



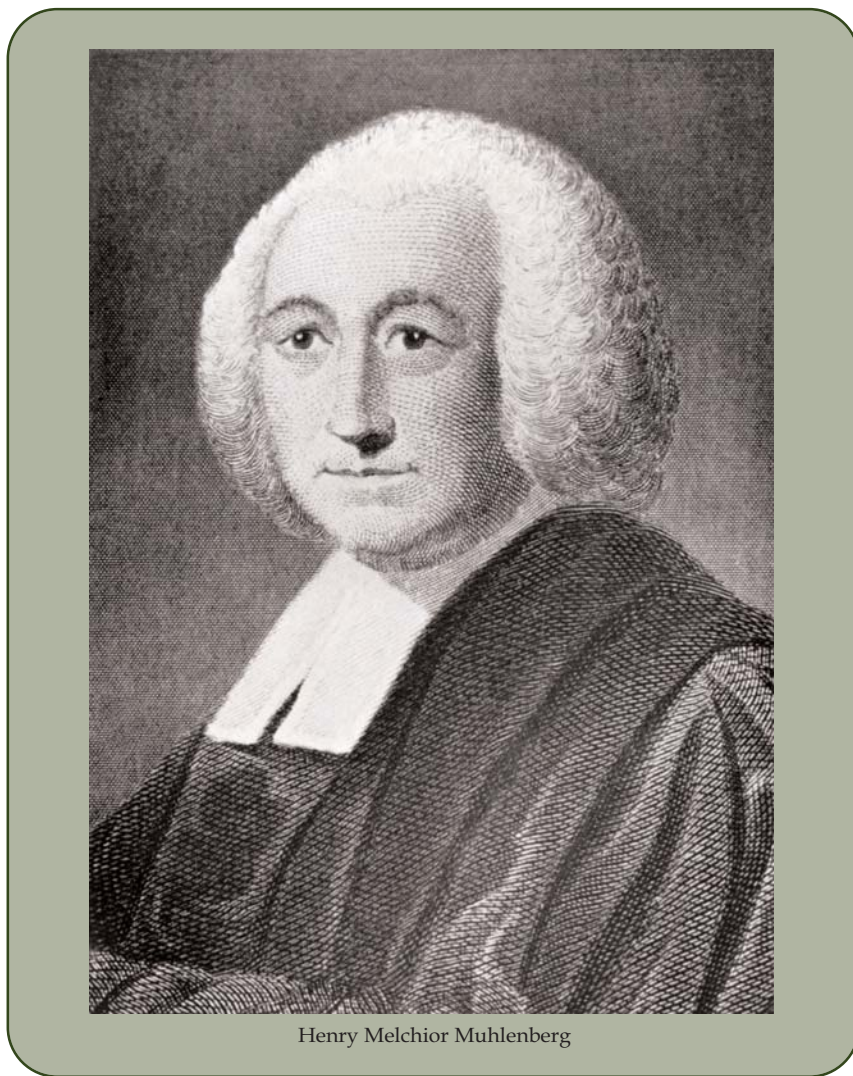
## HENRY MELCHIOR MUHLENBERG: PATRIARCH OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

**T**wo significant anniversaries in the Lutheran church will occur later this year celebrating the births of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg and C. F. W.

Walther. While many members of the Missouri Synod have heard of Walther, a founder of the Missouri Synod who guided our fledgling church body in its earliest days, fewer perhaps have heard of Muhlenberg. (This is not surprising considering that Muhlenberg's arrival in America predates the founding of the Missouri Synod by over one hundred years!) Although Muhlenberg has no direct ties to our Synod, his life and accomplishments—especially that of founding the first Lutheran church body in America—are still highly important to Missouri Synod and American Lutheran history. In fact, Muhlenberg is truly the patriarch of the Lutheran church in America.

Heinrich Melchior Mühlenberg was born on September 6, 1711, to Nicolas and Ann Maria (Kleinschmidt) Mühlenberg in the free city of Einbeck, Hanover, in the Holy Roman Empire. Henry did not have an easy childhood. His education was highly important to his parents and he was educated in the German and Latin school in Einbeck, where he excelled. His schooling ended abruptly at the age of twelve when his father died. Henry was forced to leave his studies to help his family by doing manual labor. He resumed his studies at the age of twenty-one through private instruction and three years later enrolled in the University of Göttingen with the support of patrons. He graduated in 1737 and took a position teaching at an orphan school in Halle, Germany.

