



Nordic-American Psalmofonforbundet

“ A Society dedicated to the education and preservation of the Psalmofon and Sifferskrift Music. ”



Nordic-American Psalmofonforbundet | Tel: +1 952-934-4535 | E-mail: enstrengb@gmail.com | Web: www.psalmodikon.com

Notes from MUSIC-ON-A-STRING

Beatrice Hole

The lazy hazy days of Summer have finally arrived! To me it always seems the Winter is longer than the Summer.

I do not find as much time to get together with my psalmodikon friends, like in the past and so I am really looking forward to our get-together in Hudson again on August 10–11. Please let us know if you plan on attending so we can make final plans for the weekend.

I do appreciate hearing from all you faithful supporters of the psalmodikon. I wish I could thank you in person for the well wishes, contributions in photos or personal activities and especially keeping your Membership dues current. The extra *peng*er is always welcome, too.

I am still receiving the Psalmofon Newsletter from our psalmodikon playing friends in Sweden. They keep very active and it would be fun to get together with them again and compare “notes”. If anyone is interested in receiving their Newsletter, I would be happy to forward it at your request.

The best of warm sunny days to all!

May you always have a song in your heart and music at your fingertips!

Old Muskego Church Psalmofon

Muskego, Wisconsin — a city of 24,135 population (2010) in Racine County.

In 1839 John Luraas, a Norwegian immigrant, encouraged 40 more Norwegians to come from Norway and settle in the Muskego area. This settlement became known as the “Muskego Settlement”. It flourished and many more Norwegians joined them.

In 1844, these Norwegian immigrants built a log cabin church on the shore of Muskego Lake. It was the first organized Norwegian Lutheran Congregation in America with Claus Lauritz Clausen, a



Above: Syttennde mai, 2019 — Pastor Anne Brit Aasland, from Mindekirken, in pulpit located above altar.



Danish schoolteacher (1820-1892), was ordained and served as Pastor. It served them well for 25 years until in 1871, a larger church was built.

Today, this slightly hidden historic treasure, the Old Muskego Church, can be found tucked away behind the Library and up a slight hill on the campus of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Built by Norwegians using oak

logs with walnut furnishings, it was dismantled and moved to Luther Seminary in 1904.

The Old Muskego Church is still used for festival services and weddings. Beatrice Hole often plays the psalmodikon, made in 1867, that was originally played at the Old Muskego Church in Wisconsin. It is the perfect setting to play the psalmodikon, and there is no organ in the church. 



Lutherans Love to Sing

Studies & Records, Paul Maurice Glasoe, courtesy Donald Berg

The love of singing and music of the Norwegians goes way back to the distant past. A familiar quote is that “if you are born in Norway, you are born a Lutheran and Lutherans love to sing”. Along with the great writers and musicians, the psalmodikon and the organ played an important part of where the music of the church is today.

In the middle ages Norway had a rich tradition of the song-dance, dancing to the melodies sung by dancers and onlookers. There was a close connection between instrumental music and singing even then. In the expressive sculptured stonework of the Trondheim Cathedral is a representation of an old Icelandic *fjðla* with its player, which is probably the forerunner of the Langeleik and the Psalmodikon.

Norwegian life is rich in its treasure of vocal and instrumental music. Beautiful singing is often mentioned in history and it is said that “a person would cry for joy listening to the beautiful hymns”.

By the time of the mass migration of Norwegians from 1840–1870, the folk melodies had reached a rich flowering period. The greatest poets wrote stirring words which were set to music by distinguished musicians. The male chorus, and eventually the mixed choirs, became the means of popularizing the combination of cultural influence.

Singing played an important role in all public schools, even in the far remote valleys. Every child learned to sing, notably patriotic songs and the hymns of the church. Even

Mother and Father knew many of the hymns by heart. It was not unusual for a mother to accompany her daily round of routine duties with an almost endless series of hymns.

Ludvig M. Lindeman was a collector of folk music and Magnus Brostrup Landstad was a collector of folk poems. They both lived during a time when there were few hymnbooks. In 1868 these two talented men produced a *koralbok*, or song book, known as the Landstad hymnbook. The Bible, Luther’s Catechism, and the Landstad hymnbook formed a trilogy which in their unity have done more to make the Norwegian-American people what they are than any other combination of instruments or racial traits.

During the 1800s many of the teachers were men, trained in the two-year courses of the Teachers’ Seminaries. Seminarists, as they were called, and many of their students went on to become pastors. With their well-grounded training in the elements of music, they lived before the days when pianos and organs were common, and in most instances the teachers had to make use of the *salmodikon* and know how to play it.

One seminarist, the Reverend Svein Strand of Wallingford, Iowa, said he lacked the ability to carry a tune and so he could not teach the children to sing without the assistance of the *salmodikon*. By these means his classes learned to sing the hymns and folk melodies very well.

By this time, choir singing was becoming more popular in the church worship as well as men’s and women’s choirs were being formed in colleges, etc. In many cases, the song leader would play the melody on the

salmodikon or the song parts – alto, tenor, or bass to the choir groups. What a thrill it was when two parts could perform and then all four!

The story goes that one of the church choir leaders could play the violin very well and he brought it to choir practice. It was capable of much easier maneuvering than the *salmodikon*. But the congregation was skeptical about bringing the violin to choir practice, and of course, it was never brought into the church for services.

There were many teachers and writers that have contributed to the music of churches and schools. One of the great contributors was John Dahle, who wrote, *Sangbog for Barneskolen* (Songbook for Elementary Schools), 1888. Such books were eagerly sought by the parochial schoolteachers as an aid to teaching singing to the children. Knud Henderson of Minneapolis conducted the first singing schools among Norwegian pioneer youth. He interested himself in the *salmodikon* as a practical tool of instruction in singing and issued a *Practical Manual for the Use of the Salmodikon*.

