

3-1-2007

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### Recommended Citation

Eriksson, Dick and Lindwall, Bo (2007) "Michelle Pfeiffer's Ancestors," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 27 : No. 1 , Article 10.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol27/iss1/10>

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# Michelle Pfeiffer's ancestors

The film star is a product of  
the American melting pot

By DICK ERIKSSON AND BO LINDWALL

In 1996 Bo Lindwall edited a book published in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the significant Swedish immigration to the U.S. The book was called *24 Famous Swedish Americans and Their Ancestors*. One of the many Swedish-American actresses who were not included in the book was Michelle Pfeiffer, whose heritage Bo Lindwall and his friend Dick Eriksson decided to trace anyway. After having solved the Swedish connection, they found it interesting to try to see how much information, besides the Swedish lines, that it was possible to find without leaving Sweden. It turned out to work very well.

Michelle Pfeiffer's ancestry demonstrates the various waves of immigration from Northern Europe and can be divided in four distinct groups, one for each of her grandparents.

Her paternal grandfather's ancestors were all Catholic Germans. Her great-grandfather was born in Saxony to Catholic parents. The grandfather's maternal grandfather is said to have been born in "Prussia" and also the grandfather's maternal grandmother's parents are said to have been born in "Prussia." When you see the name of Prussia you may think of Eastern Germany, Brandenburg for instance. In this case Prussia probably means the Rhine country, which was made a part of Prussia already in 1815. It looks like all the "Prussian" ancestors of

Michelle on her paternal grandfather's side are Catholics from the Rhine country. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to try to trace them in German records.

The ancestors of her paternal grandmother were from Pennsylvania and mirror fairly well the various groups of people who settled in this state, such as the Pennsylvania Dutch, Palatines (Pfalz), Welsh Quakers, and some Scotch-Irish.

The ancestors of her maternal grandfather were all from the area of Davos in the Canton of Graubünden in Switzerland. Their religion was evangelical and they were ethnic Germans, with some influx of Räto-Romans, as is shown by the name Taverna.

The maternal grandmother's ancestors were all from *Värend*, one of the many small "folk lands" that together make up the province of Småland in Sweden.

**1** *Michelle Marie Pfeiffer*, born 29 Apr. 1958 in Santa Ana, Orange Co., California, U.S.A. Actress.

## Generation I

**2** *Richard "Dick" Pfeiffer*, born 28 Oct. 1933 in Carrington, Foster Co., North Dakota, died 21 Dec. 1998 in Midway City, Orange Co., California. Salesman and contractor in Midway City, California. Married to



**3** *Donna Jean Taverna*, born 20 Aug. 1932 in New Rockford, Eddy Co., North Dakota.

## Generation II

**4** *William John Pfeiffer*, born 19 May 1904 in Brainerd, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota, died 6 Aug. 1968 in Lynwood, Los Angeles Co., California. Farmer and later machinist in Carrington, Foster Co., North Dakota.<sup>1</sup>

Married 1 Nov. 1926 in Carrington, Foster Co., North Dakota, (later divorced) to

**5** *Dorothy Straley*, born 15 Oct. 1908 in Carrington, Foster Co., North Dakota, died 19 Feb. 1986 in Santa Ana, Orange Co., California. Later remarried twice.

**6** *Jacob "Jake" Bernhardt Taverna*, born 28 Aug. 1905 in New Rockford, Eddy Co., North Dakota, died 19 Dec. 1983 in New Rockford, Eddy Co., North Dakota. Farmer and livestock buyer in Rosefield Township, Eddy Co., North Dakota.

Married 1 Oct. 1929 in Fargo, Cass Co., North Dakota, to

**7** *Delma Lillian Hill*, born 19 Aug. 1911 in Sheyenne, Eddy Co., North Dakota, died 19 Dec. 1999 in New Rockford, Eddy Co., North Dakota.

### Generation III

**8** *Wilhelm "William" F. J. Pfeiffer*, born 30 June 1863 in Calbe an der Saale, Saxony, Germany, died 6 Aug. 1942 in Jamestown, Stutsman Co., North Dakota. Farmer in Saint Mathias Township, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota, later shop clerk in Brainerd, Crow Wing Co., general merchant in Carrington, North Dakota, and finally an employée of the Northern Pacific Railroad.<sup>2</sup>

Married 19 Nov 1891 in Saint Mathias, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota to

**9** *Susanna Miller*, born 11 Sep. 1866 in Owatonna, Steele Co., Minnesota, died 26 Nov. 1936 at 615 Milton Avenue South, Jamestown, Stutsman Co., North Dakota.

