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Elisabeth Thorsell

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Those mysterious words – what do they mean?

BY ELISABETH THORSELL

Last year, when I already had come to Salt Lake City for the SAG workshop, I got an e-mail from a fellow researcher, Ron Johnson of Madison, WI, spending his time waiting at O'Hare Airport for his delayed flight.

Ron mentioned that he had come across several terms in Swedish that he could not make heads or tails of, and asked me to help him with those words later in the week.

Here are some of the words, and if you have other words you wonder about, send me an e-mail!

Brukare, hälftenbrukare

This man did not own the farm he worked on. He rented it from someone, and paid his rent in different ways, depending on where in the country he was located. It could be doing a number of days of work for the owner at harvest time, plowing in the spring, or doing a number of charcoal stacks in the winter, for a few examples.

The title *brukare* is often seen as just *br.* in front of his name in the clerical surveys.

Torpare

This is a very common group of people in the countryside. The title is often translated by Swedes to *crofter*, a word that many Americans do not understand. Our dictionaries are mainly based on British English, where they referred to crofters in Northern England and Scotland.

The word *torpare* means a person that rents a piece of land where he can farm and keep a cow, and not very much more, which constituted a *torp*, which can also just mean the house the family lived in.

As the population of Sweden grew quickly in the 1800s, many young

couples, wanting to marry, went to a landowner and asked for permission to build a *torp*. If permission was granted, the land was often situated on some bad piece of land that the farmer wanted cleared and made usable. The conditions for the *torp* were usually stipulated in a written contract. Perhaps the *torpare* agreed to do certain days of labor each week at the landowning farm, pay part of his crop to the farmer, his wife might have to spin a certain amount of yarn every year, the children would have to pick berries, etc. Also they were forbidden to take in other people without the landowner's permission. If they did not obey the conditions, they had to leave without compensation for the labor they had put in on the land.

Förpantningstorpare

This is a category of people quite similar to ordinary *torpare*. The difference is that this *torpare* had paid

a sum of money to the landowner, and thus rented the *torp* for a period of time, often 50 years. *Förpantning* is translated as mortgage. After the end of the lease the landowner had the right to pay back the sum of money and also would have to pay for the improvements the *torpare* had made to the *torp*.

Backstugusittare

A *backstugusittare* was usually a poor person who lived in a dugout, where parts of the walls were dug into a hill, so it was not necessary to have so many logs for the walls.

The people you find listed as living in a *backstuga* are usually unmarried women, perhaps with a child or two, or old, or sick people. They usually supported themselves by doing what labor they could, like raising chickens, helping with washing and ironing, woodcutting for firewood, etc. They often received a little poor relief from the parish.



This is the backstuga (reconstructed) where Goat-Anna used to live around 1900 in Nordmark parish in Värmland. She was an old, unmarried woman, whose only son had left for America. She supported herself by selling goat's milk, which was supposed to be good for those with consumption. The goat also lived here in the stuga.