

6-1-2015

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### Recommended Citation

Thorsell, Elisabeth (2015) "A murder in 1857 in Småland," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 35 : No. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol35/iss2/2>

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# A murder in 1857 in Småland

There was no doubt who the culprit was

BY ELISABETH THORSELL

In January 1857 two people died of poisoning in Bringetofta parish in Småland. There was no hesitation on the part of the local clergyman who had poisoned the victims as he entered the culprit's name, Anders Andersson, in the death records.

Andersson was arrested and put into the local jail until the court of *Västra Härad* met in February 1857, and here is the court proceedings.

The *Västra Härad's* court met at the usual courthouse in Komstad in Norra Ljunga parish (now Sävsjö) on 19 February 1857.

## Summary of the court case 1857 against Anders Andersson of Hafsjö, Bringetofta, Sweden

§ 154

In a letter dated January 31st, 1857, the county government had asked the local court of the *Västra Härad*, county of Jönköping, to pursue an investigation against the imprisoned tenant farmer *Anders Andersson* of Hafsjö, Bringetofta, who was suspected of having killed *Nils Peter Blick* of Towik and *Sigrid Katrina*

*Andersdotter* from Sigrisholm on Hafsjö lands.

The prosecutor was the crown bailiff (*kronolänsman*) P. E. Rendahl. Other plaintiffs were the widow of Nils Peter Blick, Maja Katrina Johannesdotter, and Sigrid Katrina Andersdotter's widower Swen Djerf.

The murdered persons had been examined postmortem by the Provincial Surgeon S. E. Sköldberg, who had found that both of the deceased had been killed by being given arsenic.

<u>An 1857</u>		
I. 1925	Andersdotter Lagerquist i Göttingen. Arvdottern Nils Petrus Magnusson Blick i Towik genom ingifvit förgiftad af Anders Andersson i Hafsjön	-- 99
II. 2723 1/2	Christina Sigrid Catharina Andersdotter i Bist Sigrisholm w. Hafsjö Säteri, genom ingifvit förgiftad af Anders Andersson i Hafsjö	43. 5. 17. 216
III. 3623 1/2		62. 10. 30. 330

Bringetofta C:2 (1842-1861) Bild 136 / sid 257. Picture from Arkiv Digital.

## About the victims

The testimony about Nils Peter Blick from the local pastor showed that he was well-known in the parish, knew his religion, and was an honest man with an upright conduct. He left his wife and five children in poor circumstances.

The other victim turned out to be his maternal aunt, Sigrid Katrina Andersdotter, and her knowledge of her religion was not so good, and in her younger years she had not been too steady in her conduct, but now as an older person, she had only showed good conduct.

## About the murderer

The testimony about Anders Andersson, the suspected murderer, was different. He had moved from Norra Sandsjö parish to Bringetofta in 1842, and then been a tenant farmer at several places. There were no notes in the clerical surveys about his knowledge of religion. As for his conduct, he was known as an ungodly man, always swearing, and a burden for Christian society. [This testimony is found on page 11 of this issue, as the Handwriting example.]

## The victims' families

The widow of Nils Peter Blick, Maja Katrina Johannesdotter, who was crying, told that she had been married for about 15 years, and that she had five living children, and that the distance from their home in Towik to Hafsjö was about 15 kilometers, that her husband had driven all alone for the fifth time to Hafsjö with a wagon-load of their farm equipment and other things, as they were going to move to Hafsjö in March.

He had come back home in the evening of January 23 at about 7 o'clock in the evening, and by then was already very sick and vomiting the whole time. He had terrible stomach pains, but was conscious, and said that he suspected having been given something by Anders Andersson, who had given him a glass of acquavit and a sandwich. He died the next night. The widow testified that she had

known that Anders Andersson did not like her husband, and that he had threatened to do him some damage, which caused her husband to be a bit fearful of going to Hafsjö.

Swen Djerf, the widower of Sigrid Katrina Andersdotter, told that his wife had gone in the morning to Anders Andersson in Hafsjö to deliver a pair of mittens that she had made for him, and when she returned in the middle of the day, she was feeling poorly, and was also vomiting and had pains in her stomach, and when she heard that Nils Peter Blick had died, she started to suspect that the sandwich which Anders Andersson had given her also had been poisoned. The widower did not know that Anders Andersson had anything against his wife, but knew that he wanted to buy her little property, and offered her 1000 *riksdaler*, but she had already made other arrangements.

