

9-1-2008

## 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

(2008) "Book Reviews," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 28 : No. 3 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol28/iss3/14>

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](mailto: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 <1\_viking@verizon.net> or Dennis Johnson, 174 Stauffer Road, Bucktown Crossing, Pottstown, PA 19465, so he knows what you are working on.

## A wild goose flight

**The Wonderful Adventures of Nils**, by Selma Lagerlöf, 48 pp., Hardcover, Ill., Floris Books, 15 Harrison Gardens, Edinburgh, Scotland, 2005, Barnes & Noble.com, \$24.95 plus shipping, American Swedish Institute, Minneapolis, \$24.95

Can you as a child in 1907, only four years after the first powered flight by the Wright Brothers, imagine being transported on an aerial tour of your entire country? You can in a wonderful children's book by Selma Lagerlöf, first published in 1907 in Sweden. Her great gift of imagination in creating this story, and her other works, resulted in her being awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1909. She was the first woman writer to receive this award. The book was originally published in Swedish under the title *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*. It has been republished numerous times in as many as thirty languages. This English version was edited and adapted by Rebecca Alsberg in 1989 and translated by Joan Tate. It was first published in 1992, and in 2005 is in its fifth printing. Illustrations are by Lars Klinting. The book, in one version or another, is well known to all Swedes and to many Swedish-Americans.

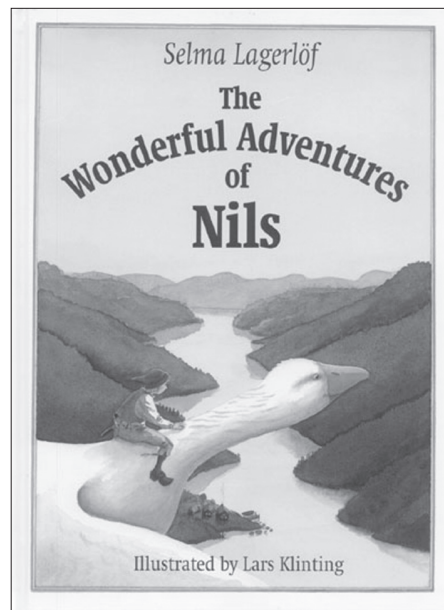
Nils Holgersson was a rather lazy and mean little boy, with little feeling for anyone or anything except himself. His household *tomte* has shrunk him down to the size of a

clothespin as punishment for his selfishness. He is carried off on the back of a white farm goose which has decided to join a flock of wild geese away on their annual migration to the far north. He accompanies his goose and the flock for an entire season on a tour of all of Sweden, all the way to Lapland and eventually back to his home in western Skåne. Along the way he visits most of the provinces of Sweden and has a series of adventures with various creatures both friendly and hostile. In the course of these adventures he learns a great deal about getting along with others and repaying kindness with kindness. He eventually returns home to his family, to normal size, and is a changed and much wiser little boy.

Selma Lagerlöf was 49 years old when she wrote the book about Nils's wonderful adventure. She was already an accomplished writer, having published several books including

*Gösta Berlings Saga*, her breakthrough and most well-known novel. She had over ten years experience as a teacher, in addition to her reputation as an imaginative writer. She was asked to participate in creating a new reader for the Swedish elementary schools, and sought a new approach. After much thought and trial efforts, she settled upon the right solution and wrote the story quite quickly. Combining the elements of a geography lesson, a morality tale, and some adventures by a little boy, with a variety of creatures found in Sweden, her work won immediate recognition and popularity. It is a timeless children's story for all ages. The illustrations by Lars Klinting are charming and add much to the lightness and spirit of the story itself.

Selma Lagerlöf was born in 1858, the daughter of Lieutenant Erik Gustaf Lagerlöf and Louise Wallroth, the couple's fourth child. Selma grew up isolated from most other children and an early illness left her lame in both legs. She later made a remarkable recovery, but as a result of her earlier condition, Selma was more serious and quiet than other children of her age. She was a gifted child who enjoyed reading and even finished reading her first novel by age 7, and the entire Bible by age 10. She grew up on Mårbacka in Värmland, her father's family estate. In 1884 her father lost Mårbacka because of his illness, and this loss had a deep impact on Selma, then only 26 years old. She studied at the Royal Women's Superior Training Academy in Stockholm and then worked as a schoolteacher in Landskrona. Her first break in literature came when



# Book Reviews



she submitted the first chapters of *Gösta Berlings Saga* to a literary contest in the women's magazine *Idun*. She won a publishing contract for the entire book.

