

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Swedish Baptist Church Project

Parishioner Experiences

O. H. 779

THOMAS ANDERSON

Interviewed

by

Rich Gustafson

on

June 2, 1979

## THOMAS ANDERSON

Mr. Thomas Anderson was born on February 15, 1904 in Wellsville, Ohio. After his mother's death in 1918, Mr. Anderson moved to Youngstown where he lived with an uncle upon his arrival. After a short employment at Stambaugh Thompson and the Sharon Steel Company, he became an accountant for Youngstown Sheet & Tube Corporation in 1922. He remained employed for the latter forty-seven years, retiring in 1969. He attended Wellsville High School for one year, whereupon he left to go to Youngstown for employment. Associations which he has belonged to include the Mahoning Valley Industrial Management Association and the National Association of Accountants. On June 8, 1926 Mr. Anderson married Ruth Dunlop, and had one child, Harry, during their fifty-three years of marriage.

Through the ministry of Reverend John Peterson, Mr. Anderson was first introduced to the Swedish Baptist Church. Beginning in 1918 when he came to Youngstown, Mr. Anderson became an active member in the church, serving on various boards during his affiliation with the church. Due to his occupational skills, Mr. Anderson became financial secretary of the church, a position he still occupies. As one might expect he has a good working knowledge of the financial condition of the church during the years of his involvement.

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INTERVIEWEE: THOMAS ANDERSON  
INTERVIEWER: Rich Gustafson  
SUBJECT: financial history, social activities, various ministers  
DATE: June 2, 1979

G: This is an interview with Thomas Anderson at 406 Brookfield Avenue, in Boardman, Ohio, on June 2, 1979, at 2:00 p.m.

Mr. Anderson, perhaps you could give me a short biographical sketch of your life when you were first affiliated with the church, when you became a member, and some of your family background?

A: I was born in Wellsville, Ohio in 1904. I lived there until I was eighteen, the year in which my mother died. A little while after that I moved to Youngstown and stayed with an uncle of mine at the beginning of the visit in Youngstown. In a short while my cousin got me a job at the Stambaugh building. There I worked about twelve months and got another job at Sharon Steel Corporation. At that time it was called Sharon Steel Hoop Company. There I spent two years and later went to Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company in the accounting department. I stayed there about forty-seven years. That was the beginning and the ending of my career in Youngstown.

G: Maybe you can describe when you were first contacted about the church. This, of course, would be at Woodland Avenue. What motivated you to become a member and what were some of your experiences at this early period?

A: Prior to coming to Youngstown, in my childhood there was a preacher from Youngstown by the name of Reverend Peterson. He made it a point to come down to Wellsville at least twice a year. Sometimes he would meet in our home, sometimes my aunt's home. That is where I made the first contact as far as anybody connected with our present church. When I came to Youngstown naturally having known Reverend Peterson, we went to his church.

After about two years we became members of the Swedish Baptist Church, as it was called at that time. Later it was changed to Evangel Baptist Church. That is my connection with the Evangel Baptist Church and how I got into it.

G: Maybe you could describe something of the ministry of Reverend Peterson. This was the first man that you mentioned that came in contact with yourself. Maybe you could describe some of his ministry and how he was received by the people?

A: His specialty was to visit Swedish people, contacting them. As he had conversations with them he would lead them into the biblical stories; he would ask them questions about how they felt about the church, how they reacted to God, did they believe in God or didn't they believe in God. His wife was just as active as he was contacting Swedish people. Mostly, in the beginning, the church was made up of people of Swedish descent. As time grew on we got more Americanized.

Another thing, in the beginning of Reverend Peterson's ministry the morning service and the evening service were both in Swedish. Later on, maybe five or six years, then the morning service was in Swedish and the evening service was in English. As the young people grew up and they were more trained in the English language and they didn't listen to their mother and father as far as Swedish was concerned, the Swedish part drifted away and we got into the American or English language. It wasn't too long that it became Americanized entirely, even though we had a lot of Swedish people. They learned the language and learned to understand it so it was very simple.

G: What was the size of the membership at this time? How large was the church?

A: At the time that I'm talking about in Reverend Peterson's days, and shortly after that, the membership was about eighty. They were really living up to the responsibilities of the church, more so than they do today. Today, there are a lot of things going on that you would never have tolerated in the early days. For instance, sports; you wouldn't think of having sports on Sunday. Sure they had some sports on Sunday in those days too, but today nobody thinks anything about it. Forget about church, go to the ball game, or any other sport. Cut grass on Sunday, things . . . Our fathers and mothers pounded into us that we should honor the seventh day. Rest! Live the word of God. Today that has gone by the board evidently.

