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Wigelius: Where Did John Wilson Get That Name?

Bernice Wilson Munsey*

John Wilson was born 7 July 1827 in Jönköping *län*, Småland, Sweden, and come to America to become a “forty-niner” in the California Gold Rush.¹ My father told me his grandfather John Wilson’s last name had been Wigelius in Sweden and that he had been extremely poor there. Wigelius is an elegant name for such a person. Researching and documenting the mystery/history of my paternal line’s name has been a lengthy and challenging education in Swedish naming patterns, records and history.

John Wilson used the name Wigelius only twice during his fifty years in the United States—when he arrived at the port of New York on the *Zebra* 19 November 1850² and when he gave his eleventh child the middle name of Wigelius. The 1846 records of the parish of Jakob and Johannes in Stockholm document his first use of the name Wigelius at age nineteen by showing the addition of Wigelius to his patronymic Johannes Fredriksson.³

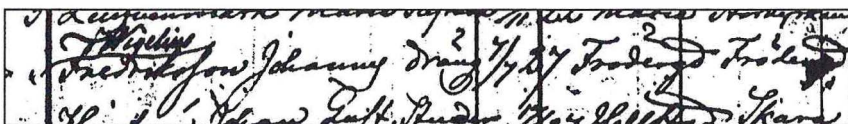


Fig. 1. Portion of moving in record (*inflyttningsslängd*) for Jakob Parish (Stockholm), July 1846. Transliteration and Translation: [No.] 4, *Wigelius/Fredriksson, Johannes, dräng* (farm hand), [born] 7/7 [18]27, [birthplace] *Fröderyd*, [came from] *Fröderyd*.

These same records indicate Fröderyd as the parish he left to move to Stockholm and the parish of his birth. (Other church records also reveal that his

* Bernice Wilson Munsey, Ed.D., resides at 3623 North 37th Street, Arlington, Virginia 22207-4821. She is a former member of the board of directors of the Swedish-American Historical Society, an alumna of the National Institute on Genealogical Research, a current volunteer genealogy course instructor, National Genealogical Society, and a licensed professional counselor who has a private educational counseling and testing practice. E-mail: <BAnnMunsey@aol.com>.

¹ See Bernice Wilson Munsey, “One Swede in the Rush to California’s Gold,” *Swedish American Genealogist* XIX (December 1999): 265-271.

² Passenger Arrival Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

³ Moving In Record (*Inflyttningsslängd*), Jakob and Johannes Parish, Stockholm, BI:4-5, July 1846.

first address in Stockholm was 51 Regeringsgatan. Though the building no longer stands, the location was just behind the current NK store and the Jakob church stands just across from the island of the king's palace and the old city, Gamla Stan).

Four years later, the Jakob and Johannes moving out records of 7 August 1850,⁴ the passport of 8 August 1850 to Göteborg, and the passport of 14 August 1850 from Göteborg⁵ document the twenty-three-year-old's emigration from Sweden to the United States. His written memoirs recall his 11 August departure from Stockholm. He may have traveled via the Göta Canal.

Fröderyd is located in the county (*län*) of Jönköping and the province (*landskap*) of Småland. Church records there document the 7 July 1827 birth of Johannes Fredriksson to Fredrik Nilsson and Lisa Catrina Abrahamsdotter in Hökhult Södergård.⁶ Fredric Nilsson of Myresjö and the widow Lisa Catrina Abrahamsdotter of Ryd at Fröderyd had married in Fröderyd 13 July 1821.⁷ Household examination rolls document the family's frequent moves within the parish. One finally records that the father had left soon after 1835 and had died in Stockholm 23 November 1840 and that the mother died 1 May 1841.⁸ Johannes Fredriksson was first abandoned by his father and then orphaned at the age of twelve.

