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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.

Swedes on the Titanic

Not My Time to Die, Titanic and the Swedes on Board, by Lilly Setterdahl, Nordstjernan Forlag, New York, 2012, 295 pages, softcover, Illustrated, Amazon.com \$19.95 plus shipping.

It is fitting that this book should be published in the year of the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the passenger liner *Titanic*, the new and “unsinkable” flagship of the White Star Line, a British shipping company. The ship sank after striking an iceberg off Newfoundland on April 15, 1912. Of the total of 2,223 on board (1,324 passengers, 899 crew), there were only 706 survivors. A total of 1,517 were lost. Among the lost were a number of prominent passengers including the captain, who went down with the ship. This disaster was widely reported at the time and has since been the subject of books, films, and articles over the century since this tragedy occurred.

Lilly Setterdahl felt it was important to write this book since the largest ethnic group on board after the British and the Americans were the Swedes, yet there has been no account of their fate written outside of Sweden. Most survivor stories that were published in 1912 and later were told or written by the more rich and famous passengers, or members of the crew. Little attention has been paid to the experiences of the third class passengers. Except for a very few, the Swedish passengers traveled

in third class. Of the 123 Swedes on board the *Titanic*, 66 were adult men, 32 adult women, and 28 were children. 14 of the men (21%) were saved, 14 of the women (44%) survived, and only 6 children (24%) were saved. Of the Swedish passengers, 118 were single and only 21 were married.

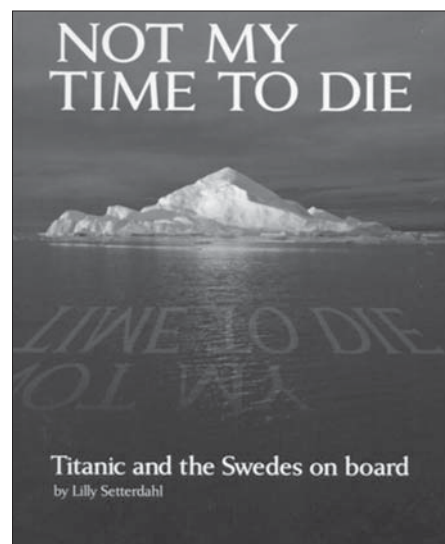
Although the more prominent passengers received most of the publicity in the press, many accounts were published in other newspapers around the nation and in Sweden, including in the Swedish-American press. The author has researched the files of all of these papers to assemble this account of the Swedes who survived and those who were lost. Many survivors’ stories were reported at the time and are included. She has also researched widely in Swedish and American records and in genealogy archives to tell the stories of those who did not survive, and those whose families were broken by this tragedy.

The introduction is a brief summary of the experience of departure from Sweden and a breakdown of who these Swedes were and their reasons for traveling. Sweden in 1912 is described, with a map of Sweden showing the counties and provinces. Following this introduction is a history of the *Titanic*, her construction, captain and crew, prominent passengers, and cargo. The voyage and collision are described, attempts at rescue, inquiries into the disaster, and the more recent discovery of the wreck on the ocean’s bottom. Numerous photographs of the ship, her passengers, and crew are included.

Coverage of the sinking in the American press, the Swedish press,

and the Swedish-American press are summarized in the next chapters, with numerous examples included to bring this event home to the reader and provide a good view of the world reaction to this major catastrophe as well as the journalistic styles of one hundred years ago in cities large and small. The Swedish-American press coverage was particularly interesting, since it tended to focus more on the fate of the Swedish passengers on board, especially those from the cities having a connection to the victims of the sinking.

The remaining two-thirds of the book is devoted to the individual stories of the Swedish passengers on the *Titanic*, first those who survived and then those who perished. Each story occupies a few pages and is individually titled according to the experiences described, for example: “Why couldn’t we be together until the end?,” or “His mother screamed, ‘Save my Boy.’” or “Swedish-American kissed his wife goodbye.” All are





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The story of a builder

Building the American Dream, A Swedish Immigrant Carpenter, Contractor, and Family in Moline, Illinois, by Curtis C. Roseman, 2012, Heritage Documentaries, Inc., Moline, IL, 241 pages, soft cover. \$20.00 plus shipping.

heart-rending stories of survival or loss. The author has found a story for each Swede on the *Titanic*, a massive research task. Lilly Setterdahl has put together a gripping account of the fate of those on the *Titanic*, one which makes the readers place themselves in the shoes of each victim, and think “what would I do if this were happening to me.” Accounts of heroism, sacrifice, circumstance, separation, and fear move the reader to tears.

