

Augustana Winter Traditions: The Joy of Christmas Celebration at the Jenny Lind Chapel in Andover

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Witkowski, Victoria H. and Meyer, Julia. "Augustana Winter Traditions: The Joy of Christmas Celebration at the Jenny Lind Chapel in Andover" (2018). *Celebration of Learning*.
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Christmas Past and Present: The Joy of Christmas at Jenny Lind Chapel

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Dr. Brian Leech: Oral History & Testimony 369
Augustana College Celebration of Learning



Background

The Joy of Christmas tradition at Augustana officially began in the winter of 1970. The college and Augustana Lutheran Church were both started by Lars Paul Esbjörn, fostering a close connection between the two throughout the years. The Jenny Lind Chapel, was finished in 1854 and named after Swedish opera singer, Jenny Lind, who made a generous donation to the early congregation for a church building. The original design had a steeple, but the wood for that was repurposed into coffins for victims of the cholera outbreak during this time, as that was a more pressing matter. Fifteen years later, the congregation had grown to exceed the small Chapel and funds for a bigger building were raised. Though the Jenny Lind Chapel is not the main church building anymore, it is still maintained as a historic building, complete with a museum on its history.

Two Different Beginnings

The Joy of Christmas was started by Pastor Richard Swanson, or Swannie, as he was affectionately called by students and staff. There are two stories of how this tradition came about however. Pastor Richard Priggie, told us what he knows as the official story of how it started in 1970, coincidentally his freshman year at Augustana, when Swannie took a group of students to the chapel and they held a Christmas service with cookies and hot chocolate to follow. Ron Peterson, the Dean of the chapel, offered a bit of an earlier start date. He says that in the 1960s Swannie would bring students to the Andover Retreat Center to have a Christmas service in the unheated basement of the chapel. In 1969, the residents of Andover decided to offer cookies and hot chocolate to students to engage in fellowship with them, which led to the creation of this tradition and its official start in 1970. Though the start date may vary, this tradition still continues and is loved by Augustana Students today.