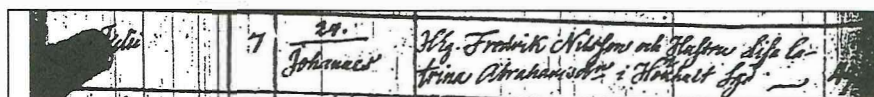


Fig. 2. Birth record from Fröderyd Parish (Smål.), 7 July 1827. Transliteration: [Födde] Julii 7, [Döpte Julii] 24, Johannes, HEG [Hemmansägare] Fredrik Nilsson och Hustru Lisa Catrina Abrahamsd[otte]r i Hökhult S[öder]g[år]d. Translation: [Born] July 7, [Baptized July] 24, Johannes, free farmer/farm owner Fredrik Nilsson and wife Lisa Catrina Abrahamsdotter from Hökhult Södergård.

Fredrik Nilsson, baptized Fredrik Johansson *Wigren*, was born 27 August 1793 at the soldier's house Gröpple, Bjädesjöholm, Myresjö, the son of Nils Johan Wigren and Maria Carlsdotter.⁹ The baptismal use of the father's middle

⁴ Moving Out Record (*Utflyttningslängd*), Jakob and Johannes Parish, Stockholm, BII:6-8, 7 Aug. 1850.

⁵ Nils William Olsson and Erik Wikén, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in the United States 1820-1850* (Stockholm, 1995), 456.

⁶ Birth and Christening Record (*Födelse- och Döplängd*), Fröderyd Parish (Smål.), C:3-5, 7 July 1827.

⁷ Marriage Record (*Vigsellängd*), Fröderyd Parish (Smål.), C:3-5, 13 July 1821.

⁸ Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörlängd*), Fröderyd Parish (Smål.), AI:10-12, 79.

⁹ Birth and Christening Record (*Födelse- och Döplängd*), Myresjö Parish (Smål.), C:1-6, 27 Aug. 1793.

name probably is an indication by which name the father was called. This was my first encounter with the Swedish custom/policy of renaming persons who became soldiers. Wigren would not be the surname of the soldier's father!

Hus- nr.	Namn	Födelse.			Flyttning.		
		Dag.	År.	Ort.	År.	Län.	År.
	Notterud. Bf.						
	Fredrik Nilsson	27	93	Myresjö ²	Död: 23	St[ock]holm	11/40
	Enk. [= Änka] (widow), H[ustru] (wife) Lisa Abrahamsd[otter]r,		78	Sandsjö ²	Död: 1/5		41
	S[on] Johannes	7	97	Här			41 86

Fig. 3. Household examination roll from Fröderyd Parish (Små.), 1840-1844. Transliteration and Translation: Line 1: *Notterud B[ack]st[uga]*; Line 2: *Fredrik Nilsson*, [Born] 27/8 [17]93, *Myresjö*; *Död* (Died) *St[ock]holm*, 23/11 [18]40; Line 3: *Enk.* [= *Änka*] (widow), *H[ustru]* (wife) *Lisa Abrahamsd[otter]r*, [Born] [17]78, *Sandsjö*; *Död* 1/5 [18]41; Line 4: *S[on] Johannes*, [Born] 7/7 [18]27 *Här* (here, i.e., in Fröderyd); [Moved in] [18]41 [to page] 86.

Before I was able to search Swedish records myself, I sought professional research assistance by writing to the Archives at Vadstena, where the records of Småland are kept. I was given the name of a woman who, for a reasonable fee, would do the research I requested. She sent her research finding on the parents and ancestry of Nils Wigren and her conclusion that there was no truth to the family story that our paternal family name is Wigelius. In 1985 I went to Sweden for the first time, participating in a genealogical trip sponsored by the Swedish-American Historical Society. At Vadstena, I located and had photocopied the original records cited by the Swedish genealogist in her research report. I found the parents of Nils Wigren to be incorrect, but I was not there long enough to do additional research. Per-Gösta Lindquist, a Swedish genealogist who was working with us throughout our trip, agreed to continue the research for the soldier Nils Wigren's ancestry.

