LOUIS SCHMIDT (Elmhurst)

When the Missouri Synod took over our church in ’56, some of us weren’t so sure. In ’59, eight families—including ours—left. We started meeting in homes again. That was the way of things out here: if you didn’t like how things were run, you built something new. That’s how Immanuel Evangelical Church came to be—built on land August Fischer donated. Built in 1860. A stone’s throw from the old one.

Then came the war.

Frederick Fischer was the first from Addison Township to go. Signed up with the 33rd Illinois. We watched him go, some of us jealous, some of us worried. By spring of ’62, recruiting had stopped. They thought they had enough men. But then… came the reverses. The Peninsula Campaign, the Valley, Bull Run again. And suddenly, the call went back out.

August 15, 1862—sixty-six of us from the township signed up, along with thirty-two from nearby. Enough for a full company. Company I, 105th Illinois. We called ourselves the Addison Guards. They told us to report to Camp Douglas in Chicago. September 8, 1862.

We were just farm boys. They handed us old Austrian smoothbore muskets and called it training. We drilled a little, visited the Confederate prisoners held nearby— and then, before the month was out, they put us on a train south. We arrived in Louisville October 2. That was the start.

EMMA CLAUSSEN (Elmhurst)

Twenty-two thousand dollars for the new church. Twenty-eight hundred for a new organ, donated by George and Mary Fischer. Alonzo paid for the stained glass. The rest? Sweat. Sacrifice. Service.

I scrubbed floors before the paint dried. I sewed altar linens while teaching my daughters to read. I learned to do more with less—less rest, less space, less ease. But never less faith.

People ask how we managed. I tell them: we were called. Not just to a town or a church—but to *each other*. That calling never wavered. Not when we lived without plumbing. Not when Frederick walked to Elmhurst College to teach. Not even when we buried neighbors too soon and baptized their children in the same week.

The church rose, just as we had. And when the choir returned—men first, then women, then all of us together—it wasn't just music. It was resurrection. It was *proof*.

ALICE CLEMENT (OAK BROOK)

So I applied to be a detective. Officially. A woman. A detective. They laughed. Even the good ones. Even the ones who meant well. “You’ve got guts,” they said. “But this is men’s work.” I said, “Crime doesn’t care what gender I am. Why should you?”

And then one day, they gave me a case. Just to see. A little girl gone missing. They assumed she’d run off. I didn’t. I listened to the mother. I followed the clues. Found the girl two days later, scared and hungry, locked in a cellar on the West Side. That was my first collar.

After that, they stopped laughing. Or at least, they laughed quieter.

The work was never easy. Never clean. Chicago was full of secrets. Men with too much power and women with none at all. I specialized in what the boys called “women’s cases”—but that just meant the cases no one else wanted. Domestic abuse. Abductions. Girls lured into prostitution under promises of dancing jobs. I saw it all. I lived it. And I brought justice where I could.

There was the Dulcimer case—God, I’ll never forget her. They called her “a girl of the night.” Found her dead in an alley behind a music hall. The papers said it was typhoid. Convenient. Easy. I said, “Let’s ask the coroner again.” Turned out, she’d been poisoned. Slowly. Quietly. I traced it back to a man who’d promised her a career on the stage. Instead, he’d fed her lies and arsenic. He’s still rotting behind bars. I made sure of it.

ROBERT ANDREW CHILDS (OAK BROOK)

My name is Robert Andrew Childs. I was born in Malone, New York, on March 22nd, 1845. A small, snowy town near the Canadian border. But it was Illinois that made me. When I was just seven years old, my family packed up and made our way west, like so many others chasing the promise of good soil and new beginnings. We settled near Belvidere, in Boone County. It was there I first learned the value of hard work and the power of education.

But youth has a way of being interrupted.

When war broke out between the states, I was barely old enough to vote, but old enough to carry a rifle. I enlisted in the company raised by General Stephen A. Hurlbut. We became part of the 15th Illinois Volunteer Infantry. And we marched—marched until the soles of our boots wore thin and our hearts even thinner. Through rain and blood and cannon smoke, I saw boys become men and men return to dust.

I don't speak of the war to glorify it. Only to say that when I returned home, I understood the cost of freedom. And I carried the memory of those who didn't return with me every day of my life.

After the war, I sought knowledge. I enrolled at Illinois State Normal University and graduated in 1870. I believed then—and still do—that education is the cornerstone of a strong republic. So I became a teacher. Then a principal. Then the superintendent of schools in Amboy. It was good work—honest work. There is no greater reward than seeing young minds awaken to the power of learning.