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Olof Stille of New Sweden

Fritz Nordström*

One beautiful summer's day toward the end of the 1880s a stranger arrived at Penningby Manor and presented himself as Prof. Stille from the University of Pennsylvania in the United States of America. I remember him vaguely, an older, distinguished gentleman, with gray hair and a gray mustache. He related that he, while on a temporary visit to Sweden, wished to see the place in Sweden where his ancestor—Olof Stille—had grown to adulthood and from which place he emigrated to New Sweden in the Delaware Valley in the 1640s.

Prof. Stille, under the guidance of my father, toured the castle, of which the two lower floors still were in the same condition, and still are, as during the time that Olof Stille visited there. So far as the man, himself, was concerned, no one could offer any information; no one had ever heard of him or his family.

During the last few years I have carried on research in various archives, looking through old documents concerning Penningby and its owners, and during this search I have come across some facts concerning Olof Stille and his family. I here present some of the material I have taken from the records.

In the month of March 1638 Katarina Fleming of Penningby Manor, newly widowed by the death of her husband, Erik Bjelke, wrote to the governor of the county (*län*), alerting him that her late husband's former servant, Olof Stille, had broken into Penningby and she therefore now demanded that Olof Stille be brought to justice. On the basis of this complaint, the governor (Lars Sparre)¹ issued an order, dated 28 March 1638, requesting that the sheriff of the Assizes (*häradsfogde och lagläsare*) of Frötuna and Länna immediately arrest Stille and keep him incarcerated until the case could be heard at an extraordinary session of the Assizes, which should be convened as early as possible.

*This article first appeared with the title, "En lännabo, som 1648 utvandrade till Nya Sverige," in Vol. VIII of *Hundare och skeppslag* for 1947-1948, pp. 106-116, a publication of Roslagens fornminnes-och hembygdsförening (The Roslagen Local Historical Society). It was written by Fritz Nordström (1873-). He and his two brothers owned Penningby Manor, near Norrtälje, north of Stockholm. The article is published here in a translation by Dr. Richard Hulan of Arlington, VA, as a contribution to the upcoming New Sweden 1988 observance, commemorating the 350th anniversary of the New Sweden colony. Fritz Nordström's niece, Dr. Elsa Nordström, formerly first archivist at the Royal Swedish War Archives, has kindly checked the translation and has furnished supplementary material. The portion of the Nordström article dealing with Olof Stille in America has been deleted. Instead Peter Stebbins Craig of Washington, DC, has prepared a follow-up story of Olof Stille and his many descendants up to the end of the 18th century, which will appear in the December issue of *SAG*.



Dr. Charles Janeway Stille, Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, who in 1888, on the 250th anniversary of New Sweden, visited Penningby Manor.

On 13 April 1638 this session of the Assizes met. The record of what transpired at the "Extraordinary Session 13 April concerning Olof Stille, by command of the Well-born Governor" may be cited here *in extenso*. (This "protokoll" is in 17th century Swedish legalese, turgid and full of circumlocutions. The translation is somewhat free, and new punctuation has been introduced to reflect the several speakers and points of view involved—Tr.)

On 13 April 1638 there appeared before the Court Per Persson, the appointed agent of Her Noble and Well-born Ladyship, Katarina Fleming; and accused Olof Stille, formerly servant of the late Lordship (Eric Bjelke): that during her great bereavement and grief, while her late Lordship lay in state, he had in bitter malice and great arrogance broken into her castle, Penningby, thereby committing the grave offense of forcible entry.

(The background of this affair is that Olof had in a spirit of arrogance spoken unseemly words to Her Ladyship at the fair in Norrtälje in 1636, besides other transgressions he had previously committed and had been forgiven through the intercession of noble persons. For this behavior he had been ordered off his [island] farm, Humblö, where his late parents had been living. By intercessory means he was, however, allowed to keep his cattle there until the following spring. The two servants who worked for Olof did not leave the farm, however, but stayed there even though Olof was gone. He conceded nothing, expressing his annoyance, etc.)

