

When the America Fever Came to Klefmarken

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A piece of family history from Dals border parishes where Karolinen (Karolin a member of the Swedish Army during the reign of King Karl XII) Halfward Bryngelson received a homestead title from Karl XII. The document is now in the possession of Dr. Swenson in Portland, Oregon.

(Group picture)

Doktorinan (an obsolete title for the wife of a doctor) Ida Gawell-Blumentahl "Delsbostintan" (her pseudonym as a singer), Emanuel Swenson and Dr. Karl J. Swenson. In front of E. Swenson is Reed Swenson holding Karl XII's deed.

Many are the young and even older men and women from western Dals border parishes who during the latest seven to eight decades travelled across the Atlantic Ocean in order to, in the vast expanses and, considered the land of unlimited opportunities seek happiness and wealth. Some of these have in the distant land found affluence, and remained over there. Others have, after a varying number of years of hard work returned to their homeland with savings sufficient to provide for a worry-free life here at home. However, not all of them managed to gain what they had dreamed of when they left. For many it became broken visions instead of the dreamed for fortunes. Of these in most cases, nothing has been heard. They have not seen fit to inform relatives and friends about the bitter disappointments. The improved conditions which were hoped for have not materialized and eventually grottekvarn (industrialism without regard for how men are used) over there gulped down its victims.

The emigration trends have not been the same in all parts of the border area. While the trend in some areas has been more prominent and except for the latest two decades, has been rather stable, the emigration in other areas has been of a more occasional nature. So was the case with the homestead Klefmarken in Dals Ed Parish. There the emigration was concentrated in the latter half of the decade of 1860 and the first two years of the 70's. During the years 1866-187 no fewer than nine families totaling 48 members plus four servants left their homes and headed for the Promised Land.

The first one to leave was a man named Henrik Engelbrektsson. He was born in 1839 and had since his 16 th year spent most of his time working in Norway. On the 20th of May 1865 he obtained Flyttning-betyg (a document issued by the State Church to a person who plans to move to another parish) to Holmestrand, a community on the west side of Kristianfjorden and the following year he left for America. It did not go so fast and it was not so easy to cross the Atlantic at that time as in our days with the races for the Atlantic Blue Ribbon. The sea journey from Kristiania to America was hard and filled with difficulties. It lasted several months.

Henrik was fortunate from the beginning and in 1869 he sent for his parents, Engelbrekt Janson and his wife Kajsa, and a sister. In the same ship travelled 18 of their neighbors from Klefmarken. The previous year Jan Andreason from Neksane and his wife had left

Carl Svenson with wife and one child had left in 1867. Seven families had left during these years for America.

Success followed Henrik Engelbrektsson or Henry Bricson as he later called himself. He built and sold houses which gave him a good income. The same year he sent for his parents, he married Elisabet Andreasson from Strand in Dals Ed Parish. In 1919 they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. In the beginning of the 1920's the marriage ended with the death of the husband. His wife survived him for several years.

On Klefmarken lived Sven Andreasson and Johan Jonson. Klefmarken's main farm which consisted of (illegible words) half mantal (a term used for taxation purposes and referring to a farm area large enough to support one family). (Part of the text appears to be missing) Klefmarken, which the farmer Halfward Bryngelsson had received as a gift from Karl XII in 1716 for his services to the king, had for three generations been a brukningsdel. (meaning unknown) After the death of Halfward, his son Engelbrecht Halfwardsson bought his brother's and sister's part of the inheritance and combined these parts with his own to form a brukningsdel. Engelbrecht had no surviving son but he had several daughters. One of them married Sven Asmundsson from Gesater who bought out his wife's co-heirs. After the death of Sven Asmundsson, his son Andreas came in possession of the farm. At the age of 70 Andreas turned the farm over to his son Sven and his son-in-law Johan Jonsson, a third generation descendant of the Karolin Tore Mattesson from Jakobsrud who was married to Halfward Bryngelsson's daughter Kari. Andreas built a gubbe stova (a dialectical word for a little house where a retired farmer lived on his former property) for himself and his wife. Sven and Johan each lived with their families in their own parts of the main building, a typical Dalsland house with a large kitchen and parlor in each half and two bedrooms.

