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**Searching for Souls on the Plains:
The German Evangelical Association
and the German Methodist Episcopal Church
in Minnesota**

Except as a focus for community life,¹ German-speaking churches are rarely discussed in academic journals other than those devoted to religious studies. References to the German Methodist Episcopal Church (*Deutsche Methodistische Episkopalkirche* or *Deutsche Bischöfliche Methodistenkirche*) and the German Evangelical Association, commonly called just the Evangelical Association (*Evangelische Gemeinschaft*)² are often just in passing.³ Although never as large as many other religious organizations, their inner workings, beliefs and activities deserve closer study as they maintained themselves as distinct organizations serving the German immigrant community over a period of some 100 years, increasing in numbers and reaching ever further west in the United States as it expanded, and back to Germany as well.

Because of their similarities, these two denominations are often grouped together. Both looked to the Methodist movement founded by John Wesley in England in the 1740s. There were, however, substantial differences that played a significant role as each charted its course. Because of the available documentation for both church entities in the state, Minnesota provides fertile ground for comparison of their similarities and differences as well as their strengths and weaknesses. It also points out that although usually

discussed, if discussed at all, in the shadow of the German Methodist Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Association was the relatively stronger of the two organizations.⁴

At the time that the Minnesota Territory was opened to settlement in March of 1849,⁵ the Evangelical Association had already been in existence for over forty years and the German Methodist Episcopal Church (German M.E. Church) for some fifteen. Grounded in the pietist movement which had developed in Germany during the late 1600s and which had subsequently greatly influenced John Wesley, largely through his contact with Moravians,⁶ each subscribed to the organization and doctrines of the English-language Methodist Episcopal Church, which was formally organized in the United States in the mid-1780s.

In each instance, the church body was composed of conferences based on geographical locations, delegates from which met every four years in a General Conference. Each conference had its own Annual Conference composed of ministers from the districts which made up the conference. The districts, which held Quarterly Meetings, were served by circuit riders, and the districts in turn consisted of Circuits and Missions, the difference being that Missions were not financially self-supporting and involved outreach to individuals who were not familiar with the church. At the very local level there were preaching points where itinerant ministers were allowed to preach in homes, local school houses, and even pastures. The hope was to gather enough adherents to form “classes” which would elect a leader from their midst to preside over prayer meetings during the absence of the preacher making his rounds, which could cover as much as several hundred miles. The members of the classes were not necessarily already “converted,” but were at least motivated to seek conversion; the classes were designed to provide mutual support in this effort. Eventually, the further hope was to form an actual congregation and subsequently build a church. This organization of the church bodies was in constant flux; with the westward movement and increase in members, new conferences were created as offshoots of old, and the boundaries of circuits and missions were reconfigured, renamed, and/or abandoned as membership fluctuated.

Each church body preached a religion that was of the heart—emotional not ceremonial, stressing the experience of personal conversion.⁷ Allied with specific injunctions against slavery, alcohol, worldly entertainments and the like, this emphasis on emotionalism and personal conversion set these religious institutions apart from Lutheranism. The preaching was intense. Revivals and outdoor camp meetings might last for days and produce “shouting, leaping and praising of God.”⁸ Austere religions, requiring abstinence from beer, favorite German entertainments such as balls, and the singing of nonreligious

songs, they were almost diametrically opposed to the religious life most immigrants had experienced in Germany.⁹ Thus, early on their efforts often encountered indifference and even violent opposition.¹⁰

Although greatly similar, the Evangelical Association particularly was not a carbon copy of the English-speaking Methodist church. It arose as a lay movement during the time of the Great Awakening just after the Revolutionary War. Its founder Jacob Albright, a tile maker, was a second-generation German immigrant who had struggled with a profound sense of sin, and ultimately experienced both conversion and what was called sanctification.¹¹ The large stream of German immigrants that was to continue throughout the 19th century had not yet begun. The Germans Albright saw in need of redemption were those, largely from the Palatinate, who had settled in Pennsylvania during the late 1600s and 1700s, and whose attitude towards religion at the time was apathetic at best.¹² Albright joined a Methodist class and started to learn English. He was allowed to be an exhorter in German, encouraging members of his class by examples and any other means short of preaching, but Albright wanted to be a minister and was denied the opportunity by Francis Asbury, one of the first bishops of the Methodist Church in America.¹³ Asbury believed that the speaking of German would be fast disappearing and thus saw no need for Albright's services.¹⁴ Heeding what he considered God's call, Albright struck out on his own, carrying his message to whomever would afford him a place to preach, and gathering a nucleus of adherents, who eventually formed the German Evangelical Association as a separate denomination.¹⁵

On the other hand, Wilhelm Nast, considered the founder of the German M.E. Church, was a first-generation German immigrant and considerable scholar, who had learned English and, after experiencing a "rebirth," became an ordained minister in the English-speaking Methodist Episcopal Church. Recognizing the fast-increasing numbers of Germans in America, the Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church called upon him in the 1830s to proselytize this immigrant group in Cincinnati.¹⁶ From a discouraging start, the missionary effort gained momentum and spread with the publication of the German language newspaper *Der Christliche Apologete* (*The Christian Apologist*), of which Nast became editor for the next fifty years, and additional manpower from converts such as John Zwahler and Adam Miller. Mission work and soliciting subscriptions to *Der Christliche Apologete* went hand in hand.¹⁷

The German M.E. Church which resulted was in fact not a church *per se*, but a group of Conferences within the Methodist Episcopal Church whose mission was strictly to minister to German-speaking immigrants. Minnesota was to become a member of the North German Conference, which included

North Dakota and Northern Wisconsin. There were to be nine other German Conferences within the Methodist Episcopal Church, two specific to the cities of Chicago and St. Louis.¹⁸

These differences between the Evangelical Association and the German M.E. Church had important consequences. Based in Pennsylvania, the Evangelical Association followed its members as many gradually spread west.¹⁹ Founded in Ohio, the German M.E. Church initially had no base of adherents and sent out ministers west, south and east.²⁰

