SEVENTIETH ANNIVERSARY

THE NORWEGIAN
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CONGREGATION
OF GREENFIELD
FILLMORE COUNTY, MINNESOTA

HARMONY, MINNESOTA, JUNE 19–20, 1926

To the members, both old and young, of the Norwegian Lutheran Congregation of Greenfield, this little memento is respectfully dedicated

BRIEF HISTORY OF GREENFIELD LUTHERAN CONGREGATION

In the year 1825 Norwegian immigration to this country began. The first contingent of 53 immigrants from Norway was a mere handful as compared to the many thousands who have since found homes in America, the promised land. Only a few came during the ten or fifteen years following the advent of the sloop "Restaurationen," but in 1839 and 1840 the stream of immigrants grew apace as the years came and went. Coming mostly from the country districts of their homeland they naturally turned their attention to agriculture. Their coming at that time was most opportune as the very heart of the agricultural section of the United States was opened for settlement. The very best of farming land could be obtained. From 1839 to 1850 most of the immigrants settled in Illinois or Wisconsin. In the early "fifties" they began to "go west." Settlers from Muskego and other places found their way to Iowa and Minnesota.

In June, 1854, the first Norwegian settlement was made in that part of Fillmore County called Greenfield Prairie located in Harmony township. The first of these settlers were Johannes E. Sauarlie and Johannes Thoe with their families. A few weeks later two more families arrived, viz. Erik Solseth and Herbjorn N. Ingulfsland. Other settlers came not only from the old settlements but direct from Norway as well. In a few years it was a large settlement, embracing a part of the surrounding townships.

While these early settlers were busy providing for the necessaries of life, building log huts, breaking the virgin soil and providing shelter for their domestic animals, they did not neglect the spiritual side of their life. Public preaching of the Gospel was limited. But they had the Bible, the Huspostil and other highly prized religious books. "At læse texten" on Sundays was customary in many families. The children were taught at home and required to learn the Cathechism, Bible History and the Explanation.

In Norway they were accustomed to attend the parish church. In their new homes there was no church building inviting them to worship, no organized church body. These wants were felt and steps were taken to meet them. As far as can be ascertained, Greenfield congregation was organized in 1856. No records were kept at that time so the circumstances surrounding the event is more or less obscure. It was the first move for organized church work in the settlement.

During this time and up to the coming of a regularly called minister, the spiritual wants of the settlers were taken care of by pioneer ministers from Norway, such as Rev. P. A. Rasmussen and Rev. V. Koren. One, Rev. Jensen, served the congregation for some time together with other Lutheran congregations in Fillmore County. Meetings were held either at the homes of the settlers or in the red school house a half mile east of the old church site.

The first recorded meeting of the congregation was held December 10, 1864

Arne Aaberg was elected chairman and Ole S. Erickson, secretary. A board of trustees was also elected, viz.: Arne Aaberg, Herbjorn Nelson and Gullik A. Maland, for one, two and three years, respectively. A second meeting was held January 19, 1865. The third meeting of the congregation was held October 5, 1865. Arrangements had been made with Satersdal, Spring Valley (Bloomfield) and Union Prairie congregations to unite for the purpose of calling a minister, and also to unite in building a parsonage.

A call was issued to Cand. Theol. Tobias Larsen. He accepted the call and was installed in Greenfield congregation, July 31, 1865, by Prof. F. A. Schmidt and Rev. P. A. Rasmussen.

At a meeting held January 2, 1866, a constitution was adopted.

Greenfield congregation was incorporated August 27, 1866.

The most pressing need of the congregation was a church building. A resolution to build one had been adopted. An acre of land was purchased, and the price was ten dollars. A building committee was elected at the meeting held October 5, 1865, consisting of the following members: G. A. Maland, Johannes Elefson (Sauarlie), Arne Arneson (Aaberg), Arne Evenson (Kirkelie) and Eric Erickson (Solseth) Sr. At a later meeting this committee was superseded by a building committee of three members, viz.: Svend E. Solseth, G. A. Maland and Johannes Elefson. The building of the church was begun in 1866. It was built of brick from a kiln owned by Arne Aaberg, about a half mile east of the church site. The size of the church was as follows: Length 48 feet, width 36 feet and 18 feet high. The steeple was 75 feet high. The building was not completed at once but as soon as it was enclosed it was taken into use. Greenfield church was dedicated October 7, 1874, by Rev. V. Koren assisted by Rev. N. Brandt, Rev. St. S. Reque and the local pastor.

