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# *Län* (County) or *Landskap* (Province)?: Implications of Recent County Name Changes for Genealogists

James E. Erickson

What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name  
would smell as sweet. - Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II, ii, 43

Knowing the names and correct spellings of Swedish parishes and the counties (*län*) in which they are located is a prerequisite to using Swedish records, whether the research is being done in Sweden or North America. Since indexes at archives, libraries, and research centers are generally arranged hierarchically, you must know the name of the county before you can locate and access specific records such as parish registers, household examination rolls, census and land records, court records or military records. In those instances where several parishes share a common name, it is imperative that you know in which county your particular parish is located.

Since knowledge of Swedish county names is so crucial to the research done by Swedish and Swedish American genealogists and family historians, the recent county name changes instituted in Sweden are of more than passing interest to *SAG* readers. Briefly, they are as follows:

- Former county (*län*) names that have been superseded (i.e., replaced):
  - Göteborg and Bohus
  - Malmöhus
  - Kopparberg
  - Skaraborg
  - Kristianstad
  - Älvsborg
- New county (*län*) names that supersede the names listed above:
  - Dalarna—includes the former *län* of Kopparberg
  - Skåne—includes the former *län* of Malmöhus and Kristianstad
  - Västra Götaland—includes the former *län* of Göteborg and Bohus, Skaraborg, and Älvsborg

What are the implications of the above-mentioned county name changes for researchers? Since the former county names that have been superseded are so well entrenched in the genealogical literature in both Sweden and North America, they cannot be replaced summarily and forgotten. For example, parish names published in *SAG* have been accompanied by a *län* abbreviation or letter code since the journal's inception in 1981 (see table 2). Similarly, C. M.

Rosenberg's invaluable *Geografiskt—statistiskt handlexikon öfver Sverige*, published in 1883, identifies all place names by parish (*socken*), district (*härad*), and/or county (*län*). There is little doubt that both present-day and future genealogists must continue to have a working knowledge of the former county names.

The larger question, however, is what will (should?) archives, libraries, research centers, and genealogical journals do with the new county names? Will (should?) they become incorporated into new indices in lieu of the former names? If so, when? Questions such as these have led many to consider identifying Swedish parishes by provinces (*landskap*)—which represent more natural historical, cultural, and geographical divisions of the country. In an e-mail to the author dated 2 January 2000, Elisabeth Thorsell wrote:

We [at the Federation of Swedish Genealogical Societies (*Sveriges Släktforskarförbund*)] are mostly feeling that *the recent changes of the county [names] and borders, and the proposed future changes, make them unsuitable for genealogical purposes. Instead, people are changing over to using the provinces (landskap)* [italics mine]. In the Federation publications, we will start using the *landskap* in the *Svenska Antavlor* from the first issue of the next volume, which will be printed during the spring [of 2000].

**For the sake of consistency, it is my intention to follow suit. In this and subsequent issues of SAG, Swedish parishes will be identified by the historical provinces (*landskap*) in which they are located.** The twenty-five province names and their standardized abbreviations are listed in table 3.

During the ensuing months, which are likely to be filled with anxiety and confusion, I would strongly encourage all SAG readers to get on the Internet and visit a relatively new page, called *Socken-Sök* (Parish-Search), located on the Web site maintained by the Federation of Swedish Genealogical Societies. When you visit <<http://www.genealogi.se/landskap.htm>> you will encounter a page that describes the type of information available and provides directions on “how to do” a search of any Swedish place name of interest. The Swedish text found on this page is reproduced and translated for you below.

