BIOGRAPHY OF NILS GÖSTA SAHLIN

by

Valerie A. Kent

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Peter Dobkin Hall
Research Scientist
Institute of Social and
Policy Studies
New Haven, Connecticut
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INTRODUCTION

"I was born a bastard," said Dr. Nils G. Sahlin. Having secured your attention, he would go on to relate that he did not meet his mother until he was an adult, and that he never knew who his father was, although at one point he told me he thought he was Jewish."

As an immigrant, the part I liked best in his life story began with his arrival in the U.S. at the age of 21; his career as a chauffeur and handyman for the principal of New Rochelle High School, who persuaded him to complete his schooling; and, at the age of 23, being offered a scholarship to Yale. That he eventually became president of a small Connecticut college seemed to me to make his life a perfect example of the American Dream. After listening to his story, I threatened to write it all down. He humored me with a smile and said, "whenever you want," but before I was able to pin him down, it was too late.

When I began to sort through his papers to write the story of this remarkable man, born in the year 1900 and who died at the age of 88, I found that so much had happened in those years that it may have been very difficult and painful for him to let me or anyone else look closely at his life story.

*A subject of considerable private importance to him. At his formal memorial service, held at Quinnipiac College in November 1988, the Kaddish, the Hebrew prayer for the dead, was recited, at the request of his wife, who said she was conveying one of his last and "most fervent" wishes.
He had lost two wives, one through death, another through divorce, and had enjoyed a somewhat complex and sometimes difficult relationship with his third. One of his children, a precious five-year-old, had died of leukemia. He had never made a great deal of money, and was always very careful as to how it was spent. Although he had led a life surrounded by scholars, he himself said, rather self-consciously and perhaps defensively, that he was a "humanist, essentially a book person, who had small claim as a scholar."

But I found that wherever he had lived or worked, there were people who still remembered him long after he had left. Students of his from the 1940s came to New Haven to celebrate a reunion in 1981. A classmate from New Rochelle High School sent him a card at Christmas. There was correspondence from friends that covered almost fifty years. His wit, his gentle irony, his presence, continued to be felt at the college he had run for 12 years, and when the current president, John L. Lahey, was appointed in 1987, almost twenty years after Sahlin's retirement, Lahey made a point to pay court to the former president and use him as a resource.

Sahlin confessed to friends that he was bored by the detailed retelling of his life story, and was not interested in the past.

**New Haven Register, June 16, 1968**
He was good at new starts, said his former wife, Hope. He would see people from each period and he loved to reminisce, but it didn’t affect his ability to live in the present.***

A repudiation of the old and an embracing of the new are characteristics of a successful immigrant. As Oscar Handlin said in his classic study of immigration, The Uprooted, "the history of immigration is the history of alienation and its consequences."****

*** Hope (Sahlin) Whitlock, his second wife, in a conversation, 11.4.92

APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA

In a typed two-page single-spaced undated document, probably an early draft of his curriculum vitae, Nils Sahlin described the first thirty-seven years of his life, exactly as follows:

He was born in 1900 near the site where St. Gören now engages with the dragon in mortal combat every day at 12, high noon, all for the love of the Princess, i.e., near the Stockholm Town Hall.¹ His childhood -- not unvaried: 1900-01 Stockholm; 1901-06 Öland (favorite Isle of the late Queen Victoria); 1906-07 in Gösta Berling-Land (his middle G. for Gösta); 1907-08 Stockholm; 1909-14 (more or less steadily) again Öland. His elementary schooling was rather irregular, but he graduated from the equivalent of Grammar School in 1912 after a grand total of 2 1/2 years of attendance, according to the American scale. Much of the time between 1909 and 1912 was spent in falling off horses and learning to swear effectively at oxen. In 1912 he left home to clerk in a store. He went into farm work for a year in 1914 partly for reasons of health, partly to find out whether his patience still was divine enough to deal with oxen extensively. After another couple of years of clerking (having sandwiched in a regulation Protestant confirmation, meantime) he joined the Swedish Navy in 1917. The years 1914-17 were spent near beautiful old Kalmar; up to about 1921 he was a shining light in the I.O.G.T. circles (temperance society). The damage done in the latter activity has in the main been compensated during the past fifteen years. During the 3 1/2 years in the navy he partook in extensive shore travels in the Scandinavian countries and Germany. Lucky breaks sent him on every major expedition which the navy undertook at that time, such as: Winter Expedition to Aland Islands during the Finno-Russian war (1917-18), West Indies Expedition (Germany, England, Holland, France, Belgium, Azores, Bermudas, USA, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, Panama) in 1919-20,

¹ A famous statue in the center of Stockholm in a church in the section called the Old Town.
Spitzbergen Expedition -hydro-biological and chartmaking work - during the entire Summer of 1920.

The latter is mainly memorable because of the unrecorded historical event at the start of which he jumped overboard to rescue a small sea-chest which had fallen just previously. The captain returned somewhat later with the ship (which, by the way, took S.A. André and his comrades and balloon up to Spitzbergen in 1898)² to retrieve the sea-chest and its rescuer. The journey continued along the Norwegian fjords and shore-line to Trondheim, Tromsø, Narvik, the North Cape. On the return in the late Summer of 1920 our hero resigned from the Navy and with one month's leave of absence joined the Swedish-American Line, S.S. Stockholm, as assistant to the ship's doctor. The discharge from Navy was surprisingly honorable; six months previously he had become a non-commissioned officer. After a few round trips, probably three or four, he went to Stockholm to find out what makes an auto go. At the same time he became better acquainted with his mother, half-sister and stepfather, all of whom he had met in the previous year. The Spring of 1921 found him as an emigrant to the USA where a determined yes to a question he did not understand put him through Ellis Island in record time, the answer representing the extent of his English at the time. His first position in the US acquainted him with the intricacies of an American furnace, but provided, incidentally, a warm place to read English books. The following Winter found him a pupil of the New Rochelle Night School, and in the Autumn of 1922 he resigned from a $45-a-week position to enter regular day High School at nothing per week. In the Summer of 1923, while driving a Mack truck in up-state New York, he became acquainted with a petite Vassar graduate who had just received her M.A. from Columbia University -- that's Mrs. Sahlin. New Rochelle handed Sahlin its diploma in 1924 and he went to Yale, that being the place where the most favorable scholarship was offered. At the end of the Freshman year he grieved the Yale Dean by marrying and the newly-weds balanced precariously on a stretched shoe-string across the big pond and back

² Salomon August André (1854-97), Swedish balloonist and explorer.
Extensive travels in Sweden during the wedding trip (Wisby, Stockholm, Uppsala, Kalmar, the Göta Kanal, Karlshrona, etc.) In 1927 he became a US citizen, graduated from Yale (B.A.) with German for a major, Honors in English, and two weeks later unwrapped his graduation present - Master Nils G. Sahlin, Jr. After a year in the English Department of the Yale Graduate School (as a student) he went to Burlington (Univ. of Vermont) to teach German. Lake Champlain is cold in May; the mountains are marvelous at any time. The Sahlin family went to Germany in the Autumn of 1929 on a small grant from the Institute of International Education. Mr. [Sahlin] attempted to study at the Univ. of Hamburg, but a bronchial condition kept him either at home or in Hamburg hospitals where the nurses are chosen on the basis of their training only. Two months' residence in the Bavarian Highlands between München and Ochamhamgau cured that. He then received a call to become Lector in English at the University of Leipzig where he remained for 3 semesters. During that time he also was connected with the export department of Köhler and Volckmar in Leipzig, among other things edited and translated their 800-page catalogue of Educational Apparatus for Chemistry and Physics, was technical translator in the Academic translation bureau, interpreter for the Leipzig Fair Board, translator and interpreter for the International Fur Congress, etc. Trips in the Autumn of 1929, Spring and Autumn of 1931 again brought him to Sweden. In 1931 he returned to the USA and Yale to teach German, which still is his main occupation. In 1932 he became German instructor at famed old Hopkins Grammar School (1660) to avoid time's hanging heavy. He passed his Ph.D. examinations at Yale in 1934. Half the Summer of 1936 was spent in Germany, travelling and working. The other half was spent in Sweden, particularly Stockholm where he had been invited to do some editing and translating at the University of Stockholm. The research project was unfinished and his only accomplishment was a 300-page translation and an economic treatise soon to appear. In 1933 he published with Prof. Schreiber of Yale a text called MINIMUM GERMAN. In 1935 he became General Editor of the Farrar & Rinehart German Series and in 1936 he published a school edition of Hans Leip's KLABAUTERFLÄGGE with a patented binding. The Winter of 1936 is spent in
writing his Ph.D. dissertation and he will, Deo volente, receive his long-delayed degree in June 1937.

