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The Varied Careers of Peter Cassel

Kevin Proescholdt*

Peter Cassel is most widely known as the leader of one of the first Swedish settlements in North America during the nineteenth century. Though his role as the founder of the New Sweden, Iowa, community and as an instigator of the Great Migration that brought over a million Swedes to the United States is important, Cassel also developed a number of other “careers” during his lifetime that show the wide range of his interests and talents.

Early Life

Peter Cassel was born as Peter Carlsson on 13 October 1790 at Redeby in Asby Parish, in the southern part of Östergötland, Sweden. He was the first child of Carl Börjesson (1762-1834), a land-owning farmer (*bonde*) and Catharina Svensdotter (1761-1809). Like some of his Cassel ancestors, Peter did not always use the Cassel surname, but rather the more common patronymic surname. Peter used his Carlsson surname for the first several decades of his life.¹

Peter traced his Cassel ancestry to his namesake, Peter Cassel (ca. 1540-16__), who came to Sweden from Scotland in 1592 to become master of the stables for Duke Karl. This Scottish Peter Cassel apparently helped lead the coronation procession when Duke Karl finally became King Karl IX in 1607. The senior Peter Cassel had two sons who were officers in the Östgötarne Regiment: cornetist or lieutenant Önnart Cassel participated in the battle of Stångebro in Linköping in 1598 and, like King Gustavus Adolphus, was later killed at the battle of Lützen in 1632; and lieutenant Mårten Persson Cassel (from whom the younger Peter Cassel descended) was badly wounded during the Thirty Years War and given in fief the estate of Ramsmåla in Torpa Parish of Östergötland around 1620 as a reward by King Gustavus Adolphus.²

The Cassel family lived in the same general area in southern Östergötland—Torpa, Norra Vi and Asby Parishes—for several generations. The younger Peter

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¹ See Asby Parish (Ög.), Birth Records for 1790.

² See Ax. Setterdahl, *Östgöta Nation i Lund 1668-1913* (Linköping: AB Östgöta Correspondentens Boktryckeri, 1913), 191-192; Herman Söderstéen, “Släkten Cassels äldre stamtafla,” *Personhistoria Tidskrift* (1914): 41-46; and Kommendörkapten Eric Cassel, “Släkten Cassel,” (1959, photocopy).

Carlsson Cassel grew up at Redeby in Asby Parish where he had been born, although he and his family lived at Lidhult in Norra Vi Parish from about 1800-1806, during which time several of Peter's younger siblings were born. The family, and Peter, returned to Redeby in 1806.³

Miller

Peter Carlsson began his first working career learning to be a miller (*mjöltnare*) at the Långeryd grist mill in Asby Parish about two kilometers from his home at Redeby. He worked initially as a mill worker (*mjölndräng*), while learning to operate the mill. It was here, however, that a major tragedy occurred. On a cold November day in 1809, when Peter was nineteen years old, his mother came to the mill, most likely to pay her oldest son a visit. She apparently slipped while at the mill, perhaps on some ice that had formed, and was crushed to death on the mill wheel. Catharina was just forty-eight years old.

Six years after this tragic accident, on 15 December 1815, Peter married for the first time to Anna Svensdotter.⁴ Peter and Anna had probably known each other their entire lives, as she had grown up on a neighboring farm in Asby Parish called Besseryd.⁵ Anna's father, Sven Israelsson, raised horses on Besseryd as a *rusthållare*, who was required to furnish horses or supplies for a cavalryman, and her ancestors had lived in the area and at Besseryd since the 1500s.⁶

In the following year, 1816, Peter and Anna moved from Asby Parish to nearby Kisa Parish.⁷ The estate of Föllingsö there had been purchased by J. P. Hellvegh that year, and this change in ownership may have created the opening for a miller to operate the large mill there, just outside the town of Kisa.⁸ Peter became the operator of this mill, and he and Anna moved into the cottage named Qvarnstugan⁹ across the road from the mill in May. Here they lived for five years.

In 1821, however, Peter and Anna left Kisa Parish for neighboring Tidarsrum Parish. The cause for their move is not known, and they lived in Tidarsrum only a few months. The move came shortly after the death of their oldest child, Lena Catharina, who died from whooping cough in January of 1821

³ See Asby Parish (Ög.), Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), 1806-1817, 69. Carl Börjesson owned a portion of Lidhult; Redeby had been owned by Carl Börjesson's maternal grandfather.

⁴ Asby Parish (Ög.), Marriage Records, 1815.

⁵ The modern spelling of this name is Beseryd.

⁶ Olov Mattsson, letters to author, 22 January 1996 and 23 February 1996.

⁷ Asby Parish (Ög.), Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), 1806-1817, 151; and Kisa Parish (Ög.), Moving In Record (*Inflyttningslängd*), 1816, 46. Peter and Anna moved to Qvarnstugan on 6 May 1816.

⁸ *En Bok om Kisa Socken*, Band 3, (Linköping, 1981), 131.

