

Swedish Roots in Oregon

An Immigration Research Project



June 2013 Newsletter

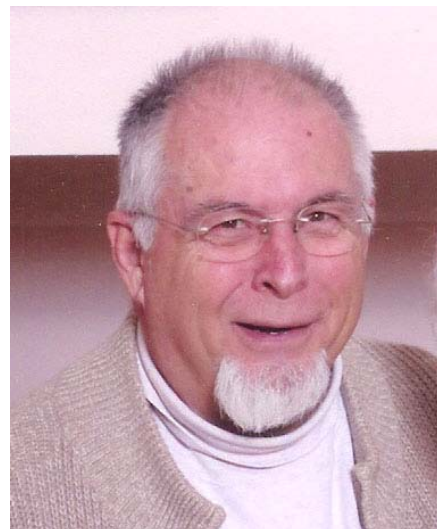
Editor: Leif Rosqvist

Volume 26

Message from your President - Barry Petersen, Vice President.

As this issue is going to print, we find President Lars Nordström nearing an end to an approximate six-month break from his duties here at SRIO. Lars has done some traveling and some spring farming. He finds it right to take a break from his duties as President for a little bit longer. That doesn't mean that we have not continued to work as we are approaching late spring and warmer weather.

We are now entering the phase of bringing our data base to the electronic age, but we have boxes of information so it may take a little while to fully complete this job. Right now there are some data at the SWEAME (Swedish America Heritage Online) website. Just click on SWEAME Genealogy database - Oregon, also shown as www.sweame.org to bring up these early data. Gunilla Rhodin is currently working with those files with assistance from Ann Stuller. Our effort got a major boost because of a grant from the Barbro Osher Pro-Suecia Foundation.



We continue to receive inquiries about Swedes who lived in Oregon. Fortunately, we only seem to receive a couple per month. If there are folks in the Portland area who like to work on such issues as where did "Waldo/Waldemar" actually live in Portland in the 1930s, we would like to have your help in this activity.

In the area of Oral Histories, Ingeborg Dean has continued to lead and accumulate interesting stories of Swedish immigrants to our area. This area is rich with stories of the travels and lives of immigrants. Ingeborg is working on the oral history of Erik and Karin Thorin and Arne Lindström will be interviewed soon. Ann Stuller wrote her own story. We note that Lillian Johnson's story and her collection of memorabilia from the Swedish Society Linnea spanning the years 1880-1960s needs to be organized and preserved, preferably digitally. Look for a few samples of the oral histories on our website, soon.

Our little research organization still lives and, we think, thrives right now. We continue to pursue this history of Swedes in the Northwest.

If you would like to participate and be active in our organization, please let us know.

See more about us on our website: www.swedishrootsinoregon.org

SRIO will be at Oaks Park Midsummer Event - by Ingeborg Dean

We will participate in the 85th annual Midsummer Event celebration hosted by the Scandinavian Heritage Foundation at Oaks Park. We will have our traditional items there; the large Swedish map for visitors to locate place of origin, books and booklets for sale, as well as many discussions about Swedish traditions.

The event will take place on June 15, 2013, at 11:00am with Midsummer Pole raising at 1:00pm.



SRIO at New Sweden Antique & Garage Sales

During a couple of very warm and sunny days, May 10 and 11, at Fogelbo, we participated in the New Sweden antique & garage sales. This is important as it was our first showing at this kind of an event and we received good interest in our activities. We sold several books and booklets, but the most important obtaining visibility among all the Swedes attending the show.



Logging history in Oregon

With the coming of the First World War, the state's shipyard industry and timber trades continued to expand rapidly again, especially in Portland. In the 1930s and on, many of us had relatives or friends working in the lumber industry. SRIO is trying to capture this important logging period by documenting experiences, people and events that has been so important for the state. If you have stories, photos and other experiences related to this logging period we would like to know and to talk about documenting these in a potential book about Oregon Logging experience. Please contact us and let us know what you are able to contribute with. Take a look at the books on our website to give a framework for what we want to do.



Centenarian Swedish Immigrant shares her memories of a long and wonderful life!

Have you ever met, looked into the eyes, or listen to a Century (100 years) old person...?

In Portland, we just celebrated such a 100-year old lady who possesses a lot of grace, wit and warmth, at the Senior center in the Hollywood district in Portland. For many of us younger people (average age about 70) it was an unique experience to sit down and meet a lady who has seen a complete century pass by, and who sees all the beauty the life could give if you just look for it. Her name is Christina Merryman of Portland, and she shared her memories from her long life with us, as documented by Ingeborg Dean of Swedish Roots in Oregon (SRIO).



