



Annie Elizabeth Nelson

Memoirs of Mother

Mrs. Andrew P. (Annie E.) Nelson

By Kenneth E. Nelson

**The author wrote this story about his mother,
Annie Elizabeth Nelson
and her parents, ancestors and relatives.
He was a minister of profession and wrote the story in 1964
when Annie was 90 years old.**

**Annie's parents were Lewis and Ellen Johnson,
and Mrs. and Mr. Nels Jenson were her grandparents.
Included in *Memoirs of Mother* is the interesting and dramatic story
about Lewis N. Johnson and Nels Jenson families' emigration from
Sweden to Minnesota. The Johnson family's settling on the prairie
is also featured.**

**The original version of the story had no illustrations. The author
gave a copy to his cousin Theodore Norton Johnson, who then gave
a copy to his brother Kenneth J. Johnson. In 2009 Kenneth J.
Johnson's son-in-law, Jon Arne Storflor Sæter subsequently made
it digital and easy accessible on the web for future generations.**

Preface

This booklet is written mainly in appreciation and gratefulness for Mrs. Andrew P. (Annie) Nelson. Truly a dear mother to her children and now 90 years of age. Innumerable memories of her loving patience, endurance and kindness merit much more than a bouquet of thanks. The optimism of Hebrews 6:10, "God is not unrighteous to forget your labor of love - -" becomes an assurance of Heavenly renumeration.

This booklet is a humble attempt to preserve a cherished summary of perhaps the most significant generation in history. This age came from the day of the oxen and the ocean sail boat to the reality of a huge B-52 airplane with it's many tons of cargo, which can fly from Dayton around the Mediteranean Sea and back again in an after supper jaunt. Many other astounding developments could be mentioned.

Also this booklet is written in real admiration of the unsung heros of the prairie – the early settlers that ventured out upon the virgin soil of Western Minnesota. During the years right after the Civil War, when Union troops came from Fort Snelling and Camp Ripley in many skirmishes attempting an understanding and subdueing the hostile relations with our Indian predecessors who roamed those hills and hunted it's buffalo and fished it's rivers and lakes. Undoubtedly it will be forever regretted for the payments the Indians never received, but let it also be forever cherished of the kindness and friendships attempted by the early settler, whether tradesman, homesteader or missionary.

Apparently the battle of Camp Release, just west of Montevideo, when 91 white people were released, became the "green light" for great numbers of Eastern folks to come out and stake out homesteads on God's virgin soiles, rich and replete with potential agricultural wealth. This was more than a camping venture. Here was reality – walking from Grove City to Leenthrop Township, 60 miles across the rolling grass lands, slews and some fields of earlier settlers. There were no trees for shelter or shade. Particular admiration is due our forefathers who took the choice land ten to twelve miles from the Minnesota River, endured the work of sledding logs and lumber from the woods and by-passed the sandy ravine hills for the richer loam soil of the plains.

Memories will weaken and fade, but the fruits and heritage of my parents and grandparents, whose names later appear in this brief treatise, will live anew, and may they long be remembered by every reader is my huble motive in writing this brief summary of their lives. May the God of creation be praised for letting this generation, my parents, come in and claim "This Canaan Land" then untouched by weeds and briars. Truly they conquered by hardships and privations. Now we have the "roads to roam and the homes to own". This is indeed material grace for us – unmerited and unworthy of us. Let us never forget that before this creation there was the Spiritual Grace of the God of creation – Jehovah Jesus – Who became the Redeemer to purchase the redemption for our sinful souls on the Cross of Calvary, that as many as received Him, may have an eternal title deed to a home in Heaven.

Kenneth E. Nelson

Old Sweden to Sweden Grove, Minnesota

"Anybody here want to go to America? Be ready in three days, and there is room in my boat!" Thus said an old sea captain in a suburb community of Malmo, Skone, Sweden. In the Nels Jenson family, the father came in and told his wife, "There is a ship starting out to America today, do you think we could get ready and go along?" They did. They did not take anything along. They came from Malmo.

In America the Civil War was just over, and friendly doors were open for more immigrant people to come to the United States. Daring sail boat companies sought about this wonderful land called "America". Suddenly there was this announcement, "Who wants to go to America?"

Along those who decided to go were Mr. and Mrs. Lewis N. Johnson and two little daughters, two and four years of age. Little did they realize the fate and future of this tremendous venture of faith. Bare necessities, food, clothes and souvenirs were quickly packed. Soon they were on their way across the North Sea and passed Copenhagen to England. Here they took a train to Liverpool, where they again boarded another sail boat to cross the mighty Atlantic Ocean. Stormy waves rolled over the deck of the ship. The captain warned passengers to stay in their assigned rooms, and forbade them to come on deck lest they be swept off the ship and drown in the deep cold waters of the ocean.

