

# Swedish Roots in Oregon

## An Immigration Research Project



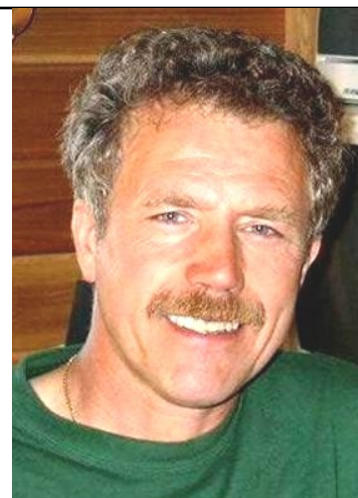
December 2013 Newsletter

Editor: Leif Rosqvist

Volume 28

### Message from your President—Lars Nordström

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 the oral history project on the other. Both have required a great deal of time and effort from all our Board members, and we are proud of the results. In this newsletter you will find a report on the database project from SRIO genealogist Barry Peterson, as well as an introduction to the recently completed oral history project.



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." If you have things to share with us, please get in touch.

More than ten years ago, when I was busy compiling material for SRIO's first book, *Swedish Oregon*, I would occasionally run across references to the Swedish settlement in Warren, located just south of St. Helens along the Columbia River. I 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 me, 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 findings on our website. Make sure you check in every now and then.

God Jul och Gott Nytt År!

## Swedish Roots, Oregon Lives: An Oral History Project - by Lars Nordström

This project got started many years ago when Harry Olson and Ross Fogelquist both began to interview Swedish immigrants in Oregon and Washington. They did so independently of each other and with no other intent than to preserve some of the unique voices they had run across in Swedish Oregon. A decade or so later, after the 1999 formation of Swedish Roots in Oregon, Ross Fogelquist was encouraged to conduct several additional interviews with Swedes and Swedish-Americans. But presenting a readable oral history requires a great deal more than just two people sitting down with a tape recorder running, and for many years these tapes sat in the SRIO archive collecting dust.

All this changed when Ingeborg Dean moved to Portland and became active in SRIO. She actually took the time to listen to the tapes and began the painstaking process of transcribing the interviews. And as she wrote them down, she became increasingly spellbound by the voices, stories, and fates of the individuals that had been recorded over the years. Many had passed away and only survived in their stories. As she handed off one completed transcription after another to me for editing, she also began the process of interviewing. When the news got out that SRIO had embarked on an oral history project, we were approached by others who had done oral histories and who graciously offered their stories as well. So it was from this growing collection of narratives that this book came into being.

I should mention that all the recordings in the SRIO archive did not get included in the book. Several transcriptions were never edited because the interviewee had passed away, and their stories raised so many questions that could never be answered. (This is a common problem with interviews that are not transcribed and corrected immediately.) Other stories seemed incomplete, unfocused, or fragmentary, and were discarded for that reason. A few were not told by Oregon residents, which was one of the criteria we used for inclusion. A handful were transcribed and edited, but ultimately not included. So what you find in *Swedish Roots, Oregon Lives* is the best of what had been gathered over the years.

To give you 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 in 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)**

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**Please support the shops that sell our books:**

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**Finn Ware**, 1116 Commercial Street, Astoria, OR 97103, (503) 325-5720

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**Scandinavian Specialties**, 6719 15<sup>th</sup> Ave NW, Seattle, WA 98117, (877) 784-7020

**Nordic Heritage Museum**, 3014 NW 67<sup>th</sup> St, Seattle, WA 98117, (206) 789-5707

**You can always reach us with questions or comments through our website:**

Contact the SRIO President: [President@swedishrootsinoregon.org](mailto:President@swedishrootsinoregon.org)

Contact the SRIO Genealogist: [Genealogy@swedishrootsinoregon.org](mailto:Genealogy@swedishrootsinoregon.org)

