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Naturalizations of Scandinavians in Los Angeles County 1856–1887

Nils William Olsson

Following up the discussions of naturalizations in the East and Middle West, we now want to turn our attention to the West Coast, Los Angeles County in California in particular. These are federal naturalizations conducted in the Superior Court of Los Angeles County. They are housed in the Los Angeles Federal Archives and Records Center and its Regional Archives Branch located in Laguna Niguel, CA. The documents in questions are to be found in boxes No. 3 through No. 8 and belong to Record Group 21, which is the classification number given to the records of the District Court.

One is surprised that so few Scandinavians were naturalized in the Los Angeles Superior Court between 1856 and 1887, only a total of 48. In view of the very large influx of Scandinavians into Los Angeles during these years, the figure is quite small. The answer may lie in the fact that many of the naturalizations occurred in the local courts and these are not deposited in the Federal Records Center in Laguna Niguel.

As with the majority of naturalizations of Scandinavians it is often quite difficult to separate out the Norwegians from the Swedes, since from 1814 to 1905 both Sweden and Norway constituted a co-dominion with the Swedish king as the head of state of both nations. Thus when a Norwegian or a Swede sought U.S. naturalization he had to renounce his allegiance to his sovereign, the Swedish king. Since this problem exists and since it is virtually impossible to separate Norwegians from Swedes with a 100% certainty, both Swedes and Norwegians have been included. There are instances when the candidate for naturalization specifically renounces his allegiance to the King of Sweden or the King of Norway, which helps the process. There are also occasional references in the text of the naturalization document which pinpoint the petitioner's place of birth, which of course also aids the process of identification.

The names themselves may at times offer clues which place the petitioner in one or the other category. There are typical Norwegian Christian names as well as surnames, which are so distinctive that they can scarcely

be taken to be Swedish. The same argument holds for some Swedish names. In such instances the reader has to make a choice, but even when he does, he should look for corroborative evidence before making a final judgment.

An observation one makes as one peruses the Los Angeles records concerns the meager information they contain. We find only the names, the nationality and the date of naturalization or the declaration of intent. In certain cases where the declaration of intent has been filed in another court, that document may however, offer more specific information.

In most cases a witness is mentioned as a person who has known the petitioner for a period of time, a kind of character witness. In a few instances two witnesses appear in the records. These names have been listed also since they may be of help in the identification of the petitioner. It may be a neighbor, a friend or relative and many of them have Scandinavian names, indicating that Scandinavians helped each other when seeking naturalization.

Immediately after the name of each person naturalized a code letter or letters have been entered which will indicate to which nation or nations the petitioner "severally belonged", as the typical phrase of the period has it. The code letters used are as follows:

N = Norway	N + S = Norway and Sweden
S = Sweden	S + N = Sweden and Norway

In one instance the clerk has erred when he refers to the "King of Denmark and Sweden". This should of course be Norway and Sweden. As a general rule one can accept the theory that the petitioner is of that nation which is listed first in the compound form. Thus the petitioner who renounces his allegiance to Norway and Sweden is probably Norwegian and the person who does likewise for Sweden and Norway is Swedish. Again this theory should be tested against other evidence available before making a final decision.

Many of the clerks of court were none too well versed in geography or history and errors often occurred when it came to filling out the part of the form which had reference to the petitioner's political loyalties. I have already mentioned the "Kingdom of Denmark and Sweden" combination. In another case the clerk refers to the "Republic of Sweden and Norway".

As with the naturalization documents examined earlier, the majority contain a very important item for every genealogical researcher, the actual signature of the petitioner. In a few cases where he could neither read nor write, he placed an (x) on the document in the presence of the clerk. This symbol is used in the list that follows to indicate that the petitioner was illiterate.

With all of their flaws, omissions and paucity of contents, the declarations of intent as well as the naturalization documents themselves supply us with vital information and constitute an excellent primary source to help us solve our genealogical problems.

