

6-1-2006

Book Reviews

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag>



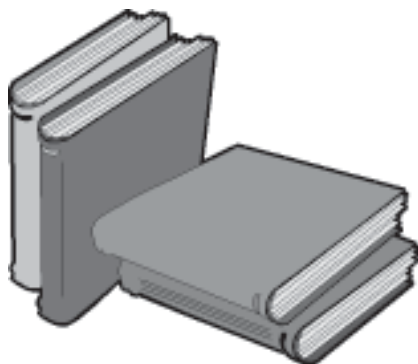
Part of the [Genealogy Commons](#), and the [Scandinavian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2006) "Book Reviews," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 26 : No. 2 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol26/iss2/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Swedish American Genealogist* by an authorized editor of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.



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 <djohnson@2vikings.com> or 2407 Hunsberger Drive, Limerick, PA 19468, so he knows what you are working on.

Old Farmhouses

Death of the Dream, Farmhouses in the Heartland, by William G. Gabler, 128 pages, hardcover, Afton Historical Society Press, Afton, MN, 1997, Amazon.com, \$35.00. (Also available in soft cover, 1999, Amazon.com, \$16.97 plus shipping.)

Driving along the highways and rural roads of the Midwest, one continues to see many abandoned farmhouses sitting in old, overgrown woodlots amidst the almost unbroken miles of corn and wheat fields. Many houses have disappeared and only the woodlots remain to signal their past locations. Those that remain are empty and deserted, in dilapidated condition or even falling down in neglect and disrepair. Modern, mostly one-story houses spaced much further apart than the old woodlots now mark the much larger, mechanized farms of today.

The author of *Death of the Dream*, William Gabler, has chosen to make a record of some of the last of these old farmhouses, centering his study on several counties in western Minnesota along the valley of the Minnesota River. Gabler found the greatest concentration of these old houses mainly in Yellow Medicine, Lac qui Parle, Big Stone, Chippewa, and Renville Counties, but also includes several other locations. These lands were homesteaded largely by Swedish, Norwegian, and German im-

migrants, together with a scattering of others of various nationalities. Most of the houses and farms pictured date to the last decades of the nineteenth century, from about 1860 to 1900. The author's aim was to record in photographs the passing away of a special dream, or style of life that took place during these decades but now is no more.

The first part of *Death of the Dream*, entitled *The Dream*, describes the historic context for the settlement of the prairie in the 19th century, including descriptions of the prairie before settlement, the coming of the settlers, pioneer farming, the rise in demand for crops such as wheat, and the rise of industrialization in agriculture. The second part, *The Structures in the Field*, concentrates on descriptions of the elements of the pioneer farmsteads, the various outbuildings and barns, and the houses themselves. The construction and layout of the houses, their style, the various rooms, and the style of living are described in detail, and how the houses relate to the woodlots, the farms, and the various outbuildings making up the farmstead. The third part of the book, *The Plates*, contains over 80 pages of plates, black and white photographs of a variety of houses and farm scenes.

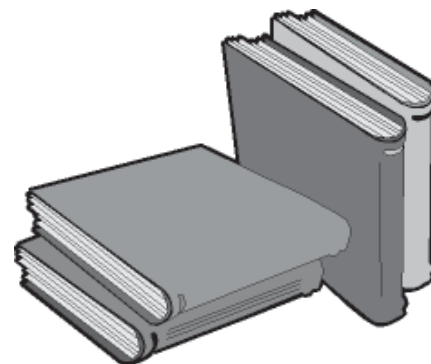
Accompanying the rich images of these houses are descriptions in text to illustrate the methods of construction, architectural styles, details and elements making up the houses, and the author's observations about common features of design. Both interior and exterior

views provide a rich collection of images of a life style that has passed away. The houses are bereft of people, the rooms are empty and often in tragic disrepair, but the powers of imagination of the reader help to recreate an impression of farm life in the 19th century. Barns, outbuildings, an abandoned schoolhouse, a wooden church, and a weed-grown cemetery add to the overall picture of once thriving but now largely abandoned communities.

The reader searches among these images for traces of houses that may have been built by Swedes, or by Norwegians, or by Germans, but finds little to suggest the origins of the original occupants. It appears that the prevailing styles, materials, and construction methods of the day in the American Midwest outweighed construction traditions of the pioneers' homeland. The materials available at the time were small wood framing members, planks for floor joists, boards for sheathing, narrow wood shiplap siding, double hung windows, and factory-made Victorian decorative elements. These were all put together by local carpenters to a generally common style, adjusted to suit the needs, means, and desires of the individual farmer.

