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A tale of a pioneer

– life in the 1880s in North Dakota

BY CATHERINE (CARRIE) BRAND

Some time ago Charles McCormick in Maple Park, IL, mentioned to the SAG editor that he had an interesting document in his family – a letter written by a relative of his father-in-law, in which she told of life in Sweden prior to immigration, and how her life developed in North Dakota.

This sounded like something for SAG, and Mr. McCormick got the permission from the current owner, Leland Brand [a nephew of Samuel Brand's and raised by Carrie], to publish it. So here it comes with a few subtitles and notes by the editor.

*Dickinson, North Dakota
March 10, 1953*

Dear Friends:

I have been asked to write as a pioneer, and tell of my achievements.

To write as a pioneer is easy for a pioneer, but as to achievements, when one stands at the crossing and feels like I have tried my best, yet I have nothing to laud myself of. Eighty years plus is a long time. Yet so little accomplished!

Childhood

I was born in Rättvik, Dalarna, Sweden, October 30, 1872. Rättvik is now probably one of the outstanding tourist resorts, if not the outstanding one in Northern Europe. We, who had the fortune to be born and raised in Dalarna, have no reason to feel anything but thankful for our heritage.

Dalarna has been said to be the home of Swedish poetry. In Swedish



Three unknown women in the traditional Rättvik costume in a picture from about 1900. Perhaps grandmother, mother, and daughter. The “grandmother” is holding a loom for making ribbons (bandvävstol).

history, when the men of Dalarna took a stand against a tyrannous government, it meant a stop to it. Its people are musical, artistic, and there is a Bible in every home, and it is read. Young men from Dalarna hold high places in athletics and sports.

Anders Zorn, a world renowned artist, lived in Leksand¹, neighboring parish to Rättvik. Selma Lagerlöf spent her winters in Falun, our nearest city. The inventor of the De Laval Cream Separator lived in Falun for a few years. John Ericsson of *Monitor* fame surveyed part of our estate².

Rättvik's church – our church – bears the date of 853 (*anno*) and when it was repaired two years ago, it was found that its walls were covered with medieval paintings³. It is said to have been built by a Norwegian king who was converted to Christianity on one of his Viking raids. Then he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Returning home, he built three of these stone-cross churches. One in Stettin, one in Rättvik, Sweden, and one in Gudbrandsdalen, Norway. Rättvik's church seats, I believe, 10,000. In all these years it has been in constant use, and only repaired inside four times. It stands today as left from Catholic times. It has two doors for front entrance – one for men, and another for women, and they each have their own side in church.

On my father's side I came from a family of industrialists. They were among the Walloons whom Louis de Geer on Gustaf II Adolf's request brought into Sweden in the 1620s to organize the Swedish iron industry. It was an upper class family. On my mother's side we were an old Swedish family, there in Dalarna.

In school

I started school at the age of six when I first went to school. We had school five and a half days a week (half of Saturday) and only two weeks of vacation at midsummer. Rättvik is so far north, that in summer for a time we have no night, and then again for a short time in winter we have no day.



Rättvik church in Dalarna, Sweden, close by Lake Siljan. The small houses to the right are stables for people that had a long way to church.

I recall making up my mind to continue reading till it got dark, and then finding it was the middle of the forenoon the next day, and I, meanwhile, had [no] indication of it darkening. There was a lot of religious instruction in our school. All our lessons had to be memorized at home. School was only for recitations and devotions and singing.

At ten, I entered high school [*folk-skolan*]. There, too, we had to memorize all our lessons at home and recite them in turn in school. The school day always began with a hymn, the teacher playing the organ. Then Bible reading and prayers. Then came catechism, Bible history, and recitation of the hymn given to [be] memorized for that day. After that came the other subjects taught in the folk high school, as it was called.

Our teacher was a middle-aged former military officer who had been one of the instructor at the nearest military training post. Sweden had universal military training. Every now and then, we pupils would be ordered out into the schoolyard, and lined up – girls on one side, boys on the other, and given the same drill as he had given the 21-year-old recruits at the military post. That was especially fun for us girls.

