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Nils William Olsson

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# Swedish Topographical Maps

Nils William Olsson

Next to the satisfaction of discovering the place in Sweden, where one's roots are to be found, is the ability to pinpoint the exact farmstead, croft or village on a Swedish topographical map. These maps, which have been in existence for a long time, constitute a valuable asset when it comes to presenting one's family history in a concrete setting. By providing a map segment, which shows at a glance, where the farm or village lay, it is possible to add much to the story. One can even illustrate life in the ancestral parish by pointing out the roads and paths the ancestor trod through the woods or the countryside on the way to the school, village or church. Here are streams and rivers, lakes and hills, natural monuments, railroads and towns, of prime importance to the original dweller in the place. Known for years as *Generalstabens kartor* (General Staff maps), because of their military provenance, they are now referred to as topographical maps or *detalj-kartor* (detailed maps).

Before going on to speak of the civilian nature of these topographical maps, it might be helpful to trace the origin of these highly useful items of cartography. The original purpose of these maps was of course military, the object being to produce and provide highly detailed maps for every part of Sweden, so that military staffs could properly prepare for the defense of their country. The responsibility for this project lay with *Generalstaben* (The Swedish General Staff), a top echelon of military officers, whose history goes back to the days of King Gustavus Adolphus in the early days of the 17th century. The purpose of the General Staff was to provide up-to-the minute information on many aspects of Swedish military preparedness — such as communications, military statistics, military history and the important field of topography. It was the latter section which was given the responsibility for setting up a special department, which had as its chief purpose to map every segment of Swedish territory.

These maps, as they were produced, became known as general staff maps. They had their genesis ca. 1810 and during the years 1810–1847 they were issued by *Svenska militärkartverket* (The Swedish Military Map Agency). From 1857 to 1874 the maps were known as *Topografiska corpsen karta öfver Sverige* (The Maps of the Topographical Corps of Sweden). Later this agency became known as *Rikets allmänna kartverk* (The General Map Agency of Sweden), the name it has kept to the present time.

At first, i.e. in the beginning of the 19th century the first maps produced

were for the northern province of Västerbotten and the southern province of Skåne (presumably because these areas were in the closest proximity of foreign soil). These maps were produced in a scale of 1:20,000. When it was discovered that this scale would consume too much time at a prohibitive cost, it was decided to use the scale 1:100,000.

In the beginning all of the work was done in secret by officers of the Topographical Corps of the Royal Swedish Army. At this time the engravings were still done by hand on copper plates. By 1844 the scale was raised to 1:50,000 and the maps were produced by means of heliography, a type of photo engraving. By 1857 it was decided to add an important detail — the inclusion of the altitude of the terrain. This was also the year in which the maps went public, and no longer restricted to the military. By 1877 the maps were produced by lithography and the contract for producing them went from the military to the civilian sector, a practice which has been adhered to to the present day. While the maps are still produced by the General Map Agency of Sweden, they are today published by Liber Publishing Co. of Stockholm. These detailed maps, for years restricted solely to the military, are today very popular in Sweden and can be purchased in almost every bookstore, not only in the cities, but also in the countryside. They are of inestimable value to sportsmen, hunters, sailing and yachting fans, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, hikers and of course genealogists.

In the United States they have been available for a long time. One of the first Americans to realize the value of these topographical maps for the study of one's roots, was the late Thorsten Hanson of Chicago, at one time district manager for the Swedish American Line. He procured an entire edition of these detailed maps and as a public service offered anyone, sending him a query and a self-addressed envelope, to furnish free information on the farmstead or the village, where his correspondent had his or her ancestral beginnings. Mr. Hanson called his pet project *Gården därhemma* (The farm back home). At his death, the entire collection of these valuable maps was bequeathed to Augustana College in Rock Island, IL. When the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center was opened at the college a couple of years ago, the college graciously offered the entire collection to the center, where it may be consulted by students and researchers.

Those who are interested in acquiring these detailed maps in the United States may purchase them from the Anderson Book Store in Lindsborg, KS, which is the official agency in this country for the Liber Publishing Co. of Stockholm. Mr. Charles Anderson, (husband of Gladys Anderson, proprietor of Anderson Bookstore) offers to provide information on a desired location with no charge for research, if a self-addressed stamped envelope is furnished and will inform his correspondent if the place name can be found and if so, on which map segment it can be located. It should be remembered that many old crofts and cottages have disappeared because of emigration, movement to urban areas, and the resulting diminution of the Swedish rural population.

In order to clarify the service which Mr. Anderson offers, it should be emphasized that unless the searcher knows the exact location of his or her ancestral place, it is of no use to forward an inquiry. There is no index for the maps at the present time, and if the exact location is not known, the resulting labor with a magnifying glass could consume much time. But if the location is known, the most expeditious way to learn on which map the locality may be found is to furnish Mr. Anderson with the following information:

- a. The name of the croft, farm, village, etc.
- b. The name of the parish.
- c. The *län* or county in which the parish is located. (It should be emphasized that in some cases there are three or four parishes in Sweden with the same name, and it is quite important to know the *län*, where the parish is situated).

Correspondents are informed not to send any money until the place name has been located on one of the topographical maps. Once this has been done, Mr. Anderson will inform the searcher and tell him or her that the map has been found. The cost of the maps varies, depending upon if one desires the map folded or *in plano*, i.e. flat, to be shipped in a tube. Anderson Bookstore can only furnish the type that becomes available to them. Prices for each map are currently — flat sheets, \$7.95, plus \$2.00 shipping and handling; folded, \$9.50, plus \$.75 postage and oversize are \$12.50 plus shipping and handling.

