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# The Search for Sven from Småland

Joyce Miller Scott\*

Successful at last! After years of fruitless search, I vowed to sing Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" if Sven was ever found. However, in deference to the County Recorder's Office in Chisago County, Minnesota, where proof for our "lost Sven" was found, the singing was withdrawn.

Sven was the one missing sibling of the Möller/Miller family in North America. Their patronymic was Petersson. The family emigrated from Kronoberg *län*, Småland, to North America between 1864 and 1869. Five siblings—Magnus, Johan, Anna, Sven and Anders—came to America. Eventually, their mother and her second husband also emigrated.

The first brother to come to America was Johan who, with his wife Inga and their three children, settled in Sycamore, Illinois. They later moved to Muskegon, Michigan. His permanent residence after 1876 was a farm near Fremont, Newaygo County, Michigan. The property is now a Michigan Centennial Farm, continuously farmed by the Miller descendants for over one hundred years.

In 1866, Johan's three brothers (Magnus, Sven and Anders) arrived. Magnus, the oldest brother, came from Linneryd Parish (Smål.) with his wife and child. After a few years in Muskegon, Michigan, he settled in Cokato, Wright County, Minnesota. Anders, the youngest and unmarried, also stopped briefly in Michigan. He finally settled near his brother, Magnus, in Cokato.

In 1869 the rest of the family arrived in North America. Their sister, Anna, had married in Sweden and came with her husband and baby. They settled in Muskegon, Michigan, and remained there throughout their lives. The mother of the family, Ingrid Cajsa Magnusdotter, also came in 1869. She arrived with her second husband, Daniel Persson, and the two daughters from her second marriage. They also settled in Cokato, Minnesota, near her two sons, Magnus and Anders, from her first marriage to Per Persson. In their old age they left for Menominee, Michigan, to live with their daughter. They both died and are buried in Menominee.

Nothing was known of Sven, also single, who came with his brother Anders in 1866. By the process of elimination, it was found that Sven evidently did not settle where any of his siblings did. Where did he settle in America? It still remained a mystery after many years of searching.

Sven's life in Sweden was well documented. He was born in Vederslöv Parish (Smål.) on 3 August 1842, the son of Per Persson Möller and Ingrid Cajsa

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Magnusdotter.<sup>1</sup> He was recorded with his family in Odenslanda Thoragård in the household examination rolls.<sup>2</sup> His father had died when he was six years of age. His mother soon remarried, so he actually lived longer with his stepfather, Daniel Persson, than with his father.

In 1859 Sven moved to the Odensjö area of Skatelöv Parish (Smål.). Meanwhile, his parents moved to Hovmantorp Parish (Smål.). Sven left Skatelöv in 1865 and went to Klintalycke in Hovmantorp.<sup>3</sup> He left from there with his brother, Anders, on 25 April 1866 to go to Hull, England, on the ship *Despatch*. They were en route to North America. Their port of entry in America is still unknown.

Sven's siblings used the surname Möller (Miller in North America), which was his father's soldier name. He seemed to usually use his patronymic, Petersson, in Sweden. It was not known which name he used in America, so both names were searched. The search for him went on for many years, centering first on the areas where his siblings settled—western Michigan and Wright County, Minnesota. Since he came as a single man, marriage records from those areas were searched for anyone with the correct name and year of birth. Many names were found for a Sven Möller/Miller and a Sven Petersson/Persson, but none of them matched "our Sven." Church membership records and minutes were read at the Swenson Center, Augustana College, for both the Michigan and Minnesota areas. Only a record of a visit to the Swedish Baptist Church in Cokato, which his mother attended, was found. However, it was the first hint that he may have settled in Minnesota.

The federal censuses for Wright County, Minnesota, and Muskegon County, Michigan, were searched for the years 1870, 1880, 1900 and 1910. The Michigan state census records for Muskegon County for the years 1874, 1884 and 1894 were also searched, as were the Minnesota state census records for Wright County for the years 1875, 1885, 1895 and 1905. Many possible Svens were noted and followed up, but none proved to be "our Sven." Cemeteries relating to other family members and surrounding ones were searched. Newspapers in both the Michigan and Minnesota locations were scanned. Fortunately, some had locally produced indexes. The Library of Michigan's many resources were often visited. Two libraries in the Twin Cities—at the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Historical Society—were also utilized. It was at the latter where the break finally came that led us to "our lost Sven."

