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THE ENSIGN OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS • APRIL 2002

# ENSIGN

A man with light brown hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and brown trousers, is kneeling on a green, textured surface. He is looking upwards and to the right with an expression of awe or prayer. His right arm is raised, with his hand resting on a dark, vertical structure. The entire scene is framed by a black, irregular border that resembles the lead lines of a stained glass window. The background behind the man is a mix of dark brown and green, suggesting a forest or a cave.

Sacred Grove,  
Sacred Light, p. 8

The Father and the Son, p. 12



BY MELANIE L. SILVESTER

*Amid the trees of an isolated area in the American Northwest, a family of Swedish Latter-day Saints remained faithful because of a home Sunday School.*

# A BRANCH OF FAITH



On the morning of Sunday, 3 June 1913, sunlight filtered through the window of a small farmhouse nestled in the tall trees of a forest in the Pacific Northwest. It shone on a spotless white linen cloth covering the sacrament table at the front of the room. Five families, consisting of nine adults and 20 well-scrubbed children, sat on homemade wooden benches. Dressed in their Sunday best, these Swedish converts intently watched the missionaries standing before them. The elders spoke in English, and every few seconds a child would whisper the Swedish translation into his or her parent's ear.

This was a historic occasion for these families, all of whom were part of the extended family of Erik and Sigrid Oslin: a home Sunday School was being organized. This was an answer to their prayers. For more than five years they had lived in Pleasant Valley, Washington—a sparsely populated wilderness area in the northwest corner of the state, far away from the nearest Latter-day Saint branch. They could have abandoned their religion, but they did not. It is a testimony to their complete conversion in Sweden that they remained faithful during those years.

## A FAMILY OF LOGGERS

In Sweden, Erik Oslin had been the financially comfortable owner of a logging operation and a modest estate on the Indals River in Liden, 30 miles inland from the city of Sundsvall on the east central coast of Sweden. He and his wife, Sigrid, were the parents of eight children, five of whom lived to adulthood: Brita, who married Lars Larson; Alida, who married Theodore Linde; Emil, who married Ida Wiklund; Erick; and Cemoria. All lived on the Oslin estate. Farther up the Indals River from the Oslin home lived Martha Selander; her husband, John; and his niece, Beda. This “community” of family and in-laws numbered nearly 20 in 1898.

## FINDING THE GOSPEL

In the winter of 1898, Lars Larson traveled to Sundsvall on business and saw two elders from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints conducting a street meeting. As he listened, a strong feeling came over him that what they were teaching was



# IN THE FOREST



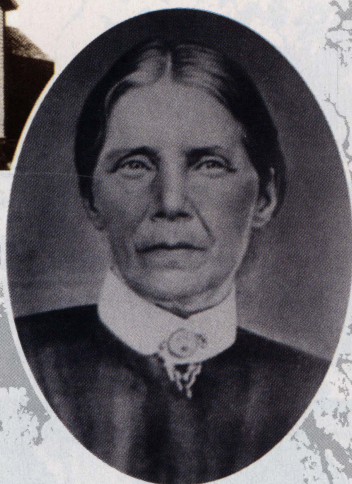
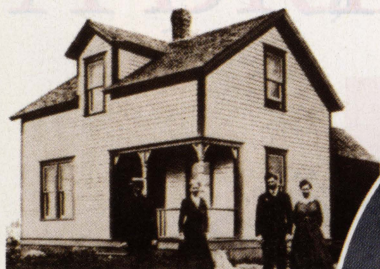
*Far left: A reminder of how things may have looked on the morning of 3 June 1913, when the Pleasant Valley Sunday School was organized. Above left: Lars Larson, the first to find the gospel, with his wife, Brita (Oslin), and their six children in 1906. Below: The Pleasant Valley Sunday School in 1917, including the Oslin, Linde, Larson, Munson, and Selander families.*





true, and he hurried home to tell his wife, Brita. As soon as he could, he invited Elders Carl O. Johnson and John H. Anderson to Liden. They were warmly welcomed by the family and soon made the Oslin estate a regular stop on their mission route. Elder Johnson wrote in his journal that he could feel happiness and peace in the Oslin home.

Eighteen-year-old daughter Alida Oslin, however, had heard disturbing rumors about the missionaries and wanted nothing to do with them. She said emphatically to a friend, who wanted her to go to a public meeting conducted by the missionaries,



*Above: Erik and Sigrid Oslin with their two youngest children, Erick and Cemoria, in front of the Oslin home. This is the only home still standing that belonged to those who attended the Pleasant Valley Sunday School. Center: Sigrid Oslin. Right: Theodore and Alida (Oslin) Linde family in 1910 in front of their home, which had previously belonged to Beda (Selander) Pehrson.*

"Nothing doing! I wouldn't go near people like that for anything." But Alida's friend begged her, and finally Alida consented to go just to show the missionaries how wrong they were. Arming herself with her well-worn Bible and a few choice scriptures, she marched into the hall ready to argue. However, as the elders started preaching, Alida felt a sweet spirit fill her heart and whisper to her that what they were saying was true. She no longer wanted to argue, but instead desired to hear more and invited them to teach her and her beau, Theodore Linde.

