

12-1-2012

Led by words (bouppteckningar)

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Recommended Citation

Sandin (Pono), Norman (2012) "Led by words (bouppteckningar)," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 32 : No. 4 , Article 9.
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Led by words

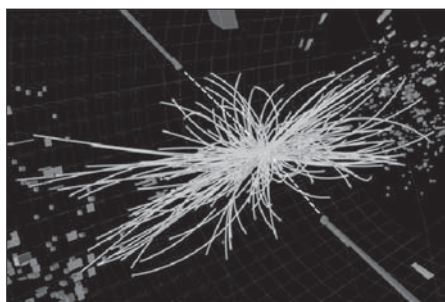
– my journey in the world of *bouppteckningar*

BY NORMAN SANDIN (PONO)

Boy, am I lucky! Why? Because I have ancestors who are Swedes! Some 15 years ago I started pursuing my genealogy. I had already been gathering contemporary information on my relations, but I decided to start digging into my ancestral heritage. The first thing I learned was that all four of my grandparents immigrated to the United States from Sweden. The second thing I learned was that Swedish records were among the best in the world. Boy, am I lucky!

Over those next few years I found some 567 direct ancestors – those who actually contributed to my DNA – and some 5,428 persons including siblings of directs, with some brief excursions into spouses and descendants of siblings. I collected names, dates, and places for these people as typical genealogists do, and quite enjoyed it.

Then I discovered *bouppteckningar* (*bous*) and my life took a turn. In fact, if one would plot the various paths I have taken since the discovery, it would resemble the data chart from the Large Hadron Collider interpreted to depict the Higg's boson.



Let me explain

When a person died in Sweden in earlier times a qualified team was called in to inventory the estate and evaluate all chattel and real property. This was done to settle all claims and debts, as well as to identify the heirs and provide the basis for disposition of the estate. Not everyone was subject to this, but when one can be found for an ancestor, it is a treasure trove of detail into the day-to-day life of that person and his family. These *bous* are found in the archives of the *härad* (legal district) where the person had lived. They are available by microfilm or online (if you have a subscription).

For a person like me however, translating *bous* to English is a great challenge. They are handwritten in Swedish in ledgers, but this statement alone doesn't begin to describe the difficulty. Handwriting factors include the recorder's penmanship, spelling, and knowledge of the decedent's areas of interest. Language factors include local dialect, year of the death, and age and dialect of the recorder. Ledger factors include quality of paper and ink used, storage conditions, and digitizing techniques used. I've only done a dozen *bous*, but in just this sample, the above factors varied widely.

Now we must add my personal shortcomings. I started with almost zero knowledge of Swedish. Those few words I did know came from parents who knew the language in their youth but lost it over time from disuse. In addition, the lifestyles of

my ancestors were unfamiliar to me. They all were firmly attached to the land as reflected by possession of animals, farm equipment, wagons, and sleighs, while some also had specialties such as milling and charcoal burning. I was quite ignorant of most of these activities – but that was the fascination of the pursuit.

Fortunately, many items found in a 1785 household will likely also appear in one in 1882 and all the years between. And that type of item is in my house today. I'm talking about knives, forks, and spoons, pots and pans, plates and bowls, furniture and bedding, and clothing. Once I learned these words, they could be recognized in each *bou*.

Weaving tools

Other words took me down their path. *Väfstol* (loom) led me to learn a bit about loom accessories, with their reeds, shafts, shuttles, heddles, pulleys, winders, harnesses, and cogs, as well as the ribbon or inkle loom. Swedish is *skedar*, *skaft*, *skyttel*, *solv*, *trissa*, *nystblad*, *spännare*, *kuggar*, and *bandstol*.

Production of linen

Häckla (heckle) led me down the road to processing flax into linen by breaking, scutching, heckling, combing, spinning, and weaving. Tools for those processes include *bråkor*, *häcklor*, *kammar*, *spinnrock*, and *väfstol*. *Bast* is the raw fiber and *linne* is the fabric.

Cloth types

Vadmal (homespun) led me to explore period cloth types. Blends of linen, wool, and cotton and methods of fabrication include *dräll*, *blaggarn*, *kalmink*, *rask*, *kamlott*, and *lärift*. *Lin*, *ull*, and *bomull* are the big three fibers, *silke* is silk, and *sammet* is velvet. Definitions of the blends and methods are still vague to me, just like the English word “worsted” which makes my eyes glaze over.

