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Swedish Genealogical Bibles

Nils William Olsson

One item which almost every immigrant carried with him in the baggage was a copy of the Holy Bible or the New Testament. It was a "must" ingredient in the packing procedure, placed on the bottom of the emigrant chest as the emigrant *in spe* made his preparations for the journey across the Atlantic. These copies of the Bible or the New Testament were usually of two types, which we shall here call Type A and Type B.

Type A. These were Bibles, usually heirlooms, handed down from father to son or daughter. They represent printings going back to the early Nineteenth or even the latter part of the Eighteenth Centuries. Many of these, so called "heirloom" types, contain notations on the flyleaf, or on the inside of the front or back covers, and sometimes even on the blank pages which separate the Old Testament from the New. These notations usually consist of pithy comments on the purchase price of the Bible, where purchased (usually at a county or village fair), or perhaps a note that the book had been inherited and from whom. There may be comments concerning the owner of the Bible, from which farm, village or parish he hailed, and occasionally family data concerning births, marriages and deaths. On rare occasions one can also find information as to when the owner departed for America or when he arrived at an American port of entry.

Type B. These were the so called Confirmation Bibles and New Testaments which were the gifts of the home parish to the young confirmands on the day they took their first Holy Communion and thus made their entry into adulthood, usually at the age of 14 or 15. The typical inscription was made by the minister of the congregation, either the clergyman or his curate, and consists of the name of the confirmand, sometimes the name of the farm or village, and almost certainly the name of the parish, the date of the Confirmation, a reference to a Bible verse and finally the signature of the officiating cleric. These inscriptions or dedications by the minister, can therefore be classified as official and as such constitute primary source material for the person researching his genealogy.

Even though the inscription may not give the birth date of the confirmand, it is fairly easy to extract this information by going to the confirmation rolls of the parish, which each Swedish officiating clergyman had to keep and which then became a part of the official record of his ministerial acts, as important in a way

as his record of births, marriages and deaths. If the confirmation took place within the last 100 years, chances are that the confirmation records of the parish will show the indentivity of the confirmand. If the confirmation act took place longer ago than 100 years, the recorded information would have been transferred to one of the provincial archives in Sweden, responsible for the safekeeping of the parish records in that district.

The data contained in these two types differ, therefore, in that Type A Bibles and New Testaments were usually inscribed by the owner or owners, sometimes after the fact — such as a birth or a death. The owner was often unlettered, his hand more accustomed to the plow than to the pen. Information contained in Type A Bibles should therefore be used with caution and should most certainly be checked against data found in the official documents. Nevertheless data found in Type A Bibles can be useful in helping pinpoint relevant information, when all other sources fail.

The material to be found in Confirmation Bibles and New Testaments, or the Type B variant, is considered to be virtually *prima facie* evidence and is fairly reliable.

Immigrants may not have read their Bibles and New Testaments, but they held such books in deep reverence and would not think of consigning them to the trash bin. They were retained when much other material was discarded. Hence, there is to be found an enormous quantity of Swedish Bibles, New Testaments, books of sermons, and catechisms in church libraries, retirement centers, college libraries of Swedish provenance and such institutions as The American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis, The Swedish Pioneer Historical Society in Chicago and The American Swedish Historical Foundation in Philadelphia — all these repositories for the Swedish books which latter-day descendants were loath to throw away. There are literally hundreds upon hundreds of these devotional books in these collections.

Tempting as it may be for these institutions to cry: “Enough is enough”, when flooded with gifts of Swedish Bibles and New Testaments, it is nevertheless very important that any Bible or New Testament, as well as catechisms, psalm books and postils containing genealogical information be preserved in some manner, so that the message contained on the flyleaves, title pages and on the inside covers of these books may be preserved for posterity, perhaps to provide the sole link which could tie the latter-day descendant of an immigrant to his parish of origin in Sweden.

Because so many of the Bibles and New Testaments are on deposit in these institutions, containing valuable genealogical information, it is the aim and purpose of *Swedish American Genealogist* to bring to its readers on a continuing basis extracts from such devotional books, in the hope that the inscriptions they contain may be helpful in solving genealogical problems. They will be assigned numbers, translated from the Swedish with personal and geographical names spelled to coincide with modern Swedish orthography. The first series of these inscriptions features devotional literature on deposit at The American Swedish

Institute in Minneapolis, to which institution the genealogical student may turn to request a xerox copy of the data available. The charge for this service is \$5.00, which covers the cost of bringing the book in question from the archives and having the material reproduced. Send all such inquiries to *Genealogical Bibles*, The American Swedish Institute, 2601 Oakland Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55407. Be sure to cite the ASI number of material desired.

ASI — 1. This is a Type A Bible, printed in Stockholm 1874. It came into the possession of The American Swedish Institute in 1980 and has the following inscription on the inside of the front cover:

“Samuel August Andersson, Skräddartorpet, Vartofta Parish April 25, 187- (the last digit illegible).”

Note: Skräddartorpet is a croft in the Parish of Vartofta, Skar.län, just south of Falköping. On a loose scrap of paper, found in the Bible, are the following names:

“Blenda Ellen Victoria, born April 27, 1883
Arthur Henry William, born May 4, 1887
Olga Hedvig Henrika, born March 25, 1889.”

☆ ☆ ☆

ASI — 2. This Bible, printed in Örebro in 1849 is a Type A, but contains a Type B notation at the beginning:

“Botilla Nilsson in remembrance of her Confirmation February 17, 1871. John 8:31.”

On a loose sheet inserted in the Bible is the following notation:

“We gave this Bible to the American Swedish Institute for Mrs. Okerlund, born Botilda Nelson in Nunnäs, Fulltofta Parish (Malm. län), who came to America in 1886, died in 1913 and was buried near the Walla Church in New Effington, SD.”

