



# Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

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Issue 2

## Norwegian Grove Lutheran Church Celebrates 125 years

By Craig Ferkenstad

*Norwegian Grove Lutheran Church of Gaylord, Minnesota, observed the 125th anniversary of her organization in June 2007. Recently the congregation was selected for an Award of Commendation from Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis, Missouri for the publication of its 125th Anniversary Book. The following is a summary of the history of the congregation:*



IT was on a winter day in 1881 when a small group of men met around a kitchen table to organize Norwegian Grove Lutheran Church. Their pastor was the Rev. Thomas Johnsen<sup>1</sup> who had arrived at Norseland, Minnesota, eighteen years earlier. Pastor Johnsen was the first Norwegian Synod pastor to reside west of the Minnesota River. At one time or another, he served twenty-seven congregations in Minnesota and Iowa. His field of labor extended from Estherville, Iowa to west of Alexandria, Minnesota. He traveled through much of this area on foot. It is said that eventually his field of labor was

divided into congregations which were served by fifty pastors.



*Pastor & Mrs. Thomas Johnsen*

Norwegian immigrants first began to settle in Sibley County in 1855. They settled in the southern part of the county where there was a big woods, and hence the name Norwegian Grove. The Norwegian Grove Lutheran Church was organized on the first day of February 1881. Prior to the organization of the congregation, members had been attending services at Norseland where a congregation was organized in 1858.



*1884 church building*

Until the church building was erected in 1884, services were held in the homes of the

<sup>1</sup> For a biography of Pastor Thomas Johnsen, see *Oak Leaves*, Volume 2, Number 2 (Summer 1998).

members. The site chosen for the new church was conveniently located as the members all lived within a five-mile radius of it. The church was only about 20 feet by 30 feet in size, and consisted of one room, with a small sacristy, built out at the west end. Two doors, one on each side of the altar, led from the church to the sacristy. Between the two doors was a small door leading to the altar. There was only one outside door. Just inside the door, to the left, stood the stove. It was a long, black, narrow stove with a large drum on top, through which the smoke went before it passed into the stovepipe which extended the full length of the church to chimney. There was a narrow aisle up the center of the church, and on each side of the aisle were rows of pews extending to the wall. Extra pews stood against the wall in the front for the Sunday School pupils. At the back of the church there was a pew facing the stove. People could sit and warm themselves there or use it if the church was full. Women, and children under confirmation age, sat on the left and men and boys sat on the right side. On one Sunday in May 1896, Pastor Johnson's son, who was a student in the seminary, was to conduct the Service. He rushed into the church and announced that he had arrived before the coming storm—and fell over dead.



*1929 church building*

It was on an autumn day in 1929 when a new church building was completed. To

meet the expenses of the new church building, pledges were made, and suppers, bazaars and ice-cream socials were held at the homes of members. The Ladies' Aid served dinners in the homes of members to help pay for the new church. The menu often consisted of lutefisk, chicken or meatballs, mashed potatoes, vegetables, rice pudding, *rømmegrøt*, and Norwegian cookies. At first the meals were served in the homes of members and the furniture was moved upstairs so all the rooms, except the kitchen, were used to set tables which were brought in from other people's homes.

It was a challenge to pay the debt incurred by the construction because the church building was dedicated to the glory of God on October 20, 1929 just nine days before the Stock Market Crash which began the Great Depression. Pastor J. J. Strand officiated at the Cornerstone Laying and Synod President Christian Anderson delivered the sermon. The size of the new building was more than double that of the old and included a full basement. This building was enlarged in 1966 when, on another autumn day it was enlarged with the addition of a narthex, kitchen and rest rooms.



*Chancel in 2006*

It was on a summer day in 2006 when the members of the congregation gave thanks to God for the 125 years of His grace received through this congregation. Although the congregation always supported the work of the Norwegian Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, it remained independent of

synodical membership until 1977 when it joined the ELS. In 1993 the congregation became a member of the Minnesota Valley Lutheran High School Association.

The chancel of the church has been re-decorated several times. The high altar was removed in 1956. The Dossal Curtain was replaced with brick in 1978. In preparation for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary the chancel again was re-decorated.

There are seventeen descendants of the charter members of this congregation who are members in this the quasicentennial year. A summary of the ministerial acts shows that 359 baptisms have been performed in the Norwegian Grove congregation, 266 individuals have been confirmed, 87 couples have been married, and 171 funerals have been held as believers have been laid to rest to await the resurrection with Christ.

