

Exploring Goodhue County

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Emmanuel Lutheran Church at Aspelund Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) Wanamingo Township

Emmanuel Lutheran Church is located at the intersection of County Boulevards 1 and 8 in Goodhue County in Minnesota. The church will have been officially active 150 years in 2012.

Figure 1 Emmanuel Lutheran Church (Aspelund Community) in Wanamingo Fellowship. It is encouraging to see a building project underway. This is always a good sign of life within the Church Body and plans for the future.



Figure 2 Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Wanamingo Township, close up of the bell. The stained glass windows, protected by outer glass, are not visible in the photographs.

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I stopped and spoke a man mowing the lawn with a John Deere riding mower. I had been driving and looking around for over an hour. My car was low on fuel and I needed to find a gas station. He gave me directions on to get to the main road back to Minneapolis. After the beauty of the open farmland and seeing the sky reach down to the horizon, it seemed almost a shame to return to the "big city."

The man was kind enough to answer a few questions. It was good to hear that the church is doing some remodeling and adding on to its space, and to hear that Emmanuel Lutheran Church is doing a little growing in membership!

Next to the church (on the right) is the old town hall. Across the road is a modern, shed-style building that has the name “Wanamingo Township” attached to the front outer wall.



Figures 3 & 4 Wanamingo Township (Aspelund Community) Old Town Hall Corn and soybeans in Southwestern Minnesota are planted in every available space. The tops of the fields appear as a *golden sea* at the end of summer.

Five years after the arrival of the first Norwegian immigrants to Wanamingo Township, a church group was organized by Rev. A. L. Boyum of the Hauge Synod. The first *formal* organizing of the congregation took place on July 9, 1862 with the Rev. Osten Hansen as their spiritual shepherd, and less than one year later the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Wanamingo Township began to worship and hold Sunday School in the building they had erected. As Hans Nielsen Hauge was a lay preacher who stressed the importance of lay participation along with a personal relationship with God, an inner mission fund was put into place at the same time to support Christian Laymen.

In 1875 the church name was changed to **Emmanuel Menighed of Town of Wanamingo**

You can read a brief history of Emmanuel Lutheran Church by clicking this link: <http://www.emmanuelaspelundaflc.org/History.php>. If the link doesn't connect to the church site, you can get there by copying and pasting the address into the *address bar* of your computer.



Figure 4 Leaving Emmanuel Lutheran Church, heading for Hwy. 52.

According to the directions given to me, I was to leave Aspelund and drive on the same road until reaching the main highway from this area that leads to Minneapolis. Stopping to cross Highway 9, I noticed a sign for **Urland Lutheran Church**. What an

unusual name, I thought, wondering if it was possibly biblical, related to the word, Ur, a city of the Chaldees in the Old Testament, but also means “flame”. **It turns out that *Urland*** has something to do with the area from which a good number of the first Norwegian settlers came, located in the Sognefjord region of Norway.

Reading the history of **Urland Lutheran Church (ELCA)** on their website, you will find the purpose of its formation was to provide a closer location for worship to the residents in the area than the town of Holden. It was in 1870 that the Holden congregation sponsored the formation of this church, so to speak.

In 1881 Urland Lutheran became independent of the Lutheran Church in Holden. Driving toward the church, you cannot miss its presence. The steeple is beautiful.

Sogn, Minnesota. As with the other places I stopped, there may be a tighter cluster of buildings or a storage building, but for the most part the actual community may be located only in the fellowship of the church if still in use.



During the two hours that I spent sight-seeing in this area, there were no gas stations, bars, stores, or post offices. There were no lower speed limit signs posted. There were no signs indicating a town is coming in a certain number of miles, nor are there signs indicating which roads go to which towns.

The area is all farms, and many appear to be large operations. For the lack of community stores and buildings, it seemed to me to put forth a greater sense of isolation. It would be interesting to know how these rural churches have survived when the towns, for

which signs are posted by the Goodhue Historical Society showing what once was, have not. Are the members mostly descendants of the first Norwegian settlers? Do people drive in to attend, passing other Lutheran Churches on their way?



SOGN: Established 1892. Signs through this area are labeled, *Goodhue County Historical Society*. There is an interesting combination in location of Sogn and Warsaw Township, and my internet search yielded a fascinating result. Sogn, as a town was never more than a post office and general store, as were many of the small townships located throughout the Midwest.

Another interesting point are the two historical town markers. Both represent the area (driving in from either

side) the Warsaw Township building. One sign gives the name **Sogn**, the other **Wangs**.



Figure 5 This WANGS sign marks the place of a former town in Western Goodhue County, Minnesota. The Goodhue County Historical Society has erected 65 such signs.

There is little left of **WANGS** other than this sign and a cemetery. Goodhue County Historical Society has marked 65 “ghost towns” with a sign¹, where once community gathered and shared their lives with each other. Each had a post office² and maybe a store and a town hall. These signs are more than a remembrance of the past. They are place markers for those who have had vibrant lives before we came to be, as well as of how we come to be as we are today.

The **Sogn Valley** region within western Goodhue County is historically significant in its entirety for the number of Norwegian immigrants to settled there beginning before Minnesota was accepted into the Union as its 32nd state. Though I have not been able to document such at the time of this writing, a process to enter at least a portion of Sogn Valley into the National Historic Places register had begun. I recommend two internet sites for further reading, noted in the footnotes at the bottom of this page.³

Soon to run out of car fuel, I reluctantly began to head home with a stop in Cannon Falls for some gas. There was a little glitch in my plan, when nearing the gas station I noticed a sign for a church that for some reason intrigued me. It was a delightful end to a delightful venture. Directed by the sign to drive eight miles to *Spring Grove Lutheran Church*, I went off in that direction. There had also been a sign about “road construction,” yet though it should not have by this point been a surprise that the majority of the road to the church was gravel.

¹ Should you be interested in exploring Western Goodhue County, there is a site that lists the town names and gives information for how further information may be found. <http://www.goodhuehistory.mus.mn.us/ghostowns.html>

² Postal documents from United States Post Offices that no longer exists are called in the trade, DPOs.

³ <http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/shpo/landscape/methods4.html#sec4>
http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/199902/26_hughesa_sogn-m



Here is **Spring Garden Lutheran Church**, a wonderful blending of the old and the new. There is nothing around this church but cornfields, and yet here it actively stands, 134 years after its inception. The sign in the arch above the door reads, **S.W. Minnesota Kyrkan, Est. 1876.**

Aha! A little further north of western Goodhue County and the Sogn Valley area, found on the *east side* of Cannon Falls, is a **Swedish Lutheran Church**. Spring Garden Lutheran Church actually dates back to the mid-1850s, being officially formed July 19, 1858, just over two months after Minnesota entered the Union.