

# Demography of the John and Lizzie Lindgren Family

by

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## **FAMILY DEMOGRAPHY OVERVIEW**

### **Background**

Unlike the classical perspective on lineal and collateral kin involving bifurcating genealogical charts and parent-offspring pedigree diagrams, considering kin in the context of their family casts each of their lives in a much different light than when viewed individually as part of a kinship network. *First*, a family perspective provides a framework for considering the lives of the founding members of a family, namely the spouses—initially as newly-weds, then as young- and middle-aged parents encountering both domestic and career (or job) challenges, and later as the matriarch and patriarch involving the extended families of their adult children, in-laws, and grandchildren. *Second*, the family juxtaposes by age the parents and their offspring as well as the siblings. The first and last born offspring can easily span 15 to 20 or more years with parents (or at least mothers) starting in their mid-20s and ending in their mid- to late-40s. Similarly the age similarities and differences of siblings can matter a great deal to the within-family dynamics i.e., siblings who are 1-2 years apart have a much different relationship than those who are 10-15 or more years apart in age. *Third*, family usually involves a family home or homes. This creates shared experiences and memories of communal rooms (e.g., bedrooms, bathrooms), meals including on major holidays such

as Thanksgiving and Christmas, structures such as farm buildings, and spaces such as backyards, woodlots, and farmyards. Last, family perspectives situates individual lives in historical context, not only by year, period (e.g., World War II), and events (e.g., moon landing), but also by family celebrations (e.g., major award for family member) or tragedies (e.g., family member killed).

### **Pedagogical perspective**

Family demography is a sub-specialty within formal demography concerned with family composition such as number of members and their ages as well as the timing and duration of marriages. The family is considered a singular unit of study that, in its simplest form (i.e., no divorce, separation, or widowhood; multiple children; no blended families) begins at marriage, moves through several stages and ends with the death of the last spouse. These classical stages of the family life cycle include: I. Formation—marriage; II. Extension—birth of first child; III. Completed extension—birth of last child; IV. Contraction—first child leaves home; V. Completed contraction—last child leaves home VI. Dissolution—first spouse dies; VII. End—last spouse dies. Although the default age for leaving the nest is 18, this is primarily for consistency rather than practicality. Most children in earlier times (including the Lindgren children) remained at home until marriage.

## **JOHN AND ELIZABETH LINDGREN FAMILY**

### **Context**

John and Lizzie Lindgren lived on a 450 acre farm about 2 miles northwest of Paton, Iowa. They raised both field crops including corn, soybeans, oats and alfalfa as well as livestock including purebred Angus cattle and spotted Poland China hogs. Their family “lifespan” was 58 years, starting in 1899 when they were married and ending in 1957 when John died. A total of 10 presidents served during this period starting with William McKinley and ending with Dwight Eisenhower. The U.S. had just ended the Spanish-American war the year before they were married. The family unit spanned two world wars (WWI—1914-18; WWII—1941-45) and the Korean War (1950-53), the Wright Brother’s first flight (1902) and transitioning from farming with horses to farming with mechanized equipment(e.g., tractors; thrashers). During this period rural Iowa was electrified (via Rural Electrification Act (REA) of 1935) so farm families could have both electric lighting and refrigeration. Radio then became the primary course of news and entertainment through the 1930s to early 1950s when television began to appear. The population of Greene County, Iowa was around 18,000 in 1900 when they were married with 330 of these persons living in Paton. By 1950 the number in the county had decreased to 15,500 but with around 400 people living in Paton.

## **Family**

### *General*

John and Lizzie Lindgren produced a total of 10 children over a 15-year period years including 7 boys and 3 girls. Ages at first and last birth were 28 and 43 for Lizzie and 31 and 46 for John. Their first child, Melvin, was born in 1900, a year after they were married, produced a new child on average every 18 months through 1915 when Elvera was born. All 10 of the children were in the family nest until 1918 when 18-year old Melvin (the oldest) died of cancer. All of the surviving children either stayed in the nest and helped on the farm or married and farmed nearby throughout the 1930s until the start of World War II when Leonard and LaVerna left for military service. By the end of the war Lizzie and John were both in their early- to mid-70s and retired to the nearby small town of Lanyon. Lizzie and John died at 78 and 88 (mean = 83). The lifespans of the Lindgren children ranged from 18 (Melvin) to 94 (Ted) with a mean of 69.3 years. The average age of death was 79.9 years if the two early deaths are excluded (i.e., Melvin at 18 and Verner at 36).

### *Children*

*Melvin*--first born child (and son) who died of cancer at age 18. It was said John collapsed on hearing the grim news. Since the extension phase of the family was complete at the time of his death in 1918, with the exception of his youngest siblings (Paul, LaVerna, Elvira), all of his siblings would have known and loved their older brother

*Olive*—first born daughter who helped raise all of her younger siblings, especially her last-born sisters, LaVerna and Elvira. Olive never married and died relatively young at age 61. At the time of her death she was helping her younger sister, LaVerna, raise her three young children as a single mother having lost her husband, Robert, the year before.

