

LUTHERAN HISTORICAL CONFERENCE

NEWSLETTER

ELCA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In an attempt to document the first 20 years of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the ELCA churchwide archives has been conducting an oral history project among churchwide, synod, and congregational leaders. Ten interviews have been completed, with another ten to fifteen in the planning

stages. Completed interviews include those with Presiding Bishop Herbert W. Chilstrom, Presiding Bishop H. George Anderson, Bishop Paul Werger, Bishop April Larson, and Dr. James Nestingen. Several LHC members have worked as interviewers in the project, including Mark Granquist, Susan McArver, Russell Kleckley, Mary Todd, and David Settje.

Susan McArver and Mary Todd were also members of the advisory committee assembled to provide insight during the planning process.

Funded by a Thrivent grant, a video component was also included in the proposal, with the intention that both the audio and video interviews could provide resources for the production of a 25th anniversary video. Transcriptions of the interviews, which are currently being prepared, will be available at the ELCA archives once donation forms have been completed.

As the formal oral history project tends to gather stories from national leaders, the archives will also attempt to gather congregational and synodical stories at a booth at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis. "I Love to Tell the Story: My ELCA" will provide 15-minute time slots for individuals to share their memories, thoughts, frustrations, and joys of the first 20 years of the ELCA, in hopes of recording first-hand accounts about congregations, synods, social ministry organizations, colleges, and seminaries.



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BOOK REVIEW: CATHOLICS IN NEW YORK...LUTHERANS IN MINNESOTA?

By Kathryn M. Galchutt, Concordia College, New York.

Catholics in New York: Society, Culture, and Politics, 1808-1946. Edited by Terry Golway. New York, N.Y.: Fordham University Press and the Museum of the City of New York, 2008. 206 pp.

Minnesota 150: The People, Places, and Things that Shape Our State. By Kate Roberts. St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007. 224 pp.

In 2008, the Museum of the City of New York hosted an impressive exhibition on Catholics in New York, 1808-1946, marking the 200th anniversary of the creation of the Diocese of New York in 1808. Along with the exhibition, a companion publication, *Catholics in New York: Society, Culture, and Politics*, edited by Terry Golway, was co-published by Fordham University Press and the Museum of the City of New York. *Catholics in New York* is a collection of historical essays and vivid images that capture the spirit of the exhibition. The book begins on a more intimate scale, exploring the Catholic family, parish, and community; then it describes the development of Catholic institutions and organizations; then it expands to explore the Catholic influence on public life, on the economy and on the politics of New York City.

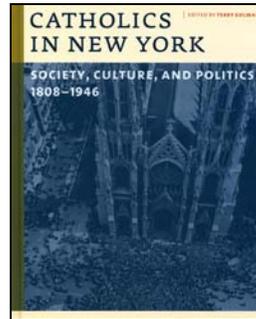
In the Introduction, Golway stresses the tremendous diversity of Catholics in New York. As Golway points out, New York's Catholics have been diverse in every way, from liberals to conservatives, from the engaged to the apathetic, from the clergy to the laity, from the rich to the poor, with a variety of different languages and ethnicities (p. 13). But despite these differences, "Catholics in New York were reared in the common language of the Mass, the sacraments, the symbols of their faith, and the belief in redemption" (p. 14). Though some 40% of New Yorkers today identify themselves as Roman Catholic, there is the

sense that the identity and influence of Catholics in New York has dramatically changed (p. 8, 18). The book includes an afterword on the changing urban Catholic population and the growth of suburban Catholicism, but generally concludes in the immediate post-World War II era. In 1946, the GI Bill enabled many European-American Catholics to move out of the city, greatly changing Catholic parishes and neighborhoods throughout New York.

Both the exhibition and the book, *Catholics in New York*, are good examples of how religious history has become more prominent and integrated into the general historical record. But what about Lutheran history? It is difficult to imagine a major state or local history museum launching a similar exhibit on Lutherans, even though there are some parts of the country, particularly the Upper Midwest, where Lutherans have had a strong regional influence and presence.

In 2007, the Minnesota Historical Society celebrated the 150th anniversary of Minnesota statehood with a creative exhibition and publication celebrating 150 historic influences on the state. Kate Roberts's *Minnesota 150: The People, Places, and Things that Shape Our State* is a popular history, comprised of brief, 1-2 page descriptions of each entry. Hundreds of people, places, and things that have shaped Minnesota were nominated by the public and chosen by a group of educators, historians, and others to be featured in the Minnesota Historical Society exhibit and its companion book.

"Lutheranism" is recognized as one of the 150 top "shapers" of the history of Minnesota. However, the entry on Lutheranism only briefly describes Lu-



theranism's association with immigrants and institutions and mainly concentrates on the development of Lutheran Social Services (p. 106). The imprint of Lutheranism can also be found in other entries. Other "shapers" of Minnesota state history include F. Melius Christiansen, St. Olaf's pioneering choir director (p. 26); Vilhelm Moberg and Ole E. Rolvaag, Scandinavian authors who depicted the immigrant experience in the Midwest (p. 124-25); and Garrison Keillor, who, though not Lutheran, has made a career of "Lutheran jokes" (p. 94). Other Lutheran connections could be made as well, from Scandinavian-American politicians, whose worldviews were no doubt affected by Lutheranism, to Concordia University-St. Paul's Center for Hmong Studies (p. 176).

