

## **GRANDFATHER'S PSALMODIKON, OR THE PSALMODIKON IN AMERICA**

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About ten years ago my uncle showed me a little 4 by 2-1/2 inch songbook and told me that as a child he had watched his father copy the numbers in the book onto a stiff sheet of paper. Then propping it up on a table and holding the book, he looked from the words in the book to the numbers on the paper as he sang. Uncle said his father loved to sing, but could not read music and probably had never played any instrument.

Neither of us could read the "number" music in the little book. However, "Sopran," "Alt" and "Bas" by the rows of numbers clearly showed that it was written for three voices. We did recognize the words for one song, "När juldagsmorn glimmar" ("When Christmas Morn is Dawning") and could tell that each number represented one note. The book consisted of three booklets bound together in cheap leather-covered cardboard with the title *Andeliga Sånger för Barn* (Sacred Songs for Children) by "B. E." Instructions for reading the numerical notation, called *sifferskrift*, appeared at the end of each booklet.

After the old Gothic script was deciphered the instructions proved very helpful, but they seemed to assume the reader had some prior knowledge of the notation and they did not clearly explain how to determine the key in which the songs were written or why this rather clumsy and limited *sifferskrift* was used instead of regular notation. Relatives and friends said they had never seen or heard of it. A search of musical references and the few books available on Swedish music in local libraries produced nothing. Finally I took the book to a professor

of musicology. While he did not read Swedish he could read the notation and hum the melodies. It was a surprise to hear him say that this music was written in modes and not in keys, and he thought it might have been used for instructional purposes. In what I had read on Swedish music there had been nothing about the use of modes. How could Grandfather, who could not read musical notes or play an instrument, have known the ancient Greek and ecclesiastical Modes?

For several years the mystery remained unsolved. Then one day a book, whose title is now forgotten, mentioned that a musical instrument called the psalmodikon had been played by Swedish immigrants and that the Goodhue County Historical Society Museum in Red Wing, Minnesota, had one. My letter of inquiry was forwarded to the Vasa Lutheran Church Museum, which had a book of music for the instrument. Mildred C. Collins answered my letter and copied some of the music from *Melodierna till Svenska Kyrkans Psalmer* (Melodies for the Swedish Church Psalms) with a foreword by John Dillner. It was *sifferskrift*!

Now with the name of the instrument and of an individual, information was found in histories of the early Swedish Lutheran churches in this country and in publications of the Augustana Synod. However, the use of modes was not explained and I found no details about how to make the instrument. The latter had to exist since it was claimed that any good carpenter could make one. Later my aunt gave me Grandfather's other songbook, the 1846 edition of the Swedish hymnal (*psalmbok*) with melodies in *sifferskrift*, which we believe Great-grandfather brought with him from Sweden in 1858. In this I found the detailed instructions for making and playing the psalmodikon, for reading *sifferskrift* and the reason for using modes.

Next, a relative in Sweden wrote that she had seen several kinds of psalmodikons and had heard them played. Then I was referred to Fil. doktor Karl Gösta Gilstring of Linköping, Sweden, “the man who knows more about the instrument than anyone else.” He is a collector of folk life information and has worked for a number of years on an inventory of privately owned psalmodikons, personally visiting the owners to examine the instruments, learn their history and determine if they were still being played. I am indebted to him for most of my reference material on its history and use in Sweden. Moreover, the material he sent shows how extensive the knowledge of the psalmodikon must have been during the immigration era. (Errors in translation and interpretation of this material are mine, not Dr. Gilstring’s.)

In the difficult times of the early nineteenth century many congregations in rural Sweden were much too poor to install pipe organs in their churches. This mattered little as people had been singing their favorites from the old hymnal without organs to lead them since 1695. It was different after 1819, when a new hymnal, edited by Johan Wallin, was prescribed for use in all churches. Only about half of the old hymns, in more or less their old form, were retained in the new book; almost 140 were new, with original words by Wallin and other contemporary writers; hymns from other editions of hymnals were also added. Now with new words as well as new melodies and no organ, congregational singing became a “song uproar.” Many members soon ceased to sing at all. Among the pastors distressed by this was Johannes Dillner (1775-1862) in Östra Ryd parish, Uppland, in the Stockholm area, who had had musical training and possessed a beautiful voice. Like Martin Luther he considered congregational singing an important part of the service and believed the people would gladly sing if they

could read the music and learn the melodies. As it was they could not afford to buy an instrument. And who would teach them to play it or read music if they did have one?

