

Salem Lutheran Church and the Town of Granville, 1830-1870

Mark A. Jeske

THE BLUFFS SURROUNDING the joining of the three rivers — the Milwaukee, Menomonee, and Kinnickinnic — were long a gathering place for Indian tribes. At one time or another the Potawatomi, Ottawa, Menomonee, and Chippewa all had villages on the site. No one can say with certainty what the name “Milwaukee” means. The name is certainly old; Father Hennepin wrote already in 1679 of the place he heard Indians call “Millecki.” A popular guess is that the name means “Gathering of the Water.”

I. Early Milwaukee County

Permanent settlements in what is now Milwaukee County were nonexistent before 1830. An 1833 map shows only a small Indian village and three white settlers' homes: one belonging to a French fur trader named Jacques Vieau and the other two belonging to his son-in-law, Laurent Solomon Juneau.

In February of 1831 the Menomonee chiefs traveled to Washington to yield all territory between the Milwaukee River and Lake Michigan. The brutal and bloody Black Hawk War in the summer of 1832 ended effective resistance to white settlement, and the following year representatives of the Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi signed treaties in Chicago ceding large tracts of land in Southeastern Wisconsin to the federal government.

In September of 1834 Milwaukee County was established as part of the Michigan Territory; its boundaries extended from Lake Michigan all the way to Madison and from Lake Winnebago to the Illinois border. In 1835 Juneau surveyed and platted “Juneautown” on the east side of the Milwaukee River. Byron Kilbourn did the same for the south side of the Menomonee River. Three competing settlements arose whose streets neither intersected in straight lines nor had the same names. In July and August of 1835 sale of Milwaukee land began at the U.S. land office in Green Bay (Fort Howard), leading to feverish speculation. Land prices were bid well beyond their worth. In 1836 Wisconsin became a territory.

In 1837 there was a nationwide financial panic, and the crisis was felt most keenly in the Midwest. Land prices collapsed overnight; wildcat banks and their worthless currency worked havoc. People traded acres of land for a barrel of flour just to stay alive. In 1837 Juneautown and Kilbourntown incorporated; land-title controversy held Walker's Point back. Tension mounted between the two North Side settlements, culminating in the famous “Bridge War” of 1845. Juneautown residents, suspecting Kilbourntown residents of sabotaging a bridge, actually wheeled a cannon to the

river bank and trained it on Kilbourn's house. The mob dispersed before any major damage was done; cooler heads saw the need for unity. On January 31, 1846, Milwaukee was chartered as a city with five wards and 9,500 residents. In 1848 Wisconsin became a state.

In 1834 Milwaukee County had been established. The land was neatly carved up into 36-square-mile townships and each section neatly divided into four tracts. By 1844 the county had been reduced in size to what is now Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties. In 1846, in order to receive a charter for the city, the county agreed to partition off the far western townships. By 1855 the present boundaries for Waukesha and Milwaukee Counties were fixed. Milwaukee County was divided into eight townships: Town of Milwaukee, City of Milwaukee, Lake, Oak Creek, Franklin, Greenfield, Wauwatosa and Granville. (See maps 1 and 3.)

II. The Town of Granville

Salem Lutheran Church's location was referred to for its first century of existence as "Granville" or "West Granville." It is curious that that name has practically disappeared today. The name survives, as far as I can tell, in only four places: the Granville Lumber and Fuel Co., Granville Park, the Granville Road, and the West Granville Presbyterian Church. A few notes on the vanished township might help to provide the context for Salem's early years.

Township #8 in the northwest corner of Milwaukee County was designated the Town of Granville. It was named by T. C. Everts, an early settler from Granville, New York, which in turn was named for John Carteret, Earl of Granville, a British politician. The first three tracts of land, sold in 1838, went to William Worth, Jesse Scholl, and *Jonas Brandt* (remember that name). There were perhaps 20 men in the whole town at that time.

Land sales in Granville ground to a halt in 1838 when the federal government granted huge tracts of land to the Milwaukee Railroad and Rock River Canal Co. for canal construction. The company folded in 1844-45. Four years later the state once again began selling land. On the first day, September 28, 1849, thousands of acres were sold; 50 tracts were sold by the end of the year.

