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Book Reviews

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Brothers from the North


This book assembles a series of 17 essays and papers by 17 leading scholars and writers who are experts in the Scandinavian-American immigrant experience. The essays deal primarily with the period 1840-1925, and focus primarily on the relations in the U.S. among first and second generation Swedish and Norwegian immigrants in various locations. The essays are arranged in four sections.

First, the context of the immigration is examined by Dag Blanck, who looks at the patterns of Swedish-Norwegian interaction, and by H. Arnold Barton, who provides a number of comparisons between Swedes and Norwegians in the U.S.

The second section of the book has five essays which primarily deal with the differences in culture between Swedes and Norwegians and the ways in which this affected the relations between the two groups as they settled in the U.S. Writers look at the effects of folk humor (James P. Leary), new organizations (Odd S. Lovoll), the language shift in each group (Angela Falk), and the viewpoint of historians toward the immigrant experience (Mark Safstrom). One essay, by Ing-Marie Kongslien, a Norwegian professor, compares the two national immigrant sagas: Giants in the Earth by Rolvaag and The Emigrants, by Moberg.

In the third section, four essays focus on conflict between the two groups in the U.S., especially regarding the 1905 Union dissolution between Norway and Sweden (Jørn Brøndal and Ulf J. Björk), and also the conflicts among the many newly established Lutheran congregations and synods in the U.S. during the immigration period (Mark Granquist). One essay, by Kurt W. Peterson, a professor of history at North Park University in Chicago, looks at conflicts in the churches over the teaching of evolution during this period.

The fourth and last section addresses the building of communities by both groups, with six examples including architects and engineers (mostly engineers) coming from Sweden to the U.S. 1880-1930, with a completely different pattern than usual immigrants (Per-Olof Grönberg), the experience of Swedish students at a Norwegian American college (Joy K. Lintelman), a small community of Swedes and Norwegians on the isolated north shore of Lake Superior called Hovland, MN (Philip J. Anderson), the two groups in Willmar, Minnesota, in the early twentieth century (Byron J. Nordstrom), political involvements by both groups in Minneapolis and St. Paul, and the experiences of Scandinavians in the Rocky Mountain West (Jennifer Eastman Attebery).

Each of the essays included in this book contributes new insights into the wide range of immigrant experiences in many locations, and the relations between Swedes and Norwegians as they found themselves in close contact in these new communities. The two groups had much in common such as their primarily rural Nordic ancestry, a very similar language allowing relatively easy communication, a common Protestant Lutheran religious faith, and many cultural similarities. (The authors occasionally referred to Danes, Finns, or Icelanders, but their numbers were small compared with Swedes and Norwegians in most of the locations described.) There were significant differences in culture as well. The overall resulting pattern that can be drawn from this book is that as long as the two nationalities were few in number...
and fairly isolated, they generally got along well in building communities, sharing churches, schools, and cooperative efforts in farming and living. There were enough differences, however, that once each group achieved a critical mass in any location, they tended to separate into their own more culturally homogeneous communities and institutions. This was especially evident in building churches, organizing church synods, founding colleges, hospitals, and other institutions, and even to some extent in intermarriage patterns.

Even today, after four and five generations, efforts at pan-Scandinavianism usually fall short, those interested in their ethnic heritage tend to see themselves more as Swedes or Norwegians than as Scandinavians. A great deal of blending and intermarriage has taken place in succeeding generations, not only among Scandinavians but between them and people of other ethnic heritages. For most, the language of their heritage has been lost and many cultural differences have blurred, but remnants can still be found in many households and families, particularly in certain foods, in ways of observing Christmas and other holidays, and in the persistence of some ethnic organizations. These ethnic traces are sustained largely by the mothers, who are most in control of organizing family and household meals and observances, but even that is lessening with each generation.

In most small towns with sizable numbers of people with Scandinavian heritage, the churches generally reflect differences as well; one Lutheran church will have a dominant Swedish history, one Norwegian, and possibly a Free Church or Mission Covenant church. If the town is large enough, there may even be a Finnish or a Laestadian congregation, and probably a Missouri Synod (conservative) Lutheran church. The once strongly ethnic churches are slowly changing into churches with an ethnic history, but now having a much more blended mix of members more closely resembling their community at large.

