

The Stolpes, Gustav and (John Gustaf) Mauritz. Two Pillars of Augustana.

Gustavus Adolphus...A New York City Augustana Church is Founded.

New York City's remarkable Augustana Lutheran Gustavus Adolphus congregation¹ was organized on 2 November 1865, with the help of two pioneering midwestern Swedish-American Augustana pastors, Andreas Andrén(1827-1880) and Erland Carlson (1822-1893). It was intended to serve those immigrants who had chosen to remain in New York City, and transients heading west to the growing Midwestern Swedish communities in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nebraska and Kansas. Both its founders were connected with the early growth of the Augustana Synod. Rev. Erland Carlson was developer of the first Swedish Lutheran congregation in Chicago, while Andreas Andrén was father of Augustana's fourth president, Gustav Andreen.

By the summer of 1866, the congregation was ready to move into their new church home, by purchase of Bethesda Baptist church, located at their present site on 22nd St. It was dedicated by Dr. Tufve Hasselquist (1816-1891), Augustana Synod president, who later became second president of Augustana College.

The young congregation was named for the celebrated Swedish warrior-king Gustavus Adolphus, whose military support of the Protestant movement during the Thirty Years War brought the spread of Lutheranism throughout northern Europe. Among the founding members of Gustavus Adolphus congregation was John Ericsson, celebrated Civil war engineer, and developer of the first ironclad, *Monitor*.

The congregation's early years were stormy, filled with both religious controversy and financial challenges. Its first resident pastor was Karl Karlén (1819-1903) from Gothenburg Sweden, serving 1865-67. He was suspended from the Augustana Synod for heresy, returned to Sweden, and became a Roman Catholic priest in 1876, serving in both Sweden and Norway. The congregation then withdrew from the Augustana Synod, petitioning to join the Church of Sweden, with which it remained until 1879, suffering occasionally from benign neglect. Its next immigrant pastor, Axel Wätter, was called from the Strängnäs stift in 1868, but returned to Sweden in 1872 to serve in Nerike. Rev. Johan Princell(1845-1915) was called from Campello, Massachusetts in 1873. Princell was suspended by the Synod in 1878, as a result of his support of the Mission Friends doctrine of atonement. He remained, however, at Gustavus Adolphus for another year, since the congregation was still technically part of the Church of Sweden until 1879.

From 1879 to 1890, stability returned, thanks to the work of Dr. Emil C.E. Lindberg(1852-1930), who also became president of Augustana's New York Conference.

¹ John Ogren, Deacon, Historian, *Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church, 1885 to 2015*

Planning for a new church building began in February 1887, designed by the architect of the Metropolitan Opera House, J.C. Cady, a prolific architect of New York churches. It was dedicated 12 May 1889 by Dr. Tufve Hasselquist(1816-1891), Augustana Synod President. Dr. Lindberg returned to a professorship at Augustana Theological Seminary in 1890, later becoming its dean. Rev. Mauritz Stolpe was then called from Ishpeming, Michigan, in 1890, beginning a Gustavus ministry of almost 48 years!

In 1902, the unashamedly Swedish national romantic writer and researcher, Rev. Carl Sundbeck, secured royal funding for a study tour of Swedish-America, beginning in New York City. While there, he spent time at Gustavus Adolphus. He described his visit thus:²

“...There are about 50,000 Swedes, among the more than 3 million New Yorkers in the great city, such as the Swedish engineers serving Americans, Swedish servant girls, widely respected, and many individuals who have climbed a bit up the economic ladder, day laborers, and finally those who have failed to secure a ranking, and perhaps never will.

There are other ways of classifying New York Swedes. There are the churchly who belong to some congregation, those who populate saloons, those enjoy themselves at dancehalls, and those involved in political clubs, socialists, etc. The oldest Swedish congregation of New York City is Gustavus Adolphus, founded in 1865, and now having a beautiful church building, and a manse at 217 E. 49th St.

American congregations are quite similar to social clubs, in the best sense of that word, since members of the same congregation also create a social network with those like them.

I remember one evening, when I was a guest of the Gustavus Adolphus congregation. It was like a large family, gathered in the basement of the church. Its pastor, Mauritz Stolpe, was their gracious host. The same conditions exist in the Brooklyn congregations, to which I was also invited as guest of Dr. Jacobson, pastor of Bethlehem Church.” Sundbeck captured the essence of the new Swedish-American church well, and its adaption to American independence, while its homeland counterparts remained firmly within Sweden’s governmental power structure.

