

THE LUTHERANS FINALLY CAME

- TO LAFAYETTE, INDIANA



Tippecanoe County Courthouse, Lafayette



Graveside ceremonies conducted in November, 1978, commemorating the 130th year of the death of Rev. Darius M. Hoyt. Participants were (l-r) Rev. Ralph Kempksi, then pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church, West Lafayette; Lawrence Leemuis, Purdue graduate student, great grandson of Rev. Edo Leemhuis (sic), the founding pastor of St. James Lutheran Church, Lafayette; David Meacham, Kerry Karner, Laura Merkel, and Cindy Prill, all seventh and eighth grade students at St. James Lutheran School, Lafayette.

Photo by Mark Scholten

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In late summer or early fall of 1848, the Rev. Darius Hoyt, the first resident Lutheran pastor in Lafayette, wrote to the directors of the General Synod's Home Missionary Society. His letter was published in The Lutheran Observer, an Eastern based periodical. What the young pastor, who died in mid-October of the same year, said may be summed up in this way: "We finally made it; the house of Luther has been established with considerable difficulty in Tippecanoe County."1)

The House of Luther did indeed have a hard time becoming established in the county. Methodist circuit riders were busy in every township as the townships were organized.2) The Presbyterians were on the scene as early as 1828. During the early 1840s they had a distinguished guest minister none other than Henry Ward Beecher. Beecher drove from Indianapolis to preach to a number of Presbyterians in the "Star City," as Lafayette came to be known. 3) The Friends (Quakers) settled in the county as early as 1827. The Baptists came in 1832, and First Baptist Church was organized in 1835. In 1836 the Rev. Samuel R. Johnson arrived from New York State to begin ministry among the Episcopalians.

The Roman Catholics were almost as late as the Lutherans in getting started in Tippecanoe County. Not until 1840 did the Catholic Bishop, Celestine de La Hailandiere, direct Father August Martin, the priest resident in Logansport, to visit Lafayette on a regular basis. It was not until 1843 that Father Michael J. Clark became the first pastor in Lafayette.

But there were anti-religious conditions at work in Tippecanoe County to stymie the House of Luther, well, for that matter, any religious group, from making much headway. The early settlers in the town were not the "convertible" type. In fact, they were pretty rough characters. Sanford Cox tells how "Solomon Hamer conducted a grocery, more aptly called a liquor store. In front of the place, underneath a number of sugar maple trees, one could daily see a few idle men, pitching quoits, hopping, jumping, wrestling, and running foot races. The hindmost man in all these sports had to pay for the liquor drank upon the occasion, or take a sound drubbing, which was frequently administered in those days for even a trivial provocation. Bruised faces and blackened eyes were frequently seen." 4)

Now the question may rightfully be raised - what about the Lutherans? Were they the industrious farmers or the quiot playing, roistering young men who whiled away their time in front of "the grocery store?" As we look at those who were part of early Lutheran settlements and read the accounts of early Lutheran traveling missionaries, we receive several and varied impressions.

The Rev. Ezra Keller, the young graduate of Gettysburg Seminary who undertook a six months' mission exploratory journey under the auspices of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, related in his diary that he went from Indianapolis to Boone County, through Boone County to Montgomery County. "Enroute I visited Lafayette, a flourishing town on the Wabash. Here I found about seven members of our church, who despair of getting a minister, and speak of uniting with other churches." 5) In his third letter sent from Peoria, Il. as a missionary report to the Synod and which was subsequently published in The Lutheran Observer, he is very critical of the moral conditions he found in towns and villages along the Wabash. He wrote:

"In towns and villages along the Wabash many groceries (liquor stores) were found. These groceries are nothing but grog shops, filthy sinks of sin, the wretched hovels of vice. In some villages which contained about three or four hundred souls I have counted six and seven groceries. In the morning you see scores flocking thither like so many thirsty swine to their troughs. In the evening you hear the muttering voice of the reeling drunkards, the sound of the violin, and of the angry words of the quarreling multitude."6)

Since there weren't many towns and villages along the Wabash with a population of three to four hundred souls other than Lafayette, the impressionable young theologian may well have been referring to the eleven year old "Star City."

