

FRIENDS OF Covenant History

In This Issue...

An acute and honest memory of our heritage, understood in depth, is prerequisite to all forward movement of the Covenant fellowship. —Zenos Hawkinson

CONTENTS

In This Issue 1

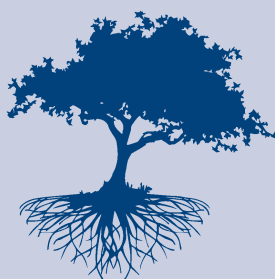
David Nyvall: Insight
for a New Generation
of Immigrants
by Mark Tao 2

An Immigrant Church
by Chris Gehrz 3

From the Archives:
Highlighting Sources:
Paul Carlson and the
Congo Mission
by Anna-Kajsa
Anderson 5

Throwback: Frisk
Collection of Alaska
Mission Journals
by Axel E. Karlson 6

We're pleased to officially adopt this tree as the logo of Friends of Covenant History. Trees symbolize our many roots, which nourish the single living organism. Trees also represent hope for the future: when asked what he would do if he knew the world would end tomorrow, Martin Luther famously answered, "plant a tree." The trunk and branches of our tree are that of the old mulberry tree on North Park's campus that lived where the new Johnson Center now stands. In this we seek to give the mulberry a new life.



The 2014 Covenant Annual Meeting saw the approval of a resolution on immigration, calling Covenant congregations to "Enter into meaningful relationships with immigrant neighbors and immigrant churches by creating a safe space to share and hear stories." Our second issue of the Friends of Covenant History newsletter offers two reflections on how the immigrant past of our denomination might offer resources for present reflection on contemporary immigration. Mark Tao, pastor of Immanuel Covenant Church in Chicago, reflects on how David Nyvall's navigation of perennial issues of immigrant identity—transnationalism, assimilation, and "Americanization"—have offered him insights for pastoring a multinational church and for reflecting on his own identity as a second-generation immigrant. Chris Gehrz, professor of history at Bethel University, considers how "usable" the Covenant's immigrant past might be—both that of the earliest Swedish Covenanters and subsequent immigrant groups.

In honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Paul Carlson, medical missionary to the Congo, Covenant archivist Anna-Kajsa Anderson highlights archival resources relevant to Carlson, the Congo mission, and the work of the Paul Carlson Partnership. Remember that the archives is open to the public (by appointment). For those not in Chicago, the expanding digital collections offer access to Covenant resources at a distance. Our "Throwback" column highlights one of the newest additions: the Frisk Collection of Alaska Mission Journals. Curtis Ivanoff, field director of the Evangelical Covenant Church of Alaska, introduces the collection and the excerpts from the journals of Axel Karlson, one of the first two Covenant missionaries to



Unalakleet Sunday School Class, 1903

Alaska. This collection recently (12/4/2014) received the great honor of appearing as the Digital Collections Featured Image of the Consortium of Academic Research Libraries of Illinois (CARLI). The selection committee praised the collection and our archives staff, saying "North Park is one of a few CARLI institutions building multiple collections that relate to one another, in this case the Evangelical Covenant Church....The collection is an excellent example of a project rendering primary source materials with limited and awkward access in physical form (microfilm) into a form that can be widely disseminated and is easy to use." Committee member Mary Rose, Metadata Librarian for Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, expressed her enthusiasm for the content, admitting, "I could read this mesmerizing logbook for hours."

We hope you will enjoy learning about, and reading a sample of, these rich resources, available through the Covenant Archives and Historical Library. We hope further that you will be inspired by these voices from our past—and from fresh reflections on them—to faithful and creative Christian living, personally and communally. ■

DAVID NYVALL: Insight for a new generation of immigrants

MARK TAO

This year marks the 152nd anniversary of the birth of David Nyvall (1863–1946), the first president of North Park University and an enduring figure in the Evangelical Covenant Church. And though Nyvall is perhaps best known for his general erudition, I've been particularly struck by his insights concerning transnationalism, immigration, assimilation, and identity.

Exploring David Nyvall's contributions in these matters could come at no better a time than the present, as we face a crisis over the current state of our national immigration system and as we continue to engage in spirited debate over what Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor has called "the politics of

planted into American soil. He called it a conversion experience, akin to the kind of baptismal conversion in which one moves from an old to a new self in Christ.

