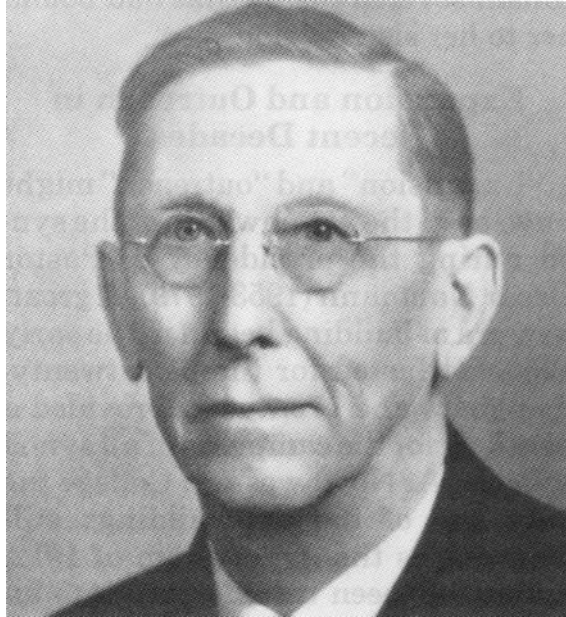


The John W.O. Brenner Papers

An Inventory



Archive of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Mequon, Wisconsin

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The John W.O. Brenner Papers

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Collection Level Description

Title: The John W.O. Brenner Files

Dates: 1868-1960

Extent: 1.6 meters of textual records

Biographical sketch:

John William Otto Brenner was born on July 11, 1874, at Hustisford, Wisconsin, the son of teacher Karl F.G. Brenner and his wife Barbara, nee Werner. He received his elementary school education at St. Peter's Lutheran School in Fond du Lac, WI.

After grade school, Brenner attended Northwestern Preparatory School and College in Watertown, WI. He received his BA from there in 1893. From there he attended and graduated from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Wauwatosa, WI in June 1896.

In 1896, Brenner was assigned to the joint parish of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Cudahy, WI and St. John's Lutheran Church in New Coeln, WI. He served there and also as an elementary school teacher at St. Paul's Lutheran School until 1908. From 1908 to 1958, Brenner served at St. John's Lutheran Church (8th & Vliet) in Milwaukee, WI.

On August 19, 1916, Brenner married Miss Anna Raether of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The couple was blessed with two children: one son, John F. and one daughter, Dorothy.

During his ministry Brenner served the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in a variety of capacities. He served on the Northwestern College Board of Control for 24 years. He served as chairman of the Seminary Building Committee and was a member of its Board of Control for 15 years. He represented the WELS on the Army-Navy Commission of the Synodical Conference during World War I and served on the Committee on State and Federal Legislation. He was the last living co-founder of the *Northwestern Lutheran*, which came into existence in his parsonage study in 1914, and served on its staff for over forty years. He was also the last living founder of the first Lutheran High School (Milwaukee Lutheran High School – 13th & Vine) in Milwaukee. He assisted in the publication of the *Junior Northwestern* for 35 years and served on the Northwestern Publishing House Board. He was one of the main proponents for the use of English in WELS worship, publications, education and other areas. Most notably, he served as General President of the Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States from 1933 to 1953. In June 1958, Brenner retired from the pastoral ministry. Upon his retirement he was made an advisory member of the Committee on Inter-Church Relations, particularly in its dealing with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and an advisory delegate of synod convention.

Brenner lived out his retirement years in Bay City, MI, becoming a member of St. John's Lutheran Church in Bay City. On September 30, 1962, John W.O. Brenner left this veil of tears and joined his Savior in the eternal rest at the age of 88. His funeral service was held on October 2, 1962 at St. John's, Bay City. Rev. Conrad Frey, president of Michigan Lutheran seminary, preached the sermon. His interment took place at Graceland Cemetery in Milwaukee on October 4, 1962. Rev. L. Wiechmann of Milwaukee, WI read the committal service.

