

Collection name: Leer Church Collection

Collection number: LCC-1

Dates: 1882-1957

Quantity: 1 box (ledger)

Provenance note: Leer Church records donated for safe keeping and access by Linda Pletcher, parish member and Norwegian historian. Originally donated to Besser Museum in 2009 as a temporary holding and transferred to the Library in 2010.

Biographical & Historical Information:

Leer church may become historic place

February 27, 2013 Jordan Travis - News Staff Writer, The Alpena News

Michigan's State Historic Preservation Office has nominated the Leer Lutheran Church to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The 113-year-old church, its congregation hall and cemetery were nominated with the help of parish member Linda Pletcher. She had found some information about the church and the surrounding community of Norwegian immigrants in her college days, she said. She had been researching the early settlement of the area while attending Central Michigan University.

Now retired, Pletcher's worked for the past two years to get the church and its grounds listed. She helped two preservation office employees find the information needed to write the application.

"The church was somewhat concerned about getting older and smaller, and concerned about surviving," she said. "At the same time, people in our congregation were talking about how valuable we think what we have is."

Pletcher and others are planning a celebration, set for Aug. 10, in honor of the church's recognition as a historic place, she said. The collection of local artifacts and stories she has collected for a local museum will be on display.

The Norwegian Lutheran Church, as it was then called, was organized in 1882 to serve the 15 or so Norwegian families that had settled the area, about halfway between Posen and Lachine, Pletcher said. Its members first met in a one-room schoolhouse and built the church in 1900.

Many of those buried in the cemetery to the north of the driveway got their burial plots for free, Pletcher said. A congregation member donated the church and cemetery land, and anyone who helped clear it got a burial plot in the cemetery.

At one time, Leer was a thriving village, Pletcher said. There were 25 families attending the church in 1910, where services were given in Norwegian until 1935. This was the high point for Leer, which had a post office and general store, and served as the center of the Gurnsey cow fair in the 1920s and 1930s.

Now, the church, cemetery and parish hall are the only things left of the community, congregation Treasurer Kay Fortin said. The building that housed the general store and post office burned, and the old school is gone except for the building's foundation.

Fortin has a strong connection with the church; she was born and raised in the congregation, and baptized and confirmed there, she said. One of her distant relatives was a pastor as well. It has about 40 members these days, and has a special place in the community.

"(For) the people that live in this community, it is the center, it is the hub of our community," she said. "People basically lived through the church. We have exercise programs going on down there; we have sewing programs going on down there. It is our life."

The application for Leer Lutheran Church was approved by the state historic preservation review board, Laura Ashley, public relations and outreach officer, said. It will be submitted to the National Register of Historic Places shortly.

"Once we submit it, then the National Register staff will review it, then determine whether or not it will be listed," she said, adding the organization has 45 days to decide.

It will be a high honor for the church if it is recognized of being worthy of preservation, Ashlee said. There won't be any restrictions on the property, but it will let people know the church, parish hall and cemetery's historic aspects should be saved.

Pletcher and Fortin went to Lansing in late January when the review board approved the application. Fortin said she thought it was "the most wonderful thing in the world," and Ashlee was pleased about it as well.

"We are glad that they were so enthusiastic about it," she said. "It was really great to have them at the meeting, to see their excitement and commitment to preserving the church." © Copyright 2013 The Alpena News.

Scope & Content: Mortgage papers; Account, Membership, and Minutes ledgers; Treasurer's records.

Access: Open to research.

Preferred Citation: Leer Church Collection, Alpena County George N. Fletcher Public Library

Contents:

Leer Church Collection

LCC-1

Box 1 of 1:

Folder:

1. Account Ledger – Members, etc. 1886-1918
2. Account Ledger – misc. papers in ledger
3. Membership Ledger – Attendance, Baptisms, Confirmands, etc. 1880-1941
4. Minutes Ledger 1882-1957
5. Programs – 75th Anniversary 1882-1957
6. Mortgage Papers – Parish Hall 1916
7. Treasurer's Record 1952-1955 (oversized – not in box)