



Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet

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



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



Ole E. Rølvaag (1876–1931)

Notes from MUSIC-ON-A-STRING

Beatrice Hole

It is time again to publish the “SPRING” Newsletter and it sure does not look like Spring in our back yard. We have had a long cold and snowy Winter. One can find beauty in the white snow, watching the deer, and the birds come to their feeding stations!

I do love this season of having to stay indoors all warm and cozy. The Nordic term “Hygge” comes to mind meaning “to find comfort”. Or as my friend in Norway tells me, “to find yourself within”.

Again, I thank all of you for your support, words of encouragement, and for sharing our interest in psalmodikon memories. I so enjoy your letters!

So until next time.....

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



Ole Edvart Rølvaag

The information in this article was submitted by Donald Berg of Decorah, Iowa. Berg is a faithful member and supporter of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet. When he is volunteering as a guide at the [Vesterheim Museum](#), he loves to tell the history of the psalmodikon that is on display in the Egge House and always puts in a good word for the efforts being made for the preservation of the psalmodikon.

When we hear the name Ole Rølvaag (1876–1931), we think of him as a Norwegian immigrant to America, who continued his education, became a well-known writer and eventually a professor at [St. Olaf College](#) in Northfield, Minnesota. Familiar titles of some of his books are *Giants in the Earth*, *Peder Victorious*, and *Their Fathers' God*.

The following information is from the book *Studies and Records*, Volume XII, of [NAHA](#) (Norwegian-American Historical Association) located in Northfield, Minnesota.

The author John Heitmann was a neighbor and friend of the Rølvaag family where they lived on neighboring farms in Norway, on the island of Dønna in the district of Helgeland. Ole had an older brother, Johan, that his father thought to

be very scholarly but looked upon Ole as not worth educating. This discouraged Ole and he lost interest in attending school, but Ole knew he did not want to be a fisherman, nor did he want to be a farmer. He loved reading books, as many as he could get his hands on. Fortunately, their precinct library was well furnished by the State. John Heitmann spent many days and nights playing and reading books with Ole and his brother. Once when the library was running short on books, Ole said with some hesitation and in a piping voice, “It is probably best to write a letter to King Oscar.” And so, they did. If Heitmann’s memory serves him right, the boys received over 100 volumes for their library from King Oscar.

The paragraph that caught Berg’s attention when reading these pages, was where it was written, “that the boys also played games, solved puzzles, sang new and old songs, and endeavored to learn new melodies with the aid of a musical instrument called the *salmodikon*, a long, boxlike affair with one string.”

Does anyone recall if O. E. Rølvaag ever mentioned the *psalmodikon* in any books that he wrote? 

Lundgren Psalmodikon

In a recent issue of the *Psalmodika*, a newsletter from the Swedish Psalmodikon organization, there was an interesting story and photo of a psalmodikon that they recently found. They believe it is similar to the psalmodikon played by Carl Lundgren, known as the Lundgren Lada (box).

In previous issues of the *Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet*, articles have been written

about Carl Lundgren (1836-1891), a psalmodikon player in Sweden. He was a singing evangelist who traveled throughout Sweden spreading the Gospel. Lundgren preferred to pluck his psalmodikon instead of using a violin bow.

It has been said that the original psalmodikon owned by Carl Lundgren was brought to the United States when his descendants immigrated here. Its whereabouts is not known at this time. 

The Psalmodikon — Legacy and Heirloom

Beatrice Hole

Question that is often asked is, “What will happen to my psalmodikon when I am gone”? We have many other treasures such as folk costumes, ethnic foods and the artistry of our creative handiworks as well. Our heritage is something we receive from our parents and it is very important that we should pass it onto our family.

The psalmodikon and its history is a legacy, a part of our heritage and a personal part of our lives. History is personal. Our memories reveal to us who we are and what we remember or treasure.

Whatever you decide to do with your psalmodikon, a good idea would be to include a handwritten note to go with it. Think about when you first acquired your psalmodikon and what were the circumstances. How it

brought you joy and satisfaction. A great way to enhance the memory is by including a photo of the psalmodikon being played, the history of the psalmodikon and why the psalmodikon is a treasured item to you.

Perhaps you want to designate whether it should be given to a special family member or a historical society. All these details make it more special and you are also sharing a part of your heritage and yourself. 🎵

Mystery Photo



Can you recognize anyone in this photo of a family surrounded by a psalmodikon? This undated photo was found in the archives of the [Finnish-American Heritage Center](#) in Hancock, Michigan.

The photo was submitted by James Kurtti, Director of the Finnish-American Heritage Center at [Finlandia University](#) in Hancock, Michigan.

If you recognize anyone, please contact either James Kurtti or the editor of Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet Newsletter!

Christmas Display at ASI

If anyone toured the [American Swedish Institute](#) in Minneapolis during the Christmas season, you may have noticed a beautiful handcrafted instrument under the Christmas tree in the Danish Room display.

When I asked about the exhibit at ASI, they referred me to the [Danish-American Center](#) in Minneapolis. It was there I learned that the instrument belonged to a gal by the name of Renee who had made the instrument in a class led by Mark Pedersen several years ago.

The following is the response received from Mark:

Hi Beatrice,

A string stretched across two points over some kind of resonance box is common to many countries. The Finns have an instrument called the kantele, and it seems in general when there is more than one string the instrument is in the zither family with different instruments having their own names. The psalmodikon, I believe, is a single-stringed instrument, but I've only heard it used by Swedes and Norwegians. I would guess that the Danes may have used it as well for music in churches, but I have not heard anything about that. As you probably know, the violin was banned because it was a dance instru-

cont'd – ASI, p. 3



Harmonica Therapy

The HARMONICA is a very simple musical instrument and is easy to play, but do you know that it can be used as a therapy instrument as well?

