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# WESTERN ILLINOIS REGIONAL STUDIES

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# **BISHOP HILL: SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT OF THE WESTERN ILLINOIS FRONTIER**

**Ronald E. Nelson**

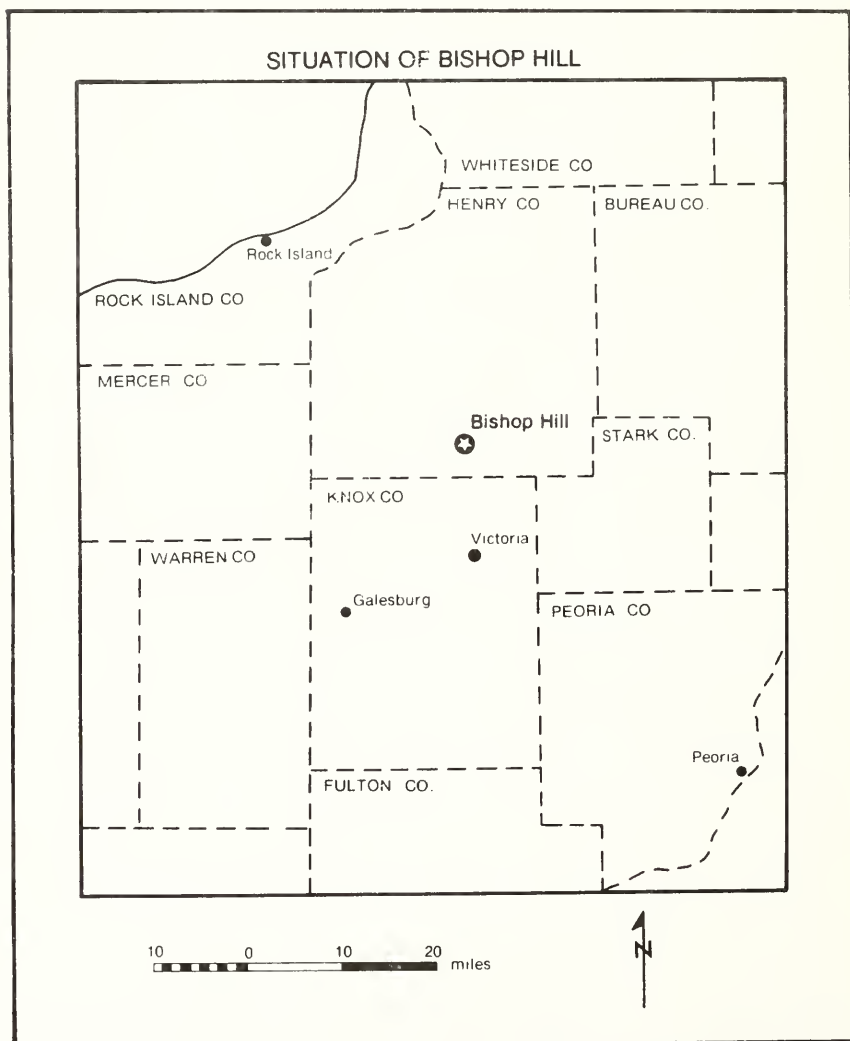
In comparison with other sites of particular cultural and historical significance in western Illinois, including Mormon Nauvoo and Lincoln's home village of New Salem, Bishop Hill is relatively little known and appreciated. Located about thirty miles southeast of Rock Island and now populated by less than 200 inhabitants, Bishop Hill was founded in 1846 by a colony of communally organized Swedish fundamentalists who subsequently developed it into an amazingly prosperous frontier village. Only an assortment of impressive nineteenth-century buildings, some of which have benefited from recent restoration activity, now provides an immediate visual suggestion of the community's unusual and distinguished past.

There are various reasons why Bishop Hill deserves continuing attention from those interested in midwestern culture and history. First of all, the colony's remarkable adaptation to the frontier environment in northwestern Illinois and its amazing economic development and rise to prosperity in the 1850's give it genuine importance in the cultural history of the Prairie State. The colony also holds particular interest because it was one of the earliest beachheads of Swedish settlement in America and an intriguing social experiment in communal life. Furthermore, the colony helped attract thousands of other Swedish immigrants to the upper Mississippi Valley during the second half of the nineteenth century as members reported on their survival and success at Bishop Hill in letters to friends and relatives in the old country. These aspects of the colony's significance can best be emphasized by tracing Bishop Hill's development as a frontier community.

The colony of fundamentalists who planted Bishop Hill on the Illinois prairie was organized under the leadership of Erik Janson, a self-proclaimed prophet, in the Swedish province of Helsingland during the early 1840's.<sup>1</sup> Unified by their opposition to liberal trends in the Established Church, the Jansonists rapidly coalesced into a prominent religious sect dedicated to strict adherence to the Bible.

After conflicts with authorities and the eventual jailing of Janson, the prophet decided to lead his flock to America where—as reported in letters from earlier emigrants—religious freedom existed.<sup>2</sup>

Olof Olson, a Janson lieutenant, was dispatched in 1845 to select a settlement site for the colony. His choice, southern Henry County, was greatly influenced by a Swedish Methodist clergyman in nearby Victoria, Illinois. The vicinity was still a sparsely settled frontier; only 1,260 inhabitants were found in Henry County by the federal census takers in 1840—a population density of 1.5 persons per square mile. Although abundant acreages with remarkably





productive soils were present, it was a prairie-dominated landscape distinctively unlike Swedish environments with which the Jansonists were familiar.

Between 1846 and 1854, Jansonists departed from Swedish ports in groups ranging from about 20 to 400 individuals. Their journey across the Atlantic and to Bishop Hill, usually by way of the Great Lakes, required two months or more and was marked by hardship, sickness, and death. The eventual arrival at Bishop Hill unfortunately did not provide immediate relief, for the sudden addition of each new group of colonists severely strained available facilities and food supplies.

During its first few years, the colony's survival was threatened by a variety of problems. The need for housing on a large scale resulted in hasty construction of log-fronted "dug-outs" in the sides of a ravine for shelter during the first winter; even the colony church, built in 1848 as the first permanent structure in the community, had its basement and ground floors pressed into use as dwelling units. The inadequacy and crowded conditions of the early housing contributed to the spread of disease, most notably cholera. The colony was nearly devastated by a cholera epidemic in 1849 when 143 deaths occurred in less than three months.<sup>3</sup> Because most of the Jansonists' financial resources had been depleted by migration expenses, the initial acquisition of land in satisfactory quantities to support the colony was restricted by a shortage of funds. In 1847 the population at Bishop Hill surpassed 800, but the colony had been unable to acquire more than 700 acres of land. The situation necessitated fasting at times, and Erik Janson required the colonists to avoid marriage temporarily.

The colony's single significant commercial activity prior to 1851, the production and marketing of linen and carpeting from flax raised near Bishop Hill, was only a temporary success. The Jansonists, familiar with the growing and processing of flax in Sweden, transferred the crop to Bishop Hill and operated their few looms both day and night to manufacture the textile in quantities for sale in the immediate area. Peak production was attained in 1851 when 30,579 yards were manufactured, but a sharp decline soon followed.<sup>4</sup> Cloth manufactured in Eastern mills became readily available in western Illinois during the 1850's, and the Jansonists were unable to compete successfully.

The most severe blow to the colony's spiritual well-being was the assassination of Erik Janson in 1850. John Root, an outsider on whom Janson had imposed restrictions as a condition for marrying the prophet's cousin, fired the fatal shot. An elder member of the colony, Jonas Olson, made a sincere effort to provide leadership



*Courtesy of the Bishop Hill Heritage Association.*

Painting by Olaf Krans



*Courtesy of the Bishop Hill Heritage Association.*

Painting by Olaf Krans

following Janson's death but was unable to maintain the initial religious fervor. Nevertheless, the colony remained unified through the following decade and succeeded in diversifying and dramatically improving their economy.

The Jansonists' accomplishments at Bishop Hill reflect remarkable adaptations to an unfamiliar physical and cultural environment as well as the ability to survive hardships, an epidemic, and their prophet's mortality. A few examples of the colony's adaptations will illustrate their variety and display the short time span during which they appeared. First, the handicap of language was quickly overcome, for by the early 1850's a colony school was established with classes conducted in English, and colony records were maintained in both English and Swedish. Also, with timber in limited supply in their prairie environment, the Jansonists learned to manufacture brick by 1848 and subsequently used it as the primary building material in constructing most of their major buildings. At the same time, both Indian corn and broom corn, crops particularly suited to the middle Mississippi Valley climate, were adopted from neighboring pioneers by 1851. Another economic improvement came when the Jansonists adopted Durham cattle, an improved breed, from the Shaker Colony in Kentucky in 1854, and subsequently grazed a herd of several hundred animals on prairie pastures.<sup>5</sup> Also, as a means of avoiding the legal problems experienced during the early years, the Jansonists succeeded in inducing the Illinois State Legislature to pass an act approving the incorporation of the Bishop Hill Colony in 1853. Because deeds to land acquired by the colony previously had to be recorded in the names of Erik Janson and other individuals, retention of ownership was threatened when these people died or withdrew from the colony. Such problems could be prevented by establishing legal status for the colony through incorporation. The charter placed administrative authority for the colony in a seven-member Board of Trustees. Finally, although the earliest railroad in the vicinity (1854-55) failed to pass through Bishop Hill, the Jansonists contracted to construct a segment of the roadbed. In the new town of Galva, a few miles away on the railroad line, the colony purchased lots and erected a warehouse to facilitate the shipment of Bishop Hill commodities by rail.

It would not be totally accurate to identify the Jansonists' communal society as an adaptation to frontier conditions, since they were initially organized into groups and placed their financial resources in a common treasury to facilitate the migration from Sweden. Nevertheless, communal life proved to be an asset on the prairie frontier in combating loneliness, fostering brotherhood, and





*Courtesy of the Bishop Hill Heritage Association.*

Main Dormitory Building (destroyed by fire in 1922)



*Courtesy of the Bishop Hill Heritage Association.*

The Administration Building

contributing to economic development. Breaking the tough prairie sod, a severe problem for individual pioneers, was accomplished with relative ease by the communal group with a large organized labor force and adequate numbers of oxen to pull the plows.

The communal organization, employed as it was to take advantage of the specialized skills and abilities of workers, also contributed to the colony's economic diversification at a time when such diversity was extraordinary on the frontier. The deployment of part of the colony's workers during the 1850's, for example, has been described by M. A. Mikkelsen:

The store and post office employed two clerks. The tailor shop employed six men and three women; the shoemaker shop, six men; the smithy, ten men; the wagon shop, six men. . . . The broom shop employed three men and nine women. . . . Four women cared for the calves, four had charge of the hogs, and two worked in the dairy. . . . There were eight laundresses, two dryers, four bakers, and two brewers.<sup>6</sup>

Also, usually thirty to forty young men were in charge of milking cows, and a number of young boys cared for and drove the oxen. Groups of men worked in the fields, operated the mills, and served as carpenters and masons. Operation of the colony's brick kilns involved women and children as well as men. Assignments were not inflexible, however, and during critical seasons nearly all of those able to work would be diverted to labor in the fields.

The colony's economic ascent commenced in 1851 with the adoption of broom corn as a commercial crop. After finding a profitable market for broom corn, particularly in Peoria and Chicago, the colony quickly increased the acreage devoted to it and began realizing an annual income of \$30,000 to \$50,000 from the venture. In describing the importance of the crop, Eric Johnson, the son of Erik Janson, claimed that it "proved a great boom and raised the colony from a mere subsistence level to one of outright opulence."<sup>7</sup>

With this source of substantial income established, the colony was able to increase its land holdings, proceed with the construction of major buildings, and further diversify its economy. The colony owned only 1,420 acres of land in 1850; by 1855 the amount had been increased to 8,028 acres, and in 1860 it totaled 12,000 acres, all within a few miles of Bishop Hill. Major buildings completed were the "Big Brick," a 96-room dormitory (1851); a hotel (1852); a carpenter and wagon shop (1852); a "Bakery and Brewery" (1853); a meat storage house (1853); the "Steeple Building" (1854); the colony store (1854); a dairy building (1855); an administration building (1856); a blacksmith shop (1857); and a school building

(1860). The Steeple Building was originally intended to serve as a hotel, but it was used instead as a dwelling and, temporarily, as a school. Reflecting the nineteenth-century popularity of Greek Revival architecture, this was the colony's most handsome structure. With the exception of the "Big Brick," which was destroyed by fire in 1922, all of the major buildings have survived.

Visitors to Bishop Hill during the colony's most prosperous period recorded some revealing impressions. John Swainson wrote:

We had occasion this year [1853] to visit the colony, and were received with the greatest kindness and hospitality. Everything, seemingly, was on the top of prosperity. The people lived in large substantial brick houses. We had never before seen as large a farm, nor one so well cultivated. One of the trustees took us to an adjacent hill, from which we had in view the colony's cultivated fields, stretching away for miles. In one place we noticed fifty young men with the same number of horses and plows cultivating a cornfield, where every furrow was two miles in length. They moved with the regularity of soldiers. In another part was a field of a thousand acres in broom corn, the product of which, when baled, was supposed to yield an income of fifty thousand dollars. All their live stock was exceptionally fine, and apparently given the best care. There was a stable of more than one hundred horses, the equals to which would be hard to find. One evening I was brought to an enclosure on the prairie, where the cows were milked. There must have been at least two hundred of them, and the milkmaids numbered forty or fifty.<sup>8</sup>

Another description, written in 1856, reveals the status of the colony at that time:

There is at the present time a population of seven hundred and eighty in the community. They possess 8,500 acres of land, of which 3,250 are under cultivation. About 500 acres of their land is timbered. The property is held by seven trustees for the community. They own some of the largest and best buildings in the county. They have two large unitary buildings, one a 4-story building, 200 feet long and 45 feet wide; the other a 3-story brick, 55 by 65 feet. They have also three or four more unitary dwellings, not so large; also a good mill, a tavern, some extensive shops and stores, one at the Community, and one at Galva, four miles off on the railroad. They also own a brick ware-house at Galva, 40 feet by 100, and likewise a large number of town-lots. They have over 200 milkcows, with as many calves, 150 head of horses and mules, 50 yoke of work oxen, and a stock of 600 additional head of cattle. They made about \$36,000 out of their crop of broom-corn alone in 1854. It is said they intend taking stock in the Rock Island and Peoria Railroad to the amount of \$150,000 or \$200,000 if it runs near their village. The fact is they are rich.<sup>9</sup>

Also in 1856, Baron Axel Adelsward, a young Swedish engineer, visited Bishop Hill and described the colony in a lengthy letter to his mother:

I made a couple days' excursion [from Chicago] to the interior of the state of Illinois to visit the Erik-Janssonists' colony at Bishop Hill. . . . Their settlement lies about three English miles from the station where I got off. Around the station there is already a little town [Galva], although it is not yet two years old. The Janssonists have a large brick warehouse here, in which I saw I don't remember how many thousand hams, salted and piled up. What is more, they have a large general store and divers other buildings. Here I met a Mr. Cronsloe . . . and we went together on foot over the prairie to Bishop Hill, where we arrived at a little before dark. It has the appearance of a large manor at home; the great, white-plastered schoolhouse, which was originally intended as a hotel, with its columns and its cupola on the roof, looks like the *corps de logis*. Round about are large, solid brick buildings, unplastered on the outside as is the custom in America. . . .

The Erik-Janssonists are communists, have everything in common; no one owns anything as an individual, but the society taken together is already remarkably wealthy and will become more so if it can preserve itself. They came here under Erik Jansson ten years ago. They brought a fair amount of money with them from Sweden but a large part of it went for the journey, and when they had bought oxen, horses, and several thousand acres of land, which then sold at a good price, they had almost nothing left. When Erik Jansson, who was possibly a great prophet but certainly no economist, was shot six years ago, the society's affairs were in such poor shape that even their bedding was confiscated and the society was on the point of breaking up. Since then a couple of smart fellows have placed themselves at their head and are now worth at least four or five million *riksdaler riksgalds*. They have, for instance, ten thousand acres of land, every acre worth at least one hundred *riksdaler riksgalds*, fine, large buildings, forest, which is worth much there, easily accessible coal, several hundred horses and mules, oxen and cows by the thousands, pigs, chickens, geese, etc., by the ten of thousands. I have never seen so many pigs in one place as I have here. Moreover, they have a steam-powered sawmill and flour mill, which earns them a great deal, water mill, general store, etc.; they manufacture a kind of broom and from that article alone they have earned 150,000 *riksdaler riksgalds* in the past year. It sounds unbelievable in Swedish ears, but is true and not much to be surprised at in America.

The day after my arrival I went around and looked at the colony, saw the school where thirty or forty children were gathered, learning to read English, naturally. Erik Jansson's daughter, an unpleasant-looking girl of fourteen years, was one of the schoolmistresses. Their infirmary is a good little facility where there was nonetheless no patient to be found, even



though there are eight hundred colonists. I saw their agricultural implements, harvesting machines, and so forth, stables, chicken coops, pigsties, steam saw, brewery, where I drank near beer, bakery, where the *knäckebröd* hung on its poles from the ceiling, their kitchen, where they happened to be cooking enormous quantities of porridge, their dining halls where they ate their meals together. . . .

They seem to live contented and happy. . . . They are capable and hard-working, and to join together, as they have done, is a sure way to amass wealth here in America, although it seems to me they can have precious little joy from their riches.<sup>10</sup>

Although visitors to Bishop Hill during the 1850's often expressed disapproval of the Jansonists' social and religious practices in their written descriptions, they usually reported on the colony's economic development and wealth with praise and astonishment.

Unfortunately, quantitative information to support contemporary descriptions is both limited and unsatisfactory. Government census data from 1850 and 1860 are of only limited value because they measure conditions in the colony before significant development had occurred (1850) and after general depression had created economic problems (1860). Despite the impact of the depression of 1857, colony possessions recorded in the 1860 agricultural census included 5,000 acres of improved and 7,000 acres of unimproved land, 200 horses, 174 working oxen, 280 milch cows, 350 other cattle, 700 sheep, 530 swine, 12,000 bushels of wheat, 25,000 bushels of Indian corn, and 240 tons of broom corn. Bishop Hill's population at the time had declined to 554.

Economic records apparently were not maintained by the Jansonists until annual reports on the financial condition of the colony were included in the minutes of meetings of the Board of Trustees, beginning in 1855. These reports have limited analytical value, however. The method of bookkeeping varied from time to time, and the reports prior to 1858 were brief and failed to place a value on the colony's land and buildings. For 1858, 1859, and 1860, farm lands represented about half of the colony's total assets, and buildings and improvements were the second most valuable possession (Table 1). A shortcoming of these reports is the listing of assets only by values and not quantities. Furthermore, by listing as assets a number of bills receivable and stocks and bonds that proved to be financial losses, the reports give the false impression of continued economic growth from 1858 through 1860.

In reality, the 1857 depression severely damaged the colony's economy, particularly because the trustees had speculated in stocks and bonds and had generously extended credit to purchasers of colony goods and services. Eric Johnson identified



Table 1  
SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL CONDITION OF THE COLONY, 1858-1860\*

	1858	1859	1860
Total assets	\$719,049.15	\$795,582.90	\$846,277.58
Farm lands	373,104.40	379,104.40	414,824.00
Buildings and improvements	126,749.12	127,349.12	129,508.61
Galva real estate	37,801.00	37,801.00	33,228.47
Horses and mules	6,795.00	18,400.00	21,520.00
Cattle	12,149.00	12,697.00	17,088.00
Total liabilities	34,667.83	55,919.74	75,645.64
Balance	684,381.32	739,663.16	770,631.94

\*Selected data from "Reports on the Financial Condition of the Colony," Board of Trustees meetings of March 15, 1858, January 17, 1859, and January 11, 1860.

\$98,000 in railroad and bank shares, notes, and personal accounts—all originally listed as assets—that eventually became worthless.<sup>11</sup>

Stunned by economic losses and critical of the 'trustees' leadership, members demanded a termination of the colony as a communal enterprise. A remarkably detailed division of the property—farm land, buildings, livestock, implements, tools, kitchenware, etc.—was carried out during 1860-62. Although legal problems persisted for several more years, the new decade brought a disappointing end to the Bishop Hill Colony.

Although supporting data are restricted and heavy reliance must be placed on the subjective evaluations of contemporary observers, it seems safe to conclude that Eric Janson's followers developed Bishop Hill into one of the most economically successful communities on the western Illinois frontier. With never more than 1,000 members, the colony constructed a diverse assortment of major buildings in their community, acquired up to 12,000 acres of farm land, and produced hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of crops, livestock, and other commodities during the 1850's. The Jansonists' rapid adaptation to conditions on the prairie frontier and their regimented division of labor seem to be important explanations for their remarkable economic productivity.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For an authoritative account of Janson's activities and the formation of the colony, see Sivert Erdahl, "Eric Janson and the Bishop Hill Colony," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 18 (1925), 503-74.

<sup>2</sup> Florence E. Janson, *The Background of Swedish Immigration, 1840-1930* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1931), p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Johnson, "History of the Bishop Hill Colony," trans. Matt Lagerberg (Illinois State Historical Society, 1954), pp. 16-17 (typewritten). The translation is of Eric Johnson, "Bishop Hill-koloniens historia," in Eric Johnson and C. F. Peterson, *Svenskarne i Illinois* (Chicago: no pub., 1880), pp. 22-61.

<sup>4</sup> M. A. Mikkelsen, "The Bishop Hill Colony," in *A History of Bishop Hill, Illinois*, comp. Theo. J. Anderson (Chicago: Theo. G. Anderson, 1946), Part II, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, pp. 25-26.

<sup>6</sup> Mikkelsen, pp. 126-27.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> John Swainson, "Swedish Colony at Bishop Hill, Illinois," *History of the Scandinavians and Successful Scandinavians in the United States*, ed. O. N. Nelson (Minneapolis: Nelson, 1893), p. 149.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in William A. Hinds, *American Communities and Co-operative Colonies* (Chicago: Charles A. Kerr, 1908), pp. 353-54.

<sup>10</sup> Included in H. Arnold Barton, *Letters from the Promised Land* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1975), pp. 79-81.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, p. 29.

# **EMIGRANT LETTERS BY BISHOP HILL COLONISTS FROM NORA PARISH**

**Lilly Setterdahl**

Very few letters written by Erik Jansonists have been found and translated. The following collection is especially interesting since many of the writers describe the building of the Bishop Hill Colony and everyday life there. The letters give us an opportunity to follow one group of people from the same parish in Sweden to the place of settlement in the United States. The Bishop Hill Colony was founded in 1846 by these and other religious dissenters from Sweden under the leadership of Janson, a farmer and self-proclaimed prophet.

The letters, dated 1847-1856, are written by emigrants from Nora parish, Uppland. After Hälsingland, the next largest number of Jansonists came from Uppland, and most of the Upplanders were from Nora parish. Erik Janson himself was born in Uppland, but he moved to Hälsingland shortly before leaving for America. At Bishop Hill he surrounded himself with men from Hälsingland, with the Upplanders playing a subordinate role. Except for Olof Andersson Nordström, who became the physician at the Colony Hospital, the people from Nora did not achieve any leading positions in the colony. However, they were ardent, obedient workers, most of whom remained at Bishop Hill.

The Jansonists of Nora parish emigrated mainly at four-year intervals, in 1846, 1850, and 1854. Jansson had visited Nora in 1843 on his way to and from Hälsingland and had converted some people. The last group is believed to have emigrated as a result of the many letters from relatives at Bishop Hill telling about the prosperity that the colony enjoyed. Among the emigrants of 1850 was a boy who later became the colony artist, Olof Krans. He was born in Sälja, Nora, in 1838 and was twelve years old when his parents Eric Olsson and Beata Persdotter decided to emigrate. The artist's father expressed himself in writing instead of pictures and his letters are the most descriptive in this collection. It is also worth noting that some of the letters were written by former Jansonists who had left the colony and settled at Victoria, Illinois. These



*Courtesy of the Illinois Department of Conservation.*

Bishop Hill, 1846. Painting by Olof Krans



emigrants give a different version of life at Bishop Hill. The final letters in this collection were written before widespread dissent led to the division of property in 1857 and, finally, to the dissolution of the colony in 1860-61.