The author points out that most of these farmhouses were originally built as a simple rectangular house, often replacing an earlier dugout lean-to or one room sod house erected by the pioneer homesteader. As the farmer prospered and his family grew, the farmer would add a wing to one side to provide added rooms, forming a house now in the shape of

Book Reviews



an 'L' or sometimes, a 'T'. A front porch would usually be added in the corner of this 'L' to shelter the entrances and provide a place to sit and view the farm or receive visitors. The house built by my own great-grandfather, Jonas Jansson in about 1870 in Nicollet County, MN, is similar to these prairie houses and, at last visit, was still standing. This house shared many of the features identified by Gabler in his book, including the later addition to the rear.

This book is a valuable record of a period in American history to which many descendants of these immigrant pioneers can closely relate and identify. I do take exception to the author's choice of title, however: *The Death of the Dream*. This somber title implies that the houses are a symbol of a failure to achieve the dream of those who built them. I prefer to think of these houses as the discarded exoskeletons of families who realized all their dreams in America. Those who built them achieved their goals of freedom, independence, and self-sufficiency to raise their families as they wished, free of old world limitations and traditions. It was a hard life, but they usually had the satisfaction of passing their farm on to a son or daughter, or selling to retire and spend their last years more comfortably in a nearby small town.

These pioneers on the prairies would gain even more satisfaction to know that their children mostly moved to the cities for different, less strenuous occupations and the succeeding third, fourth, and fifth generations were able to achieve their own dreams to become leaders in American society, ranging from industry leaders to movie stars, from astronauts to doctors, architects to scientists, teachers to zoologists, and artists to poets.

Dreams that often began in these little houses on the prairies.

Dennis L. Johnson

For the young ones

Three for Your Brood; a trio of recent children's books sharing the same title, **Swedish Americans**, by three different authors.

For those who would like their children to be more completely informed about their own Swedish heritage, three new books have come to this reviewer's attention. Two are aimed at younger children, the third is well suited to junior high school or high school age students. Written not only for Swedish Americans, these books are also intended to inform others about the Swedish American heritage as part of the American cultural mosaic.

Swedish Americans, by Tiffany Peterson, 32 pages, hardcover, Heinemann Library, Chicago, IL, 2004 (Amazon.com, \$26.79)

A compact but well organized and visually appealing book, this volume is best suited for eight to twelve year olds and would be appropriate for the classroom as well as for general reading or library use. The author has used an individual immigrant, Märta Källström and her experiences coming to America, as a framework for her book about Swedish Americans. Notes from her daughter, Sandi Ekstam and other immigrants, are used on some pages to highlight certain points in the text.

Brief chapters on Sweden, Early Swedes in New Sweden, the Journey to America, and arrival in the U.S. are followed by sections on "America Fever," Land and Lumber, Life in the Cities, Swedish Culture, Celebrations, and Swedish foods. A chapter on Arts and Entertainment highlights several well-known Swedish movie personalities, and a brief final

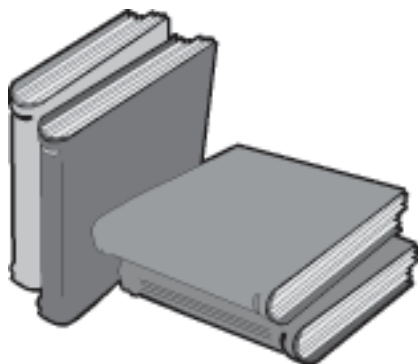
chapter describes Märta's (now Martha Challstrom) Swedish American family. Illustrations are well chosen, colorful, and intended to be appealing to younger children. A glossary explains some of the more difficult words used in the book and are highlighted in bold face type.

Although deliberately limited in scope to suit the age group for which it was intended, Ms. Peterson's book makes an excellent first reader to help your children or grandchildren begin the process of learning about their Swedish heritage.

