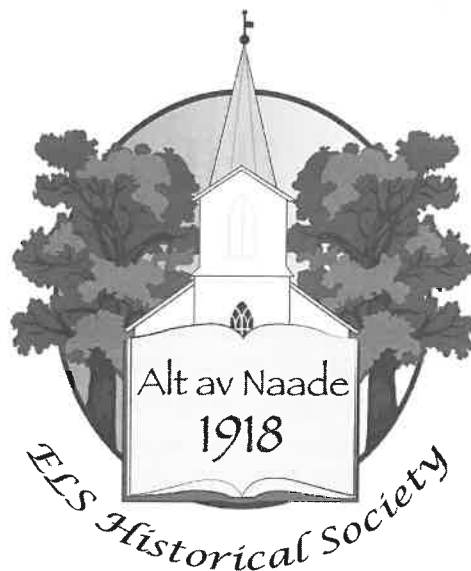


Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society



Volume 24

Summer 2020

Issue 3

HISTORY OF [OUR] HISTORIES

A Survey of Norwegian Synod Histories

Erling T. Teigen

For over 150 years Norwegian-American Lutherans have been writing histories about themselves. This article will survey the histories of both the 1853 and the 1918 Norwegian synods. It will not include congregational histories, pastoral conference papers, and academic papers, but will focus rather on the histories published more or less officially in book or pamphlet form.



Old Norwegian Synod Histories

Vivacious Daughter

H. A. Preus Norway Lectures

Until the fiftieth anniversary of the Norwegian Synod in 1903, there does not seem to have been very much concern about writing histories of the synod. Attempts to record events could be found in scattered form in the church papers, *Maanedstidende* and *Kirketidende* and some general Lutheran church histories made some references also to the synod. However, the first publication to detail the first years of the synod came in H. A. Preus's seven lectures delivered in the church of Norway in



H.A. Preus

1867. The lectures, presented to various groups in Norway, were published as Preus' trip report. The intended audience was especially the Norwegian church officials, some of whom were skeptical about the young Norwegian church in America, especially about its antagonistic relationship with other Scandinavian Lutherans. The first lecture sketched in some detail the founding of the synod, its church government, and the work it was

doing in missions, education, and care for orphans and the aged. These lectures were translated by Prof. Todd Nichol of Luther Seminary and published in 1990 by the Norwegian-Historical Association with the title *Vivacious Daughter*, a term used by Preus in the lectures to describe the relationship of the American Norwegian Synod and the Lutheran Church of Norway.

J. A. Ottesen

The second effort at a history of the synod came in its fortieth year, from the pen of J. A. Ottesen, one of the 1853 founders who had long served as pastor at Koskonong. The occasion for this pamphlet-length history (seventy pages in Norwegian, not translated) was an invitation from the Arrangements Committee for the World Exposition in Chicago in 1893. The pamphlet

continued on page 4

FROM THE MUSEUM

Cataloging the Collection

One important part of preserving the history of the artifacts in the Ottesen Museum is to catalog them. Cataloging helps to record the who, what, where, and why of the items that make up the collection. Although cataloging has been ongoing for several years, the COVID-19 lock-down has meant more time to pursue this important activity. Currently the articles already on display are being cataloged.

The process begins with a photograph. Each article is photographed, usually with a neutral background, next to a piece of paper marked off in centimeters to show



Museum Storage

scale.

Next a paper worksheet is filled out. After assigning an identification number to each article, a description of the article, its history, its

current condition, and any other pertinent information are recorded as well as its dimensions. It's not always possible to record all of this data for all of the items but the more we know, the better we can understand the story of the item. Other notes can be included if they are available.

Much of the same information is then recorded on a digital spread sheet. The data entered on the spread sheet is not as detailed as on the paper copy, but it includes the photograph of the article. The spread sheet also has a search option making finding the object and information about it easier. Separate digital files hold back-up copies of all of the pictures so that they are not lost in computer up-dates.