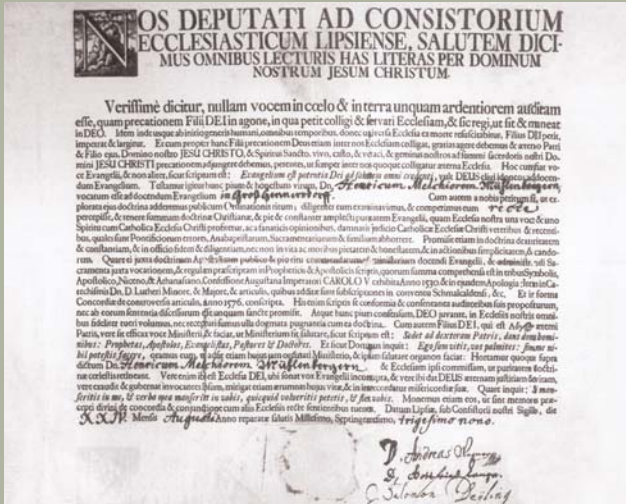
Shortly thereafter, Muhlenberg faced an important decision—what call was God leading him toward? He was first called to serve as a missionary in India, but his commissioning was delayed. Meanwhile he received another call, this



Henry Melchior Muhlenberg

time to serve as a pastor and teacher in Grosshennersdorf in Upper Lusatia. Muhlenberg accepted this call despite some reservations. He was examined and ordained in August of 1739 in Leipzig and proceeded to Grosshennersdorf, where he served for two years before receiving yet another call. G. A. Francke, the head of the institutions back in Halle, offered Muhlenberg a three-year call to serve as pastor of three German Lutheran congregations in Pennsylvania—Philadelphia, New Hanover, and Providence (later called Trappe). He accepted and began on his path to becoming the patriarch of the Lutheran church in America.

(continued from page 1)



Photocopy of the ordination certificate of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg from the Leipzig Consistory dated August 24, 1739. Original is in the Krauth Memorial Library, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Henry Melchior Muhlenberg preaching at Trappe

After a long, arduous and at times dangerous journey, Muhlenberg finally set foot in Philadelphia in late November 1742. The journey was not the only difficulty he would face. Muhlenberg soon learned that his congregations were following self-appointed pseudo-pastors and that some members had converted to other religious sects. For quite some time, these other pastors challenged Muhlenberg's authority and the authenticity of his call. Muhlenberg quickly learned that the ways of the New World were vastly different from those in his homeland. In Pennsylvania, a land that was founded on freedom of religion, Muhlenberg found no support from the government in dealing with his opponents. Another early challenge facing Muhlenberg was his finances, or lack thereof. He reached Pennsylvania to find that his congregations were in dire financial straits and were unable to pay him enough to cover his rent, clothe himself or buy the horse he needed in order to travel the distances among the congregations. He quickly found himself in debt, but God provided for him in 1746 when monies from a collection taken in Europe reached him and he was able to work his way slowly out of debt.

Despite these early setbacks, Muhlenberg persevered. He overcame his rivals and began serving as the pastor and teacher at all three congregations. Under his leadership, each congregation grew as he gathered more German Lutherans in the area and each was soon able to build a permanent building in which to worship. Muhlenberg did not only minister to these three congregations, but he also traveled to outlying areas, even as far as New York, New Jersey, Maryland and Georgia, to bring God's Word and the sacraments to other German

Lutheran immigrants.

Gathering Lutherans together and starting new congregations was not enough for Muhlenberg. He saw the need to unite the Lutheran congregations in eastern Pennsylvania by forming an organized church body. Others had attempted such a feat, but Muhlenberg was the first to succeed. In August 1748, after careful thought and much planning on Muhlenberg's part, the founding convention of the first permanent Lutheran church body in America was held. The organization founded is most commonly referred to as the Pennsylvania Ministerium.

Muhlenberg saw this first assembly as a trial and test to see if an organization would work and it did. Three major principles were decided upon at this convention: to have regular, creditable ordination of pastors; that the Lutheran Confessions would be the basis for the ministerium's beliefs and practices; and to develop a common form of worship. In addition, education was also given high priority. Concern was expressed for Christian education in the congregations, as well as noting the need for a theological training school since the organization had to rely on new candidates being trained in Europe, limiting the number of new pastors.

