

Archival Developments in the Lutheran Churches in the United States¹

By MABEL DEUTRICH

National Archives

IT is difficult to obtain a clear picture of the archives of Lutheran churches in the United States because these churches lack a unified organization. There are now in this country three large but loosely knit Lutheran bodies: The Synodical Conference, the American Lutheran Conference, and the United Lutheran Church. This organization, with its many subdivisions as indicated below, has evolved only after many divisions and shifts among the component bodies.

Two significant factors must be considered in appraising the archives of Lutheran churches in the United States. First, their archives by no means exhaust the historical evidences of these denominations. The Lutheran churches in Europe were State churches, and the State archives supplement those of the church. In this country many of the early church records are likewise inextricably tied up with records of the local and Federal Governments because, as a rule, colonial leaders were prominent in both church and government. The second factor demanding consideration is that none of the synods is old in the historical sense. The Wisconsin Synod (a part of the Synodical Conference), for example, did not reach its 100th anniversary until 1950. In most organizations, governmental or otherwise, no concerted systematized provisions for archival management are normally made during their early periods, and this was the case in the Lutheran churches.

It is the practice among Lutheran churches for each parish to be responsible for its own records. The constitution, rules, or bylaws of individual congregations usually, if not always, make the preservation of records mandatory upon the pastor. Records are usually

¹ Based on a term paper prepared by Miss Deutrich in January 1950 for the class in History and Administration of Archives, American University, Washington, D. C. Miss Deutrich obtained most of her information on the depositories and their holdings from correspondence with librarians, archivists, and other church officials and from church publications. Some of the historical sources are listed as footnotes.

stored in the church office, the parsonage, or, in some cases, in the basement of the church. Lutheran congregations pride themselves on their independence of action and their right to withdraw or change their affiliations. Consequently they have been slow to establish central archival depositories. They have not yet been harassed by records storage problems, although they have experienced a lack of adequate available records when preparing anniversary or commemorative volumes. Writers of Lutheran histories, realizing their need for Lutheran archives, have aided in the collection and preservation of historical documents. That the concept of archives as held by many of the Lutheran synods has not yet developed beyond the stage of considering them as sources for the historian is illustrated by the enumeration of holdings given below.

CENTRAL ARCHIVAL DEPOSITORIES OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE

This conference, now consisting of the Missouri, Wisconsin, Norwegian, and Slovak Synods, was formed in July 1872 by the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods, assisted by the Ohio Synod. The latter withdrew in 1881 and later became a part of the American Lutheran Church.

The Missouri Synod

This synod grew out of the second wave of Lutheran colonization that began in the 1840's. Under the leadership of Pastor C. F. W. Walther, German colonists who came from Saxony and adhered to a strict Lutheran orthodoxy developed into the compact and powerful body of the Missouri Synod, the largest and most important member of the Synodical Conference. The synod has designated the Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis as the official depository for its records. The institute was organized in 1927

to cultivate a more general interest in the history of the Lutheran Church of America, particularly of the Ev. Luth. Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States; to stimulate historical research and to publish its results; to collect and preserve articles of historical value. . . .²

In some instances it has gone outside its synodical limits by collecting Reformation and medieval documents as well as museum pieces.

The archives are under the charge of a curator appointed by the institute's board of directors. The curator is under the direct super-

² Letter from the Curator, Concordia Historical Institute, 801 De Mun Avenue, St. Louis 5, Mo., dated Nov. 11, 1949: Enclosure, "Constitution and By-laws of the Concordia Historical Institute."

vision of a three-man executive committee appointed by the board. The constitution of the institute provides that the curator shall

(1) have direct charge of and be responsible for the Library, archives, museum, and all tangible property of the Institute.

(2) be on the look-out for historical documents relative to the history of Christianity, particularly of the Lutheran Church (especially of the Missouri Synod), and shall negotiate for their transfer or loan to the Institute.