⁹ The modern spelling of this name is Kvarnstugan.

at Qvarnstugan. Perhaps their grief over the loss of Lena led to the move. But they moved back to Kisa Parish in December of 1821, just a couple of weeks before the birth of their oldest son, Carl Johan, who was born at Kjölfors¹⁰ just north of the town of Kisa. Peter operated the mill at Kjölfors until 1824.¹¹

In 1824, Peter and his family moved back to Qvarnstugan at the Föllingsö mill. Here he continued his work as a miller for the next fourteen years. In 1825, according to a note in the household examination roll (*husförhörslängd*), Peter discarded his patronymic surname of Carlsson and began using his old family name of Cassel. He used the Cassel name for the rest of his life.¹²

His remaining years at Qvarnstugan and the mill brought many changes in Cassel's life. Two more young daughters, Sophia Mathilda and Anna Sophia, and a son, Sven Fredric, were born in his family, but all died young; and Cassel's wife, Anna, died in 1829 due to childbirth complications from Anna Sophia's birth.¹³

But the following year Cassel married Ingeborg Catharina Anders-dotter, a farmer's daughter from nearby Bjerkeryd,¹⁴ who was seventeen years younger than Cassel. Her father, Anders Jönsson, had been appointed by the courts as the custodian of the Cassel children after Anna's death until her probate was finished, and Cassel may well have met Ingeborg Catharina because of this connection.¹⁵ He started a second family with her and soon Carl Johan, the one surviving child from his first marriage, had a houseful of younger siblings at Qvarnstugan.¹⁶

Inventor and Master Builder

While living at Qvarnstugan and running the Föllingsö mill, Cassel's aptitude for machine works and mechanical devices launched him on another career as an inventor. In the late 1830s, Cassel and a like-minded colleague, master builder (*byggmästare*) Anders Svan (or Svahn) from Kisa, invented a new threshing machine. The advantages of their new threshing machine apparently

¹⁰ The modern spelling of this name is Kölefors.

¹¹ Kisa Parish (Ög.), Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), 1816-1821 (Föllingsö), 4; Tidarsrum Parish (Ög.), Moving In Record (*Inflyttningslängd*), 1821, 268 (they moved in on 13 May 1821); Tidarsrum Parish (Ög.), Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), 1816-1825, 86; Kisa Parish (Ög.), Moving In Record (*Inflyttningslängd*), 1821, 80 (moved to Kjölfors on 6 Dec. 1821); Kisa Parish (Ög.), Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), 1821-1827 (Kjölfors), 250.

¹² Kisa Parish (Ög.), Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), 1821-1827 (Föllingsö), 6.

¹³ Kisa Parish (Ög.), Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), 1826-1830 (Föllingsö), 6. See also Kisa Parish (Ög.), Death Records, 1829, 298.

¹⁴ Bjerkeryd is now sometimes spelled either Bjärkeryd or Björkeryd.

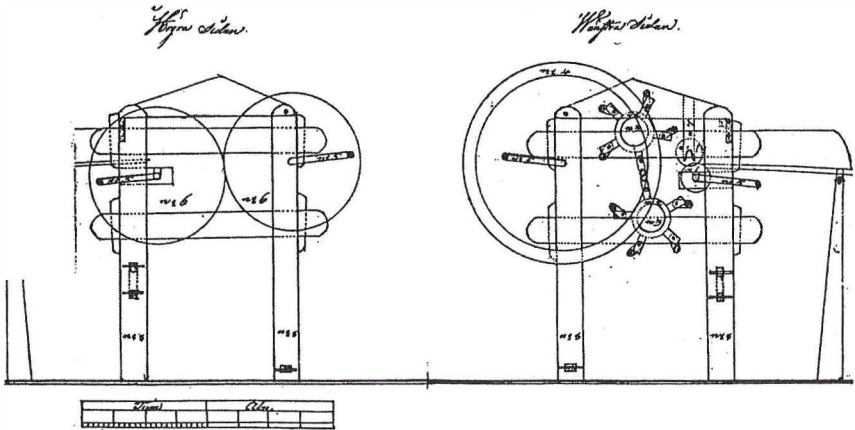
¹⁵ See Anna Svensdotter, Probate Record No. 84, Kinda Härad (Ög.), 1829.

¹⁶ Kisa Parish (Ög.), Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), 1831-1835 (Föllingsö), 10. See also Kisa Parish (Ög.), Marriage Records, 1830, 198.

lay in the fact that it was portable and, after threshing the grain, the machine left the straw whole and undamaged, suitable still for use in thatching.

Cassel and Svan applied for a patent for their new invention. On 18 December 1837, the National Board of Trade in Stockholm (*Rikets Kommersekollegium*) granted them their patent for a period of eight years.¹⁷ It may well have been Cassel's invention and patent that earned for him the description, like his partner Svan, of master builder or building contractor (*byggmästare*), which was often used in official records from that point forward.

But the strength of Cassel's patent may not have lasted long into the eight-year period. On 3 July 1838, Cassel and Svan complained in a legal proceeding of a patent infringement. Byggmästare Anders Sandström at nearby Brokind had invented a similar threshing machine that Cassel and Svan felt violated their patent. The legal proceeding dragged on for years. During this time, the National Board of Trade allowed their competitor to patent his threshing machine in 1840, apparently feeling it was different enough to qualify for its own patent. Finally in 1844, eight long years after Cassel and Svan first filed their complaint, their case was dismissed in favor of the Brokind threshing machine.¹⁸ Still, the Agricultural Society (*Hushållningssällskapet*) was sufficiently impressed with Peter Cassel's and Anders Svan's threshing machine that the society included a description of the machine in the society's publication in 1842.¹⁹



Threshing machine line drawings. (Courtesy of the author.)

¹⁷ See Kommersekollegium Huvudarkivet, Registratur, 18 December 1837, volym B II a:105; and Patentsökningar, 1838, volym E XVII e I: 5.

¹⁸ The decision against Cassel and Svan was filed on 12 March 1844. Copies of complaint and decision in possession of author.

