

A Visit to the Old Country

Sweden and Norway, 2010

The expression, “the old country,” was one that I heard frequently while growing up in a small community of first and second generation immigrants from Sweden and other European countries. The expression clearly was in reference to the homelands from which our immigrant parents and grandparents had come. Use of the expression carried with it a sense of admiration and wistfulness. The admiration was for the ambition and fortitude of our ancestors who left their homeland to settle in a foreign country; the wistfulness was for what may have been lost when separated from their roots. A few of the immigrants were able, from time to time, to make return visits to the families they left behind in “the old country;” their stories upon return received the rapt attention of family, friends, and neighbors. It is my good fortune that in the summer of 2010, together with my wife Jian – herself an immigrant in this country – I was able to visit Sweden and the parishes, villages, and farms where my paternal ancestors had lived and died for centuries. The following are my notes from this journey.

Part 2. Värmland

July 5, 2010 – Monday

Our “Highlights of Sweden” tour is finished and now we are on our own. We plan to travel to Karlstad, the capital of Värmland province, to visit the area where my grandparents, Gustaf and Emma (Larsdotter) Johnson, were born and lived before they emigrated from Sweden to the United States in 1893. Yesterday we practiced taking public transportation from our hotel to the central railroad station of Stockholm. From there we will take a train to Karlstad. While at the station we also bought “Last Minute Tickets” for the trip. These are tickets that can be purchased by students and adults over the age of 65 twenty-four hours in advance of the scheduled departure time.

The Inter-City train left at 12:25 and stopped along the way at Södertälje Syd, Gnesta, Flen, Katrineholm, Vingåker, Hallsberg, Dejerfors, and Kristinehamn before arriving in Karlstad. We knew that our hotel for our first two nights in Karlstad, the Elite Stadtshotell, was within walking distance from the train station so we pulled our wheelies along the streets until we arrived at our destination. We had a clean, newly remodeled room on an inner side of the hotel. We were settled by 16:00 so we decided to see if we could have a quick visit to the Swedish American Center located just across the street from the hotel. Alas, the center closed at 16:00 (the research room is not open on Monday in any case).

I said to Jian, “Let’s see if the Värmland Museum is open” (my ulterior motive being to ask about their collection of 1880’s maps of Värmland that I had read about a year ago). After a false start across a short bridge leading to the Opera house, we went back and followed Museigatan to the museum which was open until 17:00. We had half an hour to look for the maps. The gracious receptionist of

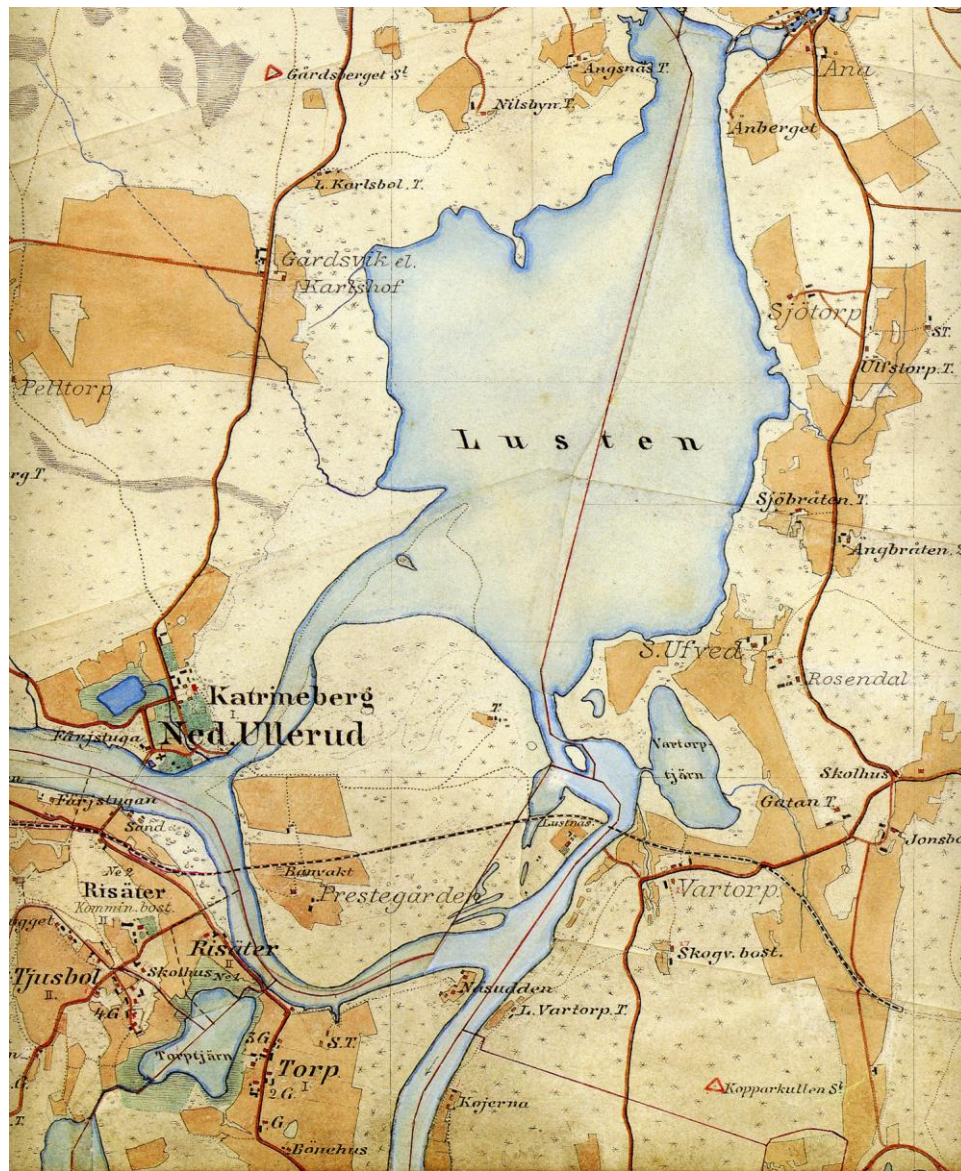


Figure 1. Detail from Lantmäteriet Värmland Map No. 134, Mölnbacka. The parish church of Nedre Ullerud and the farms Risäter, Rosendal, Sjöbraten, S. Ufved, and Vartorp all may be found on this map.

the museum gave us passes to get into the area where the maps are stored but I was not able to find them until helped by a museum custodian. We had time to find the map that shows the farms Risäter and Rosendal and the Nedre Ullerud parish church (Figure 1) and to buy a copy (25 SEK) before the museum closed. The significance of these locations is described later in this log.

