**Mrs. Brandt, the seamstress who left few threads to follow**

Today, on the International Women’s Day, I thought about Mrs. Brandt. A sought-after seamstress who didn’t leave many historical threads to follow. All her handiwork is long gone – dresses and shirts all worn out. The only traces of her are a few sentences in Augusta’s diary and in letters between Augusta and her mother Anna.

**Mrs. Brandt in Augusta’s diary and correspondence**

Mrs. Brandt was never mentioned with a first name. She was simply referred to as Mrs. Brandt, Branta, or Brandtan.

Augusta’s Diary, Loddby, 21 August 1850

Mrs. Brandt is here since yesterday, altering a few of my dresses.

Augusta’s Diary, Loddby, 28 November 1850

We were at Krusenhof last Wednesday. Little Nann bought my red silk dress. Brandtan was there, sewing a whole outfit for the move to Stockholm, which is planned for Christmas and then, in God's name, it is the end of that joy.

Letter from Anna to Augusta, Loddby, Autumn 1852

Soon after the New Year, I will take Branta here to help me sew Lejdenfrost's shirts and also August’s. She is now with Thoréns in Qvillinge.

Letter from Anna to Augusta, Loddby, 27 November 1852

Branta was here for two days and August and she did not get along. She had said something about him that he was angry about. She left 10 Rdr that I put in your snail.

Letter from Anna to Augusta, Loddby, Winter 1852 - 1853

Branta came out < > drunk and has now been in bed for 3 days. They have now have taken her to Skärlöta to sew a wool dress for the wife there and alter a coat that the wife had inheritance from her mother. We'll probably berate her when she comes back; she's really mean and wants to pit people against each other.

Letter from Anna to Augusta, Loddby, Winter 1853

Branta asked me to send you her regards, also Malla.

Letter from Anna to Augusta, Loddby, Spring 1853

If you could let me know when in June you are planning on coming home because then we will need Branta and she is now sought after in several places.

Letter from Anna to Augusta, Loddby, May 1853

… my Branta has sewn 1 ½ dozen shirts. And put new breasts and collars on a dozen and finished 6 quilts for you. This is easily said but done. Branta is now sewing on a cardigan for me and then she will sew your mantilla, which is well washed, and a little else she will sew for me. I have 14 days before she goes to Tåby where she will be until June 5 when she is at your disposition.

Letter from Anna to Augusta, Loddby, Spring 1853

We, Branta and I, are now stuffing your quilts. There will be 4 single size quilts and 2 for the people. Lina is sewing your everyday sheets and Malla does nothing but iron.

Kerstin and I have discussed Mrs. Brandt many times. When we are making our own dresses, we comment on how Mrs. Brandt would have worked at a time before sewing machines.

She was a travelling seamstress. She went from one family to the next, helping them make or alter clothes. And she helped with Augusta’s trousseau. Given this lifestyle and the fact that she referred to Mrs., she was probably a widow. A woman who had to make a living and stayed with various families as she did the work.

**How do you search when all you have is a last name and an occupation?**

Who was Mrs. Brandt? Where do you even start searching on a seamstress whose last name was Brandt?

Google is of no help with so few unspecific key words. Then there are the Household Examination Records kept by each parish, but then you would need to know in which parish she lived.

Kerstin and I discussed the dilemma this week. Should we just gang up on reading household examination records for all possible parishes? Take one parish at the time. Mrs. Brandt would be in one of those church records.

Kerstin started with Kvillinge parish where Augusta lived. Then she read through all the records in Norrköping’s Hedvig parish. I picked Norrköping’s Johannes parish. By this time, we had found no Mrs. Brandt. I next opened up Norrköping’s S:t Olai parish household examination records and realized that the population was so large that the records had to be published in 7 separate books covering 4 city quarters: Strand, Norra, Dal, and Berg. Each book could have up to 400 pages of scribbly and crossed-over handwriting by some old pastor. I was not going to read through those books. There had to be a better approach.

I wracked my brain – what other archives could be searchable?