Finally, each item may be moved to an appropriate spot in the museum. More often, though, articles are put into storage waiting for use in special displays. Some of the special displays in the museum in the past have featured church anniversary plates, Christmas ornaments, and articles related to the Oak Trees in Koshkonong, Wisconsin. Most items are wrapped in archival quality tissue paper, boxed

in archival boxes and put in either the storage room in the museum or one of its other storage spots. The



Synod Annex

special paper and boxes help to keep dust and moisture off of the articles which can lead to their decay. Large or awkwardly shaped items have their own shelves in the storage room. All of these efforts help to ensure that the Ottesen Museum's artifacts and their back stories are available for future generations.

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Marie Aaberg, Craig Ferkenstad, Theodore Gullixson, Lois Jaeger, (Secretary), Michael Lilienthal (President), Marge Lillo, John Moldstad, Andrew Soule, Erling Teigen

Check out the Historical Society website - <http://www.els-history.org/>

Oak Leaves welcomes articles of both Synodical and local significance for publication. Articles may be edited for style, clarity, or length to allow for publication. Each issue will be deposited in the archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

*Oak Leaves is published quarterly by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society,
6 Browns Court — Mankato, MN 56001*

FROM THE EDITOR

During the days of June, it seemed most unnatural not to be assembling for synod convention and the annual meeting of our Historical Society. But we will be back next year and, as announced before, the program will be the one that had been planned for 2020.

Your editor, not too frantically, had to change the usual plan for the summer issue, which would have contained minutes and a report of the annual meeting. However, looking back at the last few issues in which we recounted some aspects of our history, some comments about the various synodical histories that have been written seemed to be in order.

When the centennial history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Proclaim His Wonders* by the Rev. Craig Ferkenstad arrived, I decided to rearrange one of my book shelves to gather in one place all of the synod histories of the 1853 and 1918 Norwegian synods. It was then that the number of histories produced by and about a church body as small as ours appeared worthy of comment.

Prof. Mark Harstad used to remind us that there were two kinds of people—*those who are interested in history and those who will be*. I suppose that can be true of a corporate body too. Anniversaries tend to focus our attention, both backward and forward.

We can wonder what effect the history of our ELS has had on us. At least nine synod histories have been produced in the last hundred years by the 1918 synod. Looking at them, it is apparent that none of them treat the history of the 1918 synod (ELS) apart from the history of the 1853 Norwegian Synod. That is consistent with the fact that the 1918 founders unabashedly and even a little belligerently, insisted that their church was nothing but a continuation of the 1853 synod. In fact, the histories written in the “little synod” have usually marked 1853 as its real beginning. The article “History of Histories” is a survey of the historical writing about our synodical heritage.

Connected to the history theme, this issue also calls attention to the two archives and museum maintained on

the Bethany Campus in Mankato. In two articles, Synod Archivist the Rev. Theodore Gullixson and your editor discuss the Synod Archives and the Bethany College Archives. On the page usually devoted to the museum, Rebecca DeGarmeaux describes the process when items are donated to the museum. For further information on the Museum and Archives, see Craig Ferkenstad’s article *A Treasure to Remember* in the Winter 2020 issue of *Oak Leaves*.

These articles intend to remind the synod constituency of the importance of preserving materials that communicate the history of the synod and its college and seminary. Of at least equal importance, members of the synod are encouraged to be aware of our history and also cognizant of where we are going.

Announcing the ELS Historical Society Annual Meeting

When the Christian is Called to Arms:

A Brief History of How the ELS Has Prepared and Supported Her Members in Military Service

Sunday, June 20, 2021 at 7 p.m.

Lee Theater of the Ylvisaker Fine Arts Center

A brief business meeting and refreshments will follow the program.

Everyone is welcome to attend.

The ELS Historical Society depends on the membership/subscription fee to fund our projects and produce Oak Leaves. Even without the annual meeting our work still goes on. If you pay your membership annually, you may send your check to

ELS Historical Society

6 Browns Ct.

Mankato, MN 56001.