The author has done yeoman work in bringing all these individual stories to light about the Swedes on board the *Titanic*, a much different and more tragic immigrant experience than that experienced by most of our forebears and countrymen. Many lives were prematurely ended and even the survivors had their lives altered, often irreparably. All because of the coincidence of many factors, individually insignificant, but when taken together resulted in the sinking of a great ship and the unfortunate loss of so many lives.

Dennis L. Johnson



Dennis L. Johnson, Book review editor.

At first glance, this book appeared to be another personal family history about the author’s own ancestors. This type of book is generally valuable and of great interest to the family which is the subject of the history, but not of great interest to other readers. I do not generally review books of this type in SAG, but look for books of wider interest to a variety of readers. I did read the book, however, to make sure I had judged the contents appropriately.

I was pleasantly surprised as I made my way through the book that it had quite a bit more to offer. The book centers on the maternal grandparents of the author and his close relatives and immediate descendants in Moline, Illinois, from the early 20th century until the present day. As the story of Gust Johnson and his wife, Selma, unfolded, I found that I was developing a much more complete picture of this very Swedish community and the character of life in this city and the surrounding area for the people who had uprooted their lives in Sweden to find their own future and that of their children in this Midwestern town.

Moline is an integral part of the tri-cities of Rock Island, Illinois; Davenport, Iowa; Moline, Illinois; and several smaller communities which grew up nearby. (This area is more commonly known today as the “Quad Cities”.) From the 1840’s, these towns located on the Mississippi River at a point where water power was readily

available, made the location favorable for milling and manufacturing in the rapidly growing state. The railroad came to the area by 1854, and a bridge over the Mississippi connected Rock Island and Davenport by 1856. Moline, on the south side of the river, soon was connected by trolley to become the third of the tri-cities. In 1848, John Deere and Co., a plow manufacturer, came to Moline and quickly expanded into a major manufacturer of farm equipment. Other growth in all three cities brought many jobs and a demand for workers in the area, attracting many Swedes and others in the latter part of the 19th century.

Gustaf Adolph (Gust) Johnson immigrated to the U.S. in 1899, following a common route from Göteborg via Hull in England, to Liverpool, and then by ship to New York. He traveled by rail and steamer first to Chicago and then to Moline. His older sister Hilma had come to Moline in 1893 and he had other contacts living there from Sweden. He had grown up on a farm, Frugård, near Holsbybrunn, east of Vetlanda, in Småland. His parents, Jonas Peter and Johanna Johnson, had owned Frugård since the early 19th century. Jonas’s sister Anna had immigrated to Jamestown, New York, but Jonas Peter and Johanna had never left Sweden. They had a total of eight children, two of which died in childhood, and all but one of the remaining six migrated to the U.S.

The original Moline settlers and founders had come primarily from New England, New York, and Pennsylvania. These founders became most of the civic leaders, manufacturers, business people, and bankers. Swedish immigrants arrived a little later as laborers, tradespeople, and workers who were employed by their predecessors in the fast-growing tri-cities towns. By the 1880’s, however, about a third of the population of Moline was of Swedish



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origin, and the first mayor of Swedish descent was elected in 1895. When Gust Johnson arrived in 1889, the Swedes had gained considerable political power and the next several mayors were all Swedish. Because of the manufacturing jobs available, Moline and its neighboring cities attracted immigrants from numerous European nations. A large number of Belgians came to this area as well, but Swedes continued to be the largest ethnic group.

When Gust Johnson came to Moline in 1899, he lived with his sister Hilma. When she married, he lived for a time with the couple and worked for his brother-in-law, Nels Mattson, and later for a contractor, Erick Liljegren, doing carpentry work. He took some courses at a local business college. He moved to Oakland, California, for a few years, working as a carpenter, studying business, and teaching Sunday School. Shortly after the San Francisco earthquake in 1906, he moved back to Moline to again work as a carpenter. He moved in with his sister Selma again, by then a widow. Hilma remarried and returned to Sweden. Gust continued work in Moline,

saved his money, and bought two building lots, married Selma Carlson, and began building a house for his wife and future family.