Swedish Americans, by Lucia Raatma, 32 pages, hardcover, The Child's World, Chanhassen, MN, 2003 (Amazon.com, \$27.07)

Similar in size and scope to the first book, above, this book is also targeted toward the same age group. Chapters are headed The Swedish Life, Coming to America, Making a New Home, and The Swedish American Culture. This book may not be found as interesting to younger children as the first, since the text is a little more formal and lacks the personal references and notes included in the book by Tiffany Peterson. It is a little better, however, in explaining the reasons behind the great migration of Swedes to America and the historical background for this migration.

Small notes of "interesting facts" are sprinkled throughout the book to catch the eye, and many of the illustrations are fine historic etchings or wood cuts, among them the well-known illustration of the founders of New Sweden being greeted by the



Book Reviews

Native Americans, from the foyer ceiling of the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia. Regrettably, an illustration on page 13 is identified as being of Castle Garden in New York where immigrants arrived until 1892. The illustration is clearly of the Royal Palace in Stockholm, a serious editing error.

The author includes in several chapters profiles of famous Swedish Americans including the sculptor Carl Milles, entertainer Edgar Bergen (and Charlie McCarthy), author Carl Sandburg, aviator Charles Lindbergh, inventor John Ericsson, executive Walter Hoving, actresses Greta Garbo, Ingrid Bergman, Ann-Margret, and others. Although these people are well-known to our generation, a few Swedish Americans who relate more to young people might have been included as well.

A useful feature at the end is a timeline page with important dates in Swedish and Swedish American history, and a glossary with pronunciation notes for some of the more difficult words used in the text.

Swedish Americans, by Cory Gideon Gunderson, 106 pages, hardcover, Chelsea House Publishers, 2003 (Amazon.com, \$30.00)

This more advanced book for older young people is the sixth in a series about immigrants in America which includes books on Chinese, German, Irish, Italian, and Japanese Americans. An introduction by Daniel Patrick Moynihan serves to put the book into the context of the United States as a nation of immigrants from many

cultures and nations. It is similar in scope to the first two books for younger children, but includes much more detail about each of the subject areas. Targeted to a high school age or older reader, the book is a much more comprehensive, if more difficult, volume which delves further into the many complexities and variations within the immigrant experience.

The author has organized this book into seven chapters: The Swedes in America, The Old Country, America Fever, Tamers of the Frontier, Social Issues in Industrial America, Swedish Identity Across the Atlantic, and Into The Melting Pot: The Swedish American Influence. These are followed by a chronology of events, a bibliography, further reading, a list of websites, and a list of organizations.

Illustrations are not as numerous as in the younger children's books, but serve well to complement the text. Some are the same as in the above books, but many are different. The Colonial Swedes being greeted by Native Americans appears again as do several others, but an actual view of Castle Garden is correctly included on page 45. Unique among the illustrations is an 1850 photo portrait of Jenny Lind, and there are several other early photos from the immigrant experience not previously seen by this reviewer.

The text touches on many aspects of the immigrant experience including Swedes in American politics, Swedish American churches, the Bishop Hill colony, relations with Native Americans, Swedes in the Civil War, other Americans' reactions to Swedes, and the current state of Swedish American culture and the Swedish Language. The book is not totally error-free; it identifies Minnesota as having the highest population of Swedish Americans and does not even list Illinois as among the states with large numbers of

Swedes. Some semantic confusion exists; Illinois has the largest total number of Swedish Americans while Minnesota has a higher percentage of Swedish Americans in its population.

Viewed as whole, however, this book is an excellent introduction to Swedish Americans for those of high school or older age groups, presenting a fairly comprehensive, if brief, picture of the history of their country of origin, the immigrant experience, the influence of Swedish Americans on the nation as a whole, and the state of Swedish American culture and people in the U.S. today.

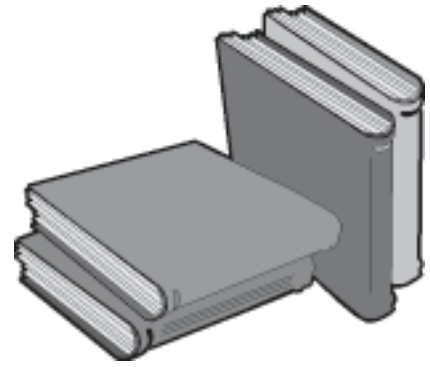
Dennis L. Johnson

On Augustana

The Heritage of Augustana, Essays on the Life and Legacy of the Augustana Lutheran Church, Hartland H. Gifford and Arland J. Hultgren, Eds., softcover, 297 pages, 2004, Kirk House Publishers, Minneapolis. Amazon.com, \$23.50 plus shipping.

