North Isanti Baptist Church
Cambridge, Minnesota

1860-1985

Under God, from Humble Beginnings

Compiled by Dr. Wilbur W. Bloom
and Rev. Jonathan L. Larson
Dr. Wilbur W. Bloom, who compiled much of this history, was a native son of Isanti County. A graduate of Cambridge High School, Bethel Theological Seminary, and Macalaster College of St. Paul, he pastored Swedish Baptist Conference churches in Mankato, Minnesota, and Marinette, Wisconsin, before moving on to service with the American Baptist Convention as pastor in Albert Lea, Minnesota, and then as an Executive Minister for 26 years in Michigan and Pennsylvania.

Married to Hildegarde Loman, daughter of the L.N. Lomans, at North Isanti in 1930, he always felt strong ties to the Cambridge area. He and Mrs. Bloom lived in retirement on what had been the L.N. Loman farm 1½ miles east of the church.

In anticipation of the 125th anniversary, the North Isanti Historical Committee asked Rev. Bloom to compile the church history. He conducted research and completed major portions of the writing itself before his death in July of 1984. This book is largely his work. However, since the book had not been completed, Rev. Jonathan Larson, pastor of the North Isanti Baptist Church, was asked to take over the task of finishing the compiling of the history, making final revisions and decisions on the arrangement of the written material and photographs.
Pastor Larson, a graduate of both Bethel College and Seminary of St. Paul, was the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Grove City, Minnesota, prior to coming to North Isanti in 1981.

The addition of Chapters 7, 8, 10, and the Epilogue was the work of Rev. Larson. The Historical Committee itself has been involved in the process of research, review and arrangement, and is grateful for the research and writing done by Dr. Bloom and Rev. Larson.

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Prologue

What is history? It is the events, experiences, trials, tribulations, victories, defeats recorded about a people, an institution, nation, or world. It is mostly characterized by a backward look to observe and discern what has transpired in the march of time.

The historian is aware that he can never delve deeply enough into the past to paint an entirely accurate picture of any spectrum of history, but yet he must struggle toward that goal. His ultimate satisfaction can come only in the knowledge that he has approximated the truth as he has perceived it from a multitude of gathered resources.

To the writers and several concerned associates has been assigned a very special and challenging task, i.e. the recording of the 125 years of the spiritual birth, growth, and maturing of the North Isanti Baptist Church. Such an undertaking has unusual implications and nuances in that it cannot meaningfully employ (except in part) the usual measuring sticks of material growth, economic barometers, or social status. Mostly we are confined to the observance of the outward man, and largely allow our deductions to derive therefrom. All this is true because a church (congregation) is composed of a peculiar people — those who have assented to a divine call. It is within that calling and its personal expressions that the church lives and discovers its place and meaning in human society. Never being perfect, it has both its strengths and weaknesses, adding to both its glory and sometimes its shame.
On June 17, 1985, the North Isanti Baptist Church attains 125 years of existence, a noble history cherished by those who are a part of it today. Surely it has had its mountaintops and its valleys, both of which have made it what it is today. Beginning in 1860, within thirty years it passed through heavy waters when the question of relocation was a vital issue. Because of the proximity of the new church in Cambridge, it seemed the course of wisdom to move farther away, to the south. Official action was taken, and the work moved to the new location. Yet there remained on the part of many a strong concern for continuing the church's mission at its birthplace, the more northern area of the Tamarack Church. Naturally human feelings entered the picture, but by the grace of God the issue was ultimately amicably settled, and the one church became two, i.e. North and South Isanti. God has richly blessed the work at both locations. So now in joyful accord, the sister churches are joining in celebrating their 125th birthdays, growing out of their first 33 years of history together, and each followed by its succeeding 92 years in separate locations.

Our historical sketch, apart from the first 33 years, shall be largely restricted to the life and activities of the North Isanti Church. This is the assignment given to the writers. Yet much of what is here written could easily apply to the life and work of our sister church.

The North Isanti Church, since its inception, has been an ethnic church, related to the Swedish Baptist Conference, now known as the Baptist General Conference. To a large extent it has lost its ethnicity, but must ever remember that its life is deeply rooted in an immigrant people whose birth, or ancestry, is a part of Sweden. This being so, it might be of interest to examine our roots in some detail.
Chapter 1
This Is Sweden

It is the fourth largest country of Europe, about 1000 miles in length, and lying so far to the north that its southern tip is about on line with the southern tip of Alaska. One seventh of its area is above the Arctic Circle, which gives to this part perpetual daylight in the summer, and long and endless dark winter nights. The midland area and southern parts have a fairly favorable climate because of the Gulf Stream and prevailing south and southwest winds. Its people are very homogeneous, with the exception of the few Lapps and Finns residing in the far north.

Geologists and students of history discover signs of human life in Sweden as early as between 10,000 and 8,000 B.C. However, no real organized living is evident until about 3,000 B.C. when archaeological evidence reveals signs of herdsmen and agriculturalists. Crude bronze tools date back to 1,500 B.C., and iron began to be used around 500 B.C.

From early days the Swedes were heathen worshipers, with Thor and Oden their chief gods. The first Christian missionary to visit Sweden was St. Anskar, a Frankish monk, who came there in 829 A.D. Under the irresistible power of its first Christian king, it was made a Christian (Roman Catholic) nation. With the coming of the Reformation period, the Swedes decided they had adopted the wrong religion, and after considerable struggle (including the Thirty Years War) changed to the Lutheran faith, which still obtains as the state religion. So, according to law, every child has as his inherent birthright the Lutheran faith. Overwhelmingly Protestant, Sweden has been so linked since the 16th century, with Uppsala as the seat of the Bishop.

In the 17th century Sweden controlled Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and other parts of the Baltic coast. In 1809, it developed a constitution which is essentially the one it has today. The Rikstag (parliament) is in practical control, with the king functioning primarily as a ceremonial figurehead.

The Swedes have a common national language which grew out of a general Scandinavian language that during the Viking period embraced Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. To be sure, a century ago — and even less — there were many variations of the Swedish language, with each province having its own peculiar dialect. These have largely disappeared in later years. Today whether a Swede be from the province of Hälsingland, Dalarne, Småland, Norrland, or any other, you will hear him speaking the pure Swedish.

In the early part of the 19th century, Sweden was largely an impoverished land. Most of its people were engaged in agriculture or fishing, with 90 percent of the population living in rural areas. Farm land was limited and poor, especially in the northern half of the country. Sweden has about 100,000 lakes, and these lakes together with streams and forests cover at least one-half of its surface. The country’s natural resources are forests (mostly pine), copper, iron, and fishing.

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution and the America emigration, when one-fifth of Sweden’s population left for the new land in a period of about 50 years, a reversal set in. Today Sweden is among the wealthiest nations in Europe, and has a welfare care program second to none. It has established and maintained a high economic level since World War II, and consequently is among the nations with the highest standard of living in Europe (and indeed the world). Its present population is approximately eight million, living in a land of 173,577 square miles, with about 45% of its citizens now making their livelihood from industry, mining, and forestry.
Sweden's high cultural life is evidenced and maintained by its approximately 400 foundations, such as the Nobel Prize. Primary education has been compulsory since 1842, with the result that illiteracy is only 1%.

With the development of Lutheranism, state-church religion and government became closely intertwined, cooperatively supportive and oppressive, with the church's priests often more the agents of the state than dispensers of spiritual nurture and stimulation. Many of the large emigrant movements from Sweden in years gone by were the result of the pressure of the church and its lack of spiritual vitality.

Economic factors also loomed large in the decision of many Swedes to leave their homeland and move on to the land of promise — America. Letters returning to the homeland from America only tended to whet the desire to escape economic poverty, religious persecution, and the inability to improve one's status materially, politically, or socially. Even population pressures entered the picture, as indicated by the fact that the population of Sweden grew from 2.3 million in 1800 to 5.5 million in 1910. The overpopulation decreased the wages to farmers and farm workers who struggled with insufficient acreages. The only apparent solution was to migrate to industrial cities and urban areas, or to emigrate to open farm land in America. Crop failures had nearly catastrophic consequences in rural areas, with persons caught between population growth and a very sluggish system of land ownership and development. (The circumstances and living conditions of the working classes of Sweden during the era of emigration are thoroughly chronicled in Vilhelm Moberg's epic The Emigrants).

The three successive years of crop failure, 1866-1868, made matters very desperate, and the streams of emigrants to America in that period reveal the practical reaction. From Dalarna province alone, 100 families arrived in Isanti County in 1866, with larger emigration waves to America in 1867-1869. Not for one or two crop failures did they fear or leave, but because of the apparent lack of opportunity and the haunting feeling that not enough was being done to avoid future crises.

Before we shift our attention to the new land for which these emigrants set sail, however, we must pause to consider in greater detail the religious climate they were leaving. We cannot completely understand the immigrant church in America, unless we are reminded of the 19th century church and state in Sweden.
Chapter 2  
The Baptists in Sweden

Prior to the coming of St. Anskar to Sweden in 829 A.D., the religious life of the Swedes was clouded pretty much in heathenism. Gods were many and carried a relationship largely to specific facets of human existence. However, the supreme gods of the Norse people were Thor and Odin, who were credited with immeasurable powers. As early as 500 A.D. old Uppsala was a leading cult center.

That St. Anskar's mission efforts ultimately bore fruit is verified by the ascension of the first Christian king to the throne in about 1000 A.D. — a leader who forcibly Christianized the nation. By 1100 only vestiges of the heathen traditions remained. Sweden obtained its first bishop at Uppsala in 1164, and Christian monks contributed much to civilizing the country. The Swedes, now Christians, vented their warlike tendencies on the heathen of the eastern Baltic region.

For several centuries Sweden was under the Christian dominance of Rome, and maintained a somewhat stable relationship with the papacy and its representatives. With the coming of the reformers early in the 16th century, culminating in the Protestant Reformation, new spiritual reverberations began to be felt throughout Sweden. With slight hesitation the Swedes threw off Roman control and turned wholeheartedly to Protestantism in the pattern of Martin Luther. Becoming overwhelmingly Protestant, Sweden under King Gustav I set up bishop headquarters in Uppsala in the 16th century.

This was the beginning of the Lutheran state church which has continued in Sweden to the present. To deny certain values in this relationship would be to miss the influences inherent in the union. At the least, it made the population aware of its government's concern for religious values. Yet, with the church completely subservient to the state, there were innumerable dangers. The clergy became employees of the state, in many ways its agents — a relationship which surely inhibited public dissent on any questionable practices (or even moral aberrations) of the government or its authorities.

Since the priests were more often government employees than persons called by God as heralds of the gospel, and since their training was primarily in secular institutions, it was natural that many of them were neither able, nor inclined, to provide deep spiritual directions to their parishioners. Surely there were exceptions; and to hear those priests, spiritually hungry people would travel great distances.

Early in the 19th century, religious revivalism began to touch Sweden, largely through missionaries from Germany, Scotland, and the United States. As a result, many Swedes were converted to a personal faith in Jesus Christ, and shared this new faith with their friends and neighbors. To them the Bible became a new and living book. For these new converts there was a natural inclination to gather together publicly for Bible study and fellowship. They found their hopes for such experiences blocked by the Conventicle Act of 1726, which prohibited gatherings for religious purposes outside of the church. Persons who transgressed this law by holding conventicles (i.e. religious services outside the church) were liable to fines and imprisonments for the first two offenses, and banishment from the kingdom for the third offense. In the coming of the revivals, the principle of religious liberty was being put to the real test. The Conventicle Act, rigorously enforced, sent hundreds of pious people to jail, where they were fed on bread and water.

To avoid the cruel impositions of the Conventicle Act, the concerned believers
began to meet in private homes to read the Bible together. Because of this practice, they became known throughout Sweden as “läsare” (i.e. readers). They still retained their membership in the state (Lutheran) church, and prayed for its thoroughgoing revival. Though a new constitution enacted in 1809 granted the free exercise of religion, such freedom was slow in coming, and both church and state authorities in many instances continued to operate as if the Conventicle Act were still in effect. The banishment of early Baptist F.O. Nilsson in 1850 reflected the continuing repression, and brings our story to the pre-dawn of Baptist work in Sweden.

Though there were many dissenters to the practice of the state church, there was no early movement toward the formalizing of church bodies outside of the Lutheran church. The “läsare” movement kept growing, with persecutions from the state church persisting as a hangover of the Conventicle Act. For those who had lost faith in infant baptism, there was no mercy on the part of either church or governmental authorities, who often forcibly took little children from their parents and sprinkled them. As punishment or fine for this resistance, the parents had livestock or other valuables taken from them.

While the Swedish Baptists of America are part of the large Baptist family of the world, they are particularly related to the Baptists of Sweden. A brief history of the Baptists in Sweden then has real import in the understanding of our roots and origins at North Isanti.

It may be surprising to learn that in a sense the Baptists of Sweden owe their origin to American Baptists, although no American Baptist was directly involved in the work on Swedish soil. A Swedish sailor, Gustavus W. Schroeder, considered by many to be the first Swedish Baptist, had been converted in a Methodist meeting in New Orleans in April 1844. A few months later, he came to New York and found his way to the Mariners Baptist Church, and on November 3 of that year was baptized in the East River. The following year, during a visit to Gothenberg, Sweden, Schroeder called on F.O. Nilsson, also a former sailor, who had been converted in 1834 (at Mariners Church) and who was now a missionary to the sailors in the service of the American Seamen’s Friends Society. Led by Schroeder to inquire into the subject of baptism, Nilsson was soon persuaded, and on August 1, 1847 he was baptized by J.G. Oncken in the Elbe River near Hamburg, Germany. Nilsson became the first preacher of the Baptist faith in Sweden.

Fired with enthusiasm, Nilsson returned to Sweden and began to share his doctrinal beliefs with his family and friends. Though the risks were high, he was compelled to proclaim his opposition to the practices of the state church and to open new roads to conscience and conviction. On September 21, 1848 five of Nilsson’s converts (four men and one woman) were baptized in the waters of Vallersvik, a bay of the Kattegat on the west coast of Sweden. That same night those five people and Nilsson formed a Baptist church — the first Baptist church in Sweden. It was a time of small beginnings.
For his heretical teachings F. O. Nilsson was called before the “hovrätt” (supreme court) of southern Sweden and banished from his native land in 1850. He fled to Denmark, where he remained for two or three years. His earnest followers in Sweden urged him to accompany them to the United States in the spring of 1853, and in June of that year the small company of 21 landed in New York. In truth they were the forerunners of a great host of Swedish Baptists who in the new world enjoyed the privileges and liberties denied them in their own land.

The group under Nilsson’s leadership moved on across the new land, through Rock Island and Moline, Illinois, some dropping off at various points, with the result that nine of the original 21 settled in the Houston, Minnesota area. There they became the original nucleus of Swedish Baptist work and outgrowth in the North Star state.

Any complete history of the Swedish Baptists in both Sweden and America would surely include such able and heroic leaders as Anders Wiberg, Gustaf Palmquist, et al., who strove valiantly for the Baptist cause and brought to fruition many of the hopes and dreams of the spiritually concerned and the libertarians of generations gone on before. With gratitude we acknowledge our indebtedness to them, and pray that in some measure we shall be worthy of their vision, their indefatigable efforts, and their noble sacrifices.
Chapter 3
Immigrants — A New Land

In 1638, the Swedes established their first settlement in America, under Peter Minuet. It was the first permanent settlement in the state of Delaware, located on the Christina River at the present site of Wilmington. The settlement was called New Sweden. In total, thirteen expeditions were sent from Sweden to the New Sweden colony. The experiment was short-lived as a Swedish colony, for the Dutch forcibly took it over in 1655. However, even to this day many descendents of this Swedish colonization remain in this area, and are leaders in industry and government in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. “Old Swedes Church” in Wilmington still stands as a memorial to this gallant effort of over three centuries ago. This colony, however, was never destined to plant Swedish Baptist churches in America.

In Minnesota, the first white men to record a visit were the Frenchmen, Pierre Radisson and Sieur de Grosseilliers, who are believed to have penetrated the region twice — in 1654 and 1660. Father Hennepin explored the upper Mississippi in 1680.

When the Seven Years War between France and England ended in 1763, northern and eastern Minnesota became British territory. After the Revolutionary War, this part of the future state became a part of the American nation; and with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the rest of present Minnesota was brought into the United States.

In 1849, the United States Congress created the Minnesota Territory and appointed Alexander Ramsey as territorial governor. Outstanding among the events of the territorial period of Minnesota were the treaties of 1851 with the Sioux Indians and those of 1854 and 1855 with the Chippewas, which opened to settlement most of southern and western Minnesota and large areas in the north. Following these treaties, immigrants swarmed into the territory. Public lands were surveyed and sold; the great lumber industry developed; roads were built; counties were organized; schools, churches, and newspapers were established. By 1857, there were 150,037 people in the territory. 1858 was a most significant year in the life of Minnesota, for in that year it became the thirty-second state in the Union.

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Minnesota (through its governor, Ramsey) was the first state to offer troops to President Lincoln. During the war 21,982 men enlisted from Minnesota. Even more serious to Minnesotans than the Civil War was an uprising of the Sioux Indians in 1862. The Sioux, after massacring more than 400 settlers and capturing many more — including women and children — were finally subdued by a military expedition commanded by Henry H. Sibley. Many settlements were depopulated when the panic-stricken settlers fled. Included in this tragedy was the complete destruction of Grove City (Swede Grove) and the Swedish Baptist church there. The Indians were brought to trial, and 38 of them were hanged in Mankato.

In recounting more immediately and directly our antecedents, we must give our attention to our local area. Aware that secular and material factors contribute greatly to both the opportunities and the difficulties of any people, in any time or place, we need to examine the environment which (in part at least) shaped the North Isanti Baptist Church. At the same time, we cannot escape the significance of the exodus from Sweden and its reason for being as notable a factor in developing both the secular and the spiritual lifestyle of our community as it is today.
As previously noted, most historians agree that the first white men to penetrate our immediate area were the French explorers, Radisson and Groseilliers, who canoed up the Rum River from the Mississippi to Mille Lacs Lake in 1655. Not long thereafter Father Hennepin descended the Rum, beginning his journey near the head of the Great Lakes.

With the building of Fort Snelling in 1819 at the junction of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, the importance of the pine trees along the Rum River became evident to the Americans. An officer and some men were sent up the Rum to examine the pine forests and to see if there was some way to get the logs to the river by hand so that the lumber could be used in the construction of the fort. The report was promising, and in the winter of 1820-1821 a logging party was sent out to cut pine and to raft the logs down the Rum in the spring. They brought down about 2000 logs by hand. Some ten or fifteen men would haul one log on a sled from one-fourth to one-half a mile, and lay it upon the bank of the Rum River. In the spring, when the ice of the river broke up, the logs were rolled into the river and floated down to the entrance of the Rum River into the Mississippi, where they were formed into small rafts and floated down to the falls of St. Anthony where the soldiers had built Minnesota's first saw mill. These logs were used for the first row of barracks at Fort Snelling.

In her book, On the Banks of the Rum, Jeanne Johnson provides background on the beginnings of permanent settlements in the Minnesota area.

