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## Book Reviews

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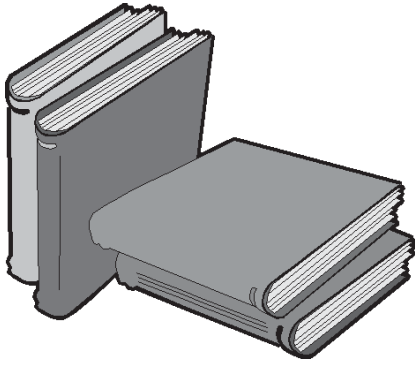
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# Book Reviews

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 Monitor Man

*The Man Who Made the Monitor: A Biography of John Ericsson, Naval Engineer*, by Olav Thulesius, McFarland & Co., Jefferson, North Carolina, 2007, Softcover, ill., 255 pp., Amazon.com, \$35.00

“He was the greatest man of Swedish blood who ever came to the U.S.” These were the words of H. M. King Gustav VI Adolf when he was Crown Prince, speaking at the unveiling of the John Ericsson Memorial in 1925 in Washington, D.C. Eighty-two years later, few historians would argue with this statement. Many very prominent or highly celebrated Swedes came to this country before or since, but none have had the overall impact on the modern world of this great inventor and engineer.

This new book by Olav Thulesius is not the first biography of John Ericsson (1803-1889), but offers a fresh new look at the man, his work, his personal life, and numerous interesting anecdotes about this enormously creative man. The author is a former professor at Indiana University, the University of Trondheim in Norway, and Kuwait University. Thulesius now divides his time between the U.S. and Sweden. He is the author of several other biographies, including that of Harriet Beecher Stowe (2001), Thomas Edison (1997), and Nicholas Culpeper (1992).

John Ericsson was born July 31, 1803, in Långbanshyttan, Färnebo

(Värmland), Sweden, where his father worked as a mine supervisor and later as a director of blasting during the excavations for the Göta Canal. Ericsson and his brother Nils showed extraordinary skills at an early age. At the age of fourteen, Ericsson was working independently as a surveyor although barely tall enough to reach the instruments used. After a period of service in the Swedish Army as a lieutenant doing survey work and tinkering with his inventions in his spare time, these interests led him to resign from the army and move to England in 1826. A love affair with Carolina Lillieskiöld and the birth of a son, Hjalmar Elworth, in 1824 may have also had a part in this decision, since Carolina’s father fiercely opposed their marriage.

Ericsson remained in London from 1826 through 1839, working on several inventions including a steam engine, early experiments with the screw propeller, and other projects. His steam locomotive, the *Novelty*, narrowly missed beating Watt’s locomotive, the *Rocket*, in a race. Income was always a problem, and he was jailed for nine months in a debtors’ prison in 1832. By 1836, he had received a British patent for his screw propeller and a ship was built which utilized this means of propulsion. Another vessel, the *Stockton*, was launched in 1838 and became the first ship to cross the Atlantic using the screw propeller. While this was going on, Ericsson also found time to marry Amelia Jane Byam in London.

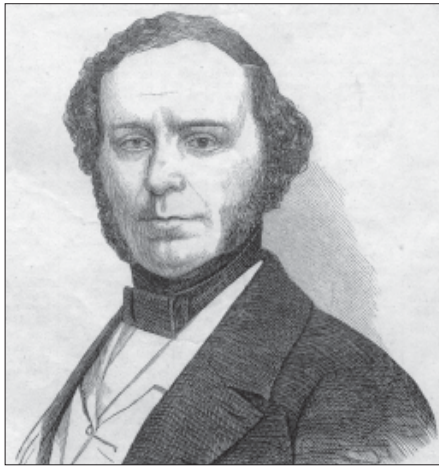
His ideas were not well received in London, however, and a friend, Captain Robert Stockton for whom

the 1838 ship was named, persuaded Ericsson to come to the U.S. to pursue his patent for the screw propeller and other inventions. In 1839, Ericsson moved to New York City with his bride, Amelia. Amelia soon found America not to her liking and she returned to London after a few months. She was to visit Ericsson one more time in New York, for less than a year in 1842, but they were not to see each other again after that.

