

Faust Family

Andrew Gustaf Johansson Faust – My Grandfather

The mystery of his home parish was solved
by a lucky chance

Faust Fam

By PAUL A. JOHNSON

South Green Lake Cemetery is located about 3½ miles south of Chisago City, Minnesota, just west of County Road No. 23. After driving into the unpaved parking lot, one enters the cemetery through a large metal gate, wide enough for a funeral coach to drive through. If, after swinging the gate open, one takes an immediate left and walks almost all the way to the southeast corner of the cemetery, one arrives at a reddish-gray granite tombstone with the inscription:



Andrew Gustaf Faust was my grandfather. He died of cancer just a few days before my mother's confirmation day. He had hoped to live to see her confirmed, but unfortunately that was not to be. In English the

inscription reads: "Born in Bärja, Sweden." But where is Bärja? There is no city, town, or parish by that name to be found on any map of Sweden. And where did the name "Faust" originate? This was all a mystery. As was the case with so many Swedish immigrants, Andrew did not speak much of Sweden. However, my late aunt Mildred Lilygren, who was very young when he died, was sure that he came from Småland, because he spoke Swedish with a "småländska" dialect.

Puzzle solved

On July 1, 1980, a young people's orchestra from the city of Växjö in Småland performed in concert at the Chisago Lake Lutheran Church in Center City, MN. Four young members stayed with us overnight after the concert. Among them was Birgitta Sandell of Ljungby. As we were sitting together in the living room enjoying a glass of lemonade and some cookies, I asked: "Have any of you ever heard of a place named Bärja?" Birgitta replied: "Yes, and I play the organ in the church there." As we were to learn later, the correct spelling is "Berga," and the tombstone was most likely inscribed the way the name sounds in Swedish, not the way it is actually spelled. When I told Birgitta that my wife and I, together with my brother and his wife, planned to visit Sweden in August of that year, she offered to show us the church. So we obtained her address and telephone number and

made plans to contact her upon our arrival.

Clues in Sweden

While in Sweden we stopped at the archives in Vadstena for an hour or so and looked through the birth records for the Berga parish, but were unable to locate any birth on November 17, 1861, that would correspond to my grandfather. Subsequently we met Birgitta who took us to visit the Berga church. While at the church we met a man who was mowing the cemetery lawn, and we inquired about my grandfather's mother, Eva Christina, who had died in Sweden, but he said he never heard of an Eva Christina Faust buried in that cemetery, so we were still unsure if this was really the place from which my grandfather had come.

During our trip to Sweden we found out that a second cousin of mine, Clara Andersson, was quite knowledgeable of genealogical research. When Clara and her husband Arne visited our home in 1982, I asked if she would be willing to try to locate information about my grandfather, which she graciously agreed to do. Later I wrote to her with the information I knew about him, his father John Faust, his brother Charlie Faust, and his sisters Mary and Ida Faust.

The next break came when Clara, who lives in Växjö and has access to the parish microfilms there, wrote to us that she had found records of the

Faust family. It turned out to be *much* more work to locate these records than might otherwise have been the case because the records in Sweden show my grandfather's date of birth to be December 5, 1861, not November 17 as is shown both on his tombstone and in my grandmother's Bible. He came to America as a young boy, which may have caused the discrepancy. This is why we were unable to locate information in the Vadstena archives. Clara was able to do so with the names of his siblings, even though they had "Americanized" their names, and we did not have exact dates of birth for any of them.

Now we knew that my great-grandfather John Faust's name in Sweden was Johan Nils Petersson, and that Berga was indeed the correct parish. My grandfather's name in Sweden was Anders Gustaf Johansson, following the patronymic naming pattern of that time.

Thus we had looked for a man who had died at a relatively young age, whose date of birth in our records was incorrect, who had changed his name upon coming to America, and whose place of birth was spelled incorrectly on his tombstone. How fortunate we were to locate him at all! When my wife and I were in Sweden in August, 1992, we visited Birgitta Sandell-Elisson. Upon mentioning to her how she had helped me find my grandfather, she said that if we had asked any of the other 75 members of the orchestra, none of them would have known about Berga. So it seems we were predestined to meet!

We Faust family members had always rued the fact that the family was so small. Only a few immediate relatives were known. However, as a result of this find, and with a great deal of subsequent genealogical research, the relation now numbers in the hundreds, in the United States, Canada, and Sweden. Andrew Faust had four siblings and 45 first cousins, all of whom have been identified, together with most or all of their descendents.



