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Swedish Parish Records on Microfiche

Lars Otto Berg*

Research in our various Swedish regional archives (*landsarkiv*) is nowadays big business, with over 50,000 visitors a year. During the year approximately 400,000 volumes of various original records are taken from the stacks, leafed through by researchers and replaced on the shelves. Many scholars are becoming aware of how this flood tide of humanity has served to restrict the resources of the various archives — in a time of shrinking appropriations — causing crowded reading rooms, shortened hours during which the archives are open, certain restrictions when it comes to fetching wanted materials and the recently instituted fee for answering written requests. All of these factors have tended to place obstacles in the path of those seeking advanced knowledge. This thirst for knowledge has also caused other problems. The wear and tear on this unique archival material is more and more noticeable, particularly when it comes to the parish records. These have no rival in popularity in the competition for the number one slot in the “top ten” at the various regional archives.

In 1977 a committee was appointed to analyze the question of what to do with the “wear and tear” problem, particularly when it came to the unique parish record materials. The group consisted of the directors of three regional archives Lars Otto Berg from Uppsala, Sten Körner from Visby and Anna Christina Ulfsparre Meurling from Lund. This trio became a quartet with the additional appointment of Bengt Fredriksson, first archivist at the Swedish National Archives. Various methods were discussed and analyzed, before the group, for financial reasons, decided on a program which would develop and expand the already acquired so called “Mormon” microfilm, done under the auspices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints of Salt Lake City, UT. A copy of this film is kept at the Swedish National Archives. The libraries in the various counties (*län*) in Sweden have usually acquired copies of these films, which have contained the most popular materials for their respective *län*. Other libraries and institutions have also procured their own copies.

As the 35mm microfilm is difficult to handle, the group decided to use microfiche, instead of the film rolls.

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The method used to convert the microfilm to microfiche is briefly the following — the present 35 mm microfilm is converted to 16 mm microfilm. One copy of the latter film is then placed in the climate controlled archives of the Swedish National Archives as a reserve copy. A second copy is then mounted into specially prepared plastic cards called jackets. Microfiche copies for the use in microfiche readers are then produced for general public use.

The material contained in the various Swedish parish records is approximately 30% of the total film produced in the “Mormon” project and consists of close to 16,000 rolls of microfilm, which account for roughly 30 million pages of parish records. The household examination rolls have as a rule been copied to the year 1895, the other materials to about 1860. For certain *län* in southern Sweden the exit lists have also been microphotographed up to the 1890s, for other areas the last year filmed is about 1860. Birth, marriage and death records for the years after 1860 are, however, available. Here, though, for the sake of convenience, one chose to photograph the extracts from the vital records which are on deposit in the Swedish Central Bureau of Statistics (*Statistiska Centralbyrån*). The photographing of this material stretches forward in time to 1897 and is to be found on a total of 1,100 rolls of microfilm.

The Swedish “Mormon” films sometimes contain material from more than one parish on the same roll. Sometimes a volume is split between two rolls. (The films in Salt Lake City have been edited so that several parishes are not placed on the same reel).

By using microfiche one is able to edit the film, so that each individual and original volume has been reproduced on its separate and specific microfiche — thus parts of different volumes do not need to share space on the same fiche. If we attempt to analyze the cost of each exposure, we find that the price differential between microfilm and microfiche is not of great significance, at least in Sweden. By using microfiche one can limit oneself to those volumes of church records one needs and not have to pay for a lot of inconsequential and extraneous material.

The converting of microfilm to microfiche progressed quite slowly in the beginning. The economic resources available were limited. The main part of the funding came from government appropriations, which, with a few exceptions, were not increased in view of the upward adjustment of costs. As a rule, the annual increase in costs for the projects, as a whole, was greater than the annual sums received. Based on this principle it seemed, in theory at least, that it would take until 1 April 2008 before the existing filmed parish record materials would be fully converted. It should be said, however, that in addition to the state funding, minor sums have been received, not only from various parishes, but also from the sale of microfiche copies.

