

## For the records

### A brief history of the Evangelical Synod of North America

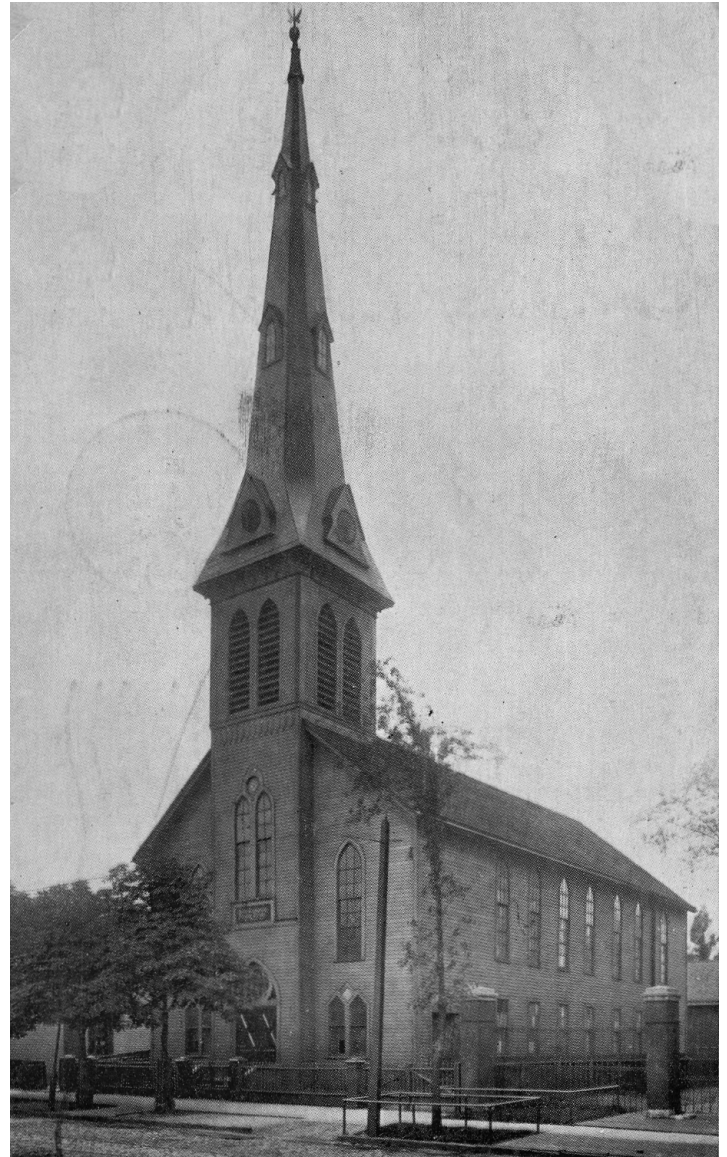
On June 25, 1957, the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church came together in Cleveland, Ohio to unite officially as the United Church of Christ (UCC). The merging church bodies themselves represented previous mergers. The National Council of Congregational Churches merged with the Christian Church in 1931 to create a denomination representing English Reformation and American frontier traditions. The Evangelical and Reformed Church came into being in 1934 as a merger of the Reformed Church in the U.S. and the Evangelical Synod of North America, a denomination representing German Reformed and united German Protestant traditions.

Of the UCC's four historical roots, the history of the Congregational Church is the most familiar. Lesser known—even within the UCC—is the that of the Evangelical Synod of North America. Founded by 19<sup>th</sup>-century German immigrants, it was unique among American denominations in that it blended German Lutheran and Reformed doctrinal traditions into a United Church.

