

Circuit Riders in Iowa

A century ago, in 1848, shortly after the founding of the Missouri Synod, the first Lutheran missionary trip was made into Iowa by Pastor Friedrich Lochner. A preacher of the Lutheran Church at Collinsville, Illinois, Pastor Lochner had been delegated by the Saint Louis Pastoral Conference to contact Lutheran settlers in Illinois and Iowa and determine their spiritual needs. The courageous missionary boarded the steamboat *Falcon* at Saint Louis on November 7, 1848, and arrived at Galena seven days later.

Pastor Lochner found the Lord had "opened no doors to us" in Galena and accordingly proceeded to Dubuque whence he wrote a discouraging letter on November 16 to Professor C. F. W. Walther, editor of the *Lutheraner* and president of the Synod. "You see that I am in the northern part of Iowa. This is, to be sure, the farthest point of my journey, and if the allotted time was not so limited, and if the duty placed upon me by the conference to visit in particular the cities of Quincy, Burlington and Bloomington [Muscatine] were not a matter of conscience with me, then surely the weather would forbid farther

travel to the north. The presence of snow and ice and the impassable conditions of the roads make it impossible to think of going to the north."

Pastor Lochner did not follow his instructions to visit Quincy, because reliable sources reported that two Lutheran ministers were active there. He did, however, visit Davenport, Bloomington, Iowa City, Burlington, and Keokuk, as well as smaller communities and isolated families along the way. "The number of German Lutherans appears to be very great in this territory," he wrote from Burlington on November 28, "and I have the high hope that they will assemble themselves into a separate congregation." This could be accomplished best, in his opinion, by sending a number of full-time permanent workers to Iowa.

In describing conditions in 1848, Lochner pointed out that Lutherans were scattered far and wide throughout eastern Iowa. He also decried the fact that so many had entered other churches, because of the absence of Lutheran pastors. In Iowa City, for example, many Lutherans had joined the Methodist Church. Wherever Lochner went many Germans expressed their desire to have a Lutheran ministry established in their midst as quickly as possible. To these religion-hungry souls he distributed Lutheran literature, performed the sacraments, and held public and

private services. Pastor Lochner's exploratory trip of 1848 laid the foundation for the work of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod in Iowa.

It is difficult to determine why Lutheran missionary work was delayed in Iowa after this survey. Population of the Hawkeye State increased from 192,214 in 1850 to 674,913 in 1860. Moreover, of the 20,969 foreign-born located in Iowa in 1850, the German element numbered 7,152. By 1860 the German population of Iowa had increased to 35,846 while the foreign-born population stood at 106,077. Not all Germans were Lutherans, of course. In addition to Roman Catholics, Pastor Lochner encountered German rationalists and many who had adopted other faiths.

Pastor John Friedrich Doescher, the first resident pastor in Iowa City, confirms the Reverend Lochner's exploratory experiences. Writing to Professor A. F. Craemer, in 1860, Doescher reported that on a visit to Ottumwa and Oskaloosa he found only one or two German people of Lutheran faith. Difficulties of traveling in sparsely settled Iowa coupled with the more pressing demands for Lutheran preachers in Wisconsin and Illinois also delayed missionary activity in Iowa. Indeed, the shortage of Missouri Synod ministers was probably the most important factor.

Apparently the first congregation of the Mis-

souri Synod was located at Maxfield in Bremer County, near present-day Denver. At the ninth meeting of the Missouri Synod at Fort Wayne in 1857, a Pastor Henry Graetzel was reported as a member of the Western District. Graetzel's name was again recorded the following year and his location mentioned as "Bremer County, Iowa." He remained in this parish for about six months, when he was transferred to Maryland.

