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John Martin Castell — Early Swedish Gold Miner

Elizabeth Oman*

“He was a man of wide experience, possessing a large share of practical information, having come from a foreign country and traveled extensively in the United States. There were many thrilling incidents connected with the trip to California in the early (18)50s, going by wagon and returning by the Isthmus of Panama to New York City. He had a keen observation and a good memory, and it was pleasing to hear him relate the experiences of his trip.”¹

The person referred to in the above obituary was John Martin Castell of Salina, IA. The writer has reason to believe that he was identical with Johan Magnus Carlsson, a servant from Boda in Hägerstad parish (Ög.), who received a passport in the city of Linköping 30 April 1849 and who arrived in New York aboard the *Charles Tottie* 12 July 1849.² He was b. in Norstad, Kättilstad Parish (Ög.) 25 Aug. 1826, the son of Carl Aronsson, a laborer, and his wife Lena Isaksdotter. When he emigrated from Sweden he was listed as a shoemaker's apprentice in Boda, Hägerstad.

Family lore claims that John Castell's name had been Carlsson and that he had changed his name in the United States because there were too many Carlssons and their mail was getting mixed up. John Castell's brother, Andrew, was born in Kättilstad Parish as Anders Carlsson.³ He also changed his name to Castell and three of his children, who died quite young, are buried with the name of Castell. A fourth child was buried with the name of Castile.⁴ Castile, pronounced *Casteel*, was the second name change for Andrew and probably took place in the late 1850s. It is supposed that the brothers changed their names partly because of a man they admired very much, Peter Cassel, the leader of the original group of Swedish immigrants which arrived in New Sweden, IA in 1845. Peter Cassel was of course the descendant of a Scottish immigrant who had arrived in Sweden in the late 16th century.⁵ Andrew's wife, Sara Lovisa Andersdotter, was a sister of Peter Cassel's wife, and had arrived at the same time as Peter Cassel.⁶

In 1900, fifty-one years after arriving in the United States, John Castell composed the following biographical sketch of his life, done two years before his death in 1902:

“I was born in Sweden in the year 1826 and came to America in 1849, landing in New York the 6th day of July after sailing six weeks and four days across the Atlantic.

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There were seventy-five on the sailing vessel that was carrying us from our mother country, half of which died before reaching port.

I came across Lake Erie by canal boat directly to Andover, Illinois. I went from Andover, Illinois to Rock Island where I worked one month at the shoemaking trade (which) I had learned in the old country.

I was the only Swede in Rock Island at that time. My boss was an Irishman by the name of Jonson, who I thought to be the best man I ever met. I received ten dollars a month for my work, but did not know when I started what wages I would receive for I could not talk to anyone.

From that place I went to Fairfield, Iowa, where my brother had a shoe shop, he having come to this country in 1848. We then worked together until 1852, when, having the Gold Fever, I started across the plains for California.

There were six of us boys (that) went together — Baldwin Swich, Hofflish Moore, and myself started from Fairfield. We left on 20th of March with six yoke of oxen, and crossed the Missouri River the 1st day of May.

During our trip we had considerable trouble with the Indians, but arrived at Donnabill, Yuba County, California, the 6th of August, the same year. I never saw the boys again after landing.

I began working in the mines, and after five years — in the year 1857 — started home crossing the Isthmus of Panama, coming on a steamer to New York where I had landed eight years before.

I now went back to Fairfield and worked at my old trade. Here I met a lady by the name of Clara Samuelson, who became my wife. We were married at Victoria, Illinois, by Rev. Hedström, September 2, 1858. We settled at Parsonsville, Jefferson County, Iowa, where I had a shoe shop. After living there four years, I bought a farm three miles northwest of Parsonsville, adjoining a little town by the name of Salina, where I have lived ever since.

I was converted and joined the M.E. Church in the fall of 1850, of which I am still a member.

I have had very little sickness in my days; am now in my 74th year. Have every tooth in my head, except one, and have never worn glasses.

I spend most of my time reading and thinking of the happy time up yonder where I shall soon be.”

