

**MAYORS OF
JAMESTOWN OF
SWEDISH DESCENT**

**16 APRIL 1988
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INTRODUCTION

To almost everyone, a mention of the word Jamestown brings to mind an association with Swedish citizenry, and, with the possible exception of the Italians, the greatest influx of immigrants to Jamestown since its founding, have come from Sweden.

Since the arrival of the first Swedes in Jamestown – almost 140 years ago – the Swedes have constituted a valuable addition to the community and to the local area. Among their many contributions can be numbered the all too numerous Jamestown Swedes who have held public office and joined the professional ranks.

Prominent among the many Jamestown Swedes to hold public office are those who have held the office of mayor of the City of Jamestown.

J. EMIL JOHNSON

Jamestown's first Swedish mayor, J. Emil Johnson, was born May 30, 1860 in the Swedish province of Smaland. As in the case of the countless Swedish families of the time, J. Emil's father, Johan Gustaf Johnson, left his wife and three children behind when he came to Jamestown from Sweden in 1868. In May, 1870, when J. Emil was ten years old, Mr. Johnson sent for his family to join him in Jamestown.

For their first three years in Jamestown, the family lived on a farm near Busti. Much of that time young Emil worked from dawn to late at night as a hired hand for neighboring

farmers. In the winter months when chores were fewer, he attended the Busti school whenever possible.

When J. Emil was 13, his family moved to Jamestown, where his father had built a house on Baker Street. For the next two years, J. Emil was apprenticed to a hatmaker. At 15 he became an apprentice tailor and at 18 he went to Bradford, Pa., to ply his trade in the environment of the booming young oil industry.

Returning from Bradford in 1883, J. Emil's skills as a craftsman, together with his attractive personality made him a popular figure whose views were widely respected. Three years later, he and a partner, Otto W. Wiquist, opened a merchant tailoring establishment in Brooklyn Square.

According to historians, the tailor shops of that era – and for many years thereafter – were forums for opinion on every conceivable question. It was here, according to historical accounts, that Johnson developed his strong views on municipal ownership of public utilities and on other important local issues of the time.

Typical of the majority of Swedish immigrants, J. Emil was a deeply religious man. In 1883, he joined the Swedish Mission Church, where he became a member of the church choir, actively served the church as a trustee, as a deacon, as a member of its Brotherhood and Sick Benefit Society, and, in his last several years, as president of the congregation.

A devoted church and family man, J. Emil still found time for active participation in the community's social and fraternal life. He was a member of the Swedish Brotherhood of Jamestown, the Swedish Hundred Members Society, The Knights of Pythias, Woodmen of the World, Order of the Golden Seal, the Maccabees, the Jamestown Legion, the Odd Fellows and the Fraternal Mystic Circle. Inevitably he was pressured to seek public office and, in the spring of 1894, he was elected alderman. Reelected to that office in 1896 and in 1898, he was nominated Republican candidate for mayor in March 1900. Although the other candidates for the GOP nomination attempted to make an issue of Johnson's lowly immigrant origin, his lack of schooling and his business experience, he won the election handily.

The caucus turnout was the largest in Jamestown's history up to that time: of 4239 Republican ballots cast, Johnson's total was 2169.

Commenting on the result, the Jamestown Journal observed that "Jamestown's future is not helped by attempts to draw class and race distinctions.....The choice of the Republican voters having been Mr. Johnson, the Journal cheerfully accepts the issue and expects he will prove a worthy mayor...His election is a foregone conclusion. . ."

Needless to say, Johnson won the election and became Jamestown's first Swedish Mayor.

In 1902, Johnson was reelected as the choice of both the Republican and Democratic parties, and in 1904 he won another two-year term without serious opposition from any quarter.

Thirteen days after leaving office, in April of 1906, J. Emil Johnson died at the age of 45.

Among the achievements of Mayor Johnson's administration were the paving of many of Jamestown's streets, the installation of a sewer system, the erection of a new City Hall, the acquisition by the City of the local water plant, and laying the groundwork for City ownership of an electric plant.

SAMUEL A. CARLSON

Without a doubt, one of the best known Jamestown Swedes to hold public office was Samuel A. Carlson who served the City as Mayor for twenty-six years. Mayor Carlson was born in Jamestown in 1868 to parents who had come from Sweden only the year before. In Jamestown he began work in the worsted mills while still a child, struggled to obtain an education, and managed to get through a partial college education at Allegheny College in Meadville, while working at the same time in Meadville's local furniture factory. Upon returning to Jamestown, Carlson resumed work in the furniture industry and for a time was part owner of a small factory. Realizing the importance of keeping himself intellectually alert, he read, thought, and spoke on serious subjects. At the age of 26, he was elected to the city council.