"No part of the present state of Minnesota was open to settlement until 1838, making most of the people living near Fort Snelling illegal squatters. In Indian treaties ratified by the U.S. Senate in June, 1838, all lands between the St. Croix and the Mississippi were ceded for annuities and other grants, and a triangular section of eastern Minnesota (then a part of the Wisconsin Territory) became the first portion of the future state legally available to the settlers. In 1847, the government made a survey of the land obtained from the Indians. The first sale of land began at St. Croix Falls August 14, 1848, and continued for about two weeks. The second sale began September 15. At this latter sale the first lands now within the limits of Minnesota were disposed of, including the original sites of St. Paul, Stillwater, and St. Anthony (Minneapolis). In all, 3326 acres were sold." (p.3)

Daniel Stanchfield, a timber cruiser from Maine, explored along the Rum River in 1847 and reported almost inexhaustible pine timber above the falls of St. Anthony. He and two companions, along with a crew of 20 men, set out in canoes from St. Anthony Falls (Minneapolis) in the fall of 1847. The crew was to advance with the explorers until the first pine was sighted, and were to cut and bank timber until the return of the exploring trio. On the third day a tract of scrub pine was discovered about three miles above the present Cambridge site. The crew began work there, and continued logging until November, when Stanchfield and his companions returned from the continuing trip which had taken them to Mille Lacs. This was the beginning of the vast logging enterprise which engaged operators and workers in the lumber industry for decades throughout a vast area of Minnesota, beginning slightly north of Cambridge and stretching to the area west and north of Duluth. Many of our fathers or grandfathers spent their winters in these logging camps, thereby garnering some financial resources to assist in the breaking and planting of their small acreages which they were carving out of the wilderness. Out of the vast timber supply
floated down the Rum and the Mississippi came the materials for the building of our metropolises, forts, villages, and homes. Literally out of the earth were the extensive farm lands, parks, and cities brought into being by those unafraid to expend their energy, vision, and diligent efforts.

In describing our own immediate area, we quote again from Jeanne Johnson in her book *The Lighted Spire*.

"The whole area of the county was originally wooded, except grassy sloughs or marshes of small extent, and a few limited tracts of prairie, seldom a mile wide. Nearly one-tenth of the total area of the county is water with the landscape dotted with small lakes, creeks and the tortuous curving of the Rum River as it snakes throughout the county." (p.2)

Isanti County (named after the Isantees, a branch of the Chippewa Indians) was first settled by scattered groups of English, Irish, and Scotch descent, moving to the area mostly from the New England states. Very likely the first concerted effort by Swedes to explore the area was the trip from Chisago Lakes to Princeton made by Olof Eastlund, Jonas Norell, and Daniel Lundquist in 1857. They were in search of possible work in Princeton. Being very favorably impressed with the area near the Rum, in the vicinity of future Cambridge, they determined to attempt a settlement there. They had come to the Chisago Lakes (Center City) area in the mid-1850’s, and all had been part of the Chisago Lakes Swedish Baptist Church there. However, the church's growth was definitely limited, largely due to the pressures and persecutions of the Smålanding Swedes who were predominant in the area and almost all Lutherans. The Baptists were fewer in number, and were composed almost exclusively of emigrants from Hälsingland, Dalarn, and Norrland. The tensions became so heavy that most of the Baptists determined to relocate. This decision led to movements to Vasa (near Red Wing) and to the Cambridge area.

In 1859, Olof Eastlund went to the Cambridge area and erected a small log cabin on the late Reuben Eastlund farm, and moved his family from Chisago lakes to this location in 1860. It is reported that as the family moved, sometimes cutting their way through the wilderness, that Mr. Eastlund carried two pigs in a sack on his back, and his wife led a cow and a calf.

Olof Eastlund, Civil War
Other Baptists from Chisago Lakes followed the Eastlund to their new home in the wilderness, and others moved up from Vasa. Together they faced and shared the rigors of pioneer life. Their settlement was somewhat south of the first location of Cambridge, which was just west of Paul’s Lake. Prior settlers in the then Cambridge site included such names as: Griswold, Owens, Slaughter, Parker, Merrick, Curtis, and Gillis. They had mostly acquired quarter sections of land through preemption (i.e., living on the land for five years and buying it at $1.25 per acre). Several of these early settlers also ventured into real estate gambling, taking up several preemptions and then selling lots to eastern investors. The financial panic of 1857 dealt a severe blow to many of these enterprisers and their eastern victims.

It wasn’t long before a second development about two miles north began, which ultimately resulted in an intense power struggle as to where the county court house should be located. Leaders in the location battle were George Nesbitt (for the “Old Isanti” location) and Ira Conger, pioneer developer of the present Cambridge site. On January 27, 1869 the St. Paul Daily Pioneer reported the removing of the county seat “from Cambridge to the NE ¼ of section 32, town 36, range 23. This removes the county seat of the county about a mile from where it was located or just across the section line from Cambridge. The vote stood 193 — 108.” Most of the original Cambridge site had by then been abandoned in favor of “Old Isanti,” a site farther south, so that obviously the early Cambridge site could not remain the seat of county government. A very interesting account of these political and economic struggles can be found in On the Banks of the Rum, authored by Jeanne Johnson, beginning on page 12.

That the emigration waves to America from Sweden in the last half of the nineteenth century rolled incessantly into Isanti
Township and its environs is demonstrated by the names that dotted the farm homes of the community. The following fairly complete historical roster of family names of those located within a radius of three to four miles from the North Isanti Church site bear this out: Anderson, Askerman, Blomgren, Bodien, Bong, Brolin, Calander, Carlson, Chelberg, Danielson, Eastlund, Engberg, Engstrom, Essen, Falk, Fredrickson, Fredin, Grant, Griff, Hanson, Hagglund, Hjeltman, Johnson, Lane, Larson, Lindberg, Lindell, Linden, Lindh, Lindquist, Lodien, Loman, Malm, Moody, Nord, Nordberg, Norell, Norelius, Norling, Nyberg, Odmann, Okerstrom, Olson, Peterson, Riis, Sandstrom, Schugren, Shulean, Skoglund, Staff, Sundberg, Thunstrom, Viden, Walburg, Wallin, Wallstone, Westin, Wickblom. Travel the roads in any direction from the church a half a century and more ago, and if one were not of Swedish heritage, he could well feel that he was in a foreign land! So nearly totally ethnic was the area prior to 1915 that one found it very difficult to find a child of other than Swedish background in any of the five schools which served families connected with the North Isanti Church — those schools being District #3, Moody’s #6, Skalin’s #30, Isanti #45, and Pine Lake.

This homogeneity and the fact that most of the settlers had come from Hälsingland, Dalarno, Norrland, or Medelpad, and that several of them had Baptist connections and/or relations to the “läsare” movement in Sweden provided a good potential for the development of a strong Swedish Baptist constituency in both Isanti Township and throughout the county. In fact, Isanti County has often been described as the most densely Swedish Baptist rural county in America. Today one can note more than one dozen Baptist churches of Swedish origin within a radius of twenty miles from Cambridge.

Very descriptive of early pioneer days and the land and the people are the words of Rev. Andrew Blomgren as quoted by Rev. C.A. Carlson in his “Sjuttio Årig Historia” (70 Years History).

The land was wild as if nature had had it in its power since creation. The Indians who had neither plow nor spade, had their wigwams here and there along the shores of the lakes and streams. There were no roads, so, if the pioneers wanted to get together with one another it was to cut openings with axes through the woods and bushes and make paths around swamps. No stores were nearer than Anoka. To get there one must go by foot to carry home on his back a sack of flour, unless in the passing of time a person became so rich that he could bring home provisions with oxen. But the land was rich; grass flourished, deer grazed in the woods, and fish were plentiful in the waters. And a person had so few necessities. No thoughts about becoming rich; only having each day’s need. You were rich if you had two cows. By reason of being in the same economic circumstances there was a warm neighborliness and general helpfulness, which made life with one another a happy experience. Also, with few exceptions, they were young, healthy, optimistic, ready with all their strength to break and cultivate the virgin soil, erect their small log shanties as a home for the family. If a person could find enough old newspapers to paper the walls he had it real nice. In those conditions a person was satisfied and felt himself more wealthy than many families in our time that have most everything beautiful that is available.

There was no electric refrigeration, no central heating, no factory-made clothing, no radio or television, no roads (graveled or paved), no power machinery.

The pioneers in hope and hard work, cleared the land and, step by step, opened
the fields and pasturelands as we know them today. They were practically all, after several years, engaged in diversified farming, using oxen and horses to pull the stumps, plow the fields, and cultivate the crops. Wheat, oats, potatoes, and corn were produced on most of the farms. Cattle, hogs, and chickens rounded out the family’s needs for personal supplies, and provided sales to purchase their limited necessities. Marketing was not easy when one had to haul his potatoes ten to fifteen miles to Harris or North Branch, where sometimes the price was as little as five cents per bushel.

Of great significance to the progress and growth of our community was the coming of the Great Northern Railway through Isanti County and Cambridge in 1899. It opened new and easy avenues for the sale of crops, chief of which were potatoes, and for the purchase of needed supplies.

In the evolution of our community we have come a long way. The small farm is practically gone, except as an occasional hobby. We have become specialists, with a few large crop farms and some fairly elaborate dairy farms. The ox and the horse (except for pleasure) are gone, having given way to mammoth tractors and combines; milking machines and huge trucks keep our dairy industry alive and well. No longer are the members of our church exclusively farmers, homemakers, and their children. We recognize them, rather, (apart from the few specialist farmers) as pharmacists, accountants, morticians, automobile dealers, lawyers, teachers, engineers, carpenters, electricians, artisans, commercial truck drivers, restaurateurs, photographers, salespersons, clerks, office workers, printers, state and county employees.

With the framework of this dramatic and interesting change of time and lifestyle, the North Isanti Church found its beginning, its growth, and hopefully, its maturity. Let’s see what history says to us, and what it has done, and is doing, to us. Surely only the highlights, interspersed with some personal humorous or serious incidents can be contained within the compass of this writing.
Chapter 4
Heroes of Faith:
The Church Begins

In the 11th chapter of the Book of Hebrews the writer waxes eloquent as he draws up an interesting and impressive list of heroes of faith. After reminding us of many from centuries long gone who have stood tall in their commitment and dedication, he hastens to utter, "What more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson...who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises..."

But heroes of faith were not confined to the early days of the theocracy, nor either to the early testamental and church history times. In the providence of God they have continually appeared on the human scene, responding to the leadership of the Holy Spirit and bringing Him to light by their lives and actions. Through the years of our congregation we are grateful that again and again God has seen fit to use many of these. They have been pastors, lay leaders, teachers, humble witnesses, musicians, missionaries, evangelists, parents — such as have been made new by His grace and have found their deepest joy in serving Him.

We shall not endeavor to clothe them in sainthood, for they, like us, were subject to both the strengths and frailties of human existence. It is but through the goodness, mercy, and forgiveness of God that we unite with them in the glorious parade of life and eternity.

How simply it began! Fourteen persons concerned about their own spiritual growth and that of their families gathered in a one-room log cabin. But God's Spirit was there, as well as a sincerely cooperative and concerned attitude. So on June 17, 1860, before the day was done, a new Christian church in solemn commitments had been born, and even moved readily to be recognized in the fellowship of a host of Baptist churches across the land. Guided by the Rev. Andrew Norelius, lately come from Wastedo (Red Wing), as chairman, and the Rev. Amory Gale, American Baptist home missionary, as secretary, they planted well. In order that they might continue with meaningful growth into the future, they selected young Matthias Smith from their group to be their leader. On that same day they voted to license him to preach the gospel wherever God would open doors.
The following is the record of that memorable day in the freshness of its happenings, as recorded by the secretary Amory Gale:

Minutes of a meeting held at Cambridge in Isanti County, State of Minnesota, June 17, 1860. The meeting held in the home of Olof Eastlund was attended by several brothers and sisters in the Lord for the announced purpose of organizing a Baptist church, and to study what the Scriptures teach concerning membership in such a church. Rev. A. Norelius was elected to serve as chairman, and A. Gale as secretary. Voted that we consider it proper and beneficial to organize a Baptist church in this area. The following members presented letters of transfer from other Baptist churches: Per Norelius, Anna Norelius, Karin Franklin, Petter Shulin, Anna Shulin, Anders Lod, Anna Stina Lod, Olof Eastlund, Lovisa E. Eastlund, Daniel Lundquist, Ingrietra Lundquist, Andrew P. Norelius, Elizabeth Norelius, Matthias Smith. Altogether fourteen persons. Voted that we recognize each other as satisfactory for membership and that we hereby consider ourselves as charter members of a Christian church. Voted that we accept the church covenant as translated from the English language and read by the chairman to be the covenant of our church. While forming a circle and holding hands the chairman read the covenant and pronounced the benediction. Thus these brothers and sisters entered into a bond of fellowship and established themselves as an independent Baptist church, founded on the Word of God in truth. Voted that we adopt the statement of faith which brother A. Wiberg has translated from the English to Swedish, and which is taken from the Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge.

Voted that the church be known as the Baptist Church of Cambridge. Voted that brother O. Eastlund be elected to serve as secretary of the church for one year or until someone else is elected to serve. Voted (by closed ballots) that brother Lundquist be elected to serve as deacon for one year. Voted that Matthias Smith be elected to serve as chairman for one year, and that he be granted a license to preach the gospel wherever the Lord opens a door for him, and that his license be signed by the chairman and the secretary. Voted that we hold our covenant meeting the last Sunday of each month. Voted that brothers M. Smith, O. Eastlund, and P. Shulin be appointed as delegates to the council which will be held for the purpose of recognizing the organization as a Christian church.

A. Gale, Secretary

The following brief sketches of the original 14 charter members are of interest in their indications as to areas from which they had come to Cambridge, and the time, place, and by whom baptized.

Andrew (Andreas) P. Norelius and Elizabeth Norelius were, no doubt, the oldest members of the group. They were the parents of Andrew, who helped to organize several Baptist churches in Minnesota and who served as chairman of the church organizational meeting and the recognition council on June 17, 1860. Andrew P. and Elizabeth were also the parents of Eric Norelius, the well-known Lutheran theologian and founder of Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. Other children of the elder Norelius couple were Jonas, who was also active in the Baptist work, Julia (Norelius) Bong, who helped to organize the first
Sunday School here, Karin Franklin, who was a charter member, and Per (Peter) Norelius, a charter member who settled on a farm near Isanti. Andrew P. and Elizabeth were baptized by Rev. F.O. Nilsson in Chisago Lake on September 11, 1856. They had helped to organize the church at Wastedo before moving to Isanti County. (Wastedo is generally associated with the Vasa church. Located in Goodhue County, they were served by the same pastor. Neither of them is any longer in existence.)

Per (Peter) Norelius, a son of Andrew P., arrived in America in 1854 with his wife Anna. They were baptized by Rev. F.O. Nilsson in Chisago Lake on September 21, 1856. They helped to organize churches at Chisago Lake and at Wastedo before moving to this area.

Mrs. Karin (Norelius) Franklin was baptized on July 25, 1858 by Andrew Norelius (her brother), and became a member of the Wastedo church. In January 1860 she moved to the Cambridge area.

Perter and Anna Shulin were baptized by Rev. Andrew Norelius on June 20, 1858 in Chisago Lake. They were members of the Chisago Lake church until they moved here in 1860.

Anders Lod and Anna Stina Lod were baptized in Chisago Lake on October 10, 1858, and were members there until they moved to the Cambridge area. They lived for some time in east Cambridge and also in West Cambridge.

Daniel Lundquist and Ingregheta Lundquist were baptized by Rev. Andrew Norelius in Chisago Lake — Daniel on the 13th of October and Ingregheta on the 17th of October in 1858. After moving to this area, they lived on a farm near Bodum, southeast of Cambridge.

Olof and Lovisa Eastlund came to America in 1856. They were also baptized in Chisago Lake on the 13th of October, 1858 by Rev. Andrew Norelius, and were members of the Chisago Lake church before coming here in March, 1860. They settled on a farm southeast of Cambridge. It was in their home that the organizational meeting and recognition council for the church were held.

Matthias Smith came from Sweden in 1850 at the age of 17. He arrived in Chisago City in 1852. He had also been a member of the Chisago Lake church before coming here. He married Brita Eastlund, a sister of Olof Eastlund.

Immediately upon the conclusion of its organization, the church sought recognition of its status within the Baptist family. So the record continues:

June 17, 1860
A church council met for the purpose of acknowledging the Cambridge Baptist Church as a Christian church according to the teaching of the Scriptures.

The council organized by choosing brother A. Norelius as chairman and A. Gale as secretary.

The following persons were present to form the church council: from the newly organized Cambridge church — M. Smith, O. Eastlund, P. Shulin; from Chisago Lakes — John Smith; from Vasa — Rev. A. Norelius, deacon John
Norelius; from Minneapolis — Amory Gale.
**Voted** that we are satisfied with that which these brothers have done and with their beliefs, and therefore wish to recognize them as a Christian church, which shall be done in the following manner at 1:30 P.M.: a) introductory message by brother M. Smith; b) preaching (on 1 Cor. 14:40) and installation prayer by brother A. Norelius; c) hand of fellowship and charge to the church by brother A. Gale.

**Voted** that when the above has been carried out, this council will be concluded.
**Voted** that we adjourn until 1:30 P.M. and that after we then have completed the above according to our decision, we assemble to hear brother A. Norelius preach on the text: 1 Cor. 14:40.

A. Gale, Secretary
A. Norelius, Chairman

The Baptist Church of Cambridge had begun!
Chapter 5
Heroes of Faith: 1860 - 1910

Margreta Danielson (age 104) with Andrew, Tilda, Geneva
It is sometimes humorously noted that the first fifty (or sixty, or eighty) years of a person's life are the hardest. In a number of respects it may be that the first fifty years of this congregation's life were the most difficult as well. When one reflects on the difficulties which were successfully overcome in those early decades, one can only praise God for His grace in preserving the witness of the group which began so humbly on June 17, 1860. The church survived — and ultimately flourished — despite the threats posed in the first half century by the Civil War, the Sioux Indian uprising in Minnesota, a doctrinal heresy from Sweden, a division over where to locate as a church, and numerous leadership changes. Indeed, these problems seem less significant than the many achievements of the period. Let us recall how those decades began.

Matthias Smith's leadership of the church was as chairman, an office in which he served for one year, and a position held the next year by John Riis and Per Anderson. The first ordained minister to lead the church was Rev. Andrew Norelius, who returned in 1862 to pastor the congregation he had helped to organize two years earlier. Though without a regularly selected pastor for many of the early years, the church from the beginning reached out to bring additional members into the fold. The first baptismal service was conducted on July 16, 1860, when Margretta Danielson was immersed. On July 17, Olof Danielson and Margretta’s sister Sigre Kaja united with the church — he by transfer of letter and she through baptism.

Andrew Norelius, who served as pastor from 1862 to 1865, was well-known among Swedish Baptists in Minnesota. Norelius was part of a well-educated and distinguished family. As has been noted above, Andrew's brother Eric, who continued in the Lutheran church, was the founder of Gustavus Adolphus College and President of the Augustana Lutheran Synod. Mrs. Julia Bong, well-known Baptist leader and one of Isanti County's first public school teachers, was a sister, as was Karin Franklin. Jonas was a brother. All were at sometime active in the life of North Isanti, except Eric.

