

Cross of Christ Archives

80th Anniversary Panoramic Photo-continued

In the May Parish Visitor, we told about the 80th Anniversary Panoramic Photo and will continue in this issue. Notice that behind the crowd, not too far out from the front of the church, you can see the roof of a tent (or some type of shelter structure). You will also see a large tent in photos of the 1902 District Meeting and the 125th Anniversary Celebration in 1991, both held at the Stone Church. Very few churches at that time had the facilities to handle the large crowds that attended such special events. We are now indeed fortunate to have a sufficiently accommodating structure in town.

While preparing for the panoramic photo in the summer of 1991, more than one oldster told us of a clever ploy that was unique to that particular procedure. Remember that the people were lined up in an arc and the camera slowly panned them beginning at the left end and finishing at the right. It seems there were instances back in its heyday when some young boy (it was always a boy) would position himself at the left end of the group, and when the camera had moved on far enough, but not too far, he would tear around behind those who were posing and then, falling in place at the right end of the gathering, wait for the camera to come around and create a "double exposure" of a different kind and thus be assured a special place in posterity. We've never actually seen one of those, but the method sounds plausible.

We would next draw your attention to the front row center of the photo. The old man with white hair and beard, holding his hat on his knee, is of course our former pastor, Rev. E.E. Jaastad, the "grand old man" who had served our congregation for 35 years, from 1873 to 1908. To the left are Rev. and Mrs. B.B. Ostrem, 1908 to 1927. Next is Mrs. Paulsrud, Dr. and Mrs. Martin Hegland, and Rev. J.O. Paulsrud, the current pastor. Dr. Hegland, of St. Olaf College, spoke as part of the program that evening.

Sitting just to the right of Rev. Jaastad was the reigning celebrity of the day, Tone Houge Wisland, the oldest living confirmand and member of the class of 1863! Born in Vrådal, Norway in 1847, she came with her family to America in 1861 and was confirmed during the Civil War. Tone, Mrs. Knut Wisland, lived all but 15 years of her life on the same farm on Houge Ridge where she grew up, was married, celebrated her 50th wedding anniversary, and passed away. Their ten children included Delbert, Abe, and Emma.

Continue to the right four more places to a woman sitting on the ground, wearing a rakishly tilted hat. Directly behind her the man in a white shirt (no necktie) with white hair and white mustache is none other than Tollef O. Skree, the second oldest confirmand, from the class of 1865. Apparently, he chose not to sit in the høgsete (literally: high seat, or place of honor), a typical "Norwegian bachelor farmer."

Next, move on to the left side until you see a gap between the children sitting on the ground. The tiny seated woman with the white collar is Anne Evanson Germanson, a member of the class of 1866, as was Mollie Loken Ingvaldson, but I have been unable to find a record of her being on the picture. Right beside Anne, with white shirt, hair and mustache is Ole S. Sanden, class of 1871, and the little lady next to him in dark clothing and hat is his wife, Ingeborg Skredtvet Sanden.

Anne, Mrs. Ole Germanson, was the mother of eight kids including Henry (Tomina) Germanson, Emma Eglund, and Edna Sholes. They lived at the west end of Paradise Valley. Mollie, Mrs. Paul Ingvaldson, lived in Sheldon and was the grandmother of Maynard and Paul Palmquist, etc. Ole and Ingeborg Sanden lived in Crystal Valley, the parents of Ed and Thor Sanden, and grandparents of Gladen Sanden, Doris Benson, etc.

Getting back to Tone Wisland, wasn't she something? She appears as a living anachronism, a vision from another time given form. No one else looks like her, and we believe she would fit in very well in the

1902 Kreds Møde pictures on display in our new entrance hallway. Tone is a prime example of what fashion historians call “fossilization”—a term we learned from Laurann Gilbertson, head curator at Vesterheim Museum in Decorah, Iowa—which was especially prevalent among those born in the 1800s. Can you imagine a woman who had never flashed an ankle in her entire life adopting the look of the “younger set” on the photo?

At some point in their lives most people simply stopped changing with the times and stayed with what was comfortable for them. This was most noticeable among the women, and in particular the pioneer generation who usually didn’t wear “fashionable dress” in the first place. It also explains the caveat that you shouldn’t look at the apparel of the older women when trying to date an old photo.

We point these people out since they were the ones deemed the oldest living confirmands by those who organized the reunion, and whose pictures appear in the 80th Anniversary booklet because of that distinction. (This list was probably limited to those who still lived in the area.)

—Shelley and Jim, Cross of Christ Archives, August 2018