

Independent
Order of
Vikings



A History

Compiled and Edited
by
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and
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An Historical Record

in Celebration of and Presented at
the 100th Anniversary of the
Independent Order of Vikings

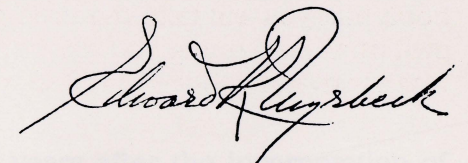
held at the Hyatt Regency Woodfield
Schaumburg, Illinois
Saturday, June 2, 1990

One hundred years ago 11 young Swedish immigrants decided to band together and incorporate an organization known as the Independent Order of Vikings. Since that day in Chicago in the summer of 1890, 119 separate lodges have joined the ranks of the I.O.V.

In this historical record we now take you back through the years. We hope that you will take the time to become better acquainted with our past and in so doing you will be thinking how we might work together for the advancement of our fraternal Order.

Dedicated to

Scandinavians and friends of Scandinavians who have joined the membership roles of the Independent Order of Vikings during these 100 years and have therefore made this milestone and occasion possible.



Kristen N. Johnson

Independent Order of Vikings: A History

The Early Years

One hundred years ago, fifty-three years after the incorporation of the city of Chicago, was a period when there was a significant influx of Swedish immigrants into the United States and, in particular, to the Midwest area. That section of the young city of Chicago, located on the near north side of the Chicago River, was where the Swedish immigrant life was centered. Many of these immigrants were in their early twenties having departed from their homes in Sweden for the "land of great opportunity". Upon their arrival, these youthful "Vikings" found themselves in foreign surroundings, confronting strange customs and language. It was not surprising, therefore, that friendship and comradeship easily developed amongst these young Swedish-Americans as they met one another in the local parks and on the beaches of nearby Lake Michigan.

From the center of Chicago and continuing north over the Chicago River is Clark Street - referred to by the Swedish-Americans in later years as "Snusgatan", or "Snuff Street", after the custom of chewing snuff, a popular habit at that time. Proceeding along Clark Street and just south of Oak Street at Washington Square Park we would have observed in the spring of 1890 under the elms a small group of these young "Swedish Vikings" conversing in their mother tongue and amusing themselves with games and gymnastics as a recreation after working hours as well as on Sundays.

These youthful men having thus found camaraderie in a country strange to them and becoming aware of their insecurity should sickness or any other misfortune befall them individually, resolved to start a fraternal organization in order to aid one another. Such a decision was made, therefore, by a group of eleven young Swedish immigrants at an informal gathering on June 2, 1890 in a bachelor room located at 86 Sedgwick Street.

At this meeting, which for all purposes may be referred to as the "Viking Founders Meeting", were present the following young Swedish immigrants: two brothers Gustaf A. and Charles J. Carlson in whose boarding room the meeting took place, two brothers, John E. and C. W. Meurling, brothers August and R. Wallden, Carl Herman Viktorin (or Victoreen), August Johnson, Charles Henry, N. Hallers and Gustav Johnson. Although perhaps not experienced in the formulation of an organization, officers were nevertheless chosen from this small group as follows:

Chairman (<i>Ordförande</i>)	John E. Meurling
Vice Chairman (<i>Vice Ordförande</i>)	Carl Herman Viktorin
Recording Secretary (<i>Protokoll Sekreterare</i>)	August Wallden
Financial Secretary (<i>Finans Sekreterare</i>)	Gustaf A. Carlson
Treasurer (<i>Skattmästare</i>)	Charles J. Carlson

At this meeting the discussion centered on the goal and purpose of this proposed organization. It was agreed that it should be known by the name "Vikingarne" ("The Vikings"). They also agreed that its primary purpose should be to aid and assist its membership in a moment of sickness and distress. Therefore, a sick benefit and burial fund was established to aid its members whenever so required. Here then was laid the foundation which became the Viking Order which today, after 100 years without interruption, is continuing to serve as a memorial to these eleven young immigrants.

The Development Continues

This new Swedish organization was an extremely energetic one and during its first six months conducted an active campaign for new members. It was also during this time that other Swedish societies located in Chicago decided to erect a statue to honor a prominent Swede. Funds were raised and a reproduction of the Stockholm statue of the famous botanist Carl von Linné was constructed. Its dedication

in Lincoln Park on the north side of Chicago took place in May, 1891. The event was preceeded by a parade of the participating societies and it was at this time that our Vikingarne organization made its first public appearance. It also captured first prize as the organization with the most representation at these festivities.

By June of 1891, a year after Vikingarne's first meeting, this small group had increased in membership to 234. The initiation fee was \$5.00 with monthly dues set at 50 cents. A benefit of \$3.00 per week was paid to sick members and a burial expense was established at \$100 for those members unable to afford this cost. The first death in the Vikingarne organization occurred on July 21, 1891 when Alfred Wernberg of 216 Townsend Street passed away due to typhoid fever. A bachelor without funds or relatives, his entire burial expense was paid by the organization.

At a meeting held on December 12, 1891 a suggestion was made that the name of the organization be changed to "Independent Order of Vikings". No doubt the "Independent Order" suggestion was made due to the fact that earlier the young men had investigated the possibility of joining the Independent Order of Foresters as a subordinate lodge but had found this too expensive. The suggestion of a new name was adopted at a meeting on January 9, 1892. (1892 was also the year in which our well-known I.O.V. seal, which we see on our correspondence and in our newsletter, was designed and produced.) The necessary state incorporation application was forwarded to the Secretary of State in Springfield, Illinois and the required advertising notice placed in the newspaper. Incorporation of the new name was granted on May 28, 1892 and the organization originally known as Vikingarne now became known as the Independent Order of Vikings. At this time the Order still consisted of only one lodge known as Vikingarne, an active group indeed, consisting of nearly 500 members who often took part in city parades with their colorful banner adorned with a Viking ship along with the American and Swedish flags and costumed participants.