Andrew Faust and Mathilda Dahl.

About the name Faust

The father of Johan Petersson (John Faust) was Nils Peter Jönsson Fast, Fast being a military name that he received when he was a farmer-soldier in the Swedish army. The family lived in a soldier's cottage.

In 1855 Johan married Eva Christina Petersdotter. They lived in the parish of Berga and raised their five children there. However, Sweden, and especially Småland, suffered three years of crop failures and severe depression between 1867 and 1870, which left Johan and his family almost destitute. So in 1870 Johan left for America to find a better life for himself and his children. During

this time his wife suffered a complete nervous breakdown and was unable to come to America.

When Johan came to America in 1870 he took the name John Fast. The children followed later. Carl Peter (Charlie), age 14, is shown as leaving the parish for America on April 21, 1871. Andrew, age 10, left in 1872 together with a brother Salomon, age 13, and a sister Maria (Mary), age 8. Ida left in 1879 at age 11. Their father found families in Minnesota with whom each of them could live. The 1875 census shows Andrew living with the Charles Weberg family in Chisago Lakes township.



The Andrew Faust farm near Chisago City, Minnesota.

At first John and the children kept the name Fast. However, Fast, which means firm and solid in Swedish, has a completely different meaning in English. I cannot say with certainty, but I believe the change from Fast to Faust may have come about in this way.

Elias Petersson Fast (no relation) was an early immigrant to the Chisago Lakes area, having arrived in America in 1854 together with his wife. Fast is the name that is shown for them in the first records of Chisago Lake Lutheran Church in Center City. However, some time after 1867, he changed his family name to Faust. The fact that Salomon and

Andrew both lived with families in the Chisago Lakes area (Andrew was confirmed at Chisago Lake Lutheran Church) leads me to believe that Elias may have influenced them in some way to change their names to Faust, or at least that they may have followed his example. Salomon (now Soloman) died accidentally in 1874 and his death record shows his name as Faust. When Elias Faust acted as census taker in 1875 he shows Andrew's name as Faust. However, their sister Maria (now Mary) was living with a family in Stillwater at the time and still had the name Fast. Eventually John and all the children took the name Faust.

John Faust purchased a farm south of Chisago City in 1890. Two years later he sold the farm to Andrew and continued to live there. On September 14, 1893, Andrew married Mathilda Dahl, who had been born in Lenhovda, Sweden, and grew up in Spring Lake, MN. They had five children. Two sons died young of diphtheria and are buried next to their parents. The three daughters were Edith (my mother), Mildred, and Esther.

Carl Peter, or Charlie as he was known, went west to look for gold. Oral tradition has it that he also went to Alaska. Nothing further is known about him. Both Mary and Ida moved to Washington, Mary to Seattle, and Ida to Tacoma. They both married and had children.

After my grandfather's death in 1910, John Faust went to Seattle to live with Mary. He died and is buried there. His wife, who remained in Sweden, spent the last 45+ years of her life in a mental institution.

So my grandfather, who was born in Sweden as Anders Gustaf Johansson, became Andrew Gustaf Faust in America. Now the mystery has been solved!

Contact information

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Swedish Genealogy Days 2006

During a weekend in August, 12–13, the annual *Släktforskardagarna* (Genealogy Days) took place in a convention center in Nacka, 20 minutes from downtown Stockholm. These "Days" travel around the country, and are usually managed in cooperation with a local society. Last year they were in Göteborg, and next year they are supposed to be in Halmstad.

For the first time in the Federation's now 20 year history there was an entrance fee of 40 SEKs, but still

there were many researchers, who felt they got more than what they paid for. There were many exhibitors, including *Ancestry*, *The Family History Library*, and the *Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation*. The archives were well represented, as well as *Genline*, and a lot of the member societies, but not as many as usual, as the booths were expensive. There were also a great number of lectures on many subjects.

The most important item on the agenda was the AGM of the Federa-

tion, where the president, *Ted Rosvall* was re-elected for another two years. The big problem this year was the very problematic economy of the Federation; the reserves have diminished rapidly during the last three years, and the future is uncertain.

Among the 6100 visitors I met many friends from all over Sweden, and even *Elsie Martin* of Brooklyn Center, Minnesota!

Elisabeth Thorsell