### ***Socken-Sök***

Parish-Search

#### ***Hitta snabbt bland socknar, kommuner, landskap och län***

Find quickly among the parishes, communes, provinces and counties

#### ***Socken-Sök är ett hjälpmedel för dig som snabbt vill veta:***

Parish-Search is an aid for you who quickly want to know:

- ***Var en socken är belägen (kommun, landskap och län)***  
Where a parish is located (commune, province and county)
- ***Vilka socknar som finns i en viss kommun***  
Which parishes are in a given commune

- **Vilka socknar eller kommuner som finns i ett visst län**  
Which parishes or communes are in a given county
- **Vilka socknar eller kommuner som finns i ett visst landskap**  
Which parishes or communes are in a given province
- **Var en sockens originalkyrkböcker förvaras**  
Where a parish's original church books are kept
- **Vilken SCB [Statistiska centralbyrån]-kod en viss socken har**  
Which SCB [Central Bureau of Statistics]-code a given parish has
- **Vilken socken som motsvaras av en viss SCB-kod**  
Which parish corresponds to a given SCB-code

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• **Gör så här:**

*Skriv namnet på socknen, kommunen, länet, landskapet eller en SCB-kod i fältet. Gör skillnad på stora och små bokstaver! Klicka sedan på knappen Sök.*

- Do it like this:

Write the name of the parish, the commune, the county, the province or the SCB-code in the field. Distinguish between large and small letters! Then click the Search button.

**Sök här** (Search here):

**Sök** (Search)

A typical search result is illustrated in table 1. In this instance, searching the name Hällestad produced three "hits." The column headings, *left to right*, refer to Province, Current parish name, Current commune, Current county, SCB-Code, and the Landsarkivet at which the parish records have been deposited.

**Table 1.** Search result using the Web site *Socken-Sök* (Parish-Search).

<b>Sökresultat i Socken-Sök</b>					
Sökning efter: 'Hällestad'					
visar träffarna 1 - 3 av totalt 3					
Landskap	Nuvarande församlingsnamn	Nuvarande kommun	Nuvarande län	SCB-kod	Kyrkböckernas förvaring
Östergötland	Hällestad	Finspångs kn	Östergötlands län	056202	Vadstena LA
Skåne	Hällestad	Lunds kn	Skåne län	128115	Lunds LA
Västergötland	Hällestad	Pålköpings kn	Västra Götalands län	149904	Göteborgs LA
Ny sökning					

**Table 2.** Swedish counties (*län*) and their abbreviations.

Blekinge	Blek.	K	Stockholm	Stock.	A,B
Dalarna <sup>a</sup>	Dala.	W	Södermanland	Söd.	D
Gotland	Gotl.	I	Uppsala	Upps.	C
Gävleborg	Gävl.	X	Värmland	Värm.	S
Halland	Hall.	N	Västerbotten	Vbn.	AC
Jämtland	Jämt.	Z	Västernorrland	Vn.	Y
Jönköping	Jön.	F	Västmanland	Väst.	U
Kalmar	Kalm.	H	Västra Götaland <sup>c</sup>	VGöt.	O
Kronoberg	Kron.	G	Örebro	Öre.	T
Norrbottnen	Norr.	BD	Östergötland	Ög.	E
Skåne <sup>b</sup>	Skån.	M			

<sup>a</sup> formerly Kopparberg (Kopp.; W) *län*.

<sup>b</sup> includes the former Malmöhus (Malm.; M) and Kristianstad (Krist.; L) *län*.

<sup>c</sup> includes the former Göteborg and Bohus (Göt.; O), Skaraborg (Skar.; R), and Älvsborg (Älvs.; P) *län*

**Table 3.** Swedish provinces (*landskap*) and their abbreviations.

Blekinge	Blek.	Närke	Närk.
Bohuslän	Bohu.	Skåne	Skån.
Dalarna	Dala.	Småland	Smål.
Dalsland	Dals.	Södermanland	Södm.
Gotland	Gotl.	Uppland	Uppl.
Gästrikland	Gäst.	Västerbotten	Väbo.
Halland	Hall.	Västergötland	Vägö.
Hälsingland	Häls.	Värmland	Värm.
Härjedalen	Härj.	Västmanland	Väsm.
Jämtland	Jämt.	Ångermanland	Ånge.
Lappland	Lapp.	Öland	Öland.
Medelpad	Mede.	Östergötland	Östg.