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Disappearing Swedes

Case 1: Johan Ferdinand Waeström, who “died in America”

By MARTHA J. GARRETT, CG

Many Swedish-American families have stories about relatives who left their home parishes and simply vanished, often in conjunction with emigration. Sometimes these Swedes disappeared immediately after they left home. Others can be found in documents recording their arrival on American shores, but after that the trail goes cold. Such cases may seem unsolvable, but they can often be resolved through various research techniques. This is the first in a series of pedagogic articles about these disappearing Swedes. The articles describe various cases and explain how I solved the mysteries. The text has been extracted from documented research reports prepared for the same Swedish client, Olof Hultén of Kalmar, who is related to all the missing persons. I thank Olof for his generous permission to tell their stories.

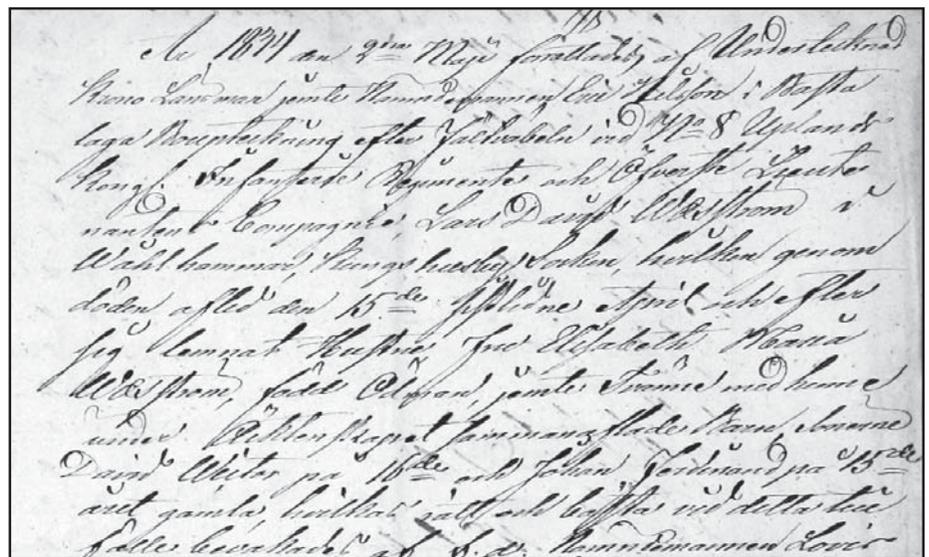
The puzzle: What happened to Johan Ferdinand Waeström after 1834?

When Olof Hultén was young, he heard about a relative, Johan Ferdinand Waeström, who was born in Sweden, emigrated, and died in America. But when Olof became interested in genealogy and looked for this relative in U.S. records, he was unable to find him.

Johan Ferdinand was born in Kungs-Husby parish, Uppsala county, on 4 April 1820, second child to Lars David Waeström, a noncommissioned army officer (*fältväbel*), and his wife Elisabeth Maria Ödman. Another son, David Victor, had been born in 1818. In 1834, Lars David became ill and died. His estate evaluation showed that the family’s possessions were modest, and the estate’s value was totally

cancelled by Lars David’s debts. One can only guess at why the family’s financial situation was so dire. The fact that a gaming table was listed among the household’s meager furnishings suggests that gambling may have been a contributing factor.

In any case, Lars David’s death left Elisabeth Maria and the two sons penniless, and they almost certainly were forced to leave the place where they had been living. The boys were young teenagers, close to the age at which children customarily left home and began to work.



The probate for Lars David Waeström, dated 2 May 1834. Trögds häradsrätt (C) F:17 (1832-1835) Image 5040 / p.219 (Arkiv Digital). Below is a part of his 2 pages of debts.

| | | |
|--|----|----|
| Den till Lars Waeström till Lars Ödman skuldsättning till 100 Riksdaler 1834 | 10 | |
| Den till Lars Waeström till Lars Ödman skuldsättning till 8 Riksdaler 1834 | 8 | 14 |
| Den till Lars Waeström till Lars Ödman skuldsättning till 10 Riksdaler 1834 | 10 | 10 |
| Den till Lars Waeström till Lars Ödman skuldsättning till 7 Riksdaler 1834 | 7 | 6 |
| Den till Lars Waeström till Lars Ödman skuldsättning till 1 Riksdaler 1834 | 1 | 21 |
| Den till Lars Waeström till Lars Ödman skuldsättning till 9 Riksdaler 1834 | 9 | 11 |
| Den till Lars Waeström till Lars Ödman skuldsättning till 11 Riksdaler 1834 | 11 | 11 |
| <i>Summas till 71 Riksdaler</i> | | |

However, a quick search in the index to the Trögd *härad* probate records, showed that the mother, Maria Elisabeth Ödman, died on 24 Nov. 1846 in Flasta in Veckholm parish, adjoining Kungs Husby parish.

