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Mary K. Fredericksen, Editor

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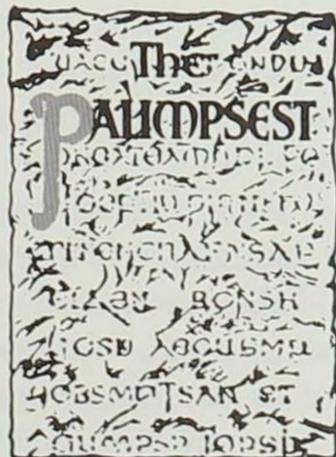
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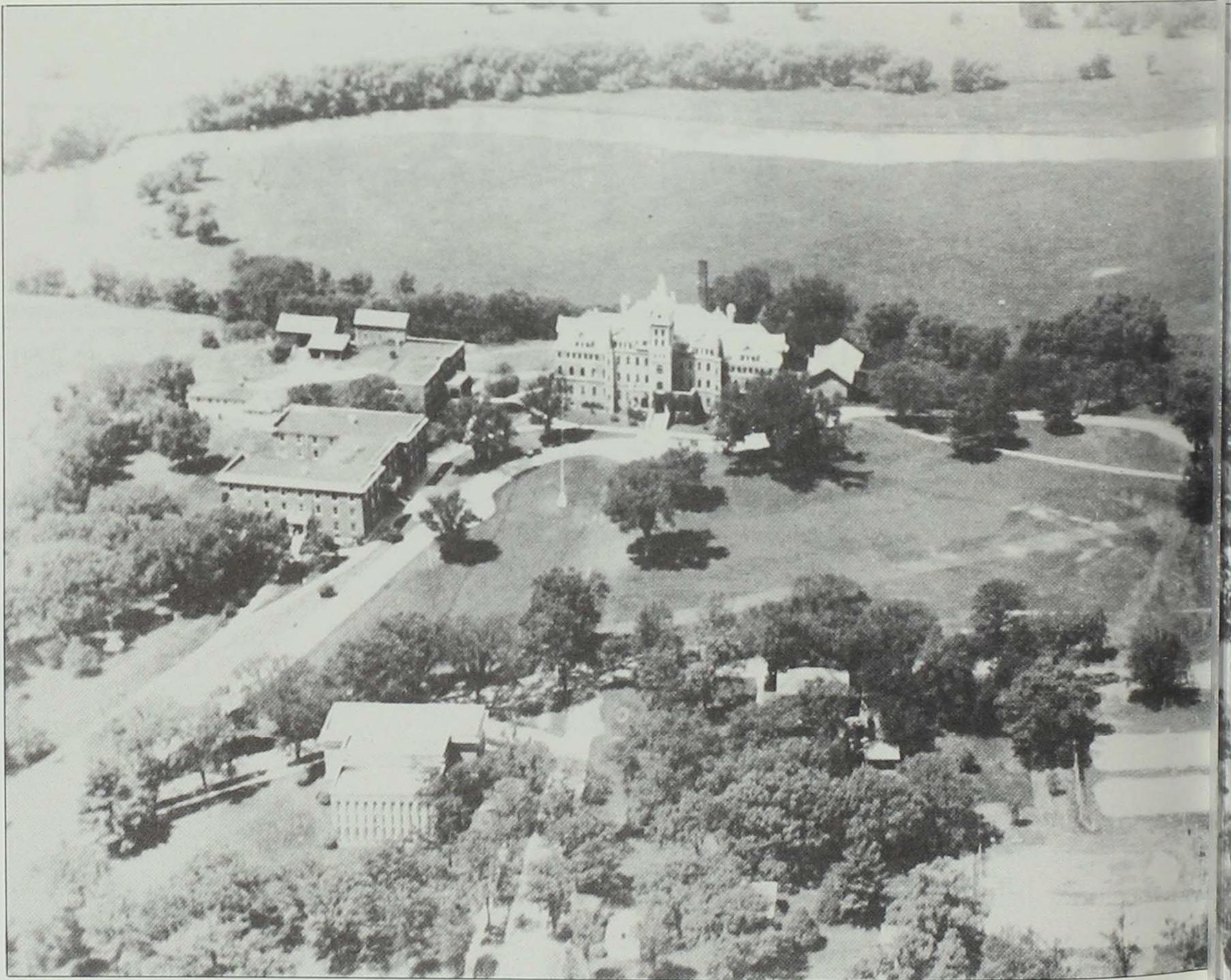
Cover: Decorah, Iowa, as it appeared in the *Andreas Atlas* of 1875. The picture "from bluff over the ice cave" shows clearly the extent of the Upper Iowa River valley over which the Luther College campus looked, as it does now. In this issue of the *Palimpsest*, various portions of Luther College's past are described as the college celebrates its 125th anniversary this year. (SHSI)



The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

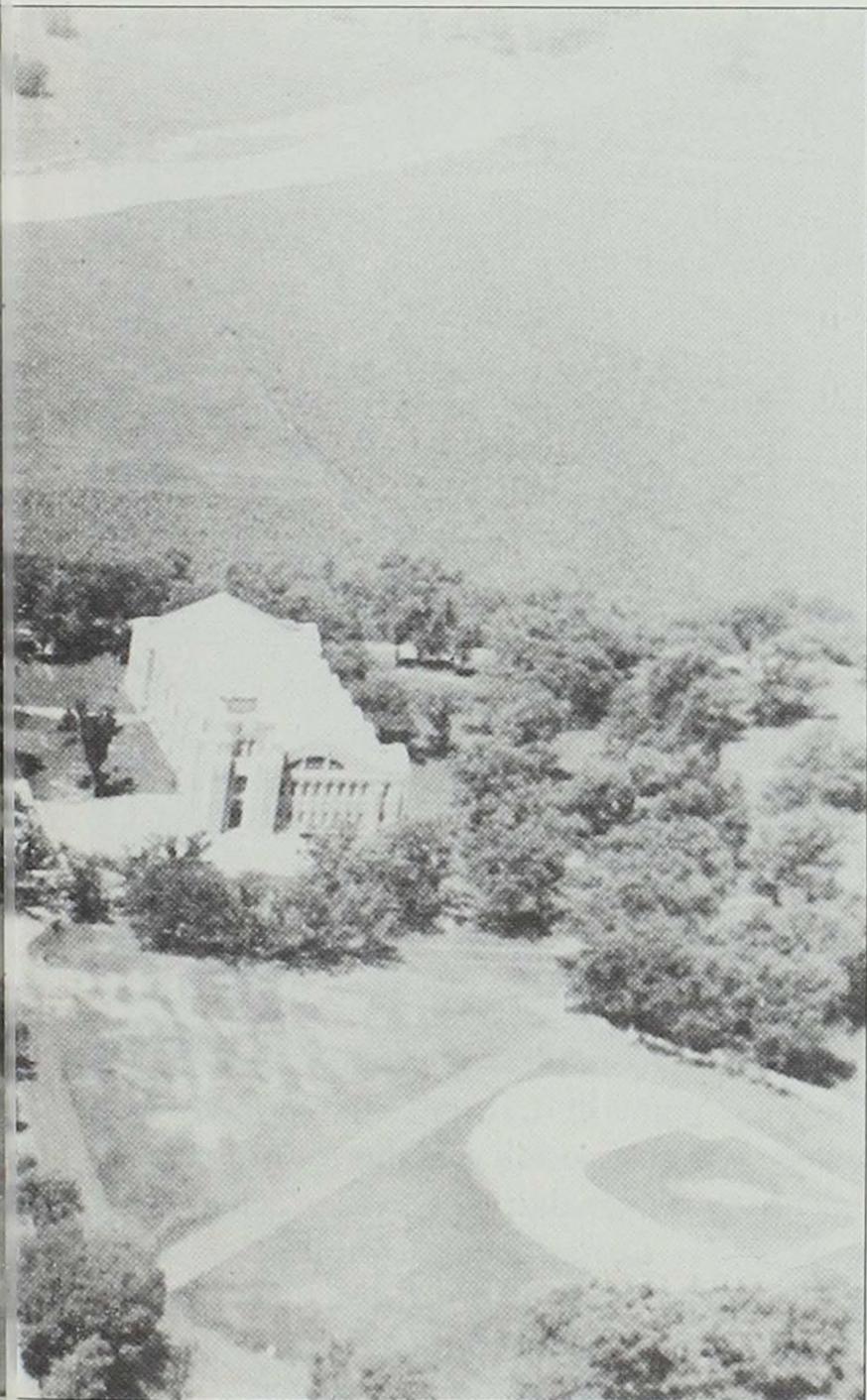
The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.



Luther College celebrates a *quasiquincentennial* in 1986. With the opening of the 1986-87 academic year the college will complete one hundred twenty-five years of service. The history of Luther's one hundred twenty-five years and seven presidential administrations can be divided into three periods. From 1861 to 1932, Luther College was a school for men modeled closely on the classical humanistic pattern that the founding fathers had brought with them from Norway. The long presidency of Laur. Larsen began in 1861 and

lasted until 1902 when he was succeeded by C.K. Preus. Following Preus' death in the spring of 1921, Oscar Olson became Luther's third president, serving as such until 1932. During those seventy-one years under three presidents, neither the curriculum nor the educational philosophy of the college changed in essentials.

Under the first three administrations, a major aim was to prepare young men to take up the study of theology, and the curriculum was arranged accordingly. At no time, however, was Luther conceived of as exclusively pre-ministerial, nor, except during the first quarter



Stability and Change

Luther College After One Hundred Twenty-five Years

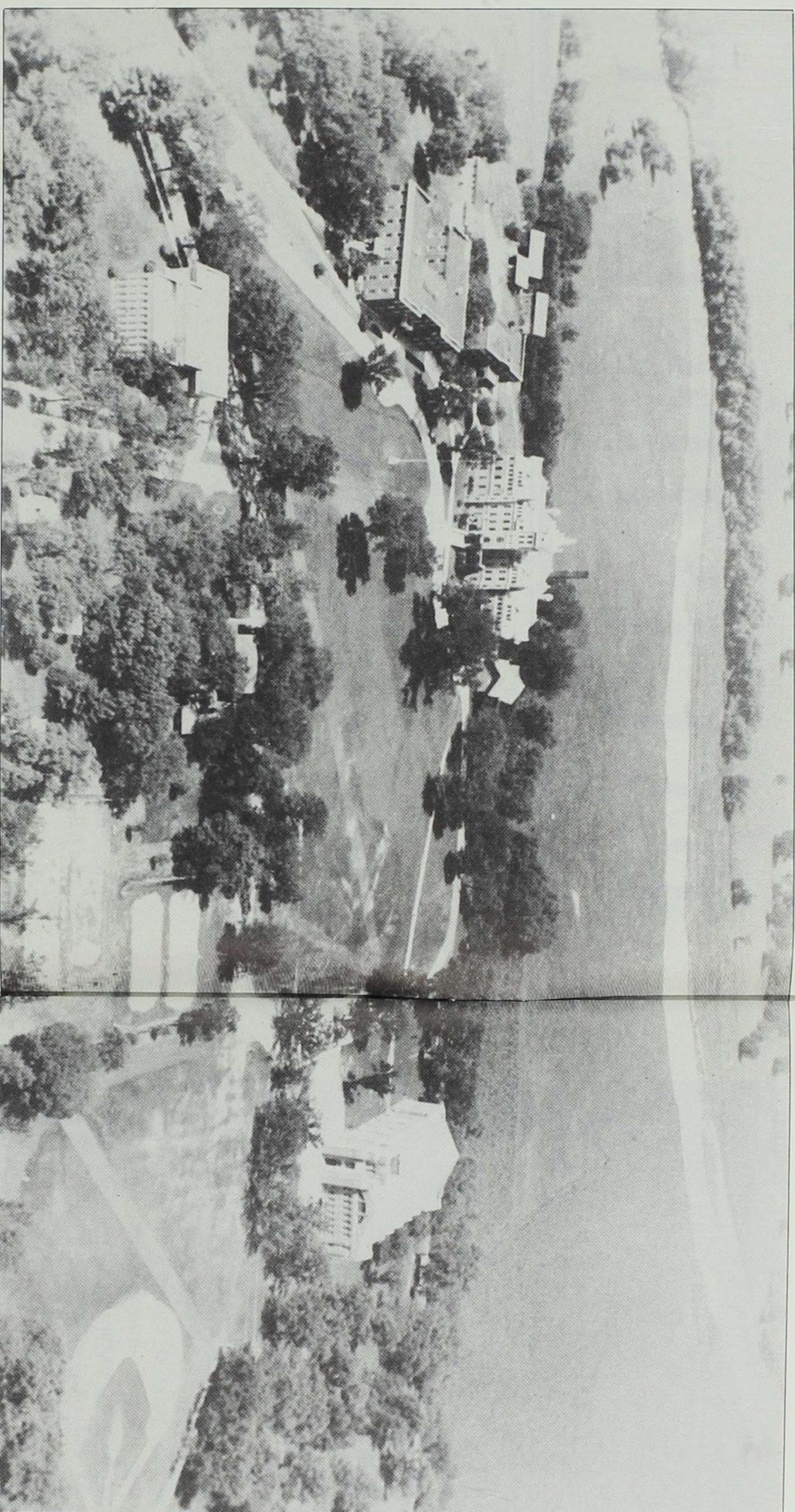
by Leigh D. Jordahl

Aerial view of Luther College in 1934, as photographed by Clarence O. Kvale. (This photograph and many others in this article and the Jens Jensen article are provided courtesy of the Photographic Collection, Luther College Archives, Preus Library. These photographs are designated throughout as "courtesy LCA.")

of a century, did the majority of graduates enter the ministry. From the very beginning the school was designed to be a quality liberal arts college. When Olson began his presidency in 1921, he affirmed the classical curriculum as the best model, not only for the study of theology, but also for "raising up" an educated citizenry. He also declared that Luther should retain its distinctiveness as a college for men. Yet by the time he left office in 1932, the classical curriculum had been thoroughly dismantled and Olson was forcefully advocating coeducation.

The second major period in Luther's history

began in 1932, when O.J.H. Preus succeeded Oscar Olson as president. That same year Luther discarded its prescribed classical curriculum; with that momentous change a new era began. As is often true at moments of transition, Luther's change of orientation was accompanied by crisis, problems of morale, reform, and determined new beginnings. The new beginnings hung in the balance for the next several years because of the Great Depression that hit the entire nation and hit Luther College with especial force. Yet under President Preus' leadership the college became what it has since chosen to remain: a mainstream coed-



Stability and Change Luther College After One Hundred Twenty-five Years

by Leigh D. Jordahl

Aerial view of Luther College in 1934, as photographed by Clarence O. Kalle. (This photograph and many others in this article and the Jens Jensen article are provided courtesy of the Photographic Collection, Luther College Archives, Preus Library. These photographs are designated throughout as "courtesy LCA.")

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educational private college with close church relationships. Since then the college has tried to balance a central commitment to the liberal arts with attention also to career goals. As at other colleges, the balancing act has not always been easy. The period between 1932 and Luther's centennial year in 1961 was characterized by a concerted effort to preserve the best of Luther's humanistic tradition while adapting the college to the demands of a constituency that was overwhelmingly Norwegian-Lutheran and distinctly middle-class, and rural or small-town in origins.

Luther's second period came to its end, though not in any such dramatic way as that marked by the end of its first period, with the centennial celebrations of 1961. That same year David T. Nelson produced a full-scale history of the school, *Luther College, 1861-1961*. The college celebrated by Nelson's book had clearly kept faith with its founders' intentions to be a school for "emigrated Norwegians, Lutheran Christians, living in Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois . . ." Homogeneity, both as to faith and culture, characterized Luther College to a degree not common in American higher education in those expansionistic years.

