

3-1-2010

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Recommended Citation

Jonmyren, Kerstin (2010) "The Strindin family and Stockholm," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 30 : No. 1 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol30/iss1/11>

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The Strindin family, and Stockholm of the past

BY KERSTIN JONMYREN

Sweden was a poor country in the latter part of the 19th century, and Stockholm was one of the worst places in the country to live if you were poor. The rapidly growing Stockholm of the time was a place of misery – many poor people were moving in looking for work of any kind. Lodgings were miserable, work was often dangerous, there was too much alcohol, disease, prostitution, unwed mothers, orphanages, children looking for work, and so on. If you were healthy and could not provide for yourself, you were sent to mandatory work, and if you were sick and poor you had to beg.

Stockholm for poor people could easily be compared to the London of the time described in English author Charles Dickens's novels, although smaller and colder.

Still, Stockholm at the end of the 19th century and the turn of the 20th century was a place showing much progress. Many new, beautiful buildings were constructed; museums, theaters, and restaurants were opened; daily papers were published. Poets and novelists became prominent and attracted readers, and some of them became famous: August Strindberg was one of them.

A new opera house was built. New architects were busy. Parks were laid out and opened for all.

New schools were opened and all children had the right to a free basic education. There were scholarships to the higher schools for poor and bright children. Stockholm University College (*Stockholms Högskola*) was founded. (The old university was in Uppsala).

Many were employed in the factories, not necessarily in good jobs, but

still jobs which would give a father a decent possibility to provide for his family. It took until after World War II, however, for Stockholm to leave most of its misery behind.

The Strindin family

As a professional genealogist I was very well aware of all this, but I was still very surprised and upset to follow the destiny of one family in Stockholm.

The father was Edvard Strindin, who was born on 27 Aug. 1842 in Sundsvall in northern Sweden.

On 27 Aug. 1870 in Stockholm, he married Johanna Charlotta Andersson, born on 15 Aug. 1849 in Adolf Fredrik parish, Stockholm.

Let us first look into her background:

Johanna Charlotta's mother was Johanna Catharina Andersson, born on 30 Oct. 1826 in Adolf Fredrik parish, Stockholm. She was unmarried and the name of her daughter's father was not given in the birth record. Later on she was married to a janitor, since in the census of 1890 she was noted as a janitor's widow.

She had a second daughter, Emma Mathilda, born in 1854, who was still unmarried and living with her mother in 1890, but according to the census of 1900, she later married and bore three children.

I guess the surname Andersson for mother and daughters came from Johanna Catharina's subsequent husband, the janitor.

Johanna Catharina Andersson had an unwed mother as well, but that mother was just noted as "unknown," of age 45. Such a note in the birth records was not exactly an ex-

ception, but rather common in Stockholm of that period.

Unwed mothers and Swedish laws

According to a royal ordinance of 1778, an unwed mother had the right to stay "unknown" in the records if she preferred to, and then leave her child to an orphanage. By that she avoided punishment from the church for sexual association out of marriage, which was forbidden by law until 1864 in Sweden.

Still long after the 1860's, this right to keep unknown in the records was frequently made use of up until 1917, when a new family law was passed, and it was no longer possible.

There was a surplus of women in Stockholm during the 19th century, which meant a "men's market," so to speak. Men more often emigrated, but women with fewer options and less means moved to Stockholm or had to stay where they were for good.

This right to stay unknown was taken advantage of in the bigger cities mostly, such as Stockholm and Gothenburg, where people could stay rather anonymous. In the smaller parishes everybody was well aware of who gave birth to illegitimate children.

Now and then pregnant and unmarried girls went to Stockholm to give birth anonymously, left their children at an orphanage, and then returned home to their country parishes, hoping that nobody would know about it. They rented a bed somewhere for some months and looked for an occasional job during the period before childbirth. The orphans were mostly sent out in the



Lutternsgatan in central Stockholm around 1900. This street was widened and flattened around 1905, and in 1911 the newly built Kungsgatan was opened, and Lutternsgatan ceased to exist. Brunnsgatan was a crossing street and still exists.

country from the orphanages to foster parents, where, as a rule, they were put to hard work as soon as possible.

Sweden had for centuries been more or less ruled by the church and its very strict moral laws, and those who most often had to suffer from them were poor young girls.

Back to the Strindins

Edvard Strindin's father was a sea captain who lived in Sundsvall. Edvard's grandfathers had both been merchants in the area. The Strindin name was originally first used by a man coming from a place called Strinne, where the name Strindberg had its origin too. There does not

seem to be any connection between these two families.

In 1870, as a young man of 28, Edvard moved to Stockholm and almost immediately married Johanna Andersson. He was noted as an actor in the records, and I have found him as a member of the staff of a Stockholm theater in 1902 performing in a play by the famous Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen. Johanna worked in the theater as an actress for many years.

Most of the time after his marriage, however, they were members of different acting companies, touring around Sweden.

Edvard and Johanna Strindin's children (at least 12 children):

Hilda Julia Catharina, born 25 Mar. 1871 Stockholm. Died 27 July 1872 in Jakob parish, Stockholm. (Record Fla:5 page 472.)

Anna Emelie Katarina, born 25 Aug. 1873 in Jakob parish. (Jakob-Johannes CIa:25:540.) Parents living at Brunnsgatan 17 in Jakob. Died as a baby in Karlstad.

Sigrid Johanna, born 1 Sep. 1874 in Jakob parish. (Jakob-Johannes CIa:25:645.) Parents living at Brunnsgatan 17 in Jakob. Died as a baby in Stockholm.