(3) supervise the archives of the Institute, classifying and cataloging all manuscript records, also maps, photographs and other pictures pertaining to the history of Christianity and particularly to the Lutheran Church, until the Institute elects an archivist to take over these duties.

(4) properly arrange and label the historical exhibits owned by or loaned to the Institute.

(5) with the consent of the Executive Committee draw up rules and regulations for the admission of the public or of interested visitors to the exhibit room or rooms.

(6) report to the Executive Committee at its quarterly meetings and submit a detailed written report once a year to the Board of Directors and a condensed report to the triennial meeting of the Institute.

Deposit of material in the synodical archives is entirely optional. Among the holdings are district and synodical reports, the Saxon immigration documents, and other information of interest to the Missouri Synod. At present the records are housed in one of the buildings of the Concordia Seminary, but plans have been started for a permanent institute building to house the collections. The institute's first president, Louis H. Walthe, has left two legacies for this purpose. The present and fifth curator is the Rev. August R. Suelflow.

In addition to the synod's archives in the institute each of the 34 synod districts has its own archives and its own archivist.

Wisconsin Synod

This synod was organized in 1850 by a group of German colonists who had settled near Milwaukee. In 1892 the Minnesota and Michigan Synods joined with the Wisconsin Synod to form the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States. Although considerably smaller than the Missouri Synod, it is much larger than the other two synods in the conference. Only recently, however, has it reached the formative stage in establishing a central archives. In May 1949 a committee under the chairmanship of Adalbert Schaller, the librarian of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Thiensville, Wis., was appointed to study the matter. A synod archives was established at the seminary in November 1951,

and Rev. Raymond Huth, pastor of the Messiah Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, has been appointed acting archivist.

THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

This conference was formed in October 1930 at a meeting in Minneapolis of the American Lutheran Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Augustana Synod, the Lutheran Free Church, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (Danish).

The American Lutheran Church

This church was organized on August 11, 1930, as a merger of the Ohio, Iowa, and Buffalo Synods. These earlier synods had been organized by immigrants, principally German and Swedish, who began arriving in the 1840's. The Ohio Synod, originally a member of the Synodical Conference, withdrew from that body in 1881 and allied itself with the Iowa Synod, which had been organized in 1854.

The central archives for the American Lutheran Church was established some 10 years ago and is on the campus of Wartburg Theological Seminary at Dubuque, Iowa. Under the supervision of Elizabeth Reu, archivist and librarian, they are housed in one room, which is equipped with modern steel shelves and cardboard filing boxes. In the near future, however, another larger room, to be utilized as a storehouse for the archives, will be made available. The present room will then be used as a reading room and for the shelving of books written by American Lutheran Church people and for bound materials, such as magazines.

These central archives contain the historical material of the old Iowa, Buffalo, and Ohio Synods, all of which is dated prior to 1930. Efforts are being made to procure records of permanent value. When project and committee reports are completed they are to be deposited in the central archives. The archivist of the Church has appointed 12 archivists throughout the country to locate and forward material to the central depository. After these records have been placed under the custody of the central archives they may not be withdrawn but may be used under supervision. The archives include biographical information on pastors, professors, and other leaders of the American Lutheran Church; pictures; and other historical background records, including blueprints of old churches and papers taken from their cornerstones.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church

This church, formerly the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, was formed in 1917 through the consolidation of the Synod of

the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Hauge's Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod,³ and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. A small group of Norwegians, protesting this merger, withdrew and now belong to the Synodical Conference.

The Rolvaag Memorial Library at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn., is the principal depository for the Norwegian church archives. A large portion of this material has been assembled over a long period of years under the supervision of Dr. O. M. Norlie. In addition the archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association are housed in the library, which is fireproof. Included in this collection are fairly complete files of various synodical publications and some letters, as well as books, dealing with the development and history of synods organized and maintained by the Norwegian-American groups in the United States.

