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Jill Seaholm

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Database errors and omissions, and ways around them

BY JILL SEAHOLM

Indexes are wonderful things and can save us hours of search time. I spend many hours a week looking in various computerized and micro-filmed genealogical indexes. However, there are errors and omissions that can prevent us from finding the people that we are looking for, when they are often right there to be found. I have the good fortune to have a wealth of resources at my fingertips at the Swenson Center, and can often go to a backup source when I am unable to find the person I'm looking for. I know that not everyone has the means to do that, but I hope that hearing about my techniques will teach you to be patient with indexes.

It's important to remember that information has usually been typed into indexes by human beings, and we all make typing errors and can be certain that the number we saw was a "7" when everyone else could plainly see that it was a "1." I have made plenty of mistakes myself and have learned to be quite forgiving when it comes to errors I find in indexes, and I have found errors and omissions in every database I have used.

Examples of horrible misspellings

The way I understand the U.S. port arrival records were originally generated was by transcribing the departure manifests that the ships' captains brought with them. If a name was incorrect in the departure records, the error would theoretically be carried to the arrival records. Consider also that the person doing

the transcribing may not have been able to read everything clearly, or that that person was not necessarily familiar with Swedish naming practices and entered names as closely as he or she could get.

In one case I was looking for a mother and her three children in the indexed New York passenger arrivals 1850-1891. I had found them leaving Malmö in *Emihamn* as Elna Jonsson with children Johanna, Gerda Maria, and Anna with a destination of Streator, IL. Finding them in the New York arrivals took some real effort because of major misspellings in the database, but I eventually found Elna and the three children arriving in New York on 19 June 1889 aboard the *State of Pennsylvania*. Here Elna's name was spelled "Elue" and Gerda Maria was spelled "Geida Maris." Their destination was "Strcaton, Illinois."

In a few other misspelling examples from the index to New York passenger arrivals I found an Amanda Christina Abrahamsson arriving aboard the *Devonia* from Glasgow, Scotland on 19 July 1882 as "Amand Abrahmonson." In another case I found a Cathrina Larsdotter and her children August, Johan, and Hjalmar arriving aboard the *Canada* on 8 May 1872. I chose to search for them under Hjalmar's name because it was the least common, but unfortunately it was misspelled as "Hya-man."

Once I found a Rydgren family listed as Kindgren. All the first names and ages matched (somewhat misspelled, but the same). It's another legitimate Swedish surname,

but not close enough! And Anders Poulsson arrived in 1852 aboard the *Industrie*, but the database had him as "Andrs Poulum" and the ship was spelled "*Tudentire*."

The Garner experience

My husband Dave Garner was attempting to find his Garner ancestors in the 1850 Census in Virginia in a printed statewide index that he had found at the Family History Center in Salt Lake City. None of his Garners was listed there. He had not been able to find them in Iowa in 1850 and was not sure when they had migrated from Virginia to Iowa, or exactly where they had lived in Virginia. The Virginia counties had been divided and subdivided over the years, and he had a few counties in mind where he thought they might be. He was at a dead end and let it go for a while.

Then while we were visiting a good friend in Washington D.C. several months later, we spent a few hours in the Library of Congress. In the genealogy area, browsing books on the Virginia and West Virginia shelves, we found a book of the 1850 Federal Census index of Virginia. It was specifically for Barbour County, which was one of the counties near Grafton, where we knew one of his Garner ancestors was born. In it we were relieved to find two of the Garner sons listed with their wives and children, but not the parents or the other two married sons. However, a glance a few inches over to the other side of the page showed families named Gainer, and three of the Gainer families turned out to be

Dave's Garners misspelled. Turning back one page showed some more matching Gainers. Finding that enabled us to go back and find them in the statewide census index book, and ultimately the 1850 census microfilm. We were happy to find them, but had been delayed by several months in finding his Garner ancestors in 1850 in Virginia because their names had been misread as Gainer instead of Garner, which seems easy to do since in cursive handwriting the two names have only the dot above the 'i' to distinguish them. In summary, the statewide index had all of the names spelled incorrectly and the transcribed county index had two right and three wrong. Anyone using the Barbour County book as a source for new indexes will perpetuate the error. There was no Soundex for 1850 Virginia, but it would not have helped because the Soundex code for Garner is G656 and for Gainer it is G560.

