



Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

Volume 3

Summer 1999

Issue 2

Our Norwegian Roots

As we in the ELS Historical Society seek to preserve and appreciate our heritage, it may do us well to dig even deeper into our history to better understand the beginnings of Christianity itself in our "home" country.

Many of us are familiar with the name Olav Trygvesson, the Norse King who brought Christianity to Norway in the Year of our Lord 995. We thank God for bringing his messengers to our homeland and establishing a church where there was once only pagan ideas and idolatrous worship. So that we may appreciate what we now have even more, it is important for us to understand the whole story. The following is excerpted from the book *A History of Scandinavia* by T.K. Derry:

"The king who set it [Christianity] in motion was Olav Trygvesson, a formidable Viking chief who was confirmed in England shortly before he sailed for Norway in 995 to challenge the position of the heathen Earl Haakon of Lade. The earl had lost his popularity with his subjects and was opportunely murdered by a slave, whereupon Olav's descent from Harald Fairhair helped to secure his acceptance as king, except in the Danish-controlled south-eastern districts. He founded Nidaros (more familiar under its modern name of Trondheim) as his base, and sailed along the coast, exacting submission and conversion from chieftains. Since the penalties for refusal included mutilation or death, the mission conducted by a handful of clergy must have enjoyed considerable success as far as the king's arm and time reached.

"In general, the folk churches of the Scandinavians were slow to bring private life into conformity with the new idea, as the church sections of their earliest provincial lawbooks clearly show. Some types of Nature and ancestor worship lingered on until the Reformation and even beyond. The timber churches rose quickly in the forest clearings, and in Norway a score of the more elaborate Stavekirke still survive. Their intricately beautiful construction astonishes the beholder, but the re-
(continued on page 12)

**Secretary's Minutes
ELS Historical Society
June 19, 1999
Bethany Lutheran College
Mankato, Minnesota**

The third annual meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society was held Saturday, June 19, 1999, in the conference room of Trinity Chapel of Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota.

Registration began at 9:30 a.m. Seventy-two registered, though others were in attendance.

An opening service was held in the chapel. "The Lord Hath Helped Me Hitherto", ELH 71, and "Let Children Hear the Mighty Deeds", ELH 180, were sung. Reverend Craig Ferkenstad used Joshua 4:1-7 as the text for a homily in which he compared the 12 stones the Israelites gathered after the crossing of the Jordan River, stones which were used to remind the people of the miracle, to reminders which we have, historical reminders of God's grace.

At 10:30 a.m., Reverend Glenn Obenberger presented stories and examples of preserving history in the Parkland Congregation of Tacoma, Washington. Formally organized in 1893, this congregation was used as an example of how an older parish has preserved its history. A newer parish, Resurrection congregation of Winter Haven, Florida, formed in 1994, is documenting its history with a church historian, photographs, official record books, the guest registry, and cassette tapes of all sermons and services. Reverend Matthew E. Thompson, its first pastor, presented the topic, "How We Intend to Preserve our History."

At 11 a.m., a ceremony of presentation of papers to the ELS Department of Ar-
(continued on page 8)

<p>Oak Leaves is published periodically by the ELS Historical Society 6 Browns Court, Mankato, MN 56001 Editors: Rev. Craig Ferkenstad, Robin Ouren. Layout: Robin Ouren Board of Directors: Erling Teigen (Chair), Joseph Abrahamson, Craig Ferkenstad, Norman Holte, Gerhard Lee, Albin Levorson, Amanda Madson, George Orvick, Marguerite Ylviskaker. 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.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Membership All membership renewals due June 1</p> <p>Voting Membership: \$10/year: individual \$15/year: husband & wife Associate Membership: \$15/year: individual \$25/year: institutional \$5/year: student Life: \$200</p>
---	---

History Has a Voice

At the organizational meeting of the ELS Historical Society in June, 1997, many ideas were brought forth on the things we might do to preserve our history. One of the things discussed was the importance of oral history.

