

Augustana in Canada - People and Places

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Swedes in Canada

In Carl R. Cronmiller's book, "A History of the Lutheran Church in Canada," references are made to early Swedes in Canada. The first is Peter Kalm, son of a Lutheran clergyman, who began his studies in theology but later changed to science. In 1747, the Swedish Academy of Sciences sent him to North America to find new varieties of plants and seeds. While in Swedesboro, New Jersey, the pastor of the Swedish Lutheran Church, Rev. John Sandin, died and Peter Kalm was asked to conduct the services.

In the summer and autumn of 1749 Kalm visited Montreal and Quebec and received letters of welcome including one from the Governor General of Canada. He collected data on fall wheat, shrubs, trees, and grains, noted his impressions of Montreal, visited the Jesuit College and cloistered convents. The Abbess informed him that she and her sisters would heartily ask God to make him a good Roman Catholic to which he replied that "he was far more anxious to be and remain a good Christian and that as a recompense for their honors and prayers he would not fail earnestly to ask God that they too might remain good Christians."

A second visit to Canada took place in the summer of 1750, travelling by way of Lake Ontario he came to Fort Niagara, and the following day went to Niagara Falls where he wrote a description of the Falls which was given to Benjamin Franklin and published in The Pennsylvania Gazette.

Kalm married the widow of Rev. Sandin and returned to Sweden where, in addition to continuing his work in natural science, he became a prominent ordained minister. The accounts of Kalm's travels have been published both in Swedish and English.

The second reference by Cronmiller is that of Rev. Paul Bryselius who came in 1767 to serve the Germans in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. A native of Sweden, he had first served the New Germantown Parish in New Jersey, 1760 - 1766. Recommended by clergy of the Episcopal Church to be proficient in German he was understood to be acceptable to the people in Lunenburg. However, just prior to coming he was ordained by the Church of England which brought about the accusation that he was only masquerading as a Lutheran Minister and the people rejected his ministry.

Jacob Fahlstrom, 1793 - 1859, chronicled as the first Swede in Minnesota, was earlier the first recorded Swede in Manitoba, having come as a cabin boy on a ship to York Factory on the Hudson Bay. The records of the Hudson Bay Company show Jacob Fahlstrom, boy, arriving on the ship Eddystone, July 29th, 1811, employed as a laborer with a contract for five years. From the records it appears he left the Company's service in 1817 going to the United States. Other accounts such as in the autumn 2002 issue of the newsletter of the Swedish Genealogical Society of Minnesota suggest earlier arrival in Canada and being employed in the Lord Selkirk Settlement near the present city of Winnipeg.

Swedish Immigration to Canada began in the 1850's in Ontario and Quebec though most moved on to the States. With the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway to Winnipeg in 1881 and British Columbia in 1885, the prairies opened up to the homesteaders. Winnipeg became the gateway to the west, a rail and retail centre - the "Chicago of the North-" and the base for the beginnings of Augustana in Canada.

Both the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian Government sought to entice Swedish immigrants to Canada - the railway through publications and agents in Sweden, the Government setting aside, in 1885, two tracts of land for Scandinavians immigrants. The land in Manitoba became known as "New Sweden" or the Scandinavian Colony located 150 miles northwest of

Winnipeg, north of Minnedosa. Here an Immigration House was constructed and served as home for families and a “stopping house” for travellers. Plans were drawn for a village with streets named “Stockholm”, “Caroline”, “Chicago”, and “Eden” but with no rail service, a store and post office was the extent of the village plans. The other tract of land became known as New Stockholm located north of Whitewood in Saskatchewan. In both these places were organized the Augustana congregations which continue today.

The census of 1921 was the first year that Icelanders, Norwegians, Danes and Swedes were no longer lumped together as Scandinavians. That year’s census reported 61,503 declaring Sweden as country of origin, which increased to the highest number in 1961 census of 121,757. An equal number of those with Swedish ancestry would have come from the United States.

