

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Swedish Baptist Church Project

Church Life

O. H. 477

CARL O. MAGNUSON

Interviewed

by

Rich Gustafson

on

June 22, 1979

CARL MAGNUSON

Mr. Carl Magnuson was born on July 8, 1905 in Clearfield, Pennsylvania. When he was eleven years old he moved from Pennsylvania to Youngstown, Ohio. After working at different jobs, ranging from farming to trucking, Mr. Magnuson decided to become self-employed in the automotive business, selling mechanical parts. As early as 1922 he was involved as a mechanic, a job he maintained until retiring in 1976. After being associated with the Oberlin Trucking Company from 1939 to 1960, (under two owners), Mr. Magnuson decided to open his own mechanical shop in 1960. From 1960 to 1976 he operated his shop until his retirement.

Mr. Magnuson was married twice, first to Dorothy Lewis and then to Mary Crivelli, after the former passed away. His first wife bore him one son, Carl Henry, after two miscarriages. Organizations which Mr. Magnuson was affiliated with include the Gideon Bible Association and Child Evangelism Association. He was first introduced to Evangel Baptist Church by an employer, Art Johnson, who was an active member at the church. Mr. Magnuson has been a faithful member throughout his affiliation with the church, serving in various capacities during his years at the church. Not only has he remained a deacon during these years, but he is also the Sunday school teacher for the senior citizens' class.

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INTERVIEWEE: CARL O. MAGNUSON

INTERVIEWER: Rich Gustafson

SUBJECT: Oberlin Trucking Firm, Swedish Baptist Church,  
involvement with the church

DATE: June 22, 1979

G: This is an interview with Carl Magnuson for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on the Swedish Baptist Church, by Rich Gustafson, on June 22, 1979, at 15 Myrtle Avenue, in Youngstown, Ohio, at 10:00 p.m.

Mr. Magnuson, perhaps you can give me a short biographical sketch of your life, where you were born, and when you came to Youngstown.

M: I was born in Clearfield, Pennsylvania on July 8, 1905. We lived in Elinora, Pennsylvania in a mining town until I was seven years old. Then we came to Youngstown; I think I was about eleven or twelve. My dad had come here before we did and went in the mill and then he sent for us. First we moved to Struthers, but actually we only lived there about six months. We knew several people in Youngstown and mother wanted friends she knew; we didn't know anyone in Struthers. We rented a place on McKinney Street in Youngstown and dad figured on buying it. We moved on Myrtle Avenue though and we lived there until about 1956. Dad lived down there in the old homestead. We sold it then, and both mother and dad passed away in a matter of a few years.

I was always interested in mechanical work, so when we came to Youngstown I went into fixing bicycles for all the neighbors. I didn't know exactly what my occupation would be, but I was so interested in mechanical stuff. I first worked on a farm. The foreman at the garage made me go on the farm. Actually I worked day times and even made their suppers and everything for them by the time they got home from work. I think I was around fourteen then.

After I was about sixteen I got a job in a grocery store. I enjoyed that. I thought maybe I would go into that. At that time they didn't have supermarkets. I used to pride in how fast I could put the order on the counter.

I remember my first driving lesson was up here on Indianola Avenue. Half the street was paved and the other half was dirt. Actually, that was the city limit in Youngstown. I didn't learn to drive sitting in back of the wheel; I learned to drive on the right-hand side. The man didn't let me take ahold of the wheel.

Next I worked for Henderson-Oberlin Trucking Company. I wanted a job in the mechanical line, but I started in truck driving. I used to clean the restrooms out and everything. That was a terrible job. I left there then.

Then I went to a Chevrolet company there and they're still in business. Then I left there and thought I would go on my own. I started a garage in my back yard. I was going pretty good; I had a lot of work, but the only thing is I couldn't keep up with the upkeep of it because of having to buy tools and everything. I had my brothers helping me also. Then I finally got into a Ford garage, Abe Frank, in Austintown, Ohio. Next I went to Lowellville, Ohio in another Ford garage, Eckels.