As a separate denomination, the Evangelical Association was free to tailor its organization as its members saw fit. Thus, for example, its bishops were elected for a term of years, not for life, and had less power than in the Methodist Episcopal Church.²¹ Itinerant ministers were preferred over those who “located” at a specific church—only the former could participate in the conferences. In addition, early on the Evangelical Association did not place much importance on education for its ministers, although it was eventually to establish schools of theology and colleges of liberal arts, the most prominent of which is North Central College (originally North-Western College) in Naperville, Illinois, and even correspondence courses of study, particularly for Sunday School workers. It was the commitment and preaching ability of an aspirant to the ministry that counted most in his selection. While for about ten years it saw its mission as specifically to convert German speakers, it later discarded this restriction and sought to minister to English-speaking Germans as well.²²

The Evangelical Association had its own hymn writers and publishing houses, first in the United States and later in Germany. Publications in German for the German M.E. Church were produced by the German Department within the larger Methodist Book Concern in the United States, although it did maintain a publishing house in Germany.

The Evangelical Association publishing houses churned out an extraordinary amount of material, both newly authored theological works, commentaries and a history of the church as well as reprints of major works by pietist predecessors, hymnals, copies of the Church Discipline, Bibles, and subject matter for their Sunday Schools. Its main subscription-based periodical *Der Christliche Botschafter* (1836) was a predecessor of *Der Christliche Apologete* (1838) of the German M.E. Church.

Nast viewed *Der Christliche Apologete* as an aggressive defender of church doctrine and interests against the likes of Roman Catholicism and as a roadmap for conversion.²³ In the early years, he contributed much of the content, ranging from more standard topics relating to conversion to a discussion of Jesus’ appearance and what music was heard in heaven.²⁴ In later years, the periodical included pages devoted to national and foreign news as well as paid advertising, probably to offset the cost of publication. At the

height of its popularity in 1890, it had 19,150 subscribers. When it ceased publication in 1941, it had 3,000.²⁵

Likewise, *Der Christliche Botschafter* included uplifting religious articles and letters from ministers in the field. It did not, however, take aim at Catholicism or other religions; its focus was more internal. It served as a cauldron where the many points of contention within the church, both procedural and theological, were argued, the most contentious being the Doctrine of Sanctification.²⁶ When it began serving English-speaking Germans, even before the tide of immigration had ebbed, the Association added English-language publications, often translations from the German, to its spiritual arsenal, including the English equivalent of *Der Christliche Botschafter*, *The Evangelical Messenger* (1848). Exact subscription figures are difficult to come by for these periodicals, but we know at a General Conference in 1859 it was decided that as soon as the aggregate subscription base for the two periodicals reached 15,000, they were to be published weekly.²⁷ In 1917 in the Minnesota Conference, one of twenty-seven Annual Conferences, there were 1,158 subscribers to *Der Christliche Botschafter* and 698 to *The Evangelical Messenger*.²⁸ *Der Christliche Botschafter* continued in publication until 1946 when the church merged with the United Brethren in Christ.

The Evangelical publishing house was a money maker for the church, bringing in a sometimes substantial profit annually. In every year between 1912 and 1915 its profit exceeded 69,000 dollars, and in 1915 alone its profit was 73,914.64, which is worth 2,416,603.00 in 2026 dollars.²⁹ We do not know if the publications of the German M.E. Church ran a profit as only gross receipts are reported, but presumably they did as otherwise it is unlikely they would have been published for long.³⁰

Dependent as it was on the parent church's publishing house, the German M.E. Church had nothing quite like the breath of content as the Evangelical Association's publishing houses. Its strength lay particularly in its Sunday School publications and literature for children and youth, as well as hymnals (compilations), Nast's catechism, collections of Wesley's sermons, and numerous tracts, although there were some scholarly works as well.³¹ In 1893, its most popular publication by far was *Der Bibelforscher* (*The Bible Student*), which provided Sunday School lesson plans, followed by *Die Glocke* (*The Sunday School Bell*), designed for children. Both sold thousands more than *Der Apologete*.³²

In terms of doctrine there was a significant difference of emphasis between the Evangelical Association and the Methodist Episcopal Church. This involved the doctrine of Christian Perfection. In a lengthy statement in the 1882 publication of *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical Association of North America*, members were instructed that to reach this state an individual³³

must be wholly resigned to the will of God; . . . He must stand upon his guard so firmly and immovably that he can parry, and gain the victory over any temptation the moment that it may present itself, without yielding more or less, either voluntarily or negligently, as it does sometimes happen with weak Christians. If his rest, peace and joy in God, are no more interrupted by any such vicissitudes or occurrences, he must indeed be firmly rooted and grounded in God; . . . sin has, as it were, lost all its power against such a one, he being surrounded by the love of God, as with a wall of fire. . .

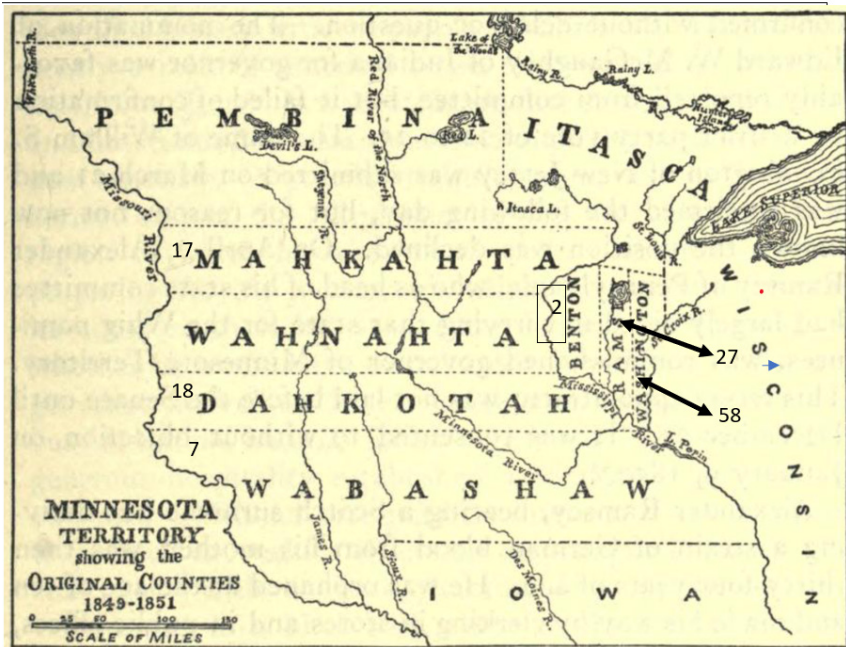
Experience has moreover taught that ordinarily, this state of Christian perfection is attained gradually by an upright course of life in following the Lamb; however, during this gradation, this work is perfected in the soul, sooner or later, by a sudden and powerful influence of grace and outpouring of the Divine Spirit. . . This grace is called SANCTIFICATION.

