

Pehr Dahlberg and the First Swedish Settlement in Iowa

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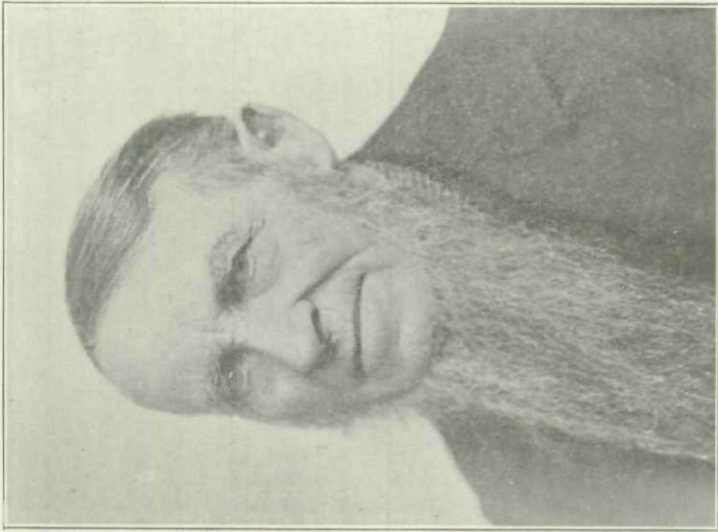
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PEHR DAHLBERG AND THE FIRST SWEDISH SETTLEMENT IN IOWA

By ROBERT NELSON DAHLBERG and CHARLES LEONARD DAHLBERG

To Pehr Dahlberg belongs the distinction of locating the first Swedish settlement in Iowa. His life story throughout his youth and entire manhood shows a struggle against adverse circumstances.

His ancestry, as far back as his descendants can trace, begins with his grandfather, Truls Trulson, who was born in Sweden about 1737. When grown to manhood he enlisted in the war between his native land and Russia, entering the service as a dragoon, which, according to the laws of Sweden, entitled him to choose the name by which he should be known as a soldier, and which he should have the right to hand down to his descendants. In accordance with this law or custom he selected the name "Dahlberg"; served his time in the Swedish Army in its struggle with Russia, was discharged and re-entered civil life, marrying and settling down to the work of caring for his family. One of his sons was named for him, "Truls Dahlberg," who on his arrival at years of maturity mastered and followed the trade of shoemaking in the village of Chevick in the southern part of Sweden, known as Skone.

In about 1801 Truls Dahlberg, the second, married and went into business in Chevick for himself. There his first child, whom he named Pehr, and who became Pehr Dahlberg, the immigrant, was born June 9, 1802. As soon as Pehr was old enough he too was taught the trade of shoemaking. For this he had great antipathy, which his father vainly tried to overcome. The boy also greatly desired to acquire an education, of which the father disapproved. As the two would go from house to house to make

shoes, the son would often stop behind a tree and read from a book he was secretly carrying, and then run to catch up with his father, then stop again behind another tree and read again, thus adding to his meager knowledge and getting a start in learning to read, not daring to let his father know about it. Prejudice against education among their people in those days was strong, it being commonly believed that all who secured an education became rogues and thieves. However, Pehr contrived to acquire some knowledge during his spare moments in boyhood, especially in the direction of navigation and commerce, as his desires led him that way.

On reaching his majority he threw away his last and awl and adopted a seafaring life, for which he had always longed. His first service was that of a common sailor on the small, common trading vessels that were used in commerce on the Baltic, principally in carrying lumber and grain. Then it became possible to gratify more than before his great desire to obtain knowledge, as he was able to beg and borrow books and make them his companions in his spare moments. In this way he secured an education considerably above the average of his associates, and his increased efficiency was recognized by his employers in promotions from time to time, of which he showed himself so worthy that within a few years he became captain, and for twelve years sailed the Baltic in command of vessels.

