



# Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

Volume 17

November 2013

Issue 3

## Christmas Open House at the Ottesen Museum by Becky DeGarmeaux

How do you say: "Merry Christmas" in Korean? What phrase do Christians in India use to refer to Christmas Day? Who brings presents to children in Korea? At what time of day do Christians in India go caroling, and why?

"An Asian Christmas" is the theme for this year's Christmas Open House at the Ottesen Museum. Come to get a glimpse into the ways our brothers and sisters in the faith celebrate Christmas in India and Korea.

Because these people are fellow Christians, there will be many things that will seem very familiar to you. But, because they live in different cultures from our own, there will be things that are very different from what we in America are used to. You may be in for a few surprises as well.

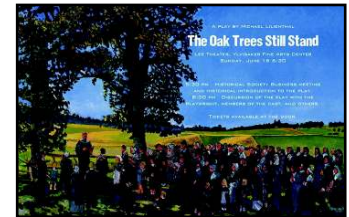
Along with learning the answers to the questions listed above, you can taste some of the treats associated with the celebrations in India and Korea and learn to sing Christmas carols in Korean and Telugu, the language used in southern India.

Make plans now to visit the Ottesen Museum on Tuesday, December 10, from 2:30 to 5:30. Come tour the museum and learn about Christmas in Asia. ■

DVDs of the play *The Oak Trees Still Stand*, written by Michael Lilienthal, are now available through the ELS Historical Society. The DVD includes Erling Teigen's historical background lecture. The cost is \$10 plus \$2.50 for shipping for each DVD ordered.

Purchase at the Ottesen Museum or mail your order to:

ELS Historical Society  
ATTN: Becky DeGarmeaux  
6 Browns Court  
Mankato MN 56001



The DVDs will be available for purchase at the Christmas Open House on Tuesday, December 10.

**3RD ANNUAL OTTESEN MUSEUM**

**CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE:  
AN ASIAN CHRISTMAS**

els ottesen museum  
4 browns court  
tuesday, december 10  
2:30 - 5:30 pm

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE ELS WORLD OUTREACH OFFICE

# Re-discovering China

by Debbie Blumer

Norwegian Lutheran Church in America mission field,  
c. 1932 (Larsen papers, Luther College Archives)



It had been my dream for many years to visit China. I spent nine years working to publish a book of letters by my grandparents, the Lille-gards, who were missionaries there for many years. The next four years I re-worked the book to make it better by correcting typos and adding information as I discovered more old photos and letters of my grandfather. In June of 2012, I made a presentation to the ELS Historical Society with my father, David, about the old China mission. In August of 2012, my son, David, left to teach English for a year in China, after graduating from Bethany Lutheran College. I hoped that I could go and see the places where George and his wife Bernice once lived 100 years ago.

My dream became reality. A couple of months after David arrived in Wuhan, China, I found myself in a temporary full-time job in Colorado. It soon became permanent. God had blessed me with the means to make the trip! David assured me that he would do the planning, and he did. My husband Eric and I tried to get our visas for a June trip. It was a difficult process. We couldn't apply until April to get three-month tourist visas. We had to pay a visa service to hand-deliver the applications to the Chinese Consulate in Chicago, because they don't accept them by mail. Then they sent us affidavits to sign declaring that we would not do any work while there. Eric is a TV photojournalist. They still de-

nied us the tourist visas. We bought the plane tickets for June 21st anyway. The visa service re-applied for one-month visas on June 10th. We finally got our visas in hand the week before we were to leave. We set off to visit one of the most exotic places in the world. When we were growing up, no one was even allowed to go to China. Now we had the opportunity to experience the country firsthand! I was nervous, but also excited!