So there's an end on't!

He subsequently changed this document slightly -- a few details were omitted (the Protestant confirmation, the membership in the temperance society) -- and sent it to Henry M. Willard, president of the Bureau of University Travel as an inter-office memo. An "editor's note" at the end stated that Dr. Sahlin had received his Ph.D. and had been elected a Timothy Dwight Fellow; also that he had conducted a Bureau tour through Scandinavia which was such a great success as a study of Scandinavian culture and as an exciting vacation adventure that he had been appointed leader of the Bureau's 1938 Grand Tour of the North (an amplified edition of the Scandinavian Travel Seminar).

Sahlin took a party of fifteen that summer and they went to France, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and England, by boat, motor, train, and bicycle. No wonder they were called "Vagabond Tours." The trip prompted a rather tongue-in-cheek letter from a friend who signs himself "Vagabondingly, Dear Henry," warning Sahlin not

...under any circumstances, to attempt the pass between Odda and Roldal [Norway], since it has been crossed on foot only twice, and never on bicycles. Provided that you and the group should accomplish this feat, undoubtedly an arrangement could be made whereby a small sum would be charged for viewing the brave party -- with this extra income, hospitaliza-
tion of the group as a whole can then be managed. This warning, late tho' it may be, may be superfluous since you undoubtedly were stopped by the difficulty of carrying sufficient provisions for the four days necessary to cover the forty kilometers. Of course, in case of rain the maximum of twelve kilometers per day would have to be lessened considerably.

Sahlin noted that "It rained like hell!".

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3 Letter from "Dear Henry", otherwise unknown, 7.4.38, written from the Breifonn Hotel, Roldal.
FAMILY TIES

After his birth in Stockholm in 1900, Nils was brought up by a foster mother, Fru Hilda Johanson, and lived on Öland, an island in the Baltic Sea. He did not meet his natural mother and half-sister until he was nineteen. After he emigrated to the U.S., he corresponded with his sister and her husband, Olga and Nils Cronenberger.¹ Sahlin wrote to them about his family, of his various successes in his career, and the moves from one job to another. Nils Cronenberger wrote many of the earlier letters because he was doing business with his brother-in-law in America, exporting Swedish goods such as fishknives and ashtrays. Many of the letters concerned these business transactions. The personal aspects of the letters were about the health of Nils (Sahlin) and Olga’s mother and her husband, who were getting old. On the death of his mother-in-law in 1950, Nils Cronenberger wrote:

Mother loved you very much and was very happy and appreciated your success in life. She told me not long ago that she had been able to do so little for you and therefore didn’t expect for you to really care for her.²

In 1951, Nils Sahlin’s stepfather died. The death of both her parents in the space of a year left Nil’s sister very

¹ All correspondence between them was, of course, in Swedish. Anna Wannstrom, a Quinnipiac College student, has kindly translated these for me.

² Letter from Nils Cronenberger, 1.30.50
depressed. For a while the correspondence between Sweden and America lapsed, but eventually it picked up again. In 1960, Olga complained about the lack of letters from her brother, adding that she felt bad for her husband, who kept writing without getting any letters back, "except when it suits you to tell him about you and your family's success." But the following year, she is writing how happy she is that he and his wife are coming to Sweden for a visit. The visit proves to be a strain; Nils Cronenberger offends the Sahlins with his anti-Semitic remarks.

Although Cronenberger apologizes, the correspondence is sparse throughout the rest of the decade. In 1976, there was a letter from Olga, answering questions that Nils had obviously asked their mother about his background and relatives:

Regarding your papers, something must be wrong. When you wrote to Mom and asked about your [indecipherable], she probably got nervous, so I suspect the worst. Maybe I can tell you what I know to help you out. Mom had two metal candlesticks and she mentioned that she had had a fiancé who was employed in a hardware store, I don't know where but she said she lived in Uppsala for a little while. She also worked at a spa in Soltsjobeden, a suburb of Stockholm, and that is where she met my father. 

6 Letter from Olga Cronenberger, 7.12.60.

7 Letter from Olga Cronenberger, . .76
There was further stories about their grandmother, their Aunt Ebbe, and Uncle Kondred and three cousins. But the questions that Nils had asked about his parentage remained unanswered.

In 1977, at the age of 75, Olga Cronenberger came to the U.S. and visited her brother. She wrote to the Sahlins thanking them for a wonderful visit. Brother and sister corresponded when they were both in their eighties. Much of their letter writing in these latter days concerned their own health. Olga survived her brother by four years.

For all the many years of correspondence and the few visits to each other's country, in the final analysis, Olga and Nils had little in common. They were only blood relatives; they had no shared childhood memories, and the relationship was not close.

The only other relative that he corresponded with was his "niece," Ethel Hunt, (the daughter of his foster-mother's daughter) and her family, who lived in Mexico. His letters are rare -- every ten years or so -- and in a letter written on July 22, 1950, he admits that he repays Ethel's mother's kindness in remembering him at Christmas and on his birthday with "the grossest negligence and complete silence."
THERESE

Sahlin was married to Therese Haaf Sahlin -- a "wonderful girl" as he notes in a 1950 curriculum vitae-- from 1925 until 1941, when she died of a cerebral hemorrhage. A graduate of Vassar College and Columbia University, she was enrolled in the Yale Graduate School from 1926-27. She also taught at a private school in New Haven. At the time of their marriage, Mrs. Sahlin still owed $150 on a student loan from Vassar, which was for the "course through said college," payable without interest, which her widower paid back monthly after her death in small sums, $5, $10, $15 a month, until it was all paid back by 1945.¹

Therese Sahlin was the daughter of Joseph F. and Mary E. (Hauser) Haaf, and the foster daughter of Frederick T. Russell. The Sahlins were married in New Jersey, where Therese had been employed as a social worker, and, forty years later, he was to write to his daughter, Nicki, that although he married at the end of his freshman year, his wife had her master's degree and was hoping to make his college years easier, which she did.

Therese and their young son, Nils Jr., accompanied Sahlin to Vermont, in 1928, where he taught German, and to Hamburg, in 1929, on a grant from the Institute of International

¹ Loan Fund Note, Vassar College, 2.21.20.
Education. He was offered a job teaching English in Leipzig in 1930. After three semesters in Leipzig, the Sahlins returned to New Haven.

From 1931 through 1939 they lived an extremely busy life. He went back to Yale to study for his Ph.D. and also teach German. At the same time, he taught German at Hopkins Grammar School in New Haven, his salary for the year 1936-37 being $600. He received his Ph.D. in 1937, writing a thesis on "The Faust Puppet Play Manuscripts in The William A. Speck Collection at Yale." He was the author of a chapter on "Soldiers and Sailors," in Swedes in America 1638-1938, and he published Minimum German and Klabauterflagge, and edited Farrar & Rinehart’s German Series, as noted in his Apologia Pro Vita Sua.

In April of 1938, the Sahlins bought a house in West Haven, on Ocean Avenue, for $5,000, paid for with a mortgage from Yale University and a private loan.

