

# NORDIC AMERICAN PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

NOVEMBER 1998

## Notes from the ANNUAL MEETING

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If you didn't attend the Annual Meeting ~ you missed a great time! Sometimes schedules conflict with events, but note the date for next year's meeting and try to put it into your schedule.

We now have 54 paid members and in addition mail our Newsletter to a number of Scandinavian organizations, museums and potential members. We also mail to the Nordiska Psalmodikonforbundet of Scandinavia and receive their newsletter in return. Perhaps someday we can envision a joint meeting with them in Scandinavia! Wouldn't that be a blast! Dreams do come true - - - -

Larry Gjenvick

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### NOTES FROM MUSIC-ON-A-STRING

The leaves have left the trees and before we know it, the snow will be falling and we will be busy with preparations for the Holidays.

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#### *PSALMODIKONS IN CONCERT— ANOTHER FIRST FOR THE PSALMODIKONS IN THE USA!*

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I still have pleasant memories of the 2nd Annual Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet which was held on September 19th.

It was a beautiful drive out to

Granite Falls, a friendly town located in western Minnesota, nestled on the prairie among outcroppings of granite, the Minnesota River and beautiful trees.

The meetings were held in the Conference Room at the Super 8 Motel in Granite Falls. The afternoon meeting began with a greeting from our Hostess, Eleanor Sandquist. After a short business meeting we were entertained with a very interesting slide presentation and talk by Daniel Larson of Duluth, Minnesota. He not only makes rare musical instruments but is probably the only one who is now making gut strings. Everyone found this to be a very educational and fascinating part of our meeting. Many of us now enjoy playing our Psalmodikons with a new gut string.



Daniel Larson and The Psalmodikon Concert Players

During the afternoon workshop, Daniel was very helpful in working with each individual in fine tuning their Psalmodikon. He gave us a better understanding of the capabilities of our Psalmodikons and what to expect from them. Because they are handmade and fretted, we cannot expect them to be perfect. Everyone was glad to hear that statement and know that "we" are not to blame for the squeaky off-key notes!

We had a fun afternoon sharing our ideas and practicing new songs on our Psalmodikons. In fact, we had such a successful practice session, that seven of the members felt confident enough to perform for the public and take part in the evening program. Namely, Eleanor Sandquist, Shirley Erickson, Marlyn Shroeder, Beatrice Hole, Floyd Foslien and Larry Gjenvick. The Psalmodikon group played the following songs: "Amazing Grace, Children of the Heavenly Father and Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross." PSALMODIKONS IN CONCERT—ANOTHER FIRST FOR THE PSALMODIKONS IN THE USA!

Eleanor, Marlyn, Beatrice and Larry attended the

PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET

Granite Falls Lutheran Church on Sunday and played their Psalmodikons during both of the Sunday morning worship services also.

There was plenty of time for coffee and refreshments all during the afternoon and evening on Saturday. Many of the members brought along their favorite baking to share and what a delicious table of goodies we had! A conversation piece was the cake I baked and decorated in the shape of a Psalmodikon. That was good eating too!

After a delicious dinner, we were entertained by two of the local women from the community. Kathy Dantzler-Olson of Dawson and Laurel Dikken of Renville. Kathy gave a very interesting presentation of the Langeleik, a Norwegian folk instrument of the 1500's. Laurel played some sprightly tunes on her accordion, which we enjoyed immensely. I was very impressed with the concert given by the Psalmodikon players and found that we were much improved from the previous year!!!

I have great hopes for the future of the Psalmodikon organization and know it will continue to be a success. Thanks to all of you who are interested in carrying on the Psalmodikon tradition.

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

Beatrice Hole

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What a treat to see old friends and meet the new members attending the second annual Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet.

The meeting was well attended and everything went along so smoothly. Our thanks go to hostess, Eleanor Sandquist who did a great job of selecting a wonderful meeting place, lodging, refreshments, advertising, etc. Tusen Takk to Eleanor!