To compare the old Greenfield church with many present day church buildings would hardly be fair. At the time it was built it was above the average. It fulfilled its mission for 46 years. It was the first church home of our forefathers. Lightning struck it once splintering the steeple, — fire had started but happily it had gone out. The building was taken down in 1919.

The four congregations above mentioned built a parsonage in 1866. Forty acres of land had been purchased. It served as a parsonage until 1897.

In 1887, Rev. Larsen resigned his pastorate having served 22 years. He moved to Wittenberg, Wisconsin, and engaged in mission work among the Indians. Later he moved to Parkland, Wash., where he died some years ago.

When Rev. Larsen resigned the charge consisted of Greenfield, Satersdal and Henrytown congregations, — Union Prairie and Bloomfield having joined other charges. Henrytown was formerly a part of Greenfield congregation but owing to the long distance from church they had organized a congregation for themselves. A call was issued to Cand. Theol. Peder Dreyer, through Bishop N. J. Laache in Norway. The call was accepted. Before coming to Harmony he was ordained by Rev. P. A. Rasmussen at Lisbon, Illinois. He entered upon his duties September 4, 1887. He was installed by Rev. Krohn of North Prairie. In 1903 Rev. Dreyer resigned after serving for 16 years. He moved to Clermont, Iowa, and then to Tacoma, Washington. He returned to Norway where he is engaged in work for foreign missions.

In 1875 a Sunday School was started and it has continued almost without a break to this day. Tollef Sanderson was its first superintendent. P. T. Larson, now of Tacoma, Washington, was superintendent for many years. It has quietly

done its work from year to year. Hundreds of children have received Christian instruction, thanks to the many willing teachers who have labored faithfully in God's vineyard through the medium of the Sunday School. At present it numbers about 150 scholars. Martin T. Bruflodt is the present superintendent, assisted by 12 teachers.

In 1876 a Ladies' Aid society was organized. The charter members were Mrs. Tobias Larsen, Mrs. Ole Larsen, Mrs. Tallak Larsen, Mrs. Ed. E. Ellis, Miss Emma Larsen and Miss Ingeborg Larsen. The first meeting was held at the parsonage, presumably in September. Mrs. Tobias Larsen and Mrs. N. Helle, nee Emma Larsen, are the sole surviving charter members.

The first parochial school teachers were Gregar Herbjørnson (Bøen) and Paul Knudson. They were elected at the meeting held October 5, 1865.

It will thus be seen that to give religious instruction to the children was one of the very first acts of the congregation. They realized the importance of Christian education. Of course, the salaries paid these two teachers were small as compared to present day prices, — only ten dollars per month. But this was part of the pioneer conditions that prevailed.

To the credit of the members of the congregation be it said that they were diligent in attending church services. Riding six or eight miles to church in a lumber wagon was a common occurrence. As a rule services were held every four weeks and lasted from two to three hours. Ordinarily the sermon took up an hour and a quarter of the time. Catechising the young required from one-half to three quarters of an hour. During Larsen's and Dreyer's pastorates it was customary to place the children and young people on the church floor where they were chatechised and instructed, — lessons being assigned from time to time. It was an excellent opportunity for the pastor to get in touch with the young. The older people, sitting in the pews, were interested listeners.

The doctrinal controversies which had been carried on between some factions of the Lutheran church in this country also affected the congregation. It could hardly escape being drawn into them. But while other Lutheran congregations divided into two hostile camps finally separating and thereby splitting the congregations, Greenfield happily escaped that misfortune. For many years it was a member of the Norwegian Synod of America, but during the controversy it severed its connection and remained without synodical connection until 1916 when it joined the United Norwegian Lutheran Church. It is now a member of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America.

At the time of the resignation of Rev. Dreyer the charge consisted of Greenfield, Henrytown and Fremont congregations. The territory embraced in this charge was the original Greenfield congregation. It had divided in this manner because of the distance to the old church.

Upon the resignation of Rev. Dreyer the charge issued a call to Rev. Gerhard Rasmussen, Pastor of Bethlehem congregation, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He accepted the call and was installed by the former pastor January 4, 1904. He has served the congregation since that time and is still its pastor.

