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Interview with the widow

– a journalist explores the world of *bouppteckningar*. Part 2.

BY NORM SANDIN

Refresher from Part 1:

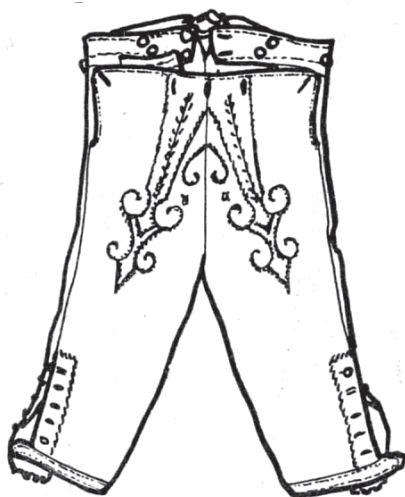
It is October 21, 1795, here in Hällefors parish and we are privileged to have with us Christina Pehrsson (CP). Christina lost her husband, the late Sven Larsson, four weeks ago and we are on the estate today with some of her family who have assembled a team to perform the estate inventory and evaluation. Christina has agreed to let us interview her during the process in an unusual way. As I question her, I've asked her to pretend that she is answering someone who will be reading the interview in a different language and two centuries or more hence. The reader will know little of the dialect of this time and place, little of the objects and equipment that are in the estate, and little of the customs and practices that prevail.

Me: Sven had lots of clothing, but some of it is in pretty bad shape.

CP: Sven would wear things until they fell off his back. Around home this was all right, but one day he



A vest from Västmanland.



A pair of embroidered yellow wash-leather breeches from Västmanland.

wanted to wear a shirt with a hole in it to church. I stuck my finger in that hole and started ripping it. The kids joined in and we all had a good laugh. Sven wasn't too happy about it, but I took out a whole shirt for him to wear! I would have been drummed out of church if anyone saw him with an unmended hole in his shirt! Because of his attitude, sometimes damaged clothing "got lost" in the laundry.

Of course, nothing was wasted – material could be cut down and used for children's clothing. Then we always had need for rags, and eventually linen was turned in to be made into paper, as the law demanded.

Me: I'm impressed that there is quite a selection of animal skins and items made of skins.

CP: My goodness, yes! Of course we had hides from the farm animals, but you may have seen that Sven had a shotgun. Whenever he had killed anything he would save the hide and tan it. So you see items made from the skin of wolf and ferret, as well as sheepskin, kid-skin, calfskin, and leather. If he could figure out how to tan it, he would have saved fish skin as well.

Me: You mention farm animals – the list includes cows, pigs, sheep, goats, and chickens. Were any of these pets or just meat, milk, and eggs?

CP: Well, Sven and I tried very hard not to get attached, but the kids did have favorites and I admit that I did also. It was always difficult when it came time to slaughter. Chickens were the easiest – they have no personality. Then pigs, goats, and sheep were a little harder, but the most difficult were the cows. They almost became part of the family. We always tried to find someone to help with the actual slaughter of a cow so we wouldn't have to see the death. I am particularly fond of the cow we named *Hvit-hufva* (White head)! I expect to take *Hvit-hufva* as part of my *tju-gonde penning*, uh, the widow's five percent of the estate.

Me: There are many items on the Miscellaneous list that support milk, cheese, and butter pro-

duction. Was this just for the family or did you sell some of it?

CP: Most of the milk was used for cheese and butter production, and most of the income from those products went for taxes. We did use a bit of it for feasts and parties, but not much. When a child was very young, some milk was always saved for him or her.

Me: We already discussed home-spun, but now I have another question. The estate includes cards for wool, a spinning wheel, a large loom, a ribbon loom, and a quilting frame. I presume Sven didn't use these – when did you find time to use them?

CP: Well, sir, I don't know how you make a living, but when people are on their own trying to raise a family and put food on the table and clothes on their backs, every waking hour is occupied. After dinner, especially in the summertime when there was light in the evenings, some of the children would clean up and I would spin, sew, or weave. In the winter when evenings were quite dark, I would spin or knit, which I could practically do with my eyes closed. I actually found it relaxing and rewarding.



A ribbon loom.



