

Nuggets of History

Volume 20

Summer, 1983

Number 3

THE CATHEDRAL WITH THE TWIN STEEPLES

By Robert H. Borden

Most people traveling through the central part of Rockford have noticed the two identical steeples of First Lutheran Church protruding above the surrounding trees and buildings. Commuters crossing the Chestnut Street Bridge are certain to see the twin towers slightly to their right aiming toward the sky beyond the Board of Education Building and the Y.W.C.A. They have been a landmark on the near east side of Rockford for almost one hundred years.

First Lutheran Church was organized by Swedish immigrants in 1854. The earliest Swedes in Rockford had settled here two years earlier because it was the farthest west they could go by rail from Chicago. Intending to settle down in that city along the shores of Lake Michigan, they had been advised by Rev. Erland Carlsson, the first Swedish Lutheran pastor in Chicago, to get on the train and go as far west as it would take them. This was presumably either because of a cholera epidemic in Chicago or a lack of jobs for immigrants in the "Windy City".

The Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, the first to cross these northern Illinois plains, had laid their tracks as far as Rockford but had not yet finished their bridge across Rock River. They had built a depot at Fourth Avenue and South Fourth Street where the railroad tracks pass Northwestern Park. That was as far as the train would go, so the Swedes got off and decided to stay.

More Swedes arrived in 1853, and still more in 1854. Most had been Lutherans in Sweden, and they began to long for a church here in Rockford, where no Lutheran congregation had yet been established. Rev. Carlsson of Chicago was asked to visit Rockford to help establish a Lutheran congregation. On Sunday, January 15, 1854, he came and presided over the organizational meeting. The name "The Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Rockford" was adopted, along with a constitution; officers were elected, and seventy-seven souls were listed as charter members.

There were few Swedish Lutheran pastors in the United States in those days. For two and one-half years, the congregation was without an ordained leader. Pastor Carlsson agreed to visit the congregation four Sundays a year to conduct a communion service, and the first Monday of each month he was to come and hold an afternoon and evening service. In between, prayer services led by laymen had to suffice.

The congregation did not erect a building until 1856. Begun in September of that year, the small frame building was constructed on the northwest corner of North First Street and what is now Lafayette Avenue (called Rock Street in those days) at a cost of \$775. It was ready to use by November, and was dedicated November 23, 1856. With a capacity of about 300, this building was very adequate at the



The congregation's first church and parsonage

time. By 1860 the total membership of the congregation, including children, was still only 213.

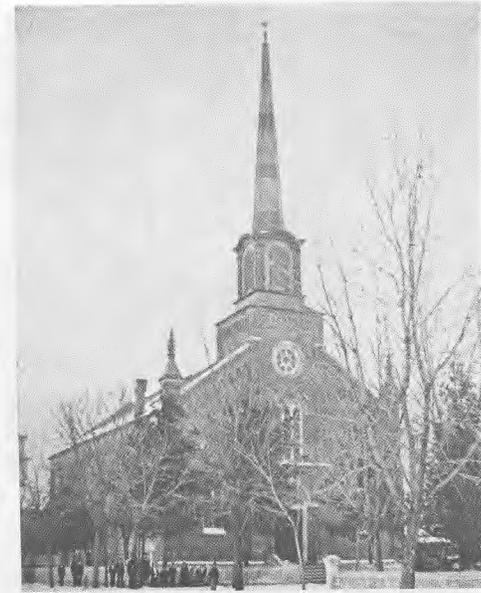
On October 10, 1856, Rev. Andreas Andreen was called to become the first pastor. His son, Gustav, would many years later become president of Augustana College at Rock Island, and a dormitory there, Andreen Hall, is named after him. However, Gustav was not born until the family had left Rockford. Born in Sweden in 1827, Andreas Andreen came to America in 1853. He attended Illinois State University, a Lutheran college then located at Springfield, and was ordained on September 12, 1856. His salary was \$150 a year, which it remained until 1859 when it was increased to \$200.

Rev. Andreen remained as pastor until the fall of 1860, and while here he built a small house next door to the church. This home still stands at 408 North First Street. By 1864 he had still not sold the house, so at that time the congregation agreed to buy it for \$725.

Rev. Anders W. Dahlsten was called to succeed Rev. Andreen in 1861. He remained for only two and a half years, and on New Year's Day, 1864, Rev. Gustav Peters began a pastorate of 22 years. These three pastors -- Andreen, Dahlsten, and Peters -- served the congregation as it continued to worship in that small building on North First Street. As more Swedes came to Rockford and joined the congregation, more space was needed. A balcony was added, but it was soon obvious that a larger church must be built.