A little more than two years after Ezra Keller stopped in Lafayette, another traveling missionary arrived. He was none other than the Rev. F.C.D. Wyneken, who had come to Allen and Adams Counties in 1838 and had extended his exploratory trips as far west as Fountain County. Coming south to South Bend from the Michigan border, he came to Logansport and then visited Carroll County. When he received a cool reception among some Germans around Delphi, he came to Lafayette. Here is his report:

"In Lafayette, Tippecanoe County, I found some Germans, but they have no desire for the Word of God. I therefore rode several miles further to a settlement on the Wildcat. Here and in the neighboring settlements, Brother Mohler also preached, and the people spoke well of his activity and zeal. In the neighborhood of Lafayette would also be a

suitable place for a minister, as six congregations, in Tippecanoe, Fountain, Montgomery, and Clinton Counties do not lie far apart. They have also made an effort to unite themselves; and Mr. Eisele of Sugarcreek, one mile from Americus, has promised a missionary of another Synod a lot in the neighboring village, worth then about \$150, if he himself should come back or send another. This man generously accepted the offer, purchased the lot for \$20, did not return himself, neither sent another, but kept the lot. Mr. Eisele is still compelled to hear the jibes of the people, on account of it, cares but little about them, and has again written for a preacher, as he is certain that he would be supported there. But it is a melancholy thing that the desire of this people to have a pastor should have so sadly failed. They promised to write to me in reference to the results of their efforts. I preached in the neighboring congregations and baptized several children. One congregation at the middle fork of the Wild Cat, I did not visit, as I had in the first place received wrong information in reference to it; and afterwards the time did not permit me, as I was expected in Fort Wayne. Fountain County was the western (most) and Montgomery County the southern (most) points that I had visited. Upon my return I preached in Clinton County, at Sugar Creek, to a congregation which Brother Henkel of Lebanon had visited several times, as also in Frankfort." 7)

So there were pious German Lutherans who had organized six congregations in and near to Tippecanoe County as early as the late thirties and the beginning of the 1840s.

It is a matter of record that Rev. John P. Dagey, a former Virginian and a member of the Synod of the West who moved to Greencastle in 1837, did some preaching in Tippecanoe County. Dagey, however, was severely criticized by men of the Indiana Synod for his "indifferentism," for his adopting "the new measures," for his communing non-Lutherans, and for his supporting the ecumenical tract, temperance, Bible, and missionary societies. Dagey was convinced that dogmatic adherence to the "old Lutheranism" of Europe was inappropriate to the time and the area in which they were working.⁸) In May, 1838, he reported of the progress of his recently organized Emanuel Church near Crawfordsville. There is, however, no similar report of the results of his efforts in Tippecanoe County.

In the early 1840s the quickening pace of settlement and the work on the Wabash and Erie Canal prompted Dagey to encourage the Synod of the West to sponsor missions both at Hickory Grove, six miles southwest of Lafayette, and in Lafayette itself. The Hickory Grove church was also known as Taylor's Station and became an attractive place for a missionary to locate because it received a donation of land for the construction of a Lutheran house of worship.⁹) Before the Synod of the West could reply to Dagey's plea, the competing Synod of Indiana sent John Markert's newly ordained, twenty-one year old son, Elias, into the county. After securing a home near Dayton in Sheffield Township in 1842, young Markert began a productive six year ministry. While his pastoral ministry included the Slipper's (Frankfort - Clinton County) congregation and one at Oxford, he organized a pair of congregations - Zion and St. Paul's - in eastern Tippecanoe County. Zion of Colburn was organized on January 5, 1843 and

remained an active congregation until 1959. St. Paul's, established in the fall of 1843, consisted of a group of rural families which gathered at least once a month in homes or schoolrooms near Isley Cemetery in Fairfield Township. (10)

But now destruction was to befall Lutheranism's advance in Tippecanoe County and elsewhere. The destruction was caused by clergy of the Indiana Synod, with Rev. Ephraim Rudisill, its president, as chief advocate, who taught and preached the un-Lutheran and unScriptural doctrine of Destructionism. In its promulgation Rev. Elias Markert of Tippecanoe County and Rev. Samuel Good of Boone County became Rudisill's most vocal lieutenants. "Destructionism" espoused the view that unbelievers would not be subject to eternal damnation but rather that their souls would be annihilated on judgment day. It was akin to universalism to which some were attracted, the view that since God is a God of love, He will condemn no one to hell or to eternal punishment.

