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## Book Reviews

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# Book Reviews

Here you will find information about interesting books on the immigration experience, genealogical manuals, books on Swedish customs, and much more. We welcome contacts with SAG readers, suggestions on books to review perhaps. If you want to review a book yourself, please contact the Book Review Editor, Dennis L. Johnson, at <1\_viking@verizon.net> or Dennis Johnson, 174 Stauffer Road, Bucktown Crossing, Pottstown, PA 19465, so he knows what you are working on.

## Joe Hill

*The Man Who Never Died, The Life, Times, and Legacy of Joe Hill, American Labor Icon*, William M. Adler, Bloombury USA, New York, 2011, 424 Pages, Illustrated, Amazon.com, \$19.50 plus shipping.

In the year 1902, about 33,000 people emigrated from Sweden to the U.S., a fairly typical annual number for the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Only one of these young immigrants was destined to be shot by a firing squad in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Nov. 19, 1915.

Of these 33,000 immigrants, about ten per cent returned to Sweden at some later date, either because of disappointment with the conditions they found, or they had decided that family and homeland ties outweighed the opportunities they found in America. Nearly 30,000 remained, found work, and settled down in many locations, predominantly in the Midwest. Many found great opportunity and some became affluent in the following decades, and their descendants assimilated into the American mosaic of mixed ethnic origins.

In 1902, opportunities in America for immigrants had shifted from the abundant land available in the period 1850 to 1890. (This pull increased when homestead land was made available after 1862.) But by 1900, more jobs were now available in the growing cities in manufacturing, and in work such as logging, mining, railroads, and related activi-

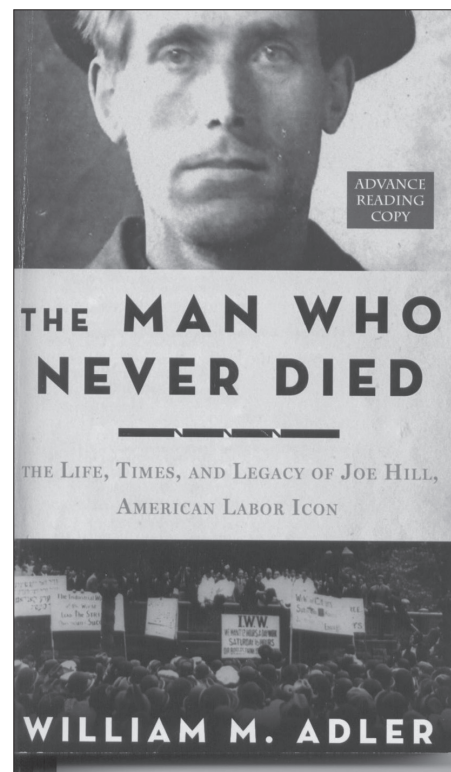
ties. High levels of skills were not as important as the willingness to work hard, long days in dangerous work at low wages. Swedes were sought after for these jobs, and many saw this work as a way of getting ahead to better, more skilled, or supervisory work as they gained skills, experience, and became fluent in English. By the standards of today, these workers were “exploited” but, by conditions at the time in industrializing countries, this work was what was available. Conditions at the time were no better in Sweden and fewer jobs were available.

Joe Hill, born Joel Hägglund in Gävle, Sweden, in 1883, was one of six surviving children of a railway conductor father. His father was a victim of a railway accident when

Joel was only eight years old, and the family became destitute. The family had been musical, and Joel taught himself to play a violin given him by his father. Despite their poverty, the family sang and played at home and in church. Joel stayed in school until he was twelve, and then went to work in a rope factory. After a near-fatal bout with tuberculosis at age 17, he went to work in the port of Gävle, probably as a stevedore. When he was 22, his mother died. The children sold their house, divided the proceeds, and went their separate ways. Joel and an older brother bought tickets for America, arriving in October, 1902.

Joel found work up and down the west coast of the U.S. for the next five years in various jobs, mostly in the port cities. The depression and panic of 1907 resulted in much unemployment in the cities. Joe became involved with a labor group called the International Workers of the World, (IWW), who became known as the “Wobblies.”

