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Daddy, where did I come from?

Reminiscences of an early Minnesota immigrant

BY LOIS ANDERSON PETERSEN

When I was a very young child, we lived in an immigrant house across the road from Lake Lillian. I thought this lake was so beautiful as it sparkled in the sun. In those days my Grandmother Julson lived with us. Many old timer relatives and friends from Sweden came to visit. They often spoke about coming over the water from the old country. I thought they had come over Lake Lillian. I was very curious and kept asking Dad, "Daddy, where did I come from? Did I come over the water too?" He always had the same answer, "Some-day I will show you a part of where you come from." I thought I had come over the water, too, probably Lake Lillian.

One day, when I was six, Dad told me we were going on a trip and he would show me where I had come from. This was very exciting for me. It seemed like such a very long trip. We drove all the way to a place called Marine on St. Croix. Here we visited Uncle Swen Albert and Aunt Alma Anderson. He took us on a sight-seeing trip. Our first stop was Square Lake. My first question was, "Is this the water I came over?" This was where Dad swam as a child. He said, "Wait a little and I will show you."

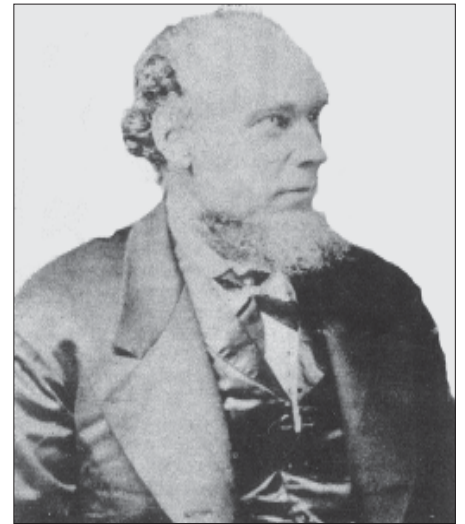
Our next stop was at a log cabin. It was explained to me that this was where the Andersons had started in Minnesota. There was no water! It was such a great disappointment to me! I thought, "What a dirty old house. It is all black! I don't want to live here." So, I went home disap-

pointed. I had not come over the water after all. I hated to think Great-grandfather, Sven Anderson, had lived in that house!

A few years passed and I was in third grade. We were celebrating President Lincoln's birthday. Miss Howe gave us a log cabin to color. It looked like the one at Marine on St. Croix. We learned that Mr. Lincoln had been a U.S. president, and was highly regarded. My opinion quickly changed about *my* log cabin. Perhaps we were famous, too. Great-grandfather had lived in a log cabin just like Abraham Lincoln. Of course, when I got home from school I checked it all out and found we were not famous. Great-grandfather had not been president.

How fast the years go by! It is now 1989, and we were visiting in Minnesota once more. My brother Wallace and I were talking about Marine and how much fun it would be to go there. We, his wife, Joyce, and my husband Allen were soon on our way to the area of Stillwater. We found Dad's cousin, Norman Anderson, and my second cousin Eldon Johnson. Before going out to explore our history, we stopped at cousin Virginia's for coffee. Who can go anywhere before that cup of Swedish coffee?

Of course, our first stop was *our* log cabin. I got inside and felt like I was breathing hallowed air. I became so excited about the cabin that I asked Eldon, "Do you think this property will ever go on sale? There must be some way we can buy it." I



Sven Anderson, ca 1875.

had such deep feelings about it. Great-grandfather had come over the water to this place, even though I hadn't. I felt like this was my, and my family's, first home in Minnesota.

A few more years passed and one day I got a phone call from Eldon. He told me the property with the log cabin was for sale. What joy! I couldn't quite figure out how we could purchase Sven's cabin. I decided to write to all of my Grandfather's family and ask for donations. Eldon did the same. With the help from family, institutional donors, and local residents, the cabin was purchased and later restored because some of the logs were rotting.

When the cabin was being restored we had a family reunion including family from Sweden, Florida, Minnesota, Montana, Arizona, and California. What an exciting day! My per-



The Early Settler's Cabin in Marine-on-St. Croix, Minn.

sonal satisfaction, my thanks to family, and joy was unlimited. What a dream come true! All of my personal family had been to see the cabin, with the exception of one granddaughter and her three small children.

Since then we have collected more money and cousins Mary, and Eldon have gotten a bronze plaque telling the history of Sven's cabin. I visited there in 2004 with my nephew, Keith Anderson, and again gave thanks to our (Sven's) family for helping make this all possible.

A few years ago a cousin, Rune Johansson, who lives in Sweden, gave me a book entitled, *De for åt Amerika*, by Olof Ljung. There is so much history in it of Sven Anderson and his experiences. He had gone from Sweden to Denmark. He heard about this wonderful place, America. He decided he would go to the territory of Minnesota where the climate and natural surroundings were similar to what he had known in Dalsland. When he got to Minnesota

he found that the population of Swedes was four.

He was known as *Sven på Snålan* having come from Sundals-Ryr. His life was published in the Minnesota state newspaper on February 6, 1879, while he was still alive.

He traveled up the Mississippi River to its tributary, the St. Croix to Marine. He brought with him four cows, the first owned by Swedes in this area. When the weather got cold he had nothing to feed them, so, he had to sell them. Then he got work at the Marine sawmill.

In 1855 Sven left the sawmill to get a piece of land in the Marine area. He plowed up 12½ acres and became a farmer. In the spring he planted wheat, the first in this settlement and probably the first in Minnesota. He soon had a great following and Minnesota became one of America's great wheat states. He threshed his first wheat harvest with flail on the frozen ground the following winter. He had to go to Wisconsin to find a mill to grind his wheat.



The memorial plaque.

After a few years he sold his farm and bought another. In 1879, he was still alive and owned one of the largest and best cared for farms in the area. He was not the President of the United States, but I am very proud of his accomplishments.

He was married to Maria, and had four children, Carolyn, Charles, Mathilda, and Swen. Among them was my dear grandpa, Charles Anderson, upon whose lap I used to sit and read "The Singing Farmer." He was born in the old log cabin, May 12, 1858, the day after Minnesota became a state. Do you suppose he was the first Swedish baby born in the State of Minnesota?

The author is a great-granddaughter of Sven Anderson. She lives in Easton, California. She can be reached through Glen R. Johnson, 361 Polynesia Court, Marco Island, FL 34145.



The Swen Anderson family in the 1880 U.S. Census, when they lived in township 31, Range 20, at Marine Mills in Washington County, Minnesota.