## The suspect

The defendant Anders Andersson then told that he had been born in Askeryd parish, and that his parents had been Anders Andersson and his wife Sara, and they were a longtime deceased. They had been sharecroppers there. When he left his parents he first worked for his maternal uncles, and then for several other people, but could not remember for how long. Then he moved around 1830 to Norra Sandsjö in the same *härad* (legal district), and worked as a tenant farmer at different places. He had married in 1831 to Anna Stina Nilsson, who died in 1856, and they had three living sons. He had never been accused of any crime before.

Regarding the crime he was now accused of, he said that he must confess that he never had had any ill feelings towards Nils Peter Blick, but that he must have been given poison during his last visit at Hafsjö, but that it had been an accident. He had given Nils Peter Blick some acquavit and a sandwich, but he had drunk from the same bottle and was well. The butter was another matter, he

had himself in the morning mixed butter with arsenic, to kill rats, and then put that butter in his usual butter box, and forgot all about it. Anders also said that Sigrid Katrina had brought the poison to his house, and then he had added more butter in the box, and then given her a sandwich, before she went home with some of the butter.

The prosecutor asked why he had added more butter to the box when he knew there was poison there? To this he had no good answer, and just said "to fulfill my sins." Then the judge asked if he had been planning for a long time to kill Nils Peter Blick and Sigrid Katrina Andersdotter, and he answered that he had not at all planned this, he had just forgotten about the poison. Now members of the jury remarked that he had earlier said that he had planned this crime for a month, but he did not explain why he had done so.

Sven Djerf explained that his wife did not bring any poison to Anders Andersson, nor did she bring any butter home; this was all a lie.

Now the prosecutor called upon a number of people to testify what they knew about the deed. Anders Andersson said that some of these people were not friendly towards him, as they did not like it when he brought his cattle across their lands. They denied this, and were still allowed to tell their stories.

[Not all witnesses are mentioned here, as most of them told the same story.]

## The witnesses

# 1) *Nils Peter Ljunggren* from Tovik told that he had been visiting with Nils Peter Blick when he came home and was sick, and that he had told the witness about the food and drink he had been given. The witness had never heard that Anders Andersson was not friendly with Nils Peter Blick, but knew that he was uneasy any time he had to go to Hafsjö, as Anders Andersson always was mean, grumpy, and not helpful at all when he came with his wagon.

# 6) *Gustaf Adolf Andersson* of Gådeberg told that Nils Peter Blick had rested for a while in his house on his way back home, and then was very ill, sometimes feeling very cold, and sometimes very hot, and vomiting the whole time. Nils Peter told the witness that Anders Andersson had been very insistent that Nils Peter Blick should not take over as tenant farmer at Hafsjö, as Anders wanted to stay there; he had also offered him 900 *daler* if he left the job.

# 7) *Anders Andersson Sjö* at Sågarehemmet, who lived in the same house as Sigrig Katrina Andersdotter and her husband, told that he had been summoned by her to meet with Anders Andersson in the evening, which he did, and he told Anders that Sigrig Katrina Andersdotter had come home very sick, and he just replied "such things happen."

Why Anders Andersson wanted to meet with the witness was to try to persuade him to leave off working at the cottage, as Anders Andersson wanted to stay at Hafsjö. He also wanted to let Nils Peter Blick work at the cottage, and would fix a room somewhere else for the witness. The witness was not interested, but also told that Anders Andersson during the last year had said that he wanted to get rid of Sigrig Katrina Andersdotter, but had not mentioned how that should come about.

# 9) *Peter Larsson* at Hafsjö told that he had heard Anders Andersson say that Nils Peter Blick would never come to Hafsjö, and when the witness said that Nils Peter Blick had a contract for this, Anders Andersson had just said that there would be many ways to hinder that, but he did not say exactly how it would come about.

# 12) *Gustaf Carlsson* at Hafsjö told that Anders Andersson had always been envious of Nils Peter Blick, ever since he got the contract. The last time Nils Peter Blick came to Hafsjö, Anders Andersson had been unusually friendly and helpful.

