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Abraham Forsskol: An Early Swede in Maine

David Curtis Dearborn, F.A.S.G.

Among the published vital records of Saco, Maine is the following entry which aroused my curiosity:

Abraham Forskol a native of Sweden born Jan. 22, 1790¹.

Following this is a record of the births of his wife Eunice Cutts Redlon and of their six children. From public records in Maine we can find the basic details of his life and are given clues necessary for locating him in Sweden and tracing his ancestry.

By his own account Forsskol (as he usually spelled his name) arrived at Portland, Maine in September, 1803 and subsequently settled in Saco, where he learned the trade of cabinetmaking. On 15 Sept. 1821 he entered his intention of marriage to Miss Eunice C. Redlon of Saco, and they were married there 15 days later by J. Cogswell.² Eunice was born in Saco 8 Aug. 1800, and died there 10 June 1833, the eldest daughter of Nathaniel and Lydia (Scammon) Redlon.³ She descended on both sides from old New England stock.

On 10 May 1830 Forsskol bought two lots of land on the northeast side of Cross Street, between Main and Elm Streets in Saco for \$300 from Daniel Buckminster of Saco, cabinetmaker.⁴ Here he carried on his cabinetmaking business until selling the land in 1863.⁵

Forsskol never remarried following his wife's death, but continued to make his home with her parents. On 17 Aug. 1848, following the death of his father-in-law, Nathaniel Redlon, he joined with his mother-in-law, his wife's two sisters and their husbands, and his children in a deed quitclaiming Redlon's home farm in Saco to one Timothy Washbourne.⁶

The Federal Censuses of 1850 and 1860 show that Forsskol was living in Saco with his mother-in-law and several daughters.⁷ It is interesting to note that in this town of several thousand persons he was the only one of Swedish birth.

On 7 July 1863 Abraham Forsskol signed a carefully worded will by which he made provision for the care of his mother-in-law, Lydia Redlon, and made bequests to his granddaughter Julia Forsskol Hill, his daughter Anna Decatur, and his daughter Harriet M. Forsskol, who was contemplating marriage to one Johnson Lunt. He named his son-in-law Thomas Decatur executor. On 19 March following he made a codicil to his will leaving his homestead and land in Saco to his daughter Harriet, who by this time had married Lunt.⁸

Abraham Forsskol died in Saco 21 May 1864, aged 74 years and 4 months,

and he was buried beside his wife in Laurel Hill Cemetery in Saco, where their gravestones may still be seen. A brief notice of his death appeared in *The Maine Democrat* for 24 May 1864.⁹

Forsskol and his wife had the following children, all born in Saco according to the vital records:

- i. JULIA, b. 3 Dec. 1822; d. Saco 7 June 1853. She m. JAMES PLAISTED HILL, b. 22 Feb. 1818; d. 5 May 1871. They are buried in the Forsskol lot in Laurel Hill Cemetery. They had two children: EMMA E., who d. 30 July 1853, aged 7 months; and JULIA FORSSKOL, who was named in the will of her father, dated 2 May 1871.¹⁰
- ii. NATHANIEL REDLON, b. 3 July 1824; named for his grandfather; d. 25 Dec. 1832; buried with his parents.
- iii. ELIZABETH REDLON, b. 16 Oct. 1826; d. Saco 1862. She m. EDWARD A. BABCOCK, b. Portland, ME 12 Sept. 1817; d. Augusta, ME 25 Feb. 1854. She was buried in the Forsskol lot in Laurel Hill Cemetery. They had one child: LIZZIE F., who d. 19 Jan. 1854, aged 1 year and 9 days.
- iv. ANNA, b. 16 Oct. 1828; d. 23 Jan. 1830; buried with her parents.
- v. ANNA, b. 31 Oct. 1830; d. Sharon, MA 17 April 1900. She m. Capt. THOMAS DECATUR, b. Barrington, NH 5 Oct. 1825; d. Sharon 6 July 1897, son of John and Aariah (Batts) Decatur. He was a provision dealer and prominent citizen of the Jamaica Plain section of Boston. He derived his title from being captain of the Roxbury [Mass.] Horse Guards, and is remembered as the builder of Massapoag Lake Hotel in Sharon.¹¹ Thomas and Anna are buried in the Forsskol lot in Laurel Hill Cemetery. They had two children: FRED FORSSKOL, who d. aged 19 years and 2 months; and FANNIE E., who m. one GATES. On 3 July 1900 her s. LOUIS FRANCIS GATES of Boston petitioned to be granted administration of the estate of his grandmother, Anna F. Decatur.¹² Louis F. Gates was b. Canton ca. 1876 and m. there 19 Oct. 1903, LAURA FRANKLIN BRYANT. He was an attorney in Boston. His name vanishes from the city directories about 1910.
- vi. HARRIET McKENNY, b. 30 July 1832; d. 29 Feb. 1892. She is buried in the Forsskol lot in Laurel Hill Cemetery. She m. late in 1863 or early 1864 JOHNSON LUNT.