Selma Carlson was born in Sweden but was brought to the U.S. by her parents when she was two years old. Gust Johnson knew Selma before going to California; the families were close and he met her in church. They were married in 1908 in their Mission Covenant church, and soon moved into their new home. Selma had worked as a domestic for some eight years for the Allen family in Moline, and they remained close after she married. The author devotes a chapter to the family of Selma Carlson and their origins in Sweden.

The remainder of the book is primarily an account of Gust Johnson's career as a carpenter and home-builder mostly building homes in Moline with a few in nearby locations in Davenport or Rock Island. By the time he married he was transitioning from carpenter into a contractor, taking on projects mostly for Swedish friends as a hands-on small contractor. He usually did one house at a time and did much of the carpentry himself, engaging others for the other trades such as plumbing, heating, and electrical work. He kept careful accounts of all his work and seemed to make a profit beyond his own wages on each house completed. Almost every house he built has been identified and recorded in this book, thanks to the careful accounts that became available to the author. This could be a very dry chronicle except for the colorful descriptions included by the author which help fill out one's picture and understanding of this city of Moline through the decades of the 20th century. The builder's career was affected by World War I, the boom times of the 1920's, the Great Depression of the 1930's, and into World War II. At least eighty houses built by Gust were recorded during his career, plus many other

smaller jobs.

Selma Carlson Johnson died of a massive stroke in 1937, leaving Gust a widower. They had two daughters, Dorothy and Elinor. Dorothy married in 1937, just before her mother's death. She married a Cliff Roseman, who later became a pharmacist and owner of the pharmacy on the campus of Augustana College. Elinor also attended Augustana College and married Rev. Martin Olson. He was called to be a missionary, and the couple left for Tanganyika, Africa, almost immediately, where they were serving for nearly four years. Elinor died tragically in childbirth at their mission in December, 1940.

Dorothy and Cliff moved into her parents' house with Gust, and lived there until he died in 1947. The couple remained in the house, raising three children, Cynthia, Elinor, and Curtis (the author). Cynthia, born in 1938, attended Augustana College and then received a doctorate in geology from the University of Illinois, married another classmate and geologist, and they went on to long careers in teaching and in the oil industry. Curtis Roseman, the author, was born in 1941, attended Augustana College and the University of

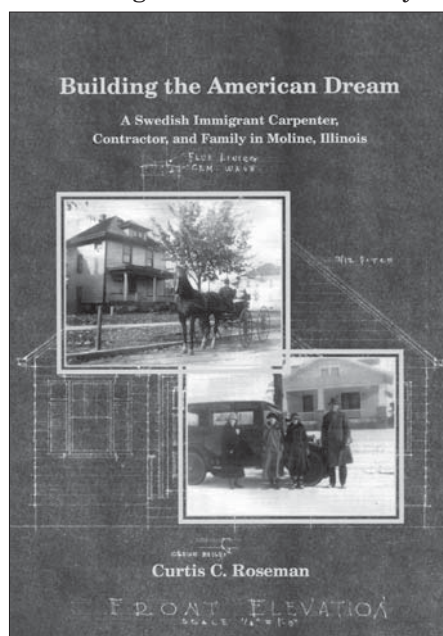
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Minnesota, and eventually became a professor of geography at the University of Southern California. Upon his retirement in 1999 he and his wife moved back to Moline to live in the house he grew up in, built by his grandfather in 1923. The home was filled with memorabilia and the boxed records of his grandfather Gust Johnson. By 2006, Curtis had begun to sort and catalog these records, a process which resulted in this book, *Building the American Dream*. In his introduction, Roseman states his goal of providing a narrative of what life was like for his grandparents and others featured in the book. This the author has accomplished.

The book is eminently readable on several levels: the story of this part of his family, the career of one builder and contractor, and the story of the growth of Moline and what life was like for the Swedes who had migrated to this particular corner of the U.S. in the latter decades of the 19th century, and the following decades. The book is well illustrated and footnoted with sources, and the author has even included photos of nearly all of the houses built by his grandfather during his career. It is not only of interest to the general reader about the Swedish immigrant experience, it conveys a good picture of Moline during that period, and is a valuable gift to all the many descendants and relatives of this remarkable and sturdy Swede and his family.

Dennis L. Johnson

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Old Swedish farming

The Agrarian History of Sweden, 4000 BC to AD 2000, by J. Myrdal and Mats Morell, Eds, Nordic Academic Press, Lund, Sweden, Hardcover, Illustrated, 336 pages, Amazon.com, \$40.11 plus shipping.

