

VILHELMINA TO WILHELMINA

The exhibition "Vilhelmina to Wilhelmina" is an attempt to establish a contact between two areas in Sweden and Canada already linked through their history. It has been produced by Västerbottens museum in Umeå, Sweden, with economical support from the Swedish Institute in Stockholm.

"Vilhelmina to Wilhelmina" är namnet på en utställning som 1984 gjordes av Västerbottens museum, Umeå, för visning i Canada, i första hand i Provincial Museum of Alberta, Edmonton. Utställningens tillkomst och visning i Canada möjliggjordes av ett anslag från Svenska institutet, Stockholm.

A CERTAIN INGA JONSSON

The starting-point was 1888. Then Inga Jonsson, born in 1860, left her native village Granliden in Vilhelmina to join her brother Johan, who was then studying in the city of Härnösand. Soon afterwards they seem to have emigrated together, heading for Minnesota, USA. There Inga met Jacob Lunde, a Norwegian, whom she married. At the turn of the century they left Minnesota to settle in the Hay Lakes district in Alberta. From there Inga wrote enthusiastic letters to her many relatives and friends back in the villages along the Malgomaj lake in Vilhelmina. During the period of 1903–1905 more than thirty families emigrated from those villages, many of them probably attracted by the descriptions by their distant friend. In Hay Lakes they found an environment very similar to their old homesteads in northern Sweden. Here their new life started much as when their forefathers had taken land in Vilhelmina some decades earlier. A part of Hay Lakes district, Lundemo, was named after Inga and Jacob Lunde who were among the new pioneers. During the first years of their stay, they provided accommodation for many of the newcomers as they in their turn did to subsequent immigrants. Within a few years quite a colony of Vilhelmina people had settled in the district. They organized a school for their children and decided to establish a Lutheran congregation which was named Wilhelmina after their Swedish home parish. The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Wilhelmina Congregation came into existence in 1908. Fourteen of the eighteen founders originated from Vilhelmina. The others came from the neighbouring parishes of Dorotea and Lycksele. The foundation of a church building was laid in 1912, and in 1919 the church was completed.

OLD VILLAGES IN VILHELMINA

The colonization of Vilhelmina has been described in great detail by O P Pettersson (1859–1944) in his work "Gamla byar i Vilhelmina" (Old Villages in Vilhelmina) published in three volumes, 1941–1946. O P Pettersson was born in Lövnäs, one of the Malgomaj villages. His father intended to emigrate to America with his family, but failing to sell his farm he disappeared to Norway leaving his family behind. In his youth O P Pettersson went to a teachers' training college in Härnösand. Later on he worked as a teacher in Tärna in Lappland, where he developed a passion for the unknown history of the region, especially Vilhelmina, and its oral traditions. The last twenty years of his life he devoted entirely to writing down oral traditions and collecting dialectal words for a dictionary of the Vilhelmina dialect, which still remains unpublished. He thus created a memorial – unequalled in Sweden – of the heroic achievements of the settlers. The three volumes were out of print for a long time. But in 1982 they were finally reprinted with an introductory analysis of this remarkable contribution to Swedish history. Here the agricultural conquest of Vilhelmina is compared with the parallel process in America. One significant trait in the colonization of Vilhelmina is emphasized. The exploitation of the natural resources was not motivated by national interests but by the needs and conditions of a self-supporting household economy. Thus it was most vulnerable when the exploitation of the forests and the hydroelectric potential of lakes and rivers started. The immigrants to Canada carried this experience of a self-supporting household economy with them.





Before leaving. The Löfgren-family. Siksjönäs, in 1909.

VILHELMINA, THE NAME OF A QUEEN

Vilhelmina is a parish in the province of Västerbotten in northern Sweden, which was separated from the vast parish of Åsele in 1812. It was originally named Volgsjö after the lake on which the main village was located. The name had, however, been replaced by Vilhelmina in honour of the queen consort of Gustavus IV, who was then King of Sweden. In the same way the two neighbouring parishes, Fredrika and Dorotea, adopted two other names of the queen. The oldest village in Vilhelmina was Råsele, the first settlement of which dates back to 1740.