I also had six months in the mill. I thought I would try it to get away from mechanics. I worked at Republic Steel and got the call to first come in before I even got home from leaving the plant. I had the job oiling, and that was too much for me. There wasn't anything to do. I had to keep out of the boss' way. Then I went into the mechanical game again. My learning was responsible from Art Johnson. I also give him credit for getting me to start in Sunday school. I was watching everybody else and I was just as good as they were. Anyway, another excuse was that I didn't have clothes.

I was married too, at the time then. I married a girl by the name of Dorothy Lewis.

I worked for this fellow eleven and a half years, and this is where I got real training in my occupation. I've been in the mechanical game from 1939 to 1945 with Linstrum Trucking Company; he sold out and had a brother so I went to work for his brother from 1945 to 1960. He sold out and then I bought the place out at 415 W. Myrtle and continued in the mechanical game. Actually, I always said this was the gift that I think the Lord gave me. I was in that for about fifty-two years then until I finally retired.

- G: Could you elaborate a bit on when you were first associated with Evangel? At this time it was still Swedish Baptist Church.
- M: Art Johnson got me started into Sunday school. Ed Shogren was the teacher. I would never stay for the services because I was afraid of the preachers a little bit. I was always afraid they were going to pin me down. My mother was a Lutheran and my dad was a Seventh Day Adventist. My mother always taught me to do the right thing. Whenever I found anything I would bring home she would question me, "Where did you get this?" They tried to raise us to be respectable and loving.

One of the early recollections of my life is that we had devotions when I was a child. Saturday was my father's Sabbath day. On Saturday we had to be all dressed up. In fact, we had two days, Saturday and Sunday. Saturday was the day that we had our devotions. They were pretty strict in those days; we couldn't go around whistling; we were held down. You couldn't go around jumping and playing on that day. I will never forget that every time I would get up or go to bed at night I would walk past my dad's room and he would be on his knees reading his Bible. That made a mark in my mind. I never heard my dad curse. We didn't hear mother or dad go around preaching much, but we knew they led good lives and tried to bring their children up in the fear of God.

Anyway, getting back to how I got in the church, Evangel was the old Swedish Baptist Church then. It had about three or four different names. I didn't go to service as I said; I was relying on how good I was. On the outside I wasn't too good. I feel that if I hadn't come to know the Lord I would have been an alcoholic. I can point out things the Lord had his hand in even before I came to know the Lord.

Anyway, they had special meetings on Ridge Avenue. An evangelist by the name of Jackie Beris was there; he gave illustrations. I had gone several nights down there and liked it. The title of one of his lectures was on death and what if you should die. After the service of that I gave my heart to the Lord. Then I got back into the church. This was in the early 1920's. They had the Swedish preachers then, and Swedish services. When David Nygren came it was 1931. In the first part of his ministry Ruth Johnson was the first one baptized and I was the second. There were several fellows to be baptized and they backed out. I hadn't been there a short time and a man by the name of Larson moved away and I got his class of boys.

G: Perhaps you could tell me a little bit about the church at this time when it was in this transitional stage from Swedish to English?

M: It took a little time to take on the English, but we had to go to it. We started to get English people in there then, and my wife wasn't Swedish.

I got involved in the choir then, and there were men that didn't want to sing next to me because I couldn't carry a tune. They put up with me until I finally got the swing of the thing.

I remember our class used to meet in the kitchen. We had a dirt floor at first, and then we got a wooden floor. I even had the class around the furnace one time.

We had a fellow by the name of John Peterson, and he would perform with guitar and sing. He did a lot of preaching too. One thing I'll never forget is when he would give the furnace in front of the pulpit a little shaking when it got a little too cool.

Around 1956 I bought myself an organ. It was a field type organ. We used it at these rest homes; we never had any trouble getting in. I would say, "I have a gospel team here." We always got into them and they were tickled to pieces.

G: Could you talk a bit about the Sunday school when you were first a member of the church?

M: We had three or four classes in the main auditorium, and then we had a side room. Our basement was all dirt, but we had the classrooms. I had the intermediate in the kitchen. Also, I've been back in the furnace room. Then we added the room in the back and that sort of helped out more or less for a choir room. We had the platform, and under our platform--we would raise the trap door and the baptistry was under that. When we left down there we had a membership of around 100; it might have been a little less. It was actually by faith that we stepped out.

G: What were the reasons why they moved from Woodland Avenue?

M: Because of our membership movement. The lower south side has made a great change from then to now. At that time people lived around Woodland, Ridge, Parkwood, all the Swedish families. We had very few families from the north side, but actually they were moving out. It just made sense to relocate because we had Swedish Covenant right off our

corner down there. Bethel Lutheran was around the corner. Then at that time we had a Mission Church or tabernacle there. We were losing the people on our membership down there.

G: Could you give some of your recollections of fund raising and this type of activity that the church had, the lawn fetes?

M: The one thing that we had at one time were rummage sales. This always bothered me. It never seemed right to me. When Reverend George Magnuson came in 1937 we had real growth; it was proof to us that we didn't need rummage sales.

We had good times; we had good Young People's meetings. I went to Young People's when I was in middle age. My wife and I had just as good a time with them.

G: Do you remember any of the social activities of the church, the socials and July Fourth picnics?

M: Yes. The July Fourth picnics were a big thing. We had to fight for a place. We met up at Bear's Den Cabin. When we had that we had that whole field there. The first one in the morning had the pick of the picnic grounds. You couldn't get it on the fourth. If you wanted reservations you had to be there on the fifth to get it for the fourth the next year. We had big crowds out there.

G: You were converted at one of these evangelistic meetings. It was quite common for the church to have these revival meetings with speakers. Could you talk about some of these people and how this worked?

M: Through Evangel I've seen many people come to know the Lord. Many kids, today, are now leaders because of evangelistic meetings. Even now I think we need to go back to this where we get evangelists. I think we need to taste a little bit of hell fire.

I think one of the great preachers we've had is Reverend George Magnuson. We've had all good preachers, but he was my favorite.

G: Could you talk about some of these ministers and what their ministries were like and personalities? Is Reverend Magnuson the first one that you were familiar with?

M: No. David Nygren was the first. Nygren was the evangelistic type minister. He actually went into it later on. He had a good ministry. Every one of our ministers had a unique

quality about them. Another thing I noticed is that the Lord had the right minister at the right time. It seemed like every seven or eight years we had a change in ministers; maybe that's good and maybe that's bad. A lot of times we tried to keep a minister and he felt the Lord had called him to another field. I never put up an argument whether he should go or not. If he felt by the Lord to be led in a ministry someplace else, who am I to have him stay? We were always fortunate that the Lord had another one for us. My idea is that a minister shouldn't leave when there is a disagreement in the church though; my idea is that he should leave when everything is smooth and nice. It is a better feeling then for those who are left. A lot of times, when the minister goes, the people go. This I just can't see, because they come and go.

Magnuson I think was there seven years, 1937-1944. He was here during the hard times. I had great respect for him because we were like brothers, not only in name, but it seemed like he and I could let our hair down when we got together.

I remember Kenneth Kolmodin came in; he was a man for the hour. I think we've been fortunate with our ministers. The pastors have had a lot to do in leading this church. Again, the congregation has a lot to do with the pastor for his feeding. The pastor should be lifted up at all times in prayer. When a pastor comes here he doesn't have a preacher; he is alone. We all have one pastor, but he doesn't.

We had a wonderful conference when we had around six or seven churches.

G: Can you talk about some of the conventions and things the church had?

M: We used to have a great group that would go to the church. Everybody went to conventions years ago in my time. I remember going to many in Akron, Jamestown, Erie, McKeesport; we had quite a group. It seemed like this was the place to go; there were no other places to go like today. We went to these conventions and the harmony all through it was wonderful. We stayed in members' homes. We had some wonderful conferences. Our men's retreats that we have today are wonderful. The convention now is getting larger. It seems your church gets so large that you lose a little fellowship.

I think the greatest thing we need to do today is be an example for the young ones. This is the future church. What is Evangel going to be in fifteen, twenty years? It all depends on teaching and what they're getting now. I always liked the young people. I went with them even when I was too old.

END OF INTERVIEW