



**JEHOVAH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH CENTENNIAL:
100 YEARS OF GRACE WALKING TOGETHER AT JEHOVAH LUTHERAN**

A HISTORY OF JEHOVAH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH:

PART ONE: 1923-1943

By Suzanne Hequet

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PART ONE 1923-1943

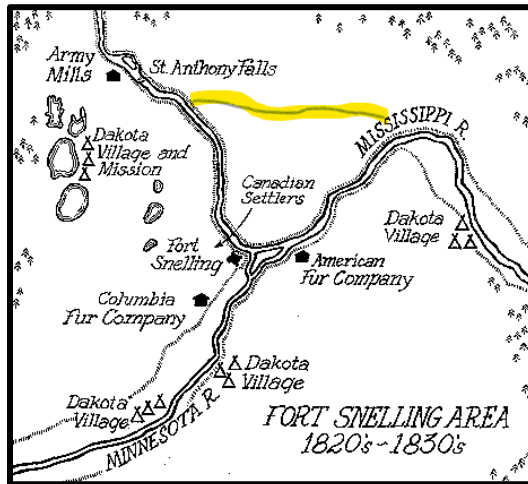
By Suzanne Hequet

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture, it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” 1 Peter 2:4-6.

On July 8, 1923, a group of Lutherans met on the second floor of the A. J. Wallace Feed Store that was located at 751 Snelling on the corner of Snelling and Minnehaha Avenues in Saint Paul, Minnesota. The old hall had previously been used as a Masonic Hall, but now it would be rented for \$15 a month so that an ethnic mix of Lutherans could meet and worship there in English. This new Lutheran church—Jehovah Evangelical Lutheran Church—was built up by living stones: faith-filled human “stones” that were built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ. The history of this faith-filled congregation, which now celebrates a centennial year, would be intimately tied to the community in which it was founded—the Hamline-Midway district of Saint Paul.

Long Before the Church was Founded: A Brief History of the Midway

Before there was a “Midway” between two urban centers, there was a river—the Mississippi—that carved a serpentine valley between waterfalls on the western curve and high bluffs on the east that were topped by ancient burial mounds. A well-travelled path between the curves linked the Dakota settlements at what is now termed St. Anthony Falls, to settlements on the river’s landing below the bluffs to the east.



Map of Fort Snelling Area in the 1820s-1830s¹

Although Fort Snelling was established in 1819 at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, European American settlement of this region did not officially begin until 1854, when land on the eastern side of the Mississippi was platted for settlement by Euro-American immigrants. One settlement near the falls would become Minneapolis, while the settlement at the river landing near the bluffs would become the state capital, Saint Paul. The road between would later be called University Avenue, an arterial link between the state capital and the state's land-grant university.

A Neighborhood Linking Two Cities

In 1855 Trinity German Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession (UAC), was established. Members worshiped without a sanctuary of their own. But by 1858 growing membership prompted purchase of a lot on the corner of Wabasha and Tenth Streets in downtown Saint Paul, and a two-story building with a school, auditorium, and pastor's residence was built. A Christian day school was established in 1864. As growth continued, in 1877 land for a new school and church was purchased on Wabasha and Tilton Streets.²



Image courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. Used with permission.

Trinity Lutheran by the capitol, later torn down when the capitol mall and grounds were extended³

Through outreach work by Trinity pastors and its members, other German Lutheran churches were organized in Saint Paul, including St. John's Lutheran (1871), Emmanuel Lutheran (1873), and St. Stephanus Lutheran (1890).⁴ (While all were members of the Synodical Conference in the late 1800s, Trinity and Emmanuel would later join the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, while St. John's and St. Stephanus would join the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.) St. Stephanus, together with Redeemer English Evangelical Lutheran Church (1891) and The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Savior (1914),⁵ would soon be instrumental in promoting the establishment of Jehovah Lutheran.⁶

