



Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

Volume 8

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Issue 2

Storytelling Comes Alive

The annual meeting of the ELS Historical Society featured four people reenacting storytelling from synod and immigrant history. It was a treat for all in attendance.



Caroline Lee depicted her great-aunt Julia Lee Reque. Some of "Aunt Julia's" stories were written down in various forms. Others were only in people's memories. Prof. Sigurd Lee collected and edited them for the presentation.



Julie Quist portrayed Elisabeth Koren. The *Diary of Elisabeth Koren* gives us marvelous insight into the life of this young pastor's wife, living in the Iowa hills and prairies.



Mark Harstad took the role of his grandfather, Peder Gustav Tjernagel, reciting selections from the *Follinglo Dog Book*.



Robin Ouren took the role of her grandmother, Gladys Busness Tolander, whom she had recorded on tape. This helped Robin include voice inflection and pronunciation in her presentation.

The portrayals made for a fascinating day and elicited discussion of the times portrayed and how to collect such histories. Diaries, written stories, and recordings are helpful ways to preserve history. Write down some questions, take along some photographs and interview your family and friends.



The Crossing and Early Settlement Period: Julia Lee Reque

By Eunice Lee Philipps

Julia Lee Reque was one of three surviving children born to Nels and Mari (Reque) Lee. She was an extraordinary woman—a fascinating story teller and writer. Her formal education was less than 8th grade, but she was a sought-after consultant and translator by Norse department professors of the University of Wisconsin, Luther and St. Olaf Colleges, as well as historians and researchers, for her vast and intimate knowledge of Norway, the Norwegian language, and Norwegian-American pioneer days. Interestingly, she was not born in Norway, nor had she ever visited there.



Julia Lee Reque

She also had an adventuresome spirit. Before she was married she homesteaded in North Dakota near the Canadian border at Devil's Lake. A picture we have of the cabin she built and the snow surrounding it can attest to how rigorous life on the North Dakota prairie must have been.

Julia married Styrk Reque, a fourth cousin, when she was in her mid-forties. They moved to Madison, Wisconsin, and built a home on the East Side where she became instrumental in organizing Holy Cross Lutheran Church, which held its first service in her parlor in 1926. She continued to be active in church affairs and had a long tenure as president of

the Ladies' Aid. She remained an honored member of the church throughout her long life. She is also remembered for her many kindnesses and Sunday dinners proffered to the young vicars and pastors who served the congregation.



Nels Lee

She was born in 1869 on the family homestead just west of Deerfield, Wisconsin. She died in 1972 at the age of 103, and was buried in the Deerfield Lutheran Cemetery on land that was donated to the Deerfield Lutheran Church by her father, Nels A. Lee. There she rests today wither her family and forbears. ❁

Eunice Lee Philipps is the great-niece of Julia Lee Reque. Eunice lives in Stoughton, WI, and is a member of Western Koshkonong Lutheran Church.

New Experiences on the Iowa Prairie: Else Elisabeth Koren

By Rebecca DeGarmeaux

Else Elisabeth (Hysing) Koren was born May 24, 1832 in Larvik, Norway, the second of eight children born to Ahlert and Caroline Mathilde (Koren) Hysing. When Elisabeth was eight years old, her mother died and in 1842 her father married Elisabeth Frechland.



Elisabeth was born into a society family. Her father served as mayor for 10 years and was one of the organizers of the Larvik Savings Bank where he served various posts. By profession he was the headmaster of a boy's school where some of the teachers gave Elisabeth private lessons. She also took dance lessons and learned to read and write, but not speak, English. Twice she was sent to Copenhagen where it was hoped that she could be helped with some hearing problems.

On August 18, 1853 Elisabeth married Ulrik Vilhelm Koren. Only 18 days later, on September 5th, she and her husband, who had been ordained on July 21st of that year, left their comfortable lives in Norway for the untamed prairies of Iowa where Vilhelm had accepted a call to be pastor. The journey was 3 1/2 months long and not at all easy. Elisabeth reports seasickness, traveling through mud and snow across Wisconsin and Iowa, and being pulled by hand - the horses were too heavy

- across the iced over Mississippi in a small buggy. They arrived at their new home December 24, 1853.