In assessing these metaphors, it may seem Nyvall was simply capitulating to conventional theories of acculturation like the popular "melting pot" model of the early twentieth century. However, a closer reading reveals that Nyvall wholly rejected the bifurcation of his Swedish identity and his newfound American one. Nyvall did not view the "conversion" of immigration as a singular event involving a binary movement from one pole to another. Rather, "conversion" was a highly critical *process* requiring careful discernment of what in the past ought to be re-imagined and appropriated to its new context, such that the thing in itself would not be entirely lost, but wholly made new. Nyvall neither urged his compatriots to cling to an exclusive ethnocentrism, devoid of American national allegiance-

Nyvall's incisive grasp of the immigrant condition was truly remarkable for his time and remains so today.

es, nor to forsake the traditions of their homeland in their process of Americanization. Rather, according to Nyvall scholar Scott Erickson, Nyvall urged his fellow Swedes to form a new "ethnic consciousness" through a careful and selective assimilation. This would require the death of an old Swedish self that a new Swedish American self could be born.

Nyvall's incisive grasp of the immigrant condition was truly remarkable for his time and remains so today.

Being both the son of first-generation immigrants as well as the pastor of a multinational church, I have found Nyvall's treatment of the immigrant experience and his reflections on cultural "conversion" helpful in considering how the church can better minister to the immigrants among us (particularly those seeking naturalization).

If the church is to more effectively serve immigrants in a globalized world, it must follow in Nyvall's footsteps in (1) upholding the dignity of immigrants as they experience turbulence on their journey towards



David and Louisa Nyvall

recognition" in our nation's courts and churches. How did Nyvall conceive of the immigrant experience, and what light does that shed for those of us who worship God in increasingly multinational ecclesial contexts?

To begin, it is notable that Nyvall was addressing the immigrant experience as an immigrant himself. This gave him unique credibility and a unique vantage point from which to comment on the transitional nature of the immigrant experience and the complexities of Americanization.

Over the years, Nyvall captured the process of Americanization by using a few metaphors. He described it as a journey, a departure from one's homeland toward new shores. He used the imagery of transplantation: Swedish flowers uprooted and re-

the formation of a more cohesive identity, and (2) standing in solidarity with them as they struggle to discern which old “forms” are worth preserving and which are need of reconstruction.

As the church, we must welcome immigrants across our borders and into our pews with hospitality, creating reflective spaces so that immigrants may feel safe to explore new possibilities, even when facing foreign and unfamiliar social conditions. The creation of safe space generates fertile ground for self-discovery to flourish, for old values to be questioned, and for new paradigms to emerge. The church’s call is to stand with immigrants as they simultaneously mourn the loss of the old and rejoice in the new.

But affirming the dignity of the immigrant condition and entering into solidarity with our immigrant neighbors comes at a cost: namely, the death of our own presumptions and the embrace of our own spiritual and cultural conversion. Entering into conversational space with the immigrants among us is risky precisely because in so doing, our own point of view is also made subject to critique and re-evaluation in light of the “other.” The unquestioned assumptions we hold about our world and our faith (e.g., our understandings of civil governance, civic participation, social roles) are all brought to bear before the “horizon” of our immigrant neighbors’ and before the “horizon” of our most sacred Scripture as we do life together. We abruptly find ourselves experiencing conversion as we ponder the questions: How much is our faith simply an expression of American civic religion? Are we perpetuating American exceptionalism from our pulpits? Has our worship become syncretistic—fusing patriotism with the gospel of Jesus Christ? This process of self-interrogation may be painful, but it is also fruitful for more faithful living.

If we are truly to live into our baptismal call and love the stranger, our churches must be safe harbors where death and resurrection is an ongoing process, not only in a spiritual sense but culturally as well. Our churches must be places of progressive cultural conversion in addition to spiritual conversion. By God’s grace, may our churches be places reflective of this commitment, following the legacy of David Nyvall! ■

Mark Tao is pastor at Immanuel Evangelical Covenant Church in Chicago. A graduate of North Park Theological Seminary (MDiv), Mark serves as a member of the Commission on Covenant History. To read more on cultural conversion, see Brian Bantum, “New Birth and the Realities of Race,” *The Covenant Companion* (September 2012).

