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# The Genealogical Workshop

## 1. The Exit Permit

Nils William Olsson

(In this series of articles, entitled The Genealogical Workshop, we intend to take up for study certain documents of Swedish as well as of American provenance, which can be useful in the ongoing search for clues concerning our Swedish ancestors. The first study, presented here, deals with the important exit permit, theoretically, at least, the last document the emigrant received as he left for American shores. Other documents, which will be discussed in future issues of *SAG* are — passports, household examination rolls, passenger manifests, U.S. naturalization records, obituaries and grave stone inscriptions, as well as other material. We hope that our readers will like these short documentaries and that they will be useful for both the advanced as well as the beginning student.)

One of the most important documents that descendants of Swedish immigrants may find in the old family files is the exit permit, which the immigrant brought with him from his home parish. Variouslly labelled *flyttningsbevis*, *flyttningsbetyg* or *flyttningsattest*, it was the final official document the emigrant procured before beginning his voyage across the Atlantic. If he had a passport, he had probably procured this earlier, as well as his ticket. It was the exit permit, given to him by the pastor of his church during his final days at home, which was the culmination of the preparations for the journey. With the exit permit in hand, he had broken the last official bond with his home land.

While it is true that many Swedes left their home country without bothering to secure such a document, it was somehow inherent in the Swedish nature to follow the regulations of the state and the church, which stipulated that upon leaving his home parish for some other place, whether this was at home or abroad, he was compelled to procure this document, which stated that he was of high moral character, and that he was an honest individual, who would be accepted into any society, wherever he planned to settle.

Before venturing into the mechanics of the exit permit, it might be worthwhile to examine how the state and the community formerly viewed the movement of people. Sweden has been a well organized state for hundreds of years with an excellent corps of civil servants, which in this case also included the clergy, which not only was paid by the state, but also was held responsible for the documentation of the lives of the parishioners. This applied to all facets of their existence: births, marriages, deaths, knowledge of reading, knowledge of

the Ten Commandments, attending Holy Communion as well as the physical movements into or out of the parish.

It is not an accident that Sweden possesses some of the most complete church records in the world, going back hundreds of years, a boon to anyone with Swedish antecedents, interested in studying his family tree. It was Bishop Johannes Rudbeckius in Västerås, who as early as in 1622 asked the clergymen in his diocese to begin keeping records of the births, marriages and deaths in their respective parishes. He was followed in 1633 by Bishop Johannes Botvidi in the Diocese of Linköping. As the 17th Century progressed, all other churches followed suit, so that by the end of the century, all parishes had been instructed to maintain the vital statistics of their people.

On the secular side the Central Bureau of Statistics, founded in the middle of the 18th Century, has been for more than 200 years the watchdog of the Swedish people. Into the Bureau has flowed all sorts of information, taken from the annual censuses (*mantalsskrivningar*), providing the government with all sorts of statistical material for many a demographic study.

In order to make a success of such an ambitious project, it was of course necessary to know as much as possible about the population in every parish, including movements into and out of that locality. It was the village clergyman who received the instruction to control these movements. His periodic reports to the central authorities were very important in complimenting the material flowing in from the census lists (*mantalslängder*).

Both civil and ecclesiastical authorities, in attempting to keep a check of the population movements, resorted to two types of control documents — one, the civil form, was the passport (*pass*) issued by the police authorities in the larger cities as well as the administrative units (*län*). These passports were necessary for any movement from one locality to another, whether it was across the country, or to the nearest city, even if it was only to visit a relative. The passport, which stated the person's name, his birth date, his birth place and the nature of his errand, was usually made out for a stated period of time, was temporary only and was good only for the journey. It was carried by the traveler, who had to produce the document in question at any time he was challenged by the authorities. Registers of those who received domestic passports can be found in every *län*, on deposit in the provincial archives (*landsarkiv*) to which the *län* belongs. Special registers for those who went abroad are also to be found in these archives, but though these foreign passports were also limited in time, they were usually issued for longer stays abroad, sometimes as long as two or three years, particularly if it involved an apprentice or journeyman who went abroad to gather some foreign experience, before returning to Sweden to practice his craft.

