

Oak Leaves

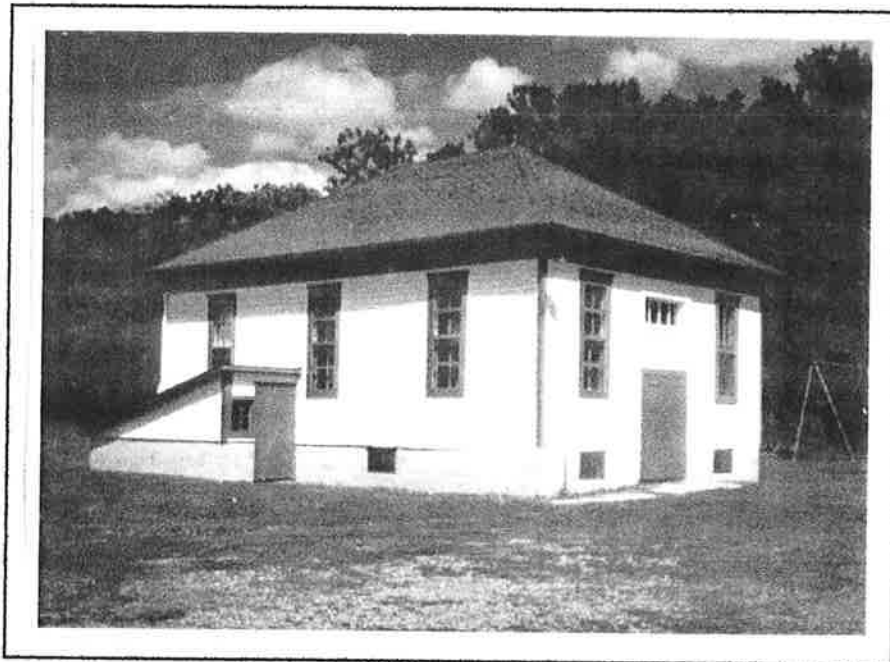
Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

Volume 5

November 2001

Issue 3

School Days Revisited



Norseland Lutheran Christian Day School served its pupils from 1930 to 1980. The building was first used as a public school, and today it serves as the church's Sunday School.

On July 21, 2001, Norseland Lutheran Christian Day School, rural St. Peter, celebrated a reunion of former students, teachers, and family members. Two-hundred people gathered to visit and to recall memories from their school days. Though the school closed in 1980, it is remembered fondly by many.

In 1861, just three years after the organization of the congregation at Norseland, money was raised for the purpose of conducting a parochial school. By 1868 the congregation had prospered sufficiently to call a full-time parochial teacher and to purchase a 40-acre farm as a teacherage. The school continued until 1893.

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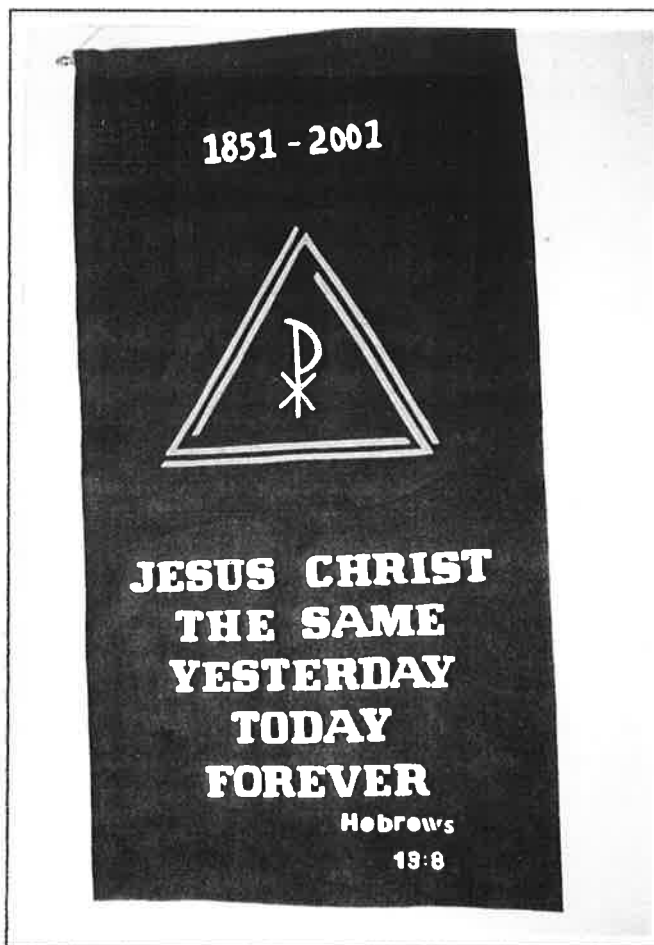
Anniversary at Paint Creek