Elias Markert's parishioners at Zion, Colburn, however, were not taken in by it. Though they were shaken and confused, they sensed something was wrong when Pastor Markert repeatedly turned the Zion, Colburn, pulpit over to clergy of other faiths. Their protests finally caused Pastor Markert to leave for southern Indiana in the fall of 1848. But the controversy over "destructionism" continued. In March, 1848, Samuel Good took up residence near Dayton, Indiana, and reorganized the pro-Rudisill faction of Slipper's Church into a new church later named Fair Haven Lutheran Church. Samuel Good may have done some preaching 'for the St. Paul's and Oxford congregations' in Tippecanoe County. He also tried, with little success, to bring Zion, Colburn, back into the Rudisill camp.

A champion who emerged to help battle against the destructionist doctrine was Rev. John F. Lautenschlager. Lautenschlager, who was born in Germany in 1822, came to the United States in 1831, grew up on a Pennsylvania farm, and migrated to southern Indiana about 1841. He soon was recognized as a bright prospect for the Gospel ministry and did extensive reading in Lutheran theology from 1844-1846. His foremost mentor was Rev. Eusebius Henkel, who had always been a strong opponent of innovations in doctrine. Though Henkel himself flirted for a brief period with Universalism, his student, Lautenschlager, maintained a solid Lutheran stance.

Lautenschlager was assigned by President Ephraim Rudisill to serve as deacon and vicar under Samuel Good. The licentiate very soon complained that he could not serve under a man who taught false doctrine, namely, the doctrine of destructionism. When Lautenschlager discovered to his dismay that Rudisill held the same views, he boldly spoke out against these errors. He soon won the support of fellow pastors, Abraham Miller, David Miller, Henry Fairchild, and Elias Goodwin. Quite a few laymen of Indiana Synod churches were also influenced to oppose the Rudisill-Good faction by the outspoken young theologian

The Synod's President, however, was not to be intimidated. He manipulated the 1847 Indiana Synod Convention by assuming "emergency powers" and by postponing the petitions for Lautenschlager's ordination. Pastors Abraham and David Miller invoked a constitutional provision which granted any two of the Synod's clergymen the right to examine and to ordain a licentiate between conventions. Rudisill volcanically countered this move by calling a special synodical session. By acting as "prosecutor, judge, and jury," he excommunicated Lautenschlager, suspended Abraham Miller, and forced David

Miller to apologize. Later the three dissidents headed the so-called Miller faction which three Synods and a Johnson County court judge declared to be the "true Indiana Synod." (1)

Needless to say, the leading Lutheran laymen of the churches in and around Tippecanoe County were badly shaken. The Slipper's Church of Clinton County, early advocates of Lautenschlager's ordination, did not agree to a joint pastorate with the Fair Haven Church until 1871, four years after its reorganization as Zion Lutheran and Reformed Church in Mulberry. Zion, Colburn, which also believed Lautenschlager was right, retained his services for several years. But there may well have been a good deal of soul searching in the Colburn church, in St. Jacob's Church near Rossville, and in other churches Lautenschlager directed from 1848-1851, years in which both he and Samuel Good lived in Dayton.

