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I Found the Needle!

My search for the immigrant Asp Family In America and Sweden. Part I

BY JAN SOKODY ASP

The needle was the Asp Family; the haystack was the 2600 parishes in Sweden.

To this day, my search has been the most challenging, frustrating, and gratifying experience of my genealogy hobby. It is extremely difficult, almost impossible, to research a family in a foreign country when all you know is the name of the country and the name of the family.

I hope that you will enjoy reading my story. I also hope you will gain the knowledge and desire to begin or continue with perseverance your research, not only in Sweden, but wherever it may take you. Perhaps my story will be an encouragement, not only to beginners who learn from experienced genealogists, but to researchers who may have a dead end line over which we often spin our wheels and go nowhere. Remember, some lines may only be found when vitals records have become available through the Internet. Some of the family may never be found if parish records have been destroyed or last names have been changed.

In the beginning

I do not remember when I learned that "Asp" was a Swedish name. It may have been the spring of 1957 when a blond-haired, blue-eyed fellow introduced himself from across the card table in the college lounge. "Asp" is a non-patronymic name. It is listed in Carl-Erick Johansson's *Cradled in Sweden* (page 26) as a

soldier's name, translated from the aspen tree. To avoid confusion among so many men with the last names of Andersson, Carlsson, Swensson, and Johansson, troops were issued new names along with their clothing and weapons.

In the spring of 1974 my cousin called to tell me about a genealogy group meeting at our Elgin public library. A high school classmate had formed the group. Pat Lose invited me to her home where I learned about family group sheets, lineage charts, and genealogy libraries. The group held one morning and one evening meeting each month. I joined.

In the fall, I attended a series of beginner and advanced classes offered by the group in our local library, taught by a woman from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). Our last class in December was at the Wilmette LDS Branch Genealogical Library now called a Family History Center (FHC), where I learned films of the vital records of foreign countries could be ordered for a fee. I was hooked. Germany, Hungary, and Sweden were my countries of interest.

As a young girl, I always had a natural affinity for family history. Now it had a name. GENEALOGY.

Research on backburner

On 3 Jan. 1975, my son, Charles Jon-Paul (called C.J.), was born and joined his sister, Janna Charlynn, who turned 4 on 12 Jan.; thus, re-

search on my new hobby had to be sporadic. I attended evening meetings, wrote letters, and began filling out charts. Trips to the Wilmette FHC were put on the "to do in the future" list.

The immigrant names

My search began by contacting the eldest family member, a great-aunt, Katharine Asp, in Muscatine, Iowa. She was the adopted daughter of the immigrant son, John August, and had done some unsuccessful research on finding the family in Sweden. The incentive for Aunt Katy's research was a family story about an inheritance available to anyone proving relationship to the Asp family. From her I learned about the immigrant family consisting of four people.

The immigrant father, *John Henry Asp*, was born in Sweden. He owned a blacksmith shop in New Boston, Illinois, located on the Mississippi River in Mercer County, south of Rock Island County. In 1856, the family moved across the river to Toolesboro, Louisa County, Iowa, on the Iowa River near the confluence of the Mississippi. He was a Civil War soldier. He died in 1863 at Vicksburg and is buried in the National Cemetery there.

The immigrant mother, *Christina*, died in 1856.

The immigrant daughter, *Anna Charlotta*, was called *Annie*. She married *Martin Pease* and moved to



the state of Washington.

The immigrant son, *Johan August*, was born in Stockholm in 1850 and came to the United States as a baby. Katy's second story was that he was born on the boat.

A son, *Henry Edward*, was born in New Boston, Illinois, on January 1, 1856.

Looking for ages, birth-dates, birthplaces, & immigration year in America

I began searching the U.S. census records taken every ten years. The 1860 census, Iowa, Louisa Co., Toolesboro taken on June 1st lists:

John H. Asp 44 Blacksmith b. Sweden (b.c. 1815/6)

Charlotte 15 " (b.c. 1844/5)

John 12 " (b.c. 1847/8)

Henry E. 5 b. Illinois (age does not compute with birth year)

The 1870 census, Iowa, Louisa Co., Grandview shows:

Asp, Jno 20 Farm Laborer Sweden

The 1870 census, Iowa, Louisa Co., Wapello shows:

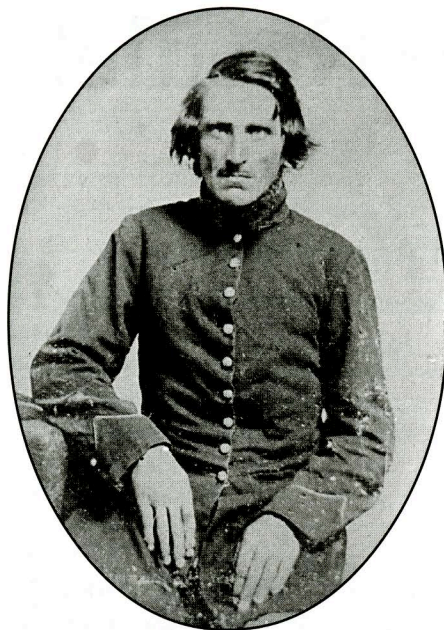
Asp, Charlotte 23 Hired Girl Sweden

The age discrepancies began. (The 3 year difference between sister & brother is consistent, but the ages from 1860 to 1870 are not.)

The 1855 Illinois state census shows John Henry in New Boston as head of household but all other family members are not named. They are marked in columns by gender and age groups.

The obituary for John August shows he was born November 12, 1850 in Stockholm, the son of John August and came to America when 3 months old, settling in Illinois. (Im. c. 1851) The name of the father and the age do not agree with the 1860 census. He married Hannah Elizabeth Carey in Aledo, Illinois, on September 24, 1879. His age on the marriage certificate is 28 years. An Assessment Roll for 1899 shows his age as 49. (b.c. 1850/1851)

The Naturalization Certificate for John Henry Asp issued on October 22, 1860, shows that he was a native



John Henry Asp, Civil War soldier.

of Sweden. An *Iowa Soldier Book* (page 149) reads:

Asp, John. Age 44. Residence Toolesboro, nativity Sweden. Enlisted Sept. 21, 1861, as Artificer. Mustered Oct. 31, 1861. Died of disease Sept. 20, 1863, Vicksburg, Miss. (b.c. 1816/1817)

Sixteen Civil War letters written in English with Swedish overtones sent to his three children do not reveal any information. However, when Nils William Olsson read two of the letters he assured me they were written by a Swede.

I wrote to the National Archives in Washington, D.C., for the Civil War packet of John Henry Asp. The copies of paper work included three pages of affidavits sent to prove a pension claim for his youngest son, Henry Edward.

The affidavits

1 *Anders Westerbla* was well acquainted with John H. Asp, a soldier in the army who formerly lived at Toolesboro, Louisa Co., Iowa. That he became acquainted with him in the year 1854 at New Boston, Ill. That he was told that John H. Asp and his wife Christine were married in Sweden. That he knows that they lived together as man and wife from 1854 until Sept. of 1856 when the

wife died. That Henry E. Asp was born at New Boston, Ill. about Jan. 1, 1856, and his parents removed to Toolesboro, Iowa, a few months afterwards.

That the mother died at Toolesboro, September, 1856. The affiant was a blacksmith and worked for John H. Asp and boarded at his house and was working there when the said Henry E. Asp was born.

#2 *John Sprouse* was intimately acquainted with John H. Asp who was a Private in Company I, Engineer Regiment of the West. That he became acquainted with him in the spring of 1856, when Asp and his wife and children came to Toolesboro. That his wife, Christine, died in the fall of 1856. That the said John H. Asp did not again marry. That John H. Asp and said Christine lived together as man and wife and Asp always acknowledged Henry E. Asp as his true and lawful son. The affiant was a near neighbor while he lived in Toolesboro, enlisted with him in the same company, and knew him well until he died.

#3 *Margaret Peterson* was well acquainted with John H. Asp and Christine Asp, his wife, who lived with her in the same house in New Boston, Ill.

That she attended Christine Asp at the birth of said child as midwife.

The originals

While on a family vacation to Washington, D.C., I ordered and looked at the Civil War packet for John Asp at the archives. I did this because I had heard that the complete packet is not always sent. In the packet was a slip of paper that had not been included in the papers sent to me. It was a note that read, "No one could read the page from the family Bible so it was sent as proof of their marriage." Unfortunately, the Bible page was not in the packet. I wonder if that page would have held the answers to all my questions of "when and where" in Sweden.

County papers

Louisa County guardianship papers dated January 21, 1864, show Charlotte Ann to be 17 years and John A. Asp to be 16 years. (b. c. 1846/7 and c. 1847/8)

Now there is a one-year age difference.

