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# Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

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Volume 3

Winter 2000

Issue 4

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## Our Father's Business: The Work of the Lord in the 20th Century

The Lord has certainly blessed the work of his servants and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in the last century. We recall here a sampling of that work:

### **100 Years Ago:**

St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Chicago, **Illinois** organized.

### **85 Years Ago:**

Manchester Evangelical Lutheran Church, Manchester, **Minnesota** organized.

### **80 Years Ago:**

Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church, Ames, **Iowa** joins the ELS.

### **75 Years Ago:**

First American Lutheran Church, Mayville, **North Dakota** joins the ELS.

### **55 Years Ago:**

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Calmar, **Iowa** joins the ELS.

### **50 Years Ago:**

Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church, Luverne, **Minnesota** organized.

### **30 Years Ago:**

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Crookston, **Minnesota** first organized as a mission congregation. St. Paul Lutheran Church, Escondido, **California** established. Faith Mission Society organized.

### **25 Years Ago:**

Our Savior Lutheran Church, Bishop, **California** joins the ELS.

### **20 Years Ago:**

Our Redeemer Lutheran School, Yelm, **Washington** established.

**15 Years Ago:** Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church, Grants Pass, **Oregon** organized. Our Savior Lutheran Church, North Lakeland, **Florida** is organized as an ELS mission congregation. Christ the Cornerstone Evangelical Lutheran Church, Scottsdale, **Arizona** organized (now reorganized as Redeemer Lutheran Church).

### **10 Years Ago:**

Holton Evangelical Lutheran School, Holton, **Michigan** established. Scriptu-

*(continued on page 4)*

# Speakers set for June Meeting

The program for the fourth annual meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society, to be held Saturday, June 10, 2000, has been set. This year's program will include two speakers.

In the morning, members will enjoy an entertaining slide presentation by Laurann Gilbertson, Textile Curator at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah Iowa. The presentation is entitled *Dating Historical Photographs Using Women's Clothing, 1860s to 1920s*.

Says Gilbertson, "Whether you're doing genealogy or just trying to sort through your family's old album, this slide presentation can help assign dates to old photographs. Women's clothing styles have changed regularly and distinctly over time. By looking at a few fashion features, such as hats and dress sleeves, you can easily narrow down the date to a single decade." Members are encouraged to bring along an old photograph to date along with the presentation.

Laurann Gilbertson earned degrees in Anthropology (BA) and Textiles and Clothing (MS) from Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. She has worked at Vesterheim since 1991. As Textile Cu-

rator, she researches, exhibits, and cares for the museum's collection of more than six-thousand decorative and household textiles, garments, and clothing accessories. Her special interests include Norwegian jewelry and immigrant quilts.

Peter Tjernagel Harstad will be the featured speaker for the afternoon session. He will present the topic: *Y0, Y1K, Y2K, and the ELS*.

Harstad has been Executive Director of the Indiana Historical Society since 1984. Born in Madison, Wisconsin in 1935, he is the third of ten children born to Rev. Adolph M. and Martha Karina Tjernagel Harstad. At the age of 95, Martha remains active and alert in her own home in Tacoma, Washington.

After graduating from Bethany Lutheran High School in 1953 and Bethany Lutheran College in 1955, Harstad earned three degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison: a Bachelors degree in Education with a History concentration in 1957, a Masters in History in 1959, and a Ph.D. in History with an English minor in 1963.

In 1957, Harstad married Bethany graduate Carolyn Schneider of Albert Lea, Minnesota. They are the parents of five children (all of whom attended Bethany) and seven grandchildren.

Between 1957 and 1972, Harstad taught at every level from junior high through graduate school. He then became involved with historical society administration, first at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City (1972-1981), and then at the Indiana Historical Socie-



Laurann Gilbertson, Textile Curator at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, Iowa will be the morning speaker at the June, 2000 meeting of the ELS Historical Society.

ty in Indianapolis.

From 1981 to 1984, Harstad was Development Officer at Bethany College. While on Bethany staff, he edited and published *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker, 1884-1959: A Commemorative Volume at the Centennial of His Birth*.

