

## ERIC NORELIUS, MINNESOTA'S CHURCH FATHER

Bernhard Erling

### Early Years in Sweden

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Eric Norelius was born October 26, 1833, in Norbäck, Hassela parish, Hälsingland, Sweden.<sup>1</sup> He was taught to read by his father when he was six years old. In preparation for confirmation he read Bible history and memorized Luther's Small Catechism, together with the explanatory Bible verses. While in the winter tending charcoal kilns he did other reading, *A Refutation of the Doctrine of Works and a Defense of the Gospel* by Fredrik Gabriel Hedberg, Luther's *Lectures on Galatians*, and *The Book of Concord*. The Folk School Law of 1842 required each Swedish parish to establish a school with a qualified teacher. Eric had begun to go to the parish school in the winter of 1847. He walked six miles to the school, carrying with him enough food for the week, while he lodged at the home of an old soldier. He studied arithmetic, geography, the history of Sweden, and Latin, largely without direction from the teacher. The teacher examined him and encouraged him to continue his studies at the *gymnasium* in Hudiksvall. Eric's father accepted this proposal and Eric began his studies there February 6, 1849. Having done much independent study, he made rapid progress, but he was not wholly satisfied with the teachers at Hudiksvall, who he felt held to the Lutheran confessions only in a formalistic way. In

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<sup>1</sup> Sources used in this account of Norelius' life are the following: Norelius began keeping a diary when he was fifteen. Journals he kept from 1833-1856, and then again 1885-1886, when he traveled on a missionary journey to America's west coast, have been translated by G. Everett Arden, *The Journals of Eric Norelius, A Swedish Missionary on the American Frontier* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967). Near the end of his life Norelius wrote memoirs covering the years 1833-1862, which were published in the Swedish periodical *Augustana*, then translated by Emeroy Johnson for *The Lutheran Companion*. Finally the translated memoirs appeared in book form, *Early Life of Eric Norelius (1833-1862), A Lutheran Pioneer* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1934). Emeroy Johnson has also written a biography of Norelius, *Eric Norelius, Pioneer Midwest Pastor and Churchman* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1954). In addition to these sources available in English, Norelius published *De svenska luterska församlingarnas och svenskarnes historia i America* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, vol. 1, 1890, vol. 2, 1916. Selected chapters of vol. 1 have been translated by Conrad Bergendoff, *The Pioneer Swedish Settlements and Swedish Lutheran Churches in America 1845-1860*, Rock Island: Augustana Historical Society, 1984) and *Vasa illustrata* (Vasa, 1905). For the years of Norelius' presidency of the Augustana Synod, see *Protokoll, Skandinaviska Ev. Lutheraka Augustana-Synodens årsmöten, 1874-81*, Augustana Book Concern, 1917 (reprint); Chicago, 1879; Moline, 1881; *Referat, Augustana-Synodens årsmöten, 1899-1911*, Augustana Book Concern.

the spring of 1850 he told his parents that he did not want to return to school. When they told him that the alternatives were either to work as a laborer or return, he reluctantly did return to Hudiksvall, though he chose to study privately. As he thought of his desire to prepare for the ministry, he was not sure that his parents would be able to afford to continue to support him. A friendly pastor advised him that it would be easier for a penniless student to receive an education in America than in Sweden. His parents agreed with this counsel and offered to pay the cost of Eric's fare to America and also that of his older brother, Anders.

### **From Hassela to Andover**

On July 18, 1850, Eric and Anders left their home in Norrbäck, Hassela parish, for the long journey to America. In Hudiksvall they boarded a steamer bound for Gävle, where they had to wait three weeks until their ship "Odin" was ready to sail to New York. More than a hundred had gathered for the journey, intending to form a settlement in America and establish an evangelical Lutheran congregation. They had hoped to call a pastor to come with them and a Stockholm schoolteacher, Gustaf Palmquist, had accepted their call, promising to come the next year. When, however, he arrived two years later in 1852, he had become a Baptist. Several persons died during the voyage and were buried at sea. At times the winds were against them and the ship made little progress. At other times there were gales so strong that the sails could not be used. One storm that lasted for three days was so intense that the kitchen, a shanty on the deck, could hardly be used to prepare any meals. There were also sunny pleasant days. Eric saw dolphins and a whale, and finally, shortly after his seventeenth birthday, flocks of black birds and sea gulls, indicating land was near.

On October 31 the "Odin" arrived in New York harbor. In 1850 there were only 3,559 Swedish born persons in the United States, many of who were followers of Erik Jansson, who had established a colony at Bishop Hill, Illinois, a few miles from Andover, Illinois. In the New York harbor there was a ship, the "Bethel Ship," used as a church. Its pastor was Olaf G. Hedström, a Methodist. Eric and a few others attended services there. Hedström gave them good practical advice about how to travel inland. Eric also asked him about possibilities of studying for the holy ministry and Hedström told him that ways and means could be found if he became a Methodist. Those who had come on the "Odin" had such confidence in Eric that he was sent with two guards to a Wall Street bank to exchange their Swedish money for American money. He returned with several thousand dollars in gold and distributed to each according to

how much Swedish money had been turned over to him. Everyone was satisfied and Eric was paid five dollars for what he had done.

From New York the group traveled by steamer to Albany. From there they had an uncomfortable railway ride to Buffalo, where they had to wait two days for a steamer to take them across the Great Lakes to Chicago. The steamer was crowded and between Lake Erie and Lake Huron ran aground on a sandbar, where they were stuck for eight hours. In Chicago they found other Swedes, among them Gustaf Unonius, who had been ordained a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church. He had organized a Swedish congregation in Chicago and claimed to be a true representative of the Swedish Church in America. He offered to help Eric continue with his schooling, but advised him for the present to stay with the company journeying farther into Illinois. They were able to take a boat on the Illinois River a hundred miles to Peru, about seventy miles from Andover. Some, who could afford it, hired horses, wagons, and drivers to take them and their luggage the remaining distance. Eric, his brother, and thirteen others decided to walk. After three days they arrived at Andover in the midst of a driving snowstorm. Where they had expected to find a fair-sized village, they found only a few scattered houses on the open prairie, but they also found the home of Pastor Lars Paul Esbjörn, who had come to the United States the previous year.

### **Esbjörn and Eric's Studies at Capital University**

Eric remained with the Esbjörns for about a month. Esbjörn urged him to consider studying at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, an institution that was willing to support a Swedish student wanting to prepare for the ministry. Esbjörn had received money so that Eric could stay with them until he went to Columbus. Eric was hesitant at first to agree with this proposal. He didn't want to be a burden to the Esbjörns, where each day many crowded around the table. He tried to find work in Galesburg and Moline. Finally a farmer, Abraham Hartzel, of German descent, who had come from Pennsylvania, invited him stay as a member of his family, which included a wife of Irish descent and six children. Eric was to do chores morning and evening and could attend without cost the nearby public school. Eric stayed with the Hartzels three months, during which time he made considerable progress in reading and understanding English, studying also the history and the geography of the United States.