Oral history - the remembrances of people within our congregations - is a valuable part of who and what we are. Our older members are storehouses of stories and anecdotes about the beginnings and early traditions of our churches in the Synod, the pastors who led our little flocks through the years, and much more.

With tape recorders, video cameras, or simple pens in hand, we can, and should, talk to these members and gather the history while we still can.

Reverend Milton Tweit served our Synod as a pastor from 1937 until his retirement in 1981. He also served as Synod president from 1957-62. Tweit began his pastoral work at Princeton Minnesota, where he vicared in 1935. He then served the congregations at Norseland and Norwegian Grove, just west of St. Peter, MN, from 1937-1958.

Reverend Tweit was the guest speaker at the 100th Anniversary of the Norseland/Norwegian Grove Young People's Society, held at the Norseland Lutheran Church in July, 1997. The following is from that anniversary address:

"Dear Members of the Young People's Society, Members of Norwegian Grove

and Norseland Lutheran Churches, and all of you gathered here:

"It is a great pleasure for me to be here with the members of the Norseland and Norwegian Grove members. This was my first parish and I am thankful for that. You know, we do learn a great many things at the seminary, but not everything. And I learned many good things from the members of these two congregations and profited much while I was here. All my children were born here and they have fond memories also of being at the parsonage.



Reverend Milton Tweit, 1953.

"It is one hundred years since your Young People's Society was organized. In many ways life today is very different from what it was at that time. There was no electricity in the rural areas and you can imagine how that limits everything. They didn't have the facilities and the advantages that we do now.

Candles, lanterns and lamps gave the light. Candles often were homemade. There were no electric ranges on which to prepare meals. Instead they had a wood stove. Fired with wood, or with coal, and I still have some memories of that because I often had to carry out the ashes and that wasn't the most pleasant job, especially when I let it get too full so I had to dig in with a little shovel to clean it out.

"The washing of clothes was done with a large wash tub. A scrub board was used to scrub, and soap, often homemade, too. A large boiler was placed on the stove filled with water and set to go until it was boiling and you had to dip the hot water out of the boiler into the tub. It was risky business sometimes.

"At that time, most of the houses didn't have full basements. Instead they had dugouts under part of it which was called a cellar. Now the temperatures in the cellars remained quite constant. And so, often foods that were to be kept a little longer were carried down into the cellar and then when needed carried back up again. Often the young people were sent to do these jobs.

"There were also people of ingenuity. When I came to Norseland, to the parsonage, there was outside the parsonage on the north side a hole dug in the ground about five to six feet deep, about two feet in diameter. Into this was fit a metal container with shelves and to a ring at the top was fastened a rope which went over a pulley about eight feet up on the sidewall. This is where they kept some of their butter, and their milk, because five to six feet

down it was fairly cool.

"However, more common it was to have water coolers, so that out by the well you would have a large container and you would pump the water through that into the tank from which the cattle drank so that the water was constantly cool. And it worked better than you might think. And so things were very different.

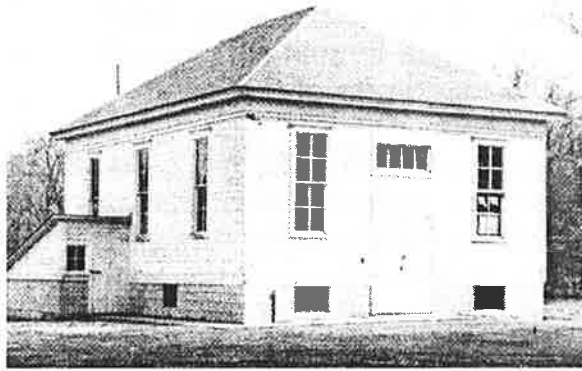
"As far as the outside was concerned all the equipment used on the farm was horse-drawn. Most of the work was hand work. When we did haying, we had to pitch with a pitchfork. We had a special fork for straw, and so on and so on. It was quite a bit different from jumping on the tractor and hooking up and doing the work. And so it was very different indeed.

