

# Sweden Native's Fame In Cement Came Through Series Of Events

1958  
PROSPECT HARBOR, Jan. 1— Looking back over a long and rich life 90-year-old Eric Soderholtz of West Gouldsboro recalls how fate—the drift of life in Maine lingo—in the form of two flower pots, changed the entire pattern of his life.

Soderholtz was born in Stockholm, Sweden, and came to this country with his parents at the age of five. His father established a successful photography business in East Boston and the boy eventually followed his footsteps and became a photographer. But at the age of 10, when he got his first job, being a messenger boy with a snappy uniform seemed more glamorous than taking pictures. Consequently his first job was a messenger boy for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company.

"In those days every boy began looking for a job as soon as he passed his 10th birthday" Soderholtz recalls. "There weren't any juvenile delinquents as everyone was too busy holding down a job."

After he finished school Soderholtz became a partner in the photography business and eventually established his own studio.

## Comes To Maine

One summer he came to West Gouldsboro on a fishing trip with his brother-in-law and that trip was the first of three events that finally changed the entire pattern of his life.

They fished in Jones' Pond and one noon went to a hill overlooking the pond to eat their lunch. Soderholtz decided right on the spot that that was the place where he would build a summer home.

"If I had selected any other place in the world," he maintains. "I would probably have remained a photographer all of my life."

The second of the "drift-of-life" events happened several years later, when a Boston studio that specialized in architectural photography asked Soderholtz to go abroad for a year taking pictures of European architecture. They offered to buy his business and give him a good salary plus traveling expenses for him and his wife.

He accepted the job and spent a year taking pictures. As a young man he had studied architecture for a time and looking at the ancient work of European artists revived his interest in that type of work.

Shortly after he returned to the United States the studio went out of business and Soderholtz started another free lance photography studio. One day he got an assignment to go to New Jersey to photograph a new home that had just been completed and that proved to be the third and final "drift-of-life" event. While he was photographing the house he noticed two cement flower pots on the lawn and decided that something like that was just what he needed to decorate a barren ledge near his West Gouldsboro home.

He took careful measurements of the pots and made a rough print of their design. The next year when he went to West Gouldsboro on his vacation he made two flower pots from the print. That was in 1904 and at that time the Bar Harbor cottage building boom was at its height. A contractor friend of Soderholtz came over to spend the weekend and when he saw the pots he decided they were just what he needed to put the finishing touches on a lawn he was building. He paid a good price



(Crane photo)

## ERIC SODERHOLTZ

for the pots and advised his friend to make a few spare ones in case some other builder wanted some.

## Demand Great

It turned out that other builders did want the pots and Soderholtz spent the most of his vacation filling orders. When he returned to West Gouldsboro the next year he had such a backlog of orders he decided to give up photography and devote all of his time to making cement products.

He began with a wide variety of articles getting many of his ideas from the pictures he had taken of ancient European architecture. In 1913 his exhibit of Grecian urns won an award at the Chicago Art Institute.

He used several methods in creating his work. Some of it was made on a hand-made kick-wheel and others in carved wooden dies, and clay moulds. The largest order he ever filled consisted of a complete garden set that weighed 52 tons. It was a winter's work for him with five men and in the spring it was shipped to Newport, R. I., by schooner.

His work in cement gained Soderholtz national recognition and he was made an honorary member of several architectural societies. During World War One he developed a cement mine but government red tape prevented it from being used. He retired at the age of 84 but he still keeps his hand in design work by doing sketches.

During his life Soderholtz has seen many changes. Perhaps none is more outstanding than the development of compact film in the field of photography. He recalls that during his European trip he used heavy 18x22 inch glass plates that were so bulky he often needed three men to accompany him on his picture trips to carry the cumbersome plates.

Another radical change has been in amount of wages paid for a day's work. When he built his home in West Gouldsboro he paid the master carpenter and masons \$3.50 for ten hours work. Common labor received \$1.50 for the same period of time.

Soderholtz is still active at 90 and takes long walks daily. He likes to take a hike before breakfast to get up an appetite and he goes to the post office, a distance of more than a half-mile, every afternoon. He lives in his West Gouldsboro home summers but is spending the winter with Mr. and Mrs. Perley McNutt in Prospect Harbor.