Swedish American Genealogist

<i>Name</i>	<i>Alle- giance</i>	<i>Date of Naturalization</i>	<i>Date of Declaration</i>	<i>Witness(es)</i>
Conrad Laurence Strobill ¹	S+N	Aug. 4, 1856	_____	Hector M. Forbes
Gustaff Linn ²	S	_____	Jan. 26, 1860	_____
Sven Petter Larsen	N	April 7, 1862	_____	Charles Holst
Peter Wilson ³	S	Feb. 27, 1867	Feb. 27, 1867	Henry Read
Alexander Nelson ⁴	S	July 8, 1867	July 8, 1867	George Wright
Christopher Ryerson ⁵	N+S	Nov. 2, 1868	Nov. 2, 1868	James W. Bryden
Jonas Nelson	S	July 31, 1871	_____	J. K. Stenup
Gudmund Sivertson				Rasmus Tobias
Kyle	N+S	Aug. 8, 1871	_____	Michaelsen
Rasmus Tobias				Gudmund Siv- ertson Kyle
Michaelsen	N+S	Aug. 8, 1871	_____	Valentine Mand
Karl Johnson	S	Aug. 17, 1871	_____	John Williams
Rasmus Rasmussen (x)	S+N	Sept. 1, 1871	_____	G. M. Lookman
Thomas Canalius (x)	N+S	Sept. 5, 1871	_____	Henry C. Short
Lars Olsen	S+N	June 16, 1873	_____	M. E. Ryan
Nicholas Nelson	S	Sept. 1, 1873	_____	_____
George O. Johnson ⁶				_____
Charles Wilson	S	Aug. 16, 1875	_____	L. E. Smith Thomas Anderson
Christofer Lude Jensen	S+N	June 21, 1876	_____	A. W. Potts
Charles Carlson ⁷	S+N	June 24, 1876	_____	J. N. Reece
Joseph Johnson (x)	S+N	July 9, 1876	_____	A. W. Potts
Edward Johnson (x)	S	Oct. 3, 1876	_____	A. Tomasini
Jonas Peter Wanvig J. George	N+S	Oct. 18, 1876	_____	Martin Vanvig
Cummings (x)	S	Oct. 20, 1876	_____	A. W. Potts
Charles Johnson	N+S	Jan. 10, 1877	_____	Alfred Radley
August Blix	S	Sept. 3, 1877	_____	C. B. Richardson
Petter Beck	S+N	Sept. 4, 1877	_____	T. W. Rule
James Olsen	N	July 29, 1879	_____	George M. Davies Thomas Carty
John Frederick Ahlstrom ⁸	S	March 18, 1880	July 15, 1875	O. Warling D. R. Payne
John August Johnson ⁹	N+S	Aug. 2, 1880	May 21, 1873	P. H. Downing
Oliver Simpson	—	Aug. 18, 1880	_____	V.C.E. Schobert
Daniel Anderson ¹⁰ (x)	S	Aug. 20, 1881	Aug. 13, 1870	D. Nagle
M. H. Peterson ¹¹ (x)	S	_____	Feb. 23, 1871	_____
John Peter Melberg	S	April 20, 1882	_____	Henry Oliver W. E. Crittenden
Andrew Wathne	N	Sept. 1, 1882	Nov. 12, 1878	Edward Anderson
John Mallgren	S	Oct. 30, 1882	Sept. 14, 1880	Joseph Maier* A. J. Hechtman
Enoch Gustafson (x)	S	Feb. 23, 1883	July 3, 1879	Nathan Jacoby
Charles J.W. Sjoberg	S	Jan. 25, 1884	Jan. 25, 1884	Henry A. Crocker R. L. Olsen
Jacob Selberg ¹²	S+N	March 11, 1884	Feb. 14, 1874	N. Lindenfeld
Alexander Olsen ¹³	N+S	April 7, 1884	Feb. 15, 1872	John R. Brierly
O. A. Johnson ¹⁴	N+S	April 18, 1884	Feb. 27, 1882	Harry D. Smith
Sivert Olsen ¹⁵	S+N	June 7, 1884	Oct. 30, 1871	R. Lofthouse
N. O. Winquist	S	July 1, 1884	May 1, 1882	John A. Carlson
Carl Anderson ¹⁶	S	March 28, 1885	Oct. 3, 1882	George Borgstede
John August Carlson ¹⁷	S	June 16, 1885	Dec. 24, 1868	Theodor Johnson
Thomas C. Peterson	S	June 26, 1885	_____	Henry Oliver
Ernest Gilstead ¹⁸	S	July 31, 1886	Nov. 25, 1882	John P. Johnson
Walfred Swoffer ¹⁹	S	July 31, 1886	April 8, 1884	John P. Johnson
Ole Anderson	S	Aug. 24, 1886	_____	Bernard Dunn
John A. Anderson ²⁰	N	Sept. 1, 1887	Oct. 13, 1884	P. W. Anderson