The congregation decided to construct a new and much larger building on land they had purchased at South Third and Oak Streets. On August 28, 1868, the cornerstone was laid, and the first service in the new sanctuary was on Christmas morning, 1869. This was the building usually referred to in histories of the church as the "Andra Kyrka", -- Swedish for "Second Church".

Immigration was heavy in the 1870s, causing the congregation to grow even more, and within a few years even the Second Church was too small. At a meeting in January, 1883, the members voted to build a new and larger building



Exterior of the "Second Church"

at the same location, after tearing down the Second Church.

Even though the Second Church had been used for less than fourteen years, many members had developed a sentimental attachment for it and were loath to have it torn down. A small group felt so strongly about it that they began holding meetings to decide what to do, and most of them eventually withdrew and established Zion Lutheran Church.

The majority, however, seemed to feel that building a new church on the present site, even though necessitating the razing of the old, was preferable to any other decision. It was obvious that the Second Church could not provide enough room for all who wished to worship.

The last service in the Second Church was held the last Sunday of June, 1883. It was a Communion service, and the guest preacher was Professor Olof Olsson of the Augustana Seminary, whose sermon topic was "Our God's Loving Mercy". Professor Olsson later became president of Augustana College and Seminary.

The church was packed to capacity. Rev. Gustaf Peters wrote a description of this last service: "After a few farewell words and prayer, the choir sang music from the old hymnal, which had been sung so often, but never with such feeling as this time. During the song, many turned with tear-filled eyes toward the altar and pulpit with prayer and hopes in their hearts that soon they would be able to enter a nicer and more beautiful sanctuary."

A farewell festival was held in the evening, at which the people said their last farewell to their "kara templet" (dear temple). The next day, demolition of the 14-year-old



Interior of the "Second Church"

building was begun. Many boys of the congregation helped by cleaning the mortar from the old bricks so they could be used for the new church. In about two weeks the building had been razed, but at least one wall, the front wall of the present sanctuary (auditorium), was left standing and became part of the new building.

Work on the present cathedral, with its twin steeples, began July 17, 1883. On August 21, 1883, the cornerstone was laid. The new structure, in which the congregation still worships after nearly ninety-nine years, was completed in the fall of 1884 and dedicated on December 7 of that year. It had a seating capacity of approximately eighteen hundred, which has been somewhat reduced in recent years by removing several pews in the rear in order to construct a narthex, and removing many seats in the back balcony. It had cost \$48,716 in addition to the usable material from the previous building, plus 300 days of work donated by members. A pipe organ was installed at a cost of \$3,100, replacing the reed organ used in the Second Church. A much better pipe organ was installed in 1925 at a cost of \$30,000, and in 1974 this was rebuilt and greatly increased in size. There was a debt of \$28,129 in 1884, which was not completely paid until 1902.

Since Pastor Peters resigned the pastorate of First Lutheran in 1886, ten senior pastors have served the congregation, as well as various assistants and interns. The present pastor is Dr. David L. Powers, who arrived in December, 1981. On June 26, 1983, the congregation celebrated the 100th anniversary of the final service held in the Second Church. The liturgy from the old Augustana Synod hymnal, which had not been used for about 30 years, was used, and a faculty member from Augustana College, Dr. Richard A. Swanson, preached the sermon, thereby emulating



First Lutheran Church's present building as it appeared in 1904

the service of June 24, 1883, when Professor Olof Olsson of Augustana had preached. More special services and celebrations are planned for 1983 and 1984 to observe the centennial of the present cathedral.

CELEBRATING 65th ANNIVERSARY of BUILDING CAMP GRANT
by Hazel Mortimer Hyde

You're in the Army now,
You're not behind a plow;
You'll never get rich,
A diggin' a ditch,
You're in the Army now.
(World War I Song)

The rafters of Atwood Park for Outdoor Education building, in its beautiful wooded setting along Kishwaukee



Speakers on panel: Helen Wray, World War I nurse; Robert Borden, Editor, NUGGETS OF HISTORY; and Jack Mundy, worker who participated in the building of Camp Grant and worked there during World Wars I and II

River, rang to a sing-along accompanied by Agnes Greenwood on a small organ on loan from Emmanuel Lutheran Church. Hazel Hyde led the Rockford Historical Society and their friends in such World War I songs as "Tipperary," "Hail! Hail! The Gang's All Here", "Over There" and "The Marines' Hymn", just before refreshment time.

