

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received DEC 20 1982

date entered 2/1/83

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Salem Church

(DX09-1)

and/or common Salem Church

2. Location

street & number

NA off NE 35

NA not for publication

city, town

Wakefield

NA vicinity of

state

Nebraska

code

031

county

Dixon

code 051

3. Classification

Category

district

building(s)

structure

site

object

Ownership

public

private

both

Public Acquisition

in process

being considered

Status

occupied

unoccupied

work in progress

Accessible

yes: restricted

yes: unrestricted

no

Present Use

agriculture

commercial

educational

entertainment

government

industrial

military

museum

park

private residence

religious

scientific

transportation

other:

4. Owner of Property

name

Pastor Robert V. Johnson

street & number

NA

city, town

Wakefield

NA vicinity of

state

Nebraska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.

Dixon County Courthouse

street & number

NA

city, town

Ponca

state

Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey

has this property been determined eligible?

yes

no

date

On-going

federal

state

county

local

depository for survey records

Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town

Lincoln

state

Nebraska

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date <u>NA</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church is a 1906 Gothic Revival church building. Architecturally, with its prominent tower, the church is a prominent local landmark, retaining its historical character within and without. The church represents a unique expression of the rich character of Gothicism used in small town and rural churches on the plains.

The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Salem Church is located on the eastern edge of the small farming community of Wakefield, Nebraska (1970 census: 1,160). Wakefield lies 125 miles north of Lincoln, Nebraska's capital, and 30 miles south of the Missouri river which forms part of the boundary between Nebraska, and South Dakota and Iowa.

The evolution of the present church began on February 15, 1905, when the congregation decided that \$7,000 should be subscribed before building was to begin on the church. This was done exactly one month later when it was reported that \$8,525 had been subscribed.

"A building committee was now elected. . . having visited several places in search of suitable plans, the committee recommended to the congregation that the plans for Thabor Church in Wausa [note: Wausa is located 40 miles northwest of Wakefield] be used for the new church. . . . Mr. Olof Cervin was engaged as the architect. His plans were submitted and adopted May 2, 1905. . . . The contract was led to Mr. Aug. Ahlstrand of Red Oak, Iowa, at a cost of \$8,675." (Anniversary Album, 1923: 18).

Work progressed rapidly, according to the plans of Swedish-American architect Olof Z. Cervin:

"Things were surely moving fast in Salem those days, On May 2, the contract was let. . . the old church was moved aside and used for services. . . the work on the church progressed rapidly. On the first Sunday of Advent the basement could be used for services. Services could be conducted in the church auditorium in the beginning of the new year." (Sandahl, 1931: 267-268).

The church was completed free of debt and dedicated March 11, 1906.

The frame church sits on a raised brick basement. The church is 40 feet wide and 80 feet along its east-west axis with a 100 foot tall steeple at the southwest corner of the nave. The nave is crossed by a transept which protrudes two feet from the sixteen foot high nave walls and is pierced by three stained glass lancet windows (see photo #1). The nave is punctured by a circular stained glass window on the west wall and extended by a frame, hipped roof section with offices and storage rooms on the east. The eaves are decorated by simple modillions.

The most prominent feature of the church is its bell tower and spire (see photo #2). The base of the tower is punctured only by small stained glass windows on three sides and by a tie-beamed, flared-eave porch entrance on the west side. The porch features a stained glass pointed-arch transom window above the door.

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The belfry is the most highly articulated aspect of the structure. The pedimented, eight sided belfry is squared off at the corners by four spired, pedimented tourelles. A trefoil design decorates the tourelle friezes and pediments, and the eight high-pitched pediments at the base of the steeple. Four Gothic leaded windows and vents allow for ventilation. The weathering at the steeple base is decorated by wood spheres, nine each side and one at each corner.

Entry is gained on the east-west axis through a double doored, gabled porch extension (see photo #3). The flared eave porch is detailed by a trefoiled decorated tie-beam, pendent support-brackets, an eave board with punched square holes, and a king post with wood decorative boards in the corners. The doors are flanked by double Composite quarter pilasters on each side, and a Gothic stained-glass window above. Inside the church, risers lead to a double doored, glazed and wainscoted narthex. A ten foot square children's room is adjacent along the north (see photo #4). Entrance to the nave is under a pressed metal balcony supported by columns and decorated by circumscribed quatrefoil and floral patterns.

