



# Oak Leaves

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Norwegian Synod Pastor Johannes Bergh (1842-1905) graduated from Concordia Seminary in 1869. In that same year he was the organizing pastor of Holton Lutheran Church (Holton, Michigan). Two years later he accepted a call to western Minnesota and in 1872 was the organizing pastor of Rock Dell Lutheran Church (rural Belview, Minnesota). That same summer, in 1872, he married Bolette Marie Stub who was the daughter of Pastor H.A. Stub of Big Canoe Lutheran Church; rural Decorah, Iowa.



*The following memoirs of Mrs. Bergh tell of the experiences of the pioneer pastor and his wife during their thirty-three years in Minnesota.*

## *Memoirs of Bolette Marie (Stub) Berg:*

### **On to the Unknown:**

In the first part of September, 1872 we set out from Borgen parsonage to the then "far west" where Bergh already had labored for almost a year as pastor of many small congregations in several counties.

From Decorah we went by train to New Ulm, which was as far as the railroad went at that time. The rest of the way we traveled by "stage" to our destination (about 70 miles) to Sacred Heart, Renville County. The next morning we started from New Ulm and came to Fort Ridgely about noon. This place is well-known from the Sioux Indian War, and a large part of the high hills were standing yet, with rifle holes all around.

It was interesting to walk around and see all these things. We also heard many accounts of the war. There was also a good hotel here, where we were served a good dinner. From this fort we then drove on across the prairie, past a mound of bones since the war. We found here some of our congregations west of the fort, and stopped for the night with a family of Finns. They had a small log house. Otherwise most people here lived in dugouts.

In the evening we saw a grand sight - a prairie fire. It was awful to see this sea of flames. But we were assured that there was no danger, as there were many furrows plowed around the house (the usual precaution against the frequent prairie fires).

Bergh said the devotion and we went to bed. But we did not get much sleep because there were too many small inhabitants in our bed, and in addition there were mosquitoes, roaches and even mice running about.

We were happy to get up and continue our journey in the morning. We passed the following night in Beaver Falls, the little town which lies in a hollow, surrounded by steep hills (this was the first county seat). At last, on the third day of our stage ride, we arrived at Hans Sagnes' where we were to live.

### **Our First Home:**

The Sagnes folks lived in a dugout, and a small granary with a straw roof was our first house. It did not look very inviting, with corn and rubbish lying around. We cleaned up some, so we got a place to sleep on the floor till we could get hold of a bed.

*continued on page 7*

## U.V. Koren A Biography

We here conclude the Biography of the Rev. U.V. Koren written by Pastor H.A. Preus of Calmar, Iowa in 1951. Pastor Preus succeeded Pastor Koren at the Calmar Lutheran Church only six years following Koren's death.

So far we have heard of the first of three periods of the Life and Work of Koren in America. The first is the Pioneer Period. The second is the Period of Doctrinal Controversy. The third is His Presidency of the Norwegian Synod.

As you have heard, Koren came to America in the year the Norwegian Synod was organized, 1853. His pastoral activity was practically coeval with the existence of the church body of which he was a member and which he served until his death in 1910. In 1855 he was elected Secretary of the Synod. In 1861 he became a member of the church council; from 1871 to 1876 he was vice-president of the Synod; from 1876 to 1894 he was president of the Iowa District; and from 1894 until his death he was president of the Synod. In 1903 during the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Synod, the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary of St. Louis, Missouri conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and the King of Norway and Sweden made him a commander of the Order of St. Olaf.

The first period of his pastoral work spanned the years from his arrival in the United States until the 1870's. That was the period of pioneering in extensive mission activity in northeast Iowa and southeast Minnesota, where at his death twenty pastors were serving charges. An outstanding piece of work was his part in establishing Luther College. He was, during the whole history of this institution until his death, a special and active friend and supporter of Luther College. It was he who in anticipation of the decision to locate the institution at Decorah, secured for the college its beautiful campus of thirty-two acres in the northwestern part of the city. In 1874-75 he was also an instructor at Luther College. And in his advanced age, it was considered a great event to have Koren present at Luther College. He was such a striking man in

