

Vermont's History Traced in Detail

by Ann Urness Gesme

At the time of the Centennial celebration of the Vermont Lutheran Church, the book *Vermont 1856-1956*, was published. This priceless collection of pictures and information provided the foundation for an up-dated history of the congregation for its Quasiquicentennial History. In addition to the material found in the earlier Vermont Church history, pertinent data has been collected from a variety of sources including publications of the noted Norwegian immigration authorities such as Qualy, Blegen, Ulvestad, and Semmingson; newspaper articles; *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans*, by Nelson and Fevold; speeches by Rev. S. and Rev. H. Gunderson; the Dane County census of 1850; the Wisconsin Census of 1855; publications of the Norwegian American Historical Association; *Sixty Years of Perry*, compiled and edited by C.O. Ruste in 1915; and the records of Vermont and other surrounding congregations.

The earliest congregational records were kept by the pastor in the same manner as has been done in Norway. All were hand written in the Norwegian language using a form of the gothic style of handwriting used extensively in Norway until 1875, and in America as well, by the early clergymen.

The use of surnames was unfamiliar to the Norwegian immigrants resulting in considerable confusion to them at the time, as well as to anyone searching the records today. People were identified by their given name, their patronymic, and the farm name in Norway. When the immigrant discovered that he needed a surname on official documents in America, he chose either the patronymic (father's name plus son or datter), or the name of the farm from which he emigrated. In the church records for Vermont, often both patronymic and farm name are shown; sometimes only the patronymic. Various spellings and forms of given and "surnames" were used. As time went on, many of the immigrants reverted back to the use of the farm name as a surname and the given name became Americanized, so that "Lars" became "Lewis", "Jens" became "James," "Brita" became "Bertha," "Siri" became "Sarah," etc.

The pastor was responsible for conducting the

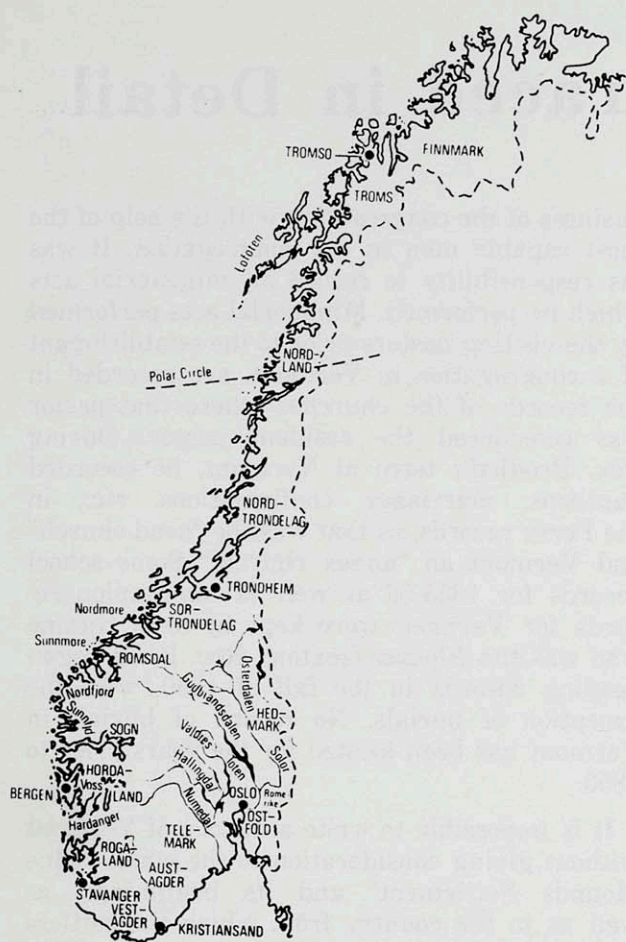
business of the congregation with the help of the most capable men in the congregation. It was his responsibility to record all ministerial acts which he performed. Ministerial acts performed by the visiting pastors prior to the establishment of a congregation in Vermont, are recorded in the records of the churches where that pastor was considered the resident pastor. During Rev. Brodhal's term at Vermont, he recorded baptisms, marriages, confirmations, etc., in the Perry records, as that was the "head church" and Vermont an "annex church." Some school records for 1855-56 as well as communion records for Vermont were kept by Jens Gjesme who was the *Klokker* (sexton). Rev. Fjeld began keeping records in the fall of 1860, with the exception of burials. No record of burials in Vermont has been located for the years prior to 1855.

It is impossible to write a history of Vermont without giving consideration to the whole "Blue Mounds Settlement" and its beginnings, as well as to the country from which the settlers emigrated.

Every effort has been made to make this account as accurate as possible. Any errors are unintentional and for these, I, Ann Urness Gesme, take responsibility. November 26, 1980.

THE FIRST NORSEMEN IN AMERICA

There is little doubt in the minds of most Norwegian-Americans that the first white explorer to reach America was the Viking explorer, Lief Erickson. Later, Norsemen were members of the early arriving groups of colonists first settled along the eastern coast of the United States in the early 1600's. Norsemen continued to arrive as individuals or single families until 1825, when the first organized group of emigrants left Norway and founded the Kendall Settlement in New York. Nine years later, in 1834, they migrated to Illinois. Thus the path was laid for Norwegians to find their way to the Midwest; and to Vermont Township.



NORWAY IN THE 1800's

What conditions existed in Norway at the time emigration began? The vast majority of Norwegians were of the rural class. The *bonde* was the land-holding farmer and at the top of the scale in possessions. Next was the *husmann*, a cotter or tenant farmer with life tenure; and last, the *innerst*, a farm laborer who maintained his own household on the property of a small land-owner. Beneath these three groups were the servants. Although Norway had never been under the feudal system found elsewhere in Europe, the social stratification was such that it was a near impossibility to rise above the circumstances into which a Norwegian was born.

During the first half of the 1800's, the *husmanns* class doubled in number and the *innerst* tripled; so that by 1855, 85 percent of Norway's 1.5 million people were peasants. Debts, high taxes and poverty plagued these people, and social and religious pressures added to the general

dissatisfaction felt by those who found themselves in this disadvantaged group.

The state-supported clergy identified with the ruling class and together they made up the social and intellectual elite of Norway. Their heritage and training did not allow for any sort of understanding of the plight of the masses. They were victims of the same uncompromising social stratification that victimized the rural class. The clergy and government officials vigorously opposed emigration.

Although few Norwegians emigrated due to religious reasons, conditions in the state church of Norway were not all rosy. As a result of the lay-preaching of Hans Nilsen Hauge, a strong feeling of pietism among the rural people was awakened. The movement spread throughout the country, and led to the recognition of this segment of the population as a political power. Lack of training and leadership kept them from exercising their potential in their own country in the early 1800's, but did not keep them from emigrating.

Hauge led a movement within the existing church of Norway, and after his death, his followers continued to depend of the official clergy for their formal services. This did not prevent them from being extremely critical of the secularism and worldly ways of the clergy. They continued lay-preaching, and held prayer meetings among themselves. Rationalism, which had entered the theological thinking of the church leaders did not enter the thoughts of the common people. Because of their opposition to emigration clergymen were not among the first to leave Norway, but it was not long after immigrating, the need of a spiritual leader for the Norwegians was felt in the American settlements.

CAUSE OF EMIGRATION

Over population during a time of economic hardship was the major cause of the great stream of emigrants to leave Norway in the last half of the 19th century and the early decades of this century. The small amount of tillable land was inadequate to support the increasing population, and crop failures make the situation critical. Wealthy land owners were often as bad off as the peasants. They were not immune to disaster; heavy tax burdens necessitated selling all or part of their property to pay heavy taxes. Lower classes of people were oppressed by the upper classes, tithes and taxes were required by the state and church, and compulsory military training regulations were all contributing factors to the Norwegian's wish to emigrate. When letters reached Norway from travelers to America, telling of the abundance of land and resources, the news spread like wild fire across Norway. By the middle of the 1800's,

"America Fever" swept Norway in epidemic proportions, and emigration was in full swing.

JOURNEY TO AMERICA

By 1850, approximately 17,000 people had emigrated from Norway, most of them settling in Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin. Norwegian immigrants first entered the United States through the harbor at New York but in the 1850's, Norwegian sailing ships carrying immigrants, entered Quebec. From Quebec the immigrants made their way to the Midwest through the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Great Lakes, landing at Milwaukee or Chicago. From there they traveled by oxcart, horse-drawn wagons or on foot to their destination. Soon after the first railroad reached Madison in 1854, the line was completed to Black Earth, offering a quicker method of overland travel to those who could afford a rail ticket. From Black Earth the newly arrived immigrants spread southward to populate the eastern half of Vermont Township, and south into other Norwegian settlements.

EARLY NORWEGIAN SETTLEMENTS IN WISCONSIN

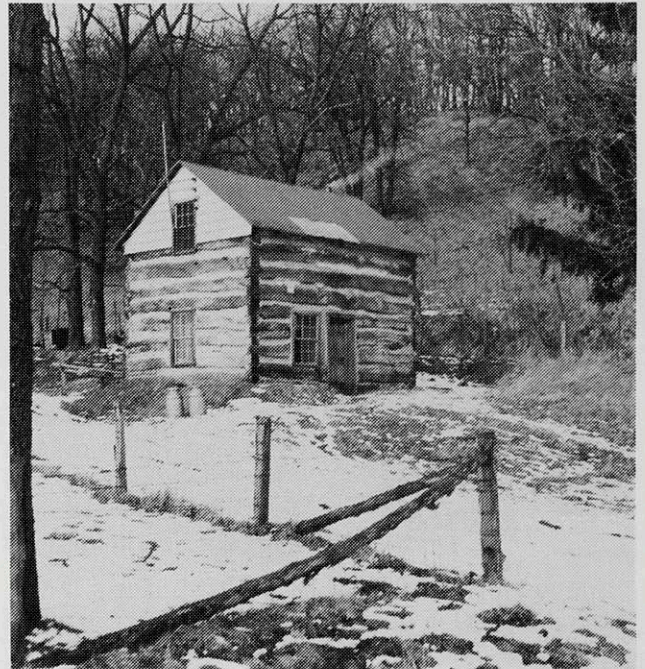
The most important settlement of Norwegians in Wisconsin was the one at Koshkonong (called "Kaskaland" by many Norwegians). As the waves of Norwegians arrived in Koshkonong, the area became saturated and overflow moved north and west to establish two additional large settlements. One was known as the Spring Prairie Settlement, located in the northern part of Dane County and the southern part of Columbia County. The second was located in the northwestern part of Dane County, spilling over into the bordering counties. The northwestern part of this last mentioned area was known as the "Blue Mounds Settlement" and included the region which was organized into the township of Vermont in 1855.

FACING HARDSHIP

It is extremely difficult to get things in perspective when considering the emigrant voyage and settling in a new country. Much is written or told in a moment of melancholy; or by someone more concerned with literary style than with accurate information. Dramatic accounts tend to become embroidered with magnified details, seldom accurate; while leaving untold the real drama—the day to day routine, both happy and sad events, experienced by every one of the people who came to America as an immigrant.

The ocean voyage lasted from 6 to 16 weeks, depending on route and weather. Each family had to have provisions to last for three months, in addition to their own bedding. Their belongings were placed in emigrant trunks made of wood and

reinforced with metal bands, and stored in the hold of the ship. The sailing vessels were seaworthy and the sailors excellent, and most people made it to America safely, in spite of crowded and unsanitary conditions. Seasickness and disease aboard ship resulted in considerable discomfort, and occasionally death; but it was the exception rather than the rule that many died at sea.



Reminiscent of the Vermont pioneer's first log houses was this home on the Andrew Jorgenson homestead now owned by Norman Sale. The picture was taken in the early 1940's.

THE IMMIGRANT'S FIRST HOME

Norwegian immigrants tended to form settlements in America made up of people from a specific district in Norway. As was seen in Mr. Lien's article, the first to come to Vermont were from the Valdres. People from this district had already established themselves in Springdale and Perry and they encouraged others from Valdres to join them in America. Another well represented district was Sogn, but the settlement in Vermont became known as a predominantly Valdres settlement after many "Sognings" migrated to Minnesota and the Dakotas. Nevertheless, many Sognings were among the leaders during the organization of the Vermont Lutheran Congregation.

Many immigrants arrived in America with tools and equipment with which to build a house. Only

the most basic necessities were packed away in the round-topped emigrant chests which carried the Norwegian's possessions to America, among them, tools. While the family found shelter with an earlier settler, a crude dugout or a small cabin of about 12'x14' was erected. The immigrants were not accustomed to luxury in Norway and found little in this country. As soon as they were able, a better house was built. Lumber was readily available and a saw mill had been in operation in the vicinity since 1847. Breaking a few acres of land and planting a crop was essential to their survival the first winter in America. Those who arrived too late to plant a crop had to use their small reserve of funds, or borrow from others to see them through to the next spring.



The chinking between the logs is all but gone on the Jorgenson barn by 1940.

Hardship and suffering experienced after reaching their destination in America was seldom greater than what they knew in Norway. Much of the hardship at that time was a fact of life, be it in Norway or America. The main difference to the immigrant was that in America they had a chance to improve their condition—an option not open to them in the Old Country. Danger and difficulty facing the settlers was not from roving bands of hostile Indians or savage beasts; and loneliness, due to isolation, was not as great in Wisconsin settlements as it was later on the western prairies. The real trials were those of adjusting to a strange country with a strange language, extremes of weather, unfamiliar customs, and struggling to stay healthy of mind and body in order to build a new life for themselves.

