

## The history of the borough of Mark, the cradle of Swedish textiles

*The story of how one and the same family with a unique and clear business concept managed to build an empire of companies that with the help of home workers in charge of most of the Swedish textile production and trade during the 1700s and 1800s, that subsequently built a network of textile industries here in the borough of Mark.*

**Mark** means in the old Swedish "outfield", an area that consisted of forests, mountains and valleys with meagre soil and therefore not suitable for food agriculture. Flux on the other hand grew well in the meagre soil as it does not need nutritious soil. The flux plant was important for the state who needed it to make ropes, fishing nets and sails. In the 1530s King Gustav Wasa wrote to the borough about paying the taxes with more flux rather than just currency.

**Peasant entrepreneur system**, was founded by peddler Ingemar Larsson (1660 - 1740) who, after being accused and convicted of the illegal trade in textiles, he had bought textiles from the neighbour and then sold it on without paying taxes to the borough of Borås, as this could not continue, he came up with the idea of placing the weaving production to the local home workers in nearby villages with Ingemar's yarns.

**The business idea.** Ingemar fathered many children whom, with his first-born daughter Marta in the lead, moved out to various parishes in Mark and started new peasant entrepreneur companies. A well-planned and implemented strategy, which meant that only one child could take over the family business, the other could if wanted get help starting up their own enterprises elsewhere in the various parishes in the borough. By the end of the 18th century, the förläggars family business idea had established itself through the borough of Mark. The whole of Mark was now weaving.

**The arrival of cotton** came with the spun yarn in the beginning of the 19th century and that meant strong growth. The availability of the workforce that previously worked with flax cultivation, flax preparation and flax spinning could now devote themselves solely to weaving, the production multiplied.

**Peasant entrepreneur grange.** The peasant entrepreneur family grew, and the profits were great. During the first half of the 19th century, great grand houses were built, Peasant entrepreneur granges, and lived a very good life. The number of weavers could total to around 2000/peasant entrepreneurs.

**Industrialisation.** By the middle of the 19th century the peasant entrepreneurs began to build textile factories in the borough of Mark. Rydals Spinning mill, the premises in which the Weavingcentre is going to be housed and where Rydals Museum is located, was built in 1853. Many textile factories were built and according to an inventory made of the borough of Mark there were 30 factories. Only one did not have his roots in the peasant entrepreneur family. From the cradle of the Swedish textile industry here in the borough of Mark, the textile industry spread across the country making Stockholm, Norrköping and Borås some of the big centres.

**The industry of Gothenburg, SKF and VOLVO**, that developed the spherical ball bearing, also originated from the peasant entrepreneur industry.

**The disaster in 1968.** The year the Swedish Parliament, the only country in the world, decided to open our borders to free textile imports. From 115,000 employees only 15,000 remained in the textile companies that survived.

**The survivors.** Here in the borough of Mark there are still internationally well-established companies with roots in the peasant entrepreneur family such as Almedahls, Kasthall, Svensson and Ekelund just to mention a few.

Christer Ekelund



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