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(Miss Frisk, Mrs. John Nordquist, Mrs. Carl Swanson)

This was written in 1926 by an old immigrant who left Sweden in 1868

Clara Sophia Swanson was born February 9, 1842, to Christina and Gustaf Frisk in Svinhult *socken*, or parish in Östergotland, Sweden. As it was the custom to have all babies christened at church as soon as possible after birth, she was taken to the church the same day, in order to be christened. The church was located a distance of one Swedish *mil* from her birthplace (six or seven miles in English miles). There happened to be a service that day as it was during the Lenten season and she was given the name Clara Sophia.

There were no public schools at that time, but around 1845 the first schools in that district were opened. Two of her older brothers attended the first school. Although she started going to school at the age of eight, the mother had taught her to read so that when she was six years of age she was given her catechism. In 1922 she gave this same catechism to her son-in-law. These schools, which were conducted by the organist of the local church, lasted for a school term of about two months out of every year and subjects taught at that time were basically reading, spelling, and religious instruction.

Her father (Gustaf Frisk) was a soldier in the standing army for forty-two years. For this reason he had to spend some time away from home at the military encampments every year. At the age of sixty-one years, he was retired on a pension.

At the age of fourteen, Clara Sophia started to work and after working four months she received as her wages, five and a half crowns, one pair of shoes, one apron, one half pound of wool, and about three yards of home-made linen cloth. It was the custom at that time to pay a person's wages partly in wearing apparel.

Confirmation and work

The following winter, she was confirmed at Västra Ryd church along with fifteen other members of the class. The minister's name was Reverend Carl Fredrik Watz. He was a very stern man and on that particular confirmation Sunday, the examination lasted five hours and the entire class had to stand the whole time.

At the age of sixteen, she started to work away from home all the time. All servants who were to move to another place had to do so either on April 24, or October 24, these being the dates so designated; otherwise known as "moving days." The girls had to work in the fields during the haying and harvesting seasons as there were no machines, and all the work in the fields was done in a primitive manner with scythes, hand rakes, etc.

They also had to do all the milking and take care of the cattle. They had to feed the cattle and during the winter months the girls had to lead the cattle out to water. The snow would often be knee-deep. The men would go out and cut down timber and haul it home in order to use it for fuel, etc.

The women had to prepare the flax, wool, etc., and their winter evenings were spent spinning, weaving, knitting, and sewing. The servant girls did not help with the cooking since this wifely function was done by the lady of the house.

At that time there was no special forms of amusement among the young people in the community. Some time before this, dancing had been very popular, but a big religious revival, which had gone through that part of the county, had put a stop to dancing. They had to work late and had little time for amusements, but, occasionally, a large crowd of young people would gather, going up and down the highways talking and singing. There were a great many lakes, so in the winter, skating was enjoyed by many. Coasting was also enjoyed since there was a great deal of snow.

Leaving for America

On October 27, 1868, she and an older brother left home to come to America. As they had a distance of five Swedish *mil* to the railroad station, Näs-sjö, they hired a man to take them and their baggage, but they had to walk most of the way as he was afraid the load was too heavy for the horse. They sailed from Gothenburg on October 30, crossing the North Sea, which was so rough on account of a storm, it took them three days to cross it. They landed at Hull, England, but had to wait six hours for the tide before they could land. They left Hull early the next morning and arrived at Liverpool in the afternoon. They rushed to the steamer, which they boarded the same evening, sailing the following morning.

In the evening of the sixth day, a severe storm broke which lasted two days. No one was allowed to go on deck during that time, and no cooking could be done, and they had to eat their lunches cold. Everything on deck was broken to pieces, so it was

a pitiful sight which met them when they could go up on deck after the storm diminished.

They landed in New York on November 18 after a fifteen-day trip across the Atlantic Ocean. They stayed at Castle Garden one night and left the next afternoon.

