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From Ljusnarsberg via Ishpeming to Trade Lake

Hans Norman*

To Nils William Olsson:

The purpose of this contribution is foremost to send a warm thank you to Nils William. I spent the 1967-68 school year in the United States on a scholarship from Svenska Amerikastiftelsen in order to collect material for a doctoral dissertation about emigration from Örebro province to North America. I was supposed to meet Nils William on the first day after arriving. A city bus brought me from St. Paul along the long University Avenue in the summer heat toward the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis. This was the first time I saw the institute—and Nils William. The foundation for my great appreciation for him, his thoughtfulness, and his generosity was laid during this meeting, which took place over an informal lunch. He took care of me as a young, newly arrived researcher, as well as my family at the time—my wife Margareta and children Kristina and Anders—in his impulsive and yet very sensitive manner. His thoughtfulness concerned most things, from research contacts to practical issues of all kinds. Margareta got a part-time job at the American Swedish Institute and admittance to the Shriner's Hospital was arranged for our son, which was of great importance for his future. Nils William made sure we had an eventful existence and thanks to his extensive network of contacts, we enjoyed the social life among Swedish-Americans and others. We were frequent guests in his and Dagmar's home. We lived in their house by beautiful Cedar Lake when they spent the summer in Sweden, and we felt a genuine friendship with them and their whole family. Therefore, I submit this short article with thankful thoughts of Nils William as a generous and broad-minded personality and friend of such great importance to the research community and contacts between America and Sweden. The article builds on a few of my first observations on American soil of the pioneering emigrants from Ljusnarsberg in northern Örebro's mining area who arrived in western Wisconsin's Swedish community for varying reasons.

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Much attention has been paid in emigration research to the importance of the course of events during the early phase of emigration. It has become evident that the emigration that took place initially, when people looked for ways to secure their livelihood in another country, often determined the development of the continued emigration from the area. During the end of the 1860s, more than 300 people left Ljusnarsberg Parish for North America, many of them settling in western Wisconsin. The emigration that took place then was not unique. At this time, substantial numbers of people emigrated from many parts of Sweden after hardships brought on by the years of failed crops in 1867 and 1868. These years of famine did not only affect the farming community. They also unleashed a financial crisis for the country's industry in general. The effect on mining operations, an important industry in this part of Bergslagen, was detrimental. However, what is interesting in this situation is how the very first emigration from Ljusnarsberg started and the direction it took. Where did the impulses come from and where did they lead? This is what contributed to this parish's very high future emigration numbers, the second highest in all of Örebro province, surpassed only by Karlskoga.

Ljusnarsberg Parish in Nya Kopparberg mining district was strongly characterized by the mining industry. It comprised the southern part of the so-called Grängesberg mining fields. People here earned their living mainly from this industry, often combining work in the mines with farming on a smaller scale. Due to the barren nature of the land, the tillable areas were especially small in this area, the fields being only 3 hectares on average. Under these circumstances, an economic crisis hit hard and led to a strong tendency among the mine workers and day-laborers to seek their livelihood elsewhere.¹

Why did people leave for America during this early period? Erick H. Johnson, who emigrated from Ljusnarsberg as a child together with his parents, tells us about the reasons. He emphasizes three factors as contributory causes: 1) the upswing of the mining industry in the United States; 2) the creation of the Homestead law, which allowed any poor person to become a farmer in "the world's biggest republic;" and 3) someone who had been in America previously had sent home a few copies of the paper *Hemlandet*, in which those at home could read about "Lincoln's free homestead law." According to Johnson, the papers circulated among people in the area until they were worn to pieces. The result was that a large number of people left for the new land, against the wishes and advice of their foremen.²

¹ *Emigrationsutredningen*, bilaga V, sid. 186.

² E. H. Johnson's accounts of the conditions behind the early emigration from Ljusnarsberg are available in two articles: "Barndomsminnen från nybyggartiden i norra Wisconsin" (Childhood memories from pioneering times in northern Wisconsin), *Valkyrian* (1900) and "Så var det i början" (This is the way it was in the beginning), *Prärieblomman* (1912).

The road to the final settlements in the new land was somewhat complicated for the first emigrants from Ljusnarsberg. By no means did they travel directly to the homestead areas they most likely had in mind. The reason has to do with the usual pattern of the emigration phenomenon. Previous occupations highly influenced the destination upon arrival. During the Civil War, the mining companies in Michigan advertised in Scandinavian papers for skilled workers in various capacities. The war situation created a shortage of workers at the same time as the war industry was in need of more metal. Agents from Quincy Mining Company in Michigan spread information regarding the possibilities of obtaining work in the mines in the northern part of the state. This was the background for the ship *Ernst Merck* setting sail already in July 1864 carrying a total of 478 emigrants onboard. Of these, the majority would settle in Michigan. Miners from many areas of the Nordic countries made this journey, not the least from the areas of Åtvidaberg in Östergötland. Also, it has been determined that a number of people from Ljusnarsberg most likely were among them, because the Lutheran parish in the mining town of Ishpeming registered immigrants from Ljusnarsberg already in 1864.³

As was common in regards to emigration, they became important contact persons during the continued emigration period. During the emigration that took place due to the years of famine, they obviously were of great importance, because E. J. Johnson notes, that among the emigrants of 1868 from the Ljusnarsberg area, "everyone involved in mining in Sweden, headed for Ishpeming, Michigan."⁴

It cannot be determined to what extent the emigrants from Ljusnarsberg regarded Ishpeming as a temporary destination, but many soon found their way elsewhere. A common pattern was that emigrants who lacked capital of their own first tried to save up, by working in industries, forestry, or by other means, to obtain a homestead farm. This also became the future for the majority of the immigrants from Ljusnarsberg. The populations of many of the American mining towns were characterized by the presence of a large number of men and people who were very mobile geographically. Accustomed to a rather quiet life in Sweden's Bergslagen, many people from Ljusnarsberg may have found Ishpeming environment to be too heterogeneous and hectic. It was a place with seething activities and a very mixed population, of which those born in America accounted for only a small part. Statistics from the 1870 federal census reflect Ishpeming's diversity (see Table 1).