Discussion at meetings now focused on the possibility of establishing a *Storloge* or "Grand Lodge" which would oversee and have jurisdiction over any future subordinate lodges established within the Order. As a result, the members of Vikingarne on September 10, 1892 appointed a committee of twelve whose purpose was to set forth the ground work for this Grand Lodge and to draft the necessary constitution and incorporation applications. This important committee

included: Alex Holm, Charles H. Victorin, Alfred Carlson, P.A. Noren, Gustaf A. Carlson, A.M. Soderlin, Gust Johnson, N.P. Glimborg, Otto Anderson, Frank Lind, Gust Bird and August Wallden. Upon completion of the necessary details by this committee, a meeting was held on October 3, 1892 for the purpose of adopting the Constitution and Bylaws of the Grand Lodge. This date, therefore, October 3, 1892, is the beginning of the Grand Lodge of the Independent Order of Vikings and these 12 members constituted our first "Grand Lodge of the Independent Order of Vikings." As a result, under the new corporation papers, the original Vikingarne organization now became the first subordinate Lodge of the Order: Vikingarne #1, with the date of its establishment being set as June 2, 1890, the start of the Independent Order of Vikings. This, if you recall, was the date of the very first meeting of our 11 founders. The lodge conducted its meetings in the First Swedish Odd Fellows Hall, 120 E. Chicago Avenue.

The Organizing Years

On October 17, 1892 the Grand Lodge of the Independent Order of Vikings granted a Charter for the establishment of the second subordinate Lodge of the Order to be known as Brage #2. Their first meeting place was located at Locust and Townsend Streets, north of Chicago Avenue. (By 1893 it was already time for larger quarters and Brage #2 moved to Phoenix Hall on Division and Sedgwick Streets. By 1910 they had sufficient membership and funds to move into their own building, the North Side Viking Temple, at Sheffield Avenue and School Street.) The first representatives sent from Brage Lodge #2 to attend a Grand Lodge meeting on November 2, 1892 together with the representatives from Vikingarne #1 elected the first officers of the Independent Order of Vikings:

Grand Chief (*Stor Hövding*): Alex Holm
 Vice Grand Chief (*Vice Stor Hövding*): Carl Victorin
 Grand Secretary (*Stor Sekreterare*): Alfred Carlson
 Grand Treasurer (*Stor Skattmästare*) P.A. Noren

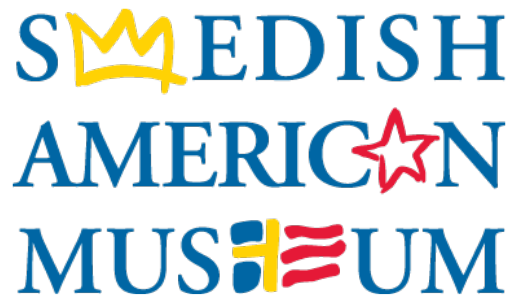
(At the 25th Anniversary of the I.O.V. in 1915, each Past Grand Chief was presented with an emblem which symbolized his special position within the organization. Since that time, every retiring Grand Chief has been presented with a similar Past Grand Chief's Pin at the conclusion of our Biennial Grand Lodge Conventions. It is at this time that each is inducted into the exclusive Past Grand Chiefs' Club. It is also interesting to note here that in 1906 the delegates to a Grand Lodge meeting

subscribed to a fund in order to erect a suitable gravestone for the grave of the I.O.V.'s first Grand Chief, Alex Holm, in Graceland Cemetery, located on the north side of Chicago. The remaining difference in the cost of this stone was paid for by the members of Vikingarne #1.)

Three more subordinate lodges were added within the next seven months: Drake #3 in March, Angantyr #4 in April, and Frej #5 in May of 1893, all located in Chicago. During these early years these 5 subordinate lodges managed their own burial funds, or what may be construed as benefits to beneficiaries of deceased members. State laws relative to the operation of fraternal benevolent societies were becoming more stringent, however. The Viking Order during its first few years of operation, always being conscientious, and in all respects willing to adhere to the legalities set up by the state, appointed a Grand Lodge committee to study the feasibility of combining the operation of the issuance of death benefit insurance of all subordinate lodges under the total supervision of the Grand Lodge. This study resulted in an application being submitted to the Insurance Department of Illinois in May 1895 for the approval of a new Charter.

A Certificate of Incorporation was granted on November 30, 1895 by the then Insurance Superintendent, Bradford K. Durfee. This Charter legalized the Grand Lodge to conduct a Fraternal Beneficiary Society and by virtue of this same issue, to provide life indemnity policies to members of the subordinate lodges. The Viking Order has continued for the past 95 years to operate under this Charter, issuing life insurance certificates to its members in amounts up to \$10,000 in Illinois and other states in which it is licensed to operate. The current solvency of this insurance fund averages 130% with periodic dividends credited to members in the form of added valuation in their original insurance certificate. It should be emphasized that a holder of an Independent Order of Vikings insurance certificate, i.e. insurance policy, need not continue to remain a member of a subordinate lodge in order to have the policy remain in force. Should it be the desire of the policy holder to discontinue affiliation with his or her lodge, premiums for the policy may be made directly to the Grand Lodge office in Illinois.

By the end of our society's first 10 years of existence and as the turn of the century drew near there were a total of 7 subordinate lodges in the Order with a combined membership of a little over 800. During these first 10 years the Independent Order of Vikings had established itself as a truly viable organization with a cash balance of



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