"It seems as though here are good people," wrote Elder Johnson of this young couple. "I have hopes for a harvest."<sup>1</sup> When Theodore heard the message of the restored gospel, he too received a witness of its truthfulness.

## BAPTISMS

On the morning of 17 March 1899, six weeks after their first contact with the missionaries, six family members were scheduled to be baptized. According to Elder Johnson's journal, they "sought for a place for the baptism, and it was shown in a dream to Brita Larson, and when we found the place, it took only ten minutes work to get it ready, and it called forth our surprise to find it so appropriate in every way. Three of those . . . baptized, who were previously ill, afterwards felt healthier."<sup>2</sup> Among those baptized that cold March day were Brita and Lars Larson; her



brother, Emil Oslin; her mother, Sigrid; and Johanna and Erik Oslin.

Nine days later, on 26 March 1899, the missionaries opened the ice on the Indals River with an axe so more of the family could be baptized. One elder entered the water and kept the ice chunks away while his companion performed the baptisms. Among those baptized were Alida Oslin; her soon-to-be husband, Theodore Linde; and her aunt and uncle, John and Martha Selander, among others. Their clothing immediately froze to them, and although they had to walk to a cabin up a long hillside, none became ill. Elder Johnson wrote, "At eight o'clock in the evening we had the sacrament together, and the power of the Lord was so richly enjoyed that all could remember it. There were about 50 to 60 persons who witnessed the ceremony, but the greatest calm and quiet prevailed, and many eyes were wet with tears. All was under the Spirit's guidance, and it seemed as though this was a powerful testimony for many and probably will never leave them."<sup>3</sup>



## IMMIGRATING TO WASHINGTON

After their baptisms, the new converts were ostracized by many old friends in the village. Even the children's friends would not play with them, and old timers, who customarily bowed to the prominent Erik Oslin when they met him on the street, ignored him—even though he had not been baptized. But instead of being discouraged, the new Latter-day Saints felt a longing to immigrate to America.

The immigration began in 1902 when Theodore Linde's brother, John, moved his family to northwest Washington and wrote glowing letters about the beauty of the country, its similarity to Sweden, and the job opportunities in the logging business. Shortly

threadbare that skunks came in during the night. Our first Christmas was quite different than what we were used to in Sweden, but the Spirit was there, and I can remember how joyful I felt. I also remember the

tears in our mother's eyes. But no matter what the hardships were, my parents never wanted to go back."<sup>4</sup>

The families were remarkable in their ability to remain self-reliant and unified. The men worked at a nearby shingle mill and, during off hours, took turns helping each other clear the land, build homes and barns, and plant and harvest crops. Mother Sigrid and her daughters and daughters-in-law helped one another with chores and children, shared their food, nursed their sick, and sewed for each other.

Theodore, who had natural leadership abilities, was asked to serve in the community. He was put in charge of building up the roads and served on the new cemetery board. He was nicknamed "Preacher Linde" because he told everyone he met about the gospel.

## KEEPING THE GOSPEL ALIVE

Missionaries visited the group of Swedish Latter-day Saint loggers and farmers sporadically. With the nearest branch in Bellingham, 25 miles away over rough roads by horse and wagon, it was nearly impossible for the large, extended family to attend church. And, without authority from Church headquarters, they could not organize themselves in Pleasant Valley, even though Lars Larson was an elder and Theodore Linde was a teacher.

Nevertheless, the group flourished. "[Our parents] had such strong testimonies," wrote one of the children who grew up there. "I am sure it was the Holy Ghost that told them it was true without missionaries or activity, and they held on to that. Nothing could rob them of their faith in the gospel. We believed the Church was true because they told us it was. They talked a lot about it. We learned to keep the Sabbath day holy, although we didn't have our church around. Dad [Theodore Linde] was straight as an arrow; things were either black or white with him; there was no rationalizing."<sup>5</sup> But they still missed going to Church and enjoying the blessings of a formal organization.

In 1910 President Melvin J. Ballard (later a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles), who was serving as president of the Northwestern States Mission, visited the group in Pleasant Valley. In 1913



*John and Martha Selander with their only child, Olaf, and his wife and children.*

## THOSE WHO IMMIGRATED

Erik Oslin's sister, Martha, married John Selander, and they immigrated in 1905.

**ERIK AND SIGRID OSLIN**  
Immigrated 1908

**BRITA**

Married  
Lars Larson  
Immigrated  
1906

**ALIDA**

Married  
Theodore Linde  
Immigrated  
1908

**EMIL**

Married  
Ida Wiklund  
Immigrated  
1908

**ERICK**

Immigrated  
1908

**CEMORIA**

Immigrated  
1908

thereafter, part of the family immigrated: John and Martha Selander in 1905, and Lars and Brita Larson with their six children in 1906.