When Sahlin received a job offer in 1939 to become an associate professor of German and to head up German and Scandinavian Studies at Russell Sage College, then an all-girls school in Troy, N.Y., the family moved to New York State, and rented out the house on Ocean Avenue in what was to become the first of Sahlin’s ventures into real estate. The house was finally disposed of in 1954 for $7,500.

If the years at Yale had been extremely productive
professionally for Nils Sahlin, those at Russell Sage College from 1940 through 1944 were of personal turmoil. He had been in his new position for little more than a year and Nils Jr. was 14 years old, when his wife died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Therese Haaf Sahlin was only 41 years old. The Russell Sage community expressed their sorrow for the young professor and his family. In a letter asking for contributions to the Therese Haaf Sahlin Memorial, they spoke of

...the deep and sincere sorrow that was felt...that to a great number of people, through the kindness of her heart, her charm, her vivacity, and her entire personality, she had become more than just another member of our community. Short though the time was, we could call her one of us...her student friends in Deutsches Haus suggested the idea of a book-fund as a fitting tribute to a person who had given all that part of her life, not devoted to her family, to the education of the young."

When he arrived at Russell Sage in 1939, Sahlin instituted an informal method of learning German. He opened a German Room called the Deutsches Haus as a campus center for all German student activities. Lectures were transferred from the conventional classroom to the German Room which was decorated as an Alpine hunting lodge. The only indication that it was a classroom was a portable blackboard. Sahlin was also in demand as a speaker to local civic groups such as the Troy Rotary Club, the Delta Club (an association of faculty men of


9 Draft letter from the House-president and director of Deutsches Haus, 1941.
Troy Area schools and colleges), the District Chapter of the Libraries Association, and the Colonial Club. Besides lecturing on Scandinavia, he led discussions on the factors which led to the rise of Hitler and Nazi Germany. He was also involved with the Red Cross and the Community Chest.

After one year as an associate professor of German, Sahlin was promoted to full professor. For four years he headed the Committee on Graduate Study and acted as advisor to the student newspaper, Quill.

Throughout his life, Sahlin liked to write poetry for his own pleasure. In the spring of 1942, a poem of his, entitled "A Pledge..." appeared in Quill. In 1953, when the class of '43 invited him to help them celebrate their 10th anniversary, he penned another poem entitled "To the Distinguished Class of Sage '43," the final stanza of which read as follows:

But I must send regrets, alas!
And fondly tell you now sans frills;
You ever were my favorite class;
I love you all and sign this, Nils.

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10 This extraordinarily rapid promotion may have been both a tribute to his successes and a testament to the not very vigorous criteria applied to promotion at the time at Russell Sage.
HOPE

On July 3, 1943, after two years as a widower, Sahlin married Hope Campbell, daughter of the Reverend Robert Campbell and Marjorie Perkins Campbell, in Albany, NY. A 1942 graduate of Russell Sage College, Hope was enrolled in Albany Medical School. It appears that his father-in-law was not totally pleased with the match. In a 1965 letter to his daughter, Nicki, on her impending marriage, he states that "I am too decent to play a role emulating that of your grandfather when your mother and I planned to marry. That was an excruciatingly sad chapter."\(^{11}\)

The following year, as part of the war effort, Sahlin went through preliminary training and was granted a year's leave of absence from the college to accept a government assignment in Europe. Mrs. Sahlin, who was finishing up her second year in medical school, was expecting to continue her studies and planned to join her husband in Europe as soon as conditions permitted. However, she had to leave school in 1944 because she developed tuberculosis in both lungs and was required to rest.

That fall, Sahlin went through the usual procedures: physical examination, immunization, government issue of equipment, qualification as a war production planner and for

\(^{11}\) Letter to Nicki Sahlin, 6.6.65

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jobs methods trainer, and in October was given an identification card which identified him as holding the rank of major.

With his knowledge of Swedish, German, and English and his traveling experience in Scandinavia and Europe, he was assigned to the O.S.S. His wife, who was feeling much better, joined him in England and Sweden, and met Sahlin's mother and half-sister for the first time.

"His mother was rather nice-looking and very humorous," she said. "Some of the work was cloak and dagger stuff, looking for documents in trees, guarding the apartment with a gun in a drawer," she recalled. "One of his more notable tasks was translating Himmler's diaries."12

Demobilized in 1945, Sahlin returned to the U.S. expecting to pick up where he had left off. He called Russell Sage and was told the salary would be the same as when he left (in 1944 he was paid $2,272), and he got the impression that he was not particularly welcome. Hope believes that in some way this was due to his reputation as a rather unconventional person. The college was now run by a temporary president, a woman, who did not appreciate his ironic sense of humor and attitude toward life. This reception naturally soured Sahlin’s outlook on the college, and it was not until 1951,

after a trip to Troy to celebrate the appointment of the 10th editor of Quill, that he was able to say that his faith in Sage's future had been restored." Over the years he continued to keep in touch with "his girls," and in 1981 a group of original members of the Deutsches Haus came up to New Haven for a reunion.

The Sahlins now returned to the house in West Haven, and Nils began looking for a job in the New Haven area, still theoretically on leave of absence from Russell Sage.

With his Yale connections, it was not long before he received an offer of a new job, and in 1945 Sahlin was appointed dean of the Junior College of Commerce, then located at 389 Whitney Avenue, New Haven.

The Junior College of Commerce, or J.C.C. as it was known, was founded in 1929 by Samuel Tator as a non-profit, nonsectarian, coeducational, business school incorporated under the name Connecticut College of Commerce."

In the spring of 1929, with the nation on the brink of the Great Depression, Tator, a highly respected teacher of accounting and administrator at the New Haven YMCA extension

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13 Letter to George F. Birkmayer (Birk), 3.27.51.

14 History of the Junior College of Commerce is taken from the College archives, and particularly from an address delivered by President John Lahey at the 1991 Connecticut Meeting of The Newcomen Society of the United States held in New Haven on April 29, 1991.
school, which was part of Northeastern University, was dismissed from his position as associate director and dean of the New Haven college. According to Mrs. Irmagarde Tator, his wife, the reason for this dismissal was a disagreement with the administration of the school, particularly with its accounting procedures.

A group of Mr. Tator's former students at the school gathered together to urge him to start a new college and each contributed $100 to help start the new venture. The Certificate of Incorporation of the Connecticut College of Commerce, dated May 31, 1929, lists the names of the eleven students who became the subscribers responsible for forming the body politic of the newly founded institution. In addition, these students became part of the first undergraduate body.

With an initial enrollment of just under 200 students, the college was first located in the Lincoln building at 956 Chapel Street, New Haven. In 1935, the college was granted approval to offer both Associate in Science and Associate in Arts degrees, and the name was changed from the Connecticut College of Commerce to the Junior College of Commerce.

During World War II, from 1943 to 1945, the J.C.C. was forced to close its doors when almost its entire student body was drafted. The trustees of the college, and its president, Samuel W. Tator, had pledged themselves to reopen the college
at the earliest possible date after the cessation of the war. The appointment of Dr. Sahlin as Dean was one of their first steps in fulfillment of this pledge.

Mr. Tator was away in Washington as director of the dairy branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, so Mrs. Tator and Dean Sahlin ran the college. Their first job was to rewrite the catalog. Sahlin's salary for the year was $4,870.

The college reopened in November of 1945 with just over 200 students, not much larger than in its first year of operation in 1929. However, within a year, as men came home from the war and were returning to college in record numbers under the G.I. bill, enrollment rose to 714.

There were ten veterans who had left college to go into the armed forces in the second year class so that in June of 1946 they were able to graduate with an associate degree. The increase in enrollment required that the school run an extra session throughout the summer. The following year, running out of space, Sahlin rented the Orange Street Armory where extra classes were held.

For three academic years, Sahlin ran the junior college with Mrs. Tator. On a personal level, he became a father for the second time, when his daughter Nicki was born on October 30, 1946.