On April 24, 1851, Eric, having accepted the offer to enroll at Capital University, began his journey to Columbus, Ohio. Pastor Esbjörn, who was traveling eastward, visiting German and

English congregations, seeking financial aid for the erection of church buildings for the Swedish immigrants in Illinois and Iowa, was his traveling companion as far as Columbus. They traveled by steamboat down the Mississippi River, up the Ohio River to Cincinnati, and then by train to Columbus, where they arrived May 10. Eric began his studies May 26 in a term that concluded July 23. He found some work during the remainder of the summer, sawing and cutting wood, also selling books. He remained at Capital University for two years, not regularly enrolling in classes, since Lars Paul Esbjörn like Norelius was a native of Hälsingland. He had studied at the University of Uppsala and been ordained in the Church of Sweden. He had been influenced by the pietistic movement that flourished in northern Sweden during the 1830's and 1840's. While serving in a number of parishes he experienced opposition from the church authorities, in part due to his pietistic leanings and his zeal for the cause of temperance. This in part led him to decide to emigrate and in 1849 he led an immigrant party to America and settled in Andover. Eric remained with the Esbjörns for about a month. Esbjörn urged him to consider studying at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, an institution that was willing to support a Swedish student wanting to prepare for the ministry. Esbjörn had received money so that Eric could stay with them until he went to Columbus. Eric was hesitant at first to agree with this proposal. He wasn't sure what kind of Lutherans he would find at Capital. He also wanted his independence and didn't want to be a burden to the Esbjörns, where each day many crowded around the table. He tried for some months to find work in Galesburg and Moline. Finally a farmer, Abraham Hartzel, of German descent, who had come from Pennsylvania, invited him stay as a member of his family, which included a wife of Irish descent and six children. Eric was to do chores morning and evening and could attend without cost the nearby public school. Eric stayed with the Hartzels three months, during which time he made considerable progress in reading and understanding English, studying also the history and the geography of the United States. On April 24, 1851, Eric, having accepted the offer to enroll at Capital University, began his journey to Columbus, Ohio. Pastor Esbjörn, who was traveling eastward, visiting German and English congregations, seeking financial aid for the erection of church buildings for the Swedish immigrants in Illinois and Iowa, was to be his traveling companion as far as Columbus. They traveled by steamboat down the Mississippi River and then up the Ohio River to Cincinnati and then by train to Columbus, where they arrived May 10. Eric was ill for a time, but was able to begin his studies May 26 in a term that concluded July 23. He found some work during the

remainder of the summer, sawing and cutting wood, also selling books. He remained at Capital University for two years. Since he preferred to study privately, he was not regularly enrolled in classes, though he did value instruction in Greek. He developed a working knowledge of English, German, and Latin, as well as Greek.

Eric was troubled when he received a letter from his brother, Anders, informing him that he had become a Baptist. He also heard in the spring of 1853 that his parents were planning to immigrate to America. He realized now that there would be no reason for him to return to live and work in Sweden. At the end of the spring term of 1853 he felt that he was as advanced as the seniors, but the faculty was not willing to let him to graduate because he had not been at Capital four years. He decided to go to New York that summer, hoping to find work while awaiting the arrival of his parents. As he left Columbus he was not certain that he would return. In New York through the help of Anders Wiberg, a pastor originally from the Church of Sweden who had become a Baptist, Eric met a wealthy Baptist ship owner, who hired him as an office boy for two dollars a week, which enabled him to pay for board and room. His parents did not arrive that summer, but he heard that a group of immigrants from Småland had come, accompanied by a pastor, Erland Carlsson. They had already left for the Midwest. Eric presumed that Carlsson would very likely remain in Chicago, where there were many Swedes and a pastor was sorely needed. He decided to travel to Chicago, where he did meet Pastor Carlsson. He taught children in the fall at a parochial school and also helped Pastor Carlsson with some preaching. Later in the fall Eric's parents came through Chicago, and then went on to spend the winter in Moline. In the spring of 1854 Eric also traveled to Andover, where he visited Pastor Esbjörn and also preached in Andover. He preached in Moline as well, since the congregation had no resident pastor. Having returned to Andover, Eric heard that Pastor Carlsson was making a trip up the Mississippi to Minnesota and hoped to accompany him. By the time he got back to Moline and Rock Island, Carlsson had already left. Eric and some others who wanted to visit the Chisago Lake settlement waited five days for the next boat. This was to be Eric's first visit to Minnesota. They arrived Sunday, May 21 in St. Paul, where Eric was requested to conduct services that evening. On May 25, Ascension Day, he came to Chisago Lake, where Pastor Carlsson had some days earlier organized a congregation before leaving. Eric conducted services there and was invited to do so throughout the summer, teaching school during the week.

### **Northern Indiana, His Marriage and License to Preach**

In September Eric returned to Andover, where he found a cholera epidemic raging, with many sick and dying. Pastor Esbjörn strongly advised Eric to return to Capital University. This he decided to do, accompanied by Esbjörn's youngest son, Joseph, who was planning to begin studies at Capital. Passing through Chicago he visited Erland Carlsson, who was recovering from cholera. Carlsson advised him while en route to Columbus to visit Swedes living in northern Indiana. On October 8 Eric held a service in a rented Methodist church in West Point. Among those who attended the service, he met Peter Peterson a zealous lay spiritual leader in the community, and also noticed Inga Charlotte, Peterson's seventeen-year-old youngest daughter. He hoped to see her again, since he was invited to return to preach at Christmas. Some weeks later he heard that Peter Peterson had suddenly died of cholera. At Christmas, in addition to preaching at West Point, he visited the Peterson family to console them and before leaving West Point he proposed marriage to Inga Charlotte, who answered, "Yes, if it is God's will." They saw each other again at Easter and were married June 10.

During the winter term at Capital University, Eric devoted himself entirely to theological studies, church history, symbolics, dogmatics, ethics, homiletics, catechetics, and pastoral theology. Because he moved into theological study before he had completed a baccalaureate degree, he received no degrees from Capital. He gave considerable thought to whether he should seek ordination in the Ohio Synod, which required adherence to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, or in the Synod of Northern Illinois, which acknowledged the Augsburg Confession conditionally, as "mainly correct." Esbjörn urged him to join the Synod of Northern Illinois, stating his conservative reservation in regard to doctrine and the symbolical books as Esbjörn had done. Eric decided to join the Synod of Northern Illinois in order to avoid schism among the Swedish Lutheran people. He also intended to work for separation of the Scandinavians from the Synod of Northern Illinois. At a meeting of the Scandinavian pastors in Chicago April 12-15, he was urged, because of the great need for pastors, to discontinue his studies and apply for examination, which could lead to his receiving an interim license to preach, a preparatory step to ordination. He chose to do this. The results of the examination were satisfactory and he received a license from Simeon W. Harkey, the president of the synod, dated April 15, 1855. He was then directed to return to the congregation at West Point, Indiana, that Erland Carlsson had organized the previous February, where there were also four other preaching places.

### **Minnesota - Red Wing and Vasa**

Norelius was well received at West Point but he had no intention to stay there. He did not believe that there were good prospects for further Swedish settlements in Indiana and he therefore encouraged people to move further west. He also had a strong desire to labor in the wilderness areas of Minnesota. The last weeks of August, 1855, he and Nils Håkansson, a deacon at West Point, left for Minnesota. They traveled by railroad to Dunleith, Illinois, where they took a river boat up the Mississippi and landed at Red Wing. Here Norelius looked for Swedes and found Håkan Olsson, who wanted to establish a Swedish Lutheran congregation in Red Wing. Through Olsson's efforts about 100 persons attended a Saturday evening service at a Presbyterian church, while more attended a service Sunday afternoon. Norelius promised to meet them Monday evening for the purpose of possibly organizing a congregation. Since word had spread also to the countryside, a man came on horseback looking for the visiting pastor. He was August Johnson from a Swedish settlement twelve miles west of Red Wing, a settlement as yet without a name, though it was sometimes called "Mattson's settlement," for Hans Mattson had settled here in 1853. Norelius agreed to come and rode the horse, while Johnson walked. They arrived too late for a service that night, but the next day, Monday, September 3, eighty-seven persons crowded into Carl Carlsson's log cabin for a service, after which the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Vasa, the first Lutheran congregation in Goodhue county, was organized. The name Vasa was chosen because it was the name of the royal family in Sweden at the time of the Reformation in Sweden in 1523. On Tuesday Norelius returned to Red Wing, held an evening service at the Presbyterian church, and organized the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Red Wing, with fifty-four communicants and thirty children as charter members.

