

Edward Peter Olson

March 17, 1879 – November 14, 1940

Edward Peter Olson, 61, of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, passed away on November 14, 1940, at a local hospital after suffering a heart attack. A former newspaper editor and skilled carpenter, he was also a dedicated leader in South Dakota's Deaf community.

Edward was born on March 17, 1879, in Holmträsk, Degerfors, Sweden, to Olof Anton Johanson and Brita Sofia Johnsdotter. His mother died when he was very young, and his father later immigrated to Dakota Territory. In 1889, ten-year-old Edward came to America with his brothers Olof and Carl, joining family in the Lake County and Salem area.

According to family history, Edward and Olof, who were both Deaf, found farm work after arriving in Dakota Territory and later discovered that the farm belonged to their own father. The brothers attended the school now known as the South Dakota School for the Deaf in Sioux Falls, where Edward learned printing and Olof studied carpentry.



dw. P. Olson, retiring President o the S. D. Association for the Advancement of the Deaf



Edward outside the Wakonda Monitor, the South Dakota he owned and edited.

Edward pursued several occupations during his working life. At about age 20, he became a rural mail carrier at Sinai, South Dakota. He later edited and owned the Wakonda Monitor, putting his printing education to practical use. He also worked for the Soo Critic in Sioux Falls before taking construction work in Iowa.

In 1910, Edward moved to Delavan, Wisconsin, where he worked in the shipping department of the Bradley Knitting Company. Delavan's large Deaf community offered opportunities for employment and friendship. There he met his future wife, Annie Gersdorf, a graduate of the Wisconsin School for the Deaf and a fellow employee. Edward was also considered for a position teaching carpentry and cabinetmaking at the South Carolina School for the Deaf, but chose not to pursue it.



Edward and Annie Olson on their wedding day, November 2,1914

Edward and Annie married on Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1914, at her parents' home in Medford, Wisconsin. They settled in Sioux Falls and became the parents of three sons: Wallace Edward, Harold Peter, and Lloyd Gersdorf. Edward joined his brother Olof in carpentry and built the family home at 1105 South Main Avenue. Family accounts credit the brothers with helping construct Sioux Falls City Hall and numerous homes, as well as working on rebuilding projects in Storm Lake, Iowa.

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Family life included visits with relatives and gatherings with Deaf friends. In 1925, Edward and Annie took their children on a two-week automobile trip to North Dakota, where Edward visited a sister he had not seen for 15 years. On their return, they visited friends in Aberdeen, attended a Deaf picnic, and stopped in Castlewood to see James Tone.



Edward, far right, with his wife, Annie, their three sons, and Annie's mother outside the family home in Sioux Falls, early 1930s.

The family also faced difficult times. Annie developed tuberculosis and spent several years receiving treatment at the sanatorium near Custer. During her illness, their sons were cared for at the South Dakota Children's Home while Edward continued working to support the family. Annie eventually recovered and returned home.

Edward remained actively involved in the Deaf community. He served as president of the South Dakota Association of the Deaf in 1925 and as secretary in 1921, 1923, 1928, and 1930. He was a charter member of Sioux Falls Division No. 74 of the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf, organized in 1919, and belonged to the local carpenters' union. His home was also a gathering place for friends; shortly before his death, friends celebrated James Tone's 82nd birthday there.

Edward was survived by his wife, Annie, and their sons, Harold and Lloyd, both living at home. He was preceded in death by their eldest son, Wallace, known as "Wally," and by his siblings.

Funeral services were held at 2:00 p.m. on November 18, 1940, at Calvary Cathedral in Sioux Falls. Dean Leland Stark officiated, assisted by the Rev. Homer E. Grace of Denver, a missionary serving Deaf people. Bernice Halvenson served as organist.

Pallbearers were Robert Otten, Albert Krohn, Norman Larson, Peter Dalgaard, Grant Daniels, and Joseph Servold. Burial followed at Woodlawn Cemetery in Sioux Falls, with Miller Funeral Home handling arrangements.



Edward Olson, seated third from left, with fellow members of the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf.