



## SVENSKBYBORNA CULTURAL SOCIETY

### January 2013 NEWSLETTER

#### In This Issue

- Notes from the President
- Membership Update
- Events
- Geranium from Gammalsvenskby
- Family News
- Elder Inspires Change
- Maria Malmas's Letter
- Gammalsvenskby i Ukraina
- Sigalet/Irving Wedding
- Memories by John Annas Jr.
- Emma Tennis Remembers
- The Heritage That Is Ours
- The Old Farm House
- Family Is Where Your Story Begins
- Photographs from 2012 Cemetery Sunday
- 85<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Questionnaire

#### Notes from the President

At the August 12, 2012 AGM, 19 members were present. At the Election of Officers and Directors, the members voted to put the current slate back in for another term.

Deb Fettig provided the Treasurer's report. We currently have \$13,501.62 in total in both our

current and savings accounts.

A questionnaire is being circulated (page 11 of this newsletter) to help us plan the 85<sup>th</sup> Jubilee in 2015. Please take this opportunity to provide feedback so the event is worthwhile to everyone who attends. Our suggestion of a one day celebration on Saturday as opposed to Sunday was well-received at the AGM. This was suggested to accommodate those who have to return to work on Monday. The cemetery service would still be held on the Sunday.

Respectfully submitted,  
Karen Wright, President

#### Membership Update

As of the end of December, there were 49 paid members for 2012. Membership fees are now due for 2013. If you receive a membership form, please submit with payment as soon as possible. Thank you in advance!

#### Events

**AGM – August 2013, Cemetery Service at Svea Cemetery with AGM to follow.**

## Geranium from Gammalsvenskby

This article is reprinted and translated from [http://www.lillabjersgardsbutik.se/?page\\_id=450](http://www.lillabjersgardsbutik.se/?page_id=450) which is a garden store website from Sweden.

Lilla Bjers  
Gårdsbutik



Gammalsvenskby pelargon *Pelargonium x fragrans*

P x fragrans came with Swedish villagers when they moved back to Sweden from Ukraine in 1929.

The plant, which has various names, such as Mother's flower, Grandfather flower and Mary flower.

Swedish villagers were descendants of the Swedes who were resident in Hiiumaa off the coast of Estonia from the 1300s until 1781, when they were relegated to the Ukraine by the Russian Empress Catherine II.

They had to go on foot from Estonia to Ukraine under extreme hardship and after less than a year, they reached the Dnieper River in southern Ukraine. There, they built a village they named Gammalsvenskby.

Russian Revolution of 1917 brought such with the civil war, anarchy and famine, and they struggled to come "home" to Sweden.

In 1929, a large number of Swedish villagers, including Margaret's grandparents, Gustav and

Catherine Hoas, came to Sweden and most settled on the island.

In his luggage a Swedish villagers carried Px fragrans.

## Family News

### Departed

*The Society wants to honour the memory of the following descendants and relatives of the Svenskbyborna who have recently left us:*

Gordon Herbert Hopkins, son of Doris Jean (Albers) Olsen passed away June 18, 2012 at the age of 71.

Douglas Martin John Buskas passed away August 17, 2012 in Ponoka at the age of 56.

Doris Jean (Albers) Olsen passed away August 21, 2012 in Vernon, BC at the age of 92. Doris is Andreas Kristiansson and Ernestine (Zado) Albers 17th child.

Pearl Evangeline Buskas (Erickson), wife of the late Oscar Buskas, passed away August 27, 2012, in Camrose, at the age of 87.

Marvin Leslie Henry Utas of Edmonton passed away November 8, 2012 at the age of 91

### Births

Mason Robert Paul Tennis-Wick born September 29, 2012 in Edmonton, son of Ashley Hamelin-Tennis and Bobby Wick; first grandson of Garry Tennis.

### Marriages

Lisa Marie Sigalet married James William Irving. Details and more photos on page 6.



### Milestones

No events reported.

