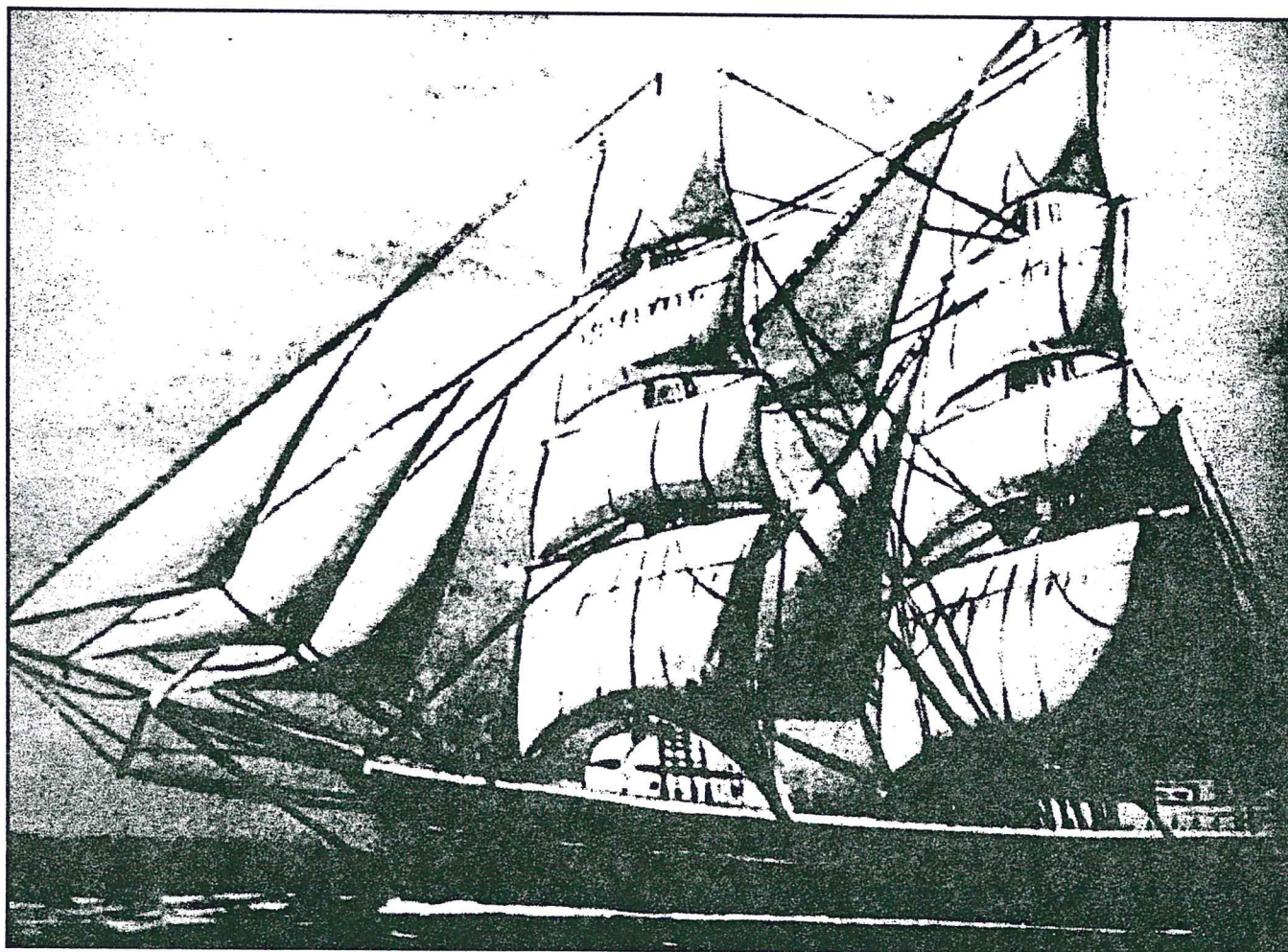


Heritage

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"The County's Memory"

Autobiography of E. P. Wicklund

The story of a party of Swedes that left the "old country" in 1850 and eventually founded a colony at what is now Center City, Minnesota, was fictionalized in a series of novels by Swedish Writer Vilhelm Moberg. His main characters Karl Oskar Nilsson and his wife Kristina became world famous through Moberg's novels. The major feature film that was made from them and a subsequent American television series only added to the stature of these larger-than-life immigrants.