Pastors participating in the September 16 Sesquicentennial service at Paint Creek, Waterville, Iowa, were, left to right: Former pastor Mark DeGarmeaux, current pastor Harvey Abrahamson, and the Reverend John Moldstad, Jr., who teaches at Bethany Lutheran Seminary, Mankato.

The Sesquicentennial banner which a committee made for the occasion was the text from Hebrews 13:8,

*"Jesus Christ the same
yesterday, today
and forever."*



Behind the Scenes...

I have a question for you: How long has your church organist been playing? Is it five years? Or is it more like twenty-five, or even twice that? I'm betting there are dozens of organists in our synod who have been steadfastly giving of their time and talent every Sunday (and Wednesdays during Lent, and for funerals, weddings, etc.) for a whole lot longer than many of us really realize. This story is about one of those people: My mom.

Eleanor Tolander began playing organ for East Paint Creek Synod Lutheran Church a couple of years after she was confirmed, which was in 1950. The exact year isn't known, since she really just segued from playing piano/organ duets with her cousin at church, into the actual church organist role. It was a long time ago, and Mom just doesn't remember.

Mom and her cousin Charlotte Busness played duets for church Christmas programs and things like that when they were in high school. Then, as older organists began to think of retiring, Mom and Charlotte began playing for church services, a couple Sundays each a month. Says Mom, "I'd never played the organ. Charlotte showed me that. Of course the organ we had then was pretty simple. We had the same organ in the East and West (churches). It just had four stops for each, bass and treble, and it didn't have any foot pedals. But they were electric organs, Hammond, or it might have been Wurlitzer, I'm not sure."

At that time, East and West Paint Creek churches each had their own services, so



Eleanor Tolander Larson (on the right) on her Confirmation day, Palm Sunday, 1950 (Sorry, Mom, I know how much you dislike this picture). I tried to find a photo of Mom sitting at the organ, but except for a couple where she's a dot in the background, I had no luck. I suspect that's typical of organist photos....

Mom played only at the East church. Of course, she did more than that. She also finished high school and married her high school sweetheart, Bob Larson, and they struck out on a life together. They moved a few times in the late 1950's, and didn't live especially close to Waterville, the little town a couple of miles south of "The East Church" as we who grew up there always call it. Cousin Charlotte married too, and moved away in 1957. Other people filled in as organist for a few years, but, says Mom, "Oh, I went down and played, they would call." They would call and Mom would drive an hour or so back to Waterville to fill in for whomever was sick or on vacation or just needed a Sunday off.

But then Mom and Dad did something that

would seal Mom's future as organist at Paint Creek: They bought a trailer house and moved it to Waterville. About this time, the organist at "The West Church" had quit, and the older lady playing at East, Agnes Thorson, was wanting less to do. By the late 1960's, Mom was playing organ full-time at both East and West Paint Creek, participating in two services each Sunday, just like the pastor. When the churches began holding joint services in the late 1960's, alternating church buildings each Sunday, Mom continued to be organist. And with the exception of a couple of recent failed attempts to retire, she is still sitting up there in front of the congregation, playing organ on Sunday mornings at Paint Creek, with no "real" retirement date in sight.

When I talked to Mom about all this, I said, "Mom, after playing for so many years, you must have played for a lot of pastors." We don't have an exact count, but I think it's close to a hundred, considering all of the vacancy pastors, Bethany seminary students and vicars we've had over the years, not to mention the full-time pastors who served there through the years. Levine Hagen, Walther Gullixson, John Smith, Tom Mickelsen, Milton Tweit, Otto Trebelhorn, Mark DeGarmeaux, Paul Madson, Harvey Abrahamson, a host of vicars, plus, says Mom, "I know I played for Orvick. I know I played for Branstad, they were all at the college at the time, or somewhere around there. And John Moldstad of course. Professor Reichwald came, he had Bible School one summer. And Ted Aaberg. And I played for George Gullixson. I was just scared to death to play for him, because he was a fabulous organist. I think I played for Merseeth. Of course we had so many things at church, you'd have meetings and you'd have all these pastors, and I played for all those things."