Developments in the Hamline-Midway Neighborhood

The growth of the two cities on the river increased the value of the land lying in their midst. Horse and wagon transport along University Avenue linked the cities, but railroads crisscrossed surrounding regions. In 1883 the Minnesota Transfer Railway

Company—brainchild of J. J. Hill—consolidated several rail lines, filling about two hundred acres of land just two miles north and parallel to University Avenue.⁷

The land between the railway transfer hub and University Avenue became known as the Hamline-Midway Neighborhood, aptly named as it included the campus of Hamline University, established in 1854, and the larger Midway District. This area was annexed by the city of Saint Paul in 1885. University Avenue became the spine of the Midway business and industrial district when the Interurban Streetcar line was completed in 1890. Snelling Avenue, the city’s main north-south transportation route, had its own streetcar line that served business and commerce throughout the neighborhood. The Hamline line, which ran along Thomas and Minnehaha Avenues, provided access to and from the residential communities and educational institutions, as well as small commercial nodes that served the residential area.⁸

This was the ideal place for urbanites to live and work. In just one hundred years after the establishment of Fort Snelling, the Midway between Saint Paul and Minneapolis had become a crown of commercial and residential life, and the “gem” of the crown was a commercial district anchored by Montgomery Ward and Company, the flagship of the retail giant, which opened in 1921.⁹



This was the neighborhood that was canvassed to determine whether a new Lutheran church should be organized in the Midway. Such significant developments notwithstanding, it would be two more years before Midway Lutherans would first worship in the hall above the feedstore on Snelling and Minnehaha.

A historical survey of this neighborhood in the period from 1900 through the 1920s reveals what Lutheran mission leaders would have seen and experienced as they

went house-to-house canvassing the neighborhood to determine whether a new church was desired. The neighborhood lacked the picturesque street patterns that characterize certain Saint Paul residential developments. Instead, a typical grid pattern was established.¹⁰ New housing soon sprang up on modestly priced lots in the area.

Although Saint Paul's earlier immigrants in the 1880s and 1890s were of Swedish, Norwegian, and German backgrounds, with Swedish immigrants often associated with the East Side and German immigrants with Dayton's Bluff, Lowertown, and Frogtown, by the 1910s and 1920s the Hamline-Midway Neighborhood embraced growing populations of second and third generations of these now English speaking immigrant groups. They were drawn by the growing commercial developments and the attractive and affordable housing in the Hamline-Midway neighborhood.¹¹

Location of two lots to be purchased for the new church—upper northwest corner of yellow highlighted block¹²



A Lutheran Church in the Midway Has Setbacks: 1910-1923

The history of Jehovah Lutheran is steeped in the history of the Midway. This was the fastest-growing part of Saint Paul in 1910.¹³ That same year Pastor Frederic Niedner canvassed the Hamline-Midway neighborhoods, attempting to organize a German Lutheran mission congregation. In Pastor Niedner's words, "The venture died a natural death."¹⁴ But by 1918, a canvass by Pastor Frederick Oberschulte of Our Savior

Lutheran, together with three other pastors, showed more promise. The residents of Saint Anthony Park, the Frankson Addition, and the Hamline District showed enough interest to plan for a first service. Ironically, a protest was raised by a nearby unnamed Lutheran pastor, who claimed that this region was under his care. His protest was strong enough to halt this second attempt to organize a church.¹⁵

