



"WE are the end-product of our history."

# FLASHBACKS



Revealing glimpses of our creative past

*Official newsletter of the*

**UNITED METHODIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN**

Vol. 16 No. 2

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## 1989 FALL PILGRIMAGE TO BE HELD AT OLDEST SCANDINAVIAN CHURCH IN THE WORLD

The 1989 Fall Pilgrimage of the Wisconsin United Methodist Historical Society will be held on Saturday, Oct. 7, at the Willerup Memorial United Methodist Church, located at 414 Water Street, Cambridge, WI 53523.

Named for its founder and builder, Christian Willerup, the old stone church, which dates from 1852, is the oldest Scandinavian Methodist Church building in the world.

The Pilgrimage will begin at 12 o'clock noon with a Scandinavian dinner featuring Swedish meatballs and Norwegian crumcake. A short business meeting of the Historical Society will follow the meal.

Host Pastor Thomas Morgan will lead a worship service of Norwegian hymns and special Scandinavian music at 1:30 p.m. The program will consist of an account of the early Norwegian Methodist missionaries and the Willerup church, featuring a slide program, "Christian Willerup and the Cambridge Church." Historical objects will be on display.

Everyone interested is invited to attend. Send reservations for the \$ 5 dinner to Willerup Memorial UMC, P.O. Drawer K, 414 Water Street, Cambridge, WI 53523 .

## NEENAH FAITH UMC OFFERS TO SHARE HISTORICAL RECORDS BACK TO 1861

Faith United Methodist Church, 1025 Tullar Road, Neenah, has set up a system of historical records which it will share with other churches or Historical Societies in Wisconsin to view at their convenience.

Emily Hole, Historical Committee Chairman, said that records consist of births, baptisms, marriages and deaths, dating back to 1861.

Contact Emily or call the church office (414) 722-5842.

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO MEET FRIDAY DURING ANNUAL CONFERENCE SESSION

The 1989 annual meeting of the Wisconsin United Methodist Historical Society will be held on Friday, June 2, at 5:30 p.m. at the Wisconsin Annual Conference, Stevens Point

It will be a dinner meeting in the downstairs meeting room of Debot Center dining hall. Those who attend are asked to use Express Lane #6.

The program, "They Went Forth Not Knowing," will follow a short business meeting.

The Rev. Lowell Messerschmidt will describe the life of his aunt, Susan Bauernfeind, an early conference missionary to Japan from Minnesota, whom he knew as a child.

Miss Bauernfeind went to Tokyo as a young woman when the city streets were unpaved, and lived there through the war years and post-war era. Pastor Messerschmidt has made five trips to Japan to research a book he wrote about the missionary experiences of his aunt.

## CHURCH HISTORIAN ARLINE WALDINGER NOTES 125th YEAR FOR DENZER UMC

The Denzer United Methodist Church will observe the 125th year of its founding in 1989.

"The present building was built in 1883," said Arline Waldinger, Denzer church historian. "During its first 19 years, the congregation worshipped in a log building."

Details of the observance will appear in a later issue.



WILLERUP CHURCH EVOKES STORY BEHIND HISTORY OF NORWEGIAN-DANISH CONFERENCE  
by the Rev. Lourinda R. Sanford

An interesting story behind the history of the Norwegian-Danish Conference provides the background of the Willerup United Methodist Church in Cambridge, site of the 1989 Fall Pilgrimage of the United Methodist Historical Society of Wisconsin.

In the mid-19th century, many Scandinavian immigrants turned to Methodism as they pioneered across the continent. At first, the American Methodist Board of Missions sent Scandinavian-speaking ministers as missionaries to the Midwest where there were many pockets of Scandinavian settlers, but soon there were requests for such missionaries from as far west as Mormon Utah and California.

Surprisingly, these very Norwegian-Danish missionaries were sent back to their native lands to introduce the religion of John Wesley to their compatriots.

Christian Willerup, a native of Denmark, sailed to America as a teenager. He was converted to Methodism in Savannah, Georgia. In 1850, he was ordained on the Bethel Ship, which was a seaman's floating chapel berthed in the midst of Scandinavian shipping in the port of New York. At the service, he met a young sailor, Ole Peter Petersen, "O. P.," a native of Norway who was returning to America from Norway with his bride. The two men became life-long friends. (Arlo Andersen, Salt of the Earth, 41, 53)

Immediately after his ordination, Willerup was sent as the first missionary to the newly-organized Norwegian-Danish mission in Cambridge, Wisconsin, where he organized a 52-member congregation. One year later, on July 21, 1852, he dedicated their new stone church--the first Scandinavian Methodist church building in the world and site of the 1989 Pilgrimage.

By this time, O. P. Petersen had become a local preacher and had been sent as missionary to Washington Prairie, Iowa, 200 miles west of Cambridge. Willerup urged Petersen to come to preach at the dedication, but Petersen could not come at that time. He did come, however, in April of 1853, for a preaching mission in the new church. (The summer before, Willerup had gone out to Iowa to hold meetings for Petersen.)

