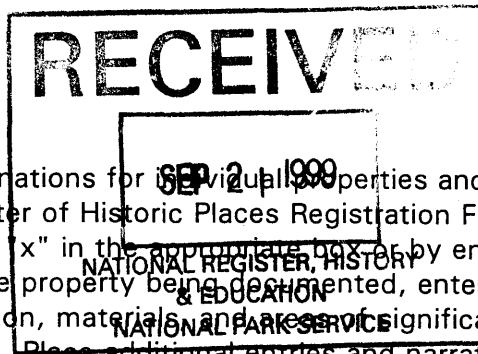


1269

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and processes significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Zion Lutheran Church

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**

street & number off Co. Hwy. 3 not for publication  N/A   
city or town Shelly Twp. Shelly vicinity  N/A   
state Minn. code MN county Norman code 107 zip code 56581

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Ian R. Stewart Date 9/16/99  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
  - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

*Edson H. Beall*

10/21/99

*[Signature]*

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>		sites
		structures
		objects
<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

**6. Function or Use**

---

**Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)**

Cat: Religion      Sub: Religious Facility

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)**

Cat: Religion      Sub: Religious Facility

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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**7. Description**

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**Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)**

Cat: Late Victorian/Gothic      Sub: \_\_\_\_\_

_____	_____
_____	_____

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**Materials (Enter categories from instructions)**

foundation Stone, Concrete

roof Wood, Asphalt

walls Wood

other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)**

**8. Statement of Significance**

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**Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)**

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)**

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)**

Exploration/Settlement  
Ethnic Heritage/European  
Social History

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1883-1949

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1883, 1892

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Olson, Tonder (Builder)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)**

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

#### Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Zion Lutheran Church

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### 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property   3  

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1 <u>14</u>	<u>666510</u>	<u>5258020</u>	3 <u>14</u>	<u>666700</u>	<u>5257860</u>
2 <u>14</u>	<u>666700</u>	<u>5258020</u>	4 <u>14</u>	<u>666510</u>	<u>5257860</u>

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a **continuation sheet**.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a **continuation sheet**.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

---

name/title David C. Anderson

organization N/A date May 15, 1999

street & number 169 Lundy Bridge Drive telephone (319) 382-3079

city or town Waukon state Iowa zip code 52172

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)**

---

**Property Owner**

---

(This item must be completed.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Zion Lutheran Church  
Norman County, MN

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DESCRIPTION

The Zion Lutheran Church is located one mile east of Shelly in western Norman County, which is in northwest Minnesota on the Red River bordering North Dakota. This is a flat, treeless landscape almost totally devoted to farming.

The church stands next to the Zion cemetery, and both are within a three-acre parcel near the southwest corner of Section 16, Shelly Township, on County Highway 3. In addition to the church and cemetery, there are two non-contributing wood frame buildings on the parcel, a 7 by 11 foot privy and an 8 by 11 foot storage shed.

The Zion church is a wood-frame, north-south oriented rectangular structure with overall dimensions of 40 by 98 feet. The first segment of the building, the 30 by 50 foot nave, was erected in 1883. In 1892 a rectangular, gable roof choir (chancel) on the north end and a vestibule, bell tower, and spire were added to the south of the nave, and in 1951 a 24 by 40 foot hip roofed addition with a small projecting shed was attached to the north end of the chancel. This segment includes a meeting room, kitchen, and bathroom.<sup>1</sup>

In 1902 a tornado shifted the church off its foundation and deflected the roof and walls off plumb. Thus, while the floor is level, the walls bear slightly east of horizontal. Three rods with turnbuckles on each long side extend from the upper walls to earth anchors. These were intended to stabilize the structure and protect it against future wind damage.

The church is on a concrete and fieldstone foundation, and there is a small basement along the north and east sides where a furnace is located. The floor joists and sills rest on large log stringers which, according to oral history, were provided by individual congregation members as their contribution to the church building effort.<sup>2</sup>

The five windows on each side of the nave and choir are 2/4 double-hung in pointed arch openings with hoods. A single window in the tower is similar except that it is a 10/8 arrangement with lancet sash with a 10-light lancet window over an 8-light rectangular unit. A large lancet window is over the front entrance which includes wooden replacement doors made to match the originals.