After the canal fiasco, authority was granted to Milwaukee County supervisors to levy taxes for roads and bridges. Still, the most popular and successful means of roadbuilding were the plank roads financed by stock companies, who would then collect tolls from freight shippers. Soon diagonal roads radiated from the city, and each was named for its destination:

Originally called

Chicago Trail
Muskego Road
Janesville Plank Road
Mequanico Road
Watertown Plank Road
Madison Road

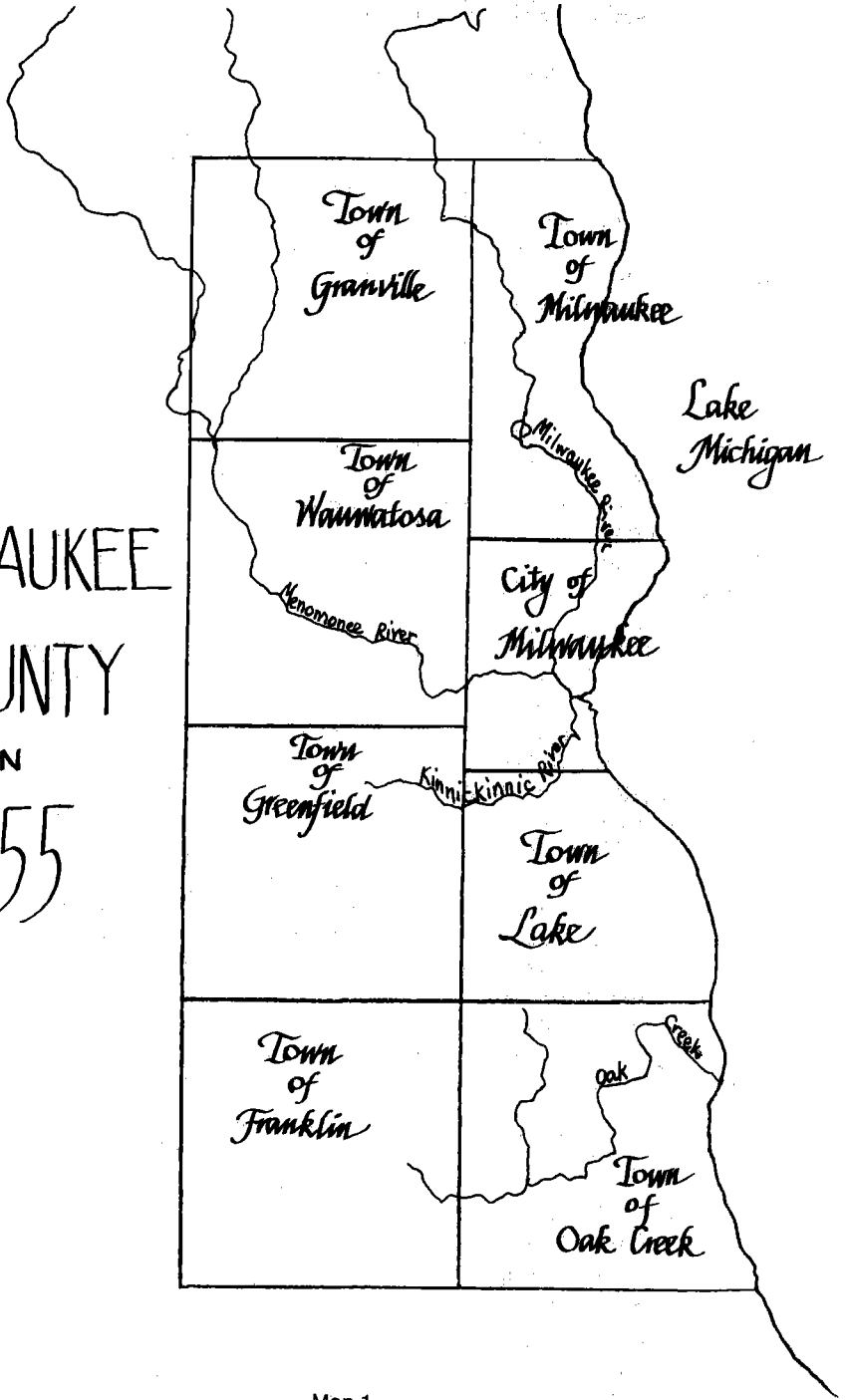
Lisbon Plank Road
North Fond du Lac Road
South Fond du Lac Road

Today is

Kinnickinnic & Chicago Aves.
Muskego Ave.
Forest Home Ave.
National Ave.
State St. & Watertown Plank
Vliet St.

