The Pomeranian Immigration to Freistadt

How did a group of 40 families from Pomerania, Prussia, find themselves in the wilderness of what would become Wisconsin in 1839? Although we learned in history class that people emigrate for many reasons, including economic opportunity and famine, the people who came to the future Freistadt came for religious reasons.

Wilhelm Iwan wrote an account of the immigration to Freistadt in 1840, as recorded in "Altlutherische Auswanderung". Those books have been translated. The full set is available in three volumes elsewhere on this page: "Old Lutheran" Emigration of the Mid-19th Century from Eastern Germany (Mainly Pomerania and Lower Silesia) to Australia, Canada and the United States.

LeRoy Boehlke, a long-time historian at Trinity Freistadt, summarized this part of Iwan's writings. His work appears in The Hidden Historical Treasures of Trinity Freistadt Lutheran Church, which is also available by checking elsewhere on this page.

This Pomeranian emigration story has been divided into five parts:

Part I: Why did They Leave? Prussia from 1817 - 1835
Part II: The Old Lutherans' attempts to leave Prussia
Part III: The Ocean Journey
Part IV: The Rest of the Trip: The Erie Canal & Great Lakes
Part V: The Settlement

Part I Religious Freedom and the Old Lutherans in Prussia

One hundred eighty-one years ago, in 1839, the Lutheran Church in Prussia had been abolished, and it was illegal to be a Lutheran. Prussia was not exactly a backward nation where one could expect this sort of thing to happen.It was fast becoming the dominant state amongthe many independent German states of that day. Prussia was renowned for its school system, its commerce and industry, its prosperous farms, and of course its army. How could people in such a progressive country lose their religious liberty?

Actually, it all began so smoothly and quietly that few Lutherans ever noticed that anything was wrong. King Friedrich Wilhelm III was of the Reformed faith, and his wife was a Lutheran. Since the Lutherans practiced closed communion, the King was not permitted to take communion with his own wife. This must have been difficult for the King, one of the most powerful monarchs on earth, to

swallow.

In order to avoid such Holy Communion problems in his realm, in 1817, the King wrote a new liturgy and an Agenda, or Order of Worship, to be used by both the Lutheran and Reformed churches. Since 1817 celebrated 300 years since the Reformation, the King asked all churches to celebrate by using the new liturgy. The cooperation was good, and so the King asked all Reformed and Lutheran pastors to accept the new liturgy on a permanent basis.

However, the pastors of both faiths preferred theirown liturgies, and there was much criticism of the new Agenda. It was the wish of the King that his people could experience, a spiritual “unification” and so the Union Church was born, a combination of both the Lutherans and the Reformed. There was not much enthusiasm for the new church, and by 1822 only one-sixteenth of all the clergy in the land had accepted the new Agenda, or Book of Worship. The King referred to criticism of his Agenda as “twaddle.”

Nevertheless, in 1824, he did revise it in order to make it acceptable to both the Lutherans and the Reformed. He let it be known that there would be “unpleasant consequences” for pastors that would not accept the new Agenda. A number of prominent clergymen who disagreed with the King were in fact now replaced. Continuous pressure was brought to bear on the clergy, and by 1825, about two-thirds of all the clergy in Prussia had accepted the Union Agenda. The pressure from the government continued,and by 1827, six-sevenths of the clergy were in the Union church. In Pomerania, only 175 churches remained Lutheran and 1,136 had joined the Union Church. In 1829, the King gave the individual provinces the rightto use variations in the Agenda based on accepted local practices. At this point, even Rev. Schliermacher, who had once led the opposition, agreed to the new Agenda. Since local variations were permitted, there was not too much that could be criticized from a liturgy standpoint. But now new questions were being asked. Does one change religious practices because the King wants them changed, or because God wants them changed? Even though the same liturgy was being used, it was perfectly clear thatthe former Union and Lutheran pastors were far from agreeing on what the true meaning of Holy Communion was or what was the proper meaning of predestination. Nevertheless, by this time almost everyone had joined the Union Church, and the King called for a large celebration on June 25, 1830 to commemorate the triumph of the new Union Church.