For a period of 50 years and more the language used in all church services was Norwegian. The old pioneers coming to this country knew only one language. Naturally all their religious work was carried on in that language. But as time went and the language of the country came more and more into use, especially by the younger generation, and the ranks of the pioneers dwindled from year to year, the language question came up for settlement. The matter was settled without any friction by deciding to use both languages alter-

nately at the services. At the annual meeting in January, 1920, it was decided that English should be the official language thereafter.

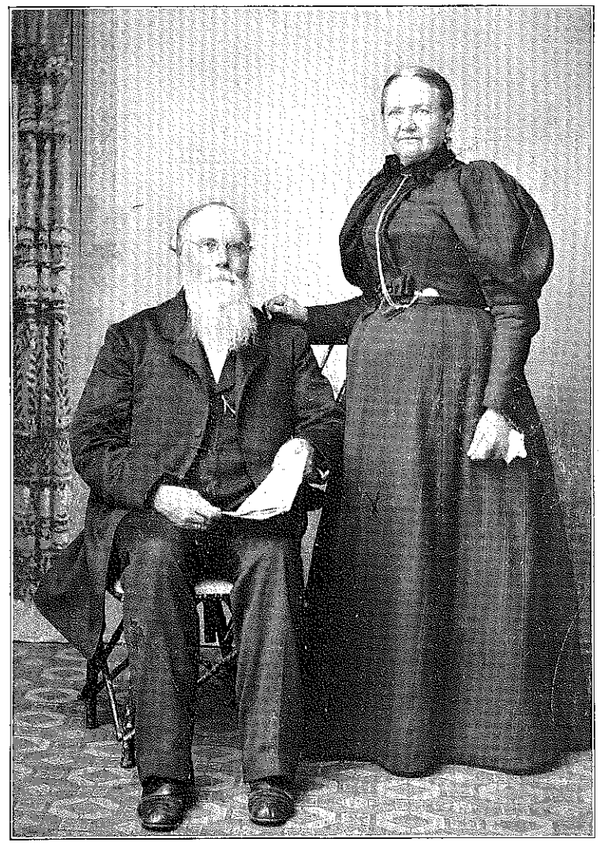
For some years the question of building a new church was considered. The old church began to show the marks of age. It was conceded that a new church building was needed but when it came to the question as to where it should be built, either on the old site or in the village of Harmony, opinions were divided. In 1912 the congregation decided to build in the village and work was commenced in June of that year. Before this time a corporation consisting of members of the congregation and others had purchased a lot and built a chapel which was used for Sunday School, parochial school, public service and social gatherings. This was donated to the congregation, and on this site the church was built. The building committee consisted of five members, viz.: Tollef Sanderson, John A. Lund, Ole O. Fosse, Tosten Applen and Ole Scrabeck. Later H. E. Hansen served on the committee. On September 29, 1912, Rev. Gerhard Rasmussen laid the corner-stone, which was a gift of Torkel Traim, an aged pioneer. The church was finished in 1913 and was dedicated Sunday, September 21, the same year, by the Right Rev. T. H. Dahl, assisted by ministers from Fillmore County circuit, and also by Prof. Weswig, of the seminary in St. Anthony Park.

As soon as the settlement began it was felt that something should be done in regard to a burial place. The grim reaper is ever ready to take toll from the ranks of both old and young, and no one knew when a place for the burial of the dead might be needed. This question was happily solved when Knut Peterson (Husevold) in 1856 gave an acre of land to the congregation to be used as a cemetery. This acre lot was directly opposite the place where later on the first church was built. As time went more room was needed necessitating the purchase of additional land. When the old church was removed in 1919 it was decided to use the site for cemetery purposes. More land was purchased. At present it comprises six acres in all. A new iron fence was built around it in 1923. In 1917 the congregation established a cemetery fund, the interest of which should solely be used for the beautifying and upkeep of the cemetery. At this writing it amounts to $2,300.00.

In 1921 a memorial was erected in memory of the founders of Greenfield congregation. It is made of St. Cloud granite, four feet wide, seven feet high and two feet thick, with a bronze tablet sunk into the granite block. The tablet has the following inscription: "On this site stood the first church of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran congregation of Greenfield, Fillmore County, Minnesota." Then follows 85 names of those who were connected with the organization and incorporation of the congregation.