Desiring to show Nils Håkansson other places in Minnesota where Swedes had settled, they traveled to the Chisago Lake community, where Norelius had served the previous summer. There had been considerable growth in the population and there were plans to build a church, since the schoolhouse in which they were meeting was not large enough. After some days Norelius and Håkansson went back to Red Wing and Vasa. A communion service was held in Vasa in one of the largest houses, after which they returned to Indiana.

### **Call to Red Wing and Vasa**

Not long thereafter Norelius received a call to serve as pastor of the congregations he had organized in Red Wing and Vasa. He decided to accept the call and planned to move to Minnesota in the spring of 1856. Eric and Inga Charlotte Norelius left West Point April 30, 1856. Norelius preached his farewell sermon in Lafayette on Ascension Day, and they arrived in Chicago the same day, where they stayed with Erland and Eva Carlsson. Some days were spent at a special session of the Synod of Northern Illinois in Geneva, Illinois, considering the question of the Swedish professorship that was to be established at Illinois State University (a Lutheran college) in Springfield, Illinois. The Scandinavian delegates in the synod insisted that the professor who occupied that position should be bound to teach in accordance with the Word of God and the Augsburg Confession. The American delegates did not want to bind the professor to the Augsburg Confession, fearing that such a decision might displease the General Synod and that as a consequence the synod could forfeit the General Synod's home mission support. They therefore formulated a resolution that did bind the professor to the Augsburg Confession, but at the same time gave the impression that the resolution was a compromise, made to accommodate the Scandinavians, who would have to bear the blame, if any, for defining the professorship in this way. Needless to say, Norelius strongly supported the Scandinavian position in this matter.

Eric and Inga Charlotte Norelius arrived in Red Wing May 16. Norelius preached his first sermon in his new pastorate in Red Wing on Trinity Sunday, May 18, in a partly finished store building amid chips and shavings. After the service subscriptions were received for a church building and a total of one hundred four dollars was pledged, fifty dollars already having been collected for this purpose. The next Sunday Norelius preached his first sermon in Vasa in the home of Per Nilsson. The gospel for the Sunday was the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Nilsson was said to be the wealthiest man in the community. Norelius reflected later that had he known this, he would have been more circumspect in his remarks. Nilsson, however, did not regard the sermon as a personal attack on him and invited Norelius and his wife to live rent free with him while their house was built. In addition to his two congregations, Norelius soon found other nearby settlements that needed his services. One of these settlements was Spring Garden. One Sunday at service time a yoke of oxen came pulling a wagon load of people. Two families in the group each had a child they wanted to be baptized. They urged Norelius to come to their settlement as soon as possible. He did come and one very warm Sunday afternoon a communion



service was being held in a small log cabin. The sashes at each end of the cabin had been removed to provide better ventilation. A board had been nailed by one of these windows to serve as a communion table. As Norelius began to preach his preparatory sermon, a hen flew in through the window, scattering the bread on the communion table and cackling furiously as she landed on the floor. The hen was chased out and Norelius resumed his sermon, but soon the hen repeated her performance, this time tipping over the wine bottle, which, though it fell to the floor, fortunately did not break. A man was then stationed outside by the window to protect the communicants from the zealous hen. Other communities in that area that Norelius visited and where congregations were established were Stockholm in Wisconsin, across the Mississippi River, Cannon Falls, and Cannon River, a few miles from the village of Cannon Falls.

In the fall he and P. A. Cederstam, who was serving the congregation in Chisago Lake, traveled to a meeting of the Synod of Northern Illinois in Dixon, Illinois, where both, after having been licensed for a year, were examined and ordained on September 12, 1856. In the spring of 1857 Norelius made a journey to Carver County. He traveled from St. Paul by river boat down the Minnesota River. For the "Oscar settlement," later known as East Union, Norelius succeeded in securing a pastor, Peter Carlson, who was licensed in 1858. That year Carlson organized two congregations, East Union and West Union. Carlson was ordained in 1859 and served both congregations until 1871, and East Union until 1879. Norelius made another similar trip to Waseca County in the summer of 1858 to visit some of his former Indiana parishioners. On that journey Vista Lutheran Church was organized on August 7.

#### ***Minnesota Posten, Organization of the Minnesota Conference***

Norelius' first pastorate in Vasa and Red Wing lasted from May, 1856 to October, 1858. During this period, in addition to his pastoral duties, he published a biweekly paper, *Minnesota Posten*, the first issue of which appeared November 7, 1857. The aim of the paper was to serve the Swedes, especially in Minnesota, both in public and churchly matters. Scientific and literary matters would receive attention, also agriculture and the arts. There would be news from Sweden as well. The appearance of this paper was a matter of concern to Tufve Nilson Hasselquist, in Galesburg, Illinois, the editor and publisher of *Hemlandet, det Gamla och det Nya*, for Norelius' paper became a competitor. Furthermore, when Norelius wrote editorials setting forth arguments for the establishment of a Minnesota Synod, Hasselquist was doubly concerned. Norelius said that he would prefer a Swedish Lutheran Synod, though he saw small

likelihood that this hope would be fulfilled. If, then, the Swedes in Illinois had joined a synod in Illinois, in which there were other Lutherans, why should not the Swedes in Minnesota join a comparable synod in their state? It was costly and difficult to travel to meetings in Illinois, especially in the winter, when travel on the Mississippi was not possible. The Minnesota pastors also felt that home missionary activity in Minnesota was not being adequately supported by the congregations in Illinois. Norelius and the other pastors and licentiates in Minnesota received letters from Esbjörn, Hasselquist, and Erland Carlsson urging them, despite these arguments, not to leave the Synod of Northern Illinois to join a synod in Minnesota, for this would divide the Swedes, weaken their influence in the Synod of Northern Illinois, and make it difficult to support the Scandinavian professorship in Springfield, Illinois. These letters did have some effect on Norelius and the other Swedish clergy in Minnesota.

A meeting was held to organize a Minnesota synod July 5, 1858, in Red Wing at the Swedish Lutheran Church, which was being served by Norelius. Pastors present were C. F. Heyer of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, Albrecht Brandt of the Indianapolis Synod, William Weir of the Buffalo Synod, William Thomson of the English Synod of Ohio, and two pastors, P. A. Cederstam and Eric Norelius, and two licentiates, Peter Beckman and Peter Carlsson of the Synod of Northern Illinois. There were also six laymen in attendance, five of whom were Swedish. The Swedes at the meeting stated that they favored the formation of the synod, but were not prepared to join it, for this could be interpreted as schism by the Swedish brethren in Illinois, with whom they wanted to carry on further discussion of this matter. The four German pastors did organize the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in Minnesota. It was to be based on the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, as interpreted in the other Lutheran symbolical books. The Swedes met after the meeting and agreed to meet again in the fall. They asked permission of the Synod of Northern Illinois to organize a conference in Minnesota and the Swedish pastors in Illinois did not oppose this plan. October 7-9 at Chisago Lake the Lutheran Minnesota Conference, a fourth conference of the Synod of Northern Illinois (in addition to the Chicago, Rock Valley, and Mississippi conferences) was organized. The Swedish clergy in attendance were Norelius, Peter Beckman, Peter Carlson, and Johann Peter Carlsson Boreen (or Borén), newly arrived from Sweden, who was licensed to assist Norelius in Vasa and Red Wing. P. A. Cederstam was absent. There were also four lay delegates. Norelius had written a brief three

article constitution. It called for three meetings of the Conference each year and stressed the Conference's home mission responsibility. Three weeks later, however, Norelius left Minnesota.

