

6-1-2002

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Recommended Citation

Moberg, Vilhelm; Lang, Ingrid A.; Nettervik, Ingrid; and Erickson, James E. (2002) "The Memoirs of My Uncle Peter Jacob Aronson," *Swedish American Genealogist*. Vol. 22 : No. 2 , Article 4.

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The Memoirs of My Uncle Peter Jacob Aronson⁺

Vilhelm Moberg
Translated by Ingrid A. Lang*
Introduced by Ingrid Nettervik[‡]
Annotated by James E. Erickson

Editor's Note: My Swedish ancestors, both paternal and maternal, immigrated to the iron mining villages of Iron River and Stambaugh, Michigan, during the decade of the 1880s. Although I began doing personal family history research in the mid-1970s, it was not until the early 1990s that I entertained the thought of a larger research project focused on all of the West Iron County [Michigan] Swedes.¹ Since that time, I have been awarded two stipends from the Swedish Emigrant Institute (*Svenska Emigrantinstitutet*), in Växjö, Sweden, to work on this project.² During a month-long stay in Växjö in 2001, I came across the manuscript highlighted in this article.

The original manuscript consists of eleven typewritten pages measuring 21.5 x 35.5 centimeters. There are two sets of typed page numbers located at the top, center of each page. One series begins with 40 and continues through 49 (page 50 is not numbered as such). A second series, located directly below the first, begins with 1 (although the number is not shown on the first page) and continues through 9. In this second scheme, the last two pages are not numbered. A third, handwritten pagination scheme, used for cataloging purposes by the archivist at *Svenska Emigrantinstitutet*, is located in the upper right-hand corner of each page (i.e., 7:1:1:1-7:1:1:11). All three pagination schemes have been retained below as reference points for future researchers.

The first nine pages (40-48 / [1]- 9 / 7:1:1:1-7:1:1:9) are included under the heading "Min morbror Peter Jacob Aronsons memoarer;" the last two (49-[50] / 7:1:1:10-7:1:1:11, under "Ur morbror Jakobs memoarer."

The original manuscript contains a number of annotations in Moberg's own hand. They are indicated in italic in the following pages.

All corrections of people and place names made by me have been placed in brackets after the actual name found in the manuscript.

⁺ "Utdrag ur min morbror Peter J. Aronssons memoarer," 4. *Memoarer och dagböcker (7:1:1:1-11)*, *Utvandrarromanens källor: Förteckning över Vilhelm Mobergs samling av källmaterial, Emigrant-institutets skriftserie*, 1, Ulf Beijbom, Emigrantinstitutet, Utvandrarernas Hus, Växjö, 1972.

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Introduction

In 1998 Vilhelm Moberg's four-volume saga of Swedish immigrants in North America—*The Emigrants (Utvandrarna)*, *Unto a Good Land (Invandrarna)*, *The Settlers (Nybyggarna)*, and *The Last Letter Home (Sista brevet till Sverige)*—was voted the Swedish novel of the twentieth century in a competition organized through a popular cultural television program. Those who sent in their votes may be assumed to be culturally interested TV viewers and the result must be looked upon as the choice of the Swedish people. These four novels have made such a great impression on Swedish readers that half a century after publication they were put foremost among Swedish novels written in the twentieth century.

When the novel *The Emigrants* was published in 1949, Vilhelm Moberg was already a well-established author, translated into several languages, but the four novels about the emigrants from Ljuder in Kronobergs län, Småland, strengthened his position as one of the great Swedish writers. He was born in 1898 in Moshultamåla, situated in the part of Småland from which his literary characters come. Moberg's mother had five brothers and one sister who had immigrated to America, his father had three brothers and sisters who had done the same thing. Both his parents were the only children in their families who stayed in Sweden.

"America is one of the first words I learned as a little boy," Moberg writes in the essay *Romanen om utvandrarromanen* (The Novel about the Emigrant Novel). He saw aunts and uncles and their children in beautifully framed photos, placed on the chest of drawers, the pride of place in the cottage. All his cousins were Americans, and for a long time the boy thought that cousins were some sort of superior and more distinguished children only to be found in America.

Letters from all these relatives were frequent, so when Moberg in the 1930s started planning his work about his unknown relations in the U.S., he emptied chests and drawers containing letters from America. He found two or three hundred such letters in his own home, and several more he got hold of from people in the neighborhood. They all had relatives in the big country on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. A great number of people emigrated during the second half of the nineteenth century from the part of Sweden where Moberg was born.

Vilhelm Moberg had earlier written a couple of historical novels, and he was very careful about historical facts. They had to be correct. He soon realized that what he could find in Sweden was not enough; he had to go to America to find out what had happened to Swedish emigrants there and how they had lived their lives. However the second world war intervened. He had to postpone his journey to America and for some years he put aside this project. Instead he engaged himself in anti-German writing. On the ninth of April 1940 German troops invaded Denmark and Norway causing great anxiety to Moberg and indeed most other Swedes. When were German troops to invade Sweden? Moberg wrote a great number of newspaper articles where he criticized the cautious attitude of the Swedish government and gave expression to his opinion of the Germans. His

articles were officially considered a risk because of their frankness, so only two brave newspaper editors dared to publish them. Moberg also wrote the historical and allegorical novel *Rid i natt! (Ride Tonight)*, which upset the Nazis so much that it was burnt in their book fires. After this book everything Moberg wrote was forbidden reading in Germany and the countries occupied by German forces.

When the war was over, Vilhelm Moberg went back to his work on the emigration novels and started writing *The Emigrants*, and finally, in 1948, before this novel was completed (1949), he went with part of his family to the U.S. This was something he had wished to do since he was a child. In fact, as a boy, he had made up his mind to emigrate, and when he was eighteen he received a ticket for America from an uncle, but his parents would not let him go. They made him stay in Sweden by promising him two terms of school (Grimslövs *folkhögskola*).

From an American relative, Vilhelm Moberg received a letter, dated August 8, 1948, urging him to get hold of the memoirs of his uncle, Peter Jacob Aronsson, as dictated to Moberg's cousin, Esther Lindqvist. These memoirs have been translated for this issue of *SAG*. Moberg has written by hand at the top of his typed copy of the memoirs that his uncle died in 1945, aged 83. In a newspaper article published in Sweden in October 1948 he wrote that his uncle died "a couple of years ago, aged 85." Professor Ulf Beijbom, head of the Swedish Emigrant Institute, writes in a book about emigrants from Kronoberg, *Uppbrott från stenriket* (2000), that Peter Jacob died in 1947, aged 86. According to Professor Beijbom, Moberg is not always to be trusted on facts like that. Certainly, Peter Jacob Aronsson had died some time before Moberg arrived in Michigan.

From the date of the letter mentioned above and from the newspaper article, we can assume that Vilhelm Moberg got hold of the memoirs some time in the early part of the autumn of 1948. Apparently he typed them out and, some time later, while considering their value for his novels, made handwritten annotations on his typewritten copy. He also underlined a few things, probably in connection with typing two pages of notes containing useful ideas from the memoirs for his novel. These two pages are attached to the memoirs. Some of the ideas appear in the first novel published in 1949. Therefore we can assume that the manuscript in the Moberg Collection at the Swedish Emigrant Institute was compiled by Moberg some time during the autumn in 1948. He did not date it. The original memoirs must still be somewhere in the U.S. It would be very exciting if this important document could be found.

In the memoirs, Peter Jacob Aronsson recalls that at one point during a journey, when he spent the night in a storage building, he was infested by lice. Moberg quotes this line in his notes after the memoirs, and judging from the lines following the quotation this is how he got the idea for the lice on board the ship in his novel. The character Kristina is infested by lice, as are all of the passengers except Gladan (Ulrika from Västergöhl), whom Kristina blames for the lice. Like Peter Jacob, Karl Oskar several times carries heavy burdens on his back. He also stakes out his land in a way similar to Peter Jacob's description. Peter Jacob mentions Swedish Anna who cooked for six Swedish boys. Moberg

makes her into one of his characters. She is a religious woman who takes on the housekeeping for Kristina's uncle Danjel, who lost his wife during the long and strenuous voyage at sea. Peter Jacob mentions that they felt dumb in the new country. They didn't understand and couldn't speak the language. The feeling is shared by Karl Oskar and Kristina when they arrive in America. Kristina never learns to speak English.

These are a few examples of the use that Vilhelm Moberg made of his uncle's memoirs. However, Gunnar Eidevall, who has written a thesis on the source material for Moberg's emigrant novels (*Vilhelm Mobergs emigrantepos*, 1974) judges that the most interesting of the memoirs or diaries Moberg studied is Mina Anderson's.

oOo

Diaries

-40-

7:1:1:1

The Memoirs of My Uncle Peter Jacob Aronson

*Unfortunately, incomplete
He died 1945—83 years old.*

I don't know where to begin if not with my name and where I was born—in Småland, Sweden, 24 December 1862 [*sic*]. My father owned a small farm located high on a big hill about four kilometers long. We could see four church towers, one of them two-and-a-half miles away—when the sun was shining. We had some timber on the farm, mostly pine but also hardwood, birch, and maple. When I was fifteen years old, my two older brothers, Axel and Aldo, left for northern Sweden to work on the railroad, leaving me to take care of the farm. We had about a dozen animals, one young and one old horse. I plowed and sowed—planted corn, rye and oats, potatoes, cabbage, turnips, and carrots for our own use. We had to sell lumber in Karlskrona in order to pay the taxes.

The farm was located almost on top of the hill. In the winter, twelve people got on two sleds and went down the hill.

My father died at the age of forty-six, my mother died when she was eighty-two. My father died from appendicitis, my mother from old age. I think my father was about my height and weight; maybe he was a little taller. He worked hard, had to in order to support seven children. I remember how he used to cut poplar trees and deliver them to the match factory in Kalmar. He attended the prayer meetings held by "the colporteur," who rode on horseback from village to village. And the church was about one Swedish mile plus one English mile, or eight English miles, from our home. We sometimes drove there and sometimes we walked.

My mother was taller than my father, strong and healthy. My father had dark hair—he didn't live long enough to turn gray.

My grandfather (*farfar*) distilled his own schnapps (*brännvin*). He was well to do for a while. He drove two horses. He stayed out at night and wanted the

boys to stay up to unhitch the horses. If they didn't, he would chase them out of bed so they quickly ran outside and took care of the horses. He gave three of his sons money to purchase a farm. At the time of the railroad construction through the area, school was taught on several farms. The teacher lived in the area from year to year. There were two schools, "the elementary school" and "the great school," the former had four grades, the latter had eight. When it was time to be confirmed, we had to walk to the church, where the pastor lived. Each school usually had forty students. One day, when the railroad between Vexjö [Växjö] and Kalmar was being built, the workers were about two kilometers from our school. We were outside and could hear the train approaching to unload ties and rails. So we all ran to see the engine which seemed to shake the earth. When we returned, our teacher was in the yard, cutting twigs to whip us. But there were too many of us to whip, so he forgave us.

Diaries

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7:1:1:2

2

I worked on the farm for a few years, then we sold it and Aldo Gottfred [Gottfrid] went to the United States. My sister Ida Moberg and her husband left later. My mother kept one cow and a little bit of land and part of the house. She would have everything she needed. Ida Moberg's daughter has now sold the farm and (*built?*) a new house and the Mobergs have built a new house on one acre.

