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The Wallins from Virestad

Sven Wallin and Elaine Wallin Nelson*

Letter from Sven Wallin to
Elaine Wallin Nelson, 30 January 1983

Dear distant relatives,

I think we have first father together. I have never looked after my family register. You write perfect Swedish and, therefore, I go over to my own language. I originate from Virestad Parish. About six kilometers from Virestad church there is an area of three or four farms called Valid. Håkan Wallin owned one of these farms. The name Wallin comes from Valid. Formerly, the children usually got the father's first name with an ending -son attached. During military service, those in command chose the place names in order to be able to distinguish the soldiers. Valid became Valin, then altered to Vallin and now Wallin.

My father's father (*farfar*), Johannes Håkansson Vallin, told me that his father was named Sven Wallin and his father's father (*farfar*) was Håkan Wallin. My father was Sven Johannesson Vallin. I myself am Sven Wallin and have one son named Anders and one daughter named Ingrid.

Unfortunately, I have only weak memories from earlier times. My father, who was born in 1877, told me that his school time was restricted to a couple of months during two years. There was poverty at home: 80 acres (80% wooded), one horse, two cows, pigs, sheep, poultry, and eight children. As soon as the snow melted, they didn't get to wear the wooden clogs but had to go barefoot. They hopped on stones, which were warmed by the sun, on the way home from school. The father, Johannes, earned extra money by selling and exchanging cows and horses and also helping farmers butcher. When my father was eleven years old, he went along on a business trip with horse and wagon to Dalarna (about 600 kilometers north). Here a Mora clock was purchased. The clock-works were wholly of wood and they had to be carried the whole way home.

When he was twelve years old, my father was placed as a farmhand with a farm owner. My father thought he was extremely nasty, especially with the food he was forced to eat. My father ran away, because if he had gone home, he would have been whipped and sent back again. He supported himself by sawing wood during his wandering, without contact with his home. He grew big and strong and told a story about his time as a smith's apprentice. The smith was demanding and, when the apprentices made mistakes, he sat them in the smithy tub. My father, however, was so strong that he sat the smith in the tub.

* Elaine Wallin Nelson resides at 625 Vista Lane, Cheyenne, WY 82009. The first three sections of this article come from a letter and typed manuscripts sent to Elaine on 30 January 1983 by Sven Wallin of Almhult, Sweden. Elaine translated the material into English and is also responsible for the last section of the article.

He helped build railroads and worked on construction in Denmark and Finland. Finally, he landed in Stockholm and got work with the construction of the parliament building. He got to be a helper to a sculptor who carved statues, flowers, and leaves to decorate the building. Here he got to prepare the stones for the sculptor and later rough out the stones so that the sculptor could perform the fine work. My father developed extraordinary feeling for the stone's nature and how it should be finished. Soon he was a sculptor and worked many times faster than the established sculptors.

Now he had financial independence and dared to return to his father's farm. All the children had moved out; most had immigrated to America. During his stay at home he made, among other things, a beautiful gravestone for his father's father. On it there are about 5 mm upraised letters with beautiful script: SVEN WALLIN / 1805-18?? (I have forgotten the year). He is probably the younger brother to the Johan in your records. (No, next older.) The stone still stands in the Virestad church graveyard. After the erection of the monument, my father returned to Stockholm.

It is probable that the simple crofter, Johannes Wallin, increased in prestige, for it was the custom every Sunday to attend the church service and, afterwards, go and look at the graves while meeting people and visiting. His son, Sven, came home in 1904 and began to produce monuments for the farmers in Virestad, Stenbrohult, Pjätteryd, and Loshult. Älmhult, a little place then with perhaps two to three thousand inhabitants, became a railroad junction. It had an inn and a market and it was located in the middle of the churches, so he settled there.

Sven Wallin had serious troubles with kidney stones and thought that he was dying many times. He married in 1910. His younger brother, Wilhelm, came home from America. Wilhelm was a good worker and helped my father during his illness. Father found it safest to enter into partnership with Wilhelm and thus the name "THE WALLIN BROTHERS STONWORKS" came about.

Both of them had certainly seen how wonderful electricity was. With great difficulty, they succeeded in having electricity brought to Älmhult. They themselves borrowed 1,500 *Kronor* from the bank in order to cover the costs. Think what a miracle to be able to set aside the oil lamp and, instead, get the first one-horsepower motor installed. Think what wonderful constructions they did, when this electric motor could help them in their work. The company grew and they had their own quarry where they cut stone and also exported to Germany. The kidney stones became completely unbearable and, in 1929, father decided to let a professor, in whom he had great confidence, operate to remove them. There was roentgen[ography] then but no contrast. On 8 August, his birthday, he died at the age of fifty-two.