There is a narrow pent roof over the front entrance and a second, larger one with brackets below the belfry. Similar brackets, in pairs, are located on the corners between the gables below the spire. The upper pent roof is clad with diamond-cut wood pattern shingles that match the originals.<sup>3</sup> The spire and roof over the nave are covered with wood shingles, while the choir and annex are clad in asphalt shingles. The belfry, which contains the original bell (1885) has pairs of pointed-arch louvered openings on the four sides.

In 1979 lightning struck the spire which then burned down to the belfry level. It was rebuilt to match the original and includes the original weathervane with "1892" on it. This had been blown off the spire some years before.<sup>4</sup>

The exterior is covered throughout with pine lap siding fastened, in the 1883 portion, with cut nails. This is painted white as are all other surfaces – windows, eaves, enclosed rafters, and corner boards. Historic photos indicate that the pent roof elements, door and window trim, gable-end fascia, and corner boards were all painted a dark color in contrast to the white or nearly white flat surfaces.

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Zion Lutheran Church  
Norman County, MN

Going into the church from the front, one comes first into a narrow vestibule with walls clad in horizontally applied beaded board. To the left is a stairway leading to the belfry, and straight ahead double doors lead into the nave.

The floor is one by four inch heart pine covered with red carpeting laid between two rows of wooden pews (original) painted white with faux wood graining.

The walls and segmental arch ceiling are clad in pressed metal (1921) painted white (ceiling), beige (walls), and dark brown (wainscot). A segmental arch opening framing the chancel echoes the nave ceiling, and it is given additional emphasis by a dark band of wood molding in the same pattern. The back wall of the choir is painted dark blue.

The chancel contains an altar placed on a short platform behind a semi-circular communion rail and padded kneeling shelf. The altar, dating from 1885, is wood painted gold and white, and it frames a large oil-on-canvas painting of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (1902).<sup>5</sup> The choir also contains a short elevated pulpit and baptismal font which match the altar in color scheme. In each corner of the choir there are doors leading to vestment rooms.

Except for the paint scheme and the 1951 addition, this property manifests an exceptional degree of historic integrity. With its low, hipped roof, the annex is a minor distraction, and it could be removed leaving no adverse impact on the remaining structure.

The building is in good condition except for certain areas near the foundation, onto which concrete has been applied in a way that is trapping moisture with attendant deterioration of the lower levels of siding and possibly the sheathing, studs, and sill as well.

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<sup>1</sup>All building-related documentation cited here is in the church Minute Record, which is complete from the organization of the congregation in 1880 to the present. A copy of this up to 1948 is in the SHPO file for this property.

<sup>2</sup>Information provided by Gloria Martinson, Kennedy, MN, with references also in the church records.

<sup>3</sup>ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Unidentified news item in the SHPO file.

<sup>5</sup>This was purchased in 1902 by the Zion Girls Aid for \$28.00. Girls Aid Treasurer's Report for 12-30-02.



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CONTINUATION SHEET

Section   8   Page   1  

Zion Lutheran Church  
Norman County, MN

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SIGNIFICANCE

The Zion Lutheran Church of Norman County, MN is eligible for listing on the NRHP under Criterion A as property associated with significant events in the areas of early settlement, European ethnic heritage, and social history. The history of the Zion congregation reflects important patterns of Norwegian-American emigration to Minnesota, and the church is one of the few extant properties with integrity built by the Norwegian-Americans who first settled this part of the Red River Valley in Minnesota. It also represents an effort to maintain an ethnic heritage through language retention, worship, education, and a variety of church-sponsored social activities. This property also relates to certain important events in local history, and to the Minnesota statewide context "Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940."

The Red River of the North forms approximately the northern one-half of Minnesota's border with North Dakota, and Norman County is located about halfway between its beginning at Lake Traverse and the Minnesota/North Dakota border with Canada (Manitoba). From there it runs north to Hudson Bay via Lake Winnipeg. It is a slow-moving meandering stream flowing across the bottom of Glacial Lake Agassiz, which ceased to exist about 8,000 years ago. Deposits formed during periods of glaciation and alluvial deposition left by the flooding of the river left fertile soil on "some of the flattest terrain to be seen anywhere."<sup>1</sup>

The area from the northern tier of townships in Norman County to the Canadian border were ceded to the U. S. in 1863 by the Ojibwe Indians via the Old Crossing Treaty. Areas south of here had been ceded in 1855 (Ojibwe) and in 1851 by the Sioux in the treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota. Settlement on the Red River Valley was then retarded by several factors including a lack of adequate transportation, the Civil War, and the U. S.-Dakota conflict of 1862.