On July 4, 1853, the Petersen family left Washington Prairie, Iowa; Petersen had been appointed Methodist missionary to Norway, where he organized the first Methodist congregation in that country.

Five years later, Willerup was appointed missionary to Copenhagen, Denmark; he established the first Methodist Society in Denmark.

In 1880, the Norwegians requested a separate conference which was established. Four years later, the name became the Norwegian-Danish Conference. It would last until 1943 when it merged with other American Methodist conferences. The first and last meetings of that conference were held in Racine at the Trinity Norwegian-Danish Methodist Church.



WISCONSIN CONFERENCE  
COMMISSION ON ARCHIVES & HISTORY  
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

ARCHIVIST MARY SCHROEDER SHARES EXERPTS FROM JOURNAL OF MICHAEL BENSON

The following excerpts from the 100-year old journal of the Rev. Michael Benson, West Wisconsin Methodist Episcopal Conference, 1876-1919, appears here through the efforts of Mary Schroeder, archivist, and Pastor David Harsh, who obtained a copy of the journal from relatives of Benson, who are members of the Chippewa Falls Trinity United Methodist Church.

From the journal of Michael Benson (1832-1919), West Wisconsin Conference  
Webster, Maine (visiting), May 30, 1865

The day before yesterday Mrs. Benson, Mrs. Bryant (sister in law) and myself went to Monmouth to visit Mr. Maycombers. Found them very pleasant. That part of state seems good. The people are in good circumstances. We remained all night. Next morning it was raining, so we stayed with them until 6 p.m. last night. The strong feature of this country is industry. In fact, the people must be diligent or starve. To gain the same products requires twice the labor that it would in the west. Saw a good farm which was gained by a miser for a bushel of barley. Davis, the miser, sold the man one bushel of barley on credit. The man failed or neglected to pay year after year. Davis added interest to interest. Then charged for every time spent in calling for his money until he accumulated quite a sum. Then took mortgage. Then the farm. He died last month, and I suppose he went to Hell."

Ingersoll, Canada, February 13, 1866

Last evening held a celebration of the Centenary of American Methodism in the M. E. Church, Ingersoll. Went to great care in giving much publicity to it. Succeeded in getting a crowd. Had excellent speeches and music. Everything seemed a brilliant success until we came to the offerings. The whole crowd of over 300 gave less than \$ 50. These people have the smallest hearts in these matters I ever saw. Their gratitude for Methodism could swell out but the pittance of less than \$ 50. The Lord enlarge their hearts. With such small hearts, they ought not to be Methodists. A kind people in all else but money. I long for the freedom from such one cent concerns. Have four meetings still on the circuit.

St. Mary's, Canada, March 14, 1866

Spent the last two days attending celebration of Centenary of American Methodism. The M. E. Church in St. Mary's is in a poor state. In speaking upon the history of Methodism in America, I received great attention. The mass of inhabitants are ignorant of the great achievements of Methodism under God.

Strathroy, Canada, April 27, 1876

Home today from Conference. It closed yesterday. Long and tedious sessions. No great unpleasantness. This closes my 21st year in the Conf. Never lost a month in whole time. But now close my connection with Conf. Sad work for me to take leave. I have learned to love the brethren. They are noble band of Christian workers. Sorry my circumstances compel me to move. Must go where I can secure a large salary to meet the demands of my family. I feel sad that Conf. closed and I have no appointment. I trust my labors in past are not lost. The Lord guide me in the future.

(continued on Page 5)

## Retired Swedish Methodist Pastor

### MARINETTE EAGLE-STAR HIRES 'COMMUNITY TREASURE' AS RELIGION WRITER

Rev. Axel Pearson, 105-year old stalwart of the former Swedish Methodist Conference, writes a regular religion column for The Marinette Eagle-Star, using his gnarled right index finger to type his articles on a portable typewriter which rests on top of his bed at Luther Home.

"Pearson is kind of a community treasure," said Editor Pat Kehoe. "We knew his work would be valued.

"A late bloomer who launched his newspaper career at age 99, Pearson has amassed a large, faithful following," according to an article by Peter Maller published on Dec. 19 in the Milwaukee Sentinel.

Pearson's thoughts on life and theology, 300-400 word articles, are published on Fridays.

A recent column read, "Have faith in yourself, and in the value of your own existence. One of the deadliest things that can enter the mind is the feeling of uselessness and the futility of it all...It is far more wholesome to believe that we are here for a high and noble purpose."

Pearson was raised in a poor family in Sweden and quit school at 12 to deliver newspapers, it was noted in the Sentinel article.

At 18, Pearson immigrated to the United States with \$ 18 in his pocket and got a job as a laborer, working on streetcar roadbeds in Chicago. He later quit to attend a seminary and was ordained in 1909.

