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Johanna Ogden – a pioneering woman in the West

A forgotten obituary tells about an amazing woman

Among the deaths during the year since the 1904 issue of *Prärieblomman* is Mrs. Johanna Sofia Ogden, one of the more remarkable women of our early Swedish American history. She came to America in one of the first Erik Janssonist parties, became the first Swedish woman in the Swedish settlement of Andover, Illinois, and participated in one of the earliest Gold Rush trips to California. She was thus a living witness to much that happened during Swedish pioneer life in the American West, and one may hope that she leaves a few notes concerning her life full of change.

Here are some details of her background, family situation, and the conditions that brought her to America.

Among the many drawn into the Erik Janssonist religious movement was the owner of Lund's paper mill in Forsa parish, Helsingland, J.E. Lundqvist, who had moved to the above-named parish from Nyköping. However, his wife Brita, born Flodin, seems to have been a more eager Erik Janssonist than her husband, judging from her having been one of the 15 persons who on 7 December 1844, on a point in Långasjö lake at Stenbo in the mentioned parish, participated in a book burning, as had happened earlier at Tranberg in Alfta, and Lynäs in Söderala, where a quantity of Lutheran devotional books was set on fire. For that the 15 were brought to trial, and on 24 February 1845 fined 16 *Riksdalers* 32 *Skillings* each by the Forsa district court. The results of that case certainly contributed to Lundqvist's decision to go to America along with the Erik Janssonists. The paper mill was sold, and Lundqvist, along with his wife and their oldest daughter Johanna

Sofia – born in Nyköping on 15 January 1824 – joined one of the first Erik Janssonist groups that emigrated in 1846. Their younger daughter Mathilda Gustafva however remained in Sweden to collect debts owed the family.

As the parents settled in the Erik Janssonist colony of Bishop Hill, Illinois, the oldest daughter took a job in the beginning of 1847, serving an American, Mr. Townsend, at Andover in the same state. There had been no other Swedish woman before her at that place, and only one Swedish (p. 235) man, former seaman Sven Nelson, who had come in 1840.

The same year Johanna arrived at Andover, she became acquainted with a Swedish sea captain named P.W. Wirström, and it was not long before the two became one. They were the first Swedish couple married in Andover. Capt. Wirström, born in Vaxholm in 1816, appears to have come to America very early. The year of his arrival is not known, but we know with certainty that he was here in 1846, sailing on the Great Lakes. In the fall of that year he learned of a party of countrymen who had arrived in Buffalo, NY. He went there, and found that the party consisted of Erik Janssonists under the leadership and care of Nils Hedin. At the request of the immigrants, he accompanied them as translator to Bishop Hill, where he became as valuable as a physician – he had some knowledge of that profession – as he had been as interpreter. He stayed there until July of 1847. He then moved to Andover, where he found Johanna Sofia Lundqvist already there, having arrived the same year as her husband.

They lived for a time in a little log cabin, but left in the fall of that year for New Orleans, from which they

returned in the spring of 1848, travelling (p. 236) again the next fall to New Orleans, and returned to Andover in the spring of 1849. That year, gold was discovered in California, and among those who went out to try their luck were Capt. Wirström and his young wife. This took place in 1850, after the long trip across the "great American desert." The trip was made largely on foot, and they had to endure much suffering. There was also heavy work for Mrs. Wirström. During the latter part of the trip, she had to cook and care for eight men in their party. She endured all the difficulties and arrived successfully in the gold fields with her husband.

As a result of poor health, Capt. W. returned in 1854 to Illinois, and died in Bishop Hill 25 February 1855. His wife had to continue the struggle for existence alone in the gold country, which she did so successfully that in the same year her husband died she could return to Bishop Hill with \$3,000, earned honorably by cooking for the gold miners.

On 4 November 1856 widow Wirström married an American named M.B. Ogden, and settled down with him in Victoria, Knox County, IL. In 1881 they moved to Riverside, CA, where she finished her rich, eventful life on 10 June 1904¹.

As for the fate of her younger sister, it may be added that she came to America in 1850 and married a Mr. J.W. Florine, and moved with him in 1855 to Andover, where he became its first Swedish apothecary, physician, and photographer. Mr. Florine served as 2nd Lt. in Company H, Illinois 43rd Volunteer Infantry Regiment during the early part of the Civil War, but mustered out on 4 Feb. 1862 and died the same year. His wife, born in Nyköping in 1829, was still living in 1898².

The Lundqvist couple, after the division of the Bishop Hill Colony, moved to their younger daughter in Andover, dying before 1880.

A large number of Erik Jansons later joined other religious groups. The sisters Johanna Sofia Ogden and Mathilda Gustafva Florine became very enthusiastic Swedenborgians. Both have tried as best they could to spread Swedenborg's teachings in their area.

A true and correct translation of the biography, of Johanna Sofia Ogden, *Prärieblomman 1905*, Rock Island, IL, pp. 234-237, by

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1) The Ogden couple was found in the 1900 U.S. Census for California,

then living in Riverside precinct #7, in Riverside county. Mr. Matthew B. Ogden was born in November 1826 in Pennsylvania, and Mrs. Johanna Ogden was born in January 1824 in Sweden, and immigrated in 1846. She had been married for 43 years and never had children. Matthew B. Ogden died in 1910, and the couple is buried in Olivewood Cemetery in Riverside (www.findagrave.com).

2) Mrs. Florine is mentioned in *Svenskarne i Illinois*, by Eric Johnson and C.F. Peterson. Printed in Chicago 1880.

On p. 323 it is told that "Mrs. M.G. Florine in Andover has an excellent home, surrounded by beautiful fruit trees and shade trees, and also 100 acres of good land. She adheres to the new church opinions."

The new princess



H.R.H. Crown Princess Victoria and H.R.H. Princess Estelle.

Photo: Kate Gabor / royalcourt.se

Little *Estelle Silvia* (for mormor) *Ewa* (for farmor) *Mary* was born in Stockholm on 23 February 2012, the first child of H.R.H. Crown Princess Victoria and H.R.H. Prince Daniel.

Estelle has also been appointed Duchess of Östergötland, a purely ceremonial title.

In the above picture Estelle is about 7 weeks old.

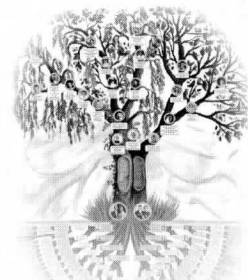
To read more about the royal family, see a link on the links page.

A little family fun:

The van Gogh Family Tree

His dizzy aunt Verti Gogh
The brother who ate prunes Gotta Gogh
The brother who worked at a convenience store Stop N Gogh
The grandfather from Yugoslavia U Gogh
His magician uncle Where-diddy Gogh
His Mexican cousin A Mee Gogh
The Mexican cousin's American half-brother Gring Gogh
The nephew who drove a stage coach Wells-far Gogh
The constipated uncle Can't Gogh
The ballroom dancing aunt Tang Gogh
The bird lover uncle Flamin Gogh
The fruit-loving cousin Man Gogh
An aunt who taught positive thinking Way-to-Gogh
The little bouncy nephew Poe Gogh
A sister who loved disco Go Gogh
And his niece who travels the country in an RV Winnie Bay Gogh
Smiling ?? there ya Gogh

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