appearance, stately and dignified, and always impressed the students with his earnestness and deep sincerity as a Christian; a worthy example to follow. And he gave evidence of his humility and complete submission to the Word of God, for instance, in suggesting as the motto of the Synod GEGRAPTAI ("It is written"), which was engraved on the seal of the Synod. Another important piece of work in which Koren exerted great influence was the publishing of the Norwegian Synod's Hymnbook. Koren was greatly interested in Church Music and Hymnology and took the leading part in preparing this Hymnbook. He was well qualified for it, being an excellent musician and being no mean poet, writing, for instance, No. 11 in the Lutheran Hymnary, "Ye Lands, to the Lord Make a Jubilant Noise". This work of Koren has not had much acclaim and has not been appreciated as it should have been. It was done in an unassuming way, in that it was regarded to be for the purging out of Guldberg's hymnbook some more or less rationalistic hymns, and replacing them with soundly Lutheran-Christian hymns. The work got to be rather extensive, but was finished before Landstad's (a rather sound and conservative hymnbook from Norway) appeared. The Synod Hymnbook was very timely, and most serviceable among the Norwegian Lutherans here, and was highly appreciated by them.

The second period of Koren's career was the one of Doctrinal Controversy in which he soon became the leader for the truth. He was the real author of "Redegjrelse", or an accounting which was published by our Synod's pastors in 1884, the main contents of which were drawn from the Formula of Concord to which our Synod had subscribed that same year. This controversy was called the Seven Years' War, because it really broke out in 1880 and was

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ended in 1887, when the Synod was split and many people and pastors withdrew from the Synod. It could also be called a thirty years' war lasting till the death of Koren; and to some at that time it seemed that it would continue longer, since the conclusion in 1910 appeared to take for granted that it should continue. Koren lived to see this conclusion. And if he didn't live to see the union movement end in unity, He had the pleasure of seeing the doctrine laid down in the "Redegjrelse" twenty-six years before, now adopted in all the districts of the Synod, and, as far as is known, it was without a single dissenting vote.

The third period in Koren's activity was from 1894 when he became successor to H.A. Preus as President of the Synod, until his death. In this position he made a name for himself by the many excellent essays at conventions and other articles and writing on the affairs of the church. These are contained in Volumes II and III of his writings (Koren: "Samlede Skrifter"). We may call attention especially to the one, "What the Norwegian Synod has willed and still wills", in 1890; and "Why is there no church unity among the Norwegian Lutherans in America?" (an answer to Martin Ulvestad and many others in 1905); also his synodical address in Minneapolis in 1890 ... and his synodical address on the "Inspiration of the Scriptures" at the convention in Chicago in 1908, and which has been

called his testament to the Synod. A better testament than this could not be given with its earnest admonition to hold fast to the truth that the entire Scriptures were inspired by God the Holy Ghost, who gave to the holy writers the very thoughts and words they should write. May the Synod never deviate from this position, one of the chief principles of the Reformation!

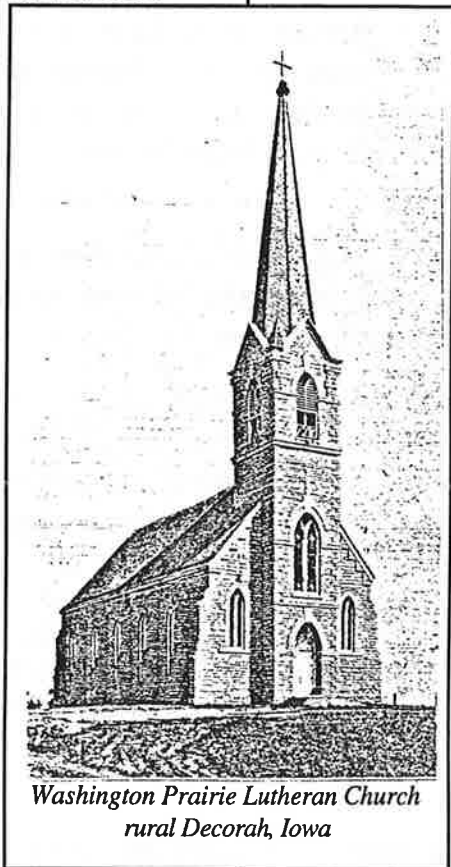
Nor from the second one, namely that a sinner is justified by the grace of God alone for Jesus'

sake without the deeds of the Law. This principle had been given much attention in the union movement which had been carried on with other synods for several years, but which by 1910 had been halted. Publicly before God and men our Synod had been accused in the annual convention of the Norwegian United Church by its president of harboring un-Lutheran and un-scriptural doctrines in the theses which the Synod had based on the Formula of Concord. When our Synod's representatives in the Union committee demanded to be shown what was un-Lutheran and un-scriptural in our teachings, this was not granted. These charges are public and official, and still the members of the Union committee from the Norwegian United Lutheran Church will not consent to point out the errors and differences in doctrine which must needs be discussed if unity should be effected. These United Church men were unwilling to perform their plain and simple duty. They simply cut off further negotiations.

