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- 1421480 - Series B - Descendants of Christina Maria Danielsdotter including the surname of Eck
- 1421981 - Series C - Descendants of Måns including the surnames of
1421984 Haglund, Karlsson, Kronlund, Mohlin, Nyden, Roner
- 1421984 Series D - Descendants of Johan Johanson including the surnames of Eck, Nelson, Palmer
- 1421984 Series E - Descendants of Ingre Hemmingsdotter including the surnames of Hemmingson, Swanson
- 1421984 Series F - Descendants of Bengt Humble
- 1421985 General Correspondence A-G Surnames
- 1421986 General Correspondence H-M Surnames
- 1421987 General Correspondence N-Z Surnames

John Augustus Nyden, Swedish-American Architect

Elaine Helgeson Hasleton*

When John Augustus (Carlsson) Nyden emigrated to America at the age of sixteen years in 1895, he landed with but a dollar in his pocket. At the time of his death, John Augustus Nyden was known as an eminent architect with many principal works to his credit. Among them was the American Swedish Historical Museum (formerly the John A. Morton building) in Philadelphia. Not only was he successful in his business ventures, but also benevolent toward his family and fellow associates and a well-respected citizen. Much of his effort was directed toward his family, and he devoted time and energy in compiling a large amount of family history information.

*See presentation of Elaine Helgeson Hasleton in the previous article, *The Nyden Collection*.

John Augustus Carlsson was born 25 March 1878 in Nybygget, Moheda Parish (Kron.), in the province of Småland, Sweden, the son of Carl Gustaf Johansson and Maria Christina Danielsdotter Humble. His parents then lived in a three-room house, of which his grandfather was proprietor. Three other children in the family had preceded him, a sister, Johanna Mathilda and two brothers, Johan Walfred and Aron Daniel. The latter two died in infancy before the birth of John Augustus. Thus, he received part of his name from his deceased brother and was christened Johan Augustus. He received his early education and religious training from his maternal grandmother, Maja Lisa Humble, and grammar school education from the parish school. The death of his mother, Maria Christina Danielsdotter Humble in 1889 occurred when John Augustus was only eleven years old. His father, Carl Gustaf Johansson, was not a farmer but hired help to do the daily chores on their farm. He was a well know mason contractor and taught John Augustus the masonry trade.

At the age of twelve John Augustus built his first house, a two-room dwelling with windows and door and an open fireplace inside. This house still stands at his childhood home. At this tender age of twelve years he decided to become an architect and later became a very prominent architect in Sweden and America. In 1895 John Augustus changed his name from Carlsson to Nyden in memory of his birthplace Nybygget. In order to do so, he wrote to the King of Sweden to obtain permission which was granted to him.

John Augustus Nyden emigrated to America in August 1895 at the age of sixteen. He arrived at the port of New York and traveled to the home of his cousin, John E. Mohlin, in Chicago, IL. His first job in America was to lay bricks as an apprentice at the New Trier High School in Winnetka, IL. He worked very hard during the days and attended classes at the emigrants' evening school and completed grammar school and high school requirements in three years. His further education began at Columbia Trade School in Chicago. John Augustus took a two-year scientific and art course at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 1898-1899, after which he was employed as a draftsman one year with the George A. Fuller Co., general contractors, of New York City. He returned to Chicago and attended the art classes at the Chicago Art Institute 1900-1901. John Augustus paid for his own education and never received money at any time from his family in Sweden.

While attending the evening school, John Augustus Nyden met a young lady who had just arrived in America from Sweden. Her name was Alma Ottilia Hemmingsson, who was born 13 March 1874 at Lövudden, Kristdala Parish (Kalm.) in the province of Småland, the youngest daughter of Sven Peter Hemmingsson and Kajsa Lisa Carlsdotter. She descended from the noble families of Bagge af Berga and Sabelsköld and the clergy family of Meurling. Her father was an alderman, assessor and juryman and well-liked in the community. In 1895 she and her younger brother, John Albin, emigrated to America. She made her home with her sister Hilda. During her first years in America she had many hard

and unpleasant experiences in her work. Eventually she was employed in Miss Slostad's sewing establishment, where she learned dressmaking and designing, 1897-1899. After answering an ad in the newspaper, Miss Hemmings, as she was then known, became a governess and later dressmaker for a Mrs. Hammon until the time of her marriage.

Ottilia's daughters described her as an "angel here on earth" and that "her husband always recognized her excellence and praised her with the lavish tenderness of which he was always so capable. He also had a tremendous admiration for her excellent judgment and foresight. Their married life was always a happy one." She was religious and also very gifted in many ways.

After a six-year courtship, John Augustus Nyden and Alma Ottilia Hemmingson were united in marriage on 9 April 1902. They combined their honeymoon with an architectural study trip to Europe. Both John Augustus and Alma Ottilia visited their childhood homes in Sweden. It was their first trip back to Sweden which lasted from April to August 1902. John Augustus then brought his brother Carl Emil back with him to America.

