

The start of a church



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On Nov. 17, 1889 the Rev. Goran Forsberg, the pastor of North Grosvenordale's Swedish Lutheran Church, and 54 local Swedish immigrants organized the "Den Svenska Evangeliska Luthereska Ebenezerkyrkan av Willimantic."

The following year Willimantic's newest church entered into the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod. During this formative period, the church members met in several locations in the borough, but at a special meeting in June 1892, the congregation's members decided to build their own church. The following September they purchased a lot on the corner of Summit and Oak streets and construction commenced in April 1893.

On May 15, 1893, the Willimantic Ebenezer Lutheran Church's officials organized a special ceremony to lay the corner stone of its new edifice and more than 3,000 people, "animated by genuine interest or mere curiosity," witnessed the proceedings. The 23-strong Swedish Emanuel Band of North Grosvenordale did not disappoint them. Dressed in

bright and colorful attire, the visitors from Thompson's large Swedish community treated the inquisitive throng to a special concert of sacred music.

The Rev. Forsberg read the dedicatory ritual and the church's builder, D.F. Terry, placed the cornerstone in position. Forsberg then placed a time capsule beneath the stone. It contained a historical sketch of the local church, a copy of a religious newspaper, Augustina, copies of Swedish weeklies Vartland and Framat, recent copies of the *Willimantic Chronicle*, the *Willimantic Daily Herald*, the *Willimantic Journal*, a cent piece dated 1889, some Swedish currency and a photograph of the pastor, the Rev. David Magnusson.

Forsberg then took up a small hammer adorned with red, white and blue ribbons and struck the stone three times in the name of the Trinity. After the ceremony, the band played while the church officials took up a collection. This amounted to \$67 and the hammer, which struck the cornerstone, raised \$2.50 at auction.

The following morning when the workmen arrived to resume construction, they discovered that thieves had dislodged the stone and stolen the time capsule. This dastardly deed came in the wake of a rumor circulating the Thread City that the Swedes had placed a \$5 gold piece in the capsule.

However, Magnusson said that the rumor was false and that the value of the time capsule's contents was no more than four cents.

Despite the loss, building continued. The builders completed the basement before winter set in and the first services were held in the church structure in October 1894. The contractors completed their task the following year and on July 1, 1895, the Rev. G. Nilsenius, president of the New York conference, officially opened Willimantic's newest church building.

On Aug. 27, 1916, disaster struck when lightning hit the Lutheran Church and a great part of it burned. Immediately, the local parishioners went to work and rebuilt the edifice in time for Christmas services.

For many years, Willimantic's Swedish church was united with the Norwich's Salem Lutheran Church, but on Jan. 1, 1957, the Lutheran authorities dissolved this Norwich-Willimantic parish, and the Willimantic church gained its own resident pastor. Also, during this period a new parsonage was completed and dedicated.

Historical records do not reveal, however, if the church members placed a time capsule in the foundation and if so, whether or not miscreants stole it.

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