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Nils William Olson

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# Swedish Land Survey Maps

Nils William Olsson

One of the most important tools in genealogical research is the possession of a detailed map of the area where one's ancestor once settled and lived. Every genealogist with forebears, who owned land, appreciates the value of the county plat books, which indicate where the ancestor's property was located and which neighbors surrounded the farm.

Searchers who look to Sweden for their ancestral roots have been aware of the presence of the Swedish General Staff maps (*Generalstabens kartor*), which by means of a scale of 1:50,000 can supply many details of land areas in southern and central Sweden. For northern Sweden, where distances are vast and areas sparsely populated, these detailed maps have a scale of 1:100,000.

Good as these General Staff maps are, though, they depict Swedish topography as it existed at the end of the last century and at the beginning of the 1900s. For earlier information, not found in these maps, we are referred to the archives of the Swedish State Office of Land Surveying (*Lantmäteriverket*), located in Gävle. This institution with its treasury of more than 200,000 maps, some of them dating back to the 17th century, have only lately come into focus and represent another avenue by which persons seeking their Swedish roots can add flesh to dry genealogical bones.

But first a word about this venerable institution and its history, which goes back more than 360 years. Sweden engaged officials since the Middle Ages for the purpose of drawing up measurements of farms and other kinds of real estate, not only for tax purposes, but also to prevent litigation over the transfer of property after a death or when the land was bartered or sold. Land surveys were however quite primitive and it was not until the beginning of the 17th century, during the reign of Charles IX, that a brilliant cartographer by the name of Anders Bure (1571-1646), was given the task in 1603 of mapping the entire country of Sweden, which at that time also included Finland. After much preparation and a great deal of research, Bure was able to publish the northern parts of Sweden and Finland in 1611 with the title—*Lapponiae, Bothniae, Cajaniaeque regni Sueciae provinciarum septentrionalium nova delineatio*. This is the first real map of Sweden in that it was based upon a number of precise measurements. The map exists today in only two copies and was considered at the time as being a tremendous leap forward in the science of Swedish cartography and aptly created for Bure the title of "the father of Swedish cartography." In 1626 Bure had completed his work for the entire country

of Sweden with the title *Orbis Arctoi nova et accurata delineatio*. It not only depicted Sweden and Finland, but also Norway, parts of Denmark and areas of Germany and Russia. This map was amazingly accurate and was used as a model for later maps published in Scandinavia.

Gustavus Adolphus, at this time king of Sweden, was so pleased with the work of Anders Bure, that he decided to go one step farther by naming Bure “Mathematician General” of Sweden with the royal commission to organize a national surveying effort of the entire country. The royal instruction, dated 4 April 1628, paved the way for the establishment of what later was to be known as the Swedish State Office of Land Surveying. Bure was to travel widely in Sweden, surveying and mapping, not only the country from a topographical point of view, but also to survey all villages and the land property of the villagers, farms, town and cities as well as areas which would be suitable for military fortifications as well as aid in the setting up of better communications. Special emphasis was also to be given to those areas in Sweden where mining was important.

Bure was given the responsibility of employing surveyors, and if there were not enough of these, he was “to employ young men, the children of honest people,” whom he was to instruct in the art of surveying.

Already by 1630, barely two years after the royal instruction, Bure was able to deliver to the royal authorities his first survey maps, representing various parts of Sweden. Work progressed at a rapid rate, thanks mostly to the energy and enthusiasm of Anders Bure. When he died, however, in 1646, and no successor having been appointed to succeed him, the work of this new governmental entity stagnated and even retrogressed. The new king of Sweden, Charles XI, a pragmatist and a utilitarian, infused new life into the institution as well as more money. The king was anxious that the surveyors should “display more energy, neatness and exactness in measuring and the executing the maps.” In 1683 the king succeeded in appointing a worthy successor to Bure by the name of Carl Gripenhielm (1655-1694), who actually became the first appointed director of the State Office of Land Surveying. While Bure had pioneered the work under a title given him personally by Gustavus Adolphus, Gripenhielm was the institution’s first appointed director. Gripenhielm succeeded in bringing into the office a number of well educated surveyors. He also organized courses for training future land surveyors. The Gripenhielm survey maps, the results of his organization, enthusiasm and energy, are well-known to this day for beauty, exactness and excellent visual content.

When Gripenhielm entered upon his duties as director he had a staff of 23 state surveyors, one for each *län*, except Blekinge. Soon it was apparent that the tasks of surveying land and drawing maps were becoming too much for one chief surveyor in each county, and by 1684 he was ordered to hire assistant surveyors to lighten the work load. As time went on, more and more maps were executed for every conceivable area of Sweden. Each county surveyor’s office became the

depository for the maps of that district, with copies forwarded to the State Office in Stockholm.

Thus for more than three centuries Sweden has been mapped and remapped, each time to meet a new challenge. This was the case during the land reform of the 19th century, at a time when most farms in Sweden consisted of a number of small plots strewn in every direction like a crazy quilt. The old system had forced farmers to sow and harvest at the same time. Thanks to the land reform, the small plots were combined into larger units, thus making the farmer independent in tending his land.