When the Korens arrived in Iowa they were expecting to move into the new parsonage which had been promised them. Unfortunately, the work on the house had not even started. At first they moved in with a young family by the name of Egge. All four adults lived in the one room main floor with calico curtains separating the "bed rooms". The two Egge children slept in the loft. After 2 1/2 months, Mrs. Egge began to feel ill and the Korens were asked to move. For the next two months they lived with the Sørland family. From the beginning of May through the beginning of October, they lived in a new home built by Mr. and Mrs. Skaarlia. Finally, after living in Iowa for 9 months, they moved into the almost completed parsonage.

The Korens lived out the rest of their lives at the Little Iowa (now Washington Prairie) Parish. Vilhelm started and served several congregations in Northeast Iowa and Southeast Minnesota. He was the first resident pastor of the Norwegian Synod west of the Mississippi. He was instrumental in forming the Norwegian Synod and served at various times as its Secretary, Vice-President and President. He also helped found Luther College in Decorah.

The Korens were blessed with eight children. Elisabeth refers to Henriette, the oldest, in the diary. The others were Caroline, Ahlert, Johan (John), Paul, William, Elisabeth and (Laura) Marie.

Vilhelm died December 19, 1910. Elisabeth outlived him by seven and one half years, entering her eternal home June 7, 1918. 

Rebecca DeGarmeaux is co-editor of Oak Leaves and was pastor's wife at Paint Creek and Saude-Jerico parishes, just as Elisabeth Koren had been.

A New Generation Is Born in the New Land: Peder Gustav Tjernagel

By Mark O. Harstad

Peder Gustav Tjernagel (1865-1932) was the second of eight children born to Ole Andreas Larson (1836-1919), who later assumed the last name Tjernagel, and Martha Karina Anderson Follinglo (1845-1907). They were peasant class people from the southwest coast of Norway. Ole Andreas had arrived in America in 1856 at the age of twenty. He lived and worked for several years in the Fox River settlement in Illinois. There he met and married his beloved Martha Karina, who was just sixteen years old at the time they married. From Illinois they headed west in a covered wagon pulled by two black horses named Frank and Charlie, accompanied by a mongrel dog named Milla. They established a farm on the Iowa prairie about fifteen miles north of where the city of Ames developed, and named the place Follinglo Farm. By the turn of the century their son Peder had assumed leadership in the operation of Follinglo Farm as Ole Andreas entered his advanced years.



Though a reserved man by nature, Peder became a skillful storyteller, like many of his generation. He loved to listen to, to tell, and retell the stories he had heard from the generation before him, and also the stories of his own boyhood and youth. His younger brother Nehemias said that Peder “had a way of being entertaining. [He] did not weary his listeners.”

In 1909, on the insistence of his siblings and his own children, who numbered eight at that point, Peder began to write many of the stories down. The collection of stories, which came to be titled *The Follinglo Dog Book*, was published in mimeograph format in the 1960s under the editorship of Dr. Neelak S. Tjernagel, and was given more formal publication in 1999 by the University of Iowa Press, with a prologue and epilogue by Dr. Peter Tjernagel Harstad.

The stories are of interest and value not just because of unique events and people in them. They reflect the common experience of tens of thousands of immigrants who came to the Upper Midwest in the 19th century. They began with little more than life itself, and the liberty which American soil provided. On this foundation of life and liberty, they built with energy of mind and body. Added to that energy were deep convictions founded upon the Bible, Luther’s Catechism, and the hymnody and liturgy of Norwegian Lutheranism. Supported by all of these components they participated in the great American pursuit of happiness. ❁

Mark Harstad is professor at Bethany Lutheran College, teaching Religious Studies, Hebrew, and History. His is a grandson of Peder Gustav Tjernagel.

Transition to the Twentieth Century: Gladys Magdalene Anna Busness Tolander

By Robin Larson Ouren

I was blessed to grow up living within 30 miles of just about everybody I was ever related to, most importantly among these being my grandparents, Ted and Gladys Tolander, who lived right next door. Whenever my parents couldn't find me, all they had to do was call Grandma and ask her to send me home. For there is where I'd be, sitting with Grandma Gladys at her kitchen table, helping her do crossword puzzles or watching her play solitaire, all the while listening to the family stories she would tell, over and over again. It was in that place that my love of history-family history, really began. When I was older, I bought myself a tape recorder and began conducting interviews with Grandma, documenting and preserving stories from her life, in her own words.