Not only was Muhlenberg the architect of this first assembly, but he was also chosen as the church body's first leader. In the following years he guided and led the synod as it grew and prospered, all the while continuing to serve his three parishes and conducting missionary journeys far and wide, establishing new congregations. His other accomplishments include preparing a common liturgy in 1748—a difficult task due to the diversity of regions from which the members of the congregations



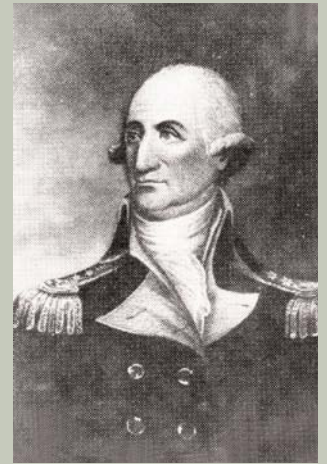
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Muhlenberg kept extensive journals throughout his life. Here is an excerpt dated November 5, 1748, describing the difficulties of his extensive travels: "I am worn out from much riding; I am incapacitated for study; I cannot even manage my own household because I must be away most of the time." (From *Notebook of a Colonial Clergyman*)



Gotthilf Henry Ernest  
Muhlenberg



John Peter Gabriel  
Muhlenberg

came – as well as helping to prepare a hymnbook for the synod, which was first produced in 1786. Due to increasing health issues in his later years, Muhlenberg retired to his home near Trappe in 1776, though by no means did he fully end his ministry. After an almost fifty-year ministry, Muhlenberg was called home to his Savior on October 7, 1787.

Muhlenberg, though considered a patriarch of the whole Lutheran church in America, was also the patriarch of his own family. In April 1745 he married Anna Maria Weiser, beginning a marriage that lasted forty-two years. They had eleven children, seven of whom reached adulthood. His three sons followed him into the ministry and became just as famous, or even more so, as their father. Muhlenberg's oldest son, John Peter Gabriel, was serving as a pastor in Virginia when he exchanged his pulpit robes for a military uniform to become a colonel and later a general in the Continental Army. Another son, Frederick Augustus Conrad, similarly left the pulpit to serve his country, not in the mil-

itary, but as a member of the Continental Congress and later as Speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives. Muhlenberg's third son to enter the ministry, Gotthilf Henry Ernest, remained a pastor, but gained notice in his own right as a botanist, discovering more than one hundred new plants. In celebration of the 300th anniversary of the birth of this patriarch, Concordia Historical Institute, along with Concordia Seminary, will host a traveling exhibit from the Francke Foundations in Halle which details Muhlenberg's life and ministry. It will be in the galleries of CHI from April 26 to May 13, 2011. The opening on the evening of April 26 will include two lectures by seminary professors followed by a reception and viewing of the exhibit at CHI, all of which will be open to the public.

If you would like more information about the exhibit or the opening events, please call (314-505-7900) or email ([chi@lutheranhistory.org](mailto:chi@lutheranhistory.org)).



First church in Trappe, 1743



Muhlenberg taught at this orphan school in Halle.

## WALTHER'S DESKS: A PRIMER ON THE AMERICAN LUTHER

**T**hey called him Ferdinand. His full name was Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther. In Lutheran circles he is known as C. F. W. Walther or simply, Walther. This eighth child of Gottlob and Johanna (Zschenderlein) was born in Langenchursdorf, Germany, on October 25, 1811. Twelve children were born to the union, though the parents outlived all but three.

His father was the pastor at the church in Langenchursdorf, as was his father before him. The first son to reach adulthood, Otto, would follow in his father's footsteps as well. Ferdinand was two years Otto's junior, but had no idea what good works God had planned in advance for him to do. He was a lover of music, and a fine pianist and composer, but in typical self-deprecating fashion he wrote in his diary, "I feel that I am born for nothing but music, within which I don't see myself making any headway. . . . Besides, the only instrument that I can play is the piano and that is certainly most pitiful." He was equally modest about his work as a scholar. After receiving praise for his academic gifts he penned this remark: "I am very much afraid of the moment when that error will be discovered."



D. Walther an der Orgel der Kreuzkirche.

**Luther:**  
"Human reason is like a drunken man on horseback: set it up on one side and it tumbles over on the other."



Luther at Wartburg

Walther sat at many a desk. At the age of seven he went to school six miles down the road at Hohenstein. At ten he began his eight years at the *Lateinschule* in Schneeberg. Here he stayed with his older sister and her husband, who was an associate principal and teacher there. In 1829 he began his studies at Leipzig University. As he sat at these school desks he was heavily influenced by Rationalism—the belief that human reason is placed above the authority of the Scriptures, thus accepting only what is reasonable in the Bible.

