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# Looking for My Family on Öland

P. Allan Carlsson \*

For a long time I have wanted to know something about the ancestors of my four Swedish grandparents, who emigrated to America around the turn of the century. My attempts to learn about my father's family can be described by one word—serendipity. My tale of good fortune might encourage others who are searching their Swedish roots.

Initially I had little information to go on, since both of my father's parents had died before I was born. I did have the name of their home parish in Sweden and a few family stories. My father, who had never visited Sweden, told me that so far as he knew, there were no close family members left in Sweden, as such, and therefore there was no person to contact.

The logical place to begin was at the parish church. It should be mentioned here that I have one valuable asset in my quest. My wife has dozens of relatives in Sweden and grew up speaking the language even though she was born in the United States.

Many years ago on our first visit to Sweden, my wife and I, accompanied by her sister and a friend, took the ferry from Kalmar to Öland and then drove to the Resmo Parish church. My great grandfather, Carl Carlsson, had been the parish clergyman at Resmo until his death in 1888.<sup>1</sup> We located his grave and that of his immediate family, and were surprised to find fresh flowers at the grave site. A passing parishioner said that there was a fund available to provide flowers occasionally for the graves when there were no relatives. We also found the family plot of my grandmother's family.

A short distance from the church is my grandmother's home, Blomstergården, and we introduced ourselves to the present owner, a retired newspaperman. When he had purchased the house, he had found several old photographs. He gave them to me as he had kept them in the event that any member of the family should come back for a visit. These photographs were of the children born to the immigrants and which had been sent to the family back home in Sweden.

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On a subsequent trip to Sweden, we again visited Öland, but nothing new was learned of my family. Nowadays one crosses to the island by bridge, rather than by ferry. After visiting several members of my wife's family, we decided to go to Stockholm. When we were ready to leave, my wife's sister told us that we should try to see a cousin of their mother's who was very much interested in the family and wanted to meet us. When we were settled in our hotel in Stockholm, we checked the telephone directory and found that he lived just a few blocks away.

He was a retired professor of Latin, and during his retirement, was performing free-lance translation work from Latin to Swedish. He asked about my family, and I replied that many of them were from Öland, and I had been told that there were several generations of clergymen in the family. One of his projects was to do a translation of a Latin manuscript about Öland. He was doing some background research on the island and said that if he found anything about my family, he would let me know.

Several months later, I received a large package containing photocopies of pages of parish histories. He also included a sketch of a family tree beginning in 1607. The trail ended there as my clergyman ancestor, Olaus Ebber, had come to the Mortorp Parish, but it did not say where he came from.<sup>2</sup> There had been a minister in each generation down to my grandfather. Since he was not interested in becoming "a man of the cloth" he had gone to sea and had finally settled in San Francisco. The material noted that there were portraits of Israel Schultz and his wife Cecilia Magdalena Carlquist at the Gärdslösa Church and of Abraham Ahlqvist and his wife, Sara Gustava Bruun at the Runsten Church, both on Öland.<sup>3</sup>

One day in the summer of 1986 when we were once again in Sweden, we decided to visit these two churches, so that I could see the original portraits. We had no difficulty in locating the pictures as the parish history pages contained photographs of them. At one of the churches we chatted with the local cleric, to whom I showed my family tree, so that he could see how I was related to the individuals in the portraits. When he saw that there was a pastor in each generation except my grandfather, he commented—"what a legacy of learning."

My wife's sister, who has a summer *stuga* on Öland, was with us. She said that my grandmother's home had been sold and that we should go and talk with the new owners as they might have something of my family. The new owners had a sea chest, which had been used by my grandmother's brother, Charlie, when he returned to Sweden from America. The present owner recited amusing stories which he had heard about Charlie since coming to the community. He also told us that there was a widow in the parish who had known Charlie and whose late husband had been his good friend. We had a short visit with her and learned that her late husband was my third cousin. She gave us a photograph of Charlie's daughter, which had a lengthy inscription on its back.