In their first letters, the emigrants tell relatives back home about the ocean voyage and the journey overland. They mention many facts, such as the name of the ships and the dates of arrival and departure from different stops along the way. All of the letters deal extensively with piety and faith, but they do not leave out material things. One sender loves to tell about "all the buildings" that have been constructed on their "holy mountain" and how they have planted and harvested "the biggest crop ever." Also, of course, family matters are discussed and neighbors and friends are mentioned in virtually every letter. Indeed, more than anything else, one notices the longing for family members left behind. Most of the emigrants were young, for the older people did not usually go along at first. It is obvious that the emigrants felt guilty about having left their parents, whom they would have helped to support had they stayed in Sweden. Later, when they learned that the colony provided for the old even though they could not work, letters urging their parents to come were sent home. But the young emigrants pointed out that their elders had to come with the right intentions—to get out of the moral darkness and become true believers.

Not one bad word is said about the way the colony is run by those still living there. However, the authors do not use superlatives either. They say that they have everything necessary for body and soul, and that they feel pretty good and like it rather well. They never say that things are great, or that they like it very much.

It is apparent that not all of the emigrants wrote their own letters. The Swedes generally learned to read at this time, but they did not always learn to write. Olof Andersson Nordström, Eric Olsson, Anders Olsson, and the two men named Eric Ersson without doubt wrote their own letters, and they probably wrote some of the other colonists' letters as well. By studying the signatures on the colony charter, one comes to the conclusion that adult male members knew how to write—at least if they were former landowners and heads of households. However, none of the Nora women actually signed their full names on the charter. Eric Olsson, for instance, signed his wife's name in addition to his own. He also wrote letters for her to her parents in Sweden.

Emigrant letters usually circulated in the home community and were read by every household until they literally fell apart. The original letters probably no longer exist. Fortunately, they were

copied by hand in a bound book more than one hundred years ago. The pages in that book are now also in the process of deterioration. The editor is thankful for the consent of the Anhder family to publish the letters in English translation, and especially Mr. H. Irvin Anhder of Hyrum, Utah.

Before the letters can be properly understood, the reader must know something about the home region of the emigrants who wrote them. Nora parish is located in the northwestern part of the province (*landskap*) of Uppland, in Västmanland county (*län*). Nora has changed a great deal since the first Jansonists left their home community. There was no town of Tärnsjö then; there were no railroad and no industries. But there were the lake (Tärnsjön), the farms, the forest, and the church that dates from the fifteenth century. It had been restored and enlarged in 1772.<sup>1</sup> Life centered around the church—the only one in the parish—until reforms slowly began to change old customs.

One of the reforms concerned education. The parish council recognized the importance of education as early as 1726, when money was made available for buying ABC-books for children whose parents could not afford to do so. Schooling was still a family affair. In 1810, school mistresses and masters traveled in the parish teaching children to read. In 1827, the parish pastor was appointed headmaster for a school program made possible through private donations. Children could attend classes six months a year. This was long before parishes were required by law to provide for schooling (1842). Around 1844 a school house was acquired.

As people became literate they began to study the Bible, and the *läsare* movement—in which people gathered at homes for that purpose—was born. Some of these *läsare* became dissenters from the established church. The Jansonists were the first to break with the Church of Sweden. Erik Janson conducted his own services, thus overstepping the law (the Conventicle Edict of 1726-1858 forbade public worship without the supervision of clergy). In Österunda parish, Uppland, where Janson lived at one time, some Jansonists were fined for not attending church.

The dissent and subsequent mass emigration of the Jansonists made it easier for others to break with the state church. Another lasting religious movement began in 1852 when the singer and preacher Oscar Ahnfelt came to Nora. Many joined with him, and a prayer house was built in 1862. As a result of the movement, a Mission Friend congregation was organized in 1878, and the following year a church with a seating capacity of 1,500 was built.<sup>2</sup> Religious reforms had broken the long-standing tradition of solid

Lutheranism, and life in Nora no longer centered around one church only.

Another reform under way at the time of the Jansonist emigration was the shifting of land into larger units. The work began between 1840 and 1850, but required years for completion. Many farms, however, were large enough to feed twenty cattle. Animal husbandry was the main livelihood, but every farm in Nora also grew flax and had hemp land. Hop was cultivated and was of great importance well into the nineteenth century. A spice derived from the leaves was used for flavoring beer, a practice continued at Bishop Hill. Two disastrous years for farmers may have contributed to the Jansonists' decision to emigrate. The year 1844 was unusually wet and in 1845 there was a drought. That this affected many is evident from the emergency loan the parish received from the government shortly thereafter.

Forestry was important. Kilns at Nora supplied charcoal for the foundries at Sala and Söderfors. It was said that Söderfors was the breadbasket for Nora. In the summer the charcoal and lumber were loaded on barges at Sälja Udde and shipped on the river Dalälven. In the winter the farmers themselves hauled the charcoal to the foundry.

In 1845, there were 140 households in Nora on self-sustaining farms. There were forty-six other households with smaller farms. Seven households consisted of so-called *ståndspersoner* (persons of higher classes). Twenty homes were soldiers' or officers' households. Seventy-two households lived on crofts, and the rest of the 573 households, or 288, were homes for day-laborers and people who were cared for in one way or another.<sup>3</sup>

Jansonism, which resulted in emigration almost to a man in some villages, died out as these people left. One village, Sälja, consisting of only three or four farms, saw three large families emigrate in 1850. They were the Eric Olsson Krans family, the Eric Ersson Lindqvist family, and the Jöns Ersson Walström family, all being tenant farmers, or *landbönder*. One soldier, Anders Nord, also emigrated from Sälja. The farm houses were situated near the woods with an open field in the front. Each farm had a cluster of small grey or red houses built around a yard.<sup>4</sup> Sälja is located in the northwestern part of Nora close to the bay (*Hedesundafjärden*). A small peninsula called Koludden marks the place where the charcoal was loaded on barges to be shipped to Söderfors. Today, Sälja still consists of three farms. Some large boulders remain in the meadows. Juniper trees are plentiful, and stately oak trees enhance the farm buildings, but this is the northernmost border for oak. The farm house where Olof Krans was born has been moved to

an open air museum in Tärnsjö. The house is well preserved, and among the furnishings is a bed (*jällsäng*) from 1849 bearing the initials of Olof Krans' parents.

The first emigrants broke with long-standing traditions. People living in Nora in the middle of the nineteenth century had deep roots in their community. Their ancestors had lived there for hundreds of years. The names of people were so intertwined with the names of villages that the two were almost inseparable. This was true even after people had emigrated to America. Olsson from Buckarby, for instance, was simply identified as Buckarby-Olsson at Bishop Hill—according to the time-honored custom. Many of the villages in Nora have names from the Middle Ages. Nordmyra has been traced to 1290; Lockarbo, Buckarby, and Mälby to 1312. Andersbo and Kråknäset have been traced to 1415. Litselbo was a new croft in 1557. Åby dates back to the Iron Age. It has two burial places from that time. It used to be called Åbygge Hamna. Stalbo was a burial place from the time of the Vikings.

In the 1840's, the old Viking blood, stirred by Erik Janson's prophecies, began to entice people to leave their well-known surroundings for the unknown. The salvation of their souls was at stake, according to the prophet. In 1846, forty-three people left Nora to follow Janson to America. The twenty-seven adults consisted of ten men and seventeen women, and together they brought sixteen children with them. Most of these people sailed on the *Agder* from Stockholm and arrived in New York on September 28, 1846. One child died aboard. Others sailed on the *Augusta* and did not arrive in New York until March, 1847. One family sailed on the *Caroline* and was shipwrecked off the coast of Newfoundland. Three Nora parishioners died and were buried there. When the Bishop Hill Colony membership book was started in 1851, only fourteen of the original Nora party of forty-three remained in the colony. Thirteen had died and others had deserted the sect. Of the original ten adult males, four remained in the colony in 1858.

In 1850, sixty-seven people followed in the first Jansonists' footsteps and left Nora for good. This time there were thirty-five adults, twenty men and fifteen women. Thirty-two children made up the balance. Most of these emigrants sailed on the *Condor* from Gävle and arrived in New York on November 9, 1850, and at Bishop Hill just before Christmas. One child died at sea. Sixty of the remaining became members of the colony, but later six of them left permanently. Of the original adult males, only nine remained in 1858.

The last Jansonist group to leave Nora consisted of sixty-three people who emigrated in 1854. The thirty-seven adults included



twenty men and seventeen women, and the number of children was twenty-six. The group sailed on the *Caroline* from Gävle on October 31, 1854, and reached New York on December 18, 1854, and Bishop Hill shortly after Christmas. There were no deaths along the way, and all members of this group arrived at their destination and were listed as new members. Twelve people either died or left the colony before 1858. Of the original twenty adult males about fourteen remained in 1858. One family returned to Sweden.

Not all the adult males are identified by occupation, but among the combined groups from Nora there were twenty farmers (including former farmers and tenant farmers), one crofter, twelve hired men, two tailors, one carpenter, one shoemaker, and one soldier. Seven men are not identified by occupation, some being listed as farmers' sons or just listed as young men.<sup>5</sup>

Twelve of the single women are listed as maids. It is interesting to note that the last emigrant group included only two maids. Letters had been sent home warning against paying the fare for servants, such as farm workers. The ratio of men to women is fairly balanced in these groups: fifty men and forty-nine women. This contradicts the notion that more women than men followed Erik Janson to Bishop Hill. Actually the groups from Nora were made up mostly of families: seven in 1846, nine in 1850, and twelve in 1854. Some of the children were grown, but if they emigrated with their parents they have been counted as children. Before 1858, twenty-six more children were born to Nora families at Bishop Hill, sixteen of whom died in infancy. The infant mortality rate was very high in the colony. Children born in Sweden, however, usually survived unless they were tiny babies at the time of emigration.

On January 1, 1855, shortly after the last group from Nora had arrived, there were 142 people listed in the membership book as being from Nora parish, including children born in the colony. At that time the newborn did not make up for the losses due to death and abandonment of the colony. The total number of emigrants from Nora was 173.

Study of the group from Nora within the larger society of the Bishop Hill Colony has revealed several interesting patterns. The Nora people tended to associate more closely with each other than with other colonists. When the young people from Nora married they usually married someone from the same parish. Even the work groups were clannish. Several Nora women, for instance, toiled at sorting the broom corn. If any of these emigrants deserted the colony, they went to places where other former Jansonists from Nora had settled. Also, the patriotism of the Nora people towards their home community was manifested in their choice of new

surnames, such as Nordström, Norling, Nordin, Nordberg, or Norman. And they often named their daughters Nora.

It should also be mentioned that men from Nora participated in the protest that led to the division of property and, hence, the end of the Bishop Hill experiment in communal living. By the time the last group of emigrants from Nora joined the colony, disputes had already arisen. One reason for discontent was the marriage interdict and celibacy rule introduced in 1854. Later objections were focused on the by-laws and the trustees' speculations in railroad stocks.

At a meeting held on October 31, 1856, the colony trustees were obliged to defend their controversial theories about marriage. The meeting was called by Olof Johnson, Jonas Kronberg, Jon Ericson, and Jacob Jacobson. According to the minutes, the trustees stated: "accusations have gone so far that some insist that we have forbidden marriage and say that we have separated spouses and prevented them from living together according to their conscience."<sup>6</sup> In their defense speech the trustees were careful not to state that they forbade marriage and marital relations; rather they used quotations from the Bible and Erik Janson's writings to appeal to each colonist's conscience, such as: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and give himself up for. . ." (Eph. 5:25); "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled. . ." (Heb. 13:4); "It is well for a man to not touch a woman" (I Cor. 7:1); "Let those who have wives live as though they had none" (I Cor. 7:29); "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain single. . ." (I Cor. 7:8). One of Janson's hymns was interpreted as saying that Christian spouses should condemn all bodily desires and lusts between them.

The defense memo was read twice and accepted as being in accordance with the colonists' beliefs. Women voted for the first time. Those who were dissatisfied were given the opportunity to address the meeting. Four men, among them Hans Nordström of Nora, stated that they condemned the way the colony was run, both spiritually and economically. They were excluded from the congregation, but were allowed to remain in the colony as outsiders provided that they took care of themselves and their families. The punishment, which was spelled out in detail, amounted to nothing less than total alienation.<sup>7</sup> Nordström was forced to leave the colony in 1857 with his wife and son without compensation for ten years of work.

The by-laws which had been adopted on May 6, 1854, contained an article causing fear among those who stayed and hardships for



*Courtesy of the Illinois Department of Conservation.*

Olof Andersson Nordstrom from Falset, Nora

those who left. It stipulated that "insubordination in faith, teaching or living was punishable by expulsion with no compensation to banished members, except as the trustees might see fit."<sup>8</sup> Eleven persons were dismissed on May 7, 1855, in accordance with the by-laws. Among them were two men from Nora, Johan Söderström and Olof Olsson. Eric Ersson of Litselbo, Nora, had left in 1854 and Eric Ersson of Stalbo in 1856.

On August 15, 1859, Olof Nordström (the former Olof Andersson of Fallet) wrote a memo to the members of the colony in regard to division of property and church-related matters. It said in part: "I confess that I have defended the leaders whom we have selected. I have had no reason to do otherwise, since I have not known them to do anything wrong. But if it can be proven to be true what was brought against them last Monday evening, then I shall no longer defend them. . . ."<sup>9</sup> Nordström sought to work within the system trying to right what he deemed wrong. To that end he introduced new by-laws, which also were adopted on February 7, 1860.<sup>10</sup> In article twelve he spelled out some rules about compensation to leaving members. The new by-laws also limited the powers of the trustees. However, the trustees failed to recognize the newly adopted rules. Olof Nordström died in 1868, the same year the lawsuit entitled "the colonists versus the trustees," or to be more specific, "Eric Norberg *et al.* vs. the Bishop Hill Colony defendants," was filed in Henry County Court. None of the Nora men signed the Bill of Complaints against the trustees. Those who had not left the colony earlier were busy building new homes on the land they had received at the time of the division of the colony. The former colonists from Nora settled as closely together as was possible on the wide prairies, sometimes in clusters, as they had been used to in Nora.

The earliest dated letter in this collection was written by Olof Andersson of Fallet, Nora, while he was still in New York. He probably started the letter aboard the *Augusta*. He was born on July 8, 1818, and emigrated in 1846 with his wife Anna Andersdotter and their two sons, Olof and Anders. He became the colony physician and assumed the name Nordström. He died in 1868 and was buried in the colony graveyard.

Due to illnesses about four hundred Jansonists were forced to spend about three months in New York before they could continue to Bishop Hill. The 1,000 "*ekland*" which Andersson refers to is Bishop Hill. It was generally considered to be located 250 Swedish miles from New York. The Jansonists living in the East were kept informed about Bishop Hill.



New York, March 5, 1847

This is to inform all my relatives and friends that we went ashore here in New York on March 6. We left Gothenburg on December 7, and we have not had any winter since then. We got some gusts of snow a couple of times, but it melted as soon as it came down. We seldom needed anything but our jackets when we were on deck. Our rooms were so warm that we often had to leave the doors open. After twenty days aboard, others started to go barefoot, so I did the same. From January 21 until February 21, I wore only a vest and summer pants, and this I wore as late at night as 11:00 P.M. to midnight. We bathed several times.

I did not get seasick. I only vomited three times, but I was ready to eat right away. The sea did not bother Anders at all, but Olof<sup>11</sup> was in bed three to four days; after that he walked steadier than anybody else, even though we had a big storm. During our last month aboard he became so anxious to read that he hardly had time to eat; now he reads with speed in any book. Anna<sup>12</sup> had to stay in bed a couple of days in the beginning until she got used to everything. . . . New Year's Eve we made our bed on the big top deck with an oiled sailcloth as our roof. Since it was so warm we needed only a quilt as cover at night. We slept there until February 26.

We live here in peace and quiet both in body and soul. We are renting two four-story houses and we seldom lock the doors at night . . . but nothing disappears. Nearby is a church which we can use any time we want. . . . Since coming here we have been given seventy to eighty New Testaments in English, and from the same people we bought thirty large Swedish Bibles for one *riksdaler riksgälds*<sup>13</sup> each. . . .

For one's bodily good there are such income possibilities that if one should look in that direction, one would soon fall for worshipping of mammon. A worker can earn an average of six to eight *riksdaler*<sup>14</sup> a day. Food costs about the same as in Sweden. We use nothing less than wheat and corn. We eat corn bread daily and it tastes like wheat bread, but the color is whiter. The working-class people walk around in just as nice clothes as the businessmen every day.

We have bought 1,000 *ekland*,<sup>15</sup> some of which is cultivated; the rest is suitable to plow. We can have as much grass as we can cut in an area so wide that it appears to be endless. The grass grows over one's head and must be burnt down. At this place which is located 250 *mil*<sup>16</sup> from here, one can also use as much pasture as needed without paying. Last year our brethren cut half of a big field of corn. They have found so many wild pigs that they have lost count of them. They go together with the farm pigs and have become domesticated and can be slaughtered as needed. One does not have any expenses

here; instead one eats the fruit of one's work. We do not regret having left anything in the land of thralldom. We now believe in Jesus' word. . . . Both of us are in good health now and so are the boys. They have outgrown their clothes from home. Now I have to say farewell forever to all of you. . . . [He then refers to the prophet Amos and I Cor. 3.]

Greetings from Olof Andersson and Anna Ersdotter and the boys.

P.S. Should anyone be able to let God's spirit move him to look us up with the right intentions, it would be joyful.

D.S. Olof Andersson

Eric Ersson was born August 3, 1816 in Litselbo, Nora, and emigrated in 1850. The date on this letter, however, indicates that he arrived at Bishop Hill earlier than the rest of his fellow parishioners who emigrated the same year. Evidently he did not sail on the *Condor*. Ersson's family remained in Sweden. In 1854 he left the colony, remarried, and settled at Nekoma, Illinois, where he earned a living as a saddlemaker.

Bishop Hill, November 9, 1850

Beloved Brother-in-law, Sister and all:

Much obliged for the last. Time and moments have gone by since I was with you, and now I find myself longing to write a few words to you and let you know that I am alive and in good health. I have arrived safely at this place which I have been dreaming about for so long. Surely, I could tell you about my endurances on the way, but it would be much too long. . . .

I have to tell you that brother Jöns Ersson [of Åby] is alive but that his wife and child are dead. They passed away last summer from the cholera, which was brought here by Norwegians. One hundred fifteen persons have died from that disease, both Norwegians and Swedes. But still the population is increasing every day now. When I came here, we were about five hundred. Most of the people from Nora are living. I have many greetings to forward to you from Olof Andersson, of Fallet to Eric Olsson in Skinnarbo as well as to all others who ask about them. But mostly he wants to show his gratitude towards you for your willingness to help him out of his ancestors' land. I also have to tell you that the younger son he had with his first wife is dead,<sup>17</sup> but the older one is living—big and undaunted. He also has two children with his last wife, and they are alive and well.

Grälls Persson and wife of Fallet are alive, and Olof Hansson of Högsbo and family are well, except for the oldest

daughter who is dead. Brita of Stalbo<sup>18</sup> and children are living and many more whom I do not have time to mention. Everyone greets relatives and friends so very much and has a foremost wish that you would let the Lord open your mind's eyes so that you will understand that you have to leave your native land and meet up with us here in a blessed peace that the world can never give. Here you will be led to the living-water well, which never runs dry.

This is also my wish. Even I want to invite relatives and friends, spouse and children, brothers and sisters. Yes, with one word *all* with any consideration of their never dying soul should come soon and gather with the croud observing God's solemnity (*högtid*) every day. Yes, this is the invitation I extend to you: Come and assemble to the mighty God's communion while there still is time, because the table is set and the supper served. Come and buy for nothing, both wine and milk . . . Luke 14:18.

I also have to look back on time past. Yes, my hair almost stands on end when I reflect upon how I lived among you, letting drinking and its many burdens prevail as you were witnesses to . . . I want to fall down before you as a child and ask that you forgive me for my unwise deeds and no longer count my wrongdoings. Since I cannot come any closer to you for some time, you should know that I did not leave you and my neighborhood to come here and fatten my body—experiencing only pleasure and lazy days. . . . Ezekiel 33:14, 16 and Mathew 16:25. You can bear witness how I, according to Jesus' word, have abandoned both spouse and children and the conveniences of this world; but I certainly do know that I have received twice as much from God's hand as I have given up. . . . [He then mentions parables about the birds and the rich man.]

I have to notify you that Eric Jansson is dead. He was shot to death in a city called Cambridge, by a Swede from Stockholm named Root. This Root had been living here at Bishop Hill a year and a half and his wife<sup>19</sup> for four years. Both had agreed never to leave this place, but Root left first, and then he came back and took his wife forcefully with him. When she wanted to return, "they" helped her, which made Root so angry that he killed Eric Jansson. Thus the faith of Jesus' followers is that they have to shed their blood for their friends.

Signed,  
Eric Ersson

I have to pay thirty-four cents for each letter. Finally, I wish you all the wisdom to realize where your salvation is while it is still day and the morning redness gives its sheen.

Eric Ersson

Lars Persson of Kråknäset or Buska, Nora, emigrated in 1850. He and his wife, Anna, sailed on the *Condor*. They left the colony and settled at Victoria, Illinois. Later, Persson returned to Bishop Hill. Letters such as this enticed many Swedes to emigrate.

Victoria ("Nox Contry, Statis Elinois") April 2, 1851

My dear Parents, Brothers, Brother-in-law, Sister and Family:

Be kind and greet the millers (*mjölners*), our relatives and friends at Kråknäset dearly and let them know our condition. We are living in a heavenly world to body and soul.

We have to tell you that our journey from our homeland went rather well. We were not seasick at all. We only had to lie down two to three days until getting used to the rolling of the ship. After that we walked as steadily as on dry land. The sea was calm as a pond, so I did not think of this trip as being any longer than from Nora to Stockholm. Pelle<sup>20</sup> was so brave; he did not give way to the sea. Instead he grew big and husky so that his clothes from home became too small before we reached Bishop Hill. We arrived in good health at this place fourteen days before Christmas. From New York to Bishop Hill it is 1,846 English miles. One Swedish mile is almost seven English.

I cannot describe the goodness of this land to you, and even if I could, you would not believe me. It is so beneficial to both body and soul. When I was still in my homeland, I used to think that the light had been out since the time of Christ until Eric Jansson came with the true light. It was probably true that darkness had prevailed in our homeland, but we should study what the prophet Isaiah says. [He refers also to the parable about the Samaritan women and to the Gospel of John.] This does not mean that I dislike Eric Jansson's teaching. I just want to tell you that enlightenment had come to America before Eric Jansson came. I have heard many men and women preach God's word with spirit and power coming from within the truly faithful. To you who are unable to come here I want to say that God is everywhere present for those who fear him; but he does not serve sinners if they neglect to do his will. Holidays are not celebrated in this country—only Sundays. Liquor is seldom used.

Many have left Bishop Hill without a cent and in four years time they have earned for themselves a house and many acres, horses, cows, sheep, oxen, pigs, chickens—everything complete. A laborer earns two *riksdaler* a day and four during the high season.<sup>21</sup> Tradesmen have more than twice that much, plus means. I have made some baskets of willow. [It appears that he got fifty cents for a half-peck basket and seventy-five



cents for a larger size.] Fine wheat flour costs one *riksdaler banko*<sup>22</sup> and the coarser forty *skilling* per *pund*.<sup>23</sup> Boneless pork is eight *skilling*, *marken*,<sup>24</sup> and butter twenty-four *skilling*.

