

Gustaf Erickson 1858-1932

For a man who travelled alone to the United States and whose bloodline ended in 1947 following the death of his only child, there is a remarkable amount of contemporary interest in his family tree. It just goes to show that you don't need to bear or sire children in order to impact subsequent generations.

In truth, Gustaf Erickson has been survived by the descendants of his three stepchildren as well as the stepson of his only child. This is no piece of romantic revisionism as is evidenced by his 1932 obituary, which, nearly 20 years after the death of his first wife still counted her 3 eldest children as his own.

The story of this family tree is also marked by the sobering observation that in the 60 years to the 1940's barely a single branch of the family remained untouched by the untimely death of a spousal partner. Indeed just two bachelor/spinster couplings established prior to WWI survived to see their children into adulthood.

Contrast that with the fate of Gustaf's older brother who, with his only wife, enjoyed 26 years of continuous marriage and, of his 23 grand children only one experienced the death of a parent before their 18th birthday.¹ Just the luck of the draw perhaps.

Gustaf left Finland in 1875 while still a teenager, arriving at Boston, Massachusetts in early summer². His older brother John Frederick Erickson was a sailor and would jump ship a year later settling in the then British colony of New South Wales. Both would spend the rest of their days in their adopted countries, never returning to Finland. However, despite living on different sides of the world the two brothers managed to keep in contact. In 1932 Gustaf died and the correspondence between his son and his Australian nephew has survived.

The first record I have for Gustaf is from the 1885 state census for Minnesota. While the US has conducted a national (or federal) census decennially since 1790, some states additionally conducted censuses, also at 10-year intervals.

Gustaf was recorded as living in the District of Duluth as follows³ –

Gus. Erickson | 30[age at last birthday] | M[ale] | W[hite] | Finland [place of birth]

Both 'Father of foreign birth' and 'Mother of foreign birth' were ticked.

¹ Arguably my grandmother and her 4 younger siblings 'lost' their father while they were children but that was because he walked out.

² Whilst the census records consistently give his year of arrival as circa 1882 I believe this relates to when he moved to Minnesota. His declaration of intention to become a US citizen made 17 May 1887 records his arrival as June 1875 at Boston.

³ Household no. 86, Page 15 of schedule 1 covering the inhabitants of Duluth in the county of St Louis. There were four others in the household; a married couple and two adult males, all born Finland.

Gustaf's first wife

The 1885 Minnesota census was recorded in order of 'household visited' so the entries give no indication of where in the given district a person resided but it is worth noting that just four households after the enumerator recorded Gustaf he recorded a family of Hendricksons⁴.

I do not have a verifiable explanation for why this family is listed under the name 'Hendrickson' but it is almost certainly a record of Eva Ryymanen⁵ with her two youngest children, 2-year-old Hilda Marie (recorded as Mary) and 6-year-old Wistar Sylvester (recorded as Sylvester).

Whilst Eva had married a Nils Ryymanen on Christmas eve 1882⁶ it is very probable that the Nils Hendrickson recorded with her in the 1885 Minnesota census was another man altogether. Whatever the case, Eva married Gustaf Erickson on 28 February 1889. A year later they had a son. The Minnesota birth register records his name as Gustav Charles however he seems to have been known simply as Charles G.

The 1890 US Federal census was destroyed in a fire in 1921 so these records have been lost forever. The next record we have for this family is the 1895 Minnesota state census. Gustaf and Eva are recorded as living at 316 East 6th Street, Duluth. They had been there since 1891. With them are Wistar, Hilda and Charles, all now bearing the name Erickson, which they will keep. There was one other in the house with them; a 25-year-old Finn named John Niemi.

Curiously, while Gustaf is recorded as having been 13 years in Minnesota and 6 years in District 2 of Duluth there is no equivalent record for John Niemi. It was the practice in this census that only the head-of-family's periods of residence were recorded. However, wherever there were residences with additional adults those men and women did have the length of time lived in the state and district separately recorded.

Niemi appears therefore to have been recorded here as a member of this family, or at the very least a visitor to the state. Who was he? Is there any relationship between the 25-year-old John Niemi and Eva's 23-year-old son David? Are they one in the same person?