The meeting was to celebrate the Sixty-fifth Anniversary of Camp Grant. The panel consisted of Jack Mundy, who was personally involved with the beginnings of the camp 65 years ago; Helen Wray, who served as a nurse there before going overseas in World War I; Bob Borden, Editor of "Nuggets of History", who manages to find old post card pictures, rare maps, and other "goodies" for slides he uses both in history classes at Jefferson high school and for Rockford Historical Society programs, and Bill Goodson, Rockford Park District, program for environmental education at the Atwood Center, located on the former firing range of Camp Grant. Over a hundred people gathered to hear the role Camp Grant played in American history during and between World Wars I and II. Persons who served in these two wars were especially welcomed to share their memories or to wear old uniforms (or parts of it, as the cap).

Jack Mundy was a boy of about 15 years of age and regularly went fishing in Kishwaukee River in the area that became Camp Grant grounds. He became a civilian employee when Camp Grant was laid out and built. The power was horses and mules. One of Jack's jobs was to go to the camp



Helen Wray and Mabel Johnson, two World War I nurses, shown at the celebration of the 65th Anniversary of Camp Grant at Atwood Lodge, site of Camp Grant November 7, 1982

employment office every morning to get orders. Then he went on horseback to each work area to see what people were needed and the number. Men had to show their draft registration cards. Then they were assigned to groups according to their skills, as carpenters, teamsters, laborers, water-boys and others. They would be assigned and follow Jack to the proper area.

It rained and the ground became a sea of mud. Eventually roads were built. All branches of service were at Camp Grant. By Christmas there were 15,000 soldiers, about the maximum number to be there at one time. Bell Bowl was a rifle range. Jack could pay 35¢ and be fed in the messhall. He soon learned that the quartermasters', cooks', or bakers' mess hall was the best place to go to eat.

Later Jack and other civilian employees worked in the salvage department. Soldiers drew new uniforms when shipped overseas. They turned in their old uniforms. These clothes were rehabilitated and used again. Another job was inventorying all equipment. In September 1922 the Department of Agriculture held an auction to realize some return on items held at the camp. Excess vehicles were lined up down Kishwaukee Road.

Some soldiers were sent back to Camp Grant to be discharged. These men were mostly from Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Michigan.

Mr. Mundy also worked in World War II. He helped Mr. Maitland of West High School. He took over one of Mr. Maitland's classes. Then he was called to the Lafayette Hotel where a man from the State Board of Education asked him if he would come to Camp Grant and start a class for auto mec-

ON THE ROAD TO CAMP GRANT

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hanics. On Saturday they unloaded books for the school and the classes started on Monday. The Mechanics school was primarily to teach the men how to get an ambulance going or make minor repairs in emergencies and get wounded men to a field hospital. It was March 1941 that he went there to teach these men, just nine months before Pearl Harbor. Later it was taken over by the Civil Service. He worked for Civil Service for a year. He has a letter crediting him with service in 1918. The School was moved to Port Washington.

East of the railroad was the Reception Center. There they gave out uniforms and sent men out to other camps.

The West Side was the Medical Center. General Lewis was over the doctors.

In World War II Prisoner of War Camp was in Camp Grant near the hospital. There was a wire fence around it, extended up along Kishwaukee Street. If prisoners of war volunteered they could be released for work. Sergeant in charge. German officers set a stake down and they had to stay within so many feet of that stake. German prisoners sang, mostly marching songs. One man who operated the crane lived in Byron, Illinois. On his birthday German prisoners brought him small gifts they could buy at PX for 15¢ or so. When they came out of barracks for breakfast, Jack said they would come out and sing, sounded just like a choir. Truckloads of prisoners cleaned up after tornado around Cedarville, Illinois.