Methodist Hospital, located in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, has formed an unusual type of therapy for patients in their Rehab Department who have breathing disorders such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or asthma. While also doing their usual pulmonary rehab exercises, the patients have learned to play the harmonica. Rehab patients need to exercise muscles that help push and pull air out of their lungs. This is another way to do breathing exercises and it is a whole lot more fun!

They also gain physical and psychological benefits from being part of the Harmonica Band, which practices every other week.

There are people in this group who have never read music in their life, but there is no need for musical training or talent. All you must do is just read the music written with numbers and watch whether the arrows go up or down, which indicate when to breath in or out. This type of therapy is very effective because the harmonica is the only musical instrument that requires breathing in and out to create a note.

Whether through the soul of music or the enjoyment of being part of a group, the patients in the harmonica program report less anxiety, improvement in attitude and a decline in breathlessness. It is a “win-win” situation. 🎵



ITEMS FOR SALE

PSALMODIKON SONGBOOK (revised edition)

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

Send orders to: Beatrice Hole

CD of the PSALMODIKON QUARTET \$15.00 pp

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

Send orders to: Singsaas Lutheran Church

Attn: Music CDs

P. O. Box 87, Hendricks, MN 56136

<http://www.countrychurchmusic.com/>

PSALMODIKON FOR SALE



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

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

Contact: tedmar@charter.net

ASI, from p. 2

ment. My great-grandfather was a Danish pastor to the Danish immigrant churches in the late 1800s, but I have not heard of him using a psalmodikon, but he did have a fiddle, but then he was a "happy Dane".

The instrument — dulcimer — in the picture was my design. I was a physics teacher; I would teach the

physics of sound and music as a class project, and then I had the class build dulcimers.

The design was intended to be something that could be done easily in a short amount of time, however it was at the expense of creativity; there is nothing inter-



esting about the design. I also go to the West Denmark Family Camp in Luck, Wisconsin every year, and we did this as a craft when Renee made this dulcimer. The instrument is patterned after the Appalachian mountain dulcimer; there is really nothing Danish about it at all. I was a bit surprised to hear it was on display at ASI.

I'm afraid I can't be of any help with your research about Danish stringed instruments. I have not heard of the Danes using a psalmodikon type of instrument.

Best regards,
Mark

— And thus, the Christmas mystery has been solved.



Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet & Newsletter

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

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

Send membership dues to: Beatrice Hole

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Greetings from Readers

26 December 2018

Dear Beatrice,

I enjoyed seeing your Summer 2018 issue of the Nordic-American Psalmodikonforbundet online.

I found a list of some Historical Finnish Psalmodikons (*Virsikanteles*) online. The link is suomenmuseoonline.fi You can click on the links for further information on a particular Psalmodikon.

There is an Estonian man that makes Psalmodikons (*Moldpills*). His name is Mat Aardam, and he lives on the Estonian island of Saaremaa.

There are several men in Latvia that make *Gīgas*. This instrument is very similar to a Psalmodikon, but they have two strings instead of one. There is also the Latvian Psalmodikon.

Hope you had a blessed Christmas!

Best regards, Ed Hopf, Timonium, Maryland

19 January 2019

Hello Beatrice Hole:

I am catching up on reading papers that had piled up. Just a note to thank you for the good work you do!

My Grandfather was a *klokker* in the Lyngdal, Norway Church, so this was particularly interesting!

I wear my vest at Sons of Norway Vesterheim Lodge meetings, and I pin my Sons of Norway & other Norwegian pins, etc. on it. It is fun to show Boulder, Colorado!

I don't know if I owe my little \$8 membership due — am I ok? Thanks!

Hilsen fra Lily Tofteland Hartmann

(Lily recently purchased a second-hand red vest with NORDIC-AMERICAN PSALMODIKONFORBUNDET embroidered on the back.) —BH





Above: Lydia Torry. Picture courtesy of Voyageurs National Park.

Lydia Torry (1891–1987) lived on Kubel Island (109 acres) on Namakan Lake, near International Falls, Minnesota.

Lydia was a young girl when she and a brother immigrated from Finland to the USA. She eventually married Emil Torry, who was also a Finnish immigrant, owned a commercial [fishing camp](#) on Kubel Island, which is now Voyageurs National Park.

Lydia and Emil were married for 26 years until his death. Lydia loved living on the island and continued to live there alone for another 30 years. Life was not easy back then as she had to carry her own water, raised rabbits for fresh meat, grew potatoes, rutabagas, and carrots in her garden, and chopped wood for the bitter winters.

Lydia enjoyed the solitude of the island and her music. Once Emil surprised her with a Hammond organ, hauling it across the winter ice. She also played a one-string harp (*see photo*) that her husband made for her. Many visitors remember her playing the song, “Old Black Joe”, a parlor song by Stephen C. Foster, on her one-string harp. Because Lydia and Emil were of Finnish heritage, no doubt this instrument was also called a *vir-sikannel* or *psalmodikon*, a common home-made instrument in Finland.

Lydia was a small woman at 4'-10", but she must have been very strong and healthy, living to the age of 95 years. The Finns would say she had *sisu*, meaning of strong will, determination or perseverance. 

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