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Another letter from the Emigration Survey: #230

Jon Hampus Bolin tells his story

TRANSLATION BY ELISABETH THORSELL

I am one of eight siblings and was born in Västernorrland County on 13 Aug. 1873. My parents were farmers and owned a homestead, inherited from my *farfar* (father's father). This was sold in 1879, when father bought a farm with an inn and county court premises on the mail line. It was an expensive place. It cost 41,000 *kronor*. Of this sum almost half was mortgaged. In the beginning everything went fine, but after the northern main railway (*Norra stambanan*) was opened, both the income from travellers and the mail diminished, and the income from farming was not enough to meet the expenses that had during the good times fostered expensive habits. Thus the property had to be sold in 1895, and the next winter I went to America and came to a place in Michigan. During my travels I had come in contact with a returning Swede from Skåne who had travelled to this place.

Where should I go?

My destination was indifferent to me, as I had neither family nor acquaintances anywhere in the U.S. During the first visit there were very bad times, as a result of [President] Cleveland's free trade policies, and I could not get a job until June. By then my money had run out, but since then, even though the daily wage was low, all has been good for me. It was the match factory where I was now working. My friend from the travels had left me already on the second day after our arrival to go to other places to look for work for himself. Everything was new and unknown and foreign, but I had learnt many things from my father, which now was a

good help. I never used hard liquor and was always at my place and tried to do everything as good as I could understand how it should be. I also did a number of things without being asked to do them. The result of this was that the supervisors gave me a quick promotion, and after nine months I was the foreman for a floor, the one where all the material for the production of matches was made. I had 67 men there.

Education

Already in the beginning I went to evening classes with a Swedish teacher who had been at home during the summer. During the winter there were evening classes in the public school, and I had now advanced so far that I could read, so I started going there. At the start there were fairly many students with four teachers, but in the end only I was left with one teacher. It was a very good school and did not cost anything. He was always so good to me. The first three years were all the same. Work 10 hours every day, going to school every evening, and doing homework until I fell asleep. It was interesting, even if it sometimes felt tiring. But every success led to another one. I was always in good health. In 1899 in August I left my job, and entered Augustana College, in Rock Island, Illinois, and stayed there for a year, and got a diploma from the business department.

Progress

Now I returned to my former work, and finally advanced to the position of business manager. It seems that I have a good life here. My few habits

are easy to maintain, and as a result of this I have been able to save a little capital. I am not married.

Things should change in Sweden

If new laws made it easy to regain citizen's rights and the right to get married without any other stipulations than those that are valid for those that have never been outside the country, then I would come to Sweden and stay there, because I am, to be honest, a stranger in this huge country. The liberty of the unlimited right to vote, that entices so many, does not replace the lack of my own country.

The only things that I complain about in Sweden is, what we here regard as unnecessary forms and troubles, by all kinds of testimonies and letters of leave (*orlofseddlar*), and that everything seems so bureaucratic and bullying, from a railway inspector and a postmaster to bank clerk or state official. On my own visit to my homeland I was myself bothered by them and wasted many precious minutes on their formal ceremonies and methods.

They make a Swedish-American tired to death and when a number of unnecessary words have been spoken, in the end you get what you asked for with a glance that clearly tells you that they are not certain that they should not have asked more questions and made it even more difficult for you, and the good-bye is usually a compassionate glance for your yokel style and lack of knowledge. I think that you would keep and regain many Swedes if a little was done to try to understand them

instead of treating them unnecessarily harsh in a way that is humiliating.

We are used to getting everything with a minimum of trouble and without waiting. Think of not getting your mail during every hour of the day, and not being able to send your goods at a railway station, while seeing the station master having his midday rest. Then to see the same station master closing the ticket booth five minutes before the train's arrival to be out on the platform and giving it the signal to stop, a thing that everyone would know that it did anyway, as there is always a *konduktör* who can see to this. Imagine to be regarded as a simpleton if you do not remove your overcoat and shoes to enter such a common place as a bank, and once inside being asked to first go to one clerk, and with a slip from him being shown to someone else before they pay out what you are asking for. Oh, such a waste of time. You do not have the time to do many other things under such a system. I am showing you this as something you would do well to simplify.