Dillner was certain he had the answer when in 1828 he constructed an extremely simple and inexpensive instrument called the “psalmodikon.” He said that when his congregation had practiced with it only two Sunday afternoons he found that by the third Sunday the singing was greatly improved. On New Year’s Day, 1830, he published the melodies for the Swedish church psalms in his numerical notation, “sifferskrift,” together with instructions for reading it and for making and playing the psalmodikon, including tables giving the length and divisions of the fingerboard and the modes. There was also a message to fellow pastors and all friends of church music, pointing out the advantages of his method for improving church singing and urging them to promote its use in their parishes. The response must have been favorable as that same year a royal letter went out calling on the cathedrals to further the improvement of church singing by using Dillner’s method.

So successful was the method that Dillner came to be considered the inventor of the psalmodikon, although he himself never made that claim. It was a monochord, a primitive instrument that dates back to ancient Greece and is still used by physicists for measuring the mathematical relations of musical sounds. Dillner was aware of this and included a chart in the explanation of his method that gives the divisions of the octave and their names, both according to the German physicist Chladni and his own sifferskrift. He also mentioned that in other countries numbers had for some time successfully been used instead of notes to teach church singing. A recent book on Dillner by Leif Eeg-Olofsson states that a psalmodikon and numerical notation

were used as early as 1822-23 in Denmark, but were discontinued after about five years. In Norway, Christian Gotfried Bohr published numerical music in 1825. Its widespread use there, however, was due to Lars Roverud who improved the instrument and made changes in the notation. Like Dillner, he deplored poor congregational singing and the two men could have exchanged ideas when Roverud visited Stockholm in 1828. Dillner also made changes to simplify and improve the instrument and its notation, but basically the Norwegian and Swedish instruments were the same: a single string stretched over a long wooden box with a fretted, hardwood fingerboard marked in half-steps and the notation numbers marked beside the fingerboard. On Swedish psalmodikons the spaces between the frets were colored white and black. Dillner's notation used numbers one through eight together with some simple signs; Norwegians used numbers one through seven. Placing the instrument and music on a table, the standing or seated player looked from the music to the numbers beside the fingerboard and pressed down the single sheepgut string in the correct place as he played it with a violin bow. Being a monochord, only one melody line could be played on an instrument. When more parts were needed two to four instruments were used. To change key, Norwegians used a set of thin boards with different scales that could be easily attached beside the fingerboard. Dillner omitted these transpositional boards by having the player retune the string. A capital letter placed below the number of the psalm was the note on the organ to which the open string should be tuned and it was followed by the scale of the mode in which the music was written. Players and singers had to memorize the six mode scales just as they do key signatures today. However, as most songs were in the Ionic mode, there was little need for retuning the string.

The use of modes even made exact tuning unnecessary when the instrument was played alone and the string only needed to be loosened or tightened to suit the player or the singer.

Dillner continued to work for the improvement of church singing when he went to Funbo, Uppland, in 1831 and then to Östervåla in Västmanland in 1839, where he stayed until his death. A second edition of his publication came out in 1840, and Americans have referred to both editions as Dillner's Note Book. He also had a number of other sifferskrift publications, some in several editions, some for schools, and one for sångskolor, as the practice singing sessions for members of the congregation were called. Östervåla had many fine furniture makers who began making psalmodikons for their own use after Dillner's arrival. Soon every family had one. It was said that as the demand increased, psalmodikon making became an industry in the parish and that in Uppland booklets of playing instructions were sold with each psalmodikon. In 1837 one pastor said he believed from 200 to 300 psalmodikons could be found in his parish. However, like many others, he spoke disparagingly of the cheap, wooden soundbox, ridiculing it as a "tinkling instrument." A number of pastors would not permit it to be used in their churches. To what extent it actually was used at church services is not clear. Dr. Gilstring doubts if its small tone could be heard well enough for it to be effective in leading congregational singing, but even churches with organs bought it for choir practice, sångskolor, and their church schools. Because of its success as a teaching instrument it was widely used in teacher-training schools and almost every elementary school had one. The first common school statute in 1842 made the singing of chorales and suitable songs a required subject and before long the knowledge of Dillner's method must have been

common in all of Sweden. Its use spread to Finland and even to Estonia. However, its greatest use was in Sweden where a recent catalog shows there were around 200 musical works published, not counting new editions. This was far more than the combined totals for other countries.