So, Christian Perfection involved a second act of grace in addition to the grace of justification at conversion, and rendered the individual not errorless, but in a sinless state.³⁴ A nebulous concept, it did not lend itself easily to analysis and explanation. John Wesley had written and preached on Christian Perfection.³⁵ When the Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in America, however, the doctrine was not included in its *Discipline*,³⁶ and that continued through the subsequent disciplines.³⁷ Thus it did not play as central role within the denomination in the United States as it did for the Evangelical Association.

Wilhelm Nast, however, wrote about his concept of sanctification in *Der Apologete*. "In endless exchanges with contributors to the *Apologete*, Nast belabored his concept of sanctification and tried to explain it to his fellow religionists."³⁸ Compared to the controversy within the Evangelical Association over the doctrine, this was a tempest in a teapot, but partly because of his views, Nast himself was not elected the first German bishop of his church.³⁹

These two institutions, the German M.E. Church and the Evangelical Association, so similar yet so different, were to scour the same ground for souls in many states and territories, including Minnesota, and it is to activity in this state that we now turn. In 1850, one year after the Minnesota Territory was established, a census was taken based on the nine massive counties in existence at the time. My analysis of the census data shows there were a total

of 5,827 white inhabitants, 23 per cent of which were foreign born, most prominently Canadian, Irish, and English. The number of Germans totaled 132, divided among six of the nine counties —Mankahtha, where thirteen of the seventeen Germans were soldiers; Dakotah, where all eighteen of the males were soldiers and the lone female born in Germany was married to a soldier; Wabashaw; Benton; Ramsey; and Washington. The largest number was in Ramsey (27) and Washington (58), and thus in what was to be the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.⁴⁰



William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, Vol. 1,
(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1922), 247.

The numbers certainly were not encouraging for the Evangelical Association and the German M.E. Church. This is even more evident in the demographics. By my count of the census data, there were eighty single males, thirty of whom were soldiers, and four single females. In twenty-two of the thirty-six couples, both spouses were born in Germany; in the remaining fourteen, one of the spouses was born elsewhere. In some instances, there is a probability that the non-German-born spouse was German-speaking, as in the case of those born in Missouri, Pennsylvania and Switzerland, but in others, such as those born in Kentucky and California, this was not likely. Including two widowers and one widow, there were a total of twenty-four

families with children and fifteen, childless. This was a small pool from which to draw.

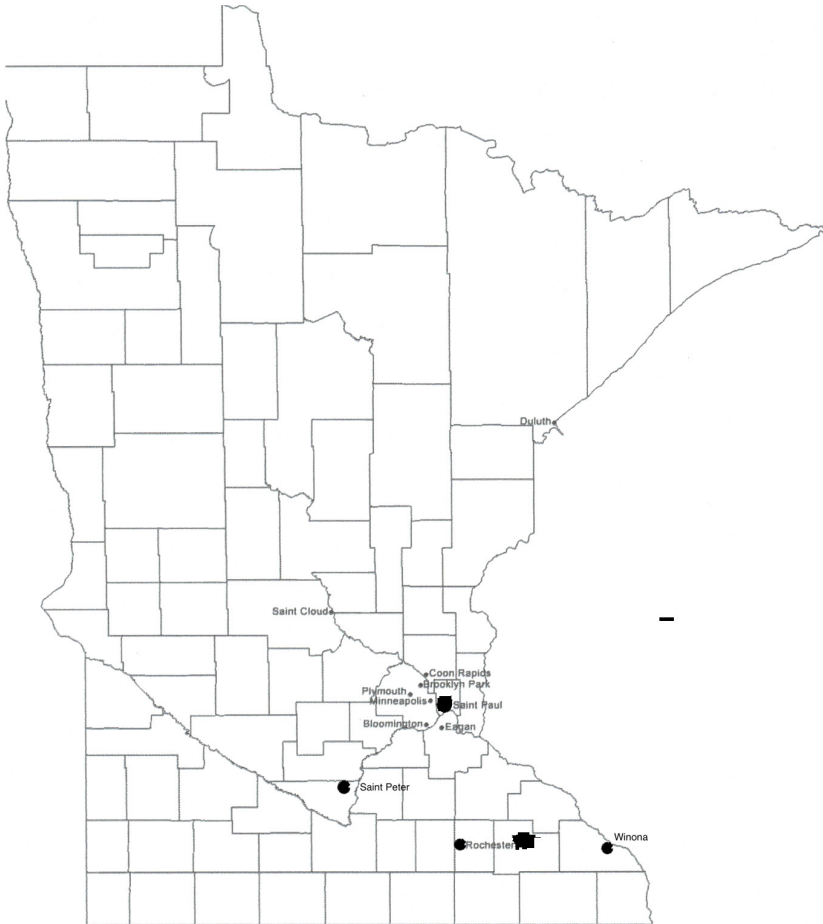
There were already, before missionaries from the two German-speaking institutions arrived, a considerable number of missionaries working to save souls in six of the nine counties. Usually, the denomination is not identified on the census rolls so we cannot know if any of the individuals identified simply as “missionary” were affiliated with the English-speaking Methodist Episcopal Church. Some missionaries undoubtedly were working among the Native American nations and the Methodist Episcopal Church had already begun work in this field before the territory was created.⁴¹ In Penbina, there were a missionary and a Roman Catholic priest; in Itasca, there was a Methodist preacher, a Catholic clergymen, and three missionaries; in Dakota, there were six missionaries, one clergyman from France, and a U.S. Army chaplain; in Wabashaw, there were four missionaries and a Catholic Church which seated 100; in Ramsey, there were two Methodist clergymen, one Baptist, and one Presbyterian; in Washington, there was one missionary and a Presbyterian and a Methodist church.⁴²