And so, my next question had to be, "Mom, are there any pastors you especially liked to play for?" "Gullixson was good," she says, "but Pastor Tweit is my favorite." Milton Tweit served many times as vacancy pastor at Paint Creek, and then served the congregation as pastor from 1974-1981. In the years after that, he continued to come back and preach whenever he was needed, while he and wife Dagny were living at Lawler, Iowa, an hour west of the Paint Creek churches. Says Mom, "With Pastor Tweit, you just moved. When he came out to the altar to start, he was ready. He didn't want to stand there while you played a prelude for ten minutes. So I mean, you made it short. I played for him for so many years, because he was there as our vacancy pastor so many times and then he came as pastor for many years. I knew exactly what he was gonna do, I knew where he was going, and the way he did it. It was just like I could play for him in my sleep. It was such a joy to play for him."

"Such a joy to play for him" didn't quite fit all the pastors for whom she played, however. One particular pastor (not mentioned in this article) was a little difficult. Recalls Mom, "We had such a time, because whoever he was mad at that week, then we had two separate sermons in the two churches. I mean, it was the same sermon, but it (the delivery) was different. That one Sunday, he was so mad after the sermon that he just went down from the pulpit and he went back to the sacristy and he slammed the door. We had the Collect to go, the Benediction, offering, two hymns. Everybody was just kind of in shock. And so, I played the hymn after the sermon. Nobody comes out, and I went into the Offering, and the guys just came up and got the plates, and we just went on. He came out finally," she says, to finish the service. Ah, the excitement and pressure of being the church organist....



Two beloved Paint Creek pastors: John Smith (left), and Milton Tweit. Pastor Smith was ordained there thirty years ago. Pastor Tweit served the congregation from 1974 to 1981 and served as bishop for several vicars and as vacancy pastor for many years.

And what about funerals? While the rest of us can sit back in our pew and pray and collect our thoughts, church organists must still do their job. Being in a small congregation where most everyone is related somehow, Mom played for funerals for nearly all of her relatives except for her own parents and her favorite aunt. "Uncle Carl's funeral was hard," she says. "Essa (Aunt Esther) wanted me to play, and I said, 'Fine, I will.' And then I always felt bad later that I didn't play for Essa's funeral. But I think the worst funeral I played for was Thelma Gjefle's. I knew her so well."

As the story goes, Thelma's brother Sidney and Mom's father Ted, died the same day. A week after her dad's funeral, Thelma died suddenly. Says Mom, "We were having Bible School, Pastor Tweit was

there. He got a phone call, and he came over to me and said, 'I have to go to the hospital. Thelma Gjefle had a heart attack.' And he left. And we probably had an hour left of school. He wasn't gone probably half-hour, and he came back, and she had died. I just thought the world of her. And I played for the funeral, and I just had a terrible time getting through it. Afterward, I thought, 'there's no way I can go down (to the church basement) for coffee'. I just went out to the car. And Marilyn (Thelma's niece and Mom's best friend) was there, and she said, 'aren't you coming in?' I said 'no, I have to go home.' And then Stella (Thelma's sister), died the next day."

But that wasn't the most difficult service for which she played. "The hardest service I ever played for was John Smith's last

Sunday. Don't you remember that?" she asked me. Yes, that day stands out in my mind, though I was just ten years old at the time. John Smith vicared at Paint Creek in 1970, and served just three years there before taking a call elsewhere. He and his wife Sandy and family were much-loved at Paint Creek. Mom continues, "Well, I was okay until we got through the sermon. I could tell John was having a hard time with the sermon, but he was okay. We had the hymn, he got over to the altar, we took the offering, and he went into the Collect, and I'm playing and I'm not looking at him. We were going on, and I couldn't hear John, he sounded funny, he was missing some words, and he never did that. And I looked over at him, and he just kept going, but he missed words, and then we went into the Benediction. He turns around to give the Benediction, and he just couldn't...and then I looked out and everybody is crying. The men are sitting there wiping their eyes, the women are sobbing, and *he's* crying. And then we sang "Lord Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing..." and I mean it was just terrible. It was the worst thing I've ever played for. It was so hard. He was so special."