Eva before Gustaf

According to his obituary David Henry 'Nelson', Eva's eldest child, had, by 1889 relocated from Duluth to Astoria, Oregon⁷, having first joined his mother in the USA in 1886⁸. He eventually settled in Pendleton, Oregon, which is 1,500 miles

⁴ Household no. 90, Page 16 of schedule 1 covering the inhabitants of Duluth in the county of St Louis. There were seven others in the household; all adult males, all born Finland.

⁵ This spelling is the one given in the register of her marriage to Gustaf however there are numerous variant spellings, such as Roonenan for her daughter's birth record.

⁶ Neil Runane 30yo, married Eva Gundola 31yo, 24 December 1882, at Allouez Township by L. Eitrem, Lutheran Minister. Witnesses; Peter Neimelain and Hendrick Madsen.

⁷ The East Oregonian, published 22 May 1939.

⁸ The *Orlando* left Gothenburg, Sweden for Hull, UK 23 July 1886. On board, bound for Duluth, Minn was the lone Finnish boy David Kandola 11yo.

from Duluth, Minnesota. It would not have been a simple matter for him to visit his mother!

However, it is likely he did just that at least once before 1895. David's descendants possess a photograph taken of him as young man, on the obverse is written 'summer 1890'. The photograph edge is water marked by the studio in which it was taken 'Carl Thiel - Duluth'. This clearly places David in Minnesota after he had relocated to Oregon, most likely on a visit back to see his newborn baby brother Charles. But if he was in Duluth in 1895 why was he recorded as 'John Niemi'?

David Henry Nelson is not the name he was born with. David was born in Finland as David Kandola⁹, the son of Henric Kandola and Eva nee Kolehmainen¹⁰. David was not yet 10 years of age when his mother left for the USA in 1881 with her two youngest children, Wistar Sylvester and a 4 year-old Carl, bound for Hancock, MI on the Keweenaw Peninsular¹¹.

The circumstances of her journey are unclear. Her descendants share the understanding that she travelled to the USA without the children's father. However Henric did follow her because he is registered as a passenger on the *Orlando* leaving just a fortnight after Eva had sailed from the same Swedish port of Gothenburg to Hull, North East England on the first leg of her journey. Henric was also bound for Hancock¹².

It is unlikely they had planned for Eva and the youngest children to go out as the advance party. It is more plausible that Henric was chasing after his wife; after all he travelled alone leaving young David behind in Finland. Did he catch up with her at Hull or had Eva already left for Michigan? Did Henric make it all the way to the USA? None of his descendants seem to think so. In any event Eva felt sufficiently free of this relationship a year later to take another husband. This strongly suggests Henric had died en route, soon after arriving in the USA or possibly on return to Finland.

Three years later, according to the 1884 Michigan census, Eva was in Allouez, 20 miles from Hancock. She had married Nils Ryymanen in this same township and it was also where Hilda had been born¹³. Curiously Nils is not recorded in the census, though Eva was listed as 'married' suggesting her husband was simply absent. Young Carl was also not listed and apart from the passenger list there is no other record of him. It seems fair to conclude he had died by this time. But he was not forgotten. Both Wistar and David had sons named Carl.

As mentioned above Eva and kids were in Duluth, Minnesota by 1885 but now with a Nils Hendrickson. Did Eva meet him in Duluth or did she travel with him

⁹The name Kandola or Kantola has been remembered by David Nelson's descendants

¹⁰This spelling comes from David Nelson's descendants. The spelling on her Death Certificate was 'Kohelmien'

¹¹The *Orlando* left Gothenburg, Sweden for Hull, UK 1 July 1881. On board, bound for Hancock was the Finnish family; Eva Kendacka 31yo, Carl 4½yo and Hilja, infant.

¹²The *Orlando* left Gothenburg, Sweden for Hull, UK 15 July 1881. On board, bound for Hancock was the Finn Henric Kandola 34yo

¹³Hilda Roononen b 8 July 1883.

from Michigan? Was he the Nils Hendrickson listed in the 1884 Michigan census who, like Eva, was in Allouez township? If so, he was newly married to the widow Mrs Elizabeth Richards nee Lukey. Did this marriage prevent him marrying Eva? We know Eva was still a Ryymanen when she married Gustaf.