¹⁹ *En Bok om Kisa Socken*, Band 4, 436.

Farmer

In 1838, Cassel and his family moved from Qvarnstugan to his wife's home farm at Bjerkeryd, initially leasing and later purchasing the Norrgård farm (North Farm) there from his father-in-law, Anders Jönsson. Cassel thus began another career as a farmer (*bonde*). Farming was not a new occupation for Cassel, as he had grown up on farms and had helped his father with the extensive manual work on the Redeby farm in Asby Parish. Cassel's Norrgård farm at Bjerkeryd contained about 75 hectares of land, or about 185 acres. The farms at Bjerkeryd (including another north farm at about 70 hectares and a south farm of about 140 hectares) encompassed some rich fertile lands.²⁰

Cassel was undoubtedly welcomed there by his parents-in-law, who probably saw in his acquisition of their farm the solution to their own long-term care in their declining years. For Cassel's wife, Ingeborg Catharina, their move meant a homecoming to the large house in which she had grown up. Another son, Gustaf Albert Cassel, was born on the first of November in 1838, after their move to Bjerkeryd.²¹

Peter Cassel continued living in Bjerkeryd and farming Norrgård as well as building threshing machines until his emigration to America in 1845. The Kisa Parish household examination roll listed *Byggmästaren* Peter Cassel and his family at Bjerkeryd throughout the first half of the 1840s.²²

Emigrant

During his years in Kisa Parish, Peter Cassel was well-known and respected in the community. He became a member of the parish council (*sockenstämman*), and was selected to be an elector of the members of the national Parliament (Riksdag) from the land-owning Farmer or Peasant (*Bonde*) Estate, one of four houses in the Riksdag. But he also began to acquire some views that were considered quite radical in Sweden at the time.

Cassel had become friends with Carl Gustaf Sundius, the apothecary or druggist in Kisa. The two talked often of politics, and shared similar views about such "radical" concepts as freedom, equality, and representation. A contemporary resident of Kisa described Sundius as a "political apothecary." This resident further described Sundius:

Apothecary S. was so devoted to politics and eager to improve society through its enlightenment that he not infrequently neglected or forgot all

²⁰ Information obtained from Gunnar Svensson, Bjerkeryd, 16 June 1995.

²¹ Kisa Parish (Ög.), Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), 1836-1840 (Föllingsö), 11 and (Bjerkeryd), 436.

²² Kisa Parish (Ög.), Household Examination Roll (*Husförhörslängd*), 1840-1845 (Bjerkeryd), 15.

else. Once, for example, when a farmer came to the shop to buy medications, it happened that after serving him, he accompanied the farmer, bare-headed in minus 18° [C] cold, all the way to Föllingsö mill, to impress upon him his ideals concerning freedom and throwing off the yoke, before it dawned upon him that there were several people waiting in the shop to have their prescriptions filled! He was a most fiery, well-meaning man.²³

The man Sundius accompanied to Föllingsö mill was, most likely, his friend Peter Cassel.

Cassel, Sundius, and the young assistant pastor in Kisa, Jonas Janzon, became involved with an effort in 1844 to reform the representation in the Riksdag. A reform meeting was held in Linköping on 2 December 1844, and Cassel explained the issues to the farmers and the adamant opposition of the other Riksdag houses, concerning a more equitable system of representation. Cassel and others signed a formal petition favoring this reform, but the Riksdag ignored it and the change did not occur for twenty more years.²⁴

Cassel and Sundius shared another radical view at the same time—freedom and equality could also be achieved by emigration to the United States.²⁵ Cassel had undoubtedly read or heard about accounts of America in some of the Swedish newspapers. Gustaf Unonius had founded the short-lived Pine Lake, Wisconsin, settlement in 1841, and some of his letters had appeared in Swedish newspapers describing life in America. Polycarpus von Schneidau and his wife joined Unonius there in 1842, and they no doubt wrote letters to his half-sisters who lived at Mjellerum in Kisa Parish, located next to Bjerkerød. Cassel probably read some of these letters as well.²⁶

For whatever combination of reasons—the failure of the Riksdag to enact reforms, frustration over his patent infringement case, the influence of Sundius, the letters of Unonius and von Schneidau, the dream of freedom in America—Peter Cassel resolved in the spring of 1845 to emigrate to America. He gathered together a group of twenty-one people, family and friends, that included not only his family, but that of Johan Danielsson (his good friend who then lived at Qvarnstugan), his wife's unmarried brother and sister (Eric Peter Andersson and Sara Lovisa Andersdotter), and his sister's family (Ingeborg Catharina Carlsdotter and Johannes Månsson).

²³ Quoted in Curt von Wachenfeldt, "Background to Peter Cassel's Emigration," in *Peter Cassel & Iowa's New Sweden*, ed. H. Arnold Barton (Chicago: Swedish-American Historical Quarterly, 1995), 1.

²⁴ Barton, *Peter Cassel*, 73. See also *Östgöta Correspondenten* (Linköping), 22 Jan. 1845. One of the other signers to this petition was Cassel's brother-in-law, Johannes Månsson, who later joined Cassel's emigration party.

²⁵ Sundius started one of Sweden's earliest emigrant agencies in his apothecary shop in 1846.

²⁶ See Kevin Proescholdt, "America Letters and Iowa's First Swedish Settlements," *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 49 (July 1998): 169-171.