An old home with a cradle, a chest for clothes, a chair, and a three-legged table.

Me: Your clothing is not listed in the inventory.

CP: No, the venerable court graciously allows the widow to not include her clothing and certain personal items. They also allow children of the deceased and other family members to exclude their things.

Me: It has been four years since your youngest child, Catharina, was born, but I see a basket bed and a cradle in the listing. Did you expect more children?

CP: I *never* "expected" more, but you can't be too careful. Since the twins were born in '82, I realize anything can happen! Now, there are the grandchildren. As you can see, Sven's new baby, Petter, is in the cradle right now! I've also kept the christening clothes for the same reason.

Me: So you had twins? I've seen the kids running around but haven't recognized twins.

CP: Christina, the 13-year-old girl over there rocking baby Petter, had a twin brother, but he only survived a few months. Twin births are very difficult. We are fortunate

that Christina survived. She was much larger and healthier at birth.

Me: Lars has a guardian and some special amounts of money laid aside for him. Can you tell me a bit more about his special status?

CP: Yes, Lars is special. The church records list him as *enfaldig* (simple), which is literally foolish. I'm not sure what his medical condition is, but he is very slow. When Sven and I married, Lars was nine years old, but he was quite behind his brother Hindric who was only seven, in terms of speech, getting along with his siblings, and taking care of himself. He eventually learnt enough to get along and even to be some help in the garden and on fishing trips, but he is always sickly and weak. I worry about his future. I'm glad Sven made special provision for him.

Me: There is also a special provision for the minor girls. Will you tell me about that?

CP: Sven's will provides some cash to cover the marriages of the three minor girls, since the bride's family is expected to pay wedding ex-

penses. The money will be held by the guardian Nils Nilsson for that purpose.

Me: And the rest of the available cash?

CP: When we married, Sven had very little money, so he made a promise in place of the *morgongåva*. So that.....

Me: Excuse me Christina – what is the *morgongåva*?

CP: The “morning gift” is usually a sum of money given to the new wife. It is sometimes thought of as a dowry, but I think of it as an insurance policy for the wife. Children are supposed to take care of the old folks, but if a couple have no children and her husband dies first, the widow needs the resources to care for herself. In this case, the morning gift was a promise made by the groom to his bride of a sum of money to be paid to her upon his death.

After that sum is taken from the available cash, one-third of the

balance goes to the widow, and the remainder goes to the children, with sons getting a full share and daughters getting a half share.

Me: Your house is full of furniture and furnishings. I see lots of sofas, tables, chairs, stools, cupboards, beds, and paintings. What will become of all of these?

CP: Sven’s son Sven married in ’93 and he has been living at home with his wife and child. I expect that he will take over the house, farm, and milling business. There will also be further division of the estate items between all of the heirs.

Me: The books listed include a Bible, a psalm book, and the Adami Sabbath Book. I take it you folks are good Christians.

CP: We enjoy the social and spiritual part of church-going. We get the news and see friends and actually get to relax for a time. We attend church as often as we can, but with so many children, sickness keeps us out occasionally. I have made sure the children get the basics of Christianity. We often read the Bible in the evenings and we observe many of the holidays as listed in Adami’s book. Our Bible also contains a record of births, marriages, and deaths in the family.

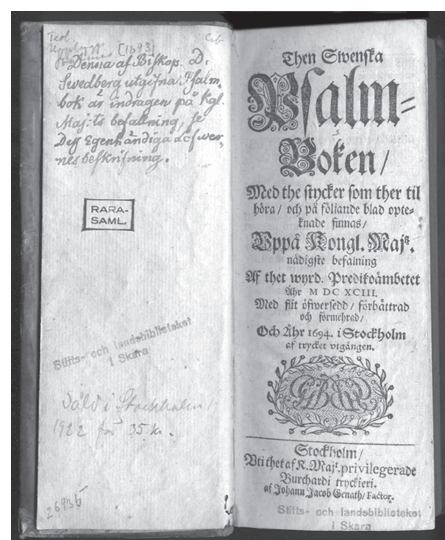
Every year, someone from the church comes by for the “clerical survey.” They examine each person for various abilities. I try to prepare the children for that examination and it helps me as well. Sven doesn’t actively participate when I work with the kids, but he sits and listens and usually does pretty well. I should say “did” – I’m having trouble accepting that he is gone.