G: Maybe you could mention some of the ways that the church raised money at this time, maybe some of the socials they had, rummage sales, this type of activity that the church had.

A: Due to the fact that the church did not believe in having dinners to raise money, the money was supposed to come into the church through faith giving. At that time, based on the faith

giving, at the annual meeting of the year we would stand up there and call off name by name what they gave during the year. As an aside, that drew the people to church. They wanted to know what the next guy gave. It was really funny to stand up there for fifteen or twenty minutes reading off the names. The ears were cocked. That is the way it was in those days. The funny part of it is that the money that we needed to operate came in. All they had to do if it looked like we were going to have an extra expense was to tell the people of the church and the money came in. It's harder to raise money these days.

G: Maybe you could describe something about the different conventions that you remember at this time. Not shortly after, I think it was Reverend Magnuson, when he was there, they had the annual convention of the Middle East Baptist Conference at Evangel. Do you remember some of these conventions that were held at this certain time, and maybe not just at Evangel, but other churches that perhaps you attended?

A: I can't tell you too much about the conventions because at that time the job I had at Sheet & Tube, I was working seven days. I worked half a day Sunday, sometimes three-quarters of a day on Saturdays. When they had conventions it was on the weekend and I couldn't attend. I might go to one meeting or so, so I can't tell you too much about the activities of the convention.

G: Maybe something about some of the celebrations. I understand they always had a July Fourth celebration where they went to a park and held activities. Maybe you could describe something about this occurrence?

A: The Fourth of July celebrations were always great. They always managed to have the Sunday school picnics as a celebration of Fourth of July. We would go down to the park and have our picnics there, Mill Creek Park. Everybody brought their own food and asked the other relatives in their family to come at that particular time even though they didn't belong to the church. It was really a family gathering and we had a lot of sports. We really had a good time. It was a time that you had the opportunity to talk to those who were not Christians and try to lead them to visit Swedish Baptist Church and see what it was like. I think a lot of the new members that came in originally were brought to the attention of our church at the picnic.

One other thing, talking about conventions, that I can recall, especially in Magnusons' day and later on, were the young people's conventions. Those were great times, much different than they are today. Of course, you had less churches in the district, but those that were in the district were really active as far as young people were concerned. Believe me, that was a big time in the young people's lives of the Swedish Baptist Church in Youngstown. Jamestown, New York, they always treated us like royalty, and many other churches too that were Swedish descent, or maybe directly from Sweden. We had a great time.

It is something that stays with you and you never forget it.

- G: Maybe you can mention something about the young people's group, the Baptist association of young people there. What was the size of the young people's group and what was a typical meeting like for you to attend?
- A: The young people's group in those days, they met in the afternoon at five o'clock, almost every Sunday. They put on a good program. It lasted one hour. This was not only for the young people; all adults were invited to this meeting. The reason for that is that after the meetings were over then they would have refreshments in the basement of the Woodland Avenue church. Adults and young people alike were invited downstairs to the eats; Swedish food, some of it pretty rich. They had the Swedish rye bread and really had a good time. Young and old were together. That led right up into the church service, which started at seven o'clock. This was every Sunday. It was a regular ritual. You never thought about doing anything else except attending the young people's meeting in the Swedish Baptist Church.
- G: Maybe you could elaborate a bit. What was Sunday like to you, starting with getting up early? Maybe discuss a little bit about your Sunday school class and the service. As you mentioned, the Sunday was really centered around the church and all your activities were at the church. Maybe you can describe what a Sunday was to you.
- A: I can describe part of it, but as I told you before, most of my young period, when I first came to Youngstown, I was working for Sheet & Tube then and had to work Sundays. I missed a lot of the Sunday school activities, but I can tell you some of it.
- You never slept any later than eight o'clock. You got up and had your breakfast. We lived in a certain section of town where we could walk to church. At that time, in the early days, you did not have a car to begin with. We walked down Woodland Avenue to church because we lived on Glenwood Avenue, right near Woodland Avenue. We had one member, John Peterson was his name, who was one of the Sunday school teachers. Carl Magnuson was another one; he was a Sunday School teacher. He had a class of adults. Sometimes they were mixed, partly adults and partly young people. At that time we didn't have too much in Sunday school membership. It was a good time for those who were able to attend. I missed a lot of that in the early days.
- G: You mentioned just briefly something about the neighborhood of Woodland. Can you describe something of the neighborhood, the composition, the ethnic groups where the church was? Maybe you can describe this.
- A: Anybody that knew anything about Woodland Avenue at all would recall first of all that it was a triangular section. In

