

1990

The Story of John Fryxell

Fritiof Fryxell

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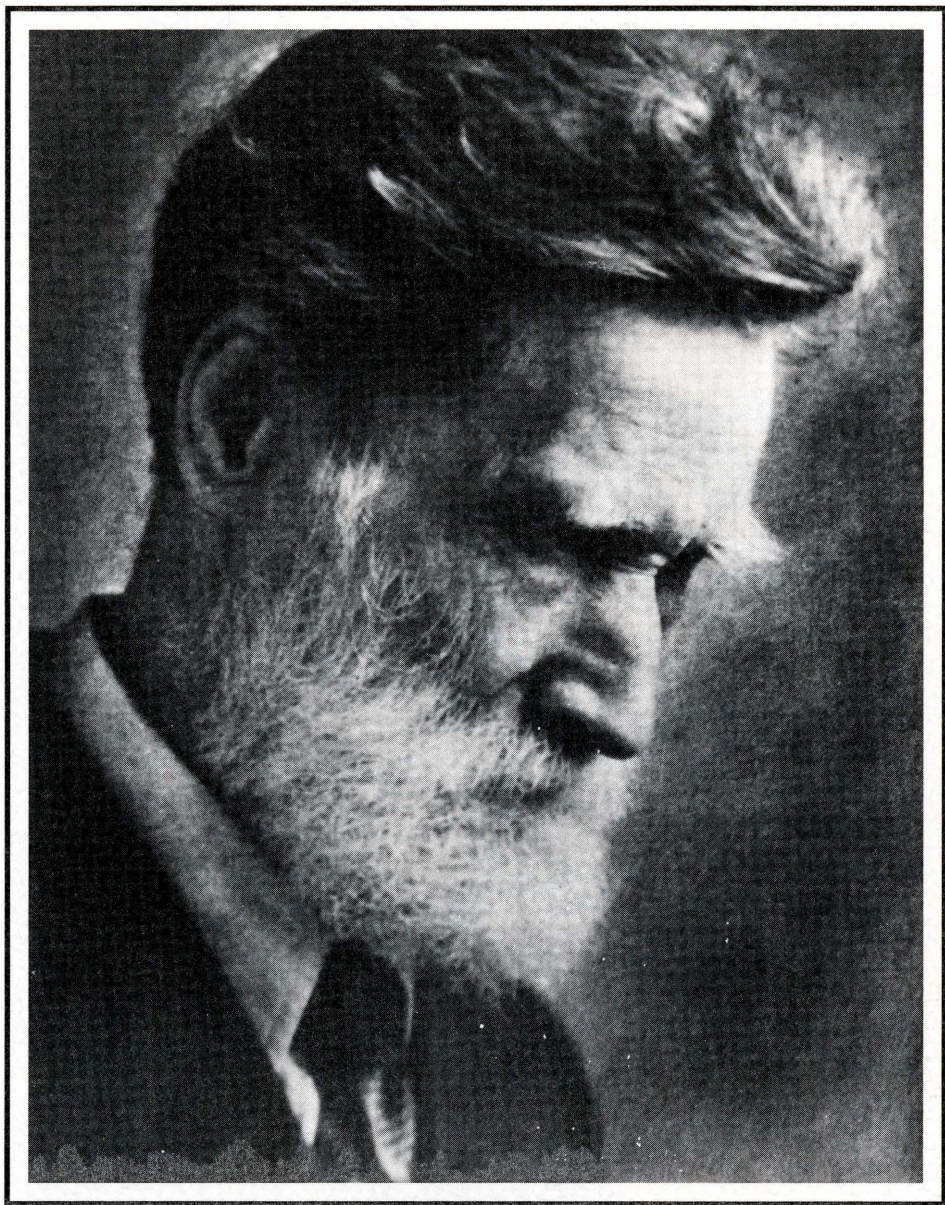


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John Fryxell



The Story of John Fryxell

THE STORY OF JOHN FRYXELL

Fritiof M. Fryxell

Rock Island, Illinois
Augustana Historical
Society
1990

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EDITORS' NOTE

Preparation of this book for publication was originally undertaken at the direction of the Augustana Historical Society, of which Dr. Fritiof Fryxell was a charter member, to honor his memory and his zealous interest in the Society. Though he felt the manuscript was not entirely completed—that is, he hadn't applied those meticulous finishing touches which characterized his work throughout his life—we believe that *The Story of John Fryxell* is strongly and compellingly told. And we believe no more loving tribute could remind us of Dr. Fryxell's background, interests, and talents than this portrait of his father, which appears on the ninetieth anniversary of Dr. Fryxell's own birth.

We would like to thank the following people who contributed to the publication of this book: Esther Albrecht for typing the original manuscript; George Olson and Joan Flynn for artwork and design; J. Rodney Fryxell and David W. K. Fryxell for supplying family photographs; Paige Mushinsky for preparing the manuscript to be printed, and the Augustana Historical Society for underwriting the project.

Ann Boaden
Paul Fryxell

April 1990

INTRODUCTION

I do not know precisely how to describe this little book. At first glance it would seem to be an autobiographical sketch, for it is the story of my father's life, told in first person and almost exactly in his own words. Yet my father never wrote a book—indeed, wrote little of anything—was not aware that this book was being written, and, in all probability, would have scouted any suggestion that his life be made a matter of record. For he loved, indeed, almost revered books. To him, books were for important things, for educating, for describing events of moment, not for the trifling recollections of one unimportant Swedish-American immigrant. So I think my father's reasoning would have run.

Yet the book is his. It is his information (though he supplied it to me unwittingly), his expression; most of all, it is his character and vitality. I was sort of amanuensis, without father's knowledge. The book gradually took shape over a period of twenty-five years. Then it lay in my files for another twenty years. From time to time over those years, I showed the manuscript to family and friends; it is at their urging that John Fryxell's story undergoes metamorphosis from manuscript to book.

The story is one from the short and simple annals of the poor. What reason, then, for printing it? Perhaps the question can best be answered if I give my reasons for writing it.

As I have said, my father emigrated from Sweden; and when I was a boy, listening to him and his brother, my uncle, talk (in Swedish, of course) about the long trip they had made and why they had come to America, the event seemed to my childish mind one of epochal significance. And indeed it was. Their ancestors had lived, generation after generation, on northern soil; and these three brothers and their sister had broken with the past, uprooted themselves, and gone to a far-off land, there to establish new homes, in a strange environment, there to begin an entirely different way of life. Epochal indeed! Listening to those Sunday afternoon conversations, I was profoundly moved by the drama of it all. And because I wanted to have the principal facts down in black and white, so that they might be pondered and not lost, I jotted them down—persons, places, dates. I made these notations when I was in my teens, with no other thought than to compile an accurate record of the story that stirred and moved me.

Many years later, when I was in my early thirties, married and returned from university to make my home with my parents, I found my interest in these early jottings rekindled, and I expanded

them, adding information of special significance to me. And now I had more urgent reason for wanting to record the facts of my father's life. He and his surviving brother were old men, and their conversations were, to me, a tale whose telling would soon be finished. Nevertheless, even my enlarged records still comprised only a few pages of notes.

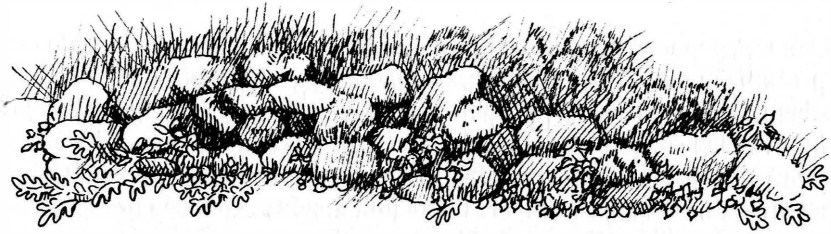
Then in 1934 my mother, 69, sickened and in a few days, died. In the words of a friend, "After mother goes, life can never be quite the same." To our little son, a child in arms, we said, "Grandma is sleeping now," and he looked at her soberly but accepted our explanation without question. For us, it was not so easy. My father, ten years older than mother, had never expected to outlive her, and seemed beyond comfort. Since my work necessitated that I move to Berkeley, California, for a year, we brought father with us. The change—and the chance to revisit San Francisco, after more than fifty years, and to discover Yosemite, the Big Trees, and a host of other new places—proved to be the best possible means of healing and adjustment for him.

It was then, when his bereavement was fresh, that I endeavored to divert him from grief with questions about his life, and writing down his answers as exactly as I could. That I made memoranda, escaped him; he was nearly blind, for one thing, and also, once absorbed in his recollections, he gave little heed to what I was doing. This time I sought a different goal from simply accumulating facts. I wanted not only more dates, places, and names, but information I could weave into a connected story—for the little boys in our household, whom "grandpa" adored—and who in turn became their willing slave. The facts were recorded, and the chapters written while my materials were fresh in mind, so that even manner of speech and idiom were retained, though accent, alas, eluded me.

The story of my father, as I then saw it—and see it now—was worthy of preservation in a wider sphere than I had first imagined. Those who come after, his own family and others, should have the chance to know that story as I had known it, to feel its poignance and drama. And they should have a chance, also, to know my father. He was a type fast vanishing, lacking formal education but curious, courageous, and persevering, with a strength of spirit that must stir and inspire.

Perhaps the best description of this record is: the book of John Fryxell.

Fritiof M. Fryxell
with Ann Boaden



MY PEOPLE

As far back as I have any knowledge, my ancestors all lived within a radius of fifteen English miles¹ of my own home.

My father's people all lived on Lake Vänern, near Forshem. The first of whom I know anything definite is my grandfather, Sven Andersson, who was born at Forshem in 1782. Though a farmer he had also practiced the shoemaker's trade, and in later years he burned and sold charcoal. He was married twice, but I do not recall the names of his wives. He had six children, all by the first wife. Father, Magnus Svenson, was the youngest of these. Grandfather was an unusually small man, but there was nothing wrong with his health as he was never really sick until the time of his death, when he was past 96. All through his long life grandfather got along without doing much work! He had a farm but never did much to it, letting it go to weeds. Like the rest of the people in this district, at the time, he was very superstitious—superstitious beyond your comprehension. Never would he undertake anything except under the right signs! I do not know if he could ever read; his sight was very poor when I knew him, and at that time there were no glasses for the old. He was an intelligent man, and if he had any education he would have accomplished more than he did. Of his six children all but father and Anna lived to be more than 90, one over 98.

Grandmother died when father was only twelve,² so I know nothing about her.

Father, a "torpare," was born at Tistelgården, Lugnås, Oct. 12, 1820. As a torpare he was required to work four days a week at the Gullhammar estate in order to keep his own holding of land. Father was a carpenter and a pretty good one, doing house building, making sleds and baskets, and so on. As a basket maker he was an expert, turning out all sizes and styles of baskets for use on the farms. This he did during the long winter evenings. Father never

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had a day's schooling, but being unusually intelligent he picked up much valuable knowledge. In his work he was honest and reliable, though rather clumsy and slow. His health was poor, and often he was laid up. I think it was simply that he had to work too hard and stand too much exposure in all kinds of weather. Like grandfather he was superstitious until in later years, when we boys got some of that out of him (none of us boys were at all inclined this way, perhaps because we began to read and therefore think while still very young). I remember that he believed in "trolldom," and at Easter he put crosses on all the doors and took everything loose into the house, so that the Easter witches would not get them. He was religiously inclined but his religion was much mixed with such superstition.

In stature father was rather lightly built, with sloping shoulders. His hair was dark brown, his beard fiery red. He shaved around his mouth but left his beard full. In temperament he was hot-headed, and inclined to argue.

My grandfather on mother's side was Johannes, who went by the name "skrädarn i gatan."³ I am not sure of his surname but think it was Andersson.⁴ He was born in 1799 [actually Dec. 15, 1798] on a torp named Sockerbo, Lilla Bjurum, in Vättilösa Socken. Here his father in turn had been a torpare. I saw grandfather only once or twice, and that before I was four years old, but I know a good deal about his character and reputation. He was remarkable in this, that by self-study (for there were no schools available in his time) he had made himself really educated, and people came to him for help in many connections, such as for inventories and auctions, legal questions, and so forth. He was the local "wise man." Confidence in him was general, in disposition he was likable, and people naturally turned to him when in difficulties. He died when between 50 and 60,⁵ of dysentery which swept away thousands. He bought himself a good-sized farm, but the land was bouldery and timber-covered, and therefore not valuable. On this farm he built a house which stands to this day.

My grandmother on my mother's side was named Anna and she was born in January, 1799⁶ at Timmersdala, twelve English miles north of where I was born. I remember her well—a short, stout woman, quarrelsome. I was six when, still quite young, she died of dropsy (on March 14, 1861).

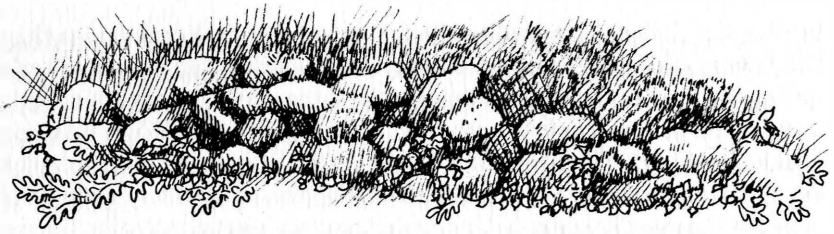
There were five children in the family of my maternal grandparents, four sons and one daughter, my mother. One son died in childhood; another when twenty, of tuberculosis; the other two lived to be past 85. Uncle Charley died here in Moline, and Uncle Gustav (Adolph Gustafson's father) died in Sweden. My mother and her two

brothers all learned the tailor's trade from their father; besides that they were, of course, farmers. Uncle Gustav inherited grandfather's ability, and carried out the same sort of interests after grandfather's death. However, later he became unfit and eventually blind from too much drinking. He also had grandfather's library. It was meager enough but all one could get in those days, and as boys we made good use of it. Uncle Charley was a kind, slow man—emphatically Christian. In Sweden he belonged to the state church; in Moline he was a Methodist. For many years he worked for the Moline Street Department, and for four years he was its superintendent.

