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David Anderson

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Oscar Erickson – the sad fate of a toddler

The search for his origins led to his Swedish birthplace

BY DAVID ANDERSON

Young Oscar Erickson died from accidental drowning on 8 Aug. 1910 at Tillamook, Oregon. He was two years, ten months, and four days old, having been born on 4 Oct. 1907. His parents, both born in Sweden, were Nels and Jenny Erickson. The location of Oscar's birth was not recorded on his death certificate, but he was buried in Tillamook, Oregon, somewhere.1 Where was Oscar born? To answer this question I turned to ancestry.com and conducted a search on what was known about Oscar. The only hint that turned up was the entry from the Oregon Death Index, extracting information already known from his death certificate. A search of findagrave.com was conducted but no results turned up, despite the fact that he was recorded buried in Tillamook. A search on his parents' names was then conducted in ancestry.com. The first hint that appeared was from the 1920 U.S. Census for Nels Erickson, born about 1862 in Sweden, and his wife Jannie (sic) M. Erickson living in Hoguarton, Tillamook [County], Oregon. Details on this entry indicated that Nels was 58 years old, born about 1862 in Sweden. He was a white male who immigrated in 1910, was married, and the head of the household. Included in the family listing were Jennie M. (48), Wayne (17), Ysador (15), Oscar C. (7), and Henry E. (5).2 There were also ten other possibilities that could be for our Nels Erickson. None seemed to be promising since they were from locations other than Oregon.

Swedish naming patterns were such that when a child died, the next child born of that sex would often receive the name of the deceased child. Therefore the presence of a child named Oscar in the 1920 Census who was less than ten years old was not surprising.

More census research
Checking each of the listed family members did lead to some promising leads. There was a Jennie M. Erickson in the 1930 U.S. Census, where she was found living, widowed, as a mother, and as the head of house with Isador Erickson in Tillamook, Oregon. Also living in the same house are Oscar (17) and Henry (15).2 Two men, recorded in 1920 are not found living in the household in 1930; they are husband Nels and son Wayne. Since Jennie is listed as a widow it is most likely that Nels died some time prior to 1930, although divorce can't be ruled out since sometimes a respondent has claimed to be widowed/widower after a divorce.

Several persons with Isador's name are listed in the 1940 U.S. Census, Indexed Birth Records from Sweden 1860-1941, and Births from the Swedish Death Index 1901-2006. A check of the 1940 U.S. Census shows that Isador Y. Erickson, who had been living in Tillamook County in 1935, was now living in Yamhill County, Oregon. He was married, and was a laborer who had completed...
only the 5th grade of elementary school. Information from the Swedish Indexed Birth Records and Births from the Swedish Death Index did not produce any promising leads.

An Oscar Erickson was found, also in McMinnville, Yamhill County, in the 1940 Census. He was a single laborer boarding with the family of Lee Bynum. Since son Henry was born in Oregon, the information associated with his name probably wouldn’t show any immigration information for his older siblings and parents.

New searches
I then began to check the Oregon Death Index for information regarding the deaths of Nels, Jennie, and the older siblings. In ancestry.com I searched the Oregon Death Index, 1898-2008 database, for deaths in Tillamook County for Nels and Jennie Erickson. Since Jennie is listed as a widow in the 1930 U.S. Census, the Nels Erickson who died on 6 June 1923 in Tillamook is currently thought to be her husband. This is not yet proven, however, since the death certificate has not yet been inspected. Likewise the Jennie Erickson who died 21 March 1932 in Tillamook County, and whose husband’s name is Nels, is thought to be the mother of our Oscar Erickson. What we hadn’t found yet is Oscar’s parents’ birth dates or the location of their births.

None of the records found on ancestry.com thus far for Oscar’s family provided specific birth dates. An inquiry of the Oregon Death Index for Isador Erickson provided the clues that prove the birth location for Oscar is Sweden. The Oregon Death Index lists an Isador Erickson who was born 12 Sep. 1904 and who died in Polk County 22 May 1989.

In ancestry.com there was one find for Isidor (sic) from the Swedish Indexed Birth Records, 1860-1941. This record gives the following information: Isidor was born 12 Sep. 1904 in Skellefteå landsförsamling, Västerbotten, Sweden. His father was Nils Eriksson, born 8 Jan. 1868, and his mother was Jenny Maria Renberg, who was born 3 Mar. 1870.

