



Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

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Issue 2

Rev. A. J. Torgerson: One of the Thirteen

By Peter Faugstad

Editor's note: In 1918, thirteen pastors and several laypeople gathered at Lime Creek, Iowa, to continue the heritage of the Norwegian Synod. They organized the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, which was later renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS).



Letter of Call.

In the name of Jesus. Silver Lake and Concordia Congregations hereby call in the name of the Triune God Rev. A. J. Torgerson as its minister and pastor. He is pledged as such to preach the Word of God pure and unadulterated in consonance with the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church's symbolical writings and to administer the two sacraments after the Lord's instruction as well as publicly and privately to fulfill the duties of the holy office with faithfulness. The congregations will on their part endeavor to make right and diligent use of the gifts of the office and to be along to care for

the minister's decent support and on the whole endeavor to show a relation which is proper for Christian congregations. Unto this end we beseech for him and us the gracious help and blessing of God.

In this way, the Reverend A. J. Torgerson was called to serve the congregations which his father had previously served for decades. A quarter of a century later, Torgerson delivered this message to one of the congregations:

I [cannot] comply with the request of the majority to resign as pastor. By resigning I would shoulder the responsibility of breaking the bond which the Lord of the church through the call from these congregations has established between you and me. And this responsibility I do not dare to shoulder. My desire and aim is to remain faithful in the call in which the Lord has placed me. May the Lord through His Spirit guide you and me, and us all, to abide faithfully by His Word and precepts. A. J. Torgerson.

A dramatic turn of events! What brought about such a change? First, some background on the man Torgerson.

Augustinus Jensenius (A. J.) Torgerson, born on November 27, 1870, was one of Torger Andreas (T. A.) and Dina Torgerson's seven children. For a time, the Rev. T. A. Torgerson was the furthest west of any Norwegian Lutheran pastor. He traveled extensively in the northern Iowa/southern Minnesota area gathering and ministering to as many as twenty-three separate groups of Norwegians, though he was called to only

three congregations: Silver Lake, Lime Creek, and Shell Rock. By 1876, T. A. was actively serving nine congregations. These duties being too great, the parish was divided, so that T. A. again had care of only three: Silver Lake, Lime Creek, and Concordia.

As he grew older, A. J. Torgerson determined to follow in his father's footsteps. He attended Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, from 1886-88 and 1889-90, Ind. Normal School in 1890, and Luther Seminary in Robbinsdale, Minnesota, from 1891-94. At the completion of his studies, Torgerson was called to serve as assistant pastor to his father and was ordained on July 4, 1894. Just six months later, the younger Torgerson took a call to congregations at Renville, Minnesota. He served there until late in 1896, when he again accepted the call to become assistant pastor to his father. Exactly a year after his ordination, July 4, 1895, Torgerson married Ingeborg Pedersen from Bode, Iowa. God blessed this union with thirteen children; however, three died in infancy, one in his teens, and another in 1952 before Torgerson's death.

Father and son Torgerson served together until T. A. died suddenly on January 7, 1906. At this point, the Lime Creek congregation formed its own parish, and A. J. was left with two remaining congregations. Shortly thereafter, the Norwegian Synod began discussions with the United Lutheran Church and Hauge's Synod with the hope that common doctrinal ground might be established. In December of 1910, the union committee of these church bodies was at a standstill, especially with regard to the doctrine of Election. This dilemma was overcome when new representatives of the Norwegian Synod were appointed to the union committee. By 1912, a document was advanced — the "Madison Settlement" ("*Opgjør*") — which contained the false doctrine that man is somehow responsible or

able to accept God's grace. Though a Minority of the Norwegian Synod was opposed to "*Opgjør*," the merger movement continued to steamroll until the Merger of the Norwegian Lutheran bodies was officially declared in 1917. Many of those in the Minority eventually succumbed to pressure and entered the union on the basis of the "Austin Agreement." This document stated that the position of the Minority would be tolerated in the new church body, but that the official position of the new synod would not change.

Rev. Torgerson and a handful of other pastors and laymen could not accept this. They protested the Merger and refused to join the new church body. The majority of the members of Torgerson's congregations favored the Merger, and asked Torgerson either to go with them or resign. He decided he could do neither. If he went along with the union, he would sin against his conscience; if he resigned, he feared that the minority in his congregations who opposed the Merger would sin against their consciences by going along, or would, at the very least, lose their rightful stake in the church property. After he refused to vacate the farm which had been provided for his use by the congregations, Torgerson and his supporters were taken to court in the spring of 1919 by those who opposed them.