Carl Birger, born 1 Aug. 1875 in Jakob parish (Jakob-Johannes

CIa:25:718.) Parents living at Brunnsgatan 17 in Jakob. Died in 1876 in Stockholm.

Anna Emilia Katarina, born 29 Dec. 1876 in Jakob parish, (Jakob-Johannes CIa:26:57.)¹ Parents living at Lutternsgatan 8 in Jakob. She was recorded in the birth record of Jakob parish, but baptized 13 Jan. 1877 in Jönköping city as her parents probably were on tour there then. She emigrated 22 Dec. 1892 to Winchester, Mass., U.S.A. In 1900 she was a servant of a family named Stone in Winchester. She was married and has descendants in the U.S.A.

Carl Harald, born 22 Nov. 1878 in Jakob parish. (Jakob-Johannes CIa:26:25.), but in reality born in Helsingborg. Died 20 Feb. 1879 at Lutternsgatan 25 in Jakob of acute stomach illness².

Stillborn girl, born and died 1880 March 17 (Jakob-Johannes

CIa:26:321.), actually born in Borås, parents' official abode at Brunnsgatan 17 in Jakob.

Nils Gustaf, born 9 March 1881 in Jakob (Jakob-Johannes CIa:6:321), but actually born in Halmstad, parents now living at Lutternsgatan 8.

Edvard Viktor Isidor, born 13 Dec. 1882 in Jakob parish. (Record Fla:6, page 282). Died as a baby.

Nils Gustaf, born 9 Dec. 1884 in Jakob parish. (Record Fla:6, page 341.) Died as a baby in Karlskrona.

Per Erik Gunnar, born 1 Aug. 1885 in Stockholm. In 1900 he was a foster child in a farmer's family in Österhaninge parish, close to Stockholm, together with some five other children. He immigrated to Winchester in 1904, but returned to Sweden. He died unmarried in 1957, March 11, in Stockholm.

Karin, born in 1888, August 16, in Adolf Fredrik parish, Stockholm. In 1900 she was staying in an orphanage in Stockholm run by the Church of Sweden. She immigrated to her sister in Winchester in 1907.

In the birth records Anna was noted as child number 5 and Gunnar as child number 11 of the family, so the couple had at least 12 children.

Of these 12 children, three managed to survive, probably since they were left to live in foster families!

In 1900 the Strindin couple was living by themselves in Stockholm. Their two under-aged children, Gunnar and Karin, were taken care of by other people. Anna was in America by then.

Johanna Charlotta Strindin died 17 July 1920 at one of the Stockholm Poorhouses³.

Edvard Strindin, the actor, died 15 June 1921, in Maria Magdalena parish, Stockholm, of a brain hemorrhage⁴.

Stockholm was certainly a mess, but this Strindin family situation was **not** the common one. It looks quite horrible to me.

Actors of the past

Heavy drinking was very common, and I would guess alcohol had much to do with this family. Beyond that, an actor's family bringing their newborn babies with on laborious tours would certainly not mean a good start for them. The wife Johanna took part in the acting or scene work in some way and was needed on the tours. She must have been constantly pregnant during some 15 years, from age 23 to at least 39, poor woman.

Today actors are considered idols and are looked upon as glamorous

and admirable, and some of them are able to make good money, contrary to in the past. The Swedish word for "actor" is *skådespelare*, but a common word for touring actors was "*taskspelare*," a nasty word, somewhat like "juggler" or "conjurer," according to my dictionary. In their performances on tour they sang, played instruments, did tricks, and performed comedies.

Their reputation out in the country was not exactly as low as that of circus people or gypsies, but almost. Those people at least had their camps to live in. It happened that hotels refused to take actors in, since they were afraid of not being paid for food and lodging. Private landlords often had the same attitude. Then the poor actors were starving and cold – and to improve their situation, they drank. No wonder that babies on the tour did not survive.

Today our social authorities will interfere directly in those family situations. But in those days...

We have had charity organizations for a long time, but not until 1917 was a law passed telling all parishes and cities that they had to have special authority assistants to take care of poor people and children.

Sources:

Census of Sweden 1890 and 1900.
Family records, Sundsvall.
Birth and death records, Stockholm and Sundsvall.

Endnotes

- ¹ Lives in 1890 with her maternal grandmother in Kurland nr 13 i Adolf Fredrik (rote 5). *Rotemannen* database.
- ² Stockholm City Archives. Database of Death certificates (*Dödbevis*).
- ³ Stockholm City Archives. Database of Death certificates (*Dödbevis*).
- ⁴ The *Söder* Database (CD).

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Teater å Arvika Stadshus.
Fredagen den 23 Maj 1879 kl. 1/2 8—10 e. m.
giver
Medlemmar af f. d. Novanderska Sällskapet
för första gången:
"Det skadar inte",
Lustspel i 3 akter af Frans Hedberg.
Derefter för första gången:
En förföljd oskuld,
Vaudeville med sång i 1 akt.
Biljettpriiserna äro:
Numrerad plats 1: 25.
Onummerad och stående 1: —
Barnbänken — 50.
Biljetter säljas å Stadshusets schweitzeri från
kl. 10 f. m. samt från kl. 5 e. m. vid ingången.
Nästa representation gifves Söndagen den 25
Maj.
Å Sällskapets vägnar:
E. STRINDIN.

This ad was found in the Wermlands
Läns Tidning 20 May 1879.