Many people became sea sick. The constant rolling and tipping of the ship became unbearable. Mother often repeated her mother's account of the trip: "We had a hard storm so the big waves would throw water on top of the ship. Many people got sick. I was not expected to pull through but I did."

The oldest Johnson girl, age four, became very weak. There they were – all in one big room together. Many were dying. This made others much worse. It seemed an endless journey. Two weeks, then three weeks and still no America. One night while the father held his oldest daughter in his lap, the anxious parents saw their dear four year old girl breathe her last breath. Then came the woeful experience of seeing a sailor with a black bag take that little limp frail body away and drop it into the huge cold waters of the Atlantic.

Shortly afterwards, the younger daughter scarcely two year old, so loving and precious to them, weakened and unable to take nourishment, became very frail. Once again these heartbroken, sorrowful parents saw the last breath of this little one for whom they had dreamed and planned a wonderful future in the great land of America.

Next it was the mother. Could she endure? Nearly four weeks of this gruesome journey had gone by. She also became very frail and sickly in the unsanitary hold of the ship. The environment of the sick and the dying was almost unbearable. No wonder when the Pilgrims came over on the Mayflower about half of the original seagoers perished of fever and sickness.

At last New York harbour came into sight. What a relief to get off the rolling, tossing ship! Rooming house quarters were found for Mrs. Johnson. She had made the trip but was to go no farther. Lack of proper medicine and food caused her to succumb to high fever, and this time a loving husband bid his dear wife goodbye, as the Lord reached down and bid her come with Him to a land even better than America.

What could a heart broken man do? Mother told me "Father Lewis was a pretty lonesome man. When we got to land he went along with our family and the next I can think of us, we were in Sweden Grove (Meeker County, Minnesota). This name was changed to Grove City. We lived there for some time while the men went out around looking for land to buy.

It was at that time mother got married to Lewis Johnson. Later a baby boy was born, but he lived only two days and was buried in the Grove City Baptist Church Cemetery.”

This is the way the above romance took place: Among this group of immigrants was the Nels Jenson family of eleven children. One of them was a daughter named Ellen. She was born in Sweden on December 23, 1845. She excelled in her school class under the State Church. (It was not considered necessary for girls to learn to write.) At the time of her graduation and confirmation, she received a cherished gift of a white Bible. But she often said, ”Instead of being happy I was weeping. I didn’t know the Lord as my Saviour even though I answered all the questions.” She could repeat many Psalms by heart.

Soon afterwards an evangelist from Germany (thought to be a convert of the famous George Mueller of the children’s orphanage in England) came to her community and preached the Gospel, the Power of God unto Salvation to everyone that believeth. In true repentance, she accepted Christ as her Savior. On the night before her birthday (December 23) a hole was chopped in the ice and a baptismal service was held at midnight to avoid persecution by the State Church. Many followed the Lord in baptism in joyful simple obedience to His Word. No wonder it was a glad opportunity for these new believers in Christ to launch out to the new land of America.

Ellen Jenson became the new wife of Mr. Lewis N. Johnson and life again began anew for this man of God and a saintly wife. The old country, and the ocean journey were past. Now it was to be the new prairies of Western Minnesota and a new home and a new generation of new experiences.

A prairie girl is born

Lewis and Ellen Johnson again are to face more waves. This time the rolling grasslands of the prairies of western Minnesota. Little Henry Victor was born on September 1, 1871, in Grove City. Four men including Martin Dahleen, Swen Lindahl, Lewis Johnson and A. B. Peterson walked sixty miles to Chippewa County, Leenthrop Township, Section 26, where they staked out homesteads. Here they spaded up the first sod and built their first homes of sod blocks. Then they walked back to Grove City to spend the winter months of the first year of this new enterprise.

The second summer they returned again. This time with four wagons pulled by oxen, and each having chickens, one pig and one cow. It took two days of slow tedious travel over hills and around ponds, sometimes between earlier settler's fields. But the lure of the virgin soil and fertile country side beckoned them on. This was more than a camping trip. This was for life, with the meager possessions they had.

They finally arrived on the second day at their little sod houses built the year before. Four farms adjoined each other for help and comfort through the coming years of privation and endurance. Each one was a little sod hut dotting the bare prairie with no trees for summer shade or shelter from the winter's snow storms.

