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## Book Reviews

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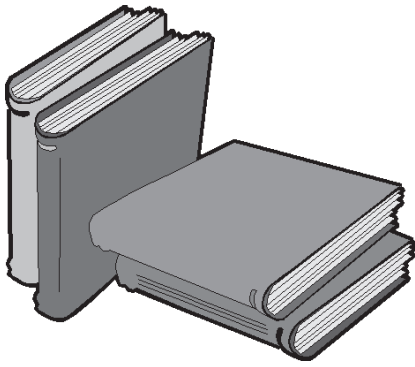
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# Book Reviews

*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 other pasture – greener?

Two sharply contrasting views of Sweden have appeared in two recently published books, the first by a Swedish-American from Minnesota, the second by a Swedish journalist who has lived in Sweden and the U.S., and has traveled the world for five decades covering world events. Both authors are about the age of this reviewer, grew up in the Great Depression, and their memories and experiences extend from those days through World War II, European Recovery, the Cold War, and all subsequent events and wars, to the present day.

### We review, you decide

**The Swedish Secret, *What the United States Can Learn From Sweden's Story***, by Earl Gustafson, Syren Book Company, Minneapolis, 2006, Softcover, 210 pages, Amazon.com, \$11.96 plus shipping.

The title of this recent book is engaging, and naturally caused me to buy a copy to find out what this "Swedish Secret" could be. When reading a new book, I usually look first at the background and brief biography of the author. I can better assess a book if I have a better understanding of where the author is coming from in presenting his views. This information was briefly given in the introduction, supplemented by a quick internet search.

I was taken by the similarities in

background between Earl Gustafson and myself. He is only a few years older than I, his grandparents also emigrated from Sweden in the 1880's and 1890's, and we both grew up in Minnesota. We both served a few years in the military. He attended Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN, where my father also graduated, and we both attended the University of Minnesota. He received his law degree in 1954, the same year I graduated from Minnesota. Our career paths then diverged, however. Gustafson chose law school, worked as an attorney in private practice in his hometown, Duluth, for a few years, served in the Minnesota State Senate from his district for ten years, then became a judge in the Minnesota Tax Court in St. Paul. I chose the profession of architecture and moved to Philadelphia for graduate school. I then pursued my career in the private practice of architecture, and raised my family in that city while maintaining roots and family ties in Minnesota.

Our family lives were also very similar; we both met and married our life companions in college and raised large families, five plus three adopted in Gustafson's case and five children in my own family. We have both visited Sweden several times in recent years and have great admiration for the nation of our own family origins. After reading **The Swedish Secret**, however, I find that I do not agree very much with his recipe of using the Swedish welfare state as a template for change in the United States. I applaud Sweden for its capacity to maintain a strong consensus for the system they have, and to generally support and maintain what

they have without major political conflict. I would not presume to suggest that Swedes make any changes from that which they have chosen in a democratic way. But my own country is a different matter.

In Part I of this book, Gustafson has sketched out a brief history of both Sweden and the U.S. in an orderly fashion, comparing and contrasting their early history, the growth and development of democracy in both nations, industrialization, histories of wars and foreign relations, and recent developments in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In the second part, the author contrasts Sweden and the United States today from a number of perspectives: democratic governance, national health care, wealth distribution, old age security, economic health, family support, taxation, and foreign policy. His final summary describes "Why Sweden Works for Everyone."

In his conclusion, Gustafson writes that the United States must now adopt the Swedish recipe of higher taxes, bigger government, universal government health care, redistribution of income, curtailment of military spending, and withdrawal from intervention in foreign affairs. This, of course, is the position of most American liberals and this book should bring great comfort to readers sharing that point of view. Large numbers of Americans disagree with this formula, however, and are not prepared to accept these positions for the United States. This is what the upcoming 2008 presidential election is all about. This country has by no means arrived at a consensus and there is an enormous partisan divide

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which is now being played out. There is little doubt that Mr. Gustafson and I are on opposite sides of this divide.

In **The Swedish Secret**, the author finds no basis to criticize anything about the Swedish systems and has almost nothing good to say about the systems in the U.S. This despite the many differences between the two countries in their size, demographics, history, international role, government, and many other factors. The U.S. has more than thirty times the population of Sweden, has the most ethnically diverse population in the world, has a federal system of 50 states with widely varying ways of governing from one state to another, and has, by default, come to play a leading role in defending the free democracies of the world against many remaining totalitarian states with territorial ambitions, and in sustaining opposition to the terrorism of Muslim fanatics. People coming to America of any race, color, ethnic background, or religion are, within a very few years, “Americans,” with all the opportunities and obligations that being an American implies. How many other nations can make that claim?