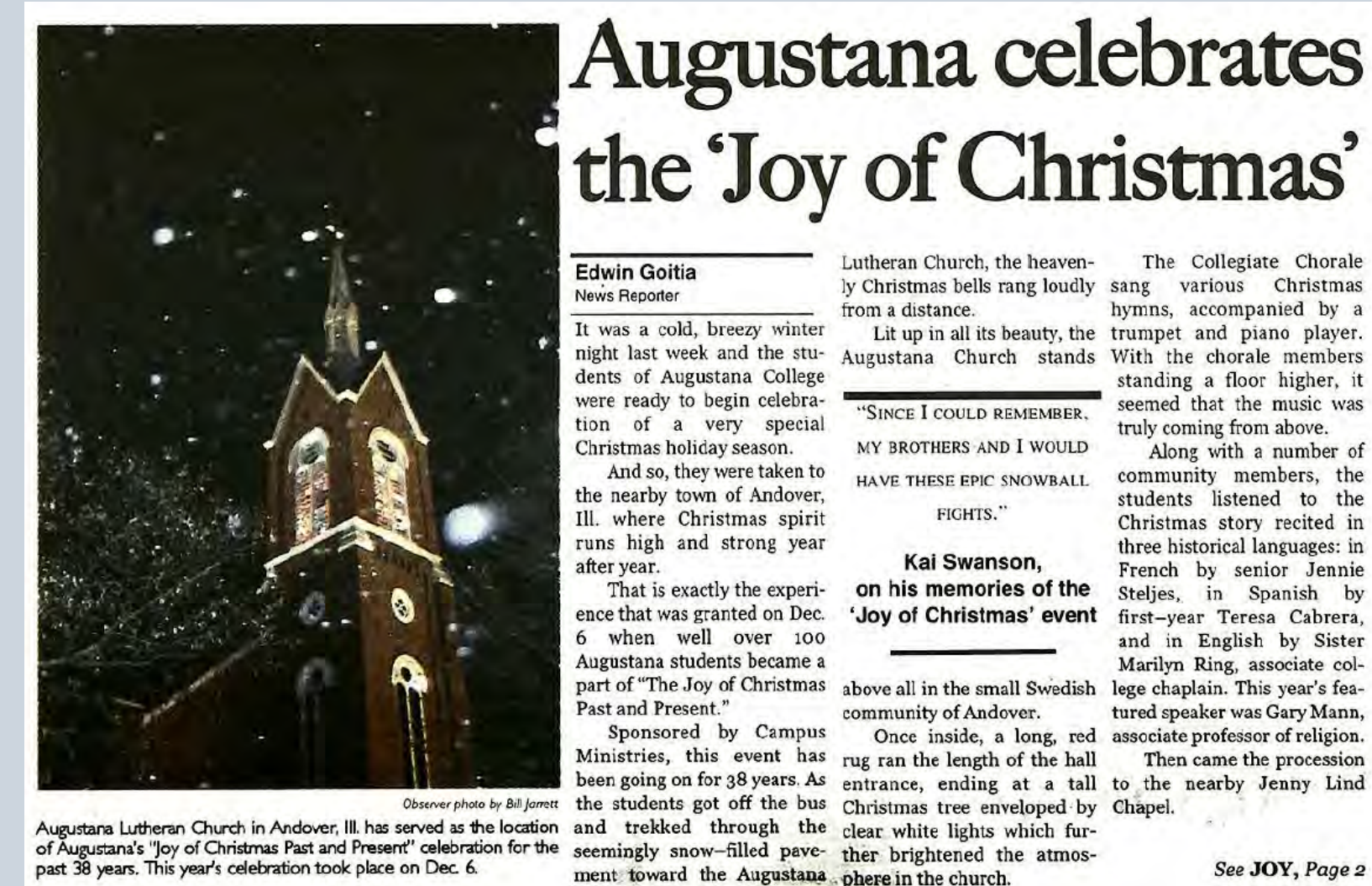
References

- Augustana Observer and Rocketry-I Database, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.
- Dave Ramacitti, "Andover Christmas," *Times-Democrat* (Davenport, IA), December 1972.
- Jenny Lind Chapel Online Photo Albums, Flickr. Accessed April 15, 2018.
- Pastor Richard Priggie (Pastor of Augustana College, Former Augustana Student), interviewed by Julia Meyer and Victoria Witkowski at Augustana College Ascension Chapel, Rock Island, Illinois, April 4, 2018.
- Ron Peterson (Dean of Jenny Lind Chapel), interviewed by Julia Meyer and Victoria Witkowski at Jenny Lind Chapel, Andover, Illinois, April 25, 2018.

Thank You

We would like to thank our two interviewees for this project, Ron Peterson and Pastor Richard Priggie, for offering their time and knowledge for this project.

Joy of Christmas Past & Present: The Program



The Joy of Christmas program begins at Augustana Lutheran Church in Andover, Illinois, pictured left in an article from the Augustana Observer.



Above is the Jenny Lind Chapel, pictured on a beautiful April day in Andover, Illinois.



The next stop is at the Jenny Lind Chapel where carols are sung and communion is served. The small church is decorated with simple candles, bows, wreaths, and an unadorned Christmas tree.



After the service has ended, students and other attendees return to Augustana Lutheran Church. Here they are treated to cookies and hot chocolate from members of Augustana Lutheran Church.

Our Interviewees



Ron Peterson:
- Jenny Lind Chapel Dean
- Longtime Andover resident
- Augustana Lutheran Church Member