Ericsson continued with his experiments and efforts to promote the screw propeller and other of his inventions. The book describes in detail the years in New York and his designs for ironclad ships with engines below the water line, his development of a caloric engine, and the development of a caloric-engined ship named the *Ericsson*. The author also mentions Ericsson’s becoming a U.S. citizen in 1848, a meeting with Alfred Nobel and with Jenny Lind in 1850, and the development of plans for armored vessels in the next decade. A high point in his career came when he was asked to design an armored ship in 1861 which became the USS *Monitor*. This ship made history when it defeated a confederate armored ship, the *Virginia* (formerly the *Merrimac*) in a small but world-shaking naval encounter in Hampton Roads, Virginia, on May 15, 1862.

After the Civil War, Ericsson remained in New York, working in his laboratory on the top floor of his house at 36 Beach Street, Manhattan, usually with only a single assistant. He continued experiments with the design of armored warships, torpedo technology, and the *Destroy-*

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John Ericsson. From the *Illustrerad Tidning*, Stockholm, 1862.

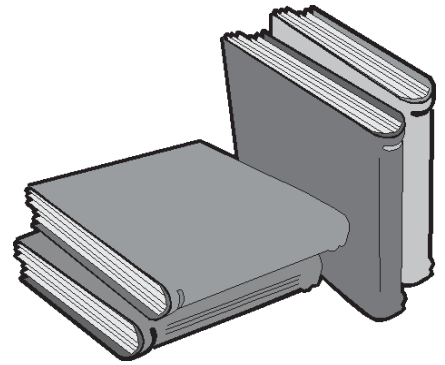
er, an advanced torpedo boat, a solar engine, and other projects. In 1876, he prepared *Contributions to the U.S. Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia*, and also received a visit from his son, Hjalmar Elworth, who was to die in 1887. John Ericsson received many honors in his lifetime and in the years following his death in 1889 at the age of 86. He was elected to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in 1850, The Royal Swedish Academy of War Sciences in 1852, and was given an honorary doctorate from Lund University in 1868. Monuments in his honor have been erected on the mall in Washington, D.C., Battery Park in New York City, at Nybroplan in Stockholm, at Kungshuset in Gothenburg, and the John Ericsson Fountain in the Fairmount Park, Philadelphia. Three ships of the U.S. Navy were named after John Ericsson including a torpedo boat (1897-1912), a destroyer (1915-1922), and another destroyer (1941-1946).

The American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia has a valuable collection of Ericsson memorabilia and a sizable archive of his correspondence. The John Ericsson Room, designed by Martin Hedmark in 1931 in an Art Deco style, has an exhibit and wall murals dedicated to the inventor's memory, including two

scenes by Swedish artist Olle Hjortzberg showing the great battle at Hampton Roads, and also Ericsson presenting his design for the *Monitor* to President Lincoln and the war cabinet. A second gallery has many of Ericsson's models of solar engines on display together with other related exhibits. The Ericsson collection catalog lists some 250 additional items including prints, photos, correspondence, lithographs, models, slides, paintings, medals, and other mementos.

The John Ericsson Society of New York was founded in 1907 to honor and perpetuate the memory of John Ericsson and the profession of engineering. The group promotes historic research and holds events annually to commemorate his life. On 9 March a Monitor Day and Annual Dinner is celebrated, and every 31 July the inventor's birthday is observed at the John Ericsson Statue in Battery Park, as well as in Filipstad. On 23 November, a dinner marks the date of John Ericsson's arrival in the U.S.

