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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.

The mystery stone

The Hooked X, Key to the Secret History of North America. Scott F. Wolter, North Star Press, St. Cloud, MN, 2009, 276 pages, Softcover, Illustrated, \$12.89 plus shipping, Amazon.com.

Throughout the entire 20th century, a battle has raged over the authenticity of the Kensington Runestone. An immigrant farmer from Sweden, Olof Öhman (1854–1935), in 1898 claimed to have discovered the 200 pound stone entangled in the roots of a tree he was removing on his farm near Kensington, Douglas County, Minnesota. Öhman immigrated from Forsa in Hälsingland, Sweden, in 1879. He purchased land near Kensington, in west central Minnesota, in 1890, where he and his wife, Karin Danielson, also from Forsa, were farmers and raised nine children.

The stone has gone through several cycles of recognition and dismissal as a hoax over the years. A new book has added fuel to this long smoldering controversy. After examination and dismissal over the years by many experts in runology and Scandinavian history, the new book presents evidence persuasive toward the authenticity of this much maligned stone, and the reputation of the man who first found it. Olof Öhman is long dead, but several of his descendants and others from Alexandria, MN, where the stone now is displayed, continue the struggle.

The author, Scott E. Wolter, was hired by the Runestone Museum in Alexandria in July, 2000, to examine the stone. He previously had not heard of the stone and warned the museum that his findings may not be to their liking. Wolter is a professional geologist and his company, American Petrographic Services in St. Paul, had developed original methods for the aging and weathering of the surfaces of stone. Using transmitted and reflected light microscopy, scanning electron microscopy, and elemental analysis, he and his staff found mica degradation on the man-made surfaces that clearly indicated to him that the inscriptions had weathered for at least 200 years, well before the date of discovery of the stone by Öhman. This and other evidence about the stone caused him to become a believer in its authenticity. He reported this conclusion to his client.

In 2005, Wolter and an associate, Richard Nielsen, published a book about his findings titled *The Kensington Runestone, Compelling New Evidence*. This book described the geological and physical evidence which led to Wolter's conclusions about the runestone.

His 2009 book, *The Hooked X*, is essentially a compilation of his added findings and conclusions which he developed after publication of the 2005 book. Wolter became very interested in the Kensington stone, enough to follow a number of leads outside his main area of expertise as a geologist. His curiosity led him to a review of prior research and theories, to travel to visit other claimed Viking artifacts and sites in the U.S. and

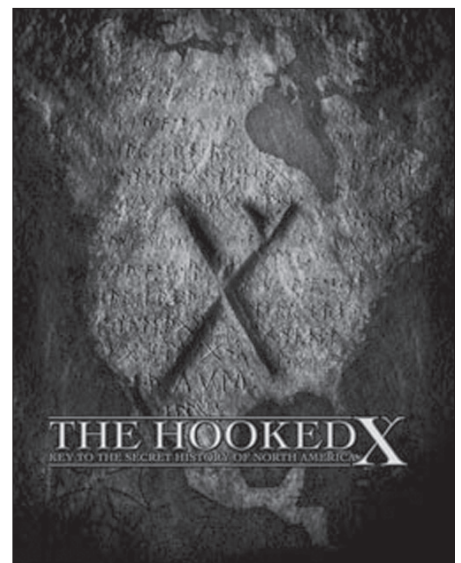
abroad, and to research into other ancient documents, legends, and writings.

The runestone, as usually translated from old Swedish, reads as follows:

“Eight Gotlanders (Geats, Goths) and 22 Norwegians on this reclaiming/acquisition journey far to the west from Vinland. We had a camp by two (shelters?) one day's journey north from this stone. We were fishing one day. After we came home we found 10 men red with blood and death. Ave Maria. Save from evil. There are 10 men by the sea to look after our ships fourteen days journey from this island. Year 1362.”

Wolter examined the stone in great detail and found marks that had been previously un-reported or ignored. Among them was a basis for concluding that this was not just a record of an event, but a stone intended to claim land in this vicinity.

A hidden code was discovered that gave the date of the stone in code as





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well as in the text, to prevent the date from being altered. Many of the individual runes which were discredited by previous experts, including the “hooked X”, were found to have been in usage in Gotland, Sweden, in the 14th century. This was unknown to previous experts since they are traced to a newly discovered trove of runic inscriptions found on Gotland in the last decade. This information plus the geologic evidence caused Wolter to embark on personal efforts to trace the origins of these runes further, and to investigate many related Viking artifacts in North America.