We took a United flight to Hong Kong and stayed a couple of nights. Then we flew to the capital of Hubei province, Wuhan. It is a polluted mega-city of 10 million people, which includes the cities of Hankou, Hanyang and Wuchang, where David lives. It is on the Yangtze River, which the Chinese call Changjiang. Wuhan is known as one of the "5 Ovens of China." The latitude is comparable to New Orleans, about 30 degrees North. When planning the trip, I took seriously all the complaints my grandparents made about summer weather on the Yangtze. My grandma wrote about Hankow; "It was as high as 101 degrees one day, with a minimum of 83 degrees. With the humidity of that city, that is something awful. One never rests because it is too hot to sleep at night." I insisted we go up into the mountains, just like they did!

They would take a 12-hour overnight steamer trip down the river (east) to Kiukiang, then go by auto to the base of the mountain, then get into "chairs," carried by Chinese coolies. We, on the other hand, took a hard-seat train from Wuhan to Jiujiang (new Pinyin spelling of Kiukiang) for about four hours. Then we got in a taxi for a wild-swerving, hairpin-curving hour-long nausea fest. I only put it that way because I get motion-sickness. In any case, it was a much shorter trip for us in 2013 than it was in 1921 when the Lillegards first went up to Kuling.

Kuling is in the middle of Mount Lushan National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is a lush semi-tropical rainforest, full of Chinese and western history. After the heat of Wuhan, it was a relief to arrive to misty and rainy conditions. My



grandma had written, "Much of the time there were such heavy clouds below that we could not see the valleys... So we are 'living in the clouds,' literally speaking."



We came to Kuling for more than relief from the heat. We came to find a piece of our family history. In my hand I held several photos labelled "Kuling." My grandma had typed on the back or made sure that her husband labelled them. I didn't have any photos of a church or home, just my family in front of unnamed buildings, like the photo of George with his daughters Betty, Marjorie and Laura. I had some house numbers which were used as their mailing addresses: 2281 and 2397.

We walked down the clean paved streets and found a couple of churches right next to each other. The larger one had been built in 1897 and had been made into a movie theater. The smaller one, built in 1902, was still in use as a "3-Self" church, the government-approved Christian church in China.



It wasn't as easy to find the Lillegards' summer homes. We found that there were over 800 "villas" built, so the house addresses didn't correspond exactly to the lot numbers of the homes. There seemed to be an extra number. Back at our hotel, we noticed that the third floor rooms were numbered in the 3300's. There was an extra number at the beginning. Could it be that the houses were numbered that way as well, in the 1900's, with an extra number at the beginning for the floor? 2281 would mean it was on the second floor of house 281. Anyway, the first two days we didn't find any matching numbers by looking at the map or walking around the neighborhood of villas.

On the third and final day in Kuling when I woke up, the sun was shining! People were hanging out their laundry, just like Grandma wrote, “And after the rain and fogs, we watch for a real bright day, hang out all our clothes, take out our bedding, and put out our dresser drawers.” We on the other hand, had to go out and take some scenic pictures. After a couple of hours, the clouds had started to roll up the mountainsides again, and we only had about half an hour before we had to take a taxi down the mountain to catch our train back to Wuhan. I suggested that we visit something on the tourist map called, “The Story of the Old Villas.” I figured it might help us find some information. We paid the entrance fee to the well-maintained compound. We looked on the ticket stub and found house number 281 on the diagram! We walked through the Episcopalian church first, then over to house number 281. Was this the Lillegards’ home? It was a villa with two floors, with separate entrances to each floor. It had been made into a museum about the founder of the villas! Other villas around it also had been renovated and prepared for viewing. Some had Communist offices in them. We were thrilled, so we took lots of pictures and videos of house no. 281. We met a Chinese man who was manager of the museum. Jason, David’s Chinese friend, translated for us. The manager wanted to see my original photos, so he followed us back to our hotel. We only had a few minutes before we had to leave town. When we left, we felt satisfied that we had seen the Lillegards’ home of a couple of summers.