Upon Brenner's death, WELS President Oscar J. Naumann was quoted in Brenner's 1962 obituary, "[Brenner was] an uncompromising foe of all that opposed the Word of God, eloquent in his struggle for the purity of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, suspicious—and rightly so—of all theological originality which proposed to know more than God has revealed in his holy Word. Our Synod thankfully made abundant use of his talents, and at this moment we pray that our former president's unswerving loyalty

to God and His Word may remain as a beacon which his beloved Synod may follow.” Northwestern College President E.E. Kowalke also wrote, “There were people who neither liked nor admired Pastor Brenner. His direct manner irritated some people. But whether people liked him or not, they all respected him. He was a man and a Christian and a dedicated pastor of the flock of Christ.”

Custodial history:

The collection was originally held during Brenner’s life and after his death in the meeting room of the old Northwestern Publishing House building (3616-32 W. North Ave., Milwaukee) and then stored in the basement of the old Wisconsin Synod building (3512 W. North Ave., Milwaukee). Brenner helped to establish a synod archives and his papers were included in this endeavor. With the move of Synod administration from North Ave. to 2929 Mayfair Rd. in Milwaukee in 1983-84 and the move of the Archives at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, the Brenner collection was permanently moved to the WELS Archives, Mequon, WI. Information supplied by Brenner’s grandson, Prof. John M. Brenner.

Scope and Content:

The collection is made up of materials created by and collected by Rev. John W.O. Brenner. The collection reflects the life of an active man involved in leading a small, conservative Lutheran synod with its roots in Germany into a solid, confessional church in the United States, while at the same time serving as pastor of a congregation in a changing neighborhood. Many of the items in the collection reflect the forthright and outspoken nature of a strong leader in the establishment of the WELS as a Scripturally-pure, confessional Lutheran church body. Many of these items reflect his strong leadership amidst the financial crises of his day and amidst the ecumenical movements which threatened the preservation of the truth of Scripture.

The collection consists of the following series:

- Series 1: Correspondence and reports on synod mission activity
- Series 2: Case files of pastors, laypeople and congregations
- Series 3: General correspondence
- Series 4: District correspondence
 - Subseries 1: Dakota-Montana District – 1933-46, 1953
 - Subseries 2: Michigan District – 1933-53
 - Subseries 3: Minnesota District – 1933-53
 - Subseries 4: Nebraska District – 1933-53
 - Subseries 5: Northern Wisconsin District – 1930-50
 - Subseries 6: Pacific Northwest District – 1926-54
 - Subseries 7: Southeastern Wisconsin District – 1933-53
 - Subseries 8: Western Wisconsin District – 1933-53
- Series 5: Correspondence and documents on synodical schools
- Series 6: Lutheran church bodies and organizations
- Series 7: Correspondence and documents on education and schools
- Series 8: Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod documents
 - Subseries 1: WELS/LC-MS fellowship discussions – 1946-60
- Series 9: Documents on church and state
- Series 10: Documents on called worker movement and doctrinal issues
- Series 11: Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States documents
 - Subseries 1: Board of Trustees minutes, correspondence and documents – 1933-48
 - Subseries 2: Synod reports and memorials – 1944-53

- Subseries 3: Board of Education minutes, reports, etc. – 1934-52
- Subseries 4: Spiritual Welfare Commission – 1941-46
- Subseries 5: Conference of Presidents – 1927-38
- Subseries 6: Synod publications – 1934-35
- Subseries 7: Minutes and reports from various synodical committees – 1939-52
- Subseries 8: Reports, minutes, etc. on various synod dealings – 1919-28, 1937-39, 1942-52
- Subseries 9: Synod conventions – 1935, 1937, 1940-41, 1943-45, 1947-56
- Series 12: Documents on synodical financial dealings
- Series 13: Documents on unionism and fellowship issues
- Series 14: Correspondence and documents on military matters
 - Subseries 1: Correspondence with Armed Services Committee at Washington – 1918-20
 - Subseries 2: Selective Service classification correspondence – 1918, 1940-53
 - Subseries 3: Committee on Relief for War Sufferers – 1945-53, 1956
 - Subseries 4: Various military matters – 1918-57
 - Subseries 5: Office of Civil Defense – 1942-43
 - Subseries 6: Documents on military chaplaincy – 1942-51
- Series 15: Miscellaneous documents
- Series 16: Newspaper clippings
- Series 17: Non-Lutheran organizations documents
- Series 18: Racial integration
- Series 19: Synodical Conference documents

Source of supplied title: Title based on the provenance of the records.

