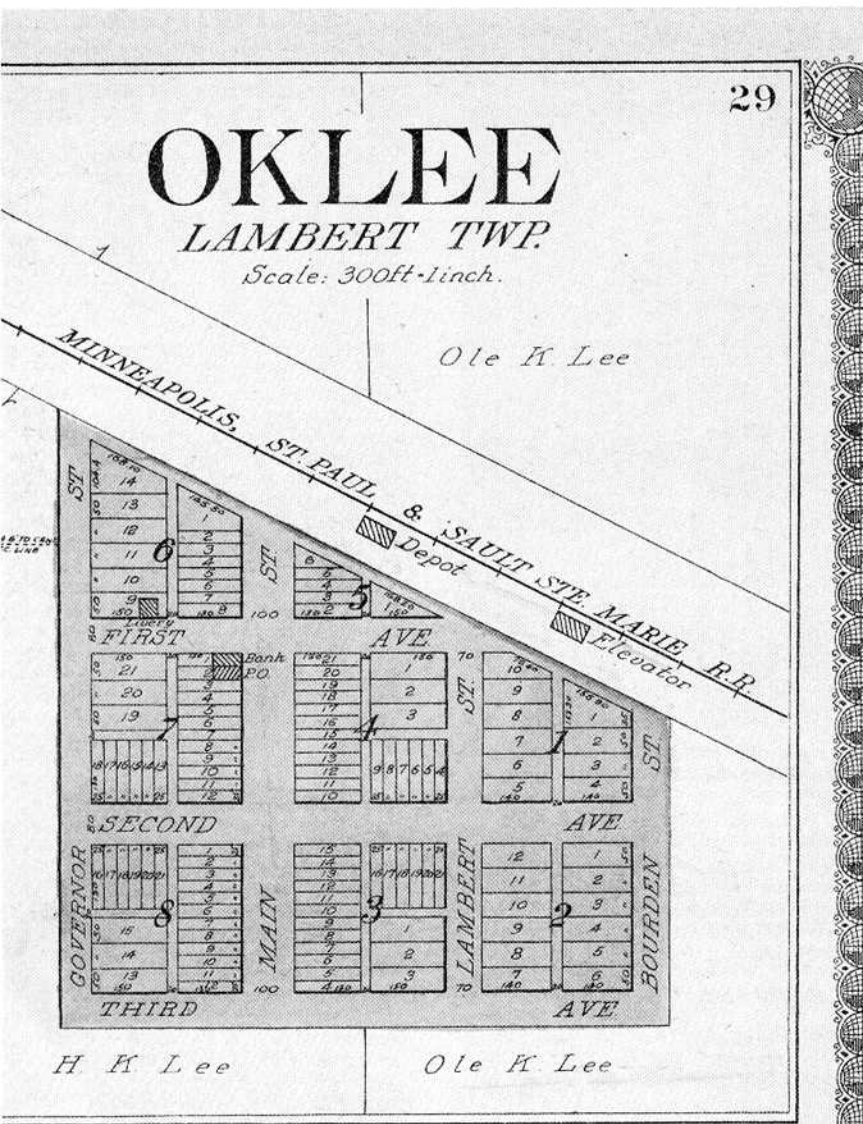




Aerial view of Oklee



The recorded history of the ownership of the land on which the Village of Oklee is located dates back to the receiver's receipt issued by the U.S. Government June 22, 1882 to John C. Fitzgerald who became the first legal owner of the west one-mile quarter of section 1, township 150 N. He sold the quarter to Cornelius O'Neill. Since then ownership changed hands several times. It was acquired by Ole and Anne Vattendahl in 1896 who retained ownership for several years. The Tri-State Land Company, a corporation, purchased the land from E. E. Quenroe in 1910.

Mary O'Neill acquired a patent April 12, 1888 to the adjoining quarter to the east. After several changes in ownership the land was purchased by Edward O. Erickson in 1905 who sold it to O. K. Lee in 1909. Mr. Lee sold it to the Tri-State Land Company which had the town site surveyed, platted and named Oklee.

The land on which the town site is located was originally located in Lambert Township, Polk County, but on December 31, 1896 Polk County was divided into two counties to form Polk and Red Lake County with the county seat at Red Lake Falls. Red Lake County at this time included what is now Pennington County, but differences of opinion developed between the people of the northern and southern halves of Red Lake County over the location of the court house, which led to the division of Red Lake County to form Red Lake and Pennington County, November 23, 1910.

The year 1905 is remembered as being very wet. The summer and fall rains made it impossible to harvest the crops on the village site. It, however, was good weather for ducks, as Oklee was situated in an excellent hunting area for water fowl.

In 1909 the Soo Line Railroad surveyed the course of the proposed route in preparation for locating and laying the roadbed. Oklee became the shipping point for freight, but mail which came in had to be addressed to Lambert until 1914 although the post office was located in Oklee. The first lots on the village site were auctioned off at a public sale to individual buyers in



locate in what promised to become a prosperous community.

Several buildings were erected on the village site during 1910. Peter Husby, local manager of the I. O. Manger Lumber Yard, of McIntosh, brought in the first loads of lumber from McIntosh and erected the first temporary building in Oklee. The one room building served both as an office and a home.

The first permanent building, a hardware store, was erected by K. K. Sannes. It was located somewhere between the present residence of Lowell Sovde and the Railroad. Mrs. Mary Sannes built the second building north of what is now the East Farmers Union Elevator where she operated a small restaurant. The First State Bank was built on the present site of the Security State Bank.

Ole and Tom Melby, brothers who had formerly lived in Wilton where Tom had operated a store, erected their place of business with the aid of Richard Sletvold as carpenter, on its present site. This is the only original commercial establishment that is still actively engaged in business under the original management. Mrs. Nap Miller was hired as the first clerk in Melby's Store.

Other buildings that went up during

had become a thriving little town which interested and encouraged other business enterprises to come and establish their businesses in the next few years.

Nap Miller first opened a barber shop in the Alphonse Paquin Building in 1911 but moved into the new addition of the Melby Store. Later he and Bert Riel put up a new building which served as a barber shop, pool hall and a soft drink parlor. Mr. Miller had operated a barber shop continuously until his retirement in January, 1958.

It was in May 1911 that a daughter, Helga Stromme, was born to Mr. and Mrs. Gunder Stromme to become the first child born in Oklee.

E. K. Gjernes who had operated a store in Garnes put up a new building and moved his business to Oklee. E. J. Wanke and Nels Strande put up a new livery stable. Henry Nelson from Garnes Town erected a new blacksmith shop, and Ole and Charles Sletvold built a new feed mill which later burned down. Many other businesses made their appearance in Oklee in later years. In 1914, eleven other buildings were put up — Fortier's Blacksmith Shop, Hamilton opened a drug and jewelry store in the Doucet Building, S. P. Johnson, General Merchandise, The Oklee Herald, The Village Fire Hall, D. Meikle, Oklee Dry

OKLEE



Main Street of Oklee 1911 looking north.

the spring of 1910. The corner lots were sold for \$300 each and the other lots for \$250. The lots were sold before there was railroad service or even tracks laid. However, the railroad was in the process of building the roadbed and in September, 1910 the first passenger train came to Oklee.

The summer of 1910 was unusually dry. There was no water in Lost River. The channel was void of water and in its place was green grass. This condition had its advantages as it made it a good year for construction work.

The next few years were destined to bring about a big change in the town site as there was considerable building activity as new business enterprises came in to

1910 were a livery stable by Peter Hince, a hotel by Elsie Haaven and her sister, Mrs. Williams, a meat market by Gunder Stromme, a hotel by Mrs. Mary Sannes, a harness shop by Charles Seeger, a lumber yard by I. O. Manger of McIntosh, a soft drink parlor by Alphonse Paquin, Northland Grain Elevator, Farmers and Merchants Bank. Albert Lemieux was Oklee's first drayman and was responsible for delivering the lumber, equipment, and merchandise used by the early business establishments and their homes.

Louis Falardeau of Lambert Town moved his general store to the present Main Street and Louis Doucet, also of Lambert Town, moved his grocery store, post office, and home to Oklee. By 1911 Oklee

Cleaner, and several residences. Abraham (Governor) Paquin erected several buildings during the early history of the town.