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We love to hear from our members! Please send news, photos, historical finds, or other submissions to The Editor.

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(The following cards, received from the Nordiska Psalmodikonforbundet of Scandinavia, were read at the meeting in Granite Falls)

August 14-16, 1998

The folks attending the Psalmodikon meeting in Vitsands Sweden are very much impressed by your accomplishments in spreading knowledge about our favorite instrument. I hereby forward the spontaneous applause received at the reading of your Newsletters.

September 9, 1998

We send you a greeting from The Nordiska Psalmodikonforbund. We hope you have a nice meeting. Thank you for the videotape of Beatrice.

Helena Odvall

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*Beatrice Hole had an interesting visit when she was demonstrating the Psalmodikon at the Nordic Fest in Decorah, Iowa in July.*

*A fellow from Norway came strolling by the table and started asking a lot of questions relating to the Psalmodikon. As it turns out, this Norwegian often gives tours of a Museum in his town in Norway and there, they have a Psalmodikon on display. He said that he was never able to tell the visitors much about it as he did not know anything of the Psalmodikon himself. So he took a lot of notes, history sheets and tapes to bring back to Norway. He made the following comment as he left. "Isn't that something, that us Norwegians have to come to America to learn about the Psalmodikon that originated in our own country!"*

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I have so much fun at the Psalmodikon meetings and so naturally I am already thinking about the next one! I am open to new ideas that anyone has and also looking for a place to meet next year. Let me know if you would like to serve as Host/Hostess. There is not very much work involved in setting up a place to get together and I will help in whatever way I can. I think it is a good idea to meet at a different location each year. That way folks do not always have to drive so far and besides it gives us a chance to familiarize a new community about the Psalmodikon. September 18, 1999 is the date set for the next Annual Meeting.

Beatrice Hole

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(Excerpts from a letter received from one of our "newest" members)

October 21, 1998

I recently learned of the Psalmodikon society from your publication which was copied to me from the music department at Gustavus. I wish to join.....My interest stems from the fact that I inherited a Psalmodikon from my grandfather. He probably made it in western Minnesota, Clinton, or brought it from Sweden~1876. The instrument needs repair and I would be grateful if I could receive the (name and) address of someone who repairs the.....I look forward to future publications of your society.

Charles A. Swenson, 3824 County Down Ln NE, North Liberty, Iowa 52317



In previous Newsletters, stories have been written about folks that have contributed to the history of the Psalmodikon from the beginning of time. In a series of future articles, stories will be written on those that have contributed to the history of the Psalmodikon more recently. This time we are going to feature Henry Storhoff who lived in Lanesboro, Minnesota.

## HENRY STORHOFF - 1905-1987

I feel very unfortunate that I did not meet Henry Storhoff before he died. I wish that he were here today and that I could learn more about playing the Psalmodikon from him. At one time, Henry was about the only one playing the Psalmodikon and he was invited to play at many events. Over the years many stories were written about his work and this is where most of the information for this article came from.

Henry Storhoff often said, "I can thank Laura Kulsrud of Fountain for saving my psalmodicon". It almost landed in the dump. But she said, "No, let's save it. Maybe somebody will want to learn how to play it." It had been in the family for over 100 years. The Storhoff family had played this Norwegian psalmodicon to lead the singing in the family home and the local parochial school.

That "somebody" turned out to be Henry Storhoff, then about 11 years old. Since nobody in the area could teach him how to play the Psalmodikon, he taught himself how to play from a Norwegian Psalmodicon Instruction Book, dated 1862. Although Storhoff learned to play from this Norwegian Song Book, where the music was written with numerical notations, he mostly played the psalmodicon by ear. He also taught himself to play the violin and the saxophone. "But the psalmodicon is a lot harder to play than a violin," said Storhoff, who enjoyed playing both instruments. "The string vibrates so much you have to bear down hard on the string." Because Henry was a fiddler, he used both a violin bow and a technique to produce vibrato as he pressed the string down just behind the fret. Storhoff said, "that this gives a smooth melody, pleasing to present-day listeners". Oftentimes his wife Marian, accompanied Henry, on the piano.