If you are a grandchild of the generations of "the swarming of the Swedes" to America in the 19th century, as am I, you are very likely to have had an Augustana Lutheran Church in your background. This Synod was the church of Swedish Lutherans mainly in the Midwest, which in the 102 years of its existence had grown to about 1,200 congregations in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Kansas, Nebraska, and many other states. My own family belonged to an Augustana church, where I was confirmed in 1946. The pastor was Rev. Reuben K. Youngdahl of Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church in south Minneapolis. The exceptional Youngdahl family also had its

Book Reviews



roots in Dalsland, Sweden.

The Augustana Lutheran Church was formed in 1860 at a historic meeting in Jefferson Prairie, Wisconsin. Swedish born Lutheran pastors were few in number in America at that early date; among those attending the meeting were Lars Paul Esbjörn, Tufve Nilsson Hasselquist, and Erland Carlsson. Lars Paul Esbjörn had organized the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Congregation in Andover, IL, in 1850. Two of the founders would become Presidents of the Synod, Hasselquist (1860-1870), and Carlsson (1881-1888). Another is pioneer pastor, Eric Norelius, ordained in the U.S. in 1856, became President of the Synod twice, 1874-1881 and 1899-1911.

The Synod maintained informal ties with the Church of Sweden but was independent of that church. By 1869, there were 17 Augustana pastors serving 36 congregations and about 3,000 communicant members

on the American continent. Swedish immigrants were attracted to other churches as well. Many became Methodists or Baptists. Eric Jansson attracted hundreds to his short-lived community in Illinois, and the Mormon church won a number of Swedish converts. Free churches with roots in Sweden (The Mission Covenant Church, and the Evangelical Free Church) formed their own groups in the U.S. Many others were served by no church at all or did not seek out a church in America. But over a fifth of all immigrant Swedes became Augustana Synod members.

In the 19th century the Synod grew along with the rise in the numbers of Swedish immigrants, and founded a number of colleges in the U.S., including Augustana in Rock Island, IL; Gustavus Adolphus in St. Peter, MN; Bethany in Lindsay, KS; and Upsala in New Jersey. The Synod founded Augustana College and Seminary under the pro-

fessorship of Lars Paul Esbjörn in Chicago in 1860. Moving to Paxton, IL, and then to Rock Island, IL, by 1875, the College and Seminary continued to thrive and grow. By 1962, when the Augustana Synod merged with the Lutheran Church in America, many hundreds of Lutheran pastors had received their training at the Seminary. In 1962, Augustana Seminary was merged with four other seminaries to form the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Augustana College continues to thrive as a Liberal Arts College in Rock Island, and is home to the Swenson Center, publisher of the *Swedish American Genealogist*.

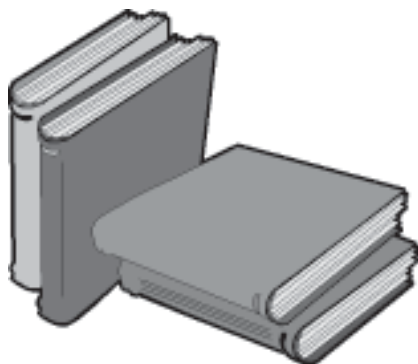
New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)

In *Bryggan 2/06* (also *The Bridge*) published by the Kinship Center of Karlstad, Sweden, there is a long article by Alf Brorson about the *Fryksande Evangelical Lutheran Church* of Evansville, Douglas County, Minnesota. The church was organized in 1877 and the founders were in many cases people from Fryksände, Östmark, and Lekvattnet, all parishes in the province of Värmland. The church was dissolved in 1932.

The *Augustana Heritage Association* (<http://www.augustanaheritage.org/>) is a society whose purpose is to define, promote, and perpetuate the heritage of the Augustana Lutheran Church (1860-1962), merged to form the Lutheran Church in America, and then merged to become the predecessor body of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. On the web site you can find a downloadable newsletter in pdf-format. The Spring 2006 issue was very interesting and had a number of book reviews on individuals and families. Also there was the second installment of a long article on the *Reverend Erland Carlsson*, one on the most impressive personalities from the 1800s, written by his relative Carol M. Perkins. Erland Carlsson was born in 1822 in Älgult parish, Småland.

