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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.

## Vikings still around?

*Vikings in the Attic: In Search of Nordic America*, by Eric Dregni, University of Minnesota Press, 2011, Hardcover, Illustrated, 290 pages, Amazon.com, \$15.30 plus shipping.

What changes have occurred in people from a traditional European culture three to four or more generations after the 19<sup>th</sup> century upheaval of immigration to an entirely new and different land? Which cultural traditions remain, which have been lost, and how have these cultural traditions changed? These are among the questions addressed by Eric Dregni in this new book mainly about Scandinavians in the Upper Midwest. The book does not burden the reader with an intense scholarly inquiry, but maintains a lighthearted, humorous approach throughout. A thorough index of sources does satisfy the needs of the scholar, however, while the reader is both entertained and enlightened.

The focus of the book includes all Scandinavians: Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, Finns, and even a few Icelanders, yet inevitably many of the anecdotes and illustrations come from the Swedish heritage simply because this was the largest population group of immigrants to the Midwest among the many Scandinavians to settle there. The "Upper Midwest" includes Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, and an occasional reference to Illinois or Michigan. The author identifies his

own heritage as having "one set each of Swedish and Norwegian grandparents, with a little Danish thrown in."

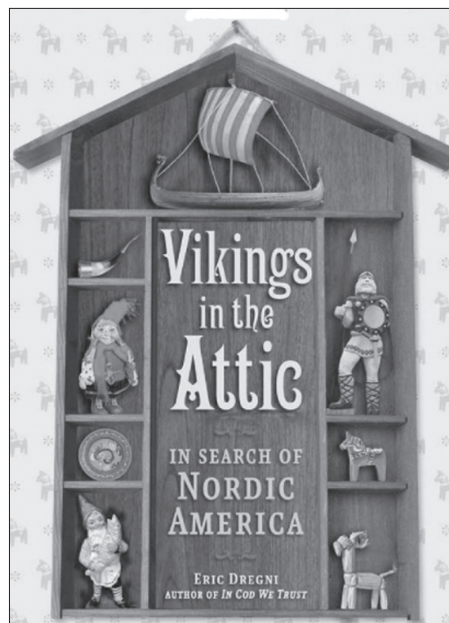
There is a brief reference to the colonial Swedes of the Delaware Valley, but the rest of the country is largely ignored.

Only in the Upper Midwest did the Scandinavians make up such a large part of the population that the presence of these immigrants over the years has given these states a flavor unlike other areas of the nation, where smaller settlements of Scandinavians were more quickly and completely assimilated. This Midwestern influence, especially in Minnesota, has been identified by the author as affecting the culture, the politics, and the social atmosphere of most of the communities in these U.S. states. Many smaller settlements continue to be identified as "Danish," or "Norwegian," "Swedish," or "Fin-

nish" to this day and continue with annual ethnic celebrations both traditional and newly invented.

After an introduction which describes the difficult conditions encountered by the newly arrived immigrants on their travels, Dregni devotes a chapter to that one universal tag of all cultures: food. Eating habits of the immigrants from the old country are described, and how they varied among the various Scandinavians. Adaptations to the conditions in the new land resulted in changes and newly invented foods which evolved into many characteristic eating habits now well-known in the Midwest including: potatoes, cold fish, sausages, the ubiquitous "hot dish," lutefisk, "Lutheran Latte" (Swedish egg coffee), Jell-O, and other foods are described. Drinking habits among the various Scandinavians are also given their due.

After this appetizer, the author devotes a chapter to the attention the Midwest Scandinavians give to their Viking heritage, including statues of various kinds in many communities, their pro football team, runestones, and blue-eyed Indians in the Dakotas. The Norwegians seem to lead in this quest for recognition of Viking presence in the Midwest long before Columbus, with the Swedes running a close second. Then a full chapter is devoted to notable Nordics and their contributions. Given a place are Gutzon Borglum, the Danish-born sculptor of the Mt. Rushmore monument, Ole Bull, the Norwegian fiddler, Vilhelm Moberg, chronicler of the immigrants epic in Minnesota, Carl Milles, sculptor, Thorstein Veblen, controversial economist, Sonja Henie,





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Olympic ice skater, Joel Hägglund (Joe Hill), Ole Rolvaag, Carl Sandburg, Charles Lindbergh, Jr. (and his politician father), and other well-known Scandinavian icons of the Midwest.