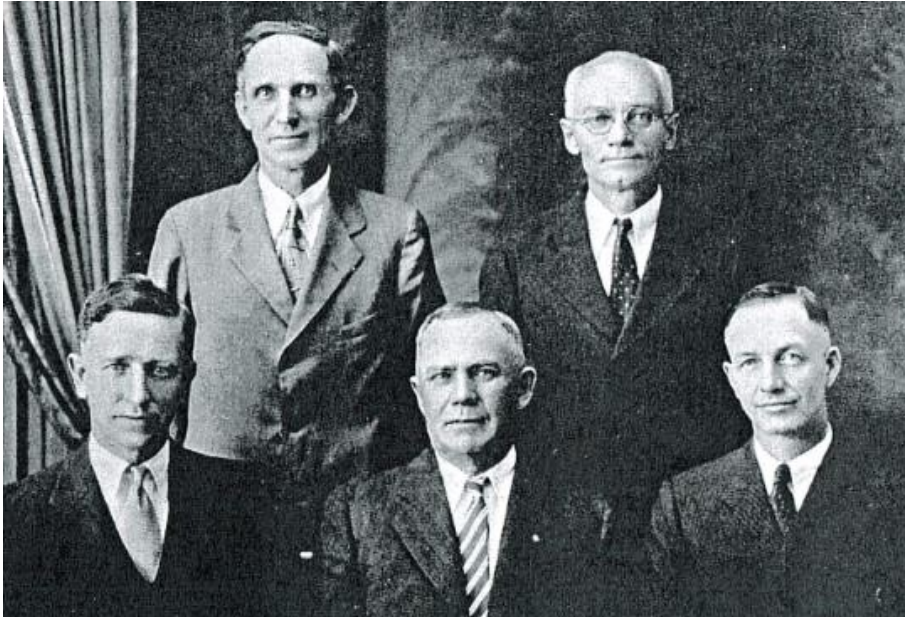
In 1922, a third house-to-house canvass championed by members of Redeemer and St. Stephanus Lutheran Churches “revealed that here are many ex-Lutherans and unchurched people living in this territory between Lexington Avenue and the Saint Paul-Minneapolis City Limits.”¹⁶ Even though a second protest was raised, the Minnesota District Mission Board pushed for the organization of a new Lutheran congregation in the Hamline District.

Jehovah Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession:

Humble Beginnings Above the Feed Store

On March 20, 1923, a meeting was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. August Hoger at 1667 Wesley (now Hubbard Avenue), located just a few blocks west of Hamline University. Five members of St. Stephanus Lutheran, who lived in the Hamline-Midway neighborhood, had asked for this meeting to discuss whether the time was right to form a new Lutheran Church of the Synodical Conference near their homes in the Midway.¹⁷ Pastor F. J. Seltz from St. Stephanus chaired the meeting, while a professor on the faculty of then Concordia College, Saint Paul, August Schlueter, served as secretary. As those at the meeting supported organizing the new church, the church was registered with the state and was called Jehovah Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession (UAC) of the Synodical Conference.¹⁸ A constitution was presented and temporarily adopted. Charter members were Fred Bandow, William Boettcher, Ernst Elling, August Hertwig, and August Hoger, together with their families. The name Jehovah was chosen because “Jehovah, Let Me Now Adore Thee” was a favorite hymn

of charter members.¹⁹ At the meeting, it was decided that since the charter members and most residents in the Hamline-Midway neighborhood all spoke English, all services would be conducted in English. The church membership list from that first meeting included five voting members and a total of fourteen communicant members.



Charter members: Front left to right: August Hoger, Fred Bundow, and Ernst Elling
Rear left to right: William Boettcher and August Hertwig

In undated handwritten notes about this first meeting, two reasons were given for the formation of the church. First, the 1922 canvass done by members of Redeemer and St. Stephanus showed many households in the Hamline District west of St. Stephanus were unchurched and/or lapsed Lutherans. Second, the members at the meeting in March desired a church and school to be established near their homes. Included in those same notes, the group proclaimed the following:

