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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.

What did the Vikings say?

From the Viking Word-Hoard, a Dictionary of Scandinavian Words in the Languages of Britain and Ireland, by Diarmaid Ó Muirthe, Four Courts Press, Portland, Oregon, 2010, Amazon.com, \$66.50 plus shipping, and Supplement, 2012, \$39.95 plus shipping.

It is well known that when cultures come into contact with each other, or merge through conquest, immigration or assimilation, their languages are altered in many ways. Words from one language are borrowed into the other through common usage and to improve communication between the two cultures. This occurs first in common everyday speech and then slowly becomes part of the new “official” written language. This occurs over a period of time, the longer the time the greater the change. English is borrowing words from many cultures, and those cultures are in turn borrowing words from English as cultural contacts expand and multiply. Technology, the Internet, and international trade have continued and accelerated the pace of the changing of languages worldwide.

This book and its supplement deal primarily with the time period of closer contact between and among the peoples of Scandinavia, Great Britain, Scotland, Ireland, the Orkney Islands, the Shetland Islands, Iceland, and their nearby territories. This time period is roughly from the

eighth century through the time of the Reformation and includes the age of the Vikings and the early medieval period. During this time the Norse people began their contact with Great Britain and their peoples, beginning with Viking raids along the coastlines through a long period of immigration and settlement of many parts of the British Isles. The development of successful, oceangoing sailing ships by the Vikings enabled travel to most parts of Great Britain, as well as the settlement of Iceland and other outlying islands and archipelagoes in the North Sea. Similar contacts and migrations were taking place in the East through the Baltic Sea into Russia, mainly by Swedes, and the eastern European languages were undergoing their own parallel changes through many of the same years.

The book begins with a preface in which the author thanks those who assisted him in his research and previous works which helped in his work. Ó Muirthe provides an introduction which explains the many factors which contributed to borrowing and exchange of Norse words into the languages of the British Isles. The outward movement of the Norse people into Britain is explained by many factors, including famine, pestilence, overpopulation, primogeniture, the natural ferocity of the Vikings, and the seeking of new trade outlets, and not least, the pillaging of wealth from these new lands. The author goes on to explain the many variations in this period of conquest and settlement, both in the invaders and the differences to be found in Great Britain.

The Danish Vikings settled mainly on the east coast of England to establish the Danelaw, while the Vikings from Norway mainly attacked and then settled the coasts of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, the Isle of Man, and the west coast of England. Swedes were less involved, but no doubt some accompanied these invaders. The new settlers encountered Anglo-Saxons, Highland Scots, Celtic people, Irish, and other groups besides English who were engaged in conflicts of their own, and often made alliances with one tribal group in conflict with another.

All of these conflicts and contacts meant that languages and dialects varied from place to place, resulting in much borrowing of words, place names, given names and surnames, and common references involved with farming, fishing, animals, possessions, warfare, and objects of everyday living. As intermarriage occurred between the inhabitants and the new immigrants, households usually adopted one language or the other and children were raised accordingly. The author gives many examples of the effects of these efforts to marry or cope with two or more languages. In the area settled by Danes, large numbers of small villages and farmsteads now have names ending in the suffix *-by*, indicating Scandinavian usage. The morphing of Norse names with Scottish or Irish surnames is illustrated with numerous interesting citations, and many other word examples are given.

One especially interesting example in place names and surnames is the name “Scarborough,” usually



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Witches

Whispers in the Church, Swedish Witch Hunt, 1692, by Charlene Hanson Jordan, 2012, Softcover, 236 pages, Illustrated, Abbott Press, Bloomington, IN, Amazon.com, \$14.03 plus shipping, kindle edition \$4.95.

thought to be Scots-Irish. The author gives the real root of this name. He writes that from one Icelandic saga, two brothers, Thorgils and Kormak, went raiding in Ireland, Wales, England, and Scotland. They were the first men to set up the fortress now named Scarborough. Kormak was a poet, and in two of the poems he addressed to his brother he called him *Skardi*, 'the hare-lip.' Hence, the Scandinavian form *Skardaborg*. It was based on Skardi's nickname, not his surname, and pronounced with a soft 'g,' morphed into the name Scarborough.

Ó Muirthe is careful to point out that most of the borrowed words are derived from Old Norse, which is most completely preserved today in the language of Iceland. Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian were all exposed to other influences and have evolved in somewhat different ways. Iceland, having less cultural contact with others, is closer to the language

used at the time by Scandinavians in these invasions of Britain in earlier centuries. He also touches on other local variants such as is found in the North Atlantic islands, Wales, the Isle of Man, and elsewhere. Norse word origins are found not only in English, but also in the older languages of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and the islands. These earlier languages were commonly spoken in Viking times but their use is much diminished today.