Perhaps the meatiest chapter in the book is entitled "Politics, Scandinavian Style." The author traces the roots of what is now known as the strong liberal streak in the states of the Upper Midwest, mainly Minnesota and Wisconsin. Early settlers (1850-90) wanted land and usually were Republicans due to anti-slavery and pro-Lincoln attitudes. By the turn of the century (1900) many new arrivals had been steeped in socialism in their native countries and arrived to work mainly in mills, mines, and factories as laborers. Labor organizers emerged to lead protests and strikes for better working conditions and wages, and a strong socialist movement resulted, with the Finns in the vanguard.

World War I in Europe and patriotism at home became a counterforce by 1914. Scandinavians were strongly anti-war, leading to much suspicion of their loyalty. (Many had immigrated to the U.S. to avoid mandatory military service at home, and did not want to be drafted to return to Europe for another war they had hoped to escape.) This anti-war sentiment, plus their socialist activism, caused these Scandinavians to be watched closely by the government as German sympathizers. Even their language (except Finnish) sounded much like German to others. The result was suppression of their native languages and even first names were avoided which sounded

too ethnic or Germanic, to avoid discrimination. This anti-German attitude continued for several decades.

Meanwhile, the farmers and laboring classes found common cause in creating a political party, the Farmer-Labor Party which continued until the 1940's, when it merged into the Democrat Party and became the still-existing DFL (Democratic Farmer-Labor Party) which pretty much ruled politics in Minnesota through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some Scandinavian leaders in this movement included Gov. Knute Nelson, John Lind, politician Charles Lindbergh Sr.,

Floyd B. Olson, Carl Skoglund, and many others. Closely related to these political trends was the cooperative movement, conceived in Denmark and still a presence in many rural communities in the Upper Midwest.

Following this political chapter are several chapters about the various ways in which Scandinavian communities exhibit their pride in their ethnic heritage, seen both as a celebration of their origins and publicity to attract visitors and tourism. The "world's largest Dala horse" is found in Mora, MN. And a replica of Copenhagen's "The Little Mermaid" sits on a stone both in Albert Lea, MN, and

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## Swedes in Iowa

*Swede Bend, Iowa – The Early Years 1848-1855*, Birgitta Blomqvist and Jerry Lundgren, Instantpublisher.com, 2009, Softcover, Ill., 153 pages, Swedish Immigrant Museum, Box 132, Stratford, IA, 50249, \$15.00 plus shipping.

in Kimballtown, IA. Lindstrom, MN, boasts a water tower in the shape of a coffee pot, as does Stanton, IA. Saunas abound in many cities, and various festivals, some tongue-in-cheek, occur throughout the many smaller towns in these states. Other subjects mentioned in these latter chapters include Lucia fests, potato *lefse*, hospitals, churches, stave-church replicas in Moorhead, MN, and in Minot, ND, *lusekofte* sweaters (“lice-jackets”), immigrant newspapers, and many more cultural traditions unique to this part of the U.S.

As a grandson of Swedish farmer immigrants, and growing up in the Midwest, many of the subjects covered in the book are familiar to me, yet I still learned many facts and events which were new. Both humorous and factual, Dregni’s book illustrates how all the Scandinavian immigrants to the Upper Midwest, and their descendants, have created a uniquely new culture in those states which is different from their original culture yet also different from most of the rest of the U.S. in significant ways. To describe this new culture completely, with all its nuances and complexities, would require many volumes, but this author has created an excellent and most readable survey of his subject in one single volume, which should appeal to all readers and lead them to further exploration for Vikings in their own attics.

