



Using DNA to Find the Unknown Father in Sweden

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There are many online classes to learn about DNA for genealogy. Many of them focus on the test companies, the tools they offer, and how to figure out solutions. The challenge is how to apply that knowledge to the research problem that you are trying to solve. The purpose of this class is to show how you can use DNA to find the “unknown father” in Sweden. To do this, I’ll use a case study from my family. Along the way, I will point out important tips and finish with a list of key learnings.

Augusta Elisabeth

On January 13, 1884, my mother’s paternal grandmother (her *farmor*) was born in Fredrika parish, Västerbotten County, Sweden and given the name Augusta Elisabeth. Her mother Anna Erika Eriksdotter had come from a neighboring parish called Bjurholm for the birth. In the Fredrika birth and christening record, the mother’s name is listed as a “unmarried maiden” (*piga*). The place where the father’s name should have been written is blank. This was the beginning of a long journey to find the unknown biological father. The first step was to search all available records which list Augusta Elisabeth.

The Records

There are 19 records that list Augusta Elisabeth from her birth in 1884 to when she married in 1915. Here’s what was found:

a. Birth and Christening

There are 2 birth and christening records for Augusta Elisabeth. One is in the parish records of Fredrika where the birth took place.¹ The 2nd is in Bjurholm where the mother was officially residing.² The record in Fredrika states that Anna Erika was from a farm called Stennäs in Bjurholm. It also shows that her mother did absolution of sins in Fredrika instead of her home parish. There is also a comment out to the side stating that the pastor in Fredrika sent a notice to the pastor in Bjurholm informing him of this birth. With this information the pastor in Bjurholm recorded the birth in the Bjurholm birth and christening book. In both records, the place for a father’s name was left blank. The word *okänd* (meaning unknown) was not written. It seems Anna Erika went to another parish, outside of the chapelry to protect the father. Further, she exercised her legal right to not disclose the name of the father.³

¹ ArkivDigital, Fredrika-C-3-1862-1894-Bild-97

² ArkivDigital, Bjurholm-C-4-1862-1895-Bild-149-sid-143

³ According to the Child Murder Manifesto (*Barnamordsplakat*) of 1778, women had a legal right to not disclose the name of the biological father. The law was abolished in 1917.

b. Household Examinations and Moving Records

The household examination records in Bjurholm show Anna Erika was living at a farm called Bredträsk in 1883 when the child was conceived.⁴ She moved to another farm in the parish called Stennäs when she was 7 months pregnant.⁵ As she approached the time of delivery, she went to Fredrika for the birth. This was not a change in her place of residence, so it is not recorded in the moving out column or records of Bjurholm. Unfortunately, the birth records do not mention where the birth took place or where Anna Erika stayed for the recovery. From the birth records we know she did absolution of sins in Fredrika parish which was normally around 5 or 6 weeks after the birth. The first time we see Augusta Elisabeth on a household examination record was in the Stennäs farming area.⁶ Her mother worked for Johan Peter Sjöberg at the time. She stayed there with her mother for 10 months when her mother changed her employment to another farm in Stennäs owned by Anders Gustaf Torén.⁷ Anna Erika's residence was moved to the Torén farm for 1 year before Augusta Elisabeth joined here there. Augusta Elisabeth was 22 months old at the time. Interestingly, there is a married son of Anders Gustaf Torén whose name was Anders Sven Torén living at the same farm with his wife and 3 children. This household examination shows a mark to the left of Anna Erika Eriksdotter b. 1859 and corresponding mark to the left of Anders Sven Torén. The mark is interesting, but it does not prove paternity. Anna Erika and Augusta Elisabeth stay there until November 1887, when they moved to Arnäs parish, about 67 US miles away.⁸ I followed them through the moving-out books of Bjurholm and the moving-in books of Arnäs.

They arrive at the farm of Kristoffer Lindqvist at Utanlandsjö in Arnäs parish in November 1887.⁹ In 1890 they moved to another farming area called Stybbesmark. The household examinations show they stay in that area, working for 3 different households during the following 10 years (Johan Andersson's, Lars Petter Mikaelsson's, and Nils Lundqvist's).¹⁰ In 1898, the head of household Nils Lundqvist died, and Anna Erika and Augusta Elisabeth move again. This time, they go to different households. Augusta Elisabeth moves back to the household of Kristoffer Lindqvist and lives there at the time of her confirmation at 14 years old in 1898.¹¹ The confirmation record lists her last name as Lindqvist.¹² This is the first time a surname is mentioned for Augusta Elisabeth. She continues to stay with the Lindqvist family until 1910 when she goes out on her own.

Augusta Elisabeth was followed in the records from her birth in 1884 to her marriage in 1915. None of the records have a note or comment that would suggest the name of her biological father. Altogether, she lived with the Kristoffer Lindqvist family for 10 years. She continued to use Lindqvist until she married at 31 years old. Without proof in the records, the only option to find her biological father is by using DNA.

⁴ ArkivDigital, Bjurholm-AI-9a-1876-1886-Bild-51-sid-53

⁵ ArkivDigital, Bjurholm-AI-9a-1876-1886-Bild-72-sid-74

⁶ ArkivDigital, Bjurholm-AI-9a-1876-1886-Bild-72-sid-74

⁷ ArkivDigital, Bjurholm-AI-9a-1876-1886-Bild-79-sid-81

⁸ ArkivDigital, Bjurholm-B-2-1879-1895-Bild-31

⁹ ArkivDigital, Arnäs-AI-12b-1883-1894-Bild-221-sid-212

¹⁰ ArkivDigital,) Arnäs-AI-12b-1883-1894-Bild-150-sid-141, Arnäs-Alla-1b-1895-1915-Bild-2960-sid-749, Arnäs-AI-12b-1883-1894-Bild-156-sid-147, and Arnäs-Alla-1b-1895-1915-Bild-3040-sid-757

¹¹ ArkivDigital, Arnäs-Alla-1c-1895-1915-Bild-3110-sid-1215

¹² Riksarkivet, Arnäs (1895-1910), DI.1, p. 20

DNA

Using DNA is a great option to solve this problem for the following reasons:

1. There are many living descendants of the unknown father within 5 or 6 generations (the limit for autosomal DNA to solve genealogical problems). Of those, the oldest living descendants are 4th generation.
2. My mother, her brother, and their half-sister were all willing to test to help solve this problem. All three are great-grandchildren (4th gen.) of the unknown father. There are multiple first cousins who are also willing to test.
3. The records in Sweden are rich with genealogical information and an extensive research and analysis had already been done.
4. This is the only line in our family tree that had not been researched. All other family lines are thoroughly researched and documented.
5. Because the genealogical goal is to find a male, a Y-DNA test might be helpful as another tool.

The Process

I started by having my mother and her brother test with Ancestry. After the results came back, we saw the number of matching results in Sweden were very low. My mother had 122 DNA matches in Sweden (and she emigrated from Sweden as an adult). Her brother in Sweden only had 144 matches in Sweden. I heard that more people in Sweden were testing with MyHeritage so I downloaded the DNA data from Ancestry and uploaded it to MyHeritage (which you can do for free). The results on MyHeritage showed 7,373 Swedish matches for my mother and 10,013 for her brother. My mother and uncle have a half-sister from a different mother. Their father (Karl Bertil Fröberg b. 1914 – d. 1962) was a grandson of Augusta Elisabeth Lindqvist. To help isolate the DNA from the unknown father to Karl Bertil, I contacted the half-sister and she was happy to test.

While waiting for the results, I researched all the living descendants of Anna Erika Erikdotter down to modern day. There are fantastic resources (censuses, person akt, online directories, and social media) to find living descendants in Sweden! She had 2 children, Augusta Elisabeth, and a son Johan Evert out of wedlock and never married. The sons line died out in 2009 so doing a Y-DNA is not an option. Augusta Elisabeth had 6 children who all have descendants today. Knowing the names of those descendants and searching their linked trees will help to identify people from the DNA match lists. Although most of the DNA from Augusta Elisabeth to the six children is the same, there are unique markers dispersed individually to each of her children which came from her biological father. After the half-sister's results were ready, I searched for DNA representation of people who have already tested. From this research, and I found three first cousins to my mother who had not tested. Through facebook, I invited them to test and so far, one of them is willing to test.

While waiting for the first cousins DNA results, I decided to try the auto-cluster tool on MyHeritage to see a visual grouping of familial lines. I explored surnames and the trees for matches within each cluster group but still didn't see a pattern to identify the unknown father. Because of Swedish naming customs¹³, the surnames in the match lists aren't very helpful. Further, the surnames on trees can be confusing from present day back to the mid-1800s. I

¹³ See https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/img_auth.php/8/89/Swedish_Naming_Customs.pdf

searched the match lists for Lindqvists (who might be related be related somehow) but did not see any connections. I wondered if Augusta Elisabeth and Johan Evert had the same father? He used the surname Eriksson, but searches for Erikssons didn't show any connections from the match lists and their trees. At this point, I decided to look at the records again. I went back to the household examination with the odd marks cross referencing Anders Sven Torén and Anna Erika Erikdotter and ran a search in my uncle's match list for the names Torén. Immediately I saw a DNA match with 100 cM's to a match with a linked tree. This tree showed the match was a descendant of a Katrina Erika Torén b. 1861 in Fredrika parish. I went back to the household examination of the Anders Gustaf Torén family and saw that Katrina Erika was a sister of Anders Sven Torén!¹⁴