In Breslau, in Silesia, Rev. Scheibel still led some dissenters, but he was removed from office. A few prominent pastors like Buschke, Steffens and von Hauginetz still remained, and they repeatedly petitioned the King to grant the Lutheran Church the right to continue on an independent basis, but all requests were promptly denied. To put an end to the opposition, in 1834, the King revised the laws so that all secret meetings were illegal, even religious meetings. No meeting could be held anywhere without a permit and, of course, the Lutherans were not granted any permits to meet. It became illegal for anyone to act as clergyman unless approved by the Union Church, and so the few remaining Lutheran clergy could no longer legally act as clergy. Furthermore, the law said that all parents must send their children to the state, or Union, schools. Punishment for disobeying these laws consisted of prison terms, heavy fines and the confiscation of property by the state.

Now, either the Lutherans would have to give up or face the consequences. The Lutherans continued to meet, so the king took the next step to force cooperation. A few churches were still in the hands of the Lutherans, and now those churches were closed. At Hocnigen, In Silesia, the congregation would not turn over the keys of the church. Pastor Kellner was jailed, but the congregation still heldthe church. Weeks went by, and finally the King called out the army. On December 23, 1834, 400 infantry and 300 cavalry surrounded the church and the 200 Lutherans who were defending it. The soldiers dispersed the crowd with blows from their rifle butts and the flats of their swords and took over the church. The defending Lutherans were jailed for a time.

With their last church gone, the Lutherans (now called “Old Lutherans” because they stayed with their old faith) met in 1835 to decide what to do. They decided that they would give up their homes, farms, money and goods if need be, but they would not give up their struggle for a free Lutheran church.

The Old Lutheran clergy now traveled from place to place in order to stay out of the hands of the police, but virtually all of the clergy did spend some time in prison. Lay people had to pay heavy fines and had their property confiscated. Under these circumstances, the Old Lutherans had to start thinking of leaving Prussia and starting a free Lutheran church elsewhere. In spite of the persecution by the government, the Old Lutherans were never eradicated. On the contrary, as people saw the oppression by the government, many that had joined the Union Church had second thoughts about it. They began to see that a church whose policies were determined by government officials instead of the church body could not maintain pure doctrine. Now people in Silesia, Pomerania, Brandenburg and Saxony gathered into groups for the purpose of emigrating, and the great Lutheran

emigration began to get underway.

Part II: Leaving Pomerania in 1839

Abstract: Already in 1837, King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia agreed that the confessional Old Lutherans should be allowed to leave Prussia, since they obviously would never agree to join the new Union Church anyway. Unfortunately, making that decision and doing it were two different things. When the applications to leave the country for religious reasons started pouring in, the King simply could not get himself to issue those permits.

As a delaying tactic, the King decided that none could leave unless they were under the care of a Lutheran pastor. Since not many Lutheran pastors were in a position to leave the country, this delayed the emigration for more than a year. Rev. Kavel did leave with a group in 1838 that went to Australia, and Rev. Krause agreed to take a group from the province of Silesia to America. Rev. Grabau also agreed to take a group from the provinces of Pomerania, Brandenburg and Saxony to America, but this group encountered many delays.

The rule that the emigrants must go with a clergyman applied only to those who said on their application that they were leaving because of their Lutheran faith. Those who said they were leaving for financial or other reasons could leave as they wished. The result was that those who wanted to leave in 1840, 1841 or 1842, when there was no pastor leaving, had no choice but to list some other reason for leaving if they wanted to get a permit. However, when they got to Buffalo or Milwaukee, they immediately joined the other Old Lutherans in their congregations.

The first delay that the Pomeranian Lutherans encountered was that both von Rohr and Rev. Grabau were in prison in early 1839. Grabau was released on April 23 and von Rohr on May 13. Besides that, the local officials in Pomerania were strongly anti-Lutheran and delayed handing out the permits.

The Lutherans in the Regenwalde and Greifenberg area decided not to wait, and they assembled in Plathe on May 16, about 176 strong. They camped in stables for two days and then they went to the provincial capitol of Stettin, arriving there in May with their horses and wagons. Most likely in this group were the four Klug families and the Knuths, Radues, Halls, and Schenzels. By May 31, they had their permits, and they started on their way by horse and wagon to Hamburg to wait for the ships.

In the Cammin and Wollin areas the government official, von Voeltz, was particularly difficult, and those Lutherans did not all get their permits until June 22. Police were posted on the roads out of town to make sure they did not leave without permits. Part of the group took horses and wagons to Stettin and then Hamburg, and part of the group took boats to Stettin and then canal barges to Hamburg. As the boats pulled away from the docks in Cammin, the Lutherans sang the hymn, "Help, Dear God". There were over 300 people in these groups, and they probably included the families Bruss, Pipkorn, Helm, Tews, Bellin, Wilde and Schoessow.

