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Erik Wikén

1905-1998

Margaretha Hedblom*

One of Sweden's best-known classical scholars, Dr. Erik Wikén of Uppsala, has died at the age of ninety-two years. The readers of *Swedish American Genealogist* have learned to know him as the eminent emigration specialist who authored many interesting and well-documented articles for the journal. He was also known as the co-editor, together with Dr. Nils William Olsson, of *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in the United States 1820-1850*, published by the Royal Library in Stockholm in 1995, reminding us all of a prodigious research accomplishment.

On his father's side of the family, Erik had his roots in By Parish in Dalarna, but was born in Jönköping, where he took his university entrance examination. Erik continued his studies at the University of Lund and his post-graduate work was concentrated in the field of classical studies. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on the early Greek contacts with Italy and was pleased when a few years ago he was able to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his receiving the doctor's ring at his old seat of learning. His interest in the ancient classical languages led him to choose a teaching career, from which he was pensioned in 1970, after a career concentrated on teaching Greek and Latin at Gävle Junior College (*Gävle högre allmänna läroverk*) going back to 1946.

It was during his research in the college archives in Gävle that Erik Wikén became fascinated by the emigrant fate of one of the college students, which later led him to devote the major portion of his time as a pensioner to emigration research. This subject seems far removed from his earlier interest in Mediterranean culture, but proved to be a topic to which he devoted the same careful scholarship and scientific approach in identifying the early Swedish emigrants to North America.

Foremost of all was his passionate interest in the history of Erik Janssonism in the unfolding story of the Swedish settlement in Bishop Hill, Illinois. Despite the fact that he never visited this early colony, nor in fact America itself, he had a phenomenal knowledge of the early story of this

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Swedish community. Up to the last moments of his life, he was still attempting to solve the riddle of the identity of Erik Rooth, the murderer of Erik Jansson.

Erik Wikén was a man of many interest and talents, who despite his advanced age never ceased doing research. On the day he was struck down by illness, he had spent several hours at his typewriter. An unfinished letter, addressed to the Royal Library, was found after his death, requesting information concerning research material, which was to be incorporated in an article he had planned for publication in *Personhistorisk Tidskrift* and *Släkt och Hävd*. He was my teacher, research colleague and very good friend, constantly active up to the final minute. "There is so much to do and I am still curious about life and would like to live a little bit longer," was his comment to me the last time we met during a late winter month, although he admitted that he was beginning to feel the problems associated with old age. "Now is the time for you young people to carry on," was his parting statement. I promised him I would attempt to continue along the lines he had drawn up and am grateful for the opportunity to shoulder the rich source material he left behind—the basis for continued research.

The scientific community of Swedish America has suddenly become poorer due to Erik Wikén's demise, but the memory of a generous soul lives on. He was a person with a youthful mind and an optimistic belief in the future of scientific research. He was a man for all seasons, a person who demanded much of himself as well as others, but who also demonstrated great personal warmth and loyal friendship. His work will live on and there are many of us who are grateful for what he has given us through his life and achievements.

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Correction

In a recent article—Eva M. K. Pihl and Rogers B. Finch, "Christina Tornberg's Bible," *Swedish American Genealogist* 18 (March 1998): 54-57—Rogers Burton Finch's year of birth was listed incorrectly. The last sentence of paragraph 3 on page 57 should read as follows: "...who was born in Broadalbin 16 April 1920, the elder son of Olga and Cecil." The authors of this article also wish to point out that the official military residence (*militieboställe*) in Väsby Parish (Malm.), where Gustaf Pihl was born (see page 56, paragraph 3), was originally known as Wätamåsa or Vätamåsa, not Vätamåsa as printed. Vätamåsa is, however, the spelling that appears in C. M. Rosenberg, *Geografiskt-statistiskt handlexikon öfver Sverige* (Stockholm, 1883; reprint, Göteborg, 1993), 4:1080.