

Historical Information on August Johnson and Lydia Helin and their Families.

Part 2 - TO THE USA.¹

Why did August Johnson leave Sweden?

Though we don't have any information from letters or recollections of family members or any statements by August of why he left Sweden to come to the USA² other evidence available gives us background for understanding his decision.

From 1850 - 1920, about 1.2 million Swedes (20% of the population!) left Sweden to go to the United States mostly for economic reasons. The exodus was heaviest in Småland, the area from which August came. Since so many Swedes left, there remains today within many in Sweden a great interest in the United States, and the lives of the immigrants who left. And there are many in the USA who have a great interest in finding their roots in Sweden.

In the 1950's, a Swedish writer, Vilhelm Moberg wrote a series of historical novels about emigrants from Sweden. These sold well in Sweden and the USA both.³ Even though some of the content was not acceptable even in Sweden,⁴ his story of how the immigrants fared in America found a ready audience. Two movies were made from his books in the 1970s which were dubbed into English and shown in the USA as well.⁵

His story uses a location in Småland which is only a few miles from Heddamåla where August Johnson grew up. Even though his story is fiction, the junction of two roads where the characters in his story met to leave, is preserved today as an historical site. Several of our cousins grew up within sight of this spot. Our cousin Ivan is one who lived there as a boy, and he has a great interest in family research and has become an expert in this. When a huge boulder was erected as a monument on this spot in 1964, Ivan wrote a poem which speaks of those who left Sweden,⁶ the hardships they faced in Sweden and on the trip to the States, the pain of separation, etc. Seeing this monument, reading the inscriptions, and reading his poem give important background on why August and others like him left Sweden.

Who in the family came first to the United States?

Annie's brother Karl was the first to leave for the States, in 1878.

Most likely, August had not yet met this family then. He was 17 at that time. When he was born in 1861, Swedes from that area had already been leaving for the USA for about 11 years. By the time Karl left, this had been in process for nearly 30 years.

Frank Helin was an influence:

Frank Helin and August were no doubt friends as teenagers in Heddamåla. Frank⁷ was born in Heddamåla Jan 10th, 1861. August's father Johan moved his family to that village in 1876 when August was 15. The village of Heddamåla is just a few houses and Frank and August were the same age so they would certainly have known each other there.

Frank Helin left for the States in 1888⁸, when August and he were 27 years of age. Herbert believes that his father wrote letters to August from the US.

Economic Factors:

August was 6 when the famine of 1868 hit Sweden. Perhaps he could remember this.

Their "torp" was inadequate for a family with six children, so they moved to a better farm. As a teenager, August probably became his father Johan's right hand man when they moved to their new farm in Heddamåla. He was the oldest, the other son in the family was only two years old at the time, and the other 4 siblings between the two boys were girls.

This whole area of Småland is covered with large boulders even today. With no power machinery to move these at that time, these were a very discouraging problem for the farmer.

About 10 years later, August tried moving to other locations in Sweden in his 20s. Did his father encourage this? Was it his own idea? Apparently he didn't find any opportunities which looked as promising as having his own farm in the United States.

Publicity in Sweden for the USA:

By 1890, Swedes had been leaving for the USA for 40 years. They were writing letters back to their families giving details about the new land. Books were being sold which told about America.⁹

More Swedes settled in Minnesota than in any other state.¹⁰ Several factors contributed to this, no doubt. I suggest just three: (1) In the 1850's when this began, Stillwater Minnesota was about as far west as you could get with riverboat transportation. (The first railroad was completed to the West coast in 1876.) (2) The area was filled with lakes which reminded Swedes of their homeland. (3) And once a few Swedes settled in this area, they told others of the opportunity and they joined them there.

Why did August Johnson and Frank Helin choose the Northwest?

In 1883, the Northern Pacific railroad was completed to Tacoma from Minneapolis. Once completed, the railroads printed brochures about the attractive features of the North West, aiming to attract passengers from both the Eastern USA and Europe. Apparently, the Satsop river valley on the Olympic Peninsula here in Western Washington was featured as being excellent farmland in such a brochure.¹¹ Herbert Helin told of his father hearing of the Satsop river valley when he was still in Sweden.

The railroads and the steamship companies worked together on establishing agents and subagents throughout Europe who sold combination tickets for a trip to the USA, covering every segment, all the way to your city of destination.¹² No doubt Annie and August both bought tickets from such a subagent near where they lived in Småland. Her destination was Stillwater, Minnesota (where she planned to live with her sister Ellen, near her other siblings) and his was Tacoma, Washington where his friend Frank Helin was.

Their tickets cost about 75-115 Kroner. At the time they came, a year's wages would have been 150-200 Kroner.

Their Trip:

The exit records for the port of Gothenburg show that they left Gothenburg April 17, 1891 on the "ARIOSTO". This ship sailed to Hull, England. There were 100 other passengers on board leaving Sweden with them.¹³

From Hull, they crossed England to Liverpool by train, and then took a large steam ship from Liverpool to New York where they were greeted by the Statue of Liberty.¹⁴ (Their ship¹⁵ was probably 400+ feet long with cabin accommodations for all the passengers.)¹⁶ They were processed through immigration at Castle Gardens.¹⁷ Then they boarded a train. Annie went to Stillwater, Minn and August traveled on alone to Tacoma. He rode the Northern Pacific railroad from Minnesota to Tacoma.

How long did it take? It usually took 3 days to reach Hull from Gothenburg. Then 3 to 7 days later they would have left Liverpool by ship. The ship would have taken 10 to 14 days to reach New York. I estimate that it took 2 - 3 days by train to Minnesota and another 2 - 3 days to Tacoma from there. They could have reached Minnesota by perhaps May 11th, and August could have reached Tacoma as early as May 14th.

