My great-great grandfather Peter August Adolphson embarked on a remarkably difficult and extraordinary journey to the United States in the late 19th century. Peter overcame many challenges in immigrating to the United States, and his story of learning a new language, operating a successful business, and raising a family is a remarkable example of an immigrant's commitment to realizing the American dream. Peter’s hardworking spirit has been passed down and still lives on in my family today.

Peter August Adolphson lived in a small, rural community in Smaland, Sweden. Peter was the oldest of seven children in a relatively poor family. When Peter turned 18 in 1886, he had a difficult time finding work in Sweden, so he and his family decided that it was in everyone’s best interest if he emigrated to America to pursue greater opportunities. This farewell must have been a difficult one for Peter and his family because they knew they would likely never see each other again, since travel was extremely slow and expensive at the time.

Peter came to America on a pre-paid ticket from his uncle, Frank Holmberg, who had been living in America for a few years. Peter traveled by ship from Sweden to England then to Quebec and then finally to Chicago, Illinois. Once in America, Peter was advised to change the spelling of his last name to Adolphson with just one “s” to better conform to American society’s expectations about assimilation. After spending some time in Chicago, Peter heard of many Swedish immigrants settling in southern Minnesota. With a new last name, speaking no English, and not knowing anyone, my great-great grandfather Peter Adolphson made his way to southern Minnesota and finally settled down in the small town of St. Peter.

Back home in Sweden, Peter’s father owned and operated a small shoe shop, and he passed his knowledge onto Peter. This skill came in handy for Peter when he tried to find work in America. After 43 years of hard work at a small shoe store in St. Peter, Peter Adolphson became the owner and operator of the store in 1933 at the height of the great depression. Peter named the store “Adolphson shoes” and ran the business with the help of his son Albin. Peter even reunited with some of his family members as his brother Andrew and sisters Esther and Jenny joined him in settling southern Minnesota. Peter’s brother Andrew was an employee at the store and he became co-owner with Peter’s son Albin when Peter passed away in 1943. Andrew and Albin continued to operate Adolphson Shoes until the store closed in 1965.

Peter was happily married to his wife Anna for 51 years. They raised 4 children together, all of whom attended Gustavus Adolphus College, which is the college I attend today. Gustavus owns a house named the “Adolphson House” which named after Peter and his relatives, that is available for students to live in every year.

Peter Adolphson learned a new language, operated a successful business, and raised a family in a new country. Peter had a tremendous amount of patience and a strong work ethic which helped him overcome
numerous challenges on his journey to the United States. Peter’s values of hard work and patience are still evident today in St. Peter and in my family. His story, like many others then and now, is a great example of the American dream.