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A Swedish Directory for Boston 1881

Nils William Olsson

As the year 1881 waned, ushering in 1882, a unique publication saw the light of day in Boston, MA. It was a city directory, solely dealing with the Swedish population of that city, enumerating the majority of all the known Swedes, who were residing in that city and its environs by the end of 1881.

The directory, entitled *Svensk kalender i Boston*, was a clever promotional gimmick, the brain child of a young Swedish immigrant in Boston, 24 year-old Eric Wretlind, who had opened a Swedish apothecary shop at 1001 Tremont Street. The volume in question contains 88 pages of text, heavily laced with advertisements for various drugs, ointments, medicines, nostrums and panaceas, all available at the Wretlind emporium. The compiler also included items which would appeal to his Swedish readers, such as Swedish jokes, anecdotes, four poems, presumably written by himself, since they are all signed with the initials E.W., short stories, an occasional pseudo scientific article, as well as copious advertisements from a variety of Boston merchants and traders, ranging from ocean tickets for persons desirous of visiting Sweden to plugs for such exciting modern inventions as the "lanterna magica", here misspelled "later-na", the slide projector of the late 19th century.

Who was this enterprising young man, who was able to elicit such a response from his countrymen for this volume? He was born Knut Eric Wretlind in the city of Nyköping, Sweden in 1857, the son of Hans Eric Wretlind, a prominent tailor in Nyköping as well as one of the city's councillors, and his second wife, Charlotta Wilhelmina Björkegren.¹ Very little is known of Wretlind's youth or his pharmaceutical studies. On the inside of the front cover of his directory he presents himself as a graduate pharmacist of the Pharmaceutical Institute in Stockholm. He furthermore states that he was licensed to practice pharmacy in Sweden and that he had been a chemical analyst as well as laboratory technician in the city of Malmö. He also claims to have been the first Swede to have been elected to the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy in Boston. He is not listed in the large biographical dictionary of Swedish pharmacists, *Sveriges Apotekarehistoria* by A. Levertin, C.F.V. Schimmelpfennig and K.A. Ahlberg (Stockholm, 1910-1949).

Wretlind did not remain long in Boston after the publication of his directory. In 1884 he was living in Omaha, NE, where he seems to have functioned as Swedish Norwegian vice consul. On August 9 of that year he married Anna Hedendahl, born in Göteborg Feb. 8, 1864. Wretlind's marriage did not last long.

SVENSK
KALENDER

I

— ❧ **BOSTON.** ❧ —

UTGIFVEN

AF

ERIC WRETTLIND.

BOSTON.
UTGIFVARENS FÖRLAG.
—
1881.

Title page of Eric Wretlind's *Swedish Directory*.

A month after the marriage, September 9, he was dead. His young widow remarried Nov. 6, 1885 Knut Otto Victor Liljenstolpe, a civil engineer living in Omaha.²

Wretlind's Boston directory of Swedes, is, so far as is known, the only such city directory extant in the United States, solely devoted to the Swedish segment of a given city. The author began his compilation in May of 1881, and was able to have the work finished by New Year's Eve of the same year. He lists the Swedes living in Boston in alphabetical order, cites the year each arrived in the U.S., gives the place in Sweden, where the immigrant came from, as well as his address in the Boston area. Not all of these facts are available for every name,

Namn.	Född.	Kom till Amerika.	Hvarifrån i Sverige.	Adress.
Linell, Gustaf	1855	1880	Göteborg	6 Cross st.
Ljungberg, John	1849	1880	Venersborg	963 Tremont st.
Ljungberg, John L.	1843	1881	Eskilstuna	12 Staniford st.
Ljunggren, Carl	1848	1869	Helsingborg	36 Kendall st.
<i>Fru</i> " Maria		1870		
<i>Barn</i> " Lina				
" Axel				
" Carl				
" Bernhard				
" Otto				
Ljungkrantz, Charles	1856	1874	Kalmar	33 Boylston st.
Ljungqvist, Henry	1843	1868	Kristianstad	56 Heath st.
<i>Fru</i> " Johanna				
<i>Barn</i> " Augusta				
" Sofia				
" Albert				
" Carl				
" Henry				
Ljungqvist			Kristianstad	Somerville.
<i>Fru</i> "				
<i>Barn</i> " Rudolf				
" Alfred				
" Carl				
" Ami				
Lloyd, Josephine		1871	Halmstad	22 Harley st.
<i>Man</i> " William (a)				
<i>Barn</i> " Josephine				
" Charles				
Logren, Oscar	1862		Norrtelge	¹⁷ Jerome Place, Charl.town.
Lucy, Emilia C.		1872	Jönköping	73 Camden st.

but for the majority of them he has been successful. There are also references in the text, indicating if the Swedish immigrant had married an American. He sometimes also notes the relationship between persons having the same surname.

