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Ester Karolina – a Värmland emigrant

One of the Swedish maids who left their home for a new life.

BY CARLA PETERSON SULLIVAN (†)

When I started doing genealogy in September of 1994, I planned on only researching my grandfather Peterson ancestors because I knew nothing about my grandmother Zetterlund. Because she died when my father was so very young, he remembered very little about her. All he told me was she died in 1917 in Springfield, MA, and of course she was born in Sweden. My grandfather also died before I was born so I never had an opportunity to talk with my grandparents.

Before my father died in 1981, he decided to try and find his mother's gravesite. I can remember him talking with a funeral director and asking him to try and find this for him as he wanted to make arrangements to have his mother moved and placed with his father in the New Swedish Cemetery. Unfortunately, he was told that they had found that the cemetery records had burned and there was no way of telling where in the cemetery his mother was buried. This fact made him very, very unhappy and he never talked about it again.

Therefore, I knew it would not be possible for me, a novice genealogist, to locate any information or records regarding my grandmother Ester or her family.

A hopeless task?

Wrong, wrong, wrong!!! Basically all the information about Ester I had or had heard was incorrect.

The following is the story of how I found Ester and the continuing research to learn more about her family in the United States and Sweden. I knew the year that Ester married Otto, in Springfield, as I had a copy

of their marriage certificate. The first fact I noticed was that in the U.S. her name was spelled Setterlund. Otto was listed in the city directories, in Springfield until 1915. My father Carl Joseph was born there on October 15, 1912, and his sister, Lydia, in 1914. Then, they disappeared. My mother said she thought my father said they lived in Connecticut for a little while.

I went to Waltham to research the 1920 Connecticut census to see if perhaps I could find my grandfather Otto and the two children. To my complete amazement not only did I find Otto, my father, and his sister, but Ester was also listed. This could not be correct, she died in 1917! I was told that perhaps the husband was afraid that if no mother was listed, he would lose his children, so he included her name on the census? Not knowing how to pursue this I simply went to the library, got the names and telephone numbers of all the cemeteries in Connecticut and started calling each, asking if they had an Ester Peterson buried there.

Unbelievably, it only took three or four telephone calls until on Nov. 1, 1995, one of the cemeteries told me that they indeed had an Ester Peterson buried there; she died in June 1920. Unfortunately this was the only information that they had: no address, no age, and no name of the person who had bought the plot. Thus, no way of knowing if this was my grandmother or not.

Nov. 9, 1995: Off to Bridgeport. I go to try and get a death certificate for the person buried at this cemetery. It was a long shot, but I had to find out. Bridgeport is ca 110 miles from my home, but I still had to find

out. After finding the correct building, I purchased a copy of the death certificate, and it was my grandmother Ester! The address on this certificate was the same address as on the 1920 census and it listed my grandfather Otto as her husband.

While walking back to the car I saw a library just across the street. Off we go to see if perhaps Otto is listed in the city directories, and dreamer that I am maybe, just maybe an obituary for Ester. Otto was not in any of the Bridgeport city directories, however, Ester had an obituary!!! Even the librarians were surprised and thrilled that I had found this. We left the library truly amazed at our finding this day.

Off to the Mountain Grove cemetery

The office personnel was very nice and explained that the little information they had is all that is legally required. The cemetery is very large and a nice man drove as we followed, to show us where Ester's grave was. Sadly, it is unmarked.

We went across the street to a monument company and got some pricing on having a stone put on her grave. We now started home still amazed that today I had found my grandmother...

No one in my family could believe that I had found Ester's grave after what my father had been told. Actually I found it unbelievable.