<i>Province</i>	<i>Persons naming Sweden as country of origin in 1961</i>
British Columbia	33,251
Alberta	28,654
Ontario	23,610
Saskatchewan	19,641
Manitoba	10,382
Quebec	2,856
Nova Scotia	1,489
New Brunswick	1,099
Newfoundland	328
Yukon	238
Northwest Territories	58
Canada	121,757

Augustana Beginnings in Canada

The history of the Augustana Lutherans in Canada was written by Ferdy E. Baglo in 1958 while a student at the Lutheran Seminary in Saskatoon. Four years later the Canada Conference published that history with the addition of a listing of congregations and pastors who had served in Canada. From this publication a summary of the early Augustana missionary work in Canada has been prepared.

In 1883 a letter from Mrs. Tobias Nelson in Winnipeg was sent to Pastor Peter Sjoblom of Red Wing, Minnesota, asking for pastoral services. This may have prompted a visit the same summer by Rev. T. N. Hasselquist and a few months later by Rev. L. A. Hocanzon, itinerant missionary of the Minnesota Conference. Two years later the Minnesota Conference decided to send “pastor-volunteers” to Canada for brief visits, and the first volunteer was Rev. Svante Udden who made three trips to Canada, his travels taking him west to Alberta as well as east to Kenora (Rat Portage), Ontario. The reports of Udden visits indicated an urgent need for pastors in Canada but call after call was declined.

Other pastors came for brief periods. Rev. J. S. Ryding presided over the organization of the first Augustana congregation in Canada - New Stockholm, Saskatchewan, October 3, 1889. Rev. L. G. Almen of New London, Minnesota, came for one month and presided over the organization of Zion Lutheran Church in Winnipeg, October 4, 1890. He also returned May 23rd, 1891, to preside at the organization of my home congregation, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Scandinavia, Manitoba. Others included L. P. Lundgren, C. I. Collin, L. P. Stenstrom, J. Alm, C. A. Bar, J. L. Haff, J.F. Seedoff, J. Lundquist, J. A. Mattson and A. G. Olson, a student who later became pastor in Kenora, Ontario.

In July, 1892, Pastor Svante Udden accepted the call to become the first resident Swedish minister in Canada. “At first, I declined,” wrote Pastor Udden, “but Pastor Peter Sjoblom who for several years had been Conference President and had carried a deep concern for Canada was

insistent, so I consented. On my fourth journey to Canada I was accompanied by my wife. Two children, two small dear boys, had some months before been taken by death home to their Heavenly Father and a girl some years before that.”

In Winnipeg the Swedish population had increased by several hundred and the congregation had a new church building. Pastor Udden not only served the congregation but during his six years visited isolated communities across the prairies, publishing his own newspaper “Vaktaren” and wrote an account of his ministry in the book, “Från Canada”.

Others who came to assist Pastor Udden were Pastor E. Hedin, Student John Truedson, Student N. P. Sjostrom and Pastor J. Fremling who travelled with Pastor Udden to Alberta and wrote detailed account of that journey. Near Wetaskiwin, Alberta, the two men met five families from the Gammalsvenskby in Russian who had immigrated to Canada. In 1895, Pastor A. C. H. Helander came to Kenora as the second Augustana resident pastor in Canada but his stay was but two years. No doubt the hardships of living in Canada resulted in short pastorates. Pastor P. O. Berg 1898 - 1901 in Scandinavia; Pastor G. S. Larson 1899 - 1900 in Kenora; Pastor E. Rehner 1899 - 1900 in Winnipeg; Pastor J. A. Matson 1901 - 1903, Winnipeg; Pastor B. O. Berg, 1901 - 1902, Kenora.

Pastor N. Ohslund travelled in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in March 1900 and reported the difficulties congregations were facing without resident pastors. Examples of the problems he reported included the “Waldenstromians” saying that the Synod will take over the church building; deacons dancing at the Templar Lodge; of twenty students in the catechetical class only three could read in the Psalmbok; dissensions caused with the Mission Covenant minister; accusations against a A. G. Olson, lay preacher who had remarried after a divorce in Sweden; suspension of two deacons for drunkenness and other sins.