"The method of transportation was also very different. You either walked or you rode in a buggy or a wagon, or in the wintertime on a sleigh. And I'm sure many of you older ones still remember that you walked to school, which may have been a mile to two miles away. There you gathered with children. Most of them were members of your congregations and so they were your neighbors too.

"As far as the congregations were concerned - by the way, at that time this was a three congregation parish. We had Nicollet [now Norseland], Norwegian Grove, and Swan Lake. And so they would have services two Sundays in a row at Nicollet, or here, then every third Sunday at one of the other churches. So there wasn't much opportunity

for everybody to get together as often and as easily as we do it now.

"When I came here we had just Norseland and Norwegian Grove. And we had two services here and then a third service at Norwegian Grove. Now remember I came in 1937 and this was still the practice. Since cars were common, I felt I could get to both churches



Originally a public school erected in 1870, Nicollet [Norseland] Lutheran School served the congregation from 1930-1980. It is now used for Sunday School.

easily. So I suggested that we should have services in each church every Sunday. Some of them were a little shocked. One man, a very kindly soul, came to me afterwards and said, 'Pastor, that's too much for you, you can't do that every Sunday at both places.' Well, we started and it's been going ever since, I guess.

"Of those things that stand out, beside the fact of being present and working with the young people, would be the New Year's Eve services. That has

stayed with me. Come up here after we had a social hour and lunch, to have our devotion and then at midnight the bell would ring, ushering in another year of God's grace. What a wonderful way to wait for the New Year!

"Once after I came, the young people also put on a Fourth of July celebration. They built a stand and a speaker's platform in Gust Annexstad's pasture over here. We had a speaker at that time, I think he was running for Lieutenant Governor.

"I would like to point out that during these 100 years we have had four major wars, two world wars, and that has had an effect upon the people of the congregation, both the young people as well as the old. I remember when I was here we had over twenty young men and women in the service. I have to admit I wasn't as effective as I should have been, but we tried to get the other young people to write letters to those who were in the service so in that way they were serving those people as well.

"Also during those 100 years there have been two major controversies in the Synod. The first one led to the breakup of the old Norwegian Synod and the formation of our present Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The next one led to the breakup of the Synodical Conference.

"This group from here was instrumental in organizing a young people's group in the Synodical Conference in this area. The first president was Otto Trebelhorn from Winthrop, MN. After he had completed his work at Standard Oil, he

entered our seminary, studied, and has been a pastor in our synod. We would take trips over to Sleepy Eye, over to Tracy, up to Gaylord, and so on and so on. The young people enjoyed this. Then, of course, the Synodical Confer-



Swan Lake Lutheran Church, organized in 1868, was a member of the Norwegian Synod until the 1917 merger. It is now an ELCA church.

ence broke up and that was the end of that. See how instrumental the young people have been in promoting and starting things. I think they should be complimented for that very thing.

"There were a few magazines, a few newspapers. All these other things weren't there that you are used to, good or bad, I don't know which, because you are faced with a constant barrage of attacks on Christian faith and on Scripture. That wasn't so prevalent when they couldn't read or have magazines to read.

"But we mustn't imagine that those people didn't face dangers to their souls and to their confession. They too, were born of sinful parents. And the Scriptures tell us very clearly, 'No temptation

has overtaken you except that which is common to man' and again, 'Each one is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.' So they faced problems too, to their faith. So a Young People's Society certainly was of great benefit for them as well. Here they could gather with their fellow Christians and here they could study the Word of God together, and be strengthened in their faith. Now the Young People's Society also acted as the literary society in addition to the study of the Scripture. Individuals would recite hymns and read different essays and things of that nature.

"Surely the Young People's Society of these two churches have been of great benefit to their congregations. But certainly the members of the society are those who have benefited the most because they have been studying the Scriptures and our Heavenly Father says, 'Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.' And He is the one who does the blessing, and He ought to know. This is the assurance that you have when you continue in His Word. For that is the way the Savior summarizes it, 'If you continue in My Word, then you are my disciples indeed and you shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free.'

"Finally, now, in closing, I congratulate you, the members of the LYS and members of the congregations on your 100th anniversary and pray that God will richly bless you in the future as He has in the past. Thank you, and I am glad that I was part of your history."



Reverend John Johnson Maakestad



Reverend John J. Maakestad was born May 10, 1854 in Ullensvang, Hardanger Norway. In 1856, he immigrated with his parents to the United States and lived on a farm in Lee County, Illinois. Pastor Maakestad attended Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, from 1873-1875. He then taught school in Iowa for two years.

In 1876, Maakestad entered the Norwegian Synod Seminary, Madison, Wisconsin. He graduated in 1879 and accepted the call to First Lutheran Church, Suttons Bay, Michigan. He held his first service there October 1, 1882.

Reverend Maakestad was truly a pioneer pastor, covering most of the region of northern Michigan to conduct services and perform pastoral functions. During his pastorate at First Lutheran, he

served 22 congregations, some which he himself organized. Many of these congregations were Norwegian, but some were German and Danish.

The areas Maakestad served included Leland, North Manitou Island (ten miles off-shore), Port Oneida, Donnybrook, Empire, Glen Arbor, Northport, Good Harbor, Elk Rapids, Duncan City, Frankfort, Wallin, St. Ignace, East Jordan, Ironton, Boyne City, and Traverse City.

Maakestad's primary forms of transportation were by horseback or train, but during the winter months when the ice was solid he skated to his congregations.

Reverend Maakestad's first wife Oline Mason of Mason City, Iowa, died four years after they were married. They had one surviving child, Josephine, whose grandson Robert Martinson is a current member of First Lutheran. Maakestad remarried, taking as his bride Elisabeth Midboe of Wittenberg, Wisconsin. She died in 1887.

In 1889, Maakestad married a third time, to Caroline Aslakson of Holton, Michigan. Caroline was a daughter of the family that founded the ELS congregation in Holton.

July 2, 1918, Maakestad accepted a call to his second - and last - parish, at Norge, Virginia. He died there May 29, 1943.



Submitted by Rev. Ron Pederson

(continued from page 2)

chives and History was introduced by Professor Emeritus Norman Holte. Five collections of pastors' papers were received, those of George Lillegard, Milton Otto, Bjarne Teigen, Torald Teigen, and Milton Tweit.

Reverend David Lillegard responded on behalf of the Lillegard family, describing his father's "in the corner typewriter," and his ability to concentrate and shut out distractions as the children ran about. The family plans to copy additional materials and donate the originals to the archives.

Norman Holte described Milton Otto's collection, 12 boxes containing, among other items, many letters to pastors and vicars, and to World War II servicemen.

Margaret (Otto) Lillo recounted, "No one could clean Dad's study. We'd ask, 'What are all these papers?' He'd explain, 'Some day these things will be important! If I don't save them, who will?'"

Norman Holte described one aspect of Bjarne Teigen's papers as being full of copious notes, underlined passages and many marginal additions.

David Teigen announced that phase one of his father's collection is complete for study by others, and that work has begun on phase two. He stated, "The past is more than just an interest. We have an obligation to study the past to see if it is in step with God's Word."

Torald Teigen's collection contains almost all his sermons. His also includes interviews with pastors who stayed in the merger of 1917.

His son, Reverend Martin Teigen, described his father as a great visitor of cemeteries, a sermon writer, letter writer, and postcard sender. "His nickname was 'Postcard Teigen'" stated Martin. "He left behind a string of postcards, the potsherds of his ministry."

Milton Tweit's collection includes minutes of Bethany College Board of Regents meetings and Bethany College Development Association minutes.

