to the Spirit-given faith

of our forefathers and their commitment to *tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, that they should set their hope in God. (Psalm 78:4,7)*. New centuries have dawned but, thanks be to God, St. Paul's commitment to "tell the coming generation" remains the same to this day.

So far all of this sounds almost idyllic. But we must keep this in perspective and consider that our peaceful valley of devout Lutherans was part of a nation grievously divided by the Civil War. The same year the Homestead Act of 1862 led our German settlers to Hartland, the Battle of Antietam took place near Sharpsburg, MD. It is remembered to this day as the bloodiest day in American history, with 22,700 dead, wounded, or missing. And in 1863, while Pastor Dicke was traveling the countryside of Hartland, gathering the settlers and forming St. Paul as a congregation, the Union and Confederate armies fought the three-day Battle of Gettysburg. The Union victory was considered the turning point of the war, but at a horrifying cost. With over 51,000 killed, wounded, or captured, Gettysburg was the bloodiest single battle of the Civil War.

*"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."* (John 14:27) The peace Christ gives, as he reconciles us to our Heavenly Father through His Cross, can never be shaken or taken from us. Our St. Paul founders knew this and, though the Civil War raged on into its third year, they moved forward in Christ's name to build their homes, their farms, their church, and their community - the Town of Hartland. It is worth inserting into our church's history the important role our founding fathers played in the growth of the township. Records show that as early as 1863 St. Paul members were serving on the Town Board. In 1863 Fred Zernicke was Town Chairman. Charles Sumnicht was Town Clerk from 1863-1865 and Justice of the Peace from 1863-1864. Karl Stern was a Supervisor in 1863, and in 1865 he was Treasurer, with Heinrich Burmeister serving as Supervisor. Some of their many duties were overseeing development of the town, surveying and building new roads and bridges, collecting taxes, and providing for the poor and for the families of those who were drafted or volunteered for military service. Additionally, while the nation was still embroiled in the Civil War, Board members were responsible for filling the Town's quota of volunteers. No easy task for these God-fearing Lutherans. But they lived their Christian faith as Martin Luther taught in the Table of Duties,

serving Christ in their homes, their church, and their community, neither shirking their duty nor abandoning the needs of their neighbor.

1865 brought tragedy to America with the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln in April. One month later, the Civil War ended, with over 620,000 men dead and almost 470,000 wounded. In December slavery was abolished by the 13th Amendment, and America, after having been ravaged by war for five years, began to rebuild.

*Built on the rock the Church shall stand, Even when steeples are falling. Crumbled have spires in ev'ry land; Bells still are chiming and calling.* St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church prospered despite the chaos of war. Just as the nation began to build, so did the people of St. Paul. In January of 1866 they purchased 40 acres of land in the Town of Hartland from Rev. Dicke for \$85 for the purpose of building a church. The three-year-old congregation was still meeting in the Burmeister home, but it had become evident they needed more room for their gatherings. So it was that in 1869 they built their first church building, a small log cabin situated on their new land. This was to be their house of worship for the next ten years.

During those ten years, by God's grace, the congregation continued to grow. St. Paul's first confirmation service was conducted by Rev. Dicke on October 23, 1870, when 19 young people confirmed their faith in the Triune God. Rev. Dicke was also serving four other churches in the area, preaching, teaching the Catechism, conducting baptisms, marriages, funerals and visiting the sick. The responsibilities began to have ill effects on Rev. Dicke's health. Then in 1872 St. Paul received its first resident pastor. Rev. Heinrich Stute had recently arrived from Germany and came to St. Paul in October as both pastor and school teacher. Housing was generally provided for the pastor as part of his compensation, so a parsonage was built the same year.

The congregation's growth continued during Pastor Stute's years at St. Paul, but not without hardship and grief. When he arrived in October 1872, Pastor Stute found a congregation that had endured devastating losses just a few months earlier. Because there were no immunizations or medicinal cures and very little proper medical care, the settlers had no defenses against contagious diseases like smallpox and scarlet fever. Beginning in December 1871 through March 1872, smallpox claimed the lives of eighteen St. Paul children, most of them under 5 years of age. One family lost five children ranging from 2 to 7 years old. Another

family lost three children, and one gentleman lost three children and his wife. All in only four months.

