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# Norlin Letters: Göteborg 1909 and Chicago 1912

Helene Norlin Leaf\*

My grandparents, Marcus Pettersson and Hanna Lydia Carlsdotter, were married in 1881 in Norra Solberga Parish (Små.). They had nine children (see family group sheet at end of article). For almost all of the first twenty-one years of their married life, they lived at Nydalen in Norra Solberga. Hanna's parents lived on the adjacent farm. Marcus was a builder and cement worker and spent many of his summers working at various places in Sweden, including Stockholm. Hanna saved many letters that he wrote home. These letters provide an interesting look into the lives of this family.

In 1902 Marcus left for the United States. While the exact reasons will probably never be known, it was undoubtedly for financial reasons that he left his home, wife, and children in Sweden. His early letters home tell of arriving in Chicago with \$15.00, struggles with language, lack of work, getting sick, being swindled out of money, and missing his family. In one of the first letters, he writes that coming to the United States was one of the stupidest things he had ever done and that he would have to work to earn money to come home.

After living in Chicago for about a year, he doesn't talk much about going back to Sweden. Within a year and one-half, he changed his surname to Norlin. No one knows why he did this or why he chose this name. And he must have been learning English, because he puts an occasional English word in his letters. Sometimes he crosses an English word out and writes the Swedish word above.

By 1906 he is trying to convince his family to come to this country. He says that he does not want to coerce his wife to come, but he won't go back to Sweden and it would be so nice if the family would come. He would travel to New York to meet them and make their trip much easier. He is now saving money for their passage, but it seems like no one in the family wants to come. He continues to ask first Karl, then Selma, Ester, or the boys (Oscar and David) to come. Hanna apparently does not want to come but Marcus keeps asking. He will get a nice apartment in an area where lots of Swedes live.

In 1908 he sends money for Selma to come in late summer. He tells Oscar to wait until after the 1908 presidential election to see if there would be work the next spring. Apparently there would not have been work for Oscar in the summer. Selma gets work in Chicago doing sewing. She is very homesick and her letters show this. She writes occasionally about returning to Sweden, but she does not do this for many years. She does send money home to her mother.

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In April of 1909, Oscar and David leave for the United States. They wrote the following letter to their mother and siblings while still in Göteborg:

Göteborg, 22 April 1909

Dear Mama and Siblings

We have finished all of our affairs and are now fine. Just to get on the ship. Our trip here went well. It was hard to wait in Renten but we were not alone. We had company on the train as soon as we got on. They were from Vimmersby. They are to sail on the Cunard Line. There were many who were to go on the Star Line. We went down to the harbor to see the ship on which we will sail. It is quite large and looks like the best of the ships in the harbor.

(We had it as good as possible so we thought that maybe you could go that way?) They have a brand new ship named *Laurentis*. She is just as large as *Oceanic*. Has three propellers. The others have only two. So she is the best of all the ships in the harbor. So I said that we should sail; so they said we should get aboard. So we did. The fare is even cheaper. She does not land in the same place. There are so many people taking this ship. There is one who is in the same room as we are. He seems to be a well-mannered man. Now maybe we will not write anymore in Sweden, not until we land in England. As soon as we get there on the big ship we will write and tell all about it. Hope you are not worried about us since it is not an old ship. It is the best of the line they tell us at the office.

Now I have no more to write about, but my biggest wish is that we may all live until we meet again. Dear ones, forgive all our faults. No doubt we were mean sometimes but you must forget all that although it may be hard. My dears, it is only one day since we saw each other, but it would be fun to see you now, but that time is past. May God bless all of us that we may see each other soon. Now I must quit with many dear greetings from us to all of you. But first of all forgive all that I [illegible].

Written by Oscar

Göteborg, 4 p.m.

Greetings to all acquaintances

We all feel fine

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Göteborg, 22 April 1909

Our trip to Göteborg went well. When we stopped in Eksjö, there were three Americans on the train. When we reached Göteborg, half of the people to greet us were Americans. We have been down to the harbor to look at the ships. We were in the company of an American. He was a fine man.

I have no more to write except many dear greetings.

David

Greet all acquaintances from us.

