

Cherry Grove, Oregon A Swedish Community

By Jerry C. Olson
A Second and Third Generation Swede

With the passing of Sigurd Wallin last year, the last of the Cherry Grove Swedes was gone, as far as known. I will not try to duplicate the two good histories of Cherry Grove by Mary Kurtz and Birgetta Nixon, but hope to share my recollections of the traditions and culture of the community.

My first relative to come to Cherry Grove was my father's uncle, John Leo Nylund (*Johann Leander Nylund, b. 1885, Bodsjö, Jämtland*), who immigrated in 1907 with a friend to Bellingham, WA at age 22. He soon moved to Preston, WA, near Issaquah, where he worked for August Lovegren in sawmilling or in logging. August was a Swedish lumberman from Minnesota, and when August purchased 7500 acres of land in the upper Tualatin Valley in 1910, John and many other Preston Swedes followed him to what would become Cherry Grove. Other Swedes were attracted to this ethnic community also, mainly from an advertisement in a national Swedish newspaper. While John was in Cherry Grove, he married in 1912 (1919?) to Lena Anderson, a woman 24 years his senior, who was the cook in the cookhouse, and who lived well into the 1950's. He said her strong Christian values turned his life around and made him into the wealthy man he became.



ii. John and Lena Nylund in front of their home at the top of the hill, just before the road reaches Cherry Grove. *Jerry Olson Photo, c. 1920.*



i. John Nylund just after immigrating to the U. S. in 1907. *Jerry Olson Photo.*



vi The Swanson farm in Cherry Grove. Shown are Lillian, Ellen, Ida and Peter Swanson. The church is on the far left, the school is near the horizon in central left, and the Swanson home is in the center. One of the small farm buildings on the left was a cold storage shed, which was dug into the ground about two feet and well insulated with sawdust, to preserve the canned items and the produce. *Jerry Olson Photo, c. 1932*



v Peter Swanson, *Jerry Olson Photo, c. 1936.*



iv. Ida Swanson, *Jerry Olson Photo, c. 1936.*

My mother's parents, Peter and Ida Paulina Swanson (*Per Svensson, b. 1866, Jämshög, Blekinge, and Ida Paulina Persson, b. 1881, Karlshamn, Blekinge*) were the next to arrive with their family. Peter immigrated before 1892, Ida in 1900, and they married in North Dakota in about 1902. Ida had aunts and uncles near Litchville, and before the immigration was over, all of her siblings had come to the U. S., some as teenagers, accompanied by adults. With his brother, Ben, Peter owned a restaurant in Litchville, but by 1909, Peter and Ida owned a truck farm in Tigard, OR, where my mother, Lillian, was born. The family came to Cherry Grove in

1912, where Peter was a teamster. He built a nice house right at the foot of the hill coming into town, and they had about ten acres, on which they raised a few cows and a nice garden. He started a livery stable, and hauled wood and lumber from the mill to local residents. Ida's sister Tekla, also came to Cherry Grove and married John Swanson there.

John Nylund paid for transportation for my father, Carl Olson (*Karl Olof Olofsson, b. 1900, Svedge, Jämtland*), and his brother, Matt Olson (*Per Mattias Olofsson, b 1899, Svedge,*



ix, Matt Olson, Jerry Olson Photo, c. 1927.



viii Carl Olson, Jerry Olson Photo, c. 1927.



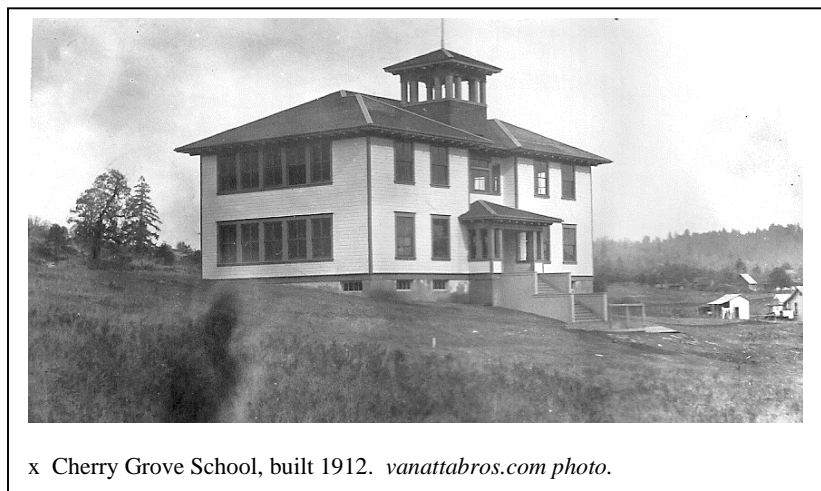
vii Lillian Swanson Olson, c. 1932. Jerry Olson photo.

