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On the Ruhlin Ancestry

Curt Hauffman*

INTRODUCTION

Two brothers Ruhlin, distant relatives of mine on my paternal grandmother's side, emigrated to the United States—one of them, Otto, 1893 and the other, Birger, approximately twenty years later. Both of them settled in Bangor, ME, an area where most of their descendants still live. Contacts with relatives in Sweden were maintained so long as the brothers were alive, but stopped with the death of the younger brother in 1969.

During a visit to Washington, DC in 1983 I leafed through a telephone book and found two persons with the name of Ruhlin—but neither of the first names checked with the information I had. Additionally I had never heard of a Ruhlin having moved to Washington. I attempted a phone call, nevertheless, to a Thomas Ruhlin, and we did not have to exchange many words before I realized how we were related. Thomas was the great grandson of Birger, the immigrant. My genealogy was based on such old information, that his generation was not included. He told me, moreover, that he had been in contact with the other Ruhlin name in the telephone book and they had discovered that they probably were not related. I was certainly lucky to have chosen the correct number. We had a very interesting chat, but had no opportunity to meet. Thomas received my address, however, and I sent him a bit of the family history in Sweden which he could use as a basis for his family studies. He told me that he had heard that there were some family notes kept by someone in Bangor, and he promised to find out about them, which, of course, awakened my curiosity and expectations. I did not hear from Thomas, however, until the fall of 1985, when he surprised me by telephoning me, telling me that he was in Stockholm on business.

We decided to meet and eat lunch together, but when we met, we immediately began talking genealogy and became so engrossed in the subject that we almost missed ordering our lunch before the restaurant closed.

Thomas brought with him a manuscript containing five typewritten pages entitled "On Ruhlin Ancestry," which had been written in 1967 by his great grandfather. This story is presented below, literally the way it was written, followed by a commentary. I believe that it is very valuable and educational to see how genealogical material appears, written by a man who had not visited Sweden in fifty years. Think if all immigrants could be persuaded to write down something like this!

It is important to underline the fact that my notes should not be seen as a negative criticism—they are written from the point of view of genuine appreciation for what the author has done and demonstrate instead how small and

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insignificant the errors are and how dependable the basic story is so far as facts are concerned. A few names and dates have been mixed, but there is no bit of information which does not contain a kernel of truth. An American family with Swedish roots of the type reproduced here should have no problem finding its origin as well as possible relatives in Sweden, provided one is careful to avoid the traps which can be found as my commentary demonstrates. From these family notes of Birger Ruhlin, it has been possible to trace Thomas' ancestors back as far as the 14th century.

Finally, I cannot help but once again to emphasize the importance which telephone books have in genealogical research on both sides of the Atlantic (Compare my "A Note on Sven Aron Ponthan," in *Swedish American Genealogist*, Vol. V, No. 3, pp. 121-123).

BIRGER RUHLIN'S REMINISCENCES OF 1967

Here is what I know of our ancestors. I have forgotten much but I have written to two of my cousins and when I get their answers, I will add them to the end of this article. One of them, Mrs. Elsbeth Ruhlin Dickerson, Sweavagen 5, Uddevalla, Sweden, is a high school teacher, writes excellent English and should have lots of information as she was born and brought up in our part of Sweden.¹

I will start with NORELIUS which was my mother's maiden name and I think I am the only one who still knows that. My mother's great grandfather was minister in Nacka church, a small parish outside of Stockholm. Nacka, at this time, was Sweden's "Bar Harbor," a summer place for all the rich people and foreign diplomats in Stockholm. This was changed suddenly by the murder of Gustaf III in 1793. One of the diplomats was Sir George Bruce, the English Ambassador to Sweden. Sir George had many daughters and one of them married my mother's great grandfather, Per Olof Norelius, and in that way became my mother's great grandmother on her father's side.²

My mother's father, Erik Olof Norelius, was minister to Kumla church. (Donald Ruhlin has a picture of him). Kumla is a small town in the province of Neirike and lies about 40 miles from Orebro which was a town of about 30,000 people having high schools, a university and much industry (chiefly shoe factories).³

Erik Olof Norelius had four children, all girls, only two of whom got married. My mother, Hulda Otilia Elisabeth, married Per Wilhelm Ruhlin. Emma married (college) Professor Udden and had two children, Betty and Gotfrid.⁴

Gotfrid Udden became a sea captain of a salvage ship. In 1905, Gotfrid Udden ran his ship through the Japanese blockade of Vladivostok, made his fortune in one month and then retired. I met him in 1901. Somehow he found out that I was in Umea high school. At that time, he was only a few miles below town, patching up a French wreck which he had salvaged on the Finnish coast and brought over to Sweden where the water was deeper. He came up and got me during the Easter vacation and I was his guest for a week.⁵

Betty married but I do not know what became of her.⁶

Magada Norelius, mamma's sister, never married and lived most of the time with us as Mamma's helper as we were a very large family. There were thirteen of us children in all but stretched over 22 years so there are a few I do not remember. The only one living now but me is my sister, Ellen Moen, Dal, Norway. She is 97 and in very good health still.⁷

Two of my sisters died here in America and are buried in a Providence cemetery. They were Ebba and Elsa. Ebba had no children. Elsa had one girl, Mrs. Elsbeth Nordstrom, who lives in Stockholm. I correspond with her. She is 65 and works in her son-in-law's tobacco store off and on.⁸

My sister, Edith, who died in 1962, had 5 children, 3 are still alive. Her daughter, Britta, with whom I correspond every month, is a cashier in the Forest Department in Kalix. Her address is Floragatan, Kalix, Sweden. A son, Erik, lives near Britta. Another daughter, Rachel, a widow and a nurse, has a large nursing home. An old place and well worth seeing. Rachel is now 63 years old and working every day. Her address is: Mrs. Rachel Casey, 25 Vaughan Ave., Newport, R.I. If you should go there, be sure to see her beautiful flower garden.⁹

There were only 3 boys in my family. Peder died when he was 17, Otto lived until he was 85, while I am now 84 and expect to live a few years more.¹⁰

Carolina, the third of mamma's sisters, married a Swedish textile manufacturer named Sjostrom (I forget his first name). He with his wife, Carolina Norelius, left Sweden around 1850, came to America, settled in Lawrence, Mass., and founded the Lawrence Dye-Works. When my brother Otto came over in 1893, there were 32 men working in the mill and when I came in 1913, there were 2,000 men in the mill. But not for long! Sjostrom died, his sons got hold of the mill and borrowed so much from the Old Colony Trust Company, they lost mill and all.¹¹

The Sjostroms had 3 sons and a daughter, Ellen, who had married a Swedish nobleman named Gusten Nordenstjarna. They all owned large estates outside of North Andover and located on the so-called Boston Post Road. To make the story short, it is enough to say they lost all. Ivar, the eldest son, went to Florida and took over his father's house (I have a picture of it still) while Waldemar went to Canada.

Gusten Nordenstjarna (Ellen's husband) after repeated attempts to repair the family fortunes, finally appealed to the Swedish Noblemen's Association for help. The Association paid his fare to Sweden and bought him a castle in the southern part of Sweden where he and his wife lived out their days. This is not an unusual procedure but a courtesy which Riddarhuset in Stockholm extends to all its members who are unfortunate.¹²

Ellen Nordenstjarna had 2 daughter's, one of whom went with her parents to Sweden while the other went with Waldemar to Canada.¹³

At this time I want to tell you about Erik and Anders Norelius who were either mamma's uncles or her father's cousins. A thing which I have not figured out.

Anyway, they were both around 40 years old when they emigrated to

Boston, went to school on a ship in Boston Harbour and became ordained ministers. Both of them later went out west to preach. In the book *SWEDES IN AMERICA* you will find a much better description of them than I can give you.¹⁴

Some time ago I found a picture of a Norelius in a Swedish weekly and an article about a Theodore Norelius, editor and publisher of the Chisago County Press, Lindstrom, Minnesota. I wrote to him and he wrote back and told me he is a grandson of Erik Norelius who founded Gustavus Adolphus College and also the Augustana Synod of the Lutheran Church. Erik Norelius was decorated by the King of Sweden. A Dr. Fredrik Johnson of Saint Peter, Minnesota, has written several books about Dr. Norelius.

Theodor also told me that he has 2 brother's, Erik and postmaster Paul, 55 and 57 respectively, and a sister, Charlotte.