The wood floored nave is wainscoted below the window sill level (see photo #5). Stained glass lancet windows and candle lanterns provide illumination. The balcony is wainscoted and its fascia is decorated in Gothic and circular motifs. The ceiling is covered in pressed-tin in the same pattern as the balcony ceiling and is barrel vaulted with concave extensions.

Center and side aisles provide access to the oak pews, and to the small chancel containing a white Gothic altar (see photo #6). A local newspaper describes the space: "Its windows are colorful and Thorwaldsen's statue of Christ graces the high altar in the chancel. It is a place of quiet and repose." (Wayne Herald, 1933: 6). The chancel is formed by a white communion rail enriched by the same decorative patterns as in the balcony fascia (see photo #7). The Oak pulpit stands to the left of the chancel and the choir to the right.

Alterations to the exterior consists of an asphalt shingled roof and a contemporary brick office and educational addition to the north. The addition connects at the sacristy, north of the chancel. The windows retain their original stained glass except for the circular window in the nave's west wall. Renovations in 1933 replaced the pulpit, light fixtures and covered the nave's decorative stencil work. In 1958, a new organ was installed, as were new choir pews. The rich historical character of the interior, however, is retained in large measure (photo's #4-7).

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1906–present      **Builder/Architect** Aug. Ahlstrand/Olof Z. Cervin

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Salem Church is significant in the categories of architecture and exploration/settlement. The Salem congregation served the Swedish pioneers of this portion of Nebraska and provided social and religious opportunities to them. The existing church retains its cultural and architectural significance to the present day as a unique product of Swedish-American church architecture sharing significant characteristics of the American Gothic Revival and Swedish formal associations.

The mass emigration of Swedes to America ranks as one of the most profound 19th-century European experiences. In the middle of the nineteenth century Sweden had a population of three-and-one-half million, but before the passing of a generation more than one million had left for America (Runblom and Norman, 1976: 11). Although the main cause of this exodus was based on economic reasons, religious dissatisfaction played a significant role and was, according to some scholars, "more potent than either political or social unrest." (Benson and Hedin, 1950: 178).

Upon leaving their home country, however, Swedish emigrants received minimal support from the established State Lutheran Church. Arriving in America they found "neither missionaries of their own faith to receive them, nor a general Lutheran denomination to help them organize churches in their new settlements" (Benson and Hedin, 1950: 194). The aloofness of the State Lutheran Church of Sweden was due to both the church's disapproval of emigration and to religious unrest that had disturbed the country for several generations (Benson and Hedin, 1950: 178). Of the four principal Swedish denominations to be established in America (Lutheran, Mission Covenant, Methodist and Baptist), the Lutherans were the largest and most important. In 1860, Swedish and Norwegian Lutherans organized the Augustana Synod, which, in 1870, became an entirely Swedish synod. At the time of the Norwegian withdrawal, 20 percent of all Swedish immigrants belonged to an Augustana congregation (Beijbom, 1980: 976).

The most significant of the mass Swedish immigration came in two waves; one between 1868–1873 and the other from 1880 to 1893 (Beijbom, 1980: 972). The Middle West was the prime area of settlement for Swedish immigrants during this migration, with Illinois and Minnesota receiving the largest numbers. The first Swedish settlers to reach Nebraska came in the late 1860's and the early 1870's, but the Wakefield settlement began in the 1880's, during the second wave of the nineteenth century mass migrations. It was through the Swedish paper Hemlandet that the opportunities of this country were made known to Swedes east of the Missouri. At first, they were attracted to Omaha and its vicinity, but by the 1880's and 1890's, many were enticed to northern Nebraska because of the low price of land. Land could be bought at that time for five to ten dollars per acre.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Wakefield

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	4	6	7	6	2	6	0	4	6	8	1	4	6	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

B 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

C 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

E 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

F 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

G 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

H 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Bounded by the area described as lots 4-6, Block 13, South Addition to Wakefield, Nebraska, located in Section 32, Township 27 North, Range 5 East of the 6th Principal Meridian; including the historic real estate associated with the property.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
NA			