**10** *James Berton "Bert" Straley*, born 20 Sep. 1874 in New Enterprise, South Woodbury, Bedford Co., Pennsylvania, died 17 July 1951 in Carrington, Foster Co., North Dakota. Farmer in Carrington, Foster Co., North Dakota.

Married 4 Nov. 1897 in Curryville, Pennsylvania, to

**11** *Hulda Blanche Griffith*, born 27 June 1872 in Fishertown, Saint Clair Township, Bedford Co., Pennsylvania, died 1 Oct. 1952 in Carrington, Foster Co., North Dakota.

**12** *Jacob Taverna*, born 24 Jan. 1868 in Davos (Frauenkirch), Graubünden, Switzerland, died 22 July 1920 in New Rockford, Eddy Co., North Dakota. Farmer in Rosefield Township in Eddy Co., North Dakota.<sup>3</sup>

Married 29 Mar. 1896 in Davos (Frauenkirch) to

**13** *Dorothea Bernhard*, born 1 Jan. 1872 in Wiesen, Graubünden, Switzerland, died 16 July 1953 in Carrington, Foster Co., North Dakota.<sup>4</sup>

**14** *John Sigurd Hill (born Charles Alfred Peterson)*, born 9 Dec. 1870 in Marine Mills, Washington Co., Minnesota, died 28 Feb. 1962 in

Sheyenne, Eddy Co., North Dakota. Carpenter in Sheyenne, Eddy Co., North Dakota.<sup>5</sup>

Married 1st 29 Oct. 1891 in Barrett, Grant Co., Minnesota, to *Anna J. Betland*, born 2 Feb. 1872, died 2 Feb. 1899 in Lien Township, Grant Co., Minnesota.

Married 2nd 25 May 1903 in Barrett, Grant Co., Minnesota, to his second cousin

**15** *Amanda Karolina Olson*, born 10 Oct. 1880 in Nyelund, Klackhult Södergård, Hornaryd parish, (Smål.), died 25 April 1952 in Sheyenne, Eddy Co., North Dakota. She came with her parents to the U.S. in 1886 and grew up in Elbow Lake, Grant Co., Minnesota.

### Generation IV

**16** *Ernst Pfeiffer*, born 18 Mar. 1831 in Germany, died 6 Nov. 1905 in Saint Mathias, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota. Farmer in Saint Mathias, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota. He, his wife, and the children came with the *Ohio* from Bremen to Baltimore 21 Dec. 1881.<sup>6</sup>

Married to

**17** *Henrietta Gebhardt*, born 18 Oct. 1830 in Germany, died 14 Aug. 1888 in Saint Mathias, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota.

**18** *Johann "John" H(einrich) Müller*, later *Miller*, born Apr. 1835 in Prussia, died 10 July 1908 at 1519 South Seventh Street, Brainerd, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota. Farmer in Brooklyn, Hennepin Co., Minnesota, and later in Saint Mathias, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota.<sup>7</sup>

Married 18 June 1862 in Chicago to

**19** *Katherine "Kate" Meyers*, born 10 Aug. 1844 in McHenry Co., Illinois, died 15 Sep. 1922 at 217 North 9th Street, Brainerd, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota. She had 13 children of which 8 were alive at her death, as well as 38 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren.

**20** *David M Straley*, born 17 Feb. 1849 in New Enterprise, South Woodbury Township, Bedford Co., Pennsylvania, died 20 Aug. 1882 in

Fairmont, Fillmore Co., Nebraska. Blacksmith and later pastor in New Enterprise, South Woodbury, Pennsylvania.<sup>8</sup>

Married 11 May 1871 in New Enterprise, South Woodbury Township, Bedford Co. Pennsylvania, to

**21** *Leah L Stineman*, born 15 Aug. 1847 in Richland Township, Cambria Co., Pennsylvania, died 22 Feb. 1916 in Grand View, Yakima Co., Washington.

**22** *Abner Messenheimer Griffith*, born 27 July 1833 in Fishertown, Saint Clair Township, Bedford Co., Pennsylvania, died 10 May 1914 in Fishertown, East Saint Clair Township, Bedford Co., Pennsylvania. Laborer in Fishertown, East Saint Clair Township, Pennsylvania.<sup>9</sup>

Married 1st 26 Apr. 1855 in Bedford Co. to *Rebecka Lingenfelter*, born 1831 in Saint Clair Township, Bedford Co., Pennsylvania, died there in 1856.