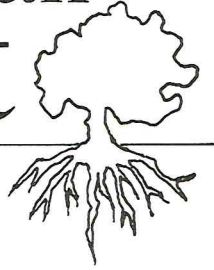
A description of the maps may be in order. Except for the more sparsely settled regions of northern Sweden, bordering on Norway and Finland, the maps are in the scale of 1:50,000 or about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile to the inch. In northern Sweden where the scale is 1:100,000, allow  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles to the inch. The maps generally measure 20 × 20 inches and cover 16 × 16 miles. The 1:100,000 scale maps cover twice as much area. In about 25 coastal areas, where only a small portion of the land mass is mapped, this portion is often added to the contiguous regular map, which makes it an oversize map 20 × 30 inches, priced accordingly.

There are approximately 300 maps for the southern half of Sweden or that portion which is scaled 1:50,000. In order to make it easier to locate a given place, a grid system has been devised (see illustration). Each square in the grid has been given the name of the largest city or town within its borders. Each square is divided into four sub-sections (or maps) and are coded according to the points of the compass. Thus if we look at the grid in the illustration, we find that as an example the Skara square may be found at the coordinate D-8. Each of the sub-sections has been coded Skara NO (Skara North East); Skara SO (Skara South East); Skara SV (Skara South West) and Skara NV (Skara North West).

The Anderson Book Store has from one to three maps in stock for each segment. Orders may be placed for those not in stock, but it may take up to ninety days for delivery. All inquiries and orders should be sent to Anderson Book Store, 120 Lincoln, P.O. Box 149, Lindsborg, KS 67456.

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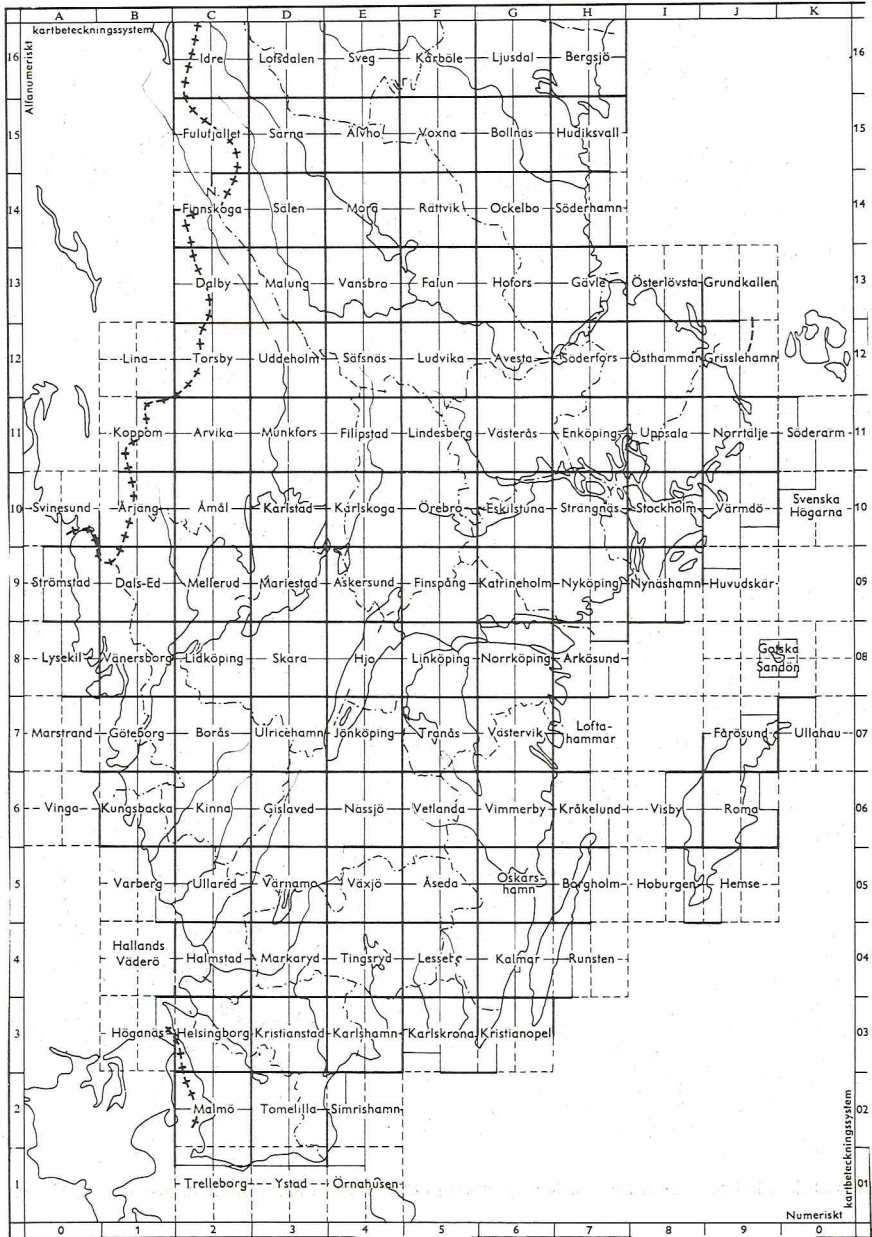
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Bladindelning till topografiska kartan i skala 1:50 000



Grid system used for the Swedish detailed maps to locate a specific area.

