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Fred Rundquist – Jazz guitar player and a successful immigrant

BY ELISABETH THORSELL

A couple of months ago I was looking at some page in the *Chicago Tribune* and noticed a link to the obituaries column. After clicking on the link there were a number of recently deceased Chicagoans, and my attention was drawn to one with a very Swedish name: *Fred Rundquist*.

I knew nothing about him, but found out from his obituary that he had been a successful guitar player. During World War II he had played in a band with the Army Air Forces, and afterwards he played with jazz accordionist Art van Damme, and in other orchestras with vocalists such as Peggy Lee, Judy Garland, Dinah Shore, and Frank Sinatra.

It was mentioned in the obituary that he had been born in 1918 in Swedish Kiruna, in Norrbotten län, and had immigrated with his parents in 1923 to Chicago. Another obituary mentioned him as being born on 2 January, and mentioned his parents as Carl W. and Ida Rundquist; also mentioned were a brother, Carl, and a sister Valborg.

With all this information I thought it would be easy to find the family in the 1930 U.S. Census.

It was not. I tried various ways of finding them, but found no results until I looked for any Rundquist, born in Sweden, with a wife Ida.

The only one I found was named Walfred, so just to check who they were, I looked at the page, and found

the right family! The older children were Carl and Valborg as they should be, but the father was Walfred and the youngest son, age 12, was also Walfred, which later became just Fred! Maybe the changed first names are the reason that I still have not found them on Ellis Island?

The family lived at Belmont Avenue in Chicago, but where did they come from?

Swedish background

The next step was to look for the birth of *Fred*, who was said to have been born 2 January 1918 in Kiruna, in Lappland, in the county of Norrbotten in northernmost Sweden.

Extracts of Swedish birth notices are now available on the subscription site SVAR <www.svar.ra.se> up to 1938, so that was where I started.

I knew that Kiruna was not a parish of its own, and that it still belongs to Jukkasjärvi parish.

On the first page for Jukkasjärvi was found little *Åke Valfrid*, son of Karl Gustaf Valfrid Rönnqvist(!) and his wife Ida Sofia Hellgren. The father was listed as a miner and they lived in Kiruna, which was at that time a booming mining city. People came from all over Sweden to find work in Kiruna and the city grew very rapidly.

It would be interesting to find out where his parents came from, and there are some clues.



Fred Rundquist.

The birth records for little Åke Valfrid gives his father's birthdate as 22 October 1880, BUT on the marriage record, from 28 February 1914, also in Jukkasjärvi, his birth is given as 10 July 1886, no place on either record. In the 1930 U.S. Census he is listed as being born around 1888(!). No suitable child is found in either the Swedish Census of 1890 or of 1900. The records for Jukkasjärvi during the 1910s are not available online yet, so he will have to remain a mystery.

His wife, on the other hand, is probably identical with Ida Sofia, born 1893 in Piteå stadsförsamling, daughter of the miner Andreas Hellgren and his wife Karolina Löfgren, living in 1900 in Piteå.

45	5210 30 44	Rundquist, Walfred	Head	R. 50	M	W	42	M	24	No	Yes	Sweden
46		Ida	Wife	H	F	W	37	M	20	No	Yes	Sweden
47		Valborg	Daughter		F	W	15	S		Yes	Yes	Sweden
48		Carl	Son		M	W	13	S		Yes	Yes	Sweden
49		Walfred	Son		M	W	12	S		Yes	Yes	Sweden

U.S. Census 2 April 1930, IL, Cook Co, Ward 39, Block 411-400, Precinct 12, E.D. 16-1378, sheet: 2 A.