Cassel sold his farm back to his parents-in-law to finance the trip, and completed the many other tasks necessary to prepare to leave Sweden for the land of opportunity across the Atlantic. He intended to join Unonius at Pine Lake, Wisconsin. Unlike Unonius and von Schneidau, however, Cassel did not belong to the upper or noble classes in Swedish society, and his departure as a land-owning farmer caused quite a stir in Sweden. Newspapers in Sweden covered news of Cassel for several years, and various writers debated his character, judgment, and veracity.²⁷

The Cassel party left Kisa Parish in May of 1845 and traveled, via wagon, north to the town of Berg and then via the Göta Canal, to the port city of Göteborg.²⁸ They arrived in Göteborg on 21 May 1845, but did not sail until 24 June on the sailing ship *Superb*. In the meantime, Cassel's skills as a building contractor were put to use, as the men in his party worked on a house under construction on a farm just outside the city that was owned by the ship's owner in exchange for lodging during the wait.²⁹

On the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of New Sweden, in 1895, Cassel's son Andrew recalled their journey:

The journey was commenced about the middle of May, in private conveyance for about 40 miles to Berg, where we took the steamboat that sailed between Stockholm and Gothenburg, through the lakes and Göta canal to the seaport Gothenburg where we had a sailing vessel engaged. But we soon found out that it was an old hull and not safe to sail in. So we threw up the contract and had to engage another ship, which had to be put in order and made suitable to carry emigrants. The main cargo was iron. And we stepped aboard the ship *Superb* about the middle of June, and sailed along very nicely until we came to the entrance of the English Channel. Then the wind began to blow right against us and continued almost a tempest for one whole week, which made nearly all the passengers sick. Again a little more than mid-sea, we had a severe storm, and the night during the worst of the storm was very dark so that we ran against another vessel and lost our front mast or what is called the bowsprit. Whether the other vessel was lost or not, we do not know, but one thing we do know, and that is, we were glad that we did not go to the bottom of the ocean. In eight weeks we landed at New York, very happy, to see the promised land.³⁰

²⁷ Barton, *Peter Cassel*, 72-77.

²⁸ Kisa Parish (Ög.), Moving Out Record (*Utflytningslängd*), 1845, 51. According to the parish records, Cassel and his family received permission to leave Kisa on 21 April 1845. Although the parish records indicate that Cassel's nephew, the tailor Eric Johan Ericsson, left with Cassel's family, he actually didn't emigrate until after his marriage the following year.

²⁹ Barton, *Peter Cassel*, 71.

³⁰ Andrew F. Cassel's account, "History of the First Swedish Emigrants in the 19th Century who came to the U.S." was given on 15 August 1895 at the old Cassel homestead at the 50th anniversary of the settling of New Sweden. It is found on pages 7-18 of Carl J. Bengtson's *The*

The *Superb* landed in New York City on 11 August 1845.³¹ In New York, Cassel met another Swede who had lived in America for several years, Pehr Dahlberg, who had come to New York to meet his family. Dahlberg advised Cassel that the best available government farm land was not in Wisconsin, but in the Iowa Territory. Cassel took Dahlberg's advice, the Dahlberg family joined the Cassel party, and the Swedish immigrants headed for Iowa. They took a combination of trains, canals, and rivers to cross the Allegheny Mountains, eventually steaming down the Ohio River, and then up the Mississippi River to Burlington, Iowa.³²

They traveled west from Burlington about forty-two miles to what is now Lockridge Township of Jefferson County, Iowa, where they found government land available under the Preemption Act. Here they stopped, in the middle of September 1845, and began building homes for the settlement that became New Sweden, Iowa.

Writer

Even before they reached New Sweden, Peter Cassel wrote his first letter back to Sweden. His letters to Sweden were widely read, and some appeared in Swedish newspapers. His letters helped ignite a firestorm of interest in immigrating to America among the common classes of Swedish society in his home area, and his letters also re-ignited the debate in the Swedish press over his veracity and the merits of emigration. Cassel's home area of southern Östergötland and northern Småland became one of the earliest centers for emigration to America, and much of that interest can be traced to the letters from Peter Cassel's pen.

Cassel wrote his first letter from Cincinnati, Ohio, on the second of September, while still traveling to Iowa. He wrote it to his good friend Sundius who, with a touch of humor given both men's strong desire for equality, he addressed as "High Noble Apothecary."

Now I would like to say something about the fact that since we left New York we have eaten fruit, as much as we liked, even grapes, for it grows wild in profusion. Poverty must be something unknown, for we have looked into what appeared to be quite miserable huts but there seen the

Early History of New Sweden, Iowa, Part I, 1925, in manuscript form, Carl J. Bengtson Papers, ELCA Archives, Chicago.

³¹ Nils William Olsson and Erik Wikén, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in the United States 1820-1850* (Stockholm: Royal Library, 1995), 42-43 and 224-226.

³² For information on how the Cassel party crossed Pennsylvania on the Allegheny Portage Railroad, see George Bernard Hanson, "How the Peter Cassel Party Crossed Pennsylvania," *Swedish American Genealogist* 15 (December 1995): 172-178. For a contemporary description of their travel from New York to Burlington, written by another Swede who joined the group, see Erik Wikén, "Who was Otto Wilhelm Åkerman?" *Swedish American Genealogist* 3 (September 1983): 111-115.

inhabitants sitting at a set table with 4, indeed perhaps 6 dishes for their dinner and no bread that is not of fine-sifted wheat flour, for any other kind is hard to find. I was able once to buy some fine-sifted rye buns. Otherwise we have eaten nothing but fresh wheat bread since we arrived on American soil. In a word, peace and prosperity prevail here.³³

Cassel continued his glowing descriptions of America in his next known letter, written from New Sweden, Iowa, in February of 1846:

The ease of making a living here and the increasing prosperity of the farmers, year by year and day by day, exceeds anything we anticipated. If only half of the work expended on the soil in the fatherland were utilized here, the yield would reach the wildest imagination; but the American farmer, content with enough to give him a living and comfort, confines himself to plowing, planting, and harvesting.