Despite linguistic and religious challenges, Gustavus Adolphus made a successful transition. It continues to thrive today, as an ELCA inner city ministry with strong community support and a broad mission, titled “Renewing Faith + Building Ministry.”

REV. MAURITZ STOLPE, EMIGRANT SON

² Carl Sundbeck (1857-1927), *Svensk-amerikanerna, deras materiella och andliga sträfvanden*.... Stockholm 1904, pp. 44-51

Mauritz Stolpe was born 15 June 1858 in Stockholm, to music director Gustav Stolpe and Engel Amore Polman, and studied in Varberg, Göteborg and Uppsala, Sweden. He was the first of his family to emigrate to the United States in 1879, and was ordained 16 October 1880 by the Kansas Ministerium of the Lutheran General Synod. He served the Lutheran Church at Marquette, KS, 1880-1885.

His early time at Marquette was remembered vividly by a youthful immigrant writer, Ernst Skarstedt, who had settled briefly in nearby Lindsborg, KS as a young man, Ernst soon moved west, becoming a recognized Swedish-American author, journalist and editor.

Skarstedt wrote of Mauritz Stolpe in 1880: “My best friend in Marquette, whom I preferred to be with, and in whose company I spent my best times, was...the well-spoken, friendly, well-read and poetic pastor, Mauritz Stolpe. Especially unforgettable were the times when Dr. Rundström(a prominent Lindsborg, KS physician) paid a visit, and we three talked in the pastor’s study about what we had experienced since we had last met. I still remember how Stolpe described, in the most comic and satirical ways, my pessimism and joked about my admiration of (Robert G.) Ingersoll³ (1833-1899). How we laughed as one does in the spring of youth. It was even spring outside. The sun shone warmly during the day, doves cooed in the trees along the river, and the woodpeckers were heard doing their dance. Everything was joyful. Why shouldn’t we be able to enjoy ourselves in silly ways, and smile at our own, and others, craziness? Yet it is so seldom that one meets any clergyman with whom even friends can set aside their self-worth, stiffness and ceremony, giving witness more to self-centeredness than Christian tenderness. Our friend Stolpe could do that in those days.”⁴

Mauritz Stolpe was received into the Augustana Synod at Andover, IL. on 22 June 1884. He then was called to Ishpeming, Michigan, serving the Augustana congregation there from 1885 to 1890. He married Helga Engberg at Chicago on 4 May 1887. They raised a family of 7 children. Mauritz was called to Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church in 1890, serving it until his death in 1938. He guided that Swedish-speaking urban congregation during a period of language change. While remaining stubbornly Swedish throughout his ministry, he saw the need of providing an English-language youth program, in order to assure the future of the church. He drew on the skills of a promising young Augustana College lecturer and Mt. Airy Seminary student, Conrad Bergendoff

³ Robert Ingersoll was an abolitionist and Civil War colonel who had organized and commanded the 11th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry, until his capture and parole at the Battle of Shiloh. He was known as a skilled Illinois lawyer and orator, but above all, as the “Great Agnostic.”

⁴ Ernst Skarstedt (1857-1929) *Vagbond och redaktör. Lefnadsöden och tidsbilder*, Seattle 1904, p. 94

(1895-1997), who served Gustavus Adolphus youth from 1917 to 1919, before his Chicago ordination in June of 1921. During later doctoral studies, Bergendoff worked with Sweden's great ecumenical Archbishop Nathan Söderblom. He received his PhD in Chicago in 1928, became dean of the Augustana Seminary in 1931, and president of Augustana College in 1935.

Conrad Bergendoff's memories of his time in New York City were captured in a 1966 series of interviews by Rev. Dr. Byron Swenson, now filed with the Augustana College Tredway Library Special Collections in Rock Island, IL. They give remarkable insights into the challenges of building and maintaining a successful, urban Swedish-language congregation in New York City, while adapting to conditions in that rapidly-growing "world city" after the turn of the century.

Conrad Bergendoff recalled his time at Gustavus Adolphus as follows:

"...the reason that I want out (ed. from Augustana in Rock Island) was to become assistant to Stolpe at the Gustavus Adolphus Church. His wife had died, ... he was shaken, and they wanted a helper. So I came out in the summer of 1917 as assistant pastor, ...before I entered the Seminary..... Stolpe was a different character...very high church, but foremost he was of Schartau leanings. And he lived completely in Sweden....He came from Varberg in southern Sweden. He read only Swedish literature, mostly Schartau and *Kyrkotidningen* from Sweden, (he used) beautiful Swedish in his preaching, as liturgical as they come.

