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The Exit Permit

If you have your ancestor's *flyttningsbetyg*, you are lucky!

BY NILS WILLIAM OLSSON (†)

One of the most important documents that descendants of Swedish immigrants may find in the old family files is the exit permit, which the immigrant brought with him from his home parish. Various labels: *flyttningsbevis*, *flyttningsbetyg*, or *flyttningsattest*, it was the final official document the emigrant procured before beginning his voyage across the Atlantic. If he had a passport, he had probably procured this earlier, as well as his ticket. It was the exit permit, given to him by the pastor of his church during his final days at home, which was the culmination of the preparations for the journey. With the exit permit in hand, he had broken the last official bond with his homeland.

While it is true that many Swedes left their home country without bothering to secure such a document, it was somehow inherent in the Swedish nature to follow the regulations of the state and the church, which stipulated that upon leaving his home parish for some other place, whether this was at home or abroad, he was compelled to procure this document, which stated that he was of high moral character, and that he was an honest individual who would be accepted into any society, wherever he planned to settle.

Why those papers?

Before venturing into the mechanics of the exit permit, it might be worthwhile to examine how the state and

the community formerly viewed the movement of people. Sweden has been a well-organized state for hundreds of years with an excellent corps of civil servants, which in this case also included the clergy, which not only were paid by the state, but also were held responsible for the documentation of the lives of the parishioners. This applied to all facets of their existence: births, marriages, deaths, knowledge of reading, knowledge of the Ten Commandments, attending Holy Communion, as well as the physical movements into or out of the parish.

Swedish record-keeping

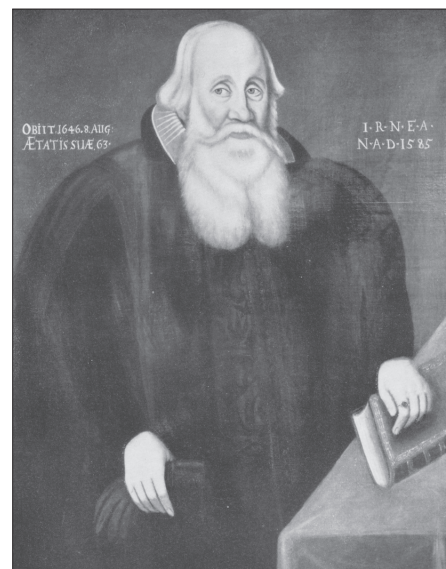
It is not an accident that Sweden possesses some of the most complete church records in the world, going back hundreds of years, a boon to anyone with Swedish antecedents interested in studying his family tree. It was Bishop Johannes Rudbeckius in Västerås, who as early as in 1622 asked the clergymen in his diocese to begin keeping records of the births, marriages, and deaths in their respective parishes. He was followed in 1633 by Bishop Johannes Botvidi in the diocese of Linköping. As the 17th century progressed, all other churches followed suit, so that by the end of the century, all parishes had been instructed to maintain the vital statistics of their people.

On the secular side the *Statistiska Centralbyrån* (Central Bureau of Statistics), founded in the middle of

This is the
3rd issue of the
30th
volume, and this is
one of the
old gems

the 18th Century, has been for more than 200 years the watchdog of the Swedish people. Into the Bureau has flowed all sorts of information taken from the annual censuses (*mantalsskrivningar*), providing the government with all sorts of statistical material for many a demographic study.

In order to make a success of such an ambitious project, it was of course necessary to know as much as possible about the population in every parish, including movements into and out of that locality. It was the village clergyman who received the instruction to control these movements. His periodic reports to the central authorities were very important in complementing the mate-



Bishop Johannes Rudbeckius of Västerås (1581-1646).

rial flowing in from the census lists (*mantalslängder*).

Domestic passports

Both civil and ecclesiastical authorities, in attempting to keep a check of the population movements, resorted to two types of control documents – one, the civil form, was the passport (*pass*) issued by the police authorities in the larger cities as well as the administrative units (*län*). These passports were necessary for any movement from one locality to another, whether it was across the country or to the nearest city, even if it was only to visit a relative. The passport, which stated the person's name, his birth date, his birthplace, and the nature of his errand, was usually made out for a stated period of time, was temporary only, and was good only for the journey. It was carried by the traveler who had to produce the document in question at any time he was challenged by the authorities.

Registers of those who received domestic passports can be found in every *län*, on deposit in the regional archives (*landsarkiv*) to which the *län* belongs.