Many of the Swedish people felt a divided loyalty between the church and the Vasa Lodge, especially on the issues of drinking and dancing, and the lodge funeral ritual. Pastor's Ohlund annoyances were shared by many pastors well into the 40's which also was reflected in other disagreements. Two women in Vancouver, one a member of the church and the other active in Vasa Lodge, had an exchange of correspondence over support for the church versus support for the proposed Home for the Aged. The Lodge member concluded by saying she would do "God's work in the world" and the other woman could do "God's work in the church."

The dissensions with the Mission Covenant occurred because of competition in the Swedish communities and through the Svensk Canada - Tidningen, published in Winnipeg with strong Mission Covenant ties, was attacked in President Tengwald's 1918 Conference Report: "A paper which obstinately continues to spread distrust and hatred against church communion and which digs up mud through their representatives and officials, under the guise of the crafty Swedish news and a stilted cultural sanctimonious appearance, making them seem to Swedish folk the mouth piece and leading organ. A paper which pulls reports through whatever means suits to damage our congregations and our church teachings. There must be no compromise with such a paper. Promote instead Augustana and Canada Härold".

Pastor Otto Eklund reflected on his early ministry and his congregation's attempts to share a church building with the Mission Covenant. The building was without a pulpit, altar, just a table. Eklund had altar furnishings built and placed in the church. When he came for services on Sunday, the furnishings were piled outside. Because the Mission Covenant church was incorporated it had the right to the building and the Lutheran Congregation was forced to leave.

Baglo gives the following account of another tour in Alberta. Towards the fall of the year (1900), Student W. Vedell was sent to work in the Wetaskiwin parish. Unfortunately, he encountered circumstances which shrouded his work in pessimism. Even though he had the joy of

organizing Bethel Lutheran Church of Burnt Lake on January 15, 1901, he wrote to Pastor Fremling in July of the same year, "I am tired of this field. In Alberta, there are scarcely ten persons who are fully devoted to our work as it is now organized."

Vedell's opinion was shared by at least one visitor to the region. Sent on a mission visit to Wetaskiwin, Pastor John A. Levine returned with scant praise for the people and the work. He got off to a bad start when no one met him at the railroad station. "After seven sorrows and eight difficulties I got hold of a Baptist and got a ride in an old lumber wagon most of the way. When he did not want to drive any farther I took my satchel and used the 'apostles horses'". He found the Baptists active in the colony of humble cattle ranchers, and was critical of their proselytizing.

His opinion of the country and its climate was low. "It is too bad about our Swedish people who are lured up to these regions. It has rained all the time. . . Last evening a severe snowstorm began. It has snowed all night so that the ground today (June 4) is covered with snow six inches deep. Today, the people say that the land agents ought to be strung up by their big toes. But, when the snow has melted they think this is the most wonderful country in America." Then Pastor Levine gives us an indication of missionary Vedell's predicament. "What does the Executive Committee mean by not sending Vedell anything on his salary ? He lives in a little attic, a veritable shack, with a bed nailed together of rough boards. Unpleasant in every way."

Harvest from Early Labourers

Pastor Per Ålmgren came as field missionary to Alberta in the spring of 1902 and began building on the work of his predecessors and the five congregations already organized. In Calgary he found a Presbyterian minister had taken over the church but Ålmgren "sent him packing." During his four years he organized seven more congregations. But his energetic and fruitful ministry came tragically to an end when he was completing a round of preaching engagements. Returning to Wetaskiwin he and his driver stopped where some homesteaders were falling trees.

Suddenly one of the trees fell killing Pastor Ålmgren, 42 years of age. He became the first Augustana Lutheran pastor to have died and been buried in Canada. The following are pastors who served and died in Canada, not all buried there.

Per Ålmgren, February 19, 1906, Wetaskiwin, AB., Svea cemetery

J. J. Frodeen, 1912 buried in Svea. AB., cemetery

Leonard Heiner, 1918, three years after ordination, Fridhem, AB.