Later in the same letter, Cassel described the nature of American society. His description, to those in Sweden living in that very class-conscious society, must have seemed almost utopian:

Freedom and equality are the fundamental principles of the constitution of the United States. There is no such thing as class distinction here, no counts, barons, lords or lordly estates. The one is as good as another, and everyone lives in the unrestricted enjoyment of personal liberty. A Swedish bonde, raised under oppression and accustomed to poverty and want, here finds himself elevated to a new world, as it were, where all his former hazy ideas of a society conforming more closely to nature's laws are suddenly made real and he enjoys a satisfaction in life that he has never before experienced.³⁴

Cassel's third known letter, written in December 1848, showed that his enthusiasm for America had not dimmed since his arrival three years earlier:

Nobody in Sweden can imagine all the advantages America offers sober, honest, and industrious persons; for them it is a veritable land of Canaan, where the natural resources are literally flowing with milk and honey. But for those who neither can nor will work, who have left Sweden with other plans for making a living, they will without exception find a Siberia, and the sooner they leave the better, if they want to escape the greatest want and misery. Thus you see that this country can be at the same time both a Canaan and a Siberia. Truly it is a peculiar country!

³³ Barton, *Peter Cassel*, 88.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 93, 95.

Cassel continued in this 1848 letter to describe the abundance of wildlife, particularly of the now-extinct passenger pigeon:

I recall that I have mentioned in a previous letter what an abundance of game there is here; but it is impossible for a Swede to have a correct conception of it—for example, the millions, not thousands, of pigeons. The places where they roost at night are almost inaccessible morasses, because they congregate so thickly in the trees that they are either uprooted or their limbs are broken down, and that with such a terrific noise that it can be heard at a distance of two English miles, like a great waterfall. We see herds of ten or twelve deer. They are pretty wild, rather fleet, and hard to shoot.³⁵

Cassel's letters sparked a huge interest in Sweden in emigrating to America, and hundreds of Swedes followed his example, left their homeland, and set off to "find Cassel" in America. Many did. Cassel's youngest daughter remembered that at one time, when she was a child, there were fourteen trunks in their attic belonging to other immigrants who had come to New Sweden and had gone out to nearby farms to work.³⁶ In the Kinda district alone (which included Kisa Parish), more than 6,000 people emigrated to America between 1845 and 1920, many in the early years inspired by the letters and descriptions of Peter Cassel.³⁷

Pioneer

In Iowa, Peter Cassel and party began new work as pioneers. Cabins and homes needed to be constructed immediately upon their arrival at New Sweden for shelter during the upcoming winter. Cassel's son Andrew years later told of their first attempts at shelter, and how they moved into a roofless cabin:

The first thing in order was to name the place [the cabin], and it was called Stockholm, and next to cut brush for the roof of the cabin. We soon found Ross' saw mill, got some boards and set posts in the ground and made a shanty. Next we commenced to make brick. To dry them we laid them on the roof of the shanty, where we had our goods, as it had a better roof than the cabin. After we had all lived comfortably for a week, it began to thunder very hard, and for night's quarters all selected the cabin. Soon it began to rain, and poured all night, and until this day I have not seen it rain harder or more fire in the air than that night. But it was rather lucky that we were on high ground or the creek would have washed us away. We had a good ducking but the next day was bright and we were busy airing and sunning our soaked clothes and other articles. Our board shanty lay level with the

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 108-109.

³⁶ Jeanette Jacobson, "Grandmother Jacobson's Ninety Years" (21 September 1941, photocopy).

³⁷ Barton, *Peter Cassel*, 9. About 20% of the entire Swedish emigration to America from 1845-1850 (669 of the total 3,411 emigrants) came from Cassel's home area of northeastern Götaland. See Lennart Åslid, "Emigranter från Nordöstra Götaland till New York 1845-1850 och Deras Vidare Öden," Linköpings Universitet, 10 februari 1976.

ground. All took courage and resolved to provide better quarters, for the Swedish immigrants had come to stay and make America their future home.³⁸

Cassel and the other Swedish immigrants also had to begin breaking the land and start farming. Unlike the farms in Sweden, which in many instances had been under cultivation for centuries, the land at New Sweden had never been plowed or farmed. This presented new challenges to Cassel and the other Swedish settlers as they began cultivation of their new lands.

Soon, Peter Cassel and the other Swedish settlers began formally selecting the lands they wanted to purchase from the government. Cassel and the other early immigrants purchased their farms for \$1.25 an acre under the terms of the Preemption Act, under which payment was not due until later. Carl Carlsson (or Charles Carlson, as he was called in America) came to New Sweden in 1846 and was apparently the first of the Swedes to file a claim for preemption land in Lockridge Township in October 1846.

