

6-1-2007

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### Recommended Citation

Leaf, Helene (2007) "Family ties to the Dakota Uprising," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 27 : No. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol27/iss2/2>

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# Family Ties to the Dakota uprising – Minnesota 1862. Part 1.

**One of the victims was Mary Anderson,  
but who was she?**

BY HELENE LEAF

This past year I have been researching the family ancestors who settled in the East Union area, Carver County, Minnesota, in the 1850s. During a trip to the Carver County Historical Museum in Waconia, Minnesota, last summer, I discovered microfilm copies of the *East Union News*. This newspaper was published from about 1890 to 1900; the editors were two Carlson brothers, Enoch and Levi, who were cousins to my husband (Reverend John M. Leaf's) grandmother, Anna Carlson. This find provided several hours of fun as I read about the weddings, funerals, births, travels, gatherings, and other happenings in people's lives as can only be recorded in a small town newspaper. I did make one great discovery: the editors' father, A.J. Carlson, had written his reminiscences of his Civil War years in serial form. In each issue of the newspaper

there would be a page or two written about the Civil War. He used his diary to help him remember events. My husband's great-grandfather, Pehr Carlson, had served in the Civil War (1861-1865) in the same company as A.J. Carlson. We have Pehr's letters written home during this period and his diary from 1865, but these newspaper writings were certainly of interest to me. After about six hours of copying, I had found about two year's worth of Civil War remembrances. I had found the information covering the times from August 1862 to October 1863 (the Indian War) and from May 1864 to August 1865 (the time down south). Perhaps this summer I can return and look for the remainder of the material.

I read this material over several times and found that some of the family stories are corroborated by his writing. He wrote about how the East Union area evacuated when the Indians came near in August of 1862. John's great-grandmother, Katarina Carlson, had told her children about this and one of them had written this information down; a copy is amongst the family papers. A. J. also wrote about the time that Pehr Carlson had sunstroke during a battle and was missing in action as he was left behind. He was not captured though and eventually made it back to his company.

## **A young girl was killed**

The story which caught my eye though was that of a young Swedish girl from East Union who was killed in the Indian Uprising in 1862. Her name was *Mary Anderson* and according to the newspaper article, she was a sister to Mrs. Peter Nilsson who still resided in East Union at the time of the writing (about 1895). The newspaper article gave a brief accounting of Mary's capture and subsequent death from a gunshot wound. Who was this Mary Anderson? The challenge was there and the hunt was on.

## **Who was she?**

First I turned to the East Union Lutheran church records (Member Register Book 3) at the Swenson Center and found a Mrs. Peter Nilsson; she was Catharina Svensdotter, born 11 Sep. 1825 in Herrljunga, Älvsborg län, according to the church records. Both Peter and Catharina were charter members of the East Union Church in 1858, and they both immigrated in 1852. The biggest surprise when studying this record was that I had already copied this page because their youngest daughter Anna Josephina had, in 1897, married Caleb Carlson, a son of previously mentioned Pehr and Katarina Carlson. Now there was a family tie.

It was time to look at the Swedish records. I live about 4 miles from the Swenson Swedish Immigration Re-



search Center at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, and it is here that I go to use Genline<sup>1</sup> and various Swedish databases.

## Into Swedish records

Using Genline, I searched for Catharina's birth in the Herrljunga birth records, but I could not find a likely Catharina. I was looking for a Catharina whose father's first name would be Sven and whose last name could very well be Andersson. I next turned to a very valuable database, EMIBAS, which lists the emigrants who have "signed out" to go to a foreign country. I found that Catharina emigrated in 1852 from Herrljunga at the same time as her future husband, who was from Tarsled (part of the Herrljunga *pastorat*). Her birthplace, however, was listed as Larf [modern spelling: Larv], Skaraborg län.

