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# The Case of Herman Freeman *alias* Harman Strome

Axel Friman\*

One of the earliest and perhaps youngest emigrants to leave Sweden for America was Herman Friman (in the U.S. he called himself Freeman), born at Stenhammar in Varnhem Parish (Skar.) Feb. 24, 1829, the son of Carl Friman (1781–1862), a regimental clerk in the Swedish Army, and his wife, Christina Fröding. During the spring of 1838, the just then pensioned civil servant left for America with five of his six sons, among them the next youngest, Herman, just nine years old.<sup>1</sup> Illness, however, forced the father to return to Sweden already the following year, together with Herman.

Three years later, in 1842, the now 13 year-old Herman started out anew for America in order to join his brothers, residing in Racine, Wisconsin Territory. He arrived in Boston Aug. 16 aboard the *Samos*. Instead of proceeding immediately to Wisconsin to join his brothers, he spent almost a year moving about in New England. According to one source he is supposed to have stayed in the vicinity of Albany, NY. His non-appearance in Wisconsin caused his brothers much anxiety as well as the father in Sweden, who all thought that young Herman had been murdered. Finally, however, during the summer of 1843 Herman arrived at his brothers' settlement in Wisconsin "on foot".

After spending some time with his brothers, Herman left Wisconsin to return to Boston, where he enlisted in Co. B of the Fourth Regiment of U.S. Artillery March 5, 1847 in order to serve during the War with Mexico, for which he received a part bounty in the sum of \$6.00.<sup>2</sup>

In a letter date Lyons, WI July 18, 1851 he relates that since he had left his brothers he had worked as a baker for four years prior to his Army enlistment. At that time he was classified as a minor, which may be the reason that he did not use his family name, but rather an assumed name — "Harman Strome".

This double identity was the subject of an article in *The Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* in 1962.<sup>3</sup> Since that article was published official papers

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in the National Archives in Washington, DC have shown that "Harman Freeman, alias Harman Strome" sought an Army pension for his service in the War with Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

Despite many years of tireless efforts it had not been possible to secure photographs of Herman as he appeared during his more active years. The only known photograph we possess of him is a picture taken at the turn of the century, which shows Herman in his seventies. Furthermore that picture is quite indistinct.

During a visit to Taft, CA during the spring of 1981, when I had the occasion to visit descendants of Herman's older brother Adolf (Adolph), I discovered in a collection of very old pictures two photographs which I suspect were taken of Herman. One of these shows a very young man in a military uniform of the U.S. Army.<sup>5</sup> The other picture is a likeness of a man, about 40 or 50 years old, dressed in a uniform which suggests a secret society, perhaps the Knights Templar. Could these photographs be of Herman Freeman, the first as a soldier and the second as a member of the Masons?



<sup>1</sup> Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820-1850* (Stockholm and Chicago, 1967) (SPANY), pp. 26-27.

<sup>2</sup> Nils William Olsson, "Swedish Enlistments in the U.S. Army Before 1851" in *The Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly*, Vol. I, No. 4, p. 33; Enlistment Papers for Harman Strome, Adjutant General's Office, Record Group No. 94, National Archives, Washington, DC.

<sup>3</sup> Axel Friman, "Notes on a Wisconsin Pioneer" in *The Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, pp. 5-8.

<sup>4</sup> Pension Files for Harman Freeman alias Strome, Mexican War No. SC 18,335, Adjutant General's Office, National Archives, Washington, DC.

<sup>5</sup> As this journal goes to press, word has been received from the U.S. Army History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, PA that the young man's "uniform as well as equipment are all from the Civil War period, not from the earlier Mexican War".