

6-1-2000

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### Recommended Citation

Lundgren, Judie and Erickson, James E. (2000) "The Story Mother Used To Tell About Her People," *Swedish American Genealogist*. Vol. 20 : No. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol20/iss2/3>

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# The Story Mother Used To Tell About Her People

Judie Lundgren\* and James E. Erickson

What follows is an intriguing account of the life and times of a Swedish immigrant family beginning a new life in the Midwestern states of Illinois and Iowa immediately following the Civil War. It is filled with family lore and written in a free, rambling style that has the feel of a taped interview that was later transcribed.

The original manuscript was found among the papers of Bruce A. Lundgren. Mother, as described in the story, has been identified as Kerstin Danielsdotter, the daughter of Daniel Carlsson and Brita Olsdotter. After immigrating to the United States with her family, she married Carl Peter Danielsson (Carlson) Lundgren and went by the name Mary Christine Lundgren. "The Story" was written by one of her children, probably Carrie.

We present this story not only to chronicle an interesting family during an interesting period of American history, but also to illustrate one fundamental tenet of genealogical research—namely, that undocumented information, while often tantalizing and potentially valuable, must be checked against primary source material to ensure its veracity. To that end, a variety of undocumented statements included in this particular family history—whether names, dates, places, or events—were selected and researched for accuracy and/or truthfulness. Note that these statements are highlighted in *italic* and **bold** type throughout the original text and are accompanied by footnotes, which provide further information that either corroborates or refutes the original assertion. Some minor grammatical changes were made to improve the readability of the text.

-oOo-

It seems that in mother's family there must have been some wanderlust on the father's side. Sometime around the revolution in France *his people left France*.<sup>1</sup> Mother did not know where they came from or what their name was in France. On the mother's side all mother knew was that the

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\* Judie Lundgren is the great-granddaughter of Bettie (Brita) Danielsdotter Carlsson Lundgren. Her e-mail address is <jude55@home.com>.

<sup>1</sup> Whether grandfather's people came from France has not yet been determined. What is known with certainty is that grandfather, i.e., Daniel Carlsson, was the son of Carl Jacob Phragmén, whose lineage can be traced back to Wernic Jonsson, a smith who came to Sweden from *Germany*. — Ivar Wallenius, "Släkten Phragmén (Phragmenius)," *Personhistorisk Tidskrift* 40 (1939-40): 218-236.

*grandmother was German*<sup>2</sup> and that she had dark eyes and dark hair and her name was Bertha, and that was all she ever knew.

Mother said that they were well-to-do in Sweden and her father owned two sawmills and one flour mill, or was it two flour mills and one sawmill, probably the latter. She did not know how many men worked for her father, but she did remember that they had three milkmaids that took care of the cows. In summer they took them up into the mountains or hills and the maids lived in huts there. Once mother went with them as they had to watch the cows so they would not run away. She became lost so she laid [*sic*] down by the cow with a bell as the bell would wake her up if the cow moved. One of the maids ran home and told them she was lost so the men came and hunted all night for her and did not find her until morning.

Their Sabbath began at sunset on Saturday night and all food had to be cooked and ready for Sunday. Everyone had to have had baths and clean clothes on as no work was allowed on Sunday until sunset. The house had to be in order, spick and span. It seems grandmother took care of the family and had girls do the work.

Some men came back to Sweden to where the family lived and told tales about America and that "it was a land that flowed with milk and honey." Then the Mormons came and wanted grandfather to come to America and they also told tales of great abundance. He almost joined the Mormons until he found they wanted him to throw all he owned into the "common kitty" and that he refused to do. He was well-to-do and did not feel like it was fair to give up what he had earned. However, he had America fever so bad that he just had to go there. He sold all his property and did not even stay long enough to settle everything, so left the two sons by his first wife, Olof and Louis, to take care of this for him and it was two years before the two sons came to America. Aunt Clara told me some of this.

Mother used to tell about some of the people on the ship that brought them to America. In steerage were the very poor and the women wore black kerchiefs on their heads and had huge woven baskets with food, and there were many children. Mother did not know just where they came from. Mother and the other children in the family used to go down and watch them. [I] do not know how long it took them to come to the U.S. in 1865. They finally made it to New York and mother was eleven years old two days after *they landed at Ellis Island*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This description of grandmother suggests that she may have descended from a Walloon. For more information on the Walloons consult the following sources: Kjell Lindblom, *Vallonsläkter under 1600-Talet* (Stockholm, 1992); Karl Kilbom, *Vallonerna: Valloninvandringen stormaktsväldet och den Svenska järnhanteringen* (Stockholm, 1958); and Bernt Douhan, "The Walloons in Sweden," *Swedish American Genealogist* II (March 1982): 1-17.

