Oslo on the Texas High Plains*

The small, rural community of Oslo, Texas, represents only a tiny dot on the map of Norwegian settlement patterns in the United States. Located on the High Plains of the Texas Panhandle, several hundred miles to the northwest of the older Norwegian colonies in the state, Oslo has never shared in the “fame” associated with its counterparts at Brownsboro, Four Mile Prairie, and Bosque County. Yet, for a brief period—the years 1909-1913—Oslo was the most promising and widely advertised new Norwegian settlement in the United States. So great was its attraction, in fact, that literally hundreds of immigrants, some from as far away as Canada, journeyed to Texas to examine the area, while others purchased land they had not seen.

Founded in 1908, Oslo was largely the creation of Anders L. Mordt, son-in-law of Nicolai A. Grevstad, longtime editor of Skandinaven. Born near Kristiania and educated in the law, Mordt migrated to the United States in 1904. With encouragement and financial support from Grevstad, he soon turned to the land business and

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sought to establish a Norwegian settlement somewhere in the Southwest. He worked for a few years to develop a rural community called Norge near Chickasha in west-central Oklahoma. This venture failed to prosper and soon Mordt began to search for another area where he could fulfill his dream of a new Oslo on the plains. In mid-May, 1908, he arrived in Guymon, Oklahoma, and announced that he had secured sales rights to nearly one hundred sections of ranch land just across the state boundary in Hansford County, Texas. Because of its location on the Rock Island Railroad, Guymon would be the headquarters of his new firm — the Anders L. Mordt Land Company: Norwegian Colonization and Immigration in and to the Great Southwest. 2

Within a few days, Mordt hired a small staff, established his offices in the First National Bank building, and set out to recruit Norwegian farmers for Texas. Initial reports in Guymon were that he planned to bring his colonists directly from Norway, but the promoter hastened to correct that impression. It was his plan, he explained to a local newspaper editor, “to colonize . . . with Norwegians who have been in America long enough to understand the country and its ways.” Mordt perceived unique opportunities arising from the changing nature of agriculture in the Midwest, where immigrants from Norway and their descendants made up a sizable portion of the rural population.

Rapidly escalating land prices and a shortage of reasonable credit had become major stumbling blocks for hired hands and tenants who sought to become landowners. Even established farmers were finding it difficult to expand their holdings. In Iowa, for example, lands that had been purchased thirty years earlier for $10 to $30 an acre were now often selling for well over $100 per acre. Consequently, many farmers who wanted to secure additional land — perhaps to provide farms for sons or
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sons-in-law — were tempted to sell their high-priced farms and to relocate in areas where the cost of land was lower. Some landowners thus joined frustrated hired hands and tenants in seeking cheaper acreage outside the Midwest. The main stream of these land seekers flowed westward toward the Pacific coast or the prairie provinces of Canada, but some, Mordt believed, could be enticed to Texas.³

Mordt, to reach as many land-hungry Norwegian Americans as possible, began placing advertisements in several of the leading Norwegian-language publications, concentrating most heavily on the pages of Decorah-Posten, Lutheranereren (official publication of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church), and, of course, Skandinaven. In addition, he printed thousands of booklets and flyers describing his settlement and traveled throughout the Midwest distributing them among Norwegian Americans. Almost all of his promotional material stressed the ethnic nature of his settlement. He made much of the fact that he had built a school near the center of his holdings, that he had designated forty acres as church property, and that he would contribute $800 annually for at least two years to support a Lutheran minister.

At the same time, Mordt invited representatives of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church “to inspect the country and to find out whether or not Hansford County is a place where Norwegians ought to settle.” In response to his call, the Reverend N. J. Ellestad, “Vice-Foreman of the Church,” visited the area in early 1909, and apparently he was impressed by what he saw. Mordt was soon able to employ Pastor Christian Heltne, who began conducting church services in the school building in early November. Reports of Ellestad’s visit and Heltne’s arrival quickly appeared in the promoter’s advertisements.
Several Norwegian families had taken up residence in Oslo by mid-1909. Among the first to arrive were Kittle C. Rostad, George S. Baker (Bakke), Lewis J. Johnson, Marthinus J. Vehm, Rolf Person Bjorngaard, John Wilkins (Wilkenes), Theodore Throndson, Chris Sagen, the Helgerson brothers, Hans P. Egedal, and their respective families. Most of the parents in this group were natives of Norway, whereas their children had been born in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and the Dakotas.4