FIRST SETTLERS IN BLUE MOUNDS

The region of Blue Mounds, including the area which became Vermont, was inhabited by Indians until the Black Hawk War of 1832. Following defeat of the Indians by Federal troops, the Indians in Wisconsin were placed on reservations. Any Indians found in Dane County after this time did not present a threat to the settlers. The first white settlers came to the area following the discovery of lead ore deposits in 1826 by Ebenizer Brigham. Miners and their families from the surrounding area as well as from Europe moved in to become the first settlers.

The first road to connect Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River ran through Blue Mounds, connecting Fort Winnebago near Portage, and Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien. Stage coaches drawn by four horses carried mail and passengers through the area, one in each direction, daily. Stations were located along the road where horses would be changed, lodging could be found, and mail dispatched. Another road was built in the early 1830's from Blue Mounds to the Wisconsin River. This road ran through Vermont Township and was used as a connecting link between the lead mining region and the river.

Thus it can be seen that it was not a completely uninhabited and unknown area that the Norwegians found in Wisconsin; but one which offered unlimited opportunity to those who had the stamina and ambition to develop it. The vast majority of Norwegian immigrants were of the rural class, tailor-made to develop the agricultural resources of the area.

The first Norwegian to arrive in the Blue Mounds area was, according to Narvestad, in *Valdres Samband*, Iver Thorson Aase, in 1844. Not until two years later did any more Norwegians come to the area. Then, Tore Spaanem came with a party of 15, settling in the Blue Mounds area and encouraging others in Norway to join them.

In "Samband," a magazine published by the Valdres Samband, A.L. Lien wrote a series of articles in 1913, dealing with the "Blue Mounds Settlement." The following is a free translation of information found in those articles:

"In the town of Vermont, Erik Saevre was the first Norwegian settler with his son-in-law, Ole Brunsvold. Later came Ole Grotodden from Hallingdal. Halvor Bakkene from Valdres came to Vermont in 1849, and settled in what became known as "Sagabatomen." Vilken Naes from Lyster was settled in the eastern valley and Erik Solve moved there from Springdale. There were also several others from Lyster.

"In the years 1850-51-52, many came from Hedalen and Aadalen in Valdres to settle in this valley. Arne VASFARET, Harold VASFARET, Christen VESTRUM, Gul KANTUM, Jorgen HAUGEN, Halsten NORBY, Harold KNUT, Peter and Ole BRAGER, Mikkel BLAEKKELIEN, Hans TOMTENE, Mikkel LARSON TOLEBRAATEN, Ole BAKKEN, Ole LANGEDRAGSLEIN, Arne HAUGEN, Ole TOLEFSON, Anders ESPELIEN, Gulbrand INGE MOEN, and others. Ole O. TORSRUD (rescued from the Atlantic in 1852) from Reinli and Thrond MIKKELSON (Store Thrond) and his wife, son and four grown daughters from Stavdalen, Valdres. These were to be on the unfortunate steamship, but due to lack of money were held back and came later in the fall. (The Atlantic is a steamship which was deliberately rammed by a rival ship OGDENSBURG, on Lake Erie, at 11 p.m., August 20, 1852. The Atlantic was carrying about 800 immigrants; 500 of them perished, including 72 of the 134 Norwegians from Valdres who were led by Stefan Helle. Ole THORSRUD, mentioned above, was one of the survivors in the group from Valdres. It is not known how many of those who perished were destined for the Blue Mounds settlement.)

"In the eastern valley, came about the same time, many from Lyster. Anders VINDE, several BARNES families, whose names were found among the soldiers from Vermont in the 15th Wisconsin Regiment Volunteers. Amund HILLESTAD, Peter MOE, Einar MIKKELSON and others. To the western valley came Hans OPSAHL and Iver BRENNUM from Gulbrandsdalen and Knud HORNET, KJOSTAD and Jens MOEN from Nordre Aurdal. Valdres."

"All who came, and had some money left after the immigrant journey, first purchased land, and all with a family must have a cow and oxen; who came with families, it was seldom that they were completely without money, and many had what at that time was considered a lot of money. When they had paid for their land, secured a house, oxen and cows; plow, stove, and other equipment, the purse became very small. All began with farming and the first task was to produce something for provisions. The summer they arrived was devoted to raising a crop, but in winter they must make rails and build fences, and cut logs for a house if they had not put up a house in the fall. When May came, they plowed up some land and planted it with grain, usually resulting in a good harvest. This provided grain for flour and feed for the pigs in the fall. Dairy products provided much of the food for the Norwegians as they

were better skilled in producing and utilizing milk than anything else. Everyone lived in the same manner—those who had less wealth were equal to those who had more, when everyone did his share."

"Everyone worked early and late, six days a week, and rested Sunday; doing only what was necessary on that day. If anyone was sick, the neighbors helped out. Doctors were seldom called because they were so far away. After the neighborhood had received crops enough for bread and seed, they were not forced to sell their crops in the fall and buy bread and seed in the spring. If they were short of grain in the fall, and could not get a threshing machine right away, the men went to a neighbor and borrowed a few bushels of wheat and paid with the same when they got their crop threshed."

One of the first Norwegians to settle in Vermont, C.K. SYVERUD, is not mentioned in the above article, but it is known that he arrived in 1849, immediately after Erik SAEVRE. Syverud was operating a blacksmith shop in Vermont in 1849. Norwegians were well established in Wisconsin by this time. A Norwegian immigrant was serving in the legislature of the Wisconsin Territory and several Norwegian language newspapers were being printed in this country.

In the year 1850, there were 9,467 Norwegians living in Wisconsin; 3,324 of them in Dane County. The Koshkonong settlement accounted for about 75 percent of this number and several hundred Norwegians were found in York, Bristol, Windsor and Sun Prairie Townships. District 37, which included the townships of Blue Mounds, Vermont, Springdale, Perry and Primrose had 375 Norwegians living there.

Vermont was first included in the Town of Madison, becoming a part of Blue Mounds Township when that was formed in March, 1848. It was not until the first Tuesday in April, 1855, that the Township of Vermont, as we know it today, was officially formed. (On some maps and in some records the township was referred to as "Hobart" in 1855.)

IMMIGRANTS AND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

Since early times, influence of the church had the strongest of any effect on the culture of the Norwegian people. In Norway, services were attended faithfully, even by the less devout people, as religious ardor was not always the main reason for attending. The church was the only place where large groups gathered to learn news of the

community, meet friends, conduct business, settle accounts, read public notices and carry on other secular activities. The State Church of Norway built the churches and supplied the pastors. Confirmation in the Lutheran Church was a condition set by law, and only those confirmed could hold public office, receive any kind of license, and receive the protection of the law. Ambulatory schools were established so young people could learn to read in order to be confirmed.

The early settlers of Vermont were eager to organize a congregation and provide a parochial school for their children. They felt strongly the need for an ordained minister to administer communion, hold religious services, to confirm their children, baptize babies, perform marriages and conduct burial services. The organized church which was taken for granted in the Old Country, did not exist in America. Recognition of the need for clerical services led to the organization of congregations, building parsonages and churches, but most important of all, calling a pastor. It was not an easy task to find a pastor who was willing to emigrate. Few were willing to leave a relatively prestigious and secure position where they were assured of a decent income, and go to live in a foreign country to minister to their countrymen.

PIONEER CHURCHMEN

The first Norwegian Lutheran ministers to be ordained in America were Elling Eielsen and Claus Lauritz. Both were ordained in October, 1853 by German Lutheran clergymen. Eielsen was a Haugen lay preacher in Norway and had little formal education. He represented the low-church point of view. Clausen was born in Denmark, later moved to Norway, before coming to America to become a teacher of emigrant children. When the people of the Muskego settlement appealed to him to become their pastor, he was examined and ordained in Milwaukee. He built the first Norwegian Lutheran Church in this country. Although Clausen represented a lowchurch point of view he did not see eye to eye with Eielsen, and a cooperative spirit did not exist between the two clergymen. Another set of religious attitudes was established among the Norwegian immigrants in America, with the arrival of Rev. J.W.C. Dietrichson. He was highly orthodox, being educated at the University of Norway and ordained there before coming to America. He arrived in 1844 to serve the people at Rock Prairie, Jefferson Prairie and Koshkonong. Dietrichson was responsible for transplanting the very formal, high-church form of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. People of the Blue Mounds settlement received the ministerial services of all of these men at some time during their travels in the settlements.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES IN THE BLUE MOUNDS SETTLEMENT

In 1846, Norwegians arrived in Springdale and Primrose, in 1848 they settled in Perry, and in 1849 the first are found in Vermont. According to C.O. Ruste in his account of *Sixty Years of Perry Congregation*, printed in 1915, religious services were first held in the Blue Mounds settlements by traveling ministers. The first service was held in April, 1850 at Thore Spaanem's home in Springdale. Rev. J.W.C. Dietrichson from Koshkonong announced that he would baptize babies brought to him. People came from miles around and 18 babies were baptized. Shortly after this service, Dietrichson returned to Norway where he remained until his death in 1883. Rev. H.A. Stub from Muskego Settlement conducted services at the Saebjorn Dusterud home in East Blue Mounds, July, 1850.

Rev. A.C. Preus, Dietrichson's successor at Koshkonong, began holding services for the settlers in western Dane County in the fall of 1850. In the letter of call to pastors at that time, the term was generally for a period of five years. From examination of the Koshkonong church records kept by A.C. Preus during the years 1850-55, it appears that he traveled to the Blue Mounds area on a regular basis. He would spend about a week in the area, holding *gudstjeneste* (divine services), *oppbyggelse* (prayer meetings), confirmation services, and other ministerial duties in the various locations at either school houses or homes. He signed the minutes of any business meetings conducted by the Norwegian Lutheran settlers. At a meeting of December 1, 1852, held in the school house of District #1, an election was held to elect trustees "for the congregation of the Norwegian Lutheran Congregation of Dane and Jefferson Counties, Wisconsin —subdivision of said congregation of the Town of Blue Mounds and Springdale."

The three elected were Aslak Lie, Nils Sjur and Erik Saevre. January 8, 1854, the people of the area issued a letter of call signed by 36 voters of Springdale, North Blue Mounds and South Blue Mounds. (North Blue Mounds later became Vermont.)

Rev. A.C. Preus was one of six pastors who organized the Norwegian Synod. The Norwegian Synod began functioning officially in October, 1853, following a meeting of the pastors and representatives of 17 congregations. Rev. Preus was elected president of the Synod and served in that capacity until 1863. In 1872, Rev. Preus returned to Norway where he died in 1878.

In 1855, Rev. H.A. Preus, a cousin of A.C. Preus, began serving the people of Vermont. He had arrived in America in 1851 to serve the Spring Prairie settlement. The constitution of that congregation allowed the pastor to use six Sundays per year to conduct services in other settlements. Herman Preus was young (30 years old in 1855) and energetic, with strong executive abilities and theological convictions. He became president of the Norwegian Synod after A.C. Preus in 1863, and served in that capacity until 1894.

In her diary, Linka Preus, wife of Rev. H.A. Preus, mentions her husband's visits to the settlements. An entry dated November 5, 1855 states:

"Herman and I had planned to take a trip to Iowa to visit the ministers Koren and his wife, and Clausen and his wife; but that did not materialize. Herman had too many other journeys to make to permit consideration of a pleasure trip. It was particularly the trips to Blue Mounds that brought about this disappointment to the Korens and us. Lange, who was called to be the minister at Blue Mounds, did not accept the call, and it became necessary for Herman to serve this congregation, and the smaller congregations associated with it, until they should be able to get a minister of their own."

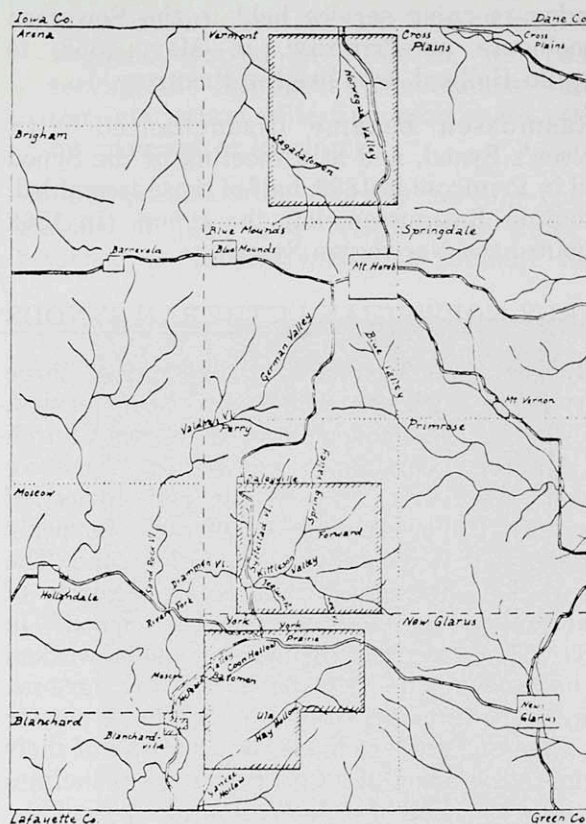
(Lange, the minister referred to by Mrs. Preus, was perhaps the one called as a result of the meeting held January, 1854.)