So, I was assistant to Stolpe. I'd spend Saturdays and Sundays, while before that, I was there the whole time during the summer. But when school started, I'd go down to Mount Airy on Sunday, and come back Friday to spend Friday, Saturday and Sunday with Stolpe.... I was there '17 to '19. Oh, I worked hard in those days. Carried two jobs. Stolpe represented a very Swedish Augustana spirit. Not the pietistic (some of his members didn't like the rumors that he drank some wine now and then), but very cultured... a beautiful home, very nice library. I lived in their home for a year. Of course, he was opposed to the ULC merger, and I wouldn't say that he influenced me....I was at Mount Airy at their Seminary, and I was in contact with Stolpe and Ölman (possibly Rev. Sven G. Öhman 1862-1939), who came down there often, and others of the Augustana people, so I had to learn to see both sides and to keep my mouth shut, (to) not get into trouble.... I was supposed to come to Gustavus Adolphus church to institute English work---They'd had none to speak of. Stolpe had been there 40 (?) years and he said it was too late now to have any English. So, we had to start very slowly—I had the first English Confirmation class and the English service in the morning.....it shows that at the time between 1915 and 1918 the Augustana Synod was beginning to diverge. The Association of English Churches had been organized. Wendell(Claus August, 1866-1950) and Rydén (Anders C. 1862-1921) were very active, as was Olander(C.Otto 1850-1918), the father of Olander(C.Martin, 1907-1948), they were the men who were rebels at the time. They represented the Americanization program.....

Then came this invitation from Gustavus Adolphus Church to assist Dr. Stolpe. I was just at the point of wavering between Seminary and teaching, so I decided it would be a good chance to decide whether I really wanted to go into the ministry or not. And they were willing to make arrangements so I could spend part of my time at the seminary. “

Bergendoff was asked about the impact of that experience on forming his position, whether there was language tension at the Gustavus Adolphus Church---a Swedish colony within metropolitan New York City, and whether they felt themselves part of the metropolitan area, or just living as a little Swedish colony in New York, trying to remain separate.

Bergendoff responded: “As far as the Gustavus Adolphus church was concerned, they were pretty isolated. I spent a lot of time on the church books. Stolpe let me take over entirely the keeping of the records, and it was an eye-opener to see how many thousands of Swedish people had gone through this church. They would come to America, stay in New York for a while, and then go on. I figured out that there was an almost complete turnover of members every five years, but there was a very loyal nucleus that kept the work going. But it was also clear that it was a dying church, as far as the future was concerned, because the young peoples’ work was not being cared for. And there was a lack of stability in the life of the church, which made you feel it had served an immigrant population. I have been called back twice to Gustavus Adolphus since then, but in each case turned it down because I didn’t feel it was right for me to go. I’ve always had a very great love for the church and for the people who have made it possible, but I must confess that the church seems to me to have missed part of its calling in being able to translate a Lutheran parish into America. It was a Swedish parish in New York, to a very large extent.....I argued with Dr. Stolpe about their long insistence on keeping it Swedish, and my work was largely with the young people who were very dedicated, and wanted to see things changed. We started a fund for a parish hall, but it didn’t get very far. The weight of tradition was too heavy. It was a Swedish church, and known as a Swedish church, so I didn’t feel that the future lay in that kind of church, though at the same time it deepened my love for things I loved in Sweden—in Swedish. I got into the *Riksföreningen för svenskhetens bevarande i Amerika*, a Swedish organization for the preservation of Swedish in America...with its main office in Gothenburg. In fact, I was treasurer of the group. It was a national organization. Through Stolpe and others, I got into it, so I had many contacts with what I would call “ultra-Swedish” representatives, and I saw their side of it. But to me it was an avocation, not something I would give myself to fully.....But the contacts at Gustavus Adolphus were also “Sweden.” I got to know people who made me interested in Sweden and the Church of Sweden, meeting dignitaries coming from there, or many of the secular representatives in government who would come to Gustavus Adolphus Church for Christmas morning or Easter, and consider it their church. So I’ve always been grateful for the days I spent there, and I go back—I was there last November (1965) for their 100th Anniversary celebration. There are a few people there that I still know, though the Swedish is gone—they have a pastor now who

has no Swedish background at all, and I'm afraid they have lost something they could have kept if there had been a more rational transition from one to the other. The peril when you keep it too long is that you lose it altogether."