Baker, Rostad, and a few of the others had come in time to plant spring crops. The success of this initial agricultural venture encouraged Mordt to step up his sales campaign, and by late summer he was regularly entertaining groups of land buyers. Usually he placed advertisements in several papers designating a certain date for an "excursion" to Oslo. Then he journeyed north to Chicago or Kansas City, met the excursionists at an appointed time and place, and escorted them to Guymon via the Rock Island Railroad. There he put them up in a hotel and furnished transportation for the twelve-mile trip to Oslo.

A typical advertisement appeared in the September 24, 1909, issue of Skandinaven: "Oslo Settlement, Hansford County, Texas Panhandle. Next excursion 5 October; buy your round-trip excursion ticket at the nearest train depot. The price of land is from $6.00 to $18.50 per acre, with one fourth of the price down and the remainder on a 5-year loan at 6 percent interest. Buy now before the price goes higher. Good, rich hay available on the prairie. Settlement located near a railroad. Religious services in both Norwegian and English. School began the first of this month. Plenty of rain and the grains look good. The new settlers like it here in the land of the 'future.' About 20,000 acres have already been sold to the 'Nordman.' More land is reserved for
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Norwegians — at least another 160,000 acres in all. Transportation costs will be refunded to all buyers.”

As the number of settlers in his community grew, Mordt became ever more optimistic. He was pleased when Pastor Heltne on December 13, 1909, called for the organization of a Lutheran congregation. Because there were members present from both major Norwegian-American churches — the Norwegian Synod and the United Norwegian Lutheran Church — a decision was made to establish a temporary unaffiliated local congregation called the Oslo Norwegian Lutheran Church. The first official meeting of the new congregation was held on January 4, 1910, with ten men as voting members. Although most of the church’s business meetings and religious services were conducted in Norwegian, English was used on the first Sunday of the month. The church expanded with the settlement, and within two years it had about thirty-five voters and nearly a hundred baptized members. On May 27, 1911, the congregation voted to join the United Norwegian Lutheran Church and was received into membership at its synodical convention in June.

About this time several members of the congregation began to consider the construction of a church building, the schoolhouse having proved too small. On July 14, 1911, Gustav Olsen, Sr., Peter Sagen, and Olai Fadnes began work on the structure’s foundation. Although the building was not dedicated until September 14, 1913, the first worship services in it were held on September 24, 1911. Mrs. Heltne’s health began to fail before the church could be fully completed, and her husband was forced to resign from the ministry of the Oslo Lutheran Church. The congregation then called Pastor K. O. Storli, who arrived in late 1912.5

Mordt meanwhile had decided that his growing community needed a newspaper. The first issue of Oslo
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Posten appeared on May 20, 1910. Edited by Mordt and printed on the presses of the Guymon Herald, it is one of the very few foreign-language newspapers ever published for residents of the Texas Panhandle. The paper, supposedly a weekly, was published irregularly throughout the spring and summer of 1910. Not until September did it begin to appear routinely. Mordt wrote most of the material and occasionally he had to “fill” with English-language copy, most often from the pages of the Guymon paper. The basic intent of Posten was to describe the everyday activities in Oslo, and, though it did carry advertisements from local merchants, sometimes in Norwegian, Mordt never conceived of it as a money-maker. He hoped that, apart from its local utilitarian function, Norwegians in the Midwest would subscribe to it and thereby become more familiar with the agricultural opportunities in the Texas Panhandle. All advertisements for his land now contained an invitation to subscribe to Oslo Posten for fifty cents a year.

By 1910–1911, Mordt’s many promotional activities were beginning to pay dividends; a small but steady stream of Norwegian-American farmers were leaving the Midwest and taking up residence in Hansford County. Typical, perhaps, of these new Texans were the members of the Lewis Johnson family. Johnson, a farmer near Black Earth, Wisconsin, decided to examine the Oslo settlement after reading several of Mordt’s notices. Having come to Guymon on one of the first excursions, he was sufficiently impressed to purchase a tract of land. Shortly after his return to Wisconsin, he rented a railroad freight car (often called an emigrant car), filled it with his cattle, horses, chickens, and household goods, and made the long trip to Guymon. Until he completed a house, he and his family lived at a nearby ranch headquarters.

