



LITCHFIELD HISTORY

# *From Sweden to Litchfield*

*A Choose-Your-Own Adventure Story*

# ABOUT YOUR ADVENTURE

You are a young Swedish immigrant arriving in America and headed to Litchfield, Minnesota, to begin a new life.

In this story, you'll be asked to make some of the same choices that other immigrants made.

You can click on the red text, *Go to page* to jump to the next step in your journey or *Take another path* to go back to the beginning.

This is your story. Choose wisely.



You and his sister, Anna Katrina, live in the parish of Bulov, a village just north of Malmo, the largest city in Skåne and the southernmost province in Sweden.

Life is very hard for the landless families in the province. There are severe crop failures, famine, and starvation in Sweden. When you turned eighteen, you took a job as a hired hand on a nearby farm.

It isn't all drudgery, though. Your father taught you how to play the cornet and you often play together at family gatherings.

You bristle at Sweden's mandatory military service and begin to think about emigrating to the United States.



# TVÅ ÅR I AMERIKA.

(1872—1874).

RESESKILDRINGAR

AF

HUGO NISBETH.

STOCKHOLM, 1874.

AFTONBLADETS AKTIEBOLAGS

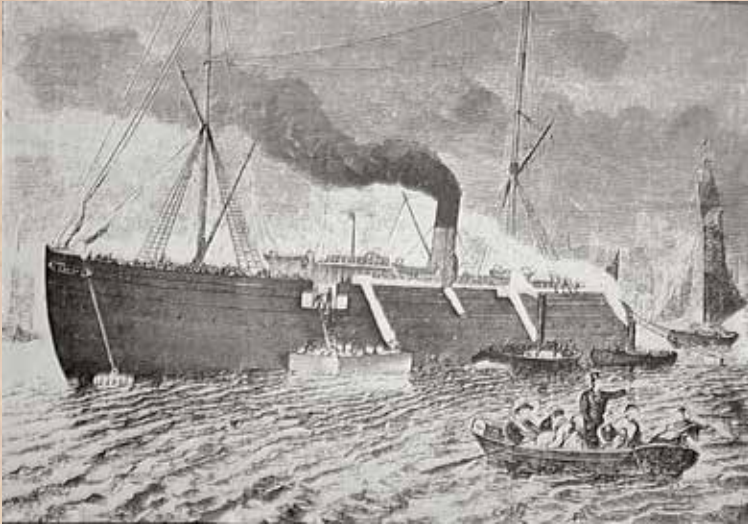
You hear many wonderful things about Minnesota and read a popular book, Hugo Nisbeth's *Two Years in America*. In it, he wrote,

“We left St. Paul and after passing through a pretty countryside arrived in the afternoon at the tiny, two-year-old town of Litchfield. This town has an almost exclusively Swedish population, all in good circumstances. We decided to remain there a few days, in order to visit the neighboring farmers. In a comfortable wagon, we rode the next day into the neighboring country, and everywhere we met honest and faithful Swedes, owners of neat houses and waving fields of grain, happy in their family life, and holding sacred Swedish hospitality.”

One day, Anna Katrina found a small item in the town's newspaper that the Meeker County Bank of Litchfield, Minnesota, offered tickets from Sweden to Litchfield for \$23.00.

Hoping to find a better life, you and your sister decide to leave Sweden and journey to Minnesota, promising to send money home so that your parents can join you.

You travel to Gothenborg, a port city to the south, and board a ship for America. You change ships in Liverpool, Great Britain, then head across the Atlantic. Your voyage takes nine days to reach New York harbor.



Ship Orlando, Gothenborg to Great Britain  
*Library of Congress*





Arrival at Castle Garden  
Library of Congress

On the morning on June 29th, the lookout shouts “land,” and everyone rushes to the deck for their first glimpse of America. At Castle Garden, you are greeted by a Lutheran minister who knew your family back in Bulov. He directs you to the railroad station where you board a train headed to Dubuque, Iowa. From there, a riverboat takes you and your sister to St. Paul, where you catch a train to Litchfield.