The second type of document was the responsibility of the parish, who issued the exit permits, which were usually permanent in nature, as for example, when a person or a family moved from one parish to another, to take over an inherited farm, to manage an industry, or for persons on the lower scale, servants and maids, who moved to another parish, because there was no work

opportunity in the home parish. The exit permit, or *flyttningsbevis*, which literally means movement certificate, was in the beginning often a handwritten document, made out by the clergyman, containing some facts concerning the person, such as his name, his birth date, his birth place, from which abode he was moving and to which parish he was going. Occasionally the shoemaker's apprentice or the tailor journeyman did not know where he might find employment, in which case the clergyman wrote that the person seeking the permit was going to *obestämd ort* (destination unknown).

As a result of the smallpox vaccination program, which came to Sweden in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, fewer people died in infancy. More people lived to maturity and thus economic pressures began building as a result of this population explosion. The family, which normally had eight or nine children, and would have lost half of them through smallpox, now would see all or almost all of their children achieve maturity. Suddenly there were many more mouths to feed. People became restless and began eyeing greener pastures across the parish border. The increased mobility of the parish population brought increased work for the clergyman to record all those who left or came. It was no longer possible to keep up the traffic with handwritten permits and the authorities began issuing printed forms, which could be filled out with a minimum of time.

At the same time the authorities promulgated a law, dated Nov. 23, 1833, which stressed that servants, males as well as females, before leaving a certain parish in order to move to another, had to produce a certificate of good character from their former employers. Without this certificate, the clergyman could refuse to issue an exit permit.

On July 20, 1861, another law went into force, which included everybody, not only the servant class, which proclaimed that any person moving into a parish, had to report to the parish clergyman within two weeks of such move, and no later than Nov. 9 of that year, and to produce an exit permit from the parish from which he was moving. Failure to do this incurred a heavy fine for the laggard. Employers of servants were also cautioned, under threat of a heavy fine, to produce exit permits for the servants recently hired, coming from another parish.

When the emigrant, therefore, left his native parish for the U.S., it was the most natural reaction for him to call on his parish pastor and request the exit permit, which he could take along on the journey. Neither he, nor the pastor, understood that in the U.S., at that time, no one questioned one's past or demanded any type of documentation.

For those immigrants who sought affiliation with a Swedish Lutheran church in America, it was usually customary to produce the exit permit from his home parish in Sweden, in order to prove such points as date of birth, confirmation and marriage status. Sometimes these permits were retained by the pastor, as was done in Sweden, but more often the documents were returned to the new member. Others never bothered to hand in the document, particularly in the non-Lutheran and American churches. Hence, we find that a number of individuals

of Swedish descent in the U.S. today still have in their family archives this very useful and important paper.

Those immigrants who preserved their exit permits and who have passed them on to their children and children's children, did not realize how well they provided for their latter-day descendants in finding the clues to their Swedish origin. Encapsulated in the permit is a wealth of pertinent family documentation, properly attested to by the parish clergyman, thus making it not only an official but also a legal document, which could be used to prove a birth or marriage date.

We are pleased to present to readers of *SAG* illustrations of two specific exit permits, what they look like and what they contain. These two documents, made out for a man and his wife, date from 1870. They are made out for Johannes Eriksson and his wife, Anna Maja Olsdotter, from the parish of Värmskog in Värmland. They have been made available by Johannes Eriksson's grandson, Dr. Albin Erickson of Minneapolis, MN, formerly vice president of North Park College in Chicago, IL. An interesting sidelight is the fact that Johannes Eriksson's brother, Lars Magnus Eriksson, who remained in Sweden, later became the founder and owner of the internationally known Swedish telephone company, L. M. Eriksson & Co.