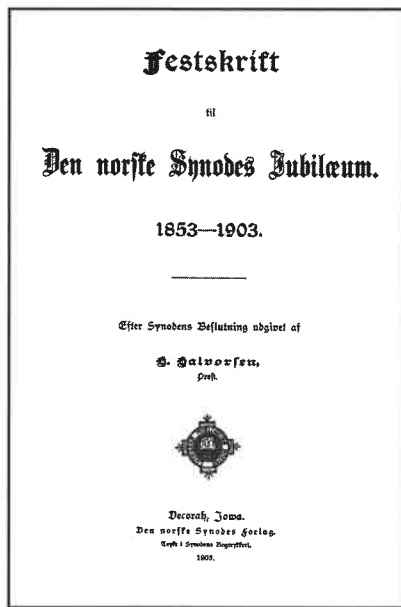


J.A. Ottesen

contains some rare insights from one of the foremost intellects in the old synod, and like Preus, one of the founders.

Festskrift

In 1903, the synod celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with festivities at Luther College and in the synod's districts. The celebration is described in great detail in the synod's church paper, *Kirketidende*. An important legacy of the anniversary was a *Festskrift* (a collection of essays usually in honor of a scholar, teacher, or sometimes, an organization). Edited by Pastor H. Halvorsen, a district president, the book contained short essays on the founding of the synod, its various institutions, its doctrinal controversies and relationship with other churches, as well as sketches on the synod's missions and publications. It also contained pictures of the founders and other notables as well as various institutions, a veritable pictorial history of the synod. Much material in *Grace for Grace* was translated from this volume.



Norwegian American Lutheranism up to 1872

The third important document of the 1853 synod's history is J. Magnus Rohne's *Norwegian American Lutheranism up to 1872*. It was not a publication of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, (later ELC), but was a doctoral dissertation by a synod pastor doing advanced studies at Harvard, published by MacMillen in 1926. He later taught at Luther College. Rohne's book, published



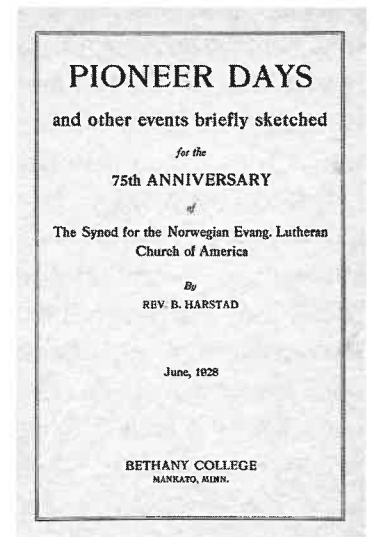
J.M. Rohne

in English, contains translations of some of the important minutes and records connected with the founding of the synod. Rohne also is much more sympathetic toward the early founders than some later histories of the synod.

Histories Produced by the 1918 Synod

Pioneer Days

The first synod history produced in the ELS was transitional. Presented first as a synod essay in 1928, Bjug Harstad, the first president of the 1918 organization, titled his paper *Pioneer Days*. Delivered at the 1928 convention and printed as part of the synod report, it was also published in a separate printing. The last two pages contain portraits of pastors and others, some of whom are not pictured for us elsewhere. It would stand to reason that the election controversy, in which Harstad was prominent, as well as the controversy over *Opgjør*, play an important role in the sixty-five page book.



Grace for Grace

In 1943, the Norwegian Synod observed the ninetieth anniversary of the 1853 synod along with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1918 synod, establishing a pattern of coupling special anniversary years of the little synod with anniversary years of the 1853 synod. The 1943 publication, *Grace for Grace*, was edited by S. C. Ylvisaker, and co-edited by pastors Christian Anderson and George Lillegard, both of whom had been present at the 1918 convention. Ylvisaker didn't leave the NLCA until 1919.

