

# Chapter Two

## SWedes OF WORCESTER

### **The Stromberg and Stenquist Families**

Our grandmother, Ebba Victoria Stromberg, was born in Worcester, Massachusetts on January 24, 1892, and grew up in the Swedish neighborhood known as Quinsigamond Village. Ebba (“Nanny” to us) was the daughter of Andrew Stromberg and Anna Marie Forsman, both Swedish immigrants.

Our grandfather, Axel Emmanuel Stenquist, was born July 8, 1891 in Gardner, Massachusetts about 30 miles northwest of Worcester. Axel was the third child of Robert Axel Stenquist and Louisa Erickson-Stenquist, also Swedish immigrants who came to the U.S. in the 1880s.

This chapter gives some background on our ancestors from Sweden, including the steel industry that motivated them to immigrate to the U.S. and tells of our Swedish great-grandparents and their families on our mother’s side. Much of the historical information in this section comes from the book *Swedes of Greater Worcester Revisited* by Salomonsson, Hultgren, and Becker published in 2005.

Worcester County in Massachusetts was a major area of Swedish settlement. “Between 1870 and 1930, it is estimated that nearly 85,000 Swede-Finns immigrated to North America.” Worcester’s steel mills “brought hundreds more from the mining districts of central Sweden” so that by the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Worcester had one of the largest concentrations of Swedes in the eastern United States. These communities were kept informed of events, both local and international, that would be of interest to Swedish immigrants, by the numerous Swedish-language publications that existed at the time (*Swedes of Greater Worcester Revisited*, page 7).

### **American Steel and Wire Company**

By 1920 the highest concentration of Swedes in the United States was in Worcester, mainly due to the steel industry. The American Steel and Wire

Company employed a lot of Swedes. The Norton company (now known as St. Gobain's) was a company started by Swedes around the time of WWI, and it was located at the north end of Worcester, on the border with a town called Holden. The company worked in abrasives which were used to repair farm equipment.

*"So, Swedes started it and they brought over Swedish men to work in the factory. They built homes for many of them [within walking distance from the factory] and then the men would then bring their families over; their wives and children. Norton Company had a history of providing free land for their gardens for their workers."*

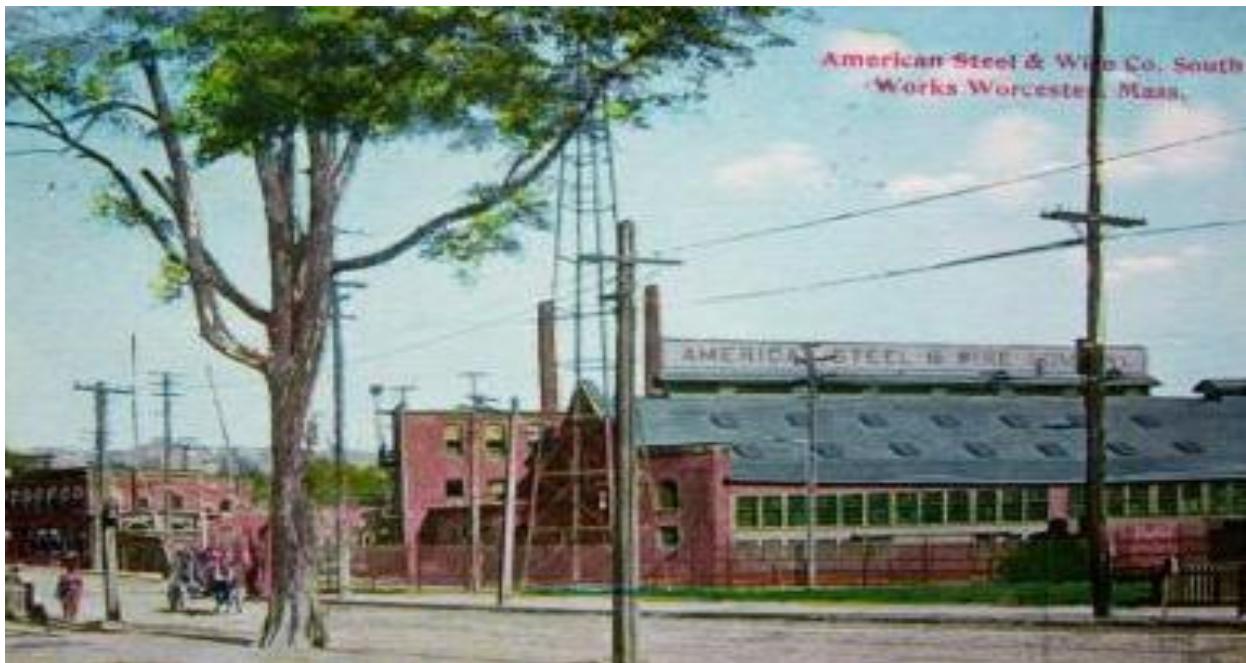
(Interview with Tina Blomquist Boyd, February, 2020)