On January 14, 1914 the county board approved a petition which authorized the village of Oklee to hold an election for incorporating. A successful election was held January 31, 1914. The first elected officers of the village were J. A. C. Torgerson, President; Louis Doucet, Clerk; W. B. Torgerson, Treasurer; and Ole Sannes, Assessor.

The first levy called for \$600 for revenue, \$300 for roads and \$50 for the poor.

The early settlers of Oklee and the community were mostly composed of persons of French and Norwegian ancestry. Many had come directly from either Canada or



The general merchandise store owned by Peter Bergeron was one of the first Oklee stores. Gunlik Holm is the driver of the ox team.

Norway. While the language, religion and customs differed, they have set an enviable record in mutual respect, understanding and cooperation in their common endeavor for the benefit of the community.

While Oklee and its surrounding community felt young, strong and was thriving in a wholesome, energetic spirit, many of the early settlers experienced privation and frustrations. Many of their days were filled with hardships, heartaches and inconveniences. Conditions existed that were a severe test of the character and stamina of the people in order to survive the rigorous demands of the day. Conditions which plagued the people were the poor roads, the long cold hard winters, the late springs, the heavy rains, the heavy snows, the floods, the droughts, the grasshopper infestations, the plant and animal diseases and pestilence, the flies and mosquitoes, and the lack of capital and equipment. There were also, of course, the deaths, illnesses and accidents. Every once in awhile the community was shocked and deeply concerned by reports of cases of individuals who had become ill with smallpox, typhoid fever, tuberculosis and pneumonia which in those days so often spelled death. Local sanitation was also a problem until the horses were replaced by cars and the city sewage system was completed.

However, these negative conditions and the long hard working days which were the rule of the early settlers did not dampen their spirits for long, nor did they cause them to neglect the lighter side of life. They sought relaxation, pleasure, and contentment in several different ways. There were the usual family and neighborhood get-togethers for fun and as early as 1912 there was popular interest in the baseball games which were played between Oklee and the neighboring towns and communities. Surprisingly enough there was even consideration given to organizing a football team in the fall of 1914 for the boys and to provide fall entertainment. A cornet band, made up of local persons under the direction of Dr. Tessier served notice to the public in the May 14, 1914 edition of the local paper that they were ready to play for the public. The same year people were talking about the wonderful moving picture shows that were brought into Oklee and shown in

the local hall. Dances seemingly were as popular in those days as today. They did differ in some respects from today's dances especially in that it seemed the dances continued later into the dawn of the new day.

The location of Oklee was ideally suited for outdoor sports such as hunting and fishing as the country side was at first sparsely populated and largely covered by trees and brush interspersed with several rivers, marshes and sloughs. During the summer many people spent much time fishing and boating in the nearby lakes and rivers. The fall months provided the sports-minded persons with many pleasant experiences hunting the upland birds and water fowl, especially the ducks, which were plentiful. As the cold fall weather moved in, the hunters made preparations to hunt the rabbit and deer which were both numerous. There was also an occasional bear hunt. The winter months offered the more hardy outdoor men the opportunity to trap the mink and muskrat which not only provided a way to spend leisure time, but often provided a profitable income when the pelts were sold.

There are records of successful Market Day celebrations as early as 1917. These were planned and promoted by The Community Club which was known to have held meetings as early as 1912. Here the people

raised on their farms and in their gardens. Here, too, the women were offered the opportunity to display their talents in handicraft work, baking and canning. As economic conditions improved for the early residents, the sale of automobiles increased. By the year 1921 car ownership had become so popular that the car owners organized a car club which planned many Sunday excursions to nearby localities where people could enjoy picnics and other get-together activities.

Besides the already mentioned organizations and activities, there were the Sons of Norway, Social Clubs, Reading Clubs, Chatauqua Programs and Tent Shows, The Woodmen of the World, and later the American Legion and Legion Auxiliary to appeal to and satisfy the interest of many persons with many hours of pleasant companionship.

The moral and spiritual needs of the people were met and satisfied by attendance at the local church, parochial schools, Sunday schools, and in later years, released time from the public school for religious instruction during week days.

The schools provided for the educational needs, making an earnest effort to successfully meet the standards of the day.

The early settlers of the area were also fortunate in enjoying many services and organizations to help enrich, promote, and inspire the life of the people and to encourage others to come and settle in the community. Once the townsite was established and development began, doctors and dentists established themselves at a very early date to foster and protect the health and welfare of the people.

In 1911, Dr. W. O. Tessier arrived from Canada and established offices in a residence on Main Street. In 1912 Dr. Sample, a dentist, provided dental services for the local people. Even a photographer, H. F. Nixon, set up an office in 1914 which, however, did not survive long.

The first edition of the Oklee Herald made its debut in May, 1912 and has served the people continuously, with the exception of a few short interruptions, as a weekly paper to the present day. The Oklee Tribune, published by G. T. Veilleux, was a short-lived paper as only the two issues of July 18 and August 1, 1912 were published.

Because Oklee and the surrounding community was settled in the late 19th and early 20th century, the settler enjoyed many public utilities which were not available in an earlier era. From the outset there was telephone and postal service.

Louis Doucet, who moved his post office



Melby's Store in 1911. Persons are Dr. Tessier, Tom Melby, Ole Melby, Aamund Person and Nap Miller.



C. F. Seeger at work in his harness shop and shoe repair business 1911. Olaf Haaven and Ted Lemieux customers.

from Lambert, was the first local postmaster. He was followed by Ed J. Soland in 1914 who remained until Henry Falardeau, who had been manager of the Farmers Cooperative Elevator, was appointed in 1936. Two permanent daily R.F.D. mail routes were established in 1925 with Clarence Lynch and Louis Horstman as drivers.

As early as the year 1914, the village had received two chemical fire engines, one 50 gallon and the other a 60 gallon engine equipped with regulation firemen's tools. (The first annual Firemen's Ball was held in 1913). It was not long before gas lights illuminated the Main Street. These were, however, replaced at an early date with electric lighting provided by a village owned light plant. A few years later light and power was furnished by the Interstate Power Co. As early as 1917, while the village was still very young, work began on the tiling of the streets which made it possible for every resident to connect their basements with the drainage. The present day water system was installed in 1919 which offered to the people one of the most appreciated services since the village was established. Again in 1948 the village installed an extensive and costly improved sewage system.

Probably the most exciting election in the history of the community took place in 1916. The big decision to be settled was whether the county of Red Lake was to be wet or dry. Much talking and arguing took place as the feelings of the people were strong as they gave support to their own convictions. Results? The Oklee Village voted dry 49 to 19, and the village of Red Lake Falls wet 358 to 45. The County voted wet 931 to 703.

In 1917 came the ominous rumblings of war which brought about a rapid change in the lives of the people from the usual every day routine. Men between the ages of 21-30 were ordered to register for wartime duty under the Federal Conscription Law. The people were called upon to observe meatless and heatless days, to buy Liberty Bonds, Thrift Stamps. Red Cross Chapters and War Saving Societies were organized. The people held loyalty meetings, and listened to patriotic speeches, and women were busy making comfort kits.

In February 1918 came the sad news

that Gunder G. Austad, the first young man from Oklee to cross the Atlantic for service in France, had been buried somewhere on the Irish Coast. He had been a member of the 20th Engineers and was on the transport, Tuscania, which Was sunk February 4 by a German submarine. He was the first young man from the county to give his life for his country in World War One. The Red Lake Falls Legion Post is named after him.

Back in 1914 a young man by the name of John O. Melby, who had been born and raised in Norway, arrived in Oklee to establish himself in business and to take a prominent part in local, civic, church and community activities. Later on he became interested in politics. In 1926 he was endorsed by the Farm Labor Party and was elected to represent the people of the 65th District in the House of Representatives of the state legislature. Here he served the people by promoting and safeguarding their interests continuously until his death in 1944.