He was not found in the incomplete nominal census index for the Minnesota Federal Census of 1880. The Soundex index to the same census was also checked. It included only people having children under ten years of age.

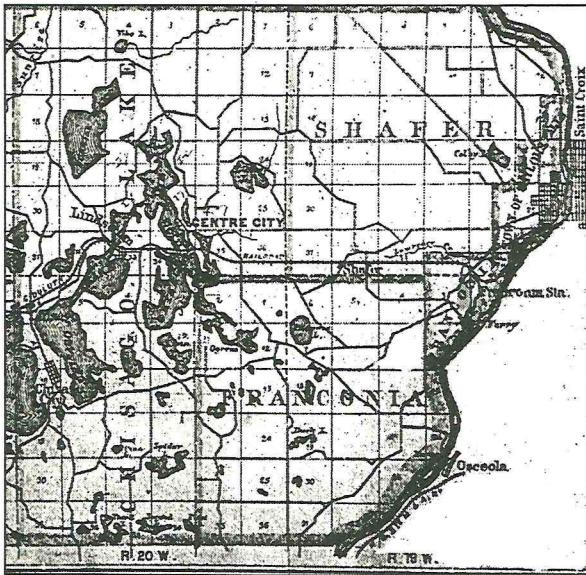
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<sup>1</sup> Vederslöv Parish (Smål.), Birth Records, 1842, p. 343.

<sup>2</sup> Vederslöv Parish (Smål.), Household Examination Rolls, 1838-1855.

<sup>3</sup> Hovmantorp Parish (Smål.), Moving Out Records, 1866, p. 303, No. 10.

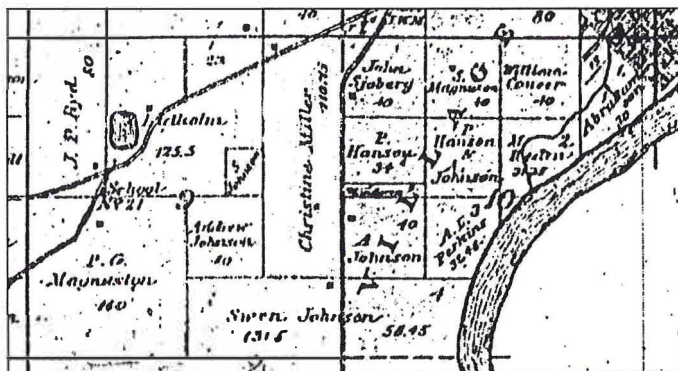
Fortunately, Sven qualified for this index. A Sven Miller, close in age to “our Sven” was located in Chisago County, Minnesota, which borders the St. Croix River. With only limited time in Minnesota, the “Scott Search Squad” (three members of our family) went into action, each researching one type of record for Chisago County. Husband Charles searched the census records for the years following 1880 and found the family. Son Michael checked the maps, especially plat maps. He found one for 1888 showing Sven’s property, then in his wife Christine’s name. I researched the history of the area and especially focused on Franconia, the place of residence listed on the census. It is a very small place and difficult to find on current maps, since it is in very tiny print. The Minnesota Historical Society had a copy of the Franconia Cemetery burials in their MS Collection, but no Sven Miller was found in this burial record.



**Fig. 1.** Southeast corner of 1888 *Outline Map of Chisago County, Minnesota*, showing the townships of Chisago Lake, Shafer and Franconia. Note the towns of Lindstrom, Centre (now Center) City, Shafer, Franconia, Taylors Falls, and St. Croix (WI).