Theodore and Alida had discussed immigration, but they did not seriously consider it as they were building a new house. One night in 1908, Alida had a dream after which she knew they should move their family to America. She told Theodore, and he had implicit faith that his wife's dream was from the Lord. He immediately put the unfinished house and property up for sale.

Erik, who supported his family's decision to become Latter-day Saints, decided he and his family should immigrate to America with Theodore and Alida. Both families had to sell their properties for much less than they were worth, but they obtained enough money for the group of 10 to book passage on the ship *Cedric* to New York. Once in America, they traveled by train to the rich farming and logging area of Washington. They continued on to Pleasant Valley by horse and wagon over pock-marked dirt roads to join the rest of the family.

The first winter was hard. Alida's oldest daughter, Ranghilde, wrote of their new home: "It was just a shack; it had holes in the corners, and the walls were so



the decision was made to form a home Sunday School there. Theodore Linde was called as Sunday School superintendent and ordained a priest by Hyrum Bell on 4 June 1913, the day after it was officially organized. Lars Larson was called as his assistant. The family was overjoyed.

The Sunday School was conducted simply. "We met in [three] different homes, using various rooms for classes," wrote one family member. "Maybe we were not all in the right age-group, but we did learn. Our teachers were family members who were teenagers or whoever was available. These meetings gave us a good Church education which influenced our whole family."<sup>6</sup>

Meetings were held every other week, or even

*Beda (Selander) Pehrson Munson, shown here with her two oldest children, had six children from two marriages. Baptized in 1912, she has a faithful Latter-day Saint posterity.*



once a month, because the roads were not yet developed and the farming chores were time consuming. They sang hymns from the Deseret Sunday School songbook, and sometimes the three oldest Oslin sisters accompanied the singing on their guitars.

"Our house was spotless for Sunday School," wrote one of the grandchildren. "I remember my mother taking out beautiful white tablecloths, ironed to perfection to use on the sacrament table. The sacrament was a very sacred thing to her."<sup>7</sup>

The sacrament bread was homemade brown bread, passed around on a dinner plate, and the water was passed in a communally shared glass. Talks and announcements were given in Swedish.

"When we became restless, we would lie back on the bed in our classroom and get giggly," remembers another grandchild. "My cousin, who was our teacher, kept reminding us to sit up and be quiet, but the only time we stopped talking was when Grandpa Theodore walked in. He was gentle with us, but when he gave us the eye we knew we had to straighten up."<sup>8</sup>

After church the families enjoyed dinner together, and whoever held the Sunday School at their house fed everyone. The wives and daughters cooked and cleaned all day Saturday.

One granddaughter wrote: "I remember it with joy. If I hadn't gone to the Pleasant Valley Sunday School I wouldn't be here now."<sup>9</sup> This was true for the whole group.

## LEGACY OF THE HOME SUNDAY SCHOOL

Oslin, Linde, and Larson descendants now number in the 800s. Many have served as missionaries, teachers, and leaders throughout the Puget Sound area of Washington and elsewhere in the world. The ripples of Lars Larson's invitation in 1898 to the missionaries on a street in Sundsvall, Sweden, continue to roll forward.

In 1932, when his Alida died, Theodore Linde drove his family members to Salt Lake City, Utah, to be sealed together in the temple. He drove others to be sealed in 1936. In 1938, when the first stake was organized in Seattle, Theodore was called to the high council; his eldest son, Ragnar, was called as first counselor to the stake president; and another son, Henry, was called as the first bishop of the new ward in Bellingham. They were all set apart by Elder Ballard, who was then an Apostle.

Just two years later, on 17 September 1940, Theodore died. The entire family and community mourned. Shortly afterward, the home Sunday School, which had sustained this group of Swedish Latter-day Saints for 27 years, was disbanded, and the members attended the Bellingham Ward.

Today the home of Erik and Sigrid Oslin, the only one left standing of the original homes, serves as a reminder of these great and humble 20th-century Latter-day Saint pioneers. The Bellingham stake was organized in 1994, and now there is a stake center in Ferndale, less than a mile away from this old home. If the Pleasant Valley Sunday School members had been asked at that first meeting to look ahead to the end of the century and envision a beautiful stake center just down the road, they might have replied in Swedish, "With God, all things are possible." And if you had looked closely, you would have seen it shining brightly in their eyes. □

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*Gospel topics: pioneering, conversion, enduring to the end*

### NOTES

1. Carl O. Johnson. All citations come from journals or letters, copies of which are in the author's possession.

2. Carl O. Johnson.

3. Carl O. Johnson.

4. Ranghilde Linde Safsten.

5. Ranghilde Linde Safsten.

6. Minnie Linde, wife of John.

7. Katherine Lantrip.

8. Evelyn Oslin Norman.

9. Audrey Safsten Hansen.