The Gustav Olsen family moved to Oslo from Mason City, Nebraska, in April, 1910. He wanted more land and

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was intrigued by a story about Oslo in Skandinaven. Soon thereafter he went to Hansford County on an excursion and, after surveying the situation, bought 320 acres. Like Lewis Johnson, he loaded his possessions in a freight car and moved his wife and five children, along with his wife's parents, to Guymon, where all of them lived in a rented dwelling until he and his sons built a small house and a barn on the new farm. His in-laws, the Peter Christiansens, moved into the house while the rest took up temporary residence in the barn. In mid-September, 1910, however, the Guymon Herald reported that Olsen was "erecting a fine residence . . . 30 by 56 which is a credit to any town."

The desire for additional land was also the motivation for the Jens Jensens, who arrived in Oslo in early 1911. A native of Norway — his wife, Maria, was Swedish — Jensen had had a 40-acre farm near Elgin in Clayton County, Iowa. He also had two nearly grown sons. After reading a notice about Oslo in Decorah-Posten, he and his wife came to the settlement on an excursion, liked what they found, and purchased 160 acres from Mordt at $16 per acre. They were able to sell their Iowa farm for $102.50 per acre, thus quadrupling their holdings while gaining $1,500 in the process. For John O. Dahl, who had been working in a grocery store in the little town of Astor, in Crawford County, Iowa, the purchase of 240 acres from Mordt in 1910 offered a chance to begin farming. His Danish-born bride, who joined him in Texas in January, 1913, recalls that Mordt's advertisements had a strong appeal for land-hungry immigrants. To her the Oslo settlement sounded like a veritable "Garden of Eden." Although the realities of the Texas High Plains came as somewhat of a shock, photographs in Oslo Posten and in some of Mordt's notices indicate that John O. Dahl was soon producing outstanding crops of wheat. 6
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Mordt, with the growth of Oslo, became an increasingly prominent citizen of Guymon. One long-time resident of that city remembers him as a hard-working individual with an outgoing personality—"a jolly, good fellow" who was "well thought of" by the people of Guymon. Seldom did an issue of the local paper pass without some mention of the Norwegian-born land promoter and his activities. Local boosters believed that the entire region benefited from Mordt's promotional efforts, especially from his connection with the National Dry Farming Congress. This organization was formed during a conference of land developers held at Cheyenne, Wyoming, in the spring of 1909. It had as its primary goal the policing of western land colonization schemes currently being promoted throughout much of the middle-western and eastern parts of the United States. According to Mordt, who played a major role in the creation of the congress, "Eastern people" had been "misled by skillfully worded advertisements until they accept statements about the West with a grain of salt." He called on his fellow promoters to "understate rather than overstate" the advantages of their projects. "We must tell the truth in dealing with the public, then will the West develop on a solid foundation, but at a rapid pace." \(^7\)

Little did Mordt realize in 1909, when he made this statement, that within a short time he would be embroiled in a bitter dispute about the veracity of his own advertisements. As mentioned earlier, Mordt promoted Oslo heavily in the pages of several Norwegian-language publications. One of these was Lutheraneren, a weekly magazine produced in Minneapolis for the members of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church. A survey of this publication for 1912 reveals Mordt's frequent use of the magazine: of the fifty-two issues, thirty-six had either half- or full-page advertisements for Oslo, almost all of
which were on the back cover. Many of these featured photographs of events such as Seventeenth of May celebrations, or of the church, homes, and crops of the settlers. Throughout the summer of 1912, they also featured the claim that Hansford County had an average annual rainfall of nearly twenty-five inches, with nearly nineteen falling during the growing season.⁸

Sometime in the fall of 1912, the Reverend Theodore Eggen, Lutheraneren’s editor, began to receive complaints about Mordt’s advertisements. Eggen informed Mordt of the criticism and the latter responded by placing a large notice in the November 27 issue of the magazine under the heading “Er Oslo-kolonien en svindel?” In it Mordt offered Eggen an all-expenses-paid trip to Oslo for the purpose of a thorough investigation. “This we make you without reservations, without making conditions,” he told the editor, “and we give you full permission to write about our settlement just as you find it. If you should think it your duty to stop our advertising in your paper, good and well; if you should find yourself morally obligated to warn the Norwegian people and all your readers against our section of the country and against settling there, we shall not object or hold you responsible for any loss which we may suffer in our business because of it. In other words, if your readers want facts, we give you free hands and a chance to give them what they want at our expense.”⁹