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title D. Murphy, Architect; James D. Fagler, Intern Architect

organization Nebraska State Historical Society

date November, 1982

street & number 1500 R Street

telephone 402/471-3850

city or town Lincoln

state Nebraska

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Mervin D. Kniett 12/10/82

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society date

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Patrick Andrews / Carol O'Shull date 2/1/83  
for Keeper of the National Register

Attest: Patrick Andrews / Carol O. Shull date 2/1/83  
for Chief of Registration

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Wakefield was incorporated in 1883, having at that time about 200 inhabitants. As was typical of most western towns, Wakefield experienced a boom following the completion of a railroad line and the establishment of a depot (Huse, 1896: 258). The first Swede to locate in Wakefield's vicinity was Gustus Johnson, who came to Dixon County from Farmersville, Illinois in 1881. Johnson encouraged other Swedes to follow, and within several years a Swedish settlement was established in southern Dixon County in the immediate area of Wakefield. On Ascension Day, May 3, 1883, the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Salem Church was organized in Wakefield under the Augustana Synod. Gustus Johnson was the main force behind this action. Regular services were held in a local school until 1885, when the Salem congregation dedicated its first house of worship, a frame building measuring 30 by 40 feet, and crowned by a 12 foot square tower (Wayne Herald, 1933: 6).

When established, the church had 33 charter members, but with the growth of families and with the arrival of more Swedish settlers in the vicinity, Salem's communicants numbered 368 in 1906 when the second and present house of worship was completed. Upon its completion, Salem's second church building was pronounced by the newspaper of a neighboring community as being "without doubt one of the finest churches belonging to this religious denomination and . . . a credit to the congregation and the little city in which it is located (Wayne Herald, 1906:1).

With its newer and larger facility, the Salem Church has provided an opportunity for Swedes to not only worship together in the desired manner, but to socialize as well. As a result, Wakefield, with its thriving Salem Church, came to be regarded as the central point of the Swedish colony in Dixon, Wayne and Cedar counties, Nebraska. In this whole territory, Salem, Wakefield, is the pioneer field and the mother congregation (Sandahl, 1931: 7). In 1920 a double morning service was instituted; Swedish for a 10 A.M. service, and English for an 11:30 A.M. service. Before 1920 Swedish had been used exclusively at Salem. With the advent of World War II, though, English completely replaced the Swedish language.

Architecturally Salem church occupies a somewhat unique position in Nebraska architectural history -- both for its formal and stylistic references, and for its associations with architect Olof Z. Cervin. Swedish Lutherans, under the jurisdiction of the Augustana Synod, have preserved their identity and autonomy better than all Swedish denominational groups in the United States (Benson and Hedin, 1950: 194). Salem church represents a significant Swedish-American accomplishment in this regard, displaying covert associations with Old Country architecture.

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Stylistically Salem church is one of Nebraska's outstanding examples of Gothic Revival church architecture built in wood. Of particular note are the flourishes of Gothic ornament at the belfry, and at the entrance porches. The fine Gothic detail of these porches is a unique aspect of Nebraska church architecture, except for those on Salem's sister church, Thabor Lutheran in Wausa, also designed by Cervin. The two churches are formally identical, but of them, Salem is the largest, most elaborately detailed, and least altered. Also somewhat unique is the almost eclectic nature of Cervin's design in the combination of a basically classical body for the church (in the proportions and details, especially the return cornices and miniscule modillions), with the Gothic detailing of the windows, steeple and entrances. To some extent this can be seen as a tentative response to changing stylistic trends at the turn of the century in the renewed preference for the Classical Revivals. Similar tendencies have been noted in residential architecture, especially in transitional Queen Anne examples (see Hargis house, NRHP, Grand Island, Hall County; Bridenthal house, pending NRHP, Wymore, Gage County). But more importantly, the selection of the simple Classical body, onto which was attached a significantly vertical tower, and a lavishly detailed entrance, was Cervin's device for creating covert associations with Swedish antecedents.