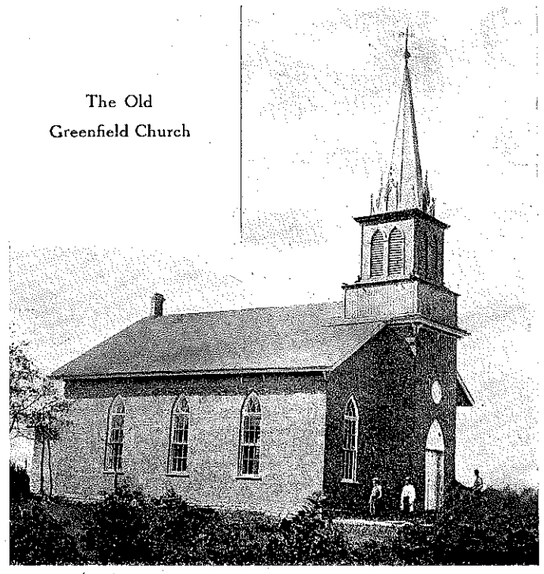
Our fathers and mothers established the church of their faith in their midst. They did well. May we who are reaping fruits of their labors continue the work and carry it on with the same determination. May we be true to the trust and loyal to our church. May we at all times joyfully sing:

God's word is our great heritage,
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor:
Through life it guides our way,
In death it is our stay;
Lord grant while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure,
Throughout all generations.



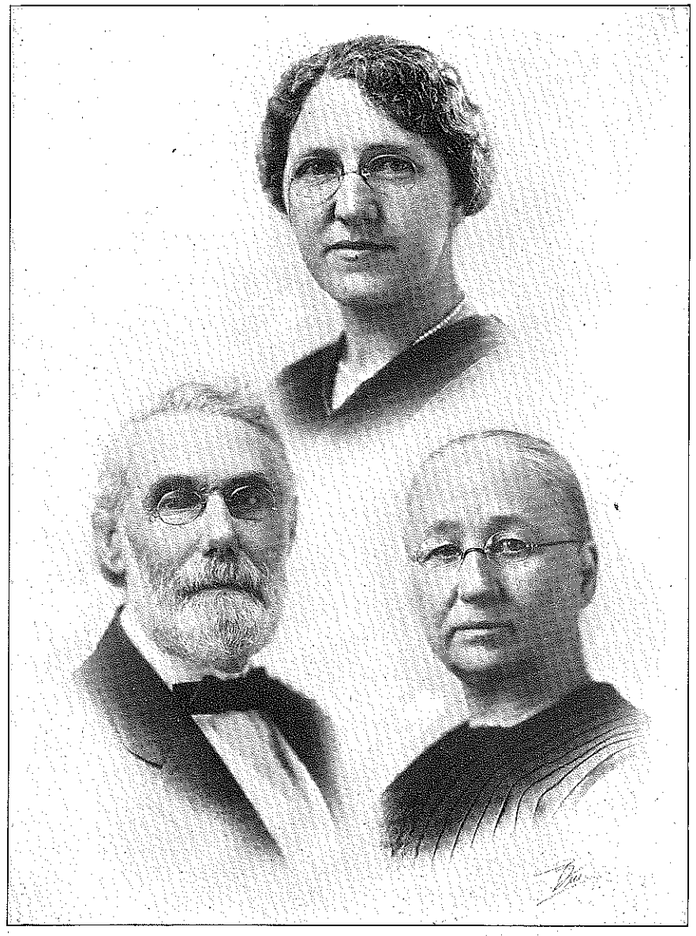
Rev. and Mrs. Tobias Larsen.