Rural people made the psalmodikon their own special instrument. It was one they could make themselves, or could afford to buy, and one they could teach themselves to play. That it was suitable only for church music did not matter. Rural life had long centered around the parish church and singing hymns outside the church did not seem unusual. The revival or religious awakening which began in Stockholm in the early 1830's spread rapidly when it reached rural Sweden. Its principal workers were devout lay preachers who met with the people in their homes for Bible and devotional reading, prayer and song. Like the Methodist movement in England, the Swedish revival inspired new songs attuned to the personal feelings of the people and the times. Some English songs were translated into Swedish, but most were new ones written by Lina Sandell, Carl Olof Rosenius, Betty Ehrenborg-Posse, and others. Oscar Ahnfelt, a trained musician with a fine voice, set many of these songs to music and began singing them at prayer sessions. Accompanying himself on his twelve-string guitar he spread his musical gospel throughout Sweden and even into Norway and Denmark. The songs he sang were collected and published in installments as Ahnfelt's *Andeliga Sångers* between 1850 and 1877, and proceeds from their sale provided him with a comfortable home for the rest of his life.

The music of these new songs was not suited to Dillner's original notation, which was for the regular two beats to the measure of the old

hymns. Therefore time signatures (2/2,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , etc.) were borrowed from regular musical notation and a system of dots above and after the numbers was devised to show the different time value of notes. This permitted the music for these popular songs to be published for the psalmodikon. The first selection from Ahnfelt's *Andeliga Sångar* appeared in *sifferskrift* in 1850.

Emigrants to America were widely influenced by this religious movement. George M. Stephenson wrote, "It is doubtful if there was a solitary child of the immigrants who could not sing Lina Sandell's *Tryggare kan ingen vara*." It is still sung in Sweden and in this country, where a well-known translation is "Children of the Heavenly Father." The pioneer ministers, M.F. Håkanson, Lars Paul Esbjörn, Eric and Anders Norelius, Olof Olson, and others, were all affected by it. As a newly ordained pastor, Esbjörn came to Östervåla as a clerical assistant to the dean shortly after Dillner did. Because he did not have a good ear for music, the dean's wife urged Esbjörn to teach himself to sing hymns and the mass by Dillner's method. As a result he became a diligent fellow worker in promoting the use of the psalmodikon. He even contributed to the 1846 *sifferskrift* edition of the 1819 official hymnal, a copy of which Great-grandfather brought to America. When Esbjörn came to Andover, Illinois, with a group of immigrants in 1849, he brought his psalmodikon and used it at services in the homes. They started to build a church – now known as the Jenny Lind Chapel – at Andover in 1851, but the next year the boards intended for the roof had to be used to make coffins for those who died in a cholera epidemic. In the spring of 1853 Esbjörn reported that the roof still was not completed, but that regular services are being held in the basement and, "I have also.....had a singing school once or twice a week, in order

to each our people a correct and harmonious way of singing hymns, which has been very well attended.”

The psalmodikon may have been used even earlier by Peter Cassel and his group of immigrants from Kisa parish who founded the New Sweden settlement in Iowa in 1845. On December 13, 1848, Cassel wrote to his brother in Sweden, “Two nights each week we hold singing school (sångskolor), when both young and old meet to sing by note and in harmony. No one sings in church who cannot carry a tune.” As their log church was not built until 1851, the church services were doubtless held in homes. Great-grandfather came there with his hymnbook in 1859.

At the Mississippi Conference of the Lutheran Synod of Northern Illinois, January 6 to 9, 1853, the following resolution was adopted: “That our congregations be warmly urged to establish Sunday schools and singing classes according to Dean Dillner’s system.” This was emphasized again the next year at the synodical conference in Chicago. A psalmodikon was used in the Immanuel Church in Chicago from 1853 to July 13, 1857, when a new melodion took its place. In 1859 the congregation in Geneva, Illinois resolved to organize a singing society to improve their church singing and there was a singing school at Princeton, Illinois, in 1859 and 1860. Eric Norelius, who worked in the new Minnesota settlements, was, like Dillner, very critical of congregational singing and is considered to have been the most active pastor in promoting the use of the psalmodikon. He reported that the Vasa church bought one in 1859. John Johnson sometimes played one in the St. Paul church and one was used in the Chisago Lake Church until 1865. Later reports added Wataga and Paxton (Illinois), Hordvill (Nebraska), and possibly Ely (Minnesota) to the list of churches.

Recently a series of articles on the settlement of Phelps County, Nebraska, in the 1870's told of the use of the psalmodikon at religious services in the homes of the Swedish settlers there. The simple wooden soundbox must have fit in very well with the furnishings of the log and sod houses. Some pastors, however, felt it was not appropriate for divine services, and, when a frame church was built, money was soon found for a reed organ.

