

Genline: Swedish Sources for Swedish Roots



IF YOU ARE a family researcher and have Swedish ancestry, count yourself among the lucky. The Swedes were wonderful record keep-



ers and an exceptional number of primary historical records survive today. Not only do they exist, but a large number are now available online.

Genline is a Swedish company that has taken on the monumental task of placing Sweden's historical church records on-line. The Swedish Church Record archive is now almost complete, and it contains over 15 million clear images of original church book pages. The church in Sweden was a state church, and was mandated to keep the birth, death, marriage and census records for the country. The church also kept track of movements within Sweden and emigration from Sweden. These records are the single most important primary resource for Swedish genealogical research and extend from the 17th through to the 20th century. With luck, you may be able to trace your Swedish ancestors back 300 years.

To create the online archive, Genline has digitized the microfilms taken by the

Church of Latter Day Saints. The Mormons left a copy of these films in Sweden, and they now reside with the National Archives. The films themselves can be viewed at Family History Centers. The advantages of having these records online are clear. You can access them at any time from your own home, with a computer and an Internet connection. Research is sped up as you can easily move between parishes and records without having to wait for the delivery of new films to your local Family History Center.

Genline's Swedish Church Records archive is available by subscription, and may be found at www.genline.com. To use the archive, you download a software tool, Genline FamilyFinder. This easy-to-use software allows you to search, view, zoom in and out, and print pages from the archive for your records. You can download Genline FamilyFinder for free. However, to have full access to the Swedish Church Records archive, you must purchase a subscription. There are a variety of subscription alternatives ranging from a 20-day evaluation subscription to a 365-day annual subscription. When visiting the site, register as a customer (no purchase required), in order to receive e-mail notification of special subscription offers as well as their quarterly electronic newsletter.

The site is in English, but, of course, the church books are in Swedish. However, the records are really just tables of individual's names, place names and dates. Knowledge of Swedish is not necessary to use them. You might consider purchasing a copy of the new book, *Your Swedish Roots*, written by well-known Swedish genealogists Per Clemensson and Kjell Andersson. This book was published in 2004, and it will help

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you to understand the structure of the Swedish Church records as well as provide translation for some of the common terms found in church books. The book is an easy read, and explores the content of Swedish sources through case studies.

In this article, you will find a description of the most important kinds of records that can be found in the old Swedish Church Books and in Genline's Swedish Church Records archive. The church was legislated to keep the vital records for Sweden in the year 1686. Some churches were in the habit of keeping records prior to the legislation, while others took a few years to conform to the law. The contents of these records vary between parishes and time periods, so the content summarized below is an approximation. To get started with these records, it is important to know the birth parish of one of your Swedish ancestors. If this requirement has been a brickwall for you, read on. New sources on CD are making it easier to uncover that information.

BIRTH AND BAPTISMAL RECORDS

The clergy kept the birth and baptismal (*födelselängd* and *doplängd*) records for the parish. While the content of these records may vary somewhat between parishes and between time periods, you can expect to find the following information in a birth/baptism record:

1. the given name of the child
2. the given and last names of the

and the name of the farm or village where they resided.

These records are organized chronologically. If you know the name of your immigrant ancestor, the date of birth, and the parish of birth, you should be able to find the birth record.

HOUSEHOLD CENSUS RECORDS

The Household Census Records, or *husförshörslängd*, were basically inventories of the inhabitants of the parish. They are extremely useful and important records. They were organized by place names, and usually an index to the volume can be found at the beginning or end in these church books. Once you find out where your ancestor was born from the birth record, you can select the appropriate volume of the *husförshörslängd* (organized by years), look in the place index of that volume for appropriate page numbers and search for your ancestor's family.

Once this record is found, you can expect to find the following information for each individual:

- name
- birth date
- birth parish
- occupation and/or relationship to head of household

In addition to the nuclear family, a household might include aged parents or those who helped with the farm or household duties.

The following information might also be found in these records:

- date individual moved into or from the parish
- place individual moved from/to
- date of marriage
- date of death
- comments about disabilities or character (e.g. blindness, criminality, drunkenness, etc.)

You might even find these movements or events cross-referenced to other pages of parish church books. A page reference might take you to another page in the *husförshörslängd* for a movement within the parish, or it might take you to a page in the emigration, marriage, or death records. The *husförshörslängd* were living documents and kept up-to-date by the clergy. If someone was born they were added to the inventory, and if someone moved out of the parish or died they might be crossed off. Generally speaking, the *husförshörslängd* appear as church records around 1750, when the national

SWEDISH COUNTIES & PARISHES

GEOGRAPHICALLY, SWEDEN is divided into provinces or *landskap*. For administrative purposes, the country is divided into counties (*län*), which are roughly comparable to North America's states and provinces. The counties may coincide geographically with a province, or several counties may be included within a *landskap*. Ecclesiastically, each *län* is further subdivided into

parishes. These parishes were formerly called *socknar*, but are now referred to as *församlingar*. Vital records were kept by the parishes, and these parishes are grouped by the county in which they resided. The same parish name may exist in more than one county. For the purposes of research into Sweden's vital records the county and the parish are the important divisions.

3. parents
3. the occupation of the father
4. the name of the farm or village in which the parents resided
5. the date of the birth
6. the date of the baptism
7. the names of the godparents

central Bureau of Statistics began operations. Some parishes, however, kept similar records which predate 1750.

MARRIAGE RECORDS

Marriage records (*vigsellängd*) typically included the date of marriage, the name of the bride and groom, as well as the names of their parents. The name of the village or farm where they lived might also be included, as well as the occupation of the groom.

DEATH AND BURIAL RECORDS

The church kept records of death and burials (*dödslängd* and *begravningslängd*). When an individual died, the clergy would typically record:

- name of the individual
- occupation
- date of death
- place of death
- date of burial
- date of birth
- parish of birth, and
- cause of death.

The names of the deceased's parents might also be listed.

IMMIGRATION/EMIGRATION RECORDS

Since the clergy was responsible for keeping track of those who entered and left their parishes, detailed records of the comings (*inflyttningslängd*) and goings (*utflyttningslängd*) of individuals were kept. These registers recorded the name of the individual, the date they came or left, and the parish they came from or went to. When an individual emigrated from Sweden, the country or city name would be recorded.

FINDING YOUR ANCESTOR'S BIRTH PARISH

The Swedish Church Records are organized by county and parish. They are not indexed by name in Genline's Swedish Church Records archive, but given patronymic naming conventions, this name indexing would provide marginal value. In old Sweden, people were identified by their given name, their father's name (patronymic), their location and their occupation (see sidebar for more information on patronymics).

In order to get started with Genline, you really need to know the name, birth date and parish of birth for one of your Swedish ancestors. If you do not know the parish of birth, there are several other sources that may help you to find that information. If you have a Swedish

place name, but do not know if it is a parish, village, or farm name, then the CD *Svenska Ortnamn* (from www.genlineshop.com) will be a helpful reference. This CD allows you to search place names. Matches will identify the location of the farms and villages and provide the associated parish and county name. This CD is only available in Swedish, but is easy to use with a minimal knowledge of the language.



SWEDISH NAMING CONVENTIONS

IF YOU ARE doing genealogical research in Swedish records, it is important to understand that Sweden used a patronymic naming convention throughout most of its history. At birth, a child was provided with a "given name" by his or her parents. The last name of the child was derived from the first name of the father, and then followed by the suffix *-son* for a male child and the suffix *-dotter* for a female child. For example, if a man named Karl Andersson had a son named Lars and a daughter named Augusta, the son's name would have been Lars Karlsson (Karl's son) and the daughter's name would have been Augusta Karlsdotter (Karl's daughter). To follow this through to another generation, if Lars had a son named Sven, that son's full name would have been Sven Larsson (Lars' son). Wives did not adopt their husband's name upon marriage, but kept their own patronymic names. Female ancestors are much easier to trace in this system!

In the latter part of the 19th century, Swedes started to adopt family surnames. This practice began first in the urban centers. When Swedes did adopt family surnames, they may have just passed on their own last name to future

generations or they may have adopted a surname based on a location or perhaps nature. By the beginning of the 20th century, patronymics had generally fallen out of use.

Sometimes, individuals had more than one last name during their lifetime. Soldiers had a "soldier name" while they were in the military. These names were taken from military terms, place names or nature names. Usually the soldier returned to his patronymic name when he ended his military service. On some occasions, individuals retained their soldier names as family surnames, passing them down from generation to generation. If you find a Latinized name in your Swedish family tree, that ancestor was likely a member of the clergy or possibly an academic. At the time an individual was admitted to the clergy he would adopt a "professional" name. In this instance, the name might be a Latinized version of their patronymic name or a Latinized version of their name and birth place. The suffix *-ander* was also used to indicate clergy. In this case, the name Björk might become Björkander and a patronymic name like Svensson might become Svenander.

If you know roughly when your ancestor emigrated from Sweden, then the new CD, *Emibas*, (from www.genlineshop.com) will likely be useful to you. The records for this CD were extracted from emigration records in Sweden's Church Books. The records are searchable on many parameters. For instance, you can search by name or by parish and/or date. If you can locate

your ancestor, the birth parish will be contained in the record. This CD is bilingual Swedish/English.

If you have only a name and birth date for an ancestor, then the CD *Swedish Census 1890* (from www.genlineshop.com) may be of assistance. With this CD, you can search by name and restrict the search by birth date. Search results will return all matches by name and location for that census year. You can then click on a match to see the listing for the entire household. For each household member, the name, date of birth, and birth parish are listed. This CD is available in either English or Swedish.

If your immigrant ancestor left family behind in Sweden, the CD *Sveriges Dödbok 1947-2003* (from www.genlineshop.com) might prove useful. This CD is roughly equivalent to the US Social Security Death Index, and contains records for those who died in Sweden between the years 1947 and 2003. If you can find the death record for a family member who remained in Sweden, this individual's birth parish might provide a clue to the birth parish of your emigrant ancestor. This CD is bilingual (Swedish/English).

Swedish genealogy is undergoing an on-line revolution. More and more records are being brought online, and more of them have English interfaces. If you have a computer and an Internet connection, you can now find your Swedish roots from the comfort of your home. Then you can travel to Sweden to visit ancestral places rather than archives!



SWEDISH SOURCES:

Genline

www.genline.com
Subscription access to a digitized Swedish Church Records archive. The Swedish church was a state church and kept the vital and household census records for the country. Over 15 million images of original church book pages representing 300 years of records.

SweGGate (Sweden Genealogical Gate)

www.rootsweb.com/~swewgw/
This RootsWeb site is Sweden's contribution to the WorldGenWeb project. It contains information useful to family research and provides links to helpful sites in Sweden and North America.

DIS-The Computer Genealogy Society of Sweden

www.dis.se/denindex.htm
This website is home to the database, DISBYT, a collection of user-submitted family files representing 10.4 million records. You can search the database for free. If you become a member of DIS (for a nominal annual fee), you will be able to submit your own family file and have it matched with those submitted by others.

The Federation of Swedish Genealogical Societies (Sveriges Släktforskarförbund)

www.genealogi.se/roots/
The Federation of Swedish Genealogical Societies maintains a website that provides information pertinent to Swedish genealogical research, an online store and a discussion forum. Although the forum is primarily in Swedish, there is an English section. You can also post a query in English to the Swedish language forum. Many Swedes have English as a second language. Someone might help you with that old script you are trying to decipher.

SVAR-Information Department of the National Archives of Sweden

www.svar.ra.se/
Sweden's National Archives maintains a website that provides access to various databases on a subscription basis. The databases of interest to North American audiences are the ones which are complete and have an English interface. At this writing, those databases are the 1890 and 1900 Swedish census. These "censuses" are not primary records, but extractions of data from the Swedish Church Records for a given point in time.



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