

Descendants of George and Ebba Bergwall - A Legacy of Music and Song

There are many attributes, physical, cultural, social, to which we can point when we consider what we inherit from our ancestors—the color of our hair, the shape of our nose or chin, our general physique. There are also our belief systems or celebratory traditions. These often transfer from one generation to the next. The inheritance of which I am most fond and appreciative is our family's love of music and our ability to perform it by singing. I love to sing.

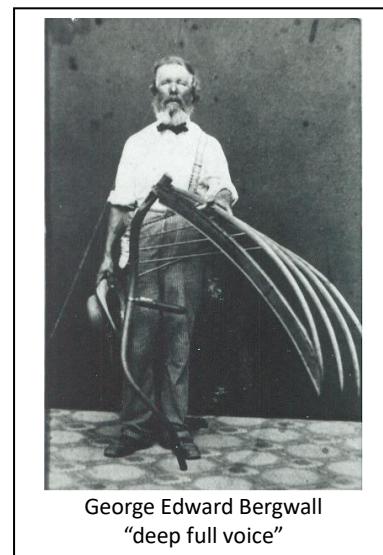
My Grandfather Robert P Bergwall met my Grandmother Marie Gill when both sang in the choir of Milwaukee's Gesu Church. Of her involvement as a soloist during her long life in Hartland WI, my mother (Margaret Bergwall) said, "No one was married or buried that I didn't sing for it". While my siblings and I cleaned the house in our childhood, we sang along with the Metropolitan Opera that came to us through the Saturday Radio broadcast. I too have continued my mother's tradition as a church choir member, soloist and cantor, and I have sung professionally on stage. In the generations that follow me, my daughter and grandchildren also sing in church and in many theatrical productions and continue to bring the Joy of music alive.



Hartland Women's Choir.
Peggy (Bergwall) Hasslinger,
3rd from left.

This tradition of music and song is not limited to my immediate family. It shows up within other Bergwall descendant families. My cousin John is a well-known performer and teacher of music. (Jazz Guitar) His sister, Rosie, appreciates having grown up in an environment of music, often going to Milwaukee's Florentine Opera. John and Rosie's mother, my aunt Maryanne, had perfect pitch and played piano well into her later years.

This is a tradition and legacy that reaches back to the first generation Bergwall to emigrate from Sweden to the Wisconsin. There are two fascinating stories about my great-great grandfather, George Edward Bergwall, that involve his exceptional singing voice. The first is told in Gustaf Unonius's memoir. As Gustaf, George, another Swede and a local band of Potawatomi hunters trekked back under the light of the moon from a day of hunting, Unonius tells us "Bergwall began to sing in his deep and full voice one of the hunting songs of his friend Wadman, whereupon the three of us (Swedes) made the forest re-echo with Atterborn's beautiful Hunter's Song and found with Florio that even hunting and winter have their glories."ⁱ



George Edward Bergwall
"deep full voice"

The second story comes from Sweden's celebrated author, Fredrika Bremer. It was September of 1850 at New Upsala and the home of George and his wife Ebba, when Bremmer was treated to dinner, "games, songs and dancing, exactly as if in Sweden." Bremer, her hosts and their family then traveled for coffee to the nearby home of Ebba's mother, Charlotta Petterson. Bremer writes that there she read "a little story..." which "incited my countrymen to sing Swedish songs. Neither were those beautiful Swedish voices lost here in the New World, and I was both affected and impressed with a deep solemnity when the men, led by Bergvall, sang, with their fresh clear voices, ..." ⁱⁱ

Story contributor - Margaret (Hasslinger) Wittkopp

ⁱ Gustaf Unonius, *A Pioneer in Northwest America 1841-1858*. P 350

ⁱⁱ *A Swedish Traveler in Early Wisconsin: The Observations of Fredrika Bremer*. Edited by George C. Brown. Wisconsin Magazine of History, The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Vol. 61, No. 4, Summer, 1978.