Probably the chief reason Norelius left Vasa and Red Wing after a pastorate lasting only from May, 1856 to October, 1858, was that, due to hard economic times in 1857 and 1858 the congregations were unable to pay the salary they had promised. Norelius himself was in debt, some of it possibly related to his attempt to publish *Minnesota Posten*, which after some months had three hundred subscribers, though few of them had sent any money. The paper lasted less than a year, the last issue dated October 19, 1858. Norelius was also disappointed with spiritual attitudes in his parish. Church attendance was not what he expected it to be, though in Red Wing they were more faithful, where Norelius felt that there were a few true Christians. He had, furthermore, an opportunity to leave. He had been called by the United Scandinavian Conferences of the Northern Illinois Synod to travel as an agent in the eastern states gathering money for the Scandinavian students in Springfield. Before he could begin, however, he was advised that due to that year's hard times it was unwise to attempt such solicitation. Hurriedly a proposal Hasselquist had earlier made, that his paper *Hemlandet* could be moved to Chicago with Norelius as editor was agreed upon. Norelius was to begin his new duties the beginning of the year 1859.

Soon, however, Norelius grew restive in *Hemlandet's* office. He had to respond to critique from Hasselquist and he found that editing a paper for an organization was not the same as editing one's own paper. In September he published a farewell message, explaining that the problem of reconciling his own thinking with faithfully representing many wills was his reason for leaving the paper. He had explored the possibility of returning to Minnesota. Instead he went to Attica, Indiana, the area in which he had served during the first year of his ministry. Living in Attica, it was possible to invite Esbjörn and his wife to come from Springfield, Illinois, to be with them at Christmas, when a new church in Attica was to be dedicated. During their time together during those holidays Norelius and Esbjörn discussed the possibility of secession from the Synod of Northern Illinois and the organization of a Scandinavian synod.

### **The Organization of the Augustana Synod**

During the months in 1859 and 1860 that Eric Norelius spent in Attica, he must have devoted much attention to the proposal that the Scandinavian pastors and congregations organize their own synod. It was the subject discussed in several letters that passed between Norelius and

Esbjörn. The chief reason for separation, about which they were agreed, was the confessional laxity of the Synod of Northern Illinois, which in its constitution only affirmed that the Augsburg Confession was “mainly correct.” Scandinavian pastors stated a conservative reservation when they joined the synod, and there was hope that as their numbers grew they could exert a conservative influence on the synod. A synodical decision had been made in May 1856 to establish a Scandinavian theological professorship at Illinois State University (despite its name a private church-related college), this professor being required to teach according to the Word of God and the Augsburg Confession, but some months later in October the Scandinavians had to struggle against an effort to rescind this confessional requirement. This effort was unsuccessful and in 1857 Lars Paul Esbjörn was called to be the Scandinavian professor and accepted the call.

Norelius and Esbjörn collaborated in the struggle to maintain the relevance of the Augsburg Confession in American Lutheranism. Though Norelius was twenty-five years younger than Esbjörn, the two addressed each other as colleagues. In some respects Esbjörn was Norelius’ mentor, but with respect to what confessional loyalty required, Norelius had felt he could advise Esbjörn. By 1860, however, they had reached considerable agreement on this issue. In some conferences of the Synod of Northern Illinois there were those who preferred the Definite Synodical Platform, published in 1855 by Dr. Samuel S. Schmucker, president of Gettysburg Seminary, to subscription to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. For Esbjörn and the Scandinavian students at Illinois State University the struggle between those called “platformists” and “symbolists” became a very serious matter. An attempt had been made by the platformists in 1859 to add a preamble to the synod’s constitution stating that doctrinal differences the Scandinavian conferences considered extremely vital were but “minor points of disagreement.” The Scandinavians were convinced that if this preamble had been adopted it would have had the practical effect of making the doctrinal article of the constitution a dead letter. There was considerable agreement among the Scandinavians that at the convention of the synod to be held in Knoxville, IL, in the fall of 1860 action would be taken to leave the Synod of Northern Illinois, though these plans were kept strictly secret. Events that transpired during the spring of 1860 led to an earlier development of these plans.

At the university Esbjörn as the Scandinavian professor felt that he was responsible for the spiritual life of the Scandinavian students. He was not wholly satisfied with the local Lutheran church, of which Dr. William M. Reynolds, the president of the university, was the pastor,

because he found no reference in the congregation's constitution to the Augsburg Confession. He did not therefore become a member of the congregation and preferred not to commune there. He asked permission of Dr. Reynolds to hold special communion services for his students, where the Swedish language could be used. This permission was at first granted but then denied. Esbjörn did not accept this refusal and held a communion service for the Scandinavian students in his home. At this service he warned his students against the "new Lutheranism" to which they were being exposed at the university and stated that Dr. Reynolds was unsound in doctrine. When Reynolds heard of this he was angered, went March 30, 1860, to Esbjörn's home, charged him with insubordination and bad faith, and demanded that Esbjörn apologize for what he had done. Esbjörn concluded that if he refused to do this he would be disciplined before the faculty. To escape the reach of Reynolds, Esbjörn chose to resign, which he did the following day. Esbjörn then left Illinois State University for Chicago, with seventeen of the twenty Scandinavian students. One Dane and one Norwegian remained in Springfield and one Swede discontinued his studies. In April the United Scandinavian Conference met to hear Esbjörn explain the reasons for his abrupt resignation. Dr. Reynolds and Dr. Simon W. Harkey also attended the meeting and spoke for the university. Though Reynolds and Harkey harshly criticized Esbjörn, the United Scandinavian Conference voted to approve what he had done and made plans to meet in June to organize a new synod.

Norelius was the youngest of the twenty-six Scandinavian pastors and the fifteen laymen who met in the Norwegian Lutheran Church at Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin, June 5-11, 1860, to implement the decisions that had been made at the convention of the United Scandinavian Conference in April. He made two significant contributions during that meeting. He suggested the name "Augustana," which expressed the importance of the Augsburg Confession for this new synod. The name did not identify the synod with any one ethnic group. The synod was composed of Swedes and Norwegians, and, when the Norwegians left in 1870, the synod's name did not have to be changed. From the beginning it was evident that the synod was open to Lutherans of several ethnic backgrounds. Norelius also introduced resolutions having to do with home missions. The resolutions called for a committee to have charge of this matter and also for a traveling missionary, especially in Minnesota, as soon as circumstances would permit such a person to be called.

### **Traveling Missionary in Minnesota**

After the Augustana Synod had been organized, Norelius left immediately for Minnesota, where he attended a meeting of the Minnesota Conference in East Union, preaching the opening sermon. Though still a resident of Indiana, he was elected president of the Conference, an office the duties of which were limited to that meeting. Much of the business of the meeting concerned the need for a traveling missionary in Minnesota. The Conference hoped Norelius could be given that call. After the Synod made an unsuccessful attempt to call such a missionary from Sweden, President T. N. Hasselquist, chairman of the Synod's home mission committee did extend this call to Norelius in July, 1860. Norelius accepted the call and left his congregation in Attica, Indiana. When the Minnesota Conference met again October 19-21 he had returned to Minnesota and was present for discussion of details regarding his work as traveling missionary. It was decided that he should live in St. Paul, where the congregation was urged to call him as their pastor and provide him with a house.