Mother's name was Britta Maja. She was born Sept. 20, 1821, in a place called Paradishagen (Planterahagen) in Vättlösa Socken, and she lived to be 54 years of age. She was a small wiry woman, light in build but strong—like me. Her complexion was dark, her hair black, her eyes small and deep-set. She worked for two, and had to—poverty-stricken, with children on every side. She was not slow! She was quick-tempered but generous at heart, and she sacrificed herself for her children.

Father and mother became acquainted through having worked on adjoining farms. They were married in 1841, when father was 21 and mother 20.

When grandfather died, his farm was divided into three parts and the children drew lots for them. Uncle Charley got the south one, with the house on it; Uncle Gustav got the center one; mother got the one to the northeast which, though largest, was poorest. It included perhaps twelve acres. Father had to clear it of forest and stone, and out of the trees that he cut he built a house and barn. But the children also divided the debt on the old farm, and this eventually caused all three to lose their places. There were several periods of hard times. Perhaps the worst came when I was about eight. Then crops failed all over Sweden, and wheat imported from Russia was sold at almost prohibitive prices. When I was twelve my parents sold their place. It is now owned by the daughter of the man who bought it from father. Her name is Ida Fröjd, and she is married to a man named Svenson. Both are still living, and I visited them when I went to Sweden a few years ago. Father sold the farm for eight hundred crowns (about \$150), which was almost giving it away, but if he had not sold it that day it would have been taken by his creditors. This money enabled father, after paying his debts, to start on a little torp near Gullhammar. But father couldn't keep away from auctions, and such, and getting into unnecessary debt was a bad habit he carried through life.



EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS

In my family there were six children. Two girls died before I was born, one when ten days old, the other drowned when about two. So we were four who grew to adulthood. My sister Johanna was born in 1850 and died in Moline in 1923. Gust was born in 1857 and is still living.⁷ Carl, my youngest brother, was born in 1860 and died in Moline in 1894.

I was born June 1, 1854, and the place of my birth has a long address if given in full: Mossatorp, Gullhammar, Vättilösa Socken, Skaraborglän, Västergötland, Sweden! Here I lived till I was almost four, when we moved to Amfinsrud, to the little farm that was mother's inheritance from her parents. It consisted of a dozen acres of timbered land, much of it rocky. Father cut out the trees, built a house and barn, and cleared what he could of the land. The house had three rooms, but only one was ever furnished. It was ten by twelve feet, and in that small room we all lived for eight years, in utmost poverty. The place was poor, with crop failures frequent, and father's financial troubles were always with him. Our food consisted mostly of potatoes and coarse oatmeal bread, and there were times when we asked mother for something to eat and she had nothing to give. Sometimes there was herring or a little bacon, and in summer berries. Father did not hunt but occasionally tried to fish, without much success. One time our cow died—starved—and father got the minister to draw up a letter petitioning the neighbors to help us secure another. Father being ashamed, I was sent from house to house with it (I was then about nine), getting contributions here and sarcastic remarks there. I finally had gathered enough, but father found other uses for the money and the cow was never bought.

It was about six English miles to church and school. I never went to school in Sweden because it was so far and because I had to help at home. Also I never had enough clothes to be presentable.

Once or twice a year I was called before a school board and questioned, and it was always said, "The boy knows enough for his age." Everyone would let it go at that.

But mother taught me to read, and read I did. Books were very scarce. My grandfather had been a book lover, and when he died one of his most important books came into possession of father. It was *Kvinnospegel*, by Johan Olaf Kolmoden, and it contained the rhymed biographies of fifty women from the Old Testament, starting with Eve. I read this book a great deal. Uncle Gustav got most of the books, and these included stories, works on geography, and as usual many religious volumes. Books could be borrowed from the Vättilösa Socken library also. Some of these dealt with Swedish history from the heathen times down. And of course there was the Psalmbok, Catechism, and Bible. I read *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Läsning för Folket* (one volume came out each year), and *Cosmos för Ungdom*, a popular science work. Most of my reading in Swedish literature and other fields was done after I came to America, where time and books were much more to be had than in Sweden.

Mother had the worry of feeding and clothing her family. She prepared the wool, involving many operations, and the linen, spun the thread, wove the cloth, colored it, and sewed the garments. We wore wooden shoes.

Being the oldest and biggest of the boys, I was usually with father, helping him clear the land of stumps and stones. When I returned to Sweden in 1926 I saw the same stone piles I had carried out sixty years before. We had no horses or oxen, and when it came to plowing father had to call on neighbors who did have animals. Oxen were usually used, as horses were very scarce.

Uncle Carl and Uncle Gustav lived only a short distance away and were often helpful as they were in better circumstances. Father sometimes worked for neighbors who farmed on a bigger scale. When we had no cow I had to go to these neighbors for milk; often they filled the pail at no charge, and we could usually have as much sour milk as we cared for. We were often helped by Tekla's grandfather, who lived two or three blocks away and who was in fair circumstances. He was a good man. One of my earliest recollections is of the first time I went to Skara—the only time, for years, when I made a trip so long. I was then seven. It was in the fall. Father had a load of hay to sell, and hired a neighbor, Person, to drive it to town. When we were ready to go, father woke me up (it was about two o'clock in the morning). Father tossed me on the top of the hayload, and walked alongside the cart. I fell asleep again, but father woke me up at daylight. We had reached the high hill called Skaraberg,

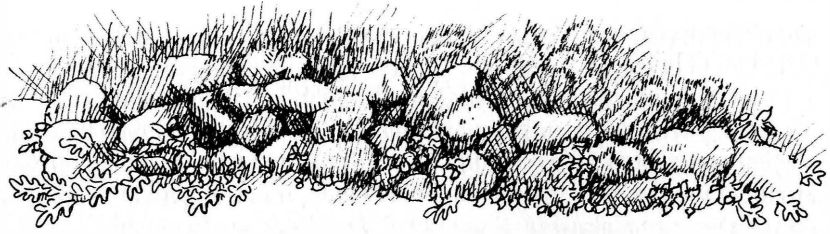
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and it afforded a fine view of the city. Father said, "Vakna upp och se Skarra-byxor!"⁸ The two towers looked exactly like a pair of pants turned upside down, because the Danes long ago reduced them to stubs. (They have since been restored.) Soon we were rattling on the cobblestone streets of Skara. Hay was sold at the open market place, and father had to stand there until a buyer came, so it was important to be on hand early. Finally the hay was sold, and father bought me a cookie that cost two öre.

That was a great trip, a distance of about ten English miles. A year later father sent me back to Skara alone, to get a grubbing hoe. I walked to Skara, but on my way home got a ride from a neighbor. I sat on his wagon holding the hoe tightly with both hands, for I was responsible for it. When I got home father praised me.

We children made our own mittens and stockings, and got so that we could do it pretty well.

I remember one fall when mother had made a coat for Gustav, then five or six years old. He was very proud of it, but one day when he was out picking berries he lost it. How we looked for it—mother, father, all of us! But we did not find it, and all that winter Gustav could not go out when it was cold because he had no coat. A year later I found it, but it was ready to fall apart.



THE SWEDISH CHURCHES

Father attended services every Sunday, and I usually accompanied him. Mother very seldom had time for church; when she could she went. Walking five to nine miles for church was nothing in Sweden! There was never but one service a week and that was from eleven to twelve on Sunday. One pastor usually served two churches, alternating between them. With very few exceptions the preachers were poor, but if a good preacher did come to one of the churches people would flock to hear him, walking ten or twelve English miles to do so. There were no church organs: a singing leader or "klockare" directed the singing, and it was seldom good.

Of course all the churches were of the Lutheran state church; while in Sweden I never heard of Baptists or Methodists. However Mormon evangelists from Utah were very active and "converted" many of our people. Some good friends of mine emigrated to Utah and I suppose they and their descendants are there today.

Probably churches were as numerous and crowded around my home as in any part of Sweden. Within five or six English miles of Vättnösa, my center, were fifteen churches. Among these were some of the most famous in the north. Husaby, the oldest Christian church in the Scandinavian peninsula, was within sight of my home. Varnhem, almost equally old, is the burial place of many early Swedish kings. Skara is one of the most important Swedish cathedrals.

Five of the churches were up in Kinnekulle, and two of them, Kleva and Österplana, were old stone structures with spires that formed conspicuous landmarks which we could see against the skyline. In 1868 Kleva was torn down and a new structure erected on a lower terrace of the mountain. After I left Sweden, Österplana was likewise rebuilt, lower but not so low as Kleva. This newer church is large and impressive. Some of the churches near home that

are still standing include Vätzlösa, Ledsjö, Eggby, Lerdala, Holmestad, and Götene.

Of the thirty-odd churches of which I write, two were frame (Fullösa and Bredsäter), two were brick (Kleva and Homestad), and all the rest were of stone. But the stone churches were not all alike, as they were built of limestone, sandstone, marble, and granite, the granite being most used. Skara and Varnhem are large edifices, the rest are small with seating capacity of 150 to 300. Most are simple in architecture, facing the west, with four straight walls and an addition to the east end for the chancel. They always face west, even in cities with diagonal streets; so far as I know there is not a Lutheran church in Sweden that violates this practice.

Many of the churches were, in my time, plastered both inside and out. Nowadays the tendency is to remove the plaster and let the churches appear in the rugged stone walls. This is a sensible change.

Only five of the churches then had pipe organs, but now practically all of them do. The organ stood in a rear balcony.

Most of the churches had steeples, but those that lacked a steeple had a "stapel" alongside, standing 25 to 50 feet away. Every church had to have at least two bells in its stapel, and preferably three. Quite early on Sundays, perhaps nine o'clock in the morning, there occurred "första ringningen" with the smallest bell; a little later came the second ringing, either with the larger bell or with the two bells together; then, just before the service, came the third ringing, with two bells or all three. The bells were tuned in thirds, to harmonize; and the biggest bell had a great, deep tone.

The church bells were also rung every day in summer at evening; I believe the practice is still followed to the extent that the bells are rung on Saturday evening as a preparation for Sunday. At ringing of the evening bell every worker paused in his work or engaged in silent prayer. Out in the fields, we could hear the music of the bells from all sides, from Vätzlösa, Götene, Kleva, and others, depending on the wind direction.

Husaby, oldest church in Sweden, was built in 1001 by Olif Skottkonung, the first Christian King of Sweden. When I was a boy it was related that a stone had been put into the corner of the old church with an inscription reading, "När ett med nollor två; och ett därtill blev skrifvet; Är rätta åratal, då kyrkan anlagt blifvet."⁹ The stone had been lost in some reparation. When I was about thirteen years old I was working in a place called Likalle, helping to remove the rubbish from an old house being torn down. While so doing I discovered a stone with some inscription on it and, being curious, scraped off the mortar. There I read the old Husaby inscription. I

turned the stone over to the foreman, and I have never learned what became of it. Probably it is in some Swedish museum.¹⁰

At services it was compulsory to announce marriage banns on three successive Sundays, and if there was anything on record against the character of either contracting party the minister announced that too.

Suicides were buried in unhallowed ground, a designated corner of the churchyard. The coffin containing a suicide's body was not carried through the gate but was put over the stone wall. No one would touch the body, and the very superstitious would avoid passing a suicide's home, at least by night.



CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

Though want was the usual lot in my home, Christmas brought something different. The holiday season began with many preparations. First, everything had to be washed. You see, washings were held only three or four times a year. Then the Christmas drinks had to be brewed, and Christmas bread baked, of fine flour instead of the coarse ordinarily used. In the baking the children took a hand, making little men and animals. These little figures were piled on the table at Christmas Eve, each child having his own collection. Father and I always carried in enough clean, dry birch wood to last over the holidays, and we piled this by the fireplace. In the house everything was scrubbed. The floors were scoured, and on them were spread fresh spruce twigs cut into three- or four-inch lengths. These gave an attractive smell of Christmas to the place. Twigs were also scattered over the walk from the door to the road (this was frequently done for ordinary Sundays as well, especially in winter months).

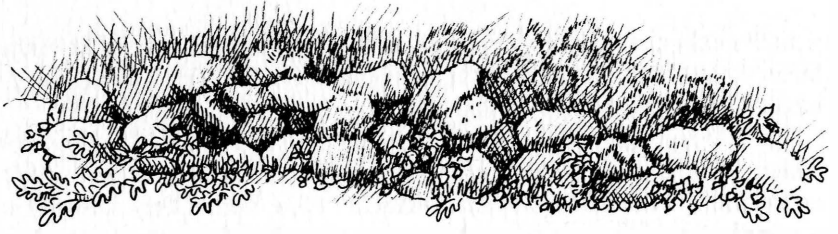
Every family had to have a Christmas tree, and cutting ours was my job. To get one it was only necessary to step a few yards from the house. I would pick one three or four feet high, and mount it on a stand. We would then decorate it with anything our childish fancies might suggest, especially candles and karameller. We had a couple of "grenljus"¹¹ too. As for Christmas gifts, we had none. But I remember that father once came home on Christmas Eve with a gingerbread rooster bought in town. Something fine!

Even in the poorest home a sheaf of oats was carefully saved, and at dusk of Christmas Eve it was raised on a long pole over the barn, so that the birds might celebrate Christmas with us. This was never forgotten, nor were the special Christmas rations for any farmyard animals we might be lucky enough to have. Our own Christmas meals included lutfisk, rice pudding (decorated with cinnamon), pork, sausage, and coffee. During my earlier years this

was the only time when coffee was ever served in my home. The older folks, even those like my father who was not a drinking man, always had to have their glass at Christmas.

"First Day Christmas," "Second Day Christmas," and sometimes "Third Day Christmas" were all legal holidays, and were celebrated. Festivities were repeated on New Year's Day, though in somewhat modified degree, there being no church service that day. January 6th, "Trettondedagen," and January 13th, "Tjugonedagen," were likewise observed, the latter being the last day of the Christmas season. Any food still left was then eaten.