Parish name instead of surname

I don't know how I was lucky enough to find this couple of travelers several years ago since it took place before the *Emibas* database came out, but I eventually I found Emma Rydén and her mother, Christina Pettersson Rydén, leaving the port of Göteborg. Their place names were incorrectly entered in the name field in the database: Christina was instead "Christine Ö Thorsås" and her daughter Emma was "Emma Thor." Finding these people was what the patron needed to advance his research into parish records. That was in the 1996 version of *Emihamn*, and I see now that they've changed it in the 2001 version so it just says "Ö" as Christina's last name, and it is the same in *Emigranten Populär*.

A Göteborg problem in 1880

In another case, I found a family listed in various places as Hansson when their name was Karlsson. I had already found the family as Karlsson

in 1880 in *Emibas*, but was having difficulty finding them in *Emihamn* and it felt like they should be easy to find. I discovered years ago that in *Emihamn* for Göteborg port in 1880 only people traveling alone and heads of traveling households were included in the database, so I knew the wife and children would not be listed.

I next went to our microfilm of the 1880 Göteborg passenger index and looked for one of the less commonly named children in the first name section. There I found one child that matched. The father's surname was off, and when that happens you should find several other things that match. Now absolutely everything did match, such as the port departure date being just a few days after the parish departure date, Trehörna parish matched, all of the other first names and ages, and the Chicago destination, were perfect.

I found the same family arriving in New York under the wrong surname. Because so many things were right about it, I determined that I had the right family and that the person who typed up the index a few decades ago misread Karlsson as Hansson. It's also possible that the pastor wrote the wrong name on their migration papers, starting a chain of errors. I confirmed that I had the right family when I went back to *Emibas* and found no Hansson family leaving the parish at the same time. The patron had been looking for their arrival for 12 years, so it felt good to find that for her.

Swedish letters are so important

I had been asked to find emigration info about a person named Amanda

that had been born in *Möckleby* parish. Initially I had trouble finding Amanda leaving a port in *Emihamn*. I had been searching for Amandas from Kalmar county on the east coast. (Möckleby parish had split into Norra and Södra Möckleby parishes, both in Kalmar county.) To help figure it out, I searched for Amanda's parents, whose names I already had, in the 1890 Census of Sweden and found them living in *Myckleby* parish in Västergötland. After that I knew that I should be looking for someone from the west coast area, and I found Amanda right away. It's important to note that the parish name spellings are *not* normalized in *Emihamn* and many other databases, so one must search in ways that will encompass all possible spellings. Here are other similar-named parishes that can get mixed up, but sometimes you see one parish spelled as the other: Skarstad (R) and Skärstad (F), Sankt Olai (E) and Sankt Olof (L), Åmot (X) and Åmål (P), and Våxtorp (N) and Voxtorp (F & H).

Missing child

Here's an unusual case where an infant child, Tilda Charlotta, was not listed with the family in *Emibas* when they left their parish, but when I found them leaving Göteborg, she was there. Curious, I went to the household records using our Genline subscription and found the family, hoping that she would be there and that someone had neglected to enter her into *Emibas*, but there was no infant listed in the household either (fig. 1). I knew when the girl should have been born and went to the birth records and found her listed (fig.2), and she should indeed have been listed with the family in the house-

6	Familj Anders Andersson Lund	33' ¹⁸ / ₄	Skarstad				
	H. Catharina Larsson	34' ³ / ₈	ibm				
7	Son Lars August	39' ¹ / ₂	ibm				
	Son Johan Alfred	60' ² / ₄	ibm				
8	Son Sida James Hyalmar	67' ¹ / ₈	ibm				
	H. Augusta	62' ³ / ₈	ibm				
9	Son Olaf	66' ⁷ / ₈	ibm				

Fig. 1. When Anders Andersson Lund and his family left in 1872, daughter Tilda was not listed. (Vara AI:7, p. 44)

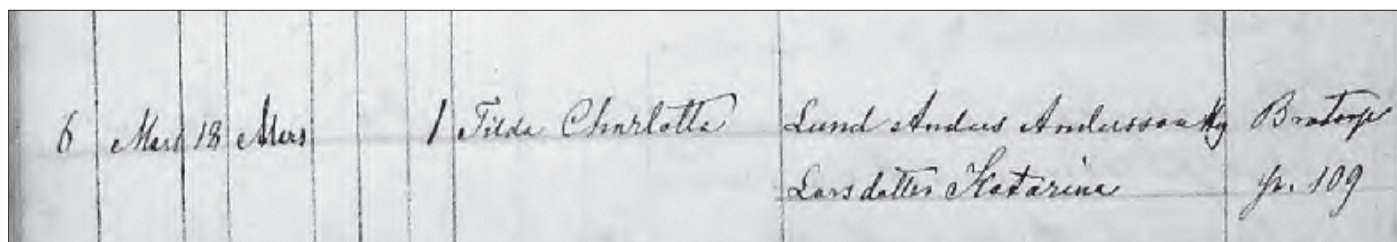


Fig. 2. Little Tilda was indeed born to her parents in Tråvad, but the clergyman forgot to record her on page 109, as he should. (Tråvad C:1).