The Swedish secret is no secret at all, but should be viewed as one of the least unsuccessful remaining examples of the world’s century-long flirtation with social collectivism. In most other nations that have tried this, the results have been disastrous. The usual end result has been poverty, a dictatorship with little freedom of speech or opportunity, and in the worst cases, genocide. It is a great tribute to the Swedes that they have been able to sustain their welfare state without great loss to their standard of living, and for many of the reasons described in Gustafson’s Book.

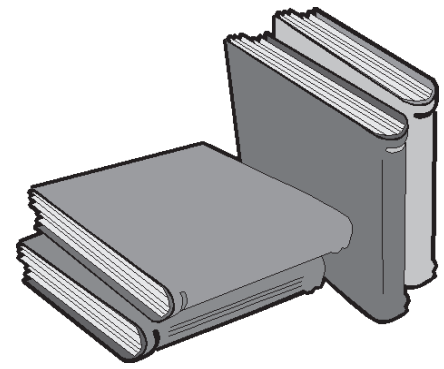
It is not the purpose of this reviewer to debate the matter with the author. Those who see the future of the U.S. in terms of a larger federal

government, more and more generous social welfare systems, higher taxes, income redistribution, increasing regulation, a weaker military, and a withdrawal from an active role on the world stage will find this book highly satisfying. On the other hand those who prefer an open society, freedom of opportunity, invention, reliance on individual enterprise in competitive capitalism, and a military strong enough to protect U.S. and world interests against worldwide threats, will see **The Swedish Secret** as a biased assessment of these two nations as seen through the highly partisan lens of Mr. Gustafson’s personal political views.

**What Happened to Sweden? While America became the only superpower**, by Ulf Nilson, Nordstjernan Förlag, New York, 2007, Softcover, 186 pages.  
Amazon.com, \$11.53 plus shipping.

The author was born in Slöinge, Sweden, a small village on the west coast, and began work as a journalist at the age of 17, and later worked for the newspaper *Expressen* for 32 years. He first came to the US at the age of 30 as a correspondent and covered the world and the many wars for five decades, living in New York, Paris, Stockholm, and many other places. He was fired from *Expressen* in 1995 for his “mildly right political views” but later rehired and has worked for the last four years for that paper as a commentator. He also writes a weekly column for *Nordstjernan*, the oldest surviving Swedish-American newspaper in the U.S., published in New York. He now lives in southern France or on the island of Värmdö, east of Stockholm, and has three daughters living in Sweden.

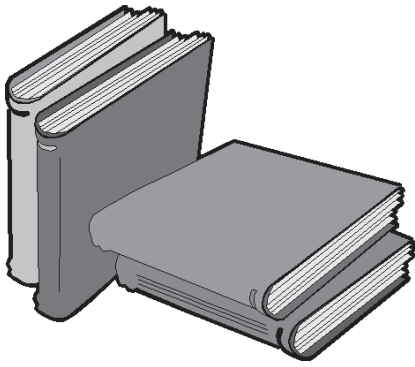
Nilson views the U.S. as his second home country, having lived in New York for 20 years as Sweden’s “Man in America.” The book is a dissident’s



view of Sweden and the author views America as a country “which will ultimately lead itself to victory over difficulties and hardships,” but views Sweden “which he no longer recognizes as his home” much more critically. He admits in his introduction that in contrasting America and Sweden, he has focused in more detail on Sweden, because America is so much better known.