Harstad is the author of dozens of scholarly articles and several books, either in whole or in part. Much of what he has written is about the midwest. In 1999 he was instrumental in the publication of *The Follinglo Dog Book: A Norwegian Pioneer Story from Iowa* [see page 6].

Under Harstad's administration, the Indiana Historical Society has experienced tremendous growth and development.

The agenda for the June 10, 2000 historical society meeting will appear in the May issue of **Oak Leaves**.



## A History Lesson

On Sunday morning, we load the children into the van and head down the road a half mile to our church, one that has stood now for most of the last century. Growing up, I rode with my family less than five miles to our ELS church, one that has been continuously served by pastors for almost 150 years. When it comes to church, I've had it pretty easy.

In June of 1997, at the organizational meeting of the ELS Historical Society, I met a couple from Shepherd of the Hills Evangelical Lutheran Church, located in Grass Valley California, in the foothills of the breathtaking Sierra Nevada mountains.

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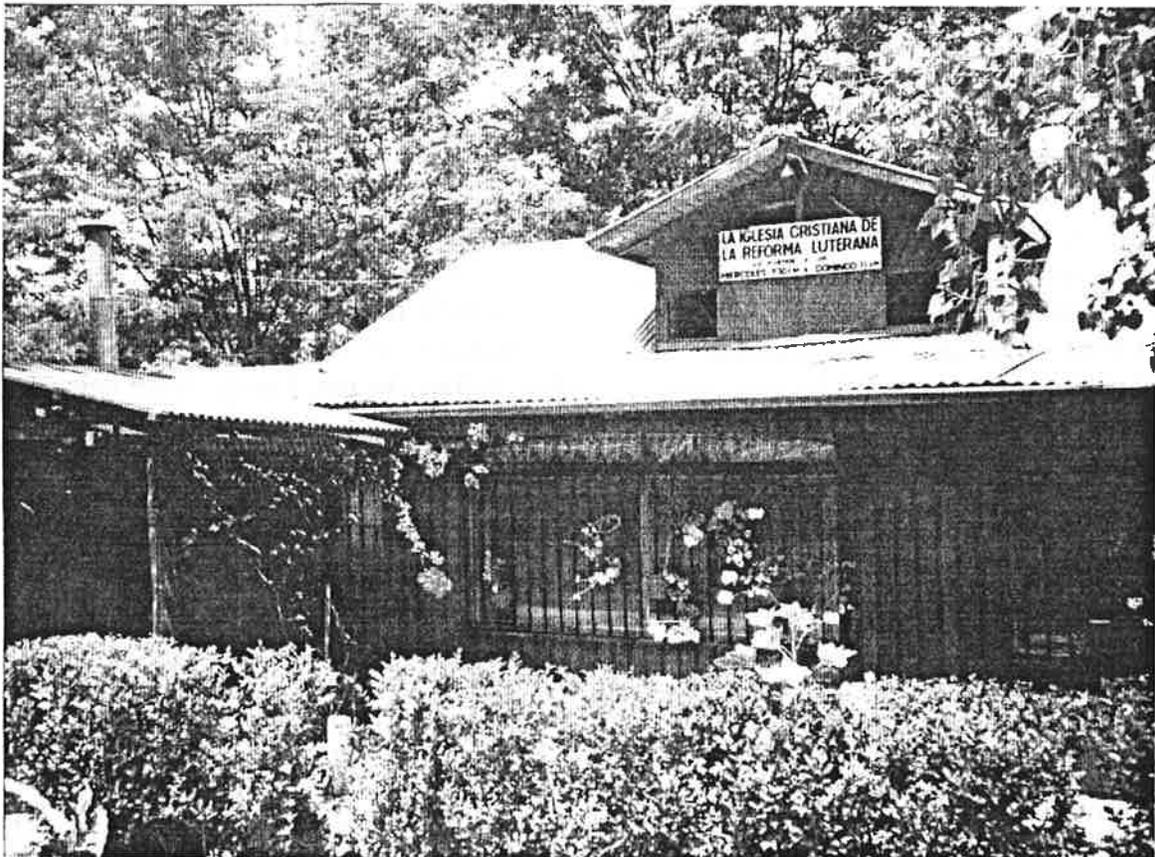
*(Our Father's Business, continued from page 1)*