Helen Wray, best known as a school nurse by a whole generation of students, was sworn in as an army nurse October 22, 1917. There were four nurses from Rockford

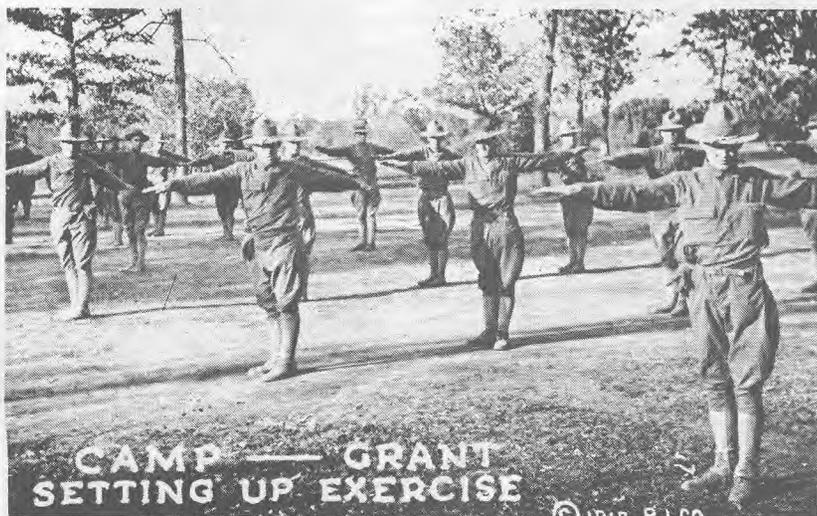


area at Camp Grant. Two others were Margaret Robertson and Miss Armstrong. She was a Red Cross Reserve nurse and was sworn in as a Reserve Army Nurse. She was put on Night Duty 12 to 12 o'clock. There was no heat at camp when she first went and it was pretty cold. Then she had one month of night duty and two months of day duty in surgical work. Most of the doctors were from the East and they were very proficient. One doctor would buy little things for the patients. He was from Chicago. High class college boys served as ward boys. There was a head nurse. There were about 40 in a ward with 20 on each side in the ward. There were a couple of little rooms for the very ill, who were about to die.

She was picked by the head nurse as an assistant to work in the office. She had to run food to quarters of nurses. Fred Harvey provided some of the food. Bread came



Hazel Mortimer Hyde, song leader for the sing-along at the 65th anniversary celebration of Camp Grant, standing near the entrance to Atwood Lodge at Atwood Park for Environmental Study



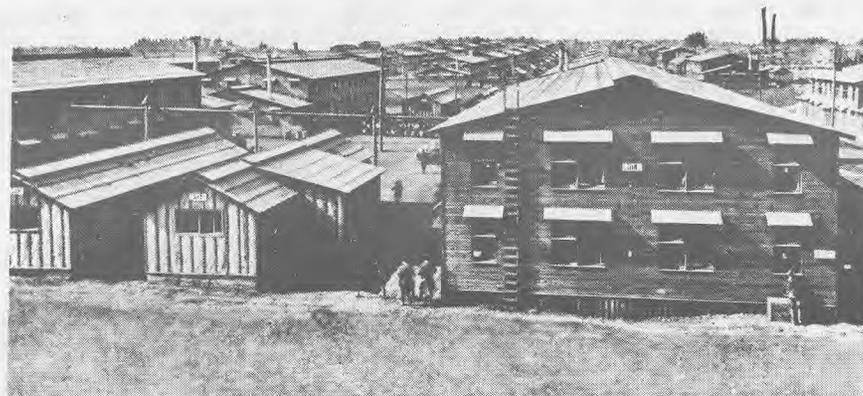
from the army bakeshop. Beef came from the Commissary. They always had plenty of sugar even while civilians did not. Nurses were allowed 60¢ a day for their food, but soldiers only 30¢ a day. There was a staff of 100-120 nurses and helpers. She had some contact with patients. The head nurse made rounds. A report was given to Commander Col. Mickey. She had come to the base hospital when there was hardly a board in place.

In 1918 Helen Wray went overseas. Her sister was at Camp Grant during the terrible flu epidemic. There was also a minor spinal meningitis epidemic. They tried out a new treatment for pneumonia. The nurses called it "Chicken serum". Red Cross had started at Camp Grant before she left. Families from all over the Middle West would come and there wasn't even a place for them to sit down until the Red Cross took over that work. In 1919 she came back from overseas.

She spoke of a base hospital 70 or 80 miles from Paris in a little town, Nesdes. At the war's end the French soldiers when discharged were just turned loose. Some tried to walk home. The Americans tried to help them some with trucks at least part of the way.

Morale at Camp Grant and its hospital was wonderful. People of Rockford were very cooperative in providing entertainment.

