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# The Farm Names of Dalarna

## A very specific type of names

BY ELISABETH THORSELL

In the province of Dalarna (Dalecarlia), people used and still use *gårdsnamn*, which means farm names.

These names are always put first in a person's name. They show that this person belonged to the "Der" farm or the "Blom" farm, and they were always put before the person's Christian name, and they were talked about as Der Eric or Blom Anna.

If Blom Anna married Der Eric and moved to the Der farm, she was usually known as Der Anna after the marriage.

But if Der Eric moved to her home, he was probably known as Blom Eric after the marriage. In that case the *gårdsnamn* is called the type of *särknamn* (a *särk* is a female dress).

The reason for this custom of *gårdsnamn* is not clear, but probably has to do with the fact that very few first names were used when a baby's name was to be chosen. In the old days people almost always used a name that was already used by an older relative, and that gave the parents somewhere less than 20 names for boys and 20 names for girls to choose from. As a result you could have several Anders Erssons or Anna Andersdotter in a village.

The villages, especially round Lake Siljan, can be very big with some 50 different farms in the same village. So to help to sort out which Anders Ersson or Margareta Olsdotter you were talking about a farm name was added to the person, like Orr Anders Ersson or Stolts Margareta Olsdotter.

Then you knew that you were talking

about Anders from Orrgården or Margareta from Stoltsgården in that village. The same farm names could also be used in other villages, without the people on those farms being related.

This custom is very common in all of Dalarna, but the *gårdsnamn* are not recorded in the church records until about 1800 or so, at least not in Leksand, which is the parish I am most familiar with. But they were probably used in the local society much earlier.

These names are of several types, and the most intriguing one are the ones like *Knis*, *Kers*, *Hases* as they are contractions of the name of an early owner of the farm. *Knis* can be derived from someone named Erik Nilsson, if you say the name fast, and the same goes for *Kers* from Erik Ersson, etc.

The name can also be of a type that has to do with nature, like *Berg*, *Land*, *Sjö* (mountain, land, lake).

Another variety are names that were first used by a soldier as his army name. My husband's ancestor Erik Jönsson Orre (orre is a forest bird) was a soldier and he had a son, and he was called *Orr Anders Ersson*.

The names can also be based on some position in the local society, like *Körkvärns* (the church warden's), *Nämndemans* (the permanent jurymen), *Klockars* (the church singer and clerk), *Riksdagmans* (member of parliament) or *Lärmors* (the school-teacher's).

Names can also be based on a craft, like

*Skommars* (the shoemaker's) or *Målars* (the painter's).

Names could also be based on personal characteristics, like *Lång* (tall) or *Munter* (cheery).

The most common ones are the ones of the first type, based on the name of the first owner of a farm. More examples are *Olars*, *Perers*, *Perols*, *Mases*, *Helgas*, and *Göras*.

These days many people with a farm-name in the family use them for surnames, like our popular singer *Björn Skifs*, or ice hockey player *Åke Lassas*, or wellknown artist (painter) *Jerk Werkmäster* or opera singer *Busk Margit Jonsson*.



King Salomo riding into town.



Björn Skifs, b. 1947 in Vansbro (W).



Busk Margit Jonsson, b. 1929 in Malung (W).



(These items are examples of the Kurbits decorations that are found in the Dalarna Folk art, and still very popular).