

9-1-2012

My Grandparents, from Fryksände

Eunice Holmgren

Myrtle Fagenstrom

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



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

Recommended Citation

Holmgren, Eunice and Fagenstrom, Myrtle (2012) "My Grandparents, from Fryksände," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 32 : No. 3 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol32/iss3/8>

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.

My Grandparents, John and Carrie Nelson of Fryksände

BY MYRTLE J. FAGENSTROM AND EUNICE HOLMGREN
FROM MYRTLE'S BOOK "MEMORIES"

The immigration

Grandfather John Nelson, Sr., was a tailor in Sweden. When his daughters sewed new dresses, they would get their dad to make the buttonholes. Grandpa said he never would have left Sweden if he could have bought a sewing machine.

When he sold his property in Sweden, he was somehow swindled out of his money so he had to borrow money to get to America. I remember Uncle Victor telling that it was grandpa's main desire to get out of debt before he died. He just made it.

The Nelsons left Vermland, Sweden, in June of 1869, with four children, all under eleven years old. They thought their children would have greater opportunities in America. They didn't realize then what hardships they would meet in this land. When they reached Christiania, Norway, they had to stay there two weeks waiting for a boat, but were finally on their way in a sailing vessel. It made good time as long as the wind was in their favor. They even passed a steamship one day. Then the wind died down and they couldn't move. That same steamship passed them and they never saw it again. They were on the ocean for nine weeks, the same time as the Pilgrims. Grandma was pregnant and sick most of the time, so Grandpa prayed that she wouldn't die so he would have to have her thrown overboard. Lena, who was the oldest, cried and was consoled with the promise that she could have all the white bread she wanted when they got to America. She was skeptical and said in Swedish, "Like fun I will." (*Vackert for ja.*)

They had bought tickets to Cokato, Minnesota, but when they got to

Minneapolis, found that the railroad ended there. A bachelor who was living in a dugout let Grandma and the children stay there while he and Grandpa joined the gang to extend the railroad. It took sixteen weeks from the time they left Sweden until they reached their destination.

After making their home in Cokato for six years, they decided to move to Swift County where they homesteaded five miles northeast of Kerkhoven. The Indians had been chased out of Minnesota and there was much hardship and many massacres.

A new home in Kerkhoven, MN

When they settled on their last farm, Grandpa chose the highest spot of land on which to build a two-storey house. Folks laughed and asked if he was building a hotel. Grandma wove her own rag rugs on a large loom. The girls sewed these strips together and used straw for padding so they had "wall-to-wall carpeting." Curtains were made from yards of white cheese cloth. The more you could drape on the floor, the more stylish you were. Mattresses were filled with straw, emptied, and refilled every Saturday. Each spring their summer kitchen was freshly papered with newspapers. To make their own candles, they had tallow on top of water in a boiler, fastened strings to a stick, and hand dipped them. They had plenty of milk, cream, and eggs, but an apple sometimes had to be divided into ten pieces.

When Grandma was asked for a recipe, she'd say "so much of this and so much of that." When pinned down for measurements, she'd say, "maybe a cup of everything except the soda." Until the boys were old enough,

grandma did most of the milking. She got really provoked when the kids would use her wooden-soled shoes for sliding, as they got too slippery. They put heated rocks in their sled to keep warm when they went to church. When all were aboard, Grandma would come running with a comb in hand and would braid and comb her hair on the way to church.

Grandpa John grew his own tobacco, an unusual crop in that part of the country. Farming wasn't easy in those days, with more drawbacks than anyone can imagine.

The locusts came

One of the most trying periods was during the two summers of the grasshopper plague. In July of 1876, the grasshoppers came and destroyed all the grain. The ground was black as if it had never been planted and the air was full of these locusts. They tried in many ways to get rid of them but to no avail. Grandpa had to borrow money to buy seed for the next year. He, like everyone else, didn't expect the grasshoppers to return, but they did, and destroyed everything, leaving in July just as suddenly as they had come. Grandpa had the seed debt to pay and nothing to show for his work,

They drove oxen, and once when uncle John was in town, the oxen got scared by the smell of a bear which a clown had on a chain. They started for home and arrived covered with foamy sweat.

Renting land from Indians

Alfred and Charlie were the ones that started to go to the Sisseton area to rent land from an old Indian. This

Indian had four wives and numerous children and for each child, the government gave him 40 acres of land. They would do the spring work on the farm at Kerkhoven, then take horses and equipment to the Indian's land west of Sisseton, break as much prairie land and sow flax as long as it was advisable to plant. Then they would come back home to harvest the crops, then go back to Sisseton to harvest there.

Victor said that throughout the time they did this, Alfred made over fifty trips between Kerkhoven and Sisseton with about 120 miles one way. He would be so lonesome that he sang the old Swedish hymns until he was so hoarse he could only squeak. Emil got involved in this too, as they plowed with a steam engine and were going to put up a tow mill.

One year Emma, who was about eighteen, went along to be the cook. An old ugly Indian came, terrifying her since she was alone. She made out that he was asking for the Nelsons. She asked if he knew where this Indian's land was. His nod of the head and an "ugh" indicated that he knew, so she told him that was where they were. It turned out that this was the landlord himself.

Victor told about overnight fishing trips to Norway Lake. They used nets and came home with a single wagon box full of fish, which they would clean and pack down in salt to preserve. No fish and game laws existed then. He also told of working in Emil's shop in Kerkhoven to help shoe horses. When it got icy as it often does in winter, every farmer had to have at least one team shod so they could walk on ice. There were three or four men who were kept busy; one at the forge shaping the shoes as the others nailed them on the horses.

Daily life

Emma used to play her guitar and her brothers, Alfred and Victor, sang with her at meetings in the various homes before the church was built. The Bethel Baptist Church in Kerkhoven was organized in 1894 with thirteen charter members, Grandma Carrie and John, Jr., among them.

Grandpa John had sometime before this donated one acre of his farm to the young congregation for a cemetery. As it turned out, he was the first one to be buried there [d. 1899 Oct. 30]. His body was later moved to the Hillside Cemetery in Kerkhoven where Grandma was buried at his side.

Grandma lived with daughter Emma's family from time to time when she wasn't at Aunt Ida's in Sisseton. She never did master the English language, so she spoke to the children in Swedish, which was no problem since that was what they mostly used at home.

During one of Grandma's stays at Emma's place, Eunice and her brother had gone to bed. But something very funny had come up so they were having a hilarious time. Grandma appeared in the doorway and she quoted a Bible verse, perhaps John 3:16. The children were too much wound up to stop, so they were still giggling. Grandma said, "*Va skratter ni ätt, skrattar ni ätt Gud's Ord?*" (What are you laughing at, are you laughing at God's Word?)

Grandma said, "I have ten children and it got to be people out of all of them. It grows sense into them." She would read her paper and come upon some account of a family with a sick member. This sickness would become progressively worse to the point of desperation. Then someone would go out into the woods and find some herb and bring it home. From that they would make a concoction which turned out to be "Kuriko." That was a patent cure-all, good for what ails you, from dandruff to ingrown toenails. When Grandma got that far she would throw down her paper in disgust. She would sit and read her Swedish paper, covering one eye with her hand, but never wearing glasses. As she read she would weep in sympathy for the people she did not know, had never met, or even heard of before. Her heart must have been big enough to include everyone. She prayed for her family even to unborn generations. Grandma died in 1921 July 5, but I'll never forget cousin Ruby Lepler's hearty laugh when she

told about Grandma being such a happy widow.

—o0o—

John Nelson left Svenneby, Fryksände, Sweden, on 1869 May 3, with his family. In Sweden he was Jan Nilsson Hagberg, and his wife was Karin Jansdotter. They traveled with their children: Karin (b.1858 Sep. 7); Nils (b. 1860 Oct. 8); Johan (b. 1863 Sep. 23); and Per Emil (b. 1865 Nov. 26). In the U.S. six more children were born, including the writer's mother Hilma (b. 1872 Apr.14 in Cokato, MN). Hilma married Isaak Johan Moe, born 1869 Sep.3 in Hattfjelldal, Norway. Their daughter Myrtle was born 1899 Sep. 1 in Black Eagle, MT. (Dates from *Emibas*).

Story submitted by Christine and David A. Larson, Salt Lake City, Utah.
E-mail: <dlars@juno.com>

Every Gift Tells A Story...



Looking for Corporate or Personal Gifts?

LuAnn Specialties offers a collection of gifts your clients, employees, friends or family will truly appreciate and remember.

*We feature Scandinavian Specialty Items,
Fine Special Edition Bishop Hill Pottery
and other locally crafted products*

LuAnnSpecialties.com

email: lu@luannspecialties.com
phone: (630) 248-6334

www.facebook.com/LuAnnSpecialties

Visit our website for
Monthly Special Offers



www.LuAnnSpecialties.com