

Winnebago Lutheran Church, rural Lake Mills, IA

It was in 1865 that six people in the area gathered to organize a congregation. They were Herjus Gansei, Marie Tallakson-Kleven, Even J. Sonderland, Halvor J. Sonderland, Sigrid Halvorson-Sonderland and Torjus Tollefson. The two women were certainly ahead of their times, being involved in organization efforts, were they not? As was said earlier, the congregation had met in schoolhouses and homes, and it wasn't until 1871 when Pastor Dahl was called to be their first resident pastor. By the spring of 1875, the need was seen to erect a church. Pastor Dahl worked hard to raise the \$5,000 to build a church. Listen to the pastor's efforts:

“It was no pleasure trip the pastor had undertaken! From house to house he went, from man to man—figuring, arguing, yes, even begging. There was no compromise; either they raised the full sum required or the church would not be built. No one was to be taxed for more than was right and reasonable for his share.

If some were unable to give their share in cash, they were asked to work out their "subscription.” Two men worked out their share by laying the stone foundation. Some young boys worked for the pastor, thus fulfilling their share.

It happened at times that the pastor came home after a long day of discussion and argument, tired and hungry, silent and depressed. Most of those on whom he called were courteous and well-intentioned, ready to give their share. But at some homes he met with cold and abusive language. They dared to hint that it was easy for the pastor to pledge \$200, he who had a good salary, plus offerings and other income. That was certainly not their situation! This wounded the pastor deeply because he was a sensitive man.



• Many members of nearly every family in this book have been baptized, confirmed, married, and buried at Winnebago Lutheran Church in rural Lake Mills, IA. This building was built to replace the first church building which was destroyed by lightning and fire in 1887.

To roam from farm-to-farm day after day, in all sorts of weather and road conditions, throughout the widely scattered congregation, was in itself a wearisome task. Yet he did it gladly. But to be met with such unwillingness and abuse from the very people for whose eternal welfare he worked, this was the heaviest and harshest burden! But the next -morning he was off again, continuing through the spring and summer

By fall Pastor Dahl was in better spirits than in a long time. He felt that the result of his labor was not so bad. A year later the church stood ready for worship and it was paid for. A number of farmers had mortgaged their farms to



• This is the interior view of Winnebago Church, typical of the United Church, which was midway in theology between the higher church style of the Norwegian Synod and the starkness of the pietist Hauge Synod..

help build the church, some giving more than they had originally paid for their farms, taking them years to pay off their mortgages.

In September 1888 lightning struck the church which burned to the ground. Pastor Dahl was on a trip to Norway at the time, so once again pledges were taken and reconstruction begun. This time the church cost \$7200 to erect and is the present sanctuary. Pastor Dahl was interested in higher education and helped organize Waldorf College at Forest City. He gave a 600-acre farm that he owned to the college. He was on the Board of Regents at St.

Olaf College and on the building committee at the time when Ytterboe Hall was built. Pastor Dahl died in 1906.



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