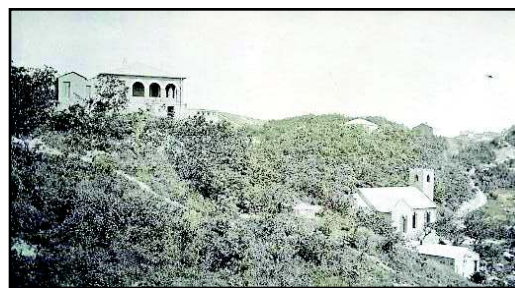


House Number 2281  
Kuling, China

The next mountain location that we were looking for was Kikungshan. I had not been able to find it in an old map book. All I had was a hand-made map from the book *White Unto Harvest*, published in 1919 by the American Lutheran Mission in China. (My grandpa’s name was in the book, but not his picture. He had left the mission in 1915). I looked up the name Kikungshan on my computer and a website came up for Jigongshan. This appeared to be a common name for several locations in China, but one matched the approximate location on the simplistic map I had.

Our son David said he knew a fellow teacher who knew someone from China Service, a tourist agency of the Jigongshan area. This someone, Shawn, knew a tour guide and historian familiar with Jigongshan who could help us. He looked at my old photos and recognized the location. Other friends, Adam and Sherry Gawel, made the arrangements to meet the historian. They also made hotel reservations, found us a driver, and accompanied us to Jigongshan with their two little kids. Sherry is Chinese and Adam speaks fluent Chinese; they both were very helpful.

We set off to the north on our road trip in two cars — four Gawels in one, and three Blumers in another driven by CJ, a Chinese friend. It took us



three hours to reach Jigongshan National Park in Henan Province. At this location, I did not have any specific address where my

grandfather had lived. I had brought a couple of photos which showed a church and a house up the mountain behind it. They looked like the same place.

While researching for my ELS Historical Society PowerPoint presentation, I found a match for the photo (Pg. 4, top photo, right-hand column) in the book *White Unto Harvest*. It was labelled “The Church on Kikungshan.” The photo (Pg. 4, bottom photo, right hand column) was labelled by my grandpa, “my house from the west.” For years I thought it was Kuling, but if it matched the other photo, it couldn’t be. Also, after having been in Kuling, I doubted it since the architectural styles were very different. It would have been much easier if my grandpa George Lillegard had written the details on the back, but many photos from his first missionary journey to China in 1912 were unlabeled. He was not married at that time, and he didn’t think to write on them.

We arrived in Jigongshan (Rooster Mountain) and drove on a dirt and gravel street to our hotel. The wind kicked up the dust. Locals were selling live roosters and walnut necklaces. There were dried mushrooms lying out in the sun and scorpions preserved in jars. Dried dead animals were hung on nails on the side of one building.

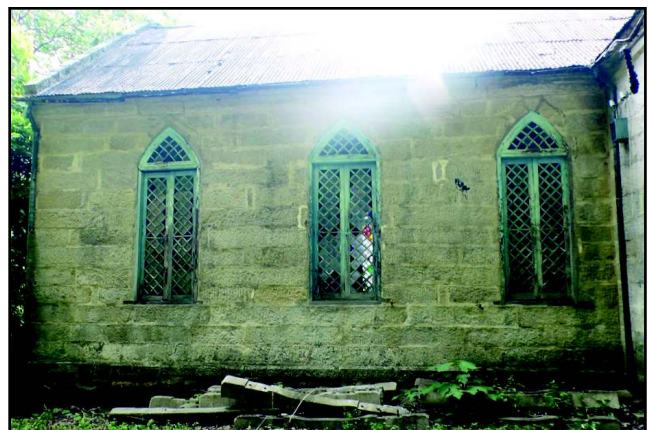


We had the typical family-style lunch outside, on a table over dirt, shaded by an awning. The old historian showed up right on time and started saying, “George Lillegard,” first to my husband Eric and then to me. He spoke limited Eng-



lish, but we knew he was here for us. I immediately pulled out my two photos, and he said he knew where the place was! His photographer started taking pictures, and an entire family from a table next to ours came over and started looking at the photos, too. It was some kind of a big event!