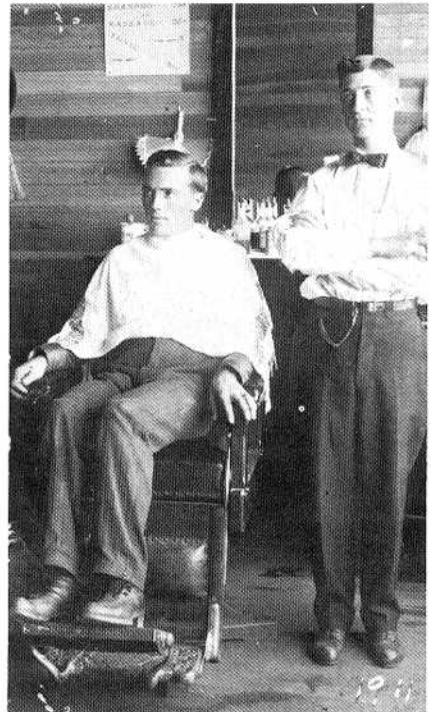
An active interest in local civic affairs by women is evident from the earliest days. In the November election of 1920 we find Mrs. J. Bourque, operator of the Oklee Fashion Shop, and the first local woman voter, occupying the position of judge of election. In 1950 Mrs. Coya Knutson, a local high school instructor and the wife of a local farmer and hotel operator, was elected to the state legislature where she served the people of the 65th District in the House of Representatives for three terms. In 1956 she further distinguished herself, and focused the attention of our entire country to Oklee, by becoming the first woman from the State of Minnesota to be elected by the people of the 9th District to the Congress of the United States where she served two terms in the House of Representatives. While there, her ceaseless and tireless efforts in helping to enact the National Defense Education Act, won for her the grateful appreciation of thousands of our young college students and their parents. The Act not only set up a student loan program which provides funds for promising and needy college students who otherwise might find it impossible to attend school but also provides funds to local schools, like Oklee, to help improve the learning and teaching situation.

One of the most difficult and persistent problems faced by the villagers of Oklee and one that defied any simple and permanent solution was the maintenance of the streets, especially during the spring break-up. It often happened that they were impassable and always treacherous in the spring as their appearances were often

deceiving. They would look dry on the surface but if used, vehicles often sank in the soft subsoil to the hubs and became stuck. Often horses and later tractors were kept near to help the victims. Large quantities of gravel were spread on the surface, but this improved the situation only temporarily. It was not until the village in 1955 undertook a program of improvement in which several inches and sometimes several feet of the old surface soil was removed and replaced by gravel and blacktop that a permanent solution was effected.

Fortunately for Oklee there never was a dearth of excellent leadership which has been repeatedly reflected in the rapid and steady progress of the village.

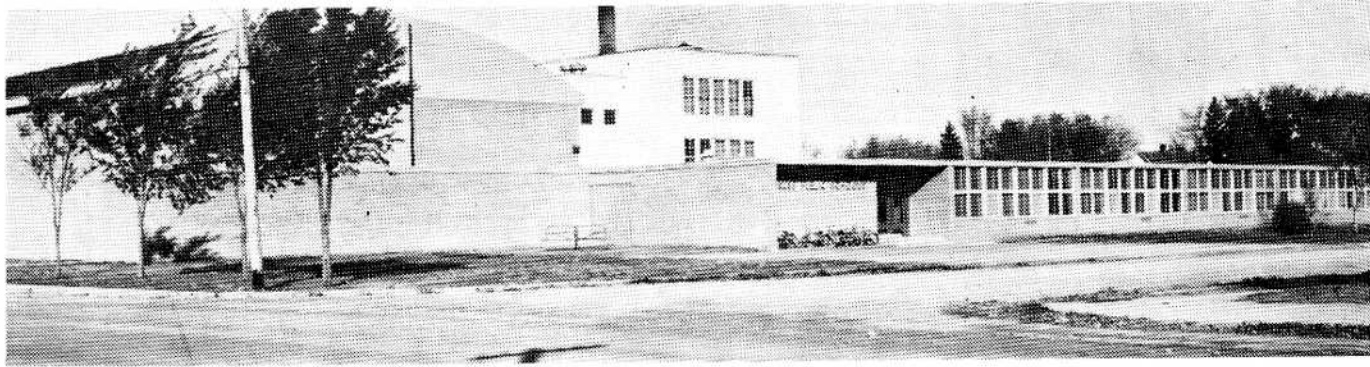
Presently serving as Oklee's Mayor is Alvin Jensen and Larry Skallet is the Clerk-Treasurer.



Ole Melby and Nap Miller in 1911



Interior of Peter Bergeron store approximately 1925. Peter Bergeron, Mrs. Paul Varin, Cecelia Bergeron and unidentified man.



Oklee public school. The gymnasium, auditorium and ten classrooms were added in 1952.

OKLEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The story of the local school parallels that of the village. It is one which denotes a continuous improvement in the educational facilities to meet the needs of the children as the village grew and prospered. From the beginning there is evidence that the parents have desired and provided the best that the economic conditions of the times would permit.

The children of the first families in the village had to attend a rural school located east of the townsite. This school was attended until the close of the 1913-14 school year. During the summer of 1914 a new frame school building was erected in the village. A sum of \$10,000 had been voted for financing the structure and it was expected to be ready for use the fall of 1914-15. However, the actual cost came to \$15,000 and it was not ready for occupancy until in February, 1915. It was dedicated in November, 1915. While the building was under construction, classes were held in the Zion Lutheran Church and the village hall. The first teachers were Victor C. Hill, Principal, with Ida Rovang of Erskine and Astrid Kindseth of Red Lake Falls as Assistants. When the school opened in the fall of 1915 manual training and domestic science were added to the curriculum. 87 students had enrolled the first week.

The rural school district lying directly to the north of the village in Garnes Township consolidated with the local district when it was decided to open a school in the village, to form consolidated school district No. 1 of Red Lake County.

During the summer of 1923 the outside of the school building was renovated by lathing and stuccoing.

On May 16, 1938 the voters of Consolidated School District No. 1 by a vote of 181 to 29 authorized the school board to issue bonds to the State of Minnesota for a total of \$12,000 for the construction of a fire-proof high school building and for repairs to the old building. The new building provided for offices, a study hall, a library room, a science room, and three general classrooms. It was built with federal aid and under the supervision of the Works Projects Administration. This building provided a tremendous boost to the educational facilities of the school.

Due to decreasing enrollments and a shortage of rural teachers during the latter part of the thirties and the early forties, several of the rural school districts closed their schools and transported their children to the Oklee Public School. This situation created an overcrowded condition which was corrected June 3, 1947 by the consolidation of schools districts 9, 10, 11, 13, 19, 20, 76, 103, 151 of Red Lake County,

204, 252, of Polk County and joint districts No. 33, 58, and 8-271 with Consolidated School District No. 1 and increased the area of the district to 86,615 acres. The consolidation made it financially possible to add new additions to our school.

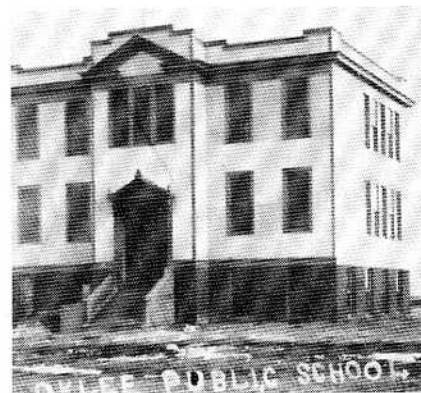
On June 27th at a special election the voters authorized the school board to dispose of school buildings and other property acquired from rural school districts by the consolidation.

On August 18, 1947 the voters at a special election authorized the local school board to issue bonds to the State of Minnesota in an amount of \$16,000 for financing the present practical arts building, and \$12,000 to be used for the purchase of new buses, both sums bearing interest at 2½ per cent per annum. This building was erected across the street to the east and provided for five elementary classrooms. Bert Riel and Ray Lindquist supervised the construction of the building which cost the school district about \$23,000. It was occupied early in 1948. This building was later remodeled to provide industrial arts and the domestic science departments in 1953.

The period following the consolidation was marked by a sharp increase in the enrollment. From 1946 to 1954 the total enrollment increased from 295 to 506. The largest enrollment in the grades (1-6) was 261 in 1955 and in the high school (7-12) with 237 students in 1959.

To provide classrooms and special departments for the increased enrollment, a special election was held March 17, 1952 which authorized the school board to borrow money and issue bonds to a maximum of \$300,000 for the construction of a new addition which included a ten room elementary school, and auditorium — Physical Education unit with lockers and storage rooms, a new heating unit, and facilities for carrying on a school lunch program.