On writing to his former students at Russell Sage, he later encapsulated his three years as dean by saying that he
"suffered under having 700 male and only 10 female students; less than 10 percent of the 70 on the faculty were women, but I did have 10 very nice secretaries!"\textsuperscript{15}

On June 18, 1947, the college's authority to grant the A.A. degree was rescinded by the State Board of Education. Sahlin wrote to Mr. Tator enclosing the notification which came in the form of a letter and semi-annual release from the State Department of Education.\textsuperscript{16} He said he was shocked at its condemnatory tone, explicit or implied, and the almost total absence of commendation. He believes that it is "no more objective than the last one." He speaks of the State being "dubious about his [Sahlin's] eligibility" but not saying that he is incompetent. In his letter to Tator he adds:

In view of their charges in my direction, it would probably ease matters all around if we allowed our present understanding to terminate when the 15th of September rolls around. It leaves rather scanty time for you to find a replacement and no more for me to find another position. On the other hand, since you are to be here yourself from July 1st, the College should experience no difficulty.

Sahlin closed by saying that he believed that the State had overreached and exceeded their authority. "By law they

\textsuperscript{15} Undated Letter to Vera, Kay, Mary, Bee, and Betty, (former Russell Sage students), in reply to theirs of 2.8.56.

accredit us; I take it to mean our overall policy and performance. Whether we have transparent magazine covers or not is none of their business. Perhaps we need a lawyer?"

After leaving J.C.C., Sahlin made a living for his family by freelance writing and translation (he worked on a translation of *An Introduction to Sweden* by Ingvar Andersson), and as a visiting professor at Yale.

In December, 1947, he corresponded with the editor of an English translation of Bodmer's *The Loom of Language*, complaining of the numerous errors in the Swedish section. He suggested that careful correction be made if there was to be a new printing or edition of this work. The editor, Lancelot Hogben, Fellow of the Royal Society, responded with gratitude and excuses (he blamed the non-stop blitz), and requested a list of errata for a future edition. Five-and-a-half pages of corrections later, Sahlin offered no guarantee of infallibility, but noted that he would be glad to offer his services for a much closer search, provided that Norton (the publisher) paid well.  

Sahlin's resume in 1948 suggests that he is looking for some kind of administrative or executive work. In it he notes his success in various phases of institutional publicity -- at Russell Sage, assisting in the revision of the college

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17 Letter to Lancelot Hogben, 1.27.48.

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catalog; at the Junior College of Commerce, writing three issues of the catalog, all the college publicity, pamphlets, broadsides, posters, and advertisements. It was a difficult time financially for the Sahlins, and in a letter to his longtime friend Adèle Heilborn, at the Swedish-America Foundation in Stockholm, he tells her that for the first time in his life he has been "rather homesick. The idea of returning to Sweden more or less permanently has often occurred to me and Hope seems to have no objection." He goes on to give her news of the family: Nils Jr. had been out of the Navy since August 1946, and was now in his third year at Yale, Hope was almost recovered from her TB, and Nicki, the baby, was just over one year old.

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18 Letter to Adèle Heilborn, 12.16.47
MINNEAPOLIS

It was not until the summer of 1948 that he found a job, and this was an administrative position outside academia and the Eastern United States. He was invited to be the first director of the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis.

The Swedes were the first of the Scandinavians to come to Minnesota, and their descendants are still the most numerous. It has been suggested that Scandinavians emigrated to Minnesota because it reminded them of their homeland. There was also plenty of good farmland available. 19

The American Swedish Institute was housed in a solid limestone castle, with thirty-three rooms, three turrets, and five chimneys, built in the style of a French chateau by an American-Swedish millionaire, Swan J. Turnblad. 20 Turnblad was born in Smaland, Sweden, in 1860. At the age of nineteen, he came to Minneapolis from Vasa, Minnesota, where his parents had settled when he was about ten. He became the manager, and then owner, of an insolvent Swedish language newspaper, the Svenska Amerikansaka Posten, and under his ownership, its circulation increased from four thousand to fifty-five thousand.

Now a millionaire, Turnblad decided to build a mansion

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20 Brink, p. 76-77.
for his family. It took seven years to build and cost one and a half million dollars. However, the Turnblad family spent little time enjoying the magnificent palace. Mr. and Mrs. Turnblad and their daughter traveled widely, and when they were at home lived in the small quarters at the rear of the mansion.

The mansion finally became home to thousands of Swedish Americans through the founding in 1929 of the American Swedish Institute of Arts, Literature and Science, which was Turnblad's idea and was financed by his generosity.

As first full time director of the American Swedish Institute, Sahlin became "king" of this castle.

At his own request he asked for a one-year contract in the beginning. This may have been because he was not totally convinced that he would prosper in the non-academic milieu, and that he was hoping that something better would come along. In fact, even before taking the job in Minneapolis, he was a candidate for the presidency of Rollins College in Florida.

Also, after two years in Minneapolis he was corresponding with his former department chairman, friend, and mentor from Yale, Adolph Benson, about the possibility of his taking over Larson College, in Hamden, CT., as dean, acting president, or,
with the death of George Larson, as president. Adolph Benson had been on the board of Larson College. Benson, born in Sweden in 1881, retired from Yale University in 1947 after a distinguished career as professor of German and Scandinavian languages. He had taught at the university for 33 years.

Nevertheless, Sahlin threw himself into the new job with his usual enthusiasm, and stayed for five years. According to his wife, the board of trustees were an unexpressive group, and it was not until a couple of years had passed that they put in writing their appreciation for his efforts. In 1952, the president of the Institute wrote a glowing letter to the Sahlins telling them how much they meant to the Institute:

You came into a most difficult situation where failure or even abandonment might at times have seemed more inviting and pleasant. But with rare patience, tact, and forbearance you persevered, made a gain here and another gain there, enlisted another worker here and another one there, made new contacts, established new philosophies of service, and so broadened the scope of the organization that now people "come to see." You have done a great job with the Institute bringing it out of a sort of comatose condition to one of vibrant pulsating vigor.

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21 Letter to Adolph Benson, 4.15.52. [Larson College was founded in 1911 as the Larson Secretarial School. In 1935 the institution was granted permission by the State Board of Education and the Legislature to award the A.S. and A.A. degrees to its graduates, and to be recognized as Larson Junior College. In June of 1947, a bill was passed into law as Special Act No. 361, incorporating the institution as a non-profit college run by a board of trustees and having an endowment fund.]

22 Letter from Dr. J. O. Christianson, 12.27.52.
During his administration, membership increased from 410 to nearly 700, the yearly income doubled, and a reciprocal training program with Sweden was undertaken. About sixty young men came from Sweden to the farms of Minnesota and the University of Minnesota for a year of work and study. Three professors from the Institute of Agriculture of the University went for a month of study in Sweden and Denmark. Close working relations were established between the Institute and similar organizations in Sweden. Cultural activities of the Institute increased with four or five exhibitions conducted annually. A book buying and procuring service was set up. A film loan library established. Editorial and translating services were made available to members and others. (Sahlin worked on a translation of Västergötland, A Rhapsody in Color, corrected and retranslated Småland, and was asked to translate Östergötland.) Under Sahlin's leadership, the Institute moved towards the idea of becoming more fully a service organization, and a center for American Swedish cultural and social life in the area and in the U.S. When diplomats, ambassadors, and royalty from Sweden came to the U.S., it was to Minneapolis that they would go to be entertained by their fellow countrymen. Sahlin was known for not only administering the Institute, but for not being afraid to work long hours, roll up his sleeves and assist in work normally outside the province of the director. During his tenure, the
building housing the Institute was renovated.