*Filmore*—the third-born, Fil married (Doris) and had one child, Phyllis, a daughter who experienced some mild mental health issues. Phyllis married and had three daughters (Cindy, Candace & Cheryl), all of whom were successful including one (Cindy) who was accomplished pianist and Stanford University engineering graduate. Fil worked at odd jobs when he lived in Iowa and driver/chauffer when he and Doris lived in Phoenix, Arizona.

*Harold*—married Betty Fields, farmed near Churdan raising both livestock (known for their purebred Angus cattle) and field crops (mostly corn and soybeans). They had two children: (1) Ann, who became a nun but left after several years to marry a former Jim Dunnegan (religion teacher) and do social work, and (2) John, who took over their farm, married a much younger woman from Mexico when he was 50 years old, and had two children.

*Ted*—raised field crops, cattle and hogs on some of the original land that had been owned by his father outside of Paton less than a mile from the home place. He married a teacher (Martha) and had three daughters—Sharon, Karon (twins) and Jennifer.

*Leonard*—farmed a portion of the original family land. Since all men between the ages of 18 and 38 were eligible for the military draft after the attack on Pearl Harbor (December 1941), all of the Lindgren sons except Fil were eligible since they were in their late 20s or early- to mid-30s. Although Harold, Ted and Paul avoided the draft since they were all married and farming at the time, 33-year old Leonard served with the Army's [Merrill's Marauders](#) in Burma during the war. After the war Leonard married Marie Small, the widow of a man killed WWII who already had two children—Larry and Janice Small. Leonard and Marie produced two of their own children, Galen and Brent.

*Verner*—married (wife—Jennie) and adopted son a son named Roger. Was farming when he was killed in his mid-30s while blasting rock.

*Paul*—took over the original family house and farmed a portion of the land deeded to him by his father. He married (Cleopatra) and had three sons—Dick, Dennis and Darrel. Dick attended and graduated from Iowa State on a baseball scholarship and worked near Des Moines in agricultural commodity marketing.

*LaVerna*—attended secretarial school (AIB) in Des Moines while playing basketball (same as Elvera). Joined the Navy Waves in her late 20s where she re-connected with and married Robert Carey, a man she knew from Paton high school. They farmed near Dana and had three children—Barb a teacher in Colorado, James an entomology professor at the University of California, Davis, and Kathy (Kate) a K-8 educator, consultant and curriculum sales manager (Seattle to Syracuse)

*Elvera*—last born and thus youngest by 15 years (relative to Melvin), married Richard Norman (Norm) White, and adopted two children (Bill and Bobbi). Lived on a small acreage outside of Boone. With her husband ran upscale women's clothing stores in both Boone and Ames (White's Women's Clothing).

Table 1. Family demography for John and Elizabeth Lindgren.

Family Name		Name		Birth	Death	Age at death								
LINDGREN (married m-d-1899)		<b>Father</b>	John Magnus Lindgren	Aug. 18, 1869	Dec. 9, 1957	88								
		<b>Mother</b>	Anna Elizabeth Johnson	m-d-1872	m-d-1950	78								
CHILDREN														
Year	Parent Age		Family Age	Melvin Atton (1900)	Olive Evelyn (1901)	Julius Filmore (1903)	Harold Gust (1905)	Theodore John (1907)	Leonard Levi (1909)	Verner (1910)	Paul (1913)	LaVerna Elizabeth (1914)	Elvera Marie (1915)	Average Age
	Mother	Father		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1899	27	30	0											--
1900	28	31	1	0										0.5
1901	29	32	2	1	0									1.0
1902	30	33	3	2	1									2.0
1903	31	34	4	3	2	0								2.3
1904	32	35	5	4	3	1								3.3
1905	33	36	6	5	4	2	0							3.4
1906	34	37	7	6	5	3	1							4.4
1907	35	38	8	7	6	4	2	0						4.5
1908	36	39	9	8	7	5	3	1						5.5
1909	37	40	10	9	8	6	4	2	0					5.6
1910	38	41	11	10	9	7	5	3	1	0				5.8
1911	39	42	12	11	10	8	6	4	2	1				6.8
1912	40	43	13	12	11	9	7	5	3	2				7.8
1913	41	44	14	13	12	10	8	6	4	3	0			7.8
1914	42	45	15	14	13	11	9	7	5	4	1	0		7.9
1915	43	46	16	15	14	12	10	8	6	5	2	1	0	8.1
1916	44	47	17	16	15	13	11	9	7	6	3	2	1	9.1
1917	45	48	18	17	16	14	12	10	8	7	4	3	2	10.1
1918	46	49	19	18	17	15	13	11	9	8	5	4	3	11.1