hold records. In the birth records I noticed that the attending pastors' names were listed on each line, and every baptism was performed by the same pastor except the one child I was looking at. What I think happened was that the substitute pastor entered her in the original birth records but neglected to enter her in the household records on her family's page. The pastors must not have counted heads for a while, because the family even moved from her birth parish to another before emigrating, and she was not listed in the second parish either. So she is missing from two household record books. Then because she was not listed in the last household, she was not entered in *Emibas*. It was the port police that must have noticed (because they wanted payment for her passage!), so she is now in port departure and arrival records.

Some extra children

For one patron I found an entire family listed in *Emibas*. There were a couple of extra children listed there that were not listed in the Chisago Lake church record: Hilda Maria and Frans August. I assumed that they'd died on the way to the U.S., but wanted to be sure so I could tell the patron what had happened. So I went to page 669 of the household records for Linneryd parish covering 1870 (volume AI:20, Genline ID# 833.49.29700). There I found the whole family listed at #81 Flislycke (fig.3). The two extra children, on lines 7 & 8, are crossed off and they have death dates in 1868 & 1870. It appears that they were entered into *Emibas* in error and died before their parents and siblings emigrated.

Arrival in New York?

Once a person or family is found in *Emihamn*, the next step is often to find the arrival record in New York arrival indexes. However, if the name one needs to look for is some form of the name Johnson, one's heart sinks. The first thing I do is to see if any of the family members had an uncommon first name and do a search for that name and a surname starting with 'J'. I don't want to enter any more than that because things are almost never spelled the same way twice in records. If that yields too many possibilities or looks like it will take a long time to go through, I will go back to *Emihamn* and print a list of passengers who bought tickets just before and after my person, and pick out people among them with the least common names. I will then look for *their* names in the arrivals. If I find them, I can usually look up or down the arrival list and find my original

person. That usually works, but not always. It might be necessary to search the entire list of people leaving the same port the same day, or even within a few days in either direction, for there is no guarantee that all passengers leaving Sweden on the same ship made it onto the same transatlantic ship from Britain. The same thing can be done in reverse when trying to find a person leaving a Swedish port. I have been given arrival records and been asked to find something about the person in Sweden. If the name is too common, I'll have to search for someone near him on the manifest with a less common name and find him or her in the Swedish (or Danish or Norwegian) passenger indexes.

Sometimes your Swede will be listed as from another country on arrival, but people around him/her all left Sweden with him/her. In the New York passenger arrival index I

Personen namn, ålder, utbildning, yrke och utgångsdatum. (Namn, ålder, utbildning, yrke och utgångsdatum.)		Barn		Utgångsdatum		Född		Död	
Namn	Ålder	Barn	Utgångsdatum	Namn	Ålder	Född	Död	Namn	Ålder
<i>81 Flislycke</i>									
<i>Hilda Maria</i>	<i>1868</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>Frans August</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>
<i>Hilda Maria</i>	<i>1868</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>Frans August</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>
<i>Hilda Maria</i>	<i>1868</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>Frans August</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>
<i>Hilda Maria</i>	<i>1868</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>Frans August</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>
<i>Hilda Maria</i>	<i>1868</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>Frans August</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>
<i>Hilda Maria</i>	<i>1868</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>Frans August</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>
<i>Hilda Maria</i>	<i>1868</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>Frans August</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>
<i>Hilda Maria</i>	<i>1868</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>Frans August</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>
<i>Hilda Maria</i>	<i>1868</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>Frans August</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>
<i>Hilda Maria</i>	<i>1868</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>Frans August</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1870</i>

Fig. 3. The missing children had died. (Linneryd AI:20, p. 669)

found 'A. Lund' arriving on 17 May 1871 aboard the *Nevada* from Liverpool. It says that he was from Germany, but I know he was a Swede because the people traveling before and after him are the same Swedes who left Göteborg with him.