His immediate need was for a means of transportation. A member of the St. Paul congregation bought a horse and wagon with funds lent by the Conference. Norelius set out on his first journey, planning to spend the first weekend in East Union settlement, where he preached that Sunday. On Monday two men arrived from St. Paul with a document attesting that the horse and wagon Norelius had gotten were stolen property. The men took the horse and wagon and left. To provide himself again with a means of transportation, in East Union Norelius borrowed a horse, which he was told was blind, and a sleigh rather than a wagon, for snow was beginning to fall. He then set out for other Swedish settlements to the north and west. He had planned a longer trip through what were known as "the Big Woods" to Meeker and Kandiyohi counties. Since there was only a short time before Christmas, he was advised to make a shorter trip through the forests in Carver and McCleod counties. He visited and preached in Swedish settlements in Waconia and Watertown. Near Glencoe he found it necessary twice to drive through an Indian encampment consisting of fifteen teepees. On his return Indian hunters came out of the woods and climbed on his sleigh, until it was almost too heavy for his horse to pull. As he drove again through the encampment, there was much noise, dogs barking, women scolding when some teepee poles were knocked down, children shouting for treats, men whooping, but no one attempted to do Norelius any harm. These same Indians, however, took part in the Indian uprising in 1862.

Upon his return to St. Paul he feared that his family would have a poor Christmas, for his money was gone. He had found the blind horse reliable and had bought it and the sleigh, had built a shed for the horse and bought fodder. But he had not received the whole amount of his salary. Walking the streets of St. Paul and praying about his situation, he felt he should go to the post office. There he found a letter from Dr. William A. Passavant, which contained a draft for \$100 from an offering received at St. John's Lutheran Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The gift strengthened Norelius' faith in God who answers the prayers of those suffering poverty and tribulation.

After Christmas he set out again in January for Meeker and Kandiyohi counties. Now he encountered stormy weather and much snow. At times the snowdrifts were so deep that the horse had to stop to rest a while before continuing to make his way through them. One of the settlers gave Norelius a compass, so that he could find his way through forests and trackless prairies.

In Hutchinson he spent a night in an unheated hotel room, sleeping in all his clothing, cap, sheepskin coat, four pairs of stockings, and moccasin boots.

On a Sunday near the present Grove City a Methodist minister, who was also visiting the Swedish settlements, had been invited to preach. An arrangement was made whereby both preached at different times and venues and both Norelius and the Methodist minister slept that night in the same bed.

Norelius traveled as far west as Nest Lake near present Spicer. On the way back to St. Paul he encountered a storm that kept increasing in fury until he was lost on the prairie. He had thought that the dependence of his blind horse on him was like his dependence on God. This time, however, he depended on the horse, which kept pulling the sleigh until they found a fence that led to a dwelling. Those living there directed Norelius to the dugout home of a Swedish family, where he was able to stay while snowbound for a whole week. In February the Minnesota Conference met in St. Paul and Norelius was able to report that since coming to Minnesota he had traveled six hundred miles, preached sixty-seven times, baptized five children, and organized one congregation.

During the summer of 1861 Norelius visited Fort Snelling several times. In the Third Regiment there was a company that consisted almost entirely of Swedes, together with a few Norwegians. On one visit Norelius held an evening service during which he was deeply moved

by the soldiers' singing of the hymns and the responses in the liturgy. He says that he had never had such an audience, nor experienced such emotion when preaching the Word. Staying that night with two lieutenants, the next morning he pronounced the benediction upon the company and bade them a hearty farewell. Many of them he was not to see again in this life. The next summer there was war also in Minnesota. In the Sioux Uprising of 1862 members of congregations in the area Norelius had visited during his traveling missionary year were scattered and thirteen persons at West Lake near New London were massacred.

### **Red Wing and Vasa 1861-1867**

As Norelius' year as a traveling missionary came to an end, he needed a call. Johann Peter Boreen was to have been Norelius' successor when he moved to Chicago to be editor of *Hemlandet*, but neither congregation was satisfied with Boreen. They wanted Norelius to return. He accepted the call to Red Wing and Vasa and moved from St. Paul to Red Wing in September of 1861. Boreen continued his ministry at nearby Stockholm, Wisconsin, until he died of tuberculosis in 1865. Norelius' first task was to help the Vasa congregation decide where to build a church, for the Augustana Synod had been invited to hold its third annual meeting at Vasa in June 1862. This deadline was narrowly met and the one hundred thirty-four member congregation entertained twenty-four pastors and fifteen lay delegates. The year of 1862 is significant also because Norelius founded a school in Red Wing which became Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter. Only one student, Jonas Magnuson (later Magny), at first enrolled, but by the end of November there were about a dozen pupils. Norelius led the school in Red Wing for one year, when it was moved to East Union and Andrew Jackson became its principal. In 1865 the school was named St. Ansgar's Academy and in 1876 it was moved again to St. Peter, where it received its present name. Though Norelius' period of leadership of his school that became a college was brief, he retained interest in the college's development, served on its board, and was active in discussions about its location. He finally in 1904 supported the decision that the college remain in St. Peter.

In 1865 Norelius established another extremely important institution, the Vasa Children's Home. In 1862 the Augustana Synod had begun to raise money for an orphan's home. Norelius also in 1863 began to gather funds for a children's home. The need for such an institution became actual in the fall of 1865 when a Swedish immigrant family intending to settle in Minnesota arrived in St. Paul. The father and the mother became ill and died, leaving four young



orphaned children. Johan Johanson, a tailor and mainstay of the Lutheran congregation in St. Paul, was appointed legal guardian of the children. He placed the two oldest children at St. Ansgar's Academy in East Union. Norelius had heard about the family tragedy. Without waiting for a Conference decision in the matter he came to St. Paul in October to confer with Johan Johanson. It was agreed that he should take the two younger children, whom he brought to his home in Red Wing. The following Sunday he appealed to the congregation for aid. A widow, Brita Nilson, known as Moster (Aunt) Brita, was willing to care for the children. Brita and the children were first housed in the basement of the Vasa church. Norelius then purchased ten acres of land near the church on which a small building was erected. The household of children grew. When Brita Nilson was no longer able to care for them, she was succeeded by Carolina Magny, who later married M. J. Strandberg. They remained at the Home until 1880. Norelius managed the institution as his personal responsibility until 1876, when the Conference took over the Home. The Vasa Children's home was the first children's home in actual operation in the Augustana Synod, also the first orphan home established by Lutherans in Minnesota.

Norelius devoted himself during this period not only to founding Conference institutions but also to nurturing the life and growth of the Red Wing and Vasa congregations. He used the Swedish custom of *husförhör* (home catechetical meetings) held in the various districts of the congregations, where members met to be examined as to their knowledge of the Catechism. They also were taught how to lead devotional meetings. A Women's Missionary Society, one of the first women's groups of its kind in the Augustana Synod, was organized in Red Wing. Both congregations grew, Vasa more rapidly, and larger church buildings were erected. In 1867 a project was begun in Vasa to build a church that was large enough and worthy of the excellent site that had been chosen. Bricks were made from soil near the building site. The congregation agreed with Norelius that he should be in full charge of securing materials, supervising the work, and securing the funds needed for the project.