Henry's career

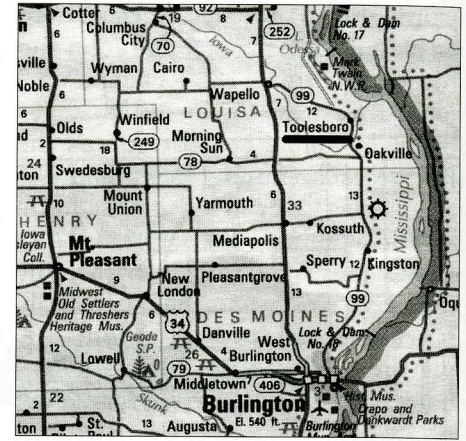
Henry E. Asp became a lawyer and migrated to Kansas, and finally Oklahoma, where he prepared the draft of a complete state constitution. For his efforts to secure lands for schools, there is a street on the University campus named "Asp" and also a crossroads north of Oklahoma City designated as "Asp." The histories of Oklahoma have many pages written about him. In one history his parents are listed as John August and Chris-

tina Asp, both natives of Sweden. His mother died in 1857 when he was an infant of one year. Is contradiction a part of doing genealogy?

Toolesboro today

The day after our 1983 Thanksgiving, with plat and state maps in the car, I drove from Geneseo, Illinois, to New Boston and Toolesboro. In New Boston I was able to find where the blacksmith shop had existed. A kind lady from the historical society sent me a copy of the 1856 newspaper ad for the sale of the shop. There were no burials in the cemeteries with the last name of Asp.

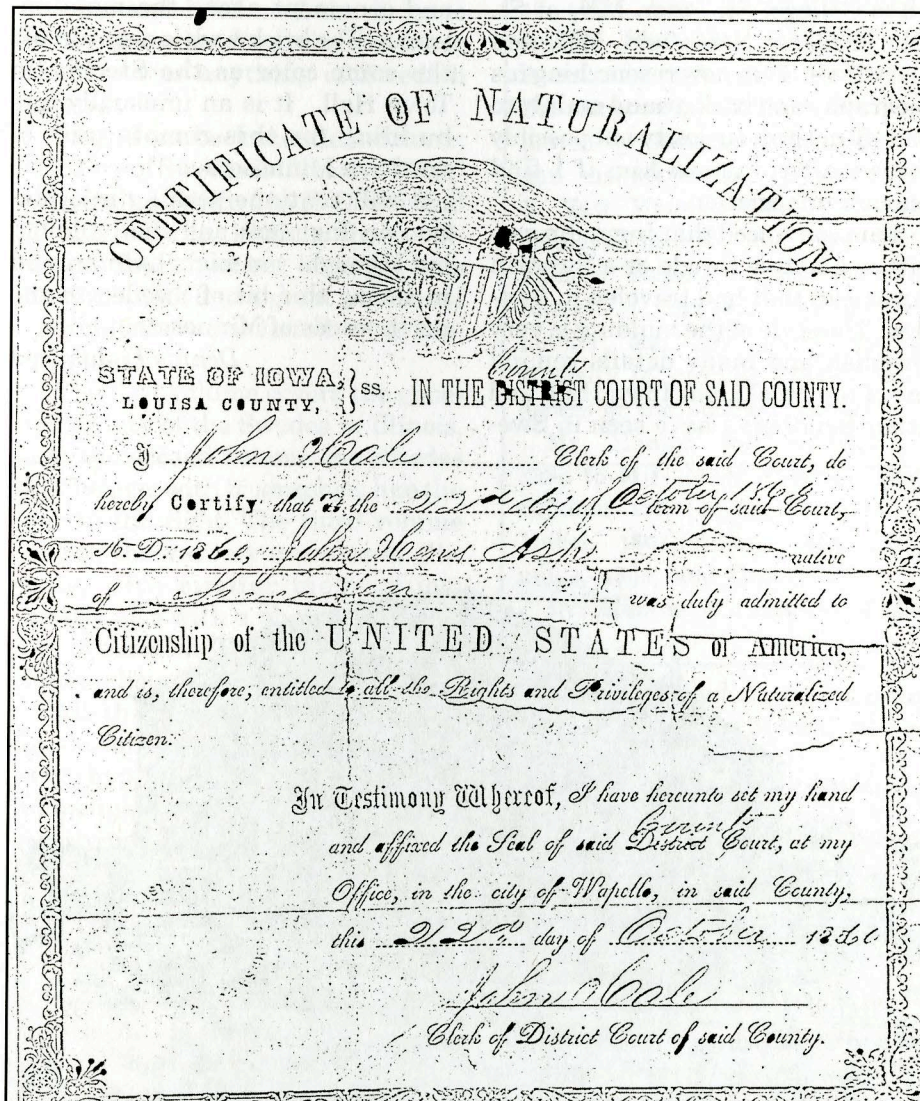
Toolesboro was an unexpected experience. On the map it is shown on the highway between Wapello to the west and Oakville to the south-east. Driving from the west to the