Eggen accepted Mordt’s invitation to visit Oslo, but as he explained in an editorial in Lutheraneren, he would not make the trip at the promoter’s expense. “The paper can pay for this itself. We have no reason to doubt the truth of the information that the Anders L. Mordt Land Company has given in its advertisements, but we owe it to our readers to convince ourselves personally of the reliability of its advertising.” Accordingly, Eggen left Minneapolis on December 3, 1912. At Albert Lea, Minnesota, he met Mordt and five excursionists and they
traveled together to Kansas City, where three more land seekers, all from South Dakota, joined the group. After a fifteen-hour train ride, the men arrived in Guymon.

Mordt furnished auto transportation to Oslo, where Eggen and the others parted company. The editor, with Pastor Storli as a guide, began visiting farm after farm, probing and questioning, all in an attempt to determine the truth about Mordt and Oslo. During the four days he spent there, Eggen managed to talk with twenty of the thirty-two families living in the settlement. Most agreed that Mordt had been “kind and considerate,” and few expressed dissatisfaction with the way the colony had been developed or was being advertised. In a lengthy account of his Texas sojourn published in Lutheraneren, Eggen warned, however, that Oslo was not a place for “poor people” who were attempting to get started in farming. Nor was it, in his opinion, an “Eldorado” for land speculators. Yet he believed that the settlement could offer “hard-working people with some resources . . . a good home where they can cultivate the soil, live happily, and have a worry-free income.”

Mordt, of course, was pleased by Eggen’s evaluation. In a letter to his father-in-law, he described it as “glorious.” It was his intention now, Mordt explained, to capitalize on all the “free publicity” and launch a new sales campaign for the land colony. His first step in this direction was to give wide circulation to both Eggen’s report and the results of a meeting of the Oslo settlers at the church on December 19, 1912. At this meeting, a lengthy statement had been drafted and then signed by thirty-four of the men present, including Pastor Storli, who served as chairman of the meeting. Entitled “Oslo Settlers about Oslo: To the Norwegian Lutheran People,” the document was a history of the settlement and a ringing defense of the Mordt Land Company. The concluding paragraph reads:

“Just about all of us have had dealings with this Land
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Company, and despite all the rumors that have been spread, we are not afraid to recommend this Company to all our countrymen. In our business contacts we have been treated honorably, honestly, and openly, without exception. Mordt . . . and others of the real estate office have given us no reason heretofore to think that we cannot depend on them and we believe that in the future they will not disappoint us. They have all along done everything in their power to lighten our burdens and to help us in all-possible ways. There is surely no other land company in the U.S. nor in Canada that has done what our Land Company has done for us.”

Mordt had the statement notarized and sent it to Eggen, who published it in the January 28, 1913, Lutheraneren. At the same time, Mordt combined the settlers’ defense of his business with Eggen’s observations, adding twenty-five photographs, and printed 2,500 copies of a new sixteen-page promotional pamphlet. An “Open Letter” from Mordt to the people of Oslo served as the pamphlet’s introduction. According to the promoter, the Oslo community now stood “upon the threshold of the entrance door to a new and bright future.” He compared his recent tribulations to a “fire test” during which the community had become “free of foreign and unclean substances.” It was a time, he said, when they “were not surrounded by many friends, but rather by evil, jealous, and nearsighted people who did not like to see others progress and to go forth.”

Although Mordt did not say so in this public letter, in conversations with Warren Zimmerman, editor of the Guymon Herald, he placed the blame for his recent troubles squarely upon the shoulders of Norwegian pastors in the North who did not want members of their congregations to move to the Southwest. At another point, he warned that he was “preparing several suits for a slander” involving “preachers, rich Norwegians and
such men who have let their gift of gab run off with them." 

Mordt continued to voice optimism in public about the future of Oslo, but an undertone of defeatism and resignation now permeated much of his private correspondence. "I wish I was out of this business and that I had never started Oslo," he told Grevstad in early 1913. "The nervous strain connected with it is too much. Though I am into it and feel that it is moral duty to stay with it until all of the settlers have smooth sailing." He confided to his father-in-law that he had developed heart trouble and lamented that he "had thrown away" his future.