Jämtland), to come to Cherry Grove in 1924. The cheapest route was on CPRR across Canada, and that is the way they came. They began working for John Nylund and soon paid him back. They learned that falling trees by the board foot paid the most money, and followed that line of work

until 1930, working in one logging camp after another, as far South as Yachats. Their mission was to make money and return to Sweden, but when they returned in 1930, things in Sweden were just as bad as when they left, and both returned to Cherry Grove to stay. They bought a house above the church, which Dad owned into the 1960's. After Dad married Lillian Swanson in 1938, Matt lived in the house until he died in 1944.

By the time I was growing up in Cherry Grove, the population had diluted to far less than 50% Swedish, down from nearly 100% in the beginning. Remembrances after 1947 are probably from my experiences, and are hearsay before that date. My parents did not speak Swedish in the home, as opposed to my mother's family where Swedish was spoken until the children went to school. My mother spoke Swedish, and I remember her helping senior citizens write letters in English. Some of the earliest residents of Cherry Grove never learned English, and when I did odd jobs for them as a teen ager, our communication was difficult, although I was always invited in for coffee and cookies.

A school was built at the founding of the town in 1912. It was two stories high, with three classrooms on each level, and was in use until about 1949, when a new school was built during the term of my father on the School Board. The top floor of the original school was condemned, and only three rooms for grades one through eight were necessary. I attended three grades in the old building. For heat, there was a large wood stove in the central hall, and the doors to the classrooms were left open. A giant bell hung in the cupola, with a rope hanging down into the central hall, and students on



x Cherry Grove School, built 1912. *vanattabros.com* photo.



xi Sixth, seventh and eighth grades at Cherry Grove Grade School 1952, Ellen Nyberg as teacher, Jerry Olson third boy from left. *Jerry Olson photo*

occasion were allowed to ring the bell. There were boys and girls outhouses a distance from the school, in addition to a free-standing gymnasium.

There was a community club to raise money to assist the new school in the 1950's. For a fundraiser they did what they knew best...a Smorgasbord. Hundreds of people came from all over Washington County, but it was discontinued after a few years because too few people were doing all of the work. But, it was very good and very authentic. My graduating class contained eight students, and the previous one had two. Ellen Nyberg, the sister of Sigurd Wallin,

and my mother's best friend, was the principal and my teacher for the last two years.

From the beginning, the church was the focal point of the community. The structure that is there now was built in 1922 and sets on a small rise overlooking the town. It was affiliated with the Swedish American Baptist Churches, and the message was fundamentalist, with full emersion baptism required for membership. Originally, the sermons were in Swedish, but by the 1940's, only Julotta on Christmas morning was in Swedish. The rules were strict: no drinking, no smoking, and no dancing or movies. When one of the grade school teachers started teaching square dancing at recess, the church intervened to the School Board, and they made her stop. The teacher resumed the lessons in her own home. John Pearson, the longtime Postmaster, and his wife, Effie Lovegren Pearson, were mainstays while I was growing up. John had a beautiful tenor voice, and sang hymns in Swedish.

The church did a very good job with the youth of the town, and was a social center, even for those unaffiliated with the church. They had picnics and sponsored a basketball team every year. Sunday night was youth night, and many of us non-members would regularly attend, if nothing else but to meet our friends. Never the less, many of their lessons rubbed off.