Upon arriving at the depot, you are welcomed at the Emigrant House. Opened by the railroad, it is “fitted up with cooking-stoves, washing conveniences, and beds.” Here, newly arriving immigrants are given shelter and the chance to buy food and clothing at cost from the railroad.

Now you must find a job.

A railroad agent says that you should purchase land for a farm. The St. Paul & Pacific owns thousands of acres of land along the route and, anxious to sell, offers good credit terms.

You learn that the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad is hiring workers and the prospect of a steady wage is appealing.

Do you

- take a job with the railroad? *Turn to page 6.*
- purchase land for a farm? *Turn to page 17.*





You decide to look for a job with the railroad. There are only two openings: brakeman or lineman.

As a brakeman, you will earn a higher wage, but it is one of the most dangerous jobs on the railroad. They have to ride the tops of freight cars in all weather for as long as it took to traverse the 100-mile division between St. Paul and Willmar.

A lineman maintains the tracks. Weather and heavy use caused shifts in the track that might cause derailment if not repaired. Sometimes high water washes out sections that need to be replaced. They became known as “Gandy Dancers” although officially they were known as section hands.







Railroad workers  
Meeker County Historical Society

The choice is difficult.

As a gandy dancer, you could stay close to Litchfield where you and your sister have made new friends at the Swedish Lutheran Church. Because it was not a highly skilled job, it was common to find it filled by new immigrants eager to earn a few dollars.

A brakeman's hours are long and the work is dangerous. You meet other brakemen who have lost fingers or suffered broken bones. The wages, though, are more than twice as much as a lineman's.

Do you take the job as

- a brakeman? *Turn to page 8.*
- a gandy dancer? *Turn to page 10.*

Wanting to earn more money, you take the job as a brakeman.

The brakeman was responsible for assisting with braking a train when the conductor wanted the train to slow down or stop. The brakeman rode in the caboose, the last car in the train, which was built specially to allow a crew member to apply the brakes of the caboose, which helped to slow the train.

A brakeman's duties also included ensuring that the couplings between cars were properly set, lining switches, and signaling to the train operators while performing switching operations.





At first, you enjoy the work. One day, while inspecting the couplings, the train lurches forward, crushing your left arm. You are taken to a doctor's office in Litchfield. The doctor amputates the limb near the shoulder.



Although you can no longer work as a brakeman, the railroad agrees to hire you as a watchman at considerably less pay.

You work for the railroad for many years and live with your sister in a small rented house, but you never save enough money to bring your parents to America.

