

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Norwegian Lutheran Church Complex
other names/site number Leer Lutheran Church Complex

2. Location

street & number 10430 South Leer Road not for publication
city or town Long Rapids Township (Leer) vicinity
state Michigan code MI county Alpena code 007 zip code 49776

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
 national statewide X local

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
Michigan State Historic Preservation Officer
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____
Michigan State Historic Preservation Office
Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register
 determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register
 other (explain:) _____
Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2		buildings
		district
1		site
	1	structure
		object
3	1	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/religious facility

RELIGION/religious facility

FUNERARY/cemetery

FUNERARY/cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: Gothic Revival-inspired

foundation: CONCRETE, STONE

walls: WOOD

roof: ASPHALT

other: SYNTHETICS/vinyl

Celotex

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Norwegian Lutheran Church is a three-bay, gable-roofed, wood frame, vernacular Gothic Revival church set atop a fieldstone and concrete foundation. Constructed of local materials, and presently clad in white vinyl siding, the building is defined by its simple rectangular massing and centrally positioned, rectangular bell tower and entrance that project from the eastern façade. The longer north and south sides each features a series of four, rectangular stained glass windows. A single stained glass window set into the bell tower and centered above the main entrance replicates in scale and design those of the northern and southern elevations. The church was constructed by German-American carpenter Joseph Bammel and completed in 1900. The complex also includes a two-story parish house located a short distance to the north of the church, and facing north. The parish house is a wood-frame, hipped gambrel roof building, clad in white vinyl siding. A one-story addition that projects from the east elevation was constructed in 1950. The main part of the parish house was constructed in 1916 by John Bruski. A cemetery, established in 1883 when the property was transferred to the Norwegian Lutheran Church Society from a local farmer, is located on the eastern end of the property. Burials are arranged in north-south rows with grave markers facing east. Individual monuments are constructed of granite and marble. A contemporary covered pavilion is situated to the southwest of the church and to the south of the parish house near the westernmost boundary of the church property.

Narrative Description

Setting

The Norwegian Lutheran Church Complex is located in the rural, unincorporated, historically Norwegian agricultural community of Leer in Long Rapids Township, Alpena County, Michigan. Established in the late nineteenth century by Norwegian immigrants, the area, known initially as Sunken Lake,¹ was eventually renamed Leer, an homage to the village from which many of the community's founders emigrated, Lier, Buskerud, Norway.

The church property measures approximately 320 feet by 342 feet, and contains a church, a parish house, a cemetery, and a modern, covered pavilion. The complex is situated at the intersection of South Leer Road and Carr Road on three acres of former forest land acquired from Karl Burud in 1883 for one dollar.² Shortly thereafter Burud and his family returned to Alpena,³ and sold thirty-seven acres of land surrounding the church to Andreas Hansen.⁴ That same property today is owned by Howard and Mary Barsen.⁵ A series of residential structures are situated opposite the church on the east side of South Leer Road.

South Leer Road is a paved road that runs north-south, and is the primary means of access to the complex. The road branches north from M-65 and extends north towards the church site and Carr Road. South Leer Road also serves as the eastern boundary to the complex. Carr Road, by contrast, is a gravel road that runs east-west, and serves as the northern boundary of the church property. The property is bounded to the south and west by farmland. South Leer Road continues north of Carr Road but transitions from pavement to gravel, and its name changes to Sunken Lake Road. The road continues one-and-a-half miles to Sunken Lake Park.

Generally, the area surrounding the complex is characterized by numerous sinkholes, a rarity in Michigan,⁶ softly undulating farmland, and stands of various species of trees. Several of the area farms continue to be owned by descendants of the first immigrants to the area, and those that have been sold to other families continue to be working farms.

¹ Email correspondence between the author and Leta O'Connor and Linda Pletcher, July 27, 2012.

² Transfer deed.

³ Email correspondence between the author and Leta O'Connor and Linda Pletcher, January 4, 2013.

⁴ P. A. Myers and J. W. Meyers, *Plat book of Alpena, Presque Isle, Montmorency Counties, Michigan* (Minneapolis: Consolidate Publishers Co., 1903), 10.

⁵ *Atlas and Plat Book, Alpena County, Michigan*, (Rockford, IL: Rockford Map Publishers, 1976), 35.

⁶ R. A. Smith, "Alpena Sink Holes a Rarity," *Alpena News*, Apr. 8, 1933.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

When originally settled, the sinkholes, rocky terrain, and abundant trees reminded those first Norwegians of the topography of their native land. Often found in areas of relatively pure limestone, the sinkholes surrounding Leer measured from fifty feet wide and ten feet deep to five hundred feet wide and one hundred feet deep.⁷

To the south, South Leer Road is intersected by Olsen Road and Enger Road before terminating at M-65. These two intersecting roads provide a connection to the foundation of both the Leer community and the Norwegian Lutheran Church. Olsen Road draws its name from the Olsen farm, which was established by Otter Olsen, the first of Leer's founders to come to Alpena County. Similarly, Enger Road is named for the Enger farm, established by Bernhard Enger, the first person to construct a home in what would become Leer.

Set back approximately 320 feet from the edge of the road, the church faces east towards South Leer Road. Mature maple trees line the perimeter of the church property along South Leer Road. An adjoining cemetery and lawn create a visual and physical separation between the road and the church. To the north, the church property abuts Carr Road, from whose edge the church building is set back 120 feet. Directly opposite the church property on the north side of Carr Road is land once owned by Bjorn Halvorsen, an early settler in Leer,⁸ and currently owned by Mathew Barson.⁹

The cemetery is bifurcated by a paved drive that leads from South Leer Road to the front of the church and then branches to the north and south, encircling the church. A paved parking area, connected to the circular drive, lies to the south of the church. Historically, the church complex was entered via a two-track dirt drive that passed through a metal gate that faced South Leer Road. The two-track drive is now paved and the metal fence and gate are no longer present. The cemetery is not only physically divided by the drive, but it is also by the burials contained within each parcel. The northern section contains the remains of the earliest members of the congregation, while later members are buried within the southern section.

A modern, metal and plastic sign, painted red, that also states "Leer Lutheran Church" is placed in the southeastern corner of the cemetery and faces north-south.

Set at the edge of the lawn, a wooden sign, facing east-west, states LEER LUTHERAN CHURCH in black, capital letters on a white background. The sign is held in place by two wooden posts set into a decorative concrete block foundation.

A two-story parish house is situated adjacent to and approximately eighty-seven feet northeast of the church. Facing north, the building is set back approximately thirty-three feet from Carr Road atop a small rise of approximately three feet above the road. The hill slopes gently eastward towards South Leer Road and gently southward towards the church. The mature maple trees that line the church property along South Leer Road continue west on Carr Road and end at the parish house.

A modern, covered pavilion is situated in the southwest corner of the site.

Mature deciduous and evergreen trees and shrubs are interspersed throughout the site.

Church Exterior

The Norwegian Lutheran Church is a three-bay, wood-frame, gable-roof church with modest massing constructed in a form, with spired tower centered in front of a steeply pitched gabled roof, suggestive of the Gothic Revival style. The simple frame structure and minimal decorative elements are typical of rural Western European and Scandinavian immigrant churches of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The cornerstone for the church was laid on September 7, 1899, and construction completed in 1900. Joseph Bammel, a carpenter and builder living in both Alpena and Onaway according to contemporary sources,¹⁰ was contracted by the congregation to construct the church. According to church records the design was based on a German Lutheran church

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ P. A. Myers and J. W. Meyers, *Plat book of Alpena, Presque Isle, Montmorency Counties, Michigan* (Minneapolis: Consolidate Publishers Co., 1903), 10.

⁹ *Atlas and Plat Book, Alpena County, Michigan*, (Rockford, IL: Rockford Map Publishers, 1976), 35.

¹⁰ "Alpena," *Saginaw Evening News* Jul. 26, 1899; *R. L. Polk's 1899 Alpena City Directory* (Detroit: R. L. Polk & Co., 1893) 53; 1900 United States Census.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

in Krakow Township, which is some fifteen miles northeast of Leer, in Presque Isle County. This German Lutheran church is no longer extant.

The main body of the church is a rectangular volume measuring fifty feet and four inches in length by thirty-one feet in width. The building rises thirty-three feet from ground level to the top of a steeply pitched gable roof. The wood-frame structure rests upon a stone foundation. The original weatherboard siding has been covered by five-inch horizontal white vinyl siding. The vinyl siding replicates the original paint color of the wood siding.

A rectangular bell tower, which is vertically divided into three sections, fronts the main body of the church, and is the most prominent exterior feature. The main entrance to the church is centered within the tower's front. The combination bell tower and entrance projects three feet and three and a half inches from the center of the building, creating a symmetrical main (eastern) façade. The square-plan tower, belfry, and spire rises approximately sixty-three feet and five inches from the ground. Low asphalt shingled roofs create a visual separation between the tower and the belfry or middle section, which is slightly recessed from the lower section. The belfry displays triangular-head screened openings. When originally constructed, the belfry was open, and thus its interior susceptible to the elements. A pyramidal asphalt-shingled spire, rising eighteen feet and topped by a simple metal cross, completes the tower.

When initially constructed, five wood stairs provided access to the raised entrance of the church. In 1915 seven concrete steps replaced the original wood steps for a cost of \$129.86, which was paid to various members of the congregation as reimbursement for materials and labor. The current steps rise three feet and seven inches from grade to the entrance to the church, extend north, south, and east from the entrance, and are arranged in a pyramidal fashion.

Mature evergreens flank the entrance on either side. Two small evergreen bushes have been planted on the northern and southern sides of the building. According to historic photographs, the evergreens are not a part of the historical landscaping.

Tubular metal handrails are present on both sides of the steps. The original wood entry doors are constructed of oak, and provide access to a small vestibule. A stained glass window, measuring seven feet and eight and a half inches by two feet and three inches, is centered in the tower above the main entrance. Two five-panel doors serve as the main entrance. The vertical upper and lower panels are separated by a horizontal panel. The entry is surmounted by a four-paneled transom of frosted glass windows. Viewed from the exterior the panes of glass, from left to right, are yellow, green, red, and blue in color.

The north and south facades are identical, each displaying four, equidistant, rectangular stained-glass windows measuring seven feet and eight and a half inches by two feet and three inches across. Aluminum, double-hung, one-over-one storm windows replaced one-over-one, double-hung wood windows. The exterior window frames are covered in white vinyl siding, and are each capped by a triangular arch.

The western, rear, elevation is largely absent of detail with the exception of a rectangular shed-like enclosure that shelters a staircase to the basement of the church. The structure extends nine feet and ten inches from the rear wall of the main structure, and has a width of six feet and six and a half inches. A wooden handicap accessible ramp, adjacent to the basement access structure, replaced a simple stairway, and leads to the rear entry of the main church building.

In 1951 the exterior of the church was painted white, and in the mid-1980s the church exterior was faced in white vinyl siding.

Church Interior

Inside the main entrance is a small vestibule measuring six feet by nine feet and four inches. To the south side of the vestibule a former coatroom was converted to a bathroom in 2011. A "cry room," from which parents with infants can observe the service but not disturb other parishioners, is located next to the bathroom and before the entrance to the nave.

A set of oak double doors, each twenty-nine and a half inches by eighty-nine and a half inches, serves as the entrance to the nave. These doors are identical in form to the exterior entrance doors, and are attached to their frames by original hardware, which include a coiled spring hinge at the top and standard hinges at the bottom. The door surrounds are of stained wood molding and feature carved "bull's-eye" corner blocks.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

The doors open to reveal the nave, chancel, altar, and pulpit, "the liturgical and visual focus of the interior of the church building."¹¹ A forty-four inch main aisle divides the nave into nearly symmetrical halves and provides access to the two rows of eight pews. Crafted of oak, all of the pews except for one are ten feet and eight inches long, two feet and eight inches high, and seventeen inches wide. The one exception was shortened to enable the placement of a wheel chair alongside the pew without blocking access to the main aisle. Two narrower side aisles provide additional access to the pews. The aisle on the northern side of the nave is twenty-six inches wide, and the southern aisle is slightly narrower at twenty-two and a half inches.

The chancel, altar, and pulpit are flanked to the north by the pastor's dressing room, and to the south by a vestibule, which exits to the rear of the church. The pastor's dressing room and the vestibule measure eighty-one inches by ninety-four inches. However, built-in cabinets in the pastor's dressing room absorb eighteen inches of space in that room. From the pastor's dressing room an oak door provides access to the chancel and altar. A second door, which faces the nave, provides direct access to the pulpit via two eight-inch steps. This arrangement of doors is mirrored on the opposite, south side of the chancel. One door provides access to the chancel and altar, and the second door provides access to the nave, and serves as a means of ingress and egress through a rear entrance.