Two other locations at which archival material is located are the Luther Theological Seminary at St. Paul, Minn., and the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America at Minneapolis, Minn. The material at the seminary is housed in the three-story library, a nonfireproof brick building constructed in 1902 in which space for the archives is inadequate. Among the holdings is the original proposed draft of the 1896 constitution for the United Norwegian Lutheran Church Seminary, a few letters and articles written by church officials, about 255 volumes of theses, some lecture notes, and two scrapbooks.⁴

The holdings of the church in Minneapolis are under the custody of the president and secretary of the church. They are housed in a two-story, brick, nonfireproof annex attached to the Augsburg Publishing House. The archives contain data on the merger of the three synods to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, minutes of joint meetings of the synod and of the union committee, and other notes, articles, reports, correspondence, leaflets, and newspaper clippings. There is also material gathered by N. J. Lohre for an official handbook of the church, including correspondence regarding its publication and suggested changes, 1918-21. Professor L. Lillehei of the Augsburg Seminary has collected a considerable

³ Named after Hans Nielsen Hauge. In 1875 the Evangelical Lutheran Church took the name Hauge Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church. Dissatisfaction at this step caused a split in the following year that left two synods: The Hauge Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church (Eilsen's Synod).

⁴ WPA, Division of Community Service Programs, Minnesota Historical Records Survey Project, *Guide to Depositories of Manuscript Collections in the United States: Minnesota* (St. Paul, Mar. 1941), p. 58.

amount of archival material, much of which pertains to the Lutheran Free Church.

An appreciable amount of archival material is in the Luther College Library at Decorah, Iowa. Luther College was the main institution of one of the synods that formed the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1917.

Augustana Synod

The Rev. Lars Paul Esbjorn, father of the synod, arrived in this country in the fall of 1849, and in the following year he organized a church of 10 members at Andover, Ill. In 1851 the Swedish Lutherans, under his leadership, joined with certain American, Norwegian, and German groups to organize the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Northern Illinois. On June 5, 1860, the Scandinavians withdrew to form the Augustana Synod at Clinton, Wis., and, since the withdrawal of the Norwegians 10 years later, Augustana has remained a Swedish synod. In 1930 it became a member of the American Lutheran Conference.

The central archives of the Augustana Synod are in three rooms on the top floor of the Augustana College Library (Denkmann Library) at Rock Island, Ill. The Manuscript Room contains official manuscript records, correspondence that is partially indexed, and papers and manuscripts of individuals; the Newspaper Room contains approximately 600 Scandinavian-American newspapers, with appropriate card indexes; and the Book Room contains printed records of the synod together with related publications, all of which have been card-indexed. An inventory of the archives was published by installments in the *Augustana Quarterly* throughout a period of years until that publication was discontinued in December 1948. Material in the archives is regarded as on loan from the depositing congregation and may be borrowed by the depositor when needed. Individual requests for data, however, are supplied from the records by the archivist, who transcribes the desired information.

Archival development in the Augustana Synod is distinctive in that it made a very early beginning. The Rev. Paul Lars Esbjorn brought with him from Sweden a record book (*Kyrkobok*) for the purpose of recording his ministerial activities, although he made no entries through fear of the Swedish State church. The following quotations, translated by Dr. Ira O. Nothstein from the printed records of synodical minutes for the dates indicated, also show the early awareness of the value and need for the preservation of records:

1864. Resolved: That such books and documents, belonging to the synod,

as are not used at the synodical meetings or do not need to be consulted by the secretary, be preserved in a special department of the Seminary library, and that the secretary keep a record of such books and documents.

1865. Resolved: (1) That each pastor be earnestly requested to prepare a carefully written account of the congregations which are under his care, regarding the first settlement, the organization of the congregation, church buildings, condition, pastors who worked there and other things which could be of interest. (2) That each pastor send a written copy of such account to the Augustana Seminary Library in Paxton, to be preserved for the use of the congregations and for future generations. (3) That these accounts, in order to help in keeping them together and keeping them classified, be written on foliopaper. (4) That these accounts be sent in within this synodical year.