Soon after my return home, Per-Gösta Lindquist's initial report arrived containing baptismal records of some of the soldier's children and two women name *Wigelia* who were witnesses. Witnesses are sometime relatives and usually live nearby. *Wigelia* is the Latin feminine form of the name *Wigelius*! A

search of parishes near Myresjö was undertaken and, in neighboring Näsby, the minister was Knut Wigelius. Näsby records revealed that the women were his daughters and that he had a son named Nicolaus Johannes Wigelius born 29 January 1756,¹⁰ the same day as Nils Wigren.

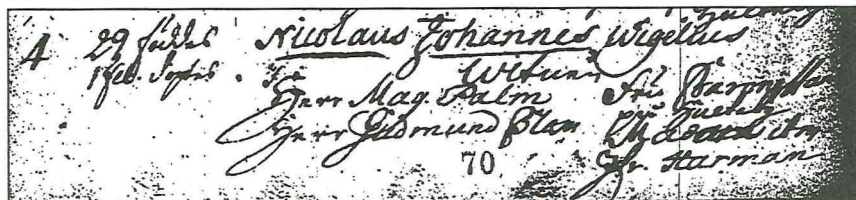


Fig. 4. Birth record from Näsby Parish (Smål.), 29 January 1756. Transliteration and Translation: [Child] 4; 29 [January] föddes (born); 1 feb. (February) döptes (baptized); Nicolaus Johannes Wigelius; Witnen (Witnesses): Herr (Mr.) Mag. Palm, Fru (Mrs.) Baronessan på (from) Hultaby, Herr (Mr.) Gudmund Blom(?), Madame ib[ide]m (from the same place), J[ung]fr[ua] (Miss) Harman.

Per-Gösta Lindquist advised me that the name Nicolaus Johannes Wigelius would have been considered inappropriate for a low-ranking soldier and that he may have begun to use the more common form of Nicolaus Johannes—Nils Johan. The mystery of the source of the name Wigelius was, most likely, solved. My subsequent research into the marvelously complete Swedish records resulted in documentation, thanks to the written statement by the minister at Myresjö (see figure 5) that the soldier Nils Johan Wigelius or Wigergren was the son of the assistant minister at Näsby!¹¹

Knut Wigelius and Margareta Catharina Harman were the parents of Nicolaus Johannes Wigelius, alias Nils Johan Wigren. The church books of Näsby gave me much information and, with the identification of a minister in my ancestry, my research expanded into an additional Swedish resource—the histories of the ministers (clergymen) serving within each diocese (*stift*) written in books known as *Herdaminnen* (The Shepherd Memorials). The account of Knut Wigelius provided me with information and with the test of a genealogist. No, no one was illegitimate; but in 1757 he had been tried in court, convicted, imprisoned and for two weeks provided only bread and water. After one year he was given his frock back, at which time he also resumed his duties at Näsby.¹²

¹⁰ Birth and Christening Record (*Födelse- och Döplängd*), Näsby Parish (Smål.), C:1-4, 29 Jan. 1756.

¹¹ Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), Myresjö Parish (Smål.), AI:1-4, 141.

¹² Gotthard Virdestam, *Växjö Stifts Herdaminne. VI, Västra och Östra Härad* (Växjö: Smålands-postens Boktryckeri AB, 1932), 360.

Additional research, now in Latin, located Canutus Vigelius at the University of Uppsala with his brother, Carolus Vigelius.¹³