So in 1910 our Synod was at the turning point in the developments of Norwegian Lutheranism in America. And where would it eventually lead to? That was the question no one seemed able to answer. It was stated at the time of the death of Koren, that if the Synod should be convinced that they were guilty of error, they would gladly retract. But if not, the Synod would declare with Luther that here we stand on the Scriptures, and cannot do otherwise, God helping them.

And if the opponents are persisting in error, our Synod must take a definite stand against them. Such was the attitude of good old Synod men in 1910 at the death of Koren.

Koren died December 19, 1910 at Washington Prairie, and was buried on December 23, 1910 on the same date on which he first set foot on Washington Prairie.



Washington Prairie Lutheran Church  
rural Decorah, Iowa



## **Norwegian Synod work in Northern Iowa and Southern Minnesota by Father and Son Pastors: T.A.Togerson & A.J.Torgerson**

In the mid 1850s a group of Norwegian immigrants had moved from Rock Falls, Wisconsin, and settled in Worth and Winnebago Counties, Iowa. To hear the Word of God, to receive the comfort of forgiveness that the Sacrament of the Lord's body and blood gives to the believer, and to have their children adopted as the children of God through Baptism, these Christians had to travel to St. Ansgar. The Rev. C. L. Clausen was serving the Scandinavian settlers in the St. Ansgar area. Later the Rev. C. L. Clausen and some other pastors, among them A. C. Preus and U. V. Koren, would come occasionally and conduct services for these settlers in their homes or school houses. There was also a school teacher, a Mr. Berg, who would walk from house to house and conduct devotions and sing hymns with these settlers.

The first service of which there is a record was conducted in Silver Lake Township at the home of Mr. L. L. Loberg by the president of the "Norwegian Synod," the Rev. A. C. Preus, on Sunday July 20, 1858. Twelve children were baptized at that service.

The Silver Lake Congregation and the First Shell Rock Congregation were organized in 1859 and the Rev. C. L. Clausen was called to come and serve them four times a year. In 1860 the Lime Creek Congregation in Winnebago County was organized. From that time the work of the "Norwegian Synod" in the northern Iowa-Southern Minnesota area continued and expanded.

On May 18-19, 1865, at a meeting of the First Shell Rock, Silver Lake, and Lime Creek Congregations attended by President A. C. Preus and Pastors J. A. Ottesen, U. V. Koren, and C. L. Clausen, a letter of Call was issued to Candidate of Theology Torger Andreas Torgerson. He accepted the call and was installed in the three congregations on August 19, 20, and 21, 1865.

Torger Andreas Torgerson was born on January 26, 1838 at the "iron works of Ness," one of the most beautiful spots in southern Norway. His mother died when he was 2 1/2 years old, and he was raised by his mother's parents. He was baptized in his infancy and he was confirmed in the spring of 1853.

In 1853 he, together with his father, stepmother, brothers, and sisters, immigrated to America and settled in the village of Winneconne, Winnebago County, Wisconsin. In 1854 his father moved to Scandinavia in the Waupaca County, Wisconsin, area.

In September 1858, influenced by the Rev. O. F. Duns, and with the agreement and the encouragement of his parents, he enrolled in the college and seminary of the "Missouri Synod" in St. Louis, Missouri. He graduated from the seminary on June 27, 1865. He accepted the call extended to him by the First Shell Rock, the Silver Lake, and the Lime Creek Congregations. He was ordained on July 23, 1865, by the Rev. H. A. Preus in Columbia County, Wisconsin. He was installed by the Rev. C. L. Clausen as pastor of the First Shell Rock Congregation on August 22, 1865.

On June 10, 1866, he was united in marriage to Dina Anderson of Dane County, Wisconsin. Their first child was born on July 6, 1867. On October 10 he developed Cholera Infantum and passed away the following day. They were later blessed with six more children, all boys.

