

Maternal Threads Unwoven: Identifying Margareta's Mother in 18th Century Sweden

Jill Morelli, CG®, CGL
jkmorelli@gmail.com
<http://genealogycertification.wordpress.com>
<http://theCDGseries.wordpress.com>
<https://appliedgen.institute>

We all are enthralled with a good case study. But case studies have a more important role—to illustrate the application of tools that are transferable to our work. This presentation focuses on the methodological tools employed to answer the question of when and where was Margareta Andersdotter (1752-1830) born and who was her mother. The answers to the question are in Swedish records, but the methodologies used apply to any ethnic group.

The methodologies illustrated in this presentation are:

- Determining a range of birth from direct evidence
- Applying broad context
 - Understanding naming practices
 - Using inheritance law as evidence
 - Transitioning from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar
- Using the FAN Club
- Developing hypotheses
- Building timelines and tables
- Assessing viability of DNA to an 18th century problem

Each one of these methodologies has three characteristics:

1. Each could be a presentation by itself;
2. Each is transferrable to any ethnic group, but the importance to your particular problem may vary; and
3. The researcher must decide when and where it is appropriate to apply them.

Let's take the methodologies one by one.

DETERMINING A RANGE OF BIRTH FROM DIRECT EVIDENCE

If it is important to determine a range of birth of your person of interest, then the use of direct evidence is obvious. In this case study, we had three records that provided direct evidence of Margareta's birth year: her age at death, her age recorded in a Swedish census late in Margareta's life and when she became taxable at age fifteen. All created a different birth year.

The range of calculated birth years may be large or, in this case, quite narrow— 1749 to 1752. For some projects, the range could be ten years or more. No matter the size of the range, it was important to assess each record indicating her birth year for reliability. Ask yourself some questions:

1. Is the record legible?
2. Is it a transcription or the original?
3. Who was the informant and what is the likelihood they knew the answer?
4. When was the record created? (The closer the source is to the event the will be likely be more accurate.)
5. Is the age a round number? (A round number often indicates a guess on the part of the informant.)
6. Could there be any intent to deceive?

The three pieces of birth evidence ranged in reliability, but the tax record is the most reliable. No one would declare to be older so they could be taxed earlier, but there is a chance she might try to be younger to avoid the tax. Margareta is at least 15 years of age when taxed. The tax record is also closer to the event of her birth than the other two sources.

APPLYING BROAD CONTEXT

Broad context is topical research that occurs throughout the process of investigation. At first, you may look for record availability and learn about naming practices of your ethnic group, but as you research your person of interest you may find additional topics that deserve a closer look. Here are some broad context topics that needed to be understood before a solution could be found in this case study.

Determining a range of birth from indirect evidence¹

If we had no evidence of Margareta's birth year then we have to rely on our knowledge of norms of our ethnic group.

Lacking direct evidence of a person's age may lead us to use indirect evidence. Another technique to determine the possible birth year range of a woman is to understand the norms for marriage and birth during her era and her ethnicity. Did the girls marry in their teens or did they wait? Using these cultural norms you may be able to determine a range of years of her birth. Another technique is to identify when the woman stopped having children. Usually this is when the woman is was in her 40s.² Again, you may be able to determine a possible time frame for when she was born.

It's just math—if a Swedish woman first gave birth in 1850, she might be born around 1828. If that same woman stopped having children in 1870, she might be born about 1830. You can now develop a reasonable range of her birth from these two data points that reflect the norms of your ethnic group. Your ancestors may have broken the norm, but maybe not.

The birth year of a man based on the birth of his first children follows the same reasoning, but the range will be much larger. Since a man can impregnate a woman over the age of about twelve and can father children until he dies, it is harder to determine their birth year based on when he started or stopped having children. Ethnically, Swedish men in Hishult parish tended to marry in their late 20s and sometimes in their thirties. If a Swedish couple had their first child in 1850, the father might have been born about 1825.

It is also likely the married couple had children shortly after marriage. For the grandparents of Margareta, the first indexed birth occurred six years after marriage, an anomaly. The lack of identification of children in the index born closer to the marriage date raised a red flag—perhaps there were children born but not indexed. Two additional children were found by going through the records entry by entry.

Whatever documented range you arrive at, be sure to broaden the bracket to account for individuals who didn't follow cultural norms and for the use of the actual search.

¹ You can find more information about this in Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards, Second Edition Revised* (Nashville : Ancestry.com, 2021) p. 12.

² Noel Stevenson, *Genealogical Evidence: A Guide to the Standard of Proof Relating to Pedigrees, Ancestry, Heirship and Family History*, (Laguna Hills, California: Aegean Park Press, 1998) 1-10.

Understanding naming practices³

Almost every group has unique naming practices and/or spelling variations. You may have a Johan Smith that begat a John Smyth that begat a Jonathon Smythe—a noteworthy (and frustrating) pattern. The Germans in Bavaria used Johan and Maria, but Ostfriesians in northern Germany used a patronymic naming system devoid of the suffixes -son or -dotter. In our case study, knowledge of Swedish naming practices initially identified the given name of Margareta's father and the full name of the father of her possible mother.

Using inheritance law as evidence⁴

Knowledge of the law (even in Sweden in the 1700s) revealed that women could inherit, but an illegitimate child could not. Margareta's inheritance of the Hanskholman farm indicated that she was born legitimately, eliminating the option of a liaison. Knowledge of the law may indicate the age of the witness or of the buyer of land. Inheritance eligibility might play a role in determining the motivation for emigration. i.e. if you aren't in line to inherit, why not emigrate?

Transitioning from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar⁵

Anyone who has traced their ancestor back to the 1700s in a primarily Protestant country, including the Colonial America, must think about the shift to the Gregorian calendar and its effect on records. Sweden's adoption of the Gregorian calendar was chaotic, but in 1752-1753, they made the shift. You can see the confusion in the records. Each pastor dealt with the change differently.

USING THE FAN (FRIENDS/FAMILY, ASSOCIATES & NEIGHBORS) CLUB⁶

In Sweden, the pastor carefully recorded the witnesses to the christening of each infant. These witnesses were often family members (siblings if of the right patronym) of the parent's generation. Researching the lives of these related individuals can often provide answers involving our person of interest. Sometimes the lack of witnesses related to one of the parties also tells us something, as was the case for the children of Anders and Anna Maria.

DEVELOPING HYPOTHESES⁷

Hypothesis building forces us to keep all the options on the table until eliminated. A hypothesis can revolve around whether this John Smith is my John Smith, but in this case study it revolved around the five different locations where the birth event could have occurred. Whether by name or geographic area, articulate all options and eliminate them one-by-one until the most likely is still standing. Sometimes all are eliminated. When that happens, spread your genealogical net wider and/or open your mind to other scenarios. This latter technique is sometimes called "radial research."

BUILDING TIMELINES⁸

Timelines and the use of correlation tables are some of the most helpful tools to tell the story visually rather than engaging in a dense narrative.

³ FamilySearch Wiki, https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Main_Page; Look under your location and then to the sidebar.

⁴ Geoff Fröberg Morris, Family History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, consultation, research notes privately held by Jill Morelli.

⁵ FamilySearch Wiki, "Julian and Gregorian Calendar," https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Julian_and_Gregorian_Calendars includes a list by country.

⁶ Elizabeth Shown Mills, *QuickSheet: The Historical Biographer's Guide to Cluster Research (the FAN Principle)*, (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2012).

⁷ Thomas W. Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof*, (Arlington, Virginia: National Genealogical Society, 2013) 89.

⁸ Jones, *Mastering Genealogical Proof* and Jill Morelli, "Using Timelines and Tables for Correlations," BCG webinar, *Legacy FamilyTree Webinars*, 6 October 2017 (<https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/using-timelines-for-correlation-and-analysis/>).

ASSESSING VIABILITY OF USING DNA TO AN 18TH CENTURY PROBLEM

All genealogists should have a foundational knowledge of DNA to assess when to apply this tool to your work. Because there was access to the test results of a test taker with a direct maternal line to the unknown mother, it was logical to identify a targeted test taker for an mtDNA test who has a verified line to one of the known children of Anna Maria.

Neither autosomal nor yDNA would be of help; the time frame was back into the 1700s ruling out autosomal DNA and there was a zig-zagging of genders ruling out yDNA. The only possible DNA test was mtDNA, with all its limitations. A willing Swede descending from a known maternal line was identified.

Anders Helgesson was identified in the Swedish tax records as Margareta's father, but the mother was unnamed. Anders married Anna Maria Ericsson Beckman in 1750. Four children were born to the couple and were either full or half siblings to Margareta. Many researchers identified Hishult as the parish of birth, Anna Maria as the mother and Margareta's birth date as 8 February 1750, the latter as revealed in the 1815 household examination record when Margareta was 67 years old. Margareta's birth, however, does not appear in the continuous and legible Hishult Parish records.

When and where was Margareta born and who was her mother?

The family did not live in Hishult before 1752, but gave the name of three parishes where they might have resided prior to their arrival. Each location became a hypothesis and was researched. Parish no. 1 and no. 2 had no birth entry for Margareta; each had continuous and clear record keeping. Parish no. 3 had no birth entries for Margareta in the five year span reviewed. The year 1752, however, had no entries, just two blank pages. Entries before and after were clear and carefully entered with a steady hand. The blank pages for 1752 forced us to ask the question of "Why?"

When you build multiple hypotheses, each one becomes a sub-proof, and each could be answered using indirect, negative or direct evidence. The three entries of known information provided direct evidence of her birth year, but were in conflict and could be wrong. No direct evidence identified her mother's name. When no direct evidence was found of Margareta's birth in various parishes where the record was completed and clearly written, the lack of a birth entry for her provided evidence suggested that she was not born in that parish.

Negative findings is a one step process:

1. I looked and didn't find.

Negative evidence is a two step process:

1. I looked and didn't find, AND
2. The fact that there were no findings told me something, usually in the form of a limited list of options; in this case, Margareta wasn't born in that parish.

Another example of negative evidence is that Margareta was 1.) not found in the 1760 tax records AND 2.) that meant she was under the age of 15.

Parish no. 3, Halmstad, where the parish book was blank for 1752, coupled with her birth not found anywhere else, was negative evidence that she was born in Halmstad.

No record named Anna Maria as her mother, but the assemblage of indirect and direct evidence, including mtDNA, the timelines of the families and the context of Margareta in the family provided evidence of the mother being Anna Maria Ericsson Beckman.

The use of mtDNA confirmed that the family of the mother was within the Askman family, but could not identify the specific person who was the mother.

RESOURCES (Websites were checked March 2024).

Not all resources noted below were used for this research problem.

General Genealogical Information

Board for Certification of Genealogists. *Genealogy Standards, Second Edition, Revised*. Nashville, : Ancestry.com, 2021.

----. "Genealogical Work Samples." bcgcertification.org/learning/skills/genealogical-work-samples/ Scroll Jones, Thomas. "Inferential Genealogy," (free) broadcast.lds.org/elearning/FHD/Community/en/CBIG/Inferential_Genealogy_Course_Handout.pdf

———. *Mastering Genealogical Proof*. Arlington, Virginia : National Genealogical Society: 2013.

Peters, Nancy. "Reporting on Research: Standards Encourage Better Communication" *FamilyTree webinars*. <https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/reporting-on-research-standards-encourage-better-communication/> . Probably the best on the construction of a research report.

Stanbary, Karen, CG. "Techniques for Integrating Documentary and Genetic Information in a Research Report." *BCG-Legacy Family Tree Webinar*, <https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/techniques-for-integrating-documentary-and-genetic-information-in-a-research-report/> 17 March 2020.

General Swedish Information

Arkivdigital, (\$\$) <https://app.arkivdigital.se> Includes a growing number of indexes including BMD and Household examinations.

Demografisk Databas Södra Sverige, <http://www.ddss.nu/> for the southern counties of Halland, and Blekinge and the area of Skåne. Index only, but helps find that missing person. AD has this info for most parishes now and it's searchable.

DisByt (\$). Swedish Computer Group's subscription site for family trees. \$ Nice site to find descendants and living cousins. To participate you must upload your Swedish ancestors as a Gedcom. <https://www.dis-sweden.org>

FamilySearch Wiki, "Sweden." https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Sweden_Genealogy. Investigate all the hyperlinks as they have an enormously rich site for Sweden and all of Scandinavia. Don't forget to explore the pages for your county and your parish.

Gravstensinventeringen. The Swedish "FindaGrave" equivalent: <https://grav.rotter.se>

Högman, Hans. "Genealogy." *Genealogy: Hans Högman*. <http://www.hhogman.se/swegen.htm> , a great site for everything Swedish, especially strong in military.

Johansson, Carl-Erik. *Cradled in Sweden*. Provo : Everton Publishing, 2002.

Johnson, CG, Robert W. & Elizabeth Williams Gomoll, CG. *Husförhörslängder: Swedish Household Examination Records: Framing the Solutions to Your Swedish Ancestry Puzzles*. Minneapolis: self-published, 2020. Devotes a chapter to each column on the examinations. NGS Award winner for 2022.

Garratt, Martha. "Swedish Naming Practices," BCG/Legacy webinar, "Sweden's Multiple Naming Systems & How they Changed in the 1800s," 6 October 2017. <https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/swedens-multiple-naming-systems-and-how-they-changed-in-the-1800s/> Excellent.

Lanmateriet (historic maps) <https://www.lantmateriet.se/en/> Can be tricky to use but has good historical maps of your parish.

Morris, Geoffrey Fröberg. *A Practical Guide to Swedish Church Records for Genealogy and Family History*. West Jordan, Utah: The Swedish Genealogy Guide, 2020. A good overview of BMD records and how to read them.

Rotemansarkivet 1878-1926: (Stockholm) <https://sok.stadsarkivet.stockholm.se/> You may have to have Google Translate open to understand all the records.

Skogsjö, Håkan. *Explore your Swedish Heritage: How to Search for your Swedish Origin in Church Books and Other Documents on the Internet*. (originally in Swedish, now available in English) Lyrestad, Sweden: Arkiv Digital, 2020.

Släktdata (Swedish GS search engine) <https://www.slaktdata.org> .

Tax records

- Cronberg, Olaf. "Thanks to the Tax Collectors," *Rooted In Sweden*. 4 (April 2007). E-journal. 6-8. https://www.dis-sweden.org/rooted/RootedInSweden_4_low.pdf : 6 February 2018. (Article is written in English.) Also, mentioned in same issue under "The SVAR Website."
- Family Search Wiki*, https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Sweden_Taxation. "Swedish Taxation," rev. 20:12, 9 June 2017.
- Hedburg, AG, Kathleen. "Using the Mantalsängder to Solve Genealogical Puzzles: Four Case Studies." *Swedish American Genealogist*, 2020:1, p. 2-7.
- Johnson, CG, Robert. "Swedish Tax Records, Part 1." Blog. *NordicFamilyHistory.com*, 18 March 2018. <https://nordicfamilyhistory.com/?s=mantals> . Part 2 is missing.
- Meade, Kathy. "Quick Find Indexes," *ArkivDigital*, 19 July 2021. <https://www.arkivdigital.net/blog?page=1> Search on mantals. (Hard to find, but be persistent and scroll down. Follow the links to the blog and then to previous posts)
- . "Population Registers (MantalsLängder)" *ArkivDigital*, 10 October 2017, <https://www.arkivdigital.net/blog?page=2> Search on mantals. See above. These blog posts are getting to be more restrictive so you may be unsuccessful.
- Morelli, Jill "Using Swedish Tax Records to Solve Tough Genealogical Problems." *Legacy FamilyTree Webinars*, https://familytreewebinars.com/download.php?webinar_id=716

Swedish records

- Ancestry (\$, World edition, index): <http://www.ancestry.com>. Start at Ancestry's home page > Search > Europe > Sweden > [click on record set of interest]
- ArkivDigital (\$, indexed censuses from 1860 to contemporary). AD is a private firm providing color digital parish images, recently photographed. Recommended.
- FamilySearch (free): <https://familysearch.org>. The Wiki is especially comprehensive and helpful.
- MyHeritage (Swedish records are FREE) <https://myheritage.com>. A different index and different coverage. What you don't find in FS and Ancestry, you might find here.
- SVAR (Swedish National Archives, free): <https://riksarkivet.se/startpage> > Search the Collections > Digital Research Room > insert parish and county (must have). Most comprehensive. Lists all that it has; perhaps all that exists!

By Jill Morelli, CG, CGL

All used mantals tax records.

- Morelli, CG, Jill. "Answering Genealogical Questions Using Swedish Tax Records" *Swedish American Genealogist*, September 2019.
- , "Indirect Evidence and mtDNA Help Identify the Parents of Margareta Andersdotter of Hishult Parish, Halland Län, Sweden." *Swedish American Genealogist*, June 2020.
- , "Kirstin Pehrsson: Indirect Evidence Helps build a Seventeenth-Century Swedish Family." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*. March 2023.
- . "Spanning a Record Gap of 160 years: Identifying Parents for Elna Johansdotter, Who Died in Hishult Parish, Sweden, 13 February 1795." *Swedish-American Genealogist*, March 2019.
- . "Swedish Records Merge Identities to Reveal Bengt Andersson's Parents" *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*. 105 (Sept 2017): 199-210.
- , "Parents for Sven Nilsson of Hishult, Sweden" *Swedish American Genealogist*, September 2020.
- , "Using Swedish Tax Records to Solve Tough Genealogical Problems." *Legacy FamilyTree Webinars*, https://familytreewebinars.com/download.php?webinar_id=716