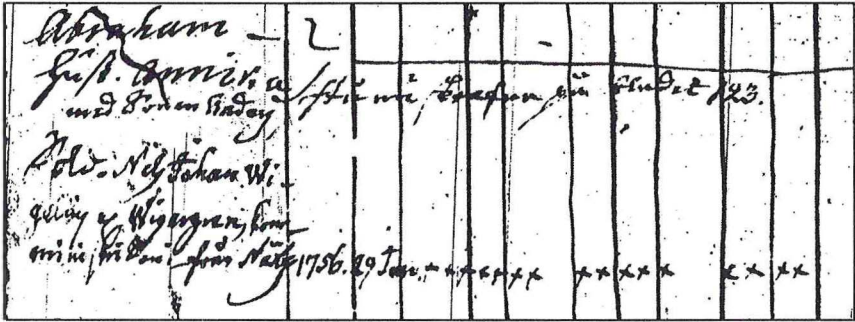


Fig. 5. Household examination roll from Myresjö Parish (Smål.), 1774-1778. Transliteration of bottom half: *Sold[at] Nils Johan Wigelius el[ler] Wigergren Comministri Son ifrån Näsby, 1756 29 Jan[uari]*. Translation: Soldier Nils Johan Wigelius or Wigergren, son of assistant minister at Näsby, [born] 1756, 29 January.

The book of ministers also provided the information that Knut Wigelius, born 15 October 1704 at Malmbäck, was the son of the parish minister, Nils Wigelius, and Helena Ternera. The Malmbäck church books were excellent and especially interesting, for they appear to be in Nils Wigelius's handwriting. This is certainly evident in his recording and underlining the birth of his first son, Knuth (see figure 6).¹⁴ The *Herdaminne* citation gave even more data. Nils Knutsson Wigelius was born 30 March 1663 in Villands härad in Skåne, son of farmer Knut Hansson and Botil Svensdotter.¹⁵ Villands härad is an area, not a parish. The authors of the *Herdaminne* apparently did not know the parish.

My research now moved on to Skåne, whose original records are held at the archives in Lund. History and additional records would become very important and interesting. Knut Hansson and Botil Svensdotter of Villands Härad were almost certainly born Danes. Just five years before their son Nils Knutsson was born, the 1658 Treaty of Roskilde transferred this land from Denmark to Sweden. Fighting in the area would continue for many more years. Knowing from the citation in the book of ministers that Nils Knutsson Wigelius had attended school in Kristianstad, when he was seven years old, and had later graduated from the University at Lund, I delved into *matrikel* (directory) records

¹³ *Uppsala Universitets Matrikel, II. 1700-1751* (Uppsala: Akademiska Boktryckeri AB, 1995), 187.

¹⁴ Birth and Christening Record (*Födelse- och Döplängd*), Malmbäck Parish (Smål.) B:1-4 (1689-1797), 15 October 1704.

¹⁵ Virdestam, *Växjö Stifts Herdaminne*. VI, 10.

for the University. Nils Knutsson had become Nicolaus Wigelius and was one of five “Scani” (individuals from Skåne) at the University 5 February 1683.¹⁶

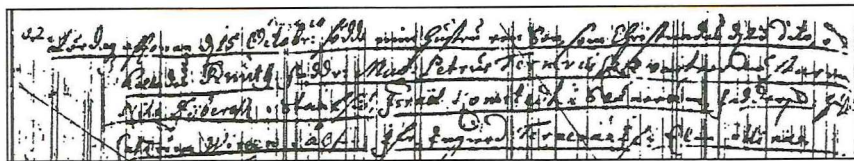


Fig. 6. Birth record from Malmbäck Parish (Smål.) noting the birth of Knut[h], son of the parish minister, Nils Wigelius, and Helena Ternera on 15 October 1704.

Continuing my search, I at last found the birth parish of Nils Knutsson, alias Nicolaus Canuti Wigelius. It was “Vigby in Villands härad.”¹⁷ Perhaps the name of his parish was the reason the young man took the similar sounding Wigelius as his name. Vigby/Viby still exists and is very near Kristianstad, where the boy Nils Knutsson attended school, but the parish name was changed in 1778 to Gustav Adolf.¹⁸ My search had been successful back to the earliest days of mandated written church records, but the original church records of Nils Knutsson’s birth and parents were not available.