Production of aquavit

Brännvinspanna (still) introduced me to the equipment for distilling alcohol, including the still, cover, funnels, pipes, and cooling vessel. Still parts include *hatt*, *tratt*, *pipor*, and *kylfat*.

Cattle

Kviga (heifer) got me curious about farm animals, so I had to learn the words *anka*, *bock*, *får*, *galt*, *get*, *gris*, *gumse*, *häst*, *höna*, *kyckling*, *kalv*, *killing*, *ko*, *lamm*, *ox*, *risbit*, *spädgris*, *sugga*, *sto*, *tacka*, *tjur*, and *tupp*. Now let's see if I remember – duck, male goat, sheep, boar, goat, pig, male sheep, horse, hen, chick, calf, kid, cow, lamb, ox, 1 to 3 y.o. male goat, suckling pig, sow, mare, ewe, bull, and rooster.



Log joinery

Timmerhake (log dog) got me into the field of log joinery, where I found *drag*, *kävla*, *huggjärn*, *bandknif*, and *vändhake*. These tools had other uses as well, but supported construction with logs – dividers, gutter adze, chisel, two-handled band knife or spoke-shave, and cant hook or peavey.

Smithy tools

Städ (anvil) reminded me of smithy tools I had used before and led to *hammar och tång*, *rasp*, *filar*, *blåsbäl*, *skruvstäd*, *nageltorn*, and *hovtyg*. These tools are used by blacksmiths, tinsmiths, and even farriers. They include hammer and tongs, graters, files, bellows, vice, nail head form, and farrier tools.

Fishing equipment

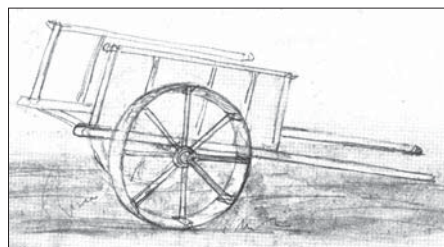
One of my ancestors was a miller, but must have fished for additional income. He had 24 fishing nets and 4 boats. Fishing equipment included *läggnät*, *skottnät*, *slinga*, *båt*, *eka*, *metrev*, *träkrok*, and *ljuster*. The gear was lay net, trammel net, fishnet section, boat, flat-bottomed row boat, fishline, wooden fish hook, and fishing gig. One boat was upriver, one downriver, one on a local pond, and one at home.

Farming equipment

Hand tools for farm and garden showed up in most of the *bous* and some had more serious equipment like *vält*, *harv*, and many types of *plog*. That is a roller for flattening the field, a harrow; and plow. Plows included *järnplog*, *hästplog*, *vändplog*, *snöplog*, and *finnplog* or *gaffelplog*. That is iron plow, horse plow, mould-board plow, snow plow, and Finnish plow or fork plow (for rocky fields).

Wagons and carriages

Kärra, *skrin*, and *vagn* introduced me to wheeled conveyances. Perhaps I'm oversimplifying it, but these three words seem to be somewhat generic terms for carts, light wagons, and heavy wagons. The *dragkärra* and *färdkärra* are light manual pull



A dung cart.

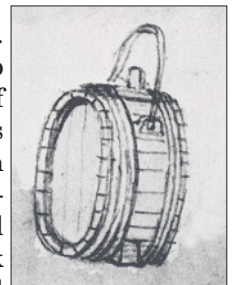
cart and animal drawn travel cart. *Färdskrinda* and *höskrinda* are somewhat heavier travel buggy and hay wagon. And *åkvagn* or *trilla* and *planvagn* or *flakvagn* are the more robust carriage and flatbed wagon.

Winter travel

Of course winter was a significant factor so some substitute for wheels was required – *släde* and *kälke* were used for that purpose. Various sleighs and sledges or toboggans were used for work and travel. Their use or cargo usually was attached to the word. Examples are *kyrkosläde* and *vedkälke* – church sleigh and firewood sledge.