The governing bodies of the Evangelical Association and the German M.E. Church however, would not have had any way of collecting all this information. Their outreach was based on finding a foothold for preaching, perhaps just among one family, and hopefully drawing in more from the surrounding area to form a class and a circuit.

The impetus for creating an Evangelical Association mission in Minnesota came from the Wisconsin Conference. The sum of \$131.50 was raised for the purpose and a junior preacher named A. Tarnutzer was sent (1856). He crossed the Mississippi River at Winona, some 100 miles southeast of St. Paul, where lived an individual who was already a member of the church, and who presumably had asked for a minister to be sent.⁴³ On this first visit to the territory, Tarnutzer worked his way west about forty-five miles to Rochester, preaching and organizing where he had opportunity.⁴⁴ The following year the Wisconsin Conference authorized three missions—centered in St. Paul, St. Peter, and Winona.⁴⁵

The record of the German M.E. Church's first penetration of the Minnesota Territory is not as detailed. One John Plank developed a “flourishing circuit” going from Pekin, Illinois to St. Paul,⁴⁶ a distance of over 425 miles. And, for ten years, from 1851 to 1861, there was only one district, the St. Paul District, in the German conference that included the Minnesota Territory.⁴⁷

Between 1830 and 1860, however, 4.9 million emigrants had come to the United States, 28 per cent of whom (1.36 million) were German speakers.⁴⁸ Between 1860 and 1890 there were only three years in which Germans were not the largest ethnic emigrant group. The total for the 19th century was



some five million, many of whom came to settle in the Middle Western states such as Minnesota and many of whom, at least at first, did not speak English, and even when they learned the language wanted to hold on to their culture mediated through their native tongue.⁴⁹

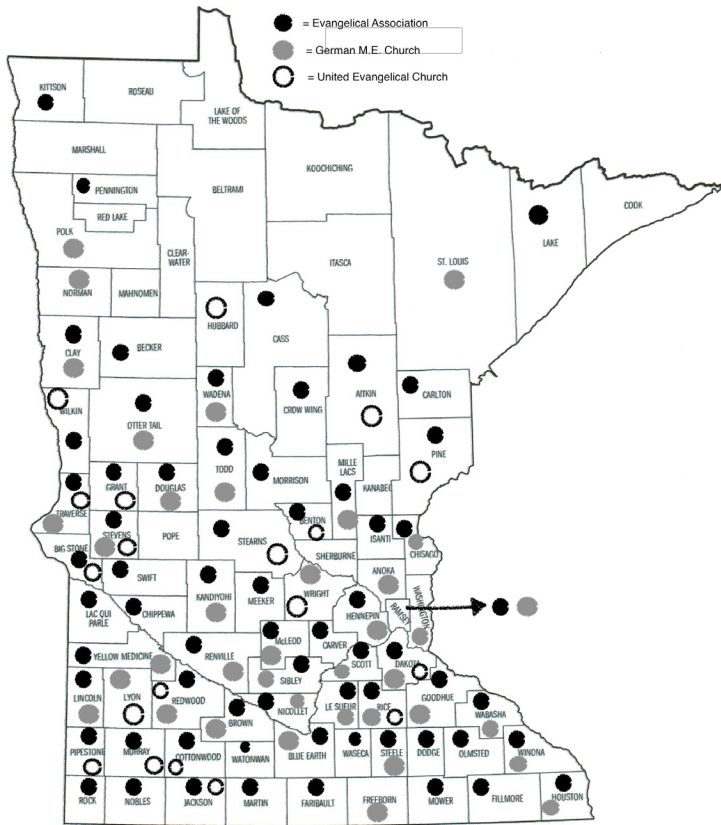
The German M.E. Church as well as the Evangelical Association depended upon this steady stream of German immigrants for their memberships. As the first-generation converts aged (and died), their children, more likely to assimilate and prefer to speak English, might leave the institution or push for the greater use of English in its religious services and activities. The hysteria generated during World War I against Germans and the speaking of German also played a role in the adoption of English services.

The introduction of worshipping in English was a major issue in Minnesota congregations of the Evangelical Association between 1891 and 1921. At times, it caused a great deal of tension within congregations between the older and younger members.⁵⁰ In the case of the German M.E. Church, there is more information on the possible progression in the use of English, with it first being introduced in those activities which served youth, then adding an English-speaking evening church service. The use of English would subsequently expand to more activities, until finally all of a congregation's activities were carried out in English. By 1924 out of a total of 530 German M.E. churches, only twenty-three had no services in English while 135 held all their services in English, with the remaining churches somewhere in-between.⁵¹

Surprisingly, both churches got a great deal of coverage in the English-language press, particularly in Minneapolis, but also in communities where they were active. It is highly likely that many of the items were provided by the churches themselves.⁵² Usually the publicity was positive, as when the *New Ulm Review* reported on a near-by camp meeting held by the Evangelical Association—“Many have gone from here”⁵³—and the considerable coverage given the holding of its General Conference in St. Paul in 1900.⁵⁴ Likewise, notices and reports of numerous benefit concerts and other social activities of the German M.E. churches in Minneapolis-St. Paul were covered by the press.⁵⁵ *The Saint Paul Globe* reported on one such entertainment entitled “An Evening of German Song”: “A large and cultured audience listened attentively to the sweet strains of the great productions of the musical talent of the Fatherland. . .”⁵⁶ But, with the good publicity also came the rare, but negative publicity, as when violence broke out between two ministers of the Evangelical Association for possession of the same church,⁵⁷ and when the German M.E. Church felt compelled to call before a committee one of its class leaders accused of being “criminally intimate” with his daughter.⁵⁸

The map illustrated below, based on the research of Thelma Ballinger Boeder, archivist and then historian for the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church,⁵⁹ shows where there was at least some activity—from a preaching point up to a circuit or mission and eventually a congregation—of the Evangelical Association (in black), the German M.E. Church (in dark gray) and the United Evangelical Church (black-outlined circle), which split off from the Evangelical Association between 1891 and 1922—from the 1850s to approximately 1940.