# 13) *Jonas Carlsson* of Hafsjö told that Anders Andersson in the evening of Saturday the 24<sup>th</sup> had come to visit with him. Without mentioning

a cause, Anders asked if he knew what sentence someone would get who had poisoned someone? And how much poison would be lethal? And that it was difficult to get hold of so much. The witness did not know until the next day that Nils Peter Blick had died. He had never heard that Anders Andersson wanted to hurt Nils Peter Blick.

# 14) *Anders Nilsson* of Hafsjö told that Anders Andersson the last year, just before Christmas, when the other people had gone to church, had shown the witness that he had a piece of arsenic with a weight of about 2-3 ounces. When the witness asked why he had this, he just said that it was expensive and put it back in his pocket.

# 15) *Judith Stork* of Hafsjö told that she had been a maid in the Anders Andersson household for some time, and that she had spoken to Sigrig Katrina Andersdotter when she came in the morning, and asked if she was going to knit more mittens, which she wanted to do. Next Anders Andersson asked Sigrig Katrina Andersdotter to sit down and relax as she should taste his Christmas cheese. Then he went to the cupboard in the room and took out something and then went into the next room and was there for a long time. Then he came back and told that he could not at first find the key to the place where he kept the cheese. He sat beside Sigrig Katrina and she ate what he had given her, and then she went home.

Later Nils Peter Blick came and Anders Andersson went out to help unload the wagon. By then it was also told that the man who owned the farm had been there the day before and Anders Andersson had again told that he wanted to stay at Hafsjö, but there was no change of tenant farmer now. While Blick was unloading the wagon, Anders Andersson went to the cupboard and took out something that he put under his sweater while looking to see if anyone saw him doing that. The other maid, Stina Katarina Danielsdotter, went into the next room to fetch something,

and then called for Judith to come and see what she had found. This was some tiny pieces of something that looked like glass, which Stina Katrina tasted, as she thought it was sugar, but it did not taste anything. There was also a piece of paper with some tiny pieces in it, which Judith showed to the nearby tailor, who said it was arsenic, and they threw it on the floor.

When Anders Andersson was questioned about the various testimonies, he could not deny the truth of what they had told, and he agreed that he had been envious of Nils Peter Blick and that he had found Sigrig Katrina Andersdotter to be a problem for him. The prosecutor had now found out that she was an aunt of Nils Peter Blick's, and that she had somehow helped him get the contract, which angered Anders.

As more witnesses had to be called, the investigation was continued on March 12.

## March 12, next session

### § 207

Again Anders Andersson was transported from the county jail to the seat of the *Västra Härad* court in Komstad. The minutes of the former meeting were read to Anders Andersson, who was asked if he disagreed with them. He just said that some things were correct and other were lies, but he could not tell what was what. He had been ill, so badly that he might not have been able to come to court, and he still felt very weak. He still said that he was willing to confess to everything, but that it had not been his intention that Nils Peter Blick and Sigrig Katrina Andersdotter should die, that had just been the consequence of his foolishness and carelessness.

Anders Andersson told that he had bought the arsenic last summer from a pedlar, so it had been a lie that Sigrig Katrina Andersdotter had brought it to him. When told that this was not what he had said before, he answered that he was so weak that he did not quite know what he had said.



Now his sons, *Johan Peter*, *Carl Gustaf*, and *Johannes August*, were called as witnesses. They did not know anything about how the arsenic had been used, but they did know that their father had bought some, and that it had cost him 1 *riksdaler*.

After he had been arrested he had asked his sons to look for the leftover arsenic and then give it to the prosecutor, and they found the arsenic in the place their father had indicated. Then the oldest son kept it for a few weeks in his waistcoat pocket, until he gave it to his younger brother Carl Gustaf, who gave it to the tailor, who gave it to the prosecutor, who in his turn gave it to the local chemist, who confirmed that it was arsenic.

The maid Stina Katrina Danielsdotter also told that the servants got butter on Wednesday and Thursday, but after that she had not seen the butter box.

Anders Andersson told that he could not deny what the witnesses had told. After having given butter to Nils Peter Blick, he put the butter box in a drawer of his chest of drawers. Later on he had taken out the rest of the butter and dug it down in the potato heap and in the cellar, to kill rats. He had also cleaned the empty butter box. He had given bread and butter to Nils Peter Blick, but himself had a piece of bread without butter, saying that the bread was so hard, he could not eat it otherwise.

Now the plaintiffs and others were told to go out, and the court discussed the case.