Soon after Pehr adopted the life of a sailor he became acquainted with Ingar Nilsdottar of Brantivik, to whom he was married in 1827 when he was twenty-five years of age, she being nineteen. Her father owned a small farm adjoining the village, owned and operated a first class windmill where people came for miles to have their grain ground, and was also a commercial fisherman and sailor. Her life having been spent among sailors and fishermen, Ingar had experienced much of the hardships and dangers incident to following the sea in its various forms, which well fitted her for the able, loyal, yes, the noble manner in which she, in after years discharged the duties of wife and mother. During the first nine years of their married life, they made their home in Brantivik.

Captain Dahlberg was an earnest and devout christian worker, especially among the young people, holding bible readings of

evenings and explaining the scriptures. His earnest christian work was well known among leading church men of the time as was evidenced by the presentation to him a short time before he left for America, of a copy of Zion Young Songs by Rosenious, inscribed in his own hand "Given by Rosenious to Dahlberg, March 21, 1843." Rosenious was one of the noted and leading divines, whose esteem was manifested in this way.

It should be borne in mind that those northern waters are ice-bound during the winter months. On one trip which Captain Dahlberg made to the city of Lulea, at the head of the Gulf of Bothnia, cold weather set in earlier than usual and his vessel was frozen in for the winter, with a cargo for which he and his partner were responsible, and which was lost, because of this unforeseen misfortune. His partner as it proved, was unable to pay his share of the loss and the entire burden fell on Dahlberg. He made a sled on which they loaded such things from the vessel as they could carry and hired a man with a horse to pull them to the next station, where a relay pulled them to the next and so on for the long trip of five hundred miles or more home. Rev. Olaf Peterson, a Baptist missionary among sailors, a warm personal friend of Dahlberg's, was with him on that trip. On the return trip, as but one could ride at the time, they had to take turns riding and walking.

In 1836 Captain Dahlberg and his family moved to Stockholm where he plied his trade as woodworker or cabinetmaker during the winter season. While living in Stockholm he was first mate two summers on steamboat on Lake Malar and other lakes in that vicinity. Part of his work in the winters while there was having charge of convicts doing that kind of work.

For years the Captain and Mrs. Dahlberg had been reading and hearing about the wonders and resources of America, until he finally determined to visit the new world and seek better opportunities for themselves and their growing family. Accordingly he sailed for America April 25, 1843, leaving his family in Stockholm till he should either return or could send for them. He landed in New York in about six weeks. The next two years he spent in getting acquainted with the country and language and looking for a location, travelling as far west as Wisconsin and Illinois. In 1845 he sent for his family. Having been raised

under the environments described above, fishing, making and mending nets, rowing for miles out in the Baltic, handling boats with the skill of a man, Mrs. Dahlberg was thoroughly inured to the hardships of the sea, and when her husband sent for her she did not hesitate nor falter, but with her seven children embarked in a sailing vessel which was loaded with a cargo of iron and was not any too well equipped for either safety or convenience. It was the old brig *Carolina* commanded by Captain Jacobson. He was an old friend of Mrs. Dahlberg's family, which was the reason they came with him. They encountered severe storms that carried them many miles out of their course, often threatening to destroy the vessel. The strain on the vessel was such that there were indications of it beginning to part, and they were compelled to fasten a spar or boom on each side of the bow, and with block and tackle and the aid of the capstan they were able to avert the threatened disaster. By the sailors keeping the pumps going, the vessel having already sprung aleak, they kept it afloat until they reached New York August 12, 1845, after a stormy voyage of twelve weeks. The old vessel *Carolina* on her next trip fell apart and sank, the crew being saved by a French vessel that happened along at that time. At New York Captain Dahlberg met his family. He had secured temporary quarters for them in the Bethel ship, "John Wesley," where they found Rev. O. G. Hedstrom holding services in the Swedish tongue and where, as a united family, they gave thanks to God for their wonderful preservation. The next two weeks were devoted to rest and preparation for the westward journey as well as recuperation from the effects of the long and hard journey by sea.