The maps¹ are a map-lovers delight. The original maps were drawn in 1883-1895 in a scale of 1:20,000. At this scale, individual buildings on the farms and in the towns are shown. Reproductions of the original maps were published in 1991 by the Värmland Museum and are available for purchase at the museum. The maps give a fascinating historical picture of the province just at the time that my grandparents were coming of age, marrying and then immigrating to the United States in 1893.



Figure 2. Stone bridge at Karlstad over the Klar River, built starting in 1761.

We stopped briefly in the tourist information center, housed in the public library building, next to the park in front of the museum. After something to eat, I called my cousin, Håkan Bergström, who has generously offered to spend a day with us exploring historical sites and an evening and night with he and his family on their farm outside of Karlstad. Håkan and I became acquainted three years ago when he granted permission to use photographs from his website and we subsequently discovered that we are related through my great grandmother, Lisa Gustafsdotter and his great-great-grandfather, Johan Gustafsson. Now we arranged to meet at the hotel Wednesday morning at 9:30.

July 6, 2010 – Tuesday

My plan is to spend the day at the Swedish American Center learning what I can about the center and perhaps looking for some ancestral information. But since the Center does not open until 10:00, we have time in the morning to walk around Karlstad. Our first objective is to have a look at the famous old stone bridge across the Klar river. Construction of this, the longest and oldest stone bridge in Sweden, was begun in 1761. Dates given for completion vary. The bridge is 168 meters long and very picturesque in the morning sun (Figure 2).

Next we went in search of the Budget car rental office located in Karlstad because we have a reservation for a rental beginning on Thursday. The Budget office is not far from downtown but is on the opposite side of the railroad tracks so one must find a street or road that goes to the other side of these tracks. Our map of Karlstad gave us a route to take. The office is in more of an industrial area of



Figure 3. Karlstad Cathedral



Figure 4. Building in which Swedish-American Institute is housed in Karlstad.

the city. On our walk we pass a warehouse where a forklift tractor is moving what looks like a load of coffee packages. Then, after we had found the Budget office and were walking back to the hotel, we pass a tall building with the signage: Löfbergs Lila (more about this later).

Shortly after 10:00, I ring the bell at the front door of the Swedish American Center and am ushered in by the voice of Andreas, one of the staff members. After signing in at the front desk, Andreas takes me to the research library and introduces me to Patrick, a young man working at one of several computers in the room. Patrick asks what am I looking for, so I fall back on the list of questions I prepared a year ago and to which I made a few additions before we embarked on this trip.

My questions are primarily concerned with confirmation of information I have previously received from others (Jean Larson and Lars Lundell) about my most recent ancestors in Sweden.² At first, I watched as Patrick searched the records³ for answers to my questions. Later in the day (Patrick was off work at 14:00) I was able to do some searching on my own after seeing how the database was organized and accessed.

A summary of data found:

Birth record for **Jan Andersson** (my paternal great-grandfather): b. 7 Oct 1832; bap. 9 Oct 1832; at Ostra Skymnäs, Norra Råda parish; father, Anders Caspersson; mother,

Ingeborg Månsdotter. Source: Norra Råda record of births, p. 272 or 272v. (Previously, I was uncertain where Jan had been born. His parents are recorded as having lived first at Östra Skymnäs and then at the farm By but it was not clear at which of these two farms he might have been born. In fact, Patrick found in the household records that he was born at By but in the birth records, Jan's birth was recorded at Östra Skymnäs. Under these circumstances, the birth record is given more weight because it was written when the event occurred.)

Death record for **Jan Andersson**: d. 25 Feb 1877; bur. 4 Mar 1877; at Risäter; age, 44 yr., 4 mo. Sources: Nedre Ullerud record of deaths, no page number; Nedre Ullerud Husförhörboken (Household book) for Risäter, p. 437. (Previously, his place of death was not known.)

Birth record for **Betti Jonasdatter Ryd** (my paternal great-grandmother): b. 25 Aug 1829; bap. 26 Aug 1829; at Risäter, Nedre Ullerud parish; father, Jonas Ryd; mother, Kerstin Ersdotter. Source: Nedre Ullerud record of births, p. 149.

Death record for **Betti Jonsdotter Ryd**: d. 27 Dec 1917; bur. 1 Jan 1918. Source: Nedre Ullerud record of deaths. (In addition to this data, a further note described her as having been a boarder or pauper at Orretorp. The cause of death was given as the result of old age weakness.)

Marriage record for **Jan Andersson** and **Betti Jonsdotter Ryd**: (translation of record) farmhand Jan Andersson from Risäter and maid Betty Jonsd. married 18 Dec 1858 at this location by A. Billman. Her oldest married brother, Torpfält approved. Witness: Soldier Torpfält (at) Nedre Ullerud. Source: Nedre Ullerud record of marriages, p.365

Birth record for **Lovisa Jansdotter**: b. 4 Feb 1858; bap. 6 Feb 1858; at Risäter, Nedre Ullerud parish; father, Jan Andersson; mother, Betty Jonsd. Source: Nedre Ullerud record of births, p. 163.

Birth record for **Carolina Jansdotter**: b. 20 May 1860; bap. 21 May 1860; at Risäter, Nedre Ullerud parish; father, Jan Andersson; mother, Betty Jonsd.; witnesses, Erik Andersson and Cajsa Jansd. Source: Nedre Ullerud record of births, p. 131. (Previously, I had recorded her place of birth as in Norra Råda parish.)

Birth record for **Axel Jansson**: b. 17 Feb 1863; bap. 20 Feb 1863; at Risäter, Nedre Ullerud parish; father, Jan Andersson; mother, Betti Jonsd.; witnesses, Emanuel Ryd and Cajsa Jansd. Source: Nedre Ullerud record of births, no page number; Nedre Ullerud Husförhörboken for Risäter, p. 343.

Birth record for **Gustaf Jansson**: b. 1 Jun 1869; bap. 6 Jun 1869; at Risäter, Nedre Ullerud parish; father, Jan Andersson; mother, Betti Jonsd.; witnesses, Erik Andersson and Cajsa Jansd., Wahltopp. Source: Nedre Ullerud record of births, no page number; Nedre Ullerud Husförhörboken for Risäter, p. 433.