Married 2nd in 1857 in Bedford Co., Pennsylvania, to his 2nd cousin's daughter

**23** *Rachel Penrose*, born 30 July 1834 in Saint Clair Township, Bedford Co., Pennsylvania, died 6 Mar. 1896 in Fishertown, East Saint Clair Township, Bedford Co., Pennsylvania.

**24** *Hans (Johannes) Taverna*, born 29 Jan. 1837 in Davos (Frauenkirch), Graubünden, Switzerland. Teacher in Davos (Frauenkirch), Graubünden.

Married 5 July 1857 in Davos, Graubünden, Switzerland, to

**25** *Anna Engel*, born 3 March 1836 in Davos (Hauptkirche), Graubünden, Switzerland.

**26** *Christian Bernhard*, born 8 Feb. 1843 in Wiesen, Graubünden, Switzerland. Lived in Wiesen, Graubünden.

Married 27 Feb. 1869 to

**27** *Dorothea Jud*, born 19 Sep. 1840 in Janisberg, Graubünden, Switzerland.

**28** *Johan "John" Gustaf Peterson*, born 15 Nov. 1845 in Ugnanäs

Påkagård, Hovmantorp parish, (Smål.), died 1 Sep. 1916 in Barrett, Grant Co., Minnesota. Postmaster, hotel owner, and policeman in Barrett, Grant Co., Minnesota. Married 2 July 1867 in Chisago Lake, Chisago Co., Minnesota to

**29** *Martha Kristina Johnson*, born 15 Sep. 1847 in Gynkelstorp Norregård, Tolg parish, (Smål.), died 4 Apr. 1930 at 338 East 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Minneapolis, Hennepin Co., Minnesota. She died at the home of a daughter, but was buried in Barrett.

**30** *Sven Johan Olson*, born 16 June 1858 in Norrgärde, Tolg Mellangård, Tolg parish, (Smål.), died 18 July 1908 in Fergus Falls, Otter Tail Co., Minnesota. Farmer in Elbow Lake, Grant Co., Minnesota.<sup>10</sup>

Married 1<sup>st</sup> 5 March 1880 in Tolg parish, (Smål.), to

**31** *Sara Katarina Petersdotter*, born 9 Jan. 1860 in Ryltestugan, Rylte, Tolg parish, (Smål.), died 30 Nov. 1901 in Elbow Lake, Sanford Township, Grant Co., Minnesota. Buried at the Union Cemetery, Elbow Lake, Minnesota.

## Endnotes

1) In October 1936 he is said to be a plumber in Carrington, but when his mother died in November 1936 he lived in Sykeston and by his father's death in August 1942 in Durwood, Minnesota. According to his obituary he came to California in 1942.

2) He came to the U.S. with his parents in 1881. In October 1936 the Pfeiffers were interviewed by M. Monson about their lives and William Pfeiffer told the following: "Mr Pfeiffer was born in Germany in 1863 and came across in 1881. He settled in St. Louis, Missouri, where he worked in the car shops. In Germany he had learned no particular trade, but had attended a seminary, thus his early days were spent as a student. From St. Louis, he went to Wisconsin in 1882. There he worked on the section for three years. Then he came to Minneapolis, Minnesota. There he kept a boarding house for a year. Then, in 1885, he came to Crow Wing Co. taking a homestead in St.

Mathias Township, then a part of Ft. Ripley. He then went to work in the machine shops in Brainerd. This he followed for two and one half years. Then he saw seven years of work in the round-house. He clerked for Fred Luken for seven years. Then he went out to North Dakota and worked there in various stations for the N.P.R.R. until 1933, when he retired. He hasn't worked since. From 1885 to 1917, William Pfeiffer was a resident of Crow Wing Co., besides a pioneer homesteader."

3) Jakob Taverna, 28 years, wife Dorothea, 24 years, and Jakob's brother Conrad Taverna, 27 years, arrived in New York 13 April 1896 on the *La Touraine* from Le Havre, France. They settled in Eddy Co., five miles southwest of New Rockford, North Dakota.