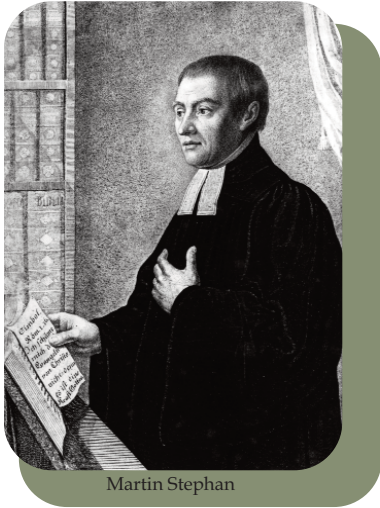
Walther found no comfort in this diluted Gospel and, while at Leipzig, fell off the proverbial horse on the other side to Pietism. Pietism takes God's word seriously, especially the Law. It places an emphasis on the outward works, morals and ethics of a Christian. Repentance, conversion and visual change in daily life are stressed. Otto, also a student at Leipzig, joined him in his quest to find peace in the Scriptures. Together, they and a handful of like-minded students made up the "Holy Club" on the university campus. Walther records that they read books emphasizing "contrition of the heart and total mortification of the old man preceding conversion."



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Finding no comfort in this Law-oriented philosophy, Walther sat at his desk and wrote to Pastor Martin Stephan in Dresden. Stephan offered him the life-line of the Gospel. Walther was moved to tears by this freeing revelation that God did indeed already love him. He did not need to earn God's love. He had already received it through the rescuing work of Jesus on that first Good Friday.

Poor health forced him to suspend his studies at Leipzig for a semester. While recuperating at his parents' home, Walther read Luther's Works. This physical setback turned into a spiritual boost for Walther as he adopted for himself the motto "The nearer to Luther, the better



Martin Stephan

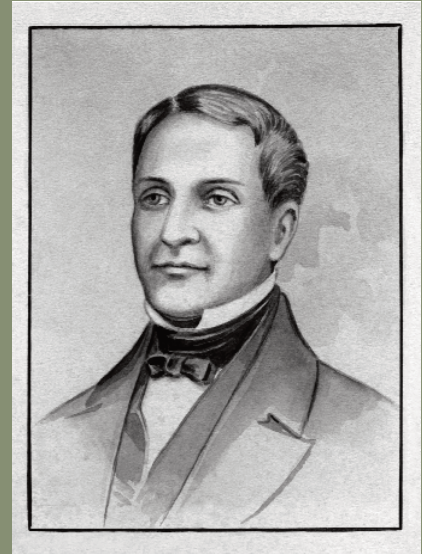
the theologian."

Walther completed his studies at Leipzig in 1833 and began to tutor in the home of Friedemann Loeber in Kahla. It was common practice for a candidate of theology to teach for a number of years before beginning work in a parish setting. In 1837 he was ordained as pastor of the Braeunsdorf congregation. After a little less than two years here, he left with Stephan's group of Saxons to sail to America.

Why did the Saxons leave? In short, the reasons were not much different from those of the Pilgrims in the 1600s: the inability to worship as they pleased. The German government was seeking to unify the non-Catholic religions. The Reformed and the Lutheran churches were expected to simply ignore all doctrinal differences and unite. Both groups found this unacceptable. Stephan hoped to travel to what was then the western edge of the settled land in the United States, St. Louis, Missouri. Just south of this city was land in Perry County where he could set up his congregation away from the pressures to succumb to spiritually dangerous teachings. The Walther brothers and several members of their congregations joined the emigration.

Five ships set sail in the autumn of 1838 carrying over 700 people. Four landed in New Orleans, Louisiana, in January 1839. The *Amalia* was lost at sea with fifty-seven passengers and the bulk of the Saxon group's cargo. The remaining immigrants sailed up the Mississippi to St. Louis and ultimately settled in Perry County, one hundred miles south of the city. It soon became apparent that Stephan was no longer to be trusted with the responsibilities of leadership after certain indiscretions came to light.

Walther's brother and close confidant, Otto, was the first pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Louis.



Otto H. Walther

Otto died suddenly in 1841 while Walther was preparing to debate Marbach in Altenburg.

By May he was cast out of the community and Walther was thrust into the position of leadership at the age of twenty-eight.

