

THE STORY OF TWO FAMILIES
AND THEIR TIMES



THE CHILSTROMS
(KJÖLLERSTRÖMS)

AND

THE NELSONS
(NILSSONS)

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1970s I've been collecting bits and pieces of family history. Each bit and each piece whetted my appetite to discover even more. How I wish it were easier to reclaim everything I would like to know. How I wish our Kjällerström/Chilstrom and Nilsson/Nelson ancestors had left more evidence along the trail -- stories, letters, journals, photographs -- things that would have given us a glimpse of their joys and sorrows, their values, their religious convictions, the pattern of their daily lives. How I wish I had asked more questions of my grandparents, my parents, my uncles and aunts.

The best I could do was to take what I had from them, look at the history of their times, and build their story as best I could. I'm now well into my 70s. I've already enjoyed several years of retirement when I've been able, by and large, to choose how I wanted to spend my time and energy. I knew this was the time to put some effort into bringing together in a single volume many of the things from family history that I've collected over the years.

We on the Chilstrom side of the family owe a deep debt of gratitude to my fifth cousin, Bengt Kjällerström, retired professor of physics at Lund University in Sweden. With his help we can trace the family roots back to the early 1600s. And we owe an equal debt to the late Rev. Dr. Emeroy Johnson, whose role I will explain in Chapter One.

In Chapter One is a list of the descendants of Mikael and Elsa Kjällerström from 1612 down to Magnus and Katrina (Catharina) Kjällerström who came to America in 1853. Bengt Kjällerström has done us the great service of creating a website for all of the family in Sweden and America. It can be found at: <http://www.kj.nu/kjm>. There is also now a “family website” where many interesting items about the Kjällerström family can be found – www.kjollerstrom.se. Those who want to look only at American descendants of Magnus and Katrina Kjällerström can find their information at another site created by Bengt: <http://www.kj.nu/magnus>.

In August of 2007 I attended a Kjällerström family reunion, accompanied by my wife Corinne and my son Christopher. On that occasion I was able to gather more family information which I have incorporated into the text of this book.

The more I’ve delved into our family history, the more I’ve come to realize what a debt of gratitude I and all of my Chilstrom and Nelson relatives owe to our ancestors, especially those who ventured to America in the 1850s. It’s hard to even begin to imagine how difficult life must have been for them, how often their hopes and dreams were dashed to pieces, and how they must have wondered at times if they should have left Sweden.

As Bonnie Beatson Palmquist has stated it so well:

*Each immigrant had a different story to tell; not all hopes were fulfilled.
For many, the rewards they hoped to obtain did not come until the second*

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*and third generation. By then the journey had faded. Succeeding
generations lost the reasons why the ancestors came. Now we try hard to
piece all the details together.*

“Voices of Minnesota History 1836-1946” p. 99

I hope this research and narrative of our family history -- a beginning and a small attempt “to piece all the details together” -- will awaken in a few others in our extended families a deeper appreciation for our often neglected past.

There were times during this research, of course, when I struggled with hard questions: *Is it worth the investment of all this time? Is it actually a bit selfish to be doing this kind of research? Am I giving too much attention to my Swedish roots?* At its most intense stage my dear wife Corinne suggested one day that I think about giving as much attention to my *living* relatives as my *dead* ones! I thank her for her patience and understanding. And I add here a note of special thanks to her and my sister, Janet Chilstrom Sickert, for their careful proofreading of the final text.

Indeed, it was a huge investment of time and effort to bring together the history of these two families and their times. I found both encouragement and reassurance in these words from Bill Holm, the sage from Minneota, Minnesota, who has done so much to help others appreciate their past:

To be ethnic, somehow, is to be human. Neither can we escape it, nor should we want to. You cannot interest yourself in the lives of your neighbors if you don't take sufficient interest in your own.

“Swedes in Minnesota” p. ix

Herbert W. Chilstrom

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