#### I. European background

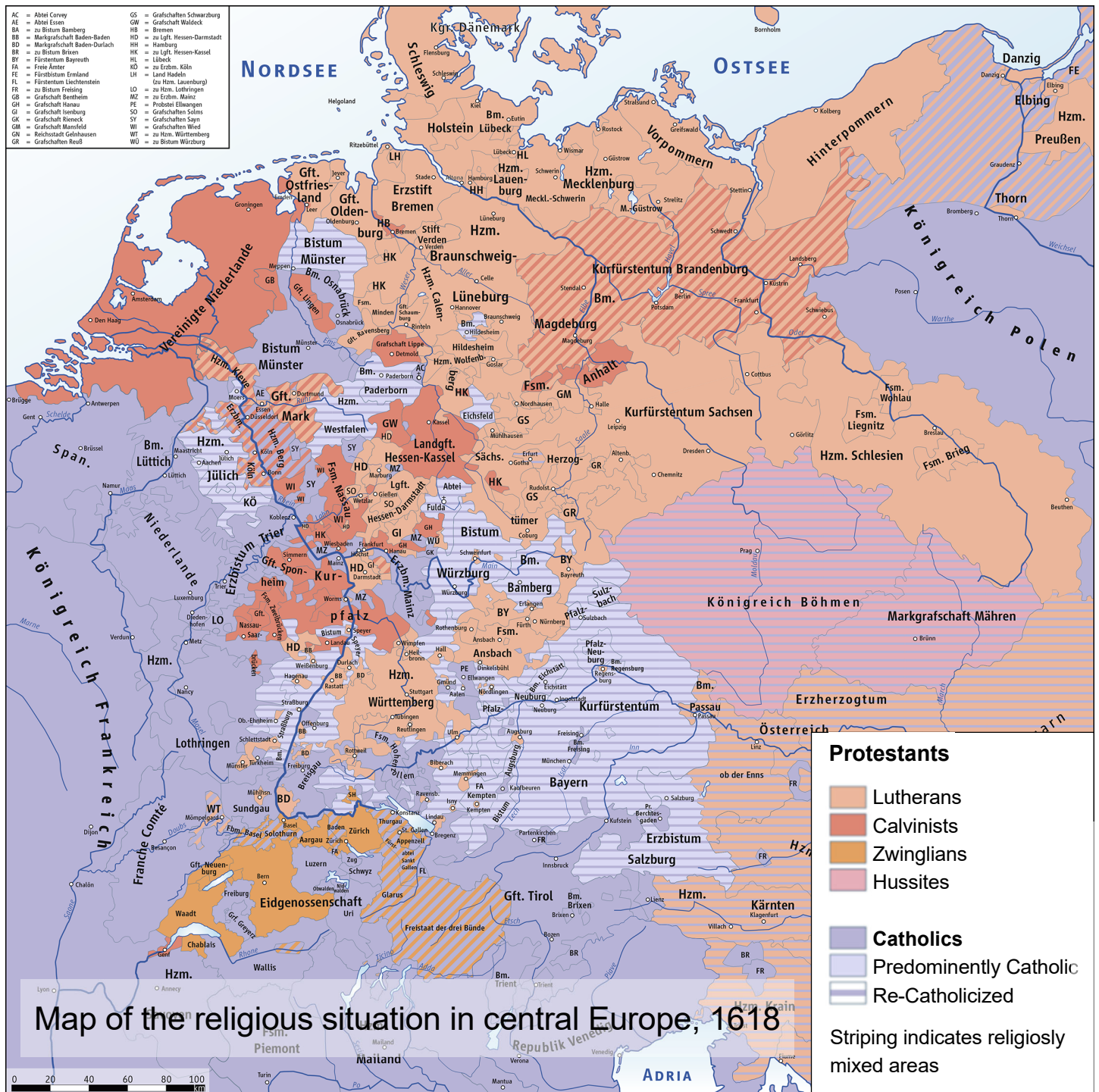
##### The Protestant Reformation

Although religious reformers had preceded him, Martin Luther (1483–1546) is credited with starting the Protestant Reformation. When he published his 95 Theses debating practices within the Roman Catholic Church, he set fire to a movement that had only been waiting for a spark. About the same time, Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) began preaching about reforms as a priest in Zürich, Switzerland. Jean Calvin (1509–1564) later instituted his own brand of religious re-



Friedens German Evangelical Church, Buffalo, New York, about 1900. | Photo courtesy Edén Seminary Archives

form in the city of Geneva. The Reformed Protestant Faith, made up of followers of Zwingli and Calvin, spread through Switzerland, France and the German Rhineland<sup>1</sup>. While Lutheran and Swiss reformers agreed on many points, theo-



logical and doctrinal differences stood in the way, and German Protestantism became divided between these two camps. Challenges from the Roman Catholic Church, as well as debate within and between Protestant groups, led to the formation of official statements (called “confessions”) outlining

their doctrinal positions. The Augsburg Confession of 1530, drafted at the request of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, was assembled along with Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms, and seven other documents into the [Book of Concord of 1580](https://bookofconcord.org/) and collectively became the doctrinal foundation for Lutheran churches in Germany. The

[Heidelberg Catechism of 1563](https://bit.ly/3Bsq4ds) <https://bit.ly/3Bsq4ds> became the fundamental doctrinal statement for most Reformed churches in Germany.

The Lutheran princes making up the Smalkaldic League fought the Holy Roman emperor's Catholic forces that attempted to suppress the Reformation movement. The Peace of Augsburg, a treaty signed in 1555, paused the conflict and permitted rulers in the Holy Roman Empire to impose either Lutheranism or Catholicism on their subjects. Peace did not last, and the Thirty-Years War (1618–1648) brought immense devastation to German lands. The Peace of Westphalia, a series of treaties signed in 1648, reaffirmed the right of territorial rulers to determine the religious confession of their realms and recognized the validity of the Calvinist faith. The result was an enduring geographical and confessional division between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and between Lutheran and Reformed churches within Protestantism.

### Rationalism and Pietism

Two post-Reformation movements helped to blur the difference between Lutheran and Reformed faiths and would have profound effects. The Enlightenment that emerged in the 17th century fostered Rationalism, which regarded reason as the primary source of knowledge (as opposed to revealed religion). Rationalists argued against the doctrine of the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, Divine revelation in the Bible, and other basic Christian tenants that they viewed as irrational. Theological rationalism became influential in German universities, where parish pastors received their educations. Preaching became moralistic and less biblical, sacramental practice and pastoral care suffered, and church services became simpler and less ceremonial. Rationalistic texts were introduced into liturgies, hymnals, and catechisms. Rationalists also de-emphasized distinctions between Lutheran and Reformed doctrines and led to calls for uniting Protestants<sup>2</sup>.

Pietism, which developed in the 17th century, emerged as a response to Lutheran orthodoxy that emphasized intellectual assent to official doctrines rather than faith. It also took hold as people sought comfort in religious faith in the face of the misery and devastation of the Thirty-Year's War. Pietism emphasized conversion to God and personal and spiritual experience over belief in church doctrine.



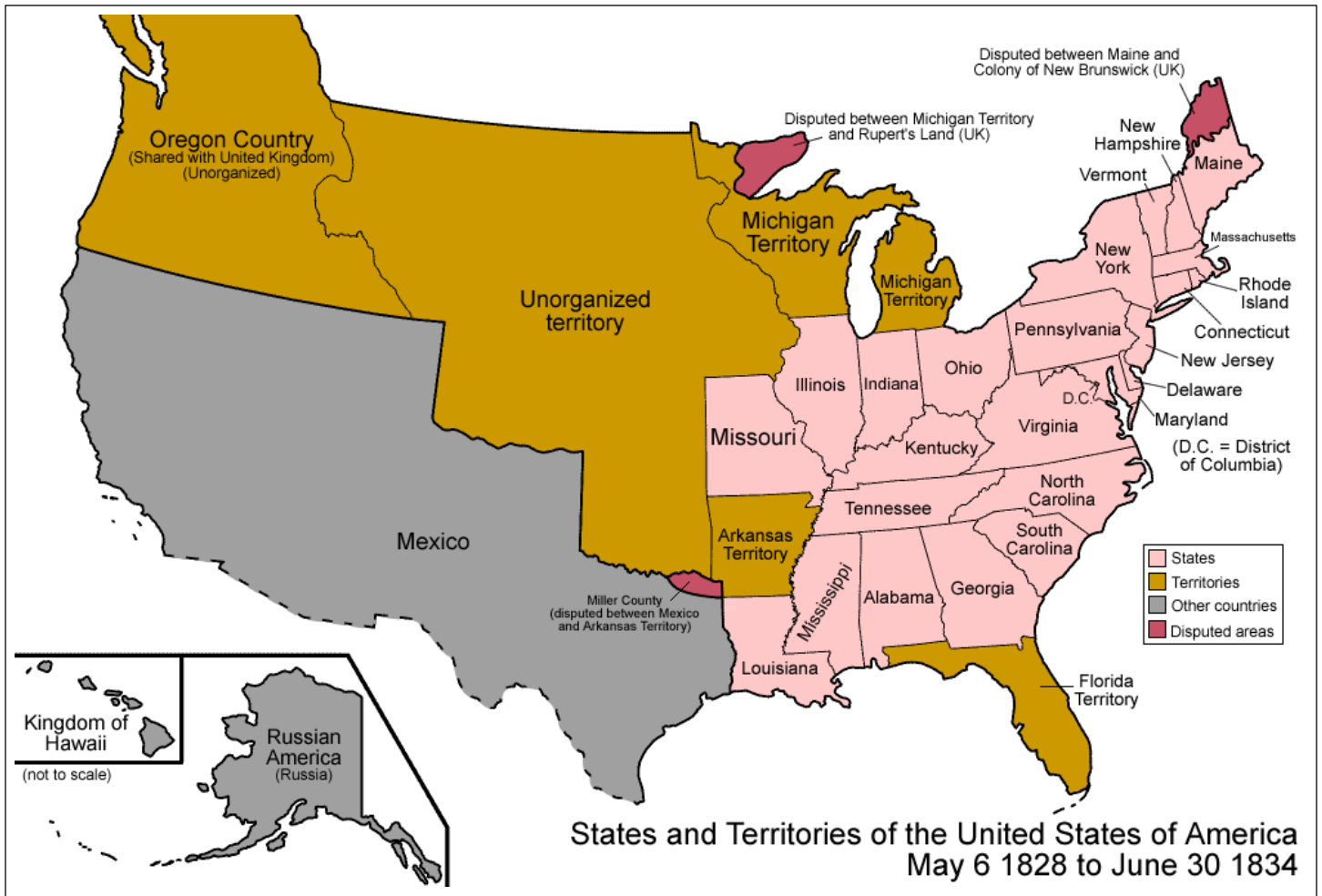
SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA <https://bit.ly/38n1uWz>