Examining Lutheran history is not the primary purpose of *Minnesota 150*; instead, the book provides valuable glimpses into Minnesota history and culture. Yet works such as *Minnesota 150* serve as an important reminder that it would be good to have more studies examining how Lutherans have broadly interacted with their communities. The field of American Catholic Studies, combining theological, social, and cultural history, is now well established. Catholic institutions of higher education support American Catholic history through endowed chairs and through specialized centers, such as the University of Notre Dame's Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism and Fordham University's The Francis and Ann Curran Center for American Catholic Studies. While American Lutherans are smaller in number and in resources than American Catholics, given the number of Lutherans and Lutheran institutions in the country, there is the potential for "American Lutheran Studies." If "American Lutheran Studies" could be more intentionally supported and developed, perhaps Lutherans would also find their proper place in the larger historical record.

ROBERT E.A. LEE, LUTHERAN FILM AND TV EXECUTIVE

Former LHC member Robert E.A. Lee, the Lutheran film executive behind Academy Award-nominated productions that brought out tensions between Catholics and Protestants in the 1950s and captured America's racial divide in the 1960s, died of cancer February 27 at his Baldwin home on Long Island, N.Y. He was 87.

Lee is perhaps best known for his involvement with the mid-1960s civil rights film, "A Time for Burning." The Oscar-nominated documentary tells the story of a Lutheran pastor who urges his all-white Nebraska congregation to reach out to African Americans.

Fred Friendly, former president of CBS News, once said the documentary was the "best civil rights film ever made." The Rev. Eric C. Shafer, a Lutheran pastor from Lansdale, Pa., called Lee "universally respected," a pioneer in religious film production, and an early advocate of film and television in the church.

From 1954 to 1988, Lee directed a pan-Lutheran organization now known as Lutheran Film Associates, and remained active afterward. The organization initiated "A Time for Burning" and "Martin Luther," another Oscar-nominated film. Other acclaimed efforts include "The Joy of Bach" and "Question 7."

When "Martin Luther" was released in the 1950s, Catholic-dominant countries such as Peru, Brazil and the Philippines tried to ban the film about the 16th century catalyst of the Protestant Reformation. After Chicago's WGN-TV cancelled its showing, 30 prominent Protestant leaders denounced the station.

Lee told the New York Times the station caved to pressure from "sources" hoping to suppress unflattering parts of their history. "Efforts at thought control, wherever they are exerted, are un-American and



F. Borden Pace (left), president of Louis de Rochemont Associates, and Robert E.A. Lee, executive secretary of Lutheran Church Productions, Inc., at the world premiere of "Martin Luther" at the Lyceum Theater, Minneapolis, 1953.

are to be deplored," he said.

Lee was born in 1921 in Spring Grove, Minn. After graduating from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, he pursued graduate studies at the University of Minnesota and New York University. He later received an honorary doctorate from Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, Pa.

Lee was a U.S. Navy aviator in World War II and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism. During the war he married Elaine E. Naeseth, a musician from Morrisonville, Wis., who sang with him in a quartet at Luther College.

From 1945 to 1947, Lee served as a Twin Cities radio announcer and program director before beginning a long career in public relations, radio, television and film production for various Lutheran organizations. Although a member of the ELCA, he was respected across Lutheran church bodies.

"In the area of Lutheran communication, he was a real giant," said the Rev. Paul Devantier, former com-

munication director, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

Lee began working for his own organization, REAL World Communications, in 1988. He wrote essays, poetry and eight books, including the memoir, *My Wings at Sunset*.

He enjoyed visits from family and friends until a few days before his death, according to a statement from his children. "He played piano almost daily, to the delight of his caregivers," they said. "His prayers before meals always included a personal and specific expression of gratitude for the gifts of a life well lived."

Survivors include six children: Peg Harris, Barbara Greenfeldt, Sigrid Lee, Richard Lee, Sylvia Lee-Thompson and Paul Lee; two sisters, eight grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. His wife Elaine, to whom Lee was married for 56 years, died in 2000.

The family has donated many of Lee's papers and audiovisual materials to the ELCA Archives and the Luther College Archives.

Joel Thoreson, Editor
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BOOK REVIEWS

Those interested in contributing book reviews or wishing to suggest a book, please contact David Settje at David.Settje@CUChicago.edu.

Each review should be between 500 and 750 words long, be sent as a MS Word document or in a compatible format, and specifically evaluate the book and its Lutheran content/context.

NEEDED: YOUR NEWS!

This newsletter is intended as a clearing-house of information for archivists, historians and librarians. It needs **you** to provide material for it.

Please send material for publication to the editor. Items of interest include notice of research in progress, new appointments, publications, meetings and celebrations planned or held, bibliographical materials, and anything of general interest to LHC members.

The LHC Newsletter is issued four times a year: February, May, August and November.

Please send items to
Joel.Thoreson@elca.org.

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