Abraham Wattman, 1919, Epidemic, Moose Jaw, SK., cemetery

Axel Sjoding, 1920, three months after arriving, New Stockholm, SK.

Olof Lindgren, 1927, Czar, AB., cemetery

Klaus J. Bring, 1927, Swift Current, SK., cemetery

Leonard Alexander, 1929, Svea, AB., cemetery

Johannes Nordstrom, 1933, Calgary, AB., cemetery

A. E. Eriksson, 1937, Camrose, AB., cemetery

O. H. Miller, 1940, Wetaskiwin, AB., cemetery

C. A. Bernhardson, 1947, Camrose, AB., cemetery

Paul Swenson, 1949, Scandia, AB., (Four years after ordination)

J. Arvid Vikman, 1953, Burnaby

Herman Larson, 1957, Scandia (Same year he arrived as pastor)

Richard Odelberg, Beatty cemetery, SK. (Unordained lay minister)

Otto A. Olson, 1976, Winnipeg, MB., Chapel Lawn cemetery

Otto Theodor Eklund, 1979, Camrose, AB., cemetery

Luther G. Eriksson, April 25, 1986, Camrose, AB.

Morris Green, not on roster at time of his death, Salmon Arm, B. C.

John Arvidson. March 15, 1990, Winnipeg, MB.

Robert L. O. Ek, 2002 , Fort Frances, ON.

Ålmgren's work was picked up in 1906 by Rev. Olof Lindgren who organized two more congregations, became the first president of the Alberta District, later President of the Canada Conference, and the first to remain in Canada for the entire length of a long ministry. Two other pastors also came to Alberta, Pastor L. J. Fihn to Calgary, and Pastor J. J. Frodeen to Wetaskiwin where he served until his death October 12, 1912. Pastor Frodeen had been president of Gustavus Adolphus College 1872 - 1874, and had a distinguished ministry in Minnesota.

In 1909 the Minnesota Conference sent Pastor L. P. Bergstrom of Winthrop, Minnesota, as Mission superintendent in Canada, a position he held until 1916. This marked a period of marked growth in the congregations aided by the 14,813 Swedish immigrants arriving during the period 1908 to 1915. Reporting to the Minnesota Conference in 1910, Bergstrom stated he had traveled 12,093 miles by rail, 1,000 by horse, and numberless miles on foot with his knapsack on his back. Six pastors served the 12 parishes spread out from Edmonton, Alberta to Port Arthur, Ontario, and Bergstrom "demanded six more men immediately."

Pastor K. J. Bring came as a homesteader as did Pastor P. A. Edquist and both of them soon began serving congregations, Pastor Bring becoming a "travelling missionary" in Southern Saskatchewan until his death November 25, 1927. In the 1922 Canada Conference Minutes his report showed 229 meetings/gathering during the year, travelling 4,400 miles by horse, 950 by auto and 5,200 by train. Edquist served New Stockholm and Zion in Fort William, ON.

Canada Conference

Opposition to a separate Conference in Canada was voiced by Pastor Bergstrom who stated that 24 of 31 congregations requested to remain in the Minnesota Conference. Dr. J.A. Krantz, Minnesota Conference President, met with pastors and congregational representatives July 1912, and from the discussions there reported: "During this exchange of opinion it was seen that the

situation and conditions on the other side of the border are peculiar to the provinces and the government under which they live. Whatever is not Canadian has for them a foreign and uninteresting stamp and this is true of our church activities there, as long as they are carried on from outside.”

A year later on May 23, 1913, the Canada Conference was organized with three Districts (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba-Ontario), Pastor J. G. Dahlberg elected as President. In the Conference Minutes of 1933, Pastor John Samuelson described Dahlberg as a “Smålänning” of whom it is written, “Han gick i unga ar rätt ofta med träskor, hackade granis och hägg björknabbar” (In his youth he often used wooden shoes, chopped spruce twigs and knotty birch brush). It is furthermore recorded, that arriving in America in 1880 he worked on a farm in Iowa, “band vete och vallade Texasstutar” (tied wheat sheaves and herded Texas steers). However, true to the tradition of his native Småland, he rose to become both professor and member of the board of Directors of Augustana College.”