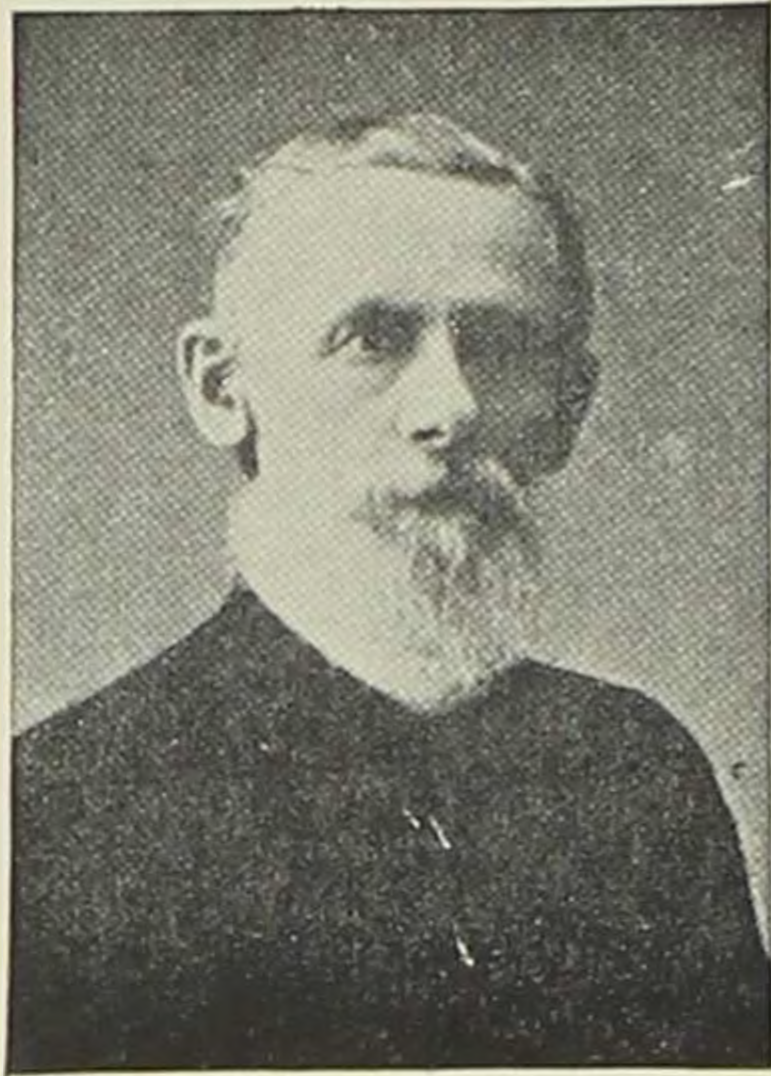
It is not certain what happened to the Maxfield congregation. In the only official history of the Iowa Synod (since 1930 a part of the American Lutheran Church) the following is reported: "The congregation at Maxfield, Bremer County, was located. It had formerly been served by a pastor of the Missouri Synod." Undoubtedly the Maxfield congregation was the first to be served by a resident Lutheran pastor of the Missouri Synod. At any rate, the first pastor to be recorded for Iowa in the *Proceedings of the Missouri Synod* was Pastor Henry Graetzel.

The work in Iowa City has been carefully recorded. It was started in 1858, ten years after Pastor Lochner's visit, when the Reverend C. A. T. Selle of Rock Island, Illinois, began to preach regularly in Iowa City. The records of the congregations at Wellman and Luzerne reveal that they also were served by Selle at regular intervals.

