

3-1-2015

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Recommended Citation

Seaholm, Jill (2015) "News from the Swenson Center: Some advice for an emigrant," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 35 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol35/iss1/3>

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News from the Swenson Center

Some advice for an emigrant

By JILL SEAHOLM

HEAD GENEALOGIST AT THE SWENSON CENTER

This text is part of a letter which I did a translation for a patron a couple of weeks ago, and there was a partial letter that I found very interesting. Unfortunately we don't know for sure who it was from or to because only pages 5-8 exist and there is no "Dear ___" and no signature at the end because it seems to continue after page 8.

Anyway, the writer is giving the reader some tips about what to do in order to emigrate and what to do (and not do) along the way. I got permission from the letter's owner to use it in SAG.

We think the patron's grandfather brought this part of the letter with him so he would know what to do along the way. Maybe he left the rest of the letter at home, we will never know.

Letter: starts on p. 5

...work, you shall get some as soon as you get here and you shall become my friend and (hers?).

If you are healthy you shall have a brighter future here awaiting you. I am doing well and getting along perfectly well but you must... (big ink splotch) ...get the chance to work hard and have a lot of drive, and both you and I have been taught to work hard since childhood, so we are used to it.

My brother Klas and I, we have thought that if you came here then we three could rent a large farm that we could have work on and have it pretty good and be our own men. (p.6)

Now I do not know if you are at the age of conscription, but if you are, then you must write to the King to be allowed to travel.¹

If you can buy yourself the form then write yourself a false pastor's certificate (of permission to emigrate). That would be best, but if you do that, then ask some educated man to write it out for you, so that you will not be caught, and travel as soon as you can be ready. If you do not want to travel, then send the ticket right back. But if you do travel then it is the least inconvenient for me if you go by the White Star Line. It is the best steamship line of all.

If you travel from Bankeberg² on a Wednesday morning at 5:30 you would arrive in Göteborg at 10:30 the same day, and there are many emigrants there and there are agents to meet you when you arrive.

You shall find them (p.7) at the "emigrant square" and there you shall ask for the White Star Line's agent and they will surely take you to the right place.

Anything further about the trip I do not need to write about for as soon as the agents have you in hand you shall not get lost, and what clothes and food sack you should have with you, I wrote to you about that last year, but buy yourself a small keg, the kind that holds an *ankar*,³ and fill it with vodka, and stick a stopper in your pocket so you can open the keg and have a taste once in a while when you are at sea, but do not do as I did.

I drank from it before I left Göteborg, but rather stay sober and keep a watchful eye over yourself and your belongings. And another thing I can caution you about is not to drink any water (p.8) during the whole trip either at sea or on the railroad.

On the trains in America there is

water in every car. But do not drink from it because it is ice water and it will give you a cold. There are hundreds who have gotten quite sick from it. Bring a little with you and when you get thirsty, just have a little sip, and if you have no choice but to drink a little, then take no more than two swallows for that should be enough. If you think that it takes too long to write to the King before you can travel, then try to write a false certificate and travel as soon as you can. In Göteborg you can exchange to a little American money in case you need to buy yourself a little food.

If you get off the train in America sometime when it stops, see to it that nothing gets (taken) away from you. (End p.8.)

Endnotes:

- 1) In 1886 a royal ordinance was instituted, which demanded that all men of military age (20-40) should apply to the King for permission to emigrate. See SAG 2008:3, p. 18.
- 2) There are three places in Sweden called Bankeberg: in Vikingstad (Östg.), in Näsby (Jönk.), and in Fliseryd (Kalm.).
- 3) An *ankare* was a small wooden barrel that could be filled with liquor.

