

6-1-2000

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Recommended Citation

Olsson, Nils William (2000) "Carl-Erik Johansson 1917-2000," *Swedish American Genealogist*. Vol. 20 : No. 2 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol20/iss2/9>

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Carl-Erik Johansson

1917-2000

Nils William Olsson*

Genealogists in Sweden and Swedish-America are mourning the death of Carl-Erik Johansson, who died in Salt Lake City 20 March this year at the age of 82. The cause of death was diabetes and heart failure. With the demise of Carl-Erik, Swedish-America has lost its most eminent genealogist and student of family history.

Carl-Erik was born in Malmö, Sweden, on 21 October 1917, the son of Carl I. E. Johansson, a saddler and manufacturer of leather goods, and his wife Syster Emilia. After elementary and secondary schools, Carl-Erik volunteered for service in the Swedish Army, where his ability and knowledge soon caught the attention of his officers. They recommended him for further studies, from which he was graduated with honors as number one in his class. He next received an appointment to the elite Royal Svea Life Guards in Stockholm, where he eventually, through exemplary service, reached the rank of captain. In 1948 he resigned his commission and immigrated to America.

Carl-Erik had grown up in a family of devout Mormons, which aroused his interest in going to Salt Lake City, where he hoped to gain employment. He did not have to wait long. His schooling in Sweden proved useful to the Mormon church authorities, who engaged him in its translation service. Thus began a career that spanned twenty years and resulted, among other achievements, in a translation of the *Book of Mormon* into Swedish. But Carl-Erik's passion was genealogy and family history and he entered Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, where he not only received his degree but was offered employment as assistant professor in genealogical research, with a specialty in the genealogical records of Sweden.

As he honed his skills, his fame as a researcher spread and he soon had clients who sought his services, not only in Swedish research but also in adjacent Scandinavian countries. The paucity of guides in English dealing with Swedish genealogical research inspired him to rectify this situation by publishing his now famous guide and study named *Cradled in Sweden*, Rev. Ed. (The Everton Publishers: Logan, UT, 1995). The volume immediately became the Bible of Swedish genealogical research, blessed by researchers in every part of the United States.

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Though he ranked high as an author, educator and scholar, it was as a very personable and compassionate human being that Carl-Erik won plaudits for himself wherever he went. He believed passionately in justice and freedom and would go out of his way to help persons in need. He felt it was his duty to make calls on the ill, the needy and shut-ins, particularly the elderly citizens of Swedish background. To many of these he was a ray of sunshine in an otherwise drab existence.

Carl-Erik believed deeply in the mission of the Mormon Church, where he had been active his entire lifetime. He held a number of important positions within the church body, being Branch President, Stake High Council Member, and serving two temple missions at the Stockholm, Sweden, Temple in Västerhaninge together with his wife Maja, née Ellström.

On a personal note, I have enjoyed his friendship over a period of more than thirty-five years. It all began, as so many other friendships involving Carl-Erik, with a genealogical query. As a college student I once received a letter from my paternal grandfather in Sweden who asked me to find out whatever happened to his uncle, Nils Pehrsson. As a converted Mormon in Skåne, he had immigrated to Utah in 1870 with his family. I began the hunt and was able to find a number of Nels Pearsons but never the correct kinsman. I even corresponded with the venerable historian of the Mormon Church, Andrew Jenson, but always came up short.

Somehow I was given the name of Carl-Erik Johansson, a rising star on the genealogical firmament, contacted him and in short order I was given the life story of the correct Nils Pehrsson as well as the names and addresses of living relatives.

I attended the World Conference on Records in Salt Lake City in the summer of 1969 where I not only met Carl-Erik for the first time but he also helped me plan a lunch for a dozen new-found relatives.

In 1991 Carl-Erik was a key player in planning the first *SAG* Workshop in Salt Lake City. He not only took an active role in the execution of the seminar but put himself and his automobile at the disposal of the group by personally meeting the arriving attendees at the airport. Each year thereafter he would ask what dates had been set aside for the workshop so that he could cancel all other engagements, thus devoting full time to help searchers find answers to their genealogical problems.

As time approaches for the tenth annual *SAG* Workshop this fall, we shall sorely miss Carl-Erik, his wisdom, his humor and, more than anything else, his warm friendship.