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Tracing the Footsteps of an Estonian in Gotland

Lila H. Kirkwood and Wendy R. Kirkwood*

Adam, an Estonian immigrant, made the island of Gotland, Sweden, his home early in the nineteenth century and, for a number of years, moved freely from parish to parish. He finally settled down in Gammelgarn Parish (Gotl.), married and fathered a child—Olof Henrik Johansson, alias Charles Harris. The story of our search for him was published in a recent issue of *SAG*.¹

According to family oral tradition, Charles Harris was the illegitimate son of a French count named D'Arryant, who had fled France to the island of Gotland. When we learned of the existence of a French fort on the north side of the island, the legend did not seem as farfetched as it first appeared. Our family searched endlessly for D'Arryants in books of French nobility but this name, which is so familiar to us, was nowhere to be found. My grandfather apparently so believed this story that he not only reported to the U.S. census in 1900² and 1920³ that his father was French but also named his son Charles Arryant Harris.⁴

As described in the December 1999 issue of *SAG*, we ultimately found the birthplace of Olof Henrik Johansson, alias Charles Harris, by retracing his sister Mary's footsteps as she emigrated from Sweden to America. We anxiously turned to the birth record (*födelselängd*) of Gammelgarn Parish to find that Olof Henrik, son of *arbetskarlen* (the work[ing]man) Adam Johansson and his wife, Anna Margretha Henricsdotter, was born in 1847.⁵ What happened to our count? Could Olof Henrik have been fathered by someone other than Adam Johansson? Not likely, since *drängen* (the farm hand) Adam Johansson and *piga* (maid) Anna Margretha Henricsdotter were married in Gammelgarn on 13 November 1845, two years before Olof Henrik's birth.⁶

Ironically, Olof Henrik's sister, Anna Maria Olivia, was born on 21 June 1842 to *piga* Anna Greta Henricsdotter.⁷ Could she be the child of the count? And would his name have been spelled D'Arryant? How mangled might the original name have become as it went from French to Swedish to English?

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¹ Lila H. Kirkwood and Wendy R. Kirkwood, "In America He Took the Name 'Charles Harris,'" *Swedish American Genealogist* 19 (December 1999): 291-297.

² 1900 U.S. Census, California, Oakland, ED 324, line 89.

³ 1920 U.S. Census, California, Oakland, ED 47, line 72.

⁴ Charles Arryant Harris is Lila's father and Wendy's grandfather.

⁵ Birth Record (*Födelselängd*), Gammelgarn (Gotl.), 1847, No. 5, 15 July.

⁶ Marriage Record (*Vigsellängd*), Gammelgarn (Gotl.), 13 November 1845.

⁷ Birth Record (*Födelselängd*), Gammelgarn (Gotl.), 1842, No. 5, 21 June.

We may never know, for on 13 July 1848, just one year after Olof Henrik's birth, the body of his father, Adam Johansson, was recovered in the water near Herrvik. He was the victim of an accidental drowning on 22 June (see figure 1).⁸ We believe that this is when the legend may have begun, as Olof Henrik's uncles filled his young mind with stories of French nobility. So, we must set aside our D'Arryant and get back to the task of researching the ancestry of the newly discovered Adam Johansson.

Juni 22	Ar 1848 Igen funnen död vid Herrvik d 13 Juli / Juli 14de Arbetskarlen å Fride Adam Johansson	32	—
14de	Arbetskarlen å Fride Adam Johansson	32	Wädelligen drunknad nöd. De han i en mans båt skulle begifva sig från Östergarns Holme till Herrvik. —

Fig. 1. Death record for Adam Johansson. Transliteration and translation (L-R): Juni 22 (death date); Igen funnen död vid Herrvik d 13 Juli (Found/recovered dead by Herrvik 13 July) / Juli 14de (funeral date) / Arbetskarlen å Fride (The working man from Fride) Adam Johansson.— / [Age] 32 / Wädelligen drunknad, då han i Enmans båt skulle begifva sig från Östergarns Holme till Herrvik.— (Accidentally drowned as he, in a one-man boat, was going from Östergarn's Holme [islet/very small island] to Herrvik.—)

We started with the residence at the time of his death and worked backwards through those unique Swedish records known as *husförhörslängder* (household examination rolls). In the 1845-1852 roll for Gammelgarn, Adam Johansson is living at Fride Grund with his wife, Anna Gretha Henricsdotter, her daughter, Anna Maria Olivia, and their son, Olof Henrik. Sadly, by 1848 he is listed as dead by drowning and his wife as a widow (*enka*). Additional information included in this particular *husförhörslängd* was his date of arrival in Fride Grund (1845), his previous place of residence (Klints, also a village in Gammelgarn), his birthplace (Dagö), and his birth date (March 1816).⁹

Dagö? We searched Sweden far and wide for a town with this name. As a last resort, we used the LDS Family History Center's computerized library catalog to try to find a four-letter place-name anywhere in the world beginning

⁸ Death Record (*Dödslängd*), Gammelgarn (Gotl.), 22 June 1848.

⁹ Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), Gammelgarn (Gotl.), Fride Grund, 1845-52, n.p.

with the letters “Da.” It was not long before we scrolled to Dagö, Estonia—an island in the Baltic Sea directly east of Gotland! Not being familiar with Estonian genealogy, the easier approach was to continue tracing Adam’s footsteps to find his first recorded entry in Sweden, with the hope of locating other family members who may have come with him.