American Swedes, including my parents, tried to blend into the community, except for special occasions. At Christmas and Midsummer, we went almost overboard. My father and Ellen Nyberg both soaked lutfisk each year for the Christmas Eve celebration. Both had tiny houses by today's standards, but they were packed with a dozen+ relatives for the feast. I still soak lutfisk, following the family tradition, and shared notes with Ellen Nyberg until she died a few years ago. I make enough to give out several portions to a growing cult-following of Swedes and Norwegians, who are unable to get quality lutfisk. Also on the table were Swedish meatballs, home-made pickled herring, hard



xii Cherry Grove Baptist Church. *Temple University Photo*

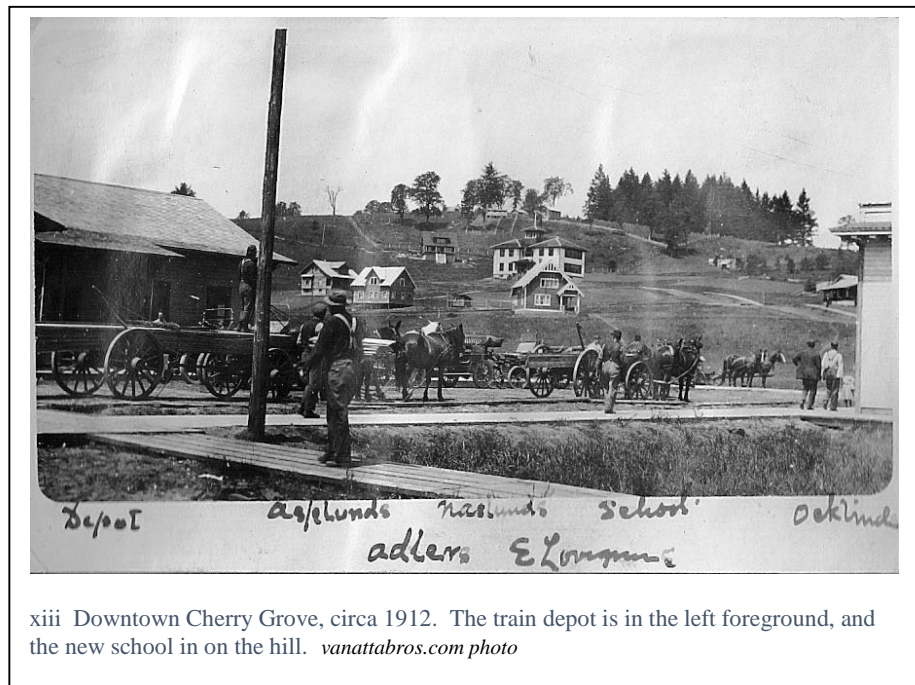
tack, rye bread, various cheeses, and Swedish cookies. Dinner concluded with rice pudding with a button inserted, promising a prize to the finder. My wife and I still maintain the ritual, even though for some Christmases there are only the two of us.

Many Swedish banners, hot pads, flags, etc. were wide spread throughout the house. John Nylund would come from where he lived in Lebanon each year, continuing into his 80's. After dinner was done and the dishes were washed, all presents were opened. That was the one time each year that children would volunteer to help with dishes, even trying to cut short the socializing at the end of dinner. Only one person opened all of the presents for everyone, one by one with everyone watching, and in our house, that was John Nylund acting as a Swedish Santa, as long as he was alive.

While I was growing up, all of the Midsummer celebrations were at Oaks Park. I remember the maypole, dancing, singing, and the speeches, but mostly I remember the carnival rides. My parents would renew contact with many of the Swedes that had left Cherry Grove. After our parents died, my sister and I hardly ever went, because the social contact part was gone. We were too far from Portland to participate in the Swedish Societies, although I remember going to a dance at Norse Hall and dancing a schottische with my mother. My parents were good dancers, but went to local dances, which were not Swedish.

As CEO of Olson Engineering in Vancouver, I have celebrated Midsummer several times by hosting an event. We had authentic food, Swedish musicians, and dancing. One year we took it to Esther Short Park in Vancouver and had it outside.

There were two stores in Cherry Grove in the 1950's. One was in the Post Office run by John and Effie Pearson. I don't remember rural route deliveries back then, but everyone had a Post Office Box, and John's store offered a quick way to buy a necessity. The shelves were very sparse, and he replenished them by shopping at a market in town. The other store was run by Pat Durand and was better stocked,





xv Steam Donkey working with Cherry Grove in the background. Alma Johnson is the lady on the right. *Jerry Olson photo.*



xiv Looking East in Cherry Grove at downtown, with Lovegren Mill on the right, and railroad heading towards Gaston. *vanattabros.com photo.*

but still meager. He replenished supplies the same way as John. The pop machine there had a water bath cooler.