#### **Interval 1867-69**

Before construction of the church began, however, Norelius was unable to continue serving the Red Wing and Vasa congregations by reason of illness. He resigned in November 1867 from Red Wing and his resignation was reluctantly accepted. Vasa granted him a leave of absence in hope that his health might soon be restored. Norelius thought a trip to Sweden might help him

convalesce. He sailed April 25, 1868, and returned in the fall. A high point during this trip was his visit with his old friend Lars Paul Esbjörn, then pastor in Östervåla, which brought them both great joy. When Norelius came home to Vasa, however, his health had not improved.

Norelius suffered from ill health periodically during much of his life. During his student years he reported attacks of high fever. On one occasion in Vasa, following exposure to cold, rainy weather, he had an attack of fever and chills while preaching and was compelled to lie down for a while. When he was sufficiently restored, he got up and distributed the sacramental bread and wine to the people, who had waited. What is somewhat surprising is that he does not report any such incidents during the winter of 1860-61 that he was a traveling missionary. It has been suggested that he may have suffered, though eventually recovered, from tuberculosis, which took the life of his associate Pastor Johann P. C. Boreen in 1865. In 1872 T. N. Hasselquist wrote to a friend in Sweden, "It seems that the Lord will soon call Norelius home, according to sorrowful news from Minnesota." In 1891 S. P. A. Lindahl, the President of Synod, in his annual report referred to Norelius sitting in Vasa in broken health, his workday almost ended.

During his periods of convalescence, however, Norelius occupied himself with writing. In 1867 he began to be the historian of the Augustana Synod, a work in which he was engaged for the rest of his life. He was a frequent contributor to *Hemlandet*, published in Chicago. He also wrote a small book, *Ev. Lutherska Augustana-Synoden i Nord-America och dess Mission* (The Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod in North America and Its Mission), which manuscript he must have brought with him on his trip to Sweden, where it was published in Lund in 1870. While the book may have been distributed and read in Sweden, it was written for Swedish immigrants in America, designed to encourage them to retain their Lutheran faith. The book points out differences between the Lutheran Church and other churches in America, gives a short account of the Augustana Synod's history and its constitution, and outlines the Synod's mission. The Episcopalians, Norelius states, so emphasize the bishop's office that they can hardly grant that there can be true Christianity without it. The Methodists stress aroused feelings and the works of a Christian. They teach that perfection is possible, and that those who achieve it do not need daily forgiveness of sins. Lutherans teach that the Christian is justified by faith and being justified does good works but does not achieve perfection in this life. The Presbyterians and the Reformed stress God's absolute election by grace of some to salvation. This strives against

Lutheran teaching that Christ died for all; only those who do not believe are condemned. For the Reformed, furthermore, the sacraments tend to be viewed as something commanded, whereas Lutherans emphasize what is promised in the sacraments. Baptists stress the nature of the baptismal ceremony and the need for complete immersion. Lutherans teach that the use of water in the triune name is all Scripture requires and that baptism is a divine promise, not a duty that we fulfill. Norelius does grant that the Lutheran Church has neglected church discipline, which cannot be exercised very well in a state church, though some progress toward proper church discipline has been made in Augustana congregations.

As to the history of the Augustana Synod, Norelius stated that Swedish immigration began in 1845, when a group led by Peter Kassel settled in New Sweden, Iowa. The next year the followers of Erik Jansson established the Bishop Hill colony in Illinois. The first congregation of what became the Augustana Synod was established in New Sweden in 1848. Not until 1860 was the Augustana Synod organized in Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin. The strictly orthodox Norwegian Wisconsin Synod has criticized Augustana for not being sufficiently true to the Lutheran confessions. This synod also, while regarding human slavery as evil, is unable to teach that it is in itself sinful, because there are passages in the Bible where slavery is not condemned. Norelius states that Augustana holds to the confessional writings but regards them as confessions of a living faith. There is true development of doctrine in the sense that the eternal truth, while always the same in its content, can be more clearly understood and more fully developed. As to Augustana's constitution, it allows a lay ministry where this is needed, but not a free lay ministry alongside of the church's ministry. The mission of the Augustana Synod is to gather into the church the Swedes in America, of which thus far only a small minority belong to Augustana congregations. Schools are to be supported so that pastors can be educated who are able to preach in both Swedish and English. There must be world missions as well as home missions. America is a remarkable country, which will have great power. Swedes have a responsibility to influence its development. They also should seek to influence what happens in Sweden. Norelius indicates the importance he gives to constitutions by including at the end of his book the constitution for congregations adopted in March 1857 by the Chicago and Mississippi Conferences of what later became the Augustana Synod.

In early spring of 1869, Norelius resigned from the Vasa congregation because his health had not sufficiently improved. A pastor called in April did not accept the call. When in July the

congregation met again to call a pastor, they called Norelius. He accepted this call with the understanding that the congregation would call and support an assistant and that he would have freedom to seek betterment of his health.

### **Vasa 1869-1879, Conference and Synod Presidencies**

During these years Norelius becomes much involved in the leadership of the Minnesota Conference and the Augustana Synod. In 1870 the Conference, which had been meeting three times a year and each time electing a chairman for that meeting, decided to elect a president for a one-year term. Norelius was the first person to be elected under this rule, and he was reelected for each of the next three years. At this time several pastors in the Minnesota Conference were restive about the Conference's relationship to the Synod. Some wanted the Conference to become a separate synod. In 1873 the Conference instead of petitioning for independence supported a proposal that the Augustana Synod become a general synod divided into district synods. A constitution was drawn up in 1874 according to which the Augustana Synod would meet triennially, while the district synods would be convened annually. Pastors would be educated at Augustana Seminary, with ordination in the district synods. The constitution was submitted to the Synod in 1874, but no action was taken on until 1875, when it was adopted. It was decisively defeated, however, at the second reading in 1876.

Norelius' role in this development is of interest. In 1873 he was president of the Minnesota Conference when the Conference expressed itself in favor of dividing the Augustana Synod into district synods. He may also have had some part in drawing up the proposed new constitution. On December 20, 1873, Jonas Swensson, the president of the Augustana Synod, suddenly died. Since the Synod at that time had no vice president, the secretary became president pro tem. The secretary was Per Sjöblom, a strong supporter of the district synods proposal. Norelius, however, was elected president of the Synod, while Sjöblom succeeded Norelius as president of the Minnesota Conference. By 1876 Norelius had had time to reflect about the district synods proposal. He expressed his opposition to it and the constitution was defeated by a vote of ninety-four to six.

During Norelius' tenure as synodical president from 1874-1881, there was no salary for the president, though he did receive a yearly allowance of \$50 for stationery and postage. When he was re-elected in 1877 he called attention to the difficulty of serving the Synod while also serving as pastor of a large congregation. The Synod then agreed to pay \$500 per year as salary

for his assistant in Vasa. He did some traveling. The summer of 1876, together with Pastor Peter Carlson of East Union, he visited the settlements along the upper Minnesota River. They rode, studied, and slept in a covered wagon, having brought food with them. Carlson's youngest son, Anders, came along to take care of the horses. They went as far as Big Stone Lake, were gone eighteen days, traveled three hundred forty-eight miles, and slept ten nights in the wagon. They gave twenty-five sermons and addresses, held four communion services, baptized eleven children, and confirmed six. Total expenses for the journey were about twenty-five dollars. In the fall of 1878 Norelius traveled to the "Indian Territory" (now Oklahoma) to investigate the possibility of mission work among the Indians. In the spring of 1879 he visited the New York Conference, which then included New England, preaching in most of the churches and investigating the newly established immigrant mission in New York.

