



# Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

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## ELS Members Honored at the 38th Annual CHI Awards Banquet

Compiled by Carolyn Harstad

using her article in the newsletter of Heritage Lutheran Church, Apple Valley, MN, and an article in Bethany's student newspaper, *The Scroll*, posted on BLC's web site

Concordia Historical Institute on the campus of the Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, is the premier institution for the study of Lutheranism in North America and the preservation of Lutheran records and documents. Each year a field of applicants and nominees is considered for awards for outstanding contributions to the field of Lutheran history. 2012 recipients received a personal certificate of commendation and a handsome, bronze medallion commemorating the 450th anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther and bearing the inscriptions *Be thou faithful unto death Rev. 2:10* and *The righteous shall live by faith Romans 1:17*.



Among those honored at the Institute's 38th Annual Awards banquet and ceremony on November 8,

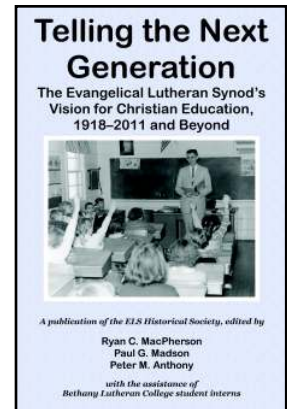
2012, were Bethany Professor and History Chair Dr. Ryan MacPherson, ELS Archivist Rev. Paul Madson, and Bethany alumnus Peter Anthony for the book *Telling the Next Generation: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Vision for Christian Education, 1918-2011*; and alumni Dr. Peter T. Harstad, author, and Karyn Lukasek, illustrator, for the book *Store Per: Norwegian-American "Paul Bunyan" of the Prairie*.

### *Telling the Next Generation*

*Telling the Next Generation*, published by the ELS Historical Society, "preserves a distinctive approach to education, one that stressed both the Word of God and the liberal arts, catechesis and academics," says Dr. Gene Edward Veith, Jr., provost at Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, Virginia. The book

"offers a harmonious chorus, singing about ideas and issues relevant to the Lutheran task of telling the next generation about the permanent things of confessional piety," notes Dr. Mark A. Kalthoff, professor of history at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan.

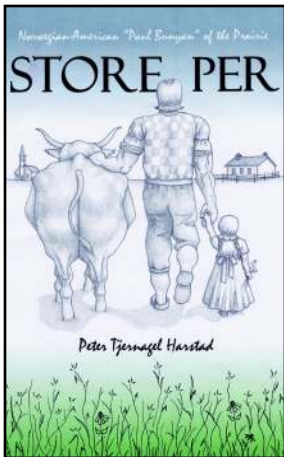
The editors were assisted by ten Bethany students who completed internships at the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society and service-learning assignments in History 460, Religion in American History over a five-year period (2006-2010): Abigail Bourman, Jeremy Costello, Kyle Damiano, Paul Gunderson, Philip Kaminsky, David Reagles, Stephen Sielaff, Andrew Shoop, Annie Williams, and Josiah Willitz. "It was my pleasure to serve as mentor and managing editor," says MacPherson, a charter member of the ELS



Historical Society, and who has served on the board of directors since 2004.

The ELS Historical Society presently is collaborating with the synod's centennial celebration committee to produce a pictorial history book and video marking the 100th anniversary of the synod's formation (1918-2018). Today, the synod numbers about 17,000 souls and operates Bethany Lutheran College as well as several world missions and over a hundred domestic congregations.

### ***Store Per: Norwegian-American "Paul Bunyan" of the Prairie***



Dr. Peter T. Harstad researched and wrote, and Karyn Lukasek illustrated and designed this collection of history and legend concerning Peder ("Big Pete") Tjernagel, a nineteenth-century immigrant whose journey from Norway to America with "his bride, his Bible, and his violin" captures the story of Norwegian Lutherans in the New Land.

"*Store Per* makes a wonderful contribution to the story of our forefathers and their brave journey across the stormy Atlantic to make their home in America," according to Dr. Odd S. Lovoll, professor emeritus at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.

The Rev. Daniel Preus, banquet speaker, stressed that in order "to be a good church historian one needs to love doctrine . . . more than history." As an example, he noted that "Dr. Harstad's work about *Store Per* speaks about a Lutheran married couple's journey, struggles, perseverance and faith. Journey, struggles and perseverance—that's history. Faith—that's doctrine."

He went on to say, "It is crucial to know and understand the doctrine that history is meant to teach," and asked, "What is the purpose of our

preservation and proclamation of our history of Lutheranism in America? It is for the sake of the preservation and proclamation of the Gospel."

So at this festive gathering Rev. Preus asked each listener to rejoice in history, but also to "give thanks to God for His Word, to rejoice in His Doctrine, and to express our infinite gratitude for the salvation He has poured out on us in Christ His Son."

*Soli Deo Gloria*

*Telling the Next Generation* and *Store Per* are both available for purchase at the Bethany Lutheran College bookstore and online at [www.els-history.org/books](http://www.els-history.org/books). ■

Larry Lumpke (far left), executive director of Concordia Historical Institute, and board member Rodney Rathmann (far right) present awards to Peter Harstad (center left) and Ryan MacPherson (center right) at the institute's November 2012 banquet in St. Louis.



Peter T. Harstad and Ryan MacPherson enjoy their moment with C.F.W. Walther in the museum at the Concordia Historical Institute.