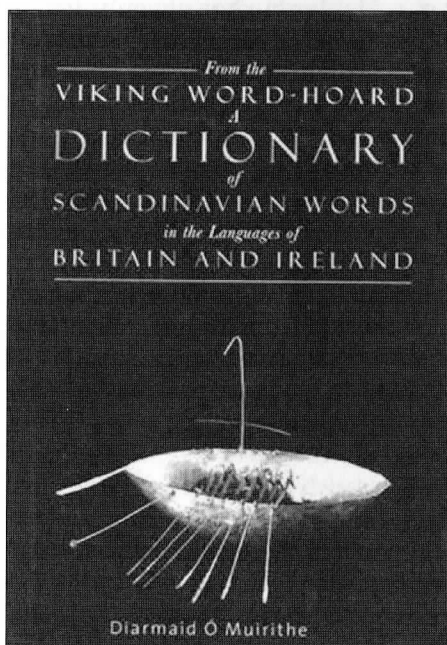
After this introduction, the remainder of the volume consists of a dictionary, arranged alphabetically, with a brief description of the word's origins, original source, often history, and sometimes an anecdote illustrating its usage with an example. Several thousand words are in the original volume, and the supplement includes another thousand or more words. The supplement resulted when the author had occasion to run across many new examples of borrowed words he had not previously encountered. The volumes also include a very complete bibliography and an index of many Scandinavian words and word components.

Of special interest to scholars of linguistics and the study of languages, this scholarly work will also be of interest to writers, historians, and students of the evolution of the English language from its many historical sources. Many lay readers with an interest in the history and culture of the places covered in this study will also find the book worth reading and owning.

Dennis L. Johnson

Most Americans will remember from their school days the Salem Witch Trials of 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts. At the time, Salem was a small village of some 500 people and part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. This was just one example of the outbreak of mass hysteria which arose throughout much of Europe and in North America in that approximate time period. This episode in Salem began with an outbreak of bizarre behaviour among a group of young girls without apparent reason, and then was attributed to the work of Satan. This soon escalated into accusations of witchcraft against several women leading to trials throughout the summer of 1692. Before the community came to its senses and the intervention of the colonial governor, nineteen victims of the witch hunt had been hanged, one crushed to death under stones, and at least four others who died in prison awaiting trial.

A similar episode had occurred in Sweden just twenty years before, in the small village of Järvsö, in Hälsingland. The consequences here were not as dire, however, with only two accused witches being executed, another committed suicide, and another half-dozen went on to be rehabilitated and live long and mostly useful lives in the community. The story of the people and events in Järvsö has been researched and written by Charlene Hanson Jordan, a Swedish-American writer who traced an ancestral home to this small community. Charlene was born



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in Texas to the children of Swedish immigrants and has written several books and articles on Texas history and on Swedish-Americans in Texas. This book is a detailed telling of these events in Järvsö as they occurred in the years 1672 and immediately following.

As in Salem, events began with accusations and wild stories mainly from children of events blamed on witchcraft. Family feuds may have played a part at the beginning. Stories escalated leading to trials and imprisonment of the accused persons.

Succeeding chapters focus on the individuals who were accused, including three women and two men. With the help of several local residents, to whom she gives credit in her foreword, Charlene has accessed old documents in Swedish which provide the main source materials for her account of the people, the community, and the witchcraft trials.

In the course of her research in preparing to write this book, the author discovered that two of the principal individuals accused of witchcraft in Järvsö were among her ancestors. This was a married couple,

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Märit Hansdotter and Karl Karlsson, living there at Karlsgården, a large elaborate house and other buildings befitting the farm of a *bonde*. They were the eighth grandparents of Ms. Jordan. Karl had been accused, but found not guilty of two murders some time before, and Märit was accused of witchcraft. She was found guilty but only fined and forced to be publicly denounced in the church.

In the appendix, Ms. Jordan includes a chapter drawing parallels between Sweden and much of Europe in dealings with accusations of witchcraft. In Sweden these trials were held over a roughly one hundred year period beginning in the early 17th century, and a total of about three hundred people were executed after being found guilty of witchcraft by testimony and several "tests." Examples are given from various parts of Sweden, including Småland, Bohuslän, Stockholm, and other locations. Similar numbers of deaths occurred in other countries such as Germany, Denmark, Great Britain, and elsewhere in about the same period.