The 1943 book had imprinted on its cover 1853-1943, 1918-1943. The introduction by Ylvisaker was entitled "The Rock Whence we are Hewn," in which he referred to the 1918 synod as "the spiritual successor" of the "first Norwegian Synod." But he let it be known that

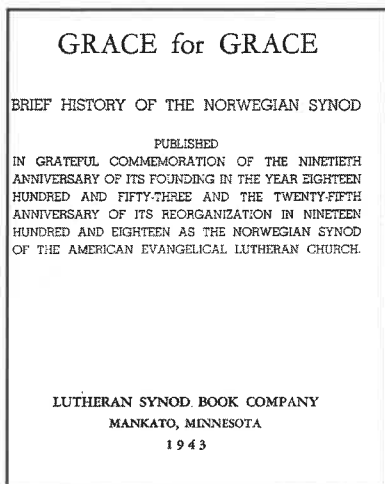
we do not value the history of our church as “a thing apart. It is rather an integral part of a great whole, the preaching of the Gospel of Christ to all nations.” “The church exists because grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” The book included the course of Christianity in Norway and after paying homage to the teachers of the first pastors, Gisle Johnson, C. P. Caspari and others, the task was passed to Christian Anderson, who, in Part I, sketched the history of the Synod’s development from the first Norwegian migration in 1827 to the 1917 merger. Much of the material in both Part I and Part II was translated from the 1903 *Festkrift* described above.

The task of George Lillegard was to deal with the synod’s controversies again consisting of some passages translated from *Festskrift*. The list of controversies established in the *Festskrift* was followed: Lay-preaching, Third commandment and Sabbath, Slavery, Absolution, Gospel and Justification, and Conversion and Election. The 1943 volume also contained U. V. Koren’s “An Accounting” (*Redegjørelse*) of 1884; translated into English, which has remained an important doctrinal statement for the ELS.

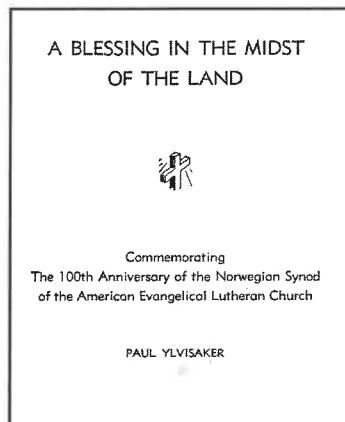
Ylvisaker wrote a concluding chapter, “Grace and Truth.” The title page carries the text from John 1:16,17: “And from his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” In his conclusion, Ylvisaker explored the impact of the two key phrases “grace for grace” and “grace and truth” on the life of the synod and explained how it had governed the teaching of the old synod especially in its doctrinal controversies.

A blessing in the Midst of the Land

In 1953, the synod pulled out all the stops in celebrating of the centennial of the old Norwegian Synod with



three publications beginning with *A blessing in the Midst of the Land* by Pastor Paul Ylvisaker. In his foreword, Ylvisaker notes the book was first suggested by



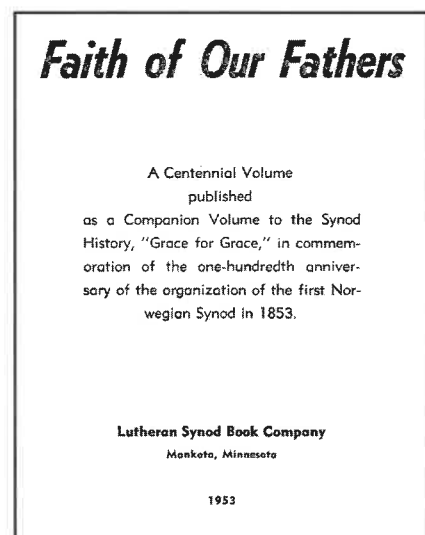
the Christian Day School Committee, which explains the nature of the 52 page book, with chapters written at the reading level of children in the upper elementary grades.