The Nydens established their first home in 1902 at 2387 Evanston Avenue in Chicago. They lived here at the time of the birth of their first child, a premature daughter named Adelaide. In May of 1903 the Nydens moved from Evanston Avenue to 1027 Victor Avenue in Chicago. Their second child, Valborg, was born there in 1904.

John Augustus next attended the Art School at Illinois University at Urbana, IL and successfully passed both the architect's as well as the engineer's examination of the University in 1904. Following his affiliation with Arthur Heun of Chicago from 1907-1909, where he was chief draftsman and chief designer, he established his own firm on 1 May 1907 under the name of John A. Nyden, Architect. His business was located at 218 LaSalle Street in Chicago. John Augustus Nyden was then a comparatively young twenty-nine years old.

Mr. Nyden never lost perspective on the humanistic side of life. He was a man of great character and well respected in the business community. Personally he was an idealist, forceful, quietly poised and deeply religious which found expression in his devotion to the Edgewater Mission Covenant Church (previously known as the Lake View Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Mission Church) of which he was founder and officer. He was the architect for this church built in 1909. During the time John Augustus was chairman and trustee of the church, 1909-1918, the Nyden home was open to visiting ministers and leaders in their denomination.

John Augustus Nyden always appeared to be interested in the persons he dealt with as well as maintaining a high degree of professionalism in his business attitude. His daughters wrote of him that he was "skillful and artistic in his business, he was gifted with an astuteness that caused many to seek his counsel." A letter to Mr. Nyden from Marion S. Burnett of Schlau, Burnett and Co. in Chicago states "I wish to thank you for your uniform kindness and courtesy towards us all the way thru in this matter (building at 1318 Thorndale Ave. in Chicago) and assure you that it has been a pleasant experience so far."

A Dr. H.A. White wrote Mr. Nyden on 29 June 1915 "I have been wanting to write to you for some time and thank you for your efficient services and many kindnesses. . . on our buildings. We certainly appreciate the reduction in rate made to us. . . We of course will leave no stone unturned to recommend you wherever possible. We have been more than pleased with your work."

The Humboldt Park Gospel Tabernacle stated in a letter that Mr. Nyden's "architectural taste was excellent" and that his "suggestions in choosing competent and experienced contractors were valuable." He was told "we esteem your character and ability very highly and shall hope to have more dealings with you."

In one letter of 22 July 1932 to a Mr. C.E. Stockseth who apparently had applied for a position as an electric service man at the Chicago Bank of Commerce, Mr. Nyden apologized for being "unable to do anything for you at the present time. . . since the bank was forced to close the day after." However, he continued, "in case I hear of anything else in which I think you may be interested, I will be pleased to get in touch with you immediately."

Mr. Nyden was generous with his money for worthwhile causes. He wrote on 30 January 1922 to a friend and former employee who was presently attending school, "it just occurred to me that this must be close to the end of your first semester and as your salary is not coming in very regularly any more, I thought it would not be out of the way to send you a little check. Therefore, I am enclosing one in the amount of \$250.00 which I hope you can use." Nyden wrote regarding the John Morton Building in Philadelphia that no more would be done on the building "until we get the rest of the country to contribute to this worthy cause, which all Americans of Swedish descent should be proud to take a part in" and that most of the raising of money for the building "has been borne by Chicago men."

He also sent money to Arvid Nyholm in Chicago, formerly of Sweden, who was a struggling young artist. Likewise there is a thank you note from the Boys Club at Hull House in Chicago for a donation by Mr. Nyden. He financially helped a Johan G.R. Banér, originally from Moheda, Sweden who was a Swedish-American poet living with the Indians in Upper Michigan.

A letter dated 22 February 1927 from the Women's Missionary Society at Augustana College at Rock Island, Illinois conveys a thank you to Colonel Nyden for gratis service in rendering a decision regarding the Women's Building at Augustana College.

A fellow Swede, E.P. Strandberg, of Strandberg Contractors and Builders, wrote Mr. Nyden that although "this job has been a financial loss to both yourself and us, it probably, however, is a good thing that we can feel that we have done something to preserve and promote the name of our Swedish ancestors" and that "we have gained some additional friends by doing this work."

C.R. Gleason of Chicago Real Estate Investments wrote Mr. Nyden that "your service, in connection with these two properties has been the most satisfying that any architect in Chicago has ever rendered me."

An Elmo Lowe of Lowe and Speer Architects wrote Mr. Nyden on 25 April 1930 that he was "very glad to enclose a check for \$100.00 covering a loan which you (Nyden) made to me so long ago." He then went onto say, "I do appreciate your kindness in helping me out when I needed it so much."