Seven essays by individual authors make up this volume intended to cover the history of agriculture in Sweden over six millennia. Woven

through the text is much information related to the social and economic history of the Swedish lands, including five inserted "theme texts" on particular aspects of Sweden's history. Two of the essays are written by the editors, Janken Myrdal and Mats Morell. Janken Myrdal is the grandson of the well-known Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal, sociologist and economist. These essays, in chronological order, provide a detailed account of the history of agriculture in Sweden. The ending of the

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later Stone Age marked the beginning of agriculture in Sweden. These essays trace the evolution of agriculture from these beginnings to the present day.

The first essay, by Stig Welinder, an archeologist, looks at a long period from 3900 B.C. to 800 B.C. This was a period of primitive crop-raising using primarily human labor and few tools. Change came very slowly, there are no written records, and most information about the period must be inferred from archeological sources. From various sources and locations the author has described many aspects of this period, from changes in farmhouses, crops, gender roles, the typical household, rituals, life, death, grave rituals, and similarities with agriculture in other parts of Europe.

Ellen Anne Pedersen and Mats Widgren in their essay cover the period from 800 B.C. to 1000 A.D., a period roughly corresponding with the Iron Age. This was a period of changes, expansion into lands previously not cultivated, regressions and the abandonment and reforestation of lands. New tools, crops, and farming systems increased productivity. Cattle began to be used more intensively and stalling (keeping indoors in winter) became more common, probably to make milk production more efficient. Manuring of crops became more widely used, and haying for winter use increased. Prior crops such as millet, emmer wheat, spelt, and nude barley gave way to hulled barley as the dominant crop. Changes in climate, newer harvesting tools, stone-clearing, and other practices were all factors in these changes. The early centuries of

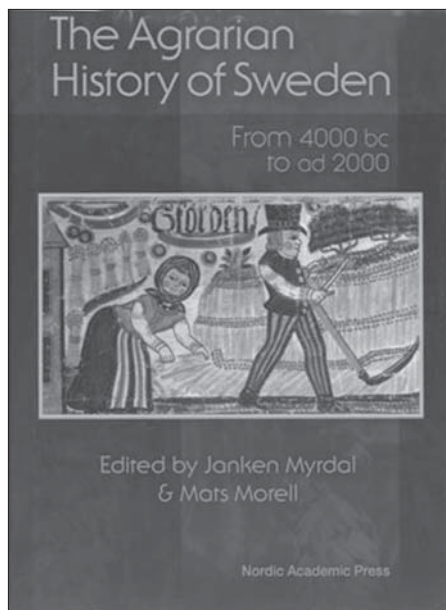
the Christian era also brought selective breeding of sheep and cattle, spinning and weaving of fabric, and the demarcation of fields and pathways with stone walls, and advances in carpentry and construction. With the Viking Age, runestones began to appear to mark property and as monuments to the dead.

Janken Myrdal picks up this history of agriculture with his essay on the rise of feudalism, the years from 1000 to 1700 A.D. The Swedish state was established in the 11th and 12th centuries, but not with its present borders. Over the next centuries Sweden gained lands from Denmark and Norway to the south and west, and lost lands in present-day Finland. Swedish people thought of themselves more in terms of their province than the nation state, and the nation of individual farmers transitioned into a feudal society more like much of Europe. This system consisted of a structure of landlords and peasants, or serfs, in a hierarchical society. A warrior caste of nobles controlled most of the land and peasants paid rents in cash, labor, or in-kind to the landowners. This was a period of steady population increase except for a trough due

to plague in the 14th century. Agricultural land expanded into the forested areas, often by former slaves. This period also saw the beginnings of larger scale iron mining, the introduction of Christianity to Sweden, and the rise of monasteries. Non-agricultural occupations began to expand, and cities were founded or expanded in many locations. Iron plowshares became common, now drawn by horses or oxen, and crop rotation came into practice. Water and windmills came into use, livestock farming increased, dairying advanced, and specialization became more common. Peasant revolts against increasing taxes and repression by the nobles and landowners resulted eventually in a parliament representing all classes.