Less, however, is known about the historical party of Swedes led by Per Anderson that Moberg, in part, based his story upon. Eric Norelius, an original member of the historical party, reported that "According to Per Anderson the two families who accompanied him to Chisago Lake were those of Per Berg from Högs parish, who had come over with the "old man of Stenbo," and P. Wicklund from Angermanland" (Norelius, The Pioneer Swedish Settlements and Swedish Lutheran Churches in America 1845-60). Pastor Cederstam added that a 4th family (the Anders Swenssons, from Östergötland) accompanied the group to Minnesota.

In The Early Life of Erik Norelius, Emeroy Johnson translated writings of Norelius that provides an eyewitness account of the entire journey from Sweden to Illinois. Lesser known is the autobiography of another member of the party that appeared in the Lawson and Nelson 1905 publication The Illustrated History and Descriptive and Biographical Review of Kandiyohi County, Minnesota (Wilmar, Minnesota: Tribune Printing Company (170-174). The author of that autobiography was E. P. Wicklund whose account of the immigration appears, in part, below.



I was born in Vike village, Stigsjö parish, South Angermanland, Sweden, February 23, 1827. My parents lived on a small farm (torp), which they had rented for life, paying 150 crowns and agreeing to do 20 days' work for the owner annually. The farm contained only six "tunnland." From this it is evident that the children could not expect any inheritance. There were two of us, namely, a sister who now resides in Otter Tail County, Minnesota, and who arrived here 16 years after I came, and myself. But although there was poverty I must say for my parents that by energetic labor and economy they managed to keep us from suffering for want of the absolute necessities of life, which I remember so many of our neighbors had to do.

There was no opportunity in Sweden to obtain an education

The worst feature of conditions at the time was that there was no opportunity to obtain an education. There were no regularly established schools at that time. An old man used to go around and teach, stopping for two or three days

with every farmer. I had the opportunity to attend that school for four days, which is all the schooling I ever obtained. This condition of things was remedied before I left the place. A schoolhouse was built for the parish, and where parents were too poor to maintain their children in school the parish had to support them there.

What education I could obtain was obtained at my Mother's side by the spinning wheel, where she taught me to read and to memorize the catechism. As a general rule the people lived in ignorance. The only newspapers seen up there were *Hernosandsposten* and *Stockholm's Aftonblad*, but it was only the minister and some of the "better class" that kept them. I have learned more about my native land since I came to America than I learned while there.

I left my home June 15, 1850 to go to America in company with a family named Wicklund.