Milton Tweit's response was to compliment Norman Holte and Walther Gullixson for their work in the archives.

During the noon meal served in the College Great Room, President George Orvick thanked the donators and the respondents.

The group returned to the chapel lower level at one p.m. for a lecture by Dr. Philip Teigen of the Library of Medicine, Washington, D.C. His lecture was entitled,

"Preserving our History through the Collections of Personal and Institutional Archives."

He outlined documenting the past by preserving organizational records, unofficial papers, such as letters to children, still pictures, moving images, electronic records, ephemera, which are printed materials meant to be used once and thrown, and oral history such as interviews of eyewitnesses.

Dr. Teigen discussed writing about the past, either in the form of book length studies, sections in reference books, Web sites, or papers presented at conferences. He suggested the participants at this society's meeting do the following:

1. Support the work of the ELS Archives and Historical Society.
2. Collect and donate significant historical records to the archives.
3. Donate money for supplies, such as acid-free materials.
4. Volunteer time to process historical materials.
5. Volunteer time to identify people in untitled pictures.
6. Volunteer time to transcribe and translate letters.
7. Take on the preparation of a small historical or biographical sketch.
8. Consider funding a full-time archivist.

The business meeting was called to order by the chairman, Erling Teigen. Amanda Madson read the secretary's report, which was corrected and accepted. Albin Levorson read the treasurer's report. He reported membership dues totaled \$840.00, with 24 lifetime members. A \$3,000 C.D. was purchased, and the checking account total is \$1,032.03

"Oak Leaves" editor, Craig Ferkenstad, reported 120 mailing labels were used. Mrs. Robin Ouren will provide assistance with the publishing of "Oak Leaves." He needs submission of materials from others.

Elections for the Board of Directors were held. Present board member, Dr. Gerhard Lee, was re-elected for a three year term. Due to the resignation of Lois Pieper in May, Marguerite Ylvisaker was elected to a two year term. Lois Pieper was thanked for her work on the board.

The meeting adjourned at 3 p.m. Coffee was served in the Great Room.

Secretary, Amanda Madson

It is true that history cannot satisfy our appetite when we are hungry, nor keep us warm when the cold wind blows. But it is true that if younger generations do not understand the triumphs of their elders, then we will be a people without a past. As such we will be like water without a source, a tree without roots.

New York Chinatown graffito

Preserving the Past

We've heard them a million times, those stories and reminiscences from grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older church members. Some of us could probably recite them by heart...almost. But have we ever taken the time to write them down? To record them for future generations? There is no time like the present.

Having worked as a freelance writer for the past several years, I've interviewed many people for newspapers and books. In my work, I have found a mini cassette recorder to be an invaluable tool, and for a couple of reasons. First of all, since my handwriting isn't getting any better, there were times when, after interviewing someone and scribbling down great quotes, I would get home, only to find I could not read my own handwriting. And, since my memory isn't also improving with age, I would have to call the person up and ask them exactly what they said.

For the sake of getting the facts and stories straight, a cassette recorder is a great help. But a recorder can do more than that. Facts are fine, but having them in a person's own particular vernacular phraseology puts life into them!

Mini tape recorders can be found at your local Radio Shack, Best Buy, or any of those "marts" that are taking over the country. They cost about 30 dollars. Two "AA" batteries cost about three dollars, and a pack of four 60-minute tapes are around five dollars. For under 40 bucks, you can easily turn your next Sunday afternoon visit to Aunt Esther's into a valuable opportunity to record and preserve wonderful memories (Remember, the cassette recorder is a one-time investment!).

