

HOVANDER HOMESTEAD



A FAMILY HERITAGE

The story of the Hovander Homestead is largely the saga of a family who immigrated to the Northwest from Sweden in the days just before the Alaska Gold Rush. They were among the second generation of pioneers to settle the river valleys and cedar forests surrounding Puget Sound, in the wave of people who brought more than log cabins, one room school houses, and trade goods for currency. The Hovanders, Hakan and Louisa and their first six children, came to the Nooksack Valley in the era of the railroad, the giant lumber companies, and Victorian architecture. Their story and that of the homestead doesn't begin until the years after the first growth forests between Mount Baker and the southern Strait of Georgia were logged off and cities built in their place.

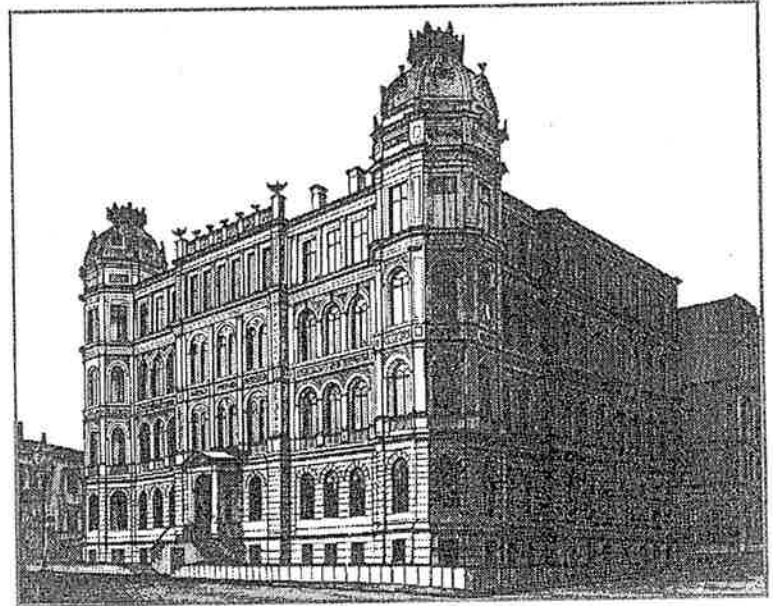
H.O. HOVANDER

Hakan Olsson Hovander was born December 6th, 1841 in Faraback, Sweden, north of Malmo. He was an inquisitive, venture driven young man who sailed with his twin brother to America just after the Civil War. When brother Christian took a homestead on the great plains, Hakan set out alone for the far west working his way around the country as a laborer and eventually a skilled builder. His travels landed him in San Francisco, Portland, and then Chicago, still smoldering from the great fire of 1871. There he refined his abilities as a builder and self-taught architect and amassed a modest fortune. He returned to Sweden, where he studied architecture, and in Stockholm met Louisa, his future wife.

Hakan and Louisa prospered, and by 1880, Hovander was involved in the construction of an elaborate Beaux Arts style building which the family always referred to as "the Mansion". It was indeed a marvelous Classical building, and with it, Hovander reached the pinnacle of his endeavors in Sweden.

During the mid 1880's Hovander, with his family, again visited the United States, this time California, but they soon returned to Stockholm to oversee the sale of the proud mansion (same as referred to in the previous paragraph) to Gillis Roy for \$95,000, who re-sold it to members of Swedish royalty. With this fortune the Hovander family departed their homeland for good. With four boys ages 15, 11, 6, and 2, and two girls 13 and 6 months, the family sailed around the world and across the equator to settle in Auckland, New Zealand.

