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Disappearing Swedes

Case 2: Carl Anders Carlsson, who was “buried in New York City”

BY MARTHA J. GARRETT, PhD, CG®

During the great wave of migration, over a million Swedes left their homeland, most of them with “*Amerika*” as their destination. These Swedish-American immigrants can usually be traced via paper trails. When they left, their departure was noted in the moving-out books of their home parishes. When they sailed, they were included on passenger lists, both leaving Sweden and landing on the other side of the Atlantic. After they arrived, their names appeared in censuses, city directories, military rolls, and records of births, marriages, and deaths.

But not all Swedish immigrants are so easy to follow. Most families with Swedish roots have a story about one or more relatives who disappeared after they left home. Some individuals cannot even be found among the passengers on any ship. Others can be documented as having reached American shores but not traced after their arrival. And, in some cases, abundant evidence is available about the *lives* of immigrants in the U.S., but their *deaths* remain shrouded in mystery.

This article is the second in a series about such “disappearing” Swedes. Each article describes a different puzzling case and explains how it was solved using a variety of research techniques and resources. All the cases were presented to me by a Swedish client, Olof Hultén, who is related to all the persons in question. I thank Olof for his permission to tell their stories.

Carl Anders Carlsson, who ran away from home

Carl Anders Carlsson was a Swedish immigrant who lived in New York City in the first half of the 1900s. He was an uncle of Karin Hultén, Olof’s mother, and Olof remembered stories about his parents visiting Carl Anders sometime in the

1930s or 1940s. Olof was under the impression that Carl Anders had remained in New York and died there. He was unable to locate the grave, however, so he commissioned me to find out where his great-uncle had died and was buried.

Delving into the church books, I discovered that Carl Anders was born on 21 January 1871 in Söderhamn, the oldest son of Carl Valfrid Carlsson and his wife Johanna.¹ Carl Valfrid was a merchant at the time of Carl Anders’s birth, but he later became a bank clerk. His oldest son seems to have followed dutifully in his footsteps. In 1900, Carl Anders was working as an assistant clerk.² He was also still living with his parents, even though he was almost 30 years old.

And then he disappeared. A note in the congregation book stated that he had gone to Stockholm on 14 November 1900. But he had not signed out of the parish,³ and he was eventually listed among persons whose whereabouts were unknown.⁴ It is probable that, when Carl Anders left, his family believed his claim that he was just traveling to Stockholm. Only later, when he did not return, did they admit to the parish priest that they didn’t know where he was.

The emigration records revealed that on 21 November 1900, just one week after leaving Söderhamn, Carl Anders was on board the *Cameo* when she sailed from Göteborg to Grimsby, England.⁵ (A popular route for emigrants was from Göteborg to Grimsby or Hull, and then across England to Liverpool to board a larger vessel for the transatlantic voyage.) In the *Cameo* passenger list, Carl was shown as being on his way to Boston. On 2 December 1900, he arrived in New York on the *Etruria* from Liverpool.⁶ The passenger list for the *Etruria* also indicated that he was on his way to Boston. And the entry included an

interesting detail. Carl Anders was going to an uncle, A. Carlsson, who lived in Boston. It seems that he had an ally in his escape to a new life.

Carl Andrew Carlson in America

But why did Carl Anders run away? One strong possibility is that he had been pressured by his father into being a clerk and escaped in order to pursue another career. The occupation he followed once he reached America was nursing, a highly unusual career for men at that time. He must have been good at his profession, because he was employed by a man who could afford to hire the best. That employer was Matthew Chaloner Durfee Borden. (Fig.1).⁷

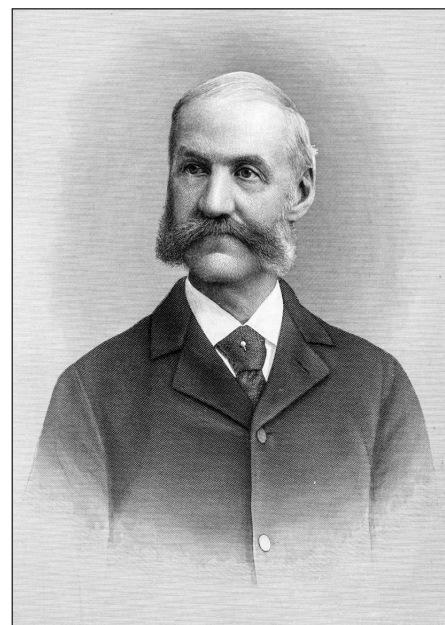


Fig. 1. M. C. D. Borden.

Borden was an extremely wealthy businessman worth millions of dollars, an industrial tycoon who made his money primarily in textiles.⁸ He collected fine

art,⁹ belonged to many yachting, sports, and social clubs, and maintained homes in two states – Massachusetts and New York. The 1910 census indicated that his New York City house staff included a housekeeper, a kitchen maid, four female servants, a butler, and a trained nurse.¹⁰ The nurse was shown in the entry as C. Andrew Carlson, which was, of course, an Anglicized version of Carl Anders Carlsson.

