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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews



Here you will find information about interesting books on the immigration experience, genealogical manuals, books on Swedish customs, and much more. We welcome contacts with SAG readers, suggestions on books to review perhaps. If you want to review a book yourself, please contact the Book Review Editor, Dennis L. Johnson, at <1_viking@verizon.net> or Dennis Johnson, 174 Stauffer Road, Bucktown Crossing, Pottstown, PA 19465, so he knows what you are working on.

The Nordic North

Far Northern Connections, *Researching Your Sami (and Other) Ancestors in Northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia*, by Virginia Mattson-Schultz, Dorrance Publishing Co., Pittsburgh, PA, 2007, 173 pp., Softcover, Illustr., Dorrance, \$18.00 plus shipping.

Although not nearly as numerous as the more well-known immigrants from Sweden and the neighboring Nordic nations of Norway, Finland, and Russia, a significant number of Sami people from the far northern regions of these countries also migrated to the United States in the 19th century.

The Sami people, from the Arctic regions of these countries, are culturally and ethnically distinct from the Finns, Swedes, Norwegians, and Russians who also live in these regions. They have their own traditions, and a lifestyle once based largely on fishing, hunting, and the herding of reindeer, but in modern times many Sami people have diversified and assimilated into the modern economy. There has also been significant intermarriage in recent times. The present population of Sami across the Nordic region is estimated to be about 80-135,000, with the majority in Norway. Sweden has some 15-25,000, there are 6,500 in Finland, and 2,000 in adjacent parts of Russia.

Recent genetic studies indicate that the Sami are descendants of

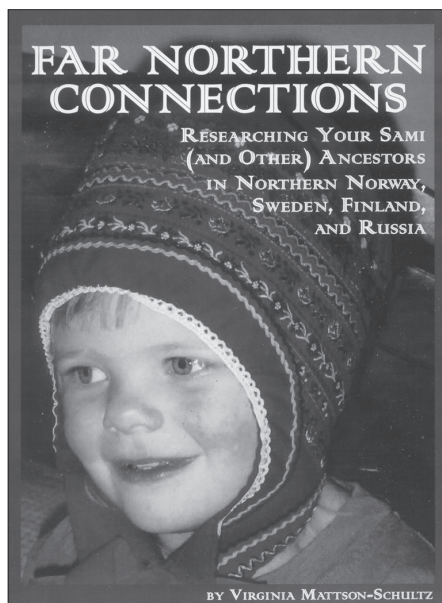
some of the earliest people to settle in the north after the most recent ice age. They are believed to be related to the Finno-Ugric people from the Volga-Ural region and also share common ancestors with the Basque and Catalanian people, the earliest inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula.

There are some nine language groups across the Sami territory related to Finno-Ugric, but not all are mutually understandable. In many, the language has been lost due to assimilation, sometimes forced, by the non-Sami majority. Many Sami are now Lutheran, and a large number are Laestadian Lutheran, a revivalist movement founded in the mid-nineteenth century by Lars Levi Laestadius, known as "The Prophet of the North." This church has divided into several branches. Sami and Finnish immigrants to North America brought these denominations with them to found churches in many parts of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michi-

gan, Saskatchewan in Canada, and several other locations.

The author, in an early chapter entitled "Who, Me? Sami?" relates how she came to discover her own Sami heritage in talking with her relatives, much to the distress of her own mother. She had grown up being told that she was half-Swedish and half-Finnish. After her mother died in 2002, her own research and further discussion with relatives revealed that her mother was in fact almost all Sami, and her father was mostly Finnish, a forest Finn from Värmland. She learned that many Sami had been discriminated against in their homeland, and took advantage of their migration to the U.S. to conceal or suppress their heritage and even change their names, in order to better fit in. After a brief period of anger about not being told of her Sami heritage, she found herself challenged to learn much more about her ancestry and Sami traditions, resulting finally in the publication of this interesting and very useful book.