Before you begin an interview with someone, there are a five things you should do in order to ensure a successful session (I've learned all of these things by making mistakes):

1. Make sure to turn the recorder "ON." Sounds simple, but we aren't perfect. Also check to make sure the Pause button is OFF, and make sure you understand exactly how to run the recorder, or you may end up with only white noise where there should be priceless gems of oral history. This may be your only chance!
2. Always carry extra batteries and blank tapes. Even brand new batteries can be dead occasionally, and Uncle Ole might talk for five hours, if he's in the right mood.
3. Try to record in a relatively quiet place. Mini tape recorders pick up sound very well - people whispering in the next room, the squeak of the rocking chair, the birds at the feeder and your neighbor's lawn mower, even when the windows are closed. Later, when you are trying to transcribe the tape, you will be glad that your precious memories aren't competing with catbirds, the stereo, and all the other

noises we generally just tune out in our daily lives.

4. Since mini recorders do pick up sound so well, you don't need to hold it right up to Great Uncle Elmer's face. He won't want to talk to you if you do this. Putting it on a table near you is fine. Once you get talking, he will forget about it (DO NOT FORGET TO TURN THE TAPE OVER IN 30 MINUTES!).

5. When you begin the interview, always state the date and time, the person you are interviewing, and who you are. You are a part of this history too!

Now you are ready to begin. What do you say? If you know the person well, you can simply ask them to recount particular stories you have heard them tell. Remember to ask specific questions. Saying, "Hey Grandpa, what was it like living in the old days?" might not elicit a great response. Instead, say, "Grandpa Ted, I know you used to like to go fishing on the Mississippi River. Did you ever catch any really big ones? Did you ever fall out of the boat?" Even if you don't know the person well, you can ask specific questions: "Who is the first pastor of your church that you remember?" Did you have a favorite pet? Can you describe the country school you attended?" If there are photographs on the wall, ask about the people in them. "Who is this man? What did he do for a living?" Specific questions jog memories.

Once you have finished the interview, write the date and name of the person interviewed on the tape, and break out the little tabs on the cassette so it cannot be taped over or erased. Cassettes should be stored away from TVs, stereos and other electronic devices because of the magnetic fields they create, and away from extreme temperatures and dust. It is best to make a hardcopy (put it down on paper) as soon as possible.

Transcribing the interview can go fairly quickly if you can use a typewriter or word processor and type along as you listen to the tape. If you prefer to write by hand, this is fine, too, unless your penmanship is like mine. The same headphones that fit a walkman radio will plug in to the recorder, and this is nice for keeping other distractions (like children yelling, children running, children singing loudly) out when you are trying to hear the voice from the past.

When you have transcribed the interview, make at least three copies, preferably on acid-free paper, and store one in a family safe, one in a safe deposit box, and send one to the ELS Archives (6 Browns Court; Mankato, Minnesota 56001).

These few tips should help you get started. History is sitting out there right now, in nursing homes, the farmhouse down the road, the church pew ahead of you, and just across the table. There is no one better qualified than you for the job, and there is no time like the present to start preserving the past.



Robin Ouren



Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Historical Society
6 Browns Court
Mankato, MN 56001

(continued from page 1)

semblance to an upturned keel, the lavish display of dragon heads, and, above all, the portals carved with scenes from heathen mythology remind us forcibly that in distant places the traditions of the old pagan world were slow to disappear.

"The parish was the organisation which brought the new cult into the life of the individual. He was most keenly aware of the outward forms, such as the receiving of the sacraments and the observance of holy days, in which were incorporated the ancient communal beer-feasts: the beer was now to be blessed, and the first cup drunk 'in honour of Christ and the Blessed Virgin for good years and peace.' At the same time the teachings of the church slowly eroded the Viking way of life in such matters as polygamy, the blood feud, the exposure of unwanted infants, and the holding of slaves."

As we read these words, we may think of the many foreign mission fields where our pastors, their wives, and many other church workers labor against heathen ideas. We may also look at our own country, the churches where we worship freely, and remember our pagan roots so long ago and far away. Just as the Lord enters our sin-darkened hearts and works faith, so he entered Norway over one-thousand years ago and brought our ancestors the Light of the World!



Robin Ouren