The congregations in British Columbia would remain with the Columbia Conference. Congregations in Fort Frances area, Port Arthur and Fort William would become part of the Minnesota Conference. The only congregation east of the Lakehead was Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church in Montreal, organized in 1919 by the New England Conference.

The early need for a school was voiced during the ministry of Pastor Udden and explored later by Pastor Bergstrom who investigated possible places in Saskatchewan and, with the “school committee” chose Percival as the site for the “Swedish Lutheran High School”. The little school began November 11, 1912 in the parsonage with eight students enrolled the first day, and the number grew to 19 in the High School department and 15 in the music school. This was a temporary arrangement as the parsonage lacked the proper space and facilities, and other locations

continued to be explored for a time. However, finances seemed to be the critical issue and the school "had a quiet and almost unnoticed end" two years after it began.

The Conference focused on social ministry projects, Home for the Aged and a Children's Home, gathering funds for both over many years. The funds were combined and the Lutheran Home for the Aged in Wetaskiwin, Alberta, was opened the fall of 1942 and has now become the The Good Shepherd Lutheran Social Service Society operating three facilities in Wetaskiwin.

Conference Presidents:

1913	John G. Dahlberg
1914 -1915	L. P. Bergstrom
1916 -1918	Victor J. Tengwald
1919	J. E. Lindberg
1920 -1923	O. Philip Johnson
1924 -1927	O. Lindgren
1928 -1939	Anton A. Nelson (Became Regional Director)
1940 -1947	J. Arvid Vikman
1948 -1951	Gilbert T. Monson
1952 -1954	G. Uno Lundmark
1955 -1962	Otto A. Olson (Died 1976, President of the LCA Central Canada Synod, (Otto Eklund served as vice-president of the Conference, 1928 - 1949)

Moving Towards An Indigenous Ministry

Strangely, it was not until the 1940's that "a home grown person" began preparations for the ordained ministry, largely because of a growing relationship to the Lutheran College and Seminary in Saskatoon. Dr. Anton Nelson, while serving Augustana Lutheran Church in Saskatoon, was

invited to teach English Bible at the Seminary, and the door seemed open for a cooperative agreement which came to fruition with the arrival of Dr. Gilbert T. Monson in 1945.

The first Augustana Student was Bernhard Bengtson from Scandia, Alberta, but upon his graduation accepted a call to Africa. In 1952, two sons of the veteran pastor A. E. Eriksson, Harold and Paul, were ordained. A daughter, Helen Eriksson, was consecrated earlier as deaconess, and in 1964 another son, Herbert was ordained. At the Canada Conference in 1953 two more ordinations took place, Vernon Sundmark and Alf Sander, followed the next year with the ordination of Donald Sjoberg. Vincent Eriksson, nephew to A. E. Eriksson was ordained in 1957, and Vincent's brother, Luther, after serving with the World Missionary Prayer League, was ordained in 1970. Ferdy Baglo was ordained in 1958 and Morris Green in 1959; the last person ordained in the Canada Conference was Herman Ludwig, 1962.

Happily, a number of American and Augustana born pastors have chosen to remain in Canada after their retirement: Delmar and Eileen Christensen (Calgary); Ed and Trudy Bowen (Calgary); Jim and Lue Chell (Hinton, Alberta); Ted and Janet Chell (Winnipeg); Bob and Harriet Erickson (North Battleford); Corliss and Caroline Holmes (Calgary); Floyd Johnson, Maple Ridge, B. C.; Jim and Barbara Kruger (Leduc, Alberta); Bob and Marilyn Moland, (Calgary); Bob and Betty Pearson (Camrose); Ken and Margaret Peterson (Saskatoon); Paul and Sally Swedberg, Osoyoos, B. C.

