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Literature

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Literature

The Pioneer Swedish Settlements and Swedish Lutheran Churches in America 1845–1860. Selected Chapters of Volume I of Eric Norelius' *De svenska luterska församlingarnas och svenskarnes historia i Amerika* (1890) translated by Conrad Bergendoff. Rock Island, IL — Augustana Historical Society, 1984 (Augustana Historical Society Publication No. 31), x1 + 419 pps.

“Water,” writes Eric Norelius, “is clearest at its source,” and the great value of his history of the Swedes and Swedish Lutherans in America is that Norelius was himself at or near the wellspring of the events which he records. As a member of an early emigrant group in 1850, the young Norelius already had personal ties to fellow immigrants who became community and religious leaders in the new Swedish settlements they helped found. During the 1850s his travels as a theological student and as a Lutheran clergyman brought him to many of the embryonic Swedish American centers in Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota and other states, often enough as the pastor who organized the congregations whose early history his writings recount. He knew many of the first settlers personally, and he was also acquainted with the major figures in the various Swedish American religious movements of the time. While historian of the Augustana Synod he wove this treasure-trove of first-hand knowledge with documentation from letters, newspapers, congregational minutes and synodical records, and augmented the primary materials with citations from other published histories, notably *Svenskarne i Illinois* and the *Minnen* of Gustaf Unonius. Published in two volumes in 1890 and 1916, the resulting historical account has long been an indispensable source for the student of nineteenth-century Swedish settlement in this country.

The first volume is a chronicle of Swedish immigration, settlement, and Lutheran church affairs from the beginning of modern mass migration in the 1840's to 1860, the year in which the Augustana Synod was established. While invaluable as a source for the time, it is not quite a complete history of Swedish immigrants in the U.S. during this period. The precedence of “Swedish Lutheran Congregations” in the original title is significant. Norelius was after all a Lutheran clergyman and church official, and this being his realm of experience and interest, non-Lutheran Swedes are less extensively and often less charitably treated than the author's co-religionists. One finds, for example, that it is more rewarding to consult directly one of Norelius' frequent sources, *Svenskarne i Illinois*, for information about such non-Lutheran Swedish centers as Victoria and Kewanee, Illinois. While Norelius devotes his first two chapters to the immigrant experiences centering around the Episcopalian Unonius and to the Jansonists at Bishop Hill, here as in his references to Methodists and Baptists he tends to be censorious of his denominational rivals. The focus on Lutheran Swedish pioneers is narrowed still further in the translated edition, which omits the Unonius and Bishop Hill chapters.

The basis for Norelius' reliability is well-expressed by the historian himself: “I have lived through much of what is here told and been so close to the events that I ought to be able to judge the authenticity of the historical records.” His work is most reliable when he is recording his own experiences or those of other immigrants whom he knew personally and corresponded with at the time of the events being reported. Closeness to the events also bestows credence upon first-hand accounts from his clergy colleagues, contemporaneous press reports, and the official minutes of meetings. But some information first published by Norelius was gained long after the fact, in several instances from immigrants who had later come to live in the area of the pastor's long-time congregation at Vasa, Minnesota. One of these respondents was Daniel F. Larsson, whose leadership role in early emigration looms large in the Norelius account. As Nils William Olsson has shown, however (“Who was Daniel

Larsson of Haurida?" *SAG*, Sept. 1982, pp. 110–117), this is at least one case in which the distance in time and location may have been too great for Norelius to have judged accurately the credibility of his informant.

While the great influx of Swedish immigrants came after 1860, the principal Swedish-American centers in the Midwest, the East and Texas were established in the 1840's and 1850's. In recording the origins of these communities, Norelius is of particular value to the personal and family historian just because the migration was yet of a scale small enough that individuals could be named and not just counted. This was a period in which migration in groups predominated, and Norelius records the emigrant groups between 1844 and 1854 with considerable information about their origins. As the beginnings of Swedish Lutheran congregations up to 1860 are described, the author names hundreds upon hundreds of Swedish immigrants, usually in conjunction with the individual's parish of origin, often with the year of arrival and at times with the name of the ship on which passage was taken. While it would still be a large project to index all these names and attempt to confirm the linkages to Sweden, a researcher of family or community history who finds subjects fixed in time and in place in this work will in many instances have cleared the way to manuscript sources in this country and in Sweden.