In 1912, Carl Anders went back to Sweden. It was a good year to go, because the Olympics were being held in Stockholm. The competitions were thrilling in themselves, especially the spectacular performances by the American Jim Thorpe and the Finn Hannes Kolehmainen. Colorful ceremonies and festivities – some involving Swedish royalty – added more excitement. The spirit of the events was perfectly captured by Olle Hjortzberg in his iconic poster. (Fig. 2).¹¹



Fig. 2. Poster for the 1912 Olympic Games.

According to Hultén family legends, Carl was a training assistant to an American Olympic team. Searches through online materials about the 1912 Olympics¹² have not revealed his name, but he still may have played some role in the games. The family story certainly has a ring of authenticity. Athletic teams need all kinds of support staff, including nurses. Carl Anders was a skilled professional, and Matthew Borden – who was interested in sports and surely had contacts in the right places – may have helped him to secure a position with one of the American teams. The timing of Carl Anders's travel also fits.

The Olympics ended on 22 July, and he arrived back in New York on 7 August on the *S.S. United States*, having left Copenhagen on 26 July.¹³

In 1915, Carl married another Swedish immigrant, Hildegard C. Johnson, in Manhattan.¹⁴ Hildegard – also known as Hilda and Helga – was a farmer's daughter who had been born in 1876 on the Swedish island of Öland¹⁵ and had emigrated in 1891.¹⁶ She found work in New York as a domestic servant,¹⁷ which is not surprising since Swedish maids were much sought after.

After their marriage, Carl Anders continued to work as a nurse or orderly, and Helga set up a private practice as a masseuse.^{18, 19, 20} Both became U.S. citizens, and they lived on East 91st Street in Manhattan for many decades. It seems that they had not only been thoroughly Americanized, but had also become real New Yorkers.

The death and burial of Carl Anders

After learning so much about Carl Anders, I was still faced with the original questions – where and when did he die and where was he buried?

Searches with many spelling variations in the New York City death index for 1862–1948 did not yield any Carl Anders Carlson born about 1871. These searches did reveal, however, that an Anders Carlsson, born about 1871, had died in Manhattan on 13 December 1948.²¹ It seemed possible that this Anders was Carl Anders. The 1910 census record in which Carl Anders was shown as C. Andrew had even suggested that he preferred to use the second part of his given name. However, I could find no one matching Carl Anders, even under the name Anders, in online databases about persons buried in the New York City area.²²

I got a clue to Carl Anders's final resting place when I remembered the passenger list of the *S.S. United States*, on which he sailed back to New York in 1912. In the space for a close relation was written the name Mrs. Hanna Carlson and an address in Uppsala, just north of Stockholm. Hanna (Johanna) was Carl Anders's widowed mother. Apparently, despite the abrupt and secretive way in which he had left Söderhamn, Carl Anders did have

contact with his closest relatives. Perhaps he had always kept in touch with his mother; perhaps they were reconciled after a number of years. It seemed likely that he had met her during his visit to Sweden. The runaway son had apparently made peace with his Swedish family.

At this point I began to wonder if Carl Anders might have returned permanently to Sweden. Of the 1.3 million Swedes who left, approximately one fifth returned. Perhaps Carl Anders was among these. Perhaps he wanted to live his final years in the old country, close to his roots. This alternative seemed a real possibility, but a search through the Swedish Death Book²³ yielded no one fitting Carl Anders's description. This meant that Carl Anders had not died in Sweden and very likely was the Anders Carlson who had died in New York in 1948. But, if so, why was there no record of his being buried in the New York area?

Eventually I imagined an answer – that Carl Anders had *died in America* but been *buried in Sweden*. Although this somewhat macabre scenario seemed unlikely, it was not impossible. Carl Anders could have arranged for his body or ashes to be shipped back to Sweden for burial.

I consequently looked again for Carl Anders in Sweden – not dying there, but being buried there. My searches in three Swedish cemetery databases yielded negative results, even with alternative name forms. But the database *Gravar.se* included a Karl Anders Carlsson, who was buried in grave 1-01-121 in the Söderhamn cemetery in September 1949.²⁴ The record indicated that the deceased had been born on 21 January 1871 and had died in New York on 13 December 1948.

It is highly unlikely that Carl Anders's wife, Hildegard, would have shipped his remains to Sweden unless he had requested that this be done. It must have been his wish. Carl Anders, who had run away to America, had decided to come home in the end.

Summary and lessons to be learned

Carl Anders Carlsson left his family without telling them that he was emigrating, and he lived in Manhattan for many decades. A New York death record for an Anders Carlson suggested that Carl An-

ders might have died there in 1948, but his grave could not be located in the area. Various clues indicated that he had retained his ties with Sweden and consequently might have returned and died there. When evidence from Swedish death records eliminated this possibility, an alternative scenario was imagined – that Carl Anders died in America but was buried in Sweden. Awareness that Carl Anders had used different forms of his name was essential in finding him – neither his death record nor his burial record was in the name Carl Anders Carlsson.