Parochial schools during the summer were common in both Swedish and Norwegian Lutheran congregations, and in early days teachers may have used the instrument as it had been widely used in Norwegian and Swedish schools. This is confirmed by Norwegians. Dr. Emeroy Johnson writes that while there is no definite proof of this in Swedish schools he would say it is quite possible. James Lindstrom, who made his own psalmodikon, was at one time a teacher in the Chisago Lake Lutheran Congregation in Center City, Minnesota, and could well have used it in classes.

In this country, as in Sweden, it was probably in the home that it was used the most, both for devotions and for the pleasure of singing. One woman wrote that "both mother and dad played and seemed to get a lot of enjoyment out of it." The best evidence now available for its use there may be in the account of a publishing company. Pastor Hasselquist started his own little print shop, Svenska Boktryckeriet (Swedish Book Printer), in Galesburg, Illinois, in March 1855. The next year he put out the first issue of the newspaper Det Rätta Hemlandet (The True Homeland) and printed the text edition of Femtio Andeliga Sånger (Fifty Sacred Songs) with hymns mostly from Ahnfelt's collection. Music in sifferskrift for these began in Det Rätta Hemlandet in October 1856 and continued until all had been printed. Three years

later the business was reorganized as the Svenska Evangeliska Lutherska Tryckföreningen (Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Printing Association) and moved to Chicago. That same year it published Salems Sånger (Salem's Songs), a collection of hymns with sifferskrift in four-part harmony by Eric Norelius, the first songbook published by Swedish settlers. His Handbok för Söndagsskolan (Handbook for Sunday Schools) with music for the psalmodikon came out five years later. When the text edition of Hemlandssånger (Songs of the Homeland) with its 200 songs appeared in 1860 the music in sifferskrift for all the songs was printed in Det Rätta Hemlandet, starting in January 1861. This magazine is said to have reached isolated places and entered into thousands of homes where the voice of a preacher was seldom heard. Ten years later, however, the first music edition of Hemlandssånger was printed with regular musical notation. By then the demand for organ and piano music had increased rapidly as immigrants replaced their log cabins and sod houses with frame ones and in these they wanted better musical instruments. Father and mother might never learn to play the organ or piano, but their children would. Carl Sandburg remembered that Reverend Mr. Hasslequist loved music and had a piano in his home. People pointed to it and said it was the first Swedish home in the United States to have a piano. Like carrying a gold-headed cane, having a piano in the parlor became a status symbol and the old psalmodikon was put in the attic.

Marion J. Nelson, Director of Vesterheim, the Norwegian-American Museum at Decorah, Iowa, states that the salmodikon (Norwegian spelling) was widely used among Norwegian-Americans and it often shows up in antique shops and at sales. That it was used for its original purpose is verified by Mrs. Verna Bloomquist of Washburn, Wisconsin,

who relates that her grandfather, Oluf C. Olsen, made a salmodikon to use when he taught some members of the church how to sing hymns. These members then led congregational singing at church services. The teaching sessions were held at the Olsen home and Verna's uncle remembered that he and the other children hurried home from school on those days to be there when cinnamon rolls, bought at the store for five cents a dozen, were served with afternoon coffee. This salmodikon was made from a box made of thin wood, 30 inches long, 6 inches wide, and 5 inches deep, and said to have been a cigar box. It was open at the bottom, had a gut string and capital letters, not numbers, were carefully drawn beside the fingerboard because Mr. Olsen played from musical notes, not numbers. He signed and dated it 1887. The salmodikon and a reed organ, purchased for Verna's mother when she was eleven, are preserved by the family.

So far no records of Finnish immigrants using this instrument have been found. Early Swedish Methodists and Baptists certainly knew about Dillner's method. Peter Cassel became a charter member of the New Sweden Methodist Church. Anders, a brother of Eric Norelius, was an early Baptist preacher and missionary. When Gustaf Palmquist came in 1851 he worked with Esbjörn in Galesburg, Illinois. The next year he was baptized and for five years worked zealously to establish Baptist congregations. After he returned to Sweden as a missionary he and his brother Per published *Pilgrims-Sånger på Vägen till det Himmelska Sion* (Songs of Pilgrims on the Way to the Heavenly Zion) in 1859 with an edition in sifferskrift. Although the psalmodikon was widely used in pioneer days it evidently was not deemed worthy of mentioning in print later. Reverend J. Irving Ericson writes that he does not remember

seeing any references to it in his reading and research for his book *Twice-Born Hymns*.