An Immigrant Church

CHRIS GEHRZ

As in all other human communities, the people of the Evangelical Covenant Church have tended to use history to ground their sense of collective identity. After all, “The sureness of ‘I was,’” writes historian David Lowenthal, “is a necessary component of the sureness of ‘I am.’” For example, members of my family and my congregation have often defined who they are now at least partly in terms of who their ancestors were in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: pietistic evangelicals who formed a movement of “Mission Friends” in the midst of a Swedish diaspora.

Yet I suspect that the Covenant’s immigrant past is both less usable than we want it to be and more usable than we imagine it to be.

Less usable because the very act of studying this history is, like immigration, a kind of movement across a boundary. “The past is a foreign country,” observes Lowenthal, “they do things differently there.” And as our imaginations make that trip from present to past, we soon learn what John Fea warns in *Why Study History?* “that what happened long ago, in all its strangeness and foreignness, may not always be as usable as we would like it to be.”

There is so much about the experience of the Petersons, Nelsons, Larsons, and Andersons in my family tree that is as alien to me now as their new homeland was to them then. For example, this summer I was struck to read the response of Mission Covenant pastors and journalists to the First World War. Celebrating Germany as the birthplace of Luther and regarding Russia as their homeland’s ancient foe, they joined other Swedish American leaders in opposing the Allied cause. Even as U-boats sank American ships in early 1917, Covenant pastors in Minneapolis petitioned Congress to reject a declaration of war. (Their representative did vote Nay, joining three colleagues who represented largely German



Covenant Annual Meeting
1907, Iron Mountain, Michigan,

Continued ►



La Villa Mission Church,
Sunday School, La Villa,
Texas, ca. 1950s

The very act of studying this history is, like immigration, a kind of movement across a boundary.

American districts.) Then when war came, the use of Swedish, like German, was restricted. After Iowa's so-called Babel Proclamation banned religious services in foreign languages, one Covenant pastor lamented that "People grieve because the word of God has been taken from them and we are not able to communicate the gospel in English."

This is an immigrant past more complex and less obviously usable than the calming one that we encounter via Lina Sandell songs (in translation) and Christmas smorgasbords. In reality, we prefer something less like history and more like what Lowenthal calls "heritage," whose purpose is "to domesticate the past" and enlist it "for present causes."

But there is enormous utility in our immigrant past, if only we would let it convict and challenge us.

First, it could remind us that those whose citizenship is in the kingdom of God must *always* live as "aliens and exiles" in this world (1 Peter 2:11). As Glen Wiberg wrote of the immigrants who founded my own congregation, Salem Covenant Church (New Brighton, Minnesota), "They were resident aliens who had become outsiders to the people they had left and were still outsiders among the people to whom they had come."

Over the decades, that immigrant past increasingly became the province of nostalgic heritage for a people who now worshiped, learned, and did business in the same language as their non-Swedish neighbors. So the paradox of alien citizenship became harder and harder to sustain.

But here we can also start to track a new phase in

Covenant history: its development as a multiethnic church. And this, too, was rooted in the migration of peoples.

Even as the grandchildren of Salem's founders embarked on a new movement—from city to suburb (Salem left Northeast Minneapolis in 1970)—the African-American descendants of those who survived the Middle Passage and those who undertook a Great Migration founded and renewed Covenant churches in cities like Chicago and Min-

neapolis. And the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 opened the door to a new wave of peoples "yearning to breathe free." Today's Covenant includes immigrants from Mexico, the Philippines, South Sudan, Korea, Liberia, China, and other parts of the Global South.

This is a less familiar past for many European American Covenanters, but it ought to inspire all of us. The black church tradition enriches Covenant worship and preaching and challenges us to seek justice, as well as compassion and mercy. And today's transnational migration patterns are bringing into the Covenant fellowship sisters and brothers who came to Christ in the revivals that have made Latin America, Africa, and Asia the centers of world Christianity. As Allen Serrano, pastor of a Spanish-speaking Covenant church in La Villa, Texas, said in a video produced for the Covenant's Annual Meeting in 2010, "As immigrant churches, we need to be able to learn from the established churches in America. There's no doubt about it. But at the same time, the established churches need to be willing to be humbled, to learn from us, too. We have so much to offer."