**THE END**

*Take a different path.*

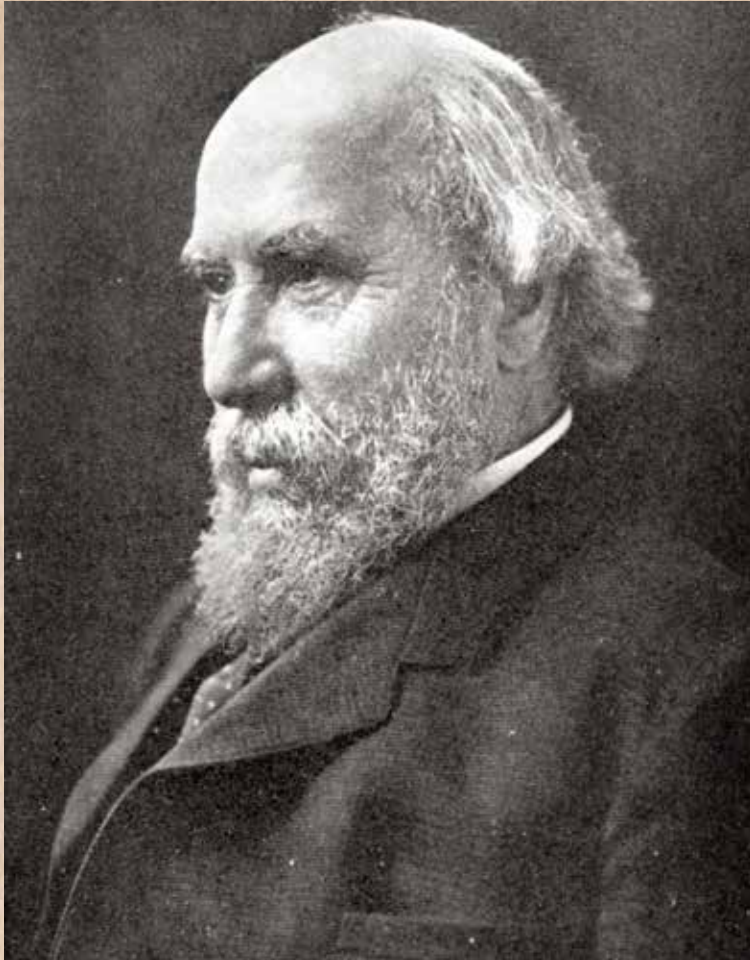


You decide to take the job as a lineman or gandy dancer. You always work as a crew with at least four people. The tasks include repairing misaligned or worn track, replace rotted ties, and tightly packing down the gravel that makes the rail bed.

Your crew has to work together when moving the rails, often leaning shoulder-to-shoulder in pairs while a caller marks time with a four-beat “tamping” song. To those watching you, it looked a little bit like you were dancing.

Your crew is responsible for the section between Litchfield and Darwin.





You find the hours are long and the wages are low, but it is regular work. The SP&P goes bankrupt and taken over by James J. Hill and other investors. It is now known as the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railway. You wonder if it might be time to find a new job.

A fellow Swede, Ole Olson, has opened a music store and offers a clerk's position to you.

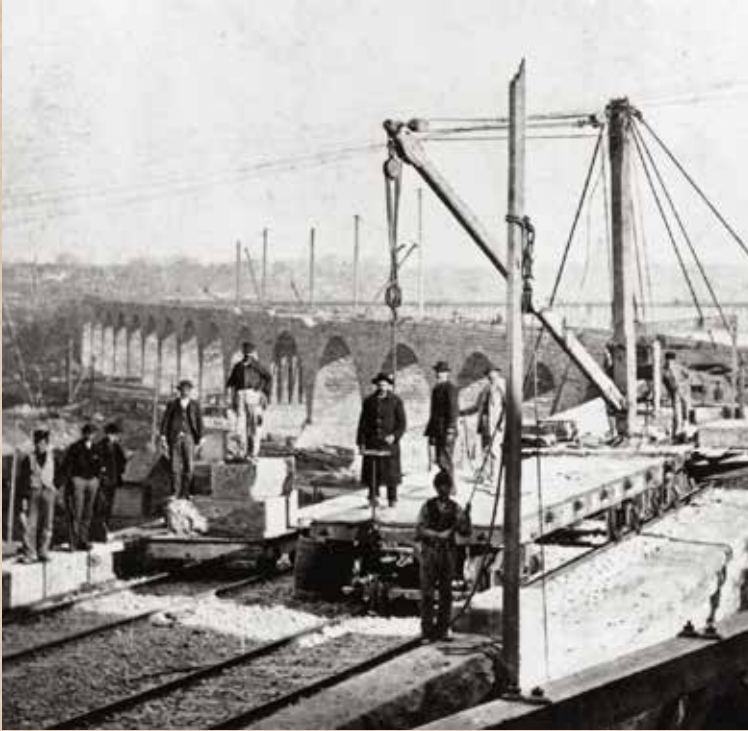
- Stay with the railroad? *Turn to page 12.*
- Go to work at Ole Olson's Music Store? *Turn to page 15.*

James J. Hill  
*Minnesota Historical Society*

You decide to keep your job with the railroad. After struggling financially, the railroad is sold to investors led by James J. Hill. The new owners rename the line as the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway.

Minneapolis millers are looking for a better rail connection to the wheat farms in the west. Hill pushes for new construction and within a few years, a bridge is built over the Red River at Fargo.