Leaving alone or not?

This type of case is not an error in database entry, but it is actually quite common to find a family listed as emigrating from their parish to America all at the same time when they actually did not leave together. For example, in *Emibas* I found a family of seven registering together to leave Vara parish in Skaraborgs län in 1872. In *Emihamn* I found the father Anders leaving Göteborg port by himself in April 1871. Then I found the rest of the family leaving Göteborg in April 1872. I regularly find examples just like this.

Another time I found Erik Magnusson leaving Göteborg port in 1885 and his wife Carolina Andersdotter leaving Malmö port in 1886 with son Carl Oscar Robert. Sometimes the date they are registered to leave the parish matches the father's port departure, and sometimes it matches the rest of the family's. And, it happens that I sometimes find the wife and children leaving the Swedish port under the new surname that the husband had adopted while by himself in America.

Name change

Last year I was looking for a Philip Peterson for a patron. The patron's cousin had found Philip for him in the Ellis Island records online and asked for more information about him. I found the same Philip Peterson in *Emihamn* and then in *Emibas* and determined that he had the wrong birthdate and that the patron's cousin had not found the right man in the Ellis Island records. I then went through *Emibas*, then *Emihamn* and Ellis Island and found that Philip had traveled under his patronymic, not Peterson. On 16 Sep. 1910 he registered to emigrate from Änimsborg parish to North America

as Filip *Eriksson*. I know that this is the right Filip because leaving his parish at the same time was an Algot Andersson and he is shown immediately below Filip on the passenger index.

Right date?

Here's an interesting case where the patron asked about the birthdate and place of her ancestor, Augusta, because she had conflicting information about her. *Emibas* and the parish household record (Trehörna AI:13) both said that she was born in 1866, but the moving paper in the patron's possession said 1869 and the age on the passenger index was consistent with one born in 1869. One theory that I'd started with while composing my letter to the patron was that Augusta appeared younger in the passenger indexes perhaps because her parents had presented her age as lower, maybe to pay less for her passage. Looking more closely at the copy of Augusta's moving paper (fig. 4), I noticed that on line 4 the date 1869 and the numbers written out as "sixty-nine" *sextionio* were darker than everything else, and eventually concluded that it had been altered. I'm convinced that people altered dates on their papers as often then as they do nowadays. Staring at it, I could see how it had previously said 1866 and someone changed the last '6' to a '9,' and that the '9' had to drop below the line. Above its circle I could see traces of where it used to be a '6.' I don't think that this is unusual. Once I saw an entire family listed in the passenger indexes with all of the children's ages

exactly 2 years lower than the parish records had said that they were, and I guessed that it must have been in order to pay less for their passage. This was the first time I had seen evidence of ages being altered. Very interesting indeed.

Conclusions

Four or five of the above examples resulted from questions that all came from the same patron. When one of my response letters is so full of explanations about why the person I've found is the right person but there are so many things wrong with the printouts, I wonder sometimes if the patron thinks I'm brilliant to have found my way around the errors, or wonders if I'm just making things up so the emigrant fits the person I found! At least I can usually provide proof in the form of photocopies. Most of these examples also came from requests I performed in about a 2-week period, so they happen pretty regularly. I could provide dozens more.

One thing to be careful of is when searching databases involving the person's year of birth. For example, if you use the 1880 U.S. Federal Census index online at the LDS's www.familysearch.org site, it has the person's year of birth listed, but if you see an original handwritten 1880 Census form, it shows their ages in years, not their years of birth. Do not rely on that birth year to be exact in the database. The year of birth is in such databases because they have made a calculation by subtracting each person's age from 1880 to get an approximate year of

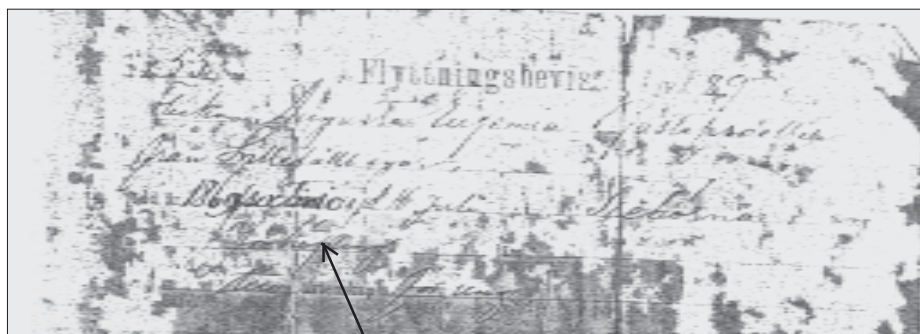


Fig. 4. The Flyttningsskett for Augusta Eufemia Gustafsdotter from Trehörna, where her year of birth has been altered.