The Sahlin family bought a house in Minneapolis and their second daughter, Conny, was born on December 5, 1950. In May, 1952, he was moved to write another poem, which I quote here in its entirety, because of what it reveals about the author:

To Our Daughters, NICKY AND CONNY

For you, our daughters, we have many wishes --
Not asking riches, fame or skin-deep beauty,
But rather qualities that do endure.
May you have healthy bodies, spared from ills,
And minds inquisitive that strive for truth,
And spirits opening to faith and beauty.
We hope your understanding will embrace mankind,
Not merely grasp the group in which you move,
Nor limits draw on faiths or hue of skin.
Your judgment train and learn to separate
Cross from the wheat, the trivial from substance.
We wish that to yourselves you will be true;
Learn to correct your own, forgive another’s errors.
Keep high your courage; bend when life’s blows come
But do not break. Meet failure’s challenge;
Accept success with due humility.
Be rich in friendships, deep, unclouded,
Based always on your giving, not your taking.
We hope each of you finds a proper mate
With whom to share life’s joys and sorrows,
A man with great capacity to treasure you,
His woman, in all vicissitudes you do encounter.
And may your children do what ours have done --
Add richness, fullness to your lives.
Keep bright your shield, your head held high,
And meet life’s happiness, life’s disappointments
With sunshine in your hearts unto the end.

During the five years they were in Minneapolis, they made many friends, including the senator from Minneapolis, Hubert H. Humphrey. Among the many important visitors they
entertained at the Institute was President Dwight Eisenhower. 23 It was, therefore, with considerable regret that the Sahlins decided it was time to leave Minneapolis and move on.

In the summer of 1953 the Institute announced that Sahlin would be leaving to become director of the American Swedish Historical Foundation and Museum in Philadelphia. The response from Minneapolis was immediate. A farewell reception was held, and everybody who had known the Sahlins either came or sent regrets. Sahlin was given the Distinguished Service Award by the City of Minneapolis.

One reason they left may have been money. Sahlin was offered the job in Philadelphia at a salary of $8,500, plus $500 moving expenses. A few years later, one of the members of the board of trustees of the Institute, Mr. Engdahl, was heard to say that they "should have paid him $10,000, or even $20,000 a year, he was worth every cent of that; but he was too big a man for these people." 24

Sahlin's secretary, Louise Wallman, stayed behind to assist the Institute in the transition to a new director, Delmar Nordquist. But after three months, she moved to Philadelphia to continue working for her old boss.

23 Letter from Dwight Eisenhower, 6.20.53
24 Quoted in letter from Albin Lyth, 1.14.55
Despite the letters Sahlin wrote giving assistance and encouragement to his successor over the next year, Nordquist decided to leave after only one year on the job. Sahlin's shoes had been difficult to fill. Even after they had been gone a number of years, people were still asking after the Sahlins, especially whether Nils was happy in his new job, hoping that he would decide to return to the Institute.
PHILADELPHIA

Sahlin was once again back in his beloved East. The American Swedish Historical Museum was built on land previously owned by the inhabitants of New Sweden, a colony that briefly flourished between 1638 and 1655, which was later absorbed by New Netherlands, and eventually taken over by William Penn. The Museum was founded in 1926, with Amandus Johnson as the moving spirit behind its founding. Sahlin's old mentor, Adolph Benson, had been connected with it for many years. In fact, he had recommended Sahlin for the job. He also gave him advice on how to proceed in the new job, which he said would be a challenging one, with great possibilities and responsibilities:

Just remember Philadelphia is not Minneapolis and that Philadelphia can stand and expect a little stronger and perhaps better fare than the Swedes in Minnesota. And you have the Colonial contingent which demands respect. Go easy at first!25

He also advised Sahlin to make friends with Mr. and Mrs. Thorsten Sellin, who were important members of the Foundation.

After his interview in Philadelphia and his acceptance of the position, Sahlin was already full of ideas and ready for the challenge. In a letter to Cornelia Cree, administrative assistant at the Museum, he notes that "something was said about the great number of members obtained in the last year by

25 Letter from Adolph Benson, 8.7.53.
the American-Scandinavian Foundation. Actually it was less than 200, and we can beat that easily, can’t we?"26 He also wrote a letter to Walter Nord, chairman of the board, with suggestions, his first priority being to bring in Louise Wallman as his secretary. He had some pungent comments about the museum’s prospectus, which he said should be changed to "attract, appeal, and hit!" He also suggested reducing the number of caretakers from three to one, and constructing a basement apartment for a live-in caretaker, thus eliminating the need for a night watchman. He wanted to start a student exchange, an area where he felt they could "achieve recognition and reputation for being alive without any expense worth mentioning."27

In his correspondence with Benson, Sahlin talked about producing and editing a quarterly issue of the Foundation’s bulletin, plus a yearbook. A letter from Adolph Benson to Thorsten Sellin indicates that Sellin thought he should be editor of the yearbook. Benson tactfully suggested that Sahlin become "nominal" editor with the promise of "their aid." A quarterly newsletter, The Chronicle, finally appeared, substituting for the yearbook. Sahlin was editor, and Hope Sahlin, a talented artist, drew many of the covers.

26 Letter to Cornelia Cree, 3.2.53.

27 Letter to Walter Nord, 5.21.53
Sahlin was also getting the Museum in the news. A letter he wrote to Congressman Barratt O’Hara, representative from Illinois, about the raising of funds to buy land to raise a monument to Swedish-Americans, was printed in the Congressional Record in July ’53.

All this activity took place before his first day on the job, on August 1, 1953.

Sahlin visited Philadelphia in June and bought a house at 1230 South 51st St. for $10,500. The three-story and basement, brick row house, had a tenant on the third floor. The house in Minneapolis was sold for $7,750 and the Sahlins arranged to lend the money to the new owners, thus providing an income of $75 a month. They still were receiving income from renting out the house on Ocean Avenue in West Haven.

In 1953, Nils Jr. was married and the following year made his father a grandfather. Four months earlier, the Sahlins had their third child in April, Clifford Russell Sahlin. He was not named after Russell Sage College, Sahlin was quick to point out, but after two people in his early years in this country who had helped him when he was "young and green."

In 1954 and 1955, the Sahlins continued their ventures into real estate. The property in West Haven was sold for $6,500, with the Sahlins lending the money to the buyer at a

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28 Clifford Bragdon, principal of New Rochelle High School, and Frederick T. Russell, guardian to his first wife, Therese.
rate of 5 1/2 percent, bringing in $65 a month. The South 51st St. property was sold and this time they lent $1,700 for a second mortgage, at 6 percent over five years. Another property in Philadelphia was purchased for $8,300, at 1816 Mt. Vernon St., which according to Sahlin was an apartment house in a semi-slum section. 29

Meanwhile, the Sahlin family moved to 145 East Levering, in Cynwyd, a suburb of Philadelphia. In 1954 Nils was earning $10,888 at the Museum and was made a member of the Swedish Colonial Society in Philadelphia. The new home and the young family, Nicki, Conny, and the new baby Clifford, were much admired by all their friends from Connecticut and Minneapolis who came to visit.

In December of 1955, the day after Christmas, five-year-old Conny was admitted to the Presbyterian Hospital in Philadelphia. Her diagnosis was apathetic anemia (leukemia). For a month she was treated with blood transfusions and cortisone treatment in the hope of saving her. In desperation, Sahlin wrote to an acquaintance, Dr. Philip Hench, at the Mayo Clinic, on the chance that recent development in the Clinic's laboratories might indicate some newer treatment. 30 But it was all to no avail. She died on

30 Letter to Philip Hench, Mayo Clinic, 1.8.56
January 28, 1956. The Sahlins were crushed.

"Nothing really helps; nothing changes the cruel fact that preys upon our minds night and day, leaving our hearts full of tears," he writes to a friend in Minneapolis.\(^{31}\)

He was also unable to gain any comfort from religion. In a letter to Dwight Marvin, editor of The Record Newspapers in Troy, N.Y., written in February 16, 1955, in response to a book that Marvin had written, he says that

Since our experience in Troy my visits to church have been rare indeed, except that I went quite regularly while I was stationed in Sweden. The reasoning that one man, allegedly one of the exponents of true Christianity, showed me that it is all a sham --nothing but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal-- was, of course, shallow and probably just the expression of a bitter disillusionment. Hence I do not excuse myself, but I still don't go.