Olof now answered: that he had been drinking in Norrtälje, and that he had paid enough fines for his impropriety—a piece of cleared (burned-over) land, the crops on his field, firewood and a Baltic herring net, all of which had been taken away from him; and in addition he had been in prison twice, but had escaped by himself.

Per Persson answered that this had come about because of an inheritance² that Olof had in his possession; and the deceased Lordship had been the guardian on Olof's sister's behalf. But the real reason Olof had been kept in jail was the fact that he had refused to leave the farm, after the judgment had been handed down, and a passport had been issued.

Olof answered by saying that he had received the passport.

But when Olof was in Stockholm (Per Persson's accusation continued), his former servants stayed in Länna Parish, in a hamlet called Mutsunda (as Olof acknowledged). But His Late Lordship, Sir Erik Bjelke, got a report that the servants were cutting firewood on his property and bringing the wood to Stockholm (which Olof denied). Whereupon His Lordship had to send for the servants and have them fetched back to the estate, telling them that inasmuch as Olof was off the farm, he had no claim on them. One of them left immediately, but the other, named Anders (who was born and raised on Humblö), came to the estate on St. James Day (25 July). He thereupon promised His Lordship (now deceased) that he would work for him, not only until Michaelmas (29 Sept.) but also afterwards.

Olof answered that the servants had not hired themselves to service (were not bound).

Anders was then questioned about this matter. He acknowledged that this was true, but said that he had been coerced; however, he could not offer the necessary proof.

But the pastor of Länna parish, Sir Olof, testified that he had heard His Lordship repeatedly avow, on his deathbed, that Anders had promised with a handshake to serve him, *i.e.*, His Lordship.

Olof answered by saying that he knew nothing of this.

Some time later (the plaintiff went on) Olof Stille arrived from the City (Stockholm) and sent for Anders, ordering him to come to him immediately. Anders left the estate, unmindful of his earlier promise. He (Anders) now stayed around Mutsunda and brought firewood to Stockholm to be sold. A while later it was discovered where he was, but no one asked about him until 18 March of this year, when he came to Väsby and began quarreling with Her Ladyship's servants. When they complained, she thereupon had him seized, on account of his running away from his contracted employment, and other reluctance. In the same spirit they sent word to the sheriff that he should come and apprehend him as a vagrant while the census commissioners (for military conscription) were there.

On 19 March Olof Stille arrived from Norrtälje, having in mind to travel to Väsby, where he had been requested to come. First, however, he went into Jacob of Torpet's place, where he was told that Anders had been locked up. Then he grabbed a wood-axe and said, "I shall get him out, in the name of the bad one." (However, he did not have a loaded gun with him; nor did he leave Norrtälje in anger, as he had been accused.) He let himself into Penningby through a secret door, and found the room where Anders was imprisoned, under the very house in which the said Late Lordship lay a corpse. Since the lock was strong he broke apart the masonry, took away the lock and keeper (worth one *daler silvermynt*), took the servant out, gave him the axe and sent him on ahead. When he himself turned from the wall he bared his sword, which was witnessed by Olof Svensson (who alone was at home in the castle, as the rest of the servant folk were at the census enrollment).

Then, Olof Svensson testified, Olof Stille swept his sword around, uttered foul language and said, "I dare you to come and take me!" Whereupon he fled. The others came home then, and wanted to apprehend him, but they were held back because of the risk to their own lives that could involve.

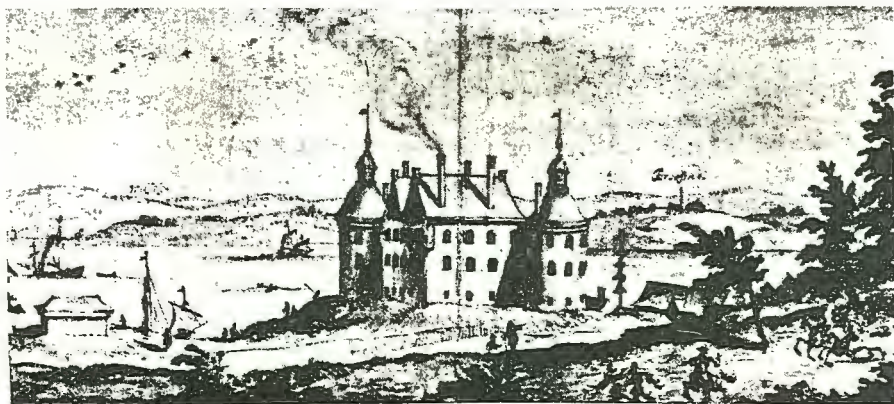
To this Olof Stille offered no rebuttal, but bade the proceedings to go on.