Andrew Norelius was an able leader, and real growth was experienced during his ministry. It was also during his pastorate that the Sunday School was begun. Two narratives regarding the origin of the Sunday School have circulated through the years. The Rev. C. A. Carlson's account of this event (in his 70 Years History) is so descriptive that we quote from him:

On Midsummer Day, June 24, 1863, the first Sunday School in Isanti County was organized in an oak grove at the location we still call Grift's place (later Albin Olson's). All gathered at Oscar Sundberg's home, and from there the group marched singing beautiful and familiar hymns — these pioneer fathers, mothers, and children, some dressed in fancy clothes, others in their ordinary everyday woolens. Laden lunch
baskets were carried on their arms, as they moved along the shore of Paul's Lake, whose dancing whitecaps pushed by the gentle June breeze seemed to re-echo the joyful tunes of the happy marchers.

To the green-leaved nearby oak grove the crowd moved, where the records tell us the first Sunday School was born. Dinner was served to over 100 persons, and they were all counted in as a part of the new Sunday School. Up to this time (1930) there have been 1,233 enrolled in this glad fellowship, with roots stretching back to that hallowed oak grove.

The second narrative on Sunday School origins comes to us from a talk given by Missionary C.E. Westin in 1915 reported in the Minnen of the Old Settlers Reunion by P. Ryden. Westin quotes Julia Bong as saying that the school began in June 1862 on a wood-clad hill on the Andrew Danielson farm near Lake Fanny. Pastor Norelius preached on Ephesians 6:1-6, following which Mrs. Bong and Jonas Lindblom were elected as teachers, and Danielson as secretary. The one hundred and more people then enjoyed dinner together. It is interesting to note that although Swedish was to be the principal language of the church for the next 75 years, there were, nevertheless, some Sunday School classes in English in those first years, as a means of helping the immigrants learn the language.

Various explanations can be offered regarding the differences in the two Sunday School narratives. It may be that one account is in error. However, the fact that date, location, and other details vary suggests that there may have been two similar events. Remembering that no church building existed at this time, and that Sunday School was conducted in homes, we wonder if more than one school was begun. It is also possible that an effort begun at Lake Fanny in 1862 faltered in the difficult winter months and was revived in 1863 with another picnic — this time by Paul's Lake. In their 100th Anniversary of the Sunday School on July 1, 1962, the church chose to celebrate the earlier date. In any event, what is most significant is that the first organization developed by the young church was designed to study the Bible.

As sometimes happens amid the commitments and emotions of Christian searchings for a fuller life, persons can center on strange and peculiar doctrines which can be disruptive to a congregational fellowship. This did happen, unfortunately, in 1865 with the evolvement, in Sweden, of a doctrine known as “Sjodinska Syndsfrihets Lara” (Sjödin’s Teaching of Utter Sinlessness). Naturally the movement reached the young Swedish Baptist churches in America. As a result, it brought almost to a standstill the Cambridge (Isanti) church, the membership of which decreased from 57 in 1865 to 11 in 1867.

With the return of the several young men (14) who had served in the Civil War and Indian wars, a return to stability began. The little group even began to plan for a house of worship. Progress was slow because of the small number and the financial limitations.
By a stroke of fate the Rev. John Ongman, serving as an American Baptist home missionary, moved from Anoka County to Isanti Township in 1869. Being employed as a traveling American Baptist missionary, he immediately related to the Cambridge church and through his effective and infectious leadership kindled new life in the dispirited group. In 1870, the church called him to be their pastor, and he served them well for the next three years.

The well-renowned “Tamarac Kyrkan” (Tamarack Church) was completed in 1870 and dedicated at the “Julotta” service (5:00 A.M. on Christmas morning). It was a building 48 by 24 feet, with sidewalls 18 feet high formed by tamarack logs placed vertically. It was rustic to be true, but at last a place where God’s people could gather in worship and praise. It served the congregation for three decades, until the present main structure was erected in 1900.

It is worthy of note that none of the early pastors had any promised salary, and that they sawed trees, grubbed stumps, and broke land like any of their pioneer neighbors. Yet the pastor was to be ready to preach on Sundays, to lead midweek services as they might be set up, and to do whatever else fell to the lot of a leader. As their limitations permitted, members and friends provided the pastor’s family with eggs, potatoes, meat, or flour. The dire financial circumstances of the congregation is evidenced in records which indicate an income of slightly more than $5.00 per year and expenditures of an approximately equivalent amount. Economic conditions were always a factor to be considered, and surely the pioneer farmers were sorely pressed when their supposed “money crop” (potatoes) was bringing them only five cents per bushel after a long haul of 10 to 15 miles to the railroad at either Harris or North Branch.
Interesting events were happening in the community during the first decade of the church. While the Cambridge community had recognized the area just west of Paul's Lake as a sort of headquarters, there were those who had other ideas, and a secular power struggle was stirring. Ira Conger had chosen a site some 1 1/2 to 2 miles north of Paul's Lake as the future site worthy of the new Cambridge. At the same time, forces allied with one George Nesbitt had been opting for "Old Isanti" just southeast of the Olof Eastlund corner. Isanti County had become a legal entity by act of the Minnesota Territorial Government in 1857. Without prolonging the details of the political aspirations and spirited "in-fighting" (also mentioned above in chapter 3) let us note that it was ultimately decided that the present Cambridge should be the county seat; and the necessary officers were appointed by the Minnesota Territory to function until a proper election.

After three and one-half years of successful and greatly appreciated service, John Ongman decided to respond to another field, and the Cambridge Baptist Church was again without a leader. However, God had his man to step into the breach — no renowned preacher, but a man of deep concern and dedication. Erik Loden, a son of the church, seemed always ready to step in when there was a need, and this was his
hour. This was to be a brief time of leadership for him, 1873-1874. It is of interest to note that Loden was the first leader to be ordained in Isanti County, and that at this time (1873) a new daughter church of Cambridge Baptist, i.e. Fish Lake Baptist, was begun.

To the Rev. Andrew Blomgren, who pastored the church from 1874 to 1883, was given the honorable recognition throughout all of the Swedish Baptist family of being the "Minnesota Philosopher" — and rightly so. At an early age he evidenced a desire for discussion," but his gentle, kindly spirit, and timid humility drew the love of all. Though a son of the church, he never became a common man to the congregation, but rather the inspiration for serious spiritual commitment.

In special evidence of affection for Rev. Blomgren, the church, one year, presented him with a gift of $50.00, and on another occasion surprised him with a horse and buggy. The ecstatic preacher commented, "O what a pleasure to be able to ride to church!" That was an unknown privilege in 1879. The wonderful spirit which pervaded the church had a most salutary effect on the community, and many were won to Christ and became a part of the growing fellowship.

During this period a young man and his bride from Sweden settled in the Isanti area. He had come to be a farmer in the free land, but God had other plans for him. Olof Bodien was converted in the Tamarack Church, and before his days were over he had come to be one of the outstanding ministers in the entire Swedish Baptist denomination. Bodien, the teacher from Sweden, had become impressed with Blomgren, and they engaged in extensive discussion about life and the Christian faith. For several years Bodien was the golden-tongued orator and famous preacher of the prodigious First Swedish Baptist Church (now Bethlehem Baptist) of Minneapolis. His earthly remains rest among his many pioneer friends in the North Isanti Cemetery.

For the first time a pastor was called to work full time for the church with the coming of Alfred Sjolander in 1884. Coming directly from the seminary, he was alive and energetic. He visited extensively throughout the area, and as a result of his dedicated witness there was a time of revival and rapid growth. A plus for the young minister was that he found his bride in the church; he married Adelia Danielson in 1886 after he had left the church to pastor in Duluth.
A second church found its embryo in the Cambridge (Isanti) church when it reached out in 1886, under Pastor Andrew Swartz, to begin a new work in the village of Cambridge. To foster the work, the congregation at the Tamarack Church went so far as to erect a building for worship in Cambridge before a church had been organized there. The real concern and generosity of the mother church was greatly evidenced by its act, in 1888, of transferring 36 of its members to the new church as it became organized. Future helpfulness was the decision of the (original) Cambridge church to surrender its name to the new Cambridge church, and to choose to be in the future known as the “Isanti Church.” Continually since then that has been the recognized identification of the church, though later experience determined that the congregation meeting at the Tamarack Church should be known as “North Isanti.”

In His wise providence, God always seems to prepare His person for whatever the circumstances may be. Surely so it seemed when Olof Engberg took up the pastoral leadership in 1888. Much was astir, and some dark clouds appeared on the horizon. The new church had gotten under way in Cambridge and was moving forward; it was less than three miles distant from the Isanti
(formerly Cambridge) church. A church was well on its way in Fish Lake; and an active Sunday School was thriving at "Stormossan," less than three miles to the south. Many thought it wise to move the church's meeting place to "Stormossan," which might well provide more ample fields of service for all. Without doubt there was merit in this opinion, and some actions were taken to attempt a total relocation. However, there was deep and sentimental attachment on the part of many to the location where they had first planted their roots, and to a location which represented some continuing travel advantages for those living farther north. Here too was the place of their first pioneer commitment, "Tamarac Kyrkan," the church of their fathers, of themselves and their families, and of so many meaningful Christian experiences. Such ties are not easily broken. Naturally tensions arose and some misunderstandings; but thank God, the saints — however they felt — were stable and strong enough to withstand the storm! After some hard days, the final resolution was to have two churches from the one — North Isanti and South Isanti, who like twin brothers came from a common womb.
The details of the division may be briefly described. Discussions in the Isanti church as early as 1888 led to a decision by the church by 1890 to relocate at the Per Winlund farm at “Stormossan,” and the subsequent withdrawal on March 25, 1893, by 71 members (who called Engberg as pastor) to continue at the Tamarack Church. This “northern group,” with which the remainder of this history will now deal, filed articles of incorporation on September 29, 1894; and beginning in 1895 Swedish Baptist Conference publications listed two churches, i.e. North Isanti and South Isanti. One group (South Isanti) retained the original charter and the new church building; the other group (North Isanti) received the Tamarack Church and site, and retained the leadership of Pastor Engberg.

To further discuss technical deeds and contracts surely has its value and (from the merely human point) its meaning, but in the long pull of God’s perspective maybe divine realities have even more meaning. How good it is now to know the Christian harmony which pervades the “twins”, as they pray and work for the welfare of one another, and join in common commitment and witness to Jesus Christ.

Through this unsettled period and until 1896, Engberg was the capable master at the helm, serving as pastor of both groups for a time before settling in as the leader of North Isanti. He is well remembered as the pastor who enlisted a group of young men from the church and sent them out as evangelistic witnesses to the surrounding territories. He was also instrumental in organizing the Mission Band, composed of primary and junior children into whom was inculcated a spirit of missionary concern.

Joy and sorrow often follow close on the heels of one another. Such was the tragic experience of the Rev. Carl Vingren, who was called in late 1896 and remained scarcely one year. Soon after his arrival, the church joyously united with him and his bride in their marriage festival, but ere the year was out, with broken spirits and bowed heads, they trudged to our hillside cemetery, where they laid young Mrs. Vingren in her final resting place. Hopes high, aspirations unlimited, they were crushed to the earth by one cruel stroke! Rev. Vingren left the field to attempt to build anew elsewhere. Incidentally, it was during the few months that Vingrens were here that the first parsonage was built.
The old (Tamarack) church

The new church building
A matter of elation to the congregation was the decision in 1898 of two of their own, Eric and Serena Schugren, to give their lives in missionary service. Schugren entered seminary that fall; later, Rev. and Mrs. Schugren served as missionaries to the Telugu tribes in India. This service caused the North Isanti church to become more intimately identified with the Great Commission.

Pastor C.L. Wallman

Not to all men are talents equally given or equally employed. Unto some it appears that God has supplied a super abundance. With the coming of C.L. Wallman in 1898, North was granted a most unusually gifted man — preacher most excellent, educator, architect, painter, watchmaker, photographer, what have you. He did not withhold these gifts from service to God’s people. He made the plans for a new church building (the present main structure), and together with Peter Bodien, the builder, saw it to its successful conclusion. He organized and conducted a weekday school for elementary-grade children, painted the former beautiful lake scene above the baptistry, arranged for church furniture, and so on, and all the while carried on an intensive evangelistic ministry that led to his baptizing of dozens of new converts. In 1901, he was led to other fields of service.

Pastor S.A. Hult

The great English preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once said, “If a man can do nothing but preach, he very likely should not preach.” When S.A. Hult became pastor in 1901, North discovered a man who could assuredly do more than preach. While the new building had been completed as far as its structure was concerned, it had not been brick-veneered, which was needed to add to both its beauty and its warmth. This became almost a personal mission of Rev. Hult, and it is reported that there was no bricklayer in the congregation who could compete with him or who gave as much time as he to the finished product. He was a true Nehemiah, who built the walls as well as kept the ramparts for the Lord!

A never-to-be-forgotten event was the completion of the Great Northern Railroad from Minneapolis to Duluth through Cambridge in 1899. What avenues of commerce, trade, and communication it offered to the young municipality! For businessmen, farmers, travelers, housewives, salesmen it opened grand vistas for progress; and what a popular stopping-off point it made for the many ministers and missionaries who were invading the young pioneer area! As a generous service to the itinerant
messengers of the gospel, the pastor’s wife in Cambridge practically became a hotel and restaurant keeper.

Nearer home a new post office was established at the Peter Bodum residence, Section 15, on October 4, 1899. The name Bodum was chosen, with Peter Bodum as postmaster. Let the Cambridge Independent tell the story:

With the booming of the new Cambridge, the inevitable effect on “Old Isanti” was a foregone conclusion; it began to disintegrate and ultimately disappeared. Yet it had its heyday of stores, cheese factory, tailor shop, blacksmith shop, brick building yard in the location southwest of O. Eastlund. There also was a cranberry bog on the south side of Paul’s Lake, and a veterinarian’s hospital north of the lake. The veterinarian was Dr. Paul Lane, for whom the lake was named “Paul’s Lake.” To meet the growing needs of the potato farmers, warehouses grew up along the Great Northern Railroad in Cambridge and a substantial starch factory was built, to utilize the potato culls.

With more and more land cleared, the farmers became more and more diversified in their production — dairy, corn, wheat, oats, hay, potatoes, etc. In fact, some of the sons of the church pioneers could well boast of the finest dairy herds in all of Isanti County. Who does not recall their beautiful Holstein-Friesian herds at the county fair in the early 1900’s?

The absence of any artificial refrigeration prior to the early decades of this century posed a problem for the care and keeping of food. Sunken wells, cool-water pumping tanks, and ice garnered from the lakes in the winter (to be stored in sawdust bins for use in ice boxes) were the means at hand. Milk was most often separated by hand-drawn cream separators, and the cream was hauled to the nearby Bodum Creamery, or,
in many cases, churned by a reluctant child until the butter formed and mother could fill the crockery jars to use the butter as a medium of exchange at the corner store. In the same way, eggs were the means of barter for flour, sugar, spices, goods, or whatever the housewife needed.
“Love never fails.” So it seemed when the Rev. Andrew Blomgren was invited for a second term as pastor in 1903. Remembered for his unusual intellectual capacity coupled with an utter humility, for his living acceptance of people, and for his unique and telling preaching, the congregation expectantly turned to him again. What a great nine-year period it proved to be! There was a great ingathering of souls, highlighted by the special meetings of the blind evangelist, A.J. Freeman, which gave increasing vigor to the entire fellowship. For nine years, Rev. Blomgren gave of his best for Jesus Christ and North Isanti, and when he resigned in 1912, he had garnered the longest service as pastor of the church — 18 years.

Near the end of Blomgren’s second tenure as pastor, in 1910, the church celebrated 50 years of ministry. It had been an eventful period, and God had blessed. The birth and adolescence of the church was over. Organizations such as the Sunday School, Ladies’ Missionary Society, Young People’s Society, and Children’s Mission Band were all in place. Daughter churches had been established in Fish Lake and Cambridge, and the division of the Isanti church had been finalized. The church name, which began as the Baptist Church of Cambridge, and then became the Isanti Baptist Church, was now (for the group at the Tamarack Church site) the North Isanti Baptist Church. The church building (after a decade in homes and three decades in the “Tamarac Kyrkan”) was now the present structure, which would remain fundamentally the same for another 50 years. The death of Olof Engberg in 1911, and the retirement of Andrew Blomgen in 1912 and his death in 1913 marked the passing of the “first wave” of church leaders — most of them immigrants from Sweden, many of them self-taught farmer-preachers, several of them “home-grown.” The era of emigration which established Isanti County to this day as one of the Swedish centers in America had now largely passed. It was time for a new chapter in the life of the church to begin.
Chapter 6
Heroes of Faith: 1910-1945

The period of life into which the church entered in the sixth decade of its existence is much more within the reach of our memories and understanding today. Several within the congregation now can remember back to the 1910's; many of the pastors and church leaders are vivid in the memories of members today. One of the pastors of this period (Martin Hamlin) continues to correspond with the church. A pastor's wife (Mrs. Carl Holmberg) and a pastor's son (Gordon Carlson) from these years are active in leadership at North Isanti in 1985. Thus, the period of church life from 1910 to 1945 seems much closer to us today than does the era of Ongman, Engberg, and Blomgren.

It was a different period, also, in the absence of the kinds of fundamental changes which characterized the first 50 years. The crises of these years were largely in society; two world wars and a great depression all fit within this era. For the church, it was a time of increased maturity, steady and effective ministry, and spiritual vitality. Let us review some of the major events of those years.

In 1912, just 28 years after the Rev. Alfred Sjolander (1884-1886) had been the shepherd of the pioneer flock, the Rev. Gideon Sjolander, his nephew, was called to the growing group. He was a young, handsome, enthusiastic, evangelistic, and able preacher. He had a special gift of being a friend of everyone, and had a community-wide respect and hearing. Never ashamed to share his transformed faith wherever he went — in the home, on the farm, in the place of business, in the church — he exerted all to commit their lives to Christ. His influence was such that farmers invited him to have evangelistic services in newly built barns, as they had their buildings dedicated to God. Sjolander gave outstanding service from 1912 to 1916.

When the Rev. G.W. Sundmark assumed the pastorate in 1916, North Isanti was the recipient of as kind and gentle-spirited a leader as any church could anticipate. Truly a man of winning ways, he well emulated the spirit of his Master, besides having the gift of embedding it in his family. There was a quality of genuineness and Christian virtue in that household that found no criticism in member or friend, and which was a tremendous factor for good in the entire community. No doubt it had its effect on the daughter, Ethel (Mrs. Edwin Erickson),
going to India as a missionary in 1928. Unfortunately, Rev. Sundmark was cut off in the midst of his years, going to his place of eternal rest at the age of 56 in 1922.

In order to properly accommodate the Sundmark family, the present parsonage was built in 1917, though the pastor had asked for just an extra room. Since that date the parsonage has had several renovations, and today is a credit to the church and commodious for the present pastor’s family.

Of considerable influence on the life of North Isanti and all other surrounding churches was the Rev. A. Lee Aldrich Evangelistic Campaign held on the town square in Cambridge, under sponsorship of the area Swedish Baptist churches in 1919. Several members of our church look back with appreciation to those days as the beginning of their spiritual pilgrimage. In 1921, a somewhat similar campaign was held jointly in Cambridge in a 1000-seat tabernacle under the preaching of the Rev. David E. Anderson. His earnest preaching, almost broken-hearted love for people and their salvation, brought many to the Kingdom. While revival fires were always smoldering or burning in the churches, an occasional special united emphasis made both membership and community more cognizant of the urgency of the constant challenge of man meeting face-to-face with God. Complacency could breed contempt.

