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# Gustaf Bergström Impulsive Emigrant

Ted Rosvall\*

Gustaf Bergström was born on the Nolgården farm in Slöta Parish near Falköping 28 Aug. 1828, the younger surviving son of Petter Bergström (1789-1841), a farmer, and his wife Johanna Sandgren (1791-1861). His paternal grandfather was Johannes Bergström (1762-1816), who had been a master builder of churches and also a member of the Swedish *Riksdag*, representing one of the four estates - the farmers. His maternal grandfather was Isac Sandgren (1751-1820), a farmer and a glazier, residing at Enåsen in Falekvarna, also in Slöta.

Gustaf Bergström learned to be a tanner and as a young man he traveled widely in Sweden, first as an apprentice, and later as a journeyman. In 1849 we find him in the coastal city of Sundsvall in the northern part of Sweden but the same year he moved south to the small town of Hjo, on the western shore of Lake Vättern. The following year he moved to the parish of Kyrkefalla, where he leased a small tannery named Katrineberg. In the household examination rolls of the parish beginning in 1852 there is no mention of him, neither is he listed in the exit lists of Kyrkefalla nor the emigration lists in Göteborg.

There is, however, one source of information concerning the missing Bergström, namely in the person of Bror Johan Sandgren (1829-1917). He was a first cousin of Gustaf Bergström and had led a very eventful life. He had emigrated twice to the United States, first in 1848 and then in 1852, working as a machinist or engineer aboard various ships going to South America and Newfoundland. Later, having returned to Sweden, he had spent 25 years in Russia, where he had operated a number of boats and barges on the Volga River. He ran a wharf for repairs and was awarded a medal by the Russian Czar for his work. He wrote an account of his adventures up until 1862, creating thereby a manuscript consisting of no less than 113 large-size pages. It is a vivid and fascinating account of his travels and of his early life in general.

In 1852 he and his older brother, Thure Emanuel Sandgren (1817-1876), who had emigrated to the U.S. already two times, decided to return to the U.S. and it is in Bror Johan Sandgren's account that we find the following information concerning Gustaf Bergström, and here I will quote from the manuscript itself:

"As we were just about ready to take off, we had a visit from our cousin Bergström. He had been struck by such a violent fit of 'America fever' that we

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could in no way dissuade him. He insisted in accompanying us, that was all there was to it. The awkward thing about it was that he had recently become engaged and had established a tannery of his own, since he was a tanner. As was typical, he also lacked the necessary travel funds, and if he was to accompany us, he had to procure the necessary funding immediately. He returned home, pried loose a quantity of leather he had stored in his tannery, which he then pawned for the sum of 300 kronor. On the following day he reappeared, after having told his mother to proceed to make a brilliant affair with the leather.

We were now ready to travel, first of all to Göteborg, where we hoped to find passage on whatever vessel that was available. But now a barrier to our departure developed - Bergström did not possess a passport. Upon our arrival in Göteborg we found that a large American vessel was about to depart for Boston within a couple of days. There was also a possibility to travel to Hull, England aboard a steamship. We therefore decided that Bergström and I would travel to Hull, whereas Thure was to board the American ship. In order to help Bergström, Thure bought two tickets to Hull - one for me and the other for Bergström. We now departed aboard the steamship, while Thure remained behind. A half hour after the steamer had left port, Thure proceeded in great haste to the ticket office, saying dejectedly that he had missed the boat. He had arrived too late and now there remained nothing else for him to do but to board the American vessel. His passport and other things were in my possession, and of course I felt sorry that he was not on board the steamship. At the office the officials could only express their disappointment and felt sorry for Thure, who thus had missed his traveling companions through no fault of his. A new ticket was then purchased for passage on the American vessel, without any opposition from the authorities."

After this little trick, whereby it was possible for Gustaf Bergström to leave Sweden, using his cousin's identity papers, he and Johan Sandgren soon arrived in Hull, where they took a train to Liverpool.. Here they bought two second class tickets for travel aboard the *Princeton*. Here is an amusing passage from Johan Sandgren's memoirs which tells about the journey to the new land.

"In the vessel's second class were a great many wealthy farmers, who were leaving for America in order to buy land and settle there. Among the passengers were also a few rather attractive girls, whom I enjoyed conversing with a great deal during the journey. Their nationality was Scottish but the majority on board were English and Irish. Thus Bergström and I were the only Swedes on board. Since the remainder of the passengers in second class never had been to sea before, they were all seasick the first week and thus we had scarcely a glimpse of them. But since I was an experienced seafarer, I was always ready to give a helping hand to those who needed it, since any service from the vessel's staff was out of the question.

There were namely two young girls on board the ship aged about 18-19, who occupied the berth next to me. They were so weak from seasickness as



well as from fear, that I felt sorry for them and attempted to cheer them up and help them. I thus volunteered to wait on them, if they so desired. They accepted my services and I remained with them the remainder of the journey, and became their darlings, as they expressed it. One of the girls was named Anny-Jane, the other was Caroline, but I have to admit that in my opinion Anny-Jane was the most pleasant of the two. I had a lot of fun with my traveling companion Bergström, telling him that Caroline was hopelessly in love with him. Since he did not understand a single English word, he became quite unhappy. He insisted that I should help him, but I turned everything around so that everything ended in laughter and mirth for the girls and for Bergström a great deal of chagrin ”.

The *Princeton* arrived in New York 25 Sept. 1852. The passenger manifest has been preserved and it shows that John Sandgren and Gustavus Bergstrom are listed together as numbers 441 and 442. Unfortunately it has been impossible to identify Anny-Jane and Caroline. Later on in his memoirs Johan Sandgren (who happens to be my great grandfather) tells how he four years later went to see Anny-Jane, who then was working in Elyria, OH, and how he also met her parents, who resided in the countryside not far from Elyria. The meeting did not work out too successfully, and thus they never married. As a curiosity, we note that Johan Sandgren, fifteen years later, living in the center of Russia, named his third daughter Annie-Jane Sandgren (1871-1888), a name appearing also in later generations.

Having arrived in New York, the cousins Johan Sandgren and Gustaf Bergström proceeded immediately to Philadelphia, where Johan had lived and worked earlier. His old landlady, Mrs. Brandt, welcomed him back and was willing to accept Gustaf Bergström as her boarder as well. Johan was to get his old job back as a machinist, and he was also able to procure a job as a tanner for his cousin. Evidently Gustaf Bergström lived on in Philadelphia for the next few years. Johan Sandgren traveled on and in 1857 we find him in Boston, where he had a job as a machinist or engineer aboard a tugboat named *Huron*. In 1858 his brother Thure arrived in Boston from California on his way to Sweden, in order to visit him, and in 1859 Thure suggested in a letter to Johan that he should take a vacation and come to Sweden and visit the family. Johan agreed, took a leave of absence from his position and arranged for his cousin, Gustaf to come to Boston in order to substitute for him. Since Johan never returned to America, it is possible that Gustaf continued to work as an engineer aboard the *Huron* or some other vessel.

This is the last clue we have regarding Gustaf. Family tradition, probably emanating from old letters now destroyed or lost, tells us that Gustaf Bergström married a Catholic girl, (could it have been Caroline?) and that he died in an accident on Cuba in the 1870s. Whether he was actually residing in Cuba, or was working on a ship which then lay in a harbor in Cuba, is not known.

Any information concerning Gustaf Bergström, his wife and family, would be very much appreciated. Incidentally - whatever became of Anny-Jane?