



They Left the Tornio Valley: The Ivarie-Rova Family's Odyssey

The following is a slightly modified version of a booklet I wrote in 2003 about my great-great-grandparents John Petter Ivarie and Greta Brita Rova, Finnish-speaking natives of Norrbotten County, Sweden. I am a granddaughter of their grandson John Hill.

Linda Reverchon
Canada

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Over a century and a half ago, in August 1848, a baby girl was born in the far north of Sweden. This area of Sweden is so far north that it is not separated from Finland by the sea, but by a river, the Tornio XE "Tornio River" . And the Tornio, being easier to traverse than the larger Gulf of Bothnia to the south, had allowed a mixture of populations with the result that Finnish was spoken by great numbers of people on the Swedish side of the river.

The little girl was born into a Finnish-speaking family, her parents being Isak Mickelsson Rova XE "Rova, Isak Mickelsson " and Brita Jacobsdotter Ruojokojärvi XE "Ruojokojärvi, Brita Jacobsdotter" . Since the family lived so far away from the Karl Gustaf parish church in Karungi, the baby was given "temporary" or "emergency" baptism (*nöddopt*) the day after her birth. This baptism was confirmed a month later, at which time she was given the names Brita Margaretha. XE "Rova, Brita Margaretha" She came to be known, though, as Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" .

Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" was the youngest of four children born to the couple:
Henrik Isaksson Rova XE "Rova, Henrik Isaksson" was the first, but he lived only a few months;
Isak Isaksson Rova XE "Rova, Isak Isaksson" was their second child;
Eva Maria Isakdotter Rova XE "Rova, Eva Maria Isakdotter" was their first daughter;
and Brita Greta followed.

Isak, the father of the Rova children, was a farmer who eventually owned his own farm. His wife Brita no doubt had her hands full with her family, the work on the farm, and also, perhaps, caring for her widowed mother who had come to live with them.

Little Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" grew up on the Rova property with her parents, brother Isak, and sister Eva Maria. Isak as the oldest child was probably the first to marry, and he lived on his father's farm with his wife Greta Isakdotter Toljus XE "Toljus, Greta Isakdotter" and, eventually, their four children.

One day in late summer of 1862, the body of Isak Mickelsson Rova, father of Brita Greta, Isak, and Eva Maria, was found in the Tornio River. Son Isak was suspected of having been

involved in some way in the death and spent several months in jail. His guilt, however, was never proved.

Released from prison in 1863, Isak returned to the family farm, his mother, his wife and children, and his two sisters. Then, two years later in 1865, with his wife and four children, Isak left Sweden for the United States, settling in Chicago, where he died about four years later.

In 1865, young Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" , just sixteen, gave birth to a daughter whose father did not leave his name in the records. She called her baby Maria Emma XE "Rova, Maria Emma" . Three years later, she had another child, a little boy named Johan XE "Rova, Johan" who lived only eighteen months.

When her daughter was five years old and five months after her son's death, a man from another parish approached Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" 's mother through an intermediary, asking for Brita Greta's hand in marriage. The young man's name was shown in the records as Johan Petter Johansson Iivari XE "Iivari, Johan Petter Johansson" . Illegitimate births may not have been all that uncommon because Johan Petter's birth record shows that he, too, was born out of wedlock, and this in 1846.

Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" agreed to the proposal, and her mother approved. So, in 1870 the couple was married, Johan Petter accepting Maria Emma XE "Rova, Maria Emma" as his own child. Nine months later she was joined by another baby, Anna XE "Ivarie, Anna" .

In July of 1872, when Maria Emma XE "Rova, Maria Emma" was just a bit more than seven years old, she died, leaving her parents with just one child, Anna XE "Ivarie, Anna" , not quite two.

The following month, Johan Petter left Sweden on his own, destined for St. Paul XE "St. Paul, Minnesota" in the United States. He returned to Sweden, though, because emigration records show him ten months later leaving once again for North America, this time in the company of two females, presumably his wife Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" and toddler Anna XE "Ivarie, Anna" . This was in June of 1873.

Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" 's older sister Eva Maria XE "Rova, Eva Maria" had, in the meantime, married and begun to raise a family. Her husband also left for America alone, this about a year before Johan Petter Iivari XE "Iivari, Johan Petter" . It wasn't until 1878 that Eva Maria XE "Rova, Eva Maria" and her children left their village to join husband and father Abram Palonperä XE "Palonperä, Abram" in the New World, settling in Cokato XE "Cokato, Minnesota" , Minnesota, a short distance northwest of Minneapolis XE "Minneapolis, Minnesota" .