The second appendix presents the author's theories about the causes of this epidemic of witchcraft accusations at this period in the history of these countries. She identifies several coinciding events which

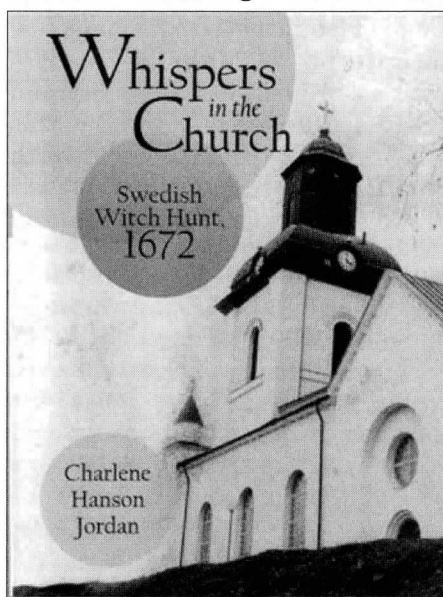
brought this about. Belief in witchcraft was widespread throughout Europe, flowing from remnants of ancient beliefs, upheavals in the churches associated with the Reformation, the ever-present lively imaginations of children, especially when this drew to them a great deal of attention, possibly some people were affected by addictions or poisonings from folk healers, a lack of intervention by the king, leaders, and church leaders, rapid spread of rumors and gossip, copycat accusations, and other factors. Cotton Mather, catalyst of the witchcraft trials in the Colony in Salem, Massachusetts, had heard of these European events also, and most Salem colony members were recent immigrants from Europe where similar beliefs prevailed.

One hopes that the state of knowledge of medicine, psychiatry, advances in legal systems and protections, and public education would ordinarily prevent such "mass hysteria" as occurred in the 17th century from taking root today. However, examples can still be found, usually in less extreme form, in what are presumably modern nations even now.

In researching and writing this book, Ms. Jordan has not only done a thorough job of reporting on one local episode in the 17th century epidemic of witchcraft trials, but has also incorporated into her book much knowledge about the customs, habits, and beliefs of the people of this period in Sweden. Foods, diets, farming methods, relations between neighbors, occupations, legal systems, the role of the church, and the culture of the time are all woven into her book.

This helps give the reader, and those interested in the lives of their Swedish ancestors in the 17th century, a much better understanding of the changes that have taken place since more than three centuries ago in rural Sweden.

Dennis L. Johnson





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A Swedish Chef

Yes, Chef, a memoir, Marcus Samuelsson, Random House, Inc., New York, 2012, 319 pages, Hardcover, Illustrated, Amazon.com, \$15.16 plus shipping.

The most surprising thing about this new book was that it far exceeded my expectations when I first decided to review it. This memoir about an orphaned African infant who rose to become a world-class master chef in New York City was fascinating and rewarding, one of the most so of any of the books I have reviewed since I began to review books for the *Swedish American Genealogist* eight years ago. The author, Marcus Samuelsson, tells his life story to date in a way that has the ring of honesty and credibility, a tale of a remarkable and most unusual career considering his origins and early life.

The name Marcus, who was born in 1971, was given him by his adoptive parents in Sweden, who decided to adopt after years of unsuccessful efforts to have their own natural children. Marcus was born in a small village in Ethiopia. His mother, named Ahnu, became a victim of a tuberculosis epidemic in Addis Ababa, where she had brought two of her children. After her death, Marcus and his sister, four years older, were put up for adoption. Circumstances brought this orphaned little boy and his sister to the attention of Anne Marie and Lennart Samuelsson in Göteborg, Sweden, who had earlier adopted a mixed race daughter then

eight years old. Within a year, they were united as a family in Sweden, where they grew up as part of the Samuelsson family. Marcus describes as much as he can recall of this first encounter, though he was very young when he joined the family.

In the succeeding early chapters, Marcus relates the story of his early life in Sweden and the major influence of his Swedish grandmother and her Swedish cooking in his choice of a cooking career, his youth growing up as a minority child among almost entirely Swedish schoolmates, his relationships with his adoptive parents and grandparents, and other Swed-

ish influences. He credits his *mormor* Helga Jonsson, who lived nearby, with his early education in preparing and cooking foods, and spent much time in her kitchen. Helga had been a cook with a well-off family much of her working life, and took great pride in her skills. His parents had a summer house on the island of Smögen, near Göteborg, where he learned much about fishing and helped with maintaining their summer house and boat. Marcus also relates anecdotes about his friends at school and in playing soccer in a youth league. He loved soccer but was cut from advancing to a better league because

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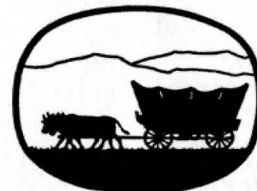
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he was judged too small.