Searching for Souls on the Plains



What is particularly striking is that quite often these church bodies were not in competition with each other. Of the eighty-seven counties in Minnesota, there are thirty-four counties in which only the Evangelical Association was active and eight where only the German Methodist Episcopal Church was active. There was one county in which only the United Evangelical Church was doing missionary work and twelve, mostly in the north, which saw no activity by any of these institutions.⁶⁰

In each of the counties, there may have been several locations being served. Statewide, the Evangelical Association had by the 1900s exclusively served 240, the German M.E. Church ninety-four, and the United Evangelical Church, fifty.⁶¹ There are quite probably more locations as Boeder does not systematically list all the locations on a circuit or mission, perhaps because they changed so often.

Leaving aside the United Evangelical Church, in the thirty-two counties where both the Evangelical Association and the German M.E. Church were active, there were forty-three locations. In two, most prominently Minneapolis, they simply coexisted. In three, neither flourished. In three, they

were active at different times. In the remaining thirty-five, they overlapped for a period of years with the Evangelical Association in the end lasting longer in twenty-five locations and the German M. E. Church in ten. This figure, however, is skewed because in the wake of the anti-German hysteria that developed during World War I, the English-speaking Methodist Episcopal Church basically forced the German Conferences to fold and merge with the English-speaking Conferences.⁶²

A closer look at the figures points out the constant challenge the circuit riders of these churches faced. One hundred and seven locations served by the Evangelical Association lasted fewer than ten years—some in fact just one.⁶³ Among these were fifty-eight whose exact location is unknown, largely because they are associated with individual families as, for example, the Rathlisberger Evangelical Association and the Rathke Evangelical Association.⁶⁴ Thirty-one of those served by the German M.E. Church likewise were short-lived.⁶⁵

By the early 1900s German emigration was significantly declining and World War I put a halt to it. The year 1915, just after the outbreak of the war, saw the height of membership in the German M.E. Church, which encompassed ten Annual Conferences, 644 preachers, and a membership of 63,260 nationwide.⁶⁶ This was at a time when the English-speaking Methodist M.E. Church had a membership of 3,965,655.⁶⁷

The exact figures for Minnesota are not available for this year, but in 1892 the Census Bureau put out a bulletin that gave the statistics provided by the Methodist Episcopal Church for each of the ten German Conferences. The North German Conference—Minnesota, North Dakota and the northern part of Wisconsin—had a membership of 4,613.⁶⁸ In 1924 when the conference was dissolved and merged with its English-speaking counterpart, the total membership was 4,318, obviously evidencing not an increase, but certainly a stability and a strong loyalty.⁶⁹

Larger than the German M.E. Church, in 1915 the Evangelical Association had a nationwide membership figure of 154,564, even with the split with the United Evangelical Church.⁷⁰ It had a total of 24 Annual Conferences and 1,707 preachers.⁷¹ In Minnesota in 1914, the reported membership was 7,864, not including the membership of congregations having sided with the United Evangelical Church.⁷²

With all the energy poured into seeking converts, the question arises of why these figures for the German M.E. Church and Evangelical Association are not more robust. Some of the possible reasons are common to both institutions, while others are particular to each. Certainly, there was a great deal of competition for the souls of German immigrants, not only from the various shades of Lutheran organizations, but also from newer denominations such as the Congregationalists and Presbyterians. As already mentioned,

the strictures of Methodism, particularly the stricture against alcohol consumption, would not have appealed to those many Germans who loved their beer gardens.

Additionally, both institutions extended themselves by supporting missions to Germany and surrounding countries, which necessarily required resources and personnel that might have been devoted to work in the United States.⁷³ The Evangelical Association went a step further and chose to establish a mission in Japan, whose climate affected the health of the missionaries assigned there, as well as subsequently in China.⁷⁴ (The German M.E. Church was a major supporter of the William Nast College of Central China, but there is no evidence of an actual mission there.)⁷⁵

Recruiting enough ministers to meet the demand was also an issue, particularly for the Evangelical Association. As early as 1840, one of its conferences appointed a day of fasting, hoping that God would inspire some of its members to become ministers.⁷⁶ As discussed earlier, its missions were often established at the behest of members who had moved west, but preachers were not always readily available to supply them, thus missing opportunities.⁷⁷ We do not know whether shortages of ministers was an issue in the German M.E. Church early on, but certainly by the turn of the century each institution was experiencing problems in recruiting replacements for an aging clergy.⁷⁸

The almost exclusive use of itinerant preachers may itself have proved a stumbling block for recruitment. While important for the mission of the two organizations in spreading their message and seeking converts, itineracy was a grueling life for the preachers themselves, and may have deterred less able-bodied and already married men, particularly those with children, from entering the ministry. With the itinerant ministers having to cover large territories, they needed to rely on the fervor, organizational skills and connections of the local class leaders to retain class members and help draw in additional possible converts. Given the variability of human nature, there would have been those class leaders who would have found the task difficult.