Then in 1878, between February and May, twelve of St. Paul's young children died of scarlet fever, again in only a four-month period. Once again Pastor Stute was called upon to shepherd his flock through the pain and sorrow of disease and death. One family lost four children ranging from 3 to 8 years old. Carl and Auguste Sumnicht had lost two young sons to smallpox in 1872; now six years later scarlet fever claimed the lives of their 11-month old baby boy and 3-year-old daughter. Several of these children's graves can still be found in the old section of our cemetery, their tiny gravestones with faded inscriptions telling of the pain and sorrow these early settlers experienced.

*Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)* Undaunted by earthly suffering and loss, the Kingdom of God stands secure and continues to thrive. The St. Paul congregation was growing rapidly as more and more German Lutheran families were settling in the Town of Hartland and worshipping with them. To accommodate their growing numbers, in 1878, the same year the scarlet fever epidemic took so many of their children, the congregation made the decision to build a new church.

The structure was to be a wood frame building measuring 70'x40' with a bell tower. The congregation borrowed \$2,000 for the project and construction began in 1879. The new church was dedicated to the service of the Lord in October 1879, and the original log cabin was now used as the school. The congregation decided in January 1881 to insure the new building for \$2,500 and the parsonage for \$500, and the Trustees were given the task of collecting 54 cents from each family to cover the cost.



Later that year, Pastor Stute accepted a call to another congregation and St. Paul granted his release. (Interestingly, a congregation could deny a pastor his request to accept a call to another church.) Upon his departure, St. Paul extended a call to Rev. C. F. Ebert, who was pastor at St. Martin in Belle Plaine at the time. Pastor Ebert had come from Pomerania, Germany in 1840 and had pastored several

congregations before arriving at St. Martin's. Sadly, while he was there, he and Mrs. Ebert lost two of their children to diphtheria. Pastor Ebert accepted the call to St. Paul Bonduel in September 1881 and was installed as both pastor and teacher in October.

It is impossible to separate the history of St. Paul Church from that of St. Paul School. Pastor Ebert was a strong believer in Christian education and, all glory to God, the pastors who followed him throughout the decades have also made parochial education of the St. Paul children a priority. The school by Pastor Ebert's time numbered 80-90 students, and he soon found he was unable to fulfill the duties of both pastor and teacher. His wife Caroline assumed the main duties of school teacher, in addition to caring for her own family, which eventually included 10 children.

It soon became evident that the school needed a full-time teacher, one whose sole task would be instruction of the children. Carl Nicholeisen, who recently arrived from Germany, was hired in 1883 at a salary of \$250 a year. Mr. Nicholeisen was academically qualified but lacked knowledge in the subjects of religion, music and English and, more importantly, was not seminary trained. Members of the congregation felt that teachers of their children should be appropriately trained by the seminary; so with much prayer and hopefulness, they applied to the seminary for a full-time teacher. God soon answered their prayers, and in early 1884 William G. Mueller was sent to St Paul at a salary of \$300 a year. Each member was expected to pay 25 cents toward his salary. The congregation was determined to provide housing for their teachers as well as their pastors, so prior to his arrival, the first teacherage was built for Mr. Mueller. (It is noteworthy that the provision of congregation-owned housing for St. Paul's teachers continued for the next 105 years when the last remaining teacherage was sold.) Mr. Mueller taught the St. Paul children for two years, leaving in 1886 when he was replaced by William Horst.

In other parts of the world, the 1880s was a decade of progress and affluence. Coca-Cola was developed; the Brooklyn Bridge opened; the Statue of Liberty and the Eiffel Tower were constructed. Kings and czars ruled their empires in Europe. And in America, men like Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, JP Morgan, and Andrew Carnegie built their financial empires. The gilded era of opulence and luxury had dawned.