Then the people were allowed to come in again, and the judge gave the following sentence:

**Sentence:**

Anders Andersson was to be beheaded, as stated in Chapter 17 §1

of the Penalty Law (*Missgärningsbalken*) as he had of his free will confessed that he had murdered Nils Peter Blick and Sigrid Katrina Andersdotter by giving them arsenic, because he disliked them and had resolved a couple of months beforehand to kill them, due to his envy of the younger man, who was to succeed him as the tenant farmer of Hafsjö.

The son, Johan Peter Andersson, was set free from the charge of not taking proper care of the rest of the arsenic, as the delay in giving it to the prosecutor did not cause any problems.

According to the law the sentence on Anders Andersson was now to be sent to the Göta Court of Appeal (*Göta Hovrätt*).

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The Göta *Hovrätt* confirmed the sentence on November 3 1857 and confirmed by the King on 18 December 1857, according to Bringetofta AI:11 (1855-1859) *Bild 371 / sid 353*.

**Sources:**

The records of the *Västra Häradsrätt*, volume AIa:209, are kept in the regional archives at Vadstena, Sweden.)

**Appendix**

When trying to find out more about this murder, I found a local web site about Bringetofta, on which I found that Anders Andersson also had a nickname, *Farao*, so by googling on that name I found that the local genealogical society had an article about this case in their newsletter, *Njudungen* 1998:3, and their nice president set me a copy of those pages.

The story of the court proceedings was the same as I have already told, but there was new information about his death, as the crown bailiff Per Eskil Rendahl had received written

**XVII. CAP.**  
*Om förgiörning genom förgift, eller annorledes.*

**H**var som annan med förgift, eller thyligt, upfatliga förgiör; then skal halshuggas, mannen steglas, och kvinnan i båle brännas. Följer ej död af sådan förgiörning; miste äntå lifvet.

2. §. Samma lag vare om then, som å hvarjehanda sätt förgiftar något, hvad thet helkt vara kan, i upfat, at thetmed skada någon til lif eller helfo.

3. §. Hafver man ulredt förgift, at någon ther med förgiöra; eller hafver man varit i samma råd och gierning delachtig; miste ock lifvet. Varder han gripen, innan han gittat fullgiöra sin onda vilja; böte hundrade daler, eller plichte med kroppen.

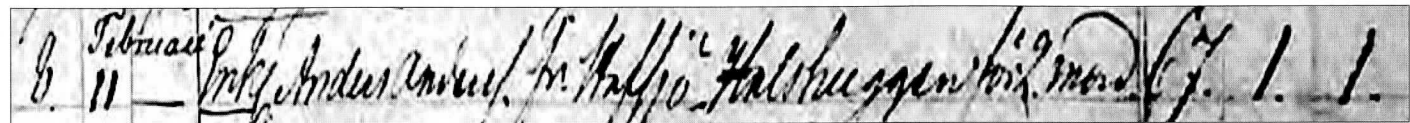
4. §. Ingen, eho han vara må, fördrifte sig at sälja något förgift, utan til trovärdig man eller kvinno: sker annorledes; böte femtijo daler. Är theraf skada timad; vare tvegiltd.

*Chapter 17 of the Criminal part of the 1734 Swedish Law.*  
*About destruction by poison, or some other way*  
*§ 1 Whoever by poison, or in a similar way, has the object to kill someone, that person shall be beheaded, the man shall be quartered, and the woman burnt. If the victim does not die, the perpetrator should still get the death.*

- instructions about the procedure:
- #1 you are to clear the execution place from trees and shrubs, so that the stumps are not a hinder for the spectators.
  - #2 not cited in the article.
  - #3 4 or 5 boards are to be bought, and made into the bottom of the execution block, which is to be 2 feet wide with a hollowing out for the culprit's chin.
  - #4 not cited in the article.
  - #5 you are to be clad in uniform, tricorne hat, spurs and sable, and mounted.

The date for the execution was read in all churches in the *härad*, so that all local police could be present, as well as the public. The executioner Glas had been sent for, probably from Jönköping.

The axe fell, and Anders Andersson *Farao* was probably buried in the nearby forest, as he was not entitled to be buried in the cemetery.



*Bringetofta C:2 (1842-1861) Bild 138 / sid 261 (Arkiv Digital). The number 8 shows the number of people that had already died in Bringetofta that year. Anders Andersson was beheaded on February 11, but the space for burial is blank.*