

Carl Gustav Hanner (1840-1921)

Carl Gustav Hanner was born in Kungsholmen Parish, Stockholm, Sweden on August 8, 1840. His mother, Maria Lilja, was an unmarried, twenty-two year old maidservant and no name of a father was ever listed in records. When Carl was about three months old, he was admitted to the Public Orphanage in Stockholm. His fees had been paid by an unknown person. On January 8, 1841 he was given to the care of the wife of Jan Janson but by age five, he was back in the orphanage. On March 3, 1845 he was then sent to Anders Petter Nilsson where he stayed until he was fourteen at which time he probably struck out on his own.

Carl's birth surname was Andersson but he changed it to Hanner to distinguish himself from the many Andersson's living around him after he had immigrated to the United States. He took the last name Hanner from the region of Sweden where he had lived. Hannas Parish was in the northern part of Kalmar County, Sweden. Scandinavians in general used the patronymic naming system, which meant that the first name of the father was used in the child's last name, adding the suffix -sson for a son or -dotter for a daughter. A man, Johan, would have a son Karl, whose name would be Karl Johansson. If Johan then had a daughter Hulda, her name would become Hulda Johandotter.

To further complicate things, there were several other naming traditions in Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries as well. Children were sometimes named after their father's occupation. If Johan was a proud town clerk, his children might bear the name Clerksson or Clerksdotter. There were also last names based upon personal characteristics such as Lars Fager (Beautiful), and last names based on geographic locations such as what Carl chose to do by taking a last name after the town of Hannas Parish where he lived. These naming traditions could be employed by children in the same family so each child in the same family might have a different last name. These practices were completely abandoned in 1901 with the Names Adoption Act, which required everyone to adopt permanent surnames which would be passed on to successive generations.

On April 17, 1869 Carl married Carolina Claesdotter in Neustadt, Hagerstad in Hannas Parish, Sweden. On May 1, 1869 Carl and Carolina left for the United States from the port of Goteborg on the steamship "Eugenia. After a brief stop in Copenhagen, Denmark they arrived in New York City. They continued their journey west to eventually settle in Altona, Illinois. The Hanners were part of a population movement that saw about 1.4 million Swedes move to the United States between 1846 and 1930. This move was fueled by a rapidly growing population in Sweden combined with a series of crop failures and a shortage of land. Carl and Carolina also lived in Kewanee, Illinois before they settled permanently in Bloomington in 1873.

Carl and Carolina had six children: Hulda Ofilia, Karl Johan, Karolina Matilda, a set of twins who died in infancy, and Gustaf Albert who died at the age of four. Of their six children, three survived to adulthood.

Around 1872 the Swedish people began to settle in Bloomington. Like most Swedish immigrants who spoke little or no English when they came to this country, Carl's job choices were limited. Besides coal mining, other jobs Swedish immigrants could obtain were as farm laborers, construction workers, factory workers, or railroad workers. Carl would spend his career as a coal miner working for the McLean County Coal Company.

During much of this local coal industry's life, the workers were mainly of Polish, Swedish and German descent.

In large measure the Civil War created the need for coal mines in places such as Bloomington. The disruption of rail service and the closing off of usual sources of coal led many communities in the 1860s to look for coal at home and Bloomington was no different. Bloomington received much of its coal by rail from the cities of Peoria, LaSalle, and Duquoin which made coal more expensive. Attempting to find coal was not an easy task in this area. Early drillings hit an underground stream which was bad for mining but good for a growing community with no reliable source for water. When veins of coal were finally found in 1867 they were quite deep for the technology of the day, over 500 feet in some places. However several wealthy Bloomington residents including the Stevenson brothers, James B., William and Adlai Ewing, were persistent in their efforts to find a source of coal for the area and founded the McLean County Coal Company in September of 1867 which continued operating until about 1927. At its height, coal mining in Bloomington was second only to the Chicago and Alton railroad shops in economic importance.

There were also two or three other coal mines in McLean County but the one in Bloomington was the most productive and often referred to simply as "the mine." The mine's entrance was located on Bloomington's West Side, north of Washington Street and just west of the Chicago & Alton Railroad mainline. The shafts ran to the northwest-almost to today's Mitsubishi Automotive Plant.

Mining of course was a hard and dangerous occupation and owners like the Stevenson's were constantly recruiting new workers. Miners not only had to worry about cave-ins, mine fires, or other accidents, but they also had to worry about "black damp." Black damp or choke damp was where carbon dioxide and nitrogen slowly replaced oxygen in the mine. It was not combustible or poisonous, but a high enough level could lead to suffocation.

Strikes were also another reason for the high demand for new workers. Miners often went on strike because of decreases in wages, unfair management, unsafe working conditions, or protesting their less fortunate comrades in other parts of the country. The McLean County Coal Company was not immune from strikes either. The earliest strike occurred in 1870 when the McLean County Coal Company reduced the price per ton of coal paid to the miners. In 1894 miners ceased working not because of the management of the mines or wages paid, rather "in sympathy for their less fortunate comrades in other parts of the country."¹ These strikes, especially longer ones during the cold months, could often produce "coal famines."