**Newspapers**

This was a long shot, would a seamstress appear in a local newspaper? I guess only if she died and her death was of interest to the readers. Would anyone care about a seamstress dying?

I decided to search in the Swedish Royal Library’s archive of daily newspapers. I limited the search to 1835 - 1870 and to the local newspaper, Norrköpings Tidningar. The search word was Brandt.

There were of course a lot hits – travelling merchants named Brandt, some famous Swedish actress named Mrs. Brandt, a run-away delinquent boy, to mention a few. I read the results in chronological order. When I got to 1869, I found a good candidate!

She was listed under the heading of Death:

Widow Katarina Brandt, 66 years, 11 months, and 22 days.

**Back to the Church Records**

With this information, I could go straight into the chronological church records of Death and Burial. I just had to check every parish, but that was now a minor problem as I had a date and the records were chronological.

Sure enough, I found Catarina Brandt in Norrköping’s S:t Olai parish. The record affirmed what I had read in the paper. The only additional information was that she died of old age (66!!!), that her household examination record would be on page R22 in the household examination books, and that she actually died in Kvillinge parish and was buried there.

I of course checked the Death and Burial record for Kvillinge parish and found that she had been buried there. The only difference was that the spelling of Katarina (K versus C) and that the cause of death was recorded as weakness.

**The Register of the Rest**

With the information of her household examination record being on page R22, I would now be able to find her in S:t Olai’s records. Page 22. But in which quarter: Strand, Norra, Dal, or Berg? I checked page 22 in every book and didn’t find her. Then I realized that other people had a prefix of S, N, D, and B and confirmed that they referred to the quarter. But Mrs. Brandt’s record was supposed to be on R22 and there was no quarter starting with R.

What could R mean? In Swedish, I imagined it could mean Resterande (remaining) or Resande (travelling). I looked at the list of church records, but no book seemed to match. Then there was a book called Böcker över obefintliga (Books of Non-existent). On top of the first page was the title: “R=Restlängd (Rest Register). I flipped to page 22, and there she was.

According to the parish, Mrs. Brandt did not live within the parish anymore and didn’t attend S:t Olai’s church. But she had also not registered a move to any other parish. She was obviously travelling or staying with other people, or both. A likely travelling seamstress.

There were some additional information in this record. She was born in Ringarum parish on 11 December 1802 (I checked the parish birth records but didn’t find her on that date. However, the pastor had such a horrendous handwriting that I could have missed it). Her last household examination page was N197. And there was a note that she was a widow for the second time in 1833.

**The Master Shoemaker - Claes Gustaf Brandt**

Aha! Maybe Mrs. Brandt’s husband’s death was also announced in the papers. I was back in the newspaper archives again, this time I focused on 1833. I included earlier years too, just in case there were other interesting hits.

*That the master shoemaker, Clas Gustaf Brandt, through a terrible accident, died on Sunday, the 9th of June at the age of 33, tenderly mourned and missed by the surviving spouse and friends, is hereby reverently announced*

And then there was an earlier announcement in the paper, in 1830, about a few houses that would be sold at auction. One was the house in which CG Brandt and his wife were living. As I now knew the year and the address, House No. 8 in Strand, block Bakungnen, it was easy to find them in the household examination book. There they were, CG Brandt born 1800 and his wife Eva Catharina Hanqvist, born 1802. So now I had her maiden name too!

Finally, there were a few announcements in the newspaper by Mrs. Brandt. There she used Eva as her first name and C. as a middle initial. In May of 1833, she advertised flower seeds that she was selling on commission. And after her husband’s death, she wanted to settle his affairs and asked his former customers to get in touch with her.

**And there the trail goes cold**

Sometime after her husband’s death, she must have realized that she had to support herself and that she had the skills to do it.

Then the trail goes cold. She eventually ends up in the Register of the Rest in the Books of Non-existent. But the fact that her death was announced in the paper, 36 years after her husband’s death means that she was well known in the community.

So with only circumstantial evidence, I will still conclude that Augusta’s Mrs. Brandt was Eva Catharina Brandt. And next time Kerstin and I visit Kvillinge cemetery, we will certainly look for her grave.