Some had special problems. John Pritzlaff from Triglaff never did get his permit, so he left without it. The Hilgendorfs from Dresow were trying to get one of their six boys out of the army, and they were among the last to get their permits. Grabau had gone to Hamburg and was meeting the emigrants as they arrived.

The detailed story*:* As late as January 1839, the Lutherans were still sending requests to their king, asking that he permit Lutheran churches in Prussia. When the king refused to consider these requests, preparations for emigrating to America proceeded in earnest. The situation was complicated by the fact that both Rev. Grabau and Heinrich von Rohr were still in prison in April.

In January of 1839, the emigrants faced one huge obstacle, which even threatened to cancel the entire emigration of 1839. Not only was the only clergyman whom they considered as their pastor sitting in prison in Thuringia, but he also became seriously ill. Requests were sent to the authorities, and even a petition sent to the king, by the congregations of Erfurt and Magdeburg, which were preparing for the emigration, and by Grabau's wife. They asked that Grabau be released from prison and placed in a private house to be given better care.

Even the governor of the province, Count Stolberg of Wernigerode, showed concern by suggesting that Grabau could die. This, he claimed, would not only have been a difficult blow for the large number of emigrants, whose emigration would have been postponed until they had found another pastor, it would also have been an unpleasant matter for the authorities and even the king. He argued that the people would have used the incident against the government by creating a martyrdom, which would provide a large boost not only for the emigration, but also for the entire separatist movement.

Fearing this, the government gave in to the requests and had Grabau released from prison and transferred to a private house under police surveillance. Grabau recovered quickly there, and in April of 1839 the doctor declared that he would be able to travel in June.

For our detailed account of the emigration, we begin with the region of Erfurt, for which we have the best resources, particularly from the consistorial archives. On January 24,1839, 28 heads of family, most of them from Erfurt itself, had sent a request for permission to emigrate to the magistrate. In this request the religious motive is again unambiguously present. It read:

The undersigned Evangelical-Lutheran residents of this city have seen, after having tolerated eight years of persecution of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Prussia by the United State Church, that no more hope exists that the Evangelical-Lutheran Church will be granted the right to independent, separate church services and other rights. We are in danger of being led into persuasion and force by the United State Church, because we lack the holy orders and with that the spiritual care and the sacraments, which we need in order to resist the powerful illusions of these recent, troubled times. Thus we have resolved to seek another country where we have the protection of the authorities to practice our free and separate Evangelical-Lutheran worship service. We obediently beg the highly esteemed magistrate to bring about most graciously the granting of permits by the royal government for emigration ...

Grabau had received his permit while still in prison in Heiligenstadt on April 21 and left Magdeburg by steamboat on June 13.

In the meantime, von Rohr was continuing to actively promote the emigration. It should not go unmentioned here that the highest levels of government were still trying to dissuade the organizer of the emigration and thus to cripple the entire movement at the last minute. The crown prince showed great sympathy for the Lutherans and had already taken up relations with Pastor Kavel in 1835. In early 1839, he sent his aide-de-camp to von Rohr (a former officer in the Kaiser Alexander Guard Grenadier Regiment) in Magdeburg with instructions to wait with the emigration, promising to tolerate the Lutherans and guarantee free practice of religion as soon as he came into office.

That was certainly both a great honor and a great temptation for von Rohr. He resisted, however, saying that they could not wait for the king to die, and that the Lutherans considered it their duty to flee from the persecution by the United Church and from spiritual starvation, in order to save their souls and that of their children. (It is well known that the crown prince often had heated arguments with Altenstein and with his father about the treatment of the Lutherans.)

It hindered the organization of the emigration little that von Rohr was arrested and in the end sentenced to prison. Here it will suffice to say that he still had enough freedom while he served his sentence to continue recruiting for the emigration movement. During his imprisonment in Magdeburg (March to May 1839), von Rohr made decisive preparations for the voyage to America.

On his first visit to Bremen and Hamburg in 1838, he had been able to find no better conditions for travel than those offered by Sloman. But this was for 40 talers (thalers*) per person, on the average, for the direct trip from Hamburg to New York. This worried the deputies greatly, because they barely had gathered 30,000 talers for 1,000 passengers.