Since no more circumstances were placed in evidence, the matter was deliberated (by the Assizes): should this be counted as forcible entry, or robbery? After much longwinded deliberation the court could reach no other verdict than that the often-mentioned Olof Stille was in the full sense a robber inasmuch as he had taken the servant, who was locked up for breach of contract. Therefore, he was condemned under the sword (to be beheaded). Still, the possibility of merciful interpretation by the most praiseworthy Royal Court of Appeals was reserved.

(This concludes the record of the Extraordinary Session.)



Detailed map of section of Uppland in Sweden, showing the place names mentioned in connection with Olof Stille's adventures in and around Penningby Manor. Pertinent places are underlined.



Seventeenth century engraving of Penningby Manor. Sketch used in Eric Dahlberg's famed work *Suecia antiqua et hodierna*, first published in 1716.

Thus Olof Stille, judged by the strict legal standards of the time, was sentenced to death; but the verdict was referred, as was usual in cases involving the death penalty, to the final decision of the Supreme Court (*Hovrätten*). Its decree was issued 28 May 1638. The verdict was greatly watered down. Stille was to make compensation for the damage he had done to the house and pay a fine of 100 *daler silvermynt*³; or, if he was unable to pay the fines, "to be placed in irons, and to labor because of his deeds."

On 31 Oct. 1638 the regularly scheduled session of the Assizes (for Länna and Frötuna) was held. In the record of this session it is briefly and clearly spelled out that Olof Stille should pay a fine of 100 *daler*, "two parts to Penningby, and the third to the hundred and the chief judge of the hundred (*häradshövding*)."⁴ Nothing is said about forced labor; this clearly implies that Stille's economic position was good.

After these entries, I have not found Olof Stille named until I found him in a manifest of persons who accompanied the *flöijt*⁴ *Charitas*, on a journey from Stockholm 3 May 1641, via Göteborg to New Sweden. Olof Stille was accompanied by his wife and two children, one seven years old, the other one and a half years of age. Stille is listed on the ship's document, which is written in German, as a "*Muehlen Macher*" (millwright). The document states that his intention is to be a farmer in the new land.

Among other emigrants aboard we also note Axel Stille, who is going out to work on the (New Sweden) Company's tobacco plantations. I have been unable to ascertain the extent of kinship between these two Stilles. It is reasonable to suppose that they were brothers. Perhaps the proof of this may be left to descendants in the United States. Olof Stille's fate in New Sweden lies outside the scope of my research.⁵

Olof Stille's Family in Sweden

With the clue in the above proceedings that Olof Stille's parents had lived at Humblö (which then belonged to Penningby), I have gone through earlier tax lists, court records and bailiffs' accounts dealing with that and neighboring tracts.

The name Stille is first encountered on the "Älvsborg surcharge" list in 1571⁶. There we find the name Peder Stille under Solö (another [island] farm belonging to Penningby). His contribution was two *lod silver*⁷, plus 8 *marks*, 7 *öre* and an illegible number of *örtugar* in coin. The amount of cash and especially the weight of the silver reveal a very good economic position in comparison with the average peasant in the region. It seems unlikely that this Peder (or Per) Stille could be identical with Olof's father. The latter died, as will be shown below, sometime between 1631 and 1635. It is conceivable, but not likely, that he could have been a man in his prime already in 1571. I therefore postulate that Peder was Olof's grandfather; hereafter I shall cite a number of circumstances that reinforce this assumption.