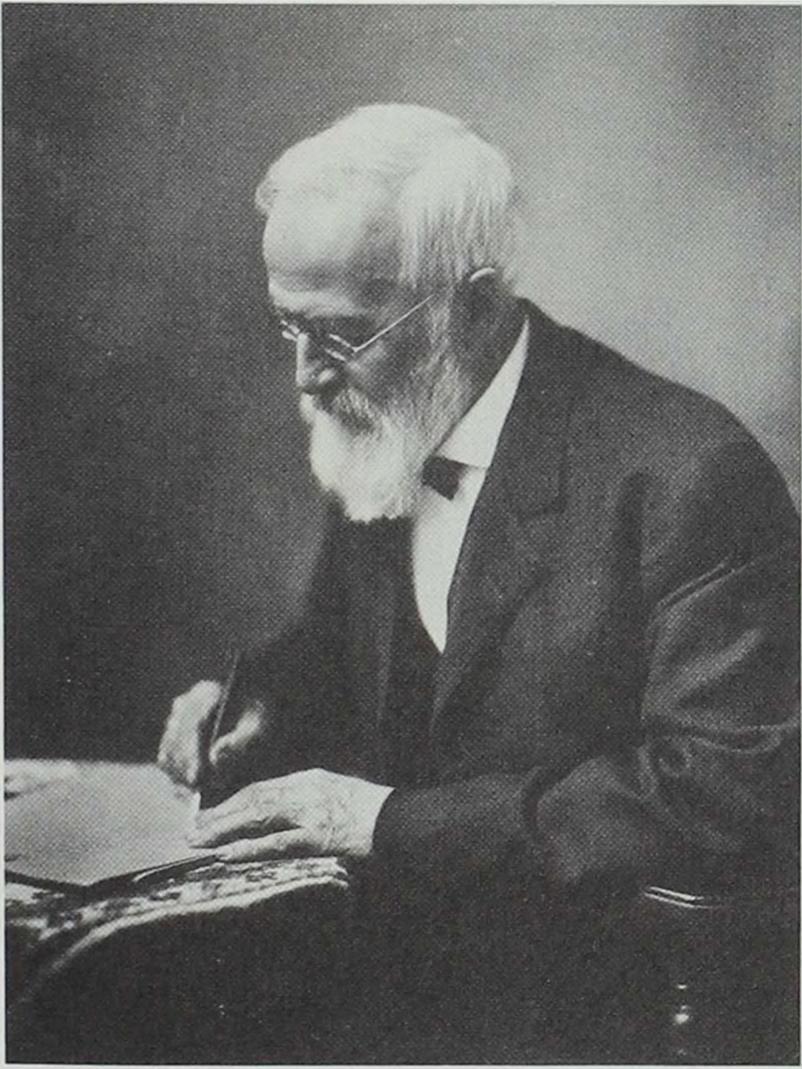
A third period in the history of the college began shortly after the centennial year. Elwin D. Farwell was elected Luther's sixth president in 1962. With his administration, a new and aggressive style became apparent. An already major building program was carried forth and brought to a successful completion. A vigorous student recruitment program, organized along the lines of up-to-date, professional admissions models, brought the college to optimal size. The faculty was expanded, the student body and faculty became far less homogeneous religiously and ethnically, and Luther steadily moved into a new prestige league among American colleges. Yet the Farwell administration, while overcoming remnants of provinciality, was also determined not

to break continuity with the past tradition of the essential compatibility of higher learning with self-conscious and articulate faith. At no time has Luther intended to be anything other than a college of the church, or, as the college mission statement puts it, "at once a community of faith and a community of learning."

The First Period: 1861-1932

A well-established college with sound academic standards, generally flourishing on its beautiful, oak-forested campus in the scenic hill country of northeastern Iowa — such was Luther College when it celebrated its sixtieth anniversary in the fall of 1921. It was a gala event with four days so packed with events that the schedule was continuously running late. The Saturday night banquet featured eight speakers! That was a bit excessive even in an age accustomed to after dinner speeches. Little did anyone realize what in retrospect appears so obvious: that the anniversary represented the high point of Luther's first period. The college was prospering and there were reasons aplenty to have on the occasion a big celebration.

By 1921, Luther, and several other Iowa colleges, had achieved the distinction of having survived from those frontier days of the previous century when scores of colleges had been founded all across the American Upper Midwest. (Several Iowa colleges that survived, however, were not destined to make it through the next two decades.) Most of the private midwestern colleges were like Luther in that they had been established under religious auspices. The Methodists and Presbyterians had been especially energetic in Iowa, the latter group well out of proportion to the size of its membership. Most of the colleges at their founding were especially identified with some visionary individual who dared to dream big dreams. For Luther there had been two men in particular: the first president, Laur. Larsen, and U.V. Koren, pioneer pastor at the historic



Laur. Larsen, Luther's first president (1861-1902). (courtesy LCA)

Washington Prairie Church near Decorah. (Koren's wife, Elisabeth, whose interesting diary has since been translated and kept in print, achieved status as a kind of founding mother.) Such colleges were all products of an optimistic frontier mentality with a belief in upward mobility as a realistic possibility for ordinary children of ordinary parents. Most of the colleges founded were liberal arts schools with the special aim of preparing their students for such public service professions as school-teaching and the ministry. As church schools they intended to join the faith with the higher branches of learning.

From the very beginning the midwestern colleges displayed distinct features of Yankee ingenuity as well as a distrust of European gentry models. Most significantly, the frontier schools were not designed for the sons and daughters of ladies and gentlemen of a priv-

ileged class. Consequently also, the curricular patterns adopted were mostly not transplanted from old-world models. The schools tended to emphasize an egalitarianism truly suspicious of anything that might suggest elitism. Such schools as Oberlin, Beloit, Carleton, and Grinnell, more successful than many similar institutions, were the most prominent representatives of the midwestern pattern of higher education.

Founded in 1861 by the Synod of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (generally referred to as the Norwegian Synod and representing high Lutheran orthodoxy), Luther College intended to be the major college for Norwegian immigrants. The aims of the college were clearly stated:

The chief object of the College is to meet [the growing demand for educated men who could preach the Word of Life to the rapidly increasing Norwegian population of this country]; but it also aims to afford the advantages of a liberal education to any youth, desiring to avail himself of the same.

Believing, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," it regards mere mental training without christian faith and love as possessing but a doubtful value. For this reason it desires through its religious instruction and christian influence to reach as many as it can also of those who do not intend to serve the church directly as pastors or teachers, trusting that those whose education has been based on christian principles will, also in other vocations, both morally and intellectually, exert a beneficial influence among their countrymen and fellow-christians.

Neither the circumstances under which the college was founded nor the language about Christian nurture was in any way distinctive to



Four students represent Luther activities in 1892/93. From left: Ivar A. Thorson, Erling A. Bothne, Helge M. Tjernagel, and Oscar L. Olson, later Luther's third president. (courtesy LCA)

Luther. Sixty years later a faculty member pictured Luther as having been “the offspring of horny handed labor, begotten of faith, reared in love and hope.” The same could have been said of most colleges founded in the nineteenth century. Certainly it was no mark of distinctiveness for Luther’s founders to state that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” What may have been more distinctive, given the undoubted sincerity of the religious commitment, was the essentially secondary status assigned to religious instruction at Luther. The courses carried less credit than other courses, they were taught by instructors whose chief expertise was in some other aca-

ademic discipline, and they were mostly catechetical in nature. Neither was there any emphasis on experiential piety, and the daily chapel services were distinctly low-key and conducted with the prayers and short meditations read out of some traditional home devotion book. It was simply assumed that the students were Christians and the fact did not have to be talked about. Luther was not an evangelistic college.

If the college founders were similar to other college founders in their commitment to combining faith and learning, they were also similar in their commitment to American egalitarianism. Although the Norwegian Lutheran

immigrants were strikingly different from their Protestant neighbors (more like the Catholics in their resistance to assimilation and their disdain for the Yankee Protestant ethos), and although the college founders were themselves representatives of a Norwegian gentry class, there was never any intention of perpetuating aristocratic class distinctions at Luther. Not surprisingly, Abraham Lincoln rather than the patrician George Washington became the beloved folk hero for the Norwegian immigrants. When the decision was made in 1857 to found a college, it was understood that it would serve immigrants, the vast majority of whom came from Norway's peasant class and who tended to settle down in America among other Norwegians in ethnically homogeneous townships. (One such township, notable for its support of Luther College, was the home of only one non-Norwegian family as late as the 1940s.) Like the Yankees, with whom the Norwegians otherwise had so little in common, the Norwegians were true populists in their egalitarian impulses and were just as eager as the Yankees to capitalize on the social mobility promised by America's democratic faith. ("Yankee" was a term regularly used by the Norwegians to refer to most of the non-Lutheran and Catholic population that the Scandinavians encountered on the frontier.)

However, Luther College was unique among Iowa colleges in one important respect, and very different than most in another respect. It was different in its long maintained determination to be a school for men. Single sex institutions, though common in the East, became a rarity in the Midwest, except among the Catholics. In one important respect, however, Luther College was unique. In its resolute and also long maintained determination to transplant the European "Latin school" model it most closely resembled the numerous Catholic "minor seminaries" and the several Concordias founded by the Missouri Synod Lutherans. Yet Luther was different from

them. The Concordias, for instance, did not become full-fledged colleges and they were specifically designed as "feeders" for the seminary. The classical languages were cultivated, as at Luther, but primarily as vehicles to be put to use in the later study of theology. Luther College, on the other hand, was never narrowly pretheological. Rather the classical authors were cultivated because they were viewed as humanistic avenues of introduction to the best that had been thought and written. If one wanted a liberal arts college, so the founders reasoned, that aim would be best accomplished through a classical education. In his defense of the classical curriculum, President Larsen presented his case forcefully with all the arguments of the Renaissance humanists.

Whether or not Laur. Larsen ever doubted



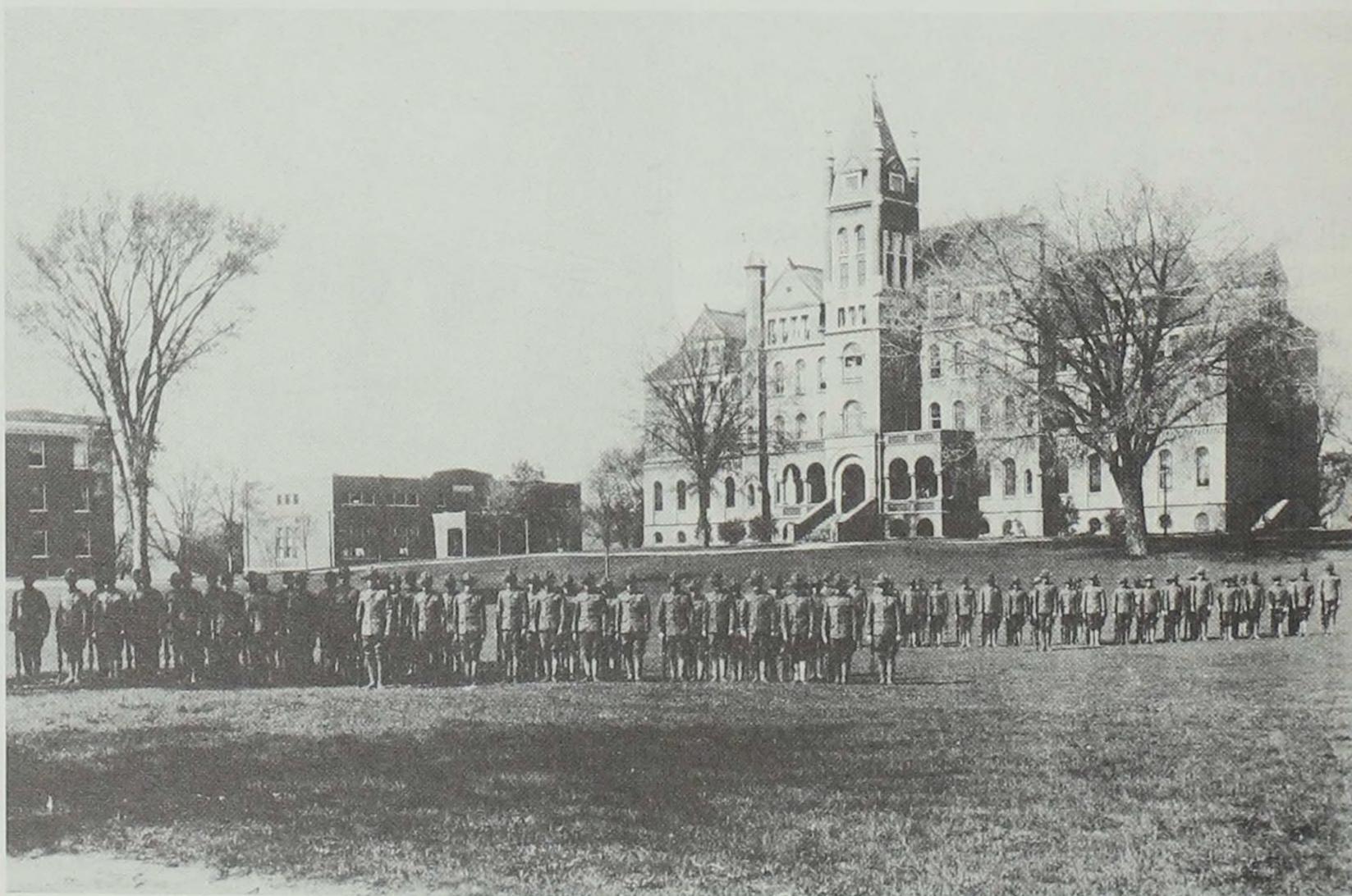
C.K. Preus, Luther's second president (1902-1921). (SHSI)

the wisdom of the curricular decision originally made for Luther is impossible to ascertain. We do know that any doubts he might have had were quickly set to rest. Only a few years after Luther began he went on an extended tour to see what was going on at other American colleges and thus to compare his school with other schools. He was not much impressed by either Beloit or Oberlin, both of which were sometimes seen as models of excellence. He spoke with disdain of Oberlin as representing "the pinnacle of Yankee humbug and conceit." He especially deplored the decline of the classical languages and was convinced that without a "true classical foundation" civilization would "sink into barbarism." In all events, Laur. Larsen returned from his travels well pleased with the Luther program.

A solid course it was that Laur. Larsen established. With a six-year program (later lengthened to eight), the courses were entirely

prescribed until 1895. That year economics was added as an elective. In 1906 a curricular revision introduced a few electives in the junior and senior year. Hebrew, formerly required, became an elective in 1918 (unlike Latin and Greek, Hebrew was viewed less as liberal arts than as distinctly pretheological). Enough education courses were introduced to make it possible for students to earn a teaching certificate. Yet even after requirements were relaxed, students studied six years of Latin, three of Greek, two each of German and Norwegian and several of history, English, and mathematics. The required science was chemistry.

When President C.K. Preus died in 1921, Luther College was making preparations for the gala anniversary already noted. Things looked good for Luther. The enrollment stood at a high point of 272 in the collegiate and preparatory departments combined. The stu-

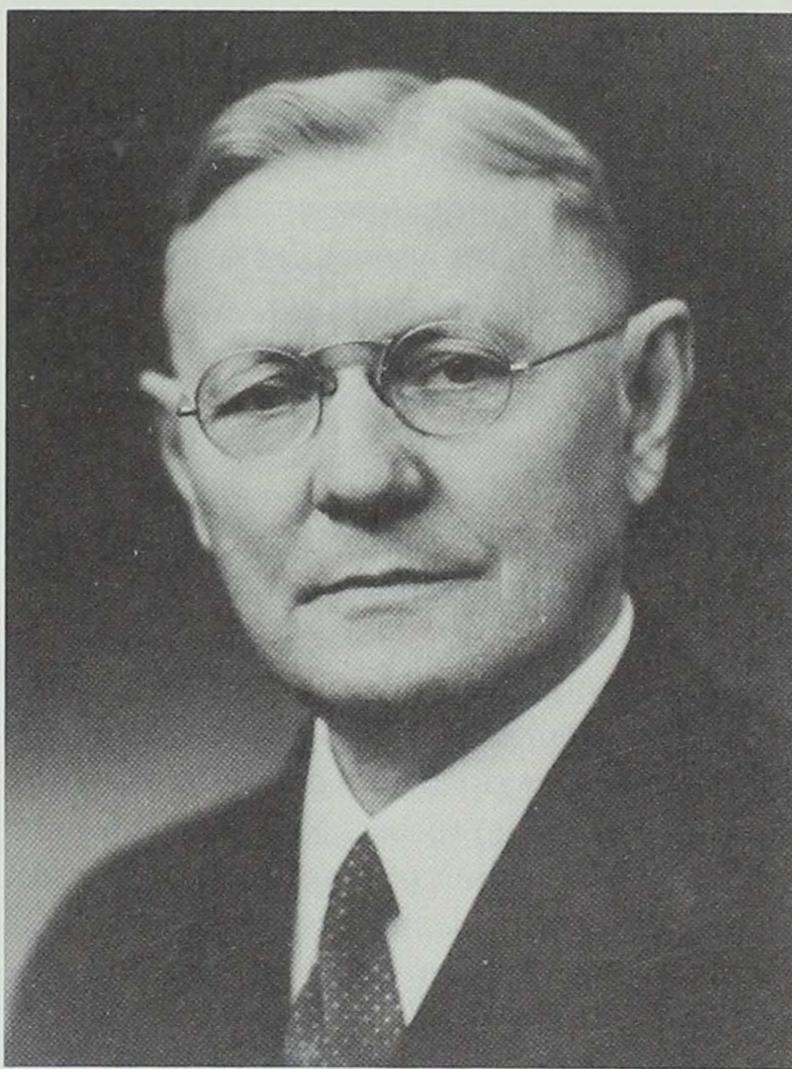


Student Army Training Corps by Main Building, 1918. (courtesy LCA)

dents were generally the first generation in their families to go to college, with Minnesota most heavily represented in the student body. With the exception of a few local boys, the students were Norwegian and Lutheran. The majority were not pretheological. The faculty numbered twenty-two members, and several had graduate degrees from good universities such as Michigan, Chicago, and Johns Hopkins. The faculty was larger than at several other regional colleges with far more diversified offerings. Most of the teachers were themselves alumni and all were Lutheran. Already by 1921, the college had achieved full accreditation from the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, a distinction not achieved by some Iowa colleges until a decade or two later.