This suggestion may be quite speculative but worthy of further research. Nils Hendrickson's wife Elizabeth was, by 1888, having children with Peter Zeppenfeld with whom she spent the rest of her days. Like Nils H and Eva there is no record of Elizabeth and Peter ever marrying.

What is less in doubt is that Eva was born Eva Margaretha Kolehmainen. This surname was the one given at the time of her death and was also recorded in a family tree drawn up by her granddaughter in the 1940's.

Into the 20th century

Gustaf built up a successful plumbing business that operated out of Duluth, Minnesota. Duluth is at the mouth of the Saint Louis River where it flows into Lake Superior, one of the 'Great Lakes' that separates the United States from Canada midway and east across continental North America.

Despite its near central position in the 3rd largest continent on the planet Duluth is in fact a seaport. The Great Lakes connect with the Atlantic Ocean through the Saint Lawrence Seaway and many European immigrants made their way by ship direct to the ports of Duluth, Milwaukee and Detroit. Not everyone it seems was dropped off at the feet of the Statue of Liberty.

Eva, with Carl and Wistar, and later David made their respective ways to the US via Canada as did thousands of fellow Finns and a thriving expat Finnish community existed in this region of the US well into the 20th century.

Many of these Finns were ethnically Swedish. My grandmother, Gustaf's great niece, maintained that while her grandfather was born in Finland he was of Swedish background. Indeed her father was known by the sobriquet 'the Swede'. Erickson is a Swedish name and while it is not disputed that, like his brother, Gustaf was born in Finland, it is probable he came from an immigrant family¹⁴.

By the turn of the century David Nelson was well established in Oregon and married to Maria Hilda Molstrom. Meanwhile his mother, siblings and stepfather, Gustaf Erickson, were doing equally well back in Duluth. The 1900 census shows the Ericksons still living at 316 East 6th Street which Gustaf and Eva owned outright. Gustaf and Wistar were both working as plumbers while the 16 year old Hilda was employed as a servant.

The 1900 census also reveals that in addition to the four children listed above Eva had had two children that had died. One was Carl and while I have not identified any record of the other it would fit if he/she was born between David (1872) and Carl (1876). That would place the birth in Finland and if true suggests the child had probably died before Eva made her journey to the US.

¹⁴ Gustaf's census entries consistently record both his parents as Finnish so if he was 'Swedish' he was not the first generation born in Finland.

The 1903 Duluth city directory provides an entry each for Gustaf and Eva – Eva is recorded as a clerk working for Panton & White Co., owners of a large department store at 128 West Superior Street. Gustaf was operating a plumbing business out of 1925 West Michigan Street. Wistar was working for his father.

The start of the 1900's saw the colony of New South Wales come together with the other British colonies of continental Australia and the island colony of Tasmania to form the independent Commonwealth of Australia¹⁵. Just one year into federation Gustaf's brother took out citizenship in this newest of nations. Gustaf had taken out citizenship in the not much older¹⁶ USA in 1894.

In 1901 Wistar married Maria Liisa Remes¹⁷. Their first home was two doors away from Gustaf and Eva, at number 310¹⁸. They had two children; Helen Maria born 1903 and Carl Davie born 1908. Carl was born in Portland OR, and from 1909 they spent a short time in Alberta, Canada before settling in Montana. Sadly Helen died at just 19 years of age following a small pox inoculation and while recuperating at Gustaf and Kate's in Duluth. Wistar and family would soon after return to Duluth but by the 1930's they had moved again to Oregon, the home state of Wistar's brother David.

Hilda Marie Erickson married the widower Abram Hemmila at the age of 36. Abram had 2 children from his first marriage to, coincidentally, another Hilda; Hilda Maria Lehto. Abram and his second Hilda would go on to have 2 children of their own. In 1929 Abram was hit by a car and killed leaving Hilda Erickson with two young boys; Lyle, 7 and Howard, 5. Her stepchildren, George and Elma, were 19 and 17 respectively.

Hilda would marry again within 2 years to another widower, Isaac Point. Isaac's first wife was also named Hilda. What was it with the name Hilda? Whatever the reason for the preponderance of Hilda's in this generation the name would disappear in the next with not a single person named Hilda!