1866. On motion a standing committee, to gather historical documents, was appointed, and consists of E. Norelius, O. J. Hatlestad, J. Sweneson, O. Andrewson and Wm. Kopp.

1869. The historical committee wishes the privilege of reporting, that during the past year it continued to gather historical information about our various congregations and settlements of value to the history of our synod; but it has not yet arranged them in the hope of receiving many more communications. The committee moves that the synod now abolish this committee and in place of it name one or more historiegrafers for the synod for a longer, unlimited time and that they be reminded from time to time, that after they find that their work is done, they shall lay the results before the synod. . . . Pastor E. Norelius was elected as the synod's "Historiegraf," and all the members of the synod were urged, whenever they could gather any historical data to send them to Pastor E. Norelius.

This, then, was the beginning of the office of archivist in the Augustana Synod.

In 1886 the synod passed a resolution electing C. M. Esbjorn, a professor at Augustana College and a son of Lars Paul Esbjorn, as synod archivist. How much Professor Esbjorn accomplished is not known because he left the school soon afterwards. He did, however, before his death collect historical material for a biography of his father. This collection is now in Augustana's archives.

Pastor Erik Norelius contributed more than any other of the early pastors toward developing an interest in the records and history of the Swedish Lutherans. In connection with his greatest literary work, a comprehensive 2-volume history of the Swedish Lutheran Church,⁵ Norelius carefully collected and preserved manu-

⁵ Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Synod, *The Beginnings and Progress of Minnesota Conference of the Lutheran Augustana Synod of America* (Minneapolis: The Lund Press, 1929), p. 255.

The title of the history is given as *De Svenska Lutherska Forsamlingarnas och*

scripts and documents on the early Swedish Lutherans. After his death in 1915 most of his collection was purchased by the Augustana Synod and is now a part of its central archives.

The early aggressive action taken by the synod has not been evident since 1915. The synod failed to appoint an archivist after the death of Dr. Norelius, but the responsibility of collecting historical documents was voluntarily assumed by Dr. C. W. Foss, a professor at Augustana College. Dr. Foss, who did little more than collect printed materials such as minutes of meetings and Swedish-American newspapers, was eventually given the title of archivist but received no salary for these services. For some years before his death in 1935 Dr. Foss had not been active in archival work.

In 1918 Dr. Ira O. Nothstein became head librarian of the Augustana College and Theological Seminary. As librarian, he was the custodian of the growing collection of historical documents deposited in the library. Since his retirement in 1935, Dr. Nothstein has been assisting in the library on a part-time basis, spending approximately 2 hours a day in the college archives. For the past 2 years he has also received remuneration from the Augustana Historical Society for another 2 hours of daily archival work. In this manner he has acquired the title of "archivist" of the Augustana Synod, but since there has been no synodical action in this respect he is still officially only the college archivist. Plans have been made for the erection of a new Augustana Seminary library in which there will be provision for adequate housing of the synodical archives. When these plans materialize it is to be hoped that there will be a reawakening of interest and that a synodical archivist will be appointed.

In addition to the central archives at Augustana College, other records are being collected throughout the synod. The Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Synod maintains an archival department at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minn., in conjunction with the college archives. The records are housed in the new (1948) college library building in quarters, including a large vault, designed specifically for that purpose. Prior to 1943 the records were under the custody of the librarian, but during that year Dr. Joshua Larson was appointed as archivist. Dr. Larson died in August 1949, and no one has been appointed to succeed him. At present the work is handled by the college library staff and the Minnesota Conference secretary, Rev. Emeroy Johnson. Since the archives are joint hold-

Svenskarnas Historia i Amerika, one volume of which appeared in 1890 and the other in 1916.

ings of the college and the conference the archivist is named and supported jointly.

The holdings at Gustavus Adolphus College include the minutes of the Minnesota Conference from 1858; correspondence and papers from the presidents of both bodies; college archives beginning in 1876 that include financial records, correspondence, minutes of meetings of faculty and trustees, and applications for admittance; records of various college organizations from 1880, minutes of meetings, membership lists, and financial records; and a collection of Swedish historical material, together with a small part of the Norelius collection. In connection with the archives there is also an historical museum.

Upsala College at East Orange, N. J., has been collecting and preserving archival material for the college and the New York and New England Conferences to supplement those at Augustana College. They hope soon to construct a new chapel and if this becomes a reality there will be suitable space and quarters for their archives. The archives maintained by Bethany College at Lindsborg, Kans., relate specifically to the college and the Kansas Conference.

THE UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH

The United Lutheran Church in America was formed in 1917 as a merger of the General Council, the General Synod, and the United Synod from the South. The most important of these, the General Synod and the General Council, developed from the Ministerium of Pennsylvania, which was organized under the leadership of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg in 1748. Lutheran colonization during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was generally restricted to the Pennsylvania-Delaware area. Dutch Lutherans settled in New York in 1623, Swedish Lutherans in the vicinity of Philadelphia and Wilmington in 1638, and German Lutherans on the banks of the Wissahickon between Philadelphia and Reading in 1694. The German Lutherans received spiritual help and guidance, church supplies, and pastors from Halle, a vigorous center of European Lutheran Pietism dominated by August Hermann Francke and his son, Gotthilf August Francke.⁶ Sweden's failure to supply pastors for her own and for the Dutch settlements allowed most of these early churches to be swallowed up in later years by the Episcopal Church. Largely as a result of the arrival in 1742 of the competent

⁶ A report by Daniel Falckner, one of the colonists' leaders, on the civil and religious progress of the colony is preserved in the archives of the orphanage (the Hallisches Waisenhaus) established by Francke in Glaucha, Germany. Considerable portions of the manuscripts in the Glaucha orphanage are available in photostat form in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

church administrator, Muhlenberg, the German Lutheran churches maintained their independence and strengthened their organization.

The two depositories of the United Lutheran Church are at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia (Mt. Airy), Pa., and the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pa. Little information has been obtained regarding the archives held by the seminary at Gettysburg. There is, however, some information regarding the collection of the Lutheran Historical Society of Gettysburg in William Henry Allison's *Inventory of Unpublished Material for American Religious History in Protestant Church Archives and Other Repositories*, p. 165-173 (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution of America, 1910). In the Philadelphia seminary are the archives of the Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania, the archives of the Pittsburgh Synod of the United Lutheran Church, and the archives of the United Lutheran Church in America. These collections are housed in a fireproof vault of the seminary library, which was constructed shortly before 1910.

The archives of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania are fairly complete from 1801 and have been kept in a systematic fashion. The official documents have been recorded in a manuscript catalog. Among the collections of the Ministerium are various documents concerning the General Council; transcripts from archival documents in Halle, Germany; minutes of various committees, boards, and conferences; papers connected with several trials and disciplinary cases with which the churches were concerned; historical sketches of various Lutheran churches; diaries; biographical sketches on several ministers; letters; and personal collections. One of the collections, known as Muhlenbergiana, consists of the correspondence, journals, and other papers of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg. His record book opens with a statement of his arrival, credentials, and the date of his introductory sermon (November 28, 1742), and his journals begin with his voyage to America and continue to June 16, 1785. All of the archivists of the Ministerium have been resident professors in the seminary, the first appointed about 1810. The ninth and present archivist is Theodore G. Tapert.

ARCHIVES MAINTAINED BY INDIVIDUAL CHURCHES

The most important and prominent of the early Swedish Lutheran churches was the Gloria Dei at Wicacoa in Philadelphia. An earlier building was replaced in 1700 by an imposing brick structure which at that time surpassed all other structures in the area.

