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An Emigrant Letter from 1853

Nils Johansson*

(Questions arise from time to time as to the methods used by Swedish emigrants traveling to America. While most of them went via ship from Göteborg to Hull and then via rail to Liverpool in order to board the large British ships, occasionally an emigrant went south via Germany. The letter reproduced below illustrates such a passage in 1853.- Editor).

The following emigrant letter written by S.A. Hörberg from Örkened Parish (Krist.) and dated Janesville, WI 1853 was loaned to me by Berndt Karlsson of Vankiva (Krist.). It was published in *Kristianstads-bladet* 14 Feb. 1986 and is reproduced here by courtesy of Mr. Karlsson and the editors of *Kristianstads-bladet*. The writer tells us here the story of going from Skåne to Janesville, WI in company with his friend Gustaf.

“Dear Relatives:

After a rather long wait I can now tell you about some of my impressions from the time that I left my home and I shall begin by giving you some information concerning the crossing.

We left Ystad 2 July by steamer and arrived in Lübeck on the 3rd at 6:10 a.m. and from there to Hamburg via railway the same day. While waiting for a steamship to take us over to England, we remained here until the 6th, during which time we bought the necessary provisions for the Atlantic crossing, which amounted to 350 Riksdaler Riksmünt (ca. \$85.00) for us both. We arrived in Hull on the 8th and left for Liverpool via railway the following day, or the 9th. We stayed in Liverpool until the 11th, when we boarded the vessel, but did not sail until two days later, or the 13th. We arrived in New York after the Atlantic crossing at 10 o'clock a.m. on the 20th of August.

In addition to the above information I also wish to tell you some of the details of the trip across the great water. We departed via one of the finest sailing vessels from England. There were 700 persons on board including passengers and crew. Most of the passengers were Irish, ca. 500.

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The remainder or about 200 consisted of Englishmen, Germans, Poles, Norwegians, Danes and the smallest number - the Swedes, consisting of Gustaf and I.

The health of almost all on board during the crossing was good, except for one woman and one child, who died. These people, were already ill before they boarded the vessel. We had pretty good weather on the journey, except for a week when we had no wind, thus hampering the sailing. We had the opportunity of viewing much of the animal life at sea - whales, dolphins, etc. With this I will end my description of the ocean crossing and turn to the overland journey in America.

On the second day after our arrival in New York we began our journey inland, of which I will relate the most essential things. We left New York by steamer and the 22:nd and arrived the following day or the 23:rd in Albany. The same day we continued the journey via railway to Buffalo, where we took a steamer to Chicago. From there we continued to Milwaukee, where we stayed a day before going on to Janesville, Wisconsin, where we now find ourselves.

Now that I have told you about the journey I shall continue the story of myself. Upon my arrival in New York I could have gotten employment, but at such low pay, that I felt that I could not accept it, but instead to occupy myself with something more profitable, while at the same time studying how the language is spoken here, something which I have been practicing thanks to having about 200 Riksdaler Riksmünt, which I had earned. After Christmas I shall attend an English school in order to properly learn how to write the language, which is necessary if I am to enter the same profession which I have had before. There will be no difficulty in getting employment in whatever city I come to, and prospects of much better pay than in Sweden. School is here free for all nationalities, except for board and room, which can be quite expensive. But it will seem strange to learn my ABCs all over again. I knew the German language pretty well and I improved my knowledge during the journey with the Germans, Norwegians and Danes. This was also true on the land journey, since most of the passengers were Germans and there are goulash restaurants in every city.

My traveling companion, Gustaf, is still with me here in Janesville and I can report that neither of us has been ill a single day and we have had employment every day.

In addition to this I can inform you concerning a few things of the nature of the country around here. So far as I have learned it is good. Wages are good, although not as exorbitant as many write about or speak of. Land can be had for 25 cents an acre.

When it comes to the Americans in general, and especially the farmers, they appear to be industrious and assiduous and they expect the same of the people who work for them. I wish to mention this particularly.

When it comes to religion, I don't have much information. I have not met any Swedes since I left Sweden, but have encountered ten or twelve Norwegians who have peculiar views as to the basics of religion.

With this I will end my letter with a sincere greeting to all relatives and friends.

I don't expect an answer to this letter, until I write you next, since I cannot tell how long I shall remain here.

Yours sincerely

S. A. Hörberg¹

¹ Sven August Hörberg, merchant, emigr. from Härlunda Parish (Kron.) 1853 at the age of 36 years. -*Personregister till Statistiska Centralbyråns i Stockholm förteckningar över emigranter 1851-1860* (A 118).