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Suzanne Erickson Wallace

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Hulda's story

- the tragic early death of a young Swedish maid

BY SUZANNE ERICKSON WALLACE

So many of our family stories turn out to be far removed from the truth when generations pass them on to new generations. A distant relative, living in Sweden, contacted me a few years ago to find information regarding his Grand aunt Hulda Johansson, who had, as he had been told, died in Chicago of a gas accident at age 18 in 1899.

Hulda Christina Johansson was born in 1881 June 3 in Tofteryd Prästgård in Tofteryd (Jönk.), the daughter of Christina and Johan Johansson. Her older sister Emma had emigrated from Tofteryd (Jönk.) to Chicago in 1895, and Hulda followed her there in 1897 from Tofteryd.

of Austin Baker, a veterinarian. Hulda was most likely living there as a servant and not as just a boarder because the 1900 census, the year following Hulda's death, lists another young girl from Sweden residing in the Baker household as a servant.

The Newberry Library searched for a death certificate. I also looked, but none has been found. The state of Illinois did not strictly require death filings until 1916. Now I am searching for Hulda's place of burial. I have been to most of the oldest cemeteries in Chicago in my search.

The story handed down through generations turns out to be true but remains unfinished for me until I can find where Hulda lies buried.

WOMAN IS SMOTHERED BY GAS. Hulda Johnson.
Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1922): Nov 26, 1899;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988)
pg. 2

WOMAN IS SMOTHERED BY GAS.

Hulda Johnson, 5651 Peoria Street, Tries to Shut Off a Leaking Stove and Is Overcome.

Hulda Johnson, 18 years old, was asphyxiated by gas in her room at the residence of Austin H. Baker, 5651 Peoria street, yesterday morning. While attempting to shut off the gas supplied to a small heating stove she was overcome by the fumes and fell on the stove. When found her right arm and side were severely burned.

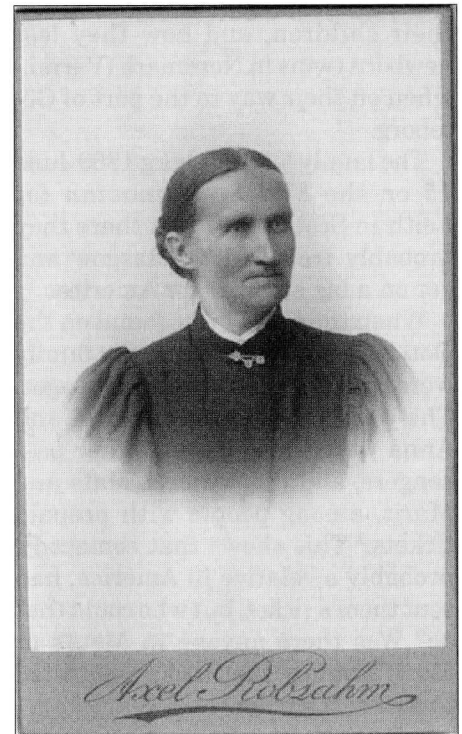
Friday night Miss Johnson visited friends in the neighborhood until a late hour. When she returned it is supposed she lighted the gas stove to warm the room. The door leading to it was closed, and it is supposed the young woman went to bed leaving the stove in full blast. The result was that the stove generated more gas than was consumed and the poisonous vapor partly asphyxiated the sleeper.

It was apparent that she had risen in a dazed condition, gone to the stove to turn off the gas, and fallen insensible. A Coroner's jury returned a verdict of death by accidental asphyxiation.

From the Tribune information, which was found by the Newberry Library, I continued my search and found that the weekend of Hulda's death was probably Thanksgiving time. The address given in the article was that



Hulda Christina Johansson (1881-1899).



Christina Johannesdotter (1842-1903).



Emma Johansdotter / Johnson (1875-?).

Emma, Hulda's sister

In 1893 Emma moved from her mother's home in Hagshult to Tofteryd, and then in 1895 immigrated to the U.S. She left from Göteborg on March 29 and had a ticket for La Porte, Indiana.

Then Suzanne writes "I do have some facts. First, Emma must have been notified of Hulda's death, probably by her employer or by the police, and Emma must have been the one to notify their mother in Sweden. The 1890s and early 1900s Chicago city directories are online through the Newberry Library include names, addresses, and occupations. It is not possible, however, with the city directory to identify which of the Emma Johnsons could be our Emma.

