

Introduction to the Swedish Church Books

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SWEDISH CHURCH BOOKS

The Swedish church books are usually the first Swedish records used when tracing one's Swedish heritage. These records are a "gold mine" because they are complete and contain detailed information about each individual. In many cases, one can trace a person's life in the church books from birth to death or birth to emigration.

The Swedish Church was a state church responsible for maintaining Sweden's vital records until 1991. The Church Law of 1686 required the parish ministers to record all births, marriages, deaths, and movements in and out of the parish. There are some parish records before 1600, but most begin in the late 1600s. The Swedish Church Books include fourteen record types, and the primary books used by genealogists are:

1. Birth and Christening (*födelse- och dopbok*)
2. Banns and Marriage (*lysning- och vigselbok*)
3. Death and Burial (*död- och begravningsbok*)
4. Moving in and out (*In- och utflyttningslängd*)
5. Household and congregation (*husförhörslängd och församlingsbok*)
6. Church accounts

BIRTH AND CHRISTENING

The birth and christening records vary by parish and time. If you know the name of your ancestor, the birth date, and the birth parish, you should be able to find the birth record. Below is the information that you will find most often in these records:

- Child's name
- Birth and baptismal dates
- Names of parents
- Name of the farm, village, or place where the family lived in the parish
- Names of baptismal witnesses
- Mother's age (actual age in years, range such as between 25 and 30, or birth date)
- In many birth books after 1860, you will find the page number of the corresponding household examination or congregation book.

In the 1600s and even in the early 1700s, the birth record may only contain the baptismal date, child's name, father's name, residence, and names of witnesses.

BANNS AND MARRIAGE

You will usually find the following types of information in the banns and marriage books:

- Dates of the banns and marriage
- Names of the bride and groom
- Names of the places where the bride and groom lived
- Name of the minister

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- Sometimes, the names of the parents
- In some marriage records after 1860, there is a cross-reference to the pages in the household examination book where the bride and groom lived.

DEATH AND BURIAL

You will typically find the following information in the death and burial books.

- Name of deceased
- Dates of death and burial
- Place in the parish where the deceased lived
- Age at death
- Cause of death
- In some books, mainly after 1860, the page number in the corresponding household or congregation book is shown.

In some parishes in Sweden, the death notice reads more like an obituary where you will sometimes get a biographical sketch of the deceased.

MOVING IN AND OUT

Each parish minister was required to keep a record of all persons moving in and out of the parish. In the moving-in records, you will usually see the name of the person moving in, the date, the place where they came from, and the place in the parish where the person moved to. The corresponding household or congregation record page is often noted as a cross-reference. The moving out records contain the person's name, place moved from, and sometimes a reference to the page in the household examination or congregation book as well as the place where the person moved to. If the person moved out of the country, usually only the country's name is noted. For emigrants moving to America, the entry is usually North America (*Nord Amerika*).

HOUSEHOLD AND CONGREGATION

The household examination records are unique to Sweden and Finland. Each pastor was required to take a yearly accounting of all members in their parish and test them for their religious understanding. To do this accounting, the minister made lists of all the people living in the parish, household by household. These records were kept in large books; each volume covers a series of years. You will see some that cover five years and many that cover ten years. This varies by parish and time. Most of these books begin in the mid-1700s, but some parishes exist earlier.

In 1895, the household books were replaced by the congregation books. All the parish members were registered in these books, but the religious examinations were no longer required. Hence, the information about religious examination results and receiving Holy Communion was no longer entered in the books.

You will generally find the following information in the household and congregation books.

- Name of place such as farm, village, or address in a city
- Names of all members of the household

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- Birth date and birthplace for each individual
- Occupation for the head of household
- Marriage date for the head of household
- Vaccination information (after 1800)
- Religious examination results (up to 1894)
- Death date if the person has died during the period the book covers (There will also be a death record in the death book.)
- Moving in and out information
- Sometimes notes in the special remarks column about the person

The household and congregation books are organized by place. This is why it is important to note the name of the place where the family lives, as noted in the birth, marriage, or death record. There is usually an index of place names in the front of the household and congregation book that gives the starting page number for a place. A few books have person name indexes, but most are organized by place names.

SCB RECORDS

These are the Statistiska centralbyrån (Statistics Sweden) or SCB extracts for birth, marriage, and death books sent by the minister each year to the central government agency. Because of Swedish privacy rules, some original birth, marriage, and death records cannot be published online because some of the records in the book are protected by the 70-year privacy law. The SCB extracts are a good replacement when the original books are unavailable. You will find extracts for 1860-1947 on the National Swedish Archives site and 1925-1947 on ArkivDigital.

STRATEGY

To search within the Swedish Church books, you need to know the parish where your ancestor came from, their Swedish name, and an important date such as a birth date.

Below are the steps for beginning to trace your family lineage when you have your ancestor's birth date, name, and birth parish.

1. Search for the birth record in the parish archive.
2. Within the birth record, generally, you will find the child's name, birth date, parents' names, names of baptismal witnesses, and the place where the family resided in the parish. Note the place of residence. You will need this to find the family in the corresponding household examination book.
3. Go to the household examination book and look for a place name index and locate the place found in the birth book. Next to the place in the index will be the starting page for that place. Go to the starting page number and search for the family. You will need to browse the book if there is no place name index.
4. Once you find the family, you will find more information about the family, such as parents' birth information and marriage information, names of siblings, and their birth information.
5. Review the moving in and moving out columns to check if the person has moved into this place or moved out during this period. If there is no entry, you can assume that the person

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lived in the same place in the previous household examination book or the subsequent one.

6. Using the information in the household examination records, you can trace your family back several generations

WHERE ARE THE RECORDS?

ORIGINAL RECORDS

- Regional Archives in Sweden

ONLINE SITES

- <https://arkivdigital.net/> \$Subscription site.
- Swedish National Archives <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/> Free.
- <https://www.ancestry.com/> - World Edition \$Subscription site.
- <https://www.familysearch.org/> - To view images, one must visit a Family History Library or Center.
- <https://www.myheritage.com/> \$Subscription site - Household examination records 1800-1947.

REFERENCES

ONLINE LEARNING GUIDES

- Family Search Wiki Sweden - https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Sweden_Genealogy
- Swedish Genealogy Guide - <http://swedishgenealogyguide.com/>.

BOOKS

- Clemensson, Per & Kjell Andersson. ***Your Swedish Roots***. Provo, Utah: Ancestry Publishing, 2004.
- Johansson, Carl-Erik. ***Cradled in Sweden***. Sandy, Utah: Everton Publishers, 2002. (Out of print).
 - You can download a copy by visiting FamilySearch.org and clicking on books.
 - Enter “Cradled in Sweden” in the search box and search. The fourth one in the list is available for all persons to download.
- Johnson, Robert W., and Gomell, Elizabeth Williams. ***Husförhörlängder, Swedish Household Examination Records***. Minneapolis, MN, 2020.
- Morris, Geoffrey Fröberg. ***A Practical Guide to Swedish Church Records for Genealogy and Family History***. West Jordan, Utah: The Swedish Genealogy Guide, LLC, 2020.
- Skogsjö, Håkan. ***Explore Your Swedish Roots***. Lyrestad, Sweden: ArkivDigital, 2020.