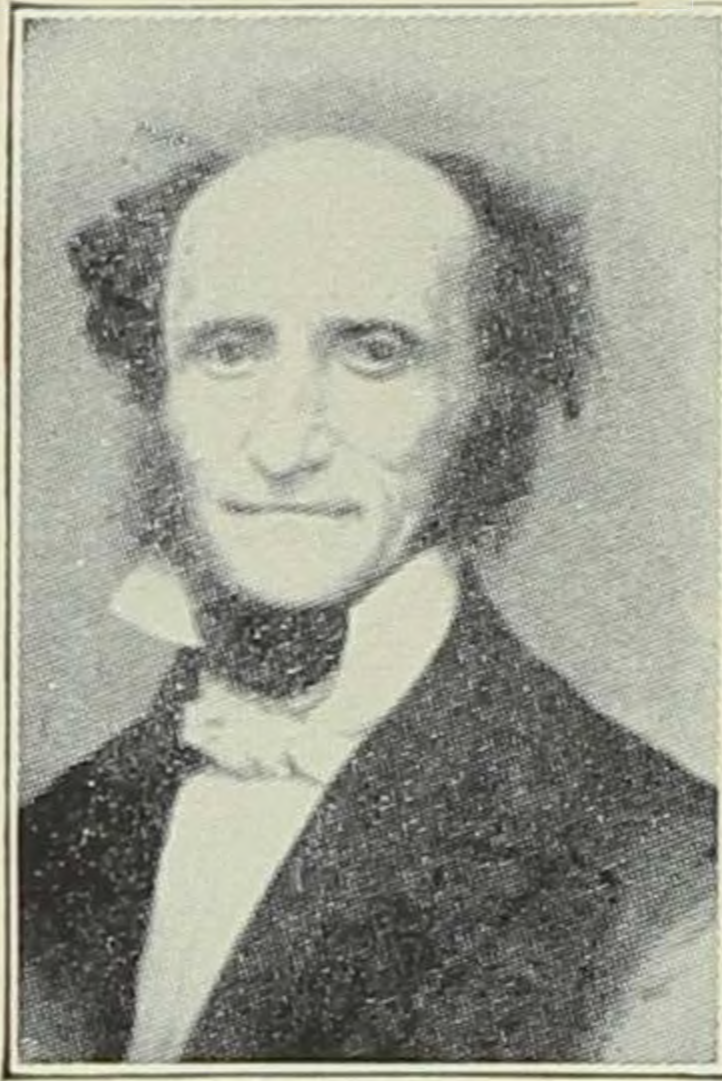
PRESIDENTS OF THE IOWA DISTRICT



1	THEO. WOLFRAM	1914-1927	5	PH. STUDD	1888-1891
2	J. L. CRAEMER	1879-1888	6	E. ZUERRER	1906-1908
3	A. D. GREIF	1908-1914	7	O. CLOETER	1900-1906
4	FR. BRUST	1891-1894	8	J. HORN	1899
HERMAN HARMS 1927-1936 (See page 343)					



FRIEDRICH LOCHNER
Lutheran Missionary
Explorer of 1848



C. F. W. WALTHER
First President of
Missouri Synod
Founder of Concordia
Seminary



J. W. BEHNKEN
President of Missouri
Synod 1935-1948



TRINITY LUTHERAN AT DAVENPORT
HERMAN HARMS, Pastor

Many baptismal certificates are testimony to his extensive activities, and the careful church records compiled at his instigation bear evidence of his diligent pastoral care beyond Iowa City.

On November 20, 1859, in a local public school building, Pastor Selle had the pleasure of ordaining and installing J. F. Doescher as the first resident minister of Iowa City. Pastor Doescher was well equipped for his difficult task, reports H. W. Wehrs, his successor and for a short time co-worker in Iowa City. According to Wehrs, Doescher "was very enthusiastic about his work and his field and revealed an almost fanatical zeal in his mission endeavors. He knew how to deal with the common people and soon won the respect and esteem of all with whom he came into contact." Pastor Doescher was born in Logansport, Indiana, and graduated from the Fort Wayne Theological Seminary (now known as Concordia Seminary and located in Springfield, Illinois). He received and accepted the call to become missionary-at-large in Iowa, with Iowa City as his headquarters.