Only in one American musical reference book, *Musical Instruments: A Comprehensive Dictionary* by Sibyl Marcuse, have I found the psalmodicon (sic) listed. Unfortunately that brief article differs considerably from the information given here. No mention is made of the numerical notation by which the instrument was played nor of its use in Norway, Finland, and the United States; it states that the number of melody strings was increased to four, or to one or two melody strings plus a variable number of drones and that strings were plucked. It is true that some Swedish instruments had drone strings, but they were never played and the single melody string was played with a bow.

It was to sustain the sound while the finger moved from one interval to another on the fingerboard that supplementary or drone strings were sometimes stretched along the top of the box on each side of the melody string. As many as sixteen have been found on one instrument and occasionally they were even placed inside the box. Over the years changes in the style and shape of the wooden box appeared. In southern Sweden some were made with unusually narrow upper ends, while others had a rounded lower end. Dr. Gilstring writes that the Jean Sibelius Museum in Åbo (Turku), Finland, has a collection of unusual and well-made psalmodikons. However, the long, rectangular box remained the popular style.

On the basis of his careful inventory of selected areas, Dr. Gilstring estimates that, in spite of the destruction of many old instruments, there are still about ten thousand psalmodikons in private hands in all of Sweden, most of them now unplayable. Yet in 1970 one woman,

who lived with her husband in a remote place without electricity, played hers for pleasure and comfort as she dreamed of the day when power lines would reach their home and they could have electric heat and maybe a television set. Another woman and several men, including one in a Swedish-speaking district of Finland, play their instruments for family devotions and special events. One such occasion was the memorial service in the Östervåla church on the one hundredth anniversary of Dillner's death, when four psalmodikons played the four-part harmony of a choral. Another choral was played on Dillner's own favorite instrument, which was said to have a cello-like tone.

Dr. Oscar N. Olson wrote in his 1943 article that four museums in the United States had psalmodikons. Today the Goodhue County (Minnesota) Historical Society Museum still has the one that belonged to Reverend Eric Norelius. It is 42 inches long by 8 1/2 and 4 inches wide at the respective ends and 3 inches deep, with four drone strings. The Smithsonian Institution now has only one, made in Norway and purchased in 1895. I have no information on the one at the local museum in Cokato, Minnesota. Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, now owns three, two of which are on display in the Special Collections Room of the Denkmann Memorial Library. One is a large tapered rectangular box with 12 drone strings of thin wire, made by Ole Pierson in Sweden and donated by his daughter. The other, donated by Dr. O. N. Olson in 1944, is a rectangular box with two f-holes and no extra strings. It ranks with the Norelius instrument in historical interest as it was played by Reverend Hasselquist and possibly also by reverend Olof Olson. Their third instrument was made by Johan Peter Lindstrom at Paxton, Illinois, between 1860 and 1865 and is now on loan to the Archives of the Lutheran Church in America in Chicago. Lindstrom used

it when he led the singing at weekly devotional meetings. It is one of the largest, being 42 inches long, 12 and 5 inches wide at the respective ends and 4 inches deep, with four drone strings and an incurve on the player's side. A similar instrument with the same incurve, but smaller in size, was described and pictured by Dr. Olson in his Lutheran Companion article. It is now the property of his son, C. Marcus Olson of Newark, Delaware, who remembers his father sometimes played it at Christmas time and that it had a low tone more like a cello than a violin. It has a gut string and no drones. Mr. Olson believes this psalmodikon could have been adequate for a small church sanctuary, particularly if it was supplemented by a small choir.

New information keeps adding more instruments to those previously known to exist. The Historical Museum in New Sweden, Maine, received from the late Bror Gustafson a well-preserved, rectangular psalmodikon made by Nils Mattiason in Skatelöv parish, Småland (in Kronobergs län). There is one at the Erlander House Museum in Rockford, Illinois. Chisago Lake Church at Center City, Minnesota, and the nearby Magnuson Museum each have one. The Chisago Lake instrument may be unique in that the normally white fingerboard intervals were painted black and the others left unpainted. The Steeple Building Museum at Bishop Hill, Illinois, has one made by Peter Hedlund in the early 1870's. There are two in the Archives at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. The small rectangular one was donated by Elmer Anderson of St. Peter about twenty years ago and Mrs. Conrad Peterson, college archivist, remembers hearing it played by Charles Anderson, father of the donor. The other one has an exceptionally graceful shape with the lower part slightly enlarged by gently curved sides that complement the two f-holes. It probably dates

from pioneer days and was a gift of John A. Sjoquist in 1947. Unfortunately its maker is unknown. Carl T. Widen remembers there was once a psalmodikon in the Swedish log cabin at Garden Center, Zilker Park, Austin, Texas. Now only a copy of a Swedish Psalmbok in sifferskrift, formerly used in the home of a local Olson family, is preserved in the Texas Swedish Pioneers Association Library. People in Jamestown, New York, do not remember seeing an instrument there, but some remember it from Sweden.