The proposal to build was carried by a



Old school built in 1915.

vote of 370-140. \$290,000 worth of bonds were issued with interest rates of 2½ and 3 percent.

As a result of the expanding school program we find that the school district as of March 1958 was appraised as having an investment of \$694,598 in building and equipment.

Transportation as a service has been provided for students since the district was first consolidated. Cars and trucks with homemade bus bodies were first used. These were owned and operated by private parties. As time went on the school district began to purchase their own buses.

Shortly after the school district began to invest in school buses, the school board purchased a garage to house the vehicles. It also hired a full-time mechanic to maintain them and to drive a bus over one of the routes.

Extra curricular activities too have prospered as the school grew. Records indicated that the first high school basketball team was organized in 1923. Members of this team were Theodore Torgerson, Raymond Lindquist, Orrin Melby, William Torgerson, Oscar Rolland, August Bourque, Carl Lerohl, Elmer Hince and Orlo Soland. Since that time basketball has been carried on continuously as an extra curricular activity, but football was not added as a permanent sport until in 1946. Interested boys have also been given opportunities to participate in baseball and track although it has received much less emphasis.

Since the school has participated in intercollegiate sports, our football teams have won three championships, 1951, 1955, 1958, and has established an enviable record in the Tri-County Conference. Our basketball teams were runners-up in the North Sub-District in 1951 and 1952. The calendar year of 1955 is remembered as a banner year in athletics as our basketball team won the North Sub-District Championship for the first and only time in the school's history.

The same spring the track team set a new record in the Sprint Medley at the Beaver Relays in Bemidji and our football team won the Tri-County Conference championship in the fall. Our boys have also set new records in both track and field events.

Several of our athletes have been sought out by college and university coaches. However, only a few have responded and have participated in college athletics.

Dramatics and speech has had a prominent place in the lives of many of our students, and special music instructors have been maintained on the staff for several years to direct vocal and instrumental music in both the grades and high school.

A successful school lunch program has been in operation since the thirties except

for a few years during World War Two. After the consolidation and before the last addition was completed the facilities of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church were used to carry on the school lunch program which is partly supported by state and federal money and surplus agriculture commodities.

The success story of the Oklee Public School can be accounted for by the genuine interest the people have always had in education and their wise choice of school board members. Special consideration should be given to Peter Bergeron, Ole Melby, Ben Sordahl and Joe Dufault who had served continuously 20 to 32 years on the board. The present Board of Education for the Oklee Public School: Dr. H. T. Lindquist, President; Robert Bluemke, Vice President; Donald Stenberg, Secretary; George Lee, Treasurer; Earl Strand and Gary Mitchell, Directors.

The administrators who have served the Oklee Public Schools from the beginning are: Victor C. Hill, 1914-1916; B. O. Norby, 1916-1918; E. T. Jacobson, 1918-1919; Elmer Johnson, 1919-1920; Herbert E. Race, 1920-1923; Olaf A. Homme, 1923-1925; George L. Nettelund, 1925-1937; Loren M. Ness, 1937-1942; Carl G. Quist, 1942-1971; Marvin Bronken, 1971.

Mr. Race writes from his home in Yucaipa, California, "I have not taught school since leaving Oklee as the load was too heavy for me. I had to be a teacher every period of the day, be a supervisor, a disciplinarian, an administrator, a librarian, a manual training teacher, a coach, and many other duties". Mr. Race did other kinds of work and for a while he was in real estate business but is now retired and lives in southern California.

Olaf A. Homme was a graduate of Concordia College and was principal of the Oklee High School for one year and when

Mr. Race resigned he became superintendent. He was the first science teacher who had a real science laboratory to work in. During his stay a high school literary society was formed and the high school students met once a month for a program, refreshments and fun. Under his leadership a small high school annual was published. Mr. Homme later taught school at Thompson, North Dakota, and Barnum, Minnesota. He died in 1965 in Minneapolis.

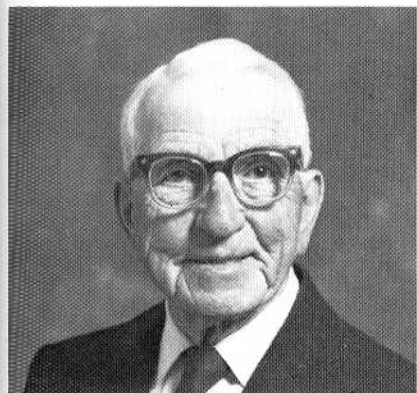
George L. Nettelund was administrator of the Oklee School during the depression of the early thirties when teacher's salaries went as low as eighty-five dollars a month. But the school weathered the period well and the enrollment increased. The first Parent-Teachers Association was formed during Nettelund's administration and several new subjects were added to the curriculum. After leaving Oklee in 1937, Mr. Nettelund has been busy in the insurance field selling both life insurance and hospital insurance. He is now ninety-one years of age and hale and hearty in both body and mind and together with his wife lives in Thief River Falls where they enjoy every minute of the day.

Loren M. Ness succeeded Mr. Nettelund as superintendent in 1937. He came from Moorhead where he graduated from Concordia College and he also had a Master of Arts Degree from the University of North Dakota. During Mr. Ness' administration a new high school building was erected through help from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during World War Two. The enrollment was growing tremendously and typing and music were added to the curriculum. After resigning from the Oklee School, Mr. Ness spent two years at Clearbrook. Since then he has been in Boy Scout work. From 1944 to 1947 he was a district executive in the Viking Council, Boy Scouts of America. In 1947 he was called

to the position of National Boys' Work Director of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and he continued the same work in the American Lutheran Church. He is now retired and he and his wife, the former Leona Soland, live in Minneapolis. They have two adopted children, Lora Lee and Lance.

Carl G. Quist succeeded Mr. Ness as superintendent in 1942. This was the World War Two period and many people from the area left for the West Coast to find employment in the defense plants. However, the school carried on and in 1948 a temporary grade building was erected which later became the Home Economics and Industrial Arts Building. In 1953 the large gymnasium and grade school building was completed and the enrollment was large due to the consolidation with many of the rural school districts. Mr. Quist had worked diligently for this cause. Mr. and Mrs. Quist continue to make their home in Oklee and have traveled extensively since his retirement.

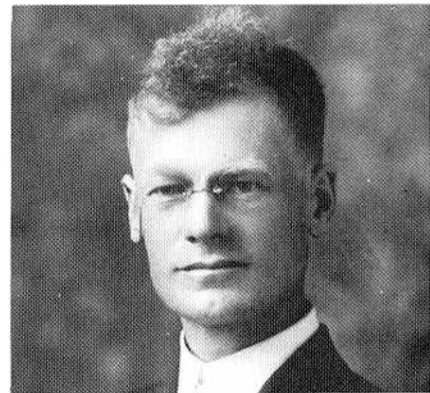
Marvin Bronken, a native of North Dakota, received his B.A. and M.A. Degrees from the University of North Dakota. He served for seven years in the public school at McVill, North Dakota before coming to Oklee in 1956 where he served as principal until 1971 when Mr. Quist retired. Since that time he has served as Superintendent. During these last four years improvements have been made at the football field such as lights, score board, new bleachers and a broadcasting booth. A full time kindergarten program, a grade school library, a new individualized reading program, an intercom system and a video tape recorder are some of the new developments. Mr. and Mrs. Bronken own their home in Oklee and four of their children have graduated from the Oklee High School.



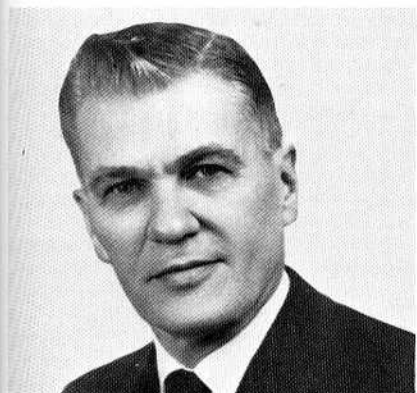
H. E. Race



Olaf Homme



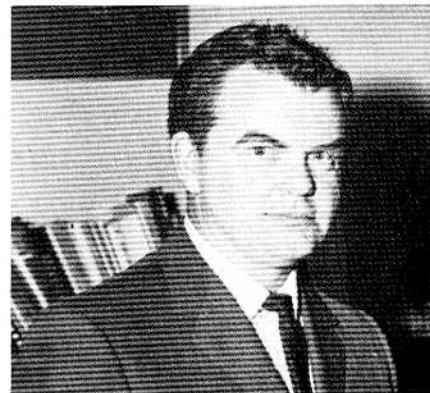
George L. Nettelund



Loren M. Ness



Carl G. Quist



Marvin Bronken



ST. FRANCIS XAVIER CATHOLIC CHURCH

Several original parishioners of what is now St. Francis Xavier Parish in Oklee unanimously agree to the humble and modest beginning of the parish.

The non-extant Lambert townsite was so named because of many families bearing the name of Lambert. These included Zepherin Lambert, father of Francis Lambert and Antoin Lambert. In addition to these, there was also the family of Joseph Lambert.

Other early pioneers were the brothers John Belland and Pierre Belland, Francois Juneau and Pierre Paquin.

All pioneer members of what was then only a mission, originally came from the Province of Quebec, Canada.

Rev. P. C. Champagne, who presumably came from the Archdiocese of St. Paul, was the first missionary priest to offer Masses occasionally for the early settlers in 1881-1884. The first Masses were offered in the home of Francois Lambert.

Under the leadership of Father Champagne, a mission chapel, 20 feet by 40 feet, facing north, was erected on the NW quarter of Section 15.

Peter Belland agreed to donate sufficient land for a chapel and proposed rectory. Land for the cemetery site was donated by Joseph Bergeron. It was Father Champagne who chose the name St. Francis Xavier for the mission in its earliest days.

The first recorded baptism dates back to June 17, 1884. This baptism was administered to Thomas Juneau, son of Joseph Juneau and Delphine Belland, by Father G. L. Dugal. Father Dugal tended the mission in the short period of 1884-1885.

Following the appointment of Father Dugal, there was a succession of four priests. This group included Father J. H. Mercil, 1885-1887; Father Elie Theillon, 1887-1888; Father L. Feige, 1888-1890; Father L. Arpin, August to October 1890.

The first priest to be named resident pastor of the parish at Lambert was Father L. Guillaume, 1890-1892, originally from

France. It was during his time that the construction for a larger church was undertaken.

Located alongside the first and original chapel, the proposed new church was completely demolished in the process of construction by a wind storm. Only the floor could be salvaged. Temporarily, church services were again held in the small mission chapel.

For lack of rectory facilities, all early missionaries were sheltered in the log house of Pierre Belland.

Following the destruction of the first proposed church building, Father Feige was appointed a second time to St. Francis Xavier Parish from 1892-1895.

Father J. Archambault, appointed pastor in 1896, remained until 1901. In 1899, it was he who was responsible for the construction of the present church building, measuring 40 feet by 90 feet.

In the hope of obtaining financial help for the construction of the church, Father Archambault and Francois Lambert, solicited donations in Canada. With a total construction cost of \$3,800 almost two thirds were realized from the Canadian benefactors.

Joseph Lachance was in charge of the construction. Having no basement, the foundation was made of rock and lime. The original altar was constructed by Pierre Roy, Sr. The first pews were made by Eugene Lambert.

At the time of the construction of the church building in the summer of 1899, the parish trustees were Antoine Lambert and Michel Boivert.

Prior to the erection of the Diocese of Crookston, the Parish at Lambert formed part of the Diocese of Duluth. Bishop James McGolrick was the first bishop of Duluth.

The records of the very first confirmation ceremony for a large group in the parish at Lambert dates back to 1888, during that time of Father Feige's pastorate. Bishop McGolrick again returned in 1898 during the pastorate of Father Archambault, to confirm another group.

In 1910, the Diocese of Crookston was formed out of the Diocese of Duluth, Bishop Timothy Corbett was the first to be appointed to the Episcopal see in Crookston. Records indicate that Bishop Corbett conducted the third confirmation ceremony on September 15, 1910. Father William Roy, appointed pastor in 1901, remained until 1912.

Father Stanislaus Beaulieu, 1912-1915 and Father Arthur Beaulieu, 1915-1918, brothers, were the next to succeed in line as pastors.

In the year 1917, while Father Arthur Beaulieu was pastor, a major decision was made. The church as constructed in 1899 by Father Archambault and the rectory built in 1895, were both moved to the present site in the Oklee Village.

The second pastor of the parish now established in Oklee, was Father L. Perronet, a native of France. His pastorate extended from 1919-1922. Father Arthur Beaulieu was appointed for a short term from June to October in 1922.

Father Ernest J. Paquin was the next to be appointed pastor. This office he held from 1922 to 1929.

During the pastorate of Father Charles O. Trudeau, from September 1929 to May 1932, major improvements were made in the church building. Beautiful stained glass windows were installed at the presently incredible cost of \$75.00 each. Yet, the national depression of the early thirties had so affected local parishioners, that in some instances, it was found necessary to ask three families to contribute jointly for the purchase of one window valued at \$75.00.

Father Trudeau was also instrumental in having the walls and ceiling of the church renovated in the first, rough type of celotex ever produced. Father Trudeau died in 1932.

Serving as assistant in St. Phillip's parish in Bemidji, Father Keough Patnode was appointed pastor of Oklee in 1932. This office he held until June of 1952.

In June of 1952, Father Patnode was transferred to St. Bernard's parish in Thief River Falls. Father Paul A. Cardin, formerly pastor of St. Dorothy's Church in Dorothy, was appointed to succeed Father Patnode on June 28, 1952.

Father Paul Cardin was transferred to Argyle in September of 1972 and Father Keough Patnode returned from St. Bernard's in Thief River Falls to once again assume the duties of pastor at St. Francis Xavier Church.

The church interior was painted and remodeled in the winter of 1971 and in the fall of 1972 a large new addition was built onto the front of the church. In 1975 an extensive remodeling project was completed in the church basement.

The congregation presently numbers about a hundred families and has been represented in church decisions by a parish council since 1971.



ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH

Not long after the coming of the railroad in 1910, the Zion Congregation was organized. The railroad company donated a piece of land to be used for the building of a church, the present site of Zion Lutheran Church. Several men, including T. O. Sordahl and E. O. Erickson, used teams and scrapers and hauled in dirt to build up the lot, and work was begun on the building of the church. Rev. Skagen served the Oklee parish from 1910 to 1911 and it was he who organized the congregation. There were seven families who first joined: Mr. and Mrs. Torkel Sordahl, farmers, and their children, Ole, Annie, Anders, Knute, Ben and Andrew; Mr. and Mrs. Torger Torgerson and family, Annie, Tom, Ole, Oscar and Alma; Mr. and Mrs. Ole Stromme, a farmer, and their family, Gunder, Tom, Ole, Willie, Annie, Gertie, Betsy, and Tollef; Mr. and Mrs. John Gunderson, the section foreman, and family, Alma, Julia, Oscar, Clara and Clarence; Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Melby, a merchant, and family, Andor, Orrin, Olga and Wilton; Mr. and Mrs. Ellef Gjernes, a merchant, and family, Carl, Gina, Adolph and Lillian; Mr. and Mrs. Dan Reiersen and family, Annie, Betsy, Regina, Molia and Swen.

These people were all of Norse extraction and from the newly formed village of Oklee with the exception of Sordahls, who lived three and a half miles from town. Later on, others joined the congregation, namely: W. B. Torgersons, E. J. Solands, Nels Strandes and Richard Slettvolds; and as the community grew the congregation grew also, including people of other nationalities and backgrounds in faith as the Zion Lutheran Church was the only protestant church in Oklee.

The first Sunday in June, 1911, on a sunny, wintry day, a throng of local people assembled in a rude structure of rough walls minus a top, with canvasses substituting for a roof and sat on planks and chairs brought by these same people for the austere occasion of laying the cornerstone of their church. This crude meeting place is what we now know as our Zion Lutheran Church.

The Rev. Skagen, who was then the local pastor, Ole Sordahl and Richard Slettvold were the actual builders of the church. On this particular June day, the Rev. A. J. H. Preus, a schoolmate of the local pastor, and the Rev. Njus were the guest speakers.

After the erection of the church it was used for a public school for two years.

The Rev. Skagen held the first confirmation class in 1911 in the Gjernes Store and the only confirmand was Alma Gunderson who was confirmed in the Norse Language.

