

# The Wennström Family – From Fembecke in Wendel

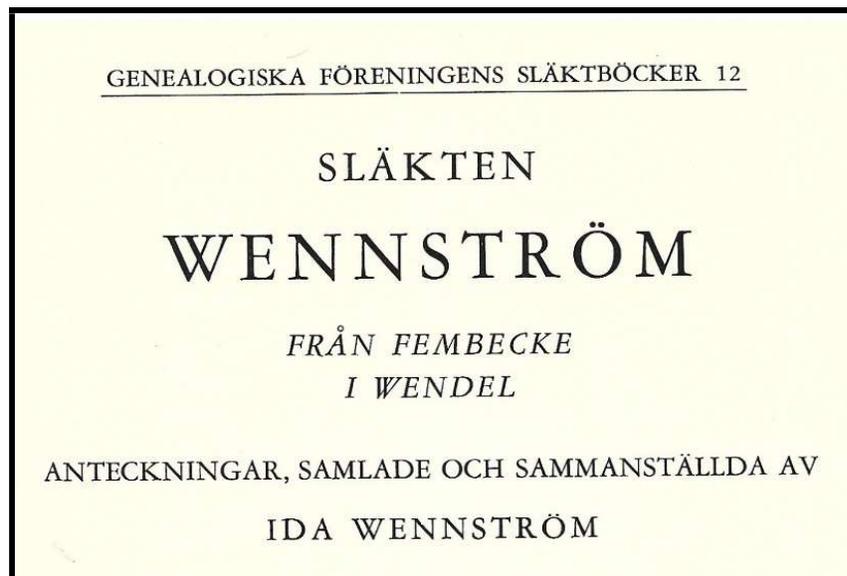
By Burks Oakley II  
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## *Introduction*

My mother was Grace Florence Brorström (1916-2000). All four of her grandparents were Swedes who immigrated to America in the 1880's. One of these immigrants was Bernhardine Wennström (1855-1932). The Wennström family can trace its roots to a farm named Fembecke, which was in Wendel parish, Sweden. And, well, that is what this narrative is all about.

## *The Wennström Family Book*

In 1965, my distant cousin Ida Wennström<sup>1</sup> wrote a book about the Wennström family. This book was entitled “Släkten Wennström – Från Fembecke i Wendel”. This translates to English as: “The Family Wennström – From Fembecke in Wendel”.



This book has been invaluable as I have researched my Wennström ancestors.

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<sup>1</sup> Ida was a third-cousin of my mother.

## ***Where is Fembecke? Where is Wendel?***

I will begin with a map of east-central Sweden.



Major cities to the north of Stockholm are Uppsala and Gävle. Gävle is considered to be the southernmost city in Norrland. Norrland (Northland) is the northernmost, largest and least populated of the three traditional lands of Sweden (the others being Svealand and Götaland).

Zooming in on the map, Vendel is located north of Uppsala and south of Gävle, just off the E4 motorway:



But this is Vendel, and the family was from Wendel. So let me digress and mention the letter W in Swedish, which is actually used infrequently. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 'W' was interchangeable with 'V'. Official orthographic (Don't know this word? Google it!) standards since 1801 use only 'V' for common words. Many family names kept their 'W' despite the changes that were made to common words.<sup>2</sup> So this is why it was Wendel parish when the family first lived there in the 1700's, but why it now is Vendel parish.

Now let me return to finding the location of Fembecke.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swedish\\_alphabet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swedish_alphabet)

Zooming in and switching to a Sweden government map,<sup>3</sup> shows the Fembecke farm being west of the Vendel parish church.



So there we have it. This location is just to the east of exit 191 on the E4 motorway.



And at some point, the spelling of Fembecke became Fembäcke.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lantmateriet.se/> - The Land Survey, part of the Ministry of Finance in Sweden

A satellite view of the area shows that it is rural farmland, with a few woodland areas.



### ***First Use of the Wennström Name***

My cousin Hans-Fredrik Wennström, who lives in Gävle, briefly mentioned the origin of the name Wennström in an e-mail that he sent me. He wrote “Also of interest may be that Gävle is not far from the rural ‘gård’ (farm) in the parish of Vendel, from which the name Wennström is taken.” In a subsequent e-mail, he added that the parish name originally was Wendel, and that the modern spelling is Vendel.

Looking the Wennström family book, the first person listed is Maths Jansson (1713-1783). He is listed “i Fembecke, Vendels sn” – or “in Fembecke, Vendel parish”.