A few years ago this ancient institution with its superb collection of hundreds of thousands of maps was transferred from Stockholm to the port city of Gävle, located on the Baltic, about two hours by rail or motor road north of Stockholm. Here century-old maps are now being cleaned and stored in large leather portfolios, ready for the use by researchers and scholars. In fact one of the frequent users of the archives is a Swedish professor, Dr. Ulf Sporrang, who heads a committee, which at the present time is hard at work on a national atlas for Sweden. Not only is this collection of maps one of the largest in the world, but from the aspect of Swedish history it can trace Sweden's development as a state over a period of a third of a millennium.

In addition to the more than 200,000 maps housed in the Gävle archives, dating mainly from the 17th and 18th centuries, there are more than a million maps reposing in the county surveyors' offices throughout Sweden. These maps, however, are mostly from the 19th century.

In addition to the large collection of maps of farms, villages, towns and cities, the Gävle archives also contains an interesting group of maps from the last century covering ca. 270 Swedish parishes. This series of maps carry descriptive analyses of each parish, in addition to the statistical material, concentrating on such observations as the character of the people living in the parish, their mode of dress, the manner in which they lived, their customs, etc. Also the instructions asked for details concerning antiquarian sites, such as ruins of any kind, remnants of old farms, castles, fortifications and defense structures. Finally, the surveyors mapping these parishes were also requested to furnish information on famous people who had resided in the parish as well as incidents of historical value.

Remains the question—how can an institution like the Swedish State Office of Land Surveying help the average American genealogist in finding his or her ancestral farm in Sweden? This question can best be answered by the information provided by the Gävle archives, which stands ready to help anyone searching for a particular map. But the inquirer must know the precise village and farm and the parish from which the ancestor came. Once these facts have been established, it is quite easy to consult the parish map and thus pinpoint the farm, the croft or the cottage where he lived or was born.

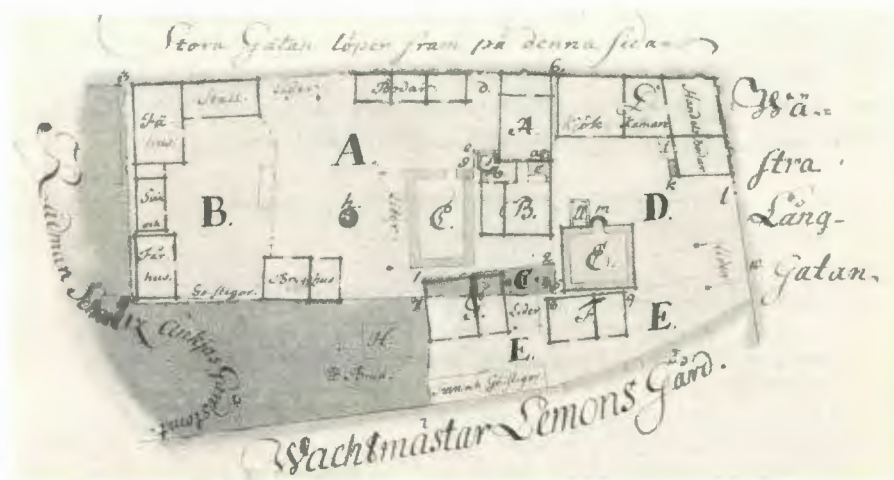
Obviously the archives works best for those searchers with a rural past in Sweden. If one's antecedent came from a city or town, ' where he did not possess

real property, it would be quite difficult to pursue the chase. But even in such cases all hope is not gone. If one's ancestor owned property in a town, or rented property for the purpose of engaging in a trade such as tailor, shoemaker, saddler, tanner, etc., it is possible to consult the town map for clues. In the illustration below, it can be seen that in a survey map of the city of Köping in central Sweden, drawn up in 1752, much detailed information is revealed as to the placement of dwellings, barns and cattle sheds on property named for a watchman by the name of Lemon. Here we meet such names as Carlman, Brunström and Holmberg. By also consulting the household examination rolls for Köping for the 1750s it would be possible to see who these individuals were and in which relationship they were to each other.

The Swedish State Office of Land Surveying is thus ready to assist American searchers in their quests. The institution may be reached by writing to Lantmäteriverket, 801 12 Gävle. Office hours are between 8:45 a.m. and 2:45 p.m., Mondays through Fridays. The archives can also be reached by telephone—011 + 46 + 26 15 30 00.

The expert in the archives on antiquarian maps is Alfred Örbäck, himself a surveyor, who resides in Västerås. His telephone number is 011 + 46 + 21 19 52 18.

A piece of good news for the student of Swedish genealogy is the fact that all of the old survey maps are now in the process of being microfilmed, a gigantic project, expected to take ten to twelve years, or to the end of this century. This project is badly needed since more and more genealogists are discovering the rich source materials available in Gävle and the district offices of land surveying in the various Swedish counties.



Detail of Survey Map from Köping in the 1750s