From the above account it seems quite evident that Abraham Forsskol blended in easily with the members of the local community. No evidence has been uncovered of any contact with Sweden after his arrival in America. He married a Yankee and his daughters married Yankees. But what of his Swedish background? A very interesting, if erroneous, account appears in the Redlon genealogy:

"Abraham Forsskoll was born at Gottenburgh, Sweden, Jan. 22, 1790, and came over to America with Captain Tucker, an old shipmaster of Portland, before the war of 1812, intending to return; but the vessels of

Tucker were taken for privateering service, and young Forsskoll learned the cabinet-maker's trade in Portland. He was a son of John-Carl Forsskoll, a physician, and left a brother and five sisters in Sweden. One uncle was a bishop. He settled in Saco and carried on business with Mr. Buckminster. Was many years town-clerk; a neat penman."¹³

The Captain Tucker mentioned in this account was undoubtedly Capt. Daniel Tucker (1760–1823), a well-known Portland merchant and public office holder who owned and captained many ships. According to a published history of Portland he served as Swedish Consul after the Embargo of 1807.¹⁴ Abraham Forsskol applied for United States citizenship at the February, 1826 term of the York County [Maine] Court of Common Pleas, and received it exactly three years later. The naturalization certificate reads in part:

“ . . . he was born in Hallistadt in the Kingdom of Sweden, Jan. 22, A.D. 1790; that in September, A.D. 1803, he arrived at Portland in this state . . . ”¹⁵

Generally speaking, passenger lists to the United States are few and scattered prior to 1820 when they began to be kept by the federal government. However, if the clues provided by the Redlon genealogy and Forsskol's naturalization are correct, we have the information necessary for determining the ship upon which Forsskol arrived in America. The *Eastern Argus*, one of Maine's preeminent newspapers of the early nineteenth century, fortuitously began publication on 8 Sept. 1803. Nothing of interest in the “ship news” column appears in September, but in the issue of Thursday, 13 Oct. 1803, we find the following announcement:

“Mon. Oct. 10, Arrived, brig George, capt. Tucker, from St. Lucie, 33 days.”¹⁶

It is possible that Forsskol was mistaken in recalling the exact month of his arrival when making application for citizenship more than twenty years later. The fact that Tucker was a sea captain who later was appointed Swedish Consul would indicate that he probably was visiting Sweden as early as 1803. Thus it is reasonable to say that these facts fit together, allowing us to presume that Forsskol was a passenger on the *George* when it arrived in Portland in early October 1803.

Hallistadt is the garbled form of the Swedish placename Hällestad. There are parishes by this name in the counties (*Län*) of Malmöhus, Skaraborg and Östergötland. No hint of Forsskol's name can be found in the parish registers of the first two counties, but in Hällestad Parish (Ög.) appears the following entry, here translated into English:

“1790. Jan. 23 Baptized Sven Abraham, the son of Hans Sunesson, a member of the assizes, and his wife, Juliana Ekman, who was born on the 23rd of this month. Witnesses — Jöran Sjöholm, the organist in Sockne-

stugan; Petter Persson in Österby; Nils Renström, an innkeeper in Österby; Cherstin Olofsdotter, a wife in Österby; Cherstin Persdotter, a wife in Österby and Maria Carlsdotter, a servant in Österby."¹⁷

Could this Sven Abraham Hansson, baptized 23 Jan. 1790, be identical with our Abraham Forsskol, born 22 Jan. 1790? The answer is to be found in an entry in the Hällestad church records, which shows that on 21 May 1789 Hans Sunesson, a juror of the assizes and a widower in Österby, married Juliana Ekman, a widow of [illegible], for which marriage banns had been said three times. Following this is a long explanation of the estate inventories of the groom and the bride and provisions for the guardianship and care of the minor children of each; in the case of Juliana, the five minor children in her marriage to *Dr. Jonas Gustaf Forsskål*.¹⁸ On the basis of all this evidence there seems to be little doubt that Sven Abraham Hansson of Österby in the parish of Hällestad is identical with Abraham Forsskol of Maine.

