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Tragedy hits on the road to the port

An unexpected find in the church records shows the sad fate of an immigrating family

BY ELISABETH THORSELL

In the middle 1800s there was a family in Mellanmon village in Malung parish in Dalarna with the farm name of Torsper. A son in the family was named Torsper¹ Mats Halvarsson, born 9 July 1827 in Malung, son of Torsper Halvar Persson and his wife Kerstin Halvarsdotter.

On 12 December 1856 he married Joni Marit Jonsdotter, (born 28 October 1833) from the Lindjo farm in Östra Fors village, also in Malung, daughter of Lindjo Jonas Larsson (also called Joni) and his wife Niss Brita Nilsdotter.

Mats and Marit had several children, daughters Kerstin (b. 1857), Brita (b. 1863), and Anna (b. 1865). There was also a daughter, Brita, born 1861, who died in 1862.

Leaving for America

In 1869 Torsper Mats decided to leave for America. He left shortly before his pregnant wife Joni Marit Jonsdotter and their three daughters also left their home in Mellanmon on 29 May. Marit's brother, Joni Jonas, took them in his wagon on the road to the port of embarkation, Göteborg). Perhaps Joni Marit had hoped to give birth before she had to leave

Malung, or perhaps she had hoped not to give birth until later, when she had reached her destination.

A tragedy

They all had to pass through Värmland on their way to the port, and in the parish of Nordmark, not very far from Malung, Joni Marit unexpectedly gave birth to probably premature twins on June 3rd. The twins, *Halvard* and *Jonas*, were emergency baptized² by their uncle Joni Jonas, and died within an hour of their birth. According to family information the birth just happened in a gravel pit, as the event was very unexpected. The little boys were buried on June 6th in Nordmark.

As the family had already officially left Malung with their removal permit, the Nordmark pastor did not send a testimony of the burial of the twins to the Malung parish office. So it was just known in Malung that the children had been born and died somewhere in Värmland.

Going on

Evidently after some rest, the journey went on and Joni Marit and her daughters left for their voyage to

America. They met father Mats in Göteborg and all of them left on June 15 for England, and then went on a bigger ship to America.

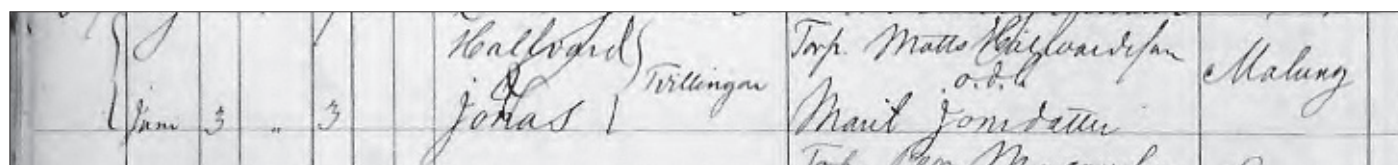
In America

The Halvorsson family settled first in Bishop Hill in Illinois, and later moved to Hayes in Clay County in Kansas, where they were found in the 1885 Kansas State Census, and by then the family had grown by three sons: twins John and Edward, born ca 1873, and little Martin, born ca 1877.

It is not known when Mats died, but he was still alive in 1885, when he is listed in the state census.

After the death of her husband Martha (Americanization of Marit) moved back to Bishop Hill. In 1910 Martha lived in Bishop Hill with her then still unmarried daughter Annie, now 42 years old. Son Edward and his family (wife Martha, born in Sweden, son Linnie (age 20) and daughter Edna (age 7) were also living in Bishop Hill in 1910, but not found in later Censuses. Edward was a "General Farmer."

Old mother Martha died 1917 Dec. 21. In her obituary it says that she



Nordmark Birth Records, book C:7, unnumbered page for 1869. Photo from ArkivDigital.

