A Swede in Joliet prison

Elisabeth Thorsell
How many of your 19th century ancestors do you know this much about?

This young man evidently ran afoul of the law and ended up in Joliet Prison, Joliet, Illinois.

This is what the prison records tell about him:

Name: Otto Nord
Date of reception: 23 Dec. 1886
Number: 8044
County Court: Knox
Crime and sentence: Horse stealing, 3 years 6 months
Age: 26
Height: 5 ft 8½
Weight: 170
Complexion: Medium dark
Eye color: blue
Hair color: brown
Nativity: Sweden
Occupation: farm laborer
Religion: catholic
Education: R & W 4 years
Habits (alcohol): moderate
Are parents living? Or age of prisoner when parents died: Mother living, father age 25.
Father's POB: Sweden
Mother's POB: Sweden
Age of prisoner when he left home: 22
Conjugal status: single
When discharged: 23 Oct. 1889

In America

Otto had a ticket for Galesburg when he left from Göteborg on 19 May 1882, and so far nothing more is known about his early life in the U.S., except that he was sentenced in Knox County in 1886. If he for some reason had to steal a horse, then he probably was wise to do it in the more civilized part of the country; further out west he might have been hanged from a tree.

As he was released after less than 3 years in prison, he probably showed good conduct.

He is not found in the 1900 U.S. Federal Census, but in 1910 he is living in Rockford, Winnebago County, IL, and works as a finisher in a furniture factory. He is married to Mathilda Christine, a fellow Swede, born ca 1871, and they had been married for seven years (ca 1903). She probably was a widow as there were children in the family older than that: Edward (18), Walter R (16), Norma M (14), and Harold E (10). The youngest was Ture L. Nord, born ca 1904. By 1930 they are still in Rockford; Otto is now a janitor in an apartment building, and stepson Edward S. Olson is an assistant in a bottling factory.

So after his time in prison Otto Nord came back to an ordinary life, which probably was a blessing for him, instead of becomign one of the many “missing Swedes.”

A link to the prison records is found on page 30.