When Patrick first began the search for Jan Andersson's birthplace, he was unable to make any progress because my information was incorrect and led him to look in several wrong places. While this was going on, another staff member, Ola Lundström, occasionally looked over our shoulders and gave

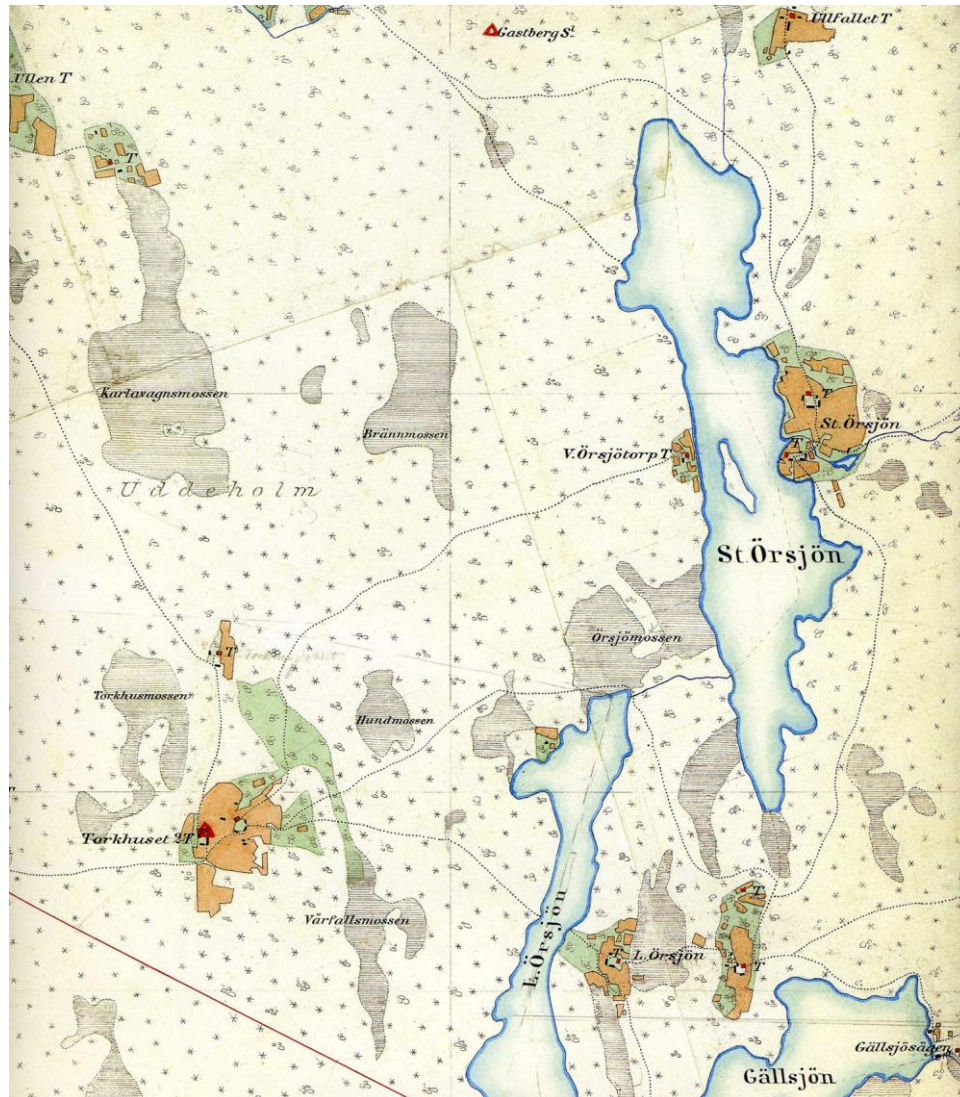


Figure 5. Detail from Lantmäteriet Värmland Map No. 82, Busken. Note the farm Stora Örsjön on the edge of the lake of the same name.

some suggestions to Patrick who is relatively new to the job. My notebook was opened to a page with a chart of descendents from Per Persson to Gust Johnson. When Mr. Lundström saw this page, he said something like, “I know these names; they are also my ancestors.” He proceeded to make a few comments including that Per Persson of 1660-1718 was known as “Stalle-Per” because he had worked in the stable of the farm Stora Örsjön in Norra Råda parish (Figure 5). This nickname has come up in the past – I think perhaps from Lars Lundell’s research into the genealogy.

I asked Mr. Lundström if he knew Lars Lundell. He replied that he knew of him through his postings of genealogy data on the Internet but did not know him personally.

Stora Örsjön and the nearby farm of Ullesberget are well known to Mr. Lundström. He has gone fishing in the nearby lakes – in fact, he is going fishing Friday with a friend. I asked him if the website we (at this point, he and Patrick) were using is part of the Center’s Emiweb database. He said no, this is a proprietary website to which one can subscribe. The website is www.svar.ra.se and is the site also described by the Swedish library at Augustana College in Rockford, Illinois. Mr. Lundström told me



Figure 6. Tällered farmhouse, rebuilt after fire of 1973 in style of the original.



Figure 7. Painting of Midsummer's Eve celebration, on display in Tällered farmhouse.

about another website having a similar database except that it is in color. That site is www.arkivdigital.se and also is a subscription site. He also told me about www.lantmateriet.se, a site for Swedish maps where one should be able to find maps like those sold at the Värmland Museum.

I asked Mr. Lundström (who is leaving at noon today) if I could meet with him again on Thursday to talk about our common ancestors. He agreed to see me on Thursday if I come in to the Center.

After a brief recess from the Center for a quick bite of food back in the hotel room, I returned in the afternoon. Patrick was off but Andreas helped me until I suggest that, if it is okay with him, I would work on the website by myself to answer some of my relatively simple questions. He had three summer interns that he needed to find something for them to do so he had no objections to my request. In the afternoon, Annette, another staff member was working in the research room (library) and was very helpful for my various questions. I was able to find most of the data summarized above with a little help from her.

By this time I had inquired if the Center would like to have the books I have brought along for their collection. They seemed happy to have the books and as a consequence, did not charge me for the photocopies I made during the afternoon. A key aspect of all this is that I learned a bit about using the SVAR website and, more importantly, I realized that I can access this information from home if I am willing to subscribe to the service.

July 7, 2010 – Wednesday

Today we will meet Håkan Bergström when he comes at 9:30 to pick us up at the hotel. He has generously offered to show us some of the farms and churches where my ancestors were born, baptized, worked, were married, and/or died. He also has invited us to his farmstead for dinner and an overnight stay in his Farmhands House. After he arrived, we sat in the hotel lobby for a few minutes to make a plan for what we will do today, then we put our luggage in the back of his Toyota vehicle and set out.

The morning was beautiful with a few fluffy clouds in the sky as we started out towards the Alster parish church. On the way, Håkan stopped at the farm, Tällered. Tällered is the farm on which **Lars**



Figure 8. Alster parish church. Håkan Bergström in front.

Larsson was born in 1827; he was my paternal great-grandfather and was the son of the crofter **Lars Larsson** and his wife, **Lena Larsson**.⁴ The croft no longer exists. The old farmhouse, which burned in 1973, has been rebuilt in its original style (Figure 6).