*Dennis L. Johnson*

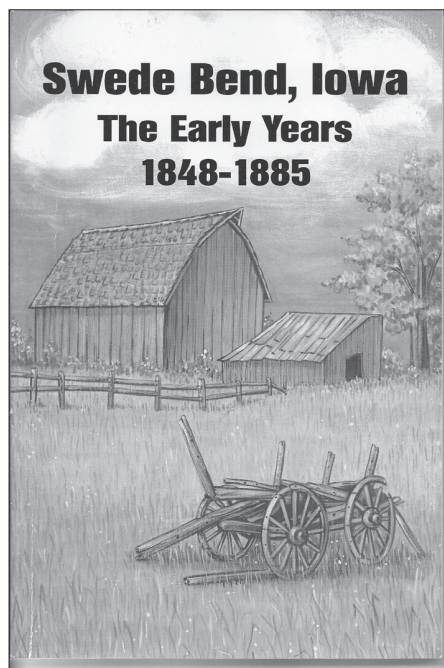
A modern map of Iowa reveals no town with the name of Swede Bend. The name refers only to a small area in central Iowa on a bend in the Des Moines River, between Fort Dodge and Webster City, where it is joined by the Boone River to flow south through Boone and Des Moines. It was so named for the first Swedish settlers who arrived in the area beginning in 1849 and later to become parts of Dayton and Hardin townships in Webster County. This was the second recorded settlement of Swedish pioneers in Iowa territory, the first being New Sweden in Jefferson County further to the east, nearer where the Des Moines River joins the Mississippi at Keokuk.

By 1850, immigration of Swedes to America had barely begun. Only

about 2,500 Swedes had arrived in the U.S. by that year. These early settlers headed mainly for Illinois and the Midwest, coming mostly from Hälsingland, Gästrikland, Dalarna, and Östergötland. Erik Jansson settled with his followers in Bishop Hill, Illinois, in 1846, and a small group of Swedes accompanied Gustaf Unonius to Pine Lake, Wisconsin. Others soon followed in several other locations, a migration which was later to swell to nearly a quarter of the Swedish population by 1900. Letters from these early immigrants, and newspaper articles in Sweden, led to increasing numbers of Swedes deciding to chance the voyage to America.

In August, 1846, a group of Swedes arrived in New York on the Swedish brig *Augusta*, headed for Illinois. After a difficult journey from New York, the small group finally arrived in late 1849 at a spot near what is now Madrid, IA, where they found much of the land was claimed already. (The three year interval is not explained in the book.) They soon moved on about 25 miles north following the tree line of the Des Moines river to what became Swede Bend, where they were able to claim land. Only a few scattered settlers were found in the area, the future townships had not yet been organized, and the land had not yet been surveyed. Over the next decade, this was to become better organized and ownership deeds recorded as the settlers tried to improve their circumstances under adverse conditions. These early Swedes first settled along the river and wooded bottomlands, but severe flooding in 1852 and 1853 caused many to relocate to higher ground. A general store was established by about 1851, and by 1881, the town of Stratford was founded.

The journey west to Iowa was well chronicled by the authors in several chapters, based on the diaries of





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several of these settlers in the Swede Bend party and in the New Sweden party of the same year, one of the best and most detailed accounts of the early route of travel I have yet encountered. This route was up the Hudson by steamer to Albany, NY, then west to Buffalo via the Erie Canal, then to Chicago over the Great Lakes, down the Illinois River to St. Louis, MO, up the Mississippi to Keokuk, IA, and finally up the Des Moines River to Swede Bend on foot or horse-drawn wagon. Conditions along the route are described in detail, the greatest hazard being the risk of cholera. Nearly a third of these early travelers died of cholera along the way, and many others suffered from this disease. At the time, the cause was unknown and cholera was thought to be spread from person to person. Later, it was discovered that this disease is caused by bacteria from contaminated water or food which had been in contact with human waste. Water supplies were primitive at the time and river sources were badly contaminated. Cholera is now rare, readily prevented, and treatment is almost always effective. Millions of people died of this disease in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and the U.S.

In later chapters, authors Lundgren and Blomqvist describe the growth and settlement of Swede Bend between 1850 and 1885. The local townships, mainly Hardin, Boone, and Dayton, and much of the surrounding area became predominantly Swedish during these decades and remain so today. Descriptions and names of the earliest settlers are given, and many of the earliest families are profiled. Swede Bend

never became a town by that name, but several communities sprang up to serve the needs of the many farmers in the area, including Stratford, Homer, LeHigh, and Dayton at about ten mile intervals to serve the needs of horse-drawn travel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These nearby towns have remained small and, with 20<sup>th</sup> century auto travel, were largely displaced as business centers by the towns now at 25 to 40 mile intervals such as Fort Dodge, Webster City, Boone, and Ames.

For the serious researcher of his own roots, the authors have also included a section listing over 1,200 individuals who were Swedish-born and settled in the Swede Bend area of Iowa. For a person with an ancestor in this area, this book may provide the missing link to the given home location or parish in Sweden, often the most difficult step in finding one's family's ancestors in Sweden. The book is also a very good and accurate description of the conditions of travel and pioneer settlement in this part of the country in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For those who wish to visit the area in person, there is a Swedish Immigrant Museum in Stratford, IA, which was founded in 1999 by several local Swedish-American descendants of area pioneers. For more information about the museum and its records, contact Ruby Erickson Hendrickson, Chair. (*See links page, p. 30*)

Providing another example of the rich and varied Swedish immigrant experience in America, the authors' work has been a valuable contribution to one particular community in Iowa and its history since its initial settlement. Vast changes have occurred in the area since the time of settlement. Paved highways and freeways connect Swede Bend to nearby towns and larger cities in the Midwest. Almost all the land is used for farming to serve the world market, mainly in growing corn and

soybeans. Farm mechanization over the past century and a half has caused the merger of these original claims into farms twenty times their original size, operated by very few people in small families. Nearby larger cities have hospitals, industry, colleges, and other businesses beyond farming. Grain elevators, water towers, church steeples, and even power-generating windmills dot the skyline and the people live a much easier, more comfortable life. But Swede Bend as it was lingers as writers such as Lundgren and Blomqvist, and local historical societies, such as the Swedish Foundation of Swede Bend, work to preserve these memories.

Dennis L. Johnson

## A Swedish pioneer pastor

*The Trailblazer, The New-Old Book, a Translation of the 1906 Memoirs of Rev. S.J. Kronberg (1840-1925)*, in Swedish, *Banbrytaren*, Evangeline Chell, Editor, Echo Printing, Alexandria, MN, 1984, Softcover, Illustrated, 262 pages, Amazon.com, used, from \$7.95 plus shipping.

One of the more amazing stories to come out of the settlement of the American Northwest by the mass immigrations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this memoir, while not so much great literature, ranks along with Moberg's *The Emigrants*, and Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth* as a vivid description of what life was like on the American frontier at that time. This memoir was written in 1905 by the frontier pastor, S.J. Kronberg, who lived this life, and wrote this memoir in Swedish. It was first published in 1906 under the name *Banbrytaren*, in Swedish, by the Augustana Book Concern, but received little notice here until 1984. At that time,

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Evangeline Chell as editor assembled and coordinated a team of nearly forty volunteer translators to translate the memoir into English. Donations from many people enabled her to get the translation published in 1984, in Minnesota. A limited number of copies are available, mostly used.

Kronberg was born in Knäred, Halland, Sweden, in 1840. He grew up in poverty on a farm, and lost his mother at age 2½. A good student, he read all he could, and studied the Bible, but had no formal education. His father strongly opposed his becoming a minister. Kronberg immigrated to America in 1868 and did manual labor in several locations in Illinois and Iowa. He soon entered the seminary later in 1868 despite no formal education and his being 28 years old at the time. He was accepted to “give it a try,” and was ordained at Augustana Seminary in Rock Island, IL, in 1874. In his foreword, translated by Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, he modestly explains that he simply wishes to tell the story of the development of the Northwest “with honesty, truth, and a noble purpose” and apologizes for making it so much about his own life, not seeking fame but only because “I was along during those years and participated in much of what is here described.”

Pastor Kronberg upon graduation and ordination was called to his first pastorate in the sparsely settled lands of the Red River Valley in northwestern Minnesota, in a town called Melby, near Christina Lake, which is about 25 miles northwest of Alexandria, MN. When he arrived in 1874, the small congregation had no church building but met in other

locations or in private homes. Kronberg served not only this congregation, but was also asked to serve other nearby settlements in the area, including Christina Lake, Eagle Lake, Fergus Falls, Elizabeth, Pelican Rapids, and several others.

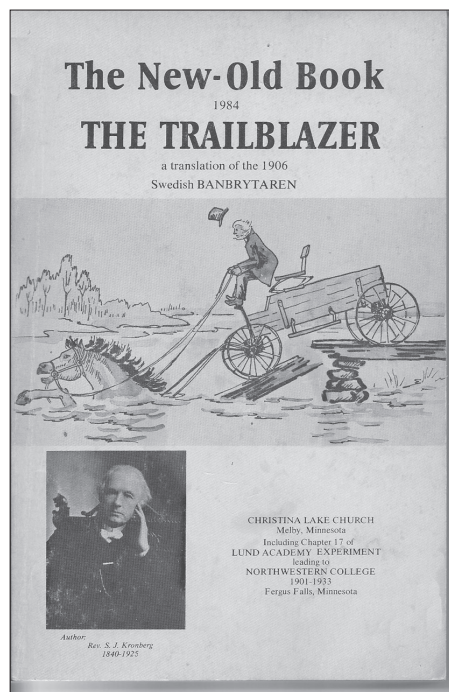
Since travel at the time was on foot, horseback, or buggy, the new pastor spent much of his time just traveling between these small settlements to hold services, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. He writes little of his wife and family in his memoir, but apparently married soon after ordination and, as shown in a family photograph, raised nine children in Melby. He retired from the Christina Lake parish in 1904 after thirty years as pastor but continued serving this and other churches during vacancies for many years. He died in 1925 at the age of 84 years and seven months.

The book begins by describing the raw territory in northwestern Minnesota in some detail and the primitive conditions under which these early settlers were living at the time of his arrival. The foods, clothing, homes, and domestic animals are

described in some detail, as are many of his early experiences and dangers. He writes of his early mission meetings as a young and inexperienced pastor, how he goes about organizing the congregation, and dealing with lay pastors teaching false doctrine. The years of 1876-77 especially were years of dire need, with plagues of grasshoppers causing great suffering. Kronberg writes about building his parsonage and a church, his relations with his congregation, and his traveling experiences serving his outlying “preaching points.” He deals with the challenges facing pastors such as how long to stay in one congregation, establishing his salary, and how to go about resigning if that becomes necessary, and his own feelings about eventual retirement.

Among other accomplishments of Pastor Kronberg while in Melby includes the organization in his Lake Christina parish of a school called Lund Academy in 1898, which grew into becoming the Northwestern College and Academy in Fergus Falls, MN, which survived for some thirty years after the writing of his memoir. He was regarded as an outstanding preacher by his peers. Included in the memoir are many anecdotes which illustrate the people he served, mostly Swedes, and the conditions under which he lived and served in the time before automobiles, electricity, and comfortable homes. Numerous photographs also illustrate many of the people, homes, farm equipment, and other buildings of that period before the arrival of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This book gives a revealing view of the time period from 1860 to 1900 as seen through the eyes of a frontier pastor trying to serve people struggling to confront and survive the difficult conditions of settling and farming on the prairie of the Red River Valley in northwest Minnesota. More importantly, it is a glimpse into the mind and faith of an active Swedish Lutheran pastor during that pe-





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riod. It is a view of life and frontier living alongside that of the farmers and settlers to whom he dedicated his life to serve, and a life of faithfulness and service in his chosen calling.