Passports for foreign travel

Special registers for those who went abroad are also to be found in these archives, but though these foreign passports were also limited in time, they were usually issued for longer stays abroad, sometimes as long as two or three years, particularly if it involved an apprentice or journeyman who went abroad to gather some foreign experience, before returning to Sweden to practice his craft.

(**Ed:s note:** all passports were abolished in 1860).

The exit permit

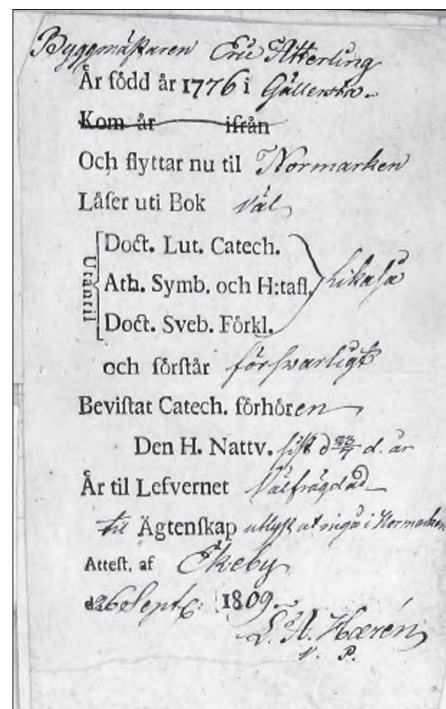
The second type of document was the responsibility of the parish, who issued the exit permits, which were usually permanent in nature, as for example, when a person or a family moved from one parish to another, to take over an inherited farm, to

manage an industry, or for persons on the lower scale, servants and maids, who moved to another parish because there was no work opportunity in the home parish. The exit permit, or *flyttningsbevis*, which literally means movement certificate, was in the beginning often a handwritten document, made out by the clergyman, containing some facts concerning the person, such as his name, his birth date, his birthplace, from which abode he was moving, and to which parish he was going. Occasionally the shoemaker's apprentice or the journeyman tailor did not know where he might find employment, in which case the clergyman wrote that the person seeking the permit was going to *obestämd ort* (destination unknown).

Increased mobility

As a result of the smallpox vaccination program, which came to Sweden in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, fewer people died in infancy. More people lived to maturity and thus economic pressures began building as a result of this population explosion. The family, which normally had eight or nine children and would have lost half of them through smallpox, now would see all or almost all of their children achieve maturity. Suddenly there were many more mouths to feed. People became restless and began eyeing greener pastures across the parish border. The increased mobility of the parish population brought increased work for the clergyman to record all those who left or came. It was no longer possible to keep up the traffic with handwritten permits and the authorities began issuing printed forms, which could be filled out with a minimum of time.

At the same time the authorities promulgated a law, dated Nov. 23, 1833, which stressed that servants, males as well as females, before leaving a certain parish in order to move to another, had to produce a certificate of good character from their former employers. Without this certificate, the clergyman could refuse to issue an exit permit.



Exit permit from Nordmark parish in Värmland. In this permit it is stated that the carrier, builder Erik Atterling, moves to Nordmark, he reads well in a book and also understands his catechism, his faith, and the explanations to the catechism passably (försvarligt), he has come to the household examinations, has partaken of Holy Communion on April 23 of this year, and is well-known as to his conduct. He is going to marry in Nordmark, as is testified from Ekeby parish on 26 Sept. 1809. (Picture from AD Online).

Mandatory exit permits

On July 20, 1861, another law went into force which included everybody, not only the servant class, which proclaimed that any person moving into a parish had to report to the parish clergyman within two weeks of such move, and no later than 9 Nov. of that year, and to produce an exit permit from the parish from which he was moving. Failure to do this incurred a heavy fine for the laggard. Employers of servants were also cautioned, under threat of a heavy fine, to produce exit permits for the servants recently hired coming from another parish.

When the emigrant, therefore, left his native parish for the U.S., it was the most natural reaction for him to call on his parish pastor and request

A flyttningsbevis (Exit permit)

Front page

(Insl:s nr År 18.....)

Utl:s nr 51 **Flyttningsbevis.** Pag 7 i Husf. B.