Håkan explained to us that although the old farms still carry their names, it is not likely that we will find the crofts today as they have been removed or torn down long ago. Even some of the old farmhouses have been replaced with new structures at various times throughout the past. As noted in the case of Tållerud, this was precipitated by destruction of the original farmhouse by fire. As we shall learn throughout the remainder of this day, some of the other old farmhouses have been torn down and new houses built.

The yard in front of the house at Tållerud slopes slightly downhill. A Maypole still stands in the yard. The leaves of the boughs on the pole have already dried to a tan color. Håkan tells us that this is where he and his family attended the mid-summers eve celebration. Tållerud is being preserved as an historical site of old farmsteads. As we visit, the farm house is being shown by the caretaker to a young couple who are planning their wedding to be held here. We are welcome to see the inside of the house which is nicely decorated and furnished as it was when lived in during the early 20th century.

The farm, Tållerud, is in the parish of Alster. The Alster church is a short distance from the farm. The church is a red-painted, wood clad structure (Figure 8). The building is roofed with thick (1-2 inches) wooden shingles and is sided with wooden shingles as well. Different sections of the outside walls are covered with shingles of different shapes, reflecting I suppose that the sections were replaced at different times. Most shingles are rectangular in shape while others have round shoulders before ending in a straight edge. Håkan tells us this is the church where their (Håkan and Gun) daughter,



Figure 9. Road sign to the farm, Mosserud. Typical Swedish forest in background.

Ida (pronounced Eda), was baptized and where several members of his family have been married, etc. He also has ancestors, some in common with me, buried in the surrounding cemetery [Gunnar Modahl (1898-1933), grandson of Johan Gustafsson, see below].

Håkan comments to me that today, 7 Jul 2010, is (almost) exactly 180 years to the day after the birth of my great-grandmother, **Lisa Gustafsdotter**. I quickly check the book (Håkan has brought along a copy of *Lars and Lisa Larsson*⁵) and find that at least three dates have been found for her birthday. One of them is 7 Aug 1830 and another is 6 Jul 1830, so we are perhaps just a day late, the first of several remarkable coincidences we are to experience today. It is through Lisa Gustafsdotter that Håkan and I are related. His great-great-grandfather, **Johan Gustafsson**, and Lisa were siblings born at Nordsjö croft in Nedre Ullerud parish, the children of **Gustaf Olsson** and **Maria Lisa Jonsdotter-Nyström**.⁶

From yesterday's brief experience with the SVAR database at the Swedish America Institute, I have begun to realize that it may be possible to reconstruct a more detailed record of a person's residencies and activities. This can be done through a combination of the data in the birth, confirmation, marriage, death, and household records. The SVAR database is available by subscription. At the present time, however, the next record I have of **Lars** is his marriage to **Lisa Gustafsdotter** at the Nedre Ullerud parish church in 1851. Lars and Lisa's first child was born at Håberg croft in Nedre Ullerud parish. Håberg croft (also located in Nedre Ullerud parish) still is found on maps but we did not visit the site.⁴ Nedre Ullerud parish is on the north side of Alster parish.

After leaving the Alster church, Håkan drives in the direction of the town of Deje. There are forests everywhere. We are on a smaller road when we come to a sign, pointing to a side road, that reads: **Mosserud** (Figure 9). We now are in Nedre Ullerud parish. Mosserud is an important site (Figure 10) with respect to Larson ancestry, much of which has been collected and written by Håkan and published on his website, www.hosserudkullen.se.⁶ I will use much of his information to reconstruct an account of my family history.

Lars and Lisa's second and third children were born at Mosserud croft. Håkan explains that there were three farms at Mosserud and that it is not possible to tell on which of the three a crofter may have lived. As we approach the farms, we see two of the farmhouses, one red and one white, located next to one another and near the road. The third, red, farmhouse is across the road from the other two and is



Figure 10. Detail from Lantmäteriet Värmland Map No. 147, Forshaga. The name of the farm Mosserud is spelled Måserud on this map.

situated away from the road at the top of a sloping pasture area. According to Håkan, in the 1800s, only the houses of the more wealthy land owners were painted white. The significance of the white house today is not clear.

Summarized below is the role played by Mosserud in my family history. Given first is a list of ancestors who lived at some time at Mosserud (the first set of dates are years of birth and death and the second set are years of residence at Mosserud). Following the list is a brief description each person's history at Mosserud.⁶

<u>Generation</u>	<u>Names</u>
Gr-gr-gr-grandparents	Jonas Bengtsson Nyström (1780-1855; 1811-1855) Britta Svensdotter (1st wife) (1782-1809) [Annika Eriksdotter (2 nd wife) (?-?)]

Gr-gr-grandparents

Gustaf Olsson (1798-1852; 1851-1852)

Maria Lisa Nyström (1804-1880; 1851-1880)

Gr-grandparents

Lars Larsson (1827-1882; 1852-1857)

Lisa Gustafsdotter (1830-1904; 1852-1857)

My family history at Mosserud began with gr-gr-gr-grandfather **Jonas Nyström**. He had four children with his first wife before she died at the age of 27. The second of his first four children was **Maria Lisa Nyström**. After his second marriage to Annika Eriksdotter, a maid from the farm Mosserud, the family moved to Mosserud in 1811. “In the church books for 1835-1845, it is noted that Jonas was ‘*superannuated*.’ From 1846 he is noted as ‘*the farm owner*.’” Jonas died at Mosserud on 2 Apr 1855. Jonas’ daughter Maria Lisa lived at Mosserud until 1826 at which time she married Gustaf Olsson.⁶



Figure 11. Red farmhouse at Mosserud.

After their marriage, **Gustaf Olsson** and **Maria Lisa Nyström** lived at a series of different farms in Nedre Ullerud parish - Nordsjö, Nolby, and Sjöbråten - before moving to Mosserud in 1851. By this time Gustaf was 53 years old and in poor health. The family lived at Mosserud as dependent (free) lodgers. Gustaf died on 17 May 1852. “In the church books for 1866-1870 it is noted that Maria was a ‘*crofter widow*’ and that she had moved to a smaller croft on the Mosserud properties.” She continued to live in the small croft on Mosserud until her death 12 Apr 1880.⁶



Figure 12 (top). White farmhouse at Mosserud. Figure 13 (bottom). Third farmhouse at Mosserud.

Gustaf and Maria's third child (and third daughter), **Lisa Gustafsdotter**, married **Lars Larsson** in the Nedre Ullerud parish church in 1851. As noted previously, he was born at Tällerd in Alster parish.



Figure 14. Deje conditori, about 1910.



