

Christer Allgulander interview

June 15th, 2023

Christer Allgulander of Sigtuna, Sweden is the 2nd cousin of Margit Johnson Colburn of Peterborough, N.H. Margit was New Boston's Town Clerk for quite a few years, when she was Margit Hooper. When she was little her parents had a house near the Howe Bridge. Christer and his wife Thea visited New Boston in June of 2023. The interview is by Dan Rothman, who said very little.

I'm Christer Allgulander. I'm a professor of psychiatry in Sweden, retired. I'm 76 years old and I have nine grandchildren, imagine! <laugh> And when my grandmother passed in 1982, she was 101 years old. In her belongings I found a Polaroid picture and she had written on the back, "This is my brother Albin in the United States." And we had no idea there was an Albin. She had a perfect memory and kept track of the entire pedigree with the exception of Albin. I started wondering, who is this Albin guy? And, um, it took many years. Only a couple of years ago I found through friends I was visiting in Tampa, Florida; Kathy and David Sheehan. Kathy said, I'm on ancestry.com, I will look him up. And a couple of weeks later I got an email from her with all kinds of documents about Albin, his World War I and II draft records and marriage certificate, all kinds of stuff. His grave was in Manchester, New Hampshire. So we had a lead. In September last year, my wife Thea and I were traveling, starting in Minnesota, going to Vermont, getting a rental car, driving through New Hampshire over to Maine. And on our continued trip Thea said, why don't we take a detour and try to find Albin's grave.

So we went to the Pine Cemetery Grove in Manchester, a large one. We walked into the office and I said, is there an Albin Jonsson here? Yes, there is. So the cemetery manager Greg Paris drove in front of us in his pickup, carrying a sort of stick, coming to a grass spot. There was no gravestone. He started prodding until you could hear a metal sound, the metal plate showing the grave number 1201. Albin's wife Elida was first buried in 1957, and Albin in 1960. It was an emotional moment. Later, I was advised by a town clerk to get in touch with Dan Rothman. So I wrote to Dan "do you know who is Margit Colburn?" a name I had seen on the grave registry. Dan wrote back immediately "yes, I know Margit. I'll give her a call". Bingo. A couple of days later I got an email from Margit saying "hello, I'm your second cousin!" <laugh>.

So we started corresponding. Then Margit turned 75 last September. Thea and I called her and sang "Ja må hon leva", the Swedish version of Happy Birthday. She'd never heard that. We realized we have a job here to help Margit find her ancestry. By now we have researched Albin's Swedish pedigree, and that he in fact had three sisters, one of whom was my grandmother Victoria. Margit and her two sisters Pam and Dottie thought he was an only child. I'm writing an "Albin Chronicle" about two brothers who were born in South Sweden in a wooden rocky area called Algutsboda. Algutsboda is where my surname stems from. Here, at a mill called Dampemåla August and Johannes were born in 1826 and 1832 respectively, among a total of ten siblings. Their father was quite an entrepreneur. He built a mill with permission from the royal governor. He dammed up the river Lyckebyån to get power for a mill to process wool, to make linseed oil paint, and electricity. I see many similar mills here [in New Hampshire].

Several house clusters were ending with "måla" from "male" in Danish, to measure something. So it means measured piece of land; Dampemåla, Spritsmåla, Duvemåla, Sutaremåla. Thea and I actually found the house Dampemåla where Johannes and August grew up. August went south to Nävrågöl a couple of miles south to work to have a farm and to make paint. The oil paint was used to paint the arched ceiling of the church, sky blue. By processing wool with warm water and pressure you get a water-resistant thick textile called loden or duffle or vadmål. This was sent to city workshops.

Johannes, Albin's father, married a local girl, went north to Spritsmåla, a village booming with entrepreneurs. In 1878 he went on with his family to live in the south part of Stockholm within walking distance of the Old Town. There, he established a store with his brother Alfred, selling porcelain, cutlery and glass. Most of that glass was actually made in Algutsboda, where we call it the Kingdom of Crystal, several glass blowing shops such as Orrefors, Kosta, and Skruf, still brand names sold all over the world. Kosta was established in 1742, and we are bringing six glasses made there in 1875 for Margit, Dottie and Pam. We were so fortunate to find them in an antique store.

Johannes' daughter Victoria, my grandmother, was working in that store. There is a photo of her holding a telephone. Stockholm was early with telephones. Albin was born there growing up with his three older sisters. In 1901 he left Sweden on a boat, only 17 years old. According to the passenger manifesto, when he arrived in the U.S. he was headed for Portland, Maine, which was a bit unusual. Most people ended up in Boston or in Ellis Island, New York. I don't know why this was his destination. Maybe he was recruited by a manufacturing company. Both men and women from Sweden went here to work at the mills. Albin started working at the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company. He found his wife Elida who came from Eslöv in south Sweden, who also worked there. They married in 1906 and had one child, a baby boy Eric, born in 1907.