Mr. Nyden was also very considerate and loving toward his family members. In addition to having brought his brother, Carl Emil to America in 1902, in 1903 he sent for his brother Ernst in Sweden and paid for his ticket. On behalf of his brother, Mr. Nyden wrote to a Mr. John A. Wetterlund in Chicago, ". . . my brother, Carl E. Nyden, is a first class bricklayer, but who like so many others has gone for months without any work. He has a very large family to support. . . I can vouch for his ability and willingness to work, and I will very much appreciate anything you can do for him." In May of 1925, he contacted the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. for a six months extension of residency in the United States of his wife's sister, Miss Charlotte Hemmingson.

A note was written to Nyden's daughter, Valborg, on her 22nd birthday which said, "Much love and very best wishes to my baby on her birthday, March 17th, 1926. Daddy." She later wrote of him, "Father was a real pal to me. . . I'm so grateful for the splendid Father I have had."

In 1913 John Nyden drew plans for proposed buildings and a future lay-out of the grounds for North Park College in Chicago. There he was the architect for the school gymnasium, Caroline Hall (the girls' dormitory), the president's home and the power house. He later served as the President of the Board of Directors of North Park College.

As of 26 January 1916 John Augustus Nyden became a member of the American Institute of Architects and served as director of the Chicago chapter. This was the first of many distinctions in his profession. He was elected Vice-President of the Illinois Society of Architects for the term of 1920-21, Vice-President of the Construction Division Association in 1923, and Vice-President of the North Shore Association of Architects.

During the First World War, Mr. Nyden was commissioned a Major on 29 May 1918 in the Construction Division, Quartermaster Corps and honorably discharged on 24 February 1919. He was supervising construction officer of forty two general and debarkation hospitals in the United States, involving a cost of more than \$22,000,000 and liaison officer between the Construction Division and the Surgeon-General's office. In 1923 he was commissioned Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Quartermaster Reserve Corps and in 1926 was granted a certificate of capacity for Colonel. He returned from his military service and resumed his architectural profession in April 1919 with offices in Suite 928-932 in the State Lake Building, 196 N. State St. Chicago, IL.

Numerous structures can be given credit to his name including the following Chicago structures: the eleven story Admiral Hotel, the fourteen story Commonwealth Hotel and the Melrose Hotel, the Edgewater Mission Covenant, First Swedish Baptist, and Bethany Swedish Methodist churches, the Humboldt Park

Gospel Tabernacle, North Park College, monument to the Three Hundred Seventieth Regiment, Illinois National Guard, the Henry P. Kranz and Waldemar Giertsen residences, Bethany Old Peoples' Home, the Builders' and Merchants' Bank building and various apartment houses. In Evanston, IL he designed the Evanshire Hotel, the Plaza Fountain, Westminster Court, Stoneleigh Manor and Stoneleigh Court apartment buildings, the Oscar H. Haugen home and the Church Street, Main Street, Hahn and City National Bank buildings. At the time of his death, he had designed one-third of the buildings in Evanston. Among his other plans were those of the Illinois State Stadium, Springfield, IL; Childrens' Home at Princeton, IL; Goddard Memorial, Marion, IL and the country estates of George E. Van Hagen, Sr. and Jr., Barrington, IL. He also designed Minnehaha Academy in Minneapolis, MN, Colony of Mercy near Bartlett, IL, and the Svecia Country Club at Spread Eagle, WI.

John Nyden delighted in combining the artistic with the practical. He once stated that, "A building should serve the purpose for which it is built but it should also please the eye; it should be beautiful as well as practical."

Mr. Nyden was founder and president of the Admiral Hotel Co. in Chicago and director of the Belmont-Sheffield Trust and Savings Bank of Chicago and City National Bank of Evanston, IL. In the fall of 1925, Nyden organized and built the Svecia Country Club in Spread Eagle, WI. His club and social connections also included membership in the Westmoreland Country Club, University Club of Evanston, the Swedish Colonial Society, and the American Sons and Daughters of Sweden.

Throughout all of this notoriety, John Augustus Nyden never forgot nor ignored his Swedish roots. The Swedish language continued to be spoken in his home. His daughters both spoke and wrote Swedish. He made five trips to Europe with his family. On the trip to their native land in 1914, Mr. Nyden erected memorial grave stones on his parents' cemetery lot and also on his maternal grandmother's grave (Maja Lisa Humble) in the Moheda church yard.

Valborg Nyden stated that her father was "particularly interested in history, and the working out of the genealogy of his own and his wife's families was one of his chief avocations." Mr. Nyden assembled much family history including large pedigree charts of the Hemmingsson, Meurling, and Wykstrom lines. Nyden's father's mother's side was traced back to the fourteenth generation (Humble line) and back to the ninth generation on his father's father's side. He spent many long hours reading the old Moheda church books at the Archives in Vadstena. Both he and his daughter encouraged others to research their own lines and freely gave suggestions and assistance such as to Fru Gudrun Lidfeldt, a distant Sjöström relative, of Ursviken, Sweden.

