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Church Records Had Been Microfilmed

A history buff saved past and present members of St. Ansgar's Lutheran Church some unnecessary worry about destroyed church records.

Dale McKinley of Cannon Falls read last week of the theft and burning of all but the last five years of records kept by St. Ansgar's church. He thought those records were microfilmed several years ago by the American-Swedish Institute in Minneapolis, so decided to check on the possibility.

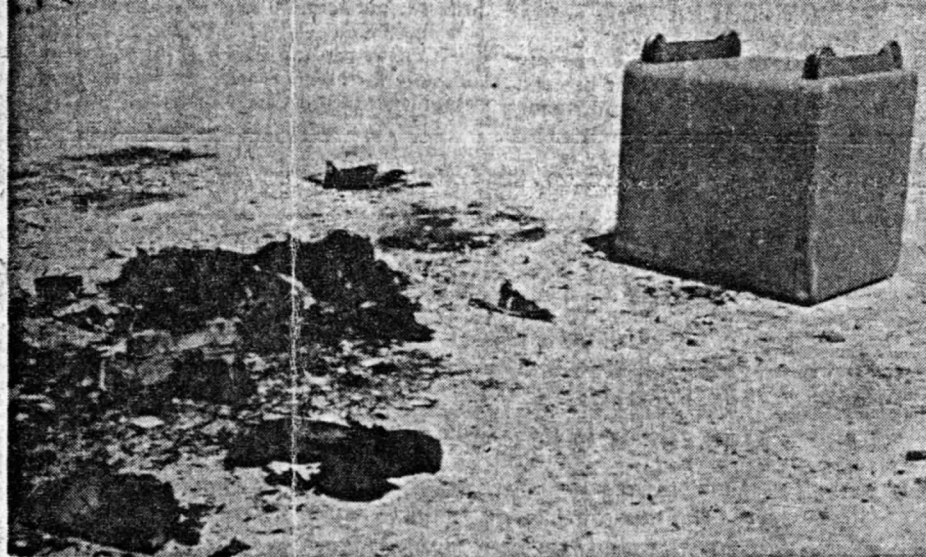
It turned out that McKinley was right. Those records were microfilmed in 1968-69 by the institute. So while there are still some records missing, only those from 1968 to 1975 were totally destroyed.

The project to microfilm old church records was started by a church in Sweden. In the late 1960s the American-Swedish Institute microfilmed 150 rolls of film containing records from 240 churches in Minnesota and southwest Wisconsin. Two of those rolls contain records from St. Ansgar's. There is also a roll for the Spring Garden Lutheran Church.

Copies of the St. Ansgar's rolls are now being sent to the church. The films can be seen at the American-Swedish Institute, 2600 Park Ave., Minneapolis. The institute is open 1-5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday. Cannon Falls High School also has a machine to read microfilm.

The Goodhue County Sheriff's Department is still investigating the burglary at St. Ansgar's. They have no further leads at this time.

The Community Churches Interaction Council is offering a \$100 reward for information leading to the arrest of those involved.



The safe stolen from St. Ansgar's Church Monday-Tuesday, June 9-10, was found Tuesday morning about two miles from the church. The safe contained irreplaceable church records (foreground) which were burned by the thieves. —Dick Dalton photo.

Century-Old Records Destroyed in Burglary At St. Ansgar's Church

Vandals broke into St. Ansgar's Lutheran Church between 10 p.m. Monday, June 9 and 7:30 a.m. Tuesday, June 10, stealing two recorders, two small banks, a small amount of petty cash from the office and a safe containing church records dating to the 1880s.

The safe was found Tuesday morning in a gravel pit on Highway 19 about two miles east of Cannon Falls. The safe had been opened and the records burned.

"I'm very upset about the records," said Betty Sparstad, secretary at the church about the irreplaceable records.

The safe had been purchased by the church about two weeks ago to protect the records in case of fire. Presumably the thieves were looking for money. Finding

none, they burned the contents of the safe.

About five years ago, Sparstad had recopied current church records, and those were not taken. She said the church had talked recently about microfilming old records since they could not be replaced if lost.

Thieves damaged church doors to gain entry and had broken open the office desk. Carpeting at the church was torn as the safe was removed. Candle wax used for light during the robbery was found on the office carpet. Total damage to the church was estimated at \$1,000, with most damage being done to doors.

The Goodhue County Sheriff's Department is investigating. There are possible suspects in the incident.