The opening chapters of the book provide a brief review of the history of both nations from the times of Gustav I (Vasa), Sweden’s age of empire and the subsequent long period of neutrality, and the evolution of the welfare state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Later chapters deal with contrasting various developments in the U.S. and in Sweden, such as freedom of religion, the Olof Palme and Richard Nixon years, immigration policy in recent decades, and the recent evolution of social policy in both nations. The most telling chapters are the last two, entitled: *Paralysis vs. action*, and *Where do we stand today?*

In *Paralysis vs. action*, Nilson begins by contrasting Ingvar Carlsson and Ronald Reagan. Carlsson, the competent but humorless, gray and cautious man, a lifetime politician, and Reagan, the bold, sunny optimist, ex-actor, and outside of the realm of conventional wisdom. Carlsson spent his life making excuses for Soviet Communism, but Reagan brought about the collapse of the “evil empire”. It was not only contrasting personalities, but also contrasting systems, that brought about this result. Sweden is a democratic one-party state since 1932 (seven parties, actually, but all committed to the welfare state). The U.S. has two,



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## A girl in New Sweden

**Elin's Amerika**, by Marguerite de Angeli, Third Edition, American Swedish Historical Museum, Philadelphia, republished 2007, 98 pp., softcover, Illustrated, American Swedish Historical Museum, \$15.99 plus postage.

[www.AmericanSwedish.org](http://www.AmericanSwedish.org)

which differ greatly in philosophy and alternate in governing, "winner takes all." Also, Sweden combines the executive and legislative branches, the leading party or coalition choosing the head of state, the prime minister (*statsminister*). This office is filled by the elected legislators, and is not directly voted for by the people. In the U.S., the Chief Executive is popularly elected through the Electoral College and is voted for by the people in our national election. Since 1932, we have had six Democrat and six Republican presidents. Each are individuals, and are not tied to their party as much as in Sweden. They are freer to chart their own course; consequently change in policy is much easier. Sweden is a nation of "No Change."

According to Nilson, when nearly two-thirds of the population either work directly for the government, or are the recipients of most of their livelihood and other benefits, few people are likely to vote for change in the system. In the last 50 years in Sweden, the working age population has increased by about one million people. The numbers employed in the private sector have not increased in that time. The system is heavily dominated by trade unions, much more so than in the U.S., which also adds inertia to the system. Other factors include the "hidden hand" of the Wallenberg interests, the incapacity to fire anybody, great difficulties in assimilating large numbers of very different refugees, and a shrinking and graying native population. Most of all, there exists a national consensus that "life should be arranged for everybody and directed by politicians, backed up by experts."

This book is highly critical of the Swedish system and their political leaders, held in such high esteem by many American liberals. For outsiders, Nilson exposes the darker sides of this flawed utopia for all to see; yet it is the system chosen by the Swedes themselves. Nilson feels that they are not about to change, and Sweden will move through the next century confronting many greatly increasing problems, and playing a smaller, almost irrelevant role in world affairs. Ulf Nilson notes also that people coming to America, legally or illegally, are mostly in search of opportunity. Those coming to Sweden are mostly seeking a place of refuge from war or persecution.

Many revealing statistics comparing the Swedish and U.S. systems are interleaved between chapters and woven into the text. At the end of the book are found lists of all Swedish kings since Gustav I, prime ministers in Sweden after World War I, and a list of all presidents of the United States from George Washington in 1789.

This reviewer suggests that interested readers digest both of these views of Sweden at about the same time in order to evaluate for themselves the greatly contrasting views presented in each. Many may choose to read only one of the books, however, depending on their own view of public policy and their vision of the future of both Sweden and the United States.

Dennis L. Johnson



Marguerite de Angeli, (1889-1987) was a best-selling American author and illustrator of children's books. She wrote and illustrated twenty-eight of her own books and illustrated at least another three dozen more for other authors. Her own books explored the many rich ethnic traditions of life in America for many people, including Polish mine-workers, the Amish, African-Americans, Mennonites, the physically handicapped, nineteenth century Quakers, and many other groups. Her ninth book, published in 1941, was a story about the earliest Swedish settlers in the Delaware Valley, in the colony known as New Sweden, dated to 1638. This settlement, in what is now Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, preceded the arrival of William Penn by many decades.

The author was well-known among educators and others for her insightful and beautifully illustrated children's books and won many awards for her work. These awards included a Newbery Award in 1950, two awards as a Caldecott Honor Book Illustrator in 1945 and in 1955, a 1957 Newbery mention, a 1961 Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, and in 1968, the Regina Medal. Marguerite de Angeli was born Marguerite Lofft in Lapeer, Michigan, one of six children. The family moved to Philadelphia in 1902, where she attended



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high school and studied music. She married John de Angeli, a violinist, in 1910 and went on to have six children. After a few years of travel, they returned to the Philadelphia area by about 1920 and lived in a number of locations in the area, interrupted by other travels. They also had a cottage in Tom's River, New Jersey. John died in 1969, and Marguerite continued her writing and illustrating. She wrote her autobiography in 1971, and her last work was published in 1981 at the age of 92. She died at age 98 in Philadelphia.

