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# Destination: La Brassa. A Research Anecdote from the SAG Workshop in Salt Lake City

Ronald J. Johnson\*

For some time I have sought to catalogue Swedish immigrants in Waseca County, Minnesota. The method of operation is straightforward: first, cull the local resources, including church records, naturalization records, census reports, county vital records, and newspaper notices and obituaries for persons described as born in Sweden. Then, trace as many of these Swedes as possible back to the Swedish parish records to verify their identities and their places of birth and/or emigration.

Among the American sources for identifying Swedes in Waseca County the records of the Swedish-American churches have been the most informative.<sup>1</sup> Because the early records of both the Lutheran and the (Mission) Covenant congregations were kept more (Lutheran) or less (Covenant) in the same fashion as the Swedish church books, the early records usually give the parish of birth, exact birth date, the parish of emigration, and a mostly unanglicized name for Swedish immigrants. To the extent that these records are accurate, it is then an easy matter to find the emigrating Swede in the parish birth (C-book), household examination (A-book), or moving out (B-book) records during the period of time for which these records have been microfilmed and made available through the LDS Family History Library system.

Since 1995, I have pursued this project during the annual weeklong *Swedish American Genealogist* Workshop in Salt Lake City. Each year at the Family History Library I have been working down a long list of inquiries, concentrating on a parish or two at a time. In 1999, my task-list brought me to Gränna Parish in Vista *härad* and Jönköping *län*. Most of the earliest settlers of the core Swedish settlement in Waseca County came from the parishes of Gränna, Ölmstad, and Skärstad in Vista *härad*, and they gave the name "Vista" to their rural community and its new Swedish Lutheran church in 1858.<sup>2</sup> The Vista area in Sweden continued to supply emigrants for a modest chain of emigration to its namesake in Minnesota for half a century. One of the links in this chain was my wife's great-grandfather, Carl Hokanson, whose origin was in Gränna.

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<sup>1</sup> Vista Evangelical Lutheran Church, founded 1858; Vista Evangelical Covenant Church, established 1876/1877, incorporated 1885; both in rural New Richland, MN; Waseca Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Waseca, MN, 1885-1923.

<sup>2</sup> All three parishes are located in the province (*landskap*) of Småland.

The records of the Vista Lutheran Church had told me that Carl Håkansson was born in Gränna on 2 January 1828, and that he and his wife, Sara Jönsdotter, and her son, Emil Carlsson, had been received at the Vista Lutheran Church from Rogberga Parish (Smål.) in 1869. Sara's sister, Johanna, and their mother, Cathrina Johansdotter, also entered the Vista Lutheran congregation from Rogberga in 1869. Another sister, Maja Stina, her husband Johannes Lundqvist, and their four children had already come into the congregation from Rogberga in 1868. Having previously confirmed these exits in the Rogberga *husförhörslängd* (AI:12), I now wished to document the family more completely, including whatever information could be found about the departure and emigrant journey of the five members who left in 1869. The moving out records (B:2) augmented the A book exit notation by recording the date that the emigrants received their moving out permits. On 28 June 1869, Carl Håkansson, his wife, and an unnamed male (her son, Emil) are recorded under certificate No. 50, while the widow Cathrina Johansdotter and the maid Johanna Jönsdotter, all from Häljaryd Uppegård, were issued Nos. 51 and 52 on the same day.

With the date of their parish exit certificates in hand, I next looked for the five emigrants from Rogberga in the port departure records which, for the main emigration port, Göteborg, begin in 1869. Thanks to my "next door neighbor" at the microfilm readers, Elisabeth Thorsell, I had at hand for the first time *Databasen Emigranten*, the CD-ROM database of such emigration records.<sup>3</sup> The database can be searched in various ways, and the combination of "Håkans[son], C, Rogberga, 1869" did indeed return a forty-year-old C. Håkanson from Rogberga leaving Göteborg on 2 July 1869. A further query on his contract number (2:19:850) showed that he was not traveling alone (see figure 1). But there were also a few surprises. One was that the party traveling under the same contract number consisted of three persons, not five—and the third person was not Sara's son, Emil, but her sister, Johanna. Where were Emil and his grandmother, Cathrina? The bigger surprise was the destination given for the party: *La Brassa*. I had expected that the destination would be New York or perhaps Boston, so where or what was La Brassa? Could this be an obscure French port somewhere, perhaps on a Caribbean island? I fantasized momentarily that perhaps Carl had said to Sara, "We're not likely to ever have another big trip like this, so let's ditch the kid and go to Club Med on the way to Minnesota!"