Joe took part in street demonstrations and strikes and soon became the writer of songs which the Wobblies would sing at demonstrations, partly to drown out the Salvation Army musicians or other street recruiters and evangelists. Joe and others even went to Mexico in 1911 to fight with Mexican troops in the Mexican revolution of that year. On his return, he resumed writing protest songs which were incorporated into the Wobblies first “little red songbook” containing all their protest songs. His words were original, but he generally used existing hymns or melodies that were easily learned by protesters, or already





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familiar to their ears.

The changes brought about by the ongoing industrial revolution disrupted many lives and economies during this period, and it was a fertile time for the spread of Marxist ideas. The inequities of workers struggling in poverty while capitalists and owners prospered caused much resentment among the working poor. The radical, socialist ideas, created in Europe, were brought to the U.S. by many immigrants and caught hold here in the U.S. as well. Many intellectuals were also seduced by these ideas. The rise of the labor movement in America resulted in the founding and growth of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) as the first national labor organization, which sought and won gains mainly by negotiations and, sometimes, strikes.

Those more radically inclined gravitated to the IWW, who not only struck but engaged in public demonstrations which often led to violence. The IWW in their songs and writings advocated violent overthrow of the government, anarchy, or worker control of the means of production. This resulted in a strong backlash from local and state governments. Leaders were often jailed or beaten, and ostracized so they could not find work. Joe Hill was among these leaders. While not an organizer, Hill did provide the songs that the IWW used to carry their demonstrations and advance their cause, many with calls to violence.

By 1913, Hill found himself living in Salt Lake City, Utah, with a new friend and fellow IWW member, where he helped organize a strike. On January 10, 1914, a grocer and his son, John Morrison, were shot

dead by robbers of his store. Coincidentally, the same night, Joe Hill visited a doctor because of a bullet wound in his left lung. (The son of the grocer had fired a shot in return before being killed, and a younger son had witnessed the killing). Hill was claimed to have been seen near the grocery that day, and was arrested for the murder. At his trial, he was eventually found guilty and sentenced to death, his choice being either by hanging or before a firing squad.

Appeals dragged on for over a year, as the IWW and others came to his defense, the trial being clearly based

on circumstantial evidence. Hill had earlier fired his lawyers and undertook his own defense, confident that his innocence would free him. Hill refused to say where he received his bullet wound, only that it was in a dispute over a woman. He would not name the woman or the person who shot him. After many more delays and appeals for clemency, including a request for a delay by President Woodrow Wilson to the Utah governor, Joe Hill was eventually executed on Thursday, Nov. 18, 1915, by a firing squad as was his choice. By that time, he had come to terms with his pending execution and felt that he would

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## Scandinavians in the U.S.

do more for the IWW movement as a martyr than if he were exonerated and lived.

The author, William M. Adler, has thoroughly researched anew numerous sources for his detailed account of the life and death of Joe Hill, including visits to Sweden and to many other locations related to Joe Hill's life. He has made a strong case for the innocence of Joe Hill, although other possible suspects were never charged or convicted. It may never be known whether Joe Hill was guilty of murder or innocent, but it is clear that his conviction was more due to public opinion and antipathy toward Joe Hill's associations with the "Wobblies" than it was based on solid evidence. The author is clearly sympathetic to Hill's cause and to the cause of the IWW. Adler is not only a writer, but also a rock musician and a songwriter, other reasons for his interest in Joe Hill. Several of Adler's other books deal with other individuals who were tragic victims of society, or of social change beyond their control.

The legacy of Joe Hill is that he remains honored as a folk hero of the working class among many on the left, a man who was martyred by those who would try to preserve the existing order in the U.S. at the time. The author, after briefly describing the life of Joe Hill in Sweden, spends the remaining chapters in a detailed examination of his life and union activities in the U.S. from about 1907 to his execution. Adler has taken pains to include the lyrics of as many of Joe Hill's protest songs as possible, many of which included appeals to violence against owners or allegiance to the IWW ahead of allegiance to the

U.S. There is no indication in the book that Joe Hill had any connections with any church, beyond borrowing the tunes of a few hymns for his songs.

This book is an intensely readable account of the life, trials, and death of Joe Hill, who had dedicated his life to the goals of the IWW, and the "liberation of the working class."