France and Great Britain had been in the Valley since the 17<sup>th</sup> century pursuing the fur trade, but most of this had been in areas to the north of Minnesota. An effort in 1820 to establish an agricultural colony near Winnipeg by Thomas Douglas (Lord Selkirk) was important to later settlement because he was able to demonstrate that wheat farming was possible in the area. In 1829 J. J. Astor's American Fur Co. set up a fur trading post at Pembina, just south of the border on the Red River. He then established connections with Ft. Snelling and St. Paul, and in 1843 he sent the first load of furs and buffalo hides to St. Paul by oxcart. Oxcart traffic thereafter developed rapidly, so that by the time Minnesota became a state in 1858, there were perhaps 6,000 carts in service traveling in trains with something like 800 carts and 1,300 people.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the Hudson Bay Co. had also shifted its traffic via St. Paul. In 1859 steamboats were introduced on the Red River to supply the oxcars with contact over the many miles of the river's course, but the U. S.-Dakota conflict of 1862 created widespread fear which suspended any further settlement into the Red River Valley until about 1870.

It was the building of railroads into the area and colonization efforts by them and the State of Minnesota that brought permanent Euro-American settlers to the Red River Valley in both Minnesota and North Dakota in numbers sufficient to transform the landscape into what it remains today. "The Red River Valley was the last Minnesota agricultural region to be developed as well as that most heavily settled by Norwegians."<sup>3</sup> Of primary importance in this was the Northern Pacific Railroad, which was chartered by the Federal government in 1864 and given grants of

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Zion Lutheran Church  
Norman County, MN

land totaling more than three million acres in Minnesota alone. The line which was begun in 1870 from Duluth and reached Moorhead on the Red River in 1871 was planned to extend to the Pacific coast, which it eventually did. Two other railroads, the St. Paul and Pacific, which reached Crookston in 1873, and the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba connecting St. Paul with Winnipeg and other Red River locations, were also important, and these became part of J. J. Hill's Great Northern system in 1890. Hill's interest in Red River transportation, however, began with steambotting, which grew after 1871 when the Northern Pacific arrived in Moorhead.

Besides providing transportation, however, the railroads, in particular the Northern Pacific, aggressively sought emigrants who could either buy their land or homestead on the Federal lands interspersed with parcels granted the railroads. The railroads also provided jobs for early settlers, who often arrived with little cash.

An additional factor behind the settlement of the Red River Valley was the wheat market. Wheat farming had accompanied the western frontier in the U. S. from the beginning. In Minnesota, where the first settlements occurred in the southeastern counties, wheat was the most important cash crop from the 1850s into the 1870s, reaching its peak in 1880.<sup>4</sup> By this time, the Red River Valley had begun to replace the southeast as the State's and the country's most important wheat-growing area. The fertile virgin prairie soil enabled large yields to be had for a national and international trade, which was carried on through Minneapolis and Duluth via the railroads. Minneapolis was known as "Mill City" by the early 1870s, and in 1889 Minnesota was the number one wheat-producing state in the U. S.<sup>5</sup>

An important development associated with wheat farming in the Valley was the phenomenon known as "bonanza farming." Bonanza farms were huge operations on land bought by American capitalists based in the eastern U. S., many of whom had acquired land from the railroad at especially low rates in 1873 when an economic panic set in. This was done by converting deflated railroad stock into land held by the Northern Pacific. These individuals also had plenty of capital available to finance purchases of machinery, erect buildings, buy seed, etc. These farms pursued a monoculture in wheat on a scale unparalleled in the U. S., which was successful for 20 years or so and was accompanied by much publicity, which also was a factor in drawing settlers to the area, in addition to large numbers of transient laborers on a seasonal basis.

The bonanza farms, encompassing as much as 100,000 acres in contrast to the average settler's farm of 242 acres, were mostly located on the North Dakota side of the river, but a few were established in Clay County, just south of Norman, and were also represented in Good Hope Township of Norman County, just east of Shelly Township.