Special too, are many of the hymns she has played over the years, "Lord Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing" being at the top of her list. "Which other hymns do you like?" I asked. "Well," she says, "I like 48, and 52. And I like 348 (these of course are from the OLD hymnary)." Only a church organist would recall favorite hymns by their number, not the first line or title! I suppose that is from years of all those Friday afternoon phone calls, some of which I took, that went something like this: "Hello," I'd say. Dramatic silence, then the response: "Tweit Speaking." My demeanor instantly changed, and my posture too. Pastor Tweit would then read the list of hymns for that Sunday, and I'd scribble them onto a piece of paper to give to Mom. A list of four

numbers if it was a regular service, six numbers if it was communion. I have to admit that I too, recall my favorite hymns by their numbers: 269, 304, 130, 462 (again, the old hymnbook). All those years of being around a church organist has that effect.

I recall many times as a child when I accompanied Mom out to the church so she could run through the service with new pastors. Some of them chanted, some didn't. Some tried and just couldn't. I didn't ask Mom who she thought was the worst at it, but I did wonder who she thought was especially good. "Well," Mom says, "Pastor Tweit. Mark (DeGarmeaux) of course. Pastor Gullixson of course. John (Smith) was good. I remember when John came," she said. "Pastor (Tweit) insisted that John chant. And of course he was scared to death because he didn't do that, he hadn't practiced it. But he could sing. Pastor said (to John), 'You sing. You chant. That's what they like here.' And so we went and practiced before Sunday. I said to John, 'Oh, it isn't hard, you won't have any trouble.' He said, 'Well, Pastor Tweit told me that Mrs. Larson would play for me, and she can play anything, just follow her, there's no problem.'" And John did just fine. "Some of the pastors chant," Mom says. "Some of them didn't chant, some of them didn't want you to play for them when they chant, they didn't want music. And of course, Pastor Tweit pushed that. He wanted music, and he wanted everybody to use that. He didn't like chanting without music. He said 'it sounds like the Catholic Church, it sounds like mass.' Pastor Tweit has such a voice," she says. It was so nice to have a pastor up there (at the front of the church) for the hymns. If the pastor is singing out, then the people sing out more, too."

Yes, the people do sing out more when there's a pastor with a good strong voice at

the front of the church. But what about that accompaniment? I recall Pres. George Orvick remarking to me once that a congregation has to have an organist "up there." Who am I to disagree with our president?

So, have you figured out the answer to my question yet? Just how many years has your organist been using their time and talent for the Lord? Just as we acknowledge the years of service of our pastors, so too should we acknowledge the service of church organists, whose job isn't always the easiest one. Organists do much more than show up on Sunday morning and play for an hour: They don't get to sit with their families during services, not even at Christmas or Easter. They do a lot of work "behind the scenes", spending lots of extra time during the week practicing hymns and Offertories and Preludes and Postludes and Collects and running through the Order of Service with new pastors and vicars. They deal directly with the temperaments of those same men. When they make mistakes up there in front of the church, everyone hears it. And when everything runs smoothly, most people don't give it a second thought.

So give it a second thought now. And then let me know. I would like to feature in each issue of *Oak Leaves* the names and years of service (and stories and photos if you are ambitious) of our church organists, as well as Sunday School teachers, janitors, and all the other folks who have given unselfishly of their time and talents for the Lord's work. Five years, twenty five, or twice that, they deserve a mention here. They have been and still are an important part of our history.

Oh, and by the way: Mom's sister, DiAnn Rocksvold, is the organist at Trinity Lutheran Church in Calmar, Iowa. She has been playing there now since 1983. **Mange tusen takk, gals.**

Editor



Calling all churches...

