

# NORDIC AMERICAN PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1

APRIL 1999

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DID YOU KNOW?

That this issue of the Newsletter is being mailed to 78 members and friends of the Psalmodikon Forbundet that live in 16 states plus Sweden and Canada? From Maine, New Jersey and Maryland on the East Coast to Washington and Oregon on the West Coast. Minnesota has the most with 42 and Iowa second with 9. Please check your label and note the date - if it reads 1999, you are current with your dues - if it reads 1998 its not too late to send in your \$5.00 for this year's dues to continue receiving the Newsletter for this year!

Larry Gjenvick

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## Notes from MUSIC-ON-A-STRING

The coldest days of Winter are now behind us along with all the birthdays of famous presidents and so forth.

The long dark days of Winter always give me time for rest and renewal and I got to thinking that there should be a holiday set aside to honor the **PSALMODIKON** *WHOSE BIRTH DATE IS JUNE 15, 1835!*

For it was on that date that Lars Roverud of Norway received the authorization from the Royal Resolution in Norway, allowing the Psalmodikon, as an acceptable musical instrument, to be played in church and to improve the choral singing.

From then on, the use of the Psalmodikon became very popular. Hymn books were written in the Sifferskrift (numerical) method and the Psalmodikon became well known throughout Sweden and Norway. Rev. Johannes Dillner was ordained in the Ostervalla Parish of Sweden in 1839. He was very influential amongst his parishioners in encouraging everyone to make these simple little instruments and learn to play them. At one time there were over 10,000 Psalmodikons in this area and many of them are still in existence today. The popularity of the Psalmodikon contin-

ued to increase and soon many were being played in the homes and schools throughout Norway and Sweden as well.

When the first wave of immigrants began, many of them brought these favorite little instruments with them or they made them after they arrived in America. They continued to use the Psalmodikons in their homes, schools and churches. The Psalmodikon was a very popular instrument used by the traveling preachers. In the early beginning there were no churches and the church services were held in the homes. The Psalmodikon certainly continued to be useful in this manner also.

The Psalmodikons were popular for about 100 years in total. Today the Psalmodikon is nearly a forgotten part of our Scandinavian heritage. Perhaps, because of its limitations, the Psalmodikon could not compete with the newer instruments that came along and the few remaining Psalmodikons today are tucked away in Museums or attics.

The enthusiasm and work that the members of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet are doing today certainly help keep this tradition alive. I am a firm believer that even if the Psalmodikon may not rank with the violin or the mighty pipe organ, it still deserves an honored place in the orchestra of sacred music. And it is up to each one of us to keep it there.

Let us celebrate the Psalmodikon whose birth date is June 15, 1835!

In the meantime....."keep practicing".

Beatrice Hole



## NOLA FOSLIEN

by Beatrice Hole

In February 1976, Nola Foslien of Garfield, Minnesota read a news article about Henry Storhoff of Lanesboro, MN and his Norwegian salmodikon. That prompted Nola to go to the attic and bring down a salmodikon that belonged to her husband's grandmother. being a self-taught pianist and organist and guided by Mr. Storhoff's comments in the article, she soon mastered the instrument. Nola's salmodikon was about the same size and age as Henry Storhoff's and she also rests the salmodikon on a special stand when playing. Nola's salmodikon has a guitar E-string tuned to middle C. Besides religious songs, she enjoyed playing tunes such as "Big Rock Candy Mountain" and "Seeing Nellie Home," often accompanied by her husband on the organ. Together the two of them enjoyed playing at many of the local functions until his death in 1993.

One of the highlights for Nola was taking part in the 1976 Bicentennial celebration in Alexandria, Minnesota, where she played and demonstrated on her old salmodikon.

In 1995, Nola decided the salmodikon should be given back to the Foslien side of the family. It was put on the auction block at the family reunion and sold to the highest bidder for \$350!