The controversy over the slavery question and Sunday which was heatedly debated in the "Norwegian Synod" in the 1860s brought about a split in the Silver Lake Congregation. A faithful minority moved to a new location on 141 acres in Bristol Township and built a parsonage which Pastor Torgerson occupied on December 1, 1869.



Rev. T.A. Torgerson

In the years that followed, Pastor Torgerson became permanently identified as pastor of Elk Grove and Round Prairie Lutheran Congregations. Being the "Norwegian Synod" pastor who was located furthest West in this part of the country he was called upon to give pastoral care to Norwegian Lutherans in Emmet, Kossuth, and Humbolt counties in Iowa as well as Fairbault, Jackson, Nevada, and Mower Counties in Minnesota. The area in which he worked was about 150 miles in length, East to West, and about 50 miles in width, North to South. The number of places where he had regular appointments over the years were 18; at times they were as many as 23.

As the years passed other pastors of the "Norwegian Synod" accepted calls to serve some to these congregations that had been organized and Pastor Torgerson had the pastorate of the Silver Lake Congregation, the Lime Creek Congregation, and the Concordia Congregation near Joice, Iowa.

Pastor Torgerson took a leave of absence from his parish from September 1, 1881, to June 13, 1882. During this time he supplied as a professor of Theology at the synod's seminary in Madison, Wisconsin.

Pastor Torgerson continued to serve these people faithfully for 41 years until his death in 1906.

In an article written in 1883 for the "History of Worth County," Pastor Torgerson summarized his ministry in these words: "Although he has had a good deal of traveling to do, much hard work to perform, some trials and hardships to endure and encounter, he is still, through the grace of God, enjoying a good health and vigor. His labor in the vineyard of the Lord has certainly not been in vain. He could, from his own experience, relate many instances, giving striking evidence of the soul saving power and praiseworthy mercy, contained in the word of "The Good Shepherd," and exercised through the instrumentality of this humble servant of the Lord, but refrains from doing it here. His dearest hope on earth is that he, together with many dear souls committed to his care, shall praise the Lord of mercy in the heavenly mansions."

After the death of the Rev. T. A. Torgerson in 1906, one of his sons, the Rev. A. J. Torgerson, who was the assistant pastor to his father, was called to be the pastor of the Silver Lake and Concordia Congregations.

August Julius Torgerson was born, the son of Torger Torgerson and his wife Dina, on November 27, 1870, in Worth County, Iowa. He was baptized in his infancy and confirmed in his youth by his father.

He got his seminary training at the synod's theological seminary in Robbinsdale, Minnesota. On July 4, 1894, he was ordained as Assistant Pastor to his father in the Silver Lake and Concordia Congregations. In 1906, when his father passed away he was called as the pastor of these congregations.

On July 4, 1895, he was united in marriage to Ingeborg Pederson. This union was blessed with 13 children.

The peace that reigned in this parish was interrupted by the union movement which began in 1912 with negotiations between the "Norwegian Synod," The United Lutheran Church, and the Hauge Synod. In 1917 a merger of these three church bodies was consummated on the basis of the "Madison Settlement" ("Opgjør"). This document permitted truth and error to stand side by side on the doctrines of election and conversion.

A faithful minority was forced to withdraw and start a new congregation which is called the Somber Evangelical Lutheran Church.

In 1918 the Rev. O. T. Lee, who had been serving the First Shell Rock Congregation, Northwood, Iowa, passed away. At this time the Rev. A. J. Torgerson was called to serve the dual parish of Somber Lutheran Church and First Shell Rock Lutheran Church. He continued serving these congregations until his retirement in 1939.

He was active in the reorganized synod, serving as its first Treasurer and serving in several other capacities until his retirement.

In his retirement he moved to Yakima, Washington, to live near to his daughter Dagny. He passed away at the Crescent House Nursing Home in Yakima, Washington, on February 14, 1963.

The Rev. T. A. Torgerson and his son, the Rev. A. J. Torgerson, served the Norwegian Lutherans of the North Iowa-Southern Minnesota area for 74 years.



Rev. A.J.Togerson



by  
Rev. Alf Merseth

How well I remember a day later on, when it rained all day, so that the water seeped through the straw roof ~ drip, drip, all over. What could I do? Well, we had a table. I crawled under it and sat there, writing down our experiences since leaving home. While my position under the table was cramped, I was at least dry here. The next night I slept in Sagnes' dugout.