Cassel himself filed his claim for 40 acres of land on 17 September 1847. His farm lay in section 20 of Lockridge Township near the heart of the New Sweden community. His 40-acre farm consisted of the NE1/4SE1/4 sec. 20, immediately west of John Danielson's land and west of where the New Sweden Methodist and Lutheran Churches would later be constructed.³⁹

By 1850, Cassel had added another 40 acres to his farm, for a total of 80 acres. But typical of pioneer farms, not much of his farm was classified as "improved" acreage or under cultivation. Only 6 acres of Cassel's farm was so classified; the other 74 acres remained "unimproved". But he had built the value of his farm to \$400, with another \$50 in machinery and implements and yet another \$90 in livestock.⁴⁰

Cassel continued to add to his farm holdings through the years. On 12 January 1856, he bought 20 more acres of privately owned farm land immediately adjacent to and on the north side of his original 40-acre farm in section 20, which also adjoined his second 40-acre tract.⁴¹

At some point in the early 1850s, Cassel became a naturalized citizen of the United States, although the early, incomplete records for Jefferson County do not

³⁸ See A. F. Cassel's account in "Jefferson County History, Settlement and History of Lockridge Township," *Fairfield Ledger*, 6 May 1903, 7.

³⁹ Original Land Entry Book, Jefferson County, Iowa, Recorder's Office, Fairfield, 94-95.

⁴⁰ See 1850 Agricultural Census, Lockridge Township, Jefferson County, Iowa. His second 40 acres was the SW quarter of the NE quarter of Section 20, which was kitty-corner to the northwest across the road from his initial 40 acres.

⁴¹ Barton, *Peter Cassel*, 19.

record when. The special 1852 and 1854 censuses indicated that he was a voter, and the 1856 Iowa census recorded him as a naturalized citizen.⁴²

Peter Cassel purchased yet another 40 acres in the 1850s, the NW1/4SW1/4 sec. 16 in Lockridge Township. This land lay about three-quarters of a mile north of his first farm, on the east side of the road. At the time of his death, Cassel owned nearly 120 acres of farmland in Lockridge Township, apparently having sold off 20 acres from his original land claim at some point.⁴³

As Cassel entered his sixties, the physical farm work and other activities (see below) prevented him from operating his farm himself. He contracted with his son, Andrew, after he had reached the age of twenty-one, to do most of the demanding farm work at \$100 per year.⁴⁴

Church Founder and Pastor

One of Peter Cassel's last careers was of church founder and pastor in New Sweden. Back in Sweden, many people participated in a personal and pietistic revival against the staid and formalistic State Lutheran Church of Sweden. The participants in this revival were called, disparagingly by their detractors, *läsare* or readers, since the *läsare* believed that reading the Bible helped people better understand God and lead people into a personal commitment to their faith. The *läsare* met together to read the Bible and devotional materials in homes or places other than the churches. Yet the 1726 Conventicle Act (*konventikelpakat*) prohibited people from meeting for religious purposes unless a pastor was present.

While still in Sweden, Peter Cassel had been involved in the pietistic religious revival in Kisa (ca. 1825) as well as the temperance movement there, and was known in his community as a godly man. Cassel's threshing machine partner, Anders Svan, was also a religious man who would later help foster the Kisa-Västra Eneby Mission Church.⁴⁵ Cassel had also worked with the young assistant pastor at Kisa, Jonas Janson, who the local *läsare* considered to be their pastor. Janson, according to one story, would attend the meetings of the *läsare* and would stand up to begin preaching only when the constable arrived to break up the otherwise illegal religious gathering.⁴⁶

⁴² See 1852 and 1854 Special Censuses, Lockridge Township, Jefferson County, Iowa; and 1856 Iowa Census, Vol. 49, Lockridge Township, Jefferson County, Iowa.

⁴³ Perhaps because of his purchases of additional land, Cassel also had a considerable debt load at the time of his death. For more information on Cassel's farm lands, see Peter Cassel Probate Records, Probate Box #8, Jefferson County, Iowa.

⁴⁴ Peter Cassel Probate Records, Probate Box #8, Jefferson County, Iowa.

⁴⁵ *En Bok om Kisa Socken*, Band 4, 228.

⁴⁶ *En Bok om Kisa Socken*, Band 4, 221.

After arriving on the *Superb* in New York, Peter Cassel and his party went to the *Bethel Ship* anchored in the New York harbor, where they attended services conducted by the Swedish Methodist minister, Olof G. Hedström. It was here that Cassel first heard Methodist preaching and doctrine, though he and his party remained Lutherans.⁴⁷

After settling in New Sweden, Cassel and the others formed their own church, the New Sweden Lutheran Church, in January 1848 and called a shoemaker from their settlement, Magnus Fredrik Håkanson, to be their first pastor. Cassel described their church in his letter of December 1848:

Send me three copies of the small hymnbook and one with large type and 2 or 3 catechisms. We need these as the old ones are very worn by frequent use and the catechisms we need for the children since they are to read their confirmation lessons in Swedish, because we now have a pastor. He is born in Blekinge and is 32 years old, a disciple of the true Pastor Sellergren and a faithful follower of him in life as well as in doctrine. He has now for eleven months preached every Sunday and holiday; on weekdays he works like the rest of us, because he does not need to take any time to write his sermons, as he has an unusual ability to speak. I recall some Sundays when he preached over two hours and as fluently the second hour as the first. The 9th of this month he married a Swedish girl. We are thirteen families who pay the pastor's salary; and there are four who are excused from paying him anything, although they nevertheless belong to the church.⁴⁸

In the spring of 1850, New Sweden was visited by Olof Hedström's brother, Jonas J. Hedström, a Swedish Methodist pastor from Victoria, Illinois. He preached, beginning on Pentecost Sunday, for a total of three days, then returned in November for a revival meeting of eight days. It was from this revival meeting that he formed the New Sweden Methodist Church. Many of the settlement's leaders, including Peter Cassel and John Danielson, converted to Methodism by the power and passion of Hedström's preaching and helped establish the new church. Cassel, coming from his *läsare* and temperance background, felt the Methodist doctrine more closely comported with his own background and faith.

