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The Nyberg File: A Double Serendipity

Ted Rosvall*

A genuine knowledge of sources and research methods—that is, experience—typically paves the way to success in genealogical research. At times, successful genealogists also need to be thorough, persistent, imaginative, intuitive, and clever. Certain obstacles, however, are only overcome with the added power of a factor “x”, often referred to as “dumb luck.”

Genealogists sometimes feel that they have been guided to *the* correct sources; that their feet have been mysteriously drawn to a shelf where *the* book is waiting; or that their eyes have accidentally fallen on one of a hundred obscure lines where *the* crucial piece of information happens to be hiding. Somehow these fortunate findings occur too often for the mental well-being of statisticians. There is a word for it—serendipity. The “Nyberg file” will provide at least two examples of this mysterious phenomenon.

Petersson - La Marque - Nyberg

Let us open the file with Carl Gustaf Petersson La Marque Nyberg, a hammer-smith at the Motala Plant (*Verkstad*) in Östergötland. For starters, the three surnames look peculiar. Having two surnames, one patronymic and one real surname, is not unusual in 19th century Sweden, but having three is very odd indeed. Carl Gustaf was born 20 April 1825 in Ekebyborna Parish (Ög.), just east of Motala, the fourth child of the grenadier with the Life Regiment (*Livgrenadjär*) Peter La Marque (1797-1861) and his wife Johanna Andersdotter Almquist (1797-1852). The father was originally “Peter Jönsson,” but was given the soldier’s name “La Marque” upon mustering. The name sounds very French, and it was probably given in honor of the great French scientist and biologist Jean Baptiste de Lamarck (1744-1829).

In 1849 Carl Gustaf found employment at the Motala Plant as a blacksmith and later as a hammersmith. In 1854 he married Carolina Wilhelmina Josephina de Falck (1831-1904), who belonged to a military family with noble connections.¹

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¹ See L. M. V. Örnberg, *Svensk släktkalender and Svenska ättartal, vols. I-XIV* (Stockholm and Vadstena, 1885-1908), vol. IX, 125.

Carolina's father was a butcher in Motala. Shortly after the marriage, Carl Gustaf and his family changed their surname from La Marque to Nyberg. The reason for this change is unknown to the descendants. Perhaps they felt that the name La Marque was too foreign sounding; and, since it was a soldier's name, it was not necessary to keep it. In the following ten years, Carolina gave birth to six children, two of whom died in infancy. The surviving children, all born in Motala, were Carl Fredrik Reinhold Nyberg, born 4 October 1855; Henning Walfrid Nyberg, born 16 September 1857; Amanda Alexandra Nyberg, born 10 January 1863; and Julia Theresia Nyberg, born 10 April 1865.



The Nyberg Family in Motala ca. 1867

Before Julia was born in 1865, catastrophe hit the family. Carl Gustaf Nyberg was fired. A draft to a certificate found in the archives of the Motala Plant sheds light on this turn of events.² It reads as follows: "Carl Gustaf Pettersson La

² The archives of Motala *Verkstad* are located at the Vadstena Provincial Archive.

Marque, also known as Nyberg, has worked here as a hammersmith and blacksmith from 1 November 1849 until now, with a wage of 3 *Riksdaler* 48 *öre* per twelve-hour working day. He is honest, willing and rather skillful at his work, but not always sober and alert, which is why he is now dismissed.”

This was in December of 1864. Unemployed and perhaps with a reputation for drunkenness, Carl Gustaf Nyberg’s chances of finding a new job in the Motala area were thin. He decided to try his luck in a new country, something that no one else in his family had ever tried before him. Early in 1865 he left Motala, heading for the United States of America. He was never to return again, nor was he ever to see his youngest daughter, Julia, who was born a few months later.

