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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.

A fisherman's view of Sweden

Fishing in Utopia, Sweden and the Future that Disappeared, Andrew Brown, Granta Publications, London, 2008. Softcover, 263 pages, Amazon.com, \$11.57.

For a significantly different take on Sweden and Swedes, this book is both engaging and a little saddening. The author has written a memoir of his recollections of Sweden past, and his current impressions of Sweden today. His passion for flyfishing and his quest for places in Sweden to explore his passion are the framework around which this book is disorganized and allows him opportunities to describe the natural environment he encounters in many parts of Sweden. Along with this, he adds his many observations about the country and the Swedish people as he experienced them. The writing is more stream-of-consciousness than following any special order.

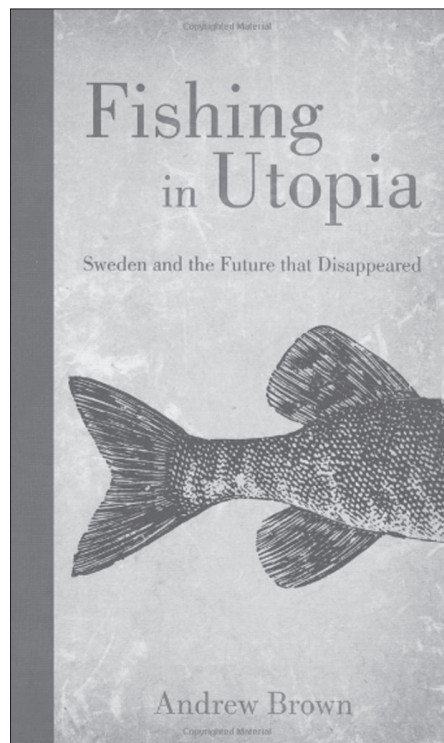
Andrew Brown, born in England, lived as a child in Stockholm due to his parents' service in the British diplomatic corps in the 1960's, long enough to learn the Swedish language passably well. He returned to England for his secondary education, in which he was somewhat of a misfit and, in his own words, was expelled from school before graduating. At loose ends, he wandered for a time as what in the U.S. would have been a "hippie." He eventually found himself working as a nurse's aide in a sanitarium, or old people's home. The

home was in Cheshire, North Wales. There Andrew met Anita, from Sweden, who had been sent there separately as a volunteer nursing auxiliary. These aides all lived in servants quarters on the top floor of a Victorian mansion, and tended to the ill and aged for about five pounds a week including room and board.

After a time, Andrew and Anita fell in love and, after a brief visit with his parents in England, they hitchhiked back to Sweden to meet Anita's mother and stepfather in Lilla Edet, north of Gothenburg. There they married and settled down into a whole new life. Anita found work as a nurse, and Andrew took a job in a small factory making pallets for Volvo engines. They lived for a time in Nödinge in a large workers' housing complex, about which the author

includes colorful descriptions of a very drab place to live. Soon a child is born, Felix, and the family moves to a little cottage outside of Lilla Edet. Andrew discovers he has a gift for writing, and has a few articles in Swedish published in various papers and magazines. The couple has grown apart, however, and soon separate, Felix remaining with his mother. Andrew was traveling to Stockholm frequently to promote his articles, some of which were picked up by English newspapers and began to pay fairly well.

Andrew then returned to London and, after a tense visit with his parents, sought writing assignments in England. Anita and Felix joined him for a time but both were unsuited to living in England and it became clear that their marriage was over. He wrote articles for the *Independent* and the *Sunday Telegraph*, and worked to develop his writing skills. His proficiency in Swedish and familiarity with the country brought him to Stockholm in 1986 to cover the assassination of Olof Palme, and other news stories. He went on to write several books, and is currently the editor of the Belief section of the London *Guardian's* "Comment is Free" site, also writing regularly for the *Prospect* and for the *New Statesman*. He has married an English wife and has a daughter. Twenty years after covering the Palme assassination, Andrew Brown returned to Sweden for a fishing holiday and to look up old friends, including his former wife Anita. He paid his visits and then spent several weeks flyfishing, mostly alone, in several places including the far north of Sweden. He





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is shocked by all the differences he finds between Sweden today and the Sweden of his earlier life thirty years before.