When Johannes, Albin's father, passed away in February 1908, the family went to visit Emma, Albin's mother, in the Old Town. Many steamships commuted across the Atlantic bringing emigrants and mail. Albin's family went over to Hull on the east side of England, crossed England on a railroad to Liverpool where they lodged for a while, and then a steam ship took them back to the U.S.

There were two waves of immigration from Sweden. Between 1850 and the early 1900s 1.2 million people left Sweden, mostly for the United States. That was 20% of the Swedish population. And you would think these were the young and able, but they also left Sweden for starvation, for political and religious oppression. The government didn't wake up to this gigantic emigration until 1906 when it scrambled to set up a commission to understand why so many left (some actually came back). Now, you would think that it was only the poor and disabled who stayed behind, but not so. In fact, in the county of Småland, slightly larger than New Hampshire, there emerged a strong entrepreneurial spirit called Gnosjö-andan.

For example, Ikea was founded by Ingvar Kamprad from Älmhult in Småland. The Husqvarna company is based in here, making lawn mowers, chain saws, shotguns and much more. The Thule company makes car and bicycle gear and suitcases that are sold globally. There were two famous authors; Astrid Lindgren, who wrote the childrens' books about Pippi Longstocking. These have been translated into many languages. There was Vilhelm Moberg, who wrote a trilogy about a poor family in Småland who left to start farming in Minnesota.

Returning now to the story of Albin and Elida, they made a successful life here in Manchester. They kept working for the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company until it went belly up in 1935. Then they switched to making shoes working for the McElwain shoe factory. Their son Eric also worked there. They lived on 991 Cilley Road until 1942 when Eric went with the Allied Forces as a cannoneer to Austria. There he fell in love with Hilda from Vienna, and she became pregnant with Margit. They attempted to get married in Austria but that was not possible due to the post-war confusion in getting the proper papers.

Eric returned to the U.S. and was decommissioned, organizing for Hilda to come across, which involved a lot of red tape. Eventually she was on a PanAm flight on the 3rd of August, 1947. They married, and in September, Margit was born. Later they had another three children, moving from Manchester to live on 110 Parker Road in New Boston.

Thea and I have worked to connect all the dots between Sweden and New Hampshire. Thanks to Margit and many others, there will be a chronicle with photos and a time line. Elida's background will be in there and how she and her many siblings came to New Hampshire. It has been a busy week!

Yesterday we were at the Manchester Historic Association with Mark Mastromarino, a historian. He helped us locate all their residences. We were driven to them by Steve O'Connell, ex postman, who took us in his 2002 Buick. I photographed the boarding houses and the houses where they lived. We struck a gold mine, on Cilley Road (Cilley was a US Senator and abolitionist). We found the three properties next to each other where Albin and Elida lived 1926-1934, running a convenience store on the corner. As I was taking pictures, a car drove up with David Staples and his mother Sandra Staples (from Peterborough). David had just moved into the house. When they heard about us, they said, oh, please come in! So we were in the house taking pictures including the original wallpaper. Thank you David and Sandra, so kind of you to share this.

We also located where Elida boarded in 1903 at Sagamore Street before she married to Albin in 1906.

At this point I have to realize that when you go into genealogy you have to stop somewhere or you end up in what Margit called rabbit holes. <laugh>.

Dan: Did you go inside any of the mills? Did you get to see maybe where the shoes were made?

Christer: We went into the Millyard Museum. We passed the former McElwain shoe factory, which is now a condominium building.

Dan: Do you think Albin was recruited [by Amoskeag] for dyeing the fabric?

Christer: That's what Mark the historian suggested. Swedes were recruited for the dyeing of cotton that was weaved by French people. Dyeing was upstairs, so maybe he was out of that terrible noise of weaving (there was a sign language to communicate).

Dan: You said Mark was able to find Albin's work records.

Christer: Yes, that's how we found where he lived and when.

Dan: Oh, that's amazing. This is wonderful. Uh, so let me see. Christer's been talking for 20 minutes. I'm taking notes. This, everything he just told us was from memory. He has no notes at all. So he has an incredible memory. <laugh>.

Christer: Thank you.



Thea and Christer Allgulander and Margit Colburn

"Remember, remember always, that all of us, and you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and revolutionists." Franklin D. Roosevelt

*"I had always hoped that this land might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong."
George Washington*



“75:an”, Kosta Glassworks, 1875



Dampemåla, where Albin's father Johannes was raised



Emigrant steamship Ariosto leaving Göteborg Harbor 1901



Photo of Albin Jonsson / Photo of Eric, Elida and Albin on Cilley Road



The old photo of the wedding anniversary of Albin and Elida that got me started



2nd cousins of mine, Margit, Dorothy and Pamela, raised in New Boston