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Life of Erik Janssonists in Dalarna prior to immigration

BY LINJO JONAS JONSSON

TRANSCRIPTION BY LARS-ÅKE WÅNGSTEDT

TRANSLATION BY JOHN E. NORTON

During the year of 1844, two girls (ed: Lishans Maria and Christina Olsdotter) from Malung and Östra Fors, were in Hälsingland, in Forssa, Söder- and Norrala parishes doing carding work, and there they came to hear and talk with Erik Jansson and several of his brothers in the faith who were preaching God's word. They were awakened, and accepted the same faith and belief as theirs. Returning home, they began to tell what they had heard and seen in Hälsingland, and encouraged and said that no one is saved without improvement and conversion, and many began to think about how this might be. Linjo Gabriel Larsson was at that time [head of] a God-fearing and highly esteemed family, his oldest son Lars was impressed by their witness, and he, himself, journeyed to Hälsingland to hear and see, and during his visit there, was seriously taken by it. Returning home, he began to witness about it, held prayer meetings in his home where people of the village gathered to hear and see, and many were captured by the impact of his word, and his parents and siblings soon came to the same belief. Persecution arose in many ways, both obvious and subtle. But since the Linjo people had previously been a God-fearing and respected family in the parish and village, it did not have much effect on them. But during the year of 1845 preachers came from Hälsingland, and the parishes of Forssa, Alfta, Delsbo, etc., and many people gathered.

But then, persecution broke out against them in a more grim way, which I cannot mention in detail. The

preachers were Firjar Anders, Stenbo Olof, and others. Those who wished to join their faith had to confess their sin, and were given forgiveness, and by an oath they joined the movement and no longer needed any daily purification and forgiveness. Once sin had been forgiven, they no longer needed to feel any sin. Great animosity arose in many homes. One girl was restricted to (tied up at) her home, since she would not obey her parents' admonishment to stay home while they read God's word. Two sisters were called by their father to appear before their pastor in Malung, named Daniel Godenius, so he could talk to them and convince them of their error. But it did not work. He did not understand their innermost situation. The books they used were the Bible, the New Testament, Erik Jansson's Psalm Book, and the Catechism. I remember well a household examination at Fors, in Malung, when it was the practice of the pastor to read a verse in our Swedish Psalm Book, Luther's Small Catechism, etc. So it was impossible for Linjo Gabriel's boys to read anything more than the New Testament for the pastor. There were even some among them who burned Luther's writings.

Erik Jansson comes by

In the beginning of 1846, in the winter, Erik Jansson himself travelled through Malung without being noticed. But he stayed some time with my father's brother Linjo Gabriel - in a little room where he could be locked in.

Then, they became even stronger in their faith, and [it was] agreed that

since they could not practice their religion without punishment and great persecution, they must move to America, a land with much religious freedom, and preparations had to be made as soon as possible. It was decided that the trip would begin in the spring of the mentioned year, 1846. Erik Jansson's journey from Malung was to Norway, and he was transported at night, and during the trip had to stay in a haymow, where he wrote a letter to his siblings in faith, and used his left hand to support the paper while he wrote with his right. This he described in his letter.

Selling the farms

Then Linjo Gabriel Larsson began to think of selling all he owned in Sweden, and he was at that time among the richest farmers in Malung. He and his wife had 6 children: sons Lars, Olof, Gabriel, Erik, and daughters Karin and Christina. Karin was then married to Hars Halfvar Hansson² of Östra Fors; all were of the same belief and conviction. The auction was announced in February, and was held for (blank space) days. They had an unusually large inventory: 20 cows, 2 to 3 horses, and many small animals. The total value of their inventory I cannot say, but for the farm and property, the last offer by his son-in-law Hars Halfvar Hansson was auctioned off at 10,110 Crowns, and this was only half of what such a farm and property was then worth.

Tailors, both men's and women's were hired to make new clothes, not only for the family, but for all the less

fortunate of their sect who wished to follow them.