The first child to be baptized by Rev. Skagen at Oklee was Helga Stromme, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gunder Stromme. This baptism was done at the home of Mr. and Mrs. E. O. Erickson as the church had not yet been built.

When Rev. Skagen left in 1911, the church was served by Rev. Njus of McIntosh until Rev. Palm came in the fall of 1912. Rev. Palm and his wife and five children lived in a parsonage located four miles north of Trail near the Greibrok Post Office.

During Rev. Palm's stay at Oklee, the union of three churches took place: The Synod, The United and Hauge's Lutheran becoming one large church and adopting the name, The Norwegian Lutheran Church.



Rev. J. K. Lerohl came to our parish in the fall of 1920 from Starbuck, Manitoba, Canada. He and his family lived in what is now the Horstman home until 1926, when the parish bought the present parsonage site across the street from the church.

In 1939 after special meetings with the officers of the church and much discussion the Ladies Aid borrowed \$1,000 from the church extension fund. With the aid of two other loans the Aid assisted the congregation in remodeling the church and building a basement, leveling the grounds and laying sidewalks. The first Ladies Aid meeting was held in the new church basement in February of 1940.

The newly enlarged church was dedicated October 20, 1940, with Rev. O. Fjeldstad officiating.

On Sunday, March 2, 1947 the church was saddened by the death of their beloved pastor, Rev. J. K. Lerohl. He had served faithfully and well for 27 years. He served five congregations the first years he was in Oklee: Oklee Zion, Salem, Valle, Plummer and a small rural congregation near Plummer. Rev. Lerohl's salary from Zion was \$375. per year, the same as it was in 1932. Church services were held twice a month and church collections would run between \$2.00 and \$4.00.

In October 1947 Rev. J. M. Runestad accepted a call to serve the Oklee parish. On November 6, 1947 a dinner and lunch was served at installation services and reception for Rev. Runestad and family. Rev. Runestad served the parish until 1954 at which time he accepted a call to serve the Bethany Church in Red Lake Falls.

Rev. Grorud served the parish from 1954 for three years. It was during his stay here the old parsonage was sold and the new one was built. Rev. Grorud and family moved from the Paquin apartment to the new parsonage on January 27, 1955.

Rev. Saethre conducted his first service in the Oklee parish on March 9, 1958. He was officially installed by Dr. A. E. Hanson, president of the Northern Minnesota District, at a special service on March 16.

In 1964 under the able direction of Rev. Saethre new plans were made for the remodeling of the Zion Church. A \$21,601. project was approved by the congregation. This new addition, a brick veneer structure, includes a pastor's study, a lounge, a cry room, four class rooms, a large narthex, a new heating system, cathedral glass win-

dows, carillon bells, and chimes, and a huge gold cross which is placed near the entrance.

Rev. Saethre served our parish until September 1964. For the following year our parish was served by pastors from Concordia College at Moorhead.

In September 1965, Rev. Charles A. Gunderson came to serve the congregation and is still our pastor at the present time.

THE ZION LUTHERAN LADIES AID

On a wintry December day in 1910, the Zion Ladies Aid was organized at the home of Mrs. T. O. Sordahl of rural Oklee. The two first members were Mrs. T. O. Sordahl and Mrs. E. O. Erickson, who became the first president. As early as 1911 the ladies sewed and embroidered fancy work to be sold at auction in order to raise money for various purposes. They also served dinners and suppers to augment their treasury.

In 1940 the Zion Church was remodeled and a basement was built. The Zion Aid assisted the congregation in the endeavor. Now they could meet in the basement instead of in the homes and they also had a place to serve their suppers.

In 1913 Rev. S. T. Palm wrote the constitution for the Ladies Aid in the Norse Language, and several years later Rev. J. K. Lerohl rewrote it in English.

During World War One and World War Two the ladies were busy knitting and sewing for the American Red Cross and various missions. In 1942 the Ladies Aid helped finance the renovation and building of a bathroom in the old parsonage. The aid also assisted in the financing of the vast remodeling project in the church in 1964.

In January of 1962 the Zion American Lutheran Church Women of Oklee organized their members into group circles named for women of the Bible. The circles are named Mary, Ruth, Naomi, Deborah and Elizabeth. The general A.L.C.W. group meets only four times a year with one circle giving the program and serving refreshments.

Throughout the years the Zion Ladies Aid has assisted their congregation in its endeavor to create a pleasant and comfortable place to worship and enjoy the fellowship of its members.



OKLEE COMMUNITY HOMES

An attractive landscaped semi-circle of senior citizens' homes are located in the eastern part of Oklee. The occupants decorate with flowers around their apartments. They also may plant and care for a garden plot just south of the homes in front of their windbreak. There are eight one-bedroom duplexes, one two-bedroom duplex, one two-bedroom unit and a seven car garage. George Bruggeman has taken care of the units and the grounds since the project was organized in May of 1964. Many persons in the Oklee area have been on the board of directors or served as an officer in the organization. It was one of the first successful senior citizen developments and has been visited by interested persons from many parts of the country.

THE OKLEE HERALD

The publication of the Oklee Herald dates back to 1911 when W. N. Phillips was publisher. Early history is somewhat vague, although it is known that for a brief period there was an Oklee Tribune, followed again by publication of the Herald. Nils Hagen was publisher for many years followed by Iver Gjernes. O. M. Sundrud was owner and publisher from 1947 until 1972 when he sold the paper to Richard D. Richards of Gonvick.

DR. W. B. TORGERSON

Dr. W. B. Torgerson was born in Worth County, Iowa on October 27, 1872. His parents were Rev. and Mrs. T. A. Torgerson. For two years he attended Luther College and then transferred to Concordia College, Fort Wayne, Indiana, from which he graduated in 1894. Enrolling in the School of Medicine at the University of Minnesota in the fall of that year he was awarded his degree in 1897.

After a year of Post-graduate training in St. Paul and New York, he began his practice at Cannon Falls, Minnesota. Later continuing it at Clarkfield and Greenbush and moving to Oklee in 1912. Prior to his illness, he was a member of the staff of St. Luke's Hospital in Thief River Falls. He was interested in banking in Oklee from 1912 to 1931.

While located at Cannon Falls, he was married to Ingeborg Ohnstad on June 14, 1900. To them were born Dora (Mrs. R. E. Bilbrough), Erling, Harold, Theodore and William.

Dr. Torgerson was active in the establishment of the Consolidated School District and long served as a member and treasurer of the school board. He also served as village treasurer. He was a member of the board of directors of the Oklee Cooperative Creamery Ass'n and was secretary of the creamery for twenty years. He

was always interested in athletics and was an active tennis and baseball player in his early years. He died on July 7, 1952.

Throughout his residence in Oklee, he was a member of the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church. He was a member of the church choir and director of the Sunday School.

Mrs. W. B. Torgerson was born near Cannon Falls on June 5, 1876. Her parents, Rognald and Perine Ohnstad, homesteaded there in 1840. She attended school in Cannon Falls and at the Ladies Seminary in Red Wing. She was a member of the Ladies Aid of the Zion Church and an active church worker. She died January 27, 1956.



Dr. W. O. Tessier's original home and office in Oklee



This home built in 1911 belonged to Dr. W. B. Torgerson.

DR. W. O. TESSIER

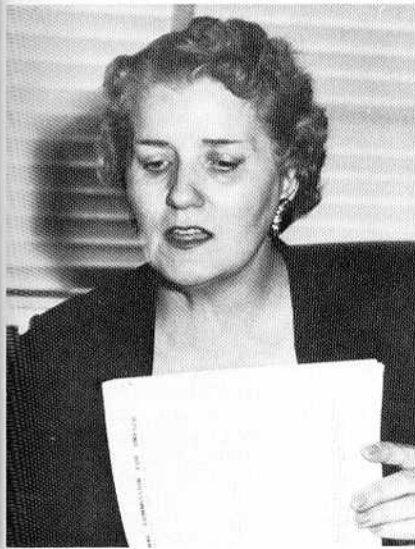
Dr. W. O. Tessier, pioneer doctor of Red Lake County, arrived in Lambert Village in the spring of 1896. Later he moved with his family to Terrebonne. During winter months he had to face blizzards and snow banks in an open cutter and in spring and summer he had to ford rivers with his team and buggy. In the spring of 1903 while fording the river close to Plummer his team and buggy were carried down stream and came up a steep bank. There he lost a fur coat and a bag of much needed instruments and valuable medicine.

