

# Swedish Roots In Oregon

## *An Immigration Research Project*

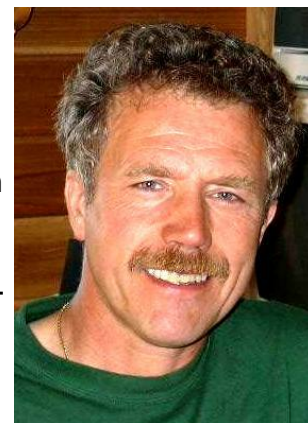
June 2010 Newsletter

Editor: Ingeborg Dean

Volume 21

### Message from the President, Lars Nordström

Spring is turning Oregon increasingly green and lush as I sit down to pen a few words about the recent activities of Swedish Roots in Oregon. It has been another year of change and transformation. The annual meeting in February saw the departure of President Barry Peterson, his member-at-large wife Laurel, and Secretary Leif Rosqvist. We have been very fortunate to have Barry Peterson at the helm through these busy years, and his list of accomplishments is long and impressive. Among many other things, Barry got our by-laws revised and updated, cleared up our slightly confused tax status with the IRS, assisted numerous individuals with genealogical inquiries and vigorously assisted in fundraising for the book *Swedish Oregon*. As a token of our appreciation, a motion was made to make Barry Peterson "President Emeritus of SRIO," and it carried unanimously. To the extent he can, Barry will remain in touch with SRIO. We would also like to thank Laurel for her steady and consistent support through all these years, and Leif Rosqvist for the fantastic marketing job he did for *Swedish Oregon*, for taking our old *Newsletter* online in a much more engaging format with illustrations and color, and for producing a number of wonderful articles about Swedish immigrants and activities for our website and Newsletter alike. These stories have become a recurring favorite among our website visitors.



To all three of you – *tack så mycket!*

Still, even though we lost three board members, we were fortunate to simultaneously gain two new replacements. Ingeborg Dean, a native of Borlänge in the province of Dalarna, has taken over as our new Secretary, and Jim Jandacek, is a new member-at-large. So the work of Swedish Roots in Oregon continues with renewed energy and enthusiasm. We are still looking for a new genealogist to work with SRIO, and welcome any suggestions or volunteers.

2010 has already seen several SRIO presentations around the state, including one at the opening of the long-awaited "Swedish Immigrant Exhibit" at the Tigard Public Library in early May, and SRIO will be present both at this year's Scandinavian Midsummer celebrations in Portland on June 26 – 27, as well at the NW Book Festival at the Pioneer Courthouse Square in Portland on August 7<sup>th</sup>. Please check our website for upcoming presentations and events.

Speaking of the SRIO website—traffic keeps increasing and we obviously have a steadily growing group of fans in both Sweden and the United States. It is not unusual to have 100 visitors come to the website every day to read and look at pictures, and it is truly inspiring to see this interest for all things Swedish in the state of Oregon.

Now that SRIO has successfully published *Swedish Oregon*, what about the future? What are our long-term plans? Since we are an educational, non-profit research organization, our primary mission remains to make the history of the Swedes in Oregon better known. And this can certainly be done in a number of ways, such as genealogy, publishing, lecturing and participating in public events. We also hope that many more libraries in Portland and around the state will be willing to host our library exhibit. When I give presentations on this subject, people sometimes ask me: “So, are you going to publish another book?” My answer is always the same: “Well, if we had a few more members on the board, and a larger budget, we would already have published another book!” Working as volunteers, with a limited budget in a difficult economic environment, things can only move so fast. But the answer is definitely yes, we have ideas for several new books. We would like to look into the experience of recent Swedish immigrants to the Pacific Northwest; show the life of the Swedish loggers in the Pacific Northwest a century ago; compile stories of Swedes during the era of the Great Migration (1850 – 1930) who returned to Sweden to visit or settle; and try to bring some of the forgotten work of Swedish artist Olof Grafström, who lived in Portland in the 1880s, back to life. In other words, there is no shortage of ideas.

Please keep in touch, and have a very *Trevlig sommar!*

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## SRIO needs your help!