<sup>3</sup> This statement is incorrect for the simple reason that Ellis Island did not open until 1892. During the years 1855 to 1890, Castle Garden served as New York's receiving station for immigrants. For more information about Castle Garden see Nils Kalle, "Castle Garden Revisited," *Swedish American Genealogist* V (June 1985): 59-64.

From there they went to Illinois. [I] think to Galesburg or Galva or maybe both. There were so many poor that came from Sweden to Illinois and they seemed to think grandfather should feed them all. He said if he had to that his own family would be out of food, clothes, etc., themselves, so he moved on to Boone County, Iowa. Mother never did say how he decided to go there as they were the first Swedish people to come to what was later called Pilot Mound, as that place was built on the land grandfather bought. Mother said *grandfather had a sister and family that came with them to America*.<sup>4</sup> I believe it was Alfred Sundberg's folks. Anyway, the sister hated it so much she decided to learn to read and write and tell people in Sweden not to come as it was terrible in Iowa. By the time she learned to write (and she did), she did not care to go back to Sweden. Girls did not need an education in those days, so the old-timers thought. *The Tornell family is related to mother*,<sup>5</sup> but [I] never did know or remember how; only that they were cousins, like Carrie, Olof, Peter, and Anna Tornell.

In the family of Olof and Louis was an *infant girl who died. [She] belong[ed] to the first marriage*.<sup>6</sup> According to Aunt Clara, *their mother was a first cousin of grandfather*,<sup>7</sup> and it was not legal to marry a cousin without the permission of the king. [S]o grandfather said he went courting the king to get married and used to sing a Swedish song about it. Aunt Clara said he was such a sweet person. Now grandmother was a very sober person and did not even smile very much. Mother told about going to church where there was a visiting preacher and he made terrible faces and on the way home grandmother said, "Girls, were you able to keep from laughing? It was all I could do to keep from doing so!" And that was almost shocking to the girls that their mother would laugh in church. Probably was a schoolhouse. Mother told about how expensive everything was after the Civil War. When they went to church they walked barefooted and carried their shoes and a cloth to wipe their feet off. They sat on the steps of the church and wiped their feet off and put on shoes and stockings. When services were over they sat down and took them off and walked home barefooted, as shoes cost too much money. Once a year, a shoemaker would

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<sup>4</sup> This statement is incorrect. It was the *grandmother*, not the grandfather, who had a sister and family that came with them to America (see footnote 5 for details).

<sup>5</sup> Grandmother, i.e., Brita Olsdotter, had a sister, Carin Olsdotter, who married Olof Törnell. The Daniel Carlsson and Olof Törnell families left Tönnånger, Skog Parish (Häls.) for North America on 11 July 1865. See figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix.

<sup>6</sup> The "infant child" in question was named Brita. She was the daughter of Daniel Carlsson and his first wife, Margta Olsdotter. Brita died at Tönnånger on 4 October 1851. See figures 3 and 4 in the Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> This statement is true. Daniel Carlsson and Margta Olsdotter were not only husband and wife but also first cousins. Daniel Carlsson's mother was *Brita Larsdotter*, who was born at Håkanbo, Hanebo Parish (Häls.) on 6 November 1775. Margta Olsdotter's mother was *Anna Larsdotter*, who was born at Håkanbo, Hanebo Parish (Häls.) on 5 November 1777. Brita and Anna Larsdotter were sisters, the daughters of Lars Nilsson and Margta Ersdotter. See figures 4 and 6 in the Appendix.

come and make the shoes they needed and the tailor would come and make clothes. [They] would stay with the family until they were done with shoes and clothes. Stockings they knit at home.

Mother used to tell about all the snakes—king snakes, rattlesnakes, blue racers, etc.—and [that] all her life she was very scared of them. Mother said the snakes would roll up into balls and when someone came they would unroll and scatter and scare them to death almost. Twice blue racers chased Mother and Uncle Pete home to the house. Once her mother sent her to borrow a flatiron so grandmother could iron something as there was only one flatiron in the whole neighborhood. When they went shopping in those days it took two days to get to Des Moines and they used a wagon with the sideboards as whoever went bought for as many as needed things. They would stay overnight in a small house halfway to Des Moines and Mother said she and Carrie Tornell slept on a cob pile with a buffalo robe over the cobs and one on them. Some coming home! Mother needed a new dress and there was not enough [material] for a whole dress of one pattern so [she] had to have the blouse of one kind and skirt of another. If I remember correctly the wood for the house grandfather built came from Des Moines sixty miles away.