The precarious financial condition of Mordt's company was the basic reason for this pessimism. It had been on the verge of bankruptcy for more than a year, and the accompanying anxiety was beginning to take its toll. The central problem was a constant shortage of cash. Mordt had heavy and on-going expenses. Not only had he built a new and costly home in Guymon, but he had also purchased one of the area's first automobiles in order more conveniently to show his land to potential buyers. He had an office to maintain. Several hundred dollars were required each month just to meet advertising bills, not to mention all the incidental expenses associated with each excursion. To meet those operational costs and still have enough money for personal expenses required not only constant new sales, but also the continued payment by those who had purchased land on an installment basis. Increasingly, however, buyers who had made down payments were failing to meet the next installment. Often these persons were nonresidents of Oslo who apparently were having second thoughts about moving to Texas because of the controversies about Mordt and the settlement's prospects.

The controversy over the accuracy of Mordt's adver-
tisements in Lutheraneren had badly damaged the company’s reputation. In the two months following Eggen’s first mention of complaints about Oslo, Mordt grumbled, “My business has simply stopped, and not only stopped but deals which we have made and were due for settlement in December were not closed because the party of the second part said he did not intend to close until he found out how the investigation would end. The result is that we are out about $10,000.” Mordt had given some thought to suing these and other defaulters, but he realized that such litigation would only add to the contentions already swirling about the land company. If he was going to salvage his business, he needed to still the criticism circulating in the Midwest. But this he was unable to do.

Opponents now charged that Mordt had vastly overstated the amount of rainfall in Hansford County. Contrary to his notices, which claimed nearly twenty-five inches, these individuals alleged that the actual rainfall was only about half that amount. Mordt responded to these charges with a new advertising campaign, relying heavily upon documentation from the United States Weather Bureau. His literature now began to feature a Weather Bureau map of the Panhandle, showing that Hansford County was located east of the “twenty-inch” line. This map was usually accompanied by a notarized statement that Amarillo had averaged twenty-three inches of rain in the fifteen years following 1895. Moreover, the advertisements explained that Amarillo was usually drier than the area “around the Oslo community.” According to Editor Zimmerman, Mordt’s efforts “proved the rainfall here.” Unfortunately, however, past averages were no guarantee that there would be adequate rainfall every year, a fact that Mordt was to become painfully aware of during the summer of 1913.

During the late winter and early spring of that year, he
traveled extensively in the Dakotas and Minnesota promoting Oslo with the hope that substantial new sales would enable his business to survive. He met with some measure of success; a few more northern farmers were induced to join the Oslo community. What was needed, however, was a major infusion of new settlers, and to achieve this end, Mordt concentrated on organizing the largest excursion in the history of his colony. From the standpoint of attracting interested Norwegian Americans, the June 3, 1913, excursion was an obvious success; getting the visitors to buy land was a considerably different matter. By this time, Oslo was already in the grip of a prolonged dry spell. With the recent controversy about the actual amount of rainfall in Oslo still fresh in their minds, the excursionists were reluctant to sign any land-purchase agreements.

For Mordt, the onset of drought was a devastating and ultimately final blow. On July 3, 1913, he informed Grevstad that there had been no rain at Oslo for nearly two months. "You know how I believed in this country, how I, in fact, like it and you may even say love it," he said, "but this moment is one of those in which even the greatest optimist must give in to the influence of circumstances... It is summer and as far as fodder and crops are concerned and even the prairies, it might as well be winter."

Conditions continued to grow worse throughout the remainder of July and into August. The Guymon Herald reported record-breaking temperatures, including 112 degrees one day in mid-July. In August, Mordt described agricultural conditions in Oslo as a "total failure... I have no money and no business," he told Grevstad. "In a month or so I expect to go 'bankrupt.'... It is no use for me to fight any further. The fighting has gone on too long as it is." The only consolation Mordt could find in all of this was the fact that his wife
and family were not in Guymon to watch the collapse of his land colonization scheme. They had left for Norway in early May and were spending the summer with his parents near Kristiania. Even so, he found it necessary repeatedly to beg his father-in-law for money to be sent to Norway, including $100 to pay medical expenses associated with the birth of a fourth child.¹⁶