"I heard him lecture in Chicago many years ago," said Conference Historian Arlow Andersen. "He was undoubtedly unique, with a fine delivery, excellent sense of humor, and a character and personality beyond reproach. For many years, he held the position of the Swedish-American pastor in Moline (IL), a strong Swedish center."

"His body is failing  
but he's got a real  
great thinker!"--Kehoe

### CAN YOU LOCATE MISSING MATERIALS FROM NORWEGIAN-DANISH CONNECTION?

Dr. Arlow W. Andersen, who traces his spiritual heritage to the former Norwegian-Danish Conference, noted from Racine Trinity Church yearbooks that 251 Norwegian or Danish pastors served in Wisconsin for at least one year. About 230 of those were of Norwegian ancestry.

Dr. Andersen asks that missing materials from the former Norwegian-Danish connection be located, identified, and processed. Such data may be anniversary programs, quarterly conference records, membership rolls, organizational records, biographical sketches, diaries, newspaper clipping perhaps tucked away in an attic, a basement closet, a seldom opened drawer or a shelf within the pulpit.

Documents may be sent to either Wisconsin Conference Archives, Sun Prairie, or to Kevin Leonard, Archivist, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2121 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60201.

### CONFERENCE HISTORIAN URGES RECORDS BE SENT TO CONFERENCE ARCHIVES

Dr. Arlow W. Andersen, conference historian, urges local churches to send their church records, now or eventually, to conference archivist Mary Schroeder, United Methodist Center, Suite 302, 750 Windsor Street, Sun Prairie, WI 53590. Phone Mary at (608) 837-7320, Ext. 43, on Monday, Tuesday or Thursday mornings between 8 a.m. and noon.

"This is especially vital in the case of churches no longer active," said Andersen, "whether because of population shifts or the convenience of transportation to a larger city church."

## Dorothy Brice Studies Family History



### NEWLY-ELECTED RECORDING SECRETARY PUBLISHES HISTORY OF CHURCHES

Dorothy Brice, Richland Center, newly elected recording secretary of the United Methodist Historical Society of Wisconsin, is a published writer of the histories of several Wisconsin churches.

"I have always been interested in history," Dorothy recalled. "When I returned to Wisconsin State University after our sons were in school, I was required to take three history courses to complete my Bachelor of Science degree in Education. I became fascinated with my history courses in Modern, Medieval, American and Wisconsin history. While studying Wisconsin history, I wrote an extensive history of Elk Mound and the surrounding area, including the churches in that area."

"After my husband and I retired, he from our ministry at Peace Church here in Richland Center and I from public school teaching," she continued, "I wrote the history of our Peace Church where we had served for the past 12 years. This book was published and many copies sold. It more than paid for itself, so now a copy is given to each new family or member who joins Peace Church."

Dorothy served on the Wisconsin United Methodist Society for a number of years while still EUB, then served for two years as chairperson. She gave a report at annual conference the year when Bishop Marjorie Matthews first presided.

She was asked to give a brief history of the United Brethren and the Evangelicals at one of the fall meetings a few years ago, and has pursued the family history of her paternal parents and visited Germany where they originated. She is now working on a history of her husband, Kenneth's, paternal parents who originated in England. Brices expect to visit that area in June.

(Michael Benson Journal continued)

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**Oregon, Wisconsin, May 20, 1876**

I came to this state (Wisconsin) the first of the month.

**Oregon, Wisconsin, July 9, 1876**

Some fool thought I had plenty of money (for no wise man would expect to find a minister with any money) and came into my sleeping room last night and took my watch and the money that was in my pants pocket. He did it nicely. Gave no disturbance. But how he passed so close to me as he did I cannot tell. By my feelings in the morning, I judged he gave me some stupefying drug. I don't mind the loss so much as the unpleasant fact of having a man moving around in my sleeping apartments while I am sleeping. Men have science in evil as well as good works. No stupid jack did it. Find no track of him since.

**Oregon, Wisconsin, July 31, 1876**

Returned from Lodi where I have been preaching for two Sabbaths and must be for another. Some three weeks since the burglar took my watch and money and I can find no clue to him. The last week a number of friends called and gave me a purse to purchase another watch. I made the purchase. It is pleasant to have kind friends. Somehow I always find kindness. I trust my living among this people may be made a blessing to them. O that all of them may seek the Lord.



address correction requested

The United Methodist Church  
Wisconsin Annual Conference  
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Mrs. Ferne E. Hoeft, editor  
P. O. Box 1126  
121 W. Division Street,  
Wautoma, WI 54982

(Phone 414-787-7616)

Material of historical interest, church  
anniversaries, recollections, activities of  
local historical committees and historians,  
should be sent to her at the above address.

## OFFICERS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Linn C. Emerick, treasurer  
Ferne E. Hoeft, Flashbacks editor  
Lois C. Olsen, membership secretary  
and Executive Committee treasurer  
P. O. Box 10326  
Milwaukee, WI 53210  
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