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Ultima Familiae: The Sandgren Files. Part 3

Ted Rosvall*

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth... Genesis 1:28 (NIV)

Genealogists are well aware of how families grow and expand, so that a person in the nineteenth century often has hundreds, a person in the eighteenth century thousands of living descendants. Given the fact that families back in those days often had eight, ten, or twelve children, this is not a surprise. There are, however, examples to the contrary. "Shrinking" families, for example, get fewer and fewer with each successive generation until the line finally becomes extinct. "Ultima Familiae" was an expression used in pedigrees for royal and noble families meaning "the last of the line." The following story is an example of the latter.

Isak Johan Sandgren was born in 1815 at Kroken, a farm located within Karleby Parish (Vägö.), east of Falköping. He was an older brother of Johan Fredrik Sandgren, whose evasive brood of children was treated in a previous article in this series.¹

Isak Johan started out as a farmer, but later became a dyer, like an older brother, Carl Gustaf Sandgren (1811-1883). In 1848 he married Anna Brita Andersdotter who, according to the household examination rolls, was born in Uddevalla (Bohu.) in 1824. Finding her birth entry and parents was a task in itself; both were finally located in the nearby parish of Bäve. She was the daughter of the crofter Anders Aronsson and his wife Regina Persdotter at Espered.

After they were married, Isak Johan Sandgren and Anna Brita Andersdotter first lived at Isak's birthplace, Kroken, where the two first children were born. In 1852 they were temporarily staying in Härlunda Parish, where Isak's sister was then living. That is where the third child was born. From 1854 to 1860 we find them in Torbjörntorp Parish, where Isak Johan was running the Balltorp mill. Four children were born there. Back at Kroken for a short time, the two youngest children were born, the last one in 1865, when it seems the family was about to move to Marum Parish, outside of the town of Skara. A few years later the family headed for Valshalla in Kölingared, which is where the younger brother, Johan Fredrik Sandgren, and his family lived. Isak Johan and Anna Brita

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¹ Ted Rosvall, "An Evasive Brood. The Sandgren Files. Part 2," *Swedish American Genealogist* XX (September 2000): 158-169. See also Ted Rosvall, "Olphult? The Sandgren Files. Part 1," *Swedish American Genealogist* XX (March 2000): 20-22.

remained in Kölingared until they died in 1890 and 1912 respectively. The information immediately available through the church records was thus the following:

ISAK JOHAN SANDGREN

*1815 Sept. 30 Kroken, Karleby Parish
 †1890 Jan. 19 Valshalla, Kölingared Parish
 married 1848 Oct. 22 in Slöta Parish to

ANNA BRITA ANDERSDOTTER

*1824 Oct. 17 Espered, Bäve Parish (Bohu.)
 †1912 Nov. 22 Valshalla, Kölingared Parish

Children: (1-8)

1/ **EVA CHRISTINA SANDGREN**

*1848 Oct. 24 Kroken, Karleby Parish

2/ **SVEN JOHAN SANDGREN**

*1851 Mar. 10 Kroken, Karleby Parish

3/ **FRANS AUGUST SANDGREN**

*1852 Dec. 18 Härlunda Parish
 †1855 July 1 Balltorps kvarn, Torbjörntorp Parish

4/ **ANDERS GUSTAF SANDGREN**

*1854 Feb. 11 Balltorps kvarn, Torbjörntorp Parish

5/ **ANNA LOVISA SANDGREN**

*1856 Apr. 21 Torbjörntorp Parish
 †1877 July 14 Kölingared Parish

6/ **MARIA CHARLOTTA SANDGREN**

*1858 Oct. 16 Torbjörntorp Parish

7/ **JOHAN FREDRIK SANDGREN**

*1862 Aug. 31 Kroken, Karleby Parish
 †1864 July 27 Kroken, Karleby Parish

8/ **REGINA FREDRIKA SANDGREN**

*1865 July 7 Marum Parish

In a pile of old letters and documents mentioned in the previous article² there was indeed one letter from this branch. It was the young daughter, Anna Lovisa Sandgren, who in 1871, at the age of fifteen, writes to her first cousin at Kroken. Since this is the only document concerning this branch of the family that has survived and since it gives a few details of her siblings, it feels appropriate to print it here. The writer died a few years later, of consumption, and this letter, although simply written, does give a bit of a character to an otherwise totally forgotten person and her short life.

² Ted Rosvall, "An Evasive Brood. The Sandgren Files. Part 2," *Swedish American Genealogist* XX (September 2000): 158-169.

Ettak, 23 Jan. 1870
Dear Cousin Johan,

I would like to wish you a happy New Year. I would also like to ask you to forgive me for my long delay in writing, but there was always something in the way, and so it did not get done.