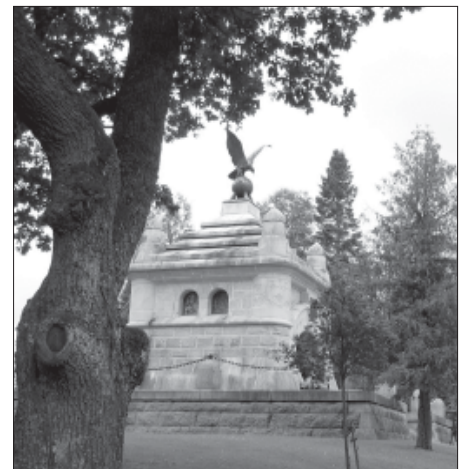
While the defeat of the *Virginia* by John Ericsson's ironclad, the *Monitor*, is the event for which John Ericsson is most remembered in the public mind, his impact on the modern world is far greater than this one naval battle. This battle, and the propeller-driven armored warships later designed by Ericsson, spelled the end of the age of sailing ships made of wood. Armored warships using rotating gun turrets like the *Monitor* made all wooden ships vulnerable and obsolete, changing naval warfare forever. Ericsson's invention of the screw propeller allowed the harnessing of steam engines to oceangoing ships and revolutionized sea travel and transport. Until his invention, the first steamers only had stern or side paddle wheels, unsuitable for ocean travel and taking up valuable space above the water line. Today, from the smallest outboard motor on small boats to the



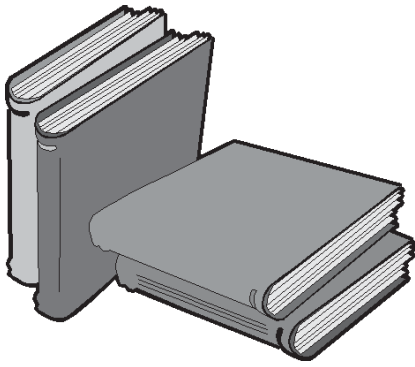
greatest giant tankers, all are driven by one or more screw propellers, from as little as eight inches in diameter to as large as 24 feet. All are descended from the experiments of John Ericsson. Diesel, turbine, and even nuclear power drives these ships, but all use the screw propeller.

Thulesius's new biography of John Ericsson spells out in detail the experiments, the successes and the setbacks to this great Swedish-American's career. The author includes not only the technical realm of his inventions, but provides much information about Ericsson's personal life, his personality, his involvements with his contemporaries, his romantic life, and his contempt for those who did not understand his work. This is surely must reading for all who have an interest in Swedish-Americans, the creative genius of inventors, engineering technology, and world history.

Dennis L. Johnson



John Ericsson's Mausoleum in Filipstad, Sweden.



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## A Child Immigrant

*At Home in a New Land*, by Joan Sandin. HarperCollins, 2007. Hardcover, 64 pages, ISBN 978-0-06-058077-3. For ages 4-8. \$15.99.

*At Home in a New Land*, written and illustrated by Joan Sandin, settles young Swedish immigrant Carl Erik and his family in their new home in Minnesota. The book concludes the story begun in *The Long Way to a New Land* (1981) and continued in *The Long Way Westward* (1989). (See March 2006 SAG for a discussion of these and other children's books about immigration.)

As the story opens, Carl Erik wakes up in his uncle and aunt's cabin. "It was not a dream. The long, hard journey from Sweden was really over." In six short episodes, the boy, his little brother, and his parents start to make a home in the woods of Minnesota. Both in words and pictures, Sandin is a masterful storyteller. She captures the immigrant experience through the eyes of a young boy, making common, oft-told experiences seem fresh and new.

The story told in *At Home in a New Land* and the two earlier books is nothing less than an immigrant saga for young readers. The challenges that Carl Erik and his family face – learning English, interacting with their Native American neighbors, and surviving while the men go away for months to work at a logging camp – are all deftly conjured up. The story takes the family from summer days

through a snowy Christmas, when beloved old traditions blend with delightful new ones. Sandin excels at describing the everyday details of life: "The cabin smelled of pine branches, freshly baked wheat bread, rice pudding, and cinnamon. 'It smells like Swedish Christmas,' Mamma sighed."