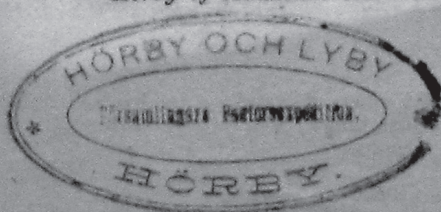
Hustru Kjersti Jonsdatter gift med Drängen
Olof Andersson vid Gästgifvaregården i Hörby
och hans hustru

blefvo med hvarandra sammanvigda den 18²⁶/₁₂ 91 (nittio ett)

Mannen	Hustrun.
är född den 12 Okt. 1846	är född den 21 Februari 1870 (sjuttio)
i Skillypta församling	i Lövsheds församling
af Malmöhus län samt döpt;	af Malmöhus län samt döpt;
Har haft skyddskoppor	Har haft skyddskoppor
Läser innantill;	Läser försvarligt innantill;
Eger kristendomsenskap;	Eger försvarligt kristendomsenskap;
Har bevisat förhören	Har bevisat förhören
Har inom svenska kyrkan begått H. H. Natteard och är dertill fortfarande berättigad	Har inom svenska kyrkan begått H. H. Natteard och är dertill fortfarande berättigad
Åtnjuter medborgerligt förtroende	Åtnjuter medborgerligt förtroende

Aflytta jemte omskrifne barn till Amerika församling af län
före mantalsskrifningen här till nästa år;

Betygar: Hörby och Lyby församlingars Pastors-Expedition
Hörby af Malmöhus Län den 18 Augusti 1892 (nitto två)

 P. Sundegård
Vänd!

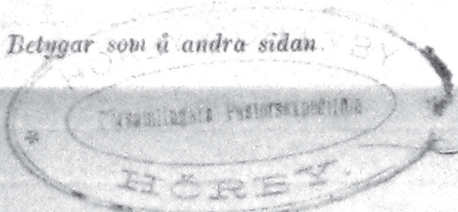
An exit permit (flyttningsbevis), preserved in the records of West Sweadahl Lutheran Church, Watonwan County, Minnesota.

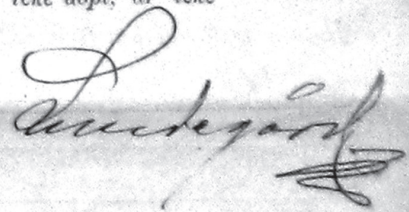
Back of page

Omstående makar åtföljas härifrån af följande, icke konfirmerade barn:

1.	son Nils Emil	född d. 2 Mars	18 92	(nättickad)
i	Horby församling af	Malmöhus län samt	döpt; är icke vaccinerad.	icke döpt; är icke vaccinerad.
2.		född d.	18	()
i	församling af	län samt	döpt; är icke vaccinerad.	icke döpt; är icke vaccinerad.
3.		född d.	18	()
i	församling af	län samt	döpt; är icke vaccinerad.	icke döpt; är icke vaccinerad.
4.		född d.	18	()
i	församling af	län samt	döpt; är icke vaccinerad.	icke döpt; är icke vaccinerad.
5.		född d.	18	()
i	församling af	län samt	döpt; är icke vaccinerad.	icke döpt; är icke vaccinerad.
6.		född d.	18	()
i	församling af	län samt	döpt; är icke vaccinerad.	icke döpt; är icke vaccinerad.
7.		född d.	18	()
i	församling af	län samt	döpt; är icke vaccinerad.	icke döpt; är icke vaccinerad.
8.		född d.	18	()
i	församling af	län samt	döpt; är icke vaccinerad.	icke döpt; är icke vaccinerad.
9.		född d.	18	()
i	församling af	län samt	döpt; är icke vaccinerad.	icke döpt; är icke vaccinerad.
10.		född d.	18	()
i	församling af	län samt	döpt; är icke vaccinerad.	icke döpt; är icke vaccinerad.

Betygar som å andra sidan.





Det åligger hvar och en, som under året inflyttat i en församling, att angående sig och medföljande personer ofördröjligen och inom 14 dagar efter inflyttningen, samt i alla händelser före den 9 November samma år, hos pastor förete prestbevis från utflyttningsorten. Skulle någon under tiden emellan den 8 November och årets slut hafva inflyttat i annan församling än den, han förut tillhört, bör han på sist ättionde dagen efter inflyttningen hafva till pastor aflemnat prestbeviset. Underlåter någon att fullgöra dessa föreskrifter, böte 2 kronor 50 öre.