In early September, Mordt finally left Guymon and moved to Chicago. He had not totally abandoned Oslo, for he planned to keep the firm name “alive,” although it was now his “intention to make it as inconspicuous as possible” until crop conditions permitted “a new and vigorous campaign.” W. A. Trawick, a trusted employe, was assigned the responsibility of managing the business during the promoter’s absence. Meanwhile, Mordt began hunting for a job. Weeks of fruitless searching for employment brought him, at one point, to the verge of suicide. “Honestly, if this isn’t Hell,” he confided to his father-in-law, “I don’t know what Hell is.”¹⁷

But in December, after securing a sales position with a Canadian land company, hope again replaced despair. Before long Mordt was dreaming of returning to Oslo. Such was not to be, however. The economic uncertainties that accompanied the beginning of World War I forced his new employer to close down operations. By late 1914, Mordt had again joined the ranks of the unemployed. In desperation, he sought to borrow $5,000 from an aunt in Norway, offering his home in Guymon as collateral. “If we get the money,” he told Grevstad, “I will go to Guymon at once, settle all outstanding business debts and clear up and after having done this I will still have money left to make a business showing and help me to pick up bargains when bargains are offered.” The loan was not forthcoming, however, and a deeply dejected Mordt finally abandoned all hope of reviving his land business. He eventually deeded his Oklahoma

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home to Grevstad as partial repayment for the money he had borrowed; apparently he never returned to Guymon. His decision meant the end of one of the most remarkable land companies in the entire history of the Texas Panhandle Plains.

Mordt’s departure also meant the end of both Oslo Posten and the townsite of Oslo, the latter already doomed to an almost certain oblivion by the failure of the Denver and Gulf Railroad Company to build a line through the area. Yet this did not totally stop the movement of Norwegians from the Midwest into the Oslo community. New arrivals continued to drift into the settlement for the next few years. Several were individuals who had purchased land from Mordt earlier and were just now moving. Generally, however, from 1913 well into the 1920s, there were far more people leaving than entering Oslo. The four years following Mordt’s withdrawal were especially difficult ones for the Norwegian farmers of Hansford County. Rainfall remained inadequate and crops were short. Many people grew discouraged and left, some returning to their old homes in the Middle West or moving on to the Pacific Northwest. But others bided their time and waited for conditions to improve.

The approximately thirty families that remained formed a tightly knit rural community with the Lutheran church at its center. Relatively isolated by the lack of good roads and the absence of any sizable town near the settlement, Oslo retained much of its ethnic character well into the 1930s. Norwegian continued to be used in many of the homes and during services and social gatherings at the church. But the development in the late 1920s of the town of Gruver and its accompanying school eighteen miles to the southeast — along with the improvement of highway travel — brought about gradual assimilation. Yet even today — more than sixty years
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after the collapse of the Mordt Land Company — a merchant in Guymon is not surprised by an order for a box of Norwegian salt herring.20

Agriculture continues to be Oslo’s predominant economic activity. The discovery of natural gas in the area during the 1930s and the subsequent development of irrigation have added greatly to the prosperity of the community. In recent years, Hansford County has become one of the top ten Texas counties in terms of agricultural production. Relatively high prices for grain in 1975 pushed its per capita income to the $8,863 mark; this places it forty-fourth among the nation’s 3,138 counties in personal income. The agricultural skills of the Norwegian settlers and their descendants have contributed significantly to this success. In 1964, at the annual Texas Conservation Awards dinner in Fort Worth, the farmers of Oslo were named an “outstanding soil conservation group in Texas,” and the Reverend Robert L. Cordes, then pastor of the Oslo Lutheran Church, was honored for “most unselfish service to soil conservation” by a professional man.21

Certainly the most striking reminder of the community’s unique beginnings is the Oslo Lutheran church building, an imposing, neogothic structure, often called the Cathedral of the Plains. Built of Austin stone, the richly appointed church features a custom-crafted pipe organ — one of the finest in the vast Panhandle region. The history of this church, much like that of the rural community which it serves, is one of both hardship and triumph over adversity. The congregation did not become self-sustaining until 1937. Shortly thereafter, members voted to contribute two percent of their wheat crop to a building fund.

