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# America Letters — An Important Genealogical Source

Erik Wikén

A letter published in *Östgötha-Correspondenten* May 7, 10 and 14, 1851, dated Andover, IL Nov. 18, 1850, has been published recently in translation.<sup>1</sup> Written by Lars Magnus Rapp, who was married to Sara Maria Nilsson, and his brother-in-law — Carl Johan Nilsson, it is addressed to Olaus Nilsson in Åby, St. Lars' Parish, Östergötland *län*. Olaus Nilsson was a half brother of Sara Maria and Carl Johan.<sup>2</sup>

After a brief introduction, in which the author describes the trip from Sweden across the ocean aboard the brig "Excellent",<sup>3</sup> he continues with the journey to the interior of America, to the final destination of Andover. This goal was reached on Sept. 12, 1850, but with a great loss of life. The letter mentions many of those who died — Rapp's mother-in-law and Greta from Govik, in addition to Magnus and three of his children, two daughters and a son (one son, Carl Oscar, and a daughter survived, however).

These persons, therefore, one expects to find among the immigrants who arrived aboard the "Excellent". Rapp's mother-in-law is easily identified. She was Greta Nilsson, and it should be noted that according to the church registers, after her first husband's, Nils Olofsson's death in 1835, she remarried Anders Andersson from Örsebo, Kisa Parish, Östergötland *län* in 1837. The couple is recorded in the Kisa household examination roll (A-1 book) as having emigrated to the U.S. in 1850, receiving their passports in Linköping April 6 that year. They are also to be found in *SPANY*,<sup>4</sup> immediately before the Rapp family.

The farm name of Govik is the key to the solution of the remainder of those to be identified. Govik is located in Dalhem Parish, Kalmar *län*. According to Dalhem's A-1 book, we find that the family, consisting of a man, his wife and five children, emigrated from Govik in 1850 —

Nils Magnus Nilsson, b. in Västra Eneby June 19, 1818

Greta Lisa Ljungström, b. in Västra Eneby July 23, 1815

Christina Mathilda, b. in Hägerstad Aug. 29, 1841

Olaus Wilhelm, b. in Dalhem Feb. 4, 1843

Maria Albertina, b. in Dalhem Feb. 10, 1845

Carl Oscar, b. in Dalhem May 29, 1847

Josephine Carolina, b. May 25, 1849

The family received passports in Kalmar March 27, 1850.

Nils Magnus Nilsson was the son of Nils Olofsson and Greta Nilsson, in her first marriage, and thus a brother of Rapp's wife as well as of Greta Lisa Nilsson and Carl Johan Nilsson, which were all on board the "Excellent".<sup>5</sup> The wife, Greta Lisa Ljungström, was b. in Södra Farstorp, Västra Eneby Parish, Östergötland län, the daughter of Peter Magnus Svensson, a farmer, and Lena Stina Pehrsson.

This family is doubtless identical with the family Olson, which in *SPANY* comes immediately after the Rapp family<sup>6</sup> —

Nils M. Olson 32	Aug. W. Olson 7	John A. Olson 9 mo.
Greta Olson 55	Malin T. Olson 5	
Chn Olson 9	Carl O. Olson 2½	

The garbled first names should not concern us. They are not any worse than many other examples we come across. The ages of the family members on the manifest coincide quite well with the actual ages, except for the wife Greta (this is probably due to a scribal error). But the question arises — why was the entire family named Olson? Because the husband's father's name was Nils Olofsson.

Thanks to this letter it is thus possible to identify an entire emigrating family group — Greta Nilsson with her second husband (two persons), four children in her first marriage — Sara Maria Nilsson, married to Rapp (five persons), Nils Magnus Nilsson (seven persons), Greta Lisa Nilsson (one person) and Carl Johan Nilsson (one person), for a total of sixteen persons. Of this group six were already dead by the time the letter was written.

Another letter, which I wish to quote, is not really an *America letter*, i.e. a letter from an emigrant to the home country. It is, nevertheless, fully as important genealogically as the first letter.