On the Atlantic we encountered frequent storms

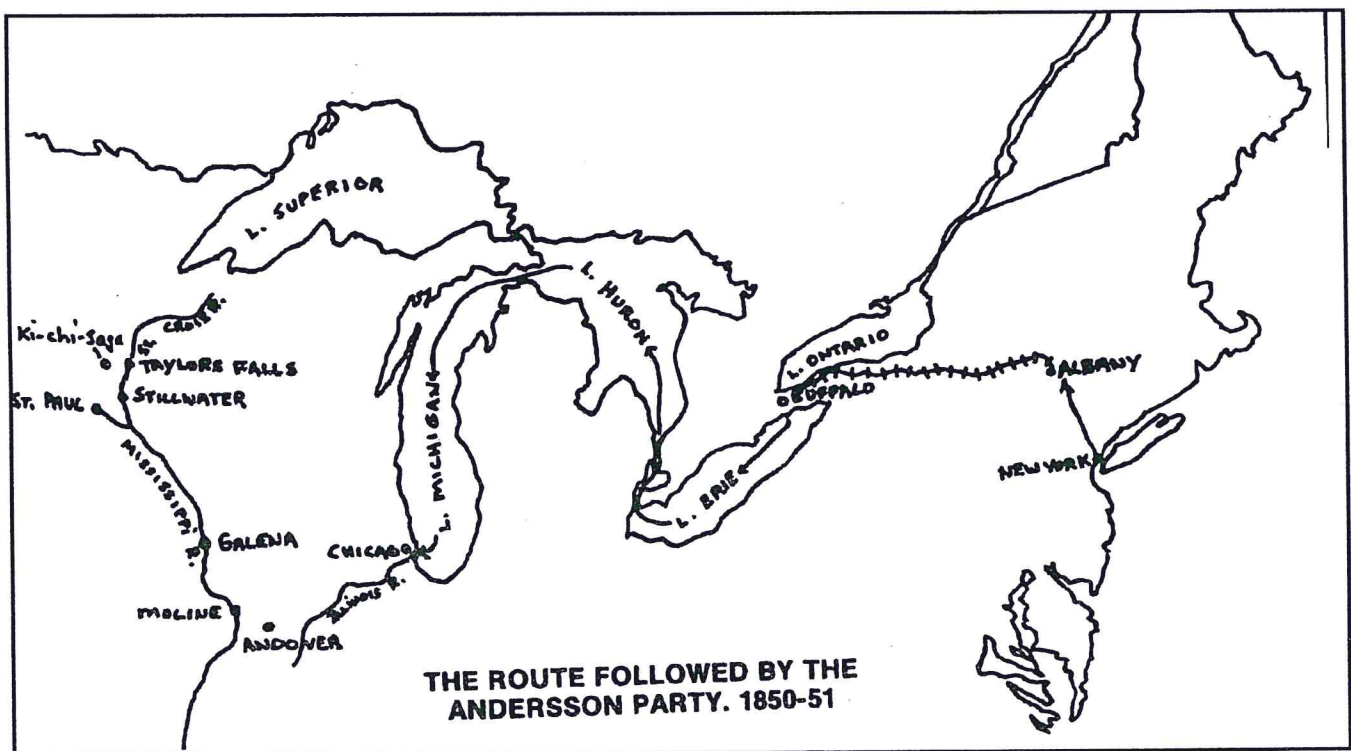
An aunt of mine, who was Wicklund's

mother-in-law and who went with them, loaned me money enough to pay for my passage. We went first to Sundsvall and from there by steamer to Hudiksvall. There we waited a week while the boat we were to take passage on was loading. It was a small sailing vessel, engaged by a rich farmer from Hälsingland, who took out a cargo of iron and grindstones, and also took some passengers. We left Sweden June 24th. The passage across the North Sea was fine but when we got on the Atlantic we encountered frequent storms, with occasional calms. There were times when it looked as if the small vessel would be swamped, but we escaped any calamity. After a voyage of thirteen weeks we finally landed in New York. We were very glad to feel ground again under our feet, even if it were strange soil. We were especially glad to get a drink of fresh water as we had suffered greatly on shipboard on account of the drinking water becoming spoiled.

having worked at that trade in Sweden. In the fall I got a job to cut cord wood for John Deere the founder of the Deere plow works at Moline. I earned just enough to pay expenses.

In ...1851 a number of us resolved to go to Minnesota...near Taylors Falls

In the spring of 1851 a number of us resolved to go to Minnesota to look for land near Swede Lake, in the vicinity of Taylor's Falls. The company consisted of Per Wicklund, Peter Borg (Berg?), Per Anderson and Andrew Swanson, with their families, and a young man named Erick Bylund and myself. The women and children were left at Taylor's Falls while we went into the wilderness to take land and build log cabins. I took a claim and built a small shanty. Then I went with a company of surveyors for a trip through northern Minnesota to survey land. When I returned I looked up a new claim west of the river. For the next six years I worked in the logging camps in the



In Bishop Hill, Illinois...I obtained a place in a shoemaker's shop

From New York we went by steamer to Albany, and from there by canal boat with an occasional land trip till we reached Bishop Hill, Illinois. I obtained a place in a shoemaker's shop,

winter and on the claim in the summer.