birth. Your person may not have had his birthday yet when the census was taken that year, which could make the calculated birth year be a year off. Do your birth-year searches on the +/- 2 years setting, at least. If your ancestor's misspelled name bothers you enough, it may be possible to contact someone with a correction (but who is to say what the actual correct spelling was then?). The **www.ellislandrecords.org** provides an e-mail address to which you can send error corrections for them to collect and eventually take care of. Other sites may do the same.

Never assume that your ancestor's name is in a source the way you think it was spelled or to find it spelled the same way in every record. Your ancestor was usually not the one who entered the name into record books. The names 'Peter' and 'Per' were forms of the same name, and one parish pastor may have preferred the spelling 'Petter', while the man who

took their traveling papers at the port may have entered the same person as 'Peter' or even 'Pehr'. I don't consider that a misspelling, but a spelling variation.

Enter your search criteria cautiously and try several spelling variations or you might miss finding them. Do *not* try to fill in every search field in case some are blank in your person's record or it will not catch him, and a search of the exact spelling of the name might not catch him. Your ancestor Anders Lund might be in some records as 'A. Lund', so look for male Lunds whose first names start with 'A' and who were born 2 years before and after your person. Don't give up too quickly. Also, remember that indexes do not necessarily exist to be taken as gospel but to lead us to original records.

Consult and cite original sources to be certain that you are sharing the most accurate information possible.

My husband's Danish great-grandparents are listed in an LDS database as buried in Utah, when we have been to their graves in Illinois. They also were listed with the completely wrong forebears. Someone was careless.

You can see that it pays to keep an open mind when it comes to names and spellings in all types of records, even handwritten. These are things that I deal with on a daily basis at work, and I am happy to share my examples and tricks with you. I hope it helps you find something that you couldn't before.

Jill Seaholm is Head of Genealogical Services at the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Rock Island, Illinois. Her e-mail is:
<JillSeaholm@augustana.edu>

People from Ockelbo/Ugglebo

Ockelbo, also called Ugglebo or Ugglebo, is a parish in northern Gästrikland, near the boundaries to Hälsingland and Dalarna. It is in the forest area, but also had its share of iron works and other small industries. In the year 1890 exactly 6,438 individuals called Ockelbo home, according to the "Population of Sweden 1890."

People having their roots in Ockelbo often have a hard time as the church burned in 1904 and with it most of the older records.

Now former school teacher *Elsa Lagevik* has devoted years to try to reconstruct the information on the population of Ockelbo before 1900. She has been using tax records, probates, court records, soldier muster rolls and much more, and it all ended in a database of some 28,000 individuals that used to live in Ockelbo. There is information on 4 iron works, 590 soldiers, 2 railroads and their employees, and much more, not to forget a detailed map of the parish from 1856, and some 40 old

pictures from the area.

The CD is totally in Swedish but should not be difficult to use; but a good Swedish-English dictionary might help.

Elsa Lagevik is also the author of *People of the Red Barns* (printed in 1996), which is a history of the early emigration from northern Sweden, including the Erik Janssonist group that came to Bishop Hill in Illinois.

The Ockelbo CD can be ordered from Elsa Lagevik at
<elsa.lagevik@swipnet.se>.

The price is 400 SEK + postage (roughly \$63 in Feb. 2008). It is probably best to contact Mrs. Lagevik and ask about the total cost before ordering.

Passport applications now online!

Ancestry.com has a new, exciting database. This database contains U.S. passport applications from 1795-1925, including emergency passport applications (passports issued abroad) from 1877-1907. It also contains passport application registers for 1810-1817, 1830-1831, and 1834-1906. Passport applications often include information regarding an applicant's family status, date and place of birth, residence, naturalization (if foreign-born), and other biographical information. Twentieth-century applications often include marriage and family information as well as dates, places, and names of ships used for travel.

When doing a search on people born in Sweden, almost 29,000 individuals were found. "Varmland, Sweden" gave 95 hits, and "Ostergötland, Sweden" gave 111 hits. If you are lucky there might also be a photo of the future traveller.