In her probate (*Trögds häradsrätt (C) F:20 (1845-1849) Image 3570 / p. 158*) son David Victor was mentioned as a shopkeeper in Nyköping, and son Johan Ferdinand as a shopkeeper in Stockholm.

A sideways approach: FAN

In genealogy, problems regarding an individual can sometimes be solved by studying the family, acquaintances, and neighbors (FAN) of that person. In the case of Johan Ferdinand Waeström, this meant looking at his brother, David Victor. Since David Victor was Olof Hulténs great-grandfather, it was possible to find records about him by tracing Olof's pedigree back in time. This process led to the 1854 marriage record of David Victor Waeström, in which he was identified as manager of a fine estate in Julita parish (Södm). The Julita church books showed that he had arrived in the parish in 1847, coming from the small industrial city of Nyköping (Södm).

The 1847 moving-out rolls for Nyköping Västra parish did indeed list a David Victor Wesström and gave the address where he had been living. And the household examination entry for that address included not only David Victor, but also other persons – including his brother, Johan Ferdinand. The brothers were apparently in Nyköping to obtain training and experience in business. In 1846, the year before David Victor left for Julita, Johan Ferdinand moved to Stockholm and was signed into Maria parish.

Johan Ferdinand Waesström in Stockholm

Johan Ferdinand's life in Stockholm was proving difficult to trace, for two reasons. One was that *Waeström* could be spelled in many other ways – *Waesström*, *Weström*, *Wäsström*, *Wesström*, etc. – and the Stockholm population included numerous persons with one of these names.

Among them were even a man named Johan Wesström and another named Johan F. Wesström, the “F.” signifying Fredrik. Unless birth dates were given in records, it was impossible to distinguish these various Johans from each other. The second reason is that Johan Ferdinand was not fastidious about reporting his whereabouts to the authorities and consequently seemed to disappear. Although he signed into Maria Parish in 1846, he was not listed as living there. A decade later, when he finally requested a permit to move out of Maria, the pastor made an entry in the church book that Johan Ferdinand had actually moved to Katarina parish many years before.

After his move was formalized, Johan Ferdinand appeared in the 1856 Katarina church books and the 1857 city tax rolls, his name being given either as *Wäsström* or *Waesström*. According to these records, he lived in the city block called Häcklefjäll and owned a soap factory. Then, in 1857, he once again seemed to disappear and was no longer listed among the people living in Häcklefjäll.

Considering the family story that Johan Ferdinand emigrated, it would be reasonable to assume that he had left Sweden. But Johan Ferdinand was not in the moving out records for Katarina anytime between 1857 and 1861, and no one matching his description and with any possible variation of his name was to be found in the Swed-

ish emigration databases or the U.S. or Canadian immigration databases. Furthermore, although searches in American databases yielded numerous Swedish immigrants who have something in common with Johan Ferdinand, further investigation disclosed that these men could not have been him. Evidence suggested, therefore, that Johan Ferdinand Waesström had not emigrated to America.

The solution to the puzzle

So where was Johan Ferdinand? The last record of him was in Katarina parish in 1857, and the Katarina records indicated 1) that he was not living in that parish after 1857 and 2) that he did not move out of the parish in or after 1857. This is a conundrum, but it is a conundrum with a solution – Johan Ferdinand could have *died* in Katarina parish in 1857.

The Katarina church books include an index of burials in the parish, and this index listed a man named *Wesström*, who was buried on 3 October 1857. According to the index, however, this man was Johan Fredrik *Wesström*, not Johan Ferdinand *Waeström*. (See picture on next page) >

In the original death book entry to which the index referred, the man's name was indeed given as Johan Fredrik *Wesström*.

But Katarina parish had yet another church book about deaths, and this one gave additional information about the deceased, including date of birth and cause of death. In this book, the man who died on 1 October 1857 was identified not as Johan Fredrik *Wesström*, but as Johan Ferdinand *Waesström*. And the birth date was the same as Johan Ferdinand's – 4 April 1820. (See picture on next page)

Johan Ferdinand had died of cholera, one of the 670 persons to die of the disease in Stockholm in 1857. Cholera graveyards had been established in Stockholm when the early epidemics hit at the beginning of the 1800s, and victims were often buried in mass graves.

During the period of 1854–1858 cholera hit Stockholm in the summers each year. The burial records for Johan Ferdinand indicated that he had been given a normal funeral and buried in the Katarina cemetery. Once the date and place of Johan Ferdinand's death were identified, it was possible to find his estate inventory (*bouppteckning*) in the Stockholm court records. This document provided con-

| Gården N: 31. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|----|----|------------|---|-----|----|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--------------|
| F. d. Handl. lund: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Carl Beijner | 19 | 1 | Kungö Sten | | | | | | | | | | | 47 |
| 1 | D. W. Waesström | 18 | 2 | Jy | 2 | Söd | 44 | medelstjärn | | | | | | | 47 Julita |
| 1 | Bekf. L. S. Mouton | 22 | 10 | Ramquill | 2 | Söd | 44 | Sanktjärn | | | | | | | 47 Stockholm |
| 1 | L. V. f. Waesström | 20 | 4 | Kungö Sten | 2 | Söd | 44 | Stockholm | | | | | | | 46 Stockholm |

Nyköpings Sankt Nicolai (D) Ala:13a (1846-1850) Image 89 / p. 82. (Arkiv Digital).