Augustana's Legacy in Canada from past laborers

In the period of Augustana's ministry in Canada, 1883 - 1962 some 200 pastors accepted calls in Canada while others, in the earlier years, came for shorter periods of time as "travelling missionaries." In addition, summer students and interns, filled vital roles almost exclusively in congregations with pastoral vacancies, and parish workers such as Edna Johnson, Inez Hedman and

Anna Wendell provided excellent ministry. Two Canadian deaconesses, Helen Eriksson and Frieda Kiel, also served in Canada.

In the early years the pastors who ministered in Canada faced great hardships living in rather primitive conditions, serving congregations under severe winter weather conditions, and being poorly paid. In his report to the 1943 Conference, J. Arvid Vikman told of one pastor explaining the delay in sending in his report: “The hopeless, very severe, alarming winter is partly at fault - riding in an open sleigh all day while Mr. Winter was riding the roads at 46 below zero with strong wind, and snow blocked roads. All winter, horses have climbed snowdrifts and rolled and fought the snow to a degree that is unbelievable unless you are an eyewitness. I have seen drifts fifteen feet deep.”

Those arriving from Sweden were not used to supporting the church with their finances. One pioneer was reported saying he liked the system of finance of the Church better in Sweden, because here it is an “eternal begging.” In his report to the 1934 Canada Conference, President Anton A Nelson laid it on the line: “Is the pastor the only one of whom God expects a stewardship account? . . . We further, with regret, report that the pastor in several cases contributes as much to the Kingdom as the whole board of trustees or the entire church council. . . Pastors, at the risk of losing both their good name and having their honesty questioned, have borrowed money in order to be able to carry out their program in the Master’s service. One pastor reports, ‘A destitute preacher on a destitute field spells destitution.’”

At the time of the LCA merger there were 50 Augustana congregations in Canada, about half of the total number organized from 1889 to 1962, the reduced number because most of the congregations in the early years were in rural area. In 2004 there are 32 former Augustana active congregations, 10 have merged, and 8 are closed though 4 church buildings are maintained. The

three earliest congregations - in New Stockholm, Saskatchewan, Scandinavia (now in Erickson), Manitoba, and Winnipeg (now known as St. Mark) are still active.

Thankfully, the Minnesota Conference in the early years, and the Augustana Board of American Missions in the later years, saw Canada as mission field and many pastors and students heeded the call to venture north. Even interns, knowing full well the congregational circumstances, returned to accept their first call in Canada.

On a personal level, I recall the wonderful ministry of Kermit Youngdale (1945 - 46), followed by Pastor George Nelson who encouraged Vernon Sundmark and myself to attend Luther College which resulted in both of us becoming pastors. Anton Nelson was everywhere in Western Canada conducting services, calling the church to mission, an inspiration to all. His "Treasured Reflections" tell how much he invested of himself in pioneering the work in Canada and describe his interesting travels throughout the prairies. Gilbert T. Monson wrote me at Luther College, Regina, Saskatchewan, urging me to come to Saskatoon for university and to stay at the Seminary Student House. Shortly after arriving in Saskatoon in the fall of 1949 I was assuming preaching assignments on weekends to Alberta. The Augustana Luther League gave me leadership training, the highlights in the Youth Gatherings, and the privilege of hosting Wilton Bergstrand. Ted Matson became my mentor when I served as Regional Director for the Board of American Missions, and I appreciated visiting congregations and councils with him. Then there is Otto A. Olson, my professor at the seminary and later my colleague as I served as Regional Director and then LCA Bishop. He was a dear and respected friend, who was regarded by all as a devoted churchman. His letters were signed "Faithfully yours" and those two words truly describe one of whom it can be said, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Thanks be to God for all the faithful, clergy and lay, whose Augustana heritage lives on in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

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Miscellaneous Collection of oral and written biographies of Pioneer Pastors.

Above shared at the Augustana Heritage Association Gathering, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, June 26, 2004.