## Elder Inspires Change

Christine Wood/Staff Writer

*The following opinion piece appeared in my local newspaper. It so reminded me of those wonderful, strong women whom we've all been privileged to have in our lives - mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, aunts, sisters, cousins and friends. I reprint it here in tribute to them all.*

October 12, 2012

I was inspired to be less of a whiner this week when I talked to my 92-year-old grandmother back in Edmonton. I call her Baba, which is grandma in Ukrainian.

I found out on Tuesday that Baba had a broken shoulder, an injury she had sported for nearly three days without complaint.

Last Sunday, in order to save herself from a fall while standing on a step stool to reach for a dish, Baba decided to throw her shoulder into the wall to stop her wobbly descent.

She hit with a thud and felt some pain in her shoulder but assumed it was just going to bruise. She went on with her Thanksgiving preparations, thankful she didn't hit the floor.

After three days of pain (perhaps muffled by the extensive arthritis in her shoulders) and no bruise, Baba decided to see what the doctor had to say.

He said her shoulder was broken and then sent her to a bone specialist to see what could be done. She may be facing surgery or perhaps living with the pain and a sling, because her age limits what can be done.

When I called her on Tuesday night to console her, she just laughed about it all and said, "What can you do?"

I shouldn't be surprised. This is the same woman who was working in the field years ago with her young infant when she realized her infected tonsils were swollen beyond their limit.

After her tonsils erupted she simply spit them out and kept on working because "the work still had to get done."

Perhaps that's where my get 'er done attitude comes from. I'd like to think so. I want to be like my Baba.

I'm not saying I want to be in horrendous pain and keep working through it, but I'd like to think I'd have the gumption to do what needs doing despite physical limitations.

My Baba has always been strong, but not just physically.

She is the spiritual rock of our family too. Through the years she has always taken our needs to God in prayer. I know she has spent many hours on her knees on our behalf. She's always been the one to encourage us, and even when things were tough for her she put on a happy face and we never knew.

I don't think my Baba has ever missed sending a card for a birthday or anniversary for any of us grandkids (or great-grandkids) and every conversation with her always goes back to how we're doing. I do believe she puts others ahead of herself in just about everything.

She has a famous saying: "Do you want it or do you need it?" and when I'm feeling brave enough to face the answer, I ask myself the question before making a purchase. It's amazing how little you buy if you use that measurement.

Living frugally has allowed my Baba to give to others, and she does that with a smile and encouraging word whenever it's needed.

I realized this week that my fabulous grandmother has more love, grace, gumption and positivity than I can ever hope to attain, but it seems a noble effort and I want to try. Thanks for the inspiration, Baba.

<http://www.coastreporter.net/article/20121012/SECHE-LT0302/310129972/elder-inspires-Elder-Inspires-Change>

## Maria Malmas's Letter

~ from a report by Karl-Erik Tysk

Karl-Erik Tysk made another trip to Gammalsvenskby in January 2012. His report on the [Svenskbyborna.se](http://Svenskbyborna.se) website includes Maria Malmas's heartbreaking letter. It is reprinted below (with minor editing for ease of reading).



Maria Malmas

When I came back to Schlangendorf, Maria [Malmas] showed me a letter that she wrote in 2003 because many were being offered DM 200 in compensation for what they experienced during the war. Maria's mother, Emma, had received nothing because she herself had to decide whether she would set off to Germany or not.

Distinguished expert commission:

I am 66 years old and it is 60 years since it happened. When the Germans came to our farm, my Mom had four children. I was the

oldest and my brother, John, was only six weeks. Our old grandmother, Catherine, was sick. Mom and Grandma cried and said they could never travel with the kids. Then he took us four children by the scruff and threw us up like kittens on the cart. He put the gun to my mother's forehead and said: I have not damaged your children! I know how far to go with them!

This was in 1943, on 26 October. It was autumn and cold. We were hungry and cold. The small ones cried all the time and wanted food. We had nothing to eat on the way. It was a ghetto!

Who owes a debt because we were hungry and cold? War!  
Who was guilty that my three siblings died? War!  
Who destroyed our house? War!  
Who took away my father? War!  
Who owes a debt to my mother for the way she had to bury their own children and cry tears of blood? War!