Contact the SRIO Webmaster: [Webmaster@swedishrootsinoregon.org](mailto:Webmaster@swedishrootsinoregon.org)

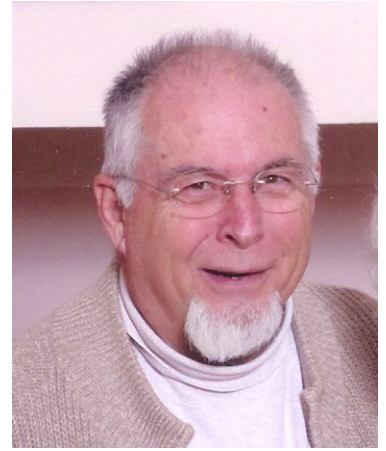
or write an old-fashioned letter to

SRIO, 8740 SW Oleson Rd, Portland, OR 97223

[www.swedishrootsinoregon.org](http://www.swedishrootsinoregon.org)

## SRIO Genealogy Project—Barry Peterson

When SRIO was young, we started to collect information about our local Swedish ancestors. Those who recall the forms know that the information was collected by many of you who picked up forms we had at past Scan-Fairs and Midsummer events. Many of you sent these forms to us and we did use them in compiling a data base of persons who emigrated from Sweden and their families here in the Northwest. This was first done in a Swedish language program and later converted to one we can effectively use here, but we also have numerous records that never made it to that data base. We received a grant from the Barbro Osher Pro-Suecia Foundation to fund the completion of the program.



SRIO expects that this will soon be fully accessible on our website as this is of value both for those of us in Oregon and Washington, but also many people who have a genealogical interest here and in Europe. It is interesting that so many settled in the Portland area and some will be included in the new SRIO Press book; ***Swedish Roots, Oregon Lives***.

It is not an easy job to read file after file, get a listing of appropriate names and to enter and tie all of the families together. Where we can, we also include the Swedish place and church names in the reports for those born there and for a good number we include the Swedish parents and grandparents who remained behind to facilitate searches.

We consider ourselves fortunate in having the project data being completed by Gunilla Rhodin-Bibby. Gunilla is Swedish, by birth, so she has the ability to read both Swedish and English files and make the decisions as to which data needs to be in our program. We expect these data inputs to be completed early in 2014 and then combined with the other electronic data. It will be available to you shortly after.

So, after the busy holiday activities, the joys of celebrating with families, the winter breaks from all the holiday festivities and, maybe, after paying all the bills from the holidays, sit down some night and check out the SRIO website, [www.swedishrootsinoregon.org](http://www.swedishrootsinoregon.org) to see if someone related to you or whom you know are listed. If not, we would be happy to receive information about those you know about -- grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends who immigrated to Oregon, you know, people who could be listed in this program and their vital date and place information. More information on those who came over here is always welcome, even for those who stopped in Illinois or Minnesota for a few years before making it across the country.

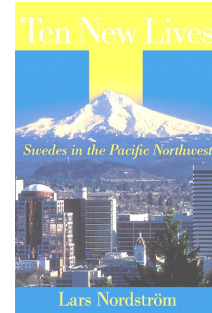
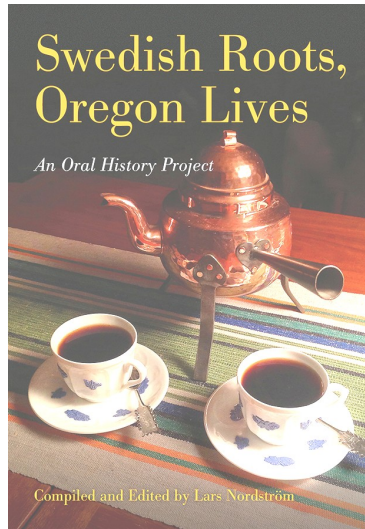
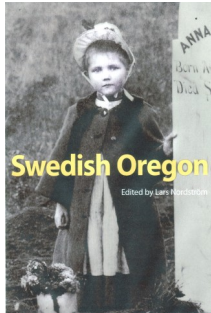
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## In Memory of Bertil Sundvall

“Bertil Sundvall, a former Vice President of SRIO, began to gather information about the immigrants when SRIO was formed in 1999. He developed a paper and electronic format for genealogical information that we could use. Bertil recently died and we salute him for the good work he did to make SRIO a better organization during its formation.”