Hilda Erickson's younger brother, Charles, had married in 1910. He was not yet 20 when he wed the 18 year old Lulu Fenttten. While I have not found a record of their marriage the young couple began their life together living with Gustaf, Eva

¹⁵The former separate colonies maintain their identity as 'states' in a federation that is the Commonwealth of Australia. There are many similarities with the former British colonies of North America that became states when they formed the 'Union', not least of which are the regular turf wars between state and federal governments.

¹⁶My reference point here is the current incarnation of the nation state. Clearly both countries had thriving communities going back well into pre-history and added to this their respective and more recent periods of European colonisation. By 1900 the 13 colonies in Nth America that had fought and defeated the British to establish the Union were just 124 years old. In 1901 the British freely granted the 6 colonies of Australia independence by an Act of Parliament. How times had changed! - Though the Irish would no doubt beg to argue this point. It is no coincidence that the colonisation of Australia coincides with the Independence of the European colonists in the 13 states. Having lost those 13 colonies the British needed somewhere new to send their convicts sentenced to transportation. Selling them to the new Union was never a viable long term solution and the remaining British colonies in what is now Canada was out of the question, not least because they feared a large convict population would rebel and join the mutinous Union. Ill-fated attempts to establish penal colonies in West Africa were given up on so in 1788 they reached out to the great southern land that they knew about but knew little of.

¹⁷Wistar Erickson married Mary Raimier 11 October 1901, St Louis county, MN.

¹⁸The houses on this street run 310, 312, 316. No. 314 is set back from the street, behind and between numbers 312 and 316.

and big sister Hilda at 31 South 6th Avenue West. The 1910 census, taken on the 15th April, records that Charles and Lulu had been married just one month.

Mrs Eva Erickson died in 1913 aged 63 years. She had been born in Ylivieska, Oulun Laani, Finland in September 1849 and had spent half her life in the US. She had had 6 children, 4 of whom had survived and were leading successful lives. After a difficult period where she lost at least two husbands and possibly another lover the last 2 decades of her life were spent in relative comfort and stability.

All change

Gustaf was now 55 years old. In Australia his 63yo brother John had been widowed for 9 years. While each of Eva's 4 children would marry spouses who were either born in Finland or born of Finnish parents her brother-in-law's family was the complete opposite. John Frederick had married Agatha Isabella Schmitzer, the Australian born daughter of German émigrés, in 1878. Five of their six surviving children married but there was not a drop of Finnish blood flowing through the veins of the various in-laws.

I doubt the Australian Ericksons deliberately eschewed the company of fellow Finns. It was more that there were precious few Finns to associate with. It seems the 'new world' of choice for Finns was the mid-west USA and not 'Down-Under'.

In the mid 1910's the 'Great War' broke out. It came later to the USA than it did Australia. For this period draft records provide a useful source of information on the adult males of fighting age.

Debates on conscription had scarred the political landscape in Australia – two referenda, 1916 and 1917 were both lost. In the US, President Wilson was more persuasive than Prime Minister Hughes, his Australian counterpart. As a result there are draft records for David, Wistar and Charles. Of their Australian cousins none signed up however cousin Edith May Erickson's husband, Edward Cambourne Mitchel did, serving in France and returning safely in 1919.

In 1915 Charles' young wife Lulu died. They did not have any children. Charles' draft record, dated 1917 identifies him with a wife and one child but this is in fact a stepson, the 13 year old Herbert Lewellyn Norman, son of Ida (Bertha) Fetter. Charles had married the widow Mrs. Bertha Norman on 7 August 1916 in his newly adopted state of Montana. Charles was now farming at Joplin, Hill County.

Wistar's draft registration dated 9 September 1918 shows that he was living just 10 miles away from his baby brother on his own farm at Chester. His draft card also notes that he was a US citizen by virtue of '*his father's naturalization before [Wistar's] majority*'. Clearly the father referred to here is Gustaf Erickson who had married his mother when he was 12. Wistar's own notes of 1940 recount '*I was 15 years old when my father became a naturalized citizen of the United States of America*'.

Three days later and further west in Oregon, David Nelson's own draft registration took place. Like his brothers he too was a self-employed farmer.