A schedule of services to be held in the Norwegian settlements appeared in one of the early Norwegian-American newspapers, *Emigranten* (The Emigrant). Rev. A.C. Preus announced the following services in issues dated February 16 and 23, 1855:

Town of Springdale, Dane County	March 7, 1855
Town of North Blue Mounds	March 9, 1855
Baker's Church near Dodgeville	March 11, 1855
Schoolhouse near Katterud, Dodgeville	March 12, 1855
Perry, Dane County	March 14, 1855
Primrose	March 16, 1855

With these services, A.C. Preus apparently concluded his term of five years and the work was continued by H.A. Preus of Spring Prairie, as several June and August issues of *Emigranten* carried the following notices:

Springdale	July 3, 10 a.m.
Perry	July 4, 10 a.m.
Baker's church near Dodgeville	July 5, 1 p.m.
Kollerud near Dodgeville	July 6, 10 a.m.



THE BLUE MOUNDS SETTLEMENT AREA

North Blue Mounds (Vermont)	(Sat.) September 8, 10 a.m.
South Blue Mounds & Springdale	(Sun.) September 9, 10 a.m.
Perry	(Tue.) September 11, 10 a.m.
Primrose	(Wed.) September 12, 2 p.m.

According to Rev. Hector Gunderson, it was under the direction of Rev. P.A. Rasmussen the Vermont congregation was organized in 1856. Rasmussen was a Haugean school teacher who emigrated from Norway in 1850 with the intention of serving in the immigrant settlements as a teacher. He lived at Lisbon, Illinois, and traveled about as a lay preacher. In 1854 he was ordained a minister of the Eielson Synod, serving 20 congregations in 5 states. The Eielson Synod was the low-church, loosely organized group that opposed the use of *krage* og *kjole* (clerical collar and gown) by their ministers.

At the same time as the highly orthodox, high-church pastors were serving the area, Rasmussen was also holding services. A *Brief History of the Rasmussen Family*, written by Mathilda Rasmussen, 1945, states that Rev. Rasmussen served Black Earth in 1856, Primrose and Perry from 1854-60, and Blanchardville and York from 1855-60. He was married by Rev. Elling Eielsen (for whom the Eielsen Synod was named) at the close of a

Sunday morning service held in the Bowerson schoolhouse at Primrose, in May, 1855, to Ragnild Holland, who lived in Primrose.

Rasmussen became disenchanted with Eielsen's Synod, and at a meeting of the Synod held in Primrose in 1856, half of those assembled, including Rasmussen, left the synod. (In 1862 he joined the Norwegian Synod.)

EARLY NORWEGIAN LUTHERAN SYNODS

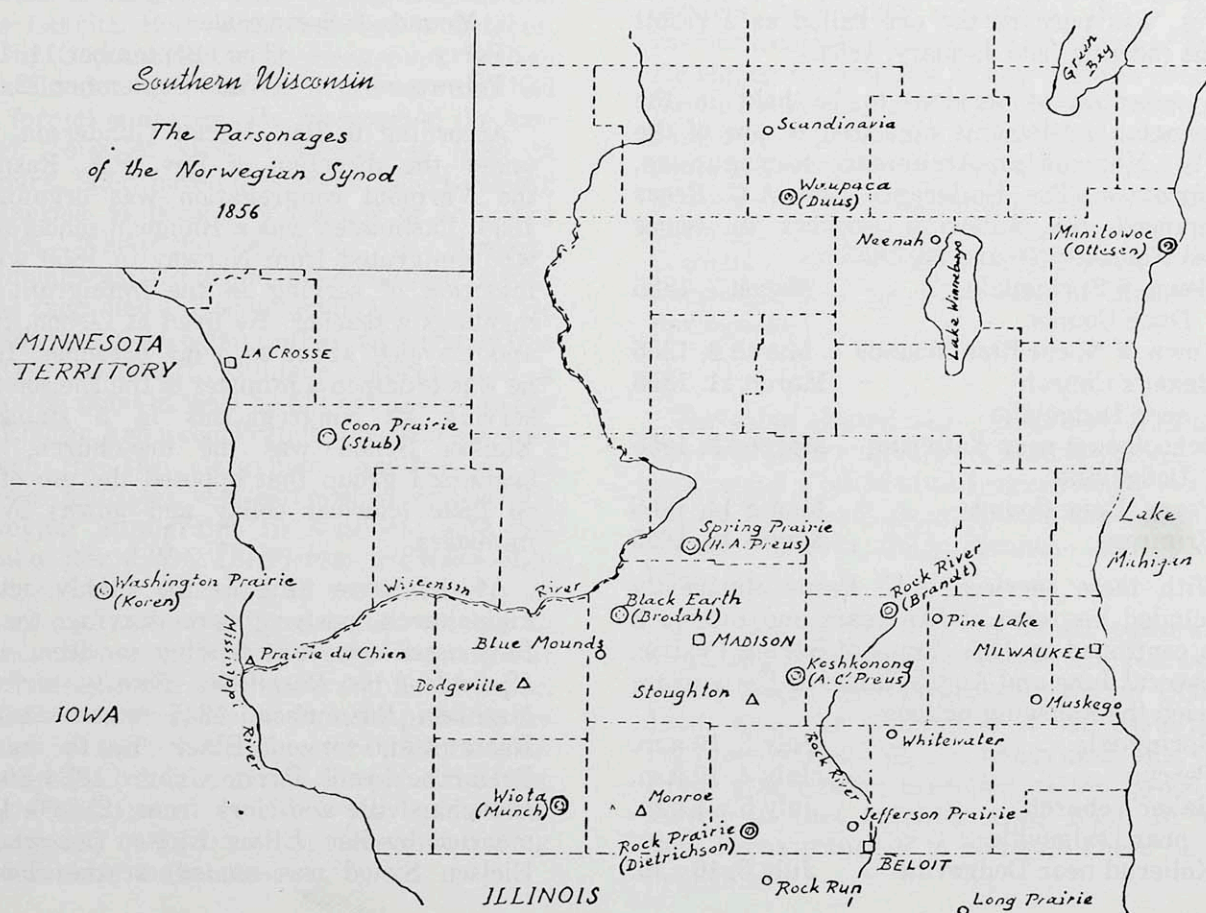
By the time Vermont was organized, three Norwegian Lutheran Synods had been formed. They were: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, commonly known as "Eielsen's Synod", in 1846; The Evangelical Synod of Northern Illinois, a dissident element formerly a part of Eielsen's Synod, in 1851; and The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, called the "Norwegian Synod" in 1863. Clergymen of the three synods worked enthusiastically to minister to the immigrants. They were in competition for members; not for the sake of numbers alone, but because of their rigid adherence to the religious principles of their synod, and a determination to lead the Norwegian Americans in the right direction spiritually.

The second biennial meeting of the Norwegian

Synod was held October 1, 1855, two days after the first recorded business meeting of the Vermont Congregation. The Synod convened with 34 representatives of 23 congregations, and eight minister in attendance, at the newly dedicated church at Spring Prairie. Vermont was to become a member of the Norwegian Synod, with a pastor of the high-church orthodoxy.

The religious conflict which led to the formation of several synods among the Norwegian immigrants was not created by the immigrants in the settlements, but by the clash among the clergy, and their inclination to perpetuate the great social chasm between themselves and the immigrants. The immigrants had crossed an ocean to be "free," only to find that class stratification had followed them to America.

It is doubtful that the Norwegians living in Vermont were deeply concerned about the technical aspects of theology and ecclesiasticism, but felt strongly the need of an ordained Norwegian minister to provide the sacraments of the church, conduct worship services, and aid them in practicing their religion as was fitting and proper.



May 26, 1851 - Blue Mounds confirmands' examination

May 27, 1851 - Blue Mounds services and confirmation

May, 1852 - Services held in the settlement by A.C. Preus

August 31, 1852 - Services held on the 11th Sunday in Trinity

September 2, 1852 - Visit to Blue Mounds by A.C. Preus

October 13 & 14, 1852 - Preus in Blue Mounds

November 26, 1852 - Primrose

November 27, 1852 - Perry

November 28, 1852 - Dodgeville (Sunday)

November 29, 1852 - Blue Mounds

December 1, 1852 - In the schoolhouse of District #1, a meeting was held to organize the congregation of the Norwegian Lutheran Congregation of Dane and Jefferson Counties, subdivision of said congregation of Town of Blue Mounds and Springdale.

January 18, 1853 - Trustees elected for the above were: Aslak Lie, Nils Sjuru and Erik Saevre.

May 26, 1853 - Services at Primrose

May 27, 1853 - Confirmation at Perry

May 29, 1853 - Sunday services at Dodgeville

May 31, 1853 - North Blue Mounds services

June 1, 1853 - East Blue Mounds confirmation

According to **Sixty Years of Perry**, Rev. A.C. Preus visited the settlement again in July, November and December, 1853. Receipt of \$25 is acknowledged from Springdale and Blue Mounds by Rev. Preus in 1853.

January 8, 1854 - Letter of call issued by Springdale, North Blue Mounds and South Blue Mounds. Late the same year, Perry established their own congregation. Services were continued 5 times each year for the next two years.

January 5, 1855 - Joint meeting of four congregations where it was decided to purchase 42 acres for parsonage. Letter of call sent through the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (Norwegian Synod) to secure the services of a pastor from Norway to serve the immigrant settlers.

July 20, 1856 - Rev. Peter Marius Brodahl installation service. (At the time Rev. Brodahl arrived in America, the pastors serving the immigrant Norwegians were of the intellectual elite and most were related by marriage or kinship.)

Of ten pastors from Norway serving congregations in Iowa and Wisconsin in 1856, six returned to Norway, including Brodahl. In his



combined congregations, Rev. P.M. Brodahl performed a total of 142 baptisms from his arrival in 1856 to the end of 1857. In 1858, 138 baptisms; 1859, 138; 1860, 190. The number of marriages he performed in his combined congregations is as follows: 1856, 11; 1857, 21; 1858, 19; 1859, 17; 1860, 19

SYNODICAL AFFILIATION OF VERMONT LUTHERAN CHURCH

1856-1867 — not formally affiliated with any synod.

1867-1885 — Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (Norwegian Synod).

1885-1890 — no synodical affiliation.

1890-1917 — United Norwegian Lutheran Church.

1917-1946 — Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (Merger of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, and Hauge's Synod).

The immigrant press played an important role in the early church among Norwegian immigrants, and provides a glimpse of conditions in the settlements of the mid-1800's. (A treasure-trove of information is filed away on hundreds of rolls of microfilm copies of the immigrant newspapers.) These newspapers became an instrument through which controversial subjects relating to the immigrants and their church could be debated and discussed, in addition to containing the usual newspaper material.

Emigranten, a Norwegian-American newspaper printed near Orfordville, Wisconsin and later in Madison, states its purpose in an issue of January 30, 1852. It was captioned, "To Our American Friends" and stated:

"...the true interest of our people in this country is, to become Americanized as soon as possible, and be one with the Americans. In this way alone can they fulfill their destination and contribute their part to the final development of the character of this great nation."

The Norwegian immigrants were quick to adopt the ways of America in business and politics; however, they were reluctant to discard the mother tongue and customs from their homeland, particularly in the home and in their church.

Issues of *Emigranten* for the years 1854 and 55, the years immediately preceding the organization of Vermont congregation, provide a means by which we can better understand the degree of "civilization" in Dane County at that time. The newspaper contained articles of information about events taking place in the nation and in the world; other articles were aimed directly at helping the newly arrived immigrants in making the transition from Norwegian citizens to becoming American citizens. Ads and notices are of special interest in the story they tell. Among advertised items are tools, furniture, groceries, pills, eye glasses, daguerrotype portraits, tobacco, religious books, book binders—all goods and services available to the settlers in Vermont Township and thereabout. Inquiries were printed to assist people in locating friends or relatives who had arrived in this country or moved away without leaving a forwarding address. Some of the people were sought because they owed money to someone. Rev. B.F. Dietrichson of Luther Valley congregation was advertising for the whereabouts of two men who had borrowed money (\$6 and \$10) from a widow

in his congregation, and had not repayed the loan. A half-grown boy was looking for employment as a herd boy. A ship company advertised opportunities available to the immigrants to visit the land of their birth, or to send packages or money to Norway. Daily and weekly American newspapers, printed in New York and Milwaukee were advertised; strayed oxen and other animals were sought; churches and schools were looking for qualified teachers and pastor's helpers, and as early as 1854, announcement was made of the opening of the railroad line from Canada "through Niagara Falls, Hamilton, Detroit, Chicago, Galena, to St. Louis and all points west" — a total of 1200 miles!

The number of subscribers does not give a true picture of the scope of readership of the immigrant newspapers. The readers far exceeded the subscribers. Newspapers were passed from family to family and the information passed on by word of mouth to those who did not have the opportunity to read the paper. In this way news of the date of arrival of a traveling minister in the settlements reached most of the residents in that area. Pastors often used the newspaper to announce marriages and deaths they were aware of, and to disseminate other pertinent information. Without the immigrant press it would have taken considerably longer to organize groups of Norwegians into congregations and establish the Norwegian Lutheran way of worship in America.