The two exit permits for Johannes Eriksson and his wife are reproduced here with each line numbered from 1 to 24. Following the illustrations are the translations of these originals with the same numbering of the lines, so that readers may follow each line and make the transliteration themselves. Since most parish exit permits generally follow the same pattern, this translation may be useful for other researchers possessing similar exit permits, thus allowing persons with no knowledge of Swedish to understand the Swedish document in question.

As readers will have learned by this time, the exit permit probably is the most useful document a person can possess, and as has been seen from the illustrative material, provides an open gate to more extensive research in Sweden. It is unfortunate that so many immigrants, when arriving in the United States, were content to slough off their memories of a country with many restrictions and much red tape, and promptly destroy the evidence of this bureaucracy, thereby helping to destroy the bridge that might have led latter-day descendants to cross over to the country of their origin.

A word of caution to those lucky enough to have permits in their archival collections. These were printed on brittle paper, which yellowed with the passage of years, and when opened from a folded position easily tear and sometimes disintegrate. The paper should be handled as little as possible. By making a xerox copy of the original, it will be easier to study the document and show it to interested parties. The document itself should be stored in an acid-free folder, or better yet in a plastic folder, which can be purchased in most stationery stores. Thus succeeding generations will have the pleasure of personally examining their heritage.

1. № 9 Flyttningsberis från Sverige, Wernskogs församling.

2. a) Inhyssmannen Johannes Eriksson ifrån Wegerbol,

3. Wernskogs församling, Wernlands Län,

4. född år 1870 (Gyratia) den 18 Februari

5. uti Wernskogs församling af Wernlands län.

6.

7. Ute äktenskap gift med å andra bladet ättesterade

8. Anna Maja Olsdotter den 12 Mars 1867.

9.

10. haft skyldskoppor

11. Läser inman till förvarligt;

12. Kristendomsksamhet förvarligt;

13. Bewistad förhör d: 21 October 1867;

14. Till begagnande af H. Natward oförhindrad;

15.

16. Till frejden eger medborgerligt förtraende;

17.

18.

19.

20. Afflyttar till Norra Amerika försög af län

21. Forä mantalsskrifningen till nästa år

22. Betygas Katterbol i Stafnäs försög af Wernlands län

23. den 7 Maj 1870 (Gyttie).

24. *W. J. Erdin*, Commminister.

Exit permit (a) for Johannes Erikson.



7. *united in marriage with the person listed on sheet (b)*
8. *Anna Maja Olsdotter on March 12, 1867*
9. ———
10. *has been vaccinated*
11. *knowledge of reading — fair*
12. *knowledge of Christendom — fair*
13. *attended the household examination on Oct. 31, 1867*
14. *free to attend Holy Communion*
15. ———
16. *has the public trust*
17. ———
18. ———
19. ———
20. *moving to North America*
21. *before the census next year*
22. *attested at Haltersbol in Stavnäs Parish in Värmland län*
23. *May 7, 1870 (seventy)*
24. *P(ontus) T(heodor) Jerdin, Curate*

*Sheet (b)*

1. *No. 9 Exit Permit from Sweden, Värmskog Parish*
2. *Anna Maja Olsdotter, wife from Vägerbol,*
3. *Värmskog Parish, Värmland län*
4. *born in the year 1839 (thirtynine) on July 4*
5. *in Värmskog Parish, Värmland län*
6. ———
7. *united in marriage with the person listed on sheet (a)*
8. *Johannes Eriksson on March 12, 1867*
9. ———
10. *has been vaccinated*
11. *knowledge of reading — fair*
12. *knowledge of Christendom — fair*
13. *attended the household examination Nov. 5, 1868*
14. *free to attend Holy Communion*
15. ———
16. *has the public trust*
17. ———
18. ——— (x) *Note: This couple has a daughter, Maria, born in Värmskog Parish January 26, 1868 (sixtyeight)*
19. ———
20. *moving to North America*
21. *before the census next year*
22. *attested at Haltersbol in Stavnäs Parish in Värmland län*
23. *May 7, 1870 (seventy)*
24. *P(ontus) T(heodor) Jerdin, Curate*