Aldo Gottfred [Gottfrid] came to America in 1881.³ Axel and I arrived in 1882.⁴ I was nineteen years old and Axel was twenty-one when we left Sweden. He had completed three months of military training. The pastor gave us certificates. We received some money when father died, and Aldo sent us some. The tickets cost about \$35. We lived in Mosehultamåla and went by train to Emmaboda. From Emmaboda, we went to Göteborg. We took a steamer to Hull and from there to Glasgow, where we embarked on a ship to New York. It took us three weeks to reach New York. The food was bad and we ran out of water. There was an emigrant [immigrant] train from New York to Chicago. In Chicago, we were free to go where we wanted. Aldo said that when we arrived in Chicago we would get a customs permit—the railroad or the sawmill company hired a person and gave him a ticket to where they wanted him to work. This practice was not in force this year and the railroad company did not hire. I did not have any extra money, so I borrowed \$10 to get to Wisconsin from one of the boys in our company. Aldo had told us he lived in a town, and as all we could see were tree stumps everywhere, we didn't get off the train until the conductor told us to. The train did not go any farther.⁵

We stepped off the train and walked between the pine stumps in the road. After a block or so, we met Lundquist⁶ and a couple of his friends. He had just arrived from I. R. [Iron River] the day before—on foot, probably—to meet us. We turned around and walked the same road back until we came to a hut, which resembled a wood shed to me, where a few Swedish boys were gathered. I was the last one to step inside. Inside, we found a table laden with buns, cookies, and

all kinds of good things to eat. They had a barrel of beer on a chair. Of course, they had some glasses and a little of everything on the table. Lundquist left for Iron River the following day and we went to look for work. We found work in the gravel pit.

Diaries

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7:1:1:3

3

They transported gravel to the mine in Iron [River]—to the Chapin mine. We worked there for two weeks, then we decided to go to Iron River, too. So we resigned our jobs and tried to tell our employer that we wanted to be paid, but he didn't listen. "Time! Time! We must have our time." He didn't even stop to listen. Axel and I began our walk with as much of our extra clothing on our backs as we could carry. It was the third of May, a beautiful day. We started out early in the morning and stopped at the Halfway House for lunch.⁷ The path stretched along Lake Chicago's [ChicagonLake's] south shore. There were a lot of Indian huts.⁸ By nightfall, we ended up in an old roundhouse (a type of storage tent) at Stams [Stambaugh's] depot and slept there on the floor. We were hired by R.R.'s mining company. The mining company had a contract to build a two-mile railroad from S. in the south to meet the railroad from Stager and two (*blank*). We were paid \$30 a month, plus food. Stams [Stambaugh's] mining company was started when the railroad was completed. The first pit was Riterton [Riverton].⁹ Porter¹⁰ was the supervisor and Otto Reibel worked in the office. Later on, the old man owned a store in Stam[baugh], which he sold to Lindwall when Lindwall sold his land in Ontonagon.

We didn't stay there very long. Two Swedish boys built a small log cabin, where the Smiths lived, plus six of us, plus the Swedish woman Anna who worked for us. She used to work for the Boyengtons [Boyingtons].¹¹ When we moved in, we had beds made of lumber in the loft and we collected moss in the woods to use for mattresses. We almost had to crawl on our hands and knees to get into the beds. In the mornings, the mosquitoes came in through the homemade roof shingles. Every evening, we had a large smoking kettle outside the house, which was supposed to drive away the mosquitoes, and at night we brought in a smoking pot to smoke them out. Yes, there were lots of mosquitoes when we first arrived here.

The Swedish woman Anna previously worked for Captain Stephenson¹² at St. Mo.[?] Eklund¹³ purchased a house from Holmberg. The Edlunds¹⁴ and Hagelins¹⁵ built their homes. There were no houses the first year. In 1883, Aldo got a lot and we constructed a wooden tent where six of us lived. Wil[helmina] Nelson,¹⁶ whom Aldo later married, cooked for us.

Diaries

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7:1:1:4

4

People started arriving the first year—Crazy Hanson, Sakrison,¹⁷ [and] Kjellgren,¹⁸ the innkeeper. The railroad came through in the fall of [18]82 and people arrived here very quickly. There was a shop in a blockhouse around the corner, where the office development is today. McDonald¹⁹ later owned a shop where Kelly Bros.²⁰ store is located today.

I worked in different mines—(*blank*), where Chas. Eklund and I were close to drowning once—and later I worked for Selden²¹ exploring Hiawatha, Canal Company, [and] Cask [Cash] entry land.²² In 1887, I signed up for an allotment in Onlagon [Ontonagon]. Everybody—all kinds of people in the company—the Youngs (Bill and Andy),²³ myself, even Mrs. Clark²⁴ owned an allotment. Chief Judge Abbot borrowed my gun before I left; I never got it back. He gave me two dictionaries before he died. Lindwall had property there. The government advertised the land in the newspapers. We were offered [a chance] to buy land for \$1.25 per acre. First we had to clear one acre and plant it, then test it and then receive the contract. We had to walk there to select the land we wanted. After that we received a description to fill in. The government had inspected the land many times before. My property (*blank*).

Axel picked land adjacent to mine. There were numerous pine trees in the area, and by choosing adjoining land parcels, we became the owners of the entire forest, 320 acres.

Axel Lindwall,²⁵ a sailor, was the first to go there. They were gone for ten days and ten nights. Then received an answer from the government that the land in question was not yet open for settlements. So Lindwall and Axel and I went up there a second time and found the previously described pine forest. According to the description, the property was located by the edge of the woods. We used maps to find it. We took the train to Watersmelt [Watersmeet] and walked by foot to the property, which was close to Ewen. The muddy road was sometimes impossible to get through. The D. S. shoreline²⁶ was being built at this time. All goods had to be transported from Watersmelt [Watersmeet]. The railroad owned a store, O'Brien's, to which paths lead from every homestead. We used to go there to buy groceries when we ran out and we had to go there to pick up our mail. Two of the miles were through the forest. And we went to buy flour and beans, but they only had enough for their own use. All we got was a bottle of kerosene. We returned to the storage shed, which we planned to build in the fall. All we had to eat for three days before we returned to I. R. [Iron River] to get supplies, were meat and cheese—wild meat—rabbit and deer.

