

3-1-2000

Olphult? The Sandgren Files. Part 1

Ted Rosvall

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag>



Part of the [Genealogy Commons](#), and the [Scandinavian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rosvall, Ted (2000) "Olphult? The Sandgren Files. Part 1," *Swedish American Genealogist*. Vol. 20 : No. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol20/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Swedish American Genealogist by an authorized editor of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

Olphult?

The Sandgren Files. Part 1

Ted Rosvall*

Sometimes the most difficult task in tracing your Swedish roots is deciphering Swedish place names, for example, the birthplaces of your immigrant ancestors. Not only are they hard to find in the American source material—"born in Sweden" is often all you get—but, even if you do come across a Swedish place name, you may still be in for disappointments. You will often find that the town or parish you are looking for is neither on maps nor in geographical reference books. You suspect that the place name has somehow been misinterpreted, misspelled, or tampered with so as to make it unintelligible. The following research story will illustrate this.

The object of my search was, on the surface, simple and straightforward—to find the origin of August S. Johnson, who was born in Sweden on 17 March 1855 and died in St Joseph, Missouri, on 29 April 1931. In 1885 he and my distant relative, Maria (Mary) Sandgren (1858-1947), were married in St Joseph, and the couple had at least five children. When I started this research some twenty-five years ago, two of their daughters—Mrs. Hedwig Gocke (1887-1979) and Miss Frances Johnson (1899-1995)—were still alive, but neither of them had any idea as to the birthplace of their father or even the names of their paternal grandparents. They did, however, suggest that their father was probably from the southern part of Sweden, maybe even from Skåne, the southernmost province of Sweden.

Now followed all the usual research methods employing census records, naturalization records, obituaries, church records, cemetery records, a death certificate, etc. On a visit to St Joseph twenty years ago, I even visited the county clerk and asked if I could see the original, local death certificate. I wanted to see if there was any clue there that the people in Jefferson City, who had transcribed the centrally filed death certificate, had missed. And yes, there was one more clue. Although the local death certificate (see Fig. 1) listed August's birthplace as merely "Unknown, Sweeden [*sic*]," his father's birthplace was listed as "Olphult, Swedeen [*sic*]."

Back in Sweden, I searched every map and geographical index that I could find, but nowhere was an "Olphult" to be found. I debated with myself that I may have misread the notation in St Joseph; maybe the word did not start with an *O* after all. Maybe it was an *A* and maybe the place name was "Alphult," a

* Ted Rosvall is a leading Swedish genealogist and a member of the editorial committee of *SAG*. He resides at Enåsen, Falekvarna, 521 91 Falköping, Sweden. E-mail: <ted.rosvall@telia.com>

name that sounded a little more reasonable. Alas, there were no "Alphults" around either, and so the search came to a standstill that lasted for twenty years.