4) She left the farm in Rosefield Township in 1928 and moved to her son, Chris, in New Rockford. She became ill in 1945 and moved to her daughter and son-in-law, Martha and Erwin Nicholson, in Carrington. She left 8 children, 16 grandchildren, and 17 great-grandchildren.

5) He was born as Charles A. Peterson and used that name still at his second marriage in 1903, but then changed his name to John Sigurd Hill for unknown reasons, possibly in connection with his move to Sheyenne, before 1910.

The origin of John Hill was rather difficult to find. According to his death certificate he was born in Barrett, and even in his obituary in the *New Rockford Transcript* he is said to be born 9 Dec. 1870 in Barrett, Minnesota. In his daughter Delma's birth certificate he is said to be born in Marine Mills, Minnesota (which turned out to be correct). By checking the 1870 and 1880 censuses it was found that neither in Barrett, which is in Grant Co., or in Marine Mills, which is in Washington Co., was there a Hill family during those years. After a contact with the Swedish Emigrant Institute in Växjö it was known that there was no Hill family in Swedish congregations in the nearby area in Minnesota.

Further leads were found in the obituaries in the local papers for Mr. and Mrs. Hill. According to the *New Rockford Transcript*, John Hill and Amanda Olson had married in Elbow Lake,

Minnesota, 1904. Elbow Lake is in Grant Co., but after corresponding with the local officials it was clear that no one named Hill had married in Grant Co. around 1904. A brick wall again. In the 1962 obituary for John Hill his children were listed, and among them, the youngest son Gordon Hill in Mandan, North Dakota. Luckily enough, Gordon Hill was still living in Mandan and he could by phone and by correspondence give information and explain the riddle of John Hill.

Gordon knew that his father's name had originally been Charles Peterson but that he had later changed his name. Now everything became clear. He was born as Charles Alfred Peterson in Marine Mills, and recorded in Birth book A, p 72, for Washington Co., Minnesota as Carl Alfred, born 9 December 1870, son of John G. and Martha Peterson. As a child he had moved with his parents to Barrett in Grant Co., where he grew up. He was still Charles Peterson in 1903 when he married Amanda Karolina Olson in Grant Co., and now it was possible to get a copy of his marriage certificate. All the pieces in the puzzle now found their places, but it is still not clear why Charles A. Peterson, when moving to Sheyenne, suddenly changes his name to John S. Hill. If we had not been able to get in contact with his son Gordon and been told that he had changed both his first name and his surname, it would have been almost impossible to trace him.

6) In an interview with the granddaughter Susanna Driver in 1936 she tells about her paternal grandparents: "After staying in St. Louis, Missouri, for some time, they came north into Minnesota and near St. Paul a while, then finally in 1885 they located at St. Mathias, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota. Mr. Pfeiffer filed on a homestead immediately and built his house, a log cabin, near where Mr. John Miller lived (see ancestor #18), a man of his own nationality and who was there when he came." We are also told that "In the old country he had worked on fruit farms. Therefore as quickly as possible, he prepared some land and put in some berry bushes." Finally it is told that "Mr Pfeiffer lived on his homestead and raised fruit and did gardening until he passed away." Ernst Pfeiffer was recorded in the 1900 Census as a widower in Saint

Mathias Township in Crow Wing Co., Minnesota, living with his daughter Anna and her husband Millard F. Shannon.

7) He came to America before 1862 and lived in 1864 in McHenry Co., Illinois. In the 1870 Census he lived in Owatonna, Steele Co., Minnesota, as a laborer. In the 1880 Census he lived in Brooklyn, Hennepin Co., Minnesota, as a farmer and in the 1900 Census as a farm laborer in Saint Mathias Township, Crow Wing Co., Minnesota. According to his obituary in 1908, he came with his family in 1884 to Crow Wing Co., taking a claim in St. Mathias township where he resided until about 1907 when he moved to Brainerd. According to what his daughter Susanna told in 1936, John Miller was originally a basket maker by trade, supplying the big wholesale houses in Minneapolis. When she became 11 years old, that is in 1877, they moved to a farm at Brooklyn Center. They lived there seven years. Then they moved to Crow Wing Co. and John Miller filed on a homestead in Saint Mathias, where they lived until he was too old to run it, and then he moved to Brainerd. During his time in Saint Mathias he wrote a petition for a road to Brainerd from the Morrison Co. line. He even helped survey it in 1886. He succeeded in putting the road through. He also helped to build Saint Mathias Church.

