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# Hunting for American Relatives

## Here we see the hunt for relatives from the other side of the Atlantic

BY ANITA CARLSSON

Together my husband Arne and I have been hunting for his American relatives ever since we got the probate from the Daga *häradsrätt* for his paternal grandmother (*farmor*) Anna Albertina Gustafsson, a widow, born 5 Feb. 1859, who died 24 Oct. 1935 at the Gryt *Ålderdomshem* (retirement home) in Södermanland.

She left the following heirs, all of age:

1. son Oskar Karlsson, living on Gotland
2. son Gustaf Karlsson, living at Hyltinge, Södermanland
3. son Axel Karlsson, living in Minneapolis, U.S.A.
4. daughter Matilda Karlsson, living in Minneapolis
5. daughter Klara Karlsson, living in Sunne, Värmland
6. son Gottfrid Karlsson, living at the Gryt *Ålderdomshem*, Södermanland.

Then comes the total inventory of her estate. Gottfrid and Klara were twins. Oddly enough my husband's father, Erik Georg Carlsson, was not mentioned on this list. It is quite possible that he was already at sea, but there was still an omission; there were already two siblings living in the U.S.

I followed the daughter Anna Mathilda in the clerical surveys (*husförhörlängderna*) and found that she had moved to Södertälje, and then emigrated from there to the U.S. She left in April 1906.

On a visit to the Kinship Center [*Emigrantregistret*] in Karlstad, we found her in the Emigrant Index:

**Surname:** Carlsson  
**First name:** Mathilda  
**Age:** 16  
**Removal date:** 1906 04 18  
**Parish of removal:** Södertälje  
**Destination:** New York  
**Ticket number:** 80:425:1342  
**County:** B

Most of this information tallied with what I had before, but some things were new. I got to know what port she was going to and what her ticket number was. Most immigrants coming into the U.S. had to go by Ellis Island, where everyone had to pass through a number of control stations to be allowed to enter the U.S.

In 1994 I wrote to the House of Emigrants [*Svenska Emigrantinstitutet*] in Växjö and asked about her. There they checked a computer listing of all members of the Swedish congregation in New York, and also looked for her on the CD of the Social Security Death Index (SSDI), but did not find anything about her.

Later on we went to Göteborg and visited the provincial archives there, where we could search the original passenger lists, where we found Mathilda Carlsson on one of the lists. It says "List of emigrants, who will be sent by the undersigned on the railroad 18 April 1906 from here to Copenhagen." There are different

columns: Contract Number, Profession of the Emigrant, Name of the Emigrant, Domicile by county and parish, Age, Sex, Total number of persons leaving together, and Destination.

Under the Contract Number 1342 we found Mathilda Carlsson from Södertälje, age 16, with a destination of New York. She took the train to Copenhagen and went from there.

### Another quest

Some time later my sister-in-law visited, and as she is somewhat interested in my finds, I showed her my genealogy files.

She looked at the names of the siblings and said "Axel Wilhelm. I have never heard of him!" And that started my interest in him. I just had to follow him from one parish to another in the southern Södermanland area. In those days I had to write to the parish offices for information; now the records are in Uppsala.

The Trosa-Vagnhärad parish told me that he had been registered in the Nyköping Seamen's Registry (*sjömanshus*) on 24 April 1919 as #850. He is listed in the Book of Missing People (*obefintlighetsboken*) during the period of 1923-1935. From 1935-1939 there is a note "said to be dead." In 17 July 1942 he is crossed out from the Nyköping Seamen's Registry, and from 1960 he is no longer listed in the *Obefintlighetsboken*.

A year later I went to the provincial archives in Uppsala and looked for Axel Wilhelm. The records of the



Nyköping Seamen's Registry are kept there and I ordered a book called "Index of Sailors" [DId:3], and found the following:

Axel Wilhelm had mustered on the vessel *Macedonia* on 25 June 1919, and left it on 19 August 1919 in Öviken [which can be short for the town of Örnsköldsvik]. *Macedonia* was a steamship sailing European waters.

On 25 September 1919 he mustered on the vessel *Ludvig Peyron*, and left it 9 December 1919 in Dunkerque (probably France).

Evidently he worked his way to the U.S. and kept in contact with his sister Mathilda.

### What next?

I asked Elisabeth Thorsell for advice and she gave me the e-mail address of Phyllis J. Pladsen, who then was the president of the Swedish Genealogical Society of Minnesota, as my "lost ones" were in Minneapolis by 1936. We wrote to her with the information we had and she searched for Anna Mathilda and Axel Wilhelm in

the 1936 phone book for Minneapolis, but found nothing. She also searched the 1920 Census in vain; the 1930 was not yet available.

We do have a wedding picture from the 1910s, which might be from Mathilda's wedding. My husband remembers that his mother kept writing to Mathilda, but all the letters were lost when his mother died.

In 2001 the Ellis Island database opened to the public, and proved so popular that the computers crashed. But on Midsummer Eve that year Arne and I were finally lucky and found his aunt, Anna Mathilda Carlsson, age 16. She was travelling to her uncle *Clas Gustafson*, *Route 4, Box 69, Buffalo, Minnesota*, and he had also paid for her ticket. She had \$13 in her pocket, was able to read and write, and had never been in prison. We felt that we found out quite a bit about her.

We found out that Buffalo was in Wright County, Minnesota. The next time we went to Stockholm, we bought maps of the U.S., of Minnesota, and a city map of Minneapolis.