Ms. Mattson-Schultz, who now lives in West Virginia, grew up in Minnesota and is a graduate of Macalester College in St. Paul and holds a Master's degree from the University of Colorado. She has worked as a language teacher and early on became an amateur and then a professional genealogist. Research into her own Sami background and culture, and that of others, led her to visit Finland and Sweden and to writing this guidebook. An introductory chapter describes her own personal quest for her roots. After a rich and fascinating description of unique Sami traditions, she outlines





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how to begin research in the U.S. and then moves on to tell researchers what to do next, including important things to know about the Sami culture and a list of common Sami surnames. (These generally are not patronymic as was common in Norway, Finland, and Sweden, but have their own unique characteristics.)

The four following chapters are devoted to researching in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia, respectively.

The chapter on Sweden, like the others, has lists of parishes and of villages in Northern Sweden with a Sami population and also includes a map of the northern parishes in Sweden. The parish clerks or pastors kept records, as in the rest of Sweden. These were generally in Swedish and these records are not that different from usual Swedish parish records. The author adds tips in using and reading these records, and a few notes about Sami customs that may appear on some records. Many Sami were nomadic in earlier times, and national boundaries did not mean as much as did the historic Sami lands which extended into Norway, Finland, and Russia. Because of this, tracing Sami ancestors may then require reference to records of more than one country in following a particular family.

The remainder of the book consists of chapters whose subjects help the reader and researcher get to know the Sami history and culture better. These include subjects such as *Dealing with the Sami Languages, Place Names in the Sami Language, Occupations, Maladies and Causes of Death, Sami You Should Know About* (notable Sami both historic and mod-

ern), a chronology of history that involved northern populations, and listings of descendants of several individual Sami in the author's family tree. The author has provided a very complete bibliography, a subject index, and a geographical index. Numerous photographs are interspersed with each chapter showing people and places of interest, a few of the author's ancestors, and other maps and illustrations.

The book as a whole is an excellent reference work for those who wish to focus on their Sami ancestry, and is an invaluable supplement to the existing general references on researching records and finding your Swedish ancestors now most commonly used.

For the general reader, it provides an informative window into the Sami culture as a whole, their history and background. The book also provides good information about Sami immigration patterns and the cultural evolution of those Sami who came to the U.S. along with the tide of immigration from Scandinavia in the 19th century.

Dennis L. Johnson

Secular countries in Scandinavia

Society without God, What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us about Contentment, by Phil Zuckerman, New York University Press, New York, 2008, 227 pages, hardcover, Amazon.com, \$25.20 plus shipping.

This book was purchased and read by this reviewer several months ago. Since reading the book, my thoughts

have returned several times to the question of how to review it, and even whether to review it at all. It is one person's important view about contemporary society in Sweden and Denmark, both disturbing and thought-provoking. The book is important in that it will help shape the American view of these countries, for better or for worse.

The premise of this book, written by a person who describes himself as a non-practicing ethnic Jew, is that a society without God can be both pleasant and civil, and that Sweden and Denmark are remarkably strong, safe, healthy, contented, and prosperous societies despite being non-religious and secular. Phil Zuckerman is an associate professor of sociology at Pitzer College and has written on the sociology of religion and on schisms among Jews. Pitzer College is a highly selective private residential liberal arts college in Claremont, California, founded in 1963 by a wealthy citrus magnate and philanthropist.

My decision to write a review of this book was finally made while attending the Easter worship service at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. We attended the third of three Easter services at St. Andrew's after a buffet brunch served by the youth group in the church meeting room. The congregation is largely made up of people of Scandinavian ancestry, but includes many of German and other European origins. It was a splendid and inspiring service, one of very many held that morning in Grand Rapids. Easter brings the greatest attendance, but normal Sunday services through the year are also well-filled.

This small but very typical town in the Midwest serves a local population of about 15,000 people in the city and the immediate area around Grand Rapids. There are 5 Lutheran churches, 3 Baptist, 3 Methodist, a

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large Catholic Church, one each Evangelical Free Church, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses, and about ten or so non-denominational, community, or other independent churches. Congregations vary in size from less than 100 members to over one thousand. There is an average of one church for every 500 nearby residents, although many are not members of any church.

Easter brings out the greatest attendance in the church year, but all of these churches are attended by large numbers of people weekly. Many support Sunday Schools for the children, and some have day schools for the general education of members' children.