In 1880 Hill builds a new passenger station in Minneapolis and shares it with other railroads serving the city. The Minneapolis Union Railway, with Hill

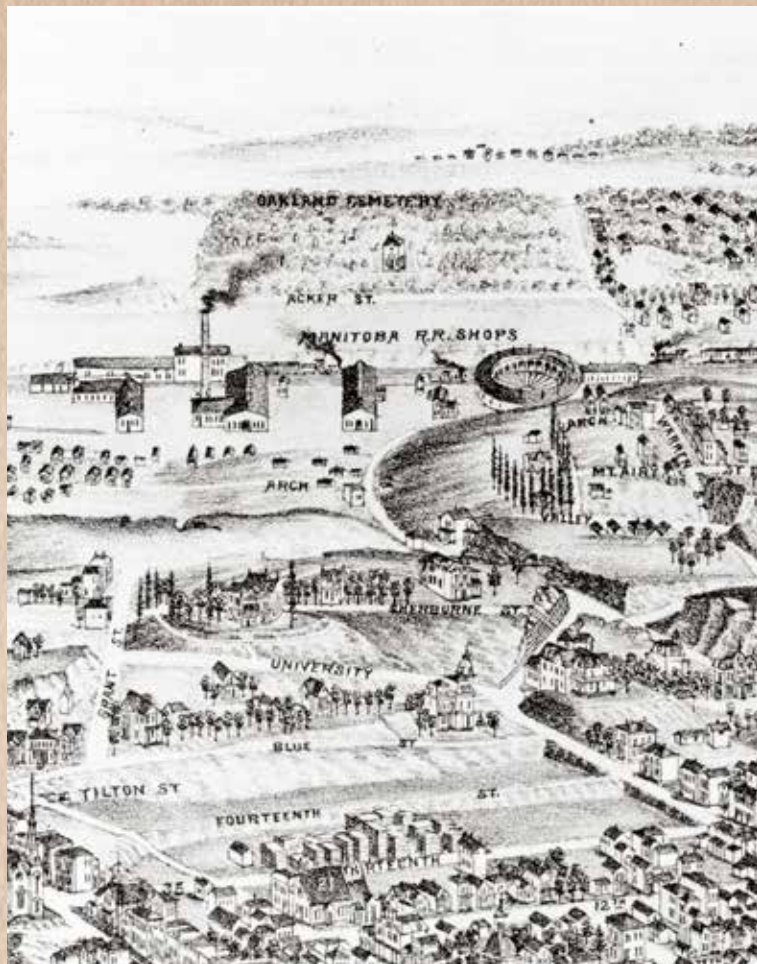


Stone Arch Bridge, Minneapolis  
*Minnesota Historical Society*



serving as president, builds a new stone arch bridge across the Mississippi.

In 1882 Hill completes a complex of railroad shops in St. Paul, the new headquarters of the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba. At these shops, technicians build and service locomotives, passenger cars, and freight cars. The shops also serve as the storehouse for the entire railroad. Nearly one-fourth of St. Paul's work force is employed in railroad-related jobs.



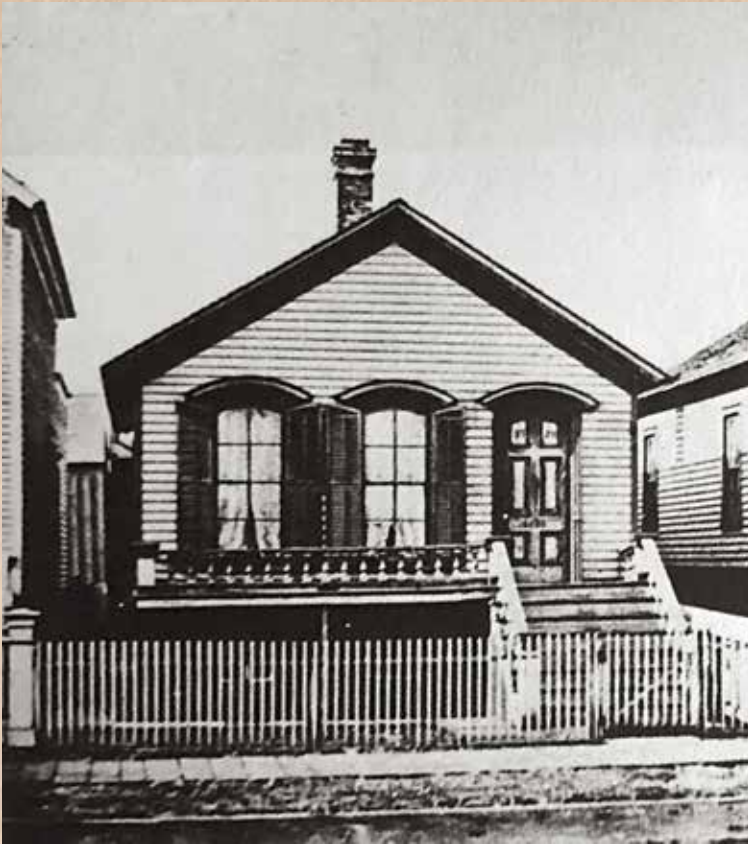
Manitoba Railroad Shops, St. Paul  
*Minnesota Historical Society*

