

**Victims of U.S. Dakota War of 1862**  
**Rev. Christian Lewis Seder and Rev. August Nierens**  
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Two young men met at a revival meeting in Marquette County, Wisconsin, Christian Lewis Seder (age 24), and August Nierens (age 25). They, together responded to a stirring message, and both later felt a call to full time ministry. The denomination was the Evangelical Association; later that denomination would join another to form the United Methodist Church.

Both men later were licensed by the conference association, and felt a call to cross the Mississippi to minister to German-speaking folk then beginning to settle on the frontiers of the Minnesota territory. Officially they received appointments from the Iowa Conference (then responsible for that part of the frontier) and were assigned to budding churches near the city of New Ulm.

Rev. Nierens was assigned to congregations around present-day Nicollet and Courtland (Nicollet County). He settled on a small farm some five miles down river from the ferry that crossed the Minnesota River into New Ulm. Nierens was a veteran of the Prussian army, and supplemented his meager association income with farming.

Seder married Ursula Saxer in 1857, and he was given an appointment as pastor the following year. Rev. Christian L. Seder was assigned three church starts – a church in Searles and another in New Ulm (Brown County), and a church start in Middle Creek (Flora township, Renville County). The custom for early Methodist ministries was that a pastor would be assigned multiple “charges.” He would go to each charge on a regular basis. When he was unable to be present for a weekend service, the Bible class and worship service was led by a “class leader.” His church in Renville County was 45 miles from his home outside of New Ulm. The lay leader for that church was Gottlieb Mannweiler.

Seder was in Renville County on Sunday, August 17. It was a beautiful summer day, and the members and attenders of that church met at the Lettau farm. More than 120 men, women, and children crowded in and around the simple farm house. Seder preached twice on that Sunday (you didn’t go to church by ox cart for a mere 45 – 60 minutes of worship). Various people present reported that Dakota contacts had warned of an impending outbreak of hostilities.

After the service, family leaders discussed whether they should leave their homes and seek shelter at Fort Ridgley or New Ulm. Few could perceive that their worst nightmares would be realized within twenty-four hours. The farms in that part of Renville County

had been land grants issued by the U.S. government before the actual signing of the treaty. Growing anger and resentment towards the government and towards the settlers who were seen as encroaching on reservation lands fueled the anger expressed the next day towards those who had developed farms on the prairies of Renville County.

On Monday morning, Rev. Seder visited a few families, and then started for home. He had not driven over a couple miles when Dakota warriors overtook him and shot him. They dumped his body from the buggy and stole the rig, his horse, watch, and wallet. The killing took place less than a mile south of the present Middle Creek United Methodist Church (Flora Township), where a stone marker commemorates the settlers who lost their lives in the conflict. Within a few days more than 70 of those who attended meetings at the Lettau farm were dead, and a number taken captive.

A few weeks after the outbreak of the war, a company of the Minnesota cavalry scoured the countryside and buried the decomposing bodies next to where they had fallen. Later, leaders of the denomination disinterred the bodies of Rev. Seder and Gottlieb Mannweiler and took them for reburial to the Evangelical Cemetery near Cottonwood (a few miles south of New Ulm). For the next years very few people lived in and around the area of Renville County.

Seder left a wife and three children (two sons and one daughter). Sons Henry and James entered the Christian ministry and were ordained by the same denomination their father had served. Ursula later re-married and moved the family back to Wisconsin where she and her second husband, a Mr. Miller, raised their blended family near Arcadia, Wisconsin.

During the following days, as news of the killings in Beaver Creek reached Fort Ridgley and New Ulm, many folk sought refuge in those places. Rev. August Nierens, Seder's friend and pastor in Courtland, fled with his family to New Ulm. During the battles of New Ulm, Nierens served to rally people in the defense of the town, and fighting at the barricades. His family, along with other women and children, were huddled into the buildings within the barricade, fearing for their lives. As New Ulm was later evacuated, townspeople and refugees went to St. Peter and Mankato.

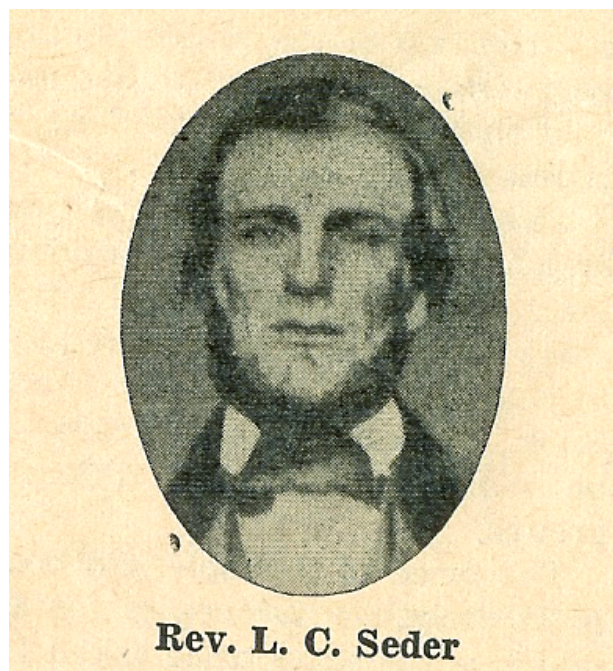
On September 1, Nierens and his family returned to their farm outside Courtland, convinced that the threat was over. A party of Dakota, returned through woods and sloughs, attacking settlers. On Tuesday, September 2, two weeks after his friend Christian Seder had been killed, Nierens was back home with his family.

While eating breakfast, Nierens and his wife heard a child scream in a nearby house. He went to the door, and was shot by a Dakota who then stole his horse. The rest of the family was unharmed. Nierens was born in Lubs, Prussia on June 25, 1828 and died

September 2, 1862. His body was buried at his farm, and only later re-buried at the Nicollet Cemetery (now the Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Cemetery).

The church records for the churches in Courtland, Nicollet, New Ulm, Searles, and Flora township for the years around the 1862 war are kept at Oakwood United Methodist Church in New Ulm. Digital copies are available at the Minnesota Historical Society, and the county historical societies for Brown, Nicollet, and Renville Counties.

This photo of Rev. August Nierens and his wife used with permission from the Brown County Historical Society.



This photo of Rev. L. C. Seder comes from a publication of the Wisconsin Conference of the Evangelical Association.

Seder's grave, with author standing next to the stone, during a memorial service held August, 2012.



Sources for the article:

The ledger for Oakwood United Methodist Church (volume 1), and The History of the Minnesota Conference of the Evangelical Association (1856 - 1922). Published by the Minnesota Conference, compiled and written by Albert H. Utzinger.