Then it was back to the Swedish records. I found the birth of Catharina Svensdotter in 1825 in the Larf birth records; there was no birth date given but the baptismal date of September 16 was consistent with the birth date of September 11<sup>th</sup> in the East Union Lutheran Church records. Her parents were Sven Svensson and Helena Ericsson. I had

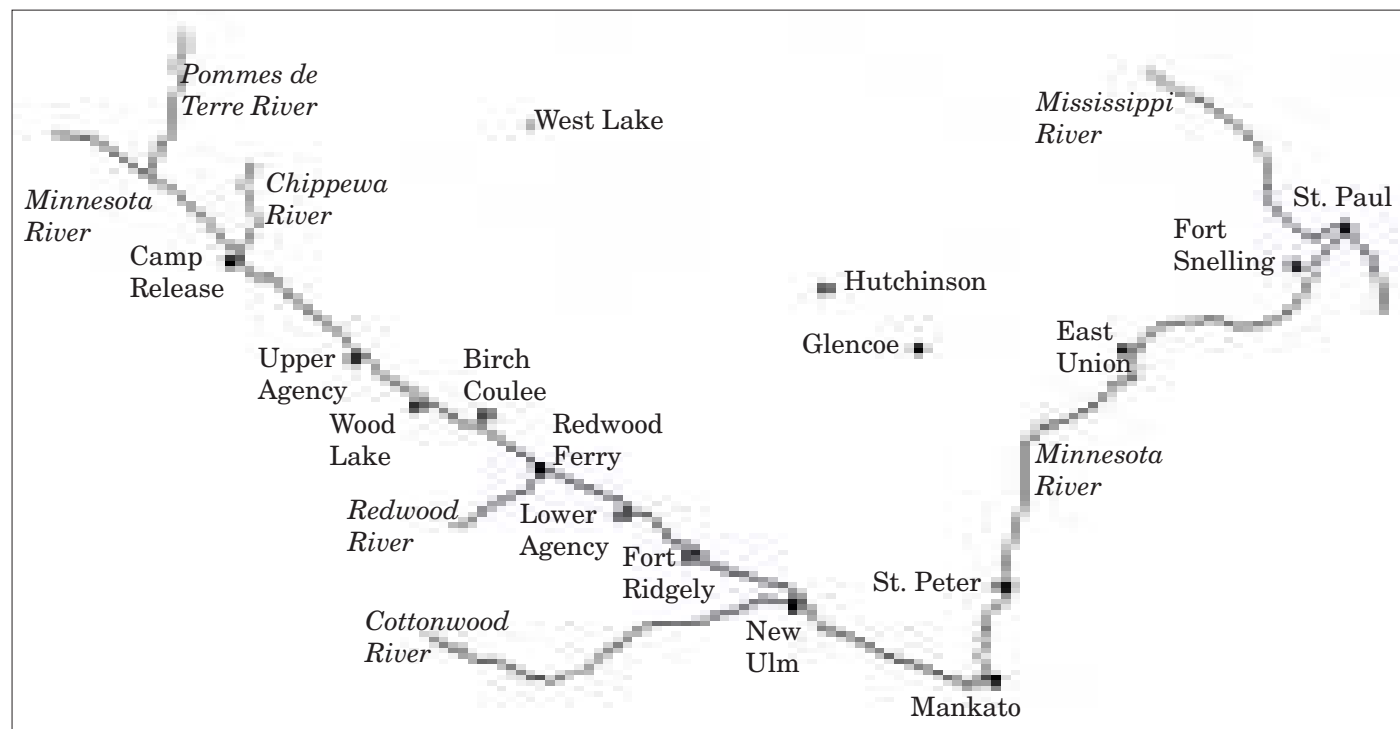
expected the father's name to be Sven Andersson. If Mary had come as a child, she most likely would have taken her father's last name. Using U.S. Census records (1860 through 1900), I checked for another Catharina Svensdotter/Nelson, but this seemed to be the only possible one. Thus I continued following this particular Mrs. Peter Nelson.