Food was no problem in those days as there were plenty of wild animals they could hunt, dig for roots the Indians used, wild plums, strawberries, chokecherries, and other things to eat. Grandfather built a house that had, I think, three rooms and an upstairs. But they did not have room for bedsteads so [they] slept on real low ones and wintertime the snow would blow in and cover the beds so they all had to wear nightcaps. Not only that, they had to go outside to get upstairs to go to bed. The Tornells had a log cabin that later they put siding on and that might still be there.

[I] forgot about *the family, the second one*.<sup>8</sup> There was **Peter W. Carlson**,<sup>9</sup> [who] owned a hardware store in Pilot Mound until he sold it and moved to Fergus Falls, Minnesota. He might even have farmed once as it seems the boys in the family farmed. [I] think mother, **Mary Christine**,<sup>10</sup> came next; then **Daniel Carlson**,<sup>11</sup> who lived in West Point, Nebraska, a

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<sup>8</sup> The "second family," consisted of Daniel Carlsson, his second wife, Brita Oldsdotter, and their children, who are listed in correct birth order (along with Daniel's two sons, Olof and Lars, from his first marriage) in figure 1 in the Appendix.

<sup>9</sup> Identical with Per Danielsson Carlsson, b. Skog Parish (Häls.) on 1 April 1852. He was, indeed, the oldest child of the second marriage. He married Elida Durrell.

<sup>10</sup> Identical with Kersin Danielsdotter Carlsson, b. Skog Parish (Häls.) on 11 August 1853. She was, indeed, the second child born in the second marriage. She married Carl Peter Danielsson (Carlson) Lundgren.

<sup>11</sup> Identical with Daniel Danielsson Carlsson, b. Skog Parish (Häls.) on 26 May 1858. He and his twin, Brita, were actually the fourth and fifth children born in the second marriage. He married Ada Petty.

while until he moved to Milburn (?) Kansas. **Charlie Carlson**<sup>12</sup> [came] next and he left home quite young and lived with some other people and later went out west. [T]hey did not hear from him for about twenty years, when he came back to Iowa. He said he went partners with some man as he, Uncle Charlie, had the money and the man had the experience. [L]ater Uncle Charlie had the experience and the man had the money. Then Uncle Charlie became ill and was ill a long time. Someone sent the grandparents a clipping about a Chas. Carlson who had died in Montana so they assumed he was gone [and] were very surprised when he returned to Iowa. The grandparents were long gone then, though.

Then there was **Carrie**,<sup>13</sup> I think, and she married Ed Fay, who lived there in Iowa. But she was a Catholic and that was not being done in those days. [It] seems Carrie wanted an organ and grandfather did not think she needed one so she got married. They moved to Denver, Colorado, as there was tuberculosis in the Fay family and only Ed Fay lived. Carrie died of cancer and by that time they had moved to Greeley, Colorado, where they are both buried [along with] Alice Fay Ketcham and Charlie Fay, son and daughter. Then there is Tom Fay.

There was a son named Willy and when he was three years old he fell into a small creek and was found too late by Pete. There was only a plank across the stream.

**Uncle John**<sup>14</sup> was one year old when he came to the U.S. He usually lived near Mother until he moved to Hamill, South Dakota. His wife died and left three small girls—Edna Sophie, Evelyn Edith, [and] Lila Aurora. John is buried at Oakland, Nebraska. His wife was Sophie Person.

[I] forgot **Bettie Carlson**,<sup>15</sup> who married John Lundgren. [S]he had a twin, **Daniel Carlson**.<sup>16</sup> Mother came to visit Bettie and married Carl Peter Lundgren from West Point, Nebraska. [I] might add [that] his name, when he came from Sweden, was Daniel[s]son and he and John Lundgren picked out the name of Lundgren and had it made legal. Grandfather Carlson's

<sup>12</sup> Identical with Karl Danielsson Carlsson, b. Skog Parish (Häls.) on 24 February 1855. He was actually the third, not the fourth, child born in the second marriage.

<sup>13</sup> Identical with Catharina Danielsdotter Carlsson, b. Skog Parish (Häls.) on 6 January 1862. She was actually the sixth child born in the second marriage.

<sup>14</sup> Identical with Anders Johan Danielsson Carlsson, b. Skog Parish (Häls.) on 15 April 1863. He was actually the seventh child born in the second marriage. He married Sophie Person.

