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The beginning and end of Nobel Lodge, No. 288, Moline, IL

A disappearing part of Swedish America

BY LILLY SETTERDAHL

Nobel Lodge No. 288 of Vasa Order of America was founded in Moline, Illinois, February 22, 1914, with 14 charter members. Due to a dwindling membership, the lodge held its last meeting 6 July 2017, and will merge with Bishop Hill Lodge, No. 683.

Of the seven members on record at the time of dissolution, only four attended all the meetings. They were Linda Lootens, chairman, Elayne Hogan, secretary, chaplain and auditor, Karen Heinzl, treasurer, and Lilly Setterdahl, MC, historian, and auditor. The other three members were Linnea Thompson and Mitch and Margaret Esken. Recently, we have met most often at restaurants or in a member's home.

Our members agreed that it was sad to dissolve our lodge, but our chairman Linda is moving to Ooltewah, Tennessee, in August, and we couldn't see a way to continue. Elayne Hogan, our eldest member, is 91 and has been a member of our lodge for 70 years. Through the years, she has faithfully attended meetings. She served as chaplain and auditor for many years and as our secretary from 4 Oct. 2012(?).

Since 2013, we have donated thousands of dollars to the Vasa Archives in Bishop Hill. The funds were used for a new vacuum cleaner, three display cases, and new toilets. At our last meeting, we finalized our donation of \$5,000 to the Vasa Archives Endowment Fund with a request that a donor plaque be made and displayed at the archives. After all the bills are paid, the balance in our account will go to Bishop Hill Lodge No. 683. We agreed to deposit our charter, regalia, and remaining records at the Vasa Archives.

We celebrated our 100th anniversary on 5 April 2014, at Community Christian Church, 4330 12th Avenue, Moline, with a *Smörgåsbord* and about 40 guests, including four district officers and several members of the Bishop Hill lodge. Rollie Kraus and Roger Anderson of Bishop Hill provided the entertainment by portraying

Ole and Lena, the much-beloved Scandinavian characters.

At our anniversary celebration, I related some of the history of our lodge that I had translated from the original minutes that were written in Swedish and deposited at the Vasa Archives in Bishop Hill, Illinois. Unfortunately, we are lacking minutes for long periods of time: 1960-1986; May 1990-May 2002; and 2011-2012. If found, they should be deposited at the Vasa Archives. An album with pictures from the convention in Moline in 1984, a list of names of people who have belonged to our lodge, and other material concerning the history of our lodge were on display.

Anniversary talk in 2014

"We all know that our lodge was named after Alfred Nobel. Toward the end of his life he divided his time between his summer residence in Karlskoga and his winter residence in Italy. He died in San Remo, Italy in 1896. The Nobel Prizes would have been established in Italy, if it had not been for the fact that Alfred Nobel stabled his horse in Karlskoga. At that time, a man's legal residence was the place where he kept his horse!

"When Nobel Lodge was founded one hundred years ago, the Swedish presence in America was at the largest it would ever be, which explains why it was easy to get members to join the new lodge.

"The first Swedes to settle in Moline arrived on foot from Chicago in 1847. The following year, another Swede arrived from Andover. Moline was still a small hamlet at the time.

"John Deere and his business partners began to make plows in Moline in the fall of 1848, and Deere actively recruited Swedish blacksmiths to his shop. In 1865, a Swede by the name of Andrew Freeberg established the Moline Plow Company and became a competitor of Deere. Many Swedes then preferred to work for him.

"In 1870, half of Moline's population

was Swedish. The language spoken on the streets and in the stores was often Swedish. As the population grew, the percentage of Swedes became smaller. To begin with, the Swedes lived in the area along the railroad, where the first Swedish churches were built. The history of Moline includes seven Swedish-American mayors, which is remarkable for a small town.

"One of the many organizations founded by Swedes was Nobel Lodge No. 288 of the Vasa Order of America. The lodge was organized on 22 February 1914. People walked to the meetings or rode streetcars. There were more horses than cars on the streets. The women wore long dresses and large hats.

"The first officers elected were Dr. E. A. Edlen, chairman; Axel Tholine, vice chairman; Gust D. Nordahl, treasurer; N. E. Munson, financial secretary; Mart Noreen, recording secretary; John Freed, vice recording secretary; C. A. Tholine, master of ceremonies; Axel Carlson, chaplain; Eric Walline, inner guard; Simon Ohlson, outer guard. (The names on the charter are illegible.)