Like so many of the other settlements of the 18th century it was situated on the bank of the big river Ängermanälven. In 1805 about twenty villages had been founded with a total population of 790 people. In the 19th century more and more settlers arrived. In 1865 Vilhelmina had 3470 inhabitants. In 1900 the population amounted to 6570. Three factors combine to create an increasing demand for arable land: a marked decrease in infant mortality, the predominance of families with many children as well as the low farming productivity. This demand was hard to satisfy which was of course one of the main reasons for the European emigration to America. Northern Sweden with its uninhabited areas of

"Lapland", where the Lapps – or sameh as they prefer to be called nowadays – carried on their nomad life as reindeer breeders, provided such land. Since the 18th century the colonization of the North had been favoured by the government who did not think there ought to be any conflict between settlers and nomads, the ones developing agriculture, the others exploiting the hunting and fishing potential of the forests and streams as well as the grazing lands of the plains and moors above the tree limit for their reindeer. Of course conflicts arose as the settlers also had to depend on hunting and fishing before they could develop their cattle breeding. Cultivation in a proper sense seldom was successful. The settlers needed vast areas for the grazing of their cows and for hay making.

The colonization of Lapland was encouraged by land grants and exemption from national taxes and military service. In return the settlers had to start the cultivation of the land within twenty years. In spite of hard work the economy of the settlers was precarious because of the hard climate and the primitive technology. Thus poverty and starvation were always imminent. Two of the most severe famine years occurred in 1867–1868. Then the first emigrants left Vilhelmina for North America.

TO CATCH A VANISHING HISTORY

In the church registers of Vilhelmina no distinction is made between the USA and Canada, both are indicated as North America in the emigrant lists. Therefore it is impossible to give an exact number of people emigrating from Vilhelmina to Canada. However, the first peak of emigration in the Vilhelmina registers, which appears in the years of 1888–1889, probably represents an emigration to the USA, mainly Minnesota. During those two years 237 people, including 46 families, left. The number should be compared with the total of 354 in the period of 1867–1894 and the total population of about 4 000 inhabitants.

The next peak is found in the period of 1903–1912. In 1902 sixteen people are registered as emigrants, whereas in 1903 the number suddenly amounts to 83. Similar numbers are found for each year up to the First World War. Then the emigration came to a standstill and has ever since been insignificant.

The community of Vilhelmina has to-day about 9.000 inhabitants mainly occupied in forestry, mining and small scale industry. Between 30 and 40 sameh-families still continue the traditional reindeer breeding.

To a high degree the emigrants of the second wave left for Canada to settle or to find work in the "North West Territories". The influence of Inga Lunde has already been mentioned. On the whole the importance of the "America letters" to the emigration cannot be overestimated. It was quite common for people already established over there to send money or a ticket to help friends and relatives with the crossing. On their arrival they also supported them until they were established as settlers or workers.

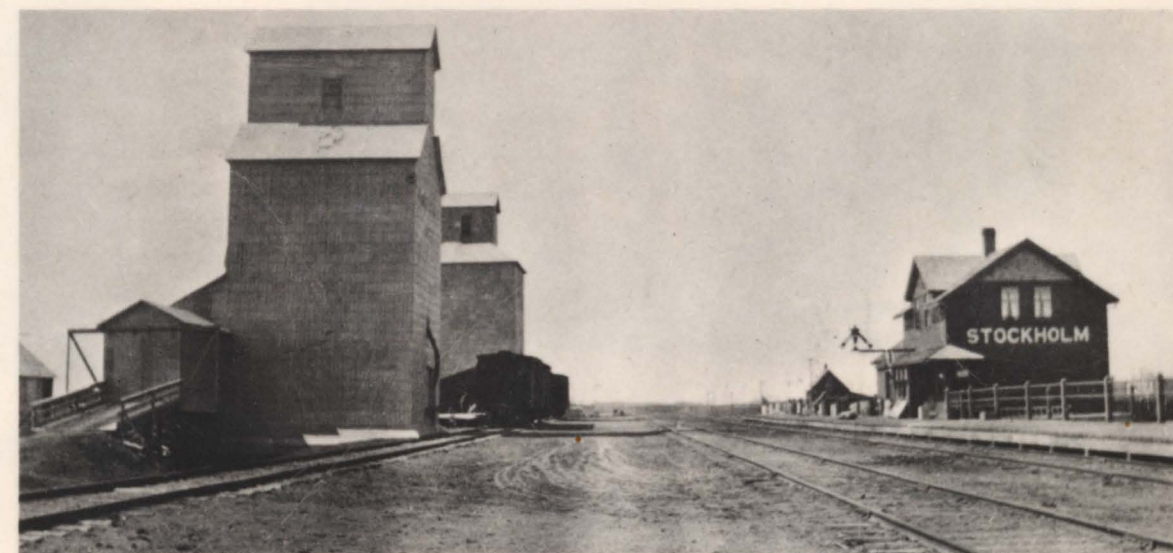
Norwegian emigration agents obviously played