Marian and Henry Storhoff 1978

"There's no need to be lonesome, just get hold of a psalmodicon and learn how to play it. You quickly become popular for entertaining at senior citizen centers, nursing homes and religious gatherings," said Storhoff.

Henry loved to entertain during his retirement years. He once said that he had played for as many as a thousand persons at a single program. He had performed at the Nordic Fest in Decora, Iowa, and many community festivals. He also played for public radio and public television. At one time the Smithsonian Institution wanted to learn more about the psalmodicon, and the researchers were referred to Henry Storhoff. Today a taped recording of Storhoff playing the psalmodicon is preserved in the Smithsonian archives. The University of Minnesota also recorded his music.

Storhoff said, "you don't play jazz music with the psalmodicon, as it was intended for religious music." So Storhoff played mostly hymns. His favorites were: "Just As I Am" and "What A Friend We Have In Jesus".

In talking to Storhoff's wife recently, she said that she still has Henry's psalmodicon but was sad to say nobody in the family is playing it. She said that Henry made a stand to hold his psalmodicon while he played it. That way he didn't have to find a table wherever he went. Storhoff was always hoping someone would come along that knew how to play the psalmodicon so that he could play more than just the melody.

Their grand-niece, Wendi Storhoff, who lives in Minneapolis, MN has recently learned how to play the psalmodicon and is also a member of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet.

You will note the slightly different spelling of "Psalmodicon" in this story. Often times that is the Norwegian version of spelling of the instrument.

We can be thankful for those before us that loved this little instrument so much as to pass on its history and that we can benefit from that today.

I was fortunate enough to hear a tape recording of Henry Storhoff playing his Psalmodikon and he truly did make beautiful music on the one little string.

Beatrice Hole

(Note accompanying the photo at left)

MR. HENRY STORHOFF, Lanesboro, MN., - Psalmodikon. Storhoff was one of a handful of people in the U.S. keeping alive "a lost art", the playing of the psalmodikon. He received national attention for preserving a unique Scandinavian tradition. The psalmodikon is a one-stringed instrument played with a bow. It was used for teaching songs and hymns in rural Scandinavian churches too poor to afford organs.





These are photos taken at Skogfjorden, the Norwegian Language camp near Bemidji, MN in June. Beatrice Hole held a class on the music and history of the Psalmodikon for the young folks there. They were accomplished enough to put on a program for their pees after only one afternoon of practice!

*NORDIC-AMERICAN  
PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET*

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**PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET**

*Notes from the Editors:*

Here is a song to play on the Psalmodikon during the Christmas season~~~~

**JEG ER SA GLAD HVER JULEKVELD**  
(I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve)

1 4 4 6 5 3 5  
I AM SO GLAD EACH CHRISTMAS EVE

1 5 6 6+ 6 5 6  
THE NIGHT OF JE - SUS BIRTH

1 4 4 6 5 4 3 2 6+  
THEN LIKE THE SUN THE STAR SHONE FORTH

5 4 4 3 2 3 4  
AND AN - GELS SANG ON EARTH.

(Sifferskrift for Psalmodikon av Beatrice Hole - 1998)

\*The melody is familiar and so the timing is not written.

Your mailing label shows (1998) if you are current with your membership dues (1999) if you have prepaid next year's dues. It's never too late to send in your \$5.00 membership. This pays for the cost of reproducing the newsletters and the postage to send them and also to defray the costs of the Annual Meeting. Send your membership fees either to:

Beatrice Hole  
6560 Leesborough Ave.  
Eden Prairie, MN 55346

or Larry Gjenvick  
1775 - 214th Ave N W  
Cedar, MN 55011-9254

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

**Spread the word ~ PSALMODIKONS are  
COOL!**