



# Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

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Issue 2

*From* **THE BEGINNINGS  
OF  
WESTERN KOSHKONONG  
EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH**

*[Cottage Grove, Wisconsin]*

*Though many Norwegians had come to the Wisconsin wilderness before 1843, none was an ordained minister. Lay preachers, who for the most part carried with them deep-rooted antagonism toward their homeland's church, first met the settlers' religious needs. This led to a state of affairs which Lutheran writers have described as chaos and confusion, and the result was that avid religionists of many different denominations visited the Norwegian settlements attempting to gain converts for their own churches. Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Mormons all had a measure of success. But by mid-1843 there was a strong desire for services held by a regularly ordained clergyman. though the lay preachers had performed a "useful labor of love and mercy," an increasing population and challenging pioneer life experiences demanded more systematic and thorough spiritual care.*

*Many immigrants looked back to Norway for religious leadership. Coincidentally, in Norway, a religious interest was stirring in regard to the Norwegian immigrants. In 1843, C. L.*

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## U.V. KOREN A BIOGRAPHY

We here continue the Biography of the Rev. Ulrich Vilhelm Koren written by Pastor H.A. Preus of Calmar, Iowa for the June 1951 issue of the ELS Clergy Journal. Pastor Koren was the first Norwegian pastor to live west of the Mississippi River.

September 6, 1853 the Korens left Norway via Kiel and Hamburg on a small sailing vessel for New York. In Hamburg on Sunday morning in a large church with a few chairs set out, he heard a pastor preach on Ephesians 3,13, a sermon on epicurean advice, which made the blood boil in Koren. In the afternoon he heard another pastor who preached a really Scriptural sermon. Koren spoke to him about the morning sermon, and the pastor said: "That's what you have to expect in this city in these times."

For eleven weeks the Korens were on their voyage on the little ship "Rhein."

There were about 200 emigrants aboard; and 30 to 40 in the second class. There were all kinds of people, among whom were some with a combination of unbelief and gross superstition. Cholera broke out aboard with fourteen deaths and burials at sea.

One night due to careless steering they struck the sandbank five or six miles off Sable Island. Fortunately it was low tide, so with high tide they got clear again. Near Long Island in a fog they again ran aground for a while. At last in November they arrived safely in New York.

The first railroad from Buffalo to Chicago

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Clausen, a young Dane, had gone to Norway hoping to join a Norwegian missionary to Africa. It was suggested to Clausen that he go to the United States instead since the Norwegians in the Muskego settlement needed a school teacher. (Muskego is in southeastern Wisconsin near Milwaukee.) Clausen accepted the proposal but the Muskego settlers persuaded him to become their minister rather than their teacher. Clausen, who was well-educated and informed, was examined and found qualified. He was ordained by a German Lutheran minister, and called to serve the people of Muskego.

In February, 1844, Clausen visited all the major Norwegian settlements in Wisconsin, including Koshkonong. At each colony he preached, baptized, and offered the Lord's Supper. He did not organize any congregations outside Muskego believing that he wouldn't be able to care for them.

Meanwhile, back in Norway, a young Norwegian theological candidate, J. W. C. Dietrichson, became active in the newly organized Norwegian Missionary Society. Through this group he became acquainted with a Christiana (now Oslo) merchant who was deeply concerned for the immigrants' spiritual welfare. The merchant offered to pay Dietrichson's passage to America if he would establish "a permanent church order among them." After thoughtful consideration, Dietrichson applied to the Norwegian church department and requested ordination so he could conduct religious work among the Norwegians in America. Although a call to serve a specific congregation was normally required before a pastor could be ordained, because of the apparent need and unusual circumstances,

the church approved his request.

Dietrichson left for America in May, 1844. His main goals were to organize Norwegian-American Lutheranism, bring religious order out of its present disorder and form congregations according to accepted state-church ritual.

After briefly preaching in the New York area, Dietrichson reached the Muskego settlement on August 7, 1844, and the following Sunday preached to Clausen's congregation and participated in the communion service.

Dietrichson came to Koshkonong Prairie in late August and conducted his first service with Holy Communion in Amund Anderson's barn. This site is in the eastern part of the district. A monument now marks this site. Local legend has it that deep niches were cut in the oaks to provide support for the communion table and as a result the trees died.