Maths Jansson i Fembecke, Vendels sn 1713—1783 tab. 1							
1	Johan Wennström 1744—1784	Pähr (Peter) Wennström 1747—1795 tab. 2	Maths (Mathias) Wennerström 1753— tab. 66, se s. 15	Eric 1765—			
2		Peter 1778—1862 tab. 3		Carl 1793—			
3	Carl 1802—1887 tab. 4	Magnus 1809—1898 tab. 9, se s. 12	Nils 1815—1914 tab. 20, se s. 12	Sven 1817—1912 tab. 31, se s. 13	Fredrik 1825—1912 tab. 40, se s. 13	Andreas 1833—1924 tab. 43, se s. 14	Hans Peter 1835—1923 tab. 48, se s. 14
4	Magnus 1828—1899	Sven 1830—	Andreas 1832—	Johan 1843— tab. 5	Isak 1845— tab. 7		
5				Henry tab. 6	Oscar	Harold tab. 8	

His three sons Johan, Pähr (Peter), and Maths (Mathias) all took the inheritable family name of Wennström. This apparently was done by taking the first three letters of the location (Wendel), combined with “ström”, meaning stream or current. If this is the case, then Wennström is another one of those “ornamental” names in Sweden, such as Bergman (mountain man) or Lindgren (linden branch). Ornamental family names frequently were based on a location. For example, Frans August Åkesson (1860-1928) changed his family name from Åkesson to the ornamental name Guttorp, and he selected Guttorp since his family was living in Gudmundtorp at the time.<sup>4</sup>

There are a number of ornamental family names in Sweden that end in -ström, including Lindström, Bergström, Engström, Wikström, and Nyström. According to ratsit.se, there are 21,502 adults in Sweden having the last name of Lindström, and there are 18,199 adults in Sweden having the last name of Bergström. By comparison, there are only 1,658 adults in Sweden having the last name of Wennström (or Vennström).

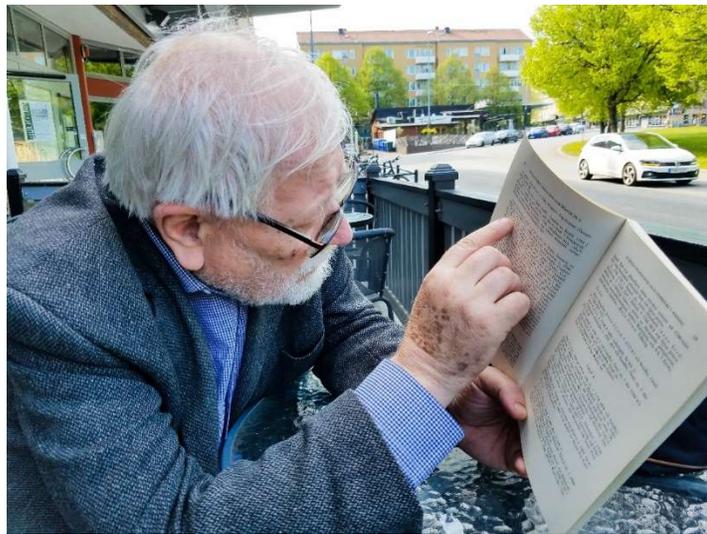
It remains unknown to me WHY the sons of Maths Jansson decided to adopt an inheritable family name.

<sup>4</sup> Frans August Åkesson’s wife was Pella Hanna Petronella Gustafva Brorström (1853-1922), and she was my great-grandfather’s sister.

## ***Visiting Fembecke in Wendel***

On 21 May 2019, I took the high-speed train from Stockholm to Gävle, where I met my cousin Hans-Fredrik Wennström. I believe that he is the first Swedish relative I have met whose last name was Wennström.

Hans-Fredrik and I stopped at a café in Gävle for fika, where he showed me some of the details about the Wennström family from his copy of Ida's book (Ida was Hans-Fredrik's aunt).



We then met his daughter Anna Karin, who drove us south from Gävle to the Fembecke property. Here are some photos I took during the visit to Fembecke.

Anna Karin and Hans-Fredrik near the Fembecke property:



Here is the stream that runs through the property:



This wooden building apparently dates to the 1500's. It would have been used when the Wennströms lived on the Fembecke farm in the 1700's. Perhaps it was built by one of their ancestors.



Here is a selfie that I took next to the old building:



We met the woman who just built a new house on the property, and Hans-Fredrik showed her some relevant sections from the Wennström family book:



Getting to touch the building from the 1500's that my ancestors would have used  
– priceless!



### ***Ottar's Mound & the Vendel Period***

South of Fembecke in Vendel Parish is a large mound, which local tradition calls Ottarshögen – from Ottar and hög, meaning mound. Ottar (also written as Ohthere) is associated with the person of that same name in the epic Beowulf. An excavation in 1917 revealed the remains of a powerful man who was buried under this mound at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, at the time of Ottar.

Map showing location of Ottar's Mound (Ottarshögen):



Here is a photo of Hans-Fredrik next to Ottar's Mound:



## *The Vendel Parish Church*

We also visited the Vendel Parish Church. There has been a church on this site since 1310.



In 1881 to 1883, several excavations revealed 14 graves in and just beyond the south-east corner of the churchyard. These graves date between the later 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Several of the burials were contained in boats up to 9 m long, and they were richly furnished with arrangements of weapons (including fine swords), helmets, cauldrons and chains, beads, shields, tools, etc.

The helmets from Graves 1, 12 and 14 bear close comparison to the helmet from the early 7<sup>th</sup> century ship-burial, at Sutton Hoo, England, with die-stamped plaques depicting scenes of warriors. The shield from Grave 12 at Vendel is also very comparable to the Sutton Hoo shield, and has a stamped metal strip mount which is actually die-linked to an equivalent piece at Sutton Hoo.

Vendel has given its name to a period (the Vendel Age) in the Scandinavian Iron Age, and to the corresponding style in Art (the Vendel Style). And it also has given its name to my Wennström ancestors. Who would have known?