This is the cry from the depths of my soul! We are war children! I defend my mother's honour. She would herself never in life have brought us away to hunger and death. There is no compassion and no understanding that can reconcile ourselves to the evil of war. And for those who survived Reich rules, it is a long time in the soil.

Thanks be to God that my mother died before she was told that she wilfully went off from their farm to Germany. And you, Comrade Maksimtjuk, need never apologize to her. They are just the war children that are left.

What brought sorrow to us? War!

Yours sincerely!  
Maria Malmas

After the letter Maria received the two hundred!  
How could they have done otherwise!

[http://www.svenskbyborna.se/Reportage/PAPPORT\\_TYSK\\_Jan\\_2012\\_EN%20SNABBVISIT%20%20JANUARI.pdf](http://www.svenskbyborna.se/Reportage/PAPPORT_TYSK_Jan_2012_EN%20SNABBVISIT%20%20JANUARI.pdf)



## Gammalsvenskby i Ukraina

**Recommended:** This 30 minute documentary is posted to a Swedish website. Filmed in 2005, it records the sights and sounds of contemporary Gammalsvenskby. The summary reproduced below is translated from the website. View it in its entirety here: (in Swedish, no subtitles).

[http://svenska.yle.fi/arkivet/artikkelit/gammalsvenskby\\_i\\_ukraina\\_67068.html#media=67077](http://svenska.yle.fi/arkivet/artikkelit/gammalsvenskby_i_ukraina_67068.html#media=67077)



*Eero Wallén has done a film about a trip to Gammalsvenskby, on the river Dnieper in Ukraine. The village is inhabited by descendants of emigrants Estonian Swedes. Some of them still speak an archaic Swedish.*

The viewer learns the group had made stopovers in Eastern Uusimaa where they lived long enough to embrace the language, and that their Swedish was therefore pure Loviisa.

The Gammalsvenskby population originally came from Hiiumaa in Estonia today (which in 1721 was part of Sweden). Catherine the Great moved 1000 Dagösvenskar during the 1780's to Ukraine. Half died on the journey and the promised fields and farms in Ukraine did not exist.

The population of Gammalsvenskby maintained their traditions and Lutheran faith. They also maintained their old East Swedish accent.

In 1929, 881 villagers emigrated to Sweden. Only about twenty stayed in Gammalsvenskby. Of the emigrants, 250 villagers returned later along with members of the Swedish Communist

Party. They founded a collective farm called the Svedkompartija - the Swedish Communist Party. Maria Malmas tells of Svedkompartija.

During World War II, the Swedes were evacuated from the village. Many ended up in occupied Poland. After the war, the Soviet authorities sent several of the villagers to labour camps. Anna Sigalet tells of the journey to Siberia and how they were rescued from there by a Swedish man in 1947.

The famine was very great in Ukraine in 1947. Almost all of Maria Malmas family died during the famine. School children received 150 grams of bread per day, infant died of starvation and the adults worked hungry, says Anna Sigalet.

Melitta Portje and Gustav Annas says that it was forbidden to speak Swedish or German in the village after the war. On the street you spoke Russian and Ukrainian. At home you could use their mother tongue.

Despite their sad stories, the old women are also full of joie de vivre. They eat and sing "We are musicians, dressed in ancient costumes".

After the war, the Soviet Union deepened the economic crisis in Ukraine. Many then moved out to the country, where wages were paid in kind. Lily Kosak moved back to Gammalsvenskby to work on the collective farm. But all the buildings on the collective farm were looted, doors and windows were stripped. Only the statue of Lenin remained standing.

In Gammalsvenskby there are three churches. One of them has a Swedish clock tower and a Russian onion dome. Melitta Portje presents relatives in the cemetery. Melitta usually sits in the cemetery and spend time with her dead husband at his ryssblå table.

Today Gammalsvenskby has 150-200 inhabitants of Swedish origin. Only a few of them speak fluent Swedish. Life in the village is primitive and uncertain. Water and power supply is not reliable, but it is easier to get food in the countryside than in the city. Lily Kosak says that the villagers itself should improve their situation. To the tune of Glory, we see a last glimpse of the Dnieper and the beautiful hills there.