The mission of Swedish Roots in Oregon is to research, preserve and document the history of the Swedes in the state of Oregon. Basically we are interested in material from any period since statehood. We are especially interested in ethnographical materials, that is to say, such things as historical photographs, diaries and letters. We are also interested in any kind of printed material—books, magazines, newspapers, old events programs, and so on. If your family has preserved material of this kind, and you would like to share it, we want to hear from you. We can't do it without you!

This is a story in remembrance of a Swedish immigrant soldier's life that ended in the battle at Meuse-Argonne, France.



Immigrants

*Prelude...*

*On a volè la rose,  
La rose de Picardie,  
La fleur de Brocèliande,  
La rose de legende.  
On a volè la rose,  
Notre meilleure amie.*

Music Haydn Wood (1882-1959), popular song “Roses of Picardie”, sung by the soldiers in France and Flanders during WWI.

I am Ingeborg Dean of Portland, Oregon and this is the story about my great uncle Klas Edward Nygren from Årby, Dalarna. He was one of the unfortunate 14,000 soldiers that died in the dreadful killing fields at Meuse-Argonne in 1918.

*The story...*

On November 22, 1918, a telegram was received by my great aunt, Alma (Nygren) Janisch in Portland, Oregon. It informed her that her brother Klas Edward Nygren, had been killed in France on September 29 of that year.

In my family, the life of great uncle Klas was always described in just a sentence or two: “Uncle Klas emigrated to America, was called up (drafted) for WWI and was killed right away.” As a child, I would look at his picture, intrigued.

I remember my father telling me that aunt Alma left for America and settled in Portland, Oregon, and that her husband was an immigrant from Bohemia. However I had no record of her last name to help me trace her family here in the USA. Then some months ago I found a copy of a letter that Alma wrote in 1919 to her mother and brother Johan (my paternal grandfather) in Sweden and it was signed Alma Janisch! This meant that I could now begin to look for possible relatives here in Portland. It also enabled me to get a fuller picture of my great uncle Klas Nygren. There was a copy of a letter from him as well, written in Portland on September 1, 1917.

Klas Nygren was born in Årby in Dalarna, Sweden on March 18, 1887, and emigrated to America in 1910. His destination was Worcester, Massachusetts, where he had a brother. In late 1917 he arrived in Portland, Oregon, to visit with his sister, who had left Sweden in 1896. Perhaps for some months Klas went to work in the Janisch family dyeing and cleaning business on NE Knott Street. He writes touchingly about seeing his sister after 21 years, about their tears and joy and sharing news and memories.



Klas E. Nygren

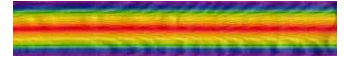
At some point Klas, then 30 years old and unmarried, was called up (drafted) as the U.S. entered WWI. He joined the 361 Infantry Regiment, 91st Division also called the “Wild West” Division as a private from the state of Massachusetts. On August 22, 1918, he writes in a letter to his sister of having drills practically day and night. Alma had a feeling that he had not yet gone off to war.



Fort Lewis in 1917



91st Division Arm Insignia



Campaign Streamer  
Meuse-Argonne

The 91st Division was activated in 1917, under Major General H. A. Greene, mainly by young men from Oregon and Washington. The division was stationed at Fort Lewis in Washington State. The 361 Infantry regiment entered into the battle zone in late 1918, and to illustrate the carnage that took place, the 91st Division lost 3,000 soldiers, 8 field and 125 company officers during four (4) days of battle before they regrouped.