The Hovander Mansion, Stockholm, Sweden

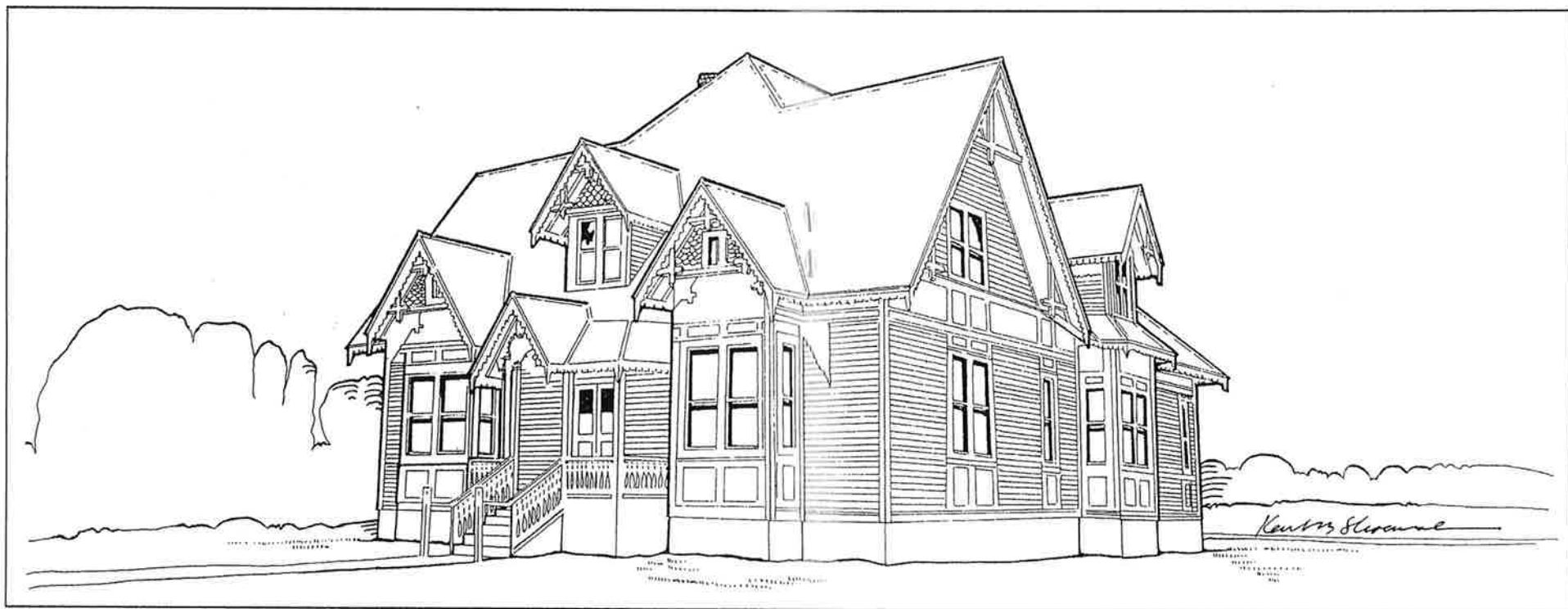


1884 WOOD ENGRAVING handprinted on a Washington Hand Press at Western Washington University by Thomas Johnston, 1985

The Hovanders' stay down-under was short. After six months Hakan brought his family once again to America, this time across the Pacific Ocean to Seattle. With \$4,000 in gold, Hovander bought a 60 acre farm on the Nooksack River, just across from the town of Ferndale. It was May 1898 when the Hovanders stood together for the first time on the rich river delta bottom-land which would 75 years later be recognized as a national treasure.

Plans for a large family home began to formulate in Hakan's mind and pen soon after his arrival in Whatcom County. The design reflected his training as an architect and his Scandinavian roots. More than anything else, however, it represented his personal dream of a family legacy in the form of an enduring ancestral home.

THE HOVANDER HOUSE



In the early summer of 1901, Hovander and oldest son Hugo laid the first bricks in the new home's foundation. By fall the brickwork, including chimneys and a furnace which burned six foot logs, was complete. The next year a crew of carpenters framed, roofed and sided the elaborate residence. They worked with 52,000 board feet of native clear fir, all hand selected by Hovander, who also attended to details like sculpting the patterns for interior moldings and exterior gingerbread.