## Sigalet/Irving Wedding

~ Morris Sigalet

Lisa Marie Sigalet, daughter of Morris (Canada) and Susan (UK) Sigalet, married James William Irving, son of William and Janet Irving (UK) on July 14, 2012 at St. Mary Church, Portchester Castle, Portchester, Farham, Hants., UK.



Lisa Sigalet escorted by Dad Morris

The reception was held at Marwell Zoo, North Winchester, UK. (The Zoo is on the grounds of a Tudor Manor owned by the brother of Jane Seymour, the 3rd wife of King Henry the VIII).

The happy couple honeymooned in Borneo.



Dad (Vern) was not able to make the trip. My sister Cindy and brother Bradley as well as my son Sean (Bestman) and stepdaughter Meredith, my wife Denise and myself were there. A few family friends from Canada were there as well.



Portchester Castle was originally a Roman fort built about 285 to 290 AD. After the Romans left the Anglo Saxon's used the fort for protection from the Vikings. Additional building was done by the Normans. During the Napoleonic Wars the castle was used to house POW's. Over 7000 were kept there, mostly officers.



The church was founded in 1128 for Augustinian Monks. The Tudor manor was built about 1320. The zoo was celebrating its 40 birthday in 2012, one of the first zoo's in Europe to place emphasis on animal conservation. They also have a very good breeding program in place for Snow Leopard, Przewalski Horse and Scimitar-Horned Oryx, the later two being returned to the wild. This was one of the places James took Lisa on a date.



## Memories by John Annas Jr.

~ as told to Karen Wright



Karen Wright with Dad John Annas, Jr.

Johannes Pettersson Annas, his wife Pauline and their 2 sons arrived at Scapa, Alberta in 1930 at the beginning of the great depression with very little money and few possessions. Working for others, weaving baskets and using their survival skills from Gammalsvenskby, they made it through, acquired land and improved their lives.

In 1942, my father had his first bumper crop. A friend, Mr. Robertson, asked him if he received all of the payments for his grain. My Dad told him that he received no money but only pieces of paper and opened the drawer to show him. Mr. Robertson laughed and told him that those were cheques and he had to cash them. The two of them went to the bank and opened up his first bank account. When filling out the form, there were not enough boxes to fill in his full name and from then on he went by the name John Peter Annas Sr. He went home to show my mother the bank book, saying "Paulina, I don't know how we are ever going to spend all this money!"

By 1944, they were able to buy their first car – a used 1927 Chrysler Sedan, a new 80 Oliver tractor and build a new house. In reflection what is incredible about this story is within fifteen years from arriving in Canada, John, Paulina and their family secured land, built a home and prospered.

## Emma Tennis Remembers

as told to Carol Oslie



Emma Tennis (nee Buskas)

When you are a kid, in bygone days anyway, you did what you were told, believed what you were told and just enjoyed the day for what it was. I didn't know what was happening in the Village. I'm not sure I knew there was anything beyond the Village. I did know we were always hungry and there was a lot of talking going on. My Grandpa\*, the head of our household, had gone away with Pastor Hoas for a time but he was back home. The year I was eight, it was on Easter Sunday morning I was told, a ship arrived at the wharf. We heard the ship's whistle. Word spread. Suddenly there was frenzied activity as all the grown-ups packed bundles and bags of keepsakes, clothes and food. I didn't know what was happening but it seemed like an adventure. I remember worried and sad faces and that some people didn't board the ship with our families and our bags and bundles. Those that stayed behind stood on the shore and sang hymns as the ship departed downriver. That's what I remember – the singing. I didn't know I would not see my home again.

I remember being on a smokey, jerky, old train. My first train trip. What I remember most is that Mom was setting out some of the food we'd brought along for the trip. It was probably bread and butter. The train jerked and my little brother, four year old Nels, fell forward with his hands in the butter.