Johan Petter XE "Ivarie, Johan Petter" and Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" also came to live in Cokato XE "Cokato, Minnesota" , and this within two years of their leaving Sweden. For in July of 1874, the first of their American-born children, Maria XE "Ivarie, Maria" , was born there. Records from the Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church XE "Finnish Apostolic Lutheran Church" in Cokato show that seven more children were also born in Cokato or nearby:

Hentriika XE "Ivarie, Hentriika" , born in 1876, but who lived only eleven months;
 Johan Jakob (John Jacob XE "Ivarie, John Jacob") XE "Ivarie, Johan Jakob" , in 1878;
 Caleb XE "Ivarie, Caleb" , in 1880;
 Isaki Viljami XE "Ivarie, Isaki Viljami" (Isaac William XE "Ivarie, Isaac William"), in 1882;
 Sophia Carolina XE "Ivarie, Sophia Carolina" , in 1884;

Oscar Bernard XE "Ivarie, Oscar Bernard" , in 1885; and
 Ida Hendrika XE "Ivarie, Ida Hendrika" , in 1888.

Their last child, Britta Greta XE "Ivarie, Britta Greta" , was born in 1892, after they had left Cokato XE "Cokato, Minnesota" and moved to Urness Township XE "Urness Township, Minnesota" , Douglas County XE "Douglas County, Minnesota" , in western Minnesota. The US Census of 1900 shows the Ivaries and their younger children still resident in Urness Township.

This same Census record indicates that while Johan Petter XE "Ivarie, Johan Petter" could speak and read English, he could not write it. Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" , according to the Census, could neither speak, read, nor write English.

The spread in the ages of the children of Johan Petter XE "Ivarie, Johan Petter" and Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" was so great that, around the time their last child was born, their first two were marrying. Anna XE "Ivarie, Anna" was already the wife of Henrik (Henry) Kuoppala XE "Kuoppala, Henrik (Henry)" , also Swedish-born and twelve years her senior, when the two of them were godparents in 1894 to her sister Maria XE "Ivarie, Maria" 's firstborn, John Hill XE "Hill, John" . Maria had married Andrew Hill XE "Hill, Andrew" (born Anders Wäyrynen XE "Wäyrynen, Anders") of Finland XE "Finland" in 1892, and the Hills were also living in Urness Township XE "Urness Township, Minnesota" at the time of John's birth. There was a fifteen year difference in the ages of Maria and Andrew.

The Ivarie sons also began marrying, Caleb XE "Ivarie, Caleb" taking for his wife Minnesota-born Kathryn Ruana XE "Ruana, Kathryn" in 1898. John Jacob XE "Ivarie, John Jacob" married Sophia Carolina Stjerna XE "Stjerna, Sophia Carolina" , born in northern Norway XE "Norway" , in 1899. Isaac William XE "Ivarie, Isaac William" and Oscar Bernard XE "Ivarie, Oscar Bernard" did not marry, remaining close to their parents instead. Ida Hendrika XE "Ivarie, Ida Hendrika" wed August Illikainen XE "Illikainen, August" , and Britta Greta XE "Ivarie, Britta Greta" , August Koski XE "Koski, August" .

Andrew Hill XE "Hill, Andrew" became a widower with five children in August of 1902 when his wife Maria XE "Ivarie, Maria" died of "rheumatism", according to her death certificate. She was buried in the Finnish Cemetery northwest of Fairfax, Minnesota XE "Fairfax, Minnesota" . The following January, Andrew remarried, wedding Maria's younger sister Sophia Carolina XE "Ivarie, Sophia Carolina" , twenty-four years his junior.

By 1906, Johan Petter XE "Ivarie, Johan Petter" , now known as John Peter XE "Ivarie, John Peter" , was no doubt feeling the need for land of his own to farm. He and his adult sons left Minnesota for western North Dakota XE "North Dakota" to homestead, and, on 18 April 1912, Patent #260320 was issued by the Land Office in Bismarck, ND, in the name of *Peter Iverson* XE "Iverson, Peter" for the property designated as 133/90-14. His sons and all his sons-in-law except Andrew Hill XE "Hill, Andrew" (who had moved with his family to Minneapolis XE "Minneapolis, Minnesota") also homesteaded in the same area of North Dakota, south of the town of New Leipzig XE "New Leipzig, North Dakota" .

