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Long Ago and Far Away

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Little did Nils know that his descendants would end up in the U.S. 160 years later

By Hal Bern

Sandhem parish is a very old parish whose records date back to the 1670's, and it is located in the south-east corner of what used to be called Skaraborgs län, not too far from the western edge of Lake Vättern.

Our story begins in the year 1700, in Sandhem Parish.

On April 26 that year Nils Andersson was born at a place called Tröjenborg. He later took the surname Thunberg and was the first to use a fixed surname in that family. His father was Anders Hjort who was probably a soldier. Tröjenborg was a farm which supported several military families. In later times Tröjenborg became known as Hjortåsen and was still a military encampment.

The Swedish military did not like patronymic names and assigned new names to most soldiers as they were recruited. One such military name was Hjort which means “deer” in Swedish. I believe that Nils (Andersson) Thunberg’s father was Anders Andersson, a cavalry soldier or ryt­tare who later was given the military surname Hjort. Anders was born in Knätte parish in 1656, and was a soldier living at Tröjenborg in 1700. I have not yet been able to conclusively prove the relationship between Anders Andersson (Hjort?) and Nils Thunberg.

The custom of taking a new last name was usually associated with acquiring a respectable position or wealth. The nobility in Sweden were the first to start using fixed surnames, followed by merchants, craftsmen, and large landholders.

Nils Thunberg seems to have acquired his last name by virtue of his position as a faktorismo at Tunarps hammar. This would have been a metal forging facility with Nils serving as the overseer. Tunarps hammar may have had some relationship to the military encampment nearby at Tröjenborg. Nils Thunberg died on 23 February 1768.

Nils had two sons, Anders and Johan, born in Sandhem parish on 7 July 1723 and on 6 October 1728, by his first wife, Karin Andersdotter. Anders and Johan also used the surname Thunberg. In some instances, the whole name is written out, as in Anders Nilsson Thunberg, and sometimes he is listed as just Anders Nilsson Tun. Anders carried on the family tradition and became a faktorismo at Tröjenborg. Later, Anders married and lived most of his life at a farm called Hagnared where he raised his...
large family. When he died at age 62 in 1785, he left an itemized will distributing his worldly goods among his four sons and two daughters. This document is very difficult to read and translate as it is written in old Gothic script. Judging from the length of the list of possessions, Anders was “well to do” by the standards of that era. There was some sort of family squabble noted in the will over who was to receive Anders’s property. A son of Anders Thunberg, Petter Thunberg, was attempting to claim an extra portion of the estate as he was owed money.

The farm, Hågnared, is still known by that name today. It is about three miles outside the village of Sandhem and is easily found. The only remnants of this long gone era are the stone fences around all of the fields. Some of these fences may have been built or at least maintained by family ancestors. In contrast to many of the surrounding farms, it appeared to have many flat tillable fields along with adequate rolling hills for pasture.

Bernt Andersson Thunberg, born

2 October 1754 at Hägnared, was the third son of Anders Thunberg. His given name is the origin of the Bern family surname in America. His life is interesting if somewhat sad. He married quite high on the social register 24 June 1789 to Magdalena Strengberg (sometimes spelled Strangberg) in Jonkoping Kristina parish.

Magdalena's father, Jonas Strengberg, was also a faktorismaled, and they lived in a cottage called Hornet in the city of Jonkoping. I have obtained a book from Sweden by K. G. Junhall about the Strengberg family which traces their ancestry to the year 1701. The first Strengberg was Lars who founded a family of metalworkers. The Strengbergs were primarily engaged in the manufacturing of armaments, some of which went to the Swedish military.

Bernt and Magdalena lived at Hägnared when they first married, probably working the farm for his widowed mother. Their children Anders, b. 1790; Johannes, b. 1792; Carl Friedrich, b. 1795; and Maria Catharina, b. 1797; were all born at Hägnared in Sandhem parish.

A new family had moved in at Hägnared by 1800, and the Thunberg family could not be found in the parish records. Karin Pehrsdotter Thunberg, Bernt's mother, died in April of 1804 eighty-four years of age. I was unable to determine where she lived at the time of her death, but I would guess she was at the fattighus (poorhouse).

**To Kinneved**

In 1803 Bernt's family had moved to Kinneved parish (northwest of Grolanda parish) to a farm called Fröje which was part of a larger estate known as Mönarp. A fourth son, Jonas, was born in Kinneved in 1804, but son Carl Friedrich died here in 1808. Bernt Thunberg died on 9 July 1809 at 55 years of age in Kinneved.

The widowed Magdalena moved to Grolanda Parish with her children after the death of Bernt in 1809. Grolanda is west and slightly north of Kinneved parish. Her two oldest sons seemed to have been her means of support at this time. Her second son, Johannes, was about 17 years old. There are notes in the record that the family was poor and struggled to make ends meet. The strongest indication that the family fell on hard times was the discontinuance of the family surname Thunberg. All descendants of Bernt Andersson Thunberg reverted back to the patronymic family surname. Magdalena never remarried and lived out the rest of her life with one or the other of her sons. She moved to Hällestad parish (north of Grolanda) in 1825 where most of her children finally located. She died there in 1842 when she was 76 years old.

Johannes Berntsson, the second son, married Maria Bryngelsdotter in Grolanda in 1816. Their first son, Anders, was born in December of that year at a farm called Hagen. Maria's family line has been traced in Grolanda Parish back to 1660. Another son, Johannes, was born 1819 and a daughter, Johanna, in 1821. The ancestor, Jonas Johannesson, who became a United States
citizen, John Johnson Bern, was born in 1825 in Hallestad parish.

John Johnson Bern probably had no idea that he came from such a distinguished family. His mother died at his birth and his father died before he reached the age of eighteen. At age thirty-seven in 1862, John was married and had immigrated to Galesburg, Illinois, never to return to the land of his birth. Both his parents were dead and he had little to tie him to his homeland.

It would take nearly one hundred and thirty years and some dogged determination to rediscover the origins of the family. Perhaps Nils Andersson Thunberg would be grateful that finally someone in this vast array of descendants would tell his story.

Notes:
1 A faktorismed was a blacksmith who worked for a faktori, a government arms factory. Jönköping's faktori started in 1620. The smiths did not have to live in the city.

The Stallcup Reunion

The first ever gathering of the Stallcup descendants of Civil War soldier and Bryson City blacksmith, Lucius Harvey (1847-1909) and his wife Almarine Hall (1852-1927) Stallcup will be held at the 1933 log house built by Stallcup brothers on Hughes Branch Road, Bryson City, Swain County, NC on Saturday, July 9, 2005.

The Stallcup/Stalcop/Stalcup family is termed a single-family unit. All persons with the name, no matter how spelled, can trace their ancestry back to one man, Johan Andersson (1627-1685) from Strängnäs, Sweden. He was later called Stålkofta, the 'Steelcoat,' His wife (m-1656) was Christina Carlsdotter. It is a totally American family as the Stalcop surname originated in America. It has never existed anywhere else in the world.

To assist there will be a handout covering the nine generations of direct Stalcop grandparents leading into Swain County.

Following lunch the early history of the family will be recounted.

Later a selection of more recent family folklore stories from the Stalcop Memory Story Collection will be told. Freida Stallcup Gilsdorf, in period costume, will be the storyteller. Some 80 visitors are expected.

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