The well-assembled group of essays in this book is strongly recommended for those who wish to delve more deeply into Swedish-Norwegian relations through the immigration period. It will add depth to their knowledge of the variety of circumstances involved in the immigration experiences of Norwegians and Swedes to North America. The essays are all well written, and extensive footnotes and references provide background and offer opportunities for further reading. Some essays include illustrations or graphs, notes are provided on the background of each contributor, and a complete index allows the reader to seek out particular subjects, individuals, and locations.

Dennis L. Johnson

The difficult 1930s


Following the first chapters about the background to the Great Depression, the crash, the New Deal, and other information, the author explores Lennart Setterdahl’s oral histories. While reading Dr. Beijbom’s book page after page, I became totally engaged. The stories of our countrymen who had actually lived through the Depression make even the written word come alive with action.

Some Swedes were too proud to work for the WPA (Work Projects Administration). Arthur Erickson was one of them. “The Chicago harbor was a nödhjälpsarbete (work project) but I never worked for the WPA. I’d rather starve,” he said. But Edvin Svenson, who had lost money in the stock market, swallowed his pride and stood in the soup lines.

He summed up his own experience of the 30s: “It was a sad time with long lines outside the Red Cross and Salvation Army. I was ashamed to stand in those lines and wait for a bowl of soup. But thousands of others stood there because nöden har ingen lag (necessity knows no law.)!”

How did the greenhorns – of any nationality – survive three years of unemployment? How did so many of the survivors manage to become successful in the end? This book will be an eye opener for many researchers of Swedish America.
Ulf Beijbom has done the Swedish-American community a huge favor by drawing out the experiences of the Swedish immigrants who lived through the Great Depression from interviews, America letters, journals, and published material. Some of the researched letters are from returning Swedish Americans who had given up on America and returned to Sweden for good.

The letters to the homeland show that the parents in Sweden actually sent money to their starving children in America during the Depression, a reversal of the earlier money orders that had gone from America to Sweden.

Dr. Beijbom has covered an amazing array of subject matters, all except the newspapers ads at the time. Although we learn that a subscription to Svenska Amerikana-ren cost 25 cents for four months, it would have been interesting to learn more about the cost of living during the hard times, such as the cost of rent, groceries, clothes, and shoes.

The book is illustrated with excellent photos.

Lilly Setterdahl

SALE!
Swedish Voters in Chicago 1888
By Nils William Olsson
302 pages of Swedes, comments, and indexes.
$10 + $5 S&H
Contact Jill Seaholm at <jillseaholm@augustana.edu>

This brief account of the life of Swedish King Gustav Adolf, grandson of Gustav I, also known as Gustaf Vasa, was written before 1930 to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of Gustav Adolf’s coming to Pomerania in 1630 to defend the religious and political liberties of Protestants in Germany.

The author, William Dallmann (1862-1952) tells the story of the heroic Swedish king from the point of view of a 20th century Lutheran. Dallmann was born in Pomerania, ordained in the U.S. as a Missouri Lutheran Pastor, served several churches in various locations, and rose to a prominent position in the Missouri Lutheran Synod. He was a prolific author of numerous books on Martin Luther, early Protestant leaders, the Apostles, and other religious subjects. The Midnight Lion is perhaps one of his less well-known works.

In this book, Dallmann offers a background to the causes of the Thirty Years War, then moves to the early life of Gustaf Adolf, his coronation at age 17, and his youthful leap into the defense of the Protestant reformation. His career as outlined in the book consisted primarily of his participation and leadership in this great war and the numerous battles in the eighteen campaigns of the war. The book ends with the King’s death in battle at Lützen at age 38. Gustaf Adolf was first a soldier, he left the affairs of state to his friend and advisor, Axel Oxenstierna.

This is a fine first reader for persons interested in the life of this heroic Swedish king which, while brief, introduces lay readers and scholars to this man, one of the most famous and beloved Swedes of all time.

