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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.

Minneapolis – a Swedish city

Snoose Boulevard and the Golden Mile, *Swedish Immigrant Life in Minneapolis in the Early 1900s*, by Ebbe Westergren, Kalmar Läns Museum, Sweden, 2006, 62 pp, softcover, illustrated, American Swedish Institute, Minneapolis, \$18.95 plus shipping.

By the end of the 19th century, Minneapolis, Minnesota, was one of the most rapidly growing cities in the U.S. New immigrants arrived every day, many directly from Sweden. Other Swedes moved into the city from the upper Midwest farms where they or their parents had settled in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Minneapolis had become known by that time as the “Mill City,” for the many flour mills that had grown rapidly around St. Anthony Falls on the upper Mississippi, miles above where it was joined by the Minnesota River near St. Paul. Manufacturing to support both agriculture and newly evolving industry were growing rapidly, offering many jobs for new arrivals from overseas and from the surrounding rural areas.

Ebbe Westergren in this brief but engaging book has chosen to focus on the life of Swedish immigrants in Minneapolis in the first decade of the 20th century, or the years 1905-1910. He highlights two contrasting areas of the city: “Snoose Boulevard,” and “The Golden Mile.” The former was the arrival point for new immigrants seeking jobs and a place to live in this

growing city, the latter was the early locale of those who had prospered in industry, milling, business, and manufacturing. The book was a joint project of the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis and the Kalmar Läns Museum in Kalmar, Sweden, and was assisted by the Malmberg Fellowship Program of the American Swedish Institute. The author, director of the Education Department, *Alla Tidens Historia*, at the Kalmar Läns Museum, studied at the Institute in October of 2005.

After a brief summary describing Minneapolis at the beginning of the 20th century, the author first describes the settlements of Swedes in Minneapolis and St. Paul, including several locations. Among these were “Swede Hollow” and Payne Avenue in St. Paul, Cedar/Riverside (Snoose Boulevard) in Minneapolis, and other locations in South Minneapolis, Northeast Minneapolis, and Camden.

The next section contrasts life in these areas with the life of the much more affluent on Park Avenue at the same time. Among those who built mansions on Park Avenue not far from downtown was Swan Turnblad, who arrived with his family in 1868 at the age of eight years, in Vasa, Minnesota. (He was born on Oct. 7, 1860, in Tubbemåla, Vislanda parish, in Småland. His parents were Olof Månsson and Ingegerd Månsdotter. They changed their name in America to Turnblad, and Sven Johan Olofsson became Swan Turnblad). When Swan was 18, he came to Minneapolis to work as a typesetter for two Swedish American newspapers. He became the manager, then the owner, of the *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*

in 1886. By 1903 he had bought land on Park Avenue and by 1908 his mansion was completed.

After describing the life of Swan Turnblad and family on Park Avenue, the author turns to a description of a Swedish immigrant family near Snoose Boulevard. This family consisted of Helga Kronblad, age 42, and her three teenage daughters, Anna, Hedvig, and Sigrid. They came from Långasjö parish in Småland. Her husband had earlier come to Minneapolis in 1897 to stay with Helga’s relatives, but by 1905 when Helga and her daughters arrived, he had disappeared. Helga raised her daughters in the Cedar/Riverside area. Two later married and moved to South Minneapolis (Hedvig died of consumption in 1913, and Helga died of cancer in 1923). The difficult times encountered by this immigrant family are used by the author to contrast with the success of Swan Turnblad on Park Avenue, as chronicled in the previous chapter.

The section on Swan Turnblad describes his career with the newspaper *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*, which had grown to a circulation in excess of 50,000 in the years from 1900 to 1917, just before World War I. It was then described as “America’s largest Swedish language newspaper.” The paper continued publication until 1940 under Lillian Turnblad, Swan’s only daughter. Turnblad was an innovative entrepreneur and a strict employer, also very active in the Minneapolis cultural and social community. His wife Christina died in 1929, and Swan died in 1933. Their daughter Lillian never married and died in 1943.

A section on the Turnblad mansion



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describes its design and construction, and the life of the Turnblad family at the mansion. In 1929, after Christina Turnblad's death, it was donated to a newly formed organization dedicated to Swedish art, literature, and science, that later became the American Swedish Institute. The Institute has maintained the mansion as its home, museum, and social center to the present day. Plans are now under way for a major expansion of this center of Swedish American life in Minneapolis.