Husbonde vare, derest inflyttadt tjenstehjon icke redan hos pastor företett sitt prestbevis, pligtig att vid vite af 2 kronor 50 öre, inom 14 dagar, sedan tjenstehjonet inträdt i tjenst, affordra och till pastor aflemna sådant betyg. K. Förordn. d. 20 Juli 1861 § 5.)

Derest detta detyg varder inlemnadt å pastorsexpeditionen i annan församling än den, till hvilken uttattestering skett, torde benågen underrättelse derom meddelas det pastorsembete, som betyget utfärdadt.

Explanations to these pages are to be found on page 12.

the exit permit which he could take along on the journey.

Neither he, nor the pastor, understood that in the U.S., at that time, no one questioned one's past or demanded any type of documentation.

The exit permit in the U.S.

For those immigrants who sought affiliation with a Swedish Lutheran church in America, it was usually customary to produce the exit permit from his home parish in Sweden in order to prove such points as date of birth, confirmation, and marriage status. Sometimes these permits were retained by the pastor, as was done in Sweden, but more often the documents were returned to the new member. Others never bothered to hand in the document, particularly in the non-Lutheran and American churches. Hence, we find that a number of individuals of Swedish descent in the U.S. today still have in their family archives this very useful and important paper.

Those immigrants who preserved

their exit permits and who have later passed them on to their children and children's children did not realize how well they provided for their latter-day descendants in finding the clues to their Swedish origin. Encapsulated in the permit is a wealth of pertinent family documentation, properly attested to by the parish clergyman, thus making it not only an official, but also a legal document, which could be used to prove a birth or marriage date.

As readers will have learned by this time, the exit permit probably is the most useful document a person can possess, and provides an open gate to more extensive research in Sweden. It is unfortunate that so many immigrants, when arriving in the United States, were content to slough off their memories of a country with many restrictions and much red tape, and promptly destroy the evidence of this bureaucracy, thereby helping to destroy the bridge that might have led latter-day descendants to cross over to the country of their origin.

Take care of the permit

A word of caution to those lucky enough to have permits in their archival collections.

These were printed on brittle paper, which yellowed with the passage of years, and when opened from a folded position easily tear and sometimes disintegrate. The paper should be handled as little as possible. By making a photocopy, or a digital photo of the original, it will be easier to study the document and show it to interested parties.

The document itself should be put in an acid-free folder, or better yet, in an archival plastic folder, which can be purchased in most stationery stores. Thus succeeding generations will have the pleasure of personally examining their heritage.

This was first published in the *Swedish American Genealogist* 1981, issue 2.

Explanations to the *Flyttningsbevis* on p.10–11

Front page

Utf.n.r = number in the moving out record.

Pag. 7 i Husf.B =page in the clerical survey.

Then comes the name of the person who gets the permit, in this case wife Kjersti Jönsdotter, married to the *dräng* (hired hand) Olof Andersson at the *Gästgifvargården* (inn) in Hörby [it is not mentioned where he is].

Next come their date of marriage: 1891 Dec. 26.

Then comes the details on Kjersti, when and where born, if she has been inoculated against smallpox. Her reading and knowledge of religion is just passable.

The information of her being present at examinations and Communion, and if she has her civil rights (*medborgerligt förtroende*) are not entered. At about this time it was felt

that the Church of Sweden should no longer record such things. In 1894 the old *husförhörslängder* were no longer kept, they were substituted by the *församlingsböcker* that had the same detailed information about the person, but no longer recorded anything about reading, knowledge, examinations, and communion. These records were kept until 1991 June 30th, when the tax authorities (*Skatteverket*) took over the keeping of population records.

At the bottom of the page it says that she and the children (recorded at the back) are moving to America, and that this will happen before the annual recording of taxpayers (*mantalsskrifning*). The permit is signed by the pastor, Mr. Lundegård, and has the official stamp of Hörby and Lyby parishes.

A quick look in the *Emihamn* database shows that she travelled

with her son Nils Emil and two male Jönssons. They all left Malmö on 1892 Aug. 25 with tickets for New York.

Back of page

Here is the information on her little son, and a space for more children.

At the bottom are printed the Royal Ordinance (*K.Förordn.*) for how long it was allowed to delay showing the exit permit in the new parish, and that there will be a fine of 2 *kronor* 50 *öre* if the law is not followed. If the master of a farm did not check that his new servants had shown their exit permit to the pastor, then he was fined the same amount.

Finally, if a person did not go to the parish stated on the other side, but to another, then the pastor of that parish was asked to send a message to the original parish.