But for the families of St. Paul, finances were a constant struggle. In 1887, church dues were \$1.00. At the end of the year, anyone who was in arrears was given four weeks to pay. If dues remained unpaid, it was ruled the person would be excluded from membership. One year the pastor's salary had to be reduced by \$100.

Yet financial concerns could not curtail the growth of St. Paul school. In 1888, under the guidance of Pastor Ebert, the decision was made to construct a new school to replace the log cabin. The new one-room, brick school building was completed and dedicated in 1889 and was the home of St. Paul Lutheran School for the next three decades. In that same year, the growing congregation voted to join the national Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.



Although Pastor Ebert had been a strong proponent of building the new school, he was no longer with St. Paul when the school was completed, having accepted a call to Berlin WI in 1888. He was succeeded by Rev. Heinrich Rathjen who shepherded the St. Paul congregation for the next 23 years. Under his direction, the cemetery was enlarged by one acre, and every voting member was to contribute one day of labor toward clearing the land of trees. In 1892 a horse shed and shelters were constructed to protect the horses during worship services. Also, a portion of the church forest was cleared to create an outdoor worship center to be used for special occasions. For many years St. Paul's annual Mission Festival church services were held in the woods.

By 1890, the congregation that began with five families had grown to 970 members, and the school population had increased to 152 students. In that same year, the Wisconsin State Supreme Court ruled that Bible reading in public schools was unconstitutional. This would have been unthinkable for the St. Paul families. Thanks be to God their faithfulness to Lutheran education never wavered!

With God's ever-present blessings, it soon became evident the duties of the school had become more than one teacher could manage successfully. In 1892 Mr. Horst was allowed to ask his unmarried sister Eleanore to assist him by teaching the younger children. The building was then divided into two classrooms. Mr. Horst remained with St. Paul for ten years, with Eleanore

serving as his assistant for the last four years of his tenure. When they left Bonduel in 1896, they were succeeded by Mr. Paul Elbert and his sister Eleanor. Eleanor married Traugott Simon in 1899 and was therefore no longer allowed to teach school. (Traugott and Eleanor lived into the mid-1900s. There are St. Paul members who can still remember “Grandpa Simon” sitting on his front porch on S. Cecil Street, playing his violin.)

To replace Eleanor, the school hired R. W. Dobberfuhl from the Lutheran Teacher Seminary. Mr. Dobberfuhl taught the younger children until 1903 when Mr. Elbert retired. He then took over the upper grades and Ernest Boseck, a student teacher, taught the lower grades.

We’ll wrap up our first 40 years with good news, bad news and then, just for fun, some cool news. First the good news. In 1895 the church purchased their first organ for \$700. The organ had to be pumped continuously while being played, and Mr. William Burmeister was hired for this important task. He was paid a salary of \$5.00 a year! Now the bad news. In February 1901 the teacherage burned to the ground. Immediately, the congregation began plans to rebuild, with each member required to contribute \$3.00 toward the building cost.

And finally the cool news. Remember Heinrich Burmeister? In whose home both the church and the school originally met? The farm he homesteaded in the 1860s remained in the Burmeister family for over a century. Earlier this year, St. Paul purchased twelve acres of it from the current owners to expand the cemetery. The last Burmeister patriarch to live on the family land saw this coming years ago and often said, “If I wait long enough, I can be buried on my own land.”

There can be no doubt that the Lord abundantly blessed, supported, and guided St. Paul Lutheran Church and School through those early years. St. Paul’s story is His story - the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ at work in the hearts and lives of His body, the Church.

*O God our Help in ages past, Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast, And our eternal home.*

Bibliography: *History of St. Paul Church* (1988), Violet Golz, Editor; *Hartland Roots* (2009), Darlene Heller, Editor; *St. Paul Lutheran Church and School - A Brief History* (2013), Marian Kupsy, Editor; *Lutheran Service Book* (CPH 2006): Hymn 645 v.1; Hymn 733 v.1; *History Part I - 1863-1903* (2023), Willa Rusch, Editor.