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Skräddar Anders Fredrik Eriksson

– the story of a Swedish Baptist in America

By MARTIN STÅHL

An interesting find

Many genealogists probably experience great joy in their search for their ancestors when they come across individuals in their family who can tell us something more about their lives, who may have “achieved” something. Unfortunately, for most of us, this doesn’t happen very often, but when it does occur, the satisfaction grows.

Last year, shortly after I had started my genealogical research, I discovered a short note in a parish book, saying that my great-great-grandfather (ffmf) had immigrated to America in 1910. That was to become the beginning of a wonderful journey where I have slowly puzzled his life together, and, in my search, established connections with previously unknown relatives in both Sweden and the U.S.¹ Here I would like to tell the story of an old man who left his village in Dalarna to seek a better life for himself and his wife in a country far away from home. At the time of the immigration, four of his children had already left for America.

Anders Fredrik’s early life and family origins

Anders Fredrik Eriksson was born 1845 February 3 in the village of Sunnanö (nr. 13),² on a peninsula of the same name, at the southern side of the Lake Runn, Dalarna. Sunnanö lies in the pretty and peaceful little parish of Torsång, close to the modern city of Borlänge. He was christened the day after in the beautiful parish church of Torsång, next to Dalälven, the river that flows through the countryside, and he was given the same name as his one-year-older brother who had died shortly after birth.



Torsång Church – the oldest in Dalarna.

The name of the farm where Anders Fredrik lived was *Skräddar*

(“tailor”), which most likely derives from one of his ancestors on the paternal line (ffffff), Erik Matsson Öman (ca 1642-1727), who according to 17th century tax records (*mantalslängder*) was a tailor. Anders Fredrik was the fifth child of Skräddar Erik Ersson (1814-1882) and Anna Eliaedotter (1813-1883). He grew up with his four siblings on the same farm that generations of his family before him had lived on.³ It was the same farm on which he spent most of his life in Sweden and from which he left for America 65 years later. Between the years 1854 and 1860, Anders Fredrik attended the parish school, next to the church.⁴

His ancestors on his paternal line came from Torsång (on his grandfather’s side) and from the parish of Grangärde, in southern Dalarna (on his grandmother’s side). On his maternal line, Anders Fredrik’s ancestors came from the parish of Norrbärke, also in southern Dalarna. Some of his forefathers seem to be more interesting than others, such as his great-great-grandfather (mfmf), Johan Larsson (1709-1760) from Norrbärke, who was convicted of

Sunnanö										82									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
Torp, härad, och förtäglige n. n. under stads- eller landskapet.										År, dag och månad.									
Personer för och tillika med förtäglige, eller som personerna till, som varit uti k. l. k. i kyrkan.										År, dag och månad.									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
Anders Fredrik Eriksson	1845	2	3	♂															
Anders Fredrik Eriksson	1845	2	3	♂															
Anders Fredrik Eriksson	1845	2	3	♂															
Anders Fredrik Eriksson	1845	2	3	♂															

Torsång AIIa:3:82 (1910–1921). Picture from SVAR. The picture shows Anders Fredrik and his family leaving for the U.S. in August 1910. It also shows that son Gustaf Agdur, b. 1892 Jul. 12 is “icke döpt” (not baptized). Son Axel is a “målare” (painter).

theft and spent the last 15 years of his life in various prisons. He was also suspected of having murdered his stepson.

The sad story of Stina Andersdotter

Twenty-seven-year-old Anders Fredrik married Stina Andersdotter in the neighboring church of Stora Tuna 1872 May 20. She was to become my great-great-grandmother (ffmm). Stina Andersdotter had worked as a maid for a number of years in the parishes of Stora Tuna and Vika ever since she had left the parental home in 1863. She was born 1845 June 28 in Ovandal (nr. 15), Stora Tuna, the daughter of Tjern Anders Ersson (1804-1876) and Anna Ersdotter (1800-1881).