John Augustus and his daughter Valborg wrote and visited numerous close and distant relatives. In 1902 John located four unknown cousins in the United States namely, Axle and Ruey Woehler (brother and sister) of Toledo, OH and Theodore and Charlie Kronlund of Brooklyn, NY. Thus, he began not only a large compilation of family genealogical information but also assembled a vast amount of correspondence with close and distant relatives.

There was a European trip again in 1924 for seven months with his family and cousin John E. Mohlin. Donations were sent in 1925 by Colonel Nyden and cousin Mohlin to keep the church belfry in repairs at the Moheda church in Sweden. Nyden also financed the book about Moheda written by the Rev. Gösta Ydström in 1926. Colonel Nyden's last trip to his homeland and specifically Örsholm was in 1931 with his wife and daughter Valborg. The year before he had purchased Örsholm in Ör Parish (Kron.) which was an old ancestral home on his mother's side.

Colonel and Mrs. Nyden were hosts to the personal staff of Crown Prince Gustavus Adolphus and Crown Princess Louise of Sweden during the Swedish Royal couple's four-day stay in Evanston in June 1926. Guests included Count Göran Posse, the Crown Prince's Chief of Staff, and Captain Gösta Åsbrink, the Crown Prince's private secretary.

In 1928 Colonel Nyden published a booklet entitled *The Story of Our Forefathers* which was a "short, comprehensive account of the salient facts pertaining to the forebears of the Americans of Scandinavian, particularly Swedish, descent." It was "in a small measure to serve our Swedish people to better know themselves and the source from which they spring." The book was written at the time when the Swedish descendants were preparing to celebrate the Three-Hundredth Anniversary of the first permanent Swedish settlement on American soil. That year, 1938, he also became a life member of the Swedish Colonial Society in Philadelphia, PA. He had previously served as treasurer of the Swedish Historical Society in 1916.

Perhaps one of his most notable accomplishments was the architectural design in 1926 of the John Morton Memorial Building in Philadelphia. John Morton was the chairman of the Pennsylvania delegation of the Continental Congress which adopted the Declaration of Independence. John Morton cast the deciding vote. As Morton was of Swedish descent, the corner stone was laid by His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince of Sweden on 2 June 1926. Today this building is known as the American-Swedish Historical Museum. This museum is a historical shrine illustrating the contributions made by Americans of Swedish birth or descent in developing our country.

Governor Len Small of Illinois appointed John Augustus Nyden as the Supervising Architect of the State of Illinois for 1926-1927. There he was well liked and respected. In fact, when Mr. Nyden suffered a heart attack on 15 August 1932, it was reported on 27 August in the *Evanston News-Index* that his

illness "was of sufficient importance to cause the blocking off of a state highway route. The street was blocked in an attempt to give him all the rest and quiet possible." The order came from the Illinois State Highway Department after it had been approached by Mayor Charles H. Bartlett and friends of Colonel Nyden.

However, Nyden's condition did not improve, and he passed away at his home on 1726 Hinman Avenue in Evanston on 4 September 1932. Burial was at Memorial Park Cemetery in Evanston. Many condolences were sent including that from Representative Carl R. Chindblom, 10th District Illinois, U.S. House of Representatives, in Washington, D.C. Representative Chindblom wrote to Mrs. Nyden, "I have learned with deep sorrow and regret of the sudden and unexpected death of your good husband, Mr. John A. Nyden. I beg to extend to you and your family my deepest sympathy and condolence. I have counted Mr. Nyden among my best friends. His death is a loss not only to his large circle of acquaintances but to our entire community."

This was the feeling of all with whom this great Swedish-American came in contact. This emigrant boy who landed on the shores of America with but a dollar in his pocket, rose to new heights through hard work and an honorable character. His daughter, Valborg Nyden, summarized her father's character saying, "In his profession he was instrumental. He was very prompt with his appointments. He always believed in giving a compliment when it was due. He was unselfish, especially among his own and wife's kinsmen. His life was pure and wholesome, his actions were humble, and his character was beautiful. He was always kind, helpful, sympathetic toward everyone, and very loveable toward his family. He was a man of few words, but when he spoke every word was the truth, and his friends highly respected him for what he stood. He was in great demand for his talents and far more for his noble qualities which dignified his character." Indeed, Colonel John Augustus Nyden was an outstanding Swedish-American.

Information for this biography has been obtained from the "Nyden Collection" now located at the Swedish-American Archives of Greater Chicago located at North Park College, Chicago, Illinois. This collection is also available on microfilm (FHL # 1421979 - 1421987) at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, or can be ordered at any of its Family History Centers.

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