You have gained a reputation as a hard worker and crew leader and are offered a job as a mechanic at the shops in St. Paul. It pays well so you accept the new position.

You move to St. Paul and buy a house on the East Side near many other Swedish emigrants. Within a few months your parents have joined you. You greet them at the depot and many people recognize you as a railroad man.

**THE END**

*Take a different path.*







You take the clerk's job at Ole Olson's Music Store. Olson sells instruments, sheet music, pianos, and organs. He also offers lessons and this has proved to be very popular, especially with young men and women.

Olson knows that you were an excellent cornet player and soon you are teaching students in all brass instruments.

The wages are still low and not enough to pay for your parents' passage to the U.S.

Ole "Music" Olson

*Meeker County Historical Society*

Now that you are well-known as a music teacher in Litchfield and Meeker County, you receive many invitations to play with local musical groups. You also play at dances. When Ole Olson organizes the Litchfield Band, you are the first person that he asks to join. Under “Music” Olson’s baton, you play a concert at the Minnesota State Fair.

With this extra income, you are finally able to send money to your parents.

**THE END**

*Take a different path.*



Litchfield Band  
*Meeker County Historical Society*



## INDUCEMENT TO SETTLERS.

The attention of persons whose limited means forbid the purchase of a homestead in the older States, is particularly invited to these lands. The farms are sold in tracts of 40 or 80 acres and upwards, at prices ranging from \$4.00 to \$15.00 per acre. Cash sales are always One Dollar per acre less than Credit sales. In the latter case, ten years are granted if required.

Example.—80 acres at \$8.00 per acre, on long credit—\$640.00. A part payment on the principal is always desired, but in case the means of the settler are very limited, the Company allows him to pay only One Year's interest down, dividing the principal in ten equal payments, with seven per cent. interest each year on the unpaid balance:

	Interest.	Principal.		Interest.	Principal.
1st payment,	\$44.80	\$64	7th payment,	\$17.92	\$64
2d    “	40.32	64	8th    “	13.44	64
3d    “	35.84	64	9th    “	8.96	64
4th    “	31.36	64	10th   “	4.48	64
5th    “	26.88	64	11th   “		64
6th    “	22.40	64			

The purchaser has the privilege to pay up at any time within the 10 years, thereby saving the further payment of interest.

The same land may be purchased for \$560.00 cash.

To save time and expense to the purchaser, applications for Railroad Lands are received by all Station Agents, who are furnished with plats of surrounding country.

To encourage farming on a large scale, this Company has introduced a new system of Land sales, whereby men of means can purchase a section (640 acres) of land on the most favorable and easy terms, and at the end of three years and a half, (the time for the whole amount to be paid at \$6.00 per acre,) have a large, productive farm, without the usual annual payments. This system has been adopted for the purpose of bringing under cultivation some of the finest prairie country and most productive soil in the Northwest.

You choose to purchase a farm.