Three of the anniversary speakers were drawn from graduating classes spanning fifty years. Yet so little had Luther changed in character that the three men had read the same classical authors and had received an education that was marked by exceptional continuity. No other accredited American college in 1921 had a curriculum as solidly classical as Luther's.

On the surface, the changes in the college had been enormous. From a vacant parsonage near Holmen, Wisconsin, used during the 1861-62 academic year, the school had been moved to Decorah in 1862. By 1921, Luther possessed a physical plant that must have been the envy of some Iowa colleges. It included a large and impressively beautiful main building, a relatively new and up-to-date dormitory, a commodious refectory, and a newly dedicated library that was a gem of architectural design and modern library planning. A new gymnasium was in the planning stage; when completed in 1926 it became the center of campus activities and was something of a regional showcase. The spartan life-style of the 1860s had long since disappeared. Nevertheless, Luther College remained what it had been since its founding: a classical school



Oscar L. Olson, Luther's third president (1921-1932). (SHSI)

for men recruited among rural and small-town Norwegian Lutheran families of modest means. The new president in 1921, Oscar Olson, dedicated himself to preserving the school essentially as it had been when he was a student in the 1890s and as it still was when he came into office. It appeared in 1921 that Olson's reaffirmation of the tradition was not inconsistent with the prospects of growth and development.

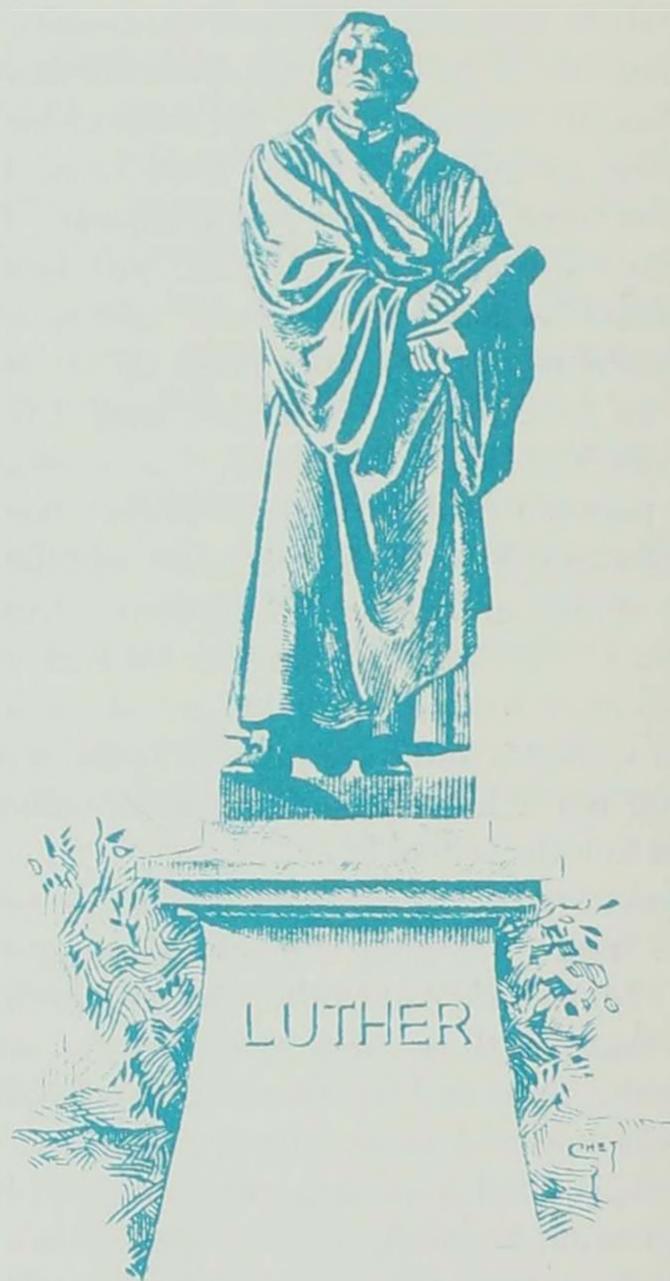
Despite what must have appeared to outsiders as a narrow curriculum, Luther graduates experienced neither more nor less career difficulties than graduates of other colleges. They were well prepared to go on to study for the traditional learned professions of the ministry, law, and medicine; those who took the required education courses could secure teaching positions in history, English, foreign languages, mathematics, and chemistry; and by all

evidence, graduates were not handicapped in the competition for jobs in business.

Although Luther's traditional "gentleman's curriculum" appeared still to be working in 1921, it was becoming more and more difficult to make the classics appear "relevant" to the students. One classics professor, who taught at Luther from 1918 to 1970, recollected in later years about what a problem motivation had been when he had to teach beginning Greek to three sections of freshmen, most of whom knew full well that they were never going to use their Greek in any practical way. It was also true, of course, that many students never did develop enough skill to read Virgil or Cicero, much less Homer or Euripides, as literature. Rather, they got stuck with a tedious word-by-word deciphering process. Nor, except for the fairly large number of minister's sons, did Luther recruit many students who came from homes where literature was much read or discussed. Luther had, after all, an entirely different kind of constituency than the elite colleges of the Eastern Seaboard, where by the 1920s the classical curriculum had lost out even despite a gentry tradition. Luther was fighting, as it became clear later, a rearguard action.

Whatever might have been happening at other colleges, Luther's sixtieth anniversary was an optimistic celebration of its curricular distinctiveness. And the enrollment continued to increase. The preparatory department closed for lack of students in 1928, but over 350 students were enrolled in the college that same fall. The campus plant was in excellent shape and the faculty had impressive credentials compared to faculties at some other colleges.

Nevertheless, there were dark clouds on the horizon. The Norwegian Synod had merged with the two other major Norwegian Lutheran groups in 1917 to form a larger church. Luther, before then *the* college of its denomination, became in the new church only one among several others. Luther thus had to compete with schools that were coeducational and that



had modern elective curricula. The most eminent scholar on Luther's faculty, Knut Gjerset, whose histories of Iceland and Norway are listed even today in standard bibliographies, had been warning for some time that the Luther curriculum did not fit the character of its constituency and, had in fact, even if unintentionally, become elitist. Instead of heeding the signs of the times and engaging in a thoroughgoing reform, the Luther faculty improvised with modifications that seriously compromised the classical curriculum, without getting at the root of the problems. Then with the national economic collapse of the late 1920s Luther found itself in dire financial straits and, by 1931, in the midst of an enrollment disaster. Questions arose, and were to continue to sur-

face all through the 1930s and early 1940s, as to whether or not the college could survive.

President Olson led the faculty in a thoroughgoing curricular reform during the 1931-32 academic year. By the next year Luther had adopted an entirely new curriculum, identical in essentials to those in existence at other colleges. A full range of majors and minors was introduced and core distribution requirements were severely reduced. For the first time in its history, Luther students could graduate with no courses in Latin or Greek. For the first time also in its history not every graduate was automatically prepared to enter a seminary. Olson also advocated coeducation and his faculty concurred in the judgment.

According to the articles of incorporation prevailing at the time, major changes had to be ratified by Luther's supporting denomination. The coeducation request was initially refused while the curricular reform was approved. In 1932 Olson resigned from the presidency to return to the classroom. Luther had abolished its classical tradition, and the modern period in the college's history had begun. The gala celebration of 1921 had been, as it were, the high-water mark in the history of a school that had been through its first seventy-one years — a valiant upholder of an old tradition. By 1932 part of that tradition could best be described as anachronistic.

The Modern College Develops: 1932-1961

In the summer of 1932, O.J.H. Preus (the son of Luther's earlier president, C.K. Preus) left the presidency of Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to assume the presidency of Luther College. He faced a desperate situation: declining enrollment, a financial crisis that bordered on the disastrous, reduced faculty salaries with four professors already released for reasons of financial exigency,

uncertainty about the school's future existence, and serious proposals from church leaders to merge Luther with one of two other colleges and close up the Decorah operations.

Despite sore disappointment that coeducation was not approved, several enthusiastic Decorah citizens determined to make a college education available for young women in Decorah. Independent of official Luther College support, they worked with amazing speed and dispatch during the summer of 1932. By August, articles of incorporation had been drawn up for what became the Decorah College for Women; a vacant mansion was secured for housing and classes; a faculty of sorts was assembled (mostly Luther College teachers who agreed to teach classes at the new school on a part-time basis); and the new school opened on September 14, with an enrollment of twenty-four. The women were allowed to



O.J.H. Preus, Luther's fourth president (1932-1948). (SHSI)

use the Luther Library and to register for biology there. Otherwise the classes were separated. Because the school had no direct affiliation with Luther and was not expressly Lutheran, some at Luther College were lukewarm about the new venture. Oscar Olson, for all his advocacy of coeducation during the last years of his presidency, feared that "in the long run [it] would . . . adversely affect the distinctly Lutheran spirit of the college."

The fears proved groundless. In fact, when the women came they set a high standard for good manners and piety. By the second year of the women's venture, steps were taken that resulted, for practical purposes, in making Luther coeducational. From that time on, all courses were taught on the Luther campus and both Luther and the Decorah College for Women listed the same faculties. The enroll-

ment of women rose to sixty in 1935-36, and in 1936 the convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America approved coeducation. When the college in the fall of 1936 celebrated its diamond jubilee it had come full circle: a classical college for men had in every sense become a mainstream American liberal arts college. Its distinctiveness had been surrendered but the changes would assure its long-term survival.

Finances remained tight throughout the 1930s. Enrollment gradually rose to just under 500 by 1941, and the college had managed to survive a serious reaccreditation examination in 1937 by the North Central Association. Although the visitation team had uncovered such serious weaknesses that "judged by the measures portrayed and the pattern map this college should not be continued on the list of



In the 1930s Luther became coeducational. The Floradora Sextet in 1935/36 included (from left): Eleanor Dorrum, Ruth Luzum, Solveig Dorrum, Agnes Engell, Dorcas Jacobson, and Helen Hoff. (courtesy Winneshiek County Historical Society Archives, Luther College, Preus Library)

accredited colleges," the team nevertheless recommended approval because of "certain intangible qualities of good scholarship that persist in spite of the obvious weaknesses." A building plant that had been excellent for a men's college with a mostly required curriculum was inadequate for a coeducational school offering majors in almost twenty departments. The church subsidy, although generous, was barely sufficient to keep a budget, otherwise dependent solely on student charges, in the black. The faculty was entirely too small and, in many cases, inadequately prepared for the full range of course offerings.

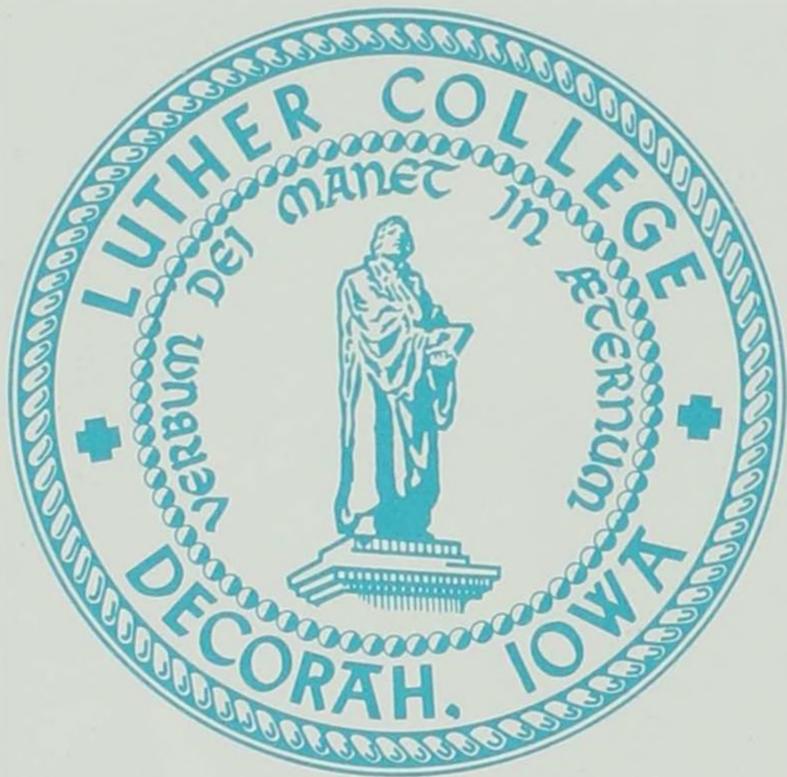
No sooner had Luther survived the Great Depression than it was hit by the outbreak of World War II. Since, despite coeducation, enrollment remained over two-thirds male, the drafting of young men into military service was harder on Luther than on many colleges with a more balanced male-female student ratio. Enrollment plummeted to a low point of slightly over 200 in the spring of 1944. In 1942 the beautiful Main Building, which housed offices, classrooms, and rooms for upper-classmen, was destroyed by fire. Talk was still going around in church circles that Luther "has no future." Had it not been for some especially loyal alumni who were also among the denominational leadership it is not entirely improbable that the college might have been closed down. Luther relied almost entirely on the church constituency for its student body and any loosening of those ties would inevitably have sentenced it to death. A combination of constituency support and the truly heroic self-sacrifice of the college administration and faculty allowed Luther to survive a crisis period that extended from 1932 through the war years.

The coming of peace in 1945 created for Luther College, as for numerous other colleges, its greatest period of opportunity. With the discharge of the veterans and the opportunities offered by the GI Bill of Rights, one of



J.W. Ylvisaker, Luther's fifth president (1948-1962). (SHSI)

the truly extraordinary events in American social history occurred. The GI Bill made it possible for countless numbers of returning veterans to think realistically about an economic and social mobility that had previously seemed unattainable. Moreover, among Luther's ethnic constituency, certain traditional characteristics had been held to longer than among others of the nation. In the rural schools and small towns in which so many Norwegians lived, assimilation had been slow in coming. Up to the late 1930s many of their young people did not attend high school and few even thought of college as a possibility. Now all that changed. Young Norwegians began to experience the world in new ways. Less and less did they think of themselves as anything other than mainstream Americans, and the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America itself was rapidly becoming part of main-

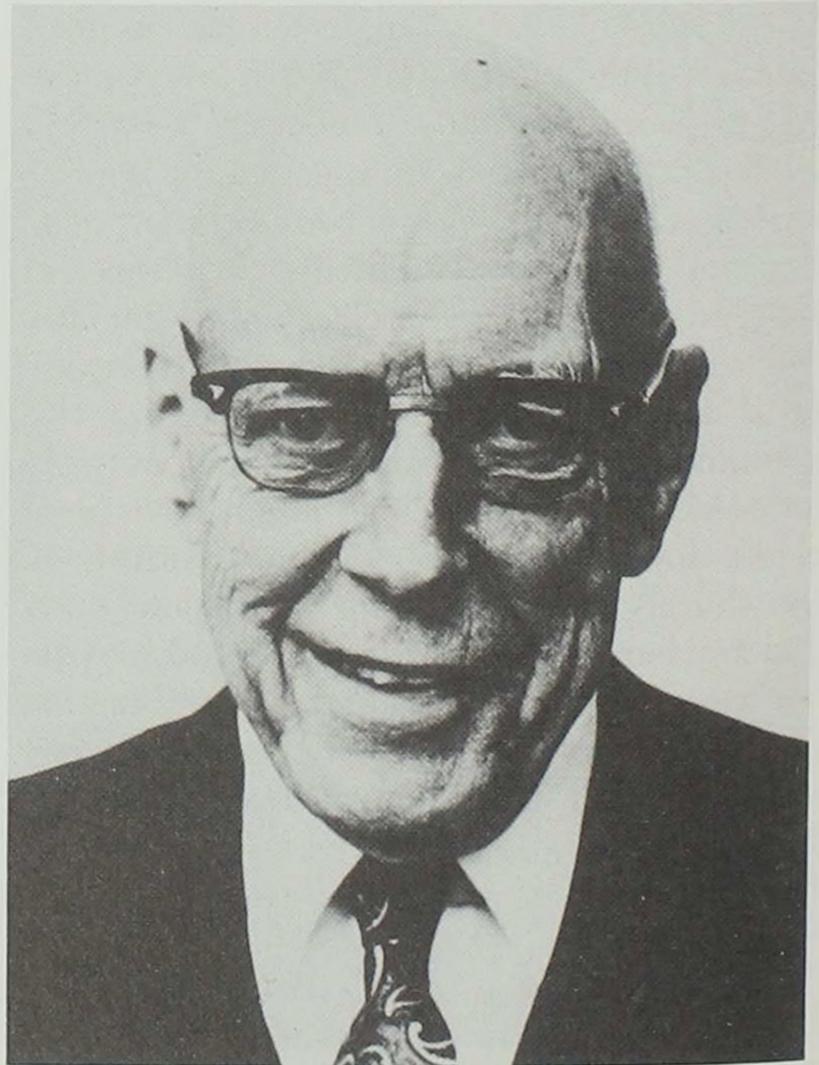


stream American Protestantism. It soon dropped "Norwegian" from its official name. Norwegian Lutheran fathers and mothers watched proudly as their sons and daughters went off to church colleges to take up their places in America. (It should be noted that in those days expenses at a church school like Luther were not much higher than at a state school.)