In addition to the Nobel Prize for literature in 1909, Selma Lagerlöf became a member of the Swedish Academy in 1914. When World War II began, she sent her Nobel medal and her gold medal from the Swedish Academy to Finland, to help them raise money to fight the Soviet Union. The Finnish government was so moved that it raised the money from other sources, and returned the medals to her. She wrote over a dozen other books and novels after *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, the last being several volumes of reminiscences under the title *Mårbacka* in about 1932. Selma Lagerlöf lived for many years at Mårbacka, and died there in 1940. Her former home is now preserved as a museum. Since 1992, her likeness has been featured on the Swedish 20 crown banknote.



There are few children's books more suitable for a gift for young boys and girls, from the ages of about 8 years to 12 years, than *The Wonder-*

*ful Adventures of Nils*. I wish I were able to read the original in Swedish, since I feel that the text would be even more colorful and fascinating than in the English translation. Although the geography of Sweden is not as familiar to most young Americans as that of their own country, this detracts little from the enjoyment of the book, and the lessons included therein. This book will survive for many generations and through many more printings. There are a number of other editions of this book available at varying prices, with different publishing dates, but this reviewer found this particular edition to be an excellent example.

Dennis L. Johnson

## The Swedish Maid becomes a Lady

*Indigo Christmas: A Hilda Johansson Mystery*, By Jeanne M. Dams. Perseverance Press/John Daniel & Co., 2008. 252 pages. \$14.95. ISBN 978-1-880284-95-7

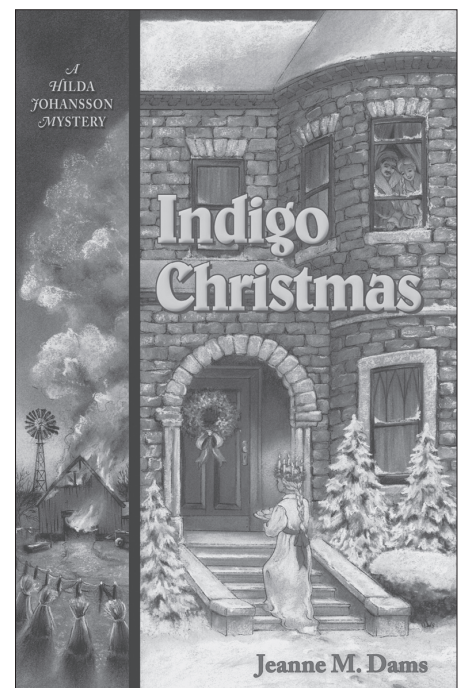
*Indigo Christmas* is the sixth volume in Jeanne M. Dams's series featuring Hilda Johansson, a Swedish housemaid with a talent for solving mysteries. The series is set in South Bend, Indiana, in the early 1900s. In this book, the newly married Hilda has left her servant days behind. The Swedish maid has become a lady, but she is still a sleuth.

As *Indigo Christmas* opens, Hilda is now the wife of Patrick Cavanaugh, the Irish fireman who was her love interest in the earlier books. Patrick is no longer a fireman; he is a partner in his uncle's business. "He and Hilda were now a part of that upper class they used to serve. They lived in a fine house in the best part of

town. They had servants of their own." However, Hilda's new social status has left her desperately bored when she is not dealing with the culture clash between her Swedish family and her Irish in-laws. When a man is killed in a barn fire and her friend Norah's husband is suspected in the case, Hilda jumps at the chance to investigate another crime.

As in the earlier Hilda books, Dams skillfully interweaves a mystery with the manners and social tensions of another era. The residents of South Bend in 1904 face unemployment and banking problems that resonate with today's newspaper headlines. Christmas preparations, a blizzard, and the Swedish Lucia celebration add to the midwinter atmosphere.