After Marcus completed his secondary education, he was disinterested in academics, and made a critical decision to study cooking in a trade school, in order to become a chef. He talks about his classes and his practice cooking, taking on all the jobs in turn that come with working in a restaurant kitchen. Marcus soon felt that he had “earned his knives” and looked around for an apprenticeship at one of the better restaurants in Göteborg. He worked there the rest of the year while continuing in school, and graduated second in his class, second only to a young man who had worked in his father’s catering business since he was ten years old. By 1999 he joined the staff of Belle Avenue restaurant, said to be among the five best in Sweden. There he honed his skills and learned to work faster and faster.

In the second part of his memoirs, Marcus describes his decision to leave home at age 18 and travel to Switzerland to apprentice in another fine gourmet restaurant. This is frequently arranged by the better master chefs for their most talented apprentices to help them advance their careers. He then joined the staff of the Victoria Jungfrau, in Bern. There he advanced himself to a specialty chef and, after six months, spent some weeks in Austria at a restaurant there (where, during those weeks, he fathered a child by an Austrian girl whom he did not acknowledge until years later).

After his longer, more advanced apprenticeship at the Victoria Jungfrau, and other adventures in Switzerland, Marcus began seeking other steps on his ladder of advancement,

thinking mainly of France. Unexpectedly, he received an offer of a nine-month apprenticeship through his mentor in Sweden, Peter, of Belle Avenue. This was at a new Swedish restaurant in New York City, owned by Håkan Swahn with Swedish Chef Tore Wretman. His old friend Peter had become sous-chef at Aquavit, where the executive chef was Christopher Larson, and Peter had recommended him for Aquavit.

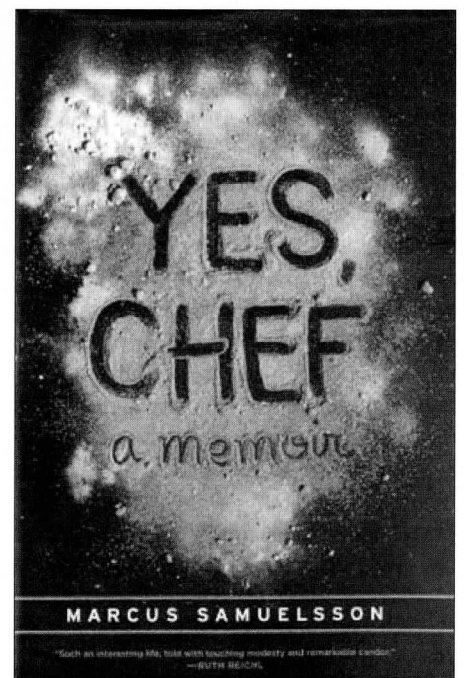
Marcus soon fell into the routine at Aquavit but rounded out his experience with several stints on a cruise ship, touring and sampling cuisine at many South American locations between Miami and Brazil, and later the diversity of Asian dishes on a cruise to the Far East. He learned everywhere he went and broadened his tastes of foods of all kinds. On one South American cruise, he learned of the death of his Swedish grandmother, his first teacher. He continued dreaming of cooking in France, and by 1993 secured a stage (temporary learning stint) at Georges Blanc, who had moved his family restaurant to Southern France and to a three-star rating. He began in the bakery, moved to the kitchen, and was eventually offered a full-time job. He declined and returned to Aquavit in New York.

Marcus felt at home in New York, and loved the variety and richness of the city as he explored all of its blend of ethnic areas, foods, ingredients, and neighborhoods. Shortly after their executive chef died suddenly, and after many weeks of chaos and searching by the owner of Aquavit in Sweden for a new chef, Håkan Swahn returned, and to Marcus’s surprise, chose him as the new executive chef. It was not long before Aquavit received a three-star review in the *New York Times*. This brought new fame and new business to Aquavit and advanced Marcus to the top ranks in New York.