I know very little about Carl Gustaf Nyberg’s life in America. I have no idea where in the U.S. he settled, although one granddaughter thought that it was “somewhere in the Midwest.” I do not know what surname he used. Nyberg would, of course, be a good guess; but, in the very last Household Examination Role (*Husförhörslängd*) of Motala where he is mentioned, is found the following remark in the margin: “calls himself Peterson.” His arrival date and place in the U.S. have not been determined, nor has he been located in any federal census (1860, 1870 or 1880). Surprisingly, I do know that he died on 30 July 1882. This date is shown in the Household Examination Role as the day when his wife, Carolina, became a widow. Apparently, someone had written to Carolina to inform her of her husband’s death. Carolina must have then shown this letter to the minister or to the parish clerk, who entered the date in the church records.

According to family tradition, Carl Gustaf wanted his family to join him in America. He even wanted to send money for their tickets, but Carolina declined and remained in Motala. From her father, she had learned the trade of a butcher, and she eventually took over his butcher shop in Motala. It would be foolish not to consider this as a resourceful and determined way of supporting herself and her children, after her husband had left. The information that their grandmother was a butcher was, however, kept from the Stockholm grandchildren, one of whom was my grandmother. It was still unwelcome information, when I revealed the shocking news to her and to her siblings in the 1970s.

The four children grew up together in Motala. The boys, Carl and Henning, both became sailors and left home at an early age. They would suddenly show up, either in Motala or in Stockholm, where their sister Amanda was living, only to disappear again for years and years. Carl moved to Stavanger on the west coast of Norway in 1881, from whence he mustered on and off steamers, working as a ship mechanic. In 1904, when his mother Carolina died in Motala, neither he nor his younger brother had been heard from for more than a decade. Henning eventually returned to Motala, after a life at sea, and died there in 1943.

Amanda Alexandra Nyberg (1863-1935), who was always the lady of the family (her younger sister, Julia, being the tomboy), was married in 1882 to the sea captain Johan Fredrik Werner (1858-1923) from Linköping and moved with him to Stockholm in 1887. In spite of poor health, Amanda gave birth to fourteen children, six of whom died in infancy. Amanda and Johan lived on the island of Djurgården, right next to the museum "Skansen," and Johan worked as Supervisor of the Traffic on the Stockholm Stream and was in charge of the ferries that connect the various islands and parts of Stockholm.



Henning Nyberg, the sailor (1857-1943)

Julia Theresia Nyberg (born 1865) lived with her mother in Motala until 1889, when she was married the merchant clerk Johannes Svensson (1862-1892) from Moheda (Kron.). She had already been engaged to him for a long time, and together they had a daughter, Linnéa, born in Motala in 1886. Immediately after the wedding, the Svensson family immigrated to the U.S. and settled in New York City. Four-year-old Linnéa died there the following year. A son, Arthur, was subsequently born in New York in October of 1890. In 1892 Johannes Svensson took ill and died, and Julia had to send her son home to her mother in Motala, Sweden, while she herself tried to make a living in the big city. Young Arthur lived with his grandmother for several years, before joining his mother again after her re-marriage. I became aware of this second marriage thanks to the estate



The Werner Family at Djurgården, Stockholm ca. 1910



The Flodin Family in New York in 1902

inventory (*bouppteckning*) that was made after Carolina's death in 1904. Listed among her survivors were the daughter, Amanda, in Stockholm, the two sailor sons residing at unknown places, and "Mrs. Julia Flodin, married to Carl Flodin, in New York."

New York, 1972

Let us now move up to more recent times. In 1972, at the tender age of twenty, I was on my first trip to the U.S. The first week was spent in the New York area, and I was staying with an elderly couple on Long Island. One day I decided to go to the Public Library on 42nd Street in Manhattan. In the genealogy section, I found a number of books listing New York City births, marriages and deaths. Trying to find something on my missing Aunt Julia, I decided to check if there were any Flodin children listed as having been born after 1895.

In the 1902 volume, I made a major discovery. An Ebba Theresa Flodin was listed as having been born in New York City on 13 May 1902. This was very interesting indeed, since Julia's middle name was Theresia, and chances were that this could be a daughter. Unfortunately the parents' names were not shown in this index. Nonetheless, it was still a clue from which to work. Happy with this finding, I returned to Long Island and was met by my landlady who said, "Oh Ted, there was a phone call for you today." "Oh yes? Who?", I asked. She replied, "Well, her name was Ebba Theresa Flodin."