Even though Nils’s birth information is six years off from that reported in the 1920 U.S. Census, Jennie’s information is a little more accurate with her birth being only two years off. Her middle initial in both of the U.S. Censuses she appears in is consistently given as “M” which matches the middle name of Isidor/Isador’s mother.

The other clue that is associated with Isador Erickson’s Oregon death index information is a record from the New York Passenger Lists database. This record gives an arrival date of 8 June 1910 in New York on the S/S CFTietgen. This arrival date is consistent with the arrival date reported in the 1920 U.S. Census for the Erickson family members who were born in Sweden. Isidor’s birth location is given as “skellefter.” However, on the image of the manifest it appears to be “Skjellefteå.”

Despite discrepancies in the birth date information, especially for Nils Ericksson, the family, and birth place of Oscar Erickson who died soon after arrival in Tillamook, Oregon, has been positively identified. Oscar did not appear in any U.S. Census data after he arrived in Tillamook County just after the 1910 Census had been taken, and his death occurred later that year. Using his parent’s names, locating the names of his siblings, and using finds related to his family I was able to locate members of his family in the 1920, 1930, and 1940 U.S. Censuses. This information...
provided the year of immigration (1910) for some of his family. Searching the Oregon Death Index provided the clues to the birth location of an older brother and ultimately led to locating Oscar's birthplace and the name of the ship the family came on.

It used to be said that without knowing the name of the parish an ancestor was from in Sweden made it pretty difficult to find someone's birthplace in Sweden. However, as more and more Swedish records become indexed, it will become much easier to locate the location of someone's birth.

Endnotes
9) Skellefteå, Birth records C:21 (1904-1909), 1907, pg 260, no 466, Oskar; arkivdigital.net.
10) Skellefteå landsförsamling AllA:10 (1900-1910), pg 275, Bureå sawmill (såg) lines 8-12, Nils Eriksson family; arkivdigital.net.

Editor's Note: The Eriksson family was also found in the subscription database Emiweb at <http://www.emiweb.eu/>. There they were recorded as having left Sweden on 17 May 1910 from Torp parish, also in Västernorrland.

A new look into the Skellefteå landsförsamling församlingsbok (endnote 10) showed that the Eriks- sons had got a testimony to go to America 6 Sep. 1909, but changed their minds and instead moved 8 Dec. 1909 to Torp, where they lived at a place called Gim until their emigration (Torp AllA:2b (1902-1911) Bild 2880 / sid 634. Arkiv Digital).

Oscar's father Nils worked in a lumber mill in Tillamook, and probably was familiar with this type of forest. Photo from 1910 from Oregon State University and flickr...

Editor's Note 2: When the family is found in Swedish records the spelling is Eriksson; in U.S. records the spelling Erickson is used.

The author is David Anderson, who lives in Portland, Ore. His e-mail is <davidsgensrch@gmail.com>

A helpful web site for U.S. vital records

When searching for vital records for someone, I usually start with ancestry.com or FamilySearch.org. Then I know that there are many other sites that can help with data, but how to find them? It can be databases from local genealogical societies, libraries, or private individuals.

Somehow I found this very helpful web site Online Birth & Marriage Records Indexes for the USA. The site is organized by states, and the links go directly to the source. Some links require payments, but that is always noted. At this site there are also a number of divorce indexes. There are also databases of U.S. Citizens Born or Married in Foreign Countries.

There is also a sister site: Online Searchable Death Indexes for the USA. It starts with the Social Security Death Index, and then two sites for fairly recent obituaries all over the nation. Then the site is organized by states and individual counties, and there is also sometimes information on how to order copies of certificates. Here are also links to military cemeteries.

These are the databases that I commonly use, but there are others, like Online Searchable Naturalization Records and Indexes, and Ship Passenger Lists and Records Online, and more.

To get information when these websites are updated it is a good idea to subscribe to the free Genealogy Roots Blog, which is based in the U.S.A., but online European, Canadian, and other records sources are sometimes included. Mixed in with all this you will occasionally find a fun post or genealogy news. Elisabeth Thorsell Links on p. 30.

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