After visiting relatives in Foley, Minnesota, we realized that we could squeeze in a day in Chisago County en route home to Ontario. The county is well known for its large number of Swedish settlers, both real and the fictional Karl Oscar and Christina of Vilhelm Moberg’s books. The county seat at Center

City conveniently houses all the county offices in one building. We first went to the Recorder's office to get a death record. Sven's record was soon found in 1886. It listed Sven's exact age in years, months and days in the original record. A quick check with his Swedish birth record matched his age exactly! (Ironically, if his death record had been obtained by mail, the age in years, months and days would have been omitted from the certificate and the proof that this was the Sven we sought would have been inconclusive!). Sven only lived twenty years after his immigration, so there were fewer records for him than his other siblings. He had died suddenly at forty-three years of age.



**Fig. 2.** Portion of 1888 Plat Map of Franconia Township, Chisago County, Minnesota. Christine Miller is listed as the owner of 110.75 acres in section 9. The town of Franconia and the St. Croix River are on the eastern edge.

Next we found a marriage record for a *Swan Miller* and *Johanna Christina Petersdotter* for 1872 in the old town of Marine on St. Croix, Washington County.<sup>4</sup> The six children of the family were listed in the census records. Michael located a later (1914) plat map for Franconia Township, showing the Sven Miller farm of 110+ acres with a different owner—Sven's son, Joseph. The farm was bordered by Highway 95 on the east. It was located on the bluffs above the river flats. Johanna Christina managed the farm and six small children, ages twelve to one, after her husband's death. Son Joseph took over when he was grown. The farm was sold in 1916 and Johanna and her son Joe moved into nearby Shafer, where they both died in 1917.

The library in Lindstrom, Minnesota, was the next stop for the "Search Squad." It was rather small and, judging from my librarian's experience, I

<sup>4</sup> Johanna Christina was born to Peter Johansson and Ingrid Cathrine Niclausdotter in Väckelsång Parish (Smål.).

doubted that they would have local newspapers on microfilm. But, they had something better—the original newspapers! In them we found the 1917 obituaries for both Johanna Christina and her son Joseph. The obituaries were replete with information! None was found for Sven, who died in 1886. The Taylors Falls, Minnesota, newspaper during that time period, *The Journal*, was searched with no result.

The obituaries led to the burial place, as well as the church where they worshipped. It was the Chisago Lake Evangelical Swedish Lutheran Church, about five miles from their farm. This picturesque church is situated on a bluff in Center City and is reflected in Chisago Lake—a lovely setting. In the graveyard east of the church in the sixth row from the last, stood a large stone emblazoned with MILLER. Beneath it were the stones for Sven (3 Aug. 1842-22 May 1886), Johanna Christina (1 July 1843-20 Nov. 1917), and Joseph (25 Feb. 1879-18 June 1917). One other child had died previously. The remaining four children went to the Twin Cities to seek their fortunes. They are yet to be researched. No descendants remain in Franconia.

One thing remained for us—to see the elusive settlement of Franconia itself. Driving along Highway 95 several times, we could find no way down to the river where it was located on the map. Finally we spotted a sign on a dirt road leading toward the river that read “Franconia Trail.” Following the winding trail down the bluff toward the river, we located the interesting, historic, and small settlement situated below the bluff and along the St. Croix River. It was a delightful surprise! Again we experienced the bonus from a genealogical search. The path often leads to a delightful small place one would not otherwise discover. Such was the case with Franconia.

Our time to leave for home had arrived. We were amazed that after years of fruitless searching we three could accomplish so much in two days—one day in St. Paul at the Historical Society Library and the other in Chisago County. American records we need are often difficult to get from Canada. Many resources are not available on inter-library loan. So we’ve learned to maximize our time on our annual trip to Minnesota and more frequent forays for research into Michigan.

After arriving home, I was musing about our success in locating Sven Miller from Småland. I began to put the data together for Sven’s account to fill the gap in the Miller genealogy.<sup>5</sup> Now the accounts for all five Miller siblings are complete—three in Minnesota and two in Michigan, with descendants spread as far as the West Coast. Looking down from my chair, I saw my often-used book, *Swedish American Landmarks*. There on the cover was an illustration of the very church where Sven and his family worshipped. Behind it is the graveyard where our lost, and now found, Sven lies. So near; yet so far!

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<sup>5</sup> The Miller genealogy will be published in the coming months. If interested, please contact the author. Contacts with Sven and Anders Miller’s descendants would be welcomed.