<sup>15</sup> Identical with Brita Danielsdotter Carlsson, b. Skog Parish (Häls.) on 26 May 1858. She and her twin Daniel were the fourth and fifth children born in the second marriage. She married Johannes Magnus Carlson (later Lundgren), son of Carl Jakob Svensson and Ulrika Jonasdotter, in Pilot Mound, Boone Co., Iowa, on 9 September 1879. Bettie died in Idaho Falls, Bonneville Co., Idaho, on 20 April 1898 and was buried in New Sweden Cemetery near Idaho Falls. Interestingly, Bettie died in childbirth with child number fifteen. One of her eight surviving children (and the only male) was JL's grandfather, Arthur Carl Lundgren. In the next generation (Judie's father's) there was also only one male who survived to produce offspring!—Family Bible in possession of Mabel Wackerli of Idaho Falls, Idaho; Lundgren family tombstones at New Sweden Cemetery.

<sup>16</sup> Identical with Daniel Danielsson Carlsson, b. Skog Parish (Häls.) on 26 May 1858.



name in Sweden was also Daniel[s]son and he took the name of Carlson when he came to [the] U.S. There was another daughter named Rosa, but she died as an infant and was born at Pilot Mound, Iowa.

Uncle Peter's wife was Elida Durrell and her people came from New York, I think. In their family there was Myrtle, Wallace, Earl, Florence and Frances. They are all gone. Wallace was killed in a car accident on the way to Minnesota to attend his parents' golden wedding [anniversary].

Daniel Carlson was married to Ada Petty who also lived in Pilot Mound and her people came from the East someplace. There was Blanch, Clifford, Raymond and Daniel in their family.

Charlie Carlson married the niece of Olof's wife after he came back to Iowa. They had Frances and Raymond. [They] lived in Des Moines and are all gone. Frances had two daughters. **Olof**<sup>17</sup> and his wife did not have any family. They lived in Pilot Mound. Uncle Olof had nineteen buildings on his place, just out of town; one for calves, cows, pigs, chickens, etc., all kept apart. His wife's name was Louise. Olof liked to play the organ evenings for hours before retiring.

Mother said Des Moines was about 3,000 population when she lived in that place. Where the capitol is there was a cornfield. Des Moines was once a forest but all that remains of forest is Union Park. In our family<sup>18</sup> there was Alma Evelyn, Victor Emanuel, Ellen Marie, Carl Emil, Walter Clifton, Albin Irenius, Esther Mathilda, Charles Frank, and Mildred Naomi. Alma, Frank and Esther [are] still around, Alma being ninety-one years now.

Mother used to say when her folks came to [the] U.S. her father knew only two words—yes and no—but that he did not know when to use them. They came to [the] U.S. in August 1865, the year Abraham Lincoln was killed in April. Times were not very good then. The first song the children learned was "John Brown's Body Lies a Moldering in His Grave." Mother spelled down the whole school and the word was "ere." [The] only reason was [that] she had seen it in a book days before.

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<sup>17</sup> Identical with Olof Danielsson Carlsson, b. Skog Parish (Häls.) on 26 May 1844. He married a woman named Louise.

<sup>18</sup> That is, the family of Mary Christine Danielsdotter Carlsson and Carl Peter Danielsson (Carlson) Lundgren.

## Appendix

Personens namn, stånd, embete, yrke, och näringsfång (barn, ungdomar, och fattighjon), nationalitet (om främmande), lyten (svagarna, blinda, döfsamma).		Födelse-		Äktenskap		Körkort	fr sta
		År.	mdn. och dag.	Ort (socken i Län, stad).	Gift.	Enkling el. Enka	
201							
Tönnånger d. d.							
Bond Daniel Carlsson (2 gr gift)		4	1/9	Halsbo			v
H. Brita Olsd.		24	25/7	Orhills			
Olof		14	26/5	Halsbo			v
Lars		40	1/7				v
Olof		52	1/4				v
Dr. Kristin		53	1/8				v
Jon Karl		55	24/2				v
Daniel		58	26/5				v
Brita (Tönnånger)		58	26/5				v
Catharina		62	6/7				v
Anders Johan		63	15/4				

Fig. 1. Household examination roll (*husförhörslängd*) for Tönnånger, Skog Parish (Häls.), AI:12B (1861-1870), p. 201. Here we find the family of farm owner (*bonde*) Daniel Carlsson (2 gr gift = 2 gånger gift = married twice) and his second wife, Brita Olsdotter, as listed prior to leaving for North America on 11 July 1865. Note that sons Olof and Lars are offspring from Daniel's first marriage (*m. f. g.* = *med första gift* = from first marriage). Son Daniel and daughter Brita are listed as twins (*tvillingar*).



