

## Notes from our Church History -Now and Then

The neighboring churches of First Lutheran in Red Wing, Vasa, Cannon River, Welch (now called Cross of Christ), Spring Garden as well as our own St. Ansgars were founded by Eric Norelius. The life of this intrepid pioneer pastor is told in the book Eric Norelius by Emeroy Johnson and can be checked out from our church library. Mae Molstrom shared a childhood memory of her father attending the funeral of Norelius, her father's uncle. The book tells of many dignitaries attending the service, which lasted five hours.

For some years Cannon River was the church home for Swedish Lutherans in the area. Some forded the river, with at least one tragic drowning. By 1869 there were more people in the village and the church was established at the site of the present Baptist church. That building was enlarged and remodeled and served for one hundred and one years.

The Swedish language was used in the service until the 1920's. Dorothy Holmes recalls that in her confirmation class, classmates repeated their memory work in the language of their home, which was English in some cases. Pastor Mattson enjoyed asking the bilingual members questions in one language and anticipating their answer in the other. Probably the Swedish language continued as long as it did for the ease of parents and other relatives in hearing the confirmand "recite the catechism" at home. The term "reading for the minister" was used for generations.

Sunday school instruction was sometimes held in the neighborhood. In summer some rural schools had a session of Vacation Bible School. Lydia Nelson of Welch, now in her nineties, remembers teaching more than twenty students of mixed ages. The name "Swede School" stuck long after the classes were taught in English, and probably ended in the thirties.

Looking back to the early years of our church history has been interesting, and causes reflection on our country's history impacting our church. Conditions in Europe brought about immigration; the early settlers wanted their own church.

World War Two touched the life of the church when more than seventy young people served their country. Services were held for five who gave their lives. Services of thanksgiving were held on V.E. Day and V.J. Day. Other wars touched the lives of more families. Our local veterans' groups are working on records to update our knowledge in the service area.

Our church is establishing an ongoing collection. Items such as photographs, programs, yearbooks, and other memorabilia are wanted. There is a wealth of information out there - share the wealth.

The first church of our congregation -now the first Baptist Church -was constructed in 1872. It is believed some of the first construction is still there,although the building has gone through many additions and changes. Plans for the present church were begun in the mid-sixties,ground was broken in 1969, and dedication was made in the spring of 1970. It is worth noting that businessmen and other friends of the congregation gave gifts to furnish and complete the church and grounds. This generosity was appreciated. The mortgage burning was a special time, perhaps sooner than expected,in the mid-eighties. The purchase of the pipe organ was the major undertaking of the eighties,financially speaking.

The addition of more staff was another concern of the eighties,as the membership neared,then passed,the one thousand mark. A salute,too,to all the volunteers,who help in many ways.

The contribution of the women's groups has been considerable,providing financial support and fellowship. In 1970,a cookbook of favorite recipes was published and the same year a plate picturing the old church was sold. One member alone sold seven hundred St. Ansgar's cookbooks. She is the same lady who makes all those handy note pads sold at the bazaar.

For many years the "Ladies Aid" had a male counterpart-the Lutheran Brotherhood,which also met monthly. Their biggest and fundraiser was the ice cream social. The farm family where the event was to be held made a real effort to provide parking and present a well groomed yard. The socials were very well attended and the weather usually cooperated. One member remembers a June social when rthe temperatures fell to the low thirties.

During the forties and fifties,two retired pastors lived in our town and assisted Pastor Nelson with communion. They were Pastor Odell,retired from Welch-Cannon River and Pastor Sandahl,retired from Spring Garden.

In the later years of the old church, an office was created near the southeast entrance. Before this time most of the parish work was directed out of the parsonage. Family members greeted callers, took messages, provided bed and breakfast for out of town V.I.P.'s, kept the parlor presentable for occasional weddings and baptisms, and probably went along on calls now and then. The old parsonage was used for extra space for church school both on week days and Sundays. It was sold and is now a private home.

One of the earliest memories shared goes back to 1873. The "mission fest" was a family type gathering at a home, usually on a Sunday afternoon in mild weather. People drove horses or walked, even long distances to partake of spiritual food-and other food-and fellowship. At one of these gatherings two infants were baptised who grew up to be long time members of St. Ansgars- Harriet Wickey's father, Ed Wickey, also Hilma Holmer Peterson. (Mrs. P.A. Peterson).

Another memory was of Pastor Mattson walking out from town to Clark Valley, about five miles, to call on Mrs. Sederblad, who was crippled and then going on to call on others in the neighborhood before returning to town. This was shared by Helen Sederblad Fredrickson.

Gus Johnson is probably the only member of the parish who was born in Sweden. It happened he was in the first confirmation class of Pastor Nelson. Gus said it took about two years before he felt at ease with English. Coming to America at age eleven, it helped that he found himself in a school populated with Rapps, Lundells, Bergs, Safes, and Edstroms.

## More Memories of St. Ansgars

Members of the anniversary committee have often referred to the "red book", the hard cover book of the history of the first one hundred years-1869-1969. Only a few can recall the pastors of the early years of this century. Pastor P.A. Mattson here from St. Peter in 1911, having served as president of Gustavus Adolphus for several years. More about Pastor Mattson later. At times a student or lay pastor filled in. Pastor J.E. Oslund came from Moscow, Idaho in 1929 and served until 1927, when he moved east to Vasa where he served until retirement twenty years later.

Pastor Birger Nelson served from 1929-1951. He was the last of the pastors born in Sweden, and continued to lead worship in the Swedish language until interest waned. Quoting the "red book", we learn that services were held in English one Sunday morning and in Swedish the next, gradually changing to English every Sunday morning and an occasional Swedish service. Pastor Nelson's daughter Sylvia wrote a book about parish life in the thirties.

Pastor Bjorkman served 1951-1957. During these post-war years attendance increased and a second service was added. The Bjorkman children were the first small children in the parsonage in many years. During this time the congregation voted to build a convenient modern parsonage on the lot next door. The Bjorkman family moved on before it was completed.

Pastor Dan Pearson also brought a young family to town and had the honor of being the first to live in the sparkling new parsonage. As it happened, they were the only pastoral family to live there. Times changed, Pastor Jacobson bought a home for his family and the parsonage was sold, ending an era.