A crofter is no beggar here. No one has to tip his hat for anybody. Everybody says "you" (*du*).<sup>25</sup> In every home there is an abundance of food like at parties in Sweden. The land is covered with a deep top soil. One can plant year after year without fertilizing. There are miles between the ditches, because the land has slopes and natural drainage. The scenery is similar to Uppsala plateau, but without stumps and stones. Here and there are small groves of leafy trees. Hops, plums, apples, berries grow wild in the woods, and a grass plant like the rye and barley in Sweden.

It is an advantage to be young when one comes here, because a farm hand earns 430 *riksdaler*<sup>26</sup> and a maid over 200 *riksdaler* a year. When it rains the ground is difficult to walk on. It reminds me of a soft cabbage bed. However, it dries quickly in the sun. The women do not have to do anything but fix meals, make beds, sweep and clean. They wear hats made of net. The men milk the cows and carry in firewood and water themselves. I have left Bishop Hill and gone to Anders Olsson to live, because I enjoy seeing the country both here and there. The distance between is two and one fourths *mil*.

Pelle and Stina<sup>27</sup> are greeting you. They are rather happy that they came to this good land. The young learn the language fast. We shall write to you again after a while when we find out how everything goes. Eric Jonsson of Fallet, son, daughter and wife are alive and well and give their regards.

Greetings from one and all,

Lars Persson and wife Anna Ersdotter from Kraknaset

Note: Tell Lars Ersson at Östa to stay put until he gets further notice from us. D.S. Lars Persson.

Anna Ersdotter was a maid at Litselbo, Nora, where she was born on September 4, 1830. She emigrated in 1850. Most of the peasant women in Sweden at that time did not know how to write and Eric Ersson probably wrote this letter for her.

Bishop Hill, May 16, 1851

Beloved relatives and old friends:

May the peace of God be unto you. Now that I have been here for some time, or since last fall, I want to write to you as I promised and tell you what I have seen and heard.

I had a safe voyage as did my friends who were on the same ship. I never regretted making this move; instead I wish you

were all here—happily rescued from the house of thralldom. . . . In other words, I have been thrown as a sparkle from the fire, which is the horrible sinful lives you all live. I am in good health and feel fine. . . . All those lies I heard in my homeland as well as during my travel about the people here and their colony are all untrue. . . .

Many buildings have gone up here at Bishop Hill. The colony owns a large land area, many animals, different service shops, and manufacturing shops. Thus we have had a divine prosperity in accordance with the Scriptures both materially and otherwise.

They started spring planting two months ago and it looks beautiful. The crop sown last autumn is beginning to spread its kernels. Many hundred persons live here together . . . and all are nice to me. We have opportunity to go to church every day . . . . If you do not want to heed my warning, I take an eternal farewell. . . . The land is truly good, but if you come here to join us, I do not want to see you among the backsliders who with their ungodly sinful lives sneer at what they do not understand. Let my sister Stina at Norrby know of the contents of this letter as well as other relatives and old friends who want to hear from me.

Oversent and signed in friendship,  
Anna "A" [her mark] Ersdotter

The following three letters are undated, but were probably enclosed with the one from Anna Ersdotter. It is likely that Eric Ersson wrote them all.

I, Lars Andersson,<sup>28</sup> formerly of Nora and Andersbo, am sending heartfelt greetings to my parents, brothers and sisters, and old friends. I have arrived safely and am in good health and feel fine in body and soul among God's people . . . all of whom are selected according to the Scriptures. I wish you were all here with me and could enjoy all the goodness that I enjoy. . . . Anyone who rightly considers the devil's trap and leaves in time to gather here at the house of lambs would be welcome. Examine the Scriptures and you will see the necessity of following me. Let my uncle (*morbror*) Olof Olsson at Andersbo or Nyström read the entire letter.

Dear greetings and best wishes from the richly blesses,

Lars Andersson  
"L" [his mark]

I, Lena Larsdotter, from Fallet,<sup>29</sup> send greetings to Eric Ersson's widow and everybody else. I live among God's people at Bishop Hill and I am in good health in body and soul. Rejoicing with the flock observing the Sabbath according to the Scriptures, I am very happy about my move. . . .

We are all alive. On December 7, I gave birth to a girl who also is living.<sup>30</sup> We came to Bishop Hill the day before she was born. She is growing under our guidance and is good, and everybody wants her best.

Lena Larsdotter

I, Eric Ersson of Litselbo,<sup>31</sup> greet you, E. Nordström, saying that I live here among God's people and feel fine in body and soul. I am asking you to quit blowing your horn and everything else keeping you and quickly prepare to join the flock celebrating Sabbath, while you still can. Come before it is too late, as it became for the rich man in the Scripture.

Eric Ersson

The following five letters were written by Eric Olsson of Sälja, Nora (1811-1854), the father of Olof Krans (born 1838). Olsson emigrated in 1850 with his wife, Beata Persdotter, and children. He



*Courtesy of the Illinois Department of Conservation.*

Eric Olsson Krans from Sälja, Nora

was a devout Jansonist, and in his letters to the homeland he tried to persuade his parents and brothers and sister to come to Bishop Hill. All except his mother, who died in 1852, emigrated in 1854. Olsson, however, died shortly before their arrival. In his letters, he describes building activities, farming, industry, and religious life in the colony. His many references to other people have been helpful in determining what happened to the emigrants from Nora parish. Olsson's first letter is by far the longest in this collection.

Bishop Hill, May 31, 1851

Gracious Parents, Brothers and Sisters (*Syskon*)<sup>32</sup> and all other relatives:

Now I pick up a pen to write a few truthful words to you, all my relatives, friends, and acquaintances. My heart tells me that all of you are eagerly awaiting news from us to find out if we are alive or not.

All of us who left you live here in brotherly love, except Anders Andersson's daughter Karin.<sup>33</sup> She became ill in Helsingör, Denmark, on September 6, when our ship *Condor* sailed. We came to England September 16, after cruising in headwinds. Then we passed through the English channel in a day and half in good wind—ninety German miles, one of which equals three fourths of one Swedish.

On September 18, we set out on the big ocean. On October 5, death came and took Karin from us. She was buried in the depth of the sea on the Fourth Sunday of Repentance. This seemed more than we could bear and against the nature of things; but God directed everything to the best, so that all came to be in a good mood. We were certain that she had come to a better land than what awaited us.

God led us safely to our destination. Most of the time we had poor wind. For eight days it was so calm that one could hardly tell which way the sails turned. Then we had pretty good wind for two days and then again calm for eight days. Meanwhile it was so warm that we could hardly walk on deck. After that we caught good wind. The further west we came, the faster it went, until we came so close that the captain did not dare to go further at night. He anchored and waited until daybreak. Then the sea birds came all around us, and two doves flew to our ship as well as many small birds. Yes, we were as happy as they. A tugboat came and guided us ashore. During the entire voyage we never had any difficulties which I would call troublesome. Nevertheless, it was joyful to see land again after so many weeks at sea. Now it all seems like one clear day to us.

There is no land between England and New York except for two islands in the middle of the ocean. They are called the Azores. One of them is eleven *mil* with a big city and vineyards. But we never reached these islands. We landed here in New York on November 7. Four days later we left for a city called Albany on a steamer so beautiful I have never seen the like. No such thing exists in Svea's land. Then we went on a river boat for seven days. It was pulled by horses to a city called Buffalo. From there we continued on a steamboat to a city called Chicago; this took thirteen days. By then it was cold and snowing. Between Chicago and Peru is a canal, but since it was frozen, we could not go that way. We rented a room in Chicago for almost a week waiting for a thaw, but then we took the steam train instead. It took four hours to get to a city called Aurora. We had a young man by the name of Swanson with us from New York. He was our guide until Olof Stenberg met us. Then it was arranged for horses and wagons to take us to Bishop Hill where we arrived eight days before Christmas.

What I have described may seem like hardship to you, my friends, but for us it was like a dream. It certainly shows the strange ways God may choose to lead his people through lightness and darkness.

Certainly I had reason to be skeptical about such a long journey, as would any man whose wife had just given birth. Like the Virgin Mary traveled to a city to give birth to a Saviour for all who believe, my wife went to the city to give birth to a girl who I say is and will remain a virgin.<sup>34</sup> Then she planned to set out on the high sea with her infant. All this was still no excuse for me to avoid seeking God and his true gospel.

I guess I should also mention what happened to our little Anders, since my sister-in-law Greta is well aware of how he was in Gefle. One day he was swollen and too heavy (*tjock*); the next, he was well. It continued like that until we reached Helsingör. Then it got worse and he wailed badly when he passed his water. But he survived it all, even though he sometimes was too weak to stand up by himself let alone walk. I prayed to God that he would live until I found land, and my prayer was heard. (I did this because of love.)

The care of him was painstaking under the unusual conditions, but still it was simple for someone who is steadfast in both prosperity and adversity. . . . At times it was simply not so easy to have two little ones to take care of, but Anna was like an angel in her mother's arms every day. She is still good-natured and growing extraordinarily both physically and mentally. She is surrounded by many loving friends. Anders started to recover soon after we had arrived here, and now he is big and chubby. He has many happy days on hand, and wishes that his old grandparents (*farfar* and *farmor*) were here—and



Stina-Cajsa too, he says. I also wish in my heart that you were here in angel-like humbleness before your God. It would be a joyous day for all of us.

Now a few words about how content my little Eric was going across the ocean. You know how lively he was in Sweden. On the ship, he was the first one on deck in the morning, and he was as chipper as a bird all day. He amused me many times. Yes, we all appeared merry for the length of the trip. Sometimes it was real, sometimes not. . . . Yes, I cannot help rejoicing about the whole thing as I look back upon a faithless world where I was considered doomed to lose my children if we went. But it did not happen. You see, God brought these young plants over water and land, and He moistened them with His mighty hand, so that they did not wither. Then He planted them in His right vineyard, where wild grapes do not grow, only real fruit, since the weeds have been pulled up with the roots and the vineyard is clean. But many who enter leave again. You see, Lucifer walks around as a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. . . .

When the time had come for Eric Jansson to die, it resulted in fulfillment for only one soul, namely Root's wife, who had not wished to leave the colony. He [Root] had been invited into the true vineyard, but he was not the true worker. Therefore he had to leave. However, he did not want to go out there by himself without his wife and son. When she refused to come along, the thought of revenge came to his mind, and he killed Eric Jansson in the Court House amongst several laymen. The bullet pierced his chest. Root was captured and taken to jail, where he is still not sentenced, since the judge has passed away and no one has been put in his place. This manslaughter took place on May 13, 1850. You might doubt that Jansson's teaching will continue, but I can assure you it does and to an ever increasing degree. Because now we have four men who have been selected to preach and take care of the duties therewith; and seven men are in charge of what is earthly.

We have a building which is three stories high.<sup>35</sup> The first floor is divided into ten rooms and so is the second floor. The church is on the top floor. We are having services there every Sunday, and you have never heard anything like it in Svea land. Our teachers do not have any sermons made up like the Lutherans pastors, but use the Bible and begin by reading a chapter. Then they can explain the whole Bible clearly and fluently for three to four hours. They are touched by the Holy Spirit and sent by God. This is a gift and therefore they can give for nothing whatever Jesus tells them. Sweden's ministers think they are called by God, but they cannot preach the word without a salary. . . . Jeremiah 23:21; Isaiah 55 and 56:10, 11, 12. This church is built with twelve windows and in front of the

altar hangs a chandelier. To the right as you enter is a school room, and in the room to the left some people are living. We gather and pray every evening also . . . . The preachers themselves light ten candles and call us together with a bell when it is time to go to church. At this vesper, anyone who is gifted enough can preach besides the pastors. Yes, it should be noted that we have come to a congregation without spot or wrinkle (*fläck eller skrynka*) and to a holy ministry.

The year 1849, a brick building was constructed which is four stories high.<sup>36</sup> On the lower level is the kitchen where all of us eat, everyone with no exception, both high and low. Whether we are poor or rich, we are equal. The children eat at a special table just like the adults. We get one large cup of coffee every morning, except the children under six years of age, to whom is carried what they need to their rooms. They are really concerned about the little children, all of whom they adore. At four o'clock we eat supper and drink just as much tea. I have not been hungry once since I came to this place. They bake and brew every day. We even get biscuits. But people do not live by bread alone. . . . We say grace before and after every meal and sing one verse.

Next to this house another similar building is being constructed.<sup>37</sup> It is the same size and has a kitchen which will be finished this summer. Then we can all eat at the same time. Through the length of the kitchen there are four long tables. This building is 110 *alnar*<sup>38</sup> and there are seventy rooms above.

We also have a smaller building with hospital and pharmacy and an American doctor,<sup>39</sup> as well as several other buildings. Right now we are building a steam mill which will soon be finished. It is going to cost about \$18,000. We have a flax swingle, windmill, water mill, and blacksmith shop—blacksmiths can earn three dollars a day, which is twelve *riksdaler*. We have two saw mills by the water, dashing horses, oxen, geese, chickens, doves, turkeys, unusually big and fat cows and pigs, but no sheep. We have two domesticated deer in the meadow with the turkeys. We buy anything we need as soon as we are able to.

Here are carriage makers making wagons for sale. The blacksmiths put hardware on them as fast as they can. The prices are about seventy dollars for a two-horse carriage and fifty dollars for a one-horse surrey. A plow is twelve dollars and an axe \$1.25. The tools are very expensive in this country. It seems that people who make that much money could get rich fast. If they saw to their soul's salvation, they would work in a colony where everything is owned jointly.

The land is not expensive though. It is \$1.25 for one *tunnland*<sup>40</sup> but then it is untilled. It costs more to put a fence around it, since we do not have any forest to speak of around

here. There are places far away with as much forest as in Sweden; but where we live, one can find only small groves one or two *mil* apart of hardwood trees such as sugar maple and walnut. From this red-pulp tree one can cut boards which are five to six *qvarter*<sup>41</sup> wide. We also have oak, linden, two kinds of hickory, elm, and wild apple and plum trees bearing fruit, wild berry bushes, and many kinds that I do not know the names of. Aspen-hops grows wild in the woods and climb up the trees, giving us as much as we need and some to sell.<sup>42</sup>

This town we are building is situated near a big grove of trees with more standing in a row. So we have quite a few trees. We have a large garden (*trädgård*) planted three years ago which now bears fruit. It is very nice with gooseberry bushes planted around it. Yes, I dare say it is going to be a nice place. We have horseradish, carrots, parsnips, cabbage, turnips, wild strawberries, and black raspberries.

Here are many species of birds, such as swans, cranes, ducks, partridges, and black crows. *Prellhöns* [probably prairie chickens] which look like Swedish grouse and are as plentiful as sparrows in Sweden. For fun we shoot and trap so many in the water and spring that the whole colony gets several meals. Right now we trap live wild deer (*rågetter*). . . . We have killed many deer since I came here. Rabbits are also plentiful but small in size. The squirrels are large, reddish gray, and good to eat. We have no wild pigs like the ones Olof Andersson wrote about. They were bred by farmers, but had come on the wild track and joined our hogs in the woods.

We are building the town on the north end of a fenced-in field. There is a creek with an embankment in the foreground. The field is 1,500 *tunnland* and the soil is such that it never has to be either drained or fertilized. The topsoil is from five to six *qvarter* and two *alnar* deep in some places.<sup>43</sup> Here are valleys and dells just like at Brodin's place in Sälja. Yes, the land is like a rolling sea. The length of a field is one Swedish *fjärdingsväg*<sup>44</sup> and half as wide. We have many other fields that are smaller, but I do not know the size of them. What I call a field is a *gårde* in Swedish. Every year we plant rye, barley, corn, spring wheat, winter wheat, buck wheat, oats, and much flax. Linen fabric is priced at one dollar for a *gård*, which is six *qvarter*.<sup>45</sup> The women make good earnings here. Among them they have woven 2,500 *alnar* during 1850.<sup>46</sup>

Here are special carpenters, tanners, goldsmiths, tailors, shoemakers, each one doing his call of duty. We have a large planting of spring wheat this year on federal land. In this country one can plow and plant as much as one wants without paying as long as one does not put fence around it. Our Olof and another fellow have some dogs along and guard the wheat so that no animals get to it. They have real leisure days.



I have worked mostly in the big building since I came here. There are many different things to do. I work with many dear brothers, and one encourages the other with God's words. I would not be so enlightened in one year in Sweden as I am during one working-day here. We have a Bible in every room.

Beata's job has mostly been to sit and prepare clippings for rugs this winter, and she has never been out to the barn. There are special barn maids for that. Yes, Beata is now plump and cheerful and she feels good in body and soul. There were many who pitied her and called her move unfortunate, but I can assure you, my friends, she is doing fine. I myself have it better than you could ever imagine and wish. I live in a joyous world, and I do not have to worry about my eternal soul, because we have healers for that too, which Sweden lacks.

Tell dear mother at Sevesqvarn, daughter Thilda, Eric Ersmor<sup>47</sup> in Bro, Norling's wife, Brodin's Brita, Lars Larsson and everyone with no exception in Sälja, Olof Persson's wife in Kjerstinbo and all who have known my face that I live free of worries for clothing and food in a Christian colony. It is really unbelievable. Our children went to the English school the entire spring season, and they can now read a little and understand the English language pretty well. Olof speaks it often already.

We have not had any snow this winter, so we had to use the wagons. The winds have been chilly. We started planting in the middle of March. Then we had a big snow storm in the middle of April. It was the most snow we had this winter. It remained on the ground for a week. By Walpurgis Eve<sup>48</sup> the grass had grown so much that the animals could graze, and now the grass looks like a green rye field covering the whole wide world. You see, this is the time of rejoicing when the trees and flowers start to burst out of their buds and spread its wonderful beauty in the world. Yes, it is a joyous day here at Zion's mountain.

Of those who came here five years ago, the following are alive: Jöns Ersson of Åby, Anders Moberg's three children,<sup>49</sup> and Olof Hansson family except the youngest son Anders and oldest daughter Brita.<sup>50</sup> Stalbo-Anders Andersson's daughter<sup>51</sup> is living and married to Jöns Ersson of Åby, Olof Ols Olof of Bro and sister Brita, Fallet-Olof Andersson, wife and oldest son, Olof, Elias Eliasson's sister-in-law who was a herdsmaid at Per Grälls in Bro.<sup>52</sup> You must ask Elias' mother in Skökarsbo to tell her sister, Greta, who is now in Löfsta that she [the herdsmaid] is fine up to now and has a healthy soul in a healthy body, and that she fears and loves God in that she could defend her eternal soul with swords. Give words to Malin Persdotter in Loberg about her son Janne.<sup>53</sup> He is alive, but has gone out among the heathen people and is now married to a Swedish girl. They live in a city called Peoria. He left the first year. Tailors and shoemakers make good money in this

country. I know that she has been very concerned about him, since he never did let her know how he was. . . . Quarnmyr-Olof is also dead.<sup>54</sup> He was married. Now I have named all who are living. The others have died here, except Olof Ols' grandmother (*farmor*) of Bro, the daughter Beata and her little son; those three died on the way.

Now I will forward some loving words from your son<sup>55</sup> Grälls and Karin. Grälls was very happy to see our faces, but missed sister Brita and his parents. He was almost sure about her, he said. Grälls was in poor health after we came here. His chest caused him much hardship. God took him away from us on March 16 of this year. The day before he assured his brothers that he had no worries about his eternal happiness, and this is the way he had felt before. Yes, Karin took a tender farewell of him a couple of hours before he quietly fell asleep—to a sweet rest. Yes, he was a faithful and good worker in God's vineyard, and he could go with gladness and not with fear to his Father and get his reward. And Karin, she is not a grieving widow; she knows he has an eternal crown. She is always cheerful and happy just as you remember her in Sweden. Walking on this the Lord's Holy Zion Mountain and New Jerusalem, she does not have to worry about clothes or food. Karin sends thousandfold of greetings to all her in-laws and is very concerned about Brita in Enäker, who is enlightened about the Scriptures and keen in her faith, but still cannot come to acknowledge the truth. We followed Grälls to his last resting place together with a large crowd of sisters and brothers. The funeral was not like anything I ever heard of before. The cemetery is located a short distance from the city on a hill. Peach trees (*Pickisträn*)<sup>56</sup> are planted in several rows around it and they now bear fruit like prunes (*sviskon*) which are used for soup. We have planted many trees like that. Yes, this is a wonderful place for body and soul. . . .

Anders Olsson of Högsbo had to leave us, because he could not part with his money and the world. . . . He took Lars Persson with him . . . to Victoria, where a Swede named Hedström is representing the Methodists in this area. Their ministers are not ordained as in Sweden, yet they preach the word as hot as a baker's oven . . . but from their fruit they shall be known. Lars Persson came back. Maybe Anders Olsson will also in due time. . . . Eric Jonsson of Fallet has also left us and gone to Anders Olsson to live, but Jonsson's wife and children remain here. . . . I ask you not to believe anything that Anders Olsson or Beck<sup>57</sup> say. All of those who have left us live at the same place two *mil* from here. Some of them have Eric Jansson and some have Esbjörn as a teacher. He [the latter] is held for nothing here among those who rightly understand the Scriptures. The Swedes who have deserted us never have any

peace. Our teachers never go and listen to other sects, but stay put and take care of their own sheep and lambs, unless some Americans send for them. Then they go out and preach. . . . Stenberg's father left us for a while. He bought himself a stone house in town and expected to live off of his riches. He listened to Hedström and Esbjörn, but since he knew the Scriptures he found their teachings to be false. He did not get any peace until he came back here. Then he realized he had a duty to give up his money and hand it over to our colony, which makes every day a holiday for widows and fatherless children. He is now married to a young girl of Zion's daughters. . . .<sup>58</sup> He had about 30,000 *riksdaler*, and still he did not want to be more respected than I. We are seven hundred people, all together, happily sharing our meals. It is probably beyond you since one household cannot keep peace in Sweden.

Now I have to contemplate a few things with my old parents, especially my father. . . . You promised me when I left that if I should write and say that I had it good, you would come later. I can assure you my father that you would be free of duties here. Nobody is forced to work. One does only what one is able to do. I also have to remind you, my brother Anders Olsson, about how unhappy you were after that you had turned your back on me. . . . You had the devil and the world dear, as did I when I was among you. I thank my mighty Lord that He pulled me out and that I let Him take me away from the Horrible darkness which I was fumbling in daily. Yes, I have to remind you, my sister Kajsa Olsdotter in Melby, about one thing, namely, now unfortunate it was that you stayed in your poverty and let your children remain in the land of thralldom—poor and unhappy. I remember how you showed me God's way, and still you passed it up yourself. . . . I also have to say a few words to you, my brother Olof Olsson. I know that you have a keen interest in God's word, but the understanding is not wise. I pray to my God that he may open your eyes making you realize your delusion. I greet your wife Greta dearly. I can see her tender tears running from her eyes the last time we talked to each other in Sweden.

Now I have to close for this time, but I wish that you were all here and believed in Jesus' teaching. If you cannot give up the world, you should not bother to come here, because the road to hell is as wide here as in Sweden. However, this land is better than all other lands and the faithless can really beef it up until doomsday. I ask you to write a reply to this letter as soon as you can and let me know if you want to come here or not. The newspapers here are saying that Sweden's King Oscar died in an accident.<sup>59</sup> Everything I have written here is as truthful as if an angel had spoken the words to you from an open sky, so help me God. I am not taking anything away and write only

what I am obligated to. I wash my hands innocently in your blood. Greet all acquaintances in Sälja, Mälby, Bro, Kjerstinbo, and all in Buckarby on the day of judgment. I would not prefer to be in Sweden if I were given all the homesteads that *patron*<sup>60</sup> owns in Norrgräden.

In Friendship,  
Eric Olsson

Bishop Hill, October 9, 1851

Gracious Parents, Brothers and Sisters, all in-laws, and relatives both big and small:

Once again I shall send a few lines to you, since God has moved my heart to do so. We live in peace and joy in communion with God. I still have not received an answer to the letter I wrote on May 31, so I do not know if you have received it or not. In that letter I mentioned that my little daughter Anna Elisabeth is and shall remain a virgin. I did not write those words in vain. They have already come true for her and for us. I will tell you on these next lines.