As time went on and English began to make its way into the German-speaking churches, the distinctive nature of the institutions faded to some degree. While as a separate denomination the Evangelical Association was able to proselytize among English-speaking Germans, the German M.E. Church was limited in scope. The much larger English-speaking Methodist Episcopal Church itself was a potential rival for those members who desired English services.⁷⁹

There were also other circumstances particular to each institution that may have contributed to the relatively low numbers of congregants compared to many other religious institutions. The German M.E. Church had started

out in an urban setting, Cincinnati, and had established two conferences in Chicago and in St. Louis. In Minnesota its most successful harvest of souls was in Minneapolis-St. Paul, where the handing out of tracts and canvassing for subscriptions to its periodicals would have been most easily done. The vast majority of the German-speaking population in Minnesota in 1860, as German emigration was reaching its height, lived in rural areas; only 33.3 per cent lived in cities or towns. In 1870, the percentage was even less, 23.6.⁸⁰ Thus, in a crucial period of missionary work, the Evangelical Association's concentration on rural areas was favored. In addition, even though there were large numbers of German immigrants in urban areas, there was also more religious competition.

Another contributing factor may have been that the German Conferences were of secondary concern to the English-speaking Methodist Episcopal Church. While there was enough support for creating a mission to German immigrants, there was from the beginning an indifference, if not hostility on the part of some of the English-speaking Conferences towards the work.⁸¹ While there were efforts at holding joint camp meetings, there is no evidence of any active support by English-speaking Methodist churches in Minnesota for the German-speaking churches when in the same locations.⁸²

Concern about membership figures in the Evangelical Association date back to 1845, when despite gaining 2,300 new members, the overall membership for the church increased by less than 100. There was obviously much falling off. This was due, according to one of the bishops at the time, to a lack of follow-up of converts by many of the ministers.⁸³ Certainly, there was such a great emphasis on the number of conversions secured each year, which were reported in Association records by name of minister and circuit, that undoubtedly this was where the ministers devoted their time and energy.⁸⁴

That the same issue was still occupying the Association at its General Conference in 1915 speaks to the fact that little had been done to address it. This was a serious lapse on the part of its aging hierarchy. In the period between 1912 and 1915 the church had gained 61,437 and lost 47,755 members, leaving a net gain of only 13,682.⁸⁵

Of the 47,755 lost members, the most common reason for their loss to the Association was change of residence (31,645).⁸⁶ While the Evangelical Association had risen on a rural base, this base was changing. Although in some instances churches were moved from the country to a near-by town or city, as the years passed the farmers were retiring to places where there was no Association presence.⁸⁷

Basically, what the Association needed was a recruitment source not dependent on emigration. It began turning to its youth. In 1891 the Association had created a young adult outreach, the Young People's Alliance,

which had proved popular and which was already seen as a source of membership. With 51,185 members, its numbers equaled approximately one-third of the membership of the Association, and played an important role in making visitations, distributing tracts, and raising funds. Through the Alliance “our young people become acquainted with the doctrines, polity, history and present activities of our denomination. Thus, the spirit of loyalty and devotion of our young people is fostered and a greater interest in our church is created.”⁸⁸

One of the most significant suggestions at the 1915 General Conference to further cement the loyalty of its youth was creating a Board of Education to establish its own primary and secondary schools⁸⁹ where teachers could foster ties to the Association and knowledge of German beyond the first generation. The Association also had an untapped source in its Sunday Schools, which had many more “scholars” than those operated by the German M.E. Church.⁹⁰ The schools were open to the children of church members and non-members alike, and in 1915 the number of “scholars” surpassed the number of Association members by almost 70 per cent.⁹¹ But, of the 207,407 “scholars,” only 25,445 had joined the Association.⁹² It is highly unlikely, however, that the youth initiatives could be fully implemented and sustained in the hostile atmosphere prevalent in the United States towards Germans and the speaking of German after it entered World War I.

Furthermore, the hierarchy of the Association was historically its own worst enemy. As mentioned earlier, the doctrine of Christian Perfection was particularly contentious, and there was much enmity created among Association bishops and ministers over the issue. However, it is questionable how much this doctrinal dispute actually interested the average Association member. The simmering hostility broke out at the 1859 General Conference in which a minister was tried on the charge of heresy and acquitted, but then charged again at the 1867 General Conference, which definitively rejected his views.⁹³ At the 1871 General Conference the views of the editor of *The Evangelical Messenger* on the topic were brought into question, and he was ultimately deposed.⁹⁴

Then in 1890-91, largely due to factionalism among the then four bishops, the Association split apart with one group forming the United Evangelical Church and trying *in absentia* one of the opposing bishops on charges of “un-Christian conduct, slander, evil speaking and falsehood, creating dissension and perpetuating and intensifying the agitation in the church, and disturbing her peace by a revival of old and previous adjudicated difficulties and differences.”⁹⁵ Congregations then had to choose sides and hundreds of churches were lost to the Association.⁹⁶ Most damaging was the nationwide publicity produced by the schism as the now two churches fought

in court over ownership of church buildings and the publishing house. It even occasioned an article on the front page of *The New York Times*.⁹⁷

In the wake of the 1915 General Conference, much of the Association's attention was taken up with intense negotiations to heal the schism. In 1922 the Evangelical Association and the United Evangelical Church finally reunited and became The Evangelical Church. During the same time, the German Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church were undergoing dissolution and merged with the English-speaking Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Would the Evangelical Association and German M.E. Church have won more converts if they had joined forces in the early days? The German M.E. Church was particularly eager for this. Wilhelm Nast attended the General Conference of the Association in 1843 looking for a closer relationship. In 1867 he made a formal address to the General Conference, but at the General Conference in 1871, the delegates failed to pass a resolution calling for the union.⁹⁸ An independent church for so long, the Evangelical Association clearly wanted to maintain its own identity.