King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia (1770—1840) united Lutheran and Reformed Protestants into the Evangelical Church of Prussia.

Later, Pietists reacted to Rationalism's increasing influence in Protestantism. Although Pietists sought a return to biblical faith and an orthodoxy based on biblical teaching, personal religious experience took precedence over church doctrine. Pietism led to awakening movements, leading people to experiences of personal salvation. The emphasis on Christian unity through personal belief rather than subscription to church doctrine also led to calls for uniting German Protestantism. The Pietists' impetus to share their faith and express it through Christian service led to the founding of mission societies, orphanages, hospitals, and relief agencies.

### The development of a united German Protestantism and Old Lutheran response

Rationalism and Pietism had the effect of blurring denomina-



SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA <https://bit.ly/39y9tMv>

tional lines or rendering confessional differences irrelevant, allowing movement towards a united German Protestantism to emerge. Although the Duchy of Nassau was the first to unite Lutheran and Reformed Churches in 1817<sup>3</sup>, the Kingdom of Prussia was more influential in doing so.

The Prussian rulers from the House of Hohenzollern adopted the Calvinist faith in the 1617, although the majority of Prussian citizens were Lutheran. Prussia later welcomed French Protestants fleeing persecution and allowed them to establish Reformed congregations. King Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770–1840), who ascended the throne in 1797, united Reformed and Lutheran congregations through a series of decrees beginning in 1817, creating the Evangelical Church of Prussia.

By the time Wilhelm III began his efforts to unite Protestants in his realm, Lutherans had begun to emerge from the effects

of Rationalism and reconsider the classic Lutheran doctrines found in the Book of Concord. Lutherans who embraced this “confessional revival” objected to merger with the Reformed as a measure that compromised their doctrinal integrity. These “Old Lutherans,” as they were known, faced imprisonment, and many emigrated rather than face persecution. The situation changed when Friedrich Wilhelm IV assumed the throne and permitted Lutherans to establish their own church organizations beginning in 1845.

**German foreign mission societies**

By the early 19th century, mission societies supported by both Lutheran, Reformed and united Evangelical churches emerged. German pastors were traditionally educated in universities, which were commonly open only to men of higher social standing. Missionary societies, on the other hand, accepted candidates regardless of status and accepted many

farmers and craftsmen into their programs. Graduates were ordained with the goal of sending them to mission fields in India and South Africa. Although they were initially reluctant to supply missionaries to German immigrant communities in North America, German mission societies would eventually begin sending pastors to the U.S. The Basel Mission Society alone would send more almost 300 missionaries to America<sup>4</sup>. Basel and other mission societies were founded by Pietists who favored a non-sectarian or united type of Protestantism.

## II. German Evangelical foundations in the United States

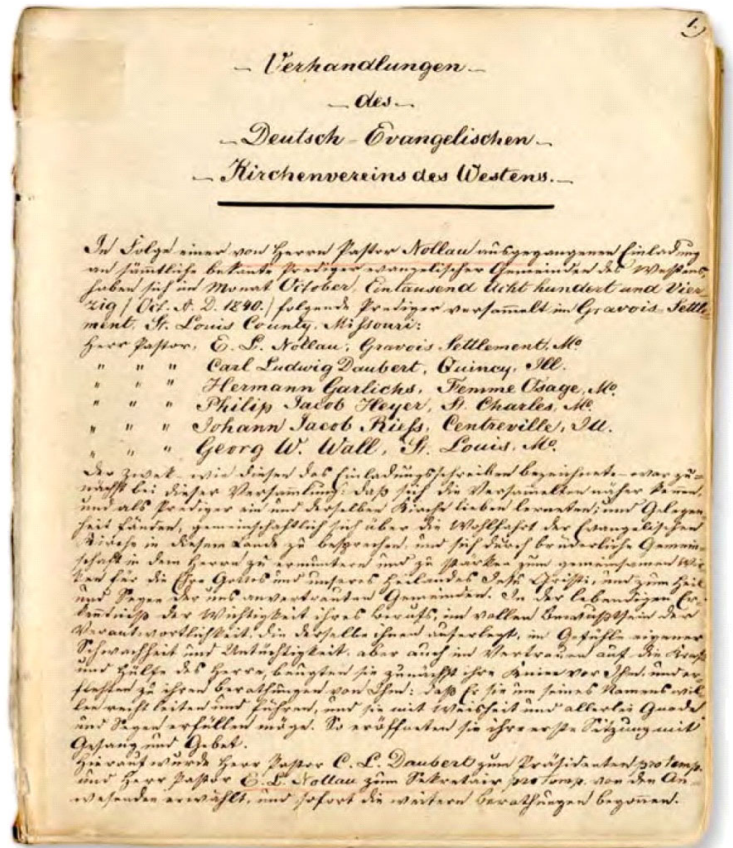
### Nineteenth-century German immigration

Although Germans began immigrating to North America in the late 17th century, political, economic, environmental, and religious factors combined to unleash a flood by 1830. Immigration was further encouraged by reports sent back to Germany extolling the availability of land, political and religious liberty, and other advantages. Although most immigrants were peasant farmers and tradesmen, intellectuals emigrated after democratic reforms failed to materialize in Germany. Many immigrants were drawn to undeveloped agricultural land located in what was then the western United States.

When immigrants begin settling the American frontier in the 1830s, they found few organized churches and even fewer prepared to minister in the German language. Existing Lutheran and Reformed denominations, founded in the 18th century during the first wave of German immigration, had largely abandoned the German language and had already acculturated. Established denominations succeeded in sending only a few pastors to the work among German immigrants on the American frontier<sup>5</sup>.