As long as the weather was good, I usually went with Bergh on his trips, but could not go along all the time, as there were many places where they did not have sleeping accommodations for two extra persons. It was hard enough to find a place for the minister when he was alone.

Most of the settlers lived in cellars, and in one place, they carried the wagon box into the room and made a bed for us in that.

The next day was Sunday and as service had been announced, they had to "clean up" for that event, with a white cloth on the table and benches along the walls, while from near and far, the settlers came to hear the Word of God. Many had ten or twelve miles to drive with oxen but the majority came walking. They had to start out early in the morning to get there in time.

Later on in the fall, I went along with my husband and we drove with horse and a small buggy. It was a Sunday morning with bright sunshine which glittered on the snow over the endless stretches of prairie. Divine services were held in a cellar and with the usual good attendance. Nearly all were invited to stay for dinner. All at once a snowstorm was brewing and the snow began to drift around so it was impossible to venture out.

All who stayed for dinner had to remain in the dugout over night. It was a dreary night, and how glad we were when the weather cleared in the morning so that we could come home, for home is home even if it is only a granary. We could have that to ourselves.

### **A Bad Scare**

I will mention another incident from our days here. One day Lisa Sagnes (later married to Ole Helgeson Agre) and I went down to the Minnesota River about three miles distant. We were to get the mail and there was also a small store (The Robert's Store to which both goods and mail were brought by steamboat on the river). We bought some coffee, sugar and other things. It was a wild life down there by the river. The Indians were half breeds who lived there and used to be well-behaved. But this time some of them evidently were drunk and acted bad and followed us. We got scared and ran faster than we had ever run, but they came on behind us. I threw my sugar and coffee packages which they had to investigate, and this gave us time to make our escape. I don't remember whether we went down there alone any more.

### **New Parsonage Built**

It got to be too cold in the fall to stay in the granary, so they called a "menighedsmote" and decided to build a parsonage. Many of the farmers were handy with tools and they started with a will, so that the building was soon enclosed and two rooms were finished so that we moved in for Christmas (1872). We could not use the unfinished rooms for divine service and other gatherings as they remained unfinished for two or three years. But the first winter in our new home was very hard and stormy.

### **We Get a Cow:**

We did not have any milk either the first winter. Then Ole Enestvedt, Sr. brought us a cow and this gave us courage. We sent \$10 to Luther College (evidently as a thank offering). Yes, a cow was a great gift in those days.

Before we came as resident minister, Lars Rudi used to conduct reading services around in the the cellars. He and his friend Ole Enestvedt, Sr. were as well versed in the scriptures as any theologian.

### **Father Sends a Piano:**

In 1874 I received a welcome gift from Father ~ a grand piano. It had to be hauled 40 miles from Willmar. How glad I was and how much enjoyment it gave me and others. It was the only piano around here. I played and sang for my children and for the children at Sunday School. A poor sick woman came to us one day. She was so downhearted because she said she lived in a cellar where the sun never got in. I asked her into the sitting room where the sunlight just streamed in. Oh, how nice she thought it was. I played and sang for her and she exclaimed: "Oh how beautiful; I believe I have come to heaven". Poor woman ~ she turned insane some time later. It was too hard for her to live in a dark cellar.

### **All Had to Use Skis:**

Now there came a winter with exceptionally heavy snows and storms (1880-1881) so that nobody could drive; the snow piled high over fences in many places and the low dugouts were nearly snowed under.

There was an endless amount of snow shoveling in those days. No mail was received for many weeks; all had to use skis to get around (the snow was about 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> feet deep on the level).

Bergh had to go ten or twelve miles on skis to hold services. I also had skis and went along when it was only two or three miles. The children also had to have skis, in order to get to school, but in many localities it took several years before they got school-houses, and they kept school at home.

That same winter Bergh went on skis to Ole Gilberton way out on the prairie. The snow had almost covered the small window of their cellar where the husband lay sick of typhoid fever.

No doctor could be had and it was far to the neighbors. There were two children and Mrs. Gilbertson said that when she had to go out to take care of the cattle, she tied the children to chairs to keep them from mischief.

#### **God Sends Help:**

One day when Mr. Gilbertson was alone, and delirious from fever, he had thrown himself out of bed and lay on the floor when Mrs. Gilbertson came in from the morning chores. What could she do now? She was not able to lift him into the bed alone.