Jesus came with a call from His heavenly Father on July 9. She passed away from us after a short illness lasting only a day and a half. She kissed her mother and aunt Anna in her last moments and then she gave up her breath. She did not seem to be in much pain, but yet it must have hurt in her soul. Why do you suppose God made her death struggle so short? Well, she was an innocent lamb and had done nothing wrong. Still, it has been said that the innocent children will suffer for their parents' wickedness. But she was born to be an angel in God's paradise. See, the Lord gave, and the Lord took. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." (*Välsignad vare han som kom i Herrans namn.*) Why do you think that God made it so easy for her to die? Well, because her parents had turned to God and had given themselves as tools in His hands. Besides, He did not want to make an innocent child suffer. See, God put her in our hands like a rose and a flower for a little while . . . and His hand guided her unhurt over land and sea. Yes, she was a dainty child, and we loved her very much, but God loved her more. She was selected already in her mother's womb.

Now, I also know that brother Anders' little girl, Stina Cajsa, has left this sorrowful world which is small and wicked. For this I am glad and my soul is rejoicing over that this little toddler could go to her heavenly Father at a well pleasing time. I know and am certain that she is now an angel in God's kingdom. I can now truthfully say that only the innocent children, who have not overstepped their baptism's alliance, will come to God's kingdom without repentance, or being born anew. Jeremiah 23 and Matthew 23. . . .



It is awful of me to paint such a dark picture for my beloved parents, brothers and sisters, and other relatives, but I have to do it since the mighty God has given me the honor, and enlightened me to do so, else I will not stand clear on judgment day. Then God will request your blood from my hands. This way I am freeing my soul whether you will listen or not. . . .

Here are widows and fatherless children from Sweden and Norway; here are men from Norway, Germany, and even countrymen from Skane. Here are seamen who can preach vigorously and not like the book-learned (*skriftlärd*). Yes, the big city is being built which God talks about through the prophet, Zechariah, in the 8th chapter. "Old men and women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem . . . and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing. Here is the new Jerusalem that the Scriptures talk about. It is built without any surrounding walls or watchmen guarding it. The Lord himself is the watchman at this Holy Zion's mountain. It is never going to be plated with silver or gold, but with peace and power from the Holy Ghost.

My wife and I can bring you the glad tidings that we have drunk and eaten from the Holy Cliff which is Christ. . . . I will explain that on Sunday before Midsummer we partook in the Lord's Holy Supper, as did all in this city, both big and small. It took some soul-searching to be worthy, because the Scriptures require that man shall reveal all secret sins he has in his heart for both God and the people. . . . One cannot come as a "dirty pig" to this important meal, as I did in my fatherland. . . and many others with me. . . .

I am now turning to you my brother, Anders Olsson, in this letter. . . . I can tell you, my dear brother, that I have carried your silver chain all the way to this place. May the Lord allow it to be a link between us pulling us together. . . . I know that you live in Fallet now in the rooms that brother-in-law Grälls built for a prayer house. Perhaps you have turned it into a sinners' nest. I know, however, that my parents will be near you. . . . I have strange feelings about my father's eternal soul, because he knew we did the right thing when we escaped our homeland. We will see what God will do with him. For what is impossible for people is possible for God. I know my mother is hard as a diamond when it comes to the Word. If the Holy Spirit cannot touch her soul to betterment, then it is too late forever. . . .

I must with a few words tell my sister, Kajsa, in Mälby that I and my beloved wife and children are able to rejoice in God every day now that we have reached a place where I do not have to worry about dying and leaving them alone. Now they have everything they need for body and mind. . . . I remember how happy you said you were when you received Holy Communion every day. But what kind of joy was that? Was "he" from God?

No, I believe he was from the devil, since he could make you cancel your pilgrimage which delighted you so much. . . . Then you could have come with me. Now it might be harder to get away from the devil's yarn. You were afraid of unimportant things. Here in this congregation, no squandering is allowed among God's people. . . .

I shall now talk to you, my brother, Olof Olsson, and in a few words tell you that even if Dalen were plated with the reddest gold, you could still not find any happiness there for your eternal soul. . . .

Now I shall tell you about the situation here. This year we had so much rain before Midsummer that it looked bad for the harvest, but it turned out to be the best we ever had, thanks to the very nice weather we had after the rain. We harvested an abundance of wheat, rye, and flax. The steam mill is now in use with two pairs of millstones, each grinding three barrels an hour. The flour is then bolted twice. We can get three different kinds of flour. Many travelers come here, so it is a busy place. We trade anything people want. The Americans come in droves to see how we have it, and it surprises them that we can live together like this. The potatoes have the same disease as in Sweden.

I am forwarding greetings from Johan Granat to his sister, Maja. He is well and he has a wonderful wife now. I have word from E.E.S. of Litselbo to his relatives saying that he is here, feeling fine and preaching mightily and not like the book-learned. I can tell you that Karin, Grälls Persson's widow, is well also. You should greet Eric Jacobsson, his wife, and son, Johan, very much from us and say that we wish they were here. To you, Eric Andersson in Ulebo, I say that if you should decide to come here, take my old father with you if nobody else wants to come, but write me if the trip comes about. I will then tell you what to do about this and that which may be helpful. You can bring this letter when you go and get gunpowder (*krut*). I want you to forward it to my brother-in-law Johan Norling, sister-in-law Stina, and their children at Domsjö Bruk. Please greet former juryman, Hans Olsson, in Skärsjö, his wife, and family from us and let them know about this letter. I have not forgotten to write but I will wait a while. As always I send regards to Buckarby eldersmen (*byamen*), Anders Persson and family, the widow Anna Staffansdotter, Jöns Jönsson, Jan Staffansson's widow and whole house, Per Nordgren, O. Nordgren, Olof Högborg, and everybody who has known my face. [Olsson also forwards greetings to persons referred to by initials only.] Do not keep anyone from reading this letter, because I am doomed if I do not blow the trumpets when I see the sword over the land. Greet one and all in Sälja, Mälby, Bro, Kjerstinbo. Olof Larsson in Geddsjö is greeted by And.

[Anders] Nord, who sends word to his brothers and sisters that he is well to this day. My wife and I also greet Pastor O. Lundwall, his wife and family. . . . If he wants to listen to this letter, let him, because I will stand free on judgment day if I have written.

In Friendship,

Your beloved son and daughter-in-law and our children, all wishing every day that you were here.

Eric Olsson

Beata Persdotter

Now I have to greet my parents-in-law dearly and tell you that we are thinking about you often, but due to the long distance between us, that is all I can do—except writing what God has enlightened me about. Truly, one can manage the voyage if one has the faith. I can tell you, my father-in-law, that if you had been fortunate enough to follow us to this foreign land, you would have made your happiest move in the whole world for your eternal soul. Even if your life is behind you, it would have been joyous for you to be here with us, for there is so much fish in the river that you could have caught buckets of it.

Remember me to Mattias Ersson and sister-in-law, Brita PersDotter, and your children. I have a special spot in my heart forever for my sister-in-law, because I know she was seeking the spiritual without finding the right kind. I like to forward greetings to my brother-in-law P.J.S., sister-in-law K.P.D., son Johan and my little Greta. I wish you were here with us, or we used to be verbally happy when we were together. Here we could be spiritually happy as well. You would not have to do anything but sew, since we have some who sew all the time. However, I know that it is hard for you to believe this teaching revealed through His son at this late hour . . . since you are so entangled by the world's teachers who fool the whole world. I also have greetings to you from your son-in-law, Anders Andersson of Bro, wife, and children. They live in communion with God and send their regards to Dragoon-Johan Ask and his mother, and Stina and son. They are in good health. Finally you are endlessly greeted by my wife and myself.

In Friendship,

Eric Olsson

[Included also is a special P.S. note to his sister-in-law about forgiveness.]

Bishop Hill, November 31, 1851

Gracious Parents, Brothers, Sister, Sister-in-laws and all of our relatives and acquaintances known to me:

In this letter I can say that we all live in communion with

God in body and soul to this day. Also, I want to thank you for the welcome letter we received on October 24. It delighted us enormously to hear that you are alive and well to date.

Now my soul is rejoicing over the message brought forward that a few more souls in our fatherland are thinking about their eternity. The whole colony is delighted. The feeling in my soul was like a running spring, when I heard there was a letter at the post office. I was happy to go and get it, and my room was filled with people when I read the letter. It was not enough to read it once. I read it for several days. Yes, many a tear fell when they heard that some are beginning to see their delusion. . . . I hear that my brothers and sister are thinking about coming here, and this gladdens my soul. [He then mentions the parable about the vineyard worker who came in the last hour.]

Do not worry and think that you are going to perish when you come to New York and foreign soil, because there are Swedes and Norwegians in business daily to take people inland; all you need is money. A Swede named Björkman took care of us and followed us to Albany, where we boarded a canal boat. You ask us to meet you in New York, but this we cannot promise right now. Make plans and start the journey, and if you believe in God, everything will be all right. Write a letter to me before you leave so I will know when you go aboard, how many are in the party, and how much money you think you will have left when you come ashore. Then God will see to your welfare. Do not be afraid to be on your own if no one meets you, because you can manage with the help of the hired man who will direct you to Chicago. You can go either way. If you cannot pay your way, let me know your situation. The letters do not take long. Then we will find a solution. Arrange it so that you leave Sweden at Midsummer time. It is best to go inland then, because it is neither too hot nor too cold. The canal route is wonderful to travel, if one comes during the comfortable season. There are orchards along the way, so you may pick as many apples as you like. There were enough for us, although we came late in the fall. The canal route is about 40 Swedish *mil* long, but it took only seven days for us. And as you know, you can go by steam boat from Buffalo to Chicago in four days for \$6 per person providing you do not have a heavy load. After that it is easy to get to me, because in Chicago there are so many Swedes. But do not listen to any voices there, or you will be cheated forever, since they have a Swedish church and Lutheran minister. The wild beast really nestles there. No, reach out for your goal ahead of you until you find me. I can assure you that I am not coaxing you on to any bad roads, and this you will find out.

Take your durable clothes: a fur coat for each person if possible, or a leather coat, which is fine too; but a fur coat like



*Helsingarna* used to have—in black sheep skin—would be the very best. However, one has to take what one has and can afford. Take as many linen shirts as you have, so you have enough changes to be clean during the trip. Also, take some warm clothes along, not because the winters here are very cold, but the winds are chilly. The clothes we have here are mostly made of cotton. Household goods can be brought if it is not too heavy and costly; bedding—enough to make one bed—shoes—only what you need on the way, because we have leather here. Take frying pans and copper kettles along, for you need them on the ship; and they can be useful here also. See to that you have some sifted barley flour and wheat flour; it is good to have at sea. Also, sharp cheese, whey-cheese (*mesost*) and some herring, beef, and pork; whatever you can furnish at the time, but not too much of peas and cereal (*gryn*), because we were totally fooled when we could not cook every day at sea. But if you somehow could bring some beer, it would be good in many ways during the journey. Liquor too—if you can afford it—bring a couple of brass cans. This is not a precise account of what you should bring. You will have to judge after your own circumstances. Everything is useful. If you could take along some hemp-seed it would be great, since we do not have any in the colony. Hemp would be good for ropes and lines. The hemp is supposed to grow fantastically in this area. The soil is everywhere like the best hemp land in Sweden. There is not a stone around and we have no ditches. Our fields never have to lie in fallow (*träde*). As soon as we have taken one harvest we can start to plow, plant wheat, and harrow it down. Farming is very easy here. Corn is planted just like potatoes, two *alnar* between every group of seeds (*stånd*), five seeds in each group. We plant them along a string in squares like a window pane. Then we plow over just like with potatoes. There are three or four ears on each plant. The yield is almost too heavy. I cannot describe it. It [the flour] is much whiter than wheat.

See too that you take along some berry preserves and syrup. Also, take some good *carduser* to smoke on the way, and—if you have any left—when you come here, because the pipe tobacco they make here is no good. Take some snuff also. But do not bring any expensive loaders (*hagelbössor*). (Do not try to obtain more pocket watches than you already have, because those are inexpensive here.) The double barrel I got from Mattias Geloth I have no use for here. I paid half price and consider it a loss. If you have one that you really like, it would be all right to bring it. Now I will end my material talk and pray to my life's God who has all the power in heaven and on earth . . . I am asking all of you, my dear ones, father, mother, sister, brothers, all in-laws, and children. . . I call out to you night and day to prepare yourselves for fight and come to me.

Do not make excuses, thinking that you are too old, because God wants everyone to repent and come to true knowledge. I hear that you have cried many tears since we left, and this we have done for you also as Jesus cried for Jerusalem. . . . You ask us, who are answered in prayers, to pray for you. Not one day goes by, that we do not call out and pray for all souls. . . . Now I have lived through two Christmas holidays here.<sup>61</sup> I have, like the three wise men, found the Newborn King of the Jews. . . . I hear that my elderly father has a desire to follow the crane (*tranan*), but you will have to take a different route then, because the crane does not migrate to this country. The birds that are here never leave this land.

I forgot to mention that the price of wheat this year is \$2.50 *tunnan*<sup>62</sup> for the best kind. Wheat flour costs two cents for one mark.<sup>63</sup> One dollar equals 100 cents. A man can earn \$1.50 a day here plus food, if he is skilled in house building. The Swedes have earned \$18 to \$20 a month doing just about anything.

A railroad is going to be built half a *mil* from Bishop Hill. It will be many, many *mil* long and will be a good money maker. The difference between the poor here and in Sweden is like between night and day. . . . I hear that it is terrible to live in Sweden now, since God has punished it; but it will be even more terrible when He will be forced to be wrathful too. . . .

Now all of us want to forward greetings to all of you. Brother-in-law Gräll's wife, Carin, sends never ending love to one and all. She lives with us in the same room. So does Lars Persson who sends his greetings along with ours to Lars Ersson in Östa and Lars Andersson in Kråknäset. . . . Surely, it looked dark for Norrman,<sup>64</sup> but he is here on this day and is married to a wonderful woman. Greet his sisters from him. Our children cried when I read your welcome letter; and they prayed to God that you will come here. Anders talks a lot about his grandparents (*farfar* and *farmor*). Well, journey to them now! I can assure you, my parents, that you will never be forced to work. Our children are now going to the English school and they read well. Olof and Petter speak almost anything they want.

Now I want to jot down that we have 120 cows, except oxen and yearlings. This year we have raised 100 calves and they are big as yearlings. We also have 30 horses, 15 oxen, and 300 hogs.

You are asking that one of us meet you in New York, but if I had money I would go to Sweden, as I mentioned in a letter sent October 9, addressed to A.A. Brandberg. If you have not yet written an answer to that letter, do so with a few lines.

Signed,  
Eric Olsson,  
wife and children.



*Courtesy of the Illinois Department of Conservation.*

Olof Olsson Krans from Sälja, Nora

Bishop Hill, April 8, 1852

Gracious Parents, Brothers, sisters-in-law, sister and children:

Since I have the opportunity to send a few lines to you, I will, although I have written enough already. I will let you know our situation to this day which is, praise the Lord, good with all of us both big and small. I think you already know that our little daughter, Anna Elisabeth, passed away last summer, because I write a letter to Eric Anderson in Ulebo about all that, but I addressed the letter to *Kronobefallingsman*<sup>65</sup> A. A. Brandberg in Östa with a sealed letter to him enclosed. In the same envelope was a letter to you. But if it was received I do not know. I asked Eric for a reply, but I have not heard anything. I have answered your welcome letter of September 7, and I sent it with a letter to *patron* Benedickz so that you would not have to pay postage for it. I believe it has reached you. . . .

If you are thinking about coming over to us, get ready soon, because no one knows how much longer the seafaring can continue. Here in America it sounds as if the Scriptures soon will be fulfilled as the prophet Isaiah says in chapter 2:4, and the prophet Mica in chapter 4. Everything that they have written shall come true towards the end of the world. . . . Prepare yourselves, all of you who can get away, because you do not know what the next day will bring. Or perhaps you have lost so much this year that you cannot manage to come. We have heard that you have had a difficult time in Sweden. . . . Luke 18:3, Timothy 3, Matthew 23:14, Mark 12:40, Luke 20:47, Titus 1:11. . . .

Letters have reached this part of the land saying that several church parishes in Northern Helsingland have disowned (*fränsagt sig*) the pastors and are baptizing the children themselves, and also that some pastors have excused themselves from the ministry. . . . In a letter to Esbjörn it read that "*Satan har tagit en Prost i Helsingland uppenbarligt*" (Satan has taken a minister in Helsingland—no doubt). . . .

I wrote to you that I wish I could go to Sweden. However, it was never meant for any other purpose than the saving of souls, because I can now see how you are going to end up. I do not know what God's plan for me is of late, since I seldom have any peace and quiet. At night I dream that I am in Sweden disputing with the priests; and then I tear them up so they cannot answer my thousand words with even one. The people gather and want to hear my voice, until "they" come with swords and pokes towards me; but they are not able to overpower me. . . .

Now I want to tell you something. People in Sweden think that no one here can send a letter until it is censured, but that is a lie. I have here written quite a bit and nobody has asked what I have written—if it is of the devil or of God, because I have my



freedom in everything and no one tells me what to write; only God's spirit moves me at the time I write.

Do not bring more peas than the food list states. Nine cans are more than enough for all adults. If you do not plan to leave this year, write a letter anyway, so that we will know how you are in material ways. The rest I know pretty well already.

Your loving son, brother, etc.

Eric Olsson, wife and children

P.S. Olof is now in painter's training (*målarlära*) under Olof Hansson of Högsbo. He can now talk, read, and write English freely. The same goes for Petter; and Carin talks well and reads willingly. Eric and Anders speak it. You may have to lend a few cents for postage if it is required.

Bishop Hill, February 8, 1854

Beloved brothers, sister and children, and my grieving old father; if he is living in his sorrow, which I have learned about.<sup>66</sup>

Your heart-breaking letter reached me April 22, last year. I understand it looks dim for you to come over here. What can I say except that you have done as the invited men the Bible talks about. The first one had bought a large estate and the other had taken a wife, so they could not come because of this. Now you, Olof, have sold your estate (*jordagods*) and you, Anders, have lost your wife, and still, you cannot come. What is stopping you now? Well, the trouble is you cannot believe God's promises . . . and secondly, you cannot give up the world completely . . . Matthew 10th and 24th chapters, Mark 13th and Luke 21st chapters . . . Thessalonians 4-8, John 10, Paul's letter to the Colossians 2:8, Jeremiah 31:8, Zechariah 3:12.

I took your letter to our teachers and they read it with great interest and said that "we hear that there are still many sheep who are without a shepherd." We have a God-given shepherd . . . He said that if the devil had not closed the way for God's word in Sweden, they would send three or four men to gather the lost ones of Israel's house, but right now I cannot see any signs from God to do so. Last fall I had a marvelous vision that I was in Sweden releasing many prisoners from the soul prison of Babel. If God selects me, I will be ready to go whenever he wants me to, even if my blood has to be spilled witnessing the truth.

I hear that you doubt that people will be allowed to go ashore in America. This is not so. The government here wants the country to be settled, because here are still wide areas where no one lives. It is only Sweden's wizards and bewitched who believe that they can keep the fools in slavery, because

families with old people seventy to eighty years old and children have been arriving here. There are poor houses in every town where poor people are taken care of, even those who have come from other countries without a cent. American sea captains have not been told to remove people from Sweden, but I know a captain who took along a family from Gothenburg free of charge, because Swedes are very well regarded here.

In 1852 an organist from Söderala in Helsingland, who had two brothers here ahead of him, came here. He is very elegantly trained in carpentry. He has built a pulpit which is rather beautiful and also pews for the whole church. We have bought organworks. It is about ten *qvarter* long and two *alnar* high.<sup>67</sup> It has bellows (*fjäderar*). It is not heavier than two men can carry, but it plays rather well (*rart*). The name of the organ player is Sven Björklund. He has received a letter from his brothers in Sweden saying that they are planning to come here. His brother in Myskje is Lars Jacobsson. Maybe you could be travel companions. . . .

Many greetings to my dear brother Sahlin in Stalbo. I have studied your welcome letter, in which I find that you are disappointed in Luther's teaching. This is justified. I also hear that my sister, Karin, is visiting indifferent teachers (*ljumlärare*)<sup>68</sup> and that this is not giving her any peace of mind. It is useless and will remain so . . . John 17th, Matthew 5th and Luke 6th. . . . Many people come here, both Swedes and Americans; even Swedish Lutherans have to come here to be burnt. . . . I cannot write any more now, since it might upset some, like you say. . . .

On June 11, last year, a Saturday, I was called to go and preach in the evening at Bishop Hill Church. Once a week I preach at Red Oak where we have many cows, as you know. I am working there all the time, but I go home every Sunday. My job is to chop wood for the town kitchen, and Nord is my brother right now on this work mission.

I shall now talk to you about wordly matters. We all have a wonderful strong health, to both body and soul, coming from the grace of God alone. We had a good summer last year. We harvested wheat, corn, flax, potatoes, carrots, parsnips (one which I measured was 14 in. around), oats—which we quiet our horses with—barley, and apples. We have an unusual garden and this spring we are going to plant several thousand fruit trees. They grow big here, so we will have a paradise (*härlig örtagård*). We have planted broom corn for ten thousand American dollars, and still we have been able to build the railroad for several thousand dollars to everybody's surprise. We have built two large brick buildings the past year, one watermill (*vattqvarn*) with two pairs of grind stones and a turning lathe; and saw mills (*sågar*). The steam will

(*stimqvarnen*) is running at a fantastic rate. We get every fifth bushel in fees, so we can feed ourselves from this alone. So many customers come that we grind all the time. Our bread is all wheat, and our livestock are breeding like Jacob's and graze on large fields. Isaiah 30:23. The railroad will be finished this summer. Then people can come from New York in four days for about ten dollars.

I have so much to write, but it would be too expensive for you to redeem it considering your circumstances. The cost is minimal to us in the land of freedom. I thank you very much for your welcome letter, although it was awful to hear what you Anders had to go through. I did send a letter to Hans Olsson in Skärsjö, but I have not heard anything from him. We are now forwarding greetings to all in-laws and the children. Anders Andersson of Bro and sister Stina send greetings to Brother Ask, mother, and children and say that they are very disappointed since they have not received an answer to their letter. Finally, greetings in abundance to your family.

In Friendship,

Eric Olsson

I can do no more for you at this time than assure you, my old father, brother Anders, and little darling sister that if anyone would advance payment for your boat ticket, I will reimburse him fully, if he would not be satisfied to live here.

Guaranteed by Eric Olsson, Bishop Hill,  
Feb. 3, 1854

If you can see a way to answer my letters, please continue to do so. Then I will know what your situation is in every aspect. Thousands of greetings to one and all. We are in good health and so are the children.

Eric Olsson

Beata PersDotter

Eric Ersson from Litselbo greets Hans Olsson and wife in Skärsjö. Anders, brother of mine, never take a wife who does not want to follow you. We have enough of Zion's daughters. We have four golden glass lamps burning in the church every evening. Two on the pulpit and two on the organworks. Let me know how much this letter and the last one cost in postage. We had a nice winter. No snow other than a couple of inches now and then.

D.S.

Eric Olsson

Anders Olsson, a farmer, was born in Segbeb, Nora, in 1823 and emigrated with his wife, Anna Olsdotter, in 1850. The couple is not

listed in the colony membership ledger. They settled in Victoria, Illinois. In a P.S. to this letter, Olsson criticizes the diet at Bishop Hill.

Knox County, Illinois, February 2, 1852

Beloved Brother:

May the peace and grace of the Lord Jesus be with you and your wife. With these few lines I wish to let you know that I am alive. My wife and a little son, four months old, are also in good health. I hope this letter will find you, family, and friends just as blessed. [The first part of the letter is about money transactions and power of attorney statements.]

