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My family history & the Swedish Baptist General Conference of America

(Svenska baptisternas i Amerika allmänna konferens)

BY RON FLODINE

It has become apparent through my genealogical research that a strong relationship existed between the Swedish Baptist General Conference of America and my family for many decades starting in the 1880s. In fact, the eventual coming together of both sides of my family is directly tied to associations with the Swedish Baptist General Conference.

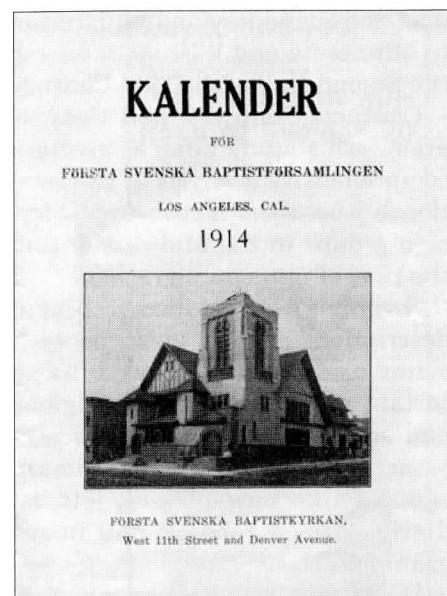
My four grandparents emigrated from Sweden in the 1880s and 1890s for various reasons. I do not have enough knowledge of their lives in Sweden to be able to accurately recount all of those motives, but it seems apparent that each had a strong faith grounded in the Baptist tradition. This was unusual for the time given the fact that the Lutheran Church was the state church as sanctioned by the Swedish government. In fact, since the late 17th century, all Lutheran parish clergymen were in effect continuous census takers required by law to record all births, deaths, and marriages in their respective parishes (*församlingar*). I surmise that they were aware of a strong Swedish Baptist presence in America under the auspices of the Swedish Baptist General Conference.

The two sides of my family had connections long before either my father or mother knew each other. It is reasonable to assume that they would not have met until 1943, when my mother, Hanna A. Omark, moved to Los Angeles and started to attend the Eleventh Street Baptist Church. In large part, her attendance at that church was due to that fact that her brother, Reverend Edwin J. Omark,

was the pastor. My father, along with his mother and sister, started attending the church in 1910, and he became a member in 1917 when he reached the age of 16. At that time, the church was called *Första Svenska Baptistförsamlingen i Los Angeles* (The First Swedish Baptist Church of Los Angeles) and had been founded in 1889.

The first link

But going back decades before, the first intertwining of family histories started to unfold. That first link would not have been apparent to the persons involved since it took years for the connection to occur. A little background here is required: My paternal grandfather, Lars Erik Carlsson, came to the United States in 1882, changed his name to Lawrence Eric Flodine, and settled in Warren, Pennsylvania. When Lars left his parish, Floda församling in Södermanland län (county), he was given a *flyttningsbevis*, literally “proof of removal,” which stated that he was leaving the parish and going to “Norra Amerika.” This document is dated 1882 Mar. 7, one day after his 18th birthday. The record is not clear as to how long Lars, now Lawrence, stayed in Warren, Pennsylvania, but a “certificate of naturalization” was executed 1887 May 4 in Warren. The First Swedish Baptist Church of Warren was incorporated in 1890 (name changed to Calvary Baptist Church in 1932). Was he involved with its fledgling congregation before moving on?



From family documents, it is known that by 1890 Lawrence was living in Chicago. On 1892 Aug. 27 Lawrence married Hilma C. Carlson in Englewood (Chicago). He was 27 years of age and she was 22. The officiating minister was Carl G. Lagergren, who was dean of the Swedish Baptist Seminary which became Bethel Theological Seminary (it has been in various locations over the years) from 1889 to 1922. Since my mother's brother Edwin J. Omark was dean of Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, from 1948 to 1964, this eventual link between the two families began at this time.

Another link

In 1894, Lawrence and Hilma had a daughter, Clara, who tragically died 1904 Apr. 10 of septic meningitis. Hilma died 1896 Aug. 22 at 25 years of

age of “septic orbital cellulitis” (a dangerous infection in the eye socket).

