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Erik Jansson's Second Wife Anna Sophia

Erik Wikén*

The story of how Anna Sophia (Pollock) became Erik Jansson's second wife is graphically told by Anders Larsson in a letter dated 1 Aug. 1850 and published in *Aftonbladet* (Stockholm) 2 Nov. 1850.¹

“There are many comical stories concerning this union, but what truthful persons, who have resided a long time in Bishop Hill, have to relate is as follows: two days after the death of his former wife from cholera, Erik Jansson preached that he had received a commandment and witness that he should marry immediately, in part because his bodily needs craved it and in part because he had to produce a mother for Israel. The woman who had received this commandment to take the place of the dead woman was therefore to appear the same evening in his sleeping quarters. This sermon produced results, but instead of *one*, *three* came, all of them having received the commandment, and all were willing to join him in bed. Erik Jansson is supposed to have declared that none of them had received the *right* commandment. The choice was therefore moved up to the following evening, when *two*, who had received the commandment appeared, and according to the sources, the stronger of the two assumed her role in bed. The following day Erik Jansson informed his congregation in his sermon that God had selected a mother, and she was the right one, since she had been present at the former wife's death, when her divine spirit apparently flew into Miss Pollock or Miss Gabriellson (her former husband was named Gabriellson, the rich man's son from Malung.”

There exist only vague references to Anna Sophia's background. All agree that she was born in Göteborg, early became an orphan and that she emigrated to America 1831 or 1832.²

One source, which so far has not been cited, is the membership register of the Bishop Hill Colony.³ Here we find her listed under the heading of Österunda Parish (page 6), thusly:

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	Arrived	Born
Ann(a) Sophia Jansson	18--	16 June 1815
Isak, son	Born in America	2 June 1849
Eric, son	1846	11 June 1838
Mathilda, daughter	1846	12 April 1842

Isak was a son in her marriage (her third) to Linjo Lars Gabriellsson.⁴ Eric (the correct birth date should be 15 June) and Mathilda were her stepchildren, Erik Jansson's children in his marriage to Maja Stina Larsdotter. The fact that the entire family is listed under Österunda Parish (Väst.) is due to the fact that the stepchildren were born in that parish.

If we examine the births in all of Göteborg's parishes for 1815,⁵ we find a number of girls named Anna Sophia, born in that year. If we follow their fates, we find that there was only one, Anna Sophia, who emigrated to America at this particular time. She was born in Kristine Parish 18 June 1815, the daughter of a laborer at the sugar refinery in Göteborg, Johan Bengtsson, and his wife, Brita Svensdotter. When Johan Bengtsson volunteered in the Göta Artillery Regiment in the city, the family moved over to the Garrison Parish (*Garnisonsförsamlingen*). Johan Bengtsson died 30 Jan. 1827 and the estate inventory was held 4 April the same year, at which time Anna Sophia Bengtsson,⁶ being under age, was placed under the guardianship of Johan Dahlander 12 May 1818. Dahlander was the secretary (*klockare*) of the Garrison Parish, and when her mother, Brita Svensdotter, also died in 1819, Anna Sophia moved in with Dahlander's mother and was confirmed 1830. In the exit lists of the Garrison Parish we find that on 9 July 1832 she emigrated to New York "with the permission of *klockaren* Dahlander and of her own free will and inclination". No trace has been found of a passport for her departure.

There is scarcely any doubt that Anna Sophia Bengtsson is identical to Erik Jansson's second wife. The fact that the Bishop Hill Register has the wrong birth date (16 June instead of the actual 18 June) is quite usual (compare the birth date of Eric, the stepson, mentioned above). The usual reference in the literature sources that she emigrated in the company of a wealthy Göteborg family, does not harmonize with the evidence in the parish exit lists.⁷

Not much is known concerning Anna Sophia's life after the death of Erik Jansson. There is a report, dated 2 April 1855, concerning the school in Bishop Hill, signed by her.⁸ From 28 July of that year she stayed for a time in the Shaker Colony in Pleasant Hill, KY.⁹ Anna Maria Stråle tells in a letter dated 7 June 1867 that Anna Sophia lived in Galva, IL and that she was the proprietor of a "better restaurant but did not sell alcoholic beverages".¹⁰

Anna Sophia died in the county poor house in Henry County, IL in 1888.¹¹

¹ The entire letter in a translation by Nils William Olsson is to be found in Erik Wikén, "John Root Once More" in *Swedish American Genealogist*, Vol.X, No.4, Dec. 1990, pp. 178-185.

² Michael A. Mikkelsen, "The Bishop Hill colony" in *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, Vol. X:1 (1892), p.43; Emil Herlenius, *Erik-Janssens historia* (Jönköping 1900), p. 77; Eric Johnson, "Fifty Years in Politics" in *Viking*, I:1, July 1906, where he says - "a childless married lady, of Swedish birth, who had lived in America for fifteen years"; Ernst W.Olson, *The Swedish Element in Illinois* (Chicago 1917), p. 50.

³ *The Bishop Hill Colony Papers and Post Colony Papers 1846-1905*. Microfilmed by Lennart Setterdahl 1971. The negative is owned by the Swedish-American Historical Society of Chicago with copies in the Emigrant Institute in Växjö. Roll No.2.

⁴ Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York 1820-1850* (Stockholm and Chicago 1967) (*SPANY*), p. 71, n.36. Both Mikkelsen and Herlenius mention that Anna Sophia had been married twice before arriving in Bishop Hill. Her first marriage was to a sailor who disappeared on a voyage. Her second husband was a Mr. Pollock, apparently residing in New York.

⁵ All of the sources referred to here are to be found in the Göteborg District Archives.

⁶ She is referred to in the source materials with her father's patronymic, according to the custom in the cities. See Erik Wikén, "When Did Swedish Patronymics Become Surnames?" in *Swedish American Genealogist*, Vol. II, No.1, March 1982, pp. 31-33.

⁷ It is tempting to identify her with the seventeen year-old Anna Ryberg, who arrived in New York 27 Aug. 1832 aboard the *Minerva* (from Göteborg), at the same time as the Peter Bergner family, see *SPANY*, p.11 and Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in U.S.Ports 1820-1850 (except New York)* (Stockholm and St.Paul,MN 1979), p. 86. But how to explain the surname Ryberg?

⁸ George Swank, *Bishop Hill, Showcase of Swedish History*. Fifth printing (Galva,IL Oct. 1978), p. 23.

⁹ Lilly Setterdahl & J.Hiram Wilson, "Hotel Accommodations in the Bishop Hill Colony" in *The Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* (now *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*), Vol. XXIX, No. 3, July 1978, p. 186.

¹⁰ The letter is to be found in the *Anna Lindevall Collection* in the District Archives of Uppsala.

¹¹ Mikkelsen, "The Bishop Hill colony", p. 70.