In the next issue of *Oak Leaves* we will again feature the anniversaries of ELS churches and Christian Day Schools. If your congregation or school is celebrating an anniversary in 2002, let us know! We don't want to leave you out. If you have photos you would like us to run, we can do that, too! Please send materials to:

Robin Ouren
RR2 Box 122
Nicollet, MN 56074

All photos will be returned. If you have questions, please contact the editor at the address above or call her at: 507-246-5309. Her e-mail address is: heyrab@mnic.net

Did you know?

- ❖ Bethany Lutheran College's "Old Main" turned 90 this year.
- ❖ The ELS Historical Society will turn five in June of 2002.
- ❖ The reorganized "Little Synod" turned 83 this year.
- ❖ The ELS Archives is open to the public on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings from 9 a.m. until noon.

(School, continued from page 1)

In 1930, the idea of a Christian Day School surfaced again. This time, however, the congregation did not elect to operate the school, leaving it entirely funded by those whose children attended the school. Reverend Olaf M. Gullerud was the guiding spirit. A New Years Day meeting was held to discuss the matter, and the school opened just a week later, with seven pupils attending.

Mrs. Gullerud had this to say about the beginnings of that school: "The best way to start a Christian Day School," she said, "is to start one! But *how* is the problem." Mrs. Gullerud, speaking in the third person, went on: "The pastor and wife, both eager to establish a school, agreed to start in the living room of their own home, using it for a school room. This was possible as the parsonage is a big, roomy house. Anyone interested was invited to come. The pastor's son [Monrad], a theological student, was the first teacher. The equipment of the room was simple. Besides the family piano and a blackboard, each pupil (and also the teacher) provided himself with a chair and a small table. That was all. True, there were some sacrifices on the part of the family, but not to be compared with the joy of hearing these children starting their work with Scripture, reading, prayer, and songs of praise to God.

"The good spirit existing was evident; for instance the girls would help the pastor's wife with dinner dishes and the boys would apply themselves to shoveling snow. The school did not grow with leaps and bounds, but through hard times and good times it survived. All thanks and glory be to God; to Him, and to Him alone, be all praise and honor."

Carl Annexad, one of the school's first pupils, recalls those early days: "Not forgot-

ten was the unexpected (to me at least) move to the "Front Room" of the parsonage after Christmas in 1930. We each brought a small table and chair, having no desks we made do with what we brought.

"I think we were a well behaved group of students. Perhaps the least disciplined student was Arvid Gullerud. His older brother, a seminary student, was our teacher; his younger sister Lois was too young to attend school but made her presence known in many annoying ways. We must have learned a few things; we all were promoted to the next grade and one passed her 8th grade state exam.

"The playground equipment was spectacular ... a cow barn (with cows), a garage, a chicken house in which to hide (we played hide-and-seek). In addition we had 10 acres of woods in which to wander.

"The next school year term we found ourselves in the vast expanse of the old band hall, the abandoned old Dist. #4 school house. Here we had 60 acres of woodland and a lake. Besides playing 'kitten ball' we could go on hikes in the woods. We also played 'pump pump pull-away' and 'duck on the rock.' We spent all winter skating on the lake."

In 1934 the school presented its first "secular program" in the Norseland creamery hall. Because the parents and friends of the school helped along so wholeheartedly the program was a decided success—so much that they were asked to give it again in the nearby town of Nicolet. Educational films were shown at the school at various times also.

Orlando Paul Kessler taught at the school during this time [1933-1941], and is also remembered fondly. "When Orlando Paul Kessler was teacher," said Lorraine Solberg Hanson, "he stayed at the homes of

the students and gave many students a ride to school in an old model T. The roads were like cart roads.... [Once] he fell into the skating pond across the road from school at noontime. He didn't go home to change clothes and he didn't even get sick.....

"The high point of the school year was the spring hike to look for purple violets, cattails, yellow lady's slippers, etc. The usual route was to go east and then northwest up by the Norseland Boy Scout Camp and then come back east toward a pond and then continue southward and back to the school.