Disagreements eventually ensued. In the middle 1850's Sven built a house on his part of the farm while Johan remained in the old house. Many drastic examples of their hostility have been told. For instance, they would collect vermin and dump the collection in the neighboring apartment.

In 1870 Sven Andreasson sold his farm, 934 Tunnland (one tunnland equals 4,936 square meters) total area, for 15,000 daler (about 2500 Swedish Kronor) to Arvid Arvidsson, even he a fourth generation descendant of Halfward Bryngelsson, and on May 17 he obtained attest for moving to North America for himself, his wife, two sons, and two daughters. His son Carl had, as already mentioned, emigrated in 1867 with his family; and a son and three daughters, two of whom were married, were among the 21 Klevemark inhabitants who had left in the beginning of June 1869. Of his ten children Sven thus had nine of them with him in America. The eldest daughter, Maja Lena, was married and remained in Sweden where she died Oct. 19, 1930, 94 years, one month and two days old.

The following year, 1871, Johan Jonsson was ready to leave Sweden. He sold his farm, 1005 tunnland, for 18000 daler (about 3000 Swedish Kroner) to Jacob Otto Arvidsson, an older brother of the previously mentioned Arvid Arvidsson. On June 1st he obtained flyttningssattest to America for himself, his wife, and seven of his eight children.

His daughter, Juliana, was married two years before to Jons Jacob Jacobsson from Hedemarken. She remained in Sweden until her death in 1912.

"One cannot make a living west of Ed's church," said Johan Jonsson to his successor in Klefmarken and predicted that in a few years he would be ready to come to America. The possibilities to make a living were meager for families with many children up there in the Tell region and the results of the famine of 1868 were still felt. For this reason the glowing descriptions of the conditions in the new country accelerated the desire to leave the home area. The emigration agents' presumptuous advertising was, of course, also not without effect. A sister's son of Johan Jonsson (nephew) has said that Johan, on one occasion before his departure, came to his sister's home, a tenant farm under Klefmarken. He had with him some papers from the agent and read from these about conditions and possibilities in America. When he had finished, his sister said: "And you believe this?" Johan became offended and asked, "Do you believe they print lies?" He put the papers in his pocket and left.

A sister-in-law of Johan's daughter, Juliana, was in Klefmarken helping with sewing before the departure of the family. She has mentioned that Johan's unconcern about leaving the home area lasted until the end. The departure from Klefmarken took place on June 3rd. Johan got up early in the morning but took no part in the preparations for the departure. He walked alone around the yard, in the cow barn and around the cultivated fields and it was obvious that it was not so easy for him as he had imagined to leave the old farm.

His wife, Johanna, was unflinching and had certainly been the driving force behind the decision to move to America. It was she who had to arrange for and decide what household goods and other articles they should bring along. When asked if she should not bring the curtains with her, she replied that she would have no use for them over there because there the windows were so large that the curtains from Klefmarken would be too insignificant. When Johanna on the 3rd of June dressed for the journey and put on her outer garments she sat down for a last pause before the journey. After a few minutes she rose and exclaimed: "Now my Sverre is neighing, now I should go outside. Farewell you all in here."

As long as she could see the old home she waved toward it and its new occupants. Johanna's unflinching attitude did not last across the North Sea. Seasickness and homesickness made her depressed and, if there had been a possibility to return, she would undoubtedly have taken advantage of it. Not much has been heard of Johan Jonsson and his family's fate in America, but his bright expectations at the departure seem not to have materialized. A Swedish-American from a neighboring parish who had returned to Sweden 35 to 40 years ago has told that, about a year before he left, he had walked along a road in Michigan. He passed a dirt hut in front of which a young girl was sitting. He greeted her in English but received no reply. He then greeted her in Swedish. She replied and after a short conversation she invited him into the hut. Inside the hut sat an old man. He had a beard that reached down to his waist. It was Johan Jonsson, the former farmer from Klefmarken who sat there. He had a job as a church custodian and, altho nothing was said, he certainly wished that the journey had not taken place. The position as farmer in Klefmarken was, despite

struggle and hardship, both better and more secure than the lot that had befallen him in the foreign country. Johan was probably also a little shiftless and lacked the energy that was necessary for success in America. His son Otto, who had homesteaded in Dakota, later brought his parents there and, there, as far as is known, they stayed until their end.