The American Steel and Wire Southworks plant in Quinsigamond Village is pictured in this 1905 postcard (below). "By 1900 the largest concentration of Swedish Americans in Worcester County was within walking distance of this mill" (*Swedes of Greater Worcester Revisited*, page 26). This is where Andrew Stromberg worked until he retired in 1921 at age 67. The plant was only a mile from the home where they lived in 1900.



American Steel and Wire Southworks plant, Quinsigamond Village (1905)

American Steel and Wire Company was probably the biggest asset to Worcester's past. It made Worcester a manufacturing giant from the 1870s well into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The photo below shows the Southworks plant in 1915. (From the website: *Places of the Past – Worcester, Massachusetts. Photo submitted by Mark Malchik, 2013.*)



Southworks plant, Worcester, Massachusetts (1915)

### **Andrew Stromberg**

Our great grandfather was one of those Swedish immigrants coming to America to work in the steel industry. Andrew M. Stromberg was born in Degefors, Varmland, Sweden in August 1854. Andrew married Anna Marie Forsman, who was born in May 1852 in Sweden.

Andrew arrived in the United States, in Worcester, in 1884, when he was 30 years old, and he was employed by Southworks of the American Steel and Wire Company. In the US Census of 1900, when Andrew was 45 years old, his occupation is listed as "Heater" at the steel mill.

Our grandmother once told me a story of her father's expertise in the steel making process. After the raw materials were heated and turned into molten steel, they had to be poured into forms). "Father knew precisely the right time to pour the molten steel from a large vat, simply by its color." Apparently, this was a much-valued skill at the time.

### **The Stromberg Family**

When our grandmother was born in 1892, the Stromberg family lived on Thenius Street, in Quinsigamond, the Swedish neighborhood of Worcester. Their home was only a block from Quinsigamond Elementary School, presumably where Ebba went to school.

A few years later the family moved to North Quinsigamond Village, Worcester. In the US Census of 1900, the family consisted of Andrew (46), his wife Anna (48), sons Seth (15), David (13), Nils (10) and Ebba (8). Living with them at the time was Alfred Forsman, Andrew's nephew. The Stromberg family lived at 21 Greenwood Street which was only a half mile from their previous home.

By the 1910 US Census the family had moved again and their home at 16 Halmstad Street was only two blocks away from their previous address. Ebba was 18 and her brothers, between the ages of 20 and 24, were still living at home. Seth, the oldest, was a grocery clerk., David was a clerk at the Southworks wire mill, and Nils was an engraver at the wire mill. Andrew's occupation was listed as "wire worker" at the wire mill. It must have been a multiple family residence as the census report listed other families living at the same address.

## Our Swedish-American Grandmother



Ebba Victoria Stromberg, whom we affectionately refer to as "Nanny," is shown posing in the photo below with her mother, Anna Marie (Forsman) Stromberg.

We believe that Nanny was close to her father. She spoke fondly of him, and how he influenced her eventual involvement with Theosophy. This is revealed by my notes from a conversation with her on June 12, 1983 (only three months before she passed away).

