

#5
HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS by Orlynn Mankell

Hard Times and Good Times

In the summer of 1885 the First Lutheran Congregation was finding itself in a precarious position--to say the very least. Without a church home these staunch supporters of the Norwegian Synod had been meeting in homes and from Sunday to Sunday wondering who would serve them. Rev. Markhus had died a few weeks before and there were observations that the "minority" (forerunner of First Lutheran) would simply now wither away.

This struggling congregation was then to make a couple of critical decisions and no one could have visualized their importance at the time. One was the decision to build a church of their own which was completed in 1891. From the record: "On Oct. 23, 1892 the cornerstone was laid with appropriate festivities." The congregation had been served by Rev. Johannes Halvorson who left in 1890.

During its almost 100 year existence First Lutheran was soon to make its most important and critical decision--but certainly no one realized it at the time. They extended a letter of call to Rev. D.C. Jordahl.

Rev. Jordahl would later be recognized as one of the true giants of the old Norwegian Synod and as he appeared at First Lutheran for the first time in May 1892, he seemed destined for both time and place. Not only was he a powerful preacher, he was also a dynamic leader and it was he who molded First Lutheran into a strong and large congregation and one, the synod leaders had to agree might now be around for a while. First Lutheran had come into its own. Good fortune was then again to look favorably on First Lutheran but in a different way.

Feb. 23, 1902 Gulbrand Nelson had died. And it was general agreement among his peers that he would be missed as Gulbrand was a just and good man. It would turn out that Gulbrand was not only a just and good man but also a man of means. Being a bachelor, his will specified that First Lutheran would be the sole beneficiary of his estate. It was something totally unexpected. A couple of pressing bills were paid and the balance applied towards debt retirement from the new church. The church council appropriated a sum of money for a cemetery marker for their

benefactor. Providence had again been looking favorably on First Lutheran.

Every Hundred Years or so

A congregation seems to build a new church building about every hundred years, and at First Lutheran the interval comes out to 93 years. Probably the biggest day ever to occur at First Lutheran was that long ago day of July 11, 1897 when the new church was dedicated and with much ceremony and fanfare. The crowd was estimated at 1200 to 1500 on this gala afternoon with six pastors present to keep the festivities going. And no one has explained why the long five year interval following the cornerstone ceremony of Oct. 1892 until this big day in the summer of '97.

After almost a century there will soon be another dedication Sunday. A few years from now someone will probably look back on it and describe it as a "Big Afternoon". And projecting ourselves into the year 2084, a century from now, we can easily see someone making an assessment of the Norway Lake Church scene and coming up with that same description which has been around for the last 120 years: "There was talk of building a church."

=====

We are now completing plans for the special Service of Dedication scheduled for 1:30 pm on Sunday, September 30. Rev. Joel Njus has agreed to be our afternoon preacher and several former pastors, including Revs. Bjorkland, Burke, Lillejord and perhaps others, as well as a son of the congregation, Rev. Lyle Peterson will be present. A joyful, celebrative service with hymns of praise and special music is being prepared. Following the service, a reception will be held in the Fellowship Hall.

=====

A special Time Capsule will also be sealed on this day. Members of the congregation are invited to bring family photos, records and histories to be included in the capsule. In addition, church records, accounts, photos and other community memorabilia will be placed in the Time Capsule. The capsule will be sealed and will not be opened again for 100 years.

Materials can be brought to the church office between now and Sept. 30. Please identify photos on the back.