

Anecdotes from the life of August Lovegren  
By Shannon Nakano

Initially, I thought to give a chronology of Lovegren's life but decided against it in hopes that selected anecdotes from people who know him would paint a better, if not still incomplete, picture of who he was as a person. But, as well, I recognize the fact that dates give historical reference so here is a very short chronology:

August Lovegren was born 1 June 1861 in Smedstad, Nor Parish, Varmland, Sweden. He married Hilma Maria Nelson on 31 December 1885 in Spring Garden, Minnesota. August and Hilma had eleven children. The official founding date of Preston is 31 August 1892. August died 27 February 1917 in Seattle, Washington and is buried in the Fall City Cemetery in Fall City, Washington.

August was born and raised in Sweden and didn't emigrate from there until he was 21 years old. His life was not easy there as famine and economic hardships permeated Sweden at the time. Things were so difficult that at the age of six August was sent into the forest to gather bark from trees in order to make bread for the family to eat. Consequently, at age 9 he quit school to work at a sawmill. While in Sweden he also obtained skills as a blacksmith and carpenter.

It was about the age of 15 or 16 that he became involved in a group who were known as "Bible Readers". They were viewed as a somewhat radical religious group at that time as the Lutheran church was the state church of Sweden. They later became known as Swedish Baptists and were frequent victims of persecution in Sweden. August, however, was a firm believer and would meet in secret to worship as he chose. Religious freedom certainly played a role in his decision to emigrate. While on his way to America in 1882 August conducted services on the boat when he realized none were available.

I find his early life interesting in that these events, and probably many more we are not aware of, shaped and prepared this man to found Preston. He was obviously a hard worker, accustomed to difficult times. The skills he acquired while growing up were perfectly suited to the mill town environment. And to his religion and beliefs he was amazingly devoted. It is no wonder that one of the first buildings built, besides homes and the mill, was the church. He possessed integrity and character.

In 1892 he and five other men, riding on a building boom in Seattle, struck east to find a grove of cedar where they could establish a mill to make shingles. Unfortunately, in 1893, there was an economic depression that about completely halted the building boom that Seattle had been experiencing and the embryonic Preston Mill Co. began to fail. The other five men sold their shares to August. It is here that I give credit to the Lovegren family for founding this town as at this point August's wife Hilma and her children moved out here from Seattle to make a go of it. The strength that woman must have possessed!

Suffice it is say that Seattle recovered, building began again and Preston thrived. If you were Swedish and Baptist you were guaranteed a job at the mill.

It is here I will end my prose and let Lovegren family memoirs give a more complete picture of this man.

From daughter Mabel Lovegren Tupper who recalls a vivid story of August having to provide the necessities of life for his family in Preston after the 1893 depression:

"Another thing that Levi [Mabel's brother] told me about the hard times of those days was that their shoes wore out and they didn't have money for shoes. Papa had about \$5 left. He knew that \$5 would buy a side of leather – a cow hide side of leather – and a few simple shoe making tools. He had seen his father make their shoes in Sweden so he knew how to do it. He decided to walk to Seattle and get the leather (that was he could use his money to buy the leather). By foot Seattle wasn't as far as it was by railroad. I think they said it was probably around 35 miles, because, of course, they could walk steeper hills than the railroad could take. He walked to Seattle, bought his leather and tools, walked back and got busy making his shoes. My mother helped him. He punched the holes with the punch and she did the sewing with the waxed thread. He made shoes for himself and there was enough leather to make shoes for Phil (because he had to go to school) and, for Levi... Then, there was a little bit of leather left, I think he said, to make a little pair of shoes for Edna (who was just beginning to walk)... So they got along with these shoes for a while."

Also from daughter Mabel:

"My father was very, very much against alcohol... My cousin, Anna Ryberg, whom we call "Aunt Anna", was living with us during these years. There's a kind of a funny, little amusing story about Aunt Anna and my father. She would get home from school in the afternoon before he would get home from his office work. She would get the newspaper, which came in the train in the morning and look over it. If there was anything interesting in it that concerned her, possibly a recipe or something about ladies' affairs or something like that, she'd clip it out. When my father got home ready to look over his newspaper he said, "Well, somebody has cut pieces out of the newspaper here" and Anna Ryberg would say, "Well, I did that." She said, "And I'm sure it is nothing that would interest you". Well, this went on, so he decided to play a joke on her. He got the newspaper before she got home one day. He went over it very, very carefully and he cut out all of the liquor ads. He left everything else in there. She came in to look at the newspaper and she said, "Who's been clipping in the newspaper?" My father said, "Well, I cut some of the things out of it". She said "Well, I wanted to read the whole newspaper". He said, "Well, I'm sure that it's nothing that you would be interested in". She said, "Well, how do you know? I might be interested in them." Finally, after some sort of talk like this my father got out his clippings and showed them to her. That, of course, was his big joke on her."

Again, from Mabel:

"I want to tell you now about their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. This happened in 1910, on New Year's Eve. Of course, we left in the summer of 1911 for Cherry Grove. That was our last winter there. They had a big celebration in the church. Believe it or not, my mother was able to wear her wedding dress, so she wore her wedding dress... During the year of their courtship, my father had written a big, long poem and a letter to my mother as sort of a love poem. She had saved that all through the years, probably in some trunk, someplace. My father knew it was there. He got it out unknown to her. He passed it on to the person who was officiating... Of course, I didn't know the details, but I saw all the action and all the laughing and everything. My father and mother were sitting on the platform and everything was going along real fine. Then, this man got up and said that he had a letter to read. He started to read this letter, all in poetry, a love poem that my father had written 25 1/2 years ago. My mother recognized it right away. She jumped up and she tried to get the letter from the one who was reading it. She reached up and he held his hand up higher and wouldn't let her have it. Finally, she gave up and sat down. He read it and the audience enjoyed the whole episode very, very much."

"I never heard my mother and father argue about anything. My mother told me once that when they were young they decided never to interrupt when the other one was disciplining a child."

Memories of the Fourth of July from August Lovegren's niece, Olga Edwins Fritzberg:

"Uncle August was an unusual man, very civic minded, if anyone ever was. At the site of Camp Terry, a place was cleared and picnics were held there. A band stand was built. Festivities were held there – Fourth of July – every year. The biggest of the year – everyone formed a parade, there was no music, but everyone marched, singing the Star Spangled Banner. They would salute the flag, and have speeches. All the Swedes were learning to be Americans and were very civic minded. There were large sheds by the river so there was always a place for a picnic. Before the fourth of July Uncle August sent men from the mill to dam up the river. Then they had two row boats. At dusk they would have a sham battle – a fort would be built across the river and the two teams would shoot at each other with Roman Candles – to think that we can't have fire crackers now – and they used Roman Candles! And there would be skyrockets later. I don't think any town ever had a bigger Fourth of July."

There are so many good memories that people have of this man. It was hard choosing just these to share. I could have shared how hard he worked on his English so he had hardly a Swedish brogue left or how much he loved his house he built on the Middle Hill. He handpicked each piece of wood for trim to best show the grain. How he gave money to other churches and schools in the Seattle area to help them thrive. Many stories - but in interest of time I will save those for another day.

The Lovegren's left Preston in 1911 to found a new town outside Portland, Cherry Grove. It has been said that Preston wasn't the same after the Lovegren influence left.

Until next time!

Many thanks to Krisitina Basinger for her amazing efforts to record the memories of the Lovegren Family.