In the northwestern corner of the nave stand the pulpit and baptismal font. The octagonal-plan pulpit rises sixty-seven inches from the floor, and is set atop a stepped, octagonal, stained wood base. The steps of the base increase in diameter as they rise to meet the base of the pulpit. The bottom of the pulpit has scalloped-edge trim. Each panel of the main body of the pulpit is painted white, and features lancet-shaped inset panels trimmed in gold paint. A beveled cap adorns the top of the pulpit. The pulpit was crafted by Hans Matheson, a member of the Leer congregation. The pulpit, previously attached to the wall, was lowered from its original position in January 1938, following a vote by a committee of the congregation, and is currently accessed by two eight-inch steps, which, in turn, are accessed through the pastor's dressing room.

Standing before the pulpit is a moveable baptismal font. The base, column, and font are octagonal in form, and constructed of stained wood. The column is divided into two sections. The upper portion features carved brackets affixed to each panel of the column. Each panel of the base of the font proper displays a raised dove; a Christian symbol representing peace and purity.

The chancel rises one seven-inch step from the floor of the nave, and is visually and physically separated from the nave by a turned baluster railing, which rises twenty-five and a quarter inches from the chancel floor and is painted white with gold paint detailing. A gated opening in the center of the railing provides access to the chancel. When closed, the gate provides a continuous railing at which parishioners kneel to receive communion. The volume of the chancel rises to a pointed arch that extends to the ceiling of the church.

The altar, also created by Hans Matheson, stands in the center of the chancel, and two feet from the rear chancel wall. The altar itself rises forty inches from the chancel floor, and is fifty-two inches long and twenty-one inches wide. Inset lancet-shaped panels, twenty-two inches by eight and a half inches, are trimmed in gold paint, and adorn all sides of the altar base.

Centered and affixed to the rear wall of the chancel is the altar painting, *Crucifixion*, by Sarah Kirkeberg Raugland, set in a white-painted Gothic frame. The painting was acquired in 1901 at a cost of approximately \$100.¹² Such paintings were as common in Norwegian Lutheran churches as a Bible or pulpit, and nearly as important. Altar paintings featured common themes and events found in the Bible, and were often a source of comfort to immigrants by serving as a visual reminder of the power of God, the comfort of Jesus, and the promise of salvation.

Perhaps of as equal import as an altar painting is the altar frame in which the painting was displayed, as Anderson has observed:

"The majority of frames [in immigrant churches] were made in Victorian Gothic style, reminiscent of elements of the architectural revival which informed many of the buildings. [They were characterized by

¹¹ Kristin M. Anderson, "Altars in the Norwegian-American church: An Opportunity for Folk Expression," in *Material Culture and People's Art Among the Norwegians in America*, edited by Marion John Nelson, 199-226. (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1994), 201.

¹² Pieper, Mary. "Altar Painting by Renowned Artist Uncovered after 51 Years in Storage," *The Globe Gazette*.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

Name of Property

the] use of the pointed arch, trefoil or quatrefoil shapes, and multiple spires, and emphasis on the verticality of the frame.... The finish of the altars could be natural wood, perhaps with some paint, but the Gothic-style altars were typically painted white, with gold details.”¹³

The altar frame of the Norwegian Lutheran Church is comprised of two sections. The painting itself is placed within a rectangular space within the main body of the frame. A recessed lancet shape is carved into the triangular cap, and a recessed quatrefoil carved within the lancet. Columns flank the painting on either side of the frame and are capped by modestly decorated finials painted white with gold paint detailing. A similar finial protrudes from the triangular frame cap. The altar frame is painted white and trimmed in gold paint. The complete frame measures forty-eight inches in width by 128 inches in height.

The upper interior walls and ceiling of the nave, chancel, and balcony have been covered in Celotex, a fiberboard product, first produced in 1921, “using bagasse, the dry pulp byproduct of sugar cane after the juice has been extracted.”¹⁴ The panels were installed in the early 1940s as part of a modernization program. Two support beams spanning the width of the nave were added to the upper walls of the nave in 1951 as a means of providing stability to the church walls.

The lower walls of the nave and chancel, and the front face of the balcony, are covered in stained, two-and-a-quarter-inch oak beadboard wainscoting. Wood battens trim the nave, chancel, and balcony. Along the main walls of the nave, the wainscoting rises forty-seven inches from the floor and terminates in a three-inch decorative cap rail.

A balcony projects out from the eastern interior wall of the nave, and is set eight feet and five inches above the main floor. Access to the balcony is by a twenty-six inch wide stairway in the northeast corner of the nave. The staircase is comprised of fourteen steps, each measuring seven and a half inches in height. The balcony is comprised of two rectangular spaces – the main space that extends the width of the nave, and a recessed area that provides access to the belfry via a ladder affixed to the wall and an access panel in the ceiling. The recessed space is comprised of two elevated levels, each rising one six-and-a-half inch step above the preceding level. The railing rises twenty-eight inches from the floor of the balcony. The front of the balcony is faced in the same beadboard wainscoting as used in the nave. Similarly, the walls and ceiling of the balcony are faced in Celotex. A stained glass window is centered in the recessed area, providing natural light into the balcony.

Nine stained glass windows were installed into the window frames in 1941-42, replacing the original wood sash windows. Six of the windows are found in the nave, one in the balcony, one in the west exit vestibule, and one in the pastor’s dressing room. All of the windows were donated to the church by its members.¹⁵ The rectangular windows measure ninety-two and a half inches in height by twenty-seven inches in width, and are recessed five-inches into the wall. The majority of the window is composed of a translucent pointed arch, with opaque glass in the remaining upper corners and in a narrow band across the top of the window. The windows are non-pictorial, with the exception of a small cross near the point of the arch. Each window is composed of 219 pieces of cut glass in twelve colors. Six of the windows are located in the nave, three on the north façade and three on the south façade, and are spaced nine feet and nine inches apart. The middle windows on each façade feature a center portion capable of opening to allow for ventilation. Similar to the interior doors, the windows are encased in five-inch, stained wood surrounds with decorative, five and three-quarter inch corner blocks featuring carved “bull’s-eyes.” Where the windows meet the cap rail of the beadboard paneling, the rail abuts and merges into five-inch deep window sills. The windows were registered with the Michigan Stained Glass Census (MSGC 12.0013) in September 2012.

The wood floor of the nave and chancel is covered in dark red, low-pile, commercial-grade carpet. Prior to the installation of the current carpet, the chancel was covered in a green carpet that was similar in color to the fabric that covers the pads on the pews. A carpet runner of similar color to that of the chancel extended from the entrance of the nave to the chancel, and provided the only cover for the otherwise exposed wood floor.

Six cylindrical, frosted, white glass light fixtures, measuring thirty-six inches in length, hang from the ceiling. Three metal crosses rising from the bottom edge of the cylinder are equidistantly spaced around the light. They replaced the original

¹³ Kristin M. Anderson, “Altars in the Norwegian-American church: An Opportunity for Folk Expression,” in *Material Culture and People’s Art Among the Norwegians in America*, edited by Marion John Nelson, 199-226. (Northfield, Minnesota: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1994), 208.

¹⁴ “Early 20th-Century Building Materials: Fiberboard and Plywood.” United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service Technology and Development Program, Tech Tips, <http://www.fs.fed.us/t-d/pubs/htmlpubs/htm07732308/index.htm>, accessed Oct. 17, 2012.

¹⁵ “History of the Leer Ladies Aid Society,” *Leer Historical Album*, 40.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Alpena County, Michigan

Name of Property

County and State

electric light fixtures that were installed in the building when it was initially wired for electricity in 1938. The original light fixtures are currently stored in the basement of the church, and more of the same lights are still in use in the upper floor of the parish house.

The oak pews were crafted by an unidentified member of the congregation. A decorative recessed arch is carved into each end panel. Within the arch are two identical raised tablet shapes that serve as a reminder of the Biblical story of the two tablets that Moses carried down from Mount Sinai, upon which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. Above the tablets appear a curved form resembling a dove, the Christian symbol of both peace and the Holy Spirit. Scrolled armrests cap the end panels. Two carved grooves, separated by a raised center, run the length of the each arm rest, which forms a soft s-shape as it rises from bottom to top. The pews are supported by an additional, undecorated panel located in the center of each pew. In 1945 the church pews were refinished and cushions covered in blue fabric were added.¹⁶ Additional pews are located in the parish house.

The bell, purchased from Sears, Roebuck & Company in 1899 for approximately forty dollars, is housed in the enclosed belfry in the upper portion of the tower. The bell is accessed from a panel located above the balcony, and rung from one of two ropes that descend through the balcony ceiling. One rope produces a standard toll, and the other creates a special toll used for funerals and other somber occasions. According to the 1897 Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog, the No. 34 bell, which weighs 465 pounds, sold for a cost of \$40.50. The bell was described as "cast from an alloy of cast steel and crystal metal," and reliable "under all circumstances and in all seasons."¹⁷

Wiring for electricity was installed in September 1938 by a member of the Elowski family for \$160.00. The Elowskis were a German immigrant family that established the now-State Register of Historic Sites-listed Elowsky Mill a short distance north of the church complex, along the north branch of the Thunder Bay River, in Posen. A coal and wood-burning furnace was also installed in the church in 1938.¹⁸

Several modifications were undertaken in the 1940s. In 1941 a committee was created to plan and oversee the renovation and construction projects. In addition to the installation of stained glass windows and the lowering of the pulpit, a lighted cross was installed, new carpet was laid down, the coal and wood-burning furnace was converted to oil-burning in the late 1940s, and in 1947 a water system was donated to the church by a number of members who had moved away, some as far as California.¹⁹

Throughout the remaining decades of the twentieth century numerous maintenance and improvement projects have been undertaken. In 1951 the church was braced, and the exteriors of the church and parish house painted, new asphalt shingles were installed in 1959, and a public address system was purchased in 1960. In 2011 a coat room was converted into a bathroom.

Norwegian Lutheran Church Parish House

The Norwegian Lutheran Church Parish House has historically served as the social gathering space for the congregation and Leer community. The building hosted numerous events and activities, and also became the venue for the Leer Ladies Aid Society's coffee socials and yearly auction. Previously, the group met in the homes of its members. The proceeds of these activities were used to defray maintenance expenses of both the church and parish house.²⁰ The historic building was constructed in 1916 by John Bruski, and expanded in the middle of the twentieth century to its current configuration.

Parish House Exterior

The historical volume of the parish house is a three-bay, hipped gambrel roof, wood frame building atop a concrete block foundation. The building is rectangular in form and measures approximately forty feet in length and twenty-seven inches in width. In similar fashion to the church, the parish house is presently clad in horizontal five-inch, white vinyl siding applied to the building in the middle 1980s. The roof is covered in light gray asphalt shingles, and is punctuated by a red brick chimney that rises from the southwestern corner.

¹⁶ *Leer Evangelical Lutheran Church Seventy-Fifth Anniversary*, (Leer, MI: Leer Lutheran Church, 1957).

¹⁷ Sears, Roebuck & Co. Catalogue, 1897, 120.

¹⁸ *Leer Evangelical Lutheran Church Seventy-Fifth Anniversary*, (Leer, MI: Leer Lutheran Church, 1957).

¹⁹ "History of the Leer Ladies Aid Society," *Leer Historical Album*, 40.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

The original main entry faces north on Carr Road and is accessed by ten concrete steps that rise to a covered entry. Metal tubular handrails are present on either side of the steps. This entrance provided access to the upper floor of the parish house. The entrance projects eight and a half feet from the northern elevation, and is ten and a half feet in width. Two five-panel oak doors enter into a small vestibule. Two small, rectangular windows allow natural light into the vestibule. This space is a single room that currently houses the Leer Heritage Center.

An enclosed entry that is thirteen feet and six inches in width projects nine feet from the southern façade. This entry now serves as the main point of ingress and egress for the parish house interior. A storage structure is attached to the entry. As the lower level of the parish house is below grade a stairs leads downward from this point of entry, through a kitchen, and to the contemporary main social space for the congregation.

The concrete block foundation is punctuated by a series of four double sash, one-over-one aluminum windows on both the east and west facades, but the southern-most window on the east façade has been covered by vinyl siding. Similar individual windows are present in the foundation of the northern façade, but not in the southern. The windows in the northern foundation flank either side of the entry.

A one-story concrete block addition, constructed in the 1950s, projects seven feet and eight inches from the eastern façade. The roof angles gently eastward, and is covered by asphalt shingles and vinyl fascia. The addition is not situated symmetrically on the eastern elevation. Rather, the structure is pushed northward towards Carr Road, though slightly recessed from the northern façade of the historical volume. A vinyl, horizontal, triple-sash window is centered in the southern façade of the addition. The addition is further extended by an enclosed entry faced in white vinyl siding.

While the historical entrance rises above grade and enters into the upper floor of the parish house, the western and southern entries, which are currently the primary means of access to the interior of the parish house, are both at grade and enter into the lower level of the building.

