

Biographical Sketches

*Mårten Jeppsson (1869–1950) and Anna Erika Olsson (1880–1926)*¹

Mårten (Martin) Jeppsson was born on 12 December 1869 in Bolshög, Skåne, Sweden, and Anna (Annie) Erika Olsson was born on 3 October 1880 in Allerum, Skåne. Martin and Annie immigrated separately from Skåne to Chicago—Martin around 1893, Annie in 1896. As far as is known, neither was accompanied by siblings or close relatives. Each traveled alone from rural Sweden to a rapidly expanding industrial city, one of the largest Swedish population centers in the world.

The transition would have been overwhelming. Chicago's crowded streets, towering buildings, constant noise, and relentless pace stood in sharp contrast to the open fields and seasonal rhythms of rural Skåne. During their initial years, they encountered challenges stemming from language barriers, unfamiliar cultural practices, and economic instability. They likely lived in boardinghouses, relied on Swedish-speaking communities, and accepted whatever work was available—Martin on the railroad, Annie in domestic service.

Marriage and Early Family

Martin and Annie probably met at Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church, a cornerstone of Chicago's Swedish immigrant community. They married on 19 June 1901. By 1910, they were living on South Cornell Avenue with their young sons, Arthur and Carl, our ancestor. Martin worked as a railroad foreman, a solid and steady position, and reported having been naturalized in 1896.

Their family life brought both joy and sorrow. A daughter, Martha, born in 1909, died shortly after birth. In 1912, the birth of Mildred brought renewed hope. Like many immigrant families, their progress was gradual and hard-won.

Family Tragedy

On 29 June 1918, tragedy struck when fifteen-year-old Arthur was killed by an Illinois Central train while working as a messenger. Such accidents were common in industrial Chicago, where young workers often navigated dangerous environments as part of daily life. The loss would have devastated the family, underscoring the risks that accompanied working-class survival in Chicago.

The 1920s and Later Years

By 1920, the Jepsons owned a home on East 69th Street—a significant milestone for working-class immigrants. To supplement their income, they took in boarders, creating a busy household. In 1922, Martin received a modest inheritance from his mother's estate in Sweden, providing temporary relief. Four years later, Annie died, leaving Martin a widower responsible for their remaining children.

¹ Much of what we know today about the Jepson family comes from the work of Mildred Morse (1913–2001), sister of Carl Jepson. Beginning in the 1970s, she corresponded extensively with archivists, traveled to Sweden, and gathered documents, records, and photographs that now form the foundation of our understanding of the family's Swedish roots.

Martin continued working into his sixties, retiring only by 1940. His later years were spent surrounded by family—children, grandchildren, and lodgers—reflecting both economic necessity and familial continuity. He died on 9 October 1950 and was buried at Oak Woods Cemetery in Chicago.