In 1867, Stina Andersdotter left Vika and moved back to Stora Tuna where she was employed as a maid at the inn in Buskåker. Two years later she was arrested for having stolen money from the inn, in total 600 *riksdaler*, on several occasions during the year 1869.⁵ This was a considerable amount, as it was the equivalent of more than a year's salary for an industrial worker. The money



Anders Fredrik Eriksson, wife, daughter, and grandson at their home in Sunnanö, Torsång, prior to emigration in 1910. The girl in the middle is possibly a granddaughter from Mora.

had partly been spent on the purchase of clothing in Falun, and partly been placed in Stina's bank account. However, most of the money could be handed back to its rightful owner, the widow and innkeeper Johanna Lundberg. Stina was sentenced 1870 January 12 to prison for one year and four months. Stina Andersdotter was imprisoned in the county prison of

Falun (*länsfängelset*), but was released 1871 February 7. Several prison documents give interesting information about her, such as her physical appearance and what personal belongings she had, etc.⁶

After her release, Stina Andersdotter returned to Stora Tuna, but this time to the village of Dalsjö, before she left Stora Tuna once and for all when she married Anders Fredrik the year after. The couple settled down on Anders Fredrik's family farm in Sunnanö. The first child, Johanna Christina, was born shortly after, but died in 1873. A second child, Johanna Sofia (my great-grandmother, ffmm), was born in Stora Tuna 1874 June 1. The place of birth cannot be identified for sure, but since the child's mother, Stina Andersdotter, died of meningitis in Dalsjö, Stora Tuna, only ten days after the birth, it is almost certain that Johanna Sofia was also born there. Stina Andersdotter was only 28 years old when she died.

Years of travel and a new family

To provide for his young daughter, Anders Fredrik left Sunnanö in December 1874 and moved to Dalsjö to find employment as a *statare*, an



The family farm in Sunnanö, lived in by generations of Anders Fredrik's ancestors. At the time of the emigration, it consisted of two dwelling houses, seen here at the front. The picture was taken by author Karl-Erik Forsslund in 1921, shortly before the buildings were demolished. Printed by permission of the Dalarnas museum.

agricultural laborer who received the greatest part of his payment in kind. It was perhaps here that he met his future wife, Anna Lisa Jansdotter (an illegitimate child of the maid Greta Ersdotter, born 1851 Jan. 13 in Naglarby, Gustafs). They married in the church of Stora Tuna 1875 Sept. 17. Anna Lisa brought her illegitimate son, Carl Johan (born in 1873), into the marriage.

The couple didn't stay long in Dal-sjö. A few months later that year they moved on and were to settle in various nearby parishes over the coming years (Stora Kopparberg, Stora Tuna, and Torsång), before they finally settled down in Sunnanö in November 1879. Anders Fredrik had supported the family by taking on different jobs as a *statare* and as a *rättare* (an agricultural foreman). The number of children had been increased by the births of Elin Elisabeth (in 1876) and Fredrik Emil (in 1878; the latter sadly drowned in Stora Skedvi in the summer of 1896). Others were to follow: Oscar Emanuel (in 1880), Anna Juliana (in 1883), Axel Albin (in 1888), and Gustaf Agdur (in 1892).

Poverty and hardship

What was life like in those days for an ordinary farming couple like Anders Fredrik and Anna Lisa? It is difficult to imagine the hardship they must have gone through. A glimpse of how life would have been is given us by the parish book: in 1878, for example (the year of Fredrik Emil's birth), Anders Fredrik and Anna Lisa were living in Fagersta (Stora Tuna). They were away from their family without other people to rely on for help. They lacked a social network and security. As Anders Fredrik was working long days, Anna Lisa gave birth and cared for the couple's other three children, all under the age of five.

What were the material conditions of the family? An interesting insight of how a rural home would have looked like in the 1870s and 1880s is provided by the inventories of estate of Anders Fredrik's first wife, Stina Andersdotter (1874), and his father,

Erik Ersson (1882).⁷ The poverty is striking: no luxury items, only everyday items such as a few pieces of furniture, tools, and some clothes.

Religious conversion and life in Sunnanö

Anders Fredrik Eriksson and his wife joined the largest dissenting movement in Sweden, the Baptist faith. They were baptized, together with Anders Fredrik's older sister Johanna Envall, 1890 September 10, in the local Baptist congregation, Torsångs *baptistförsamling*.⁸ The congregation had 25 members and worshipped in the Elim chapel in the nearby village of Räfstylla. The couple was to remain faithful to their new religion throughout their lives.

Life went on at the farm in Sunnanö. Through maps, photos, tax and court records, etc., it has been possible to follow the development of the farm during Anders Fredrik's lifetime. It consisted of two dwelling houses of different sizes. The smaller one (which can be seen at the front of the "Forsslund" picture, p. 2) was added at some point after 1818. That year the land was divided up between the farmers in Sunnanö in a new order (*laga skifte*) and a detailed map of the peninsula, with all its buildings, was drawn up for this purpose.