"We assume she was in Chicago though. I did find her husband in the 1910 city directory living at 2224 Kedvale and working as a motorman. Secondly, I cannot find Emma in the 1900 and 1910 census. In the 1920 census an Emma and husband Emil Carlson are listed at 2224 Kedvale with a daughter Evelyn age 11. The first verified piece of information is the 1930 census, listing Emma and the husband Emil Carlson, along with a 21-year-old daughter Evelyn, and a nephew named Carl Ekstrom living at 2237 S. Keeler, just a block away from the 1920 census address on Kedvale. We know this entry is correct because Lars [my source/relative in Sweden] has a photo of Carl Ekstrom at the S. Keeler address. Lars first told me the nephew's name was Carl Våge Johansson. The name Ekstrom, Våge's mother's maiden name which he used while in America, was easier for me to find. This nephew returned to Sweden and died there. According to this 1930 census Emma's husband was a motorman for the Street Car Company surface lines, which my relative Lars had been told. On the census, daughter Evelyn Christina Carlson was a teacher for the Chicago city schools. "The 1940 census is now online and indicates that Emma, Emil, and daughter Evelyn were still all alive, with the same occupations, and still living at

the Keeler address.

"According to Lars, Emma also had a daughter named Ruth Mathilda born about 4-5 years before Evelyn. Ruth should have been on the 1920 census as she was about 15 years of age, but she is not listed there. So, Emma's first daughter remains a mystery.

"I have been to several Chicago cemeteries searching for Hulda and for Emma and Emil with no success. I have one more cemetery to visit; it is the oldest one in Chicago. Emma and Emil could have moved out of Chicago after 1940 to the suburbs, but in what direction? Without the date of Emma's death, or her husband's, it is nearly impossible because the names are so common. For sure there was a daughter Evelyn, but what about the daughter Ruth in the photo? I need to have Lars go over all the old letters he has once more for clues about Emma and her daughters. I have much more research to do."



Emma Johnson and Emil Carlson.

The author is
Suzanne Erickson Wallace.
Her e-mail is:
<jsw0731@frontier.com>

Appendix: Hulda's family

Hulda was the 6th child in the family of Johan Johannesson, born 1840 July 2 in Tofteryd, and his wife Christina Johannedotter, born 1842 May 7 in Hagshult. Johan and Christina were married in 1869 May 29 in Hagshult, where Christina was a maid at Torp Norregård, and the groom a farmhand in Boarp in Tofteryd.

They soon had a large family:

- d. Anna Carolina, b. 1871 Jun. 21 in Tofteryd, as most were of the children.
- s. Carl August, b. 1873 Apr. 1.
- d. Emma Mathilda, b. 1875 Sep. 15.
- s. Johannes Fritiof, b. 1877 Oct. 28.
- s. Anders Viktor, b. 1879 Nov. 30, d. 1885 Dec. 25 in Hagshult, no cause of death listed.
- d. Hulda Christina, b. 1881 Jun. 3.
- s. Johan Gustaf, b. 1883 Apr. 3 in Hagshult.

When Johan and Christina were first married they lived in cottage Hagen on Sjöeryd lands in Tofteryd, then moved sometime in the 1870s to Tofteryd Prästgård, where Johan was a tenant farmer. In 1882 they moved to Jönshult Södregård in Hagshult, where Johan was again a tenant farmer, and in 1883 they moved to Kushult, also in Hagshult, where Johan died in 1885 of intestinal obstruction (*tarmvred*).

Widow Christina and the children moved in 1890 to the dug-out Segerholmen on Starkeryd lands, also in Hagshult. It was from this place that Hulda emigrated in 1897. She got her moving-out testimony (*flyttningsbetyg*) on May 31 and travelled to the port of Göteborg, where she boarded a smaller steamer on July 21, and sailed for England. On July 24 she left from Liverpool on the steamer *S/S Lucania* and arrived at Ellis Island, New York, on July 31, and she was going to her sister E. Johanson in La Porte, Indiana.

In 1899 Nov. 19 the widow Christina moved to Tofteryd, where she lived with her children at cottage Molund #2. The head of the household was her oldest son, the blacksmith Carl August Johansson. He married in 1903 June 21 to Anna Ekström, born 1874 Mar. 26 in Tofteryd, and they had a son, Holger Josef, born 1904 June 12.

Unfortunately his grandmother Christina never saw this grandchild as she died 1903 Jan. 16 at Molund in Tofteryd, of cancer in the larynx.

Elisabeth Thorsell