



# Trinity of Freistadt Historical Society Notes

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*Deut: 32:7 Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations*

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## April 1839 — Grabau and von Rohr are Still in Prison But the preparations for the Lutheran emigration continue.

As late as January 1839, the Lutherans were still sending requests to their king, asking that he permit Lutheran churches in Prussia. When the king refused to consider these requests, preparations for emigrating to America proceeded in earnest. The situation was complicated by the fact that both Rev. Grabau and Heinrich von Rohr were still in prison in April. We continue with the story, taken from Iwan's book on *The Old Lutherans*.

Grabau remained the only clergyman to accompany the emigrants. Brandt, a theology student called Siebert of Quedlinburg, changed his mind and joined the emigrants of Magdeburg to serve them in the future and received his permit on August 1, 1839.

In January of 1839, the emigrants faced one huge obstacle, which even threatened to cancel the entire emigration of 1839. Not only was the only clergyman whom they considered as their pastor sitting in prison in Heiligenstadt in Thuringia, but he also became seriously ill. Requests were sent to the authorities, and even a petition sent to the king, by the congregations of Erfurt and Magdeburg, which were preparing for the emigration, and by Grabau's wife. They asked that Grabau be released from prison and placed in a private house to be given better care. Even the governor of the province, Count Stolberg of Wernigerode, showed concern by suggesting that Grabau could die. This, he claimed, would not only have been a difficult blow for the large number of emigrants, whose emigration would have been postponed until they had found another pastor, it would also have been an unpleasant matter for the authorities and even the king. He argued that the people would have used the incident against the government by creating a martyrdom which would provide a large boost not only for the emigration, but for the entire separatist movement. Fearing this, the government gave in to the requests and had Grabau released from prison and transferred to a private house under police surveillance. Grabau recovered quickly there, and in April of 1839 the doctor declared that he would be able to travel in June.

Another difficulty was posed by poverty, especially that of the Saxon congregations or, better, the Saxon emigrants. Here, too, some were better off than others, such as Sutthoff, a garden owner, and a wholesale merchant from Magdeburg named Meisch. But these were the men who welcomed the dissent among the Lutherans con-

cerning the emigration and the call to remain in the country rather than flee from their burden. They ultimately did not join the ranks of the emigrants, primarily in order to hold on to their possessions. This is even described by Franke, the mayor, as well as the consistorial councilor of Magdeburg, Möller. As a result, Franke could report that only four of the fifteen families from Magdeburg could come up with the money for the journey. But this poverty was dealt with by the unification of the wealthier Pomerania group with the poorer Saxons and the formation of the common travel fund. von Rohr had foreseen these problems and proved his talent for organization here as in other situations.

For our detailed account of the emigration, we begin with the region of Erfurt, for which we have the best resources, particularly from the consistorial archives. On January 24, 1839, 28 heads of family, most of them from Erfurt itself, had sent a request for permission to emigrate to the magistrate. In this request the religious motive is again unambiguously present. It read:

*The undersigned Evangelical-Lutheran residents of this city have seen, after having tolerated eight years of persecution of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Prussia by the United State Church, that no more hope exists that the Evangelical-Lutheran Church will be granted the right to independent, separate church services and other rights. We are in danger of being led into apostasy through persuasion and force by the United State Church, because we lack the holy orders and with that the spiritual care and the sacraments, which we need in order to resist the powerful illusions of these recent, troubled times. Thus we have resolved to seek another country where we have the protection of the authorities to practice our free and separate Evangelical-Lutheran worship service. We obediently beg the highly esteemed magistrate to bring about most graciously the granting of permits by the royal government for emigration ...*

Grabau had received his permit while still in prison in Heiligenstadt on April 21 and left Magdeburg by steamboat on June 13.

In von Rohr's notes in "Informatorium," the official periodical of the Buffalo Synod in America, the Madgeburg congregation's request for permits from January 8, 1839, is preserved.

*The undersigned members of the Evangelical-Lutheran congregation in Magdeburg humbly ask a most praiseworthy government to deign most graciously to issue permits to emigrate to the United States of North America. The reason is the conviction that His Majesty our beloved King does not want to tolerate the Evangelical-Lutheran Church as was its right earlier according to the Treaty of Westphalia... We consider it our duty to flee from the deceitful United Church, which tries to convince us with flattering talk and punishment by the police. Because we have found no protection against this and have to forego the spiritual protection of our pastor, this is the most pressing reason why we should go to another country where we can find the holy orders of our separate Lutheran Church. Grabau has requested permission to emigrate and committed himself to accompany us ...*

In the meantime, von Rohr was continuing to actively promote the emigration. It should not go unmentioned here that the highest levels of government were still trying to dissuade the organizer of the emigration and thus to cripple the entire movement at the last minute. The crown prince showed great sympathy for the Lutherans and had already taken up relations with Pastor Kavel in 1835. In early 1839 he sent his aide-de-camp to von Rohr (a former officer in the Kaiser Alexander Guard Grenadier Regiment) in Magdeburg with instructions to wait with the emigration, promising to tolerate the Lutherans and guarantee free practice of religion as soon as he came into office. That was certainly both a great honor and a great temptation for von Rohr. He resisted, how-

ever, saying that they could not wait for the king to die, and that the Lutherans considered it their duty to flee from the persecution by the United Church and from spiritual starvation, in order to save their souls and that of their children. (It is well known that the crown prince often had heated arguments with Altenstein and with his father about the treatment of the Lutherans.)

It hindered the organization of the emigration little that von Rohr was arrested and in the end sentenced to prison. Here it will suffice to say that he still had enough freedom while he served his sentence to continue recruiting for the emigration movement. During his imprisonment in Magdeburg (March to May 1839), von Rohr made decisive preparations for the voyage to America. On his first visit to Bremen and Hamburg in 1838, he had been able to find no better conditions for travel than those offered by Sloman. But this was for 40 talers per person, on the average, for the direct trip from Hamburg to New York. This worried the deputies greatly, because they barely had gathered 30,000 talers for 1,000 passengers. Then two young merchants from Hamburg, John Fräntzel and Bätke, came to Magdeburg to see him in prison and presented to him a plan, by which the congregation would travel by steamship from Hamburg to Hull, from Hull to Liverpool by canal boat through England and from there to New York on returning American ships for about 29.50 talers per person. von Rohr himself would function as the principle agent to save the 1 to 2 taler agent's fee. Fräntzel and Bätke themselves would settle for 1 taler per person plus expenses in anticipation of future business. This was such a good offer that von Rohr devoted himself entirely to getting his prison term commuted. He succeeded in doing this, at least by a few days. On the day he was released, May 10, he requested and received a passport for a trip to Berlin, Stettin and Hamburg. On May 13 we find him in Kammin, Pomerania, where the majority of the Lutheran emigrants of 1839 came from.

*To be continued ...*

## Recent Tours and Events

- August 3, 2009 ..... The Klug and Schoessow families had a gathering at the picnic shelter.
- August 11, 2009 ..... Dr. Mark Loudon, professor of German at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, turned our museum. He also helped us sort our old German books.
- October 4, 2009 ..... The Historical Society furnished a speaker for the celebration of the 170th anniversary of our congregation.
- October 6, 2009 ..... The Seniors from Elm Grove Lutheran toured our church and museum.
- October 7, 2009 ..... The German Language classes at Germantown High School toured our museum.
- October 7, 2009 ..... A college student from Munich, Germany toured our museum as part of her studies for becoming a teacher.

*Psalm 105: "Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known among the nations what He has done."*

*Editor: LeRoy Boehlke*