The man who had purchased the property was a retired Lutheran pastor. After he had given us a tour of the house, we showed him the family tree. He noticed that my great grandmother's maiden name was Ahlqvist. He knew a widow whose name was Ahlqvist and whose husband had been a clergyman. "Let me call her, you might be of the same family," he said.

The woman spoke Swedish, so my wife conversed with her. "Yes," she thought "that it might be the same family," but she was not sure. Her son, who lived near Malmö, kept the family tree. We intended to go to Malmö some days later, so my wife gave her the name of a cousin in that city, where we would be staying.

A few days later, we called my wife's cousin to confirm the days we would be in Malmö. His wife answered the telephone and said that a man had called saying he was related to Al and that she had invited him and his wife to have dinner on one of the evenings we were to be there, so that we would have a chance to talk with him.

We had a very pleasant visit. He thought that he had a complete family tree of his Ahlqvist family in Sweden. He had my father in his records and was very happy to add my name. He was also trying to locate some of the family which had emigrated to America. He showed us a copy of the Ahlqvist family tree which stretched across the living room floor. We joined the Ahlqvist Family Association but unfortunately we were not able to attend the association meeting which was to be held five weeks after our return to the United States. Later I received a card sent from the association meeting carrying the signatures of several of my new-found relatives.

On my way to Malmö, we had stopped off at the Mortorp Church on the mainland, where Olaus Ebberli, the earliest of my ancestors, had arrived to become a parish minister in 1607. My wife was leafing through the guest book, which one usually finds in the old Swedish churches and noticed that a few years previously, a woman from a small town in Illinois had signed the book and had stated that she was descended from the same pastor as I. When we returned to the United States, we contacted her and found that she was married to a Lutheran clergyman, though German, not Swedish, and had hoped that someone would see her note in the parish guest book. Her maiden name was Ahlqvist, so we told her about the Ahlqvist Family Association in Sweden. We had coffee with her and her family when we were in the Chicago area for the Christmas holidays.

Incidentally, the clergy connection did not end with Grandfather Joseph. My father was ordained in the Swedish Evangelical Free Church, which later dropped the "Swedish" from its name. I also completed my seminary training, earning a BD degree, but was not ordained. My first love was philosophy, so I went on to graduate school and became a philosophy professor.

A chance encounter, a conversation here and there and knowledge about one's family emerges. So far, I haven't had such luck with my mother's family, but maybe on the next trip to Sweden . . .

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Carl Ludvig Carlsson was b. in Fliseryd Parish (Kalm.) 28 May 1826, the s. of Carl Jonsson, a farmer, and Kjerstin Danielsdotter. After studies at the University of Lund, he was ordained into the Lutheran ministry 17 Dec. 1851. After a tour in Kråksmåla Parish (Kalm.) he became parish minister (*kyrkoherde*) at Resmo on Öland in 1876. He d. in Resmo 1 June 1888. He m. Hilda Augusta Ahlqvist, b. in Runsten Parish (Kalm.) 17 Oct. 1832, the dau. of Abraham Ahlqvist, the local pastor, and Sara Gustava Bruun. —Bror Olsson, *Kalmar stifts heredaminne*, I-V (Kalmar 1948-1980), IV, p. 369.

<sup>2</sup>Olaus Ebberli also used the surname Moraeus, which might indicate that he came from Södra Möre hundred in Kalmar län. He was m. to Kirstin Pedersdotter. —*Ibid.*, IV, p. 508.

<sup>3</sup>Abraham Ahlqvist was one of the most enlightened clergymen in Sweden in the early part of the 19th century. He wrote a classic history and description of Öland named *Ölands historia och beskrifning*, published in 1825-1827. —*Ibid.*, IV, pp. 238-241.



# Abraham Ahlqvist Ölands Historia och Beskrifning

Title Page of Abraham Ahlqvist's *History*  
of Öland, published 1825-1827.