Because so few people today would recognize the old instrument or its music there is a danger that those currently stored in attics and storage rooms may be discarded and lost. Armed with a description of the instrument and its music, Wesley Mattson, vice-president of the Smoky Valley Historical Association, asked the curator of the McPherson County Museum in Lindsborg, Kansas, to search the museum's storage area. There they found the psalmodikon that had been made by Andrew Hokanson and donated to the Bethany College Museum from the Oliver Hawkinson estate. It is now exhibited in the Swedish Pavilion of the Museum. A privately owned copy of Pilgrims- Sångers with melodies in sifferskrift has also been located.

The largest known collection in this country is in Decorah, Iowa, where Vesterheim, the Norwegian-American Museum, has fourteen salmodikons and a number of music books in storage waiting to be cataloged. There is limited information on early acquisitions, but for more recent ones they have all the facts the donors could supply. Their salmodikons are all straight-sided, rectangular boxes with few variations and no drone strings. The majority have transpositional boards and some are displayed in or with their original cases. Frequently they are smaller than the Swedish instruments. One made

by Carl J. G. Felland of Stoughton, Wisconsin, in 1905 is 34 ½ inches long, 3 and 5/8 inches wide and 1 and 7/8 inches deep. It has a metal key for tuning the string and five transpositional boards. Another, said to be made by Erik P. Egge who settled near Decorah in 1851 or 1852, is only 33 ¼ by 3 ½ by 1 ½ inches and has three transpositional boards. Both have the bows by which they were played and a songbook with numbers accompanied the latter. Not only is the instrument still used on special occasions in Sweden, but it is also remembered in Norway. A newspaper clipping tells of a salmodikon being added to the school museum in Drammen, Norway, in 1980. Karen Vermund describes her early life in a forest district where her father was a schoolmaster after World War I:

The salmodikon is very familiar to me. We had one in our home and my Dad often used it in his classroom. At that time children had 30 min. singing every day, Mon.-Sat., in school. We also had an organ, a piano, a violin (which my father also used in class) a guitar, a zither, a flute and bells. Having no radio, TV, no movies, no outside entertainment, we made our own music.....

So far it has not been documented that Swedish-Americans used psalmodikons after 1900, but Mr. Felland was still making them for Norwegians. Mrs. Florence Dybdahl of Chicago documents that a group, known as the "Harmonium Ladies," played salmodikons in ensemble in Stoughton, Wisconsin, in 1929. Burns Kaupanger, Stoughton historian, writes that Stoughton was founded in 1847 by Luke Stoughton from Vermont, but Norwegians had started settling in that area already in 1844. It became the focal point for immigrants who later moved westward. There are still hundreds there who maintain their Norwegian heritage. Six Lutheran churches lie within a radius of six miles and some

people there have firsthand knowledge of the salmodikon. At least seven instruments are known to be in the area, six of them made by C.J.G. Felland.

Clara Asbjörnson, age 97, writes that she learned to play the salmodican (“as we called it”) by numbers instead of notes. It was very easy to learn to play. Mrs. Felland, whose husband made the instruments, was the teacher. The group had no name and played music in two and three-part harmony. Once they played at a Ladies Aid meeting.

Alma Tenjum says her grandparents came to this country when her mother was a year old. The salmodikon they brought with them was destroyed in a fire. She bought her own instrument, made in 1870 by Hans J. Hamrum of Verona, Wisconsin, in 1943 and was taught to play it directly from regular musical notation by the school music teacher, Pearl Lillesand. They often played two-part harmony and both belonged to a quartet that played hymns for church and school programs. She thinks salmodikons may have been played in public in the 1950’s but is not certain of the exact date.

Miss Tenjum’s instrument is 34 inches long, 3 ½ inches wide and 2 and 1/8 inches deep. She uses a cello A- string. It is a soprano and she corroborates statements made by others that salmodikons were soprano, alto, tenor, and bass, depending on differences in size and string. They were used for church services and by teachers in schools. She never knew of their being used for dance or secular music. Although transpositional boards were usually used on Norwegian instruments, she did not use one on hers as it had a piano-like keyboard, marked beside the frets, on which were both the numbers

and the letters of the notes. Unmarked intervals were the sharps and flats.