John Castell married Clara Samuelsson, the daughter of Peter Samuelson and his wife Catharina Ingesdotter, who had emigrated from Tidarsrum Parish (Ög.) in 1851. Clara Samuelsson's birth date is given variously as 21 March 1839 and 21 July 1840.⁸

John Castell and his wife had thirteen children, four of whom died before their parents. They lie buried in the Castell plot in the Swedish Methodist Cemetery at Four Corners, Lockridge Township, Jefferson Co., Iowa. They were Adlena Castell (1866–1867); Cora M. (1868–1869); Bertha (1878–1886) and Lillie (1870–1895). The first-born was William B., born in 1859. The other children were Alfred, Ervin, Etta (who married Fletcher) (1863–1966); Priscilla (who married Cummings) (1865–1920); Anna (who married Day); Eunice (who married Emry); Mary (who married Howell) and Stella (who

married Lynn). John Castell's wife died on 21 March 1912, ten years after his death.

Many of the children moved West after their marriages. Among the grandchildren was John W. Castell, an M.D., who practiced for many years in Fairfield and then retired to Berryville, AR. He was a son of the oldest son, William B. Another grandchild was Eunice Emry Campbell. She and her husband ran the House of Sweden shop in Carmel, CA. A third grandchild was Leonard J. Fletcher (1891–1983), who for many years was vice president of the Caterpillar Co. of Peoria, IL.⁹ His mother, Etta Castell Fletcher, lived to be 103 years old.

DISTRICT OF NEW-YORK—PORT OF NEW-YORK.

I, Wm. B. Sullivan do solemnly, sincerely, and truly swear that the following List or Manifest of Passengers and Crew of the Charles Tottie is a true and correct statement of all the Passengers and Crew of the said vessel, as the same were taken on board at the Port of New-York, on the 12th July 1849, and delivered by me to the Collector of the Customs for the District of New-York, in compliance of the Act in that behalf made, and that I am a Master, or other Officer, or Agent, or Clerk, or other Person, authorized by Law to sign the same.

1849 Wm. B. Sullivan
Wm. B. Sullivan
 Master, from Gallatin to the Sw. Ark. C. Sattin 5 Boys

LIST or MANIFEST of all the PASSENGERS taken on board the Sw. Ark. C. Sattin on the 5th July 1849.

NAME.	AGE.	SEX.	OCCUPATION.	The Country to which they severally belong.	To which they intend to go.	Red on the vessel.
<u>Carlson</u>						
1 <u>Christ. K. Holm</u>	22	male				
2 <u>Carl M. Telling</u>	20	♂	<u>Shoemaker</u>			
3 <u>Carl Wahlberg</u>	19	♂	<u>Clerk</u>			
4 <u>Joh. M. Karlsson</u>	25	♂	<u>Mediciner</u>			
5 <u>Yngve Holm</u>	21	♂	<u>Seaman</u>			
6 <u>Alvar. J. Carlsson</u>	36	♂	<u>Bo. Sek.</u>			
7 <u>Alvar. J. Carlsson</u>	19	female				
8 <u>Carlson</u>	48	male				
9 <u>Anna J.</u>	37	female				
10 <u>Carlson</u>	20	male				
11 <u>Carlson</u>	25	♂				
12 <u>Carlson</u>	27	♂				
13 <u>Carlson</u>	28	male				

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Part of the Charles Tottie manifest. Johan Carlson is listed as passenger No. 107.

¹Obituary in *The Fairfield Ledger* (Fairfield, IA), 7 May 1902, p. 3.

²Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820–1850* (Chicago and Stockholm 1967) (SPANY), pps. 164–165; 274.

³Anders Carlsson was born in Kartorp, Kättilstad Parish 3 March 1823. He was the parish shoemaker and received a passport in Linköping 19 April 1848. He arrived in Boston 12 July 1848 aboard the vessel *Minona*. — Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in U.S. Ports 1820–1850 (except New York)* (Stockholm and St. Paul, MN 1979), p. 16; records in *Landsarkivet, Vadstena*.

⁴Records of the Swedish Methodist Cemetery at Four Corners, Jefferson Co., IA.

⁵Axel Setterdahl, *Östgöta nation i Lund 1668–1913* (Linköping 1913), p. 191.

⁶SPANY, pp. 64–65.

⁷John Castell's memory played tricks with him. He actually arrived in New York 12 July 1849, not 6 July. His estimate of the number of passengers on board the *Charles Tottie* is also off. Instead of the 75 on board the vessel, there were actually 226, of which none died on the passage, according to the ship's manifest.

⁸Parish records in *Landsarkivet, Vadstena*.

⁹His son, L. James Fletcher, is married to the author. The couple lectures at Bethany College in Lindsborg, KS.