My visit to USA in August 2007 looking for traces of the Swedish emigration

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Background
Ever since the 1960s I have been interested of the Swedish emigration to USA. I read the novels of Vilhelm Moberg where he writes about Karl-Oskar and Kristina who went from the poor Småland province to the Chisago Lake in Minnesota as the first settlers there. If not all Swedes have read the novels they have most likely seen the movie that was produced in the 1960s. The novels are so realistic so it is said that some Swedes are coming to the Minnesota looking for the grave stone of Kristina although she is a fictitious person.

From the parish of my grandfather in the region of Småland, 25% of the population went to USA but up to 5 years ago I did not know about any ancestor of mine that went. But then I got to know that my grandfather Anders Johan got a daughter Ida 1889 with Sara Christina before his marriage. They did not marry and Sara Christina went to USA with her 2 year old daughter.
After some years research I found that Sara Christina married the widower Nels Welin in Sioux City and they got 5 children. Ida married and got a daughter who got two boys, Harold and George. Harold is dead due to an accident but George lives outside Sioux City.

During my research I got fascinated in the history of Sioux City which had a remarkable development during the 1880s. It was a booming town and was called little Chicago.

After my retirement in June I had now the possibility to visit Sioux City and the Chisago lake area. My plan was to go to Sioux City of my own and then join a Swedish travel group in Chicago that should visit Swedish settlements including the Chisago lake area. But that travel was cancelled so I had to go there of my own. My dear wife Kristin is not that much interested in Swedish emigration and she still is not retired.

**Diary**

**Thursday Aug 21**
Arrived to Minneapolis airport at 6 pm. Got the reserved rented car and drew for some hours south. Stayed in a motel at Faribault.

**Wednesday Aug 22**
Started driving towards Sioux City. Stopped at Svea City in the north of Iowa. (Queen Svea is a symbol of Sweden). One of many places in Iowa that was founded by Swedish emigrants. Had a nice talk with the Ford dealer who offered to call the responsible for the town museum to open it for me but I could not accept as I wanted to continue to Sioux City in due time.
For me it was exiting to drive mile after mile only seeing food that was growing. It seemed like Iowa could produce all food that is needed in the world. Arrived to Sioux City and met Thomas Munson at a nice restaurant.
Through the research centre of the Sioux City public museum I had been in contact with Tom before my visit. He is a volunteer at the museum and seems to know everything about the history of the city. He had planned my visit and guided during two days in an excellent way.

**Thursday Aug 23**
In the morning at the research centre I met Tom, the manager Grace Linden and members of the Vasa order of Sioux City. The members were: Arlynn O’Connor, Stan Swanson, Harland & Jeanette Johnson and George Burg.
First I told my story about my background and about my aunt Ida and then the members told about their Swedish background. After that we had a very interesting talk about the Swedish community in Sioux City. At the time it was the biggest ethnic group. In 1890 it consisted of around 4000 persons (10% of the population). At that time it existed 4 Swedish-American churches and also newspapers in Swedish and some Swedish societies. My introduction of my visit in Sioux City could not have started better.

In the afternoon I was guided by Tom to the area were most Swedes lived. We visited the places of the Swedish churches were/had been. Also the place were the Welin family lived and my aunt Ida. The house of the Welin family does not exist anymore. At that place is now a storage house. I was surprised how green the area was and the great spaces between the houses. I do not think the contrast to live in the modern city compared living in the countryside of Sweden for Sara Christina was that big as I had imagined.

We went to the Floyd cemetary and found the graves of the Welin family including the gravestone of Sara Christina. We visited another cemetary and saw the monument of the Swedish Monitor society.
We visited the packing house area. Year 1888 it was slaughtered 11000 hogs and 2000 cattle every day. Most of the workers were newly arrived emigrants. This business was the main reason for the expansion of the city at the 1880-ties. Still there is a modern plant working that now employs mainly Mexican workers but this business is not as dominant as it used to be.

At last we visited a third cemetery and saw the memory stone of Andrew Anderson, a Swedish emigrant who saved 27 people at the river flood of 1892 before he drowned.