Samuel A. Carlson was first elected Mayor of Jamestown in 1908 on a platform calling for extension of the public power and water utilities, a publicly-owned hospital, public market, parks, playgrounds, non-partisan local elections, and a new city charter. Every one of these proposals was eventually approved under his able leadership.

Carlson's civic-minded interest and the driving enthusiasm with which he devoted himself to the betterment of Jamestown gained him national reputation. His most noteworthy accomplishment was to establish Jamestown as the city which makes its own electric power. Under his leadership the city bought a competitor power company and expanded its facilities to a point where it could become a major supplier of power to the local area.

Mayor Carlson instituted the system of non-partisan elections and was noted for non-partisan appointments. He was able to induce the most able and successful men in the city to serve on the Board of Public Utilities, the Health and Hospital Board and other City commissions, giving their time generously without compensation to the betterment of Jamestown. Because he was a straightforward, honest, progressive man, the quality of the public servants as a whole was elected.

After a record of twelve terms as Mayor, Samuel Carlson retired in 1938 and was given the title of Mayor Emeritus. He continued to serve on the Board of Public Utilities and attend city council meetings. Samuel A. Carlson died on May 14, 1962, at the age of 92.

LARS A. LARSON

Lars A. Larson, affectionately known as "Old Lars" was elected as mayor of Jamestown on November 8, 1927 at the ripe old age of 69. His election as mayor represented the first successful challenge of Mayor Carlson at the polls since his initial triumph in 1908 and

climaxed a vigorous campaign by the Republican Party organization to nullify the 1923 City Charter sponsored by Sam Carlson which provided for non-partisan election of top city officials.

Historians have since characterized the election of "Old Lars" as a personal tribute to a highly respected furniture manufacturer and devoted churchman who had recently retired as an officer of Nelson and Company which specialized in manufacturing extension tables at its Jamestown plant located on Steele Street.

Normally a quiet, soft-spoken man, Lars Larson is today chiefly remembered for an historic explosion of laughter he innocently touched off in the council chamber of the old City Hall at his inauguration ceremony on New Year's Day, 1928. According to contemporary accounts, "Old Lars" had assigned the task of writing his inaugural address to several assistants who composed an oratorical message that appealed to "Old Lars" though it was quite unsuited to his manner and temperament. After a few unremarkable introductory paragraphs, "Old Lars" became visibly moved by the rising cadence and volume of his own voice. Suddenly the normally stolid "Old Lars" halted, swept the crowded chamber with a glance and delivered a thunderous blow to the lectern with a huge clenched fist. "That," he shouted, "I believe myself!"

After two uneventful years in office, Lars Larson retired from public life when Sam Carlson defeated him in the mayoral race in November 1929. "Old Lars" died on April 5, 1931.

OTHER SWEDISH MAYORS

Among Jamestown's other Swedish mayors can be counted HARRY C. ERICKSON who was one of the two final challengers of Sam Carlson for the office of mayor of Jamestown and one of only three men who challenged Sam Carlson in November 1937 in a close, three-way contest with mayor Carlson and former Mayor Leon F. Roberts.

SAMUEL A. STROTH, the son of Swedish immigrants, served as Jamestown's mayor for 12 years during the 1940's and early 1950's.

Other Swedish mayors were Carl F. Sanford, Charles B. Magnusson, Sr. and Charles Magnuson, Jr., the only father and son to both serve as mayor, Stanley N. Lundine, and Jamestown's present mayor, Steven B. Carlson, who has served as mayor since 1976.

STANLEY N. LUNDINE

Perhaps the most distinguished individual of Swedish heritage to hold public office is Stanley N. Lundine, who is currently the Lieutenant Governor of the State of New York and was formerly a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Lundine was elected to Congress at a special election in March 1976, which had been called to fill the unexpired term of Representative James Hastings, who had resigned.

Lundine was Mayor of Jamestown at the time, and had been re-elected for a fourth two-year term only four months earlier.

Congressman Lundine was re-elected to Congress in 1978, 1980, 1982, and 1984. While still a freshman in Congress he introduced and later won approval of legislation providing federal assistance for labor-management committees aimed at improving productivity and the quality of working life. He was subsequently named to the Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs Committee and House Select Committee on Aging. Chosen by his New York delegation colleagues as a member of the steering committee of the Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition, Lundine became co-chairman of the coalition's task force on Regional Economic and Community Development.

In 1986, Stanley Lundine left Congress to run as lieutenant governor of New York. Needless to say, Lundine was elected lieutenant governor and currently occupies that position.

CONCLUSION

Hundreds of Jamestown Swedes have been elected to positions ranging from justice of the peace to city councilman, town and county supervisor and legislator, coroner, sheriff, county clerk, district attorney, judgeships and the New York State Legislature. Even more have served with distinction in appointive posts at all levels of local, county, state and federal government; they abound in every sector of the civil service and in every profession, and they represent the outstanding heritage which we of Jamestown are fortunate to share.