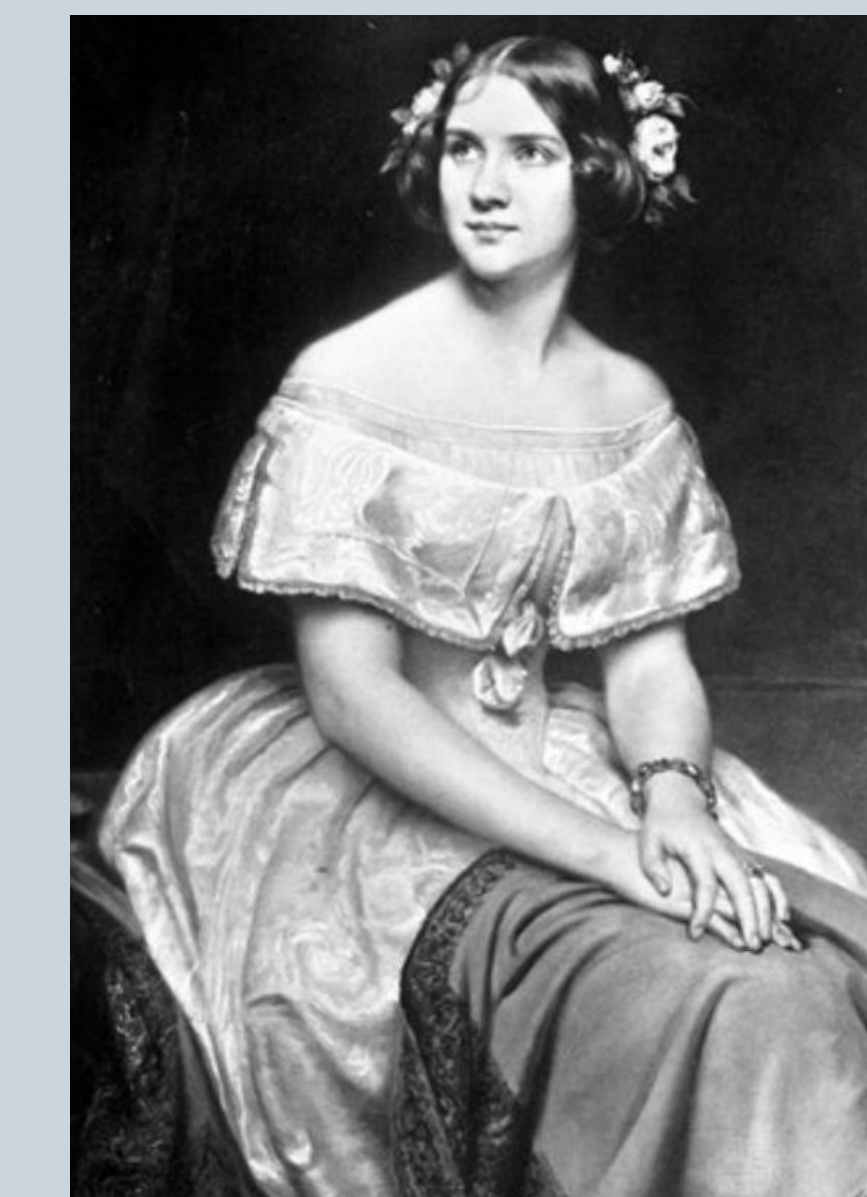


Pastor Richard Priggie:
- Augustana College Chaplain
- Oversees Augustana College Campus Ministries
- Alumni of Augustana College

Key Figures



Swedish Pastor Lars Paul Esbjörn (above left) was a founder of the Augustana Lutheran Synod and Augustana College. To build a chapel in his current-day Andover, Esbjörn asked and received a \$1,500 donation from singer Jenny Lind (above right). The chapel was named in her honor.



Public Involvement & Interest

According to Ron Peterson, current Dean of the Jenny Lind Chapel, people from all over come to the yearly program known as the Joy of Christmas. Attendees included people from Galesburg, Geneseo, Kewaunee, Andover, and the Quad Cities. The largest group is of students from Augustana College who are brought over from the Quad Cities in buses. These students also participate in providing music for the gathering, both vocal and instrumental. Augustana also has provided the guest-preacher and various students or faculty who participate in telling the Christmas Story in various languages. Citizens of the Andover area who belong to the Augustana Lutheran Church of Andover play an integral part in this program. The church members prepare the church for the service and provide a place to gather after the service, with cookies and hot chocolate to enjoy as well.

How Jenny Lind Chapel Has Been Affected

With the introduction of the Joy of Christmas program came a helping hand from Augustana College for the Jenny Lind Chapel. As we learned from our interview with Ron, Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, former president of Augustana College, took an interest in the Chapel and its history. Bergendoff formed a group of individuals to help restore the old church and keep its history alive. The group raised around \$40,000 for renovations which helped to install fixtures like bathrooms and heating. Included in this restoration was the construction of a small museum that was organized by former Augustana Geology professor Dr. Fritiof Fryxell. The museum which is in the basement of the Chapel focuses on the history of the Jenny Lind Chapel, the Augustana Synod. Augustana continues to be an influential partner for the Chapel with its participation in research as well as aiding in events such as the Joy of Christmas and Founder Day celebrations.

Stories from Past Joy of Christmases

There are countless special memories that students have associated with the Joy of Christmas tradition. Pastor Priggie and Ron Peterson both recounted the story of a young couple who met on the bus ride to Andover for the Joy of Christmas the winter of their freshman year. The couple continued to date throughout college, and their senior year, after the service was over and the cookies and cocoa were being passed around, the young man asked his soon to be fiancé to marry him. Ron recounts another couple that had moved to California but came back to the chapel to get married because they were Augustana alum and the chapel held special meaning to them. Pastor Priggie added that some alum had their children baptized there and Ron stated that many of the weddings that were held at the chapel were also that of those who previously attended Augie. Clearly this chapel has shaped the lives of many Augustana alum and still holds a special place in their heart, even years past their graduation date.