

9-1-2017

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### Recommended Citation

Paulson, Fran (2017) "Reality search: some advice for doing Swedish research at the FHL," *Swedish American Genealogist*. Vol. 37 : No. 3 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol37/iss3/3>

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# Reality search

## Some advice for doing Swedish research at the FHL

BY FRAN PAULSON

Each year the participants in the Salt Lake City SAG week find new facts and locate a few lost souls; get thoroughly confused by the handwriting and ever-changing Swedish spelling; and decide they'll be better prepared next year. By the end of a week in the Family History Library most of us are comfortable with the routine and excited about what we have found; then we pack up and leave. Our knowledge dims through the year so that most of us must restart our internal computers and try to pick up where we left off. This has become a continuous learning experience for many of us, each year we learn a little more and forget some of it. We feel lucky that such talented leaders as Elisabeth, Ingrid, Ulf, Jill, Wilma, and Geoff are there to guide us. Each year they drop wisdom around us like falling leaves; we rake some in, make use of it, and then discard the lot.

This year I decided it would be interesting to collect some of this knowledge and make a written record of it. Once this was down on paper, we would have a reference that could be used when preparing for the next year's study. It could also be a valuable guide for new researchers and the "occasional genealogist" among us. I'm certain there are more things that should be cited, but these are the tips I collected at the end of the 2003 Swedish American Genealogist Workshop. If you have other hints to add, send them in to SAG; we could end up with a valuable study guide and leave our mark on SAG forever.

1) The most confusing part of researching Swedish records is getting familiar with the strange writing. Slanting S's sometimes look like F's or L's or J's or they might just be fancy flourishes. This simple tip from one of our experts will help. Look elsewhere on the page for the same letter used in another word. That word may be

easier to understand and you can confidently decide what letter the writer had meant it to be.

2) When looking through countless lists (household records, ship manifests, civil and court entries, etc.) with only a name and birth date to guide you – look for the date, not the name. Numbers are easier to read and plainly written with none of those extravagant elaborations some Swedish record keepers used. It will also help when dealing with the commonality of Swedish names. Find the year, check the month and day, then check the name. Bingo, you've found Uncle Gustaf. Using the year and date could save you from hours of tracking someone else's Cousin Bengta.

3) You should remember that not all dates and names are written in stone. When you think you've found the right parents and the right child but she's born on the wrong day, consider that the recorder or information giver may have made . . . a mistake. I found two Elna's with the same last name and birthday but different parents. One turned out to be an error and I wasted time chasing the wrong family. Further checking of birth records I found both baby Elnas, with different birth dates and I was able to select the right family.

4) This tip, a variation on the above, will help you follow a family through those confusing *Husförhörslängd* lists. Pick the most unusual name in the family and follow it. You'll find lots of men named Nils; fewer called Åke. With Åke's birth year, month, and day in hand, you'll have an easy time spotting your family's record. This tip works especially well when you are doing a computer search. Why look through hundreds of Lars Jonsson when there's probably only a few Åke Jonssons. This is so simple but it is often overlooked and can lead to much confusion.

5) If you can't find the family you are researching, you may find that they have moved to another parish, usually nearby. Get a map of parishes from the "Genealogical Guidebook and Atlas of Sweden." One of our fearless leaders told me that is the first place she looks when she is starting a search. Not only will you be able to track family moves, you'll also get the correct spelling and that could save you from a lot of lost time. 'Bjuv' can be written so it looks like 'Örja' when recorded with swirling letters.

6) First names change and change and change from report to report to report. Sometimes this may be by design, sometimes by mistake. Pål or Pol is sometimes Pähl; Johanna becomes Hannah; Alma can be derived from Albertine. One baby I researched started life as Maria Lena, answered to Lena as a young woman, and became Magdalena after she married.

7) The *Household* records follow the same pattern through the years. Once you've found your family, they will usually show up at the same place, often on the same page number. Find the parish, look through to the farm and page where you found them before. Unless they have moved, you will find them living in the same house. If you find the farm and page but no family, go back to the beginning and check again. They may have moved up to a better house or the eldest son had become the family head.

8) Go back through the records more than once, especially if this is the first time you've looked at them; it takes time to adjust to different writing patterns. If you've failed to find the family, go back through from end to beginning; the name may pop out at you from this different perspective.