While the Hilda Johansson books are a mystery series, the character of Hilda – a spirited, independent young woman – is in the tradition of Laura Ingalls in the *Little House on the Prairie* books or Anne Shirley in *Anne of Green Gables*. *Indigo Christmas* presents this resourceful immigrant with a whole new set of challenges. Although Hilda is liberated from the hard work of being a house-







# Book Reviews

maid, her new status means that she has less freedom to do her detective work, to drop by the police station, or talk to servants and tradesmen without being noticed. Hilda also has to negotiate awkward situations, such as being a guest in the house where she used to work as a maid. "She had taken these women's cloaks, served them tea, opened doors for them, done a thousand little things the women were, in her opinion, perfectly capable of doing for themselves. She doubted they would recognize her. People never really did look at servants, never saw past the cap and apron to the human being inside."

Hilda's life is a classic American story, and *Indigo Christmas* is a satisfying read. For an entertaining fictional perspective on the Swedish-American experience, the Hilda Johansson mysteries are highly recommended.

Erica Olsen

## Skåne immigrants

**Coming Full Circle, Return Migration and the Dynamics of Social Mobility on the Bjäre Peninsula 1860-1930**, by Magnus Persson, KFS i Lund AB, 2007, softcover, 269 pp.

Between 1860 and 1930, it is estimated that about 1,300,000 people left Sweden for America. During that same period, about 200,000 of these emigrants, or roughly 15 per cent,

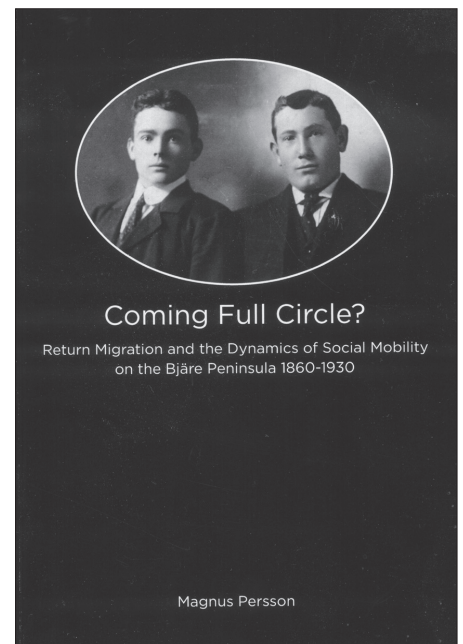
returned to Sweden. This book is intended to be an evaluation of the reasons for this return migration, and the resulting effects not only on these return migrants, but also on the community from which they migrated. The book was written as a doctoral thesis by the author, who is now a member of the Department of History at Lund University in Sweden.

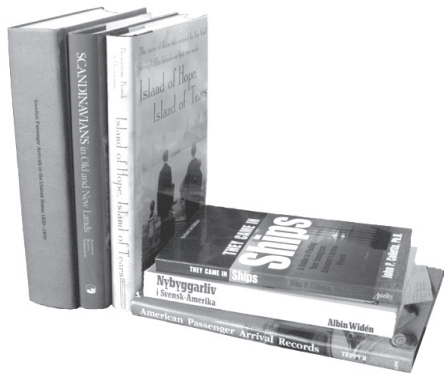
Since the task would have been enormous to examine the entire country of Sweden, Magnus Persson chose to select a small region and use that region to develop his conclusions for the nation as a whole. The region that he chose to use is the small Bjäre peninsula in southwest Sweden, in the northwest corner of the province of Skåne. This region, although in Skåne, was thought to be more similar in its migration history to the high emigration areas nearby in central Sweden. It is now known as the Båstad Kommun, and includes six parishes: Båstad, Förslöv, Grevie, Hov, Torekov, and Västra Karup. This is an area of workable size, has accurate parish records, and has a representative sampling of emigrants and returnees. The Bjäre Peninsula is today a prosperous farming and tourist district with good communications to the rest of the country. It remains mainly a prosperous farming district, growing mostly potatoes.

