

How are the Alleged Hoaxers of the Kensington Rune Stone Connected to Each Other?

Jerry Lutgen

July 8, 2015

Introduction

The Kensington rune stone (hereafter KRS) is a controversial artifact found at Kensington Minnesota in 1898. It tells of an expedition by visitors from what is now Sweden and Norway to the center of North America in 1362. Adding to the mystery of the KRS is that it is written in runes that were not well known and understood at the time of discovery. If the KRS is genuine it would cause a major reevaluation of our understanding of how the Americas were “discovered”. There are many theories which assert that the KRS is something other than it seems at face-value. Perhaps the most popular counter-theory is that the KRS was a hoax perpetrated in a conspiracy among known, then-current residents of the Kensington area.

This paper will examine the extent to which these individuals actually comprised a kind of clique that could reasonably be expected to join into such a conspiracy. This examination will incorporate information that recently has become more widely publicized. This information purports to show a potential connection between these alleged conspirators and documents (i.e. the so-called “Larsson Papers”) that could have been source material for a hoax.

The author will not take a position on the question of whether or not the KRS is a hoax. Furthermore, this paper will suggest alternative ways to interpret any connections found amongst the alleged conspirators as well as connections between them and the Larsson papers.

Following is a Background section which hopefully will provide readers who are new to the subject with enough material to follow the findings and discussion in this paper. It is not intended to be a comprehensive review of the massive body of knowledge that has accumulated relative to the KRS.

Background

In 1898 a rune stone was found in the roots of an Aspen tree that was being taken down by a farmer named Olaf Ohman. His farm was located in the north central US near the town of Kensington, Minnesota, which is about a 100 miles north of the state capitol in Saint Paul, Minnesota. This area has a very large Swedish population. Swedes have been in this area since about 1850, but they started to arrive in large numbers by about 1870.

This rune stone has been the subject of intense controversy. It tells the story of “8 Goths and 22 Norrmen on an acquisition journey from Vinland over the west”. The stone dates itself to 1362. If this story is correct it means that a mixed group of individuals from what are now the Scandinavian countries arrived in the center of the North American continent, most likely coming from what is now the “New England” region of the eastern U.S. This would have happened 130 years before Christopher Columbus “discovered” America. If true this would cause a major reevaluation of the early American history.

There are many theories about how the KRS came into existence. The two most popular theories are quite simple. One popular theory holds that the rune stone is genuine and we should accept the story that it tells at face-value. Another popular theory holds that the rune stone is a hoax that was created by Swedish immigrants who came to the Kensington area after 1870.

Two motives have been suggested for why someone would want to create such a hoax. One motive suggests that the hoaxer(s) intended the rune stone to be a kind of joke, designed to create some excitement in the ordinary lives of the local farmers. One view is that the target of the joke would have been certain American and Scandinavian intellectuals who were scorned by the hoaxer(s). The other suggested motive is that it was created in order to generate even greater interest amongst Swedes to come to the Kensington area.

Adherents to the hoax theory often name three primary suspects for having executed the hoax. They allege that three local Swedish men from the Kensington area who were associated with each other acted in a conspiracy to create the KRS. They are 1) Olof Ohman, the man who found the stone on his property, 2) Sven Fogelblad, an educated vagabond and 3) Andrew Anderson, a neighbor to Ohman. A tailor from Sweden named Edvard Larsson has been associated with the possible hoax because he wrote papers (i.e. Larsson Papers) which demonstrated an awareness of rare runes found on the Kensington rune stone and few other places. Furthermore, Larsson had an aunt named Karin Larsson who, along with many members of her husband's family, lived in the vicinity of Ohman, Fogelblad and Anderson around the time the KRS was uncovered. Some commentators take this as evidence of a connection between the alleged hoaxers and the Larsson Papers.

How are these people connected to the KRS and each other?

Following is some additional information about each of the individuals named above with special attention paid to how they are connected to one another.

Olof Ohman: He departed Gothenburg Sweden on June 20, 1879 travelling under the name Olof Olsson. He changed his name in the U.S. to Olaf Ohman after his father's childhood home in On, Sweden. The name Ohman has been interpreted by some to mean "island man". There is a reference to an island in the KRS inscription which some people have taken as added evidence that Ohman was referencing himself when he participated in the hoax.