At the beginning of the book, four Swedish words that will appear in the dialogue are defined, with a pronunciation guide. This is a marvelous feature for young readers who are just getting comfortable reading "real books." They will have fun learning some words in Carl Erik's language, too.

Sandin has dedicated her book to "all immigrants past and present. May they feel at home in their new land." This historically accurate tale – and its two predecessors – are highly recommended for introducing young readers and their families to the Swedish immigrant experience.

*At Home in a New Land* is available through Amazon.com and other online booksellers, or through bookstores with a good selection of new titles for children.

Erica Olsen

## Another Life

*The Healing House, A Memoir*, by Elaine Ostergren Adams, Publish America, Baltimore, MD, 2007, Softcover, Ill., 150 pages, Amazon.com, \$19.95 plus shipping.

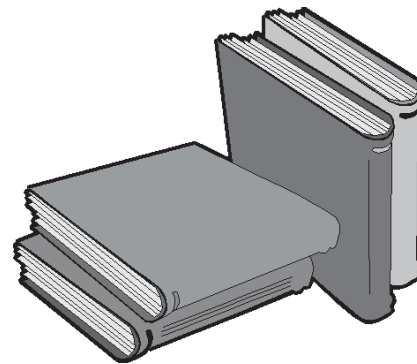
*The Healing House* is the personal recollection of a woman who grew up in Oakland, CA, in the 1930's and her visits to the farm of her grandfather each summer in northern Idaho. As a sickly child who suffered in turn from tuberculosis, pneumatic fever, and pneumonia, her parents believed that only fresh air in the country would return her to good health. For

about two months in July and August, she would travel with her mother to Idaho to her Swedish-born grandparents' farm every year from 1929 through 1940, missing only two years (1933 and 1934) during that time.

Elaine Ostergren had four Swedish grandparents, all of whom had come to the U.S. about 1890 and met in a boardinghouse in Spokane, Washington territory, a community in what is now eastern Washington State near the Idaho border. Her mother's parents, Jacob Thunborg and Christina Nelson (Nilsdotter), were married in November, 1890, near Spokane and, by 1892, had settled across the Idaho border on the east shore of Hayden Lake only 45 miles or so from Spokane, to farm. In a few years they had five children, including Elaine Ostergren's mother, their third child, Ruby. Their homestead was then in a remote area of northern Idaho on a beautiful lake, and they began to farm some 146 acres. Within a few years they had a self-sustaining farm, livestock, and had established crops and orchards. After an initial one-room log cabin, Jacob then built a barn and then a larger farmhouse in several stages. He also built a one-room schoolhouse for his and his new neighbors' children.

By 1925, when the author was born, her mother Ruby had married Carl Ostergren and settled in Oakland, California, where Carl worked for the railroad. This same year, her grandfather Thunborg at Hayden Lake died, her grandmother Christina was widowed, and the farm was now being run by the next generation including Elaine's Uncle Frank, his wife Frances, her Aunt Marie. Grandmother Thunborg lived on at the farm another twenty-five years and passed away at the age of 91 in 1950. Eventually, by about 1960, this second generation, too, became too old to farm and the land was sold to

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developers in what was now fast becoming a popular resort and vacation home locale. The old farmhouse, as a unique example of hand-built construction in the Swedish style, was then entered on the National Register of Historic Places.

This memoir is not, however, so much the story of these early Swedish pioneers as it is the recollections of a young girl who grew up through the Depression and World War II, and her fond memories of summers spent at the distant farmhouse of her grandmother and other relatives who either lived there, or came to visit the farm each summer. The title, *The Healing House*, was chosen because of the effect these summer visits had on Elaine Ostergren, transforming her from a sickly young girl into a mature, healthy woman who married Clifford Adams in 1945 and went on to a distinguished writing career and long life as an author, wife, and mother. She has returned several times over the years to *The Healing House*, and in 1994 Elaine traveled to Sweden to meet many cousins and other descendants of her grandparents who had remained in Sweden.