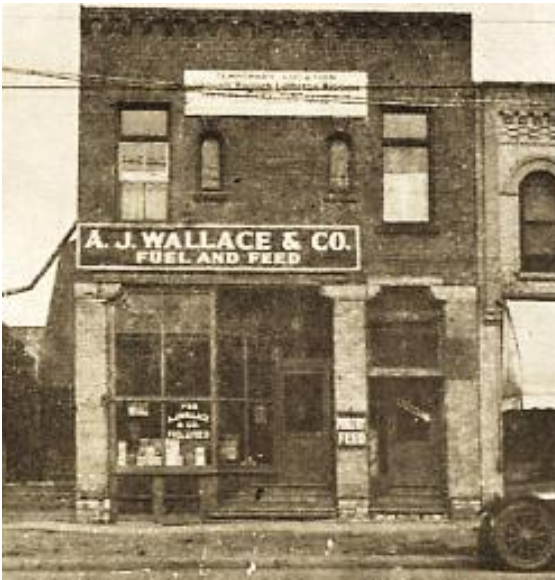
Our Platform: The Bible
Our Motto: We Preach Christ Crucified
Our Aim: To win and keep Souls for Christ

The faith and optimism of these five families of “living stones” testifies to God’s gift of grace that would bless this humble beginning. Although they had no church building, they sent a call to Pastor H. Mayer of International Falls, Minnesota. That call was declined. A second call was sent on April 17, 1923, to Pastor John Schumacher of Saint Paul, who had been serving as a missionary to the deaf communities in the Saint Paul area. This call was accepted on May 28, and on July 1, 1923, Schumacher was installed as the first pastor of Jehovah Lutheran at a special service held at St. Stephanus.

Now that the congregation had a pastor, the next challenge was to find a place to worship. A vacant hall located above the A. J. Wallace & Co. feed store was available for \$15 per month. Previously, the hall had been used for Masonic meetings, so a platform and lectern were already in place. But the hall had not been used for several years. Some of the challenges that needed to be overcome prior to worship were highlighted in the Tenth Anniversary booklet for the church:

This meant much hard work for our first members, especially for the ladies. But after scrubbing and cleaning from top to bottom, and even hanging curtains before the windows, they succeeded in giving it a somewhat church appearance, so that we were glad to call it “Our First Place of Worship.”²⁰

St. Stephanus loaned chairs and hymnals to the new congregation, and Our Savior Lutheran donated an organ. Unfortunately, the organ could not be delivered prior to the first service that was scheduled for July 8, 1923. Knowing this, women from Jehovah met Saturday evening to practice singing the hymns. This enabled praise to be led by the women the next morning. As noted in the Tenth Anniversary booklet, “The pastor could not feel safe in singing after having been in the Deaf-Mute Mission for five years, where congregational singing is not known. But our ladies did very well, receiving, of course, good support from the men.”²¹



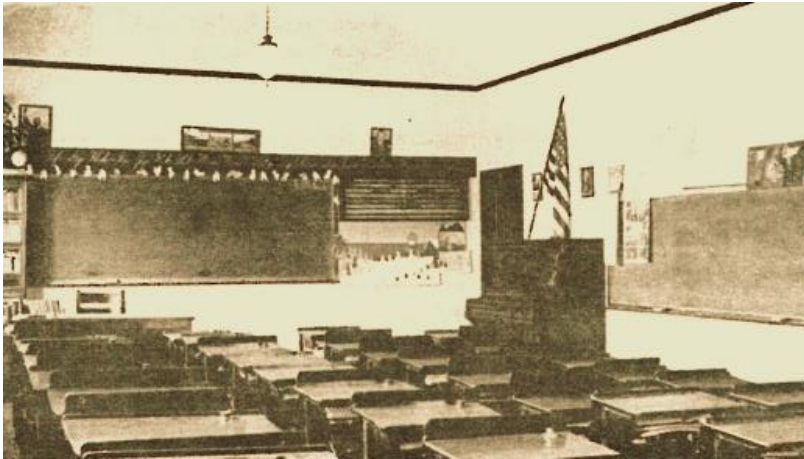
Feed store on Snelling and Minnehaha—first services met in the second-floor hall