Parish House Interior

The historical, main entry to the parish house enters into the upper floor of the building. The exterior doors open to a seventy-two-and-a-half inch long by ninety-five inch wide vestibule. A second set of stained, five-panel oak doors grants access to the parish house. The exterior and interior entry doors retain their original hardware, and the interior entry doors operate on an upper coil hinge similar to that found on the entry doors to the nave.

The upper floor of the parish house is a single volume measuring twenty-seven feet in width and approximately thirty-nine feet in length. This space is largely intact, and features two-and-a-quarter inch oak flooring and pressed metal walls, ceilings, and window casings. Eight-inch oak baseboards separate the walls from the floor. Two non-historic alterations have occurred to the upper level of the parish house – the chimney, which is visible on the interior of the southern wall of the building, has been faced in a stone-patterned vinyl covering, and a small storage closet projects from the eastern wall in the southeast corner of the space.

The interior walls and ceiling of the parish house are faced in an elaborate combination of embossed and painted pressed metal panels. Beginning at the top of the eight-inch baseboards, metal wainscoting rises to meet the main body of the walls. The wainscoting panels are dominated by diagonal crosshatching within floral embellishments.

The wainscoting terminates in a floral-patterned upper rail and cap, and transitions into vertical panels embellished with *fleurs de lis* connected by beaded braiding. The verticality of the panels is enhanced by vertical lines placed between the *fleurs de lis*. As the walls rise to meet the angled ceiling of the gambrel roof, a third pattern, also marked by its verticality, leads to the ceiling. The main body of the ceiling duplicates the panels of floral and crosshatching pattern of the wainscoting.

The ceiling panels replicate the crosshatch and floral design found in the wainscoting panels with the exception of two, larger panels from which original lighting fixtures descend. The larger, square panels are equal in dimension to four standard ceiling panels and feature a circular shape centered within the square. Original light fixtures are placed in the center of each of these panels and descend from the ceiling to a circular, opaque white shade. These fixtures and shades replicate those that were originally found in the church.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

In addition to the two exterior entries, the lower level of the parish house is also accessible by a stairs and railing located in the northeast corner of the building. The railing, treads, and risers are all constructed of oak, and are original materials. The risers have been treated with a darker stain than the treads. The railing ascends the west side of the stairs, and the stairs abut the lower wall of the historical volume on the east. The east side of the stairs lacks a wall stringer. The railing is composed of a starting newel post in the lower level, rectangular balusters, and a carved handrail with rounded edges. The landing newel also serves as the starting newel post for a balustrade that separates the stairway opening in the upper level floor from the activity space.

On the upper floor, the balustrade is composed of rectangular balusters spaced approximately five inches apart, box newel posts located at the end points and corner of the ell, a railing that rises approximately thirty-six inches from the baserail, and a carved handrail with rounded edges.

The lower level of the parish house has been significantly modernized since its construction, and may be considered typical of fellowship spaces connected to contemporary small congregations. Within this space is found a kitchen, dining and social space, bathroom, and a small office. The interior walls of the lower level are faced in wood laminate paneling. Floors are covered in brown commercial-grade carpet.

Beginning in the mid-1960s through recent years, the Norwegian Lutheran Church became a "teaching congregation." Through this arrangement, divinity students from Wartburg College served the congregation during the internship portion of their studies. In order to accommodate these students, an office was created adjacent to the west of the stairs in 1965. The space was fashioned by erecting three walls in the northeast corner of the lower level, with the eastern wall abutting the stairs. Mirroring the office on the east side of the stairs is a bathroom, which is incorporated into the 1950s expansion. In addition to

Records of the Ladies Aid Society indicate that a kitchen was first installed in the parish house basement in the mid-1950s, and subsequently remodeled in the spring of 2007.

Cemetery

The Norwegian Lutheran Church cemetery fronts the entire length of the church property along South Leer Road, and is comprised of two sections. The older north section, established in 1883, is separated from a circa 1924 south addition by a paved drive leading from the road to a drive that encircles the church. Though the cemetery is not formally plotted, the burial plots are arranged in logical sequence of rows and columns. Upright, flat, and obelisk headstones and memorial benches, crafted of both granite and marble, identify the vast majority of the burials; however, some graves are presently unmarked. Cedars, yews, pines, and both perennial and evergreen shrubs are scattered throughout the cemetery.

The oldest section of the cemetery is situated in the northeast corner of the church property and is bounded by South Leer Road to the east, Carr Road to the north, and the paved drive to the south. The addition lies in the southeast corner of the church property and is bounded by South Leer Road to the east, farmland to the south, and the paved drive to the north. Both sections abut an open lawn that serves as a physical separation from the church. The cemetery's south section was opened circa 1924 with the burial of Helga Christopherson Wilson, who passed away that year.

Land that lies adjacent to and south of the church property has been donated by Howard and Mary Barsen for a future expansion of the cemetery; this land is excluded from the nominated property.

Pavilion

A modern, covered, open-air pavilion is situated a short distance to the southwest of the church. When the church was constructed, covered horse stalls were erected adjacent to the southwest of the church. Parishioners used these stalls to provide shelter for their horses while attending services or other events. The stalls were also used as pens for the community's dairy farmers' cattle during the annual Leer Guernsey Fair. The structure was eventually demolished, and the pavilion erected in its place.

The pavilion is placed on a rectangular concrete pad. The asphalt shingle roof is supported by twenty-two wood posts with brackets. A kitchen and utility facility is enclosed within a rectangular structure placed at the southwestern corner of the pavilion. The northern and southern gables and the kitchen and utility facility, are faced in white vinyl siding similar to the church and parish house.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

ART

ETHNIC HERITAGE/European

Period of Significance

1899-1963

Significant Dates

1885, 1899, 1900, 1916, 1935

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Norwegian

Architect/Builder

Bammel, Joseph, builder (church)

Bruski, John, builder (parish house)

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

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

Period of Significance (justification)

The Period of Significance begins with the construction of the church building and ends with the elimination of Norwegian from regular religious services.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Norwegian Lutheran Church Complex is nominated under Criterion A under Ethnic Heritage for its importance as the central focal point of a Norwegian settlement at what became Leer in rural Long Rapids Township, Alpena County. The Norwegian settlement at Leer began in 1878, the Lutheran church established in 1882, and the present church site obtained in 1883. The present Norwegian Lutheran Church, the only building the congregation has had, dates from 1899. Descendants of the area's Norwegian Lutheran pioneers still comprise a substantial part of Leer residents. The Norwegian Lutheran Church is also nominated under Criterion C for its significance as a vernacular representation of the typical tower-fronted gable-roof masonry churches of Gothic Revival design constructed by German and Scandinavian Lutheran congregations in the later nineteenth century across Michigan, the Midwest, and beyond. The church is also significant for containing an altar painting by turn-of-the-century Norwegian-American artist, Sarah Kirkeberg Raugland, one of several artists well known to Norwegian-American congregations throughout the Upper Midwest for her religious art. Raugland was one of the most productive Norwegian-American painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, producing between 200 and 300 works. Working in a field and time dominated by male artists, Raugland was also one of the few professional female Norwegian-American painters creating works for Norwegian Lutheran congregations at a time of rapid expansion.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Norwegian Immigration to the United States

The beginning of Norwegian immigration to the United States can be dated to October 1825 when forty-six Norwegians arrived in New York harbor aboard the single-mast sloop, *Restauration*. The party, numbering forty-five at the time (a child was born during the journey), departed from Stavenger, Rogaland, Norway, fourteen weeks prior, sailed through the English Channel, then south to the Madeira archipelago, and then on to America.²¹ Their arrival marked the first mass migration of Norwegians to America, and precipitated a slow but steady stream of Norwegians who made their way to America through the remainder of the nineteenth century. In the end, one small boat led the way for hundreds of thousands of Norwegians who left their home country for the prospect of a better life in the United States.

The question of why so many people left the land of their birth for a place filled with uncertainty does not have a single answer. Indeed, the reasons for leaving are as varied as the number of emigrants. Considering the question in 1909, Flom identified eight factors that influenced Scandinavians to emigrate from their homelands: "the prospect of material betterment and the love of a freer and more independent life," "letters of relatives and friends who had emigrated to the United States and visits of these again to their native country," "church proselytism," "political oppression," "military service," and "the desire for adventure."²²

Of the aforementioned causes, the prospect of material betterment rises above the others in importance. Few avenues for economic and social advancement were available to nineteenth-century Norwegian commoners.²³ "The predominant pursuit in Norway is agriculture, cattle farming and forest cultivation."²⁴ However, arable land accounted for a mere five percent of Norway's total land mass, the rest being mountains and forests. Thus, less than a quarter of the country was capable of cultivation.²⁵

This crisis of space was further exacerbated by a naturally expanding population, and by the Norwegian crown, which possessed some two thirds of all land. Notably, when land was made available by the crown, it was often acquired by

²¹ "A Novel Sight," *New York Daily Advertiser*, Oct. 12, 1825, p. 2.

²² George T. Flom, *A History of Norwegian Immigration to the United States: From the Earliest Beginning to the Year 1848* (Iowa City, Iowa, 1909), 88.

²³ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

wealthy, predominantly Dutch, foreigners.²⁶ Consequently, land ownership became one of the few avenues of social prestige,²⁷ yet was often difficult to achieve.

Those who were not landowners often either worked for someone who was, or they rented land from a landholder, or *bønder*. These tenant farmers, or *husmen*, comprised sixty percent of the adult male population of Norway in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁸ The majority of the *husmen's* crops or earnings went to the *bønder* as payment for the privilege of farming the land. With little left to support a family, the *husman* often engaged in secondary employment such as fishing or lumbering, or in trades like wood carving. Despite their efforts, "the rewards of labor are meagre [sic] and the opportunities for material betterment small."²⁹ Indeed, the "pressing and general lack of money... [made] it difficult for many people to earn the necessaries of life."³⁰

In 1909 John Nelson Luraas, a Norwegian immigrant living in Wisconsin, explained to Flom why he left home:

I was my father's oldest son, and consequently heir to the Luraas farm. It was regarded as one of the best in that neighborhood, but there was a \$1,400 mortgage on it. I had worked for my father until I was twenty-five years old, and had had no opportunity of getting money. It was plain to me that I would have a hard time of it, if I should take the farm with the debt resting on it... I saw to my horror how one farm after the other fell into the hands of the lendsman and other money-lenders, and this increased my dread of attempting farming. But I got married and had to do something. Then it occurred to me that the best thing might be to emigrate to America.³¹

So it was that the "hope for abundance"³² that may be found in America stood in stark, appealing contrast to the want and worry of Norway.

While the economic station of many Norwegians caused them to consider emigrating, the number of individuals that actually did so may have been significantly fewer but for the numerous letters sent from family and friends already in America telling of (by comparison) good wages, cheap land, and fertile soil – all things necessary for independence, and all things that could not be found in Norway.

Since the publication in 1837 of Ole Rynning's short book, *Sandfærdig Beretning om Amerika (True Account of America)*, or the "America book," as it was popularly called, letters, books, newspaper articles, and personal stories told of the freedom, land, wages, and even adventure that could be found in America. These items were often passed along to family and friends, and some were copied and distributed in local newspapers.³³ Many letters included money or tickets to America.³⁴ This literature led to, and ultimately fueled, an "America fever" that swept through the country.

Norwegian Immigration to Michigan

The greatest number of Norwegian immigrants ultimately settled in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and Iowa. They were drawn to these states "by the abundance of cheap government land,"³⁵ which was not as available in Michigan. Thus, the sizeable Norwegian communities found in the aforementioned states are not commonly found in Michigan. In 1850 there was a total of 110 Norwegian-born residents in Michigan compared to merely seven in Minnesota. However, by 1860, Michigan's Norwegian-born population increased only to 440, while Minnesota's exploded to 8,425. By the end of the nineteenth century, Michigan ranked ninth in the United States for number of Norwegian-born residents, with 7,582 individuals. Minnesota and Wisconsin ranked first and second with 104,895 and 61,575 individuals, respectively.

²⁶ Andreas Elviken, "The Genesis of Norwegian Nationalism." *The Journal of Modern History* 3, no. 3 (1931): 372.

²⁷ Linda Christopherson, "Norwegian Migration: From Lier, Norway to Leer, Michigan" (Central Michigan University, 1966), 2.

²⁸ Leer Heritage Foundation, "Who Were the 'Husmen' in Norway?," *Keeping the Past*, June 2011, 8.

²⁹ George T. Flom, *A History of Norwegian Immigration to the United States: From the Earliest Beginning to the Year 1848* (Iowa City, Iowa, 1909), 65.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

³² *Ibid.*, 69.

