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Books Reviews

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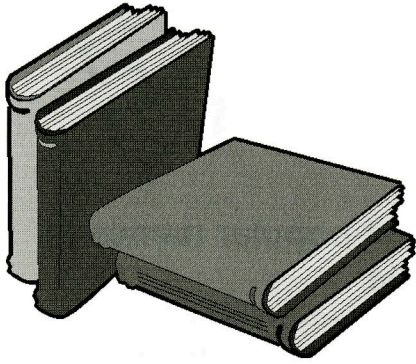
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Book Reviews

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

Swedes in Kansas

If We Could Only Come to America . . . , A Story of Swedish Immigrants in the Midwest, by Robert J. Nelson, 2004, Sunflower University Press, Manhattan, KS, Soft cover, 166 pages, Amazon.com \$23.95.

The intriguing title for this book comes from the pages of a 125-year-old letter written from Sweden to Kansas by Nelson's great-grandfather in 1869. The letter was discovered by the author in a box of old family papers, and was one of the things that spurred his interest in exploring his family roots and the immigrant experience. The letter illustrates the enormous pull of the new land for the Swedes experiencing "bark bread winters" in the 1860's, especially in Småland.

While this book is similar to many others written by third or fourth generation Swedish Americans who wish to discover their roots in Sweden, Robert J. Nelson's book goes beyond this goal. He not only chronicles his own family history, but uses it as a vehicle to paint a broad picture of conditions in the old country and the new which help explain the great migration. He grew up on a farm in Saline County, Kansas, which had been homesteaded by his maternal grandparents. His mother grew up on that farm and married a recent immigrant from Sweden, Oscar Nilsson from Karlshamn, Blekinge. Nelson's childhood and early years were

spent on that same farm.

Nelson is an award-winning journalist with a long career as a reporter and writer. He now lives in Lincoln, Nebraska, not far from where he grew up near Salina, Kansas. As a professional writer, Nelson has woven into his family history much rich detail about Sweden at the time his ancestors left, and about the adversity faced by homesteaders and later farmers struggling to survive on the Kansas prairie. His immigrant ancestors span the breadth of the great migration from beginning to near the end, and Nelson in seven chapters describes much of this period in concise and readable form. The book is richly illustrated with family photographs and copies of various immigration records.

Of special interest to me and to many readers is the chapter on the homestead farm on which Robert Nelson grew up. This was only an 80 acre farm in central Kansas, near the edge of suitability for reliable crops, mostly wheat. When it was settled by Nelson's grandparents, it must have seemed large by old country standards. This was bottomland in the valley of the Smoky Hill River amidst a landscape of rolling hills, not far from the present Swedish American town of Lindsborg, KS. Nelson goes on to provide a detailed description of the farm and farm life, including careful drawings of the layout of the farm as established and built by his grandfather. The recollections of farm life, crops, animals, and coping with the adversities of nature, the "Dust Bowl," and of the Great Depression are rich in detail. They will evoke memories for those of his generation and will bring to

younger readers an understanding of this unique period in our nation's history.

In his final chapter, the author attempts to weigh the influence of his Swedish heritage on his family today as measured by the continuing presence of various traditions and practices having their roots in Sweden. He further goes on to evaluate the impact of this massive infusion of Swedes into the character of America today. Singling out many examples of Swedish Americans who made great contributions to American culture, Nelson asks if America would be the same without these distinguished sons and daughters of Sweden. He also touches on the politics of Swedish immigrants, and on the rise of the welfare state in Sweden.

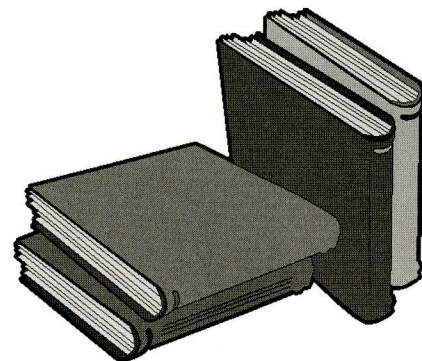
A review of the author's sources and how they were incorporated into this book indicates that Nelson is thorough and well-read in the entire immigrant experience, and he has summarized this information well in his book. For a person new to the saga of the great migration, this highly readable book enlarges upon one personal family history to provide the reader with a good sketch of this period in history for both Sweden and the U.S.