I like to describe briefly what the land is like. My eyes have never rested on more beautiful or profitable land. The soil is one and a half *aln* deep and like the finest cabbage bed. One never has to fertilize or drain it, and it bears fruit every year with very little work. The soil is not worked more than once a year. We do not have as much forest as in Sweden, but we do have enough to be fully helped. The taxes are quite insignificant and one can have as many cows as one wants. We can cut as much grass as we like outside our own land. The grassfields stretch farther than the eye can see. We have access to coal and limestone.

My greatest desire is that you and all my relatives come here and get away from your oppression. Over here it seems as though everyone has a God. The judge works like the hired man does. The minister as well as the farmer. Here it is true that the one who does not work shall not eat.

The language is a little difficult for old folks, but the young learn fast. We are now fifteen households in the neighborhood and we are as close to each other as in Sweden; all are satisfied and happy. There is more land available next to us. If you are thinking of coming, I wish you would come as soon as possible. In case you do not want to come, please send my money if you have received it, but help yourself first to some compensation for your trouble. It is best to send them in the form of a draft. Buy it from Rettick in Gävle and send one part in a letter to me, the other you keep. But I hope you will come yourself together with our brothers and sisters and other relatives.

In the event you come, I want to inform you about what to bring. Take with you as much bedclothes and every-day clothes as you need. It does not pay to bring tools or old containers of any kind.

I also want to inform you about the most important matter, and that is how we have it with our religion. We believe everything that the prophets and the apostles have written



about our Saviour Jesus Christ. . . . I have found the treasure that neither rust nor moths can destroy. I must say that our preachers do not speak about God's deeds in strange words, but, as is evident, with spirit and power. It seems to me as we were in the time of the apostles. The ministers have to travel from one place to another even to our homes. They are not like masters to their people, but set good standards for the flock to follow. . . .

I trust the Almighty that He will let us see each other once again. I end for now with a hearty greeting to you and your wife, father and mother, and my little brothers and sisters as well as the rest of my relatives, friends, and all who know me and ask about me, but mostly the ones I mentioned.

Signed with love,  
Your friend and brother  
Anders Olsson

P.S. [He includes their address in Victoria, more greetings, and the following about Bishop Hill:]

I also want to mention how they have it at Bishop Hill. There are between 600 and 700 persons and they all eat at the same table but have a poor diet. Some are content and happy with what little they have. Jöns Ersson of Åby<sup>69</sup> is married to Brita in Stalbo, and my hired man, Jöns,<sup>70</sup> is married to Gräll's Karin. Lars Persson returned to Bishop Hill, but his wife did not want to. She is now out in the world and working. She earns four *riksdaler* Swedish money a week, which is the least a maid makes here. Eric Jonsson of Fallet has left, but his wife and children remain.

Anders Olsson

Jöns Olsson of Högsbo was Anders Olsson's hired man in Sweden, but Jöns did not follow him to settle in Victoria, but stayed at Bishop Hill. He changed his name to Nordin. In the following letter he surrenders an inheritance in Sweden to the benefit of his mother. The Jansonists at Bishop Hill did not mind relinquishing their inheritances in Sweden since they could not keep the money for themselves anyway. The trustees, however, needed all the money they could get to run the financially troubled colony. To that end, Olof Johnson went to Sweden to collect inheritances which the colonists were entitled to.

Bishop Hill, July 1, 1852

God has richly blessed me here, compared to when I was in Sweden. Now I can write by myself well enough for you to

understand what I mean. I will therefore forward a few words to my place of birth and everyone there who used to know me, both relatives and friends, and my elderly mother, who has a warm spot in my heart. I know she carried me under her heart, and now she will soon be leaning towards the grave. . . . It saddens me at times to think about the terrible darkness in which you live. . . . My health has been good since I left home. . . . I wish you would believe God's promises and leave for America, but you say you are afraid it is too far away. Then I can do no more than leave everything in God's hands.

I received word about the money I have left in my fatherland, and I thank you my dear Eric Olsson for all your trouble with my inheritance. Since God so richly cares for me both with clothing and good, I think it would be best if you would be so kind to give what is left to my beloved mother. It is a small reward for her having cared for me from my childhood. However, if you, my sweet and towards-the-grave-slanting mother, would find it good to come here to me, then I will take care of you in your old days. Your mysterious thought when I left that I would be back, I leave in God's hand and He directs everything to the best. Greet all who know me and say that I wish you were where I am

. . .

In Friendship,  
Jons Olsson

In Albin Widén's book, *Amerikaemigrationen i dokument* (Stockholm, Prisma, 1966), is a draft of a letter written by a Janssonist (pp. 59-60). Widén found the draft in a home in Bishop Hill in 1939. He had no idea who had written it and when, nor whom it was intended for. Arnold Barton translated the printed draft and included it in his book: *Letters from the Promised Land* (Minneapolis, 1975), pp. 82-83. Now I have found the rest of the content of the letter and the previously missing data. The letter was from Jöns Andersson of Stalbo, Nora, and it was dated Bishop Hill, February 1, 1853. Jöns' brother, Olof Andersson, of Fallot, probably wrote the letter, which was addressed to "Dear Friend and Brother Eric Ersson" (probably Eric Ersson of Stalbo, who emigrated in 1854).

The first part of the letter is about religion and the welcoming of another group from Nora to Bishop Hill. It is unimportant except for one phrase which says: "We have received the glad tiding that you, who have been our dearest and closed friends . . . have decided to *forsake all your comfort* to walk in Christ's footsteps. . . ." This seems to imply that the friends were very comfortable in their homes in Sweden and that they could not expect to be so at Bishop

Hill. The last part, which was not included in the published draft, continues to criticize those who had left the colony.

Bishop Hill, February 1, 1853

Dear Friend and Brother Eric Ersson:

.....  
 They [the deserters] say that they have been treated unfairly by our people, and that they have put up thousands of *riksdaler* for the colony, and yet they had to leave. The truth is that they never had a *skilling* to help pay for their trip over here. They were believed for some time, and we had to suffer for it; but it is different now when we are known for what we are. However, it is not our wish to neglect the poor if they are rich in faith. Peter 4:3; Acts 2: 4, 7. . . . The fact that we had a gang of day-laborers, etc.—people who seldom had enough to eat in their own homes—tagging along with us has often been discussed. Those are the ones most likely to leave us. It seemed fitting to them to be part owners of the rich people's money, but when we came here to this land as settlers the mentioned riches were almost gone, and we had to work hard to feed ourselves with the help of God and certainly without harvest and fat oxen. Then some started to leave us for the love of false gods, such as nice clothes and good food. We are now observing with regrets that those who were dependent on others in Sweden and could have been members of our colony—they are now so hardened in their own thinking that they buy the most expensive clothes like black silk for the men and hats with net for the women, etc. One can hardly get them to say one Swedish word or admit to being Swedish, although some of them can barely say one word correctly in English. They are thanking those who helped them over here with slander and dismay. . . . We are not saying that they are all like that, but I do not want to recommend that anyone who loves riches and earthly honor should come to America. The land is good; this is most certainly true. People do not have to work much to live in luxury, but they have to endure to live far apart, one here and one there, surrounded by large fields. There is from one half *fjärdingsväg* to one *mil* to the nearest neighbor. It appears that all their blessings would be more enjoyable if they lived in villages like in Sweden. Furthermore, no one is respected more because of wealth or high standing. One is as good as the other. The simplest citizen says *du* (you) to the president, without bothering to tilt his hat. I say this so that no one will come here and regret it later. People from other areas in Sweden have begun to come over here. Some are content but others are unpleasant and regret their move. Here among us we are many enough to cheer each other, because we are nearly

seven hundred people living together. All of us eat in the same kitchen and we go to vesper every evening as a group. From the very first day, we have delighted in being able to learn more about God's will. We have also been spared from worries about our bodily well-being that all of those living on the outside have to be burdened by. We have been released from that by dividing all work among us. Since each and everyone is doing his part faithfully, we have everything needed to live. . . . In regards to housing, I can assure you that there is no reason for fear, because no one, who believes in God's words and promises, had to leave for lack of bodily commodities. It is different now from what it was in the beginning because all this time we have worked to get room for all who wanted to join us without regard to the person. Although the letter will be long and expensive to redeem, I will give you a short account of how our community is organized. . . . First of all, we have contributed all our belongings to this commonly owned property, which is not held or owned by any individual or individuals. It is to be owned jointly and used to the benefit of all of the members who are here now, as well as those who from now on will join us in the manner mentioned before. We have, as in the Acts of the Apostles, chapters 6 and 7, selected seven men. They are to take care of all the economic duties as long as they are working for the best of the colony. If they do not they can be discharged by the colony. Two of our brothers went to the Assembly this last month of January and arranged to get the above corporation valid.

I do not find it necessary to tell you how much land we have, since I hope that you soon will be able to see it all for yourself. May the Lord lead you safely over. Grace and peace from the Lord be with you and all of us. Amen.

. . . You have probably noticed that I did not write the letter myself as you requested. This is true, but you know yourself how slow I was to write when I was home; and since then, I have not written anything but a short letter to Sweden. If I had lied to you in this letter, I would have been in debt to you when you come here. Now I do not have anything to be ashamed of when we meet.

With deep love,  
Your servants,

Jöns Andersson and Olof Andersson

P.S. Do not let anything frighten you and you will experience God's power. Tell Lars Ersson in Östa, if he is alive, that he should not despair in dark moments, because everything is possible for him who believes. D.S.

The following two letters are written by Olof Andersson Nordström, who wrote his first letter to the homeland from New



York in 1847. His parents, brothers, and sisters were also living at Bishop Hill. Andersson advises the next group from Nora to take the train from New York instead of the canal boat, but he says nothing about conditions in the colony. The first part of the letter is about money transactions, power of attorney, etc., and it has been omitted here.

Bishop Hill, February 1, 1853

My dear Eric Ersson:<sup>71</sup>

.....  
 Brother-in-law Jöns Ersson sends many greetings to his children.<sup>72</sup> He wishes that they would seek him out and that you would help them in case they will. His loving father heart must miss them. Eric Ersson of Litselbo<sup>73</sup> greets you saying that he is satisfied, although he would love to have his children by his side, so that he could raise them in discipline and God's admonition ("*tukt ouch Herrans förmaning*"). J.F. Norrman asks if you would be so kind to bring his orphan niece with you, the one who was at Stable-master Aggelu in Buska—if she would like to come. Norrman would raise her with fatherly love. We look forward to the moment when you have reached your goal and we can tie the knots of friendship and peace which never again will be loosened.

When you write next time, let me know if brother-in-law P. Andersson received the letters I sent him last summer. Say hello to him, his wife, and Jöns Jönsson in Buckarby from me. I cannot stop hoping that they also in time will become our brothers. This I have also wished for you ever since we said good-by at the Parsonage well (*Prästgårdsbrunn*).

We are all fine and healthy. My nearest family consists of the wife, the sons Olof and Joseph, and the daughters Hanna and Josephina. [Andersson ends the letter here with the usual greetings, but he begins again, giving his name and address and then some more advice.]

When you come to New York, there are so many Swedes and Norwegians, all of whom would like to transport you inland. They are very kind, but you should not bother with them, because they are cheaters. Instead find a man, whom Olof Jönsson knows, namely shipping agent Kindberg and ask him for a contract on the railroad to Chicago. He will help you. We will arrange so that Olof Jönsson writes to him ahead of the time. The railroad ticket costs about \$7 per person. Do not go on the canal boat whatever you do, even though it is cheaper, because it takes longer. From Chicago the railroad will probably be finished as far as to Peru, and from there you can walk to Bishop Hill. It will take two days.



*Courtesy of the Illinois Department of Conservation.*

Jöns Andersson from Stalbo, Nora

Since no letter can go faster than you travel, we would not know when to meet you. Therefore, it is best to hire transport. If everything works out well it should not take more than six days from New York. We could have gone there, but it is so uncertain how long the sailing will take. When Jöns and his party came,<sup>74</sup> one of our brothers waited for two months. But we will write to the above mentioned Kindberg before your arrival, and then you will get a letter from us through him and the requested help.

Signed,  
Olof Andersson

Bishop Hill, March 30, 1853

Beloved friend and brother Eric Ersson:

[Andersson begins by referring to a letter written by him on February 1.]

Now I can inform you that there are two railroads being built from Chicago to several cities out here.<sup>75</sup> These are supposed to be finished by fall. One of them runs a half Swedish *mil* to the south of us and the other three *mil* north of here. We will describe this better in a letter which will meet you in New York. You will get it from the Swedish businessman, Kindberg. . . .

The travel time varied a great deal for us. Some of us have sailed in six weeks and for some the journey lasted thirteen weeks. When my brothers<sup>76</sup> left, they had to wait in Gefle until August 11; and our men went to New York on July 20. They waited two months until the first ship came. While one of our brothers followed this party home, the other had to wait three more weeks, or longer than it took for our fellow parishioners to sail over the sea. . . .

Dear friends! It is my wish that you prepare to join us as soon as possible, because it is up to God how long you are free to leave your fatherland. The time may soon come when everything will be fulfilled . . . as Eric Jansson predicted. His words have been twisted to mean that this was going to happen as soon as he had turned his back on Sweden, but he never mentioned the time or hour.

We rejoice over the fact that God's grace and love is embracing more countrymen of ours, so that they can share this joy with us. If it should happen to any former foes of ours, God will not look upon the past. Ezekiel 18th and 23rd chapters. . . . May He guide you during the journey ahead of you. Amen.

Your loving and devoted friend and brother,  
Olof Andersson

P.S. A New York newspaper of February 24 reported that a regiment of the Russian Army has marched to the Swedish

border and that another was ordered to follow. How it is in reality you must know better than we. Most newspapers here speculate about war in European countries, but for now we do not know if there is any reason for the rumors.

When you write contract with the shipping company, reserve the right to remain aboard for about six days after arrival so that you have time to arrange for freight inland. . . .

A dear greeting to you from all acquaintances without exceptions,

Excuse my hurry. Signed,  
Olof Andersson

Eric Ersson was born in 1821 at Stalbo, Nora. He was the leader of the last group of Jansonists from Nora which arrived at Bishop Hill in December 1854. At that time the colony was prosperous. Including the latest arrivals it could boast of a population of close to eight hundred people. The foundation for a large hotel, the Steeple Building, was about to be laid. In the following year, the celibacy movement was introduced and several people left the colony. Eric Ersson and his wife left in 1856, and in 1867 they returned to Sweden.

Bishop Hill, January 10, 1855

Deloved Brother Per Andersson and your whole house:

With these lines I will let you know that we by the grace of God arrived here at Bishop Hill on December 28—all of us in good health. None among us had any illness to speak of during the voyage other than the usual seasickness. It was a very special grace of God. We were 101 emigrants aboard—none sick and none dead.

You cannot imagine the innermost happiness we felt, when we could lay eyes on our former neighbors and friends all of whom we know so well. They were lively, merry, and happy as they greeted us with a cheerful welcome to us (*välkomna till oss*). Yes, tears of joy could not be held back. The joy was no less for them—or the colony. They were so happy that they could have carried us on their upstretched hands (*burit oss på händerna*).<sup>77</sup> We are quite all right here and have decided to become members of Jesus Christ's parish on earth.

Well my dear, I cannot but confirm (*vederlägga*) all letters and printed news which have come from here to our fatherland. The newspaper we read last fall contained the most truthful writing I have read, and still there is so much more to be said than was described in the paper. Thus, one has enough of everything—both worldly and spiritual. We have feast-like



supplies of food and drink and God's words are spoken clearly and unchanged every evening. . . .

We had fantastically beautiful weather across the entire ocean. It was so warm that we were on deck in our shirt sleeves and with bare feet all day long up to the time we reached American waters. Then we were held back by strong, stubborn winds. We sent ashore in New York on December 18. Stenberg met us, and it was sheer delight for us to meet someone we could trust to help us inland. We boarded a steam ship on the 21st in the evening—a trip which lasted a few hours. Then we went by rail. It was rather fun to ride the train. Sometimes there were forty cars in a row being pulled by the steam engine, and it went smoothly like a bird in flight. The cars even had fireplaces, and there were benches to sit on like in a church. They were beautifully painted too. Yes, my good brother, now you will have to let all the families and relatives of the travelers know that all are in good health and feel quite well. They do not regret having left their fatherland. Since you know my entire party, there is no need for everyone to write a separate letter at this time. You will have to forward greetings of endless love from aunt (*moster*)<sup>78</sup> in Kjerstinbo to her foster daughter and son-in-law, Eric Ersson, and sister Stina and her family in Skärsjö. She likes it here and is happy about her move. She lives at the place of your brother-in-law, Olof Nordstrom, and we live with our neighbor, Jöns Andersson, with such joy and satisfaction that it is unbelievable. You should tell her relatives to write to her and let her know how they have it. Greet Sahlin's, Anders Olssons, *Olof Bengts' Olof's relatives, mothers, friends, and all acquaintances and say that they are well. Olof Ers' Eric sends endless greetings to his parents, sister Stina, and others. Would you, my dear brother, forward all these greetings? Now it is my turn to bring greetings. My wife, who sits here at the table beside me, asks you to greet your wife thousandfold and says that she rejoices about her move from Sweden and thanks God for the decision that we made to leave our fatherland and join the colony honoring the sabbath. Greet Per Jansson, his wife and children; Olof Ers-mor; Österbo-mor; Stål and the old lady; the folks at Lindängen and everybody else from her and myself. Say that we wish they were all here, especially the poor Ståls and the Österbo people, because they would not have to be in want for bread here since we have a surplus of manna for body and soul.*

Before we start working in the morning, we eat breakfast with coffee and good fresh food. The coffee cups are big—of one *quarters*<sup>79</sup> volume. Dinner is at 12:00 noon with meat or potatoes, and fruit soup (*sviskonsoppa*). Coffee is also served at supper. We eat only bread made of wheat—big piles of bread

as at a party in Nora. All members are happy, cheerful, and satisfied with their jobs. They are friendly towards each other and outsiders.

Greet Smens-mor<sup>80</sup> from Brita and the girl Anna, who thanks her very much for the stockings and wish that she were here. She would be just as well cared for as in Sweden, and maybe better. Olof Nordström and his wife and son, Olof, greet you endlessly and also all other relatives. They are all in good health. I also have greetings from Jöns Andersson, his wife and children to all relatives and friends. Tell Eric Ersson's widow that Stina is cheerful and happy. Her children are nice, healthy and growing big. The daughter, Stina, is working as a kitchen maid. They love us as if we were their nearest family and welcomed us with indescribable love. Your cousin, Stina, from Torp, greets you and wants you to forward a dear greeting to her mother, brothers and sisters, and all. She is well. I also have greetings from Lars Ersson from Östa to his brother-in-law and sister, and mother. They like it here. You must not forget to greet my wife's cousins, madam Lundström, and Dahlström's Kajsa from her. Brita greets her father and mother, and brothers and sisters and wish they were here. Greet Olof Ers' Stina from her and others. My boys and little Stina greet you; forward greetings from them to Anders, your children, and other playmates still in Stalbo. My family and I send thousandfold greetings to all who are wondering about us. Everything is just fine. Tell Björkman in Högsbo that I will write to him soon and tell him about America.

Your friend,  
Eric Ersson

[Eric Ersson continues. No date.]

Brother Per Andersson:

Olof Ersson from Sälja<sup>81</sup> sends greetings to you and asks you to kindly inform his relatives about his condition which is good. He is feeling fine as are the others who were with him. It was peculiar that he did not get to meet his son, Eric Olsson,<sup>82</sup> who had such warm consideration for his father and brothers. As you know, he wrote long letters urging them to get ready to come to America. God saw fit to call him from this world before he could meet his family. He had died a few days after Stenberg left for New York. He was buried when we arrived here. Anyway, tell the old man's brothers and other relatives that he is well. Tell Anders Andersson and wife in Mälby, Jan Jansson, and Eric Jansson that Kajsa and the boys are fine.<sup>83</sup>

The weather is nice with long days and no snow, although it is a little cold at night. Tell Eric Flostrom in Kjerstinbo to write to the old lady (*gumman*). I shall write again later when I have

more to tell. Greet Anders Olsson and Djurbom and say that they probably never again get the opportunity to come over here. A. O. S.<sup>84</sup> should be reminded about how he cheated me before it is too late for him to consider his peace of mind. It was too good for him to come here, so God arranged so that somebody else could go on his down payment. You can tell Jan Jansson in Hallsjö that Dahl-Olof Hansson<sup>85</sup> lives and Hedeman in Zevesqvarn that Jöns Ersson of Sälja lives.

Signed,  
Eric Ersson

Anders Andersson, a farmer's son, emigrated from Lockarbo, Nora, in 1854, when he was twenty-one years old. Eric Ersson of Stalbo probably penned the letter. He enclosed a note to Anders Andersson, presumably the father of the youth by the same name.

Bishop Hill, Illinois, January 10, 1855

Beloved Parents and Sister: Grace and peace of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be unto you all.

This is to inform you that we arrived here at Bishop Hill on Thursday December 28 with the help of God, in good health. We were heartily welcomed by our friends. I am comfortable here and feel pretty good. We do not, as they believe in Sweden, suffer distress in regards to our bodily well-being. When it comes to religion, we have so much of it that it is like a stream that never dries up. I wish you could hear such preaching in Sweden. It goes through bone and marrow.

I wish that you, my parents and sister, were here and could enjoy all the wonderful things. It would be an innermost happiness to me. May the Lord be with you and all of us. I will see that you get another letter later on.

Your obedient son,  
Anders Andersson

Brother Anders Andersson, wife and daughter:

Even I want to send a loving note to you from my wife and myself to let you know that we like it and feel pretty good. My wife wishes that you were all here with us. Then you could live in splendiddness without any worldly cares. We just go to the kitchen and eat the good food, wheat bread, coffee, and fresh meat, fruit soup (*svickonsoppa*), and other supper dishes. The kitchen maids take care of the cooking. It is not half as burdensome with work as in Sweden. The work stops at 6:00 P.M. and the weather is nice; no snow to wade in and no dull trips. All people are friendly and religious. They like to carry our burdens for us.

Your friend and cousin,  
Eric Ersson

Lars Ersson of Östa, Nora, emigrated with his wife, Stina Ersdotter, and daughter in 1854. The first part of the letter, dealing with their arrival, health and well-being, has been omitted here.

Bishop Hill, May 21, 1855

Beloved brother Anders Mattson:

.....  
All we have to do is to work quietly, each one in his call of duty and listen to our teachers preaching. We let the words rankle in our minds until they start to grow and bear fruit in our hearts. We do not have to worry about either clothing or food. We just go to the kitchen and eat. It was not like that in Sweden. We have breakfast with coffee as soon as we are dressed, dinner at twelve noon, supper with coffee around 4:00 P.M., and the evening meal at 6:00 P.M. The food is fresh and tasty. We always have wheat bread. As for clothes, we get garments as needed. The tailor and the shoemaker work in their shops as fast as they can, so there is no shortage of wearing apparel.

We have a steam mill which is famous in the area. It grinds and sifts about 100 Swedish *tunnor* (barrels) in twenty-four hours. It is keeping the whole colony in bread. When there is no milling, the same steam engine is powering a saw. With God's blessing the colony has now become prosperous. We have about 1,000 hogs which are nice and fat. We keep them in a small meadow and feed them bran, oats, and corn. The soil is good and yields more than in Sweden. For the most part it is like the finest cabbage bed. The top soil is four to six *quarter* [about three feet] deep. The forest is like a paradise, with green leaf trees, grass, and flowers of all kinds making it a pretty place.

Last year several brick buildings were built. This year more houses have gone up and more will be built. It will be a strange but rather beautiful town when it is ready.

My daughter Johanna goes to school to learn English like everyone else her age. I have been working in the forest chopping wood for the kitchen, the brewery, and the bakery at a place called Red Oak where we have a herd of cows in summer pasture (*fäbodstalle*). It is located a half Swedish *mil* from Bishop Hill. I also have to tell you that my wife has been working at the broom factory together with other women from Nora sorting the broom corn. She is doing fine here and does not want to go back to Sweden, although she was reluctant to leave. I am talking about *quartris*, but you should know that it is not like the twigs you use for brooms in Sweden. We are planting broom corn yearly and are selling brooms for several thousands of dollars. They are so fine you would think they were made of clipped rattan (*rotting*).