Containers

By far the largest group of Swedish words found in these *bous* involve the subject of *kärl* (containers). I feel the need to summarize rather than simply list them. Barrel, bin, box (4), chest, jar (2), jug, keg, pail or bucket (7), trough, tub (3), and vat each have 1 or more “root” words as noted. But it doesn't stop there. Many of these root words are combined with words that indicate the intended content (milk pail), the material the container is made of (wooden box), or the intended use of the container (brew vat). The possible combinations are limited only by the imagination of the recorder.



Summary

Every one of the Swedish words discussed here appeared in at least one of the 12 *bous* that were translated during this period. The words themselves gave great insight into the lives of my ancestors and further educated me in many areas. The monetary side gave still further insight and revealed that the sample covered a wide range of the human condition. The following table provides a means for comparison. Values are given for 7 inventory items that

are somewhat common, 4 category sub-totals, and the total value of each estate.

The monetary systems changed over this time and values needed to be adjusted to provide a valid comparison. Several early ones showed values in two systems, the higher values were divided by 18 to get the lower. Shown in the table are the lower values. The 1879 and 1882 may need some adjustment – possibly a division by 4. The 90 *daler* cow in 1785 is odd relative to other item values, but consistent with other animals in the same inventory.

After adjustments, 1820 was the largest estate. The gentleman had significant real estate and was owed more on promissory notes than anyone else. 1879 was the only one with a negative remainder – last

digits of debts and total are unreadable.

Instead of doing an inventory of loose items for 1853, an auction was conducted and the proceeds determined the total.

* Real estate apparently belonged to the widow and was not included in the estate.

** Heritable rights to value added to rental property (*röjselrätt*) – i.e., buildings, new fields, etc.

*** Loose property was auctioned and not inventoried.

Afterword

It doesn't seem like much now that I reread it, but it took many months, lots of help and innumerable side trips to get where the information is today. The result is a dozen trans-

lated *bouppteckningar* and a Swedish-English Pictorial Dictionary with more than 750 words online and available to help others trying to do a translation.

These Genealogy Resources are available at *p. 30*. I hope they will help you.

Ed:s note: Norman Sandin has written before on the *bous*. See SAG 2009:3 and 2009:4.



An 18th century man from Småland.

	cow	silver tumb	taylor sciss	food cab	loom	clo-thing	copr ketl	real est	loose prop	cla-ims	deb-ts	total
1785	90			12	7.3			300*	1542		1015	529
1793	7	.5	.2		.5		4	194	275		58	411
1795	7		.1	3.4		29	5	222**	620	137	209	770
1803	11	1	.1	3.3	.5	25.2	1.1	555	268	149	65	800
1807	12				1.7	13.5	.6		133			133
1820	15	1.5				7.5	10	1800	358	726	41	2844
1822	13		.1	4	1.3	19	4.7		417	108	165	370
1829	10			2		10	4	190	112	190	57	435
1849	16	.3			2	10		797	464	30	157	1133
1853	***							150	142		135	157
1879	50					25		619	310		235x	-145x
1882	50	.5	.3	6	6	15		2300	354	320	107	2867

Swedish noblemen in California in 1852

In SAG 1/2012, on page 18, there was an article on Swedes found in the 1852 state census of California. One *R. Fleetwart* was identified as Baron Gustaf Robert Fleetwood, b. 1824 Dec. 23 in Uddevalla (Göt.), son of Baron Carl Johan Fleetwood and his wife Sophia Carolina Gödecke. He immigrated in 1845, and in 1855 continued to Australia (SPAUS #950).

Another one was *Albin Fredrik Adalrik Gegerfelt*, b. 1823 Aug. 16 in Jönköping, who immigrated un-

known date, and died in the U.S. on 1891 April 20.

Now a specialist on Swedish noblemen abroad, *Örjan Werkström*, has found two more in that article.

The first is recorded as just *C. Westfield*, but can be identified as Claes Henning Wästfelt, b. 1829 Jan. 27, immigrated unknown year, later major in the Confederate Army, died 1863 Apr. 5 near Mobile, AL.

The other one was listed as *Chas Quilfald*, and has been identified as

Carl Gustaf von Quillfelt, who might have been a son of Wilhelm Carl Kurt von Qvillfelt, who had at least three sons who immigrated to the U.S. This man is probably the Carl Gustave von Quilfelt who in 1854 Jan. 9 married Anna Maria Kortkamp in Calaveras Co., CA.

Source: Elgenstierna, Gustaf: *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor (History of the Swedish Nobility)* (1925–1936).