



Zion Lutheran Church, Friedheim, Indiana

"Send us a faithful Shepherd"

Prelude to Wyneken in Ft. Wayne

Adam Wesel on the Death

of Jesse Hoover¹

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“At the 1839 Convention of the German-Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Pennsylvania, its Missionary Society met. The executive committee reported that in the latter part of 1838, Missionary Kohler had decided to accept a call in Eastern Pennsylvania, and thus was unavailable for continued service in the West. During the Summer of 1838, an open letter from Adam Wesel, Elder at Fort Wayne, likely reached their hands. Dated June 4th and sent to at least the Synod of the West and C. E. Schmidt, editor of the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*.”

Robert Smith, “Wyneken as Missionary” in *Let Christ Be Christ: Theology, Ethics & World Religions in the Two Kingdoms*. Daniel N. Harmelink, ed. Huntington Beach, CA: Tentatio Press, 1999, 321-340. <http://media.ctsfw.edu/1787>.

Fort Wayne, June 4th, 1838

I write with tears in my eyes and with a trembling hand to inform you that on May 23, at 8 o'clock in the morning, it pleased the almighty Lord of life and death to call into eternity our beloved Pastor, J[esse]. Hoover, at the age of 28.² The deceased was bedridden for about 12 days, but had been in failing health for a longer period. Nevertheless, he pursued his calling with tireless zeal, for nothing, even in his illness, was more dear to him than his congregation. I visited him several times. When I visited him the first time in the company of several brothers, he asked me to read, for his personal edification, a chapter from the Bible. We read the 4th chapter of Acts, after which we prayed, and then we departed. When I visited him the next time, his illness had progressed to the point where he could no longer converse. On the morning of his death he did not recognize me. He died a blessed death, completely in the faith.

We buried him, our teacher, with love and thanksgiving, according to German order [Ordnung]. In the church the congregation sang: "After Trial-Shortened Days."³ The procession following the casket was greater than had ever been seen in Ft. Wayne – a tribute to the love and esteem in which he was held, even by the enemies of Christianity and the Church. He was a good man. At the grave we sang the hymn: "All Men Living Are But Mortal."⁴ After this I encouraged the congregation to remain unified so we will not be destroyed. The funeral sermon was preached in English by Mr. Baal, a Methodist minister, because no German preacher lived within miles of this area. If an English Pastor had died, it might have been possible for someone else to fulfill that duty. There is no one here among the German immigrants to preach the words of eternal life. For that reason, have pity, honored fathers and brothers and send us a Pastor. Not only the congregation in Ft. Wayne, but also a seemingly strong congregation in Adams County, Indiana mourns the loss of the deceased.⁵ If you canvas the northern part of Indiana you will soon see how important it is that you send us a faithful Shepherd. The harvest is great but unfortunately there are no workers. If it is not possible to send us a Pastor, dear brothers, then send us a circuit rider [Reiseprediger]. We hunger and thirst for the Word of God.

We heard that it was resolved at the conference in 1837 to hold the next conference in Ft. Wayne. I hope you do not change your resolve because Pr. Hoover has been called from us. Coming here you would be better able to assess our situation.

Remember us in your prayers, and cause a sigh to ascend the throne of grace in our behalf that the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ Himself might build us up and encourage us in our most holy faith, and comfort us with His help, and may the Holy Spirit sustain us. Greet all the brothers in Christ Jesus. Grace, peace, and blessing to the members of the honorable Synod.

Written by order of the church council at Ft. Wayne,

Adam Wesel

¹ *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung und Allgemeines Schulblatt*, Easton, [Pennsylvania] 15th of November, 1838.

² "The Reverend Jesse Hoover, a Lutheran minister from Woodstock, Canada, arrived in town in 1837 and became the first teacher in the new Presbyterian school. He also organized the first Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne and served as its first pastor. Adam Wefel [Sic] and Henry Trier served as elders, and Henry Rudisill and Conrad Nill as deacons. Two years later the congregation began construction of a church on the site of the present St. Paul's Lutheran Church." *First Presbyterian Church in Fort Wayne*. Reprinted from an original paper published by the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society (1959).