Then Rev. Bergh happened (or was it only a happening?) along on his skis and by their united efforts they got the sick man to bed again. But Mrs. Gilbertson thought he was sent by God. In a couple of days Bergh went there again and brought some wild grape juice and rusks (which Mrs. Bergh had evidently sent).

Once, later in the winter, when Bergh came driving to Ole Gilbertson's, he stopped there as both he and his horse were tired from the long drive through the snow drifts.

He could not reach home but had to stay over night in their one room cellar. But as the Norwegian saying is: "Where there is heart room, there is house room". So he was gladly accommodated, and when he wanted to make his bed on the floor, on the fur robes (skindfelder) which he always had along, the folks objected so strenuously that he had to sleep in bed while the husband, wife and children made their beds on the floor. The pastor was very tired and slept until way out into the forenoon. Mrs. Gilbertson did not want to awaken him, but she could not make the breakfast, as the bed stood right by the stove.

#### **Bow-Wow-Wow:**

But she hit on a scheme. The dog was inside and the pepper shaker was near at hand. She shook some pepper into her hand, and threw it at the dog's nose then ran outside. The dog easily awakened the minister by his sniffing and howling and Mrs. Gilbertson soon had the floor all to her self. The next day the weather cleared up and Rev. Bergh came home, none the worse for the incident.

In 1873 a wedding was held at Halvor Goti's place. The groom was Jens Rolie and the bride was Anne Ogaarden. It was a bright, sunshiny day, the snow glittering sharply in the sun. We had gone only a couple of miles, when we noticed that the horse sniffed the air and wanted to turn back which he used to do when he felt a storm coming. But we had to go, there could be no wedding without the minister.

When we arrived, everything was ready ~ bride and groom and guests were there, so the ceremony was performed without a hitch. After dinner the snow-storm burst so that everybody had to remain where they were. Quite a few young people were present.

I remember specially Kari Roste and Henry Paulson (later leading merchant of Sacred Heart). I asked if they would pass the time playing games, such as "finding that ring in the flour basin". This was a laughable game, especially if the victim was a man with a long beard, who had to duck his face into the flour basin and try to pick the ring out of the flour with his lips.

Another good game was shooting rabbit blind. This was performed by making a drawing of a rabbit on the wall and blindfolding someone and telling him to strike with his fist and hit the rabbit. Just as the victim lunged ahead to hit the rabbit, a pan of sticky dough was held up in front of the picture and he would bury his fist in the mass for the enjoyment of the crowd.

#### **They Got Rid of Us:**

But in the evening the young people got restless. We understood that they wanted to get us away so that they could have a dance. They pulled a sleigh up to the door and four husky men were ready to furnish the motive power in place of horses, which could not be taken out in the storm. Then they sent a boy in to give us the following offer: "Well, if Presten og Frua (the pastor and his wife) want to take a sleigh ride, it is ready".

We understood and went out, and the four husky fellows pulled us to the nearest house, half a mile away. Here the folks were all over at the wedding place and we had the small log house all to ourselves. We had it nice, built a fire in the stove and found creamy milk and flatbread in the cupboard, which tasted even better than the wedding fare, earlier in the evening. We slept well and the next day was nice and clear, so we got home in good shape. But how we longed during those hard winters for the coming of spring with its sunshine and warmth. But the rivers and creeks were usually so high in the spring (no bridges) that driving across was nearly impossible. Bergh then would ride horseback, but in that way he always got wet. But he had to go on riding horseback even down to Fort Ridgely. And to ride 50 or 60 miles was a common occurrence.

#### **He Drove in a Circle:**

During the early days, Bergh was away more than he was at home and he had to put up with any kind of lodging, and was often in danger for his life. He would start out on a sunny morning and before he knew, a storm would begin and in a snowstorm there is a peculiar tendency to drive in a circle.

One evening he passed a certain granary but came back to the same granary three times he had to give up and lie down in an oat bin until it got light in the morning so that he could go on.

Bergh froze often but he was nearly always cheerful and satisfied, glad to work in the Lord's vineyard for the uplifting and encouragement of the



sometimes despondent pioneers. These pioneers did not have an easy life either, during the first years. They lived as we have seen in the dark dugouts in the earth out on the wild prairie, subject to fierce snowstorms in winter and devastating fires in the summers.

But the great majority of them kept their faith in the future and they won out. On the bare prairies, there rose in due time fine churches and school buildings and good dwelling houses and homes surrounded by protecting groves.

