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

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Christmas Past and Present:
The Joy of Christmas at Jenny Lind Chapel

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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, 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.

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.

References
Augustana Observer and Rockety-I Database, Special Collections, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

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

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, Kewanee, 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. Augusta 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. Fritolf Fryxell. The museum which is in the basement of the Chapel focuses on the history of the Jenny Lind Chapel, the Augustana Synod. Augusta 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 Augustana. Clearly, the chapel has shaped the lives of many Augustana alum and still holds a special place in their heart, even years past their graduation date.

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