On the way to America

The trip began around 9-10 April to Christiania (now Oslo). They were to leave there on the 20th, around 50 persons went from Malung. Spring floods had come, bringing great difficulties to travel through the woods to Värmland and Dalby parish, whose forest is 4 Swedish miles (40 kilometers) across. In the middle of the forest is a place called Femt-ryan. There, a family of good economic means lived, who also went with them. I will leave out describing all the difficulties which were said to have met them en route to Christiana. However, I should mention that many of those leaving said that our land of Sweden would become like Sodom and Gomorrah after they had left.

The second part of their flight

Six girls and a wife were not permitted to follow them – the wife, because of her husband, and the girls because of their parents. Linjo Gabriel Larsson returned from Christiania. His second son in order, Olof, and a boy from Fors named Toris Anders Larsson, after fasting three days, came back to Fors and were hidden in the attic of a farm whose people had left. They got food at night from the girls and even from the sister remaining at home, Karin, who was married and was not permitted to follow along. It should be mentioned that this sister lived no longer than barely a year after at the Linjo Farm. After they had left, she died of sorrow, it is said. For a month, the boys remained undetected at Fors, until the girls were ready. One night in the beginning of June, they began their trip.

In the morning, when my mother went to awaken sisters Anna and Brita, they were gone. Then mother-in-law came with a crying baby, the husband did not know where its mother had gone during the night. She would try to see if she was with

our girls. She has thus left her husband with a suckling child. Soon the news was known throughout the village that the other girls had also vanished, namely those who belonged to the same sect. Tears and crying were exchanged, and after discussions, it was decided to send out two scouts.

Men in their best years were sent, one towards Christiania, one towards Hälsingland. Those who had fled had, during the night, gone to a mountain pasture farm (*fäbod*) called Råberget. Near the named farm at Rålinjan between Lima and Malung parishes they rested the first time, and three women from Lima came along with their party, a wife who had left her husband, and two girls. They had decided to meet there. They sang and prayed, and strengthened themselves in both mind and body. The trip continued through the forest, and they had to cross rivers and waters, and the boys had to make floats with their axes to cross the rivers. When they had to go through a village, it was at night. After many adventures they came to Ovanåker in Hälsingland. They stayed there some days. There were also some of their fellow believers there.

Caught in Hälsingland

Our spy kept them locked in the upper story of a building. He got a ser-

vant of the Crown, and together they went in through the door by force. The boys who had been their guides were not there, but had gone to another village. Four horses were ordered (the three women from Lima were set free). The wife rode with the prison driver, the girls, two by two on the others. They had to go as prisoners to the Gävle cell prison, and during the trip people were amazed at such a party, but they were glad to suffer for the sake of Jesus' name. Arrived at the Gävle cell prison, they sang nearly the whole night, like Paul and Silas, and the other prisoners wondered what so many beautiful girls had done.

On the second day after their imprisonment, there was a hearing. The wife was heard first. She was questioned if it was true that she had fled during the night from her husband and a suckling child, and she answered "Yes." "What are you thinking of, or what is the reason for this, etc.?" she was asked, and she answered, for the sake of Jesus' name, and according to His promise to His first apostles who left their homes and fields, who should get a hundredfold in return, and inherit Eternal life. They answered "You are a strange(?) person." The girls were then questioned as to whether they had been servants, or what their situation was, and they answered that they were

No	Namn och Hemvist.	Född		Häft. böcker utst. År.	Gift	Ankom		Flyttad		Läsa uti Bok.	Utentill		För- står.	Anmärkingar.
		År och Dag.	Ort.			År.	År.	År.	År.		Luth. Cate. och Boggs	Sveck. Cate. och Boggs		
31	Linjo Jonas Jonsson	1795		1816										
	Brita Larsson	1798		1816										
	Anna Larsson	1800												
	Marit Larsson	1801												
	S. Larsson	1804												
	Marit Larsson	1804												
	S. Larsson	1807												
	Reyfir	1812												

Writer Linjo Jonas Jonsson's family. Note d. Brita and the note by her "escaped to North America in 1846." (Malung AI:5b (1845-1854) Bild 35 / sid 32. Arkiv Digital).

daughters in their homes who had illegally fled their parents, as they were not permitted to go to America with their partners in faith. They instead had to immediately travel home, and were sent by public conveyance paid by those at home. But if they wanted to leave and promised to walk home within 12 days, they could do so if they kept their promise to behave in a proper way, which they firmly promised.