Conrad Bergendoff wrote a detailed article on his developing the English-language program for youth at Gustavus Adolphus in New York, class-by-class. It appeared in the *Lutheran Companion* of 15 February 1919, titled "A Sunday School Program." It was clearly intended as a blueprint for establishing similar programs within the Swedish-speaking congregations of the Augustana Synod, as they sought to educate and retain their English-speaking youth, acculturating them, while acquainting them with their historic Swedish traditions. Many clearly did, as transitions to use of English continued!

Prof. Gustav Stolpe, father, musician, composer, director.

Mauritz Stolpe's father, Gustav Stolpe, was born at Torsåker, Sweden in 1833, the son of Torsåker's church organist. He was first educated in Gävle public schools, and received his degree of "Musikdirektör" from the Royal Swedish Academy of Music in Stockholm. He embarked on a successful career at home as teacher, composer, organist and music director. While his son emigrated to Kansas in 1879, Gustav remained in Sweden for professional reasons. Among the professional accomplishments claimed for him was a Swedish tour as accompanist for the "Swedish nightingale" Jenny Lind. Gustav came to America on a concert tour in 1881, following his first wife's 1880 death. The tour ended unsuccessfully in Colorado, where he was discovered by Augustana professor Olof Olsson- He then accepted a position on the faculty of Augustana College in 1882, serving 11 years. He founded the Augustana Conservatory in 1886, beginning with 17 students. When he left the College in 1893, the Conservatory held 157 students. After founding and operating the new Augustana Music School in Rock Island, IL for a few years, he moved to Upsala College, where he headed its Music Department until his death in 1901.

Gustav Stolpe's love of classical music brought him into unfortunate conflict with the intensely pietistic Augustana College President Olof Olsson, over the issue of Stolpe's encouraging the Messiah Orchestra to also play "worldly" music of the great masters. As a result, Olof Olsson pushed for the burning of secular sheet music, leading to a heated debate, later reported with some glee by Carl Aaron Swensson.

Swensson's *Vid hemmets härd*, p. 342) described the confrontation as follows: "But the orchestra also played worldly music, though classical. O. Olsson had the most decided opinions in that question. He wanted the Messiah orchestra to play only sacred music. He expressed these thoughts bravely and with conviction. Within the orchestra, the question of burning it was debated strongly. Two or three members were against the proposal. One said: "If this kind of music is evil, one should do what one can to prevent its spread. If no one buys from the publishers, they will have to cease publishing. Thus, let us sell it, instead of burning it to prevent evil." However the burning proposal went through with only three dissensions, and \$20.00 worth of music selected by a competent

German musician fell victim to the flames. Since then, the Music Conservatory has been established. Its Director (Gustav Stolpe) had much different views than O. Olsson, who was, after all, only a layman in the musical world. Now classical music reigns in Rock Island, and Chopin, Liszt and Mozart share friendship with the skillful and respected. Just note that the crowds at concerts are not what they were and could have been. Musical interest among our people is now secured. It required a Napoleon to kill it, but the Augustana Synod does not put up with such people..." By 1893, his Augustana Conservatory student numbers had grown from 17 to 157 students.

Gustav Stolpe left Augustana in 1893 over another battle with the College administration, this time on the merger of Stolpe's academic Conservatory Choir with the Oratorio Society choir. After running a small music school in Rock Island, he moved east to New York, to head the music program at Upsala College in New Jersey, on whose board his son Mauritz served and where Gustav died in 1901.

In 1916, his former student Prof. Adolf Hult of the Augustana Seminary wrote a tribute to Gustav Stolpe in the *Augustana Bulletin*, saying Gustav was "...the greatest church musician of the Augustana Synod," but noting that Stolpe never truly fit in, saying: "He lived and died in our land as one of us, even if his European carriage, his transatlantic thoroughness, the Swedish gentleman spirit of the noblest type, his culture worked into his character, even if this and yet more gave proof of the fact that he was not one of us." His legacy of compositions at Augustana was, however, enormous, including 38 operettas, 25 orchestral works, 25 pieces for the brass band, 25 piano works, and more.

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