Pastor John Schumacher
1923-1950

The congregation almost doubled in size five days later at the first congregational meeting. Three voting and eight communicant members were added. On July 22, Myron Arthur Elling was baptized during services in the feed store—the first baptism in the congregation. A Sunday School opened on October 6, 1923, with fifteen pupils and three teachers: Eugenia Hertwig, Ruby Kerl, and Edna Teuber, who was also the first organist. Before the week had passed, the Ladies' Aid Society was organized on October 11, and ten charter members signed and adopted their constitution. While still worshipping above the feed store, Jehovah's Christian Day School opened less than one year later with seventeen students. Pastor Schumacher taught these students for two months, before Helen Trick was hired to teach the lower four grades. When three more grades were added, Louise Moehlenbrock also began teaching there, and in 1926 Christian (Tim)

Affeldt was called to be both a fulltime teacher and music director, which included playing the organ and directing the choir.²²



Classroom in Jehovah's First School

A Second Location: First Church Is Built on Thomas and Snelling in 1924

Memories of worship in the hall above the feed store reinforced the need for a better worship space. The outside stairs leading to the hall were old and rickety, so much so “that some of our ‘heavier’ [members] actually uttered a sigh of relief after reaching the top.”²³ Plaster slabs hung loose from the ceiling, and an old stove heated the space unevenly. Old-time gas lights were so dim “that it was impossible for the pastor to tell whether anyone had fallen asleep during the sermon.”²⁴ Clearly, a better worship space was needed, both for services and for teaching the growing numbers of pupils in Sunday School and the Day School. Pastor Schumacher wrote about these first months in a new monthly newsletter, “The Voice of Jehovah,” Volume 1, Number 1, published February 1924. He described the early days as follows:

The first service [on July 8] was held in the hall at 751 Snelling Ave., 28 being present. For the first three months we had an average attendance of 39. Since then our attendance has been increasing steadily, so that for the past two months we have [had] an average attendance of almost 50. Our best attendance up to the

present time has been 88. This, of course, does not include the special Christmas service, when we had a full house.²⁵

And later in the same newsletter, under the heading “Our New Church,”

Schumacher wrote:

It surely must be of great interest to you, dear reader, to hear that the work on our new church has begun. On Wednesday, January 23, [1924], ground was broken and now the work is progressing very nicely, so that we may hope to have our church completed within three months, provided the weather is favorable.

Our church, as you know, is being built on the southeast corner of Thomas and Snelling Ave., across the rear of the lots, reserving the front part for the main church, which, as we hope, will be built a few years later. The present building [that is being built now] will face Thomas St., while the main church will be built lengthwise toward Snelling Ave., joined and forming a perfect “T.” The first building will then be used for school purposes and meetings, while the second building will serve as church.²⁶



Laying the cornerstone of the 1924 church building—Pastor Schumacher stands to the left of the stone

It appears that even as ground was being broken for the first church on Thomas and Snelling, foresight envisioned a second larger church would soon be built. In the tenth anniversary booklet, titled *Memories*, a summary of the next four years is shared:

Our second church-home [after the feed store hall] is also, to a great extent, only a collection of fond memories. How often did we not travel over the whole Hamline District in a “fresh-air flivver,” looking for a suitable corner to build a church? Finally on August 11, 1923, the property at Snelling Ave. and Thomas St., where our church is standing today, was bought at \$4,100. The plans for the new church were drawn by Mr. Carl H. Buetow, Architect, and on January 23, 1924, ground was broken. The cornerstone was laid on March 9th, Pastor F.J. Seltz [St. Stephanus] preaching the sermon. On May 18th we were privileged to dedicate our new church to the service of the Triune God. What a joyous occasion this was! Three special services were held, Pastor F.L. Oberschulte [Our Savior] preaching in the morning, Pastor Paul Lindemann [Redeemer] in the afternoon, and Pastor A.W. Koehler of South Saint Paul, in the evening. How proud and happy we felt to worship in such a beautiful church, especially after our humble beginning in “The Church Above the Feed Store.” The seating capacity was figured at 225, and the total cost amounted to about \$11,000, including pews and chancel furniture. But our stay in this building was rather brief—only four years. In fact, we began to realize shortly after the dedication, that our little church would soon be too small. And today, there is very little of this building left—only memories. What a pleasure it was to see our church crowded to utmost capacity, Sunday after Sunday!²⁷



