

3-1-2012

My Swedish adventure

Brian Gerard

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag>



Part of the [Genealogy Commons](#), and the [Scandinavian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gerard, Brian (2012) "My Swedish adventure," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 32 : No. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol32/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Swedish American Genealogist by an authorized editor of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

My Swedish adventure

The winner of the TV show tells his story

BY BRIAN GERARD

In June of 2011 I began a journey to discover my Swedish ancestry. I did so not through some of the more traditional means like gathering information and stories from family and historical records. Nor did I do so through some of the more modern means like the many on-line genealogical resources that are now available. My journey into my family history began on the reality TV show, “*Allt för Sverige*.”

The premise of the program is to bring ten Americans of Swedish ancestry back to their homeland to discover its history, culture, and traditions. But the heart of the adventure was the discovery of family. A genealogist had done extensive research for each cast member that included detailed family histories, family trees, and even trips to locations where our families had lived in Sweden.

There was also a competition. The prize did not include a cash reward of any kind, but something far more valuable – a reunion with living Swedish relatives. Having won the competition, and thus the grand prize, I can say without reservation that it was truly a grand prize worth winning.

I did not know anything about the family I met other than the story which divided us, leaving one side of the family in Sweden and the other in America. In the late 1800’s my great-grandfather (Gustaf Wilhelm Lejon) and his brother were courting

the same girl near Åtvidaberg, Östergötland. She chose my great-grandfather’s brother, leaving him so brokenhearted that he left Sweden to escape the pain he felt. A blacksmith, he eventually settled in Kansas where he started his own family.

But that is just one side of my Swedish story. My other great-grandfather (Carl Johan Algott (Johansson)) also emigrated from Sweden in the early 1900’s. His family’s story was of hardship similar to many Swedes’ of the time. Living as workers on the land of a wealthy family in Småland, they reached a point of struggle great enough to drive them toward the promise of a new beginning across the Atlantic. They began that journey in Chicago, but my great-grandfather, who was a watchmaker and minister in the Swedish Covenant Church, began serving a church in Kansas.

As part of my journey, I not only met my family but also traveled to many places where they lived. I went to the small village of Söderö near Åtvidaberg and saw the tiny house in which my great-grandfather and his 13 siblings lived as well as the blacksmith shop where he was apprenticed.

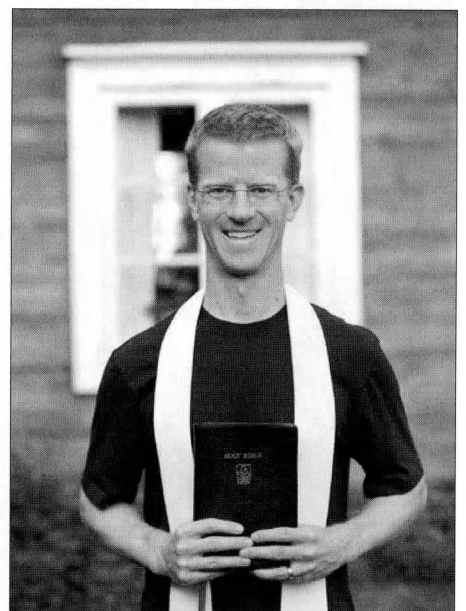
I even had the chance to tour the home of the largest landowner there – a home that existed when my great-grandfather was a boy and is still furnished today as it was then. I visited the church in Båraryd, Småland, where my great-grandfather



(Carl Johan Algott (Johansson)) was confirmed in 1893. I walked the land which he and his family worked, and ate *ostkaka*, one of the traditional dishes my family still enjoys.

The power of these visits can not be described, but I wish it for everyone who can trace their ancestry to a particular place and time.

But more than just visiting the specific locales of my family origin, I got to journey much of the height and breadth of Sweden. We traveled from Torekov in the southwest to the historic site of Duvemåla in the southeast; from the Island of Öland in the Baltic to the magnificent city of Stockholm; from the Viking village of Birka all the way to a Sami village



Brian Gerard.

in the Arctic; we spent midsummer in Järvsö and ended our journey on Utö, an island in the Stockholm Archipelago.

It seemed to me that each place we went was more beautiful than the last, as were the people.

What began as the trip of a lifetime, ended up becoming a life-changing trip. I never thought I'd have the chance to discover my heritage in such a powerful way. I'll never be the same having done so.

Wherever you are on the journey of discovering your Swedish ancestry, I encourage your every continuing effort. What you will find are more than just names on a timeline or in a tree, you will find stories, locations, and in many ways you will find yourself. If travel can be part of that journey, your trip will richly reward you and Sweden is an easy and wonderful place to travel. I hope to see you there!

More on Brian

I was born in 1971, and am an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) serving on staff at First Christian Church of Louisville, KY.

(www.fcclouisville.org).

Biggest loves in life are family, connecting others to God, college baseball, Dallas Cowboy football, Yale University, good bourbon, dark chocolate, and all things Swedish!

(Borrowed from Brian's Facebook page).



Brian Gerard and his wife Carrie, and sons Ethan (11) and Graham (7).

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Allt-F%C3%B6r-Sverige/198932940175752?sk=wall>

Information from Brian Gerard, Jill Seaholm, and Elisabeth Thorsell.



Brian (in the middle of the back row) and his family at their family reunion in Sweden.

Brian's maternal Swedish roots