In the question and answer period, Jack Mundy told that during the flu epidemic they were very short of help. Anyone who could walk was accepted to help. He checked the trucks that brought the dead soldiers to Rockford. These drivers made up a convoy. It was cold, snowy weather and as you walked along you couldn't see the street for the snow. The morgue was up on North First Street. They brought in five trucks at a time, twice a day. The embalmers were there and kept very busy. There were marching groups for a number of military funerals in Rockford. They would commandeer soldiers to help. Those soldiers would



rather face a gun than to come help. It was a country-wide epidemic. Col. Hagadorn committed suicide because he felt so helpless to deal with this crisis.

Miss Helen Wray was mustered out July 8, 1918, not quite two years of service.

We had another World War I army nurse in the audience. This was Mabel Johnson, the widow of W. Ashton Johnson, better known as "Ash". (See: Nuggets of History, Vol. X, No. 2 March-April 1973 "Willard Ashton "Ash" Johnson, First Honorary President")

Gertrude Pedersen, an Army nurse World War II, spoke for Rockford Chapter DAR recently on the subject "Experiences of an Army Nurse". Wearing a portion of her uniform, she gave a stirring and sometimes chilling report not only of what she saw when she was sent to Dakau near Munick, Germany, but her feelings and horror when they helped in the rescue of Jewish people interned and tortured there. The survivors were in a desperate state. Pictures were taken of stacked bodies and Gertrude has one as well as an etching on her mind that will not entirely go away. It was just after this experience that she was stricken with typhus and hospitalized. She tells of nurses' uniforms, their accommodations, their duties. Her talk is partly amusing and often instructive.

Where were you on Armistice Day, November 11, 1918? I must have been about ten years of age. My fervor was as great as that of the adults for I had been singing for local gatherings such songs as "Long Boy" and "Over There". My mother had been a leader in organizing drives to sell war bonds, with cars going out in various directions into the country adjoining our small town. She had been in charge of our local Red Cross room where she was the cutter for the women who were folding bandages. My father operat-

ed a grain elevator and would have been exempt anyway but was also over the draft age. He joined the home guards, a group of men who drilled regularly and submitted to the term of "tin soldiers" from some people. World War I had a tremendous impact on our community. We went to a near-by city to see General Pershing. On that evening we all turned out for a celebration of Armistice when fighting ended in World War I. Some enterprising citizens had made an effigy so we could "burn the Kaiser in effigy". We made noise in various ways around a bon-fire. I think I beat on a kitchen pan. Perhaps that is the reason some of us forget to say Veteran's Day and use the old appellation, "Armistice Day".

It is right and proper to honor the veterans of all wars in which our country has engaged. It is fitting to choose the day first proclaimed in 1919 by President Woodrow Wilson as a day to remind Americans of the tragedies of war. It became a federal holiday in 1938 and the name was changed by Congress to Veteran's Day in 1954.

Robert Borden (See: Nuggets of History, Vol. XVII, No. 3 "The End of World War II") in which he relates some of his war-time recollections for World War II. With the aid of Ruth Lunde, Local History and Genealogy Room Rockford Public Library, Bob has made a very informative set of slides on Camp Grant. There were maps showing the owners of the land that the United States Government took over for Camp Grant, views of such buildings as Red Cross, Knights of Columbus, Y.M.C.A., the check point when entering the camp so familiar to many young women taken under military escort for an evening of dancing and kept under strict surveillance to see that they stayed in the recreation area, reception center, hospital, and other points of interest.

Billy Goodson, Rockford Park District, supervisor for the environmental program, lives at Atwood Environmental Center. He showed films of the children who come thereto learn about the great out-of-doors. They have also discovered artifacts left from Camp Grant and make a kind of museum or display of these. The children have discovered not only the small animals, the beauty of plants and flowers or flowing water, but have found a sense of history in this place associated with two wars in which our country was engaged. They learn that people still living can tell much of being involved in the civilian or military events of those times.

NUGGETS OF HISTORY is published quarterly by the Rockford Historical Society, Rockford, Illinois, William J. Garson, President, 3516 Meadow Lane 61107; Jack Mundy, Vice President; Lawrence Wendland, Treasurer; Sue Patric, Recording Secretary; Winona Madden, Corresponding Secretary; Gertrude Mead, Past President; Robert H. Borden, Editor; Hazel M. Hyde, Associate Editor; Mrs. Warren Burlend, typist; Mrs. Patricia Dauenbaugh, Circulation Chairman, 1507 Greenmount Street, Rockford, Illinois 61107, Telephone 962-1268. For membership information, contact Russell Miller, Membership Chairman, 5003 Delmar Street, Telephone 399-7565