Greetings from my family. I was home over new years. They were all fine and in good health.

Greetings from Sven, he was home too, as well as Christina and Lotta. They asked me to greet you. Sven wants you to write to him, he said that it would be nice to hear from you. If you write, his address is "S. J. Sandgren, Huskvarna, Jönköping." My parents had a letter from Gustaf before Christmas. He was well too. If you write home to your parents, do greet them from me. I had better stop now. I hope that you can read this, although I write so badly.

Please do write to me, but perhaps you are angry with me for not answering until now, but please forgive me for that. Also, do greet the children from all of us.

Best wishes from your cousin
Anna Sandgren
Ettak, Wättak [Vättak]

From the few family details in this letter, we gather that one brother and two sisters evidently lived reasonably close, so that they could come home for the holidays, whereas the other brother was perhaps further away. We also learn that the brother Sven Johan is evidently known as "Sven", whereas the other brother, Anders Gustaf, is known as "Gustaf".

Now it is time to try and follow the various branches. Eva *Christina* Sandgren worked on several farms in Västergötland until she eventually settled in Göteborg. She married rather late, in 1883, to Carl Johan Svantesson (1851-1921) and had four children, three of whom survived. Christina died in 1929 in Göteborg. Her three surviving children never married and the last one, Helena Maria Svantesson, died in 1971 as the last of her line. She became a bit of a "celebrity" in Göteborg, inasmuch as she was known as a friend of the birds, which she used to feed every day from her walker.

Sven Johan Sandgren moved to Huskvarna near Jönköping, and lived there until his death in 1928. He too made a late marriage. On 22 April 1894 he married Aurore Augusta Ramstedt (1854-1937) and a few months later their twin sons Sven Thorsten Sandgren (1894-1935), a sailor, and Thor Olof Sandgren (1894-1970), a painter, were born. Both boys died unmarried.

I found out about this branch a couple of years after the death of Olof Sandgren and was able to get in touch with a social worker that had been in touch with him towards the end of his life. She sent me an envelope with a few photographs and personal documents that had been in her care. I was of course happy to have these items, but here again was an extinct line of the Isak Johan Sandgren family.

Maria Charlotta Sandgren (1858-1932) and Regina Fredrika Sandgren (1865-1937) both worked in domestic service and died in Göteborg. They never married, and the estate inventories not only name Eva Christina's and Sven Johan's children as heirs but also "the children of a deceased brother, the foreman Gustaf Sandgren, by his wife Maria Sandgren: a) Lydia Hawley, widow of Sea Captain Frank Hawley, b) Anna Kristina Sandgren, and c) Elin Maria Sandgren—all residing in New York."

All children accounted for but one—Anders Gustaf Sandgren! What happened to him? The estate inventory above lists his three daughters, Lydia, Anna, and Elin, all in the U.S. Surely this means that Anders Gustaf must have emigrated, but when, from where, and most of all to what place? For many years I tried to find clues as to his whereabouts in the U.S. While in the U.S. in 1972 I even went as far as to call every Sandgren listed in the U.S. phonebooks asking them if they were somehow related to my missing Sandgren relatives, of whom Anders Gustaf was one. No luck!

From time to time the Swedish archives produce new tools, indices to church records, estate inventories and other source material. The central archive in Göteborg (*Göteborgs landsarkiv*) is no exception, and whenever a new index is released, researchers flock around to see if any of those interesting surnames or elusive relatives might be listed there. In September 1979, while visiting the archives, I noticed that a new index, covering the household examination rolls for Örgryte Parish (within what is now Göteborg) for the period 1773 to 1890, had found its way to the shelves of the reading room. Navigating through the index volumes I quickly found the name Sandgren, and there were two listings: Carl Alfred Sandgren (b. 1859) and Anders Gustaf Sandgren (b. 1854). A reference was given, "AI:23, page 527," and I immediately located the corresponding microfiche and put it into a machine. So, I said to myself, he lived in Göteborg before he emigrated. On page 527, I stared at the following:

- Saddle maker / **SANDGREN**, Anders Gustaf, *1854 March 10, Torbjörntorp Parish (Västergötland)
- Wife / Maria Eleonora Johansson, *1857 June 23, Gillberga Parish (Värmland)
[married 1885 April 26]
- Daughter / Signe (wife's illegitimate daughter), *1883 February 28, Göteborg/Domkyrkoförsamling
- Daughter / Lydia, *1885 October 22, Göteborg/Kristine
- Daughter / Anna Kristina, *1887 October 22, Göteborg/Kristine
- Foster daughter / Emma Augusta Magnhild Vahlström, *1890 July 11, Göteborg/Haga

This roll ended in 1897, with a reference to the next volume, still kept at the local parish office. A letter to the parish office provided the following additional data:

- Anders Gustaf Sandgren died 1899 May 31 at Örgryte.