After 100 Years

A second publication in 1953 was Pastor Iver Johnson’s pictorial history *After 100 Years*. No official synodical imprint appears on it, and it appears to have been a private venture, but Iver, an inveterate photographer, took it upon himself to collect photos, many taken by himself, of all the churches and pastors of the synod, along with a few photos of the centennial convention and celebration. Since then, pictorial histories of the congregations of the synod have appeared from time to time.

Faith of our Fathers

The major publication of the 1953 anniversary year was *Faith of our Fathers* which the synod published as a companion volume to *Grace for Grace*. George Lillegard was the editor for this volume, which was divided into three parts. In the first section pastors J. B. Unseth, J. A. Petersen, and Christian Anderson presented biographical sketches of Preus, Ottesen, and Koren. S. C. Ylvisaker added a sketch of “Dr. U. V. Koren the Theologian.



In a third part, the volume printed translations of three essays by Koren, after which editor Lillegard added a few pages entitled

“The Great Divide.” That essay dealt with church unity and the doctrine of fellowship. Lillegard noted how that issue played out in the compromise of the Madison Agreement (*Opgjør*) and the Norwegian merger. There were also intimations of the widening division in the Synodical Conference that would lead to the synod’s departure from the conference—which the synod had helped create.

Our Great Heritage

In 1968, with a nod to the 50th anniversary of the ELS, George Orvick privately printed and distributed a short booklet *Our Great Heritage* — subtitled “A Popular History....” In a foreword Orvick notes the he has felt the need for a shorter survey of the synod’s history for “Bible Classes, Confirmation Classes, and private reading.” This volume closed with some reflections on Koshkonong history by Mrs. Julia Reque.



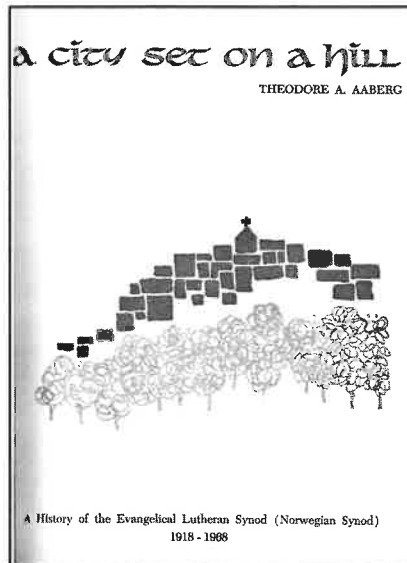
G. Orvick

A City Set on a Hill

In 1968, the Synod’s more officially published historical volume was Theodore A. Aaberg’s *A City Set on a Hill*. While it was primarily a synod history, it was also a more penetrating analysis of the earlier controversies, especially Election and the Madison agreement, and served also as a defense of the synod’s 1955 suspension of fellowship with the Missouri Synod and its departure from the Synodical Conference in 1963.

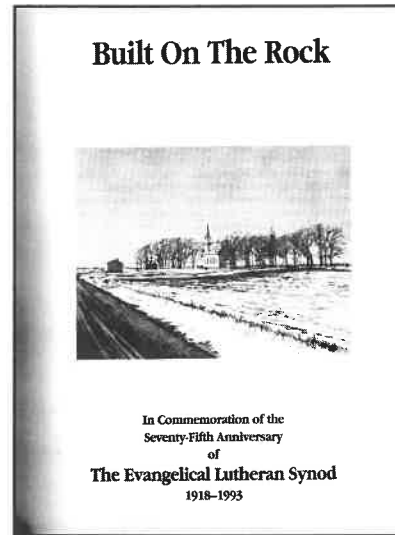
Built on the Rock

While Aaberg’s history had a focus on the old Norwegian Synod, it marked the move toward histories aiming more towards understanding the ELS in its theological context, while still observing the anniversaries. Thus in 1992, *Built on the*



Rock, an officially published synodical history written by Pastor Herbert Larson and Prof. Juul Madson made its appearance, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the synod. In this history less than one fifth is devoted to the old Norwegian Synod. One concept not appearing in previous synod histories appeared on page 32, when the authors attempted to describe the synod’s “flavor.” The key words in the description were evangelical versus legalistic, and gospel emphasis versus law emphasis.