Nola's nephew, Floyd Foslien, was the lucky recipient. Floyd is now a member of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet and has mastered the art of making beautiful Psalmodikon music and has also built several more Psalmodikons.

I had the pleasure of meeting and visiting with Nola Foslien in October of 1996. She is a delightful lady and I just wish I had known her when she was actively playing the Psalmodikon. She now resides at an apartment in Brandon, Minnesota. She often writes me that she wishes she were closer to the Psalmodikon group and could hear us play!



Nola Foslien & Mr. Foslien

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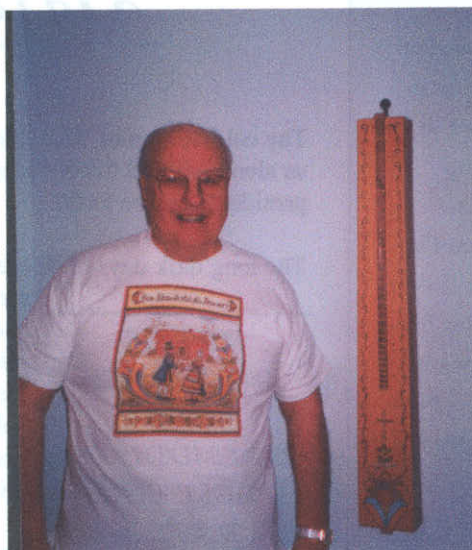
A church bulletin blooper:

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What is Hell?" Come early and hear our Choir practice.

## NOT EVERYONE PURCHASES A PSALMODIKON TO MAKE MUSIC!

Herb Nelson, the retired banker of Fairfax, MN, became so enthused about Psalmodikons when he first learned of them that he decided he just had to have one to hang on the wall of his Swedish Stuga! Here is a photo of Herb, the proud owner of a Psalmodikon. He decided to go all the way and asked Bobbi Peterson, who teaches folk art painting at the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis, to decorate his Psalmodikon with the Swedish style of Dala painting.

We are all envious of you Mr. Nelson!



Herb Nelson & his Psalmodikon

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The Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet Newsletter is published in March(April), August and November. The editor and staff are always looking for news worthy items or photos and welcome articles from members that you want to share with other readers. Your \$5.00 membership fee helps to cover the cost of printing and postage for the Newsletter and also helps to defray the costs incurred at the Annual Meeting. The Newsletter is mailed to over 78 households as well as several Museums and other historical societies.

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Correction: In the last issue of the Psalmodikon Newsletter, the name of **Betty Knivsland** was inadvertently omitted from the list of the Psalmodikon members who performed with the Psalmodikon group at the annual meeting in Granite Falls last September. Our apologies go out to Betty!



## SYMPATHY

Our sympathy goes out to Lorraine and family of a very dear member of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet. Curtiss Johnson of Minneapolis passed away on January 21, 1999, after a courageous battle with cancer. Many of you will remember Curtiss, as he was one of those who attended the first meeting of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet held at the Norwegian Lutheran Church in September of 1997. Curtiss was very proud of his Swedish heritage and especially the work of the Psalmodikon group. Curtiss will be greatly missed as he contributed much historical information on the Psalmodikon and was always so willing to translate any of the Psalmodikon information that arrived printed in the Swedish language.

Blessed be his memory.



Curtiss Johnson (1997)

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WELCOME TO ALL NEW MEMBERS OF THE NORDIC-AMERICAN PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET. MANY OF OUR NEW MEMBERS JOINED AS A RESULT OF AN ARTICLE ABOUT THE PSALMODIKON IN THE DECEMBER ISSUE OF THE **NORWAY NEWS** MAGAZINE PUBLISHED IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

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For those of you who would like to have an original sheep-gut string on your Psalmodikon, you may order them directly from Dan Larson, who makes them in his shop. You may contact him at:

Gamut Strings  
26 North 28th Avenue East  
Duluth, MN 55812  
Toll free phone and fax in the USA: 1-800-724-8099  
E-Mail: [Ivgamut@cpinternet.com](mailto:Ivgamut@cpinternet.com)

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New Address for Larry & Deann Gjenvick:  
4205 South Ravinia Drive, #108  
Greenfield, WI 53221-5720  
Phone: 414-817-8443  
E-Mail: [gjenvicklk@AOL.com](mailto:gjenvicklk@AOL.com)

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Charles A. Swenson of North Liberty, Iowa and a recent new member of our Psalmodikon group sent us a letter and picture of his Grandfather's beautiful instrument:

"I enclose at long last a picture of my Grandfather's Psalmodikon. As I indicated he, Carl Johan Svensson, supposedly accompanied the first Elim Lutheran choir in Clinton, MN with this instrument in 1883. My grandfather emigrated from Småland, Sweden, village of Nöbböle in 1876. I do not know if he brought it with him from Sweden or if he constructed it in Minnesota. He as most pioneers built almost everything.

The instrument is about 39 inches long, ranges from 4 1/2 to 7 1/2 inches wide and is 3 1/2 inches deep. It has a bow and a remnant of the gut string. I have several questions about the instrument. For example, should it have a bridge? It doesn't appear to have had one."

Any information you are able to give Charles his address is:  
3824 Country Down Ln N E  
North Liberty, IA 52317



Charles Swenson's Psalmodikon

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The date for the next meeting of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet is Saturday, September 18th, 1999. The location is still to be decided upon. If anyone would be interested in having the group come to your town, please contact :

**Beatrice Hole**  
**6560 Leesborough Avenue**  
**Eden Prairie, MN 55346**  
**Phone: 612-934-4535**  
**E-Mail: [ENSTRENG B@aol.com](mailto:ENSTRENG B@aol.com)**

Also, please send all membership fees to Beatrice Hole.

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Another bulletin bloop: "Weight Watchers will meet at 7 pm at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use the large double door at the side entrance."



## FROM THE DESK OF BEATRICE HOLE

It is not too early to make travel plans to Sweden if you would like to participate in their next gathering of the Scandinavian Psalmodikon enthusiasts. This spelstamma will be held at the Nordiska Folkhögskolan in Kungälv, Sweden in August 1999. All members of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonförbundet are invited to attend and participate! This is a very interesting and educational experience for anyone attending.

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*Plans are already being made for another fun gathering at the Nordic Fest in Decorah, Iowa on July 23, 24, and 25. Once again the Psalmodikon has been invited to take part all three days of the festival!*

*We have been blessed in that we will be located in the air-conditioned Bethania Church right next to the Vesterheim Museum. Many of you have experienced the heat and humidity that is often associated with the Nordic Fest and not everyone is fortunate enough to be inside where it is cool.*

*Playing and demonstrating the Psalmodikon is a real fun experience at the Nordic Fest as it is a wonderful way to meet people and introduce them to a part of our heritage that is almost forgotten.*

*Again, I am inviting any of you to assist me in demonstrating during the Nordic Fest. The days are long and I sure could use a break! Contact me and let me know when it would be a good time for you to fill in.*

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Recently the "Keenagers" of St. Mark's Church of North St. Paul were entertained by Paul and Betty Knivslund, members of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonförbundet. Paul gave a very informative demonstration as to how he goes about making a Psalmodikon and Betty entertained the group by playing her favorite melodies on the Psalmodikon while members of the audience sang along. The "duo" received many favorable comments following the program and are sure to be invited to do more of this kind of thing!

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It is always good to hear when members of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonförbundet are out sharing their talents and history of the Psalmodikon. Ed Hopf of Timonium, Maryland and his Psalmodikon have been invited to participate this Summer at the SCANFEST in Stanhope, New Jersey. He will also be representing the Finnish and Estonians by demonstrating on the Virsikantele and the Mollpill.

