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From ward of the parish (*sockenbarn*) in Sweden to pastor in America

**“America, the land of opportunity”
proves to be the truth**

BY KERSTIN JONMYREN

Through my work as a professional genealogist I have made a new genealogy friend, Ned Nordine. He lives in Ludington in the Midwest and is active in the local Baptist congregation. It was founded a long time ago by local Swedish-Americans. Ned is in charge of the archive of his church, and one day he found a number of autobiographies, all written in Swedish around the turn of the 20th century. They were all about pastors with a Swedish background that had served his church.

Of course, Ned was interested in these texts and asked me to translate them, but first he wished to find out about the pastors' Swedish background. Most of these pastors came from farmers' homes in southern Sweden, and had been educated in Stockholm.

One of them did not fit this pattern; he had both a different background and a different track in life. His name was Isak Hedberg and he came from Torp parish in Medelpad in northern Sweden.

An unwed mother

On 29 May 1850 an unwed maid at Backen in Torp gave birth to a boy. The child was christened a few days later and given the name Isak. The maid was named Cajsa Greta Sundström, born 10 April 1815. She lived her last years as a lodger at Vagi in Torp with her two boys, Isak and his older brother Per Olof, born 8 Aug. 1845.

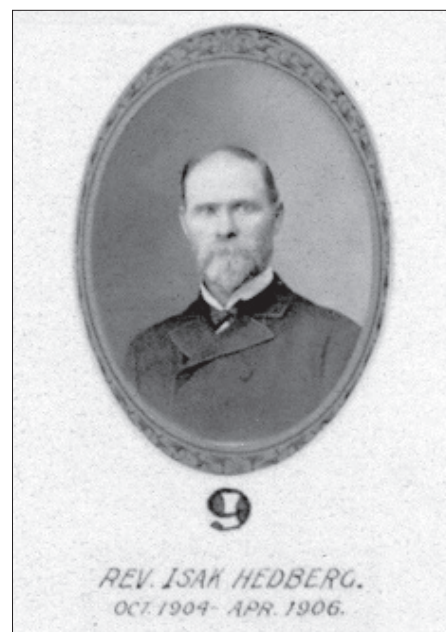
Cajsa Stina died 30 January 1857 and Isak became an orphan. In his

autobiography he tells that he was sold at auction to the person in the parish who gave the lowest bid to keep him. He tells about the very difficult years that followed. He first lived with the Nils Jonsson family in Vike 2, and then, presumably after his confirmation, was able to work as a farmhand at Väster Komsta, Finsta, Storboda, and last Kälen near Finsta. By 1860 he had already started to use the surname Hedberg. During his time as an orphan he got his birth date mixed up and is listed thereafter as having been born on 16 June 1850.

Around 1873 he met his future wife Kajsa Greta Matsdotter, born 2 June 1848 in Stöde, a nearby parish. In 1876 they moved in with Kajsa Greta's father Mats Matsson Sundström, born 30 January 1814 in Stöde, who lived at Kälen as a widower and former sharecropper (*torpare*). Isak is then listed as a charcoal maker.

Meeting with Baptists

In his autobiography Isak tells that he met Baptists for the first time at the home of some neighbors of the family where he was living as a *sockenbarn* (ward of the parish). He happened to enter the room when they held a meeting and at the end they also prayed for the orphaned Isak, who was very touched by that they also cared for him, the orphan. In 1873 he and his fiancée Kajsa Greta both joined the local Baptist congregation.



Immigration

Mats, Kajsa Greta, and Isak all left Kälen on 25 November 1880, with the destination of Muskegon, Michigan.

There is no record about why they left or how it was possible, but a year later Isak was a student at a Baptist seminary in Stromsburg, Nebraska, where he became a pastor. His first mission was to Fish Lake, Minnesota, and later travelled as a "state missionary" in Minnesota, Michigan, and South Dakota.

He was in Dalton, Muskegon County, in Michigan from 1899 to 1901, and in South Dakota 1901–1903. A missionary of the Swedish Baptist churches in those days had responsibilities that might correspond to the job of the district executive minister and church planter of the Baptist General Conference to-

day. The missionary visited the churches in his district and offered encouragement and whatever help he could.

In 1904, pastor Hedberg left Michigan and moved to the Baptist Church of Ludington (now Cornerstone Baptist Church). He pastored there in Ludington from October 1904, until April 1906. The church's history describes his preaching as "strong and courageous."

The Hedberg's foster daughter was called Levia Ruby and was born on February 19, 1889.

On November 9, 1906, Rev. Hedberg conducted the marriage ceremony which united his daughter with Andrew Anderson. The marriage took place in the Dalton church. The witnesses were Mr. and Mrs. Sven Lexen of Ludington, (Emma Lexen

was the sister of the groom.) Levia and Andrew Anderson lived in Ludington following the wedding. They had four children. Levia died in 1921, at the age of 32.

In 1909 Isak and his wife Kajsa Greta returned to Torp, where he served for a year as pastor to the Fränsta Baptist Congregation, but the Hedbergs returned in 1910 to the U.S. There he became the "finance secretary" to the Sunset Home in Clay Center, South Dakota, a home for old people, run by the Baptists. Isak only lived there for about 6 months before he died 27 April 1911.

The Hedberg couple did not have any children of their own, but during their time in the U.S. they took in their foster daughter, who was listed as next of kin with Kajsa Greta when Isak died. Isak also had a brother in

Sweden. He might be identical with the retired allotment seaman (*båtsman*) Per Olof Klots, born in 1845 in Torp, who in 1900 lived at Flata in Torp, with his family.

Sources:

Database *Emibas*

Torp church records:

C:6, page 77

AI:12b, pages 405, 560

AI:13b, pages 680, 686, 757, 704

AI:14, pages 353, 358, 710, 755

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The church started as a Scandinavian Baptist Church in Ludington, Michigan. After a few years the Danes and Norwegians left and formed their own church. The church was then the Swedish Baptist Church until the Swedish language was dropped and the church became Washington Avenue Baptist Church. In 2004, the church moved to a new location no longer on Washington Avenue and now is the Cornerstone Baptist Church. (Information from Rev. Ned Nordine, Ludington.)