The book is organized into chapters which describe in turn her first trip to the Thunborg farm, later trips year by year, and then several chapters relating various experiences as part of her visits and in growing up in the 1930's. An epilogue brings the reader up to date on what has happened in her life since her days at the Thunborg farm and concludes with a recipe for butterchip candy, an obviously favorite family treat.

Fascinating to me as a member of almost the same generation, being only a few years younger than the author, were the ways in which she wove in descriptions of farm life during that period, with no electricity, no running water or indoor toilets, and few modern comforts or conveniences to be found at the farm.

Also fascinating was her memories of the great Depression when I, too, was a youngster, with fathers who were either unemployed or reduced to working only three days a week, shortages of food, and making do on very little money. Traveling by train between Oakland and Spokane was vividly described, memories of the days when automobiles were owned by very few and train travel was the norm for most people, if they traveled at all. The nation entering into the war in 1941 and the attack on Pearl Harbor are also a part of my own memories and had a deep impact on all of us who remember that time.

Daily life at the farm and the experiences of a young girl from the city at *The Healing House* during these summers, however, are the most moving and enriching parts of this book, a confection to read for those of her generation and a glimpse of another time and place for young people now growing up and coming of age in an entirely different world. Childhood diseases are now mostly a distant memory in the age of antibiotics, vaccinations, and prevention of many common illnesses of the 1930's. But for many, these were fun times in spite of hardships and bring back many fond memories of family gatherings, travel, and special moments such as those so richly described.

Dennis L. Johnson

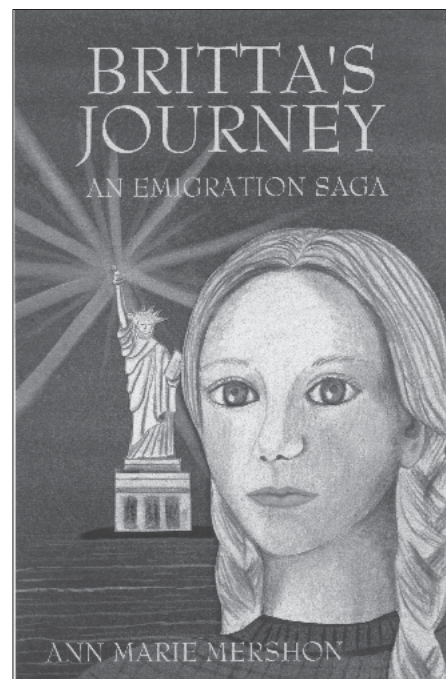
## Another Child Immigrant

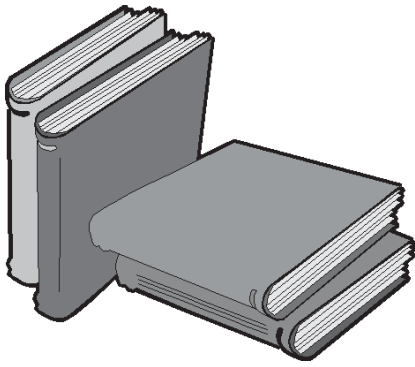
***Britta's Journey, An Emigration Saga*** by Ann Marie Mershon, Singing River Publications, Inc., Ely, MN, 2004, 210 pp., Ill., softcover, Amazon.com, \$12.00 plus shipping.

If you, as I, have teenage granddaughters now in 2007, you know

how difficult it is to get this young generation to sit down and read a book. A history book of a time a little over one hundred years ago is even more difficult to persuade a young girl to read. It seems their lives center around TV, the Internet, text messaging, a personal cell phone, and their social relationships with their peers. Yet, it is worth a try in the case of *Britta's Journey*.

This little paperback is a fictional account of the journey of a young girl traveling with her mother, brothers, and a sister to America in the year 1903. They are traveling to meet their father, who has preceded them by four years, in New York City. Their ultimate destination is a homestead in northern Minnesota. Johan Eric and Maria Jacobson, from the Swedish-speaking village of Kvevlax in Finland, have decided to immigrate to America to escape poverty. They





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had already lost three of their children to illness, and were determined to find a better life in Minnesota for the rest of their family. Traveling with Britta were her mother Maria, older brother Johan, and the younger twins Arvid and Elsa.

