

Ness Lutheran Church

Arriving in 1856, Ole Halverson Ness and his wife Margit were some of the first settlers to the area. The Ness Lutheran Church was first organized in the home of Ole and Margit and named "St. Johannes Lutheran Congregation of Meeker and Surrounding Counties." The name was changed on October 28, 1861 to "Ness Norwegian Lutheran Congregation of Meeker County." Ole hired the first teacher, John Blackwell, and held school in his house for his children as well as the neighboring children. A six-year veteran of the Norwegian Army, Ole supervised the construction of the Forest City Stockade that provided shelter to 240 settlers. Ness was also part of the Acton Burial Party. The town of Litchfield was named "Ness" in honor of Ole Ness from 1858 to 1869.



Ole and Margit Ness



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Original home of Ole Ness, church and school.

In 1861, the first confirmation in the granary took place. The members of the first confirmation class were Even Evenson, Ole Kittleson, Hans Johnson, and Helle Kolberg. Many baptisms and weddings were presided over by guest pastors in the Ness granary before a permanent pastor was found and the church building was constructed in the spring and summer of 1874.

In 1864, the congregation purchased 40 acres of land from Hendrick Halverson for \$100. The land included the cemetery that been previously set aside in 1857. The first interment on record is that of Ole Olson, a five-week old baby, in March of 1858. There are indications of at least one previous burial.

Buried in one grave, the cemetery contains the remains of the first five victims of the U.S.-Dakota War. Their names are Robinson Jones, Viranus Webster, Howard Baker, Ann (Baker) Jones, and Clara D. Wilson. The grave is marked by the third oldest monument in the state. Also in the cemetery is the grave of Andreas Olson who was brutally murdered by Sioux Indians on September 22, 1862 during the Sioux Uprising.

The Ness Monument was erected by the State of Minnesota under the direction of the Meeker County Old Settlers Association. The unveiling took place on September 13, 1878 at 2 p.m. In 1964, Governor Karl Rolvaag and Russell Fridley, Director of the Minnesota Historical Society, spoke at a rededication of the cemetery and state monument.

In 1970, the Ness Church and Cemetery became a Minnesota State Historical Site at a dedication held on



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Ness Monument and burial site of the first five victims of the U.S.-Dakota War.

September 13 at 2 p.m. In 1978, the church was restored with a grant of \$10,843 from the Minnesota Historical Society and memorial gifts of over \$6,000, along with donated labor.

The church as it stands today was built in 1874 at a cost of \$798.57, plus the donations of many logs by its members. Gracing the altar is an extraordinary painting completed in 1898 by a well known artist from Minneapolis, Sarah Ragland. The Young People's Society held an ice cream social and oyster supper to pay for the painting. The altar and pulpit were installed in 1875. The altar bible belonged to O.H. Halverson, the first male child born in the area on December 11, 1856. Over the years, Gothic style windows were added along with other improvements.



The interior of the Ness Church.

Holding a prominent place in the church, the baptismal font was hand carved from basswood and placed in the church in 1875. The font has been used for baptisms up to the present time. The fellowship hall was constructed in 1957 and an opening was left in the ceiling for viewing the oak log foundation that were hand hewn by the early settlers and are still part of the present day church floor. The church's bell was donated in 1898 by Mr. and Mrs. E.B. Sorness. The old bell of 1878 was given to the New London Lutheran Church and used until it cracked. In 1947, the basement was added at a cost of \$6,226.26.



Ness Church as it stands today.

The Ness Congregation turned over the 40 acres of land purchased in 1864 to the Ness Memorial Cemetery Association and is part of the perpetual care fund. The church's congregation voted to disband on December 31, 1968. The church building and all of its assets were given to the Ness Memorial Cemetery to be kept as a memorial to the congregation and the early pioneers of the area. The final Ness Lutheran Church service was held on December 29, 1968. Ness Lutheran Church is the mother church to thirty other churches in the surrounding area. Many are still active.

The cemetery and grounds are open to the public in the summer (May through September) from 8:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m., and in the winter (October through April) from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. The church and granary are open during special events and by appointment only.

Cemetery plots are available for purchase and the church is available for rental. For more information, please contact Ness Church through their [Facebook](#) account.

References:

- Kenneth Ness., n.d., The Original Worship Site & n.d., Ness Church Preservation Board, Love Never Ends