Meanwhile, while all this ruckus was going on in the Indiana Synod, men of the Synod of the West were still convinced that Tippecanoe County was a field ripe unto harvest. Rev. William G. Hunderdosse, who twice visited Lafayette before locating in Dubois County, made a strong appeal for further missionary efforts in a letter sent to The Lutheran Observer editor. The letter, dated March 31, 1845, and published under the heading, "Brethren, Come Over and Help us," claimed that no area in the United States was more deserving of the attention of the Lutheran Church than the stretch along the Wabash and Erie Canal from the State of Ohio to Lafayette, Indiana. He concluded his enthusiastic plea in this way: "But we must act soon, or our golden time will be over here, as it has been the case in many other places." (2)

Very possibly it was in response to this plea that Rev. Darius Hoyt came to Lafayette in 1845. Licensed to preach by the English

Evangelical Synod of Ohio, he and his bride of a year arrived in Lafayette by the end of October. Renting space in a school building at the foot of Illinois Street (now 4th Street), the twenty-five year old Hoyt began preaching services on November 2. Later on November 13, the editor of the Lafayette

Tippecanoe Journal and Free Press, commented on the proposed formation of the city's first Ev.Lutheran congregation. "This body," he explained to his readers, "was not known very extensively in this part of the country, but was the oldest of Protestant groups and was noted for a pious and learned ministry." The editor added that Rev. Hoyt was a Yale graduate who would "be found an intelligent and fearless advocate of the great principles of the Reformation." 13)

Hoyt soon organized the joint parish of "First Lutheran," the city church which continued to meet in a 20 x 40 foot schoolroom or in borrowed churches, and the Hickory Grove Church, reorganized with twenty five members in 1845, which proceeded to construct a 36 by 40 foot church in 1846. Rev. Hoyt also was instrumental in reviving the disturbed Emanuel Church, near Crawfordsville, by preaching there as his schedule allowed.

In his ministry Hoyt reflected his ties to Americanized Synods. He remained a member of the English Evangelical Synod of Ohio until about 1847. He then joined the Wabash Conference of the Miami Synod, and he helped to bring about this Synod's re-alignment as the Olive Branch Synod in 1848. All three bodies were affiliated with the General Synod and therefore differentiated between fundamental and "non-essential" doctrines, adopted "new measure" practices, cooperated with theologically compatible Protestant groups, and backed social reform movements.

Already in his first year of ministry in Lafayette, Darius Hoyt headed up an interdenominational drive to have barber shops, reading rooms, and places of business and amusement closed on Sundays. In 1847 he served as a committeeman for the local Sons of Temperance Society. He preached for a time at the vacant Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. In February, 1848, when the Wabash Conference of the Miami Synod assembled in Lafayette, he reported he had just concluded a series of meetings for "back-slider Lutherans." So many had renewed their faith that he soon might need an assistant.

But with the advent of more German immigrants in Tippecanoe County, Hoyt's dreams vanished when the German Lutherans began congregational activity. In the winter of 1847-1848 a migrating Pastor Chambour, and later an unidentified Swiss-born preacher temporarily conducted German services in a carpenter shop not far from the school where Hoyt's "First Lutheran" was located. Next, in the summer or late fall, 1848, Albert H. Luecken of Terre Haute, a licentiate of the German Ev. Lutheran Synod of Indianapolis, visited Lafayette. He encouraged and assisted the German Lutherans to form their own congregation. Some members defected from "First Lutheran," perhaps because of Hoyt's prolonged absence in the summer of 1848 when he attended the General Synod convention in New York.

Real tragedy struck when shortly upon his return to Lafayette, Darius M. Hoyt contracted typhoid fever. He lay seriously ill for a week, and died on October 16. He was buried in Greenbush cemetery, in a grave close to that of the founder of Lafayette, Wm. Digby.

In view of what Hoyt himself experienced in his almost three year ministry in Tippecanoe County, chiefly in Lafayette, it is quite remarkable that he maintained a strong sense of his own mission and retained an enthusiasm for his Gospel ministry. Nonetheless, he was realistic. This he demonstrates plainly in the essay, "Lutheranism in the West," appended to his letter published post-humously in The Lutheran Observer, October 27, 1848, issue. After some introductory remarks, he repeats the firm resolve of a Prof. Stowe who spoke two or three years earlier in a New York Tabernacle, at the anniversary of the American Home Missionary Society. It was worded in this way: "Resolved, that the great West belongs to Jesus Christ, and He shall have it."