Arrangement: See appendix A for arrangement of the folders in the boxes.

Restrictions: None.

Accruals: No additions are expected.

Series level description

The John W.O. Brenner Papers

Series 1: Correspondence and reports on synod mission activity

Dates: 1934-1952

Extent: 11 folders, 10 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence and reports on a variety of world and home mission fields during Brenner's presidency. Mission fields included are: Refugee mission in Germany; Polish mission; Norway, MI mission; Arizona mission; Apache Indian mission; and Africa mission. Also included are reports and documents from the General Board for Home Missions, mission administration and documents from the Arizona-Colorado survey.

Series 2: Case files of pastors, laypeople and congregations

Dates: 1926-1956

Extent: 12 folders, 3.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence from twelve cases that came to Brenner's attention during his ministry and presidency. Included are: Bethlehem-St. James, Evanston, IL Case (1936-1938); Fort Atkinson Case (1933-1937); Ernest Gerds Case (1954-1956); Grace Lutheran Church, Tucson, AZ Case (1934-1935); Carl Harman Case (1941); Leo Kerber Case (1948); A. Matzke Case (1938-1939); J.P. Meyer Case (1945); Arnold Schulz Case (1938); D.E. Schwecke Case (1939-1942); Sioux City, IA Case (1926); Tucson Case (1946-1949).

Series 3: General correspondence

Dates: 1868-1958

Extent: 24 folders, 26.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence from a large number of correspondents on a variety of topics. This series was found organized by first letter of the last name. Some correspondents included are: Im. F. Albrecht, G.E. Boettcher, Paul C. Dowidat, W.A. Eggert, Conrad Frey, Im. P. Frey, A.W. Fuerstenau, G.W. Fischer, John Gauss, Karl A. Gurgel, Paul J. Gieschen, Edgar R. Gamm, O. Hohenstein, Otto Hoenecke, Roland Hoenecke, E.E. Kowalke, Frederick Knoll, K.F. Krauss, M. Lehninger, J.P. Meyer, H.A. Moussa, W.F. Mueller, H.C. Nitz, Paul Pieper, Wm. Roepke, Edmund Reim, W.J. Schulze, M. Schuetze, E.A. Sitz, W.P. Sauer, H.A. Sitz, Carl Schweppe, Winfred Schaller, E.W. Tacke, F. Uplegger, and Arthur Wacker, as well as a large number of other correspondents.

Series 4: District correspondence

Dates: 1926-1954

Extent: 23 folders, 13 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence to and from the eight districts of the Synod during Brenner's presidency.

Subseries 1: Dakota-Montana District – 1933-46, 1953

Subseries 2: Michigan District – 1933-53

Subseries 3: Minnesota District – 1933-53

Subseries 4: Nebraska District – 1933-53

Subseries 5: Northern Wisconsin District – 1930-50

Subseries 6: Pacific Northwest District – 1926-54

Subseries 7: Southeastern Wisconsin District – 1933-53

Subseries 8: Western Wisconsin District – 1933-53

Series 5: Correspondence and documents on synodical schools

Dates: 1910-1956

Extent: 5 folders, 5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence, reports and other documents dealing with three of the synodical schools, the calling of professors and giving offerings for synodical schools. Specific schools are Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Northwestern College and Northwestern Lutheran Academy.

Series 6: Lutheran church bodies and organizations

Dates: 1936-1953

Extent: 7 folders, 2 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of primarily correspondence, as well as reports and other documents, with other Lutheran church bodies, both inside and outside of fellowship with WELS. Included are the American Lutheran Church, the Augustana Synod, the Church of the Augsburg

Confession, the National Lutheran Council, the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Orthodox Lutheran Conference and the Slovak Lutheran Church.

Series 7: Correspondence and documents on education and schools

Dates: 1915-1953

Extent: 5 folders, 3 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence, reports and other documents dealing with school and education issues, particularly after World War I. Included are documents on education legislation post-World War I and correspondence dealing with the Lutheran High School of Milwaukee.