an active part in Vilhelmina – as the poster reproduced on the reverse shows. People living so close to the Norwegian border as the Vilhelmina people had a convenient passage from Trondhjem to Hull and then reached Canada by an Atlantic liner from Liverpool. Remaining posters and brochures testify to the Norwegian activities. A traditional work migration from Vilhelmina to Norway already existed in those days. The Atlantic remained open in the winter and thus offered good opportunities for fishing. Many young men from Vilhelmina found work on the Norwegian coast as fishing hands, when there was no work on their farms.

In the period of 1867–1915 the total number of emigrants from Vilhelmina amounted to 850, including 140 families. Where did they go and what became of them?

Only a few returned. Others kept in touch with their relatives and friends at home, sending postcards, letters and gifts. Some of them even returned to visit their old homes or – when it comes to the second and third generation – the villages and homes of their parents and forefathers. One such visit, paid by Mrs Anna Greta Lofgren in 1954, inspired a gift to the local museum of Vilhelmina. It included keepsakes and notes and an album with photos from the emigration and early settlements in Hay Lakes.

It requires patience and time-consuming search in church registers as well as interviews with the descendants of the emigrants in Vilhelmina to get an idea of the vanishing traces of emigration history. The stories of individual families told in "Each step left its mark", published in 1982 by Hay Lakes History Book Committee, give interesting clues to the destinies of many of the emigrants from Vilhelmina.



The railway-station in Stockholm, Sask. About 1910.



