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The Genealogical Workshop

3. The Household Examination Roll

John Robert Anderson*

The time has finally arrived when you have traced your Swedish ancestors back to the port where they arrived in the United States sometime during the nineteenth century. It is probable that it was on the east coast — Boston, New York or Philadelphia. As you are peering off to the east, across the Atlantic, you may be faced with one of the most difficult of genealogical tasks — that of crossing the ocean. Perhaps, you are fortunate. You have located the port from which they left the homeland on one of the steamships which ran between Göteborg, Sweden and Hull, England. Now you must “dig” in the native soil. Where do you begin? Thanks to the excellence of Swedish vital records, you may have a veritable genealogical goldmine awaiting you.

During the seventeenth century, parishes of the State Lutheran Church of Sweden were given the task of keeping vital records on all who resided within a particular parish.

Since these records are organized on a parish basis, your first job will be to locate that home parish, if you have not already done so. Let us assume that you have located the parish, by consulting the Emigrant Institute in Växjö or the Emigrant Register in Karlstad, or perhaps by some other way. The next step is to determine the name used by your ancestor in Sweden — most likely a patronymic. A great number of Swedes changed their names when they arrived in the New World. Perhaps it was merely a matter of anglicizing the patronymic — i.e. Persson became Peterson. On the other hand the patronymic may have been abandoned for a completely different name — the author’s maternal grandfather, Lars Johan Pehrsson, became Lewis Johan Dalberg, and his wife, christened Maja Stina Larsdotter, became Maria Christina Dalin. While searching records in Sweden, we came to the point where we found that the name Dalberg had been taken from what had been a permanent name in Sweden, after one Olof Dahlberg, a clergyman in a parish of the State Church, located near Karlstad.

Once the researcher has surmounted the problems of locating the parish and identifying the patronymic, he may have clear sailing ahead, thanks to a rather unique document — the household examination roll, known in Swedish as the *husförhörslängd*. If you are working with the Mormon records, you will find that the *husförhörslängd* is translated and indexed as clerical survey. I believe, however, that the title household examination roll is a more descriptive translation. State Church regulations in Sweden required that the examination of every parishioner would include his or her ability to read in a book, to read and understand Martin Luther’s *Cathechism* and his

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One will find in the household examination roll every resident in the parish, his title or occupation, his name, his birthdate, the parish of his birth, whether he had been vaccinated against smallpox, whether he had suffered from smallpox, as well as his reading ability and comprehension of the documents listed above. There is also a column reserved for private comments by the examining clergyman and these comments can be quite revealing. One of the author's great aunts returned to Sweden after a sojourn of 23 years in the United States. When she was examined after her return to her home parish, the clergyman noted that she was *förvärldsligad* (she had become "worldly"), an apt observation, judging from the comments by family members who had known her. Finally, columns are provided for recording the date of entry into the parish and the name of the parish from which he or she had come. Should one leave the parish, an entry was made to record the date of departure as well as the name of the parish to which he or she was moving. Marriage dates and death dates are also noted in the *husförhörslängd*. Furthermore, family relationships are indicated so that the researcher may be able to identify the wife, the widow(er), son, daughter, step-son or step-daughter, servants, and anyone else who belonged to that particular household. If all of this material appears to be a goldmine, it is — especially after working with some of the fragmentary and scattered records of many jurisdictions in the United States.

Since some parishes in different geographical locations have identical names, the researcher must also know the *län* or county in which the parish is located. As an example I can mention that there is a Gryt Parish in Kristianstad *län* as well as a Gryt Parish in Södermanland *län*, and even a Gryt Parish in Östergötland *län*. Also if the subject of the research resided in a large city, the genealogist must know the name of the parish within the city. For example — Stockholm has some 39 parishes and Göteborg has about 18.

There was a reorganization of Swedish administrative districts in 1952, merging and amalgamating many of the smaller parishes into larger more efficient units called communes (*kommuner*). Though the name of the parish has remained the same, the administrative unit or *kommun* it now belongs to may have changed after that year. For an excellent reference book for locating the names of the parishes before 1952 and the *kommun* they belong to after 1952 one should consult Carl-Erik Johansson's *Cradled in Sweden* (Everton Publishers, Inc., P.O. Box 368, Logan, UT 84321). Not only are the parishes listed but also in which *härad* (district or hundred) and *län* (county) they are located. This work is almost indispensable when one is involved in Swedish genealogical research, as Johansson has devoted detailed treatment to the various Swedish documents with which one will work, including the *husförhörslängd*.