³³ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁵ Arthur Meier Schlesinger. "The Significance of Immigration in American History," *American Journal of Sociology*, 27 (3), Jul. 1921, p. 77.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

A curious byproduct of the decision of many immigrants to continue west, past Michigan, is that Michigan has often been ignored in the study of the Norwegian settlement in America, and sometimes discussed only in passing, as evidenced by Gjerset's mention of "a settlement of some size in southern Michigan,"³⁶ but failure to identify the settlement by name or provide an account of its history.

Although Michigan did not draw Norwegian immigrants in as great numbers as other states there were, nonetheless, significant Norwegian communities throughout the state. The largest Norwegian communities were established along the Lake Michigan shore, specifically in Leelanau and Muskegon counties, and in the Upper Peninsula counties of Houghton, Marquette, and Menominee.³⁷ Smaller communities were also established throughout the state – mostly in shoreline counties. Few Norwegian communities seem to have been formed in the interior counties, though individuals and small groups certainly lived throughout Michigan.

Norwegian Immigration to Alpena

Along Lake Huron, on the east side of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, the frontier, lumbering town of Alpena drew many Norwegians in the middle and late 1800s. Between 1858 and 1890, the town was "in the throes of tremendous growth and development,"³⁸ and the demand for labor and the lure of the wages that were paid occasioned many individuals and families to relocate to lumbering communities like Alpena.

The dense forests surrounding Alpena were populated by hemlock, maple, beach, tamarack, basswood, white and black ash, poplar, birch, elm, ironwood, and white oak.³⁹ During the lumbering boom in Alpena County some thirty-three thousand acres of pine were harvested each year.⁴⁰ Between 1860 and 1890 the population of the city grew nearly four thousand percent, from three hundred to more than twelve thousand.⁴¹ By 1891 there were eighteen sawmills operating in the vicinity of Alpena,⁴² and by 1900 many of the lumber camps had moved inland, some sixty miles.⁴³

In the spring and summer of 1869 a small group of Norwegians were living in Buffalo, New York. Among them were Otter and Oline (Andersdatter) Olsen. Having heard of a successful Norwegian community in Wisconsin, and having little work in Norway, the Olsens emigrated from Lier, Norway, in 1867. While the Olsens were living in Buffalo, a few other people from Lier arrived there. Andreas Andersen, Oline's brother, and his wife, and Per Christensen and his family emigrated from Norway sometime between 1867 and 1869. They would later travel with the Olsens on their way to Michigan and Alpena.

Eventually Andersen and Christensen heard of Alpena's abundant lumbering jobs and year-round work, and in the autumn of 1869 they and the Olsens set out for Alpena. After a brief stop in Detroit, the small group arrived in the bustling lumbering town in the middle of the night, only to find that all of the businesses were closed. Unable to find accommodations, the group found a haystack and burned a little hay to keep warm. When morning came the group awoke to the unpleasant reality of an 1870s fishing and lumbering town – "a few shacks and a half-dozen unpainted boarding houses," and approximately sixteen fishing huts. Despite the uninviting appearance of their new home the men in the party soon found work in one of the city's many sawmills, and shortly thereafter erected a modest home that they all shared until they could procure proper accommodations.⁴⁴

Shortly after their arrival, the Olsen party found that they were not the first Norwegians to come to Alpena. Isak and Louisa Isakson (listed as Isaac Isaacson in United States census and local directories) arrived in Alpena in approximately

³⁶ Knut Gjerset, "An Account of the Norwegian Settlers in North America," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 1924, 8 (1), p. 80.

³⁷ The assessment of the number of Norwegian Lutheran congregations established at those locales were derived from Norlie's 1915 survey of Norwegian Lutheran Congregations in the United States, *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter i Amerika, 1843-1916*.

³⁸ Carlton C. Qualey, *Norwegian Settlement in the United States* (Northfield, MN: Norwegian American Heritage Association, 1938), 172.

³⁹ William Boulton, *Complete History of Alpena County* (Alpena, MI, 1876), 41.

⁴⁰ Charles Moore, *History of Michigan, Vol. I* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1915), 524.

⁴¹ *History of the Great Lakes, Vol. I*. (Chicago, IL.: J. H. Beers & Co., 1899), 817-818.

⁴² *The City of Alpena* (Alpena, MI: Alpena Weekly Argus, 1891).

⁴³ Rollin Lynde Hartt, "Notes on a Michigan Lumber Town" *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. LXXXV, 1900. Cambridge, Mass., 102

⁴⁴ Hjalmar R. Holand, "Our Settler Saga: Far in the east at Huron's Lakes," *Skandinaven* (Chicago, IL), 1925.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Alpena County, Michigan

Name of Property

County and State

1860. Isaac earned a living first as painter,⁴⁵ then as a fisherman,⁴⁶ and later as a foreman for the Alpena Fish Company.⁴⁷ There is also some indication that a Norwegian named only as Augustine inhabited Sugar Island as early as 1840.⁴⁸

After some time Otter Olsen, like so many Norwegian immigrants of his time, wrote "America Letters" to his family and friends in Lier, Norway. He told them of the plentiful work and wages in Alpena, and offered a temporary place for them to stay should they want to come to America.⁴⁹ Olsen thus provided an important "gateway" for those wishing to come to the new world.

Over the next few years many more Norwegians arrived in Alpena – many from Olsen's hometown of Lier. Martin and Andrine Gullickson arrived in 1870. Erik Eriksen, Karen Olsen, Hans Nilson, Oline Gunderson, Andreas Christopherson and family, Gilleert Olsen, Christopher Hanson, and Nils Olsen all arrived in 1871 from Lier, Norway, and Johannes Inverson, Andreas Holstad, and Martin Roefs arrived from Herdemarken, Norway.⁵⁰

The following year, 1872, still more people came from Lier: Jacob Anderson, Nils Kopperud, Christian Peterson, Anders Larson, Lars Olson, Sven Rød, Bernhard Enger, Hans Olsen, Gustav Gullickson, Even Svang, and Anders Amundsen. More immigrants came in the following years, and many of these newcomers lived with the Olsens until they were able to establish themselves or their families in Alpena.⁵¹

Much like Otter Olsen, Andreas Andersen, and Per Christensen, many of the men who came to Alpena found work with the city's numerous lumbering operations. Much like other Norwegian men who immigrated to the United States, those that came to Alpena found that their "previous experience in wielding the axe and logging," coupled with "a robust physique, brawn and brain," proved to be "desirable qualifications in such a strenuous occupation."⁵² These men also brought with them a "strong attachment to the soil," a "hunger for land,"⁵³ and a desire to "continue a form of life which they were acquainted with from home. They wanted to cultivate the land and establish a social organization similar to that of the home parish, with the advantage America could offer of less stones and more bread."⁵⁴

Community of Leer

By the early 1870s a sizeable Norwegian population had gathered in Alpena. Many of these men worked in the city's many lumber mills, along the docks, and in the vast forests of Alpena County. Eager to see their dream of independence fulfilled, some of these men discussed establishing a Norwegian farming community, "a new Lier,"⁵⁵ some distance from the chaos of the city. Within a short time they had accumulated enough money to purchase former forestland from the lumbering concerns that, having harvested the desired timber, wished to sell the supposedly worthless cutover land.

In addition to the myriad tree stumps left by the lumber companies Alpena County, at that time, "was, in reality, an unbroken wilderness,"⁵⁶ and considered unsuitable for farming. The practice, in fact, was not only discouraged, but "those who did make the attempt were ridiculed considerably."⁵⁷

In the mid-1870s Andreas Christopherson, Bernhard Enger, Gustav Gullickson, and Otter Olsen set out from Alpena to search for a place in which to establish just such a place. Traveling on foot, they eventually reached the area near

⁴⁵ 1870 United States Census

⁴⁶ 1880 United States Census

⁴⁷ R.L. Polk & Company's 1893 Alpena City Directory, Detroit: R. L. Polk & Co., 1898, p. 117.

⁴⁸ *The History of the Lake Huron Shore*. (Chicago, IL: H. R. Page & Co., 1883), 191.

⁴⁹ Linda Christopherson, "Norwegian Migration: From Lier, Norway to Leer, Michigan" (Central Michigan University, 1966), 9.

⁵⁰ Hjalmar R. Holand, "Our Settler Saga: Far in the east at Huron's Lakes," *Skandinaven* (Chicago, IL), 1925.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Harry Sundby-Hansen, "Suffered Under Pontius Pontoppidan or Good, Old Pontoppidan?" In *Norwegian Immigrant Contributions to America's Making*, ed. Harry Sundby-Hansen (New York: Norwegian Group Committee of the American's Making Exhibit, 1921), 47

⁵³ Laurence M. Larson, "The Norwegian Element in the Northwest," *The American Historical Review* 40, no. 1 (1934): 74.

⁵⁴ Semmingsen, Ingrid. "Norwegian Emigration in Nordic Perspective: Recent Migration Research," in *Norwegian Influence on the Upper Midwest*, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Knut Anderson. "They Created Lier in America," *Lierposten* (Lier, Norway), Aug. 23, 2007.

⁵⁶ W. Sleator, *Alpena County, Michigan: As She is, by Those Who Know* (Alpena, MI: Argus Printing House, 1903), 5.

⁵⁷ William Boulton, *Complete History of Alpena County* (Alpena, MI, 1876), 43.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

Sunken Lake, in the northwestern portion of Alpena County. The rolling hills reminded them of Lier, Norway. Finding the area to be to their satisfaction, the men purchased land from a number of lumber companies. Learning of the purchase, several other men quickly followed suit. Years later, a visitor from Norway was struck by how much the “varying amounts of woods and acreages under cultivation and fine well kept farms” reminded him of his “Norse land.”⁵⁸ It was this location, originally known as Sunken Lake, that became the community of Leer.

Economic independence and freedom, however, were not the only motivations for leaving the bustling, frontier city. Drunkenness and lawlessness were prominent fixtures in Alpena during its lumbering, frontier-town heyday. Fisticuffs had become something of a “national pastime” for a great many of the “shanty boys,”⁵⁹ and prostitution, another. By one accounting there were eighteen houses of ill-repute operating in Alpena during the latter part of the 1800s.⁶⁰ Such was the reputation of the city that a portion of its downtown came to be known as Dirtyville.⁶¹

Stewart Edward White’s 1907 fictional tale, *The Blazed Trail*, provides a glimpse of what a frontier lumber town, like Alpena, may have been like after the season’s trees were felled, and the men returned to the city from the camps.

A lumbering town after the drive is a fearful thing. Men just off the river draw a deep breath, and plunge into the wildest reactionary dissipation. In droves they invade the cities – wild, picturesque, lawless... The saloons are full, the gambling houses overflow, all the places of amusement or crime run full blast. A chip rests lightly on every one’s shoulder. Fights are as common as raspberries in August... Organized gangs go from house to house forcing the peaceful inmates to drink from their bottles. Others take possession of certain sections of the street and resist *a l’outrance* the attempts of others to pass. Inoffensive citizens are stood on their heads, or shaken upside down until the contents of their pockets rattle on the street... The respectable elements of the towns were powerless. They could not control the elections. Their police would only have risked total annihilation by attempting a raid. At the first sign of trouble they walked straightly in the paths of their own affairs, awaiting that time soon to come when, his stake “blown-in,” the last bitter dregs of his pleasure gulped down, the shanty boy would again start for the woods.⁶²

Although none of the Norwegians living in Alpena reported being “stood on their heads, or shaken upside down,” they often could not escape the commotion caused by the great numbers of shanty boys. A German immigrant who lived in close proximity to Bernhard Enger “kept a bad house where many lawless things happened,” including an unsuccessful attempt by two hundred drunken men to tear down Meyer’s house.⁶³

Such raucous living was at moral odds with the families who eventually established Leer.⁶⁴ Their faith prescribed a more sober life. Moreover, the dreams and desires that brought them to America were not fulfilled through the seasonal rotation of lumber camps, mills, and docks. It must be remembered that these people brought with them not only a profound devotion to their faith and a hunger for freedom, but Norwegian social mores that held land ownership in high esteem.

On the afternoon of July 12, 1872, “the greatest conflagration in the history of Alpena” swept through city.⁶⁵ The fire spread with “astonishing rapidity” through the downtown area of Alpena, destroying sixty-five structures,⁶⁶ and practically wiping out the business portion of the city.⁶⁷ Undoubtedly some of the city’s notorious saloons were destroyed in the fire. As the city was rebuilt, the saloons and brothels, along with businesses of greater repute, reappeared, much to the consternation of the Norwegians.⁶⁸

⁵⁸ Letter written by Martin Trulsnud after a visit in November 1914. Translated by Linda Pletcher.

⁵⁹ Jeremy W. Kilar, “Great Lakes Lumber Towns and Frontier Violence: A Comparative Study,” *Journal of Forest History*, 31 (2), 1987, 81.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁶² Stewart Edward White, *The Blazed Trail* (New York, The McClure Company, 1907), pp. 258-268.