Then two young merchants from Hamburg, John Frantzel and Batke, came to Magdeburg to see him in prison and presented to him a plan, by which the congregation would travel by steamship from Hamburg to Hull, from Hull to Liverpool by canal boat through England and from there to New York on returning American ships for about 29.50 talers per person, von Rohr himself would function as the principal agent to save the one to two taler agent's fee.

Frantzel and Batke themselves would settle for one taler per person plus expenses in anticipation of future business. This was such a good offer that von Rohr devoted himself entirely to getting his prison term commuted. He succeeded in doing this, at least by a few days. On the day he was released, May 10, he requested and received a passport for a trip to Berlin, Stettin and Hamburg. On May 13 we find him in Kammin, Pomerania, where the majority of the Lutheran emigrants of 1839 came from.

(*a thaler is regarded as being worth 69 U.S. cents)

Part III The Journey to America

On June 28,1839, the first group of Lutherans boarded small ships and sailed to the east coast of England. They then traveled across England to Liverpool, where they boarded large sailing ships for the trip to New York.

The Lutherans in Grabau's congregation who wished to emigrate came to America on the five ships. This large transport is put at 1000 individuals by several sources. But in fact it was considerably larger, even without the contingent that had arrived earlier. Whereas the earlier group traveled directly from Hamburg to New York, the next five ships went via Liverpool, as von Rohr had arranged. Liverpool was the meeting point. Up until there they traveled separately on different routes, about 600 via Newcastle on Tyne and about 400 via Hull. They all traveled to these port cities by steamer. They departed from Hamburg on five ships, the first on Friday, June 28 at 2 pm, the second and third two days later, the fourth on July 12 and the fifth on July 27. Since they also continued the transatlantic journey on five ships, it is likely that the distribution of the passengers remained the same from Hamburg on. Grabau traveled on the last ship, and rightly so, to oversee the transport of his people.

Of the groups sailing via Hull we know only that they went to Liverpool on cross-channel boats. But we are better informed on the groups that sailed via Newcastle, thanks to two sources. Following the passage of these Lutheran emigrants through England, the publishing company of Hamilton, Adams & Co. brought out a small book in 1840 entitled "The Persecution of the Lutheran Church in Prussia." Here we are interested only in the preface, which was signed " A.H.R." on December 26,1839, in Newcastle. It read:

> “In the summer of 1839, a company of interesting strangers in German clothing were observed entering the harbor at Newcastle on Tyne. They stayed only a few hours there and traveled on to Liverpool, from which point they intended to sail to America. Inquiries were made by representatives of the Bible Society as to whether they needed Bibles, and they received a pleasing response.
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> “Their conduct was polite. But they seemed to have no letters of recommendation to anyone in this region. Little could be learned of their story, except that they were Lutheran emigrants who were going to uncivilized America due to severe religious persecution in their native country.
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> “One or two weeks later, a similar company arrived, and others gradually followed throughout the summer months, about 600 individuals in all... They showed no bitterness toward their oppressors, nor did they grumble. But the sickly appearance of many, the gray hairs of respectable people and the streaming tears of the women showed clearly enough that this was not brought about by any ordinary circumstances. They were seen praying at evening.
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> “Only a few were from higher classes, most of them were apparently peasants and laborers. The visitors could only offer small sums of money, but these were always accepted with the deepest gratitude. Each company had common funds. If asked whether they were angry with their government, they answered that they were not. Once some

young people even said that they would all give their lives for their king.

"Are these people whom one drives out of the country? If their own country disowns them, surely the hearts of British Christians will protest against such cruel treatment and seek to alleviate their suffering...

"The people of this region showed great interest in the admittance of 400 Tyrolians by the King of Prussia. But this is not consistent with the persecution of thousands of his own subjects, simply because they do not wish to unite with the state church."

This preface is followed by a request for donations for the emigrants, to be paid to a committee via the Union Joint Stock Bank or Barnett, Hoare & Co., bankers in London. There is also mention of the fact that a number of letters from Grabau have been received in Newcastle since his short stay in the city. We hear that Grabau received a sum of money from Newcastle in America. The second source is Ernst Schmidt's letter, which we mentioned earlier. It read:

"We departed with the help of God on July 28,1839, but had to lay anchor at Cuxhaven already due to unfavorable winds. After that, though, we continued the voyage. We were onboard a steamer. The storm persisted, and all but a few were overcome with seasickness. And then there was the pounding of the engine, the grease from the machinery and the steam from the coals. The storm was against us, but we fortunately reached England at Newcastle — 130 miles in 36 hours.

