

## **In Pursuit of A More Perfect Union**

Speech delivered June 1, 2024 at the historical marker unveiling at Saint Anskar Church and titled:  
*Gustaf Unonius, New Upsala and the Scandinavian Parish*

I was given this slot to speak because, when I was an infant, my grandfather Dr. Robert Bergwall spoke at the dedication of another memorial that celebrates Gustaf Unonius and the New Upsala Colony. Today that memorial—a granite stone supporting a bronze plaque—sits on the Chenequa Village Hall grounds, about a mile north of here. I surmise that my grandfather was asked to speak because he was the son of Edward Bergwall who was the son of George and Ebba Bergwall. George and Ebba are Swedes who came separately to new Upsala. Several years after their arrival, they married. The Pine Lake Scandinavian Parish was in attendance and Pastor Gustaf Unonius presided.

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I would like to acknowledge my fellow descendants of George and Ebba who are here today: Michael John Hasslinger, Margaret Wittkopp, Monica Hasslinger, Elaine Hasslinger, Bernadette Hasslinger, Bridget Crego and Charlotte Crego.

If any descendants of Ebba's siblings are here, please raise your hand and let us know your name and lineage...

...and finally, this is Travy Hasslinger, my nephew and fellow descendant of George and Ebba. He is assisting me today.

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In early December of 1841, soon after Gustaf Unonius and his fellow emigres settled into their newly constructed cabin at New Upsala, Gustaf and his farming-partner Groth met Kee-wah-goosh-kum<sup>i</sup>, one of the leaders of a community of Potawatomi People who were residing just north of Pine Lake. According to Unonius's writings, the Swedes and the Potawatomi came to live in harmony.

Words are powerful and published words are even more powerful. Gustaf wrote letters concerning his life in the United States which he sent to Sweden. Newspapers there published the letters and people read them. Within 18 months of Gustaf's arrival upon the eastern shore of Pine Lake, 59 Scandinavians had found their way to New Upsala and settled there.<sup>ii</sup>

We do not know when Unonius's friend Kee-wah-goosh-kum and his community were no longer seen in the New Upsala neighborhood. Renowned Wisconsin historian, Charles E. Brown

reports that Kee-wah-goosh-kum lived his later years in Dodge County—the county immediately northwest of this one. Kee-wah-goosh-kum died and was buried there in 1857.<sup>iii</sup>

After returning to Sweden in 1858, Gustaf wrote a two-volume memoir about his time in the United States. [*Travy holds up the books.*] In addition to stories of Swedes in New Upsala, the volumes contain numerous stories of Kee-wah-goosh-kum and his community there. In acknowledgement of this history that we Swedes share with these Potawatomi People, I am donating these volumes of Gustaf’s memoir to the Swedish American Historical Society of Wisconsin [*Travy hands the books to Jan*] and I ask the Society to in turn donate them to the Forest County Potawatomi Museum and Library.

I believe Kee-wah-goosh-kum and his descendants are as much a part of the legacy of the history told on the marker we unveil today as I and my fellow descendants of George and Ebba are.

It has become customary for us of the dominant culture of this country to acknowledge in word and writing the historical presence of Indigenous People on the lands we inhabit and use. While I believe these acknowledgements are important, I believe we need to do more. I believe we and our indigenous neighbors whose ancestors also inhabited land to which we have historical ties need to engage together in exploring our shared history. It is my hope that this engagement will enrich our understanding of our ties to each other and thereby help us form, together, that elusive “more perfect Union.”

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<sup>i</sup> Vol I, P232 Unonius, Gustaf. *Minnen fran en sjuttonarig vistelse I Nordvestra Amerika*. Upsala, Sweden, 1862.

This book was translated into English and a memoir of two volumes by the Swedish Pioneer Historical Society and titled *A Pioneer in Northwest America 1841 – 1858*. University of Minnesota Press, 1950-60.

<sup>ii</sup> Chapters 2 and 3. Stark, William. *Pine Lake* Zimmerman Press, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, 1984

<sup>iii</sup> Brown, Charles E. Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives-B44,F4: Washington County, 4/5/1927