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# Jean explored the land of her roots in 2013

## A Swedish descendant from America visiting Virestad parish

BY YLVA SAMUELSSON

During Midsummer 2013 a very nice lady by the name of Jean Larson of Dallas, Texas, visited Virestad parish. She made a trip of more than 8000 kilometers across the world in her ancestral tracks, to see with her own eyes places where her roots are firmly planted in the soil of Småland.

Jean's great-grandfather's name was Sven Larsson, and he was born in 1848 in Kateboda (then associated with Virestad parish). On 31 Jan. 1870 Sven emigrated, like so many others, from small poor Småland to the great rich land of America, where opportunities to earn a living was so infinitely greater.

Sven went first to Rockford, Illinois, and the following year his siblings also came. Peter (b. 18 July 1851) and Nilla (b. 26 Feb. 1845) joined him in Rockford. Sven and Peter earned their living as farm laborers for eight years in Illinois. They saved their wages to eventually be able to buy their own separate farms in Maple Valley township, Buena Vista County, Iowa.

### Marriage and family

On 4 Sep. 1881 Kristina Jonsdotter (in the U.S.: Christina Johnson), born 9 Oct. 1856 in Finnanäs, Västra Tors-

ås, migrated to Buena Vista County, Iowa. She and Sven found each other and married shortly thereafter. Sven sold his first farm and bought, together with Christina, a new farm in Diamond township, Cherokee County, Iowa. At about the same time he renounced his allegiance to the Swedish king and became a United States citizen.

Sven and Christina had four children, three sons and a daughter. The eldest son, George, became a farmer like his father. He had a farm in Aurelia, and he married Lydia Lydell, a widow originally from Hestra (Smål.). She already had two children, and together they had three more. Their son Orville abandoned his father's occupation and became an accountant for the government. His only child was his daughter Jean, who is now an avid genealogist and thus a third generation Swedish descendant.

### Plans for Sweden!

After actively researching her family for over 18 years, Jean decided she wanted to visit the places where her ancestors had been born and where they experienced their childhood. So she went on a week-long guided group tour in Denmark and Sweden and remained in Scandinavia a few extra days for personal travel. Prior to leaving she researched heritage association web pages for parishes where her ancestors lived. She also contacted the Kronoberg Genealogical Association (KGF) and asked for information about Virestad and Västra Torsås. Ingegerd Johansson, from KGF, and Ylva Samuelsson from Virestad heritage society responded.

	Personernas namn, stånd, embete, yrke och näringsfång, (backstugu-, inhyses- och fattighjon), nationalitet (om främmande), lyten, (svagsinta, blinda, döfstamma).	Födelse-		
		År.	Mån och dag.	Ort, (Socken i Län, Stad)
1	J. Stenbrohult N:o Kateboda 1 Mantal.			
2	1/4 Eg. Lars Larsson	1815	26/4	yyed
3	H. Svenborg Svensdottr	1809	29/8	
4	J. Nils Larsson	1830	20/5	
5	D. Ingrid Larsson	1840	4/11	
6	D. Nilla Larsson	1845	26/2	
7	J. Lars Larsson	1848	16/7	
8	J. Peter Larsson	1851	18/7	

Virestad AI:18, p. 192 (1866-1870). Picture from Arkiv Digital.



*Kateboda farm in 1942, then owned by Lars Gustaf Nilsson, b. 1883, son of Johannes Nilsson and his wife Ingrid Larsdotter. Picture from Svenska Gods och Gårdar (1942).*

She sought assistance for the additional days that she wanted to spend visiting Virestad and Västra Torsås. And since Ingegerd and Ylva themselves are dedicated genealogists, there was of course no doubt that this was something that we very much wanted to help with.

A detailed plan was made up for the three days that were available. All were aimed so Jean would see both as much as possible of her ancestral home, but also that she would get a glimpse of the "Småland of Today."



*Ylva Samuelsson and Ingegerd Johansson.*

## Arrival in Småland

At noon on Midsummer Eve Jean arrived at *Pensionat Björkelund* in Stenbrohult. There she met Ingegerd and Ylva and the first item on the agenda was a visit to the Midsummer celebrations in Virestads Community Park. In America midsummer is not celebrated, so it was especially satisfying to see how Swedes celebrate this event, with the midsummer pole,

folk dance team dances and costumes, girls with garlands in their hair, etc. She visited the cabins in the park and saw what her ancestral homes may have looked like.

After midsummer celebrations, we were welcomed at the home of Hugo Magnusson and his wife Maj-Britt in Brommeshult, Virestad. Hugo was born there, and it turned out he is a third cousin to Jean's father!

He showed a photograph he had of his grandfather's son and his family, and Jean was pleased that she knew the photograph well. It was her great-grandfather with his family, and it is a copy of the larger picture that she has at home in Dallas. Ancestors echo across both centuries and continents, and we can all understand how clearly she feels bonds tied together in this now.

The talk with Hugo and his wife was both enjoyable and interesting, and Maj-Britt served coffee and homemade cakes that tasted deliciously good on midsummer evening.