Probably the most vigorous and far-reaching of the united gospel crusades was that under the leadership of the Rev. James Rayburn, a Presbyterian of Kansas, who preached to overflow crowds in the corner tabernacle in Cambridge. He literally captured the community to such an extent that business and professional places would close down from 10:00 A.M. to 10:30 A.M. each weekday morning to assemble in earnest prayer for impact on the whole town. Who can forget those midnight prayer meetings in the Baptist church when it seemed the evangelistic fires needed a lift? Among the more significant results of this special effort were the many young people who dedicated themselves to full-time service as pastors, missionaries, Christian teachers, merchants, farmers, or wherever God’s Spirit should lead them. The service motto was “Rayburn Is Different”, and his leadership truly made a difference in Isanti County.
Many who had emigrated from Sweden to America had done so on religious grounds. Dissatisfied with a seemingly dead rationalism, they longed for a land where man could feel the lift of the Spirit. Thus in early days it was but natural to discover many of them gathering from time to time in the little log cabins to study the Word and to pray, or to meet on their rugged roads and to share with one another the wonder of God’s working with them. Faith and confidence in the ultimate victory of God had few rivals — not even the “weather report”.

With Isanti County having a Swedish population of practically 12,000 in 1900, it was not difficult for them to form in small groupings of like language, and often like faith. So it was but natural for a minister to say in 1900, “We have 20 Baptist churches of less than a day’s walk from Cambridge.” Celebrating itself at that time as the most heavily populated Swedish county in the United States, Isanti County also contained the greatest concentration of Baptists in any American rural community. Yes, we have a goodly heritage which merits our best to keep it so! Always remembering that God does not work in traditional patterns, we must constantly rise to the new day and be relevantly at work with Him in a vastly changing society. Old ways are gone, but old truths remain ready to impact themselves on a changing generation alert to His call to meaningful life whenever and wherever it be. The “good old days” do not often gain by comparison when we note the way so many of our younger generation are laying hold on the eternal values of life. As the torch is being passed on to them, we see hope and victory ahead.

After the passing of Rev. Sundmark, the church turned to an unusually vibrant and energetic young minister, the Rev. Martin Hamlin, who arrived in 1922. He was a young seminary graduate with high aspirations, aligned with a gifted eloquence. It was at this time that the first consideration was given to the wisdom of using the English language in some of the services. The first proposal was to have one Sunday evening service a month in English, and after voting it “in” and “out” it was finally resolved to proceed with the new idea. As the years moved on, the wisdom of having all Sunday evening services in the new language became increasingly evident.

Unfortunately, while the church was making good progress Pastor Hamlin’s health failed, and he was compelled to leave the happy prospects in 1924. With a return to health, he later went on to effectively serve several Baptist General Conference and American Baptist churches. In this anniversary year he is still living in retirement in Storm Lake, Iowa, having celebrated his 91st birthday.

In the marvel of His grace, God has made no two persons exactly alike. This adds to the continual interest in and excitement of humankind. In the creation of the Rev. C.A. Carlson, who served North Isanti from 1924 to 1939, God fashioned a unique man — practical, courageous, stern, lovable, and gentle — who had a concern for all people.

C.A. Carlson very likely didn’t get off to the best start in life, coming from humble beginnings. However, spirited as he was as
a young man, he became a jolly, boisterous, gambling seaman in the Swedish marine. Being competent in whatever he undertook, he likely became the best gambler on his ship.

How God can alter the ways of man! Convicted of his evil ways, Carlson sought forgiveness and found it abundantly. From scoffer he was changed to prophet. Finding a wife who was notable among women, he made his plans for sharing the good news which had so transformed him. As a hard and earnest laborer he was soon in pulpits of the Swedish Baptist churches in this new land of beginnings. The unflappable seaman was always calm, practical, and able to see the wise way to proceed. Knowing another side of life, he was not afraid to identify with the needs of a sinner, always encouraging him to seek the new way.

As a pastor he did much to establish prayer meetings in homes, schools, or wherever convenient. He had a special gift for enlisting young people to serve with him in these efforts, and many have testified to what it meant for them to accompany him and sing and give a testimony.

A splendid family of three sons and one daughter rounded out this household, of whose mistress it has often been said, “She was my ideal as a minister’s wife.” During Carlson’s pastorate, the James Rayburn county-wide evangelistic effort (mentioned above) was held, and dozens were added to the churches. Even today those added constitute many of the stalwarts of the church.

It must be remembered that Pastor Carlson led our church through the very difficult days of the Great Depression, one of the darkest periods of our American history. No doubt the parsonage pantry shelves were often nearly empty, but the pastor’s family and the congregation rallied in support of one another and survived to the glory of God. While short of the material things of life, they held on firmly to the hand of the Eternal.

It was also the era of the Roosevelt presidency, the bank failures, the bread lines, the dust bowls, the defunct stock market, and, yes, the abolition of the Temperance Amendment! “Giving in” to the liquor interests was hailed by many as a victory and a notable achievement. With the widespread unbridled and nefarious effects of alcoholism today, one wonders, “Where was the victory?” The writer was among the fortunate who experienced the prohibition days.

Among the highlights of the Carlson pastorate was the assembling of the Minnesota Swedish Baptist State Conference at North in 1928. It brought hundreds from all parts of the state and was a great experience for all in attendance. North did itself proud as a host, and both physical and spiritual food were in abundance. The energy and self-sacrifice of the church’s women rate a high degree of praise.

In 1930 the 70th anniversary of the church was beautifully and effectively celebrated. For the occasion Pastor Carlson wrote a very full and able history of the church, pictured so graphically in the language he so effectively employed. He called attention to the complete remodeling of the church basement in 1926-1927 (fully paid by 1930),
Pastors present at the 70th Anniversary

the blessings of God seen in conversions, baptisms, and 75 new members in 6 years, and he spoke of the generosity of the congregation in their support of other works.

Church officers, 1934
At the end of C.A. Carlson's 15-year tenure as pastor (in 1939), the church was faced with an issue which had been gradually emerging for some time, i.e. the use of the English language. Swedish had been the official language of the church from its inception. This was but natural, given the background of practically every family in the community. Very early on, as we have noted, there was a Sunday School class in English, maybe for the enterprising and daring; but every service, every business meeting, every social gathering heard only the well-beloved Swedish language.

Not until the 1920's was any public church service attempted in the English language. Against considerable pessimism, it was decided to attempt one Sunday evening service per month in English. Reactions were mixed, but the response of young people was such that it was agreed to continue. By 1930 there were at least two Sunday evening services in English each month, and by the end of the decade all evening worship was in our national language. Even possible Sunday morning services in English had begun to be contemplated. In 1940 a young seminarian, Rev. Carl Holmberg, not readily at home in Swedish, was called to be pastor. Pleased with the possibility of his leadership, the church voted practically unanimously to conduct all services in the language of the land. It had not been an easy experience for many of the older generation, but bowing to the inevitable, and recognizing English's greater potential for evangelistic outreach, they bore it as good soldiers of the cross.

Up until 1940 all the church records had also been kept in the Swedish language, but with the somewhat hasty and necessary change, the church clerk, O.P. Ling, began a new recording in the English language. Thus for the past 45 years it has been possible for the newer generation to follow easily all the decisions and events of the church.

In 1940 Rev. Holmberg brought his young bride to the church, and they paired into an excellent team, especially in their visits to the elderly and shut-ins. Nor were those easy years, for they covered the tragic World War II, with most of the young men away, and the occasional necessity of hearing the sad news of a man who would never return or the hard-bitten words “missing/wounded in action.” The young minister bore the load well, and he is remembered for his enduring and stalwart faith.

Mrs. Holmberg today recalls not only the
transition from Swedish to English, and the war years, but also the special meetings of that period — meetings which, like many services in earlier years, touched lives and changed families as souls were brought into the Kingdom. Those new members of the family of God were a blessing, for there were many of the older stalwarts of the church who were called home during those years — John Olson, L.N. Loman, Aleck Peterson, and others.

The church as it existed at the end of World War II bore many resemblances to the group which had celebrated 50 years of ministry in 1910 — the same building, many of the same names, the same spirit and doctrine. However, it was different, also, for it was another step removed from the immigrants with the change in language, and it was about to be caught up in the swirl of a rapidly changing community and world.
Chapter 7
Heroes of Faith: 1945-1985

North Isanti Baptist Church shared in the experience of peace and prosperity which followed World War II. The years following 1945 were happy and optimistic ones; the war was over, the servicemen had returned, and the country was prospering. Many improvements were made in the church properties during the period; a partial list includes the following; “glassed-in” porch — parsonage (’45); insulation of church and new basement oil heater (’46); stove and water heater at parsonage, and a check to the pastor for a new car (’47); new front cement steps at church (’48); new oil furnace (’49); new maple flooring, new carpets, new light fixtures, painting of interior and exterior of church (’50). During the 1950’s the renovations continued; new chairs, water pump, plumbing, paint, and lighting in the basement; new Conn organ (’55); new church roof; tower repairs; new wall and ceiling paneling; parsonage renovations — making the interior “just like new.”

But the church did not just think of themselves and the work at home — they continued to have a concern for reaching out to the whole world with the gospel. This was the period during which the Conference churches formed their own foreign missions board and appointed scores of missionaries in a great “advance.”

The missionary spirit of the North Isanti Church at this time is reflected in the receipts for missions, which expanded from $507 in ’42 to $2822 in ’46 and $3307 in ’47 and $3926 in ’48 — an eightfold increase in just six years. (When we learn that the pastor’s annual salary in ’47 and in ’48 was $2000 we have a better perspective on the amounts given for missions.)

While being concerned about missionary outreach, the church at home was growing. 62 new members were added in the first five years following the war.

The pastor who led the congregation during this period of expansion was Herbert L. Peterson, who had assumed the pastorate.

October 1, 1944. Rev. Peterson has been described as “a gentle, spirited leader of uncomplicated faith.” Approximately the same age as the man who led the country as president during most of the 1950’s (Dwight D. Eisenhower), Herbert Peterson provided the kind of leadership that fit the period well.

When the church met to celebrate the 90th Anniversary on June 28 — July 2, 1950, there was a sense of accomplishment and well-being. The weather was ideal; the celebration was well-attended and deemed successful. Former pastors Gideon Sjolander, Martin Hamlin, and C.A. Carlson, missionaries Almyra Eastlund and Mrs. Eric Schugren, and sons of the church Axel Anderson and Olaf Lind were all on hand to preach or bring greetings. A ham dinner was served to 450 people. (There had been 700 for the Sunday dinner at the 50-year celebration in 1910.)

The decade which followed was a period of harmony and well-rounded ministry, with many of the same organizations and activities we have today, including choir, Sunday School, Women’s Mission Society, White Cross, Men’s Brotherhood, Young People’s Society, and Junior Mission Band.
The growth which had followed World War II slowed considerably, however. Giving to missions, which had peaked in '48 at $3926, leveled out to average $2954 per year through the 1950's. Contributions to the major funds (General, Mission, Building) of the church were greater in 1947 than in '51, '52, '54, '55, or '56, and the totals for 1950 and 1957 were the same to the dollar — $11,487. The number of giving units providing $40 or more annually actually decreased from 57 in 1947 to 49 in 1957. The number of new members joining the church, an average of 12 per year in the late 1940's, dropped to 4 per year in the '50's; and total membership declined from 187 in 1950 to 149 in 1960.

None of the above is to suggest that the "heroes of faith" of this era were not hard-working and faithful. The fact is that the county was changing. The day of small farms and large families and thriving rural creameries and general stores and country churches was passing. The move was on to the city; metropolitan areas were on the rise. Sixty-five years earlier a congregation remained at the "Tamarac Kyrkan" in part because the four miles to "Stormossan" was too far to travel; but as North Isanti reached its 100th birthday, the church found itself in an age in which the increasingly mobile rural and non-rural residents might well drive past several churches to join the group of their choice. The base at North Isanti remained solid, but what would the trends of the future bring?

In August of 1960 the church celebrated 100 years of ministry in Isanti County, joining — as in 1950 — with the South Isanti Church for two union services, in addition to conducting North's own celebration. Speakers again included Axel Anderson, Martin Hamlin, and H.L. Peterson (who had retired the previous October), but also Carl Holmberg and Mrs. Holmberg from Brockton, Massachusetts, and son of the church Gordon Sundberg, who was pastoring in St. Paul. New pastor J. Wesley Anderson, who had come from Karlstad in the fall of 1959, had the privilege of hosting the centennial observances. From humble
Pastor J. Wesley Anderson

beginnings and through changing times God had raised up and faithfully preserved a people to bring glory to His name.

The records of the church in the period following the centennial suggest that the congregation sensed the need for new directions in ministry. Perhaps there was some question, however, as to what needed to be preserved and what needed to be changed. There was a weekly newsletter that was tried, and then dropped. There was concern about declining participation in the Sunday evening services, and a decision by the congregation to employ outside speakers and singers with special advertising for a ten-week period. Union services with South and Elim on summer Sunday evenings were also approved. The time of the Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services during the school year was changed to 7:30 P.M. Communion was scheduled for one Sunday morning, one Sunday evening, and one Wednesday evening each quarter. One October, there was a decision to dispense with “Julotta” that Christmas and to replace the early morning program with a ninety-minute service at 10:30 A.M.; but early in December the congregation at a special business meeting reversed itself by reinstating “Julotta” and cancelling Sunday School and the later worship instead.

(Several years later, the congregation voted not only to have “Julotta”, but also to sing “Var Hälsad Sköna Morgonstund”!

In a matter of greater significance than the items above, the Church Board in 1961 recommended that the congregation consider sharing Pastor Anderson’s services with South Isanti Baptist on an equal basis. The vote taken on September 19, which required a three-quarters majority for passage, was 25 yes, 9 no, and 3 blank ballots. If the three persons abstaining had voted “yes”, the motion would have carried. In 1962 by a vote of 38 to 13 it was decided to discontinue the printing of individual giving; but a vote to terminate the “envelope” system of giving failed 30 to 16.

There was one subject during this period which in retrospect may symbolize the concern of the day — the concern to do something, but what? Late in 1959 a committee had been appointed to investigate expansion of the facilities for Sunday School space. At the Annual Business Meeting in 1961 the committee recommended tabling the project, but in March of that same year, a revived committee was put back to work, and in April the church minutes note the following:

A report by the committee on Sunday School Addition was given by Ray Olsen.

He stressed the great need of additional room for the Sunday School, and that we are entering the second century of existence of our church, and that we need to look forward and grasp the opportunities that present themselves, and be alert to the possibilities that we have.

Gust Stromner then showed the plan as drawn up by the committee and explained various details of the same. Present estimates of the cost of this addition is approximately $6,000.00.

The vote in May to go ahead was 41 yes and 5 no; and on July 9 ground was broken for the first structural expansion of the church building in 61 years. Archie Stone
1961 ground breaking for the east S.S. addition

(Trustee), Oscar Carlson (Vice-Chairman), and Orley Eastlund (Sunday School Superintendent) turned over the first shovels of dirt. On November 19, 1961 the four-room, $7,000 east addition was dedicated with music by the junior choir, sisters sextette, and Orley Eastlund, and with parts by several others, including Rev. Lee Kingsley, Rev. H.L. Peterson, and Pastor Anderson.

While affirming their intention to continue and expand the ministry at North Isanti by undertaking a building project, the church also took a moment in 1962 to look back and celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Sunday School on July 1 with Dr. Virgil Olson of Bethel Seminary as speaker. 1962 was a good year of ministry with 10 new members. Rev. J. Wesley Anderson continued as pastor until April of 1964, when he resigned after 4½ years of ministry.

In each of the eras of the church's history there has been a pastor whose influence has been particularly significant. In the first fifty years it was Andrew Blomgren, serving two 9-year tenures (though Olof Engberg's impact is also very notable). In the middle period it was C.A. Carlson, serving from 1924 to 1939. In the last forty years it was Rev. Roy E. Johnson, who came from St. Paul in November of 1964 and pastored here for nearly 16 years — the longest continuous tenure.

Pastor
Roy E.
Johnson
It would be easy to speak of the impact of Johnson on the North Isanti Church. Outgoing, sociable, concerned for the needy and hurting, he developed a wide range of friendships both within and outside of the church. Through athletics, auto mechanics, “coffeeing” in the area cafes, Pastor Johnson built relationships and shared Christ. Membership in the church grew slowly but steadily from 157 in 1965 to a peak of 253 in 1977.

However, it is equally appropriate to speak of the impact of North Isanti on the pastor. As Johnson himself expressed it in 1978, the church, first of all, gave him roots:

Although I do not consider myself to have been a vagabond, I do consider my past as one of nomadic tendencies. . . The first seventeen years of my life, I moved with my family four different times, and each neighborhood was different in status, economically, racially, and religiously. The following twenty years of my life were a mobile twenty years, moving out of my home city, my home state, and my home country, living in ten different places of residence. . . I am not a product of roots, tradition, of culture. . .

In 1964 it was my opportunity to move into Isanti County, a place or residence about which I knew nothing at all. I only knew it was my new place of residence to serve another church. Strange it was that a pastor who had so little experience in settlement and roots becomes the pastor of a church which is more than a century old in ministering the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Strange that I would take up a residency in a county and a community where “homesieading” was a familiar word, where son and daughter talked about living in the home where mother and father lived and grandmother and grandfather previous to that. Strange that I should become a neighbor to a gentleman who was born and raised in the home in which he lived 92 years . . .

Over . . . fourteen years, the significantly deep traditions of Isanti County’s religious and civic roots have influenced me a great deal. I met people with strong family ties, interrelated at that, hard working and friendly. . . Tonight I am more an Isanti County Minnesotan than I have been of any other tradition and culture. Having lived these fourteen years in the same home, my nomadic tendencies have faded into oblivion.

Secondly, the church gave him love and encouragement in ministry, as this quotation from Rev. Johnson writing in 1984 would indicate:

Our sixteen years were as much receiving as it was in giving. You remembered your pastor and family with kindness, with prayers and repeatedly with gifts and parties, most of them surprise parties, and with money. Such generosity certainly made a long time pastorate that much more enjoyable. As I reflect back now I no longer look at my stay of ministry in terms of years as much as a wonderful opportunity to minister under the umbrella of God’s anointing upon a people whose love and devotion to God made impact upon one another, upon the community and upon me personally.

In this writer’s view, it is not a coincidence that pastors have often had long tenures at North Isanti — that five men (Blomgren, Engberg, Carlson, Peterson, and Johnson) pastored for 73 of the first 120 years of the church’s history — that since 1924 (61 years) there have been only six pastors. The church has had a tradition of kindness and graciousness to the pastor which has somehow been passed on from one generation to another. They surprised Blomgren in 1879 with a horse and buggy, and later with gifts on his 60th birthday (1905) and in 1910 on the 50th anniversary of his ordination. When Sundmark asked for an extra room at the parsonage to accommodate the family, the church in
1917 built a new house, and when he became ill in 1921, the congregation continued to pay his full salary until his death in March of 1922. C.A. Carlson never forgot how on the second day of his ministry at North Isanti the church raised his salary by $300 per year. In 1926 he was given $558.50 to buy a new car. To quote Carlson, he "had never had that much money at one time." Herbert Peterson, as has been mentioned, also received money for an automobile in 1947. The list of gifts and surprises goes on and on.