In the chapters dealing with the ELS, the study was



able to treat parts of the history not dealt with before. There was much more to say about Christian Education—elementary, secondary, higher and theological. The book was written before Bethany became a baccalaureate institution, but the educational emphasis of the synod, also in the lower levels was care-

fully described.

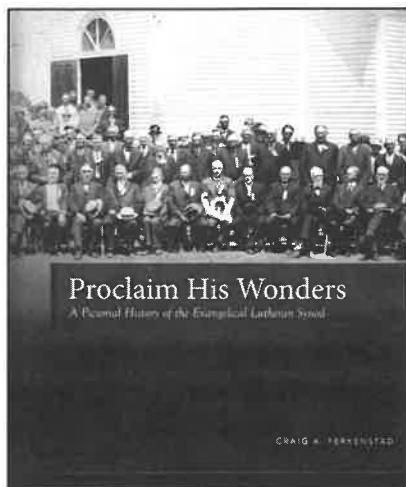
Proclaim His Wonders

The final history we will note is the most recent, *Proclaim His Wonders*, published by the synod as the centennial volume of the ELS in 2018. This history was of a different flavor from the major histories published earlier— not as heavy with text as some previous volumes, this volume used the pictorial record to give an intimate picture of the life of the synod through a large number of historical, seldom seen photos. While the interweaving of historical themes and intertwining events is missing, this last written history of the synod comes close in many ways to doing what Madson and Larson had described in asking for the synod’s flavor.

To capture more completely the flavor of the synod, one would need to read and study Bjug Harstad’s *Pioneer Days*, the 1943 and 1953 volumes *Grace for*

Grace and Faith of our Fathers, and *City set on the Hill*, and finally follow up with *Proclaim His Wonders*, with *Built on the Rock* also at hand for a few details not found elsewhere.

It does seem unusual, and even incomprehensible, that a small church body like the ELS should have produced so many historical volumes over the years—that too says something about its flavor.



A Selected List of Synod Histories (1853 & 1918)

1. *Vivacious Daughter*, H. A. Preus Norway lectures, Todd Nichols, (Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1990)
2. *Den Norske Synodes Historie*, Jakob Aall Ottesen, (Decorah, Iowa, 1893).
3. *Festskrift for 50th Anniversary of Norwegian Synod*, (Decorah, Iowa, 1903).
4. *Norwegian American Lutheranism up to 1872*, J.M. Rohne, New York: Macmillan Co. 1926.
5. H. A. Preus "History of Norwegian Lutherans in America to 1917," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*, Oct 1967.
6. *Pioneer Days*, Bjug Harstad, 75th Anniversary of Old Synod, including Opgjør, (Synod, 1928).
7. *Grace for Grace*, 90th Anniversary of Old Synod, S. C. Ylvisaker ed., (Mankato, 1943)
8. *A Blessing in the Midst of the Land*, Paul Ylvisaker,

(no publisher given), 1953.

9. *After 100 Years: A Pictorial History*, Iver . Johnson, (n.p., 1953).
10. *Faith of our Fathers*, G. Lillegard, ed., (Mankato, 1953).
11. *Our Great Heritage*, George Orvick, (n.p. 1968).
12. *City Set on a Hill*, Theodore Aaberg, 50th Anniversary, (Mankato, 1968).
13. *Built on a Rock*, Herbert Larsen, J. B. Madson, 75th Anniversary, (Mankato, 1992).
14. *Proclaim His Wonders*, Craig Ferkenstad, ELS Centennial, (Mankato, 2018).
15. E. Clifford Nelson & Eugene Fevold, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans*, (Augsburg, 1960).