The case had to do with which group was the rightful owner of the properties. The congregational constitution of both churches said this:

Should, which may God forbid, a division arise in the congregation, then all of the real and personal property of the congregation shall belong to that part, which, in addition to adhering faithfully to this constitution, adheres to the Word of God and the symbolical books, and also demands that the pastor and school teacher are obliged to do the same.

According to this paragraph in the constitution, Rev. Torgerson and the minority were the rightful owners of the church property, for they upheld the doctrine of Scripture as

correctly outlined in the Lutheran Confessions. The judge of the District Court of Iowa did not see it this way. He ruled that the strife was merely a battle over words, and that no real doctrinal division existed—at least in his opinion. Therefore, the property was awarded to the majority, which is, no doubt, the usual way that such a case would be ruled in a court of law. Rev. Torgerson and his fellow defendants appealed to the Supreme Court, but their case was dismissed without a hearing.

By this time, Torgerson had been called to serve the Shell Rock congregation and the minority from Silver Lake, who now formed Somber Lutheran Church. Though the name of the new congregation aptly describes the sad events which had transpired, it was actually named after the post office that Mrs. T. A. Torgerson staffed in Bristol township, namely, “Somber Post Office.” These two congregations participated in the reorganization of the “little Norwegian Synod,” and the Rev. Torgerson was one of the thirteen Norwegian Lutheran pastors who met at Lime Creek for this purpose. He served as Synod treasurer from 1918 to 1932 and also worked on various committees pertaining to Finance and Christian Education. He presented the paper, “Christian Day Schools,” at the 1921 Synod Convention describing

the great need for such schools (see Synod Report from that year).

Rev. Torgerson retired in 1939 after faithfully serving those congregations which could trace their roots to the work of his father. In all, Torgerson and his father served seventy-three full years in the same area of northern Iowa. Upon retirement, Torgerson and his wife moved to Lakeland, Florida, where two of their children resided. When his wife died in 1947, Torgerson moved to Yakima, Washington, to live with his daughter, Dagny. There, he remained in generally good health until his death on February 14, 1963, at the age of ninety-two years. Considering Rev. Torgerson’s faithful service, the sentiments of ELS members today should mimic those of President Theodore A. Aaberg, who remarked at Torgerson’s funeral:

We cannot help but appreciate and treasure the preaching and labor of men like Pastor A. J. Torgerson, and this must include also their faithfulness during church controversy. We shall not forget the Scriptural admonition: “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” Hebrews 13:7.

Peter Faugstad is a seminary student, vicaring at Parkland Lutheran Church near Tacoma, WA. His home church is Scarville Lutheran Church, Scarville, Iowa.

Trip to Saude — June 2008

By Camilla Dashcund

“Plan it well, and they will come.” And so we came from near and far, from Minnesota, the Twin Cities, and New Jersey to name just a few places. About forty people came together at Saude, Iowa, for the 2008 ELS Historical Society’s annual meeting the Saturday before Synod Convention began.



As many of us boarded a comfortable charter bus at 6:15am on Bethany’s campus, there were smiles of recognition, warm greetings, cups of coffee, a few pillows, and an air of excitement. A majority of us had attended past meetings and had always come away with new information, a renewed appreciation of our heritage, and the joy of fellowship. We were not to be disappointed by this year’s program.

The bus ride itself was a mixture of education and adventure. Our first historical lesson took place during the ride as Professor Mark Harstad showed us a DVD entitled *Store Per*, which chronicled the lives of the Tjernagel family as they immigrated from Norway and settled into the American Midwest. As we neared our destination Pastor Ferkenstad directed the driver away from the high floodwaters and detours of recent flooding in Iowa toward safe passage to Saude. So who is to say that historical meetings are rather “dry” affairs?



The theme for this year’s meeting was “The Word of the Lord Grew.” Our presenters for the day all had some personal tie to Saude whether it was through the Tjernagel family or having served the Saude congregation. The morning sessions were presented by Professor Mark Harstad, Professor Erling Teigen, and Professor Mark DeGarmeaux. They gave an excellent overview of the founding of Saude Lutheran Church tracing its history back to the settlement of Norwegian families in America and specifically the Midwest that led to the need for pastors to serve them.



