

Jonas Olof Larsson

Written by an unknown child or grand-child of Christina Larson Palmer, 1981

Jonas Olof Larsson was born in the little village of Yttre, in Borgsjö, Sweden. Borgsjö is located about fifty or sixty miles from the Gulf of Bothnia which separates Sweden from Finland. He was born 12 January 1834, the eldest child and only son of Lars Jonsson and Christina Olofsson. Little is known of his boyhood except that he early revealed an unusual interest and skill in carpentry. He loved working with wood and he enjoyed building. He watched the builders of ships and became fascinated with their work. He apprenticed as a ship builder and became very accomplished in his chosen profession.

Jonas was a hard working, sober young man; about five feet ten inches in height, of medium build, but strong, vigorous and wiry. His brown hair was thick and wavy and his keen blue eyes were friendly. In fact his whole countenance was frank, honest and comely. He enjoyed a close and loving family relationship in the strictly religious but happy home of his parents and two younger sisters. His parents were strong Lutherans and taught their children to love God and deal honestly with their fellow men; two character traits that marked Jonas throughout all his life. Another strong trait acquired early in life was that of thrift. As a result of his skill and dependability Jonas earned a good wage, an allotted portion of which was saved from each paycheck.

On the 21st of May 1861, at the age of twenty-seven, Jonas married his sweetheart, his dearly beloved Margretha. Margretha Pehrsson and her family were friends and neighbors of the Larssons. At the time of their marriage Margretha was twenty-two and a lovely example of Nordic beauty. She was tall and slender with blond hair and eyes as blue as a summer sky. She had an even tempered, thoughtful, tender disposition. She was born 17 June 1839 in Yttre, Borgsjö, Sweden, the eldest of the five children of Per Olofsson and Helena Olofsson.

The union of Jonas and Margretha was happy and fruitful. Within eleven months they became the proud parents of a strong healthy baby girl whom they named Christina in honor of her grandmother Larsson. Christina looked like her father and was a good natured child. Two and a half years after Christina's birth the family was blessed with a son. He arrived on the 25th of October 1864 and was named Pehr Johan. Pehr was not a robust child. He had inherited not only his mother's blond good looks but also her delicate constitution.

No one knows when Jonas and Margretha first dreamed of emigrating to America – that golden land of opportunity. Perhaps they had talked and planned of this move for many years. However the case may be, they had saved enough money by the time Pehr was nearly two years of age to buy their passage on a large ocean liner. They also had money saved to establish themselves in a new country. They immigrated 19 May 1866.

The ocean liners in 1866 were partly steam driven and partly wind driven. The fastest transatlantic liners could make the trip from Liverpool, England to New York Harbor in two weeks. Bad weather lengthened this time considerably. Unfortunately the voyage of the Larsson family was long and stormy. Jonas and Christina soon found their sea legs but Pehr and his mother were deathly ill. For many days and nights Jonas nursed them tenderly. Gradually Margretha became strong enough to help care for her small son but her lungs had been affected and she suffered with lung trouble all the rest of her life. The

ship's doctor told the anxious parents that their baby would die before they reached land and would have to be buried at sea. He tried to prepare them for what he thought was inevitable. However, through the intervention of the Lord, in answer to the humble, earnest prayers of his parents, Pehr Johan did survive the journey. How thankful they were when they first sighted land. They were not welcomed by the Statue of Liberty for that famous landmark had not yet been erected, but just to set foot on the good earth after the long, anxious weeks on board ship was cause for heartfelt tears of joy. The Jonas Olof Larsson family landed at New York sometime in the late spring of 1866 – a little more than a one year after the end of the Civil War and the assassination of that great and good man, Abraham Lincoln.

After disembarking the family still had many miles to travel over land. This was an arduous trip in those days by rail, steamer and stage coach but despite the discomforts they must have been awed by the magnificent unspoiled beauty of this vast new land. Finally they reached their destination – Andover, Illinois. Here the family soon found congenial friends and plenty of work for Jonas to do. They had lived in Andover just a few months when they heard of a group of Swedish immigrants who were planning to take up homesteads in Minnesota the following spring. Jonas and Margretha were eager to take advantage of this opportunity to gain a farm and so joined the group. This settlement was established in 1867 in Isanti, Isanti County, Minnesota. Isanti is situated about twelve miles from the larger town of Cambridge, and about thirty-five miles north of the city of St Paul, Minnesota.

Since Minnesota was the home of the Larsson family for the next fourteen years it may be well to consider somewhat of the history of this state. In 1803 President Jefferson purchased the huge Louisiana Territory from France for \$15,000,000. Thus at one stroke of the pen and without bloodshed the territory of the United States was more than doubled. Minnesota was the fifth state carved out of Jefferson's great land purchase and was admitted to the Union in 1858, without slavery.