As in much of central Sweden in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Båstad *kommun* suffered from a rapidly increasing population and a limited amount of arable farmland. Local farmers resisted government pressure to divide their land and the eldest sons then inherited the farm, with most younger sons and daughters having little opportunity except to migrate from the area or to America. At the time there were only two towns, the town of Båstad and the smaller fishing village of Torekov. The population of the *kommun* began to shrink with the rise of emigration, beginning

about 1870 and continuing until the 1920's. The famine years in Sweden of 1865, 1867, and 1868 resulted in increasing emigration from a trickle to a flood. For Båstad *kommun*, Persson's research indicates a total of about 5,600 emigrants from 1860 and 1930, and a return rate of some 21 per cent during that period, somewhat greater than for Sweden as a whole. (These numbers are approximate and difficult to establish, since some returned to other than their original parish, and some returned for a time but then immigrated again to America.)

The author, as is customary in dissertations of this type, provides chapters which outline his theory, methodology, and sources, his use of statistics, the demography of the migration, and other background information about the area studied and Swedish migration as a whole. His final chapters look at the social mobility of the migrants and the returnees, various other aspects of social mobility, and the lifestyles, innovations, and business opportunities of the return migrants and the effect of returning entrepreneurs on the local communities.





# Book Reviews

In addition to the statistics presented, the author also uses the experiences of two Nilsson brothers as examples of those who migrated and spent some years in America around 1900, before returning to their home parish in Sweden. The Nilsson brothers served to illustrate his conclusions about these returnees and their impact on their home community. For them, and many others, the time spent in America and the money they earned there helped them to improve their lives, to advance their social position, and has affected their own lifestyles and also the lifestyles of their neighbors who remained in Sweden. Persson's conclusions differ considerably from earlier studies on return migration, and he claims that the earlier research was affected too much by bias against the changes brought back from America by these returnees and in favor of traditional Swedish lifestyles. The author also found that many returnees advanced their social position through marriages, achieved greater success in their farming operations through innovations learned in America, took part in local politics to a greater degree than those who did not emigrate, and were more active in founding local businesses and other entrepreneurial activities.

This book is heavily footnoted and research is thoroughly documented, as expected in a doctoral thesis. The illustrations, family photographs, and anecdotal examples help make the book engaging and readable, as well as giving the reader more insight into the lives of both the return migrants and the communities

from which they came. The thesis was written in English by the author, with no significant weaknesses brought about by translation or unfamiliar usage of terms and expressions. This volume is an important contribution to the history of the Swedish migration experience.

*Dennis L. Johnson*

## Medieval sins

*Auctoritae Papae, The Church Province of Uppsala in the Apostolic Penitentiary 1410–1526*, by Sara Risberg and Kirsi Salonen, published by Swedish National Archives

(*Riksarkivet*) in the series *Diplomatium Suecanum: Appendix: Acta Pontificum Suecica, II: Acta Poenitentiarum*. 526 p., hard cover, indexes. **Prise 250 kr SEK + postage.**  
Contact <kundtjanst@svar.ra.se>

In the Middle Ages, the *Apostolic Penitentiary* possessed the papal powers to grant four types of graces: to absolve Christians who had violated the rules of Canon Law, to grant dispensations and licenses to those who wanted to act against the norms of the Church, and to issue letters of declaration that, for example, could free the petitioner from an unjust accusation of murder. The office dealt

**Put your genealogical  
research  
into historical perspective**

What was America like when your  
grandparents arrived and what  
was their life like here?

**Join the Swedish-American  
Historical Society and find out.**

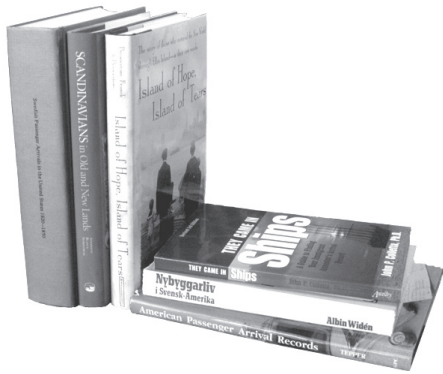
Every issue of the *Swedish-American  
Historical Quarterly* tells the personal  
stories of typical immigrants.

