

Swedish Church Books: Your Research Just Got Easier (and Faster)

Kathy.meade@arkivdigital.com

INTRODUCTION

The Swedish church books are usually the first Swedish records used when tracing one's Swedish heritage. These records are a "gold mine" because they are so complete and contain much detailed information about each individual. In many cases, one can trace a person's life in the church books from birth to death or emigration.

For many years, to research one's Swedish ancestry, one had to spend hours browsing through church books and deciphering the Swedish text. Today, Swedish research is becoming much easier and faster because many church books are being indexed, allowing one to search by name. Now, one can often see an index record with a partial transcription and a direct link to the source.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF SWEDISH CHURCH BOOKS

The Swedish Church was a state church responsible for maintaining Sweden's vital records until 1991. The Church Law of 1686 required the parish ministers to record all births, marriages, deaths, and movements in and out of the parish. There are some parish records before 1600, but most begin in the late 1600s. The Swedish Church Books include fourteen record types, and the primary books used by genealogists are:

1. Birth and Christening (*födelse- och dopbok*)
2. Banns and Marriage (*lysnings- och vigselbok*)
3. Death and Burial (*död- och begravningsbok*)
4. Moving in and out (*In- och utflyttningslängd*)
5. Household and congregation (*husförhörslängd och församlingsbok*)

BIRTH AND CHRISTENING

The content of birth and christening records varies by parish and time. If you know your ancestor's name, birth date, and birth parish, you should be able to find the birth record. In the birth record, you will find the child's name, birth and baptismal dates, parents' names, names of baptismal witnesses, the family's residence, and the mother's age. In the books in the 1600s and early 1700s, sometimes only the baptismal date, not the birth date, is recorded, and the mother's name may not be recorded.

BANNS AND MARRIAGE

You will usually find the following types of information in the banns and marriage books: dates of the banns and marriage; names of the bride and groom; names of the places where the bride and groom lived; name of the minister and, sometimes, the names of the bridal couple's parents.

DEATH AND BURIAL

You will typically find the following information in the death and burial books: the name of the deceased; the dates of death and burial; the place in the parish where the deceased lived; the age at death; and the cause of death.

In some parishes in Sweden, the death notice reads more like an obituary, with a biographical sketch of the deceased.

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HOUSEHOLD AND CONGREGATION

The household examination records are unique to Sweden and Finland. Each pastor was required to take an annual accounting of all members in their parish and test them on their religious understanding. To do this accounting, the minister made lists of all the people living in the parish, household by household. These records were kept in large books, and each volume covers a series of years. You will see some covering five years and others covering ten years. This varies by parish and time. The existence of household records varies by parish. In some areas, they date back to the early 1800s, while in others, to the early 1700s.

In 1895, the household books were replaced by the congregation books. In these books, all the parish members were registered. Since religious examinations were no longer required, the information about religious examination results and receiving Holy Communion was no longer entered in the books.

You will generally find the following information in the household and congregation books.

- Name of place, such as farm, village, or address in a city
- Names of all members of the household
- Birth date and birthplace for each individual
- Occupation for the head of household
- Marriage date for the head of household
- Vaccination information (after 1800)
- Religious examination results (up to 1894)
- Death date if the person has died during the period the book covers (There will also be a death record in the death book.)
- Moving in and out information
- Sometimes, notes in the special remarks column about the person

The household and congregation books are organized by place. This is why it is important to note the name of the place where the family lives, as is noted in the birth, marriage, or death record. There is usually an index of place names in the front of the household and congregation book that gives the starting page number for a place. There are a few books that do have person name indexes, but most are organized by place names.

MOVING IN AND OUT

Each parish minister was required to record all persons entering and leaving the parish. In the moving-in records, you will usually see the name of the person moving in, the date, the place they came from, and the place in the parish they moved to. The page in the corresponding household or congregation record is often noted as a cross-reference. The moving-out records contain the person's name, place moved from, place moved to, and sometimes a reference to the page in the household examination or congregation book. If the person moved out of the country, usually only the country's name is noted. The entry is usually North America for emigrants moving to America (*Nord Amerika*).