Today, virtually every detail crafted by Hovander and his builders is intact. The raw linseed oil treated woodwork on the ceilings, window casings, and interior trim still

looks fresh. The original plaster, with a horsehair mix for strength, has been replaced, but the flooring, cabinetry, hardware, and even some furniture remains as they were when the Hovanders lived there.

In addition to practical design features, like orientation to the sun for favorable light and heat, Hovander used several Scandinavian stylistic elements. Such things as finishing all the wood inside and out with linseed oil, rather than paint, set the house apart from other local farmhouses. The overall scale and use of ornamentation gave the place a manor house appearance.

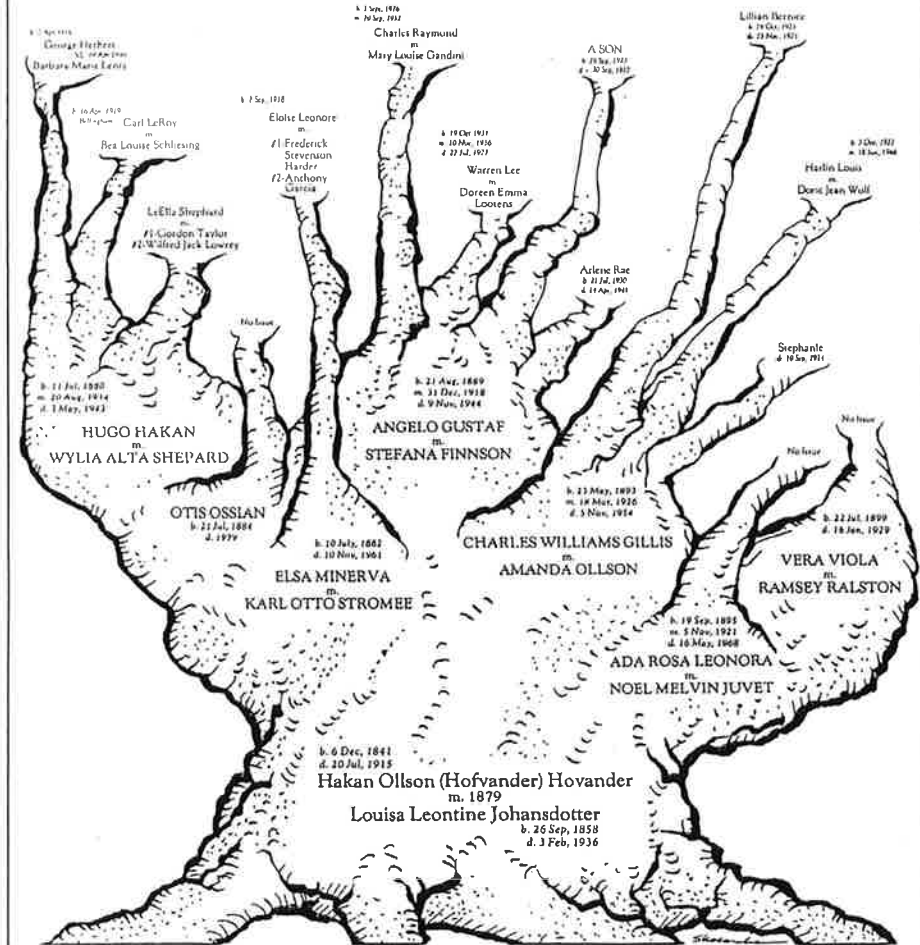
THE HOVANDERS

Hakan Hovander died on July 20, 1915, but the Hovander legacy was just beginning. For a few years the boys stayed to work the farm. Then Hugo, the oldest, left to operate a grocery in Bellingham. Angelo and Charlie both joined the U. S. Army during the First World War, and then returned to marry and raise families in Ferndale.