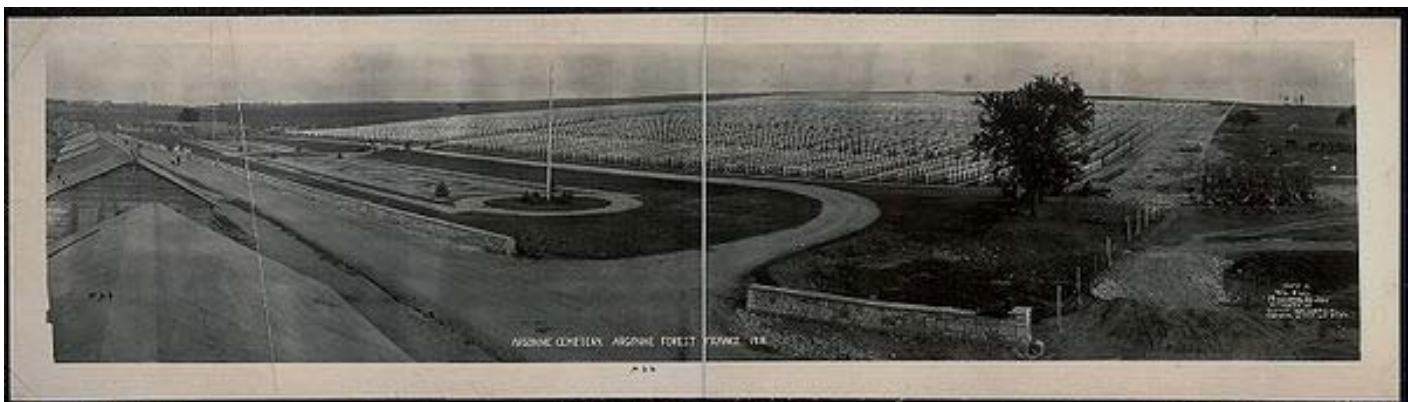


Advance in  
Meuse -Argonne

Three months later his sister Alma received a telegram from the U.S. Army with the devastating news of Klas' death in the battlefield. Her subsequent letter to Sweden ends: "You ask how Klas felt when he left me for the last time. Well, he came to see me on June 22, in the morning and said", "Alma, I have come to see you one more time. I don't think we will see each other again. I am leaving for France." Alma wrote that she never forgot his words." Klas thought about how this news would affect his mother. "Poor mamma when she finds out where I am!" He knew how difficult it would be for her.

Alma's letter includes a lengthy discussion of how to deal with the expected monetary compensation that Klas had intended for his mother to receive in case of his death. The disbursement by the U.S. Army was \$64.90!

Alma told her family in Sweden that she decided not to have her brother's remains returned for burial in Portland. "People tell me not to do it, since we can't see him and so can't be sure it's really Klas." The French government assured her that his grave would be well taken care of, where it is located and she sent this information to her brother in Worcester.



Nygren, PVT Claus E. 9233793 Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery  
b. unknown d. Sep. 29, 1918 (captured from cemetery database over buried soldiers)

91 years later....I am in Beauvais, France, and today I visited my great uncle's grave, the first member of his family to do so and an occasion of great meaning to me! After almost a century Klas Nygren is no longer just a name and date of death on a cross in the vast American cemetery in Romagne, France.



American cemetery in Romagne

Family was there, moved by the unbearable and wasteful loss of life and of 14,245 others, most of them died in the unimaginable horrific battle of Meuse-Argonne, September 25 to November 11, 1918. The grave markers fill some 100 acres near where they fought and died. Now large beech trees and well kept grassy walks separate eight plots, lettered A to H. Uncle Klas lies in plot H, row 34, grave 30.



Nygren, PVT Claus E.

There is a memorial; chapel, a "Wall of Remembrance" with the names of the missing, and a fountain, dignified and serene surroundings for those who perished, among them my uncle Klas, who emigrated to America, no doubt with dreams of a better future. Instead he had to go to war for his chosen country and, tragically, lost his life. As I search for his grave I noticed the names of many other young Swedes, who shared his fate.

*Epilog...*

In times like today, when we are living our busy lives, it's very important that we don't forget the lost loved ones, and don't allow their names, like Klas E. Nygren's, to fade into the shadows of lost memories.

**Vid vägens slut** (Verner von Heidenstam)  
*Vis, o människa, det blir du först,  
när du hinner till de aftonsvala  
höjders topp, där jorden överskådas.  
Konung, vänd dig om vid vägens slut,  
vila där en stund och se tillbaka!  
Allt förklaras där och allt försonas,  
och din ungdoms riken hägra åter,  
strödda än med ljus och morgondagg.*



Story written by Leif Rosqvist, the editor of New Sweden Heritage Society and SRIO newsletters. The story is based on information by the family here represented by Ingeborg Dean.