Hoyt defends the Home Missionary Society of the General Synod by asserting: "It is doing something, and will do more to give the Gospel to the West." He, however, laments that a species of religious romance has come over some of the churches of the East (where he had visited in the summer of 1848). He boldly states: "They think everything in the West is done by magic. They have heard of cities springing up by enchantment and they

expect churches will be built in the same way." He goes on to list the special obstacles confronting the Lutheran missionary in the West. These are:

1. His church is unknown.
2. The pre-occupancy of the ground by other denominations.
3. The isolated condition of our ministers.
4. The want of churches.

In connection with number four, he gives evidence of a nativistic sentiment, one very

prevalent in those days. "I must confess," he writes, "it is not peculiarly grateful to my feelings to look upon the new Catholic Church recently erected in this place." He adds, in words reminiscent of young Luther: "Shall the minions of Rome chant their mummeries in temples lined with cedar and plated with silver, while the followers of Luther--every word of whose tongue was a thunderbolt against papal usurpation--are compelled to pay rent for an incommodious shelter, or worship amid the pitiless peltings of the storm and the scoffs and jeers of the ungodly?" Yet in spite of the bitter complaints, he concludes: "Our congregations in the country are flourishing, and an effort will soon be made to build a church in town.. Let our people arise to execute the high resolve that "Jesus Shall Have the West." 14)

The question now almost jumps at us: How much difference would it have made for the Lutheran cause if Darius Hoyt had been able to continue his ministry? Certainly he had a firm understanding and true comprehension of the problems and difficulties. How much could he have done about them? Yet here a sober fact of history confronts us that the Americanized type of Lutheranism, which Hoyt championed, was on the decline and "Old World Lutheranism," a more confessional type of Lutheranism brought to our land by thousands and ten thousands of German and Scandinavian immigrants. was on the ascendancy. Henry Waltmann puts it plainly: "Indeed, intra-denominational disharmony had a pivotal impact on Lutheran development in the County, in the aftermath of Hoyt's death. Ministers representing four separate 'schools' of Lutheranism soon lived or labored in the Lafayette vicinity." 15)

The Lutheran Church did become established in Tippecanoe County. The vacancies at "First Lutheran" and Hickory

Grove were partially filled until mid-1849 by Hoyt's co-worker and neighbor, the Reverend Samuel McReynolds of Delphi. He made monthly trips to Lafayette to keep the shepherdless flock together. His repeated requests prompted the Olive Branch Synod to assign Obadiah Brown of Indianapolis to the Lafayette parish several weeks even before he was ordained in 1849. By 1852 Brown managed to organize the Wyandotte Church, a new mission southeast of Dayton, in Sheffield Township. But "First Lutheran" in Lafayette seems to have disappeared by 1858.

As Lafayette's "First Lutheran" parish waned, another began with vigor to take over its missionary enterprises. The German Lutheran congregation gathered by Albert H. Luecken, really stepped forward. In the spring of 1849, the German Lutheran church asked Luecken to become its resident pastor. He declined, but he did recommend his young brother-in-law, Edo Leenhuis. A music and academic teacher, Leenhuis had been licensed to preach by the Indianapolis Synod. He took charge of the Lafayette German Lutheran congregation in the summer of 1849 and began collecting signatures for a roll of charter members within a few weeks. In 1850, while renting quarters at a church on the corner of Fifth and Columbia, the congregation constructed a church, 20 feet by 42 feet, on Ferry Street. What is also significant, it opened a Lutheran School. On September 29, 1850, forty members signed a constitution and named the church St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church. In 1857 St. James affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States (now known as the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod) which was making remarkable strides in enlisting Indiana Lutheran congregations into its fold at this time.