I carried an iron stove full of bedding and half a window on my back, and a cheese in front. As we walked through the mud, I got stuck and had to be pulled out. We had 30 miles to walk, first to Bouce's [Bruce] Crossing and then into the country. My whole back was skinned. The others carried the same loads. We walked to Bouce's [Bruce] Crossing—20 miles—stayed at the R. R. storage

building, where we caught lice just as in Watersmelt [Watersmeet] (1st trip - 2 all of - ?). We selected land for ourselves. We slept in a tent and stayed for ten days and ten nights. We selected allotments. Lindwall's allotment was the first one along the path, then Axel's and then mine. Lindwall got sick. We walked for a whole day in the warm fall sun. We could not find any water. Around sunset, we came upon the military road leading from Green Bay to Ont[onagan]. In the ditch by the road was some green water, full of horse manure, which we strained using our (*blank*) and made tea of. Toward morning, Lindwall became ill. We didn't have anything to help him. Axel and I found a storage shed, where we got some whisky for him. We had a small tent and sometimes we slept on the ground. We walked several days just to find a sign telling us that the land had already been taken. This was the reason it took us so long. We arrived late and most of the land was already taken, but we finally got an allotment each and began the return trip to sign up for the land before someone else did. We cut down a couple of trees and wrote the date when the land was taken, along with our names. We returned in order to build a storage shed according to the government's specifications, 14 by 16, with a door and windows. We had to clear one acre. When we arrived, Lindwall stayed on his land and Axel and I settled down with a plan to construct Axel's building first. We slept on blankets and woke up to find 4 inches of snow on our blankets. We crawled out, started a fire, made some coffee and had breakfast. After that, we decided to go and see how Lindwall was doing. We noticed the tracks where he had crawled out of his bed. He had written a note on a big birch tree, saying that he was on his way back to Stambaugh; it was too cold here. Axel and I went back and began to cut timber. By the time we returned to I. R. [Iron River] about a week later, we had the walls and the roof finished. We had to build the roof using hollow cedar in order to get a roof that would keep out the rain.

Diaries

-45-

7:1:1:6

6

We sealed the cracks in the roof and walls with moss to keep out the cold and fastened the moss with wood planks. When one tent was completed, we went down for supplies and returned with big loads. We lived in Axel's tent while working on mine. This is how we spent the winter. I borrowed some [?] from Captain Johnson²⁷ to help with my land. We cleared land and planted potatoes in the spring. We got a lot of nice, big potatoes. We brought the last of the potatoes up there in the spring. We had about 100 potato plants—a whole lot. We carried them up and left them there, tried it out in 1888. We walked back and forth all summer. Once, fire had gone through it and destroyed the bark.

Another time, a storm had knocked down trees along the entire path. The next time, all these trees had been burnt. We had planned to cut them up for lumber. John Sitting was up there and helped us build logging roads. We were offered \$10,000 for this, but it was worth twice as much. When fire had destroyed it, we had to sell it for \$5,000. This man had two daughters who were

killed in the fire at Idogin's Theater. He said, "When I have sold the logs I will let you know so you can pay the taxes." He didn't let us know until it was as much as \$300. I was stupid enough to pay for many years to come. Axel sold his land to someone in Norway, Michigan. I let my land go back to the government.

We could not be gone for more than 30 days the winter we stayed on our land for fear that someone would take possession of our land. L[indwall] stayed away longer than that, so an old man settled down in his storage shed and began to cut wood and clear land. Axel and I noticed this and went down to tell L[indwall], who went back with us. He wanted us to go in with him. The three of us took the bed, told the old man he had to sleep on the floor. He stayed for three days. He was alone and we were three, so he was crowded out.

The last time I worked for Selden, I dug a test pit for his excavation work for the S[tambaugh] depot. He told me to keep digging until he returned. I continued to work every day. The pit got so deep that I had to move the dirt many times.

Diaries

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7

7:1:1:7

I found a little ore in a corner. The same fall, they began opening a pit and found ore; this mine was called the Commonwealth Mine. When Selden returned, I asked him if he could give me work over the winter. He could not promise me that, so I left to work for W. W. Hunter in his store.²⁸ This was really a turning point. I said good-bye to the mines and never returned. In 1890, Hunter gave me five months off from work. I went to Augustana to study. When I returned, he offered me work inside the store. Before, I had taken care of the horses, delivered goods and taken sale orders. I had to carry wood and coal and do all (*blank*). He bought a cow in Wis[consin] and wanted me to do the milking. I told him I had never milked and I never would and that he had two weeks to find someone else to take my place.

Before two weeks had passed, he had hired his brother to milk and do (*blank*) and he raised my wages with \$10 besides. I now earned \$50 a month, which was more than the miners earned. The best miners earned \$2 a day, with deductions for each day off.

1883

Six Swedes had a contract to build a one-half mile long road from the curve by Mapleton—now Inn West—to the present And[rew] E[rickson] line. The group consisted of Crazy Hanson, And[rew] Erick[son],²⁹ myself, Swanson (he went back to Småland) and two more, whose names I can't remember. We earned \$5 a day and worked from sunrise to sunset. We had to cut trees and dig them out. We built a small storage [shed] from poles. We carried water.

We used a 15-gallon wine kettle to carry the water. First, two people carried the kettle, which hung from a rope on a pole, and then C. Hanson carried it himself using a carrying belt, and the rest of us took (*blank*). And. Erick was only 19 years old at the time.

Diaries

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8

7:1:1:8

One Saturday evening on our way home, Hanson said, "Let's take a shortcut south of Ice Lake. I bet you a pitcher of beer that I can beat you."

I started down my path, he started by the road construction site. He came running and others tried to get him to explain the reason for the hurry. When I arrived in the town of Mas.[?] I was told that he still was not home. I could have run the stretch one more time before he came home.

Eklund and I came wandering in Man.[?] one Saturday night. Most of the men were already there. We must have been a little late. Halfway down the stream, we noticed water. I had as many drills as I could carry and Eklund, too. I screwed the drills and started to run with Eklund behind me. The closer we came to the pit, the deeper the water got. It must have been 3 1/2 to 4 feet deep. We managed to grab the ladder and climbed up to where the pumps were. The pumps were not running and the pump man was sound asleep. We woke him up. Then we had to walk home in our frozen clothes.³⁰

When I returned from Augustana, I began working for Hunter again, and then I got married—1891. In 1892, Hunter wanted me to buy the store. I didn't want to buy it. Hopkins was in the process of selling his patent for gates. Hunter went to Wisconsin to sell gates and left me to take care of the store. He wrote home that the gates sold like hot cakes. I told him I would like to sell gates, too. Hunter sold the store to Brunell, the depot agent. He didn't get any cash, just a letter from Brunell, which guaranteed monthly installments. Roundy, Peckham & Co. had a mortgage on the supplies and they left Brunell out and sold everything on auction. When they were finished, I wrote to Hunter, asking him how much he wanted for the building. He replied, \$1,000. So I purchased the building for cash.