Especially interesting is the way in which the republication of **Elin's Amerika** came about, more than sixty years after its original printing. One day a year or so ago, a new member of the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia came in for a visit and viewed a film about the New Sweden Colony. The people and settings in the film reminded her of her favorite book as a child, **Elin's Amerika**. The member, Sylvia Elin Davenport became interested in reprinting this cherished story. She was able to arrange for her family's foundation, the Davenport Family Foundation, to sponsor the reprinting of the book. This was to take place with the cooperation and help of the American Swedish Historical Museum and with the permission and assistance of the executor of the Marguerite de Angeli estate, Mr. Michael de Angeli, a grandson of the author. The estate had retained all rights to the original story and artwork. The Davenport Family Foundation contributed \$32,000 toward the reprinting, and the work was carried out with the help of the museum director, staff, and volunteers.

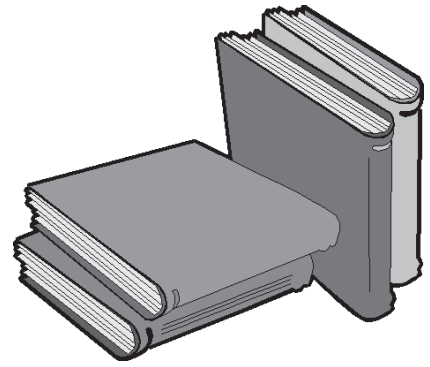
An exhibition titled "Drawing Us Together" opened at the Museum on Dec. 1, 2007, to coincide with the completion of the newly published book. The exhibit includes many of the author's original drawings from various of her books, and other

materials relating to Marguerite de Angeli and her career in writing children's books. A special guest at the opening was the only surviving child of the author, Mr. Maurice de Angeli, her youngest son. The exhibit will remain open through May 11, 2008, and many copies of the book have been distributed and sold since the exhibit opened.

Marguerite de Angeli did her research for **Elin's Amerika** in 1941, at the then newly completed American Swedish Historical Museum in South Philadelphia, situated on land which once was part of New Sweden. The Museum had been dedicated only a few years before, being finally completed in 1938 after slow progress during the Depression of the 1930's.

Mrs. de Angeli relied on records about New Sweden there that were collected by Dr. Amandus Johnson, founder of the Museum and a professor of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. She was most certainly assisted personally by Dr. Johnson, who was the museum director in 1941. The museum's *stuga* was the inspiration for Elin's family home in the book. While fictional, the book is quite faithful to the history of the Colony as it was known in 1941, although much more has been learned in recent years about the New Sweden Colony and its people.

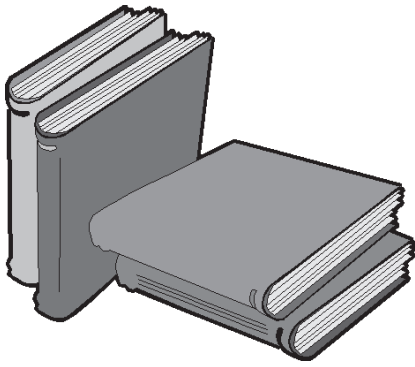
The story centers on the eleven-year-old Elin Stegstedt who had come with her family to join her father, Per, who had arrived in New Sweden with the new governor of the colony, the rotund Johan Printz. Elin, her mother, and her three older brothers, came to the colony a few years later, and found that her father had built them a cabin in the Swedish manner of fitted logs, with a fireplace and a brick chimney. Elin has various adventures in her new world, including friendly and not-so-friendly encounters with the Native Americans and with several of her Swedish



neighbors. Daily life, early farming work and dealing with domestic animals, household chores and other activities, even attending the old log church in Tinicum, are all described in plausible detail. The beautifully drawn illustrations, both in color and in pencil sketches, help to fill out a picture of 17<sup>th</sup> century life in the New Sweden Colony before the founding of the English colony under William Penn. The cycle of the seasons, winter frost, and, in summer, taking grain to the mill, the exciting arrival of ships from the old world, and encounters with the Dutch and the English colonists are all depicted.