It is difficult to summarize sixteen years of church history, but in retrospect there are two developments which stand out in Roy Johnson's memory as notable from his years at North — an evaluation with which this writer concurs. One was the nurturing of a new generation of leaders. Pastor Johnson has written as follows:

Mrs. Anna Carlson . . . and Mrs. Eva Danielson . . . saw potential leadership among young people who were not only members, but willing workers. They were but in their twenties, but when confronted with serving in offices, they agreed and being encouraged and having already been wisely influenced by stable and mature men and women of the church, these young people became grounded in the things of the Lord and the affairs of the church, and today many of them have become mature spiritual leaders who have not so much taken the place of the older leaders, but serve side by side with them.

The other notable event — in 1974 — was the building of a two-level Christian education unit which doubled the size of the church facility. Ever since the late '50's, there had been a sense by some within the congregation that more room for ministries was needed. The construction of the Sunday School addition in 1961 was a significant event, but it did not end the discussions. As early as 1967 there was new study of the need for Sunday School space. At the annual meeting in 1968 the Long Range Planning Committee proposed building a new sanctuary seating 300 and converting the existing facility to a C.E. unit (downstairs) and fellowship hall (upstairs). A building committee was elected. A new
Church site was also considered. However, in April 1969 the church voted 44 to 23 against proceeding with a building project. Nevertheless, the issue would not go away. By 1971 there was a building committee again, and a proposal to build. Again, the church decided not to proceed, but this time the vote was 31 yes and 18 no — just two votes short of the required two-thirds majority. Then in late 1973 by a final vote of 59 to 21 the church said “yes” to a building addition; and on December 9 the church broke ground for the $145,000 project with Jan Swanson, Robert Olson, John Anderson, Loran Larson, and Pastor Johnson leading the ceremonies. A special fund-raising effort brought pledges of over $87,000 by January. The building was dedicated on September 8, 1974 and completely paid for within four years. If there was ever any doubt in anyone’s mind about the commitment of the North Isanti Church to continued ministry in the Cambridge-Isanti area, this project said conclusively to congregation and community alike that the church, by God’s grace, was there to stay.

The church expansion project stands out in the 1970’s, but there were other significant developments. A number of North Isanti people became involved with Art and Florence Miller in setting up a Sunday School in the Lake Francis area; that Sunday School continues to operate in 1985, and many children and youth from the area are involved in weekly club programs here at North. A bus ministry was established, and continues on a more limited scale at present. The congregation voted to purchase the 2½ acres between the church and cemetery from Roman Jaloszynski. Mrs. Russell Walburg was hired as a part-time church secretary.

Throughout the decade there were continuing efforts to revise and update the Church Constitution, culminating in a 15-month trial period with a new one-board form of church government. However, in April of 1980 the organizational plan fell 3 votes short of the required two-thirds majority for approval, and the congregation returned to the previous multi-board form of church government. Also in 1980, on
June 22, the church celebrated 120 years of continuous ministry in Isanti County with Martin Hamlin speaking. Roy Johnson resigned effective September 28 to move to Amery, Wisconsin.

The years since 1980 have been generally peaceful and without major changes. New members have been added — 66 in the four years from 1981 through early 1985. Many of them (31) joined in the year-long interim pastoral ministry of Rev. William T. Horn, who carried on effective and much-appreciated service from November ’80 to November ’81. Jonathan L. Larson, who arrived from Grove City, Minnesota to begin his ministry November 2, 1981, was the first member of the post-World War II “baby boom” generation to pastor the church. He was, however, linked to Isanti County in being a descendant through his father of Swedish forebears from Dalarne, and the grandson through his mother of an immigrant Swedish preacher who was a contemporary in Minneapolis of Olof Bodien.
In the early 1980's there was a heightened emphasis upon the unfinished task of world missions and the need to become "world Christians." A missions committee was active; missionary presentations were frequent; and several young people served as summer missionaries. Contributions for missions, which had averaged $9,000+ per year in the late '70's rose sharply to average nearly $21,000 per year from 1980 to 1984,
with much of the increase coming with the adoption of a faith-promise system of missions giving beginning in 1981. Gifts for ministries outside of the local church reached $24,000 in 1981 and again in 1984. All of this occurred while economic conditions in the area were less than ideal, and while notable expenditures for church property improvements were being made. The parsonage was extensively renovated in 1981 and insulated in '82. New pews were installed in the church in '81, the exterior painted in '82, the sanctuary windows covered with permanent storms in '83. As the church prepared to celebrate its 125th anniversary, it could thank God for an attractive, well-maintained and debt-free functional facility in a beautiful location. Many of the older heroes of faith were now gone. Even during the 1980's the congregation said good-bye to many long-term workers, including Mrs. C.A. Carlson, Charlie Carlson, Reuben Eastlund, Eva Danielson, Nils Carlson, Gladys Eastlund, and Oscar Carlson. Yet, in their places stood younger generations — some with the same names, and some with different names — to carry on the witness for Jesus Christ in this part of God's Kingdom.
Chapter 8
Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the World

To his followers just before he left the earth Jesus said, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” As one reflects on the history of North Isanti, which has just been recounted, one of the dominant themes is the involvement of the congregation in outreach in the county, the state, the nation, and the world. Sometimes today in a consumer-oriented age in which people go “church-shopping,” it is helpful to be reminded that the church exists not only to meet our personal needs, but even more to reach out and out and out to people dying in spiritual darkness. Part of the heritage of North Isanti is that this congregation throughout its history has felt burdened to go and to send in the name of Jesus Christ.

To be witnesses in Jerusalem has meant outreach right here in Isanti County. Yes, since the days of the Tamarack Church there has been a witness for the gospel on this property southeast of Paul’s Lake. However, the church members have not been content to wait for people to come to the church building. There have always been Sunday Schools and preaching points fanning out from the church. In the early years (1870’s) there were Sunday Schools at Moody’s School, Pine Lake, Oxlip, “Stormossan,” and Skalin’s School. In 1910 there was work in Isanti village, at Pine Lake School, and at Skalin’s School. In 1930 North Isanti people were helping at Spencer Brook by holding meetings and by paying half the support of Lowell Anderson, who was serving there. At the same time at Long Lake there were meetings conducted and repair work done to restore the building. The present involvement at Lake Francis, led by Art and Florence Miller, and the church bus ministry of the ’70’s and ’80’s reflect the same spirit.

One of the ways that God allowed North Isanti to reach its “Jerusalem” — especially in the late 19th and early 20th century — was special movements of the Spirit in revivals. Alfred Sjolander wrote of the spiritual awakening which occurred in 1884 - ’85, during which 200 persons came to the Lord, and the church grew from 82 to 184, largely by baptism. A period of revival just after the division into North and South brought so many into the church that within three or four years the North church was as strong as the original unit. 1898 was a particularly remarkable year. Missionary E.O. Schugren, who was a young man of 24 at North then, wrote later of those special days in an unpublished historical sketch of the church:

“During the winter months, ...we experienced a spiritual awakening and revival in our church and community. This genuine revival was unique in many ways. There were no special speakers that God used and no sensational attempts to attract the attention of the people and to invite them to attend the meetings. But the homes were crowded night after night as the meetings continued in various homes of the farmers. The Holy Spirit fell on sinners who came under conviction and confessed their sins, kneeling at the feet of Jesus. . .

These meetings continued for a period of two to three months, and we followed some 80 souls to the mercy seat, and about half of this number joined our North Isanti church.

In 1907 the blind evangelist, A.J. Freeman, held a series of meetings which resulted in 28 being baptized and 31 joining the church on New Year’s Eve. New pastor Gideon Sjolander in 1912 took no credit for the revival that broke out shortly after he came, but people were converted in church, in the homes, even in barns; and 50 believers were added to the church. Church members chose to dedicate their new barns with
evangelistic meetings (instead of the then-customary dances) and in one such meeting about 120 people were prayed for, including the pastor’s brother. A union campaign in Cambridge during the summer of 1919 with Lee Aldrich, led to the baptism at North of 25. A similar campaign in 1927 with James Rayburn resulted in 100 decisions and the welcoming of 20 new members at North, and touched the life of the co-compiler of this book, Wilbur W. Bloom, and his wife-to-be, Hildegarde Loman. Many of those who shared in one or more of the special periods of revival literally never forgot the experience.

North Isanti people have also been witnesses in Judea, which in this case may be said to symbolize the State of Minnesota. A beautiful example of the church’s outreach in Minnesota is Carl Erick Westin, who began teaching Sunday School at North in 1876 and served as Sunday School Superintendent from 1885 to 1891. In 1892 through the efforts of Pastor Engberg and
others in the county the Northeastern Minnesota Missionary and Sunday School Union was formed (the first such organization in the state) with Westin as their missionary to northern Minnesota. Beginning in 1900 he was full-time, logging 22,054 miles through 1911 partially on foot but primarily with the John Anderson Memorial Bible Wagon, presented to him in 1903. In 1910, for example, he visited Duluth, Two Harbors, Bremen, Ely, Soudan, Virginia, Cook, Leander, Little Falls, Sandy Lake, Atwater, Cloquet, an Indian reservation, Deerwood, and Aitkin. He found it hard to be away from his wife (Mrs. Andrew Blomgren's sister) and four children for months at a time, but even when he returned to Cambridge he would still try to visit churches in the surrounding counties. He resigned his position as of January 1, 1915, but continued active at North. Pastor C.A. Carlson, who conducted Westin's funeral service in 1925, wrote of this home missionary's influence in his unpublished 70-year history:

When brother Challman visited here two-and-a-half years ago, he talked of a visit he made to a place near Moose Lake. There's no Christian work there now. C.E. Westin had visited there 21 years before. Among those who heard his message was a little girl. The message gripped her and she yielded her heart to the Savior. This young lady is today a missionary in the Congo.

C.E. Westin was most of all a man of love — for God and for man — and in love he was a faithful witness in his Judea.

Albert Grant was another North Isanti witness “in Judea” who, like Westin, began his active service here, and then later was sent to northern Minnesota. Grant was the grandson of Margreta Danielson, the first to be baptized after the church organized. In the early 1900's, A.D. Grant was Sunday School Superintendent at both North Isanti and Pine Lake. He would lead Sunday School at North in the morning, then after dinner at home, walk two or three miles to Pine Lake, before returning to the farm for chores, and finally trekking the four miles to church for the evening service — over 20 miles in all. Several years after Westin's retirement, Albert Grant became the church's new witness to the recent settlers in northern Minnesota. The annual report of January 1, 1919 reads: “It was decided to give A.D. Grant a recommendation from the church to be a missionary.” A number of the members of North Isanti in 1985 still remember vividly the interesting and inspiring reports of his work, which Grant would share on his returns home.

It is interesting to note that Grant received financial support from the Young People's Society in the church, a group organized in 1888 with the primary purpose of sending out and supporting suitable young men to preach the gospel in Minnesota. Olof Lind, who later served as a pastor in several states, was the first to be sent out. Eric Schugren, who became a missionary to India, was another, and L.N. Loman, a farmer who at times served with Grant, was still another. It is significant to discover that virtually all of the organizations formed by the church in the 1800's had a missionary or
John Sundstrom went to Blomgren when he needed help in interpreting Scripture. Baptism was the topic. They debated between themselves on the merits of sprinkling and immersion. Sundstrom lost steadily and so he turned and said, "You have the easy side." So they traded sides. Even then Blomgren tangled Sundstrom up so badly that Sundstrom lay on the floor and cried, "Oh!" He never thought one could get as much out of sprinkling.

Ulrike Berg was born in Sweden in 1844 (the year before Andrew Blomgren), converted in Dalarne, and baptized in 1866. She came to Isanti County in 1868 (two years after Blomgren) with her family, and they settled on the shore of Lake Fanny just three miles northeast of where the "Tamarac Kyrkan" was built two years later. In 1871 Ulrike married Andrew Blomgren, then a farmer but soon to become a pastor as well. For over 40 years she served with him as pastor's wife, lending great support and encouragement to his ministry.

If "Jerusalem" symbolizes Isanti County, and "Judea" symbolizes Minnesota, then "Samaria" may be said to represent those related states with whom we are neighbors in our nation. North Isanti has sent witnesses whose influence has extended far beyond our own state. Many of these are "sons" and "daughters" of the congregation. How much influence the church body has had on any and all of these men and women can never be fully known. These pastors and wives were not
necessarily commissioned, but they grew up here, learned here, made important decisions here, and counted North Isanti as part of their spiritual roots.

The list begins with Adelia Christine Danielson, born in 1868, and a member of one of the early families of the congregation. In September of 1886 she married Rev. Alfred Sjolander, who at the time was a pastor in Duluth but who had pastored here in '84 and '85. As pastor’s wife and home missionary wife she served with him in Minnesota, California, Nebraska, Colorado, and Kansas until his death in 1912. Later, she became Mrs. Fred Carlson, and for many years was Superintendent of Sunset Home in Concordia, Kansas.

Another early home missionary and pastor was Olof Lind (mentioned earlier), who was born in Dalarne, Sweden in 1865, but came in 1883 to Isanti County, where he was immersed and joined the Swedish Baptist church. Later he was ordained by the church, before going on to pastorates in Wyoming, Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin, South Dakota, and Minnesota, as well as state missionary work in South Dakota. Mrs. Lind (Huldah) was a daughter of Olof Engberg, who came from Sweden with his family in 1887 and pastored the church beginning in 1888. Huldah Engberg Lind must also be listed as having gone out from this congregation into full-time ministry.
Axel Anderson (born in 1895) was one of the young men saved in 1913 in the revival under Gideon Sjolander. After several years of education at Bethel, he served widely in Minnesota, with pastorates in Eveleth, Duluth (Bethany Baptist), and Alexandria. For three years (1935-1938) he led the Minnesota Baptist Conference as Executive Secretary. Rev. Anderson also pastored in Illinois at Edgewater Baptist, Chicago, in Cadillac, Michigan, and in California at Turlock.

Hildegarde Loman grew up at North Isanti, the daughter of L.N. Loman, a long-time deacon in the church. Following her marriage in 1930 to Wilbur Bloom, the co-compiler of this history, she served with him in his pastoral and denominational leadership for forty years in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

Many sons and daughters of North Isanti continue in the ministry today. Bernice Glader, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Emil Glader, joined the church in 1942. She married Reuben Johnson, who has served as a BGC pastor in Nebraska, as a chaplain in Greenville, and now at Gracewood Home in Augusta, Georgia. Joanne Eastlund grew up in the Edwin Eastlund home and speaks of North Isanti as the place where she received her spiritual training, gave her life to the Lord, was baptized by C.A. Carlison, fully committed herself as a teenager in special meetings with Rev. Rockstad, and was encouraged by Rev. Holmberg and Rev. Peterson. Married to Roland Gustafson, Joanne as a pastor’s wife for more than 35 years in Minnesota, Illinois,
that Gordon made a commitment to Christ, with Huldah Stromner the personal worker who led him to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Earl Glader, brother of Bernice, attended Bethel and went on into the pastoral ministry in the '50's in South Dakota. In the 1960's Adrian Sundberg, a nephew of Gordon, entered the pastorate. He now serves the Conference church in Elk River, Minnesota. Karin Carlson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Carlson, was married in 1964 to Rev. William MacKinney, and has served with him since that time as pastor's wife in Minnesota, Illinois, and (currently) Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Dr. Milton Olsen, New York, Massachusetts, and California, has thought of Mrs. H.L. Peterson (Hannah) and Mrs. C.L. Holmberg ("Tiny") from North as her models or examples. Gordon Sundberg, son of Nels Sundberg, grew up at North during the same era, and has gone out into the pastorate, serving churches in Colorado and Minnesota (currently in Grand Rapids). It was at a Sunday School Rally under Alphin Conrad
who is an administrator and former teacher at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, attended Bethel Seminary in the '60s and then pastored at Karlstad, Minnesota. The North Isanti Church minutes of June 3, 1962 record that “Mr. Milton Olsen was voted a license to preach and carry on general religious work, this summer, in the Midwest Baptist Conference.”

To this list of witnesses in various parts of our nation, one must add Olof Bodien, a man of extensive influence among Swedish Baptists, and a most gifted preacher (“the William Jennings Bryan of Swedes in America”). He pastored at Stanchfield, served as a Sunday School missionary and revivalist in Minnesota and western Wisconsin, ministered for six years in Sweden (where in one year 914 were baptized), and pastored what is now Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis for 19 years, beginning in 1893 — welcoming over 1000 new members. He was on the committee that established Bethel Academy in 1905; he helped plan “Nya Psalmisten,” the much-used Swedish hymnal, and wrote several of its hymns; with four others he founded Swedish Hospital; for nine years he was board chairman of the Minnesota Baptist Conference.

There were several important formative influences upon Bodien, but one of the most significant was his time in this church and area. With his wife Margreta, Bodien arrived in Isanti County from Sweden at age 23 in June of 1880, intending to be a farmer. It was not long, however, before this young man’s gifts as a public speaker and his zeal in soul winning became very evident. He was baptized by Erik Loden, joined the congregation, began to teach Sunday School at church and to preach in the surrounding area. Most important of all, he spent one year studying with Pastor Andrew Blomgren. It was a “theological seminary” with one teacher and one student, and “classes” that on occasion extended through the evening and night until dawn. For a year, Blomgren was Bodien’s mentor — discussing God’s Word, bringing the younger man on preaching tours and to district rallies, and encouraging him in every way possible. In the spring of 1881, his gifts already obvious, Olof Bodien was called to become a missionary for the Isanti district. Although the time spent by Olof and Margreta Bodien in the Isanti church was relatively brief, it was also important; and so we add the names of Rev. and Mrs. Bodien to those others who have gone out from this church and county to serve the Lord.

“Samaritans” for our church has meant Wisconsin, Iowa, South Dakota, Michigan, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Georgia, Texas, and California (as well as Minnesota) — states where men and women who grew up or received training and experience in our congregation have gone on to serve in full-time ministries as pastor, pastor’s wife, home missionary, or educator. However, there are some who have gone out even further, and have been witnesses to the world.
North Isanti Baptist Church was linked to the great land of China before the turn of this century through Pastor Carl Vingren, who had previously been a foreign missionary there. Vingren, born in Sweden in 1865, was sent by the Baptists of that country as their first missionary to China in 1890. He helped establish a mission station in Kiaochow before returning to Sweden because of poor health late in 1893. Soon afterward, Vingren came to the United States, and in 1896 became pastor of our church. Widowed here, he remarried in 1898, and with his family returned to China under the Southern Baptist Convention in 1905. When his wife's health failed, he came back to the United States in 1908 to serve for many more years in the pastorate and in editorial work.

North Isanti cannot claim Carl Vingren as the church's missionary, but he must inevitably have helped to increase the congregation's vision for the world. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the first world missionaries to go out from North Isanti, Mr. and Mrs. Eric Schugren, were young people in the area at this time. Eric Schugren had come from Hälsingland in Sweden to America as a teen-ager in the early 1890's. Serena Larson, who became his wife, lived near the North Isanti Church. In 1898, the year after Vingren left the church, E.O. Schugren entered Morgan Park Seminary in Illinois. Early in 1907 Rev. and Mrs. Schugren went to Gurzalla, South India, where they served among the Telugu people until 1914. When the world war made service in India impossible, the Schugrens spent two years in ministry in Texas and another two-year period as missionaries in Spain. They then returned for two extended terms in India from 1922 to 1936.