Olof was born in 1854 near the town of Halingsland, Forsa parish. Even though he had very little education, Ohman was thought to be an intelligent man who could read and write.

Being homesick, he returned to Sweden in 1883. He returned to the US to live near the Kensington area around 1886. Around this time he married a Swedish woman named Karin Danielson from Forsa and their first child was born in 1887. He bought his first land in the Kensington area in 1890. He bought the adjoining piece of land on which the stone was found around 1895.

Ohman uncovered the stone while clearing land for farming. Ohman claimed that the stone was found amongst the roots of an Aspen tree. There are no precise estimates for the age of the tree, but most estimates suggest that the tree started growing before Ohman came to live in Kensington. Olof brought the stone into town for public display, but it did not get significant attention outside of the area for some years.

Ohman was suspected to have been involved in the hoax for three reasons; 1) he was the person who uncovered the stone, 2) he was known to have a book about runes which he obtained from Sven Fogelblad after the stone was uncovered and 3) some local people simply regarded him as personally

odd. The accusations that he was involved in a hoax caused Ohman much pain in his life. He denied that he was involved in a hoax until his death in 1935.

Sven Fogelblad: He was born 12-10-1829 on Monsa farm, Faglum, Vastergotland, Sweden. His parents were Anders Anderson (1775) and Ingrid Jonsdotter (1783). Presumably Fogelblad was born with the name Sven Andersson. It is thought that he changed his name to Fogelblad sometime between 1839 – 1847. His siblings apparently did not change their names. He was educated to be a preacher. Upon graduation he moved to Larv parish where he became a Pastor Lecturer. At some point prior to his emigration to America he was defrocked for unknown reasons.

He immigrated to America in 1869 using the name Fogelberg. Importantly, the Swedish emigration data base shows only two other individuals as ever having used that last name on their emigration documents. Prior to his emigration he was last known to have lived in the Jakob and Johannes parish of Stockholm. On his emigration documents he is listed as a “renskrifvare” or copyist.

It is noteworthy that of the two other émigrés named Fogleblad in the data base one was a Helena Fogelblad Persdotter. She also emigrated from Stockholm, but from the Klara parish, on the same month and perhaps the same day as Sven Fogelblad. The computerized data base record shows that she went to Russia, but examination of the hand-written source document shows that she actually went to America. In the 1880 census from Traverse County, Minnesota Sven Fogelblad lists himself as married,, but there is no census record for his wife. Even though she is from a different parish, it seems quite possible that Helena Fogelblad was Fogelblad’s wife or perhaps his divorced wife. The author was unable to find any records for Helena in the U.S.

Sven Fogleblad lived for short amounts of time in several towns in Minnesota where he sometimes worked as a school teacher. He is also known to have published several scholarly “free-thinking” papers of social commentary while in Minnesota. It is believed that he moved to the Kensington area in the 1880’s, where he died in 1897, prior to the discovery of the rune stone. For a period of time in the 1890’s Fogelblad lived on the Ohman farm. It was discovered that Ohman had a book relating to runes belonging to Fogelblad which he may have obtained from Andrew Anderson following the discovery of the rune stone.

Fogelblad is suspected of participating in the hoax for three reasons; 1) he was a highly educated but non-conformist man with an unclear and perhaps troubled past which made him a suspicious person to the local residents, 2) he lived on the Ohman farm for a period of time and he died at the home of Andrew Anderson and 3) he was known to have at least a limited understanding of runes – perhaps even an extensive understanding of runes. This last notion is based partly on the fact that he owned a book about runes which was found at the Ohman farm. Also, there is speculation that Fogelblad had some degree of association with the runic expert Claes J. Ljungstrom of Uppsala.

Andrew Anderson: Anderson was born Anders Jonasson in Norra Ny Varmland in 1863. There are conflicting records as to the date of his arrival in the U.S. The most likely dates are 1882 and 1892. He was a close-by neighbor of Olof Ohman. There is an unofficial record that shows that he borrowed money from Ohman and that Ohman came to own property once owned by Anderson. Sven Fogelblad died in Anderson’s home in 1897. Little is known with certainty about Anderson except that he also was regarded as having a non-conformist personality by the local people.

Anderson's wife was named Betsy Dahl. Her birthplace is unknown to the author, but it is known that her brother was born in Forsa, just as was Olof Ohman. There is an unofficial report that Betsy Dahl was a cousin to Ohman's wife, Karin Danielson. She was not the sister-in-law to Ohman as some have stated.