In Andrew Brown's view, the affluent, egalitarian country that he knew in the 1970's had literally fallen apart. Refugees from many nations were welcomed, and the welfare system he knew had crumbled along with the industries that had supported it. One writer describes the book as a lament for a lost Eden; a story of modern rootlessness and the search for something to believe in. The author appears to come from a far left worldview who admired the welfare state he found earlier but on return finds that Sweden has moved to the right, moved toward privatization, and toward a little less egalitarianism. (In the context of 2010, it appears that Sweden is in much better economic shape than, for example, Greece, Spain, Ireland, and other European countries, probably due to this step backward from socialism and its very generous benefits for all.) He describes Sweden as now being much closer to the U.S. than to England.

In 2009, **Fishing in Utopia** was awarded the Orwell Book Prize for "making political writing into an art." The Orwell prize is the pre-eminent British prize for political writing and Brown received the Book Prize. The judges cited, among other things, "The descriptions of fishing are as enchanting as anything since Izaak Walton, but in its light and easy way the book is as profound as it is enchanting."

I found Brown to have a unique

skill for rich and poetic descriptions of the nature he found in Sweden and of various Swedes that he met or befriended – he has a special gift for this kind of writing. For a flyfisherman, I would think the book would be captivating. It is one free spirit's view of the Sweden of his early life and then of his later life in revisiting the country. As a resident for some years, his experience and impressions no doubt differ from that of a visitor or tourist. My main disappointment was in the apparent rootlessness of the author, who could leave a wife and child of his youth

with little regret, and even at the mature age of about sixty years has still found little to believe in beyond his own craft, and flyfishing.

Dennis Johnson



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A Swedish city: Chicago

Chicago's Swedes, *They spoke from the heart*, Lilly Setterdahl, Publisher not given, 234 pages, illustrated, softcover, Amazon.com, \$19.95 plus shipping.

In her thirteenth non-fiction book, Lilly Setterdahl continues to add to the literature about Swedes and Swedish-Americans in the U.S. This volume is a collection of 340 oral histories and 300 photographs about Swedes in Chicago, the American city with the largest number of persons of Swedish descent in the U.S. Mrs. Setterdahl's late husband, Lennart, was an avid collector of oral histories from Swedish immigrants throughout the U.S. from the 1960's to the mid-1990's, mostly for the Emigrant Institute in Växjö, Sweden. Lilly has collected and organized her book around the materials Lennart collected about Swedes in Chicago.

The book presents these materials in six sections, based on the year of birth in Sweden of the individual being described, beginning with the period 1873-1899, then 1900-1909, 1910-1929, 1930-1965, and finally those who were born in the U.S. of Swedish parents in two groups, 1883-1919 and 1920-1943. Included also is a name index at the rear to assist readers or researchers in locating persons of interest to them. The common theme is the residence in Chicago or nearby suburbs of the individuals discussed. A photo section at the beginning illustrates many well-

known Swedish Chicago landmarks, churches, lodge halls, and other buildings including the first home of the Swedish-American museum and the present home of the same Museum.

In her introduction, the author tells a brief history of the settlement of Chicago by Swedes beginning in the 1840's, some originally headed for Wisconsin or for Bishop Hill in Illinois. The largest numbers of Swedes to settle in Chicago were born between 1890 and 1909, and came to Chicago seeking work in that city, a fast-growing town where jobs for newcomers were plentiful in the years from 1890 through the beginning of the Great Depression at the end of the 1920's.

Large numbers of Swedes came to the U.S. earlier, in the period 1860-1890, but most of these immigrants headed for farm states such as Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Dakotas in search of land. Some of these also settled in Chicago but the claiming of most good farm lands and the coming of the Industrial Revolution caused later Swedes to head for the larger cities and urban jobs.