☆ ☆ ☆

ASI — 3. Type A Bible was printed in the U.S. but lacks information concerning date and place of printing. Between the pages, separating the Old and the New Testaments, is the following notation:

“It is herewith declared that Lawrence Pearson from Sweden and Gerda Johanson from Sweden were united in Holy Matrimony according to the Ordinances of God and the laws of the State of Alabama August 1, 1896. Witnesses were David and Hulda Karlbom and Rudolph and Lydia Pearson, all from Mobile, AL.

Lawrence Pearson was born December 15, 1867

Gerda Pearson was born March 26, 1859

Sonja Anita (Pearson) was born May 15, 1897; died June 27, 1897

Elin (Pearson) was born January 11, 1899

Vera (Pearson) was born January 22, 1905; died January 10, 1906

Elin Pearson and Thomas William Mayo were married on January 24, 1925

Thomas William Mayo, Jr. was born October 24, 1925.
Donald Gene Mayo was born October 23, 1935."



ASI — 4. This Type A Bible was printed in Stockholm (no date) and has the following notation:

"This book belongs to Brita Andersdotter Rapp in Hällåsen, Hassela Parish, Gävl. län as a remembrance from her father on her journey to America 1861."

On the back of the title page of the New Testament part is the following notation:

"Erick Olson was born in Bergsjö Parish, Gävl. län March 2, 1837
Britta Andersson was born in Hällåsen, Hassela Parish December 12,
1835

Oscar Leonard was born in Henry County, IL October 19, 1870
Blanche Adelia was born in Sac County, IA July 16, 1874"



ASI — 5. Samuel Ödmann's *Geographiskt Hand-Lexicon öfver Nya Testamentets Heliga Skrifter*, printed in Uppsala in 1799, is a Type A book and has the following inscription:

"Carl Z. Pontén" as well as a book label No. 284 from the library of C. J. Johnson, (well-known book collector in Minneapolis).

On the reverse side of the title page is the following notation:

"This book belongs to me, Henrik Zachariasson in Broholm, Barkeryd Parish, Jön. län."



ASI — 6. Henric Schartau's *Predikningar*, published in Stockholm in 1865 is a Type A book and has the following notation on the inside of the front cover:

"Per Nilsson, No. 13, Tunnby." Below this is a signature of "Mrs. E. D. Johnson".

On the fly leaf facing the back cover is the following inscription:

"Mrs. E. D. Johnson, Willmar, Minnesota."

Note: Tunnby may be identical with a village by that name in the Parish of Norra Åkarp, Krist. län.



ASI — 7. A badly damaged copy of Daniel Nohrborg's *Postilla* without year and date of printing, but with internal evidence showing that it stems from the late 18th Century, is a Type A book with the following notation on the inside of the front cover:

"Olof Persson is the owner of this postil in 1797 and is born in 1769.
Maria Lovisa Carlsson 1849; Carl Carlsson in Råbäcken; Olof Carlsson in Råbäcken; Jonas Carlsson Råbäcken 1881."

On the inside of the back cover is the following writing:

“Carl Carlson in Unbyn, Råbäcken (Överluleå Parish, Norr. län) 1849; Maria Lovisa Carlson, Unbyn, Råbäcken is the rightful owner of this book; Carl Carlson in Unbyn, Råbäcken is the rightful owner; Maria Lovisa Carlson in Unbyn, Råbäcken is the rightful owner of this book 1853; Agatha Albertina Carlson — Olof Carlson in Råbäcken 1819.”

Continued on the inside of the back cover is the following information:

“1797 to 1908 is 111 years ago. This book has gone through the third generation. It first belonged to Olof Person, next to Carl Carlson and next to Mrs. Charley Johnson. This was written July 30, 1908 in Pelican Rapids, MN.”



ASI — 8. An illustrated family Bible, printed in Stockholm (no date) is a Type A book and has the following information on the inside of the front cover:

“This Holy Bible belongs to C. E. Hammarström and his wife, Inga Elisabeth. Axel Ferdinand was born June 12, 1870.”

On the flyleaf is the following:

“C. E. Hammarström was born 1831; his wife Inga Elisabeth was born May 22, 18-- (last two digits are illegible). Their son Carl Johan was born November 21, 1855 and died April 27, 1859. Their daughter Hulda Elisabeth was born December 10, 1857. Daughter Hilda Christina was born May 24, 1860. Son Carl Johan was born October 4, 1862. Son Axel Ferdinand was born October 11, 1865 and died September 18, 1866. Daughter Anna Axelina was born September 27, 1867. Son Axel Ferdinand was born June 12, 1870 and died August 7, 1871. Son Axel Otto was born August 5, 1872.”



ASI — 9. A New Testament, printed in Stockholm in 1864 is a Type A book with the following notation on the inside of the front cover:

“This book belongs to me Anna Maria Andersdotter in Planen August 24, 1882.”

On the flyleaf is the following information:

“Martha Catharina Nilsson was born July 20, 1850 and was confirmed May 6, 1866. This book belongs to Johannes Danielsson. This Bible belongs to Nils Peter Samuelsson in Ulvagraven and I have bought it at auction after Märta Catharina Nilsson in Espetuna December 27, 187- (last digit is illegible). This book belongs to me Johannes Danielsson in Planen of Sjöatorp Postgården. Johannes Danielsson was born 1864. This book belongs to me Christian Johannesdotter in Planen, born 1864. This book belongs to me Anders Johan Johannesson. This Bible belongs to Johannes Danielsson in Planen of Sjöatorp Postgården 1883.”

Note: Espetuna and Ulvagraven are located in Blådinge Parish, Kron. län. The names of Planen and Sjöatorp can be found in many parishes in Småland.



(continued on page 25)