Then it was on to the HFL<sup>2</sup> for Catharina Svensdotter's family. In the Larf HFL I found the Sven Svensson family, but Catharina was not listed. However, the family moved in 1825 to Herrljunga. I was able to find this family in the Herrljunga records and here Catharina was listed with the September 11, 1825, birth date. This record provided two problems. First Catharina's mother was born in 1790 and her father in 1782. It was not likely that these two would be the parents of a child born in the early 1840s. The second surprise was that Catharina had a sister born in 1812; her name was Maja Stina. This certainly was not the young girl working 50 years later as a maid in Minnesota and having the name Mary Anderson. Time to recheck the steps I had taken. I did this; I decided that I did have the correct Mrs. Peter Nelson/Catharina Svensdotter.

## When the Indians attacked

In the meantime I was reading all I could find about the attack and capture in which Mary was wounded and later died from her wound. There were numerous writings about it. Mary had been working for Joseph B. Reynolds and his wife Valencia near the mouth of the Redwood River about 10 miles above the Lower Agency. Mr. Reynolds was a teacher for the government, but his home was also a stopping place between the Upper and Lower Agencies.

I read the account of Valencia Reynolds and also several accounts written by Mary Schwandt, who was a 14-year-old girl also working for the Reynolds. On the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> of August 1862 a half-breed trader, John Moore, came to the Reynolds to warn them that the Indians were attacking and killing all the white people. Immediately, the Reynolds family got into their buggy and headed towards Fort Ridgely. They eventually made it there safely although they had some frightening meetings with Indians along the way. Their hired man, William Landmeier, at first was not going to leave, but eventually he started to walk to



the fort; he also made it there safely. The rest who were gathered at the Reynolds's place piled into the wagon of Francois Patoile, a trader from Yellow Medicine; he had been on his way to New Ulm. Besides Mary Anderson and Mary Schwandt, there was another young girl, Mattie Williams, who was a niece of the Reynolds. There was also a Mr. Legrand Davis and an unnamed Frenchman who was riding his own horse. The wagon took off across the prairie and avoided the Lower Agency which the Indians were attacking and burning. When this group was about 10 miles from New Ulm, the Indians attacked. All the men were killed; Mary Anderson was wounded in the lower abdomen with the ball remaining in her body. All three girls were carried off to Wacouta's<sup>3</sup> house near the Lower Agency and after four days to Little Crow's<sup>4</sup> camp about 2 miles above the Lower Agency. It was here at four in the morning that Mary Anderson died. In Mary Schwandt's words; "I was awake when she died, and she dropped away so gently that I thought she was asleep, until Mattie told me she was dead. She was a good girl, and, before she died, she prayed in the Swedish tongue, but I did not understand what she said. She had a ring on her finger, which she wished Mattie to give to her mother, if she died; but, after her death, her finger was so swollen that we could not get it off, and it was buried with her. Joseph Campbell, a half-breed, assisted us in having her buried. Mattie and I saw her carried to the grave by the Indians, wrapped in an old piece of tepee-cloth, and laid in the ground near Little Crow's house. She was subsequently disinterred, as I am informed, and buried at the Lower Agency. A likeness of a young man, to whom she was to have been married, we kept and returned to him; and her own we gave to Mrs. Reynolds, who yet retains it."<sup>5</sup>

## Clues to Mary's identity

In one point in her narrative, Mary Schwandt said that Mary Anderson's

Änkan Maja Svensdotter, 1812—. Döttrarna Maja Stina, skjuten af indianerna under upproret vid New Ulm 1862, och Johannes, död 1859. Sönerna Anders Peter och Johannes afflyttade.

*From the 50th Anniversary book of East Union Lutheran Church.*

father had worked at one of the agencies as a blacksmith. While at the Minnesota Historical Society I did check through the reports for the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the years 1859-1861, but I did not find any blacksmith whose name was Swedish at either the Lower Agency or the Upper Agency. Sometimes the blacksmiths' names were mentioned but not always. This was another dead end.