While a work of fiction, this story was inspired by a family history written by a friend, Eleanor Jacobson Stone. The author, Ann Marie Mershon, is an English teacher and outdoor lover living in a wilderness home near Grand Marais in the arrowhead country of Minnesota on the north shore of Lake Superior. The book has a number of fine illustrations drawn by a friend, artist Gail Alden-Henderson, who also lives and has a studio near Grand Marais. The book is historically accurate, although much of the detail in the narrative of the story has been added by the author. The book is geared to be easily readable by young people, although the story is gripping and suspenseful to readers of all ages.

The story centers on Britta and therefore may be more attractive to young girls as an adventure seen through the eyes of a girl, not a boy. Her older brother Johan, 12, is a wanderer and unafraid to explore new places on land or on the ship, but is constantly worrying Britta and her mother by his constant disappearances. His adventurous spirit, however, often comes to the aid of the family, while Britta is more inclined to follow her mother's orders and avoid causing any extra worries. The story is humorous at times and also has an element of tragedy as the journey unfolds.

The family group takes a ship from

the port of Hangö in Finland to Hull, England, where they travel across England to Liverpool to await their ship to America. Coping with unfamiliar people and another language causes many frustrations and delays along the way as the mother struggles to keep the family together and survive on very little money until their ultimate arrival in New York and reunion with their father. A very convincing and realistic picture of travel in the time of the story (1903) is incorporated into the account of their travels. Hazards of travel by train and ship are described: getting lost, finding and making friends to share the journey only to be separated from them by circumstances, the challenges of traveling in steerage and surviving contagious childhood diseases, storms at sea, and other trials are all portrayed vividly and realistically through the eyes of Britta, barely eleven years old. She struggles hard to learn as many English words as possible during her journey and keeps her own homemade dictionary of all the new words she encounters.

In a brief epilogue, the author adds that the Jacobson family on which *Britta's Journey* is based, settled on the North Shore in Minnesota. The Jacobsons went on to further adventures and all three children who survived the journey went on to live long, full, and happy lives. The Jacobsons had four more children after settling on their homestead in northern Minnesota.

The author also encourages her readers to take the time to talk to their older relations, parents, and grandparents about their memories and childhoods. Regrettably, by the time the young are old enough to have a genuine interest in their heritage, the older generations are often no longer living to tell their stories. Elders should try and find the time to write down the essentials of their family history before it is too late.

So if you wish your own daughter or granddaughter to experience the challenges and adventures involved in this immigrant girl's experience of one hundred years ago, try and persuade her to read this book, possibly even by positive reinforcement (bribery) if necessary. It is much briefer and not as formidable to read as Moberg's masterpiece in four volumes on the same subject, yet it will provide your youngster who has Swedish roots with a taste of the experiences of her ancestors in making their way to the new world several generations ago; a difficult journey in a time long before air travel, e-mail, cell phones, computers, automobiles, and other modern devices became commonplace and inexpensive.

Dennis L. Johnson

## A helpful book

*Following the Paper Trail. A Multilingual Translation Guide*, by Jonathan D. Shea and William F. Hoffman. New edition 2007, 241 pages, softcover, published by Avotaynu, Inc. \$29 from [www.avotaynu.com](http://www.avotaynu.com)

This unusual and very helpful book lists documents in 13(!) languages (German, Swedish, French, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Czech, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, and Lithuanian), and gives translations and hints and tips on the different languages and their alphabets. There are 25 pages on Swedish, including "selected vocabulary terms" and "selected first names." The documents are of the type that an immigrant might save after his journey: his immigration contract, a confirmation certificate, a marriage certificate, and others. The translations from Swedish seems to be correct, so hopefully the others are too. A useful book.

Elisabeth Thorsell