- The stepdaughter, Signe Sandgren, immigrated to the U.S. in 1898 at the age of 15.
- The daughter, Lydia Sandgren, immigrated to the U.S. in 1901 at the age of 15.
- The foster daughter, Emma Vahlström, left the family in 1899.
- The widow, Maria Eleonora Sandgren, and the two remaining daughters, Anna Kristina and Elin Maria, immigrated to the U.S. in 1924.

Everyone gone, it seemed. Everyone but the foster daughter, Emma Vahlström, whom I was able to follow through the Göteborg records up until her death in 1974. She had been married to a man named Efraim Löfman and had had three children. I was able to contact the youngest son, Mr. Bengt Löfman, who told me that his mother often talked about her step-sisters, who may also have been her cousins, and that he could probably find an old address to one of them in his mother's address book. Sure enough, a few days later Mr. Löfman reported, that Anna and Elin Sandgren had lived in a place called New Rochelle, New York.

Time to seek the assistance of a local New York researcher, who eventually came up with death certificates for all three sisters and for their mother. The following information could be added:

- Mrs. Maria Sandgren died 1936 September 11 in New Rochelle, NY
- Mrs. Lillian [*sic*] Hawley died 1970 March 31 in New Rochelle, NY
- Miss Anna Sandgren died 1961 September 2 in New Rochelle, NY
- Miss Elin Sandgren died 1976 April 7 in New Rochelle, NY

The researcher was also able to find obituaries for Mrs. Maria Sandgren and for Miss Anna Sandgren. The former listed her as the widow of Gustave Sandgren and the mourners as Mrs. Lillian Hawley, Miss Anna and Miss Elin Sandgren, all of this city; Mrs. Signe Whitmyre of Oakland, California; and one grandson, John Hawley, of this city. The latter listed three sisters—Mrs. Signe Whitmyre, Mrs. Lillian Hawley, and Miss Elin Sandgren—and a nephew, John H. Hawley.

Urged by me, the researcher also visited the address in New Rochelle where the Sandgrens had lived and interviewed a few neighbours that had known the family. One reported that Anna Sandgren was a diabetic and an amputee and that Elin Sandgren was a virtual recluse. They had heard of a nephew, but he could not be located at the time of Elin's death.

This new information somehow rang a bell. Searching through my notebooks I finally found what I was looking for, my notes from a 1972 visit to New York. I had copied off all the Sandgren listings from the various New York telephone directories and had tried to call as many of them as I could, asking for the missing Sandgrens—Otto Emil, Carl Arvid, August, Frans Oscar, Henning, Carl, and others. It seems that on 3 October 1972 I did talk to one *Ellen Sandgren, 45 May, New Rochelle*. She told me that she was born in Göteborg and that her father's name was Gustav Sandgren. At that time, however, I had

not found the Göteborg Sandgrens and did not realize that this was a daughter of the missing Anders *Gustaf*, the son of Isak Johan Sandgren.

What additional clues to work with? Well, there was this "Oakland, California" reference for the eldest daughter, Signe Sandgren/Whitmyre. With the help of "my" incredible researcher, Mrs. Maurine M. Krohne of Wheaton, Illinois, I searched city directories and contacted neighbours and people connected to Signe. In April of 1981, I was finally able to determine that the hunt for a death certificate, an obituary, or a cemetery record would not succeed, simply because Mrs. Whitmyre was still alive at age ninety-eight! Mrs. Krohne interviewed Signe over the phone, and the following life story emerged.

Signe Sandgren recalled that her father was a shoemaker. She said that she was one of five girls in her family; four were full sisters but one was a foster child whose father was a hired man who died when the child was very young. Because Signe was the oldest and the family was poor, she was sent to the U.S. at the age of fifteen. In her early years, Signe worked as a waitress. At the time of the great earthquake, she lived in San Francisco and was employed at the Emporium Cafeteria. Later she worked for a Collins family in San Francisco and raised the little boys. She lived in Oakland, California for over sixty years.

I was able to locate Mrs. Collins, and got a most charming letter back, in which she gives praise to Mrs. Whitmyre "a dear, dear friend, a truly loving and kind person." I quote directly from the letter:

"I first knew Mrs. Whitmyre when I started to teach at Claremont Junior High School in 1927. At that time she prepared delicious lunches for the teachers—healthful, well balanced, inexpensive—and even had special holiday meals just before Thanksgiving, Christmas, or other holidays. In 1932, I got married, and when our son Larry arrived in 1934 we moved into our present home. Mrs. Whitmyre came each day to care for Larry and to run the household. She was devoted to our boys and they to her. For the next fourteen years, when the principal asked in the spring term if the teachers would be returning for the fall semester, my answer always was, "If Mrs. Whitmyre quits, I quit!"

