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Carl Leonard Berggren, a well-known Swede in New York in the 19th Century

Erik Wikén*

One of the best known Swedes in New York during the decades after 1850 was Carl Leonard Berggren.

He was born in the Cathedral Parish in Uppsala 26 Feb. 1817, the son of Carl Berggren, a dyer, and Sara Catharina Öhngren. As a student at the University of Uppsala he participated in the social life of the the Juvenal Order, a group of students who combined their musical talents with other social abilities, and which became a source of inspiration for Gunnar Wennerberg when he wrote his famous cycle of duets entitled *Gluntarne*.¹

After his studies at the university, Berggren became employed as a clerk in an Uppsala bank, but when it was discovered that there was a shortage in the accounts, he left Uppsala at the end of June in 1851.² The first clue we have concerning his presence in the United States is in a letter, dated New York 20 Nov. 1851, written by Johan Sandwall, another Swedish banker, who also had absconded to the United States, and addressed to Gustaf Clemens Hebbe, still another storm tossed Swede, who, however, had been able to establish himself in the New World.³ Sandwall relates that he and Berggren were rooming together, that they lacked money and that they wished to borrow from Hebbe.⁴ Soon thereafter Berggren was fortunate to find employment with a Swede, Augustus Ohlander,⁵ who on 10 July 1852 advertised in Gustavus Öbom's Swedish American newspaper, *Skandinaven* (New York) that he had opened a tobacco shop at 659 Broadway and had employed Berggren as a clerk. The same newspaper for 13 Sept. 1852 advertised that the shop had been moved to 9 Rector Street, now under the name of C.L. Berggren & Co.⁶ In 1853 Berggren entered the firm of Knickerbocker Ice Co., where for a quarter of a century he was a trusted employee. Thanks to this position he had the opportunity to assist many a newly arrived Swede to earn his first money in America in the ice business.⁷

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Now he began thinking seriously of bringing over a woman, whom he had probably met during his sejour at the University of Uppsala and to whom he probably was engaged,⁸ Josephina Schultzberg, born in Västerås 6 April 1824, the daughter of the assistant minister at that time, Eric Olof Schultzberg, and his wife, Margareta Elisabeth Engzelius, and who during the 1840s had been residing in Uppsala with a married sister. Her departure from Sweden was delayed for some time and it was not until 10 June 1856 that she received a passport in Stockholm for travel to America. She arrived in New York 16 Aug. 1856 from Hamburg aboard the vessel *Borussia*.

Berggren won a respected place among the Swedes in New York. He was first secretary of the Swedish Society of New York, founded in 1836. In 1866 he became its president. He fought for the idea that the society should not only be a mutual aid organization, but that it should also devote its efforts to furthering social life and cultural activities.⁹ On several occasions he was the featured speaker at festive occasions among the Swedes of New York. An example of this was his appearance as the guest speaker at the 400th anniversary celebration of the founding of the University of Uppsala in 1468.¹⁰

He played a major role in the founding in 1865 of the Swedish Lutheran Gustavus Adolphus Parish¹¹ and later he was instrumental in straightening out the tangled financial affairs of the congregation, after Fredrik Wallroth had embezzled the moneys of the congregation.¹²

As evidence of the great respect Berggren enjoyed among New York's Swedes was the celebration arranged for him on his sixtieth birthday 26 Feb. 1877.¹³

Berggren also played the role of the lavish host for visiting Swedes from his homeland. One of these occasions was the extravaganza he put on for the officers of the Swedish naval vessel, the *Norrköping*, when it visited New York in Dec. 1861¹⁴ and the good will and the assistance he gave Swedish officers who had come to the United States to participate in the Civil War.¹⁵

Isidor Kjellberg, a journalist, known for his radical journalistic activities in Chicago 1870-1871 for the purpose of stopping the unsavory conduct of the emigrant runners,¹⁶ visited New York in the beginning of 1870, before departing for the West and wrote the following concerning Berggren, that he