Fortunately, Luther College had splendid leadership during the postwar years. Already in 1936, O.W. Qualley had been appointed vice-president of the college. On the faculty since 1918, Qualley was to prove the academic master of the school for a quarter of a century following 1936. J.W. Ylvisaker succeeded Preus as president in 1948. Ylvisaker became a first-rate public relations man, a leader with a vision of an expanded Luther, and a tactful but steady promoter of Luther within the Norwegian Lutheran constituency. The people of the church had confidence that Ylvisaker knew how to build a good college. Qualley, in the dean's office, devoted his unbounded energies to building a strong faculty, academically well-trained and skilled as classroom teachers. With a truly ingenious ability to size up talent,

Qualley recruited a young, energetic faculty, mostly drawn from graduates of Luther or one of the other Lutheran colleges and enthusiastic about teaching at a church-related liberal arts college. Together Qualley and Ylvisaker, although very different in their personalities, administered Luther with a harmony that must be rare in the history of higher education. Both wanted a good school; both were also oriented toward the traditional Luther constituency. Both wanted to take their academic models from the best in educational circles while, at the same time, neither was even slightly interested in turning Luther into anything but a distinctive college of the church.

Luther prospered under the Ylvisaker-Qualley administration. A massive building program was undertaken. The faculty grew in size and quality. Enrollment steadily increased, so that by the centennial year of 1961,



O.W. Qualley, faculty member and vice-president during Ylvisaker and Farwell administrations. (photographer, Jay Kamin; courtesy Luther College News Bureau, LCA)

the physical plant was on the way to being almost all new, the enrollment had increased to 1,300, and Luther College was recognized as a school of quality, even if not yet in a league with some of the better known colleges of the Upper Midwest. In any event, the comments made by the visitation team of 1937 read like irrelevant words from some dim and distant past.

The centennial celebrations of 1961 marked the end of Luther's second period. The student body was ninety percent Lutheran; the tenured faculty was totally Lutheran; and the school still served mainly those same "Norwegians, Lutheran Christians, living in Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois" that it had been founded to serve in 1861.

The Last Quarter of a Century: 1961-1986

If the period between 1932 and 1961 witnessed the most radical educational transformation in the history of Luther College, the period since 1961 has witnessed the greatest social transformation. A school almost entirely oriented toward an ethnic constituency has become, compared with 1961, cosmopolitan. While the student body remains sixty percent Lutheran, the Lutherans are no longer overwhelmingly Norwegian. Non-Lutherans, especially Methodists and Roman Catholics are well represented in the student body. The rules for student behavior have been radically modified (the rules of 1961 were not, however, much different from those at numerous private colleges with no church relations, except in the prohibition of dancing) and students today enjoy a freedom undreamed of a quarter of a century ago. Cities and towns produce more students today for Luther than do the rural communities. The faculty includes almost as many non-Lutherans as Lutherans and far fewer of them are graduates of other church colleges. Luther College has continued to



*Elwin D. Farwell, Luther's sixth president (1963-1981).
(courtesy LCA)*

improve its image and finds itself a prestigious college, something that was not dreamt of twenty-five years ago. One keen observer has put it quite simply: "A good college has become an excellent college."

When Elwin D. Farwell succeeded J.W. Ylvisaker in 1963, he determined to build on the tradition of quality he inherited and to push it even further in the direction of "a vision of greatness." Yet he also determined that change at Luther should be balanced with stability and that the college should remain a purposeful school of the church.

Some have referred to so-called church colleges as existing in one of two extreme fashions: as a "defender of the faith"; or as a "non-affirming church-related" type. President Farwell intended to avoid both extremes. Contrary to what some outsiders had occasionally thought, Luther had never really been a "defender of the faith" school. To put it more precisely, it had been a school where religious homogene-

ity and ethnic identity had been so taken for granted that there was little occasion to critically examine the tradition. The days for that homogeneity were coming to an end by the early 1960s. Certainly, the ethos that went with that tradition could not have survived at Luther into the late 1960s. Farwell saw the need for change. Farwell was, at the same time, thoroughly committed to the tradition of a liberal arts college informed by a self-conscious Christian understanding of its mission. He also knew — he was an alert pragmatist at this point — that Luther's denominational constituency constituted the single best thing going for it in terms of recruitment. The Farwell administration turned its energies toward preserving the Christian tradition while also broadening that tradition within its cultural context.

Luther's new administration intended also to preserve an overriding commitment to the traditional arts and sciences but to be at the same time sensitive to career goals of students. It worked hard to recruit excellent students but, at the same time, to avoid signs of academic elitism. Wisely, it was recognized that Luther would have its best future by recognizing that its student body would probably continue to represent what it traditionally had represented: a lower-middle to middle-class constituency with a Lutheran base. Even today a large number of Luther College students are the first generation from their families to go to college.

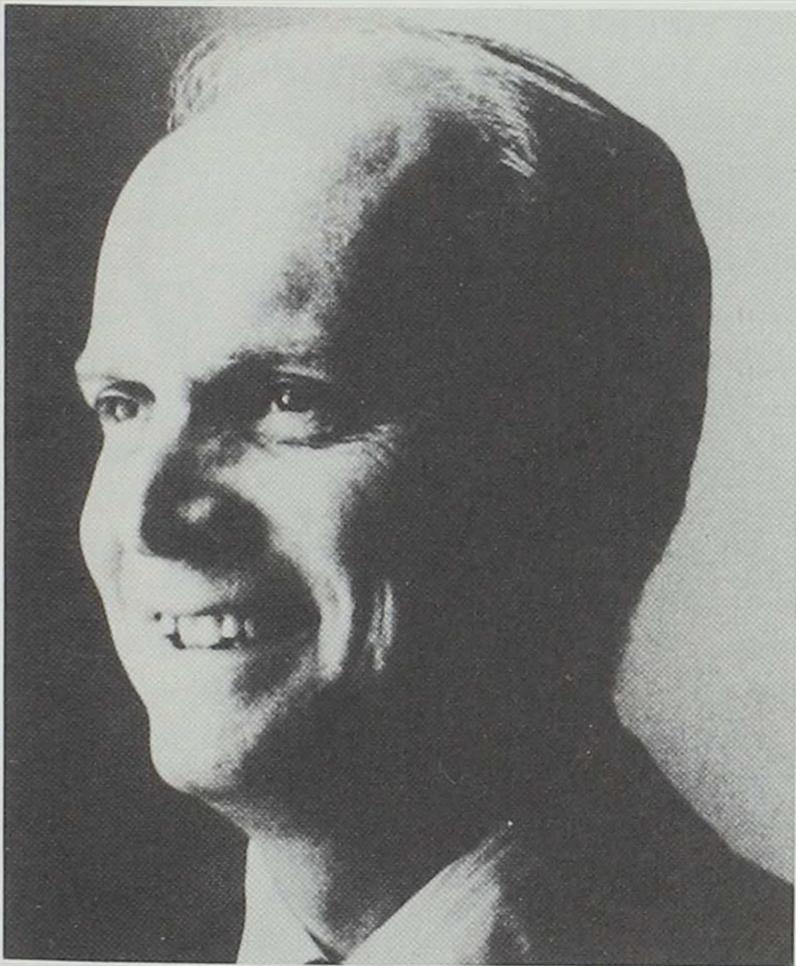
The student body increased during the 1960s and 1970s and then leveled off at about 2,000. The faculty almost doubled, and numerous new departments were established, especially in the social sciences in which Luther had been slow to develop concentrations. As might have been expected, the areas of accounting and management attracted more and more students including large numbers of women. Yet less career-oriented liberal arts majors continued to do well. Core distribution

requirements were not discarded, and all attempts to introduce degrees other than the bachelor of arts were defeated. The quality of students admitted steadily increased. Even in the tough recruitment days of the early 1980s the college was not forced to tailor its offerings to the demands of a rapidly changing job market, and the dormitories were full on a campus that has remained overwhelmingly residential.

When Elwin Farwell retired in 1981, he left behind a strong college that had proven the essential compatibility of change and stability. The college really was "at once a community of faith and a community of learning." The continued success of the liberal arts was evidenced in that same year by the announcement that the college now had a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa.

H. George Anderson was inaugurated as the seventh president of Luther College in the spring of 1982. He brought to his task impressive credentials. His inauguration was another of those gala celebrations at Luther College.

The college Anderson came to lead was a very different school than that inherited by O.J.H. Preus in 1932, or that which Elwin D. Farwell had come to serve in 1963. Preus had faced the desperate problem of the survival of a school on the edge of bankruptcy. Farwell came to office during those happy years of growth and expansion when private colleges were flourishing as never before. By the time Farwell retired in 1981, national observers of private liberal arts colleges had become prophets of gloom. President Anderson set himself the task of insuring that Luther would beat such gloomy predictions. Yet he was also realistic about the college. Its future as a viable church-related liberal arts college was, by all indications, well assured. Yet expansion, such as that during the 1960s and 1970s, was probably over for a least a while. The task in the 1980s was to maintain a stable enrollment, increase the financial base, and, most impor-



H. George Anderson, Luther's seventh president (1982-) (courtesy LCA).

tantly, build on and improve an already established standard of excellence. In short, President Anderson wished the college to remain true to its overall commitment of being "the church in higher education, calling and preparing people to serve in the world."

If the founders of Luther College could see their school today they would be amazed. For that matter, any former student who had not returned to campus during the last half century would likewise be amazed. The entrance to the campus has changed little. Otherwise almost everything else is different. Only a few of the old buildings are left — only one remains from the nineteenth century and only three others

from before 1948. Koren Library, so proudly dedicated in 1921, is a candidate for restoration and renovation and has long since ceased to house the book collection. The beautiful Old Main, the campus landmark for more than half a century, has been replaced by a more functional but far less striking building. The campus is no longer a forest of oaks, although oaks are still the main trees on campus. In place of the forest there are now new buildings on a spaciouly landscaped campus. Gone long ago are the days when the faculty coffeed together day in and day out at the big tables in the old dining hall. Gone too, for that matter, are the days when almost all faculty members could be counted on to be present at virtually every campus event. Neither can it be taken for granted that everyone knows everyone else. Luther may be a "small college," but to those who knew it half a century ago it has become a big college indeed. Yet those from years past and those from years present all know the motto with which Laur. Larsen began his work and with which Luther celebrates its *quasquicentennial*: *Soli Deo Gloria*. □

Note on Sources

Of earlier Luther College histories there are four, each valuable for information not available in the others. Johan Th. Ylvisaker, *Luther College* (Decorah, 1890); Gisle Bothne, *The Norwegian Luther College, 1861-1897* (Decorah, 1897); O.M. Norlie, O.A. Tingelstad, Karl T. Jacobsen, eds., *Luther College Through Sixty Years, 1861-1921* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1922); and David T. Nelson, *Luther College, 1861-1961* (Decorah: Luther College Press, 1961). The last is the definitive interpretive account of Luther's first century. Leigh D. Jordahl's *Stability and Change: Luther College in Its Second Century* (Decorah, 1986), surveys the earlier period, but concentrates on the last quarter of a century and thus brings the Nelson volume up to date.

Linka Preus' Sketches of Iowa

by Gracia Grindal

The pastors who founded Luther College, with the help and support of thousands of Norwegian immigrants in Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois, were cultivated people. They were largely drawn from the Norwegian upper class known as the "conditioned class." Their families had long furnished government officials who had been significant in the history of Norway. They had come to America to minister to the thousands of Norwegian immigrants who had streamed across the ocean in search of free land and opportunities. The clergymen were among the few Norwegian immigrants who had made the trip to the United States for reasons other than the possibility of improving their lot. They had come to serve, in answer to urgent calls from their compatriots in America. Moreover, they came with the reluctant approval and sometimes the outright opposition of the Norwegian church which felt little, if any, responsibility for the immigrants.

When Pastor Vilhelm Koren and his wife, Elisabeth, came to Washington Prairie, Iowa, in 1853 to begin their ministry, they built there a home similar to the typical manse, or *prestegaard*, in Norway. Mrs. Koren had a keen



Linka Keyser Preus in 1850. (SHSI)

eye for detail and a youthful interest in the people around her which was well illustrated in her diary. In that diary she wrote of their journey from Kragerø in Norway to Washington Prairie, with an account of their stop in Spring Prairie (now DeForest, Wisconsin), where they stayed with Herman and Linka Preus, also a young Norwegian pastor and his wife. The Preuses had come to this country a year earlier and were soon to become close friends of the Korens. Elisabeth Koren and Linka Preus carried on a vigorous correspondence while their husbands frequently met to discuss the future of the Norwegian Lutheran Synod which they were instrumental in founding and leading for the next fifty years.

The letters of Elisabeth Koren (as well as

those of other pastors' wives) to Linka are now in the archives of the Preus Library at Luther College. They give a vivid and warm picture of the early days in Iowa as seen by the sophisticated and increasingly mature Mrs. Koren. The lively tone of the letters sets in sharp relief the sober work of the men. The recent discovery of two books of sketches by Linka Preus has given us early scenes in the founding of Luther College as well as amusing and ironic pictures of such places as McGregor, Washington Prairie, and Decorah. The sketches date from 1858 to 1866 and each scene is a little moment which tells a story and catches life as early cameras could not do. Those who practiced the art of drawing, usually cultivated ladies, were often able to capture a feel for life which not even a modern camera can accomplish.

The Preus family had first come to Iowa in 1858. Their trip was amply illustrated by Linka, a young mother of two. By that time, the Korens had had time to get the parsonage built and a yard and garden created on Norwegian

models. Mrs. Koren was an avid horticulturist, collecting seeds from the surrounding prairie as well as from her father in Norway and Linka. The drawing of the Little Iowa parsonage, as Koren's parish was called at the time, is from the west, where the church stood. (See figure 1.) The Little Iowa parish was an enormous one stretching from Clermont in the south to the Turkey River to the west, to Rushford, Minnesota, to the north, and was said to include at first over eight thousand souls. Both Koren and Preus were frequently gone for long periods of time ministering to their far-flung congregations. Mrs. Koren and Linka, having been left alone, with no companions to talk to except the children and the help, often longed to visit each other. Such trips were, for Linka, the fulfilment of a dream, and from her drawings, one can see that she enjoyed every minute of them. The stick figures walking toward the house are very likely the Preus family, Herman and Linka, with their children, Christian Key-

FIGURE 1 Rølvaag Collection



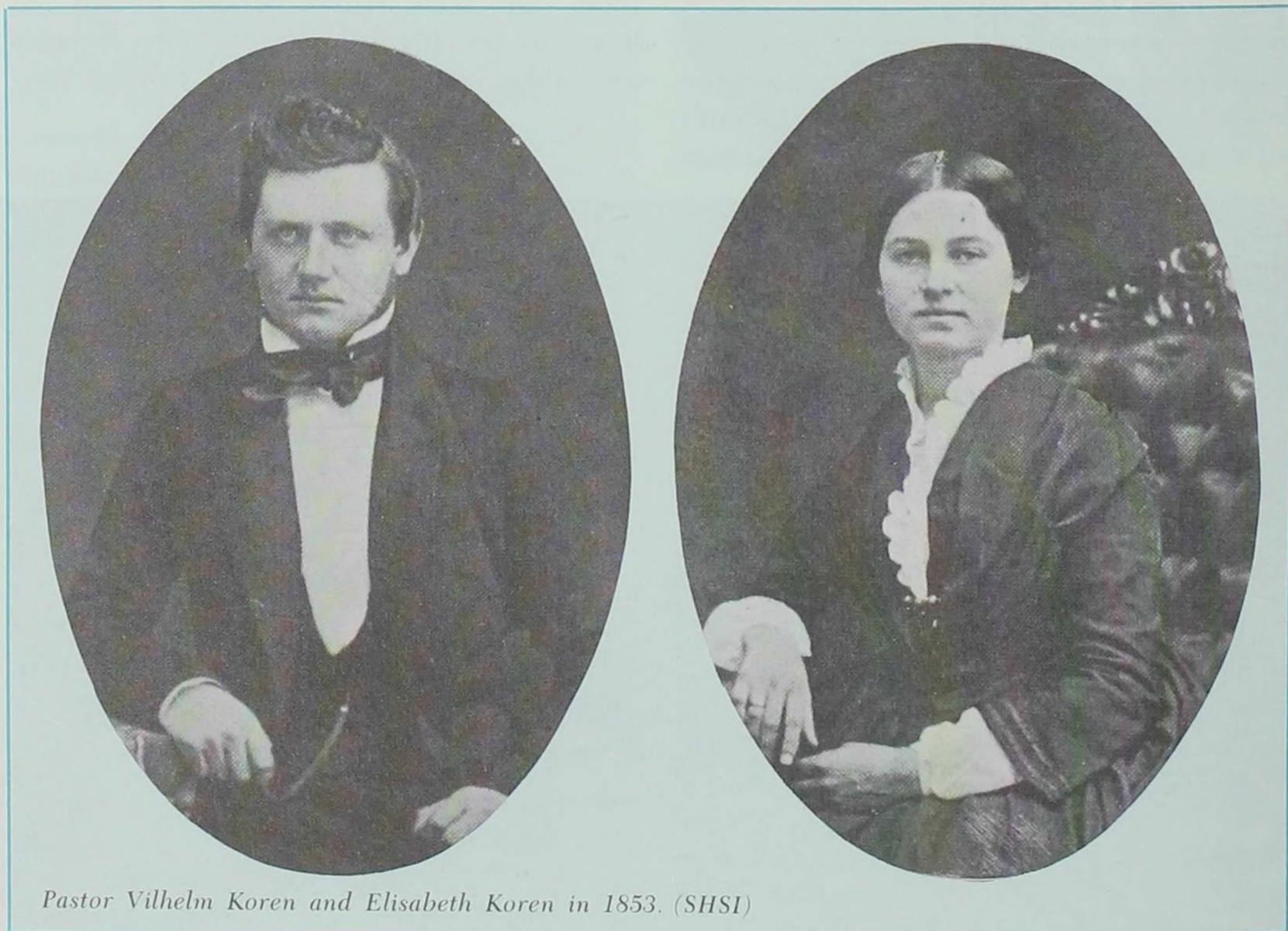
ser (who grew up to be the second president of Luther College) and Rosina.