We all jumped into our two cars and drove from our little dirt “South Street” west along winding roads over to the “Little Church” on the tourist map. Our tour guide, Mr. Jiang, said that the front looked different because the bell tower had fallen down. It matched the photo of my grandpa’s church! How amazing! I never expected to find anything this easily.



Better yet, Mr. Jiang pointed us in the direction of my grandfather’s house, judging by my photos. We walked to the “North Valley” up a steep walkway made of stones. We saw a house on the hill, directly behind the church. Mr. Jiang and I held up the photo to compare it to what we saw. It matched!



We counted the arches on the west porch of the house; three. We looked at the position of the basement door. It was the same. There was also a little addition on the back of the house. When we walked around to the front of the house, we saw three arches, just like in the other picture. Both photos showed the architectural details still present: the light-colored stucco topping the arches. This had to be the place, because none of the other houses in the area were in the right location with the right number of arches on both sides! How unbelievable! It was the highlight of the trip!

After we returned to the States, I looked through the old photos from China. I found another photo of Grandpa's house and church in Kikungshan. It was even more detailed than the other two. It showed both sides of the house and more of the neighborhood. It made me even more sure that we had found Grandpa's summer home and church in Kikungshan!

I also went through many old letters by the Lillegards to try and find more information about

their summers in Kuling. I found more house numbers: 1140 and 1228. All the house numbers began with a 1 or 2, reinforcing the notion that the first number was the floor of the building. Did they actually live on one floor rather than use the entire building just for their family? I found this letter:

***The Manager of The Kuling Estate,  
Kuling, China,***

***Dear sir:***

***Would you kindly give us such information as you have at hand regarding available houses or rooms for rent at Kuling for the next summer season, 1923? We would want only a small house or part of a house, or even, if there is nothing else to be had, just one single room, with accommodations for a married couple. We should prefer houses or rooms in Hypes Valley or West Valley, as the rest of our missionaries live in that section. The rooms would be wanted from June to the first part of September. Thanking you in advance for your information, I am***

***Respectfully yours,  
George Lillegard  
Shihnanfu, Hupeh, China***

This letter certainly helps us understand the living arrangements in Kuling. The missionaries did rent just parts of the large villas in the summertimes. The more I dig, the more information I find! It's fascinating. I'm already imagining what I could re-discover if I went back to China: to Shihnanfu, Wanhsien, Yichang, or Kuling again. All in all, it was a great trip full of excitement and fulfilled expectations. We were truly blessed to walk and sightsee where my grandparents lived 100 years ago. ■

***From Lutheran Synod Quarterly, Sept. 1988, pg. 45,  
Lectures on Missions by Geo. O. Lillegard,  
delivered in 1955 at Theinsville, WI***

*...In practice, the people of China mix all three religions, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism together, so that it is hard to say which elements belong originally to which religion. Built into the face of a sheer cliff back of our home in Wanhsien, China, there was a temple dedicated to the chief gods of all three religions: the Confucian Shang Di, the Taoist Yu Hwang Shang Di, and Buddha; and the face of the temple bore the inscription: "The three religions are one."...*

# 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

by Gaylin R. Schmeling

The constituting convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) took place April 27–29, 1993, at Oberwesel, Germany, a beautiful site overlooking the Rhine River. This was my second trip down the Rhine River. On the first trip, my thoughts centered on Heine's Die Lorelei, the castle ruins, the vineyards, and the beauty of the Rhine Valley. During the 1993 trip, my thoughts turned to things far more important. We were travelling to Oberwesel to establish an international organization which would unite confessional and orthodox Lutherans from around the world.