“was generally praised for his unbelievable and utterly selfless assistance to his countrymen Many of Mr. B's friends are concerned at the thought that this noble gentleman will make such great sacrifices in his charitable pursuit that he finally will bring about his own ruination”¹⁷

Perhaps one is apt to suspect that he was aware of this fact and that he was attempting to restrict the number of persons seeking help, when he on several occasions wrote in Swedish newspapers warning people not to rush into the emigrant adventure.¹⁸

Berggren died after a long illness 21 May 1886, leaving a wife and two sons—Carl and Ernst—to mourn him. Both of the sons were employed by the Edison Electric Co. of New York. He was buried 24 May 1886 in the Flower Hill Cemetery in Hoboken at which occasion a large number of New York's Swedes paid their last respects. The newspaper *Dalpilen* (Falun) for 18 June 1886 carried an extensive account of the burial and even named the pallbearers for the occasion. These represented some of the most influential Swedes in New York—men like Henry H. Hodges, Alphons Westee,¹⁹ Theodore Linderborg, W. Östberg, Albert Björcklund, Louis Hallen,²⁰ Charles W. Stjernfelt²¹ and Olof Lundgren.²²

¹Sven G. Svenson, *Gunnar Wennerberg. En biografi* (Stockholm 1986), *passim*.

²Concerning the embezzlement in the bank, see the court records of the City Court of Uppsala (*Uppsala rådhusrätts akter*) (*ULA*) for 1851; the newspaper *Upsala* also contains a full account of the case during June-Aug. 1851.

³Concerning Sandwall, see Erik Wikén, "Sandwall och Sundevall" in *Personhistorisk tidskrift* 1976, pp. 45-47. Concerning Hebbe see Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820-1850* (Stockholm & Chicago 1967) (*SPANY*), p. 45, n. 54; *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, Vol. 1. 18 (Stockholm 1969-1971), pp. 367-369; Brita Hebbe, *Wendela. En modern 1800-talskvinna* (Stockholm 1974), pp. 242-250.

⁴This letter is to be found in the Brita Hebbe Collection. —Private Collection.

⁵August Ohlander was born in Uddevalla, emigr. to New York, where he became a wholesale merchant. On 29 Jan. 1852 he became a member of the Swedish Society of New York and from July 1854 to June 1855 he served as its president. He married Josefina Lovisa Zengerlein 5 Nov 1853 and died in Montgomery, AL in 1903. —The Archives of the Swedish Society of New York, deposited in the Emigrant Institute of Växjö; Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, I-IX (Stockholm 1925-1936), IX, p. 154.

⁶*Skandinaven* is in the collection of Swedish American newspapers in the Royal Library in Stockholm. For information concerning Öbom, see Nils William Olsson, "Was Napoleon Berger the First Swedish Journalist in America?" in *The Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* (now *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*), Vol. III, pp. 3-13; Erik Gamby, "Napoleon Berger alias Gustaf Öbom" in *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXXIV, pp. 4-31.

⁷See the pen name Quaero in the newspaper *Amerika* (Göteborg) 2 June 1870; [Carl Edvard Herman Gestrin], *I Amerika*, I-II (Stockholm 1881-1882), I, p. 11.

⁸According to a letter from New York dated ca. September 1853, published in *Ställningar och förhållanden*, ed. by Magnus Jacob Crusenstolpe, Sept. 1854, p. 18.

⁹Ulf Beijbom, "Svenska Societeten i New York 150 år" in *Personhistorisk tidskrift*, 1986, pp. 57-66.

¹⁰See *Nordstjernan* (New York) 14 Sept. 1877.

¹¹The Diary of A. Andreen (see Gustav Andreen, "The Early Missionary Work of the Augustana Synod in New York City, 1865-1866" in *Augustana Historical Society Publications*, II (Rock Island, IL 1932), pp. 1-26; George M. Stephenson, *The Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration* (Minneapolis 1932), p. 229.