9) Don't miss finding widower Grandpa

Olof or Sister Sissa mixed in with a new family listing. Read the whole page. There may be other relatives, married siblings, or old Mom and Dad listed with the new head of family, his wife, and children or they could be listed separately near the bottom of the page.

**10)** Don't give up because a name you found doesn't sound Swedish. It is easy to discount such names as Ralph or Harriet but who's to say your ancestor didn't want to give the child a singular name. Certain names are common in one area and not in another so don't think it's wrong just because this is the first time you've seen it; check the dates and other family names. Also remember that different name may make it easier to follow the family when doing future research.

**11)** Cite your sources or you could spend time looking at the same data. You might even copy information more than once and those 23 cents add up. If you find information in more than one source, write them all down. Check what you've found before you decide this is new info. Some future researcher will bless you for keeping detailed records.

**12)** Look at other records not just the *Husförhörslängd*. Check *Mantal* lists, *in/och utflyttningslängd*, *Födde*, *Vigde*, and *Döde* records. Some of these go back further than the household records and you could surprise yourself by finding a Great-Great-Grandfather. The *Mantal* lists helped one researcher find someone that was missing from her family records for 20 years. He had moved to another farm and was alive and well with a new family.

**13)** Browse the library's books and references; don't fear the printed word. Some people spend all their time on the computer and never find out that there's lots of great stuff to be found in hard copy sources. You might find a picture of the farm your ancestors called home, Grandpa's name on an army list, or even an old photo of the relative who stayed behind.

**14)** Tackle those probate records (*bo-uppteckning*) even if they sound dull and daunting. We heard several positive stories about the wondrous things people found in probate records. Decide to give it a try next year.

**15)** Review, review, review before you leave. Don't get home and find that you lack one necessary bit of information or date. Keep a written record of what you

have found and where you found it. It could save you from having to wait for next year to add one vital fact.

**16)** Repetition is the best way to learn. If one of our great leaders shows you how to find something, on computer, film, or in a reference book, do it again, immediately, to implant it in your brain. Do it a second time and then teach it to someone else. Chances are you'll never need to ask again and you'll be well on your way to becoming an experienced researcher.

**17)** Be comfortable while you research; you'll get more done. Give your eyes a rest when studying those microfilms or computer screens. Look off into the distance; get up and move about. Tired eyes might miss something and a tense body could distract you. Drink lots of water; SLC is very dry, and you can get dehydrated. Use lotion on your hands and face. Wear layers of clothing; the temperature in the library varies depending upon where you are working.

**18)** If you can't find the film you need, check at the desk. I waited and waited for a film to return thinking someone else was using it. When I finally asked I was told the film wasn't in the stacks; it had to be ordered. If all else fails go to the desk with your film number and ask about it – but don't wait until the last day as it takes 1 or 2 days to arrive at the library. The same goes for ordering books.

**19)** Resolve to bring fewer clothes and stay longer. This good advice comes from a first-timer. Staying a few days longer might be a good time to collect your information and find anything you missed. It's a tempting thought, but our trusted leaders will be gone and you'll be on your own. Coming early is another good idea. Spend Saturday in the library to get a jump-start relearning library procedure and maybe even do some research.



Looks like B1! The International floor of the Family History Library.

The library is closed on Sunday but you can attend the Mormon Choir broadcast, a musical treat, and you'll have time to explore the city and university or visit a museum or two. You'll be ready for the work week ahead.

**20)** Final tip – try to find things on your own; it's a satisfying thing to do. Take a collection of records to one of our gurus and have them bless your research. You'll go home happy, determined you'll do better next year.

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#### Editor's note:

This article was written years ago by author *Fran Paulson*, who sent it to *Karna Olson*, our then leader of the workshop. *Karna* sent it to me, and I immediately lost it in my various heaps of paper. It resurfaced earlier this summer, and I thought it was too good to be lost again. However, things have changed since *Fran* was a part of the workshop – computers have replaced the microfilms etc, so I have changed a few things.

*Fran* (full name: *Frances C.*) was born on 23 April 1922 in Beaver, Nance Co., Nebraska, and died 25 February 2011 in Chicago. She worked for years as a journalist.

Her parents, *George* and *Geris Paulson*, were both the children of immigrating Swedes, which explains her interest in the SAG workshop, of which she was a member each year from 2000 to 2009.



*Fran Paulson* (1922–2011). (Photo by *E. Thorsell*).