*On Saturday nights he would drink (at "the restaurant") and just as he was beginning, before having too much, he would talk.*

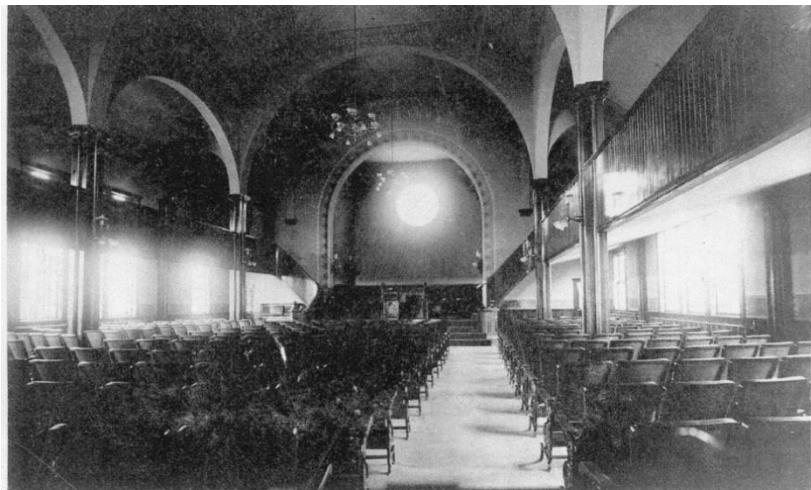
*"He often talked of philosophy and life; at these times you knew that he knew very much – he was a well-read person. He often spoke of a philosopher, Swedenborg."*

*It was this memory that caused her to seek out books by Swedenborg, when paperbacks became commonly available around the turn of the century.*

*She then became impressed with Swedenborg's writings – containing references to the esoteric basis of Theosophy – and really appreciated the knowledge her father had. It was around that time that she pledged herself to Theosophical work "for the rest of her incarnations."*

*She made another reference to "the restaurant" where many others, and other children, would play. There was a man (not named) who would bring candy and flowers to the other girls – but to Nanny he brought copies of **The Temple Artisan**. She said to me that "blew her mind" because it must have been around the time when she began reading Swedenborg's writings.*

It is likely that this man she referred to is the man identified by our mother as Mr. Taylor (during the recorded reunion with Bernard Lentz, in March 1984).



Nyrkhus Interiör.



Andra Svenska Kyrkan  
Worcester, Mass.



Ludwig Aleson, Pastor

At the age of 18, Ebba was a pianist for an orchestra (1910 Census). From family stories we know that as a young woman Nanny played organ and piano for a church in Worcester.

The photos at left (c. 1905) show the Second Swedish Congregational Church, and the Pastor who served from 1901-1906. (*Swedes of Greater Worcester Revisited*, page 68).

We believe this is the church where Nanny often played [based upon our ability to identify the building during our pilgrimage in 1996].

Ebba's teen years (ages 13-19) in Worcester were between 1905 and 1911. National and world events included the first violent event of the Russian Revolution (1905); Einstein's published Theory of Relativity (1905); San Francisco earthquake (1906); an asteroid hit the Earth in Siberia "Tunguska Event" (1908); the first Model T automobile produced (1908); and the first talking motion picture was released (1910).

The photos below are of Ebba sitting on the porch and standing in front of her home at 16 Halmstad Street where she grew up in Quinsigamond Village. In the bottom photo, the buildings and landscape look very much like the 1917 photo of Quinsigamond Village (later in this chapter). The church in the background looks like the church where she played in the church orchestra (previous page).



*Ebba "Nanny" in Quinsigamond Village, Worcester, MA*

The photos below are from a small, tattered album containing photos of several young people and Ebba. None of the photos were labeled. But we can identify Ebba in the top left photo, and in the photo at right, and at bottom.



*Ebba "Nanny" in Worcester, MA*

The photo on the next page shows her father Andrew Stromberg holding a small child. We believe this is Bob, Ebba's first of two children. We believe the other men are her brothers Seth and Charles; it is likely that her third brother, Nils, had already moved to Detroit by this time.

There must have been a close bond between Ebba and her father surrounding music as well. Ebba's father passed away in 1934, after she had moved to California. She received a letter from Seth's wife, Ida, describing her father's last days. About a week before he died, he said (translated from Swedish) "*Write to Ebba and ask her if she remembers when she played and sang 'Till We Meet Again.'*" (A favorite, religious Swedish song).

Ebba's father Andrew enjoyed 13 years of retirement before he passed away in August 1934, at age 80. When he died, he left his widow Anna Marie, daughter Ebba Victoria, sons Nils of Detroit, Seth and Charles of Worcester, 10 grandchildren and five great grandchildren. Andrew was a member of the Emmanuel Lutheran Church, and he was a Mason, belonging to the Ragnar Lodge V.O.