Eventually, however, the two did become parts of a whole. In 1946 The Evangelical Church merged with the United Brethren in Christ to become the Evangelical United Brethren. Then, in 1968, this body merged with the Methodist Episcopal Church to form the United Methodist Church. As Thelma Ballinger Boeder has documented for Minnesota, the Evangelical Association and the German M.E. Church brought with them into the various mergers many congregations which are on-going today. Although English finally prevailed, it is significant that their German-speaking members continued to be served through the publication of their major periodicals, *Der Apologete* and *Der Christliche Botschafter*, into the 1940s, and thus these members were kept within the Methodist fold. Their mission activities overseas likewise contributed to the penetration of Methodism there. Educational institutions the two organizations founded still play an important role. Finally, their outreach extended beyond their own membership, through their publications, Sunday Schools, orphanages and hospitals.⁹⁹ Relatively small in numbers, the Evangelical Association and German M.E. Church have left legacies of which their founders most likely never anticipated.

Notes

1. See Hildegard Binder Johnson. "Factors Influencing the Distribution of the German Pioneer Population in Minnesota." *Agricultural History* 19, no. 1 (1945): 39–57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3739700>.

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2. After the Association began to undertake a mission to Germany and decided to adopt an English version of its name for use in the United States, it was also referred to as the Evangelical Association of North America.

3. See, for example, the one sentence reference to Jacob Albright in John B. Franz, "The Religious Development of the Early German Settlers In 'Greater Pennsylvania': The Shenandoah Valley of Virginia," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 68, no. 1 (2001): 87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27774312>. It categorizes his organization simply as "German Methodism." JSTOR lists twenty-nine journal references to "Jacob Albright," several of which appear in book reviews. Only three journal articles are listed which specifically mention the "German Evangelical Association." JSTOR lists eighteen journal articles and two book chapters which make mention of the "German Methodist Episcopal Church." The number increases to fifty-two journal articles for simply the "German Methodist Church," but again these are mainly in passing.

4. See, for example, W. Harrison Daniel. "Wilhelm Nast (1807-1899): Founder of German-Speaking Methodism in America and Architect of the Methodist Episcopal Church Mission in Europe," *Methodist History* 39, no. 3 (April 2001) in which Daniel erroneously refers to Jacob Albright as a "Methodist preacher" (155) and makes no mention of the considerable proselytizing effort of the Evangelical Association in Germany. Likewise, in Walter D. Kamphoefner. *Germans in America: A Concise History*. (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), the German Methodist Episcopal Church is discussed, but not the Evangelical Association.

5. Initially, the Minnesota Territory was larger than what is now the state. It included parts of North and South Dakota. <https://www.mnterritorialpioneers.org/territory-borders>. For purposes of this paper, however, the areas in North and South Dakota, where they could be identified, were not included in counts.

6. Julian E. Pace IV. "Pietist Credentials of John Wesley," September 26, 2020. <https://wesleyscholar.com/pietist-credentials-of-john-wesley/>

7. "...from its very origin our church has been a protest against mere ceremonialism. ..."

Evangelical Society of North America, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference of the Evangelical Association, Los Angeles, California*. Cleveland, Ohio: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1915: 27. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.324350233.66305&cseq=94>.

8. W. W. Orwig. *History of the Evangelical Association*, Vol. I *From the Origin of the Association to the end of the Year 1845, translated from the German* (Cleveland, Ohio, Charles Hammer for the Evangelical Association, 1858):121. <https://archive.org/details/EVwmHistoryOfTheEvangelicalAssociationByWWOrwig>. In his *History of the Minnesota Conference of the Evangelical Association: 1856 to 1922* (Cleveland, Ohio: Evangelical Press, 1922), Albert Utzinger recounts an anecdote of a recent immigrant from Germany being initially angered by the shouting and "physical demonstrations" at a revival meeting (439).

9. For detailed descriptions of what this was like, see Anna C. Johnson, *Peasant Life in Germany* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1858).

10. For a descriptions of two of the many attacks that occurred, see Ammon Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association of North America and History of the United Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Publishing House of the United Evangelical Church, 1900), 35. https://books.google.com/books?id=r0xAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA3&source=kp_read_button&hl=en&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0#v=onepage&q&f=false and Paul F. Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism: Biography of an Immigrant Soul* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1939), 52-53. <https://archive.org/details/storyofgermanmet00doug/page/n8/mode/lup?view=theater>.

11. R. Yeakel. *History of the Evangelical Association*, Vol. 1 1750-1850 (Cleveland, Ohio: Evangelical Publishing House, 1924), 38-41. <https://archive.org/details/historyofevangel00yeak/page/12/mode/1up?view=theater>
12. Paul Himmel Eller. *These Evangelical United Brethren* (Dayton, Ohio: Otterbein Press, 1963), 31 and 33. <https://archive.org/details/theseevangelical0000elle/mode/1up>
13. Orwig, *History of the Evangelical Association*, 15-16.
14. Yeakel, *History of the Evangelical Association*, 37.
15. Orwig, *History of the Evangelical Association*, 16-35.
16. Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism*, 8, 9-10, 11, 13, 17-18, 20.
17. Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism*, 33, 39, 40-41.
18. "Statistics of Churches," Census Bureau Bulletin No. 195, June 24, 1892: 1. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1890/bulletins/churches/195-statistics-of-churches.pdf>
19. Frank Ross Blakeley, "The Evangelical Association as a Factor in the Development of the West" (master's thesis, Northwestern University, 1914), 22-27. <https://archive.org/details/EVwmTheEvangelicalAssociationAsAFactorInTheDevelopmentOfTheWest/mode/2up>
20. Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism*, 34-56.
21. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 166.
22. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 168-169, 459, 179, 181, 177.
23. Carl Frederick Wittke. *William Nast: Patriarch of German Methodism* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1960), 86. <https://archive.org/details/williamnastpatri0000witt/page/86/mode/1up>
24. Wittke, *William Nast*, 89, 91.
25. Wittke, *William Nast*, 86-88.
26. For a history of the controversy within the church, see Ralph Kendall Schwab. "The History of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection in the Evangelical Association" (doctor's thesis, Graduate Divinity School, The University of Chicago, 1922). <https://dn790002.ca.archive.org/0/items/cu31924031451606/cu31924031451606.pdf>
27. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 325.
28. Utzinger, *History of the Minnesota Conference*, 252.
29. <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1915?amount=73915>.
30. In fact, two of its periodicals only remained in publication for a few years. Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism*, 228.
31. Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism*, 225-234.
32. Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism*, 228.
33. (Cleveland, Ohio: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1882), 16-17.
34. See Section III, The Doctrine of Christian Perfection in *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical Association of North America* (Cleveland, Ohio: Publishing House of the Evangelical Association, 1882), 16-22.
35. "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/a-plain-account-of-christian-perfection/>.
36. *The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, Revised and Approved at the General Conference Held at Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, in November, 1792 in which Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury Presided*, 8th ed. (Philadelphia: Parry Hall, 1892). <https://divinityarchive.com/handle/11258/16726>
37. Bishop Andrews, ed. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church: 1900* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1900).
38. Wittke, *William Nast*, 157.
39. Wittke, *William Nast*, 78.