Lisbon Ave.
Fond du Lac Ave.
Appleton Ave.

MILWAUKEE
COUNTY
IN
1855



Map 1

New Fond du Lac Road
Green Bay Trail
Port Washington Road

Teutonia Ave.
Green Bay Ave.
Port Washington Road

In the 1850s the plank roads began to lose their profitability and were gradually surpassed by the steam locomotive. In mid-century, railroad building became a fever. Byron Kilbourn had a line built to Madison by 1854 and to La Crosse by 1857. Unfortunately the city grossly overextended itself in the bond market, and in the financial panic of 1857 every railroad went bankrupt. Alexander Mitchell was the first to recover and begin building again. He reopened the La Crosse line in 1863 as the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul R.R.

Granville's first town meeting was on April 10, 1842. Leonard Brown, Solomon C. Enos, and Lyman Wheeler were elected supervisors and *Jonas Brandt* treasurer. The town remained decentralized and rural for a century; after all the tracts were sold, the population did not grow much.

Census information: 1840: 225
1850: 1713
1860: 2663
1870: 2401
1875: 2431

Land use in 1875: 3,200 acres wheat
1,525 acres oats
1,290 acres corn
1,296 acres barley
154 acres rye

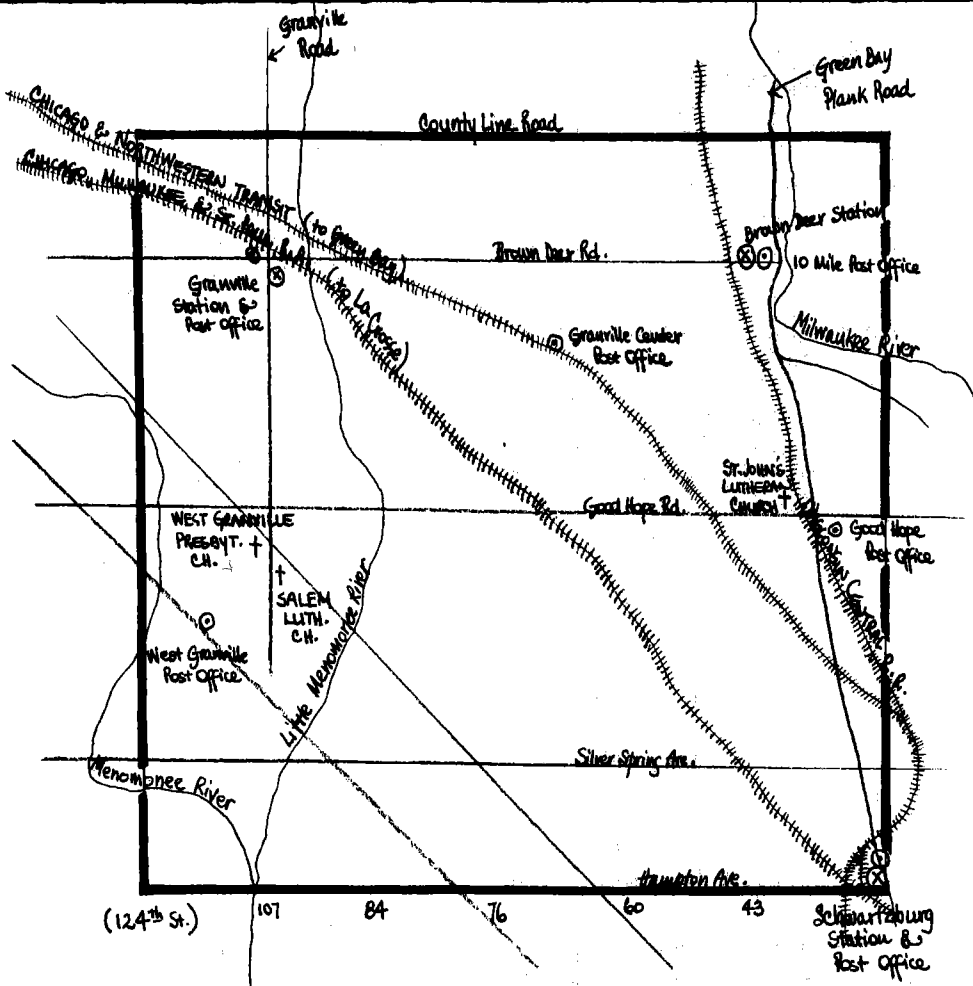
1875 Livestock census: 1,867 horses
1,894 cattle
1,643 sheep
1,374 hogs

In the 1950s the town was annexed almost completely by the city of Milwaukee. Only the northeastern section successfully resisted annexation. The sliver around the bend in the Milwaukee River was added to the Village of River Hills, and the rest of the N.E. corner became the Village of Brown Deer in 1956. (see map 2.)