The Old
Greenfield Church

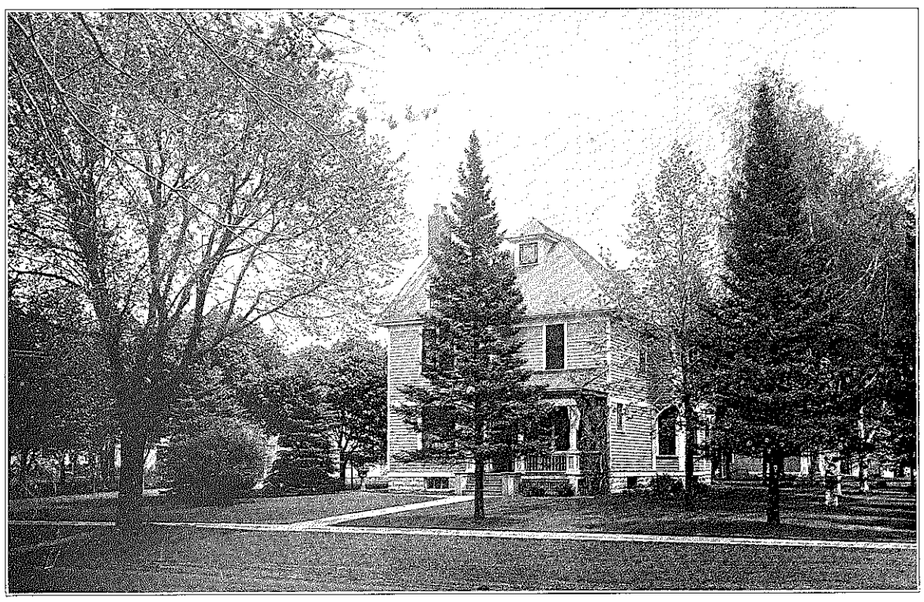


The New Church.

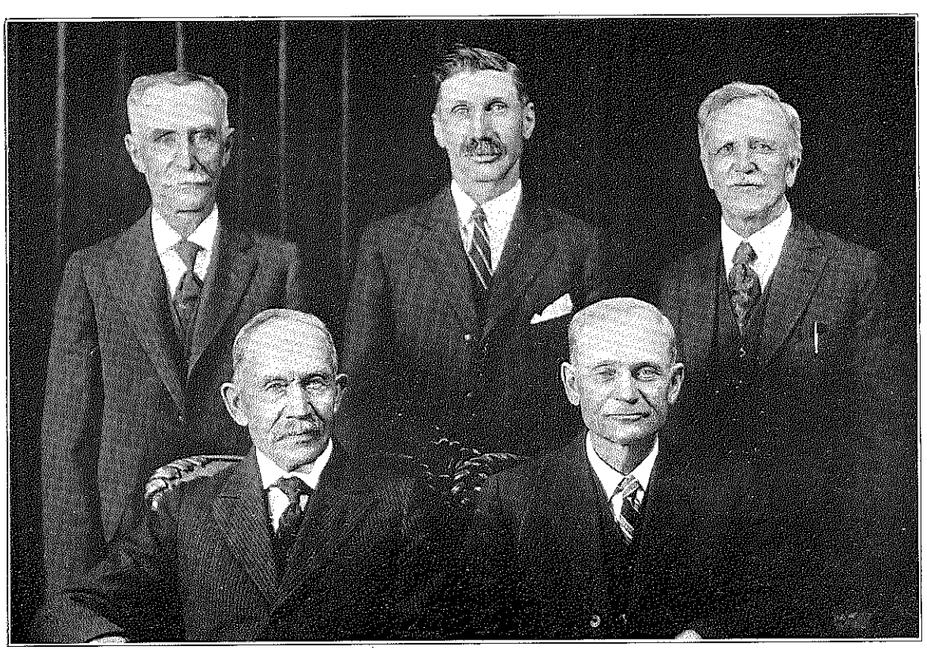
Rev. and Mrs. Peder Dreyer.



Rev. Gerhard Rasmussen and Family.