Figure 15. Deje pizzeria. 2010

From the records showing the births of Lars and Lisa's children, we learn that they also lived at a series of farms throughout their lives, first at Håberg, then at Mosserud, and finally at Carlsberg (later Rosendal) until Lars' death in 1882.⁴ Their residency at Mosserud from about 1852-57 (maybe can be checked in household records) is the last at this farm for my immediate ancestors.

Lisa's brother, Johan Gustafsson (b. 1835; Håkan's gr-gr-grandfather), was age 16 when his parents Gustaf and Maria returned to Mosserud. He left Mosserud for a year at age 20, moved back and four years later in 1860 married Maja Cajsa Andersdotter. They lived at Mosserud for two years before permanently moving to the croft Fallbråten (later Skivfallet) in 1862. Greater detail of Johan and Maja Cajsa's life is given in Håkan's family history.⁶

When driving on the road to Mosserud, the second unusual coincidence of the day occurred. Håkan slowed the car as we came to a red house and remarked that a family with a well known name had lived here at one time (below the farm Måserud on map, marked by "G"). I asked what the name was. He replied that people named Aldrin had lived here. As in Buzz Aldrin? Yes. So, of course, I couldn't resist explaining to him that I am related to Buzz Aldrin. I know of this thanks to Lars Lundell who several years ago traced our genealogy to include the Aldrin family.⁸ I told Håkan the story of meeting Mr. Aldrin at a book signing event at the Book Passage bookstore in Corte Madera and how I had tried to interest him in the genealogy that we (Lars Lundell, Rodney Johnson, and I) had compiled. But Mr. Aldrin was uninterested, to say the least.

Upon reflection, it should not be too surprising to come upon the Aldrin farmhouse since, if we are related in the distant past, it is logical that the families lived in the same area. I included this house in the photographs taken along the road to Mosserud.

By now, the time was nearly noon so Håkan asked us if we had yet eaten Swedish pizza. We hadn't, so he asked if we would like to try some for lunch. That was fine with us. He gave us a choice of stopping in either Forshaga or Deje. I chose Deje since this is a name I had heard off and on when a



Figure 16. Nedre Ullerud parish church, from back.

kid asking about where Grandpa and Grandma had come from in Sweden. We stopped at a pizza house right along the main road into Deje and, with Håkan's guidance, ordered two pizzas. Two things about the pizza are noteworthy. The toppings were (on #1) bananas and chicken seasoned with curry and (#2 ?). Secondly, apparently pizzas are not normally shared in Sweden but we agreed that we would do so with our orders.

Right after lunch the third coincidence of the day occurred. I had brought with me an old postcard⁷ showing the photograph of a building on the front and with handwriting in Swedish on the back. The front side also had a label, Deje. I thought that since we were in Deje, now would be a good time to show the postcard to Håkan. He looked at the card for just a second or two and said, "That is the building where we just had pizza!" Indeed it was (Figures 14 and 15). The placement of windows and, especially, the angles of the roof lines clearly were those of the building in the photograph. We walked around to some open space below the building to take some photographs. Håkan translated the handwriting which explained that the building was a new *conditori* (bakery). Håkan estimated the postcard was from 1910-1920. I was amazed.

Our next destination was the Nedre Ullerud parish church, located on the other (east) side of the Klar river from the pizza house (Figure 16). We crossed a bridge just above a small power dam and then drove east a short distance before reaching the church. As with many of the churches we have seen in Sweden, the building is located in a lovely, serene setting, in this case on a bluff overlooking the river. Also like other churches, this one is surrounded by a huge cemetery. This is one of the best kept cemeteries we have seen with gorgeous begonias blooming in front of nearly every gravestone. Several people are working in the cemetery maintaining the beds of flowers.



Figure 17. Altar, Nedre Ullerud parish church.



Figure 18. Baptismal font, Nedre Ullerud church.

The building is open, allowing us to enter and look around (Figure 17). The rough stone baptismal font has been in use since the mid-1200s (Figure 18). Outside, we see that there is a separate bell tower. In the cemetery are a number of iron markers that look something like a family tree with tags hanging on the limbs for family members (Figure 19). If original, some are very old, dating to the 1600s. According to data collected by Håkan Bergström⁶ and by myself,² the following of my ancestors were married in this church on the dates given:

Olof Christophersson and Karin Andersdotter, 24 Jun 1705 (gr-gr-gr-gr-gr-gr-grandparents)
 Gustaf Andersson and Anna Olofsdotter, 28 Dec 1726 (gr-gr-gr-gr-gr-grandparents)
 Hans Persson and Britta Håkansdotter, 15 Oct 1727 (gr-gr-gr-gr-gr-grandparents)
 Anders Gustavsson and Ingerid Olofsdotter, 27 Oct 1751 (gr-gr-gr-gr-gr-grandparents)
 Petter Hansson and Margareta Andersdotter, 15 Oct 1758 (gr-gr-gr-gr-gr-grandparents)
 Olof Andersson and Britta Persdotter, 8 Nov 1778 (gr-gr-gr-grandparents)
 Gustaf Olsson and Maria Lisa Nyström, 26 Dec 1826 (gr-gr-grandparents)
 Jan Andersson and Betti Jonsdotter Ryd, 18 Dec 1858 (great-grandparents)
 Lars Larsson and Lisa Gustafsdotter, 3 Mar 1851 (great-grandparents)
 Gustaf Jansson and Emma Larsdotter, 23 Jan 1892 (grandparents)

Not included in this list are great-uncles, great-aunts, and the like.



Figure 19. Iron markers in Nedre Ullerud parish cemetery.



Figure 20. Nedre Ullerud parish church and cemetery. Jian Johnson and Håkan Bergström by church.



Figure 21. Doorway in old barn on the farm, Sjöbråten. Note logs of the barn wall.

Now we will try to find some of the farms in Nedre Ullerud that are given as birthplaces or homes of ancestors. The first stop is at the farm Sjöbråten. **Gustaf Olsson** and **Maria Lisa Nyström** lived and worked on this farm from 1840 to 1851.⁶ During this time, **Lisa** (my great-grandmother) would have been from 10 to 21 years old and probably would have been living with her parents at least the first years and perhaps until her marriage in 1851.

The farm is set back from the road about 200 meters. As Håkan drives in to the yard we see four buildings: the house, a long barn, a second long barn or shed, and a small shed-like building of undetermined use. A motorcycle is standing in front of the house. As we get out of the car, a middle-aged man comes out of the house. Håkan explains to him in Swedish why we have stopped. The man is cordial, agrees to my taking of photos and eventually takes us out to the log barn (Figure 21). Part of the yard is mown but elsewhere there is tall grass growing. There is no farming occurring this year.



Figure 22. Rosendal farmhouse, seen from back.

Our next stop is at Rosendal where we are met by an elderly, heavy man and a woman. The house is very near the road and has another building behind it. According to the man, the farmhouse he is now occupying was built in about 1880 (Figure 22). The building in back is an unused barn. Behind the barn is the old foundation of what may have been an original barn (Figure 24). We walk back to the old ruins and take photos through the grass and weeds. Rosendal is where my great-grandparents, Lars and Lisa Larsson, lived from about 1857 until 1885 and is where my grandmother, **Emma Larsson** (1869), and seven of her siblings were born. Lars died there in 1882. Lisa left Rosendal in 1885, moving to Risäter near Deje. The farm Rosendal was known by the name Carlsberg before about 1868 according to information gathered by Jean Larson.⁴



Figure 23. Nordsjö sign.

Between Sjöbråten and Rosendal is the farm, Uved, where Brita Persdotter (mother of Gustaf Olsson) was born in 1759.⁶ Her family moved in 1760 to the farm Karsbol. We did not stop at Uved or Karsbol. All three farms, Sjöbråten, Uved and Rosendal are located on the eastern shore of Lake Lusten. Karsbol is about 3 kilometers east of Rosendal.



Figure 24. Old barn foundation at Rosendal.

We then drove east away from Lake Lusten to arrive at the farm Nordsjö where Gustaf Olsson and Maria Lisa Nyström first lived after being married in 1826. The family lived at Nordsjö until 1836



Figure 25. Mailboxes for the three homes at Nordsjö farm.

during which time my great-grandmother, **Lisa Gustafsdotter**, was born. Håkan's great-great-grandfather, Johan Gustafsson also was born here.⁶ As at Mosserud, there are three farmhouses at Nordsjö (Figures 23 and 25). We stopped by the building nearest the road and walked back to a larger red house about 100 meters from the road. Håkan knocked at the door and a middle-aged man came out and talked to us. He thought the house he is living in also was built around 1880.

A short distance further east we came to the farm Nolby having two farmhouses. Gustaf Olsson and Maria Lisa Nyström lived at Nolby from 1836 until about 1840. A sign in the driveway to the nearest house said "Do Not Enter." When I took a few steps up the driveway, someone shouted at me from the house in an angry voice. Fortunately, I do not understand Swedish. I retreated, snapped several photographs of outbuildings and the other farmhouse. We moved on to find our way back to a main road.



Figure 26. Swedish flag at Bergström farm, "Hösserudkullen."

By now the time was about 16:00 and I had begun to get a clear impression of the present day status of the farms where my ancestors had once lived and worked. The old crofts are non-existent, farmhouses are still in existence probably much as they have always been although in many cases rebuilt since the time of my ancestors, and many fields that were worked by manpower now are grown back to forests. An exception was the farm Mosserud where active farming still is evident. Perhaps the most representative historical farmstead that we visited is Hösserudkullen, the home of Håkan and his family where now we were soon to be guests (Figure 27). Håkan gives excellent descriptions of his farm, its history, and its buildings on his website.⁶ Hösserudkullen is located in Alster parish and has been in Håkan's family for at least six generations.

It often is said of Swedish immigrants, such as my grandparents and those who settled with them in Lammers township, Minnesota, that they chose this area because of its similarity to the forest and lake regions of Sweden from where they came. Indeed, there is a remarkable similarity between the area we have been traveling today and the area where I grew up in Minnesota. Both areas are forested with pine



Figure 27. “Hösserudkullen,” Bergström farm.

and deciduous trees, have numerous lakes, and have similar climates of cold, snowy winters and bright sunny summer days. Ironically, even today another similarity exists. In both Värmland Province and Lammers township, much of the farmland that was wrested from the primal forests now is slowly reverting to a forested condition. Old farmhouses are used as residences while outbuildings such as barns and sheds stand empty or are used for sheltering riding horses and for storage of hay and wood.

But I think being in similar areas is the result more of coincidence than of deliberate planning. My grandparents first settled in northwestern Minnesota (in Bear Park township, Norman county, near the town of Fertile) in an area of prairie where the land was more suitable to farming. Their big problem was that by the time they arrived, the best land had all been homesteaded ten years earlier. To become landowners, (which I am guessing was one of their primary objectives) they would have had to buy the land. They probably did not have the financial resources to do this and so could only rent land or work as laborers for the existing farm owners. Consequently, when the U.S. Federal government opened land for homesteading in Beltrami County, which includes Lammers township, my grandparents saw the opportunity at last to become landowners. By coincidence, Beltrami County is a forested lake region very similar to Värmland in Sweden.

I also will speculate on the reason they first settled in Bear Park township. My grandfather (b. 1869) was the youngest of five siblings, three of whom emigrated from Sweden. His sister, Carolina (b. 1860), had emigrated from Sweden at least before 1885 because in that year she married John Thoren in Norman County. John Thoren, in turn, was one of six children born in Sweden to Carl and Anna



Figure 28. Farmhand's house and long shed at Hösserudkullen.

Maria Olson. Carl Olson and his brother, Per Olson, were among the early homesteaders near Fertile and each owned their farms as a consequence. It is not known how Carolina and John Thoren had met but it is logical that she moved from Sweden to the Fertile area to be with John in the proximity of his parents. Next, my grandfather's older brother, Axel (b. 1863), emigrated from Sweden in 1888. Again it seems logical to guess that he went to the Fertile area because his older sister was now raising a family there. Likewise, when my grandfather together with his wife and baby daughter emigrated in 1893 (also with his mother, mother-in-law, and brother-in-law), it is not surprising that he chose to settle near his older siblings.

We were warmly greeted at the Bergström farm by Håkans wife, Gun Hassel, and daughter, Ida, with a serving of tea, coffee, and cookies. Also present was Håkans friend, Lars Arnarp, whom, after they met a number of years ago, he learned is a distant cousin. We soon were joined by Håkan's father, Matts-Rune Bergström, and mother, Brita Modahl, who now live in a small house on the farm.

We are introduced to the farmhands house (Figure 28) where we have been invited to spend the night. In one half of the house is a nicely decorated room with bunk beds. The other half houses a workshop used by Håkans father. Then, while Jian stays in the main house, Håkan and Lars take me on a tour of the farmyard. Håkan explains that he was born and raised in Stockholm but as a kid he occasionally spent a week or two during the summers on the nearby farm, Mosstorp, owned by his grandmother. They occasionally visited Hösserudkullen which at that time was owned by Dagmar Andersson, a first cousin of Håkan's grandfather, Gunnar Modahl. When he had the opportunity to "take over" Hösserudkullen, he had no real experience with farming or country living. However, he and especially his parents, Matts-Rune and Brita, have invested considerable time and effort in restoring



Figure 29. Håkan and Gun (Hassel) Bergström



Figure 30. Håkan and Ida Bergström

and stabilizing the various buildings on the farm. Descriptions of the farm buildings may be found on Håkan's website (see above for web address).