E.O. Schugren has been recognized as a missionary of considerable ability and accomplishment. He authored at least 10 books, including *Seen and Hear in India*, two others in Swedish, one in Spanish, and five in Telugu. An evangelist and linguist, he translated the Old and New Testament into Telugu, and saw the caste system begin to crumble among the 6000 members of the Baptist churches under his supervision.

Why did the Schugrens give their lives in missionary service, and why were they so effective? It is not possible to answer those questions conclusively, but there is no doubt that North Isanti Church and Pastor
Olof Engberg in particular were very important influences. Engberg was a leader with a heart for missions; during his pastorate (1888-1896) a Young People's Society and a Children's Mission Band were both formed for the encouragement of missions, as well as the Northeastern Minnesota Union, and several were sent out as home missionaries — including Schugren. Perhaps the most significant experiences for Schugren began in 1898, at a time when Engberg, who had retired more than a year before, was serving as Interim Pastor. Schugren himself told the story in his unpublished history of the North Isanti Church (mentioned earlier):

The year 1898 was a remarkable year in the history of our church. Pastor Ole Engberg was our shepherd and had his home north of Paul's Lake...

The grace of God was poured out in the Engberg home as we often sat, sometimes till midnight, conversing about spiritual subjects. I also had the privilege to sing some of the Pilgrim's Songs for him using what little talents God had given me, while I also learned some new songs which were used in the family. These songs still echo in my heart and give me strength when I falter...

I came to Pastor Engberg's home to cut cordwood, but on Sundays I went along with him to church and heard him announce meetings in the homes of the members; whether he had arranged with the home-owners about this I never knew. On Monday evening after finishing the work in the woodpile, he told me to harness the horse and get ready. I was greatly puzzled when he told me to take the horse and go to the home where the meeting was to be held, and he also told me to choose the best text I knew and to preach to the people, assuring me that God would help me. I could not refuse to go although I trembled with fear when I saw the house full of people who were waiting for me. But the Spirit was present and I said what He inspired me to say. After I was finished we sang several songs and five sinners dropped on their knees and asked God to forgive them their sins and be merciful to them...

Later on after L.N. Loman arrived from his work in the logging camps he also helped. At first we hardly recognized him as he had grown a beard while in the woods, but after he shaved we knew him. He entered the work with great enthusiasm and did what Engberg called "adding fuel to the fire." We then took turns in leading the meetings, and together with A.D. Grant, Henry Storm, and Levi Lodien we carried on even though none of us had been trained for the preaching of the Gospel...

Our pastor usually remained home during these meetings praying for us and encouraging us. When we returned usually about midnight he rejoiced with us over victories won...

Zeal for the cause of foreign missions in the world was always emphasized in our church... My wife and I have devoted the best part of our lives to the work among the Telugu people in India after some years in Spain... Our Women's Society has faithfully stood by and helped us during our thirty years in India...

We also wish to mention in this connection the work of the Young People's Society in support of foreign missions. After the awakening, already referred to, Olof Engberg asked me to go out to Northern Minnesota and seek for Swedes and lead them to Christ. My first stopping place was at Opstead... My heart was filled with joy as I preached a message of salvation which the Lord poured out in my soul. A school teacher, who understood Swedish, listened and fell down, and others confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness. It was a glorious celebration...
Leaving Aitkin I boarded a river steamer and came to Swan River where I again felt the power of the Spirit. There were several settlements where I witnessed and the Lord blessed me and the needy people who came to our meetings. Many sinners were saved in each place. I had not at that time thought of being a preacher and least of all a foreign missionary, or of willingness to use any other language than the clear sentences of the Swedish tongue.

When I came to Grand Rapids... I had only 25 cents in my pocket. ... Even though I knew nothing of the art of preaching the Lord blessed me and many were saved. ... A farewell offering was taken that amounted to $20, and that was a large sum in those days. When I reached home in Isanti North I received $50 by Post Office Money Order from the Young People's Society. “Depend on the Lord in all that you do,” Engberg told me, “and if you fail it is the Lord also who will be disgraced.”

There can be no question that in the years of missionary service which followed in places as far away as Texas, Spain, and India that Eric Schugren always remembered the spiritual lessons he had learned in Isanti County. He returned in his retirement to North Isanti, living again in this county until his death in 1942.

The next world missionary from North was Mrs. Edwin Erickson (Ethel Sundmark), who was in her late teens when her father, Rev. C.W. Sundmark, was called to pastor the church in 1916. For several years she taught school at District #3, and is remembered here as an outstanding Sunday School teacher at North. She moved to Chicago in 1922, and then with her husband, Mrs. Erickson went to South India in 1928 under the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society — serving there until her retirement.

Almyra Eastlund, a granddaughter of charter members Olof and Lovisa Eastlund, became the fourth person from this church to enter world missionary service when she left for Assam in 1937. Her early experiences in Christian work occurred here, as she served as Sunday School Superintendent and teacher, church organist and accompanist, and was active in the young people's work. For nearly 30 years in India as a missionary, and for many years as a pastor's wife following her marriage to Rev. Bengt Anderson in 1966, she has been a witness for the Lord. Mrs. Anderson has written of North Isanti's influence upon her life as follows:

Our church had a strong mission emphasis on both home and foreign work. We were privileged to have members of the church who had responded to the call of full-time Christian service in pastoral work, and in home and foreign fields of service. What a thrill it was to hear the live stories as only Albert Grant could relate them, telling of his experiences in Northern Minnesota... We had a clearer view of the foreign work when the Schugren family came for furlough.
and presented India to us. Their testimonies gave witness to the continued need of workers wherever the Lord would call, whether at home or abroad. I am thankful for the outreach of the church in its support of a world-wide ministry through prayer, material help and in sending out its own...

The church has been a good training ground for young people who take a vital part in the Sunday School, choir, young people's work...whatever, as these are stepping stones in the walk of life. I remember well my first Sunday School class which I taught. This was a group of young active boys, about a dozen of them, and we met in the furnace room, not altogether an ideal place, but there was room...

This was a preparation ground for an outreach that went beyond home boundaries as the Lord led me into further service at home and later to the foreign mission field in Jorhat, Assam, India in 1937 through the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society. My assignment was to the Christian Hospital in Jorhat where Dr. Ahlquist and Elina Forsell Avey had opened the hospital work together with a nursing school... This work has grown through the years and has served a wide community in the ministry of healing and Christian witness. During these years in which I served there from 1937 to 1965 the church took an active interest in me, upholding me in prayer and helps in so many ways.

The person who has most recently gone out from North Isanti into world missionary service is JoAnn Sundberg Wright, who is scheduled to return to Japan in 1985 with her husband, Don, and children for a fourth term under the Baptist General Conference Board of World Missions. She is the only member from North Isanti to have served under the Conference board, which was organized in the mid-1940's. JoAnn is remembered for her winsome spirit and service for the Lord even in her early years; and she has gone on to effective ministry as homemaker and hostess, personal worker, and speaker. A Commissioning Service for Rev. and Mrs. Wright was held at North Isanti on September 21, 1969.

Throughout 125 years of history, this church has sent out men and women in Christian witness to our "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and world" to minister as pastors, and wives of pastors, evangelists, missionaries, and teachers. They have shared the gospel around this county and state, in at least 17 other states, and on several foreign fields. No less than 12 men and 12 women — a total of 24 special witnesses — have gone out or gone on from North Isanti into what we commonly call "full-time Christian service." For that we thank God, who is the One who saves and calls and directs and sustains.

In this account there is one concern. Full-time workers have gone out in every decade of this century — except the 1970's and the 1980's. Will the roster of ministers and missionaries continue to grow? Each new generation must keep alive the vision of a world in need. A church bulletin from North in December 1938 carried the following account:
In connection with our Thanksgiving service, the church held a farewell reception for Rev. and Mrs. E.O. Schugren, who now for the fifth time are going out to the mission field in Gurzalla, India. After spending the Christmas with their children in California, they will leave their children and grandchildren, relatives and friends, and once more return to their field of labor where God so abundantly has blessed their efforts with such a glorious success. One of the last words that Brother Schugren said... before he left was this: “See to it that you have a young family ready to send out to take our place and continue our work when we return.” That is a challenge from a veteran on the missionary field. Shall we accept it? Where are the young folks who will say, “Lord, here am I, send me.” Brothers and sisters of the North Isanti Baptist Church, we can pray them forth.

Schugren never returned to India; he was almost 65 years old, and his health was broken. Less than four years later he was dead. But to his words in 1938 may the congregation of North Isanti in 1985 say “Amen!”
A Roster of Those Who
Have Gone Out

Olof Bodien
Margreta Bodien
(Mrs. Olof Bodien)
Andrew Blomgren
Ulrike (Berg) Blomgren
(Mrs. Andrew Blomgren)
Adelia (Danielson) Sjolander Carlson
(Mrs. Alfred Sjolander)
(Mrs. Fred Carlson)

Olof Lind
Huldah (Engberg) Lind
(Mrs. Olof Lind)
Carl Erick Westin
Eric O. Schugren
Serena (Larson) Schugren
(Mrs. Eric Schugren)
Louis N. Loman
Albert D. Grant
Axel Anderson
Ethel (Sundmark) Erickson
(Mrs. Edwin Erickson)
Hildegarde (Loman) Bloom
(Mrs. Wilbur Bloom)
Almyra (Eastlund) Anderson
(Mrs. Bengt Anderson)
Bernice (Glader) Johnson
(Mrs. Reuben Johnson)
Joanne (Eastlund) Gustafson
(Mrs. Roland Gustafson)
Gordon Sundberg
Earl Glader
Adrian Sundberg
Milton Olsen
Karin (Carlson) MacKinney
(Mrs. William MacKinney)
JoAnn (Sundberg) Wright
(Mrs. Don Wright)

home missionary, pastor, MBC leader
pastor's wife

pastor, home missionary, MBC leader
pastor's wife

pastor's wife, retirement home supervisor

home missionary, pastor
pastor's wife

home missionary

home missionary, pastor, world missionary
pastor's wife, world missionary

home missionary

home missionary
pastor, MBC executive
world missionary

pastor's wife

world missionary, pastor's wife

pastor's wife

pastor's wife

pastor

pastor

pastor, educator
pastor's wife

pastor's wife, world missionary
Chapter 9
I Will Sing Unto the Lord

Church choir, early 1900's

NIBC Choir Reunion, Oct. 6, 1940

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Music has ever been a vehicle of joyful expression of praise unto the Lord. To this the North Isanti Baptist Church has given unending assent. The only church organization as old as the choir is the Sunday School. When the church was less than three years old, in 1863, a choir was organized under the direction of Margreta Danielson. In unbroken succession, the choir has lent its support to the church’s worship services to this day. Complemented by a musically appreciative congregation, the choir has helped North Isanti to become recognized as a “singing church.”

By the grace of God the church has nearly always had talented musicians who have expressed themselves as choir directors, organists, pianists, violinists, guitarists, horn players, quartets, duets, and soloists. Invariably the music has been of high caliber — strong and meaningful, not easily succumbing to the light, sentimental, and meaningless.

Throughout the years there have been many who in lengthened years of service have given unselfishly of their time and talent to developing and maintaining the special music of the church. Here we can cite but a few, recalled out of the indelible mark of history or the memories of our fathers, or even out of our own generation’s experiences.

As previously noted, Margreta Danielson was the church’s first choir director. Lost in the dimness of history are many of her successors. Moving toward the 1900’s, we note the long and effective leadership of E.W. Erickson, probably more easily remembered as a brother of Mrs. L.N. Loman. His daughter, Mabel, a widely heralded soprano soloist, often shared her lyric voice with the congregation.

The very exacting and high caliber leadership of Charles Carlson over many years helped the congregation sense the value of good music both as art and as a strength to meaningful worship. His ability as a leader and also as a violinst is still reflected in the life of the church.
It is doubtful that Orley Eastlund had any peer as a tenor soloist in Isanti County. With limited training but a God-given gift, he inspired multitudes as his melodious voice broke out in the language of his forebears or in his native tongue. Orley was also the able choir director for several years.

Among those who have given unselfishly in extended service as organists and pianists we take special cognizance of Mrs. C.L. Frederickson and Mrs. Evelyn Olson. The church recognized Mrs. Olson in 1985 for her 62 years of piano and organ accompaniment. The appreciated service of many others is stored in our records and in our memories.

An unusual singing group, which spanned forty years, was the male quartet composed of Orley Eastlund, 1st Tenor; Nils Carlson, 2nd Tenor; Reynold Skoglund, 1st Bass; Joe Walburg, 2nd Bass. Formed about the year 1930, the quartet received acclaim, and brought blessings to many — not only in their local church, but throughout the county and state. In his short history of the group, Nils Carlson wrote:

For forty years we sang together as a quartette. These were some of my happiest years. When Reynold Skoglund passed away we disbanded. Joe Walburg and Orley Eastlund followed in death within the next two years. I know that some day we will be together again to continue where we left off.
With Nils' death in 1982, we can say that they have all now joined the heavenly choirs.

The string band, from early years until recent decades, was an inspirational instrumental group which added to the uplift of both worship and social gatherings. For several years in the 1950's and 1960's a young ladies' sextet composed of three sets of sisters from the Oscar Carlson, Hilbert Olson, and Willard Sundberg families sang frequently in the church and community.

Soloists such as Marilyn Johnson, daughter of Rev. Holmberg, and Robert Eastlund, son of Orley, have carried on the special musical tradition of North Isanti.

Fifty-five years ago, in 1930, Pastor C.A. Carlson expressed his high regard for the music of this church when he wrote, "I wonder if there is to be found in Isanti County a congregation that, in proportion to membership, has a better group of singers and musicians than our church."

String band, 1890's

More recently, in the past five years, "The Joyful Sound," a women's trible trio with piano and vibraharp accompaniment, has to membership, has a better group of singers and musicians than our church."

May ours ever be a music-minded church.

Yes, "I will sing unto the Lord a new song!"
Chapter 10

The Cloud of Witnesses

In Hebrews 12:1 the Biblical writer refers to a "great cloud of witnesses" surrounding the believer, in a passage in which he challenges the living to "run with perseverance the race marked out" for them. There is no question that this group of witnesses will include — for most of us — some men and women like the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 who are well-known and widely recognized for their spiritual exploits and accomplishments. To names like Abraham, Moses, and David of the biblical era we may at North Isanti be inclined to add names such as Andrew Blomgren, C.E. Westin, Eric and Serena Schugren — people whose reputation and influence came to extend far beyond Isanti County. In the history thus far recounted we have already given special acknowledgment to pastors and wives, missionaries, and musicians. This is good and appropriate, as long as we do not forget that this church — and any congregation — is ultimately built upon that group of faithful workers who week-after-week and year-after-year serve the Lord by doing their jobs and living their faith. This history will not, and could not, list all of the Christian education workers, callers, cooks, custodians, committee members, carpenters, and contributors who have made North Isanti Church what it is today. Even the major office holders and lay leaders have not been systematically listed. What this chronicle can briefly attempt, however, is to highlight the importance of all of those who have gone before and have become by their example an inspiring "cloud of witnesses."

To whom, more specifically, do we refer in this chapter? We allow some of the people who have known the church well to speak for themselves. In a limited survey to assess North Isanti's significance in the lives of people, our Historical Committee Chairman sent out a number of inquiry forms to former and present members of the congregation. The response was good, and the answers apparently very honest. One never realizes the various facets that touch and influence lives until he delves these depths. The expected and unexpected come to the fore and are most revealing. Humble saints, never realizing their quiet influence, are made to stand tall, as the shadow of a serene life has fallen across some child or youth, or even some adult. Ministers have often been regarded as the heroes, but earnest laymen and laywomen frequently rise to great heights of sainthood in the eyes of those whom they have touched deeply. Seen close at hand, these lay folk have made the gospel real.

When surveyed, many members and former members of this church remembered those who taught them God's Word. Sunday School teachers have reached deeper into souls than they ever knew. Consider this partial list of those who have been remembered and appreciated: Mrs. Herman Anderson, John Anderson, Julia Bong, Lenore Carlson, Oscar Carlson, Eva Danielson, Gladys Eastlund, Nellie Essen, Hilma Falk, Mrs. Carl Frederickson, Andrew Larson, Eben Larson, Mrs. Eben Larson, Evelyn Olson, Muriel Olsen, Nancy Skoglund, Huldah Strommer, Lillian Walburg.

Some of those surveyed mentioned entire families that stood out in their memories, e.g. the Edwin Eastlund family, the Andrew Larson family, the Skoglund family, the C.E. Westin family.

Among the men of the church who lived an exemplary and challenging life were such as these: Herman Anderson, Albert Grant, L.N. Loman (all mentioned frequently in the surveys), C.A. Calander, Charlie Carlson, Edwin Danielson, Edwin Eastlund, Olof Eastlund, E.W. Erickson, Carl Frederickson, Erik Loden, Ole Nyberg, Oscar Odmark, John Olson, Nels Sundberg. There were many others, also, who prayed and paid, who decided and reconciled, who encouraged and pointed others to the cross.
When lay workers in the church are being discussed, there is yet another group which deserves particular mention, i.e. the women of the congregation. While men have served through the years in many of the primary lay leadership positions, it has often been the women who have done the larger share of the on-going ministries of teaching, planning, serving, visiting, helping, and praying. Very early in the history of the church, an auxiliary organization for women was formed. Through various changes in name and structure this organization has continued to the present.
Mrs. Oscar Carlson, a member of the NIBC Historical Committee, has written about the women's work in our church as follows:

According to the records available, the women's organization dates back to February 18, 1879. The name of the group was "Systernas Missions Cirkel." It seems that there may have been two groups even from the beginning, as at one time reference was made to the northwest group. This seems possible, as the area was large, and distances were great between the places. Some of the officers mentioned during the early days were Mrs. A. Swenson and Mrs. Freda Harv and Mrs. Wickstrom from the south, and Mrs. B. Peterson and Mrs. J. Westin from the north.

During the early years the meetings were simple. Usually the pastor was the moderator, and carried out the business necessary, and conducted a Bible study followed by discussion and prayer by members of the group. Emphasis was made on missions — both in our homeland and in foreign lands. Offerings were taken even though very small in the early years, and the money was sent to help the missionaries or their native workers. Some of the regions mentioned were India, Burma, and China. The money was sent directly and not through any mission board. Letters were received and read to the women — a practice which seemed to create a keen personal interest in the missionaries. A visit by a missionary was a real highlight.

After the church divided into two congregations, the women's group (then called "Kvinna Cirkeln's Mission") decided it would be wise to do the same. On April 25, 1893 this action was taken. The funds in the treasury were divided, but it seems that it was decided that both groups should continue to support the native missionary in China.

When the women in North Isanti met for the first time in 1893, the list of members totaled 33. (The records for 1893 also indicate that Miss Erickson, listed elsewhere as a salaried church worker, was present and spoke at the women's meeting.) By 1897 there were 54 members in the group. The meetings continued much in the same pattern. As the years went by, the ladies were able to adopt a larger budget, and included Jewish and Russian missions, Rev. Schugren's field in India and Spain, Rev. Grant in northern Minnesota, and also the Klingberg Orphanage in Connecticut. During World War I the soldiers were remembered with Bibles and tracts. The offerings at the beginning were small — probably $3 and $4 at each meeting — but these increased as the years went by. All the meetings were conducted in Swedish until the 1930's.

In the early 1920's the women began to preside at their own meetings. They also entertained the Minnesota State
Conference in 1928. Mrs. L.N. Loman and Mrs. Ed Westin were hired to be responsible for planning and supervising the meals during the week of the conference.

From these early reports one can sense a strong bond of fellowship and love for each other and a deep concern for missions. When money was scarce, the women would have an auction and they would bring articles which they had made or anything they could spare, and the money received was given to missions. Other projects were also sponsored.

The White Cross organization was started in about 1930 and is still functioning at the present time — though the type of work being done has been changed. At first there was much need for gauze and other types of bandages to be cut and sent to the missionaries.

In more recent years the North Isanti women’s organization has cooperated with similar groups in other area churches. Minutes of our women’s group indicate that in October of 1941 a decision was made to join with the other societies of the Isanti District to organize a Baptist Women’s Federation, similar to the group in the Twin Cities, with the object of helping to keep up the furnishings of Bethel Academy and Bethel Seminary.

What are some of the spiritual lessons to be learned as we remember the work and impact of the laity through the years? The Historical Committee’s surveys (mentioned earlier) did more than just produce a list of well-remembered men and women. The surveys also revealed something of how it is that the faith is passed from one person to another and from one generation to another.

The first striking impression one receives from reading these recollections is that people make a greater impact than programs — that relationships are what really makes a difference. For example, many of those responding to the survey were growing up when the language of the land was English, but the language of the church was still Swedish. The services could be boring. One man had this story to tell:

When I was a youngster, the morning service was conducted in Swedish. While I understood conversational Swedish, I did not understand formal Swedish, and therefore could not follow the thought or theme of the sermon. As a result, my cousin and I would become very bored and sleepy. I noticed that he had less trouble than I did to keep awake, so I asked him to reveal his secret. He would thumb through the English song book, and after each song title he would add the phrase, “without a shirt.” After trying it myself, I found that some of the titles became humorous enough to keep me awake.

A woman wrote as follows:

When we were young, they always sang Swedish, and we could not understand it, so we would open the song book and follow to see how soon they would finish.

Another person had this memory:

As we were growing up, we had our grandfather living upstairs. When the weather was bad, especially in winter, so we couldn’t go to church, we would have to go upstairs so he could teach us the Sunday School lesson in Swedish, which we didn’t like one bit.

A fourth wrote something similar:

I remember sitting through Swedish sermons — counting the words, light bulbs, and so on. There was no junior church those days.

All of the above sounds like a recipe for disaster, and yet each of the persons quoted here wrote over-all with great warmth and appreciation for North Isanti, and each is a man or woman of personal faith in Jesus Christ today. The conclusion must be that
although the program may not have seemed to be meeting needs, the people were. The same person who wrote of sitting through Swedish sermons also wrote of “a close bond of Christian believers who supported and loved us as youngsters and teens” and of “our youth group who enjoyed each other and stayed together.” The same person who spoke of grandfather’s Swedish Sunday School lessons also wrote of him; “As I think back, we were surely privileged to have him with us all those years,” and of the church, “It has truly been a Light House to my family.” Perhaps we underestimate the impact that we can have upon one another just by caring and by being ourselves.

A second striking impression that one receives from these surveys is that one of the best things a church can do is to put people to work — that the best way to encourage a vibrant faith is to give men and women (young people especially) the opportunity to express their faith. If the number of references in a survey with limited responses is an accurate indication, then the person who made the greatest impact upon his generation at North Isanti in this spiritual area was Rev. C.A. Carlson. Over half of the surveys returned mentioned his name. What is the most interesting and significant, however, is that so many mentioned the same thing, i.e. his encouragement of the young people to sing in church, pray publicly, lead a service, accompany him in outreach ministries around the county. What people most remember and what stands out as of greatest importance in the development of their own spiritual life is the way that older Christians challenged and encouraged the younger ones to learn by serving.

A third impression and lesson is that every person of faith is a link in a chain. The race that we run, surrounded by the “cloud of witnesses,” may be thought of as a relay race in which each one must pass on what he or she has received to others. 125 years of history in this congregation provide many illustrations. Margreta Danielson, the first person to be baptized after the church began in 1860, was the mother of Andrew Danielson, on whose farm the Sunday School began in 1862. Andrew and Margaret Danielson were the parents of Adelia Christine Danielson, who married Pastor Alfred Sjolander in 1886. Olof Eastlund, in whose home the church was organized in 1860, was the father of Edwin, who was the father of Orley, who was the father of Robert, who chairs the NIBC Deacon Board in 1985. Erik Loden, the lay preacher and faithful interim pastor who came to Isanti County in 1869 and was a member of the church from 1870 to 1926, has among his descendants pastors Gordon Sundberg (grandson), Adrian Sundberg (great-grandson), missionaries Ruth Gollings (great-granddaughter), JoAnn Wright (great-granddaughter), Almyra Anderson (granddaughter), pastor’s wife Joanne Gustafson (granddaughter), and pastor’s wife Karin MacKinney (great-granddaughter), and a host of lay leaders in this area and far from here. One person can make a tremendous impact for God in this world as one link in the chain of grace.

In bringing this chapter to a close we consider these words written by a “son of
the church:"

My memories are filled with the names and faces of many ordinary people — people who will never appear in a history text or in a copy of Who's Who, but who have followed their Lord Jesus in simple obedience, who have given of their time, their effort, their substance, and their concern so that the work of the Lord would go forth from this lighthouse. These were the ones who encouraged me in my training... as we left to serve in the pastorate... and even yet today pray for us...

We consider also the conclusion of the message by Rev. Andrew Blomgren delivered at the 50th Anniversary in 1910:

The miracle of it all is that this congregation has survived in spite of all its changes in leadership and membership, and deaths, of so many dedicated men and women. The love of our Heavenly Father is the only reason why we are here today. The many sacrifices, untold hardships, and hard labor have taken their toll, as life has dealt with us all, as individuals or members of the fellowship. Our reward is joy and peace of mind during periods of opposition, times of sorrow and tears — but also in times of success, joy, and assurance. We have made our mistakes; we have been selfish, at times slow, and also guilty of sins; but our motivation in doing good has been to show forth the goodness of God and His love, while trying to be faithful and persistent in our service to Him. The source of strength in a congregation can be traced to the men and the women who have stood by, steady and strong, in all the changes that have come in the life of the church. Our inner lives, and our experiences, can be expressed in the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:29: "Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places."
Chapter 11
Salt of the Earth

“You are the salt of the earth.” These words of the Lord Jesus from Matthew 5:13a remind us that Christ’s followers are to serve as preservative and flavoring in the world. Theologically this church has maintained a very conservative stance through all its years. In so doing it has been in the tradition of the large majority of Swedish Baptists. Most of this has had a positive effect on each church and on the total denomination. Yet, withal, in its strong determination to hold to a considered position of literalism, it may have sometimes erred in emphasis. A frequent danger, almost unconsciously adopted, is to set up a standard of negatives which can become the criteria of genuine Christianity. “Don’t’s” sometimes can become more important than “do’s,” so that what one avoids in certain social practices or activities is more significant than what one does in love and concern for his fellows.

Fortunately, the years have taught us more understanding ways in dealing with human weakness and limitations. It is not that we should be more tolerant of the evils which afflict mankind, but rather that a loving and sympathetic understanding be extended to those in need of forgiveness and restoration.

This modified toleration and growing involvement in the total life of the community has continually enhanced the image of the church and its influence. Participation in social, cultural, moral, and political issues of the community has added to the church’s stature. Out of the fellowship have come many who have added their values to improving the life of our area. Among them, through all 125 years, have been county commissioners, town and school board members, assessors, doctors, ministers, missionaries, school teachers, agriculturalists, businessmen, restaurateurs, nurses, minister’s wives, morticians, artisans and more.

Loving Christian concern has involved growing numbers in such service efforts as the Grandview Christian Home, Wood Lake Youth Camp, King’s Ranch, Trout Lake Camp, nursing homes, home and overseas enterprises, food banks, Meals on Wheels, and so on.

The sense of togetherness in common Christian ventures has contributed to an increasing feeling of ecumenicity among the area churches. While maintaining their distinctives, the various denominations have largely laid aside the suspicions — and sometimes animosities — which for years kept them at arm’s length. Yet we must acknowledge there are those among us even today who hold to some limited particular interpretation as the “sole and only truth.” All, in wisdom and charity, must forever pray that we may possess the light of His Spirit, cognizant of the fact that only in the eternities shall fullness of knowledge be ours.

Thus, in faith, by the guidance received from our fathers and our acquired understanding of God’s revealed truth, we press on in the conviction that Jesus Christ has done something so meaningful for us and ours that we rejoice to share it with others. May this church ever be salt in the earth!
History is often chiseled in our memorial stones. This is eloquently true of North Isanti Baptist Church. In our beautiful cemetery to the south, marble marker after marble marker reminds us of our valued history. No doubt, there is no cemetery in the entire nation which has so many notable Swedish Baptist leaders resting beneath its sod as North’s.

A call of the roll of the pastors, wives, and missionary workers who, in this century, await the resurrection day includes the following: Andrew Blomgren, pastor and “the Minnesota philosopher,” and Mrs. Blomgren; Wilbur W. Bloom, Swedish Baptist pastor and A.B.C. pastor and executive minister; Olof Bodien, son of the church and renowned Swedish Baptist preacher, and Mrs. Bodien; C.A. Carlson, pastor at North, and Mrs. Carlson; Olof Engberg, pastor at North, and Mrs. Engberg; Albert Grant, son of the church and missionary in northern Minnesota; Carl L. Holmberg, pastor at North; Olof Lind, son of the church and Swedish Baptist pastor, and Mrs. Lind; L.N. Loman, collaborator with Albert Grant as home missionary, and Mrs. Loman; Erik Loden, son of the church and faithful interim pastor, and Mrs. Loden; H.L. Peterson, pastor at North, and Mrs. Peterson; Peter Ryden, Swedish Baptist pastor and historian, and Mrs. Ryden; Eric and Serena Schugren, missionaries to Spain and India; Mrs. Carl Vingren, pastor’s wife at North; C.E. Westin, Sunday School missionary in northern Minnesota, and Mrs. Westin.
"In peace their sacred ashes rest, fulfilled their days' endeavor; They blessed the earth and they are blessed of God and man forever."

Wm. G. Tarrant

1985 Cemetery Board

(l. to r.) — Reynold Peterson, Gordon Carlson, Gottlieb Guderian, Paul Peterson (not pictured-Vernon Anderson)
Epilogue

As the North Isanti Baptist Church of rural Cambridge celebrates 125 years of ministry in 1985, it is a congregation of over 200 baptized members, with a budget of $67,000 for local ministries, and an additional faith-promise missions goal of $21,000. Regular church programs include the Sunday Bible School, Sunday A.M. Worship, Sunday P.M. Fellowship, Wednesday Family Night with club programs for all ages and an adult Bible study and prayer meeting. Auxiliary organizations include the BCW and White Cross, CVF for young people, adult fellowship groups, church choir, and junior choir. In addition, many members of the congregation are involved in home Bible studies and special Christian ministries in the community.

The church is led by six boards, each with a different area of responsibility and concern. The Deacon Board seeks to provide spiritual direction for the congregation, and works closely with the pastor in evaluating needs and developing plans for ministry. The Deaconess Board serves the church through special ministries of prayer, care, and concern, with special emphasis upon the women of the congregation, each of whom is assigned to one of the deaconesses for interest and prayer. The Trustee Board seeks to maintain an attractive and well-appointed church, parsonage, and grounds. They supervise the volunteer custodial program which has resulted in considerable savings for the church in recent years. The Christian Education Board plans and oversees a variety of activities, including Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, youth programming, chapel church, nursery care, club programs, and camp ministries. Three or four of every ten resident members are involved in the leadership of a C.E. program or project. The Music Board and Cemetery Board with responsibilities in their areas round out the leadership group.

Representatives of the six boards, as well as the pastor and church officers, constitute the Church Council, which functions as an advisory board and finance committee. In 1985 a total of 37 people (17 men and 20 women) serve in these primary leadership areas. They carry on in the tradition and spirit of many faithful volunteers from years gone by.

1985 Deacon Board (l. to r.) — Robert Olson, Robert Eastlund, Vernon Anderson, Pastor Jonathan Larson, Len Greenberg, Jerry Johnson
1985 Deaconess Board (l. to r.) — Norma Hjeltman, Darlene Calander, Hilma Falk, Edith Johnson, Mildred Carlson, Karen Anderson, Lois Daby, LaVonne Ham

1985 Trustee Board (l. to r.) — Wayne Calander, Curtis Olson, Charles Wilson, Larry Dee, Larry Gustafson
1985 Music Board (l. to r.) — Scott Walburg, Cindy Olson, Carol Maveus, Wendy Holden, Lori Walburg

1985 Church Council (l. to r.-back) — Loran Larson, Charles Wilson, Robert Eastlund, Gordon Carlson, Pastor Larson (l. to r.-front) — Cheryl Burger, Mildred Carlson, Joyce Greenberg, Lois Peterson, Betty Walburg, Carol Maveus, Phyllis Streed
The members of the North Isanti Baptist Church in this anniversary year have a need both to look back and to look ahead. For some people, there is nothing more boring than history, nothing more uninspiring than an anniversary, nothing more uninteresting than a lot of talk about the “good old days.” When it comes to the church, they want to be part of a congregation that is looking ahead — not looking back; they don’t much care where the church has been — they are concerned only about where the church is going. There is no doubt, of course, that the past can be over-emphasized — that tradition can become a dead weight holding back the work of God — that church buildings can become museums. However, in its proper place, attention to the past is beneficial, spiritual, and biblical. The bulletin board in the historical room of church where this book has been put together bears this display: “God’s Leaders — Solomon, Jeroboam, Joash, Josiah, Jeremiah.” Those men all lived more than 2500 years ago, but our children today are studying them, because we are people who believe in history, and whose faith is rooted in history and steadied by tradition. Every time we read from a Bible story book to our children, every time we observe communion, every time we sing about the cross, every time we celebrate Christmas or Easter, we are going back into the past — and that is good!

At a crucial point in the history of Israel — the crossing of the Jordan River to enter the new land — the Lord told the people through Joshua (in Joshua 4:5b, 6, 7):

Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, “What do these stones mean?” tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord...

These stones are to be a memorial...

No less than the Israelites do we need memorial stones today. This anniversary and this history book can serve as “stones of memorial,” reminding us of the spiritual lessons from our past.

As we review our history, one thing we remember particularly are special movements of the Spirit of God. There have been times in the history of this church when God’s Spirit moved in the hearts of people in this area in an unusual way. The spiritual awakening of the 1880’s under Alfred Sjolander, and the renewal in 1898 remembered by E. O. Schugren (see chapter 8) are notable examples. In 1913 there was another time of revival. Mrs. Axel Anderson of California recalls what happened in the life of the young man who was later to become her husband:
Upon the arrival of a young pastor, Gideon Sjoland, Axel felt the Holy Spirit tugging, and at the usual prayer week service in January of 1913 he remained on his knees until Pastor Sjoland questioned him why, and he said he wanted to be saved. He was shown the way, and started on his way home walking through the snow. Feeling the need of a deeper assurance of salvation, he knelt in the snow by a log, confessing his sins until he felt an inner peace within. The next morning he told his mother, and as the word spread, a great revival among youth broke out in the community, and about seventy souls were added to the church by confession and baptism.

These were not revivals in which nobody got revived; these were true movements of the Spirit that touched the whole community. This church exists today in part because of movements of the Spirit that changed lives in days gone by. We need to remember, and pray that it might happen again.

In reviewing our history, one is also impressed with the early believers' sense of the reality of heaven and hell. A striking example would be Andrew Blomgren who served longer (18 years) as pastor than any other. Blomgren was a reader, a thinker, a lover of books, a philosopher, and definitely not a highly emotional, excitable person. Yet, his whole life, and his call to ministry in particular, were profoundly affected by two vivid dreams in his younger years in which first hell and then heaven were portrayed. Ryden published Blomgren's account in Swedish in a pamphlet called "The Two Worlds." We must remember today that this church exists in part because through the years our predecessors have really believed in heaven and hell — really believed that because there is a heaven no sacrifice on earth is too great, and really believed that because there is a hell no complacency about sharing the gospel is possible.

In light of the above, it is not surprising that another consistent theme in our history has been the importance of outreach — beyond the walls of the church, beyond the county, beyond the state, beyond the nation. This has been highlighted in chapter 8 ("Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the World") and need not be repeated here. Let us give brief consideration, however, to the way that North's first world missionary, Rev. E.O. Schugren, explained why he and his wife went out to India to a people who already had a religion, and who were not all asking them to come. Writing about the missionary issue in his book *Seen and Heard in India*, Schugren said:

... I will not quarrel with the great religions of India. I have been in close contact with them for many years. I have seen their fruit at close range. If salvation is found in all religions, as maintained by many today, then I have spent my life in India in vain.

... The Bible points to Calvary...

That cross alone makes him Christ and Lord, yes, the only Redeemer of the world.

Religion is religion; but we take notice of a vital difference in religion and religion. A small stream trickles past my bungalow. During the hot season of the year it dries up and turns into stagnant pools. Its water cannot stand any sort of comparison with the crystal clear water of my well. Pigs, buffaloes, and other domestic animals wade into it to quench their thirst. It is an established custom among some of my neighbors to wade out with them and they also drink the water as they need it. In their conception the water of these pools is perfectly satisfactory for drinking purposes; but in my conception it is utterly repugnant. The issue, however, does not depend either on my conception or on theirs. The unalterable fact remains that some water is good and some water is bad and sometimes carries microscopic organisms with deadly effect; and so with religion. (pp. 67, 71)
Our church has been characterized by people who believed that there is a difference between religion and religion, and who felt compelled to reach out with the “living water.”

It is vital for our future that after 125 years we not forget the themes of the past, and that we do not follow the pattern of the Israelites who remembered the memorial stones during the lifetimes of Joshua and Caleb and during the generation of people who had known Joshua and Caleb, but who then forgot. Our “Joshuas and Caleb” are people like Olof Eastlund, Andrew Blomgren, and the E.O. Schugrens. Those names may sound like “ancient history” to younger folks today, but Eastlund lived until 1914, Blomgren pastored until 1912 and died in 1913, Schugren was living here in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s, and there are members of the congregation today who knew our “Joshuas and Caleb” personally. The question is whether the coming generations will know the God of our fathers. When those who can tell us personally about the earlier days are gone, will we still be committed to dependence upon the Spirit, and the reality of heaven and hell, and the imperative of outreach? Anniversaries and histories can help keep alive for our children and children’s children what the church has been and is to be.

So we celebrate another anniversary, not just to be able to rattle off old names and places, not just to bring back the old Swedish, not to talk about the great things God used to do but doesn’t seem to be doing any more, not to philosophize about a kind of Christianity we no longer experience, but rather to recommit ourselves to the still unfinished task of bringing Christ to our community and nation and world. We do not want to be like the Israelites in Canaan, who had their history, and their pile of stones from the Jordan, and a proper cemetery for Joseph’s bones, and the land carefully divided, but who had lost sight of their mission — their commitment to conquer. Movements in time tend to become institutions; each new generation must make a new commitment to carrying out the work of Jesus Christ. This is why we are concerned to reach our boys and girls — the children of today who

1985 Boys Brigade leaders
1985 Girls Club leaders

Children with Chapel Church leaders
will be the church of tomorrow. This is why we are concerned about our young adults who not only did not know Blomgren and Schugren, but who do not know a world without manned space flights, and television, and the Super Bowl, and who do not remember "Pearl Harbor" or the assassination of John F. Kennedy. They will be leaders with a different past.