III. Salem Lutheran Church

Though the "Yankees" (English-speaking Easterners) were more numerous in Granville at first, the Germans, chiefly Pomeranians and Brandenburgers, were not far behind. A farmer named Samuel Wambold had gathered 20 or so families in West Granville for worship; they were said to be mostly Pennsylvanians. On December 25, 1847, "Die Deutsch-English Ev. Lutherische und Reformiert Gemeinde von Granville, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin" was organized. It was the custom in those days for lay people, in the absence of a pastor, to read sermons from Luther's *Hauspostille*. Samuel Wambold, Friederick Brandt, and Aaron Leister were elected elders, and Peter Herzwurm and Christopher Wagner were elected trustees.

Exactly when the church adopted the name "Salem" is not clear. One guess is in 1862 when the congregation reorganized and reentered the syn-



TOWN OF GRANVILLE, c. 1875 (27th St.)

Map 2

od. The centennial history calls the congregation "Salem" from its founding, but that is most likely an error, since the synod proceedings and President Muehlhaeuser's history of the synod's first decade simply refer to it as the "Granville congregation."

H. L. Dulitz, 1848-1849

In May of 1847 Pastor H. L. Dulitz, though university trained, had been commissioned for service in America by the Langenberg Mission Society, a "union" (Lutheran-Reformed) society connected with the mission school at Barmen, Westphalia. Landing in New York, he was sent on to Milwaukee.

During the summer of 1847 he preached at a gathering of Lutheran families in Milwaukee at the "Gruenhagen" church between 3rd and 4th Sts. In the spring of 1848 he accepted a call to the originally "union" "Schmitz" church on 5th St.

Salem's centennial history reports that from July, 1848, to January, 1849, Dulitz also served the Granville Lutheran/Reformed church, though the location of these meetings is not known and no other records mention Dulitz's work in Granville. When the work in the Schmitz church soured, Dulitz moved to Chicago. He seemed to have been influenced by the "Old Lutherans" of the Missouri Synod, especially Pastor Keyl at Trinity in Milwaukee. When later that year, 1848, the Gruenhagen people formally organized as the Ev. Lutherische St. Johanniskirche, Dulitz accepted their call and returned to Milwaukee. In the fall of 1849 they rented and later purchased a former Episcopal church on 4th and Prairie Sts. (now Highland Ave).

Dulitz grew more Lutheran. Though he attended the Wisconsin Synod convention in 1851 and even gave the closing prayer, he did not apply for membership, choosing instead to join the Missouri Synod a week later at their convention. St. John's was minded to join Missouri, too, but since Missouri had a strict rule about parochial boundaries, it would have meant disbanding to join Trinity, only a few blocks away. When merger plans fell through, Dulitz in 1856 resigned from St. John under considerable pressure and the church split. The minority joined Trinity, and Dulitz accepted a call to Buffalo, New York. St. John called William Streissguth from Town Newton and joined the Wisconsin Synod in 1857.

Paul Meiss, 1849

Meanwhile, in Germany a cobbler named Paul Meiss took a teacher's course, but was rejected by the Langenberg Society in 1846. He came to America on his own, though, seeking placement among the Reformed in New York. A certain Schmidt in Albany referred him to Dulitz in Milwaukee for personal training, a common practice of the day. Dulitz agreed, but before Meiss had finished the course he left abruptly for Granville. The Granville church was willing to accept his services in January of 1849 even though he was not yet ordained.

Unfortunately Meiss was too Reformed even for a union congregation. He led a revival, rebaptizing 25 adult members. Reluctantly the church council withdrew its call in December. President Muehlhaeuser assigned Meiss to a new charge — to replace a certain Pastor Beckel in Schlesingerville (Slinger). There he had seven (!) congregations to develop. He got into trouble again, though, and after roving around for a while he died in the South in 1859 of yellow fever.

