

Using Swedish Records to Resolve Family Lore

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Overview

My four maternal great-grandparents emigrated to the United States from Sweden between 1883-1893. My mother, Betty Platin McKee, undertook the initial genealogical work to trace these immigrants. At the time, her efforts were somewhat hindered by the paucity of digitized and indexed records, her limited knowledge of the Swedish language, and simply by the minimal amount of family information available. Despite these hurdles, she accomplished much and left a treasure trove of charts, biographical information, photos, notes — and post-it notes. My initial goal was to “simply” fill in the tree, ideally to my great-great-great grandparents (approximately the late 1770s to the mid 1850s). I soon discovered that this research would require addressing several brick walls, some glaring inconsistencies, and several relationship mysteries. And, I’d have to deal with some family lore that just did not add up.

Fortunately, since my mother’s research days, there are abundant resources. In this presentation, I’ll share how I used these tools, particularly Sweden’s ArkivDigital, to address the specific research question: “Who Were Ida Charlotta Lundberg’s Parents?” By resolving this issue, I broke through some brick walls, cleared up various inconsistencies, and solved a few relationship mysteries.

While this presentation focuses on Swedish genealogical research and resources, I hope it also offers a step-by-step approach to tackling a genealogical research question.

Sources for Swedish Records

Ancestry: <http://www.ancestry.com>

FamilySearch: <http://familysearch.org>

MyHeritage: <http://myheritage.com>

Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archive): <https://riksarkivet.se/>

I highly recommend ArkivDigital for Swedish Genealogical research. The documents are digitized in color, the site is user-friendly and easy to navigate with multiple ways to search, and the documents are easy to “copy” and transfer to other platforms, along with their corresponding citations.

ArkivDigital — Types of Records Available

ArkivDigital is a vast resource with many types of documents. For this presentation, I relied primarily on Swedish Church Records (Kyrkoböcker).

Church Parish Vital Records: Kyrkoböcker

- Birth and Christening: Födde och Döpte
- Marriage: Vigde
- Death and Burial: Döde och Begravde

Church Vital Records are typically organized chronologically at the Parish level. Household Examination Records are organized by the Place (village, farm) residence within the Parish. See below for hints on identifying the Parish and Place for your ancestors.

Birth Records typically include the child's name, birth and baptismal dates, parents' names, names of baptismal witnesses and the age of the mother. Birth records also include the very important Place (village, farm) needed to utilize the Household Examination Records. Later records may also include a page number reference to the Place.

Marriage Records typically include the dates of the banns and marriage, names of the bride and groom, current residence place of bride and groom, and the name of the minister. Again, later records may include a page number reference to the Place.

Death Records typically include the name of deceased, dates of death and burial, Place of residence at time of death, age at death, and cause of death. Again, later records may include a page number reference to the Place.

Household Examination Records: Husförhörslängd

- Clerical Survey Annual "Census" of all family members
- Incoming List (Inflyttning) Arrival in Parish
- Outgoing List (Ufflyttning) Departure from Parish

The Clerical Survey is an annual "census" that includes all family members; the census was originally intended to test them for their religious understanding. **To access these records, you must know the Place (village, farm) residence within the Parish for your ancestors.** These records typically include names, birthdates, birth places of all family members, occupation for the head of household, marriage date, smallpox vaccination status, and religious examination results.

The Incoming and Outgoing Lists were required to keep track of everyone moving into or out of a Parish. The records typically include the names, the date they moved in or out, the place they moved from or are moving to. Sometimes there is a page number reference to the corresponding page in the Clerical Survey. For emigrants to America, the reference is Nord Amerika.

Other ArkivDigital record sets include Probate and Estate Records, Land and Property Records, and Military Records.

Key Data for Success in Using Swedish Records

Name

You'll need to know the name of your ancestor as it was in Sweden — not how it might have been altered after immigrating. It's helpful to compile a list of all the possible variations. In this presentation, for example: Ida Charlotta Lundberg, Ida Charlotta Nilsson, Ida Lundberg, Lotta Nilsson, etc.

Birthdate

Birthdate is a key data point in most Swedish records, akin to a social security number. Even a birth year will be helpful as you search through the records.

Parish/Place (Village, Farm, think “Hometown”)

Sweden is organized by *County (Län)*, then *Parish (Socken or Församling)*, and finally by *Place (Ort)*. Note that the boundaries and names of Swedish counties have changed over the years. For example, the primary county in this presentation is Älvsborg. In 1997, Älvsborg became part of Västra Götaland so we'll find the historical records under Älvsborg.