### Early German missionary activity

German missionaries began arriving in 1833, when the Basel Mission Society sent Friedrich Schmid to the Ann Arbor, Michigan area to work among Native Americans. By 1840, Schmid and Basel missionaries were establishing congregations in Michigan, western New York, eastern Ohio, Indiana, southern and northern Illinois, and eastern Missouri.



Minutes of the meeting establishing the German Evangelical Church Society of the West, Oct. 15, 1840 | Photo courtesy Eden Seminary Archives.

Life on the frontier meant overcoming challenges common to undeveloped areas, including lack of infrastructure and access to transportation, harsh climates, and the threat of diseases, such as yellow fever and cholera. Missionaries faced additional challenges as they struggled to establish congregations among German immigrants<sup>6</sup>:

- Religious antipathy among immigrant peasants—Many immigrants had justified resentments against the Church based on their homeland experiences. Immigration was a chance to gain personal liberty from a bureaucratic Church, as well as oppressive governments. Immigrants were also unfamiliar with voluntary religious association, as church membership in Germany was automatic and assumed.
- Mixed religious nature of immigrant communities—Immigrants from Germany in the 1830s could arrive from 41 different independent states, each having its own territorial

church with its own character, customs, and doctrinal position (Lutheran, Reformed, or United Protestant). Each territorial church published its own hymnal and catechism and worshiped according to its own liturgy, so that frontier settlers (who often brought hymnals with them from Germany) could literally not sing out of the same hymnbook when they gathered for worship.

■ Clergy impostors—Immigrants settled in areas unsupervised by established church bodies. With no denominations to examine potential candidates, any German male claiming a university education could pose as a cleric to take advantage of unsuspecting congregations. Such imposters hindered the development of congregations and made the work of honest and sincere clerics more difficult<sup>7</sup>.

■ Hostility from German “Free Thinkers”—Intellectuals disappointed with the lack of democratic progress in Germany immigrated to the U.S. to settle in developing urban centers or as “Latin Farmers” in rural areas. Their rationalist outlook often made them opposed to any form of organized religion. Free Thinkers (*Freidenker*) often controlled the German-language press and used this instrument to stir up opposition against German clerics attempting to organize congregations.

■ Old Lutherans—Old Lutherans, who arrived beginning in the late 1830s<sup>8</sup>, were opposed to union with Reformed churches, bringing them in conflict with missionaries who were organizing congregations along united Protestant lines. Old Lutherans proselytized heavily in German immigrant communities and were vocally critical of “unionists<sup>9</sup>.” The influx of Old Lutherans often caused newly established congregations to split.

### III. Establishment and development of the German Evangelical Synod of North America

#### Early organization

To meet these challenges, frontier cler-

gymen began organizing to create mutual support for themselves and their congregations, and to provide a means of screening and credentialing pastors. Four regional organizations developed along united Protestant lines:

- The German Evangelical Church Society of the West, established 1840, with congregations in St. Louis, the Missouri River Valley, northern and southern Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin.
- The German Evangelical Church Society of Ohio, established 1850, with congregations in eastern Ohio.
- The German United Evangelical Synod of the East, established 1858, with congregations in Buffalo, Syracuse, and Rochester, N.Y.; Baltimore, Maryland; Indiana; and Erie, Pennsylvania.
- The United Evangelical Synod of the Northwest, established 1859, with congregations in Chicago, and Michigan.

The German Evangelical Church Society of the West was the earliest, largest, and most organized, and its history is the best documented<sup>10</sup>. The key figure in its establishment was Louis Nollau, a missionary sent to St. Louis by the Barmen (Rhenish) Mission Society in 1837. He subsequently founded St. John’s Church in what is now Mehlville, Missouri in 1838 and established numerous preaching stations. In Sept. 1840, Nollau invited German pastors known to be working in the

area to a meeting to discuss issues of mutual concern. Six clergymen responded, and the group organized the *Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenverein des Westens* (German Evangelical Church Society of the West, hereafter referred to as KV).

Because of prevailing anti-religious sentiment among German immigrants, the group voted to constitute themselves as a pastoral conference rather than as a synod (a term typically used by German American denominations)<sup>11</sup>. The organization adopted an official constitution in 1841. Congregations were encouraged to become members and send lay delegates to conferences.

#### What is “Evangelisch?”

The German Word “Evangelisch” translates into English as “evangelical.” While the term is often used to refer to conservative Protestant Christianity in the American context, *evangelisch* means generically Protestant in the context of German Protestantism. United German Protestant churches in Germany were simply “evangelical,” indicating they were neither Lutheran nor Reformed, but a union of both.

The confessional statement (statement of doctrinal position) adopted at the KV's first meeting stated vaguely "[to] confess wholeheartedly the symbolical books of our Evangelical Mother Church in Germany"<sup>12</sup>. In 1848, the KV approved a more complete statement and adopted it into its constitution. It was formulated to accommodate both Lutheran and Reformed churches<sup>13</sup>. The KV identified itself simply as *Evangelisch* (Evangelical), a non-sectarian term that could apply to any German Protestants.

The KV quickly set about developing means of supporting frontier churches and their pastors. They developed a procedure for receiving, examining, and ordaining candidates for ministry and screening previously ordained clergy applying for membership. Committees worked on essential publications to foster denominational cohesiveness and support congregational worship and teaching. These included the *Evangelischer Katechismus* (Evangelical Catechism, published 1847), *Evangelische Agende* (liturgy, published in 1857), *Evangelisches Gesangbuch* (hymnal, published 1862), and *Der Friedensbote*, a denominational newspaper (1850). The German Evangelical Preachers Seminary was founded near Marthasville, Missouri in 1850.

### Consolidation and growth

Contact and dialogue with other united German Evangelical groups lead to a mutual recognition of their similar outlooks and doctrinal positions. Consolidation began in 1858, when the German Evangelical Kirchenverein in Ohio joined the KV as its Eastern District. The United Evangelical Synod of the East followed in 1860. The German United Evangelical Synod of the Northwest and the German United Evangelical Synod of the East both joined in 1872.

Consolidation and geographical expansion brought name changes to the denomination. In 1866, it became the German Evangelical Synod of the West and, in 1877, the German Evangelical Synod of North America. The KV's adoption of the term, "Synod," was a recognition that it had developed into denominational organization. By 1890, the denomination claimed 187,432 members in 870 congregations<sup>14</sup>. Although the denomination was strongest in the "German Triangle" (an area bounded by Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Cincinnati), congregations could be found almost anywhere 19th-century



Louis Nollau (1810–1869), born in Reichenbach, Upper Lusatia, Saxony, was sent to St. Louis in 1837 by the Barmen Mission Society with the intent of establishing a mission among the Native Americans in Oregon. Instead, he founded St. John's Church, Mehlville and became the leading figure in establishing the German Evangelical Church Society of the West. | Photo courtesy Eden Seminary Archives.

German immigrants settled.

### Polity

The denomination was divided into geographical districts. Elected officers presided over district conferences, which convened to ordain pastors, aid congregations in finding clergymen, decide local affairs, and elect delegates for general conferences. The General Conference conferred about issues affecting the denomination as a whole, received reports from denominationally supported missions, institutions, and orga-



Students and faculty members of the German Evangelical Preachers Seminary near Marthasville, Missouri, about 1860. | Photo courtesy Eden Seminary Archives.

nizations, and elected national officers.

The polity (governing structure) of the Evangelical Synod could be described as congregational with strong local leadership. Congregations could affiliate with the denomination by accepting its credal position and adopting an approved constitution. Many congregations served by a pastor of the Evangelical Synod did not become members, however, but remained independent. Decisions made at district and general conferences could be imposed on pastors but not on congregations or their members.

### Doctrine and ethos

The ethos of the denomination was primarily, but non-dogmatically, Lutheran and adverse to controversy. The denomination's official catechism was strongly Lutheran in character with Reformed influences. Liturgical forms were similar to those found in the Lutheran Church of Württemberg. Congregations followed the traditional liturgical year as practiced by Lutheran churches in Germany and celebrated the sacraments in a similar manner. The Evangelical Hymnal included hymns familiar to both Lutheran and Reformed members. Congregations in some regions of the denomination referred to themselves as "Lutheran" in the names of their congregations.

As the denomination developed, its original non-sectarian position (that is, neither purely Lutheran nor Reformed but accepting both) developed a solidly Evangelical (that is, united Protestant) confessional stance. Although favoring Lutheran doctrine, differing theological positions were accepted within the denomination. Internal doctrinal controversy was rare, especially compared to other German Protestant groups<sup>16</sup>. Lutheran denominations often criticized the Evangelical Synod for its United Protestant position, but denominational leaders generally refused to engage in such debates<sup>15</sup>.

### Institutions and missions

#### *Education institutions*

The German Evangelical Preachers Seminary, the denomination's sole school of theology, opened near Marthasville, Missouri in June 1850 with six students and one professor. By 1883, the seminary had outgrown its quarters, and its remote location had become a disadvantage, prompting a move to new facilities in Wellston, Missouri near St. Louis. Its location near Eden Station on the Wabash Railroad gave Eden Theological Seminary its present name. When commercial activity and industry began to encroach on the site, the seminary moved to its present campus in Webster Groves, Missouri in 1924. [Eden](https://www.eden.edu/) continues to as seminary of the United Church of Christ.

When the seminary opened in Marthasville, it quickly became evident that entering students lacked the necessary academic preparation for theological study. The denomination opened a liberal arts college next to the seminary in 1858 as a remedy, but the effort failed due to an unfavorable location and Civil War conditions<sup>17</sup>. Elmhurst College near Chicago was established in 1871 as a "pro-seminary" to prepare students for seminary study and train parochial school teachers. [Elmhurst University](https://www.elmhurst.edu/) continues to operate as a liberal arts institution affiliated with the United Church of Christ.

Congregations often maintained parochial schools—a tradition brought from Germany—to provide primary education and religious instruction. The expense, shortage of trained teachers, availability of public education, and acculturation led to their decline by the early 1900s<sup>18</sup>.



*Benevolent institutions*

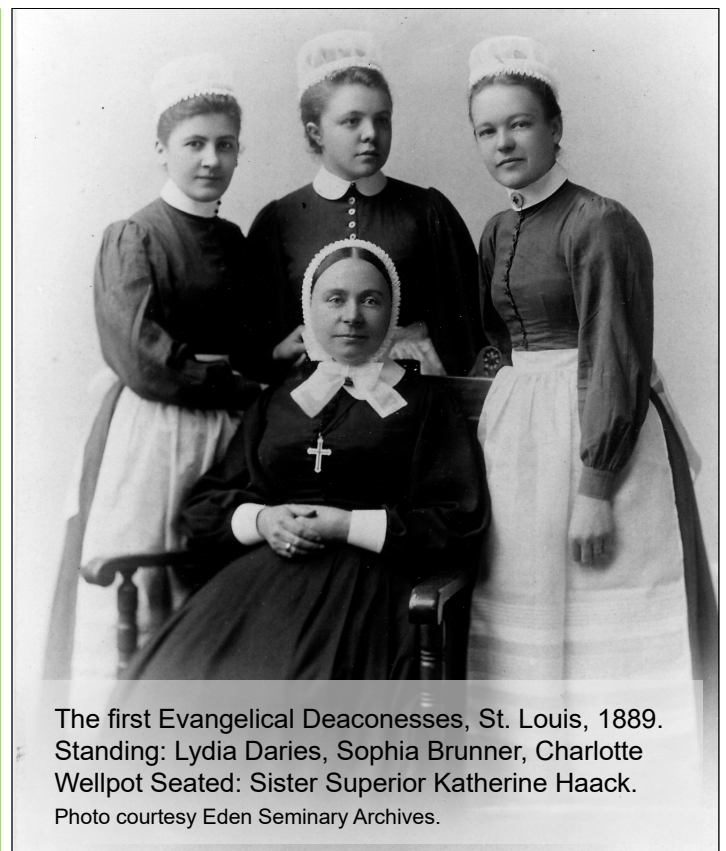
The Evangelical Synod founded hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the aged. Early efforts to establish a hospital were begun in 1856 by a member of St. Peter’s Church in St. Louis and lead to the opening of Good Samaritan Hospital in 1861. The Evangelical Children’s Home, now known as [Every Child’s Hope](https://everychildshope.org/) <https://everychildshope.org/>, was founded by Louis Nollau, Pastor of St. Peter’s Church in St. Louis, and officially chartered in 1861. Orphanages and old age homes were later established in Hoyleton, Illinois; Chicago; Detroit; and other cities.

The deaconess movement, founded on principles developed by [Theodore Fliedner in Kaiserswerth, Germany in 1836](https://bit.ly/3sXgRqi) <https://bit.ly/3sXgRqi>, was enthusiastically embraced by the Evangelical Synod. Similar to Catholic sisterhoods, Deaconesses took vows and were consecrated, lived in community, and were encouraged to maintain their vows for life. Most deaconesses were nurses and operated hospitals, although some served as parish workers and missionaries. The denomination’s first German Evangelical Deaconess Hospital opened in St. Louis in 1889. Others were subsequently established in East St. Louis and Lincoln, Illinois; Evansville, Indiana; Detroit; Marshalltown, Iowa; Faribault, Minnesota; Milwaukee; Chicago; Cleveland; Baltimore; and Louisville.