At a later service in 1844, sixty people came to communion under the oaks, and Dietrichson used as his text words from Psalm 78:19 "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?". At this time he was asked by many of the settlers to come and work among them. However, before making a decision, he wished to survey other Norwegian communities. Dietrichson continued his travels and visited other settlements where he conducted services but did not organize congregations.

Dietrichson found the Koshkonong settlement to be the largest and relatively nearest the geographic center of the other "western settlements." Therefore, he agreed to the Koshkonong settlers' written request to be their minister and made Koshkonong his ministry's focal point. In October, 1844,

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Oak Leaves welcomes articles of both synodical and local significance for publication; articles may be edited for style, clarity, or length to allow for publication; submitted manuscripts will be deposited in the Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

he organized the "Norwegian Lutheran Congregation on Koshkonong Prairie in Dane and Jefferson Counties, Wisconsin Territory, North America."

It became evident that church structures needed to be built. Exactly sixty days after the western part of the congregation was organized, on December 19, 1844, a completed 28 X 36 foot log structure was dedicated. This building was the first Norwegian-American Lutheran Church to stand complete in North America (the eastern church building was identical and it was dedicated on January 31, 1845).

As described by Dietrichson, both churches were made of logs and plainly furnished. A table covered with a white cloth, and with a black wooden cross, surrounded by a kneeling bench, served as an altar. A simple lectern served as a pulpit and an oak log topped by a tin pan served as a baptismal font. The parishioners sat on benches. A parsonage was probably built at this time in the same austere fashion.

In early March, 1845, the congregation extended a formal call to Pastor Dietrichson and asked him to be their permanent pastor. He didn't accept right away, since he had planned a return trip to Norway after he had established the congregation. On this trip he hoped to convince young pastors to emigrate and minister here.

Dietrichson left for Norway, promising he would come back if he couldn't secure any capable young pastors. In his absence, C. L. Clausen served the Koshkonong parish and the Muskego congregation.

Unable to find even one pastor willing to emigrate, Dietrichson returned with his bride in September, 1846. At this time the congregation purchased land for a parsonage which was located halfway between the two settlements. Dietrichson moved into the new parsonage just before Christmas in 1846. It was a simple oak structure consisting of three rooms with a kitchen and pantry.

When Dietrichson returned from Norway, he brought along a common chalice which had been given to him as a gift from the late bishop of Christiania's children, for the Koshkonong congregation. The chalice was regularly used to serve the wine and the cover was used to serve the bread. This chalice, which was crafted in 1833, is now preserved in West Koshkonong's museum.

Dietrichson spent four more years at Koshkonong. At that time the entire Koshkonong area had 2,012 members.... On May 26, 1850, Dietrichson preached his final sermon at Koshkonong and returned to his homeland.



## G.O. LILLEGARD

Pastor George O. Lillegard was one of the thirteen pastors present at the Lime Creek Lutheran Church when the Evangelical Lutheran Synod was reorganized in 1918.

Previously he had served as a Norwegian Synod missionary in the interior of China. Having been born in Calmar, Iowa in 1888, as the son of a Lutheran parochial school teacher, he received his theological training in the "old" Norwegian Synod. As a missionary, following his ordination, he wrote back to his synod: "who [can] sit quietly in the safe shelter of good homes in a civilized community and do nothing to bring 'Peace on earth, good will to men' to the ears and the hearts and lives of China's millions?"

Finding himself unable to enter the merger of Norwegian Lutheran church bodies in 1917 also meant he could no longer serve as its missionary in China. However, in 1921, Pastor Lillegard returned as an ELS missionary to the Chinese mission field of the Missouri Synod. He served several stations in China, preaching and teaching of Jesus the Savior of sinners, to the Chinese people in their own language. Civil war in China was chiefly responsible for his departure in 1927.

Following his return to the United States, he served as pastor of Harvard Street Lutheran Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts [now Pinewood Lutheran, Burlington] for twenty-four years. He then was called to Bethany Lutheran Seminary in 1952 and taught there until his retirement ten years later.

At his death, in 1965, it was said: "George Lillegard will be remembered not least of all for his many writings, ranging from a book of sermons to numerous articles in church papers. He was known as a staunch defender of a verbally-inspired Bible, and of a conservative Lutheranism based upon the old Lutheran confessions. He served his synod as secretary from 1934 until 1952, and as a representative on committees, some of them intersynodical. He served for a time as a vice-president of the former Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America."