First church faced Thomas Ave—vacant lot on corner of Snelling and Thomas was preserved for expansion



Cornerstone of the first church building

Hamline-Midway Neighborhood in the 1920s and 30s

Hamline-Midway was Saint Paul's fastest growing neighborhood in the 1920s and 1930s. Although in 1890 the population was only 3,019, numbers rose rapidly over the next thirty years. By 1930 residents numbered 24,811.²⁸ The population of Hamline-Midway would grow even more rapidly in the years after World War II, as the economy expanded in the area. Most homes were new single-family houses and duplexes that were built on previously undeveloped lots scattered throughout the neighborhood.²⁹ New neighborhood schools were built to accommodate the rapid rise in student numbers. This growth impacted growth at Jehovah, too. Evidence thereof is included in a 2018 Saint Paul historical survey of the neighborhood, which noted building of a new Central Lutheran School on Lexington Avenue (1950), and an earlier significant enlargement of Jehovah (1928) on the corner of on Snelling and Thomas Avenues.³⁰

A New Church Needed Just Five Years After the Humble Beginnings

In the Gospel of John chapter 4, following the story of the woman at the well, Christ said, "Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for the harvest." (John 4:35)

The "harvest fields" in the Hamline-Midway area were ripe. In January 1925, Jehovah Lutheran members petitioned the Minnesota District for a loan to build an additional structure on their lot on the corner of Thomas and Snelling. The need for a larger worship space was clear as attendance was packed at each of the three Sunday services (mornings at 8:30 a.m., Sunday School at 9:45 a.m., worship again at 11:00 a.m., and an evening service at 7:45 p.m.).³¹ Carl H. Buetow was again called upon to draw the architectural plans for this second church building. Groundbreaking for the new church took place in July 1928.³² The new church was dedicated in November that same year. By 1929, the "church [was] again well filled including the balcony."³³



Second church built in 1928—first church on the left was attached behind and was used for classes for young students, and the annex building across an alley on the right was used for classes for older students

A series of “firsts” and an unusual service bulletin note follow. Eleven were confirmed in the first confirmation class in the new church in 1929. On July 20, 1931, the Boy Scout troupe was organized. Lawrence Tabbert served as the first Scout Master. A choir was organized that same year, under the direction of Merlin Berg. The following year, a children’s choir of 26 members was organized. By 1933, the tenth anniversary of

the church was celebrated, rejoicing and praising God for the blessings over those years. The church now had 531 communicant members. A much-welcome gift was given in 1935 when Sunday School offerings of \$3,000 paid off the debt for the pipe organ. On March 20, 1938, Pastor Schumacher included an unexpected note in the bulletin that demonstrated his welcoming and pastoral nature: “Although the pastor had announced the topic of his sermon for today, yet we believe that our people will enjoy hearing a guest speaker. Meet Pastor Lloyd Mommsen of Sheyenne, N.D., son-in-law of Mr. and Mrs. H.C. Menk.”³⁴ One can envision the joy and pride the Menk family had when their daughter and son-in-law, who was a pastor in North Dakota, came to visit the Menk family’s growing church in Saint Paul. Pastor Schumacher welcomed this son-in-law into the pulpit—a gesture that was undoubtedly remembered decades later when Pastor Mommsen and his wife moved to Saint Paul and joined Jehovah Lutheran.

The first twenty years of God’s grace to Jehovah ended on a sad note as the United States entered World War II in the fight against Germany and Japan. In 1943, eighty-two members of Jehovah were serving in the Armed Forces. Three casualties were reported that year: Werner Jahr, Robert Widholm, and Neil Wiley.