My sister Eva and I were brought up together and went to school in Umea for four years. Eva went to normal school and became a teacher while I went to high school. Every semester we went home together and back. She was teaching school in Boden when I came over to America. Eva wrote me her last letter just three weeks before she died in 1963.¹⁵

My sister Ellen who is 97 had 5 sons and 2 daughters. She remembers a great deal about the early days of the family so I will write to her for more information. Her daughter, Camilla Elvetun, Dal, Norway, writes perfect English and you could contact her for information. Camilla collects data and pictures of relatives here in America. Perhaps her children or grandchildren might meet some of ours sometime in the future.¹⁶

The Ruhlin family originated in the small parish of Lehrbacka about 10 miles outside of Kumla.¹⁷

Prior to serving as a Captain of Artillery in the Finnish-Russian War, Per Olof Ruhlin went under the name of Person. Anyone interested in genealogy could easily trace Person-Ruhlin in the old church records.¹⁸

After the war, Per Olof settled in Lehrbacka. Per Olof Ruhlin died in 1821.¹⁹

Around 1842, a son of Per Olof moved from Lehrbacka to Kumla where he owned a store and was an innkeeper. When he moved, he had one son, August, and 2 daughters. After moving, he had 4 more sons, Per Wilhelm, John, Gustaf and Erik. I met him in 1892 and he died in the same year.²⁰

John and Erik worked for Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, and went to Russia with Nobel where they married, and had families. I met one of John's daughters in 1912, in Stockholm, at the Olympic Games. Olga is now 84 years old and I correspond with her once in a while.²¹

August, the eldest, was very prominent in politics and was stationmaster. He died young, aged 54. His family of 5 boys and 2 girls are all dead except Thorgorg. Her address is: Aby, Sweden. Thorgorg is 84 years old and lost her sister, Valborg, last year. Four of August's five sons married four sisters, all beauties in town.²²

The youngest, daughter of August's youngest son, Helmfrid, married a professor who lectures all over the world. The professor and his wife come every

year to America and stay with friends in Albany, New York. (You will find their names in the addenda).²³

One of Helmfrid's sons was father to Elsbeth Ruhlin Dickerson in Uddevalla. Another son, Bertil, married his cousin Olga, the Russian interpreter I mentioned previously.²⁴

And then there was Sixten. He and I were like brothers. Sixten lived in my home from the time he was 19 years old. He had 5 children, 2 boys and 3 girls. The oldest is Mrs. Viola Sohlberg, Kengis, Pajala, Sweden, and we correspond frequently. Another daughter married a Swedish diplomat (her name will be in the addenda). Still another daughter is a bank clerk in Stockholm and a son an innkeeper in Kalix.²⁵

In 1892 Eva and I visited our grandfather, the innkeeper, in Kumla. My father and mother went on to Lehrbacka to call on an old aunt of Papa's. I understood that she lived on the old place which was given to her father by the Swedish Crown as a reward for his services in the 1808-09 Russian War. I have seen such places in the northern part of Sweden and they consisted of 160 acres of land with quite a number of buildings.²⁶

My brother Otto, who died in 1962, married Mae Scherer from Scotland. They had 3 sons, Carl Waldemar, M.D., Donald, living in Massachusetts and Otto, Jr., living in Sangerville, Maine. Carl, who died this last summer, married Lailia Stevens of Steuben, Maine and they have 2 children. Nancy, married and a schoolteacher, and Galen, presently in the United States Army.²⁷

I, Birger, married Alette Jensen-Bothne of Fredrikshald, Norway, and we had 2 sons. James Robert, Col., U.S.A., Ret. and Vice President of the Eastern Trust and Banking Company, Bangor, married Helena Hewes of Bangor. They had 4 sons and 1 daughter, Maj. Jas. R. Jr. is stationed in Korea and has 4 sons. Richard, an engineer and city councilman, has 3 sons. Robert, an architect, has just recently married. David, unmarried, is in the service in Vietnam. Carol, unmarried, is a student nurse. Maj. Earl Oswald, Senior Pilot, U.S.A.F., killed in action in the Korean War, married Eleanor Paine of Bangor. They had 2 sons and 1 daughter. Erik, married, is living in Washington, D.C. Peter Charles was killed in an automobile accident, 1 January 1966, aged 17. Gail is a student in the College of Education at the University of Maine.