The way back

The trip went first to Falun. On the way back, they began to write a letter to Ovanåker, which caught up with the boys, telling that they were going home in 12 days. They then decided to make a second trip to Malung. Our deserters continued with them to Falun where there were even some of their fellow believers. There they went their separate ways. One remained there, two traveled to Hälsingland, and four went home. My sisters separated. Anna came home, and Brita followed another to Ovanåker. When our escapees came home, and parents and children got to see each other, and the wife saw her husband and child, their sorrow changed to joy. One can imagine the reunion and what it was like. Our boys mentioned above in Hälsingland, after having received their letter written when they had gotten out of prison, decided to make another trip to Malung, and had arrived before the girls got home to Fors, but did not dare go further than Råberget, and by then the cattle had been driven up, and Torris Anders Larsson's old mother was also there, from whom they got some food. Only she and Linjo Olof's married sister knew about their return. The girls did not then get to meet them. They stayed mostly in the forest north of the mountain farm. There is still a large pine there, with long branches hanging to the ground, where they stayed for some time. It is generally called the "America pine." South of the mountain farm, in a very hilly area with caves, they stayed the last days, and the old Mother had to bring

food to them. They had comforted themselves with Jesus' words about the foxes having dens and birds having nests, etc.

And during their stay they had been discovered by some, and became very fearful, since they knew what would have happened if any of the girls' parents had learned about their second arrival. One day, when the old Mother was bringing food to them, they had fled. She called but got no answer, since they had traveled back to Hälsingland where they rejoined the three remaining. Along with the women from Lima and several from Hälsingland, they went to the coast and journeyed to America. These three girls, among whom one was my sister, and the boys arrived safely. Linjo Olof lived until 1893 (transl.: 1892 Mar. 24). My sister is still alive (transl.: Brita 14 Nov. 1824 to 16 Oct. 1909) and since I believe you know much already about their first experiences in America, I will not write more.

Your letter has arrived, but no other books than Erik Jansson's Hymnbook and Catechism, nothing more is known here.

If you have any use of the writings, you can send me 3 kronor for the trouble. I could have written much more, but have not wished to. This should be enough.

Sincerely,
Linjo Jonas Jonsson

Endnotes:

- 1) Letter dated Sep. 1900 by Linjo Jonas Jonsson of Östra Fors, Dalarna, Subject: The Beginnings of Erik Janssonism in Malung 1844. Filed with the Uppsala University Library on 30 March 1910 in the Herlenius Collection. Transcribed 9 July 2008 by Lars-Åke Wångstedt. Translated by John Norton.
- 2) Hars Halvar Hansson was born 7 July 1811 in Malung, farmer at Moby, and died 30 April 1870 in Norra Mon, Malung. He was married in 1838 to Karin Gabrielsdotter, born 25 July 1814 in Malung, daughter of Linjo Gabriel Larsson and Karin Olsdotter. Karin died 6 Nov. 1847 in Östra Fors, Malung (Malung F:4 (1847-1855) Bild 21). Widower Halvar remarried in 1853 to Kerstin Larsdotter Wallerås (Josef Sjögren [Acta Genealogica Malungensia], 1963 p. 385).

Editor's note: When this letter was written time had passed and as Jonas was only about 9 years old when all this happened, he might not always be correct. On the other hand this was a big event in the community and much discussed during the years.

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A fäbod in Malung in 1920. Photo by Karl Lärka.