None of the various accounts gave me much additional information. The Swedish American newspapers wrote about the event, but I could find no additional information about Mary Anderson. It was back to the Swedish records. A searching of the Herrljunga *utflyttningslängd*<sup>6</sup> did reveal that three of Catharina Svensdotter's sisters emigrated at the same time that she did. Two of them were unmarried, but the oldest one, Maja Stina, was married to Anders Andersson. They and their five children also emigrated from the same parish at this same time. One child was Maja Stina, born 4 Apr. 1841. Could this be "my Mary Anderson"?

I checked the 1860 Census for Carver County, and there in San Francisco Township was Maja Svensdotter listed with her two youngest children, but not with Mary. There was a Mary Anderson of the proper age living with a Swedish family in northern Carver County. This could be my Mary Anderson, but it is impossible to tell for sure. Anders Anderson was not listed, but it could have been that he was working elsewhere and was in the census somewhere else. It was also possible that he had died before the census.

I was now sure that Maja Stina Svensdotter had belonged to the East Union Lutheran Church. She was not listed in the indexed 1884 member register (Book 3), but I did find her as a charter member, having become

a member in June 1858. Her husband is not listed so I now assumed that he had died before June 1858.

## Mary is found!

I know that member register books 1 and 2 exist as I have seen them at the church in East Union. I just cannot find them on the microfilms at the Swenson Center although they supposedly were also microfilmed. If I could not get the information otherwise, I would have checked out these books again when I visit the East Union Lutheran Church in Minnesota this summer. However, I was not content to wait. I decided to check out whatever anniversary books the Swenson Center had for East Union Lutheran Church. I really hit the jackpot when I started to read the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book. It is all in Swedish, but I could read it well enough to find this information about the charter members: "*Änkan Maja Svensdotter, 1812- , Döttrarna Maja Stina, skjuten af indianerna under upproret vid New Ulm 1862, och Johanna, död 1859. Sönerna Anders Peter och Johannes afflyttade.*"<sup>7</sup> I had my answer; I had found Mary Anderson.

In this book there was even a picture of Maja Stina Svensdotter (later called Maria Anderson) and her sister Catharina Svensdotter with her husband Peter Nilsson/Nelsson.



*Mrs. Maria Anderson.*



The book is a real treasure-trove of information. I found this information about the Anders Anderson and Maja Svensdotter group which traveled to Carver County in 1854. Their trip was probably much like that of other immigrants to Minnesota during that time period.

A Translation: "In May, another group arrived from Wisconsin. It consisted of Sven Gudmunson and his wife, sons Anders and Johan, also daughters Maria (later Mrs. Nils Alexander) and Lotta, Andreas Anderson and his wife with 5 children, also the sisters-in-law Katrina Svenson (later married to Peter Nilsson) and Anna Kristina Svenson, also Johannes Gustafson. This company had come from Herrljunga, Västergötland, in the spring of 1852 to Milwaukee and then moved to Hartland, a little place some 20 miles from there. In April 1854 they set out to Minnesota with 3 wagons, each pulled by 2 pair of oxen. Besides the most essential household goods, they took along some cows and two pigs which trotted the whole way and during the journey became as tame as dogs. A cat also followed along for someone had written that there weren't any to be had in the new

land. Only the smallest children got to ride. The women walked behind the load and knit stockings. The compass was followed, when one did not know the right way. One evening they came to a beautiful place with a brook and made camp for the night. It had been a warm and stifling day, and in the night a fierce thunderstorm came up. The brook flooded over its banks, the low land was inundated, and one was compelled to get out of the way of the water. It was a difficult night. Some of the men held an umbrella over the cook stove, for they baked and cooked during the nights. On another occasion a man had gone up to a high spot and had seen no way to get down on the road that they planned to take. The oxen were unyoked, rope was attached to the back wheels, some steered the tongue; the rest, both men and women, hung on the rope and let down the load as carefully as possible. The Minnesota River overflowed where the Carver ferry now is, which was then named Louisville, and they sought to build a city there."