Services Before 1856

by Ann Urness Gesme

In 1850 there were 27 congregations of Norwegian Lutherans in the United States. None had been organized in the Blue Mounds area, however, the area had been visited by Elling Eielsen at least once before 1850. The ministerial records of the Koshkonong Parish, Dane County, Wisconsin, 1850-55, contain information about the visits of Rev. A.C. Preus to the Blue Mounds settlement. In April 1850 Dietrichson held services at Thore Spaanem's farm, Rev. H.A. Stub conducted services at Saebjorn Dusterud's farm in July of that year, and in late fall Rev. A.C. Preus held communion services at Thor Maanum's in Blue Valley. For the next several years, he was to continue visiting the people in the area. Some of the recorded meetings are as follows:

March 28, 1851 - Religious services at the Volstad residence in Perry Twp.

1946-1961 — Synod name changed to the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

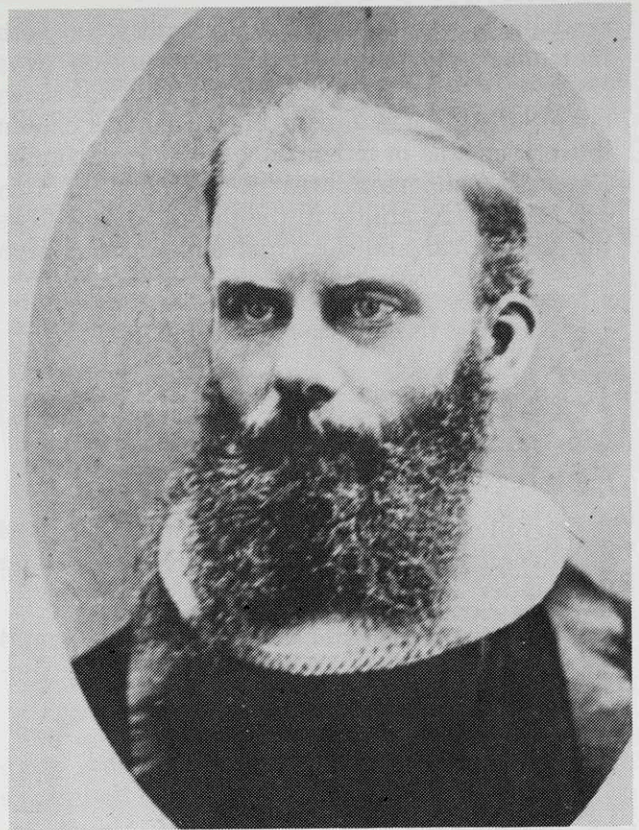
1961 - present — The American Lutheran Church.

Although Vermont was not formally a member of any church synod prior to 1867, the constitution of the Norwegian Synod provided for a congregation to send delegates to the conventions of the Synod. These delegates could make proposals and participate in discussions of these proposals, but could not vote. Rev. J.N. Fjeld joined the Norwegian Synod in 1862, and the congregation voted to become a member of the same synod in 1867.

From its inception in 1853, the Norwegian Synod was constantly occupied with controversy of one sort or another. The first major issue was that of lay preaching, which was adequately resolved by the time Rev. Fjeld joined the synod. The slavery issue was resolved with the end of the Civil War. Conflict over "common school" versus "religious school" cooled considerably after the compulsory school law of 1879 was passed in Wisconsin; but a new issue, predestination (*naadvalg*), was boiling in 1880.

Up to this point, all of the major issues of controversy were intensified by the close alignment of the Norwegian Synod to the German Missouri Synod in America. The very highly orthodox ministers of the Norwegian Synod were strongly influenced by the Missouri Synod and their stand on slavery, parochial school and lay preaching. They turned to the Missouri Synod leaders to help settle theological squabbles which sprang up in the Norwegian Synod, and utilized the seminary in St. Louis to train clergymen for the Norwegian immigrants. The Norwegian leaders followed the pattern set down by the Germans of the Missouri Synod. This led to the alienation of the Norwegian immigrants from the Norwegian Synod leaders, resulting in many congregations withdrawing from the Synod.

Under the leadership of Rev. Olaus P Syftestad, Vermont withdrew from the Norwegian Synod in 1885 over the predestination controversy. They were one of the "Anti-Missourian" congregations involved in the movement toward union in the 1880's, which led to the formation of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America in 1890. This was the merger of the Anti-Missourians, the Norwegian Augustana Synod and the Conference for the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church. No sooner had the union been formed, when another bitter



Rev. Olaus P. Syftestad

controversy flared up over the control of Augsburg Seminary. The result was the organization of the Lutheran Free Church. In spite of the above mentioned fragmentation of the new synod, steps were taken to further unify Lutherans in America, under the leadership of the United Synod.

Rev. S. Gunderson played no small part in the organization of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America; a merger of the Norwegian Synod, the United Synod, and the Hauge Synod. This was accomplished in 1917 and continued as a synod until 1961, with the name being changed in 1946 to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Rev. Gunderson served on several union committees from 1911 to 1917. One of the greatest problems for the Norwegian Synod and the United Synod to resolve was the one which caused most of the controversy in the 1880's — that of "election." When a deadlock was again reached in 1912, Pastors Ylvisaker and Gunderson were appointed to "thrash things out." E. Clifford Nelson quotes R. Malmin in **The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans**: "We are going to lock you in a room, and will not open the door until you have found the right way of stating this matter." The two men were successful in

arriving at a statement satisfactory to both factions, and the major obstruction was removed. Progress toward a merger was slow; but in 1916, a new union committee was chosen to work out the practical aspects of organization. Rev. S Gunderson was a member of this committee. His ability in the practical as well as the theological and doctrinal aspects of church

union was recognized throughout the synods.

In 1961, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the American Lutheran Church (German), and the American Evangelical Church (Danish) merged to form The American Lutheran Church, of which Vermont is a member.

Meeting of Fjeld's Menighed

(congregation), September 20, 1861

The following items of business were discussed and decided at a meeting of the congregation on September 20, 1861:

1. Mikkel Halstensen Blakkelién would take the responsibility for supplying communion for the coming year.
2. *Medhjelpere* (pastor's assistants) Ole P. Moen and Nils Steenson Barsnes were reelected, as well as Mikkel Blekkelién, Arne Vasfaret and Amund Hillestad.
3. An association of pastor's assistants and trustees elected the following members of the congregation to assemble for the purpose of determining the pastor's salary for the congregation. Those elected were: Jorgen Guulson, Ole Knudsen Syverud, Knud Lad (Gjesme), Erik Eriksen Solvi and Nuub Rustebakke.
4. A new church should be erected here in the congregation, and each farmer will be assessed in proportion to their assets and circumstances.
5. \$300 is necessary to begin building a church.
6. Ole Knudsen Syverud and Mikkel Blekkelién will investigate the purchase of building materials.
7. The following men were elected to assess funds for building the church: Jorgen Guulson, Ole Syverud, Knut Lad (Gjesme), Erick Eriksen Solvi, and Nuub Rustebakke.

The following members signatures appear at the end of these minutes:

Amund Hillestad	Haral Vasfaret
Ole P. Moen	Ole H. Brager
John P. Dybdahl	Ole Knudson Syverud
Lars Syversen	Nuub Rustebakke
Jorgen Guulsen	Johannes Hermundsen
Gulbrand Dokken	Knut O. Lad (Gjesme)
Iver Pedersen (Barsnes)	Knud H. Brager
Peder Muggedalen	Anders K. Espelien
Nils Espeseth	Mikkel H. Blekkelién

Petter C. Vestrum	Guul Olsen
Peder Pederson Valager	Jakob Ottesen
Ole Tidemandsen	Arne Vasfaret
Peder Skalet	Nils Steensen Barsnes
Ole A. Steensrud	Erik Eriksen Solvi
Torbjorn Ellingsen	Syver Syversen
Amund Pedersen Huset	
Rasmus Solfestsen (Sylvester)	
Lars Solfestsen (Sylvester)	

THE CONGREGATION GROWS

With the continued flow of immigrants into the community, the new church building soon became too small, and the congregation voted to build a 14 foot addition to the church in 1867. This addition would accomodate a balcony with stairs on each side, an altar, communion rail in a half circle, a pulpit, seats, and double doors at the entrance. The committee in charge of these improvements consisted of the following men: Rev. Fjeld, Knut Fekjar, Ole Syveryd, Hans Evenson and Ole Eidsbakken.

Rev. Fjeld's records show a total of 527 baptized members in 1866, 602 in 1867, 633 in 1868, and 645 in 1869: indicating the need for the expansion of the church. In 1895 extensive improvements were again necessary. Einar Mickelson, T.J. Fjeld, Nels Simley, Peter Halsten, and Andrew Anderson were in charge of the committee to make recommendations for renovation of the building. A steeple and vesitbule was built in front of the church, and the church was painted and redecorated inside and out for a cost of \$435.

CHURCH ORDER

The Vermont Lutheran Congregation was organized according to the order of the church in Norway. A *medhjelper* (Pastor's assistant) was selected from among the most sincere and Godfearing members of the congregation, whose duty it was to direct the churchly affairs and to aid in establishing proper Christian conduct. Trustees were elected to govern the temporal affairs of the congregation. The *laerer* (teacher) was

responsible for the instruction of the children in preparation for confirmation, and the *klokker* led the singing, read the opening prayer, epistle, and closing prayer. The *klokker* was an important layman, and had to have a good singing voice, as well as a good speaking voice. He sat near the pastor during the worship service, and struck the melody for the hymn and kept the congregation on it—if needed. He received his salary as a part of the offering from the congregation. His portion was laid on a separate table from that where the portion for the pastor was placed. Apparently his portion was meager, as the saying arose, “When it rains on the pastor, it drips on the *klokker*.” (Some of Vermont’s *klokkers* were Jens Gjesme, Jorgen Gulson, Ole Gaarder, Ole Helland, Andrew Anderson, Peter Paulson, Ole Amble, Nels Haugner, Elvin Anderson, Jens Shamoe, and Magnus Forshaug.)

Year		Total memb.	Conf. memb.	Baptisms
1866	18	527	294	35
1867	22	602	330	49
1868	-	633	365	40
1869	27	645	349	41

Year	Conf.	Comm.	Marriage	Funerals
1866	17	301	12	18
1867	18	352	9	5
1868	35	401	16	3
1869	22	653	13	13

During the early years of the congregation members of the congregation were chosen to supply bread and wine for communion. It was understood that each communicant would give 5¢ to reimburse the one who supplied the bread and wine. 653 people received communion at Vermont in 1869.

Rules of order for church services were established in 1874 at Vermont. According to these rules, 1)-No one is allowed to leave during the opening prayer or the Lord’s Prayer. 2)-No one ought to unless necessary, go out of the church before the service is finished. 3)-Parents with children are reminded that silence should be maintained during the service, as far as possible. 4)-The elected, dedicated men honor these rules and carry them out as far as possible. In 1877, rules were laid down regarding non-members who participated in congregational activities but did not give financial support to the church. In order to have a child baptized in the congregation, a non-paying family was to pay the congregation \$5, the pastor \$1, and the cantor (*klokker* or *kirkesanger*) 50¢.

VERMONT CONGREGATION RECORDS

It is sad to realize that it takes 100 years, and sometimes 125 to appreciate the importance of safely keeping records of a church. It seems the records are most important to those who make them originally, and those who seek them a century or more later. In between, they fall into the hands of those who consider them of no importance and they are destroyed or are “put away” in some forgotten location.

The Constitution for the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, or the Norwegian Synod, prepared in 1853, states in its by-laws:

“Each pastor belonging to the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church is responsible for keeping the following official books: 1) A ministerial record book for members of the congregation covering births, confirmations, communions, marriages and burials, and also including a daily journal of ministerial acts performed; 2) A record of all ecclesiastical proceedings by the congregation; 3) A letter book for all incoming and outgoing official letters; all such records maintained by the pastors are to be authorized and approved by the synod.”

The by-laws go on to provide direction to the congregation’s secretary, trustees and parochial school teacher for the recording of business and school affairs.

In light of these rules, and Rev. Brodahl’s reputed orthodoxy, it is surprising that Vermont Congregation did not have a ministerial record book for the early years. Close examination of the Perry records may reveal that all ministerial acts performed by Rev. Brodahl are recorded in those records, and Vermont considered an “annex” congregation, not worthy of its own record books at that time.

VERMONT’S FIRST PAROCHIAL RECORDS

September 29, 1855, a meeting of Norwegian settlers was held in “Hobart Town” (Vermont). At this meeting, Jens Olsen Gjesme, a parochial teacher, was authorized to arrange for at least three religious services per year and to pay the pastor \$5 for each service. In addition, he agreed to lead the singing, supply the bread and wine for communion, record the names of communicants and other ministerial acts. For these services he was to be remunerated with one bushel of wheat from each settler. This agreement was signed by: Erik K. Saevre, Ole A. Grotodden, Jorgen G. Vestgrove, Erick E. Solvi, Anders Norhaga, Lars

Hellegaard, Anders S. Solvorn, Mikkel Blekkeli, A.K. Espelien, Erik Andersen, Hermund Barsness, Ole Evensen, Gulbrand Vold, Vilken Naess, Erik Andersen, Lars Monsen, Amund Andersen, Peder Pedersen and Iver Gudmandsen.