The train was very uncomfortable with no accommodations whatsoever. It was also very crowded, so one night she crawled under the seat and laid on the floor to sleep. They traveled mostly at night with the train sidetracked during the day.

At one place, simply because the immigrants had lunch with them and didn't buy anything at the lunch counter, the manager locked the pump so they couldn't have even a drink of water. However, they discovered another water pump not far away, so they had a drink after all.

The train was carried across Lake Erie on a ferry boat, which landed at Detroit, Michigan. They had a ten hour wait there and as it was a beautiful afternoon, they took advantage of it and took a long walk. Detroit was the most beautiful place they saw during their trip.

From Detroit to Chicago, they had a fast ride. There were a great many people crowded into one car, but they didn't mind it as they were anxious to arrive at their destination. At Chicago, they spent several hours at an "Immigrants Home," then boarded the train once more, bound for Alton, Illinois. There they visited friends for a few days.

In the meantime, another member of the party borrowed some money promising to send it to them as soon as he reached Galesburg, a distance of sixteen miles. There they found the man; since the money didn't come, she and her brother had had to walk to Galesburg in order to collect what he had borrowed from them. They then bought tickets to Oquawka Junction, IL. From there they went in a stage to Oquawka where their uncle lived as well as one sister, who had come from Sweden a few months earlier.

She stayed at her uncle's home until after Christmas when she went to Burlington, Iowa, to look for work. She succeeded in getting a place, but stayed there only ten weeks, receiving at first one dollar a week and finally one dollar and fifty cents per week.

More work

After that she went to a place about one and a half miles from the city. These people had a fruit farm and also conducted a nursery. Here she was treated like a member of the family. Mrs. Leonard helped her with her sewing and taught her a great many other useful things. They were very religious people, having a family prayer every day at which the servants were allowed to be present. They also attended church mornings and evenings on Sundays and, rather than stay in the country or walk alone in the evenings, she attended the English church with them.

There being no one else out there to talk to in her own language, she learned to understand and to speak the English language more fluently than the majority at that time. She lived there nearly three years, her wages being from one dollar and fifty cents per week at first to two dollars and twenty five cents before she quit. Prices had not returned to normal after the Civil War, so there was nothing left for luxuries.

Marriage

On December 7, 1871, she was married to John Nordquist, a shoemaker by trade. He was a widower with three sons. In April, 1873, they moved to Montgomery County, IA, where he bought land four miles east of Red Oak. There were a great many Swedish people farming a settlement there at that time. The price of the land averaged about ten dollars an acre. He and one son made the trip overland, but she and her baby boy came on the train as the railroad had been finished some time before.

Life in Iowa

The country at that time was wild prairie – no trees or bushes of any kind. The men drove to the R.R. banks and dug up sprouts of cottonwood trees and replanted them on their farms. These and poplars grew very fast and served as a protection for their homes, stock, and orchards from the severe storms. They carried sprouts of young trees several miles to replant on their farms, cared for them, and watched as they grew into large trees.

In order to get lumber for building purposes, fencing, and fuel, her husband and two others bought five acres of timber land thirteen miles away and all of this had to be hauled by a team and wagon.

There were large sloughs running through the farms where slough grass several feet tall grew and this was used for roofs and walls for their barns and cattle sheds. The country was overrun with snakes, especially rattlesnakes and blue racers. At one time she saw one snake over six feet long, which one of her stepsons shot. Their homes were built of common barn lumber, mostly one or two rooms and no plastering – just a single thickness of the boards.

July 4, 1873, was an unusually hot, sultry day and that night there was a terrible wind and thunderstorm, accompanied by hail, which lasted all night. The next day being Sunday, they went to church. There were no bridges and they had to drive across the sloughs where the water was so deep it went up into the wagon box as lumber wagons were the only means of conveyance at that time.

As they came into town and drove by the large, three-story brick school house, which had been built a short time before and which is still in use in 1926, they saw large piles of glass lying on the ground, as every window pane on the north side of the building was broken by the hail.

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