Hedström described his visits to New Sweden on February 1851:

We have extended our work across the Mississippi River into Jefferson County, in the State of Iowa, where there is a large Swedish settlement. I visited that place last spring, and the people received me with much friendship. We began and continued a meeting three days, and the Lord was

⁴⁷ See, for example, Kevin Proescholdt, "Religious Life and Controversy in New Sweden, Iowa, 1845-1860," *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 47 (April 1996): 84-88.

⁴⁸ Barton, *Peter Cassel*, 108.

present to bless the people. Many were inquiring after the way of life; but having some appointments out, I had to leave this interesting field and go to my work on this side of the river. I visited my countrymen in Iowa the second time last fall, and held a meeting eight days. There was much opposition from those that rejected the life and power of religion; but the Lord poured out his Spirit and blessed the people: many souls were converted, and many more cried for mercy. I have never seen so great and general a revival among my countrymen as we had during this meeting. The last Sabbath that the meeting continued was the most interesting. We had a communion session on that day, and as no efforts had before been made to form a society, it was thought better to see how many would join our Church. The invitation was given, and sixty came and joined on probation. Two class leaders were appointed, and the missionary and people parted with many tears of joy, praising the Lord for his goodness.⁴⁹

A somewhat mysterious Dr. Gustaf Smith served the New Sweden Methodist Church as its first pastor, sent by the Iowa Conference of the Methodist church. But he was soon expelled from New Sweden and the ministry, because of some now-unknown treachery and deceit.⁵⁰

Cassel had initially been appointed by Hedström as a local preacher, meaning a layman who is authorized to preach. But from 1851, following Smith's dismissal, until the fall of 1854, Peter Cassel himself served as the pastor of the New Sweden Methodist Church. One of his contemporaries, Rev. Nils O. Westergreen, wrote of Cassel's service as pastor: "Old brother Cassel was one of the best men we have had among us. A gifted preacher, practical and endowed with clear insight in the Word of God, he served the Church faithfully and was of great blessing as long as he lived."⁵¹

In addition to serving as the pastor of the New Sweden church, Cassel may also have served as a traveling circuit-rider minister to scattered Swedish settlements as far away as Swede Bend in north central Iowa, 175 miles from New Sweden. At least one source credits Peter Cassel with visiting and preaching in Swede Bend in 1854. If he did so, he would have undoubtedly also visited the Swede Point (Madrid) settlement to the south, where his oldest son, Carl Johan Cassel, had lived since 1849.⁵²

⁴⁹ J. J. Hedstrom, Missionary, Report of February 25, 1851, in *Thirty-second Annual Report of the M. E. Missionary Society*, 1851, 63.

⁵⁰ C. A. Anderson, "A Short History of the Swedish M.E. Church, New Sweden, Iowa," ca. 1891, manuscript translated by Carl J. Bengtson, Carl J. Bengtson Papers, ELCA Archives, Chicago.

⁵¹ Victor Witting, *Minnen från mitt Lif som Sjöman, Immigrant och Predicant* (Worcester, Massachusetts: Burbank & Co. Tryckeri, 1902): 219-22. See also *Sändebudet*, 17 June 1940, 1, 5; and C. G. Wallenius and E. D. Olson, "A Short Story of the Swedish Methodism in America," *The Swedish Element in America*, Vol. II (Chicago, 1931), 25.

⁵² The source that names Cassel as a visiting preacher in Swede Bend is George T. Flom, "The Early Swedish Immigration to Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. III, No. 4, 1905, 601-615. Other sources indicate that Gustaf Smith from New Sweden had visited the Swedish

The ninetieth anniversary booklet of the New Sweden Methodist Church contains a quote attributed to Cassel regarding his faith and doctrine: "You all know me as one accustomed to hearing a preacher of the pure doctrine and grounded in the correct doctrine of the atonement through Jesus our Lord and Redeemer, and therefore have the assurance that I would never subscribe to any doctrine that does not rest on this foundation."⁵³

Rev. Peter Cassel remained active with the New Sweden Methodist Church even after he stepped down from the pastorate in the fall of 1854 at the age of sixty-four. He was further honored when Bishop E. S. Janes formally ordained him as a deacon of the Iowa Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in nearby Mount Pleasant, Iowa, on 29 September 1856.

Peter Cassel died in New Sweden, Iowa—his land of freedom and opportunity—on 4 March 1857.⁵⁴ He was sixty-six years old. Jonas Hedström mentioned Cassel's death in a report written in July of that year: "We have met with a great loss in the death of one of our beloved local preachers. He had been a member of the Church about six years, and was ordained deacon last fall by Bishop Janes. He was nearly fifty [*sic*] years old when he died. His end was triumphant; so much so, that his death carried conviction to some who had before been careless."⁵⁵

Conclusion

Neither Peter Cassel nor any of his children ever returned to Sweden, but his memory and legacy there have continued. In 1914, for example, nearly seventy years after Cassel left Sweden, his grandson Wesley became the first Cassel family member to return to Sweden. Wesley sent a postcard to his aged father Andrew, showing the Kisa church Andrew had known as a boy. "Dear Father," Wesley wrote, "We are now in your little town [of] about 1900 inhabitants. We were up to Bjkrud [*sic*] last night and looked around." How exciting that must have been for Wesley and for the eighty-three-year-old Andrew, to re-trace the Cassel footsteps in Kisa and rekindle the collective family memories!⁵⁶

settlements in Swede Bend and Sheldahl in 1854, but Smith had long since been dismissed from New Sweden at that point. Conceivably it was Cassel of New Sweden who traveled there rather than Smith of New Sweden. Andrew Erickson, who succeeded Cassel as pastor at New Sweden, also traveled extensively to Swede Bend and other settlements during his tenure from 1854-1856. See Witing, *Minnen från mitt Lif*, 439, 448-450, and 454; and N. M. Liljegren, N. O. Westergreen, and C. G. Wallenius, *Svenska Metodism i Amerika* (Chicago: Svenska M. E. Bokhandels-Föreningens Förlag, 1895), 443-448.