Eleven days prior to this meeting, 73 people received communion at Black Earth, the first list to be recorded shows the following names:

(A #2 following the name designates husband and wife.)

Anders Anderson	2	Andreas Steensrud	2
Thorstin Anderson	2	Jorgen Guulson	2
Amund A. Eid	1	Ole Jenson	2
Anne Andersdatter	1	Jens Olson	2
Berthe Andersdatter	1	Lars Sjurson	2
Chersti Thorstensdtr.	1	Lasse Arneson	2
Berthe Eid (widow)	1	Erik Sevre	2
Lars Monson	2	Olaug Brage	1
Gunnild Nielsdatter	1	Sivert Gjermundson	2
Knud Nielson	2	Ole Olson	1
Turi Andersdatter	1	Gjermund Lien	2
Ole Anderson	2	Tarald Pederson	2
Ole Olson	1	Gunnild Olsdatter	1
Mikkel Blackelie	2	Anne Hansdatter	1
Anders Sjurson	2	Gulbrand Bakken	2
Thora Blackelie	1	Anne Hansdatter	1
Knud Sivertson	1	Tomas Rust	2
Gunnerius Christianson	2	Ole Rust	1
Maria Christensdatter	1	Eivind Svarer	1
John Christenson	1	Jens Gjesme	1
Bunnar Olson	2	Christopher Blak	2
Turi Helgesdatter	1	Gulbrand Anderson	2
Peder Pederson	2	Halstein Bakken	2
Anders Aspelie	2		

The second recorded communion list is from Black Earth, Wisconsin, November 9, 1855, at which time 34 people communed. They were:

Arne Haveson	2	Arne Vasfaret	2
Inga Herm. Barsness	1	Mikkel Vasfaret	2
Inger Herm. Barsness	1	Ole Olson Kleigar	2
Anders Aslagson	2	Johannes Snekker	2
Harald Vasfaret	2	Arne Olson Moen	2
Ole Eivindson	2	Sophie Arnesdatter	1
Erik Anderson	2	Gjermund Torgrimson	2
Elling Olson	2	Knud Olson	1
Knud Brage	1	Gulbrand Vold	2
Petter H. Brage	2	Ole Brage	1

Jens K. Gjesme lived up to his agreement, and arranged for at least three services in the year 1856, and registered the communicants. At the communion service held at Black Earth, January 24, 1856, 14 communicants were registered. They were:

Mikkel Blackelie	2	Sivert Kasa	2
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Christen Vestrum	2	Knud Sivertson	1
Petter Christensen	1	Gulbrand Dokken	2
Vestrum			
Kari Christensdatter	1	Johannes Christenson	2
Vestrum		Anders Nordhaga	1

March 11, 1856, Black Earth, Wisconsin, communion was administered and the following communicants were recorded:

Olaug Brage (widow)	1	Ole Sjurud	2
Hjermund		Jorgen Guulson	2
Hjesjebakken	2	Gulbrand Berg	1
Anders Espelie	2	Halstein Bakken	2
Amund Nielson	1	Thone Gunnarsdatter	1
Anders Solvorn	2	Andreas Stensrud	2
Thor Sivertson	2	Anders Nordhagen	2
Arne M. Vasfaret	2	Berthe Guulsdater	1
Mikkel A. Vasfaret	2	Kari Mikkelsdatter	1
Johannes Pederson	2	Ragnild Tollefsdatter	1
Anne Christophersdr.		Brynnild Oldsdatter	1
Eid	1	Thora Eriksdatter	1
Brynnild Olsdatter	1		

Communicants Aug. 17, 1856	Communicants Sept. 7, 1856
Christen Vestrum	2 Hans Tomte and wife
Peter Christenson	1 Eivin Pederson and wife
Torbor Endresdatter	1 Ole Eivinson and wife
Tore Helgesdatter	1 Hans Eivinson and wife
John Hanson	2 Ole Paulson
Ole Arneson Stensru	2 Jorgen Guulson and wife
	1 Erik Nybraaten and wife
Gulbrand Vold	2 Mikkel Larson and wife
Knud Sivertson	1 Knud H. Brage

The above records were prepared by Jens K. Gjesme, signed and dated by Rev. P.M. Brodahl, October 3, 1956.

PREPARING FOR A PASTOR

During the years Rev. A.C. Preus was visiting the Blue Mounds Area, congregations were being organized and a church had been built at Perry. The 20 x 20 foot log building was erected in 1852. The same year, in December, Springdale congregation was organized. In November, 1854, Perry congregation was organized.

At a meeting held in the Nels K. Syverud home in the town of Blue Mounds, February 5, 1855, the Vermont group voted to enter an agreement with Perry, Sprindale and Blue Mounds to build a parsonage. Apparently the importance of having a place for the minister to live was realized as the letter of call included the promise of a parsonage.

The decision was made to purchase forty-two acres of land in section 34, Town of Blue Mounds, from Mils K. Syverud and Lars Pederson Dusterud at a cost of \$70. For the sum of \$538, Nils K. Syverud was to make the following improvements:

- To dig a well and mason it, water to be plentiful.
- To build a stable with room for two horses and two cows.
- To break 5 acres of field.
- To enclose the field with a seven rail fence, safely staked.
- And lastly to furnish the material and build a frame parsonage 16 x 24 x 14, sided on the outside, and lathed and plastered on the inside. The contract stipulated the size and height of the parlor (*stue*), kitchen, pantry and cellar. The dimensions of the rooms upstairs were also stated, and it was specified that the stairway should have a railing about it. Then comes the size of window panes, the panel (*speil*) in the doors, the doors to be hung on hinges, three of them to be supplied with locks and four with latches.

The contract was signed by four men from each of the following congregations — Perry, North Blue Mounds (Vermont), and Springdale. and three men from Blue Mounds. Those from Vermont were: Erik Knudson Sevre, Mikkel Blekkelién, Arne Mikkelsen and Gulbran G. Olson. (The above taken from *Sixty Years of Perry*.)

A deed was issued to the 4 congregations by the Syvruds and Dusteruds on May 17, 1855. At a joint meeting of the four congregation's representatives work on the parsonage was found to be satisfactory and was accepted May 31, 1856, more than one year after the agreement was made.

REV. PETER MARIUS BRODAHL

Peter M. Brodahl was born September 1, 1822 in Norway. He attended the University of Kristiania (Oslo), completing his studies in 1849. In 1848 he married Johanna Caline Hoff. He was employed as a teacher and *klokke* until called by the Blue Mounds area congregations to become their pastor. With his wife and children (at least two), he emigrated from Norway, arriving in Koshkonong the summer of 1856. July 20, 1856 he was installed as minister under the large trees near the school house located ¼ mile east of Daleyville.

Rev. Brodahl's ministry extended beyond the four congregations he had been called to serve. He traveled to other settlements, holding services and assisting in organizing congregations among the

Norwegian immigrants.

As a strictly orthodox minister, he adhered to the doctrine of the Norwegian Synod. At the time when Civil War seemed eminent, his attitude toward slavery was not appreciated by some of his constituents. Although he did not actually approve of the holding of slaves, he believed that in and of itself, slavery was not in conflict with Biblical doctrine. This was a hard pill to swallow for the Norwegians with their zeal for freedom and aversion to inequality. Many had experienced inequality in Norway, and had no intention of compromising their thinking in their new country. It was a free country and they were willing to fight to keep it that way!

It is told that when services were in progress and a team went by on the road Rev. Brodahl would stop preaching and go to the window to see who it was who was not in church. (Told by Guri Espeseth when she was 92 years old.)

For some reason the Brodahls were not content living in the parsonage which had been provided for them. February 4, 1860, representatives of the four congregations which had built the parsonage met at the parsonage to discuss the disposal of the same. Rev. Brodahl and his family had rented a house in Black Earth and had moved there. It was decided to lease the parsonage to Peder Johnson Klemoen: one year for \$25. March 26, 1861 the trustees of the four congregations met again and sold the parsonage at public auction for \$529 to Alexander Gundelfinger, a German.

After fulfilling his five year contract with Vermont, Brodahl requested that he not be called to serve them again. (As early as August 29, 1859, a change in Brodahl's charge was proposed. Perry, Wiota, Primrose and Springdale should form one parish; Vermont, Blue River, Spring Green, Richland, Big Hollow and others would form another.) His request was granted.

After living in Black Earth for two years the Brodahl family moved to Perry where he continued to serve until his return to Norway in 1868. While living in America, five children and the wife of Rev. Brodahl died. When resigning from Perry he gave his reason as impaired health; thinking that the cooler climate of Norway might restore him. He returned to Norway where he continued to serve as a minister. In 1872 he married Johanne Marius Bull. February 13, 1906, at the age of 84 years. Rev. Petér Marius Brodahl died.

Clara Jacobson, daughter of Abraham

Jacobson, the pastor who succeeded Brodahl at Perry, wrote an article for *Symra* in 1911. It was translated from Norwegian in 1944, and appeared in *Norwegian-American Studies and Records*, Vol. 14. The following excerpt from the article, "Memories from Perry Parsonage," contains information about the Brodahls:

Mrs. Brodahl and five children are buried in the cemetery at Perry. From their tomb stones: Hanna born August 26, 1850-died January 31, 1857; Soren M., b. April 29, 1854-d. January 14, 1866; Carl G., b. April 20, 1860-d. January 1, 1866; Henry N., b. September 23, 1862-d. January 23, 1866; Morris, b. September 2, 1865-d. April 13, 1866; Johanna Catherine Brodahl, b. Feb. 21, 1829-d. March 22, 1867.

"The pastor lived plainly but his parishioners lived still more plainly. The minister's salary was small, and the family did not understand how to manage. The wife was not used to keeping house; she was not of a practical nature. Even up to the present day old women can tell how helpless she was when she had ignorant hired girls, and that happened often.

"It was customary for the women of the congregation to bring presents of food when they visited the parsonage. The minister's wife was friendly and always wanted to treat them to a meal but often there was so little to eat on hand that as one woman put it, the guests sat and ate up the food they had brought. The pastor was such a poor businessman that sometimes he could not get credit at the stores for needed goods. One woman said that once the pastor's wife steeped tea three times on the same leaves; but again, when she had good supplies, she cooked and baked according to the most expensive Norwegian recipes.

"In spite of such extravagance the minister and his wife were both loved. Old women would tell how charming the wife was. She was sweet even when she wept. Poor lady, many were the tears she wept, for there was much sickness in her home and several small children died; then she too died, and the minister and his remaining children went to Norway, where he passed away a short time ago." (He died in 1906 — the article was written in 1911.)

THE FIRST CHURCH IN VERMONT

It appears that the first meeting at which the business affairs of Vermont as a separate congregation under Rev. Brodahl's charge were considered, was held November 23, 1857.

and signed by the following members: Erik Saevre, Iver Pedersen Brenden, Hans Arnesen Tomtene, Knud Asslagsen Bakken, Ole Olsen Brunsvold, Mikkel Larsen Torebraaten, Ole Evendsen Haga, Thron Knudsen Dokken, Ole Andersen Bakke, Johannes Kristiansen, Knud Olsen Lad, Knud Olsen Moen, Anders Guttormsen Brenden and Arne Mikkelsen Haugen.

December 20, 1857, at a meeting held in Black Earth, a committee was elected to serve under Rev. Brodahl's direction for the purpose of finding a suitable location for the church. The committee's decision is not stated in the minutes of the next meeting but what ever plan they presented was unanimously accepted at a meeting held at the Christen Vestrum home, January 10, 1858. The committee was successful in raising \$794 toward the purchase of a building. The subscription list is as follows:

Jacob H. Preus	\$30
Anders Anderson	25
Syver Syverson	25
Andreas Anderson Lie	25
Thomas Knudson Rust	15
Johannes Hohannessen Rust	15
Petter Harraldson Braka	15
Christen Vestrem	15
Arne Mikkelson Vasfared	20
Halvor H. Bakkene	15
Harald Mikkelson Vasfared	15
Guul Olson	10
Ole Olson Klefgaard	15
John Pederson Dybdahl	10
Jorben Guulson Haugen	20
Paul Sinningsrud	10
Skak Jenssen Skjaellestad	10
Anders Olson Nordhagen	15
Ole Andreas A. Steensrud	15
Gjermund Torgrimsen	10
Anders Arensen Stensrud	15
John Anderson	10
Ole Olson Thorsrud	15
Ole Olson Aamot	15
Berte Andersdatter Eid	10
Amos A. Eid	15
Erik E. Solvi	12
Lars Monson	10
Rasmus Solfestsen	5
Weilken Nees	10
Ole Arnesen Stli	15
Thorsten Anderson	25
Ole Olson Bjorge	20
Ole Knudson Syverud	15
Ole Jenson Frodvingen	5
John Hanson Grimsrud	10
Taral Pederson Gausdal	5
Syber Jermundson Ludulen	5

John Hanson Skjottveitt	5
Gunar Olson	10
Ole Arnesen Grotoden	12
Erik Knudson Saevre	20
Hans Arneson Thomtene	15
Ole Evenson Hagen	10
Ole Tolovsen Flashaugen	10
Mikkel Larson Tolebraaten	5
Ole Anderson Bakkene	10
Johanas Christiansen Sun	10
Arne Mikkelsen haugen	15
Erik Anderson Nybroten	10
Knud Olsen Moen	10
Jahannes Johannesen	10
Mikkel H. Blekkeli	10
Thron Knudsen Doken	5
Kulengen	5
Ole Olsen Brunsvold	12
Gulbrand Andreassen Bratlia	10
Knud Olson Fekjer	5
Anders Erikson Traeggebraaten	5
Knud Haraldson Brager	15
Halsten Norby	10
Ole H. Brager	10
Knud Olson Lahd (Gjesme)	10
TOTAL	\$794

With this money raised early in 1858, a schoolhouse was purchased at Black Earth. Sixty-three families had contributed money toward the purchase of the building which was to serve as the first Lutheran Church in Vermont.