In the third part of his book, Mar-

cus talks of his awakened interest in cooking from his homeland and birthplace, in Ethiopia. As part of an idea a writer had, he returns to his home village to meet his birth father and the remains of his family. There he explores Ethiopian cooking in his village and in Addis Ababa and gains new knowledge and respect for Ethiopian cuisine. He had done a cookbook on Swedish cooking and now wished to do one on African cooking, which became *The Soul of a New Cuisine*, in which he hoped to awaken an interest in the variety of African cooking. Marcus was in Australia on Sept. 11, 2001, the day of the World Trade Center attack. This shocked the world and cast a pall on New York City and on Aquavit’s business. Soon after this tragedy, Aquavit was hit by a kitchen fire, and the start of the Iraq War depressed business. Their new Minneapolis restaurant had to close after only four years. Yet after all this, Marcus went on to win a world-class chef’s competition called the Beard Award, a medallion, and many honors.

In the midst of this turmoil, Marcus met his wife-to-be, a model from Ethiopia who was working in New





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York. He began making an annual journey to Ethiopia to visit his African family, and to help send his half-sisters to school. At his Swedish mother's insistence, he had been helping support his Austrian out-of-wedlock daughter all along and was yet to meet her. He soon arranged to do this, and she and her family are now part of his life.

In 2008, Marcus left Aquavit and opened his own restaurant in New York called Merkato 55. It had a Pan-African cuisine and opened to a big splash. Despite this, and possibly a poor location, the restaurant only lasted six months and failed. His dream to open an African restaurant survived, but he had to spend all of his life savings to buy out his own

name, with his reputation, from Aquavit. He kept himself busy doing corporate dinners and charity work, but he set his sights on Harlem. He also competed in a Top Chef Masters in Los Angeles, and was asked to do the first White House State Dinner for the newly elected President Obama in 2008. His new honors helped him finance and open his new Harlem restaurant called the Red Rooster. It was well-received and appears to be a continuing success in New York and in Harlem.

The bare bones of Marcus Samuelsson's story do not begin to tell of all the steps, missteps, and turning points in the life of this remarkable man. One has to read the book to appreciate his singular focus on his career as a chef, and all the incredible circumstances in his personal life which enable him to bring his talent to fruition. If this were a novel, readers would find his story beyond belief. That a poor African orphan from a poverty-stricken village in

rural Ethiopia would in forty years rise to be one of the renowned top chefs in a world-class restaurant in New York City is indeed almost unbelievable. He gives great credit for his start to his Swedish adoptive parents (and grandmother) and to all the chefs and friends along the way who helped him in his journey. His is a career where so many with the same goal fall by the wayside and do not succeed, for a variety of reasons. One can only wish him well in his future endeavors.

Readers will find *Yes, Chef*, a fascinating and rewarding story of one man's quest for excellence in the face of so many obstacles. And his story will make all African-Swedish-Americans proud of their own heritages in playing a small part in helping make some of Marcus Samuelsson's success possible. Readers will also learn quite a bit of "inside baseball" about how great kitchens work.

Dennis L. Johnson

New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)

The National Genealogical Society (NGS) has released the newest addition in its Research in the States series: *Research in New York City, Long Island, and Westchester County*. This publication was written by native New Yorker and nationally recognized genealogist Laura Murphy DeGrazia, CG.

Research in New York City, Long Island, and Westchester County is an introduction to resources and repositories essential to genealogical research in these geographic areas. "Millions of Americans have ancestors who spent some time in the New York City, Long Island, and Westchester County area," said Laura Murphy DeGrazia, author, "and knowing what resources exist and where they are located can help family historians be more successful." This publication can be bought at the NGS Online store at <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/>. Price \$17:50 (print), \$10:00 (pdf), discount for NGS members.

An early immigrant ship was the *Minona*, on which around 1100 immigrants sailed for America during the early period. The ship's captain started to take passengers on top of the bar iron, that he was carrying as export goods. In 1850, arriving on July 2 in Boston, 75 passengers landed, and were probably very pleased to get out of the crowded ship. One of the passengers was the farmer Andrew Peterson from Sjöarp in Västra Ryd (Östg.) who started a diary that he kept for the rest of his life. This is now in the Minnesota Historical Society, and was used as a main source for life in the 1800s by Vilhelm Moberg, when he wrote his Emigrant Series. The *Minona* was enlarged in the 1850s and registered then as a bark ship, and could now take up to 130 immigrants on each trip. Her last voyage was in 1864, when steamship made much faster crossings, and the era of the sailing ships was over. All this information comes from a book *Emigrantskeppet Minona af Götheborg. Karl Oskar och Kristinas emigrantfartyg – ett skeppsporätt berättar*, (in **Swedish**) by Berit and Göran Valinder (2012). Emigration historian Bo Björklund has compiled lists of all emigrants, and where they came from. The book can be bought from Swedish net bookstore www.bokus.com price 174 SEK + postage.