The only bright spot in the next few months, while they answered the many letters of condolence and planned a memorial to Conny at the Museum, was an invitation that arrived in April from Irmagarde Tator asking Nils to be the commencement speaker in June at Quinnipiac College, formerly the Junior College of Commerce. This was more than an invitation to speak. Sam Tator had decided to retire, and the board of trustees of the college was looking for a successor. Tator saw Nils Sahlin as his heir, his crown prince, and the commencement address would give the trustees and the college

\(^{31}\) Letter to Carl Lindquist, 2.8.56.
a chance to view the prospective candidate and see if he would be suitable.

Meanwhile, at the Museum, there were a couple of indications that all was not well. In a letter to an old friend in New York, Sahlin mentions a certain Dr. Meixner who "would be happy to see me thrown out on my ear." With his usual wit, he also sends a telegram to the Swedish Society Revelers' Balmasque, in Minneapolis:

IN SOBER INDUSTRIOUS EAST WE SORELY MISS YOUR CAREFREE LIFE AND REVELRY WITH ABANDON. RUMORS ABOUT MY BEING FIRED ARE GREATLY EXAGGERATED LIKE THOSE OF TWAIN'S DEATH, BUT WE EAGERLY AWAIT IRRESISTIBLE OFFER FROM MINNEAPOLIS. SORRY PLANE FARES AND CHILDREN PRECLUDE OUR ATTENDANCE TONIGHT. LOVE TO YOU ALL. HAVE FUN.
HOPE AND NILS SAHLIN

He had been at the Museum for three years. His goals had been modest enough --to enlarge the number of activities, to widen the membership basis, and to build the endowment until the Foundation's future was secure.

He had achieved all three. The second goal may probably have been the most difficult. As Membership Secretary, Louise Wallman, noted in *The Chronicle*, as fast as they added new members, they lost members through resignation and death.

A number of exhibits took place during these three years, including a display of bookbinding, a collection of old maps, and works of art by famous Swedish artists. There were

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32 Letter to Mrs. Gerdis Eckert, 8.6.56

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lectures on Strindberg, concerts by well-known Swedish singers. However, to Sahlin, the attendance at these events was "rather disappointing," "not overwhelming," or "rather discouragingly low."

In regard to the third goal, Henry Goddard Leach, a member of the Board of Governors, noted that in addition to managing the Museum, Sahlin traveled from coast to coast soliciting contributions, and the third year was able to balance the budget. In the Autumn, 1956, issue of The Chronicle, Leach lauded Sahlin as a meticulous scholar, a writer in the classical style both in Swedish and English, and an able administrator. Once again, tribute was paid to his technical ability to "build his own house, landscape his gardens, and put a better roof on the Swedish Museum when one of our female hurricanes blew off the old one."

After he resigned from the Museum, Sahlin continued to keep in touch with Walter Nord, chairman of the board of trustees, who had hired him. Two years later, Nord solicited his advice on one of the programs Nils had instituted at the Museum, the Student Training Program.

Louise Wallman continued to work at the Museum, although at the time of Sahlin's resignation it was announced to the board that she would be leaving as well to continue to work as his secretary. In a letter to Sahlin in 1958, Amandus Johnson, of the Swedish Colonial Society and Swedish Colonial
Foundation, called Miss Wollman [sic] "a girl in a thousand," although he did not think she was sufficiently appreciated by Walter Nord."}
QUINNIPIAC

The commencement speech was a great success and he was offered the job as president of Quinipiack College. In the summer of 1956, the Sahlin family planned to move back to New Haven. Nils was already writing to the Tators with suggestions about new faculty and changes to be made in the evening school leaflet (he only found one misprint!), the style guide, and the college catalog.

Sahlin returned to an institution which was in some ways familiar, but in others had changed tremendously since the time he had served as dean from 1945-47.

The College was in the process of taking over Larson College (see footnote on page 22), which had suffered a number of setbacks, including the ill-health and death of its founder, George Larson, in 1952, declining enrolment, resignation of faculty and some members of the board of trustees, and the distinct possibility that the State Department of Education would withdraw its accreditation.

Quinipiack College, on the other hand, as Samuel Tator pointed out to the Quinipiack Board of Trustees, was (a) short of space; (b) in need of a gymnasium and recreation property; (c) in need of a physical education program to meet the requirements of a full college program; and (d) able to meet the indebtedness of Larson College by disposing of Quinipiack
The college moved from the old J.C.C. buildings at 389 Whitney Avenue in New Haven to the buildings of the former Larson College at 1450 Whitney Avenue in Hamden, but despite the completion of a new classroom building, was already in need of extra space. Tuition was $17 per semester hour of credit, which amounted to $250 per semester for a full program in the Day Division. Sahlin inherited three administrators from the Tators: Melvin P. Larson was Vice President in charge of business affairs, Harry L. Bennett, Dean of the Day Division, and Robert W. Evans, Dean of the Evening Division.

In a convocation address to the students of Quinnipiac in 1956, Sahlin stressed that a well-rounded education was the responsibility of the individual student, despite the fact that he may learn from his teachers, his textbooks, his fellows, and "even the administration." 35

The 1957 convocation speech urges the students to search for basic values, not to sink into mental apathy, and not to fall into the error of believing that one of the most important things in life is money. 36

He may, in part, have been reflecting on his personal

34 Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Quinnipiac College. Meeting of March 25, 1952, p. 3.

35 Convocation speech, 9.18.56

36 Convocation speech, 9.17.57.
affairs. The two properties he had owned in Philadelphia had proved to be unwise business ventures. The current owner/tenants had skipped town, and Sahlin was forced to reimburse the previous owners after the properties were foreclosed. After fifteen years of marriage, Sahlin and his wife were in the process of divorce, and in 1959, he married Johanna Carl, a German immigrant who taught at the University of Connecticut.

Johanna recalled that she was introduced to "the new president of Quinnipiac College" at the home of some old friends, who were always talking about "Uncle Nils" and how wonderful he was and how happy they were that he was returning to New Haven. She said that as soon as she met Nils, she knew how important they would be to each other. They had a lot in common. Besides teaching German, they were both immigrants, she from Germany, he from Sweden. Johanna was recently divorced, in her late thirties, beautiful, blond, and sexy. She said that the Tators were very unhappy about Nils' divorce and subsequent marriage to her.37

Not one to let his personal turmoil interrupt his professional life, Sahlin completed his translation of

37 Conversation with Johanna Sahlin, 10.17.92. (Despite their personal feelings, the Tators did not withdraw their support from Sahlin. They needed someone of his stature, a graduate of Yale, with national administrative and fundraising experience, to lead Quinnipiac into the next decade and solidify its new role as a four-year college.)
Churches of Sweden in 1959, and in 1962 Columbia University Press published his opus magnus, a translation of Etruscan Culture, Land and People, which consisted of archeological research and studies conducted in San Giovenale and its environs by members of the Swedish Institute in Rome. The book was written with the collaboration of King Gustaf VI Adolf of Sweden, an ardent archeologist. In 1963, the King bestowed upon Sahlin the Royal Order of the North Star "in recognition of [his] outstanding contributions throughout many years to the dissemination in the United States of Swedish culture and things Swedish in general." Conferral was made at the 1963 Commencement Exercises of Quinnipiac College, held in Yale's Woolsey Hall by Consul Gosta Westin, of New York, acting on behalf of His Majesty King Gustaf VI Adolf.  

"I suppose we shall now have to call you Sir Nils," said the President of the University of Bridgeport on hearing the news.  

Despite the time and effort involved in these scholarly works, and the personal turmoil of divorce and remarriage, Sahlin continued his primary role as the chief administrator of Quinnipiac College without missing a beat. In his annual

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38 A few years earlier, Adolph Benson had received the same honor.