A final chapter describes what it was like to be a kid in the city in the early 1900s, both in the poorer neighborhoods and on Park Avenue. The book is well illustrated with numerous historic photographs of the times and places described. Recent color photos illustrate the Turnblad Mansion today, and others in black and white show the construction and the setting on Park Avenue. This book offers many fine glimpses of the Swedish American experience in early 20th century Minneapolis and adds to the literature about the Swedish immigrant experience in that part of the United States.

Endnote:

This reviewer lived in Minneapolis from 1941 through 1959 as a teenager and college student, and I am very familiar with the places described. I lived in South Minneapolis and on Lowry Hill, commuted to the University of Minnesota where I often passed through and parked by the river near Snoose Boulevard, by then a run-down shabby area where few if any Swedes remained. I even worked for a summer in an architect's

office very close to the American Swedish Institute, in another mansion that had been taken over as an architect's office. By the 1950's, the wealthy had moved on to South Minneapolis, Edina, and Minnetonka, and Park Avenue had become, with Portland Avenue, paired one-way streets in a major traffic corridor into and out of the center of the city. Most Park Avenue mansions had been taken over by institutions, or demolished. Minneapolis was beginning to build its first freeways, and the first indoor shopping mall in the U.S. had just been built in Edina. Many descendants of the Swedish immigrants of the times of Swan Turnblad and Helga Kronblad had prospered, and now had their own mansions and large homes on Mt. Curve Avenue, around the lakes, and in the growing suburbs.

Dennis L. Johnson

Railroads and railroad workers

Railroading and Labor Migration, Class and Ethnicity in Expanding Capitalism in Northern Minnesota, the 1880's to the mid 1920's, by Jimmy Engren, Växjö University Press, 2007, 433 pages, softcover, 141 SEK (about \$21.00) plus shipping, or available online.

Two Harbors, Minnesota, is a small town on the North Shore of Lake Superior, about thirty-five miles northeast of Duluth. Originally called Agate Bay, the town was incorporated as a village in 1888, mainly to serve a number of logging camps in the area. At the time, it could only be reached by boat until a road was built about 1900 to allow

stagecoach transportation from Duluth. It had earlier developed a "Whiskey Row" of some 22 saloons, dance halls, and brothels on Main Street, wiped out by a fire in 1885 and later rebuilt. It had an early reputation as a rough town with many lumberjacks, drifters, and miners, but later became populated by more settled families. By 1901, a high school was built, and by 1910, a library, plus a number of churches and social clubs. The population of Two Harbors in 1900 was 3,300 people, and by 1910, nearly 5,000.

Today, the town of Two Harbors has a population of about 3,600 and serves a larger surrounding population in southern Cook County. It has become more oriented toward servicing the recreational, resort, and lake home population of the area, and now has little if any industry. It is the terminus of a scenic railway from Duluth along the North Shore, and has several nearby state parks, campgrounds, hiking and snowmobile trails, and scenic areas. In 1902, five local men founded a company in Two Harbors to use a local mineral, thought to be corundum, to be used to make sandpaper. It was soon found not to be corundum, and the company was moved to Duluth and later to St. Paul, MN. But Two Harbors is remembered as the original home of the now global corporation, Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing (3M Co.). Today the area has almost no industry or railroad employment.

By the 1880's, the logging activity in Lake County was winding down as the prime forests were depleted. The men employed in logging either moved on west or sought jobs elsewhere, although a few remained in the area as farmers or settlers. Land was mostly unsuitable for farming, however, but iron ore had been discovered along the Mesabi Range from Grand Rapids to Ely. The Vermilion Range, further east, also had good



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prospects for mining, and the nearest port to that range was Agate Bay, or Two Harbors. By 1882, interests from Philadelphia in the East led by one Charlemagne Tower, began the construction of a railroad from Two Harbors to the Vermilion Range, to bring iron ore from the mines to Lake Superior, there to be loaded and shipped to eastern steel towns mainly on Lake Erie. The labor force needed to build and run this railroad, and operate the coal docks, resulted in a large influx of people into the Two Harbors area. Many of these new jobs fell to Swedish, Finnish, Irish, German, and other new immigrants from Europe.

Jimmy Engren, the author of **Railroad and Labor Migration**, has chosen the city of Two Harbors and this time period of the development of the town to examine the conditions at that time of class and ethnicity in Northern Minnesota. This book was written as a doctoral thesis for Växjö University, to qualify Engren to receive his Doctoral Degree in Humanities and Social Sciences from that university, and he is now on the faculty there in the School of Humanities. As with most theses of this type, an academic format is followed including an introduction, a review of previous studies, an outline of the methodology used, his analysis of several aspects of conditions during the time period studied, and a summary of his conclusions. All statements are well footnoted and documented, with a long bibliography of both English and Swedish sources. The book is in English, and the author has good command of the language.