The unanswered question remains: why did he alter his name upon coming to America? I can only imagine that it was from a desire to associate himself with a prominent Swedish family, and to rid himself of the anonymous-sounding patronymic.

Dr. Jonas Gustaf Forsskål, former husband of Abraham Forsskol's mother, was from a prominent family. He himself was a physician, and died in Örebro 23 Dec. 1783. His father, Johan Forsskål, was *pastor primarius* of the Maria Magdalena Church in Stockholm and was born in Sagu, Finland 28 Aug. 1691. The Forsskål family was quite prominent in Finland and its earliest clergyman had signed the document of the Conclave of Uppsala in 1593.¹⁹

Abraham's father, Hans Sunesson, was born in Österby in Hällestad 25 Aug. 1738, the son of Sune Olofsson and Ingrid Hansdotter. He married first, at Hällestad 23 Oct. 1761, Gertrud Nilsdotter, born in Grytgöl, Hällestad Parish 16 April 1723, daughter of Nils Andersson and Ingrid Håkansdotter. Little else is known of him. His last mention in the records is his appearance on a household examination roll for Österby Södergård in Hällestad in which he is called a former juror of the assizes, had arrived from Vadst[ena] in 1802 and was now in the poorhouse (*Fattighuset*).¹⁷

The following ancestor table summarizes our knowledge of the family of Abraham Forsskol:

1. FORSSKOL, Abraham/HANSSON, Sven Abraham, bp. Hällestad (Ög.), Sweden 23 Jan. 1790; entered the United States via the port of Portland, possibly on board the brig *George*, 10 Oct. 1803; d. Saco, ME 21 May 1864.
- I. 2. SUNESSON, Hans, b. Österby, Hällestad Parish (Ög.) 25 Aug. 1738; living there in 1802; m. (1) Hällestad 23 Oct. 1761, NILSDOTTER, Gertrud; m. (2) Hällestad 21 May 1789

3. EKMAN, Ulrica Juliana, b. Veta Parish (Ög.) 31 Dec. 1755; m. (1) 2 Oct. 1775, DAHLBOM, Anders Gustaf; m. (2) 20 May 1777, FORSSKÅL, Dr. Jonas Gustaf.²⁰
- II. 4. OLOFSSON, Sune, of Hällestad Parish (Ög.).
5. HANSDOTTER, Ingrid
6. EKMAN, Carl Magnus, b. Mörlunda Parish (Kalm.) 28 Feb. 1712; d. Veta Parish (Ög.) 28 July 1781; m. Målilla Parish (Kalm.) 19 Nov. 1752
7. MORIN, Anna Maria, b. Vissefjärda Parish (Kalm.) 2 Jan. 1724; d. Veta Parish (Ög.) 26 Aug. 1775.²¹
- III. 12. EKMAN, Carl, overseer (*inspektör*).²⁰
13. HJORT, Maria.
14. MORIN, Folke, b. in Kalmar in the 1680s; lecturer in Greek in the college preparatory school in Kalmar; d. Kalmar 12 March 1730.²¹
15. HEDERSTIERNA, Sara, b. 1702; d. Gårdveda parish (Kalm.) 10 Oct. 1760.
- IV. 28. MORIN, Lars Bengtsson, city treasurer in Kalmar.²¹
30. SCHERNA, Erland, b. Båstad 1676; ennobled 1717 with the name *Hederstierna*,²² d. Karlskrona 17 Nov. 1730.
31. PAULIN, Anna Christina, d. 1706.
- V. 60. SCHERNA, Magnus, customs official in Båstad.
61. PAULIN, Sara.
62. PAULIN, Magnus.
63. RAVN, Ottiliana Rasmusdotter.

—oOo—

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¹*First Book of Records of the Town of Pepperrellborough, now the City of Saco* (Portland, ME 1896), p. 209.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 52, 53.