The St. Paul & Pacific Railroad is selling tracts of land with easy credit terms. Since you do not have any savings, you decide to purchase eighty acres just east of Swede's Grove.

You now own a farm. You write home to your parents, "The climate is remarkably fine; nothing stands in our way except the language."

You choose a site for a house and build a simple 14 x 16 ft. box-like structure. By the evening of the second day, the walls are up, and two days later, the roof.

“It is not a very handsome structure,” you write to your parents, “but it will serve my needs.”

Already late spring, you begin plowing the fields and thirty-five acres is all you can manage with the one horse. It is hard work. You plant thirty acres of wheat and five acres of oats. In a makeshift stable, you keep a single cow and a few chickens.





In the early fall when the grass was dead and dry, there is a danger of prairie fires. Weeks pass without any rain. One night in late summer, you see distance flames light up the sky. Hugo Erickson, your neighbor, rides up on his horse and yells “Prairie Fire!” Hugo tells you to create a firebreak and set small fires to stop the big fire.

Do you follow Hugo’s advice? It sounds almost foolish to start more fires. Maybe you should wait and see if the fire dies out.

Do you light the firebreak? *Turn to page 20.*

Or do you wait? *Turn to page 23.*





With the help of your neighbor, you plow two rows of eight to ten furrows each along the fence at the west end of your farm. In between the rows, you light fires and burn off all the grass.

The prairie fire is now within a few hundred yards of your home. Sparks fly through the air but at the firebreak, the flames stop. Your farm and the fall harvest is saved.

Your barn is full and you'll survive the winter.



In the fall, with the help of your neighbors, you harvest your wheat and oats. You sell the oats to nearby farmers as feed. You take your wheat to Jacob Howard's grain elevator in town and receive a fair price.

You have enough money to build a larger wood-frame house and you convert the older house into a barn. You purchase an additional eighty acres and plant five acres with trees. To encourage planting on the prairie, the State of Minnesota pays you \$2 each year for every acre of trees. You calculate that this will garner \$1,000 by the end of the decade.





You join the Meeker County Agricultural Society. Every year the society holds a county fair on the north side of Lake Ripley. In 1893 you submit samples of your wheat to a competition at the Chicago Columbian Exposition — the World's Fair. Although you do not win, a local farmer, Andrew Quinn, receives a medal for the "Best Wheat in the World." You feel pride that Meeker County agriculture is recognized as outstanding.

You make the final payment on your land and now can send for your parents in Sweden.

**THE END**

*Take a different path.*



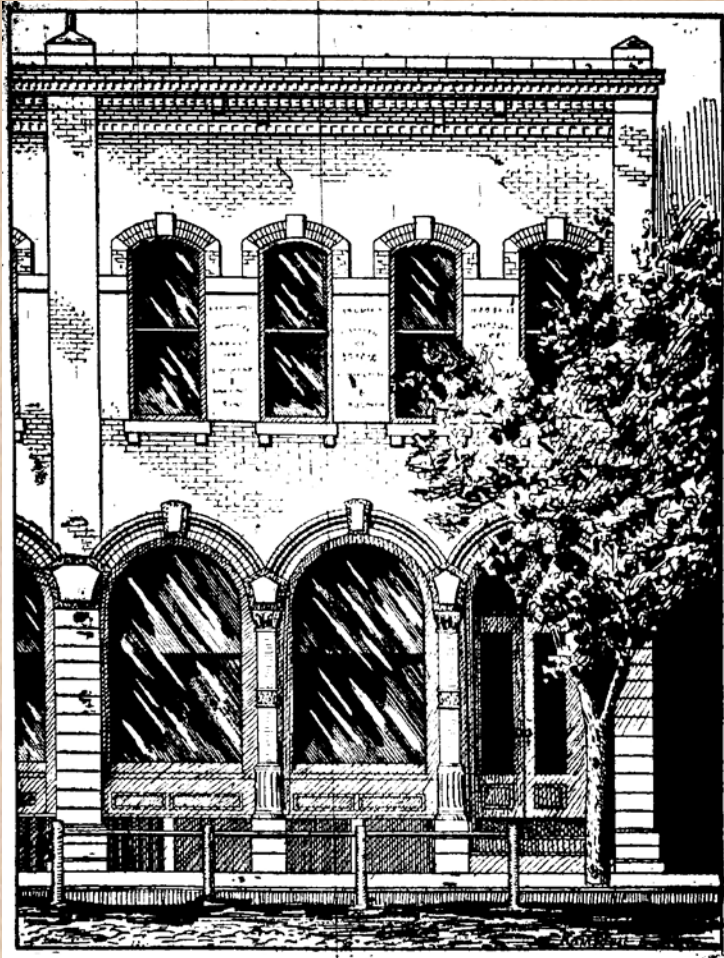
You decide to take a chance and wait to see if the prairie fire burns itself out.