INMAN

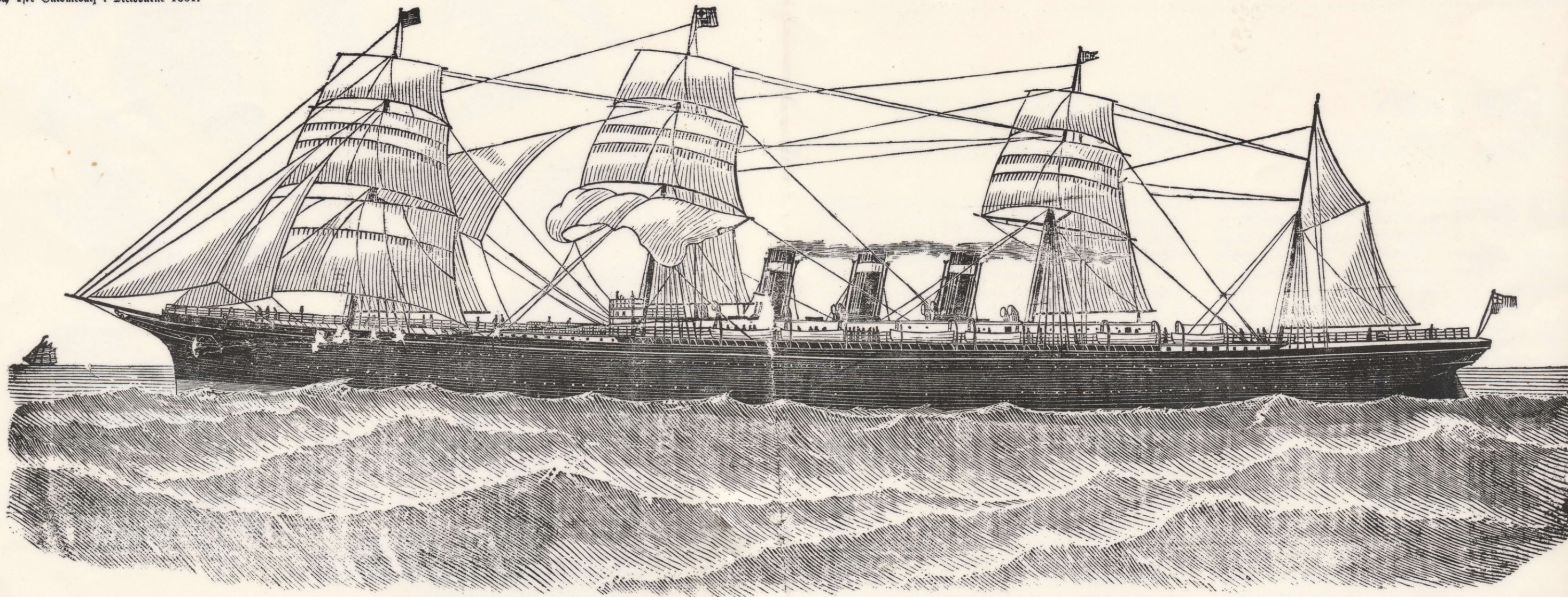


LINJENS



från Verldsutställingen Paris 1878,
1ste Guldbmedalj i Sidney 1880
och 1ste Guldbmedalj i Melbourne 1881.

med 1ste Guldbmedalj i Paris 1878
1ste Guldbmedalj i Sidney 1880
och 1ste Guldbmedalj i Melbourne 1881.



Kungliga Postångare, Verldens största och säkraste Passagerångare,
Bygningssummen ca. sex Millioner (6,000,000) Kroner.

Snabbaste och säkraste Befordring med Inman Linjens engl.

angelska och amerikanska Postångare

INMAN-LINJEN

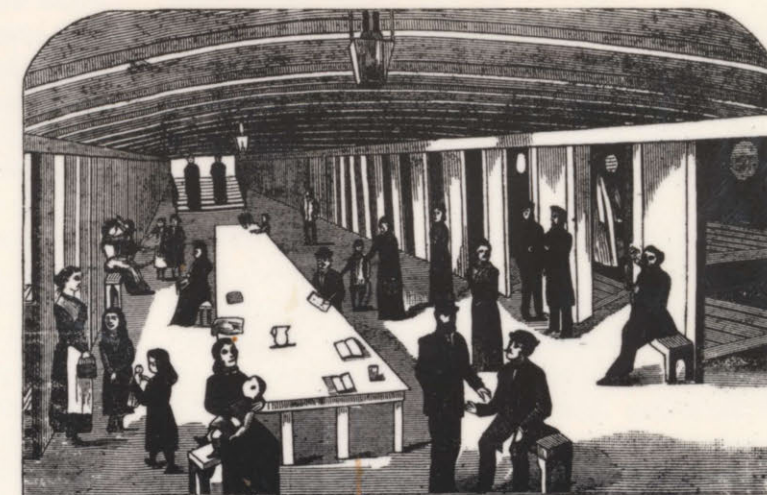
i **Forbindelse med ERIE-BANAN**
erbjuder en god, säker och bekväm befordran till Bestemmelsesorten i Amerika.

Hvarje passagerare har rättighet att så välja banen han ämnar resa med, dock må Erie-Banan föredragas framför någon annan,
då den förenar snabbhet med säkerhet.

Snabbaste och billigaste Väg till Amerika

från norra Sverige och Finland er ovilkårligt öfver Throndhjem, Norge.

Nedenstående Ritning visar Emigrantafdelingen på bolagets ångare jämte Castle Garden i New York.



Carl Johnson,
27, Bjordgatan, 27,
Throndhjem, Norge,

Närmare Uppllysningar fåes hos Bolagets Agenter:
Peter Siira,
Christiansund.

Jens W. Möller,
Nalesund.

eller till Landagenterne i enhver Stad och Socken.