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Two Early Swedes in New York

Erik Wikén*

The Swedish weekly newspaper, *Uddevalla Veckoblad*, published in Uddevalla, ran the following story on 13 Sept. 1833:

“Approximately thirty years ago a young man, the son of a clergyman in Bohuslän, left for America as a sailor. There he remained, without ever again contacting anyone in his homeland.

Carl Berg, which, with a minor change, is his name. In 1825 his nephew, the son of his sister, as a twenty-year old, also attempted to seek his fortune in America. We shall call him Dahl, which in reality was the final syllable of his name. In order to carry out his intention of going to America, he departed for Karlskrona, where a naval frigate was being outfitted for a journey. Young Dahl signed on the vessel and arrived safely at his destination. Since he had heard that New York was a place where one could make one's fortune, he went there. Though his cash reserves were low, he nevertheless decided to visit an inn, where several persons had congregated, reading the latest newspapers. During the course of his stay he asked if anyone could tell him where a young Swede might find employment. A person in the crowd stepped forward and asked the young man in Swedish, from what part of Sweden he hailed. Dahl answered: ‘From Bohuslän and my name is Dahl.’ The man asked him, ‘What is your mother's name?’ Dahl answered, ‘Her name is Lena Berg.’ The man rushed forward to take Dahl in his arms, saying: ‘I am Carl Berg, who left Sweden long ago and you are my sister's son. Come with me home. I am married and am a wealthy man. In our home you will be received in the same warm manner as if you were in the home of your parents.’ Dahl accepted the invitation of his maternal uncle with joy. He was immediately placed in a navigation school and became a clever sailor. His most recent letter to his parents tells of the fact that he is married, has a child and is the skipper of a steamship, with which he had earned a large income.”

Who were these two emigrants—the clergyman's son, whose name had been slightly changed to Carl Berg, and his nephew, who only used the final syllable of his family name, calling himself Dahl? According to the newspaper account, the nephew had departed in 1825 aboard a frigate out of Karlskrona. This information immediately calls to mind the episode of the naval vessel deal of 1825, which involved two Swedish naval vessels, the *Tapperheten* and the *af Chapman*, which according to Nils William Olsson “were involved in a deal

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between Sweden and Colombia, by which the Swedish vessels were to be sold to the new South American republic. When international complications threatened, the sale was stopped and the vessels went from Cartagena to New York in 1826 and were sold at auction there."¹ The crew lists for both ships have been preserved,² and in the crew list of *Tapperheten* we find Jonas D. Otterdahl. According to the biographical dictionary of the clergymen in the Diocese of Göteborg, we find that he was the son of an associate clergyman (*komminister*) in the Lyse church of Bro Parish (Göt.) by the name of Carl Magnus Otterdahl, and his wife, Helena Fredrika Svenberg, as well as the information that he emigrated to America.³

Helena Fredrika Svenberg (the Lena Berg of the newspaper story) was the daughter of an associate clergyman in the Bärfendal church in Tossene Parish (Göt.) named Jonas Svenberg and his first wife, Juliana Helin,⁴ and among the children we also find Carl Olof Svenberg (the Carl Berg of the newspaper account).⁵

Carl Olof Svenberg was probably born in 1788. I have found nothing concerning his life in America, beyond that which is mentioned in the Uddevalla newspaper. Nils William Olsson has found a notice of Carl or Charles Swenberg in the Port of New Orleans crew lists, which indicates that on 5 Aug. 1817 a Carl Swenberg, a native of Sweden and a resident of New Orleans, signed on board the brig *Free Love* of New Orleans, destined for Campeche, a city in Yucatan, Mexico. On 15 Nov. of the same year, a Charles Swenberg, a native of Göteborg and a resident of New Orleans, signed on board the brig *Tippo Saib* of New Orleans, also destined for Campeche.⁶

Jonas Daniel Otterdahl was born in Lassehaga, Lyse Parish (a part of Bro Parish) (Göt.) 12 April 1804. In 1820 he moved to the Cathedral Parish (*Domkyrkoförsamlingen*) in Göteborg and then departed 20 May 1825 "for sea voyages".

While the two Swedish naval vessels were docked in New York in 1826, he probably signed off or perhaps jumped ship in conformity with another Swede, Carl Gustaf Gripenschütz, who enlisted in the United States Marine Corps and who on 23 Oct. 1877 was honorably discharged after 51 years of service.⁷ Other crew members who came off the *af Chapman* were Olof Gustaf Hedström, who later became the well-known Methodist pastor of the Bethel Ship in New York Harbor,⁸ Johan Peter Hägerlund, who became a merchant in Richmond, Fort Bend Co., Texas,⁹ and Gustaf Fredrik Berghman, who for a time was employed at the U.S Army Academy at West Point, but who in 1837 was living in Mobile, AL.¹⁰