I left for Minnesota.

I went to see him down in Shrocton [Shiocton], Wis[consin]. Around this time, I also purchased 20 acres of land north of town. We went to Appleton to purchase supplies at the mill, bought a wagonload of flour and feed. Hunter went with me to Appleton.

Diaries

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9

7:1:1:9

I also bought a horse, hitched the horse to a wagon and loaded flour in one end and feed in the other and shipped it all to Iron River. From Appleton, I went

to Johannes Bros. in Green Bay and bought my groceries. I had not made a list of what to buy. I could see Hunter's shelves in my mind, starting in the northeast corner of his store, following them along one wall, across and up along the other wall—I didn't overlook anything. I also purchased food in Green Bay, and china. When I had returned home, the goods began to arrive and I opened the store immediately. At this time, I didn't have any money so I borrowed a \$25 gold coin from my brother-in-law to pay for the shipping. When I purchased the building, I told Hunter that I could not pay for the land. Instead, I gave him an IOU and he told me to pay when I could. But shortly thereafter, he sent me a demand note. Ballow in Karney [Carney, Michigan], who bought timber, had paid Hunter in advance so that he would buy from the farmers. Hunter did not honor his contract, and said that Ballow was after him for the money when he left here. As I was unable to pay my bill, he sent it to Ballow as payment for his own debt. I had also shipped lumber to Ballow, but instead of money, I received a bill.

These were hard times—1893 and 1894—and it was rather difficult to run a store.³¹ People did not have much money. Most of my customers were farmers, and I had to take lumber, hay, butter, eggs, whatever they had for sale. I used to ship hay to C (*blank*) everywhere. The mines were not in operation.

I always had an errand boy. Anna L. worked for me. Every time I wanted to go fishing, I had to call down my wife.

Times took a turn for the better and we were doing well. I thought I would like to take a trip home to Sweden to visit my mother. I recruited Gust Ruus as a partner to run the store while I was gone. This was 1904. Gust and I ran the store until 1912, when I sold my part to H[jalmar] L[indquist].³² I rented out the house for many years for \$100 a month. In 1941, I sold it to Mr. Mayhew.

Diaries

-49-

7:1:1:10

1

Excerpts from Uncle Jakob's memoirs.

The beginning can be used for the first chapter.

He was born on top of big hill, from which they could see four churches when the sun was out. They had about a dozen cattle, one young horse and one old. They sold—had to sell timber in Karlskrona to pay the taxes. The father was five feet tall, the mother was taller.

The grandfather (*farfadern*) distilled his own schnapps. He drove out his sons at night to take care of the horses.

School was taught on different farms.

There were emigrant trains from New York to Chicago. (When did these emigrant trains start running? When was the railroad from New York to Chicago opened?)

They arrived at a hut—just a wood shed—which had been built by Swedish boys.

They had set the table with a lot of food, everything good, pork and potatoes and bread and butter and cheese.

They had a keg of beer, and they drank a lot of beer.

They walked through the woods. They were unsure about the direction. Here and there were marks in the trees. They were marks from the settlers' axes, making their ownership marks on the trees.

There were marks by people, by axes, by peoples' tools. People had been here and claimed their property.

They continued walking.

Tree stumps were visible. People had been here. They continued their trek through the woods.

They met people, but were not able to talk to them. So it was best to be quiet.

Finally, the strangers got angry when they didn't answer them.

They walked on as if they were deaf and dumb in the new land. They did not hear and they did not speak. They did not have use for either ears or mouths (tongue).

The forest fire swept the land, which was worth \$10,000—now it is worth \$500 [sic].

Diaries

7:1:1:11

2

Most of the land is taken!

From Uncle Jakob's memoirs:

Most of the land was taken!

The Swedish woman Anna cooked—fixed food—for six Swedish boys. She had twelve cats, who licked the coffee cups and washed the dishes for her.

They could take land in 1887 without paying anything at the time in Michigan. In some places, the land had not been opened for settlers.

They carried loads of essential goods—flour, pork, meat—for 30 English miles, so their backs were skinned. (Good pictures from the lives of the settlers.)

During their walk, they were infested by lice in a night quarters.

(They could be infested already during the trip to Karlshamn—they are infested on the ship, but who is to blame? They all blame each other:

You have given the rest of us lice! They blame Gladan!

The lice want to emigrate, too—they are coming with us!

Remember that the forest workers [lumberjacks/loggers] in America often had lice. My brother-in-law Karl was once full of lice. And the lice in America were much more aggressive, bit harder and were harder to get rid of than the lice in Sweden—the native lice. God save us from the American lice!

One morning during their walk, they awoke with 4 inches of snow on the blankets.

The settlers wrote their names and date on the trees in their “claim” or area—they used a red logger’s pen. Now everybody knew who lived there. K. O. writes: Karl Oskar Nilsson, Swedish, or from Sweden.

They got their goods from the storekeeper in exchange for timber, hay, eggs, and butter—the settlers did not have cash.

One friend was ill—all they had to give him was whisky.

They worked for a boss, but did not get paid. They called:
Give us our time! Our time—our money!

They had mostly potatoes the first few years, and lived on that. Got 100 bushels in ? = 60 barrels.

Endnotes

¹ See, for example, James E. Erickson, "The Hjulsjö (Öre.) to Stambaugh, MI Migration Axis," *Swedish American Genealogist* XI (March 1991): 1-33.

² In both 1996 and 2001, I was awarded research scholarships of SEK 20,000 by the board of the Swedish Emigrant Institute to support my "Swedes of West Iron County, MI" research project.

³ Aldo Gottfrid left Göteborg on 17 June 1881; with Chicago as his destination.