Two schoolhouses had been built in Black Earth prior to the building of a brick schoolhouse in 1859, and it is one of these buildings which was acquired by Vermont. The earliest, built in 1845, was of logs; the one built in 1853, of frame construction. If the building purchased by Vermont is the same as was later used as the Helland School until 1912, it was the school house built in 1853 which was purchased by Vermont for a church. Reference has been made to "the old log church," however, evidence points to the fact that the "old church" was not of log construction, but a frame building.

Rev. Brodahl came from Perry on weekdays to hold services in Black Earth, apparently in the building purchased by the congregation. At a meeting of the congregation in Black Earth, January 25, 1860, it was decided to move the church building to "Rust."

Each farm in Norway had a name, permanently attached to it. The farmer who owned the property was referred to by the name of the farm. To some extent, the Norwegian immigrants applied this "farm name" principle after settling in America, by referring to the farm by the name of the owner — so it was that the

farm in section 12, Vermont Township, where the church was moved, was called "Rust." For \$75 and the help of each farmer with his team of oxen, Anders Anderson agreed to *flytte kirken* (move the church). Exactly how this was accomplished is not known, but it seems logical to believe that a group of Norwegians might well take advantage of the winter weather; wait until the ground was covered with a generous layer of snow; and utilize their knowledge of the effectiveness of skis under these conditions. (Dave Barber of Black Earth, told that he and a Heyden boy rode along as they moved the building.) One report states there were 20 teams of oxen used to accomplish this move, another states there were 22 oxen.

FIRST RESIDENT PASTOR IN VERMONT

Rev. P.A. Rasmussen, who was instrumental in the organization of the Vermont group, returned to Norway in the late 1850's for a visit as well as to induce pastors and lay preachers to come to the United States. He called on the Fjeld family in Valdres, and received the promise of John Nielsen Fjeld to come to America. The Fjelds arrived in America in 1860. Fjeld was ordained in Chicago in the fall of 1860 by Rev. A.C. Preus, President of the Norwegian Synod. A letter of call dated June 8, 1861, Black Earth, Wisconsin, was presented to Pastor Fjeld. It stated:

"We the undersigned do hereby request you to accept us as members of your congregation. We have previously been members of Brodahl's congregation, but with the expiration of the contract with him for the past 5 years, and this new call of Brodahl, declared that contract expired. (Brodahl asked to be retired from his service in Vermont.) We think we have full right for these reasons. First, the contract's time is expired. Second, the congregation of which we are members has never been an officially and properly organized congregation. We have not been informed of any *sognebaand* (obligation of the parishioners to avail themselves exclusively of the services of the local pastor), nor has the congregation's law (or *sognebaand*) been published or approved by the congregation while we were members of Brodahl's charge. We would like you to accept us as members of your congregation. That is our sincere wish."

Signed by: Syver Syverson, John Pederson Dybdahl, Haral Mikkelsen Vasfaret, Erik Erikson Solvi, Knud Haralson, Petter C. Paulsen, Guul Olson, Knud Olson Lad (Gjesme), Ole Haralson Brager, Ole Arnesen Stensrud, Ole Johnsen Bonlie.

Some rather prominent names are missing from the list of signers of this call to Rev. Fjeld. It is a logical possibility that there was some reluctance on the part of a few people to call a man who had been a lay preacher. One very prominent family withdrew from the congregation at this time but soon after Rev. Fjeld began serving the congregation, were "back in the fold."

REV. JOHN N. FJELD

John N. Fjeld was born October 18, 1818 to Nils Johnsen and Gunhild Kristoffersdatter in Valdres, Norway. The father was a farmer, very clever and alert, but not a practical man. The responsibility for keeping poverty from the door was left to the mother, a quiet and hard working woman. John inherited his father's keen mind, and his mother's diligence and patience to become a capable lay preacher as well as a leader in his community in Norway. He had several government positions there, including one on the school board and was an alternate to the legislative representative of his district.

At an early age he received the modest education offered in the community. It is told that he was sent to herd the animals on the farm during which time he read profusely and practiced preaching to the cattle, sheep and goats — certainly humble training for one who was to become the "shepherd" for the congregation in Vermont!

Fjeld was influenced by the Haugean movement sweeping Norway in the first half of the 19th century and went out as a lay preacher traveling widely in Norway. A new religious revival began in the 1840's, combining the pietism of Haugeanism and the orthodoxy of the Norwegian State Church. One of the most influential men in this movement in the 1850's was Gisle Johnson, a young member of the theological faculty at the University in Christiania (Oslo). Fjeld was a follower of Johnson, who recommended him for a pastor to emigrate with his family in order to serve his countrymen in America.

On a visit to Norway to encourage clergymen to go to America, Rev. P.A. Rasmussen called at the Fjeld home. At the urging of Rev. Rasmussen and the recommendation of Johnson, John N. Fjeld, his wife, Gunhild Torggrimsdatter Hesjebakken, and four children left Norway in 1860. He began serving Vermont in the fall of 1860 before he was officially called.

In addition to Vermont he served Primrose, York, Bear Creek (near Arena), Big Hollow (near Spring Green), Adams and the Hauge Church at Perry, the farthest congregation being 24 miles away, the records state.

The Fjeld's family bought a home in Vermont from Peter Brakka. The Espeseth's and Fjeld's lived together in the log house near the meadow east of the church hill. This house was affectionately referred to as "gamle stogo" (old hut). Later the Fjeld's built a house near the top of the hill just east of the site where the new church was to be built. Rev. Fjeld sold two parcels of land to the church for \$10. The smaller one for a church and the larger for a cemetery.

Two children were born to the Fjeld's in America and in 1877 Mrs. Fjeld died. In 1879, Rev. Fjeld married Ingebord Belgum with whom he had one or two children. The children of his first marriage were Sophia (Mrs. H.S. Holland), Torggrim, Nils, Christine (married Rev. Jorgensen), Hannah and Johan; his second marriage, a son, Richard.

The salary received by Rev. Fjeld was \$400 per year to be paid by Perry, York, Primrose, Dodgeville and Vermont on a proportionate basis. The share for Vermont's 28 participating farmers was \$2.67 per farmer. It might seem strange that only 28 farmers in Vermont contributed to the pastor's salary in 1861 when 63 farmers contributed to the securing of a church a few years earlier. This is an indication of the reluctance of some of the immigrants to support a clergyman who was not of the orthodox church of Norway, and who was not University educated. Judging from the long term of Fjeld's service in Vermont and the growth of the congregation during his time here, it is apparent that his diplomacy and dedicated ministry won the support of the vast majority if not all of the Norwegian settlers.

Rev. Fjeld served Vermont for about 23 years. He resigned in 1883 but continued to assist the new pastor periodically. He died March 12, 1888, at the age of 69 years.

CONTROVERSY IN THE 1860's

The decade of the 60's was a difficult one in the Norwegian settlements. Conflict brewed over lay preaching vs. strict orthodoxy, public school vs. parochial school, and the issue of slavery. Rev. Fjeld had joined the Norwegian Synod in 1862, but did not adhere to the attitude held by many of the synod leaders who believed that slavery was not in and of itself contrary to Biblical teachings. Fjeld believed that slavery

was a sin and was contrary to the teachings of the New Testament. His attitude reflected the thinking of most of the Norwegian immigrants.

The form of Lutheranism accepted by Rev. Fjeld was less somber than that of the old Haugeaners, but nevertheless, pietistic. Drinking, dancing, card playing, theater and some secular literature was not approved. That is not to say that people should not have fun and be happy. He was from the same district in Norway as most of his constituents, Valdres; he was of the rural class of people in Norway; and he was not of the intellectual elite, as were most of the clergymen of the Norwegian Synod. His maturity, patience, love and understanding are reflected in his faithful service to Vermont Lutheran Church. Through his guidance Vermont was spared much of the strife which plagued many congregations of the Norwegian immigrant church.

A NEW CHURCH IS BUILT

Norwegian immigration was steadily increasing into the 1860's and the congregation needed a larger place of worship. In 1861 it was decided to build a new church on top of the hill above the Fjeld home. To finance it a committee of over 30 men acted as assessors. The amount assessed each farmer was based on the number of "forties" he owned, the value of his land and also considered the amount of his debt. In 1861 the assessment was \$2 for each forty of land and 50¢ for each hundred dollars of value after deducting debts. Later, during the Civil War, the formula changed and \$300 was deducted from the value of property for each "drafted" man.

Construction went on for some years, the records show the following expenses:

- 1861 - \$299.50 cash was raised for lumber, shingles, nails and labor.
- 1862 - \$107.00 for windows, doors, paint and painter's wages, as well as Mikkel Blekkeli's wages as carpenter.
- 1863 - \$241.00 for 5000 feet of flooring, 2 stoves, and for 110 bricks for the chimneys.
- 1864 - \$157.40 for carpenters for interior work, nails, and to finish the stove foundation.

Five gallons of paint and ½ gallon of oil for that first church cost \$2.65, and the total bill was \$29.40 plus \$11.75 to the painter.

Church dues averaged about \$4.50 per member in those days and an additional \$8 to \$10 was



Despite the Civil War raging to the south the Vermont Congregation built this church from 1861 to 1864.

assessed annually when they built the first church. At a time when a man's wages were 50¢ per day, his contribution to the church was his total wages from several week's work.

According to the records of the congregation's treasurer, John Dybdahl, the new church cost \$802.90. Wages at the time the church was built were:

- one man-one day 50¢
- a man with team of oxen and wagon .. \$1.00
- a man with team of horses and wagon .. \$1.25
- one mason- one day75¢
- one carpenter-one day75¢

FUNERAL CUSTOMS

Mortuaries and funeral directors were unknown to the early settlers in Vermont. The responsibility for preparing the body of the deceased and providing a coffin rested with the

family. A coffin of ordinary lumber was constructed and painted black with *kjonrok* (lamp black). Looped pieces of rope formed handles along the sides of the coffin. The inside was lined with white muslin, also used to make a shroud for the body. The "hearse" was an ordinary farm wagon or sled.

Most often the deceased was buried by the family. If death was due to a highly contagious disease burial took place immediately to reduce the danger of exposure to the disease. Under ordinary circumstances the family and friends would gather for the burial and read appropriate Scripture passages and sing hymns such as "Lov og takk og evig aere" (Praise and thanks and eternal glory) or "Naar liv og aand..." (When our life and spirit depart). Singing at the open grave was often very weak due to the sorrow of the mourners but was a custom from the "Old Country" and continued to be a part of the burial service for many years in this country.

It is difficult to know exactly where the first settlers of Vermont were buried as the burial records for Vermont begin in 1883. It is known that a few may be buried in the first Springdale cemetery which was established in 1847 and continued to be used until 1863. Others were buried in the old cemetery located on the Urness farm, a short distance from the present Vermont church. A monument erected on the site in the 1940's bears the following names and dates: Miss Andrine Solve - born 1866, Mrs. Halvor Bakken, Mrs. Hans Tomptene, Mrs. Cecelia Hillestad, Miss Mattie Flashaugen, Mrs. Ole Flashaugen, Erik K. Severe, Halsten Gilbertsen - born 1812, Arne Steensrud - born 1799, Lars Monson "And Some Children." (Erik K. Severe was said to be the first Norwegian to come to Vermont.)

"Tombstones" as we know them, were rarely used except in the case of a very prominent person. Apparently none of the people buried in those early years was prominent enough to warrant the erection of a permanent marker in Vermont burial ground and time has erased any evidence of native stone or wooden markers.

Mikkel Blakkeliën, one of the early Norwegian farmers in Vermont, was also a carpenter and painter. He made grave markers from three inch planks of wood and painted appropriate inscriptions upon them. One of his favorites was, "Salig er den dode, som dode i Herren." (Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.)

At a time when it was more reasonable for the minister to come to the cemetery he would sprinkle dirt on the grave and conduct the proper committal service. When he visited a settlement he often had several committal services to conduct, in



The marker placed at the site of one of Vermont's early cemeteries. It's located northwest of the present cemetery on the Urness farm.

addition to baptisms, marriages and communion services.

In the early church records it is noted that the date of death and date of burial may be several months apart. If the death occurred in winter when the ground was frozen, the burial was delayed until a grave could be dug. Later on, when a minister was more readily available a short funeral service was held in the home where the body had been prepared and placed in the coffin for burial. The coffin was then taken to the church where the formal service was held followed by the burial. The deceased was often photographed in the coffin. Pictures were also taken of floral tributes arranged around a photograph of the person who had died.

