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A murderer in the family

By AGNETA LINDAU PERSSON,
with research help from
BLENDA PEHRSSON

About four years ago I started to research my family from Össjö and the surrounding area. I soon discovered a murder of a young girl. Ten-year-old Helena Olsdotter had been battered to death on the night of 10 November 1842 in a most vicious way by her cousin Christian. This happened 172 years ago and there were many other interesting things to research, but the murder of Helena captured my interest, and I wanted to find out what had really happened. This is what I found.

The year 1842

The 20-year-old Christian Andersson lived in Rigatorpet by Skillinge in Munka-Ljungby with his mother Kjerstina Hansdotter, his stepfather Carl Johan Didrick, and his half-brother Johan Daniel.¹ Both the stepfather and Christian were employed at Skillinge manor. Christian was a *dräng* (farmhand), but his work did not go well. He was regarded as lazy, and had had several similar jobs, but had always left them too early or abruptly. The problem was his drinking.

Helena Olsdotter

In the middle of October Helena had come to Rigatorpet to help her *faster* (paternal aunt) Kjerstina Hansdotter. The intention was that she should stay the whole winter. From her home at Wennersborg in Tåstarp it was a walk of about 10 kilometers to Rigatorpet.

From what I could read in the documents, Christian was jealous because Helena had come to Rigatorpet. She took up too much space, and he was irritated by that. He was the illegitimate son, and the step-

father often mentioned all his faults. He was now 20 and no longer welcome in his own home.

Because of Helena, for three weeks he had shared a bed lying head to tail (*skaföttes*) with the maid Kerstin Jönsdotter to be able to sleep.

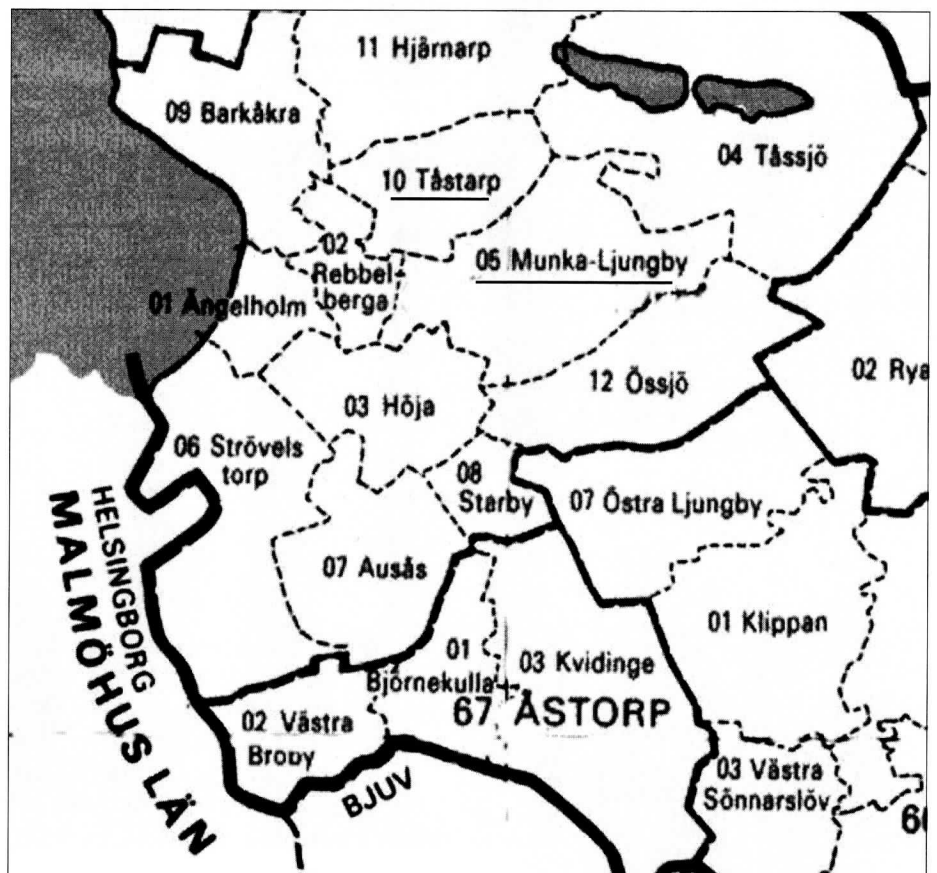
During the fall Christian had been threshing at Skillinge manor. One night, not long before the murder, he had a nightmare and had been fighting in his sleep. When he awoke, he told the maid that he had dreamt of being in a fight. In the morning he stayed home from work to rest, and did not return there until the next day. Back at work he was admonished for being lazy, and because of the reprimand he lost his temper. He threw a packet of food at the wall and

a glass bottle that broke. Then he grabbed a threshing rod and hit the table. By then the others had called the supervisor. It seems that afterwards he received a letter from the local clergyman about the need to improve his behavior, and that may have prompted what happened next.

The murder

On 9 November Christian had come home drunk, according to his mother. He had gone to bed in the same room where Helena and his half-brother Johan Daniel were sleeping. Then his mother Kjerstina had also gone to bed. Her husband was still at Skillinge working.

After a while Christian jumped out





Skillinge manor, just south of Munka-Ljungby church. Built around 1780, it was a large estate with about 2500 acres of land, worked by farm laborers.

of bed and started to pound a stone on a paper on the floor (perhaps a letter of complaint). This behavior was so strange that Kjerstina went out to get help and returned with the farmhands Pål Pålsson and Pehr Nilsson. The maid Kjersti Jönsdotter had been in the house that night and also heard about this incident. She quickly left for Skillinge manor to fetch her husband. According to her testimony later in the court she had never seen any signs of madness in Christian, except that he had been anxious before going to Holy Communion. But she did not know any reason for that.

