

**Aina Anderson Rinaldo Erickson from 1901 to Today –
The Love of Family On Bainbridge Island**

by John Sandage

Aina Erickson lived a very long time. She just missed being born in time for the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century (she was born in 1901), and likewise almost saw Y2K (she passed in 1998). Her life spanned the early days of Bainbridge Island's settlement to the place more or less as we know it today. It is a story typical of the times, and yet – to me, as a new-comer to the Island – very interesting in illustrating what “Old Bainbridge” was like.



Photo courtesy of John Sandage

She was born Aina Anderson in a small house on the top of Toe Jam Hill, on the south side Port Blakely Harbor. Her parents had separately emigrated from Sweden in the 1890s and met on South Beach on Bainbridge. Her father worked at

the Port Blakely Saw Mill (he was a stevedore who oversaw the loading of logs onto ships), and her mother was a housewife. Aina was their only child. The family moved to Taylor Avenue (near the intersection of Taylor and Pine Way – but that house is gone). This was on the north side of the Harbor, to a “suburb” of Port Blakely – a few blocks of houses and farms called “New Sweden.” New Sweden Avenue still carries that name, and is the next street west of Taylor Avenue. The little village of New Sweden was immediately north of the Port Blakely cemetery.

When Aina was seven, her mother died of peritonitis following an operation. Soon after, Aina got diphtheria. By the time she recovered, her father had decided he could not manage to take care of a small child given the long hours the Saw Mill demanded. Another Swedish couple, John and Anna Peterson, had no children of their own, and offered to take Aina in, and she found her safe place.



John and Anna Peterson.

Photo courtesy of Kathy Blossom

Aina’s birth father later remarried and asked her to come back home, but Aina at that point was so attached to the Petersons that she declined. She lived much of her life on the Peterson farm, and she died there at the end of her long life.

The Peterson Farmhouse still stands (though modified and modernized), and is still home to the extended Anderson-Erickson family. It stands opposite “Mac n Jacks Island Auto Services” on Eagle Harbor Drive.



The Peterson Farmhouse

Photo courtesy of Kathy Blossom

Aina attended the McDonald School, which was located not far from the avenue that still bears its name. There were nine grades, and three teachers (including the Principal). The school had a well for drinking water, and an outdoor privy. There was no electricity (and certainly no phones) on the Island. Aina recalled her boy classmates as prone to what now sounds like innocent mischief – tipping over the privy, hauling a buggy up onto the school’s porch, and the like – but in the strict Scandinavian community of New Sweden the boys got “whipped” at school, and then whipped again at home!

The Petersons were active in the nearby Presbyterian church (the Lutheran church was far away in the North End) and the life of the community. Aina

recalled them inviting to Sunday dinners young soldiers stationed at Fort Ward during World War I to protect Rich Passage. Aina remembered meeting one homesick young soldier from a far, faraway place called “Alabama.” Bainbridge in those days had few roads, and each little village was almost a world unto itself. One of her neighbors took the opportunity to ride in a delivery wagon to Island Center, which Aina remembered was a thrilling ride “almost like going to a foreign country!” Island Center is 4 miles from Port Blakley – about an 8 minute drive by car these days....

Aina was a good student, and wanted to go to high school, which was not necessarily common for girls in those days (nor for boys – teenagers typically went to work at the Mill or nearby businesses that supported the workers). But the Petersons supported her ambition, and she did enroll at Lincoln High School, which sat where the Winslow Green is today.

In those days there were no cars, much less school buses. Children in Port Blakley and New Sweden who wanted to go to high school had to walk to Eagle Harbor, down Ward Avenue, and then row across the Harbor to the Winslow side, near where Doc’s Marina Restaurant stands today. Although Aina never learned to swim, she and her girlfriends rowed across the Harbor, morning and afternoon, autumn, winter and spring, for three years. The boys rowed in a separate boat. She only missed one day of school. Aina remembered the big city Winslow kids as “snobby, aggressive and rude” towards the country folk from Port Blakely and New Sweden. She graduated with the Class of 1919, one of six graduating seniors.



From left to right: Cora Oviatt, Aina Anderson, and Lillian Welfare.

