

My great-grandfather, Johan August Dahlstrom emigrated from Sweden to America in 1902. His story is representative of the millions of Swedish citizens who sought greater opportunity on this side of the Atlantic. What factors motivated him to make this decision can be explained by looking at the conditions in the two countries during the period 1880–1910.

Two excellent sources provide background for the discussion that follows. They are John Michal Quigley's "An Economic Model of Swedish Emigration,"¹ and Lars Ljungmark's *Swedish Exodus*.²

Background

The primary cause of Swedish to American migration was the disparity in economic opportunity between the two countries. During the period, economic conditions in Sweden were deteriorating, especially for farmers because of crop failures, the combination of increases in the rural population, and the decline in the additions to land under cultivation. Because Sweden was heavily dependent on farming, and many farms operated cooperatively, crop failures often influenced groups of workers, rather than single landowners. Crop failures in Sweden, at a time when free land was available in America because of the 1862 Homestead Act, inspired the exodus.

Other areas of Sweden were heavily dependent on iron mining and production, comprising nearly 75% of total Swedish exports during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the expanding lumber industry gradually supplanted the iron industry's position. Potential migrants, at least during the late nineteenth century, were likely to be marginal workers in their own countries – those employees most likely dismissed in bad times.

While Sweden struggled to support its growing population, America needed settlers, and skilled workers. Railroad companies, such as the Illinois Central advertised in Sweden for workers, often offering to pay for transportation in exchange for a commitment to help build the railroad.

Religious and political reasons played a much smaller role for the move to America, although it was decisive in some instances.

The greatest number of Swedish-born residents in the United States, approximately 1.3 million, was recorded in 1910. About one-fifth of the world's Swedish population was living in America, and the second largest "Swedish" city was Chicago. Approximately 40 percent of all Swedish emigrants left during the peak years of the 1880s.

The Dahlstrom Family

In 1900, Charles and Mary Bogren lived in Unity, Clark County, Wisconsin. He was born in September 1862 and she was born in October 1866, both in Sweden. Charles, one of the farmers mentioned above, immigrated in 1886 and became a naturalized citizen. They had two children, Carl A. (born Feb. 1896) and John L. (born Jan. 1898), both born in Illinois.³ Like many Swedish immigrants, they must have communicated their prosperity back to their relatives in Sweden. My great-grandfather was one of those who came.

With \$5.00 and a dream, thirty-two-year-old Johan August Dahlstrom, along with his seven-year-old son Johan Hjalmer Dahlstrom, arrived at Ellis Island, New York, on 29 November 1902 aboard

¹ John Michael Quigley, "An Economic Model of Swedish Emigration," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 86 (February 1972): 111-126.

² Lars Ljungmark, *Swedish Exodus*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1996).

³ 1900 U.S. Census, Clark County, Wisconsin, population schedule, Unity, ED 16, page 13 (stamped), sheet 13B, dwelling 236, family 239; entry for Charles Bogren; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 18 April 2011); citing NARA microfilm publication T623, roll 1781.

the S.S. *Celtic*. Traveling as third-class passengers during their ten-day trip from Liverpool, England, Johan's destination was the home of his wife's sister, Mary Bogren, by then a resident of 3145 5th Ave., Chicago, Illinois.⁴

The following year the S.S. *Celtic* carried Johan's wife, Emma Josefina, and his two daughters, Agnes Elvira (age 4) and Anny Linnea (age 10 months) to New York where they arrived 07 November 1903. They listed their relative as Johan Dahlstrom, 3145 5th Ave., Chicago, Illinois.⁵ It was typical for the husband to travel first, followed by his family. The fact that his wife was pregnant with little Anny in 1902 probably contributed to this decision.

In 1977, my grandfather, Johan Hjalmer (John Elmer) Dahlstrom provided an interview with my first cousin, John Neil Dahlstrom. Here is how my grandfather described these times:

We lived in Chicago there from nineteen hundred and two until after mother died. Mother died in nineteen five.⁶ And dad was always having quite a time getting a job. He worked for a big fire escape company there, the Link Belt Company. Dad was an expert blacksmith and machinist and that's how he come to get a job like that but it seemed like him being handicapped because he couldn't talk (English) why, those people would give orders for him to do and he didn't understand it and he had to have someone else to tell him what it was. He finally either got laid off or quit, don't know which. But anyway, he got a job up in Petoskey, Michigan as a millwright, blacksmith and machinist. So we moved up there then and Aunt Mary, that's the ones we were staying with at that time. Her family moved up there too.

By 1910, the family indeed moved to Michigan where they resided with John and Mary Lundberg (Charles Bogren had died and Mary had remarried). The family consisted of John Dahlstrom, and his three children, Helmer, Agnes, and Lillie.⁷

My grandfather's final reflection described horrible working conditions and the family's next move:

(I decided to come out West) after we moved back to Chicago. Dad quit his job up in Michigan and we went back to Chicago and I lived with another aunt there. That was Margaret's mother and father. I lived with them there for a while and was trying to learn the pattern makers trade. And then I went from that into a mining outfit that was manufacturing mining locomotives. And I went into the pattern shop in that and worked as an apprentice pattern maker. I don't know -- I was around those glue pots so much that my health was going bad on me. I went to a doctor and I was coughing

⁴ "Passenger Record," database, *Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation* (<http://www.ellisland.org> : accessed 18 April 2011), entry for Johan Aug[ust] Dahlstrom, age 32, arrived 29 November 1902 aboard the S.S. *Celtic*. Traveling along was Johan Hjalmer Dahlstrom, age 7, both of Gafle, Sweden.

⁵ "Passenger Record," database, *Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation* (<http://www.ellisland.org> : accessed 18 April 2011), entry for Emma Josefina Dahlstrom, age 27, arrived 07 November 1903 aboard the S.S. *Celtic*. Traveling along were two daughters, Agnes Elvira (4) and Anny Linnea Dahlstrom, age 10 months, both of Gefle [Gafle], Sweden.

⁶ His mother, Emma Dahlstrom, died at Chicago Baptist Hospital on 11 February 1906 from pulmonary tuberculosis. See "Illinois, Cook County Deaths, 1878–1922," database, *FamilySearch Internet* (<http://www.familysearch.org> : accessed 18 April 2011), death record for Emma Dalstrom [Dahlstrom], no. 3490, 11 February 1906; citing Cook County (Illinois) County Clerk, "Death certificates, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, nos. 2605–5388, 1906," FHL microfilm 1,239,735.

⁷ 1910 U.S. Census, Emmet County, Michigan, population schedule, Resort Township, ED 105, dwelling 19, family 19; family of John Lundberg; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 18 April 2011); citing NARA microfilm publication T624, roll 645.

terribly and getting skinny. And the doctor sez -- what kind of work to you do and I sez -- well I'm an apprentice pattern maker, and I'm around glue pots all the time. He sez ... I'll tell you what you've got to do to before you get any worse. He sez ... you better just quit that job and go out on a farm somewhere and work on a farm for about a year or so until you get your health back. He sez ... you won't last long in a pattern shop. So that's how I come to go West.

After the death of his father, Johan August Dahlstrom (from tuberculosis),⁸ and his sister Anny Linnea from epilepsy,⁹ grandfather did go west. He eventually ended up in Montana where he met "a girl," my grandmother, Paloma Glee Graham. The rest is history.

SAMPLE

⁸ "Illinois, Cook County Deaths, 1878–1922," database, *FamilySearch Internet* (<http://www.familysearch.org> : accessed 18 April 2011), death record for John Dahlstrom, no. 3924, 28 February 1915; citing Cook County (Illinois) County Clerk, "Death certificates no. 3613–6258, 1915," FHL microfilm 1,287,515.

⁹ "Michigan Deaths and Burials, 1800–1995," database, *FamilySearch Internet* (<http://www.familysearch.org> : accessed 18 April 2011), entry for Lily Linnea Dahlstrom, died 08 July 1916 at Resort Township, Emmet, Michigan; citing Emmet County (Michigan) County Clerk, "Deaths, v. L1 1867-1897 Deaths, v. 2 1898-1907 Deaths 1907-1920," FHL microfilm 966,504.