Kristian IV, King of Denmark, had built a glorious church in Kristianstad and the city of Lund had belonged to the Danes for 600 years. The treaty of 1658, which formally established that Skåne no longer belonged to Denmark but to Sweden, did not end the fighting. Sweden even had to close its new University at Lund, opened in 1666 and closed in 1668, until shortly before Nils Knutsson Wigelius enrolled there in 1683 as the thirty-second student from Skåne.¹⁹ Later, he would be assigned to serve a parish in northern Småland, not in Skåne.

My search for more information about Knut Hansson and Botil Svendsdotter will continue despite the few original records that have survived and the fact that I was told at Lunds *landsarkiv* (provincial archives) that the castle near Viby was the focus of many skirmishes and that church books there were used to light guns! Family history research certainly is never dull. Note how my paternal surnames have changed over the generations because of patronymics, careers (church and military) and emigration to a new land and language:

¹⁶ P. Wilner, *Lunds Universitets Matrikel 1667-1732* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Weksell International, 1984), 29.

¹⁷ Carl Sjöström, *Skånska Nationen, fore Afdelningarnes Tid 1682-1832 biographiska och genealogiska anteckningar jemte historic* (Lund: Carl Sjöström, stadsfogde i Lund, 1897), 42.

¹⁸ Nils-Gustaf Rosenberg, *Gustav Adolfs Kyrka* (Kristianstads Boktryckeri AB, 1995), 3.

¹⁹ Sjöström, *Skånska Nationen*, 42.

Hans ---;
Knut *Hansson*;
Nils *Knutsson*, alias Nicolaus Canuti *Wigelius*;
Knut *Wigelius*;
Nicolaus Johannes *Wigelius*, alias Nils Johan *Wigren*;
Fredrik Johansson *Wigren*, alias Fredrik *Nilsson*;
Johannes *Fredriksson*, alias Johannes *Wigelius*, alias John *Wilson*;
Victor Emanuel *Wilson*
Allan Marshall *Wilson*
Bernice Ann *Wilson*

I have learned far more than just the family's name(s) while searching those centuries.

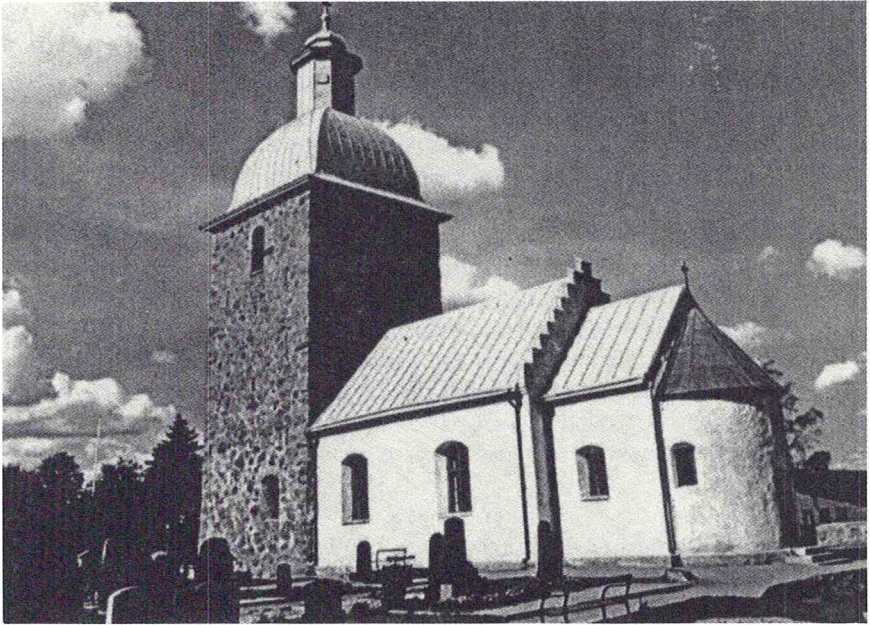


Fig. 7. Gustav Adolf's (formerly Viby) Kyrka in Kristianstad. The church was built in the 1100s; the tower was added in 1784.