The Saxons were undone, pastors and laymen alike. Had they made the mistake of their lives by following Stephan? Should they return to Germany? Were they a legitimate congregation? Walther and Adolph Marbach debated these questions in Altenburg, Missouri, in April 1841. Walther emerged the winner with his clear theological arguments outlined in eight theses. The Altenburg Theses later became a foundational base for the Missouri Synod. The Saxons moved ahead, confident that what they were doing was God-pleasing. In the midst of this turmoil they built a log cabin as the first school. It opened on December 9, 1839. Ten years later it was moved to St. Louis where it is now known as Concordia Seminary.

Walther began writing *Der Lutheraner*, a publication that served as a beacon for other Lutherans in America, saying, "This is who we are. This is what we believe." It was the magnet to which many Lutherans were drawn and the catalyst for forming the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio and Other States in 1847. This church body, now known as The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, elected Walther as its first president. He served at that desk from 1847 to 1859 and again from 1864 to 1878.

Walther's other desks included those of professor and president of the seminary and pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Louis. To fill his time, he also continued to write *Der Lutheraner* as well as other publications, books, papers and innumerable letters.

He traveled around the country and sought to unite with other Lutherans who agreed on doctrinal issues. The Synodical Conference was formed from this desire.

*(continued from page 5)*

C. F. W. Walther's desk

As his duties increased, he asked to be released from his call to Trinity. He also resigned as president of the Synod and finally, toward the end of his life, was no longer able to teach at the seminary. At his desk at home he continued to

write, but even that took great effort. On May 7, 1887, he passed from this vale of tears to his Savior's loving arms. God had granted him seventy-five years, six months and twelve days. Several of his desks will be on display at Concordia Historical Institute beginning this fall in a special tribute honoring the 200th anniversary of his birth.



C. F. W. Walther's study

## References:

- *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C. F. W. Walther* by August R. Suelflow; Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 2000
- *Zion on the Mississippi* by Walter O. Forster; Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1953
- Citation for Luther quote
- As quoted by William Hazlitt in "ESSAY XV: On Paradox and Common-Place," from *Table-talk: Essays On Men And Manners*, n.d.

## Who Was John Peter Baden?

**W**as he a Lutheran pastor? No. Was he a Lutheran teacher? No. Was he a lay leader in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod? YES!

Baden came to America from his home in Elsdorf, Hannover, Germany, in 1866 at the tender age of fifteen. He arrived in New York and quickly made his way to Hannibal, Missouri, to the home of his brother Dietrich. The next four years were spent working at a cigar factory, studying English and taking business classes at Jones Commercial School in St. Louis. Armed with a business degree and the language of his new country, J. P., as he was known, traveled to Columbus, Kansas, where he had a short-lived confectionary business. In 1872 he moved to Independence, Kansas, to the home of two more brothers, Henry and John W. Here he worked in their grocery business by day and built up a poultry and game business by night. After seven years he had accumulated \$5,000, a massive wealth by that day's standards.

In 1879 he moved to Winfield, Kansas, where he purchased a neglected grocery and mercantile store. Dr. Roland Mueller, a retired history professor in Winfield, records that

while engaged in this venture, he also sent many carloads of eggs, poultry, butter, and wild game to markets as far away as Chicago and New York. The construction of a packing house and ice plant made it possible to expand to the point of shipping 10,000 pounds of butter a day and 48,000 dozen eggs per week. In addition to his many American customers, Baden also developed markets in England to which he sent one carload of produce each week. The scope of his business reputation is illustrated by an article in a Galveston, Texas, newspaper in 1890 which described Baden as "the most interesting character in commercial circles . . . he has done a business aggregating almost \$2,000,000 in a city whose population does not exceed 5,000 people."

This is but one aspect of Baden's life. A glimpse into his boyhood in Germany offers us an idea of his faith life as well. His mother died March 26, 1851, when he was only two days old. He was able to help the family by tending sheep when school was not in session. The story is told that a lamb under his care became sick. J. P. nursed it and prayed to God for its recovery. He was at peace



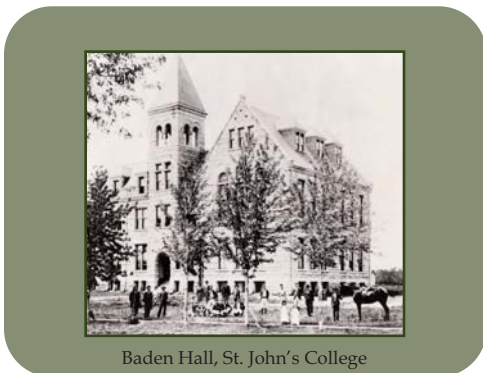
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knowing that the lamb was ultimately in God's good and gracious hands. At his confirmation he was given as his verse Psalm 23. This he made his life's motto. Baden's knowledge of Jesus as his Good Shepherd seems to have directed all his ways.

His was not a superficial knowledge of the scriptures. He studied Luther's sermons and read the Bible as he led his family in devotions. He was familiar with Lutheran doctrine and practice. Before there was a Lutheran church in Winfield, he would drive throughout the countryside to hear true Lutheran preaching. When the General Synod tried to organize a church in Winfield, his opposition to that synod and their policy of "open communion, pulpit fellowship and secretism" put a halt to the General Synod's plans. Instead, in 1882 Baden helped to found a church that would eventually join the Missouri Synod.

At first this church, now known as Trinity Lutheran, was part of the English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri and Other States, which consisted of a handful of churches doctrinally in line with the Missouri Synod, but not limited by the German-only language requirement. It held services in English and German. At that time there was a shortage of pastors and an even smaller list of those candidates that could preach in English. The congregation struggled to fill the pulpit.

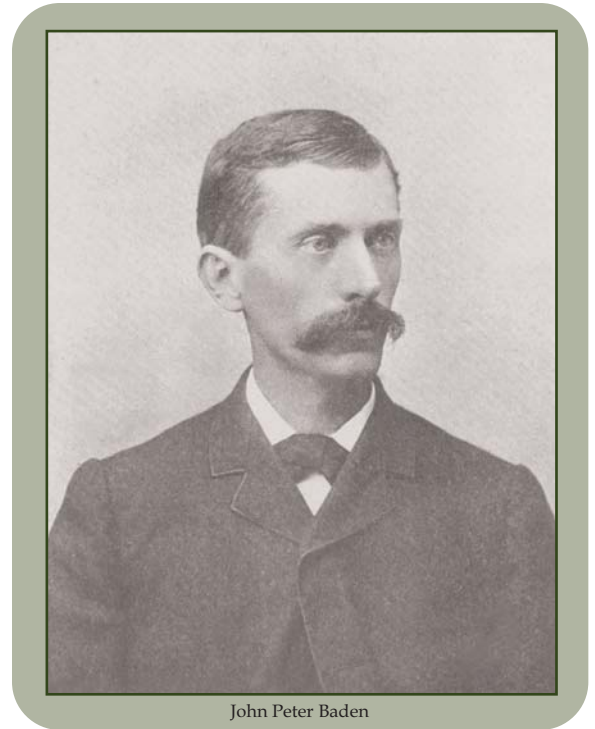
Seeing this dilemma, Baden decided to start an English-speaking Lutheran college in 1892 for men entering the ministry. Its mission, however, would be larger than this. It would also house a commercial department for laymen and women who wished to have a Christian education while in pursuit of a business degree. This was ground-breaking territory. The Concordia colleges in the Missouri Synod were strictly for male church workers and the language of instruc-



Baden Hall, St. John's College

tion was German. Because this college would be different from the others, its name should reflect that difference. Baden's wife, Adelaide, chose the name St. John's College. Baden's dream was realized when the college opened less than a year later in 1893. Baden then gave the college to the English Synod. When the English Synod joined the Missouri Synod in 1911, St. John's College was part of the merger.

Baden assumed a great deal of the debt to start both the church and the college. The year 1893 marked the beginning



John Peter Baden

of a depression, sometimes known as the Cleveland depression since it occurred during Grover Cleveland's second presidency. Banks were reluctant to make loans, but because of Baden's high reputation as a solid Christian businessman, he was able to secure the funds necessary to support these missions. His other civic duties included serving as chairman of the board that constructed the city's hospital, heading the building of a scientific observatory and being an originator of the local Chautauqua, a summer educational gathering.

It is no wonder that shock waves rocked Winfield when it was learned that Baden was stricken with a severe case of pneumonia and died suddenly on March 3, 1900, just shy of his forty-ninth birthday. He left behind his widow, Adelaide, and two sons, Martin, age twenty-one, and Ernest, age eighteen. The entire city shut down to mourn the passing of its leading citizen. The *Winfield Daily Courier* reported that "business was suspended, district courts were adjourned and the public schools closed for the afternoon, out of respect for the illustrious dead . . . the college chapel did not hold one-tenth of the people. . . [T]he building was full to overflowing and the sidewalks were blocked."

Although Baden was not a called full-time church worker, he nonetheless worked tirelessly and selflessly for his church. The church in Winfield still thrives, but the college closed in 1986. The St. John's College Alumni Association is still carrying on Baden's mission by offering scholarships to descendants of alumni studying for full-time church work.

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