The first wave of pastors were born and educated in Norway. As members of the upper class in Norway they viewed America as a wilderness. The second wave of pastors were very young men of the peasant class who attended institutions such as Luther

College, were trained over here, and preached in Norwegian, German, and English. The third wave of pastors were born and educated in America.

Pastor Koren was the first Norwegian pastor to venture west of the Mississippi. Often traveling on horseback but sometimes by foot, he ministered to 10,000 members scattered throughout northern Iowa. Rev. Koren became the first pastor of Saude in 1858. The dedication and physical hardships endured by these early pastors impressed us because we were so grateful that they had persevered in bringing the Lutheran faith to some of our very ancestors and thus on to us today.



After a delicious lunch served by the “Saude ladies” many of us took the opportunity to tour the log cabin schoolhouse which stands on the property of the Saude parsonage. It was built in the 1920s by H. M. Tjernagel to commemorate the death of his wife, Anna. Here some of the Tjernagel children were educated.

During the afternoon session Missionary Tim Erickson spoke about his extensive work in the mission fields of Peru and Chile. The connections were interesting. Pastor Erickson had served the Saude congregation prior to his missionary work, and the Saude congregation itself was established due to the efforts of those early Norwegian missionaries who worked to bring the Word of God to Norwegian settlers in America. “Go ye therefore and teach all nations.” has been

the original mission statement that has impacted the historical and the current work of the ELS.



Our day finished off with a stop at the sister congregation at Jerico. Three of us in attendance had been teachers at their Christian day school. From there we journeyed back to Mankato, delighted with the day, and full of a new appreciation for our Norwegian ancestors who set us an example of the need to keep the Word of the Lord alive throughout the world and growing in its outreach.

So I invite you to join us at next year’s meeting. I guarantee that you will grow in faith, in knowledge, and in Christian fellowship.



*Camilla Dashcund teaches at Holy Cross Lutheran School in Madison, Wisconsin.
Photos, courtesy of Norman Madson.*



Saude parsonage



Inside Jerico Lutheran Church



Strandebarm school

Historical Bookmarks

Here's a great idea from Pastor Craig Ferkenstad and the Norseland Lutheran Church Sesquicentennial. They produced a series of bookmarks highlighting the pastors who

have served the congregation. Examples of the first four are shown below.

This simple idea can have lots of applications.



How can you commemorate and teach history and heritage?

Here are some ideas:

- Heritage “Show and Tell” at some congregational gathering.
- Create a booklet of family or congregation stories or “lore.”
 - Heritage potluck dinner: Family or ethnic dishes
- Create a map or story of how people came to be connected with your congregation.
 - Write and perform a congregational or family play.

If you have more ideas, please share them with us so we can share them with others.

Music of Nehemias Tjernagel

An Interview with Peter T. Harstad

Nehemias Tjernagel, musician and composer, was the brother of the Rev. H. M. Tjernagel. Over the last several years the descendants of Nehemias' siblings, who refer to him affectionately as "Unko", put together a book and DVD of Nehemias' music. The following is an e-mail interview conducted with Peter T. Harstad about Nehemias and this project.

For more information about the book and DVD, contact David Teigen, 5153 Red Rambler Drive, Pine River, MN 56474, or dave.teigen@yahoo.com



1. Tell us a little about Nehemias Tjernagel.

My Great Uncle Nehemias was born March 28, 1868, on Follinglo Farm in a Norwegian settlement near Story City, Iowa. When he was a lad, he, his brothers, and some neighbor boys bought band instruments and learned to play them on their own. Then they bought an obsolete schoolhouse for a practice room and engaged the services, successively, of a professional musician from Norway, Anton Pederson, and of a composer and editor of church music, John Dahle. The Riverside Band, as they called themselves, delighted audiences throughout Iowa in the 1880s. Nehemias played cornet and clarinet and took piano and organ lessons for a year at the Iowa Agricultural College in nearby Ames. He also played in the college band. Music was in his soul and he began composing and publishing his scores.

