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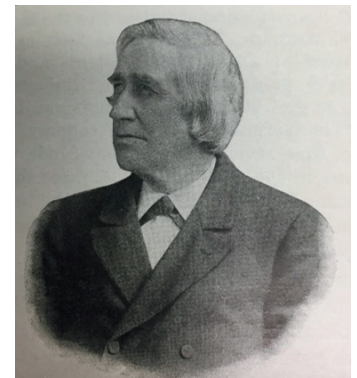
Celebrating a Rich Past . . . Inspiring a Promising Future

"There Were Giants in Those Days"

by Randy Tschetter

A headline in the 1965 Annual, an NAB magazine, reads, "There Were Giants in Those Days."¹ That phrase quotes Genesis 6:4 in which translators of the King James Version of the Bible refer to a mysterious and powerful group of people or beings (Nephilim) as giants. In his article, Professor Albert Ramaker uses giants as a play on words to describe the lives of some influential leaders who contributed greatly to the development and growth of the North American Baptist Conference.

First among Ramaker's giants was August Rauschenbusch – generally known as the founder of Rochester Theological Seminary (aka, North American Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls Seminary, Kairos Seminary). After times of intense spiritual struggles, he became a man of strong and firmly founded faith. He was once described as the "most learned man in Rochester." During his thirty-two years of seminary ministry, "he taught the whole gamut of courses: languages, science, secular subjects, and the entire theological curriculum"² in addition to recruiting students and securing financial resources. Most of the 179 students who came under his tutelage remained in ministry for their entire lives.³



August Rauschenbusch

At his funeral service in Hamburg, Germany, 1899, he was remembered as one who in many ways had been a teacher not only of seminary students but also for the entire denomination. His major contributions had been: 1) the blessings of a faithful teacher of divine truth; 2) the benefit of

¹ Albert J. Ramaker, "There Were Giants in Those Days," *1965 Annual*, January 165, 8.

² Frank H. Woyke, *Heritage and Ministry of the North American Baptist Conference* (North American Baptist Conference, 1979), 49.

³ Ramaker, "There Were Giants," 8.

an orderly study of God's Word; and 3) the value of a trained ministry.⁴ Having overcome several health and relationship challenges, the record shows that his "contribution to our denominational life [. . .] far outweighed that of any other of our early leaders."⁵



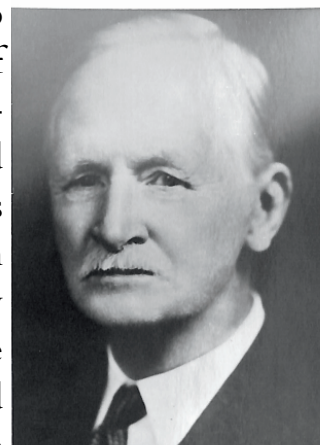
Jacob S. Gubelmann

Another of Ramaker's giants was Jacob S. Gubelmann – a beloved pastor and seminary professor. Following a distinguished quarter-century of pastoral ministry, Gubelmann transitioned to the Rochester Seminary as professor of Systematic

Theology and Homiletics. For more than thirty years (1883–1914) "he stood before his classes as an embodiment of [the] very spirit of Jesus." His example of "loving kindness and his calmness of faith" made it difficult for him to "flunk" any student.⁶ "His sermons were polished and scholarly but their greatest beauty consisted with their warmth and fervor, combined with an evangelical simplicity and winsomeness which warmed the hearts of his hearers."⁷ "He was a gentleman, in every act, in every word. [. . . T]here was about

him an atmosphere of the utmost consideration for the self-respect and the personality of those whom he met."⁸

Somewhat in contrast to the easy-going spirit of Gubelmann was the hard-working and disciplined Alfred J. Ramaker, who was selected in 1889 to teach Church History and New Testament Literature. "He was a born teacher, a good disciplinarian, a wise counsellor, a scholar, a



Alfred J. Ramaker

prolific scholar and the best friend any student who did his work well ever had."⁹ A student once said of him, "Ramaker got more work out of me than any other professor."¹⁰ Additionally, his educational and uplifting sermons at pastors' gatherings around the denomination were always well received and blessed by his warm personality. The Kaiser-Ramaker Theological Collection that bears his name is still part of the Kairos University library system.¹¹

In writing about giants of the faith, Ramaker understood that there were many others who served faithfully and were deserving of extended

⁴ Woyke, *Heritage and Ministry*, 53.