Göteborg den 22/4 1909

Älskade mamma i sydkorn

Vi ha ju ett eller två spår här nu  
 så nu är vi fria. Kom till att stiga  
 på båten. När era hit jänk bra men  
 det var nog skönt att vänta i Rasken  
 men vi var ju ensamma vi fick sällskap  
 så för vi kom på något. De var fria

Winneryd de skulle vara på hemkomsten  
 men det var många sedan som skulle med oss  
 Vi har varit mer med honom och alla den  
 här som vi skulle vara på han är sått så  
 stor och ser ut till att vara best bland de  
 bästa som ligger i hamnen.

Vi bed att för det så bra som möjligt  
 och att om vi lyckas ha en ut så skulle  
 kanske ni gå direkt. Det har en  
 stället ny bit som den Lennar har i  
 båten ska även Piss i den har 3 propeller

Fig. 1. First page of a three-page letter written by Oscar Norlin from Göteborg on 22 April 1909.

Göteborg den 22<sup>e</sup> April 1909

Vår resa till Göteborg har gått  
mycket bra när vi var i Skövde  
var där på tåget 3 Amerikansare  
och när vi kom till Göteborg då var  
häftan af folket på tåget Amerikansare  
här i Göteborg var de och mötte oss  
så allt har gått mycket bra vi har  
varit över i hamnen och sett på  
båtarna nu för ett par timmar  
utan ned till hamnen hade vi  
sällskap med en Amerikansare honom  
fingo vi bekräftelsen af de var en  
mycket snäll man ja nu har jag  
inget att skriva om utan många  
kära hälsningar David.

Hälsn alla bekanta från oss.

Fig. 2. Letter written by David Norlin from Göteborg on 22 April 1909.

Three years later, David Norlin wrote the following letter to his mother and siblings back in Sweden. He was trying to convince them to come to the U.S. Hanna had apparently asked questions about the trip and, by this time, was considering moving to the U.S.

3555 Southport Ave.

Chicago, Ill.

Feb. 24, 1912

Dear Mamma and Siblings

I must first thank you for your letter. You ask many questions, which I will try to answer. You ask if we had a letter from Gideon. Do you think you will get very much for the house so you can pay for his trip? I will pay for it as soon as you come. He will always get work and earn \$2.00 per day and it follows that he will have it better here than the 4 crowns he earns in Sweden.

We must in some way answer your question if we have it cold. It has been colder here than I ever felt in Sweden but now it is fine and lovely weather. You ask if we were warmer when we moved here. Then you asked about vaccinations. All those who could show marks pass and that was most of them. You asked about the hotels in Hull and Liverpool. You get food free but on the train in England it takes 3 hours and there you get no food, for there you are shut in a car. But keep your eyes open and do not take off your clothes or shoes, for when you get to Liverpool you are put on a three-tier bus to the hotel, where you get free food and lodging. Then you ride to the ship two hours before it leaves. Then you get on a little boat for the ship. When you get to New York someone helps you to the train and then you have to find your own food. You can take coarse bread and cheese with you from home. That is best to bring along. You can buy oranges, bananas, and apples on the train. But bring along as much food as you can because you like your own food the best. You ask if it is far from the station to where we live. It is about as far as from Solberga to Nyholm. But we will meet you and help you. Just so you come; then all will be well.

Above all, you think it is the whole world to travel here. But it is not like if I were home and get ready in one day. It is not like going to Stockholm. Just remember to stay together when you are getting on or off the train or the ship. Then all will go well. Do not take along more than one suit, for you have the same one for the trip. My suit was only worth 5 crowns when I came. You need no more than 2 shirts. My shirts are in my dresser yet. So do not bring any extra.

I think I have now answered all your questions. Therefore I will end with many greetings to you all from your son and brother.

G. D. L. Norlin

[A note in another hand, signed M(arcus, the father)]:  
It is best to go to Skåne and Malmö, Selma says.

[A note in another hand; most likely written by sister Selma]:  
Miss Nelson greets all of you dearly.