We in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) were only a small church body by human standards, a remnant of Norwegian mergers in 1917. We experienced the devastation of the demise of the Synodical Conference and its aftermath in the 1950s and 1960s. We were gathering remnants of confessional congregations in various places in the Midwest and elsewhere in the States, but what could we do to reach out to confessional groups in other lands? There were many lonely Lutherans spread across the globe. Yet there were men of vision in our midst, such as Rev. Edgar Hoenecke, who called for a worldwide Lutheran fellowship already in the late 1960s.

Many people advocated such an international organization over the years and did much to bring it to fruition. However, three names stand out as individuals who worked to promote such an organization and make it a reality: Pres. Gerhard Wilde of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche (ELFK), Pres. George Orvick of the ELS, and Prof. Wilbert Gawrisch of the WELS. Pres. Wilde emphasized again and again the need for such a fellowship for lonely Lutherans throughout the world. He had experienced

that loneliness in his own country during Soviet times and later when his church body struggled to maintain its confessional stand. Pres. Orvick expended considerable effort throughout his presidency to make contact with confessional Lutherans in the United States and around the globe who were in need of a new confessional home. Prof. Gawrisch worked tirelessly for this organization. He put in more time and effort than anyone else to organize, promote, and establish such an international synodical conference.

We experienced some amazingly heady days in the spring of 1993. We in the ELS were mainly a rural Midwestern synod and now, on the twenty-seventh of April in Germany, the cradle of Lutheranism, we were establishing an organization including church bodies from Europe, North America, Asia, Africa, and Australia. The CELC has continued to portray its international outlook with conventions in Puerto Rico, Sweden, Japan, and Ukraine. This coming spring the triennial convention of the CELC will take place in Lima, Peru (May 30–June 2, 2014), hosted by a daughter church of the ELS, the Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church. The theme of this convention will be "We Are God's Workmanship – Created in Christ Jesus for Good Works: A Study of the Doctrine of Sanctification."

The CELC was established as the spiritual heir of the Synodical Conference and it is definitely fulfilling its purpose. The purpose of the CELC has been to preserve the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions in our midst and to proclaim the message of salvation in Christ throughout the world. The CELC has done this through mutual encouragement and strengthening of the member churches. Hearing brothers from across the seas confess the same doctrine and proclaim the same Gospel that we do in southern Minnesota is a wonderful encouragement and blessing. Having had the privilege of being able to attend every convention of the CELC since its establishment, I have seen first-hand the mutual consolation of brethren and strengthening that is the result

of this gathering of orthodox and confessional Lutherans. Because of this international organization, I can count among my personal friends men and women from nearly every continent.

The CELC stands ready to give answer to the confident hope of salvation in Christ that is within us. It is a refuge for those seeking confessional homes and a beacon shining the light of the Gospel in a sin-darkened world. Here the central truth of the Reformation, justification by faith alone, continues to be proclaimed. We are declared righteous by nothing we do or accomplish, but alone on the basis of Christ's redemptive work which is counted as ours through faith in the Savior. He accomplished salvation for all on the cross and announced it to all by His resurrection declaring the whole world righteous in Christ. This treasure is brought to us personally through the means of grace and is received by faith alone in the Savior which is worked through those very means of grace.

We are filled with gratitude and thankfulness to the Lord for all the blessings He has bestowed on us through the CELC. Here He has preserved His Word in its truth and purity and His sacraments rightly administered, providing a refuge for lonely Lutherans in an evermore secularized world. On this, the twentieth anniversary of the CELC, we pray that as He has been our refuge and strength in the past, He would continue to be with us in the future through Word and Sacrament. ■



The CELC met June 4-6, 2011 at MLC and BLC

**(Editor's note:** The following excerpts are from an April 1973 article Rev. George Orvick wrote for the publication, *Affirm*, published by those within the Missouri Synod "still laboring for the cause of confessional Lutheranism." The ELS withdrew from the Synodical Conference in 1963 so this year, 2013, marks the 50th anniversary of the withdrawal. Rev. Orvick's article of encouragement marked the tenth anniversary.)