These then were the major "pull" factors behind settlement in the Red River Valley, but to account for the larger number of Norwegians that moved here, certain "push" factors must also be discussed. That this European ethnic group was the most numerous in nearly all the counties bordering the Red River in both North Dakota and Minnesota is remarkable. To be sure, Norwegians came to all agricultural areas of the state beginning in the 1850s, and in a national context, between 1825 and 1928, more came to Minnesota than to any other state.<sup>6</sup> People with Norwegian ancestors still represent a large proportion of the population in Minnesota.

The period of the largest emigration from Norway began in the mid-1860s and continued into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the highest number leaving in 1882 (29,000). Other than Ireland, no other European country lost such a high proportion of its population to emigration. The emigrants were mostly farm dwellers who had become superfluous in Norway due to a rising birth rate and farm consolidation, among other things. They saw that the only way to preserve their rural way of life was to emigrate. However, the Red River Valley was not known to prospective

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Zion Lutheran Church  
Norman County, MN

Norwegian-American settlers until 1869, when the State of Minnesota, through its Bureau of Immigration, hired a Norwegian journalist to travel there and send his (positive) reports to publications in Norway as well as to Norwegian-American papers.<sup>7</sup> And also to take advantage of the social crisis in Norway, the Northern Pacific set up a "Land and Immigration" department and sent recruitment agents to Norway.

The settlement patterns of the Norwegians who had come to Minnesota beginning in the 1850s, and subsequent migrations from Norway and by the offspring of the first arrivals, were also factors in the large numbers who moved to the Valley. A three-state chain migration describes their practice in settling rural areas, and we find that movement was mostly in family units, not only from Norway but to other locations in the U. S. over time. The first stage would be the immigration of families to a newly opened settlement area, e.g. southeast Minnesota in the early 1850s. These families would attract subsequent migration, often related people or those from the same parish in Norway. The original zone of settlement would soon become overcrowded and, as new territory became available, the latest settlers would move on and, after getting established, attract additional people directly from Norway, thus completing the cycle.<sup>8</sup> This explains why people with ancestral roots in the same places in Norway can be found together in particular Minnesota townships, belonging to particular Lutheran congregations here, and it lies behind the settlement events of Norman County as well.

#### Norwegian-Americans in Norman County

The first Norwegian settlement in the Minnesota Red River Valley occurred in 1869 in Clay County, and a year later John Shely (sic) arrived in what was to become Shelly Township of Norman County. Shely was not Norwegian, and Shelly Village and Township got their spellings from the railroad. In 1872 the first Norwegians arrived, having traveled 500 miles by wagon from a settlement in Fillmore County in southeast Minnesota. They were followed by several more families, and in 1874 Shelly Township was organized as part of Polk County, created the same year. Norman County achieved independent identity in 1881 and it was named for the large number of "Nordmen" living there.<sup>9</sup>

Population in the county went from 0 in 1870 to 369 in 1875, 3,500 (1880), 8,335 (1885), 10,611 (1890), peaking out at 15,045 in 1900. The 1880 Federal census of Shelly Township lists 432 individuals, with all but ten either born in Norway or having parents born there. Of the Americans born of Norwegian parentage, 107 were from Minnesota with smaller numbers for Wisconsin and Iowa, which conforms to the pattern outlined above, as does the fact that a number of Norwegian-Americans moved from Shelly further north in Minnesota as new lands were opened and also west as the frontier moved in that direction.<sup>10</sup>

As of 1918, there were 35 Norwegian Lutheran congregations in Norman County, with all but eight being in the countryside. At the same time, there were 13 other congregations representing a variety of denominations including one Norwegian Methodist-Episcopal Church. In 1935 there were 27 country churches still extant in addition to 18 cemeteries with no church nearby. As of 1985, fourteen were identified, but few of these have historic integrity.<sup>11</sup>

The Zion congregation is one of four Norwegian Lutheran congregations that were to be organized in Shelly Township including the Village of Shelly. The first was Marsh River (1872), followed by Zion (1880), Bethany (1905), and Shelly Village (1907). Zion's was the first permanent church building and the only one surviving with historic integrity.

