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The Farm Names of Dalarna

An old type of name still lives on and can confuse the new researcher

BY ELISABETH THORSELL

In the province of **Dalarna** (*Dalecarlia*) people used and still use **gårdsnamn**, which means farm names.

These names are always put first in a person's name. They show that this person belonged to the "Der" farm or the "Blom" farm, and they were always put before the person's Christian name, and they were mentioned as Der Eric or Blom Anna.

If Blom Anna married Der Eric and moved to the Der farm, she was usually known as Der Anna after the marriage. But if Der Eric moved to her home, he was probably known as Blom Eric after the marriage.

The reason for this is not clear, but probably has to do with the fact that very few first names were used when a baby's name was to be chosen. In the old days people almost always used a name that already was used by an older relative, and that gave the parents somewhat less than 20 names for boys and 20 names for girls to choose from. As a result you could have several *Anders Erssons* or *Anna Andersdotter* in a village.

The villages, especially around lake Siljan, can be very big with some 50 different farms in the same village. So to help sort out which Anders Ersson or Margareta Olsdotter you were talking about, a farm name was added to this person, like *Orr Anders Ersson* or *Stolts Margareta Olsdotter*. Then you knew that you were talking about Anders from Orrgården or Margareta from Stoltsgården in that village. The same

farm names could also be used in other villages, without the people on those farms being related.

This custom is very common in all of Dalarna, but the *gårdsnamn* are not recorded in the church records until about 1800 or so, at least not in Leksand, which is the parish I am most familiar with. But they were probably used in the local society much earlier.

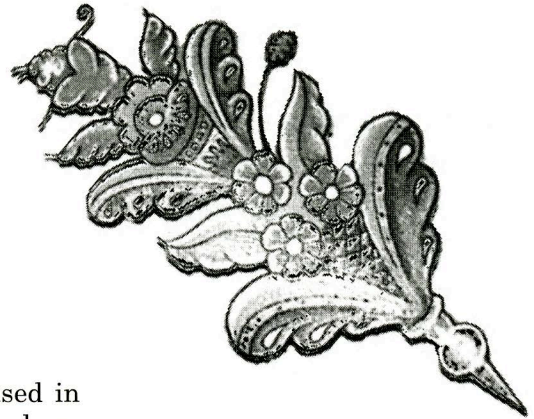
These names are of several types, and the most intriguing ones are the ones like *Knis*, *Kers*, *Hases* as they are contractions of the name of an early owner of the farm. *Knis* can be derived from someone named Erik Nilsson, if you say the name fast, and the same goes for *Kers* from Erik Ersson, etc.

The name can also be of a type that has to do with nature, like *Berg*, *Land*, *Sjö* [mountain, land, lake]. Another variety are names that were first used by a soldier as his army name. My husband's ancestor, *Erik Jönsson Orre* [*orre* is a forest bird], was a soldier and he had a son, and he was called *Orr Anders Ersson*.

The names can also be based on some position in the local society, like *Körkvärns* (the church warden's), *Nämndemans* (the permanent jurymen), *Klockars* (the church singer and clerk) or *Lärmors* (the schoolteacher's).

They can be based on a craft, like *Skommars* (the shoemaker's) or *Målars* (the painter's).

Names could also be based on personal characteristics, like *Lång* (tall)



or *Munter* (cheery). The most common ones are the ones of the first type, based on the name of the first owner; more examples are *Olars*, *Perers*, *Perols*, *Mases*, *Helgas*, *Göras*.

These days many people with a farm name in the family use them for surnames, like our rock singer Björn Skifs, or ice hockey player Åke Lassas, or artist (painter) Jerk Werkmäster. My husband's direct farm name is Helgas, but I am quite content that his grandfather changed this to Thorsell.

Note:

A longer essay on these names can be found in the SARA Journal VI (2001), "Farmstead names in Dalarna," by Eric B. Kula. SARA's web site is

www.members.tripod.com/~SARAassociation/sara/SARA_Home_Page.htm