Information on the arrival and activities of many of the early pastors has been preserved in the archives of Gloria Dei. In 1697 Pastors Andreas Rudman and Erick Bjorck arrived from Sweden, Rudman becoming pastor of Gloria Dei and Bjorck of the church at Wilmington, the second most important Swedish church. The original letter from the Swedish archbishop, containing the official authorization and assignment of these two pastors, is preserved in the archives of Gloria Dei. The records from 1737 to 1741, while John Dylander was pastor, are so complete that it is even known what books the pastors had in their studies.⁷ Nils Collin, the last Swedish pastor, arrived in 1770 and was in charge of the Gloria Dei Church until his death in 1831. After his death this church, among other Swedish churches, was taken over by the Episcopal church.

Trinity Lutheran Church (now St. Matthew's) in New York City is the oldest Lutheran congregation in America. Pastor Justus Falckner, who accompanied his older brother Daniel on his return to the colonies in 1700, had considerable theological training prior to his arrival in Pennsylvania. He was ordained according to Swedish ritual in Gloria Dei on November 24, 1703, and within a month was accepted as the regular pastor by Trinity Lutheran. Although ordained by the Swedes and according to Swedish ritual, Falckner was a German Lutheran, so it was natural for this church to have become affiliated with the German Lutherans when the Swedish church declined. One of Falckner's first acts was to deposit his diploma of ordination among the archives of the church. This document, as well as some others of the church, has been lost or destroyed, although a copy, along with other documents, is in the archives room of the old Lutheran church in Amsterdam. The church register of the Trinity congregation, opened by Justus Falckner, is the oldest systematic Lutheran record in America. In this book he recorded his ministerial acts irrespective of where they were administered. The inventory of church papers, consisting of several bundles of documents labeled "Church Papers," Packet I, II, etc., has disappeared. A list of the archives in the church in 1910 is given in William Henry Allison's book mentioned above.

The records in the archives of the Gloria Dei and the other Swedish churches presumably were retained in them and constitute archival holdings of the Episcopal church. This explains the great interest displayed by the Episcopalians in the records of the early

⁷ Theodore Emanuel Schmauk, *The Lutheran Church in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: General Council Publishing House, 1903), p. 46 and 58.

Lutheran settlers. The old Trinity Lutheran Church in New York, in which Justus Falckner played so important a role, escaped absorption, but the missing records of this church, referred to above, have been searched for perhaps as diligently by Episcopalian authorities as by the Lutherans.

THE FUTURE AND LUTHERAN CHURCH ARCHIVES

Although the preservation and administration of some of the archives of the Lutheran churches have been provided for in a commendable manner, others have not yet reached this stage of development. Since there are many additional small collections in locations other than those mentioned in this paper, and no doubt there are many church reports, pamphlets, and documents of enduring value that are presently being destroyed because of their seeming lack of importance to the present generation, consideration might well be given to the consolidation and centralization of some of the holdings. Such general archival agencies would permit housing of the archives in structures specifically constructed for this purpose and serviced by competent professional staffs in a manner which would insure the oversight, preservation, and availability of material to ministers, other church officials, and research students. The records would thus be more accessible and the various collections would supplement each other. The central agencies would be custodians of the records, ownership being retained by the present organizations, but the economy of such an arrangement would permit housing under more ideal conditions and permit the purchase of equipment for physical preservation and for photostatic, microfilming, and other reproduction processes. Effective central organizations would be able to provide valuable reference service to the synods, conferences, and individual parishes and would no doubt be able to locate and salvage many archival treasures. The Presbyterian Church of the United States (southern) has established a modern central depository at Montreat, N. C., called the Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches; and the United Church of Canada has recently been very successful in its consolidation and collection of church archives at Victoria University, Toronto. Some such similar general archival agency might well be considered by each of the three large Lutheran bodies.