Dennis L. Johnson

Minneapolis again

Swedes in the Twin Cities, Immigrant Life and Minnesota's Urban Frontier, Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck, Editors, Minnesota Histori-

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cal Society Press, 2001, soft cover, 367 pages. (Available at Amazon.com, \$57.50 new, used from \$29.00).

In October, 1996, as part of the 150 year celebrations marking Swedish Immigration to North America, a conference was held at the Minnesota History Center. This well-attended conference was titled "Swedish Life in the Twin Cities," with papers and essays presented by many distinguished scholars and experts on Swedish America and the immigrant experience. *Swedes in the Twin Cities* is a collection of 24 essays presented at this 1996 conference. Included are papers examining a wide range of facets of the immigrant experience with their primary focus on the urban experiences of Swedes coming to settle in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota.

The editors, each contributors of an essay themselves, have organized this collection into four divisions: I, *Aspects of Urban Settlement*, II, *Institutional and Creative Life*, III, *The Language of Immigrant Experience*, and IV, *Swedes in Religion and Politics*. An introduction by Editors Anderson and Blanck presents well the background for being Swedish American in the Twin Cities. The introduction describes the special character of Minneapolis and St. Paul resulting from the unusual presence of such a large proportion of Swedish and Scandinavian immigrants as compared with most other larger cities in the United States. This unique urban experience, with its interaction with other groups and the existing population, has been less

studied than has the experience of the rural Swedish pioneers to the Midwest.

In Part I, *Rudolph J. Vecoli*, history professor at the University of Minnesota, examines whether the Swedes were part of a melting pot, or of a mosaic. *H. Arnold Barton*, author and history professor emeritus at Southern Illinois University, adds his insights on why Swedes came to Minnesota and to the Twin Cities. *David Lanegran*, geographer and social science professor at Macalester College, discusses the many neighborhoods settled by Swedes, both initially and as they prospered and assimilated into Twin Cities life. *Joy Lintelman*, of Concordia College, focuses on the experiences of those less fortunate men and women who became inmates of the Minneapolis City workhouse around 1900-1910.

Lars Olsson, professor of history at Växjö University in Växjö, Sweden, writes about immigrant labor conditions in his essay on "Evelina Johansdotter, Textile Workers, and the Munsingwear Family", and *Lars Ljungmark*, retired professor at Göteborg University, contrasts the Twin Cities with the role of Winnipeg, Canada, as a service station for immigrating Swedes.

These examples from Part I of the book illustrate the quality of the scholars and the breadth of topics discussed. Space does not allow a full listing of the remaining subjects in all four parts, but some highlights of special interest to the reviewer included:

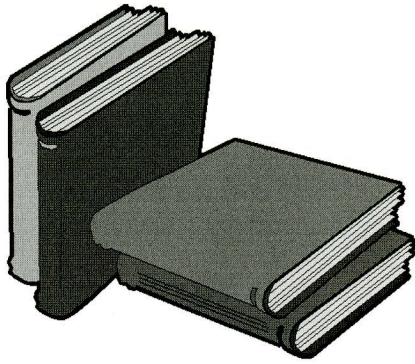
- A brief history of Swan Johan Turnblad and the founding of the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis, by the distinguished

Nils William Olsson and Lawrence Hammarstrom.

- Swedish Theatre in the Twin Cities, by *Anne Charlotte Harvey.*
- The history of Dania Hall in Cedar-Riverside, long time center for Swedish American theatre and social events, by *David Markle.*
- The role of public libraries in the Swedish Immigrant Experience, by *Kermit Westerberg.*
- Ethnicity and Religion in the Twin Cities, by *Scott S. Erickson.*
- Swedish Americans and the 1918 Gubernatorial Campaign (Lindberg versus Burnquist), by *Dag Blanck.*
- Gubernatorial Politics and Swedish Americans in Minnesota, the 1970 Election and Beyond, by *Bruce L. Larson.*

Others will find other articles of special interest to them amid this array of essays. Each essay is well documented and the author's reference lists will lead to further resources relating to his or her subject. As a whole, the book offers to scholars and interested students of Swedish America many new insights into the breadth and depth of the immigrant experience. The editors have added a section with a brief summary of the background of each contributor.

My own immigrant Swedish grandparents were all farmers and I inherited this rural background. The second generation nearly all left the farms and had all learned English in school. They followed various occupations which brought them to smaller cities and towns, but their contact with an urban setting as large as the Twin Cities was minimal or occurred only later in life. As



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a third generation Swede, I lived in Minneapolis (1942-1958) and had largely assimilated into that environment, then left for an even larger and more diverse city (Philadelphia). This gradual introduction to the big cities in my own experience contrasts greatly with the sudden encounter with the urban milieu of most of the immigrant Swedes who are the subject of the essays in this book.

Those Swedes who came directly to a large city as immigrants from a largely rural or small village background no doubt found adapting to this abrupt change considerably more challenging. Yet a surprising number of the first generation achieved considerable success, and their children and grandchildren have nearly all flourished and become part of the mainstream in America. This book helps provide a more complete understanding of the factors which continue today to give a special character and personality to Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Swedes in the Twin Cities will remain a valuable addition to the literature about the effects of the great migration from Sweden on the adopted country of these people.

Dennis L. Johnson

Soldier in the 1800s

Soldier Sven Planck Wallpol: Prisoner of War under Napoleon. His 96-year-long life story and his diary from 1810. By Rolf Ström. 2004, soft cover, 118 pages, illustrated. ISBN 91-631-4727-0. More information at

the author's web site, see p. 31.

Rolf Ström has written a book on his ancestor, the soldier *Sven Planck Wallpol*, born 1777 in Asby parish in southern Östergötland. To be able to share his knowledge with his American relatives, he has had the book translated into English by a British translator.

The story begins with Sven's family background, which was a bit unusual, as he was born out of wedlock to a servant girl and a man from the higher classes, who evidently permitted the "bastard" son to use the family name.

The army was a good place for a poor young man, so Sven joined the *Livgrenadjärregementet* in the early 1800s.

The author does a good job in explaining how the army worked in those days and what happened when King Gustaf IV Adolf started to make several treaties, aimed at Napoleon. Finally the Swedish troops in northern Germany became prisoners of war, and had to spend several years in France. In 1810 they were released and marched home, only soon to be called out again.

The soldiers were generally able to read and write, and a few diaries have been preserved; this is one of them. Sven's is mostly a list of towns they passed through while on their marches. He also wrote down the words to several songs, more or less bawdy.

This book can be of great interest to anyone who has a soldier in their family tree around 1800, as their conditions were similar.

Elisabeth Thorsell

New CDs

Sweden Census 1890. CD for PC Windows 98 or later, at least 64 MB RAM, 535 or 100 MB free space on the hard drive and 16-bit color. Price 595 SEK + postage and handling. Contact <info@genealogi.se> for exact price in USD.

This CD was presented by Federation President Ted Rosvall in SAG 4/2003, when it was all new in Swedish. This is a joint effort of the Swedish National Archives (*Riksarkivet*) and the Federation of Swedish Genealogical Societies (*Sveriges Släktforskarförbund*). The database has almost 4.8 million Swedes in 1890.

Recently an English-language version was published, in which the text (except titles) is in English as well as all explanations and the manual. This is included on the CD in PDF-format, so you need to have *Adobe Reader* to access it.

I certainly would urge you to print out the manual, as there are many little things in the search menus that you may not think of, but which are described here.

The installation is easy, but works best if you install the program just after booting up the machine, and have no other programs running.

The eagerly awaited EMIBAS CD is still not complete enough for publication. Hopefully the first version will be ready in time for the Genealogical Days in Göteborg in August. The contents are excerpted from the clerical surveys and the moving-out records, work done by volunteers from all over the country.

Elisabeth Thorsell