The book presents profiles of each of the persons in alphabetical order by surname in the groups by year of their birth described above. Spouses are sometimes included next to their husband, or sometimes separately. Each profile first provides a few quotations from their oral history about their lives in Sweden and their experiences as an immigrant or child of immigrants. The last paragraph in each profile gives the person's primary or current place of residence in the U.S., their place of birth and, usually, of their parents in Sweden and a few facts about their families, the ship on which they traveled, and their occupation in the U.S. Where available, information about their spouse and children is added. (Many of those giving interviews some years ago are now deceased.) There is a photograph of almost all of those included, and a reference is given with each of the profiles to enable a researcher to locate and listen to the oral history on file, either at the Vasa archives at Bishop Hill, Ill., or at the Emigrant Institute in Sweden.

Reading this collection of interviews as a whole gives the reader a fascinating view of the extraordinary variety of circumstances these Swedes encountered in their lives. Many planned to stay in the U.S. only a few years, and then return home, but most did not. Often those who went back to Sweden found themselves dissatisfied and returned again to the U.S. Reasons for leaving were lack of opportunity in Sweden, encouragement, and often free tickets, sent by family members or siblings who had already come to America. Many were born into very large families in Sweden, with as many as twelve or more children, yet in Chicago few had more than one or two or, occasionally, three children.

Few of the Swedes had any advanced education when they arrived, but nearly all could read and write. Women most frequently worked as





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introduction and opening to the tracing of your own family tree and family history in Sweden.

Dennis L. Johnson

maids until they married and became homemakers, but others worked as teachers, cooks, waitresses, and nurses. Men were frequently carpenters, tailors, and builders, or engaged in the building trades. A few became pastors, artists, writers, musicians, or joined a profession after obtaining more education.

The most common church affiliation was Lutheran, followed by Mission Covenant, Methodist, Baptist, and several other denominations. Most belonged to various societies and clubs including Svithiod, Vikings, Vasa, and others. Other activities included singing clubs, Daughters of Sweden, Odd Fellows, Swedish Guild, and Svea. Their Swedish origins included nearly all provinces, although the most numerous seemed to be Småland, Dalsland, and Dalarna. Most came directly to Chicago, but some made Chicago their second destination after first trying various other locations from upper Michigan to Minnesota.

Coincidentally, my wife's family were also Chicago Swedes between 1929 and 1943, but left too early to be interviewed by Lennart Setterdahl. Her father, Elmer Stonefelt [Stenfelt], was an engineer with Western Electric Company, having been born in 1896 in South Dakota to a family of Swedish immigrants. They later moved to Wisconsin and Minnesota.

To the general reader of Swedish-American history, this book adds another interesting facet to the Swedish immigrant experience in one important city in America. If your own family member is included in this collection of profiles of Swedes in Chicago, this book may give you an

A family from Östervallskog

Tales of a New-line, and related stories, Ronald J. Newlin, received June 10, 2010, softcover, 189 pages, Ill., publisher not given, no price given. Ronald J. Newlin, <rinewlin@gmail.com>.

This self-published family story was received recently from the author, Ronald Newlin, of Saukville, Wisconsin. Newlin writes: "I have written a book of the experiences of my ancestors, all of whom came from the border region of Sweden/Norway, and settled in upper Michigan. It is written 'as it might have been' because records were not easy to find."

As many writers have done, Newlin has uncovered the basic facts about the families described, then uses his imagination and research to present this information in an interesting and readable way as if their stories and experiences of immigration and settlement were more fully known. The families described all left their homes in and around Östervallskog parish, in Värmland near the Norwegian border, to farm in the little settlement of Bethel, near Wallace, Michigan. This was in a fairly remote location on the west shore of Lake Michigan's Green Bay, where upper Michigan meets northern Wisconsin.

The author is a great-grandson of Anders Persson from Östervallskog, who came to Bethel in 1875 to stake a claim on land outside of Wallace. He came to Wallace through a friend, Andrew Oleson, who had immigrated

a few years earlier. He was shortly followed by his fiancée, Ingeborg Eriksson, his brother Ole and his wife Nettie, and another friend and his wife, Nils and Maria Andersson. The tales in this book center on the experiences of these four immigrant families and their children in ten chapters. The related stories add to these stories with information about other relatives or friends of the initial four.

