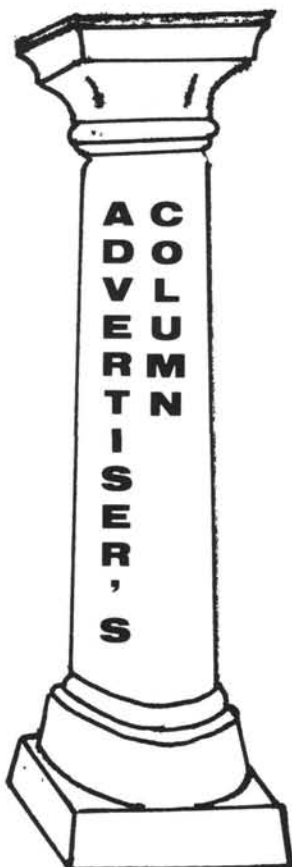


## Nels J. Johnson Tree Experts, Inc.

I appreciate the opportunity to relate some of my early experiences and training, practical and academic for becoming an Arborist.

Born in Sweden my boyhood years were spent in the forest, meadows, rivers and the moors. Swedish forest population is made up of Beech, Oak and a mixture of other deciduous trees such as Lindens, Ash, European Alder, Willows, Aspen and Wild Cherry. Fifty four percent of the area of Sweden is forested with conifers; such as Spruce, Pine being predominant and accounting for the heavy lumber industry. The forests with its rich flora and wildlife fascinated me and I early made contact with foresters who were always respected by the common people.

While still in grade school, during semesters I worked; transplanting seedlings in the forest nurseries and later also planting the Pine and Spruce seedlings in the "badlands"; moors not suitable for agriculture. To-



*The forest I planted when just in grade school.*

day, those plants are mature trees ready to be harvested. After graduating from grade school I secured employment as a gardener apprentice at Christinehof; a large estate with the corps de logis being built during the latter part of the 17th century and owned by Count Piper. In order to be accepted at any professional school, forestry, gardening, agronomy, three — four years of practical experience were mandatory for the applicant and I was no exception. Besides myself there were 3-4 other apprentices under the direction of a graduate head gardener. There were conservatories for grapes and peaches, and also for flowering plants. Considerable acreage was covered with nursery stock, perennials and vegetables. The area around the mansion was terraced with walks, turf and flower borders. Because of a rather harsh climate, grapes and peaches were

(cont'd page 18)

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*Christinehof, the mansion where ghosts nightly held forth.*

grown under glass. The castle or mansion was surrounded by deep forests and also some rather wide fields. During the winters because of inclement weather making my trip home difficult, I stayed in an auxiliary building. The apprentice quarter had a large fireplace and was quite comfortable. However, the local population told so many gruesome ghost stories that I some nights did not feel too well at ease. The constant nocturnal noises also at times disturbed me. But for a stubborn belief in the protection of a greater power, I would not have stayed overnights. After about one year and a half I became an apprentice at "Villa viola"; a rather extensive greenhouse complex some 400 miles from my home. All employees had room and board furnished by the employer, Mr. Forsberg.

Mr. Forsberg was a fine person and I liked cultivating flowers for the trade. However, after about one year I was employed by the City parks of Uppsala. This year Uppsala is celebrating

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some 700 years of being the cultural center of Sweden. The University was founded 1472, and Carl Von Linneus, the father of the botanical science worked in Uppsala and founded its first botanic garden where I often studied. A statue of Linneus has now also been erected at the Chicago Botanic Gardens. After two years with the parks in Uppsala including annual studies from November until April at Tarna Folk High School, upper division I left to attend a private university that would shorten the time to graduation. During the years of apprenticeship; — if you changed employer, a letter of recommendation was required from the previous employer. The recommendations covered industry, knowledge and general comportment; — if the recommendations were below par — no employment. I loved Uppsala, the parks, the buildings and the great mounds holding