"The people are very friendly. They gave us shelter for the night, coal and $62, along with a packet of English Bibles. We continued by steam locomotive — 15 English miles in three hours. Words cannot express what a machine that is and how well it runs. It is more than majestic, and such a relief after the seasickness... On the southern border of Scotland and in northern England we traveled by channel, whereby the boat was pulled by two horses. Then we boarded a steamer. In 24 hours we were in Liverpool. Here we had to wait nine days. Here I had to deal with much difficulty, particularly with cooking for my family. Our dear Pastor Grabau held a public worship service in Liverpool on the ship's deck. It did not remain a secret, why we left Prussia." (All above ellipses are original)"

Iwan continues the story: From Liverpool the Lutherans crossed the ocean in five American sailing ships. The first four ships were called "Georgina," "Alfred," "Republic" and "Britannia." We hear little of their voyage. The passengers arrived in New York happy and had good provisions on the ship — water and healthy food, a quarter pint of brandy per day for those peasants accustomed to it, fresh milk for the women and children, wine, refreshments and medicine for the sick. Still, two people assigned to these ships died, both of them among the congregation's elected deputies. Wilhelm Bortfeld died already in Hamburg, and David Helm of Scharchow died at sea.

These four ships all arrived in New York between September 4 and September 10,1839. There they were accommodated on board ships at reasonable prices until it could finally be decided where they should go. This decision was not to be made until Grabau, who was on the fifth ship, arrived. This ship's arrival, however, took some time, and rumors spread that it had met a fate similar to that of the fifth of Stephan's ships, which had sunk the year before, taking everyone

with it.

But to the relief of all, Grabau's ship finally arrived in New York on September 18. It had sailed from Liverpool on August 14 and had a terrible journey. Again, Ernst Schmidt describes it for us:

“Our ship set out to sea after nine days in Liverpool. We were surrounded by crowds of people. It was a new, five-year-old, very spacious ship with three masts. It was carrying salt. In addition, there were 220 Lutherans (from Thuringia, Saxony, Pomerania and Silesia), 20 sailors and another five passengers, totaling 245 individuals. The wind was favorable. The ship passed between Ireland and Scotland. The wind became increasingly stronger and better, so that we managed to cover 250 German miles in three days.

“Then seasickness returned. Brother Reimann and his son were not at all sick, whereas his wife was hardly well for four weeks, as was brother Schulthes. I was sick for ten days, after which time I became accustomed to the tossing of the ship. But then the wind became unfavorable, so we had to tack. Two storms came but did no damage.

“Then we saw a night in which not a single wave could be seen in the ocean. The journey proceeded quickly. Pastor Grabau held devotions on deck every evening. Life on the ship was blissful. Everyone was cheerful and invigorated. My heart was full of praise and thanks. In the mornings an officer held the devotion. That was beautiful.

“It was then that the first passenger died on the ship, a Pomeranian of 24 years. He was buried at sea the same day. Pastor Grabau conducted the burial ceremony. That was in the Spanish Sea, where it is so deep that no one can find the bottom. More became sick on the warm Gulf Stream, especially the Pomeranians. Two adults and three children died before we reached New York. On September 12, 1 told Pastor Grabau that no one needed to fear in such waters. I felt blissful. The pastor was silent. We held our evening prayers and laid ourselves down to sleep.

“At midnight the wind began to rage. The sailors wanted to furl the sails. The captain, a foolhardy man, did not permit that and continued until 3 o'clock with full sails. When the storm continued to grow, he ordered the sails to be taken in. The sailors. The sailors had hardly climbed onto the masts when one was tossed into the sea and drowned. Another was caught in the sail and could not be rescued for two hours, and two fell down to the deck — fortunately without harm.

“Now the sails — 22 of them in all — had to be left exposed to the storm. They were brand new, having been bought just three weeks earlier in England. It was only then that the danger truly began. We were told to call on God, since we would be lost if he did not rescue the ship. Everyone cried to the Lord with all their strength, even the children and criminals. The ship tossed frighteningly. Death threatened to come any minute. All the barrels and crates, which had not been battened down, were flung from one corner to the other. All the vessels which were not well packed shattered. Part of the deck broke in the middle of the ship. Water was pouring into the ship. At times it came up to our knees. Amid this peril of death arose the cry that the ship was breaking. Everyone charged up the steps until they broke. I sat on my bed with my family, and we held each other as tight as we could. I asked the Lord whether I should also run on deck. I received the answer that I should remain calm.