The IWW reached its zenith on the eve of World War I, and still exists today in much reduced form. His last words before his death were recorded as "do not waste time mourning, organize!" In the decades after Joe Hill's death, the working class gradually but steadily liberated itself through the acquisition of skills, organizing into labor unions, collective bargaining, and the achievement of better working conditions in most employment activities. The advancement of machinery, automation, and capital investment in better equipment for mining, manufacturing, logging, materials handling, and other activities greatly reduced the need for hard, dangerous, human labor. The children and grandchildren of these immigrant miners, laborers, and stevedores have advanced to become accountants, engineers, teachers, technicians, or are often in other much more skilled occupations requiring an advanced education.

Perhaps if Joe Hill had chosen another course, and married, he would have had children and grandchildren who would be among those now taking part in a much more satisfying and comfortable life in America.

*Dennis L. Johnson*



*An early spring flower.*

*Scandinavian Descendants in the United States: Ethnic Groups or Core Americans?*, Torben Grøngaard Jeppesen, Odense City Museum, 2011, hardcover, 206 pages, illustrated, cost not given. More information from

<museum@odense.dk>

If you are a seeker of a broad overview of Scandinavian immigration to the U.S. over the period 1840 through the 1950's, this is the book for you. Originally published in Danish in 2010, this book is now available in English. The author, Torben Jeppesen, is director of the Odense Museum in Denmark and has compiled a remarkably complete and graphic picture of the immigration patterns of Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes during this period.

All three national groups are covered, but if your interests are only in one of these countries, it is still an excellent reference. Nearly all charts, graphs, and illustrations show data from all three groups, often color-coded and combined on one chart, so it is easy to pick out the desired information and determine the variations between the three groups.

After a brief introduction which includes photos of prominent persons of Scandinavian ancestry now in the U.S., the author explains how the

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book came to be written and the goals established by Jeppesen. The chief aim is to “map and describe the main characteristics of the situation of Scandinavians in today’s America and to investigate and analyze how far they have come in becoming integrated and assimilated into American society.” In this aim, the author has gone far in achieving his purpose in a very clear, organized, and well-illustrated fashion.

The first of eight chapters provides a general picture of immigration to the U.S. including the where and how of arrival, registration, and travel to destinations in the States. Overall numbers for each country, by decade, show the pattern, beginning with very small numbers from 1810 to 1860, then swelling to a peak between 1860 and 1900, then tapering off from the turn of the century until 1930 to a very small trickle. Peaks and valleys within the overall pattern coincide with recession years in the U.S. and, sometimes, with famine years in Scandinavia. Norwegians were the first to come, but by about 1860 were overtaken in numbers by the Swedes. Danish immigration figures were smaller than the others through the entire period, but are still significant. Maps of the U.S. illustrate the settlement patterns in the various states, similar for all three but varying in detail. Included also is information about the “second migration” as some first and many second-generation Scandinavians moved to other locations, generally west and south.

The following chapters discuss, first, the Scandinavian immigration in the context of all other immigration to the U.S. over the same period,

and second, a description of American society today. The author covers breakdowns of ethnic groups, internal migration patterns, and income, religious, political, and social patterns, by states. An interesting map shows what the author calls a patchwork nation, indicating the wide variation in patterns in the population, by counties. Chapter four describes the more current locations of second and third generation descendants for the three groups as they moved to other locations to pursue their lives. Excellent maps show these patterns, and included also as an example of post-immigration movement is a detailed map of the Minneapolis area, by voting district, for all three Scandinavian groups.

Chapters five and six are intended to show the degrees of social, cultural, residential, and political integration among the three Scandinavian countries, and to compare these and other social attitudes with other ethnic groups and the nation as a whole. Graphs, charts, and text draw some vivid contrasts, while in other areas most have a great deal in common. The seventh chapter, to add a more personal touch to the volume of statistics presented, profiles the lives of some Scandinavian Americans in Wisconsin born around 1939. This state was the preferred destination for most Scandinavians through about 1870, when it was displaced by Minnesota, mainly due to the availability of land. Many interesting facts and anecdotes emerge in this chapter, comparing similarities and differences between these second and third-generation Scandinavians. Many of these have begun to marry across ethnic groups, with many mixed families among these later generations.

