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A letter from Kansas to Bishop Hill in 1869

Letters by Nelson Hayden

TRANSLATED AND COMPILED BY LARS-OVE JOHANSSON AND JAN ERIK HALLSTRÖM

Introduction

One day not so long ago, *Bishop Hill Heritage Association* (BHHA) received documents concerning the Jacob Jacobson family in Bishop Hill, Illinois. Among all the documents there were a collection of more than a dozen letters written from Kansas to Jacob Jacobson in Bishop Hill, starting in the late 1860s after the American Civil War. They were signed *Nelson Hayden*.

These letters were all signed *Hayden* or *N. Hayden*, who was soon identified as *Nils Jonsson Hedin* (also Hedeenn, Hadeenn, or Headin), one of the original members of the Bishop Hill Colony.

Scans were soon sent to Jan Erik Hallström and Lars-Ove Johansson for translation into English, which has now been finished and presented in a PDF file.

Who was Nils Jonsson Hedin?

Nils Jonsson Hedin was born 5 August 1818, the 5th child of Jon Persson and his wife Carin Olofsdotter of Långå 8 in Hede parish (Härj.). By 1840 his father had died and several of his siblings, and he decided to seek work elsewhere. By now he had started using the Hedin surname, derived from his home parish. He ended up in Söderala parish (Häls.) and learnt the tailor's craft, and in 1843 was appointed parish tailor (*sockenskräddare*).

When the future prophet Erik Jansson arrived in Söderala, Nils Hedin became an ardent follower. After about three years of conflict with both church and law authorities, emigration was the sole solution.

In the summer of 1846 Nils Hedin, his mother, and siblings boarded the barque *Wilhelmina* in Gävle, heading to New York.

From there the Janssonist slowly made their way to Bishop Hill, where Nils Hedin was appointed as one of the twelve apostles by Erik Jansson.

After the murder of Erik Jansson, Nils Hedin was one of the men that took his body back to Bishop Hill, which shows his high standing in the colony. He preached and performed marriages as a minister. He also supported Jonas Olsson, the new head of the colony, giving him his advice.

After the gradual dissolution of Bishop Hill during the 1860s, true Janssonism faded out slowly, while Methodist and Adventist influence grew stronger. Nils and Martha Hedin seemed suddenly to vanish from Colony life. He had sold his property in Bishop Hill on 29 August 1868. But where did they the group go?

Later the BHHA found evidence in their archive that Nils had sold most of his belongings in Bishop Hill in August 1868.

The first letter

After their move from Bishop Hill, Nelson Hayden kept in contact with his old friends in the Colony. Below is the first of many letters to the Jacobsons.

“Lebanon, Osage County, Kansas (the envelope is stamped in Burlingame, Kansas).

June 12, 1869

Dear friend Jacobson

From the inmost sincerity of my heart, I am very thankful for the kind letter I have just received from you, giving us a satisfactory explanation of various matters in our old home. I am satisfied with what you have done and that you will do the best you can, in reference to my affairs. I don't expect much from the balance of the sale



Jacob Jacobson (1817–1883), his wife Helena Persdotter (b 1821), and their son Jacob (b 1859).

once my remaining debts are settled, but what little there is, I will be very glad for when it comes.

I think you are strictly correct in reference to J. E. Lunquist:¹, the 32 dollars in his favor has been kept in my memorandum since August 10th 1868. You know that when I bought 800 feet of lumber and closed up the wagon shed, I said to him that he could have his cows free, and I should take his share at the assessed value in the Colony division, which was as far as I know \$12. Twenty dollars came to me from O. Lin,² which I should give an account to Lunquist for. The wagon shed stood vacant for a number of years and gave no interest to either of us. Now, if Lunquist got six percent for the whole time, I think this is about right between two Brethren in the New Jerusalem.

I have had a letter from O. Olson³ a few days ago, and made a reply to it, that he can not draw any of the \$45 from the Note with Beck in Galva. I wish for you to save me the trouble to write a subpoena letter to Beck, and say to him that he can cancel the twenty dollar account against me on his Bank and send the remaining \$200 with the interest to Simsons Bank in Lawrence. They have told me that they would call for it after the 18th of May.