Series 8: Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod documents

Dates: 1919-1960

Extent: 11 folders, 11.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence and documents dealing with the Wisconsin Synod's dealings with LC-MS before, during and immediately after Brenner's presidency. These documents reflect the growing tension and controversy between WELS and LC-MS, including accusations of WELS sheepstealing, LC-MS unionism, issues with the Common Confession and the Concordia Seminaries of St. Louis and Springfield, as well as with Valparaiso University.

Subseries 1: WELS/LC-MS Fellowship discussions – 1946-60

Series 9: Documents on church and state

Dates: 1913-1952

Extent: 3 folders, 2 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence and reports on veterans' organizations, the creation of Columbus Day and the WELS' position on the Americanization movement.

Series 10: Documents on called worker movement and doctrinal issues

Dates: 1934-1953

Extent: 7 folders, 4.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence concerning calls, call requests, suspensions, resignations, assignments and other matters dealing with the call. Also included are documents on the issues of calling female teachers, discussions of the doctrine of the call and the practice of ordination, and on the need for called workers.

Series 11: Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States documents

Dates: 1919-1953

Extent: 33 folders, 40 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence, reports, articles, minutes and other documents from the life and dealings of the Joint Synod before and during the presidency of John Brenner. Most notably included are the documents from most, if not all, of the synod conventions during his presidency.

Subseries 1: Board of Trustees minutes, correspondence and documents – 1933-48

Subseries 2: Synod reports and memorials – 1944-53

Subseries 3: Board of Education minutes, reports, etc. – 1934-52

Subseries 4: Spiritual Welfare Commission – 1941-46

Subseries 5: Conference of Presidents – 1927-38

Subseries 6: Synod publications – 1934-35

Subseries 7: Minutes and reports from various synodical committees – 1939-52

Subseries 8: Reports, minutes, etc. on various synod dealings – 1919-28, 1937-39, 1942-52

Subseries 9: Synod conventions – 1935, 1937, 1940-41, 1943-45, 1947-56

Series 12: Documents on synodical financial dealings

Dates: 1935-1944

Extent: 5 folders, 5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence, reports and other documents dealing with the financial plans and problems of the WELS in the immediate post-Depression era. The most notable portion of the series is two files on the debt retirement of the WELS between 1935 and 1943. Also included are files on the self-insurance plan and the pension plan.

Series 13: Documents on unionism and fellowship issues

Dates: 1936-1956

Extent: 6 folders, 6.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence, reports, essays and other documents dealing with unionism and fellowship issues that arose during and after Brenner's presidency. One interesting file contains a large number of requests for the WELS to join in national or world ecumenical endeavors. Brenner's responses are quite clear. Most notably are a large file on unionism problems and also one on scouting.

Series 14: Correspondence and documents on military matters

Dates: 1918-1957

Extent: 10 folders, 14.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists primarily of correspondence between Brenner and Selective Service exempting all teacher and theological students from the draft. Also included are correspondence on the Committee on Relief for War Sufferers, conscientious objectors, civil defense, military chaplaincies, and other matters with the armed forces. This series can be broken into three eras: 1. World War I and immediately after, 2. World War II, immediately before and after, 3. Korean War.

Subseries 1: Correspondence with Armed Services Committee at Washington – 1918-20

Subseries 2: Selective Service classification correspondence – 1918, 1940-53

Subseries 3: Committee on Relief for War Sufferers – 1945-53, 1956

Subseries 4: Various military matters – 1918-57

Subseries 5: Office of Civil Defense – 1942-43

Subseries 6: Documents on military chaplaincy – 1942-51

Series 15: Miscellaneous documents

Dates: 1910-1949

Extent: 1 folder, 1 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence and other documents on a variety of topics from Brenner's life and ministry.

Series 16: Newspaper clippings

Dates: 1912-1958

Extent: 3 folders, 1.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of newspaper clippings on a variety of issues. One file contains newspaper clippings from the 50th anniversary of Northwestern College. One contains articles on fellowship, scouting and World War II, among other subjects. One contains articles on the Lutheran World Federation and the Missouri Synod's growing friendliness with liberal Lutheranism.