A second marriage

Earlier that same year in May 1918, at the age of 60 Gustaf married for a second time. His wife was the widow Mrs. Kate Castren nee Moilenan. Kate was 44 years old and her first husband Jacob Castren had died in 1915. They had been married 13 years and his death left 6 orphans aged 21 to 15 years. These children were the product of Jacob's first marriage. The last of Kate's stepchildren married 6 months before her wedding to Gustaf. There is no evidence to suggest Kate had any children of her own, either with Jacob or Gustaf.

The only picture of Kate of which I am aware is dated about 1928 with her standing in an open field, probably at Menagha MN, with her stepson Ferdinand Castren and his 3-year-old boy.

Gustaf and Kate enjoyed 14 years of marriage before Gustaf's death in May 1932 at the age of 74. Gustaf's Australian brother had died just 8 weeks earlier. On the 29 August Charles wrote to his Australian cousin Fred Erickson, *'well we buried Dad in the family lot here beside our Mother and I also have a wife buried there and a niece so the lot is nearly, full but there is room for me left'*.

Gustaf's obituary, published at the time reveals he was born in Himanka, Vansan county, Finland, March 30, 1858. It also states he was survived by his

..wife; one daughter, Mrs. Isaac Point, Midway, Minn.; three sons, David Nelson, Pendleton Ore.; Wistar Erickson, Portland, Ore.; Charles Erickson, Duluth, and six grandchildren.

It is not immediately obvious who the six children being referred to here are. To complicate matters further the Finnish language obituary refers to *seitseman lasten lasta* [7 children's children]. In 1932 David, Wistar and Hilda had, between them, 8 surviving children. Added to this is Hilda's 2 stepchildren and Charles' stepson Herbert. If I was to hazard a guess I would say the 'six grandchildren' refers only to the living sons and daughters, step or otherwise, of the 3 'Ericksons'; Wistar, Hilda and Charles.

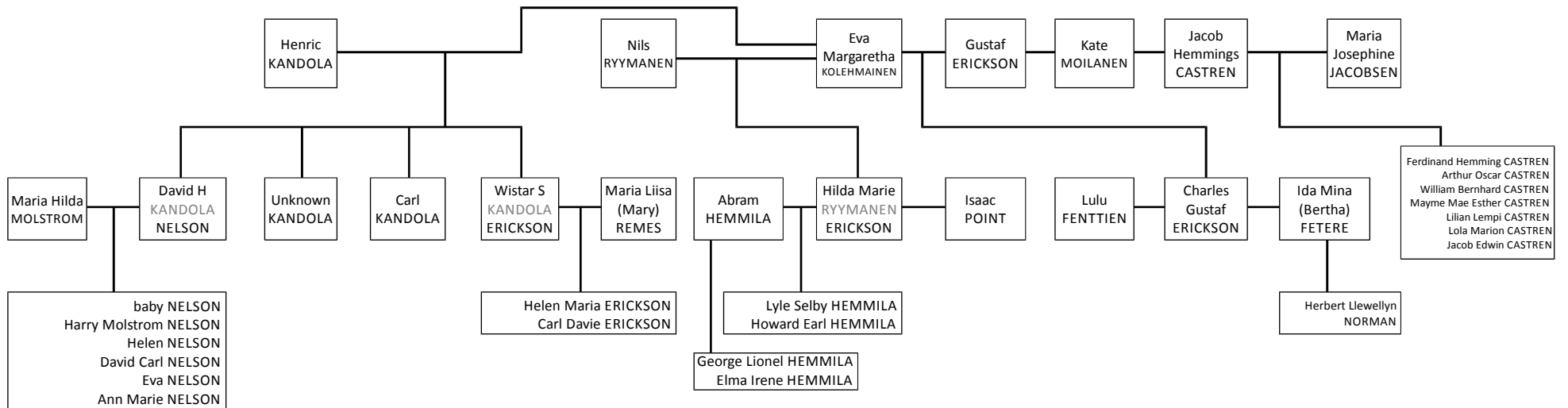
I have attached family trees for both the American and the Australian Ericksons below. My thanks to the many Americans and Australians who, over many years have uncovered the numerous documents referred to above and more importantly have kept alive the memories of their forebears. Hopefully, now that the relationship between the two brothers has been clearly established it will be much more likely that their family in Finland can be traced. The race is on to find yet more pieces to this puzzle.

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ERICKSONS in AMERICA



ERICKSONS in AUSTRALIA