It was during this two weeks' interim that Captain Dahlberg noticed a Swedish vessel anchored near the Bethel ship, and while taking a walk along the wharf he met some of her men from whom he learned that four families had arrived from Sweden, the leader and spokesman being Peter Cassel. These people were contemplating locating in Wisconsin, owing to letters that had been written by a settler of that territory to his friends in Sweden. This company was greatly pleased, however, to meet with a fellow countryman who had had two years' experience in America, was familiar with locations and was able to speak the English language. Captain Dahlberg advised them that Iowa was

much the more desirable and was where he was going to take his own family. After a conference among themselves this company decided to accept Captain Dahlberg's advice and go with him to Iowa.

Peter Cassel, a man of some fifty-four years, was the head of the colony then and continued to be during his life. In later years Jefferson County was represented in the state legislature by Andrew Cassel, a worthy son of this worthy father, who also had the confidence of all who knew him.

The company which traveled from New York to Iowa was made up of the following persons: Captain Pehr Dahlberg, wife and seven children, five girls and two boys; Peter Cassel, wife and five children, two girls and three boys; John Danielson, wife and five children, two girls and three boys; John Munson, wife and three children, three girls; A. P. Anderson, wife and two children, one boy and one girl; Erick Anderson, single; Sarah Anderson, single; also a Mr. Berg, an old time friend of Captain Dahlberg's, a former government official from Stockholm.

The journey from New York to Iowa was made by rail and canal to Pittsburgh, thence by boat down the Ohio to Cairo and up the Mississippi to Burlington where they arrived September 13, 1845. Father Dahlberg being the only one in the company who could speak the English language, his task was of no small proportions in looking after the different families, with their baggage to be transferred and checked from time to time from one mode of travel to another, with the many changes between New York and Burlington. This leadership and care kept him on the go so nearly all the time that he had but little time to devote to the care of his wife and seven children.

An amusing incident occurred one time where the whole company had to pass through a gate to be counted, the order being that a mother with her baby in her arms were to be counted as one person, the fees for entrance being so much per head. As they started through the gate one of the mothers picked up her eight-year-old boy and carried him through as her baby, which caused much merriment.

From Burlington they traveled by team and such conveyances as they could procure, and stopped at the nearest place where government land could be had, which was at Brush Creek, a few

miles west of Rome, but in Jefferson County. Soon after their arrival, in a roofless cabin, Father Dahlberg and Mr. Berg, each with a glass of wine, christened the place New Stockholm.

Among the settlers whom this company found there already as neighbors were those bearing the names of Austin, Hopkirk, James, Vorhies, Stevenson and others who were kind to the newcomers and rendered them whatever assistance they could, but they had hard work to understand that they were Swedes and not Switzers.

On October 7, 1847, Captain Dahlberg filed pre-emption declaratory statement No. 1043, Fairfield Series, for the west half, northeast quarter, Sec. 26, Twp. 72 N., Range 8 West (Lockridge Township, Jefferson County), upon which he had built a log house and in which he was living. The government at that time charged a small entry fee after which the settler could hold the land for one year before paying for it. Finding it impossible to raise the money in this pioneer settlement, and after instructions from the government land office regarding the privileges and rights of settlers, he took a few of the most necessary household goods, leaving the rest after securely locking the door, and went with his family to Keokuk. There he secured work at his trade as woodworker, in which, as before stated, he was highly skilled, in order to secure the necessary funds to meet the payment on his claim required by the government.

While in Keokuk and before the year expired, his house was broken into and the goods set out. A party made affidavit that Captain Dahlberg had abandoned the claim and that there was nothing in the house. Another party then filed claim and took possession. Not having sufficient funds to either pay the government or to fight the case in the courts, he lost his claim. This experience was so discouraging that he had not heart to try it again, but continued with his trade.