In addition, periodic dividend books  
further explore this rich history.

**For more information, write  
Swedish-American Historical Society  
3225 W. Foster, Box 48  
Chicago IL, 60625  
or see [www.swedishamericanhist.org](http://www.swedishamericanhist.org)**







# Book Reviews

## Swedes in Pullman, Ill.

*The First Church Register 1885-1900.*

The first part of the book is a listing of all the families that were members. Unfortunately the compiler only listed the full name of the head of the household, and just first names for the rest of the families. All dates and places are also missing, which would really have made the book invaluable. If the head has a specific surname that helps a lot, but what about the Johnsons? Some surnames are *Ekeberg, Zetterstrand, Lindeblad, Forsberg, Lönnquist, Lundgren, Höggren, Ekström, Elmer, Nordin, Sandström, Granberg, Kärrström, Saxon, and Sköld.*

*Baptisms* are listed by date, child's name, and surname. *Confirmation* gives full name and date of birth. In the *Marriage* section bride and groom are listed with full names, date of marriage, and address. There is a section on *Reception and Dismissal* of members and then *Funerals*, with names, dates, and ages. A useful book!

*Elisabeth Thorsell*

with numerous matters such as marriage, illegitimacy, violence, apostasy, and confession. In the registers of the Penitentiary, documents involving around 550 Swedes have been identified for the period of 1410 to 1526. In that year Sweden became a Protestant country, and all ties with Rome were severed. Some of the identified persons were members of the nobility, including King Karl Knutsson Bonde (VII).

The present volume brings forward this new source material, reveals details on daily life, and shows the influence of Canon Law on medieval society.

The book is published in both English and Latin.

*Elisabeth Thorsell*

*The Greater Roseland Area och Chicago: Svenska Evangelical Lutheran Elims Församlingen 1885-1900*, compiled by Janice Helge, published by the South Suburban Genealogical and Historical Society (2004). Spiralbound, 77 pages. Order from South Suburban Genealogical and Historical Society, 3000 West 170th Place, Hazel Crest, IL. 60429 - 1174, or look at

<http://www.ssghs.org/sspub.htm>

This book is of great interest for anyone with an immigrating relative in the Pullman area of Chicago.

It starts with a short history of the *Svenska Evangeliska Lutherska Elim-församlingen*, which was organized in 1885.

In 1969 the church registers were microfilmed, and the present book is a compilation of the information in

## New and Noteworthy

(short notes on interesting books and articles)

A new book of general interest has recently been published, called *How the States Got Their Shapes*, by Mark Stein. He has done extensive research in many sources to be able to share his anecdotal findings on the biggest jigsaw puzzle of them all—the United States. It is little known that those shapes most everyone takes for granted are rooted in various histories of intolerance, military skirmishes, and ideological intrigue. Available at Amazon.com for \$15.61. Read more at <http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/0809/states.html>

A great book for young scholars is *Kristina. The Girl King* by Carolyn Meyer, Scholastic, Inc., 2003. ISBN 0-439-24976-7. It is part of a series, *The Royal Diaries*, that are based on real royal figures and actual historical events, according to Scholastic press. However, some situations and people in this book are fictional, created by the author, Carolyn Meyer. Kristina's diary runs from Midsummer Day, 1638, to October 2, 1639, during the time she is turning 13 years old. Although the purpose of the series is to make history alive and interesting to children in 4th to 7th grades, this book hits the mark for adults, too. An epilogue sets the diary in historical context, describes life in Sweden at the time, includes a Vasa-Palatinate family tree, black and white portraits of royalty, a 1638 map of Sweden, and a glossary of characters. Author Meyer gives the reader a window on the lives of the nobility, and a 21st century American's view of Swedish history. As she put it, "I embraced the challenge to present this brilliant young girl who inherited the crown and then gave it all up to live the life she wanted." And of course, 1638 was the year of the first Swedes coming to America! The book is available at Amazon.com for \$10.95 in hardcover.

Thanks to Lynn Campbell of Davis, Cal., for the tip about this book!