No effort has been made to check on the music in numerical notation that still exists in this country. The National Union Catalog lists the well-known Swedish hymnals and religious songbooks, but none I checked were described as having music in sifferskrift. The Denkmann Memorial Library at Augustana College has files of *Det Råtta Hemlandet* and a copy of *Salems Sånger* by Norelius is in its rare book collection. A careful check of the collection could show more. The Archives of the Minnesota Synod at Gustavus Adolphus College had *Salems Sånger* as well the *Handbok för Söndagsskolan* by Norelius and six other songbooks plus files of *Det Råtta Hemlandet*. A check of other academic, church, and private libraries, as well as the Swedish Pioneer Historical Society Archives, and the Lutheran Church in America Archives, both in Chicago, could show that a surprising number of music books for the instrument still survive.

Although considerable information on the psalmodikon has been published in Sweden, Dr. Gilstring reports there is no comprehensive study of it. I hope he will write one. Eeg-Olofsson's book on Dillner devotes a whole chapter to the psalmodikon in Swedish literature, listing the places where it is mentioned. American readers may have been curious when they read in Moberg's *The Emigrants*, "The farmer of Kårragårde picked up his psalmodikon; he tuned the instrument and began to hum the hymn while he listened to the howling snowstorm outside....." This scene, in which the self-styled prophet, Danjel Andreasson—perhaps modeled after Eric Jansson—plays the instrument, is also included in Jan Troell's film version of the novel. Of the three poems Dr. Gilstring sent, "Psalmodikon" by Anders Österling

is the best known and Dr. Olson used an English translation of the first verse in his Lutheran Companion article. The others are: "Psalmmodikon: Till minne av mormors far, Olof Mårtensson, Kyrkovård i Svey," by Georg Granberg (Psalmmodikon: In Memory of Grandmother's Father, Olof Mårtensson, Church Warden of Svey) and "Nattvardsgårdsgången i Fjåset," by Samuel Gabrielsson (The Lord's Supper at Fjåset).

Even after seeing a psalmmodikon I never really expected to hear one, but that came true on July 28, 1978, at the Nordic Fest in Decorah, Iowa, when Henry Storhoff of Lanesboro, Minnesota, played his Norwegian salmodikon. He does not know who made it, but it has been in his family for about a hundred years and was given to him by his grandparents Kulsrud of rural Lanesboro about thirty years ago. It had been used in their farm home and also to lead the singing at the local parochial school. It is made of spruce with some pine wood and is 40 by 3 ½ by 1 ½ inches with a single string and a finger board marked by metal frets. After making necessary repairs he taught himself to play it, aided by an instruction book from Norway. Being a fiddler, he used both a violin bow and technique to produce vibrato, as he pressed the string down just behind the fret. This gives a smooth melody, pleasing to present-day listeners. Although he has a Norwegian book with music in numerical notation, he plays by ear and has marked the letters on his instrument. To produce more volume for large audiences, he uses a steel string tuned to G below middle C and rests the instrument on a stand constructed to hold it with a minimum of physical contact. This gives more resonance than the traditional way and he is able to produce a volume of sound somewhat less than that of a good violin. From comments made by people in the audience and the way they

joined in singing the last hymn, "What a Friend We Have In Jesus," there was no question that others enjoyed hearing it as much as I did.

As a result of an article in the Minneapolis Star on February 23, 1976, the television station KTTC in Rochester, Minnesota, featured Mr. Storhoff on a newscast. This was picked up by NBC and broadcast nationally. Afterwards he heard from many people in various parts of the United States who knew of the instrument. However, none wrote to say that they also played it.

When Mrs. Nola Foslein of Garfield, Minnesota, read about Mr. Storhoff, she brought the salmodikon her husband's grandmother had played down from the attic. Being a self-taught pianist and organist and guided by Mr. Storhoff's comments in the article, she soon mastered it. Her salmodikon is about the same size and age as his and she also rests it on a special stand when playing. She also rests it on a special stand when playing. She believes hers is an alto salmodikon and she uses a guitar E-string tuned to middle C. Besides religious songs, she also plays tunes like "Big Rock Candy Mountain" and "Seeing Nellie Home," often accompanied by her husband on the organ. Mrs. Foslien has made the same folk use of her instrument as earlier Norwegians, Swedes, and other immigrants probably did. As part of the 1976 Bicentennial celebration she demonstrated her old instrument at a craft fair and an article about her, with pictures, appeared in the Alexandria, Minnesota, newspaper, Lake Region Echo, on July 6, 1976.