Julotta, the early morning Christmas service, was held at seven o'clock. You must remember that in Sweden at that time of year the sun does not rise till nine o'clock. I remember times when I tramped in the dark to Götene with father, in deep snow, to attend Julotta. For this service churches were packed to overflowing. There were no decorations in the church except candles, but these were used in large numbers, at each end of the pews, on the altar and pulpit, and in candelabra hung from the ceiling. The service was not different from that held on other Sundays, and there was no special singing. But there were the old Christmas korals, and how deeply these impressed me!



BOYHOOD AND YOUTH

In 1866, when I was twelve, father was compelled to sell our home. He received enough from the transaction to enable him to settle his debts and move back to Gullhammar, my birthplace. Here he took a torp again, one called Lunnen, and this was my home until, at almost 22, I left Sweden.

At his new torp, father was to put in four days' work in every week for the owner, the year round. The terms were such that on other days, if father had nothing to do, he could work additional time for the owner, at about 25 cents a day. The land was almost enough to support a family. We now usually had two or three cows, an ox, four to eight sheep, a couple of pigs, and a lot of chickens. Father was in somewhat better circumstances and could at least make a living. His debt was gone and we children were big enough to be of help.

To tell about this period I must go back a little. At Amfinsrud, when I was ten and a half, father contracted me to a shoemaker named Frans Stenander. Father was to pay him twenty crowns for a two year period during which I was to receive board, room, and training, though I was allowed to come home on Saturday evenings and remain there until Monday morning. Thus I was to learn the shoemaker's trade. I started work January 2, 1865. Except for time off for meals, I worked at the shoe bench from five o'clock in the morning till ten and sometimes eleven at night. The work necessitated going from house to house, wherever shoes were needed. As the housewives usually provided good board I generally had plenty to eat. Another boy (I only recall his first name, August) was also apprenticed to Stenander; he was a little older than I. Stenander had a reputation for being a hard man, and he lived up to his reputation. I was apprentice to him partly because he lived near home and partly because father believed in hard taskmasters for boys. However, it was repeatedly reported to father that I was being abused, and he

asked me if this was so. I refused to admit being kicked, beaten, and overworked, but secretly I laid my own plans. After I had been with Stenander a little more than a year I simply left him, and started out one Monday morning for a place where I expected to find other work. But in this I failed, and there was nothing for me to do but go home and tell the whole story. Father said I had done right, and that he had known all the time what was going on. Stenander came and tried to take me back by force, but being guilty could not succeed in this.

Incidentally, the first money I ever possessed was a tip of 25 öre given me when I was an apprentice.

Later I went to work for another shoemaker, Andrew Peterson. He was the opposite of Stenander; in fact he was so good that the boys (two besides myself, both older than me) took advantage of him. One of the older boys was August Peterson, still living in Sweden; the other was Claus Holmstrom, now in Duluth. I received a letter from Holmstrom this year. To begin with, Peterson paid me 25 öre a week, but I was quickly raised several times.

Although such a kind man, Peterson was the rankest of unbelievers, yet, strangely, two of his daughters became missionaries.

While we boys were working for Peterson, we used a single candle, and when it burned down all went to bed. To make the candle burn fast, the boys would bend a nail into a ring and put it around the wick. It would sink out of sight into the wax, so this mischief was never detected.

We both made and repaired shoes. The party for whom we worked furnished materials. Then every farmer saved his hides and had them tanned, so that all he had to buy was sole leather. Of course, everything on a shoe was hand work; there were no machines yet. Styles were pretty much the same then as now, except that knee boots were principally used. Boots were simply pulled on, but the shoes were laced.

In those days two years constituted an apprenticeship. This was all nonsense, as no boy of ten or twelve can really learn a trade. I worked for Peterson a good five years, so became a full-fledged shoemaker. But when I left him, at nearly sixteen, that was the end of my shoemaking. I hated the trade—even the sight of shoes themselves—and for good reason. When a boy often is impressed as I was he doesn't learn to love his work.

In June, 1869 I was confirmed at Vätö church by Jakob Abraham Hoof, who died about a year later and was buried on the grounds of this church. We were 24 in the class. Confirmation then was much the same as now, with public examination. The minister,

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unfortunately, was a man of mediocre ability and poor health, so I got little from the teaching.

I was big enough now to do a man's work on the Gullhammar estate, and did so from 1870 to the fall of 1874, when I hired out to Alfred Anderson, a farmer living near Gångarebo, two English miles away.

In June, 1875, I was called on for my first term of military service. This necessitated going to Axval, a training camp about ten miles away (the buildings are still standing). I was at camp only three weeks but remained on the army rolls for a year. At Axval we soldiers learned to march, handle weapons, and so on—there was no book work to it! There were two full regiments, but I can hardly venture to guess how many men that included. I belonged to Skaraborgs Regimentet; the other was Västgöte. We were furnished uniforms of blue coats, white trousers, and gold-decorated caps, but had to provide our own shoes. When men were mustered into the army, each took a new name. If a man had no name to suggest for himself, he was both named and numbered. There was no plan to this naming business except that in the same regiment there could be no two men with the same name. As a result many unusual names were chosen—as can be observed among prominent military men of present-day Sweden.

I, of my own suggesting, became John Fryxell, No. 30. Admiration for Anders Fryxell, writer and poet,¹² had something to do with my choice. Anders Fryxell too, I believe, took his name when he entered the army. It was derived from localities in his native province of Värmland, the Lake Fryken, and the valley Frykdall. Adding "ell" to make a name was common practice in Sweden. Also, I had known a boy named Fryxell, who worked with me for a while when I was apprentice with Peterson. I liked both him and his name. (I have always wondered if the "other" Fryxells in this country may not be descendants of his.) The name Fryxell was rare then as now, so when I suggested it to the officer he said, "There is no one in the regiment with that name, so you may have it."

It was common to drop one's legal military name upon return to civil life, but I retained mine. Then a year later when Gust and I emigrated to America the customs officials told us it was not advisable for two brothers to have different names. My first thought was to go back to the name "Magnusson," but the customs men did not approve of that either. So I remained John Fryxell, and Gust took the name Fryxell too. When our brother Charley joined us in America in 1880 he, too, took the name.

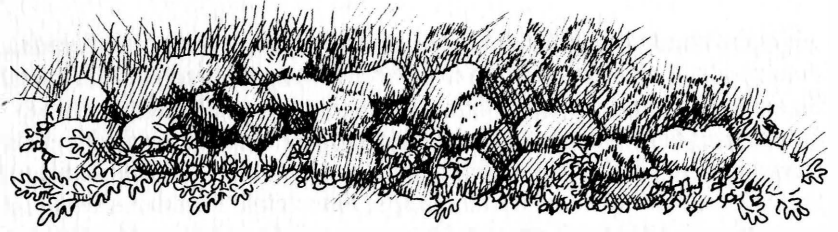
In the fall of 1875 I left Alfred Anderson and moved to Hilde

(already I had tickets for America, so did not sign on for a full year). Johansson was then postmaster, and I became mail carrier from Skara out around Götene. This work occupied six days of the week. Johansson, for whom I worked, was one of the most remarkable men I ever met. In later years he bought and sold land, and built many factories at Götene—machine shops, foundries, furniture shops, a creamery, and an ice plant. He arranged for a railroad to enter Götene, and he built Hotel Carl (where your brother stayed when he visited Sweden). Before he died the citizens of Götene erected a monument in Johansson's honor. He wanted me to stay and work for him, but when I still insisted on emigrating he said, "Any time you tire of America, come back here and there will be work for you."

Uncle Charles Peter Johnson, mother's brother, emigrated to America in 1869 with his wife and their five children. They were the first of many emigrants to leave our corner of Sweden. In our relation, my brother Gust and I were destined to be the next to seek homes in the New World.

Cousin Frank Johnson (father of Mildred and Luvy), one of the boys in America, was of my age. We had grown up together so corresponded. In his letters he boasted of America, and in replying I said—more in joke than seriously—that if Gustav and I had tickets we would join him. The next letter from America brought us the tickets! Frank wrote that if we couldn't come we should return the tickets as they could be cashed in again. (The tickets were from Gothenburg to New York and cost \$35 each.)

I went home to break the news to my parents. Father said nothing; mother said it should never happen. She would never have let us go, but one Sunday afternoon they came to me at Hilde and told me she was dying. I hurried home at once. I knew she could not live long. She told me to open a certain drawer and take out a comforter, and said, "Take this; I made it for you." On December 5th she died. She was only 54 but worn out; she never had had clothes enough. I am not sure what she died from, maybe pneumonia. After that we could go without giving her sorrow.



EMIGRATING TO AMERICA

It was on May 10, 1876, that Gust and I left Gullhammar. That morning father had already begun the day's work, so we went out to him. He then followed us part of our way before we parted never to meet again, for three years later he died. We had hired a horse and wagon to take us to Axvall station, ten English miles away, and brother Charley and (brother-in-law) Lusty accompanied us to bring back the wagon. Strange things happened on that trip. In the first place we forgot our provisions for the ocean journey and had to return for them. Then our horse got sick and we had to get a substitute animal at a farm. At Axvall we boarded a train, but the other boys were not yet ready to leave us so they bought tickets too and went with us as far as Stenstorp, where we had to change trains. They there decided to go along still further, and bought tickets for Ranton. Here at last final farewells were said.

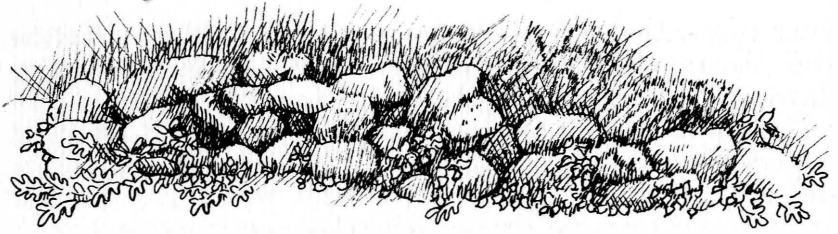
In the evening Gust and I got to Gothenburg, which was by far the farthest from home we had ever been. We put up for the night at an emigrants' hotel. Emigration was a great thing then; every boat was filled up, and hotels existed exclusively to cater to those leaving for America. On the morning of June 12 we boarded the steamer *Orlando*, an old freighter, and were bundled in like so many items of freight. Although most all passengers got seasick I did not. We were assigned to dirty, crowded wooden bunks which we had to equip with our own blankets. The steamer was an old English ship that had been operating for many, many years between Hull and Gothenburg, and it was still running up to three or four years ago. The passengers were all Swedes, and they came from all parts of the country. The ship also carried much freight. We got to Hull in 42 hours, unusually good time because of the lovely weather (this stretch as a rule required three days' journey).

At Hull we left the boat for three hours and walked around.

From Hull to Liverpool we traveled by railroad. The first part of the trip was exceptional only for its ugliness, as it led through factory districts; but the latter part was through a veritable garden. When we left Sweden spring had just begun; here in England, we found flowers everywhere. In Liverpool we remained four days waiting for the ship, again living in an emigrants' hotel. We had good quarters and food, and spent our time as well as last cent in seeing the city. The great horses used in driving the Liverpool drays astonished us. I don't know what kind of horses these were, but I never saw their equal, before or since.

I think it was the eighteenth when we boarded the emigrant steamer *Celtic*, an English ship of the Inman Company, then one of the busiest lines operating on the Atlantic. This ship was wrecked a few years later, salvaged, and returned to use, continuing to operate until another wreck finished it. It, too, was overloaded, with emigrants from different countries, mostly Swedes but many Irish, English, and others. It was a better ship than the *Orlando*, but food was poor so we relied on what we had brought from Sweden. There was plenty of that, hardtack, cheese, and dried mutton. We had stormy weather, with corresponding amount of seasickness, so it didn't go hard on the food. I too was sick for three days. For recreation there was not much to do except walk around and get acquainted with others. Those who had been to America before were besieged with questions.

We arrived at New York on the evening of June 29, 1876, but had to stay on board overnight. The next morning, Decoration Day, we left the ship and spent the day around Castle Garden, where all immigrants were then landed. Toward evening we were met there by cousin Frank Johnson, who took us to a boat running on the Hudson River, the *Christina*. The *Christina* took us up the river 45 miles to Haverstraw at Tompkins Cove, where Frank lived. This was a remarkable trip for me, for the scenery along the Hudson at this season was glorious. Neither Gustav nor I had a penny so Frank paid our fares, 35 cents each. At dusk we reached the Cove, and walked up onto a high hill overlooking the river. Here was Frank's home. Aunt and uncle were standing on the porch waiting for us. Having no other home we stayed on here, where we were so kindly treated.



ON THE HUDSON

We soon learned what we had not at all suspected, that there were hard times in America. The crisis in started in 1873 and lasted about five years. People walked along the roads in gangs, begging for food and if need be taking it. In some ways those hard times were worse than the present. On Frank's recommendation I finally got a position working for a Scottish farmer named John Ferguson, who lived about six miles northeast of the Cove. The job was not easy. I had to get up at two o'clock in the morning to milk eight cows. In Sweden milking cows was a woman's job and below a man's dignity; therefore I had not done such work, and did not like it. At 5 or 6 o'clock when the cows were put in pasture I had breakfast. Then to the fields, and I was the only man to take care of a large farm. For this I got \$8.00 a month and board. That was poor pay even for those times, but when men were offering to work for board alone, better could not be expected.

I remember when I got my first pay in America. It was a Sunday morning, and my pay consisted of 800 pennies. It made quite a pile on the table. You see, Ferguson was selling milk, and so accumulated one- and two-cent pieces. I sacked the pile and carried it over to Frank as first payment on my debt for ticket to America. Every payday thereafter I did the same thing till the debt was paid in full, till then not buying so much as five cents' worth of anything for myself.

Though I was treated well and had good board I felt lonesome because there was no one I could talk to. I got real homesick. If I had had money for a trip back to Sweden I would have returned. At my uncle's, six miles away, were the nearest persons who could speak Swedish. On Sundays I went to Uncle's home when I could, though only for a short visit, for the farm work tied me down. Sometimes my brother came to see me. He had not succeeded in getting work, so

stayed with Uncle for ten months.