In the bailiff's accounts for 1590, we find Per Stille under Solö; but in the list of (church) tithes for the same year under Solö is found "Mrs. Brigitta." I therefore suggest that Per Stille died that year, and that the widow remained on the farm.

The next time the name is met is in the bailiff's accounts for 1596. There we find, under Solö, Per Stille. I assume that this is the son of the above-named Per Stille, and is Olof's father.

Per Stille's name is still found under Solö in the bailiff's accounts for 1597 and 1600. But in a 1601 list of the farmers working under the foreman at Penningby estate we find, remarkably enough, not Per Stille but "The Widow at Solö." In the bailiff's accounts for the same year we find Per Stille under Solö. Perhaps the mother and son had the homestead as some sort of partnership.

In 1601, when Penningby reverted to the Crown⁸, a list was kept of all the persons who were fed on the estate, either constantly or occasionally. Per Stille's name occurs four times, and "Mrs. Britta at Solö" twice. On one occasion they were both guests (at the manor) at the same time; here her name precedes his, a sequence that would not occur if they had been husband and wife, but one that would be natural in reference to a mother and son. I think, therefore, that one may venture to say that there were two persons named Per Stille, father and son.

The other farmers who were fed at the manor were (in contrast with Stille) never listed by name, but only as statistics. Stille thus appears to have held a unique position among the farmers. I would guess that he was the supervisor of the estate. This supposition can be shored up by other circumstantial evidence, which, however, would lengthen this account too much.

At the Assizes on 1 Feb. 1606 Per Stille in Solö appeared as the authorized representative of a farmer accused of murder. Stille promised, on behalf of his client, full compensation if the heirs of the deceased would in turn give the murderer a letter of peace (*fridsbrev*). This was allowed.

Per Stille's name occurs under Solö in the bailiff's accounts of 1609, 1610 and 1618. In the list of married persons in the parish for the year 1609, Per Stille is mentioned as having a wife. In the same list for 1610 Per Stille is listed with his wife, one male servant and two maids.

After 1610 I have not found Per Stille's name until 1627, when he appears in a list of cattle owners. There he is no longer resident on Solö, but on Humblö. Apparently he has left the post of estate supervisor, and received the right to live on the latter island as a kind of pension. This conclusion is only intuitive, but analogous cases are found in the history of Penningby that lend credence to the theory.

In a 1628 list of the farmers holding land under Penningby one finds "old Pär Stille" at Humblö. His name is also found in a list of contributors in 1630, and in the lists of cattle owners for 1630 and 1631. In the corresponding list for the year 1635, however, the name under Humblö is Anders Persson. Per Stille appears, therefore, to have died sometime between 1631 and 1635.

In the list of enrolled students of Uppsala University may be found the following entry: "In the year 1625, the 16th of February, Johannes Petri (Stille) Roslagius (Pastor in Fundbo, Uppland)." The words in parentheses have been added later, and in a different hand. I cannot absolutely document the fact that this Johannes was a son of Per Stille, but nevertheless I am fully persuaded that such was the case.

The following is borrowed from the *Memorials of the Pastors of the Archdiocese of Uppsala*: "Funbo. Pastors. #16: Master Johan Stillerus of Roslagen. First of all he was house chaplain to the Royal Treasurer.⁹ Pastor here (Funbo), 1644. The Council greatly interfered with his appointment in 1643, because he had been a pastor only a short time, had no experience of suffering, and was like no other priest either in his mode of dress or in his hair style, and possessed no special eloquence. First Master, 1646. Member of the Riksdag (parliament), 1649. Speaker of the ministerial assembly, 1657, and the following year its President.¹⁰ Provost for Contracts, 1665. Died 1672. Married the daughter of his predecessor (Azarias Johannis Upsaliensis)."

His tombstone in Funbo church reads: "Here rests from his labors Master Johannes Stillerus Roslagius, Pastor at Fundbo, 1644-1672."