The fire roars closer and closer. After a few minutes, it seems to turn south. But at the last minute, the fire turns toward your farm. After a few attempts to beat out the flames, you barely have enough time to get out of its way.

Your house and barn is gone. All your crops have burned.

To rebuild and get through the winter, you'll need to borrow money.





You visit the Meeker County Bank in Litchfield to apply for a loan. There, you meet the president of the bank, Alexander Cairncross. A friend from the Swedish Lutheran Church, John Palm, works for Cairncross as a clerk in his general merchandise store.

Cairncross approves a loan for seed, but suggests that you might want to take a position in his new boot and shoe store.

Do you sign the papers for a loan and return to farming? *Turn to page 25.*

Or do you take the position at the store?  
*Turn to page 27.*

Meeker County Bank  
Meeker County Historical Society



You decide to stay on your farm and try again, but to do that, you'll need that loan from the Meeker County Bank. The interest rate is high but you believe that you will be able to make payments.

That spring you plant wheat and it turns out to be a good growing season.

You take your grain to the Farmers' and Merchants' Cooperative Elevator in Litchfield because you trust the manager, John Lindgren, who is a fellow emigrant from Sweden. He offers a fair price and you have enough money to rebuild your house and barn. In a few years, you are doing so well that you purchase an additional eighty acres on credit.



After a few years, though, the economy falls into a depression. As more farms open in the Dakotas, followed by several years of good weather, there is so much wheat being brought to market that the price drops sharply. Times are hard.

Like many other Meeker County farmers, you read *The Rothuggaren*, a radical Swedish-language newspaper published by Franz Widstrand from Grove City. He blames the depression on the railroads. They control the shipping rates and farmers have no other choices if they want to get their goods delivered. Friends begin to talk about new laws to regulate the railroads. Others believe farmers should organize into cooperatives.

In 1887 Congress passes the Interstate Commerce Act, giving oversight over long distance shipping to a new federal commission. This legislation is followed by the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890, which prohibits monopolies.

These do little to help you. It is too late. You cannot keep up payments to the bank and the farm is repossessed. You move into town and take a job at the Litchfield Woolen Mill.

**THE END**

*Take a different path.*



You decide to lease your farm and go to work at the Cairncross Boot & Shoe Store — the only one in town. While you work in the store, assisting customers, you build a friendship with John Palm. You enjoy the opportunity to speak the Swedish language with him and share traditions — like Midsommar and St. Lucia Day — that are not celebrated in America.

Palm is a shrewd businessman and, within a few years, becomes a full partner with Cairncross in the general merchandise store. Together they erect a new two-story brick building in 1885.

Alexander is a member of the Masons and he recommends you for membership.



Cairncross Block  
Meeker County Historical Society



The local lodge has many influential civic leaders who enjoy your friendship. You are asked to sit on the new city light and water commission.

When Cairncross dies in 1891, in his will, he leaves \$13,000 to be divided among his four clerks. This generous gift leaves you financially secure.

All this success, however, comes after your parents had died. Your sister, though, introduces you to Johanna Johnson. You are married in the Swedish Lutheran Church and begin your own family.

**THE END**

*Take a different path.*





LITCHFIELD HISTORY

# From Sweden to Litchfield

*A Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Book*

Daniel John Hoisington

LITCHFIELD HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION