

Critique of Harry Anderson's article – Possessions of A Swedish Pioneerⁱ

By

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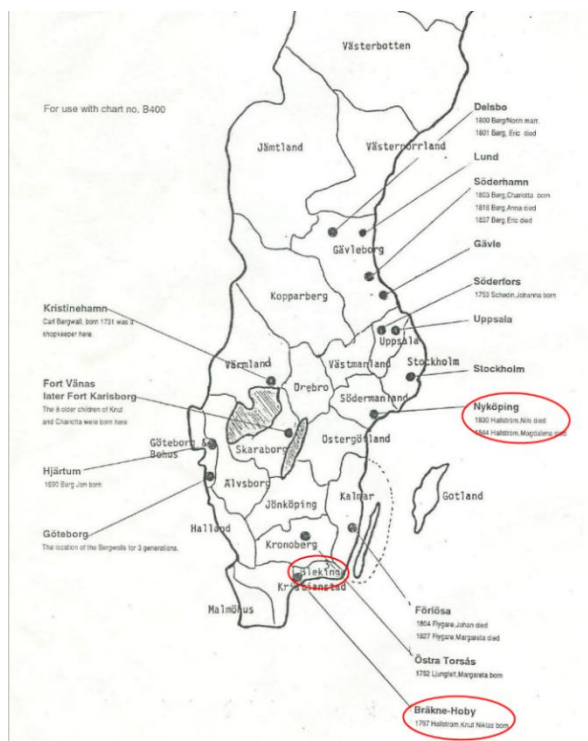
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Bengt Petterson is my great, great, great grandfather—3 greats added to one grand. In other words, I am of the sixth generation to follow Bengt. He emigrated from Sweden to the United States and to the northwest quarter of what is now Waukesha County in 1840. In 1988, Harry Anderson wrote a short article for a magazine, the *Swedish American Genealogist*. The article was titled *Possessions of A Swedish Pioneer* and concerned the probating, by Bengt's wife and her lawyer, of Bengt's estate when he died.

In the opening to his article and in reference to the inscription on Bengt's headstone, Harry writes, "Remarkably, almost every bit of this information is either incorrect, incomplete, or at least misleading, and deserves to be corrected." I agree with Harry's assessment of the markings on the gravestone, but today, I would like to offer my corrections and added information to what we find in Harry's story.

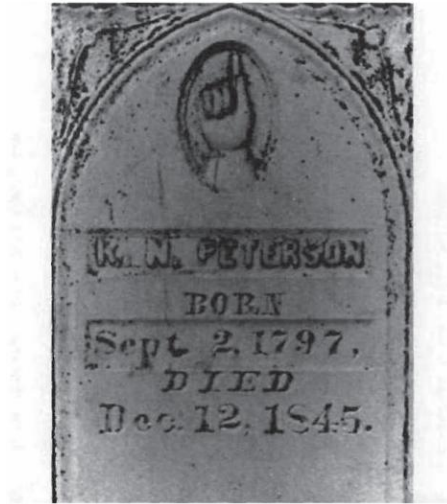
I have three minor corrections:

- My family records set Bengt's Birthplace in Bräkne-Hoby, a locality in Sweden's Blekinge County. We do not have Bengt born in Nyköping in Södermanland County as Harry does.



- Harry writes that Bengt's headstone has the initials "K M" carved onto its face. One can see from the photo of the stone below—a photo displayed in Harry's article—that the initials are clearly "K N." I

mention this minor detail because Bengt took on an alias when he arrived in the United States. As you will later learn, Bengt was a fugitive from the Swedish King's officials and fled to the United States to avoid arrest. Bengt's actual first and second names were Knut Niklas, giving us K N (his last name was Hallstrom). I see the placement of Bengt's actual initials on his gravestone as either Bengt's or his family's everlasting taunt at the Swedish officials who roamed United States frontier searching for him.



Bengt Petterson's tombstone in Holy Innocents Cemetery, Waukesha Co., WI.

- The third correction is that Bengt never purchased a land claim as Harry asserts in his article. Just as Gustaf Unonius and his wife did, Bengt and his family squatted on Canal Land and built a log cabin on that land. This was land that the Federal and Territorial Governments granted to the Milwaukee and Rock River Canal Company so that the company could sell it to raise funds for constructing its canal. Due to political decisions, this company was about to go defunct at the time of the Swedes' arrival in Wisconsin and had little chance of making sales. Those Swedes seeking land "claimed"—or simply took—canal land under the rubric of a local vigilante—or non-legal—Claim Club. This claim is the "One Claim on Canal Lands" that is listed as one of the "Credits at the time of Decease" in the probate documents in Harry's article. I find it intriguing that a piece of property with no official title of ownership could have been accepted and listed as property on an official document accepted by the District Court of Milwaukee County.

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I also have a major item which, due to its incompleteness, leaves a misleading impression and deserves correction:

In his article, Harry characterizes Bengt's estate as "relatively modest." Despite evidence to the contrary in commonly known and readily available sources, Harry leaves unquestioned the amount of the liquid assets that Bengt left to his family. The probate's inventory lists this liquid asset as "A Certificate of Deposit on the Manufacturers Bank N.Y." This certificate is valued at 280 dollars. If these dollars are the extent of the liquid assets that the family inherited from Bengt, how did they come to purchase, in various transactions made in the four years following their patriarch's death, over 450 acres of land for which they paid over 970 dollars?

It was not hard for one to find evidence for about half of these acquisitions. A chart on page 66 of Bill Stark's book, *Pine Lake*, shows that 294 acres were acquired at the cost of \$421 by Charlotta, Bengt's wife, and by his daughter Ebba and her impoverished husband George Bergwall. The remaining acquisitions were made by two others of Bengt's descendants, his sons Nils and Sten. I found the transactions of these sons in the office of the Waukesha County Register of deeds. Obviously, the "detailed property inventory and appraisal of all (of Bengt's) worldly goods" submitted by Charlotta to "the District Court of Milwaukee County" was not a complete inventory of all Bengt's—and then Charlotta's—worldly goods.

A footnote in Nils William Olsson's book, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in U. S. Ports 1820-1850 (Except New York)* gives good reason to anyone writing about Bengt's wealth to question it being characterized as "relatively modest." The footnote states, "Knut Niklas Hallstrom alias Petersson was apparently guilty of more than personal imprudence. ...The charge against Petersson/Hallstrom, which had been submitted to the Court Martial of Appeal (in Sweden), consisted of documentary proof that Petersson had falsified ... financial accounts in connection with government grants ... for the construction of the new fort at Karlsborg."

It appears that we have, in Bengt's probate submission, evidence of another case of "falsified financial accounts."

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Year Published	Book Title	Author
1979	Swedish Passenger Arrivals In U. S. Ports 1820-1850 (Except New York)	Nils William Olsson
1984	Pine Lake	Bill Stark
1988	Possessions of a Swedish Pioneer	Harry Anderson

From Bill Stark's Pine Lake:"

Land Buyer	Land Description	Date	Acres	Amt Paid	Notes
	Merton Township				
Ebba Bergius / Bergwall	NW1/4 of NW1/4 of Sec 29	1846	40	\$40	
Charlotta Petterson	NW1/4 of Sec 33	1847	50	\$126	
Charlotta Petterson	N1/2 of NE1/4 of Sec 33	1847	80	\$100	
Ebba Bergius / Bergwall	SW1/4 of NE1/4 Sec 21	1847	40	\$50	
George Bergwall	NW1/4 of NE1/4 Sec 21	1847	40	\$50	
George Bergwall	Lot 6, NW1/2 of SW1/4 (Fractional)	1849	44	\$55	
Sten Petterson	Lot 12 Sec 16	1850		\$300	Reg Deeds research
Nils Petterson	SE1/4 Sec 16	?	160	\$200	Reg Deeds research
Total			454	\$921	
All these transactions are on p 66 of Bill Stark's <i>Pine Lake</i>					
Ebba Bergius / Bergwall	NW1/4 of NW1/4 of Sec 29	1846	40	\$40	
Charlotta Petterson	NW1/4 of Sec 33	1847	50	\$126	
Charlotta Petterson	N1/2 of NE1/4 of Sec 33	1847	80	\$100	
Ebba Bergius / Bergwall	SW1/4 of NE1/4 Sec 21	1847	40	\$50	
George Bergwall	NW1/4 of NE1/4 Sec 21	1847	40	\$50	
George Bergwall	Lot 6, NW1/2 of SW1/4 (Fractional)	1849	44	\$55	
Total			294	\$421	

ⁱ Harry Anderson, Possessions of A Swedish Pioneer, Published in *Swedish American Genealogist*, 1988