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# Johan Fredrik Roos

Erik Wikén\*

Nils William Olsson has published and commented on Johan Fredrik Roos' diary and says that Svante Palm in a letter, dated 7 Oct. 1856, offers Roos the chance to return to his former position and to old friends in Austin.<sup>1</sup>

Svante Palm tells us in a couple of articles printed in *Hemlandet*, the first published 27 Aug. 1857 and the second 24 July 1866, and continued on 14 Aug. concerning the early Swedes in Texas.<sup>2</sup> He discusses rather thoroughly Roos' fate after the date that his diary notes cease, i.e. 29 March 1852 (*not* 22 Jan.).

Of Roos and Hammarström, whom Roos discusses in his last diary entry, Palm has the following to say:

“(They) tried farming on a Louisiana cotton plantation. The climate as well as the work did not suit them and H(ammarström), the weaker of the two physically, was felled by the miasma, which rises from the swamps of Louisiana and died shortly thereafter in the Charity Hospital in New Orleans.”

Roos buried his friend in a cemetery outside New Orleans and Palm continues:

“At this time, approximately during the spring of 1852, there was a story in the newspapers that gold had been discovered in a stream above Austin in Texas. Several people were fooled by the report. Fred(rik Roos) turned his steps in the direction of this, the newest Eldorado, but having arrived in Texas, soon discovered the truth and that his small sum of money again had been sinking toward zero. In La Grange he stayed with a countryman, until he was able to find employment in Austin with a German merchant ... When he first arrived we became acquainted with Fredrich. He stayed in Austin for the remainder of the time. It was only during the winter of 1854–55 that he was gone for about six to eight months ... At this time the State of Texas was equipping four cavalry companies to protect the western border of our state against the wild Comanche Indians. Fredrich's early love for a soldier's life reawakened and he volunteered. He probably did not care to become an officer, now that he was a good democrat. He became a Texas Ranger and visited during his absence even parts of Mexico, as far away as Monterey. In the beginning of this campaign we were attached to the 'Army' as 'field commissioner' ... and daily had the opportunity of seeing how the always happy Fredrich now was in the element he loved best. When he returned he stopped briefly with a Jewish merchant ... but returned that fall to Austin, where he then remained.”

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One day while gardening, a cold north wind came up and struck him while he was quite warm, he caught a cold and died suddenly.

“Several Americans as well as Germans, who had known F(redrich) were in attendance at the grave site with their families. The grave was well cared for and was surrounded by a simple wooden fence. In the shadow of a live oak his remains now rest.”

A few notes can be added concerning the Swedes, which Roos mentions in his diary:

Note 11. Bååth went to California via South America and arrived in San Francisco in May 1851, as he himself relates in a letter, dated Camp Ceko near the South Mines 7 Feb. 1852 and published in *Kalmar-Posten* 21 April 1852. After his return home he wrote a series of articles in the Kalmar newspaper *Barometern* in 1859 concerning his life in California. A continuation of these articles was published as a brochure, entitled *Skizzer ur lifvet i Californien (Sketches from Life in California)*, which came out in Kalmar in 1859. During the 1860s Bååth taught English in an evening school in Karlshamn.<sup>3</sup>

Notes 28 and 29. The brothers Herrman were born in Halmstad—Birger 14 March 1819 and Johan Anton 30 Nov. 1821, the sons of Anders Herrman, a blacksmith, and Anna Hallström. Both returned to Sweden 1860 and 1856 respectively.

Notes 33 and 44. Sven Jansson, who called himself Skogman, was born in Löveskog, Äspered Parish (Älvs.) 22 Sept. 1794, the son of Johan Löfgren, a soldier, and Brita Pehrsdotter. He left Ulricehamn in 1829 for Hamburg, Germany. Nothing is known about him until he arrived in New Orleans 22 Oct. 1835, with a passport made out in Bahia, Brazil 2 sept. 1835. He arrived together with a person named Anne Skogman, who supposedly was his betrothed.<sup>4</sup> Both of them returned to Sweden and were married in Katarina Parish in Stockholm in 1839. They then stayed in Stockholm until 21 or 22 May 1850, when they received passports to Hamburg. From Hamburg they travelled with *Helena Sloman* and arrived in New York 29 June 1850.<sup>5</sup> After this nothing is known about them until the husband, who now has the Christian name Svante, died in Katarina Parish in Stockholm 25 June 1866. He is noted as being unmarried (the wife was probably dead already when Roos met him in July 1851, since she is not mentioned).

Note 35. This must be the son, Nils Gustaf Eduard Wengberg, who left for America from St. Petri Parish in Malmö 6 May 1850.