N: 2. Lördagen den 3 Oct: kl 5 em beg! Fabriksönn. Johan Fredrik Wesström, 37 år, för Mellan jord, Sackor, 3 blyttor, 6 bäran, N: 30 Östra Kyrkogatan. Jord af barn. Österström.

Katarina (AB, A) FIII:22 (1857-1857) Image 39 / page 70. (Arkiv Digital).

Translation: #2. Saturday the 3rd Oct. at half past 5 in the afternoon was buried the factory owner Johan Fredrik Wesström, 37 years old, at the Middle Earth [place in the cemetery], blanket, 3 [???], 6 bearers, [lived at] #30 Östra Kyrkogatan. Burial ceremony performed by assistant vicar Österström.

| 1857. <i>Oktober</i> Död- och | | | | | | | | | | Begravnings | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|---------|----------|------|-----------------|------|--------------|------|----------|--------------|------------|
| Nr | Personens Namn och Stånd. | Ogift. | | Gift. | | Barn. | Ålder. | Födelse- | | Dödsfallets | | Begravnings- | | Födelse- | Begravnings- | Dödsorsak. |
| | | Ålder. | Ålder. | Ålder. | Ålder. | | | ort. | tid. | ort. | dag. | ort. | dag. | | | |
| 1 | Mrs. Margareta Wilhelmina, f. Håkström, af Åkersberg | / | / | / | / | / | 46 21 | Stockh. | 1833 | Järnk. gatan 75 | 1 | Månag. b. 4 | 4 | / | / | |
| 2 | Wesström Johan Ferdinand, f. Wed. S. S. S. S. | / | / | / | / | / | 37 5 26 | ? | 20 4 | Barn äggar. | 1 | Östern 2 | 3 | / | / | |

Katarina (AB, A) FI:13 (1856-1859) Image 48 / page 45 (Arkiv Digital).

This is the original death records, which shows that Johan Ferdinand was a soap manufacturer, and died from cholera and that his place of death was Barnängen.

firmation that it was indeed Johan Ferdinand Waeström who had died of cholera in Katarina parish.

It was interesting to see that he died at Barnängen, which since his time has been well-known for a factory producing soap and cosmetics.

Family stories placing Johan Ferdinand's death in America suggest that his relatives were unaware of his death in Stockholm. But this could not have been the case. Johan Ferdinand's probate named only one heir, his brother. So David Victor surely knew of Johan Ferdinand's death. Why the family believed that Johan Ferdinand had emigrated is unknown. But cholera was feared, and cholera cemeteries and graves were seldom visited. It is possible that, although he must have given permission for part of Johan Ferdinand's estate to be used for a church burial, David Victor may have decided to hide the fact from his family that his brother had died of cholera and lay buried in the Katarina parish cemetery.

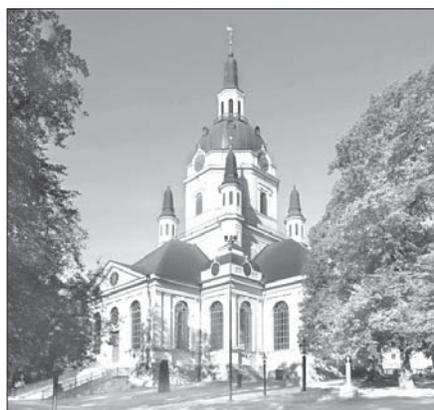
Summary and lessons to be learned

The gaps in the church books made it impossible to trace Johan Ferdinand directly after his father's death in 1834. But the FAN method, applied to David Victor, led to Johan Ferdinand in Nyköping, from where he could be traced to Stockholm. The Stockholm records about Johan Ferdinand were confusing because the spelling of names was not codified at the time, but that confusion had the positive effect—it made clear that information about Johan Ferdinand Waeström and men of similar names could easily be mixed up. The family story of Johan Ferdinand's emigration was examined and rejected but left an apparent conundrum – he did not leave Katarina parish, but he was no longer there. The only remaining explanation was that he had died in that parish. Confirmation

was found by examining all three Katarina church books regarding deaths, only one of which gave full and correct information about the man who died in October 1857, identifying him as Johan Ferdinand Waeström.

Lessons that can be learned from this case and applied to other instances of disappearing Swedes are these:

- If the trail is cold, the FAN method might help.
- Since names were not codified in the past, identities may be unclear.
- Family stories can provide good leads, but they also may be incorrect.
- Apparent conundrums may have solutions.
- Records can exist in multiple forms, some incorrect and some correct.



Katarina church, Stockholm, Sweden.

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