

A SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE THROUGH MOUND'S PAST

By Jeremy Berg (2012)

This July the City of Mound celebrates her centennial. It's a time to look back and remember the people and places that have shaped our shared history. As a pastor called to start a church in Mound where I grew up, I've been fascinated by the beginnings of other local churches and inspired by the influential Christian leaders in whose footsteps I like to think we're following.

Every year 3 million people visit the Holy Land in Israel. They go to stand in the places where God worked wonders in Bible times. The experience is life changing. Yet what makes these places sacred is not that they are old, located in the Middle East, or mentioned in the Bible. They are sacred because marvelous things happened in those places and lives were forever changed.

I have been on my own spiritual pilgrimage of sorts this past year. Yet my pilgrimage hasn't required a passport or plane ticket. I simply took a walk in my own backyard and learned a bit of the rich spiritual history of Mound.

I grew up not too far from in the Highlands in Mound. The park where I learned to fly a kite as a boy is the grounds of the old Baptist Assembly Grounds where Billy Graham held revival meetings in 1950. An old photo shows a 31 year old Billy swinging a softball bat in between meetings. Many Mound residents remember attending those meetings. Doris Greig remembers coming to Mound to teach Home Economics in the late 40s and being lonely and in search of meaning for her life. She was invited to work in the kitchen at the meetings by a man she would later



Billy Graham in Mound, 1950

marry. "The first night I went and hear the gospel message that Billy Graham preached, I knew immediately what was missing from my life," she recalls. "Life took on a new joy from that day forward." I wonder how many lives forever changed while sitting in that big tent in Mound back in the summer of '50.

Interestingly, a young Tim LaHaye parked cars at the meetings. LaHaye would later become the bestselling co-author of the popular *Left Behind* series which has sold more than 65 million copies. But not before working valet in Mound.

In 1961 a house on Cooks Bay became the training headquarters for Campus Crusade for Christ, now the largest evangelical organization in the United States employing over 25,000 full-time missionaries around the world. A photo from the time shows young missionaries in Mound sitting around a world map, planning to bring the message of Jesus around the globe within a decade. Founder Dr. Bill Bright is said to have written *The Four Spiritual Laws* during his time in



Campus Crusade Headquarters in Mound, 1961

Mound. One version of the story has Dr. Bright writing them out with a stick in the sand at Surfside Beach. This pamphlet, which describes how to become a Christian, is likely the most widely distributed religious booklet in history, with approximately 2.5 billion printed to date. But it had its start in Mound.

Going much further back we meet my favorite personality to have preached on the shores of Mound. In the late 1890s "the greatest of all preachers among the Swedish immigrants in America" purchased a summer home on West Arm Bay. Erik August Skogsbergh's summer abode became a destination point for Christians near and far. He was pastor and builder of the great Swedish Tabernacle in Minneapolis, and his popular preaching drew thousands. One time the balcony began to collapse from the weight of the overcapacity crowd. He also drew crowds out to Mound. His biographer tells of crowds too big for the steamboat in Spring Park to handle. Skogsbergh

decided to build a barge "to fetch guests to the Point on days when they came in so great numbers that the steamboat could not accommodate all in one trip....On calm days the barge was more popular than the steamboat." The Bible ministry at "Skogsbergh's Point," as it was called on older lake maps, eventually gave birth to Fairview Covenant Church in 1901.



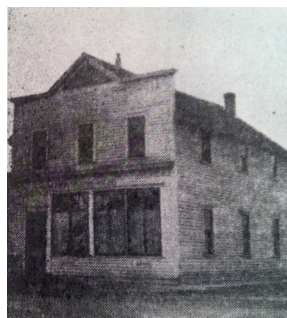
Gathering at Skogsbergh's Point c. 1900

Each church's story of origins deserves retelling but space doesn't allow. Bethel Methodist was the first congregation in Mound (1889). In 1909 Fr. Francis Jager and the Archbishop took a buggy ride through Mound where they spotted a deserted school house



Bethel Methodist

near the depot where Our Lady of the Lake began. In 1926 a group of scattered Lutherans began meeting in the upstairs room of Thornquist's Pool Hall across from the depot and St. John's Lutheran was born. A year later Mount Olive Lutheran was organized. In 1944, the war caused gasoline and tire rationing which made it difficult for Mound residents living on Phelps Island and beyond to drive into town for worship. Calvary Memorial Church helped organize a small congregation on the island called Island Park Community Church which later became Mound Evangelical Free Church when they moved back to town and acquired St. John's original building. Other churches have come and gone, leaving their own unique imprints on the Westonka community.



Thornquist's Hall

In recent days, a new wave of pioneer pastors have

brought fresh vision and started new churches in the Mound area. Freshwater Community Church began meeting in the St. Boni City Hall in 1998. River Valley Church (Apple Valley) started a Minnetrista campus at the former home of Mound Assembly of God in 2010. MainStreet Covenant Church launched weekly services in January 2012 at the Gillespie Center.

Yes, you don't need to go to the Middle East to stand on holy ground. You need only have the eyes of faith and a basic knowledge of our city's past to discover that it's all around us. There's a well known in the Bible where Jacob lies down at no particular place for a brief nap. After awakening from a dream, he remarks, "Surely God is in this place, and I didn't realize it!" Mound is full of such places. So, next time you're throwing a frisbee in the Highlands, or making a sand castle at the Mound beach, boating across West Arm Bay, or driving past a local church, let us remember and marvel that God has been in this place -- and still is.

Join us for a special **Centennial Community Worship Service** to be held at Surfside Beach/Mound Bay Park on **Sunday, July 22 at 9AM** where all churches are invited to join in worship to celebrate our shared history of ministry in Mound and prepare for the next 100 years.

Jeremy Berg, native of Mound (MWHS '98), is lead pastor at MainStreet Covenant Church in Mound. MainStreet worships at the Gillespie Center Sundays at 10AM.