The Emmaus Home for Epileptics and the Feeble Minded, founded by local pastors at the seminary’s former Marthasville campus in 1893, was another important benevolent institution. [Emmaus Homes](https://emmaushomes.org/) <https://emmaushomes.org/> continues to provide care for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

<b>Membership in the Evangelical Synod</b>			
	<b>1890<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1906<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>1916<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Churches</b>	870	1205	1336
<b>Members</b>	187,432	293,137	339,853

1. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census. Religious Bodies: 1906. Bulletin 103, rev. ed. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910 <https://bit.ly/3kKF4fV>;  
2. Department of Commerce, bureau of the Census. Religious Bodies, 1916. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919 <https://bit.ly/3mQjh9o>.



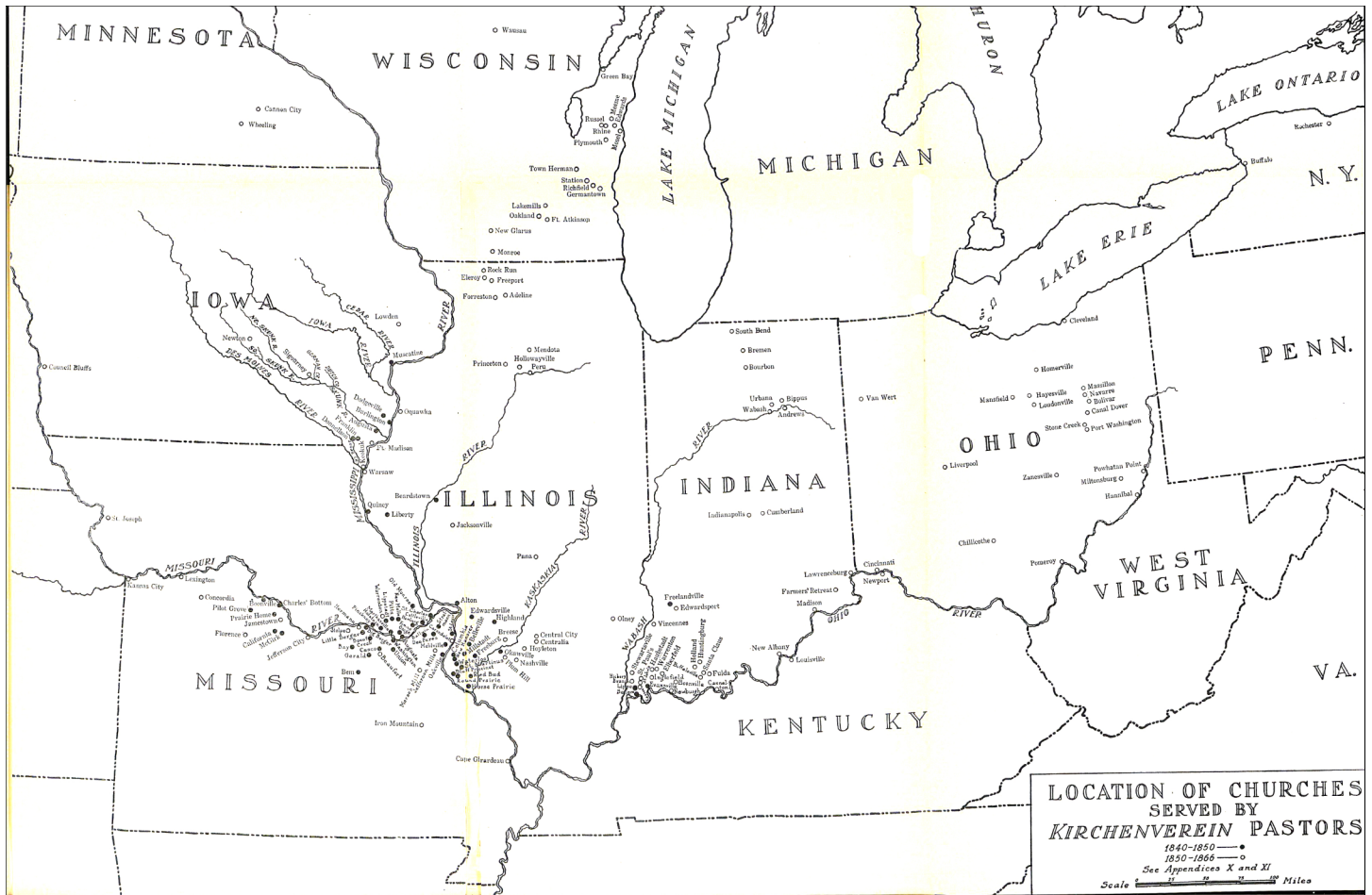
The first Evangelical Deaconesses, St. Louis, 1889. Standing: Lydia Daries, Sophia Brunner, Charlotte Wellpot Seated: Sister Superior Katherine Haack. Photo courtesy Eden Seminary Archives.

*Foreign missions*

The Evangelical Synod took over support of a mission station in the Central Provinces of India in 1884. The mission was taken over by the Church of North India in the mid-20th century. A mission established in Honduras in 1920 developed into the present-day Evangelical and Reformed Church in Honduras.

*Home missions*

Establishing congregations for newly arriving German immigrants and providing pastors to serve them became the denomination’s home mission focus after the Civil War. Although the denomination abandoned plans to establish a pro-seminary in Germany to funnel pastoral candidates to its seminary in the U.S, it contracted agents in Germany to recruit pastors and potential seminary students. German mission societies also continued to send pastors to North American congregations.



Map showing the location of congregations by pastors of the German Evangelical Church Society of the West / German Evangelical Synod of the West, 1840–1866. It does not include congregations in Northern Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, or Maryland that entered the denomination through the 1872 merger with the German United Evangelical Synod of the East and United Evangelical Synod of the Northwest. | Source: *The German Church on the American Frontier*.

#### IV. Acculturation and merger

##### The language question

As with other German-American denominations, debate about use of English and issues of acculturation arose by 1900. After peaking in 1882, when 250,000 German immigrants arrived<sup>19</sup>, immigration rapidly declined. As the children and grandchildren of immigrants came of age, the desire for English-language worship services increased. Some Evangelical Synod leaders became alarmed that the church body was in danger of losing its generation of younger members to English-speaking denominations.

The Evangelical Synod’s efforts to support the use of English

developed relatively late. An English liturgy was published in *The Evangelical Book of Worship* in 1874, and English hymnal did not appear until 1899. *The Evangelical Catechism* was not translated until 1892. *The Messenger of Peace* (later renamed the *Evangelical Herald*) began publication in 1902 alongside *Der Friedensbote*<sup>20</sup>. The seminary offered instruction in the English language from the beginning, but theological subjects were exclusively in German until 1908. English-language worship services were rare before 1900. Their introduction into congregations usually came only after debate and initially only as occasional or supplemental services.

