

St. Olaf College to cap its centennial with symbolic journey to rural church

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 The Star's Religion Editor

NORTHFIELD, Minn. — St. Olaf College, nearing the end of a year-long observance of its centennial, will make a symbolic journey back to its church roots tomorrow with a service in a rural congregation near Kenyon, Minn.

The 10:30 a.m. service at Holden Lutheran Church will recall how St. Olaf — now Minnesota's largest private college — grew out of an academy started by a Norwegian immigrant pastor, the Rev. Bernt J. Muus, in the Holden parsonage.

The service is one of the concluding events of the centennial. The others — all on the St. Olaf campus here — will include the centennial worship at 4 p.m. tomorrow; a centennial fair at 7:30 p.m. tomorrow; a Norwegian Heritage Day convocation at 9:40 a.m. Monday, and a Founders' Day convocation at 9:40 a.m. Wednesday.

News of the Churches

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St. Olaf's centennial history, written by Dr. Joseph M. Shaw, a St. Olaf professor, says a phrase from the college song, "Founded in faith to render light," speaks lyrically and concisely of the origin and purpose of the college.

Led by Pastor Muus, "a small group of men and women willing to sacrifice goods and energies for Christian faith and higher learning established St. Olaf, dedicated it to the service of the Triune God, and prayed that it should be 'a blessing to us and the coming generations,'" Shaw recounts.

Muus named St. Olaf for the patron saint of Norway,



Muus Shaw Christiansen Rolvaag

King Olaf Haraldsson, and made the king's battle cry the college's motto. In English, it means "Forward, Forward, Men of Christ, Men of the Cross." As St. Olaf's first president (principal), Muus chose a St. Paul pastor, the Rev. Thorbjorn Nelson Mohn.

The first home of St. Olaf's School in Northfield consisted of two frame buildings, resembling country schoolhouses, which had been relocated near Carleton College. St. Olaf moved to its present hilltop campus in 1878 and added a college department in the 1880s.

The college suffered a harsh blow in 1893 when it was abandoned by its sponsoring Lutheran church body. For six years, it was literally an orphan. A St. Olaf professor, H.T. Ytterboe, is credited with saving the institution by traveling around the Midwest collecting money for it. Mohn reportedly did the work of several men in keeping the college in operation. In 1899, the college regained official church support. It is now affiliated with the American Lutheran Church.

During its 100 years, St. Olaf has had six presidents, all clergymen. Besides Mohn, who headed the college until 1899, the other presidents, with some of their accomplishments as cited by Shaw, have been:

John Nathan Kildahl, president from 1899 to 1914, who appointed some of St. Olaf's most gifted teachers, including F. Melius Christiansen, the composer and choir director, and Ole E. Rolvaag, the author of "Giants in the Earth" and other novels. Both Christiansen and Rolvaag had critics in the church because of their unconventional ways.

Lauritz A. Vigness, president from 1914 to 1918, who

led St. Olaf in gaining accreditation and in increasing its contacts with other colleges.

Lars K. Boe, president from 1918 to 1942, who "presided over St. Olaf's coming of age" and who left on the institution "the unforgettable impact of his strong personality and remarkable vision."

Clemens M. Granksov, president from 1943 to 1963, who led the college in growth in every area from budgets and buildings to memberships in national honorary societies, including Phi Beta Kappa.

Sidney A. Rand, president since 1963, whose choice "reaffirmed the institution's historic commitment to higher education closely tied to the church." Rand had been executive director of the ALC's Board of College Education.

Students at St. Olaf lived under confining rules during its early history. In the mid-1920s, they were forbidden to use intoxicating liquors, attend dances, visit billiard rooms, pool rooms or bowling alleys or to gamble. Men and women were not allowed to room or board at the same house; a student could not visit one of the other sex in a private room; students could not keep automobiles or leave Northfield without notifying the dean. Chapel attendance was compulsory.

Over the years, many of the rules were relaxed — chapel attendance became voluntary, social dancing was introduced and inter-dormitory visitation and coeducational housing were permitted. Drinking on campus is still prohibited.

One of the oldest traditions at St. Olaf is the practice of writing examinations without supervision under terms of an honor system which went into effect in 1911.

Two incidents at St. Olaf have become legendary among "Oles," as students and alumni of St. Olaf are called.

One occurred in 1939 during the visit of Norway's crown prince and princess to the college when a veteran professor, C. A. Melby, tipped backward in his chair at the rear of the stage and disappeared from view. Fortunately, a student and a college employee caught him and pushed him back on the stage as the audience cheered.

Another incident took place in 1957 when the campus mascot, a dog named "Ytterboe," was shot by a Northfield policeman. Throngs of students surged toward the police headquarters downtown, demanded Ytterboe's remains and conducted an elaborate funeral.

Recent academic innovations at St. Olaf include introduction of a 4-1-4 calendar, starting of a "para-college" which enrolls some 150 students who design their own curricula, and an extensive international studies program that annually sends scores of St. Olaf students abroad for study.

"Freedom Kindled By The Flame of The Spirit"

10:30 a.m.
 1974 LECTURE-SERMON SERIES
 by Dr. Howard Conn
THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF H. RICHARD NIEBUHR:
 The Focus of God in Church and Society
 2. The Responsible Self

DOWN

Worship: 8:15 a.m.
 Bible Hour: 9:30 a.m.
 Worship: 10:45 a.m.
 Evening Services: 5 & 7 p.m.

Morning Worship