Johannes Stille had, as far as I can learn, only one child who attained maturity, the daughter Christina. She married Nils Sparrman (1668-1722), pastor at Biskopskulla, in 1694, as his second wife. Christina died in 1721.¹¹

In the court proceedings of 13 April, 1638 (above), a sister of Olof Stille's is mentioned. I believe I have also found her, although in her case as well I am unable to present absolute proof for accepting her as such.

In 1667 on 20 Sept. an inventory was made of the estate of the naval artillerist Niels Andersson Stake for the guidance of the widow Kerstin Pedersdotter Stille and her stepdaughter Margareta Nielsdotter, 12 years old. Three years later the widow died. In the inventory of her estate is found this: "In the year 1670, the 12th of June, Councilman W:tt Gustaf Mattzson and Notary Johan Nielson were present to take inventory, pay the taxes and distribute the property left by the late Mrs. Kirstin Pedersdotter and the late Niels Stake among the heirs, that is: the late wife's brother, the worthy and learned Mr. John Stille, Pastor at Funbo; and the two sons of her sister, the accountant W:tt Johan Larsson (present) and his brother Per Larsson, Inspector of Lesser Customs in Finland, resident of Åbo (present); and the representative of the interest of the widow's stepdaughter Margareta Nielsdotter (whose father and mother are both dead), the Advocate of Her Majesty the Dowager Queen¹², the noble Johan Rotman . . ."

In the will, which is copied *in extenso* into the inventory, is written among other things: "I, Chirsten Persdotter, hereby make known . . . that those of my folk who survive me should have the following bequests . . . 7) Inasmuch as both of my late husbands are buried in St. Clara churchyard, so I wish that when God calls me, I may be laid to earth and buried in the same place, ITEM, that the

stone that lies on that grave, and has still not been completely carved and finished as it should be, may by these my survivors be properly completed, the details of which I entrust to them. Dated Stockholm the 4th of May, 1670. Chirsten Persdotter.”

I looked for this grave, but did not find it anywhere in the churchyard, nor in the altogether inadequate burial registry of the congregation.¹³



Several (Swedish) researchers who assume that the Stille family must have been of Walloon origin ought to note the fact that the family, as shown above, was seated in Sweden long before the Walloon immigration began. The family is quite certainly of purely Swedish origin.



A few facts about the (Penningby) castle and some of its owners might be of interest in this connection.

The castle, built of granite in the three lower stories and sandstone in the fourth, consists of a rectangle with two diagonally placed round towers. The rectangle was built in the latter part of the 1400s; its original masters were members of the families Bonde, Sture and Ulf. The towers were built in the beginning of the 1500s by Lars Turesson Tre Rosor. The two lower stories stand, as previously mentioned, essentially as built; the two upper ones were modernized at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1831 the roof burned off, after which part of the walls of the uppermost story were broken off and the house got its present aspect.

The above-named Lars Turesson (Tre Rosor), who died in 1560, had inherited the estate from his mother, Birgitta Bonde, daughter of the well-known Lord High Constable Tord Bonde (d. 1454). Lars Turesson—a contemporary of King Gustav I Vasa and one of his trusted men—and his wife, Kerstin Eriksdotter Gyllenstierna, had a single child, the daughter Brita. She married Lars Ivarsson Fleming. Their daughter Elin (d. 1586) was married to Klas Bielke, probably the richest man in the country. On account of political developments he had to go into exile, whereupon his property, including Penningby, was confiscated for the Crown in the year 1600. In 1602 the property of their mother was restored to Bielke's children, and Penningby then fell to the daughter Margareta. She was first married to Councillor and Admiral of the Realm Axel Ryning (d. 1620); afterward to the Lord High Chancellor, Lord Gabriel Gustafsson Oxenstierna, younger brother of the great Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna. Margareta Bielke died childless in 1629; Penningby then passed into her brother Erik's possession. Erik Bielke was Olof Stille's master. Erik Bielke died in the beginning of the year 1638 and the property was inherited by his widow Katarina Fleming, who passed away in 1649.¹⁴

On a visit to Philadelphia on May 20, 1947, my brother Vilhelm Nordström presented these research results, together with a number of pictures, plans and maps, to Doctor Uppwall.¹⁵