So too does the Covenant's immigrant history, so long as we are willing to be challenged by its complexity and to recognize that it includes more recent, less European chapters. ■

Chris Gehrz is professor of history at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. He blogs at pietistschoolman.com and is the editor of *The Pietist Vision of Christian Higher Education: Forming Whole and Holy Persons* (IVP Academic, January 2015).

Highlighting Sources: Paul Carlson and the Congo Mission

ANNA-KAJSA
ANDERSON

November 24 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Dr. Paul E. Carlson, medical missionary to Congo. News of his death made global headlines, including the covers of *Time* and *Life*, and resulted in the development of the Paul Carlson Partnership (PCP), established to support medical and economic development in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In honor of the life and witness of Paul Carlson, as well as his ongoing legacy through the PCP, we're

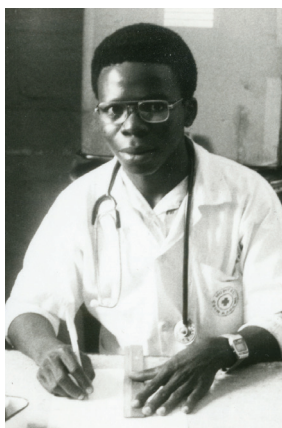
pleased to highlight materials available in the Covenant Archives and Historical Library that document Dr. Carlson's service, the Congo mission field, and the work of the PCP.

The Covenant Archives and Historical Library is open to all. If you're in the Chicagoland area, please make an appointment to stop by and explore these and other sources by contacting archives@northpark.edu or (773) 244-6223.



▲ Zulu Falls hydroelectric dam construction, 1983

Can you help identify ►
this person? Email
archives@northpark.edu



Laying the wires from the
Zulu Falls hydroelectric
dam to Karawa, ca. early
1980s ▼



Paul Carlson:

Ministerial files include:

- Carlson's short-term missionary application records and correspondence
- Copies of *Time* and *Life* magazines and clippings of articles covering Carlson's death
- Memorial service program and brochure publishing the service's meditation by Dr. Arden Almquist
- The book *The Fire Canto* by Deb Kumar Das (1970) including the poem "To Carlson of Stanleyville," written about Paul Carlson

Executive Secretary of World Missions files include:

- Correspondence regarding the beginning of Carlson's short-term missionary service in 1955 and 1962, and his service in 1963–64
- Correspondence between the Department of World Missions and Paul Carlson, his wife Lois Carlson, and various Covenant churches and members in response to Carlson's death
- Tributes to Carlson

Board of World Missions files contain minutes of the board, including decisions made regarding Carlson memorial funds and projects.

Two books on the life and work of Carlson: *There Was a Man* compiled by Carl Philip Anderson (1965) and *Monganga Paul* by Lois Carlson Bridges (1966, 2004).

Covenant mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo:

World Mission Congo-Zaire files contain correspondence, minutes, and reports regarding the Congo mission field (1930–71), including the Mission Évangélique de l'Ubangi (the joint Covenant and Free Church mission), the Congo Mission Coun-

cil, and Université Libre du Congo (Protestant university).

Board of World Missions files contain minutes of the board, including decisions made regarding the Congo mission field.

Executive Secretary of World Mission files include the executive secretary's correspondence with different missionaries to Congo.

Kenneth P. Lundell files contain his records kept as World Missions administrative assistant (1965–87), including correspondence, reports, clippings, brochures, and other documents regarding the Congo mission field.

Covenant Missionaries: Theodora Johnson files contain the missionary's correspondence to friends and family while serving in Congo (1938–78).

Covenant Missionaries: Kay Sundstrand files contain her collection of French and Lingala educational booklets and brochures for use in the Congo mission field.

Paul Carlson Partnership (formerly the Paul Carlson Medical Foundation):

Paul Carlson Partnership files contain about thirty cubic feet of administrative records, including meeting minutes, correspondence, reports, newsletters, and more, documenting the work and development of the foundation.

Board of World Missions files contain minutes of the board, including decisions made regarding the development of the Paul Carlson Foundation.