Now you can visualize how we have it in worldly matters and that we are all the same both rich and poor. In regards to our religion, it is a blessing to be able to hear God's word preached clearly and purely. We have services almost every evening, and there is nothing wrong with our faith, as some book-learned say in Sweden. . . .

Dear brother, be so kind to greet all my brothers and sisters, relatives, and friends from me, my wife, and daughter, saying that we live here in a divine prosperity and good health. Also greet my old mother from me and brother-in-law, Eric Nilsson. If he should want to come here, he would be welcomed being a blacksmith. Greet my brother, Jan Ersson in Källskog, and say that we are well. If he desires to come here, he should look for traveling companions this summer. If money is lacking something will be sure to turn up. Tell my cousin, Anna, not to fear to come if she wants to, because she would be well treated and I believe she has the necessary funds. I also want to send loving greetings to my dear brother, Anders Mattson, your wife, and children, and those near you. May the Lord be with you. Greet everyone in Östa, men and women, no one named no one forgotten. Tell all who want to come here that we live in comfort and are all right.

I also want to tell you about our journey. We sailed from Gefle on the ship *Carolina* with Captain Åsander on October 31 [1854]. We had fine weather until we came up to the American coastline. Then the wind kept us at sea a few days longer. We stepped ashore in New York on December 18, everyone being healthy. Stenberg met us and guided us inland on the steam train. We came to Bishop Hill on the fourth day after Christmas. All coming from Nora are here.

Bishop Hill has about 800 inhabitants. We all eat in the same kitchen—the men on one side and the women on the other. The children have a kitchen to themselves.

Kindly forward regards from Anders Andersson of Bro and his sister Stina to their brothers and sisters, none of whom came along. It looks dim, but we hope they can come some other time if it is God's will. Tell them that Stina's little boy, Johan, is living and that he wishes to see his cousins here.

With this I have to close with an innermost greeting coming from my heart assuring you, my dear brother Anders Mattson and yours, that everything I have here written is true.

Your friend and brother,  
Lars Ersson

Per Jansson of Stenrönningen, Nora, is probably identical with Petter Jansson, born in 1834, from Nordansjö, Nora. He emigrated in 1850 with his relatives Lars Persson and his wife from Kråknäset, Nora.

Bishop Hill, June 4, 1856

My dear parents and brothers and sisters:

Since I have not written to you for a long spell, I will send you a few lines to let you know that I am alive and well. I still live at the same place, and I will remain here until my death. My relatives, namely Lars Persson and his wife who were with me during the journey, have left me for the world that they now love. But I am not worried because I have many brothers and sisters in the spirit if not in blood. We believers are all like brothers in a father's house. Now I will end this short letter with heartfelt greetings to my parents. Remember me to all, but especially to Lars in Kråknäset. Tell him I remember him well and wish he were here.

Your dear son,  
Per Jansson

## NOTES

Several individuals in the United States and Sweden have given me advice, for which I am very grateful. I especially want to thank Mr. Ronald E. Nelson, State Historian, Bishop Hill, for his support.

I am indebted to the following people for their assistance in editing the manuscript: Mr. and Mrs. Ernest M. Espelie, Mrs. Birger Swenson, all of Rock Island, and Professor H. Arnold Barton of Carbondale, Illinois.

<sup>1</sup> The church is located in Tärnsjö. Originally it could accommodate only 650 persons. In 1772, the population in Nora had reached 1,300 ("Anteckningar om Nora Socken, Västmanlands län." Author unknown. Sala, Sweden, 1898).

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Nilsson, *Vår Hembygd Nora, Upplands Nordvästligaste Socken* (Tierp, Sweden, 1959), p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Nilsson, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> This information about the farms was gathered from Bror Erixson, Holm, Tärnsjö.

<sup>5</sup> This information is from "Norabor som utvandrade. . .," a list of emigrants from Nora in 1846, 1850, and 1854. Copies are located at Tärnsjö and Bishop Hill.

<sup>6</sup> Notice (*Kungörelse*) read to members of the Bishop Hill Colony, Sunday, October 25, 1856, concerning complaint against colony preachers and minutes of the meeting which followed. The LR collection, BHHA Archives, Bishop Hill, IL.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> "Proceedings of the meetings of Bishop Hill Colony in Henry County and the State of Illinois," Art. 2, in custody of Mrs. Emmelyne A. Hedstrom, Galva, IL.

<sup>9</sup> "Till de Respectiva medlemmarne af Colonien." (The Philip Stoneberg Collection, Knox College, Galesburg, IL.)

<sup>10</sup> "Proceedings of the meetings of Bishop Hill Colony. . ."

<sup>11</sup> Olof and Anders were Andersson's sons by a previous marriage.

<sup>12</sup> Andersson's wife.

- 13 About 25 cents.
- 14 Probably *riksdaler riksgälds*. In this case \$1.50 to \$2 a day.
- 15 One *ekland* or *ekerland* is 160 square rods; hence, it is the same as one acre.
- 16 One Swedish *mil* (mile) equals approximately six English miles.
- 17 Anders, born in 1842.
- 18 Brita Andersdotter, a sister of Olof Andersson of Fallet.
- 19 Charlotta Jansdotter, a cousin of Erik Jansson.
- 20 According to available records, the Perssons did not have any children of their own. Pelle was probably identical with Petter Jansson of Nordansjö, born 1834.
- 21 Fifty cents a day, one dollar during the high season.
- 22 About forty cents (per pound).
- 23 The old *riksdaler banko* was divided into 48 *skilling*; hence the coarser flour was almost as expensive as the finer, or 35 cents. The *pund* or *skålpund* was equal to the pound.
- 24 About six cents per half a pound.
- 25 The Swedish language has a formal (*ni*) as well as the informal (*du*) subjective form of the pronoun "you." The English "you" was understood to be informal and more democratic.
- 26 Probably *riksdaler riksgälds* (about \$100).
- 27 Probably Stina Olsdotter, born April 9, 1830, from Heversbo or Kråknäset.
- 28 Lars Andersson was born in Ingbo, Nora, April 3, 1822, and emigrated from Kerstinbo, Nora, in 1850. He was a shoemaker's apprentice.
- 29 Lena Larsdotter was the wife of Eric Jonsson, Fallet, Nora. They emigrated in 1850.
- 30 The baby girl died as an infant (colony membership ledger, in the custody of Mrs. Emmelyne A. Hedstrom, Galva, IL).
- 31 Eric Ersson is the same man who wrote the second letter in this collection.
- 32 Siblings, usually plural; hence it is translated as brothers and sisters.
- 33 Catharina, the infant daughter of Anders Andersson of Bro, Nora.
- 34 The daughter Anna Elisabeth was born shortly before the family departed from Sweden.
- 35 The Old Colony Church built in 1848-49.
- 36 The first part of the "Big Brick."
- 37 Second part of the "Big Brick." When it was completed in 1851 the entire structure measured some 200 by 45 feet.
- 38 Plural of *aln*. The old *aln* measured one arm's length or the same as an ell.
- 39 The first hospital was built in 1847. A Dr. Foster was hired as colony physician during the cholera epidemic.
- 40 A *tunnland* is larger than an acre, but Olsson is referring to the price per acre.
- 41 The old *kvarter* was equal to one quarter of an ell.
- 42 Hops were used for flavoring beer.
- 43 From one and one half to two *ells* deep.

- 44 A quarter of a Swedish mile or one and one half English miles.
- 45 Olsson is probably referring to the price per yard.
- 46 This is in sharp contrast to other accounts listing ten times as much.
- 47 Ersmor, not a surname, means Ers' or Eric's mother. Similar combinations were formed by using place names such as Quarnmyr-Olof, as other letters indicate.
- 48 April 30th.
- 49 Actually four Moberg children are listed in the colony membership book. They were Olof, Anders, Stina, and Beata, all born in Domarbo. They emigrated from Bålinge parish, Uppland. (Colony membership ledger).
- 50 Brita was 25 years old in 1846.
- 51 The widow Brita Andersdotter.
- 52 Probably Anna Stina Olsdotter, who emigrated with Gräll Persson and his family in 1846.
- 53 Probably Jan Jansson born 1829.
- 54 Probably Olof Olsson of Högbo.
- 55 This message was intended for Olsson's parents-in-law. Grälls Persson and Olsson's wife Beata were brother and sister.
- 56 According to an old man in Bishop Hill, the trees surrounding the cemetery were peach trees and he could verify that they were called "*pickistrån*."
- 57 "The old man Beck from Bollnas bought a farm in Victoria in 1847. He wrote home to Sweden saying that he had the biggest house between Chicago and Galesburg." (Eric Johnson and C. F. Peterson, *Svenskarne i Illinois*. [Chicago: Tryckt hos W. Williamson, 1880], p. 155.)
- 58 Jan Olofsson Stenberg, born 1795, married in 1851. (Colony membership ledger.)
- 59 Oscar I did not die until 1859.
- 60 Master, owner of large estates.
- 61 It is possible that Olsson did not finish this letter until after Christmas.
- 62 *Tunnan*, the definite form of *tunna*, means barrel.
- 63 One *mark* equalled about half a pound.
- 64 Johan Fredrik Norrman of Buska, Nora. He came to Bishop Hill in 1850 and married a woman who had emigrated in 1846.
- 65 *Kronobefallingsman* or *kronofogde*, civil servant upholding the law and collecting taxes.
- 66 Eric Olsson's mother had died in 1852.
- 67 2.5 *ell* long and 2 *ell* high.
- 68 Lukewarm teacher, one who believes in God but who does not understand the power of God.
- 69 Jöns Ersson emigrated in 1846. His first wife died at Bishop Hill. Ersson then married Brita Andersdotter, a widow.
- 70 Jöns Olsson of Högbo.
- 71 Eric Ersson, of Stalbo, Nora, was the leader of the 1854 group.
- 72 Jöns Ersson of Aby left some of his children behind in Sweden.



- 73 Eric Ersson of Litselbo left his wife and children in Sweden.
- 74 Jöns Andersson of Stalbo, who was the leader of the 1850 group from Nora.
- 75 The railroads were the Chicago-Burlington-Quincy Railroad and the Chicago-Rock Island Line.
- 76 Again he is referring to his brother, Jöns Andersson.
- 77 This is a literal translation. The expression actually means to make life as easy as possible for someone else.
- 78 *Moster* means mother's sister or any elderly lady.
- 79 *Qvarter*-or *kvarter* equals about half a pint.
- 80 The blacksmith's wife or mother.
- 81 The father of Eric Olsson of Sälja.
- 82 Eric Olsson of Sälja.
- 83 Kajsa Olsdotter, who was the sister of Eric Olsson of Sälja.
- 84 Probably refers to the aforementioned Anders Olsson.
- 85 Probably Olof Hansson of Högsbo, who emigrated in 1846.

# **“A ROMANTIC AND MIRACULOUS CITY” SHAPES THREE MIDWESTERN WRITERS**

**Marcia Noe**

In 1903, Davenport, Iowa was the scene when three writers came together to form the nucleus of a group of freethinkers and social activists. Floyd Dell, George Cram Cook, and Susan Glaspell would set tongues wagging and heads shaking in that midwestern city during the first decade of the twentieth century.

That year Floyd Dell moved to Davenport with his family from Quincy, Illinois. Dell, who would later be called by Upton Sinclair “the finest critic of books in America,” was at that time a high school junior writing poems with the encouragement of Davenport librarian Marilla Freeman. His experience as a teen-age cub reporter on the *Davenport Times* and on the *Davenport Democrat and Leader* provided a firm grounding for his future career as a journalist.

1903 also saw the return to Davenport of George Cram Cook, who had abandoned his career as a college professor after the publication of his first novel, *Roderick Taliaferro*, that year. Cook returned with his wife Sara to his family's estate near Davenport to raise vegetables and write. Although he may have envisioned himself as a gentleman farmer, leisurely writing novels in a quiet pastoral setting, it would be as a playwright and producer rather than as a novelist that Cook would be remembered. In 1916 Cook would be the moving force in the formation of the Provincetown Players, a little theater group which first produced the plays of Eugene O'Neill and offered their stage to many new American playwrights.

Shortly after Cook and Dell arrived in Davenport, Susan Glaspell returned from Chicago to that city where her family, like Cook's, had been respected citizens since pioneer days. Already well-known as a journalist and free-lance writer of short stories, Glaspell, too, would make her mark in the theater; after her marriage to Cook in 1913 she would become one of the Provincetown Players' most prolific and original playwrights, her career in the theater culminating with the Pulitzer Prize for her play, *Alison's House*, in 1931.

The period that these writers spent together in Davenport would be crucial in shaping their careers. First of all, their Socialist involvement would provide subject and theme for their early work. Later, when they left Davenport for Chicago, and then moved on to Greenwich Village to become part of an even larger radical movement, their writing would reflect their early experiences as radical writers and activists in Davenport. This involvement would prove a problem for all three writers as they sought to reconcile the demands of politics with those of art. For Susan Glaspell it would furnish a theme that would be explored in many of her later works of fiction and drama: the role that the artist should play in society.

Davenport was an ideal choice of residence for three young writers beginning to develop their craft. Located about one hundred miles northwest of Spoon River country in a bend of the Mississippi, Davenport, with the Illinois cities of Rock Island and Moline, formed a metropolitan area of over 100,000 inhabitants known as the Tri-Cities. Floyd Dell's description of the contrast between the Iowa city and her Illinois sisters in his autobiography, *Homecoming*, reveals his early infatuation with Davenport:

I liked Davenport. It was, or so it seemed to me, different from its sister towns across the river, Rock Island and Moline. Rock Island was merely commonplace and uninteresting. Moline seemed like a nightmare—the inconceivably hideous product of unrestricted commercial enterprise; its center was occupied by the vast, bare, smoke-begrimed structures of the greatest plow-factory on earth; a little fringe of desultory shops, insulted and apparently pushed aside by incessantly switching trains of freight-cars, gave way to a drab and monotonous area of cheap and hastily-constructed workingmen's dwellings, each house exactly like the next, street after street and mile after mile—while afar, set almost inaccessible upon the hills like the castles of robber barons, could be discerned the houses of Moline's leisure class. The town of Davenport was like neither of these towns. It had a kindlier aspect. Its long tree-shaded streets, its great parks, its public buildings, even its shops and homes, seemed to have a kind of dignity and serenity, as though it were understood that in this town life was meant to be enjoyed.<sup>1</sup>

As Dell indicates, Davenport at that time was a very different midwestern city from those described by Sinclair Lewis, Zona Gale, and other writers considered part of "the revolt from the village." The trappers, fur traders, and military men who platted the village of Davenport in 1836 were followed by millers and merchants, lumbermen and riverboat pilots, railroad men and factory owners. Eager for the wealth that could accrue to those able to take

advantage of an area rich in natural resources in an ideal location for rail and water transportation, they developed Davenport culturally as well as industrially, building homes heavy with gingerbread and high with cupolas that towered above the city on the bluffs that overlooked the Mississippi. By the first decade of the twentieth century, three newspapers, including a German language publication, flourished in Davenport. Since pioneer days, the city had had a Library Association, and in the 1870's an Academy of Science was formed. Davenporters could enjoy that city's two orchestras, see Lillian Russell at the Burtis Opera House, or attend a performance of *Aida* or *Il Trovatore* there. The German immigrants who settled in Davenport after the Schleswig-Holstein conflict of 1848 introduced singing festivals, beer gardens, shooting contests, and gymnastic societies to the Davenport cultural scene. Rabbi Nathan, a character in Floyd Dell's autobiographical first novel, *Moon-Calf*, points out that "Port Royal [Davenport] has a quality of its own. I suppose this is partly due to the pioneers from New England, who brought with them ideals and a respect for learning; but it is more due, I think, to the Germans, who left home because they loved liberty, and brought with them a taste for music, discussion and good beer."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the Germans to Davenport was Turner Hall, a community center built by the *Turngemeinde* which included a restaurant, bowling alleys, a German theater, a library, an opera house, and meeting rooms. Every community group from the German women's society to the children's gymnastic class met at Turner Hall. One of these groups was the Socialist Party of Davenport.

# I

When sixteen-year-old Floyd Dell arrived in Davenport in 1903, he had already been exposed to Socialist theory in Quincy, Illinois and was familiar with the writings of Robert Ingersol, Ernst Haeckel, and Frank Norris. He became an active member of Davenport's Socialist local in 1904, serving on the program committee and leafletting at factory gates for Eugene Debs, the Socialist candidate for President that year. Later, he became financial secretary of the local and a delegate to the Socialist State convention. When a Socialist monthly publication, the *Tri-City Workers Magazine*, was founded in November of 1905, Dell, who had quit high school to help support his family by working in a candy factory, was able to report the evils of capitalism from his own experience.





Floyd Dell

*Courtesy of the Newberry Library.*

Writing under the pen name of Thersites, Dell embarked upon a career as a muckraker, publishing thirteen articles and one poem in the *Tri-City Workers Magazine* until it ceased publication in September of 1906. The social problems that Dell exposed were those common to any city: inadequate disease control, unsafe working conditions in the factories, poor attendance in the public schools. Dell argued for the establishment of a kindergarten in the public school system, and his article on inadequate children's library facilities was instrumental in the library board's decision to move that department to a larger, better lighted room in another part of the building. But Dell was not satisfied with mere reform; his purpose was to apply Socialist theory to the troublesome situations he wrote about, showing how they could be resolved by the Socialist system of government.

He promoted that purpose in an article called "A Municipal Crime! Moline's Antiquated Garbage Dump," published in August of 1904. When informed that garbage was being dumped into the ravine at Fourth Street and Tenth Avenue without the knowledge or consent of neighborhood residents, Dell began an investigation, reporting that illness had broken out in twelve neighborhood families since the dumping began, and that one family had been forced to move after one of them became seriously ill. Dell reported that the alderman elected from that part of the city seemed reluctant to deal with the issue, and that the mayor and the health commissioner had visited the dump but had made no commitment to remedy the situation. Further, the Moline City Council meeting, scheduled for eight o'clock the following evening, had already been adjourned by that hour when protesting citizens arrived. After a little more inquiry, Dell discovered that two nearby property owners had requested that the ravine at that location be used as a dump. When it was filled, they could have the street opened over the dump, which would cause their property value to appreciate.

To Dell the dumping controversy was a prime example of class struggle: wealthy landowners were exploiting the helpless poor, allowing them to become diseased and miserable so that the rich could get richer. Dell's solution, a municipal garbage reducing plant, was one that the Moline City Council was reluctant to pursue. "The only hope for the future is in the election of Socialists to all offices, municipal, state, and national," concluded Dell. "And when the working class is grown up mentally, that is just what they will do."<sup>3</sup>

Another article in which Dell used Socialist theory as a model for analyzing contemporary problems was "Why People Go to Brick Munro's." Brick Munro's was a dancing pavilion in Davenport's

tenderloin district, an area which spanned several blocks along the riverfront. This was Davenport's "Bucktown," a legacy of steamboat days, where saloons, brothels, and burlesque houses flourished.

Dell's objections to Brick Munro's formed part of a larger theory of women and society which he would develop later in his career in book reviews, articles, and non-fiction works such as *Women as World Builders* and *The Outline of Marriage*. He believed that women were an oppressed class in a capitalist society, and supported their demands for better paying jobs and the vote. He was disgusted by the plight of shop girls and female factory workers whose fourteen-hour days gained them as little as two dollars a week. In Davenport, these women found their only amusement at dancing pavilions such as Brick Munro's, where men paid admission, but women got in free. Dell regarded this arrangement as legalized prostitution, providing men with cheap female companionship and women with a

Half-way House to the red-light district. . . . Afterward, the men of the working class marry the women who have gone through Brick Munro's—that is, those who do not graduate into the red-light district. The men go there because of Capitalism. They go there because there they find the only amusement which their education fits them to appreciate. They go there because under Capitalism the women of the working class are the prey of the men of the business and professional classes, and this is the way to get what they are after.<sup>4</sup>

In 1908 Dell left Davenport for Chicago, where he reviewed books for the *Friday Literary Review*, a weekly publication of the *Chicago Evening Post*. He became the editor of that publication in 1911, but moved again in 1913, this time to New York, and settled in Greenwich Village, where he edited the *Masses* with Max Eastman, wrote and produced several plays for the Liberal Club and the Provincetown Players, and contributed to magazines such as the *New Review*, *Harper's Weekly*, and the *New Republic*. Because he consistently read and wrote about literature in terms of class struggle and economic determinism, Dell might be considered an early Marxist critic. He regarded John Greenleaf Whittier as "the poet of rebels and revolutionaries," who saw through "the efforts of a property-system to bulwark itself behind conceptions of order and justice, and to construe righteousness itself as the mere maintenance of the *status quo*."<sup>5</sup> Dell praised H. G. Wells for exposing the fraudulence of such nineteenth-century notions as individualism and progress, and for pointing up the need for an alternative mode of social organization. In his review of *The Outline of History*, Dell noted that Wells, like Marx, viewed the primitive era

of man's existence as one of great achievement, and showed that since that time, people had become victimized by such "civilized" institutions as private property, marriage, government, and the military. He considered Wells' book an important contribution toward a new world order maintained by the proletariat because it demonstrated so clearly that civilization in its present form could not last.<sup>6</sup>

Dell's socialist-feminist theories also came to light in his later work. His analysis of the woman question was shaped by his socialist beliefs; he considered the emancipation of women and their achievement of full personhood in society as part of the larger revolution which would liberate all working people. Because bourgeois society required that men postpone marriage until they were financially able to support a family, the prostitution of women to meet their biological needs at a time when they were economically unprepared for marriage was inevitable. "Our present scheme does indeed, in its own hypocritic fashion, make social provision for the sexual needs of masculine youth, by the institution of prostitution," he wrote in his review of Grete Meisel-Hess's *The Sexual Crisis*.<sup>7</sup>

In 1927 Dell expanded his analysis of the woman question in an article in the *New Masses*, showing that the real impact of industrialization was its destruction of the patriarchal family, previously the basic socio-economic unit for thousands of years. Since men, women, and children began to work outside the home instead of in cottage industry as a family, the authority of the husband over the wife, and of parents over their children became morally and economically weakened. Labor unions began to replace the family as methods of group protection, and the old ideals of chastity and dependence for women became less important. As Dell commented, "the economic weakness of the new marriage is now destroying the old patriarchal concept of the importance of virginity in young women; and with their giving up of their old-fashioned care for 'purity,' commercialized prostitution tends to become obsolescent."<sup>8</sup> The young author was also an advocate of free sexual unions between men and women. If marriage seemed desirable, it should be a "companionate marriage," in which both husband and wife worked and practiced birth control so that a divorce could be easily obtained if the couple proved to be permanently incompatible.<sup>9</sup>

Dell's theories about feminism clashed sharply with his feelings about the women he encountered on a daily basis, for although he advocated accepting women as equal comrades in the revolutionary



struggle, the women he idealized in his poems were beautiful, chaste goddesses. Dell found this conflict occurred in other aspects of his life as well, as he continually wrestled with the problem of reconciling his activism with his art. The two seemed destined to be at odds. "I did endeavor to educate my Muse, teach her something about Evolution, Socialism and Biology," Dell wrote in his autobiography, "But she could not be trusted; she would presently revert to some earlier uneducated and sentimental stage in which she was more at ease."<sup>10</sup> When he found himself unable to write poems compatible with the Socialist party line, Dell resolved to give up poetry and concentrate on a more worthwhile type of writing: radical journalism.