Lessons to be learned and applied to other immigrant disappearance cases include these:

- The family relationships of a person may play an important role in their decisions.
- If the likely solutions don't work, unlikely ones should be investigated.
- Records in which a name is spelled differently may still refer to the same person.
- It's good to remember that people are not always buried where they die.

Endnotes

- 1) Söderhamn Parish (Gävleborg County), Birth and baptism book, 1868-1877, CI:5, p. 47, birth record of Karl Anders, ArkivDigital image 52.
- 2) Söderhamn Parish, Congregation book, 1896-1905, AllA:1c p. 935, entry for the household of Carl Valfrid Carlsson, ArkivDigital image 470.
- 3) Söderhamn Parish, Moving-in and moving-out roll, 1895-1910, B:6.
- 4) Söderhamn Parish, Congregation book, 1896-1908, AllA:1d, p. 1800, entry for Carl Anders in the list of persons absent or missing from the parish (*obefintligha*), ArkivDigital image 4820.
- 5) Gothenburg, Sweden, Passenger Lists, 1869-1951, 1900, November, *ship Cameo*, image 4 of 8, entry for Karl A. Carlson, accessed at <http://www.ancestry.com>.

- 6) New York, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1957, 1900, December, 02, *Etruria*, image 3 of 15, entry for Carl A. Carlson, accessed at <http://www.ancestry.com>.
- 7) Photo of M.C.D. Borden, accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M._C._D._Borden. Image in the public domain.
- 8) Biography of M. C. D. Borden, accessed at <http://www.nycgo.org/organs/NYC/html/ResBordenMCD.html>
- 9) Old and modern masters in the collection of M. C. D. Borden, accessed at <https://archive.org>.
- 10) U.S. Federal Census, 1910, New York, Manhattan, Ward 19, District 1181, house number 25, family number 80, image 5 of 38, entry for the household of Matthew C. D. Borden, accessed at <http://www.ancestry.com>.
- 11) 1912 Olympics poster, accessed at <http://olympic-museum.de>. Image in the public domain in the United States.
- 12) Searches were carried out in the digitized 1912 Olympics archives at the Swedish National Archives and in various online American reports about the 1912 games.
- 13) New York, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1957, 1912, August, 07, image 1 of 147, entry for Carl A. Carlson, accessed at <http://www.ancestry.com>.
- 14) New York, New York, Marriage Indexes 1866-1937, entry for the marriage of Carl A. Carlson and Hildegard C. Johnson on 23 October 1915, Manhattan, certificate 23277, accessed at <http://www.ancestry.com>.
- 15) Köping Parish (Kalmar County), Birth and baptism book, 1861-1885, C:8, unpaginated, birth record of Hildegard Cornelia Pauline, ArkivDigital image 101.
- 16) Köping Parish, Moving-in and moving-out roll, 1861-1892, BI:6, unpaginated, entry for Hildegard on 29 July 1891, ArkivDigital image 73.
- 17) New York State Census, 1905, Manhattan, Assembly District 25, Enumeration District 20, image 25 of 36, entry for household of Helga Johnson, accessed at <http://www.ancestry.com>.
- 18) U.S. Federal Census, 1920, New York, New York, Manhattan Assembly District 18, Enumeration District 1536, household number 569, image 43 of 45, entry for household of Carl A. and Helge [sic] Carlson, accessed at <http://www.ancestry.com>.

- 19) U.S. Federal Census, 1930, New York, New York, Manhattan (Districts 751-1000), Enumeration District 794, family number 245, image 17-18 of 18, entry for household of Carl and Helga Carlson, accessed at <http://www.ancestry.com>.
- 20) U.S. Federal Census, 1940, New York, New York, New York, Enumeration District 31-1659, household number 136, image 7 of 20, entry for household of Carl A. and Hildegard Carlson, accessed at <http://www.ancestry.com>.
- 21) New York, New York, Death Index, 1862-1948, entry for Anders Carlson, born about 1871, died on 13 December 1948 in Manhattan, certificate number 27145.
- 22) General searches were first carried out in the burial databases available at <http://www.ancestry.com> and at <http://www.findagrave.com>. Since many persons who died in New York City were buried in the large cemeteries in Brooklyn, focused searches were also carried out for those cemeteries.
- 23) Swedish Death Book (*Sveriges dödbok*) 1901-2013, version 6.0, digital database on CD-ROM (Solna: Sveriges Släktforskarförbund, 2014).
- 24) Cemetery record for Karl Anders Carlsson, accessed at <http://www.gravar.se>.

The author

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Arkiv Digital: Table of contents for SCB records

ArkivDigital has earlier photographed the Statistiska centralbyrån (Statistics Sweden) or SCB extracts for the years 1925-1947 (1930-1947 for Stockholm city). The SCB extracts consist of transcripts of birth, marriage and death records that were sent yearly to the

government department, Statistics Sweden (SCB).

To search for a SCB extract, do the following:

Select *Index search*.

Select "*Table of content SCB*" in the *index source list*.

You can begin your search by using the "Simple search" routine by writing in the desired year, parish and/or the type of record (*födda/vigda/döda*) or fill in the desired search terms in the "Advanced search" routine.

(From the *ArkivDigital* blog).