



Madison County Genealogical Society



Madison County Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 1031, Norfolk, NE 68702-1031
mcgs@telebeep.com

www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nemcgs/ www.nesgs.org/~mcgs

October Program: **God Did It!...by Accident???**

In 1999, Kent Warneke, asked me if I would write a weekly series about the Norfolk Churches for the Norfolk Daily News. As I began researching and writing, I could not believe how many churches there were in a town this size. And they all had such interesting stories to tell. The clergy were great.

I thought you might like to know about three questions that people have been asking me. One is "Why did I write this book?" the second is "Whatever does the title mean?" and the third one is "What is the book about?". People began asking if I had every thought of doing a book on all the churches in town. But there were also other stories that should be told. There are eight parochial schools in town. That is unbelievable for a town this size. Most town of 100,000 don't even have eight parochial schools.

Beside the parochial schools, there are a dozen other major Christian institutions in Norfolk. For example, Immaculata Monastery is the priory or headquarters in the whole nation for the Order of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters. In eight short years the Orphan Grain Train has become one of the nation's largest philanthropic operations for the needy overseas. It has facilities from New York City to the Rockies and the headquarters is here in Norfolk. And there are the great stories of the Nebraska Christian College, Norfolk Rescue Mission and Hope House, the Salvation Army community programs, and the incredible Faith Regional Hospital born from a Catholic and Lutheran hospital, which now serves patients from as far as a couple of hundred miles away.

So why would I write "the book?" Norfolk is a great town. It was settled by Christians, and their religion has played a major role in the growth and development of this town for the past 134 years. And I wanted that story to be told. The book contains the names of about 1500 present Norfolk residents, and someday their descendants can read how their parents, grandparents and other relatives played an important role in the history of Norfolk.

Mel explained that the meaning for the book's title was found in a brief chapter in the book, which he read.

So now, what is the book about? It is about 39 churches, eight parochial schools, and a dozen Christian institutions in Norfolk. Eleven of the churches came to Norfolk in the 1800's.

I thought it might now be interesting to see what was happening in the world when the different churches in town began.

Let us go back to the 1860's. From 1861-1865 our nation is torn apart by the great Civil War. In 1866, the wounds are barely beginning to heal. Out in the prairies of the Midwest 42 wagons of immigrants leave Wisconsin and head for a place in the middle of nowhere that does not even exist. There is no town. There is no state. They start a town. It is to be called North Fork. A year later North Fork finds itself in a new state called Nebraska. When Nebraska is created, the newly created St. Paul's Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Church is already a year old.

In 1870, back east, John D. Rockefeller is forming the Standard Oil Company. Here in Norfolk, the Congregational Church and the Methodist Church are each being formed.

In 1871, P. T. Barnum's Circus, The Greatest Show on Earth, opens in New York City. Three miles northeast of Norfolk, Christ Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, opens its doors.

Ten years later in 1881, President James Garfield is inaugurated in January. He is shot in September and Vice-President Chester Arthur becomes President. In Norfolk, Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church and Trinity Episcopal Church began and northeast of town Peace United Church is organized

In 1889, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Washington become states. In Norfolk, the First Baptist Church is organized.

In 1891, the wireless telegraph is the newest thing and the zipper is invented. In Norfolk, First Christian Church is born.

In 1896, the first modern Olympics are held in Athens and the gold rush to the Klondike begins. Here in Norfolk, the Presbyterian Church begins.

1897 is the year of the first American comic strip, the Katzenjammer Kids. In Norfolk, the Evangelical United Brethren Church is organized. Seventy-one years later, and after building its newest church at 2000 Norfolk Avenue, it will merge with United Methodist Church.

We move into the twentieth Century. In 1902, in America, the minimum working age for boys is raised from 9 years to 12 years, and for girls from 11 years to 15 years. St. John's Lutheran Church is born.

The first twelve churches are summarized above. The talk continued with the other 27 churches that were founded through 1999. There was also audience participation and a question and answer series. Some of them were as follows:

What was the first church (denomination) built in downtown Norfolk and where was it located? (The Congregational Church was built in 1871 on the south side of Norfolk Avenue between second and third streets.)

For which church did Andrew Carnegie of New York City buy an excellent and expensive pipe organ? (First Methodist in 1915, cost was \$2,200.)

Which church was destroyed by a tornado? (Trinity Episcopal in 1892.)

What church was destroyed by fire? (First Congregational in January 1944 on the very day it became free of all indebtedness.)

Which church was once located where the former post office and present McMill Building is now located? (First Baptist, it sold the site in 1903.)

Rinehold Marxhausen, the famous Nebraska artist, who appeared twice on the David Letterman Show and who is the only Nebraska artist who was commissioned to do two murals in the grand gallery of the Nebraska State Capital, designed the reredos or retable on the altar wall of which church? (Mt. Olive Lutheran Church on Omaha Avenue.)

What modern brick church in Norfolk was built in two days? (Jehovah Witness Kingdom Hall on Channel Road.)

Which building in town is home to people from Switzerland, New Zealand, Germany, Korea, Czechoslovakia, Namibia, Philippines, and Australia as well as sixteen states from New York to California and from Minnesota to Texas? (Immaculata Monastery.)

It was a very enjoyable program.

God Did It!...by Accident??? is available from Mel Hintz, 2800 Prospect Ave., Norfolk, NE 68701 (402) 379-1077