I, Christina, was born in Norrköping on April 25, 1913, and, considering that I weighed less than four lbs at birth and was given an emergency christening at church, I suppose it is a miracle that I am still here. My “mormor” kept me alive, feeding me until I was almost square. My father, Valdemar Eriksson, died of TB when I was only three, so I have no memories of him. Ten years later my mother, Edit, married my step-father, a very nice man. I was born in what was then known as “fattigsverige” (poverty Sweden) or “lortsverige” (dirty Sweden). Nevertheless, I was given a good education. After “realskolan” (high school), I attended business school for three years of very difficult work. I graduated from there just as the depression hit, and times turned extremely hard. We lived on potatoes and gravy or whatever my mother could come up with. Vegetables were a rare sight on our table, and I remember having stale bread soaked in so called “war time coffee”, made of rye and even dandelions. Getting an office job was, of course, next to impossible. Even people with doctorates were sweeping floors, just to get a foot in. After knocking on every office door we could find, my friend and I took sewing jobs and learned tailoring. This way we managed to stay alive.

After the depression, I worked for ten years as head bookkeeper at Svenska Turbinaktiebolaget Ljungström in Finspång, a large company still in existence, but under another name. In my time they made cooling systems for large ships. The company owned practically half the city. One thing I had to do was to transport salaries, all in cash at that time, across the city in a wooden box, and I was given a revolver for protection. I had no clue as to how to use it and luckily never needed to find out. I lived in a company building that also housed some engineers, to whom I became a sort of “mamma” (mother). They would come to me when they needed a button sewn on or someone to listen to their lovelorn tales. We liked to play tricks on each other. One very cold night they took my winter coat and put it on a statue in the park, and I reciprocated by nailing their galoshes to the floor. I enjoyed working at this company very much.

After my years as a bookkeeper, I began to think about seeing the world and since I had two uncles in Portland, OR. as well as my grandmother's sister, I decided to come here. One problem with leaving Sweden at that particular time was that I had just bought a fur coat and it bothered me to think that I wouldn't need it in America, because it wouldn't be cold enough for it. But I left Sweden, (the fur coat I later gave to my sister-in-law) and while in Portland I worked at Weimer's downtown as an alteration seamstress, a job I did not enjoy at all. Before returning to Sweden, when my two years were up, I applied at the post office for a re-entry permit, should I decide to come back.

After two years away, I did return to America, this time with everything I owned. My future husband, Harold, whom I had gotten to know in Portland, met me in N.Y., and with me in a complete daze, we were married soon afterwards in Buffalo, the minister almost drowning in my tears of uncertainty. However, Harold turned out to be the very best human being I have ever known, and since his death at age 80 in 1994, I have missed him constantly.

We travelled across the country in Harold's new car, a trip that, because my life had changed so suddenly and completely, and the fact that I couldn't stop crying, is a blank page in my mind. Once in Oregon, we settled in Eugene, where we bought a house and filled it with my possessions, brought to Portland on the ship's maiden trip to the north-west. It took me a long time to get used to living in Eugene, but after we fixed up the house to our liking, we enjoyed the city. During those years I was never involved with any Scandinavians, except for joining Vasa to get a cheap trip to Sweden with three other women. I have been a member ever since, paying my dues that I think initially were \$5.

In 1972 we reluctantly moved to Portland and bought the house I am still in. It turned out to have a room that would fit the blue Karastan carpet I had just bought! Our early time here was miserable. Harold didn't like our house, nor his job, but we were near retirement age at that point, and eventually we came to enjoy our life here. I began to work as a seamstress in the design department at a Pendleton Woolens branch in the city. During my two years in Sweden, I had attended the prestigious "Svenska Tillskärarakademin" (Swedish Tailoring Company) and had had plans to open a little studio of my own. When Harold and I settled in Portland, I was not at first aware of the Scandinavian community here, other than a Swedish store at Lloyd Center that later folded. Now I have been an active member of many Swedish organizations for a long time.

The national dress I like to wear to Swedish celebrations here is at least one hundred and fifty years old. I believe it belonged to my great-grandmother and is from the village of Boda in Dalarna. I found it in an attic, when I visited Sweden a long time ago and was told it had been there for decades. Wearing a national costume was completely out of fashion at the time, and mine was going to be thrown out. I took it, thinking I could use it for the occasional costume party we liked to attend here. It never entered my mind that I was ever going to wear it in public!

I am an American citizen and have been for a very long time. I did it for Harold's sake.

He was employed by the state, and I thought he should have a wife, who was an American citizen, but it was also important for me to be able to vote in this country. I have also since regained my Swedish citizenship.

My husband went to Sweden with me only once, and, to tell the truth, I don't think he enjoyed it.