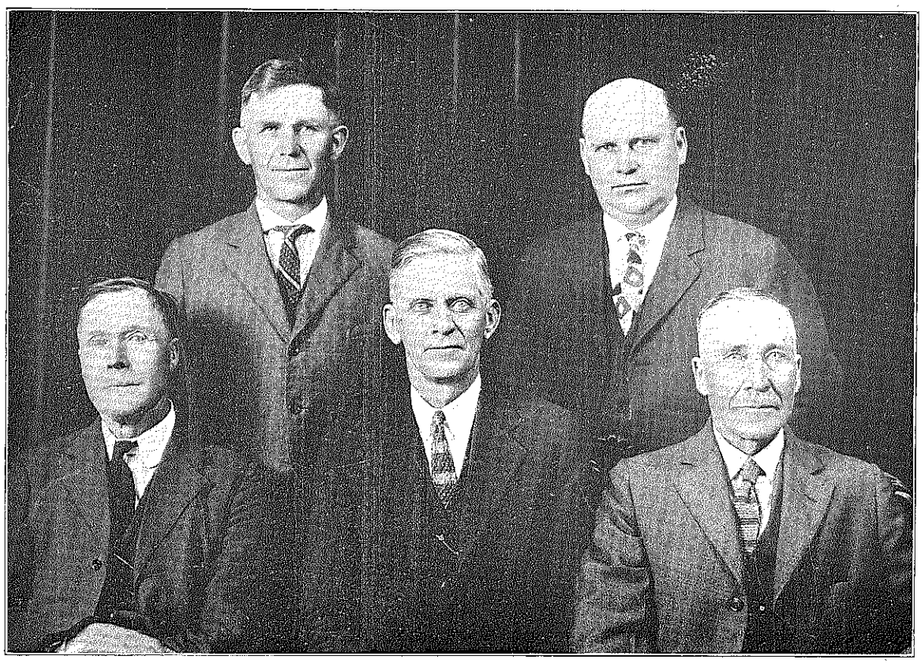
The Lutheran Parsonage.



Church Council:

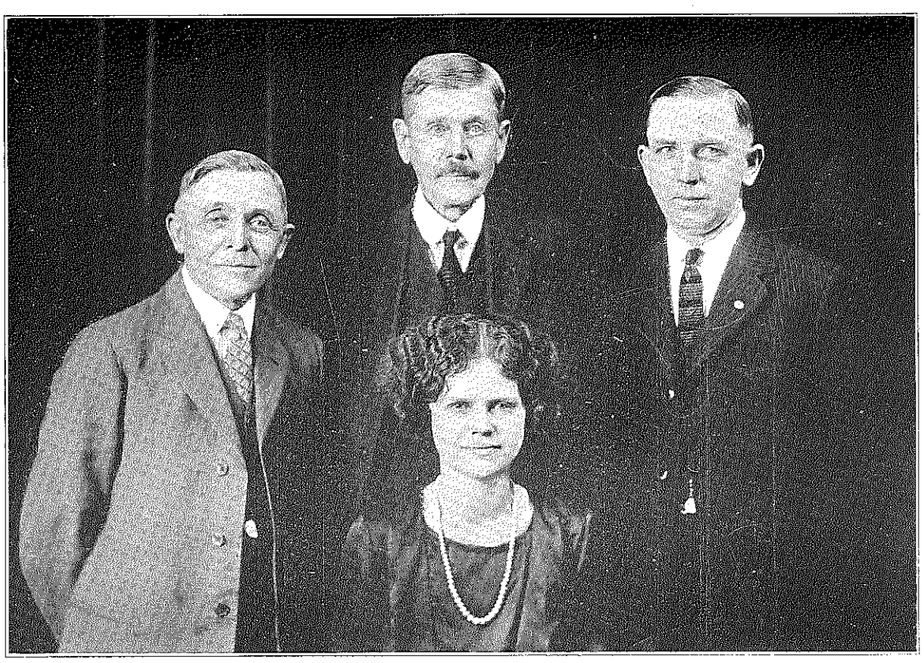
Henry Gregerson Theodore Olson H. E. Hanson

Steen Soum Oliver Halvorson



Board of Trustees:

Hans Barnum — Ingebret Soma — Nels Fosse — Oscar Peterson — Austin Morem



Officers:

Peter M. Oistad, Treasurer. — Tollef Sanderson, Chairman. — Martin T. Bruflodt, Secretary.

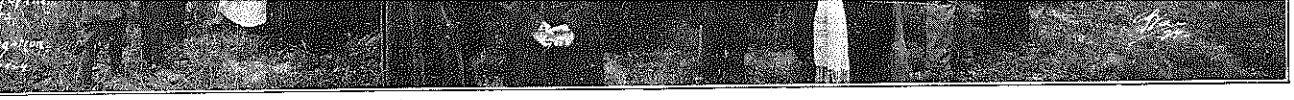
Miss Thelma Christianson, Organist.

Greenfield Lutheran Sunday School, Harmony, Minnesota.

Harmony Lutheran Ladies' Aid.

Harmony Luther League.

Lutheran Gleaners.



Dedication of Monument in Memory of the Charter Members of Greenfield Congregation
May 29, 1924.

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