The value of the work to scholars and researchers notwithstanding, it has not been easy for some of us to imbibe the clear water of the Norelius history; even if equipped to master the original Swedish, the would-be reader is unlikely to find the long out-of-print volumes outside of specialized libraries. These difficulties have now been remedied in large part by the Augustana Historical Society's publication of this translation. Those who share with me either linguistic limitations or the bibliophile's desire to possess such an important resource must applaud the Society and the translator, Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, for having opened the way to the source both for the specialist and for a wider readership. Laymen with an historical bent will be pleased to read about the early days of their community or church. I have already witnessed this enjoyment of history in one of the chronicled congregations to which the Augustana Historical Society generously sent a complimentary copy.

The title page and introduction to the new edition make clear that this is not the complete Norelius history: *The Pioneer Swedish Settlements and the Swedish Lutheran Churches in America 1845–1860* is a translation of "selected chapters of volume I," those "which bear most directly on the title of the work." In omitting the chapters about Unonius and Bishop Hill, the numerous clerical biographies throughout the text, and all of the original Part III, with its 100 pages on Lutheran church polity and a listing of what might be termed the incunabula of Swedish-American publishing, the translator has pared volume I from 871 pages down to 419. Dr. Bergendoff not only cites good reasons for the abridgement (principally redundancy and minor historical value), but he adds a short bibliography on the beginnings of Swedish immigration to guide the reader who may wish to fill in the gaps. It is hard to argue against the deletion in particular of the clerical biographies, one or two of which Norelius allowed to run to excessive length. The absence of the Unonius and Bishop Hill stories is, however, a drawback, as their omission removes the foundations of historical continuity from the Norelius history and leaves some later references marooned without a context. I would have preferred a complete translation of the original, allowing the reader to make his own decisions about the value of the sections omitted here.

One hesitates to be critical of an undertaking which is beyond one's own capabilities. I perhaps cannot assess the true accomplishment of translating this large work from Swedish, but I must nevertheless register disagreement with a number of the editorial decisions made in the process. In general, I believe that greater fidelity to the original would have increased the usefulness of this much-needed translation. Dr. Bergendoff has

chosen to omit the Swedish diacritical marks from immigrant names, simplifying a "Jönsson" to "Jonsson" and transforming an "Åkerman" to "Okerman." The immigrants may indeed have anglicized their names, but it seems to me more appropriate to have left the names just the way they were originally published. When "Åström" becomes "Ostrom," the spelling changes may cloud the links to Swedish records for the genealogist and personal historian.

The major abridgements and the orthographical revision are duly noted in the translator's introduction. But these are not the only changes. On close comparison, numerous deviations between the original text and the translation come to the fore: occasional words, names, and sentences have been left out. These changes are usually of little or no consequence, but they undermine confidence in the translation. As the translator omits the identities of some scoundrels named by Norelius and also excises footnotes with unfavorable comments about rival denominational figures, the English rendition appears somewhat bowdlerized. Other omissions of names seem simply to be gratuitous: why on page 363 does the translated sentence "They were mostly relatives of two families, one from Grenna, one from Skärstad," leave out the names of the family heads, "Lars på Rasta," and "Åsarpaenkan?" The appearance of these two names in the original text happens to have provided me with an important link in my own research project, and I thus deplore these and other excisions of personal names. While the translator has occasionally added a footnote to the text, he has frequently shortened or deleted Norelius' references without noting the change. By such practice one loses for example on page 23 the interesting historical sidelight that the "Norwegian by the name of Larson" who helped Norelius' emigrant party in 1850 was one of the "sloopers" of 1825, the precursors of Norwegian group emigration.

Dr. Bergendoff has produced a very readable translation of Norelius' text. One error, no doubt more of transcription than of translation, stands out: "plenty of reindeer and other wild animals" (p. 314) — in southern Minnesota! The original is not *ren*, but *hjortar*: "red deer." One wonders why on pages 337-338 *klockare* is translated as "organist," especially when the church in question seems not to have had an organ (it is true that in modern Swedish *klockare* is *kyrkomusiker* "church musician," but in the 19th century a *klockare* was equivalent to a parish clerk). Why should "yards," rather than "ells" be used in rendering the word *alnar*, when neither is the same size as the Swedish measure. But in 419 pages there are few such instances in which the translation itself engenders questions.

Unfortunately there are some erroneous dates. Dates are the historian's basic building blocks, and the structural integrity of the translation is somewhat undermined by the discrepancies in day or year of events as printed in the English version. Most errors in names appear to be typographical, (e.g. "Brody" for "Broby;" "Fröja" for "Fröjd"), but on page 284 the "so-called Nordbeck peninsula" at Chisago Lake was in fact *Nordbergsholm*, after the pioneer settler, E. U. Nordberg (actually here Norelius was in error — the settler was Eric Ulric Norberg from Västergötland). In my opinion, the book would have been helped by less editorial pruning of content and a closer editing for accuracy.

