

Cross of Christ Chronicles

Still More Recent Acquisitions

We were very pleasantly surprised early last summer (2017) when Joanne Amundson brought what could be called a “great, big, old, fancy, Norwegian Bible” to the Stone Church. She and her sister, Marion Frickson, presented it to the archives in memory of their grandparents, Theodore and Betsy (Halvorson) Anderson, the original owners. With copyrights listed as far back as 1872 this particular book is dated 1904, and it really is quite remarkable that in the three decades of the archive’s existence this is the first Bible of its type that we have received, so we are very grateful to the “Anderson sisters” for their donation.

Almost pristine in condition, it is a prime example of the so-called *Doré Bibles* so popular in the years surrounding the turn of the last century. Indeed, the artist, Paul Gustave Doré, is given name recognition on the title page, but he is only one of many artists whose works appear throughout.

These most impressive tomes were made as much for display as for use, perhaps even more so. If put away on a shelf one could not enjoy their richly decorative covers clad in highly polished leather embossed with gold. The half-inch thick covers were of an impressive three-dimensional design with deeply beveled indentations.

Weighing in at 15 ½ pounds, their unwieldiness made them somewhat impractical for daily use, but with over 1200 9x12 inch pages the treasures they contained were remarkable. Its circa 400 illustrations opened up a stunning visual representation of the stories in both Testaments, as well as many views of the Holy Land, its people, buildings and monuments, artifacts, plants, wildlife, etc., — *as seen through the lens of the 19th century* — and may well have been the very first immersion into the Biblical world for young and old alike. (We have never seen a Bible that was brought along from the old country or obtained in the first decades over here, that was illustrated in any way.)

From its Bible dictionary and colored maps, to its introduction and descriptive guide to each individual book, ending with an extensive concordance, there was something for everyone. Full-page black-and-white and color prints can be found throughout the 1137 pages of Scripture, and every now and then you will even run across a genuine lithograph, complete with facing page of protective tissue paper. The difference between the printed version and the real thing is quite evident, and you can often feel the texture of the thousands of hair's breadth incisions necessary to create the original work, transferred onto the page.

Not to be outdone the last two leaves were composed of the heavy matboard used in late Victorian photo albums, with slots for two cabinet cards (ca. 5x7) and eight *carte-de-visite* photos (each about the size of a playing card).

Included as well are two “artists’ galleries” featuring well-known New Testament illustrations by Heinrich Hofmann, and photographs of biblical sculptures by Danish artist, Bertel Thorvaldsen, leading with his world-famous statue of Jesus with outstretched arms and the caption, *Kommer til Meg* (Come onto Me). Also known as The Consoling Christ, a life-size copy has been in place on the Stone Church altarpiece since 1897.

So common were these exceptional Bibles that if you were to enter the home of any Norwegian Lutheran family at the turn of the last century, in town or out in the country, you would very likely find three things: Portraits of the family forbears suspended in elaborate multi-linear frames of lustrous wood and gilded plaster, peering down at you from their positions of honor high on the parlor walls; a framed visual depiction of the Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments in Norwegian — a “divinely” designed color print put out by the *Decorah Posten* Norwegian newspaper in Decorah, Iowa — which was made available to customers and also given as a *premium* in appreciation of their subscriptions; *and* their own Doré Bible proudly displayed on a small ornate table, likely of Eastlake design, in the middle of the room.

Like many other Bibles, the Doré also contained pages (often splendidly illuminated) for the Family Register on which the owners could proudly record the vital statistics of their family members, etc. (see note below).

This was to assure that this precious information would be preserved forever, just as it had been back in the old country, but they were now in a new world and a new time in which the prevailing customs and circumstances were very different. Most were simply too much baggage for modern and more mobile descendants.

Following the Great War, most of the abovementioned items were relegated to attics, storerooms, and trash heaps – *sic transit Gloria mundi!* Fortunately for my family the attic was the preferred place of repose for the cherished ancestral portraits and *Decorah Posten* prints, with the Doré Bible going to my great aunt, Sarah Kragness, whose family has preserved it. On its register pages is a precious inscription in his own hand, by my g-g-g-uncle, Mikkel Sennes, the original settler of our farm in 1853 who lived until 1904, including information that I have found nowhere else.

The Anderson family Bible can be seen in the display case at the west end of the narthex, and in the opposite corner there hangs an example of the *Decorah Posten* print, graciously donated by Oran Loken. Notice the inscription *Premie med Decorah Posten* at the very bottom. Framed family portraits were on display in this same case in the early 1990s, and we are very sorry if you missed out on observing them at that time.

N.B.- The register pages were titled *Ægteskaber* (Marriages), *Fødsler* (Births), and *Dødsfald* (Deaths); with a *Foræret* (Given by) page at the front.

— *Jim and Shelley, Cross of Christ Archives, September 2018*