*News from the*

**Convention Daily, Thirty-Fourth Regular Convention**  
Norwegian Synod, Synodical Conference  
Mankato, Minnesota

**Sun., June 17, 1951**

Desmond Jose Arrives From England

A welcoming delegation of six pastors and laymen scurried by car to Minneapolis Saturday evening to greet Mr. Desmond Jose on his arrival from Cornwall, England. Mr. Jose will enter our Bethany Seminary in the fall to train for the Lutheran ministry. He will then return to Cornwall to bring the Gospel of free salvation to his countrymen.

Mr. Jose, who is 26 years of age, was introduced to the Synod Sunday worshipers attending the English service in the Bethany chapel. He is to speak to the synod during the Monday sessions.

Jose arrived in New York on Tuesday, June 13, aboard the Queen Mary. ...We welcome you, Desmond Jose, and wish you God's blessing in your life and work.

## ***Synod Mission Work in Cornwall, England***

by Rev. Craig A. Ferkenstad



The Evangelical Lutheran Synod made its first efforts with independent foreign mission work in 1951 when Joseph Petersen was commissioned as a missionary to Cornwall, England.

Lutheran mission work had already started in Cornwall county in the extreme southwest corner of England by Mr. Joseph Pedlar. In 1948 the ELS received an appeal concerning work in Cornwall. The following year, the Board for Foreign Missions recommended a missionary be sent to work with Mr. Pedlar for at least three months with the expenses being covered by special gifts. Rev. Joseph Petersen, who was serving Pinehurst and Ascension Lutheran Churches in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, spent three months in England. Upon his return he urged the synod to send a missionary. The 1951 convention concurred with the recommendation.

Several calls were extended by the board until Pastor Petersen accepted the call and was commissioned as a missionary at large in September 1951. The center of Missionary Petersen's work was in Redruth [*re-DRUTH*] which was the largest urban area in Cornwall. Work also was conducted at Goonhavern and Fal-mouth. The work progressed slowly, in part due to a reluctance to receive a foreign missionary. Upon urging from the missionary, it was determined to purchase a

building for use as a residence and a chapel in Redruth. Yet, the following year, the situation had not improved and Missionary Petersen reported to the 1954 convention, "I feel strongly that our church has a God-given mission in Cornwall, but we must be reconciled to the fact that it is a field for native workers."



Desmond Jose and Joseph Petersen

He had become a Lutheran under the instruction of Joseph Pedlar and enrolled in our seminary in 1951. Four years later he was ordained on Synod Sunday and commissioned by the ELS as a missionary to Cornwall. At this same time Pastor Petersen's visa expired and he returned to the United States. The synod continued to subsidize the salary for Pastor Jose.

The members of the synod provided financial support for the work in Cornwall. In 1951 the contributions were nearly double of the need. During the ten years the "Cornwall Mission" account existed, there were approximately \$22,677 in contributions and \$22,237 in disbursements.

Even with the arrival of a national pastor, the size of the Cornwall mission did not grow. Pastor Jose felt the lack of a "proper church building" was a hindrance; but the cost of a building was estimated at \$30,000 and would need to be the sole financial responsibility of the synod. An arrangement was made with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England (ELCE) to allow for a one-year vicarage for Desmond Jose under their supervision. At the conclusion of his vicarage, he accepted a call to serve an ELCE congregation. Our synod did not feel it was in a position to send another missionary to fill the vacancy at Cornwall and at the 1959 convention resolved that work in Cornwall be terminated. The synod also expressed its concern about the spiritual welfare of the people in Cornwall and resolved to ask the ELCE to take over the work in Cornwall. ■

The above is selected and condensed from "A Half-Century of Mission Involvement: ELS Foreign Mission Work prior to 1968" which was printed in the December 2012 issue of *The Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.



## The Lives and Legacy of the Hjörts: Pioneer Pastor's Family

by Robin Larson



Robin Larson is a former ELS Historical Society board member. She loves history and writing, and combines the two interests fairly often. When she isn't immersed in history projects, she spends her time hanging out with elementary school children (as a teacher). Robin is a member of St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church (WELS) in St. Peter, Minnesota, where she lives with her two children.

Some years ago, at a church gathering, I overheard some folks talking. One of them (obviously a historian, his name may have been Ferkenstad) said, "The Hjört family provided wives for the synod's pastors."

The name "Hjört" was familiar to me because Pastor Ove Jacob Hjört served at East and West Paint Creek, my home churches in northeast Iowa, back before the Doctrine of Election Controversy rocked the synod in the 1880s. No, I'm not *quite* old enough to have met him, but I often saw his photo hanging in those church basements, right between portraits of U.V. Koren and A.K. Sagen.

I was curious about the Hjört/pastors' wives connection, and began to look into the matter. What I discovered was a very interesting family story that unfolded during a significant time in American and Synod history and had as its cast of characters a veritable "Who's Who" of the old Norwegian Synod.

Much of what we know about the early lives of Ove and Janna Hjört and their family can be found in two memoirs written by their daughters, Louisa (who went by "Lulla") and Didrikke (known to all as "Dikka"). Lulla's memories were published in the Norwegian-American magazine, *Symra*. *Symra* was published in Decorah, Iowa for ten years, beginning in 1905. Its subtitle was "an Annual for Norwegians on Both Sides of the Sea," and its purpose, according to Einar Haugen in *Symra: A Memoir*, was "to sharpen the awareness of our historical memories in this country and of Norwegian history, literature, and culture in general." By this stress on their common heritage, the editors hoped for a "unification on a national basis of the Norwegians in America" (Haugen V. 27, p. 101). Dikka penned her memories for the 1941 *Jul i Vesterheimen* magazine (published annually from 1911 to 1957).