In spite of the arduous struggle Darius Hoyt, Edo Leemhuis, and other Lutheran pioneers had to establish Lutheranism in Tippecanoe County, it has survived and is flourishing. What was referred to in the 19th century as English or Americanized Lutheranism is represented by Holy Trinity and Prince of Peace Lutheran Churches in Lafayette, by Our Savior Lutheran Church and the Purdue Lutheran Ministry in West Lafayette, and by Faith Lutheran Church, Otterbein. St. James, with a large congregation which maintains a 200+ parochial school, and Grace Lutheran, Lafayette, are Missouri Synod affiliates, as are Redeemer Lutheran and University Lutheran Churches in West Lafayette. These four belong to the Indiana District of the Synod. The English District of the same Synod (Missouri) now has a mission church, Living Christ Lutheran Church, which meets regularly at the 4-H Center Chapel, west of West Lafayette. The Wisconsin Synod has a small, but growing mission in Lafayette, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. The ELCA churches (Holy Trinity, Prince of Peace, Our Savior, and Faith, Otterbein) help especially to maintain Mulberry Lutheran Home located on the west edge of Mulberry just across the Clinton County line. While Lutherans are outnumbered by the Methodists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and Baptists, they are a substantial minority with strong convictions and dedicated to Christian nurture and outreach, mindful of their forbears' arduous struggles to establish Lutheranism in Tippecanoe County and elsewhere in North America and throughout the world.

Footnotes

1) The Lutheran Observer, October 27, 1848. The Lutheran Observer was begun in Baltimore, Md., in 1831. Except for a few years in the possession of the Maryland Synod, it was privately owned, and it became the organ of the more liberal elements of the General Synod. Its editor from 1833 to 1861 was Dr. Benjamin Kurtz.

The essay, "Lutheranism in the West," is reprinted in the Indiana Magazine of History, Volume - LXXV, Number 1 (March, 1979). It follows the extensive article by Henry G. Waltmann, "The Struggle to Establish Lutheranism in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, 1826-1850."

2) Tippecanoe County had three original townships: Wabash, Fairfield, and Randolph. The other townships were organized within the following forty-five years.

3) Cf. Elsmere, Jane Shaffer. "Henry Ward Beecher, the Indiana Years, 1837-1847." Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Society, 1973, XIII, p. 148

4) Gen. R.P. DeHart, "Past and Present of Tippecanoe County," Volume I, p. 414. Indianapolis: R.B.Bowen, 1919.

5) Diehl, the Rev. M., "Biography of Ezra Keller, D.D. Founder and First President of Wittenberg College, Springfield, Oh., 1935," p. 72-73.

6) R.F. Rehmer, editor, "Sheep Without Shepherds: Letters of Two Traveling Missionaries, 1835-1837." Indiana Magazine of History, Vol. LXXI, Number 1, p. 67.

7) Report of the Executive Committee of the Missionary Society of the Synod of Pennsylvania, containing Brother Wynecken's report, pp. 9-10.

8) Waltmann, "The Struggle to Establish Lutheranism in Tippecanoe County," IMH, Volume LXXV, Number 1 (March, 1979), p. 35.

9) Ibid, p.37.

10) Ibid., p. 38.

11) Cf Martin L. Wagner, "The Chicago Synod and Its Antecedents." Waverly, Iowa: The Wartburg Publishing House Press, 1909, pp. 146-147.

12) Waltmann, op cit., p. 39.

13) Lafayette Tippecanoe Journal and Free Press, October 30, 1845.

14) Waltmann, op cit., pp. 47-51. Hoyt is here referring to the attractive, ten thousand dollar brick church erected at the corner of Brown and Mississippi Streets. Hoyt contended that "the money to build it comes from far - much of it from Europe - some from wealthy Catholics in our country."

15) Ibid., p. 42.

The Author

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He also was pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, Kent, Oh., from 1951-1958; of Our Savior Lutheran Church (The Gospel Center) in the inner city of Cleveland (1948-1951); and of Calvary Lutheran Church, Bedford, In., (1944-1948).

He has done extensive writing of early Lutheran history and Lutheran Pioneers in Indiana. He also edited the Indiana District, Lutheran Witness, for twenty four years (1963-1987).



Cover Copy Photo of the Constitution of the German Ev. Luth. Church (unaltered Augsburg Confession) in Lafayette, Tippecanoe County, Ind. St. Louis, Mo. Synodical Printery of Aug. Wiebusch and Son, 1861. Reprinted by Lafayette Printing Company, Lafayette, In. The Constitution consists of 28 articles and was passed by the Voters' Assemblies of August 4 and August 25, 1861.