Several scenes from the farmyard and buildings remain in my mind. First was a large room in the long old shed (Figure 28) in which five years of split and aged firewood was stored. Another small building housed a blacksmith shop complete with the bellows used to oxygenate the fire. In the old barn, the stanchions and drinking cups once used for the milk cows housed there in the winter were mostly intact. We decided that two cows probably used each drinking cup; consequently the barn had housed at least 16 milk cows at one time.

As we finish our tour of the farmyard and enter the house, it is time for the smörgåsbord dinner that the Bergströms have prepared for our visit. The dinner begins with Håkan introducing us to one of the Swedish customs for special occasions. Briefly described, it is the drinking of a glass of schnaps (pleasant liqueur) accompanied by singing of songs appropriate to the occasion. I am sitting by Håkan's mother, Brita. Although I am somewhat overwhelmed by the vast informational and pictorial input of the day, I remember the fact that she and I are second cousins. This is a pleasant thought enhanced by her charming personality. Our conversation is limited a bit by language but more so, unfortunately, by the fact that at the age of 85 she is suffering from some loss of vision and the infirmities of age. Nevertheless, we exchange some brief comments in English before she excuses herself at the end of the dinner and is walked back to their house by Håkan's father, Matts-Rune, a very gracious gentleman. The experience of the family smörgåsbord with the Bergström family is

wonderful. I am reminded of holiday gatherings with relatives here in the Untited States where the atmosphere in the kitchen/dining rooms is remarkably similar.

After dinner, a moose and her calf come out of the woods on the edge of the field lying to the north of the Bergström farmhouse. A close look through binoculars at this moose reveals that she has a grayish head and shoulders. A genetic variation is found in Swedish moose that results in some animals being white or part white. She and her calf slowly move into the field, grazing on the grass.

July 8, 2010 – Thursday

We pack our bags in the farmhand's house and meet Håkan and Gun in the farmhouse for breakfast. We say good-by and take a photo or two of Gun who works today so she must leave by 8:00. After breakfast, we accompany Håkan to his parent's house to say good-by to them. When we return to the main house, Ida has come out to also say good-by so we capture a couple of more photographs before departing. Håkan drives us to the Clarion Collection Hotel Drott in Karlstad where we arrive at 10:00 and meet Carina sitting in the lobby. Now we bid adieu to Håkan, who is planning to pick up a new lap-top computer before returning to the farm. We check in at the hotel.



Figure 31. Råda church, built in 1813 by Johan Westman

Carina and I walk over to the Swedish American Center to meet Ola Lundström as previously agreed. He gives me a printout he has prepared of a partial family tree starting with Per “Stalle-Per” Persson. Mr. Lundström is descended from Per Persson, son of “Stalle-Per,” as are we but I didn’t learn where the tree branches into our present day families. “Stalle-Per” = Stable Per, indicates that he



Figure 32. Norra Råda parish church.

had worked in the horse stable on the farm Stora Örsjön (Stora = large). Stora Örsjön is on the east side of the lake of the same name and, according to Mr. Lundström, still exists today. The farm was in Norra Råda parish until 1788 at which time it was shifted into Gustaf Adolf parish (the subject of Lars Lundell's genealogy project). I think it later reverted back to Norra Råda but I'm not sure about this. There are two farms at Stora Örsjön, a fact clearly illustrated on the map of 1883-95 (Figure 5).

In addition to farming, another activity around Stora Örsjön was production of charcoal for use in iron smelting. The combination of iron ore, forests for fuel (wood and charcoal), and rivers to provide water power led to development of an iron smelting industry in Sweden that continues today (although dramatically altered from the earlier historical times). Initially, small smelters were scattered throughout the country side. When a larger mill using newer methods was built in Hagfors, the small smelters closed. Hagfors is still a site of active steel production.

Our (U.S. Johnsons) line of descendants from "Stalle-Per" is: Per Persson (1694), Casper Persson (1730), Anders Caspersson (1779), and Jan Andersson (1832) before arriving at my grandfather, Gustaf (Jansson) Johnson, who emigrated to the United States. Per Persson was born at Stora Örsjön but as an adult, he lived his life on the farm, Ullesberg (Ullesberget), located about six kilometers west of Stora Örsjön and off the west side of the large lake, Stor-Ullen. His son, Casper Persson remained at Ullesberget his entire life. Anders Caspersson was born at Ullesberget but moved south in 1822 to the farm Östra Skymnäs and later to the nearby farm By, both in Norra Råda parish. As outlined above, Jan Andersson was born at Östra Skymnäs and later moved to Risäter in Nedre Ullerud parish.

I left copies of the three books I brought with me with Mr. Lundström to give to the archivist at the Center. By now, noon had come and it was time for us to leave. I was really tired so I decided to



Figure 33. Interior of Norra Råda church. Indistinct marks on the ceiling are light-colored paintings.

postpone the scheduled pick-up of a rental car from the Budget agency from noon to 15:00. After getting the car, we take Carina along part of the route we covered yesterday so she was able to see the Alster and Nedre Ullerud parish churches. On the way to Deje, by chance we take the same route as yesterday so when I see the sign to Mosserud, I drive the 2 km to the farmsite.

Both churches were locked by the time we stopped in the afternoon but Carina expressed that she usually is more interested in the exterior architecture than the interior decorations of churches. After exploring the cemetery of the Nedre Ullerud church – especially studying the old wrought iron markers – we returned to the hotel in Karlstad for dinner.

July 9, 2010 – Friday

Carina and I visited the Värmland Museum from 10:00 to 11:30. My first order of business was to buy a few more of the 1883-95 maps. This took longer than expected but I bought five maps (125 SEK) and then went through several of the exhibits rather quickly. The permanent collection is displayed in galleries in one section of the museum. The entrance to the museum is in second, low, sprawling building to the right (when facing the buildings) of the gallery section.

In the low building is an exhibit showing a “history of Värmland” from the earliest evidence (~8,000 years ago) of a human presence (hunter-gatherers) in the province to the present time. By now I was very short of time so I rushed through. I did stop to look at the 1510-20 altar screen from the Gräsmark church (which we plan to visit later in the day). One part of the exhibit featured the iron smelting history of the province with a focus on Hagfors.



Figure 34. Gräsmark parish church, 1738.