Immigration

In May, 1886, my parents and four children landed in Taylor, North Dakota. As we got off the train there

was a Norwegian minister from Sims, ND, instructing a confirmation class at the N.P. Section House – the only place then for us to go to. I was not confirmed, so from the train I landed in that class. With all my religious instruction, I knew my answers, but he tried to read Swedish as if it were Norwegian, and got it twisted. The class sat and laughed. So after it was over with, I went up to him, and said "This will not do. Get me the Norwegian books. I must learn it in Norwegian." He said, "Oh no! You are too old to learn Norwegian." Well, I got the books myself, and from that time I recited in Norwegian, and he, as long as he lived, spoke of it as a miracle. What a dummy he must have considered me!

That fall they had two months of school in a small frame house, close to the section house in Taylor. And we had another two months of school the following spring. I attended both terms. After some years the terms were two in the spring and three in the fall.

The next summer, after school closed, I went to Port Arthur, Canada, where I had relatives, to attend school. I was enrolled as a freshman in their first high school class. My next move was back to Taylor after finishing that one year.

Becoming a school teacher

One day after my return, my father

came home and told me that he had gotten a school for me to teach in the fall, so it was up to me to obtain the required third grade certificate before the first of September. There I was a foreigner, not yet sixteen years old, with only those few months of English. I was shy and very, very bashful, but father had spoken, and it was up to me to follow orders.

The examinations for teacher's certificate then were held by the county superintendents, and she or he graded the papers and issued the certificates. There were three grades. To get a *third* grade, you had to be eighteen years old, and pass 75% in all subjects. For a *second* grade, you had to have a year's experience in teaching, pass at a grade of 85% in same subjects as for third plus a couple of added subjects. For a *first* grade certificate, you had to be at least twenty years old, and pass besides those required for second grade in any of the high school subjects with a still higher grade, 90%, I believe. I felt my limitation, and I was not old enough. What was I to do? Well, I took my books out on the prairie, and I studied day and most of the night up to the day of the examination. I hated the thoughts of misrepresenting my age, but as I was heading for the schoolhouse where the examination



was to be held, I met Mr. Tracey, who was at that time farming on a big scale around Taylor. In passing he said, "Be sure to mark your age as 18." When I passed the county superintendent on my way to my desk, she whispered, "Write 18." I must succeed, and thus encouraged, I, within, thanked my two very kind friends and wrote '18' without any feeling of guilt.

I passed and taught my school and taught it for nine terms in succession. And then I left only to be a student myself. The third grade was only good for a year. So my second examination came only a year later and I got my

second grade. That was good for two years. I was then 19 years old, but the superintendent said, "Try for first, even if you are not twenty."

The wages for teachers then were \$30 a month for 3rd Grade; \$32.50 for 2nd Grade, and \$35 for 1st Grade, and we paid \$12 or more for board and room. School terms were two months in the spring and three months in the fall.

Getting an education

My whole soul was set on getting an education. I had to help brothers and sisters also to get theirs. I saved all I could and whenever I could see my way clear, I went to school – to Concordia, to Valley City, to Valparaiso, to the University of North Dakota. I got my B.S. from Valparaiso, and my M.D. from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. I could only make it by terms. When my money gave out, I had to go back to teaching. I then got my first grade, and that is the last teacher's examination I wrote for, though I taught up to the time I decided to study medicine and even when studying medicine.

I was fortunate, though, on getting a private school to teach during my vacations. I would close my term on Friday and start a private term the next Monday, unless I went to school myself. And I always studied even harder when I was not going to school than when in school. My happiest



A one-room school in the U.S. in 1921.

time was when I could attend a grand lecture, or be a member in a class under one of those wonderful teachers we were privileged to have now and then in our search for knowledge.

I loved teaching, and even now, I never pass a schoolhouse without wishing I were young again, and could be in the work guiding the young.

I am now past eighty, but I still study. I give myself a daily lesson in four, five subjects, just as if I were attending college. Struggling for an education, as I had to, I was too busy for anything else.