⁵³ *Ninetieth Anniversary Celebration, New Sweden Methodist Church*, June 14 to 16, 1940, 8.

⁵⁴ *Den Svenske Republikanen* (Galva, IL), 13 March 1857, 1.

⁵⁵ *Missionary Advocate*, Vol. XIII, No. 7, October 1857, 55.

⁵⁶ Wesley Cassel, postcard to A. F. Cassel, 10 July 1914. Andrew Cassel died in July 1915, and had earlier served six years in the Iowa Legislature.

Peter Cassel's legacy and memory live on in other ways as well. Since 1979, Kisa has held a Peter Cassel Day (Peter Cassel Dagen) celebration on the Sunday before Midsommar each June. The event is usually co-sponsored by the Filbyter Lodge of the Vasa Order of America, the Kisa-Västra Eneby Hembygdsförening, Kinda Kommun, and the Svenska Peter Casselsällskapet (Swedish Peter Cassel Society). In 1995, on the 150th anniversary of the Cassel party emigration to New Sweden, the Swedish-American Historical Society co-sponsored an American Peter Cassel Days in the New Sweden, Iowa, area, in conjunction with the Swedish Heritage Society of Swedesburg, the Lockridge Augustana Lutheran Church, and the New Sweden Lutheran and Methodist Churches.

In 1995, the Swedish-American Historical Society also published the book *Peter Cassel & Iowa's New Sweden*. This book included the special April 1981 issue of the society's *Quarterly* on Peter Cassel and New Sweden, as well as the seminal scholarly work on the same topic by George M. Stephenson from a 1929 issue of the *Swedish-American Historical Bulletin*. In 1996, the Svenska Peter Casselsällskapet published a Swedish language version of the same book. In 1998, on the twentieth consecutive Peter Cassel Dagen in Kisa, the Svenska Peter Casselsällskapet dedicated a plaque to the memory of Cassel and the entire first company of emigrants from Kisa, placed on a boulder, originally from Bjerkeryd, located outside the Emigrant Museum in Kisa, the same building that housed Sundius's apothecary shop and emigrant agency in Cassel's time.

Peter Cassel's legacy and memory also live on through his descendants in America. Cassel was the father to eleven children; descendants of Carl Johan, Anders Fredrik, Maria Mathilda, and Carrie Sofia help carry on Peter Cassel's legacy.

Children of Peter Cassel:⁵⁷

1. **Lena Catharina Cassel**, b. Qvarnstugan, Kisa Parish (Ög.), 21 February 1818; d. Kisa Parish, 24 January 1821.
2. **Carl Johan Cassel**, b. Kjölfors, Kisa Parish, 26 December 1821; d. Madrid, Boone County, Iowa, 25 November 1902; m. Ulrika Eriksdotter Dalander.
3. **Sophia Mathilda Cassel**, b. Qvarnstugan, Kisa Parish, 20 October 1826; d. Qvarnstugan, 30 June 1827.
4. **Sven Fredric Cassel**, b. Qvarnstugan, Kisa Parish, 3 April 1828; d. Qvarnstugan, 3 April 1828.

⁵⁷ The birth records of the first five of Cassel's children give their surnames not as Cassel, but as the patronymic forms of Persson, Petersdotter or Petersson. For consistency's sake, I have listed the surname of all eleven children as Cassel.

5. **Anna Sophia Cassel**, b. Qvarnstugan, Kisa Parish 29 May 1829; d. Qvarnstugan, 20 April 1830.
6. **Anders Fredrik Cassel** (Andrew Frederick Cassel), b. Qvarnstugan, Kisa Parish 3 December 1831; d. New Sweden, Jefferson County, Iowa, 29 July 1915; m. Margareta Lovisa Petersson (Louisa Peterson).
7. **Maria Mathilda Cassel**, b. Qvarnstugan, Kisa Parish, 27 January 1834; d. Fairfield, Jefferson County, Iowa, 9 December 1918; m. Carl Johan Petersson (Charles John Peterson) and Frans Oscar Danielsson (Frank Oscar Danielson).
8. **Catharina Cassel**, b. Qvarnstugan, Kisa Parish, 4 February 1836; d. New Sweden, Iowa, August 1846.
9. **Gustaf Albert Cassel**, b. Bjerkeryd, Kisa Parish, 1 November 1838; d. Helena, Phillips County, Arkansas, 27 December 1862.
10. **Peter Edward Cassel**, b. New Sweden, Iowa, 12 July 1849; d. New Sweden, 13 January 1875.
11. **Carrie Sofia Cassel**, b. New Sweden, Iowa, 14 August 1851; d. Spaulding, Adair County, Iowa, 16 March 1942; m. Axel Jacobsson.

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