## *U.V. Koren, (continued from page 1)*

being completed that fall, they proceeded by train to Chicago, then a city of about 60-70,000 people. At May and Erie streets, where Our Saviour's church of the old Synod later was built (and which is now a Catholic church), at that time was nothing but open prairie. They couldn't go farther by railroad. So they took a boat to Milwaukee, where they got a train on a little stump of a railroad to Whitewater (now a part of the C.M.& St. R.R.) There they got transportation by horse to Koshkonong to A.C. Preus's home. The driver of the team of horses and the lumber wagon was lively young American of about twenty years. He said, he had attended school to the extent that he knew some Latin and quoted from Cicero. He seemed common and unassuming, which made quite an impression on Koren used to the class distinction in Norway, where a man with a higher education considered it below his dignity to perform menial tasks. But in the United States of America it seemed that labor was considered just as honorable as anything. Koren's hope was that Norway might learn this too, [and] was expressed by him.

At Koshkonong [Wisconsin] the Korens were most heartily welcomed, though the parsonage was small and primitive. Here the older Dietrickson [sic], the first Norwegian pastor in this country, had resided for four or five years. He was very much interested in ritualistic ordinances. As a consequence he wore his pastor's robe and ruff when he was out in the barnyard, hauling wood or water or other stuff.

A.C. Preus was pastor in the Synod organized only a little over a month earlier. He did not seem to think it mattered much whether Koren went to the Iowa parish or to another one. Koren held that he had been ordained on call to Iowa, and that there was need for him there. So it was that he went to Iowa, as he had expected to.

Koren had been promised a house to live in and a few hundred dollars. He knew, there was no house there. He had seen some log huts on the way through Ohio. And he wondered what his wife would think of such a home. It was hard to tell.

Now Pastor H.A. Preus from Spring Valley arrived and took the newcomers with him by horse and buggy. Koren marveled at the ability of Preus to find his way in the dark, not realizing that it might be the old horse who by instinct found the way home. They arrived at a little log house, the parsonage. In the parlor was a so-called "sofa" with a back of spindles made by the pastor. This was backed up to the window, and there between this sofa back and the window as in a crib lay

baby Christian Preus, later the President of Luther college.

A neighbor of Preus, a Vossing, guided Koren on the way through Madison, Blue Mounds, Wingville, etc. to Bridge-port on the Wisconsin River, where they expected to be ferried across. The weather was bitterly cold; but the ice was broken up, so how were they to cross the river? There was no house on the south side of the river where they were. Help had to come from the other side, where there were some houses. What should they do? So they began calling out at the top of their voices until they heard voices answer from the other side. After a bit two men came rowing toward them in a canoe. They were half-breed Frenchmen. They told the Korens to sit facing each other in the bottom of the canoe, holding on to the sides of the craft. Their baggage, two trunks, had to be left behind for another trip. They did not use oars or paddles, but pike poles to push their way between the cakes of ice. Their guide from Spring Prairie wept when he saw them leave in the canoe.



*The Korens crossing the Mississippi River  
[from sketches by Pastor Koren]*

*From: The Diary of Elisabeth Koren 1853-1855, translated by David T. Nelson. Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian-American Historical Society, 1955, page 108.*

When the trunks had been brought over, they got a brisk ride to Prairie du Chien. Here they were informed that they could not yet get over the Mississippi River, as the ice was not safe yet. So there they waited several days. Finally, a man who claimed to be a doctor offered to help them across. He had no horse; but had a light buggy. The doctor was a little man with gold specs and a high hat. He went ahead with a long stake to test the ice. Koren with a sou' wester [sic] on his head and high boots walked between the shafts pulling the little buggy in which sat Mrs. Koren wrapped up in buffalo robes. There were also the two trunks. In the rear walked a little Norwegian boy who could help by pushing the buggy. When the doctor found that the ice ahead was safe he came and took hold of a rope

tied to the shafts and helped pull and away they went. At last they got safely over to McGregor [Iowa]. Koren said that he crossed the Mississippi many times thereafter, but that first one was the most curious of them all.

There were only a few houses in McGregor. There was, of course, a tavern. There appeared to be only one large common bedroom. Where should Mrs. Koren sleep? The inn-keeper said she should have the "ladies' room," which was sort of an addition to the main bedroom and had a door but no window. But there was a bed for the lady.