In 1849 he removed to the town of Columbus on the Des Moines River in Van Buren County, where he manufactured walnut rocking chairs, some of which are still in as good condition as when made. About 1850 he removed to Keosauqua where he carried on the manufacture of window sash and later did finishing work in carpentry.

On September 8, 1852, he became a citizen of the United

States. The order admitting him to citizenship recites that it was made "in open court, on the testimony of Captain Frederick Hancock and C. H. Ober, in the presence of Charles Baldwin, clerk, and Benjamin P. Marlow, sheriff, and was signed by Wm. H. Seevers, presiding judge."

Captain Dahlberg was self-educated. After having mastered the common branches of education he became a student of theology and philosophy, having two volumes of the works of Thomas Dick, a Scottish writer on astronomy, theology and philosophy; also a number of works by Swedenborg, the great Swedish theologian. He was a mathematician of ability. His favorite periodicals of the later times were the *Scientific American* and the *St. Louis Globe Democrat*. His handwriting was such as is seldom seen today, described by one ex-county judge as "like copper plate."

"Mother Dahlberg," as she was familiarly called, a member of the Lutheran church in Sweden, finding no church of her choice accessible in the New World, joined the Methodist Episcopal church, of which she was an earnest, active worker the rest of her days. She died in her eighty-third year, on October 9, 1890, from the dislocation of the hip, improperly set. Her illness and decease occurred at the old home in the village of Pittsburg, just west of Keosauqua. She was a woman of remarkable personality. She had acquired only such schooling as was obtained by children through the Lutheran church. She became a fluent reader of English as well as of the Swedish language, and had remarkable talent for song, which became especially noteworthy in her later years when she often led the congregational singing in the little chapel in the old home village of Pittsburg. She also possessed natural ability in common mathematics, and often surprised some members of the family by solving mentally some problem before they could figure it out with pencil. Above all these qualities Mother Dahlberg was a devout Christian, whose faith in God never faltered and whose earnest prayers for each member of her family have been answered in many ways.

Captain Dahlberg died three years later, December 9, 1893, at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Elsie Le Cresley, in Fairfield, at the age of ninety-one years and six months. They are laid side by side in the Purdom cemetery at Keosauqua, where the

son, Robert N. Dahlberg, has provided a beautiful plot of ground for the family, and where the son, John P., had been laid away before them.

Father and Mother Dahlberg and the other members of the family who have passed over to the great hereafter have gone with a blessed assurance of a glorious immortality.

The only surviving members of the company that crossed the Mississippi on September 13, 1845, are Robert Nelson Dahlberg, five years old at the time, who still maintains his residence at Keosauqua, although of recent years much of his time has been spent on the Pacific coast and the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, and Charlotte G. Dahlberg Mort of Hill City, Kansas, two years old at the time.

FOUNDING OF LEANDER CLARK COLLEGE

The first authoritative steps toward the founding of what is now Leander Clark College was taken by the Iowa Annual Conference at its session in Muscatine in August, 1855. At this time a board of trustees was appointed and empowered to take such measures looking toward the establishment of a college as might be deemed expedient. The board finally accepted an offer from the people of Shueyville to donate lands and some money on condition that the college be located in that neighborhood. Acting on this proposition a site on the open prairie was selected in January, 1856, and in the following summer a college building was erected. The name "Western" was given to the new college because it was the farthest west of the schools of the United Brethren Church; the same name was given to the village that grew up around the college. The doors of the college swung open to receive students for the first time in January, 1857. At this time thirty-eight students offered themselves for enrollment. The faculty consisted of Rev. Solomon Weaver, president, and S. S. Dillman, M. A., J. C. Schrader, and Mrs. S. S. Dillman, teachers. It was seven years before the college sent out its first graduate.—From minutes of the Iowa State Conference of the United Brethren in Christ; second annual session, 1910, p. 52.

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