Rye, oats, corn, and onions were the crops on the farm, which covered one hundred acres. Everything had to be done by hand: cutting (with the cradle), binding, and so forth. In the fall I had to thresh the entire crop alone, by flail.

During this first year I began the task of learning English. This I did by use of a New Testament that had the Swedish and English equivalents printed on pages facing each other. Each night after work I studied this Testament. Meanwhile my Scottish landlady kept up a running chatter in English with the kind intention of making me learn the language. At first I had no idea what she said, but with time I profited a great deal. Anyway, by the end of that hard year I could get along pretty well with the strange language of this new country.

I remember well when the news of the Custer Battle on the Little Bighorn River in Montana reached us at the Cove.

After five months, work decreased on the farm, but Ferguson said he would keep me on at five dollars. So this arrangement continued for two months. Then I stayed on another month or two for only my board. My debts were now paid, but I had no money at all. At Christmas I received permission to go over to my Uncle's, arriving there about ten o'clock on Christmas Eve (as they expected me, they had waited up). We celebrated together, and I got a present from my aunt, a suit of drawers she had made for me, the first underclothes I ever owned. On Christmas Day I returned to the farm and had to spend the day butchering a cow—the first and last butchering I ever did in this country. How I disliked that business!

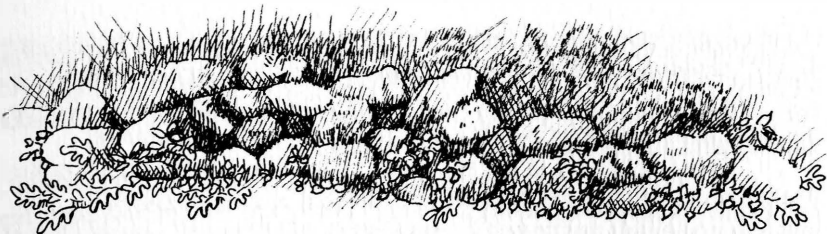
In February Gust came to see me, and we talked things over. I was dissatisfied because I was not receiving any pay. Since I could now read surprisingly well and make myself understood in English (Gust could not yet do this), I decided to look elsewhere for work. Ferguson did not like this news and offered me \$100 for the summer if I would stay. That was good pay, but I packed my things together, and Gust and I walked over to Tompkins Cove. There I borrowed \$10 from Cousin Frank, and arranged to board myself in Uncle's garret. I was there six weeks while looking for work, and at the end of that time I still had \$3 left.

One day cousin Otto rowed Gust and me over to Croton Island on the Hudson, where lived a Swede whom we knew named Olson. We hoped that through him we could get work on the island vineyards. We were met by a boy, Albert Randolph (whom you know), and he took us to the Olsons, his foster parents. Olson took us to another Swede, Edward Miller, who worked in the vineyards.

After much questioning the boss at the vineyards (not the owner), Samstag, hired us at \$12 a month (or rather I got that, Gust receiving only \$11). We returned to the Cove for clothes, and next morning began to work on the island.

Croton Island is about three miles long and, at its widest, three-quarters mile across. It is high, sandy, and suited for gardening. About seventy acres were then planted in the grapevine. On the island also were two brickyards, and the three Underhill brothers who owned the island had their homes on it. The Underhills must have been wealthy, as they had fine residences. During the summer we were twelve men working in the vineyards, four Swedes, the rest Germans. We had poor quarters—a garret room—and the board was also poor; sometimes we were next to starvation. Cabbage and miserable meat were the main items in our meals. There was no coffee except chicory, and that without sugar. The island was unhealthy, with much malaria each summer. In the fall so many men were sick that there were not enough to do the work. I too was sick off and on for four months.

As for the work, that was difficult but interesting: trimming, hoeing, picking, packing, and shipping. I also had four cows to care for and milk. Work started at daybreak, long before breakfast, and it lasted till dark, so the length of the working day varied with the season. The other Swedes had their families with them. The Germans were bachelors of a poor type, who drank heavily and each fall went down to New York City for the winter, spending there their summer's savings. On Sundays we Swedes visited together, and often went sailing on the Hudson.



TO THE MIDDLE WEST

Gust and I began our work on Croton Island April 1, 1877. In the fall all were laid off except a German named Herman and myself. We were kept on for the winter, for board and \$25. Later the German left and I got Gust his job—Gust taking care of the cows and I the horses. We stuck the winter out till April, and on April 1, when the other men were put back, our wages were again increased to \$12 a month. But Gust and I were dissatisfied, chiefly because of the food, and on July 1, we quit—finally receiving our pay but only after trouble with the foreman, who tried to make us stay through the summer.

We now went to Sing Sing in order to take the train to New York City. Here we applied to a Dane named Jensen who conducted an employment agency for immigrants, and sold train and steamship tickets. Jensen sent the immigrants out to places where canals, levies, and railroads were being built.

A Croton Point friend named Nelson had previously gone to Alabaster, Michigan, and had written to us about his work there. When we mentioned this to Jensen he said, "That's all right, boys; if you go to Alabaster you will get work."

However, he wanted \$23 for a ticket, and by inquiring at the station I learned I could buy one for \$18. So we didn't make use of Jensen's services.

We were in New York only one night, but that was time enough for adventure. A young Swede got ahold of us and offered to find us lodging for the night. We accepted and he brought us to a hotel, where our grips were placed behind the counter. Then the proprietor came in, and I recognized him at once as the notorious "Danske Smith," who had an ill reputation among all Scandinavians and whose picture, along with warnings, had appeared in the Scandinavian papers. He was a professional "fleecer" of immigrants.

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Gust and I had some trouble getting out of his clutches, but under pretext of needing to buy some clothes we recovered our grips and left. Later I met the young Swede who had brought us to Danske Smith, and I said what I thought of him.

We took the train for Bay City, going via Buffalo and Detroit, but made no stopovers along the way. Between Detroit and Bay City the railroad went through almost unbroken virgin forest. Bay City, with about 7000 inhabitants, was a sawmill city, lumber being cut right around the town. At Bay City we bought tickets, costing \$2 each, for the seventy-mile boat trip to Alabaster. At that time there was no road, railroad, or settlement between these points, and boats provided the only means of transportation. At Alabaster, the Smith, Bullard, and Company, manufacturers of Plaster of Paris, were in business, as they are today, and the firm owned all the surrounding land, the quarries, mills, stores, and every house in the settlement. Men were paid off not with money but by means of what were called "checks" or "due bills," at the rate of \$1.50 per day for ten hours' work. The pay was fair, but the trouble was that the scrip was good only in the company stores. Several hundred men were employed, mostly Swedes but some Finns and others. The majority had come direct from the old country and knew nothing about America except what they had seen on the journey and here. There were no churches or schools, and no saloons. But the men drank heavily, sending to Bay City for their liquor. The people were living more primitively than I had seen at any other place, most of them in three-room frame shacks that were crude and unpainted. But the work was steady, winter and summer, and the people, being well fed and well clothed, were happy. A house cost each family \$3 a month, and there were no other expenses, except clothing, food, and whiskey. All around was the impenetrable forest, through which one could not go without the aid of an axe. Water was gotten from the lake, which was clear except after storms.

After working in the quarry one week I was assigned to the warehouse, where I remained as long as I stayed at Alabaster—three months. We were two men there. As the 350 pound barrels of Plaster of Paris came in on tram cars we took them and rolled them into the warehouse, banded, labeled, and stacked them—one man to a barrel. For a little man like me to handle a 350 pound barrel is a trick, but once you learn how you can do it with one hand. It was at this work that I got the crooked joints on the fingers of my right hand, see? I got the hand between two barrels. We ran the barrels up on skids, four high; and we had to take them down alone too. The work was peculiar in this way, that when the boats came in we had to work

very hard, but between times there might be practically nothing to do. Then as now the boats went to all parts of the country. There were both steamers and sailboats.

My brother Gust worked in the stone quarry part of the time and on the farm the rest.

Alabaster made a deep impression on me, with the dark forests on one side and the great lake on the other, boats coming and going. The storms were grand! The warehouse was about five hundred feet out in the lake, built on pilings, and I could look out and, if the day was clear, see Point Huron very faintly to the northeast. To the west, of course, no land could be seen, this being the widest part of the lake.

On Saturday nights most of the population took to drinking and card playing, and kept it up more or less till Monday morning. Gust and I did not drink, and didn't go in much for card playing. A road led northward from Alabaster to Tawas City, six miles away. Once an accident to my arm made it necessary for me to lay off for three days, so I tramped up to Tawas City. There I found nothing but mills and shacks for workmen; having seen these I went home again.

When I left Sweden I promised all my friends I would return in a year. I loved the homeland too much to think of giving it up for good. But at the end of a year I did not have any money; if I had, probably I would then have returned. Now, after more than two years, I still had not decided to make America my permanent home.

But I felt that Alabaster was not the place for me. One day I was having trouble banding a barrel, and getting a little "hot," slammed it hard. The boss, who was watching, said to me, "Do that again and I'll fire you." I did it and got fired.

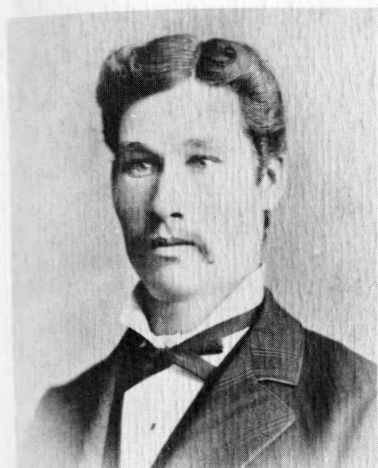
At Bay City I tried to sell my scrip, and finally got a bank to take it for 25 cents on the dollar. Altogether I had saved up between \$200 and \$300 when I left.

On October 1, 1878, I took the train to Chicago, and arrived there at 5 a.m. There I went to an employment agency conducted by a Dane named Christian, who spoke Swedish. Yes, he could get me work, either on the levees in Mississippi or at railroad-building near Creston, Iowa, and he recommended the latter. I accepted the Creston job, paid my fee of \$1.50, and left my satchel with Christian.

A company of us were to leave for Creston the next evening. Meantime I set out to see Chicago. While walking about the Loop I stopped at a window around which a crowd was gathered. Behind me I heard Swedish spoken. It sounded good, so I turned around and introduced myself. My new acquaintances, two young men, were friendly, and we fell into conversation. They strongly urged me to

give up my railroad work because of the hard work, unpleasant living conditions, and bad company. I protested I had signed up, and had left my satchel with the bureau. They said, "Oh, we'll fix that up for you." They inquired as to my religious connections, and I explained that I had not attended church since coming to America because of not being located near any. They then insisted I should visit them that evening at a new Mission Tabernacle church located at 31st and Wabash, on the south side. The "Mission Movement" was just a year or two old then. So that evening I walked down for the first Swedish service I had heard since leaving Sweden. Arriving early I struck up an acquaintance with the janitor, Charles Johnson. After service I met many friendly people who also tried to dissuade me from going to Iowa—and succeeded. Johnson, who lived in a nearby house with his mother and sister, invited me to stay with him. During the days that followed we went around Chicago together, he selling books and papers for which he was agent, I looking for work. Sometimes I found odd jobs lasting a few hours, but that was all.

I soon got tired of this, and on October 10th decided to leave. "Where are you going?" asked my Chicago friends. "To Moline," I replied. "Oh, don't go to that ungodly place," they said. But I had decided.



*John Fryell as
a young man*



John and Sophie Olson Fryell on their wedding day (June 7, 1890)



The family of John and Sophie Fryxell (about 1904): front: Carl Arvid. Second row: John, Hjalmar Edward, Fritiof Melvin, Sophie. Back: Esther.

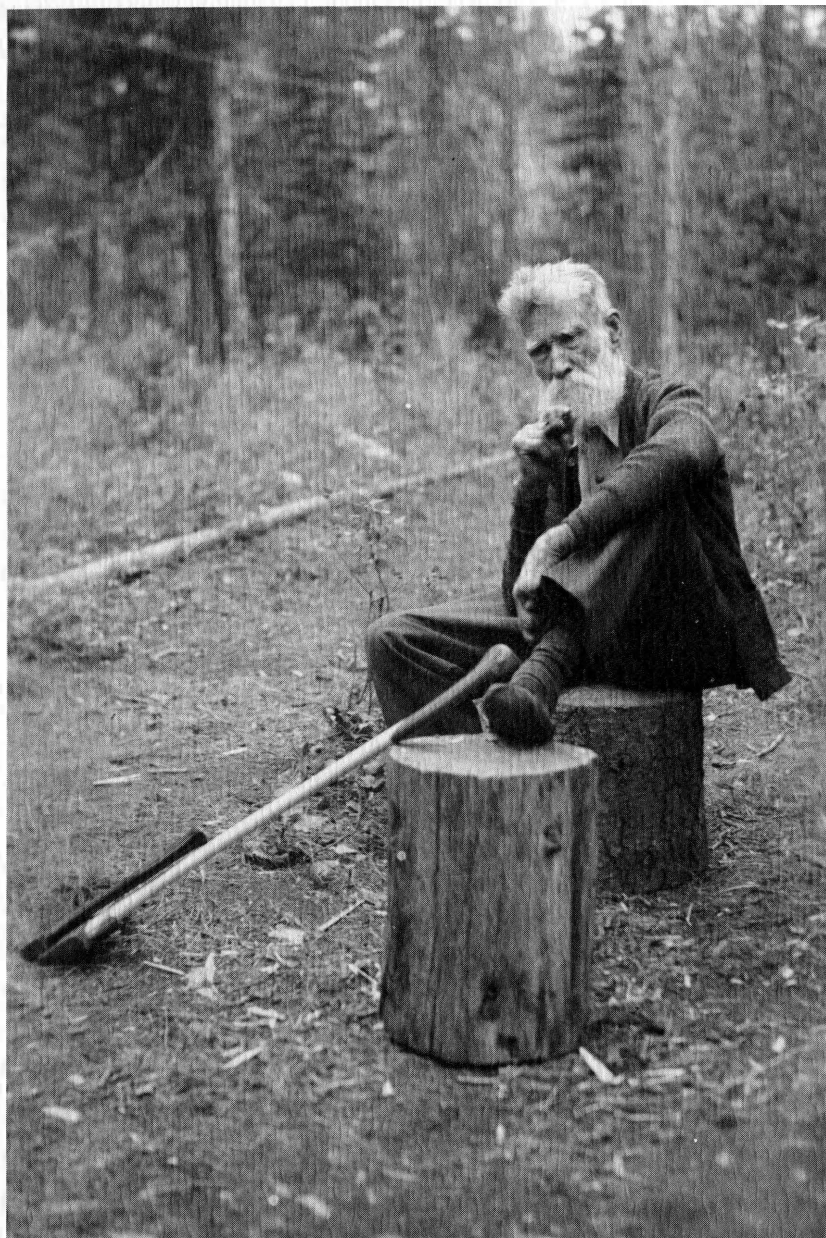
*John Fryxell with
grandson
Robert Edward Fryxell*