⁴ Axel Julius and Peter Jacob left Göteborg on 24 March 1882, with Chicago listed as their destination.

⁵ In the summer of 1879, railroad construction crews had reached the halfway point between Quinnesec, Michigan, and Florence, Wisconsin. On 12 September 1880, the first train entered Florence. As of April 1882, the train only went as far as Stager (originally called Iron River Junction) in Iron County. The extension of the Menominee Branch of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad from Stager to the Iron River area was completed in October 1882. - Jack Hill, *A History of Iron County Michigan* (Iron County Museum: Caspian, MI, 1976), 71, 74, 75, 76; Marcia Bernhardt, ed. *Frames for the Future: Iron River Area Michigan* (The Iron County Historical and Museum Society: Caspian, MI, 1980), 190.

⁶ This is undoubtedly a typographical error; the surname should read Lindquist, not Lundquist. Two lines of evidence support this contention. First, I have come across no one in my research on West Iron County Swedes with the surname Lundquist. Second, Peter Jacob's older brother, Aldo Gottfrid Aronsson, took the surname Lindquist after his arrival in the U.S. It would have been natural for Aldo to meet his brothers at "the end of the line." This supposition is corroborated by the following statement by Hill: "In 1882, he [Peter J. Aronsson] left Sweden and came directly to the end of the railroad line at Florence, Wisconsin, where he was met by his eldest brother, Aldo Lindquist, who had made the trip from Iron River on foot for the meeting. - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 134.

⁷ Peter Jacob and Axel walked a well-traveled trail between Florence, Wisconsin, and Iron River, Michigan, a distance of approximately 15-20 miles. Note that in the following description of this trail, *two* halfway houses are mentioned: "[Mastodon] Township was the gateway to the vastness of the Iron County wilderness. Here entered the trail followed by hundreds of land-lookers, [timber] cruisers, [iron ore] explorers, settlers, and others who in the short span of fifteen years preceding 1880, selected or purchased some sixty per cent of the county's total land area....The lands embraced in this township were, by their location, most accessible to the advance from the southeast....The early trail [followed the south side of the Brule River until it crossed the river] near the south quarter corner of Section 11, some two miles east of the present crossing of U.S. [Highway] 2. The trail divided about one mile north of the river, one branch striking westerly toward Iron River and the other taking a general northerly course to Crystal Falls....The trail toward Iron River was somewhat outlined by state geologist C. Rominger on his inspection of mining areas in 1880. Mr.

Rominger reported a *halfway house operated by a Mr. Brown in the vicinity of Stager* [italic mine]. The trail led in a northerly direction from this point to the site of the present village of Alpha...From this point the trail swung in a southwesterly direction to *the south end of Armstrong Lake where Mr. John Singler is reported to have kept a halfway house for the early settlers* [italic mine]. No mention however is made of this house by Mr. Rominger. The trail took a general straight northwesterly course from this point to the Indian village at the south end of Che-Ko-Gan (Chicagon) Lake where a branch of the Chippewa tribe under the local chieftain John Edwards had a sizeable village...Mr. Rominger continued his journey now in a westerly course from the village [to the] Iron River valley.” - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 74, 76, 166-67.

⁸ In October of 1879, a party of men and ten ponies with travois (each loaded with one hundred pounds of supplies and equipment) led by state geologist C. Rominger, made the forty-mile trip from Quinnesec to Iron River. He noted that approximately seventy-five individuals composed the Chippewa village located at the south end of Chicago Lake. - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 74.

⁹ “Exploratory work on the Iron River Mine (also later known as the Stambaugh and Riverton Mine) was begun in 1880 and results were sufficiently encouraging to induce the Emmet Mining Company, an organization formed by Kimberly & Boyce Company of Sharon, Pennsylvania, to undertake development of a mine in the spring of 1881...The mine workings are situated one-quarter mile due west of the initially platted village of Stambaugh. It was on the south end of the workings of this mine that the first iron ore was noted on the west side of Iron County. The discovery was made by Harvey Mellen, a surveyor of government lands, while engaged in the subdivisions of the townships into sections. - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 73-75.

¹⁰ In 1881 James N. Porter, “a gentleman of considerable practical experience in the Ohio coal mines and in the lead mines of Missouri,” came to the Iron River district from Youngstown, Ohio, to become superintendent of the Iron River Mine workings for the Tod, Stambaugh Company. In an 1883 annual report, Charles E. Wright, Commissioner of Mineral Statistics, noted that “[Porter] has been on the ground for the year past and endured the mosquitoes and sand flies in a shanty by the river through one season while clearing the ground and directing the preliminary work of bringing order and civilization out of the roughest wilderness.” Porter and his wife moved to Colorado in 1891. - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 80, 122.

¹¹ Andrew J. Boyington, the son of Asahel Boyington, was b. in Allegany Co., New York, 3 September 1842 and d. in Iron River 20 November 1923. During the Civil War, he served for four years (1861-65) with Company H, Thirteenth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, losing his left arm in the process. He married Lefa Wait in New Berlin, Waukesha County, Wisconsin, on 16 March 1872. Lefa, who was b. in New Berlin on 30 June 1850, was the daughter of Thaddeus Wait and Lura Barber.

“[The Boyington family] arrived in [Iron River] on 16 February 1882. The site of Iron River was then a wilderness, the only buildings in the vicinity being three small log cabins. He at once began the erection of a hotel, which, though it was then far from complete, he opened to the public on 1 November 1882. It contained fifty rooms, and was well equipped for those days. On 27 June 1885 the structure was burned but Mr. Boyington, with characteristic enterprise, moved to a house nearby and continued as before to entertain travelers. In the meantime, the work of rebuilding progressed...and on 1 July 1886 the new Boyington Hotel threw open its doors to the public. In addition to conducting his hotel, Mr. Boyington also operated his farm of two hundred and forty acres, two miles and a half from the village center, raising an ample supply of milk and vegetables for the hotel and all of the hay needed in his livery [stable]. In 1897 he admitted his son, Philip L., born [in Menomonie, Wisconsin] 29 January 1876, to partnership and continued with him until 1906, when he sold out to his partner.” - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 99, 127; Bernhardt, *Frames for the Future*, 381-382.

