

## Notes on the Ekdahl Family

Pamela Hutchison Garrett, 2019

Andrew Ekdahl and his wife Charlotte "Lottie", along with several of their children, immigrated from Sweden to the United States in the year 1881. The scant evidence we have on the Ekdahl family indicates that they came from the counties of Jonkoping and Ostergotland near the eastern shores of Lake Vattern, in south-central Sweden. The Ekdahl's were from the town of Granna.



[Granna, on Lake Vattern, Sweden](#)

Several genealogies are available on the internet for the Ekdahl family, but Swedish naming patterns cause confusion. Kimberly Powell has prepared a brief, but helpful explanation, titled "[Understanding the Swedish Naming System](#)" (2018). Her article opens with -

*Until the turn of the 20th century, family surnames were not in common use in Sweden. Instead, most Swedes followed a patronymic naming system . . . the process of designating a surname based upon the given name of the father, thus consistently changing the family surname from one generation to the next.*

As explained in Powell's article, by the latter-half of the nineteenth century some Swedish families were beginning to use surnames, sometimes referred to as "nature names", which were made up of two natural features. By the time Andrew and Lottie arrived in the United States, they seem to have settled on the Ekdahl surname - "ek" meaning oak, and "dahl" meaning forest. Given names for the family appear with a number of spellings as they slowly transitioned from Swedish to English usage.

Andrew and Lottie Ekdahl raised up two sons and six daughters who established themselves in the United States - Oscar Emil Ekdahl, Andrew John Ekdahl, Hilda Josefina Ekdahl Burr, Helga Ekdahl Burr Lundgren, Jenny Charlotte Ekdahl Speidel, Selma Ekdahl Lowery, Esther Axelina Ekdahl Swanson, and Anna Otelia "Tillie" Ekdahl Nelson.

It has been difficult to pinpoint exactly where the Ekdahl family settled after their arrival in the US. Their older children were teenagers when the family immigrated. Within the first few years in America they married and began their own families. Records place these children in the counties of Montgomery and Phelps in Iowa, and Clay and Franklin in Nebraska. Both of these areas had significant Swedish born populations in the late 19th century. Today these "enclaves" rest along Interstate Highway 80, about two hundred miles apart; Omaha Nebraska is the largest city serving the area. There are several examples of Swedish families who began in the Iowa communities, and as they needed more farm land, "moved on down the road" to Nebraska. This is probably what the Ekdahl family did, as both church and family connections tie these Iowa and Nebraska areas together.



*Every summer, Stromsburg Nebraska holds its weekend-long Swedish Festival, a celebration of the town's Swedish heritage. Traditional Swedish foods are prepared, and the Stromsburg Public Library hosts events that deal with genealogy or Swedish heritage. Craft shows and live Viking demonstrations are staged. Photo - Center of Stromsburg town square, 2011, by Rockford1963, wikimedia commons.*

It seems likely that the Ekdahl family had ties to the Lutheran (Christian) Church. Lutheranism was firmly established in Sweden, and there were numerous congregations that sprang up in the Swedish communities of Iowa and Nebraska. By the 1850s, . . . "there were 'revivalist' and 'confessional' movements within Lutheran churches in Europe and in America . . . there developed a wide variety of expressions of Lutheranism in North America. Nineteenth century Lutherans still looked to their homelands to supply pastors and worship materials, but as second and third generation Americans spoke English more than their native language, a need arose to provide formal theological training, hymnals, catechisms and other materials." ([Lutheran History and Culture, at Genealoger](#)).

The communities where the Ekdahl families lived were primarily represented by two Lutheran "offshoots" - the Augustanians and the Mission Friends. The Swedish Methodist Church also had congregations in Nebraska and Iowa, and traveling pastors visited several of the towns that Ekdahl families called home. More might be learned about the Ekdahl family if they could be located in local church records.

It is of interest to note that the Ekdahl children were pretty evenly divided in marrying inside and outside their Swedish immigrant group; also two Ekdahl sisters, Hilda and Helga, married two Burr brothers, Alwyn and Albert. There is no indication that the Burr family was Swedish.

Andrew and Lottie Ekdahl have not been located in the 1900 census, but it seems likely that they were living in Nebraska at this time. The census places their married children as follows: Oscar and Minnie Ekdahl, three children, in Billings Montana (1900)

Alwyn and Helga (Ekdahl) Burr, seven children, in Franklin county Nebraska (1900)

Andrew J and Mary Ekdahl, three children, in Montgomery county Iowa (1900); later to Montana

next door -

Albert and Helga (Ekdahl) Burr, three children, in Montgomery county Iowa (1900); remained at Red Oak Iowa

Henry and Jenny (Ekdahl) Speidel, children, in Harlan county Nebraska (1910)

Emil and Selma (Ekdahl) Peterson, five children, in Clay county Nebraska (1910)

Swan F and Esther (Ekdahl) Swanson, three children, in Clay county Nebraska (1910)

Andrew and Otelia (Ekdahl) Nelson, children, in Fillmore county Nebraska (1920)

Andrew H Ekdahl and his wife Lottie do appear in the 1910 census of Clay county Nebraska. They were probably living in or near the town of Ong, a heavily Swedish community that is mostly deserted today. Lottie died in 1917, and Andrew in 1923. They are buried at Ong Cemetery. The line we are following continues through their daughter Hilda Ekdahl who married Alwyn Burr.



Alwyn and Hilda (Ekdahl) Burr were married in 1885, and the census records from 1900-1930 place them in Franklin county Nebraska, near the community of Upland, about seventy miles to the west of Ong. Like her parents before her, Hilda raised up two sons and six daughters. The family likely lived on a farm outside of Upland. Hilda Ekdahl Burr died in 1930 and Alwyn Burr in 1932. They are buried at the cemetery at Upland in Franklin county Nebraska.

Do you want to know more?

[Link to Andrew Herman Ekdahl in the database](#)

[Link to Hilda Ekdahl in the database](#)

Don't miss [Bob Greenwall's website](#) for learning more about the Swedish Immigrant Church. The pages on the [Mission Friends of Hamilton County Nebraska](#) are of particular interest.

[Umgas Magazine](#) - Umgås is your online destination to celebrate Swedish life and culture in the United States.

[The Swedish Festival at Stromburg Nebraska](#)

A truly wonderful book!!

My Antonia (1918) is the third book in Willa Cather's Prairie Trilogy, which began with *O Pioneers!* (1913), and was followed by *The Song of the Lark* (1915). *My Antonia* tells the story of several immigrant families who move to rural Nebraska . . . clearly documents the struggles of the hard-working immigrants that homesteaded the prairies, particularly the hardships suffered by women.

**Notes on the Ekdahl Family compiled by Pamela Hutchison Garrett for the Family Stories website; 2019.**