Executive Secretary of World Mission files include correspondence, financial reports, and meeting minutes documenting the establishment and early years (1964–70) of the Paul Carlson Foundation and Paul Carlson Medical Center in the Democratic Republic of Congo. ■

Anna-Kajsa Anderson is interim director of the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collections. For a series of recent reflections on the life and legacy of Paul Carlson and stories from the history of Congo and PCP, see the PCP fiftieth anniversary website www.paulcarlson.org/stories. 5

November 1894 From Unalaklik to Salavik

AXEL E. KARLSON

For more than two years I have had the wish to visit the people by Kotzebue Sound. My wish now would finally be fulfilled, even though it now seemed almost impossible to be away for so long, so time demanding to make such a long trip....

Towards evening we came to a place named Nuaktolik. It was here that I met Mephiboset last year. His earthen hut was there but Mephiboset wasn't there anymore. He was brought to the king's castle. His son, it was said, had been married to the chief's daughter and Mephiboset had become a member of the court as well. But there were still two families who showed us great friendship. I also had the pleasure of presenting to them the Gospel for the first time. The father in the family was a very old man. With a loud voice he said, "I have never heard anything like it before."

The 16th in the morning we left this place and we were promised a welcome when we returned. It was

**No night, what a land
Alaska is! A picture of
the heavenly.**

much colder than the day before. We traveled along the bay all day and about dusk we saw Kungekosook in front of us. Stephan Ivanoff was still busy teaching in the school. I was really cold when we arrived because of the northerly winds....

That evening I spoke to the people. They listened quietly and with reverence. Our Brother Ivanoff had already seen the fruit of his labor. For me it looked very promising. We stayed here for two days awaiting Brother Rock. He arrived at last and we left Kungekosook the 19th in the morning. The trip went well. We came to a little house without any people. Here we would spend the night. Everything seemed so cold, and cold it was even when we made a fire and made tea. It was cold when we went to sleep but it was even colder when we woke up. Breakfast was soon ready and consumed. Then we continued our journey. About ten o'clock we overtook a man on the tundra who was from the village where we were headed. He was out to inspect his traps. Rock knew him and I allowed him to sit on my sled since the man was old and couldn't



Unalakleet Sunday School Class, 1903

keep up with us. After a half-hour we were in front of a little old Eskimo woman with a crooked nose and with no teeth in her mouth. She welcomed us in to a large and splendid house where one could both stretch one's legs and stand up straight. The old man who rode on my sled gave me a present of various fresh salmon and pike. So I and my colleagues had a real feast of fresh fish. Opposite me on the other side of the room sat a bald-headed Eskimo who reminded me of the dashing valley folk back home in Sweden. We hadn't yet satisfied our hungry stomachs before someone in the house asked when I was going to talk to them about God. It came to me that the people there were just as hungry to hear about God as our stomachs were for the fresh fish. I talked for a long while about God. Then we had a prayer meeting where everyone raised their voices to God. When the father of the house should pray, he asked what position he should take so that God would hear him. He took his place in the middle of the house and with a loud voice called to God. Our sermon and prayer meeting took a long time and then we talked with each other for a long time. Then I crawled into my sleeping bag and had a good rest.

....

December 22, 1896

Both Mrs. Karlson and I got up early in the morning today. Last night we made candy and today we will bake. I have been busy here all day. A couple of the

girls have made donuts in seal oil so that it smells throughout the whole house. A disgusting smell for those who are not really initiated into Eskimo life. I thought I was a complete Eskimo, I have been among them for so many years, but when it comes to seal oil, I am a novice.

...One of the boys had been fishing with Brother Rock, but none of the fish had ended up on the hook. Ivan, the boy's name, came home with a frozen hand. You understand, my friend, it is cold in Alaska. Back at home, Brother Rock's boy had fallen down in the cellar and hurt his leg. It was a miracle that he didn't break it. Today has been a bad news day. But I am very tired and will no longer listen to any messages, good or bad. John Blund (the Sandman) has better things prepared for tired pilgrims. Therefore, good night. I am going to Beulah Land just now. Good night.

....

January 25, 1897

The wind is somewhat slower today so the snow is not drifting. Brothers S. Ivanoff and Rock have packed their sleds and are ready for a mission trip along the coast. They plan to visit the villages between here and Golovin Bay. When they get to Golovin Bay they will stay a few days to let the dogs rest. From Golovin Bay, Mr. Anderson will join them on the way to Cape Prince of Wales. Our brothers will not return for a couple of months.