“The brethren quickly came back and reported that the ship was not breaking. Brother Reimann went on deck to convince himself of the waves. He said he saw waves as tall as the Elisabeth Church in Breslau, and that the ship was in the depths one moment and atop a wave the next. All the sails were torn, two masts had broken at the top. The middle mast, which was the thickest, had broken in the middle. The sturdy crossbeams, to which the sails were attached, had broken in two. But through all this, the Lord was still with us on the ship.

“That afternoon the wind died. We had eaten nothing all day, and we could not cook because our two kitchens had been destroyed. September 13 will always be remembered by us and our children. The sailors were very capable. They mended 18 sails in two days, and our journey continued. By September 15 the sea had calmed down. It was still and smooth as a mirror. We had celebrated the third day of repentance when we sighted land. How happy we were, it was America. After a voyage of five weeks, we arrived in New York.”

Even before they reached New York, a son, Wilhelm, was born to the Schmids. But he soon died and was buried on land.

From a biography of Grabau written by his grandson, we learn that someone had ignored Grabau's warning and given the second mate, along with several sailors, brandy, so that they were not equal to the danger when the hurricane broke loose. The captain, he adds, repeatedly said, "We can do nothing," and locked himself in his cabin to await death. The ship was full of water, and all hope seemed lost. Then one of the Lutherans tasted the water, and lo and behold, it was freshwater. The storm had smashed the kegs containing freshwater. Thus the danger of the ship filling up was not so great. Pastor Grabau encouraged the frightened and desperate people. The water was pumped out, the sails were mended, and the ship was saved. On September 18 they landed at New York, and on September 20 the passengers disembarked.

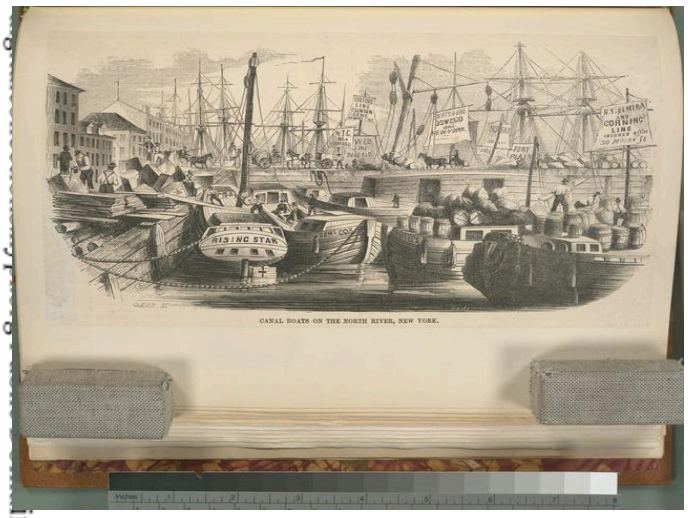
Part IV The Journey from New York to Milwaukee

The first four ships made it to New York without problems, and they arrived by September 10. Because it was so late in the year, this group immediately made plans to continue the journey without waiting for the fifth ship with Pastor Grabau on board. It had been hit by a bad storm, and its whereabouts was unknown until it docked in New York on September 18, 1839, and on September 20 those passengers disembarked.

With this, all the Old Lutheran emigrants of 1839 were in America. Von Rohr had prepared this well. He stated that according to his information there were three possibilities. First, they could stay in New York and work on the canals. Or they could go to Buffalo, where Krause had already formed a small congregation with a few families, and where the Silesians under Bierosch had already gone. Then those without money could stay in Buffalo with one of the pastors and work on the Erie Canal until they earned enough to follow if they wished.

Those with money and the desire would then go on to Wisconsin, buy land at the government rates of $1.25 per acre, and found a settlement. Thus Buffalo and Wisconsin would be the two congregations where the Lutherans would concentrate their efforts and build a church and school.