Scriptural Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cape Girardeau, Missouri



New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church, Sebring, Florida



Las Vertientes Church, Santiago, Chile

ral Evangelical Lutheran Church, Cape Girardeau, **Missouri** joins the ELS. The ELS Board for Home Missions begins exploratory work in Kissimmee, **Florida**. Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church is a result. New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church, Sebring, **Florida** becomes an ELS mission congregation.



Redeemer Lutheran Church, Scottsdale, Arizona

### 5 Years Ago:

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rogers City, **Michigan** first meets

for worship. The ELS Board for Home Missions begins work in Cartersville, **Georgia**. Lamb of God Lutheran Church is a result of that work. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, North Huntingdon, **Pennsylvania** joins the ELS. The ELS Board for Home Missions begins work in Bowling Green, **Ohio**. Abiding Word Evangelical Lutheran Church is a result of that work. From only 13 congregations in the 1918 synod reorganization, there are currently 139 ELS congregations in 19 states.

Through the Synodical Conference, ELS pastors served foreign missions in **Africa** and **India**. From 1951-1955, mission work was conducted by the ELS in Cornwall, **England**. Thirty-two years ago, the ELS began doing mission work in **Nicaragua**. A year later, work began in **Costa Rica**. These mission fields continued until the end of the 1970's. We now have foreign missionaries in **Peru**, **Chile**, **Ukraine**, and the **Czech Republic**.

The ELS enjoys fellowship with fifteen church bodies world-wide through the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC). Among these are the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Evangelical Free Church of Germany, the Lutheran Confessional Church (Sweden and Norway), the Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church of Finland, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Australia.

As the new year, and the new millennium, opens, we are reminded again of the fields ready for harvest, and the Lord's work there is yet for each of us to do:

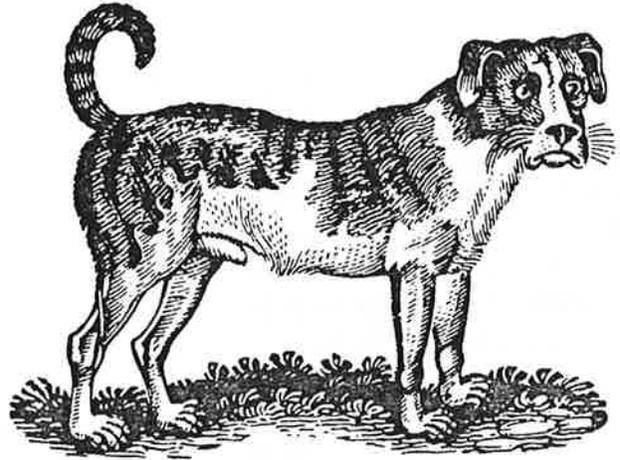
***"Go everywhere in the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation."*** Mark 16:15

May the Lord continue to bless the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in the new millennium.



# "The Follinglo Dog Book: A Norwegian Pioneer Story from Iowa"

A book review by Rev. Craig Ferkenstad



Drawing used with permission  
from University of Iowa Press

Of interest to readers of **Oak Leaves** is the publication of *The Follinglo Dog Book*. This 1999 addition to *The American Land and Life Series* was published by the University of Iowa Press.

Told from within the time frame of the family dogs, this book is the story of life on the Iowa frontier. Here one reads about the pioneers as they established their homes, faced blizzards, prairie fires, and the rigors of 19th century immigrant farm life. At one point the explanation is given that there was no thermometer, but the temperature was determined by building "a roaring fire in the stove, and if the heat from the stove was sufficient to thaw a little on the frosted east window", it was safe to venture out.