Dr. Bergendoff's index is a marked improvement over the original one, which is inconveniently located at the end of Vol. II, published 26 years after the first book. At 490 entries the index is by no means exhaustive, but it is more than double the size of the one prepared by Norelius while Norelius' index contains more names of localities in Sweden, the new index greatly expands the number of persons listed. The inclusion of the names of immigrant ships is also a useful finding aid.

Despite some of these minor flaws, I wish to congratulate Dr. Bergendoff for his remarkable achievement in translating and editing this mammoth work. It is the fulfillment of a dream which I know that he long has nurtured. I am pleased to have it available for reference on my bookshelf. I also wish to recommend it to the reader and the researcher as a valuable resource, which the Augustana Historical Society should be proud of having financed and published.

—Ronald J. Johnson

Sing It Again! A Handbook on **The Covenant Hymnal** by J. Irving Erickson. Covenant Press, 3200 West Foster Ave., Chicago, IL 60625, 1985. VIII + 466 pp. \$12.95.

Sing It Again!, judging by its title, is not the kind of book that one would expect to see reviewed in a genealogical journal. Apart from the title, however, Erickson's volume contains much valuable information having a direct bearing on our Scandinavian heritage.

The volume is a companion work to *The Covenant Hymnal*, published in 1973 as the official hymn book of the Evangelical Covenant Church of America. The author has in this work analyzed all of the 667 hymns in that work, one by one, tracing the history of every hymn, its melody, its lyrics and its place in the development of Christian hymnody over several hundred years. He shows how a particular song, hymn or psalm and/or its melody has migrated from foreign lands to be replanted in the soil of 20th century America. Erickson has gathered together the strands of these influences from all over the world, skilfully weaving a story of cultural history, but also demonstrating how music can flow from country to country irrespective of natural boundaries.

What strikes the reviewer forcibly is the number of Scandinavian hymns and psalms which have made the transition to the New World so successfully. Here is an excellent example of how the heritage of the North has been handed over to newer generations and in the process has lost nothing of its vitality. We are indeed indebted to the author for having furnished this compendium to the treasury of our Scandinavian musical heritage.

Mr. Erickson's work is divided into two major sections — the first dealing with the hymns themselves, their history and their make-up, and while this portion is of great interest to the student of Scandinavian cultural history, it is the second portion which is of particular value to the genealogist and biographer. In somewhat more than 200 pages the author has created a biographical dictionary of more than 700 persons — authors and composers of hymns, arrangers of music and translators of texts. The startling observation is that about one seventh, or a little more than 100 of these biographies concern Scandinavians and American Scandinavians. The question comes to mind — what other denomination in America, possessing an ethnic background, can demonstrate such a wealth of material arising from its cultural wellsprings?

Here we find presented all of the greats of Scandinavian psalmody — Hans Adolph Brorson, Thomas Hansen Kingo and Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig of Denmark, Johan Ludvig Runeberg and Jean Sibelius of Finland, Valdimar Briem of Iceland, Johan Nordal Brun and Edvard Grieg of Norway and Johan Olof Wallin of Sweden.

But in addition to these luminaries, Erickson has assiduously ferreted out and included many others, either in Scandinavia or in America, who have had a hand in adapting their musical heritage to the 20th century American church. Thanks to Mr. Erickson we now know a lot more of the many Americans of Scandinavian descent who have shaped the hymnal now in use. Here we find such well-known names as F. Meijus Christiansen, Leland B. Sateren, A. L. Skoog, Nils Frykman and his three sons — Andrew T., Carl M. and Gustaf, as well as Ernst W. Olson and Aina Lilja Kantonen-Halkola.

The author has meticulously annotated each biography with references to his or her major works including referrals to others in the text who have had a major influence on their life and work.

The Evangelical Covenant Church of America is this year celebrating the centennial of its founding in Minneapolis, MN in June 1885. Erickson's book underlines and emphasizes the strong Swedish background the church has had during its century of existence and although the ethnic connection is fast fading, there is still a strong commitment to the music of Scandinavia, which inspired our forefathers and continues to give pleasure and edification to latter generations.

Mr. Erickson is to be commended for giving us this rich treasury of knowledge. Considering the enormity of the work and the inclusion of thousands of names, dates and titles, *Sing It Again!* is remarkably free of misprints and errors of fact.

— NILS WILLIAM OLSSON

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Eric Norelius'

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