

Lawrence F Wahlström and the Midwest Institute of Scandinavian Culture

By Leif Sjoberg August 22, 1985 for the Norway Times

This is in brief, the story of a remarkable man from Eau Claire Wisconsin. Lawrence F Wahlstrom, now 70, the youngest of eight children, of Aurora, Florence County, Wisconsin, where his parents (from Vastmanland and Varmland Sweden) had settled. Lawrence received his B.A. in Chemistry and Geology from Lawrence College, Appleton Wisconsin (1932) and his PH.D. in Mathematics and Education from the University of Wisconsin, Madison (1950). As you might figure, teaching mathematics has been his livelihood to this day. He reckons he will retire from teaching in 1986.

If Professor Wahlstrom has always employed mathematical precision in every delicate dealings with the trigonometrical triangle: “University administration -faculty—students”, is more than can be ascertained in this context. It stands to reason that Dr Wahlstrom has done something more than what is arithmetically correct, he must have been wise and endlessly patient to have been Chairman of the Mathematics Department at the University of Wisconsin for 32 years, from 1948 to 1980.

Mathematics, an important but basically an auxiliary science, proved already in the 50's, beyond the shadow of a doubt, to be inadequate to Wahlstrom as a mission in life. His life's equation just would not work out unless he had some other, to practically unknown, quantity to deal with. That concerned his roots.

Finding his Roots

His parents had become good Americans, busying themselves with more pressing matters than telling their eight children about the old homeland. As an adult, Lawrence with his wife, Dorothy, daughter Linda, and son Jon, repeatedly visited the Scandinavian countries, making comparative studies of Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Finnish, and Swedish history and culture. In the process he found his roots. Not only did he learn the Swedish language, he also taught Swedish at no cost to the University in Eau Claire! Then Lawrence, by inner necessity, envisioned a pretty down-to-earth antidote to the abstract mathematical science he was hired to teach. It is known as “The Midwest Institute of Scandinavian Culture”. The original incorporators were Trygve Ager, A. Elmer Anderson, Gerald O. Thorpe, Henry Christofferson, Mrs. K.L. German, Orville Torgerson, Ralph Gilbert, and L. Wahlstrom, primus motor. In 1973 he selected an incredibly beautiful 50-acre site for the Scandinavian center. A few years later the “Richard Amundson Memorial Park” of eight acres was added.

Lawrence Wahlstrom engaged the world-famous Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, to design the Center. There is every reason to believe that it will become architecturally as well as functionally a landmark of Scandinavian genius.

A ROAD TO GET THERE

A road is required to get there. Therefore, Wahlstrom and his supporters proceeded, according to the demands of logic and sound fiscal planning, to raise \$50,000 for the construction of a road to the site! An additional \$9,500 is needed to pave the road. Heavy treated oak guard rails are already in place along the scenic winding road and blend in well with the natural beauty of the hilly terrain.

The MWISC has a retail Scandinavian shop at 16 S. Barstow in Eau Claire which thanks to time and work of devoted volunteers, can pay for the overhead expenses for the Institute as it gradually takes shape. The shop has imports from each one of the Scandinavian countries and items range from jewelry to furniture clogs and glass.

The office of the Midwest Institute of Scandinavian Culture P.O. Box 522, Eau Claire, WI 54702-0522 will send you its impressive newsletter upon request.

The Raoul Wallenberg Fund

Contributions to MWISC are also being received for the Raoul Wallenberg Fund (established on May 17, 1980). It is the intention that the fund should accrue to \$10,000. At that time the interest from the fund will be used annually to help students from universities and colleges attend a special retreat, usually held in February. So far, the retreats have been held each year at the Eau Claire County Youth Camp. It is anticipated that when the MWISC Scandinavian Center has built adequate facilities that the retreats will be held there.

As far as it is known to the present writer, the MWISC is the only project in existence in the USA with such an ambitious scope. This make Professor Wahlstrom unique in the nation, and that is a distinction as sweet as success! It goes without saying that the Board of MWISC is in dire need of outside financial support. For a large segment of the population in the Midwest, and perhaps in the nation, especially this younger generation, it will provide necessary and logical functions, work, education, inspiration for greatness. Thus, it is a most worthy cause! Individuals as well as corporations and business are, therefore, urgently invited to join MWISC whose headquarters are in Eau Claire, WI. It now has greater potential than ever.