Ove Jacob Hjört was born in Kristianna (Oslo) Norway, in 1833. He lost the sight in one of his eyes at age three (his "good eye" was also weak), and learning was a challenge for him. Ove attended an agricultural school in Sweden and went back to Norway where he purchased the Dalby farm in Ringsaker. In 1855, he married Christiane Elisabeth Otteson, the daughter of Otto Christian Otteson and Didrikke Aall. Christiane (who went by "Janna") was a sister of Jacob Aall Otteson, whose name we recognize as one of the founding fathers of the Norwegian Synod in America.

Now, Janna Otteson Hjört, according to her daughter, Lulla, "was gifted and received a good education." Janna's grandson, J.C.K. Preus, in his 1966 family history book, said, "Grandmother Christiane Hjört's 'good education' was received primarily during her three-year attendance at a girls' school of the Church of the Brethren at Christianfeldt, Schleswig-Holstein (now Denmark). This school, frequented by a considerable number of girls from Christian homes in Norway, had its roots in the old HERNHUTTER movement and had a strong missionary and pietist emphasis. The curriculum stressed cultural subjects: languages, literature, history, and the fine arts, especially music and drawing." While at this school, recalled daughter Dikka, "she learned German, French, English, singing and music and handwork."



Ove Jacob Hjort  
and  
Christiane Elisabeth Ottesen

Ove and Janna began their life together in Norway, farming, and having children. They were very successful in the latter endeavor, but not the former, which, as we will see, were both good things for the Norwegian

Synod and the spreading of God's Word. In 1856, the HjØrts were blessed with a daughter, Louisa. In 1858, son Otto followed, and two years later, another daughter, Diddrike, joined the family.

While Ove and Janna were struggling to make a go of their farm, many Norwegians were leaving their homeland and immigrating to America. Janna's brother, Jacob, had gone to America in 1852 and helped found the Norwegian Synod. Under the leadership of its first president, A.C. Preus, the new synod was starting congregations all over the Midwest, but many more pastors were needed in the new country to minister to the growing number of Norwegians. Until the new synod could establish its own college and seminary, a Norwegian professorship had been set up at Concordia College and Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri (founded in 1839 by German emigrants) with Professor Peter Laurentius (Laur) Larsen called from Norway and appointed to that position in 1859.

Meanwhile, tension was on the rise. The "slavery question," along with vastly different ideas about states' rights and how the country ought to run, continued to tear at the seams that bound the young nation. Southern states were emboldened. Secession became a reality. War looked like a real possibility. As a "border" state between northern and southern ideals, Missouri became a hotbed of tension between anti-slavery folks and southern sympathizers. St. Louis also happened to hold the largest weapons arsenal in the west, located less than a mile from Concordia Seminary.

But back in Norway, Janna had caught America fever. She longed to head west and join her brother. Ove, too, became more and more interested in the idea. In 1860, Laur Larsen returned to Norway to urge more men to come to America and become pastors. Despite his poor eyesight and learning difficulties, Ove made his decision. He would pick up his family, leave the farm (which wasn't working out so well anyway), and head for America to attend the theological seminary in St. Louis.

In April of 1861, the HjØrt family, consisting of Ove, Janna, Lulla, age five; Otto, age three; Dikka, nine months, and most of their worldly possessions (including a piano) left Norway on a ship bound for America! But this voyage was no pleasure cruise. A fire on-board killed the first mate. One man went mad and fell overboard. Huge icebergs threatened the ship. Fog poured in and stranded the boat for weeks, at which time another ship ran into it, destroying the bowsprit. Food ran low and had to be rationed. Fifteen of the five hundred passengers died, probably from eating rancid food. Janna feared tiny Dikka would perish. One wonders if the adventures of the apostle Paul at sea crossed the HjØrts' minds from time to time during this eleven-week voyage.

As the HjØrts (and their piano) were enduring their tense voyage to America, tension in the states came to a breaking point. At 4:30 on the morning of April 12,

1861, southern troops fired on Fort Sumter, marking the beginning of the Civil War. Concordia president C.F.W. Walther and other professors had more on their minds now than the instruction of seminarians. August Suelflow recounts in his biography of Walther, *Servant of the Word*, "some of the (Concordia) students had formed 'half a company' under the direction of seminarian Captain Styrk Sjursen Reque, a Norwegian who had served in the military before his enrollment . . . Seminarian August Crull was appointed a lieutenant. Though they exercised with broomsticks instead of rifles, the force was not needed and was never called into action."

With the war on, the St. Louis Arsenal became a prize that both Union and Confederate armies wanted. Confederate President Jefferson Davis ordered a steamboat loaded with siege guns and howitzers up the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to St. Louis, to enable the pro-secession Missouri militia to take possession of the arsenal.

On April 25, before the Confederate boat arrived in St. Louis, Union troops, under the leadership of Captain Nathaniel Lyon, and under cover of darkness, loaded the arsenal of 40,000 muskets and 110,000 cartridges onto a steamer and moved them across the river to Illinois.

Dr. Walther closed Concordia Seminary the very next morning and Professor Laur Larsen and half a dozen Norwegian students left for safer ground in Iowa. Dr. Walther also sent his wife and children to safer quarters in Jefferson County, Missouri. Walther and Professor Alexander Saxer alone remained in the seminary building, "living there alone and solitary like two eccentrics in the attic" (from Walther's personal correspondence).

Tension was palpable in St. Louis, as troops from both sides had encampments there. On May 10, Captain Lyon, with considerable more manpower, decided to force the surrender of almost seven hundred militiamen who refused to pledge allegiance to the Federal (northern) government. After the surrender, Lyon paraded the men through the streets of St. Louis. Nothing like rubbing salt in wounds, especially in a place as divided as Missouri at that time. St. Louisians, some of them southern sympathizers, saw this act as a great humiliation, and began to throw insults, fruit, and rocks at the Union Army. You can imagine what happened next. It is unclear how the shooting started, but it did, on both sides. Three militiamen were killed, twenty-eight civilians—including women and children—were killed, and fifty more were injured. Riots broke out, and over the course of two days, many more people were shot, buildings were set on fire, and tensions greatly increased.

The HjØrt family finally arrived safely from their trying journey, landing in Quebec on July 4. Recalled Dikka, "The trip continued by steamer to Chicago, and by railroad to Madison, Wisconsin. We then rode by horse out to Koshkonong, where we stayed with Uncle Jacob (Otteson) until the fall of 1861."

Despite the war, Walther (whose family had by now returned to St. Louis) reopened the seminary in September and welcomed Ove and his family and the other seminarians warmly. Lulla recalled, “one thing that contributed a lot to our feeling at home was the socializing with the four other Norwegian students that attended the seminary that year. They were (Amund) Mikkelsen, (Ole Johan Knutsen) Hagestad, Thomas Johnson, and (Jens Ivarsen) Krohn. They all came to our house often and felt at home there, since we were the only Norwegians they had occasion to visit.” (The Norwegian Synod also opened Luther College that fall in a small parsonage at Halfway Creek, Wisconsin, a dozen miles north of La Crosse. There were sixteen pupils, taught by Professors Laur Larsen and F.A. Schmidt.)

Lulla also mentioned in her memoirs, “at that time General Fremont [sic] was in camp with his troops in St. Louis. It was great fun for us children that they marched right past our house. Brother Otto crawled up on the kitchen roof and shouted with all his might: ‘Hurrah for the Union!’ and was not a little proud



when the soldiers noticed him and presented arms.” General John C. Fremont, better known as the “Pathfinder” to most people, gained fame early in his life exploring the western part of the United States. He ran for president—and lost to James Buchanan—in 1856. In 1861, President Lincoln put him in command of the Department of the West. In this role, General Fremont

oversaw all military operations west of the Mississippi River. He was headquartered in St. Louis. On the battlefield, Fremont’s forces did not fare well. In late August 1861, right before the Hjërts arrived, Fremont and his troops began to fortify St. Louis. Fremont (without consent of the president) then declared martial law in St. Louis and ordered all slaves set free. As President Lincoln puzzled over how to deal with Fremont’s effrontery, Fremont spent his time marching the troops around St. Louis, much to the delight of the Hjært children and probably many others. President Lincoln eventually reversed Fremont’s order, had him removed from command, and, in March of 1862, sent him off to West Virginia.

Four significant events happened to the Hjært family in 1862: A daughter, Johanna, was born; Ove graduated from seminary; he was ordained; and the family moved to northeast Iowa where Ove had been called to shepherd the congregations at East and West Paint Creek. As the Hjërts were settling in to parsonage life in northeast Iowa, the Dakota tribe, just a couple hundred miles north, were rising up in protest to their living conditions and mistreatment at the hands of the

U.S. government. When word arrived in northeast Iowa that the Dakota had massacred settlers in New Ulm, Minnesota, and were headed south, burning settlements and killing those in their way, terrified Iowa settlers from near and far took refuge at “Alberta House,” a limestone house originally built as a way-side inn. Its three-foot-thick walls made it fortress-like, and indeed, during the Dakota Conflict, it served that purpose for many people until word came that the Dakota had been contained in Minnesota. Alberta House stood (and still does) just thirty miles from the Paint Creek parsonage. At this same time, frantic folks who could afford to do so were booking passage on steamboats leaving Lansing, Iowa (ten miles from the parsonage) to points farther south. (Remember, the Civil War was in full-swing, and in August of 1862, Confederate troops were invading Kentucky, and Generals Lee and Pope were waging the Second Battle of Bull Run in Virginia.) Finding truly “safe” ground at this point in American history was a bit of a challenge.

It was a very tight-knit group of pastors and their families who lived in northeast Iowa and southwest Wisconsin at this time, sharing the struggles and triumphs of life. They helped to establish the Norwegian Synod. They established Luther College at Halfway Creek, Wisconsin, and then a year later, moved it to Decorah, Iowa. They ministered to hundreds, maybe thousands, of immigrants, traveling hundreds, maybe thousands, of miles during the year, making the rounds to their congregations tucked into the hills and valleys. Lulla wrote, “in our childhood there was a very ideal friendship-relationship among the first pastors from Norway. It can certainly be said in truth that they were like a large bunch of siblings. The children were taught to call each others’ parents “Aunt” and “Uncle,” within this circle, and we thought we were all related.”

With the strong bond and easy camaraderie of the pastors’ families and the kindness and generosity of neighbors and congregation members, life at Paint Creek was happy for the Hjært family. “When I recall in my memory how nice people were toward us at Paint Creek in my childhood,” wrote Lulla, “it seems almost like a fairy tale and I must often wonder whether there is a pastor’s family today who are treated so well as we were treated by the people of the congregations there.”

During their years at Paint Creek, the Hjërts often had young women stay with them, helping to care for and teach the young children. The first of these was Maren Sahlsgaard. In 1862, twenty-five year old Maren had just arrived from Norway. She lived with the Hjërts for a year. During this time, she met the Hjërts’ Concordia Seminary friend, one Thomas Johnson.

Johnson was ordained in 1863. Shortly thereafter, Thomas and Maren were married, and the young couple set out for Minnesota, where Thomas began his incredible ministry. The April, 1898 *Evangelisk Luthersk Kirketidene* says of Johnson’s ministry, “it stretched itself over Nicollet, Sibley, Carver, McLeod,

Brown, Watonwan, Blue Earth, Faribault, Jackson, Yellow Medicine, Meeker, Kandiyohi, Pope, Sterns, Chippewa, Grant and Douglas Counties in Minnesota and down to Emmet County in Iowa.” More than fifty congregations were formed from his efforts and Johnson personally served twenty-one congregations from his homebase of Norseland (ten miles west of St. Peter, Minnesota).

The Johnsons arrived in southern Minnesota just one year after the Dakota uprising. Tension was still high. Though the “Indian problem” was being addressed in the continued removal of Dakota and other tribes from this area, settlers still worried about further conflicts. “At the time when Pastor Johnson was installed, watches were held at the houses, and also at the house where the young pastor’s wife lived alone while her husband was gone with the calling of his office. In this manner, she lived to see many fearful nights and days of that hard time” (*Evangelisk Luthersk Kirketidene*).

Ove and Janna welcomed more children into their family: Jacob in April of 1864, and Maren in December of 1865. Maren was born just half a year after the end of the Civil War. It was a time to be thankful for many things.

In 1866, the Hjörts welcomed to the Paint Creek parsonage another young woman just arrived from Norway. Christiane Hoff (known as “Rikke”) and Janna had known each other as children in Norway. When Rikke’s mother died in childbirth, Janna’s family took her in and raised her. Now, all these years later, Rikke, along with big trunks and boxes full of utensils, dishes, and lots of clothing, came to America to stay with the Hjörts. It was a joyous reunion for Rikke and Janna.

Rikke stayed with the Hjörts for two years. In February of 1868, Janna brought daughter Cathinka into the family. While Janna was tending to a newborn, Rikke’s mind may have been elsewhere, for it was about this time she attended a pastoral conference in Decorah, at the home of Reverend Nils Brandt (Janna’s uncle). At this conference Rikke met the man she would marry within the year, Reverend Frants Wulfsberg. Wulfsberg was an 1867 Concordia Seminary grad and was at this time serving a congregation in Albert Lea, Minnesota. Frants and Rikke were married at Paint Creek, by her father, on October 23, 1868. The couple made their home in Albert Lea. In an unpublished Wulfsberg family history, daughters Dikka and Caia wrote, “that winter of 1868 was terribly cold with lots of snow. The house was poorly built with no cellar. They could have frozen to death if mother had not had so many good clothes from Norway.” Being Norwegian prepared Rikke well for Minnesota winters! The Wulfsbergs survived many winters together and were blessed with eleven children.

Ove and Janna Hjört obviously loved children. They also loved to entertain the youth of the congregation

at their home. The Hjört house was full of music, some of which sprang from the piano they brought across the ocean. This was one of the first, possibly the VERY first, piano, that had a home in an American pioneer parsonage! Janna, like so many educated pastors’ wives at that time, used her educational background to help others. “We had no higher school for girls at that time,” recalled Lulla, “and not seldom [Mother] was asked to take young girls into the house to teach them a little bit of everything that they otherwise had no opportunity to learn.” It is no wonder pioneer parsonages acquired the reputation as being centers of culture.

About 1870, Ove and Janna opened their home to another young woman, Laura Knudsen. Laura soon met Pastor Ellef Olsen. Olsen was an 1866 Luther grad who had also gone to Concordia Seminary, being ordained in 1869. If you have been paying attention so far, it will not surprise you that Laura and Ellef married in 1871 and set off for South Dakota, where Ellef served the Brule Creek congregation.

The Hjörts frequently opened their home to students traveling to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, as well as Luther College professors and students. Among the Luther students was one Peer Strømme (who would go on to Concordia Seminary and become a noted writer and pastor).



In his partly autobiographical book, *Halvor: A Story of Pioneer Youth*, Strømme talks about his trips to the Hjört parsonage—“the pastor was a handsome, rather stocky man with a closely clipped brown beard and a skullcap on his head. He welcomed Halvor with a sonorous bass voice and a hearty handshake. Mrs. Dahlby [book pseudonym for Hjört] was so gracious that Halvor immediately felt like calling her ‘Mother!’ . . . The visit to this parsonage was the beginning of a new epoch in Halvor’s life. It was his first contact with family life in a Christian home of cultured people. . . . In this house, all was serenity. At first it seemed almost queer to him that they should all be so polite to each other. Even in ordinary daily life the pastor was as gallant to his wife and daughters as if they were guests in the house. . . . When the family gathered for prayers mornings and evenings and Pastor Dahlby read a chapter of the Bible in his rich bass voice, Halvor felt that he had discovered the wellspring of the love and happiness with which the home abounded.”

Ove and Janna were blessed with another daughter, Kaia, in January of 1871. Kaia would only be with the family for a short time, as the Lord called her home just nineteen months later.





In 1873, wrote Ove's grandson, J.C.K. Preus, "grandfather had gone to Norway for a last visit with his aging parents. Grandmother naturally was in charge at the parsonage. One morning as she was stirring up the fire there was an explosion, her clothes caught fire and she was so severely burned that she passed away a few hours later, the same day, the ninth of July, 1873." What a horrible loss for the family! Ove was left with seven children,

ages 17, 15, 13, 11, 9, 7, and 5. Life went on.

Though Luther College was just thirty miles away, it was a men-only institution of higher learning. But in 1873, an opportunity for young women presented itself in the form of a radical idea: Luther professors in Decorah agreed to instruct teenage girls who were eager to learn. The girls who did not live in Decorah stayed on campus with Pastor Nils and Diderikke Brandt that year and came together in a study group. The group was called "Comitia" or sometimes "Comitia Dumriana" (literally meaning "committee of dunces," or, slightly less pejoratively, "assembly of the silly fair"...). The group was taught by faculty members from Luther College. Similar groups for young women were being formed elsewhere, in prestigious colleges including Cambridge and Harvard.



Comitia Dumriana, 1873-74  
 Standing l. to r.: Thora Larsen, Marie Reque, Margrethe Brandt, Emma Larsen, and Rosine Preus. Seated: Lullie Hjort, Caroline Koren, Henriette Korsa, and Mathilda Stub.

Nine young women attended this first "Comitia Dumriana": Lulla Hjort, Thora Larsen, Emma Larsen, Anna Marie Reque, Edel Margrethe Brandt, Rosine Preus, Henriette and Caroline Koren, and Mathilda Stub. Most of them had pastor or professor fathers, and it is likely the girls already knew one another well. Peer Stromme, in *Halvor*, describes his feelings about the group: "Almost all these young ladies were so pleasant and attractive that they made poor Halvor's heart ache. When this bevy of girls, or 'Comitia Dumriana', as they were called, strolled down the

road, he could not keep his eyes off them. He was not especially concerned over any one member in particular; but collectively—taken all together—they were irresistible. They caused not only his heart but also his feet to ache. For on their account he began to take pains in his appearance. He forced his big feet into shoes so small that they caused him unspeakable agony. He had to buy clothes oftener than he could afford. ...And what did it all avail him? Not a single one of the silly fair would look at him anyway."

Lulla Hjort paid Halvor/Peer no mind. Her mind was on her studies, and maybe on thoughts of her friend Sine Preus's older brother, Christian Keyser (C.K.) who had finished his studies at Luther that year and headed off to Concordia Seminary. Sine and C.K.'s parents were Pastor Herman Amberg and Linka (of diary fame), another pioneer pastor family with which the Hjort's were well acquainted.

While Lulla enjoyed the opportunity to learn and to socialize (and ponder on C.K. Preus), her brother, Otto, also headed to Decorah to become a Norseman. Otto and Peer Strømme became Luther College roommates and best friends, as Strømme recalls in *Halvor*, "Christian Dahlby [Otto Hjort] was a pale, light-complexioned young man who often stayed out of games because he might get hurt. He would not go swimming when it was cold, for fear of catching cold. As for Halvor [Peer], it had never occurred to him to worry about his health or to change his socks because he happened to get his feet wet. Why in the world should one fuss about such things? But that the minister's son paid attention to such matters made him interesting. ...The two boys were soon confiding all their secrets to each other."

Alas, Comitia Dumriana only lasted for a year. David Nelson, in his article, *Norwegians Found the College*, written for the August, 1961, *Palimpsest* (published by the State Historical Society of Iowa), said, "Luther College all but forgot them and continued on its way as a college for men, much too preoccupied with the pressing tasks before it to give thought at this time to the education of women." (Luther became coeducational in 1936.)



In 1875 father Ove Hjort married Henriette Neuberg, the sister of a good friend of Janna's, Karen Neuberg. Henriette was also a dear friend of Linka Preus (of diary fame, as has been mentioned before). Henriette became like a mother to the Hjort children.



It will come as no shock that Lulla Hjört and C.K. Preus got married, on May 24, 1877, a year after C.K. graduated from Concordia Seminary. Much ado was made of the event. A newspaper article of the time said, "The occasion will long be remembered as bringing together the largest assemblage that ever witnessed a marriage in this vicinity, more than five-hundred persons being present, and among them, many of the most able ministers of the Lutheran Church, and prominent Norwegian citizens of Iowa and Minnesota. Among the pastors present were: Rev. E.A. Otteson, Dane Co., Wisconsin; H.G. Stub, Minneapolis, Minnesota; H.A. Stub, Winneshiek Co. (Iowa); N. Brandt, Decorah, Iowa; V. Koren, Decorah, Iowa; H.A. Preus, Columbia Co., Wisconsin; R. Larson, Spring Grove, Minnesota; and J. Nordby, Northwood, Iowa."



Louise Augusta Hjört

The service was held at 11 a.m., and, according to the newspaper account, "following the ceremony the guests were invited to accept the hospitality of Rev. and Mrs. Hjört at their residence. The tables were spread, in the open air, in a kind of floral bower, arranged under the skillful direction of Mr. Wm. Erickson, of this place, and accommodated two hundred and ten persons at each of three sittings. The principal guests being seated at first, at an appropriate time the toasts (or addresses) ten in number, were given."



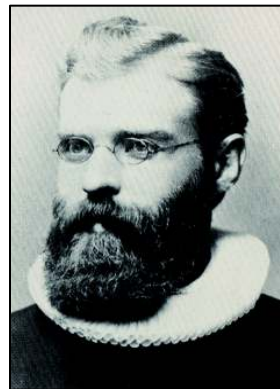
Hjort parsonage at Paint Creek, Iowa.

The parsonage where the Hjörts lived from 1862 until 1879, while Reverend Ove Hjört was pastor at East and West Paint Creek Lutheran churches. It was to this home that so many friends, congregation members, Luther College students, and pastors and their families came to enjoy fellowship and the hospitality of the Hjört family.

Gift-opening followed the meal: "the presents were as numerous and costly as useful and beautiful. Prominent among the articles were a magnificent Bible, presented by Rev. and Mrs. Hjört, and costing \$30. The silver set... was presented by the Norwegian citizens of Lansing [east of Waterville]. Accompanying this set was a magnificent coffee urn, from the Norwegian residents of East Paint Creek. A water pitcher,

dozen knives and forks, jewelry holder, waiter, castor, and goblet, all of silver, were presented by citizens of West Paint Creek." Another notable gift that day was "an oil painting, representing the Madonna, by Raphael, from Rev. V. Koren." Considering his pastor's salary, it may be assumed the painting was a reproduction.

And so, the first of the Hjört daughters married a pastor and the two began their family. Of their eleven children, four died by the age of thirteen. Of the remaining seven children, C.K. and Lulla had four sons. Ove Jakob Hjört Preus, born in 1880, graduated from Luther in 1901, and Luther Seminary (St. Paul) in 1904. He served congregations in Washington, California, and Wisconsin and became Luther College's fourth president in 1932 (his father had served in that capacity from 1902 until his death in 1921). Son Johan Carl Keyser Preus also went the Luther College/Luther Sem route (graduating in 1902 and 1905), and served congregations in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Son Jacob Aall Otteson Preus, though he had a fantastic name for a pastor, instead served as governor of Minnesota from 1921-1925. Son Paul taught school and played semi-pro baseball until he died of a heart attack at age 51.



Otto Hjört finished his studies at Luther College and went on to seminary at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio in the fall of 1877. Capital University, the oldest university in that state, was founded by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio (German Lutheran Church) in 1830.

In the fall of 1878, Ove's son Jacob, went off to Luther College. His love of music, instilled in him his whole life,

took his attention.

In 1879, more tragedy befell the Hjört family. Ove's wife, Henriette, died in February, during childbirth. The child also died. It was a difficult year for the family. Ove's health was failing, and he wrote about this in a letter to his Paint Creek congregations in September:

*Since I am so weak that I dare not preach for you this morning, I hope that you will kindly excuse me. Perhaps God will again make me healthy and still grant me the grace for a time to work among you in word and teaching, but perhaps not. Oh, I would really still like to be allowed to do this! God grant me in any case the grace to entrust myself into His good will!... Teach us... with full confidence of heart to say: 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, Lord! Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.' The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all! Amen.  
Herewith, heartfelt greetings to you all from the caretaker of your souls  
O. J. HJORT.*

*P. S. I'm going to Lansing now to put myself under a doctor's care.*

On December 4, 1879, Ove officiated at the marriage of East Paint Creek member Kirsti Storla and Reverend J.C.T. Moses, who served the Saude congregation an hour west of Paint Creek. On Monday, December 8, Reverend Hjort conducted a service at Faegre Prairie, about eight miles north of the Paint Creek parsonage. He was very ill, and worsened over the next few days.



Daughter Lulla wrote, "December 14, the same year this letter was written, my father died. One evening when he said good night to sister Johanna, he told her to sleep well in Jesus' name! As so often in the times when he was sick, he repeated these words: 'O God, for the sake of Christ's blood make my last hour good,' then he

would fold his hands and would sleep. When Olaus Erikson in Lansing, who was with him that night, thought it was so strangely quiet at 2 o'clock in the morning, and went to the bed to see to him, Father had fallen asleep in death without having moved a finger from when he had folded his hands in prayer. Blessed be his memory!"

After the death of their beloved father, the Hjort siblings left their Paint Creek home and went to live with their sister, Lulla, and her husband C.K. Preus, at the parsonage in Spring Prairie, Wisconsin.

Otto Hjort completed his theological studies, graduating from Capital University in 1882. He was then called to the parish at Halfway Creek, Wisconsin, where Luther College got its start some twenty-five years earlier. He married Oline (Lena) Johnson the next year.

Johanna was the next Hjort daughter to marry. On May 28, 1884, she and Eilert Martin Erickson began their life together. Eilert was the son of Norwegian immigrants who settled near the Hjorts and farmed. Eilert became a merchant (not a pastor) and he and Johanna lived primarily in the Twin Cities. They had



Johanna Sarine Hjort

six children, one of whom would grow up and marry...a pastor. Luella Erickson became the bride of Reverend Sven Berven on April 26, 1905. Reverend Berven served congregations near Zumbrota, Minnesota.



Didrikke Aall Hjort and Ahlert Hysing Koren

1887 was a big year for Hjort weddings. On May 17, Dikka married Ahlert Hysing Koren, oldest son of Reverend U.V. and Elisabeth Hysing Koren. Perhaps being the oldest son of a prominent pastor was daunting. Whatever the reason, Ahlert did not go into the ministry. Ahlert and Dikka ended up in Colorado, where Ahlert worked as a mining engineer.

He contracted Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and consequently died (in 1901) at the age of 42. Dikka lived another 43 years, running a boarding house in Minneapolis. Among her guests was Herbjorn Gausta, the itinerant Norwegian artist responsible for about four-hundred altar paintings in Norwegian churches throughout Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.



Linka Hjort Preus

On July 20, 1887, daughter Maren Hjort (who went by Linka) married Pastor Johan Wilhelm Preus (her brother-in-law C.K. Preus's little brother) at Spring Prairie, Wisconsin. J.W. graduated from Luther in 1882, Concordia Seminary in 1885, Kristiana University in 1886, and Leipzig University in 1887. Maren and J.W. had eight children. Their son, Herman Amberg Preus, became a pastor. He served congregations in Washington, Illinois, and at Trinity

Lutheran Church, Calmar, Iowa, where he served from 1944 to 1966.

In 1891, on a return trip from Norway with his wife Lena, Reverend Otto Hjort became very ill. He had contracted tuberculosis some years before and perhaps one reason for this journey was to try and alleviate the symptoms of that disease. Sadly, Otto died while in Liverpool, England. Lena took his body back to Norway and had him buried in Kristiana on October 21. He was 33 years old.





Jacob Hjort would get married a year later, to Caroline Anderson. Jacob and Caroline had a son and a daughter. Jacob used his musical talents as a singing instructor at St. Olaf College, and then at Lutheran Ladies Seminary in Red Wing, Minnesota. Eventually the family moved to North Dakota, where Jacob

became vice president of a bank.



And now, only one Hjort child remained unmarried. The big question: would daughter Cathinka marry a pastor? Yes, in fact, she did. Cathinka married the Reverend Johan J. Strand on September 17, 1896. Strand was an 1889 graduate of Luther College, and an 1892 graduate of Luther Seminary, Minneapolis. Reverend Strand served parishes at Hartland-Manchester, Minnesota; Kalispell, Montana; Grand Forks and Bowman, North

Dakota. In 1910, the Strands moved to rural St. Peter, Minnesota, where Strand served as pastor at Norseland, Norwegian Grove, and Swan Lake parishes until 1925.

Oh, and Cathinka and J.J.'s son, Ahlert? Well, he became a pastor.

And so, this brings us back to the comment I overheard at that church gathering long ago: "The Hjort family provided wives for the synod's pastors."

Given the unique situation the pioneer pastor families were in and the tight-knit group of friends they became, it is understandable why so many pastors' children married other pastors' children, and why so many of those young men became pastors themselves. Surrounded by such wonderful role models, living lives focused on the spreading of the Gospel, Christian fellowship and thankfulness, it would have perhaps been more unusual if the Hjort daughters (and the young women who lived with them) didn't marry pastors, or have sons (and grandsons and great-grandsons) who also went into the ministry.

The Hjort family's dedication to God's word and living lives of Christian service strengthened the Norwegian Synod and helped ensure that the Gospel was preached, in its truth and purity, for generations to come. ■

## Family Bonds of the Early Norwegian Synod

by Rev. Craig A. Ferkenstad

The Norwegian Synod was strongly united in its doctrine and its practice. Yet often overlooked are the relationships of the family bonds which also united them. Pastor Ove J. Hjort is pivotal in demonstrating these family bonds.

Until 1863, when O.J.Hjort became a member of the Norwegian Synod, there were only sixteen pastors in the Synod. In recalling these days someone wrote, when the Synod had its meeting in 1857 it was found, to the amusement of all, that all its ministers could be seated on one sofa! This small group of Norwegian Synod families were not elitists. For example, Pastor U.V.Koren thought his parishioners were the finest people from Norway and considered the farmers to be the cream of the earth and was honored to be their friend.

Following Mrs. Hjort's untimely death, Pastor Hjort married Henriette (neé Neuberg), a sister-in-law to Luther College President Laur. Larsen, and with this marriage the earthly bonds become even tighter. A family tree shows the Larsen and Astrup families with ties to the mission fields in Africa and China.

This extended family includes the names of the six founding pastors of the Synod who were present at Luther Valley in 1853: N.Brandt, G.F.Dietrichson, J.A.Otteseon, A.C.Preus, H.A.Preus, H.A.Stub. These people were bound together by a cultural bond but, more importantly, they were united by a spiritual tie. They shared a communion of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:5-6). They sought to extend and preserve the Kingdom of the Triune God in the land which they called "Amerika" until the day when they would again emigrate. This time their emigration would be from earth to heaven where they would be united again, with their Savior, in the Church Triumphant. ■

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Current and future members of the ELS Historical Society, Ryan and Marie MacPherson and family, attended the Ottesen Museum Christmas in Eastern Europe Open House on Dec. 13, 2012.



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