⁶³ Hjalmar R. Holand, “Our Settler Saga: Far in the east at Huron’s Lakes,” *Skandinaven* (Chicago, IL), 1925.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Viall. *Alpena: Dates of Events, 1862-1902*, (Alpena, MI. Argus, c. 1915), 8-9.

⁶⁶ “The Alpena Fire: Full Particulars of the Disastrous Conflagration,” *Detroit Free Press*, Jul. 16, 1872, 1.

⁶⁷ Viall. *Alpena: Dates of Events, 1862-1902*, (Alpena, MI. Argus, c. 1915), 9.

⁶⁸ Hjalmar R. Holand, “Our Settler Saga: Far in the east at Huron’s Lakes,” *Skandinaven* (Chicago, IL), 1925.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

The hundreds of acres of land purchased by Christopherson, Enger, Gullickson, and Olsen were littered with tree stumps left by the lumber companies. Before the land could be inhabited and suitable for farming, the fields had to be cleared of the myriad stumps, as well as rocks and stones that punctuated the terrain. This difficult work was made all the more so by the fact that neither roads nor railroads had as yet been constructed to the outlying regions of Alpena County, so travel to and from Leer was on foot.

The first house to be constructed in what would become the community of Leer was the home of Bernhard and Kristine Enger. It was a simple two-room house of roughly hewn logs and a wood shingle roof. In the fall of 1878 Bernhard Enger and Ole Markusen, "the strongest man in Alpena,"⁶⁹ left the city to start clearing their land and to construct the Enger house.⁷⁰ Carrying with them each only an axe, saw, and a few supplies, the two men worked from fall until winter to fell trees, remove stumps, and, log by log, construct the Engers' first house. Every two weeks the men walked back to Alpena to obtain food and supplies, and then returned, again on foot, to their small outpost in the woods of Long Rapids Township.

The long roots of the leftover stumps made their removal by hand well-nigh impossible. The trees that had been harvested were as tall as 100 feet and ranged from three to six feet in diameter.⁷¹ To aid in the removal of these enormous stumps, the men acquired horse-powered stump pullers, but even with the strength of the horses, only two or three stumps could be removed each day.⁷² This work was so difficult and time-consuming that some of the larger stumps were left in place.⁷³ Intrigued by the promise of dynamite, Otter Olsen placed eight sticks of the material in one stump, ignited the fuse, and watched as "the stump flew all over the forty!"⁷⁴

During the winter of 1878 Enger returned to Alpena to be with his wife, Kristine, as they awaited the birth of their first child. Markusen, meanwhile, remained at the Enger home in Leer and continued clearing land for himself and Sven Rød, for which he was paid ten dollars an acre. In the summer of 1879, Bernhard and Kristine Enger, Olaf and Bertha Olsen, and Andreas and Gunhild Christopherson moved their families permanently to Leer. The next year Otter and Oline Olsen joined the first three families

Enough families followed this roughly blazed trail that a place to educate their children became necessary. In 1881 Otter and Oline Olsen sold a half-acre parcel of land to Long Rapids Township Public Schools for one dollar for the purpose of constructing a school. The *Norwegian School*, a one-room building of approximately twenty feet by thirty feet, was constructed in 1882.⁷⁵ The school, no longer extant, was located approximately two miles south of the existing church on South Leer Road. The building was deconstructed in the early 1930s by a local resident who wished to use the materials to construct a chicken coop.⁷⁶

In 1899 Bernhard Enger was elected to serve as treasurer of Long Rapids Township, a position he appears to have held for two years.

A post office was established on March 27, 1901, in Carl Alfsen's store, which was located at the intersection of Carr Road and Posen-North Leer Road.⁷⁷ It was at this time that the community received its name. John Alfsen, the first Leer postmaster, suggested "Leer" for the new office in honor of the hometown of many of the founders of the community. The name was accepted, and the little Norwegian colony became known as Leer.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Leer Lutheran Church: 1882-2007" (Leer, MI: Leer Lutheran Church, 2007), 2.

⁷¹ Robert E. Haltiner, *The town in bits and pieces: historic facts and photographs of Alpena, the small surrounding communities, and those tiny "towns" here no more*, (Alpena, MI: R.E. Haltiner, 2004), 10.

⁷² Hjalmar R. Holand, "Our Settler Saga: Far in the east at Huron's Lakes," *Skandinaven* (Chicago, IL), 1925.

⁷³ Letter written by Martin Trulsnud after a visit to Leer in November 1914. Translated by Linda Pletcher.

⁷⁴ Linda Christopherson, "Norwegian Migration: From Lier, Norway to Leer, Michigan" (Central Michigan University, 1966), 16.

⁷⁵ Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association. "One Room Schoolhouses in Michigan," accessed July 25, 2012, <http://www.one-roomschool.org/schools.php>.

⁷⁶ M. Ethelyn Nevins Dunckel, *Alpena County Normal: Life in the Rural Schools*.

⁷⁷ David M. Ellis, *Michigan Postal History: The Post Office, 1805-1986* (Lake Grove, OR: The Depot, 1993), 140.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

By 1908 the community had expanded to the point that a second school was needed. The Leer School was constructed on South Leer Road near Olsen Road on a half-acre of land previously owned by Carl Anderson. Then, in 1928, the new, larger Leer School, constructed on land deeded to the township by Andrew Bensen, replaced the 1881 and 1908 schools.

In addition to crops, many Leer farmers also raised Guernsey cattle. The Guernsey was first introduced into the United States in 1831 in New York. The breed was initially popular as a "house cow," due, in part, to its smaller size, and the fact that it consumes twenty to thirty percent less food than the popular Holstein-Friesian breed.⁷⁸

In approximately 1909 Leer dairy farmers, led by Truls Hansen, established the Leer Guernsey Breeders' Association as a means of coordinating and improving the community's dairy herd.⁷⁹ Over the years, the community's dairy herd, through selective breeding and purchasing new, pure-bred sires, grew in numbers and quality. By the early 1930s the association's twenty-six members possessed collectively over two hundred cows. Occasionally the Leer farmers would partner with other Guernsey farmers in the area to purchase new cattle that would assist in upgrading the herds, but also reducing the initial costs for everyone involved.

As late as 1916 the Leer association joined several similar organizations throughout the state in participating in the Michigan Agricultural College's Live Stock Project. This program was devised jointly by the Extension Division of the Michigan Agricultural College (today, Michigan State University) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) with the stated goal of aiding "in the improvement and development of the live stock [sic] interests of the state."⁸⁰

Beginning in the 1920s and carrying into the 1930s the annual Leer Guernsey Fair, sponsored by the Leer Guernsey Breeders' Association, was held on the grounds of the church. The sheds that were built to provide shelter for congregants' horses during church services were used to display the farmers' cattle. Agricultural experts and representatives from the Michigan State College extension office came to speak on topics of interest to the farmers, thus creating an educational, as well as a recreational, experience for those that attended. The first event was a small, local affair, but increased in significance over time.

In October 1922 the Breeders' Association sent three pure-bred bulls and five Guernsey cows to the national dairy show as part of an educational exhibit that demonstrated the "result of fourteen years of upgrading work."⁸¹ The cattle were of such fine quality that the breeding techniques employed by the Leer association were noted by the American Guernsey Cattle Club.⁸² As a result of their breeding techniques, the introduction of new bulls, and the consultation with experts, Leer became "noted in the state for its Guernsey herds and Guernsey dairy products."⁸³

By 1933 the annual fair had become "an event of interest to Alpena and the adjacent territory... drawing interested breeders from far and near."⁸⁴ The 1933 show featured the "famous new sire," Chester of Oronoko, whose presence likely contributed to the "largest attendance in years."⁸⁵

As the community grew, its members desired a road that led from the community to the main thoroughfare. In 1913, thirty-seven men from Leer signed an agreement amongst themselves to work together to construct a road leading from what is today state highway M-65, to the south, north to the church, then on to the post office, and terminating at the county line. Each man promised a number of days of labor, usually two or three, and a team of horses or an amount of money, in order to construct what would become Leer and Carr Roads.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ Janet Vorwald Dohner, "Guernsey Cattle: Heritage Livestock Breeds," *Mother Earth News*, August 2010:

<http://www.motheearthnews.com/Sustainable-Farming/Guernsey-Cattle-heritage-livestock-zeylaf.aspx>

⁷⁹ "Cattle Improvement Work Shown at Fair" *Cass City Chronicle* (Cass City, MI), Sep. 9, 1921, 5.

⁸⁰ *Fifty-Fifth Annual Report of the Secretary of the State Board of Agriculture of the State of Michigan and Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Experiment Station*. Lansing, MI: State of Michigan, 1916, 92-93.

⁸¹ *Sixty-Second Annual Report of the Secretary of the State Board of Agriculture of the State of Michigan and Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Experiment Station*. Lansing, MI: State of Michigan, 1924, 301.

⁸² "Bull Brings Town Fame," *The Bay City Times Tribune* (Bay City, MI), September 28, 1922, 9

⁸³ "Famous New Sire to be Shown." *The Alpena News*, Jul. 14, 1933, 2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁵ "45 Head of Cattle to be Shown at Leer Guernsey Fair." *Alpena News* (Alpena, MI), Jul. 22, 1933, 2.

⁸⁶ Handwritten agreement signed by thirty-seven male residents of Leer in 1913.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

In addition to a church, post office, and schools, the community supported a number of businesses including a flour mill, a sawmill, a blacksmith shop, two liverys, a lime kiln, and two stores, one owned by Carl Alfsen and the other by Olaf Alfsen. The stores were located directly across from each other on Carr Road at the intersection of Posen-North Leer Road. Only Elowsky's mill, a State-registered historic site, one of the stores, though no longer a functioning as a commercial facility, and the 1928 Leer School remain today. The school has been incorporated into a single-family house, and some structural elements of one of the stores are still visible.

By 1925 there were approximately fifty families in Leer. Most of the families and individuals had emigrated from Lier, Norway, but some families came from the city of Drammen, about twelve miles south of Lier.⁸⁷

With the passing of time, the community evolved. Individuals and families from other ethnic groups settled in the area, and initial interaction progressed into integration.⁸⁸ Lands that were deeded for the community's first schools were returned to the families of the original owners in 1932.⁸⁹ Norwegian naming customs, and even names themselves, were abandoned.

One such case is illustrated by a certain Bjørn Hulvarson... according to the accepted Norwegian manner of naming offspring, Bjørn's children would be named, for example, Ole Bjørnsen, for a son, and Randine Bjørnsdatter, for a girl. However, in America this became confusing, for it was generally assumed that all children of one family would have the same last name. Consequently, the immigrants named all their children with the -sen ending. To make the family relationship more simple sometimes the father, too, would change his name to that of his children, so the whole family adopted the name Bjørnsen. Yet Bjørnsen was too foreign-sounding so it evolved into Barsen.⁹⁰

Likewise, first names were eventually Americanized. "Ole was dropped in favor of Will or Willie, Per and Peder gave way to Pete, and Andreas and Anders were replaced by Andrew."⁹¹

The evolution of the community was evident in its commercial ventures as well. Carl Alfsen eventually sold his store to his brother-in-law, George Christopherson, and moved with his wife, Katherine, and their family to Lachine, seven miles south, to work at the Lachine Bank,⁹² before settling in Pontiac where he worked as an inspector at an automobile factory.⁹³ The post office was closed by the Postmaster General on April 30, 1935, and mail service was transferred to nearby Posen. Olaf Alfsen's store eventually closed, and, in 1962, defective wiring caused a fire that destroyed the store originally owned by Carl Alfsen.⁹⁴

Some things, however, remain unchanged. Two local roads still bear the names Enger and Olsen. Several of the original farms were passed on to the descendants of the community's founders. In the 1970s lands that were cleared by immigrants from Norway nearly 100 years previous were still owned and farmed by members of the same family. Several family farms have been designated as Michigan Centennial Farms – specifically, the Andreas (Andrew) Christensen and Bjorn Havlorson farms in 1981, and the Otter Olsen farm in 1995.

Immigrant and Rural Churches in the United States

Hirschman noted Herberg's theory of immigration in which he posited in 1960 that "new immigrants become more religious after arrival in the United States in order to maintain cultural continuity following the trauma of international migration."⁹⁵ Religious practice also served as an anchor for immigrants as they adapted to life in their new land.

⁸⁷ Hjalmar R. Holand, "Our Settler Saga: Far in the east at Huron's Lakes," *Skandinaven* (Chicago, IL), 1925.

⁸⁸ Leer Heritage Foundation, "Saving Our Past for the Future." *Keeping the Past*, October 2010, 1.

⁸⁹ Ruth Ann Cochrane, "Leer, A Norwegian Community," *The Wilderness Chronicles*, 1987.

⁹⁰ Linda Christopherson, "Norwegian Migration: From Lier, Norway to Leer, Michigan" (Central Michigan University, 1966), 21.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² 1920 United States Census.