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Notes

- ¹Copies of this and other orders signed by Sparre, before and after Stille's trial, have been examined through the courtesy of Fritz Nordström's niece, Dr. Elsa Nordström.
- ²Elsa Nordström suggests that the inheritance was personal property Olof was refusing to surrender to his sister.
- ³This sum, roughly equivalent to eighty American silver dollars, was more than three years' pay for a common soldier or farmer in New Sweden. See Amandus Johnson, *The Swedish Settlements on the Delaware* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1911), I: 41, 151-53, *et passim*.
- ⁴Usually called a "fly-boat" in English, this Dutch-style vessel was much used in the transatlantic trade of the day.
- ⁵Nordström's brief notes on American references to Olof Stille are omitted here. His sources and many others are covered in Peter S. Craig's article to appear in a subsequent issue of this journal.
- ⁶The citizens of Sweden were assessed an especially heavy tax in 1571 to ransom the fortress of Elfsborg (Älvsborg) from the Danes, who had captured it. This fort overlooked the mouth of the Göta River, where Gothenburg was later built. In 1643 Governor Johan Printz had his men construct Fort *Elfsborg* in present Salem County, New Jersey, and Fort *New Gothenburg* on Tinicum Island, now in Pennsylvania.
- ⁷About 27 grams of silver, exclusive of the coins.
- ⁸Crown custody of the estate was temporary, being directed against Klas Bielke, not his wife (in whose family the inheritance of Penningby was vested); see below, and note 14.
- ⁹One might speculate that the Royal Treasurer was the "noble person" on whose intervention Olof Stille relied in several potentially fatal conflicts with the nobility, both in Sweden and in New Sweden. The Treasurer of Sweden was Gabriel Bengtsson Oxenstierna, a stockholder of the New Sweden Company and a signer of Johan Printz's commission as Governor in the colony. See Amandus Johnson, *The Instruction for Johan Printz* (Philadelphia: Swedish Colonial Society, 1930), facing 32 (facsimile) and 98, note 106. One of the documents mentioned in note 1, above, shows that the final (lenient) judgment against Olof Stille was signed May 28, 1638 on behalf of the Supreme Court by Gabriel Gustafsson Oxenstierna, an even larger stockholder in the New Sweden Company, who was first cousin to Olof's brother's employer.
- ¹⁰The Clergy, as one of the four estates represented in the Swedish parliament, held a proportionate number of seats; in 1657 Johan Stille was orator on their behalf (Concionator).
- ¹¹Note that Bishop Hill, Illinois—in some respects the most impressive monument to the Swedish immigration to America—is named after this Swedish parish. Biskopskulla was the place of origin of Eric Jansson, whose followers colonized Bishop Hill.
- ¹²Hedvig Eleonora of Holstein-Gottorp, widow of Charles X and mother of Charles XI, then King of Sweden. In 1696 (a year before his own death) Charles XI resumed the mission of the Church of Sweden to America; these events are discussed in a forthcoming article, as the Stille family remained active in the Church.
- ¹³St. Clara's (Klara Kyrkan) is one of the commanding features of seventeenth and eighteenth century views of Stockholm. The present building, which dates from the 1750s, replaced the original thirteenth century church after that burned.
- ¹⁴A more recent and more complete treatment, both of the architecture and of the chain of title of Penningby castle, appears in Bengt G. Söderberg, *Uppland* (Malmö: Allhems Förlag, 1967), II:32-45. This entry in the beautiful, multi-volume series "*Slott och Herresäten i Sverige*" updates (and in some details corrects) the present article. Söderberg states that his information on ownership of Penningby is based largely upon Fritz Nordström's further research (published between 1947 and 1962).
- ¹⁵Axel Johan Uppvall was born in Avelsäter, Tveta Parish (Värmland) 2 Jan. 1872. After studies in Germany, France and the U.S. he became professor of Scandinavian studies at the University of Pennsylvania in 1924. He was active in Philadelphia at the time Nordström wrote his article on Olof Stille.