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- ¹ Conrad Lorentz Strobill was b. in the Garrison Parish in Göteborg May 17, 1812, illegitimate s. of Lorentz Ulrik Ehrenbill, captain in the Göta Artillery Regiment, and Johanna Dorothea Snäll. He emigr. twice, the first time in 1834 and the second time in 1837. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1838, serving thirteen years, being discharged at Rancho de Jurupa, CA Oct. 14, 1853. In 1856 he was living in San Bernardino Co., CA, when he sent a letter to the Swedish Legation in Washington, requesting information regarding an inheritance case in Sweden.
In 1834, before Strobill left for the U.S., he made a will, which specified that his estate was to go to certain named individuals in Sweden if he were to die abroad. On June 19, 1871 the Göteborg Municipal Court (*Rådhusrätt*) ruled that since nothing had been heard from Strobill in twenty years, it was presumed that he was deceased and thus he was officially declared to be dead. — Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820–1850* (Stockholm and Chicago, 1967), pp. 14, 15, 26; Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in U.S. Ports 1820–1850 (except New York)* (Stockholm and St. Paul, MN, 1979), p. 86.
- ² Gustaff Linn declared his intention of becoming a U.S. citizen in the District Court of Marin Co., CA.
- ³ Peter Wilson arrived in the U.S. more than three years previous to reaching the age of 21.
- ⁴ Alexander Nelson arrived in the U.S. more than three years before reaching the age of 21.
- ⁵ Christopher Ryerson was honorably discharged from the U.S. military service, having served in the 1st Cavalry, Colorado Volunteers.
- ⁶ There is no naturalization date for George O. Johnson but there is a deposition made before the County Clerk of Los Angeles County which reads as follows: "George O. Johnson being duly sworn deposes and says that he was born in Norway and came to the United States in 1850 and that he was naturalized in Nevada City in the State of California in 1854 and that his naturalization papers were destroyed by fire in Virginia City, State of Nevada". Statement was sworn to Nov. 30, 1874.
- ⁷ Charles Carlson presented certificate from the Office of the Secretary of State of Illinois, dated Springfield, IL April 8, 1876 stating that he had resided in the United States more than five years.
- ⁸ John Frederick Ahlstrom declared his intention of becoming a U.S. citizen in the District Court of the Tenth Judicial District, Yuba Co., CA.
- ⁹ John August Johnson declared his intention of becoming a U.S. citizen in the 7th Judicial District, Mendocino Co., CA.
- ¹⁰ Daniel Anderson declared his intention of becoming a U.S. citizen in the 13th Judicial District, Mariposa Co., CA.
- ¹¹ M. H. Peterson declared his intention of becoming a U.S. citizen in the Circuit Court of Knox Co., IL.
- ¹² Jacob Selberg declared his intention of becoming a U.S. citizen in the Criminal Court of Cook Co., IL.
- ¹³ Alexander Olsen declared his intention of becoming a U.S. citizen in the Third Judicial District of the Territory of Idaho, Owyhee Co., ID.
- ¹⁴ O. A. Johnson declared his intention of becoming a U.S. citizen in the District Court of Pottawattamie Co., IA.
- ¹⁵ Sivert Olsen (Olesen) was born in Norway about 1846, emigrated to the U.S. and landed in Detroit in July, 1865.
- ¹⁶ Carl Anderson declared his intention of becoming a U.S. citizen in the Superior Court of San Diego Co., CA.
- ¹⁷ John August Carlsson, 31 years of age, emigrated from Stockholm to the U.S. Aug. 22, 1866 and arrived in New York Sept. 9, 1866, according to his declaration of intent made out by the judge of the Probate Court of Hamilton Co., OH.
- ¹⁸ Ernest Gilstead declared his intention of becoming a U.S. citizen in the Superior Court of Humboldt Co., CA.
- ¹⁹ According to his naturalization certificate Walfred Swoffer was 28 years old at the time of his naturalization, that he arrived in Chago (Chicago?) from Sweden Nov. 22, 1879.
- ²⁰ John A. Anderson's declaration of intent was made out in Third Judicial District Court of the Territory of Arizona, Yavapai Co. It stated that John A. Anderson was 25 years old and that he was a native of Norway.