An interesting note is found in the Vermont Church records regarding a funeral in 1899:

"Difficulties in the congregation from previous days, between the family and the congregation resulted in the refusal of the deceased's husband to pay his church dues for several years. Under the leadership of one of the members of the congregation a group of objectors were roused by this refusal, and succeeded in getting the trustees to agree to forbid the use of the church and the pastor and to refuse taking the corpse into the church, unless the widower would first pay his obligation to the church. Coming to the church, the pastor and mourners found it locked and the janitor refused to give the key to the pastor. When the minister went to the janitor's house to get the key, the janitor said, 'It is hanging there on the wall.' The minister took it, unlocked the church door and conducted the funeral as usual."

The organist had been contacted by one of the trustees and was told not to go to the church as they would not be having a service there. On the advice of her father the organist went to the church. The organist's father felt that this woman should not be deprived of a proper Christian funeral service.

A large meeting of the congregation was called to decide what punishment should be given the pastor for conducting the funeral when the trustees had ordered him otherwise. The result was that the objectors acknowledged their shameful deed in trying to prevent this family from using the church for the funeral.

Olaus P. Syftestad

by Ann Urness Gesme

Olaus Paulsen Syftestad, son of Paul and Gro Olsen Syftestad, was born in Perry Township, September 13, 1859. He attended Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, and Luther Seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. He was ordained in 1883, and married to Sarah (Siri) Ruste, August 4, 1883. August 26, the same year, a letter of call was issued to Rev. Syftestad by Vermont (as well as Springdale and E. Blue Mounds), which he accepted. The call committee for Vermont was Ole Gaarder, Peter C. Paulson, Arne Mikkelsen, and Ole Olson Thorsrud.

Rev. Syftestad and his 19 year old bride moved in to the newly acquired parsonage, and lived there until his death in 1890. Three children were born to them: Paul Gerhard, Ole, and Anna. Rev. Syftestad died of pneumonia, February 27, 1890,

at the age of 32. His 26 year old widow and three children moved to Madison, where the children received their education. The sons married, and the daughter became a teacher. Mrs. Syftestad (born April 3, 1864) died April 19, 1922, and is buried next to her husband in Mt. Horeb Cemetery. The daughter, Anna Emilie is also buried there.

Clara Field told in 1955 that Rev. Syftestad remarked to his wife, shortly before his death: "I forgot to say something in my sermon today. It was these words, 'Let us work while it is yet day, for the night cometh when no man can work.' " The closing hymn at the last service he conducted at Vermont was a farewell hymn. Shortly after this service he became ill and died.

Rev. Syftestad was a man of strong convictions and organizational ability. He was active in the temperance movement, and organized a temperance society in 1886. In addition to his regular congregations, he began serving a small group of Norwegian Lutherans at Black Earth. Many of them were members of Vermont Congregation but lived in town. When he learned that the leading personality of that group was a member of the Masonic Order he became reluctant to serve them so asked Rev. S. Gunderson, with whom he had attended the seminary in Madison, to take over the work in Black Earth. In his personal notes, Rev. Gunderson states: "Syftestad and I agreed on the Lodge question, but I did not have any scruples as to the fitness and worthiness of A.P. Winden to have charge of the modest religious work we were doing in Black Earth."

During Rev. Syftestad's term at Vermont (7 years), only 13 marriages were recorded and very few burials. It is noted in the record of baptism for that time, "many omissions."

INTERIM PASTOR

Following the death of Rev. Syftestad, Rev. Abraham Jacobson was called to fill the vacancy until another pastor's services could be obtained. Jacobson had served Perry congregation until 1878, when he retired and moved to his farm near Decorah, Iowa. He performed baptisms from April 12, 1890 to September 14, 1890. He performed one wedding in Vermont that year and conducted confirmation services there June 8, 1890.



The Rev. S. Gunderson family. Hector Gunderson who later became pastor at Vermont is the small child astride his father.

Rev. Severin Gunderson

by Ann Urness Gesme

Members of Vermont were familiar with the pastor serving the small group of Norwegians at Black Earth, and it was to him the call was sent after Rev. Syftestad's death. Severin Gunderson was born on the island, Braevik, seven miles north of Kalvaag in Sunnfjord, Norway, June 13, 1853. His parents were Gunner Hansen Vikane and Ingeliev Sandei. He was the youngest of several children who lived with their parents on a small plot of land which was located on the farm of his uncle. His father was a farmer, but also worked with the fishermen living on the island. On a fishing expedition the father was lost at sea.

Rev. Gunderson tells of his childhood in Norway in an article which appeared in the *Lutheran Almanac*, 1944. The article, "I Saw the March of Faith," was written by Gerald Giving as told by

Rev. Gunderson.

"We were five children who stood trembling as our uncle came to our island home and said to our widowed mother: 'I know the poverty in which you live and know the extreme hardship you are encountering in feeding your family so I will take one of your children and make a home for him with us to thus lighten your burden.'

"He pointed to me and said, 'I'll take that one.'

"Thus at the age of about four, I was taken out of the extreme poverty and hardship of our home and separated from the family. My father had perished at sea when I was less than four years of age. We knew what it was to fear the sea and the storms which raged around our island and along the Norwegian coast. I was only five when I left home to go with my uncle. I had already learned the great truths about God, for in our home there had always been fear and respect for the Almighty One, and for his creations, especially the stormy ocean."

Severin lived with his aunt and uncle for a while before he was adopted by a couple who had no children of their own. He became the foster child of Christoffer and Dorteia Dahl and lived at Kalvaag until he was a teenager. At that time he was taken in by a relative in Bergen who had a fishing supply store. Here young Gunderson worked as a *Lopegut* (errand boy) and did other chores while attending school. In his small attic room he read and studied in his spare time. He read profusely in Latin, Greek and German. He memorized several of Paul's Epistles in Norwegian. His remarkable abilities were brought to the attention of the Norwegian clergymen and teachers resulting in the granting of a scholarship to the Latin school to young Gunderson. Before he enrolled at the Latin school, Provost Lunde of Oslo advised him to go to America.

Rev. H.A. Stub, one of the pioneer pastors of the Norwegian Synod, visited Norway where he met one of Gunderson's teachers. As a result of the teacher's recommendation, Rev. Stub was able to arrange for Severin to come to America. Late in the summer of 1874 Severin Gunderson arrived in Decorah, Iowa where he attended his first church service in this country, and enrolled as a student at Luther College. Rev. Stub had arranged for Gunderson's college and seminary expenses to be paid by the Norwegian Synod, so when he had completed his course of study at Luther College, he went to the Lutheran Seminary in Madison, Wisconsin. Wives of the seminary professors looked after him when he lived in Madison. When he completed his studies at the Seminary, he was called to serve Bethel congregation, the congregation in which the faculty of Luther Seminary had membership, and where he was already very familiar. He was ordained in La Crosse, Wisconsin in 1882.

In addition to serving Bethel in Madison, he ministered to the congregations at Norway Grove and Sun Prairie (Burke). One of his duties during this time was to meet the Norwegian immigrants arriving by train in Madison. He is quoted from *The Lutheran Almanac*, 1944:

"I could always find them by sight and smell. Their blonde faces, rosy cheeks, and familiar native apparel guided me, and the gingering smell which they carried on person and baggage, contracted on the crowded, congested ships gave me the final evidence."

Rev. Gunderson was serving the small group of Norwegians in Black Earth in 1890 when Rev. Syftestad's death occurred, and Vermont was left without a pastor. Gunderson's excellent qualifications were known to the people of

Vermont, Springdale and East Blue Mounds. He accepted the call from the three congregations in 1890 at the age of 47 years—and continued to serve the parish until 1932, when at age 79, his son took over and Rev. S. Gunderson became Pastor Emeritus.

Vermont had withdrawn from the Norwegian Lutheran Synod in 1885 and joined the United Synod in 1890. Rev. Gunderson was a student at the seminary when the predestination controversy began, and was to be deeply involved in pondering this division issue for many years. He saw it not only as a divisive issue, but one which would have a positive effect—driving people to the scriptures to search out spiritual truths.

His long term at Vermont not only speaks well of him as a pastor, but gives evidence of the determined loyalty and faith of his constituents. He possessed that rare combination of sophisticated theological knowledge and a practical understanding of human nature, which was necessary to successfully lead the congregation.

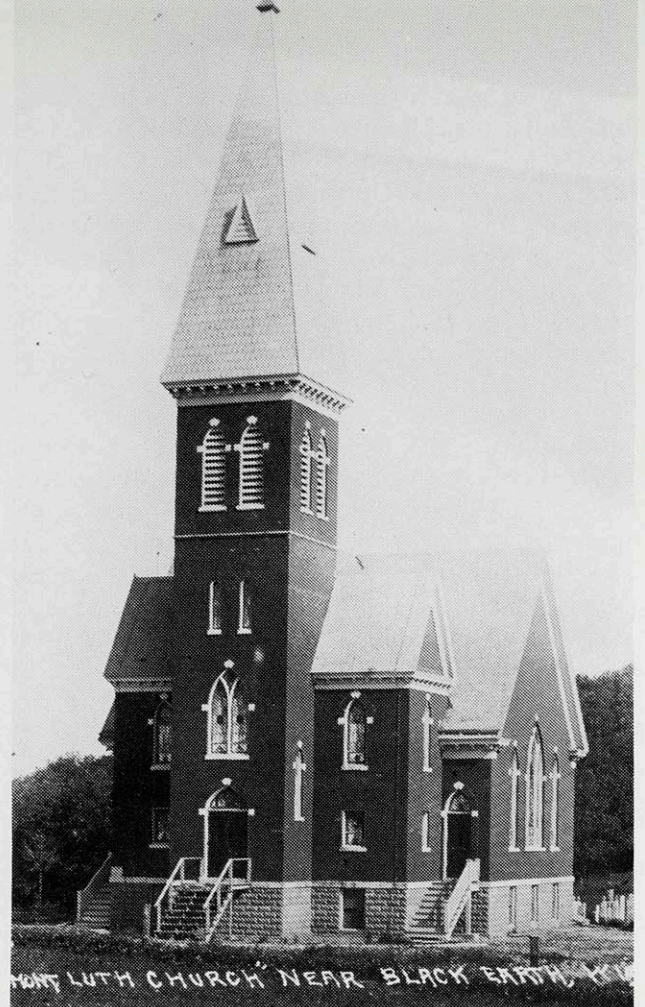
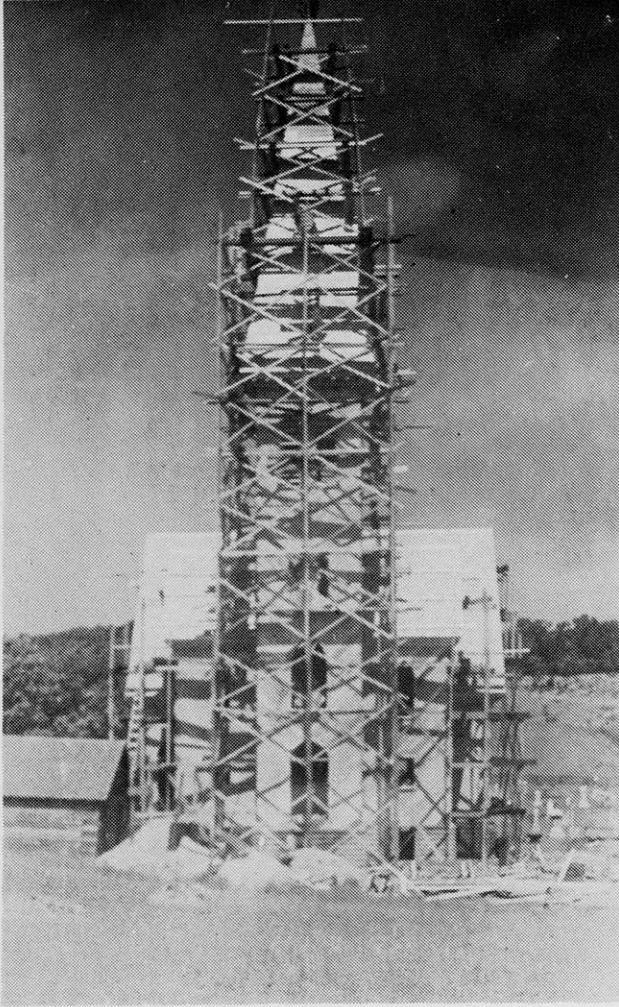
September 28, 1882, Severin Gunderson was married to Clara Antona Widsted, a native of Hammerfest, Norway. The Gundersons had eight children; Dorothea and Gerhard who both died in 1894, and three sons and three daughters who grew up. Gerhard and Hector became pastors, Sigurd was a teacher, Sophia married Rev. H.M. Mason, Valborg married Rev. J.M. Worth, and Dorothy married John Hook.

The Gundersons lived in the parsonage in Mt. Horeb which the parish had purchased in 1883. From here, "Rev. S." as he was affectionately called, traveled with his high spirited team of horses, Patti and Sleipner. Patti was named for Adelina Patti, one of the world's greatest operatic singers; Sleipner for Odin's horse of Norse mythology. On visits in the parish, he was often accompanied by his faithful Newfoundland dog, "Jacob Gunderson." When the dog died as a result of being beaten by hail during a severe hail storm, it was written up in the Mount Horeb newspaper.