All of Grandma Gladys' grandparents emigrated from Hardanger, Norway to America in the 1850's, settling in northeast Iowa, where they became members at East and West Paint Creek Lutheran churches, shepherded by the Reverend Ulrik Vilhelm Koren. Twenty years later, these same families left those churches during the Doctrine of Election Controversy because they could not in good conscience remain there. They then helped to build new churches – our ELS East and West Paint Creek Synod Lutheran Churches. It is from this background that Grandma Gladys came into the world.

Born Gladys Magdalene Anna Busness on September 29, 1908, she was the sixth of seven children of parents Edward and Mathilda. She grew up in a time of great changes in America and in the Little Synod. With the advent of World War I, Norwegian could no longer be used for public gatherings (including church services) in Iowa. In 1917, the on-going doctrinal controversies finally split the Synod. People endured. Grandma

lived a long, full life, working as a school teacher, raising two daughters, caring for an ailing husband, loving her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Her legacy is the many stories she has given to us.



Gladys Magdalene Anna Busness
High School graduation, 1926

Grandma Gladys passed away in July of 2000, at the age of 91. We buried her at East Paint Creek cemetery, right next to Grandpa Ted, her sisters, brothers, parents, and grandparents. Of course, we sang her favorite hymn at the funeral, words that I've always thought captured well the faith and hope that she expressed so many times in her life:

*I'm but a stranger here; Heav'n is my home.
Life is a desert drear; Heav'n is my home.
Danger and sorrow stand Round me on ev'ry hand.
Heav'n is my fatherland, Heav'n is my home*



Robin Ouren is a member of Norseland Lutheran Church in rural St. Peter, MN, and has served as **Oak Leaves** editor in the past.

Sermon on Psalm 78:1-7

ELS Historical Society — Eighth Annual Meeting — June 19, 2004

By Erling T. Teigen

Psalm 78:1-7

1 Give ear, O my people, to my law;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

2 I will open my mouth in a parable;

I will utter dark sayings of old,

3 Which we have heard and known,

And our fathers have told us.

4 We will not hide them from their children,

Telling to the generation to come the praises of the

LORD,

And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.

5 For He established a testimony in Jacob,

And appointed a law in Israel,

Which He commanded our fathers,

That they should make them known to their children;

6 That the generation to come might know them,

The children who would be born,

That they may arise and declare them to their children,

7 That they may set their hope in God,

And not forget the works of God,

But keep His commandments.

When he gave instructions to the Israelites in Egypt for the Passover, Moses said *“And it shall come to pass when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service,’ that you shall say ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt....”*

Ever since that time, it has been important to God’s people to tell their children the story of the past, from Eden to Calvary, and beyond. For nearly 3 millennia, the promises of God were known by that telling of the past, as fathers to children passed on the history of Eden and Ararat, of Egypt, Exodus and Sinai, — of the promises of their merciful God.

The story we still have to tell is the story of salvation — it is not a made up story — not *cunningly devised fables*, as Peter says — stories embellished by local color, or by exag-

geration to give them some credibility or artistic verisimilitude. It is a story that is in history — the history in which I live. And as our Lord’s history, it is the basis for ALL the rest of history.

Set on top of that history, the story of our salvation is the history of God’s people. Jerusalem, Alexandria, Nicea, Constantinople, Rome, Wittenberg — that is the history of the struggle of God’s people to be faithful to his word of promise. And there is the history of God’s people in Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo, Riga, Leipzig, and thousands of other places. All of that history is the story of the struggle of God’s people to be faithful to his Word of promise.

And then there are the stories of Fox River, Muskego, Koshkonong, Lime Creek, Mankato and the many other place names that those names encompass — again, the history of God’s people, their struggle to be faithful — and that is also a struggle against their own flesh. And so we hear about Deerfield, Waterville, Story City, Washington Prairie and Decorah. They are comfortable and familiar stories to us by now.

But we stopped our text perhaps too early. The rest of Psalm 78 does not hit the high spots of the story of the struggle of God’s people — it mostly hits the low spots. It rehearses the stories of their disobedience, their stubbornness, their rebellions. Memorable lines in the chapter are these: *“And they still sinned....”* — *“How often they provoked him.”* And yet he was merciful.