After leaving the museum, I spent a few minutes in the nearby public library. I looked at several telephone directories to see if I might be lucky and spot Lars Lundell's name but soon decided that the directories are too fragmented (*i.e.*, split up according to small communities) to offer any hope of finding his name in a short period of time. I did look in the directory for the town of Deje and, as I looked for the name Johnson-Nord, was surprised to see an entry for Karl Victor Nord at Kastanjev., 12, in Deje. Lovisa Jansdotter and her husband Gustaf Johanson Nord were parents of a son, Karl Victor, born in 1877. Of course, that was too long ago to be the person in the directory but is it possible that a grandson might have that name? I wrote down the phone number and then continued on the day's planned activities.

Added note: On Saturday, July 10, before we left Karlstad, I called the telephone number, 41083, that I had found for Mr. Nord in the directory. A man, who sounded elderly, answered. I explained why I was calling. He seemed to understand and when I asked him if he had a father or grandfather named Karl Victor Nord, he said "no". I came around to the question again by restating a few things and again he said no. Consequently, I apologized for interrupting his morning and thanked him before hanging up. I am left wondering if he truly understood me and, also, if he was just being cautious about talking to a stranger.

We picked up Jian by the train station at the agreed upon time of noon and proceeded south out of town in search of a small store that, according to Carina, is noted for its smoked salmon. Carina navigated us to the shop, Lillängshamnens Fiskrökeri, located just off the shore of Lake Vanern. Carina bought a slice of smoked salmon that had been seasoned with a "rustic" coating. We returned



Figure 35. Frykerud parish church.

to Karlstad and found Route 61 that would take us north to Råda and the Norra Råda parish church where “Stella-Per” and many of his descendents (see notes for July 8) would have attended church.

The time was almost 14:00 by the time we stopped in front of the church (Figures 31-33). The entrance doors to the church were locked. We walked around, took a few photographs, and then ate our lunch on a picnic table in the church yard. As we were packing up to leave, a young man in a black suit rode up to the church on a bicycle, unlocked the front door and went inside for a few moments. He was carrying what looked like a silver vase that he returned to the church. As he came back out, we asked if we could go into the church for a few minutes and he kindly agreed to let us do so. We took a few photos inside and noticed that the ceiling, finished with wooden boards, is similar in structure to the Nedre Ullerud church.

The other church I thought would be of interest to see is the Gräsmark parish church. Gräsmark church is about 40 km to the west of the town of Råda but requires a longer drive as we must go south

before we can cross over to the west sides of Övre Fryken and Mellan Fryken lakes. The roads pass through pretty countryside, the last part following along the edges of the lakes, Rottnen and Udden. We arrived just about at 16:00 and found a custodian watering flowers inside the church so, again, we were able to see the inside of the church.

The Gräsmark church stands on the edge of Lake Udden in a lovely setting and is an off-white color decorated with reddish-brown cornerstones painted on the exterior (Figure 34). This is the parish from which my great-grandmother's, **Betti Jonasdotter-Ryd**, ancestors came according to genealogical research by Stan Danielson of Minnesota.⁹ Once again the basic interior (not including altar pieces, pulpits, paintings, etc.) of the church is similar to those we have seen previously. The ceiling is finished with wood and reminds me of an upside-down boat. The afternoon is beautiful and the setting by the lake is peaceful and serene.

Our route back to Karlstad takes us south on E45, a major north-south highway in western Sweden. The church of the parish Frykerud is just off from the highway. The farm Fagerås in Frykerud parish is one place where my great-great-grandfather, **Jon Jönsson Ryd** lived briefly, perhaps serving as a soldier hired by the local farmers. Håkan explained to me on Wednesday that it was common practice for a group of 3-5 farmers to hire a soldier to fulfill the national requirement for military service. These soldiers, who might be married and have a family, were provided with a croft or small house in which to live while serving the farmers and the government.

At Frykerud Kyrka (Figure 35), the design of the church again is very similar to those at Norra Råda and Gräsmark (see Figures 32 and 34). From Frykerud, we continue back to Karlstad with a short stop at the "IKEA" mall located on the west side of the city. We then returned to the hotel for our included buffet dinner after which we went out to fill the gas tank and return the car to the Budget lot.

July 10, 2010 – Saturday

Today Jian and I will take the train to Oslo and Carina will take the train to Stockholm. We have a late morning departure so there is time to do a bit of last minute shopping for souvenirs, gifts or to use some of our remaining Swedish krona. Karlstad has a nice downtown with a number of good shops. Jian buys some yellow and blue schnaps glasses at one store and small table runners at another. I also buy a pound of coffee at the grocery store.

The first inkling we had that Karlstad is the home of a large coffee roasting company was on Tuesday (see notes for that day) as we were looking for the Budget car rental office. Subsequently, from inspection of the coffee section in the big grocery stores, we began to realize that the company, Löfbergs Lila, is a big coffee roasting company with its headquarters in Karlstad. The company has a website, www.lofbergslila.com, that gives in English some very brief information. By switching to Swedish on the website, one can find much more information, including descriptions of their different coffees but of course not readable to me.

The Hotel Drott is literally across the street from the train station so we have an easy walk to catch the train. The train is a Swedish Rail Inter-City train to Oslo. Jian had obtained "last minute tickets" once again and so we said goodbye to Karlstad and to Värmland as the train proceeded westward towards Norway.

Notes and Sources

¹Economic maps drawn in 1883-1895; copies published in 1991 by Värmlands Museum. The province of Värmland is covered by 227 sheets in a scale of 1:20,000. The copies measure 50 x 70 cm in size of which the map area is 45 x 60 cm.

²Johnson, Roy A., "Meadowview: A Family History of Gust A. and Lydia (nee Gack) Johnson and the 'Swede Settlement' of Lammers Township," 2002, 332 pages.

³Parish records were accessed via the website, www.svar.ra.se.

⁴Larson, Jean, "A Saga of Otto, Son of Lars," in *American Bicentennial Biographical Album, 1776-1976*, J. Gnacinski and C. Nowak, Eds., Gateway Press, Inc., Baltimore, 1976; pp. 242-269.

⁵Johnson, Roy A., "Lars and Lisa Larsson: A Record of Three Generations, 1827-1990," 2008, 104 pages.

⁶Family history and genealogy compiled by Håkan Bergström on the website, www.hosserudkullen.se.

⁷Postcard in the collection of Emma (Larsdotter) Johnson (my grandmother) and handed down to me.

⁸E-mail correspondence from Lars Lundell forwarded to me by Rodney Wayne Johnson.

⁹Register reports for Jon Jönsson Ryd (1795) and Lars Jönsson (1722) prepared by Stan Danielson and forwarded to me by Rodney Wayne Johnson.