⁹³ 1930 United States Census.

⁹⁴ Ruth Ann Cochrane, "Leer, A Norwegian Community," *The Wilderness Chronicles*, 1987.

⁹⁵ Charles Hirschman, "The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States," *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 1208.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Alpena County, Michigan

Name of Property

County and State

Religion provided meaning, identity, certainty, and served as an anchor in a time of transition,⁹⁶ and, in some cases, “actually built communities by attracting newcomers.”⁹⁷ Churches also served to meet the material needs of their members, and, undoubtedly, others within the community.

Given the prominent role the church played in the lives of those who established many frontier or rural, ethnic communities, the proverbial little white church came to define rural America.⁹⁸ Indeed, the country church is the “pre-eminent emblem of rural life and community.”⁹⁹

Swierenga noted that:

The church was more than a religious meeting place; it was a cultural nest, integrating families, social classes, and nationality groups. It gave members a cultural identity and status and socialized them into the community... They provided charity and aid in times of sickness and disaster, educated children, offered recreation and leisure activities, facilitated marriages, consoled the grieving, buried the dead in the adjacent cemetery, and sought to legislate morality through political action... The church building was sacred space in the center of the community. It belonged to everyone.”¹⁰⁰

Rural churches also provided for an entrée into public life for women through various women’s organizations and numerous social functions. Funds raised through social activities sponsored by the women of the congregation provided direct support to the church and larger congregation.

Development of Norwegian Lutheranism in the United States

After employment, housing, and basic provisions were acquired, thoughts of immigrants often turned to meeting spiritual needs.¹⁰¹ “Scholars of immigrants in America have consistently [sic] stressed the centrality of religion in the evolution of the immigrant communities. Religion and the church, according to earlier historians and sociologists, provided emotional and material resources which enabled ultimate assimilation.”¹⁰² Despite the near-compulsory nature of the Norwegian state church, immigrants did not abandon their faith upon settling in the vastly freer United States. On the contrary, Norwegian Lutheran congregations flourished. By 1859 there were eighty-nine such congregations in the United States, and by 1861 that number had grown to 113.¹⁰³ Given their newfound religious freedom it is no surprise that as the number of congregations grew so too did the differences in such seemingly mundane matters as administration and organization, as well as in matters of greater consequence such as styles of worship and paths to salvation.

The first Norwegian Lutheran synod in the United States, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Eielsen Synod), was established in Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin, in April 1846, under the leadership of itinerant preacher Elling Eielsen. Eielsen, a pietistic preacher in spirit as well as in method, arrived in the United States in 1839. He brought with him the teachings of Hans Nielson Hauge, a Norwegian reformist lay preacher. Though Eielsen began his ministerial career as a lay preacher, as was Hauge before him, he eventually relented to pressure from his associates and followers and was ordained on October 3, 1843, thus becoming the first Norwegian Lutheran minister in the United States.

Eielsen’s desire for simplicity in Christian worship contrasted, and occasionally clashed, with other early Norwegian Lutheran pastors, who valued the formality and ritualistic nature of the Norwegian state church, and who sought to transplant that structure to the United States. Indeed, his refusal to give serious consideration to a more formal organization prompted many of his followers and fellow preachers to establish a new synod, Hauge’s Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod, in 1876.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1211.

⁹⁷ Robert P. Swierenga, “The Little White Church: Religion in Rural America,” *Agricultural History* 71, no. 4 (1997): 417.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 415.

⁹⁹ Michael Southern, *Educating Ourselves About Rural Church Preservation*. *Partners for Sacred Places*, accessed August 8, 2012.

<http://www.sacredplaces.org/PSP-InfoClearingHouse/articles/Educating%20Ourselves%20About%20Rural%20Church%20Preservation.htm>.

¹⁰⁰ Robert P. Swierenga, “The Little White Church: Religion in Rural America,” *Agricultural History* 71, no. 4 (1997): 417.

¹⁰¹ Jon Gjerde, “Conflict and Community a Case Study of the Immigrant Church in the United States,” *Journal of Social History* 19, no. 4 (1986), 687.

¹⁰² Ibid., 681.

¹⁰³ Carl S. Meyer, “Lutheran Immigrant Churches Face the Problems of the Frontier,” *Church History* 29, no. 4 (1960): 445.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

In addition to Eielsen and other Haugians, a cadre of formally trained pastors were intent on establishing a Norwegian Lutheran synod in America in a manner with which they were accustomed. Among this group were pastors Claus Lauritz Clausen, A. C. Preus, Herman Amberg Preus, and Johannes Wilhelm Christian Dietrichson. These men were “skilled theologians, excellent administrators, and passionate controversialists,”¹⁰⁴ and were instrumental in organizing the Synod of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Norwegian Synod) in 1853. The Norwegian Synod competed immediately with the Eielsen Synod, and due, in large part, to superior organization and administrative skills, increased its numbers of pastors, parishioners, and congregations much more quickly than did the Eielsen Synod.

In the mid-1800s a “slavery controversy” arose within Norwegian Lutheranism. The issue divided the Norwegian Lutherans as it did most American protestant denominations. While the Eielsen Synod adopted an anti-slavery resolution the same year as the synod was established,¹⁰⁵ some pastors, including many of those in the Norwegian Synod, took the position of the German-American Missouri Synod, with which they maintained a close alliance, and professed that the institution of slavery, by itself, was not sinful,¹⁰⁶ and, since “not specifically rejected” in scripture, was permissible.¹⁰⁷ Other pastors avoided the issue altogether. Some pastors, such as Clausen, argued against its morality, and took exception with the assertion that such enslavement was permitted by God. He eventually left the Norwegian Synod and formed the Conference of the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (the Conference) in 1870.

Equally opposed were a majority of the Norwegian Lutheran laity. In addition to moral opposition, “the European peasants and workingmen” of which much of the laity was constituted, were “predisposed against slavery by temperament and economic interest,” and found the institution to be anachronistic.¹⁰⁸

Then, in the 1880s the great Election Controversy further fragmented the Norwegian Synod, and again, the German-Lutheran Missouri Synod would be at the center. From the start the Norwegian Synod maintained close ties with the Missouri Synod, largely through the seminary in Saint Louis, where the Norwegian Synod’s early American pastors received their theological training. The controversy over election, or predestination, resulted in a significant number of congregations seceding from the Norwegian Synod. The Anti-Missourians, as this group called themselves, adopted their name as a demonstration of their keen displeasure with the Missouri Synod.

Despite their secession, there existed a strong desire among the Anti-Missourians to “have only one Norwegian Lutheran church body in America,”¹⁰⁹ and, in the ensuing years, they set out to achieve such unity. Norwegian Lutherans effected a major synodical merger in 1890 when the Anti-Missourians attempted to “effect a union between their synod, the Conference, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church (Augustana Synod), and Hauge’s Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod in America (Hauge’s Synod).”¹¹⁰

The Augustana Synod began as a Swedish Lutheran church organized in 1850 in Andover, Illinois, by Pastor Lars Esbjorn. Esbjorn and his church later allied itself with Pastor Paul Anderson, a former compatriot of Elling Eielsen, who, by that time had left the Eielsen Synod and was preaching in Chicago, Illinois. The two pastors and their congregations formed the United Scandinavian Conference (USC), and joined the Synod of Northern Illinois in 1851. Several years later, in 1860, Esbjorn and the USC left the synod and formed the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church at a meeting in Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin.¹¹¹ Much like the USC, the Augustana Synod was a pan-Scandinavian synod.

Hauge’s Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod in America was formed in 1867 by a group of congregations that left the Eielsen Synod. Its name was taken from the Norwegian lay preacher and religious reformer Hans Nielsen Hauge. Hauge

¹⁰⁴ Nichol, Todd W., *All These Lutherans: Three Paths toward a New Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986): 73.

¹⁰⁵ Theodore Christian Blegen, *Norwegian Immigration to America* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, Ltd, 1940), 419.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 421 & 426.

¹⁰⁷ E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, *The Lutheran Church among the Norwegians, Vol. I* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960): 176.

¹⁰⁸ Arthur Meier Schlesinger, “The Significance of Immigration in American History.” *American Journal of Sociology* 27, no. 1: 79.

¹⁰⁹ I. F. Grose, “The United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America,” *St. Olaf College*, accessed January 7, 2013.

<http://www.stolaf.edu/collections/archives/scripts/25/norwegian.html>.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ “Augustana Synod,” *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, accessed January 7, 2013. <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/History/ELCA-Archives/ELCA-Family-Tree/Augustana-Synod.aspx>.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

emphasized personal faith over formal worship, and was often at odds with the Norwegian state church. Hauge's approach to faith was brought to the United States by Elling Eielsen, who later established the Eielsen Synod. Hauge's Synod operated until 1917 when it merged with the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America.

The 1890 merger "marked the end of one epoch and the beginning of a new as far as Norwegian-American Lutheranism was concerned. The old era of divisions, jealousies and doctrinal strife was all but over... the age of major schisms on questions of doctrine was ended."¹¹² Despite the loss of a small faction of congregations in 1900, known as the Lutheran Brotherhood, the United Synod "was by name and definition a church built to include rather than exclude."¹¹³ It attempted to achieve unity by seeking a middle course between the "high" and "low" churches.¹¹⁴

In 1917 the Norwegian Synod was reunited with its Anti-Missourian congregations when the Norwegian Synod, the United Church, and the Hauge Synod formed the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (NLCA).

The NLCA renamed itself the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1946, and, through still more mergers, became the American Lutheran Church in 1960, and eventually joined with three synods in 1988 to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Development of Norwegian Lutheranism in Michigan

According to Norlie, the earliest Norwegian Lutheran congregation established in Michigan was the Claybanks og Benona congregation near the village of Shelby, Oceana County, in 1862. The Claybanks and Benona congregation was first affiliated with the Norwegian-Danish Augustana Synod in America, until 1870 when it joined the Conference of the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Conference).¹¹⁵

Though not a complete accounting, Norlie's work, *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter*, published in 1915, identifies 110 congregations and preaching places that were established in Michigan by six different synods between 1862 and 1914. The Conference and the Norwegian Synod were the most active of the six synods represented in Michigan, having established thirty-one and thirty-three congregations, respectively. Other Norwegian Lutheran synods active in Michigan established far fewer congregations, thirty in all. By comparison, sixteen independent congregations, that is, those without any synodical affiliation, were established during the time frame covered by Norlie's study. In total, the vast majority of Norwegian immigrants, and thus Norwegian Lutheran congregations, were found along the state's shorelines and in the Upper Peninsula. Very few congregations were established in the interior of the state.

The greatest number of Norwegian Lutheran congregations were established along Lake Michigan, particularly Leelanau County, and in the Upper Peninsula, where mining drew a great many Norwegians. Norlie documented eleven congregations in Leelanau County and nine in Muskegon County, fourteen in Menominee County, and an additional fifteen congregations throughout Houghton and Marquette Counties. In contrast, Wayne County, the state's most populous county, hosted a mere three Norwegian Lutheran congregations, all in Detroit.

In comparison to the counties along Lake Michigan and in the Upper Peninsula, the Lake Huron shore saw far fewer congregations established during the years of mass Norwegian immigration, but there were, nonetheless, significant settlements that, today, serve as examples of the development of both Norwegian Lutheranism and patterns of immigration. One such congregation was located in Alpena, and another in the small agricultural community of Leer, both in Alpena county.

Development of Norwegian Lutheranism in Alpena, Michigan

Eager to have a place of worship, the burgeoning Norwegian community in Alpena established the Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1873 under the guidance of Pastor Martin Pederson Ruh. Jorgen Olson was elected to serve as the secretary

¹¹² Nelson, E. Clifford. *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans, Vol. II, 1890-1959* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 36.

¹¹³ Todd W Nichol, *All These Lutherans: Three Paths toward a New Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis:, 1986): 75.

¹¹⁴ "Record Group 5: United Norwegian Lutheran Church," *Luther Seminary*, accessed January 7, 2013.

<http://www.luthersem.edu/archives/collections/5-UnitedNor.aspx?m=1048>.

¹¹⁵ O. M. Norlie, *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter i America: 1843-1916* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1918), 862.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

of the new congregation,¹¹⁶ and Otto Olsen was elected to serve as treasurer. Otto Olsen, Andreas Olson, and Marten Gullicksen were elected deacons.

A building was erected two years later on Dunbar Street at a cost of approximately \$5,000.¹¹⁷ The members of the church promised Ruh a salary of \$500 per year (approximately \$11,500 in current dollars).¹¹⁸ Families were required to pay \$12, bachelors \$9, and working single women \$6 annually.¹¹⁹ From its founding until 1878, the Norwegian Lutheran Church in Alpena was affiliated with the Conference of the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The congregation then affiliated itself with the Norwegian Synod until a merger of synods occurred in 1890 that created the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America.¹²⁰

Several of the founding members of the Alpena congregation, including Otter Olsen and Bernhard Enger, later established the Norwegian Lutheran church in Leer. Because of these connections the two churches maintained a mother-daughter relationship over many decades.

