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Corrections and Additions to Genealogical Works

Nils William Olsson

TILAS

According to Elgenstierna, Baron Daniel Axel Tilas, b. in Stockholm Sept. 15, 1747, the son of Baron Daniel Tilas and his wife in a second marriage, Anna Catharina Åkerhielm af Margretelund, departed for America, presumably soon after having resigned his commission as ensign (*fänrik*) in the Royal Swedish Närke's and Värmland's Regiment July 7, 1787.¹

It is not known what motives Tilas had for emigrating. The scion of a prominent Swedish family, he had every reason to remain in Sweden, being the eldest surviving son of parents, now deceased. Perhaps his service with the French forces in the Caribbean against the British in the storming of Grenada had planted a desire within him to return once more to the western hemisphere.

Elgenstierna states that after Tilas' departure for America he was never heard from again. This statement is erroneous. The National Archives (*Riksarkivet*) in Stockholm possesses the correspondence between the Royal Swedish Chancery (*Kanslistyrelsen*) and the Swedish consular representative in America, Richard Söderström² of Philadelphia, covering a period of time from 1798 to 1804, in which the disappearance of Tilas is discussed at great length.³

In October 1799 Söderström answered an inquiry from the Swedish Chancery, which had been forwarded to him the year before, regarding the whereabouts of Tilas, who supposedly had left for America in 1788, and who had neglected to keep his family informed of his movements. In 1790 the Svea District Court in Stockholm (*Kungl. Svea Hovrätt*) had placed Tilas under the guardianship of Carl Johan Iserhielm,⁴ whose task it had become to keep in touch with Tilas as well as to supervise the estates of the Tilas family, personal as well as real, which one day would revert to him. In 1792 Iserhielm had written two letters to Tilas, whom he supposed to be living on a plantation along the Ohio River, one of them had been sent via London to the Swedish pastor in Philadelphia, Nils Collin.⁵ The other letter had been routed via the Swedish consul in Bordeaux, France, Harmensen.⁶ Neither letter had been acknowledged. Finally in 1798 Iserhielm asked the Chancery to intervene, and if possible, to institute a search for Tilas, to determine that, if alive, he was entitled to certain incomes from Sweden, but if dead, proof of his decease was to be forwarded to Stockholm.

In his answer to the Chancery, Söderström related the main facts of the Tilas case, as it stood at the moment. Tilas had arrived in New York in 1787, where he remained until October 1788, when Söderström, with some trouble and outlay of money, had had him moved to Philadelphia. He did not remain there long, but with the aid of Dr. Collin, had left for Fort Pitt on the Lancaster road. Through the medium of friends Tilas had carried letters of introduction to General Parson[s], who had taken him along to Marietta, Ohio, where he had stayed until the latter's death by drowning on an expedition to Lake Erie.⁷

Söderström then referred to a letter from Tilas to him, dated Marietta Feb. 23, 1790, a copy of which Söderström had forwarded to Stockholm (this copy is not to be found in *Riksarkivet*). Söderström also informed Stockholm that his correspondents in New Orleans had related that Tilas had moved there, where he was living on the outskirts as a tutor in a wealthy family.

In April 1801 Söderström again wrote to the Royal Chancery, this time in reply to an urgent request from the authorities. There was little new to report on Tilas, except that Söderström's correspondents had reported that in 1798 Tilas had left for Havana, Cuba with a Spanish family and from there had either gone or was about to proceed to Mexico.

