

6-1-2009

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Recommended Citation

Thorsell, Elisabeth (2009) "Those mysterious words, Part 2," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 29 : No. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol29/iss2/5>

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Those mysterious words – what do they mean? Part 2

BY ELISABETH THORSELL

Koja

A *koja* is a very small, probably also poor, cottage. My dictionary translates it as a “hovel.”

Bonde (pl. bönder)

In general it means farmer, but there were three kinds of farmers:

1) *skattebonde*; he owned his land, the children could inherit it, and he paid his taxes to the Crown directly.

2) *frälsebonde*; he farmed land belonging to a nobleman (*adelsman*), and paid his taxes to the nobleman, who kept it, as the nobility was exempt from ordinary taxes. After 1789 a *frälsebonde* was able to buy the land he had rented from his landlord.

3) *kronobonde*; he farmed lands belonging to the Crown and paid his taxes to the Crown. It was possible

from 1701 for the *kronobonde* to buy the land, and he had priority to buy the farm he lived on. This is called “*skatteköp*” and there are records about these purchases that can give a description of the various fields and other properties belonging to the farm, and also the price that was paid.

Inheritance of farmland

When a *skattebonde* died, one of his children usually took over the farm, and after evaluation paid the siblings their share of the value. The distribution of the inheritance (*arvskifte*) was regarded as a private matter, and does not often show up in the records of the local court.

But it was a different matter if the farmer wanted to sell land. If he had inherited it, it was called “*arvejord*.”

This type of land could not be sold out of the extended family, unless nobody wanted it. The intended sale had to be announced (*uppbjudet*) at three court meetings. If nobody in the family complained, then the buyer would get his land title (*lagfart*) during the fourth court meeting.

Land that people had purchased themselves (*avlingejord*) was easier to sell, but still had to be announced at three court meetings.

The records for purchases of land are kept in the records of the local court (*häradsrätt*), and are micro-filmed to the mid-1800s. During the 1800s the documents in possession of the farmer about land purchases start to be listed in the estate inventories (*bouppteckningar*).

Försvarslös

In the old days you had to have a steady job, like being a farmer, a tenant farmer, a craftsman, or be hired as a *dräng* or *piga* for a year.

If you did not have a master who gave you protection (*försvar*) and who could write a testimony for you, you might end up as being regarded as a vagrant (*lösdrivare*).

A vagrant could be arrested and taken to the county capital (*residensstaden*), and interrogated. These interrogations (*förhör*) are still to be found in the county records.

If your answers were not satisfactory, you might end up in the enlisted army, or be sentenced to work in a state-owned quarry.

Women usually were sent to a female prison, where they worked spinning for factories.

If a vagrant could find somebody in the home parish to give him/her a job, he/she was released.



The interior of a “*koja*” in Åsle, Västergötland. Imagine man, wife and six kids in the one room!