#### **Pascha Parsonage:**

Our first parsonage was a beautiful place. In the hillside half a mile from the Minnesota River, lived Indians and halfbreeds, who were our neighbors for many years. If we gave them a friendly greeting, they would also be friendly. They often gave me maple sugar and dressed game.

They called our parsonage Pascha, which in our language means White Heads or White People. There were great oak trees all around and grape vines covered our arbors, of which we had several.

On the Fourth of July, 1893, we had a festival in honor of Rev. Thomas Johnson, the first minister in this area who was present and received a fine gold watch for which he thanked and gave a talk about his many missionary trips out here in early days.

And we always had what we called Barnefester ~ children's festivals, which were enjoyed by all, young and old. They were held in the spring of the year; if weather permitted, in a nice grove or at the parsonage.

The children would then learn their lessons from the Catechism and verses of hymns, and recite and sing to the whole audience.

There would always be catechization of the children and then the women of the congregation would set the table with good things to eat and the children always were given first place at the table on such days.

Christmas was always a great festival season. One day during Christmas, we would invite all the neighbor children and we would have a large Christmas tree, with pretty, if not expensive, trimmings.

Then I would prepare a lot of baking shapes like animals, stars, and buildings, and cover it with colored sugar. We brought apples from Willmar and cut out figures from "silke papir" and we made our own candles. And did the children enjoy it. We sang our Christmas hymns and repeated the gospel message in unison.

We also had Saturday school at the parsonage when the weather was agreeable. The confirmands generally met at our home, and when Bergh was away I read with them.

Our first neighbor minister was Rev. N.P. Xavier of Fort Ridgely. I longed so to meet a "prestefamilie"

but even when Xaviers came, we could not visit them very often, as it meant a drive of 40 miles on poor roads. But Bergh was relieved of these long drives as part of his missionary work when Xavier came.

#### **First Ladies Aid Organized:**

It took some years before we got a ladies aid started. This took place at the parsonage in 1877 and the new organization was named Pascha, the same as our home. We sewed useful articles which were sold at auction. At first we sent all the money we made to missions, but after a while the need for a new church building got so urgent that we laid aside part of our profits for this cause.

But on account of the grasshopper scourge which for four years damaged or totally destroyed the crops, this work was greatly delayed. (It got so bad that the congregations were unable to pay the minister his salary and he had to accept the 40 acres of land and the parsonage which originally was the congregation's property, as payment of this debt. It was not unusual in those days to see the pastor with patches on knees and elbows).

However, there were soon many school houses erected in the country, so that divine services could be conducted in these. And how willingly people came to these services. They would come walking many miles or drive with oxen.

We had 40 miles to our closest town, Willmar. We did not have much need for doctors in those days. The children grew and thrived from their outdoor life ~ in winter time, sliding on sleds and skis, and in summer out in the woods or down by the river. After a few years the Indians moved away and we got good neighbors, who belonged to the congregation. We had many fine neighbors, who divided what they had with us, as we were all "lige fattige" (alike poor).

#### **A Rare Treat:**

One of our nearest neighbors, Mrs. Ingeborg Stensrud, or "Gamlemor" as we called her (mother of Rev. Stensrud) was a great help to me in those days. She stood by me in joy as well as in sorrow. If anybody was sick, she was always ready to help out. Our children were at home at her place and were the playmates of her children.

For winter use, she would hang up chunks of beef to dry for "spekekjot" ONE CHUNK FOR EACH OF THE CHILDREN, MINE AS WELL AS HER OWN. That is why my children always talked about "Gamlemor". She also had a chest up in her attic, which held many queer things. Among these there was a bottle of Naphtha from which she would pour a few drops on lumps of sugar and give each one of us. "Dae Ae so Got", she would say.

Mrs. Stensrud became a widow the first year of our stay here. She was sure to come to services, good or bad weather. We always had to admire her

strength and cheerful disposition, always ready to help in time of need. She is long ago gone to her eternal rest, and so are Ole Enestvedt and Lars L. Rudi. (Historical note: Lars Rudi was buried at Rock Dell but his body was later moved to Opdal cemetery).

**Organizing Congregations:**

On the 28th of November, 1872, Rev. Bergh called a Menighed's mote" where it was decided that those residing on the south side of the Minnesota River, and who previously had belonged to Our Savior's Congregation in Sacred Heart Township, should be allowed to organize a new congregation by name of Boiling Springs Congregation. This name was changed at a meeting on the 25th of January, 1875 to Rock Dell Norwegian Lutheran Congregation of Redwood County.