Norelius was president of the Synod during the time of the Waldenströmian controversy. Paul Peter Waldenström was a young lector at the gymnasium in Gävle, Sweden, who at the sudden death of C. O. Rosenius succeeded him as editor of *Pietisten* and leader of the Swedish Evangelical Mission. Waldenström was a biblical scholar especially interested in the doctrine of the atonement. Rosenius in his teaching had presupposed the Anselmian theory of the atonement, that the suffering and death of Christ had satisfied God's wrath. Justice demanded that God punish man eternally for his sin, but Christ had intervened to appease God's wrath, so that Christ's righteousness could be imputed to man for man's justification. Waldenström began to ask with respect to every doctrine, "Where is it written?" Is this understanding of the atonement explicitly spelled out in the Bible? If language such as "God was reconciled in Christ" is missing, then, he said, such a statement need not be believed. In 1872 Waldenström published in *Pietisten* a sermon in which he said that no change occurred in the heart of God as a result of man's fall into sin. What is needed is change in man, which occurs as the sinner believes in Jesus Christ and is reckoned by God as righteous. This preaching became divisive both in Sweden and America. Some pastors and parts of congregations left the Augustana Synod to join the Mission Covenant Church (now Evangelical Covenant Church) or the Evangelical Free Church, both Swedish denominations strongly influenced by Waldenström. The Augustana Ministerium tried Johan Gustaf Princell, pastor of Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church in New York, concerning his views about the atonement and justification in 1878. The committee that examined his answers to their question about these doctrines concluded that he denied teachings

of the Bible and the Lutheran Church. He was suspended until such time as he would publicly retract his errors. A congregation in Brockton, Massachusetts, called him as their pastor despite his suspension. When Norelius visited them in 1879, they had expected stern words from the Synod president. Instead he gave them a simple presentation of the Word of God about Jesus and what he has done for sinners, which gripped them so deeply that they decided to remain in the Synod. Princell, however, left the Augustana Synod and became one of the founders of the Evangelical Free Church.

Eric Norelius, was twice elected president of the Synod, serving 1874-81 as the third president, and 1899-1911 as the seventh president. These nineteen years were the longest tenure of any of Augustana's presidents in the Synod's 102-year history. Norelius' first term was during what he calls the Synod's second stage of development. An important change was the formation of conferences. Hasselquist, the Synod's first president, had sought to visit the Synod's congregations, but with the growth of the Synod this became impossible. This work was now given to the leaders of the conferences. In his reports at the annual Synod conventions Norelius reflects on the state of the world and the church. In his 1875 he says that church and state at an earlier time (presumably in Sweden) had the same worldview and understanding of God. Now the state does not think it needs Christianity for its purposes. The church and the state run on different tracks. Norelius uses apocalyptic imagery as he imagines the future. The church must anticipate a time of lawlessness in preparation for the lawless one's appearance and power on earth. In 1876 he says the struggle between God's kingdom and the scarlet beast, this world's kingdom, is becoming more serious the closer we come to the end. The greatest danger, however, is from false Christianity, those who abandon the confessions, who think being without confessions is a sign of evangelical life in the church. He criticizes the party spirit in congregations, which is subjective and rationalistic. In many of his reports he expresses concern about the Christian education of children and youth. He would prefer that congregations had their own schools, though as time goes on he begins to realize that it may be possible to develop Sunday Schools that are Lutheran.

In 1879, referring to the unbelief of the times, Norelius states that God's truth cannot be negated. For the church God's word remains the final judge and standard, for she has prior assurance that no scientific or experimental discoveries can ever in any real sense contradict the divine word. The church's chief task is to preach God's word. The pastors are faithful, though

one can say that for the most part they preach too much rather than too little. The quality of preaching suffers from its quantity. Pastors generally preach at least three sermons a week, but to prepare thoroughly three sermons a week, while possible, in most cases does not happen. He expresses, however, satisfaction in the increasing confessional faithfulness of Augustana's people. Church discipline is still needed, however, with respect to secret societies, with which a Christian believer who would walk in the light can have no fellowship. Americanization continues especially in the cities and youth are often lost to the congregation. The church must take measures to deal with the language question. If this matter is put off too long the church can suffer irreparable damage.

No explanation is given as to why Norelius resigned from being pastor at Vasa in 1879 other than that Per Johan Swärd had accepted the call to be vice pastor at Vasa. Swärd was extremely capable and was later president of the Synod 1891-99. Norelius was willing to turn the whole pastoral responsibility at Vasa over to Swärd. Since he had built a home on his land near the church, when he resigned he and his family continued to live in Vasa. He was there when the tornado struck shortly before midnight July 2, 1879, destroying the Children's Home and killing five of the children. Norelius and Swärd officiated at the mass funeral on July 4, when ten of the victims were buried, the eleventh dying that day. In addition to his duties as Synod president, Norelius continued with his writing. He was also pastor of a small congregation in nearby Goodhue from 1869-1915, and 1882-84 he was pastor at Spring Garden.

### **Journalism and Further Travel, 1880-1885**

Norelius sought several times to develop a paper in Minnesota. He edited *Minnesota Posten* 1857-58, *Missionären* 1870-71, which he tried unsuccessfully to bring to Minnesota and make it an organ of the Minnesota Conference, and *Luthersk Kyrkotidning* 1872-73. In 1878 he began to cooperate with two other pastors, Per Sjöblom of Red Wing and Anders Peter Montén of St. Paul in the publication of *Skaffaren*. Sjöblom and Montén were both vigorous and aggressive. There was another Swedish paper in Minnesota, *Minnesota Stats-Tidning*, which had begun publication in 1877. Montén found a way to buy out *Minnesota Stats-Tidning*. The papers were united and both names were used for a time, though after 1895 the paper was called *Minnesota Stats-Tidning* and it continued until 1940. Norelius was listed as editor-in-chief of *Skaffaren* until 1882. Tension, however, developed between Norelius, Sjöblom, and Montén because they could not agree on causes the paper should support. Norelius had, for example, supported the retention

of Prof. A. W. Williamson at Gustavus Adolphus College, while Sjöblom had opposed his retention because he was a Presbyterian. The three disagreed also about another faculty appointment at the College. A more serious matter was that Norelius and some others accused Montén of fraud in a business matter. The matter was brought to the attention of the Minnesota Conference and in February 1885, a committee was elected to investigate the affair. The committee's report exonerated Montén and the Conference adopted this report. In the course of the discussion of the report Norelius made an additional charge that Montén had misappropriated \$150 of Conference funds. The Conference officers investigated this charge in the presence of Montén and Norelius on September 24, 1885 and found that no misappropriation had taken place. In February 1886, at a meeting that Norelius did not attend, the Conference resolved that it would be right and proper for him to confess that his accusations against Montén had been made hastily and without any foundation in fact. Thereafter for seven years Norelius stayed away from Conference meetings, though when he came back after this absence in 1893 he was once again elected president.

Norelius enjoyed traveling and in 1882 the Minnesota Conference appointed him to make a journey to Bismarck and other places in the Dakota Territory. At that time the Northern Pacific railroad was under construction in eastern Montana and two brothers, John and Peter Johnson of Bismarck, were sub-contractors with a crew of Swedish workers. They invited Norelius to come to the construction camp and hold services. He rode the train as far as the tracks were laid, preaching to the men each evening. He may have reached the vicinity of Miles City, Montana. His was the first visit of any Lutheran pastor to Montana, though circumstances at that time were such that no permanent work could be established.

