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Alien Registration in Minnesota, 1918: Swedes in Waseca County

Ronald J. Johnson*

Beginning with the very first issue of the *Swedish American Genealogist*, Nils William Olsson has led the way in locating and extracting naturalization records as sources of information about Swedish immigrants.¹ In this journal he and others have published coast-to-coast examples of the usefulness both of the declaration of intention to become a citizen—the "first papers"—and of the final naturalization records in tracing Swedes and other Scandinavians.² Not every immigrant, however, became a citizen or began the process by taking out first papers. But for those immigrants living in Minnesota in February 1918 who were not (yet) naturalized, the state's Alien Registration and Declaration of Holdings form provides an alternative source of valuable personal data that in some respects goes beyond what is to be found in even the most complete of naturalization records.

The Alien Registration and Declaration of Holdings form was a product of the fear and hyper-patriotism fostered by the entry of the U.S. into World War I. In April 1917, the Minnesota legislature created the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety (MCPS), endowing it with broad, dictatorial powers, later characterized as "martial law in bureaucratic form," to support the war effort.³ Among other activities, the MCPS launched a loyalty campaign, which included shaming aliens who had delayed naturalization, and mandated the registration not only of German male aliens, as required by the federal government, but of all aliens as well.⁴ MCPS Order 25 of 5 February 1918 decreed that all resident aliens fourteen years of age and older were to register with their local governmental unit during "Alien Registration Days" on February 25 through 27.⁵

The requisite document, the Alien Registration and Declaration of Holdings form, compelled aliens and native-born spouses of aliens to swear to the truthfulness of their responses to thirty-five questions about themselves, their

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families and their property. The form asks for (1) full name of the registrant; (2, 3, 4) address and length of residence at that place; (5) age at last birthday; (6) country of allegiance; (7, 8) place and date of birth; (9, 10) port of entry and date of arrival in the United States; (11, 12, 13) marital status; (14) literacy in English; (15, 16) occupation; and (17) names, ages, and school status of living children. Questions 18 through 21 focus on the war, inquiring about male relatives serving on either side in the war, and whether the alien has registered under the draft or claimed exemption from military service. The next three questions zero in on the individual's alien status: (22) has the registrant ever taken out first papers? If so, when and where?; (23) why haven't second papers been completed?; and (24) If first papers have not been taken out, why not? Items 25 through 35 demand detailed information about the description, value and date of acquisition of the individual's property holdings, including farm land, city lots and other real estate both within and outside of the state of Minnesota; stocks, bonds, securities; property held in trust for the registrant or by minors for whom the registrant is a guardian; and personal property such as cattle, sheep, horses, autos, and farm machinery. The form concludes with inquiries about whether the registrant has sold or transferred property since the United States entered the war with Germany (34), and the location of the registrant's safety deposit box, if any (35).

While compliance with Order 25 may have been less than complete,⁶ some 225,000 aliens were registered.⁷ These original forms are housed in 47 cubic feet of records boxes in the state archives at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul. A personal name index was compiled on 3" by 5" cards between 1979 and 1995, filling 124 card file drawers. The cards are arranged alphabetically, by surname and given name(s), and record the county and civil subdivision (township, village, lumber camp, or city, with ward and precinct numbers where applicable) in which the form is filed.⁸ In 1996 both the index and the original forms were microfilmed and are available in that form at or through the Minnesota Historical Society Library. The index consists of 48 microfilm reels and the forms themselves take up 394 rolls of film.⁹

With the exception of the Twin Cities, Duluth, and their surrounding counties, the alien registration forms are arranged in alphabetical sequence by county name (rolls 1-167). Within each county the forms were first filed alphabetically by township, village, or city in folders that may contain forms for several such local units. For indexing, the forms in each folder were alphabetized by surname and given name(s) and then microfilmed in that sequence. Forms for Hennepin, Ramsey, and St. Louis counties and for the cities of Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth are arranged differently, as explained in the introduction to the microfilm set.¹⁰

at Vårdnäs [Vårdnäs, Ög.?] 30 Jan. 1881. - AR; Vist Parish (Ög.) Household Examination Roll.