In our story telling today, we will not dwell on the low spots for our fathers and mothers. Maybe we got our fill of that last year at Koshkonong — where we saw five churches where once there were three. But in the stories that are told today, it will nonetheless be clear that these were people with feet of clay, who knew they were sinners, and for

that reason, fled to the throne of grace to drink from the fountain of mercy. And when we tell the story of the fathers and mothers, immigrant believers, believers living in the growing nation, we tell the story of God's people, of their faithfulness to God's Word and Sacraments.

It IS important, as the psalmist says, to tell the stories to the generation to come. The first story is the story of salvation—once and for all, far away, at Calvary. But it is not so far away, for that story of Calvary always extends to my place, and my time, and my heart. And I can know that it so struck the heart of my great grandfathers and mothers as they moved their roots to this soil.

Maybe there are some dark sayings in the stories, for the darkness we know, as we peer into our own hearts. But they are stories which celebrate God's faithfulness to his people and he shows mercy to them without end.

The purpose of our stories is assigned by the psalmist:

*That they may set their hope in God,
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments.*



Erling T. Teigen is professor of religious studies at Bethany Lutheran College. He has served as chairman of the ELS Historical Society for many years.

Big Thanks, ETT!

By President John A. Moldstad

There are times when we would like to give special recognition and thanks to people who serve. The ELS Historical Society has come upon such a time. We wish to acknowledge with gratitude the services that Prof. Erling Teigen has rendered in serving for the past number of years its chairman. He has been instrumental in leading the society to plan its annual presentation for convention week each year and to keep up the production of *Oak Leaves*. Erling was among the first appointees to the ELS Historical Society when it was organized by action of our synod in 1996.

At the 2004 annual meeting, Prof. Ryan McPherson was elected to fill the Board of Directors position now vacated by Prof. Teigen.



Erling T. Teigen

Again, thank you very much for all your hard work, Erling!



John A. Moldstad is president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

A Chapel Comes to Lakewood, Washington

The Beginnings of Lakewood Lutheran Church

Tacoma, Washington

By Theodore G. Gullixson

From 1917 to 1946, Parkland Ev. Lutheran Church was the only Evangelical Lutheran Synod congregation on the west coast. When synod president, the Rev. Henry Ingebritson came to Parkland to ordain Walther C. Gullixson on August 11, 1940, he told the new pastor that he was now the ELS “bishop” of the U. S. West Coast. Even though Parkland Lutheran Church was 1,500 miles from the nearest ELS congregation, at that time the members and pastor did have fellowship with those in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Feeling rather separated from the ELS brethren, that “bishop” wrote to the synod’s Mission Board (as it was then known) suggesting that a mission congregation be opened in Lakewood, Washington. This small village was located ten miles west of Parkland and fourteen miles south of downtown Tacoma. After some preliminary investigation, the Mission Board commissioned the Rev. Alf Merseth (a recent graduate of the St. Louis seminary in 1946) to begin work in Lakewood. When he came to Lakewood, Rev. Merseth’s phone number at that time was GRanite 7377.

After canvassing the Lakewood area and finding a number of unchurched people, the two pastors planned to begin with a series of three worship services. On November 27, 28, and 29, 1946, services were conducted in the evening of each day in the Custer School Auditorium. The newspaper article described the location as “one quarter of a mile west of the Lakewood ice arena” (which was a landmark then). The three services emphasized the heart of the Lutheran teaching with the themes: “Scripture Alone” preached by Pastor A. Shelp (LCMS), “Grace Alone” preached by Pastor E. Gamm (LCMS), and “Faith Alone” preached by Pastor W. Gullixson (ELS). As a

result, a small group formed the nucleus of worshippers. Regular worship services began on December 1, 1946 at 11:00 am, with Sunday School at 10:00 am.

In 1947, the Rev. Hans Theiste (Mission Board) and Mr. Melaus (Board of Trustees) came to Lakewood by train to purchase property for the new mission. With the help of a local realtor, they purchased three lots in Lakewood at a cost of \$1,215.00.



Now they needed a building. After World War II, building materials were still hard to find or very expensive. As an advisor to the Oregon-Washington Walther League, Rev. Gullixson became aware of a portable chapel that was no longer needed at Calvary Lutheran Church (LCMS) in Vancouver, Washington. After negotiations for its sale, the synod purchased the chapel for \$3,000.00.

In September 1947 (five months after Parkland Lutheran Church acquired their chapel), the chapel was dismantled and loaded on flatbed trucks for the trip to Lakewood. Three trucks made three trips to and from Vancouver. Meanwhile, the members from Parkland and Lakewood churches had poured a concrete slab for their church. When the trucks arrived, volunteers unloaded and later reassembled the chapel at its new location.