For young boys and girls, from age eight and up, this book forms a delightful introduction to the history of the first Swedes in the American colonies. As timeless as when it was first written, it will go on to inform and entertain many new generations of children about life in New Sweden as the years go by. The book includes a glossary of a dozen or so common Swedish words, and a translation of the old Swedish nursery rhyme, "*Rida, rida, ranka,*" known to many second and third generation Swedish Americans. In fact, this newly republished book will be used as the centerpiece of the American Swedish Historical Museum's outreach program to bring the story of New Sweden to local schools and libraries in the area.

Dennis L. Johnson



## Swedes in Nebraska

**Early Omaha Swedish Immigrant Families: A New Beginning.** The Swedish Cultural Committee, Omaha, Nebraska, Donald H. Erickson, Chairman, 2007, 100 pp., Ill. softcover, Swedish Cultural Committee, 8442 N. 47<sup>th</sup> St., Omaha, NE, 68512, \$19.95 plus mailing.

Omaha, Nebraska, was founded in 1854 on the site of an early ferry across the wide Missouri River from Council Bluffs, Iowa. The name "Omaha" was derived from a Native American name for the location which meant "Dwellers on the Bluff." The Lewis and Clark expedition to explore the upper reaches of the Missouri had passed this way in 1804, and soon after, settlers drifted into the area. Fort Lisa was developed in 1806, and Fort Atkinson by 1819; a trading post opened in 1822. Mormons built a town called Cutler's Park in this area in 1846. Residents from neighboring Council Bluffs, Iowa, crossed the river to stake claims and founded the city of Omaha by 1854. This town became the jumping off point for the first trans-continental railway, causing Omaha to grow rapidly from less than 2,000 people in 1860 to 16,000 by 1870 and 30,000 by 1880.

From the 1860's, immigrants from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark moved to Omaha and homesteaded farms to the west of the city. They were soon followed by many other ethnic groups that together now make up today's urban population of

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nearly 500,000. Omaha was growing into a center of commerce: railroads, meatpacking houses, and other businesses serving the region. It is today also a center for technology, insurance, and construction, and is the hometown of Warren Buffet, contender for the richest man in the world. Well known actors, among them Fred and Adele Astaire, Dorothy McGuire, Marlon Brando, Nick Nolte, Henry Fonda, and Montgomery Clift, claim Omaha as their hometown.

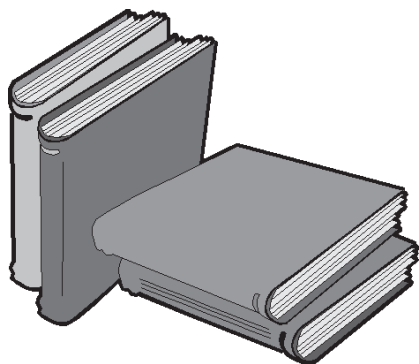
Omaha today retains a significant number of people with Swedish roots who continue to affirm their heritage. The Swedish Cultural Committee of Omaha under the leadership of Donald Erickson has in recent years published several books about this Swedish heritage and this book is the most recent. The book was put together based on a selection of interviews of long time Omaha residents made in the 1980's by Lennart Setterdahl and, in some cases, his wife Lilly, well-known chroniclers of the Swedish American experience in several American cities. In 2005 the Swedish Cultural Committee, Inc., published the *Directory of Swedes in Omaha and South Omaha - 1889*, with Louise B. Baumann as the editor, and in which Nils William Olsson (SAG founder) helped to identify many of the inhabitants.

As an introduction to this volume of interviews, the Committee has reprinted in the foreword excerpts from *The Swedish Element in Omaha, 1935*, written by O. M. Nelson. These thirty pages set the scene for the individual interviews by describing the immigration pattern in the city, early Swedish activities, and the important role of the Swedish churches in the lives of the Omaha Swedes. These included four Lutheran churches, a Covenant church, two Baptist, and one Methodist church, and several others founded by Swedish immigrants. Several of

these churches are now gone. The Swedes also founded a number of other institutions in Omaha including the Immanuel Deaconess Institute, The Evangelical Covenant Hospital, The Augustana Lutheran Women's Home, The Swedish Auditorium, and others. Swedish newspapers and journalists in early Omaha are also listed and described, as are a number of fraternal lodges, singing societies, social, and political clubs. This introduction also includes a number of old photographs of these Swedish churches, institutions, and groups.