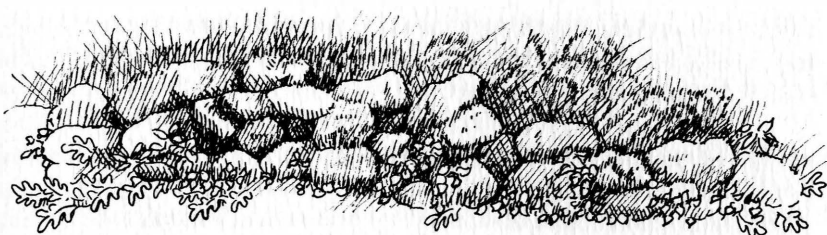
Sophie Olson Fryxell



*Sophie Fryxell with
granddaughter
Hildegard Johnson*



John Fryxell at 84 (August 1938)



FIRST YEARS IN MOLINE

In the spring of 1876, when I landed in America, a Swedish newspaper called "*Skandia*" had been started in Moline. It was put out by Professor Melin of Augustana College, Gustave Swenson, a prominent real estate man of Moline, Herman Stockenstrom, a writer, and Magnus Elmlblad, a well-known Swedish-American poet. A story could be written about each one of these men, but that does not belong here. At Tompkins Cove, I happened to get ahold of the first copy of *Skandia*, through a Swedish family there whose son lived in Moline. I subscribed for the paper and continued my subscription for two and a half years, when *Skandia* was absorbed by another Swedish-American paper. News in *Skandia* was mainly local, and through reading it I got to know Moline intimately long before I saw the town—its leading families, business houses, and factories. I suppose there were many other similar papers published in America, but Moline would be the place for me. John Deere was then the great magnet that drew Swedes to Moline, for it was well known that he gave preference to Swedish workmen.

Oddly enough, I went to Moline on the Burlington Railroad. You see, my trunk was at the Michigan Central station, where I arrived in Chicago, and that station also served the Burlington line. Being a newcomer I was imposed on, and when I asked for information about reaching Moline the ticket agent sold me a Burlington ticket instead of one on the direct Rock Island line. It got me to Moline, all right, but the trip took from 5 A.M. to 10 P.M. There was a two hour stop at Galva, and a four and half hour stop at Alpha; what there was to see of those places I saw! At nightfall on October 11, 1878, then, I arrived in Moline, got off the train, looked for someone who might be Swedish, and, finding no one, set out to walk. I happened to hit 16th Street and walked north till stopped by the Mississippi. On 2nd Avenue between 15th and 16th Streets was a

row of saloons and boarding houses. One of these was lit up so I went in, applied for a room, and stayed. So my first night in Moline was spent upstairs above a saloon.

Next morning it was raining hard. The streets were of Illinois mud, and only in places were there board walks. But I hiked about a bit. Upon inquiring of some man on the streets as to chances for work, I was referred to Keator's Sawmill, at the foot of 17th Street. Here I was immediately given work at the mill, though the boss looked at me dubiously because of my small size, and inquired if I could stand such hard work. I was given time to have my trunk hauled up to a boarding house at the southwest corner of 15th Street and 3rd Avenue, a big frame structure called the "Moline House." At noon I reported for work.

My work consisted in cutting slabs at the slab-saw, that is, taking off the rough outside of logs, preliminary to cutting planks. The logs were fifteen to twenty feet long, and the slabs were used for laths. The logs, mostly pine, were rafted down the Mississippi from Wisconsin and Minnesota. Almost any time one could look out on the river and see great log rafts, many hundreds of feet long, with a steamboat at each end. In each raft were thousands of logs. Keator's Mill was a large one, employing 150 to two hundred men, nearly all of whom were Swedes who came to America after becoming adults. Some had been in this country as much as fifteen years, and spoke good English.

At Keator's Mill I worked the regular eleven-hour day, from six to six with an hour off at noon, for \$1 a day. After four days I was put on a log carrier, turning the big logs as they were cut into planks. For this I received \$1.25 a day, which was as much as anyone at the mill got. At this job I worked steadily till December 5, when the mill closed down because the river froze up.

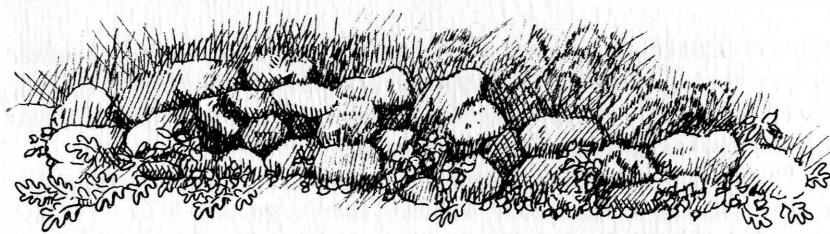
The first Sunday I was in Moline I went to the Swedish Lutheran Church (now First Lutheran). It was just being built; the basement was finished, but the upstairs was still unplastered. However, the upstairs was opened up for services that Sunday for the first time, all previous services having been held in the basement. We sat on planks put out for the occasion. Professor Olof Olson preached as Rev. A.G. Setterdahl, the regular pastor, was absent for the day. In the afternoon I went out to see the city. I came down 15th Street, crossed into the Arsenal, and spent several hours sight-seeing on the island. On the return trip I almost got arrested by the guard, who had somehow missed seeing me before. I had a hard time explaining how I got onto the island. However, the guard proved to be a Swede named John Lindgren, and as a result of our

talk he invited me to move to his home for room and board. This I did the next day. Lindgren lived on 4th Avenue between 12th and 13th Streets, where Crandall's warehouse now stands. In those days the standard price for room, board, and wash was \$3.50.

For some time I sought new work without success, though I reported at the shops before opening hours day after day. Then through Lindgren I was hired by "rike Ericson,"¹³ Nels J. Ericson, whom you will place as the grandfather of Druscilla Ericson. He owned two hundred acres of land in what is now Villa Park and West Highland Additions. I began with him on January 2, 1879, as regular farm hand working for \$10 a month with room, board, and wash. This was about the first place I ever worked at where I was really kindly treated. Ericson had gone to Sweden to settle his father's estate, and I took his place until he returned in the first week of April. Again I was laid off. I hated to leave this family, such a very happy one.

Returning to Lindgren I resumed the old hunt for work. Gust was now living with me, having come to Moline about the last of March. When the mills started up in late May we both got work—at the same mill for me but not the same job, as I became a lumber trimmer. (The trimmer cuts off the boards, getting as long a section as possible.) As helper I first got \$1.25 a day; promoted to first man I got \$1.35.

In the fall I left the mill for a job with the Cornplanter Shop, which later became Deere and Mansur. At the time the firm, newly organized, moved into the brick building in which it still operates. Here I ground castings for \$1 a day. After four months in the winter of 1879-1880 I quit, failing to get promised increases in pay. After a month's idleness I began work in April at the Pail Shop, located between the present locations of Dimock, Gould, and Company and the Montgomery Elevator Shop. Here I started at 75 cents a day for ten hours of hard work, but I soon was getting \$1.25. Here I remained for nearly four years, doing carpentering, repair work, or anything else demanded of the "handy man."



RELIGIOUS AND MUSICAL INTERESTS

My Chicago Mission friends had written to Moline Swedes about me, and I had been in Moline only a few days when these looked me up. Thus I got started with this group, and the first year in Moline I usually attended their church, known as the "Half-way Church" because situated at what is now 4th Avenue and 3rd Street—midway between Moline and Rock Island, which were then distinct towns separated by a stretch of woods. Here there were services every evening and on Sundays, mostly revival meetings. Brother Gust presently joined the Mission Church and has continued as a member of it ever since.

As for the Swedish Lutheran Church, I attended that only occasionally. But one Sunday in October, 1879, it was announced that a "singing choir" was to be organized at that church. All who could sing and knew notes a little were invited to join. A young man named J.F. Ring had recently been called to Augustana to lead the students' choir, and also to give lessons in organ, piano, voice, and violin. He was then elected organist of the Swedish Lutheran Church in Moline, and it was through him that a choir was now organized. Before there had only been a quartet. So a tryout was held, and I was assigned to the bass section. We were about 22, and I can still mention them all by name. The only ones now living are Mrs. Emma Jacobson Lindstrom, Mrs. A.G. Anderson, Mrs. Hanna Larson Johnson (wife of a Galesburg doctor), Emil Aronson of Sioux City (I think he is still alive), and myself. A by-law of the choir constitution required Lutheran membership, so at the next meeting I joined the congregation. (The Mission choir in which I had been singing never pleased me, and was dying out.) The choir, then, was the immediate cause of my joining this church, though I probably would soon have joined anyway. I sang regularly until about 1895, when I transferred to Zion Lutheran Church¹⁴ in Rock Island.

much like that of a viola. When I left Sweden I had to leave my psalmodican behind, and it may still be over there somewhere. In Tompkins Cove I made a second instrument, which I also lost track of. In some of the Swedish settlements of America, psalmodicans were used for services, but I never saw any after I left Sweden except this one I made myself in New York. It was not tapering in shape like those in the museum at Augustana.

To return to the eighties and Moline. The Young People's Society of the Swedish Lutheran Church was very active in these years, and I took much part in it. We met every month on a Friday evening, and had programs of music and declamations. Our music took the form of duets, quartets, and double-quartets, all mixed. But we found it hard to get the girls to attend rehearsals. In the fall of 1886 I suggested we form a male chorus, but nothing came of it. Later I again brought the matter up, and the boys finally said, "Someone has to take the lead; go ahead and call a meeting to consider the question." So I did and we met one Friday evening in the church basement. All of the eight I had called on were present. I was elected President *pro tem*, and in the meeting which followed we decided to organize a Male Chorus. Those who signed on the list that evening and constituted the nucleus of the chorus were: first tenor, Charley Carlstedt and Hellstrom; second tenor, August Anderson and Joseph Lindstrom; first bass, C.A. Larson and myself; second bass, John Valentine and David Swenson. A committee was elected to report a week later with recommendations for rules and name. The next Friday we accepted a constitution and the name Svea Male Chorus. Permanent officers were then elected: C.A. Larson, President; Joseph Lindstrom, Secretary; David Swenson, Treasurer. Wilhelm Ljung, a schoolmaster in the parochial school of the church, was chosen as our leader. A few years later, when the church burned, our minutes were destroyed, so these facts are not now generally known.

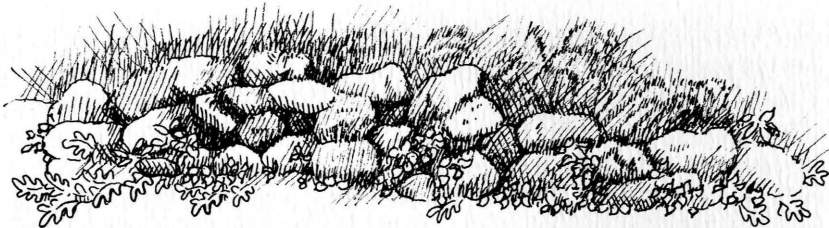
When I went to California in 1887 I dropped out of the chorus for some time, but later rejoined. As time went on Svea, originally strictly a church organization, changed its character, becoming more of a social and secular group and less of a musical and religious one. For this reason I did not long continue as a member. Svea was in existence up to a few years ago. Of the eight charter members only three are now living, Joseph Lindstrom, August Anderson, and I.

Svea was not the first male chorus to be organized in Moline. Ten years earlier one was formed and given the name Nordenskiöld Chorus, after Baron Eric Nordenskiöld whose Vega Voyage through the Northeast Passage had just made him a world hero. The

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Nordenskiöld Chorus, an independent group without church affiliation, was active for many years. It included some good singers, only one of whom is still alive, its director, John Anderson, a tailor in Moline.

Through the churches, musical groups, the college, and other interests I had come to feel at home in America. On October 27, 1884, I took out my final papers at the Rock Island County Courthouse and became a naturalized citizen.



IN THE ORGAN BUSINESS

In the fall of 1883 I became connected with the Moline Cabinet Organ Company. The company had been advertising stock preliminary to expansion, and I applied to Mr. Peter Colseth, president and manager of the company, with the result that I purchased five shares at \$100 each on condition I would be given work at the first opportunity. A week later came instructions to report. The factory stood just where it may now be seen, at 7th Street and 4th Avenue, and had been active since 1877 when started by Colseth and Sjoberg. I was employed to learn the tuning trade, and started in at that. But tuning did not take all my time, so I also learned action making, and finally had to choose between the two specialties. I chose the action making and continued at this till I left for California. In time I became a "regulator," the inspector who made the final check-up on organs before they were approved for sale.

Colseth was one of the really unusual men among the Swedes in America. It was he who erected the first main building at Augustana, now the old Men's Dormitory. When he began the organ business he did so with the theory that he could place his organs about the country through connections with Augustana students and pastors. This he did. The Moline organs sold at higher prices than others, but they were bought because they were honestly built. Depending on size, number of stops, and woodwork, the different types sold at from \$65 to \$175. They went to Swedish settlements wherever they might be—in Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and so on. The margin profit was small. We paid 15% to our agents whereas competing companies paid up to 60%. This was partly the reason for the limited success of Colseth's company.