On October 1, 1885, some days after the Minnesota Conference officers had met to investigate Norelius' charges against Montén, Norelius began a missionary journey to the west coast. The object of journey was to inspect the work the Synod had already started and to seek out new Swedish settlements, where congregations might be established. This was his first journey through the Rocky Mountains and he was greatly impressed by the snow-capped ranges, the towering mountains, and the scenic valleys. He kept a detailed journal and wrote one evening that he regretted having to sleep when there was so much to see. In Portland he visited a Chinese festival and temple. He thought the ceremonies he witnessed were an example of human degradation, but wondered whether the paganism of the white man was essentially



different or better than Asiatic idolatry. He preached several times in Portland, then moved on to Tacoma and Seattle. Norelius stayed three weeks in Seattle where he found Swedes but they were indifferent to religion. The rainy weather depressed him and he said, "I have never been in a more disagreeable place in all my life." A congregation had been established in Seattle but he concluded as he left Seattle that Augustana's mission there did not look hopeful. Returning to Tacoma and Portland, he spoke at Reformation services. Peter Carlson, who had left East Union in 1879 to be a missionary on the west coast joined him. They traveled together to San Francisco. In early December Norelius received a call from the Synod's Board of Missions to serve as Mission Superintendent on the west coast, which he thought he could accept for a time. He visited various places in northern California, such as San Rafael, Oakland, Santa Cruz, and Monterey. On the advice of a physician he spent a week at Paraiso Springs resting, relaxing and both drinking and bathing in sulphur water. He felt that the stay there had improved his health. On this journey he preached wherever people could be gathered, in some places also catechizing children. After a trip to Moscow, Idaho, he met in Portland with the west coast pastors to discuss missionary work in the west coast area. It was reported that the Augustana Synod had seventeen congregations, ten churches, and two parsonages in its west coast mission district. Norelius left for home May 4 and arrived in Vasa May 9, 1886.

#### **Norelius' Last Years 1886-1916**

During the time that Norelius was on his missionary trip, Pastor P. J. Swärd had left the Vasa congregation, having been called to St. Paul. The congregation called several pastors but had no success. In August they once again called Norelius. This time he served them from 1886-88. The next pastor at Vasa was Johan Fremling, who served them 1889-1901. Once again Norelius was called and he served a fifth term as pastor at Vasa from 1901-1905.

In 1890 the first volume of *De svenska luterska församlingarnas och svenskarnes historia i Amerika* (The history of the Swedish Lutheran congregations and of the Swedes in America) was published by the Augustana Book Concern in an edition of eight hundred copies. It was a volume of 871 pages on which he had been working since he was appointed Augustana's historian in 1867. The book covered only the period up to 1860, giving an account of the settlements in Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, New York, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and Wisconsin up to that time. Biographies of eighteen pastors were included. Norelius used a broad range of source material, including his own correspondence and records. In recognition of this

contribution Augustana College and Theological Seminary granted him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree in 1892. He then began to write a second volume, based on the minutes of the Synod, its conferences, and institutions. This became a book of 527 pages and was not published until 1916, the year of Norelius' death.

In 1899 Norelius was again elected President of the Augustana Synod and served in that office until 1911. In his report to the Synod in 1901, he took note of the progress that had been made during the last twenty-five years. The number of conferences had increased from five to eight, the number of congregations from 273 to about 900, the number of communicants from 34,807 to about 120,000, the total membership from 59,399 to 200,000, the number of pastors from 108 to about 470, the number of schools from two to six, three of them complete colleges, the income from \$168,183.62 to \$918,264.10. The next year, however, the assassination of President McKinley the previous September led him to think again of signs of the last times, as did the San Francisco earthquake in 1906. In 1908 he responded to the Minnesota Conference's refusal to accept a new congregational constitution by pointing out that, while it is possible for synods, conferences, congregations and individual Christians to make mistakes, it is easier for a person, a congregation, and a conference to make a mistake than the whole Synod, which is a representative gathering of all the conferences.

Norelius was interested in constitutions. Constitutions were human achievements. It was worthwhile to work hard to write a constitution that would best enable the Church to carry out its mission. The immigrants did not bring with them a model congregational constitution from Sweden. A congregational constitution began as a group called a pastor to preach and administer sacraments. They would then have to decide how to support him and his family. In the process a constitution would develop that could later be written down and used as a model by other congregations.

A festive event during the years of Norelius' presidency was the celebration in 1910 in Rock Island of the fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the Augustana Synod. Jubilee Hall, a temporary building, was erected on the Augustana College campus for the ten-day event. Knut Henning Gezelius von Schéele, Bishop of Visby, came representing the Church of Sweden, bringing official greetings from King Gustav V and President William Howard Taft. On June 5, the same day the constituting convention had begun in Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin, in 1860, Augustana's pioneers were remembered. Of those present at that meeting in 1860, three pastors

and one layman were still living. Pastor Peter Beckman was not well enough to attend, but Pastor Gustav Peters and John Erlander joined President Norelius on the platform. Norelius spoke on their behalf: "Here before you stands what is left of the first Synod. Pastor Peters, he is blind and cannot see any of you in the vast congregation. And here is Mr. Erlander, he is deaf and cannot hear a single word of this great celebration. And here I stand, apparently well preserved, but aware that the end is not far off."

Norelius did live to preach in 1912 at the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Gustavus Adolphus College, and he was present June 24, 1915, at the sixtieth anniversary of the Vasa congregation. His last pastoral acts were a funeral in Vasa October 16, 1915, and a baptism, Christmas 1915, at the small congregation in Goodhue he had served ever since it was organized in 1869. Early in 1916 his wife, Inga Charlotte became ill. He waited on her to the point that he neglected his own rest, and when her health began to improve his began to fail. A severe cold forced him to take to his bed and he weakened rapidly. On March 15, 1916, he died, survived by his wife and two sons, Leonard and Sigfrid. Two sons and a daughter preceded him in death. One of the sons, Theodore, had drowned at the age of thirty-one, shortly after having been admitted to the bar. The funeral for Eric Norelius was held March 20 and he is buried in the Vasa churchyard.

### **The Measure of the Man**

During his long ministry that extended sixty years, Norelius made significant contributions to the Augustana Synod in four areas. He was first of all a home or American missionary, traveling extensively in Minnesota but also to the west coast, finding Swedish settlements where congregations could be organized. He concentrated on rural areas. On his first journey in Minnesota in 1860, he passed through Minneapolis without stopping, for, he said, there were no Swedes there. He organized congregations in Red Wing and Vasa, both of which flourished, but he preferred rural Vasa, where he built a home and spent much of his ministry serving that congregation. Second, he established institutions, two in particular. In 1862 he opened a secondary school in Red Wing, that became St. Ansgar's Academy in East Union, and then Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter. In 1865 he began to care for orphaned children at what became the Vasa Children's Home. Its successor is now Lutheran Social Service, which offers a wide range of services, not only to children, but also to families and the aged. Third, Norelius was Augustana's historian, who gathered archival material and wrote in one volume the history

of the Synod's congregations from 1848-1860 and in a second volume a history of the Synod, its conferences and its institutions. Fourth, he was a church administrator who gave much attention to church polity. He served several times as president of the Minnesota Conference and twice as president of the Augustana Synod, 1874-81, 1899-1911. He was a member of Minnesota Conference and Synod constitution committees, and constitution committees for Conference and Synod institutions. He was of the opinion that the Church's doctrine had been determined once and for all in God's Word and the witness of the Church's confessions. While no particular form of the church's government is specified in the Scriptures, questions of church polity are of great importance for the Church's welfare and development. This is especially true in America, where the Church has the freedom to determine how it shall be organized at the congregational and the synodical levels. By reason of these four extremely significant contributions Eric Norelius is gratefully remembered as one of Augustana's church fathers.

Bernhard Erling  
Gustavus Adolpus College  
St. Peter, Minnesota  
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