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40. Minnesota Historical Society, 1977. Microfilm. Reels 1-47 and 107-164. Minnesota. *Minnesota Territorial Census Schedules, 1849-1855*. St. Paul, MN, USA.
41. See Thelma Balinger Boeder, comp., "Planting United Methodist Roots in Minnesota, 1837-2018: summarizing attempts, successes and outcomes" <https://www.minnesotaumc.org/files/websites/www/Planting+UM+roots+in+MN.pdf>
42. My count.
43. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 316.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 319.
46. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism*, 81
47. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism*, 88.
48. "Xenophobia: American Nativism" <https://library.indianapolis.iu.edu/static/collections/kade/adams/chap9.html#:~:text=The%204.9%20million%20immigrants%20who,waiting%20period%20for%20citizenship%20had>.
49. "Destination America: When Did They Come?" https://www.pbs.org/destinationamerica/usim_wn_noflash_2.html#:~:text=Many%20Germans%20were%20fed%20up,ancestry%20than%20any%20other%20group.
50. Lorraine Esterly Pierce. *Marching Through Immanuel's Ground: The Evangelical Church on the Minnesota Prairie* (East Lansing, Michigan: RLE Press, 1999), 195-196.
51. Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism*, 208-209.
52. At the Evangelical Association's 1915 General Conference, two delegates were appointed as "reporters for the local press," *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 22.
53. July 4, 1883, 3. Database and images: Newspapers.com
54. News of these was featured in numerous newspapers such as "A World's Convention," *The Minneapolis Journal*, April 17, 1899, 7 and "A World's Convention," *Willmer Tribune*, April 26, 1899, 11. Database and images: Newspapers.com.
55. See for example, the *Star Tribune*, September 19, 1885, 5 and *The Saint Paul Globe*, June 15, 1886, 2. Database and images: Newspapers.com.
56. "The Sociable Oxfords," May 29, 1889, 2. Database and images: Newspapers.com
57. "Rev. August Lutz Excommunication," *The Duluth News Tribune*, April 29, 1910, 2. Database and images: Newspapers.com
58. *The Minneapolis Journal*, September 2, 1887, 3. Database and images: Newspapers.com
59. Boeder, "Planting United Methodist Roots."
60. My count.
61. My count.
62. Joshua Hollingsead, "Prejudice and Purging: World War I and the Demise of the German Methodist Church in America," "<https://www.mckendree.edu/academics/scholars/issue7/hollingsead.htm#:~:text=The%20German%20Methodist%20Church%2C%20a,to%20the%20missions%20of%20Methodism>."
63. Boeder, "Planting United Methodist Roots."
64. Boeder, "Planting United Methodist Roots."
65. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism*, 242.
66. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism*, xiii.
67. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 165-166.
68. "Statistics of Churches," Census Bureau Bulletin No. 195, 1.
69. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism*, 224.
70. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 43.

71. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 157.
72. Utzinger, *History of the Minnesota Conference*, 240.
73. Yeakel, *History of the Evangelical Association*, 475; Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism*, 74.
74. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 482-484. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 47.
75. Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism*, 172.
76. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 260.
77. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 330, 347.
78. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism*, 211; *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 27.
79. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism*, 207-211.
80. Johnson. "Factors Influencing the Distribution of the German Pioneer Population in Minnesota," 40-41.
81. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism*, 22, 33.
82. Douglas, *The Story of German Methodism*, 94.
83. Orwig, *History of the Evangelical Association*, 393-394.
84. See, for example, Utzinger, *History of the Minnesota Conference*, 121.
85. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 157.
86. *Ibid.*
87. See, for example, the listing for Hay Creek Evangelical Association in Boeder, "Planting United Methodist Roots."
88. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 143-144.
89. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 54.
90. See "Vital Statistics of German Methodism by Decades: 1858-1928," Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism*, 221-224. The statistics are given by Conference. In many Conferences the number of "scholars" was less than the number of members, and in others the number of "scholars" only marginally exceeded those of members.
91. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 38-39.
92. *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference*, 157.
93. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 360. At the 1915 General Conference the presiding bishop stated "The session of 1867 was a memorable one.—a man of great influence had for years systematically labored to change the doctrinal basis of the Evangelical Association.—However, the General Conference of 1867 reiterated the doctrine of our Discipline as the biblical doctrine of the Church and stood firm as a rock, and we remained Evangelical instead of becoming Lutherans."
94. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 379.
95. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 448.
96. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 601.
97. "The Escher-Dubbs Fight: Big Evangelical Row in Court at Des Moines," 1. Database and images: Newspapers.com.
98. Stapleton, *Annals of the Evangelical Association*, 270, 362, 376.
99. Precise figures for the Deaconess Hospital operated by the Evangelical Association are available in the *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth General Conference* (110). Individuals of twenty-three different nationalities and thirty-two different religious persuasions were served. Of the latter, Lutherans and Catholics were the most numerous, but patients included 102 Jews and 192 of no religion.