Lewis Johnson was very good at making simple furniture, tables, stools, and even wooden shoes. Some of these we still have and cherish as keepsakes. Fuel in the old stove were ropes of dried grass, cut in short pieces. Sometimes it would just smoulder and other times burn too fast. Imagine baking with this type of heat today!

An eventful day for this new settlement took place March 5, 1874. Henry Victor was two years old. "The snow was still a foot deep. There were no roads. Father walked to Olanders who lived on the farm Nels Norbys bought. Mrs. Olander couldn't come! Then Mrs. Martin Dahleen said she would come. Mrs. Dahleen was to come to the Lewis Johnson home and do the work of a doctor, called a mid-wife or nurse when the new little baby was to be born. She had two little boys of her own. The only thing she could do was to bring them along."

Imagine three little boys less than three years old in a little one room, one door, one window dirt floor sod home besides three adults! However, during the night all three boys were fast asleep in another corner of the home when little Annie Elisabeth Johnson was born. All went very well. What rejoicing and blessing this little girl was to become in this early settler's prairie home – a little house and a little barn, two little specks dotting the open prairie country with not even a tree for shelter or shade.

What a comfort the neighbors were to them in those days. May these friends be forever remembered. Not to exclude others, but these come to our appreciation now: The Swen Lindahl family who lived on the first farm south of us and their five daughters; Christine, Ellen, Annie, Bessie and Emma. Ellen became Mrs. John Weberg. One of their three sons, Selvin, married Eunice Nelson and lives on the John Weberg farm.

"My folks and this family had pretty much together. If one bought one thing, the other would too, also Martin Olsons, parents of Sadie and Willie Olson. Grandma's family were the Nels Jensons, who had ten children when they left Sweden. One daughter, Hilda, married Martin Dahlquist, the first preacher-farmer of the Leenthrop Baptist Church, and lived west of Martin Olsons."

The first Baptist church to be organized in Chippewa County. Services were first held in homes. Then one Sunday some folks met on Rose Hill. It began to rain. They tipped

the wagon box over, got in under it and prayed that a church be built there some day.

Andrew B. Petersons lived a mile west on the Granite road, in whose home the first public school was conducted by teacher O. F. Rolefson. Later a school house was built on a corner of Martin Dahleen's grove. They had three sons, Henry, Alfred and Stanley.

Maiden days of a prairie girl!

Annie was born March 5, 1874. She was the only daughter in their family of six boys; Henry, Annie, Alfred, Joseph, Edward, Alexander and Elmer.

Henry and Annie started school in Andrew B. Peterson's home a mile west of their home. "Once the teacher, Mr. Rolefson, called me up to his knee for my first lesson. How I wished I could go in the kitchen where mother was and my two smaller brothers who were visiting Mrs. Peterson. Here I got through the fourth grade. That is as far as I went."

"One early morning right after the threshing was done, I heard father ask mother if she would go out and burn the straw which was spread out over the fields. He needed to take a few sacks of wheat to the mill in Granite Falls and bring home some flour, bran and shorts. So he went. After awhile mother, Henry and I went out to the straw not far from the house and started the fire. It went fine, but then the wind started up, so the fire went in the stubble right towards the neighbor Olanders. Mother and Henry worked as hard as they could, but the fire got worse and worse. Mother said, 'Help, pray to God'. All of a sudden the wind stopped and turned the opposite direction which killed the fire."

"The first buggy we had was a discarded race cart which my father bought in Monte (Montevideo) for five dollars. Father fixed it up so it was safe for "old Bill" to pull. Old Bill, greyish white and very faithful, was one of father's first horses. The cart was made for only one driver, but mother and I used it to go visiting sick people and to prayer meetings in homes in the afternoons. The other horse was a pretty black. It became sick and lost its mind. It ran away to Pete Larsons, a mile east of us, then came back, threw itself on the ground, turned its head and nose on its stomach to show where the pain was and then died. We all cried to see this valuable horse die."

"Mother and I made many trips in this cart buggy. Mother never drove so I had to. After I learned to write, I was her secretary too. One day we did the washing in the morning then went south of Maynard to a home where a girl about 19 or 20 years old had TB. She was very weak and stayed in bed all the time. I played on the guitar and sang all the songs I knew. She would say 'Play some more'. She accepted the Lord as her Saviour, and was so happy she was to go to Heaven with the Lord."

"Another time we came to a poor family where one boy had died of TB and a teenage girl was sick in bed. A younger girl laid outside in the shade of a blanket hanging on a clothesline. There were no trees around. Mother read from the Bible and prayed. I had my guitar along (which I had paid for myself by helping ladies in threshing time and sewing. I got fifty cents a day. Many times I worked till 1:00 in the morning and too tired to sleep). I sang and played songs. The sick girl said, 'Play and sing some more'. I did. The mother was bound that we should have something to eat before we started out. She went out and got a few stalks of rhubarb and cooked. So we had that with some bread and butter and water. We heard afterwards the sick girl was so happy in Jesus when she passed away. Sometimes Mrs. Martin Dahleen would come driving in a buggy with four wheels and a little old blue horse. She would bring her little baby boy, Stanley, with her and leave him with me to take care of while she and mother went visiting. I was glad he would sleep most of the time."

For three months I worked at a dress making shop in Granite Falls. Here I learned to cut cloth by chart. I got the lessons free by sewing for them. I made very good button holes. It was hard to do this and sit still all day. The first week I got so tired. I had an attic room where I worked for room and board at the Frank E. Nelson home. Once in a while

Mrs. Nelson would ask me for a meal at their table. I had no place to cook for myself. But I learned how to make patterns and later had the privilege of sewing a nice dress for Mrs. G. R. Anderson, the preacher's wife and it fit so well. Once I sewed three dresses, two for the two oldest girls and one for the mother in John C. Nelson's home. I stayed there the whole week. I went with them after church and came back the next Sunday. I got fifty cents a day. That Thursday I went along with them to the ladies meeting at the Albert Tack home. I remember how good was their homemade bread. John C. Nelson's was the first farm west of Charley Normans."

"One time when I was 17 years old I was visiting at the home of John and Mary Olsons about four miles northeast of Grove City. One day I was alone with God in their back woods. I was so convicted of my sinfulness. I really came to the point and gave myself to the Lord. I prayed and cried, 'God take me as I am', and God really spoke peace in my heart and said, 'Go in peace'. I will never forget that day. It was a wonderful conversation."

"I wrote home to my parents that it was not Grandpa that saved me! He used to preach to the boys! They resented it and would run away! I really believed and knew I was saved from sin. I was so happy in Jesus."

"After I was converted, I was baptized by Rev. G. R. Anderson. Four blankets were hung in the trees by the Minnesota River as a dressing room for the ladies. Alma Dahleen and her cousin Hannah and an older couple were baptized too. It was a nice Sunday afternoon."

"Soon after the preacher asked me if I would teach a Sunday School class of seven 7 year old girls. I said, 'I can't do that. I haven't got the education'. He said, 'Yes, you can – you have the Bible and I will get some helps for you and you can pray'. So I said, 'I will try'. I found the more I prayed, the easier it went. I really loved those girls and enjoyed to see them get saved too. I had the same class over seven years."

"The first potatoes were planted between the spades of sod. They grew flat like pancakes! But they were very good. The soil was rich and there were no weeds. Mother had two nice grey colored chickens. The hen had some extra feathers on top of her head that looked like a hat. The rooster had a big comb. She got them from her parents, Nels Jensens, who stayed in Grove City. We kept this kind of chickens for many years."

"Brother Joseph was janitor in church when there were chairs instead of pews. What a job it was to sweep the floor and dust all the chairs, and clean all the glass chimneys for all the kerosene lamps. He got \$15.00 a month for this. 'How much did you get?' 'Oh, I didn't get anything for that!'"

"One year we planted Box-elder trees along the east side of the church property. One of them was mine. It might still be there. It made shade Sunday mornings for the horses and buggies and later for the automobiles. In the winter time the horses were put in the barn where each family that wanted one had a stall where they could feed and rest their horses. The minister had another barn where he kept his horses, one cow and chickens. Willie Olson used to have the nicest horses! It was really nice property there. We used to have such good times singing in the church choir and other social activities. It looked so good to see folks come walking to church in the evenings carrying their lanterns. Everybody used to come to church in those days. There was no other place to go on Sundays."

When the automobiles began to come, the old church barn was neglected and finally taken down. Everything got different when the cars came and the attendance became less and less.

A trip to Rochester Mayo Clinic

Lack of a variety of food took its toll on growing children. Annie was to be no exception. Anemia of the blood was causing weakness and constant fatigue. Often she felt embarrassed by a lack of ability to work and take care of her five smaller brothers. Father had passed away.

Henry had left home to work in St. Paul. Alfred took over most of the farm work. "I must go to the Mayo Clinic for a complete checkup." But Alfred said there was no money. More weeks went by and finally Alfred consented to sell one calf that brought \$20.00. How could this buy a ticket to Rochester and pay for an operation too!