The form of Salem church, and the placement of its ornament, most strongly relate to contemporary Swedish practice. Architecturally, Sweden as well as the other Scandinavian countries during this period (c. 1880's-1930), was dominated by various national, traditional revivals, or what Henry-Russell Hitchcock has referred to as "National Romanticism" (Hitchcock, 1958: 395). The movement was not a simplistic copying from historical precedent, but was a complex and intellectual one; ". . . a technical renaissance, which expresses itself in the condemnation of inferior material and false construction, followed by a stylistic renaissance which, rejecting academic and hackneyed conventionalism, aims at individual and national forms suited to the particular purpose in view" (Ahlberg, 1925: 18). Significantly, some of the most lively and distinguished traditional architecture of the turn of the century was thus produced in Sweden (Hitchcock, 1958: 396).

More importantly, Salem's architect was intimately familiar with and intellectually inclined toward the Swedish national movement in architecture. Son of Anders Richard Cervin, professor at Augustana College, one time assistant editor of Hemlandet, and long-time editor of Augustana (Benson and Hedin, 1950: 237), Olof Z. Cervin's life was intimately associated with Swedish tradition, higher education and the Augustana Synod. Indeed, he was a scholar as well as an architect. Having received his A.M. from Columbia University in 1894, he was noted for his writings (numerous articles published in leading architectural journals), as well as being a prominent Swedish-American architect (Nyden, 1931: 377). In addition to his own private practice in Rock Island, Illinois, he was for a period the official architect of the Augustana Synod (Benson and Hedin, 1950:237).

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As an author and scholar, his descriptive and interpretive article on contemporary Swedish practice showed more than casual interest in contemporary Swedish architectural theory (Cervin, 1905). In fact some of his own thinking, pertinent to this nomination, slipped into the text: "It is certainly a worthy effort to link our day with yesterday" (Cervin, 1905: 91). These same connections were elaborated further about a decade later on another Nebraska project, the Bethphage Mission near Axtell. Here he combined more personal knowledge of Swedish traditional architecture with influences from Jensen Klint's Grundtvig Church in Copenhagen (Christensen, 1944: 26; Olson, 1976: 260).<sup>1</sup> The planning and building of the Bethphage Mission is perhaps his most significant Nebraska effort. His Home Tabor (1915), Zion Chapel (1931) and Home Bethesda (c. 1944-1950) are masterpieces of "Swedish National Romanticism" in Nebraska.

Salem church offers subtle connections with Swedish church architecture, connections primarily manifest in its distinct formal characteristics. Chiefly composed of the simply detailed gabled nave section, and the vertically composed, semi-detached tower, Salem shares these characteristics with some of the finest church buildings erected in Sweden during this period. Further similarities are seen in the concentration of ornament on the tower -- at the entrance (and/or the base) and at the belfry level, the main shaft being primarily unadorned mass, sometimes punctured with a few small openings.<sup>2</sup> Notable churches exhibiting these characteristics include Boberg's Saltsjöbaden church, Wahlman's Engelbrekt and Kristiana churches, and Ericson's Masthugg's Church in Gothenburg. More striking, perhaps, are Eric Lallerstedt's M.E. Church and St. Matthew's Chapel, both in Stockholm and both illustrated in Cervin's article on contemporary Swedish architecture (Cervin, 1905: 92 and plate).

Salem church's significance is literally of a Swedish and American nature: Swedish in its subtle inflections toward contemporary Swedish architectural theory and design; American in its use of the Gothic Revival detailing which so dominated church architecture in the United States through World War II; and Swedish-American, both in the sense of the church's central role in the Wakefield Swedish settlements, and in its associations with Olof Z. Cervin, an architect who sought to make connections not only across time, but across national and cultural boundaries as well.

1. The connection implied here is with P. V. Jensen Klint's design for the Grundtvig church and not to any philosophical connections between N.F.S. Grundtvig and the Augustana Synod. Klint's design of the church dates to 1913 (Hitchcock, 1958: 395), two years prior to Cervin's work for Bethphage, but even here the connection may be of lesser importance since Swedish National Romanticism tended to be drawn from the Swedish rural vernacular among other sources.

2. Indeed, towers of this nature were significant to the buildings which both introduced and closed the "National Romantic" period in Scandinavia, opening with Nyrop's Copenhagen Town Hall in 1892 and closing with Östberg's Stockholm Town Hall, completed in 1923 -- Hitchcock, 1958: 395).



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\_\_\_\_\_. March 15, 1906.