

**AN IMMIGRANT'S  
AMERICAN  
ODYSSEY: A BIOGRAPHY  
OF ERNST SKARSTEDT**

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An Immigrant's American Odyssey: A Biography of Ernst Skarstedt by Emory Lindquist

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**EMORY LINDQUIST**

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Ernst Skarstedt

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A Biography of  
ERNST SKARSTEDT

By Emory Lindquist

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TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
DR. MARCUS SKARSTEDT

## PREFACE

In the annals of Swedish emigration to America, Ernst Skarstedt is generally recognized as a distinguished editor and author. His many books, essays, articles, and poems made him a great influence in Swedish American culture for five decades. His editorial responsibilities with Swedish-language newspapers in Chicago, San Francisco, and New York, as well as his free-lance writing, provided a fine forum for expressing his ideas and established him as a pre-eminent journalist.

Towering above this mass of published material is the man himself—sailor, vagabond, farmer, musician, poet, photographer, nature lover, champion of freedom for the human spirit. He was a restless person, agonizing over the fate of mankind; a rebel, full of protest; an enigma, unable to come to terms with himself; and a man seeking answers to questions for which there seemed to be no answers. Ernst Skarstedt's individualism and eccentricity produced responses to life that made him interesting and controversial. These qualities and others fashioned his career and destiny.

Ernst Skarstedt, who grew up in the home of a distinguished professor of theology at Lund University, spurned an academic career and, after a brief experience as a seaman, followed his cherished goal of becoming a pioneer in the American West. Although he lived close to nature as a farmer in Kansas, Washington, and California during various periods, economic circumstances dictated that he abandon again and again the peace and solitude of life in rural areas for a career as a journalist in the city, an assignment he always viewed as temporary.

The hostility of Ernst Skarstedt to the institutional church and to sophisticated standards of social custom and propriety was the result of his forthrightness and hatred of sham and hypocrisy. His condemnation of socialism, communism, and the prohibition movement are clearly identified with his repudiation of everything that encroached upon his most cherished goal—freedom. His opposition

to racism and his early support of women's rights are examples of his respect for personality. He had tolerance for diversity of ideas and opinions, but no tolerance for humbug, sham, conformity, and class consciousness.

Ernst Skarstedt was honest but impatient. He had a deep strain of melancholy which at times drove him to the point of desperation. But he found enjoyment in nature, in books, in music, in drinking with friends, and in his family. He accounted himself a failure. Moreover, he regretted that the vagabond quality of his life created hardships for his family.

The "mania for keeping records," to use Ernst Skarstedt's own words, wins the praise of a biographer. He was virtually a slave to his diary which he maintained unflinchingly in the Swedish language from youthful years until a few months prior to his death. Moreover, he kept a journal which provides extensive material about his many activities. His books, articles, poems, and letters enrich the resources for the study of his life.

The quest in biography is for information and understanding. According to Dumas Malone, "What the historically-minded biographer tries to do is to live with his subject in spirit long enough and intimately enough to form definite impressions of his character and personality." This is a challenging but not always an achievable goal because the intimate qualities of life are not always fully grasped. In any event, this study has produced impressions of character and personality that are intriguing but, at times, frustrating. Ernst Skarstedt was an extraordinary person. Life was for him an interesting puzzle, which at times fascinated him, but whose meaning seemed to elude him. Perhaps there is something of Ernst Skarstedt in each one of us.