They hoped to unite with Pastor Krause's congregation in Buffalo. Von Rohr immediately signed a contract with the shipping agent Wolff to transport 1,000 individuals, along with a hundredweight per person, by steamer to Albany and from there by canal boat to Buffalo. Once he had taken care of everything for Grabau's arrival, he headed to Buffalo to prepare for the emigrants there. Von Rohr's first task was to find lodging for the brethren, who would arrive soon. He rented a few warehouses in Buffalo to house the emigrants temporarily.



The trip to Buffalo was neither cheap nor pleasant, since the emigrants had a lot of excess freight with them — some as much as six to ten hundredweight instead of just one. The mass of crates cramped the space on the ship, and the captains took advantage of that to break the terms of the contract, despite the care taken in drawing it up. It is said that the emigrants suffered more during this six to eight-day voyage than on the ships at sea.

Once in Buffalo, the group held a congregational meeting. It was decided that elders should be elected by those staying in Buffalo and by those going on to Wisconsin. The elders should meet once each week. Schools should be started at once in Buffalo and Wisconsin, and since they had brought two organs, one would stay in Buffalo and one would go to Wisconsin.

These resolutions are clear proof of how pressing intellectual and spiritual nourishment was to the emigrants. Even when some of them were still sleeping on warehouse floors, and others were set to journey into the primeval forest, they were nonetheless making decisions about church and school.

Von Rohr and his group had held their last congregational meeting in Buffalo on September 25, and shortly thereafter about 40 families and von Rohr boarded boats and traveled through three of the Great Lakes to Milwaukee. Milwaukee had a population of about 5000 people, so temporary housing and necessary supplies could easily be obtained there. We know surprisingly little about the exact date of departure, as well as the journey itself, from von Rohr.

The trip to Milwaukee by ship took about nine days. When ships arrived at Milwaukee they had to anchor out in the lake and transfer their passengers to smaller vessels to reach shore, or to travel up the Milwaukee River as far as Chestnut Street (Juneau Ave.) to where Byron Kilbourn's settlement, Kilboumtown, was located on the west side of the river. The tired passengers are believed to have disembarked from their

One might be surprised that von Rohr, whose history of the emigration in the American church newsletter "Informatorium" provides us with most of these accounts, did not consult with Pastor Krause and the Silesians already present in Buffalo. He did attempt to do this, but apparently did not receive any help. He wrote that Krause was in a state of hypochondria and physical weakness. Grabau, whom Krause met and to whom he

long journey about October 4.

Meanwhile, Rev. Grabau arrived in Buffalo on October 4 and conducted his first church service on October 5. Grabau approved of the plans that had been made, and on October 10, he sent off a letter to von Rohr saying that they expected to follow to Wisconsin with his congregation the following spring. This was not to be, however. Many Germans were already in the Buffalo area, and the congregation grew at an astonishing rate. By 1843, the church had 1,500 souls. Even in the first few months they had to move several times in order to find larger quarters for their church services. Then they had the bad luck that the building they had been using burned down, and the congregation had no funds with which to build their own building. At that precise time, a stranger arrived with $300 as a gift from the people of England, who had carried out their promise to help the Germans get started in America. Land was bought in February of 1840, and the new church was dedicated on June 7. It is ironic that on that very day, King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia, that resolute enemy of the Old Lutherans, died.

Part V: Getting Settled in Freistadt

Forty Pomeranian families, under the leadership of Heinrich von Rohr, journeyed to what would become southeast Wisconsin as pioneers, in the hopes that Grabau and the rest of the emigrants would follow. This hope was not fulfilled, as Grabau and the others — about three-fourths of the emigrants — remained in and around Buffalo.

But these Lutherans were the first large, unified company to arrive in Wisconsin for the expressed purpose of remaining and forming a settlement together. When they arrived in Milwaukee under von Rohr's leadership, they immediately received a number of offers near the city, which had about 5,600 residents at that time. But they preferred to go deeper into the primitive forest, where they could buy government land not only for themselves but also for the brethren still to follow.

Since it was already late in the year, the Lutherans considered it necessary to decide quickly where they would settle. They charged von Rohr, August Radue and Martin Schoessow with looking for suitable land. A mill owner named Turk proved especially helpful to the new Wisconsinites in their search. With his help, they looked at a number of sites. This was not so simple at that time, since the forest was so thick and dark that one had to travel through it with a compass, as if at sea. One often could not see the sky through the thick foliage of the enormous oaks, maples and walnut trees.