The book contains little reference to religious life. There are only passing references such as when young Peder was sent to watch the cattle in the pasture and he writes that he went out "with tear-stained eyes, a little haversack fastened to a strap thrown over my shoulder, into which Mother had tucked as many dainty morsels as she could lay her hand on, and my catechism." Yet, this volume is of special interest to the readers of **Oak Leaves** as this is the story of the Tjernagel family, which are well-known members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. These natives of Norway came to central Iowa in 1864. They established a farm known as *Follinglo*. *The Follinglo Dog Book* is the story of these days as told by Peder Gustav Tjernagel (1864-1932).

It is said, "In 1966 a family genealogist identified 550 progeny, living and dead, of the founders of Follinglo Farm, representing 25 countries. Christian missionary work has been the main reason for the diaspora beyond the United States."

A most interesting Prologue and Epilogue have been written by Peter Tjernagel Harstad (the author's grandson, and Executive Director of the Indiana Historical



The Peder and Jennie Tjernagel family, circa 1915. Back row: Jennie and Peder Gustav. Front, left to right and youngest to oldest: Peder Julius, Olaf, Martha Karina (Mrs. Adolph Harstad), Alfred, Erling, Elizabeth (Mrs. Christian Olsen), Herman, and Otto. Photo used with permission from University of Iowa Press.

Society). These anchor the book into the history which we know and also tell the sad story of what happened to the Follinglo farm.

Readers of **Oak Leaves** will also enjoy this book filled with stories first told orally as bedtime stories and then recorded on a school pad in 1909 by one of the patriarchs of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

*The Follinglo Dog Book: A Norwegian Pioneer Story from Iowa* is available through University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, Iowa, 52242. The web site is <http://www.uiowa.edu/~uipress>.



*(A History Lesson cont. from page 2)*

In November, 1985, this couple, Herbert and Roberta Fischer, along with two other retired couples, all attending confessional Lutheran churches in surrounding communities, held a meeting to discuss the possibility of establishing a WELS or ELS congregation in their home city of Grass Valley.

The Fischers, who had left the Missouri Synod for doctrinal reasons, had been attending WELS churches for 13 years. Herbert contacted the WELS mission developer to see if there was interest in beginning a church there. With neither the resources nor manpower, the WELS declined the opportunity. Fischer then contacted Pastor William Kessel, ELS Mission Developer. In February of 1986, a meeting was held with Pastor Kessel and Pastor Nile Merseth, ELS pastor serving a bi-vocational ministry in Yuba City, California, about 40 miles west of Grass Valley. After touring the area, it was decided that the ELS also did not have the manpower or financial resources to proceed with mission work in the area.

Despite this news, the folks at Grass Valley persevered. Arrangements were made with Pastor Merseth to have him lead a Bible study at Grass Valley. In time, the couples were able to rent the Wesleyan Methodist Church for their class, at the cost of five dollars per meeting.

In July of that same year, Bethany seminary student Dan Schroeder spent three weeks in Grass Valley, canvassing the area. A name was chosen for the fledg-

ling congregation: "Shepherd of the Hills Evangelical Lutheran Church."

On July 31, 1986, the first formal service of this congregation was held, with 19 in attendance.

In November of 1986, the congregation rented a new space, at the nearby fire hall, and soon after, an organ was purchased. An altar and lectern were made and donated.

In June, 1987, Shepherd of the Hills was accepted into membership of the ELS.

Knowing that Pastor Merseth could not continue to serve them, as his own church and responsibilities grew, and that they needed to have their own pastor, the flock began sending calls to ELS pastors. In February, 1988, semi-retired pastor Robert Waldschmidt accepted a call to Grass Valley. Pastor Waldschmidt accepted the call with the understanding that he would serve until another pastor could be found, or until he felt he could no longer serve the congregation.

In April of 1989, the congregation was evicted from the fire station. For a time, services were held in the Fischer's garage. Then the congregation moved to a space in the Center for Human Resources building. During the summer months, Pastor Waldschmidt also served a WELS church two and a half hours from Grass Valley.