But this prairie girl was determined it was the Lord's will for her to go and that He would supply her needs. She took the train to Minneapolis where she encountered crowds of people going and coming from the State Fair. The trains were very crowded and in transferring from Minneapolis to Rochester, she found every train car was also full. A conductor told her there was room in special passenger cars added to a freight train. These went only part way and then she was told to ride in the caboose of the freight train. Here she was, a young girl from the prairie, late at night, alone in a freight train caboose with the brakeman and two other men who sat together talking and paying no attention to her.

It was after midnight when the train stopped in Rochester and no lights anywhere. The depot was closed and locked. She stood alone, barely able to carry her suitcase, on the depot platform in the darkness of a big strange city.

"Where are you going?" said one of the men.

"Mayo Hospital."

"Have you a place to stay tonight?"

"No."

"Follow us – we will take you to a hotel."

They carried her suitcase and after passing high buildings they came to a hotel. The man wrapped long and loud. Finally someone opened the door.

"Have you a room for this lady?"

"No. Every room is taken." And he began to shut the door. Again the men pleaded. "Don't you have one spare bed?"

"I suppose I could fix up a cot in the store room. Sit here on the steps until I call you." The strange men left and refused to take any money for this kindness. They must have been Christian men. So she went into this hotel and found a junky corner with a small bed improvised for her. What a day it had been – the first day of this trip! "Thank you Lord, for taking care of me."

She stayed two weeks in Rochester. While there, she stayed at a home where a man with one arm helped his wife serve meals on a long table to several boarders. One doctor suggested an operation and another thought it not necessary. Finally, at the end of the examination the doctor said, "All you need is blood – yours is almost all water!" As soon as she got the new medicine she felt much better and stronger right away.

"How long do I have to take this?"

"As long as you live", the doctor said. Little did she know she would live another 70 years! Her heart rejoiced in God's answer to her prayer. God heals by using doctors too. "Once God stopped a prairie fire in answer to prayer. This time He stopped her sickness.

"I know I would have died long ago if I had not gone to Rochester."

"How did you pay your bill?"

"I don't know, but it was paid!" Undoubtedly others helped her, but let us thank the Mayo Hospital too for their work for those unable to pay. The Lord had rewarded her faith.

Returning by train by way of St. Paul, she visited her brother, Henry Johnson. Arriving quite unexpectedly she asked, "Can I stay here and visit awhile?"

"Yes, but we are looking for the stork! Can my little boy sleep with you till morning? I can't have him in the bedroom now."

The next day Clement Johnson was introduced to this world! Soon after she called a taxi to take her to the railroad depot. This cost a dollar, but it was a good buggy and two horses, much better than John Knapp's old horse and buggy with broken floor boards. This was a pleasant visit of three weeks in the big city of St. Paul. The ride home on the Milwaukee train was a much happier and pleasant experience. The Lord had been so good to her. Once again she felt strong and healthy. She was almost a mother to five smaller brothers. In later years these boys greatly appreciated this.

Now, 70 years later, she is very much alive and still taking her medicine, but all her brothers have long since passed away. Certainly God is in Heaven, "designs the ages" and calls His own Home one by one.

Henry left the farm when he was 17 years old and went to St. Paul and became a foreman in the St. Paul Hoist and Derrick Co. He was married to Huldah Olander from Willmar. They had three children, Clement, Eugene and a daughter. Henry died September 6, 1947.

Alfred stayed on the farm and built a house near the road for grandma until she came up to Nelsons in 1933. Four years later she died at 91 years of age. Alfred died suddenly of a heart attack on October 12, 1949.

Joseph was the Printer in the family. He worked in Willmar for awhile where he met and married "Aunt Nettie". They have two sons, Theodore, a minister, and Kenneth, a doctor. Joseph died February 17, 1956.

Edward went to California where he received a university education and became a dentist. He died suddenly of heart attack on April 7, 1927.*

**Edward graduated from Northwestern University as a doctor (M.D.), not a dentist. (Reference: Dr. Kenneth J. Johnson, 2003)*

Alexander, "AB", became a surveying engineer with the Illinois Pipe Line Co. He did much work in Wyoming and later became an official with offices in Findlay, Ohio. He passed away in Florida, November 26, 1956.

Elmer went to St. Paul and worked with his oldest brother Henry for a few years. Then left for Seminary training in Louisville, Kentucky. His ministry seemed to have been cut off as he died on March 8, 1940 of an earlier injury which caused a tumor on the head. His wife, Theresa, lives in Rome, Georgia near her son Donald. Lee, the oldest son is in California and Roger is a missionary in the Philippine Islands.