

A Graveyard Secret
by Arden Anderson

It was warm that day when Reinhold Tynelius, a photographer from Braham, Minnesota traveled some 60 miles to St. Paul to get a few needed supplies for his studio. He shopped at Zimmerman Bros. Wholesale House on West 3rd Avenue. Reinhold, a Swedish immigrant, had become a successful photographer in central Minnesota with his studio in Braham. While checking off his list of things to buy, he was told that one item he wanted was on the second floor. The shopkeeper remembers that he warned him to be careful, "It's dimly lit up there." Unfortunately, while Reinhold was rummaging around he stepped into a dark, open, unguarded, elevator shaft, fell sixteen feet and fractured his skull. He died hours later, on July 18, 1902. He was buried in a far corner in the Royalton Cemetery in Braham.



As kids, we loved springtime after a long hard winter when we could play outdoors. This was particularly true when our families would make their annual trek to the Royalton Cemetery to decorate the graves on Decoration Day, now known as Memorial Day. We actually didn't notice or care what the grownups did or whose graves were decorated with flowers. We just romped around and played tag running on top of our ancestor's remains and the secrets they took with them.

Years later, in 2002, this changed as we gathered around the death bed of our mom, the last of her generation. As she lay there, she gave us various instructions, such as, to continue our Swedish traditions, how to carry on without her and "Oh, yes, don't forget to put out flowers on the graves each year and don't forget the grave of Reinhold Tynelius." She couldn't, or wouldn't, say more and within hours she was gone, and the explanation with her.

As the years passed, we followed these orders, never forgetting to include this unknown Swede named Reinhold Tynelius. This mystery remained in our family for many years. As time went by technology, travel and social media improved to the point I was able to investigate and travel to Sweden. I explored church records, talked to the locals and began to unravel the mystery.

My great grandmother, Petronella Vestlund, was from a very poor family and as a twenty-year old she worked as a maid in the home of a local family, a wealthy family, named Tynelius. While working there, Petronella became pregnant, however, Reinhold was forbidden to marry her because of her family's low status. Two months before the child, my grandfather, was born 1876,

Petronella married a man fourteen years her senior. We grew up thinking he was our great grandfather. Sometime later Petronella with her husband and my grandfather immigrated to America and settled on a farm in Braham, Minnesota. Within a couple of months, Reinhold Tynelius followed and immigrated to America and settled in the Braham area. The mystery had been solved!

The truth is that Reinhold was my great grandfather and Tynelius should be my family name. Some of our extended family are in complete denial about this and are content to let secrets remain secrets. For me, I am certain, that sometime in 1875 Petronella and Reinhold, at least once, laid closely together, in their youthful exuberance, in Sweden. Today they lay together, about 80 feet apart, in the Royalton Cemetery in Braham, Minnesota. We continue to decorate their graves, as instructed.