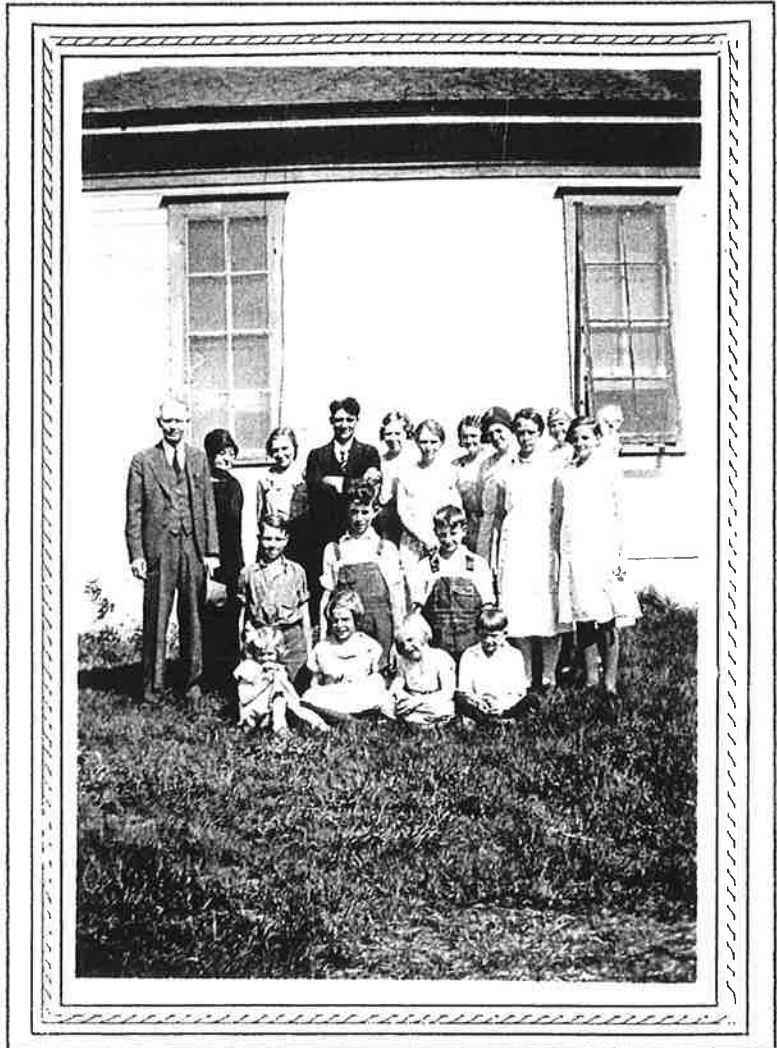
In the autumn of 1934 the Parents Club was formed. It began very informally with no officers and no dues. Approximately once a month the parents gathered at the school (occasionally at the homes). After the children had presented work from their classes, the mothers served a lunch. At this time voluntary contributions were accepted, the proceeds of which were used to buy books and supplies for the school.

It was in the later '30s that a school bus was used to gather the children from farther away.

At first it was a Model "T" Ford, then a Model "A" and finally a Chevrolet panel. The

latter was sometimes jokingly referred to by the children as the "hearse."

In those days the teacher "boarded around" at the homes of the children. At the time when the school stood on the Annexstad farm, the students would enjoy their noon hour across the road in the Annexstad pasture. In the fall and spring they often hiked through



The Norseland Christian Day School and parents, 1933. Back row, L-R: Rev. O.M. Gullerud, Mrs. John Annexstad, Adele Gullerud, Teacher Leonard Mattner, Clara Annexstad, Mrs. O.M. Gullerud, Valborg Lokensgaard, Mrs. Adolph Annexstad, Imogene Annexstad, Mrs. Gust Annexstad holding child (maybe Glenn Annexstad?), Luella Annexstad. Middle Row: Arvid Gullerud (pastor's son), Maurice Annexstad, Carl Annexstad. Front row: Gudrun Annexstad?, Borghild Annexstad, Lois Gullerud, Howard Annexstad (Photo courtesy of Lu Annexstad Monke).

the woods and had picnic lunches there. Both pupils and teachers felt more eager to get back to work after such experiences. The school did not have electricity at that time; the heating system consisted of a wood or coal heater which had to be banked to keep a fire overnight; the water supply was carried by the students from the Gust Annexstad home.

In 1940 the first School Board was elected and consisted of Rev. Milton Tweit, Maurice Swenson and George Anthony. In 1947 the change was made to single-seat desks; and in 1948 the school building was moved to its present location, next to the church.