In his final chapter, Jeppesen concludes that most present-day third and fourth generation descendants of the large Scandinavian migration have in fact become part of

what he calls Core-Americans. He tries to measure this as scientifically as possible through a key chart which presents data on six factors, for each of the nationalities. These are by location of settlement, socio-economic factors, choice of marriage partners, religious choices, politics and values, and ethnic affiliation. Admitting to the deficiencies of such analysis, he does conclude that the Scandinavians closely approach in most factors the measurements of mainstream white Americans, in some cases exceeding them somewhat. (In education levels, income, and politics/values). Variations among the three are not large, although he finds the Norwegians to be less integrated in some factors than the roughly equal Swedes and Danes.

Many nuances and exceptions are speculated on by the author as to their causes in trying to explain these differences, all quite subjective. But it is clear that these Scandinavian descendants now share with most white Americans the characteristics of that group. A group that is more conservative than most other more recent immigrant groups of non-white origins. Many, even despite a much greater pattern of mixed marriages, keep a corner of their lives tuned to their ethnic origins.

The first generation married almost exclusively within each nationality, the second preferred other Scandinavians, the third moved toward others of European background, and the more recent generations will no doubt marry more commonly among non-white groups. These later generations have maintained in surprising numbers connections to their religious background, the Lutheran Church. Many of the later generations have moved to other parts of the U.S. to further opportunities for themselves and their children, largely to growing metropolitan areas. And many other observations and conclusions are

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identified by Jeppesen, too numerous to include in this review.

The first volume to examine in such detail these patterns of present-day descendants of Scandinavian immigrants, this book is easily readable by those interested in their own heritage. People in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark will find it interesting to learn more about what happened, and is happening, to all the descendants of their own ancestors who immigrated in past years. The book is a useful reference for students, scholars, and writers about the present status of Scandinavians in the U.S., and adds a valuable resource to the literature about the current outcome of the immigrant experience for Norwe-

gians, Swedes, and Danes. It also provides a valuable forecast for the prospects of other, more recent immigrant groups as they blend into the ethnic mosaic that is the destiny of the American people.

*Dennis L. Johnson*

## New DVD – Rotemannen

Now in early February the new DVD *Rotemannen* has been released. It is an amalgamation of all databases in the older Stockholm CDs, and with some new information too. The whole city is not complete, but it still has 4.7 million posts on a great number of people in the city. It runs on PCs, XP, and newer, and has a friendly search interface, looking like the one for the Swedish Death Index. It costs about \$99 including shipping and handling, and can be bought from the bookshop of the Swedish Federation of Genealogical Societies. It is now possible to use a credit card.

*Link on page 30.*



*The new Rotemannen DVD.*

## A correction

In SAG 2/11, p.26 there was a review of the book *Swede Bend, Iowa – The early years 1848–1855*, in which there was some misunderstanding of when the immigration to the Swede Bend area started. One of the authors, Jerry Lundgren, wants to clarify that the group that settled in Swede Bend came directly from Sweden in 1849 on the bark *Virginia* out of Göteborg.

*Elisabeth Thorsell*

## New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)

The new Swedish Family Register 2012 (*Svenska Släktkalendern*) was published in early December. It is the 46th volume in a series that started in 1885, then appeared in a new format in 1912, and continued to 1950. Then there was break in the series, but in 1962 it came back in a new larger format and has since been published every 2 or 3 years, with some longer hiatuses sometimes. The total number of families has now reached 2,714 different families. Some families come back and present updated articles, others are just published once. In this volume there are 68 families, of which 44 are totally new ones and 24 are “repeaters.” A list of families in the whole series can be found at <http://www.svenskaslaktkalendern.se/#english>. The theme for this volume was “famous authors,” which explains the picture of dramatist August Strindberg on the cover. Several families have branches in the U.S. presented here.

Dr. Brita Butler-Wall has an interesting article in *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* for October 2011, entitled Erik Jansson’s *Two Wives and the Bishop Hill Colony*. The prophet Erik Jansson was married two times, first to Maja Stina Larsdotter, b. 1815 in Uppland, who faithfully followed Erik Jansson on his travels, and tried to get him out of prison, and then travelled to the “Promised Land”, where she died in 1849. A few weeks later Erik Jansson married the widow Anna Sophia Bengtsson Pollock, who seems to be little known. Brita Butler-Wall has now found a memoir that she wrote, which gives a lot of new information on her. She seems to have been a well-educated woman and led an interesting life, besides being remembered as just Erik Jansson’s wife.