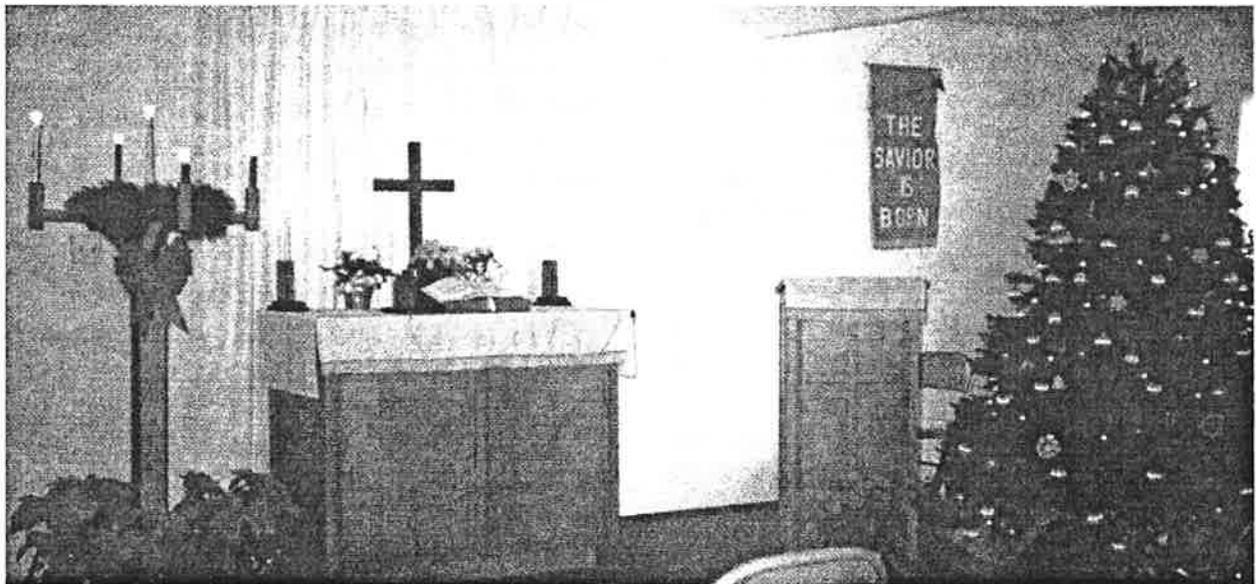
In January, 1990, Pastor Wilbert Werling, serving the ELS parish in Chico, California, more than an hour from

Grass Valley, passed away. Pastors Waldschmidt and Merseth began serving that parish in addition to their own congregations.

During the time that Pastor Waldschmidt served Shepherd of the Hills, several pastoral calls were extended, but all were declined.

In January, 1995, the Grass Valley congregation moved once again. That summer, the Chico and Yuba City congregations were disbanded.

Pastor Waldschmidt became ill at the June, 1997 ELS convention, and was taken to Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. He and his wife, Elisabeth, were able to return to Grass Valley,



Shepherd of the Hills Evangelical Lutheran Church, Grass Valley, California.

In April of 1991, the congregation was evicted once again. Fischer's garage served as the Lord's House until another building was found in August. Members continued to look for a house that could be used as a parsonage and worship site.

In the summer of 1993, Pastor Merseth left Yuba City, taking a call to the mid-west. Pastor Waldschmidt took on this additional parish. In December of that year, he underwent surgery to remove a cancerous kidney.

where he began undergoing treatment for cancer. Pastor Waldschmidt passed away three months later.

The Shepherd of the Hills congregation continued to extend calls for pastoral service. All were returned. Church members moved away, some asked for releases, and the average number attending church services at Shepherd of the Hills dwindled to about eight souls. Finally, a difficult decision was made, and in July of 1998, Herbert Fischer sent a letter to ELS President George Orvick: "Due to declining membership

and lack of pastoral care, we the remaining members of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church have voted to disband as of August 31, 1998....much thought and prayer has gone into this decision. We have had laymen conducting services for fourteen months and a communion service once a month by a WELS pastor....we pray that Almighty God will continue to bless our ELS Synod."

Six of the members from Shepherd of the Hills, including Fischers, now travel almost three hours each Sunday to our ELS church in Windsor, California, "A church and pastor we truly love" says Herb Fischer.