Wilhelm Wrede, 1849-1853

Wilhelm Wrede was a candidate from Kreis Magdeburg, recommended to the Langenberg Society in 1845. Though he passed his examination, he was ordained in Germany and spent the winter serving in Pomerania. In April, 1846, he set sail from Bremen with two other Langenbergers: Rauschenbusch and Johann Weinmann. They were met in New York by a Langen-

berger who had been in America since 1837 and was now stationed in Rochester — Johannes Muehlhaeuser. Rauschenbusch eventually became a Baptist; Wrede accepted a pastorate in Callicoon, N.Y.

Weinmann was sent on to Wisconsin, where he served a lay-organized congregation on the Kilbourn Road (S. 27th St.) in Oakwood (now Oak Creek). His letters to New York induced Muehlhaeuser to leave his Rochester parish and come to Milwaukee as a missionary. He soon set about organizing an East Side German "Evangelical" congregation in October, 1848. A year later it reorganized as a Lutheran church, first as "Trinity" and then as "Grace."

That year Wrede left his parish in New York and came to Milwaukee, doubtless at the instance of his Langenberg friends. Immediately after it had released Meiss in December, 1849, the Granville church called Wrede, and he accepted. That same month the three Langenbergers felt the need to consolidate their efforts. On December 8 they met at Muehlhaeuser's church in Milwaukee and organized "die erste deutsch ev. lutherische Synode von Wisconsin." Meiss was present as well. Muehlhaeuser was elected president, Weinmann secretary, and Wrede the treasurer.

That winter Muehlhaeuser prepared a draft of a constitution, and the three met on May 26, 1850, at the Granville church. Also present were a lay delegate from Grace and three candidates: Meiss, Kaspar Pluess, and Jacob Conrad, a tract distributor. Conrad was given to Wrede to train. After a few amendments the constitution was adopted, forming the "German Ev. Lutheran Ministerium of Wisconsin," whose meetings were called "ministerial" meetings and whose meetings with the delegates were called "synodical" meetings. Thus does Salem call itself the "Birthplace of the Wisconsin Synod." The big inscribed rock does not mark the precise spot, though, since the original church was on the other side of the street.

In 1853 Weinmann left for Baltimore. He died about five years after that when an ocean liner burned. Muehlhaeuser recommended Wrede for the pastorate of the Racine congregation that Weinmann had started, and though the Racine congregation almost bolted the synod because its Lutheranism was so mild, in April or May of 1853 they called Wrede and he accepted. He returned to Germany in 1855.

William Buehren, 1853-1860

The synod was expanding to the south and west, and groups were meeting in Caledonia, Greenfield (Root Creek), and New Berlin. In 1851 Candidate William Buehren, a former Methodist preacher in Indiana, was assigned the work in New Berlin. At the 1852 convention in Racine he was formally examined and given a license to preach under the condition that he continue diligently to study theology. The minutes make some pointed comments about Methodists' pressured conversion and true Lutheran repentance. In July of 1853 the Granville church extended Buehren its call and he accepted. At the 1853 Synod convention Buehren was formally colloquized under Muehlhaeuser's and Goldammer's supervision and then ordained.

An unresolved problem at Granville was the congregation's dual nature, Lutheran and Reformed. It is said that already since 1850 the Reformed faction was holding services at a different time. Buehren favored the Re-

formed group and induced the congregation to leave the synod. At the 1857 convention in Oakwood Buehren was dismissed ("entlassen") from the synod. The congregation split in 1860.

The Reformed element was organized on April 9, 1860, as the "First Presbyterian Church of Granville, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin," with the assistance of the Presbytery of Milwaukee (Old School). Their earliest minutes report that 30 members from the Lutheran-Reformed church were received by John Bantley, minister, and William Buehren, clerk. Their first pastor was Ernst Kudobe; what happened to Buehren is not known. On August 9, 1861, they received another 32 members from Salem. In April of 1868 the German Presbyterian Church of Germantown resolved to merge with the Granville Presbyterian Church.

