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Edith E. Anderson

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# Great-grandmother's Strange Name Change

## Persistence pays off!

BY EDITH E. ANDERSON

From the time I was first aware of the name by which my great-grandmother (*mormors mor*) was called, I have been fascinated with her. "Tyre." The name fell lightly from the tip of my mother's tongue. Her full name was *Tyre Nilsson*.

Born in southern Sweden, *mormors mor* had died in Chicago when my mother was seven; and my *mormor* had died before I was born, so I had not known either of them. But Mother's frequent references to aspects of their lives were windows into which I peeked from time to time.

## Contacts with Sweden

Tyre had had many children, creating a generous assortment of relatives whose letters and members comfortably entered our home at regular intervals. Some of those letters came from Sweden, pasted with distinctive stamps and bringing sweet pressed flowers and intricately crocheted doilies. A portrait of an elderly couple connected them all. It had been made in Helsingborg. It showed Tyre with her husband, whose death in Sweden had preceded her making the transatlantic journey to join her Swedish-American sons and daughters for her final years. There were no windows into the details of that voyage. There was only the knowledge that one of Tyre's children had provided us with Scanian relatives.

## Early notes

When in my teen years, I jotted down a brief outline of these various relatives. Many years later I attempted to flesh out the outline, with the help of some essential details collected and left behind by my mother after

her 1978 death. Included was the key to my own research – a copy of my *mormors* baptismal certificate (*dop-attest*) from Vedby parish (Kristianstad län). It had been provided by a Pastor C.L. Malmberg, pastor of Vedby's mother church at Klippan in 1957. My own research was to be given the same kind and generous help he had provided to my mother by way of their correspondence in the Swedish language. It was from Ulla Larsson, clerk of the Klippan church, that my help began coming – in English, thankfully! – in 1995.

## What's In a Name?

I was to learn that Tyre Nilsson's name had undergone many changes over the years. Who knows what thinking and social practices effected those changes? Her marriage to Per Knutsson in 1854, in Flenninge parish (Malmöhus län), was not one of them. The Swedish practice then was one which retained a woman's maiden name after marriage, hers coming from the patronymic of Nils Pålsson, 1802-1861. From her birth in Strövelstorp parish (Kristianstad län) on the last day of 1831 through the birth of her eighth child in 1870, she kept the same name. Then, suddenly, with the birth of son Nils in 1872, she became Tyre "Nilsson", and continued with that name through the births of two more children. In Chicago her name was listed on her own death record, February 5, 1907, as "Tyra Knutson" and on the Illinois death certificates of four of her children her maiden name had become "Nelson."

Everyone who has done genealogy research of Swedish immigrants to America knows how important it is



*Tyre Nilsson and Per Knutsson. Portrait taken in Helsingborg before 1900, reproduced in Chicago.*

to know the name used by the individual in Sweden. Otherwise it can become difficult, if not impossible, to locate the individual in Swedish records. My problem was the opposite – that of locating American records in the face of an uncertain name change. In this family were so many name changes, of both first and last name, with siblings choosing from among no fewer than four different surnames even before marriage, that I expected anything could be possible.

Eventually I had gotten a copy of Tyre's death certificate, but only after the custodian of the vital records had notified me that a diligent search could not find it. (It paid to be persistent; and it helped that I had first found her name listed in a Chicago death index.)



## Searching for the Details

Now I searched for details of the trip that brought Tyre to Chicago. In the Vedby parish household rolls (*husförhörslängd*) I found the likely date *mormors mor* was given permission to leave her Vedby parish – January 23, 1901. But I found neither emigration nor immigration records for her.

Tyre's married daughter Botilla (Persdotter), the last of her living children still in Sweden, lived 30 miles away in Helsingborg. Botilla and her husband, Johannes Persson Sandström, had four children, the younger ones being Knut Viktor and Lilly Walborg. Lilly Walborg's grandson in Sweden had written to me in the 1980s that his grandmother had once been in America "in her youth." I began to wonder whether Botilla and Lilly Walborg could have accompanied Tyre on her long journey?

Indeed, I located all four of these family members in the 1901 Malmöhus län *utflyttade (emigranter)* records under the name "Johan Sandström." Since Tyre's name was not listed with them, and lacking a more exact date for their departure from Helsingborg, I wrote to Skåne's provincial archives, *Landsarkivet i Lund*, for help. From there I was referred to the Maria church parish office (*Maria församlings pastorsämbete*) in Helsingborg. It was there that the 1901 city parish household rolls (Helsingborg's *stadsförsamlings husförhörslängd*) still were housed.

In a little over six weeks a letter arrived from Maria församling with answers to my questions. I was informed that these four family members – Johannes, Botilla, Knut Viktor, and Lilly Walborg – had moved to the U.S.A. in July of 1901; and I eventually found them all in the August 1901 Ellis Island immigration records under the name "Johannes Persson Sandstrom." They had come aboard the *Germanic*, from Liverpool. I was disappointed to find that Tyre was not with them. So much for my theory that Botilla was her mother's traveling companion to America!

The letter from Helsingborg's Maria församling had contained another piece of information that interested me very much, however: Botilla's two older children had both "moved to U.S.A." ahead of their parents. The younger of the two, a daughter, had gone in August of 1899. The elder, a 19 year-old son named Thure Ferdinand, "moved to USA 30 January 1901." This was Tyre's oldest grandson, living at the time in Helsingborg's *stadsförsamling*.

Ulla Larsson, from the Klippan church, agreed with me that it was reasonable to assume Tyre and Botilla's older son had left Sweden in early February and that the others had gone later that year, after school was out for the younger children. (Botilla and her tailor husband and younger children later moved back to Sweden after only a few short years in Chicago. She was the only one of Tyre's children to remigrate.)