Looking back, Fischer says, "It was a real blessing to be involved with the start-up of a new congregation. We have used six buildings including our garage during our twelve and a half years. We were evicted three times. We have two large Lutheran churches here, LC-MS and ELCA, who have all the programs. So it's hard to compete with them."

You know, history serves many purposes. One of the most important is to teach. The history of Shepherd of the Hills congregation has many lessons for me.

Because of all that has happened in Grass Valley and the other California congregations, I realize how much I have always taken for granted, and how unwise that has been. I realize how truly blessed I am to have my church just down the road, and a pastor to serve it. And, I am reminded of the command that Christ has given me to go out into

the world and preach the gospel.

I may never help to start a congregation, but I realize that I can - and must - help in other ways: I need to continue to pray for our Bethany Lutheran Seminary, to encourage our young men - and maybe not so young - to enroll there, so that there may be an abundance of workers to go into the fields ready for harvest. I need to send more money, and more prayers, to home and foreign missions, so that this little synod can go into all the world and preach the *One Thing Needful* to everyone who will hear it.

I don't exactly know why the Lord allowed things to happen as they did in Grass Valley. But I believe He knows best. So does Herb Fischer. "Even though we closed our doors," he says, "it doesn't mean we failed. There were souls that were saved, people who had not been in church for many years were brought back, and we were a service to many shut-ins who had no pastoral care. Maybe this is the amount of time that the Good Lord gave us."

Romans 11:33-36: "*How deep are God's riches, wisdom, and knowledge; how impossible it is to figure out His decisions and to trace His ways! Who has found out how the Lord thinks? Or who has become His advisor? Or who has first given Him something for which he must be paid back? Everything is from Him and by Him and for Him. To Him be glory forever. Amen.*"



## "Koren Country" Tour Tentative

Plans are being made to sponsor a bus trip for members of the ELS Historical Society and their guests, to "Koren Country", the northeast Iowa area where Reverend Ulrik Vilhelm Koren, pioneer pastor and important figure in the history of our synod, lived and worked from the mid 1800's until his death in 1910.

The tour will include visits to Washington Prairie Lutheran Church, rural Decorah, where Koren preached and is buried, and Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, Decorah, which houses the largest collection of artifacts dedicated to any one immigrant group. Vesterheim's outdoor division includes the Egge cabin, where Koren and his wife, Elizabeth, stayed when they arrived in Washington Prairie in 1853.

The tour will leave Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, on Friday, June 9 (the day before the annual historical society meeting), and return to Mankato that same night.



**Reverend U.V. Koren**

Those interested in joining the tour should contact Rev. Craig Ferkenstad. If there is enough interest, plans will be set and those interested will be notified regarding costs and itinerary.

If interested, please fill out the form below and send it to: Rev. Craig Ferkenstad, RR3 Box 40, St. Peter, MN 56082 by **March 15, 2000**. Rev. Ferkenstad can also be reached at the following e-mail address: [elsec@prairie.lakes.com](mailto:elsec@prairie.lakes.com).

**Yes! I am interested in the "Koren Country"  
bus tour on Friday, June 9, 2000.**

Number of people wishing to join us: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send more information to the following address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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

## The Budding Historian and the Ancient One...

My family and I attended the traditional New Year's Eve service at Norwegian Grove Evangelical Lutheran Church, rural Gaylord, Minnesota this past December. The service consisted of hymns and Scripture readings, prefaced by Pastor reading commentary by Martin Luther.

Four year old Beret, ever attentive and curious, turned to me during a reading and whispered, "Mom, was Martin Luther real?" "Yes, he lived a long time ago." "Did he die?" "Yes, he died about four hundred years ago." "Did you know him?"



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

Editor: Robin Ouren. Advisor: Rev. Craig Ferkenstad

Board of Directors: Erling Teigen (Chair), Joseph Abrahamson, Craig Ferkenstad, Norman Holte, Gerhard Lee, Albin Levorson, Amanda Madson, George Orvick, Marguerite Ylvisaker.

**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