The picture of the Korens' parlor shows three young couples and their children having coffee and reading letters. (See figure 2.) Mrs. Koren is probably the woman serving. Herman is the man on the left with the long pipe, a trademark of his, and Koren is probably the one seated on the right. The woman next to him is either Linka or Diderikke Brandt, wife of Pastor Nils Brandt who is facing the viewer. The Brandts lived at Rock River, Wisconsin, at the time and had accompanied the Preuses on their trip west for the dedication of Coon Prairie Church near Westby, Wisconsin. They moved to Decorah in 1865, where they would live on the Luther College campus. Diderikke, a woman of considerable education and

energy, devoted herself to the students at Luther College, giving parties, and teaching manners or singing or music or other things future pastors might need to know. Her husband taught at the college in addition to being a pastor in the local community.

A more intimate picture shows Linka using an eyecup to treat Mrs. Koren's eye which is apparently infected. (See figure 3.) While she is doing that, the boisterous Mrs. Brandt has leaped up on the bed in an attempt to appease little Margrethe, her daughter, who is unable to sleep because, as Linka writes on the opposite page, of the terrible mosquitoes, a nuisance for the Norwegian immigrants who were not used to them.

On their way home from the Korens, July 28, 1858, Linka drew a wonderful picture of



Pastor Vilhelm Koren and Elisabeth Koren in 1853. (SHSI)



Dagligstuen hos Krens.

1858

FIGURE 2

Rølvaag Collection

Rølvaag Collection

FIGURE 3



Spisestuetestuen hos Krens.

1858

McGregor's Landing on the Mississippi while they were waiting for Nielson's ferry to take them to Prairie du Chien. (See figure 4.) Linka shows herself running rather frantically to the outhouse which, she noted, was on a barrel in the water. "McGregor is a curious town," she wrote beside the drawing, "built in a very narrow valley, there is no space for more than a street. They had to dig the limestone and sandy ridge of hills to make enough room for the houses. They are 3 to 4 stories tall. The various necessary outhouses lie above the hills. We counted 174 steps from the flats to the hill. There are different 'establishments' built upon large barrels out in the river. The ferry boat waits on the dock and we take it over to Prairie du Chien." This sketch is illustrative of Linka's self-deprecating humor. The woman on the boat is pointing to her as though she were quite the spectacle. Herman is following behind with Christian dragging along beside him. The date on the bottom right foreground indicates that Linka finished this drawing on her next trip through McGregor on April 24, 1859.

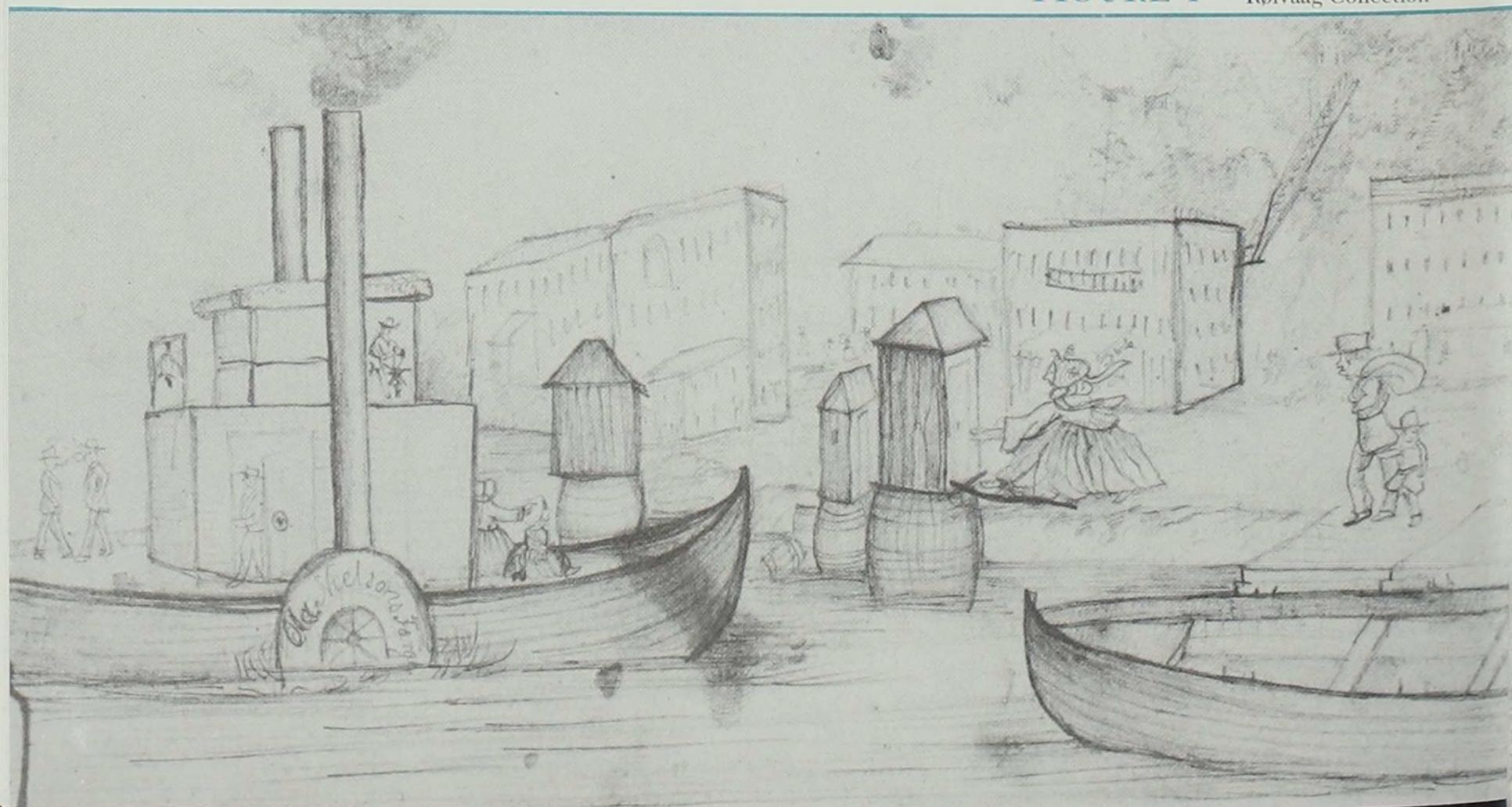
In another sketch, Linka draws a flatboat, complete with women and children, noting "it is fun to meet these houseboats when one sails the Mississippi. The men stand still and peacefully by their oars; in the middle of the raft

there is a little house for the stove; there is smoke in the stove pipe. A wife with some children and a dog sit by the house." (See figure 5.)

The Preuses made the trip west more and more frequently as Koren had persuaded Preus and the rest of the church members that they should build their school in Iowa as the population was moving west and Decorah would be a central location for students from both the east and west. Koren also argued that Decorah was easy to get to, something that failed to be true after the railroads passed it by. The Preus family had just been to Washington Prairie for a visit in October 1860 when Linka drew the picture of Christian and Sina throwing stones into the Mississippi by moonlight while waiting for the ferry. (See figure 6.) On that visit, Preus had gone with Koren to view the land north of Decorah which Koren thought would be a great place for a school, with its high bluff overlooking the Upper Iowa River. Preus had agreed and soon Koren paid down earnest money in the amount of \$1,500 for it.

In June 1864, the Preuses once again came through McGregor, this time on their way to the cornerstone laying of the new school

FIGURE 4 Rølvaag Collection



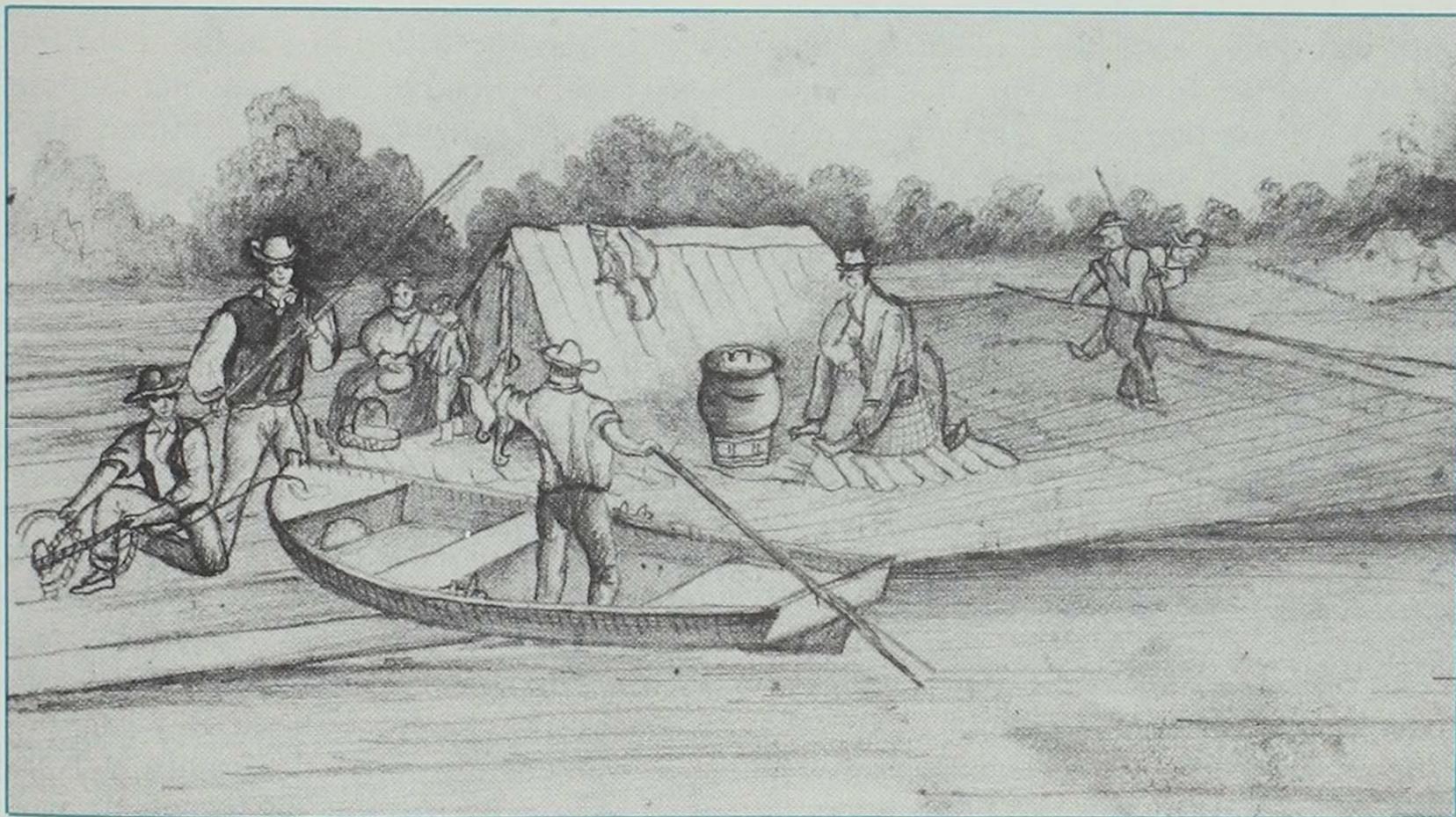


FIGURE 5

Rølvaag Collection

Rølvaag Collection

FIGURE 6



which, despite the Civil War and raging inflation, was finally underway. Linka explained the two pictures from this trip. (See figures 7 and 8.) "On our trip to Iowa last summer, we met Ottesen's whole family in McGregor. It was a surprise. We were all traveling in order to take part in the cornerstone laying of our school building in Decorah. The German theologians, Professor Walther and Cramer did us the honor of sharing our journey and participating in our celebration. Koren had promised to meet Walther and Cramer and us with a horse and wagon, but Ottesen told no one about his coming. They had to go in a crowded stage. June 29 was a very hot day and there they sat, 28 passengers in the stage. . . .

"Professor Walther and Cramer with Herman wanted to give their places to Mrs. Ottesen and Miss Norman and themselves to take a work wagon. This was unnecessary for our children were in the lumberwagon and Pastor Koren's three-seated buggy had enough room for 6 adults. So Koren took the German guests in addition."

Koren, known as a proud man, seems to have

been embarrassed by this situation. Linka, who frequently twitted him in her drawings, once again seemed to be teasing him in these sketches as she shows his obvious dismay. He is driving the wagon in the first picture and saying to Mrs. Ottesen in the second, "Please let me carry your luggage, Mrs. Ottesen." She is saying, somewhat archly, "It is marvelous to get out of that heat!"

The sketch of the actual cornerstone laying on June 30, 1864, is the only pictorial representation on record of that day. (See figure 9.) The foundation had been dug and the Decorah papers commended the Norwegians for using local stone for the foundation, local sand for the mortar, and local clay for the bricks which they fired on the site at a place which for years afterwards was known as the Brick Yard.

The event attracted thousands of Norwegians from the surrounding farms and towns who were astonished at what the school was setting out to do as they gathered around the foundation and sang songs and listened to

FIGURE 7 Rølvaag Collection



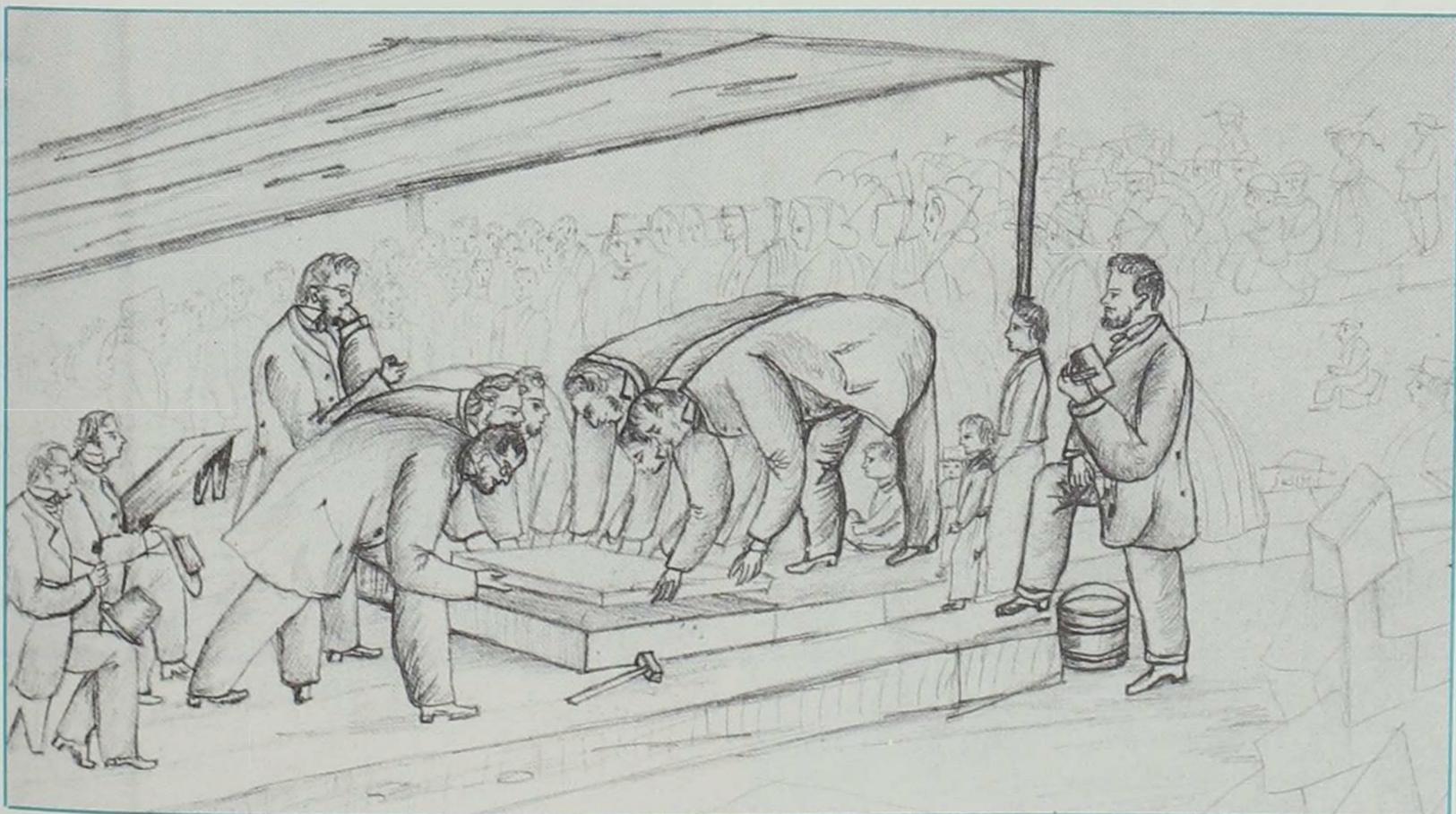


Rølvaag Collection

FIGURE 8

speeches. When the young pastors of the synod bent down to set the cornerstone — literally the ground stone in Norwegian — in place, Cramer and Walther looked on approvingly and the crowd moved off to escape the approaching rain showers. Herman, the newly elected president of the young church body,