**Friday Aug 24**

In the morning I visited the research centre. Tom helped me with research of Ida in several records. I wanted to know about her latter days in Sioux City. But she was not found any ware in the records which is strange. Grace showed me a lot of pictures from the history of Sioux City that was very interesting. I think the name “little Chicago” was an appropriate name in 1890. It was a booming town and was one of the most modern cities in the world. In the afternoon Tom guided me in the old downtown where a lot of old big beautiful buildings still exist and most of them are in good condition. The most interesting building is the Woodbury County Courthouse completed in 1918 in a Prairie style such as tan brick and white terra cotta.
In the evening Grace and Tom arranged a farewell supper at a very sophisticate restaurant at the Missouri riverside on the Nebraska side of the river. The meal proved that the best meat in the world you can eat in USA (I can say this although I have also visited Brazil and Argentina!) Thank you, Grace and Tom for an excellent hosting at my visit in Sioux City!

Before the meal we also drew into South Dakota and saw monument of the first white man living in the area including his house and monument of the Sioux Chief that lived there at the time of the arrival of the white people. We also passed a rural area with very very exclusive living houses.
Saturday Aug 25
In the morning I met Ron Johnson from Dalesburg, South Dakota. He has Swedish ancestries and actually stayed one year in Sweden and talk good Swedish. In Dalesburg there is a Scandinavian Association which promotes an interest in Scandinavia and Scandinavian America and is a special interest group at Dalesburg Lutheran Church. We talked a lot about the Swedish emigration. Rons ancestries settled in the prairie which was quite different from settling in the forests of Minnesota or go to live in a town. We had a very interesting talk about the emigration and his experience of Sweden.

Then I visited Grace a last time at the research centre and she showed me the best family book I have ever seen. For example it contains names and pictures from her ancestries who lived in England.

Then I took a chance trying to meet my relative George Cormany, son of my cousin Helen and grandson to my aunt Ida. The problem was that I have tried to phone him several days before but his number was closed. He had told me in June that he planned to move and he would inform me about new address and phone number in due time. I was somewhat puzzled but decided to go to his old address in Onawa south of the city. And by luck, George and his wife Karmen were there to move things to their new address. They thought I should come in September which was my original plan and had therefore not yet informed me. Of course I was very happy to meet George and Karmen which was one of the main objectives with my trip and which was nearly spoiled by a misunderstanding or bad communication from my side.
It was very nice meeting them and we talked about many things. Also about the latter life of Ida who was grandmother of George. I got some additional information but there is still some uncleanness about Ida. George promised to contact a cousin in Texas who probably knows more about her.

After the meeting I drew through a beautiful landscape of Iowa to the little town of Kiron, also settled by Swedes. I visited the oldest churchyard beautifully situated on a hill. After that drew back to Sioux City.
Sunday Aug 26
I was invited to the church service by George Burg at the Augustana church of Sioux City. The parish was founded in 1875 by Swedish emigrants and the present church was built in 1889.
It is a big and beautiful church. It was a great experience to take part in the service. The service was according to how the service is done at the church of Sweden with a few differences: there was a part called Children’s Moment. The communion is slower in Sweden due to that everybody shall drink in the same old cup which also was the old rule in America according to George. As always in America the speeches are good, also at this occasion. After the service I had a short talk with George and his wife before I started my journey back to Minnesota.

In the afternoon and evening I drew many miles and ended up in a motel just south west of Minneapolis. Compared to Europe it is not so tiring to drive in USA. Good cars with automatic gear and cruise control, very good roads with not too much traffic and very good drivers in general on the roads. And for the second time I was impressed by all the growing food I saw mile after mile.

Monday Aug 27
Started my trip to the “Moberg country” at Chisago lakes. First stop was in Stillwater north west of Minneapolis. It is situated at the St Croix river at the border to Wisconsin. Had lunch at the old town. Went by the river up to Taylor’s Falls were the first settlers of Chisago landed in 1850. Then went straight west to the lakes. At the Chisago lakes there are 3 small towns founded by Swedish emigrants: Center city, Lindstrom and Chisago city. Checked in at the Summit Inn Bed & Breakfast in Center City. The inn keeper is Elaine Sommer. It was a very beautiful house in an old style and Elaine was a perfect hostess that made me feel almost like home. I stayed there 2 nights. I can really recommend Summit Inn.

In the afternoon I started my Moberg journey. First I went to the Glader cemetery at a very beautiful place at the shore of the lake. It was the first cemetery in the area it
was created by Anders Petter Nilsson Glader when his wife died in 1855. Glader came from Småland.

Moberg lived in Chisago city in 1948 and made research for his coming novels. He discovered this cemetery when it was forgotten and hided by high grass. When he wrote about the grave of Kristina, he was thinking that this cemetery would be the perfect place for Kristina, so beautiful at the lake. I found the gravestones of Glader and his wife.

Near the cemetery is “Nya Duvemåla”. In 1948 Moberg was inspired by this old house and created Karl-Oskar’s and Kristina’s fictitious home where they would live out their final days in America. Kristina called it Nya Duvemåla after her home Duvemåla in Småland. The Karl-Oskar house was moved from its original site ¼ mile West to Kichi-Saga Park November 1995. The Swedish king and queen visited the place 1996. It was also planted an apple tree from Sweden which have a central role in the last novel.

At Chisago City I saw the statue of Vilhelm Moberg. The statue shows Moberg standing with his bicycle. He was seen by the inhabitants cycling around in 1948 making his researching. The statue was dedicated in 1996 and shortly afterwards had a Swedish royal visit.

In the evening I was invited to participate in the birth day party of Elaine’s one year old granddaughter. I really appreciated to be invited to a private family party and it was very nice to meet the family of Elaine.
Before I went to bed I read a book called “The wooden shoe people” that I borrowed from Elaine. The author is Lloyd C Hackl. It contains a very good history description about the first Swedish settlers at the Chisago lakes. In Moberg’s novel he writes that Karl-Oskar and Kristina were the first settlers and lived during their first winter alone at the lake. In reality it was 4 Swedish families that first settled there together in the springtime of 1851.

**Tuesday Aug 28**

When Elaine served the best breakfast I ever had in USA, she told that Lloyd C Hackl lives only two houses away and he probably would like to meet me. She promised to try to contact him during the day.

I started to see the old cemetery at Center City. It is very big and practically all names are Swedish. After that I drove the old road to Taylor’s falls. The landscape was rather like that in Småland but without stones in the ground. When I drove I was thinking that according to Moberg, Karl-Oskar walked many times from the lake to Taylor’s fall buying things and then wearied the goods on his shoulder. It seems to be a very long way to walk. He also writes that Karl-Oskar once walked to Stillwater in the winter in order to buy a bag of flour to avoid his family of starving. That distance seems even more impossible to walk carrying a bag of flour.

After a short visit in Taylor’s Fall’s (including being 5 minutes in Wisconsin) I drove to Scandia situated between Stillwater and Lidstrom. There is probably the best museum in USA that is about the Swedish emigrants. It is called Gammelgården (= the old farm). It contains the oldest Lutheran church building in Minnesota built in 1856, a pastors house from 1868 a small immigrant house from the 1850s. All houses are built by logs in the Swedish way.

There is also a new house, Välkommen Hus (welcome house). It contains among others a gift shop of Scandinavian imports. I could see that the things were of very high taste and quality. At the museum they have special events around the year celebrating according to Swedish traditions: Midsommar Dag, Spelmansstämma, Lutfisk dinner and Lucia Fest.
At the museum I met Ronald C Croone who has grown up near Scandia on a farm but now lives in Florida. We had lunch together and he told me a good story. When he made military service for the American forces in Germany in the beginning of 1950s he went to Småland in order to meet his Swedish relatives. He did not understand Swedish and at that time there were few cars in Sweden. And few people could understand English. He went by train to Växjö, then by some kind of local bus out in the countryside. At a stop he luckily met a girl that could some English. She understood to what village and farm he was aiming for. She gave the bus driver order where to stop. He was then standing alone on a road and started to walk. After a while he saw a woman working on a field. He said his name and the names of his relatives. The farm was just close! And he spend a few weeks there as a very important guest. I think the visit was the biggest occurrence in that village for years!.

( Ronald, I hope you do not mind I am writing you story although you told it much better).

When I returned to my room Elaine said that Lloyd wanted to meet me. We met at the nice house of Elaine for some hour. As Lloyd has very big knowledge about the first emigrants I was very interested to discuss the differences in history between Moberg’s novels and the reality. I asked him if the first emigrants really walked to Taylor’s Falls and even to Stillwater from the lake area then back. He confirmed it. He even said that mostly it was the women who walked in wintertime as the men usually were working in the woods cutting trees in order to get some money. I had a very good luck to be able to meet the man that knows the real history of the first settlers. We also talked about the movies of the Moberg novels that were made in the 1960.s which I have some knowledge about.

Wednesday Aug 29
When leaving the Chisago lake area I stopped at the statue of Karl-Oskar and Kristina in Lindstrom (( it is a copy of the statue in Karlshamn (a funny remark: man and wife are more fat in the American copy!)). It shows Karl-Oskar at the
harbour in Sweden looking forward preparing himself for the challenge to make the life of his family better in America. And Kristina who looks backwards to see her old country that she shall be missing for the rest of her life. She never felt at home in USA.

Also stopped at a house in Chisago city with a very big sign: Vilhelm Moberg slept here 1948!

At the flight to Minneapolis I happened to sit beside Roger Falkenstein and his wife. I told Roger that I was very interested in the Swedish emigration. Roger lives in Carver south east of Minneapolis. I told him that I had a plan to visit the farm of Andrew Peterson in Carver county. Roger is engaged in the parish of East Union church near Carver and proposed that I should contact Scott Hallin who knows a lot of the first Swedish emigrants in the county.

So in the morning I drove to the church in Carver where I met Scott. He showed me the beautiful church. The parish was founded by Swedes 1858 and the present old church is very beautiful and well preserved. Scott also showed me the first wooden church, the cemetry and the parish office.

Then Scott guided me with some difficulties to the farm of Andrew Peterson. Andrew had emigrated from Sweden in 1850. Then worked 4 years in Iowa and after that he became a settler in Carver County. He married 1858 and they got 9 children but no grandchildren. He died 1898. Andrew also wrote a diary during his whole life as settler and farmer and it is this diary that is the base of the novels of Vilhelm Moberg.

Moberg wrote 1966: “In the diaries of Andrew Peterson I found what I had been looking for in America. During several months I sat at the library in St Paul reading about this farmer in order to know what he had done and to know about what he thought about the life in this world. I read about his wife, his nine children, his cattle and harvest and his church life. When I had read his diaries I had got all information I needed about the life of a Swedish farmer of the first Swedish farms in Minnesota.”

At the farm there are still some houses that Andrew built according to how houses were built in Sweden at that time. One of the houses was restored last year by members of the “Andrew Petersonsällskapet” ( = Andrew Peterson society) from
Sweden. The farm looked very much as a big farm in Småland. Many thanks, Scott that you made it possible to visit the farm!

After I had said goodbye to Scott, I went to a hotel near the airport in southern Minneapolis. In the evening I visited probable the biggest shopping centre of the world : Mall of America. It has 520 stores, 50 restaurants and a big indoor family amusement park.

**Thursday Aug 30**
The day I spent at the state fare of Minnesota. It was a great experience. It has been arranged every year since the 1850s. It is said that more then a million people are visiting the fair during 2 weeks. At the fair I felt that I was part in the American culture, A lot of happy families from all classes and races, serious exhibitions which promoted production of quality food and a lot of amusements attractions. Also a lot of different ways of serving food. I eat the best “bratwurst mit sauerkraut” since I were in Germany. I also listened to a very good concert of American country music. And I suddenly heard a melody that I remember from my childhood : “Kalle på Snippen”. It was performed by an orchestra “Skålmusik”, I bought 2 CD:s with old Swedish melodies that almost are forgotten in Sweden.
Friday Aug 31
The day of departure from USA. As I had not got enough of Sweden in America I visited Ikea and the Swedish American Institute.

IKEA is probably the biggest chain of furniture selling in the world. It has stores in most countries of the word. It was founded by Ingvar Kamprad. He was a farmer boy from Småländ starting to sell ballpoint pens when he made military service in the 1940s. My cousin Erik knew him very well during his military service. Now Ingvar is one of the richest men in the world. IKEA is emphasizing its Swedish background. At the store in Minneapolis is served Swedish meatballs with lingonberry. There is also a Swedish food market. The playing ground for children is called the Småländ forest.

After IKEA I went to the Swedish American Institute near the centre of Minneapolis. It is situated in a building that looks like a castle. It has 33 beautiful rooms and was built around 1900 for Swan John Turnblad, one of the most successful Swedish emigrants, He made his money as owner of “Svensk Amerikanska Posten” a paper in Swedish that was sold all over USA. The building in its self is an attraction. But it contains also an information centre and keeps the
knowledge of Swedish culture. And has also interesting exhibitions. I saw some figures that was cut in wood made by Herman Rosell from Slåthög. I know about him and he was classmate to my father at the small school of Slåthög! The world is small!

After the visit I drove directly to the airport, returned my rented car, checked in and managed to pass the security control. The plane left according to schedule. I went by Iceland air which I recommend if you shall go between northern USA and northern Europe.

Saturday Sept 1
Arrived to Sweden according to schedule and was very happy to meet my wife who I had missed during my travel. As we say in Sweden: ”Borta bra men hemma bäst!” (to be away is nice but getting home is even better)

Some conclusions

The best in America
All the very nice, polite and helpful Americans I met.

The worst in America
As I travelled alone I was trying to see a lot of TV from my hotel room. But I was very disappointed by all programs that very frequently were interrupted by stupid commercials.