More reading:

Full text of "[Meuse-Argonne battle \(Sept. 26 - Nov. 11, 1918\)](#)", go to Google and type in the text.

American Cemetery Meuse-Argonne in Romagne, go to Google and type in text under search

Fort Lewis and 91st Division, 361 Infantry Regiment, go to Google and type in text under search

Verner von Heidenstam, go to Google and type in text under search



## SRIO Event at the Tigard Public Library

A month-long celebration of the Swedish presence in Oregon was opened with a reception of May 7, 2010 at the Tigard Public Library. More than sixty people gathered for a lecture by Dr. Lars Nordstrom on Swedish immigration to North America with particular emphasis on settlement in the Northwest. An interesting question and answer session followed. Event participants enjoyed traditional Swedish refreshments while sharing life stories of their immigrant ancestors.

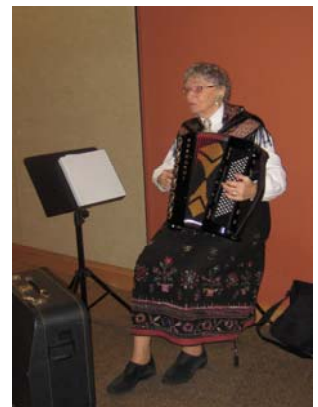
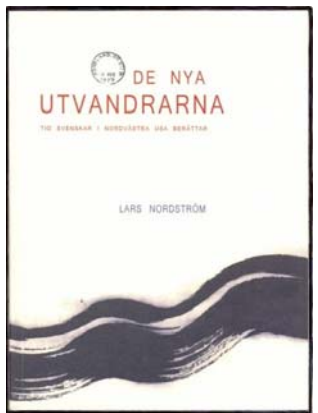
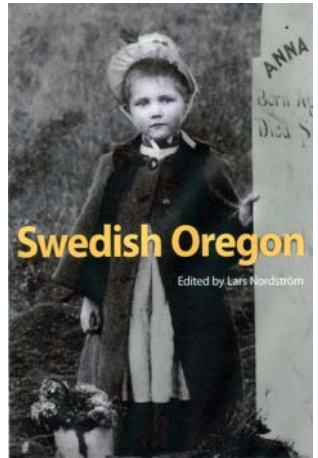
Mrs. Doreen Dwigans with her accordion filled the room with melodies that those settlers would have recognized. It was a most enjoyable evening.

Along with the May 7 festivities, Swedish immigrant life was further illustrated with an exhibit in the library lobby. Entitled "Past to Present", this exhibit contained items for everyday living brought here by the early settlers, a 1912 issue of the Swedish newspaper, Oregon Posten, as well as pictures and sheet music pointing to the love and importance of singing in Swedish immigrant life. There were also items highlighting lodge activities and the decades of celebrating Lucia and Midsommar which, it was pointed out, continue to this day. The Swedish school and its summer language camp, Trollbacken, were also presented as were the many activities of the New Sweden Cultural Heritage Society. The book, "Swedish Oregon", published by SRIO and Lars Nordstrom's "De nya utvandrarerna" (The New Emigrants) were also part of the exhibit.

SRIO is looking forward to continuing its celebration of Swedish immigrant life in Oregon with exhibits and events at other area libraries.

Check our web site [www.swedishrootsinoregon.org](http://www.swedishrootsinoregon.org), where you are able to find publication, books and immigration stories.

You are also welcome to contact us if you have questions about immigration, schedules etc.



## Future SRIO Event

SRIO will participate in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual NW Book Festival which will be held at Pioneer Courthouse Square on Saturday, August 7, 2010. This will be an opportunity for festival visitors to learn about SRIO's work and to purchase its publications, in particular the very well received "Swedish Oregon".

SRIO will also participate in the SHF 82nd Annual Midsummer Festival Saturday, June 26, 2010, at the German American Cultural Center 7901 SE Division.

Check our web site [www.swedishrootsinoregon.org](http://www.swedishrootsinoregon.org) for more information