Like other western states, Minnesota was first opened by the hunter and trapper who then gave way to the farmer and townsman. These hardy, intrepid frontiersmen had to be a very special breed to combat the elements, loneliness, hunger and the many other privations and dangers of opening up this vast new territory. Maintaining a workable peace with the Indian was no easy task. Frederick Merk, in his history of the westward movement gives us the following insight into the conditions which existed as late as 1862.

“With the opening of the Civil War sporadic Indian hostilities tormented the trans-Mississippi West. They began with a revolt of the Minnesota Sioux. The tribal reservation, dating from the treaty of Travers des Sioux (1851), gave no easy access to good hunting grounds, and those Indians were often in a state of starvation. In the summer of 1862 the discontented in the tribe revolted and for two weeks ravaged south western Minnesota with raids that cost 450 lives. Especially ferocious was the New Ulm massacre. In terms of casualties the war was one of the costliest uprisings in American history. It horrified the nation and federal troops were needed to restore peace.”

This terrible uprising took place five years before the Larssons and their accompanying Swedish immigrants moved to Minnesota but they would certainly have heard of it and known that this was still a real danger. It needed men and women of courage, industry, thrift, independence, inventiveness, self-confidence, honesty and perhaps a little luck to succeed as pioneering homesteaders. All of these characteristics Jonas and Margretha had to a marked degree. They even had a little luck for in the years following the Civil War the Northern State entered a period of unprecedented prosperity, wages were

high and farm produce was disposed of at very favourable prices. This was an auspicious time for the establishment of a new community.

Homesteading

The Larsson homestead was a beautiful 160 acres of timber and fertile farming land. It was located about three and a half miles north east of Isanti. There was a lovely lake on the property which was suitable for boating and fishing. Wild blueberries, huckleberries, cranberries and other small fruits were plentiful and made excellent pies, preserves and desserts. It was an idyllic spot to build a home and raise a family. The hearts of Jonas and Margretha were full of joy and thanksgiving as they walked over their land and planned where to build the homestead buildings. It didn't take Jonas long to build a small house suitable to live in and which could be added on to later. There were also corrals and a barn to build before winter came.

Jonas Larsson took great pride in his building and was known for many miles as the man to get if you wanted a good professional job done. The log houses he built were exceptional and expertly constructed. Each log was cut to fit so exactly that chinking between the logs was unnecessary to keep out wind, dust and cold, He was also an expert tool maker. He had a sea chest which he had made in the old country in which he kept his hand crafted tools. These tools he always kept in repair and made replacements as needed. Another skill which came in handy was that of tailoring. He made his own suits. He loved the land and became a very respected and successful farmer. Soon after the family settled in Isanti they Anglicised their names. Their surname became Larson. Pehr Johan became John Peter and Margretha was Margaret and her surname was written as Olsen or Olson.

The years in Isanti County brought much rewarding work, life-long friendships, many joys and deep sorrow. It gladdened the hearts of John's parents to see how his health and strength improved as he grew older. Christina, always a sturdy child, blossomed in this natural beautiful environment. The children were taught the value of hard work – they had their special chores to do – but they also had freedom to run and play with each other and their young friends. The attended a village school in Isanti and both were good students. They were encouraged by their parents to excel in school. This was especially true of John for Jonas thought a man needed to be educated in order to take his rightful place as breadwinner, head of a family and worker in the community. In her life story Christina tells us somewhat of those days. She says:

“In those days there were no picture shows, no cars, no airplanes, but we children had great fun anyway, with lots of sports. Once in a while a circus would come into Cambridge. In the wintertime we went sleighing, coasting and skiing, There was a big hill on our land that ran down to a tamarack swamp. The four of us, my brother John, two of our neighbors and I used to get on a coaster and go shooting down this hill. We had lots of fun. When the deep snow would thaw and then freeze it would form a hard crust on the top and we would go skiing all over the country. We often went sleighing in the one-horse open sleigh with bells on the horse. The horse would run as if he was proud of wearing bells. Sometimes I think if I had to choose between the life we had then and the life people have now I would choose the life I had.

“In the summer there were fish in nearly all the lakes around and we would go fishing, swimming and boating. One day my younger brother John and I went out in a boat on Lake Fanny which was fifteen miles long and three miles wide, when a big wind came up and the boat began to rock. I became quite timid so we rowed back which was fortunate for us as the wind became much stronger. We were very

glad when we reached the shore. Wild fruit of many kinds grew plentifully such as blackberries, raspberries, blueberries, grapes, strawberries and cranberries. We never thought of buying cranberries but we boxed them and kept them for winter. There were also hazel and butternuts. One day I was picking blueberries in a thicket and was working around to the other side when I came face to face with a bear who was also picking berries.”