Norwegian Lutheran Church, Long Rapids Township, Michigan

When the first several families left Alpena for what would become the community of Leer, they naturally took with them the desire to have a house of worship for themselves. Leer was too far – about twenty miles – from Alpena for the settlement's Lutherans to participate in regular religious services. Thus, a Norwegian Lutheran Church Society was organized at a religious service conducted on March 5, 1882, in the home of Andreas and Gunhild Christopherson at Leer. The service was officiated by Reverend Peder Isberg, pastor of the *Norsk Evangelisk Lutherske Menighet* (Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation) in Alpena.¹²¹

At the organizational meeting, Rev. Isberg agreed to travel to Leer four times per year to conduct religious services. As compensation, he received an allotment of produce from the community's farms.¹²² Following the service an election of the congregation's first officers was held. Otter Olsen was elected chairman, Bernhard Enger was elected secretary, and Andreas Christopherson and Olaf Olsen were elected trustees of the new congregation.¹²³ During the inaugural service Carl Christopherson, the son of Andreas and Gunhild, was baptized, marking the first baptism for the new congregation.¹²⁴

Over the next several years the congregation met in the Norwegian School. Bernhard Enger was called upon by the community to serve as a lay preacher in the absence of an ordained pastor. Enger also conducted Sunday school for the community's children. As compensation for his services, each child worked for him for one day a year.

Between 1882 and 1890 the congregation was not officially affiliated with a synod, but was served by pastors from the Alpena "mother church," which was a member of the Norwegian Synod Anti-Missourian Brotherhood.¹²⁵

Peder Isberg studied theology at Luther College in Saint Paul, Minnesota, from 1870 until 1875, before transferring to Concordia Seminary in Springfield, Illinois, from 1875 to 1876. He then returned to Luther Seminary where he was ordained as a minister of the Norwegian Synod in 1878.¹²⁶ Following his ordination, Isberg served the congregation of Saint Peters in Detroit until 1881.¹²⁷ He arrived in Alpena with his wife, Gundve, and young daughter, Helga, the following year, and served the congregations of both Alpena and Leer until 1883 when he left to serve a congregation in Perry, Wisconsin.

¹¹⁶ Knut Anderson, "The Created Lier in America," *Lierposten* (Lier, Norway), August 23, 2007.

¹¹⁷ "A Growing City," *The Bay City Times* (Bay City, MI), Dec. 10, 1890, 3.

¹¹⁸ CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm, accessed May 3, 2012.

¹¹⁹ Holand, Hjalmar. Skandinaven article 1925.

¹²⁰ O. M. Norlie, *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter i America: 1843-1916* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1918), 881.

¹²¹ *Leer Lutheran Church: 1882-2007* (Leer, MI.: Leer Lutheran Church, 2007), 2

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ O. M. Norlie, *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter i America: 1843-1916* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1918), 870.

¹²⁴ *Leer Lutheran Church: 1882-2007* (Leer, MI.: Leer Lutheran Church, 2007), 2

¹²⁵ O. M. Norlie, *Norsk Lutherske Menigheter i America: 1843-1916* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1918), 870.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 881.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

Name of Property

Pastor Isberg was followed, in 1883, by Pastor Jens Andreas Wang. Born in 1854 near Trondheim, Norway, Wang emigrated to the United States with his mother, Nicoline, and sister, Marie, in 1871. After arriving in America, the Wangs traveled to Madison, Wisconsin, where Jens Andreas attended the Northwestern Business College in 1879 before enrolling in the Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota, in 1880. Wang was ordained as a minister of the Norwegian Synod in 1883, and subsequently was invited by the Norwegian Lutheran churches in Leer and Alpena to serve as the pastor of both churches.¹²⁸ While in Alpena he became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1885.¹²⁹

During Rev. Wang's pastorate the Leer congregation established a church building fund with the primary goal of erecting a proper and permanent church¹³⁰ on a three-acre parcel of land in the northeast corner of Section 5 of Long Rapids Township. This property was sold to the congregation in 1883 by Karl Burud for one dollar upon the condition that it be used for a church and cemetery.¹³¹ The Ladies Aid Society and Young Girls Sewing Circle were also established during Wang's first year at Leer.¹³² The Ladies crafted "shirts, socks, mitts," and the like, while the Girls made "fancy work."¹³³ These goods were then sold at an auction held once a year. The societies also held coffee socials at the homes of the congregation's members. The funds generated by these activities were deposited into a church building fund. After the church and parish house were constructed, the work of the Ladies Aid and Young Girls were used to support the activities of the congregation, as well as maintaining the church and parish house. Rev. Wang presided over two notable occasions in the history of the congregation: the first confirmation class was confirmed in 1884, and the first death in the new community occurred in 1885.

Wang was also something of an inventor, having successfully patented two inventions related to farming. His first patent was issued for a pantograph in 1886,¹³⁴ while living in Alpena, and the second patent was issued for a combined ash sifter and receptacle in 1901,¹³⁵ while living in Stoughton, Wisconsin.

As the building fund grew, and planning for a church moved forward, the congregation approved a measure in 1896 that required that each member procure one thousand feet of hemlock or other hardwood lumber and also provide stone for construction of the church.¹³⁶

In November 1898 the congregation created a building committee consisting of Otter Olsen, Andreas Christofferson, and Hans Sætrang. The committee was commissioned to inspect the German Lutheran churches in Krakow Township, Presque Isle County, approximately fifteen miles northeast of Leer.¹³⁷ Throughout the spring and summer of the following year the congregation progressed from figuring out how to fund the construction of a church to actual construction details. Debates focused on how to site the church, whom to employ to construct the building, and when the construction of the foundation of the building should occur.¹³⁸ To help solve these matters a new building committee was formed consisting of Andreas Christopherson, Thomas Bensen, and Hans Mathison.¹³⁹

The year 1899 proved a year of transition for the seventeen-year old congregation. Pastor Wang departed for Wisconsin after nearly two decades of ministry, and Pastor Lorentz Christian Johnson arrived. Shortly after Johnson's arrival he laid the cornerstone for the Norwegian Lutheran Church in Leer¹⁴⁰ on September 7, 1899. The church was constructed by carpenter and builder Joseph F. Bammel for \$3,000. At this time little is known of Bammel other than that he emigrated from Germany, settled in southeast Michigan, was engaged in carpentry, and died of paresis on October 21, 1906.¹⁴¹ In addition to the Norwegian Lutheran Church, he constructed several other buildings in Alpena and Presque Isle counties,

¹²⁸ O. M. Norlie, *School Calendar 1824-1924. A Who's Who among Teachers in the Norwegian Lutheran Synods of America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1924), 25.

¹²⁹ 1920 United States Census

¹³⁰ *Leer Lutheran Church: 1882-2007* (Leer, MI.: Leer Lutheran Church, 2007), 3.

¹³¹ Alpena County Register of Deeds, Liber 10; Page 413.

¹³² *Leer Lutheran Church: 1882-2007* (Leer, MI.: Leer Lutheran Church, 2007), 3.

¹³³ Grace Christopherson, "History of the Ladies Aid," *Leer Historical Album*, 39.

¹³⁴ United States Patent No. 350,027. United States Patent Office, Sep. 28, 1886.

¹³⁵ United States Patent No. 684,483. United States Patent Office, Oct. 15, 1901.

¹³⁶ Norwegian Lutheran Church meeting minutes, Apr. 19, 1896, P. 46

¹³⁷ Norwegian Lutheran Church meeting minutes, Nov. 28, 1898, p. 53

¹³⁸ Norwegian Lutheran Church meeting minutes, Jan. 3-Aug. 7, 1899, 55-58.

¹³⁹ Norwegian Lutheran Church meeting minutes, May 29, 1899, 57.

¹⁴⁰ *Leer Lutheran Church: 1882-2007* (Leer, MI.: Leer Lutheran Church, 2007), 4.

¹⁴¹ "Town Topics," *Bay City Times* (Bay City, MI), Oct. 22, 1906.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

Name of Property

including a "German institution in Rogers City" (c. 1899),¹⁴² the Onaway School (1900), and a replacement Onaway School (1902).¹⁴³

Rev. Johnson was born in 1855 in Florsten, Norway. He emigrated to the United States in 1883,¹⁴⁴ and entered the Chicago Theological Seminary in 1885. He received his ordination as a minister in 1886.¹⁴⁵ Johnson became a naturalized citizen of the United States on April 8, 1892.¹⁴⁶ In 1896 Johnson joined the United Norwegian Lutheran Church and ministered to Norwegian Lutheran congregations in Suttons Bay, Northport, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, before assuming the pastoral duties at the Leer and Alpena congregations in 1899.¹⁴⁷

During Rev. Johnson's ministry the Norwegian Lutheran Church in Leer, the congregation in Alpena, and the rest of the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood joined the Augustana Synod and the Conference in a merger into the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America, which was established in June 1890.¹⁴⁸ In contrast with the divisions that led the Anti-Missourians to leave their synod, the union of 1890 was not necessarily a union on doctrinal issues. Rather, the goal was to unite as many Norwegians of the Lutheran profession as possible. By 1899 the United Norwegian synod "numbered 350 pastors, 1,059 congregations, and 125,575 'members.'"¹⁴⁹

Between 1908 and 1909 Rev. Johnson handwrote two complete copies of the Bible, one in English and the other in Norwegian. The *Detroit Free Press* reported that "absolutely nothing is omitted which would be found in the most complete Bible. Every word is written, even the headings of the pages and chapters being included in Latin type, just as if printed." Both manuscripts totaled 2,179 pages. To produce these works, Johnson used "two large bottles of ink and just two gross of pen points." He was reported as desiring only "the awarding to him of some prize at a world's fair" as remuneration or reward.¹⁵⁰ Rev. Johnson served the congregation of Leer until 1913, when he accepted a call from a church in Mormon, North Dakota.¹⁵¹

After Johnson's resignation, the Leer congregation sent three delegates, Ole Markusen, Thomas Bensen, and Truls Jacobsen, to meet with representatives from the congregations of Alpena and Spruce to jointly call a new pastor to serve all three congregations.¹⁵² Norwegian-born Rev. Ingvald Hustvedt was selected. Hustvedt trained for the ministry at Augsburg Theological Seminary in Marshall, Wisconsin,¹⁵³ and was ordained in 1904 as a minister of the Lutheran Free Church, before joining the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1913. After ordination, Hustvedt ministered to congregations in Saskatchewan, Canada, and Minnesota, before accepting the ministerial call from the Alpena County, Michigan, churches.¹⁵⁴

During Rev. Hustvedt's ministry a two-story parish house was completed at a cost of eight hundred dollars and donated lumber and labor.¹⁵⁵ The parish house was essential to community life. Generally speaking, parish houses served as a venue for various forms of entertainment, provided both young and old a wholesome social life, and aided in both the temporal and spiritual welfare of the church and community.¹⁵⁶

At the same time that he accepted the pastorate at Alpena, Leer, and Spruce, Hustvedt also published a book of children's recitations, *Recitationer for ungdoms- og afholdsmøder, juletræ- og barnefester*. When Hustvedt left the three

¹⁴² "Alpena," *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, MI), Jul. 26, 1899, 6

¹⁴³ Holmes, Donald E. "History of Onaway Schools," Presqueisle.migenweb.net, accessed Sep. 7, 2012.
<http://presqueisle.migenweb.net/historyonasch.html>.

¹⁴⁴ 1900 United States Census

¹⁴⁵ O. M. Norlie, *Norsk Lutherske Menighter i America: 1843-1916* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1918), 325.

¹⁴⁶ Lorentz C. Johnson United States Passport Application, 1922.

¹⁴⁷ O. M. Norlie, *Norsk Lutherske Menighter i America: 1843-1916* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1918), 325.

¹⁴⁸ E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian Americans, Vol. II, 1890-1959* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 23.

¹⁴⁹ Juergen Ludwig Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America* (Burlington, IA: German Literary Board, 1904), 160.

¹⁵⁰ "Alpena Pastor Writes Two Copies of Bible with Pen," *Detroit Free Press*, Jun. 20, 1910, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ "Alpena," *The Saginaw Daily News* (Saginaw, MI), Nov. 9, 1912, 2

¹⁵² *Leer Lutheran Church: 1882-2007* (Leer, MI.: Leer Lutheran Church, 2007), 4.

¹⁵³ *Davison's Minneapolis City Directory Volume XXIV*, Minneapolis: Minneapolis Directory Company, 1898: 615.

¹⁵⁴ O. M. Norlie, *Norsk Lutherske Menighter i America: 1843-1916* (Minneapolis, 1918), 421.