The following pastors have served the congregation during the past 125 years:

Rev. Thomas Johnson	1881-1906
Rev. Benjamin J. Raffteseth	1907-1909
Rev. J. J. Strand	1909-1925
Rev. O. M. Gullerud	1925-1937
Rev. Milton E. Tweit	1937-1958

Rev. Joseph N. Petersen	1958-1969
Rev. Theodore A. Aaberg	1969-1976
Rev. Tosten D. Skaaland	1976-1980
Rev. Norman A. Madson	1980-1993
Rev. Craig A. Ferkenstad	1993-



*“Founders’ Service” – February 4, 2006*

It is yet with gratitude that the congregation acknowledges the many special gifts which have been received over the years for the building and improvement of the church property. And as the congregation looks back on over a century of God’s blessings it says as with one voice: *“Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness”* (Psalm 115:1).

*Craig Ferkenstad is pastor of Norseland and Norwegian Grove Lutheran Churches, and secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.*

*Norwegian Grove Lutheran Church through the years:*



1929



1966



1978



2006

# Historical Society Annual Meeting: June 17, 2007

By Betsy Hermanson

AMONG the stated goals of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society in its mission statement are the following: to “promote interest in the historical and doctrinal heritage of Lutheranism, particularly of the ELS and its institutions,” to “stimulate historical research,” and to “preserve items of museum quality.”

The ELS Historical society successfully addressed each of those mission goals at the annual meeting, held June 17, 2007, at the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center of Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato. The theme of the day was “Preserving Our Heritage.”

The day began with registration, coffee and cookies. The Rev. Juul Madson opened the program with the singing of a hymn, and a devotion based on Romans, chapter six.



The first presenter of the day was Prof Erling Teigen, who offered a power point presentation from the book: *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker's Letters from Leipzig to His Family in Minnesota, 1907-1910*, (edited by Martha Ylvisaker Limburg and Barbara Ylvisaker Newsom, and translated by Erling T. Teigen). As a young man, Ylvisaker traveled far from home and family to complete his education in Leipzig. His letters home showed his fondness for his family, and also reflected something of his lifestyle while at the university.

Prof. Teigen highlighted many interesting aspects of the letters, including the fact that Ylvisaker wrote in different styles to different members of his family. For instance, he wrote more of his feelings and emotions to his mother, but wrote teasingly to his younger brothers. In his presentation, Teigen also displayed maps of the university area in Leipzig, showing where Ylvisaker walked and the church where he worshiped.

Following a short morning break, Rev. Paul Madson began the next portion of the program. His presentation was entitled “Letters from World War II: the war time correspondence of the Rev. Norman A. Madson, Sr.” From his parish in Princeton, Minnesota, Rev. Madson sent letters to armed forces personnel throughout the United States and in many places abroad. The timeline of the letters ran from before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, to the days after the US bombed Hiroshima in August, 1945.

As Rev. Paul Madson read the words of his father, a common thread was repeated in letter after letter. Whether the question or comment from a serviceman concerned doctrine, faith or behavior, the admonition from Rev. Norman Madson was the same: “look in your Small Catechism” or “remember your Small Catechism.” It was a good reminder to each of the listeners of Rev. Paul Madson’s presentation over 60 years later.

After the morning presentations, members of the historical society enjoyed a delicious chicken dinner served at noon in Bethany’s Great Hall.

Following the lunch break, a short business meeting was held.

The afternoon program featured Shelly Harrison of the Blue Earth County Historical Society. She began by telling the audience what the historical society does, some of the

many different items the society is given, and how they preserve various documents, textile items and other artifacts. Harrison said many items come to the historical society from attics or from basements, both of which are poor places to store things. Her chief admonition was to keep things as much as they are, and to do as little as possible to alter them.



After the formal presentation, Harrison invited audience members to bring forward items and artifacts so she could offer advice and answer questions on how to preserve them. Becky DeGarmeaux assisted her in showing the civil war artifacts, a Chinese kimono, tiny children's shoes and other treasures.

Harrison said in the beginning, and it proved to be true, that her advice would be

similar for everything. Keep items in cool temperatures; keep them out of direct sunlight; don't use spray cleaners like Febreze or any other type of chemical on them. Store items in acid-free tissue paper, and in acid-free boxes.

With paper items, such as an old birth certificate or family record, she suggested people make copies of such fragile treasures for handling and display purposes. The original document should be stored in a safe place, wrapped in acid-free tissue paper. Harrison advised against trying to repair clothing items or tears in paper or paintings, because unless the work is done by an expert conservator, it may further damage the original article.

The many items brought forward, and the many questions asked showed that the ELS Historical Society and its members have a deep and abiding interest in preserving historic artifacts. Harrison concluded her presentation by distributing some handouts and by offering future assistance of the Blue Earth County Historical Society to the ELS Historical Society.