To finish the story of Ester's gravesite: my family and I discussed what we should do as we knew my father was very unhappy thinking his mother's grave would not be visited by his children and grandchildren. My



grandfather is buried in a single grave at the New Swedish Cemetery and with this fact and the knowledge of the difficulties involved in moving a body, we decided to have her memorialized by having her maiden name, date of birth, date of death and the word MOTHER inscribed on my grandfather's monument just below his name and the word Father. This was completed the week of my father's birthday, October 1996, and my sister, mother, husband, and myself went and brought flowers for the first time ever to my grandmother. My father is buried just a few rows up from this grave. My son has since visited it with me and we all plan to continue.

What was her background?

Now to see if I can find out anything about her family. I thought Ester was probably the only Zetterlund that immigrated because if there had been others, wouldn't my father have known something about them? NO! She definitely was not the only Zetterlund who immigrated.

We went to Springfield to search the indexes to the New York passenger records. I found no Ester Zetterlund. However, I found one Ester Setterlund who came in 1910. It did not say from where, but it did say she was a 20-year-old female.

I kept this information until I could go to Pittsfield. We finally got to go to Pittsfield in August of 1996 and again there she was. Ester arrived at the port of New York on Sep. 18, 1910, and she was traveling with her sister Maria Setterlund [both indexed as "Salterlund"], going

to Springfield to what is very difficult to read but I think it says to see her sister B. Johanson. The address is unreadable. There were two sisters, one in Springfield, and it stated that Maria had come previously to the U.S. in 1910.

More pieces to the puzzle fitted nicely into place. I was able to find the 1910 and the 1920 census for MA for Maria in Springfield. I have not been able to locate B. Johanson as of yet.

The passenger record was difficult to read as far as where in Sweden Maria and Ester had come from. I carried this record everywhere for a long time, hoping someone could read it. Many guesses were given but no one could really tell for sure. Thus, without a parish no records of her family could be found. However, I was very happy just to have found her.

*Louis Zetterlund
Sunne*

Later, someone suggested that it could be Sunne, in Värmland.

A letter was written, on my behalf, to the parish of Sunne in Värmland explaining that I was trying to locate any living relatives and thought my grandmother was born in Sunne. Again, more information came listing my grandmother and all her siblings, the addresses of any still living in Sunne and the records of where and when the others moved.

I learned that Ester had many siblings; so far I have been able to find out the following information [added by the editor from Sunne church records]:

Ester Karolina was born 6 Oct. 1889 in Norra Borgeby in Sunne, daughter of the homestead owner Lars Zetterlund (born 8 June 1851 in Norra Råda, Värmland), and his wife Kerstin Persdotter [incorrectly listed as Maria in the birth records], born 3 Jan. 1852 in Sunne, and they had been married 16 Nov. 1875. Several of the siblings also came to the U.S.

Ester's siblings were:

s. *Olof*, b. 16 Aug 1876 in Skog, Gävleborg län.

d. *Betty Kristina*, b. 9 Jan. in Ockelbo, Gävleborg län.

d. *Inga Mathilda*, b. 27 Sep. 1879 in Skog.

d. *Ada Katarina*, b. 19 Dec. 1881 in Skog.

d. *Maria Wiktorina*, b. 21 Feb. 1881 in Skog.

d. *Elin Amanda*, b. 31 May 1885 in Sunne

d. *Emma Alfvida*, b. 25 May 1887 in Sunne.

d. *Lydia Charlotta*, b. 16 Apr. 1896 in Sunne.

They were all living at Norra Borgeby in 1895.

Sources:

Sunne C:15, page 344

Sunne AI:67, page 127

Sunne AI:71, page 134

Sunne AI:75, page 152



Ester Zetterlund (Sätterlund) 1889–1920.

About the author

Carla Peterson Sullivan was an avid genealogist who passed away in 2003. She was passionate about her Swedish ancestry, and tried to write down the story of all her Swedish ancestors. Most of her genealogy collection was donated to the *Swedish Ancestry Research Association [SARA]* of Worcester, MA. Some of her material has been printed in the SARA Newsletter. The above story was printed in the 2010 February Newsletter and is reprinted in SAG with permission from SARA.