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Write a journal when you travel!

By JACK JOHNS

Every trip that I have made to Sweden, or visits by Swedish relatives here in the States, has resulted in a journal of my travels, and more importantly, a remembrance of things that were said. Interestingly enough, my first journal didn't start as such, just a few notes of places to visit. Let me give you a little background first.

In the late 1980's I was bitten by the genealogy bug. It was a pretty serious bite which has resulted in many visits between the U.S. and Sweden and bringing together cousins who in some cases lived within a few kilometers of each other yet hadn't seen each other in over 20 years.

I always had a large stumbling block where my Swedish ancestors were concerned. My grandfather was born on the ship arriving in the U.S. in 1890, and of course he was proud of that. It makes for interesting reading, when searching records, to see in place of birth "At Sea," but it sure doesn't help in searching where the family came from. Added to that is the fact that he died young when my mother was just a little girl, and you can see how a lot of information can be lost. Town and state records were not much help either, but then in 1989 I discovered the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center and wrote to them with all the information that my mother remembered, including town names and trips to NY to visit a cousin. A few weeks later I received a letter from Christina Johansson with copies of my great-grandparents' embarkation records! Christina was even kind enough to

give me the names of two genealogists in Sweden who might be able to help, one of whom was Elisabeth Thorsell, the present editor of this magazine.

I wrote to Elisabeth with all the information that I had, including a little tidbit that my mother remembered needing to write down family information for her grandmother in the 1940's for a book on the family in Sweden. That book turned out to be *Svenska Släktkalendern* and Elisabeth was the editor! She was able to easily find information in the 1950 edition and gave me the names and addresses of two cousins still living in Stockholm.



Johan Theodor Oscar Waldner (1822–1890), rural dean (prost) of Flisby and Norra Solberga in Linköping diocese.

December 1990 I wrote to the eldest brother, Jan, and awaited his reply with much anticipation. He did not let me down! I'd used my mother's address so as to hear as soon as possible when any reply arrived, and a few weeks later my mother called me at work, ecstatic that a letter had arrived from Sweden! In it was a very warm greeting along with copies of current family photographs and two of my grandfather's grandparents. We were thrilled to hear of the new cousins and a few days after that we received another letter from his younger brother Lars, with more photos and family information. Jan and Lars's father was the genealogist for the family in Sweden, and they were thrilled to discover the "long lost cousins" from America.

This started a long correspondence where I not only learned of my Swedish family relations, but started them all communicating with each other again as well. Then in 1992, the two brothers, Jan and Lars, came to the U.S. to visit us. I contacted cousins here in Connecticut and Massachusetts to come and have a reunion. My mother's aunt and uncle were still alive and it was a wonderful time with many photos taken of the occasion. Soon my sister and I were making arrangements to visit Sweden, and we left in 1993.

Sitting in Kennedy Airport with my sister and niece I started to jot down some notes of places to visit. Soon, however, I started writing down the time we'd left home, when we arrived at the airport, what my sister, my niece, and I said and did, and before I knew it I had several

pages of a journal of our trip. I decided that I would continue that throughout the trip, and I am so happy that I did.

It helps to bring back all those wonderful memories of arriving in Sweden, driving to Stocksund where we would be staying for the next few days, and meeting family. Each night before going to sleep I would write what happened during the day, and would sometimes add more in the morning.

One of my fondest memories of that trip is walking into a small “family gathering” in Danderyd and seeing about 20 people waiting for us. I am so glad that I was writing a journal as I still have the words of the toast that was said to us. “We the descendants of Thure Martin Waldner, welcome back to Sweden the descendants of his brother Oscar Henrik Waldner. *Välkommen! Skål!*”

We had a wonderful trip, meeting cousins in the Stockholm area and then down to Eksjö and next to see the church that our great-great grandfather had built in Flisby. Best of all was being able to show our videos and photos, with a detailed description of where we were and what we did from the journal, to our family back home.

As the years have gone by, some of the family has passed away, new members have been born, and the



Thure Martin Waldner (1855–1901), captain. (Krigsarkivets porträttsamling.)

memories fade, but pulling out a journal and opening its pages will bring me right back to Sweden, where it is always summer, and I am again with my cousins.

Computers are making things so much faster, but there is a feeling I can't quite describe of writing down on paper the things that happened on my travels. Entering it into the computer afterwards can make a wonderful gift for present and future generations.



Oscar Henrik Waldner (1863–1934) as a young lieutenant before his immigration in 1890. (Krigsarkivets porträttsamling.)

So next time you take a trip to visit relatives be sure to bring a blank notebook, plenty of pens, and write, write, write. Years later you will be so glad that you did.

Jack Johns lives in West Haven, Conn. His e-mail is <jack.johns@charter.net>

The Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellowship

This year there were four applications for the Olsson Fellowship, and the applicants all had good projects. They were voted on by the Advisory Board of the Swenson Center. Two applicants were chosen to receive fellowships for 2007: *Christopher D. Cantwell*, of Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, and *Dr. Elizabeth Baigent*, University Reader in the History of Geography at the University of Oxford, England.

Mr. Cantwell is a graduate student at the Department of History at Cornell, and his dissertation project is called “Bodies of Worship: Gender, Class, and Congregation among Chi-

cago's Evangelicals, 1870-1920” and he wants to use the Swenson resources to look at Swedes in Chicago and their relationship to Dwight Moody.

Dr. Baigent's project concerns the Swedes in McKeesport, PA, and she writes “The iron and steel mills of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, made that town a magnet for immigrant labour at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: amongst those attracted were many Swedes. They were sustained by Swedish community groups and a surprisingly vibrant and liberal Swedish language press. Although illness, drink,

and misfortune brought down some migrants, others were upwardly socially mobile, and most thought themselves better off in their new home than in their old.” Her work will result in a book, which promises to be interesting reading, and which we hope to be able to review in SAG, when it has appeared in real life.

The fellowship, which is in the amount of \$1,500 (taxable income), is open to anyone doing academic research on any aspect of Swedish-American history. The deadline for applications is May 1, 2008.