

9-1-1983

Mount Olive, the Scandinavian Cemetery in Chicago

Nils William Olsson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag>



Part of the [Genealogy Commons](#), and the [Scandinavian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Olsson, Nils William (1983) "Mount Olive, the Scandinavian Cemetery in Chicago," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 3 : No. 3 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol3/iss3/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Swedish American Genealogist by an authorized editor of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

Mount Olive, the Scandinavian Cemetery in Chicago

Nils William Olsson

Cemeteries in American cities and towns with large Scandinavian populations can be extremely useful in providing leads for conducting genealogical research on persons with a Nordic background (see *SAG*, Vol. I, No. 3, pp. 122-124). When that cemetery also happens to have a Scandinavian origin, the researcher's task becomes quite a bit easier.

The Mount Olive Cemetery in Chicago, located at 3800 North Narragansett Avenue, two blocks south of Irving Park Boulevard on Chicago's north-west side, and bounded on the west by Oak Park Boulevard, was founded in 1886 as the Scandinavian Lutheran Cemetery Association, a stock company funded with the issuance of 1,000 shares at \$25.00 per share. From a small tract, comprising but a few acres, the cemetery in time acquired well over eighty acres of farmland contiguous to the original site. In 1903 the name of the cemetery was changed to Mount Olive Cemetery Association, thus giving up its Scandinavian name, if not its ties with the vast number of Danes, Norwegian and Swedes living in that city. Even though many non-Scandinavians are interred here, the majority of those buried are of Scandinavian stock.

The first interment was made on April 10, 1886, when a 32 year-old man by the name of Carl M. Borgeson was buried here in a single grave, No. 29 in Block No. 1. He had died of apoplexy at the Cook County Insane Asylum the previous day. He had been attended by Dr. Spray. His undertaker was named Josephson.

The information to be had on Borgeson is generally what can be found on any person interred in Mount Olive. The following facts of information are generally available:

- Number of interment
- Date of interment
- Number of lot and grave
- Age of the deceased in years, months and days
- The last residence of the deceased
- Cause of death
- Doctor's name
- Undertaker's name

The age of the deceased is generally taken from the burial permit issued by Cook County, IL. While the date of death may not be given, this can be found on the death certificate, also available at the Bureau of Vital Statistics of Cook County. The usual time span between the date of death and the date of burial ranges from one to five days. Thus if the date of burial is the fifth of the month, the date of death may be any day between the first and the fourth.

Information not available in the Mount Olive Cemetery records is the birth date, birth place or the nationality of the deceased, if he was born abroad. The newer record books, however, do give the address of the next of kin.

The management of Mount Olive is willing to help anyone looking for information concerning a burial. There is no charge for answering an inquiry concerning one person. If information is desired on two or more individuals, the office assesses a research fee of \$23.00 per hour, with a minimum charge of \$10.00.

In directing an inquiry to Mount Olive it is quite important that the name of the person sought be spelled correctly with the date of death and his address at the time of death. Scandinavian names like Johnson, Andersen, Pedersen and Swanson are all so common that it is imperative that all known facts be included in the request. All inquiries should be directed to Mount Olive Cemetery Association, 3800 North Narragansett Avenue, Chicago, IL 60634.

The cemetery office still has on file the original books of entry, which run chronologically from No. 1 to more than 69,000, the number interred here during the last 97 years. In order to facilitate searching, however, the management has also installed an alphabetical index card system covering all those buried.¹

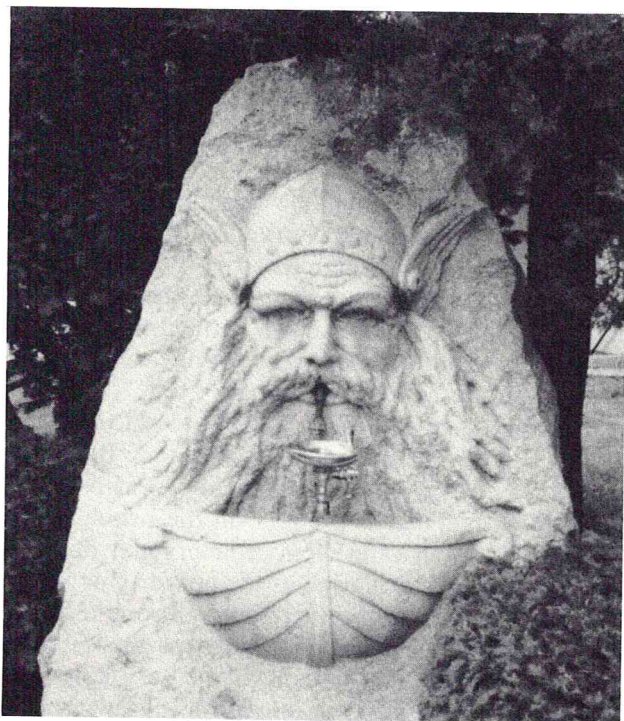
The Scandinavian atmosphere of the cemetery is readily apparent as one approaches the main entrance on Narragansett Avenue. Inside the gate, standing a bit off to the right, is an impressive water fountain, sculptured out of solid granite. It is in the shape of a Viking head, protruding from the craggy rock. Below the face is the bowl, formed to portray the prow of a Viking ship. From the mouth of the hoary Viking face projects a pipe, which is the conduit for the water into the fountain itself.

The question that comes to mind is the name of the artist who created this piece of art. A closer examination of the base of the monument reveals that it was produced in 1906 and that the sculptor was N. Heldt Henriksen.² The sculpture produces a startling effect on the beholder. While the very presence of a pagan figure in a Lutheran cemetery may on the face of it seem incongruous, it should also be viewed as the proud achievement of an artist, who certainly must have been motivated by a strong feeling for his Norse heritage. Seen from this angle the placement of the Viking monument in Mount Olive may not seem unusual after all. The Vikings were known for the meticulous care with which they buried their dead, not only their kings and chieftains, but also those of lesser social stature.

Anyone who is doing genealogical research in Chicago and who has Scandinavian connections, should include a visit to Mount Olive. Here may well be found the answers to genealogical problems which for all too long have resisted solutions.

¹ The author is grateful to Lee B. Nyhart, general manager of Mount Olive Cemetery, for his generosity in providing pertinent information concerning the cemetery.

² Actually the inscription reads "N. Heldt=Henriksen & Co., Sculptors". A check of Chicago city directories for the period provide clues for identifying the artist. In 1899 a sculptor by the name of N. Heldt Henriksen was residing at the corner of Graceland Avenue and North Clark Street on Chicago's northside. In 1908 the same N. Heldt Henriksen, still listed as a sculptor, owned a monument company at 2273 North Clark. Three years later he had moved his monument works to 3956 North Clark and by 1913 he had expanded his business, adding another location adjacent to the Mount Olive Cemetery. By 1915 he is listed as president of the Mount Olive Monument Company, now solely located at 3825 North Narragansett Avenue. It should be pointed out however, that despite the similarity in names there was no connection between the cemetery and the monument works. Subsequent listings in Chicago directories indicate that two other Henriksens, Jens and Emanuel, perhaps sons of N. Heldt, were president and vice president-treasurer of the monument company. I am indebted to Rolf Erickson, librarian at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL and chairman of the Chicago History Committee of the Norwegian-American Historical Association for providing information concerning the above N. Heldt Henriksen.



Viking fountain in Mount Olive Cemetery.