Notes

¹The name should be Elsbeth (Ruhlin) Dartman and the address is Strömstadsvägen 5, Uddevalla. She was not a cousin but the daughter of a cousin, which Birger, himself, shows in note 24.

²The only one of Birger's ancestors who served in Nacka was his maternal grandfather. At that time there was no church in Nacka, only a chapel. The area became popular much later as a resort for summer guests and had nothing to do with Gustaf III. There has never been a British ambassador in Sweden by the name of Bruce. Birger's maternal great grandmother was Carolina Bruce and belonged to a very famous noble family with origins in Scotland. Her father was Carl Magnus Bruce who was an army captain. Birger's maternal grandmother's father was the well-known theologian and member of the Swedish Parliament (*Riksdag*) by the name of Johan Henrik Brantenberg. For him and his family the assassination of Gustaf III must have meant a radical change in life style, inasmuch as Brantenberg was a pastor at the Royal Court and after the murder he moved from Stockholm to Lidköping. Nobody with the name Per Olof Norelius has existed among the antecedents. "Mother's great grandfather" was Per Persson, a farmer, and it was his son who took the name Norelius.

³The maternal grandfather's name was Carl Otto Norelius. The rest of the material in this paragraph is correct, except there was no university in Örebro at that time.

- ⁴Carl Otto really had a total of eight children, of which three died before reaching maturity. Three of the daughters married, which Birger mentions in the paragraph linked to note 11. Emma was the unmarried sister, and the sister who married Olof Uddén was Carolina. Olof Uddén was not a professor. He took his Bachelor's degree in law, soon left the academic arena and became a farmer. They had two children—Betty and Henrik (not Gotfrid).
- ⁵It is a fact that Henrik became a sea captain. There is not much to say about him except that he married a Russian and perished with his vessel outside of Hong Kong in 1949.
- ⁶Betty married a Major Gustaf Nordencreutz of a noble family. They had a daughter Brita, who became an accomplished artist.
- ⁷Magada Norelius' correct name was Magdalena and she resided in Canada 1871-1875 when she returned to Sweden. Birger is correct in mentioning that there were thirteen children in the family. Three of them died as infants. The names of the other ten were in order of their ages—Ester, Elsa, Ellen, Ebba, Karl Peder, Otto, Edit, Eva, Birger and Elise. All of the girls had names beginning with the letter "E." Ellen Moen was exactly 100 years old when she died in 1970.
- ⁸Ebba died in 1909 and Elsa 1915 and it is correct that they resided in Providence, RI. Ebba had a daughter, though, Rachel Watson, married to Charles Spooner and she had the following children—Charles Edward and Barbara. Elsa's daughter was also named Elsa and was married to Bernhard Brännström (not Nordstöm). She was born 1898 and thus 69 years old (not 65) when Birger made his notes in 1967. It is correct that she worked from time to time in her son-in-law's tobacco store in Stockholm.
- ⁹This is correct. It can be added that Rachel Casey recently moved to Sweden and now lives in Kalix.
- ¹⁰Peder was only 15 years old when he died. Birger, the author, died in 1969 and was then 86 years old.
- ¹¹Carolina was the oldest of the sisters and married, as mentioned earlier, Uddén. The sister who married Ludvig Sjöström was Maria Norelius and was the next oldest. Other than that, I cannot comment on this paragraph but it ought to be correct.
- ¹²Information from Riddarhuset (Swedish House of Nobles) indicates that this information is completely erroneous. To be sure, however, the staff checked Gusten Nordenstierna's dossier and found no record of any financial aid. The facts are, though, that the family returned to Sweden, settled in the southern part in 1938, where Ellen died in 1947 and Gusten in 1948.
- ¹³Ellen's daughter Ebba died in Malmö in 1985, while the other daughter Wera is married and resides in Ottawa, Canada.
- ¹⁴Birger's mother had a paternal uncle named Anders and at least one of his sons emigrated to America. I have not examined this branch of the family and cannot, therefore, comment on the information here. I cannot see any evidence for the fact that there should be any relationship.
- ¹⁵Eva died in 1962.
- ¹⁶This is correct.
- ¹⁷The place is Lerbäck and not Lehrbacka.
- ¹⁸Another oral tradition mentions that his name was Ersson, first name unknown, who was at the Battle of Ratan as a drummer and was wounded in the head by a sabre cut.
- ¹⁹Unknown to me.
- ²⁰His son was Per Ruhlin, who had the following children, mentioned in order of their ages—Amalia, Sofia, Matilda, Per Wilhelm, August, Viktor, Adolf and Johan. It is correct, though, that August was born in Lerbäck. August died in 1893.
- ²¹Johan and Viktor were the brothers who worked for Nobel. Both had daughters named Olga. It was probably Viktor's daughter, whom Birger met in Stockholm, since it appears as if the other Olga never was in Stockholm.
- ²²August was not the oldest, as I mentioned in note 20. On the other hand, it is correct that he was a well-known politician, even a member of the Swedish Parliament. He had in fact six sons and three daughters. Thorborg was the last to die in this group of siblings. She died in 1969. Only three brothers Ruhlin married, each a Fosselius sister, but a fourth marriage was actually in the making, when some problem arose.
- ²³Helmfrid was August's next eldest son—not the youngest. His youngest daughter, Eivor, married Prof. P.G. Kihlstedt. They still visit family and friends in the area around Albany, but not every year, according to Eivor Kihlstedt.
- ²⁴The first line here should read "One of August's sons (Georg) was the father of Elsbeth Dartman in Uddevalla"—see note 1. The son who married his cousin Olga was Sigurd. The son Bertil as well as Helmfrid and George were married to the sisters Fosselius.
- ²⁵This is correct except that the daughter Gunilla did not marry a diplomat but a surveyor named Lars Öjborn, who later became Director General of the Royal Board of Surveyors. It should be noted that Viola Sohlberg has kept all of the letters sent by Birger.