³G. T. Ridlon, *History of the Ancient Ryedales . . . and the Families of Riddell, Riddle, Ridlon, Ridley, etc.* (1884), p. 652.

⁴York County Deeds, 136:158; recorded 17 May 1830.

⁵*Ibid.*, 281:312.

⁶*Ibid.*, 258:396; recorded 3 July 1858.

⁷U.S. Census for 1850, Maine, York Co., Saco, No. 162–181; U.S. Census for 1860, Maine, York Co., Saco, No. 596–599.

⁸York County Probate, No. 6076.

⁹*The Maine Democrat*, Saco, ME, Tuesday Morning, 24 May, 1864, p. 3, col. 2 calls him "Abraham Forsskol, Esq." An intriguing death notice appeared in the 28 March issue of the same paper: "In California, Jan. 25, of dropsy of the heart, Abraham Forsskol, formerly of Monroe [Maine], 2d son of J. P. and Betsy Cousens, 38 yrs. 5 months." Evidently there was an intimate friendship between the Forsskol and the Cousens families.

¹⁰York County Probate, No. 9259.

¹¹Boston *Transcript*, Wednesday, 7 July 1897, p. 5, col. 4.

¹²York County Probate, No. 4277.

¹³G. T. Ridlon, *Ridlon Family*, p. 652n.

¹⁴William Willis, *The History of Portland, from 1632 to 1864* . . . (Portland 1865), pp. 845–846.

¹⁵York County Court of Common Pleas, Vol. 44 (Feb. Term, 1826), Docket No. 454; Vol. 48 (Feb. Term, 1829), Docket No. 857; Maine State Archives, Augusta, ME.

¹⁶*Eastern Argus*, Portland, ME, Thursday 13 Oct. 1803, p. 3. The *George* was a brig of 148 tons with two decks. It was put up for sale immediately after its arrival in Portland, according to an advertisement that ran in the *Eastern Argus* beginning 20 Oct.

¹⁷Church Records, Hällestad, Östergötlands län (LDS Roll No. 151237).

¹⁸*Ibid.*, (LDS Roll No. 151226).

¹⁹Gunnar Hellström, *Stockholms stads herdaminne* (Stockholm 1951), pp. 368–369; K. G. Leinberg, *Åbo stifts herdaminne* (Helsingfors 1903), p. 186.

²⁰Johan Alfred Westerlund, Johan Axel Setterdahl and Erik Meurling, *Linköpings stifts herdaminne*, I-IV (Kalmar 1951), I, p. 176.

²¹Bror Olsson, *Kalmar stifts herdaminne*, I-IV (Kalmar 1951), I, p. 176.

²²Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, I-IX (Stockholm 1925–1936), III, pp. 514–515.

Death in Paris

One of our loyal subscribers, Cameron Allen of Columbus, OH, spotted the following item in going through microfilms of dispatches from U.S. consuls to the Department of State from 1790 to 1906 at our nation's National Archives. The document deals with an American tailor, with the obvious Swedish name of Ernest Nystrom, who, though born in New York, died in Paris, France 19 Oct. 1858. In translation from the French, the language in which the original dispatch was written, the document has the following wording:

“City of Paris

City Hall of the Ninth Arrondissement. Extract from the Civil Register for 1858.

On the twentieth of October one thousand eight hundred fifty eight at ten o'clock in the morning, the death was reported concerning Mr. Ernest Nystrom, tailor, who died yesterday, at eight thirty o'clock in the morning at his place of business, Notre Dame No. 4, at the age of thirty five, born in New York (America), dwelling at Rue St. Nicolas d'Antry No. 3, Hotel Europe. He was a bachelor and the declaration was made by Mr. Manuel Lerendu, fifty six years old and Marie Trost, seamstress, thirty eight years old, both of them employees and domiciled at the address of the establishment, Notre Dame No. 4.”

We know very little about Ernest Nystrom, except that Daggett's City Directory for New York, dated 1850–1851, lists Ernst Nystrom as a tailor with an address at 379 Sixth Ave. He is not listed in the accelerated index of the Federal census, of 1850. If any reader can furnish further information concerning this Parish inhabitant, it would be interesting to know where Nystrom came from and why he settled in Paris. He may even have been a Swedish immigrant, despite the reference to his having been born in New York.