Marriage eventually

So dates, men, and marriage never bothered my mind, but I had an old friend who for over thirteen years had hoped that I would some day, when he felt free to marry, marry him. He had an invalid father, a mother, and a number of younger brothers and sisters to make a home for, support, and educate. He believed in having a home of one's own. So when I had graduated from my medical course, the time had come for us to decide.

I married a rancher, and was henceforth more than busy as a rancher's wife. We had a large number of hired men, and in those days, we housewives had to be self-sufficient. Most everything had to be made and prepared at home for the table and for the home and for ourselves.

The son

We had one child, a son, *Theodore*. We sent him to Peddie, New Jersey, one of our foremost boys' preparatory schools for his preparatory schooling, and then he graduated from Sheffield, Yale University, as an engineer. He passed away in Denver, Colorado, at the age of 25. Mr. Brand soon followed him. Losing his only child was more than he could survive. He bottled up his grief, and it shortened his life⁴.

I have often said that God gave us only one child, but we have always had several to do for, and given them

a chance in life. Mr. Brand used to say "Help them to make a better and easier living than I have had." As some grew up and stepped out, there would be some others coming to us for homecare and education. We are happy and thankful when we see some of them pressing onward to the high calling we set as our goal, but could not reach – cut short by some reason or other.

Stories from the schoolhouse

I must tell you of my first schoolhouse out here in Dakota. It was a roughly built sod house. The benches were of rough boards, just nailed together. In front of each long bench was another rough board to serve the pupils as a writing desk. It was placed so high that the small pupils were quite hidden behind it. In those days we had only one-room schoolhouses out here, and I had to walk four miles to this school. I have several remembrances from these early days.

The first day of one of the terms, the six-year old son of my landlady asked me if I knew how to make *pølse*. That is Norwegian for sausage. I did not. So he got disgusted and told his mother that evening "I thought the teachers knew everything. This one does not. She does not know how to make *pølse*."

Another time, two little lads refused to go back to school the second day because I had not treated them right. I had not served them coffee and cake.

Then there was the young man – he belonged to a neighboring school district – who came bent on mischief. He was much bigger than me. I marched up to him and grabbed him and must have shook him somehow. He must have been overcome with surprise – anyway from that time on I was perfect in his eyes, and he was my knight.

I had been born and raised as the oldest grandchild in an original aristocratic home⁵, and here we are among the first settler of the prairies. We lived in a settler's shack first,

then in a cottage, but we never were in want nor were we unhappy with the thought of inferiority or any poverty, or wanting what we could not get. We looked up and forward and pressed on, depending only on ourselves and certainly on God.

The beautiful prairie

The prairies always reminded me of the boundless ocean. I was held by them in admiration. We have indescribably beautiful sunsets. Have [you] ever stood alone on one of our hilltops in a clear moonlit night, when the heavens flooded all around you with a supernatural radiance. We have many of those scenes. It speaks of God, of His majesty and glory. "The heavens declare the glory of God," is a mild expression compared with sensing it. Or have you been out in a wonderful storm? They can be beautiful as well as cruel and threatening. So beautiful one wishes one were an artist enough to tell it or paint it. One can feel rich in North Dakota even without riches.

I have lived in my books, in my work, and thus feel happy and spiritually rich. My whole wish has been to be a sharer in all I found good and most worthwhile. Is not that really a teacher's wish and aim?

Notes:

- 1) Famous painter Anders Zorn did not live in Rättvik. He was born in nearby Mora, and lived there in his old age.
- 2) It is not probable that John Ericsson, the inventor, born in 1803, surveyed the Johnson family land. Before leaving Sweden in 1826 he did some land surveys in northern Sweden.
- 3) The Rättvik church is old; but not that old, the oldest parts are from the 1200s. It may seat 1000 people, not 10,000.
- 4) Son *Theodore* was born in 1908, and died 1933, and is buried in Dickinson City Cemetery with his parents. *Samuel* was born 1861 in Switzerland, and died in 1938. *Carrie* (Catherine) died in 1955. [North Dakota Death Index]
- 5) Carrie embellishes her home a little. There is nothing in the cl. survey that seems to be different from the neighbors.