Throughout his career, Dell felt continually torn between his literary ambitions and his Socialist involvement. Being a good writer seemed to demand detachment, to require that he subordinate everything else in his life to writing. Being a Socialist required the same total commitment. "As a Citizen, I would always be passionately interested in the political destinies of mankind; and as an artist, I would always find in my political hopes a stimulus to creative effort," he wrote. "But as an artist, I felt the wish to detach myself from the immediate and daily anxieties of the political situation and to renew my contacts with the ageless and timeless aspects of nature, which afford a deep refreshment to the restless mind."<sup>11</sup>

In 1920, as Dell was simultaneously editing a radical journal and finishing his first novel, he began to have severe headaches. Realizing that the headaches were a sign that the conflict he had tried to resolve during most of his life had become unbearable, Dell immediately took a leave of absence from the journal. His first novel, *Moon-Calf*, based on his Davenport years, was published later that year.

By this time Dell had become somewhat estranged from the New York radical scene. He was married, living in Croton-on-Hudson, and thinking about starting a family. After *Moon-Calf* was well received both by critics and the general public, Dell began work on *Briary-Bush*, a novel of his Chicago years, which was published in 1921. Soon novel-writing, psychoanalysis, and child-rearing began to replace Socialism in his life. In 1929 he wrote to Mike Gold, editor of the *New Masses*, asking that he no longer be listed as a contributing editor because he did not feel in sympathy with the magazine's editorial policy. Gold's response, which was to accuse Dell of selling out for the acclaim and prosperity enjoyed by popular novelists, was typical of the reaction of the new generation



*Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.*

Mr. and Mrs. George Cram Cook

of radicals to Dell's success. Now entirely withdrawn from the Socialist world, Dell wrote nine more novels. In 1935 he began work for the Federal Writers Project in Washington, D.C., ironically offering his writing talent to the bourgeoisie government he had worked as a youth to overthrow.

## II

Dell touched many lives with his impassioned demands for a new Socialist world order, among them that of fellow Davenport George Cram Cook. Cook was an unlikely candidate for conversion to revolutionary views. The great-grandson of pioneer settler Ira Cook, grandson of Congressman and banker John P. Cook, and son of attorney Edward E. Cook, one of Davenport's most wealthy and respected men, the young Cook enjoyed all of the aristocratic privileges: private school at Davenport's Griswold College, a Harvard education, and the grand tour of Europe, complete with study at Heidelberg. Before returning to Davenport he had taught at the University of Iowa and at Stanford University. It is perhaps not surprising that, until he met Dell, Cook was enamored of the Nietzschean concept of the Superman.

Dell and Cook seemed a strange pair. The sixteen-year-old son of an unemployed Civil War veteran and a thirty-year-old former professor, disillusioned with academe and marriage, would not appear to have much in common. As Dell viewed the situation, each man, to the other, represented his lost youth—Cook envying Dell's youth and potential, Dell seeing in Cook the educated man he could have become had he not dropped out of school to work in a candy factory.

Dell and Cook became especially close when Dell moved to the Cook family estate in 1907 to work as a hired hand. With others, they formed the Monist Society in Davenport, a group of freethinkers which met every Sunday afternoon. Many of the Monists were also Dell's Socialist friends, and soon Cook was drawn into this circle. He joined the Socialist Party in 1907, and began inviting workers out to the family estate for picnics. In 1908, after his divorce from his first wife was granted, he married journalist Mollie Price, a self-proclaimed anarchist whom he had met at a meeting of the Chicago Press Club in Moline. Through the influence of his wife and his friend, Cook became sensitive to the plight of the oppressed. A countervailing influence, that of his conservative parents, led occasionally to conflict.

Cook and his father habitually attended meetings of the Davenport Contemporary Club to listen to local doctors, lawyers,



clergymen, and businessmen read and discuss papers on current topics. On October 1, 1908, the Cooks, Dell, and Fred "Fritz" Feuchter, a Socialist mail carrier whom Cook met at meetings of the Davenport local, walked to the Outing Club to hear Arthur Davison Ficke read a paper on injunctions. The three Socialists were appalled at Ficke's presentation because it merely enumerated the ways injunctions had been used without offering any critical discussion.

In the absence of stimulating discussion, Cook decided to provoke a reaction from the staid and dignified Club members. But his criticisms of Ficke's paper were modified by his own uncomfortable awareness of whom he was and where he was. As Dell later commented,

It was the George who belonged to respectable Davenport, hated it, feared it, was morbidly sensitive about what it thought of his eccentricities—the George who had been brought up as a gentleman, whose father was there looking on and wishing to be proud of his big, handsome, brainy son—it was *that* George, never clearly seen by Fred or me before, who got up, tried to modulate his voice to the right tone, a tone implying that it wasn't anything to be excited about, the tone of an amiable, academic discussion between gentlemen—got the tone, lost it, and then said his say like a schoolboy in the presence of his father with the family clergyman looking on.<sup>12</sup>

When Dell then addressed himself to Ficke's paper, he overreacted to Cook's meekness and came off sounding like a hot-headed anarchist. Fritz Feuchter then tried to save the situation, but did no better, becoming angry and lapsing into broken English. Although the members of the Contemporary Club tried to pretend that nothing unusual had happened, and E. E. Cook carefully recorded in his diary that, "Arthur Ficke read a very able paper on 'Injunctions Against Labor' and a long and interesting discussion followed,"<sup>13</sup> the evening was more aptly described by George Cram Cook. In response to his wife Mollie's query as to whether they had overthrown the capitalist system, Cook replied, "We met the enemy and we are theirs."<sup>14</sup>

After Dell departed for Chicago in 1908, Cook did not abandon his radical activities, even after the humiliating rout he and his friends suffered at the Contemporary Club. In December of that year Cook became active in the Davenport local of the Political Refugees Defense League, a group formed to block the extradition to Russia of Christian A. Rudowitz. Serving as the group's secretary-treasurer, Cook was involved in circulating a petition which asked the President to countermand Rudowitz's extradition because of



clear evidence that he was a political dissident, not a criminal, and that torture was used to procure his indictment. The 200 members of the Davenport group also pledged to secure abrogation of the extradition treaty with Russia and assistance for six other political prisoners.

Cook's Socialist involvement culminated in 1910 when the Party nominated him as its candidate for United States Representative from the Second Congressional District of Iowa. His campaign took him to Muscatine, Buffalo, Princeton, and other little towns in Eastern Iowa; it also took him back to the Contemporary Club, where, on October 6, 1910, he offered "Some Modest Remarks on Socialism." Cook's not-so-modest undertaking was to convince men like industrialist Nathaniel French and former mayor C. A. Ficke that the triumph of Socialism was inevitable. His paper was a response to one read by C. M. Waterman, who had warned the city fathers the previous year that Socialism would destroy their community.

Cook's remarks were more carefully planned than those he delivered two years earlier to the same group, for this time he made an effort at audience adaptation without becoming subservient. He attempted to reassure the businessmen of Davenport that Socialism would not sweep away the entire fabric of contemporary political and social organization, and cited Marx, Engels, and Kautsky to refute Waterman on this point. He further added, "Some Socialist lawyers now go so far as to claim that no constitutional change will be necessary in order to transform the capitalist republic into the socialist republic."<sup>15</sup>

Cook also cited Catholic clergymen and government office holders to show that not everyone in sympathy with Socialist ideas was a foreign anarchist and further tried to argue that Socialism was nothing more than democracy in practice. "Democracy, as we all know, has never been tried in America. We intend to try it," he pledged.<sup>16</sup>

The list of changes Cook read to show how the Socialists would make America truly democratic read like the Progressive Party platform: the referendum, the initiative, the recall. But he argued that the Progressives, in advocating reform, were really trying to prevent the collapse of capitalism in America, which had reached an all-time high of corruption, monopoly and graft. In Cook's view, things were so bad that only when industry became socialized would graft stop, majority control become a reality, and industry begin to run efficiently. "Shall the trust own the government, or shall the government own the trust?" he asked.<sup>17</sup>

Gradually Cook became less the disinterested professor and more the fiery activist. He attacked the doctrines of *laissez-faire* and individualism as fronts used to protect the privileged status of wealthy entrepreneurs. He took Herbert Spencer's condemnation of Socialism as "the coming slavery" and turned it back on Spencer, using the analogy of Negro slavery to show how American workers were, in effect, slaves themselves. He once declared, "The conspiracy of silence about world-socialism, its exposition of wage-slavery and its remedy—a silence for many years characteristic of the American press—resembles the silence in the 1850's described by Mark Twain on the subject of chattel slavery."<sup>18</sup> He developed this analogy further by asserting that just as chattel slavery was wiped out despite the conspiracy of silence, so would the Socialists wipe out wage slavery. "We do not think we need give you more than twelve more years," Cook warned.<sup>19</sup>

It is unlikely that Cook would have gained many votes at the Contemporary Club, even had he not abandoned the stance of the scholar for that of the rabble-rouser. In the election of 1910 Cook got 1507 votes in Iowa's Second Congressional District, doubling the number that the Socialist candidate for Congress in 1908 received, but finishing far behind his Democratic and Republican opponents. After the election, he was able to focus his attention once again on literature. Like Dell, Cook was faced with responding to the demands of both his political and literary commitments. For quite some time he had been working on a socialist novel, *The Chasm*, which was published by Frederick A. Stokes in 1911.

*The Chasm* records the conversion from upper-middle-class elitism to Socialism of Marion Moulton, daughter of "the great man of Moline," plow manufacturer Dave Moulton, a thinly disguised John Deere. Marion's status in Moline is similar to that of Cook's in Davenport, and her interest in radical ideas seems to be motivated in part by her rebellion against her father and the restrictions his power and social standing place on her freedom, just as Cook's early fascination with Socialism seems to have been a means of breaking away from his father and establishing his own identity.

The plot begins when Marion's father breaks her engagement to a Russian count she has met abroad, and Marion retaliates by making friends with one of the gardeners on her father's estate. Their conversations suggest those Dell and Cook may have engaged in (which brought Cook into the Socialist fold) as well as the mental gymnastics Cook must have undergone before he came to espouse Socialist theory:

Do you know your father sells a plow costing him seven and a half for labor and materials, for thirty-five dollars? Do you

know he has crushed the union which stands for a little better pay, a little better house, a little better life for all these workingmen? Do you know these workingmen receive less than one-fifth the value of their labor?

I don't know just what proportion of the total value they receive. Did these workmen buy the steel and wood to make the plows?

No, the steel was mined and made, the wood cut and sawed by other workers who received only a fraction of the value they created out of the natural earth.

Why didn't your workers organize the United States Plow Company themselves? Why did they leave that to my father and grandfather?

The time was not then ripe. They had not learned to work together in great factories. They know how now, your grandfather did perform a service to society. Was it so great that society should give him and his heirs forever despotic power over their labor and life? Only a tiny fraction of the human energy of brain and muscle that built these factories and constructed this machinery was his. The savage who first used fire, perhaps a thousand centuries ago, helped him to make his plow. Architects and wage workers made the machinery. Thousands of men have been forced to content themselves with a pittance for creating the wealth with which the Moultons bought factories.<sup>20</sup>

Marion's dialogues with Socialist gardener Walt Bradfield are interrupted by the arrival of her Russian suitor in Moline. Count deHohenfels believes that the evolution of a biologically superior race of men is as inevitable as Bradwell believes the proletarian revolution to be. Thus, Cook represents in deHohenfels, Marion, and Bradfield the three stages of his own development: Nietzschean elitist, rebellious freethinker, and radical activist, and shows in Marion's return to deHohenfels his own initial retreat from radicalism. After the Nietzschean triumphs over the Socialist in the contest for Marion's hand, the newlyweds journey to deHohenfels' estate in Russia. There Marion witnesses for herself the beginnings of the Russian revolution and the poverty and oppression that caused it. Finally converted, she becomes a spy for a band of revolutionaries headquartered in her husband's village. After deHohenfels learns of her radical sympathies and divorces her, Marion is discovered by the government to be a spy and flees to Riga. There Marion is reunited with Bradfield, and as the novel closes the two are escaping from Russia to Finland in a fishing boat.

*The Chasm* tends to be preachy, and the improbable appearance of Bradfield in Riga near the end of the novel is neither well-motivated nor prepared for, yet the novel has some

suspenseful moments as the Russian government closes in on Marion and her sweetheart. Although the book had a fairly good reception, especially among liberal, Eastern readers, *The Chasm* was Cook's second and last published novel. His efforts on another Socialist novel, *The Pendulum*, were abortive. He left Davenport for Chicago in 1911 and became Floyd Dell's assistant on the *Friday Literary Review*, then moved to Greenwich Village and married Susan Glaspell in 1913 after his divorce from Mollie was granted.

At this time, the Cooks became interested in the theater and collaborated on a one-act play, *Suppressed Desires*, which spoofed the obsession of New York intellectuals with Freudian psychology. That play was first performed during the summer of 1915 and stimulated a rash of play-writing and acting among the writers and artists who were vacationing in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Again the conflict between politics and art surfaced, for as Cook became more involved with the Provincetown Players, his interest in social activism waned. In the spring of 1918 when his friend Floyd Dell was tried for sedition and conspiracy for his radical writings in the *Masses*, Cook expressed his anti-war feelings in a long historical play set in the Athens of Pericles called *The Athenian Women*. The play was not a success, and a second effort at full-length drama, *The Spring*, produced in 1921, fared no better. In 1922 Cook retreated even further from reality to concentrate on art when he and Susan Glaspell sailed for Greece, where they lived for nearly two years until his death in 1924.

### III

Susan Glaspell's writing career, like Dell's, was grounded in her experience as a journalist; her background, like Cook's, was thoroughly old-Davenport. As a high school graduate she worked as a reporter for Charles Eugene Banks' *Republican* and as society editor of his *Weekly Outlook*. After graduating from Drake University and working for nearly a year as a political reporter on the Des Moines *Daily News*, she returned to Davenport to concentrate on writing free-lance magazine fiction. She left Davenport again in 1902, to work with J. J. Hamilton on the *Chicago Daily Review* and study literature at the University of Chicago.

Susan Glaspell returned to Davenport for the second time as a local celebrity. *Trident*, a monthly magazine published in Davenport, featured her in the July 30, 1904 issue, citing her publications in national magazines, her \$500 prize story in *Black Cat* and her participation at a literary meeting in Winona Lake. Upon her return Glaspell was welcomed by Davenport's social



establishment; in 1905 she chaired the literary committee of the Davenport Amateur Musical Club, and in 1906 she was elected to the feminine counterpart of Davenport's Contemporary Club, the Tuesday Club. Had she settled in any other midwestern town her future would have been predictable: she would have lived quietly at home with her parents, selling short stories to women's magazines, attending church services, and presenting papers at the women's literary club.

But Davenport's Socialists and Monists were irresistible to a young woman with a penchant for adventure. Susan Glaspell was not naturally drawn to social activism, for even as a political reporter she admitted that, "I knew nothing at all about politics, and I wouldn't have had the least idea of what was going on, except that some of the legislators took pity on me and told me enough news to keep me from being disgracefully scooped."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps she was attracted to Davenport's circle of feminists, Socialists, Monists and freethinkers by a rebellious streak in her nature that prompted her to shock her family, who had long been active as farmers and merchants in the Pioneer Settlers Association, the Davenport Board of Trade, and the Christian Church: "Declining to go to church with my parents in the morning, I would ostentatiously set out for the Monist Society in the afternoon, down an obscure street which it seemed a little improper to be walking on, as everything was closed for Sunday, upstairs through a sort of side entrance over a saloon."<sup>22</sup>

At the meetings of the Monist Society Glaspell became better acquainted with Floyd Dell and George Cram Cook. The two Socialists made fun of the novel she was working on, criticizing her romanticism and unwillingness to experiment with new literary forms. This novel, *The Glory of the Conquered*, was published in March of 1909 while Glaspell and a friend were traveling in Europe. The romanticism that Dell and Cook criticized made the novel a popular success, and Glaspell's publisher was eager to see a second effort. But after returning from Europe and visiting briefly with a friend in Colorado, she returned for the third time to Davenport and her old friends, who now belonged to a group called the Ethical Society, which was soon to become embroiled in a political controversy that would keep Davenport in turmoil for several months.

The issue was censorship. George Cram Cook and his wife Mollie, the Rabbi William Fineshriber, Fritz Feuchter, and their friends took on Davenport conservatives with the assistance of the *Davenport Democrat and Leader*. Six years later Glaspell treated the incident with tongue in cheek in a short story, " 'Finality' in



*Courtesy of the Newberry Library.*

Susan Glaspell, Age 18

Freeport," suggesting that the incident was little more than a welcome excuse for natural enemies in Davenport to choose up sides and snipe at each other. But her part in the controversy was not that of a disinterested and amused observer.

In February of 1910, only a month after her return to Davenport from Colorado, Glaspell sparked the censorship controversy which would have a disastrous effect upon Davenport's mayoral elections that spring. At a meeting at the Labor Lyceum, she asked the Rabbi Fineshriber, who had delivered a paper called "A Study in Religious Liberty," why the library board had not purchased *The Finality of the Christian Religion* by Professor George Burman Foster of the University of Chicago. Glaspell maintained that because the book committee had recommended the purchase, the refusal of the full board to buy the book was tantamount to censorship. Her attack was followed by a letter in the *Davenport Democrat and Leader* from one of the library board members, E. M. Sharon, who argued that the library was unable to purchase all of the books the library needed, and that because there had only been two requests for Foster's book there was little reason to buy it.

Glaspell promptly responded, and the *Democrat* carried her letter the next day. She argued that the importance of the book and the reputation of the author were evidence that it should have been purchased, and that the library had the responsibility to purchase such books, regardless of the number of requests for them. "We live in an age of inquiry," she concluded. "In fiction, poetry, many critical fields, a large number of the best things being written stand upon that same ground upon which Prof. Foster wrote 'The Finality of the Christian Religion.' Are these books too to be excluded from the Public Library?"<sup>23</sup>

Also in that issue of the *Democrat* was a letter from Cook, who chaired the meeting which caused the controversy. Describing Glaspell as "a non-Socialist writer of national reputation," Cook went on to object to Sharon's characterizing of the Sunday gathering as a Socialist meeting: "The Labor Lyceum is a place where any man or woman is welcome to express any serious opinion and is likely to find intelligent attention and criticism. The committee in charge of the lecture course has neither concealed nor advertised the fact that it was elected by one of the local Socialist branches."<sup>24</sup>

The next day's *Democrat* contained, as might be expected, a rebuttal of the Cook and Glaspell letters by none other than E. M. Sharon, who remarked, "Were it not so exclusively feminine to 'stand appalled' I might assume the pose because Miss Glaspell is even a 'little mystified' at the suggestion that 'the religion of the

future must be investigated at private expense' because the law does not allow religion, past, present, or future, to be investigated or taught, or discussed at public expense." Thus, he argued that it may have been unconstitutional for the library board to have purchased the book. Sharon further concluded that because Foster had praised George Sand in a recent Sunday sermon, his book might not be one suited to a community such as Davenport, in which the home was sacred.<sup>25</sup>

The *Democrat* continued to fan the flames of the censorship controversy, publishing letters every day from residents who wanted to get into the fracas. Bishop Morrison argued that much better books on the subject of religion were already in the library; the Reverend Leroy M. Coffman was less interested in the question of Foster's book than in the issue of whether or not America was a Christian nation, and Isaac Petersberger took Sharon to task for his allegedly anti-Semitic attitude.

The next meeting at the Labor Lyceum featured Mollie Price Cook lecturing on feminism, but the censorship issue did not die. The Ethical Society censured the library board at its Sunday evening meeting, and the February 21 edition of the *Democrat* published still more letters attacking E. M. Sharon as a narrow-minded bigot.

By late February, community interest in the conflict had so increased that the Ethical Society decided to invite Professor Foster to lecture on March 17 at the Grand Opera House. His speech was entitled "The Religious Problems of Today." Also, critics of the library board who had previously limited their attacks to the pages of the *Democrat* and the chambers of the Labor Lyceum began to circulate petitions in the city requesting the library board to buy the book. Meanwhile, Unitarian clergyman Manfred Lillifors reviewed the book for a capacity crowd at the March 6 meeting at the Labor Lyceum. In an attempt to introduce an element of reason into the controversy, the Reverend Lillifors explicated the title of the book, showing that "finality" in that instance did not derive from the Latin word meaning the end, but from the Greek word, meaning progress. Despite his efforts to show that the book was an objective appraisal of Christianity rather than an attack on religion, the library board again refused to purchase the book, even when confronted with a petition containing over 200 signatures endorsing its purchase.

Professor Foster's appearance at the Grand Opera House on March 17, although well-attended, did not suffice to quell the controversy, for Glaspell reports that the protesters had managed to make the censorship case an issue in the mayoral campaign of 1910. "We even became powerful and changed the city election," Glaspell recalled in her biography of George Cram Cook, *The Road*



to the Temple. "The Library Board refusing to buy a book called 'The Finality of the Christian Religion,' we wrote the papers such stinging letters, both Monistically and individually, that the short-sighted candidate for mayor who had first defended the Board was quite snowed under by enlightenment."<sup>26</sup>

In Dell's account of the controversy in his autobiography, he refers to the conflict as "an epistolary war" in which "the issue of freedom of thought became the chief one in the municipal campaign, and a new mayor was elected on a pledge to appoint a library board that would put Dr. Foster's book in the public library."<sup>27</sup> Neither the *Davenport Times* nor the *Democrat* mentioned the library board controversy in their coverage of the 1910 municipal elections, but Dell was right. A new mayor, Republican Alfred Mueller, was elected, narrowly defeating incumbent Democrat George Scott. If the *Democrat's* thorough coverage of the conflict over Foster's book served to inflame public opinion against an incumbent mayor who defended his own library board, that newspaper did not have the grace to admit that it had been hoist with its own petard.

The summer that followed the library board controversy found Glaspell and Cook spending a great deal of time together in literary collaboration. Stokes accepted *The Chasm* in June and published it in 1911. That year also saw the publication of *The Visioning*, Susan Glaspell's second novel. Very different from her sentimental first novel, *The Visioning* can be seen to measure Glaspell's intellectual development as a result of her involvement with radicals and freethinkers in Davenport. The novel is much like *The Chasm* in that the heroine in each novel is a wealthy young socialite who is introduced to modern political ideas and scientific thought by a Socialist worker.

Glaspell's heroine is Katie Jones, daughter of an army officer, who lives in the military quarters on Arsenal Island, near Davenport. Like Marion Moulton, Katie has many conversations with a Socialist who infuriates her by challenging her most basic beliefs. The counterpart of Walt Bradfield in *The Visioning* is Alan Mann, a boatmender, who gives Katie books on evolution and feminism that disturb her previously well-ordered ideas about life.

But while Cook's novel takes its heroine from socialite to revolutionary spy in the period of less than a year, Glaspell's treatment of the intellectual awakening of Katie Jones is more realistic. Katie never becomes a Socialist, even though she falls in love with one. She never becomes a feminist, although she is intrigued by her cousin's fiancée who works for the forest service in Colorado, believes in women's suffrage, and plans to continue

working after marriage. Katie's development is one of broadened understanding and changed outlook; her Pollyannish view of life and sense of natural social hierarchy are tempered by her growing awareness of the intolerable working conditions in the shops on Arsenal Island and in Davenport factories, and her awakening to the inequitable double standard that regulates the conduct of men and women is brought about by her coming to know and love "a woman with a past."

*The Visioning* presents radical ideas without ever fully exploring them, and Katie remains, from beginning to end, a generous, caring person, politically uninvolved if more intellectually aware. Like Katie, Glaspell never moved beyond a superficial interest in radical politics. The library board controversy was the closest she ever came to sustained social activism, and even then, she refused to allow the Socialists to nominate her as their candidate for Davenport school director. But her exposure to radicalism in Davenport had a lasting effect upon her work. Although she would always be primarily concerned with moral issues and spiritual values in her fiction and drama, her writing, especially during the second decade of the twentieth century, conveyed the flavor of the times: feminists, radical journalists, birth control pioneers and the avant-garde predominate, arguing the issues of the day in her plays and fiction.

