

Tracing My Swedish Ancestors or Who and Where Was Dorothea?

By RICIGS member Patti Hughes, of Silverdale, WA on her Moline, IL Larson Family

Years ago, my daughter brought home a school assignment which required her to research three generations of her ancestors. To help her get started, I suggested that she begin with my father's side of the family because I "already knew" that my paternal grandfather, Charles Oscar Larson and his parents, Erland and Dorothea Larson had all been born in Sweden. How hard could it be?

Using information from my father's aunts and uncles, and my grandfather's death certificate, which only showed his birthplace as "Sweden", I quickly realized that I didn't have much family information after all and needed to start over. I began by searching Swedish microfilmed Clerical Survey records at the local Mormon church library. I couldn't read Swedish, but was able to recognize key words using a Swedish- English dictionary and a very helpful research book, *Cradled in Sweden*, by Carl-Erik Johansson, and was able to easily locate my Larson ancestors in the town of Oskarshamn. I was able to trace back three more generations. What puzzled me was not finding a scrap of information about great-grandmother, Dorothea, or her family, when my Larson line was so clearly available once I learned where to look. So, frustrated by my lack of progress, I encouraged my daughter to just use what we had found about the Larsons, and began researching my mother's ancestors, for whom I really did have the information she needed. She completed her assignment and was satisfied with what she had learned. End of story, I thought, but no, I was hooked on genealogy, and began researching my husband's family with enjoyable success.

In 1998-1999, I went back to working on my Moline Larson family, and contacted RICIGS. I was very fortunate to be helped by Bev Francque, who located old Moline Lutheran Church membership records at the Swenson Swedish Center at Augustana College, Rock Island, IL. Those records contained background information about each member, where they were born, and their parents' names. There was enough information about Dorothea's surname to point me in the direction of writing to the Swedish National Archives in Stockholm. Their researcher found that Dorothea was actually NOT Swedish at all; she was born to Izak Katz and Anna Bervald. Her correct name was Dora Katz, and she, her sister Ida, and her parents were all born in Filipow, Poland, and they were Jewish! Now knowing where the family originated, I happened upon a Jewish Interest Group online which focuses on the area in Poland that this family was from. I joined the group, which publishes a quarterly journal. I wrote to the editor for more information, which then led to my

to my research story appearing as part of an article by Paula Herrson-Ringskog, a Swedish Jewish woman's article about Jews in Sweden. The Suwalk-Lomza SIG Journal, Landsman, (Vol. 9, Nos. 2-3, June, 1999)

I still had questions about Erland and Dora that needed answering. There was no record of their marriage in Sweden, and no Swedish record of the birth of my grandfather, Karl Oskar Konstantin Larson, born 17 October 1875, or of his brother Axel Reinhold Larson, born 22 December 1876. Thanks to Paula, I learned that my great-grandparents could have not been married in Sweden. The Lutherans wouldn't have allowed a marriage of a Christian to a Jewish person, and the Jewish community wouldn't sanction a marriage to a Christian. Emigration records show that Dorothea, as she then called herself, Karl (became Charles Oscar once in Moline), age 9, and Axel, age 8, left Sweden for New York on 23 September 1885. The boys were baptized as Christians in Oskarshamn just prior to sailing. Erland had left Sweden and was in Moline by 1883. The marriage that I couldn't find in Sweden took place at the Moline Lutheran Church on 17 October 1885, my grandfather's 10th birthday. I still haven't located my grandfather's place of birth but will keep looking.

Erland and Dorothea Larson went on to have four more children in Moline. Their story took a long time to finally put together and made for some very surprising turns. I have enjoyed finally finding Dora.

Following excerpts reprinted from The Suwalk-Lomza SIG Journal, Landsman, (Vol. 9, Nos. 2-3, June, 1999) Dora and Erland: A Love Story with permission from the Landsmen Editor.

Contacts between Patti Hughes and Landsman article author Paula Ringskog established fairly convincingly that the two boys Dora Katz had while in Sweden were born out of wedlock in 1875 and 1876. According to Paula: "The father, Erland Larsson, was a sailor from a place close to Oskarshamn. In those days, a Christian could not marry a Jewish person. Presumably, Dora did not convert to Christianity since the boys were baptized only just before they went to the U.S. with their mother in August 1885. The father, Erland, had gone a year earlier. There is no information about whether Dora lived with her parents those ten years before moving to the U.S. Just imagine the hardship in those days for a single mother." Landsman author Paula Ringskog provided more information: "Regarding Dora's family, on a household examination roll in 1880 I found the following: Isak Katz profession, tradesman; mosaic believer; Russian-Polish citizenship, born 1832 in Philipova; wife Anna Berwald, born 1840 in Philipova. Listed with them is Isak's son-in-law, Wilensky (later named as Herman Wilensky), born 1856 in Szaki, and his wife Ida Katz, born

1859 in Philipova and their only child at the time, David Leopold, born 1877 in Oskarshamn. They would later have Sofie (b. 1882), Gabriel (b. 1884), Ragnhild (b. 1887), Salomon (b. 1891), Joseph (b. 1893) and Ester (b. 1896). About the year 1896 the Wilenskys moved to Stockholm. From the minutes of the Jewish community meetings, the Chevra Kadischa (burial society) had paid 130 Swedish Crowns to arrange the funeral of Anna Berwald Katz. That was a large sum in those days but since Oskershamn did not have their own cemetery the deceased had to be taken by horse and carriage to Kalmar, some 90 kilometers away. Years earlier, in a letter of June 14, 1896 the chairman of the “Aid to Destitute People,” Mr. Lofgren is given four Swedish Crowns to pay Mr. Katz who is now in a home for poor people. This is also the first year that the Jewish community (of only some 10 families) among its debits show 120 Sw. Crowns paid to this home for the well-being of Mr. Katz, who was the only Jewish person there. I assume that since the Wilenskys had left in 1896 (and Dora then being in America), no one was left to care for the old folks.”

(Additional notes from RICIGS member, Patti Hughes: Dora Katz’s family had immigrated to Sweden from Poland. Since this story appeared in 1999, Patti has continued her research of her Moline relatives, and filled in a lot of info about Erland’s brothers and their families. She had no idea that all lived close together on the same street! She has filled in many blank spots, including the aunts, uncles, and cousins of her father. Her father, Albert Larson, was the son of Erland’s eldest son, Charles Oscar Larson.)



The Larson family of Moline, Illinois, c. 1900
(From left to right)
Standing: Victoria, Arthur, Charles (born Karl), and Axel.
Seated: Erland, Reuben, Dora (nee Katz, b. 1855 in Filipow), and Anna.