The next of their children whom John Peter XE "Ivarie, John Peter" and Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" were to lose prematurely was Ida Hendrika XE "Ivarie, Ida Hendrika" in 1915, at not quite twenty-seven. She was buried in the Finn Lutheran Cemetery XE "Finn Lutheran Cemetery" on the outskirts of New Leipzig XE "New Leipzig, North Dakota" . She left two young sons, one of whom, the infant Oscar Illikainen XE "Illikainen, Oscar" , was taken in by his grandparents.

John Peter XE "Ivarie, John Peter" died of cancer of the stomach in April of 1917, at seventy-one years of age. The inscription on his gravestone in the Finn Lutheran Cemetery XE "Finn Lutheran Cemetery" reads:

FATHER JOHAN PETTER IVARIE XE "Ivarie, Johan Petter"
 SYNTYNYT Helmi K 17 P V 1846
 KUOLLUT Huhti K 23 P, V 1917
 Ikänsä on 71 v 2 K 6 P
 Vanh VK No 320
 Mä nukun haavoin Kristuksen.
 Ne puhdistaa mun synneistä!
 Sill' veres on ja kuolemas
 Mun eloni, kauneuden' kans.
 IVARIE

The translation is:

FATHER JOHAN PETTER IVARIE XE "Ivarie, Johan Petter"
Born February 17, 1846
Died April 23, 1917
His age is 71 years 2 months 6 days
From the Old Hymnal Number 320 [actually 390]
I sleep in the wounds of Christ
They cleanse me of my sins.
For your blood and your death are
My life, and my adornment.
 IVARIE

Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" lived on for another sixteen years without her husband, dying of influenza in 1933 at more than eighty-four years of age. She was buried next to John Peter XE "Ivarie, John Peter" , although her grave is not marked.

The Depression years saw the departure of many of the Ivaries' grandchildren from North Dakota XE "North Dakota" to the West Coast of the United States where employment prospects were better. Their first son John Jacob XE "Ivarie, John Jacob" (Jake or Jack) and his wife, in their retirement, followed most of their children out to Washington XE "Washington State" State in 1941. His sister Britta Greta XE "Ivarie, Britta Greta" (Gertie) Koski settled along with many of her offspring in Clatskanie XE "Clatskanie, Oregon" , Oregon XE "Oregon" . She died there in 1976 at the age of eighty-three.

Widowed Anna Kuoppala XE "Ivarie, Anna" , the little girl who had emigrated from Sweden with her parents, left North Dakota XE "North Dakota" for Minneapolis XE "Minneapolis, Minnesota" where she lived for a time with her sister Sophia Carolina XE "Ivarie, Sophia Carolina" (Sophie) and husband Andrew Hill XE "Hill, Andrew" . She had never had children. She died in Minneapolis in 1957, and her body was returned to New Leipzig XE "New Leipzig, North Dakota" to be buried in the same cemetery as her husband Henry Kuoppala, her parents, her sister Ida Hendrika XE "Ivarie, Ida Hendrika" , and brothers Oscar Bernard XE "Ivarie, Oscar Bernard" who had died in 1934 and Isaac William XE "Ivarie, Isaac William" in 1949.

Caleb XE "Ivarie, Caleb" passed on in 1959 and joined the growing number of Ivaries in the Finn Lutheran Cemetery XE "Finn Lutheran Cemetery" . He left a wife and five children.

Sophie survived her husband Andrew by over twenty-eight years. She had raised not only her late sister Maria XE "Ivarie, Maria" 's five children but also seven of her own. Only fifty-

nine when Andrew died in 1943, she remarried four years later and continued living in Minneapolis XE "Minneapolis, Minnesota" with her new husband Alex Krutz XE "Krutz, Alex" . On her death in 1972, Sophie was buried next to Andrew Hill XE "Hill, Andrew" in Crystal Lake Cemetery XE "Crystal Lake Cemetery" in Minneapolis XE "Minneapolis, Minnesota" .

From the remote land of their origin in far northern Sweden, the couple Brita Greta Rova XE "Rova, Brita Greta" and John Peter Ivarie XE "Ivarie, John Peter" scattered seeds which took root first in Minnesota, then North Dakota XE "North Dakota" , followed by Washington XE "Washington State" State and Oregon XE "Oregon" . And who knows where else in the generations that have followed?

I hope that this brief history of Brita Greta XE "Rova, Brita Greta" and John Peter XE "Ivarie, John Peter" will, for those of their descendants who read it, throw an interesting light on our ancestors. Their story is, after all, part of our own.