I started work at \$1.50 but soon got \$2.00, which was considered very good pay. In 1886, however, the shop had to close. There

was friction among the officers and times were very hard, so we could not sell stock or collect for organs. Consequently we were all sent out to do collecting, selling, and repairing. In the spring of 1886 I went to Nebraska, and later I was sent out again. I visited Oakland, Omaha, Osceola, Swedesburg, Bertrand, York, Stromsberg, Saronville, Axtell, Minden, Wahoo, Gothenburg, and other Swedish communities, working exclusively among the Swedes. I was on salary and did a great deal of repairing, as well as some selling and collecting.

A word about Nebraska as I saw it might be interesting. As far west as Platte County and perhaps Phelps county, the "oldest settlers" had been on the ground only six years when I went through the region. In many places sod houses¹⁶ were used almost exclusively. At Bertrand, for example, every house was sod except the hotel; the town itself was only two years old, and the railroad ended at Elwood, twenty miles farther west. What few trees had originally stood along the Platte River had been cut out by the settlers. To get rafters for their sod houses the farmers had to go thirty to fifty miles, and even so had to be contented with crooked sticks. Bundled hay and sunflower stalks—and heads too for that matter—furnished fuel. Sunflowers grew rank and were planted in great fields.

Trains were few and irregular. Once I found myself at Elwood, the end of the railroad, and had to get to Bertrand. But the only train was a "special" to which I had no access, so I walked down the twenty mile stretch of ties, a heavy suitcase in each hand. Another day I walked with my baggage from Stromsberg to York, an all-day tramp. There were only two houses along that entire stretch.

After this summer in the west I returned to Moline, working irregularly all winter for the company. The reed organ business was clearly dying out, I had come back thoroughly convinced of that. The competition of cheap, poor makes made survival of our firm very difficult.

When summer again came around, in 1887, I found work with a furniture company in Davenport, Knosman and Peterson.

In the fall of 1887 I went to California. I decided on this long journey because of my desire to see more of the country, and because of the scarcity of work in Moline at the time. My friend Closeth approved, gave me a recommendation to Pastor John Teleen of San Francisco, and presented me with a guidebook for my journey. Round trip tickets were available, with a six months' limit that could be extended indefinitely by monthly payments of \$10. My ticket cost me \$74.80. A young man who boarded with me, August Peterson, decided to accompany me. Unlike me, Peterson went to

California to stay. We left on December 5, and the trip west was over the Rock Island, Union Pacific, and Central Pacific railroads. We stopped off at Denver for a day and a half where I had business with Rev. Brandelle whom I knew well. At Salt Lake City we stopped two and one-half days.

Arriving in San Francisco I contacted Rev. Teleen and his church members, and on the basis of my recommendation got work the day after my arrival with a carpenter named Carl Algren (he died at Turlock, California, last summer). After working for Algren five weeks I secured a position with the John Bergstrom Pipe Organ Company—my first connection with a work which was to be my principal occupation for nearly four decades. Bergstrom was a fine old man, who came from Lidköping, Sweden, near my old home. He was so far as I know the first builder of pipe organs in California, probably on the Pacific coast. At the time he enjoyed considerable reputation. He had three daughters and three sons. The latter had checkered careers. One became a prominent manufacturer of ukeleles in Hawaii; another married an Indian girl and was lost sight of; the third was associated with his father, was later fleeced by unscrupulous organ builders, and died on the streets of Los Angeles.

While in San Francisco I attended evening school for four months, at Lincoln School, located at Market and Fifth. It was a tax supported school, and everything was free except books, which were sold at cost. Classes met five evenings a week. I took work in the three R's, and my English was much improved by this training, the last schooling I ever got.

At this time agents were busy booming California land, and one company tried to create a Swedish settlement in southern California. Its officers sought a couple of young Swedes to look over the proposed site, and I volunteered to go. In company with Eric Hedvall of Boone, Iowa, I made a week's trip in early June. Expenses were taken care of by the company, and we traveled by train and stage among the valleys near Templeton, Paso Robles, and San Miguel. That was a great experience for me! San Antonio Valley was later selected as the site for a settlement, but when it was found that clear title to the land could not be had the project fell through. Farther south a settlement given the name of Vasa was founded, and a good many Swedes—brother Charley among them—invested in what proved a poor investment. The company was after me to become land agent among the Swedes, but I had no taste for it.

While I was in San Francisco I got to know the city thoroughly—almost every street. I was young and curious about everything. I was active in church work too, the choir and Young People's Society.



MARRIAGE AND HOME

As a bachelor I had lived in one place after another in Moline, always keeping somewhere in the vicinity of the church. You may be interested in knowing where I roomed:

First, at a house which stood where the Crandall Transfer Company's warehouses are now located;

Next, at 1230 4th Avenue, the big corner house next east of the Plow City Cleaners;

Then at a house on the southeast corner of 12th Street and 5th Avenue, where a gas station is now located;

Finally, at 1143 6th Avenue, the house across from Irving School, next to the corner. Here I was rooming with Salomon Freeburg and another young man when, in 1890, I was married.

If I could tell your mother's story in full you would know that like so many another from those times it had its share of poverty and sadness. She was born on November 20, 1864, at Bjurtjärn, Värmland. Her parents, Lars (I do not know when he was born) and Anna Kajsa Olson (born September 29, 1825) were married late in life, and had no other children. In the spring of 1869, when your mother was 4 1/2 years old, they disposed of their few acres at Bjurtjärn, so that they could join the large emigrant company which then left Värmland. They were even able to give a little help to some others poorer than themselves. The group formed a shipload—all families that had sold everything to go to America. In the company were many of whom you know something: Rev. C.E. Olsson's parents, also from Bjurtjärn; the parents of Will Johnson of the *Moline Dispatch*, the Bjorndahls, and others. On the journey across the Atlantic your mother almost died of measles. The company arrived in America in June, 1869, when times were indescribably hard. Most of them went to Moline; some went to Geneseo and other nearby places. Cholera, malaria, pneumonia, ague, and typhoid took

a deadly toll; it is said that some of the immigrants became ill and died while walking from Moline to Geneseo.

In Moline these immigrant families grouped together, several families living in a single house and all sleeping on the floors, many to a room. This was what your grandparents did with their little girl. As soon as they could, they moved to a place of their own, a garret on Railroad Avenue. This they furnished with second-hand material, of which we still have the coffee grinder and kitchen table.

Then Lars Olson and Peter Olsson (father of Rev. C.E. Olsson) together built the double house which still stands at 317-319 5th Avenue, a few doors west of Ericson School. Shortly after it was finished, both Olsson and his wife sickened and died. The four-year-old boy, Emil, was placed in the Lutheran Orphanage in Swedona (later moved to Andover). As you know he later received a good education and in 1894 was ordained as a minister of the Augustana Synod.

Promised work somewhere in Iowa—I cannot remember the town—your grandfather set out from Davenport on foot. But your mother was then so sick he did not expect to see her again, so before leaving he arranged with a friend, Person, to take charge of the funeral if need be. In spring he returned to Moline. Finding a job at a sawmill which stood where Peterson's boat landing is now located, he reported to work but the very first day was brought home with the fingers of one hand cut off. He recovered, but a little later in the summer became ill of "inflammation of the stomach" and died. He was still a young man, only 40 or 45. He was buried in the Old Riverside Cemetery, Moline, just where we do not know as no cemetery records were kept until several years later. When your mother lost her father she was only 6 1/2 years old.

Selling the place by Ericson School, your grandmother built a little house on Second Street (157 4th Avenue). It still stands, but has been moved and rebuilt. The lot cost \$100 and the house \$500. Here the two got along as best they could, and this was your mother's home until she was married. They kept two cows, and as a little girl your mother ran all about these hills and ravines looking after them. The two old pitchforks that we have date back to this time. Of course she helped also with the milking and selling. As your mother grew older she worked for Emily Anderson, now in California, and so learned dressmaking. Though the cottage was small, they managed to keep two or three roomers—usually college students—in a bedroom and the parlor.

When your mother was a girl she had a fistula on her neck. She suffered from this for years, and tried many treatments before

Dr. Piper extracted it with a pair of pliers. You know of the bad scar that resulted.

Shortly after they moved to 2nd Street, your grandmother suffered a stroke which left her so crippled she could walk only with difficulty. Nevertheless your mother used to lead her to church; I remember them so well as they came, arm in arm, the girl and her mother. Your mother was always active in Sunday School and other church work, though she had no chance to take part in choir and Young People's Society. She was confirmed on April 13, 1879, by Rev. A.G. Setterdahl, in the Swedish Lutheran Church in Moline.

I spent Christmas in the house on 2nd Street the year before we were married, and then gave your mother a furniture set of which now only a mirror remains (it hangs over the dresser upstairs).

It was of course our plan that after we were married your grandmother would live with us. She therefore sold her house, and helped make it possible to build (for \$1100) our first home, at 715 12th Street, Moline. Our marriage took place in this house on June 7, 1890. I was then 36, and your mother was ten years younger. Rev. Henry O. Lindeblad performed the ceremony, and Svea Male Chorus sang several selections. We lived in this home two years, and here (on November 18, 1891) Esther was born. In 1892 we sold this place (house and lot for \$2700), moved to our second home at 715 3rd Street. Here we have lived more than forty years, and here you boys were all born (Hjalmar on June 4, 1895; Carl on October 29, 1897; Fritiof on April 27, 1900). In the exchange of homes we had a little money left over, but much of this we lost through a bad investment in the Furniture Works. Also, soon after we were married, your grandmother had another stroke which left her bedridden and helpless, and there were many doctor's bills. She lingered on for several years, but finally passed away on April 14, 1898, when almost seventy.

When we built the present home there were few other houses in the west end of Moline. The Swenson place on 11th Avenue and 3rd Street A, a house on 12th Avenue and 3rd Street, and Holmes' house in the block next to us were the only others. Holmes had built the fall before us. The Williams place next north of ours was begun shortly after ours but was the first to be finished. In those days we had to call for our mail at 4th Street and 4th Avenue. The first years we carried our water from a spring in the ravine known as Hawk Hollow, at what is now 4th Street and 13th Avenue. Then for several years we got water from a spring on our terrace (I dug a well just above the big south elm), and from a well in our yard. In winters we melted snow. There was no road up here. Coal had to be hauled by

roundabout trails up the ravines to the level of the prairie. But in the summer of 1896 3rd Street was cut through, as a hard times project to provide work for the unemployed—of whom I was one. Eleventh Avenue was also cut then. The dirt from these excavations was hauled south to 11th Avenue and north to 5th Avenue. Uncle Charley was then Street Commissioner of Moline, and I worked for him with pick and shovel.

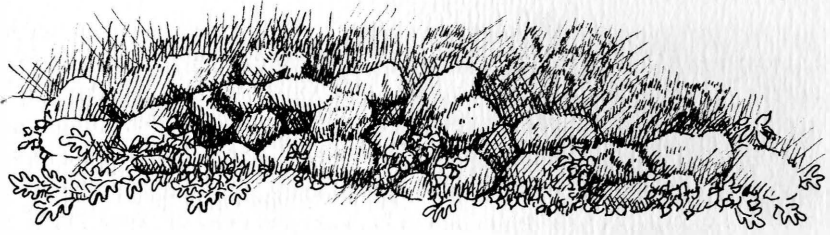
In 1895 we transferred our membership from the Swedish Lutheran Church of Moline to the newly organized Zion Lutheran Church¹⁴ of Rock Island. This was more convenient for us, as Esther was now ready for Sunday School. Later I served on the building committee which had charge of erecting the brick church now in use.

I have mentioned hard times in 1896. This particular depression began in 1893 and lasted for years. The Organ Company closed in the fall of 1896, and we had to get along on such odd jobs as I could find. It was even necessary to mortgage our home. In 1901 I worked eight months on the Arsenal, but was laid off in December. Then in the following spring (1902) came calls to report at both the Arsenal and the Organ Company. I accepted the latter, which may not have been the wisest choice.

Although I have always loved the outdoors, and the beautiful and grand in nature, it was really not until I had a home of my own that I developed the enthusiasm for botany and gardening that you know so well. At the public libraries I found books on botany which I studied till I had the information I wanted about the habits and the Latin names of the native flowers, shrubs, and trees of the Mississippi Valley, as well as of the cultivated plants. Botany, music, travel, and literature—especially Scandinavian literature—are the fields of which I never tire, but as you know I am interested in almost everything.

I need only remind you of the last years. On June 9, 1920, I left the Organ Company to go to the hospital for a major operation (hernia), and I never returned to organ building—partly because I could no longer do the heavy work of assembling, and partly because the company itself was now on the verge of bankruptcy. When able to work again later that summer I became gardener for the Huber estate in Rock Island, and, still later, carpenter at Williams, White, and Company, Moline. In the fall I was employed by the woodworking department of Deere and Company, as general repair man, and I continued in this capacity off and on for three years. When I laid off in the summer of 1921 I was doing work on a house on 8th Street and fell, incurring a double leg fracture. But the bones healed perfectly, in less time than most young people need, and I returned

to work—with not so much as a limp. In the summer of 1922 I served as gardener in the Moline city parks, work more to my liking than anything else I have done before or since. Accidents have followed each other. In the summer of 1923, while repairing a ceiling at Deere's, I touched an uncovered power wire, and was almost electrocuted. I was at the hospital a long time before the burns healed. In August, 1923, I left Deere's and began work at Hadley's Furniture Company, Moline, doing cabinet work and furniture finishing. This work continued till June 5, 1926, when I left for Sweden. After my return to Moline in middle August, I had no regular work, but for a year I did odd jobs at carpentering, cabinet making, and so on. In October, 1927, I became night watchman for Dimock, Gould, and Company, and continued till late spring, 1928. During this time my sight began to fail rapidly,¹⁸ and I would have become completely blind but for the remarkable operation performed at the Billings Hospital, University of Chicago. This saved what little sight remained. Since then, poor sight has kept me from regular employment, though I have found work to do now and then here at home and elsewhere.



