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# John Norquist, a “Good, Honest Swede” and his Journey to America

BY JOHN D. NORQUIST

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, about 1.3 million Swedes immigrated to the United States. My great-grandfather, also named John Norquist, was one of these immigrants, but I knew little about his life other than that he lived in Roseau, Minnesota. I did not even know when he was born or when he died. My research would lead to a number of surprises.

Like many Minnesota researchers, I started with the Minnesota Death Index, an online listing of Minnesota deaths, currently dating from 1904 to 2001. Surprisingly to me, he was not listed there, even though he lived in Minnesota. I decided to investigate nearby states, and found him in the online North Dakota Death Index listed as dying in Pembina County, North Dakota. The North Dakota Death Index allows one to search in ten-year increments, and I found that he died on 29 October 1923, at the age of 70. It also listed his birthdate as May 7, 1853.

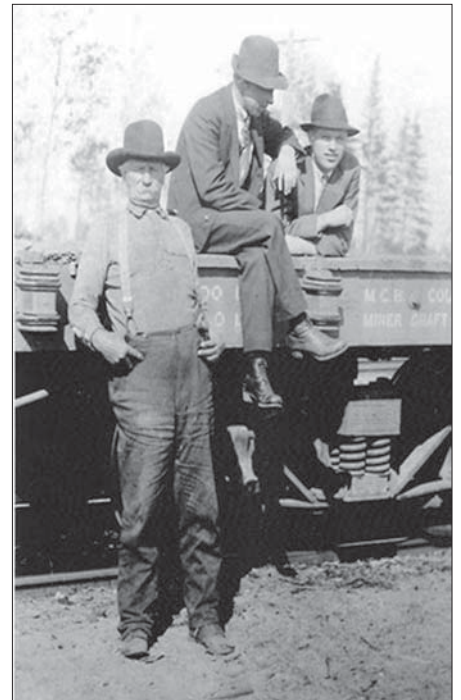
Why did a 70-year-old Minnesotan die in North Dakota? I'm not entirely sure, but this led me to his obituary in the *Roseau Times-Region* found at the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul. The article said that he was “the earliest actual settler in this section” and was taken to Drayton, North Dakota, “about five weeks ago in an attempt to check a cancer of the stomach.” The article said that he “slept away painlessly, a fitting close to a life of energy and action.” The article also said that he came to the Roseau Valley in 1888 and located on a homestead five miles north of what

is now Roseau village. He was engaged in the mercantile and timber business at Roosevelt (Minn.) and in the last ten years spent the greater part of his time there. “He was a man of good principles and always on the square. His hearty handshake will be missed by a great number of friends in all walks of life.”

The Minnesota Historical Society also has a very good index of articles, including an article from *Minnesota History* entitled “Touring with a Timber Agent,” which detailed the travels of a federal timber agent in northern Minnesota in 1890, which described Norquist as a “good honest Swede.” The Historical Society's records showed me that the first dance in Roseau County occurred at his claim house (square dancing took place) and he also served on the first school board in Roseau County.

The next step was to fill in the gaps using census records. Working backwards, I was able to find him in Roseau County in the federal censuses of 1920, 1910, the Minnesota census of 1905, the 1900 federal census, and the 1895 Minnesota census, using resources like *familysearch.org* and *Heritagequest*. Going farther back became more difficult. The 1890 census was destroyed by fire, but I found the family in 1885 in Alma, Marshall County, Minnesota.

The 1880 federal census lists a correct-age person named “John Nordquist” living in Cokato, Wright County. He was listed as married, living with his widowed mother and children, but no wife was listed, even though his obituary said he had



John Norquist with sons Emil and Alfred ca 1920.

married “45 years ago” or in about 1878. I then found a record of his 1877 marriage to Katie Peterson in St. Paul, Minnesota. I still cannot explain why his wife was not listed in the 1880 census, but I can speculate.