In subsequent chapters, the author describes these investigations and his conclusions about many related artifacts and discoveries. He looks into the history of the hooked X and certain other runic marks to tie them to Gotland, the Cistercian monks who were the prevalent religious order on Gotland in the 14th century, and their related organization, the Knights Templar. He looks into and describes ancient sacred geometry, objects in New England and in the British Isles, and other locations. He finds associations with the Newport tower in Newport, Rhode Island, another highly controversial object claimed to be of Viking origins by some, with arguments for its authenticity.

The book as a whole offers strong support for the authenticity of the Kensington stone, although many questions remain. If, as Wolter argues, the tablet is truly a land claim, why is there nothing to describe the extent of the land claimed? Many other connections seem a little

far-reaching, others make sense at least to this lay reader. My own view is that of continuing to be a skeptic despite my desire for the stone to be an authentic artifact of Vikings in Minnesota in the 14th century. I would not go so far as to claim the runestone is a hoax, as others have, but to consider it still “unproven.” I await with interest the publication of rebuttals by skeptics and scholars to the information that Wolter has put forward in his latest book.

All readers with an interest in Swedish-American history will be fascinated by the information and arguments presented by Wolter, and

will have to decide for themselves how persuasive the arguments are in favor of the authenticity of the Kensington Runestone. If the stone is authentic, then this represents the first known discovery and exploration of this part of the New World by Europeans, at least eight of them being Swedes. Olof Öhman and his family and supporters would at long last be vindicated after constant accusations for being the perpetrators of a hoax.

He would be pleased to know that what he claimed is true.

Dennis L. Johnson

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A family story

The Journey Takers, by Leslie Albrecht Huber, Foundation Books, 2010, 321 pages, Softcover, Ill., Amazon.com, \$19.75 plus shipping.

The greatest challenge a person faces in writing about his or her ancestors is how to organize the material into a concise, coherent, and readable account. Many family histories are written primarily for the immediate family and relatives of the writer, while some seek a broader audience and mission. Some start with themselves but work their way back, some start in the distant past and work their way forward, and still others even start in the middle and work both ways. Many leave the reader confused and filled with names and places but wondering how their family story all fits together.

Leslie Huber has met this challenge well in *The Journey Takers*, her account of her own family; a blended family with roots in Sweden, Germany, and England, and whose immigrant ancestors on her paternal side came together in southern Utah beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century. (Limiting her history to her great-grandfather's side, Earl Albrecht, b. 1890 in Fremont, Utah, eases the challenge a bit). The "Journey-takers" of the title are her fifth generation ancestors, grand-parents of Earl Albrecht. These were George Albrecht and Mina Haker from Germany, Edmond Harris from England, and Karsti Nilsdotter from Sweden.

In the first three parts of this family story, each journey-taker in

turn has been researched and described, beginning with George Albrecht b. 1837, and Mina Haker, b. 1843, from Mecklenberg, Germany.

The second part is about the family of Karsti [Kersti] Nilsdotter, b. 1843 in Vallby in Skåne.

The third part traces the family of Edmond Harris, b. 1825 in Wingrave, England. George and Mina Albrecht married before migrating and the latter two met in Utah. The common thread that drew all four to Utah was the Mormon Church, which by then had found its New Jerusalem in Utah and was actively seeking recruits to their faith in northern Europe at the time.

The Fourth and last part of this family history focuses on the life in Utah of Earl Albrecht, his family, and his descendants.

This method of organizing her book is of great help to the reader in keeping the family's complex history in mind as you follow their journeys page by page. The general style of the writer is not only to describe the ancestry of these four journey-takers back several more generations, and the conditions of their lives in their native countries and times of origin, but also to describe her own journeys in visiting the locations and seeking

records in the local archives to document their lives. Interweaving her own impressions and discoveries during her travels keeps the reader involved in her quest.

As one reviewer wrote, this family history is "as readable as a novel" as it draws the reader along in the discovery of her roots. Along the way, the reader is educated about the lives and times of the people in three countries, and the circumstances under which her ancestors decided to undertake their journeys to the American West. In Utah, the pioneer life of these early journey-takers and their children is vividly depicted in the final part of Ms. Huber's book as she brings her story up to the present day.

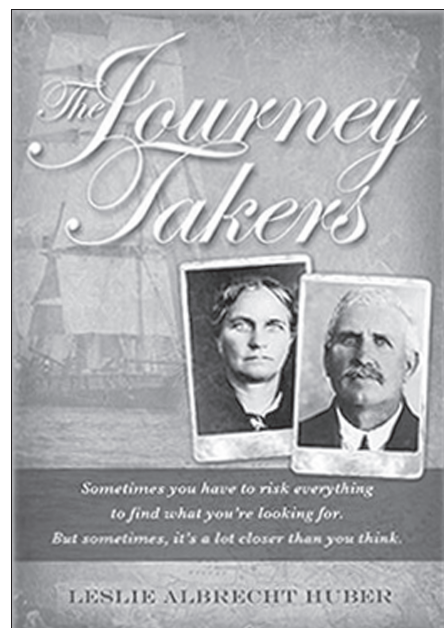
The Journey-Takers is exceptional as a family history in that it combines a well-documented record of one branch of the author's own family tree for the benefit of her own family and descendants, with an eminently readable and coherent story for those interested in the variety and scope of the immigrant experience in America.

Dennis L. Johnson

An historic saga

Long Journey to the South River, Leif Lundquist, Comreco AB, Vaxholm, 2009, 334 pages, Softcover, Amazon.com, \$21.00 plus shipping, Kindle \$9.99.

Historical fiction can be a fine way of telling an engaging story while informing the reader about the life and times of people in a particular time and place in the past. This tale about a young Swedish man from the newly founded port city of Gothenburg begins in the early years of the 17th century, when Sweden was engaged in the Thirty Years' War. Ben



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Magnusson was the son of a Swedish sailor and his Dutch Huguenot wife. His father was lost at sea when he was only 11 years old, and his mother took over running an inn begun by his father's parents in Gothenburg. He works at the inn, and when he is 16, signs on with a ship sailing to Holland and Scotland. Not long after this fairly uneventful voyage, Ben is called up by Swedish recruiters and conscripted to serve in the army of Gustavus Adolphus, in 1632. Like many other conscripts, he is given the military name of Fogel (bird) since there are already too many Magnussons in his new regiment.

The war had been going on for 14 years, and Sweden was at the height of its imperial power, dominating many of the lands around the Baltic Sea. Gustavus Adolphus had over 130,000 soldiers, including mercenaries, fighting in Europe. Ben was given a few weeks of basic training and then sent to a newly formed unit and assigned the duties of a transla-

tor and interpreter, since he spoke Dutch, German, Swedish, and some English. Within a month he was in Germany. Ben at eighteen was one of the older recruits, many were young boys of fifteen and sixteen, away from their homes for the first time.

The story moves on with Ben's adventures with the army in Germany. His Flaxen Guard is assigned several missions and on Nov. 6, 1632, is in a region near Lützen when the famous battle takes place, and where Gustavus Adolphus dies. The Flaxen Guard is assigned to carry the body of King Gustavus Adolphus back to Sweden for a royal burial. Along the way he meets many of the notable Swedes involved, including the king's widow Maria Eleonora, Axel Oxenstierna, and others. After a successful mission requiring several months to complete, Ben is promoted and remains with his unit in Stockholm for the eventual burial ceremonies. He later becomes involved in an altercation with another junior officer, son of a very important nobleman. Friends advise him to leave the country for a time, and he is offered a post on a voyage to New Sweden in North America on the ship *Kalmar Nyckel*.

This event sets the stage for the second part of this novel, the journey and the life of Ben Fogel with the New Sweden colony in North America. After looking to all the supplies and loading of the *Kalmar Nyckel* for the first voyage, he remains in Gothenburg to make preparations for a second voyage. This voyage takes place two years later and Ben accompanies the ship to the South River, now Delaware Bay. He serves the colony for some years and marries another colonist's daughter. The novel ends when Ben moves from Fort Christina upriver to begin a new settlement at Schuyl's Kill, near the present site of Philadelphia.

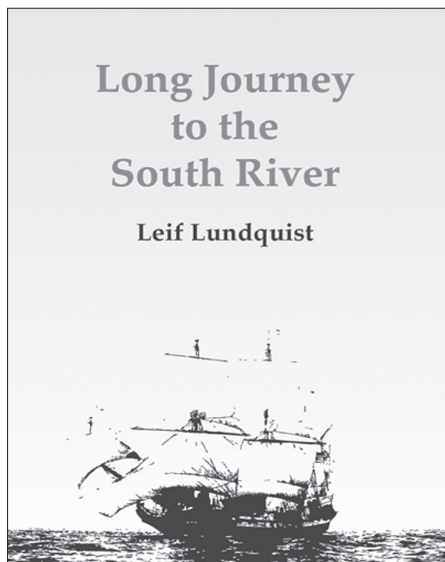
The bare outlines of this soldier's

tale does not reveal the rich detail included in this novel, which paints a vivid picture of life in Sweden and in the New World at the founding of the North American colonies. The juxtaposition of two major events of these decades: the Thirty Years' War and the New Sweden colony is an adept way of putting each of them in the perspective of the other. Many of the actual participants in these events are woven into the story, from the young Queen Christina to Governor Johan Printz and his arrival in the colony. This detailed glimpse into these events gives the reader an intense education about Sweden, its leaders, and its common people during that period, meanwhile carrying you along with the adventures and many poignant moments in the life of Ben Magnusson Fogel.

