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Searching for an unknown father – the eternal problem

BY JAN KÄRRMAN

On 23 Feb. 1904, a girl, Gulli Engla Maria, was born in Domnarvet, Stora Tuna parish,¹ in the province of Dalarna. The mother was 21-year-old Anna Hammarström (b. 4 Oct. 1882 in Kloster, Husby [Dlrm]).² Anna was not married, and the book of births notes that the baby has a “father unknown.” The daughter immigrated to Minneapolis, MN, U.S.A., on 23 Feb. 1928³ and started a family here.

She is now dead, but her American son wanted to find out who his grandfather was. He contacted the Swenson Center who suggested that he could contact me. I have done a lot of research in that region, having been born in Stora Tuna myself.

A clue

The son told me that his mother thought that her real father might have been one Edvin Dahl, perhaps based on some resemblances. Someone had told her that she walked like him.

I responded that I was prepared to make an attempt, but pointed out that chances are not good to find an unknown father of a child born-out-of-wedlock. I have three such cases among my own ancestors and have failed to identify any of them.

Found him in the court records!

The best chance would be if Anna had gone to court to get alimony from the man she claimed was the father. The relevant court records have not been preserved on film, but I live close to the archives where the original documents are stored: Uppsala *landsarkiv* (regional archives). So I went there and requested the court records

for 1904. The jurisdiction is quite large, so the book was also big. Since these books have no indexes, one has to page through them. Nothing was found in the 1904 volume so I requested the protocols for 1905. That book was even bigger! And indeed, halfway into the book⁴ there was an alimony case: Anna Hammarström vs. Edvin Dahl!

What the records told

Here is a short version of the trial: Edvin denied that he was the father. Anna then called two witnesses. The first had seen Anna and Edvin lying together, although fully clothed at the time. The second had heard Edvin saying things about Anna having a child, like “it had been better if it had not happened.” Edvin did not deny having said so, but claimed that he had just meant that it had been better from her perspective only, and that he felt sorry for her.

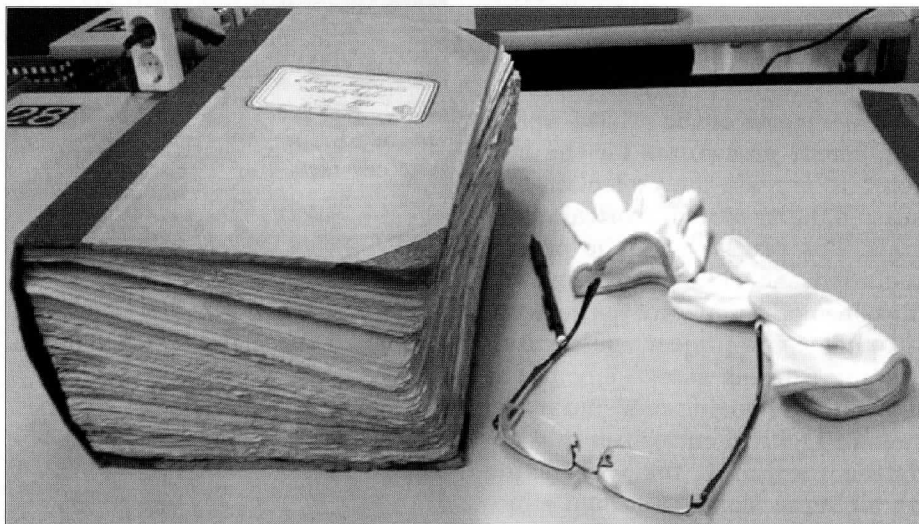
Those testimonies did not of course prove anything, but it was enough for

the court to decide that Edvin must come back at a later time and take an oath, with two fingers on the bible, that he could not be the father. Before that, he must go to a priest to be lectured about the importance of the oath, and about perjury. This was a common practice in cases like this, but it seems to have required a certain level of substantial information from the witnesses. There were other similar cases where the defendant was acquitted without having to take an oath.

[To see parts of the court records, go to the Handwriting example on p.14.]

Edvin did not take the oath

Edvin did not show up for the oath, which legally was equivalent to him acknowledging his fatherhood. It should be noted that if he had taken the oath, he would have been acquitted. The judgment for him was to pay Anna 30 Swedish *kronor* for her ex-



The court records were found in this book at the Uppsala archives. (Photo by Jan Kärrman).

penses around the birth and the trial. He then had to pay her six *kronor* each month until the child was 15, or could support herself. One Swedish *krona* in 1905 is about \$7 in today's value.

A not very common case

It was gratifying to be able to find a court trial in this case, but it seemed to be an exception. I looked through about a year and a half of trials, and found maybe about a dozen alimony cases. And the jurisdiction is larger than just Stora Tuna.

What happened next

Edvin Dahl, (b. 23 May 1882 in Smednäset, Rämmen [Värml.])⁵ later married Gerda Ottilia Ranström, (b. 9 May 1884 in Ovensjö [Gävln.])⁶. They had two sons, Gösta Edvin Oliver, and Erik Holger.