TWO ARCHIVES

Erling T. Teigen

The Bethany Campus contains two archives. The oldest is the Synod Archives, located on the lower level and the Seminary-Synod building on Browns Court. The Archives were established by the synod in 1970. Previously, Bethany's "Old Main," held the memorial library and a museum. After the archive was established it was housed in a basement room in the 1968 Memorial Library. When a seminary was built on Division St. in the mid-1970s, the old Synod Memorial Library and some archival materials found a new home in that building. The archives included many periodicals and books in Norwegian that were not useful for the working seminary library. The synod archival material and work room remained in the 1968 library.

The original cataloging of much of the Synod Memorial library and the archive materials there was done by

Prof. C. U. Faye when they were located in Bethany's Old Main. After the Synod archive was established, Pastor emeritus Walther Gullixson became archivist and began the present cataloging system. His work was later carried on by Prof. emeritus Norman Holte, then by Pastor emeritus Paul Madson, until the work was handed over to Pastor Theodore Gullixson. Others have managed the archives for short periods.

When the new synod office and seminary building on Brown's court was completed, a large storage space and office were created, and that is the present home of the synod archives which is much more conducive to organizing the material so that it can be located and accessed.

Since the beginning of the systematic archiving of materials of the synod, the Synod Archive also contained materials pertaining to Bethany



Archived Papers

College. After 2010, it became more efficient for the college to collect and organize its own archive in order to make it more accessible to the college administration and faculty and for historical research. Before that time, there was not a systematic way to determine which items should be retained for the future in such a way that they could be located.

The Bethany Lutheran College Archives

In 2015, materials pertaining to Bethany history, administration, and faculty were moved to the lower level of the college library in a large book vault already containing the Synod's rare book and hymnal collection. The former cataloging system was retained in modified form and Professor emeritus Erling Teigen is the College Archivist.

Since the establishment of the College Archives, materials have been collected from the administrative offices, and the various departments in student services. In

addition to faculty minutes, Board of Regents minute, and collections of faculty member and committee papers, the archives has organized a large collections of photos of student activities from fine arts to sports, a complete collection of the college year book, *Fidelis*, and the *Scroll* newspaper. Blue prints from the original 1911 construction are also available, as well as the construction drawings of all of the later campus buildings. The photo collection also includes the panoramic, rolled pictures of the student body and faculty from the 1940s and 1950s. One notable item in the collection is the graduation certificate of Anna John Silber who was the very first student to enroll in Bethany Ladies College. A recent acquisition has been the extensive collection of papers belonging to Erling Bolstad whose legacy had established the Erling M. Bolstad Chair in Contemporary Culture and Christianity. Most of the material in the archives can be located in a digitized, searchable Finding Aid to facilitate accessing the materials.

The College Archives has also provided digitized materials, *Fidelis*, *Scroll*, and pictures for a web site maintained by the library which can be accessed at <https://archives.blc.edu/> and is open to the public. Check it out!



DONATIONS

Synod Archivist, Ted Gullixson

Donations to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Archives come in a variety of ways and circumstances. Perhaps you have saved things over the years and are now sorting through papers and pictures. This writer found a collection of mimeographed Camp Indianhead newsletters from the 1960's that are now located in the archives. When this camp was at Squaw Point Resort near Onamia, Minnesota, the practice was to produce a newsletter for each day of camp about the activities, contest winners, and cabin news.