2. What types of music did he write?

Through the years he composed a great deal of sacred music, but his earliest published pieces were band music, *Daily News Andante & Waltz* (1891) and *Overture "Story City"* (1892), both arranged by D. L. Ferrazi, band master at the United States Military Academy at West Point. His teacher at Ames had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory of Music so he set a goal of studying there too. In 1892 Nehemias contracted typhoid fever and by mistake drank a dose of carbolic acid which he said "permanently deranged" his colon. Sickly for the rest of his long life, he nevertheless lived and traveled in Europe in the mid 1890s, did some composing, but did not progress far with his formal studies. In addition to band music he wrote songs, anthems, hymns, and even some waltzes.

3. *What types of instruments did he write for?*

Nehemias wrote for all band instruments, piano, and voice (solo, for four voices, and for choir). His occupation appears as “musician” in the 1895 Iowa census but two years later he joined his brothers in taking over the family farm. Nevertheless, he continued to publish music down to World War I. Thereafter he dabbled with composition but channeled most of the creative energy he could muster after farm work to writing. Two of his travel books went into second editions and he wrote scores of articles for church periodicals (including *Lutheran Sentinel*), farm journals, literary magazines and historical periodicals. He wrote prolifically on the pioneer period of central Iowa history.

4. *How much of his music is intact today?*

Miraculously, quite a bit. However, it is difficult or impossible to find complete scores for his band music. His composition that received the greatest public exposure is a case in point. Nehemias crossed the Atlantic on the *Lusitania* early in 1910 and was in Oslo when former president Theodore Roosevelt was there to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. When organizers learned that an American composer was in town they contacted him and he submitted a score that he had just completed. Thus on May 5, in the words of Neelak Tjernagel, “a skinny Iowa farmer in thread-bare coat, bowler hat, and rubbers” stood attentively while Norway’s Military Band of the 2nd Brigade struck up Sousa’s *Stars and Stripes* followed by *The Roosevelt Overture* by “N. Tjernagel.” The score can no longer be found but parts of it are incorporated into an unpublished waltz Nehemias wrote for piano.

5. *He grew up on Follinglo Farm near Story City, Iowa. The farm house burned*

down in 1968. Was any of his music lost in that fire?

Yes. A large walnut music cabinet stood in the music room when an Iowa National Guard F89 Scorpion jet fighter crashed into the farmstead December 9, 1968, a decade after Nehemias’ death. The cabinet, its contents, as well as Nehemias’s papers elsewhere on the premises went up in flames that day.

6. *Tell us about your efforts to preserve his music. When did this start and what has this process been like?*

Actually, Nehemias, a life-long bachelor, took measures to perpetuate his music in 1944 when he sent his nieces, including my mother, 67-page albums of his published and unpublished music. He designed these hand-made books to be used by families around their pianos, and thus did not include band music. Our family (eventually numbering ten children) used the album heavily and its pages became torn and soiled.

Here some ELS history comes into play. The Tjernagels of Story City did not go along with the merger of American Lutherans in 1917. One of Nehemias’ brothers, H. M. Tjernagel (a horn player in the Riverside Band) was, in fact a pastor and president of the “little synod” that we now know as the ELS. Members of scattered congregations, most of them small and rural, “bonded” in many ways. In the early 1920s an orchestra consisting of Tjernagels played a concert at Koshkonong, WI. To thank the Knute Juve family for hospitality extended, Nehemias presented Amelia Juve with copies of some of his published songs. Fifty years later she gave these pristine copies to her new Pastor at Western Koshkonong, the Rev. Norman Madson and his wife Amanda, a member of the Tjernagel family.

Thus an excellent copy of Nehemias’ most loved piece, *Lille Madit* (Little Margaret), composed upon the death of my

mother's sister and published in Kristiania in 1911 escaped the clutches of ten Harstad children and the flames that destroyed the family farmstead. Use of the "Juve" copy to replicate the anthology that Nehemias himself put together illustrates the techniques used to collect, preserve, and disseminate his music in the 21st century.