When we found out that Mathilda was going to her uncle, Clas Gustafson, we had to find out about him. He was born Claes August Gustafsson 24 Aug. 1861 in Helgesta parish, Södermanland, and he emigrated from Lunda parish, also in Södermanland, on 25 June 1887, and left the port of Göteborg on 1 July 1887 with a ticket for St. Paul, Minnesota.

### Misleading information

Around 1997 we asked the wife of one of my husband's uncles, if she knew the married name of Mathilda? There is a big problem with women in the U.S.: when they marry they lose their maiden name and it is impossible to guess their married name. She told us that she thought Mathilda had married a Jonsson, a story which later turned out to be wrong.

As a member of the regional society, *Kronobergs Genealogiska Förening*, I get their newsletter in which they once published a list of members living in the U.S. who might help



Paul and Anna Mathilda Larson's wedding picture 1912. Photo by Peoples Studio, 1501 So. Wash. Ave., Minneapolis, Minnesota.



Swedes with some research there. We contacted a person named Lois Anderson, and she told me that she had her roots in the parish of Algutsboda, so I could help her with information from there, as that is one of "my" parishes. We told her about the information we had on my husband's aunt and her uncle. Lois promised to get in touch with the local Lutheran church in Buffalo, and see if they had any information.

## Uncle Clas is found!

After a while she reported back that Clas and his family had been members of the church! He had been married and had two sons. This was a sensation for us, to be able to find the right people in this vast country! They lived in a small town called Marysville outside Buffalo. Finally something we could start searching for, with the intention of finding something about Mathilda.

The name of the uncle was Clas/Claes August Gustafsson, but in the U.S. it was Gustafson, with just one s, as is the American custom. His wife was Carin (Karin) and the sons were Alfred Albin, born in 1893, and Algot Emil, born in 1894. We have also seen Clas being named Chas (Charles), so you have to look for variations.

We wrote to various addresses in Marysville and Buffalo, without any result.

In April of 2004 we went with a group of researchers from Eskilstuna to the House of Emigrants in Våxjö, and decided to look for the 1900 census of Marysville. We found both Marysville City and Marysville Village, and it did not take us long to find Claes August Gustafson and his family. Here we found the birthdates (month and year) of the sons, how long Clas and Carin had been married, and that Claes was a farmer. They also had a daughter, named Sally Mathilda, born in May 1896. Next we searched the 1910 census and found the family there also.

When we had returned home we started writing to the Minnesota Health Department to try to get the complete marriage date for the

parents and the full birthdates for the children. You will have to pay a small sum for the search and then some for the postage of the answer, a "non-certificate" one. After two weeks we got the answer that they did not have the information we wanted, but that we should contact Wright County.

So we went through the same procedure again, but were lucky this time. In two weeks time we got certificates with the dates we asked for, except for Karin Pettersson, the wife of Claes, who we only knew was born in Sweden, but not when.

## No luck with Mathilda

During the summer we visited the House of Emigrants again, and spent a whole day searching the census for Ramsey County, where we hoped to find Anna Mathilda, but found nothing.

The next day another researcher asked us what we were doing, so we told him, and then he told us to get hold of the SAKA [*Svenska Amerikanska Kyrko Arkiven*] index, which we did not know about. It is an index to the records of the Swedish American churches that have been microfilmed and are available for research in Våxjö, Karlstad, and Rock Island, Illinois. Soon we found the microfilm we needed to find Anna Mathilda and Claes and his family.

## Marriage!

After some reading of the microfilms I found the marriage notice for Anna Mathilda and who she married. She married Paul Larson in 1912 when she was 22 years old. This marriage took place in Sherburne County, Minnesota, not in Ramsey County with Saint Paul, or Wright County as we had guessed. Her married name was Larson, not Jonsson as Arne's uncle's wife thought. Paul Larson was born in Iowa 31 December 1888, so one of the next steps was to write to Iowa for his birth.

Then I looked for Claes and his family and found baptismal dates for the children.

The researcher who helped us had

his own database in his computer and found Karin Pettersson and her parents and two brothers born in Sweden and two brothers born in the U.S. This is how we found that she came from Venjan parish in Dalarna.

I have found the oldest son, Alfred Albin, of Claes and Karin in the Social Security Death Index (SSDI), and he died in August 1974 in Frederic, Polk County, Wisconsin.

In the SSDI I have also found Paul Larson, who died in September 1968 in Hennepin County, Minnesota, the county where Minneapolis is located. I have also found the same information on the Minnesota Historical Society [<http://www.mnhs.org/index.htm>] website.

In October 2004 I wrote to Sherburne County to get Anna Mathilda's marriage date verified. Earlier I had the date 3 March 1912 from the Swedish American church records, but on the copy of the marriage certificate I could see that the date was really 6 April 1912. Paul was from Hennepin County, but for Anna Mathilda only Minnesota was recorded, and the marriage took place at Big Lake, Elk River, in Sherburne County.

In October 2004 I also wrote to Iowa to get the birth information for Paul Larson, but my letter was returned with the note that I was not entitled to that information, as I was not related to the person in question.

But I printed out an English version of the family file from my genealogy program, and wrote a new letter that my husband signed, and also included a copy of the marriage certificate that we had just received.

This worked; after three weeks I received the information that Paul's full name was Paul Martin Jonathan, born 31 December 1888 in Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa, son of Andrew Fredrick Larson and his wife Bertha Anderson.

Perseverance pays off!

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