## A Word of Encouragement From The Evangelical Lutheran Synod

This article has been written for *Affirm* for the purpose of giving encouragement and support to those who are still laboring for the cause of confessional Lutheranism within the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod. It comes from the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, a former sister-synod of the LC-MS. Again and again our ELS has expressed its desire to communicate such a message to its former brethren and we sincerely appreciate the opportunity to do this through the pages of *Affirm*. As we view the fact that an historic battle seems to be about to take place at the forthcoming convention of the LC-MS we wish to let it be known that we are earnestly praying for those who staunchly defend the historic Lutheran faith.

Permit me to quote some of the actions of our ELS which would verify our desire to give such encouragement. At its 1971 Synodical Convention ... the following resolution was adopted: "WHEREAS, The Confessional deterioration throughout much of Lutheranism often places faithful confessors in a position of battling against great odds within their own circles, and WHEREAS, In such a struggle there is often need of and room for the encouragement and support of those who share these concerns, as we ourselves have learned from our own history, therefore, a) BE IT RESOLVED, That we give earnest heed to the resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum urging us to encourage and support concerned members of other Lutheran synods in their confessional battles by, 1) Seeking to make personal contact with them, 2) Inviting them as guests to conventions and conferences in our midst, 3) Sending them literature we may deem helpful, including our *Lutheran Sentinel* and *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, 4) Being



ready to accept invitations to set forth our Synod's confessional position and the Scriptural basis for it, and, b) BE IT RESOLVED, That we request the officers of our Synod to continue to take the initiative in laboring for a realignment of Lutherans who wish to remain faithful to God's Word" (*Synod Report*, 1971, pages 45-46). ...

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod first began practicing fellowship with the LC-MS back in the later 1850's before the founding of the Synodical Conference in 1872. It was a member of the Synodical conference from its beginning, and participated in the wonderful work of that body for many years. When the ELS had to re-organize and start over again in 1918, when it could not go along with a merger of three large Norwegian church bodies, it received strong encouragement and support from its brethren in the LC-MS. For many years the pastors of the ELS were trained at LC-MS schools until the founding of our own seminary in 1946. Nearly half of the pastors presently serving in the ELS are graduates of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. The ELS therefore realizes that it owes a real debt of gratitude to the LC-MS. It was therefore a very sad day when it had to decide that it could no longer walk together in fellowship with Missouri after such a long and harmonious relationship.

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod today, by the grace of God stands where "old Missouri" stood under such great leaders as Walther and Pieper. It holds firmly to the teachings of conservative, orthodox, evangelical Lutheranism. It confesses the Holy Scriptures to be the true and inerrant Word of God, verbally inspired by the Holy Ghost. It holds that the Scriptures are infallible also when they deal with historical, geographical and scientific matters. It rejects the conclusion of the so-called Historical-Critical Method of Bible interpretation as an unwarranted and arbitrary dealing with the sacred Scriptures. It holds to the statement of Scripture that God created all things in six days, as taught in Genesis 1 and 2 and elsewhere in Scripture and thus rejects the theory of evolution. Especially does the ELS emphasize that, in order to rescue fallen mankind, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world, clothed in human flesh, true God and true Man in one Person. By His righteousness and by His

innocent suffering, death and resurrection Jesus has redeemed the entire world. The ELS also believes that the Scriptures require that church fellowship shall be built upon the full confession of the true doctrines of the Word.

... With this article, then, we express the fervent prayer that the Lord will give strength and zeal to those who are earnestly contending for the historic Lutheran faith within the Missouri Synod. We sympathize with you in your struggle. We urge you to stand fast for the truth. And at the same time we must add the earnest admonition that the time comes when those who love the truth must separate themselves from those who would continue to teach and tolerate error.