Perhaps Glaspell's refusal to become personally involved in political issues indicated her awareness of the difficulty of balancing political involvement with artistic integrity. "Of course I am interested in all progressive movements, whether feminist, social, or economic," she told a reporter from the *New York Morning Telegraph* in 1921, "but I can take no very active part other than through my writing."<sup>28</sup> Like Dell and Cook, Glaspell had learned that writing demands total commitment. But how much isolation was necessary? Can one participate in life and write about it too? Or is perhaps the separation between one's life and one's art a stimulus for creativity? Is the better writer one who devotes himself completely to his craft, or one who immerses himself thoroughly in the issues of the day?

These were questions that perplexed Glaspell but also served to inform many of her works, particularly her plays *Chains of Dew*, *The Comic Artist*, *Alison's House*, and *The Verge*. In each play the problem of how much of himself the artist needs to separate from society in order to preserve his integrity and talent is explored. Glaspell's treatment of her artist figures varies from play to play. In *Alison's House* and *The Verge* the sacrifice of family and friends to one's art is seen to have dangerous consequences. In her comedy

*Chains of Dew* she pokes fun at the poet who takes himself too seriously and insists on living a dual existence instead of combining his roles as poet and businessman. In *The Comic Artist*, irony abounds as she portrays a painter whose isolation from society will never help him transcend mediocrity, and his brother, a gifted cartoonist, who is destroyed by too much involvement with the world.

The Irish poet A. E. once defined a literary movement as "five or six people who live in the same town and hate each other cordially,"<sup>29</sup> and after a while this definition proved no less true for the Davenport writers. Susan Glaspell and Floyd Dell were never close, and when she and George Cram Cook became lovers, Dell annoyed the couple when he expressed his disapproval of their affair because it threatened to disturb Cook's family life. Cook irritated Dell by taking what the latter believed to be undue liberties with one of his plays, and his "democratic" methods of working with the Provincetown Players impressed Dell as more dictatorial than those of a Broadway producer. But for a time, in Davenport, there were golden years when the three became excited by ideas and politics, and that excitement stimulated some of their best writing. Although Glaspell snidely wrote to Dell that "Davenport as a Literary Center is too precious a thought to be marred by a comment of mine. I pass it on to you in all its virgin beauty,"<sup>30</sup> nonetheless Davenport was good to Susan Glaspell, Floyd Dell, and George Cram Cook. Looking back on that period, Dell would later write, "Davenport was in many ways a romantic and miraculous city . . . the fabulous capital of Haroun al Raschid, in which anything could happen. In this Bagdad-on-the-Mississippi a truck farmer could be a poet-philosopher and a young factory hand could plot with him the overthrow of ancient tyrannies and the inauguration of a new world."<sup>31</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Floyd Dell, *Homecoming: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1933), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Floyd Dell, *Moon-Calf* (New York: Knopf, 1920), p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> Floyd Dell, "A Municipal Crime! Moline's Antiquated Garbage Dump," *Tri-City Workers Magazine*, Aug. 1906, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Floyd Dell, "Why People Go to Brick Munro's," *Tri-City Workers Magazine*, Sept. 1906, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Floyd Dell, "Whittier, Prophet and Poet," in *Looking at Life* (New York: Knopf, 1924), p. 181.

- 6 Floyd Dell, "Wells the Destroyer," in *Looking at Life*, pp. 275-88.
- 7 Floyd Dell, "A Woman's View of the Sex Muddle," in *Looking at Life*, pp. 93-94.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Floyd Dell, "Some Gifts of the Machine Age," *New Masses*, March 1927, pp. 22-23.
- 10 *Homecoming*, p. 100.
- 11 Ibid., p. 346.
- 12 Ibid., p. 178.
- 13 E. E. Cook, Diary, Oct. 1908, Cook Family Papers, MS. 109, Box 1, Special Collections, University of Iowa.
- 14 *Homecoming*, p. 179.
- 15 George Cram Cook, "Some Modest Remarks on Socialism," *Papers of the Contemporary Club*, 15 (1910-1911), p. 2.
- 16 Ibid., p. 3.
- 17 Ibid., p. 5.
- 18 Ibid., p. 8.
- 19 Ibid., p. 9.
- 20 George Cram Cook, *The Chasm* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1911), pp. 40-41.
- 21 Gladys Denny Schultz, "Susan Glaspell," in *A Book of Iowa Authors by Iowa Authors*, ed. Johnson Brigham (Des Moines, Ia.: Iowa State Teachers Association, 1930), p. 112.
- 22 Susan Glaspell, *The Road to the Temple* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1927), pp. 191-92.
- 23 Susan Glaspell, "Buy Books That the People Want," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 16 Feb. 1910, p. 10.
- 24 George Cram Cook, "Geo. C. Cook Answers Sharon," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 16 Feb. 1910, p. 10.
- 25 E. M. Sharon, "Denies That He Is Book Censor," *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 18 Feb. 1910, p. 9.
- 26 *The Road to the Temple*, p. 193.
- 27 *Homecoming*, p. 237.
- 28 Alice Rohe, "The Story of Susan Glaspell," *New York Morning Telegraph*, 18 Dec. 1921, Susan Glaspell Papers, Barrett Library, University of Virginia.
- 29 As quoted in Harry Hansen, *Midwest Portraits* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1923), p. 97.
- 30 Susan Glaspell to Floyd Dell, 17 Sept. 1910, Floyd Dell Papers, Newberry Library.
- 31 As quoted in George Thomas Tanselle, "Faun at the Barricades: The Life and Work of Floyd Dell," Diss. Northwestern University, 1959, pp. 25-26.



## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Knox College obtained a considerable jump on other regional institutions of higher learning in the matter of archival collections. As any good "Siwasher" knows, Knox was founded in 1837 by a group of easterners led primarily by George Washington Gale. In the original charter, the school was called Knox Manual Labor College, an indication that the founders of the place were interested in their students becoming as vocationally prepared as they were intellectually stimulated. One may suppose that it was merely a sign that the frontier had passed on westward when, in 1857, the words "Manual Labor" were dropped from the Knox title.

When Lombard College of Galesburg was closed in 1930, Knox not only absorbed the Lombard library and some of the Lombard faculty, but the alumni files as well—which accounts for the fact that Carl Sandburg is sometimes mistakenly considered to have been a graduate of Knox rather than of Lombard College.

The famous names associated with Knox are numerous. For example, Hiram Revels, the first Negro to serve in the United States Senate, was a Knox alumnus. Newton Bateman, who affected Illinois education so much in the post-Civil War period, was a president of Knox at one time. So was Albert Britt, whose reminiscences about growing up in western Illinois are both delightful and informative. Edgar Lee Masters (1890), John Huston Finley (1887), S. S. McClure (1882), Ellen Browning Scripps (1859), and Otto Harbach (1895), all Knox alumni, achieved national distinction. Finley was an editor of the *New York Times*, McClure founded a powerful muckraking magazine which bore his name, Scripps was the co-founder of a newspaper chain of national significance, and Harbach, a lyricist and song writer, once had three marvelous shows running on Broadway at the same time.

In 1890, some six or seven students at Knox organized the Memorabilia Society, the purpose of which was to begin the collection of archival materials. Unfortunately the society lasted only a few years and its original purpose was only modestly fulfilled. Nevertheless, under various librarians and retired faculty members, materials in the archives of the library continued to grow, and by 1965 there were approximately 2,000 feet of holdings. Because the records of the city of Galesburg had been moved to Knox, the largest percentage of space was given over to these materials.

In 1921 the Knox College Library obtained the Finley Collection, a number of books and pamphlets relating to the history of the Old Northwest. Mr. Edward C. Caldwell, a former president of McGraw-Hill, was the donor, giving the collection to the college in honor of his friend, John Huston Finley. The Finley Collection contains extensive early French materials in original and later editions; an exhaustive collection of the writings of the early English settler, Morris Birkbeck; and complete runs of journals and publications of historical societies for some of the midwestern states.

To complement the Finley Collection, the library obtained the Edward C. Caldwell Map Collection. Although it contains many important nineteenth century maps which indicate the effects of settlement on midwestern geography, the major attractions in the collection are the early and rare maps dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These include the famous Mitchell Map of 1755 and others by the French cartographer DeLisle.

The Preston Player Collection includes books, pamphlets, maps, and prints relating to the Mississippi River. Gathered by a Boston engineer in the early years of the twentieth century, the collection contains a number of rare items, the most notable of which is the original edition of Henry Lewis's *Das Illustrierte Mississippithal*. A facet of this collection includes early prints relating to the Mississippi valley, including many Currier and Ives representations of steamboats.

Knox College Library has a number of items of Civil War interest as well. The Ray D. Smith Collection, given to the college by a Chicago businessman, includes a number of books relating to the American Civil War. The highlight of this collection is the unique name index to the *Confederate Veteran* magazine. Mr. Smith, whose name the collection bears, compiled this index himself.

One very interesting collection acquired by the library is that of General Philip Sidney Post. Post joined the 59th Illinois Volunteer Infantry—a worthy collection of men who fought at Pea Ridge, Chickamauga, the Atlanta Campaign, and at Nashville. Post was awarded the Medal of Honor and, after the war, continued his career in both political and administrative fields. His letters are invaluable to the student of American military history.

Other manuscript collections include those of "Mother" Bickerdyke, the Civil War nurse; James Branch Cabell, a novelist; Earnest Elmo Calkins, a writer; Otto Harbach, a lyricist; Hamlin Garland and Faith Baldwin Cutherall, both writers; Arno Benedict Luckhardt, a scientist; Herbert Spencer, English philosopher; Edwin Markham, a poet; John G. Neihardt, Charles V. E. Starrett,

and George Sterling, all writers; and Kenneth Walker, an editor and publisher.

Recently the editors came across a book by William Carter entitled *Middle West Country*. Published in 1975 by Houghton Mifflin, the book contains a number of references to Geneseo, Illinois, as a typical midwestern town. Carter makes a great deal out of the fact that Geneseo's main street holds such attractions as Hornsby's dime store, Guzzardo's novelties, the Geneseo Hotel (now defunct), and a marvelous restaurant called The Cellar. Carter quotes one resident as saying: "A town like Geneseo makes for more stable relationships all around."

Hardly any of this is surprising to the people of western Illinois, and even less so to those of Geneseo. Perhaps to confirm the historical importance of their community, the Geneseo Historical Association has published a little four-page resume of the Geneseo past. Adapted from Mrs. Ella Hume Taylor's *History of Geneseo* and from library records, the pamphlet was written by Doris Morrow and Louise Atwood.

In September, Roy Turnbaugh, Head of the Publications/Finding Aids Unit of the Illinois State Archives, announced that the State Archives had published the first comprehensive computer-based guide to its holdings, entitled *Descriptive Inventory of the Archives of the State of Illinois*. The volume contains 107 record groups and over 1,750 series, and includes records of the major executive, legislative, and judicial offices and agencies. There are also materials on territorial papers; federal and state census data; documents from internal improvements and public works projects; official files of state institutions dealing with transportation, banking and finance corporations, education, labor relations, law enforcement and corrections, and military affairs.

There is, of course, much more, and the *Descriptive Inventory* costs only \$20.00, including index and postage. There is little doubt that this project is an invaluable research tool, especially in light of the fact that most of the material included has never been subjected to historical research.

Western Illinois University Library was dedicated on September 21, 1978. Members of the Board of Governors of State Colleges and Universities were present, as was Governor James R. Thompson, who gave the principal address. The book capacity of the new library is 1,000,000 volumes, and the cost of construction runs to over \$12,000,000. There are, in the new building, computer links to

data bases throughout the country, direct terminal ties to the OCLC, and a computer-based system called PLATO, which allows teachers to individualize student instruction. Most members of the Advisory Committee of *Western Illinois Regional Studies* were on hand, and all were shown the modern facilities which the new library has to offer.

Victor Hicken



## REVIEWS OF BOOKS

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE: THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN. By Stephen B. Oates. New York: Harper, 1977. Pp. xvi, 492. \$15.95.

If one is to understand and appreciate the American experience, it is essential to understand Abraham Lincoln. He was the central figure in the most traumatic episode in our history, the American Civil War. Under the leadership of a lesser man than Lincoln, the strains to which the nation's republican institutions were subjected might easily have led to the imposition of arbitrary government and the permanent subversion of the spirit of the Constitution. At the same time, there was the distinct possibility that not only would the nation be divided into two nations, but also that the Union might be further sub-divided or "Balkanized," to use a twentieth century term. Fortunately neither threat became reality. That it did not was, in large measure, owing to the caliber of the man in the White House, Abraham Lincoln.

Because Lincoln is the key figure to understanding the American Civil War, numerous major biographies have been published since his death, each reflecting many of the major interests and concerns of both the scholarly community and the general public at the time the works appeared. Each half-generation a "new edition" of Lincoln's life appears in "modern language understandable to the American public." At least since the opening of the Robert Todd Lincoln Collection of the Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, however, little really new research material has become available.

University of Massachusetts historian Stephen B. Oates, author of the latest major biography of Lincoln, *With Malice Toward None*, does not offer many new details of his life. Oates does, however, cast the story of the sixteenth president in language that is reminiscent of Carl Sandburg's colorful biography of Lincoln. It is also similar to Sandburg's work in that the author decided to speculate on what Lincoln and others were thinking and doing privately. Unfortunately, this speculation is not always clearly labeled as such. Frequently Oates resorts to the present tense in describing the assumed thoughts of individuals and groups about Lincoln, a device that is a little jarring and leaves the reader uncertain about the authenticity of the assumptions (see as an

example the discussion of southern attitudes toward Lincoln on pp. 187-88).

Although Oates' coverage of the presidency, and his grasp of national politics is sure, he does not have the same grasp of state politics during Lincoln's pre-presidential years. At least until the crisis of the 1850's, Lincoln was enmeshed in local and state politics much more than he was in national affairs. If we are to understand Lincoln we must understand the local milieu in which he developed and matured. Further, Oates would have been well-advised to become more familiar with Illinois in general. Had he done so, he would have avoided referring to Southern Illinois as "Little Egypt" when its accurate nickname is simply "Egypt." It is unfortunate, finally, that Oates did not conclude his work with a general assessment of Lincoln and his impact on the nation: this would have increased the value of his work.

Despite the reservations catalogued above, this work is an important contribution to the shelf of Lincoln studies. It is an accurate, highly readable account of Lincoln's life in swiftly moving prose. Oates has incorporated the recent scholarship concerning the motives of leaders North and South, and he recognizes the importance of slavery in causing the Civil War (although I find his characterization of the commonly denominated Radical Republicans as Liberal Republicans a little disconcerting). His most significant contribution, perhaps, is his explanation of Lincoln's frequent advocacy of black colonization. Oates asserts, correctly I think, that Lincoln advocated colonization, not as a genuine solution to the race problem, but as a way to politically defuse opposition each "time he contemplated some new anti-slavery move" (p. 312). In this context, Lincoln's generally advanced view on the racial question becomes more consistent than it otherwise appears. At the same time, however, Oates mentions that Lincoln's attitude toward the American Indian minority was much less enlightened and more in the tradition of Andrew Jackson and his successors, who saw removal and concentration as the best solution to the vexing western problem. Better than any other recent biographer, especially for the presidential years, Oates has portrayed the difficult relationship between Lincoln and his wife, caused by the personal characteristics of both.

*With Malice Toward None* does not replace, or supplant, Benjamin P. Thomas' *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography* (1952); it does, however, stand alongside it as a must for serious Lincoln and Civil War students. Many readers will prefer Oates' lively style and Sandburgian flights of colorful prose and musings to Thomas' more sparse and straightforward account. A more personal and intimate

Lincoln emerges in Oates' work than in the Thomas biography.

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Illinois State Historical Library

**THE MONUMENT MAKER: A BIOGRAPHY OF FREDERICK ERNST TRIEBEL.** By Adelaide N. Cooley. Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1978. Pp. 32, 33 illus. \$5.95.

During the time Adelaide N. Cooley was at work preparing *The Monument Maker: A Biography of Frederick Ernst Triebel*, the distinguished art historian, H. W. Janson delivered an Andrew W. Mellon lecture entitled "The Rise and Fall of the Public Monument" (Tulane University, Fall, 1976). His opening statement, setting the tone for the lecture, went as follows:

Any attempt . . . to stay the tide of oblivion and indifference that has engulfed the public monument may strike you as no less futile than King Canute's well-known command to the sea. I am the first to admit that the public monument, as a species, is dead today. But so are a great many other things that flourished, like the public monument, as recently as a hundred years ago: portrait painting, for instance. Does that prompt us to conclude that the portraits of Ingres or Eakins are of no interest for us? Surely not. And I should like, if you will bear with me, to make a case for the public monument as a subject of considerable inherent fascination.

*The Monument Maker* is a brief essay, with a variant on Janson's theme, which sketches the career of a sculptor who enjoyed the moment of flourish and experienced the approaching demise of the public monument in America.

Born in Peoria of German-immigrant parents, Frederick Ernst Triebel (1865-1944) was introduced to the art of sculpture through the family stonecutting business. After a year's study in Boston, he traveled to Italy to study and to become established there as a highly regarded professional. The pattern is a familiar one which goes back at least to the days of Horatio Greenough early in the nineteenth century, or John Singleton Copley, the portrait painter of the late-eighteenth century. It was virtually a tradition by the 1850's when Thomas Ball, a prominent American sculptor, sailed for Italy to establish himself as one of the many expatriate American artists and writers who attained their artistic maturity abroad. By the time Triebel went to Europe in the 1890's, the number of his predecessors was probably legion and their sculptures commemorating great personages and events already populated the parks and open spaces of American cities and towns.

Though Mrs. Cooley does not expressly place Triebel in this mainstream of artistic activity, her understanding of it seems inherent by the mention of dominant personalities in American sculpture such as Augustus St. Gaudens, Daniel Chester French, and Frederick MacMonnies, among others who emerged in the eighties and nineties. Not the least of these is Illinois' Lorado Taft (1860-1936) whose *History of American Sculpture* (published in 1903) is one of the sources for this biography.

Because of scant availability of details regarding Triebel and his work, the biography may appear sketchy, but the catalog of his works is not so brief considering that some projects of great scale and others were lost and are not listed.

Mrs. Cooley's essay contains a lament with twofold implications. She feels that recognition of Triebel should have been greater by contemporaries such as Taft, but we can find no fault with the accompanying suggestion that Peorians especially should find continued appreciation for the work of their native son. Similarly, there is, as I see it, the quite implicit entreaty which reaches beyond Peoria and Illinois. In any American community, there are public monuments (as well as private ones like those by Triebel for the Don Meyer family of Peoria) which are neglected or ignored and eventually lost. Others are defiled by vandals with physical damage or the ubiquitous can of spray paint, and there are also those which are questionably treated in later architectural planning, as happened with Triebel's War Memorial Monument in Peoria.

*The Monument Maker* is a worthy tribute to Triebel. It seems to me also a very meaningful one which calls attention to the public monument and makes "a case for it as a subject of considerable inherent fascination." For a society which has become accustomed to discarding cultural resources comprising the man-made environment Mrs. Cooley provides a challenge. Perhaps the growing interest in preserving the architecture of a bygone time will expand to the preservation of public monuments, and restore them to their proper place in the community.

Although restricted in scope to an isolated career, Mrs. Cooley's challenge, and appeal if you will, merits our attention on those two levels: that of Triebel as an individual, and that of his work—which was once an integral part of the mainstream of American culture. During the century before his death in 1944, there were many like him, and we do indeed need to know more about them. *The Monument Maker* is a worthy contribution to that end. It is thorough in research, written with charm and sincerity, and it is also well illustrated. This book and others like it can play a significant role in



diminishing our cultural ignorance and indifference regarding the public monument.

Titus M. Karlowicz  
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**BUILDING FOR THE CENTURIES: ILLINOIS, 1865 TO 1898.** By John H. Keiser. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977. Pp. xvi, 286. \$12.50.

In the years following World War I, a number of distinguished historians sought to write the history of the State of Illinois from its beginnings up to the end of the nineteenth century. Among the writers connected with that outstanding Centennial History of Illinois were Evarts Boutell Greene, Arthur C. Cole, Theodore Pease, and Solon Buck.

Since this original series of books had left untouched the years following 1893, it was decided by the Sesquicentennial Commission of Illinois in the mid-1960's that three more books of high quality should be produced. Two, as yet unfinished, would treat the period from 1912 to the 1960's, and a third would deal with Illinois from the Civil War years to the end of the century. John H. Keiser, a professor of history and vice-president of Sangamon State University, was chosen to write the latter volume.

It might be pointed out that Keiser's assignment was to go over ground covered by the last book in the Centennial History, a piece of writing published in 1920 and written by Ernest L. Bogart and Charles M. Thompson. For anyone who has attempted to read Bogart and Thompson, the reasons for this rather peculiar decision would be obvious. Whether it was because their work had been hurried or whether they lacked talent to make it otherwise, that last volume of the Centennial History had been so inadequate and colorless that it had drawn nothing but censure from professional historians who had tried to mine its pages for information.

It has to be said right off that Keiser's book is far superior to that of Bogart and Thompson. Illinois was, after all, a state which exploded in all areas after 1865—industrially, agriculturally, and culturally—and the earlier volume had been deficient in the coverage of those developments. Furthermore, Illinois was the seed bed for a good many radical and labor movements of the time, a fact which many professional historians might have cautiously ignored in such a conservative time as the 1920's. There was the Grange Movement out on the prairies, and from the coal mines came that

powerful leader of the United Mine Workers of America, John Mitchell. Of British background, with a probable Welsh heritage, Mitchell had come to the fore out of the pits of Spring Valley, Illinois. When Mitchell began to fade from the scene, another leader with Welsh roots, John L. Lewis, surfaced from the mines of Panama, Illinois.

Keiser, of course, knows all about these men. He came to maturity in the little village of Mt. Olive, Illinois, which, to use a cliché, is only a stone's throw from Panama. Furthermore, Mt. Olive happens to be located in what used to be one of the most radical coal union counties of Illinois—Macoupin County—and, if that is not enough, it was the town in which the famous "Mother" Jones spent her last years, and it is where she is buried. "Mother" Jones was regarded by many miners as the patron saint of the mine union movement.

Of course, Keiser covers a good deal of the union activity and strife in the period, and he deals appropriately enough with other aspects of Illinois history as well. In his chapter on "Prairie Culture," he touches lightly but effectively upon the works of Lorado Taft, Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, and Edgar Lee Masters. Significant and interesting information is also added concerning the establishment of the University of Illinois and the various "normal" schools as well.

Unfortunately, the book is not graced with pictures, but there is a substantial appendix containing information on elections and industrial development. The bibliography is impressive. So is the entire book.

Victor Hicken  
Western Illinois University

**A TECHNICAL GUIDE FOR DETERMINING LAND USE SUITABILITY.** By D. W. Griffin. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign College of Agriculture, Special Publication No. 47, Aug. 1977. Pp. 26.

Information relating to limitations and suitabilities of soils for various uses is important in making land use decisions. The Soil Conservation Service, USDA, has developed both the interpretations for most of the soils in the United States and the procedures for making suitability interpretations from specific soils data. However, it is difficult for an individual to assemble the procedures and apply them to individual soils. Dr. Griffin has summarized the

materials developed by the Soil Conservation Service and presents them in usable form in *A Technical Guide for Determining Land Use Suitability*. Even though the project has broad applications, the methodologies were developed in a ten-county region of Western Illinois.

The main text of the *Guide* is divided into three chapters. Chapter two is a discussion of the criteria that were used to rate the limitations and suitabilities of soils for residential development, recreation, conservation, and crop cultivation; a glossary of the soils criteria is presented as well. Chapter three features detailed tables that show slight, moderate, and severe limitations of soil properties that are important in such land use activities as the construction of dwellings, the development of campgrounds, and the creation of wildlife habitats. Chapter four is devoted to a discussion of the procedures that were developed to rate the overall suitabilities of the soil limitations presented in chapter three.

The *Guide* provides the information necessary for individuals not specifically trained in soils to interpret data for land use suitability classifications. In addition, some procedures are simplified, and where none exist, the author suggests methods that can be used for determining land use limitations and suitabilities. This publication is a useful tool for those involved in making land use decisions.

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