When we got to Sweden, we lived in separate



units at the barracks in Jönköping. We used to live with our grandparents and cousins in one big house back home. This was very different. I attended school for the first time when we got to Sweden. My Grandpa made the trip to Canada to explore the possibility of a place for us. I had never heard of Canada. We stayed in Sweden for almost a year and then continued our journey to our new home – Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Canada.

\*Emma's Grandfather accompanied Paster Hoas to Sweden to arrange for extraction of the Swedes and also on the Canadian exploratory trip.

### The Heritage That Is Ours

~transcribed from the writings of Ivan Tennis

Grandpa John Tennis or Tinis Sr. with his wife, Anna Maria, their sons, Julius and John, and baby Annie left Gammalsvenskby, Russia in 1899 or 1890. They left the old Swedish settlement near Odessa on the Black Sea and broke all the old ties to head for a new land called Canada. Some Swedes had been leaving for the previous two years, namely the Malmas's and Save's.



Anna Maria and John Tennis Sr. In later life

Coming as immigrants, they landed in New York and came to Manitoba where they stayed at a Mennonite settlement for two years. They came on to Alberta, to Wetaskiwin the end of the steel. They stayed with the Malmas family that fall and winter. Grandfather struck out southeast on foot along the Buffalo Lake Trail searching for the home and land that would suit him. He came at length to Red Deer Lake where he saw good building logs, lush pasture and lots of water. He decided this would be it. He spent much time

that first winter starting to build a house and clear the land. The family moved in the early spring to the homestead where their joys and sorrows were multiplied many fold.

I know little of those early years. My father (John Jr.) roamed the woods and lake shores. Indians were roaming back and forth on the old trails around the lakes. Red river carts were still being used and the trail was a three rut affair.

Wild ducks, geese and swans abounded as well as partridge and prairie chicken and just about every species of game. Some deer, but the moose and the elk were absent with only the occasional straggler of the later, such as occasionally happens to this day.

Prairie fires were common, once destroying the log house.

Once one of the oxen disappeared and was missing for a week before they found him. In jumping a large fallen log, he had straddled it and could neither get forward or backwards. He was alive but thin as a rail. With a little axe work, he was free.

Once as a barefoot boy getting the cows, Dad was trotting along a new furrow and as he came abreast of a clump of buck brush, sage or whatever it was, a coyote was sitting on his rump on the other side, looking the opposite way. Dad had a big stick upraised but was too frightened to muster strength either to strike or yell. When the coyote finally looked over his shoulder, its hard to say who was most frightened. As I recall, they both fled.

Bows and arrows of saskatoon were used by the growing boys in the family. One day when the prize rooster was strutting his stuff, a well placed arrow ended his career. The boys knew what would happen when said rooster was found so dashing across the yard with the victim, they threw it over the nearest rail fence into the tall grass and willows right to the spot where grandpa had sat down to attend to nature's call. The result was disastrous (for the boys).

.... continued in the next newsletter



## The Old Farm House

- Ingrid Pottkemper

As we walked through the old farm house, we were reminded of the 60+ years our parents lived here, it's where the three of us were raised and where we learned so many things from Mom and Dad!



It took me over a year to get up the courage and also to find the time to spend with my brother in Manitoba, to go through things in the old farm house. What we found was a past full of hopes and dreams for a better future for themselves and their family, and a determination to make it all work!



As we sorted through the drawers stuffed full of old papers, saved for 30 years or more; we found a past which we had heard about in stories or saw in pictures, but just realized that this had all been our parents hopes and dreams!! Now, what was left? Old bills, grain receipts from the elevator in town dating back to the early days of Dad's

just starting out; receipts/invoices for machinery purchased over the years; receipts for payments made to the VLA after the War; and Dad's service records from World War II! Along with

this, there were old lists written on the backs of envelopes by Mom who was very good at planning and making lists for everything - whether it was for her garden, shopping, or planning out a redecorating scheme. We also found numerous pieces of memorabilia from Russia and Sweden, and pictures taken in the Old Swedish Village!

