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Adolf Fredrik Hansen - The First Swede on St. Barthélemy

Erik Wikén*

In reference to Henry Hoff's article on "Additional Swedes on St. Eustatius," which appeared in *Swedish American Genealogist* in Sept. 1984, I wish to call attention to an obituary which appeared in the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*, published in Stockholm 26 June 1844, referring to the death on St. Barthélemy on 29 March 1844 of Adolf Fredrik Hansen. The necrology is dated St. Barthélemy 2 May 1844 and is signed with the initials *Ubg*. The author is doubtless Johan August Uddenberg, the Swedish garrison physician on the island.¹

The obituary sheds new light on the life of Hansen, who spent the better part of his life on the Swedish island. It is reproduced here in an English translation:

"St. Barthélemy 2 May 1844. Adolf Fredrik Hansen, almost 89 years old and a merchant here, died 29 March and was buried the following day. He was our colony's oldest resident, among the male population, and also the oldest Swede in point of residency on the island. The death of Hansen was not unexpected, because of his advanced age, but despite this fact, it did not diminish our sorrow at his passing. When the bell in the Swedish church tolled—which it did continually as long as the corpse remained above ground—it spread the news to the citizens of our town (Gustavia), imbuing everyone with the feeling of a personal loss. It called to mind the many virtues which this individual, citizen and businessman possessed. One could see in the faces of those citizens who had had the privilege of knowing the deceased in the flower of his manhood, a sincere and genuine sorrow, which when interpreted could only mean that they felt nothing but the highest esteem, devotion and trust, which he so justly had won for himself.

The Swedish flag on top of the fort was at half mast during the funeral services, waving in the breeze a final farewell to the man who first raised that flag on the soil of the West Indies. Almost to a man, the citizenry of Gustavia marched in the procession to the cemetery, honoring the founder of their city.

Adolf Fredrik Hansen was born in Stockholm 31 Aug. 1755. He began his mercantile career working for the well-known Swedish firm, Schön & Co.² After returning from the Orient, where he had gone as a supercargo, he made several business journeys to Europe. In 1784 he was dispatched by the Swedish West India Company to go to St. Barthélemy as its agent. He arrived on the island 30 Jan. 1785, and immediately took

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charge, representing the Swedish Government, until the arrival of the first governor that spring, Rayalin.³

Without human habitation and covered with prickly cactus, the long thorns of which kept the wanderer at bay, this place was chosen as the spot where our city now is situated. Hansen appreciated the excellent harbor, sheltered from the winds from almost every quarter, and thus the cactus, so highly prized by the Scandinavian, had to make way for an unfettered shore, along which the industrious Hansen saw to it that new houses were constructed, one after another.

During the prosperous times of our colony Hansen was our foremost merchant, but after the decline in trade, he lived at times on the neighboring island of St. Eustatius, where he owned property and from which he also chose his life partner. He was for many years a member of the Governor's Council, as well as a member of the Court, during which time he was able to do justice to the trust and confidence vested in him by his fellow citizens. He was friendly toward all and showed a special concern for the welfare of his Swedish compatriots. The memory of his fatherland was always precious to his soul.

In 1805 he visited Sweden, spending a year in that country.

He married 8 Jan 1786⁴ to Judith Benners of St. Eustatius and had with her four children, three of which survive the father — a daughter, Adriana, born 1789, the widow of the former garrison physician here, Dr. Leuvrén;⁵ a son Alexander, now residing in Sweden, and a daughter, Sara, married to a medical doctor named Stuart."

Then follows a poem dedicated to the memory of Hansen, which was read at his bier. Since it does not add anything of significance to the obituary, it is therefore omitted.

¹Johan August Uddenberg was b. in Smedby Parish (Kalm.) on the island of Öland 18 Aug. 1812, the s. of a clergyman named Johan Gustaf Uddenberg and his wife, Magdalena Wentling. After finishing his medical studies at the University of Uppsala he was named army physician with the Västgöta Dal Regiment, serving this army unit from 1835 to 1842. The following year, 1843, he arrived in St. Barthélemy to take up the duties as garrison physician and some-time secretary to the Governor's Council. He d. in Gustavia 23 March 1852. —Vilhelm Ljungfors, *Svenska släkter* (Lund 1908), p. 154.

²Schön & Co. was founded in the 1760s by Johan Martin Schön (1721-1781), who had arrived in Stockholm from Lübeck via Windau (Ventspils) in the Baltic in the 1740s. He gradually became one of the most successful businessmen in Stockholm. —*Svenska män och kvinnor*, 1-VIII (Stockholm 1942-1955), VI, p. 603.

³Salomon Mauritz von Rajalin, was b. in Karlskrona in Sweden 23 Aug. 1757, the s. of Baron Johan von Rajalin, a Swedish naval officer, and Barbara Eleanora von Gertten. He served as the first governor on St. Barthélemy from 22 Sept. 1784 to 1787. He returned to Sweden, rising in the ranks of the Royal Swedish Navy to attain the rank of vice admiral. He served also as Governor of the counties of Gotland and Gävelborg. He d. in Stockholm 23 Sept. 1825. —Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, I-IX (Stockholm 1925-1936), VI pp. 129-130.

⁴Here Uddenberg errs. According to Henry Hoff's research in the St. Eustatius church archives Hansen married 15 March 1786. —*Swedish American Genealogist*, Vol. IV, No. 3, p. 118.

⁵Jacob Levrén or Leurén was b. in Västergötland 24 Sept. 1784, the s. of Peter Levrén, veterinary, and Petronella Lundgren. After medical studies at the University of Uppsala he came to St. Barthélemy in 1811, where he became government physician and garrison doctor. He d. in Gustavia 8 Nov. 1851. —*Ibid.*, p. 120.