Finally, they found a site along a delightful stream, 16 miles northwest of Milwaukee in Washington County, which later became Ozaukee County. They decided for this spot and later gave it the name Freistadt. They bought 1,200 acres at first from the Land Office and must have soon bought more to provide each settler with the 40 acres planned, plus 40 acres in the middle of the settlement as church property. Everyone who bought land, including those who came later, was required to contribute one shilling per acre for the purpose of establishing church and school and support the preacher. After registering with the Land Office, von Rohr was busy for several weeks surveying the land, during which

Two Buildings; One Congregation

The church the Milwaukee settlers formed was also named Trinity Evangelical Lutheran. The first pastor served both churches, but Freistadt was considered the "home church".

After the group formed its own congregation, they eventually built a church on 9th and Highland in downtown

time they camped in tents, which they had brought along.

Then each was issued his plot and the title to the land in an order chosen by lottery. The church property was provisionally put under the names of von Rohr and the parish council member Lucke. It was located in Town IX, Section XIX, Range XXI East and stretched from von Rohr's farm to the properties of M. Schoessow and C. Knuth, the blacksmith.

Once this was settled, the families began to move out of Milwaukee. About 20 families did remain in the city, above all fishermen and artisans, who laid the groundwork for a congregation there and soon began worship services in a rented hall.

The colonists, on the other hand, immediately set about building their log houses, assisted by Turk and several other Americans from the area. By late October, the first ones were finished, and when the severe winter of 1839-40 began in November, almost all of the settlers were safely under cover. Several families were caught off guard and were living in brush huts when the first snowfall came. But they also managed to finish construction before the winter fully set in.

... and all were happy around the Christmas tree, and the first Lutheran hymns of the Savior's birth sounded in the forests of Wisconsin.

When von Rohr moved in on November 14, he was said to possess only one dollar and a little food. He had sacrificed all his property, including the maternal inheritance of his four-year-old daughter, Julia, to the congregation. His loyal aide, a former officer named Guttner, who had watched over his antique bookstore in Magdeburg while von Rohr was in prison or on journeys also lived with him.

The colonists immediately began clearing and fencing in their property. This required felling the mighty trees - often three to four feet across - some of which were then sawed into logs and split for use as support beams. Much wood was burned as well. They could not accomplish in a week with their bare hands what a pair of oxen did in one day. But there was only one yoke of oxen. Thus it was a great gain for the colony when the Silesian Hegwer joined them from Illinois with a second yoke.
All this time food was scarce. They had bread and black coffee, and twice a week bacon or salt pork. The few draught animals they had were not enough to bring them the most basic food supplies through ten miles of forest without a road and six miles of bad road from Milwaukee the whole winter long. As a result, the fathers often had to carry food on their backs, wading through or crossing on fallen trees some 30 streams.

Heinrich von Rohr even did this for the Christmas festival in 1839, according to a biography in a congregational calendar for Milwaukee in 1909. He had to carry 80 pounds of flour and other supplies by himself to keep from going hungry at Christmas. In addition, he, like many others who had no money, had to sell all sorts of valuable items, or even clothing. Many also had to buy everything on credit. And still, we hear that all were happy around the Christmas tree, and the first Lutheran hymns of the Savior's birth sounded in the forests of Wisconsin. They had to endure a difficult time, and the winter lasted long. The snow remained three to four feet deep until early May, and Indians passed between the log houses on snowshoes, hunting deer. The first pioneers met with the Indians often. But the latter were friendly, since the last hostile Indians had been eradicated from the state in the Black Hawk war of 1832. The colonists were also fortunate that they followed Thompson's advice again by bringing along a large supply of American axes,

saws and drills.

Once the sap finally began to rise in the trees, the colonists enjoyed an elegant addition to their fare. They drilled into the sugar maples, collected the sap and cooked it into syrup. Von Rohr alone made 100 wooden troughs for collecting the sap. And before the vegetables grew, the land itself yielded nettles and all kinds of leaves and forest vegetation. By June all the vegetables and grain stood tall on the six acres of cleared land.

In the spring of 1840, the settlers erected a special structure for church and school – 30 feet long and 20 feet wide. Since they did all the labor themselves, the building cost only $45.00. Eventually this church was named “Trinity.” This was to be the first of four structures the congregation built. The fourth church, designed by Architect Frederich Velguth, was built in 1884 and is still in use today, on the same land that was purchased in 1839.