The larger house (which stands to the left of the smaller house on the "Forsslund" picture – the back of it can be seen from the lake on the picture from 1910) is marked on the *laga skiftes* map. It is either the same building or it was replaced by a newer one. Apart from the two dwelling houses, there were also other buildings, used for storage, etc.⁹

When Anders Fredrik took over the farm after his father's death in 1882, it consisted of 1.36 acres of land (including forest). A large part of the land was then sold by Anders Fredrik in 1886, for unknown reasons. He kept a part of the property for himself and later purchased a part of land from the neighboring estate. It was all sold shortly before the emigration in April 1910 for the sum of 1,000 *kronor*; buildings with forest and land in two different estates.¹⁰ Anders Fredrik was a *hemmansägare* and a *skattebonde*, which meant that he owned his land and paid the taxes directly to the Crown.

Leaving for America

Anders Fredrik and Anna Lisa were getting older. It seems to have been a natural decision, although a probably very hard one to make, when they decided to leave their village in Torsång for a secure old age in Amer-



This picture, ca 1915, shows daughter Johanna Ståhl in Falun, with husband and three sons. The boy in the middle, Bror Ragnar (1906-1992), is the author's grandfather.

ica. Four of their children had already emigrated: Carl Johan as early as 1893, Oscar Emanuel in 1903, and the two youngest boys, Axel Albin and Gustaf Agdur, in the spring of 1910. They all settled down in Chicago. Two of the daughters stayed at home: Elin Elisabeth in Mora (she married the painter August Vilhelm Språng, but sadly died in 1915, 38 years old), and Johanna Sofia in Falun (she married the railway employee Bror Gustaf Ståhl and had three sons). The third daughter, Anna Juliana, went to America on the same ship as her parents. In total, seven of the nine family members left their native country.

Destination Chicago

The emigration from Torsång was smaller in comparison with that from other parishes in Dalarna. Of 1.3 million people who left Sweden – 45,000 of them from Dalarna – it is estimated that just under 200 people emigrated from Torsång.¹¹ Anders Fredrik and Anna Lisa left their home 1910 August 19 (according to a certificate given by the parish). They travelled via Gothenburg to Oslo, where they sailed on the *Hellig Olav*

(Scandinavian-American Line) a week later. On the 6th of September they arrived in New York where they first were kept for observation due to medical reasons before they were admitted.¹²

It must have been a great adjustment for an elderly couple from a small village in Dalarna to adapt to their new life in the great and hectic city of Chicago. The fact that several of their children were already there must have made it easier for them. A few weeks after the arrival, on the 26th of September, they became members of the Austin Swedish Baptist Church, where they remained active until their deaths, 14 and 15 years later.¹³ During their first eight years in America, Anders Fredrik (or “Fredrick Erickson” as he was called in his new country) and Anna Lisa stayed at various addresses (at least two) in the city. In 1918, when the U.S. entered the First World War and the risk existed of their sons being drafted, which would mean there was no one at home to help them out, the couple moved in to the Swedish Baptist Old People’s Home “Fridhem” in Morgan Park¹⁴. Here they were admitted on the 1st of March the same year. The home in Morgan Park,

previously located elsewhere, had been inaugurated in 1906 and had been provided with all the modern facilities.

The letters home

A fascinating and unique insight to life in Chicago in the 1910s and 1920s – and how it was perceived by Swedish immigrants – is given to us through seven letters from various years between 1915 and 1923, written by Anna Lisa to her son-in-law (August Vilhelm Språng) and her grandchildren in Mora.¹⁵ The letters are very touching in their love and tenderness. With all their spelling mistakes, trivial subjects, naivety, and simple form, they give us information that can’t be found elsewhere in any of the official documents. The most striking feature in the letters is the deep religiosity and the immense thankfulness to God and to the grandchildren in Mora for not having forgotten them. The sadness of never being able to see them again can be read between the lines. Despite this and the fact that life in Chicago was very simple, neither homesickness as such nor a desire to return to Sweden can be traced in the letters. They were happy where they were. According to the 1920 census, they were able to speak English, but they had not become naturalized.