Note 45. Sven Månsson was born in Lilla Hult, Ormesberga Parish (Kron.) 21 June 1813 (his age is therefore in error in the 1850 Census), the son of Måns Zachrisson (whose patronymic he used as a surname) and Karin Jaensdotter.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Nils William Olsson, “The Diary of an Early Swede with a Texas Connection” in *Swedish American Genealogist*, Vol. III, No. 1, pp. 1–18.

<sup>2</sup>The article from 1857 is anonymous, that of 1866 is signed Swen Pärson, but there is no doubt that both articles are written by Svante Palm. This is also the view held by Eric Norelius in his *De svenska luterska församlingarnas och svenskarnes historia i Amerika*, I-II (Rock Island, IL 1890, 1916), I, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Agnes Wirén, *Uppbrott från Örtagård*. Utvandring från Bekinge till och med 1870 (Lund 1975), *Bibliotheca historica Lundensis*, No. 34), p. 144.

<sup>4</sup>Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in U.S. Ports 1820-1850 (except New York)* (Stockholm and St. Paul, MN 1979), p. 54. Her maiden name was Anna Dixhuit.

<sup>5</sup>Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820-1850* (Stockholm and Chicago 1967), p. 212.

<sup>6</sup>Erik Wikén, "When Did Swedish Patronymics Become Surnames?" in *Swedish American Genealogist*, Vol. II, No. 1, pp. 32 and 33, note 15.

### Lars Emil Scott\*

The extraordinary diary of this young Swedish immigrant, Johan Fredrik Roos af Hjelmsäter, was presented to the readers of *Swedish American Genealogist* last year (see *SAG*, Vol. III, No. 1, March, 1983, pp. 1-18). For some time I had been aware of the diary's existence and had always wondered about its author's destiny after the final entry of 29 March 1852. Why did Roos af Hjelmsäter come to Texas and why did he change his name to Hamilton?

Nils William Olsson has cleared up the probable circumstances surrounding Roos' birth and parentage. The diary itself is a wonderfully rich tapestry of life in mid 19th century America, seen through the eyes of a widely-traveled, yet still fresh and somewhat innocent young man, possessing a good eye for detail, a romantic heart, gullible, yet not himself wholly guileless, as his dealings with the notorious Dr. Roback would indicate.

In a letter, dated Texas in July 1857, and published in *Hemlandet* 27 August, 1857, Svante Palm (thinly disguised as "Swen Pärsson") self-appointed correspondent from Texas, had inquired if any fellow Swedes knew of Roos, who had died earlier that year.<sup>1</sup> Not until nearly a decade later, in August of 1866, could he report that his letters had come into the hands of Roos' stepfather, Johan Elias Roos af Hjelmsäter of Göteborg.<sup>2</sup> There we gather additional information. Palm notes that he first met Roos "in the spring or summer of 1852," which means that Roos must have left New Orleans (where the diary entries end in March) almost immediately for Texas. Palm adds that notices of a wholly fraudulent gold discovery near Austin in the spring of that year had appeared in newspapers all over the south. This, Palm states, was the primary reason for Roos' voyage to Texas, where he moved to La Grange and settled for a while near Palm. In these early days, he used the surname of "Dahlgren" (his mother's maiden name) in order to avoid the continuing persecutions from Dr. Roback. Soon, however, Johan Fredrik Roos af Hjelmsäter had assumed the name of John F. Hamilton (perhaps a drastic anglicization of the name "Hjelmsäter"), by which name he was known until his death.

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He put his military training in Europe to good use almost immediately after coming to Texas, joining one of the four Horse Companies recently established by the State of Texas to combat the continuing attacks by Comanche Indians in western Texas. In 1854 Hamilton joined the Texas Rangers, in which he served for a brief period, approximately six to eight months, following the troops as far south as Monterey, Mexico.<sup>3</sup>

By the autumn of 1856, it seems that the Swedish wanderer was contemplating putting down roots in his new homeland. In October of that year Svante Palm and S.M. Swensson offered him employment in the Swensson mercantile business as a clerk at \$45.00 per month. He moved from San Marcos to Austin, where he moved in with Daniel Hurd, the foreman on Swensson's Austin plantation - Govalle (from the Swedish *god vall* meaning good pasturage). Perhaps it was through Hurd's influence (he had been one of the 25 original Swedish immigrants to arrive in Texas in 1848)<sup>4</sup> that Hamilton contracted to buy a 160 acre homestead from S.M. Swensson on 14 January 1857. A week later he was dead.