To locate most Swedish records, you will need to know at least the Parish — and ideally, the Place (Village, Farm, think “Hometown” .

Possible sources to identify the Parish or Place include family records, including obituaries; census records (immigration year is a helpful additional piece of information); U.S. vital records; passenger lists and immigration records; U.S. Scandinavian church records; and Scandinavian emigration records. Ancestry has a database of emigrants registered in Swedish church books. The Emihamm data set is also available at Ancestry.com and includes emigration records from several ports.

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61085/>

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1189/>

If you've exhausted all resources and not discovered the Parish, don't despair. If you have a birthdate, a name, and some patience, you may meet with success.

The FamilySearch Wiki on Sweden has very helpful information on most Counties that includes a listing of all the Parishes and, in turn, all of the Places within each Parish.

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Sweden_Genealogy

Bonus Information

While not critical to research success, additional information including parents' and siblings' names and birthdates, last Parish of residence prior to emigration, and place and date of emigration can be very helpful.

Tools and Resources

Common Words for Genealogy

A dictionary of common words is available on the FamilySearch Wiki for Sweden:

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Swedish_Genealogical_Word_List

Handwriting

Most of the historic Swedish documents are written in the Gothic or Old German style. The Swedish alphabet also has three additional letters in its alphabet. Å (å), Ä (ä), and Ö (ö). These three letters come at the end of the alphabet, after Z: Z, Å (å), Ä (ä), and Ö (ö). Very helpful online tutorials on reading the script can be found on both the FamilySearch Wiki for Sweden

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Sweden_Handwriting and on the The Swedish Genealogy Guide site: <https://swedishgenealogyguide.com/learning-center>

Naming

The 1901 Names Act was the first Swedish law that required fixed surnames. Until this time, most families used Patronymic naming. Using this method, children's surnames come from the father's given name and change with each generation. For example, Johan Andersson's son is Lars Johansson, and his daughter is Anika Johansdotter. Women typically kept their maiden names throughout their lives which is very helpful in genealogical research.

Traditional naming patterns were followed by some families:

Sons	Named After	Daughters	Named After
First Son	Father's Father	First Daughter	Mother's Mother
Second Son	Mother's Father	Second Daughter	Father's Mother
Third Son	Father	Third Daughter	Mother
Fourth Son	Father's Eldest Brother	Fourth Daughter	Mother's Eldest Sister

Variations in both the names and spellings of names appear in the Swedish records. In one place, she might be listed as Charlotta Jakobsdotter and in another Lotta Lundstedt — even though they are one and the same person. Additionally, the “son” and “dotter” designations are often omitted or abbreviated in records. Hence, using variant spellings and “wild cards” can assist in locating the right records for the right people.

Resources

WebSites

Ancestry: <http://www.ancestry.com>

ArkivDigital: <https://www.arkivdigital.net>

FamilySearch: <http://familysearch.org>

MyHeritage: <http://myheritage.com>

FamilySearch Sweden Genealogy Wiki: http://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Sweden_Genealogy

Family Search Sweden Genealogy Wiki, Parish Register Examples, Sweden: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/img_auth.php/4/40/Swedish_Par_Reg_and_Exam_head_ings.pdf, prepared by the Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

Family Search Sweden Genealogy Wiki, Swedish Genealogical Word List: https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Swedish_Genealogical_Word_List

Google Translate: <https://translate.google.com>

Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives): <http://www.riksarkivet.se>

The Swedish Genealogy Guide, LLC: <http://www.swedishgenealogyguide.com>

Resources (continued)

The Swedish Genealogy Guide, LLC, Swedish Alphabet Examples by Geoffrey Fröberg Morris, © 2015 by Intellectual Reserve: <http://www.swedishgenealogyguide.com>, found under Learning Center as a Class Handout for the Video Tutorial, Reading Gothic Handwriting for Swedish Genealogy-1.

Tyda Text/Decipher Text: <http://www.tydatext.se>

Books

Fryxell, David A., *The Family Tree Scandinavian Genealogy Guide, How To Trace Your Ancestors in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway*, ©2019 by David A. Fryxell, Published by Family Tree Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, ISBN: 978-1-4403-0075-2

Johnson, JD, CG, Robert W. and Gomoll, CG, Elizabeth Williams, *Husförhörslängder, Swedish Household Examination Records, Framing the Solutions to Your Swedish Ancestry Puzzles*, ©2020 by Robert W. Johnson and Elizabeth Williams Gomoll, Printed in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Library of Congress Control Number: 2020915199, ISBN: 978-1-7355627-0-4

Courses

FamilyTree University, *Find Your Scandinavian Ancestors*, June 2022