It is clear from the introduction on, that the author has entered into his study with the mindset of a Socialist, using words not commonly found in American discourse or newspapers today. There is frequent reference to the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, class struggle, the hegemony of the capitalists, and the exploitation of the working class. These terms are generally unfamiliar to American ears now, most of that discourse is behind us. The author appears to be seeking out examples of discrimination against the newly arrived Swedish and other laborers, and evidence of the domination and control of the workers by the eastern capitalists. He does not see this period as many Americans and even the immigrant laborers themselves often saw it. That is: a period of opportunity to establish themselves in their new land, earn a decent wage, and a chance to advance themselves to become a part of the growth of America. These Swedes and others saw little opportunity for themselves in their homeland and had voted with their feet to enter the "Golden Door."

Beginning in the 1880's, when opening up the Iron Range to development required many skilled and unskilled laborers, many immigrants and others were attracted to the area with the prospect of jobs. Opportunities in farming had lessened with the homesteading of most good land in the region; work in the mines, forests, and railroads were the prospect for young, single immigrants with few appropriate skills. When the "Capitalists" began to invest in the building of the railroad, the docks, and the mines, their first need was for capable trained surveyors, supervisors, operating engineers, and other skilled trades. These were only available by the use of mostly experienced and assimilated Anglo-Saxon people from the eastern U.S. who had experience with this kind of work.

It fell to the new immigrants from Scandinavia and elsewhere, without these special skills, to provide the labor force to do the hard but unskilled work, since they had not yet mastered the language or the skills needed for technical, managerial, or supervisory work. This may be called discrimination, but it made sense and has been the pattern for every new immigrant group in the U.S. If this is discrimination, so be it, but all ethnic groups began in this way and they then continued to advance themselves and their children up the social and income ladders that existed and still exist in America. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of these workers are now often found in the ranks of the universities, the professions, and in prominent positions in business, industry, and government. It is not a static, closed class system as it was, and often still is, in many other nations.

The first two decades of the 20th century were perhaps the apogee of Socialist thinking in the U.S. In Two Harbors, as Engren points out, there were many Socialist clubs and societies and even a Socialist newspaper during that period. Ideas from the old world permeated many workers' movements in the U.S. in the period leading up to World War I, and chapters of the IWW and other radical groups proliferated, based on the Marxist and Leninist ideas then popular in Europe. The Swedes were no exception, and took part heavily in these movements in Two Harbors and elsewhere. (See the review of **On the Left in America** about Henry Bengtson, a Swedish Socialist in Chicago during this period, published in the SAG Journal, in June 2005, Vol. XXV).

According to Engren, the rise of socialism in this and other areas in the U.S. was to change greatly by 1915 and the years following, due to the Great War in Europe, World War I. Most of the Socialists strongly op-



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posed U.S. entry into this war. By the time the U.S. entered in 1917, nationalist and patriotic feelings overcame most of the Socialist movement, and these groups lowered their visibility. The groups and the newspaper changed their names to remove the words Socialist from sight. By the 1920's, most of the Swedes had advanced in their skills, economic status, and many had entered the ranks of management. As they raised their families in the area, their adult children entered the work force and further advanced the assimilation of the Swedish, as well as other immigrant, populations. The Socialist movement declined after the war, and Swedish-American advancements continued as newer immigrants, many from Eastern Europe, entered the work force in the area.

During this period, the employers also evolved in adding many benefits for their workers, and invested by new labor saving methods and equipment to ease the hard labor, increase productivity, and reduce accidents and injuries among workers. With higher wages, more skilled jobs, and an increase in prosperity in the area, the differences in classes began to dissolve, or to be minimized. News of the results of radical Socialism in Russia also helped reduce the appetite for such extreme ideas in America, at least until the Great Depression of the 1930's.

Two Harbors and the Iron Range remained a stronghold of unions, however, and are to this day. Union organizing, labor negotiations with employers, and sometimes strikes did much to improve the lot of workers during this period. The workers in

the mines, railroads, and factories of Minnesota found much in common with the farmers in the state and the Socialist sentiments which remained found common cause in the founding of a political coalition from 1920 through the Depression and beyond. By 1944, these groups officially merged to become the Minnesota DFL (Democrat-Farmer-Labor) Party and that name continues as the name of the Democratic Party in Minnesota. These roots have had a major influence on politics in Minnesota, which frequently elects Democratic governors, senators, and congressmen, and leans left in most

national elections. Two Harbors and the Iron Range remain one of the strongest Democratic regions of the state.

