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Russel Chalberg

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The French Huguenot Connection

A Swenson Family Legend

BY RUSSEL CHALBERG

<austinruss@sbcglobal.net>

For at least the last two generations, the Swenson family has circulated an oral story that this family was not 100% Swedish; it is said to have a bit of French blood. A recent DNA test seems to confirm this fact as the test indicated approximately 2% to be Western European.

As this family legend goes, one of their ancestors was a Huguenot who came to Sweden in order to escape religious persecution in France.

When this Frenchman got to Denmark and found the Baltic frozen, he proceeded to skate across to Sweden on a pair of wooden ice skates. The Öresund is only 4 km. (2.5 miles) wide and although it is very rare, records show it does occasionally freeze over as it did in the extreme winters of 1703 and 1708. This is the period when the Huguenots were fleeing France. No more than about one hundred Huguenots came to Sweden at that time.

The Huguenots were a group of French Protestants with origins in the 16th and 17th centuries. History tells us the Huguenots were persecuted by King Louis XIV and the Catholic Church. Because of the harsh persecution, many Huguenots chose to leave France and it is estimated more than 250,000 fled the country by the early 1700s. They fled to many areas including the surrounding countries of England, Ireland, Scotland, Denmark, and Sweden. This series of religious persecutions continued intermittently from the early 1500s until 1787-89, when Louis XVI signed the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

Tracing the family story

Now back to our legend: “**Just who was this Frenchman?**” Many people, on both sides of the Atlantic, have been looking for years for a clue to solving this question.

In a tape recording, made many years ago, Ruth Swenson (b. 2 Mar. 1885) states very clearly, “*that one of her ancestors was a Huguenot who had escaped the persecution in France.*”

Ellen Ruth Swenson was the youngest of nine children born to Frans August Swenson (b. 10 Mar. 1838) and Johanna Johansdotter (b. 9 Feb. 1840). This family lived in Ljuder parish (Kron.), until the father, Frans August, died in 1897. Shortly thereafter Johanna and 6 of her children came to America and settled in Indiana.

(See “*Bondeskog and the Frans August Swenson Family, Swedish American Genealogist* - June 2010.)

Carl Emanuel Swenson (b. 31 May 1875) was another child of this Swenson family and he wrote in a handwritten copy “*Memories of Carl Emanuel Swenson,*” dated Nov. 27, 1965. He states, “*My maternal grandfather was a descendant of the French Huguenots, who fled their native France to get away from the Catholic persecution in those days, which was quite fierce. . . .*” Carl lived in Indiana and had no idea that his sister in Texas was relating the same Huguenot story.

A third child in this family was Maria Johansdotter (b. 18 Nov. 1842 – d. 1907). Maria and her family did not immigrate to America. Recently, a great-granddaughter of Maria, Christina Nyberg, a Stockholm resident, visited the United States and asked if anyone in our family knew anything about our French ancestor. With descendants on 2 different branches of this family tracking the same legend, this story is likely to have some validity.

Ruth Swenson had said on several occasions that she remembered the name *Peter Marche*.

This Peter Svensson Marche (the name was also spelled Mars) was Ruth’s moth-



The Lenhovda medieval church was torn down in the early 1800s, and the new church was inaugurated in 1843.

er’s paternal grandfather. The name Marche could be French, but research has found that Peter got the name Marche while he served in the Swedish military. Besides, Peter was born on 4 Nov. 1773 in Kyleskruv, Lenhovda (Kron.). He was married on 19 Nov. 1797 to Annika Persdotter in Kyleskruv, Lenhovda, and died on 20 Dec. 1828 at Jäppamåla, Lenhovda.

Since Peter Marche could not be our Frenchman, let’s look at Peter’s father, Sven.

Sven Börjesson (also spelled Birgersson; Birger and Börje are variants on the same name) was born on 4 Jan. 1749 in Kyleskruv, Lenhovda, and married on 10 May, 1772. He died 1 Dec. 1811 in Kyleskruv, Lenhovda.

Sven’s parents were Birger Persson and his wife Maria Johansdotter. When Maria and Birger were married 8 Jan. 1738 in Lenhovda, Birger is said to be a bachelor from Badeboda and Maria a maid from Kyleskruv.

Birger Persson died at Kyleskruv on 28 Dec. 1768, age 52, which makes him born around 1716. He died from consumption.