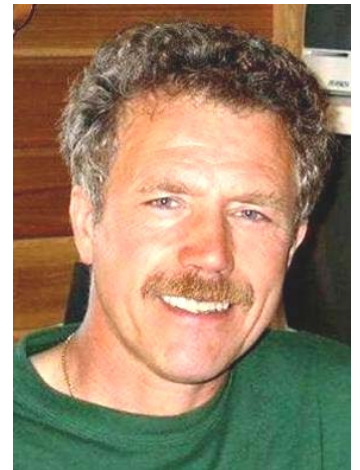
Keeping up my Swedish has never been a problem. I have kept writing letters to friends, among them my friend Mary from all those years ago in business school. In fact, I still find it easier to write in my native tongue, but I know that in our Swedish-speaking women's group, I am a sinner, throwing in an English word here and there without really noticing.

Christina received congratulations cards from President Obama, Governor John Kitzhaber and Portland Mayor Charlie Hales.

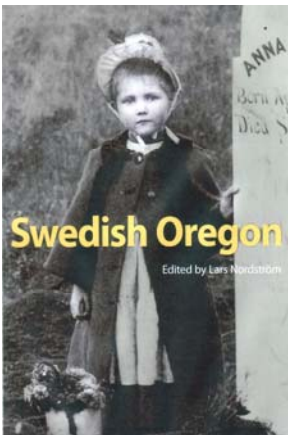


SRIO Lecture in Sweden - by Lars Nordström

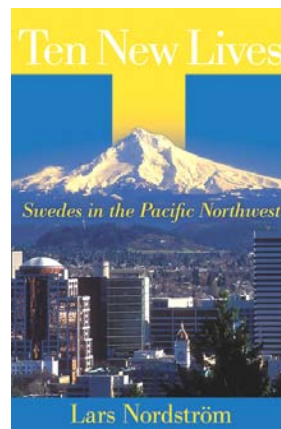
On February 27, SRIO President Lars Nordström gave a talk entitled "The Swedes of Oregon" at Sverige-Amerika Centret in Karlstad, Sweden. He showed a number of historical slides and spoke about the reasons why Oregon was settled so late in US history, and about the large influx of Swedes to the Pacific Northwest in the early years (from the 1880s to WW II). SRIO would like to thank SAC for actively supporting the dissemination of our ongoing historical research!



Find out about SRIO books for sale at our web-site : www.swedishrootsinoregon.org



Swedish Oregon \$ 20
The story about Swedish immigration to Oregon



Ten New Lives, \$15
Our Latest Book. The story of 10 Swedish Immigrants in current times.

Combo offer: Buy both for \$30

And when you are considering to purchase our books, please remember that SRIO is a 501 (C) (3) non-profit corporation able to accept tax free donations, that significantly will help our organization.

Oregon Swedes in 1911 - by Lars Nordström

Those of you who visit the SRIO website regularly know that we completed translating the 98 thumbnail biographies from Ernst Skarstedt's hard-to-find book *Oregon och dess svenska befolkning* a few years ago. The biographies of these Swedish immigrants were originally published with over a hundred black and white photographs, and it was always the goal of SRIO to add them where they belonged. But finding the time to do it proved difficult. In January this year, however, Lars Nordström and Herje Wikegård finally decided to team up and complete the project.

Skarstedt's book is, in so many ways, an anomaly. It was self-published and did not have access to organized book distribution. It was written in Swedish, even though it must have been clear to everyone that the children of the first generation immigrants had already made the leap to English. Furthermore, this volume was conceived of as a chronicling of the Swedish-American community in the Far West, since it was part of a trilogy that also included *Swedes in California and Washington*—which meant a somewhat limited audience. Beyond that, its main purpose was probably to promote Swedish immigration to the state by projecting—more or less consciously—the prosperity and success of a large, vibrant Swedish Oregon community. Attracting Swedes to Oregon was confined to countrymen already residing in North America, because very few books ever seemed to have reached Sweden, where the book is completely unknown and only a few copies survive in special library collections.

Today, a hundred years later, the photographs accompanying the immigrant biographies add up to a fascinating portrait of an ethnic group in a particular time and place. They tell an interesting story. First of all, almost all the portraits depict men. When we look at them we get a sense of the fashion at the time—from hair styles to coat lapels, ties, collars, hats, and glasses. We quickly notice that it was an era when the moustache reigned supreme—whether small, large, dark, blond, thick, thin, wide, narrow, drooping, waxed or un-waxed, twisted or pointed. It was a time when the bow tie was popular and portraits were expected to convey gravity and determination. A few family photographs include wife and children, and by today's standards many families seem large. The photographs also make clear that most of these Swedes were city dwellers, and that the majority of them lived in Portland.



Prof. J. A. Bexell.



Charles Rudeens köttbutik.