³ Church records from Ishpeming Lutheran Church, Ishpeming, Michigan.

⁴ E. H. Johnson, *Valkyrian* (1900).

Table 1. The ethnic make-up of Ishpeming, Michigan in 1870.

Irish	30%	American born	5%
English	27%	French-Canadian	5%
Swedish	18%	German	4%
Norwegian, Danish, Scottish	10%	Others	1%

Source: The Ninth Census of the United States, 1870. Population and Social Statistics, Washington, D.C., 1972.

The Swedish pastor of the Lutheran congregation, S. P. A. Lindahl, consequently complained about the sinful and active life in the city, where most people preferred to spend Sabbath at the saloon:

The congregation in Ishpeming is small in comparison with the large number of countrymen which are to be found in this place, and will perhaps for a long time be of no account, in as much as most of those on the outside area such as neither want to, nor can be received in the congregation. Many will not, and some say they are not to stay here long, only long enough time to earn the means to move to a milder and more agreeable climate. They find it unnecessary therefore to join the congregation.⁵

Even if many of the emigrants from Ljusnarsberg may have had the sense of not belonging in Ishpeming, their settling in Trade Lake seems to have been by coincidence. E. H. Johnson notes that a person from Hudiksvall on Sweden's east coast, had settled on a beautiful point of land in Trade Lake, Burnett County already in 1865. He eventually tired of living alone with only Indians for neighbors. Therefore, he placed an advertisement in the paper *Hemlandet*, where he described the homestead land available in this area as the most beautiful in this part of Wisconsin. This brought about such a big interest among the people from Ljusnarsberg in Ishpeming that a knowledgeable person was sent to further investigate the circumstances. His name was Carl Andersson. He verified that, "The area is Nordic in all respects, but with much more fertile soil and resources for subsistence many times bigger. There are lakes and rivers rich in fish, there are deer in countless numbers, and it is just to take and eat."⁶

Consequently, many of the earlier Ljusnarsberg people moved to Trade Lake in 1868 and 1869, both from Ishpeming and the Green Bay area, where industries had attracted many people. More arrived directly from Sweden, as

⁵ Letter from Pastor S. P. A. Lindahl, 1873, the archive of Ishpeming Lutheran Church, Ishpeming, Michigan.

⁶ E. H. Johnson, *Valkyrian* (1900).

mentioned in the introduction. Carl Anderson played a prominent part during this relocation. He was no novice in regard to America-travel, as he emigrated already in 1865. He became somewhat of a central figure in the new settlement and continued to play an important part in the immigration to Trade Lake. Ten years after the first settlement in the area, he returned to Sweden as an agent for the Allan Line. In the spring of 1879, he returned with about 80 new emigrants from the parishes of northern Örebro province and southern Dalarna.

The Trade Lake settlement developed into one of the larger areas with Swedish immigrants and became well known among the Swedish population in the Midwest. A rather large number of Norwegians also settled here. The original population consisted of those who came from Ljusnarsberg and surrounding parishes. Another rather homogenous group of immigrants came from the parishes around Hjälmarén in Örebro province. These people were predominantly Baptists. Therefore, this area of Wisconsin would be dominated by two active, religious persuasions—Lutherans and Baptists—influencing the ecclesiastical and social life. During the following years, the Scandinavian population spread in different directions, especially to Wood Lake and Grantsburg, but also to West Sweden in Polk County, just south of Burnett County. New congregations with their own churches were eventually formed from the two original congregations. The area was periodically characterized by bitter disputes between the two persuasions, as well as of divided tendencies when new denominations appeared, such as the Seventh Day Adventists in Trade Lake.⁷

The emigration from Ljusnarsberg during the years of famine often lead via the mining and industrial areas of northern Michigan to Trade Lake, Wisconsin in its second phase. It exemplifies some well-known characteristics of the history of Swedish emigration. First, the importance of the impulses reaching the area at a time when emigration might be considered and were made a reality in an initial emigration wave. Second, the emigrants' early tendency to seek out areas with a similar industry as they left behind, which became especially natural in a case like this, when recruiting campaigns were in force to get workers in the mining industry to the mining areas in Michigan. Third, and finally, the common pattern emerges. When an emigration tradition is started at an early stage from an area in the native country, this area continues to have a strong emigration history. Ljusnarsberg became such an area, from where many people with Swedish background in America today derive their origin.

⁷ Hans Norman, "Swedes in North America," in *From Sweden to America. A History of the Migration*, eds. H. Runblom and H. Norman (Uppsala and Minneapolis, 1976); Hans Norman, "From Nerike to Wisconsin. Emigration of Baptists, Their Settlements and Congregations from 1868 to the 1920s," *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 49 (July 1998): 195-209.