Ebba's father Andrew Stromberg (center) holding small child, around 1916.

### **Robert Axel Stenquist and Family**

Robert Axel Stenquist was born in 1858 in Malmo, Sweden on the southern tip of Sweden. His wife Louisa was born in August 1861, also in Sweden. They came to the U.S. in 1886, when they were 28 and 25, respectively. A year later on April 1, 1887 they got married (on Robert's birthday) in Clinton, MA.

They lived in Clinton (15 miles north of Worcester) after they were married. Their first child, Ester C. Stenquist was born in Clinton, December 13, 1887. Some records show 1888 as her year of birth. The family moved to Gardner (30 miles northwest of Worcester), and their second child, Ernest Robert Stenquist, was born on March 1889.

On April 9, 1891 Ester died due to severe enteritis. She was only three and a half years old. A few months later, on July 8, 1891, our grandfather Axel Stenquist was born. Robert and Louisa gave birth to another girl, Esther Florence Stenquist, in February 1893 and Mamie Stenquist, their last child, was born October 25, 1894.



Robert and Louisa's children (*from left to right*: Axel (4); Mamie (six months); Esther (2); Ernest (6) (March 1895)

In 1900 the Stenquist family lived "off Mechanic Street," very near their address in later records. Robert, at 42 years old, was employed as a "frame maker." In 1910 their address officially became 7 Crawford Street, Gardner. Robert's occupation then was "reed worker at chair shop."

In the photo below, Robert is seated on the left and his wife Louisa is seated on the right. The younger girl is Mamie, the girl behind her is Esther. We believe Axel is the boy on the right and Ernest is on the left. We can see a resemblance between Axel and our Uncle Bob Stenquist of Halcyon. Ernest became a career Naval officer, and Ester, who later married Andrew Simonsen, died during childbirth.



Robert Axel Stenquist and his wife Louisa Stenquist with their children.  
Our grandfather Axel is on the right behind his mother and sister.

In 1920, when Robert Axel Stenquist was 62, he worked as an “iron worker at baby carriage shop” and the family was still living at 7 Crawford St.

Louisa Stenquist passed away on April 13, 1920. Four years later, in June 1924, Robert married a woman named Klara Sofia Mattson. Sofia was a native of Finland, who arrived in the U.S. in 1902 at the age of 30. She was 52 when she married Robert.

In 1930, at age 71, Robert's occupation was "ironworker at Foundry." Living with him and Sophia was their grandson, Robert Simensen, age 6, their daughter Ester's child.

We learn from his obituary that Robert Axel Stenquist was a founding member of the Swedish Methodist Church in Gardner. He was a deeply religious man. He had an organ in his home that he played until he died, and he was a furniture maker. He worked for one of the furniture companies in Gardner. In 1936, at the age of 77 years, he became one of the first people in the United States to receive Social Security. Robert lived to be 101 years old.

*And our great grandfather, Robert Stenquist, was a furniture maker. And there were two furniture companies in Gardner. Eventually they combined into one furniture company.*

*So – that rocking chair over there – he made that rocking chair – is close to 100 years old. It was in my grandmother's house, and when I was a little girl, I asked her if I could have it."*

Interview with Tina Blomquist Boyd (February, 2020)



*Robert Stenquist and his third wife, Grace. Rocking chair that Robert made by hand; the chair is now in Tina's home.*

## Stenquist Home in Gardner

The photo below is the home of our great grandfather Robert Axel Stenquist, located at 7 Crawford St., Gardner, MA.

Tina, born in May 1950, remembers visiting there when she was a child. At that time there was an apple orchard behind the house.

Robert had a cider press to make his own cider from his apple orchard. His grandson Don Blomquist (Tina's dad) inherited it and made hard cider. Great-grandfather was totally against drinking alcohol. Tina remembers her parents, aunt, and uncle sneaking a drink in her grandmother's pantry during family dinners.

After our great grandfather died in 1959, a freeway was built through their property.