It appeared to us, who now had the task of cleaning it all out and determining what needed to be saved and what needed to be discarded, that they had saved every piece of paper and every article of clothing that ever came into the house over the past 60 years!! There were souvenirs from past trips, and there were pictures!! Pictures, pictures, pictures!! So many pictures, of people whom we did not recognize, and so few with names and dates on the back! Along with pictures, both from our father's days growing up in Saskatchewan and the family's move to Manitoba during the 'dirty 30s', and our mother's family's long journey from Russian in 1929 to their finally settling in Manitoba in 1931! As it turned out, both sets of our grandparents ended up settling only 16kms apart!

So, what do we do now? There is still sooooo much more work to be done in removing old furniture and ripping up old carpet and pulling down worn out drapes.....

My first priority were the pictures!! Firstly, all family pictures were gathered together and given back to the family member who had given them to Mom and Dad originally. Then I took all the memorabilia and pictures from both Mom and Dad's families where we recognize people and places, and have put together a scrapbook/album in a timeline; showing our parents roots and growth over the years, to their marriage, having children and then our births and growth, to their deaths!! I hope it will be viewed appreciatively and recognized as being our little piece of history!!



## Family Is Where Your Story Begins

~ Carol Oslie

As I took my seat in anticipation of the first session of a new course, I happened to glance up to a display of wall signs. There it was in the middle. "Family is where your story begins" it said. I had to blink to see if it was an illusion!

You see, I am preoccupied by storytelling right now, being half way through an Eldercollege class called "Tell Me A Story", and almost through editing this edition of our newsletter with the theme of "our stories". And there it was, another story reference.

My assignment for next storytelling class is to answer what seems on the surface an easy question – what is a story? Turns out there are many answers; many kinds of stories such as tales, history, anecdotes, and gossip; for many purposes such as entertainment, instructing the next generation, and preserving history; and in many formats such as verbal, written, video, photo, newspaper, and performance. And that's not considering technical classifications.

Our collective stories are in all those forms, serve all those purposes and cover many topics. Besides today's happenings, some themes that come to mind are early history in Sweden, Estonia and Ukraine; early arrivals home-steading in Canada; life in Gammalsvenskby before and after 1929; life in Sweden after 1929; making a life and living in Canada; our families known to us and unknown in Ukraine, Sweden, Manitoba, Alberta and other far-flung places; individual family histories, personal histories and observances, and the list goes on. Our history is rich and complex.

Some have lamented that their children or siblings are not interested in our history. Maybe its the word 'history' that brings up terrors of memorizing dates and writing essays. Story is a much more gentle way of remembering. Maybe its necessary to get to "that certain age" to become interested in other than our own immediate lives. At any rate, it seems more important than ever to share our history as those

who have personal memories or have heard the stories first hand are getting older and fewer. I think our job today is to preserve those stories (history) in any form - stories for us and for those who become curious later because family is where your story begins.

## Photographs from 2012 Cemetery Service

- Myrna Wyse



## 85<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Questionnaire

To ensure that the 2015 Jubilee will be meaningful to all who are able to attend, the Jubilee planning committee would appreciate your feedback by completing this questionnaire and returning it with your annual dues.

1. It is suggested that the Jubilee be held on the Saturday before Cemetery Sunday in August. Do you agree with this date?
2. To keep costs down, it is suggested that the Jubilee be a one-day event, with a church service in the morning followed by a hot lunch at a hall nearby. Do you agree with this format?
3. We have considered halls in the country, closer to the church such as Angus Ridge. Are there any other suggestions as to the hall/venue where we could hold the luncheon and have our fellowship time?
4. It is suggested that the afternoon be an informal gathering, providing lots of time to visit. There will be a short Annual

General Meeting. Would you also like to have a program, if so what should it include?

5. Would you be interested in another silent auction?
6. Would you be interested in donating to the silent auction?
7. Do you have any other suggestions/comments?

Thank you! Please mail/email your comments to Karen Wright, 114 Caledonia Street, Wetaskiwin, AB T9A 3H6 or [kwright@telus.net](mailto:kwright@telus.net)