

Swedish Roots, Oregon Lives: An Oral History Project

It has been another busy and exciting year for SRIO with two major projects in the works: the transformation of the initial (and unusable) SRIO genealogical database into a new, easily accessible online resource for our website visitors on the one hand, and the completion of our more than a year long oral history project in to a book.

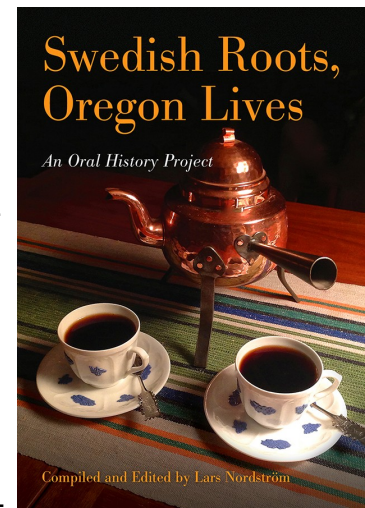
The fifteen stories gathered in our new book, *Swedish Roots, Oregon Lives: An Oral History Project*, confirm the richness and evolving character of the Swedish experience in the state of Oregon during the twentieth century. We look forward to sharing it with all readers interested in Oregon history, in Swedes and Swedish-Americans in Oregon, and in oral history in general.

Over the years, SRIO has collected all kinds of items on the Swedish immigrant experience. They vary from physical objects to written material, recordings, and historical photographs. Some of them have names and stories attached to them, while others are anonymous. It is, of course, impossible for us to preserve and publish everything in the form of books, but we would like to expand our website and add a gallery of selected historical photographs, as well as a page of family histories and recollections. Another idea we would like to realize on our website is to add various sound recordings associated with the Swedes of Oregon, perhaps traditional folk music or a few excerpts from some preserved recordings of Bob Anderson's radio show "Scandinavian Hour" in Portland.

More than ten years ago, when SRIO was busy compiling material for SRIO's first book, *Swedish Oregon*, we would occasionally run across references to the Swedish settlement in Warren, located just south of St. Helens along the Columbia River. We knew that the Swede C.J. Larson was often credited with being the founder and promoter of this settlement, and even though he had written an interesting, hard-to-find book about a journey he made with his daughter to Sweden and Jerusalem in the 1920s, very little had actually been written about the Warren settlement. With just a few snippets of information available to us, and not enough time, there was never enough for an entire chapter.

We are now delighted to have SRIO Secretary Rhonda Erlandson—who has deep family roots in Warren—start an investigation into the lives of the Swedes in that area. As her project gets underway, we will publish some of her finding on our website.

(www.swedishrootsinoregon.org)



To give everybody a sense of what you will find in *Swedish Roosts, Oregon Lives*, here are a few excerpts:

I finally left Omaha and worked on the railroad for some time. After that I went to Wyoming because I took my sister up there when her husband was working there. He had moved there by himself. So that's why I ended up on a ranch in Wyoming. It was rugged. I had a cattle ranch, but I didn't have enough stock, and then the government told me I had to go into defense. There was a war on, after all. I don't know what I would have been if the government hadn't taken me out of that place. When I think about the winters... I had some tough winters there all alone, right on the Colorado border. In fact, the man at the station asked me where I worked, and when I said I had a ranch up there, he said, "You're on that ranch! It's too hard to get up there. The last man who had that ranch we hauled off dead. He froze to death."



"Well, you are looking at a Swede now!" I told him.

Oscar Nastrom (1898 -1987)

The train took us across the country right out to Bridal Veil in Oregon. Morfar and Mormor lived there, and they got us a house. It was a mill town where the Bridal Veil Timber Company owned everything—the houses, the store, everything. I have a check my mother saved. On January 2, 1931, Dad received 25 cents in pay for 93½ hours of work—which is all that remained after everything he owed the company had been taken out. He made 47½ cents an hour. Housing and groceries had added up to \$44.17, so a quarter was all that remained. The company kept urging Mom to cash the check in order for them to clear their books, but she told them, "Not on your life!" We were simply dirt poor. But all during the Depression, Mother would sit and polish the copper she had brought from Sweden, her beautiful, lined cookware.



Nils Arne Lindström (1926 – 2013)

In 1969, when I was sixteen years old, my wonderful Great-Aunt Ruth and her husband Clarence Ellison took me with them to spend the summer in Sweden. We first saw London, Copenhagen, and Stockholm and then boarded a small plane for northern Sweden. From the airport we drove back to the little village of Bratten a few miles outside of Lycksele. There I met my Swedish family, for me a life-altering experience. It's hard to describe what a powerful experience for me this was. I had heard about these people and about the northern landscape all of my life so it was at once both new and familiar.



Ever since I was a little girl, being Swedish has been my identity. And when I came there as a sixteen-year-old, it was almost like déjà-vu, like I had been there before, because it is so much part of who I am.

Rhonda Erlandson (b. 1953)

The final book :*Swedish Roots, Oregon Lives*” cover 15 wide-ranging oral histories from the thousands and thousands of Swedes—and their descendants—who made their way to Oregon. They speak of dreams of a better life, of an enduring allegiance to family, work, and ethnic heritage. The book is in the format of Swedish-Sunday coffee table conversations in the family.



The book is also including a story about a Swedish immigrant Christina Merryman earlier featured in *Nordstjernen* in an Emigrant article named:

Agnès and Erik Eklund
Immigrants 1916

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



Ca 1952



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Presented by Leif Rosqvist, editor for SRIO and New Sweden Cultural Heritage Society newsletters in Portland, Oregon, based on material provided by Ingborg Dean and Lars Nordström of SRIO.

More information at SRIO web-site: www.swedishrootsinoregon.org