In 1904 he moved to Saskatchewan, Canada, and returned to Oklee in March of 1911. Here he built a home and office and established his medical practice. He took part in civic affairs and organized and conducted Oklee's first band. This band, known as the Oklee Cornet Band, was Dr. Tessier's pride and joy.

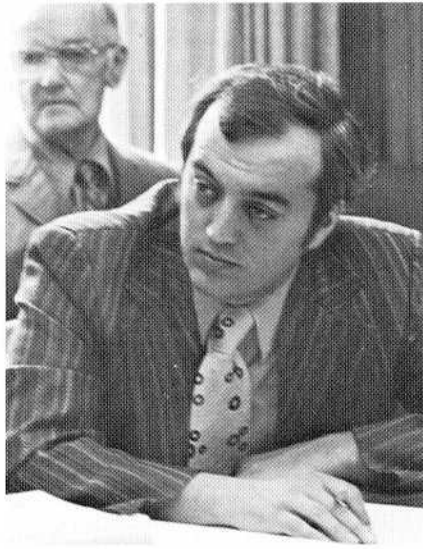
Dr. and Mrs. Tessier lived in Oklee until World War One when they moved to Red Lake Falls. This was the time of the worst epidemic of "Flu" ever encountered and Dr. Tessier was called to attend to the sick in all parts of the county. He soon returned to Oklee after the war ended and lived here until 1925 when poor health forced him to retire from active practice. He then moved to Kelliher, Minnesota and returned to Oklee in the fall of 1927. Here he conducted a limited practice and lived in the village of his choice until his death in October of 1932.

Following Dr. Tessier's death, his widow lived in Oklee with her brother, George Rahier, until her death. There were two children, Onezime and Flore (Mrs. C. F. Seeger).

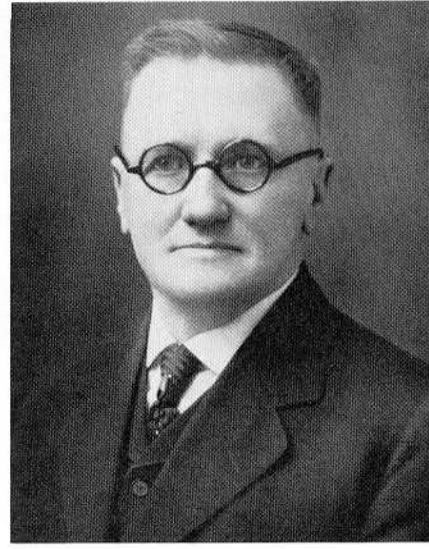
OKLEE



Congresswoman Coya Knutson



John Corbid, Legislator



J. O. Melby, Legislator

COYA KNUTSON

Coya Knutson was born August 22, 1912 to Chris Gjesdal and Christina Anderson Gjesdal at Edmore, North Dakota. She graduated from high school there in 1930 and graduated from Concordia College at Moorhead, Minnesota in 1934 with majors in English and Music. Her teaching duties took her to Penn, North Dakota, Plummer, Minnesota, and Oklee, until her entry into politics. She married Andrew Knutson of Oklee in March of 1940 and they were divorced in March of 1963. She has a son Terry Knutson and two grandchildren, Jackie Lee and Jason Randolph Knutson.

Coya served in the Minnesota Legislature from 1950 to 1954. She ran for Congress, defeating five men in the primary and was elected and served from 1955 to 1959.

Two legislative landmarks are credited to Minnesota's first Congresswoman. Title Two of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 was "to create a federal student loan fund". Of her years as a high school teacher, she says, "They motivated her to find a way for poor country kids to go to college". She still gets letters from grateful graduates who write, "I wouldn't have made it without the loan".

She also authored the bill which provided more than one million dollars for Cystic Fibrosis Research. A grant to the University of Minnesota Medical Research Department resulted in the perfection of a serum to counteract the disease.

Coya Knutson retired from public life in 1970 and presently lives with her son and his family in Devils Lake, North Dakota.

JOHN CORBID

John Corbid was born and raised in East Grand Forks and moved to Oklee in 1968 where he taught political science and history at the Oklee Public High School. In November of 1974 he was elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives from District 1B which includes Red Lake, Pennington, Marshall and North Polk counties. He is now presently serving on the Appropriations, Agriculture, and Finance and Banking Committees. He and his wife, Roberta, and their three children live in Equality Township.

J. O. MELBY

Mr. J. O. Melby was a Representative in Minnesota's 65th Legislative District from 1926 to 1944. He had been born and educated in Norway and emigrated to the United States in 1900, living first at Lake Mills, Iowa and then in Wilton, Minnesota. In 1915 he came to Oklee and operated a meat market.

Mr. Melby was interested in politics and had a well rounded library at home. All the years he was in the Legislature he introduced many bills and every one passed. He was especially interested in farm legislation, old age assistance for widows and in the Oklee Consolidated School District. He was also president of the Garden Valley Telephone Company where he served without a salary.

He was up for re-election in 1944, but he died in October of that year after serving faithfully for eighteen years.



RECOLLECTIONS OF A PIONEER WOMAN

Mr. Erickson and I came to Red Lake County in 1899, a very different place from what it is today. There were no roads, just trails across country. The only Buicks to be seen were wagons drawn by work horses, or if these weren't available we got about on foot. The land was overgrown with brush and there were many rocks to be hauled off. It rained often so great patches of water were everywhere. The mosquitos were plentiful in those days, too.

The nearest town was McIntosh and Mr. Erickson and I made 21 trips there to get our goods from the railroad car shipped from Moorhead where we had lived the first three years of our married life. We usually left home about three o'clock in the morning so that we'd get back by evening.

We were fortunate in having a general store and a post office one mile from our home operated by Mr. and Mrs. Havik. The mail was brought out from Plummer, via horse and buggy or wagon, twice a week. It was called "Grit Post Office", and it was a well chosen name. It took a lot of grit in those days.

To this store we brought our eggs and

butter, churned by hand, to exchange for Arbuckle coffee at 15¢ a pound, syrup came in bulk and we would get it in gallon jugs; five pounds of loaf sugar cost 10¢, and seven or eight cents worth of peanuts was a load to carry home. Calico for dresses cost 14¢ a yard, and in dresses of that material we felt almost as festive as in the dacrons and nylons of today. We sold our eggs for eight cents a dozen and the butter for 10 and 12 cents a pound.

Our first home was a 14x16 one-room structure built of rough boards. We used kerosene lamps and heated our house and cooked our meals over a wood fire. Wood was easy to get as fallen trees were everywhere as the result of a fire that had passed over many acres of timber some time before we came.

We preserved our meat by packing it in a salt brine or by frying it and covering layers of it with fat. Quite often beef was salted and then cured and dried. Berries of all kinds were plentiful; wild cranberries, pincherries, choke cherries, june berries, raspberries, and wild strawberries were large and plentiful. A large pail of strawberries could be picked in a short time.

On Sundays we attended services conducted by Rev. Kolstoe in a little school house located not far from Gilman Hegland's farm. Our pews were the little school desks. How thankful we were for the privilege of worshipping together.

One of our neighbors, Mr. Compton, went to Iowa on a visit and on his return he brought back three telephones, so Bishops, Comptons and Ericksons could visit over the line. It was a very simple instrument, just a circular box and in place of ringing or dialing, we would tap gently on the box and wait for a voice to speak. We were gradually becoming modern.

Quite often you hear old-timers like myself speak of the "good old days". We were young and strong with hearts full of love and hope and courage. In youth no task seems too great to perform and there is always that "hitching of one's wagon to a star".

We hear so much in these modern times of "keeping up with the Jones" — the Jones in those days had no more nor no less than the rest of us. We all had the same humble beginning; that of building a home in an unsettled community.

On Sunday afternoons we visited with the neighbors and occasionally we got together for a birthday party or a dinner.

After a few years we bought another farm, known now as the Reiersen farm, where we lived for six years. Our house there was built of logs, one story, with a small attic. The walls were whitewashed, not painted. Oh, yes, we enjoyed the luxury of a "cook shanty", a little shack built of logs, near to the main house, where I cooked the meals and did the baking. Of course, my two little girls loved to help.