²⁶No comments.

²⁷According to a newspaper obituary which I have, dated 27 Dec. 1961, Otto died 25 Dec. 1961.

—oOo—

As basis for these commentaries I have, in addition to my own notes concerning the Norelius family, also had help from the following persons:

Britta Kant, daughter of Birger's sister Edith, see note 4.

Viola Sohlberg, daughter of Sixten Ruhlin, see note 25.

Gunilla Öjborn, also daughter of Sixten Ruhlin, see note 25.

Margit Ruhlin, also daughter of Sixten Ruhlin, see note 25.

Karl Erik Ruhlin, son of Sigurd and Olga Ruhlin, see note 24.

Marianne Hole, née Brännström, granddaughter of Birger's sister Elsa, see note 8.

Elsbeth Dartman, daughter of Georg Ruhlin, see note 24.

Eivor Kihlstedt, daughter of Helmfrid Ruhlin, see note 23.

Thorild Kristiansen, granddaughter of Birger's sister Ellen Moen, see note 7.

Britta Nordencreutz, granddaughter of Birger's maternal aunt Carolina, see note 11.

All of my informants have been positive and cooperative in telling what they know of the family. I feel that my commentary, therefore, rests on a very reliable basis, even in those cases where I did not conduct archival research.

Postscript

After this was written I was contacted by George Barclay de Tolly of Newport, RI. He is the son of Alda Lydia Ruhlin, married to Barclay de Tolly, and a daughter of Per Ruhlin's youngest son, Johan, who worked for the Nobel oil interests in Kiev in Russia (see note 20 above). George is descended from the Russian general, Michail Barclay de Tolly, who in the Swedish-Russian War of 1808-1809 commanded the Russian military forces in northern Sweden. In note 18 I mentioned that the ancestor of the Ruhlin family is supposed to have fought in the Battle of Ratan in Västerbotten *län* against these very Russian troops—thus the first meeting between representatives of these families was not of the most hearty kind.

George had grown up in Poland and during the Nazi era it had been demanded of his family to prove its Aryan origins. For this reason the family had contacted the Swedish authorities in order to procure his genealogical lines. George showed me the documents which indicate that Per Eric Ruhlin, the innkeeper, was born 26 Nov. 1818 and had married 18 Dec. 1842 Birgitta Maria Andersdotter, born in 1819, the daughter of Anders Jönsson in Norra Björnfall, Lerbäck Parish (Öre.), born 1779 and Maja Jonsdotter, born 1789 (see note 20). Pehr Eric Ruhlin's parents were Eric Ersson, born 1783 and Anna Persdotter, born 1776 (see note 18 above).