Harlis Anderson of North St. Paul, Minnesota, first saw his instrument as a child and his father told him it was a "Salmedikt" that his uncle, Peter Halvorson Anderson, had made in 1867 when the family lived on a homestead north of St. Ansgar, Iowa. He found it again in 1962 in the

attic of his parent's home, but not until he recently heard about Mr. Storhoff did he restore it and start to play. He also plays only by ear – hymns, folk songs, and any easy flowing melody that he knows – and has been kept busy playing at church functions, Sons of Norway meetings, and similar events. As his salmodikon is signed and dated, he knows his uncle was only ten years old when he hollowed out the two-by-four board of linden or basswood and nailed two end-pieces on it, leaving the bottom open. Mr. Anderson thinks the father helped his son make the fingerboard with its carved wooden frets. The numbers are burned into the wood. Mr. Anderson uses a guitar E- string which he tunes to C. Since the instrument has neither a bottom nor a sound hole he places it on a bare wooden table or a special soundboard when he plays. Although the carving is crude and the wood unfinished, the tone is mellow and pleasing.

The psalmodikon made in 1868 and signed on the bottom by its maker, James Lindstrom of Carver, Minnesota, is now owned by Earl Porter of Minneapolis. When Lindstrom left the Chisago Lake congregation, where he had been a parochial teacher, he sold his instrument to Mr. Porter's uncle, William Lonquist. Earl Porter writes:

I salvaged it from my grandmother's attic back in the 1930's, where water from a leaking roof had dripped on it and about a dozen ground cherry shells had found their way into it. In spite of this neglect, my instrument is in the best condition of the five or six I have seen.

It is 40 inches long, 8 inches wide at the bottom, and 5 inches at the top, and 4 inches deep. Originally it had eight drone strings, but Mr. Porter prefers to use just a cello A-string tuned to C below middle C. With little squares of masking tape he marks the notes E, G, C, and E as

an aid in finding his way around the long finger board and rests his psalmodikon on a table. Both Mr. Porter and Dr. Emeroy Johnson took part in the annual 1971 Swedish Communion Service at Chisago Lake, their home church. Dr. Johnson preached the sermon and Mr. Porter played Hymn no. 66 in the 1819 Koral-Bok ("Se Jesus är ett tröstrikt namn") first alone and then accompanying the choir as it sang the four verses. This was the first time those attending the service had heard a psalmodikon. Later a tape was made of Mr. Porter playing two Christmas hymns. Hearing the often mentioned slight buzz of the string as he played the well-loved no. 55, it was easy to believe that such deep, rather cello-like music had led early immigrants as they sang "Var hälsad sköna morgenstund" (All Hail To Thee, O Blessed Morn) at julotta on a cold Christmas morning.

People have asked if it would be possible to make a psalmodikon and when Harold D. Laurence of Westminster, Colorado, inquired about directions for doing so, the instructions from Grandfather's 1846 Psalmbook were sent to him. He found the directions for playing the numerical notation very clear and detailed, but those for making the instrument rather inadequate. However, after some experimenting, he now has a handsome instrument with a "beautiful, very resonant tone", which he plays from regular musical notation. This may be the first psalmodikon made in this country since the first part of the century. Those thinking of making one may want to write to Mr. Laurence and profit by his experience.

The psalmodikon is a unique instrument inasmuch as it was designed for a specific purpose, was widely used in schools, was closely associated with a religious movement, became a folk instrument, was transplanted to a new land where, when it had served its purpose as a

pioneer instrument, it almost faded from memory. Because of its limitations it probably cannot find a place in today's musical world except as a curiosity. Yet it is part of our Scandinavian heritage and it should not be forgotten. Possibly its place in our cultural life is best illustrated by the account of early music in the book *Smoky Valley People*, by E. K. Lindquist. When Pastor Olof Olson, a well-trained musician and ordained pastor, moved to Lindsborg, Kansas, in 1869 he started choir practice that very fall. As only he, his wife and a doctor could read music, Pastor Olson changed all the notes in his music into numbers and then copied the numbers into little books for the choir members so they could learn their parts at home. The choir became well known for its singing, but changing notes into numbers and copying them took so much of the Pastor's time that he soon began teaching choir members to read music by drawing notes on a homemade blackboard. From this beginning came the famous "Messiah" tradition of oratorio singing at Lindsborg. From such beginnings also came many fine church choirs and a continuing love of music.