Strikes like these were one of the reasons why many Swedes, like Carl, were brought to Bloomington by the owners of the McLean County Coal Company. During one such strike in 1872, James Stevenson was said to have gone to the towns of Kewanee and Galva and hired a number of Swedish coal miners as strike-breakers. About 30 Swedish families and almost as many single men came to Bloomington in August of 1872. The McLean County Coal Company paid their transportation and provided homes and work for these people.²

¹ "Miners on Strike." *The Daily Bulletin*, May 4, 1894

² Jubilee Album of the 40th Anniversary Festival of the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bloomington. McLean County Historical Society Archives.

Miners often got paid for what they produced rather than a set wage and seldom worked year round. When the mine opened, miners made \$1.50 per ton of coal they mined and some miners would make up to \$4.00 a day (about \$58.00 today). At this rate, some of them could make as much as \$150 a month (which would be about \$2,169.00 today). The price gradually dropped to men making an average of \$1.50 to \$2.00 a day. During the summer, most miners were forced to find other kinds of labor to pay the bills. When they were working in the mines, it was usually an eight hour day, six or seven days a week with virtually no holidays. When fully employed miners made decent wages but a shutdown by owners meant no pay until they went back to work. They would also sometimes have to work a whole month before getting their first pay.

Accidents also meant time off work without pay. This meant not only personal accidents but also shutdowns caused by accidents in the mine such as the mine fire which occurred in 1907. This fire, located in the second vein mine shaft, was caused by the torches on some miners' caps coming in contact with the timbers which supported the mine shaft. The fire lasted for a few days and in order to smother the fire, mine owners ordered those portions of the mine on fire to be sealed with the hope that suffocating the fire would cause it to go out. This was a common practice in coal mines when a fire broke out. Though not many men died in the local mines, miners in this area were often reminded of the dangers of their chosen occupation by accidents such as the Cherry Mine Disaster on November 13, 1909. The accident at the Cherry Mine was caused by a cart of hay for the mules in the mine being placed too close to one of the open flame torches. This tragedy claimed nearly 300 lives and dominated newspaper headlines across the country for weeks. People from throughout McLean County, including local miners, sent aid and donations to help the families of the miners who perished in this terrible accident.

Most of the Swedes who worked for the McLean County Coal Company lived in a section of town called "Stevensonville." For most of his life, Carl and his family lived at various address in this area of town located on the west side of Bloomington. The residence they lived at the longest was in Stevensonville at 1303 W. Olive Street. This area of about 250 homes was created by the same members of the Stevenson family who owned the McLean County Coal Company. Workers could rent or buy modest homes, often only three or four rooms in each house. It was a great opportunity for them to own their homes. Also, many of the Swedes in this part of town could speak little to no English. Mr. Erickson, the Swedish grocer, helped the Hanners and other Swedes by having his wagon go downtown and pick up items for those who did not speak English. Eventually, Stevensonville was incorporated into the city of Bloomington in 1883.

Carl and his family also belonged to the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is now known as St. John's Lutheran Church. The church was founded in 1872 by a group of Swedes from Kewanee, Illinois. Carl and his family joined the church on March 28, 1875 and were life-long members. The church was first located at the Flechman School House on Roosevelt Street on Bloomington's west side. Eventually the church would grow so much that it would be relocated to its present location on the east side of Bloomington at Emerson Street and Towanda Avenue in 1959. Church services continued to be held in the Swedish language until about 1923. Carl and his family were very active in the church. Carl was a deacon for the church from 1885 to 1888 and one of the church's trustees in 1887. Carl also taught Sunday school there for a number of years.

One event of interest which occurred during Carl's life was a huge, multi-day gathering of Swedish societies from around the country to honor Swedish inventor John Ericsson. Many notable speakers came to Bloomington to discuss both Ericsson and other issues of importance to those of Swedish heritage. Ericsson, among his many other achievements, designed the *U.S.S. Monitor* during the U.S. Civil War. The *U.S.S. Monitor* was a revolutionary innovation in naval technology in that it was a ship with full iron construction and a rotating gun turret. The naval engagement between it and the other ironclad, the *C.S.S. Virginia* (also known as the *U.S.S. Merrimack*) is credited by some as one of the turning points of the Civil War.

Carl retired from a long and hard life as a coal miner in 1915. The very next year, on July 8, 1916, his wife Caroline died at their home on Olive Street following a short illness of double pneumonia. She had breathing troubles for sometime before this having suffered from chronic bronchitis. Carl continued to live at their home on Olive Street with their daughter Hulda until his own death on February 19, 1921 from organic heart disease. He was eighty-one years old at the time. He was buried next to his wife in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

By: Candace Summers, 2008