I have their receipt in my possession and Beck's for the note was delivered up to them on the 14th of April when I received the \$100 you sent me. Erick did not, I presume, make any claim for the present, as I have not yet been able to tell him, that we have a shelter to live in of our own in Kansas now. Our homestead at Bishop Hill is not available for our use for the present, if Olof Olson has any claim on me. For the lawsuit my estate remains at Bishop Hill, and must pay for itself to either party when the contest is ended.

I should like to say something to you in reference to the country in which we intend to make a new home. In my opinion the soil and climate is beautiful as it can be in the creation of God anywhere. A great country for stock raising, milk and dairy business, and fruit and farming products of all kinds.

We live now in the western part of Osage County, one *mil*⁴ to the line of Lyon County. This season of the year the country looks beautiful. The great extensive prairie, so well covered with the best kind of grass, the atmosphere is very agreeable, the day is warm and the night cold and pleasant. In my opinion it must be a healthy country if we settle on the upland, but most of the families here live on the bottoms, on wetter *courses*; they will no doubt be subject to fever and ague more or less.

I determined early in the spring to locate in an upland. The reason I did not settle in that *New Church*⁵ colony was, that I did not like their selection of land. Ten miles above on the river, I found the country in different shape, the first grade of farming land. Timber of course is scanty.

I have closed the bargain on the quarter section that I selected for my new home in April. There have been many thousand acres sold here since that time. I began to fear that I might miss it. I have paid \$200, two-hundred dollars, and got a bond of deed. We can still buy the best prairie land here, for \$5 per acre, but no one can tell what it will be a year hence. The railroad from Topeka will then be running through this section of the country, as we are only 42 miles from the capital of the state (Topeka). Being then connected by the railroad, the land may be more expensive here too.

I trust in God that things will turn out as with our troubles at Bishop Hill, that it may not make any one of us homeless in our old age. For our part, since we left you with

deep feelings on *the 15th day of December -68*, (here Hayden's writing in English suddenly ends, and he continues in Swedish!) we have had, as you say in your letter, clothing and food. We have not suffered from distress, for which we should be grateful to the Almighty Father in heaven... and I think he makes the best for both you and us henceforth, as well as before.

Let us hear from you Jacobson, if you are willing to wait for an opportunity with the sale of our old home at Bishop Hill, so that we could get the funds to build us a house, but first I need to get me a team and wagon to bring home construction wood from Topeka and six hundred dollars, the remainder of our quarter-section of land.

A hearty warm greeting to you and those near you, S. Swanson's, Linbeck, and other friends in our old home.

Your devoted friend
Nelson Hayden

Notes:

- 1) Probably: *Johan Erik Lundqvist*, b 13 Aug. 1801 in Lunda (D). He settled in Bishop Hill, but later moved to Andover, Illinois.
- 2) Probably: *Olof Ersson Lind*, born June 19, 1824, on Ellne 6, Söderala Parish, Helsingland. He was the son of a crofter. He started as a farmhand working for farmer Jonas Olson in Ina, Söderala (trustee *in spe* in Bishop Hill), and he was one of the 8 Jansonists led by Jonas Olson, who went to California in 1850 looking for gold. Lind married in 1848 to Brita Persdotter from Alfta parish, (Häls.). He became a U.S. citizen in 1857, and died in Bishop Hill in 1877.
- 3) There were at least half a dozen *Olof Olsons* in Bishop Hill, but the pathfinder and Jansonist envoy Olof Olsson from Ina1/Kinsta s5, died in Victoria with wife and two children already at the end of 1846, from fever chills. Olof Olson mentioned in the letter might be Olof Olsson from Ovanåker in Helsingland. (He was painted by Olof Krans).
- 4) One Swedish *mil* = 6 miles
- 5) He might mean *The New Church* = The Swedenborgian Church in Barclay.

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