Given the anachronism of the sybaritic resort and the pietistic character of my wife's ancestors, I could not dwell long on that thought. Instead, I searched

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<sup>3</sup> *Databasen CD-Emigranten* lists about 1.3 million emigrants who departed from the ports of Göteborg 1869-1930, Malmö 1874-1930, Stockholm 1869-1930, Norrköping 1859-1919 and Kalmar 1880-1893; emigrants from the central parishes of Göteborg from the mid-1700s to 1930; and seamen who left their ships outside of Europe between 1812 and 1930. It also contains the catalogue of microfilmed Swedish-American church records. Issued in 1996 by Göteborgs-Emigranten (Box 53066, 400 14, Göteborg), the original CD is not currently available, pending revisions under development. See *Swedish American Genealogist*, XIX (March 1999): 56-57.

the CD for the destination "La Brassa" and found that out of 1.3 million emigrants in the database only five were headed for La Brassa when they left Sweden. The other two, listed as Karin Janson, age fifty-four, and son Emil, age nine, travelling under the next contract number, 2:19:851, from Göteborg on 2 July 1869, proved to be the missing grandmother and grandson from Häljaryd Uppegård in Rogberga.

*Databasen Emigranten: Query result for källkod (source code/contract No.) 2:19:850*

Efternamn	Förnamn	Ålder	Församling	Län	Utvrår	Destination
HÅKANSON	C	40	ROGBERGA	F	1869	LA BRASSA
	SARA	34	ROGBERGA	F	1869	LA BRASSA
JONSON	JOHANNA	20	ROGBERGA	F	1869	LA BRASSA

**Fig. 1.** Printout from the CD-ROM *Databasen Emigranten* based on a search for the contract number 2:19:850. Note the puzzling (and incorrect) destination "La Brassa" listed in this index. The letter "F" listed under the column heading "Län" is an abbreviation for Jönköping County.

Thus, the members of a single family departing Sweden on one day, 2 July 1869, were the only Swedish emigrants ever bound for the puzzling destination of La Brassa. The singularity of the destination now made it seem likely that La Brassa was some kind of error in the records rather than an alluring foreign port. It was time to move from the indexed emigrants in the CD database to the microfilm of the original police records of emigrant departures from Göteborg.<sup>4</sup> Here was the original listing of the five family members under their two contract numbers for their departure on the vessel *Nero* to Hull in England on 2 July 1869 (see figure 2). For their destination stood the single entry of "La Brassa" followed by four ditto marks. But, was that indeed a "B" or was it another letter? Was it perhaps "C"? Light-bulb!—the mystery destination was "La Crosse," which had been misread as "La Brassa" when the record was indexed. When they were leaving Sweden, the emigrants apparently had through tickets on the railroad as far as La Crosse, Wisconsin, on the other side of the Mississippi

<sup>4</sup> *Göteborgs poliskammare inkomna uppgifter om utvandrare personer, 1869 1/7 - 24/12.*

River from their ultimate destination with their kinsmen in southeastern Minnesota. From La Crosse, the passengers could continue on the Winona & St. Peter Railroad to the new village of Waseca.<sup>5</sup>

Contract No.	Name	Origin	Destination
850	Håkanson	Ynglings Län	La Crosse
	Matt Larv	Björby Län	
	Andersson		13
851	Håkanson		13
	Carl Larv		13
852	Christina Persdotter	Själling Län	Chicago
	Anna Persdotter	Björby Län	Chicago
	Matt Larv		13

1869  
A. Eriksson

Fig. 2. Photocopy of the original Göteborg police record of emigrants aboard the *Nero* bound for Hull, England on 2 July 1869. Note that the destination for the five individuals listed under contract numbers 850 and 851 is correctly read as “La Crosse,” not “La Brassa”!

The mystery was solved, and I was ready to leave Salt Lake City, because I realized the physical proof of this itinerary was in my own house in Madison, Wisconsin. When my wife’s mother moved a few years ago, we had rescued a plain, unpainted, but paint-splattered wooden trunk (see figure 3) from storage in the house on the farm where the Hokanson family had lived since the emigrant generation. Carved into the lid of that trunk was an inscription, I knew, but I did not remember it exactly. Upon my return home, I found it to read: “C Håkanson Ckago, Lakross, Wainona Waceka Wilton Nort Amirka.” One hundred thirty years later, Carl Håkansson’s emigrant trunk still had its built-in baggage routing: Chicago, La Crosse, Winona, Waseca, Wilton,<sup>6</sup> North America.

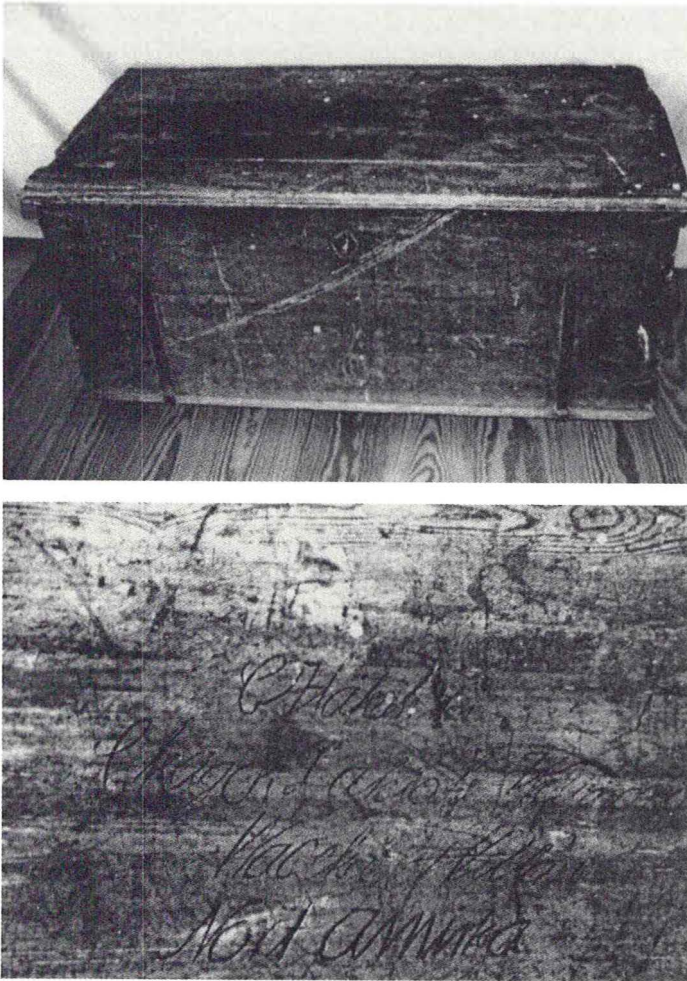
<sup>5</sup> The railroad had been built to Waseca and passenger service was extended there from the east on 2 September 1867. - *Wilton Weekly News*, 5 September 1867.

<sup>6</sup> The last leg of the journey would have taken place by stagecoach from Waseca to Wilton, the village closest to the Swedish settlement in Otisco Township. After the railroad reached Waseca, a stage line ran from Waseca to Wilton, which was the county seat at that time. - *Wilton Weekly News*, 5 September 1867.



Later querying of the *Databasen Emigranten* also fortified that “La Brassa” was a transcription error for La Crosse, Wisconsin, as two departures are recorded for the destination of “La Brosse,” and one for “La Brosse WI.”

All in all, the solving of this little puzzle about “La Brassa” serves to demonstrate both the usefulness of the *Databasen Emigranten* and the error potential in relying upon such database compilations, indexes, and other secondary sources. It is best to check the original record.



**Fig. 3.** Carl Håkansson’s emigrant trunk. The inscription carved into the lid reads “C Håkanson Ckago, Lakross, Wainona Waceka Wilton Nort Amirka.”