Edvin left 11 Feb. 1909 from Norrbärke (Dlrn) for Rockford, IL,⁷ and the wife and children came later; they left on 29 Sep. 1909⁸ also for Rockford. According to a family tree at ancestry.com, there seems to be living descendants of Edvin. If he

indeed was the father of the child, which seems very likely, then Anna's American grandson has first cousins from that family branch. A DNA comparison with one of them could clearly show such a close relationship.

Anna Hammarström married on 5 Feb. 1908 in a civil ceremony in Stora Tuna to Karl Ruben Larsson,⁹ ironworker (b. 20 Jan. 1886 in Enköping [Upps.]). He was not baptized, so they could not marry in church. Anna and her husband had five children, of which three died as infants.

Anna died 18 Feb. in Stora Tuna of tuberculosis. Her husband later remarried twice and had more children. He died 24 Oct. 1943 in Domnarvet, (Dlrn.).

As a side note, a first cousin to my mother married one of Anna's sons, whom I met several times during my youth.

Endnotes:

- 1) Stora Tuna C:16 (1902-1908) img 1410 / pag 137 (Arkiv Digital).
- 2) Husby C:18 (1880-1891) img 48 (Arkiv Digital).
- 3) Database Emibas on CD.

- 4) Falu *domsagas södra tingslags häradsrätt*, AI:17 (1905), §216 (June 5), §250 (July 15), §65 (October 3), and §113 (November 27). Original book in the regional archives in Uppsala, Sweden.
- 5) Rämnen C:7 (1878-1894) img 43 (Arkiv Digital).
- 6) Ovensjö AI:26a (1881-1885) img 182 / pag 219 (Arkiv Digital. Not found in birth records).
- 7) Databases Emibas and Emihamn.
- 8) Databases Emibas and Emihamn.
- 9) Stora Tuna EI:6 (1895-1910) img 2010 / pag 193 (Arkiv Digital).
- 10) Enköping C:9 (1876-1886) img 96 (Arkiv Digital).
- 11) Stora Tuna F:10 (1905-1914) img 2690 / pag 261.
- 12) Swedish Death Index 1901–2013, database on DVD.

Domnarvet iron works

Originally Borlänge was the name of a tiny village in Stora Tuna parish, and the first historical information about it is from 1390.

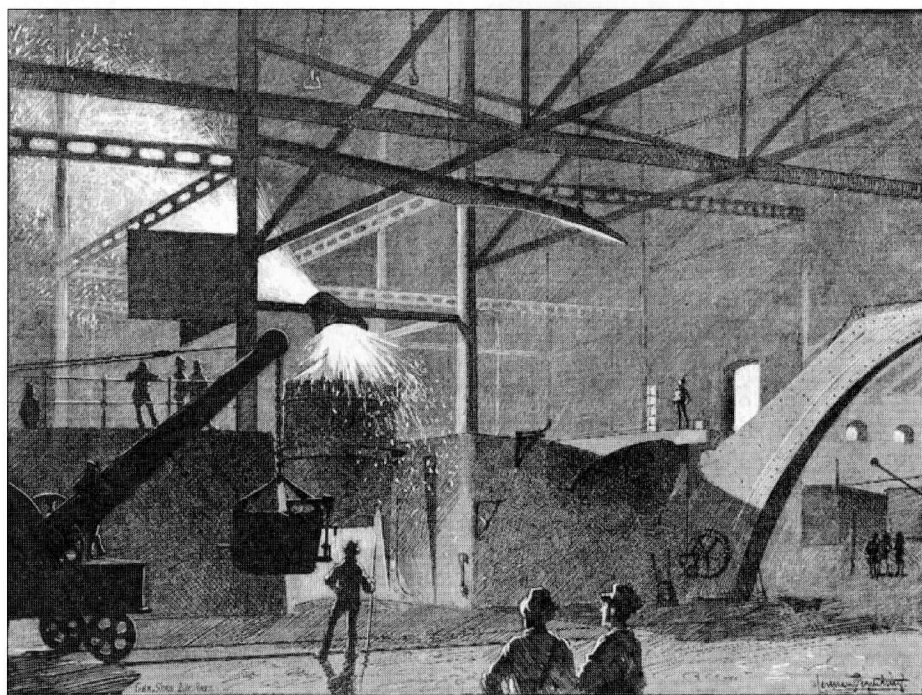
The village was insignificant up until about 1870. In 1875 a railway between Falun and Ludvika, via Borlänge, was inaugurated and at the same time the construction of Domnarfvets Jernverk, the ironworks of neighbouring village Domnarvet, had started.

When the works started functioning in 1878 there was a demand for skilled workers, and many with experiences from other ironworks in the middle of Sweden (the *Bergslagen* area) moved there.

In the year 1900 some 2500 individuals lived in the workers' village of Hushagen, and some 1500 workers were employed by the ironworks.

In the 1900s, the Stora Kopparbergs Bergslag – the owner of the ironworks in Domnarvet at the time – built a papermill in an adjacent village to Borlänge called Kvarnsveden. Many area residents immigrated to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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The Domnarvet iron works in Stora Tuna parish in Dalarna, where the men mentioned in this article worked. Wood engraving by Herman Feychting (Picture collection at Jernkontoret).