39 Letter from James Halsey, President of the University of Bridgeport, 6.21.63.
State of the Union addresses to the students, he reports in 1958 that for the first time the college had over 1,000 day and evening students. The number of faculty had remained remarkably stable with no resignations, only additions. There were more improvements to the physical plant. His only complaints were about the behavior of some of the students: "Apparently we have a few juvenile delinquents among us who can read and write but do not have college maturity" and, the following year, in typical Sahlin humor: "Our men could dress better, but are for the most part no sloppier than the Men of Yale. The girls dress well, and the black stockings presumably are warm in winter. I can think of no other excuse for them." In 1960, he cautions those who fall by the wayside: "Don’t lose your chance, for you will be forever sorry! Stay in college, at whatever sacrifice."

Sahlin was not only interested in growth in the form of new buildings and numbers of students. In 1961 he announced several new professional two-year programs: optometry, dental hygiene, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and nursing; a four-year program for high school teachers in business, secretarial, history-sociology, and science; and a master’s

40 "State of the Union", 2.4.58
41 "State of the Union" 3.17.59
42 "State of the Union," 3.17.60
degree in business administration. The medical technology program became a four-year degree. According to Harry Bennett, his vice president, "Nil’s fondest dream was to get baccalaureate levels in liberal arts." He achieved this dream in 1963, when Liberal Arts was approved as a baccalaureate program.

In 1961, the Board of Trustees recognized that there was a limit to the expansion of facilities on the present campus. They charged Sahlin and Vice President Mel Larson with the task of finding a new location for the College. In November of 1962, the search was ended when Sahlin and Larson located a 100-acre site just south of the Sleeping Giant State Park. In March 1963 the site was purchased for $300,000 from Mr. G. Harold Welch, and plans drawn up for a master plan for the next fifteen years on the new campus. Sahlin projected that by 1972 there might be twelve to fifteen buildings on campus and a projected day enrollment of 2,500 full-time students, including 1,200 resident students in dormitories. His prediction was very accurate.

Not only did Sahlin continue to run the day-to-day affairs of the college and deal with faculty senates, library budgets, a litany of complaints from within and without the

"Conversation with former Vice President Harry L. Bennett, 5.11.90.

"State of the Union," 3.21.63

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college, the hiring and firing of faculty, but he became increasingly involved in that area of the college known as development. The next three years were spent raising money for the new campus, as well as planning the new buildings. In 1966, Quinnipiac officially moved to Mount Carmel Avenue. Sahlin was named "Citizen of the Year," by The Hamden Chronicle. Throughout 1967 and 1968, an increasing proportion of his correspondence relates to fundraising and public relations.

Appointed president in the mid-fifties, Sahlin felt frustrated by the '60s generation, according to his wife. As a man who believed in personal responsibility, he may have been ill-equipped to deal with the many students of the sixties and their protests against much that he stood for. This may have been why, at the age of 68, he decided --or the board helped him decide-- that it was time to retire as President of Quinnipiac College.

In July 1967, writing from Spain where the Sahlins were on vacation, he wrote to William Perlroth, chairman of the board of trustees, and said that after considerable "cogitation," he had decided that the 1967-68 academic year, his twelfth, should be his last year. He said he would like to continue to serve the College in every way he could, as a

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45 Conversation with Johanna Sahlin, 10.12.92.
member of the board, by writing a history of the College, and assisting in fundraising efforts. His salary, the year he retired, was $25,000.

Once again, his decision to leave an institution resulted in an outpouring of words, from those who would be most closely affected by it, and from the media. In a ceremony honoring Sahlin in June 1968, Leonard J. Kent, representing the faculty, said that:

It was he who brought a sounder academic focus to Quinnipiac than she had before. It was he who pressed always for a faculty of culture and scholarship and intellectual commitment, and, finding good people, he had the rare sense and the security to step back to encourage them to exercise leadership. The library that graces our campus was born in great measure of his work, and the liberal arts program had long been part of his aspirations.
JOHANNA

Nils and Johanna Sahlin had traveled frequently during the years of his presidency. Before their marriage, he had not been back to Europe since 1945, probably due to financial and family reasons. Now, with a wife who was self-supporting and who had long college vacations, and with his two younger children living with his former wife who had remarried, the Sahlins were free to travel. They went to Europe in 1961 and visited with his sister and her husband in Sweden. Johanna said this was an expensive, miserable, experience. Nils Cronenberger, husband of Sahlin's sister, was a Nazi, according to Johanna (whose father was Jewish). He offended her by his anti-Semitic conversation, and the visit was a disaster.

In 1963 the Sahlins went to Puerto Rico for the first time and stayed at the University of Puerto Rico during the Christmas break. They went back to Puerto Rico for several years in the '60s and became friends with the President of the University and his wife, Jaime and Luz Benitez. In 1965 they visited Italy, Greece, and Turkey, spending some time at archeological sites. (Since his translation of the book on Etruscan Culture, Sahlin had a keen interest in archeology, and belonged to several archeological societies.)

"We loved to travel," said Johanna. "And I showed him a way we could do it and save money. We would buy a car abroad,
drive it around Europe, and bring it back home to the U.S., thus saving on import duties and taxes on a new vehicle.""

One side effect of foreign travel was the number of foreign students the Sahlins met over the years, many of whom they welcomed to their home.

"Nils was very hospitable," said Johanna. "We once had a Swedish family staying at our house for almost a year -- a man, his wife, and their one-and-a-half year old baby."

In 1970 Sahlin was honored by the American Swedish Institute on its 40th anniversary. He and Johanna went to Minneapolis where he renewed old acquaintances and was once again the center of attention. But here in Connecticut, retirement proved to be less energizing. He had always enjoyed outdoor work in the garden, and carpentry. But there was not enough activity and challenge to fill his day. At 68, there were not many career opportunities open to a former college president. He did work as a consultant for a private school in Branford, taught two sections of German at the University of Connecticut, and continued to work on translations. But he did not work on the history of Quinnipiac (which he had first promised to do back in 1956 when he was appointed president), nor did he assist the new president, or become involved in fundraising efforts for the

46. See note # 38.

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College.

Not only had he retired from his job as president, but in 1968, Sahlin also lost one of his closest friends, whom he loved like a brother, the indispensable Mel Larson, who died at the age of 53. Larson, Sahlin’s vice president for finance, was a graduate of the Junior College of Commerce. In tribute, Bud O’Connor, editor of The Hamden Chronicle, wrote:

"Mel played the role of contractor, architect, site selector, government relations expert, interior decorator, food handling consultant, and just about everything else required of him to make the new campus a reality --and all the while he continued to handle his administrative and academic responsibilities at the College."

In his final report to the Board of Trustees, Sahlin said:

For me, my last year as president, came to a crushing end on September 14, as the news of Mel Larson’s death met me in New Jersey. It was a grievous blow to me personally, a serious loss to Quinnipiac College. We had been friends for 23 years, professionally we had been like brothers for 12 years, united in our devotion to this institution. A very large part of what Quinnipiac College is today traces back to the contribution of a hard-working, sometimes hard-headed, always warm-hearted man by the name of Melvin Paul Larson.

With the death of Mel Larson, and the absence of Nils Sahlin from the College, the new president, John Herder, had a difficult time. Within a year or so, letters were being written to Sahlin reporting differences between the president
and the faculty senate, and it was not long before a search was on for a new president.47

In February 1971, Leonard Kent, a former English professor and chairman of the senate during Sahlin's presidency, took over as president. Sahlin looked with favor on the young (41-year-old) president, whom he regarded somewhat as a protegé. Sahlin was welcomed back into the Quinnipiac fold, became an active member of the Board of Trustees, and began working part-time as Consultant for Development at the College. (It was during this period that I first met Dr. Sahlin, when I was hired as a part-time secretary to the Vice President for Development.) As consultant, Sahlin visited and wrote to prospective donors, including banks, utilities, alumni, and financially well-off businessmer.

In 1973, Quinnipiac College honored Sahlin by awarding him its first honorary degree for his service to the college.