¹⁵⁵ Leer Lutheran Church, 1882-2007, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Edmund de Schweinitz Brunner, *The New Country Church Building* (New York, Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1917), 113-118.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex

Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan

County and State

congregations in 1918, he traveled east to New Jersey,¹⁵⁷ then returned to Michigan to serve as the pastor of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in Calumet,¹⁵⁸ before settling in Minnesota.

The 1920s began a time of transition for the Norwegian Lutheran Church in Leer. Throughout the 1920s and into the next decade, Leer's second generation increasingly found themselves in leadership positions in the church and community. In 1921 Pastor Nils Edwin Halvorsen and his wife, Emma Louise (Paulson), arrived in Alpena to serve the congregations in Alpena, Leer, and Caledonia. Halvorsen introduced English language services for the first time in 1922. At first, English services were alternated with services in Norwegian.¹⁵⁹ Eventually, however, as the older, Norwegian-speaking members of the congregation passed away, English-language services became more prominent. Pastor Halvorsen left the three congregations in 1924 to return with his family to Wisconsin.

It is uncertain when the congregation officially changed the name of the church from Norwegian Lutheran Church to Leer Lutheran Church, but just as the mother church changed its name to reflect the changing nature of its constituents, so too did the congregation of Leer.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, several modernizations were made to the physical church as well as in the worship experience and the formal structure of the congregation.¹⁶⁰ Towards the end of the decade, a new constitution and new bylaws were proposed and approved,¹⁶¹ and in 1935 English officially replaced Norwegian as the language of common worship services.¹⁶² After this point, Norwegian would only be used in a few special services.

Sarah Kirkeberg Raugland

Shortly after construction of the church was completed, the congregation acquired an altar painting, *Crucifixion*, by renowned Norwegian-American artist Sarah Kirkeberg Raugland. "Altar art was common in Lutheran churches built between the late 1800s and mid-1900s,"¹⁶³ and "the crucifixion was a common altar subject through the late nineteenth century."¹⁶⁴ "Most of the chancel furniture, statues, and paintings after about 1890 were supplied by a limited number of companies and individuals who specialized in such materials." As Norwegian Lutheran congregations flourished, there was a corresponding demand for altar paintings. This demand was "filled almost exclusively by Norwegian-American artists who lived and worked in Minneapolis."¹⁶⁵ One of these early painters was Sarah Kirkeberg Raugland. Working in predominantly male field, Raugland was also one of the few female artists working during this time.

Raugland painted several versions of *Crucifixion* during her career – one featuring Christ alone and another with figures surrounding the cross – the number of figures dependent on the dimensions of the altar frame into which the painting was to be set. The altar painting at the Norwegian Lutheran Church in Leer is of the latter variety. Christ, covered in a simple loincloth hangs on a wooden cross against a dark and foreboding sky. Two figures, presumably his mother Mary and disciple Peter, are to the left and right of him, respectively.

Raugland was born on July 10, 1862, in Gunder, Clayton County, Iowa, to Anders and Ingrid (Juvkam) Kirkeberg. She demonstrated an artistic aptitude at an early age, both in drawing and clay molding. An uncle, so impressed with her pottery, convinced her father to allow her to study art in Minneapolis. While there, she met Carl Raugland, a musician, composer, and music publisher, whom she married in 1891. Through her artistic training Raugland eventually settled on painting as her primary medium. Throughout her career, which lasted until the death of her husband in 1918, she painted

¹⁵⁷ 1920 United States Census

¹⁵⁸ *R. L. Polk & Co.'s 1930 Calumet City Directory*, R. L. Polk & Co., Detroit, 86.

¹⁵⁹ *Leer Lutheran Church: 1882-2007* (Leer, MI.: Leer Lutheran Church, 2007), 5.

¹⁶⁰ Leer Lutheran Church Meeting Minutes, 1937-1939

¹⁶¹ Leer Lutheran Church 1939 Annual Meeting Minutes, January 16, 1939.

¹⁶² *Leer Lutheran Church: 1882-2007* (Leer, MI.: Leer Lutheran Church, 2007), X.

¹⁶³ Erin Hemme Froslic, "Altar Art," *The Lutheran*, 36

¹⁶⁴ Sarah Raugland Story, 15. This is a PDF document obtained from the Norwegian-American Historical Association, which is a compilation of various articles concerning the Raugland's life and work.

¹⁶⁵ Kristin M. Anderson, "Altars in the Norwegian-American church: An Opportunity for Folk Expression." In *Material Culture and People's Art Among the Norwegians in America*, edited by Marion John Nelson, 199-226. (Northfield, MN: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1994), 200.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

several hundred works, many of which were commissioned altarpieces for United Norwegian Lutheran congregations in the Upper Midwest, but some paintings were installed in missionary churches as far away as China.

Norwegian Lutheran Church Parish House

The Norwegian Lutheran Church Parish House served as the social and educational center of the congregation, and hosted numerous community events. The building was constructed in 1916 by local carpenter John Bruski at a cost of eight hundred dollars.

Constructed as a venue for providing religious instruction for the congregation's children, the building also served as a venue for numerous social activities for the congregation and community. Historically, the upper level of the building was the main social space. Congregational organizations like Luther League (for teenagers), Cradle Roll (for young mothers) Ladies Aid Society, and the Sewing Circle met there. Events and activities such as full-court basketball, modified by special rules to accommodate the dimensions of the building, the annual Fall Sale, quilting bees, dances, and general community gatherings were also held in the upper floor of the parish house. The lower level, or basement, was used primarily for church dinners.

Perhaps the most significant non-religious event to be held at the parish house was the annual Guernsey Fair. Since its founding, the Leer Guernsey Breeders' Association had steadily improved the community's dairy herd, and, through their work, the community's dairy farmers had garnered recognition as having maintained an excellent herd.

A one-story addition to the eastern elevation of the parish house was constructed in 1963. This addition expanded the lower level gathering space. Presently, the lower level of the parish house is used for dining and social space for church gatherings. The lower level features a full kitchen, dining space, and a pastoral office. The upper level now houses the Leer Heritage Center, which features historic photographs and other local history exhibits.

Norwegian Lutheran Church Cemetery

The cemetery of the Norwegian Lutheran Church is, by itself, a microcosm of the greater community, and reflects the community's early Norwegian heritage and the more diffuse national origins of those who have lived and died there in more recent times. The older part of the cemetery, located in the northeast corner of the church property, contains the remains of the earliest settlers. The names found on the headstones reflect the congregation's Norwegian heritage such as Andersen, Christensen, Enger, Halvorsen, and Olsen. As the community and congregation grew it became necessary to expand the cemetery. It is in the southern portion that the more recent burials are placed. The names adorning the grave markers reflect the changing nature of the surrounding area. In addition to Norwegian surnames, those of German, Polish, and other national heritages are also found: Clapp, Elowsky, Harris, and Pletcher, to name but a few.

The cemetery was established in 1883 when the property was transferred from Karl Burud to the Norwegian Lutheran Church Society. That the congregation establish a cemetery was one of the conditions of sale of the property to the Norwegian Lutheran Church Society from Burud. Men from the congregation who assisted in preparing the land for the construction of the church were awarded plots in the original cemetery.

The first burial in the cemetery occurred in 1885 with the death of Olaf and Bertha Olsen's young daughter Clara Ovidia. Her funeral was officiated by Pastor Wang.¹⁶⁶ In 1924 an addition to the cemetery was opened when Helga Christopherson Wilson passed away.

Land that lies adjacent to and south of the church property has been donated by Howard and Mary Barsen for a future expansion of the cemetery.

Conclusion

The elimination of Norwegian from religious services in 1935 marked a significant point in the history of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in Leer when the early generation of Norwegian-Americans who pioneered Leer had all but died out. But the Norwegian heritage remains alive in the many descendants of pioneer families still residing in the area and attending

¹⁶⁶ *Leer Evangelical Lutheran Church Seventy-Fifth Anniversary*, (Leer, MI: Leer Lutheran Church, 1957).

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

the church and in the surviving presence in the area of homes and farms – and particularly the Norwegian/Leer Lutheran Church complex – that reflect that long and continuing heritage.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

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Name of Property

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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

Primary location of additional data:

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

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Other
Name of repository: Leer Lutheran Church

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 3.0
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 _____
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The entire property associated with the church building.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Todd Walsh, Analyst
organization Michigan State Historic Preservation Office date _____
street & number 702 W. Kalamazoo St. telephone (517) 373-1630
city or town Lansing state MI zip code _____
e-mail walsh@nichigan.gov

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.

Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Complex
Name of Property

Alpena County, Michigan
County and State

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property:

City or Vicinity:

County:

State:

Photographer:

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of ____.

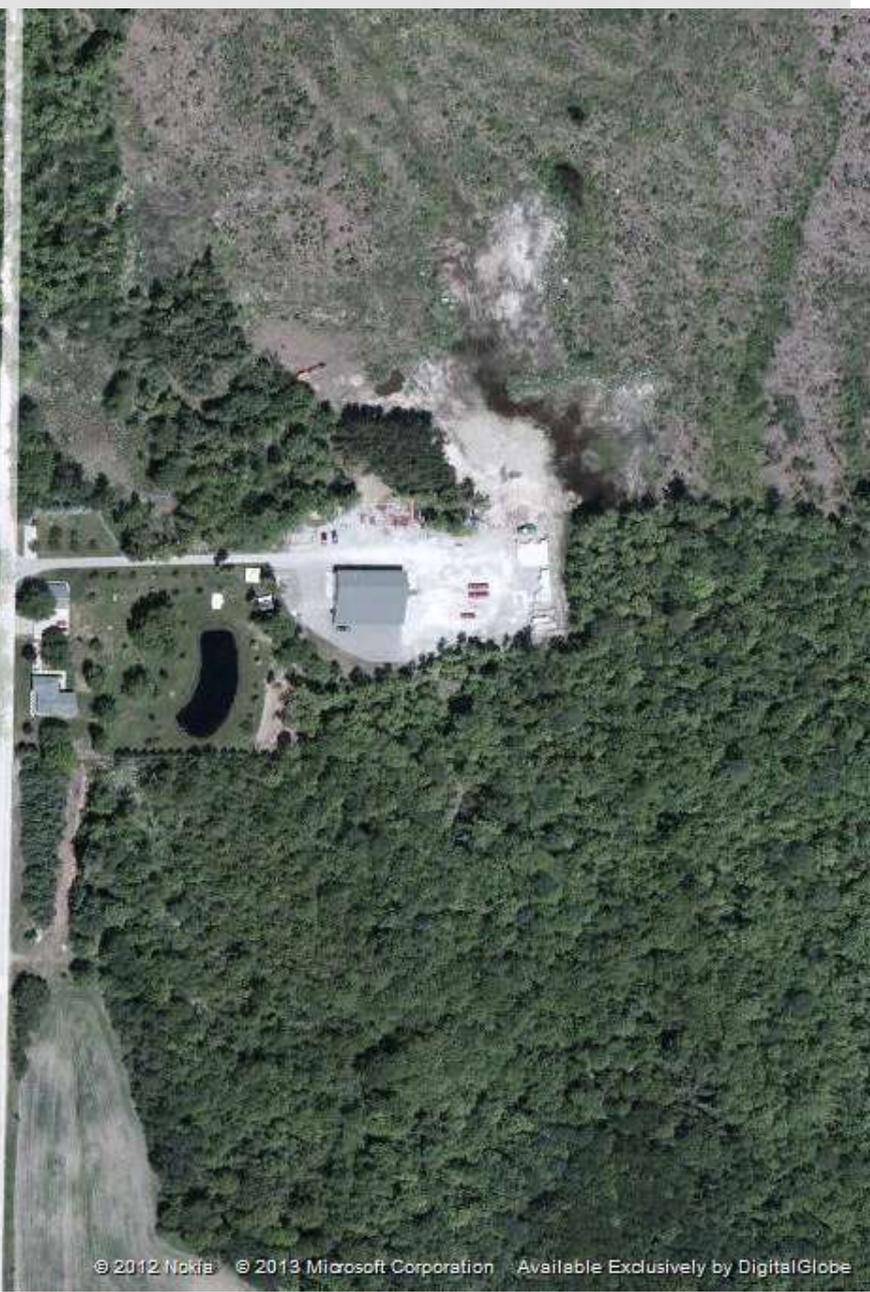
Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Leer Lutheran Church
street & number 10430 South Leer Road telephone _____
city or town Posen state MI zip code 49776

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



250 feet 50 m











LEER LUTHERAN CHURCH



LUTHERAN CHURCH

E. LONSKY









HYMNS
733
589
890

COME
HOLY
SPIRIT











I
HAVE
YOUR WORD
IN MY HEART.









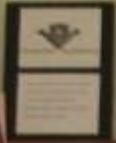






LEER HERITAGE CENTER

EXIT





LEER LUTHERAN
CHURCH







EXIT







