

CELEBRATING THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF WELS



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—John Brenner, chairman of the seminary building committee, in the Sept. 1, 1929, edition of *The Northwestern Lutheran*

DEDICATION OF THE SEMINARY

On Sunday, Aug. 18, 1929, an estimated 15,000 people, perhaps the largest crowd in Wisconsin Synod history, gathered in Thiensville (now Mequon) to dedicate the new seminary complex. The contractor donated cement blocks and wood planks for seating. A band led the singing. There was a 500-voice choir. A primitive loudspeaker system amplified the voices of the preacher and worship leader for the outdoor services. Many Milwaukee congregations suspended services so their members could attend. The Interurban Railroad added extra cars for those coming to the dedication.

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necessary alteration of the seminary building at 60th and Lloyd, and the synod did not hold clear title to the property. A new

campus was needed. The building committee began working in 1919. That same year the synod bought the 33-acre Bues farm in West Milwaukee for \$35,000. In 1924 the property was sold for \$45,000. The synod found another site in Wauwatosa about one-half mile south of the old campus and paid \$40,000 for the property; it was sold four years later for \$107,500.

The committee finally settled on an 80-acre farm in Thiensville. The farm, owned by Edgar Wille, had been in his family for three generations and was not for sale. But when the committee approached him with its plans, he agreed to sell it for \$25,000.

The synod had hired the prestigious architectural firm of Clas, Shepherd & Clas already in 1923. When the Thiensville property was purchased in 1927, plans for the new campus were presented to the synod. Prof. J. P. Koehler provided conceptual drawings. The building design was inspired by the Wartburg Castle in Germany. The dedication took place just two months before the stock market crash that ushered in the Great Depression. Total cost for the Thiensville campus—including land, improvements, construction, and furnishings—was \$388,000. Because of the diligent fundraising work done by the committee, that amount was paid in full by the day of dedication.

Although there have been many campus additions since that time, the original seminary buildings and the four original professor homes still stand. These buildings add a sense of history to what has been called the most beautiful seminary campus in America.

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