Following a period of ill-health in 1974 and 1975, Sahlin officially retired from his work in development and his association with the college was solely as a member of the board of trustees. In 1982, the Alumni Association presented its fifth annual Distinguished Service Award to Sahlin, president emeritus.

47 Letter from Alfred Stiernotte, 6.2.70
Otium cum dignite (leisure with dignity)

Over the years, Sahlin had collected a well-stocked library, much of it devoted to a particular Swedish writer, Selma Lagerlof. In 1937, he had written to Dr. Nils Afzelius of the Kungliga Biblioteket (Royal Library), in Stockholm, saying that he had decided to concentrate on one or two Scandinavian authors, and "since Selma Lagerlof's works have given me endless pleasure, to start on her." At that time he owned about 20 items by Lagerlof. His correspondence with Afzelius continued until the 1950s.

Selma Lagerlof, 1858-1940, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, was a writer who belonged to the "Nineties" school of poets in Sweden. Her first novel was the masterpiece Gösta Berlings Saga, The Story of Gösta Berling, published in 1891, which used the folktales and oral traditions, with which she grew up in a framework borrowed from Thomas Carlyle's The French Revolution. Her second book, in 1897, was The Miracles of Antichrist, followed by Jerusalem I, and Jerusalem II in 1901 and 1902. Here ancient rural traditions confronted modern religious revival. The works were simple and powerful, with attitudes towards peasants reminiscent of the great Icelandic sagas. Lagerlof's many works over her long career consisted of short stories, historical tales, and novels

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By 1975 the collection comprised some 250 items, half of which were books by, on, or relevant to Selma Lagerlof, in various languages, many of them autographed by the author. The other half was composed of journals, magazines, and many first printings (and sometimes only printings) of her poems and stories. Sahlin decided that he would donate this collection to the library of Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN, a college that he had been to many times when he lived in Minnesota in the fifties. His only condition was that a competent person or persons assign a fair but also generous value for his income tax deduction claim.

He donated many other books to the college, and became a Library Associate supporting the resources and collections of its Folke Bernadotte Memorial Library through an annual membership. In 1981 he visited the college and was welcomed with open arms for the many gifts he had given over the years to the library. Through letters, he developed a warm friendship with Dr. Karl Ozolins, the head librarian during the 1970s, and Joan Moeri, his secretary. Dr. Ozolins said that, as pen pals, they discovered they had many things in
common, especially in academics, and having to overcome the many handicaps of adjustment as immigrants. They shared their love of history, especially the period of history that was in common to the Swedish and Latvian territories, namely 1600-1700. They also shared their love for Swedish literature. \textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{50} Letter from Karl Ozolins, 12.24.92.
IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

Nils Sahlin had always lived a healthful life and was always active physically, from his early days of bicycling around Europe and Scandinavia, to his later years at the Club Med. He liked to work around the house and yard. He was a member of the European Health Spa in his mid-seventies. After a lifetime of what may be described as "rude health," he finally began to succumb to a series of ailments in his seventies and eighties. In late 1974 he was hospitalized after a severe bout of pneumonia, and he was still convalescing the following year. In 1980, he was investigating the possibility of a retirement home --The Swedish Home of the Aged-- and he willed his body to the Yale University School of Medicine. In 1983, he thought he had a slight stroke. In 1984 he had a pacemaker installed. The same year he joined the Society for the Right to Die, and signed a living will.

The Sahlins had continued to travel abroad during the '70s, to Sweden, Paris, Austria, Cancun (where they stayed at Club Med) and several times to Munich, where Johanna had been born. Occasionally Johanna went alone, but when his health began to deteriorate, Johanna went on her own more frequently. The longest separation was in 1978-9, when she accepted an offer to teach for a year at the Goethe Institute in Munich. When they were apart, the Sahlins wrote to each other every
day. They often communicated with each other this way, during the last years, even when they were living in the same house, a ritual which suggested they essentially were leading separate lives. Johanna admitted that in many ways communication between them had become difficult.

When Johanna was away, she made arrangements for someone to come in every day to take care of Nils. His trusty friend from Quinnipiac days, George Hawley, who had been business manager and later director of facilities at the college, was always on call. He would chauffeur the former president to Quinnipiac College for various events, such as concerts, lectures, or Commencement.

THE LEGACY

Besides leaving his wife, children, and grandchildren, provided for, in a modest way, Nils Sahlin left some money to a number of children of longtime friends and acquaintances, as well as to Quinnipiac College. Over the years, he had opened bank accounts at the Eureka Savings Bank in California and regularly deposited small sums in the names of his children and other people's children. He and Johanna also contributed to the Save the Children Fund for many years. He supported several other charities, and Johanna carried on this work after his death. Organizations that fought diseases -- leukemia, cancer, heart disease, etc.-- were sent regular contributions. The Sahlins gave to local charities such as the New Haven Soup Kitchen. According to Johanna, Nils was a member of the National Organization for Women (NOW), which may come as a surprise to some of the female faculty members he hired.

At Quinnipiac, Sahlin had a reputation for being careful with his money, which probably stemmed from his own circumstances and the tendency of the college to hire people at low salaries, a practice started by the Tators and encouraged by Mel Larson. This conservative bent was known as the "Sam Tator School of Accounting." Budgets always balanced.

Personally, he was generous, said Johanna, with what she
described as "pockets of stinginess." Hope pointed out that as a teacher most of his life, he was not in the position to make a great deal of money, and she quoted the old expression "poor as a Yale professor."

But his true legacy had nothing to do with money. He spent a considerable portion of his life as a "professional Swede." For eight years he administered two national Swedish organizations, providing a home for Swedish culture in this country. He also continued to translate Swedish writings into English.

His other major interest was education. From his years at Russell Sage and the Junior College of Commerce as teacher and administrator, he returned to Quinnipiac in mid-life to lead the college into a future as a solid four-year institution on a brand-new 100-acre campus.

As an immigrant, he had learned to meet new people, adapt to new situations, and, sometimes, to repudiate the past. His was a life marked by loss --loss of parents, loss of wives, loss of a child. He was able to move on from these tragic situations to make a new life for himself.

Neither Hope nor Johanna considered him a good father. ("But, after all, he had no role model," said Johanna.) They felt he was very hard on his children, expecting too much of them, in the same way he was with his students.

His oldest son said he felt his father was a good father
"but not close." He remembers the tough times they had when they were "bachelors" together, after the death of Therese, and in the correspondence between father and son, they often seem more like brothers than parent and child.

The two younger children were born when Nils was well into middle age. For them he was more of an authority figure, as well as someone from whom they would have to formally request money for college and other expenses while they were growing up.

Despite his difficulties with being a parent, in his old age, Sahlin's three surviving children were a source of considerable pride to him. Nils Jr. had emigrated with his family to Australia in 1970, and in a letter written to them in 1981, Sahlin says he is very proud of the "Sahlin's australiensis," which includes two grandchildren who had become an environmentalist and an attorney. He relays news of the younger Sahlins in America. His daughter, with a doctorate from Brown University, was a college teacher and "writes like an angel," said her father; and his younger son, like his father and older brother a graduate of Yale, was also a teacher and had "considerable artistic talent."

Nils Gosta Sahlin was a remarkable man. He had made his mark on whatever institution he had been associated with, be it New Rochelle High School, Yale University, the American Swedish Institute, the American Swedish Historical Foundation,
or Quinnipiac College. He was remembered for his love of learning and teaching and for making things work. For his ability to get right down to the "nitty-gritty," whether it was proofreading a college catalog, fixing a museum roof, or assisting in the moving of books from a college library.

He also made a difference to the people whose lives he had touched. He was a loyal friend to many people who continued to keep in contact with him long after he or they had moved on. His presence, his ironic wit, and his belief that anything and everything could be made better if only we gave our personal best, left behind a standard that those of us who knew him strive to emulate. We sorely miss him.
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