The situation began to change after 1900. A new generation of church leaders began to advocate for acculturation and openness to other American

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## Finding records of Evangelical Synod congregations

Researchers who have used German Lutheran records will find those produced by Evangelical Synod congregations to be familiar. The most common records include:

- Infant baptisms, confirmations, marriages, funerals
- Communion attendance records
- Membership lists
- Records of financial contributions
- Church council minutes
- Congregations owning cemeteries often kept separate burial records.

Less common are family records that list information for parents and children on one form. The format of records vary depending on the time period. Early records are commonly handwritten in paragraph format. The introduction of standardized tabulated forms bound in ledgers provided printed headings with hand-written entries. Access to a [word list](https://bit.ly/3t1f0Rg) <<https://bit.ly/3t1f0Rg>> and an ability to decipher German text in handwritten script and text printed in *Fraktur* will benefit the researcher.

### Finding records

#### Microfilm and digital sources

The History & Genealogy Department has microfilm copies of records for churches in Missouri, Southern Illinois, and a few other locations. [An online guide to the films is available](https://bit.ly/3mKzRap) <<https://bit.ly/3mKzRap>>. [“Guide to German Evangelical Congregations Related to the United Church of Christ in St. Louis City and County”](https://bit.ly/38scWs2) <<https://bit.ly/38scWs2>> lists microfilmed records in the History & Genealogy Department and provides historical information.

Records of many Evangelical Synod congregations have been filmed by the Family History Library and subsequently digitized at [FamilySearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org).

#### Print sources

Indexes, abstracts, and transcriptions of church records are available in print in the History and Genealogy Department

### Denominational archives

#### Eden Theological Seminary Archives

475 E. Lockwood Ave.  
St. Louis, MO 63119  
314-252-3141  
[sholl@eden.edu](mailto:sholl@eden.edu)

Besides official records for the denomination, the archives has original records for congregations in Missouri, Illinois, and a few other areas. The archives can also provide biographical data for pastors and graduates of Eden Seminary.

#### Evangelical & Reformed Historical Society

555. W. James St.  
Lancaster, PA 17602  
717-290-8734  
[info@erhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@erhistoricalsociety.org)

The archives of the Evangelical & Reformed Historical Society, holds the records of the Reformed Church in the U.S. and the Evangelical & Reformed Church. Besides records for German Reformed congregations, the archives also has those for a few congregations originating in the Evangelical Synod in Midwestern and Eastern states.

and included in the library's [online catalog](http://webpac.slcl.org) <[webpac.slcl.org](http://webpac.slcl.org)>. Researchers can locate print publications in other repositories using Worldcat.org <<https://www.worldcat.org/>>.

Information extracted from many Evangelical Synod congregations are included in *German Immigrants in American Church Records*. At this writing, thirty-four volumes include genealogical information records of German Protestant congregations. Information is abstracted largely from microfilm found in the Family History Library. [The History & Genealogy Department has all available volumes](https://bit.ly/38q3LbS) <<https://bit.ly/38q3LbS>>

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## Locating original records

When the researcher has evidence of a connection to a specific congregation, contacting the congregation or its successor directly may be the simplest method of finding original records. Finding them may require researching the history of the congregation to ascertain its present name and location. A useful tool for determining the status of congregations is *Congregations of the German Evangelical Synod of North America and Related Groups* (see bibliography).

If the congregation is still in operation, a Google search will often find contact information. [The “church finder” search engine on the United Church of Christ \(UCC\) website](https://www.ucc.org) <www.ucc.org> can be useful if a Google search produces no results.

If the congregation no longer exists, the records might have been given to another local congregation, or sent to a local, regional, or denominational archives. Records occasionally end up in the hands of a former pastor or church members.

## Continued from page 10

denominations. Among these were brothers Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, both of whom would become influential within American Protestantism. A younger generation of seminary professors began to teach theological subjects in English, and they influenced their students to be open to the American context. A younger generation of leaders realized that the denomination could no longer survive as an isolated ethnic enclave, and they were attracted to the progressivism found in Anglo-Saxon Protestant denominations.

Although the denomination’s transition to English was already beginning, the effects of World War I sped up the process. Anti-German sentiment sometimes led to vandalism of church properties and occasional violence. The Evangelical Synod’s identification with the Evangelical Church of Prussia led antagonists to proclaim it “the Kaiser’s church,” and it became the object of anti-German rhetoric. Several of its pastors were detained on suspicion of sedition. In this atmosphere, members of the Evangelical Synod became eager to exhibit their patriotic loyalty, accelerating the acculturation process and the adoption of English throughout the denomination. By the end of WWI, most congregations held weekly services in English<sup>21</sup>. In 1925, the denomination’s president, John Baltzer, read his report in English for the first time at the 1925 General Conference. In 1927, “German” was officially dropped from the denomination’s name and was thereafter known as the Evangelical Synod of North America.

## Merger with the Reformed Church

The Evangelical Synod’s increasing openness to other denominations came in the context of the ecumenical movement developing in the 1900s. The denomination became an early member of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ (the predecessor to the current [National Council of Churches](https://bit.ly/3jt7taQ) <https://bit.ly/3jt7taQ>) when it was created in 1908, and its united Protestant position made it open to exploring unification with other denominations.

Discussions about finding another church body to merge with began as early as 1925<sup>22</sup>. In 1928, the denomination’s Commission on Closer Relations with Other Church Bodies began negotiations with the Reformed Church in the U.S. and the United Brethren in Christ. The latter dropped out of the process, but the Reformed Church and the Evangelical Synod approved a plan of union by 1933. The merger creating the Evangelical and Reformed Church became official on June 26, 1934. A constitution was finalized in 1938 and the new denomination officially incorporated in 1940. The combined membership of the two uniting denominations was 629,787 members at the time of the merger.

The Evangelical Synod took shape among efforts to minister to 19th-century German immigrants settling on the American frontier beginning in the 1830s. Its theological heritage came from a united German Protestantism with roots in the Reformation in German and Switzerland. Its commitment to a united Evangelical faith made it unique in American Protestantism and eventually propelled it to merge with the Reformed Church. In existence for only 94 years, it established

congregations that were the centers of faith for hundreds of thousands German immigrants and their descendants.