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Zion Lutheran Church  
Norman County, MN

The congregation was organized on November 29, 1880, and one of the first orders of business was to find land for a church and cemetery. This was achieved within a year, but the church was not built until 1883. Until then worship services were held in members' homes. The cemetery was put into immediate use and over the years a large number (60) of unmarked burials have been placed there. According to local legend, these were unidentified transients who died in one way or another on their way to or from the bonanza farms in the area, which hired large numbers of migrants each year at harvest time.<sup>12</sup>

The church is also a reminder of other local events which affected many people in the area. One such was a tornado in 1902, which killed a Zion member and damaged the church, moving it off its foundation. The three steel rods on each long side are a visual reminder of not only that particular storm but of the devastating storms that are common in these parts. The same is true for the legendary blizzard of 1941, when the church provided life-saving shelter for people caught out in the storm, which is still regarded as the deadliest snowstorm ever to visit the area.<sup>13</sup>

Having established that the Norwegian-American settlement of Norman County conforms to a pattern that was typical for this immigrant group, it is necessary to examine other ways the Zion church represents Norwegian Lutheran settlement in the state.

Gjerde and Qualey write:

... the most visible manifestation of the bridges between the Norwegian and Norwegian-American cultures ... in Norwegian America as a whole was the Lutheran church. Still dotting the rural Minnesota landscape, these white spires once marked the undisputed social and religious centers of the rural communities.

and

Once built, the church quickly became the heart of the community ... so that if one did not come to worship God one might come for other purposes, such as trading horses, ... or hearing the latest news.<sup>14</sup>

It may seem remarkable that so many individual congregations, including a church and cemetery, would have been established in what seems to be an ethnically homogeneous area. Primitive transportation facilities can account for some of this, but the apparent homogeneity was limited by strong differences in religion and even language. Whereas in Norway a single official Lutheran church was dominant, when they arrived in the U. S. the immigrants were able to split off into a myriad of synods, which was itself uniquely Norwegian-American, distinguishing them in particular from other Scandinavian groups.<sup>15</sup>

Over time, there were 14 separate synods, and when most of the parishes in Norman County were established, there were about five. In the beginning, Zion was a member of the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, but this became part of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America as did the other three congregations in Shelly Township. Across Norman County, however, the diversity in synodical affiliation remained.<sup>16</sup> Differences in spoken language dialect, reflecting the different regions of Norway from whence settlers came, also served to separate congregations.

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Zion Lutheran Church  
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Nevertheless, Norwegian-American Lutherans representing the various synods shared many expressions of cultural identity. For example, the church buildings erected in rural areas from 1870 to about 1910 were predominantly a vernacular wood frame neo-Gothic type of which Zion is a representative example. Typically these were built by local carpenters with assistance from congregation members. Although plans were available from sources like the Augsburg Publishing House in Minneapolis, no two churches were built exactly alike, and the type was also used by other Protestant denominations.<sup>17</sup> Zion church records show that whereas a design (*tegningen*) or a prototype of some kind was at hand, details such as the number and type of windows and basic dimensions including height were discussed by the congregation. Zion's wooden altar painted white and gold framing an oil painting is also typical for Norwegian-American immigrant churches.<sup>18</sup>

Further, immigrant Norwegian Lutherans were all more or less "puritan," according to scholars who have studied them.<sup>19</sup> This term suggests many things, but in this case it means a prohibition of drinking (temperance), dancing, playing cards, going to the theater, or wearing fancy dress. Older members of the Zion congregation today affirm this, and the church sponsored a local affiliate of a national Norwegian-American temperance society in 1887 (the *Normana Afholds Forening*). Temperance was a controversial issue in the Village of Shelly at various points in time, with the citizenry voting one way or another until national prohibition was established in 1922. However, in late 1938 a vote was held there concerning beer sales, and when most voted against it the Zion congregation sent a resolution of appreciation to "the people of Shelly."<sup>20</sup>

As with other immigrant groups, preservation of social values and cultural heritage was achieved in worship and via many church-sponsored social activities. And even though public schools were established in their midst and supported by them, it was typical for the Norwegians to set up parochial schools, which usually were operated as a supplement to the public ones. Norwegian was used in these parochial schools and religion was the primary subject matter, although secular subjects were sometimes included.<sup>21</sup> Zion set up a parochial school in 1880, and it continued for years, usually meeting for four to six weeks in the summer when the public schools were in recess.