In July of 1861 they dedicated a Cream City brick church just north of the West Granville cemetery, a few hundred feet from the competition. The church is in the Greek Revival style; it is still standing on the Southwest corner of 107th and Fond du Lac Ave., though with a small Gothic tower added and major building additions in 1956 and 1968. These additions should be models for any church which is considering adding on to old buildings, for they use the same style and materials of the original building, which was declared a Milwaukee landmark in 1977. The congregation today numbers about 200 adult members.

Rausch, 1860-1861

Salem's centennial history speaks of a "Pastor Rausch" who served the Lutheran remnant after the split, from November, 1860, to September, 1861. Other records show that this was actually *Candidate Rausch*. The synod's new president, Johannes Bading, reported to the 1861 convention in Watertown, "Mr. Rausch is at present with the congregation in Granville; he, from time to time, sends his sermons to me." In the *ministerial* meeting at the convention Candidate Rausch was discussed and it was resolved that he be released. Granville was again vacant.

The Lutheran remnant from the split (still just called the "Granville congregation") petitioned the 1861 synod convention for readmission and for a pastor who could preach both English and German. The synod assured them of readmission if they would reorganize as a Lutheran congregation.

Johann Heinrich Sieker, 1861-1867

The young synod's greatest burden was in trying to respond to the enormous need for manpower without having a seminary. Advertising in church papers for manpower was producing only unacceptable candidates. The practice of assigning young men to study with a pastor just wasn't working out and it came to be viewed as a quick and easy way to get into the ministry. The pastors were already overworked, and their meager training did not fit them for theological training. Missouri's brand of "Old Lutheranism" was thought to be too strict, so their schools were judged unacceptable. A new approach for obtaining pastors was tried in the case of J. H. Sieker, Salem's (sixth?) pastor.

Johann Heinrich Sieker was born in Schweinfurth, Bavaria, in 1838. He came to America in 1847 with his parents, who chose to settle in Newton-

burg, near Manitowoc. Trinity Lutheran Church was founded in 1851. In 1856 Pastor William Streissguth accepted Trinity's call. He persuaded the young Sieker (who was to marry Streissguth's sister) to study for the ministry. Sieker agreed, and he was presented to the 1858 synod convention at St. John, Milwaukee. He was judged a good candidate. Muehlhaeuser was instructed to get in touch with his friends back East at the Gettysburg Seminary, and Pastor Gottlieb Reim, Mrs. Streissguth's brother-in-law, took Sieker under his wing in Helenville for a few months to get him started in his studies.

Two leaders of the Pennsylvania Synod graciously and generously offered not only free training for the destitute Sieker but financial aid as well. One of those was Dr. William Passavant, who had a fondness for Milwaukee (he founded Passavant Hospital in Milwaukee, the city's second hospital after St. Mary's; it is now called Good Samaritan). The other was Dr. C. F. Schaeffer of the Gettysburg Seminary. Sieker was to be their first and last Wisconsin Synod student. At Gettysburg the other students thought of him as an arrogant Wisconsin rube, a reputation which he did not particularly attempt to disprove.

Sieker returned to Wisconsin in September of 1861 and was examined at a meeting of the Southern Conference. He was assigned to the vacant Granville congregation and installed by Muehlhaeuser. The young pastor not only had to heal the wounds of the split but lead a major building project as well. The log church was too small by now. A plot of land across the street was donated by Jonas Brandt (there he is again) from one of the Brandt farms. A Cream City brick church in the Italianate style was constructed; it was dedicated on October 28, 1863. Prof. Eduard Moldehnke delivered the first sermon. Also present were Muehlhaeuser, Streissguth, and Dr. Passavant.