It has also been claimed that Anderson was educated in Uppsala at the same university as Fogelblad, but no direct evidence of this connection has been found. Is it just a coincidence that Fogelblad was born with the name Andersson?

The main reasons that Anderson is a suspect in the hoax are; 1) his close association with Ohman and Fogelblad, 2) he was also regarded as somewhat odd by the local people and 3) the possibility that he was associated with Fogelblad at Uppsala.

Edvard Larsson: He was born on August 8, 1867 in Floda, Dalarna, Sweden and died in Sweden in 1950. His parents are Lars Larsson (born 1831) and Kristina Wastling (born 1836). Following Edvard's death it was discovered that he was in possession of documents that showed runes with a close match to rare runes found on the KRS. In some ways these documents remain the closest document to the KRS, in terms of rare rune content, ever discovered.

Many theories exist as to how Larsson may have come to have authored these papers. One intriguing theory was that even though he was a tailor by profession, these documents were essentially exercises for someone practicing to be a copyist. This is of course very interesting given that the last listed profession for Fogelblad in Sweden was that he was a copyist.

Karin Larsdotter: It is known that the aunt of Edvard Larsson came to live in "Croket Lake", Alexandria, Minnesota. This information was found on a post-card apparently sent by Karin to Edvard (see Figure 1)

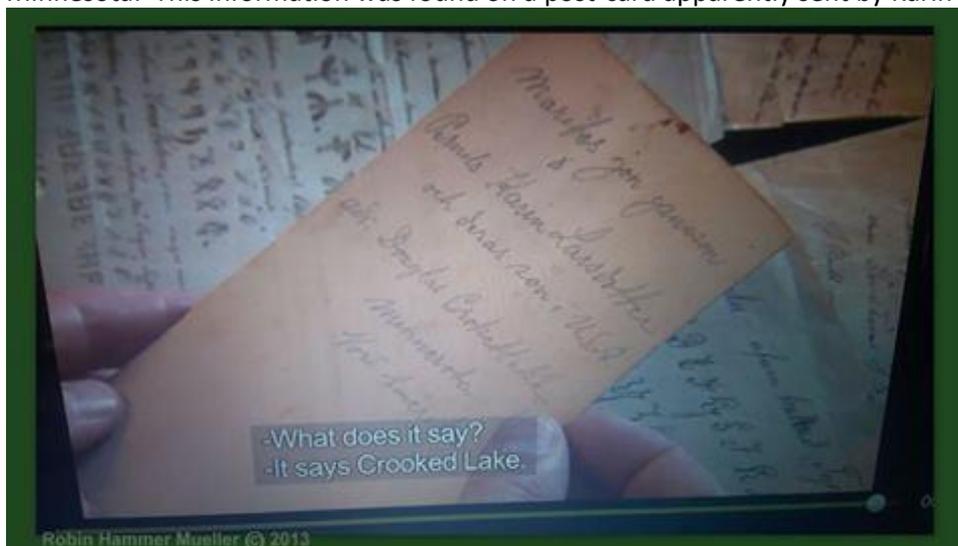


Figure 1. Postcard from Karin Larsdotter to Edvard Larsson with "Larsson papers" in the background

The word "Croket" has been interpreted as "Crooked". It has been generally assumed to be a reference to "Crooked Lake" which is near Alexandria, Minnesota and about 25 miles by modern roads from where the rune stone was discovered.

The aunt is named Karin Larsson born 9/17/1838 in Holsakern, Kopparberg. Her parents are Pernils Lars Larsson(born 1806) and Karin Jonsdotter(born 1811). They are the grandparents of Edvard Larsson. Karin's husband is Jon Jansson born 2/15/1839 in Mossel, Floda, Kopparberg. Karin and Jon arrived in Crooked Lake, near Alexandria and Kensington on or before 1875 with their infant son Lewis. They lived in the same "Crooked Lake" area as her husband's parents and his brothers.

Other than the fact that Karin Larsson lived within about 25 miles of Ohman, Anderson and Fogelblad, this author has been unable to find any other geographic or familial connection between Larsson or her husband's family and these other three persons (Ohman, Fogelblad, Anderson) or their families.

It has been reported that this Karin Larsson and her husband actually lived in Solem, Minnesota on property very near to the discovery site, but this is incorrect. This error derives from confusing Larsson's aunt and her husband with another married couple with very similar names who lived near Olaf Ohman.