Here they hired a team of horses and a lumber wagon with a young Scotchman and a driver to bring them to Little Iowa parish. By nightfall they came to a Norwegian farmer, who rode horseback ahead and led them to another farmer Katterud. There they came and found the house full of relatives just come from Norway. However, they received the Korens and gave them temporary shelter.

The next morning Nils Katterud and Koren walked on to Thron Lomen (from Valdres, Norway), the oldest and most enlightened man among the pioneers there. He advised Koren to get lodgings with some people near Katteruds, because nearby they had prospects of getting 80 acres of land for the parsonage. After several vain attempts at getting lodgings, they finally got into the home of Erik P. Egge. It was only a log house with one room, which they were willing to share with Korens if they would put up with it and so would not have to hunt further for lodgings, Katterud hitched up his oxen and hauled Korens and the two trunks to Egges, where they remained for three months.

Round about were neighbors from several different districts in Norway.

It was Christmas Eve when they arrived at Egges. The house was 14 X 16 feet. It was divided into two rooms by a calico curtain. The one room had one wall with two beds backed up against it. The beds were separated by a curtain. The rest of the house served as a kitchen with a stove, as a living room for them, and as a study for the pastor. The following day was Christmas. Services were announced by messengers sent abroad in the community. And Koren had to prepare a sermon. Koren had on hand only a New Testament, an Altar book, ritual, and a hymn book. The rest of his books were in Milwaukee, and he didn't get them for another six months. He had pen, ink, and paper. The big question was what to do for a light. For a lamp they rigged up a dish with some fat and a rag in it. This dish was set on top of an inverted coffee cup to bring it a little higher than the

paper. And so he worked at his initial sermon almost the whole night, for he maintained that he could not be too well prepared in preaching God's Word.

Christmas Day the service was held in the home of Thorgrim Busness, a neighbor of Egge. There was only one thing the people complained of after the service and that was that Koren had not announced a hymn for offering to the pastor. And so no offering was given, which the people missed, and which they had been used to before in Norway and wanted to continue here. This was Koren's third sermon in his career so far. The Second Christmas Day he was to preach six or seven miles west of there. It didn't occur to him to use the same sermon, so spent most of the night again writing a new sermon. New Year's Day he was to preach thirty miles east of there--at Paint Creek. There he was well received and the people wanted him to make his home there. The next sermon was on Epiphany, also at Busness' home, and the following Sunday twelve to fourteen miles west of there at Hans Aakres (near Ridgeway). Then there were all kinds of ministerialia. Fourteen services and meetings were conducted by him in January in the four-

county parish. It was not an easy matter to find out where his parishioners lived. It was a month later that he heard of some living at "Whiskey Grove" near what was later called Calmar. The land was new, so there were hardly any landmarks to go by. But when the land was surveyed Koren got some maps and marked in the townships and sections where his parishioners were located, using all kinds of letters and numerals as keys to locations. His letter of call specified three divisions:-- "Little Iowa," "Painted Creek," and "Turkey River." In reality the parish included Decorah, Madison township, Lincoln township (near Ridgeway), Calmar, Stavanger (Ossian), Washington Prairie, Glenwood township, West and East Painted Creek, Yaegre, Lansing on the Mississippi River, Norway, Marion, and Clermont. A little later Little Turkey [Saude] and Crane Creek [Jerico] (near Lawler) were added. This parish was then spread over six counties. Still later a mission field in southern Minnesota was added.



*To be continued ...*

### Your Help is Needed!

The **Altar Paintings** in many Norwegian churches were painted in the 1890s by H.Gausta. If your altar painting bears his name, please contact Oak Leaves. Also include the subject of the painting. An article about the artist will be printed in a future issue.

Also, remember to submit articles of historical interest to the editor for future issues.

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TO

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Early Norwegian Lutheran clergymen often would wear a ruff collar as they conducted the Divine Service. It was known in Norwegian as a *Prestekrage*. Several explanations have been advanced for this collar ...

... The various "flutes" radiating from the collar are as rays of the sun which is radiating the Gospel of the Redeemer Jesus Christ (Malachi 4:2),

... It has been likened to the platter upon which the head of John the Baptist was presented (Matthew 14:11).

... The most common explanation is that it is to remind the pastor of Jesus' words in Mark 9:42: "whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea."



Rev. U. V. Koren