8) In the 1879 Directory for Bedford Co., where also his middle initial is mentioned, he is listed as a blacksmith in New Enterprise, Woodberry Borough-South (present spelling South Woodbury). He united with the Church of the Brethren, in the New Enterprise congregation, in the spring of 1878. This congregation called him to the ministry 14 October 1878. In the spring of 1882 he moved to Nebraska, where he met with an accident that cost him his life, he died from being kicked by a horse.

9) In the 1879 Directory for Bedford Co. he is found in East Saint Clair Township as Abner M. Griffith, worker in Fishertown. From his obituary it is found that he "was the 13th child and last survivor of William and Hannah Griffith, all of whose large family became people of local prominence." Next you are told: "When a young man he learned the tanner trade with his brother Joseph, which business, after a few years, he abandoned and devoted the remaining years of his active life to lime burning and all other forms of outdoor labour for his neighbor farmers. Mr. Griffith had lived alone for many years prior to his death. He was a great reader and had a large store of general information. He was a member of Osterburg Castle No 307, Knights of the Golden Eagle."

10) Sven Johan Olofsson, as was his Swedish name, was a tenant farmer in Nyelund, Klackhult Södergård, Hornaryd parish (Smål.) 1880-1881, then sharecropper at Holmatorpet, Bringeback, Hornaryd parish (Smål.) 1881-1882, tenant farmer and carpenter at Bråna Frälsegårds *soldattorp*, Tolg parish (Smål.) 1882-1886, and then the whole family moved to North America on 26 May 1886. They settled in Elbow Lake, Sanford Township, Grant Co., Minnesota. Some years after his first wife died, Sven Johan and four sons went back to Sweden, where he remarried. After about one year they moved back to America, first to Canada and then to Alexandria, Douglas Co., in Minnesota. He worked as both a butcher and a carpenter until he bought some land, 80 acres, in 1906 in Zimmerman, Sherburne Co., Minnesota and moved there. Buried at Bellwood Cemetery, Orrock Township, Sherburne Co.

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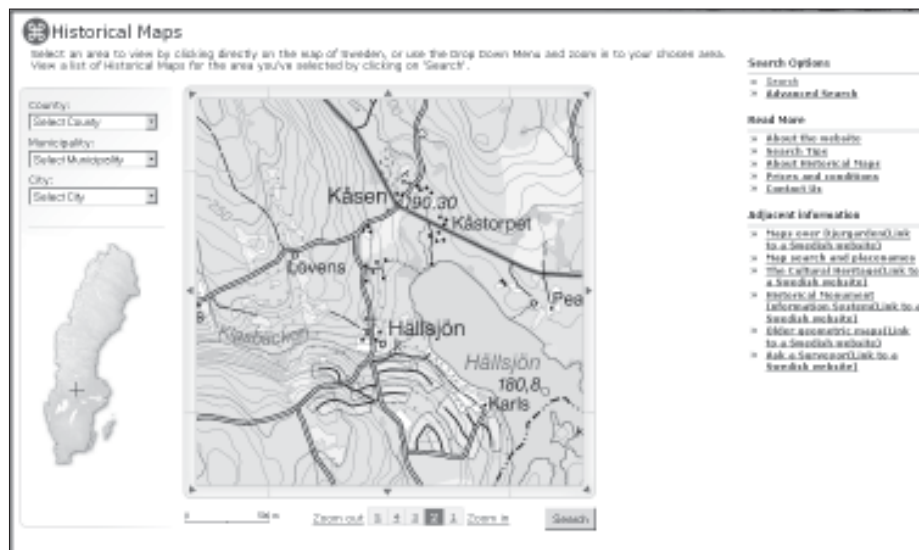
## Historical maps online

The Swedish General Surveyor's Office (*Lantmäteriet*) has recently opened a new version of their web site, and now you have access to many thousands of old maps. To look at the maps is free, but the maps are not downloadable. Instead you can go to the *Lantmäteriet's* e-shop and buy copies of maps on paper, online or on a CD/DVD.

This service is quite new, so the SAG editor has not yet tried all different kinds of searches, but will get back to this important site in a future issue of SAG.

When you first come to this site, it might be in Swedish, but look for an English link in the upper left corner, click on that and all, or most, following pages will be in English.

*Lantmäteriet* started in 1628.



This is the view you get if you click on "Historical Maps". There are two search possibilities – either just click on the map, or fill out the fields to the left. Then click on the Search button under the map.

<http://www.lantmateriet.se/>