Are the Connections Meaningful?

This paper has shown that there was a strong connection between Olof Ohman and Andrew Anderson. Given Sven Fogelblad's transient nature it is difficult to know precisely how attached he was to these other two men. Still we can probably say with confidence that they were connected to the extent needed for them to have been conspirators in a hoax. However, it must be said that the fact that these individuals were associated with each other does not of itself constitute evidence that they actually conspired to create the KRS. The author is simply unaware of any evidence which directly points to any of these men as being involved in the creation of the KRS.

What of the fact that Karin Larsson, the aunt of Edvard Larsson lived within about 25 miles of the KRS site? It is tempting to argue that this is clear evidence of a connection between the KRS and the Larsson papers, therefore making it a near certainty that the KRS is a late 19th century hoax carried out by these suspected conspirators. There are two problems with this line of thinking.

First, it may seem highly improbable that the aunt of Edvard Larsson could come to live so near to the KRS site by chance. This is actually a somewhat complicated statistical question, but in short, it is not nearly as improbable as one might think. This is an area that would benefit from further study including a formal statistical analysis, but for now we should not necessarily conclude that Edvard Larsson is connected to the KRS simply because his aunt lived in the vicinity of the KRS discovery site.

Second, logic tells us that there are mechanisms by which Edvard Larsson could obtain knowledge of rare runes found on the KRS that do not lead one to conclude that the KRS is a hoax. That is, the Larsson papers could simply be showing us what we now know to be true. Larsson did not invent these rare runes. They were known to have been in use during the period around the 1362 date found on the KRS and to have been preserved, albeit very sparsely, into modern times. The Larsson papers could simply be evidence that there are undiscovered documents which were available to Larsson which contained these rare runes.

It is also possible that the Larsson papers are a clue to another way to look at the history of the KRS. Consider that if the KRS is genuine that at least one of the persons who created it may have been able to communicate its existence to the outside world in some way. Or perhaps knowledge of its existence was available through native witnesses for a time.

In any event, if the stone is genuine, we should not be surprised if knowledge of the stone, its message and its runes survived into modern times, but not in a widely distributed way. One theory holds that the persons who created the stone were Cistercians and/or Knights Templars and that knowledge of the stone could have been retained as a secret within these groups, perhaps via the Freemasons, even up to the present time. Might Larsson have been privy to this secret or least documents related to it?

This last idea is of course highly speculative and one can imagine other intriguing twists on this theme that the KRS was known, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. For now, we are really just left with the inconclusive fact that Edvard Larsson's aunt lived in the vicinity of the alleged conspirators and the KRS discovery site. On its own, this newly discovered location of Karin Larsdotter's residence provides scant direct evidence of an association between Edvard Larsson, the Larsson papers and the KRS.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that the alleged conspirators were indeed connected to each other. However, this study has uncovered no additional evidence which links any of them directly to a KRS related hoax. Furthermore this paper has confirmed that Karin Larsdotter, the aunt of Edvard Larsson did in fact live in the vicinity of the KRS and the alleged conspirators. It was argued that this is an inconclusive connection and that there is no new evidence directly connecting Edvard Larsson to a KRS hoax.

This paper still leaves us with several open questions, including:

- Can any connection, outside of Solem Minnesota, be established between Andersson and Fogelblad, perhaps at Uppsala? Is it a mere coincidence that at some point in their lives they both used the last name Andersson?
- Was Fogelblad married to Helena Fogelblad Persdotter? Is she a possible point of connection to the Larsson family or the alleged conspirators?
- Can any direct connections be discovered between the Edvard Larsson, Karin Larsdotter and their family with any of the alleged conspirators; Ohman, Anderson or Fogelblad?
- Can anything more be learned about Fogelblad's career in Sweden, especially as it relates to his profession as a copyist? Is this a potential connection to Edvard Larsson? Was Fogelblad associated with Claes Ljungstrom?

Hopefully, answers to these questions will be pursued by other researchers in the near future.

Acknowledgement:

The author wishes to thank Robin Mueller for publicizing the existence of Figure 1 and for pointing out the importance of studying the potential Karin Larsdotter connection to the KRS.

The author also wants to thank Judi Rudebusch for her work in uncovering the history of Karin Larsdotter in Minnesota