The Rev. George M. Orvick, President  
Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Madison, Wisconsin

## Watertown Campus of Bethesda Lutheran Home to Close in August, 2014 by Mark O. Harstad

In 1904 Lutherans belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America established a facility in Watertown, Wisconsin, to provide care for their mentally handicapped members. The motivation was to provide an environment in which the intellectually disabled could be cared for and given opportunity for education and skill development in keeping with their abilities. An essential part of this care was the spiritual component. The residents would be served by a Lutheran pastor who would see to it that daily attention was given to spiritual matters. The name Bethesda, House of Mercy, was eventually chosen for the institution on the basis of the account of Jesus' healing of the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.

An initial donation of 40 acres of land along the banks of the Rock River provided a beginning for the development of the institution. Eventually the land holdings expanded to about 400 acres, which included a farm which produced dairy products, meat and garden produce for the residents. This work also provided jobs for residents with physical ability.

The number of residents grew rather quickly to over 200 in the 1920s, and over 300 by the 1930s. It is worthy of note that precisely at this time when handicapped people were being used in inhumane experiments by regimes elsewhere in the world, which sought to prove their superiority according to an evolutionary model, compassionate care based on religious values was being provided for the residents of Bethesda. By the 1960s Bethesda was home for 660 residents, and had a long waiting list of applicants who were in line to be admitted when room became available. Priority in admission was given to families belonging to churches of the Synodical Conference.

As a member of the Synodical Conference the Evangelical Lutheran Synod maintained interest in the development of Bethesda. Synod members had roles in the functioning of the institution, including the overseeing of the spiritual care of the residents.

ELS Pastor Adolph M. Harstad served as the resident chaplain from 1953 to 1970. For these seventeen years his congregation was the resident population of Bethesda. His work included conducting daily, morning and evening chapel services, in addition to the Sunday morning service of Word and Sacrament. For those of sufficient ability he provided instruction in Luther's Small Catechism in preparation for Confirmation and admission to the Lord's Supper. He also provided Bible classes, visitation of the sick, and worked with a staff of assistants who provided additional programs for the spiritual enrichment of the residents. From time to time he was called on to do public relations work for



the institution as guest preacher and speaker in many churches of the Synodical Conference in southern Wisconsin. For several years his duties also included a weekly devotional broadcast through a local radio station. During these years Pastor Harstad remained on the ELS clergy roster, and served the Synod in various capacities. Among other things he was involved in the exploratory work which led to the establishment of mission work in Peru in the late 60s.

Another ELS member with long-standing connections with Bethesda was Mr. Eugene Schiller, member of Holy Cross congregation in Madison, Wisconsin. He served on the institution's board of control for many years.

By the 1970s new approaches to the care of the intellectually disabled were developing. The idea of placing the disabled in institutions which isolated them from larger society gave way to an emphasis on providing supervised living in the communities where people lived. This enabled handicapped people to remain more closely connected to their home communities. A network of group homes began to flourish across the country affiliated with a new organizational structure which came to be known as Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services. A result was that the population at the Watertown campus began to decline dramatically. This led ultimately to the recent decision to close the campus as a residential facility at the end of August, 2014. Watertown will continue to be the administrative headquarters for the national organization now known as Bethesda Lutheran Communities. ■



Residents participate in games at a summer picnic at Bethesda in 1969.

## GOLD! GOLD! GOLD! STACKS OF YELLOW METAL!

### Join the ELS Historical Society in the stampede to the Klondike!

Rev. Bjug Harstad did not back down in theological controversy or in physical and financial challenges. After graduating from Concordia Lutheran Seminary in St. Louis in 1874, he went to Dakota Territory to do mission work, establishing churches and schools. He spent part of his first year of ministry in a dugout in the side of a hill. About 180 miles to the west, George Armstrong Custer was stationed at Fort Abraham Lincoln, located a few miles from Bismarck. Custer's cavalry unit had a mission to protect the Northern Pacific Railroad building project from Indian interference. You know the rest of the story about Custer's last stand where he and 225 troops were killed at the Little Big Horn by Sitting Bull and over 2,000 warriors. Harstad was not an Indian fighter but he did wage another kind of war, wielding the sword of the Spirit—the Word of God.