FIGURE 9



Agnes Preus Collection

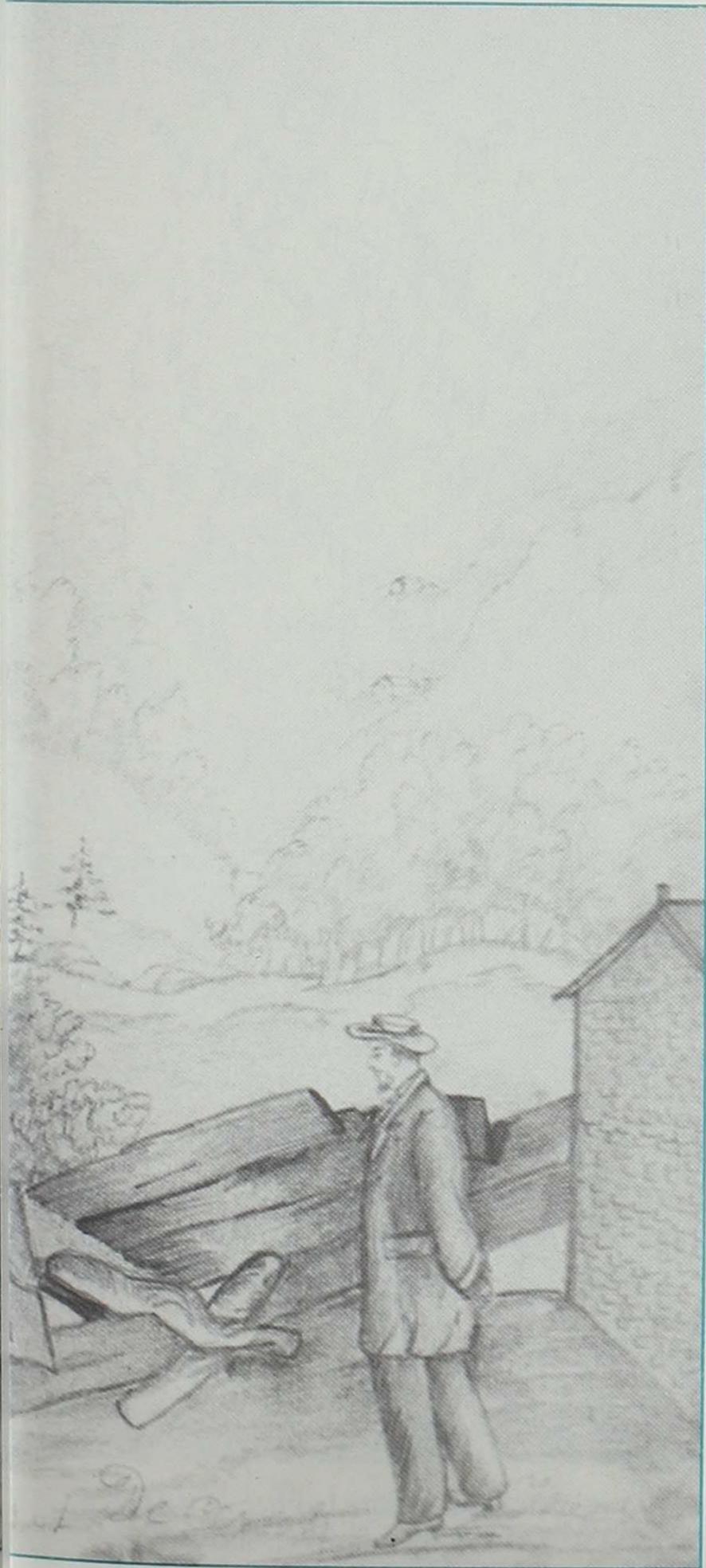


FIGURE 10

had tapped the stone with a hammer three times for the Trinity, and then helped to set the stone in place. Linka's attention to detail shows itself once again. Note the hammer lying beside the stone at Herman's right hand.

Construction proceeded through the summer under the persistent urging of Laur. Larsen, the young president of the school. He taught full-time while overseeing the building project. The work was plagued by the slow delivery of materials, generally sent up the Mississippi, then through Lansing to Decorah. Inflation meant that laborers, dissatisfied with previously agreed to wages, often walked off the job. Larsen's worries seemed endless. He and his wife lived in the St. Cloud Hotel in Decorah with the schoolboys while awaiting the completion of the new building. He wrote the Preuses that summer inviting them to visit. Decorah, he wrote, was big and they had lots of room. Linka picked up on his irony in a picture of Laur. Larsen's guest room No. 8. (See figure 10.) She made the sketch in October 1864.

Laur. Larsen is the man on the right, looking over the woodpile to the Oneota Valley. Young Christian Preus is on the far left, pointing down into the valley, or perhaps across the valley at a tree which had grown into the shape of a cross, a sign from which the young school took much encouragement.

Linka's most dramatic picture shows dedication day, October 14, 1865. (See figure 11.) In it Professor Larsen has found a young Irish lad at the picnic stealing cake and he is asking him to leave. One is reminded that there actually was a student rebellion on that day which was

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Preus Library Collection

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Preus Library Collection

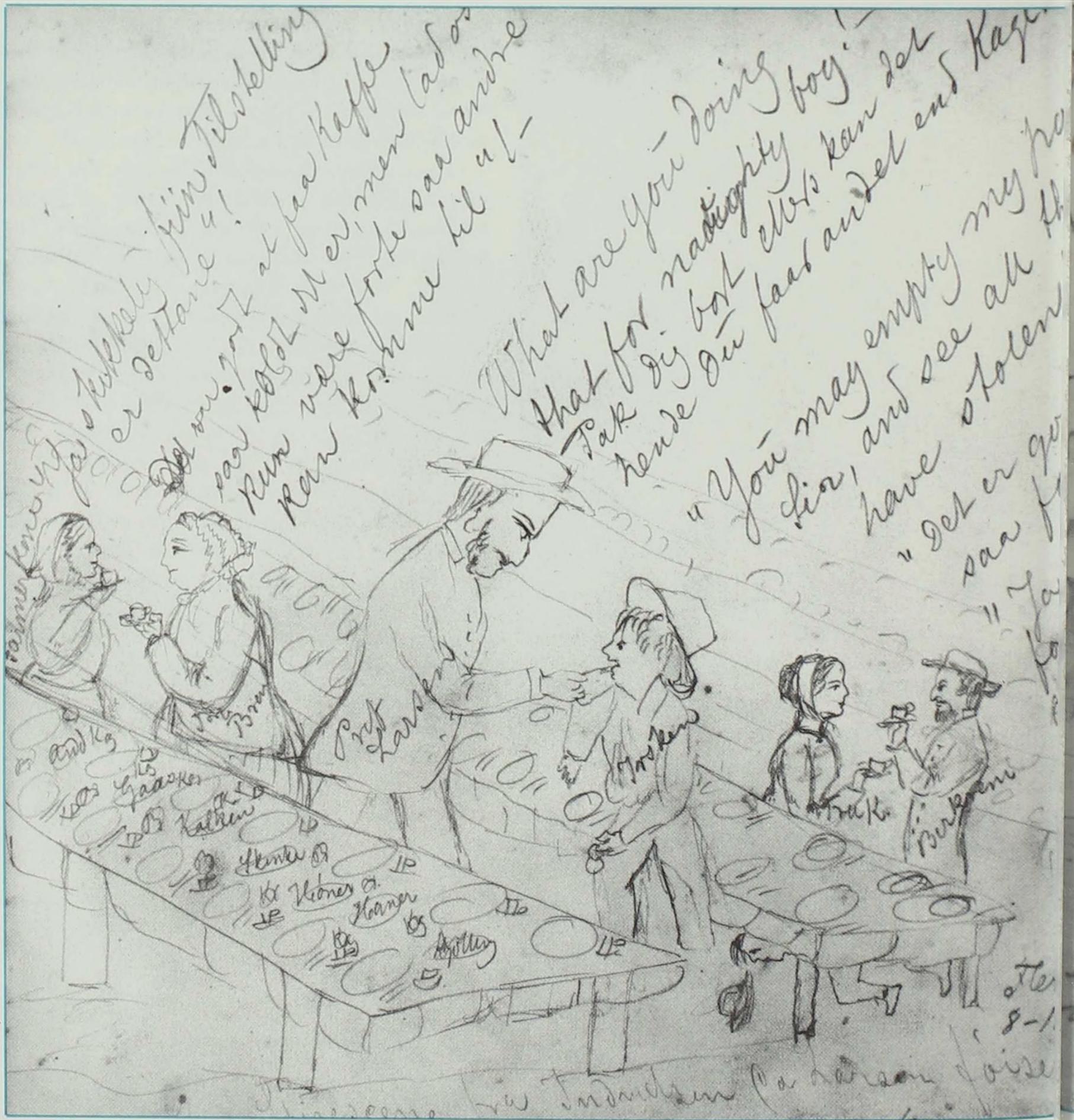
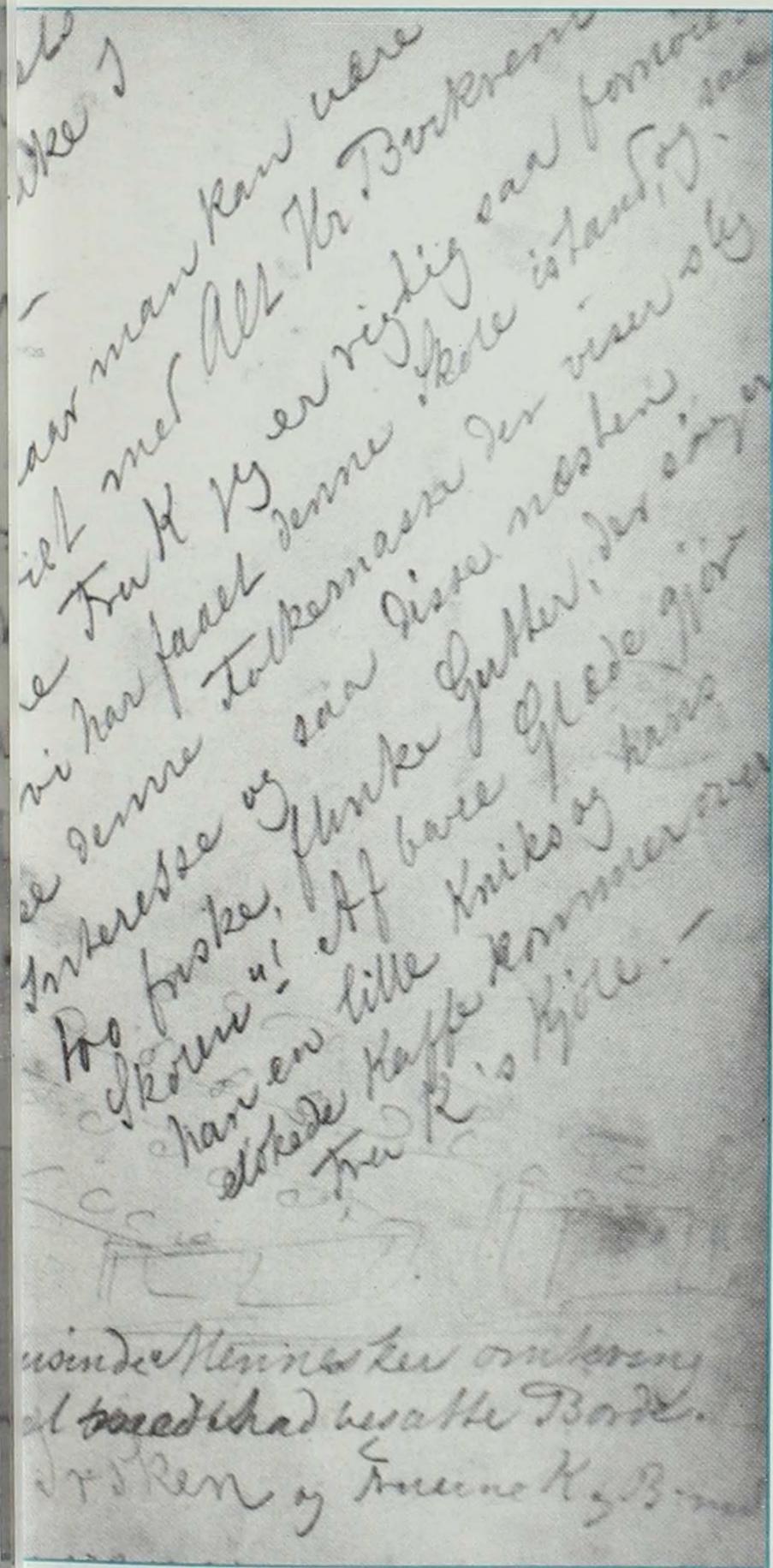


FIGURE 11

rather embarrassing for the college officials. It was led by Rasmus B. Anderson, who was later to become professor of Scandinavian at the University of Wisconsin, and U.S. Minister to Denmark. The college officials summarily dismissed Anderson, but the memory of his



rebellion remained strong for years.

In this last picture, Diderikke Brandt is on the left, talking to a farm wife about how nice it is to have coffee, as it is a cold day. She is also urging the women to hurry so others can partake of the grand feast which Linka has repre-

sented on the table with names of food — chicken, ham, goose, etc. Christian is playing under the table. To the right, Mrs. Koren is conversing with Mr. Birkrem about the new school and how happy they are that there is at last a place for their students to go to school. He is so excited he spills his coffee on Mrs. Koren's dress, Linka remarks on the side of the drawing. At the bottom of the page Linka wrote, "A scene at the table during the dedication where Larsen scolded an Irish boy and Mrs. Koren and Mrs. Brandt walked around conversing with the people. Several thousand people, around 8-10 at table."

Linka's estimate was too high but the dedication was an impressive event attended by probably six thousand people. Their number included farmers from all around, church leaders, children, students, and even some of the English from Decorah.

The Preuses, Korens, and Brandts attended a party that evening hosted by the Laur. Larsens, aristocrats of gracious mien. Linka has not left us a sketch from that event, but from her drawings of the early life in Washington Prairie and Decorah, we can get the idea that it was a glittering event, attended by a cultivated and charming group.

Linka's two books of sketches include work done through 1866. After the birth of her last child, Paul Arctander, in 1867, Linka's health deteriorated. In 1876, at the age of forty-seven, she suffered a serious stroke which confined her to her home until her death in 1880. Her legacy to the Luther College community went beyond the family she raised, all of whom lived to support the college in their mature years (in one fashion or another). It also included the insightful sketches of life at the college and in the state in the 1850s and 1860s. Those sketches of the early years of the college vivify and make richer our sense of the past. For that she should be remembered warmly and with pride. □

Jens Jensen and the Prairie School Campus of Luther College

by J.R. Christianson

Traveling from Chicago to northeastern Iowa in the spring of 1909, Jens Jensen passed through the heart of what he and his friends, Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan, thought of as the "prairie region." They had taken this region for their own and had already achieved considerable fame as the Prairie School of design. Jensen was a landscape artist, not an architect like the other two, and he was particularly sensitive to the natural ecology of the region.

To Jens Jensen and his friends, the word "prairie" referred to the natural clearings in the woodlands of the midwestern landscape which stretched roughly from Indiana to Minnesota. A wide, rolling country of luxuriant open grasslands mixed with hardwood glades, lakes, and rivers, it was a region of four seasons, with intense autumnal colors, snow-filled winters, poetic springtime awakenings, and bountiful summers. This was the "prairie region." Although there was a basic unity to the area, it was a region of considerable variety and beauty. Proponents of the Prairie School saw it as the heartland of America, where a powerful new civilization was in the very process of emergence.