Lindsborg, Kansas, is one of the very well-known small town Swedish settlements in the U.S., having been settled in the late 1860’s by immigrants from Sweden and other Swedes from Illinois and other nearby locations. It remains very strongly Swedish, especially on the days of their semi-annual October celebration, or Hyllningsfest, begun in 1941. Most of the time it is a typical Midwestern small town but with several prominent Swedish elements including gift shops, a Swedish restaurant, and other features.

Lilly Setterdahl
Like many of these small towns, it has its own college, 600 student Bethany College, founded in 1881 as a Lutheran school. Lindsborg is part of an agricultural community in the Smoky Valley of Kansas, just off Interstate Highway 35, about 30 miles south of Salina. Lindsborg now has a population of about 3,000 residents.

The book is organized as a collection of about 35 essays, the first 23 about early Lindsborg (1860’s to early 1900’s) and the remaining articles about Lindsborg today (2010). Each essay focuses on a particular subject such as the naming of Lindsborg, entertainment for pioneers, or happenings (now) in 2010. Pioneer days, Indians in the Smoky Valley, early church controversies, music and traditions, Depression hobos are all touched on, and more currently there are essays on celebrations, city organizations today, King Carl Gustaf’s visit in April 1976, and major happenings in 2010. It is designed to give you a flavor of the many facets of this small, mostly Swedish heritage community, rather than a detailed chronological history.

The author, Bill Carlson, is a long time teacher and athletic coach in area schools and later an administrator of the Bethany Home, a retirement community in Lindsborg. He has been an active leader in Lindsborg for many years, and he is dedicated to preserving the history of Lindsborg. The book informs the reader not only about Lindsborg, but gives insights into typical small town life in our agricultural Midwest shared by many other communities.

3) Scandinavian Kings and Queens, three stories, by Selma Lagerlöf, Penfield Press, Iowa City, Iowa, no publication date, 79 pages, Ill., Penfield Press $12.95, Amazon.com $130.84(?), used $9.76, kindle $10.95.

Penfield Press has undertaken to republish many works of Selma Lagerlöf and has published this interesting small volume containing her accounts of three well-known stories from Sweden’s history, Astrid,
Sigrid Storråda, and The Silver Mine. The first two stories are taken from her 1899 book, Queens at Kungahälla (Drottningar i Kungahälla), a collection of stories about 12th century Swedish royalty. The third story is from her 1908 book of short stories, The Girl from the Marsh Croft (Tösen från Stormyrtorpet), a story about the time of King Gustav III. Each is, in a way, a morality tale.

Included as a preface is an essay, On the Site of the Great Kungahälla, a description of the great city which once stood not far from the mouth of the Göta River (älv) above present day Göteborg, where the present town of Kungälv now stands. A modern visitor finds only fields and meadows, with no sign of the great dwelling place of kings in the twelfth century. There once stood the great hall, a marketplace, docks and wharfs, the church, the convent, kilns, the weeping bridge, and the great ships at the piers. All now gone.

The first story, Astrid, is about the bondswoman (trälkvinna) who by deceit became the wife of King Olaf Haraldsson of Norway in place of the Swedish King's daughter, Ingegerd, who was pledged to him. They found, however that when the deceit was unmasked, they truly loved each other and Olaf forgave her. She was in fact the Swedish king's daughter by a bondswoman.

The second tale is of another Swedish queen, Sigrid Storråda, who was betrothed to another king of Norway, Olaf Tryggvason. King Olaf was a Christian king and Sigrid was a heathen, and at the last moment she was rejected by King Olaf because of visions of disaster, and signs that he had if he joined with this heathen woman.

The third story is called The Silver Mine, in which King Gustav III (1746–1792) is traveling through Dalecarlia when his coach is disabled. While waiting, he speaks to a man in the parsonage whom he takes for a peasant. It is in fact the parson, who relates to the king the story of the few peasants who find a silver mine near their poor village. It brought nothing but pain and suffering to the finders, and the parson was pledged to keep the mine hidden so as not to corrupt the entire village. The king understands the lesson of the story, judges correctly that this is the parson who is keeping the mine secret, and tells him to continue to do so in spite of the king's great need for money to protect his nation.