Photo courtesy of the Bainbridge History Museum Photograph Collections.

After finishing Lincoln High School (as it was then called), Aina attended Bellingham State Normal School (now known as Western Washington University) for one year to study teaching. This was quite uncommon in 1919! Most girls were married young, and a career outside the home was looked down upon in the conservative Scandinavian community of Port Blakely. Aina had to have been determined, and the Petersons very open-minded, for her to attend college. When Aina was credentialed as a teacher, she returned to Port Blakely to live with the Petersons, and to teach at the Port Blakely School (where she recalled that many of her students were Japanese) as well as the McDonald School she had attended herself, only a few years before.

When Aina turned 24, she met and married John Rinaldo. He was a Swede like Aina, but John's great grandfather had changed his surname to the very non-Swedish sounding "Rinaldo" to try to make himself stand out from all the Andersons, Petersons, and Ericksons. Rinaldo was an Italian general that the great grandfather had read about in a history book. John was a woodsman like most everyone else Aina knew. The next year, their daughter, Lois Eleanor was born in Port Blakely.



L-R: John Rinaldo, Lois Rinaldo Stone, Aina Anderson Rinaldo Erickson, Anna and Ted Rinaldo

Photo courtesy of Kathy Blossom

Soon thereafter they moved to Bellingham where John found work at a logging camp, and the young couple lived in a very primitive three-room cabin owned by the logging company. But later that same year, John was diagnosed with an enlarged heart following a case of rheumatic fever, and was warned he could not

survive the hard life of a woodsman. So John and Aina bought a small grocery store in Bellingham and became shopkeepers. Three weeks after they bought the store, John was bedridden and he never recovered. He died a few months later, in 1929, leaving Aina and Lois on their own. Aina was not yet 28, and Lois was only 2 years old.

Aina tried to carry on with the small store, then the stock market crashed, and the Great Depression came. So Aina closed the business and moved back to Bainbridge – back in with the Petersons, in fact. Aina played the organ and taught Sunday school at the Presbyterian Church in Port Blakely. She was back home in New Sweden, in the house she had grown up in, in the community she knew.

Aina and Lois lived with the Petersons until 1937, which was the beginning of many changes in the life Aina had known. Family friends introduced her to a young widower. That was Inar Erickson, whose ancestors were Norwegian. Inar was a salesman. Before long, they were courting, and Aina Rinaldo became Aina Erickson. She moved to Inar's house in Everett.

But then Anna Peterson died of pneumonia following a broken hip. A year later, John Peterson died of a heart attack. Aina inherited the Peterson Farmhouse, and about 17 acres of farmland. She and Inar moved back into the house Aina had lived in nearly all her life.



Photo courtesy of John Sandage

Aina and Inar were married for thirty years. Lois graduated from Bainbridge High School. When Lois married Bob Stone and started her family, she and Bob moved into the Peterson Farmhouse, and Aina and Inar moved into Inar's former home in Seattle. Then Inar died in 1967, and Aina returned to live with Lois and her two daughters (who, eventually, gave Lois seven grandchildren) in small house on the Peterson property, and near the Farmhouse in what was, by then, known as "Eagledale" rather than New Sweden.



L-R: Lois Rinaldo Stone, Bob Stone, Aina and Inar Erickson

Photo courtesy of Kathy Blossom

Aina lived in that small house on the land she had known as a young girl for another 31 years. She kept livestock, knitted and crocheted, and pampered her grandchildren and great grandchildren. She died at home in April of 1998, two months shy of her 97th birthday. Aina is buried in the same plot with the Petersons, and with Lois buried next to her (who passed away in 2012), all in the Port Blakely Cemetery.



Photo courtesy of John Sandage

Kathy Blossom, Lois's daughter, and Aina's granddaughter, lives in a house next door to the original Peterson Farmhouse. Kathy's daughter (Aina's great granddaughter) lives in the Peterson Farmhouse that Aina first moved into 115 years ago, in 1909, as a little girl whose widowed father could not take care of her.

I didn't know Aina, but I am sure that she would be glad to know that her family continue to love and care for her family home, and the neighborhood, as much as she did as a young girl.