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EXTRACTS OF CHURCH BOOKS (SCB RECORDS)

Beginning in 1860, the ministers were required to send extracts of all birth, marriage, and death records to the Central Bureau of Statistics (*Statistiska Centralbyrån*). These records are often referred to as SCB records. So, after 1860, there are two sets of birth, marriage, and death records: the original church book and the civil record (SCB). The SCB records don't contain religious information, such as baptismal records.

TRADITIONAL SEARCH STRATEGY

To search the Swedish Church books, you need to know the parish your ancestor came from, their Swedish name, and a significant date, such as a birth date.

Below are the steps for tracing your family lineage when you have your ancestor's birth date, name, and birth parish.

1. Search for the birth record in the parish.
2. Within the birth record, generally, you will find the child's name, birth date, parents' names, names of baptismal witnesses, and the place where the family resided in the parish. Note the place of residence. You will need this to find the family in the corresponding household examination book.
3. Go to the household examination book, look for a place name index, and locate the place in the birth book. Next to the place in the index will be its starting page. Go to the starting page number and search for the family. If there is no place name index, you must browse the book.
4. Once you find the family, you will find more information about the family, such as parents' birth and marriage information, siblings' names, and birth information.
5. Review the moving-in and moving-out columns to check if the person has moved into this place or moved out during this period. If there is no entry, you can assume that the person lived in the same place in the previous or subsequent household examination book.
6. Using the information in the household examination records, you can trace your family back several generations

WHERE ARE THE SWEDISH CHURCH BOOKS?

The original Swedish church books are in the Swedish regional archives. Online viewing is available at the following sites:

- **ArkivDigital** (<https://www.arkivdigital.net/>) is a subscription site with newly photographed color images that provides access to the Swedish Church Books and other Swedish historical records. ArkivDigital has church books from the earliest times up to the law of privacy. In Sweden, some records, such as birth, death, and household records, are not allowed to be published online if the subjects are younger than 70 years. Today, the cutoff year is 1955.

ArkivDigital is indexing its Swedish Church Books so that one can search by name. ArkivDigital has the most complete set of indexed records, with links to the sources. Currently, **all birth and marriage records for Sweden between 1750 and 1840** have been indexed. **All death records for Sweden between 1750 and 1799** have been indexed. In addition, many birth, marriage, and death records from parts of Sweden before and after these years have been

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indexed. To find a complete list of all the records that have been indexed, use the following links:

- Births - <https://www.arkivdigital.net/online/register/birth-index>
- Marriages - <https://www.arkivdigital.net/online/register/marriage-index>
- Deaths - <https://www.arkivdigital.net/online/register/death-index>

ArkivDigital has also indexed all the **household/congregation records for all of Sweden between 1800 and approximately 1952**. Records before 1800 are currently being indexed. This index enables one to break brick walls even when one does not have complete information, such as the exact birth date or parish.

To **index search in ArkivDigital**, one does the following:

1. Access app.arkivdigital.se
2. Select ***Index search***
3. Click on the down arrow in the box under *index source* and choose the desired index. Then, a search menu will open for the selected index.
4. Church book indexes are the following:

Population of Sweden (BiS)	Household/Congregation Records
Birth index, parts of Sweden	Birth records
Marriage index, parts of Sweden	Marriage records
Death index, parts of Sweden	Death records

- **National Swedish Archives – Riksarkivet** (<https://riksarkivet.se/en>). The National Swedish Archives, or Riksarkivet, is a free site that has scanned images of the Swedish Church Books and other Swedish historical documents. Riksarkivet has church books from the earliest times up to the law of privacy. In Sweden, some records, such as birth, death, and household records, are not allowed to be published online if the subjects are younger than 70 years.

The indexing at Riksarkivet is not as extensive as ArkivDigital's. Still, you will find indexed birth, marriage, and death records for the counties of Blekinge, Halland, Kristianstad, Malmöhus, Gotland, Jämtland, and Västernorrland. Not all have links to images. To find a complete list of parishes and years that have **birth records indexed**, go to the following links:

1. Blekinge, Halland, Kristianstad and Malmöhus counties
<https://sok.riksarkivet.se/fodelseregister/blekinge-hallands-och-skane-lan>
2. Jämtland - <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/fodelseregister/jamtlands-lan>
3. Västernorrland - <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/fodelseregister/vasternorrlands-lan>

To find a complete list of parishes and years that have **marriage records indexed**, go to the following links:

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1. Blekinge, Kristianstad and Malmöhus counties
<https://sok.riksarkivet.se/vigselregister/blekinge-och-skane-lan>
2. Gotland - <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/vigselregister/gotlands-lan>
3. Jämtland - <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/vigselregister/jamtlands-lan>
4. Västernorrland - <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/vigselregister/vasternorrlands-lan>

To find a complete list of parishes and years that have **death records indexed**, go to the following links:

1. Blekinge, Halland, Kristianstad and Malmöhus counties
<https://sok.riksarkivet.se/dodregister/blekinge-hallands-och-skane-lan>
 2. Gotland - <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/dodregister/gotlands-lan>
 3. Jämtland - <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/dodregister/jamtlands-lan>
 4. Västernorrland - <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/dodregister/vasternorrlands-lan>
- **Ancestry's World Edition** (<https://www.ancestry.com/>) is an online subscription site that does have Swedish church books. The collection is titled Sweden, Church Records, 1451-1943, and these are scanned images of the microfilms. A large number of the birth, marriage, and death records after 1860 are not scans of the church books but extracts from Statistics Sweden (SCB) records.

There are searchable indexes for the birth, marriage, and death records, primarily the SCB records, with links to images. The indexes are named:

1. Sweden, Indexed Birth Records, 1859-1947
 2. Sweden, Indexed Marriage Records, 1860-1947
 3. Sweden, Indexed Death Records, 1840-1947
- **MyHeritage** (<https://www.myheritage.com/>) is an online subscription site that contains household examination, birth, marriage, and death records that include searchable name indexes and links to images. The names of the collections are:
 - **Sweden Household Examination Records** – These are the same records that are on ArkivDigital, covering the years from 1800 to 1947, with searchable name indexes and a link to the image.
 - **Sweden Births 1850-1920** – These are scanned images of the microfilm with searchable name indexes and a link to the image.
 - **Sweden, Marriages and Banns 1850-1945** - These are scanned images of the microfilm with searchable name indexes and a link to the image.

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- **Sweden, Deaths 1850-1945** - These are scanned images of the microfilm with searchable name indexes and a link to the image.
- **FamilySearch** (<https://www.familysearch.org/>) is free and has digitized images of the Swedish church books from earliest times to about 1941. The image is the scanned copy of the microfilm. Many of these images are restricted and, for most people, are available to view only at the FamilySearch Library or Centers.

FamilySearch has a copy of ArkivDigital's index and images of the household/congregation records for the years 1874-1931. There is no restriction on viewing for this collection. Also, in some cases, when one searches by name for a record, there will be a link to the record on Riksarkivet.

ADDED NOTE – POPULATION OF SWEDEN (BiS)

The Population of Sweden (BiS) is ArkivDigital's largest index of household/congregation records, with most of its content spanning from around 1800 to approximately 1952. Currently, household examination records from before 1800 are being indexed and added to the collection. In total, there are more than 177 million searchable records in the Population of Sweden (BiS).

Currently, ArkivDigital has the most sophisticated search interface for these records; most of these same images with search capabilities are also on MyHeritage and FamilySearch.

Site	Collection Name	Years
ArkivDigital	Population of Sweden (BiS)	1800-1952 Complete, Years before 1800 Indexing in Progress
FamilySearch	Sweden, Household Examination Books, 1874-1931	1874-1931
MyHeritage	Sweden Household Examination Records	1800-1947

BOOKS

- Clemensson, Per & Kjell Andersson. **Your Swedish Roots**. Provo, Utah: Ancestry Publishing, 2004.
- Johansson, Carl-Erik. **Cradled in Sweden**. Sandy, Utah: Everton Publishers, 2002. (Out of print).
 - You can download a copy by visiting FamilySearch.org and clicking on books.
 - Enter "Cradled in Sweden" in the search box and search. The fourth one in the list is available for all persons to download.
- Johnson, Robert W., and Gomell, Elizabeth Williams. **Husförhörlängder, Swedish Household Examination Records**. Minneapolis, MN, 2020.
- Morris, Geoffrey Fröberg. **A Practical Guide to Swedish Church Records for Genealogy and Family History**. West Jordan, Utah: The Swedish Genealogy Guide, LLC, 2020.
- Skogsjö, Håkan. **Explore Your Swedish Roots**. Lyrestad, Sweden: ArkivDigital, 2020.