"I have looked at the earliest minutes that are preserved at the Vasa Archives and found that 17 new members joined the lodge when the second meeting was held on 3 March. The lodge decided to order 500 applications. (Early membership records list the place of birth in Sweden. The records for hundreds of lodges have been microfilmed.) Nobel Lodge voted to exclude members who were saloonkeepers and bartenders. A counter proposition was made to also exclude everyone who had anything to do with the sale or making of intoxicating drink. However, John Freed said it was enough to exclude the saloonkeepers and bartenders. After a lengthy debate, his motion won approval with a large majority. The temperance movement was strong at the time. The consumption of hard liquor was much greater than it is

today, and it contributed to the Prohibition that began in January of 1920.

“On 14 April 27 new members joined the lodge. On 28 April, when the chairman was C. A. Tholine, 15 new members joined. On 12 May six new members were added. On 27 May, no less than 30 new members joined. Two monthly meetings were held.

“In June 1914, Hjalmar Widell was the chairman and Oscar Bjurstrom the secretary. Bjurstrom remained as the recording secretary for many years. So far, the lodge had only added members, but in August two women asked to withdraw for unstated reasons. The meeting was held in the Swedish Olive Building, and the Olive Chorus of Moline entertained.

“Early in 1915, Oscar Ring chaired the meetings. At that time, 55 members were stricken from the membership rolls because they owed dues for up to 15 months.

“In May of 1915, a lady’s sewing circle was formed. The next year, the sewing circle ladies declared that they would not act as the serving committee at the meetings any more. Instead, a special refreshment committee had to take care of the responsibility of serving hundreds of people. The rent was \$18.00 for the first quarter of the year.

“In February of 1916, the lodge decided to rent the “Red Men’s Hall” for the meetings. All the membership applications had been used up, and the lodge again decided to order 500 applications. John Freed served as chairman until 1917 when Hjalmar Widell was elected to take his place.

“In October 1917, when the U.S. had joined the war on the Allied side, it was reported that the inner guard, Brother John Nelson, had been drafted. Henry Carlson was elected to fill the post.

“In June 1918, the General Defense Committee requested that funds be collected for imprisoned fellow men. The lodge collected \$15.00.

“Oscar Bjurstrom still served as secretary in 1939. Sometime before 1947, Edwin Lundstrom assumed the role. Hedvig Jacobson was the secretary for ten years from 1948 until the end of 1959.

“Nobel Lodge hosted District Conventions in 1921, ‘28, ‘40, ‘49, and ‘55. In ‘76 and ‘84 our lodge cosponsored the convention together with the Bishop Hill lodge. Three former members of our lodge have served as district masters: Oscar Ring

in 1920, Rupert Kask in 1929, and Carl Cederblad in the 1990s. Sture Dahlstrom and Carl Cederblad were members of the Grand Lodge Executive Board.

“The dues in 1931 were between one dollar and \$1.50 a year. In 1935 (note that this was during the Great Depression), the lodge bought six acres of land located on the shore of Rock River and built Camp Nobel that opened in 1936. It was incorporated in ‘39 and an addition was built in 1940. The lodge had its headquarters at Camp Nobel until 1962 when the clubhouse was sold.

“A children’s club was formed in the 1940s, and the women started a drill team under the leadership of Sture Dahlstrom. The ladies’ sewing circle sold crafts at an annual fall festival and bazaar at the camp. In 1956, the sewing circle published a Vasa cookbook, containing 101 recipes. That same year, the lodge had 460 members and held winter meetings at the Swedish Olive Hall in Moline.

“In 2007, we changed our meeting place from Salem Lutheran Church to the Community Christian Church in Moline, the same year that we put together a simple cookbook. We have spent many hours going through our lodge records, and these

will be turned over to the Vasa Archives. I have copied 612 names from the membership books. The total number of people who have belonged to our lodge through the years is about 2,050.

“We remember and miss these departed officers from our recent past: Betty Thompson, Bill Nyquist, Silvia Maier, Beverly Maher, Florence Anderson, and Irene Sundberg.”

PS. Two more former officers have died since our anniversary, Stig Anderson on 28 Sep. 2014, and Clarice Johnson on 26 July 2016.

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Elayne Hogan, Lilly Setterdahl, Karen Heinzl (standing) and Linda Lootens, sitting in front.