My brother, two years older than me, and father's brother managed the business. In 1938 my father's brother had an accident and our family took over the company. I studied at the technical school in Göteborg and, after my studies, planned to travel to America. In 1939 the war came and I was in the military service and at home. The machinery was modernized and our company grew to the largest in Sweden. In 1945 I married and have a son and a daughter, both

married, and also a granddaughter (*sondotter*). My brother, Sture, manages a slab-grinding business we built up and I manage the stone company. I am almost sixty-eight years old and now want to sell the company. Afterwards, I hope for good health and to be able to travel and see the world. English is now certainly the universal language but, during my schooldays, German was first and English second. I write and speak German fluently and I also know English; but it is not so fluent.

During the period 1600-1800, few people moved out of Virestad and most marriages took place within the parish. I can remember that my father had relatives in every farmstead. During the markets our house was full of relatives. Between 1930 and 1950, the farmsteads were mechanized and Virestad's parish inhabitants dropped from 6,000 to 1,500. During this time, I employed many that said they were related to me. They were all clever, industrious, and responsible.

If you are interested in this place where you have your roots and have any questions, please write and I will be glad to tell what I know. When I was little, I remember well that over Midsummer we got to stay with father's father. He came then with horse and wagon and took us the five-quarters of a Swedish mile (about 12.5 kilometers). It was fun to play in the hay pile.

Greetings,

[signed Sven Wallin]

Håkan Svensson Wallin (*Farfars farfar*)

Håkan Svensson was born on 28 June 1760 at Valid Södergård in Virestad Parish, the son of Sven Håkansson, a freehold farmer (*henmansägare*), and Bengta Johansdotter. He was the youngest of four brothers. However, the next oldest brother had died before Håkan's birth. Håkan became motherless when only one year of age, when his mother died of pneumonia (*bröstfeber*) in July of 1761. Two years later, Håkan lost his father, who died of cancer (*kräfta*) in September of 1763. The estate inventory (*bouppteckning*) made at the time of his mother's death shows that the family had a good economic standing.

Håkan came into the world during a severe economic crisis. The crisis had arisen through the Hat Party's well-intentioned, but all too generous, way of encouraging industry, by partly relying on subsidies to manufacturers and partly on large loans. The Hat Party also had a war mentality, which helped to involve the country in war in 1741-1743 and in 1757-1762. In 1762, the currency had been devalued to its lowest level. The Hat Party retained power for three more years but, in 1765, with the help of Russian, English, and Danish gold, the Caps managed to come to power. Now the Rikens Ständers Bank stopped lending money, old loans were called in, and financial support for industry ceased. These actions resulted in company closures, unemployment, and inflation. This, in turn, brought about buyer resistance, which resulted in even more unemployment. When farmers traveled to the cities with their produce, they had to either sell it for next to nothing or return with full loads. This resulted in many farmers leaving their land and farms.

In 1769 the Hat Party returned to power. Although economic restrictions were eased, the lives of manufacturers and farmers did not substantially improve. In 1772 it was the Caps turn to return to power. Nothing worth mentioning was carried out. When Gustav III, through a state coup on August day in 1772, became a powerful force in Sweden, brighter times began to dawn. However, it was the end of 1776 before effective measures could be undertaken. That was through coin conversion. At the same time, however, Gustav III, took one more measure to strengthen the monetary system that was anything but popular among Sweden's people. Distilling liquor for home use was abolished and Crown distilleries were established in order to obtain increased income for the state. As a result, prices for spirits were raised, and spirits meant infinitely more to the common man during the eighteenth century than during the twentieth century.

Håkan's situation from the time of his father's death in 1763 until about 1780 is unknown. In the household examination rolls for 1775-1787, one finds Håkan's brother, Johan, listed for 1/4 *mantal* in Valid Södergård. With him is noted "the boy Håkan Svensson." In this parish record, Håkan's name has been crossed out, which suggests that he moved away from his father's farm prior to 1787. His whereabouts are unknown until 1788, when one finds him listed as a soldier. Whether Håkan participated in Gustav III's war is not known, but his participation seems rather probable. However, it is not certain, for at this time the military preferred to send into the field the older soldiers who had already formed families and had children. In this way, they ensured continued population growth. That their wives and children would be in a hard situation if the soldiers were killed was not anything the authorities attached any importance to.

The above-mentioned war raged until 1790. Håkan is found to have remained in military service for seven years. He was called "soldier Wallin." One must suppose that the name was taken from the birthplace. This is the more likely because Håkan was a soldier for Valid's squad. Håkan belonged to the Royal Kronoberg's Regiment's Seventh Company, which was also called Allbo Company.

In addition to the previously mentioned economic difficulties during his childhood, Håkan also had to weather many other troubled periods, which partly were caused by the aforementioned Swedish-Russian War, partly by Gustav III's costly attitude, and partly by crop failure.

Perhaps the hardest period of hunger during Håkan's time was the winter of 1783-1784, which lasted so long that the people had to eat the straw roofs of their buildings. The regime's attempts to get provisions to the hungry population were made more difficult because the ice and snow stayed long into the summer. The coldest winters on record occurred between 1787-1789. Poorer crops certainly followed these hard winters.