Me: I’d like to add for those not familiar with the practice that the clerk keeps separate ledgers for recording births and christenings, banns and marriages, and deaths and burials. In addition, during the clerical survey, the clerk keeps a big ledger for the parish and records the names of each person in each family with his or her personal information. This includes things like birth date and place, smallpox vaccination status, ability to read and write, level of Christian knowledge, dates of entering and exiting the parish if that happened, marriages and deaths when they happen, and sometimes even comments about handicaps or personal conduct. These ledgers are known as *husförhörslängder*.

Christina, you are certainly an intelligent and interesting person. How do you feel about recent activities in the monarchy?

CP: Oy-oy-oy-oy – I’ll tell you I was worried when King Gustav III was trying to fight the Russians! I could just imagine him raiding the countryside for young men to help in the fight. And he was such a spendthrift – he would spend lots of money for his own personal frivolities! I suspect some of that came from the taxes we all pay! I wasn’t very sorry in ’92 when they shot him.

On the other hand, this King did some good things, too. I think the best of his works was that he assured that every parish had a trained midwife and every county



The 1694 Swedish Psalm book.



Gustaf III, King of Sweden 1771–1792.

had at least one doctor! He also made improvements to the prisons and supported the arts, but that didn't help our family very much.

Me: And do you get any news of events in other countries?

CP: There are rumors in church about a small number of English colonists in a new land across the

ocean who have broken ties with England and are seeking settlers. I suppose as adventurous youngsters hear of this they will start leaving Sweden to seek their fortunes.

Me: Well, thank you very much for your time, Christina! I have enjoyed talking with you and I wish you all the best for your future!

Note from the author

The facts in this report are real, taken from the actual *bouppteckning* of Sven Larsson and the clerical records. The responses by Christina Pehrsson are obviously speculative. A few responses are based on my maternal grandmother who was one of those "adventurous youngsters" who immigrated to the United States from Sweden in 1891. I can still hear her saying "Oy-oy-oy-oy"

when I would spill something, or remarking about "butter melting in their mouth" regarding my grandfather, in her delightful accent. She had ten children, nine of whom lived to be 72 or more years old.

Sven Larsson and Christina Pehrsson were two of my fourth great-grandparents.

Written by Norm "Pono" Sandin, kapon@maui.net.

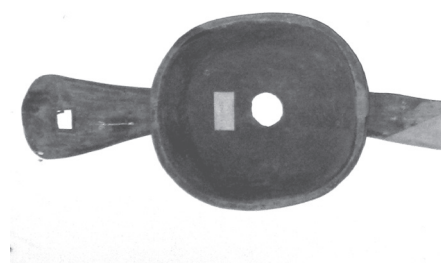
You can see the actual *bouppteckning* from which this information was taken, and you can see more than 500 Swedish object words with pictures and their English translations at <http://www.sandinfamily.com> then *Genealogy Resources*.



Meat mincers.



A set of wooden bowls.



A milk strainer (you put some spruce twigs in, to catch any dirt).

The Dalsland Conference 13–15 August 2010

The 3-day Emigration Conference starts with a tour of Dalsland on Friday, continues with seminars at Kulturbruket Mellerud on Saturday, and concludes with a church service on Sunday.

The conference fee includes Friday lunch and supper, Saturday lunch, snacks and banquet, and Sunday church coffee with Swedish sandwiches. A personal one-to-one session with a genealogist is also optionally included. During the conference you will have an English speaking hostess for your service.

Saturday's seminars will be open to all who are interested in the emigration history and in genealogy. There will be an exhibition about the emigration history made by Swedish school children, another with pictures of Carl Oscar Borg, emigration information, bookstands and coffee. This is a perfect time to make connections between Swedish and American people.

Lunch will be served in the nice village restaurants and you can pick your favourite place. The day ends with a banquet with Swedish smör-

gåsbord and entertainment in one of Dalsland's beautifully situated restaurants in the countryside.



<http://www.emigrationaldalsland.com/en/conference.html>