

## History Files: Why the Koepsells Moved to America

*This is the first in a series of articles reprinted from the 150th Anniversary booklet of David's Star Evangelical Lutheran Church, outside of Kirchhayn, Wisconsin (near Cedarburg). The address of the church is 2750 David's Star Road. The congregation founded the town of Kirchhayn, which means "church in the wildwoods." It is the second oldest Lutheran church in Wisconsin. Originally called Deutsche Ev. Lutheran Gemeinde (meaning "congregation") when it was founded in 1843, the church changed its name to Davids Stern in 1946. This is the home church of the Freidrich Koepsell family (house now relocated to Old World Wisconsin). The booklet gives a fascinating answer for why all those Germans moved to Wisconsin and some moved on to South Dakota. As you will read, the church was originally part of the Buffalo Synod, although today it is part of the Wisconsin Synod, due to its founding theology. The current David's Star has over 1,300 members and it is growing, as Kirchhayn and neighboring Jackson become part of the spreading urban area of Milwaukee.*

Prussia's ruler in the first four decades of the nineteenth century was King Frederick Wilhelm III. One of his most treasured goals during his reign was to effect a "Prussian Union" of all Protestants in his realm. Beginning already in the previous century (1798), he began actively to research the possibility of unifying the Calvinist (Reformed) and Lutheran faiths. Having received a favorable response from many of the leading theologians of the time, the king started work on a new liturgy that would be used in the Union churches. The work was slowed by the intervening Napoleonic Wars, which were eventually settled by the Congress of Vienna. Finally, in 1817, a proclamation was declared by Frederick Wilhelm III, announcing the celebration of the 300th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Joint services were to be held between the Lutheran and Reformed churches as the foundation of the Evangelical Union Church.

While some Lutheran pastors voiced opposition to the coerced joining of the two doctrinally-diverse bodies, nevertheless acceptance of the union grew. For example, in 1826 in Pomerania, there were only forty-one pastors in sixty-four congregations outside the Union, compared to approximately 660 pastors and 1,280 congregations within the Union. However, during the 1830s, stiff resistance to the Union was going to be the death blow to confessional Lutheranism. Because of their insistence on abiding by the Lutheran Confessions, they became known as the "Old Lutherans."

By 1835, Frederick Wilhelm was ready to try by edict to unite all Lutherans and Reformed into one church. He denied all true confessional Lutherans the use of their houses of worship and ordered that, thenceforth, Lutherans and Reformed must worship together as one united church. Confessional differences were to be ignored. In an effort to satisfy adherents of both persuasions, new words were to be used for the distribution of Holy Communion. Pastors were ordered to say, "Christ says, 'This is my body; Christ says, 'This is my blood.'" In so doing, Lutherans could supposedly still believe that they received the true body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine (Real Presence); while the reformed could believe the rationalization of Zwingli and Calvin that the bread and wine only "represent" Christ's body and blood (Representation). In effect, the king was asking both sides to agree to practice fellowship

with one another by simply ignoring doctrinal differences. This the confessional Lutherans were unwilling to do.

Persecution of Old Lutherans ensued. Faithful pastors were suspended and, if caught conducting church services or in other ways ministering to their people in a pastoral function, were imprisoned. When lay people were caught attending services conducted by a suspended pastor, they might be fined, have cattle or other possessions confiscated, or be sent to jail for short terms. Police surveillance was used to identify pastors and lay people who were acting contrary to their Cabinet Order (1835) and, if possible, to catch them in the act of doing so. Police would follow suspected pastors as though they were dangerous criminals, spying on them and recording their every movement.

In this atmosphere, it soon became evident to many of the Old Lutherans that the only way that they could preserve true Lutheranism and maintain their safety was to exit the country, to a place where they could practice their religion freely. Already in 1835, emigrants began to trickle out of various provinces of Prussia, some to Russia, some to New York (United States), and some to Australia. The fever to emigrate increased and large groups from Silesia and Mark left in 1838. By 1839, Pastor Johann A. Grabau and his congregation from Saxony, accompanied by another large group from Pomerania, set sail for America. Pastor Grabau and his congregation settled in Buffalo, New York, but most of the Pomeranians continued on to Wisconsin, some to settle in Milwaukee and some to continue north of the city to Town IX, now known as Freistadt. Also in the group were some members of a Silesian congregation led by Pastor Lebrecht F.E. Krause, who was destined to play a prominent part in the beginning years of David's Star congregation.

In 1840, the great persecutor of the Old Lutherans died, and his son Frederick William IV ascended to the throne. One of his first actions as king was to release all imprisoned Lutheran pastors and to allow relative freedom of worship to all Lutherans. Already in 1841, the Lutheran church in Prussia convened a general synod convention. It soon became obvious that confessional Lutheranism had suffered during the years of persecution, and that had resulted in the weakening of Lutherans to send their children to "public" schools (where Reformed false doctrine was actively taught) was allowed to stand in the resolutions of the convention. To this the Pastors Ehrenström and Kindermann, whose congregations were near Stettin, Pomerania, protested. When their protests to the General Synod of the Lutheran Church in Prussia went unheeded, they felt constrained, out of love and respect for God's infallible Word, to make plans to emigrate with their congregations. Thus it was partly out of concern for the Christian education of the young that the founders of David's Star made a commitment to depart for the New World.

Pastor Gustav Kindermann was born on January 8, 1805, in Pomerania. His first pastorate was at Kammin, Pomerania, to which he was called in December 1837. The previous pastor had been arrested and Kindermann likewise had to remain on the move to avoid being detained by the authorities. At one point in 1838 a reward was offered to any person who succeeding in bringing about his arrest. While he was on the run, he

married Marie Charlotte Wilhelmine Hoernigk, who later was arrested in April 1840. Kindermann himself was arrested and held for two days in March 1841, but by now the change in rulers had taken place and he was at last set free to perform his duties unhindered. Unhappy, however, with the direction that the Breslau Synod was taking on the question of "public" schools, he longed to emigrate as others had done.

Preparations were well under way during the late winter of 1843. We have the minutes from a meeting held on March 10, 1843, between Pastor Kindermann and representatives from congregations at Holm, Pribbernow, Natelfitz, and Gross Justin. In this document, we find a number of key ideas that all agreed to, the first and most important of which was the pledge that "nothing else shall lead us but God's Holy Word and the confessions of the true church of Christ, being: the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creed, as well as the confessions of the Lutheran Church, particularly the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology thereto, the Smalcaldic Articles, Luther's Large and Small Catechisms, the Formula of Concord, and whatever is in agreement with the true and pure Faith of the Holy Christian Church." They also agreed that their destination under God would be the Territory of Wisconsin and that they would live as closely together as possible "in order to advance the building of God's Kingdom among us, in which the education of our children in our school is of the essence."

They resolved that a common fund would be established from which all bills for the journey would be paid. Into this fund those who had greater wealth were expected to place more money so that those with fewer means would be able to borrow funds sufficient for the journey, and to purchase land in the New World. Fifteen to twenty percent of the wealthier emigrants' money went into the common treasury, to be repaid later with interest. Pastor Kindermann was authorized to procure books for the "propagation of the holy ministry and the proper training of school teachers."

Preparations for the emigration were not without complications. Police surveillance of Kindermann lasted until April 22, 1843, and was discontinued only after the investigation failed uncover sufficient evidence to prosecute him on the charge of inciting his congregation to emigrate. Finally, permission to emigrate was granted to Pastor Kindermann on June 30, 1843; however, his friend and fellow pastor Ehrenström failed to be cleared, and had to be left behind.