I had found Mary Anderson. I also had found much more information about family, and family pictures that I had never seen before. It was

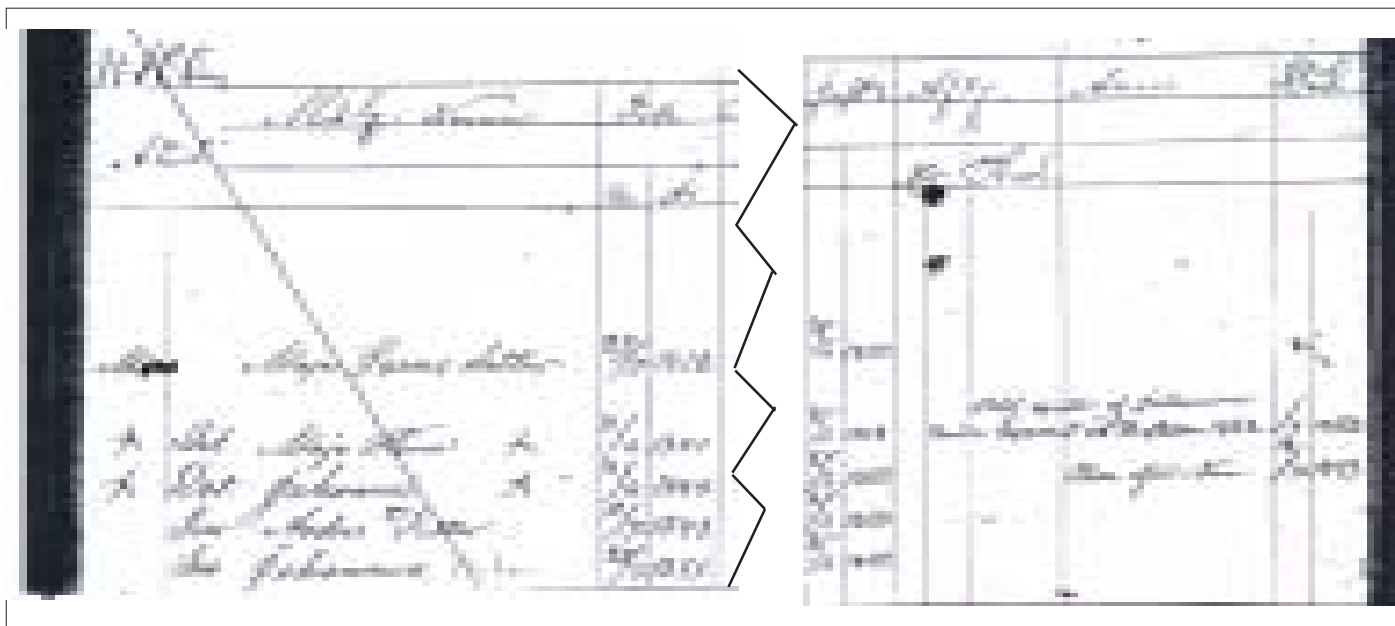
a very fruitful endeavor. However this search for Mary Anderson – Maja Stina Andersdotter, born 1841 in Herrljunga – has lead to finding other relatives who were involved in the Indian War of 1862.

## Notes

- 1 Subscription online database of the Swedish church records.
- 2 *Husförhörlängd*, an ongoing clerical record of Swedish individuals.
- 3 A chief of one of the bands of the Lower Sioux.
- 4 A chief of one of the bands of the Lower Sioux and the head chief of the Indian attackers.
- 5 Bryant, Charles S. and Murch, Abel B., *A History of the Great Massacre by the Sioux Indians in Minnesota*, Rickey and Carroll, Cincinnati, 1864, Pages 340-341.
- 6 Record of people leaving the parish
- 7 *Minnesskrift öfver Skand. Ev. Luth. East Union Församlingen vid hennes Femtioårs-Fest*, Augustana Book Concern, 1908. page 52.

*To be continued.*

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Part of a page of the East Union Lutheran Church records [film R 110], where it says about daughter Maja Stina "Blef skjuten af Indianer under upproret wid New Ulm 1862 [was shot by Indians during the uprising at New Ulm 1862]."