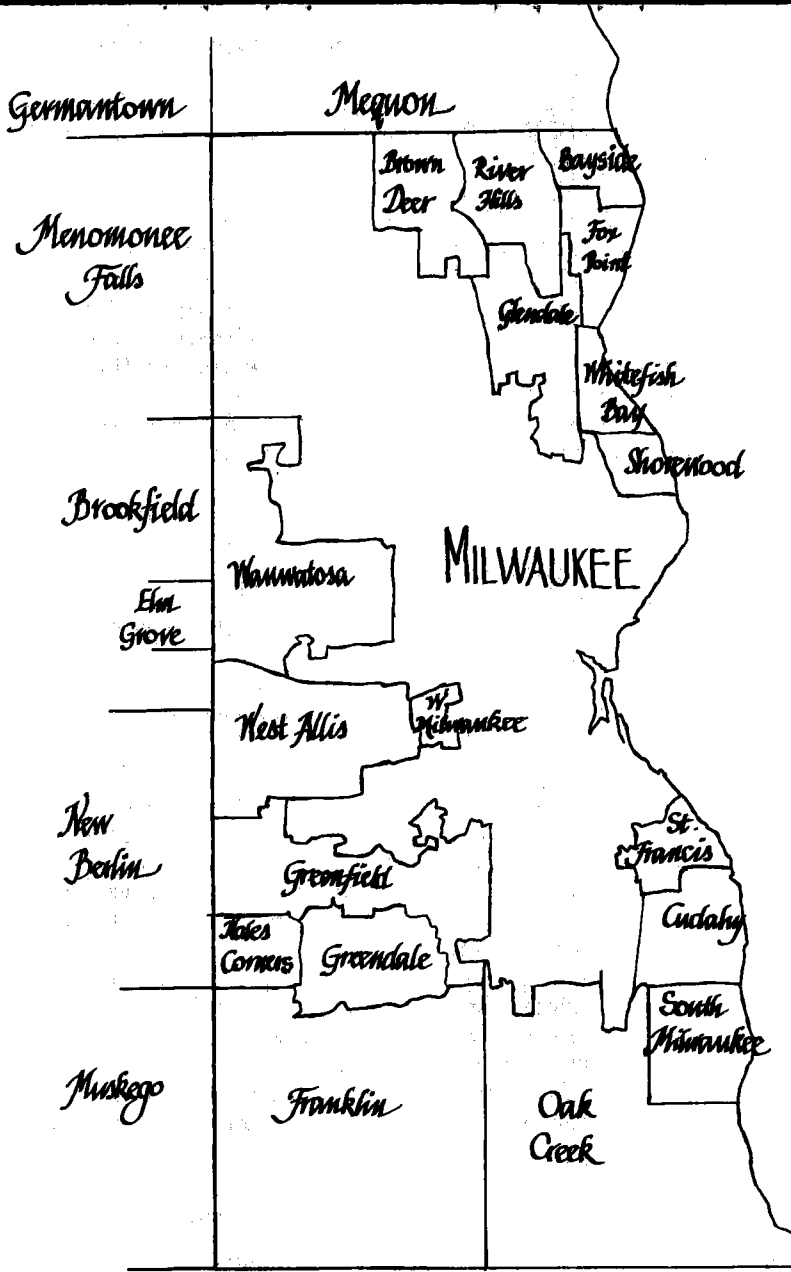
The congregation did reorganize and was accepted back into synod membership at the 1862 Columbus convention. It is perhaps at this time that the name "Salem" was adopted. Statistics for Sieker's last year, 1867:

Communicants:	386	Contributions:	Heathen missions, \$19.50
Baptisms:	39		Inner missions, 51.40
Marriages:	3		Working Training, 125.71
Burials:	3		Synod, 18.05

(These offerings were in the days when a working man got \$2 for a ten-hour day.)

During his Salem years Sieker was a strong proponent of the planned seminary and college. In 1863 he was a member of the planning committee which successfully argued for the school's being placed in Watertown. Sieker was of the opinion that a small town environment was preferable because the seminarians would not be corrupted by the easy living of a large city. (Milwaukee by then was a veritable Gotham with 50,000 inhabitants.)

When Northwestern was launched and built its first buildings, there were some dreadful cost overruns. Sieker was one of the synod leaders who traveled around the state (and back east) to raise money to keep the school going. His particular assignment was to speak to the congregations in the Theresa-Town Herman area. Later the Northwestern board hit on the idea



MILWAUKEE COUNTY IN 1985

Map 3

of selling perpetual scholarships to raise money. Sieker was commissioned by the synod, with the promise of salary, to travel around as a sort of director of development and sell scholarships. That idea never worked very well either, and long after Sieker left Milwaukee he was still trying to collect the \$500 that the synod owed him.

In October of 1867 Sieker accepted a call to succeed Gottlieb Fachtmann as pastor of Trinity, St. Paul, Minnesota. Two years later he was elected president of the young Minnesota Synod, serving until 1876. His confessional influence and friendship with the Wisconsin Synod were of enormous importance in two critical decisions for the Minnesota Synod: 1) getting the Minnesota Synod out of the moderately Lutheran General Council and into the Synodical Conference, and 2) developing close ties with the Wisconsin Synod, which would result in the 1892 federation.