Swedish TV personality *Tina Nordström*, famous for her easy-going cookery programs, has produced a DVD, called *New Scandinavian Cooking with Tina Nordström*, which came out last year. To cite a review "this is the best source of info you will find on Swedish traditions and their way of life. It's so great because it gives you an introduction to the Swedes' lifestyle and it's also entertaining because Tina is always doing something to keep your attention." In English. \$44.49 at amazon.com. [This is probably the summer version, there is also a winter version, which does not show up at Amazon, but the Sweden Bookshop (see p. 30) has both for SEK 188 + postage/each].



Book Reviews

For children?

The Augustana Synod no longer exists, but has been a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) since 1986. Under the leadership of Donovan J. Palmquist, the Augustana Heritage Association was formed in 1998 to preserve the heritage of the Augustana Lutheran Church. This book includes a number of essays about the Augustana Church given at conferences in Rock Island, IL, in June of 2000, and at Bethany College in Lindsborg, KS, in June of 2002. The mission of the Augustana Heritage Association is "to define, promote, and perpetuate the heritage of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church." (Note: the Association may be contacted at www.augustanaheritage.org).

These essays are organized into a series of sections beginning with the roots of the Church in Sweden, and its early connections to the Swedish Church. It continues with the organization of the early churches in Illinois and in Kansas, the formation of the Augustana Synod, and the founding and history of the Seminary. Later sections address the global outreach of the Church, and the role of women in the Augustana Women's Missionary Society. The book concludes with essays on two early Church leaders, Gustav Andreen and Conrad Bergendoff, and two sermons by participants in the heritage conference, Dennis A. Anderson and Reuben A. Swanson. The essays have been contributed by many distinguished former Augustana Parish Pastors, College Professors, and two churchmen from Sweden, who add their perspectives to the history of the Augustana Synod.

Of special value are the essays in the section titled "The Church." These essays focus on the theological roots of the Augustana Synod, its unique character in distinction from the Church in Sweden and from the other Lutheran groups formed in the U.S. Peter T. Beckman describes these distinctions in his essay, "The Heart of Augustana." Herbert E. Anderson addresses "The Theological Foundations of the Augustana Lutheran Church," Robert Anderson describes the Synod's awakening social consciousness, and Mark Granquist writes about "The Augustana Synod and the Evangelical Covenant Church" in America. Taken together, a picture is formed of a Church with its own personality and character, no longer a separate Synod, but clearly having transmitted many of these special elements to the continuing mission of Lutheran theology and practice.

Persons with a history of association with the Swedish Lutheran Church in America will find this collection of essays highly informative and interesting to read. A picture is clearly outlined of the transitions of the Augustana Synod Churches from a Swedish language immigrant church to mixed Swedish and English congregations offering services in both languages, and then to a completely Swedish-American but English-speaking church. The still later outcome was inevitable; a merger with most other Lutheran congregations in America as a part of the ecumenical movements of the 20th century. Many of the unique features of the Swedish Augustana churches continue to exist and this heritage has contributed greatly to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Dennis L. Johnson

Swedish Folktales & Legends, translated by Lone Thygesen Blecher and George Blecher. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2004. ISBN 0-8166-4575-2. \$13.26 from Amazon.com

This book is a collection of old Swedish folktales (*folksagor*) and is divided into several sections: *Animal tales; Trolls, Giants etc; True Dummies and Clever Folks; How to Win the Princess; Tales of Heroes and Heroines*; and many more.

Most of the stories are well-known in Sweden, but may be new to American readers. These stories were told before the fire in the fireplace during the long winter evenings, with shadows flickering in the corners, which made stories about trolls and other phantoms quite plausible.

There are the familiar stories about stepmothers, others about the three brothers, where the youngest turns out to be the smart one, and how to outsmart a giant (not known for their intelligence). The stories often come to a moral conclusion, and was a way to teach the youngsters how to behave and what they should look out for in life, at the same time as they gave some relaxation from the daily toils.

One example might be the hare, who in the wintertime says he will build a house in the summer. When summer comes, he does not need a house, he has a home in every bush! The moral here is that you have to think a little longer into the future, or you will regret it in hard times.

This book will give you and your little ones many hours of fun, and maybe also set some thoughts in motion in those little heads. Still in these days of TV and DVDs, kids come running if you start by saying "Once upon a time there was a..."

Elisabeth Thorsell