Hence, through the *husförhörslängd*, the researcher may develop a good insight into the nature of his family almost on a year-to-year basis. A *caveat*, however, the farther back in time one goes, the more difficult it is to read the

old writing, since it is written in old German script. However there are very good printed guides with samples of old German script, so that the problem is not an unsurmountable one. One should also be aware of the fact as today, handwriting differs from person to person, and clergymen of the eighteenth century show the same divergence in their penmanship. By the nineteenth century the church books became more or less standardized and contain much more detailed information. The quality of the records may also vary from parish to parish.

I should also like to sound another caution while using the *husförhörslängd*. Any information found in the household examination roll, such as a birth, marriage or death, should always be checked against the original records for the parish, i.e. the birth, marriage and death registers. Occasionally the data to be found in the *husförhörslängd* may not be entirely accurate. Just as we in the United States find that in the various census enumerations, the information recorded is only as good as the information given to the enumerator. The researcher should therefore remember that when dealing with the *husförhörslängd* he is dealing with a secondary source, except for the matter which was directly observed by the clergyman on his visit. The parish registers, therefore, in addition to being primary sources, will sometimes provide additional and valuable data. When conflicts appear, the parish register should always take precedence over the *husförhörslängd*, absent evidence to the contrary.

The grades given for reading, knowing the Catechism and understanding Svebilus to be found in the household examination rolls were recorded in the form of a code, much as the present-day school teacher uses alphabetical grades in addition to plus and minus to correctly grade the student's work. Unfortunately there was no central coding system. Each diocese and sometimes each clergyman devised a system only appropriate for that diocese or that parish. The best advice I can give is to look for the code on the inside of the cover of the *husförhörslängd*. You may have to go back to earlier volumes to find it. The key must be searched for with the proverbial "fine-toothed comb." But once found, it will provide a great deal of insight into the intellectual capacity of those who were examined.

As I stated earlier the codes vary from diocese to diocese and from parish to parish. The Hallsberg Parish (Öre.) *husförhörslängd* for 1831 has the key inside the front cover. It looks something like this:

- ⊕ = Excellent/Very good
- ⊖ = Reasonably good
- ⊔ = Less passable
- ⊘ = Knows very little/In need of help

- = Weak
- = Very poor

One should be very careful to be sure that the code is applicable to the parish records used. In the Uppsala archdiocese the following code was used in 1764:

- m. = *mediocriter*, passable
- b. = *bene*, well
- o. = *optime*, good
- k. = able to read
- f. = understands

In Västerås diocese in 1773 the following key was used:

- v. = well
- n. = passable
- i. = poor
- o. = knows nothing

Thus an o. in Uppsala is the direct opposite of an o. in Västerås. Here is an example from Åker Parish (Söd.) from 1764 to 1780:

- = *nihil*, nothing
- = *parum*, poor
- = *aliquid*, passable
- ⊥ = *melius*, well
- ⊕ = *optimus*, good

In the diocese of Härnösand a system was used which is quite complex. Different symbols were used for the ability to read and for ability to understand. Here are the keys for Härnösand:

- Reading*
- = has begun to read
 - ┌ = reads poorly
 - ┌┌ = reads somewhat
 - ┌┌┌ = reads well
 - ┌┌┌┌ = reads fluently

<i>Understanding</i>	—	= has poor conception
	— 	= understands passably
	— ┌	= understands fairly well
	— ┌ ┌	= has a good understanding

Sometimes the symbols were joined to form a figure. The dots in the symbol below demonstrate knowledge of the Catechism and its interpretation. The more dots, the better understanding the individual had.¹



If a family member possessed some quirk of personality or was suffering from a physical ailment, or was extremely poor, there may be a comment to that effect by the clergyman in the column reserved for his private comments. Remarks in this column are quite valuable to the family historian. After all, as genealogists we are attempting to reconstruct the lives of our ancestors in so far as it is possible. Personal data of this nature can really bring them to life as we assess their successes and frailties.

A most valuable tool in tracing the family migrations from one part of Sweden to another, are the entries recording dates of arrival into and departures from the parish. Combined with data from other sources, it is possible to trace your family's wanderings from the present residence to the earliest parish of residence in Sweden for which records exist. The author, for example, traced his maternal line from Oxford, NJ back through the parishes of Hallsberg, Kumla and Lerbäck in Örebro *län*, back to Kroppa Parish in Värmland *län*. A similar tracing through the use of the *husförhörslängd*, enabled him to follow the peregrinations of his paternal line from Forshälla Parish (Göt.) through three parishes in the city of Göteborg, back through the *län* of Älvsborg, Halland and Kristianstad to the city parish of Helsingborg in Malmöhus *län*.