In 1876 Sieker accepted a call to the wealthy St. Matthew Lutheran Church in New York City, the oldest Lutheran church in the United States. In 1881 Sieker joined the Missouri Synod, and the congregation followed his lead four years later. He was a vigorous advocate of Christian education in New York and was a founder of the Concordia Institute in Bronxville, developed from the academy of St. Matthew's.

He did not forget his old synod, though. He sent his own sons to finish their college work at Northwestern. Adolphus and Otto graduated in 1891 and Henry in 1896. Sieker died in 1904.

In many ways the early history of Salem Lutheran Church mirrors the early history of the Wisconsin Synod. The only response that a confessional Lutheran can have is "How amazing is God's grace!" Both Salem and the Synod had extremely rough beginning years. How God planted congregations with such small resources, such poorly trained pastors, and such heartbreaking setbacks can only be ascribed to his gracious power.

In retrospect, God's grace can be seen also in his wisdom in planting a church in an area of Milwaukee destined to be one of its greatest growth areas in the latter part of the 20th century. Today Salem has 1,110 communicants and a day school enrollment of 266.

Finally, Salem is an example of God's gracious growth in confessional understanding. Though the church began with a wobbly doctrinal foundation, the Lord enabled it to survive its mistakes and grow stronger in the truths of the Scripture and the Lutheran confessions. In that way, too, Salem is a microcosm of a synod which had its beginnings as a revolt against "Old Lutheranism," but which in time grew to adopt a strongly confessional stance.

IV. Notes on the Salem Landmark Church

Bricks of Milwaukee County clay were first commercially fired in 1835. The first house so built is dated 1836. The clay's high magnesium and calcium content gives the bricks a splendid, soft ivory-cream color. The pressed brick from Milwaukee brickyards was the dominant building material until about 1900 and gave Milwaukee the nickname "The Cream City." The chief producer of these bricks was George Burnham and Co., employing 500 men and producing about 15,000,000 bricks a year. The brick's disadvantage is its porosity, which means that it weathers quickly. As buildings

age they acquire a coat of grime and soot which rain will not wash off. Buildings near industrial areas soon turn black.

The landmark church is built in the Italianate style. The roof is not as shallow as Greek Revival which preceded, nor as steep as the Gothic Revival which followed. The overhanging eaves are supported by heavy, carved brackets. Windows are round-arched. Evenly spaced pilasters decorate the outside walls. There were quite a few alterations:

1922: 75th anniversary

1. The original pointed steeple was replaced by a square, crenellated tower in the English Gothic style;
2. The small-pane windows were replaced by leaded art glass;
3. The low, simple altar with its painting of the Last Supper was replaced by a carved, white wooded altar in the German Gothic (Gothic Revival) style, with matching baptismal font and pulpit;
4. Curved pews were installed.

1950:

1. The pews were replaced again with blond straight pews;
2. The corner screens were replaced with blond English Gothic screens;
3. The chandeliers were replaced.

1977: The building became a City of Milwaukee landmark, part of the West Granville Historic District.

1985: The building, no longer used for regular worship services, is dedicated as the synod museum, to be in the care of the WELS Historical Institute and the Salem Lutheran Landmark Church, Inc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Harry, and Olson, Frederick. *Milwaukee: At the Gathering of the Waters*. Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, 1981.
- Austin, H. Russell. *The Wisconsin Story*. Milwaukee: The Journal Company, 1948.
- H. Belden & Co. *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Milwaukee County*. Chicago, 1876.
- Koehler, John Philipp. *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*. St. Cloud: Sentinel Publishing Co., 1970.
- Kowalke, E. E. *Centennial Story*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1965.
- Landscape Research. *Built in Milwaukee*. Milwaukee Department of City Development, n.d.
- Salem Ev. Lutheran Church. *1847-1947*. Centennial booklet, West Granville, Wisconsin.
- West Granville Presbyterian Church. Historical notes prepared for the 125th anniversary, 1985.

Pastor Jeske serves at St. Marcus Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin and is on the board of directors of the WELS Historical Institute and an associate editor of the Journal. This essay was delivered at the dedication of the old Salem church as the WELS Museum on April 21, 1985.