The letters give us details about contacts with Swedish friends, about the war and periods of high prices (there and at home), general hardship and moves, Anders Fredrik’s worsening deafness, updates about what the children in Chicago were doing, etc. We get a view of the harsh living conditions of the family, about Oscar Emanuel who lost his wife, leaving four small children, and August Vilhelm Språng who encountered the same fate and had to raise six children on his own. Anna Lisa’s and Anders Fredrik’s health was deteriorating. In the last letter to the family in Mora, dated 1923 May 26, she couldn’t write it herself. Somebody at “Fridhem” had to help her with it. Anna Lisa expressed in the letter that she wouldn’t live for much longer.



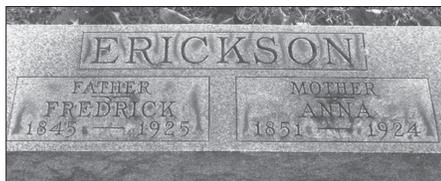
Anders Fredrik and Anna Lisa with family members in Chicago, 1915/1916.



A group picture (detail) from "Fridhem" taken in 1921. Anders Fredrik can be seen in the middle of the back row and Anna Lisa in front of him, to his right.

Epilogue

The last years were spent at "Fridhem." The year after her last letter to Mora, Anna Lisa died 1924 September 23. As a last personal tragedy (among several) in his life, Anders Fredrik was to experience the death of his eldest daughter, Johanna Ståhl in Falun, barely two months later. At 80 years old, he finally died the following spring, on the 26th of March 1925. He had survived two wives and four children. Anders Fredrik died of organic heart disease, Anna Lisa of diabetes. The couple were buried in the Forest Home Cemetery in Chicago (lot 19, sect. 57).¹⁶



What were Anders Fredrik and Anna Lisa like as people? In the preserved documents we get a picture of them as a decent and hardworking couple, as a very kind couple who cared a lot for the people around them, and as a couple with a strong faith, who were for a long period engaged and active in their congregation. As two human beings who wanted to do right for themselves and

who, because of their common, everyday lives, most likely would have remained among those millions of anonymous people in history if they hadn't been brought back to life again by this article. An obituary of Anders Fredrik and Anna Lisa will end the story of their lives: "...now this amiable couple is at home with the Lord. They were united with the Austin congregation in 1910 and when they stayed among us, they were always a joy and comfort at our meetings. They were thoroughly devout and never a word of complaint could be heard from them, but instead, thanked God and thanked the minister and thanked everyone who came into their lives."

Notes

1) Material for this article has mainly been gathered from different parish archives (Torsång, Stora Tuna, Gustafs, Vika, Stora Kopparberg, Norrbärke, Grangärde, Falu Kristine, and Mora), if no other source is specifically mentioned. The original church records, court, and prison records are kept in the Regional Archives (*Landsarkivet*) in Uppsala, Sweden. The Swedish and American censuses (1880,

1890, and 1900 and, for the latter part, 1910 and 1920) have also been used.

- 2) The exact date of birth hasn't actually been possible to determine. All the Swedish records, including the register of births, mention the 3rd of February as the date. Only the records of the Torsångs *baptistförsamling* state the 2nd of February as the date of birth. This date also occurs in all the American records; for instance, in the death certificate. To make the situation even more confusing, Anders Fredrik's wife writes in a letter (dated the 7th of Dec. 1920) of the 2nd of February as his birthday. Did Anders Fredrik know himself what his correct date of birth was?
- 3) The village of Sunnanö was first mentioned in a record from 1368. The name means "south on the island." (See Harry Ståhls *Ortnamnen i Kopparbergslagen*, Stockholm 1960, p. 104.) In 1910 approximately 100 people were living in the village of Sunnanö. The other villages on the peninsula are Nordanö and Viken.
- 4) *Torsångs hembygdsförenings årsblad 1985: Folkbildning och skolundervisning i Torsång (tiden före 1893)*, by Thorild Ahlund, and Torsång's parish records, *skolrådets protokoll och andra handlingar rörande skolväsendet* (K4, vol. 2 and 3). The latter source contains information about Anders Fredrik's school attendance (grades, etc.).
- 5) *Stora Tuna och Gustafs tingslags häradsrätt (protokoll vid extra förrättningar, A3, vol. 6)*.
- 6) *Kriminalvårdsanstalten i Falun*: see for instance *fånggrullor* (D2aa, vol. 15), *kyrkböcker* (D2ba, vol. 8), *inkomna prästbetyg* (E6, vol. 1) and *fångarnas motböcker* (G7, vol. 6).
- 7) Inventories of estate of Stina Andersdotter (nr. 6, Torsångs *höstting* 1874) and of Erik Ersson (nr. 3, Torsångs *vårting* 1882) in Torsångs *tingslags häradsrätt, boupteckningar* (F2, vol. 11 and 12).
- 8) See Torsångs *baptistförsamling* (Elim) at Dalarnas *Folkrörelse-*

arkiv. Historik as well as mötesprotokoll (A1, vol. 1) and medlemsmatrikel (D1). Anders Fredrik and Anna Lisa are listed as members nrs. 76 and 77.