¹ “Fort Snelling During the Winter of 1850-51,” www.connorhistory.com, accessed October 10, 2023

² “Who Built Our Capitol: Trinity Lutheran Church,” <https://www.whobuiltourcapitol.org/trinity-lutheran-church>.

³ Ibid. Note: Permission for use of picture was granted for publication in “Who Built Our Capitol: Trinity Lutheran Church.”

⁴ Minnesota Historical Society, “Trinity Lutheran Church (Saint Paul, Minn.: 1855 -),” <http://www2.mnhs.org/library/findaids/01106.xml>

⁵ St. Stephanus Lutheran, organized in 1890, was in the Frogtown neighborhood of Saint Paul on Lafond and Grotto Streets; worship was conducted in German at St. Stephanus, Trinity, and Emmanuel. Trinity and Emmanuel would later join the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, while St. John’s and St. Stephanus would join the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Redeemer English Evangelical Lutheran (at first located on Eighth and Locust in 1891; later located on Dale St.), and The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Savior (organized 1914; located in Dayton’s Bluff neighborhood on Earl and East Minnehaha) worshiped in English. St. Stephanus joined with Redeemer and Our Savior to support the establishment of Jehovah Lutheran.

⁶ *Memories: Tenth Anniversary [of] Jehovah Evangelical Lutheran Church St. Paul, Minnesota 1923-1933*, 6.

⁷ McClure, “Midway Chamber,” 5.

⁸ “Hamline Midway Neighborhood Historic Resources Reconnaissance Survey St. Paul Project 2152-0002,” <https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/2018%20Hamline%20Midway%20Historic%20Resources.pdf>, 15.

⁹ Historic-structures.com, Historic 1921 picture of landmark tower of Montgomery Wards Company store located in the Midway, https://www.historic-structures.com/mn/st_paul/montgomery_ward_catalog1.php.

¹⁰ Mead & Hunt, Inc., “Neighborhoods at the Edge of the Walking City, a Saint Paul Historic Context Study,” 2011, <https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/2011%20Neighborhoods%20at%20the%20Edge%20of%20the%20Walking%20City.pdf>.

¹¹ Hamline-Midway Survey, 13-16.

¹² Ibid., 16. Figure 7: Development of Hamline-Midway 1873-2010; 1923 ma Steve & Nancy Bailey, 2012.

¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴ *Memories*, 5.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ *Memories*, 6.

¹⁸ Note: In *Memories*, 6, the church name is listed as Jehovah Evangelical Lutheran Church, but the first pastor. Rev. John Schumacher called the new church Jehovah English Lutheran Church. See “The Voice of Jehovah,” Vol.1, No.1. This should not raise confusion, as the emphasis in “The Voice,” a congregation newsletter, was on use of English in worship services.

¹⁹ Phone interview with long-time member Rick Krueger, recalling memories of Christian T. Affeldt, September 24, 2023.

²⁰ *Memories*, 7.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 15.

²³ Ibid., 11.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ “The Voice of Jehovah,” vol. 1, no. 1, 2.

²⁶ Ibid., 3.

²⁷ *Memories*, 10.

²⁸ Hamline-Midway Survey, 16.

²⁹ Ibid., 19.

³⁰ Ibid., 20.

³¹ *Memories*, 10.

³² Fiftieth Annivervy booklet of Jehovah Evangelical Lutheran Church: “Celebrating 50 Years of God’s Mercy to Jehovah Congregation and 125 Years of God’s Mercy to the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod,” 4.

³³ From undated handwritten history of the church, 1923 to 1962, 4 (back).

³⁴ Undated frail carbon copy of notes, titled “History – First’s at Jehovah,” taken from bulletins from 1932-1949, 3.

Centennial Sundays

Reformation Sunday, October 29, 2023

Transfiguration Sunday, February 11, 2024

Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 2024

Rally Day Sunday, September 8, 2024

Reformation Sunday, October 27, 2024