Homestead records, found online at the Bureau of Land Management, helped solve the puzzle. He filed his first homestead application in Marshall County, Minnesota, in November 1879. The actual homestead records are at the National Archives in Washington, and I was pleased to find it saying “I am the head of a family and have declared my intention to become a citizen of the United States.” I think that in the 1880



*The John Norquist family.*

census John was in the process of moving from Wright County to Marshall County, and the census taker simply missed his wife and one-year-old daughter Hulda (maybe they were getting settled in Marshall County).

The family was also listed in the 1875 Minnesota census as the “Norquist” family and the 1870 Minnesota census as the “Newquist” family living in Cokato, Wright County, Minnesota.

## Swedish roots found

My next big discovery was the family’s emigration records. From the 1900 census, I knew they emigrated in 1868 from Värmland, Sweden, but did not know exactly when and from where they left. I knew that Värmland was in the western part of Sweden, and thinking about their journey, thought, “what if they left through Oslo rather than through a Swedish port?” Norway has excellent on-line emigration records, and they allow one to search using various fields such as name, date, age, origin, and destination.

After a series of trials and errors, I found the family. 15-year-old “Jan

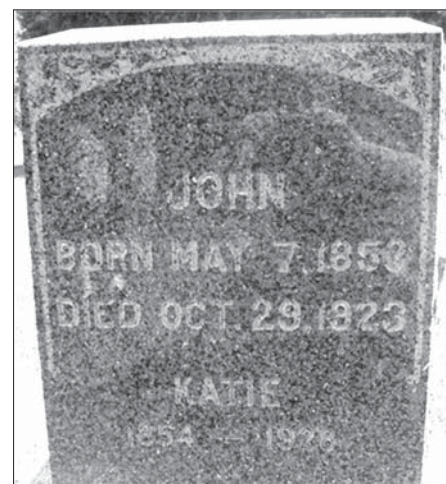
Jansson” (AKA John Norquist, Jr.) left with his father, 56-year-old “Jan Larsson” (AKA John L. Norquist, Sr.) and 8-year-old “Johannes Jansson” from Östmark, (Värm.), aboard the *Nordlyset* (*Northern Light*) via Kristiania (Oslo) destined for “Kvebec” (Quebec) on May 26, 1868 (“Johannes” was listed in the Östmark parish records as born on 9 November 1865, so he would have been only 2, not 8, when he emigrated). Interestingly, his wife Carrie (listed as Kari) departed a month later, on July 4, 1868, with their other six children. Why didn’t they travel together? It must have been difficult for a woman to travel with six children. Nevertheless, they eventually reunited along the way and made it to Cokato, Minnesota.

Now that I knew their home parish, it led me to many other interesting discoveries through Swedish parish records. It turns out that Jan Larsson was born in Malung, (Dala.), and had been married once before to a Marit Andersdotter, and had five children. His first wife died before he remarried Carrie (Karin) Larsdotter Nordqvist. The surname “Norquist” that they adopted around 1875 actu-

ally came from her side of the family rather than his. I also found out that Carrie had an illegitimate son, Peter, before her marriage to Jan.

One discovery led to another. John’s wife Kajsa (Katie) Persdotter was born 1 September 1854 in Östmark, (Värm.), to unmarried parents. Through a Swedish website called *Anbytarforum*, I found out that Katie had a sister who also emigrated (Marit Persdotter) and other siblings who stayed in Sweden. Through *Anbytarforum*, I was able to connect with a third cousin who lives in Sweden.

Katie Persdotter Norquist died 25 August 1928, and is buried with her husband at Silent City Cemetery in Roosevelt, Roseau Co., Minn.



On Jan Larsson’s line, I was able to trace his line back to Per Pålsson Hakkarainen, a “Forest Finn” who immigrated from Finland to the forests of western Sweden in the 1600s. I therefore learned that I am part Finnish, although in my case it is less than 1%.

Genealogy has been a fascinating journey for me, and I hope to keep learning more and more about my family’s past.

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**Ed:s note:** An article about the Forest Finns was published in SAG 2008/4.