On Feb. 10, 1856, I was united in marriage to a sister of my old comrade in frontier life, Erick Bylund. The marriage took place at Bylund's home.
—cont'd on page 6

In 1858...we resolved to...sell our claim and locate in Kandiyohi

In the spring of 1858 we heard about a place out west somewhere named Kandiyohi, noted for its fine prairie land. As I had tired of the woodland I resolved to go out and look over the land. Per Wicklund and A. M. Eklund accompanied me. We were so well pleased with the land that we resolved to go home and sell our claim and locate in Kandiyohi, which was done. By the later part of October we were back in Kandiyohi with our families. Now the battle for life in the wilderness commenced in earnest. The first question was to find a place for the families. The only settlers here at the time were Noah White, Charles Petterson, Andrew Johnson, Gustaf Johnson, James Anderson, Mark W. Piper and Erick Ostlund. We had to leave our families in Swede Grove till we could provide shelter for them. Two young men had accompanied me from Taylors Falls, and were to help me build a cabin. We drove around the prairie for a couple of days, looking for land. Finally we came to Lake Lillian, where we found a very fine place and where I resolved to locate. The place is now the home of the Norwegian minister in Lake Lillian. There was a big slough that we had to wade over until the water froze sufficiently to carry a load, which happened soon after.

In crossing the ice one day with my team they broke through.

In crossing the ice one day with my team they broke through. I got one of them up immediately, but could not get the other one out so I had to go back two miles to get the men to help me. We finally got it out but in cutting the ice we had accidentally cut one of the legs of the horse, rendering him useless for the winter. There I was without a team, and could not haul logs for a cabin. I went to old man Ostlund in Lake Elizabeth to see if we could get a place there for the winter. They had come there the previous spring and had built a shanty, 12 x 14, without floor and not much of a roof. But they were kind hearted people and

let us share their narrow quarters for the winter. During the winter I looked up another claim in Lake Elizabeth, but just as I was ready to build there a man who had the claim where I now live offered to sell it to me for \$100, and I took the offer. He had broken one acre of land, dug a cellar in one place and built a small shanty in the woods. When I had paid him I had \$40 left to begin farming life. I also had a team of horses, one cow and one heifer. The claim I had taken in Lake Elizabeth afterwards became the home of John Dahlin.

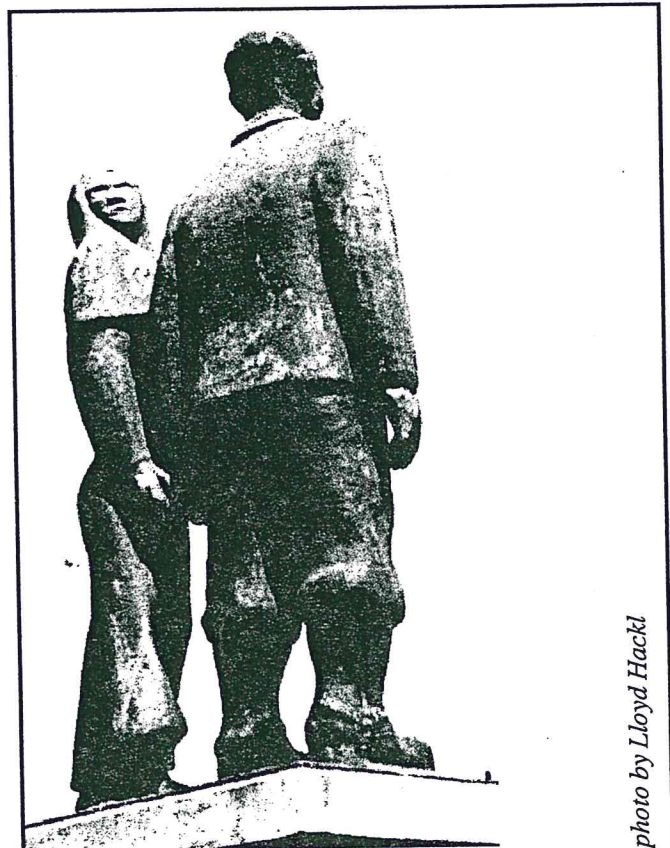


photo by Lloyd Hackl

The statue of Karl Oskar and Kristina Nilsson that stands on the side of hiway 8 in Lindstrom takes its inspiration from the writings of Vilhelm Moberg, but represents all immigrants who came to the area. Like their real life counterparts, the statues represent the ambivalence of many who immigrated to the old world. Kristina turns her head looking back towards the old country and the people left behind there, while Karl Oskar's head is pointed straight ahead, fixed upon the new land:

The editor is thankful to Lee Bjorklund of Minneapolis, who drew attention to the autobiography of his grandfather's uncle, E. P. Wicklund, an unmarried 24 year old in the spring of 1851.