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# An Improvised Meeting with a Database

Lars Ljungmark\*

That Göteborg (Gothenburg) was the leading port of embarkation for the Swedes who emigrated to the United States is well known, but much less is known about the residents of Göteborg who joined this emigrant stream. To acquire knowledge of this, the project *Göteborgs-Emigranten*, whose purpose was to register the emigration from Göteborg, was begun in 1983.

To date the church records of almost all parishes in Göteborg, from the eighteenth century up to 1980, have been examined and almost 80,000 emigrants have been registered by name, age, date and place of birth, civil status, address, profession, destination, and date of emigration. Data from approximately 39,000 individuals who had emigrated up to 1930 formed the basis of a computerized database called EMIBAS-GÖTEBORG.<sup>1</sup> In 1996 this database (although incomplete) was included in the CD EMIGRANTEN, which was co-produced by *Svenska Emigrantinstitutet* (The Swedish Emigrant Institute), Växjö; *Emigrantregistret* (The Emigrant Register); Karlstad, and *Göteborg-Emigranten*. A new edition of the CD EMIGRANTEN that will be available in the fall of 1999 will include the completed EMIBAS-GÖTEBORG.<sup>2</sup>

This article presents a general summary of the emigration history of the citizens of Göteborg up to 1930. The data were selected from the completed database EMIBAS-GÖTEBORG and are presented in random order.

*Number of emigrants.* Up to 1868, 3,648 residents of Göteborg emigrated. That is 9.4% of all emigrants up to 1930. In 1868, one year before the first Swedish emigration boom, the emigration from Göteborg increased dramatically. During the years 1868-1873, 2,502 persons emigrated. Thereafter, the Göteborg emigration curve followed that of the country as a whole. Thus, the tide of emigration from the city came between 1887-1893, when almost one-

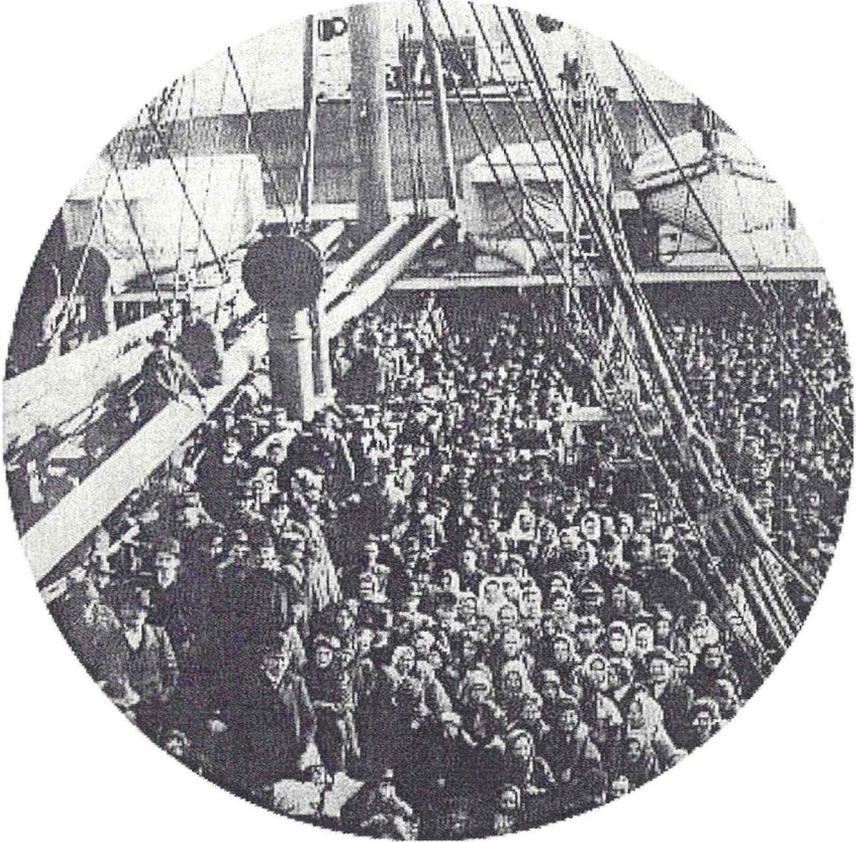
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<sup>1</sup> *Datainspektionen*, a government body in control of all registrations in order to protect the integrity of individuals, has not yet allowed registrations from 1930-1980.

<sup>2</sup> See Per Clemensson, "CD-EMIGRANTEN Update," *Swedish American Genealogist* 19 (March 1999): 56-57.

quarter of all emigrants up to 1930 left. The emigration intensity (emigrants in relation to population) was almost always higher in Göteborg than in all of Sweden.



*Destinations.* In spite of the fact that the registration also covers the time before the mass emigration to America, the United States, with 64% of the emigrants, was the leading country of destination. The Nordic countries were the destination for about 23% of the emigrants, 11% each to Denmark and Norway and 1% to Finland. During World War I, the Nordic countries were the leading destinations. Two other European countries, Germany and Great Britain, were the destination for 5% and 3.5%, respectively, of all emigrants. Quite a few of those who went to Africa or countries in Asia were missionaries. Two persons went to the Swedish island of St.-Barthélemy in the West Indies. The first one

was Mademoiselle Väderlöf from Garrison (the Garrison) Parish who went there in 1786, only two years after Sweden had acquired the island from France. In 1827, Sergeant Carl David Lejon, also from Garrison Parish, headed for the island. Using the term “emigrants” for individuals who went to a Swedish territory is, of course, questionable.