- 9) In the inventory of estate of Erik Ersson from 1882, four other buildings are mentioned: a barn, a storage building, a cattle shed, and a forage shed. The buildings were valued higher than the land. The maps, which have been used to study the history of the property in the 19th and 20th centuries, can be downloaded on the website of *lantmäteriet* (the Swedish national land survey).
- 10) The main real estate was called Sub nr. 13 Sunnanö, Littra Na, 22:1. It was divided up in 1968. The neighboring estate was Sunnanö nr. 13, Littra N. The information is taken from Falu domsagas södra tingslag: lagfartsboken (C1b, vol. 27) and lagfartsprotokoll (A2a, vol. 5, 8b, 20 and 28). The following paragraphs, including attachments, are relevant: 133-134 (1898), 110 (1904), 569-570 and 606 (1916) and 103-105 (1924). The purchase was also mentioned in the newspaper *Dalpien* on the 20th of May 1910.
- 11) See *Torsångs hembygdsförenings årsblad 1996: Utvandringen från Torsång*, by Pär Nilsson/Harald Skölvling. However, this number must be seen as an absolute minimum, since individuals who de-

parted from other parishes (such as Anders Fredrik's five children) are not included in this number. With these people not taken into account, Torsång's population was reduced by approx. 14%. This figure can be compared with other parishes, such as Våmhus, which lost 60% of its population.

- 12) The emigration documents are found on the website *Ancestry.com*.
- 13) The First Swedish Baptist Church of Austin was founded in 1891. The name was later changed to "Central Avenue Baptist Church" and existed until 1982. In the membership records, Anders Fredrik and Anna Lisa are listed as nrs. 469 and 470. The records were provided by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center (Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois).
- 14) The official name of "Fridhem" was "Home of Rest – The Swedish Baptist Home for the Aged." For the early history of the home, see *Fridhem – a brief history of a noble work 1905-1930* (Chicago 1930), by Eric Scherstrom.
- 15) The letters have kindly been provided by Jan-Olov Språng, great-grandson of Anders Fredrik Eriksson. Jan-Olov Språng has also been helpful with supplying many of the pictures. Two of them can be seen here: the picture of Johanna Ståhl and her family and the one from "Fridhem." Margot Mats-

son, another great-grandchild, has been a great help as well. The picture on the front cover and the one of the farm from 1910 have been taken from her photo collection. Other pictures have been provided by American relatives: the one of the Elim chapel by Joyce Aspinall, and the family picture from Chicago by Ken Erickson, both great-grandchildren of Anders Fredrik. A great thanks to these four people, and to others, who have contributed with material to my research.

- 16) "...nu äro dessa älskvärda makar hemma hos Herren. De förenades med Austin församlingen år 1910 och medan de bodde ibland oss voro de alltid en glädje och tröst vid våra sammankomster. De voro genom gudfruktiga och aldrig hördes ett klagans ljud från dem utan fastmera, alltid, tack gode Gud och tack käre pastor och tack till alla som kom i deras närhet." See *Församlingens banér*, the monthly newsletter of the Austin Swedish Baptist Church, Chicago, April 1925.

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The Swedish American Line in an exhibition in Karlstad

At the *Sweden America Center* in Karlstad, Sweden, there is now an exhibition about the Swedish American Line (SAL), the first direct line from Göteborg, Sweden to America. It started in 1915 and made travels to America much easier. One of the attractions of the SAL was the ambition to give even the 3rd class passengers fine accommodations, not like before, huge dormitories, but instead separate cabins. More than a million travelled by the SAL during the company's lifetime, which ended in 1975.

The exhibition in Karlstad shows all kinds of items with a connection to SAL, like a part of a cabin with a washstand, menus, and even spoons that were gifts for 1st class passengers. These items have been collected by Torsten Torstensson, Ljungskile.

A database of some of the passengers (242.000 individuals) between 1915–1950 can be found on the CD *Emigranten Populär* and at *Ancestry.com*.

The exhibition closes at the end of the year 2011.

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