This picture, common to most small towns in the U.S., contrasts sharply with the largely empty but beautiful historic churches in Sweden, almost all of which are Lutheran. The picture also contrasts sharply with the public image of Christian churches in the U.S. as characterized by Hollywood and by much of the entertainment and news media, and with the public view of U.S. Christianity held in much of the world. The description of U.S. Christianity as portrayed by Phil Zuckerman in his book is also greatly at variance with my own experience with Christian churches in the U.S., mainly Lutheran and Presbyterian and with my friends and neighbors who are members of other Christian denominations. I also wonder how accurately Mr. Zuckerman has portrayed the Swedish and Danish image of Christianity in those countries.

Zuckerman's image of Christianity in the US supports the usual

portrayal in the media: that all Christians are Bible-quoting, stern-faced judgmental hypocrites who mainly sing revival hymns off-key and shun all non-believers. A glance at the St. Andrew's church newsletter and calendar reveals a rich and varied program of service and giving to others. The local food shelf for the poor is strongly supported, young people participate regularly in community service projects and travel in groups with adults to assist in flood relief, volunteers of all ages help build houses for the disabled or poor, older ladies make quilts to send overseas, and the congregation supports overseas missions and service projects. This is not unusual, but typical of most churches throughout the land.

In *Society without God*, Zuckerman bases his book on his experience living in Scandinavia for 14 months in 2005 and 2006. He lived in Aarhus, Denmark, with his wife and two daughters; a third child was born while in Denmark. During his time there he conducted formal interviews with about 150 Danes and Swedes of varied ages and educational backgrounds. He interviewed people of various occupations and from small towns and large cities, and had many informal conversations with others that he met socially or while traveling.

In the first chapter, the author describes his impressions of this "Society without God" in Sweden and Denmark, and the succeeding chapters give accounts of many of his interviews with individual Swedes and Danes about their attitudes toward religion in general and Christianity in particular. All are interesting, and illustrate the well-known reluctance of his subjects to discuss such personal matters as their own religious faith, as well as the deference and courtesy always extended by Scandinavians to visitors from abroad.

Chapter six, entitled "Why?" offers Zuckerman's speculations on the reasons for the apparent secularity of Sweden and Denmark. Among these reasons are: countries where one denomination or faith is almost a monopoly, faith is weak; a society offering a high level of benefits does not have a strong need for religious faith; a very high proportion of working women, once the core workers of a church; a lack of a need for a cultural defense against foreign threats; a history where Christianity was imposed on the people by rulers rather than voluntarily adopted; a fairly short history of Christianity since the Viking Age [just 1000 years! Ed:s note] resulting in a lighter imprint on the culture; and a few other assorted speculations. Possibly very strong peer pressure is no doubt a factor, where it is no longer "cool" to have a strong Christian faith.

In his closing chapter, "Back to the USA," the author describes his reaction to his return, and speculates on the reasons why Americans by contrast are so religious. Reasons include the colonization of the continent largely by religious refugees from Europe; the founding and independence of a nation by, almost without exception, men of deep religious faith and practice, where peoples' rights (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness) are given by God, not by Kings or rulers; the uniquely diverse population built by immigration from many other lands and cultures; the prohibition under the Constitution of a state church; an open market of competition for people's souls; and many other reasons. Zuckerman also comments on the inequities of wealth, health care, and housing to be found in America.

Zuckerman concludes with his personal reactions to Christianity in the U.S. on his return home and his strongly voiced approval of the way in which Sweden and Denmark have created a secular but highly success-



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The Swedish Maid herself

ful and contented society in the 21st century. The author is clearly an admirer of Scandinavian culture and governance, and a critic of American culture and society, as are the vast majority of academics and intellectuals in the U.S. Yet many Americans stubbornly hold on to the traditional American values of religious faith, freedom, independence, skepticism about government, and equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome. There is now a great and growing cultural divide in America and Christianity is under persistent assault by the media, Hollywood, the politically liberal, and academia.