Were it not for the public schools, there would have been little incentive for the early settlers in homogeneous ethnic regions like the Red River Valley to learn English. As time went on and the children learned English, it became increasingly difficult to maintain Norwegian as the only language of discourse either at home, in church, or elsewhere. In Minnesota, the period of the First World War marked a turning point in the language issue for all European-American immigrants. One indication of this was a law passed in 1919 by the state legislature requiring the use of English in all public schools and in private schools serving in lieu of public schools. However, part-time religious schools, where a foreign language was used for the instruction of religion or where language was treated as a "handmaiden of religion," were not directly affected,<sup>22</sup> which both illustrates and continued the intimate relationship between language and religion in immigrant communities.

However, in 1925 English exceeded Norwegian in Lutheran churches for the first time, though in rural parishes this shift took longer. At Zion, it was decided in 1947 to make "American" the language to be used in recording the Minutes of congregation meetings, even though church service was conducted in Norwegian until 1953.<sup>23</sup>

Typical for all the Norwegian-American Lutheran churches was their support of auxiliary organizations for the different gender and age groups in the congregation. These were represented at Zion and include Ladies' Aid, Girls' Aid, a Young Peoples' Society (later Luther League). These groups had the primary function of raising money for

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the local church plus foreign and home missions, and this was done by staging musical performances, craft and bake sales, and so on. They also sponsored bible camps and religious education.

Home missions had top priority in the church after 1890, since their job was to establish and support new congregations as immigration continued. Foreign missionary activity was also important, and this can be seen in the history of the Zion church. The foreign missions operated in many parts of the "undeveloped" world, e.g. at several locations in Africa. The American frontier was regarded as no less in need of the civilizing influence of Lutheran doctrine, and even though the Norwegian Lutherans in rural areas tended to isolate themselves from the larger social context in order to more fully realize their own particular identity in a context of freedom, they saw it as their sacred duty to bring their version of Christ to wherever it was unknown, whether Africa, the western Dakotas, or Norman County. As one scholar put it:

In the Old World a person was likely to lead a respectable life because of the restraints of family and tradition. But in the New World these restraints were gone. No one knew him; life was harder; and the former pleasures were not available. Moral standards had been an outward prop, not an inner support, and now the prop was gone.<sup>24</sup>

Norwegian emigration to Minnesota continued into the 1920s but at a diminishing pace and with larger numbers going to the large urban centers of Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth. In 1910, Norman County had the highest proportion of Norwegians of any county in the state. As the land in the Red River Valley became occupied, Norwegians moved on westward, according to the established pattern, to the western Dakotas, Montana, the western Canadian provinces, and Washington.<sup>25</sup>

After 1917, when the three largest Norwegian synods merged to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, many of the pioneering efforts of the church in keeping the Norwegian heritage alive had begun to shift to secular groups. In 1946 the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America changed its name to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and in 1960 it became part of the American Lutheran Church, which is not strictly Norwegian in membership. By this time the job of keeping the heritage alive was being done by secular groups such as the Sons of Norway, the Norwegian-American Historical Association, and the Bygdelag groups – associations of Norwegian-Americans who can trace their origins to specific districts (*Bygdelaget*) in Norway. In recent years, however, some traditionally Norwegian Lutheran congregations, e.g. Zion, have reestablished a Norwegian language worship service on something like a once-a-month basis.

The Zion congregation has dwindled to an active membership of about 20 households in recent years, but contacts have been maintained between some members and their relatives in the *Dalane* region of southwest Norway from whence a number of the pioneer settlers in Shelly Township came.<sup>26</sup>

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SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Zion Church and Cemetery bear witness to the first Euro-American settlement of Norman County and the Red River Valley by Norwegian immigrants in patterns typical for their movement into this and other rural areas of Minnesota, where they remain an important presence. This property served not only the religious needs of these pioneers, but it was also the locus of multifarious social interactions and represents the desire to maintain cultural identity via religious worship, language retention, and the perpetuation of customs with origins in Norway. The desire to own and control land and maintain a rural lifestyle no longer possible for them in their native country led these pioneers to a fertile but difficult territory where insect plagues, constant winds, fierce storms, and periodic flooding remain endemic. The church, and cemetery too with its unmarked graves of unknown migrants, are reminders of all this plus the good and bad economic times experienced in the Red River Valley and in the nation as a whole.

A well-established depopulation trend in many areas of rural Minnesota has resulted in the abandonment and destruction of most architectural remains of these Norwegian-American pioneers in Shelly Township, Norman County, and the Red River Valley. The Zion Church remains what it had become by the time the first history of Norman County was written, in 1918, a landmark in the western part of the county.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ojakangas and Matsch, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Drache, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Qualey and Gjerde, p. 228.