During his first year at Iowa City, Pastor Doescher traveled approximately 325 miles each month to serve eighteen preaching stations. A letter to a friend reveals the strain of this enormous circuit. "The great drain on the physical

strength the day before and the thirty miles I had travelled on this same day began to take its toll. I became very tired. It was the time of harvest and people did not gather for worship until a rather late hour. . . . On the next morning I felt as though I was becoming desperately ill. Nonetheless, I got on my horse and traveled six to seven miles in order to preach to a few Germans." Among the stations which he visited were Homestead (founded in 1864 — first resident pastor, E. A. Schuermann) and Luzerne (founded in 1859 — first resident pastor, Phillip Studt). He also made occasional trips farther west preaching at such places as Boone and Fort Dodge.

It is interesting to note that during the Civil War, Pastor Doescher, one of the few Lutheran pastors who could preach in the English as well as the German language, held divine services for the "boys in blue" at various Iowa camps. Years later, one of the surviving veterans of the Civil War, Charles Hennrich of Iowa City, who was a member of Company D, 27th Iowa Infantry, reported that he had heard Doescher in one of these camp services.

It soon became apparent that Pastor Doescher's work could not be continued without some aid. In 1861 he received the assistance of theological candidate Herman Lossner, who was called by

the Synod as missionary-at-large for Iowa. Lossner lived at first in Iowa City from where he served eighteen preaching stations. In 1863 he moved to Marshalltown and there continued to serve many parishes. In the spring of 1862 Pastor Doescher received help in the person of H. W. Wehrs, a theological candidate. Wehrs also had been commissioned as missionary-at-large for Iowa. He rode a circuit of about 200 miles every four weeks holding services at a goodly number of preaching stations.

At this point it might be well to mention a movement that took place among the Lutherans of Iowa City under the leadership of Pastor Doescher. An attempt was made to establish a Lutheran colony, very similar to those founded among Lutherans in Wisconsin, Michigan, Arkansas, and the Dakotas. In an appeal published in the *Lutheraner* in 1862 attention was directed to the sad plight of many Lutheran families who were spread far and wide and who could be served with the Gospel only at infrequent intervals and under trying circumstances. Together with three men of his parish, the enterprising Doescher was ready to migrate to an acceptable location in Iowa, in order to make use of the free land available in western Iowa under the Homestead Act of 1862.

Pastor Wehrs, in his autobiography, calls at-

tention to the difficulties which faced Pastor Doescher. In his own parish there were divided opinions as to the location of such a colony. Some wanted to go to Texas, others to California, and still others to western Iowa. After the notice appeared in the *Lutheraner*, letters reached Pastor Doescher, asking many questions, but not indicating too great a readiness to migrate. At first great enthusiasm was shown for the movement. Pastor Doescher even had a large wagon made for the trip, but with the passing of time he lost his zeal for the cause. This became true especially after a second notice in the *Lutheraner* drew attention to the fact that a favorable tract of land north of Fort Dodge in Humboldt County was available. Apparently the response to this second notice was negligible, and interest in the entire project waned. In his historical sketch Pastor Wehrs simply states: "The colony quietly fell asleep."

With the exception of about two years, Pastor Doescher labored with marked success in Iowa until 1874. In his own words, he often talked "until close to midnight; instead of sleep, tears came to the eyes of the people. They expressed the desire that I return again in four weeks to preach." Wherever Pastor Doescher served he evinced his missionary zeal and ability as an administrator. He carried on his work at Marshalltown, Me-

chanicsville, Boonesboro, and Fort Dodge. He not only served these churches but rode extensive circuits with far-flung parishes, which today credit him as founder of their congregations.

During his pastorate at Fort Dodge, Pastor Doescher received the assistance of many theological students who aided him in taking care of the many preaching stations established in western Iowa. Three men who served him as assistants are today revered among the pioneer workers of the Missouri Synod in the State of Iowa. They are Pastors George Endres, John B. Anson, and Theodore Mattfeldt. These men were supported from the funds of the Fort Dodge Mission Society, which was established under the leadership of Pastor Doescher.

The early history of the Missouri Synod in Iowa may well be characterized by the title: Doescher in Iowa.

L. C. WUERFFEL