

## **John Erik Jonsson**

Tony Hanson

John Erik Jonsson (Erik) was born in Brooklyn, New York on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1901. He was the only child of Johan Peter Jonsson and Ellen Charlotta Palmqvist, Swedish emigrants who met in the United States and were married in Brooklyn on the 20 February 1893.

The family moved to Montclair, New Jersey in 1912. Erik graduated from the Montclair High School in 1917 and from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1922 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering.

He began working for the Alcoa Aluminum Index company in 1922 as a rolling mill apprentice and was soon promoted to the position of Manufacturing Superintendent. He left Alcoa in 1927 to establish a Pontiac dealership but returned as a Sales Engineer in 1927.

He married Margaret Fonde in Knoxville, Tennessee on 8 February 1923. They had three children and remained married until her death in 1984.

During this time Erik provided material expediting assistance to J. Clarence Karcher, the husband of his wife's cousin, who had co-founded Geophysical Services Incorporated (GSI). Erik left Alcoa for good in July 1930 when he joined GSI in Newark, New Jersey to manage the production of seismic instruments.

Erik and his family moved to Dallas in 1934. He and three other employees purchased GSI on 6 December 1941, at which time he assumed the duties of Vice President and Treasurer. The company provided electronic devices to the United States Army and Navy during World War II and continued to produce seismic equipment for the oil industry following the war.

In 1951 GSI changed its name to Texas Instruments and Erik was elected president. He was elected Chairman of the Board in 1958 and served as Honorary Chairman from 1966 through 1977.

Erik became the Mayor of the City of Dallas on 3 February 1964, shortly after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. During this, and three subsequent terms as Mayor, he was a major force behind a \$175 million bond issue that financed the I.M. Pei-designed City Hall, the Dallas Convention Center, and the Dallas Central Library.

Erik was the first president of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, served as President of the Dallas Citizen's Council, and was the founder of the Southwest Center for Advanced Studies which became the University of Texas Dallas in 1969.

The Dallas Central Library, which opened in 1982, was renamed the J. Erik Jonsson Central Library in 1986 in his honor.

Erik died of pneumonia at the age of 93 at his home in Dallas on 31 August 1995 and is buried at the Sparkman Hilcrest Memorial Park in Dallas.

He received a large number of Honors, Awards and Honorary Degrees during his lifetime. His children donated his papers, consisting of 170 boxes, to SMU in 1998.

His life was documented in a biography, *"No Small Dreams: J. Erik Jonsson – Texas Visionary"* by Darwin Payne, published by the DeGolyer Library in 2014.

An initial search for genealogical information about Erik provided a surprisingly small amount of information for such a public and prominent person. His family's emigration and life in the United States was easily discovered and documented. However, my lack of familiarity with Swedish genealogical records hampered my efforts to trace his family's Swedish lineage.

Fortunately, Dallas Genealogical Society member Jean Larson offered to apply her knowledge and skills and she has provided a wealth of information about his Swedish roots. You can view the information we discovered about his family on the Family Search Family Tree at <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/GMQF-HBD>

#### References & Additional Information

- "J. Erik Jonsson," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=J. Erik Jonsson&oldid=1051395397](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=J._Erik_Jonsson&oldid=1051395397).
- "J. Erik Jonsson", National Academy of Engineering - Ramo Founders Award, <https://www.nae.edu/238088/J-Erik-Jonsson>.
- "About Us: The History of the Dallas Public Library", <http://dallaslibrary2.org/about/history.php>
- J. Erik Jonsson papers, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/smu/00053/smu-00053.html>