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Nils William Olsson and the Royal Library, Stockholm

Folke Sandgren*

In connection with the three-hundred-year jubilee of the Royal Library in 1961, during the ominous days of September when Dag Hammarskjöld died in Africa, a new monograph series of the library was started—*Acta bibliothecae regiae Stockholmiensis*. In 1967 Nils William Olsson's extensive work, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820-1850*, was published as number 6 of this series. Compared with other items of the series, it is an impressive work, both with regard to the size and the research work behind it. In any case, without knowing the author, a then-young assistant librarian working with Dr. Olof von Feilitzen at the department of acquisitions, now writing these lines thirty years later, had his eyes opened to a new world of research hitherto unknown to him.

Nils William, due to long stays in Stockholm as a U.S. government official, was a prominent figure of Stockholm academic life and a good friend of the National Librarian, Dr. Uno Willers, as well as my mentor, von Feilitzen, both now deceased. It is evident that these two gentlemen proposed to Nils William that his work be published in Sweden as part of the Acta-series. Upon the invitation of von Feilitzen, I had the pleasure to be introduced to Nils William and his wife, Dagmar, at a sumptuous dinner on the veranda of the Grand Hotel in Stockholm on a memorable summer evening in the early 1970s.

After the retirement of von Feilitzen in 1974, I was appointed by Uno Willers to be the de facto editor of our scientific series, and it came naturally to keep up the contact with Nils William. He was extremely kind to visit our library as soon as he put foot in Stockholm, and our meetings developed into an everlasting friendship. Although I have no personal lines with Swedish immigrants in the U.S., I was stimulated by my acquaintance with him to promote other research work in the area. Thus, when the well-known collector of Swedish-American prints in the U.S., Tell G. Dahllöf, announced that he wanted his collection to be catalogued, I persuaded my colleagues, Gunilla Larsson and Eva Tedenmyr, to make a professional description of Dahllöf's unique collection, which they did with grand gusto in their spare time. Even this work, when finished in 1988, was included in printed form as number 47 in the Acta-series. After the catalog was completed, the collection was sold by Dahllöf

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to the Wilson Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, much to the disappointment of myself and the catalogers, especially since several items of the Dahllöf collection were missing, and still are, in the Royal Library.

After 1967, Nils William continued to identify early Swedish immigrants to the U.S. and Canada. As a result of his continuing work, a second volume, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in U.S. Ports 1820-1850 (except New York)*, was ready for publication in 1979. It appeared as number 32 in our Acta-series. But, apparently, this is a field of research where completeness and total correctness remain unattainable. It became clear to Nils William that both volumes had to be thoroughly revised, as new and supplementary information became available during the 1980s. A contract was established between Nils William and Dr. Erik Wikén in Sweden (born in 1905 and thus four years older than Nils William), a former professor of Latin and Greek at the secondary grammar school of Gävle, north of Stockholm at the threshold of Norrland. Wikén, more and more prone to immigration studies, offered his services to Nils William, which were accepted with gratitude on the other side of the Atlantic.

Wikén started to verify identifications of single immigrants in the vast Swedish archives and, thus, contributed considerably to the reliability and exactness of Nils William's work. It was decided that the two former volumes should be amalgamated into one single volume, which would totally supersede the two previous ones, and that the Royal Library, consequently, should take care of the publishing of the final volume. Wikén, in spite of his age, worked tirelessly as he traveled around in Sweden to different archives. He kept me continuously informed about the progress of his work, turning up now and then in my office at the Royal Library. At Nils William's place in Florida, letters from Wikén arrived without interruption. It was with the utmost pleasure that the three of us realized that the enormous work was going to be finalized and published in due order. On the title page, both Olsson and Wikén are listed as co-authors, which seems absolutely correct. The 618-page volume, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in the United States 1820-1850*, was published in 1995 as number 55 of the Royal Library Acta-series. Sadly enough, Erik Wikén died in 1998. However, he had some time left to enjoy the volume and the appreciation of his work, both from Nils William personally and from all those who benefited from the completed work.

Nils Williams's achievements cannot be underestimated. There is still, in Sweden, a broad popular interest for the history of the emigration to the brave new world. He has laid a foundation stone and made up a model for future continued research work in this area. When the Royal Library was reopened after five years of work and re-inaugurated in June 1997, in the presence of His Majesty the King of Sweden, one of our dear honorary guests was Nils William.