With this information I ran searches for the names Torén or Thorén in the match lists of my mother, her brother, and the shared matches with their half-sister. I found 30 matches with cM values ranging between 100 cM down to 15.2 cM's that have trees linked to their DNA in MyHeritage. Additionally, there are 9 in Ancestry, and 7 in FamilyTree DNA. Next, I started a family file offline using Legacy Family Tree¹⁵ for the Torén family. I searched and identified multiple generations of ancestors and descendants of Anders Sven Torén by comparing the data from linked tree's in Myheritage to the parish records. This resulted in a family file containing 74 people. Then I went back to my mothers, her brothers, and their half-sisters DNA match lists to compare cM amounts for each unique match. Some people match to all three. Others match to only two, and one only matches to my mother.

Proof of Paternity

Evidence from parish records, combined with DNA matches have proven Anders Sven Torén is the biological father of Augusta Elisabeth Lindqvist for the following reasons:

1. DNA matches are within 5 generations (the limit for autosomal DNA and genealogical conclusions).
2. There are 46 DNA matches with centimorgan values between 100 cM - 15.2 cM to the Torén family.
3. The DNA matches have appropriate cM value and relationships to my mother, her brother, and their half-sister.
4. Anders Sven Torén is one of 4 siblings, 2 females and 2 males. His only brother died as an infant.
5. The places identified in the Bjurholm household examination records, combined with maps, show that Augusta Elisabeth's mother Anna Erika Erikdotter (b. 1859) was living on a neighboring farm to Anders Sven Torén when the child was conceived.
6. The marks to the left of Anna Erika Erikdotter and Anders Sven Torén in the Bjurholm household examination (1876 - 1886) A.I 9a page 81 are unique to them on the page. Nobody else on the page has similar marks. The pastor in Fredrika probably informed the pastor in Bjurholm of the biological father. The pastor in Bjurhom could not legally disclose Anders Sven Torén so he made the marks with no comment or explanation.
7. All other lines on my mother's side have been researched, and sourced. This is the only place where DNA matches to the Torén family would fit.

¹⁴ ArkivDigital, Husförhör (1876 - 1886) Bjurholm-AI-9a-1876-1886-Bild-79-sid-81

¹⁵ Legacy Family Tree, <https://legacyfamilytree.com/>

Conclusion

It's unknown if Anders Sven's wife had knowledge of his paternity to Augusta Elisabeth. Perhaps having Anna Erika Eriksson (b.1859) living and working on the farm was a secret arrangement of supporting the child rather than an open payment of ongoing child support. Anna Erika and Augusta Elisabeth continue to live on the Torén farm until November of 1887 when they move to Arnäs parish, about 67 US miles away. At that point, Augusta Elisabeth was 3 years and 10 months old. We don't know why they moved at this time. Maybe Anders Sven's wife found out and insisted they leave? Maybe there was a dispute between Anna Erika and Anders Sven Torén over her wages and support of the child? Whatever the case, they leave to Arnäs and move to the farm of Kristoffer Lindqvist. They stay in Arnäs living and working on a few farms. Augusta Elisabeth eventually returned to the Lindqvist family and stays with them for about 10 years until she moves away 1910. Gratefully, the parish records and DNA evidence lead to the same conclusion. Anders Sven Torén is the biological father of Augusta Elisabeth Lindqvist b. 1884. Finally, the empty spot in the family tree has been filled.

Key Learnings

1. It's important to get the oldest descendant from the genealogical goal to test.
2. Do a Y-DNA test if there is a paternal living descendant.
3. If the genealogical goal is in Sweden, you will get a lot more autosomal DNA matches using MyHeritage in this case 30 matches.¹⁶ Interestingly, I found 7 matches to the Torén family with cM values between 41.86 and 19.53 in FamilyTree DNA with my mother. Three of those were already in MyHeritage and 4 were not. There are 6 Torén matches to my uncle in Ancestry and 4 to my mother.
4. Centimorgan values over 15 are solid autosomal matches. Under 15 might be a false positive.
5. There are fantastic resources (censuses, online directories, and social media) to find living descendants in Sweden.
6. Try to find (or get) DNA test results for each line that descends from the unknown father. This is looking for the unique markers that may have been passed to only one of the children.
7. Use social media, e.g. Facebook to reach out to descendants that have not tested.
8. Swedish naming customs regarding surnames complicates searching match lists. There are many reasons why one or more people in the same family may have changed their surname.
9. Search every household examination record listing your ancestor. Key evidence might only be on one. Search birth, confirmation, marriage, and death records to support what you see in the household examinations.
10. It's helpful to re-evaluate the evidence seen in records.

¹⁶ Matches over 15 cM with a linked tree. There were at least 15 more with a private tree, or island tree (where the tester is the only person in the tree) or cM values under 15 that looked like a possible match.

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