⁵ Woyke, *Heritage and Ministry*, 53.

⁶ Ramaker, "There Were Giants," 8.

⁷ Charles F. Zummach, "Our School of the Prophets," *These Glorious Years: The Centenary History of German Baptists of North America 1843–1943*, ed. Herman von Berge, (Roger Williams Press, 1943), 90.

⁸ *Rochester Theological Seminary Bulletin* – No. 1 (1919), 18.

⁹ Zummach, "Our School," 91.

¹⁰ Ramaker, "There Were Giants," 8.

¹¹ *Kairos University Student Handbook: 2025–2026*, (2025), 2.

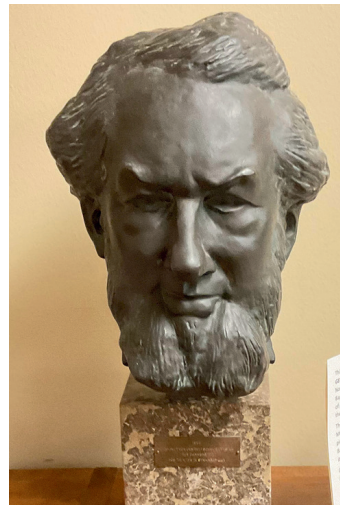
biographies. Men like Konrad Fleischmann, founding pastor of the first German Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – a man of varied gifts: preacher, pastor, organizer, hymn-writer, and first editor of *Der Sendbote*. The Publication Society was led by faithful servants and editors Philip Bickel and Julius C. Haselhuhn, who said, “I would rather wear out than rust out.”¹² Behind the scenes, business managers such as Henry P. Donner brought integrity and efficiency to the finances of the publication and communication department.



Ramaker also included pastors like Rev. Jacob Kratt who served as pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Portland, Oregon, for forty years in his list of denominational giants.

Nearly everyone who reads these stories will recall someone, somewhere (a pastor, Sunday School teacher, youth worker, camp counselor, professor, etc.) who made a significant impact in their life. Take a moment or two today to remember and give thanks for those spiritual giants who have blessed your life. 📖

Johann Gerhardt Oncken Another Baptist Giant



If you drop into the Archives for a visit, one of the first items you will see on display is this 40-pound bust of another Baptist leader. This 20-inch bronze sculpture of Johann Gerhardt Oncken was presented to the NAB by the Baptist Union of Germany as an expression of gratitude for the relief assistance given them following World War II. The sculptor was Klaus Luckey, son of Dr. and Mrs. Hans Luckey of Hamburg. The piece, which was prepared for exhibit at the Baptist World Congress in 1955, did not reach its destination due to a shipping strike.

Oncken was a Baptist pioneer in Germany (1800–1884) and was largely responsible for the spread of Baptist witness in Europe. He is often referred to as the “Father of the German Baptists.” 📖

¹² Ramaker, “There Were Giants,” 9.

The Heritage Commission is a partner ministry of the North American Baptist Conference. An advisory committee is in place to offer support and direction to the director and staff.

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Life in the Archives



Bloomenfield Baptist Cemetery near Streeter, North Dakota

While there are days when life at the Heritage Commission can be somewhat routine, there are also days when life is very interesting and challenging. Early in May, we hosted a researcher from Hamburg, Germany, for an entire day. After several years of email-communication, Niclas was able to do an in-person visit to the Archives. The purpose of his visit was “to inquire about the historical records of two Baptist congregations that once existed in Stutsman County, North Dakota.” He wrote:

“My ancestors were involved in the founding of the German Baptist Church of Bloomenfield in Germania Township (later, Streeter Baptist Church), which was dedicated on December 3, 1899. As part of my research, I am looking for information about the history and records of this church” – in particular, his great-great grandmother, Katherina Hermann. Conversation about life and family around a lunchtime pizza added enjoyment to a busy and productive day. ☞



NORTH AMERICAN BAPTIST CONFERENCE

**HERITAGE
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