Another example: An article appeared in the Mankato Free Press about a Rev. Ben Unseth, who was serving

a church in Mankato. When Vivian (Unseth) Weseloh was asked how Rev. Ben Unseth was related to her, it began a series of emails about giving items to the archives. As a result, Vivian's son, Matthew Weseloh, drove from North Dakota to Mankato to deliver two boxes of materials to the ELS Archives on June 5, 2020. Vivian Weseloh had been organizing sermons and photographs from her father, Rev. Eivind Unseth, and her grandfather, Rev. Joseph B. Unseth. Some photos showed the parsonage at Suttons Bay, WI, where Eivind Unseth once served as pastor. Also included was a CD of the 100th anniversary services at East and West Paint Creek Lutheran Churches of rural Waterville and Waukon, Iowa. This CD showed the last time that Rev. Eivind Unseth preached. Two other pastors were shown on this CD were Rev. Milton Tweit and Rev. Walther Gullixson.

Communication with a grandson of Rev. John Hendricks brought two boxes of materials about this man's ministry. Rev. Hendricks was among the original thirteen pastors gathered at Lime Creek in 1917. Little is known about his work because after that date he did not serve a local congregation. Instead, Rev. Hendricks traveled by train to serve isolated Lutherans in northern Minnesota and North Dakota. Along with books and photographs of Rev. Hendrick's ministry in rural Wesby, Wisconsin prior to 1917, there were typed pages of N. J. Laache's *Book of Family Prayer* that he had translated.

Professor emeritus Silas Born, has been going through his personal archives and has brought many items from his varied positions in the ELS. Materials from his teaching in the Czech Republic, from the Board of Thoughts of Faith, and his work in Peru on schools have added to our collections. Another item he brought was a collection of "Jungle Journals" by Missionary Terry Schultz. This prompted the archivists to have Elsa Ferkenstad find and make a definitive set of documents of "Jungle Journals" from what Terry Schultz emailed and what was printed in the *Lutheran Sentinel*.

Another collection came from Norman Werner. He was asked to gather together articles that he had written for

the *Lutheran Sentinel* under the heading "View From the Pew." Norman said that he enjoyed going through his past articles and wrote, "I think that my favorite is "Baptism,"



Matt Weseloh & Ted Gullixson

followed by "Mother's Day" and "Parting Company'." They are stored in a file drawer marked "ELS Laypeople." This is a new collection of materials from and about lay people who have served in the ELS offices or have contributed to the archives.

When Rev. Harry Bartels was assistant pastor at Parkland Lutheran Church, he presented a series of evening lectures on "Bach Cantatas For the Church Year." When his son, Rev. Mark Bartels, flew to Portland to visit his father, he was able to secure a copy of these lectures and an essay "Confessional Lutheran Hymnody" that his father has written.

Mrs. Stephanie Wentzlaff, outgoing secretary of the Women's Mission Rally of Southern Minnesota, brought with her the older secretary and treasurer's records for the organization. They were given to the archives for safe keeping.

Prof. Thomas Kuster has donated several boxes of materials from his father, the Rev. Arnold V. Kuster. His files contained documents from many Lutheran Free Conferences that occurred from 1954 to 1970. This collection is nearly complete and tells part of the history of Lutheran pastors and laypeople who worked to hold to the truths in the Lutheran Confessions. Other files have a collection of letters written to Arnold Kuster about Cornwall, England, as he was considered for working there. Later Rev. Joseph Petersen was sent as a missionary.

President John Moldstad attends many services of dedication, anniversaries, and installations. He takes along copies for the Archives. He regularly contributes presidential letters and printed emails to record the synod's work.



ACORNS

FROM THE ELS ARCHIVES



Theodore G. Gullixson - Archivist

OLD -TIMERS



Photo from After 100 Years, Iver C. Johnson

The Members of the ELS pictured were in attendance at the 1953 centennial convention of the Norwegian Synod (ELS) and had also attended the 1903 fiftieth anniversary of the old Norwegian Synod. From left to right: Pastor Henry Ingebritson, Pastor J. B. Unseth, Mr. A. J. Natvig (Mankato), Mr. Herman Natvig (Saude), Pastor Christian Anderson, Miss Gertrude Natvig (Saude), Pastor Christian Moldstad, Elsie Madson (Mrs. Norman A., Mankato), and ?.

Can anyone identify the man on the left for us?

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