Within ten years there was enough money to begin the construction of a replacement for the frame structure erected during the Mordt era. When the new sanctuary
was sufficiently completed for services, the old church was razed. Tragically, on February 18, 1950 — the very eve of dedication services — a disastrous fire almost totally destroyed the new structure and its contents. Not only had the congregation lost nearly $80,000 in building funds — much more if equipment and donated labor were included — but it now found itself without a building of any kind. The fire was a terrible blow for the small parish, but seemingly undaunted, the members almost immediately set out to construct another house of worship. The new church — the second built in less than a year — was dedicated on October 29, 1950. Incredibly, the congregation still managed to finish the year free of debt!

Since 1950 the congregation has built a new parsonage, completed a major addition to the sanctuary, and assisted financially in the development of two new Lutheran churches in Texas. And, during the early 1960s, several members contributed a substantial sum for the purchase of the land on which the American Lutheran Church now stands in Oslo, Norway. All of this is a remarkable record of stewardship for a rural church with less than two hundred members. Some sixty years ago, when Anders L. Mordt began the Oslo settlement, he envisioned a community of prosperous Norwegian-American farmers with a Lutheran church at its center. That dream has become a reality.22

NOTES

1 Carlton C. Qualey, Norwegian Settlement in the United States, 198 (Northfield, 1938).
2 Martin Ulvestad, Nordmændene i Amerika: Deres historie og rekord, 1:234, 2:808 (Minneapolis, 1907); Guymon Herald, May 28, 1910; Skandinaven, January 7, 1910.
3 Guymon Herald, July 9, 1908. For a description of agricultural conditions in the Midwest, see John D. Hicks, "The Western Middle West, 1900–1914," in Agricultural History, 20:65–77 (April, 1946). For an account of Norwegian migration westward, see Kenneth O. Bjork, West of the Great Divide: Norwe-
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gian Migration to the Pacific Coast, 1847–1893 (Northfield, 1958), and especially the same author’s more recent work, “Scandinavian Migration to the Canadian Prairie Provinces, 1893–1914,” in Norwegian-American Studies, 26:3–30 (Northfield, 1974).

4 Olaf Holen, “En norsk menighet i Texas,” in For Fattig og Rik, 32:1 (September 21, 1958). Information on the nativity of the Oslo settlers came from birth records kept by the Oslo Lutheran Church.


6 Interview with Bill Johnson, November 13, 1975; Selma Olsen English to Genevieve Olsen Miller, June 20, 1975, copy in the author’s possession; Guymon Herald, September 6, 1975; interview with Burton Olsen and Genevieve Olsen Miller, September 6, 1975; interview with Elmer Jensen, April 13, 1973; interview with Mrs. John O. Dahl and Mrs. Ingeborg Sogn, September 6, 1975.

7 Interview with Thomas Jefferson Randol, February 26, 1976; the Denver Post quoted in the Guymon Herald, April 1, 1909. See also the Guymon Herald, July 8, October 8, 1909, September 8, 1910, October 12, 1911.

8 Lutheraneren, 18:960 (July 17, 1912).

9 Lutheraneren, 18:1568 (November 27, 1912).


11 Anders L. Mordt to Nicolai Grevstad, January 1, 1913, in the Grevstad Papers in the archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, Northfield. Mr. and Mrs. Joel Stavlo kindly furnished me with a copy of this document; a xerox copy is now deposited in the archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association.

12 Guymon Herald, December 26, 1912; Mordt to Grevstad, January 18, 1913.

13 Mordt to Grevstad, January 18, 1913.

14 Dagny Mordt to Grevstad, March 18, 1912; Anders L. Mordt to Grevstad, February 6, 1913.

15 A good illustration of this type of advertisement is in Lutheraneren, 19:192 (February 5, 1913). See also the Guymon Herald, February 13, 1913.

16 Anders L. Mordt to Grevstad, June 23, July 3, August 11, September 25, 1913; Dagny Mordt to Grevstad, November 2, 1913.

17 Mordt to Grevstad, October 14, November 1, 1913.

18 Mordt to Grevstad, November 30, December 12, 1914. For reasons that remain unclear, Mordt eventually changed his surname to Van Maarth.


20 Interview with Cora Stedje Knutson and Leona Knutson Stavlo, September 6, 1975.