Badeboda village is found in nearby Åseda parish, and there is born a boy Börje on 9 March 1712, son of Per Jonsson and Sara Börjesdotter in Badeboda. This baby

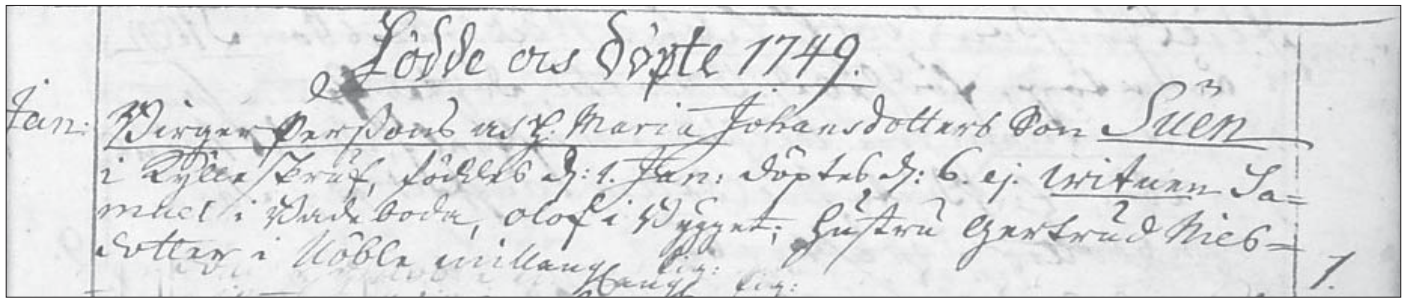
is probably the future Birger Persson who marries in Lenhovda, but that needs further research.

We have almost no information about the father of Per Jonsson, but he would have been born about 1680 and probably would not be our missing Frenchman, as history tells us that most of the Huguenots had escaped from France by 1700.

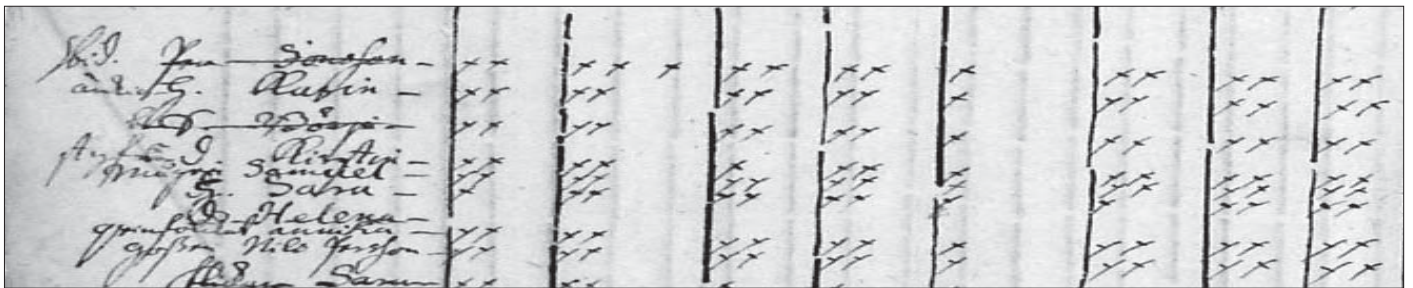
Now after some 300 years and nine or ten generations later, members of the Swenson, Johnson, Samuelson, Franson, Carlson, Nyberg, and Chalberg families have all searched for an answer to this question and to this point no one has found the "French Connection." However, there are female lines to research too, and you never know what to find if you do not do a thorough research.



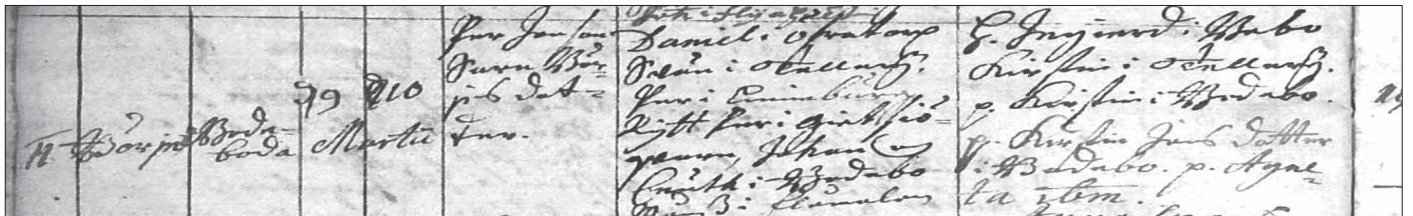
A house in Kyleskruv village in Lenhovda.



Lenhovda (G) CI:2 (1740-1838) Image 19 / page 31 (Arkiv Digital). Birth of Sven Börjesson (Birgersson), son of Birger Persson and his wife Maria Johansdotter of Kyleskruf. Sven was born on 1 January and baptized on 6 January (ej=ejusdem) a Latin word that means "the same month"). Witnesses were Samuel of Badeboda, Olof in Bygget, wife (hustru) Gertrud Nilsdotter in Nöbble Millångård.



Åseda (G) AI:1 (1737-1745) Image 10 / page 3. (Arkiv Digital). Clerical survey for Badeboda in Åseda 1737–1740. It shows that Per Jonsson died during the period. His first wife seems to have died and he remarried to Karin. His son Börje moves away, and stepdaughter Kierstin is married to Samuel, who is noted a son-in-law (måg), and then they have other people living with them.



Åseda (G) CI:1 (1688-1780) Image 42 / page 77 (Arkiv Digital). Birth of Börje on 9 March and baptized on March 10, son of Per Jonsson and Sara Börjesdotter in Badeboda. Witnesses not transcribed.