Robert Axel Stenquist's home in Gardner, MA (around 1910-1914)

## Stenquist Blomquist Connection

Mamie Stenquist, Axel Emmanuel Stenquist's sister, married Axel Blomquist in June, 1919, and they had two boys. One of the boys, Don Blomquist, would marry Nancy Bowman, and their first child was Christina (Tina) Blomquist Boyd, our cousin who has helped with this family history. The Lentz and Stenquist families of today are connected to the Blomquist family through the siblings Axel and Mamie Stenquist. Mamie was very close to her brother and his family, and "Aunt Mamie" became a very special person to our mother, growing up as a child in Worcester (explained more fully in Chapter Five).

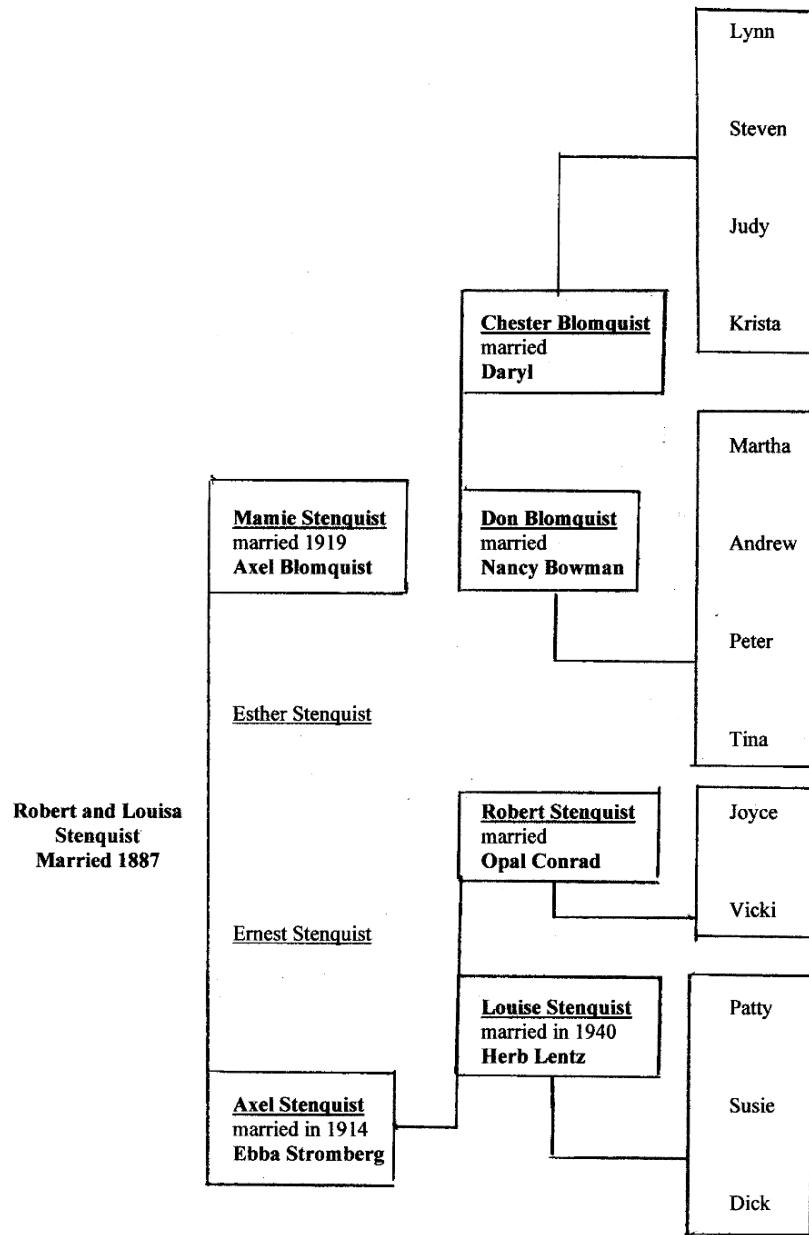
A partial family tree on the following page shows how our families are connected. Robert Axel Stenquist is our mutual great-grandfather.

The photo below is a close-up of Robert Axel and the Stenquist Family. In this photo Robert and his wife Louisa are in the front yard of their home. Mamie, Robert's daughter (Tina's grandmother) is sitting on the railing on the porch. The man on the porch appears to be Axel Stenquist, our grandfather.



Close-up of Robert Axel Stenquist's home in Gardner, MA

## Stenquist Family - Partial Family Tree



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