RETURN TO SWEDEN

You can understand that as the years passed I longed to revisit Sweden and see once more the places where my early years were spent, but I did not dare to let myself believe that this could ever happen. Then when I was 72 the chance did come, as a present from you children. What other gift could have meant so much to me? You had planned it so that in June, 1926, just fifty years after I had come to America, I should go back to Sweden.

On this return journey, too, my brother Gust traveled with me, but for him the journey did not have quite the same meaning as for me since he had been back before. While in Sweden I did not make any attempt to see much of the various parts of the country, but only those places that I had been thinking of for so long. By the middle of August I was again "back home" in Moline, after experiences which I tried to write about in my letters and describe on my return but which after all I must leave to your imagination.



EPILOGUE: What John Fryxell Built: A Son's Recollections

John Fryxell, my father, was I suppose the most important single influence in my life. His vision, his values, the kind of home he made for us, have had a profound impact on what I have tried to do and be. In the foregoing pages I have attempted to show some of the experiences which built his character. Now I would like to step back and look at some of the things he built. For it seems to me that above all, my father was a builder.

He was a slight, wiry man, whose beard turned from dark to white in the years he was with us; whose keen eyes, circled in spectacles, gradually blurred with glaucoma; whose face weathered into long deep lines—but whose mind and spirit remained strong until the day he died. I early realized he was an extraordinary man, and the more I contemplate his life, the more remarkable I think he was. If he had been given the opportunities that we, his children, had, he would have breezed through college and postgraduate work, and there's no telling where he would have finally ended up because his talents were so unusual in many areas.

He was unschooled, but by no means unlearned. His brief leisure time—he worked ten hours a day, five and a half or six days a week—he spent in reading. He read Swedish poetry and recited it extensively, Scandinavian history, botanical studies. He was musical to the tips of his fingers. He loved to listen to music, his taste was instinctively good, and he sang in a delightful deep bass voice; not large, but the rumbly sort that was joy to hear. An organ builder for the Moline Organ Company, he was an exacting critic of organ performance. When we went to Zion church, Rock Island, now St. John's, we always took essentially the same pew: right next to the organ my father had helped to build. After services he expressed himself very forcibly about the quality of the music. I particularly remember one man who took the post of organist because he was

experienced in piano. He played the organ by hooking his left leg behind the bench, manipulating the manuals, and with the right foot giving an occasional dab at the pedals. Father would come home sputtering with indignation: it was a travesty, he said, that kind of organ-playing in the Lutheran church! He built in his children a love for music: all of us, at some time in our lives, played an instrument or sang, with varying degrees of seriousness and expertise.

Yet much as he loved the arts and the sciences, my father also commanded a wide variety of practical skills; he built, and built well, with his hands. He chose the site of our home, atop a hill on Third Street, Moline, overlooking the Mississippi River Valley—an exceptional site, all the more so when I recall that he picked it out when there were just a few houses in that part of Moline. But he had evidently been quick to note the remarkable view that this lot afforded, and the unlikelihood of its ever being blocked. The aesthetic and the practical met in this choice: we never had any problems with water in the basement because rain all ran away from the house. He'd seen that, too.

Having chosen the site, he helped with the actual building of the house. He planned it to be spacious, and it was big enough to allow each child in our expanding family to have his/her own room. Large windows gave good light for music and reading. My father loved fine wood and working with it, so our furniture was of solid walnut, birch, and oak. And he built a bookcase into one closet, a cabinet into another. Thanks to him, all my life I have noticed and appreciated the look and feel of fine wood.

Anything pertaining to the house he took care of: painting, putting up screens or storm windows. And of course he had endless work adjusting the plumbing for greater efficiency (I remember he was always changing the location of the bathroom), and keeping the furnace working in cold weather. He enjoyed mowing the lawn, and often remarked, particularly in his later years, that if he could have lived his life over again, he would have wanted to become a gardener.

Undoubtedly the very nature of our home, spacious, light, full of views on wood and sky, had much to do with our love for it. And from it, throughout our growing up, we could see to the west the dome of Augustana's Old Main, in a very real sense our hope for years to come.

For my father's great concern, almost his passion, was education. That, above all, was what he built in us. In my earliest memories of him, which come to me like pictures, he is teaching me: holding his big noisy silver watch to my ear to let me hear and marvel at the clanging inside. Sitting with me on his lap, turning the pages

of H. T. Williams' *The Pacific Tourist*, an illustrated travelers' guide to the Overland Trail given to him in 1887, before his six-month sojourn in San Francisco. As we explored that book, he would explain—in Swedish, of course—each scene. We'd make a game of it, because in all the views along the railroad, if you looked closely enough, you'd see a train—way down in the bottom of a canyon, or emerging from a snowshed or tunnel, or threading its way over a frail wooden bridge across a foaming river. Father would say, "Find the train!" and I would jab out my finger and poke the train. It was in that book that I first glimpsed an illustration of the Tetons.

When we went to school, studying was expected and encouraged—even to the point of our being relieved of some of the household chores our friends had to perform. I think our family was very unusual in that all of the members were pervaded by a singleness of purpose as regards the objectives toward which we were working. This was largely my father's doing; our mother, kind and gentle, didn't altogether understand our drive for academic success, though she always supported us. The intensity with which we pursued our studies was not the result of a great deal of talk; neither of my parents spoke much about what we should do, or what our objectives should be. They simply created an atmosphere in which we understood that we had opportunities far beyond anything they had experienced—and that to fall short of these opportunities was simply unthinkable.

Thus all of our objectives revolved around education—to miss no opportunities with respect to education, and to go as far with our studies as circumstances allowed. We knew, though he seldom expressed it, the immense satisfaction father took in our report cards. (And any deviation in performance was sharply questioned.) I can see him, sitting in his rocker, with me standing before him, carefully looking at my card with his round spectacles on, running a finger down the various subjects in which we were marked, then nodding, turning it over and signing it. It was very serious business for us both.

The end purpose of these endeavors, although again never spelled out, were traits such as honesty, decency, respectability, good citizenship. None of these necessarily meant worldly success; I don't recall ever having heard my parents speak about trying to make money. We grew up with the assumption that if we got a good education, and became honest, respected individuals, other matters would take care of themselves. We would at least get along as well as our parents, and that should be enough.

It seems to me remarkable that my father, with virtually no

education, should have valued education so highly. I think to some extent this point of view was influenced by his association with clergy, and with Augustana faculty and staff. But even so, I find it one more evidence of an unusual and enlightened character.

The discipline in our home, as we grew up, was a fundamental condition of our lives, but it was unobtrusive and, again, largely unexpressed. My parents didn't believe in corporal punishment; nor in fact did they even scold us very often. There were certain simple "laws," not to be transgressed: frugality, hard work, and at least while we were small, the use of Swedish for conversation in the home.

As regards frugality, we really had little choice. My father's job netted him about thirty cents an hour; I remember how, as soon as he came home on Saturdays, he would take out of his pocket and drop on the kitchen table a little manilla envelope that was heavy and clinked because it contained the silver dollars in which he was paid. Eighteen dollars a week! It seemed an enormous sum to me, but on it he maintained a family of six. And so our clothing—at least mine, as the youngest child—was mostly hand-me-downs. We got shoes at the store, but not very often because my father resoled and reheeled them with his last and tools in the basement. Our meals were simple. We had to clean our plates (or get one of our siblings to do it, if we happened to overestimate our capacity), but we couldn't throw anything away. Also, we were told, food was perfectly good even if it chanced to be scorched a little, as potatoes and toast occasionally were. Father would say, very shortly: "Eat it—it'll make you beautiful."

In our home we used Swedish because my father said we should use it. If we forgot, he said, "Speak Swedish," and we had to repeat our remark. The rule was strictly enforced until we were teenagers. Yet my father did not share the illusion, adopted by some of his fellow-immigrants, of a permanent Swedish-American culture. On the contrary, he was eager for his children to experience the full benefits of the new land—and contribute to it. But I think he felt it would be foolish for us not to learn a second language when we had the chance, and he also wanted us to know something about the history and literature of the country from which he and his family had come. To this day I thank him that I can read Swedish poetry and history, for it has enlarged my world immeasurably.

As I think of our family life, I see in my father its center, its cornerstone: reading in the light of the kerosene lamp, or sitting by the woodburning stove in winter; and in summer, leaning against the wall of the back porch, puffing occasionally on his pipe, "just

enough to keep off the mosquitoes," as he watched the sundown. I think of him working with wood, and I see the long white scrolls of wood shavings at his feet. I see him at Christmas, by the tree with the live candles, distributing our gifts—many of them made by him.

The later years took my father's sight—he could no longer read or work with wood, though he always kept his tools scrupulously cleaned. But neither years nor illness could take his vision or stop his building. He was a zestful and intrepid traveler, eagerly embracing new scenes and new spheres. (A list of his travels follows.) He took long walks, exploring Moline. He found great pleasure in listening to my brother Carl and me read to him from newspapers in both English and Swedish, though he would always take care to avoid making it a chore for us. "Just read enough so I can get the gist of the story," he'd say. And he was deeply involved in the musical activities of his children and their families—Regina's, Hjalmar's, and Hulda's. He "adopted" the Tri-City Symphony (of which Hjalmar was a charter member) almost as an extended family, attending all their concerts, and keeping in his head a precise record of who played in the orchestra year by year. And toward the end of his life he did a curious and touching thing.

Unable to build with the wood he loved, he turned his creative and physical energy to what he could do. Long ago, as a young man in Sweden, he had pried boulders from the earth with a crowbar, that seed might be planted in the thin soil. With those boulders, he had built a wall—a wall that was still there, sixty years later when he returned to visit his old home. Now, as an elderly man, he built another wall of boulders. Day after day, pushing a wheelbarrow, my father scoured the countryside around his home for boulders. He found many along a bed of a creek not too far from us, and he loaded them into the wheelbarrow—sometimes two, sometimes three at a time, and wheeled them home. These rocks he set along the south side of his property line, beginning at the east end of the yard and slowly, laboriously, working his way west. Before he died, the wall reached the full length of the yard. It is still there.

One afternoon in 1941, while I was teaching at Augustana, my brother Carl called me out of a lab session. Our father was seriously ill, he said. I went home at once, and found father suffering acute abdominal pain. We took him to the hospital, where physicians performed an emergency appendectomy. But the appendix had ruptured, and, without modern infection-fighting drugs, there was little hope of recovery. Yet he lived for three more weeks, and almost to the end remained alert and clear-headed, aware of the battle situation in Europe, anxious for what news we could bring or

read to him, concerned for the future of the country and the world, as long as his mind was his own. It was during this time, too, that he talked about my mother, and we learned some of the painful events in her life which had taken place long before we were born.

And then he died, and the story was finished. Or perhaps not. For what John Fryxell built was finer and more intricate than organs, stronger and more enduring than walls.

Fritiof M. Fryxell with Ann Boaden



NOTES

¹References throughout to “English miles” are to distinguish them from “Swedish miles” of JF’s youth (1 Swedish mile = 10 kilometers = 6.1 miles), this quite different from the measure used in America.

²According to the genealogical record, JF’s paternal grandmother died 24 November 1845, when his father would have been 25, not 12 years old.

³“skrädern i gatan,” the tailor down the street

^{4, 5}His name was actually Johannes Pettersson; he died in 1857 at the age of 59.

⁶JF’s maternal grandmother was born 31 December 1798.

⁷Gust Fryxell died 23 August 1947.

⁸“Wake up and see the Skara-pants!”

⁹“If one and two zeros, with a one thereto is written; then you have the year that the church was built.”

¹⁰“The old Husaby stone, originally put into the corner of the [Skara] church in 1784 on the initiative of the parish priest JONAS MARCHANDER, is now bricked into the tower of the same church.” (Tycho Norlindh, personal communication)

¹¹“grenljus” = a branched candle

¹²Anders Fryxell (1795-1881), Swedish historian, who devoted most of his life to writing his great history of Sweden, published in 46 volumes, 1823-1879.

¹³“rike Ericson” = rich-man Ericson

¹⁴Zion Lutheran Church is now St. John’s Lutheran Church.

¹⁵“prastfru” = preacher’s wife

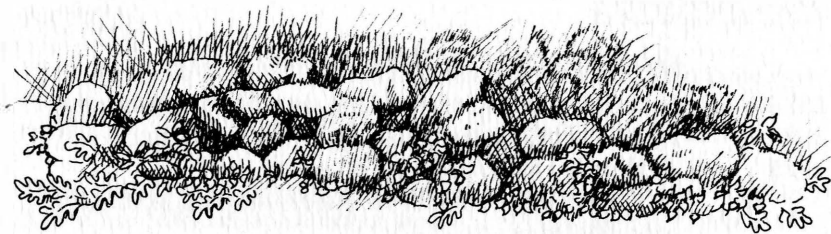
¹⁶For photographs of these early settlers of Nebraska and of their sod houses, see *Soloman D. Butcher, photographing the American dream* by John E. Carter (University of Nebraska Press, 1985; ISBN 0-8032-1404-9). Many of the photographs were taken in 1886, the very year JF traveled in Nebraska.

¹⁷A diagonal cut from the base of the little finger to the tip of the index finger.