....

March 8, 1897

Just as we sat down to the supper table, the alarm sounded: Rock and Stephan are coming. I hopped up from the table and ran out to welcome my brothers in the traditional way. Brother Rock as usual grinned with a heartfelt smile and was as happy and joyful as always. They had completed a long trip all the way up to Port Clarence. Brother Anderson joined them from Golovin Bay. He continued on to Cape Prince of Wales. Our brothers rejoiced over their success and the reception of the Word that they experienced. The people had listened with great interest, so Brothers Rock and Stephan felt really happy on the way home....

....

June 12, 1897

The days are now long enough. It is between 12 midnight and 1, yet full daylight. If I weren't so tired I could continue my work around the clock. No night, what a land Alaska is! A picture of the heavenly.

Axel E. Karlson (1858-1910) was among the first Covenant missionaries to Alaska. Read more entries from the journals of Karlson and others in the Frisk Collection of Alaska Mission Journals, available through the Covenant Archives and Historical Library, <http://bit.ly/AlaskaJournals>.

Translated by Charles I. Peterson

Frisk Collection of Alaska Mission Journals: Axel E. Karlson

CURTIS IVANOFF

The story of the gospel of Jesus arriving and taking root in Alaska has a varied texture. It began with the work of the Russian Orthodox Church in the late eighteenth century. Then, with the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, the latter nineteenth century ushered in a wave of Protestant, mainly American, missionaries and churches to preach the gospel. The story of the work of the Covenant Church in Alaska is unique in that the call to go and preach the gospel among the indigenous peoples of Alaska

had its origins in Sweden, not the United States.

The writing featured here comes from the diary of Axel Karlson, one of two Swedes sent to the United States in 1886. His partner in ministry was Adolph Lydell, who ended up beginning a work in Yakutat, in the south-east part of Alaska. Karlson continued north and landed



Portraits of Axel E. Karlson and Uyaqag (meaning "Rock")

on the shores of the Norton Sound in the community of Unalakleet. Not knowing much English, and certainly not the Eskimo language, Karlson was able to build bridges on account of knowing Russian.

Karlson's diaries reflect to us vision, to answer the call to go to a foreign land among an unknown people to share the good news of Christ; perseverance, to learn the ways of living in the wild land of Alaska and overcome barriers (his life being threatened many times); and an unwavering commitment to preach the gospel of Christ. May you be spurred on to be and do the same.



Curtis Ivanoff is the field director of the Evangelical Covenant Church of Alaska.

Get involved!

- **Follow us** on Facebook (Friends of Covenant History) and Twitter (CovHist) for more frequent updates.
- **Write for our newsletter.** If you are interested in contributing to our newsletter, contact Hauna Ondrey, hondrey@northpark.edu, or write to Hauna Ondrey, 3225 W. Foster Ave., Chicago, IL, 60625.
- **Keep us informed** about important events and anniversaries relevant to Covenant history by posting on our Facebook page (Friends of Covenant History)
- **Explore the digital collections** available through the Covenant Archives and Historical Library: the Historical Photograph Collection and the Frisk Collection of Covenant Literature (www.northpark.edu/Brandel-Library/Archives/Digital-Collections).
- **Become a member.**

To become a member...

Join the Friends of Covenant History at <http://bit.ly/FCHjoin> or by contacting Andy Meyer (773-244-5585) to receive a registration form by postal mail.

Annual membership fees*:

Regular - \$20
Student - \$10
Supporting - \$50
Sustaining - \$100

*Memberships are renewed each June.

FRIENDS OF Covenant History

Winter/Spring 2015

The *Friends of Covenant History* newsletter is produced biannually by the Commission on Covenant History.

To become a member of Friends of Covenant History visit <http://bit.ly/FCHjoin>, or contact Andy Meyer (773-244-5585) to receive a registration form by postal mail.

Photos courtesy of the Covenant Archives and Historical Library, North Park University, Chicago, Illinois

FRIENDS OF Covenant History

North Park University
3225 W. Foster Ave., Box 38
Chicago IL 60625