Johan Daniel had also been awoken at this time and had seen Chris-

tian reading aloud from some paper.

Helena had also been awoken by all the noise and started to cry because of his behavior. Christian had then grabbed a rifle that he had borrowed from the farmhand Pehr Pålsson earlier.

With the rifle he had approached the beds where Helena and Johan Daniel were lying and asked the girl if she was “a child of the Devil.” Johan Daniel had answered that she was his cousin, and asked what he wanted. Then Christian says that he will pardon Johan Daniel, but that he will murder Helena as she was a changeling. Now Johan Daniel ran out of the house in just his underwear and rushed to the nearest neighbor.

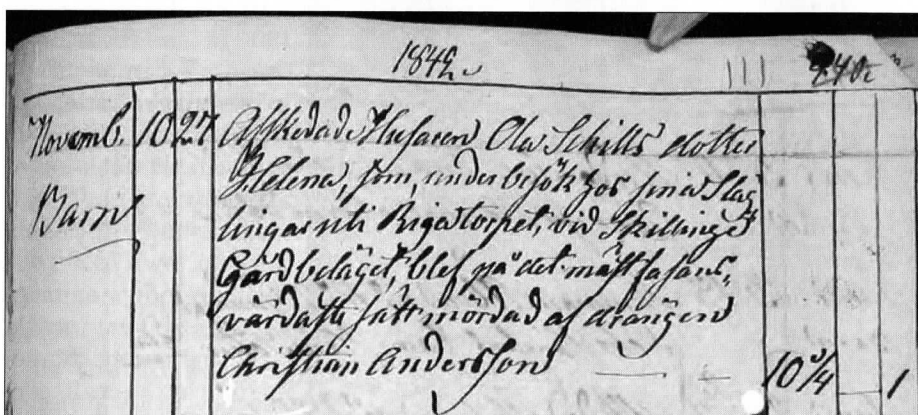
According to Johan Daniel’s testimony, Christian had not started to attack Helena while he was in the room. Nor had he ever seen any madness in Christian before, except occasionally when he was drunk and had become violent.

When Kjersti Jönsdotter, the maid, returned to the house with her husband, they did not dare go in, but stayed at the window. There was a light inside and they could see Christian pounding with the rifle on the body of the deceased, who was on the floor and already dead.

Then the farmhands Pål Pålsson, Pehr Nilsson, and Sven Hellström from Freden, who had been sent for, arrived at Rigatorpet. The front door was open and from inside they could hear Christian saying “Who are you Satan’s devils who have come here??”

He then came out through the door completely mad, and attacked Pehr Nilsson and hit him with his hand. Pål Pålsson and Sven Hellström had then held Christian until they could get more help. Together they had bound his arms and feet and managed to get him into the house. After half an hour he had calmed down. Inside the house they found bedding on the floor, a large pool of blood, and pieces of flesh from the dead girl. Outside of the house they found more body parts, which lay by the broken rifle. The butt of the rifle was found inside the house, on the floor and in the bed. Christian had, after Johan Daniel had run out to find help, killed Helena with the rifle.

Helena’s death was recorded on 10 Nov. 1842 in Tåstarp church records, as that was where her family was recorded.



Helena Olsson's death notice in Tåstarp CI:3 (1836-1860) Image 61 / p. 111 (Arkiv Digital). Translation of the text: Discharged Hussar Ola Schill's daughter // Helena, who during a visit to her relatives in Rigatorpet near Skillinge // was in the most horrible // way murdered by the farmhand // Christian Andersson. Age 10 3/4 (years), not married.



Transport of a prisoner in the 1800s.

Description of the victim and her killer:

In the court records there are usually at this time a description of both the victim and the perpetrator. Both physical traits and education are mentioned.

Here are the descriptions in this case:

Helena Olsdotter, b. 24 June 1832 in Tåstarp, daughter of the former soldier Ola Hansson Schill and his wife Bengta Månsdotter in Wenersborg in Tåstarp parish. Helena had good knowledge of religion for her age, and her conduct was modest, and she had a pious and good mind. She had never caused her parents any grief.

Christian Andersson, b. 1 April 1822 in Tåstarp, illegitimate son of Kjerstina Hansdotter. His father was said to be Anders Hansson. Christian's mother and Helena's father were siblings. Christian had gone to school in Munka-Ljungby parish school. He had learnt to read passably, had some knowledge of religion, and could write a little. He was at this time quite tall: 5 foot 9 and a quarter



Rigatorpet in the 1930s. (Photo from Agneta Lindau Persson).

inches. He had dark hair and eyebrows. His eyes were brown. He had a straight nose and a round face. On the left side of the nose he had a scar, and on his left index finger a wart.

He was taken into custody on 11 Nov. 1842, and placed in the prison of Norra Åsbo härad in Ängelholm. The date for the trial was set for 22 November 1842.

Footnote

- 1) Munka-Ljungby AI:3 (1839-1844)
Bild 154 / sid 303

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To be continued!



Train to the market!

This picture shows how the people of Nordmark, north of Filipstad in Värmland, gather at the railway station around 1900 to take the train to the market in town.

The market is called *Oxhälja*, and still exists on the first weekend of September.

Thousands of people come to town to buy T-shirts, reindeer sausages, music CDs, locally produced honey, "home-made" candy, craft products and much more. The traditional lunch is cabbage soup (*kålsoppa*). (Photo from Nordmark Local Heritage Society.)