APPENDICES

John Fryxell's Travels in Later Years

- 1924 By car to the Dells of Wisconsin, with Hjalmar.
- 1925 By car to Muskegan, Michigan, with Hjalmar.
- 1925 To Sweden in spring and summer.
In late summer, by car to Wisconsin and Michigan, with Hjalmar.
- 1928 To Kansas (for Fritiof and Regina's wedding) by car, with Hjalmar.
- 1929 By car to Washington, D.C., with Hjalmar.
- 1931 By car to Keweenaw Peninsula, Michigan in spring, with Carl and Fritiof.
By car with Esther to South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.
- 1932 With Carl to Minneapolis, Duluth, and Wisconsin, by car.
- 1934 To Alabama with Carl, by car.
- 1935 In early summer, by car to Washington, D.C., with Fritiof.
Later in summer, to Yellowstone and Grand Teton Park with Fritiof.
In November through the Southwest to California, by car, with Fritiof.
Lived in Berkeley four months.
- 1936 In March returned to Moline alone by train.
In summer, by car, to former home on the Hudson, in New York, and throughout New England, with Carl.
In November, alone by train to Berkeley, California.
In November and December returned by car with Fritiof through the Southwest (with stops in Mexico).
- 1937 By car to Escanaba, Michigan, with Hjalmar.
In summer by train, with Regina, through the Pacific Northwest (Glacier Park, Seattle, Portland, etc.) to California.
In fall returned to Moline by train, with Fritiof.
- 1938 Alone by train to St. Paul, Minnesota to visit Arthur Carlson.
By car with Fritiof to Tetons; home by way of north rim of Grand Canyon, and Zion and Mesa Verde Parks.
- 1939 By car with Carl through the Southeast and South (Great Smokies, Virginia, Carolinas, etc.).
- 1940 By car with Carl through the Ozark Mountains, Missouri.



THE WALL

by Ann Boaden

He woke these days to blurred edges of things: the tracery of winter branches a dark brush; sky and rooftops smudged into one another. The bedroom massed with shadow, and his hands, lying on the quilt, pale and remote. Book pages were indistinct grayness; now even that was fading, and when he had brought in the newspaper last night it had been like holding sheets of soft smoke. And he remembered how long he had waited for the time and the quiet to read. His family read to him, in the evenings, but it wasn't quite the same without seeing the fine sharp shapes of print and feeling a book in the hand.

And so, waking, he thought sometimes of all the writing gone from him like smoke-drift. He grieved for it. But that was an old grief. Harder now was the going of his more immediate world—design of leaf and petal and root—things he had identified and loved. He wouldn't really see the spreading and starring of the bloodroot down the ravine to the creek this spring; and the flowers, when he knelt to them, would look like patches of snow. Worst of all was to lose the relationship with wood—no longer to be able to trace its grain and shape it into table or stool. It filled him with a kind of desperation, sometimes, to know that he could no longer build. In the long days, empty and somber, when the house was quiet, the family gone, he would touch the things he had made—run his hands over smooth surfaces and precisely-turned legs. It was a painful gratification, for his fingers kept the craftsman's wisdom and desire, and he would want to build, and go to the basement and clean the tools he could no longer see to use.

He wasn't resentful. If he discovered even the beginnings of bitterness or self-pity, he eliminated them with the same scorn for the shabby, the same relentless integrity he had applied to his work. He disciplined his soul as he did his body, which was still lean and

straight and agile. He'd made it that way, in the old days back in Sweden, doing jobs no one so slight should have been able to do—rocking the great boulders out of the earth with crowbars to clear the fields for plowing; setting them, stone on stone, to build the wall along the boundary of his father's land. And so, these mornings when the world seemed no longer solid but shifting luminosity, he would think back to those days of work; and remember that they had made him strong enough to escape them, to come to the New World and find a craft that asked delicacy as well as strength. And he would remember the organs he had built, see and hear them in his mind, know their beauty. And he would think with wonder of the dreams his children had dreamed, and of the work that made them realities, and say to himself that his life had been good. If now things were lost—books and plants and wood—well—life took as well as gave. So, cleanly and remorselessly, did he deal with his soul; and the result was that his grief for the lost things could be pure.

What was less manageable was the restlessness; the drive of baffled energy. Evenings, with the family at home, he could talk; hear the newspaper read; recall the old days; listen to the son who was the scientist (the scientist—and to look at him, slight and strong, was like looking at himself thirty years ago). But days were long spans of vacancy. Wandering through the house and down the brick sidewalk to the end of the back yard. Standing at the lip of the ravine and looking at the massed dun of its eternal leaves. He took long walks into the town and along the river; the busy gallop of it pleased him; but then one day as he crossed Third Avenue a car was upon him with a scream of brakes and a gnash of chrome, and he had not seen it. He jumped back—his reactions were still quick—and the driver of the car yelled something at him as he pulled by. It was not, he thought ruefully, a kind inquiry. And indeed, why should it be? Old men who couldn't see cars were safety hazards and ought to know enough to keep off the streets. He held himself erect as he walked home, but it was an effort; the rhythm and ease were gone; he walked carefully and felt his knees bend with each step, like old men's knees. He did not walk in town after that.

So he woke, these nebulous late-winter mornings, with a weight of something like grief. All his life had been driven to effort that meant something, that made something, and now—Now the discipline, painfully learned, rigorously practised, must be turned against the very drive it had honed. He would lie in bed, looking out the window, and think how oddly things had happened.

ii.

He decided to clean the basement. One did what one could; and early on, in the jostle of moving from Sweden to New York to the Midwest, to the river town where he had settled, he had learned how to compromise activity—though never vision. He cleaned the basement. It wasn't building furniture, but it was necessary and available work. And when he had finished—even to clearing out and chopping into neat and disposable chunks some forgotten rubbish crammed along the rafters—it felt good. The slight ache in the arms and along the back was good.

The family were delighted that evening. Told him he shouldn't have. "Well, you don't have time for it," he said. They didn't. Two college professors... "You need to give time to your studies and your music." His pride at moments like these was almost tangible. That his son should have married a woman who played the organ superbly and taught it in college seemed to him still, after so many years, both inevitable and miraculous. "I'm glad to have the work to do," he told them.

They thanked him, more than he wanted. He wanted to thank them for having a basement that needed cleaning. And then his son said, "And you even found a place for my Indian stuff. I've been meaning to move it. Those rafters aren't meant for storage."

He said, "Indian stuff?"

"Yes—you know, the bowl and the papoose carrier. You did find it?"

He looked at his hands. They seemed not quite steady, and he wondered if it were his eyes. He said slowly, "Did you want that?"

"Want it? Papa, I've had those things for years—they're valuable artifacts, and I—"

His son's wife said, "The boys are ready for Grandpa to tell them good-night. A story about Sweden is being strenuously requested, and of course I wouldn't do at all."

He pushed himself out of the chair and went upstairs and, because he couldn't think of anything else, told the boys about clearing the big rocks from the field and building the wall with them. It seemed to him a dull story, but the boys bounced on their beds and said wouldn't it be neat to have a wall in their yard too. When he came back down, he told his son what he had done with the valuable artifacts.

His son said it was his fault entirely; he should have put them in a better place, or taken them to the college museum, as he'd so long intended to do; how was Papa to know? And he'd been so good and

made the basement look so—"They didn't look like valuable things to me," his father said heavily, staring at his hands. They still kept the gratification of holding a hatchet and chopping cleanly through old wood, and they shamed him, like the hands of a barbarian. "I did not know they were treasures."

"Papa—it's—look, it's all right." The son put a hand on his shoulder—awkwardly, for they were not demonstrative people. His father looked up at him, and his face blurred, and he could not tell whether the scientist still looked like him or not.

That night he did not sleep. Useless was bad enough; to be destructive was intolerable. And to have destroyed things created long ago, by fingers that had held just the living energy and skill of his own—A man had lived too long, he thought, staring into the dark, if all he could find to do was desecrate. Typically, he did not excuse himself because the desecration had been unintentional. It was done, that was the thing, irrecoverably, and he had done it. Uneasy visions came to him—of hands he had known, brown and hard, white and delicate, hands of the young that had buckled and gnarled with age and work, hands of the living and the dead, and the imagined earth-red hands of the Indian whose work he had destroyed. Morning came bleakly, a slow spill of cold light, and he got up before the family was awake and put on a coat and walked out to the edge of the ravine. It was still, mist smoking down among the leaves where the creek ran. He stood there for a long time.

He thought of the life he had had—things he had done, ways he had gone. They had been long ways—across an ocean and a continent—and always he had gone learning and building and loving the newness of experience as it unfolded. Mornings were always his favorite time, when everything and anything lay ahead. Not that it hadn't been hard. He would go to bed aching with the hardness of it, of muscles balled and stretched, of attention holding the new thing like a vise. But always it had come—the skill, the knowing; and always there had been tomorrow.

Now, all that was done. He had never said it before. Though he had lived beyond his threescore years and ten, though the world blurred before him like the mist that hid the creek in the ravine below him, yet still, in some unacknowledged part of himself, he had been waiting for the new way, the new thing, the new, bright morning.

Fool, he called himself bitterly. Fool—and felt two points like gimlets at the back of his eyes. Yes, blubber now, as the old do, who have nothing else to occupy them and no strength to stop themselves....

He rubbed the back of his hand fiercely across his eyes. He stood for a moment in hard and terrible darkness. Then it eased. He was looking down the ravine again, at the soft brown leaves, the soft curling cover of mist. He noticed that a patch had opened in the mist, and through it he could see a slender vein of bright creek water. The opening was curiously round, as if a big rock had fallen through and torn the mist away.

And there was the very rock, if his eyes didn't cheat him, lying on the bank beside the creek. It reminded him of the ones he'd had to clear out of the fields at home; the ones he'd dug and pried and wrestled from the soil and hoisted up to build the wall that marked off his father's land. He'd come a whole ocean and half a continent to get away from that stony land and that tedious, back-breaking job. It had seemed to him, when he was young, as if he were building a wall that bound in his life.

Bound in his life.

Mist swam over and covered up the open patch of running creek. But he was not looking there anymore. He was looking off into the quiet sky. Then he looked down at his hands. Last night they had shamed him. He wanted to get rid of the shame. He flexed them slowly. They were gnarled from work and weather, but they were still strong. He felt their strength. He thought, a man could, perhaps, choose his walls....

For once he was impatient for the family to be gone. Almost as soon as they were out the door he got the wheelbarrow from the tool shed and loaded the crowbar into it and rolled it down to the end of the alley. Here the slope to the creek was gentler than the one by the house, but the old leaves covered bumps and knobs of the earth, still winter hard, and the wheelbarrow took them jumping and shuddering and the movement ran up his arms. It seemed very quiet when he reached the creek, and he listened for a moment to the little intimate sounds of water moving in small places. Then he got out the crowbar.

As he wedged the crowbar under the boulder and pressed down, he thought he heard thunder and looked up. The sky was quiet. Then he knew: the sound was inside himself—it was the old time and this time coming together. A man could choose his walls.

A man could choose his walls. The words stayed with him like a litany, all through the work of prising up the rock and loading it onto the wheelbarrow and pushing it up the slope of the ravine to his yard. A man could choose his walls. The day never really broke; the air was thin and gray and hushed from morning to afternoon. When he came into the yard with his second load, he was soaked with sweat

and his legs shook under him. He had two good-sized boulders. He put them side by side and thought, Well, it's a beginning.

The boys saw them first when they came home from school and pulled him back out into the yard with them, shouting that grandpa was going to build them a wall—a wall of their very own, right here, just like he did in Sweden. His son and daughter-in-law came out too; they smiled at him, tentative, reconciling smiles, and his son the geologist knelt down in his suit and examined the boulders and said they were good ones and explained what they were made up of, all those swirls and glitters, and where they might have come from and how old they were. The boys watched, their faces still with concentration, and for a moment time blurred and he thought they were his own sons, and the father explaining, moving skilled hands over the textures of the rocks as if he were touching places where their secrets lay, was himself. The sun came out, briefly and suddenly, the air all at once promised spring and the glitters from the boulders hit his eyes sharply as stars.

58 GENEALOGY

Ancestors of John Fryxell (and his siblings, Johanna Lusty, Gustav Fryxell, and Charley Fryxell):

Parents:

Magnus Svensson (born: 12 Oct. 1820 - died: 1880)
Britta Maija Jonsdotter (born 20 Sept 1821 - died 5: Dec. 1875)

Paternal grandparents:

Sven Andersson (born: 6 Apr. 1782 - died: 1878)
Annicka Ericsson (born: 4 Jan. 1779 - died: 24 Nov 1845)

Maternal grandparents:

Johannes Pettersson (born: 15 Dec. 1798 - died: 1857)
Anna Ericsson (born: 31 Dec. 1798 - died: 14 Mar. 1861)

Great-grandparents:

Parents of Sven Andersson: Anders Svensson and Cajsa Jansdotter.

Parents of Annicka Ericsson: Eric Pehrsson (1747-1808) and Brita Svensdotter (1754-1823)

Parents of Johannes Pettersson: Petter Andersson and Britta Andersdotter

Parents of Anna Ericsson: not known.

Descendants of John Fryxell (born Sven Johan Magnusson) (1 June - 30 Jan. 1941) and Sophie Olson Fryxell (20 Nov. 1864 - 30 Oct. 1934):

Esther Fryxell Johnson (18 Nov. 1891 - 23 July 1952); husband, Otto Philip Johnson (2 Aug. 1887 - 25 July 1967)

Hildegard Johnson Carlstrom (23 Jan. 1922 - 29 May 1960)

Lawrence Johnson (10 Apr. 1925 - *)

Margaret Johnson Anderson (7 Oct. 1930 - *)

Hjalmar Edward Fryxell (4 June 1895 - 6 Aug. 1963); wife, Hulda Peterson Fryxell (15 Feb. 1897 - 12 Apr. 1983)

Robert Edward Fryxell (24 Mar. 1923 - 22 Dec. 1986)

Paul Arnold Fryxell (2 Feb. 1927 - *)

Carl Arvid Fryxell (29 Oct. 1897 - 3 Aug. 1946); wife, Lucile Gause Fryxell (17 Oct. 1904 - *)

Richard Arvid Fryxell (18 Sep. 1934 - 5 Oct. 1960)

Fritiof Melvin Fryxell (27 Apr. 1900 - 19 Dec. 1986); wife, Regina Holmen Fryxell (24 Nov. 1899 -*)

John Birger Fryxell (8 Feb. 1831 - 26 Nov. 1953)

Roald Hilding Fryxell (18 Feb. 1934 - 18 May 1974)

Redwood Thomas Walcott Fryxell (11 Jan. 1938 - *)

NOTE: The genealogy is not extended beyond the nine grandchildren to subsequent generations because the above individuals are the only ones who were a part of JF's life.