In Virestad on 3 August 1794, Håkan, who was thirty-four years old, married twenty-four-year-old Kerstin Simonsdotter, who was born a Jättastiget in Virestad. Håkan's chief, Herr Fendrich Lagerbielke, had given permission for the marriage. (At this time, the command had much to say about anything concerning the soldiers.) After his marriage, Håkan moved to Jättastiget under

Fanhult in Virestad Parish, and took over the croft that had been worked by his father-in-law. He seems to have left his military service in the following year. His wife brought a son to the home. The son's father is unknown, but it certainly was not Håkan, for the son had the surname Jonsson.

At this croft, Håkan had three sons, the first coming into the world just three months after the wedding. This son died of smallpox at a young age. In 1800, Håkan moved with his wife and two sons and the stepson to Degersnäs Nordgård in Virestad Parish, where he became a farmer. In 1809 he had to leave his position as a freeholder and content himself with being a crofter at the croft (*torp*) Norra Vasatorpet belonging to Degersnäs Nordgård.

He moved here with his wife and five children. At this croft, he had yet another son, who was born in 1810. In the fall of the same year, two of Håkan's sons died (one week apart) of dysentery. Only a few months later, on 1 February 1811, Håkan died of consumption. He was fifty years old.

Kerstin Simonsdotter (*Farfars farmor*)

Kerstin came into the world on 29 June 1770 at the croft Jättastiget under Fanhult, the daughter of crofter (*torpare*) Simon Svensson and Johanna Persdotter. She was the third of six known siblings. Certainly it was crowded in the cottage where Kerstin grew up. In 1787, when she was about seventeen years old, her mother died. Kerstin was still living with her father when she entered into her marriage.

On 13 November 1791, when Kerstin was twenty-one years old, she gave birth to a son at Jättastiget who was baptized as Bengt. The son received the father's patronymic—Jonsson—so the father must have been called Jon. Nothing more is known about him.

On 3 August 1794, at the age of twenty-four, Kerstin was married to the thirty-four-year-old soldier Håkan Wallin from Valid's soldier's croft. Her husband subsequently moved to Kerstin's father's croft, which he took over. Thus, Kerstin continued to live at the croft where she had been born.

The year after the wedding, Håkan evidently received his discharge from his military service. Until 1800 the family lived at Jättastiget. During these years, Kerstin bore three sons, the first of whom came into the world just three months after the wedding! She had the sorrow of losing this son early in life to smallpox. In 1800, Kerstin moved with her husband and three sons to Degersnäs Nordgård in Virestad Parish, where her husband became a farmer. At this farm she gave life to three more sons.

In 1809 Håkan became a crofter at the croft Norra Vasatorpet under Degersnäs Nordgård. Here Kerstin moved with her five children. The year after the move, she bore still another son. Six months after this son's birth, she had the sorrow of losing two of her children to dysentery. On 1 February 1811, she became a widow.

After her husband's death, the son Bengt returned from Västra Torsås Parish, where he had moved in 1807, to take over the croft. How long Kerstin remained

with her son at Norra Vasatorpet is not known, although she was still there as of 1816. Before 1820, she and her three youngest sons had moved.

By the beginning of the 1820s, Kerstin lived alone at Femlingehult Mellangård in Virestad Parish. The minister here at this time noted that she was poor (*fattig*). Kerstin was a widow for twenty-nine years. She died on 8 April 1840 at Femlingehult Mellangård from the infirmities of old age (*alderdomsbräcklighet*). She was just two months short of her seventieth birthday.

Six Generations of Wallins (Vallins): A Summary

1. **Alma Elaine Wallin:** b. Des Moines, Iowa, 7 December 1925.
2. **Albert Emanuel Wallin:** b. Des Moines, Iowa, 21 September 1893; m. Edna Sophia Gertrude Anderson in Des Moines, Iowa, 16 August 1924; d. Des Moines, Iowa, 17 February 1953.
4. **John (Jonas) Wallin:** b. Gylteboda, Virestad, 23 September 1845; m. Hannah Matilda Benson in Mankato, Minnesota, 30 December 1882; d. Des Moines, Iowa, 5 October 1908.
8. **Johan Håkansson Vallin:** b. Degernås Norrege, Virestad, 9 August 1804; m. Cherstin Jonasdöter in Virestad, 31 December 1844; d. Björkedal, Femlingehult Södergård, Virestad, 15 May 1890.
16. **Håkan Svensson Wallin:** b. Valid Södergård, Virestad, 28 June 1760; m. Kerstin (Cherstina) Simonsdöter in Virestad, 3 August 1794; d. Norra Vasatorpet, Virestad, 1 February 1811.
32. **Sven Håkansson:** b. 1712; m. Bengta Johansdöter; d. Virestad, September 1763.