The Norwegian Synod commissioned Harstad to establish a Lutheran Academy in Parkland, Washington. The school opened in 1894. Harstad served as the first president. The decade of 1890 turned out to be an economic bust and the school was unable to repay its loans. In 1896 gold was discovered in the Klondike region of the Yukon in northwestern Canada. Fueled by the depression, thousands of would-be prospectors "stampeded" to the Klondike. Of the 100,000 who booked passage on north-bound ships, only between 30,000 and 40,000 made it to the gold region and only about 4,000 struck gold.

In his series of letters and articles titled, "A Trip into the Yukon Region," Harstad described his adventure. The fact that he was married, had children, was 50 years old, and did not have permission for the trip from the Pacific District of the Norwegian Synod didn't stop him. The stampeders experienced unbelievable hardships that reached its zenith in climbing the Chilkoot Pass where each miner was required to transport food and equipment weighing close to a ton up the steep embankment. Many didn't make it and the

pass was strewn with the bodies of hundreds of horses that were worked to death.

In a letter dated April 7, 1898, Harstad explained to the friends of Pacific Lutheran Academy why he went to the Yukon. He wrote, "I am intensely sorry that those who bought property on account of the school cannot now sell it and get their money back. ... Were it within our power to compensate you for those disappointments it would be our greatest pleasure to do so. But, unfortunately, we cannot. ... I also feel bitterly the injury that has been brought about by our inability to repay according to our promises. ... Both you and I believe in that Lord to whom the world and its abundance belongs. Should He desire to allot to me any riches which he has clearly deposited in many places here in the far north, then you ought to know that it is so devoted to the repayment of debt to you."

His 18-month search did not yield an ounce of gold.

Herman Harstad

ELS Historical Society President Mark Harstad says, "We would like to find out what interest there might be in hiking the 33-mile Chilkoot Pass Trail in late



July or early August of 2014. This would involve getting to the trailhead at Skagway, Alaska, then four days of hiking with backpacks, and a return from the end of the trail to Skagway by train. All who plan to do the hike should prepare for it by several weeks of vigorous walking and getting accustomed to a backpack. Those who are interested

should contact either Peter Anthony or me." [peteranthony100@hotmail.com](mailto:peteranthony100@hotmail.com); [mharstad@blc.edu](mailto:mharstad@blc.edu)

Information for this article was drawn from Wikipedia Encyclopedia, an article from the *Fargo Forum* dated 1/16/05 and 1/23/05 by Curt Eriksmoen, edited by Jan Eriksmoen, "A Trip into the Yukon Region" by Bjug Harstad, and *Oak Leaves*, Vol. 2, Nos. 3 and 4, biography of Bjug Harstad, written by Peter T. Harstad. ■

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

## Renew your membership!

ELS Historical Society

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Send completed form and check (see box below right  
for type of membership and correct amount) to:

**ELS Historical Society**  
**6 Browns Court — Mankato, MN 56001**

**Oak Leaves** is published periodically by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society, 6 Browns Court — Mankato, MN 56001; [www.els-history.org](http://www.els-history.org)

**Editors:** Herman and Cheryl Harstad - [heharstad@charter.net](mailto:heharstad@charter.net)

**Board of Directors:** Mark Harstad (Chair), Peter Anthony, Craig Ferkenstad, Betsy Hermanson, Lois Jaeger, Michael Lilienthal, Paul Madson, John Moldstad, Erling Teigen

**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. Each issue will be deposited in the archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

### MEMBERSHIP

All membership renewals are due **June 1**

**Voting Membership:**

\$10/year: individual

\$15/year: husband & wife

**Associate Membership:**

\$15/year: individual

\$25/year: institutional

\$5/year: student

**Lifetime Membership: \$200**