On May 30, 1955, the school celebrated its 25th anniversary. From these years, the students recall the plays in the spring when they would put large safety pins on flat sheets and hang them on wires for the curtains, box socials when they would spend hours decorating boxes to be auctioned off, pie socials, going for hikes in the woods in the fall and spring, walking over to the sledding hill and coming back soaking wet, and putting mittens close to the stove with the smell of wet wool drying.

There was a short recess in the morning and a real long one in the afternoon. The kids brought their sleds and ice skates and went sliding and skating at the swamp southeast of the cemetery. They had to be careful when sliding down the hill so they didn't hit a muskrat house when they reached the swamp!

Noon lunches for the teacher were prepared by a different mother each week. In 1970 the entire school voted the Aaberg family dog, Snoopy, as the "most favorite pupil" as he practically lived at the school.

On July 6, 1980, Rev. Milton Tweit returned to preach at the 50th anniversary of

the school. For lack of students, and other reasons, the Christian Day School Board decided not to open school in the fall of 1980.

One of the greatest memories former students recall is the religious training they received every day from their dedicated teachers. Through the faithful cooperation of parents and friends, teachers, and pastors, the school for fifty years served as a tool in the Lord's hand to train the many children who passed through its doors.

Norseland Lutheran Christian Day School Teachers

1930: Monrad Gullerud
1930-31: Emma Johnson
1931-32: David Pfeiffer
1932-33: Leonard Mattner
1933-1941: O.P. Kessler
1941: Rev. Milton Tweit,
Clara (Annexstad) Norrell
1941-42: Alton Vick
1942-43: Margaret (Tjernagel) Annexstad
1943-44: Gudrun (Madson) Moldstad
1944-45: Orla (Anderson) Peterson
1945-47: Violet (Fevig) Holte
1947-1950 Melvina (Olson) Aaberg
1950-1951: Lorraine (Solberg) Hanson
1951-53: Shirley (Bode) Timm
1953-56: Donna (Johnson) Wold
1956-1957 Earl Brassow
1957-1960: Howard Schroeder
1960-1962: Margaret Myrum
Beatrice Enter
1962-65: Irene (Schlomer) Brug
1965-67: Diane Quist
1967-70: Sharon (Stanley) Granke
1970-72: Linda Marozick
1972-76: Thomas Schroer
1976-78: LuAnn (Larson) Shoop
1978-1980: Margery Dudley

Compiled by Rev. Craig Ferkenstad



Just a reminder:

We encourage all of our congregations to preserve their histories. How can you do this?

1. Keep copies of all church bulletins, bulletins of ordinations and installations, church anniversaries, and other events. Start a file for these records.
2. Send copies of these records to the ELS Archives; 6 Browns Court; Mankato MN 56001.
3. Take photographs of your pastors and their families, charter members, confirmation classes, and of groups that attend special church functions. Identify the people in the photos on a separate sheet of paper, and keep with the photos in a special file.
4. Gather church history from your members. Write it down! Tape-record it! Make a special file for these oral histories. Send copies to the ELS Archives!
5. Display important artifacts from your church history: Bibles, hymn books, communion cups, baptismal bowls, portraits of pastors and churches. Use church display cases, or create a special area in the church or fellowship hall.
6. Join the ELS Historical Society! Information on membership can be found at the bottom of this page. Send membership dues or questions to: ELS Historical Society; 6 Browns Court; Mankato, MN 56001. If you are already a member, give someone special a membership. Just fill out the form on the back page and mail it in. It's that simple!
7. Attend the historical society's annual meeting, held at Bethany Lutheran College the Saturday before Synod Convention.
8. Send articles of historical significance to the synod or your own congregation, oral histories, photographs, story ideas, and comments regarding **Oak Leaves** to: Robin Ouren; RR2, Box 122; Nicollet, MN 56074. E-mail: heyrab@mnlic.net.



Oak Leaves is published periodically by the ELS Historical Society: 6 Browns Court; Mankato, MN 56001

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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.

Membership

All membership renewals due **June 1**

Voting Membership:

\$10/year: individual
\$15/year: husband & wife

Associate Membership:

\$15/year: individual
\$25/year: institution.
\$5/year: student



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

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