*Betsy Hermanson serves on the ELS Historical Society board and is a member of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Mankato, MN.*

Send us *your* ideas, articles, and suggestions for **Oak Leaves**. We welcome information and articles on church anniversaries, and articles of Synodical and local significance.

And remember to visit the Historical Society's website:

**[www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/history](http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/history)**

OR

**[www.els.name/history](http://www.els.name/history)**

# ELS Honor Choir Marks 20th Anniversary

By Lois Jaeger

WHEN Dennis Marzolf and Steve Jaeger initiated the idea of a high school “honor choir” to meet, rehearse, and participate at the 1987 ELS Convention, neither of them knew that it would become a “fixture” in the summer rhythm at Bethany and Convention. However, June 2007 marked not only the 20th anniversary of the Honor Choir it also saw the arrival of the “next generation” of Honor Choir participants. Back in 1987 Donnette O’Neill traveled to Mankato from Washington State with her father Ron, a delegate from the Parkland congregation, to sing with the very first choir. In 2007 Donnette’s daughter, Erika Goff, made the same trip for the same purpose.

Mother and daughter both reflect positively on their experiences at Honor Choir. Donnette writes:

I had a wonderful time that summer learning more techniques with other youth from our synod. I met many very nice peers. We found exuberance in beauty with our music. That Honor Choir gave kids optimism. We gained hope as well. For me, that week touched many aspects of my life. I made new friends and realized that I can do so much more if I don’t hold back but leap forward.

Erika writes similarly:

This year’s Honor Choir Camp at Bethany was a great experience. I have learned how to sing properly along with hanging out with friends. This camp has been a fun experience and I hope that any kid who wants to go to something like this can have the chance.

Prof. Dennis Marzolf has directed the ELS Honor Choir each year of its existence. High school students participate in rehearsals, classes, and a variety of social activities while attending each camp from Sunday afternoon through Thursday of Synod Convention week. Choir members live in the Bethany residence halls for the week, enjoy meals and free time together, and typically make new friends. Campers have the opportunity to present the music they have rehearsed on several occasions throughout the week including a convention devotion, communion service, and closing recital. Above all, choristers are immersed in the rich heritage of Lutheran music and liturgy that our church is privileged to enjoy.

At the close of her first Honor Choir experience, Erika wrote, *“I do highly recommend that if you are in high school and love choir, do go to this camp.”*

*Lois Jaeger is Director of Fine Arts at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, MN*



Honor Choir 1987



Honor Choir 2007

# Storing Your Treasures for Archival Purposes

Adapted from materials provided by the Blue Earth County Historical Society.

*Used by permission.*

Shelley Harrison gave us many tips for preserving our family and church artifacts for future generations. Here are a few of them:

1. **Photograph storage supplies should be acid-free and buffered or be polyester, polyethylene or polypropylene plastic sleeves.** Don't use self-adhesive photo albums; the sticky cardboard mount will adhere to the pictures permanently, also the sticky mount contains highly acidic chemicals. *Note:* There are pH testing pens available to test if an item is acid-free.

2. Use **photo-mount corners** to adhere photographs in albums or scrapbooks. Don't use rubber cement, glue or cellophane tape on your photos, it contains a sulfur compound which will cause your photos to yellow, fade and curl.

3. Use **“safe” plastics** like polyester, polyethylene and polypropylene. The “safe” plastics will be clear and will not have a strong plastic smell. Don't use vinyl sleeves with polyvinylchloride as the main component, the off-gas created by this product is hydrochloric acid. *Note:* PVC plastic may give off a strong plastic smell and may appear cloudy or yellow.

4. **Store your photograph negatives in the “safe” plastic sleeves.** Also, don't throw your negatives away; they are the true origi-

nal of that image.

5. Avoid **storing textiles** in or on wood or metal surfaces. Wood emits resins and metal can corrode. Avoid commercial papers and cardboards (generally wood pulp products) which are acidic and will cause yellowing and browning of textiles. Cloth with synthetic finishes, rinsed with fabric conditioners or dyed should not be used in storage, nor should adhesives on surfaces which will come in contact with the object. Polyethylene bags or sheeting is not recommended for use as covering or containers. Aside from retention of moisture, plastic attracts and holds dust, which is bound to come in contact with the textile when the sheeting is removed. Acid-free tissue paper and acid-free boxes are preferred for storage of most textiles. However, dust covers and wraps made from washed muslin or 100% white cotton sheets may also be used.