Palm recounts that the Swedish community in Austin had experienced a particularly poignant bout with homesickness for Sweden, a powerful yearning for their former homeland. A "lilac-like" bush (perhaps the crepe myrtle) had reminded them strongly of home. So, during the first weeks of 1857, Palm and several other immigrants, including Hamilton, had busied themselves with transplanting several of these bushes. The weather, Palm noted, was cold, wet and raw, which afflicted them especially severely since their "blood was now thin as water." Hamilton became quite ill, but after a few days seemed to be recovering. Then, however, pneumonia set in and on 21 January 1857 he died.

The funeral for John F. Hamilton was held at the S.M. Swensson building at 10 a.m. on Friday, 23 January 1857. It cost eighteen dollars and was paid for by Swensson himself. Hamilton was not quite 36 years old at the time of his death. His estate, inventoried by Palm in March 1857 consisted of the following items:

- 1 cloth frock coat
- 1 summer coat
- 3 pairs of old pants
- 1 satin vest
- 1 lot of clothing, of no value
- 1 lot of medicine for private use, of no value
- 1 old trunk
- 1 old gold watch with chain and two keys
- 1 gold ring to be sent to his mother
- 1 dress sword to be sent to his father
- 1 old sabre
- cash in gold and silver amounting to \$29.50<sup>5</sup>

The medical expenses incurred during his final illness amounted to \$16.00 and the net value of his estate came to \$261.73, which went to

Swensson for dispersal, since Hamilton had an account of long standing with him. Not until 1867 — ten years after his son's death and fifteen years since he last had received a letter from him, did Elias Roos take possession of his son's modest estate.<sup>6</sup>

The following poem, whose authorship I have not been able to identify—conceivable it might have been written by Swante Palm himself—was read at Hamilton's funeral:

He left his home with a pounding heart,  
For the world was all before him,  
And felt in scarce a pain to part  
Such sunbright beams came o'er him.  
He turned him to visions of future years  
Then rainbow's hues were round them —  
And a father's bodings – a mother's tears  
Might not weigh with the hopes that crowned him.<sup>7</sup>

Was young Roos/Hamilton a failure or a success in his new homeland? Financially, his reverses seem to have outstripped his advances, spurred no doubt, by his nomadic military way of life. Yet, to those who knew him, he must have been a delightful human being:

"He was short of stature, lively and energetic and always in a good mood . . . He had been 'intended for business,' but courageous temperament and great liveliness were ill-suited for shop and office life. . . . He could, not without reason, hope for quick advancement, for among other advantages, F. (John Frederick Roos) had those Swedish habits, which, on more than one occasion, can be recognized in Swedish history . . . His fate is not an uncommon one, and, with a few changes, the same portrait could be drawn of many a young Swede who left the fatherland full of hope, from whom the letters home first arrive not infrequently, but, finally 'are never heard from again.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Hemlandet, Det Gamla och Det Nya* (Galesburg, IL), 27 August 1857, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>*Hemlandet* (Chicago, IL), 14 August 1866, pp. 3-4. Palm's account of Roos af Hjelmsåters' later career is summarized in the text.

<sup>3</sup>Swante Palm's statement as to Roos' military service in Texas is at variance with the Ranger muster rolls, which show that John F. Hamilton served as a private in Co. E of the Organized Texas Volunteers from 20 July 1855 to 19 Oct. 1855. The reference in the muster roll to John F. Hamilton's birth place being Austin is of course erroneous. — Texas Rangers, "Frontier Battalion Minute Men, Commanding Officers 1847-1900" (Manuscript copy in the Texas State Library).

<sup>4</sup>Daniel Hurd had arrived in Boston, MA 9 Oct. 1848 aboard the *Augusta* from Göteborg. He was born Daniel Johansson in Forserum Södergård, Forserum Parish (Jön.) 10 April 1825, the son of Johannes Carlsson Björkelund, farm owner, and Catharina Danielsdotter, and a brother of Anna Palm, Swante Palm's sister-in-law. He died in Palm Valley, TX 15 April 1902. Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in U.S. Ports 1820-1850 (except New York)* (Stockholm and St. Paul, MN, 1979), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup>"Palm, Swante Papers." Box 2F188, Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center Archives, the University of Texas, Austin, TX.

<sup>6</sup>*Hemlandet*, 14 August 1866.

<sup>7</sup>"Palm Papers." See also "Roos (Frederick) Papers, 1826 (sic) 1874," Box 2F483; "A Swedish Miscellany," Box 2G450 in the Barker Center.

<sup>8</sup>*Hemlandet*, 14 August 1866.