Two of the great symbols of the prairie region were Chicago, its metropolis, and the Mississippi River, its lifeline. The train on which Jens Jensen traveled west from Chicago

in 1909, traveled for several hours across the cultivated land of northern Illinois, then wound through the hills along the Mississippi River. Suddenly the "Father of Waters" lay before him, flowing majestically through a deep gorge of immense natural beauty. On the far shore lay the state of Iowa.

An hour or so later, Jensen arrived in Decorah. There his Norwegian-American hosts took him by open automobile through a quiet landscape of gentle hills and dales. They drove him along the banks of sparkling, spring-fed streams, then up rugged, unpaved roads to the limestone palisades above the Oneota Valley. Jensen was anxious to capture the essence of what he called the "immediate environment." He snapped pictures with a little box camera. He took notes on the native vegetation.

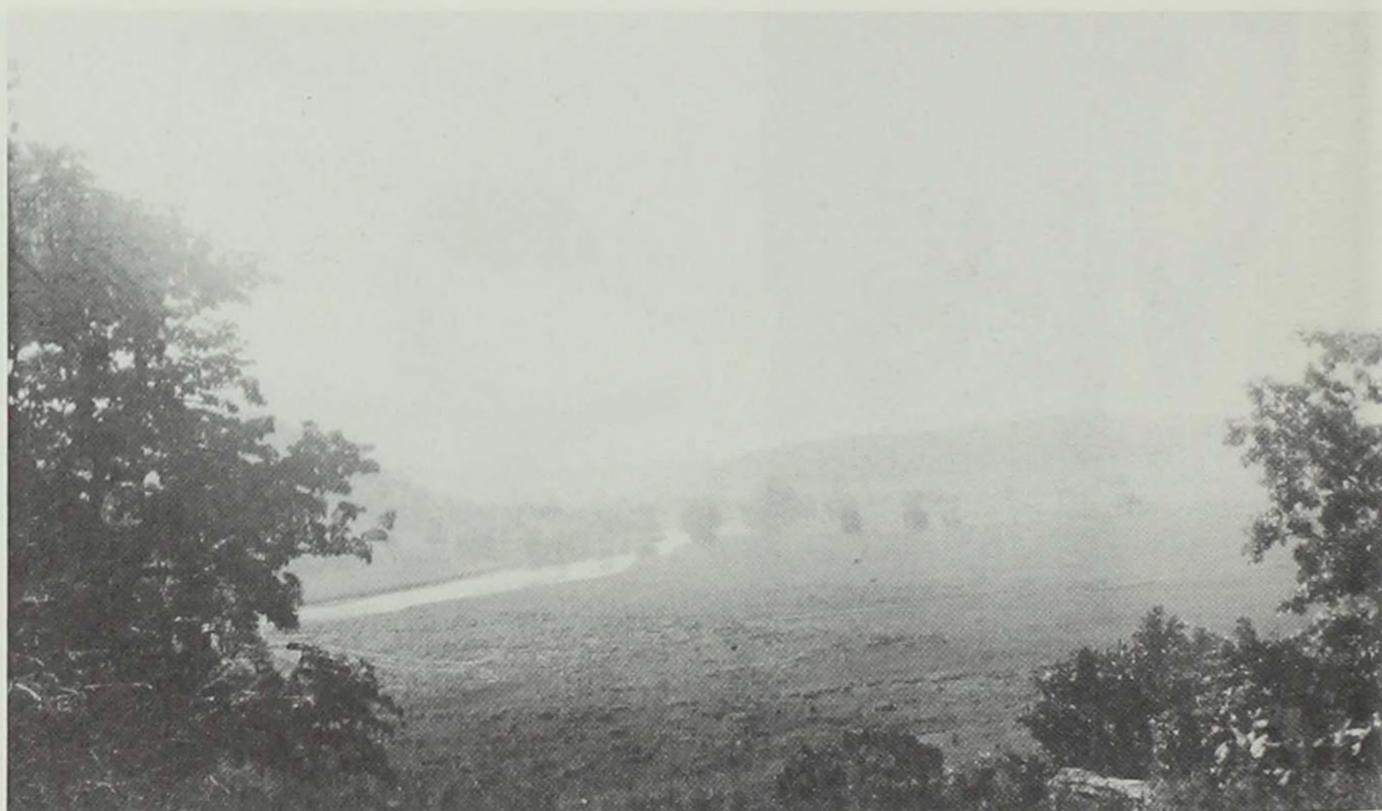
Wild plums were in bloom. Their delicate aroma and color stuck in Jensen's memory for years to come and became his symbol of Iowa's springtime. The blossoms of the plum, he later wrote, "appear like clouds of snow drifting through the shady bottomlands. In the woodlands its blossoms appear like fleeting notes in a mighty symphony."

They drove to the campus of Luther College. Here Jensen saw many large burr oaks, just coming into leaf. At Luther College, Jensen found a deep old-world sense of the past set in a new world landscape. His amiable Decorah hosts told him tales of pioneer days. Others spoke of a more distant past, when Oneota



*Jens Jensen, landscape
artist. (courtesy Jens Jen-
sen Collection, Luther
College Archives (LCA),
Preus Library).*

When Jensen visited in 1909, the view from the campus bluffs had changed little since the 1860s. The Upper Iowa River curved through an open valley flanked by wooded hillsides. (courtesy Stephen F. Christy Collection, LCA)



peoples had roamed the valley. And finally, he heard anecdotes of life at Luther College during the half-century since it had been founded in what was then a wilderness. Watching students stroll under the oaks, Jensen mused on the links between past and present and future, as well as those between human life and physical environment.

He had come to reshape this landscape in ways which would allow traditions to remain strong and the campus to remain in harmony with its prairie environment. What could be more appropriate than a "prairie campus" located amidst such trees; what could be more appropriate than a college which each spring, as the oaks sent forth their tassels and leaves, also sent forth its graduates — children of the prairie region itself?

Approaching the age of fifty, Jens Jensen was at the height of his powers in 1909. Born in the Danish province of South Jutland, he had been four years old in 1864, when Bismarck's successful attack on Denmark suddenly made him a subject of the German kaiser instead of the king of Denmark. Dybbøl parish, where he was born, remained solidly Danish in

language and sympathy under Prussian rule. Jensen was sent across the border into Denmark for his secondary education, but he also learned to speak fluent German. Drafted into the Prussian army, he served two years in an elite guards regiment in Berlin. A tall, courtly individual, he always retained the gallant air of a guardsman.

Jens Jensen was heir to the largest farm in Dybbøl parish. In the year 1884, however, he turned his back on his inheritance and emigrated to America. It was love, not money, that led him to do it. His childhood sweetheart, Anne Marie Hansen, came from a family of poor cottagers, and Jensen's prosperous parents would not allow him to marry her. Jens and Anne Marie thus traveled to America where they were married.

During their first two years in America, they wandered about, looking for a new home. Finally, they settled in Chicago. Jensen found work as a common laborer in the West Side parks. Within four years, he had risen to the position of superintendent of Union Park. By 1905, Jens Jensen was superintendent and landscape architect for the West Parks System, with a multimillion dollar budget and a mandate for expansion and reform. He laid out the

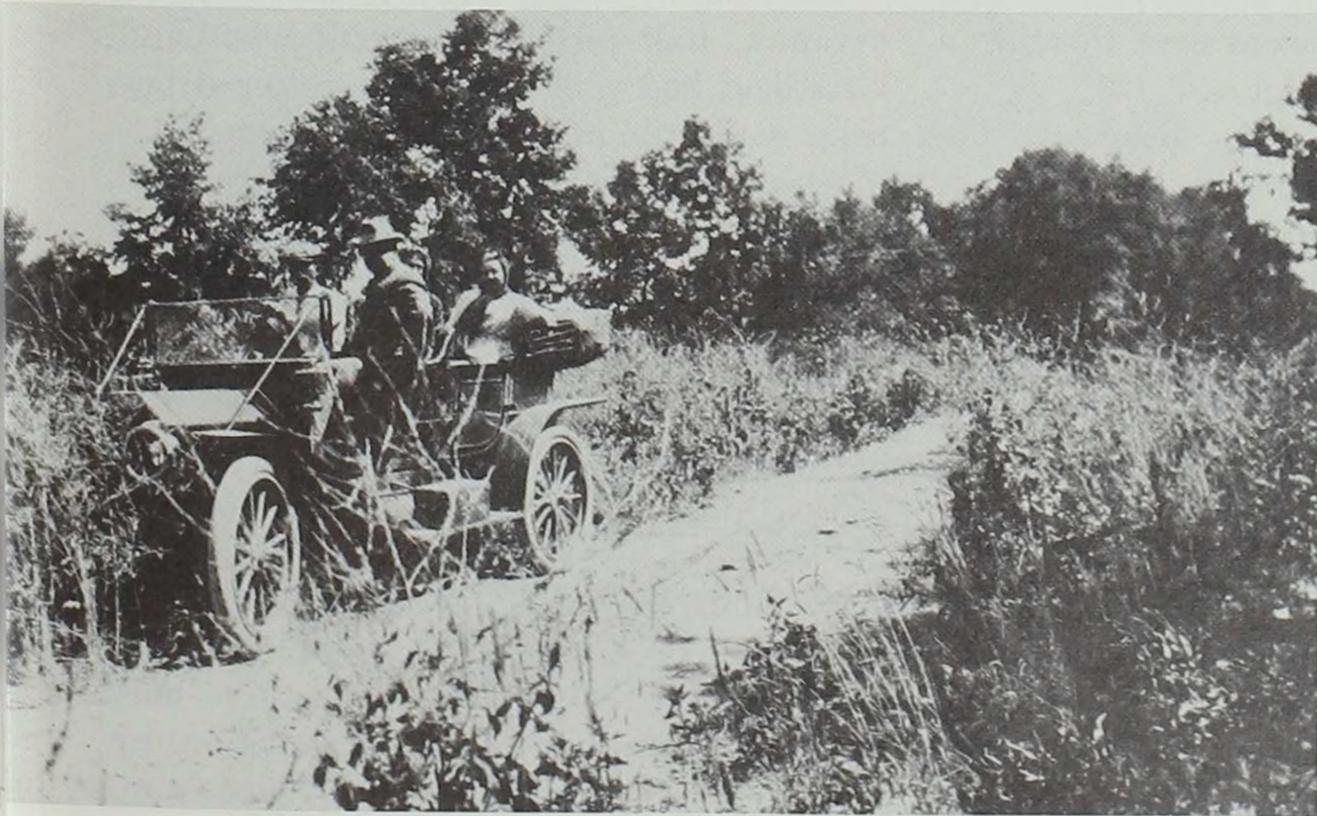
large parks under his jurisdiction in great symbolic prairies, rivers, bluffs, and woodlands, asserting that he intended to bring the spirit of the Illinois prairie into the very heart of Chicago.

Meanwhile, Jensen also began working on private projects with some of the most prominent architects in the city. In 1905, Jensen and Robert C. Spencer, Jr., collaborated on a large house in Winnetka for August Magnus. Inspired by Jensen's landscape plan, Spencer used stylized hawthorn designs in the house and its stained-glass windows. The Magnus house was widely publicized and became a prominent example of Prairie School design. The hawthorn, with its free but strongly horizontal branches, was a powerful symbol of the prairie region, and Jensen, the creator of this symbol, now became the leading landscape artist of the Prairie School. Soon he developed new symbols of the prairie region: the wild rose; the crab apple; and the spreading oak. Jensen moved his studio to Steinway Hall, close to the famous architects with whom he now shared so many commissions. His designed landscapes incorporated natural arrangements of native plants with symbolic

prairie landforms. In 1908, Jens Jensen landscaped Frank Lloyd Wright's famous Coonley house in Riverside. The following year, when he came to Luther College, he also landscaped Louis Sullivan's Babson house in Riverside.

The fiftieth anniversary or "semicentennial" of Luther College was the occasion that brought him to Iowa. Although Jensen's circle of Chicago friends was quite cosmopolitan, he and Anne Marie still lived in a predominantly Scandinavian neighborhood near Humboldt Park, and Jensen had strong ties with the city's Scandinavian colony. In Chicago, he knew many graduates of Luther College, the oldest Norwegian-American college. Among them were the Torrison brothers, Judge Oscar M. Torrison, and Dr. George A. Torrison of Rush Medical College. A third brother, Pastor I.B. Torrison, formerly of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Wicker Park, Chicago, was living in Decorah in 1909.

Around 1909, the Luther College Club in Chicago formally recommended that the college engage Jens Jensen to landscape its campus in time for the college's semicentennial in 1911. Jensen agreed to visit the campus, and he was subsequently engaged for the project by



Jensen photographed his hosts as well as the countryside when they toured the Decorah area in 1909. (courtesy Stephen F. Christy Collection, LCA)

The south wing of Main Building, added in 1874, and in right front, the clay pit called the Brick Yard, source of bricks for construction. Roughly filled in, the Yard still sloped toward an abrupt bank when Jensen saw it in 1909. He ordered it leveled and graded. (courtesy LCA)



the club in Chicago. On his first visit to Decorah, he probably traveled in the company of Judge Torrison. While in Decorah, he met still another former Chicagoan, C.K. Preus, the president of Luther College. It was on this trip that Jensen had such a splendid time, touring the area by automobile, taking photographs and making notes. He went over the thirty-two-acre campus with great care.

Then as now, the majestic burr oaks and undulating shape of the surrounding hills gave the Luther College campus its character. The land had been untouched wilderness when Pastor Vilhelm Koren had purchased it in 1860 from J. Gibbons, a Quaker, for the sum of \$1,500. In 1909 the topography was little changed. The campus rose gradually towards the west and ended in a bluff with limestone outcroppings, overlooking the Oneota Valley. Irregular, wooded hills surrounded the site on all sides in 1909, as they do today — mixed hardwoods underlain with woodland wildflowers. At one time, immense white pines had risen here and there above the hardwoods.

Towards the setting sun, the Oneota Valley below the campus remained open prairie in 1909, with the sinuous curve of the river winding through it. Mixed hardwoods on the far hillside gave way to oak savanna and then prairie in the valley.

The campus proper had originally been oak savanna, half prairie and half woodland. Grassland had run under the scattered burr oaks, with little underbrush. In Jensen's day, much of this original character still survived, though footpaths and playing fields could be seen as well as unmown prairie grass.

Fifty years earlier, between 1863 and 1865, the old Main Building of Luther College had risen on the heights of the bluff above the river. Under the oak savanna, workers had discovered clay. A German brickmaker had fired almost two million bricks within thirty yards of the construction site, and from these bricks they had erected the huge, three-story building. Oaks had fallen to the axe to furnish lumber. Limestone had been quarried on cam-

pus, burned into lime, and mixed with riverbed sand to make mortar. Building stone for most of the foundation had also been quarried on college land. Old Main at Luther College had literally grown out of the campus land, and when it was finished, landscaping was needed.

The founders of Luther College had been European immigrants, and so had most of the early students. They all had a European sense of order, and they had wanted to see this order imposed on the landscape of their wilderness campus. Most of them had come from Norway, a land of deep fjords, isolated valleys, and towering mountains, where people had long carved patches of ordered landscape out of the immense, imposing wilderness. The immigrants set out to do the same thing in the wilderness of northeastern Iowa. Under their hands, the campus of Luther College had gradually been transformed from a wilderness to a European landscape.

Their model had been the European country estate, not the school. European schools were in cities, but country estates stood by them-

selves, surrounded by their own grounds — like an American college. Geometrical order and regularity differentiated the grounds of these estates from the surrounding wilderness.

In the early days of Luther College, athletics were not a prominent part of the college scene. The students got their exercise by splitting firewood or clearing brush on campus. In 1874, after a south wing had been added to the Main Building, Professor Jacob D. Jacobsen put them to work cleaning up the building site and landscaping parts of the campus. A row of spruces was planted in a regular diagonal line, from the southeastern corner of the Main Building to the southeastern edge of the campus. An *allé* of elms was planted to shade the lane that cut directly across campus to the front entrance of the Main Building. Elm and spruce were common to both America and Norway, and they were often similarly employed in European landscaping.

These regularly spaced rows of trees enclosed an open meadow of natural prairie, roughly triangular in shape, mown once or twice a year. This was the only landscaped part



Objecting to stiff European formality, Jens removed this avenue of elms that led to Main Building. (courtesy LCA)

of the Luther College campus when Jens Jensen arrived there in 1909. Professor Jacobsen's student crews had roughly leveled out the old clay pit, called the Brick Yard, and sown it in grass, but the Yard still ended in a rather precipitous bank near the northeastern corner of the Main Building. At the campus entrance, a portal with Ionian columns had been erected in 1903. The northern part of the campus was still dotted with the remnants of the original oak savanna, and many of the burr oaks were quite old when Jens Jensen first saw them.

Visitors from Europe must have felt quite at home on the Luther College campus in the very early years of this century. Approaching it in a horse-drawn carriage, then riding through the portal and down the long, arching avenue of elms towards the Main Building must have been much like arriving at a stately manor house or larger rural parsonage in Norway. To immigrants, it must have been a comforting landscape, one that helped to bridge the gap between their old homeland and their new.

