



THE SWEDISH EV. LUTHERAN BETHANY CHURCH
ERICK GUSTAF PETTERSON, ARCHITECT

A
HISTORY
OF
THE SWEDISH EV. LUTHERAN BETHANY CHURCH
— SVENSKA EV. LUTHERSKA BETHANIA KYRKAN
OF
SOUTH CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
with a short biography of its architect,
ERICK GUSTAF PETTERSON
by
CHARLES E. GREGERSEN

COVER: Exterior of the church in 1882
(?) from the **Chicago Weekly Review**,
October 13, 1899.

Contributions from the following have made publication of this work possible:

The Ev. Lutheran Bethany Congregation,
in memory of its charter members.

William and Esther Bushnell.

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Eva Lind.

Helen Lind.

Eleanor Lindgren.

Ethel Nelson.

PREFACE

The first church of the Ev. Lutheran Bethany Congregation of Chicago, Illinois, while having proportions and detailing of the highest quality, lacks, like many other elegant buildings, the revolutionary character that is part of all the great milestones of architecture. Buildings such as it seldom find their way into architectural histories, but they are aesthetically no less worthy than those that do.

It was because this elegant structure seemed in danger of destruction from either neglect or alteration that this work was begun, so that at least a record of it might remain. Recognition of the great effect it has had upon my interest in architecture has been the main force in carrying the work to completion. In order to help make it definitive, I have included, in addition to the history and photographs which usually characterize such works, a series of drawings for a restoration of its most significant parts and a short biography of its architect, Erick G. Petterson.

To avoid clouding or altering the facts of history, I have deliberately avoided interpreting them. Interpretation, I leave to the reader with whom it properly belongs.

The records of the secretaries of the congregation and its two newspapers, **Herde Rösten** and **The Voice**, have been the principle sources of information on the church's history. Quotations in the text come entirely from these sources and are made only when a variable interpretation of them is possible. Translations from Swedish have been made as literal as possible. I am greatly indebted to Pastor Roy W. Ryden, present pastor of the congregation, for allowing me to use these and many other documents relating to the church's history.

In compiling material on the life and works of Erick G. Petterson, I received great assistance from his friend, Ernfrid R. Jacobson and from the librarian of the Lutheran School of Theology, Joel W. Lundeen.

Many photographs, some of which appear here, were received from Robert Anderson, Anna Hultquist, Helen Lind, Eleanor Lindgren, Ellen Mattson, Roy Quant, Robert Stolt, Oscar Swanson, and Emmet Vinzens. Special thanks are due to Ralph Grasso of Fein Studio who restored and made copies of many of them. Although only a few appear here, I would have been unable to reconstruct the original appearance of the church without most of them.

It would have been impossible to make the drawings for a restoration of the church without the permission, to measure it, so graciously given me by Pastor Atanasio Lopez of the Pentecostal congregation which now has its home there. I was assisted in taking these measurements by my close friends, Herman K. Erikson and Pablo M. Hernandez.

Chicago, Illinois

Christmas Day, 1967

CHARLES E. GREGERSEN

ORIGIN OF THE CONGREGATION

During the late 1870's efforts were made to establish a Swedish Lutheran congregation in South Chicago, Illinois. Exactly how this work began is not known, but C. A. Landfors, a lay immigrant preacher of the Augustana Synod, held services there during that period, occasionally in the Congregational Church at 9135 Burley Avenue, then Superior Avenue, founded in 1872. The Swedish Ev. Lutheran Bethlehem Congregation in Englewood, Illinois may also have been involved, for on at least one occasion Erick G. Petterson and other members of that congregation assisted in procuring a tree for their own Christmas services and those in South Chicago.

The work did not really begin in earnest until the fall of 1879, when organizational meetings were held in the cottages of "some partly poor Swedes." These meetings culminated in the formation of the Swedish Ev. Lutheran Bethany Congregation (Svenska Ev. Lutherska Bethania Församlingen) with the acceptance of the Augustana Synod's prescribed constitution for congregations. This meeting was held after a communion service on Sunday, May 30, 1880, in a German Lutheran schoolhouse at "100th Street", which was probably the schoolhouse of the German Ev. Lutheran Bethlehem Congregation in Colehour at 103rd Street and Avenue G. It served as the Swedish congregation's church until its own was completed.

