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Emigrants from Össjö parish, Skåne

BY AGNETA LINDAU PERSSON

TRANSLATION BY ELISABETH THORSELL
AND CHRIS OLSSON

In 2014 I took part in a family reunion in the U.S. It was a great experience for me to meet with so many relatives, and to hear so many exciting stories about what happened to them in America. I want to tell you some of these stories.

The reasons for emigrating are well documented. Össjö parish is not among those that were hit the hardest, but fits well into the usual pattern. Increase of the population during the 1800s made jobs to support themselves very scarce. On smaller farms the distribution of lands after the death of the farmer became problematic. The division of a farm among the heirs made it impossible to run the farm at a profit.

The Homestead Act of 1862 in the U.S. said that you could get 160 acres – almost the same as the Swedish *tunnland* – if you worked the land for five years and paid money to the land office.

The first wave of immigrants went to the farming states of Minnesota, Illinois, and Nebraska, and even as far away as Idaho. At the end of the 1800s it was the big cities that attracted the immigrants. One can wonder what the situation in Sweden would have been if emigration had not been a solution to the social problems?

Janne Nilsson

He was born 24 April 1839, the son of the shoemaker Nils Olsson (b. 12 May 1815) and his wife Kjersti Larsdotter (b. 5 June 1801) in Västra Broby. The family lived in a house called Trappen in Össjö (now a parish community home). Janne had at that time two sisters: Petronella and

Botilda, and four brothers: Ola, Christoffer, Per, and Lars, all having the patronymic Nilsson.

Jannes's brothers Per and Lars also became shoemakers, but immigrated to America and became farmers. Lars left Össjö already in 1868, and settled in Illinois. He had two children, born in the U.S., but both died as infants. Later in life Lars Nilsson returned to Munka-Ljungby in Sweden, where he died in 1922.

Per Nilsson emigrated with his family from Kroppåkra in Munka-Ljungby in 1881, and settled in Odebolt, Iowa.

Brothers Ola and Christoffer Nilsson stayed in Sweden and became soldiers, with the military names Ola Lundahl and Christoffer Lindau (this author's ancestor). Sister Botilla emigrated in 1870 with her husband and four children to Illinois. Sister Petronella and her husband emigrated in 1874, also to Illinois.

There is not much known about Janne's early life in Sweden, but at that time Swedish society was divided into social classes, the rich and the poor. Janne's family belonged to the poor class, and he had to work hard at a young age, mainly with farm work for rich farmers. Most of the farm work was done by hand as there were few horses. He often would have to walk a number of kilometers to help with the treshing of rye. This was also done by hand as there were no treshing machines then. Then he had to walk a distance after work to get home that night. Janne did not own any farmland while he lived in Össjö.

Besides doing farm work, he also worked as a baker, and for some time had the help of his sister Petronella

with the baking, before she left for America.

First marriage

On 24 May 1861 in Munka Ljungby, Janne married Elina Olsdotter (b. 26 Jan. 1841, daughter of Ola Bengtsson and his wife Kjersti Nyström of Vålänge (Skån.).

For a short time after the marriage they had a small bakery, specializing in rye bread. Janne also continued doing farm work at farms in the Össjö neighborhood, but seldom got paid in money; instead he received a pair of trousers, shoes, etc.

Later in life he often told his family that when poor people came into the store, rich people were always served first.

Emigration

In 1871 Janne (John) and wife Elina decided to emigrate with their four children, Carl Oscar (age 10), Alfred (age 8), Olof (age 4), and Amanda (age two). The last day in Sweden an auction was held of their goods, which gave them a small amount of money for their journey. Elina's brothers had also lent them some money. In the evening of the last day at home they met their families to say good-bye, and also prayed to the Lord that all should be well. Many tears fell the next day (27 April) when they started their travels. They went by horse and wagon to Helsingborg, and then boarded a steamer that took them to Helsingör, where they boarded a larger vessel that took them to Glasgow in Scotland. On the journey to Glasgow they were in a bad storm, but on the third day they arrived happily. In Glasgow they had to wait a few days in a hotel before they could



John Nelson and his first wife Elina Olsdotter and two of the children. (Photo courtesy of Wayne E. Nelson, Chicago.)

leave for Quebec in Canada. The mail steamer that took them across the Atlantic was the R.M.S. *St. Patrick*, a ship that crossed the Atlantic regularly, a fairly modern ship for only 250 passengers.

Probably they next continued by steamer from Quebec across the Great Lakes to Chicago, where they continued by train to Marshalltown, Iowa. There they could stay with friends. During the first night their fifth child was born, a little girl named Marie Christina. They stayed there for a few weeks before they continued their travels.

Iowa

They stayed in Sac City, Sac County, in Iowa for six years (1871-1877). In 1875 they got land 20 miles west of Marshalltown, in Wheeler township, in Odebolt. Elena already had two brothers in the area, Carl and Per Olsson. The ground consisted of prairie grass. The Nilsson family

worked hard and finally had 80 acres [40 hektar] cultivated land – a really big farm. Janne (John) donated an acre for the first school in Sac County. But the farm work was more important, so the children did not go to school every day.

Son Olof drowned during this time at age 12. He was out with his brothers to mind the cows, and tried to swim across a river, something his mother had warned him of.

