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Acknowledging the Octogenarian Resource

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The gardener Johan Fredrik Larsson, born 12 December 1856 in Julita (Södm.) and his wife Lovisa Jansdotter, born 11 April 1852 in Linde (Väsm.) left Locknevi (Smål.) 14 October 1890 with their six children, all born in Locknevi: Anna Lovisa (b. 28 August 1880); Signe Christina (b. 12 October 1881); Johan Olof (b. 27 February 1883); Alfrida Maria (b. 3 December 1885), Clara Eleonora (b. 7 January 1889). In the U.S. daughters Lillie was born in Illinois in February 1892, and Mabel in March 1895 in Iowa.

In 1900 the Larson family is found in Rock Island, Rock Island County, Ill., and the children at home were Sigrid (Signe), Gustav, Freda (Alfrida), Lillie, and Mabel. In 1910 John, his wife, Gustav, Elfrieda, Lillian, and Mabel are still in Rock Island. But what happened then? I am very grateful for all information.

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Acknowledging the Octogenarian Resource

BY P. ROBERT WILLEY

Frequently an often overlooked resource in researching family genealogy is "The Octogenarian Resource."

My experience in identifying and communicating with individuals who are eighty years of age or more has consistently proven to be a valuable resource in my continuing 36-year ancestral search. The octogenarians I have communicated with have not always been immediate relatives nor have we necessarily met. Several, like me, had been conducting their own independent genealogical research for years and welcomed the opportunity to make connections with someone interested in learning about their life experiences. Over time I discovered that gently prodding earlier memories was all that was needed to focus them on their recalling past events. Once the inquiry was made, they frequently followed up on a clue, an idea,

or memory that was graciously shared with me.

I have found that the octogenarian has memories that include information previously forgotten or unrecorded in letters, family records, and official documents. On the Swanson side of our family a family friend whom I had not communicated with in years sent old documents that brought new information re family experiences; a church archivist's, much to my surprise, communicated that her grandmother had purchased the home of my grandparents in 1916 and resided there as a child; a distant relative recalled as a little girl visiting our grandparents at Christmas time and having "glögg"; or someone related via one of my grandfather's sister's children leading to new information recently discovered and shared with a second cousin living in Sweden. On the Willey side, there was communication with a distant relative, previously unknown to me, living in Canada, who shared

significant information and photographs that led to my being able to make additional connections with our ancestors.

Over time I have come to appreciate that they are a treasure of knowledge, are most responsive to questions, and eagerly welcome reawakening old memories as they connect the many facets of their family history. My genealogical journey has shown that the octogenarians keenly understand the importance of sharing and documenting family history for present and future generations. Not many years from now, I, too, will be an octogenarian who may be asked similar questions.

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