¹² The name “Captain” implies that this individual was a mining captain, i.e., a man in charge of day-to-day mining operations for one shift at a particular mine. Captain Stephenson may have been one of the following three individuals with the surname Stephenson who were active in Iron County at this time.

Two brothers, Ross R. and Samuel M. Stephenson, emigrated from New Brunswick, Canada, to Menominee, Michigan, where they became involved in logging and sawmilling operations. They were among the second wave of private land buyers—most of whom were associated with railroad, mining, or lumber enterprises—who invested in Iron County timberland between 1870 and 1875. Samuel Stephenson and William Holmes purchased the south half of the southeast quarter of section 7 [later part of Gaastra] in 1880. - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 32, 128, 143.

Isaac Stephenson was associated with the Menominee River Manufacturing (alias Boom) Company that was organized in 1866 and reorganized, expanded, and incorporated in 1872 “for the purpose of driving, sorting, and dividing the logs of [affiliated] companies.” In 1874 these affiliates “were in possession of between eighty and ninety thousand acres of Iron County timber lands. - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 45.

¹³ Carl August Eklund (b. Västanfors [Väsm.] 12 Dec. 1848) and his wife, Anna Carolina Persdotter (b. Västanfors [Väsm.] 12 Dec. 1849), emigrated from Göteborg on 16 April 1880 bound for Chicago. Peter Jacob married their oldest daughter, Mathilda Carolina, on 25 July 1891.

¹⁴ Gustaf Persson Edlund (b. Järnboås [Väsm.] 7 Oct. 1856) emigrated from Göteborg on 14 Nov. 1879 bound for Chicago. His future wife, Matilda Wilhelmina Hansdotter (b. Nora [Väsm.] 9 July 1863), emigrated in 1881. They were married in Iron River on 19 Dec. 1885.

¹⁵ John August Hagelin (1842-1927) and Ingeborg Bridget ---? (1849-1925) emigrated in 1879 and 1882, respectively. They were married in 1882. Both are buried in Resthaven Cemetery, Iron River Township, Iron County, Michigan.

¹⁶ Wilhelmina Nilsson was b. in Hjulserud, Bäcke Parish, on 4 May 1861; emigrated from Sweden in 1881; married Aldo Gottfrid in Florence, Wisconsin, on 26 Aug. 1882; died in Norway, Michigan, on 28 April 1893; and was buried in Quinnesec Cemetery, Dickinson Co., Michigan.

¹⁷ This is undoubtedly a reference to Olof Edvin Zachariasson (alias Olof Sackerson) who was born in Sillbodol (S) on 1 Dec. 1853 and emigrated from Trankil in 1877.

¹⁸ Carl Kjellgren (Charles Shellgren) was born in 1863 and emigrated in 1882. His wife, Wilhelmina, was born in 1864 and emigrated in 1883. Possibly the son of Olof Fredrik Kjellgren, who was born in Börrum (Östg.) on 18 April 1844; died in Iron River, Michigan, on 9 May 1892; and was buried in Quinnesec Cemetery, Dickinson Co., Michigan.

¹⁹ "John MacDonald [also McDonald]...was born in Inverness, Scotland, on 9 November 1845 [and came to Canada as a young man. Later he moved to northern Wisconsin where he was] engaged in a tea and spice business in Marinette. [He] was induced to come to Quinnesec [Michigan] about the year 1878, when he started a grocery business. In the year 1881, the Iron River district looked more promising so he shipped his stock to Florence [Wisconsin] by rail and hauled it overland with teams to the new location, setting up his business [a general mercantile store] in a log cabin situated immediately east of the present post office. Here he was selected as the first postmaster....The following year Mr. MacDonald moved his store into the Innes Block opposite the Boyington Hotel....The log cabin post office structure was converted into a home for the MacDonald family, which arrived in 1882....Mr. MacDonald died on 4 June 1933." - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 135.

"MacDonald... was also the first township treasurer and donated the land for the Iron River Cemetery. With John L. Buell and the MacKinnon brothers, he aided in the development of the Nanaimo Mine and afterwards opened the Beta Mine. He left the area in about 1896 and moved to Colorado where he was engaged in mining....His wife, Christina, was born in Inverness, Scotland, and brought to Middlesex County, Ontario, Canada, by her parents as a baby. They were married in London, Ontario. The MacDonalds had five children—Minnie, Kitty, Tera, Ronald, and 'Sandy.' John died in [Denver, Colorado on 4] June 1933 and Christina in June 1931." - Bernhardt, *Frames for the Future*, 32-33.

²⁰ "Michael Kelly was born in Loughrea, County Galway, Ireland, [on] 29 September 1856. He came to America in the 1880s, staying in Boston, Massachusetts, for a short time. Looking for better working opportunities, he came to Michigan. He worked for a time in a mine in Vulcan, but after a disaster in the mine, decided to become self-employed. He came to Iron River where he operated a general merchandise store on the corner of Second and Main Streets. His brother Patrick, who was working in Iron Mountain as a stone mason, came to help in the store and as Mike became busy in other work, Pat took over the management of the store. Many local and national political questions were discussed and argued around the pot-bellied stove by the local politicians.

Jokingly, it was called "Tammany Hall." - Bernhardt, *Frames for the Future*, 406-407.

²¹ "The Selden family made its entry into the district with the arrival of William H. Selden in 1878. The Seldens were natives of Connecticut and were currently engaged on railroad surveying projects....Following a thorough exploration of the area, Mr. Selden purchased several tracts of land and returned to his work of surveying for the winter. In the early spring of 1879 he returned to the area with his father, Richard L. Selden. Upon further investigation of the lands in the area, the senior Selden filed a homestead claim to a quarter section of land adjacent to the noted discoveries of the General Land Office surveyors located on the west side of the Stambaugh hill.