Dennis L. Johnson

## A Swede in Kansas

*An America Book*, by Alf Brorson. Hardcover, 176 pages, illustrated, 2010. ISBN 978-91978906. Price ca \$35, from Anderson Butik, 134 North Main, Lindsborg KS 67456  
<<http://www.andersonbutik.com/>>

Alf Brorson, of Torsby in Värmland, is a frequent contributor to *Sweden & America*, the magazine that is published by the Sweden America Cen-

ter in Karlstad. Alf Brorson has a great interest in the immigrants that left Sunnemo in Värmland in 1870 under the leadership of Pastor Olof Olsson, and settled in McPherson County in Kansas, where they also built the town of Lindsborg.

Now Alf Brorson has collected his various articles, speeches, etc., both in Swedish and English, in a book, called *An America Book*.

His English articles are "Minneapolis Sculpture Garden", "From the Mini Apple to the Big Apple", "Swedish Emigration History" and "The Sunnemo – Lindsborg Connection." Three articles are about Olof Olsson: "Turning Experience into Knowledge," "Words of Warning and Encouragement," "A Musical Heritage – Choirs, Stringed Instruments and More." Then a group of articles about Lindsborg: "Lindsborg, Kansas, (in both Swedish and English)," "Interaction of Sports and Academics into the School Program" [Alf is a teacher], "Midsummer's Day Festival 2007." Then he presents his book "Sweden and the Swedes (2007)," next comes his personal "Views on

the Church of Sweden" with comparisons of the situation in the U.S. We also get an explanation of "Who was King Knut", whose name day is on January 13, which is often regarded as the end of the Christmas festivities. Alf Brorson also gives short explanations of the concepts of "mantal," and "fäbod." The book ends with a few sermons that he has delivered in Lindsborg, and a number of pages with black and white photos from many parts of America.

As seen from the editor this book has mostly the character of a scrapbook, even though the articles in Swedish are not mentioned here. Sometimes the articles are partly in Swedish and partly in English, which is a bit confusing.

The book would have been more attractive if he had edited his articles more, and perhaps used only one language, Swedish or English. His knowledge about these things is deep, so it is a pity he did not concentrate on doing a Lindsborg history, for instance. Now the book feels like it is neither here nor there.

Elisabeth Thorsell

## New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)

The *Sweden & America* magazine 2/2011 (publication of the Sweden America Center in Karlstad) has an interesting article about Kingsburg, California, and its Swedish heritage, which the people there take very seriously. There is also an article about the architect Gustav Albin Pehrson, born in Sweden in 1882, who in 1943 was asked to design a new town in Richland, Washington State. This town was aimed at housing the people that were going to work on the Manhattan Project (the production of the first atom bomb).

The April 2011 issue of *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* has a very scholarly article by Adam Hjorthén, one of the new Olsson scholars, about how the Kensington Stone was presented in five different exhibitions, and by being a part of those became a historical object in itself, independent of the question if it is a real runestone or not.

The *Finnsam* organization of Sweden, mostly made up of Swedes, but with members in Norway and Finland, is working with research the Forest Finns (*skogsfinnar*) that came from Finland to Sweden in the 1500s and the first half of the 1600s. They have recently re-printed their informative booklet *Forest Finns of Scandinavia*. This booklet can be ordered from Maud Wedin at <[maud@finnbygden.se](mailto:maud@finnbygden.se)> the cost is ca \$10 + postage. (By the way, the signer of the Declaration of Independence John Morton was a descendant of the Forest Finns that came over to New Sweden!)