Improvements

Sell tickets until the train leaves, receive and hand out (*lämna ut*) goods all day, and let the *konduktör* handle the train. He has plenty of time. Also let me go to the bank without having to behave as if I was going to an audience with the King. It is the question of business, not a polite visit. The same was observed at the government offices that I visited. Waste of time, and more waste of time, from the early morning until late in the evening. All and everything is hindered by lack of access and unnecessary pickiness. A man of sound mind and desire to work and some freedom to act would not hinder work in such a way for others. As it is now, he has to contact his superiors at three or four levels, and then back to the lowest of those, who now is able to do what he already knew had to be done. A supervisor or other foreman "is resting" and is not to be disturbed, so a row of workers will

have to wait for an hour. It is just this one hour that is lost forever, and could have been used to lower the cost of production with a few *öre* for each product. This is usual to seek the cause of high costs and small production among the supervisors, not among those that work. A supervisor is in command as long as he keeps the production costs lower than another's. To do this it is important to let your workers feel that they are humans too, and being treated as such. Let them be on their own, when they are not working. Do not call them into the office to be judged by a director or an office scoundrel for some offense he has committed towards somebody at another place, like a journey for pleasure or among friends during the evening. Let the law care for that. One gets the job, another the salary, and that should be enough.

How this custom has survived is not understandable. It deters many, and for someone else this being called often to the office for small matters becomes a habit and thus lacks all value as a punishment or a warning example to others. I have here several men from the factories in Ådalen. They are my best workers and behave themselves. But back in Sweden they were often "called to the office" with others for "old wives tales." They were never safe from such a call any day. There can be too much discipline also. Leave a part of this, the part the law does not care for, to the free will of the individual. He will then care more for his own conduct, as that is what gives him regard or disregard.

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Who was the writer?

The Emigration Survey was explained in SAG 2011:3, as an effort by the Swedish government to understand why people left the country. Swedish-Americans were invited to share their experiences, and they were later printed in volum 7 of the survey. The authors of the letters were only identified by their initials, their year and county of immigration.

Nowadays with the information on CD:s and internet, it is sometimes possible to find out who they were. Other letters have been printed in SAG 2011:3; 2011:4, and 2012:1.

The writer of this letter was born 18 Aug. 1873 in Stensätter in Ytterlännäs parish in Västernorrland County. He was named Jon Hampus Bolin, son of the farmer Erik Johan Bolin and his wife Cajsa Stina Ulander. In 1878 they all moved to Fantskog in the parish of Skog, in the same county, from where Jon Hampus immigrated in 1896. At Ellis Island he gave his destination as Menominee, Michigan, where he seems to have stayed for many years. He americanized his name to John H. Bolin.

Around 1908 he married Anna Margareta Lidbaum, born 20 Dec. 1887 in Gudmundrå, Västernorrland County, who immigrated in 1908. About the same time John and his wife moved to Sandpoint in Bonner Co., Idaho, where he was the manager of a match factory. The couple had several children; infant born and died in 1909; s. Johan Runo, b. 1910; d. Ingrid Christina, b. 1912; s. Carl Gustav, b. 1914; d. Ann-Marie, b. 1916; d. Olga Margareta, b. and died 1917.

The family was still living in Sandpoint in the U.S. Census 1920, but could not be found after that.

In 1923 John applied for a passport for himself and his family to visit Sweden and other countries in the northern area of Europe, which indicated that they might have settled in Sweden?

It turned out to be a fact. In 1924 Anna M. Bolin and her children moved to the house Tor 2 and 3 in Djursholm, an upscale neighborhood not far from Stockholm. They were joined there in 1928 by the father John, and the family lived there until he died in 24 Nov. 1936 of myocarditis chronica.

His widow moved to Stockholm, where she died 25 Feb. 1959. John and Anna are buried in the Djursholm cemetery, with most of their children, who also stayed in Sweden.