Richard L. Selden was born in Connecticut in 1824. There he received his early education and in the year 1856 was elected to the state legislature. A surveyor by profession, he followed the advance of the railroads to the west and in 1872, we find him engaged in the railroad surveys leading to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. While working on the extension of the Menominee River Railroad west of Powers, he became interested in iron land and in 1878 he turned his energies to exploring and mining promotion. In 1879, he secured possession of a 160-acre homestead in Section 35....These lands proved to be rich in iron...." - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 88, 122.

²² This rather curious and cryptic sentence is undoubtedly referring to three different types of land on which Richard L. and William H. Selden were actively exploring for iron ore.

Hiawatha land is most likely a reference to land, owned by the Seldens, on which the Hiawatha Mine was developed. According to Hill, "the Seldens continued their exploration on their own adjoining homestead lands to the west [i.e., land adjacent to the noted discoveries of the General Land Office surveyors located on the west side of the Stambaugh hill]. These efforts soon proved the existence of good ore. The position of these ores, however, did not afford the conditions of ready removal by the quarrying methods employed in the early stages of the two former mines [the Iron River and the Isabella] and development was delayed for ten years. On these lands was later opened the well-known Hiawatha and Chatham Mines." - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 88.

Canal Company land is undoubtedly a reference to land selected in Iron County as part of The Portage Lake Ship Canal Grant. "In March 1865, [the United States] Congress provided for the enterprise [the construction of the Portage Lake Ship Canal near Houghton, Michigan] in a grant of 400,000 acres to the State [of Michigan]. The work was undertaken in 1866...and completed in 1873....Some 50,000 acres of these lands were selected in Iron County. There was no order in the selection of these lands and all parts of the county were covered...." - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 29.

Cash entry land is a reference to private land that was purchased by individuals known as cash entry men. They were private land buyers as opposed to homesteaders and pre-emptioners. - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 31-33, 98.

²³ “William Young was born in Ballysadare, County Sligo, Ireland, on 4 October 1846. He arrived in Detroit in 1866. He took a sailboat to Sault Sainte Marie [Michigan] and in 1870 he arrived in Marquette. In 1873 he went to Fort William, Ontario, but he returned to Marquette in 1875. He came to Stambaugh in 1882 with his brothers, Tom and Andrew, and worked in mining operations and helped to build the first buildings around the old Riverton Mine. With his brothers he cleared the first streets of Iron River. He homesteaded the Bengal Mine site, becoming one-half fee owner. He developed the Young’s block on Washington Avenue in Stambaugh and at various times operated a store. He was postmaster and helped organize the Commercial Bank. He married Mary Geintzschein Folgelgren [Rosa Maria Gerntscheim] who died in 1903.” - Bernhard, *Frames for the Future*, 451.

“He became the district distributor of petroleum products, mainly kerosene, for lighting purposes....[and later] the representative of the DuPont Powder Company. Mr. Young...died on 12 January 1935.” - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 134.

²⁴ This is probably a reference to the wife of Fay G. Clark, “a lands examiner [surveyor] who followed the progress of the Menominee River Railroad and came to the village [of Iron River] in 1881. Mr. Clark was a native of Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin, where he was born in 1851.” - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 162.

²⁵ This is a reference to Olof Johan Lindvall, who was born in Överluleå [Nobo.] on 19 July 1850. He emigrated from Luleå in July of 1881 with his wife, Hilda Johanna Nilsdotter (b. 11 Feb. 1852), and son, Johan Alfred (b. 1 July 1880). Olof J. was “the local [timber] cruiser who aided many of the early settlers to locate their lands.” - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 117.

According to Hill, “Mr. [Peter J.] Aronson was engaged in mining, railroad work, and as a grocery clerk in the store of Mr. Hunter until 1887, when he joined John Lindwall and others in filing on newly opened homestead lands in Ontonagon County near the site of Ewen. - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 134.

²⁶ This is a reference to the Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic Railroad Company, which had taken over the Marquette, Houghton & Ontonagon Railroad Company. - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 26.

²⁷ The name “Captain” implies that this individual was a mining captain, i.e., a man in charge of day-to-day mining operations for one shift at a particular mine. Captain Johnson has not been identified.

²⁸ Peter worked “as a grocery clerk in the store of Mr. Hunter.” - Hill, *History of Iron County*, 134.

²⁹ “Andrew Erickson, the son of Erick and Anna Löfberg, was born in Härge, Sweden, on 6 October 1864. In 1881, at the age of 17, he came to the United States with his parents and brother and sisters, first to Commonwealth, Wisconsin, and then to Bates to establish a homestead on Section 21, on what is now U.S. 2 between Mapleton and Bates School. He later acquired the property from his father....Andrew Erickson helped hew the first highway from Iron River as far east as the Chicagon Lake Mine in 1883. He had a contract for one-quarter

mile. That first route ran north to Iron River Cemetery, then east to the present U.S. 2 junction with Hunter Road. His first wife, Caroline, died July 24, 1889, after giving birth to twins, a boy and a girl, who also died. Caroline had been kicked by a cow and went into early labor. Andrew later married Anna Sundin in 1898. Anna was born in Sweden in 1874. One daughter was born to the Ericksons.... Andrew Erickson passed away on March 1, 1954, at his home at the age of 89 years. Anna Erickson died in 1955 at the age of 81. They had been married for 55 years.” - Lindbeck, *Bates Township Legacy*, 119.

³⁰ This paragraph is a more detailed description of the mining “incident” alluded to in the first sentence of the second paragraph on page 43 / 4 / 7:1:1:4 of the diary, where Peter Jacob comments that “I worked in different mines—(blank), where Chas. Eklund and I were close to drowning once...”

³¹ According to Bernhardt, “Aronson was in the [grocery] business in 1894 and retired at the same site in 1912.” Bernhardt, *Frames for the Future*, 288.

³² “August Ruus entered the employ of Nelson E. Fisher in 1900. Mr. Fisher owned and operated a pioneer food store on Adams Street. In 1911, Ruus entered a partnership with another pioneer Iron River man, Peter Aronson.... When Aronson retired, Ruus took Hjalmer Lindquist as his partner, and the firm became Ruus and Lindquist. In 1935 Mr. Ruus became the sole owner. - Bernhardt, *Frames for the Future*, 296.