Many immigrants changed their names upon moving to the U.S., for a variety of reasons. Anders and his brother Ole decided on a new name entirely, deciding that they were to establish a new line of families in America. They decided on the name Ny-lin (or new line), which was to morph into the names Andrew and Ole Newlin. This became the family name of their descendants in the new land.

The ten chapters of the book describe the process of immigrating to the U.S., deciding on land to claim, and the difficulties of becoming established farmers in their new Michigan community by these four families. Building their homes, farming land never before put to the plow, building up their farms, building a community church, raising their children, and other activities are all described in some detail. These experiences were unique in some ways yet had much in common with the stories of other pioneer farmers in the Midwest. Northern Michigan was a less hospitable location than many others, with its harsh northern climate, farmland marginal in character, and remote location, but these settlers made the best of it. With the coming of mechanized agriculture, farms became much larger in size and many of these marginal locations, suitable for the 80 to 160 acres of 19th century horse farming which needed large families to operate, have been abandoned or turned to other uses. Most children, now sur-

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plus to mechanized farming, moved away to larger cities to further their education or take up industrial or commercial employment.

The author has included a number of photographs, recent and historic, that show many of the persons who are subjects of the stories, their homesteads, and also photos taken by Newlin while visiting Sweden and the farms, buildings, and churches familiar to the immigrants described in the book, who left Sweden for America in the 1880's. Newlin also met with several descendants of these immigrants and obtained other information incorporated into *Tales of a New Line*.

Today, Wallace, Michigan, is a small community in Mellen Township, Michigan. The township has a

population of 1,260 people (2000 census) but had 1,821 people in 1900. This reflects the general reduction in population of rural areas in the U.S. with the urbanization of the nation since 1900. The town of Bethel no longer appears on the map, but the Bethel Mission Church was still standing in 1950.

The related stories included in the book of other relatives of the Newlin family or their friends are also of interest in adding to the overall picture of the immigrant experience in America.

For a member of this family or for their remaining relatives in Sweden, this book offers a great deal of information which is generally lost to succeeding generations, and the author is to be commended for his efforts in recording the history and experiences of these families.

The book also helps fill out the picture of such facets of immigration as the reasons for making the move, the fairly typical pattern of chain migration among related or neigh-

boring communities, and the religious and spiritual lives of the people involved.

Readers can learn more about Swedish settlers in Wallace, Michigan, through an article in the March, 2010, SAG Journal titled "Chasing John Nordholm" by Paul D. Sward. The paths of the Newlins and John Nordholm no doubt crossed in Wallace, and a Newlin family member was one source for Sward's research for his article.

Dennis L. Johnson



New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)

For people with Norwegian roots it might be interesting to know that the Norwegian American Genealogical Center and Naeseth Library in Madison, WI, in 2008 published the fifth volume of their major work *Norwegian Immigrants to the United States, a biographical directory, 1825-1850*, by Blaine Hedberg and Gerhard B. Naeseth (†). 491 pages, U.S. \$55. This fifth volume contains biographies of almost 4000 immigrants that arrived in 1850. The Center has a web site at <http://www.nagcnl.org/index.php> as well as a Facebook page. (Information from the journal *Genealogen* 2/2009, published by the Norwegian Genealogical Society, Oslo, Norway).

For those that read Swedish it might be interesting to know that the Friends of the Swedish Emigrant Institute (*Svenska Emigrantinstitutets Vänner*) has published a new book, called *Transatlantiskt*, edited by Ulf Beijbom. The book contains several articles by various authors, such as Ulf Beijbom, Jimmy Engren, Claes-Håkan Jacobson, Stig Marz, Margaretha Hedblom, and Klas Ralf.

In *Family Tree Magazine* (November 2010) there is a good article on how to organize your study/office. If your looks anything like mine with papers all over, and books, and then more books, there are some useful tips here. If you do have roots ther is a usdeful article in this issue "Back to the Baltics" by Liza A. Alto. There is a good map, which shows the different regions in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The author explains naming systems in the three different countries with three different languages. Due to the history of the area immigrants from the Baltic countries, that all were part of Russia until shortly after World War I, can be found as Russians, Polish or Jewish. The 1920 U.S. census is the first where the Baltic countries are mentioned as birthplaces.