Ed has been very generous in sharing his findings on tape and video of these various instruments. These items will be shared with the members of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonförbundet at the September Annual Meeting.

Mange Tusen Takk til Ed!!!!

## LARS ROVERUD 1777-1850 NORWAY

Lars Roverud was an original figure in the period of Psalmodikon music. Roverud was a teacher of music and a skilled musician in violin and piano. He was very enthusiastic and eager to create a simple instrument to improve the music education of people as well as to promote his own ambition to improve church singing.

In 1825 Lars Roverud saw a Danish one stringed instrument in Herr Winther's Music Shop in Christiania (Oslo, Norway). He decided to simplify the playing and hired Professor Christopher Hansteen, a mathematician, to measure out the fretboard in half-step increments. Roverud developed four long, flat boards (transposition tables) for a greater range of notes. He also constructed larger instruments tenor/bass and contra-bass to supplement the Alto/Soprano Psalmodikons for use with 4-part music. Roverud introduced a numbering system (sifferskrift) instead of notes.

In 1835 Lars Roverud received official permission and authorization from the Foundation of Education of the Royal Resolution, to use the Psalmodikon for betterment of church singing. He received grants and was commissioned to teach Psalmodikon in the Gudsbradalen parish and larger cities such as Christiania. Because this instrument was easy to play, the Psalmodikon was received with much enthusiasm from both children and adults.

Roverud's fundamental work with the Psalmodikon and song teaching has an enormous meaning to the history of our common church songs.

av Beatrice Hole - 1998

LARS ROVERUD

1776-1850

(Below)

Lars Roverud's  
Salmodikon & Bow  
and  
Transposition Tables





# Aftensolen

Sunset  
S. A.T.B.

C.H. RINCK

Andantino

1. Af - ten - sø - len smi - les o - ver jor - den ned,  
1. Sun - set warm and glow - ing Smiles and sounds all cease,

og na - tu - ren hvi - ler taus i hel - lig fred.  
Na - ture is be - stow - ing Si - lent, ho - ly peace.

## AFTENSOLEN

3 3 2 2 1 5 6 7 1 3 2

3 3 4 3 2 5 1 4 3 2 1

Sifferskrift for Psalmodikon av Beatrice Hole - 1998

## NORDIC-AMERICAN PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET

Return Larry & Deann Gjenvick  
Address: 4205 South Ravinia Drive, #108  
Greenfield, WI 53221-5720

Mailing  
Address:

PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET

### *Notes from the Editors:*

**We try to keep our membership records accurate and up to date, however if you do note any error please advise the Editor for correction.**

#### **A Moving Experience**

Perhaps you noticed that the Newsletter has been mailed from a new location and that it is a little late in reaching you. We have moved from Minnesota to Wisconsin and as any of you who have gone through moves - it takes time to pack and unpack and in our case downsizing from a household of "stuff" to an apartment has meant one garage sale, just discarding, donating to our daughter's home and piling up things for another garage sale next month. But the move was good preparation for our next move to Harwood Place, a senior retirement community in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin - a suburb of Milwaukee. We are on a waiting list for our apartment there and by then, being downsized, should make that move easy. We are happy that the days of shoveling snow and caring for a large home

and yard are retired and our energies can be channeled to new endeavors and interests and of course continuing our participation in the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet. Wherever we go and whenever we meet new faces, we promote the Psalmodikon as best we can. You never know when someone will say "that must be the instrument that's up in our attic". It does happen - as evidenced by some of our present members who have had just that experience. If there were over 10,000 Psalmodikons in just one area of Scandinavia in the 1800's, some of them certainly came to this country in the years of the great emigration to America and perhaps some of them are still waiting to be "re-discovered". Keep spreading the word about Psalmodikons and it may happen.

Remember our Annual Meeting in September. Even though the location hasn't been determined, the date is set and try to mark your calendars now to reserve that time.

Larry & Deann Gjenvick