These simple tales are masterfully written, in a way that conveys the sense of the times and the traditions and beliefs of the people in the time of the story. Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940) is one of the best known writers Sweden has produced and her stories are read and enjoyed all over the world in multiple translations. She received a Nobel prize for literature in 1909, and soon after repurchased her family home, Mårbacka, in Värmland, where she lived and wrote most of the rest of her life.

Dennis L. Johnson

What was life like?


This book was a find at my recent visit to the Old Sturbridge Giftshop, and it looked very interesting. It is not just about Swedish immigrants,
but about people from all corners of the world; their joys and problems in the new country were often similar.

The author describes the purpose of the book as “It seeks to recreate the world of the immigrants – as much as any such thing can be done – in order to understand their daily lives as they lived them. By seeing the environments through which these immigrants passed in their very mobile and diverse careers, we can better understand what they did and how they reacted to the considerable challenges they faced.”

Then he goes on and discusses the reasons for emigration, among which he counts the end of the Napoleonic wars, and the new stability in Europe, and later the new movements, when the reigning classes did not listen to the wishes of ordinary people. This caused revolutions in, for instance, France and Germany, and people left in the thousands to look for better understanding and conditions in America. Also he mentions that in 1800 some 184 million people inhabited Europe; by 1850 there were 266 million and by 1900 more than 390 million, and all these wanted food, and jobs, and the U.S.A seemed to be the solution of these problems.

A factor that was important was also the amount of land that became available in western U.S.A. There a farmer could buy a large farm for the money he had received for his small farm in the homeland.

In the chapter “Leaving Home” various stories are cited from accounts about various people of why they emigrated. One Norwegian, Ole Rynning, had plans to start a community in northern Illinois for a group of religious dissenters, a project that later failed. A German woman immigrated because her husband, a doctor, saw better prospects of finding paying patients in America than among the poor people in his hometown. In beginning there were hardships, but after twenty years they were doing well. There are many similar stories from other groups of immigrants, and it is interesting to compare them with the stories of the Swedes.

Another chapter is called “Across the Atlantic and into America 1820–1845.” The stories here focus on the progress of transportation that came along during this period: better roads, many canals, and finally the railroads that could take people further than anyone could imagine at the start of this period.

Others than the Swedes also seem to be quick to organize their own churches and societies, both for social contacts and for mutual help in case of illness and death.

This is a very rich book, which I think will be useful for the understanding of the conditions for the “New Americans.”

Elisabeth Thorsell

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**Book Reviews**

*Downton Abbey* seems to be just as popular in the U.S. as in Great Britain and in Sweden. People love to follow the many things that happens at this historical manor house. Then you might want to read *Lady Almina and the Real Downton Abbey: The Lost Legacy of Highclere Castle*, by Fiona 8th Countess of Carnarvon (2011). In this fascinating book about Lady Almina, the 5th Countess of Carnarvon, and her husband, the 5th Earl, famous for his discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb. We also get to know much of the life downstairs and what happened during World War I. (Amazon.com ca $11).

Two new CD’s were presented at the Genealogy Days in Gävle this summer. The most important one is the *Begravda i Sverige 2*, which has information on more than 6 million burials, starting with a few from the 1500s, but with the majority from the 1800s (130,000), and the 1900s (5.2 million) and even some from the 2000s (952,000). About 85% of the local cemetery authorities have shared their databases to make this DVD possible. It can be purchased from the Swedish Federation of Genealogical Societies (*Sveriges Släktforskarförbund*) for about $100. But it is best to contact them first and get the exact price (info@genealogi.se) and writing in English should be OK.

The other new CD is *Svenska Ortnamn*, which is the same as the previous edition, but now it works with Windows 7 and Windows 8. Many have had problems with installing it on new computers, but now it should work. Price around $35, but check with the Swedish Federation first. They do take credit cards nowadays.

*Family Tree Magazine* has a couple of interesting articles in the October 2012 issue. One shows a number of small research projects that can be done in a short space of time. Another teaches how to spot faulty records or find the truth about those three brothers that immigrated and then went different ways.