One must also be on the alert for surname changes when patronymics were dropped which often happened, especially during the 19th century. When this occurred, the individual's birth name may also be mentioned, along with the newly-acquired name. Thus Johanna Larsdotter's name was changed to Dalin. When this was first recorded in the household examination roll it was noted *född Larsdotter* (born Larsdotter). While we are on the subject of names, the researcher must be on the lookout for military names, since an individual with a patronymic invariably was given a soldier's name when he enlisted in army or navy service.

To assist the researcher when working with the household examination rolls, as well as with any of the other Swedish records, Johansson's volume, *Cradled in Sweden*, already mentioned, is probably the most comprehensive

reference book on Swedish genealogy in the English language. There are of course also other reference books.

Nils William Olsson has authored a booklet, *Tracing Your Swedish Ancestry* which in a brief and succinct style tells all the essentials that one needs to get started. It sells for \$1.50, but may be secured free from the Swedish Information Service in New York or the Swedish Embassy in Washington or one of the many Swedish consulates general and consulates throughout the United States. Attesting to this brochure's popularity is a statement in the foreword that states that "both the original printing as well as several reprintings have been exhausted."

If the researcher is familiar with the Swedish language, a good general work is Börje Furtenbach's *Släktforskning för alla*, (*Genealogy for Everyone*) published by the ICA Publishing Company in Västerås, Sweden. A recent addition to the Swedish genealogical literature is Per Clemensson's and Kjell Andersson's *Släktforska! Steg för steg (Genealogical Research! Step by Step)*, published by the LT Publishing Company in Stockholm in 1983. This is a do-it-yourself book with many illustrations on how to use Swedish church as well as civil records. As mentioned earlier there are also guides on how to decipher early handwriting. The ICA Publishing Company in Västerås has also published *Läsebok för släktforskare (Reader for Genealogists)*. The researcher should, by all means, secure a copy of this book. The reading exercises as well as examples of handwriting are most valuable. It is in Swedish, but with a good Swedish-English dictionary, there should not be too much trouble in vaulting the language barrier.

Some of the terminology in the household examination rolls may pose a bit of a problem for the searcher. ICA Publishing Company has also here come to the rescue with its *Ordbok för släktforskare (Dictionary for Genealogists)*. One should not expect to find every needed term, but there are some ninety pages with double columns to assist you in having an old term or expression translated into modern Swedish.

One other basic resource that will assist the Swedish-American genealogist is the book of road maps for Sweden. There are two of them, since there are two separate Swedish automobile associations in Sweden. *Kungliga Automobilklubben* (The Royal Automobile Club) publishes a book of maps with a good index to place names called *KAK bilatlas*. *Motormännens Riksförbund* (The National Association of Motorists) also publishes an equally good book of road maps entitled *Vägvisare Sverige* (Road Finder for Sweden). Both books are excellent and since each of the organizations gets its maps from the same source, it makes little difference which one to buy.

For those who desire detailed maps of Sweden they are available in the scale of 1:50,000 for most every part of Sweden. They may be bought from the sole importer of these maps in the United States, Anderson Bookstore,

SG-1 P.O. Box 149, Lindsborg, KS 67456. By using the atlases referred to above or the detailed maps it will be possible to trace the movements of your ancestors from one part of the country to another, and eventually to the port of embarkation, based upon the material to be found in the household examination roll.

The *husförhörslängd* is there for you to use — available on microfilm on loan through Mormon branch libraries throughout the country. A few supplemental resources to assist you have been noted. Now, it is up to you. Using the household examination rolls, you may be able to follow your family back in time to at least 1700. That is if you are lucky enough that the records have not been destroyed by fire, as so often happened in past years in an era of the tallow candle and the open fire. You may also be able to trace your family forward in time in order to locate possible living relatives.

It will take patience and time, just as in any genealogical search. It will be exciting and rewarding as you get to know your forebears and better understand their joys, trials and tribulations. Good hunting!

¹The examples given above of various codes used by clergymen while examining parishioners are to be found in Per Clemensson and Kjell Anderson, *Släktforskning! Steg för steg* (LT Publishing Co., Stockholm 1983).

Correction

Several errors crept into the article "The Lindquist (Lindqvist) Family from Avesta" by Hans Gillingstam and Esther V. Hemming, published in *SAG*, Vol. IV, No. 3, Sept. 1984. The editor apologizes for these slips, which were beyond his control, and asks the reader to make the following corrections:

- p. 99, line 6 from the top — Ebba Maria Lindqvist *should read* Elsa Maria Lindqvist.
- p. 100, line 13 from the top — Axel Vilhelm Lönnqvist *should read* Axel Vilhelm Lönnkvist.
- p. 101, line 5 from the top — June 1979 *should read* June 1970.