As genealogists, we all have our moments of utter surprise, amazement and disbelief; moments when the floor starts swaying and breathing gets difficult. This was one such moment. There was, however, a logical explanation.

Thanks to the article in Örnberg's *Ättartal IX* on the de Falck family, I had earlier discovered another branch of my family—the Falks of Moline, IL. A visit to Moline and Mrs. Effie Bergren, a great-niece to Carolina Nyberg, was on my itinerary, and I had given Mrs. Bergren my New York telephone number, in case she wanted to get in touch with me. Having received that note, it suddenly struck Mrs. Bergren that her second cousin Ebba in New York, with whom she had always been in touch, ought to be even more closely related to me than she herself was. And so she contacted Ebba, who was thrilled beyond words to hear from anyone from Sweden. The next day I met my grandmother's first cousin, Ebba, and her husband, Thomas D. Mould, who were then living in Pine Bush, NY. Ebba was able to fill in the missing information about Julia's second marriage, children, and descendants, and she also had a lovely picture of the Flodin family taken in New York in 1902. Unfortunately, that picture was about all that had been saved of old pictures and letters. Ebba had recollections of other pictures and documents, all sadly lost over the years.

I learned that Julia's second husband was actually from the little town of Hjo (Skar.) on the other side of Lake Vättern from Motala, and that he was twenty years older than she. His real name was Kraft, his father being a soldier, but Carl had changed his surname to Flodin. In 1974 Ebba and Tom Mould came to Sweden to visit the places where her mother was born and raised and to meet her remaining first cousins in Sweden. They also spent a few days with me.

In 1990 I had a surprise phone call from Ebba's son, Gordon T. Mould, of Point Pleasant, NJ. He and his wife, Barbara, had suddenly decided to spend a week in Sweden and wondered if they could stop by. Certainly! When the Moulds arrived, they had brought along beautiful presents for my wife and children and a shabby old envelope for me. What a treasure that envelope contained! Gordon had found the old pictures and letters that his mother had lost. There were wonderful letters—from Carolina to her daughter Julia and from Amanda and Henning to their sister Julia—that gave new insights into the lives and characters of my great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother. Not a single line written by these two had survived the notorious burning mania that sets in after someone has died in Sweden; but, in America, the letters had been kept.

There was also a letter from Carl Nyberg, the missing sailor brother; a single letter, the first and last, written in July of 1893 on a ship called the SS *Bonavista*, going from St. John's, Newfoundland, to New York City. In this letter, Carl (or Charles as he now called himself) tells of his life and work, and he also mentions his fiancé in Stavanger, Norway, who had gotten tired of waiting for him and had married someone else. Julia had told her daughter, Ebba, that sometime in the 1890s, she got on board a streetcar in New York, noticed a gang of semi-sober sailors in the back, and thought one of them looked like her brother Carl. Julia was not quite sure, and it was not proper for a lady to approach a bunch of sailors on a streetcar and speak to them. For the rest of her life, she regretted that she did not have the courage to find out if it was her brother or not. It could have been.

Ottawa, 1997

In May of 1997 I was again in the U.S., and this time a short visit to Ottawa, Canada, was included in the tour. If there is an archives or a library in a new city, that is where a genealogist will eventually end up. So one day I decided to visit the Canadian National Archives and Library. In the archives section, I was able to identify and order the actual crew lists for SS *Bonavista*, which was owned by Kingmans in Montreal. Great-uncle Charles Nyberg is listed therein as a "steamers fireman" for the years 1892 and 1893, after which there is no further trace of him.

A stroll through the library section of the building revealed a rather splendid collection of old and new city directories for all major Canadian cities, some of

them going back to the 1870s and 1880s. I searched for Charles Nyberg in St. John's and various other Newfoundland cities, but to no avail. I also tried Montreal, the location of the head office of his employer. A few other cities in the maritime provinces were also picked, including Halifax, Nova Scotia. In the Halifax City Directory for 1911, I found myself staring at the following entry: Nyberg, Charles; seaman; 81 Duke Street.

Min Adress
Mr Charles Nyberg
S. L. Bondavista
40 Kingman Broude,
Costume House Ltd
Montreal
Canada

Jag vill skrifa till
Sverige mamma skref och
satt om mycket nyheter
ibland annat att Mackinacs
Falk var död men det
skeser mig litet för den
har aldrig varit i mitt
fycke enny om den du
skref till mig om den
och att det var från mig

Levy St Johns den 23/7/93

Älskade syster Julia
jag vill skrifa dig några
fag lever väl och har hälsa
och jag önskar dig det samma
goda orsaken att jag inte
har skrifvet förut is jag
fick svårken ditt eller mam-
mas bref fören den 18 july
och jag er nu i det samma hemmet
som jag var förriga året
Min jag var ut af dit för
tre månader jag var då i en
båt som gick emellan stoffens
an New York, nemligen ss Boston
vi brukade ligga i Brooklyn
i Robertson shores Men den

Portion of Carl Nyberg's letter to his sister Julia

The old feeling from New York in 1972 returned. This was too good to be true. A nervous, yet thorough, search of all subsequent directories revealed that this Charles Nyberg lived until the 1930s and that there was possibly a Mrs. Charles Nyberg and also a Charles Nyberg Jr., the latter being listed until 1971. This was good news! Now it was time to go backwards and see how long Charles Nyberg had been listed as a resident of Halifax. Although the entry in the 1901 city directory supported the theory that this Charles Nyberg was identical to my great-uncle, the 1903 directory provided disturbing new information. In that year, the following individuals were residing at 81 Duke Street: Nyberg, Archibald, laborer; Nyberg, Charles, seaman; and Nyberg, James, 2nd steward.

The disappointment was enormous. The surnames Archibald and James were not in my Nyberg family; and, since Uncle Charles was still single in 1893

(according to the letter to his sister), there would not have been time by 1903 to have grown-up sons by those names. It had looked promising, but alas!

After a sleepless night, I decided to return to the archives the next day. Somehow I felt the need to confirm that this was indeed the wrong family. A way to do this would be to find the Nybergs in the 1901 Census for Halifax. Since I knew the exact address, the task was fairly easy and straightforward. On 81 Duke Street in the 3rd Ward was listed the following family:

- Nieberg, Charles;** male; head; born 4 October 1855, Sweden; origin, Swedish; nationality, Swedish (immigration 1889); “Steemers fireman;” language, Swedish
- Brady, Mary;** wife; born 12 July 1861, Ireland; origin, Irish; nationality, Canadian
- Brady, James B.;** son; born 21 October 1880, Nova Scotia
- Brady, Gertrude;** dau.; born 22 July 1881, Nova Scotia
- Brady, Archibald;** son; born 23 August 1884, Nova Scotia
- Brady, Burton;** son; born 4 October 1890, Nova Scotia
- Nieberg, Charles;** son; born 1 November 1899, Nova Scotia

Eureka! There it was. The missing sailor had been found. He was a married man with one son and four stepchildren, two of whom had mistakenly been shown with their stepfather’s surname in one of the Halifax city directories.

With the help of a hired local genealogist, it has since been possible to find out more details about the family, including the rather disappointing fact that Charles Jr. did not have any children, so that this line has indeed died out. But to have found something that I never thought would be found is still a cause for great joy and genealogical satisfaction.

After twenty-five years, and with the help of good luck and a brush of serendipity, the Nyberg file is almost closed. There is still the matter of the missing Carl Gustaf Nyberg (or Peterson), who died in 1882, perhaps somewhere in the Midwest. What happened to him? Where did he settle? Where did he die? The file needs these answers and obviously I welcome every helping hand toward that goal.