In 1914 Ester came to the U.S. In 1916 she wrote a letter back to her sister Elsa telling her not to take another job; just help Mama pack up and come to the U.S. She would have to work hard in this country, but it was better economically than in Sweden. She said not to worry about the trip; it was not so bad!

All of the encouragement from the family eventually must have led Hanna to change her mind, and in November 1916 she left Sweden with her four youngest children—Maria, Elsa, Inga, and Harry (my father). I do not know how the others felt about leaving Sweden, but my Dad (fourteen years old) did not want to go. He never went back to Sweden though, because he felt that this country had given him so much.

The oldest son, Karl, eventually came to this country in 1923, with his wife and two oldest children. The whole family was then in this country and they all settled in Chicago. Marcus became a cement contractor, Oscar and Harry started businesses as tuck-pointers, David did woodworking for the Hammond Organ Company, Ester became a nurse, and the other girls became seamstresses.

The family lived at a house on Kedvale Avenue in Chicago for some years. I think that my grandfather had rented this house shortly before his wife came to Chicago. The 1920 census shows my grandparents and their eight youngest children living in this house. My dad bought the house eventually and then, in 1940, traded it for a house that his sister Ester owned just around the corner on Keystone Avenue. Marcus and Hanna lived there at Kedvale until their deaths in 1949 and 1944, respectively. Ester lived there until her death in 1972. Selma and David married but moved back to Kedvale later in their lives. Inga and Maria lived there until their deaths in the 1930s. Interestingly, that house was never referred to as Aunt Ester's house; it was always Kedvale. Perhaps this comes from the Swedish custom of naming each farm.

It was interesting to note that originally none of the family wanted to come to the United States. Each wanted to stay in Sweden; but, once they came here and got over their homesickness, each one encouraged others of the family to come.



**The Marcus Pettersson Norlin-Hanna Lydia Carlsdotter  
Family of Norra Solberga (Småland)**

**Marcus Pettersson Norlin**; b. Kuggarp, Gammalkil (Östg.) 19 September 1858, son of Peter Fredrik Marcusson Rydvall and Johanna Ericsson; emigr. 1902; d. Chicago, IL, 23 January 1949; m. 11 December 1881

**Hanna Lydia Carlsdotter**; b. Danstorp, Norra Solberga (Jönk.) 13 November 1862, daughter of Carl Johan Pettersson and Clara Charlotta Bygel; emigr. 8 November 1916; d. Chicago, IL, 8 February 1944.

Children:

1. **Karl Gideon Marcusson Norlin**; b. Norra Solberga (Jönk.) 30 October 1882; emigr. 1923; d. Chicago, IL, ca. 1934.
2. **Selma Amanda Josephina Marcusdotter Norlin**; b. Norra Solberga (Jönk.) 21 August 1884; emigr. 1908; d. Chicago, IL, February 1964.
3. **Ester Clara Martina Marcusdotter Norlin**; b. Norra Solberga (Jönk.) 5 September 1887; emigr. 1914; d. Chicago, IL, July 1972.
4. **Oskar Marcus Marcusson Norlin**; b. Östermalm, Stockholm 9 June 1891; emigr. 22 April 1909; d. Chicago, IL, 17 January 1988.
5. **Gustaf David Laurentius Marcusson Norlin**; b. Norra Solberga (Jönk.) 10 August 1893; emigr. 22 April 1909; d. Chicago, IL, May 1967.
6. **Lydia Maria Charlotta Marcusdotter Norlin**; b. Norra Solberga (Jönk.) 5 October 1895; emigr. 8 November 1916; d. Chicago, IL, 16 December 1926.
7. **Elsa Anna Elisabeth Marcusdotter Norlin**; b. Norra Solberga (Jönk.) 5 January 1898; emigr. 8 November 1916; d. Sun City, AZ, March 1974.
8. **Tora Adina Ingaborg Marcusdotter Norlin**; b. Norra Solberga (Jönk.) 1 April 1900; emigr. 8 November 1916; d. Chicago, IL, 1935.
9. **Axel Harry Benoni Petersson Norlin**; b. Norra Solberga (Jönk.) 16 June 1902; emigr. 8 November 1916; d. Elgin, IL, 20 September 1986.