Witting cites an undated letter in his *Minnen*,<sup>7</sup> written by August Linder, who at that time was living in Minneapolis, to Charles Otto Lobeck in Omaha, NE. The author had arrived in New York July 12, 1849 aboard the bark "Charles Tottie".<sup>8</sup> He described the journey westward for the family group which had arrived aboard this vessel, among which was also the mother of the addressee. Thus the main character is identified, namely Anna Lovisa Zachrisson (in *SPANY* listed as Isaacsdotter), first married to Gustaf Gustafsson and secondly to Otto Lobeck, the father of the addressee.<sup>9</sup> The letter tells about the next of kin of Anna Lovisa who had died on the journey —

- the mother, dead in Chicago July 21,
- the son Carl,
- the stepfather, who was also the father of the wife of the author of the letter, August Linder, dead in Princeton, IL,
- the husband, Gustaf Gustafsson, dead August 1, two daughters and the brother Anders.<sup>10</sup>

Witting adds the following information concerning Anna Lovisa — only a few days after attending the memorial service held for the dead, she bought a farm and moved there with her daughter Mary, seven years old, her sisters Caroline and Mary, as well as her brother John M. Erickson.

Anna Lovisa's mother was Lena Maja Pehrsson. Where can she be found

in *SPANY*? And who was her stepfather? If we examine *SPANY* carefully and look immediately after the entry for Anna Lovisa's family, we find a Lena Maja Pehrsson, married to Erik Jonsson.<sup>11</sup> This should give us a clue. A reading of the parish registers for Hägerstad Parish in Östergötland will indicate that Lena Maja Pehrsson was married the first time in 1819 to Zachris (Zacharias) Andersson, and after the latter's death in 1824, she married Erik Jonsson June 10, 1828. As a consequence we see that Witting's statement that Anna Lovisa had two sisters, Caroline and Mary, as well as one brother, John M. Erickson is correct — they are her half siblings, the children of Lena Maja Pehrsson in her second marriage to Erik Jonsson.

It was one of Anna Lovisa's half sisters, Caroline or Mary, it is uncertain which, to whom the author of the letter, August Linder, was married. There remains Witting's declaration that Anna Lovisa moved to the farm with a seven-year-old daughter, Mary. The age coincides exactly with the daughter Anna Maria, born June 2, 1842. On the other hand Linder's letter tells us that Anna Lovisa's *both* daughters had died upon arrival. We must reason that the author of the letter was not able to recollect the facts exactly, so long after the event.

Finally it should be pointed out that according to *SPANY* only one child belonging to Anna Lovisa is listed, namely Anna Maria. We must conclude, however, that both of the other children, Emilie Charlotta, born 1844, and Carl Gustaf, born 1847, must be identical with the two children listed immediately before Gustaf Gustafsson's name on the manifest — Emilie C. Ericsson, four years old, and Carl G. Ericsson, two years.<sup>12</sup>

Again we meet here an entire emigrating family group — Anna Lovisa Zachrisson with husband and three children (five persons), her mother and stepfather with their three children (five persons), as well as her brother (one person), for a total of eleven people. Even in this group, six persons died during the journey westward.

<sup>1</sup> The letter has been translated in H. Arnold Barton's *Letters from the Promised Land* (Minneapolis, MN, 1975), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> For information concerning the authors of the letter, see Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820–1850 (SPANY)* (Stockholm and Chicago, 1967), p. 215, n. 51 and n. 53, as well as supplementary information on p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215, n. 49. The note does not mention the relationship with the Rapp family.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215, n. 52 and n. 53, with supplementary information on p. 280.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Witting, *Minnen från mitt lif* (Worcester, MA, 1902), pp. 310–313.

<sup>8</sup> *SPANY*, p. 156. There were two adult passengers with the name of August, Johan August Johansson (p. 159, n. 97) and Jöns August Larsson (p. 165, n. 25). Which of them took the name of Linder is not known.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167, n. 39. Otto Lobeck was born in Germany, but had come to Sweden as a foreman on several estates in Blekinge and Skåne.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167, n. 42.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167, n. 41.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166.