On Sundays visiting pastors came to the different homes and conducted services. Rev. Oppegaard and Rev. Njus were two who served.

Some of us felt the need for a church and a parochial school so we decided to form an Aid and have meetings in our homes. The first meeting was held at the home of Mrs. T. O. Sordahl in December of 1910. This was the beginning of the Zion Ladies Aid, the name being suggested by Mrs. Sordahl. Three members were present at this meeting, Mrs. Sordahl, Mrs. Paul Sorenson, a grandmother of Paul Sorenson of Oklee, and myself.

Such were the humble beginnings of our Zion Ladies Aid. It is my prayer that our beloved Zion may press forward with strong and courageous hearts in the building of God's Kingdom on Earth.

Contributed by Mrs. Edward O. Erickson

JENNIE BOURQUE

(b. 1872 — d. 1962)

MY MOST UNFORGETTABLE RED LAKE COUNTY CHARACTER

In the summer of 1915 my family moved to Oklee. Our home for the first year was a small house just north across the railroad tracks.

The first house on Main Street just south of the tracks (where the Tom Mayernicks now reside) was the home of Ferdinand and Jennie Bourque and their two sons, Jennings and August. The Bourques were our nearest neighbors and Jennie became my mother's first friend in Oklee.

Mrs. Bourque had made her front room into a millinery shop. What a fascinating place that shop was to a little girl! She would fashion the silk, felt, or straw into

shapes. After the straw hats were fashioned, she would often put a dye on them with a little brush making them red, brown, or black. Then the trimmings of silk ribbon bows or bright flowers were sewn on.

However it was in story telling that Mrs. Bourque excelled. If she came to our house, my sisters and brothers and I would leave our play and rush in to hover around her chair to hear her tell those exciting stories.

Jennie Bourque was Jennie Bottineau before her marriage to Ferdinand Bourque, a homesteader who lived southwest of Oklee. Jennie was born in Osseo and moved with her parents, the Pierre Boutineaus, to Red Lake Falls.

Mrs. Bourque told many stories about her father and especially liked to tell of his naming Red Lake Falls. Stories about her grandmother who was the daughter of an Indian chief left us wide eyed. We laughed gaily as she told of her experiences as a teacher in the old Lambert school. She never failed to play the organ when we visited her.

She often described her wedding dress. As she talked, I could vividly imagine I was seeing that row of buttons down the front of her wedding dress, each button being a gold piece. What happened to those buttons? "Well," she said, "as we needed flour to make bread, I would cut off one button, take it to the flour mill, and give it to the miller for a sack of flour." What sad faces we would have as we pictured one button after another being cut off until not a one was left.

The Bourques' two sons were August and Jennings. Jennings had a scientific mind and was always inventing things. One invention of his was a doorbell for the millinery shop. If his mother was in the kitchen, which was just back of the shop, she could hear the bell if a customer turned a little knob as she entered the shop. What fun it was for me when Mrs. Bourque would let me go to the kitchen to hear the bell while she turned the knob. Since this was before Oklee had electricity, I don't know how Jennings made the system work.



Jenny Bottineau Bourque

Mrs. Bourque loved her two children dearly so it was a sad time when Jennings, a high school student, died very suddenly. For many weeks the sparkle was gone from those black eyes. But the kind heart of this lady reached out that very same year to a motherless 18 month old boy. She took Marvin Strande into her home and raised him with loving care. Marvin always speaks of Mother Bourque with deep affection.

August Bourque became director of the REA in Northern Minnesota and literally brought light into most of the homes in that area before his death in 1955.

Jennie Bourque closed her millinery shop in the 1920's, and she and her family moved back to the original homestead. Mrs. Bourque died sometime in the 1930's.

When Mrs. Bourque was nearly 90 years of age, I visited her in Pioneer Home at Erskine. Her eyes were still as shiny and black as ever in a dark lined face topped with the whitest hair I have ever seen. She didn't recognize people then, but whenever anyone said, "Hello, Mrs. Bourque," she would begin talking of those days long gone by when she was a pioneer in Red Lake County.

Contributed by Alice Lindquist

GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATION

Early in the winter of 1960 the people of Oklee began planning the Golden Jubilee Celebration to be held July 2, 3, and 4th.

Tom Melby was elected chairman of the steering committee assisted by William Seeger, A. W. Nyquist, Bernard Remick, and Orlo Melby. Seventeen special committees were at work for several weeks before the event.

The alumni committee headed by Grace McManus and Selmer Walhaug assisted by Walter Asselin, Mrs. Joe Asselin, Adella Lindquist and Carl Quist was especially busy sending out invitations to former graduates and planning the banquet and program for the big event. It was held in the High School Auditorium on July 2nd with Kenneth Thorpe as master of ceremonies. Several members spoke and brought greetings from the various classes. It was a huge success as over four hundred alumni returned from distances as far as California and Washington, D.C.

Historical committees had been appointed for both the village of Oklee and surrounding townships and a beautiful book called "Oklee Community Story" was published and ready for sale at the time of the celebration.

A large parade took place on July 4th. All the business places, some of the townships, the two village churches and a few country churches entered their beautiful floats in the parade. St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church of Oklee won first prize for the best float. The day before a wonderful kiddie parade was held for the enjoyment of all.

An outdoor street program was held late in the afternoon of July 4th with Senator Hubert Humphrey as main speaker. Some of the pioneer business men and their wives were honored at this event. They were Mr. and Mrs. Peter Bergeron, Mr. and Mrs. Ole Melby, Mr. and Mrs. Nap Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Seeger and Mr. and Mrs. Nels Strande.

It was a gala event with men sporting beards and women and children dressed in pioneer costumes. A queen contest had



Oklee's Golden Jubilee celebration in 1960

been held and Myrna Bakke, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Bakke, was crowned Golden Jubilee Queen.

The two churches of Oklee, the Zion Lutheran and the St. Francis Xavier Catholic had special services on Sunday and saw many former members return for the event. Rev. A. N. Grorud and Rev. Francis Jeffery, former pastors of Zion Church returned to be with their former congregation.

It was a gala three day celebration never to be forgotten. William Seeger, the Mayor, received a message from President Eisenhower congratulating the community on its fine tradition of progress and hospitality.



Tom Melby presents gift to oldest graduate Marie Lindberg at celebration.

SETESDALSLAGET

The "Setesdalslaget of America" is a Norwegian organization composed of descendants of natives of the province of Setesdal, Norway. The group was organized at Grand Forks College on June 30, 1909. It is a two day convention with a program of Norwegian music, folk and old time dancing, poems, readings and speeches. Highlights of the laget include costumed folk dancers and Hardanger fiddlers and many special guest speakers have appeared on the program.

Oklee has been called "The Capitol of the Setesdals" because it is located in the midst of a settlement of Norse people who came from Setesdal, Norway. Olaf Vattendahl, a Setesdøl, was an early owner of the Oklee townsite. Though most of the old pioneers from Setesdalen are dead the younger generations and other Norwegians and nationalities who are interested, attend the convention every summer.

This has been an annual event in Oklee for many years and is usually held in June, attracting hundreds of people from several states, Canada and Norway.

Bjorguluv Bjornaraa served as president of the Organization for the first thirty-two years, from 1909 until 1932. The present officers are: Oliver Lien, president; Byron Flatland, vice-president; Mrs. Erick Johnson, secretary-treasurer; Gunder Sorenson, Osmund Olson, Oscar Flatland, Gust Gunstenson and Julian Gunderson, directors.

TELELAGET

"Northwest Telelaget of America" was organized at Williston, North Dakota in July of 1917. It is a Norwegian organization composed of descendants of the Natives of the province of Telemark, Norway. Until a few years ago the convention was held in various North Dakota towns, but it has become an annual summer event in Oklee.

The two day program includes a fiddlers contest, musical selections and speakers. An old time dance and social gathering follows the program each evening.

The first president of the Telelaget was Ottis A. Hauge. The present officers include: President, Archie Teigen; Vice-President, Truman Sorenson; Treasurer, Ole Gullickson; Secretary, Mrs. Erick Johnson; Directors, Tilda Langerud, Leonard Gullickson, Arlie Brekke, Carl Norjore and Oscar Carlson.

