

My grandfather, Lars Erickson, came to America as a seventeen year old in 1882. He left Kristiana, now Oslo, and came to Michigan in the company of two young Norwegians who became his good friends. All of them spent their youthful working years in the white pine woods, cutting timber, working on the railroad, or working in sawmills. Lars eventually settled on the farm where we live and spent the rest of his life here, farming for the most part, but also running a threshing machine, baling hay, and working in the woods.

In 1927, after forty-five years in Michigan, Lars made a visit back to his home in Sweden. He didn't tell his family there that he was coming, so when this stranger arrived at their door that spring day, they had no idea who he was. Except for his brother Emil's daughter Frida, that is, who looked at him and said: "Det är farbror Lars från Amerika."

Lars stayed at the home of his brother, Emil, Emil's other daughter, Anna, and Anna's husband, Fritz. Lars was homesick for his American family, but he also became very attached to his nieces and nephews in Sweden and Norway. On his way back home to America, he wrote to Anna from the steamship *Gripsholm*. When I was living in Sweden in 1971, Anna gave me the letters she had saved for more than forty years. His letters gave me some treasured insight into the grandfather who died years before I was born. I translated the letters into English as a gift for my father and other family members. Following are some excerpts from the letters Lars wrote on the voyage from Gothenburg to New York.

*I will try to tell you how this journey is going. We left Göteborg the 29th, at 12 o'clock in the midst of a crowd of people who stood on the dock and fluttered their handkerchiefs into rags when we sailed. In the North Sea, it began to blow, and now the sea is rolling tolerably well. Several of these young Swedes are beginning to be white around the gills. I don't think it will be long before they begin to go, or rather to crawl, to their beds. The North Sea is white now and the ship is rocking beautifully. There was one young fellow who went over to the side of the boat to take a look, but he lost his dinner instead. Now, it is beginning to be fun. The Västerbottning was on the ship. He had searched the whole boat for me. He was referring to a neighbor with whom he had made the trip to*

Sweden. He and his companion had parted in Gothenburg, each to travel alone to visit their respective relatives. They had not seen each other since the trip from America to Sweden, but now Lars knew that Fred had made it to the ship.

*Thursday, June 30th. Up at 6 a.m. The sea is as clear as a mirror, not the least bit of wind. Big fish are jumping out of the water around the ship. Otherwise, everything is the same. I have given up hope of finding anything that is fun. We have been on this journey four days and haven't come farther than Scotland's coast. Have seen land the whole afternoon, but now a thick fog has rolled in.*

*Friday, July 1. One more day. We nearly ran aground on a rock near Scotland's shore. We were so near the rock that we could see it through the fog, but they were able to turn in time, so everything was all right.*

*Sunday, July 3. Change in the weather. A cold wind is blowing from the northwest. The seas are high and the boat is rocking nicely. Looks as if I can do as I please; there aren't many to see on deck today excepts some old "hardtacks," if you know what that means. Yes, some dumb asses like me. The Västerbottning is lying in his bed. I have been down there and got him up a couple of times, but he goes right back again. Now, he can lie there as long as he wants to.*

*Tuesday, July 5. Up at 5 o'clock. Only five or six people on deck. The fog was as thick as it could be. We were in between several icebergs for a while, and they had to back out so they could go past them. Now they are going as slowly as they can and still maintain their course. Now we are near the Newfoundland bank, and there is always ice and fog.*

*Dear Anna, I have so much to write about to you, but it's best that I stop now, for I don't think you can read much of this. I am so poor at penmanship, and the ship is shaking so badly that it is almost impossible to write. I wonder if Frida has her barn finished yet. Just so she doesn't go and work too hard now. And you be careful and not work too hard when you begin haying.*

*We have one more day until we reach land. I hope you have written as quickly as I have and that I have a letter when I get home. Greet everybody.*

*Your old uncle.*

The correspondence between Lars and his Swedish family did continue faithfully until his death two and a half years later. I only wish

our family on this side of the Atlantic had kept the letters that came from Sweden and Norway. I will always be grateful that Anna had kept my grandfather's letters and that she and Fritz gave them to me.