1919	47	50	20		18	16	14	12	10	9	6	5	4	11.4
1920	48	51	21	died of	19	17	15	13	11	10	7	6	5	12.4
1921	49	52	22	cancer	20	18	16	14	12	11	8	7	6	13.4
1922	50	53	23		21	19	17	15	13	12	9	8	7	14.4
1923	51	54	24		22	20	18	16	14	13	10	9	8	15.4
1924	52	55	25		23	21	19	17	15	14	11	10	9	16.4
1925	53	56	26		24	22	20	18	16	15	12	11	10	17.4
1926	54	57	27		25	23	21	19	17	16	13	12	11	18.4
1927	55	58	28		26	24	22	20	18	17	14	13	12	19.4
1928	56	59	29		27	25	23	21	19	18	15	14	13	20.4
1929	57	60	30		28	26	24	22	20	19	16	15	14	21.4
1930	58	61	31		29	27	25	23	21	20	17	16	15	22.4
1931	59	62	32		30	28	26	24	22	21	18	17	16	23.4
1932	60	63	33		31	29	27	25	23	22	19	18	17	24.4
1933	61	64	34		32	30	28	26	24	23	20	19	18	25.4
1934	62	65	35		33	31	29	27	25	24	21	20	19	26.4
1935	63	66	36		34	32	30	28	26	25	22	21	20	27.4
1936	64	67	37		35	33	31	29	27	26	23	22	21	28.4
1937	65	68	38		36	34	32	30	28	27	24	23	22	29.4
1938	66	69	39		37	35	33	31	29	28	25	24	23	30.4
1939	67	70	40		38	36	34	32	30	29	26	25	24	31.4
1940	68	71	41		39	37	35	33	31	30	27	26	25	32.4
1941	69	72	42		40	38	36	34	32	31	28	27	26	33.4
1942	70	73	43		40	39	37	35	33	32	29	28	27	34.3
1943	71	74	44		43	40	38	36	34	33	30	29	28	35.5
1944	72	75	45		44	40	39	37	35	34	31	30	29	36.4
1945	73	76	46		45	43	40	38	36	35	32	31	30	37.6
1946	74	77	47		46	44	40	39	37	36	33	32	31	38.5
1947	75	78	48		47	45	43	40	38		34	33	32	39.7
1948	76	79	49		48	46	44	40	39	killed	35	34	33	40.9
1949	77	80	50		49	47	45	43	40	by	36	35	34	42.1

1950	78	81	51		50	48	46	44	40	blast	37	36	35	43.0
1951	--	82	52		51	49	47	45	43		38	37	36	44.2
1952	--	83	53		52	50	48	46	44		39	38	37	45.2
1953	--	84	54		53	51	49	47	45		40	39	38	46.2
1954	--	85	55		54	52	50	48	46		40	40	39	47.1
1955	--	86	56		55	53	51	49	47		43	40	40	48.2
1956	--	87	57		56	54	52	50	48		44	43	40	49.3
1957	--	88	58		57	55	53	51	49		45	44	43	50.6
Year death	1950	1957		1918	1962	1971	1996	2001	1998	1947	1983	2005	1996	1978
Age death	78	88		18	61	68	87	94	87	36	70	91	81	69.3

Table 2. Summary of John and Elizabeth Lindgren family demography. Although the stages involving contraction are based on children leaving the nest at 18, this was seldom the case for any of the Lindgren children since they stayed to help farm until they married.

Stage	Begin	End	Stage	Ages at beginning		
				Elizabeth	John	Family
I. Formation	1899	1900	1	27	30	0
II. Extension	1900	1915	15	28	31	1
III. Completed extension	1915	1918	3	43	46	16
IV. Contraction	1918	1934	16	59	62	19
V. Completed contraction	1934	1950	16	78	81	35
VI. Dissolution	1950	1957	7	--	88	51 (58)