other words, the Swedish Baptist Church across the street was what they called the Mission Church at that time, Swedish Mission Church. Then you had the Swedish Ruler Church on Ridge Avenue. That tells you a story in itself. The Swedish people were in that neighborhood. That is why the church is built in that particular neighborhood. To top it off, right next door to the Swedish Baptist Church they had Adolf Gustafon, who had a grocery store. He furnished a lot of the stuff that the Swedish Baptist Church would buy. Then we had Swedish contractors. Frolund and Johnson, I think, were the two contractor in the church membership.

Then what usually happens in churches many times, even in our present church, things get bad. People get in an argument and forget the word of God and get selfish and outspoken and say the wrong things. The first thing you knew, the church was divided. We lost maybe half of the membership. However, as time went on some of them came back. We continued on and finally we got up to where we are right now, on Southern Boulevard. Not to repeat myself, but the same thing happened in the Southern Boulevard church. Things happened and the church split over it. A lot of the members came back after they found out that they were in the wrong. We have 415 in membership in the Southern Boulevard church, Evangel Baptist Church.

- G: This is probably a topic that you don't want to elaborate on, but do you remember what the issues were that were divisive at this early period? Was it a clash of leadership maybe or personalities that resulted in this dissention in the church? You could talk a bit if you would like.
- A: I don't know what the particular issue was down on Woodland Avenue, but it was people who were strong-willed and one-sided. They couldn't look at the other person's viewpoint; they wanted their own viewpoint pushed. They couldn't go along with your ideas. I don't know what the particular issue was at Woodland Avenue church. However, I think you're familiar with what happened out at Evangel Baptist Church on Southern Boulevard. I'll just mention that the preacher got involved with one of the members. I'm not going to go into detail on it, but after a meeting and so forth and further discussion of the situation people started to take sides not fully knowing what the whole issue was about. They had the wrong impression of it. Part of the people didn't know what they were doing. You tried to explain it to them and the more you tried to explain it to them the madder they got. They decided that this wasn't the place for them, so they broke up and went to another church. Sure, that hurts us, however, you've got to remember that the Lord still runs everything. As a result, we got a man in our church--Reverend Coleman followed the previous pastor--and that was a lifesaver in our church. Things started to fade away and he got people active in the church work, got the young people active in the church work, and finally, that is what drew the other

people back into the church again. When it all finished, I don't think there was a net loss of more than about ten people to the church. I always attributed that to the fact that we had a wonderful pastor at that time, and that was Reverend Coleman.

- G: Just to digress a few moments, maybe you can talk about some of the contact between some of the different Swedish churches. You mentioned the Mission Church and the church that eventually became the First Covenant Church, and then also Bethel Lutheran was back in the neighborhood at this time. Maybe you can mention some of the shared activities of the neighborhood, how the churches got together on occasions and how they complemented one another.
- A: In the early days our church got involved with the Swedish Mission Church. Especially on Good Friday, one time the combined service would be in the Swedish Mission Church, the next time the combined service was held in our church. This went on for many, many years. You looked forward to it. The Mission Church being the bigger had more room and they had more membership than we had. Everything worked out perfect. We were not too closely in contact with the Swedish Lutheran Church. Why? I don't know. However, we did have some combined meetings with them, but not as active as with the Swedish Mission Church.
- G: Do you remember anything before our church and the Middle East Baptist Conference purchased Camp Burton? There was another camp that the church went to. Some of the people I've talked to don't recall so much about this, but I believe this was in Linwood and it was Camp Findley. Do you remember anything about the camping program that they had before the ministry started at Camp Burton?
- A: I don't recall too much, but I do know that we did not have a camp at Linwood. However, Linwood was a gathering place in August. A lot of people still go up there, but to my knowledge it was not considered a camp.
- G: Can you tell us something about some of the revival meetings that they had at the church, let's say special speakers who would come to the church? Any that stand out in your mind?
- A: Oh yes. I'll never forget in the early days, it was a regular ritual that you had to have a speaker come in maybe once or twice a year. They would be there for a week, ten days. Those are early days too when the preacher came to the church and stayed in a member's house. He didn't go to a hotel or anything like that in those days. He lived right there at the home. A room was furnished and they made him feel at home. Most of the time, as a reminder, the preacher stayed at the Dalberg home. I think it was Frank Dalberg Sr. The preachers in the conference knew that when they came to Youngstown they would be staying at



the Dalberg home. That was really nice. She made them feel at home and gave them everything that they wanted. Those were real revival meetings. I've seen lots of young people and older people come in.