6. **Temperature and humidity** extremes should be avoided. Attics and basements are not recommended. Ideally, an enclosed space without contact with exterior walls is preferred.

7. **It is best not to clean** (wash or dry clean) **an older textile unless you have a professional assessment.** The less done to the item, the least amount of damage that will occur.

# The Monkey In The Willow Tree

## A One-Act Play, by Amanda Madson

CAST: Teacher, Vicar Paul Anderson

STUDENTS: Lawrence, Virginia, Harlan Levenson; Philip, Allen Storby; Sven, Amanda Tjernagel; Robert, Virgil, Marilyn Oakland; Alice Dahle; Connie, Donna, Mickey Honsey; Harlan Hagen; Donnie, Mavis, Phyllis Vermedahl

SETTING: Lime Creek Lutheran School, Lake Mills, Iowa. October, 1943

NARRATOR: In 1943, many children in Iowa went to small schools in the country. These schools had one big room for classes, and two little rooms for coats and lunches. Lime Creek Lutheran School had one teacher. In 1943, the teacher was Vicar Paul Anderson. He taught 18 children in first through eighth grades.

TEACHER: It is 12:00 o'clock. Time for noon lunch hour and recess. Take your dinner pails outside. It is a nice day.

NARRATOR: The children went outside. Teacher stayed in the school.

LAWRENCE: Let's play softball. I want to bat first.

PHILIP: I want to be the pitcher.

DONNIE: Can I play first base?

SVEN: I'll be the catcher.

NARRATOR: Soon they quit playing ball. No one wanted to play.

VIRGIL: I want to climb the willow tree. Watch me climb very high.

ROBERT: Little brother, you are just a big show-off!

VIRGIL: Look at me! I'm at the top!

VIRGINIA: Be careful! You might fall.

VIRGIL: I can crawl out on this long branch.

HARLAN: That branch is not very strong.

NARRATOR: Virgil crawled very far on the branch. He was high above the ground.

VIRGIL: Now watch me! I'll swing like a monkey!

NARRATOR: Virgil hung from the branch like a monkey. He made monkey noises. The school children stood below and watched.

VIRGIL: My arms are tired. I can't pull myself up. I'm going to fall. Help! Robert, help me!

ROBERT: I'll climb the tree to help you. Hold on to the branch. Here I come!

ALICE: Virgil will fall to the ground. He will be killed! Robert, help him!

MARILYN: Hold on Virgil. Don't let go. Robert is coming!

CONNIE: I'm going to the school to tell the teacher.

NARRATOR: Robert crawled out on the branch very quickly. He crawled out to reach Virgil's hands.

ROBERT: I'll grab your hands, Virgil. I'll pull you up. Hold on to me. There, I've got you up!

NARRATOR: Robert and Virgil slowly climbed down the willow tree. They were crying.

VIRGIL: Robert, you saved my life.

ROBERT: That's what big brothers are for.

ALL STUDENTS: Hooray for Robert! Hooray for Robert!

TEACHER: Don't ever climb that tree again! Come into the school for class-time. We will say a prayer of thanks to our Lord for saving Virgil's life.

The End

*Amanda Madson wrote several childhood stories while teaching English to children in Korea in 2003. She and her husband, Pastor Norman Madson, live in North Mankato, MN.*



# Letters from Leipzig

## A Summary of the Presentation at the Annual Meeting by Erling T. Teigen

BETHANY LUTHERAN COLLEGE has had a particular interest in Sigurd Ylvisaker's educational background, especially the Leipzig years, because his tenure as Bethany's president was especially formative in defining the college's direction. Much of his influence on Bethany's policies could be explained by his Luther College background, but not all of it. (*Letters*, xi)

### What did Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker learn from his three years in Germany that would help to form the culture of Bethany Lutheran College?

- An appreciation for learning and scholarship, begun at Luther College, and sharpened in Leipzig.
- An appreciation for the arts—already learned at home, but deepened in Leipzig, Dresden, and travels through Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, and England.
- A readiness to make a conscience-stand, through his exposure to the Saxon Free Church and Adolph Kunstmann, and other pastors there.

### What does Bethany owe Sigurd Ylvisaker?

- SCY would say: “Nothing: To God Alone be the Glory.”

- President Ylvisaker brought to the struggle for Bethany a vision of education rooted in the Liberal Arts tradition that evolved at Luther College, a mixture of classical Latin School education and the Liberal Arts.
- Doctor Ylvisaker did not get to use the expertise he learned at Leipzig directly in the classroom. But he gave to Bethany his commitment to scholarship, his love of learning, and his commitment to Laur. Larsen's vision—that “intellectual vision might possibly escape extraordinary narrowness.”