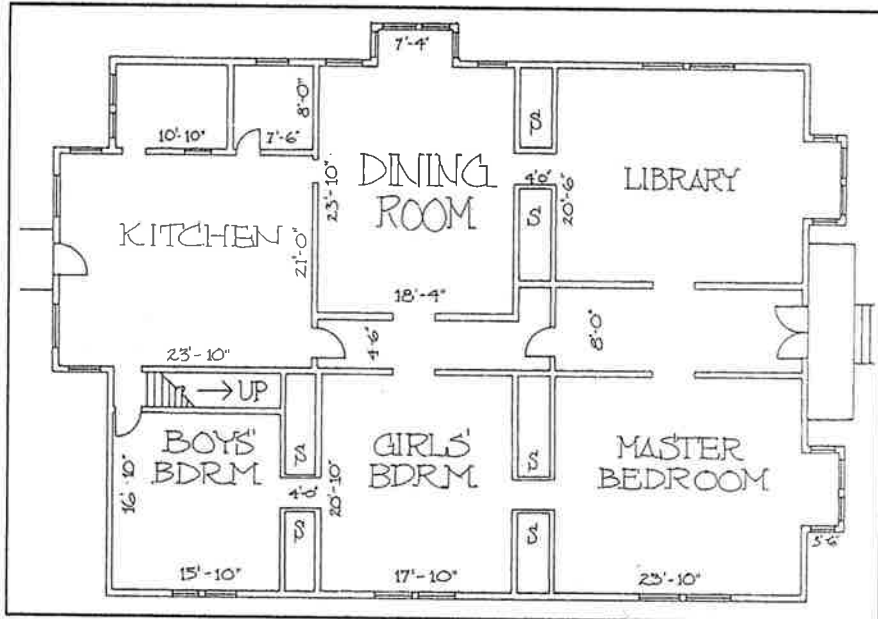
Strikingly beautiful Elsa married a printer, Karl Strome, the son of family friends in San Bernardino, California. She became the only child to move away from the Northwest for any length of time. Sister Ada married the son of a Ferndale dry goods merchant, Joel Juvet, and youngest Vera met and married a young man named Ramsy Ralston in the mid-1920s. Sadly, Vera came home to the farm in 1927 seriously ill with tuberculosis. She died little more than a year later, still in her twenties.

All the children, however, did not leave the farm. Second son Otis stayed on with his mother until her passing in 1936 and then inherited the land and buildings. Charlie and Elsa both returned to the farm with their families during the 1930s and 40s. By then, several grandchildren of Hakan were beginning to have memories of the beautiful family home. With most of the family living in Whatcom County, a third and fourth generation of Hovanders became familiar with the house that Papa Hovander built. They also grew to know Uncle Otis, who lived there until the Homestead was sold to Whatcom County Parks & Recreation in 1969. Since that time the Hovander Homestead has been available for enjoyment by county residents and visitors as a park and interpretive center.

A GENEALOGY



In June 1971, Hovander Homestead Park was dedicated, and in October 1974, the site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Then in 1978, the year before Otis' death, the house was awarded the National Trust for Historic Preservation President's Award, recognition that the Homestead was among the country's finest restored landmarks. H.O. Hovander's dreams of an enduring family legacy had come to pass.



Hovander Homestead Park is open year round from dawn to dusk. The Hovander House is open during the summer Thursday through Sunday, noon until 4:30 p.m.

When visiting Hovander Homestead Park, don't miss the nearby Tennant Lake Interpretive Center and Fragrance Garden. A trail connects these two adjacent parks.

Whatcom County Parks & Recreation would like to thank these organizations and people for their assistance and support :

Whatcom Volunteer Center
 Hovander Homestead Park Volunteers
 WSU Whatcom County Master Gardeners
 Hovander Family,

with particular thanks to Amanda Hovander and Dorice Hovander



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