SRIO will be at the 29th Annual ScanFair December 14, 2013

Join us to celebrate the sights, sounds and tastes of a Swedish Christmas. And most of all come and celebrate our new exciting book about Oregon lives. The book will be available for purchase at the event together with the rest of our publications.



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## Request for Material on Swedish Loggers in the Pacific NW

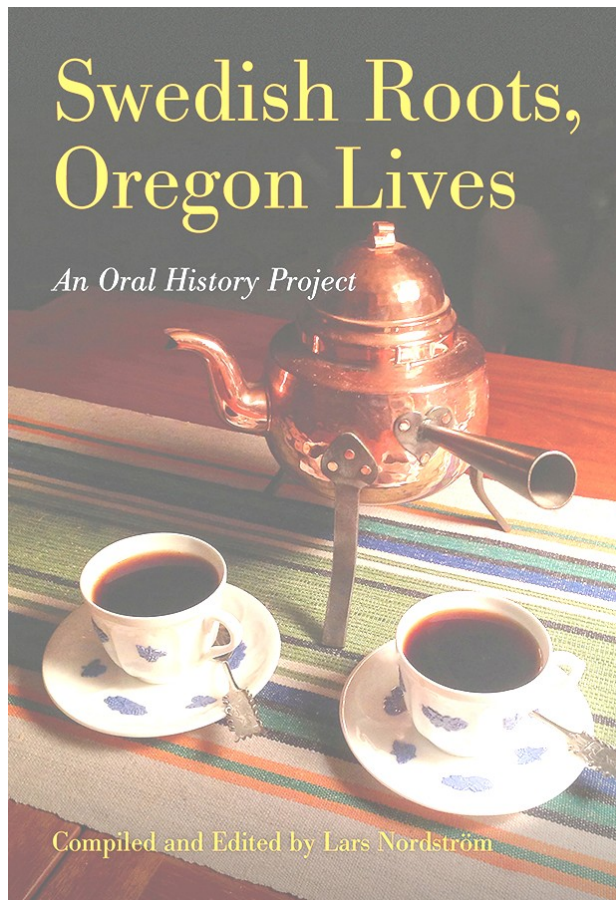
That there were a great many Swedish loggers and sawmill workers throughout the Pacific Northwest a hundred years ago was once a well-known fact. Today the old-growth forest is mostly gone and so is the memory of the Swedish logger. In order to counteract that inevitable trend, SRIO would like to preserve at least a few glimpses of that magnificent forest and the people who worked there. Our vision is to gather as many historical photographs as we can and publish them as coffee table book, and in order to do that we need your help. Please share with us any information you may have that could be included in realizing our new undertaking. We are looking not only for historical photographs, but also items such as old letters in Swedish or English, newspaper clipping, titles of books—in short, any historical material that fits our criteria. If you have something to share, we need to hear from you.



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## SRIO Needs Help with Marketing

SRIO is, as many of you know, an educational, non-profit organization. We are a small research group that usually meets every month or so. Each member is asked to focus on some of the many tasks we do throughout the year. Still, even though our combined skills add up to a great deal of expertise, we need help with marketing the books we produce. Would you like to help us preserve and make the Swedish history of Oregon better known by promoting our books to bookstores and Scandinavian gift shops? We could really use your help and would love to hear from you!



## Book order form

Price: \$16

Shipping & handling: 1 copy = \$4.00 or 2 - 3 copies = \$5.00 or 4 – 6 copies = \$7.00

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