<sup>4</sup>Robinson, Table XIII.

<sup>5</sup>Schmidt, pp. 218-219.

<sup>6</sup>Qualey and Gjerde, p. 220.

<sup>7</sup>ibid., p. 228. Drache, p. 26.

<sup>8</sup>Qualey and Gjerde, p. 222.

<sup>9</sup>Turner and Semling, pp. 506-508. Qualey, p. 127.

<sup>10</sup>Turner and Semling, p. 517. The 1885 State Census also lists the Zion church valued at \$1,500.

<sup>11</sup>Turner and Semling, Chapter IX. Minnesota State Archives, Rural Credit Dept., Map of Norman County (1935). MN SHPO History/Architecture Inventory, Norman County.

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<sup>12</sup>Zion Lutheran Church. Minute Record. This legend was related to the author by Marcella Neprud on October 8, 1998 and later substantiated by a wealth of printed documentation and oral histories gathered by Gloria Martinson. Details of migrant labor on the bonanza farms can also be found in Drache.

<sup>13</sup>Accounts of both events can be found in the Norman County history (1976), pp. 474 ff., 478, and in the Shelly history (1997), pp. 237-238 and 225.

<sup>14</sup>Qualey and Gjerde, p. 227. According to Fevold, "Students of the Norwegian immigrant group agree that the church was the most important social institution established in its midst." (p. 12)

<sup>15</sup>Qualey and Gjerde, pp. 234-235.

<sup>16</sup>Turner and Semling, Chapter IX. Blegen, p. 173.

<sup>17</sup>Glasøe, Design XIII.

<sup>18</sup>Anderson, p. 208.

<sup>19</sup>Hansen, Chapter 5. Blegen, pp. 221-222.

<sup>20</sup>Minute Record, p. 145. Norman County history, pp. 25, 132.

<sup>21</sup>Fevold, p. 14. Blegen, pp. 247-248.

<sup>22</sup>Munch, pp. 64-65. The language issue among Norwegians is also discussed in Nelson, pp. 242-251. Quotation is from Chrislock, p. 125.

<sup>23</sup>Nelson, *ibid.* By 1942 it was 90% of the Norwegian churches using English. Congregational Minutes, meeting of January 7, 1953.

<sup>24</sup>Quotation from Hansen, pp. 103-104. Zion's mission activities discussed in the church's 100-year anniversary brochure and recorded in part in the Minute Record.

<sup>25</sup>Qualey and Gjerde, p. 230. On Norwegian immigration in the Red River Valley region see Chapter X in *History of the Red River Valley*. Volume I, Grand Forks and Chicago, 1909.

<sup>26</sup>There is now a two-way traffic in that Norwegians visit Shelly Township and the Zion Cemetery to locate relatives both living and dead. See "*Okka By I Minnesota*" (Our Town in Minnesota), *DALANE TIDENDE*, September 8, 1997. Provided to the author by Gloria Martinson.

<sup>27</sup>Turner and Semling, p. 371.



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Turner, John and C. K. Semling. *History of Clay and Norman Counties Minnesota*. Indianapolis, 1918.

Zion Lutheran Church. 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Brochure. Shelly, 1980.

----- Minute Record, 1880-1948.

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The church and cemetery occupy separate but contiguous parcels and are described as follows: The church parcel is that part of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 16, Township 146N, Range 48W of the 5<sup>th</sup> P.M. commencing 607.59 feet east of the southwest quarter of the said SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , thence north 271 feet, thence east 170.13 feet, thence south 271 feet, thence west 169 feet to the point of beginning, containing 1.05 acres.

The cemetery parcel is that part of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 16, Township 146N, Range 48W commencing 776.59 feet east of the southwest quarter of the said SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , thence north 271 feet, thence east 311.55 feet, thence south 271 feet, thence west 313.83 feet to the point of beginning, containing 1.95 acres.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

Historically the Zion church and cemetery have together occupied a single three-acre rectangular lot with the church located on the west end and the cemetery taking up the majority of the lot east of the church. Recently this lot has been divided into two parcels, one containing the church building and the other the cemetery. These parcels are owned, respectively, by the Zion Norwegian Lutheran Church and the Zion Perpetual Care Cemetery Association, both of Shelly, MN.