August Lovegren had moved his operations to Cherry Grove in 1911. After purchasing about 7500 acres, he built a sawmill, a railroad, and a large dam across the valley. Cherry Grove was platted and built out with lumber from the mill, but when the dam broke in 1914, August was done, mainly because lumber prices had fallen to the cellar, and he died two years later. He sold his operation and the railroad to Haskell and Carpenter, which continued to provide jobs,



xvi Rudolph Anderson, Alfred Wallin, and John Nylund as part of a photo of the whole crew of Nylund Lumber Company in about 1940 at Lebanon, Oregon. *Jerry Olson photo.*

continuing through to the Fred Koennecke sawmill in my time, which closed in 1957. Cherry Grove stayed Swedish for a long time, partly because of the isolation in the early years with access only from the railroad. There was a water system, a local phone system and an electrical grid supplied by the Lovegrens. Electricity from outside did not arrive until 1940. It has always been a very blue collar town, mostly lumbering and logging workers, with a few farmers. The houses were modest, but well cared for, even though there were regularly seasonal layoffs in the mills and woods. The children were well behaved, and there was almost no crime, with exception of an occasional alcoholic father being about the worst thing there.

John Nylund and Alfred Wallin operated three different mills in the area, one on the South side of the valley, another in the canyon below Lee Falls, and then they built a sawmill, called Grove Lumber Company. It was on the railroad at Mountindale, near North Plains, with about 90% of the employees being Swedes from Cherry Grove. It operated from 1918 to 1922, before John moved his operations to Lebanon, Oregon, and took the Swedes with him, including Alfred.



xvii Olson Lumber Company in about 1950 in Scoggins Valley. *Jerry Olson photo.*

Carl Olson, Matt Olson and Swan Nyberg (husband of Ellen) operated a sawmill at Crabtree, Oregon from 1938-41, living in three portable one room cabins. This was at the time I was born. Carl and Matt returned to Cherry Grove, built a sawmill at Seghers and ran that until Matt died in 1944, after which Carl temporarily worked for John Nylund. Carl built his last mill in 1947 in Scoggins Valley, and operated until 1963, when he retired.



xviii Ellen Wikstrom Eklund. Jerry Olson photo. C. 1920



xix Sigard Wallin at Nylund Lumber Co., c. 1950. Jerry Olson photo



xx Fred and Alma Johnson family. Jerry Olson photo. C. 1920



xxi Lena Anderson Nylund. Jerry Olson Photo, c. 1920.

I have read that many Swedes, instead of leading a 100% Swedish life, just keep their traditions up on holidays, and that is what I perceived also. We really celebrated Christmas, attended Midsummer, and listened to Bob Anderson each Sunday morning while eating a breakfast of Swedish pancakes. We

said “*tack så mycket*” and “*Varsågod*” instead of “Thank You” and “You’re Welcome”, and the children recited a Swedish “grace” before some meals. We only knew the Swedish names for some foods. The Swedish language skills of my sister and I briefly grew on the two trips to Sweden, but fell far short of communicating. There was a jar of pickled herring in the refrigerator, Swedish cookies in the cooking jar, and hardtack on the table 365 days a year, but no pepper shaker.



xxii Albin and Louise Love. Jerry Olson photo

From the 1920 Census of Cherry Grove, here are some Swedes I knew: Ellen Wikstrom Eklund, my Mom’s childhood friend that we often visited in Eugene; Lloyd

Johnson, a Portland policeman, and his mother, Alma, that we saw at Midsummer; Alfred Wallin and his children, Ellen Wallin Nyberg, Agnes Wallin Moore, Olga Wallin Garrigus, Lilly Wallin Anderson, and Sigurd Wallin, all of which came to Ellen Nyberg’s small house on Christmas Eve; Carl Johnson, with whom I was working with in the sawmill the week before he was killed in the woods, Ruth Bergland Johnson, his wife, and John Johnson, his brother; Albin Love, who worked for John Nylund many years; Hilma Larson, who rented Dad’s old house when I was painting it, and spoke only Swedish; Olaf, Gustava, Allen, Roy and Einer Hedin, who formed the family tree of one of my grade school classmates, Bob Hedin; Rudolph Anderson, who bought Dad’s old house after his wife died, and his son Turk Anderson, who married Lilly Wallin; and widow Hulda Larson, who lived in John Nylund’s house in Cherry Grove for a long time, came to many of our family dinners, and made coffee by putting coffee grounds in an open pan, rarely replacing the grounds.

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