## Asking the Right Question

Now I concentrated on Tyre and her 19 year-old grandson Thure Ferdinand in *CD-Emigranten* and the Ellis Island Internet records ([www.ellislandrecords.org](http://www.ellislandrecords.org)). Not knowing what surname either of

them might be using, I entered into my search every possible name combination and spelling variation I could think of; but I continued to draw a blank in both databases. I searched for every 69 year old in *CD-Emigranten* for 1900-1903. Nothing. I felt sure that were I to find one of the pair I would find the other. By what surname had Thure Ferdinand gone, I wondered. Johannesson? Johansson? Sandström?

In early February of 2004, I decided to look for every person surname "Sand-" arriving at Ellis Island in 1901. There were some 380 of them. None of the given names beginning with "T-" was the individual for whom I was looking; but just above them, on the same page, the name "*Sure Sandstrom*," a 19-year-old with residence of Sweden, caught my eye. When I clicked on it I found a male arriving from Southampton on February 21.

## Whoa!

Turning to the original ship manifest, I was elated to read on line 8: "Ture Sandström," and immediately below him, "Tyre Knutssen," age 69, a widow headed for Chicago. Several years' worth of research had resulted in the shipping records finally giving up that lovely name!

S.S. "Vaderland" sailing										
1 No. on List.	2 NAME IN FULL	3 Age		4 Sex	5 Married or Single	6 Calling or Occupation	7 Able to		8 Nationality	9 Last R
		Yrs.	Mos.				Read	Write		
1	Lars Trafshöns	42	3	M	M	Labour	✓	✓	Swedish	✓
8	Gottfrid Jonsson	32	✓	M	✓	Labour	✓	✓	Swedish	✓
9	Ture Sandström	19	✓	M	✓	Labour	✓	✓	Swedish	✓
10	Tyre Knutssen	69	✓	F	✓	Widow	✓	✓	Swedish	✓
11	Emma Telmar	38	✓	F	✓	Mrs	✓	✓	Swedish	✓
12	Gottfrid Jonsson	24	✓	M	✓	Labour	✓	✓	Swedish	✓
	Olga Andersson	35	✓	F	✓	Mrs	✓	✓	Swedish	✓

The Passenger Manifest for S.S. *Vaderland* listing Tyre on line 9. The names on lines 8, 9 and 10 are braced together, indicating that Tyre was traveling in a group of three.



They had come on the *Vaderland*, a new British steamship accommodating nearly 1,200 passengers. Tyre and her grandson, like some 600 others, were traveling in third class (steerage) on the 13-day voyage from England. Moreover, they apparently were traveling in the company of Tyre's married daughter Ingar "Emma" Palmen<sup>1</sup>, already a U.S. citizen of several years.

How had I not found Tyre in my many earlier attempts to do so since the Ellis Island records had first come on line? I clicked on the "text version manifest," the typed record for that page. There was the obvious answer: Not only had Tyre been listed as a male, with a surname ending in "-ssen," but she, also, had been entered into the transcribed database with the given name of "Sure." "Sure Knutssen," 69 year-old male. Would you have recognized her?

Had I been more creative with my entering of information into the database query, I probably could have come up with Tyre sooner. As it was, I never did go to the option of searching the ship manifests, line by line, for ships arriving at New York from European ports during February of 1901. It was by this method that I had found my *mormor* in the manifests some years earlier – a tedious job! Had I used this method for *mormors mor*, however, I would likely have recognized her name in the clear, handwritten manifest pages of *Vaderland*. Short of that, I could hardly have been certain I had the right person without the accompanying identifiers for her grandson/traveling companion. My thorough searches through the various household rolls (*husförhörslängd*) listing Tyre and her children while they remained in Sweden had paid off.

I still have not located Tyre and Thure Ferdinand in the Swedish police records or Danish emigration records, so I don't know how they got from Sweden to England's southern coast. Tyre's children began leaving Sweden by way of Copenhagen in 1883; and although I have not yet located all of their emigration/immigra-



Ingar "Emma" Persson Palmen (1861–1947). Photo taken in Chicago, unknown date. Note the brooch which Emma wears, bearing the likeness of her parents.

gration records, either, it would not be a surprise to learn that she followed their travel route. I remain open to other possible ports of emigration for my name-changing *mormors mor*, as well.

### Note:

1. The presence of Emma's name on the manifest came as a complete surprise to me. Although the Chicago address listed there for her is not corroborated by other family documents, the names of these three passengers have been grouped together on the record; so this Emma is unlikely to be someone not connected with Tyre and Thure. Unlike others of her sisters, Emma did not have young children at home, and would have been in this wise unencumbered from making the journey to Sweden and back with Tyre. As a seasoned traveler and a cautious Swede, Emma might have thought it unwise to reveal one's correct address for the manifest record. Another reason for believing this Emma to be Tyre's daughter is a notation which gradually emerged from line 9 as I studied the handwriting on the manifest page. It was the word "senil-



Emma's brooch.

ity." I never had heard this – or anything like it – spoken in regard to Tyre. Somehow, it seemed much different from the phrase "old age" written on her death certificate. However, if after raising eleven children under adverse conditions she had become too forgetful to undertake this long journey with only a young grandson to accompany her, she probably would have earned that privilege!

Emma and her husband, Edward Palmen, were to make another visit to Sweden, in 1907 – a fact which, curiously, resulted in my meeting up with a previously unknown cousin north of Helsingborg some 90 years later. But that is another story.

Author Edith E. Anderson was raised in Wisconsin and resides now in Brownsville, Texas. E-mail: <editand@hotmail.com>