Rev. Bergh was to visit and serve this congregation once a month with a salary of \$50 per month. He served this congregation for 30 years, until New Year's 1902. For years the services were conducted in Mrs. Rudi's commodious log house or out in the nearby grove.

In 1884, they started to build a church, which was ready for dedication in 1891, which was solemnized by the President of the Synod, H.A. Preus.



*Pascha parsonage at Sacred Heart, Minnesota where Pastor & Mrs Bergh lived from 1872 until it was replaced in 1896.*

**Another Ladies Aid:**

It was seldom that I could find time to visit the different congregations. But I remember one spring when I went along to Rock Dell. Arrived at the Minnesota River, we found the water too deep to cross with our rig. We rowed across in a boat, and as there was no other way, we had to trudge along in the spring mud up to Mrs. Rudi's home and up the ravine to the church where services were announced for the next morning ~ Sunday.

On Monday we met again when Bergh read with the confirmands, and I met with a few women to organize the first ladies aid of Rock Dell in 1887. This aid has done much good work in the Lord's service.

*Grant then, O God, where 'er men roam,  
That when the church bells are ringing,  
Many in Jesus' faith may come  
Where He His message is bringing.*

Much more and much better could be written, many memories come to me from those days, days of joy and days of sorrow.



**Notes:**

Pastor Bergh died in 1905 and Mrs. Bergh died in 1940. Both were buried at Sacred Heart, Minnesota.

The above article was reprinted from the 125th Anniversary booklet of Rock Dell Lutheran Church, Belview, Minnesota (1872-1997)

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BUILDING OF ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH Tracy, Minnesota

*The story of Zion Lutheran Church, Tracy, Minnesota is typical of the story of many people who were left without a church building following the "Merger of 1917."*

Only a few people know the problems we had in getting started with the building of our church. Those who opposed us not only locked us out of our church, but they told the real estate agents not to sell us any lots in Tracy.

The people of Tracy didn't know that John Steinberg was a part of our group. He had come to Tracy a couple of years earlier and bought a building to start a business, and now he was planning to build a home. Therefore, he was able to buy the lot with our money. That is why the Deed to the church property reads that we bought it from John Steinberg for \$1. He was one of our trustees. We had enough voters to make up a Board....

There were seven families that started the congregation....

The time came when we had to decide where we

might get the money to start building. The Synod officials knew of a wealthy farmer in Iowa that would be willing to lend us the money, and the Synod promised to back us up if we failed to make our payments. This generous Christian farmer had never met us, and we had no idea who he was. But he came to see us one day, and loaned us \$12,500 with a hand shake. We never failed in making our payments.



Now [in 1937] the building was to begin. Most building projects start by having the "big shots" pictured with shovels in hand turning the first dirt. Ours started by my turning the dirt with a team of horses and a walking plow. I would plow some and then my father and one other helper would move the dirt with horse-drawn scrapers. I would plow some more, taking six-inch layers of dirt at a time, until we had the basement dug. It took a full day to complete.

Contractors then took over and finished the building.

I am proud to have helped with the building of our church, and also to have served as Secretary of the congregation during that time. I was twenty-four years old when the church was built and dedicated.



by  
Julius Railson



**Oak Leaves**  
ELS Historical Society  
6 Browns Court  
Mankato, MN 56001

TO

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## **Membership Renewal**

It is time to renew your Annual Membership in the ELS Historical Society. **All one-year memberships are now due.** A membership renewal form will soon be arriving in the mail.

As a member of the ELS Historical Society you are helping to promote and maintain the history of the ELS.

Members also will receive future issues of Oak Leaves. Future issues of Oak Leaves will include articles on Herbjørn Gausta, who painted Norwegian altar paintings; Bjug Harstad, the first president of the ELS who went to Alaska in the gold rush of 1898; and a tour of historic sites in our Synod.

The Annual Meeting of the ELS Historical Society will be held on Saturday, June 20, 1998 at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota.

<b>1998 Membership Rates:</b>	
<b>Voting:</b>	
	\$10/year - individual
	\$15/year - husband & wife
<b>Associate:</b>	
	\$15/year - individual
	\$25/year - institutional
	\$5/year - student
<b>Life:</b>	
	\$200/life