Perhaps he stayed in Minnesota a few days instead of continuing straight through. The train could have taken longer crossing the US if there were any delays. Other delays could have been connections in Liverpool and unfavorable weather crossing the Atlantic. But we estimate that their trip took about 4 weeks.

How did August and Frank choose the location of Matlock?

Matlock was not a logical choice if they wished to be near other Swedes. There were communities of Swedes in nearby areas when they arrived here in western Washington, where they probably could have found a place to settle if they wanted to be near other Swedes. It seems clear that this was not their goal. They both wanted to have their own farm.

The land in the Satsup River valley was good land. But it was selling for \$20 an acre and they neither one had the capital to buy land at that price.

August told his children about an early job he had when he first came to this area.¹⁸ He said that he and Frank Helin had worked together for a lumber mill in Cosmopolis for 6 months before either of them were married. They had decided to wait to take their pay till the job was finished. However, when the job was finished, there was no money for their pay so they didn't get paid. The company had lost their logs or something, so had no money to pay them!

It seems likely that they took this job in hopes of earning enough money to buy a farm on the Satsop river. And when this didn't work out decided to apply for free land under the homestead law.

What was the USA like Spiritually when they came?

Not only was there a revival in Sweden before August left there, but there was revival going on in the USA also. The period from 1800 - 1914 is called the "Great Century" and it had it's greatest impact in the USA. This is also called the "2nd Great Awakening" for America. The preaching of D.L.Moody was one influence and Spurgeon was another. (Hundreds of other people were used by God in this period in the US.) (Spurgeon died in 1892 and Moody in 1899.) Though Spurgeon didn't spend time preaching in the US, his sermons were sold here. Moody and Spurgeon were the most widely published preachers of that day. August had books of sermons by both of them which he read to his family when they worshipped together.

Under the influence of this revival, the USA to which August and Annie came was more moral and Christian than 40 years earlier when the immigrants were first leaving Sweden. In the 1850s the spiritual influence of revival was beginning to be felt. Just prior to the 1850s consumption of alcohol was at an all time high, slavery was at it's height, abortion and wife abuse were common, and violence was a major problem. But these ills were dramatically changed over the next 20 years or more through the influence of the revival on the culture. Note also that the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves were history when August came.

The statistics of church attendance tell an interesting story. Here I quote from Kenneth Scott Latourette from Volume Four of his work, "The History of the Expansion of Christianity" Page 177:

"In no other land in the nineteenth century did the churches have so large a numerical increase. Indeed, in spite of the enormous growth in the population of the land, in 1914 the proportion of those who were members of some church was larger than it had been a century before. It had risen from about 5% in 1790 and 6.9% in 1800 to 15.5% in 1850, to 35.7% in 1900, and to 43.4% in 1910. Great as was the growth in population, in attracting the allegiance of men and women the churches more than kept pace with it. In every major group Christianity won ground - among the older American stock, on the frontier, among the traditionally Christian immigrants, among the confessedly non-Christian immigrants, among the Indians, among the Negroes, in the rural districts, and in the cities."

Though the revival in Sweden touched August's entire family, it seems it may not have touched Annie's family there.

Annie's brother Charles who was first to leave Sweden in their family was converted after he reached Minnesota in a Lumber camp. He went on to become a stalwart in the church in Stillwater.

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FOOTNOTES:

- ¹ This chapter combines the few clues we have from family recollections with facts learned from research of other historical information available.
- ² See below on why he chose Puget Sound. See part 3 on why Lydia chose to come to the US, according to Herbert Helin.
- ³ Four were translated into English. See the supplement for a synopsis of these.
- ⁴ Our cousin, Berit Almqvist, told us that the sexual themes he included were objected to by the average Swede when the books first came out.
- ⁵ Their names in English are, **THE EMIGRANTS** and **THE NEW LAND**. These are available on video today.
- ⁶ See the supplement for a copy of this poem in Swedish and a translation into English.
- ⁷ He was born Frans August Petersson. According to the church records, by the time he got his permit to leave for the States, he had begun using the name of Petersson - Helin. We conclude he got the "He" from Heddamaåla and the "lin" from Linneryd parish where the village was located. We don't know why he took this name, though many Swedes did simplify or change their last names when they came to the USA.
- ⁸ He received his permit from the parish to leave, Jan 25, 1888 and probably left a few weeks later.
- ⁹ When we visited Ivan in Varberg in April 1994, he showed me books in Swedish which documented the economic hardship of that time in Sweden. These books also showed the type of literature which was available about the USA, including samples of the pictures sent back from the USA, details of how you got a ticket, etc.
- ¹⁰ The census of 1910 recorded 122,000 Swedish born residents in Minnesota. Illinois was next with 115,000. New York had 54,000 and Massachusetts had 40,000. In 1920 Washington state had 35,000 Swedish born residents.
- ¹¹ I have not found a brochure featuring the Satsup, but I have seen samples of this type of brochure in a book about the Northern Pacific railroad.

- 12 I saw such a multi-section ticket in the Maritime museum in Liverpool in England. (Through that port passed over nine million Europeans headed mostly for the USA during that same period of immigration to the USA and Canada.)
- 13 While we were in Sweden in 4/94, I obtained a copy of the exit record for Gothenburg for that date which shows their names and destinations, etc.
- 14 The statute of Liberty was completed in 1886 so it was there to greet August and Annie when they made their trip.
- 15 We saw models of such ships from this era in the museum in Liverpool.
- 16 Passenger lists exist for New York and other ports of the US. Besides people coming from Sweden, there were hundreds coming every day from other parts of Europe as well. The records for these years are not indexed by name, so a search is an arduous task.
- 17 Ellis Island replaced Castle Gardens in 1892.
- 18 Arthur Johnson recounted this in 1984.