

3-1-2005

## The Immigrants Best Friend

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### Recommended Citation

Thorsell, Elisabeth (2005) "The Immigrants Best Friend," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 25 : No. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol25/iss1/8>

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# *The Immigrant's Best Friend – His English Phrase Book*

For those who could read, a phrase book was very important during the preparations for leaving home

BY ELISABETH THORSELL

As we all know, Robert spent much of his time onboard the *Charlotta* reading to his friend Arvid from his phrase book, according to Vilhelm Moberg's story in the *Emigrants*.

His story is placed in the early 1850s, but the need to learn a little English continued during all the years of immigration, and new phrase books were printed all the time.

The book shown here was found on a Swedish auction site on the Internet, and is probably fairly typical of its kind.

The title of the book is

*The Little American*

– *An easily understood guide  
for emigrants to America*

*or others, who within a short space  
of time wishes to learn the most  
important fundamentals of  
the English Language*

*containing*

*a short chapter on pronunciation  
and syntax*

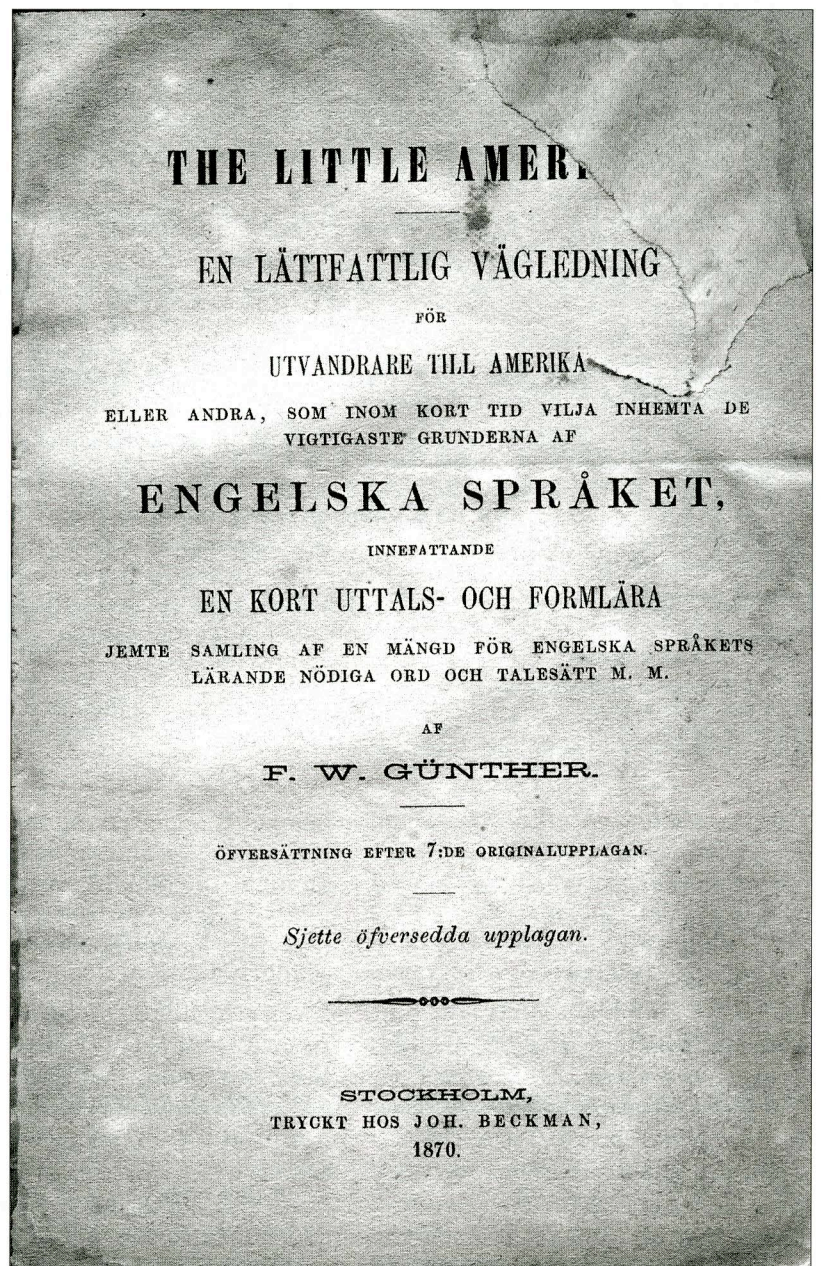
*and a collection of a number of  
necessary words and phrases for  
the student of the English*

*language,*

*by F. W. Günther.*

The book was printed in 1870 in Stockholm and has 95 pages. Unfortunately the price is missing, but a guess is that it cost around \$1, which an average farmhand could pay after working for a week.