Sven Andreason homesteaded in Kansas and died there as a farmer. Fate favored him and his descendants more than his brother-in-law, Johan Jonsson. All Sven's children are now dead but for more than 65 years his descendants have lived and worked in different places in the States. His children and many of his grandchildren chose their father's and grandfather's occupation, most of them in Kansas. Several of the grandchildren and many of the great-grandchildren have, however, chosen and been successful in other fields. Among them are: physicians, teachers, lawyers, engineers, artists, business men, journalists, etc.

Carl, Sven's eldest son, who with his family emigrated three years ahead of his parents, became a farmer in Kansas and was killed on his farm by a bolt of lightning. Anders Magnus, the next eldest son, died from sun stroke a few years after arriving in America. Two of the daughters were, as mentioned, married when they left Sweden and the others married farmers. All spent most of their lives in Kansas. Wilhelm, who was barely 14 years old at the time of the departure to America, later moved to Minnesota where he farmed for 15 years. He was a County Commissioner in Todd Co., Minnesota for two terms. He sold his farm in Minnesota and returned to Kansas.

Emanuel Edvin, Sven's next to youngest son, born in 1854, (16 yrs. old when coming to America) lived most of his life in Kansas. He moved to Beaverton, Oregon where he died in 1931. He was involved mainly in business, the last two years as a real estate salesman in Beaverton. He served several years as Justice of the Peace. His son, Karl Johan Swenson, is a surgeon in Portland, Ore. and, since 1912, on the staff of Emanuel Hospital there. Dr. Swenson was, as a physician among the troops that America sent to Europe in 1917. He became known as valiant and unafraid as he moved among the hail of bullets to assist the wounded. As Commander of the 364th Ambulance Corp in the 91st Division on the Western Front he received from the hand of Marshall Petain the French Croix de Guerre and was decorated by General Pershing with the American Distinguished Service Cross. When America entered the war, he had the rank of First Lieutenant and advanced to Major during the war. He now holds the rank of Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve Corps.

Dr. Swenson has possession of Karl XII's deed on Klefmarken to Halfward Bryngelson. When Sven Andreasson, at his departure for America, went through his books and papers to decide what he should bring along, he paused when he came across the Deed and wondered if it would be of any value in America. His son, Emanuel, asked if he could keep it which he was allowed to do. When he arrived in America he found it to be difficult to keep it safely. Although he was only 16 years old, he had the foresight to deposit it with the museum of Augustana College in Rockford, Illinois until he was in a position to properly care for the relic.

However the deed remained in the museum in Rock Island for 40 years. One day Emanuel Swenson happened to mention about it to his son, the doctor. He became very interested and urged his father to write to the President of Augustana College and request that the document be returned. The request was granted. Before his death, Emanuel Swenson gave the family relic to Dr. Swenson.

The deed reads as follows: We Karl with the Grace of God King of Sweden, Giote and Wende (Giote refers to the island of Gotland. Wende is part of the old Danish title of the king. Both words have been part of the title of the King of Sweden since the 16th century), Grand Duke of Finland, Duke of Skane, Estonia, Livonia, Karelia, Brehmen, Steffin, Pomerania, Casuben and Wenden, Duke of Rugen, Lord over Ingermanland and Wismar. Also Duke of Pfalzen at Rein in Bavaria to Julich, Clewe and Bergen, Duke, etc. make known that We of royal grace will have donated, which we here with force of this open letter in grace donate and grant the farmer Halfward Bryngelsson his wife and children heir after heir the right to occupy Clewemark a half Crown homestead with outlying meadows, tenent farms, and mills situated in Elfsborgs lahn (now lan--- approximatety county), Wedbo harad (a political subdivision) and Ed Parish, so that no one shall have the power to evict him or them from afore mentioned half homestead as long as they pay their taxes. We have signed this with our own hand and confirmed it with our royal seal. Christiania April 9, 1716  
Carolus  
(Seal)

