

Migration from Sweden to Illinois

Name	Date	From	To
Mårten Jeppsson (1869–1950)	1893	Bolshög, Skåne, Sweden	Chicago, Cook, Illinois
Anna Erika Olsson (1880–1926)	1896	Allerum, Skåne, Sweden	Chicago, Cook, Illinois

Mårten Jeppsson (1869–1950)

Mårten Jeppsson was born on 12 December 1869 in Bolshög, Skåne, Sweden, the youngest child of Jeppa Hansson and Anna Mårtensdotter. He had two older siblings—Johannes, born in 1861, and Johanna, born in 1863. An earlier son named Mårten, born in 1865, lived only eleven days; as was customary, the name was reused for our ancestor, who would later carry it across the Atlantic.

Bolshög, Skåne, Sweden: Historical and Cultural Background

Mårten's ancestors had lived for several generations in Bolshög, a small village in the fertile Österlen region of southern Skåne. In this part of Sweden, agriculture was not merely an occupation—it was the organizing force of daily life, shaping family routines, community relationships, and even the rhythm of the year itself. Growing up in Bolshög meant living in close relationship with the land, where each season brought its own demands, uncertainties, and long hours of labor.

Church Influence

The church stood at the center of life in Bolshög, serving as far more than a place of worship. It provided religious instruction, basic education, and official recordkeeping, while the parish priest exercised considerable authority within the community. Through the annual *husförhör*, each household was examined on religious knowledge and reading ability, reinforcing both spiritual discipline and social order. The church also recorded all major life events—births, marriages, deaths—creating a detailed documentary record that survives to this day.

Education in rural Sweden was limited, and most children completed only the elementary instruction offered through the parish. Mårten himself finished schooling through the eighth grade, which was typical for children expected to contribute to agricultural labor rather than pursue further education.

Early Life and Family Disruption

Mårten grew up in the village of Gnalöf, within the Bolshög parish. His father, Jeppa Hansson, was an *åbo*—a tenant farmer who managed either a full or half farm under a long-term hereditary lease. This arrangement allowed families to work the same land across generations, paying rent to a landowner in exchange for relative stability. The position placed the family solidly within the middle ranks of rural society: respected, secure, but never wealthy.

That stability ended abruptly in 1877, when Jeppa died while Mårten was still a child. At just seven years old, Mårten lost not only his father but the foundation of family security. Because his older

brother, Johannes, was not yet of age, their mother Anna inherited responsibility for the farm. Managing the land, paying rent, and caring for the children proved overwhelming. She hired a farm laborer—whom she later married—and family accounts describe him as cruel, forcing the children to work relentlessly. These conditions reflected both the harsh realities of small-farm life and the limited labor resources available to tenant families.

Limited Opportunities in Rural Skåne

Rural Skåne offered few prospects for young men like Mårten, who had no realistic expectation of inheriting land. Employment was often seasonal, wages were inconsistent, and young farm workers frequently moved from village to village in search of paid positions. Mårten's early movements reflect this pattern:

- In 1886, at age seventeen, Mårten left Bolshög for Västanbäck to work.
- In 1888, he moved to Östra Tommarp, likely for another temporary agricultural position.
- In 1892, he returned to Bolshög, possibly after a contract ended.

Life during these years was difficult. Challenges such as strained familial relationships, unstable employment, and declining future opportunities likely posed significant concerns for him. At the same time, large estates increasingly shifted toward wage labor, reducing reliance on tenant farmers and eroding the long-term security of families like the Jeppssons.

Military Conscription

In addition to economic uncertainty, Mårten faced the prospect of military conscription. Upon turning twenty-one in 1890, he would have been required to register for Sweden's draft lottery, a system in place from 1812 to 1901. Annual drawings determined who would serve, often for several years, and the uncertainty alone disrupted planning for work, marriage, and family life. Studies of Swedish emigration consistently identify the draft lottery as a major motivating factor, particularly for young rural men without land or stable prospects.

Migration to the United States

Although the precise motivations behind Mårten's decision to emigrate are unknown, the pressures were considerable. Family tradition holds that he initially attempted to reach America as a stowaway. Archival records clarify that he first traveled to New York on a "free ticket" but was deported back to Sweden. Undeterred, he soon purchased passage aboard the *Berlin* for 105 Swedish crowns and arrived in New York City on 11 April 1893.

After his arrival, Mårten's name gradually shifted to its Americanized form, Martin Jepson.

Anna Erika Olsson (1880–1926)

Anna Erika Olsson—later known in the United States as Annie Olson—was born on 3 October 1880 in Allerum, Skåne, the daughter of Anders Olsson and Botilla Andersdotter. Her family had deep roots in Allerum, with ancestors living in the parish for at least five generations.

Historical and Cultural Background

Allerum was a small agricultural village near the coastal town of Helsingborg, where families raised crops such as rye, barley, oats, and potatoes, while also caring for livestock. Work followed the seasons, and family cooperation was essential. The church stood at the center of community life, shaping both daily routines and major life events. It served as a gathering place, a record keeper, and a moral authority, overseeing the annual *husförhör* and maintaining the records that now allow us to reconstruct the family's past.

Anna's Migration to America

Anna's father was most likely an *åbo*, leasing land from a large estate and paying rent through a combination of money, crops, and required labor days on the manor. Supporting a large family under these conditions demanded constant work and careful management, with little margin for error. Anna was the eighth of nine children where everyone contributed to daily farm work.

Anna likely worked as a maid at the parish church and house, one of the few employment options available to young rural women. Wages in Sweden were low, advancement limited, and independence rare. In contrast, American cities such as Chicago offered far higher pay for domestic and factory work, and for young women, the possibility of autonomy and marriage. In 1896, at just sixteen years old, Anna immigrated to the United States. While the details of her journey are unknown, her experience mirrored that of many young women from southern Sweden who emigrated alone in search of opportunity.

Family Origins and Patronymics

Understanding and tracing the Jepson family through historical records requires familiarity with Swedish naming practices, which differs sharply from the fixed surnames common in English-speaking countries. Until the 1963 Names Adoption Act, Sweden followed a patronymic system in which a child's surname was derived from the father's given name, combined with the suffix *-sson* ("son of") or *-dotter* ("daughter of"), with the added "s" indicating possession.

Because surnames changed with each generation, individuals cannot be traced through a single family name over time. For example, Mårten's father, Jeppa Hansson—whose own father was named Hans—passed on the surname Jeppsson, while Mårten's mother, Anna Mårtensdotter, carried a surname identifying her as the daughter of Mårten. Anna did not take her husband's surname, nor was that expected. Interestingly, all of the daughters in Anna Erika Olsson's family carried the surname Olsson rather than Olsonsdotter, reflecting a gradual shift toward fixed surnames that had already begun in some regions. While this naming system clearly reflected parentage, it complicates modern genealogical research and requires careful attention to context.