7. *You have put together a book of his music and also a CD. Tell us a little about them.*

The core of the 84-page, coil-bound *Nehemias Tjernagel's Music: An Album* (2006) is the bound music he sent to Martha Harstad, my mother, as a Christmas gift in 1944. The new anthology also includes an introduction, a summary biography of Nehemias, the sheet music cover of *Lille Madit* in color, the composer's commentary on his music, two pictures, a comprehensive bibliography, and some miscellaneous items. Among the latter are an 1890 letter from Edvard Grieg assessing Nehemias' early compositions and a 1912 letter from opera diva Olive Fremstad thanking Nehemias for a copy of *The Departed Sister* (Chicago, 1912) dedicated to the memory of Olive's deceased sister Marie. The sisters grew up on a farm near St. Peter, MN. Nehemias knew them when he studied in Germany.

My favorite choral work in the album is a Christmas piece, *The Guiding Star* (Chicago, 1918). Much of Nehemias sacred music merits use in the 21st century.

The CD contains examples of Nehemias' vocal music recorded in August 2006. Accompanist Margaret Annexstad, Nehemias'

niece, also recorded some of Nehemias' music for piano.



8. *What other relatives have been involved with the book and the CD?*

All of the people associated with the two productions descended from Nehemias' siblings. Margaret Matzke served as assistant editor for the album, Eric Harstad as engraver of Nehemias' hand-written music, and John Schalow as bibliographer. I conceptualized the project and pulled it together as editor. Other relatives helped too, including sisters Mildrid Nickson and Amanda Madson.

In August 2006 Norman Teigen videotaped a group of musicians, led by Eric Harstad, who performed selections from the album. Bethany student Kristin Lussky [now Faugstad] sang soprano (and soloed for some of the songs); Amanda Madson and Linda Becker sang alto, Eric Harstad tenor, and Mark O. Harstad bass.

A Ship Made of Ice

By Amanda Madson

As the snow of 1944-1945 melted, the water had no place to drain away. The water stayed in the fields where corn and beans had been harvested. The water made a small pond in the field near Lime Creek School.

The March weather was both cold and warm. When it was cold, the water in the shallow pond froze. Ice covered the pond and the deep ditch near the road.

Teacher Luther Vangen let the children play on the ice. Alice, Amanda, Donna and Mickey made snow houses on the ice. Sven brought his white ice-skates to school. The big boys played hockey. They used stones for pucks. Their hockey sticks were willow tree branches.

Soon the weather was warmer. The sun melted some ice. The ice broke into big pieces. Amanda's snow house was on a big ice piece near the edge of the pond. Amanda jumped over the water and stepped on to the ice. Mickey jumped on another piece of ice. They both had long willow sticks. They moved the ice with their sticks.

"I have a ship made of ice!" shouted Mickey.

"I have a house on the ice. I will push my house to your ship," said Amanda.

Mickey and Amanda put the long sticks into the water and mud and pushed the pieces of ice around on the pond. Sven and the big boys did not skate or play hockey because the ice was melting. They watched Amanda and Mickey float on the pond.

As they floated, the ice broke into smaller pieces. Mickey and Amanda pushed their ice ships farther and farther away from the edge of the pond. Their sticks pushed into the mud in the pond.

The ice ships bumped other ice pieces. Mickey and Amanda did not see the ice pieces breaking. Suddenly the two ice ships were near the deep water in the ditch.

Amanda screamed, "My stick won't reach the bottom of the pond! I can't make my ship move away from the ditch! Help me! Help me!"

Mickey shouted too. "My ice is breaking! I'll fall into the deep ditch!"

The big boys saw the broken ice and the little girls. They knew they must rescue them. They picked up their willow hockey sticks. They waded into the pond. The icy water came over their boots, up to their jackets. They waded in the water to the girls. They stopped before they came to the deep ditch. The boys held out their hockey sticks to Mickey and Amanda. The girls grabbed the hockey sticks and the big boys pulled the ice ships away from the ditch to the edge of the pond.

The girls jumped off their ships. They all hurried to the school to tell the teacher.

Amanda and Mickey were not wet or cold. But the big boys were so cold they shivered and shook. Teacher made them sit by the coal stove to get dry and warm. They sat by the stove until noon hour lunchtime. Teacher heated milk in a pan of hot water on the stove. They drank the warm milk.

Teacher told the children to stay away from the pond. He said, "It's time to play soft-ball. I'll be the pitcher."

The end

Amanda Madson and her husband, retired pastor Norman Madson, live in North Mankato, MN. Amanda wrote these stories to help teach English to children in Korea.

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