“Rev’d Hoover came to Fort Wayne in 1836 and became the first pastor of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church (later named St. Paul’s), founded under Henry Rudisill’s leadership on October 14, 1837. Pastor Hoover kept the church records in English and although he normally preached in German, he occasionally preached in English, believing it would help his German-speaking members to become “American Lutherans.” Hoover was a successful and popular pastor. “Men and women would walk on Sundays, even eight and sometimes twelve miles, to hear him preach. He preached in English to all denominations in the morning; when the English congregation was dismissed, we would see the Germans in their native dress pouring in crowds.” Although Hoover died suddenly on 24 May 1838 at the age of only 28, he had firmly established a bilingual congregation. Unfortunately, bilingual clergymen like Hoover were rare and he was replaced by Fredrich Konrad Dietrich Wyneken who spoke only German [ed. note: According to 19th century sources, Wyneken spoke English and French fluently. See Lindemann, *Friedrich Konrad Dietrich Wyneken: An Evangelist Among the Lutherans of North America* Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary, 2010. <http://media.ctsfw.edu/2608>] and had been born and educated in Germany. Wyneken wanted to reinstate the old confessional and liturgical Lutheranism and he drove the Methodist and Reformed from the church by excluding them from Holy Communion.[ed. note: For the first few years of his ministry in Indiana, Wyneken was very much of the same pietist orientation as Jesse Hoover. It was only after his trip to Germany was Wyneken a fully confessional pastor] Other members, including Henry Rudisill, became disenchanted with Wyneken’s rejection of the more “American style” of Lutheranism, and Wyneken resigned in 1844. [Wyneken did not resign. He accepted a call to Baltimore, only after Sihler accepted the call to St. Paul] He was replaced by Wilhelm Sihler, who was even more anti-American Lutheran than his predecessor! Once again the church split. “The issues of doctrine, liturgy and language were substantial: if Sihler was determined to turn his congregation back to 16th century Lutheranism, Rudisill was equally determined to restore his remnant to 19th Century American Lutheranism.”[ed. note: Trinity English was formed at the end of Wyneken’s pastorate. Rudisill, his family and Wyneken remained friends.] So Henry Rudisill and some other members decided to form an English- speaking congregation, without alienating any of the numerous Germans who patronized his mill and supported his leadership in the Democratic Party. Too, Sihler knew how popular Rudisill was with the congregation and he did not want to alienate his supporters who remained with the German congregation. Among the charter members of the new congregation were many Rudisills: Henry, Emmanuel, Susannah, Elizabeth, Henry J., Ann and Sarah. The last Rudisill trustees of the new church were listed in 1868: Emmanuel Rudisill and Henry J. Rudisill. The new church was called Trinity English Lutheran Church [now ELCA]. Relations, *Newsletter of the Rudisill Family Foundation Inc.* No. 7, December, 2007, p. 4.

³ Nach einer Prüfung kurzer Tage
erwartet uns die Ewigkeit.
Dort, dort verwandelt sich die Klage
in göttliche Zufriedenheit.
Hier übt die Tugend ihren Fleiß
und jene Welt reicht ihr den Preis.

--Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, 1715-1769.

English:
After a Test of but short Days
we so await Eternity

There, there, the Lament, so it changes
in god-ly Content-ment
Here their Flesh practices Virtue
and yon World richly theirs in Praise

--tr. Russell Davis.

⁴ Alle Menschen müssen sterben,
alles Fleisch vergeht wie Heu,
was da lebet, muss verderben, soll es anders werden neu.
Dieser Leib, der muss verwessen,
wenn er ewig soll genesen
der so grossen Herrlichkeit,
die den Frommen ist bereit.
Johann Albinus 1652

English:

Hark! a voice saith, all are mortal,
Yea, all flesh must fade as grass,
Only through Death's gloomy portal,
To a better life ye pass,
And this body formed of clay
Here must languish and decay,
Ere it rise in glorious might,
Fit to dwell with saints in light.
--Tr. C. Winkworth

⁵ The reference is to Zion Lutheran, Friedheim, near Ft. Wayne. Smith (op. cit.) notes: "Wyneken arrived at the settlement of Friedheim, near Decatur, on September 20th. The first German he met in Indiana received the missionary with suspicion. "If you are an honest pastor, then go to that house over there. A very sick man lies in it," the woodman challenged. "If you are something else, like most pastors coming from Germany, then go over there to the rich wagonmaker!" "Nevertheless, I'd love to see the sick man first," Wyneken quipped and then carried through. At this sick man's home, he learned of Karl Friedrich Buuck, the leader of Jesse Hoover's Adams County congregation and the pastor's future father-in-law.⁵¹ Wyneken ministered in the area for six days before riding north along the Decatur Road to visit Fort Wayne and New Haven.

In 1838, Fort Wayne was a small but growing town on the Wabash-Erie Canal. This community of fifteen hundred sat at the portage between the Wabash and Maumee rivers, the only passage between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. At the summit, overlooking the merger of the Maumee's two sources, Fort Wayne was the focal point of the effort to create a continent-wide water transportation system. By 1837, the Wabash-Erie Canal was complete to Logansport, a growing community on the Michigan Road. This road

stretched north to South Bend and Michigan City and south to Indianapolis, Madison and the Ohio River.

Due to this geography, Fort Wayne grew in spite of a depression that followed the Panic of 1837. The Northeast corner of Indiana quickly became a destination of choice for German emigrants in search of a new home. Fort Wayne was an ideal location for a circuit rider charged to 'gather scattered Protestants.'"