The author, Leif Lundquist, is described as having started writing about ten years ago after a long career in a high-tech business involving much traveling. He has lived in Holland and England, and in the 1960's he lived in New Jersey where he became fascinated by the history of New Sweden and the colony founded on the South River, now the Delaware. He now lives in Sweden, but spends his winters in Tucson, Arizona.

He is a member of the Swedish Colonial Society and is the editor of a Swedish website, "*Nya Sverige i Nordamerika*," dedicated to the history of New Sweden [see the link on p.38!]. He has also written essays and stories; this is his only known novel.

Swedish historians reading this novel may find flaws in historical accuracy about events surrounding the times of the Thirty Years' War, but to this reader it all sounds quite plausible and the result of considerable research on the part of the author. *The Long Journey to the South River* is a highly engaging and interesting novel which will bring a clearer understanding of Swedish





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history during these tumultuous times. It is a very welcome supplement to the more scholarly histories written about this period. It is life as seen through the eyes of a fairly average Swede who is drawn into these events with the major actors on this historic stage by the chance circumstances which befall him.

Dennis L. Johnson

Medals of Honor

Årans medalj (Medals of Honor), by K-G Olin, hardcover, 204 p., ill., ISBN 978-952-9600-20-5. More information: olin@multi.fi

Well-known immigration author and researcher K-G Olin of Jakobstad,

Finland, found a gap in the literature about Finlanders as recipients of the U.S. Medal of Honor, and made that the subject of his 15th book about Finlanders in America. This book is in Swedish, but of interest for many still.

The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded by the United States government. It is bestowed on members of the United States armed forces who distinguish themselves "conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his or her life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States." Due to the nature of its criteria, it is often awarded posthumously (more than half have been since 1941.

K-G Olin has studied the list of recipients and found six men with a background from Finland, of which at least five were Swede-Finns. A problem was that some of the older ones were described as being from Russia, as Finland was a grand duchy (*storfurstendöme*) of Russia until the liberation in 1918.

The recipients from Finland were Axel Leonard Sundqvist of Jakobstad, Johannes S. Andersson from Björköby, Emil Tötterman from Degerby, Uno Henrik Toivonen Hendrickson from Björneborg, Axel Westermarck from Borgå, Nick Erickson from Hammarland, and John Eglit with an unknown background.

In this book K-G Olin also tells a lot about the conflicts that these men took part in, mainly the Spanish-American War, the Philippine-American War, and the Boxer Rebellion in China.

In his previous works K-G Olin has written about New Sweden in Delaware, he has written three books about the Finlanders in Alaska during the Russian time, about miners in the Rocky Mountains, immigrants to Argentina and South Africa, and much more.

The web site for K-G Olin is found on page 38.

Elisabeth Thorsell

New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)

In the July 2010 issue of *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* Kevin Proescholdt has an interesting article about "Unraveling the Mystery of August Brodin," in which he describes in good detail how he was able to identify a man of which he only knew his address in Minneapolis in 1945. Step by step we can follow his research, and maybe this can help others to locate information on 1900s people, awaiting the 1940 U.S. Census, which will be released in 436 days (as I write), or 1 April 2012.

In *Family Tree Magazine* for January 2011 there are a set of research suggestions, one for each month of the year. They have many good tips on how to become a better researcher. The tips work fine for Swedish research too, mostly. One of the subjects is "How to find your ancestors' U.S. arrival records?" and it has a Swedish example.

The National Archives in Washington, D.C., publishes a very nice magazine, *Prologue*. This magazine brings readers stories based on the rich holdings and programs of the National Archives across the nation – from Washington, DC, to the regional archives and the Presidential libraries. There are very many good articles on a great number of subjects, and even a special link to articles of special interest to genealogists, like "The Forgotten Federal Census of 1885 - An "extra" census helps researchers find information that may not be found anywhere else," (Fall 2008), or "'Any woman who is now or may hereafter be married . . .': Women and Naturalization, ca. 1802–1940 – An examination of why women are not represented in early naturalization records, (Summer 1998)." Another interesting article is probably "De Smet, Dakota Territory, Little Town in the National Archives – Finding records of Laura Ingalls Wilder's family in the National Archives, (Winter 2003)."

Link to Prologue is on p. 38.