¹²A letter from Berggren to his family in Uppsala, dated 7 Feb. 1866 and published in *Upsala-Posten* 14 April 1866; also Berggren's account, dated New York 24 Feb. 1869 and attached to the dispatch of the Swedish Norwegian minister in Washington, dated 27 Feb. 1869 in the National Archives in Stockholm (*Riksarkivet*).

¹³*Nordstjernan* (New York) 2 March 1877.

¹⁴Lars Johan Govenius, *Fregatten Norrköpings expedition 1861-1862* (Göteborg 1862), pp. 76-78. Govenius served as naval chaplain aboard the vessel.

¹⁵According to a letter from Carl Ludvig Theodor Berlin (1834-1910), dated New York 27 May 1863 (copy in Carl Berlin's Collection in the Royal War Archives (*Krigsarkivet*) in Stockholm). The collection, the originals of which are in private hands, contains a number of letters connected with Berlin's participation 1863-1865 in the Civil War—see Sune Nordenskjöld, "Utdrag ur Carl Berlins brev 1863-65" in *Föreningen Gamla Christianstad Årsskrift*, 1954, pp. 34-59. Berlin remained in the United States and was married three times. He died in 1910 in the National Military Home in Dayton, OH. —Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Svenska släktkalendern*, Vol. III, 1914, p. 90.

¹⁶Ulf Beijbom, *Swedes in Chicago* (Stockholm 1971), *passim*.

¹⁷*Göteborgs-Posten* (Göteborg) 10 March 1870.

- ¹⁸Letters from Berggren published in *Upsala-Posten* 18 April 1866; in *Dalpilen* (Falun) 4 April 1868 and in *Jönköpings Tidning* (Jönköping) 21 July 1875.
- ¹⁹Ludvig Wilhelm Alphons Westee was born in Hedvig Eleonora Parish in Stockholm 30 Sept. 1827, the illegitimate son of a 25 year-old mother, probably Lovisa Ulrika Nyman. The father was Fredrik Wilhelm Westee, a civil servant, according to his last will and testament appended to his estate inventory probated in Stockholm 1883. Alphons Westee moved from his parish of birth to New York 24 April 1850. He became a member of the Swedish Society in New York 25 Sept. 1851. —The Swedish Society Archives.
- ²⁰Doubtless identical with Ludvig F. Aullin, male, 20 years old, who arrived in New York 17 Oct. 1850 aboard the British bark *Janet*. He was born Ludvig Fredrik Hallén, posthumously, in Kristianstad 9 Aug. 1830, the son of C. E. Hallén, quartermaster, and Catharina Lovisa Pettersson, and received a passport in Kristianstad 26 July 1850. In New York he became a manufacturer of plumes for ladies' hats as well as other decorative items, gradually amassing quite a fortune. He died in New York 5 Nov. 1899. —*Swedish passport* lists in the Royal War Archives, Stockholm; *SPANY*, p. 250; *Prärieblomman*, 1900 (Rock Island, IL 1900), pp. 200-201; District Archives, Lund (*Landsarkivet*).
- ²¹Carl Fredrik Volmar Stiernefelt, born in the Svea Artillery Parish in Stockholm 10 Sept. 1819, the son of Conrad Fredrik Stiernefelt and Sofia Lovisa Hellman, is almost certainly identical with Fredrik Stjerfeldt, a member of the Swedish Army, who arrived in New York 20 Aug. 1842. He became a member of the Swedish Society in New York 25 Sept. 1845. —*SPANY*, pp. 42-43; information kindly furnished by Pontus Möller of the Swedish House of Nobles.
- ²²Olof (Olaus) Fritz (Fredrik) Lundgren, a watch manufacturer, was born in the S:ta Maria Parish in Ystad 10 Feb. 1817, the son of Hans Lundgren, a brewer, and Anna Margareta Söderberg. He received a passport in Ystad 27 April 1847 for travel to New York. He joined the Swedish Society in New York 27 July 1848. In 1850-1851 he was residing as a watchmaker at 224 Canal Street in New York. —S:ta Maria Parish Records, the District Archives of Lund; Swedish Society Archives; *Daggett's New York City Directory* 1850-1851.

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