

Most of us know very little about the lives of our ancestors, even of those who lived only a generation or two before us. We know, of course, that their circumstances, whether they were poor or wealthy or somewhere in between, were quite different from ours today. The way of life has changed immensely for most people in the so-called "developed world" during the past century.

And yet, just a glimpse or two into the lives of those in our families who came before us can be both enlightening and maddeningly insufficient. In one way, it seems intrusive to look this intimately into the resources of our ancestors, and yet, it seems that we can do no harm to those who are gone by delving into their lives, and perhaps we can learn something that will influence us in some way. Or, maybe we are just a snoopy lot.

In some of the old papers that our Augustineson family (or Augustinessen, as it was written in the Swedish and Danish documents we read) had brought with them when they immigrated to America in the early 1870s, we found the listing of the estate of my great-great grandmother, mother to Benedicta who married Lars Augustineson.

Benedicta was an illegitimate child of Gertrud Persdotter and was born several years before the children of Gertrud's marriage to Bengt Olsson. Gertrud and Bengt were parents to four sons and two daughters who were still young when Gertrud died. Nils and Johanna were twelve years old, Ola was eleven, Anders eight, Petronella six, and Johannes two. Johannes later emigrated to the United States, settling in Marshalltown, Iowa. John Benson, as he was called here, had two children, Martin and Nellie, and our family was in contact with them over the years. Neither married, so the Iowa branch of the family is no longer in existence.

But, Gertrud's estate gave me a peek into her life. The possessions she had were indicative of how she lived, and very probably, how she had to live. She died in 1854, and one wonders how her husband and children coped after her death. It seems that she was a typical farm woman of the day--not a peasant, but not with any great wealth, either, since her possessions were more than offset by debts she owed to farm

workers.

Her assets were listed, right down to her personal effects, even clothing. Those were probably typical of the time and place.

Household goods, too, were those that were necessary to maintaining a family in rural Sweden in the mid nineteenth century. She had a pot and two measuring cups of pewter; in copper, there were two kettles, one baking dish, two coffee cookers, one pan, and one pitcher; she had two iron Dutch ovens, several small tools, and two spiders; there was a pendulum clock, a vase, some porcelain and knives and forks.

I was most interested in the fiber tools she possessed and in her livestock. She had a spinning wheel, flax tools, bleaching utensils, dyeing vats, wool, and linen. She owned two cows, five sheep and two lambs, and three geese. One can assume that the sheep provided much of the material for her spinning, although the flax tools probably show that they raised flax and prepared and spun the linen threads as well.

There weren't many books in the household, but she did own a Bible and a "household book."

Gertrud had some other possessions, too, and had some outstanding bills, mostly wages to farm workers.

Gertrud's illegitimate daughter, Benedicta, was wife to Lars Augustineson and mother to Larsine, "Sine" and Cornelia, "Nell." Cornelia married Lars Erickson and had ten children, one of whom was my father, Einar.

I will never know much more about Gertrud, but I will think of her now and then when I sit down at the spinning wheel and make yarn from our sheep flock. It is a fine thread spun from generation to generation through the centuries, but it is a connection, none the less, and one that adds another dimension to our lives.