The Introduction explains that most of the contents are dialogues as





that is the best way to learn a foreign language. But first comes a section on how to pronounce all these foreign sounds, and the next one is a short grammar, which seems to require the eager student to know about Swedish grammar to make the best use of this.

The Swedish parts of the text are always printed in the old *fraktur* font, while the English parts are printed in Roman font. All English is also transformed into a phonetic spelling, which looks very curious, but probably was of some help. (The same system was lately used by the Swedish *Systembolaget* to explain how to pronounce French wines.)

[The words in the following part are quotes from the phrase book].

After this more formal part of the book comes lists of words, necessary for daily life, starting with the groceries. Here one learns with some astonishment that raw meat was called flesh, and cooked meat was just meat.

Then comes venison, vegetables, and fruits. Next comes soups, the beloved pea-soup and pancakes, for instance. You will also learn the words for cutlery and for drinks of various kinds, different wines and hard liquor. A corkscrew has the phonetic spelling of "ä kärkskruh".

Another chapter teaches words necessary on travels like various kinds of trunks and boxes, horses' harnesses and different kinds of wagons; there were no trains then. When you arrived at your destination you needed to be able to ask for the townhouse, the house of correction, or the library, and then an alehouse.

To be able to travel you also needed clothes, like a great-coat, and a pair of breeches with breeches-bearers, a shirt and stockings. On your feet you could have spatterdashes or slippers, and in your belt there hung a sword.

## To buy a farm

Your goal was probably to become a husbandman, and here is how you fulfilled that dream:

*I want to purchase a farm.*  
And the agent answered: *I know one*

Min moder kom ur huset.	My mother came out of the house.	mej moddher kehm aut ov dhe haus.
De sutto fring en eldbrasa.	They were sitting round a fire.	dheh hvehr sitting raund ä fejr.
Sedan min an- komft.	Since my arrival.	sins mej ärrejvel.
Jag skall qvar- stanna till nästa morgon.	I shall stay till the next morning.	ej schäll steh till dhe nekst mårning.
Det inträffade mot slutet af Novem- ber.	It happened to- wards the end of November.	itt häppn'd tuoärds dhe end ov nå- vembör.
Det är under sto- len.	It is under the chair.	itt iss önder dhe tschär.

*that will suit you; it is only two miles from here.*

And now you asked: *Is it near a village? I should be glad if it were situated on a salubrious spot of ground and did not lie in a marshy soil. Is the house built of brick or freestone, or is it a loghouse? Is there a well near the house or a spring or do they drink riverwater? What is the produce of the estate?*

The agent comes back:  
*The ground seems to be rather sandy, yet it can be converted into fertile fields.*

You are still not decided:  
*It must be dinged now and then. I have a mind to drain this marsh and make a meadow of it. What corn do you sow this year?*

The agent informs: *Summertime, that will soon sprout, wheat, barley, oats and pease[!].*

## On America

**Q.** How many inhabitants are there in the United States?

**A.** About 28 millions. The increase amounts to a third part every 10 years.

**Q.** Is there still much land to purchase?

**A.** Inclusive Oregon between 42 degrees North and 49 degrees North more than 1,042 millions of acres.

**Q.** What is the fixed price of an acre of the remainder after the public sale?

**A.** 1 1/4 dollars.

**Q.** What is the worth of an American dollar in Swedish money?

**A.** 4 riksdalers.

**Q.** What is the postage of a single letter in the United States?

**A.** Five cents for every distance not above 300 miles; ten cents for more than 300 miles; that's all.

**Q.** What means a single letter?

**A.** Not above half an ounce.

**Q.** How much costs a good labouring horse in America?

**A.** You will have a very good one for fifty dollars.

**Q.** And a cow?

**A.** For 25 dollars.

## Employment

Qualified craftsmen easily meet employers in the United States. Such ones will be wanted in the western countries yet for centuries to come.

**Q.** What wages does a journeyman get daily?

**A.** At least one dollar, but no boarding and lodging. He must work 6 days in the week, 12 hours during the summer, 10 in the winter. He that will thrive must rise at five. A sober, diligent and considerate tradesman will never be in want for employment in America.

The first dwelling of the colonists is a log-house, and then, if they prosper, they build a brickhouse or a house of freestone.

The American supper consists commonly in tea, bread and butter, cheese and cakes.