Above all, Sigurd Ylvisaker brought a love of the Gospel:

- Kindled in his baptism and cultivated in the Christian home of Johannes and Kristi Ylvisaker;
- Nurtured in Norwegian Synod churches and in Christian Education at Luther College and Seminary;
- Tested and deepened as a “Stranger in a strange land”;
- Lived and proclaimed as president, pastor, and teacher at Bethany Lutheran College.

*Erling Teigen is professor of Religious Studies and Philosophy at Bethany Lutheran College.*

# A World War II Legacy

A Summary of the Presentation at the Annual Meeting by Paul G. Madson

DURING WORLD WAR II (1941-1946) upwards of some forty young men and women from Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Princeton, MN, had entered the Armed Forces of our country. During this time, their pastor, Rev. Norman A. Madson Sr., corresponded regularly with them. A collection of 335 of these letters remains.

The letters convey the pastor's concern for the spiritual welfare of the servicemen as well as for their physical safety. They reflect also a knowledge of life in military service, since the author himself had served as a chaplain in World War I. The servicemen would sometimes have questions and would seek advice on spiritual matters, such as what to do about attending chapel services at the military base, or what to do about Communion, etc. Whatever the question might be, it was carefully considered and answered.

These were not form letters but, for the most part, they were individualized to fit the person and the circumstances, such as when as young soldier was to be told that his old brother had been killed in action in France. The pastor wrote:

*As Christians we know on whom we believe,*

*and we are persuaded that He is able to keep that which we have entrusted to Him against that day — namely our immortal soul. ... It is in times like these that our Christian faith stands us in good stead...*

Or there was the time when he writes a soldiers about his family at home, where his little sister offered the table prayer after lunch, "*and then followed her threefold Amen, which she chanted as she had heard it chanted by her pastor in church.*"

In one of the last of these letters to be written, Pastor Madson wrote:

*We have heard little also over the radio the past 24 hours than the reports of the new secret weapon — the atomic bomb... May God take pity on humankind if such weapons are to be made use of indiscriminately! ... In the meantime, let us not lose sight of the eternal verities of God's Word. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but God's Word shall not pass away. And when we cling to the precious promises of His everlasting Gospel, we shall be safe at all times under all circumstances.*

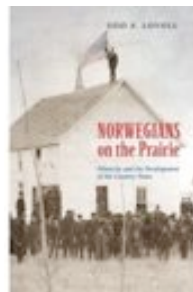
*Paul G. Madson, a retired ELS pastor, and son of Rev. Norman A. Madson Sr., works in the ELS Archives in Mankato, MN*

## New Books to Read!



**Remedies and Rituals** is a fascinating look at how Norwegians and Norwegian-American immigrants faced the challenges of medical issues in the 19th century. The book discusses natural remedies, "spells," customs and laws.

Also be sure to read **Kathleen Stokker's** *Keeping Christmas*.



**Odd Lovoll** is a wealth of knowledge and insight into the life and struggles of 19th-century Norwegian-American immigrants. **Norwegians on the Prairie** looks at towns in southwestern Minnesota and how Norwegian immigrants' ties to the old country are still reflected in the people who live on this prairie today.

## Secretary Marguerite Ylvisaker Finishes Term



Marguerite Ylvisaker is a charter member of the ELS Historical Society and has served on the board since 1999. She has served as secretary for the past several years. She is a very dedicated worker and has been a very helpful member in promoting the Society and its work.

Thank you, Marguerite, for your faithful service. We always look forward to seeing you at the annual meetings.

## From the Archives

### *Mystery photo!*

This photograph was recently brought to the archives from Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Madison, WI. It may be connected to the Ylvisaker family, but no one is sure. If you have information on this photograph, please let us know!



*From the last issue:*



*Photo by Denise Woller*

Many immigrants were farmers by vocation, and most people, including rural pastors, had at least a cow or two to provide milk, cheese, and butter for the family. This barrel churn made butter simply by rotating the barrel end to end, without any internal paddles. Until recently this churn was on loan to the Ottesen Museum. Barrel churns like this were sold from the 1880s through the 1920s through the Sears catalog.

For more information on butter churns, see this website:

[dairyantiques.com/Wood\\_Butter\\_Churns\\_1.html](http://dairyantiques.com/Wood_Butter_Churns_1.html)

**Oak Leaves**  
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## Renew your membership!

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**Oak Leaves** welcomes articles of both Synodical and local significance  
for publication. Articles maybe edited for style, clarity, or length to al-  
low for publication. Submitted manuscripts 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  
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