Railroading and Labor Migration offers an intensively detailed look at the time period of 1880 through 1920 in the development of labor relations and the role of Swedish and other immigrants in the development of the Two Harbors area during this period. It is a good resource for students of labor relations and politics during that period in Minnesota history. The book also makes evident the significant differences in the points of view about this

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a search for the Växjö University Press.

Dennis L. Johnson

A colonial diary

Dagbok från New Jersey 1770–86, by Nils Collin. Introduction and edited by Robert Murray. Proprius Förlag, Stockholm, 1988, 160 pages.

Also English translation: *The Journal and Biography of Nicholas Collin 1746-1831*. The Journal Translated from the Original Swedish Manuscript by Amandus Johnson. With an Introduction by Frank H. Stewart. Philadelphia, The New Jersey Society of Pennsylvania, 1936.

Nils, also Nicholas, Collin was born 1746 in Funbo in Uppland, not far from Uppsala, where he later studied at the university, and in 1768 was ordained. In 1769 he got on a boat for England, where he stayed for a

year before proceeding in 1770 to Philadelphia, where he started his career at Gloria Dei, but soon was put in charge of the congregation at Racoon. He stayed until 1786, when he moved back to Philadelphia. He died there in 1831, just a few years before the new influx of Swedish immigrants started.

His diary covers the years in Racoon and he tells a lot about the many journeys he had to do by horse-back to outlying farms, where children were born, and people wanted communion before they died. There was always trouble in getting the people to give him his salary. He complains a lot about how other denominations lure “his” people to their churches, and how their many preachers were just ruffians. He spent much money and energy to keep his church building in good order, with help from “the best” Swedes, as he calls them. This is quite a fascinating book, giving a view of what remained of New Sweden!

Elisabeth Thorsell

period among Americans, immigrants, and Swedish scholars in examining labor relations during this period. Engren describes the period and the conditions experienced well, but clearly from the perspective of a person trained in Socialist ideas and thinking. It would have been well if Engren had traced more of these Swedish American immigrant families to examine how these families fared over several succeeding generations.

For the lay reader interested in the history of the area, and how Swedish Americans took part in its development, it is probably sufficient to read Chapter 10 only, which summarizes the book and the author’s findings very concisely. The book is available online at the Växjö web site; just do

New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)

Google Your Family Tree, by Dan Lynch, and published by FamilyLink.com, Inc. is a 340 page-book on how to use Google to find information on the ancestors on the web, and not have to go through 419,000 results before you find something relevant. I could not find this book at Amazon, but had read enthusiastic reviews, so when I found that it could be bought from www.avotaynu.com for **\$34.95 + postage**, I sent for it, and am reading it right now. So far I think it will be very helpful in tracking my elusive Swedes. The search techniques in the book will help a lot on other searches too, not just looking for ancestors.

The *Tidningen*, published by the *Swedish Genealogical Society of Minnesota* (SGSM) just came with its first issue for 2009. In this issue there is a long and factfilled article by John Winblad von Walter about the estate of the burghers (*borgarståndet*) which was one of the four estates represented in the Swedish Diet (*riksdag*) until 1866, the others were the nobles (*ridderskapet och adeln*), the clergy (*prästeståndet*) and the farmers (*bondeståndet*). This would be good reading for anyone with town-living ancestors, be they merchants or shoemakers.

In the October 2009 issue of the *Swedish American Historical Society Quarterly* there is an interesting article by Anita Olson Gustafson, associate professor of history at Presbyterian College in Clinton, SC. The title is ‘“We Hope to be Able to Do Some Good”; Swedish-American Women’s Organizations in Chicago’. As you know Chicago was by 1900 the second largest city in numbers of Swedes, only Stockholm had more Swedes, even Göteborg had fewer than Chicago. In 1910 there lived some 63,000 Swedes in Chicago and that means some 30,000 women, at least, many with lots of ideas how to help build new connections and find new friends in a foreign country. They started all kinds of Woman’s Missionary Society, the Augustana Hospital Auxillary, the Linnea Aid Society, to just name a few. The first generations of American-born Swedish women continued this, an example is the American Daughters of Sweden, which is now into the fifth generation, and still alive. This is a good read!