In December 1804 Söderström returned to the Tilas case once more, reporting that he now had gotten some hard facts concerning Tilas from his correspondents in New Orleans, who reported that Tilas had died near New Orleans at the estate, where he had been employed as a tutor. His New Orleans correspondent had promised that he would procure a death certificate for the authorities in Stockholm.⁸

Here the Tilas case ends so far as Stockholm and Philadelphia are concerned. Recently, however, research has shown that the intensive correspondence between Iserhielm and the Royal Chancery on the one hand, and Söderström on the other, had been concerned with a man who was dead already in 1792. According to an article by Elizabeth Becker Gianelloni, "Louisiana's Spanish West Florida Records," published in 1972, Daniel Axel Tilas had died in New Orleans more than twelve years before Söderström's final letter to the Stockholm authorities. An abstract of the proceedings surrounding Tilas' death is contained in this study and is quoted verbatim as follows:

"Ab. II: 111 Proceedings concerning the death of Daniel Aple [sic!] Tilas, Tr. II: 354-356 native of the city of Stockholm, Sweden, who died on 17 August Or. II: 681-692 1792 at the house of Benjamin Smith. The deceased had a brother and two sisters in Stockholm.

Declaration, in French, 24 August 1792, by Benjamin Smith before Vahamonde, with witnesses John Buhler and Hubert Rowell, stating that on the 16th, Tilas came to his house sick of a fever, accompanied by a negro slave belonging to Charles Proffit. Smith's wife made up a bed for him and gave him water, but he was unable to swallow it or to talk. Smith stayed with him all day until about 10 p.m., then left two slaves with Tilas to take care of him, returning about midnight. At about 4 a.m. a slave came to tell him that Tilas seemed to be dying, and

he died as Smith entered the room. In dressing the body for burial, Smith found a French book in the clothing Tilas had been wearing on arrival. His only knowledge of the deceased was that Tilas had been living for some time at the habitation of Widow Nash, where he had left a trunk and other belongings.

Order. 26 August, by Vanamonde that the widow of Joseph Nash send the trunk and whatever other belongings the deceased had, to which Sybil Nash answers (in English) on 6 September that she sends the trunk which contains all the property he left there.

Inventory of the trunk's contents on 16 April 1793 by Vanamonde, with witnesses Francois Pousset and Miguel Mahier, disclosed only a few items of old clothing, half a pull of tobacco, and a shaving razor."

¹ Gustaf Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor I–IX* (Stockholm, 1925–1936), VIII, p. 304.

² Richard Söderström (174[1]–1815), first merchant in Göterborg, Swedish consul in Boston, MA 1783; consul for entire United States Feb. 27, 1795, at which time he moved to Philadelphia. — Joh. Ax. Almquist, *Kommerskollegium och riksens ständers manufakturkontor samt konsulsstaten* (Stockholm 1912–1915), p. 621.

³ Correspondence from Richard Söderström to *Kanslistyrelsen*, dated Philadelphia Oct. 10, 1799, July 4, 1800, April 23, 1801, Aug. 21, 1801, Nov. 22, 1802 and Dec. 28, 1804 in the National Archives (*Riksarkivet*), Stockholm.

⁴ Carl Johan Iserhielm (1761–1817), member of the Swedish Supreme Court (*Konungens högsta domstol*) 1806; minister of justice 1809. — Elgenstierna, *Ättartavlor*, IV, p. 18.

⁵ Nils Collin (1746–1831), Swedish pastor of the Gloria Dei Church in Wicaco, Philadelphia 1786–1831. — *Svenska män och kvinnor I–VIII* (Stockholm, 1942–1955), II, p. 119.

⁶ Mikael (de) Harmensen (1717–1792), Swedish Consul in Bordeaux 1751; consul general 1772. — Almquist, *Konsulsstaten*, p. 529.

⁷ Samuel Holden Parsons (1737–1789), American major general in the Revolutionary War; drowned when his canoe overturned in the rapids of Big Beaver River in western Pennsylvania Nov. 19, 1789. — *Dictionary of American Biography*, XIV, pp. 270–271.

⁸ Much of the material in the Söderström correspondence is included in Nils William Olsson's article, "Extracts from Early Swedish Consular Reports from the United States," *American Swedish Historical Foundation Yearbook* (Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 32–39.

⁹ Elizabeth Becker Gianelloni, "Louisiana's Spanish West Florida Records," *Louisiana Genealogical Register*, XIX (June, 1972), pp. 141–142.

¹⁰ I am much indebted to Winston de Ville of New Orleans for calling my attention to Mrs. Gianelloni's study.