Lawrence was married again on November 24, 1897, to Ida Elisabeth Göransson; the officiating minister was Eric Rosén, pastor of the *Första Svenska Baptistförsamlingen i Englewood* (Chicago). He was also one of the founders of the Oak Hill Cemetery in Chicago which became the final resting place for Lawrence Flodine in February 1904 and of his daughter just 1½ months later. In addition, Reverend Rosén founded Fridhem, Home of Rest, 11400 Crescent Avenue, Morgan Park (Chicago) in 1905. Here, the second linkage occurs – my mother’s sister, Ellen Omark Ward Ericson, was matron of Fridhem for many years.



Lawrence Flodine and Ida Göransson married 1897 Nov. 24 in Chicago.

To California

After the death of my grandfather, Lawrence E. Flodine, my grandmother, Ida Elisabeth Göransson Flodine stayed in Chicago for a few years before moving to Los Angeles in 1910 with her two children, Ethel Louise (b. 1898) and Lawrence Eric (b. 1900) along with her mother, stepfather, and half-sister. According to church records, all of them started attending the First Swedish Baptist

Church of Los Angeles. This church would play an important part in the lives of members of my family from then on for decades. As previously stated, my father, Lawrence Flodine (Junior, although he never used that designation since his father had died when he was young), became a member of the church in 1917.

In 1930, Reverend Edwin J. Omark, my mother’s brother, accepted the call to be the pastor of the First Swedish Baptist Church of Los Angeles. He remained in that capacity until November 1943. In 1940, the name of the church was changed to the Eleventh Street Baptist Church of Los Angeles. So Reverend Omark was the minister to my father, his mother, and his sister from 1930 until 1943. (I have a picture of my grandmother, Ida E. Göransson Flodine, standing next to my uncle Edwin and his wife, Marie, in front of their home in Los Angeles in 1932. My grandmother would have had no idea that fourteen years later, her son would marry Reverend Omark’s sister).

My mother, Hanna A. Omark, was born in Kewanee, Illinois, in 1909, the youngest of six children. She was brought up in the Swedish Baptist Church of Kewanee (name changed to Calvary Baptist Church in 1931). Her parents, Peter John Omark and Hanna Christina Englund, were two of the founders of the church in 1901. She lived in Kewanee until 1943, when she made her way to Los Angeles, influenced in part by the fact that her brother was minister of the local Baptist church there. She lived away from Kewanee for a year starting in August 1936 when she attended Bethel Institute in St. Paul, Minnesota, and received a certificate in Bible and religious education in the Junior College Department 1937 June 11.

In 1943, she moved to Los Angeles and started attending the Eleventh Street Baptist Church where she met Lawrence Flodine. This link brought the two families together in a permanent way since they married 1946 Aug. 20 at the Calvary Baptist Church in Kewanee with her brother

Edwin as officiating minister.

He had left Los Angeles in the latter part of 1943 and was professor of practical theology at Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul at the time; and, as previously mentioned, subsequently became dean of the seminary in 1948.

The importance of the Baptist connection

As I stated at the beginning of this article, the Swedish Baptist General Conference of America, which became the Baptist General Conference of America in 1945, was central to my family’s history. The Swedish Baptist churches gave a sense of belonging and inclusion in an immigrant community so far from the “Old Country.” The strong faith in God and communion with those of the same religious beliefs provided strength and hope, and gave the impetus for starting a new life in the United States.

My Swedish background

A brief biography of the members of my family who comprise the focus of this narrative follows:

Farfar

Lars Erik Carlsson was born on 1864 Mar. 6 at Haga, village of Bie, Floda församling, (Södm). His father, Carl Johan Andersson was born in the same place on 1825 Nov. 25 and his mother Stina Cajsa Larsdotter was born 1826 Sep. 12 in the parish of Stora Malm, (Södm). He followed his brother, Anders August, to the United States in 1882, changed his name to Lawrence Eric Flodine, and initially settled in Warren, Pennsylvania.

Farmor

Ida Elisabeth Göransson was born on 1876 Mar. 29, in the village of Gamlestilla, Torsåker, (Gäst.). Her father was Karl August Göransson, born 1845 Jul. 3 in the parish of Hedemora, (Dala.). He died when Ida was only five years old 1881 June 7. Ida’s mother was Anna Louisa Hägg, born 1852 June 19, in the village of Gysinge, Österfärnebo (Gäst.). Ida

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