There was also the following note from Mr. Collins, which gave some more details:

"She was already a widow when we first knew her. She never volunteered much information about herself and it was some years before we knew that she had an earlier husband by the name of Kiefer. We learned this when she became ill one time and asked us to notify her son whose name was John Kiefer. Mr. Whitmyre, the second husband, was a veteran of World War I and is buried in the National Cemetery at the Presidio of San Francisco."

It seems after the 1906 earthquake, Signe must have moved to Denver, Colorado, where she married George Paul Kiefer (1874-1965). They had twin daughters that died at birth and a son, John Albert Kiefer (1911-1979). The

marriage ended in divorce, Signe moved west, and a paternal aunt in Denver raised the son. He later came to Oakland, was married, and had three children. In 1920 Signe married Frank Whitmyre. The marriage took place in Billings, Montana, and both bride and groom are said to be from Spokane, Washington, her name being given as "Signe Sangreene." This was a short marriage too, since Mr Whitmyre passed away in 1931, apparently from traumas received during the First World War.

No time to lose. Thanks to the Collins family I was able to get in touch with Signe's grandchildren, Colyne and John, and a meeting was arranged. This was in the summer of 1981, and one July afternoon I got to meet the then ninety-eight-year-old Signe Sandgren Whitmyre. On that particular day she was not feeling too well and was in her bed. I did get to talk to her for a while and she was quite aware of who I was and from where I had come. I was able to interview her, I got to see some old pictures and documents, and I enjoyed the company of an (almost) centenarian, who had emigrated to the U.S. at the age of fifteen, some eighty-four years earlier, had lived through the San Francisco earthquake, and had somehow made a living far, far away from her family in Sweden and New York. As I said goodbye to Signe, she gave me a small necklace, telling me to give it to my future wife (which I did...).

But was she really a Sandgren?

According to the birth record, she was the illegitimate daughter of Maria Eleonora Johansson, who two years later married Anders Gustaf Sandgren. At the time of her emigration in 1898, there is a remark in the clerical survey saying that Anders Gustaf Sandgren had acknowledged her as his natural daughter on 7 September 1898. According to Signe herself, she, Lydia/Lillian, Anna, and Elin were "full sisters." So why doubt this? It is the absence of Signe in the estate inventories made following the deaths of her two paternal aunts in Göteborg in 1932 and 1937 that makes me wonder. Also, when did Anders Gustaf arrive in Göteborg? Could he have fathered a daughter in Göteborg when he was still residing in Malmö in southern Sweden? Possibly, but not very likely.

Isak Johan Sandgren had eight children and nine grandchildren, but only one great-grandchild—John H. Hawley, Lydia's son, from New Rochelle. But where to find him? It seems Lydia Sandgren changed her first name to Lillian and was married around 1919 to the six year younger John Henry Hawley, a navigator from Rochester, New York. He had been an officer in the U.S. Navy during World War I. The son, John Harry Hawley, was born in 1920 in New Rochelle. By 1924 it seems John Sr. had left the family and gone to California, where he passed away at Palo Alto in 1927. It was perhaps this turn of events that caused Lydia's mother and sister to come over to the U.S. in 1924.

It is not easy to find a John H. Hawley, but I had a clue. Someone, either the neighbour in New Rochelle or old Signe in Oakland, had mentioned that the nephew was with the U.S. Coast Guard. After several contacts with the Coast Guard and with the help of a Captain Knight, I was finally able to locate Mr. Hawley. I wrote to him and got several very nice and helpful letters back. After retiring from the Coast Guard in 1966, he and his wife had been cruising the Caribbean from 1967 to 1980. In 1984 they decided to settle down in the Pacific

Northwest, and it was there I was able to visit them in 1995. John H. Hawley had two sons, the older of whom died in a plane crash in Mexico in 1974. The younger, Christopher Hawley, used to live in the West Indies for many years, but has now, like his father, moved to the state of Washington. He is the last descendant of Isak Johan and Anna Brita, the last of the line—the Ultima Familiae.

Epilogue

After writing this article, I received a message from Mrs. Gisela Hawley, informing me that her husband, John H. Hawley (the son of Lydia/Lillian Sandgren), passed away on Monday morning 20 May 2002 in his home at Coupeville, Washington. So now Christopher Hawley is truly the “Ultima Familiae.”