*Uppsala, ancient castle, birthplace of Mr. Hammerschild — president of the United Nations.*

the bones and weapons of the Viking Kings of long ago. The students gave the city an air of youthfulness and eternity. By the time I was through with my preliminary studies it was almost time for induction in the Army; — not just as a conscript, but as a student with extra time added to become an officer in the reserves. This did not appeal to me; — had debts to pay and wanted to get ahead in the world. My parents lived in upper Minnesota. My father was a woodsman, sawyer, farmer and hunter, — naturally U.S.A., was my destination. Late 1925, the King of Sweden granted my permission to leave. I had no difficulty getting passage to U.S.A., or to clear Ellis Island. Almost immediately I was employed by a Landscape firm in Manning Brown, Mass. This firm was landscaping the estate



*This estate — Bosjokloster, dating back to year 1200 — and owned by Count Bonde, has an 18-hole golf course. There are numerous golf courses in Sweden, but frankly, the Swedes are much better on ice than on grass. (cont'd. page 20)*



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(Nels J. Johnson cont'd.)

of Pier-Point Lamont, Ridge Rd., Lake Forest, Illinois. I spoke English and had a reasonable knowledge of Botany, and worked as foreman for about 20 "plantmen", mostly from Highwood, Illinois. They worked well, even though I did not speak Italian. That was the year 1926, and things were booming.

About two years ago I and my friend Adolph Bertucci met an old fellow whom we both recognized. His name was Robert Dixon and 1925 we had worked together at the Lamont estate. We had breakfast and Dixon still remembered the names of some of the fellows we worked with and to my surprise wrote me a letter relating what went on 1926, at the work place, the Lamont estate. Dixon is now dead, — but I treasure his document as much as my degree from Northwestern.

The winter 1926, I spent at home in Blackduck, Minn., and in the spring I was employed by a "tree care firm" on the Northshore, Illinois. Much of the "care" given the trees in those early years would not be approved today. One serious but popular practice was filling tree cavities with concrete. Concrete is non-compatible to living plant tissues and only accelerates the decay. After one year I was made foreman and remained in that capacity until the financial crash of 1929.

When I left my employer I was single; my parents had moved to Evanston and I told my boss he should give the jobs to the married fellows. Strangely, although things were tough, still work started coming in. My mother was my first "office girl" and in spite of her Swedish accent customers liked to talk to her. In a couple of years I employed 3-4 "steady" tree trimmers. No one had ever heard of powersaws, high rangers, or wood chippers; — it was all hard work using only physical power, determination and clear thinking. As years went by my business grew. In the early thirties I studied Plant Pathology at the University of Chicago. Eventually also "graduated" with honors from the Northwestern University. Also conceived the idea of licensing through examination of custom tree experts.

The Illinois Tree Expert Act, in spite of poor enforcement by the Dept. of Registration & Education still protected our trees, the homeowner and the environment. 1983, the Illinois Tree Expert Act was phased out, because the legislators did not consider it necessary to protect the public against "fly-by-nights" tree quacks and mental midgets, nor the proper care of our trees or environment. Certainly any successful undertaking demands determination, knowledge and fair play, — 1962 with some 50-60 employees the "Teamsters" decided we should be "unionized" and suddenly I found myself without workers. The men eventually came back and in spite of being followed to the worksties by union agitators we survived and today still remain free. The credit for our success with the Teamster situation is due to Congressman Robert McClory, and my attorney Raymond L. Jones, Elgin, Illinois. Ann Czech, my secretary for many years, also deserves credit for staying with the Johnson Tree Experts. All villages we worked for, golf courses, parks, with the exception of one, sympathized with our cause and so did our clients.

Today my two sons, Joel and Karl, are active owners and executives of the Nels J. Johnson Tree Experts, Inc. Based on background and education, love for our trees, ornamentals, environment and consideration and understanding of our clientele I am confident they will continue when I leave off.

**Nels J. Johnson, President**

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