MISSOURI STATE BOARD OF HEALTH BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS CERTIFICATE OF DEATH				Do not tear this apart. 13303	
1. PLACE OF DEATH		85		No. 13303	
County <u>Ruchanan</u>		Registration District No.		No. <u>471</u>	
Township		Primary Registration District No. <u>1001</u>		Registered No.	
City <u>St. Joseph</u>		No. <u>516 So. 14th St.</u>		No.	
2. FULL NAME <u>August S. Johnson</u>					
(a) Residence, No. <u>516 South 14th</u> St. (Usual place of abode)					
Length of residence in city or town where death occurred <u>43</u> yrs. * mos. * da. (If nonresident, give city or town and State)					
PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS			MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH		
3. SEX <u>Male</u>	4. COLOR OR RACE <u>White</u>	5. SINGLE, MARRIED, WIDOWED, OR DIVORCED (circle the word) <u>Married</u>	7. DATE OF DEATH (MONTH, DAY, AND YEAR) <u>April 29th</u>	21. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased <u>April 1st</u> to <u>April 29</u> and last seen alive on <u>April 29</u> at <u>9:20</u> a.m.	
14. IF IMPRISONED, IMPRISONED, OR DIVORCED HUSBAND OF (OR) WIFE OF <u>Mary Johnson</u>			The principal cause of death and related causes of importance were as follows: <u>Cerebral thrombosis</u> <u>948674</u> <u>47</u> <u>James Delaney</u> <u>Coroner, Arkansas</u>		
6. DATE OF BIRTH (MONTH, DAY, AND YEAR) <u>March 17, 1885</u>			to have occurred on the date stated above, at <u>9:20</u> a.m.		
7. AGE YEARS <u>76</u> MONTHS <u>1</u> DAYS <u>12</u>	IF LESS THAN 1 day, hr., min.		The principal cause of death and related causes of importance were as follows: <u>Cerebral thrombosis</u> <u>948674</u> <u>47</u> <u>James Delaney</u> <u>Coroner, Arkansas</u>		
8. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, or occupation <u>Foreman Tin Shop</u>			Date issued by coroner of inquest <u>April 29</u>		
9. Industry or business in which work was done, or with which <u>Union Pacific Ry.</u>			Date of inquest <u>April 29</u>		
10. Date deceased last worked at this occupation (month and year) <u>April 1925</u>			11. Total time (years) spent in this occupation <u>45 yrs</u>		
12. BIRTHPLACE (CITY OR TOWN, STATE OR COUNTRY) <u>Unknown Sweden</u>			13. NAME <u>Pere Johnson</u>		
14. BIRTHPLACE (CITY OR TOWN, STATE OR COUNTRY) <u>Ophult Sweden</u>			15. MAIDEN NAME <u>Unknown</u>		
16. BIRTHPLACE (CITY OR TOWN, STATE OR COUNTRY) <u>Unknown</u>			17. INFORMANT <u>Mrs. Mary Johnson</u>		
18. BIRTHPLACE (CITY OR TOWN, STATE OR COUNTRY) <u>Ashland Cemetery</u>			19. UNDERTAKER <u>John M. Hoffner</u>		
19. UNDERTAKER (ADDRESS) <u>1302 Faxon St., St. Joseph, Mo.</u>			20. FILED <u>MAY 1 1931</u>		
20. FILED <u>MAY 1 1931</u>			21. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased <u>April 1st</u> to <u>April 29</u> and last seen alive on <u>April 29</u> at <u>9:20</u> a.m.		
21. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased <u>April 1st</u> to <u>April 29</u> and last seen alive on <u>April 29</u> at <u>9:20</u> a.m.			22. Was disease or injury in any way related to occupation of deceased? If so, specify: <u>Yes</u>		
22. Was disease or injury in any way related to occupation of deceased? If so, specify: <u>Yes</u>			23. (Address) <u>Phys. & Surge Bldg. St. Joseph, Missouri</u>		

Fig. 1. State of Missouri Death Certificate for August S. Johnson. Note line 14, which lists his father's birthplace as Ophult, Sweden [sic].

This summer, while visiting the Emigrantinstitutet in Växjö, Sweden, I was delighted to find that the EMIBAS project had grown considerably since my last visit there. The EMIBAS is a searchable database with information on several hundred thousand Swedish emigrants. The information in this database has largely been extracted from the Swedish church records, from the household examination rolls, and from the migration rolls. The beauty of the database format is, of course, that it is searchable in so many different ways and that, with

a bit of luck and a little know-how, you can filter forth just about anyone, even if you begin with very little information. In this case, I decided to let the computer search for a man named August who was born 17 March 1855. A few seconds passed, and then there he was; or was he?

SVEN AUGUST JOHANSSON; coppersmith apprentice; born 17 March 1855 in Sandsjö; emigrated from Lund stadsförsamling [in southern Sweden] 30 August 1875.

The first name "Sven" neatly fits in as the middle initial *S* that August S. Johnson used in America. The entry even gave the address in Lund and the page number in the household examination roll, which I naturally used at a subsequent visit to the *Landsarkivet* (regional archives) in Lund. In that book, I found the additional information that Sven August Johansson had arrived in Lund in 1872 from Ölgehult Parish in the province of Blekinge.

Turning immediately to the records of Ölgehult, I found Sven August Johansson living with his parents, Johannes Olofsson and Sissa Danielsdotter, and three siblings, in the village of Belganet. Moving my eyes a little further up on the page, I found the name of the parish listed; and, my goodness, did it say "Olphult"? Well, no, actually not. There were two dots above the *O*, for the extra Swedish letter *Ö*. But apart from that, the *j* and the *e* in Ölgehult had been written in such a way that they together looked very much like a lowercase *p*. Hence, "Ölgehult" looked like "Olphult" and this is how some document of August's must have been interpreted by an American county clerk in St Joseph, Missouri, when his death certificate was composed. Of course, "Ölgehult" was not even his place of birth, but the place where he grew up and from where he probably had a transit document of some sort that he brought along to his new, adopted country.

Fantasy is sorely needed when dealing with Swedish place names found in U.S. documents. The EMIBAS, once finished and available on CD, will, however, no doubt solve many mysteries for the researcher.