east, when I got to Oakville I knew I had missed Toolesboro. There were no signs to indicate the town limits. Driving back to the west, I asked a teenager washing his car where it was and he indicated right there and to the west. Next, I asked a lady taking groceries out of her car in a parking area of a school building, now turned into apartments. She told me to drive down the big hill at the next street and go to the only house at the bottom left side where a man who knew the history of Toolesboro lived. Guy Brown and a friend began to talk about Toolesboro of the past and I learned that an old cemetery had been at the top of the hill along the highway but it no longer existed. We walked on the land, now a cow pasture, where Toolesboro had been along the Iowa River. He pointed out the shards in the water, remains from a ceramic factory, and the cistern where the blacksmith shop had been. He did extend an invitation to bring the family and camp along the river. There are no cemetery records to show where the immigrant mother was buried.

More unexpected information arrived with the birth certificate of John August's first child. Henry Aden, (later, Henry Wilbur) born September 20, 1880. Henry is the father of my father-in-law, Charles Arthur Asp. The father's age was 28

Naturalization certificate for John Henry Asp. Iowa, Louisa County, 1860.



years and his birthplace was listed as **Nevada!** I had not found John and his wife on the 1880 census so I looked forward to the 1900 census being available because it was the first to list an immigration year. The family was living in Muscatine, Iowa.

The census line for John Asp shows: head of household, born in the month of Nov., year 1847, age 49, b. Nevada, parents b. Sweden, carpenter. No immigration year was listed. Next I looked for his sister,

Annie, on the Washington State 1900 census and found her to have been born Nov. 1843, 56 years, b. Sweden, and immigration year as 1860. That information did not seem to be correct. Not wanting to wait for the 1910 and 1920 census, I ordered them in 1980, sending the required fee and proof of relationship. On the 1910 census, John was born in Nevada and was age 58. On the 1920 census it lists **Illinois** as his birthplace and 65 years of age.

With all the discrepancies in the secondary sources in the U.S., I decided to look at records in Sweden.

To be continued.

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Bovey Town Hall

I ran across something this summer which may be of some interest to you, I know it is to me and has me doing some detective work.

About 35 km east of Grand Rapids, MN, on the main highway to Hibbing and the rest of the Iron Range, is a small town called Bovey, population about 800. We pass through Bovey now and then on our way to Hibbing and other local destinations. (Hibbing was the location where Carl Eric Wickman founded the Greyhound bus company in 1914).

A building in Bovey caught my eye because of the definitely Swedish character of the architecture. One day I stopped to check on the building and its architect. I learned that the Town Hall was built in 1936 under a public works program enacted during the Depression to help provide jobs in towns around the U.S., by President Franklin Roosevelt.

The photograph was taken soon after construction of the building as evidenced by the car parked nearby, a 1938 Pontiac, I believe. The main street is on the left, and the car is parked on a side street. Now the building is almost obscured by tall trees in the front. It is on the National Register of Historic Buildings, a designation reserved for buildings of special historic or architectural importance.

I also learned that the architect

was Mr. William A. Ingmann, who designed a number of college and other buildings in the 1930's, including buildings at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN, at St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN, and elsewhere. I am now researching his biography and background mainly to satisfy my own curiosity but possibly for an article about him if I find enough information.

I am convinced that Ingmann was either a native Swede or a Swedish American that had traveled in Sweden. The style of the building is very Swedish and many details remind me of the Stockholm Town Hall, and other buildings I have seen in Swe-

den. Note the shape of the upper floor windows, the detailing in the brickwork, the grouped windows on the main level, and the special pediment and ornament above the main entrance. The brickwork is even almost the same color as the Stockholm Town Hall. It is an unusually fine building for this remote part of northern Minnesota.

I will continue seeking information on Ingmann and the building, but I thought you might be interested in seeing this bit of Sweden in the north woods of Minnesota.

Dennis L. Johnson