The value in this book is not that it is a thorough work of academic research. It is not. While well-footnoted and with a massive list of references, the book is largely an opinion piece based on a limited number of interviews and anecdotal experiences over a short time period. The author has limited familiarity with Christian congregations in the U.S., and his notions of Scandinavian contentment are assumed but not readily measurable. The book's value is more as one writer's thought-provoking observations about Scandinavian society in contrast with American, which should be read by Swedish-Americans, Swedes, and by the many thoughtful Americans who are seeking their own position on religion and other matters of culture, as the great American cultural divide plays out.

Dennis L. Johnson

I Go to America, *Swedish American Women and the Life of Mina Anderson*, by Joy K. Lintelman, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn., 2009, 194 pages, Hardcover, Ill., Amazon.com, \$19.77 plus shipping.

When I received this book, I presumed that it would be another personal biography of one more Swedish

immigrant to America, but it turned out to be far more than that. The author has skillfully built this book around a fascinating personal memoir, which she discovered in the archives of the Swedish Emigrant Institute in Växjö, Sweden. Her research was partly funded by the fellowship program of the Emigrant Institute, and included several trips to Sweden, much e-mail and Internet research, and personal interviews with scholars, historians, and others in Sweden. Back in the U.S., she interviewed several descendants of Mina Anderson and drew upon resources at the Minnesota Historical

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Society and various college and university libraries to augment her research.

Joy Lintelman is a Fulbright Scholar and a professor of history at Moorhead College in Moorhead, Minnesota. Upon the slim armature of the memoirs of Mina Anderson, Prof. Lintelman has fleshed out a vivid picture of the life of one person who immigrated as a single Swedish woman, married in the U.S., and who built her life around her marriage, her family, a farm in central Minnesota, her community, and her literary talent. Beyond this biography, Lintelman has added a wealth of detail about the immigration experience of single women from Sweden in the late 19th century, largely from a woman's perspective. She weaves in many anecdotal episodes from the accounts or recollections of others as a way of relating Mina's experiences to that of her contemporaries who made similar choices. A good selection of photographs help illustrate many of the people, places, and surroundings experienced by Mina and those like her.

Mina (probably Wilhelmina) Andersdotter was born in 1867 to Anders Jansson and Maja Jansdotter in the village of Bäckefors, Bäcke Parish, in Dalsland, Sweden. Her family was very poor, her father worked in an ironworks (*bruk*), and they lived in one room in a house called *Hamnevattnet* on the ironwork's estate. This house, essentially a poorhouse, was shared by up to six families. Mina was the oldest child, her sister Kristina was born in 1876, a brother Wilhelm in 1879, and a youngest sister Anna, born in 1882,

who died as an infant. She was confirmed at age 15, and immediately left home to work as a maid (*piga*) for another family. After a year, she moved across the border to Norway, where she worked in a larger household that had several other servants. After several years, she concluded that there was little opportunity for a young woman to advance in Sweden, and decided to immigrate to America. An uncle who had already immigrated sent her the price of a ticket, and she left Sweden in 1890, at the age of 23 years, traveling alone.

The author fills in a wealth of detail about the lives and the lot of the poor in Sweden at the time, which offered little future for the young and poor. Mina was part of the third wave of migration. The first phase, that of Karl Oskar and Kristina, and of Eric Jansson and his followers, was primarily that of families and groups seeking religious freedom and better conditions to farm in America.

The second was largely driven by the crop failures of 1867 and 1868, also largely families drawn by cheap land and homestead land (after 1862) in the Midwest. My great-grandfather, (*farfarsfar*) Jonas Jansson and his family were part of this phase, migrating from Dalsland to Minnesota in 1867.

In the third phase, from 1879 to 1893, the motive was still mainly economic improvement but included many more young and single men and women who saw their opportunities more in the cities and in the growing urban jobs in America brought about by the industrial revolution. My grandmother (*mormor*) from Småland was part of this wave, coming to Chicago to work as a domestic, then marrying another Swede to farm in Nebraska, later in Iowa and Minnesota. A recession in the 1890's ended this third phase, the fourth being from 1900 to World War I, and fifth being in the 1920's and later.