Lately, however, an organization named SVAR (*Svensk Arkiv-information*) — Swedish Archives Information, now a section of the Swedish National Archives and located in Ramsele in northern Sweden, has in an effective manner, by pooling its resources, been able to speed up the converting process. Additional funding is necessary in order that the conversion committee can carry out its goal of transferring the present microfilms to microfiche during the 1980s.

Up until 1 July 1985 a total of 5,600 rolls of microfilm, containing parish records, have been converted. To this should be added the 1,100 reels containing the abstracts from the Swedish Central Bureau of Statistics. Thus a little more than a third of the material has thus far been converted.

The areas which thus far have been covered by the conversion procedure from microfilm to microfiche cover various sections of Sweden. These counties (*län*) are Norrbotten, Västerbotten and Västernorrland, all in the north. In the south we have Kronoberg *län* and parts of the province of Skåne, and from the central parts of Sweden Kopparberg *län* and more recent material from the *län* of Göteborg and Bohus, Skaraborg and Älvsborg in the west and Gotland in the east.

If the project is voted the necessary funding the time schedule for the continuing work is as follows:

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|------------------------|---|
| Budget Year 1985–1986. | Jönköping and Kalmar <i>län</i> , as well as older materials from the <i>län</i> of Göteborg and Bohus, Skaraborg, Värmland and Älvsborg. |
| Budget Year 1986–1987. | The remainder of the material from the provinces of Skåne and Blekinge; Östergötland <i>län</i> and more recent material from Värmland <i>län</i> . |
| Budget Year 1987–1988. | The <i>län</i> of Halland, Gävleborg, Södermanland, Västmanland and Örebro. |
| Budget Year 1988–1989. | The city of Stockholm, the <i>län</i> of Stockholm and Uppsala. |

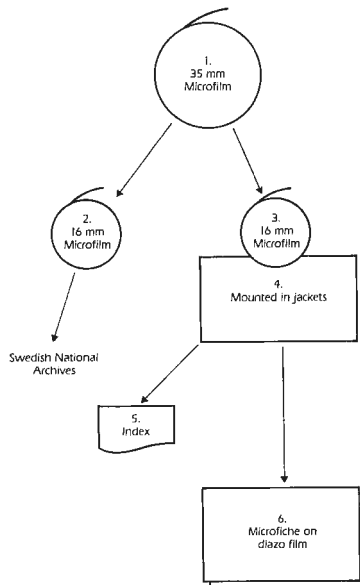
The grouping of the various areas within the time schedule is at best only a temporary move. Priorities have to be determined on the basis of how the original microfilm reels are arranged, the needs for substitute material in cases where certain documents are threatened from too frequent use, the need to improve the service to the researchers, and the possibilities of selling copies of the microfiche, etc. Because of the system used when the original microfilming was done, it will be necessary in certain instances of keeping a couple of *län* together during the conversion process. To dislodge or break out a certain *län*, and for that matter, a separate community or parish from the original microfilm would result, as a rule, in additional labor costs, which in turn means that the original plans both as to the time schedule and the

financing might be disturbed and dislocated.

Through the conversion program the researcher will in the future confront an almost new milieu when he or she visits the regional archives. The individual will no longer be allowed to handle the original records, which will be held in permanent storage. The researcher will be asked to use microfiche. When it comes to the parish records one hopes that this new system will lead to a speedier and smoother service to the customer.

In addition to the conversion work itself, there are other elements in this preservation program. SVAR is responsible for producing indexes, which to a high degree will ease the work of the researcher in gaining access to the material. SVAR also sells copies of the microfiche and will probably be able to serve the searcher by lending microfiche as well as making research space available for him in a reading room. Re-filming of certain portions of "difficult-to-read" filmed pages is planned, where new exposures are to be made of the actual pages in the original volumes. Hitherto unfiled material will also be photographed, etc. Even though it will still be possible to buy the old microfilm rolls, it is only a question of time before the easily used microfiche will take over the role of providing information to the researcher.

The goal before us is a twofold one — first of all to save the original material from the threat of becoming extinct through excessive use — secondly to make it possible for the private researcher, by means of producing new copies of microfiche, to have easier access to the desired information, closer at hand, and perhaps even in his home.



The microfilm to microfiche process.