If the people of God are to serve God effectively, they must know from whence they have come, but they also know where they are going. All of us are shaped by tradition, but also by vision. North Isanti Baptist Church is a church with a strong tradition; by God's grace this group will also through future years be a church with great vision. The decision of the congregation in this 125th year to call Rev. Wm. Horn as a part-time associate pastor reflects that vision. The concern to maintain and improve our physical facilities reflects that vision. The providing of educational programs for our children reflects that vision. As we pause to look back, we also look ahead. We pray that the children of today will be committed to the Lord of the church and led out by Him to "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the world" as pastors, missionaries, teachers, musicians, church leaders, good neighbors, caring friends, dedicated parents, and witnesses to Jesus Christ.

Lead on, O King eternal, We follow not with fears,
For gladness breaks like morning Where'er Thy face appears.
Thy cross is lifted o'er us, We journey in its light;
The crown awaits the conquest; Lead on, O God of might.

—Ernest W. Shurtleff
Appendix 1: Roster of Pastors

* Matthias Smith 1860-1861
Andrew Norelius 1862-1865
John Ongman 1870-1873
Erik Loden 1873-1874
Andrew Blomgren 1874-1883
Alfred Sjolander 1884-1886
Andrew Swartz 1886-1888
Olof Engberg 1888-1896
Carl Vingren 1896-1897
C.L. Wallman 1898-1901
S.A. Hult 1901-1903
Andrew Blomgren 1903-1912
Gideon Sjolander 1912-1916
C.W. Sundmark 1916-1922
Martin Hamlin 1922-1924
C.A. Carlson 1924-1939
Carl Holmberg 1939-1944
Herbert L. Peterson 1944-1959
J. Wesley Anderson 1959-1964
Roy E. Johnson 1964-1980
William Horn 1980-1981
Jonathan L. Larson 1981-

* Matthias Smith has traditionally been considered the first pastor. Technically, he served in the office of church chairman, with a license to preach. He was followed as chairman in 1861 by Jons (John) Riis and Per (Peter) Anderson. The first ordained clergyman to serve in the office of pastor was Andrew Norelius. The first full-time paid pastor was Alfred Sjolander.
Appendix 2: A Chronology of Church, Area, State, and Nation

1655 Frenchman Pierre Radisson and Seiur de Groseilliers probably first white men to travel up Rum River (by canoe) to Mille Lacs Lake.

1660 Father Hennepin descended the Rum to the Mississippi.

c. 1783 Land east of the Mississippi (including future part of Minnesota) came under control of France and England.

1803 Louisiana Purchase brought rest of the area of Minnesota into the United States.

1819 Fort Snelling built at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers.

1820 First logging operations in the pineries along the Rum, slightly north of present Cambridge.

1837 The Sioux and Chippewas sell their claim to St. Croix Valley.

1838 In treaties with Indians all land between St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers, a triangular section of eastern Minnesota (previously a part of Wisconsin Territory), became first portion of Minnesota land available for sale. According to Preemption Law squatter on land could purchase it for $1.25 per acre after 5 years occupancy.

1841 A log chapel, first in Minnesota, erected by Father Lucien Galtier in St. Paul.

1843 First sale of Minnesota land began in Stillwater, at which the original sites for St. Paul, St. Anthony (later Minneapolis), and Stillwater, a grand total of 3,326 acres, were sold.

1847 Daniel Stanchfield begins logging operations in pineries north of Cambridge, using Stanchfield Creek and Rum to float logs to mills at St. Anthony (Minneapolis). In 1860, 6 million board feet logged.

1849 U.S. Congress created Minnesota Territory. Alexander Ramsey chosen Territorial Governor.

1850 About 100 Swedish immigrants arrive in New York. They were farmers and laborers. Their leader, Per Anderson, had great influence on early Minnesota history. Others in party included Eric and Andrew Norelius, who became outstanding leaders in the Lutheran and Baptist churches. Per Anderson is buried in the Cambridge Lutheran Church cemetery.

1850 Minnesota Territory census reports 6077; St. Paul 800.

1853 As many as 22 companies are logging on the Rum and its tributaries.

1853 Great tide of immigrants begins.

1856 October 22 — first location of Cambridge at least one mile south of present site and in Isanti Township.

1857 Isanti County formed from parts of Ramsey and Benton Counties — February 13. First Commissioners Hugh Wylie, Oscar Smith, and Eldridge G. Clough. Cambridge, the plotted village, designated as county seat.

1857 Olof Eastlund, John Norell, and Daniel Lundquist make scouting trips, possibly seeking work in Princeton, but also in search of new location because of conditions in Chisago Lakes Area.

1858 Minnesota becomes thirty-second state of U.S.
1858 U.S. Land Office moved from Stillwater to Cambridge.

1858 Minnesota Swedish Baptist Conference organized in Scania — 4 churches represented by six persons.

1850's Late first settler on present site of Cambridge is considered to be A.B. Odell, who settled where former fairgrounds were (now Erickson's Store, Savings & Loan, Coast to Coast, etc.)

1859 Having been impressed with Cambridge area, Olof Eastlund builds log cabin south and slightly west of Paul's Lake.

1860 Census lists 242 resident voters in Isanti County and 172,023 in Minnesota.

1860 June 17 — Cambridge Baptist Church (later Isanti Baptist) organized as first church in county at Olof Eastlund home.

1860 July 16, 17 — first baptism (Margreta Danielson) and 3 new church members.

1860 Abraham Lincoln elected President of the United States.

1861 Civil War begins. Gov. Ramsey offers 1,000 men. First state to offer volunteers.

1861 Several men of church volunteer for service in Civil War.

1862 U.S. Homestead Act. Settler could take up as many as 169 acres. After 5 years improvement to land and commitment to become U.S. citizen, land was his.

1862 Sioux Indian uprising in central Minnesota. Over 400 murdered, including women and children; many more captured. Grove City (Swede Grove) Baptist Church wiped out. Rebellion crushed; 38 Indians hanged in Mankato.

1862 A. Norelius becomes pastor.

1862 Sunday School organized with 101 enrollees.

1863 Choir begun under direction of Greta Danielson

1864 Cambridge Lutheran Church organized in Olof Edblad home.

1864 Church adversely affected by 67 Sjödin's doctrine of "sinlessness" imported from Sweden. Church barely survives.

1866 100 families from Dalarne arrive in Isanti County.

1869 First schoolhouse built in Cambridge. First plat of present Cambridge filed.

1869 Cambridge court house site moved to its present location, two miles north of original location after bitter struggle between "Old Isanti" and Cambridge.

1869-1870 Rev. John Ongman brings new 70 life to congregation.

1870 Minnesota population 439,706.

1870 Tamarack Church dedicated.

1871 Great Chicago fire kills thousands. Several Swedish Baptist churches lost.

1873 Fish Lake Church organized as a daughter of Isanti Church.

1873 Sunday School begun in Moody's School under Julia Bong.

1875 Civil Rights Act forbids discrimination against Negroes.

1876 General Custer and troops destroyed by Sitting Bull at battle of Little Big Horn.

1878 Railroads extended by Northern Pacific from St. Paul to Duluth, via North Branch.

1879 Women's Mission Circle begun, to support overseas missions. First organization within church apart from Sunday School.

1880 Minnesota population 780,713.
1886 Work begins in Cambridge as “outstation” of Isanti Church.
1887 Iron ore discovered on Mesabi Range.
1888 Young Peoples organization begun, primarily concerned with supporting young men of the church in nearby evangelistic outreach.
1888 36 members released from Isanti church to become the nucleus of the First Baptist Church in Cambridge. Our name changed from Cambridge Baptist to Isanti Baptist.
1889 Dr. Mayo and sons, William and Charles join staff of St. Mary's Hospital, Rochester.
1890 Children's Mission Band organized to interest the youngsters especially in overseas missions.
1890 Sunday School and Northeast Mission Society begins. It was an area-wide organization whose primary effort was to support colporteur work of Rev. C. E. Westin.
1893 Isanti church becomes two congregations - 71 members remained at Tamarack Church and about equal number related to "Stormossan" (now South Isanti).
1894 Great Hinckley fire, wiping out the village and Sandstone and surrounding communities. 400 die.
1897 First parsonage built; Carl Vingren, pastor.
1899 Beginning of Spanish-American War.
1899 Great Northern Railroad opens route through Cambridge.
1900- Present church building (main structure).
1903 Wright brothers fly first airplane.
1905 Considerable outreach undertaken, mostly Sunday Schools, in Pine Lake and Skalin's Schools and Isanti Village.
1906 Devastating San Francisco earthquake and fire.
1907 Fruitful Freeman evangelistic campaign.
1910 Rev. and Mrs. E.O. Schugren go as missionaries to Telugu, India, under American Baptist Foreign Mission Society.
1910 50th Anniversary celebrated; Andrew Blomgren, pastor.
1917 April 6, U.S. enters World War I against Germany.
1917 Present parsonage built. C. W. Sundmark, pastor.
1918 Germany surrenders, November 11. U.S. suffers 112,432 war deaths, many from influenza.
1919 A. Lee Aldrich county-wide campaign in Cambridge.
1919 Albert Grant begins mission service in Northern Minnesota.
1919 19th Amendment provides for women's suffrage.
1921 Combined evangelistic campaign in Cambridge under David E. Anderson.
1922 Pastor C. W. Sundmark dies.
1925 Scope's evolution trial. Prosecuted by Wm. J. Bryan; defended by Clarence Darrow.
1927 Charles Lindbergh makes first solo transatlantic flight.
1927 James Rayburn united evangelism campaign in Cambridge.
1928 Entertain Annual Meeting of Minnesota Swedish Baptist Conference.
1930 70th Anniversary celebrated. C. A. Carlson, pastor, and writer of excellent history.
1930- The Great Depression.
35 1933 Franklin Roosevelt’s “New Deal” begins.
1935 75th Anniversary celebrated.
1940 Church records begin to be written in English.
1941 Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, December 7th. Germany and Italy declare war on U.S. December 11th.
1941- World War II drains church of 45 most of its young men.
1944 “The Standard” budget plan put into effect.
1945- Major improvements made to church and parsonage; included new communion table and pulpit chairs.
1950 U.S. troops sent to Korea.
1950 Church repainted, inside and out, new hardwood floors and carpet laid, new light fixtures installed, at a cost of about $6,200.00.
1950 90th anniversary celebration 6/28 to 7/2. H.L. Peterson, pastor, and writer of historical record.
1954 U.S. Supreme Court outlaws discrimination in public schools.
1955 Purchase and dedication of Baldwin organ.
1958 Minnesota State Centennial
1959 Hawaii and Alaska admitted to the union as 49th and 50th states.
1960 One hundred years Jubilee. J. Wesley Anderson, Pastor.
1961 Dedication of Sunday School addition (east side).
1962 John Glenn is first American to orbit the earth.
1962 100th Anniversary of Sunday School, July 1st.
1963 John F. Kennedy assassinated.
1968 Assassinations of Martin L. King and Robert Kennedy.
1969 First man lands on moon.
1973 Ground breaking for new Education Unit.
1974 Dedication of new Education Unit, September 8th.
1976 Celebration of United States Bicentennial, July 3rd.
1980 120th Anniversary Celebration, Roy Johnson, pastor.
Appendix 3: The Baptists

Who are the Baptists? Baptists are Christians who hold the basic beliefs of most Protestants, but who insist — among other distinctives — that only believers should be baptized and that baptism should be done by immersion rather than by sprinkling or pouring of water.

From whence did they come, and when did they become a recognized communion? There is a considerable variety of answers to that question. Some extremists would insist that the New Testament church of the first century was Baptist. That many of the early church’s practices and beliefs were consonant with the Baptist church is accepted by most impartial historians. However, the major consensus is that there is no straight historical line back to the beginnings of the Christian era.

Without doubt there have been those through the centuries who could not subscribe to a generally church-state imposed practice of infant baptism, or “sprinkling,” as a proper Biblical mode. Those who challenged infant baptism as practiced for many centuries came to be known as Anabaptists, i.e. “those who baptized again.” They were mostly European Christians, often following such protesting groups as the Waldensians, the Petrobrusians, and the Albigenses, named mostly after their leaders. The Anabaptists were openly active in the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries. Many of them suffered martyrdom for their faith; one of the most famous martyrs was Balthasar Hubmaier, who was drowned in the Elbe River. While Baptist roots and practices may go back many centuries, the history of Baptist churches cannot be carried, by the scientific method, back any earlier than 1611, when the first Anabaptist church, consisting entirely of Englishmen, was founded in Amsterdam by John Smyth. Due to persecution by both the church and the government of England, these Anabaptists had fled to Holland to set up their desired form of religious beliefs and practice.

According to recent historians, the Baptists were numerous in England even before 1611, but as of that date a more certain historical ground is reached. A notable milestone was passed when William Carey was sent out by the English Baptists as the first modern missionary in 1798.

The Baptists in America had a very humble beginning when Roger Williams, banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony because he denounced a state church and upheld liberty of conscience, moved to Rhode Island in 1636 with a small group of followers to found the town of Providence. The first Baptist church in the new land was established there in 1639.

Today the Baptists constitute the largest Protestant group in America, with more than 28 million members divided mostly among 15 groups. The largest of these groups are the Southern Baptist Convention (with about 14 million members), three major black groups (with a total of approximately 10½ million members), the American Baptist Churches U.S.A. (numbering 1.6 million), and the Conservative Baptist Association (with 1.5 million members). The total number of Baptists world-wide is about 40 million.

The large number of Baptist groups in the United States may be accounted for in part by the nineteenth-century slavery controversy, in part by differences in race and nationality, and in part by difference of opinion in questions of doctrine and organization. Baptists also have a basic suspicion of attempts to create organizational unity through ecclesiastical structure. However, there is a growing tendency toward ecumenical cooperation, as Baptists realize that the bases of faith are more significant than organizational structural differences.
The history of Baptists in America — including the development of a variety of separate groups — cannot be separated from their world missionary concern. It is estimated that immediately prior to the Revolutionary War there were 494 Baptist congregations. Twenty years later there were as many as 1152. By 1800 there were at least 48 local associations, and the main problem was to bind these into some form of a national organization. Perhaps providentially this was effected through a common concern for foreign missions.

In 1814 Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice were sent to India by the Congregationalists to serve as their foreign missionaries. En route, through intensive Bible study, Judson and Rice became convinced that only believers should be baptized. Thus cut off by conscience from their sponsors, they had to find a new avenue of support. Landing in Calcutta, Judson pressed on to Burma, but Rice returned to America to contact the Baptist churches for support. This proved a rallying point for the Baptists and became the beginning of their vast mission program, with its immediate result being the organization of a General Convention of Baptists in 1814. The convention's scope was soon enlarged to include — in addition to foreign missions — a concern for home missions, education, and the publication of religious periodicals.

As indicated above, the unity achieved through these societies was disrupted by the rising slavery question, with the resulting organization of the Southern Baptist Convention at Atlanta, Georgia in 1845. However, the Home Mission Society and the Publication Society continued to serve the South even after the Civil War. Toward the end of the 19th century the Southern Baptists began to develop their own home missions program and publication work, and to protest the intrusion by the older societies from the North. A formal separation occurred with the organization of the Northern Baptist Convention in 1907 (renamed the American Baptist Convention in 1950, and after 1972 called the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.).
Appendix 4: The Baptist General Conference

The Baptist General Conference is a conservative Baptist denomination which was organized in 1879 as the Swedish Baptist Conference of America. Its present name was adopted in 1945. In large measure it developed from the work of Gustaf Palmquist, a Swedish immigrant school teacher and lay preacher who became a Baptist in 1852. He established the first Swedish Baptist Church of Rock Island, Illinois that same year. Palmquist and other Swedish Baptists worked in several midwestern states among Swedish immigrants. The movement received assistance from the American Baptist Home Mission Society and the American Baptist Publication Society for several years until the Swedish Baptists became self-supporting. Regarding this assistance Dr. Virgil Olson in Pioneering with God's Promises writes:

Practically all Swedish churches received some financial help in the early years of their history and most of this aid came from American Baptists. Amory Gale, the energetic state missionary (for the American Baptist Home Mission Society) in Minnesota, was a warm friend to the immigrant settlers. He travelled with F.O. Nilsson, encouraging him and helping him to reach new settlements. Norelius and Okerson were also supported by the American Baptists in their missionary work. In 1903 Minnesota had 14 missionary pastors, three district missionaries, one Sunday School missionary and two colporteurs, and most of them were supported, at least in part, by the American Baptist Publication Society. This generous support was given not only to missionaries, but was applied to pastors' salaries and new church buildings, and generally accelerated the evangelizing of Swedes in America and the establishing of Swedish Baptist Churches. There is no record of the number of miles Swedish Baptist missionaries travelled in "Bible Wagons" across the state, sponsored by the American Baptist Publication Society. (pp. 32, 33)

This concern for missionary outreach on the part of fellow Baptists is further evidenced by Rev. Peter Ryden's report of the Minnesota Baptist Convention's support of Swedish Baptist work in the state up to the time of his writing of the Svenska Baptisternas i Minnesota Historia in 1918:

If we were to add together what churches have received and the support given to missionaries, we discover that there has come to the advantage of Swedish work $125,484.37 at the same time as we have given to them $68,263.18. So the Conference has received $57,221.19 more than it has given to the State Convention for missions in the state. In regard to church building, congregations in our Conference have received gifts of $10,700 and loans of $11,900. In no sense have we been handled as stepchildren by our American brethren. We have reason to be grateful for the outreached brotherly hand, which unselfishly helped us, especially during the earlier days of our work, and without which help we surely would not be where we are today. (pp. 94, 95)

Today such support is no longer needed as our Baptist General Conference has grown to a position of strength which enables it to support its own overseas and home missions enterprises and to sustain an excellent and growing educational program through Bethel College and Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.
In earlier days, before 1950, those who went out from our churches into overseas missionary service often went under the aegis of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society — among them such familiar names as the E.O. Schugrens, the Bengt Andersons, and Almyra Eastlund. In fact, the vital and fruitful Baptist missions work in Assam was staffed almost exclusively by Swedes as representatives of the American Baptist Convention. Under that pattern of operation the missionary giving of our churches was channeled through the American Baptist Convention (Northern Baptist Convention).

For the past four decades the Baptist General Conference has operated and sustained its own overseas missionary program. Fields in which we are currently working are Japan, the Philippine Islands, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, and India.

The membership of the Baptist General Conference in 1985 is approximately 138,000.
For Further Reading

Blomgren, Andrew. 50th Anniversary History of North Isanti Baptist Church. unpublished essay.

Bloom, Wilbur W. One Hundred Twenty Years of Faith and Work. unpublished essay.

Carlson, C.A. 70th Anniversary History of North Isanti Baptist Church. unpublished essay.


Peterson, Herbert L. 90th Anniversary History of North Isanti Baptist Church. unpublished essay.


Ryden, P. Svenska Baptisternas i Minnesota Historia. Minneapolis: Statskonferens, 1918.


Schugren, E.O. A Brief Sketch from the History of the North Isanti Baptist Church. unpublished essay.


In addition to the above, original minutes, membership records, other reports, a variety of photographs and clippings, and miscellaneous collections are held in the archives of the North Isanti Baptist Church and at the South Isanti Baptist Church.