Mina Anderson, as part of this third phase, first came to Wisconsin to meet her uncle, but he was an aging solitary farmer and she saw little opportunity there. She soon moved to St. Paul, where there was a strong demand for domestic servants. She learned English quickly in an English-speaking household, held several other positions including trial jobs as a seamstress and other work, but found herself best suited to domestic work. Jobs were plentiful, salaries were better than in Sweden, hours and living and working conditions were far better, and she felt she had found a much better life by immigrating. She was financially independent.

Mina's life story continues to be woven around her memoirs, but the author adds much material to illustrate the lives and conditions for immigrant Swedish girls in St. Paul and other locations. Everything from their social lives, employment, changes in dress to American styles, the absence of a rigid class system, shopping, Swedish churches and organizations, entertainment, and other elements in the lives of these young ladies is described in colorful and interesting detail. All facts cited are carefully footnoted, though not at the expense of a good story.

Within two years, Mina had met her future husband, Jacob P. Halgren, and they were married on March 2, 1892. Jacob Halgren was four years older than Mina (now Minnie) and was from Tidarsrum in Östergötland. His name was originally Peterson, but he took the name Halgren after immigrating to the U.S. He had been trained as a tailor in Sweden, worked for a time in Chicago, and came to St. Paul by 1890. They lived in East St. Paul and were married in an Evangelical Lutheran Church nearby, in a neighborhood near downtown that housed many Swedish people and businesses. The author adds many details about

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opportunities for courtship and marriage among immigrants, including a number of anecdotes about other couples, both successful and some in troubled relationships.

The couple shared an apartment for a time and soon had their first son, Henry. By 1894, the young family left St. Paul for Mille Lacs County, to the north, where they purchased 160 acres of land for 240 dollars. They were the first to settle in that area, and had to walk some four miles from the main road to find their land, a few miles southeast of the little town of Milaca, a railroad stop with a lumber sawmill and a few residents. The memoirs of Mina chronicle the trials of settlement, building a log house, clearing land and acquiring a horse, then cattle and chickens, forest fires, getting new neighbors, raising babies, and other steps toward building a life. Jacob returned each winter to St. Paul to earn money as a tailor, so Minnie was left alone with her family to fend for themselves. Many details of settlement in the area, adding new neighbors, building a school and a church, and many anecdotes of their and their new neighbors' experiences round out this part of the story. Minnie had 7 children in all; one died in a tragic accident at age 18 and another died young of tuberculosis, but through it all Minnie met all challenges and remained in good spirits.

The couple grew old together farming on this land, their children left home, and their grandchildren came to visit. Jacob died on the farm of a heart attack at age 82, in 1945. They had marked their 50th wedding anniversary in 1942. One son and family remained on the farmstead, the other

children worked in St. Paul but visited regularly with their families. As her children retired, some moved to Arizona and Minnie sometimes joined them for the winters. Minnie died in April of 1955 at age 88, in the Milaca community hospital.

From an early age Minnie found time to write many letters to friends and relatives and, later, to write her memoirs. The author includes a number of her poems, most written in Swedish but provided with English translations, and she was a regular correspondent to several Swedish newspapers with letters to the editor expressing her opinions on many subjects. She even wrote to Vilhelm Moberg while he was doing research for his four-book series about Karl Oscar and Kristina, and some of her work was used as a basis for some of the tales he included. Minnie could never understand Kristina's longing for her homeland in that story; she remained upbeat to the end of her days about how her life was so much better than in Sweden. Ten years

after her marriage she helped her widowed mother and her brother and sister follow her to America.

This book is not an uncommon story, but it is exceptionally well told and exceedingly readable. Its greatest asset is the way in which Prof. Lintelman has built a much more complete image of the entire immigrant experience, so common to so many of the descendants like myself, of these Swedes and the context in which they lived, made their decisions, and built their lives.

The story is strongly focused on the experiences of women and their views about their expected roles and aspirations in life, and should be especially rewarding to be read by contemporary women. This book is a model for the way in which history should be written and read, informative, factual, and highly enjoyable.

Dennis L. Johnson



Professor Joy Lintelman in the Research room at the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, Rock Island, Ill., in 2004. (Photo: E. Thorsell).