207. Tönnånger N: 5555 #

Personernas namn, ålder, emble, yrke, och näringsfång (äktenskap, inhyses- och fattighjon), nationalitet (om främmande), lyten (svagarna, blinda, döfstumma).	Födelse		Äktenskap		Flytta
	År. och dag.	Ort (socken i Län, stad).	Gift.	Enkling el. Enka	
Olof Törnelli	32 4/6				
Carin Olsdotter	23 17/7	Schulbo.			
Dr. Carin	37 25/6				
Jon Olof	60 24/5				
Pia	62 9/9				
Dr. Anna Stina	65 17/7				
Amundson					
Jon Jonsson p. 217					

**Fig. 2.** Household examination roll (*husförhörslängd*) for Tönnånger, Skog Parish (Häls.), AI:12B (1861-1870), p. 207. Here we find the family of farm owner (*bonde*) Olof Törnelli and his wife, Carin Olsdotter (see her also in figure 3), as listed prior to leaving for North America on 11 July 1865.

102 Tönnånger									
Nr	Namn	Född	Flyttade		Läger huden	Läger wändill			Barn
			Från	Till		Enth	Sack	Sackh	
	inf.	Handl.							
14	bonde Daniel Carlsson	14 9/10							
	h. Brita Olsd.	24 11/10							
	S. Olof m.f.	44 11/10							
	† S. Per	74 11/10							
	S. Lars m.f.	49 1/10							
	Per m.f.	52 1/10							
	D. Kerstin	1853 3/10							
	J. Karl	55 2/10							
	† Dr. Per Carlsson	71 2/10		1852					
	Wif. Brita Olsd.	74 2/10		1852					
	W. Karlén Flygt	31 1/10		93-51					
	S. Margareta Olsd.	33 15/10	121-57	122-52					
	W. Per Olsd.	28 1/10	188-52	188-52					
	W. Dr. Per Persen	34 25/10	208-52	109-53					
	Dr. Johan Carlsson	1855 10/10	118-53	112/54					
	Dr. Per Persen	37 2/10	75-55						

Fig. 3. Household examination roll (*husförhörslängd*) for Tönnånger, Skog Parish (Häls.), AI:10B (1851-1855), p. 102. At this time, the household for farm owner (*bonde*) Daniel Carlsson included his second wife, six children (three from the first marriage), three farm hands (*drängar*) and four maids (*pigar*). For a time, Daniel was a widower (note the word *Enkl.* = *änkling* = widower). Note also that *piga* Brita Olsdotter *flyttade till supra*, i.e., was moved up to line two, where she is listed as Daniel's new wife.





Södra Kyrkbyn.	Född.	Flyttningar.		Omständighet.	Ännu Lämnad.	Lutheri. Cateches.	Svebilii Cateches.	Husf. Ath. Symb.
		ifrån.	Til.					
N:o 8. Bonde	h. l.			G. m. B. 1800. Postförare.				
Carl Jak. Phragmén	1774				h.	1-5	1-5	
H. Brita Larsdotter	1775				med.			
Son Lars Jakob	1801			h. m. B. 1802	h. m. B. 1802	1-5	1-5	
Son Carl	1803			h. m. B. 1804	h. m. B. 1804	1-5	1-5	
Son Anders	1806				h. m. B. 1806	1-5	1-5	
Son Jonas	1809							
Son Olof	1811							
Son Daniel	1814							
H. Cajsa Andersdotter	1775		1811	h. m. B. 1811	h. m. B. 1811			
H. Babba Greta Phragmén	1781		1811		h. m. B. 1811			

Fig. 5. Household examination roll (*husförhörlängd*) for No. 8 Södra Kyrkbyn (known as Phragméngården), Hanebo Parish (Häls.), AI:6B (1809-1814), p. 55. At this time, the household of farm owner (*bonde*) Carl Jacob Phragmén included his wife, Brita Larsdotter; his six children, including son Daniel [Carlsson]; his mother, Cajsa Andersdotter, who died in 1811; and his sister, Babba Greta Phragmén. Note under the column heading *Omständighet[er]* (Circumstances) that Carl Jacob is listed as a mail carrier (*postförare*).

**Fig. 6.** Household examination roll (*husförhörslängd*) for No. 1 Håkanbo, Hanebo Parish (Häls.), AI:2 (1773-79), p. 24. Here we find Lars Nilsson, his wife Margta Ersdotter, and their four daughters. In addition, we find Lars's father, Nils Larsson, listed with his third wife, Karin Nilsdotter. Daughter Brita Larsdotter, born [6 November] 1775, was the mother of Daniel Carlsson. Her sister Anna Larsdotter, born 5 November 1777, was the mother of Margta Olsdotter, Daniel Carlsson's first wife. Thus, Daniel and his first wife Margta were first cousins.