## Notes

1. German-speaking Swiss Protestants were more influenced by Zwingli, while French-speaking areas adopted Calvinism. Calvinism also took root in the Netherlands, East Frisia, and the British Isles. The German Rhineland generally adopted a mild form of Calvinism that some scholars see as occupying a middle position between Lutheran and Reformed doctrinal positions.
2. The effects of Rationalism on the German Protestant churches are described in Walter O. Forster, *Zion on the Mississippi: The Settlement of the Saxon Lutheran in Missouri, 1839–1841*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953, 10ff.
3. “Die Geschichte Der EKHN.” EKHN. Evangelische Kirche in Hessen und Nassau, November 21, 2014. <https://www.ekhn.de/ueber-uns/geschichte.html>.
4. Leuschner, A. “Liste Der Basler Missionare Die Als Pfarrer Nach Nord-America Kamen, Basel, Switzerland,” Ms., n.d. Eden Theological Seminary, Archives no. 4-1 / Bas 29. This document, lists 291 missionaries who sent to North America between 1833 and 1930.
5. For a discussion of early missionary efforts of established Lutheran and Reformed denominations, see Carl E. Schneider, *The German Church on the American Frontier*, St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1939, pp. 42ff. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the West, formed by Lutherans from the East, might have been the best American prospect for establishing congregations among immigrants. For a discussion of this synod and its activities, see Benjamin T. Phelps, “A Cause for Distress: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the West,” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, 94, no. 2 (Summer 2021), 31–55.
6. See Schneider, pp. 25ff. for a description of frontier conditions. Forster also discusses these conditions in chapter 9, 226ff.
7. Schneider discusses the problem of unscrupulous men filling pulpits in frontier churches. See 36ff.
8. Forster’s book provides a thorough history of the Old Lutheran Saxon migration to Missouri. For the Saxon Lutherans’ view of Basel and Barmen missionaries working in the St. Louis area, see 307ff.
9. Schneider, 103ff.
10. “Their history has never been recorded, and only fragmentary documents tell the story of their achievements,” Schneider, p. 387. See the bibliography at the end of this article for historical information about these bodies beyond what is noted in Schneider’s.
11. Schneider, 108
12. Schneider, 110
13. “We recognize the Evangelical Church as that communion which acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the Word of God and as the sole and infallible rule of faith and life, and accepts the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures as given in the symbolic books fo the Lutheran and the Reformed Church, the most important being: the Augsburg Confession, Luther’s and the Heidelberg Catechisms, in so far as they agree; but where they disagree, we adhere strictly to the passages of Holy Scripture bearing on the subject, and avail ourselves of the liberty of conscience prevailing in the Evangelical Church.” Schneider, 409.
14. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*. Bulletin 103, rev. ed., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910, 23–24. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1900/bulletins/demographic/103-religious-bodies.pdf>.
15. The Evangelical Synod’s ethos and doctrinal development is described well in Hugo Kamphausen, *The Story of the Religious Life in the Evangelical Synod of North America*, John W. Fluke, trans., Ts.. 1990; originally published as *Die Religiöse Geschichte der Deutschen Evangelischen Synod von Nord Amerika*, St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1924. In the 1870s, seminary professor Karl Emil Otto created a theological controversy by introducing higher criticism of the Bible into his seminary lectures. The case and its resolution is described in Kamphausen, 85ff.
16. The attitude of Old Lutheran towards the KV are described in Schneider, 373ff. J.L. Neve, “The German Evangelical Synod of North America” in *The Lutherans in the Movements for Church Union*, Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication House, 1921, called on the German Evangelical Synod to stop describing itself as a united Protestant denomination and acknowledge itself as a true Lutheran Church.
17. Schneider, 318ff.
18. For the development of parochial schools, see Kamphausen, chapter 9, 73ff.

19. "European Reading Room: The Germans in America," Library of Congress, April 23, 2014, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/european/imde/germchro.html>.

20. *Der Friedensbote* remained in publication until 1958.

21. While English services became common, the use of German only gradually disappeared. Many congregations continued to hold German services at Christmas and other special occasions well after WWII. The migration of German refugees to the U.S. at the end of the war fueled the recovery of German services in some urban congregations.

22. The story of the denomination's merger with the Reformed Church is described in David Dunn, et al, *A History of the Evangelical and Reformed Church*, Philadelphia: The Christian Education Press, 1961, chapter 11, 279ff.

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## Of note

### St. Louis County Library Board expands reciprocal lending program to additional library districts in region

St. Louis County Library (SLCL) is pleased to announce the addition of reciprocal lending agreements with Jefferson County Library, Scenic Regional Library and the Washington Public Library. At their Aug. 16, 2021 meeting, the SLCL Board of Trustees approved adding reciprocal lending agreements with the three additional library districts. The agreements were approved the following week by the Board of Trustees at Jefferson County Library, Scenic Regional Library and Washington Public Library. Reciprocal lending between the districts will begin on September 1, 2021.

Currently, those residing within the Jefferson County, Scenic Regional and Washington Public library districts must purchase a \$50 non-resident card (per household) to check out materials at the St. Louis County Library. Likewise, residents of St. Louis County must purchase a non-resident card with these districts to receive library services. Starting Sept. 1, individuals living in these areas can apply for a free St. Louis County Library card and vice versa. There are currently 1,608 individual library cards issued in these three districts; many of these individuals visit SLCL's Cliff Cave, Eureka Hills and Meramec Valley branches.

The reciprocal lending agreements were initiated by the li-

brary districts to remove barriers for library patrons, resolve the confusion from patrons about library access and foster regional cooperation.

In 2017, SLCL eliminated transactional fees with 11 area library districts. Starting September 1, SLCL will have reciprocal lending agreements with the following libraries: Brentwood Public Library, Ferguson Public Library, Jefferson County Library, Kirkwood Public Library, Maplewood Public Library, Richmond Heights Public Library, Rock Hill Public Library, Scenic Regional, St. Charles City-County Library, St. Louis (City) Public Library, University City Public Library, Valley Park Community Library, Washington Public Library, and Webster Groves Public Library

To learn more about getting a St. Louis County Library card visit <https://www.slcl.org/content/library-cards>.

### September St. Louis Genealogical Society meetings

#### Coming to a conclusion...based on what?

Saturday, Sept. 18, 10: 00 a.m.  
*StLGS general membership meeting*

Do you have multiple records for each event for each ancestor in your genealogy? More than one record is needed to determine which of them is more accurate, and only then can you come to logical conclusions. Carol Whitton, speaker. [Registration is required](https://bit.ly/3t3Fodo) <<https://bit.ly/3t3Fodo>>.

#### Hofgeschichten, Häusergeschichten, and Bürgerbücher: Using Local History Sources in German Genealogical Research

Wednesday, Sept. 15, 7:00 p.m.  
*StLGS German Special Interest Group*

*Hofgeschichten* (farm histories), *Häusergeschichten* (building histories), and *Bürgerbücher* (citizen registers) are local history publications that can provide important genealogical clues and insights into your ancestors' lives. Discover each of these unique publications, how to use them, and tips for finding them. Scott Holl, speaker. [Registration is required](https://bit.ly/3t30ZT4) <<https://bit.ly/3t30ZT4>>

**PastPorts** is published by History & Genealogy at St. Louis County Library, located on Tier 5 of Library Headquarters.

[Current and past issues can be downloaded from the web](http://www.slcl.org/pastports) <<http://www.slcl.org/pastports>>.

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