With all the efforts and success of music through the years, we are still conscious of the original ideal set up by the men and women of emigrant days who had nothing to offer but hearts’ devotion, courage, and willingness to sacrifice. As a singing church we are still loyal to and inspired by the chorales of Luther, Nicolai, and Bach. Dr. Christiansen says that all great church melodies have sprung from the same source – the folk melody, and we claim the folk melody of Norway as our particular heritage.

Another One-Stringer

The Washtub Bass is a homemade one-stringed instrument often used in playing American folk music or as an addition to what was called the Jug Bands. The washtub bass was often accompanied by a washboard as a percussion instrument. Jug bands, first known as “spasm bands”, were popular especially among African Americans around 1900 in New Orleans and reached a height of popularity between 1925 and 1935 in Memphis and Louisville.

At about the same time, European-Americans of Appalachia were using the instrument in “old-timey” folk music. A musical style known as the “gut bucket blues” came out of the jug band scene, and was cited by Sam Phillips of the Sun Records company, as the type of music he was seeking when he first discovered Elvis Presley.

A folk music revival in the USA in the early 1960s re-ignited interest in the washtub bass and jug band music. They were often played for “Old-time” barn dances and provided deep down sounds for

fiddles, accordions, or whatever instruments were available. Other times the washtub bass was played in homes of the early Scandinavian immigrants.

The traditional design of the washtub bass is simple, very low cost and a “do it yourself” construction to build one.

All that you need is a big old metal washtub as the resonator, a long heavy cord and an old broomstick to change the tension. Turn the tub upside down and attach one end of the cord to the tub by drilling a hole in the center of what was the bottom, and then attach the other end of cord to the top of long stick that is positioned on the edge of tub.

It is now playable! By placing your left hand at the top of the long broom handle, this will enable you to adjust the string by pulling or pushing on the stick to change the tension for the desired pitch and use your right hand to pluck

the string for the rhythm.

For more detailed information and photos, you can Google “washtub bass instruments”.





ITEMS FOR SALE

PSALMODIKON SONGBOOK (revised edition)

Written in *Sifferskrift* and 4-part harmony for psalmodikons. Includes 95 easy-to-play tunes of hymns, folk songs, and Christmas favorites. \$15.00 ea. + shipping

Send orders to: Beatrice Hole

CD of the PSALMODIKON QUARTET \$15.00 pp

Featuring favorite hymns and folk tunes played on the psalmodikons of the Nordic-American Psalmodikon Quartet.

Send orders to: Singsaas Lutheran Church
Attn: Music CDs
P. O. Box 87, Hendricks, MN 56136
<http://www.countrychurchmusic.com/>

PSALMODIKON FOR SALE



Mary Booth of Cambridge, Wisconsin has a new psalmodikon for sale. Her husband purchased it from Music Makers in Stillwater, Minnesota shortly before his death.

It is still in the original shipping box. Mary is asking \$125.00 for the psalmodikon and will pay the shipping cost within the USA.

Contact: tedmar@charter.net

Greetings from

Readers

I always look forward to the Nordic-American Psalmodikon Newsletter. It is invariably informative and attractive.

The article regarding the dulcimer at the American Swedish Institute was especially interesting to me. My younger brother is an old hippie in the mountains of North Carolina, but he is also a fine luthier who makes, among other instruments, beautiful dulcimers. He also makes the Langeleik, a dulcimer antecedent from Norway. (If you are interested in seeing what he does, go to: www.kudzupatch.net)



My check for Membership is enclosed.
—Dr. David M. Seymour, Newberry, SC



Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet & Newsletter

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The Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet Newsletter is published in the Spring, Summer, and Autumn. We are always looking for newsworthy items and photos that you want to share with other readers.

The **\$8.00 membership fee** helps to cover the cost of printing and postage for the Newsletter and annual fee for the Psalmodikon Web Site.

Check the date on your mailing label which indicates if your dues are current.

Send membership dues to: Beatrice Hole
6560 Leesborough Ave
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Looking for a Good Home

God dag!

I wish to sell my Swedish Tenor Psalmodikon that I bought at an auction in Stockholm, Sweden in the 1980s. It dates back to around 1860-1880. It is structurally in very good condition but has never been restrung. The original resonance strings are still inside it. Perhaps someone can tell me what it is worth and make an offer on it.

—Steve Barrell.

srbarrell@hotmail.com





Lithuanian Instrument

Ed Hopf of Timonium, Maryland sent an 8 x 10 photo of this fellow playing an instrument from Lithuania that is similar to a psalmodikon. I wanted to share it with our readers as I love the expression on his face as he concentrates on playing the music. It such an awesome photo that I think it is suitable for framing.



SAVE THE DATE!

Floyd Foslien of Hudson, Wisconsin has arranged a day for all psalmodikon players to get together and play their favorite songs. The gathering will be held in the church dining room (where we have met before).

Date: Saturday, August 10, 2019

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Place: Mt. Zion Lutheran Church
505 – 13th Street S.
Hudson, WI 54016

It will be fun to see everyone again.

Lunch will be served. Please let us know as soon as possible so we can plan enough food for all.

Mt. Zion Lutheran Church has invited all the psalmodikon players to participate in the Sunday morning worship services the next day at 9:00 a.m. All are welcome.

RSVP to:

Beatrice Hole, 952-934-4535

enstrengb@gmail.com

Floyd Foslien, 715-386-4196

ffoslien@sbcglobal.net

Please let us know if you are coming to the meeting so the committee can make final plans.

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