The Luther College campus might have remained to this day a European landscape carved out of American wilderness if Jens Jensen had not come to Decorah in 1909. It was Jensen who was to transform its most characteristic features beyond all recognition.

Jensen did not like the long avenue of elms which was the pride and joy of the college. Formal boulevards reminded him of his days as a soldier in Berlin. They represented the spirit of Prussian militarism, not the prairie spirit. He believed such tendencies towards militarism inappropriate on a campus where young men were being trained for life in a free, democratic society. The *allé* had to go.

Most of the elms fell to the axe. A few were moved to the edges of the campus, where they remained until Dutch elm disease struck them during the 1980s. A few scattered specimens were left to mark the scale of the symbolic

prairie which Jensen began to carve out as the center of the new campus.

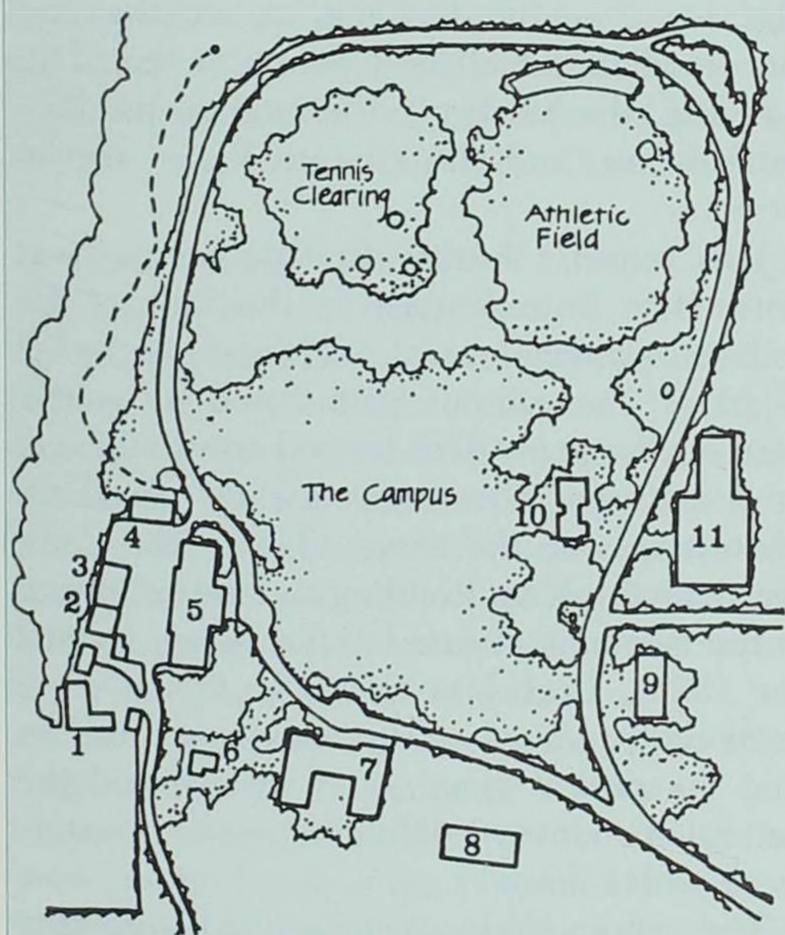
When the elms were gone, a large, long knoll, several hundred feet east of the Main Building, broke the sweep of Jensen's symbolic prairie. This knoll was just northwest of a smaller building called Prestegaarden (now Campus House). The old, half-leveled pit of the Brick Yard also marred the open space. Jensen ordered a gradient plan of the whole campus. During the spring and summer of 1910, extensive grading was carried out according to his orders. Students were sometimes given days off so that they might join the grounds crew in some of the work. The knoll was removed. The excavated soil was used to fill and level the slope of the old Brick Yard. When the grading was completed, the open campus rose gradually and evenly westwards towards the Main Building as it has ever since that time.

As a sentinel for this symbolic prairie, Jensen selected a lone cottonwood east of the Main Building. Some trees, he wrote, "speak much more forcefully alone, as, for instance, the cottonwood with its gray branches stretching up into the heavens as a landmark on the plains."

Jens Jensen did not attempt to imitate the varied natural landscapes of the prairie region, but rather he tried to capture their essence in symbolic forms. "Man cannot copy nature," he proclaimed. At the same time, he had a lofty, almost mystical view of his profession. "Art has its roots in the soil," he wrote. "Landscaping is a composition of life that unfolds a mysterious beauty from time to time until mature age. All other arts are founded on dead materials." Again, he wrote, "Nature cannot be copied; man cannot copy God's out-of-doors. He can interpret its message in a composition of living tones."

His plan for Luther College came to include three sunlit clearings surrounded by woodlands. North of the large symbolic prairie, which he called "The Campus," Jensen laid out

PLANTING PLAN:
 GROUNDS OF LUTHER COLLEGE,
 DECORAH, IOWA



KEY

1. Stable
2. Cook House
3. Power House and Heating Plant
4. Museum
5. Main Building
6. Hospital
7. Laur. Larsen Hall
8. Music Hall
9. Library [now Koren Hall]
10. Cottage [now Campus House]
11. Gymnasium/Natatorium

Jensen's planting plan (dated July 1910) shows three clearings, or symbolic prairies, separated by hard maples and burr oaks. (courtesy Jens Jensen Collection, LCA)

two smaller openings called the "Tennis Clearing" and the "Athletic Field." Hard maples scattered among native oaks separated these clearings from The Campus.

Along the bluff on the western edge of the campus, Jensen laid out a scenic trail leading to a Council Ring above a natural limestone outcropping, where there was a commanding view of the valley. Low native shrubs covered the steep bank behind Old Main. These shrubs attracted birds and small wildlife, provided some seasonal variety, yet allowed an open vista to the setting sun. Jensen clustered a few spruces near the Main Building and the Council Ring to mark the ends of the trail.

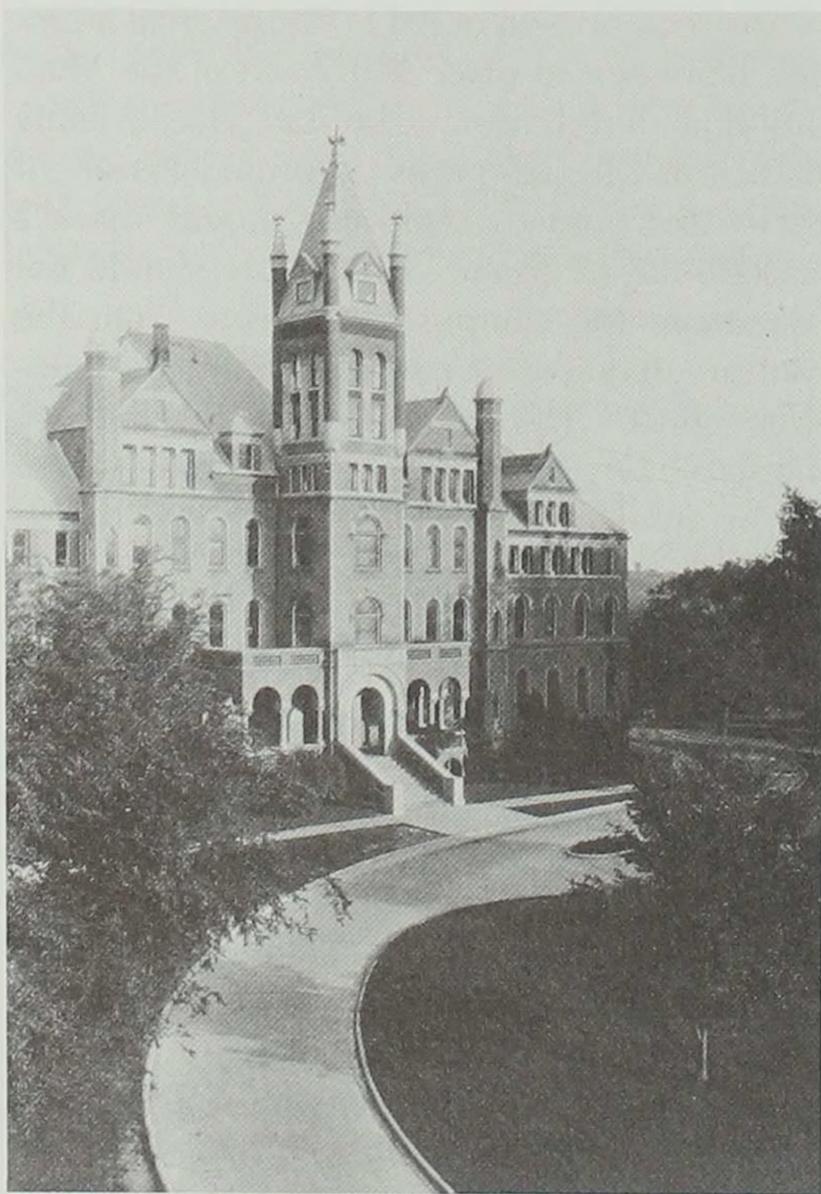
A large new statue of Martin Luther was to be dedicated during the semicentennial anniversary celebration in 1911. The original intention had been to place it in front of the Main Building, but Jensen, who had placed many statues in Chicago parks, informed President Preus that outdoor sculpture should "have a background of green." The statue should not "dominate the campus," he wrote. "On the contrary, it ought to be subservient to the landscape effect." Thus Jensen recommended that the statue be placed east of Larsen Hall, where he surrounded it with honeysuckle, hawthorn, and crab against a background of native oaks.

Finally, Jensen's plan provided for new roadways and a dramatic new entrance to the campus. The old roads had been linear and straight, with right-angle curves, approaching the college through a tunnel of elms. Jensen's new approach was from Hill Street (now Leiv Eiriksson Drive) at the lowest, southeastern corner of the campus. The approach road followed a low, sloping hillside below an old country house, Sunnyside. Along this hillside, Jensen planted a rich symbolic woodland of evergreens and hardwoods, with underplantings of flowering shrubs, and wild roses at the edges. Towards the end of the approach, the woodland was very close on both sides of the road. As the visitor thus approached through

the woodland, the campus remained hidden from view.

Then suddenly, the road curved upward and the prairie campus came into view. Ever-changing vistas appeared as the road continued to curve and rise; one could see across the sunlit campus towards the Main Building, or towards the half-hidden smaller clearings in the distance. Finally, there was a splendid view of the whole Oneota Valley in the direction of the setting sun.

Jens Jensen's Luther College campus in its final form was a masterpiece of Prairie School landscaping. Three large, open areas of prairie grasses were bordered by shady woodlands with a rich variety of regional trees and flowering shrubs. Roadways curved and rose in the



Jens changed straight, right-angle roads to curved roads that wound through woodland and dramatically emerged into clearings and campus buildings. (SHSI)

dappled sunlight along the margins of the clearings, without violating the open spaces. Views of the Oneota Valley and the hills beyond brought the surrounding countryside into the campus, reinforcing the regional identity of the designed landscape. So did the footpath along the bluff, where one looked down on the river from natural limestone outcroppings. The views from the shaded margins of the campus woodlands had focal points in the Main Building, the Martin Luther statue, the lone cottonwood, and the Oneota Valley to the west.

Jens Jensen's Luther College campus was finished in its essentials by the time of the college's semicentennial celebration in the fall of 1911. The campus maintained its serene harmony for many decades and grew in beauty as it matured. Groups frequently posed for photographs on the lower edge of The Campus, with the Main Building and the full sweep of the symbolic prairie behind them. During the 1920s, President Oscar L. Olson often reminded students not to "walk on a path," so that the prairie grass could survive and the natural open areas would not have to be interlaced with sidewalks.

The campus landscape looked so natural that many of the younger generation failed to realize that it was a masterpiece of American landscape design — or even that it was a designed landscape at all. Finally came the time when no one had seen the original oak savanna of the campus wilderness before 1861, and few could even remember the European landscape of the years before 1909. Gradually, Jens Jensen's work in Decorah slipped from many memories. It had been a major work at a key point in his career, but Jensen's Luther College campus never achieved the fame of his Chicago parks or his other urban landscapes. Part of it had been left unfinished. Short-lived smaller trees and shrubs were not replaced when they began to die out in the 1930s.

Yet such was the power of Jensen's work that

it put its stamp upon the expanding campus even after most people had forgotten Jensen. Few realized the extent to which the "natural" look of the Luther College campus was the result of a master landscape artist's planning, but everybody agreed that the "natural" look should be maintained. It was. The campus grew to 119 acres and came to include much of the floodplain below the bluff. In addition, the college acquired some eight hundred acres of land, including all the distant wooded hillsides that frame the campus view of the Oneota Valley.

After the semicentennial of Luther College came the centennial, and with the approach of the 125th anniversary, the Luther College Women's Club of Decorah brought forth a plan for further landscaping of the college lands. The club commissioned a new campus landscape plan which would recapture the essence of Jens Jensen's design for the Luther College campus and extend it to the much larger campus of the present day.

Two young landscape architects, John Harrington of the University of Wisconsin and Robert E. Grese of the University of Virginia, were put in charge of the project. Harrington has a special interest in the midwestern prairie region, while Grese is an authority on the landscape designs of Jens Jensen.

During the summer of 1985, Harrington and Grese conducted a thorough evaluation of the Luther College campus landscape. In the autumn, they submitted a detailed "Landscape Master Plan for the Luther College Campus." Their plan included an analysis of both Jens Jensen's philosophy of landscape design and his work at Luther College. In their plan, they divided the existing campus into eleven zones, ten above the bluff and one in the floodplain. They described the current state of each zone. They presented a master plan for the development of each zone, together with lists of recommended plant species for each zone of the campus.

The campus landscaped by Jensen between 1909 and 1911 is mostly within zones one, two, three, and eight of the 1985 master plan. Harrington and Grese noted that Jensen's shrubs and elms were gone, many of his other trees had reached maturity, and the small cottonwood sapling in front of Main had grown into an immense and "highly visible focus of the central campus." Many of the old burr oaks were still there, having added seventy-five annual rings to their girth, but very few young oaks had sprung up. Along the bluff, a ragged mixture of box elders, elms, maples, and other trees obscured views towards the Oneota Valley and the setting sun. Two buildings in succession had been erected in the Tennis Clearing, where the Center for Faith and Life now stands. The other open spaces in Jensen's plan, The Campus and the Athletic Field, were strewn with young trees, obscuring the vistas which had once unified the campus. Moreover, many of these trees were exotics that did not fit into the regional character of Jensen's campus design.

Despite the changes of seven decades, however, Harrington and Grese concluded that Jensen's campus design was still an important "historical and cultural asset to Luther College." They asserted that the majority of the "design elements that Jensen initiated at Luther College over 70 years ago are still applicable and can be recognized as existing on the campus today."

Beyond the zones of the campus once landscaped by Jens Jensen, Harrington and Grese found much of the newer land to be in harmony with Jensen's basic design. Newer buildings had been located along the edges of the openings as Jensen had thought they should be. A good deal of the native woodland and oak savanna still survived in the new, northern parts of the campus. Many of the campus roadways continued to curve around the open spaces.

The master plan of Harrington and Grese



Some campus buildings (here, Larsen Hall) are set in natural, prairie-like expanses. (courtesy Stephen F. Christy Collection, LCA)

was accepted by the college and will be implemented by stages in years to come. Detailed planting plans for zones one and two were presented in the spring of 1986, together with proposals for relocating some trees in Jensen's Campus and Athletic Field areas. A plan for establishing a small trial zone of prairie, across the road from the northern entrance, was presented at the same time. The initial stages of implementation began in 1986.

Jens Jensen's Prairie School campus of Luther College will take on new life in the years to come, restored and expanded as the Prairie Woodland campus designed by John Harrington and Robert E. Grese. Renewal of small trees and regional shrubs will introduce color and attract songbirds back onto the campus. Council Rings as outdoor classrooms or places for quiet conversation will be found in shady, wooded coves around campus, with views across the sunny open areas to the

wooded hills beyond. In all seasons, this campus, designed both to symbolize and be integrated into the surrounding region, will offer a beautiful, serene, and harmonious environment for higher education. □

Note on Sources

The primary sources on Jens Jensen's work at Luther College are in the Luther College Archives in the Preus Library. They include Jensen's photographs of Decorah and Luther College, one of his 1910 landscape plans for the Luther College campus, and other photographs of the Luther College campus. John Harrington and Robert Grese in their "Landscape Master Plan for the Luther College Campus, Decorah, Iowa" (1985) summarize Jens Jensen's philosophy and his work at Luther College. Robert E. Grese, "A Process for the Interpretation and Management of a Designed Landscape: The Landscape Art of Jens Jensen at Lincoln Memorial Garden, Springfield, Illinois" (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1984), is a major study of Jensen's work. Other works on Jensen include Leonard K. Eaton, *Landscape Artist in America: The Life and Work of Jens Jensen* (Chicago, 1964). Jensen represented his own ideas in rather poetic language in *Siftings* (Chicago, 1939).

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