The balance of the book consists of some 38 individual interviews of Swedish Americans who grew up and lived in Omaha in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many were born in Sweden, others were second generation from Omaha or other centers of Swedish immigration. These interviews offer a variety of perspectives into the lives, attitudes, and values of these Swedish Americans, who shared many things in common, yet there were many unique elements to each person's own history. Collectively, they offer a broad picture of the experiences of these people whose lives had much in common with Swedish Americans in other cities and in other Swedish American communities.

The people profiled in this book were all city dwellers who lived much of their lives in Omaha and were at an advanced age when interviewed. Among the subjects of these interviews were many homemakers, two Lutheran pastors, one pastor's wife, several businessmen, a medical doctor, an engineer, an accountant, a banker, several executives or business owners, and assorted others. Few of this generation attended college, but all had successful lives and had raised families in Omaha. Of special interest were many of the anecdotes from early days related by the Swedes in their interviews.



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## A pioneer woman

*Butter in the Well, Historical Diary 1868-1888*, by Linda K. Hubalek. 1994, 128 p., ill. ISBN 1-886652-00-7. \$10.16 from Amazon.com.

Photos of the people interviewed accompany many of their own stories, and other historic photos of places mentioned are scattered throughout this book.

**Early Omaha Swedish Immigrant Families** paints a valuable historic portrait of the generation of Swedes who helped shape the culture of Omaha in the twentieth century. Readers will find that it offers a fascinating glimpse of one time and one place in the history of the Swedish American immigration experience. It also reminds us that those involved in this experience have mostly passed on, and without the record of these interviews, much of this history would be lost.

Dennis L. Johnson

This book is a work of fiction, based on true events in the life of an immigrant Swedish woman, Maja Kajsa Jansdotter (born 14 June 1844) who came to the U.S. in 1867 from Klevmarken in Dals-Ed, Dalsland, with her husband Carl Svensson (born 18 Jan. 1839) and their little daughter Anna Christina (b. 3 Dec. 1866).

They first settled in Jacksonville, Illinois, but soon became homesteaders on the Kansas prairie, in the Smoky Valley area, and stayed there the rest of their lives.

Maja Kajsa's fictional diary tells about their progressive development of the farm; the day they got their

first cow, the day her parents and siblings also arrived, when the railroad came, etc. But it also includes sad things like when husband Carl was killed by lightning, when she miscarried her baby, when the locusts came, and how life on the prairie could be so difficult.

The book is a good read for anyone age 10 and up, and has a number of sequels. The illustrations make Maja Kajsa and her family come to life.

I am just a little sorry that the author did not have a Swede read the manuscript as some errors might have been avoided. The description of *kräm* (a dessert of thick fruit syrup eaten with milk) is a bit funny.

People did not address their parents as *Moder* or *Fader* when speaking to them, – *Mor* and *Far* was the custom, but that is just a minor thing. On the whole, the book is highly recommended.

Elisabeth Thorsell

## New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)

In *Family Tree Magazine* for May 2008 there is a good article on *naturalization records*, how it all started, the requirements to become a citizen of the U.S., and how to find the records. For instance, you will learn that women could not become citizens independently until 1922. Before that they became citizens when the husband became one, or when they married a citizen.

The newsletter *Tidningen* from the Swedish Genealogical Society of Minnesota often has very interesting articles. The recent issue, Summer 2008 (it is a quarterly), has an long article about *Swedish America in 2050*, by professor H. Arnold Barton. In this article Barton discusses the future of Swedish-American culture, and is optimistic that it will live on, strengthened by the new easy means of communication: internet, movies, etc.; and by the steady influx of new Swedish immigrants (about 1,700 every year). Another article, by Bruce Larson, tells about the various Swedish-American governors of Minnesota.

One of the best popular magazines about genealogy is *Ancestry* magazine, which in the recent May-June 2008 issue has an article on what it took to get an almost free homestead on the federal land. For \$18 you could get 160 acres of farmland and start building your homestead. The same sum would in 1863 get you any of these items: 72 dozen eggs, 120 lbs of sugar, 22.5 lbs of butter, 90 haircuts, or 1/5th of a horse or a Colt revolver. This article also tells you what records were created about the family homestead and how and where to find them. Other articles tell about shotgun weddings, some tips on how to work with old photos, finding family manuscripts, and experiences doing a DNA test with the Icelandic deCode project, and other similar organizations. At the end you will find an article on old-time "home" remedies and "natural medicine."