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# Swedish-American Guitar Makers

Richard Hulan\*

The standard survey of American luthiers is Tom Wheeler's *American Guitars: An Illustrated History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982; 2nd edition, 1991). With the exception of my note at the end, the following checklist has been compiled from Wheeler's book. I wonder whether readers are aware of periodical articles, speeches prepared for lodge meetings, or other documentation of these craftsmen produced within the Swedish American communities in which they lived. I should like to receive anecdotes about the craftsmen, news of their descendants, and pictures of them or of the instruments they made. Some of these, and other Swedish Americans, made mandolins, pianos, violins, and psalmodikons. It would probably make sense to expand the list to include all stringed instruments.

**Almcrantz** (given name not on label). He made guitars and mandolins; held an 1895 patent for a guitar with a detachable neck. The shop was located on Halsted Street in Chicago.

**Anderberg, Pehr A.** He came to New York City during the Civil War and worked for the guitar manufacturer C.F. Bruno there. He moved to the Boston area (Somerville) around 1880, where he became shop supervisor for the John C. Haynes Co. (manufacturing arm of the large music publisher, Oliver Ditson & Company). Other Swedish luthiers, including Sundberg and Swenson, learned the trade in Anderberg's shop, which made the Haynes Excelsior, Bay State and Tilton guitars. Around 1900 Anderberg moved to Philadelphia, where he supervised guitar making for the firm Stewart & Bauer.

**Larson, Carl Johan Ferdinand** (1867-1946) and **Peter August** (1873-1944). They were brothers from Småland who came to Chicago as young men in the 1880s. They went to work for Robert Maurer, a music teacher, who established an instrument manufactory about 1888. By 1901 August was president of the firm and Maurer had left it, although his name continued to appear on the instruments made by the Larson firm, until it went out of business in 1946. They produced guitars under the brand names of Maurer, Prairie State, Euphonon and WLS (after the Chicago radio station). They also made some instruments for Dyer Brothers and for Stahl (a Milwaukee music teacher and dealer, who may have been Swedish), that were marketed with the customers' names.

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**Nelson, Julius and Carl**, were brothers, who immigrated from Sweden. Julius Nelson and several partners (including Sundberg and Swenson from Pehr Anderberg's shop) founded a guitar company in Boston in 1881. The Nelson brothers bought out the other partners and incorporated as the Vega Company, with a star logo, in 1903. This firm was especially well known for its banjos, holding the patent on the still-popular "Tubaphone" tone ring; Vegaphone and other guitars were made by Vega until Carl's son William W. Nelson was bought out in 1970. The brand name was resold to a Korean merchandiser. New Vegas are of oriental manufacture.

**Stahl**, of Milwaukee, see **Larson**.

**Stromberg, Charles A.**, came to Boston from Sweden in 1887. He was overseer at the firm of Thompson & Odell for 18 years, going into business for himself about 1905. One of his sons was **Elmer Stromberg** (1895-1955), who became his partner in 1910. The instruments built by Elmer at 40 Hanover Street in Boston between 1927 and 1950 were among the largest and loudest on the market, much favored by jazz musicians (who had to compete with horns, etc.) before amplifiers were perfected.

**Sundberg, C.A. or C.F.**, was a Boston craftsman before 1881. He worked under Anderberg at John C. Haynes Company and was a partner in the firm that became Vega.

**Swenson**, given name unknown. He was a colleague of Sundberg at both firms.

It may be of related interest to note that the fine Levin guitars, made in Gothenburg, Sweden, were imported to America under the brand name "Goya" between the late 1950s and about 1980. The brand name was sold to an international company, which continued through the eighties to make Goya guitars in Korea, and perhaps elsewhere in the Orient, for export to America. The new Goya should not be perceived as a Levin.

A good line of electric guitars, including basses, were made by A.B.Hagström, Älvdalen, Sweden, for a New York importer, Merson Musical Products, who marketed it in the 1960s with supporting literature in English. As sold in America, the "Hagstrom" guitar logo contains no umlaut.

The Finland Swedes also have a nice guitar, sold under the name "Jakobstad", in which coastal city it is made. I have no information on the export of that brand to America.