Concerning Otterdahl and his descendants in America, it has been possible for Nils William Olsson to come up with a few additional facts, partly from archival sources and partly from a couple of articles in *Encyclopedia of American Biography*.¹¹ Otterdahl married in New York 31 Aug. 1830 Mary Wanzer (Wonza) and by this time changed his name to Dale.¹² His son, Charles Gideon Dale (1831-1891), the oldest of nine children, was born 26 June 1831. He became an outstanding naval engineer. An exhaustive article concerning him

and his accomplishments is to be found in the *Encyclopedia* mentioned above.¹³ He married in 1854 Cordelia Lauretta Von Katten. A granddaughter of this couple was Ida Dudley Dale (who died in 1955), “artist and writer of Americana”, and who also has been given an article in the *Encyclopedia*.¹⁴

¹Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820-1850* (Stockholm and Chicago, IL 1967) (SPANY), p. 5, n. 22.

²The crew list of *Tapperheten* is in the *Carl August Gyllengranat Collection* in the Royal War Archives in Stockholm, whereas the crew list of the *af Chapman* is in the *Nordenskjöld Collection*, Vol. 51 (E4928) in the National Archives (*Riksarkivet*) in Stockholm.

³Carl Wilhelm Skarstedt, *Göteborgs stifts herdaminne* (Lund 1885), p. 261. Ot(t)erdahl is a well-known family, which took its name from Otterhällan, a height in the old city of Göteborg. For more information concerning this family, see *Svenska Slaktkalendern* (Stockholm 1967), pp. 290-291.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 877, 1148. The parish records of Tossene and Bärfendal have been destroyed by fire.

⁵According to an estate inventory (*bouppteckning*) of Juliana Helin, dated 20 May 1790 in *Bouppteckningar från Tunge med flera härader (Estate Inventories from Tunge and other hundreds)*, 1790:1443 in Göteborg *Landsarkiv* (Göteborg District Archives).

⁶*Port of New Orleans Crew Lists for 1817* in the National Archives, Washington, DC.

⁷Nils William Olsson, “Gripenschütz” in *Swedish American Genealogist*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1981, p. 37. Gripenschütz received a passport in Göteborg 22 July 1820 for travel to America. If he actually left for America, he must have returned soon thereafter inasmuch as from 1822 to the time he boarded the *Tapperheten* he was a volunteer in the Fifth Squadron of The Crown Prince’s Hussar Regiment (*Kronprinsens husaregemente*). - The Archives of *Kronprinsens husaregemente*, Vols. 237-241 in the Royal War Archives (*Krigsarkivet*), Stockholm.

⁸SPANY, p. 13, n. 55.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 59, n. 36; Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in U.S. Ports 1820-1850 (except New York)*. (Stockholm and Minneapolis, MN 1979), p. 92.

¹⁰Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, I-IX (Stockholm 1925-1936), I, p. 347; “Svensk-norske konsuln i New York Henrik Gahn till Kommerskollegium 1 Nov. 1831” (Swedish-Norwegian Consul in New York, Henrik Gahn, to the Swedish Board of Trade 1 Nov. 1831) in *Kommerskollegii arkiv* (The Archives of the Board of Trade) in the National Archives (*Riksarkivet*) Stockholm; “Sven Magnus Svensson to Carl Reinhold Nordenskjöld”, dated Richmond, TX 1 April 1840 in Albin Widén, *När Svensk-Amerika grundades* (Stockholm 1961), p. 16.

¹¹*Encyclopedia of American Biography*, New Series (New York 1935).

¹²Jonas Daniel Dale of the City of New York and Mary Wonza, also of the City of New York, were married 31 Aug. 1830 by the Rev. Frederick C. Schaeffer, according to a certificate filed with the City of New York 13 Sept. 1830 (*Marriages Performed by the Various Mayors and Aldermen of the City of New York, as well as Justices of the Peace, etc. 1830-1854*), compiled and edited by Roy S. Sawyer 1936. (Typescript in the New England Historic Genealogical Society, Boston, MA), In 1838-1839 the sailor’s mate by the name of Jonas D. Dale was residing at 11 Essex Street in New York City according to *Longworth’s American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory* (New York 1838), p. 191.

¹³*Encyclopedia*, pp. 435-438.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 445-447.

Long Generations

Ruby Didrickson Sloane, b. in Roslindale, Meeker Co., MN 8 May 1895, d. in Arleta, CA 10 Aug. 1983. Her mother, Sara Mathilda Sandström, was b. in East Lake Lillian Township, Kandiyohi Co., MN 18 Oct. 1872, the dau. of Anders Ersson Sandström, who at the time of his daughter’s birth was 67 years old. He was b. in Färila Parish (Gäv.) 20 July 1805. The difference between the birth of the grandfather and the death of the granddaughter is here 178 years. A grandson, the last to bear the name Sandström, is still living in Seattle, WA.

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