³⁴ Resident 30 years; married (but no data on spouse); engaged in farming. Charley Samson, "40 some years," and Tilda Samson, 41 years, are listed as living children. Anna Maja Månsdotter was b. at Raestorp, Gränna Parish (Jön.) 22 Jan. 1841 and m. the miller Samuel August Samuelsson in Vireda Parish (Jön.) 31 Dec. 1864. They moved to Husqvarna Qvarn, Hakarp Parish (Jön.) in 1866 and to Jönköping in 1868. The former miller was sentenced on 19 Feb. 1870 to 2 years imprisonment for postal robbery. Anna Maja and her s., Carl August Samuelsson, b. in Hakarp 2 Oct. 1867, and dau., Tilda Kristina Samuelsson, b. in Haurida Parish (Jön.) 15 March 1870, emigr. from Haurida, leaving Göteborg for New York 16 June 1882. They came to Otisco Twp., joining Anna Maja's bro., Carl Peter Månsson (Charley Lindberg), b. at Bohult, Haurida 29 Sept. 1843, who had emigr. from Eksjö (Jön.) via Göteborg to Chicago 21 May 1875 and arr. in Otisco Twp. in 1875. Charley Lindberg d. in Otisco Twp. 20 Dec. 1933. Anna Maja (Sampson) d. in Otisco Twp. 2 Sept. 1929. Carl August (Charles Sampson), d. at Owatonna, MN, 14 Dec. 1935. Tilda Kristina moved to Minneapolis and m. a Mr. Skarnes(s). - AR; Gränna, Vireda, Hakarp, Haurida, Jönköpings Sofia, and Eksjö parish records; DE; VL; VM; WD, E:141,23; E:121,18; *Waseca Journal*, 18 Dec. 1935.

³⁵ Resident 22 years; unmarried; farm laborer. Registered for draft at Otisco, MN, serial no. 647. No first or second papers, as "did not think he needed same as he was only one year old when he came to this country." Took out first papers in Waseca 15 March 1920, giving birthplace as "Edhalla Gord, Sweden" and arrival at "Boston, state of New York" on White Star Line as 24 Oct. 1895. Johnnie Gunnard was the adopted s. of C. O. Larson (Carl Oscar Larsson), b. at Söderhult, Fröåsa, Kisa (Ög.) 20 Jan. 1860, and Emma Sofia Elisabeth Peterson, b. in Otisco Twp. 1 Oct. 1865. He d. unmarried in Waseca, MN, 24 Oct. 1969. - AR; DI; Kisa Births; VL; WD, 12:315.

³⁶ Resident 2 months; married; speaks English; trade: R. R. work, work in shops; present work: washing boilers. One child listed: Doris, 11 weeks old. Registered for draft in Otisco Twp., serial no. 652. Took out first papers at Waseca, 1912. Carl Elaf Bernhard Anderson, b. 25 Sept. 1893 (cf. AR), was a farm laborer in Otisco Twp. at the time of his declaration of intention, 22 Aug. 1912. He arr. New York 30 March 1912 on the *Mauritania*, having emigr. from Asberg, Denmark. His last foreign residence was Hjertlanda, Sweden. He is presumably the same as E. B. Andersson, aged 19, *hemmason* from Hjertlanda Parish (Jön.), who emigr. from Malmö, 19 March 1912, to Waseca, MN. Elof Anderson m. 8 Aug. 1917 Elsie Lydia Swenson (below). A resident of Waseca, he d. in a truck accident in St. Mary's Twp., Waseca Co., 30 May 1955. - AR; DI; DE; WD, 5:274; *Waseca Journal*, 31 May 1955.

³⁷ Dau. of Johan Erik Eriksson (above) and Elida U. Lundgren, d. unmarried in St. Paul, MN, ca. 15 Dec. 1926. - VL; *Waseca Journal*, 26 Dec. 1926.

³⁸ Wife of Carl Elaf Bernhard Anderson (above), d. in Waseca, MN, 25 Aug. 1962. - WD, 9:132.

³⁹ Resident 6 months; married; speaks English; butter maker. Two children listed: Madline, 3 years; Rosolla, 17 months. Registered for draft 5 June 1917, serial no. 1239. Took out first papers at Waseca, MN, 22 Nov. 1913. His declaration of intention gives name as Carl Anderson Munson, born at Marsvinsholm, Sweden 29 Sept. 1889 (cf. AR). Emigr. from Liverpool; arr. New York 16 Dec. 1910 on *Arabic* [White Star Line's *Arabic* arr. New York 12 Dec. 1910]. He m. Laura Cecilie Tollefson and d. in 1966. - AR; DI; Johnson, *Vista* 76, 198.

⁴⁰ Resident 20 years; single; stonemason. Took out first papers in Waseca, MN, 18 Jan. 1919, giving name as Andrew John Hultgren, b. Exro, Sweden 21 Aug. 1854. Last foreign residence was Svinhult, Sweden. Emigr. from "Jeteborg," arriving in New York 3 May 1880 - AR; DI.

⁴¹ Resident 2 years; unmarried; packer in flour mill. Registered for draft at Waseca, MN, serial no. 1258. Took out first papers at Waseca, [1 April] 1916. Birthplace in declaration of intention is Ekeby, Sweden. Emigr. from Aranas (?), Sweden via Copenhagen, arriving in New York 23 March (cf. AR) 1916 on the *United States* (Scandinavian-American Line). Ed Franson was a barber in Waseca. He m. 31 Aug 1930 Mabel Anderson Bartz and d. in Waseca 13 Dec. 1976. - AR; DI; WD, 16:170.