Series 17: Non-Lutheran organizations documents

Dates: 1945-1946

Extent: 2 folders, 0.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence from the Protestant Film Commission and documents on post-WWII Roman Catholicism.

Series 18: Racial integration

Date: 1950

Extent: 1 folder, 0.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of brief correspondence on an outside-WELS movement for racial integration in the congregations of larger urban areas.

Series 19: Synodical Conference documents

Dates: 1936, 1938-1955

Extent: 4 folders, 2.5 cm. of textual records

Scope and Content: This series consists of correspondence between members of the Synodical Conference, reports and documents dealing with Synodical Conference conventions, missions and other inter-synodical matters.

Appendix A

The John W.O. Brenner Papers

Arrangement

Box 1: Folders 1-47

Box 2: Folders 48-108

Box 3: Folders 109-143

Box 4: Folders 144-175

Series 1: Correspondence and reports on synod mission activity
Folders 1-11

Series 2: Case files of pastors, laypeople and congregations
Folders 12-23

Series 3: General correspondence
Folders 24-47

Series 4: District correspondence
Subseries 1: Dakota-Montana District – 1933-46, 1953
Folders 48-50
Subseries 2: Michigan District – 1933-53
Folders 51-53
Subseries 3: Minnesota District – 1933-53
Folders 54-56
Subseries 4: Nebraska District – 1933-53
Folders 57-58
Subseries 5: Northern Wisconsin District – 1930-50
Folders 59-63
Subseries 6: Pacific Northwest District – 1926-54
Folders 64-66
Subseries 7: Southeastern Wisconsin District – 1933-53
Folder 67
Subseries 8: Western Wisconsin District – 1933-53
Folders 68-70

Series 5: Correspondence and documents on synodical schools
Folders 71-75

Series 6: Lutheran church bodies and organizations
Folders 76-82

Series 7: Correspondence and documents on education and schools
Folders 83-87

Series 8: Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod documents
Folders 88-95

Subseries 1: WELS/LC-MS fellowship discussions – 1946-60
Folders 96-98

Series 9: Documents on church and state
Folders 99-101

Series 10: Documents on called worker movement and doctrinal issues
Folders 102-108

Series 11: Ev. Luth. Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States documents
Subseries 1: Board of Trustees minutes, correspondence and documents – 1933-48
Folders 109-111
Subseries 2: Synod reports and memorials – 1944-53
Folders 112-115
Subseries 3: Board of Education minutes, reports, etc. – 1934-52
Folders 116-117
Subseries 4: Spiritual Welfare Commission – 1941-46
Folder 118
Subseries 5: Conference of Presidents – 1927-38
Folder 119
Subseries 6: Synod publications – 1934-35
Folder 120
Subseries 7: Minutes and reports from various synodical committees – 1939-52
Folders 121-126
Subseries 8: Reports, minutes, etc. on various synod dealings – 1919-28, 1937-39, 1942-52
Folders 127-133
Subseries 9: Synod conventions – 1935, 1937, 1940-41, 1943-45, 1947-56
Folders 134-143

Series 12: Documents on synodical financial dealings
Folders 144-148

Series 13: Documents on unionism and fellowship issues
Folders 149-154

Series 14: Correspondence and documents on military matters
Subseries 1: Correspondence with Armed Services Committee at Washington – 1918-20
Folder 155
Subseries 2: Selective Service classification correspondence – 1918, 1940-53
Folders 156-159
Subseries 3: Committee on Relief for War Sufferers – 1946-53, 1956
Folder 160
Subseries 4: Various military matters – 1918-57
Folders 161-162
Subseries 5: Office of Civil Defense – 1942-43
Folder 163
Subseries 6: Documents on military chaplaincy – 1942-51
Folder 164

Series 15: Miscellaneous documents
Folder 165

Series 16: Newspaper clippings
Folders 166-168

Series 17: Non-Lutheran organizations documents
Folders 169-170

Series 18: Racial integration
Folder 171

Series 19: Synodical Conference documents
Folders 172-175