Thus Christina and John grew to maturity knowing the security of loving, God-fearing parents and a well-ordered, comfortable home. They also learned the meaning of death and sorrow. Between the years 1868 and 1881 one daughter and three sons were born into this family but none of the children survived infancy. Ida Matilda, born 15 July 1868, died 23 July 1868. Agust, born 26 August 1870, died 23 July 1878. Teodor, born 11 September 1872, died 27 July 1873 and Silas Eugene born in 1881 lived but a few short hours. Margaret, as noted earlier, was always of a delicate constitution and never recovered from the severe injury to her lungs which she had suffered while crossing the ocean. Unfortunately she was unable to bear the strong, healthy children she and her husband both longed for. All these deaths were heartbreaking, especially that of Agust for both parents had struggled valiantly to safeguard his health throughout the seven years of his life but all to no avail. His death caused each parent great distress but his mother suffered not only emotionally but also physically. There is little doubt that she had tuberculosis of the lungs by this time.

Christina Helena Larsson

The Larson family first came in contact with the Church of Jesus Christ in the autumn of 1876 when Christina was a young woman of 14 years and John a lad of 12. I will let Christina tell this experience in her own words:

“Now I will tell you how I came to hear about the Gospel and join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I had a girl friend, Katie Wickstrom, whose people also came from Sweden. One night while I was visiting with her a knock came at the door. It was a man and he asked if he could stay the night as he was traveling without purse or scrip, since he was a minister from Utah. Mr Wickstrom invited him in. Kate and I talked about him in the other room. He was dressed so nicely and talked so nicely that we wondered how we could have heard such terrible stories about the Mormons.

“After supper the missionary asked if he could have prayer with the family. That prayer affected me and I thought, “A man cannot be mean who can offer a prayer as beautiful as that.” It seemed so sacred. He prayed for the family and was so thankful to the Lord that he had a place to stay. Then he asked Mr Wickstrom if he thought he could get the schoolhouse to hold a meeting in. Missionaries never asked for church houses because they knew they could not get them. Mr Wickstrom was one of the trustees so the meeting was held in the schoolhouse. I stayed over for the meeting. The next day another meeting was held which all of us attended and there were quite a few there. People were very prejudiced in those days and did not know much about the Mormons. I could not make fun of the meeting because it seemed so sacred to me. After the meeting we went back to Wickstrom’s and the missionary stayed there again that night.

“The next day I went home and I told my folks that I had seen something they had heard about but never seen. My father said he would like to talk to a Mormon missionary. I told my father that maybe he could get to see this missionary as he was going over to the neighbor’s and would pass by our place. I said we could easily recognize him as he carried two suitcases and wore a nice overcoat. The next day

Father did see him when he stopped to ask Father if he was on the right road. Father invited him to stay all night with us as he wanted to talk with him and find out more about his people and their beliefs. Father asked him many questions which he answered frankly. The Elder then asked Father if he could hold a meeting in the schoolhouse, but Father told him that he could hold a meeting in our house if he liked, that very night, and that he would go around and invite the neighbors to attend. At this meeting Mother became intensely interested and she and I believed and were baptized the next summer. Our neighbors, the Clements, Mother and I were the only Mormons for miles around. Father never joined the church but he was friendly with the Mormon Elders and always welcomed them to our home. Years later when I came to Utah I met a number of these elders and they returned the hospitality we had given them in the mission field. Neither my father nor my brother John ever joined the Church but they were always friendly and attended meetings.

“When I was nineteen years old an elder by the name of William Moroni Palmer, along with Mr Clements, came to our place. They were on their way to Cambridge to hold a meeting. This was the second time I had seen Elder Palmer who was the mission president at that time. When he came I was picking cranberries. Afterwards he always said he found me in a cranberry patch.

“Father came out and invited the two men to eat supper with us. He also invited President Palmer to stay the night at our house. After supper we went in two buggies to a conference in Cambridge. After the meeting and on the way home some ruffians threw eggs at Elder Palmer and they splattered his overcoat. The next day I cleaned it for him. He often said that was the first thing I cleaned for him but it certainly wasn’t the last.”

The next October Christina decided to join the Clements family in their move to Utah. She wanted to move to Zion to be with the body of the Saints. They joined a company of Saints who had been organized under the leadership of President Palmer. Train travel was difficult in those early days but as Christina said, “It was far better than pulling a handcart.” During the railway journey William Palmer and Christina Larson became well acquainted and fell in love. Shortly after their arrival in Salt Lake he proposed marriage to her as a plural wife. She wanted to marry him but didn’t know whether her father would approve of a polygamous marriage for her so she wrote to her mother and asked her to ask her father if he would give his consent. Jonas Larson’s reply was typical of the man and gives us further insight into his character. We do not know his exact words but according to the story passed down from Christina to her children, he said something like this: “From what I have seen and heard of William Palmer he is a good man. If Christina wants to marry him and this by her own free choice, I have no objections. Now we’re going to sell out here and go to Utah and if Christina has been forced into that marriage I’ll get her out of it if it takes everything I’ve got, but if she has done it of her own free will I will support her in it.” Jonas Larson believed in free agency and he believed in family solidarity.

Christina Larson married William Moroni Palmer as a second wife on 15 December 1881. Jonas, Margaret and their son John moved in 1882 to be near Christina and her husband. They settled in Aurora, Sevier County, Utah.