In 1901 it was decided to build a larger parsonage. The old parsonage was moved to another location and a larger parsonage was built on the old site at a cost of \$2290. In 1955 the parish sold this house for \$15,000 and it is still standing (1981) at the corner of Highways 78 and 151 in Mount Horeb.

A NEW CHURCH IS BUILT

The Vermont Lutheran Church, built in the 1860's, became inadequate to accomodate the growing congregation. In 1908, a committee of



seven men was appointed to investigate the possibility for solving the problem. Martin Mickelson, Sever Lee, Albert Dybdahl, George Gulson, Carl Paulson, Ole Moen and Amos Thorsrud comprised the first committee. The committee "dragged their feet" and nothing was accomplished. Finally it was decided to build a new church adjacent to the burial grounds. Again there was a difference of opinion as to what sort of church edifice should be erected. The committee opted for a large, empty building but Rev. Gunderson was in favor of a more elaborate place of worship. At one of the committee meetings someone in anger said, "I make a motion we appoint Rev. Gunderson to be a committee of one to build a church." To this, Rev. Gunderson gave his conditional acceptance. He asked to appoint his own committee. Five years of debate and delay resulted in the appointment of the following committee to build the church: Rev. S. Gunderson, Chairman; Martin Mickelson, Sever T. Lee and E.O. Anderson, committee members.

Rev. Gunderson's keen architectural sense and experience in other congregations made him well

qualified to chair the building committee. He made plans, including calculating the number of bricks necessary to build the church. Several churches of his former parish were of brick construction and he chose that for Vermont. When the building was complete, a prankster placed a sign on the church door which read: "Vermont Lutheran Church. Built by Rev. S. Gunderson."

Rev. S. preached in Norwegian, exclusively, until about the turn of the century. At that time there was increasing interest in using the English language in church services. Rev. S. was a forward-looking man and felt strongly that worshippers in his congregations should understand the service. If he saw one single person in the congregation who did not understand Norwegian, he would use English in the services. The first evidence of anyone confirmed in English is in the church record of 1909 where it is noted that one confirmand was confirmed *paa engelsk* (in English). In the record of confirmation in 1910 it is noted following the confirmand's name: "Son of a Polakker, *laeste paa engelsk* (Son of a Polish person, read in English).

In the year the new church was built, 1913, five services were conducted in English, and in 1920, half of the services were in Norwegian, half in English. In 1926 the minutes of the annual meeting were first recorded in English, and by 1930, when Rev. Hector Gunderson came to Vermont, services were almost exclusively conducted in English, with the exception of a few occasions when Rev. S. conducted a special portion of the service in Norwegian.

After English was firmly established as the language of the congregation, it was necessary that the constitution be translated from Norwegian to English. The last tangible remnant of the congregations' ethnic origin was eliminated February 4, 1940, when at a special meeting of the congregation, the translated and revised constitution and bylaws of Vermont congregation were adopted.

DOUBLE ORDINATION

June 22, 1930, Rev. and Mrs. S. Gunderson's two sons, Hector D. and Gerhard M., were ordained at Vermont Lutheran Church by Dr. Aasgaard, President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. "Rev. Hector" was called by Vermont to be associate pastor in his father's parish, and Gerhard was to serve at Mizpah, Minnesota.

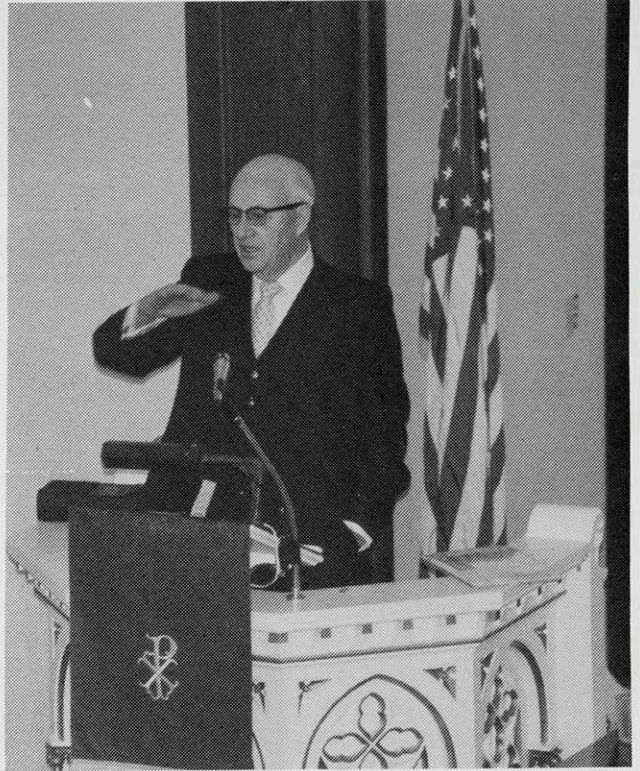
Mrs. S. Gunderson died in 1941 and Rev. S. continued to live in the parsonage with his son, Hector, and family. June 14, 1947 he died in the hospital at Eau Claire, Wisconsin at the age of 94 years. He is buried beside his wife, Clara, in the Mount Horeb Cemetery. At age 89, Rev. S. donated the greatest portion of his library to St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. It consisted of 2000 books weighing 3 tons.

REV. HECTOR D. GUNDERSON

The youngest son of Severin and Clara Gunderson was born in Mount Horeb, June 8, 1903. He graduated from high school in Mount Horeb and attended St. Olaf College, graduating in 1925. For two terms he taught English and Speech and was Dean of Men at Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa. He enrolled at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, from which he graduated in 1930. On June 23, 1930, he married Anne Strandness at Springdale Lutheran Church. Four children were born to them; Helen (Mrs. James Durkopp), Dr. Finn Gunderson, Mrs. Kristine Adamian, and Valla (Mrs. Robert C. Fisher). Ann Gunderson, Hector's wife, died in 1964 and is buried in the cemetery at Mount Horeb.

After serving Vermont for 24 years, Rev. H. Gunderson resigned from his position in the

parish. He and his father had served Vermont for a total of 64 years. Upon his resignation, Rev. H. Gunderson was called by the Mission Board to establish a new congregation at Lake Edge in Madison, Wisconsin. He served this congregation for ten years, after which he served Burke Lutheran until his retirement in 1973. He presently lives in Sun Prairie.



Rev. Hector Gunderson preaching during Vermont's 125th Anniversary celebration in 1981.



Rev. Oliver Solberg Family in 1980. Jeffery Morgan (son-in-law), Sharon, Pastor Solberg, Viola, Steven, Susan, Rod Resheske (son-in-law) and Sandra.

Solberg Sends Greeting

When looking back on my 30 years of ministry, I must give praise and glory to God for the privilege of working in His Kingdom. The Lord has blessed me with wonderful family, friends, and congregational members who have faithfully worked in the building up of the body of Christ. My walk with the Lord has brought me to serve in Crystal Lake, Iowa; Mt. Horeb, LaCrosse, Racine, and Mondovi, Wisconsin. My years serving the Mt. Horeb area bring many wonderful memories. Vermont, being a part of those memories, has a special place in my life. I was able to share many of your joys and sorrows. Your fellowship exemplified the spiritual unity that we have as the family of God. My heart flows with gratitude to our Lord Jesus Christ for the opportunity to minister in your midst.

Along with the parish ministry, I have served as Chaplain for the Civil Air Patrol in LaCrosse, St. Luke's Hospital in Racine, and the American Lutheran Home in Mondovi. I have also served as a Counselor for the Family Court Services in Racine and as a member and Chairman of the Board at Lutherdale Bible Camp.

Since leaving Vermont, our family has matured in many ways. Vi has served as a social worker at the Lincoln Lutheran Complex for the Elderly in Racine and is presently at the American Lutheran Home in Modovi. Our oldest daughter, Sharon, is married to Jeffrey Morgan.

They live in Appleton, Wisconsin where Sharon is an obstetrical nurse and Jeff is in music merchandising. They have a 1½ year old daughter by the name of Heather Ingrid who has brought great joy to the family. Sandra is a vocal music specialist who has recently completed her M.A. degree in Pastoral Theology and Ministry from Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul. Our youngest daughter, Susan, is married to Rod Resheske. He is preparing for the ministry and is presently on internship in Medford, Oregon. Susan is a medical secretary. Since our stay at Vermont, the Lord has blessed us with a young man by the name of Steve. He is a student at Augsburg College in Minneapolis where he is majoring in math and physics with dreams of space travel.

Our family extends congratulations and God's richest blessings upon Vermont Lutheran as you celebrate your 125th Anniversary in His Ministry.



Rev. T.N. Borgen and his wife Mary Lou.

Borgen Offers Message

"Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." (Psalm 90:1-2) This prayer of Moses surely must be ours at Vermont Lutheran Church, especially as we celebrate 125 years of being a congregation.

There is a warm spirit of fellowship among us. We are glad to celebrate. To celebrate is to express gratitude for the past and hope for the future. And while we are saying "Thank you for yesterday," things are happening which are a joy today and will be a blessing tomorrow.

It is a particular blessing for me to be a part of the history of Vermont congregation. It is exhilarating, and at the same time humbling, to be counted among the people by whom God has maintained the life of Vermont congregation. I think of the times I have had the privilege to share tears of laughter and tears of sorrow. It is a proper mixture of that kind to tears with which the cement of a congregation's life is set. What an awesome privilege it is to pour the water of your baptism, to hear your vows of confirmation and marriage, to be the voice which speaks the words of God's comfort when you are grieving, and to proclaim the wonderful love and mercy of God in Word and Sacrament. That is what makes 125 years a time to celebrate. Through Word and Sacrament God has kept us together as a little family in His great Kingdom.

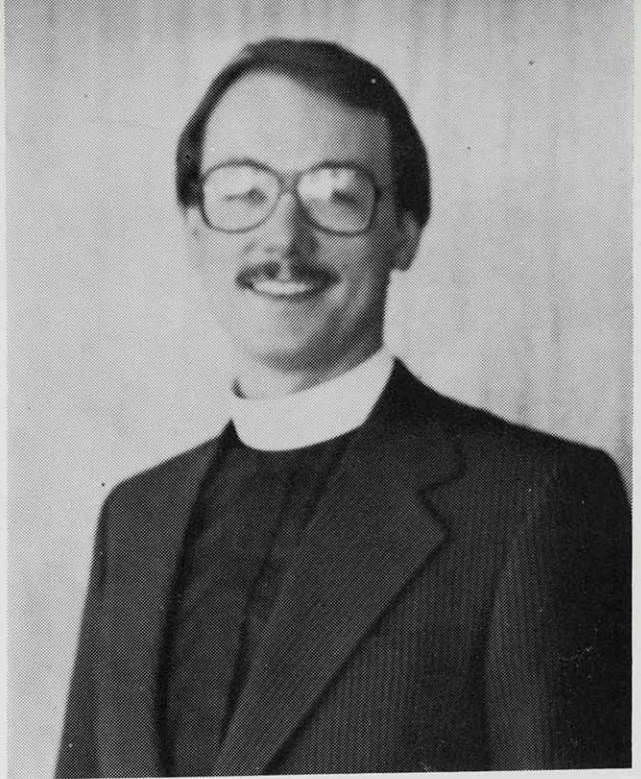
With confidence in the True God we celebrate His great works among us, and commit ourselves anew to Him.

To The Glory of God
T.N. Borgen, Jr. — Pastor

Internship Program by Virginia Johnson

At a special meeting held after services on February 27, 1977 the members of Vermont voted 51 to 28 to take part in the Rural Internship Program. The proposal also passed at our sister congregation Our Saviors, in Black Earth. The program covered a period of three years and involved three interns.

Our first intern, Todd Bell and his bride Jane, came to us on August 17, 1977. Todd had completed two years at Wartburg Seminary. His internship was terminated shortly after he completed his first semester about the middle



Todd Bell, intern 1977-78.

of March, 1978. He and his wife are presently residing in Madison where he is employed by an investment firm.



Ruth Hanson, intern 1978-79.

Our second intern, Ruth Hanson, had also completed two years at Wartburg Seminary. She arrived on September 13, 1978. She completed her internship in the year that followed and returned to Wartburg to complete her studies. She has since been ordained and is serving a parish in Nauvoo, Illinois.



Joyce Guldager, intern 1980.

Our third and final intern, Joyce Guldager, came to us with many years of experience as a public school teacher and parish worker. She had completed five semesters at Wartburg Seminary. She arrived on February 1, 1980 and was with us for one year. She then returned to Wartburg and finished her remaining semester. She graduated May 17, 1981 and is presently awaiting a call.

The cost of the internship program was \$9000 per year and was paid in the following manner: first year-United Mission Appeal \$6000, Our Saviors-Vermont parish, \$3000. Second year-\$4500 each. Third year-Our Saviors-Vermont parish, \$6000, United Mission Appeal, \$3000.

An internship committee was formed at the onset of the program. Vermont members who served were: Philip Skalet and Donald Schultz, 3 years each; Verginia Johnson, 2 years; and Selma Lee, 1 year. It was felt that the program was a good experience for all concerned.