## On the road

The next day it was time for a tour along the byways around Virestad and Västra Torsås. Ingegerd was well prepared and chose farms where Jean's ancestors resided. First stop was Gottåsa old inn, then we visited the Kär, Kull, and Torsås villages.



*Torsås Sjögård, with the Sjöströms, and Ylva and Ingegerd. Jean stands to the right.*

In Västra Torsås we visited the first church and looked for a headstone that may be related to Jean. Then we went to Torsås Sjögård, where we were welcomed by Ann-Kristin and Thomas Sjöström who now own and occupy the beautiful old farm that has been in Ann-Kristin's family for many generations. Even Ann-Kristin is distantly related to Jean, and there was a nice chat with the family before it was time to rush on to a lunch on Thurs farm in Lönehult.

After lunch we drove to Finnanäs where Jean's grandfather's mother Christina was born. Jean had her camera ready, and took pictures of all the farms we showed her. Of course, most of the houses are newly built or renovated since her ancestors inhabited them, but the Småland core can always be seen.

## The stones of Småland

Jean told an anecdote about how Swedes who moved to America felt about rocks even after they left Sweden. One of Sven Larsson's sisters, Ingrid, did not move to the United States, but her daughter Signild did. She married Charles Nelson, from Västra Torsås and they had four children. One day their two daughters wanted to build a "rock garden", i.e. a garden with rocks, in their yard.



*Virestad church.*

When Charles Nelson came home that day he told the girls to put the rocks back. He said he was from the rocky Västra Torsås and did not want his daughters putting rocks in his yard. Since childhood he had to work himself weary removing all these miserable stones from the fields in Sweden.

Well, via Brommeshult and Hor meshult we came to Åbogen, and then the day was spent already so we ended the tour there.

## In Kateboda and more

Sunday began with a visit to two of the Kateboda farms. In advance, we had contacted the current residents there, Per-Olof Johnsson and Stefan Salomonsson, and they had kindly consented to let us come and roam around the yard and take pictures. Unfortunately, the weather was not the best, but for Jean, it was obviously a good experience to finally see her great-grandfather's birthplace. She turned up the jacket hood against the rain and photographed



*The Massa Pettern's dug-out (jordkula) in Västra Torsås.*

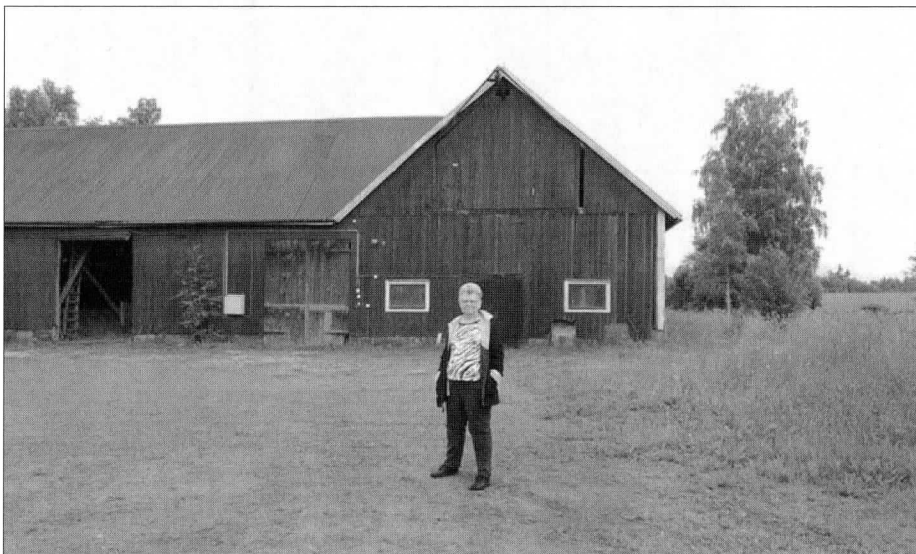
everything of interest. The house in Kateboda is certainly not the same anymore, but there are gateposts, a root cellar, stone walls, and much more that look like it could have been there since the late 1800s. Even some older farm implements, such as a scythe leaning against the barn, was photographed and discussed.

From Kateboda we continued the trek out to Tjurkö, in Agunnaryd parish, where Ingegerd offered a lunch of smoked sausages cooked the "Småland way," in the wonderful environment of the beautiful old farm where she grew up.

In the afternoon we visited Massa Pettern's dug-out (*jordkoja*) in Västra Torsås. It is a well preserved poor man's dwelling, which shows visitors how modern living conditions actually were like for the district's less fortunate. On the way we stopped also, of course, in Grönhult and Stahult, two farms that often occur in a Västra Torsås researchers ancestry.

The evening ended with a visit to Stenbrohult church, where this year's Music Week had begun that day. A visit to one of our beautiful churches, with a taste of our beautiful Swedish music, thus rounded off American Jean's visit to Småland.

We hope she has had a fruitful stay in our wonderful countryside, and that she has taken home many wonderful memories from her ancestral homeland.



*Jean at the Kateboda farm.*

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