In his foreword Wretlind states that he has purposely eliminated all references to occupations and professions of the people listed. This policy seems to have been practiced by many Swedish immigrant groups, including Swedish American churches, in whose records all references to the parishioner's occupation are conspicuously absent. One might interpret this exclusion to the immigrant's distaste for the system so prevalent in Sweden at that time, the ranking of every person by his occupation or station in life, from the common day laborer to the white collar worker or the high court functionary.

A curious side of Wretlind's compilation is that he discreetly and studiously leaves out all information concerning the birth year of the females listed.

The editor is careful to note that his effort to list all Swedes living in the Boston area has met with varying degrees of success. He admits that it has been virtually impossible to reach all Swedes, principally because so many of them belong to the laborer category, and hence move frequently, not only within the city, but also to other parts of the country. He estimates that of the approximately 3,500 Swedes living in Boston, he has been able to come up with slightly more than 2,000 names. He acknowledges that some of the names he has gotten surreptitiously, but hopes that people will not mind, and that he might be forgiven the indiscretion, since he has acted in good faith.

Wretlind notes in his foreword that one of the compelling reasons for publishing his directory was that it could be used as an aid in helping clear up the intolerable situation pertaining in Boston at this time, the arrival from Sweden of so many incorrectly addressed letters, which thus never reached their destinations. In some cases it had not been possible to reach Swedish Bostonians, who had inheritances waiting for them in Sweden. Already in the beginning stages of his task, Wretlind states that newly arrived Swedes, lost in the big city, had been able to locate relatives thanks to his lists. Dozens of incorrectly addressed letters, brought to his drug store by confused and harried letter carriers, were being re-directed to their correct destinations.

"Unfortunately," says the editor, "many have not understood, or have not wished to understand the importance of this project, and have thus refused to leave their names and addresses. These people will have no reason to upbraid the editor for not including them in this work."

Wretlind admits that the volume includes addresses, not to be found in Boston proper, but he excuses this state of affairs by saying that some people did not wish to be listed, or that they had their employment in the city, but resided elsewhere.

A cursory examination of the information contained in the directory shows that in the majority of cases the immigrant has listed as his place of origin in Sweden a province, county (*län*), city or town. In only eleven cases has the

immigrant listed a parish. These are Åby (Ög.), Bollnäs (Gävl.), Floda (Kopp or Söd.), Höör (Malm.), Hova (Skar.), Sandsjö (Kron. or Jön.), Spjutstorp (Krist.), Värnamo (Jön.), Vingåker (Söd.) and Vrigstad (Jön.).

This is strange inasmuch as most immigrants came from the rural areas of Sweden and one would have expected that they would have mentioned this when interviewed. The most likely answer to this puzzling question is that when interviewed the immigrants gave names easily recognized, such as Göteborg, Stockholm, Malmö or Helsingborg, even though they might have come from obscure parishes near these metropolitan areas.

Göteborg dominates by far, which might be explained by the fact that that was the port from which most Swedish emigrants embarked on their way west. It was in Göteborg that they boarded the small emigrant steamers which took them across the North Sea to Hull in England, from where they went overland via the railroad to Liverpool, the great embarkation port in England.

It is also interesting to observe the year in which the immigrant reached America. An analysis of the years and the numbers which came each year is given below:

1837 - 1	1856 - 2	1864 - 11	1872 - 97	1880 - 203
1839 - 1	1857 - 7	1865 - 14	1873 - 59	1881 - 159
1849 - 1	1858 - 1	1866 - 14	1874 - 29	
1851 - 2	1859 - 5	1867 - 19	1875 - 15	
1852 - 3	1860 - 4	1868 - 21	1876 - 12	
1853 - 6	1861 - 5	1869 - 44	1877 - 16	
1854 - 5	1862 - 5	1870 - 52	1878 - 31	
1855 - 2	1863 - 7	1871 - 71	1879 - 64	

Used in conjunction with other sources at our disposal, such as Swedish American church records, Boston city directories, naturalization documents and the Swedish American press, it should be possible to further identify the major part of the Swedish immigrants listed here.³

In his final commentary to his directory Wretlind promised that if it proved successful, he would consider the publication of a fuller and more complete edition in the future, which in addition to Swedes, also would include Norwegians and Danes as well. For this purpose, he states, that he hopes that names and addresses would be deposited at his drug store on Tremont Street. Unfortunately, Wretlind's move to Omaha put a stop to his ambitious plans. We are, however, indebted to him for what he did accomplish, a listing of more than 2,000 Swedes living in Boston in 1881. Ignoring the advertisements, the jokes, poems and essays, we can nevertheless distill from the volume a remarkable cross section of the Swedes who resided in Boston a century ago.

¹ V. Örnberg, *Svensk släkt-kalender & Svenska ättartal*, I–XIV (Stockholm, 1884–1908), VIII, pp. 512, 514.

² Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, I–IX (Stockholm, 1925–1936), IV, p. 653b.

³ The author of this article is in the process of preparing an annotated translation of Wretlind's Swedish directory of Boston.