In the *husförhörslängd* for Klints, Gammelgarn Parish, in 1844-1845, Adam Johansson is listed as a farm hand (*dräng*) born in Dagö on March 1816.¹⁰ The record further indicates that he came to Klints from Gothem Parish (Gotl.) in 1844. After a vain search in the Gothem records, we eventually were led to Norrlanda Parish (Gotl.), which was formerly part of Gothem. Here, Adam had lived in two villages—Butreps Edmark (from 1843 to 1844) and Munkebos (from 1841 to 1843).¹¹ Once again his birthplace and birth date are listed as Dagö and March 1816, respectively. Furthermore, he had arrived at Norrlanda Parish from Anga Parish (Gotl.) in 1841.

While in Anga Parish, *drängen* Adam Johansson had also lived on two farms. While his birth information is consistent with previous records, he is listed as having arrived from Dalhem in 1839.¹² After a futile search in Dalhem Parish, we were led to an annex parish called Ganthem. Here we once again picked up the trail. The Ganthem Parish *husförhörslängd* notes that Adam lived at a village called Hartviks and had arrived from Kräklingbo in 1838.¹³

In the Kräklingbo roll, we found the entry—“Adam, [born] 1816 [in] Dagö.”¹⁴ He had moved to Kräklingbo in 1836 from O--?--?. After this long journey, we found ourselves stymied by a microfilm flaw or mildew blotch. The place name appeared to begin with the letter O, but the rest was indecipherable.

What could the name be? We considered several possibilities: *Österby*, a village in Kräklingbo; *Östergarn* Parish, very familiar to us as the birthplace of Anna Margaretha; and *Othem*, now known as Slite, a parish on the east coast of Gotland. We first eliminated Österby, since Adam was simply nowhere to be found in the Kräklingbo records. We then searched and re-searched the familiar Östergarn records, with no success. Twice we ordered and scanned the records of Othem, again with no success. It had seemed a likely possibility, since it was the arrival point of many immigrants from the east. We even thought that perhaps Adam had known Anna Margaretha in those earlier years.

Finally, we decided to investigate the original source material at the regional archive in Visby, Gotland, which had been so helpful in our earlier trip to Gotland. We searched the Internet for “Landsarkiv” and “Visby” and found their Web site (<http://www.ra.se/vila>), which gave us the e-mail addresses of each of their staff. We e-mailed the individual who had helped us as we searched the Henrickson connection and asked if the original record held in the

¹⁰ Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), Gammelgarn (Gotl.), Klints, 1845-52, n.p.

¹¹ Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), Norrlanda (Gotl.), 1838-46, p. 99.

¹² Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), Anga (Gotl.), 1839-41, p. 120.

¹³ Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), Ganthem (Gotl.), Hartviks, 1839, p. 61.

¹⁴ Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), Kräklingbo (Gotl.), 1836-38, p. 97.

archive was clearer than the microfilmed version. Could she read it? Yes! She reported back to us that the place name in question was indeed Östergarn.

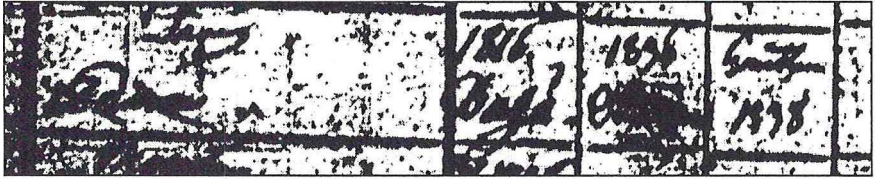


Fig. 2. Portion of *husförhörslängd* from Kräklingbo Parish that includes the illegible entry. Translated column headings (in brackets) and written text (L-R): [Name]: *Dräng(?) Adam*; [Born]: *1816 Dagö*; [Moved in from]: *1836 O--?--*; [Moved to]: *Ganthem 1838*.

But Adam is simply not in the Östergarn records. Had Adam moved in and out so rapidly that he wasn't recorded? In each record we have examined, we have discovered neither parents nor siblings. What do we do now? There appeared to be a significant number of people in the parish from Osel, another of the Estonian islands. It is very possible that Adam's first landing in Sweden was in Östergarn. If it wasn't, in which of the many villages in the area should we be searching? Would we find him and his family? Or just a young drifter?

We believe there may be some significance to Adam reporting his birth date consistently through the years as "March 1816." Did Adam not know the day of his birth? Did he have so strong an accent that he could not communicate effectively? The earliest Swedish record that we can find doesn't even include his last name! Interestingly, his *reading* ability was described as follows: "Cannot read anything in our catechism, but can read Swedish from a Lutheran religious book in his [own] language."¹⁵ Evidently he could translate from Estonian to spoken Swedish.

Obviously, we should also be researching the Estonian records, and we are. Dagö (now Hiiumaa) is a fairly large island off the coast of Estonia that has three churches—Puhleppa, Keinis and Reigi—whose records do exist.

In the final analysis, Adam and his son are more than individuals to us. They represent two flows of Swedish migration: the still-mysterious Adam coming from the East in the first half of the nineteenth century and the recently-documented Olof Henrik Johansson, "known in America as Charles Harris," going to the West in the latter half of that century. The migration west from Sweden is well documented, but the Swedish-Estonian connection will be a challenging genealogical journey.

¹⁵ - Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), Ganthem (Gotl.), Hartviks, 1839, p. 61.