Janne had a fine singing voice, and sang every morning when he was tending the fire. He was also a very social person, and often visited with friends and neighbors. He also invited people to his home and shared everything with all the people he knew.

On 13 March 1881 his wife Elena died from tuberculosis after a long illness. When she got worse they sent their daughter Mary to the neighbors to get help. When she returned her mother had died and her father was praying over her. Elena was 40 years

old when she died, and is buried at the New Bethel Cemetery in Kiron, Crawford County, Iowa.

A nanny from Sweden

After Elena's (Helena's) death and with ten children to care for, Janne hired a young Swedish girl, Emma Lovisa Vikbom (b. 15 Mar. 1860 in Åtvid, Östg.), to look after them. She had come from Sweden in 1879 to live with her uncles Sol and Gus Peterson. Her parents and siblings had all died before she left Sweden.

To learn English Emma Louise (she Americanized her name) went to school for a short time, but the children laughed at her accent. She was first engaged to Janne's son Carl, but he died in 1882 of smallpox at age 21.

Married again

Janne (John) suffered from rheumatic fever and often visited spas to get treatment. During such a visit Emma Louise and Janne got married on 21 April 1882 in Sac City. They had not told the children what was going to happen, but a woman lodging with them had told them that they were getting a new mother. Janne was then 43 years old, and Emma Louise 20.

They soon had two children, Elena in 1883, and Anthon in 1884.

At this time they decided to leave Odebolt because of Janne's health. They had heard that there was free land in Nebraska, and thought that the drier climate there would be healthier, so they decided to move. They sold the farm, machinery, and cattle, and packed the household items in a freight car.

Emma Louise was then pregnant again, and stayed with the younger children in Iowa until Janne had a home for them. Daughter Thilda was born in 1886.

Nebraska

Soon Janne sent for the family, and they settled in Chappel in Duel County, between the North and South Platte Rivers. They stayed



John Nelson and his 2nd wife Emma Louise Vikbom. (Photo courtesy of Wayne E. Nelson, Chicago.)

there for nine years, but they were hard and difficult years and they never got any crops. The grain grew and it looked good, but there were strong winds and a lack of rain. All rivers dried up during summer, and sons Nels and Joe took turns to take the cattle a mile to the nearest watering hole. The cattle were just as thirsty when returning as when they had gone to the water, but it did keep them alive. To get household water they fastened buckets on their carts and fetched water from several miles away. It was difficult to reach the water and they had to crawl down into the watering hole and collect water in a small tin cup.

After nine years of misery, and when the money from selling the farm in Iowa ran out, they decided to search for a new home. Six more children were born in Nebraska: Oskar (1887), Carl (1888), Albin (1890), Frank (1892), Ester (1893), and John (1895).

Idaho

In 1894 they left Nebraska and moved west with a dozen families. They had heard about a place in Idaho where several Swedes had settled. The place was close to Eagle

Rock, now Idaho Falls.

Before leaving they had an auction and sold most of their possessions. Daughters Mary and Amanda, who worked for the Salvation Army in Denver, Colorado, came home to say good-bye. Amanda got ill of "mountain fever" and died unfortunately before the auction. Son Joseph also got the fever but survived, despite the travel.

Six horses and two Conestoga wagons, packed with all their goods, were to take them to Idaho.

During the mornings on the trip, they prepared a dough, which they could bake during the nightly rest in a stove. They had to take out the stove from the wagon to be able to use it. When they came to Green River it rained so hard that Emma Louise had to stand up to her ankles in mud to be able to bake.

They came to Idaho Falls in September 1894. Janne had 50 cents in his pocket when they arrived in Idaho. He went to the Anderson bank and told them he wanted to buy land and settle there and needed some credit. With the credit he bought flour, sugar, and other necessities. He also bought some boards to make their first table. They first settled in an area north of Idaho Falls, close to one of the big canals. Son Jack was born soon after their arrival in Idaho, and daughter Phoebe was born later in the same place.

They later moved to the "New Sweden" area south of Idaho Falls, where son Emil was born. During this time Janne became a member of the Baptist church in "New Sweden."

Later they moved to Lavaside, where they bought more land, in total they had 300 to 400 acres. Janne (John) later sold some parts of this land. Daughter Clarence was born in this place.

Janne dies

In November 1902 Janne (John) died of pneumonia at age 63. Son Harold was born two months later.

Emma Louise died in 1933 in Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho.

They are both buried in the River-

side Cemetery in Firth, Bingham County, Idaho.



Family reunion

Janne had ten children in his first marriage, and thirteen in his second marriage. Several of the children died young, but nineteen lived far into the 1900s and started their own families. All of the children stayed in the U.S. and have become the large family that I and my family met at "The Nelson Family Reunion" in Rexburg, Idaho, in 2013.

Janne Nilsson (John Nelson in the U.S.) was a brother of my ancestor Christoffer Lindau.

Addendum:

Wayne E. Nelson tells that son Alfred Nelson, born 21 Jan. 1863 in Össjö (Skån.) was his grandfather. Alfred was 8 years old when he came to this country. Alfred stayed in Iowa when Janne and most of the family moved to Nebraska. He was married to Anna Sophia Peterson (1864-1936), and they had many children. They were farmers in Sac County, Iowa. Anna Sophia died there on 4 April 1936, and Alfred died on 3 June 1938.



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