There are some funny sides too to these revival meetings that I'll just recall lightly here. There was ~~one~~ one individual that I can recall who always could be found at the revival meeting. Sooner or later you knew he was going to go forward. I think as an aside that you know who I'm talking about. That was a regular ritual. Sometimes there was another gentleman who also came in. There was a reason for him coming in all the time. He evidently had sense enough to sit still and not go forward every time like the other guy.

Those revival meetings were great. We had a lot of good speakers, real religious speakers. Sometimes in the early days there would be Swedish speakers. One of the preachers really had the Swedish language. He spoke beautifully.

Another thing, having those Swedish pastors coming in like that the young people had a chance to learn part of the Swedish language, just from talking to the parents and listening to the preacher. If they didn't understand what the preacher was saying when they got home they would ask their mother and father what he meant. They learned a lot of Swedish that way.

G: You've been very active on the different boards of the church, and maybe at this time you can describe what the composition of the different boards were, how many members the different boards at the church had? You've been very active in the church this way. Maybe you can describe some of the people on the board and what the responsibilities of the different members were, and what the breakdown of the different boards were.

A: The first thing you had were the deacons. Elmer Gustafson, Frank Dawber Sr., John Peterson Sr., and several others were almost a fixture on the deacon board.

Then you had the mission board. Due to the fact that our church wasn't very large at that time you could be on two boards. I think Elmer Gustafson was on the mission board, and you had Ed Shogren and several others.

Then you had the finance committee with Elmer Gustafson being the financial treasurer. You had various financial secretaries and then you had one member from the trustee board.

The trustee board was quite an active board. Even though our church was small it still required a lot of attention.

Then you had the music committee. Mrs. Shogren was quite active in that and Mr. Lindberg was the organist of the choir. He took

care of the choir service for many, many years, along with Mrs. Shogren. The soloists were Mr. David Nelson, tenor, Ed Shogren, bass; Cora Johnson was one of the bass singers, soloists. We had quite a good choir for a small church at that particular time. The music was by piano and organ combined. That is the same as we have today. I think those are about all the committees in the early church.

G: Do you remember anything about renovations of the church that took place, funds that were appropriated for this type of expenditure?

A: Every year the womenfolk have a fever every spring, and that fever is housecleaning. They have the same thing at church. The members of the church did their own housecleaning in the church. They set up scaffolds and everything. Maybe every two or three years they would wash down everything and maybe the fourth or fifth year there would be a lot of painting. A group of people would furnish the eats at breakfast, noon, and evening. It would take two or three days sometimes to houseclean the church. That was a regular ritual and everybody knew it had to be done so there was no problem.

G: Maybe you can elaborate on why the church decided to move from Woodland Avenue to Southern Boulevard. What were the reasons for this move?

A: The first move was because the church was getting too small. They decided that if we were going to grow at all we had to get out of that area because business was moving into the area and just about swallowing up all the property in that neighborhood. We didn't have any parking area was another thing. We had to park on the public street. The police department wouldn't tolerate that any further, so it was decided we would buy a lot. It was right off of Midlothian Boulevard. We were going to build on that. For some unknown reason it was delayed and delayed. The money wasn't coming in to even start anything. Finally, they gave us those lots, sold them, and decided to go out to Southern Boulevard where we are now. By making that move we picked up some new members and these members helped the church in raising money. They put on the north wing of the Sunday school facilities and then the auditorium for the church services. However, there was a delay in the auditorium part of it; we had to use the basement for about two or three years. Finally they got the thing fixed up upstairs so that we could move up there. Then we had chairs in there; we did not have the benches. That didn't work too good either, so finally they put on a campaign to raise some money and they bought the benches. That is how we got started there. The reason we had to move was lack of growth in the Woodland Avenue area.