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# Jostedal's Church

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**J**ostedalen, Norway was deserted for more than two-hundred years following the Plague which affected much of 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

It appears that

“...at the time the first pioneers settled the Jostedal valley in the 1580's, they found the remains of the old Jostedal stave church used prior to the Black Death. With no subsidies from the King they must have rebuilt this church as well as they were able to. Still the church must have been in poor shape since a demand was made for a new church as early as in the 1630's, and finally in 1660 the current church was ready for services” [Lars E.Øyane, *Gards-og Ættesoge for Luster Kommune*, Band V-Jostedal Sokn, Luster Kommune, 1994, page XIV].



Jostedal received its own “*sognprest*” [pastor] in about 1600. The first “*sognprest*” to come from Denmark was Otto Hansson Raven. Tradition says that he served for one year in Denmark before coming to

Jostedalen. Otto and his bride, Anna Christensdotter came to Jostedalen in 1635. It is remembered that he was a popular pastor. The requests for a new church building already had begun prior to his arrival in Jostedalen. The “new” church was dedicated on 2 October 1660 a few years after his death. This pastor was a maternal ancestor of Ole Larsson Aasen. Another of Ole's direct ancestors was Asbjørn Brynjulfson Hus who came to Jostedalen in 1790 as the “*Klokker*” for the parish. The “*byggmester*” (main carpenter) for the church was Hans Otteson Ravn who was a son of Pastor Ravn.



The following description is given:

“Jostedal's church is a wood church. It is of the long-church form [as opposed to being in the shape of a cross] with the chancel added on having an enclosed entrance. It seats 120 [Note: the 1996 Bishop's report says that the church seats 100, but by my counting, it seats 85].

“According to the parish records the church was built in 1660 at a cost of 138 rkdr. [riksdollars]. The minister at that time was Tørger Jensen.

“The inscription on the altar says it was given to the Kaupanger Church in 1609 by Giøde Pedersen and his wife Kirstine Pedersdatter. Therefore, it appears to have been moved from Kaupanger. The pulpit is inscribed with the year 1626. There is no

picture on the altar. Rather, it has the ‘Catechism text,’ the Lord's Prayer, and the Words of Institution.

“The old ornamentation of the church is completely preserved. This church, like the Gaupne Church, is a long church. They are the only two churches of this type in Sogn. They were both built after the Reformation. In 1900 the State gave 4,500 crowns (krone) for restoration of the church and the addition of a sacristy. An architect, Johannes Kløften, was hired to plan the work.

“The Jostedal Church was dedicated on October 2, 1660. Its inventory in 1750 listed a silver chalice given in 1636

by Peder Ravn, Jens Jensen Skive, Hans Grimesen, Anders Madsen, Floqvard Brodersen, Jens Mikkelsen, Niels Harbo, Peder Hansen, and Herman Garmen; and a silver paten given in 1656 by Hans Ottesen Ravn.



“The church in Jostedal was named in the visitation ordinance of 1323 and in a document of 1360. It appears to have been a stave-church. Portions of the church have been preserved—two columns in 1877. One can guess that the stave-church was torn down in 1660.

“Jóstrudals kirkja was the church’s name in Old Norse. It had its own priest since 1375 at the latest. There is a legend that goes with the building of the church: When Jostedal’s new inhabitants after the Black Death wanted to build a church they chose a flat area near the parsonage—called Kirkestein (church



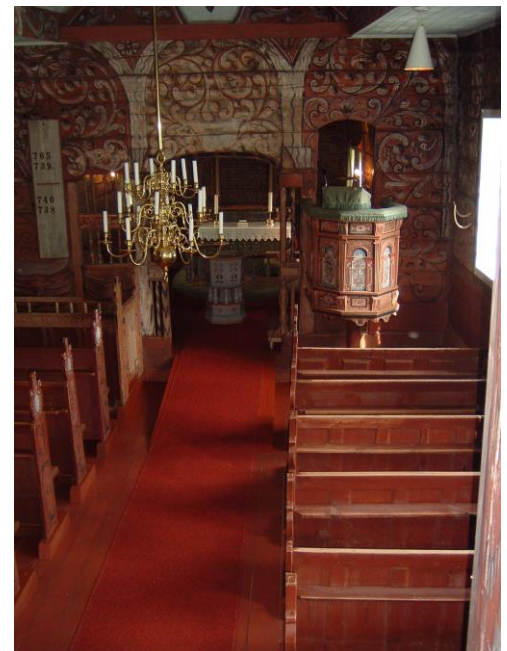
stone). Everything they built during the day was torn down at night and they found it in the river. Because of this they decided to build the church near the river. When they began to clear the forest they found the old church bell. This bell is still found in the church today.”

In 1660, the congregation had its own pastor and was the smallest parish in Norway at the time.



When the church was restored, in 1900, the Jerico Lutheran Church (New Hampton, Iowa) gathered an offering to purchase the chandelier which hangs in the Jostedal Church. The offering was in excess of the amount needed to purchase the chandelier and so the Baptismal Font also was purchased.

The cemetery surrounds the church building. Burials are made in “rough boxes” within eight days of death. After twenty years the grave sites are reused and the markers are ground-down also to be reused. If a family desires, they can “repurchase” the grave site for an additional twenty years.



The current population of the valley is about 500. At the high point, in the mid-1800s, the population was 1,000. In 1996, the pastor said that the average Sunday attendance, every third-week, is 30-40 people. The parish today consists of 2,000 members at Jostedal, Gaupne, Joranger, and Fet. The current parsonage at Jostedal was built in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is rented out. The “old” parsonage stood to the west of the church.



Note: The Crane Creek Settlement in Chickasaw County and Howard County, Iowa was the largest settlement of emigrants from Jostedal in America. [*Luster Lokalhistorisk årbok*, 1994-Nr. 1, Utgjevar Sogelaga I Luster kommune I samarbeid me Luster kulturkontor. ISBN: 82-7560-001-4].