The fourth essay, by Carl-Johan Gadd, a professor of economic history, deals with the period from 1700 to 1870, a period of agricultural revolution in Sweden. Although many other factors were present, the greatest changes were brought about by the new enclosure laws passed in 1827. These laws led to a fifty-year period which brought about a great transformation to the patterns of land, living patterns, and agriculture. The older pattern had resulted, in most areas, of villages where the farmers lived, surrounded by lands which over generations had been divided into multiple small strips. Each farmer might own from a dozen to up to fifty separate strips of land. With redistribution, these lands were reorganized such that each farmer had a single contiguous and regular parcel of land roughly equal to his previous holdings. This resulted in an increase in productivity for each farmer. It also meant that many farmers moved from their villages to a house on their own land, resulting in the dissolving of these many small villages.

Other changes included use of newer implements for agriculture,





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and the introduction of the potato as a crop. The potato would feed twice as many people from the same land, freeing up land for other sale crops. It also brought an era of very cheap liquor (*vodka* and *snaps*) with a rise in alcoholism. By the 1870's a religious revival became a response to the rise in alcoholism. Surprisingly, the author describes this period as a time of increased prosperity for farmers, and ignores completely the effects of the massive emigration, mainly to North America, which occurred during the period 1850-1900. Despite this loss of nearly a fifth of the people, the overall population of Sweden continued to grow.

The transition to an industrial society is chronicled by co-editor Mats Morell as he examines the period from 1870 through 1945, and the resulting changes in agriculture and marketing. Advances in mechanization went hand-in-hand with advances in agriculture and mutually reinforced each other. Increasing productivity on the land required fewer farmers, releasing many farm workers for jobs in industry and manufacturing, and greater prosper-

ity among farmers opened the market for many new products that made their lives easier or more comfortable. The era of the self-sufficient farm was ending, farm work became less arduous, and animals were raised for food while machinery replaced their use as draft and work animals. Food consumption changed from the traditional gruel, porridges, and unleavened barley bread, as these staples in the diet gave way to a variety of leavened breads, cheeses, meat, butter, commercial fish products, and specialty foods. Better transport and roads led to industrialization of much food production for both city dwellers and farmers. Wages and a cash economy replaced much traditional barter and home-grown foods. Electrification of rural areas and telephones added to the comfort and efficiency of farming.

In the sixth essay, Irene A. Flyggare and Maths Isacson address tensions that they see between modernization of farms and reality from 1945 to the present day. These tensions include the transition from a nation of small farms to an increase in larger, more industrialized farms, tensions between town and country, changes in the roles of men and women in farming, stronger farmer organizations, national agricultural policy, and tensions in land use and conservation of the landscape.

A concluding essay by Janken

Myrdal, co-editor, summarizes this volume on Swedish agrarian history and provides a wider view of farming in northern climates on northern Europe's frontier. Swedish farming history is contrasted with European mixed farming, and the importance of farming implements through history is reviewed, and periods of expansion and stagnation in agriculture are discussed, and this history of agriculture is placed in the perspective of changes in the social system. Implications for the future, and the competition for uses other than agriculture for land conclude this final essay.

For the lay reader, this book offers a great deal of information which charts not only the agrarian history of Sweden but also adds to the knowledge of the social and cultural history of Swedes over a period of 6000 years. For scholars, this is the first effort to condense this long and rich history into a single volume about the history of agriculture in Sweden. All essays are well footnoted with sources, and many illustrations add to the clarity of the presentations. This book may be a bit ponderous for the casual reader, but is rewarding for those willing to take the time to absorb the wealth of information provided.

Dennis L. Johnson

New and Noteworthy

The January/February 2013 issue of *Family Tree Magazine* contains a very useful article by Rick Crume on "Hitting the books", which gives insight on how to search for family history in Google Books. A try with this gave me a number of hits on books I did not know existed.

The *Swedish Ancestry Research Association (SARA)*, based in Worcester, MA, was founded in 1994 to serve genealogists with Swedish roots in the northeast U.S. During these years they have had an ambitious publication program, with a monthly *Newsletter* and an annual journal, *The Sara Journal*, dedicated to a different Swedish province (*landskap*) in every annual journal. The provinces that have been presented so far are: *Östergötland*, *Dalsland*, *Närke*, *Skåne*, *Småland*, *Värmland*, and *Dalarna*. Recently a new journal appeared: *Västmanland*, with a number of interesting articles on, for instance, the Skultuna Brassworks, Castles in Västmanland, The Engelbrekt Rebellion (1400s), the Bergslagen Mining district, and a story about emigrants from Säterbo to Worcester, and more. These journals can be purchased by contacting SARA. A link to SARA is to be found on page 30.