# Iowa Farm-home for John and Elizabeth Lindgren Family

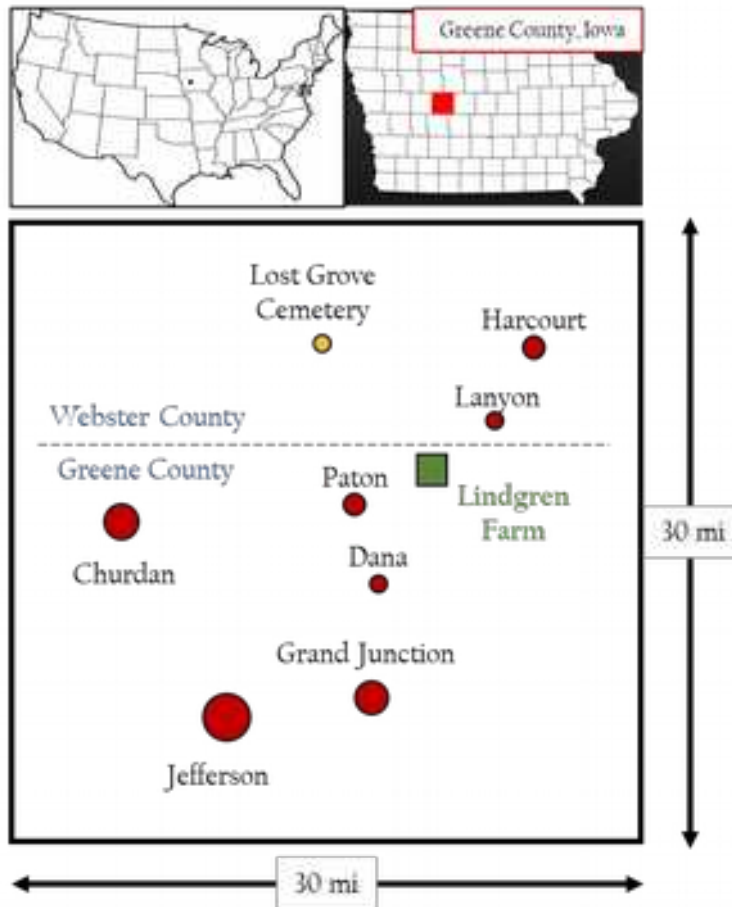


Fig. 1. Location of Lindgren 450 acre farm near the northern border of Greene County Iowa approximately 2 miles northwest of Paton. In the early 1950s John and Elizabeth Lindgren retired in Lanyon, the small nearby town where the family attended the Evangelical Covenant Church. John and Elizabeth are buried in Lost Grove Cemetery along with many other Lindgren kin. Jefferson is the Greene County seat. Three of the Lindgren sons (Leonard, Ted and Paul) farmed the original land, Harold bought land outside of Churdan and LaVerna lived on a farm between Dana and Paton.

# Lindgren and Johnson Families

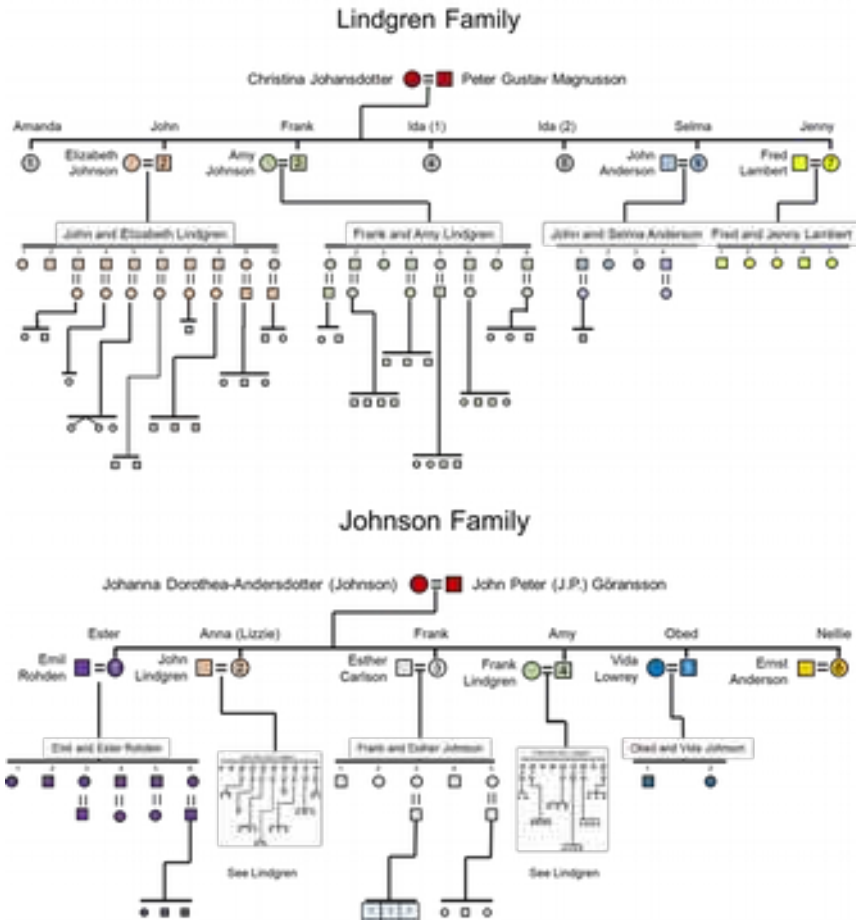


Fig. 2. Genealogies for John and Elizabeth (Johnson) Lindgren. Note that John's brother Frank married Elizabeth's sister Amy. Thus John's ten children and Frank's eight children were double first cousins (i.e., a quarter related rather than a typical eighth for first cousins).