*Civil status and age of the emigrants.* The Göteborg emigrants were mostly young adults, primarily unmarried men and women under the age of twenty-five who mostly traveled alone. The strong element of family emigrants so characteristic of the early phase of the Swedish emigration had no counterpart in Göteborg. In many cases the married man emigrated first, followed after some time by his wife and children. A close study of individual emigrants often shows that many of them were relatives traveling together on the same boat.

After World War II—a period not yet covered by the database—the family emigration became much more common. The Göteborg emigration was now dominated by refugees fleeing further west or skilled workers (who had been imported to Sweden in the late 1940s and early 1950s) returning home. Family emigration was also common among the Swedish-born emigrants who were more well-educated persons going to new jobs abroad.

Sixty-two percent of the Göteborg emigrants were fifteen to thirty years old. The largest five-year group was that including individuals between twenty and twenty-four years of age.

*Sex proportions.* For the whole period there was a slight dominance of women (52.2% females versus 47.8% males). Up to 1888, however, men were in the majority. Men also dominated the last emigration boom in 1923, which was caused by economic crisis accompanied by high unemployment. In this year, the many men going to the industries in the eastern U.S. and to the prairies of Canada outnumbered the rising stream of female emigrants from the shops and offices. The highest female dominance came during World War I. In 1917, for example, 68% of all Göteborg emigrants were women.

*Places of birth.* It is, of course, quite natural that Göteborg ranks first among the places of birth, but the emigrants born in the city are not in the majority. Of the 28,002 individuals whose birthplaces are given in the records, only 38% are natives of Göteborg. This rather low percentage is, in fact, not so strange considering the great in-migration to the rapidly expanding city. One thousand six hundred eleven emigrants were born abroad—1,046 of them in the Nordic countries and most of them (548) in Norway. The 122 who were born in the U.S. illustrate the emigrants' uprooted situation. Most of them were children of emigrants who had returned home after some years in America. Now

they went back to America with their parents, who had become disappointed when the old homeland didn't correspond to the longings and expectations they had entertained during their earlier hard years in America.

Among the strangest birthplaces listed is "the Atlantic." That was the birthplace that Vesta Christina Åman gave when she emigrated from Karl Johan Parish to Glasgow in 1903. She was the daughter of Captain Henrik Åman and his wife, Hilda Maria Natalia, and the birthplace of 1876 was undoubtedly connected to her father's profession.

*Occupations.* The distribution of occupations is of interest when examining the social composition of the emigrants. The first impression is how the emigration is dominated by the lower classes, even when the database includes those who went before the start of the mass emigration in 1869. Only 10% of the 28,451 individuals whose occupations are given are outside the sphere of the unskilled workers. The single largest group included 5,385 domestic servants. They were daughters, both of farmers and of the rural and urban proletariat, who had worked as servants in the homes of the growing middle class in Göteborg. Here their working and living conditions were often hard. In America they expected a better life and better social status. The second largest female group was composed of 719 seamstresses.

Many emigrants had more than one title (i.e., occupation). They ought to have fit rather well in the often-varying labor market that was waiting on the other side of the Atlantic. The watchmakers in particular had varied occupations. We meet, for example, individuals with the titles "watchmaker and artist" and "watchmaker and physiotherapist" (*sjukgymnast*). An unusual combination was "tailor-police," the title used by Carl Fredrik Sjöbeck when he, together with his wife, Benedikte, went from Domkyrko (the Cathedral) Parish to California in 1874.

Four barons stand out against the gray emigrant stream and arouse curiosity. After analysis of the data, two sets of brothers (named Fleetwood and Örnköld) enter the scene. During the years 1869-1873, they immigrated to different countries—the U.S., England, Scotland and Germany.

The court dentist (*hovtandläkaren*) is also interesting. The man with this imposing title was Baptist Bernhard Hybinette, who emigrated from Vasa Parish to France in April 1914 with his wife, Josine Maria née Rijkom.

In a time period that begins in the eighteenth century, many professions seem strange and are unknown to us. The lamppost lighter (*lykttändaren*), the greystone mason (*gråstensmuraren*), and the gypsum-smoker (*gipsrökaren*)

have all faded away. Really genuine titles from the western coast of Sweden include the ten "seafaring men" and the only "seafaring woman." And we all wish Hilma Lovisa Dahlgren all success. According to the church records of 1897, this eighteen-year-old who traveled alone to America had the title "crochets nice things."

Although this article has also dealt with emigrants with non-American destinations, it is natural that in Göteborg, the city from which more than four-fifths of all emigrants to America left their homeland, the emigrants to America are of special interest. The main purpose of this short presentation has been to introduce a new source for studying these emigrants.

All who are, or have been, involved in these studies are very grateful to Nils William Olsson for his interest in the story of the Swedish exodus to America. His ability to find emigrants both in Sweden and America is hard to surpass, but we hope that EMIBAS-GÖTEBORG will be a useful starting point for those who will try to follow in his footsteps.