Doktorinnan Ida Gawell-Blumenthal, Delbostintan, tells about a meeting with Dr. Karl J. Swenson and his father. During a concert tour on the American west coast in the spring of 1925 Mrs. Gawell-Blumenthal came to Portland, Ore. where she was the guest of the Swedish Consul, Lidell. During a car trip in the city, Consul Lidell happened to mention a Swede in Beaverton who owned a document signed by Karl XII. Stintan became, of course, interested and the consul suggested that they go to Beaverton and visit the Swede. After a telephone call to ascertain that Emanuel Swenson, who was the one they intended to visit, was home they all went there. They were warmly received, particularly since Dr. Swenson with his son (Reed) was visiting his father. They all were pleased to receive greetings directly from Sweden.

The document, which the Concul had mentioned was the deed which Karl XII the 9th of April on Ekeberg outside of Kristiania had given to the farmer Halfward Bryngelsson as proof of his right to Klefmarken. the deed was framed and encased in glass on both sides since the writing was on both sides of the paper. It was well preserved and was apparently considered a relic by the family. At the occasion Consul Lidell took a picture of the group with the younger Swenson (Reed) holding the deed in front of him.

When Prince Vilhelm during his lecture tour in America a a couple of years later visited Portland, Dr Swenson had an opportunity to show even him the deed. The prince studied the deed with interest for a long time and expressed great surprise to see such a document far away in America.

They are now departed all those who during the time mentioned left Klefmarken. None of them has again set foot on Swedish soil

and none of their descendents has visited Sweden. The now living generation has not, with few exceptions had contact with their relatives in the old country or felt any other affinity, except that of the blood, with the country of their ancestors. For the emigrants, on the other hand, including those who experienced hardship, the memory of their home region, despite tis barrenness, had not paled.

Smoke blue, dear old Tells  
Far beyond vast depths  
Where once I from the home of my ancestors  
Went away on on the sloop of fate  
I go there often in my thoughts  
To flowers, sun and song  
And dream about my bygone Spring  
In the Tells many a time

So has a later emigrant, Carl P. Ericson, interpreted his and likely most emigrants longing for the home region.

Carl P. Ericson, a sister's son of before mentioned Johan Jonson, was very intelligent and also a very skilled artisan. "His talents should certainly have made him successful and made him known here at home." As K.G. Ossiannilsson writes in his poem, "If John Ericson had had a cabin member for a father!" But Carl Petter was just the son of a tenant farmer up in the Tell region and this fact prevented any thought of an opportunity to an education. Instead, as soon as he was able he had to fend for himself. After having lived and worked in Norway for about 15 years he went to America in 1883 where he was occupied mainly in the construction business. He later became a farmer and is now enjoying retirement in Fruitport, Michigan.

Carl P. Ericson has during his time in America published many poems in the Swedish-American press. During all his time in America he has maintained contact with the home region. His letters, even now in his old age, show that, in spite of an absence of 53 years, his home region is, in the most minute detail, impressed on his memory. A few years ago he wrote a poem about his home region:

The greatest bliss found in time gone by  
Was here in the days of the greatest poorness  
My wealth was an axe and an Eskilstuna Knife  
I knew no other laws of a better fate  
And the thrush was satisfied with only a beak and a claw  
We were both glad with freedom, hope and faith  
And sang our praise in the woods  
So thank you for happy memories,  
You barren corner of Dalsland  
You had no gold to give me  
But quiet, blissful moments that you gave me anyway  
Which still in my old age shine before me  
With reflections and echo from chirps of birds and spring  
I now go here and dream, a child with gray hair  
Who has been rocked by winds among the mountains.

Clewemark