The number of people present at this meeting is not known; the minutes state only that it, "was held by the Swedes in and around South Chicago". Those who did decide to form the congregation and were, therefore, its "charter members" were the following:

Mr. & Mrs. Ola Peterson
Mr. & Mrs. Nils Monson
Mr. & Mrs. Hans Wickenberg
Mr. & Mrs. Nils Olson
Mr. & Mrs. Nils Polson
Mr. & Mrs. Magnus Johnson
Mr. & Mrs. C. P. Sjöquist (Sequist)
Mr. & Mrs. John Peterson
Mr. & Mrs. Nels Hanson
Mr. & Mrs. Carl Bengtson
Mr. & Mrs. Wilhelm Lagergren
Mr. J. P. Peterson
Mr. Henry E. Linman
Mr. John A. Johnson
Mrs. Christina Widelius

Pastor A. Challman of Chesterton, Indiana served as chairman and C. A. Landfors as secretary.

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

At a meeting of the congregation on July 21, 1880, in the German Lutheran schoolhouse, C. A. Landfors, Hans Wickenberg, John Johnson, Ola Peterson and John Peterson were chosen as a committee to look for "churchlots".

They reported at a meeting of the congregation, in the home of Magnus Johnson on October 8, 1880, that the Calumet and Chicago Land and Dock Company would donate one lot and sell or rent the adjacent one to the congregation. This offer was for lots 34 and 35 in block 87 of the company's subdivision. These were on the east side of Brandon Avenue, then Ontario Avenue, between 92nd and 93rd Streets. The offer was accepted, and it was decided to rent lot 35. Lot 35 was leased from the company at \$1.00 for the year beginning on October 1, 1880.

At some later date the same offer was made for lots 13 and 14 in block 70 on the west side of Houston Avenue between 91st and 92nd Streets where the church was erected. In this case the one lot was purchased for \$600.00.

The choice of the site seems to have been quite controversial. It has been rumored that the lots on Brandon Avenue were chosen with the hope of establishing a cemetery next to the church and that when this idea was dropped, it became easier to find more centrally located property, i.e., the lots on Houston Avenue. According to another source, some of those present at the early meetings wished to have the church located in Colehour, which may account for the fact that regular services, sponsored by the Bethany Congregation, were held in the public school there as late as 1885.

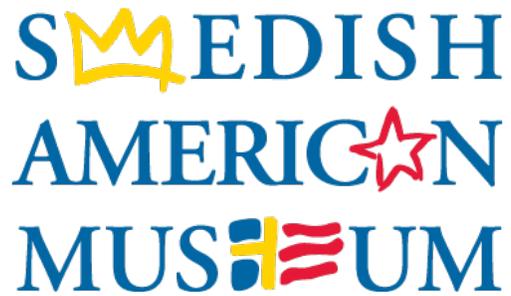
At a meeting of the congregation on June 29, 1881, the decision to build a church was made. Ola Peterson, Magnus Johnson, Nils Monson, John Peterson, Henry Linman and Nils Polson were chosen as a building committee to procure drawings and a cost estimate for the church.

At a meeting of the congregation on August 8, 1881, this committee reported that "a drawing" had been donated to the congregation by Erick G. Petterson together with a cost estimate (apparently only for materials), which indicated that the church could be built and furnished, excluding the chancel furniture, for \$2,700.00. The drawing and estimate were accepted, but the building committee was given the right to make some "small alterations". To avoid the problems which would arise if funds were unavailable, it was also decided that the church should be built by daily wages rather than under a contract. Ola Peterson was chosen to supervise construction at the requested pay of \$2.50 per day, with Nils Polson and Hans Wickenberg serving as his counselors on behalf of the congregation. Ola Peterson and Nils Polson were to purchase the materials as listed on the cost estimate, and a theology student, Edward Uhrbom, who was acting as pastor, was chosen as a member of the building committee.

The fact that Erick G. Petterson was the architect of the church is easy to understand. He had erected the first church of his own congregation in 1876 and was known by some if not all of the "charter members" of the Bethany Congregation. At that time Edward Uhrbom was also acting as pastor of both of these congregations.

At a meeting of the congregation held in Englewood on August 15, 1881, Ola Peterson and Nils Monson reported that they had purchased \$1,142.03 worth of the materials mentioned in the cost estimate. It was then decided to erect the church 25 feet back from the front lot line and 4 feet from the alley line, and to excavate an area 25 feet wide under the rear of the church as a storage area for tools and materials during the period of construction and for coal, etc., later. Construction was begun two days later on Wednesday, August 17, 1881.

The church must have been enclosed by December, 1881, for at a meeting of the congregation on the 11th of that month, it was decided that pews made of pine should be constructed and installed, and that a "Vulcan" stove to heat the church, "three six armed chandeliers, two lamps and a Light for the hall" should be purchased by a committee consisting of Ola Peterson, Magnus Johnson and Nils Monson. Whether or not the lighting apparatus was purchased as listed cannot be



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