The chapel was dedicated to the glory of God. Later the members added a Fellowship

hall with a kitchen and Bible class area. Inside, the chapel looked like a log cabin, with metal crossbars holding the roof together. The members worshipped in this chapel until 1972 when it built a church and school buildings at its present location. ❁

Theodore G. Gullixson is pastor of Zion Ev. Lutheran Church, Thompson, IA and Forest Ev. Lutheran Church, Forest City, IA. Information was provided by the Reverends Alf Merseeth and W. C. Gullixson.



Lakewood Lutheran Church

Minutes from the Annual Meeting

By Marguerite Ylvisaker

The eighth Annual Meeting of the ELS Historical Society convened at 10 a.m. on Saturday, June 19, 2004, at the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center at Bethany Lutheran College.

The opening service took place in Silber Hall, with Chairman of the Board Erling Teigen leading a short devotion based on Psalm 78. Mark DeGarmeaux was organist for the two hymns, "I Pray Thee Dear Lord Jesus" and "Let Children Hear the Mighty Deeds."

The theme of the meeting was "Understanding our Heritage Through the Stories Handed Down from our Forebears." The four storytelling sessions, based on letters, dairies, and oral history, were:

1. The Crossing and Early Settlement Period. Stories of the Lee and Reque Families from Koshkonong Prairie, based on writings of Julia Reque. These were presented by Caroline Lee, with commentary by Sigurd Lee.

2. Arrival of Pastors from the Old Country. The diary and letters of Elisabeth Koren provided the material presented by Julie Quist, with commentary by Rebecca DeGarmeaux.

3. A New Generation Is Born in the New Land. The writings of Peder Tjernagel formed the basis of Mark Harstad's sketches about life at Follinglo farm in central Iowa. He and Mrs. Harstad also performed compositions by the subject for piano, cello, and violin.

4. Transition to the Twentieth Century. Robin Ouren, who had recorded recollections of her grandmother, Gladys Tolander, presented selections from this oral history of life in northeast Iowa.

All members of the Board of Directors were present at the business meeting which followed:

George Orvick spoke on the importance of collecting oral history, and distributed a sheet

with suggestions for interviewing family members and other subjects.

The **Secretary's report** was read and approved.

Albin Levorson, Treasurer, reported a current balance of \$387.80 after expenses, which included the cost of the commemorative medallions and the bus trip to Koshkonong. He also reported that membership numbered 73 and mailing labels for Oak Leaves 119.

Mark DeGarmeaux requested submission of articles for Oak Leaves. A suggestion was made that a blanket subscription be made for congregations, but no action was taken.

The Board of Directors:

During the past year, Mark Harstad was appointed to the board by the president of the synod.

Marguerite Ylvisaker was nominated to a second three-year term. A motion was made and carried that she be elected.

Erling Teigen declined to run for another three-year term. Ryan McPherson was nominated to succeed him. A motion was made and carried that he be elected.

No new business was discussed.

The subcommittee which had planned the day's meeting was thanked, as were those who had prepared and presented the historical sketches. In addition, Synod President John Moldstad thanked Erling Teigen for his work as chairman. A standing ovation followed.

The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Marguerite Ylvisaker, Secretary

Marguerite Ylvisaker serves on the board of the ELS Historical Society. She lives in Albert Lea, MN.

From the Archives: “Name it!”

Can you identify this item from the archives? Who is this person? What is her role in Synod history? We’ll give the answer in the next issue.



From the last issue:



The *prestekrage*, or *prestekrave*, or *pastor's collar* was traditionally worn by Norwegian pastors. It is an adaptation of the old ruff collar used in Europe for several centuries.

There are several explanations of the meaning of the *prestekrage*. One is a reference to the millstone in Matthew 18:6 and the pastor's responsibility for teaching the truth: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Another explanation is that the collar resembles the rays of the sunshine, pointing to the pastor's message as proclaiming Jesus, the Sun of righteousness who rises up with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2).

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.

In the next issue: Continuing a series of biographies of “The Thirteen.”

Communication between the immigrants and their relatives back home

Oak Leaves
ELS Historical Society
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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
\$25/year: institutional
\$5/year: student

Lifetime Membership:

\$200