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Literature

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Literature

Andrew Peterson and the Scandia Story. By Josephine Mihelich. Minneapolis, MN: the author and Ford Johnson Graphics, 1984. viii + 202 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes and index. \$25.00.

The journals of Andrew Peterson have long attracted and frustrated researchers. Between 1854 and 1898 the Swedish immigrant kept a daily record of life on his pioneer farm in Waconia, Minnesota. The activities he described have added to our knowledge of the early settlement of southern Minnesota; in addition, they provided Vilhelm Moberg with a skeletal framework for his *utvandarroman*. Still, Peterson's chary language and unready eye for events of human interest have repeatedly left his readers feeling that no one ever wrote so much about himself and told so little.

We have wanted to know: What was Andrew Peterson really like? Who indeed were the "Brobärgs," "Hammabärgs," and "Bergquists" he so often refers to in the more than 1,350 pages he wrote? And how did he and these others respond to the social and political issues of their times?

Josephine Mihelich has taken a major step towards answering these questions in *Andrew Peterson and the Scandia Story*. While previous writers have studied Peterson in the broader context of statewide Minnesota history or confined themselves to Moberg's literary interest in his journals, Mihelich has written a local history which centers around the families and personal lives of the people Peterson knew and mentioned in his daily entries.

A Waconia resident since 1962, Ms. Mihelich began her research with a reading of Emma Ahlquist's 1930's translation of Peterson's journals. From the (translated) text itself, she moved on to sorting out the reminiscences of older members of the former Clearwater Lake (now Lake Waconia) settlement which Peterson helped to found. Her research has led from there to papers in the Minnesota Historical Society, records in local churches, schools, and township offices, newspaper files, and even published reports of the Minnesota Horticultural Society, whose work Peterson long took an active interest in. The result is a book written in the familiar style of local histories but built on a firm foundation of varied and careful research.

In the introductory chapters Mihelich traces Peterson's path from rural southern Sweden to rural southern Minnesota, largely by referring to previously-published documents. The most informative part of the book is the middle chapters, which recount Peterson's relationship to the many immigrant families, not all Swedish, who shared the settlement. For instance, Andrew Bergquist, a native of Kristianstad and the first Swede to visit the Waconia area, settled on the east shore of the lake and gave it its original name of Clearwater, while John and Catherine Broberg, the neighbors Peterson names most often in the journals, settled close to the Peterson farm in the mid-1850s. John Broberg served on local road development and school boards with Peterson. The final chapters of the book tell of Peterson's relatives in Sweden and pay tribute to various organizations which presumably aided in the completion of Ms. Mihelich's Heritage Committee project.

Several aspects of this book are to be commended. First is the new information given about Peterson's personality.. While Mihelich agrees with previous writers that he was generous, public-spirited, and industrious, she also describes him as a "no-nonsense" type who wrote more in the journals about his farm animals than about the birth of his children. He was also blunt, a chronic complainer, and—quite possibly—tight-fisted with his money. Peterson had lived thirty years in Minnesota before he first went to a store to buy furniture for the family home. Mihelich writes: "Until then, most of the family furnishings seem to have been handmade or purchased at local auctions" (p. 79).

Mihelich also notes the difficult and subservient role of women in this environment. Besides doing housework with primitive devices and in cramped quarters, they raised large families and worked in the fields. Mihelich writes, for example, of Peterson's wife Elsa that she lived "a godly life, one of total submission to her husband and family. She was content to live and work in the shadow of her husband" (p. 40). Mihelich notes that Peterson recorded at one point how his wife was busy shearing sheep only days before her seventh child arrived.

Hardship and ill health were, of course, common in such surroundings. Mihelich writes of numerous women widowed and left with large families and of people who were killed in farm accidents or were in bad health, either physically or emotionally. With professional services expensive and far away, folk practices seem to have been the order of the day for dealing with problems. Whether intentionally or not, Mihelich gives a composite picture, in this respect, of a typical farm: a midwife nearby, a cabinet full of patent medicine at home, a stack of butternut wood in the shed for casketmaking, and friends and the church for moral support. This latter willingness to share seems to have created a sense of community that later generations might look back on with envy.

Mihelich also answers certain questions that have often puzzled scholars. One example is Peterson's term *kärleksmåltid*, usually translated—with considerable uncertainty—to mean *communion*. Mihelich illustrates that Peterson's Baptist congregation must surely have borrowed this word from neighboring Moravians, who spoke of "lovefeasts," during which the use of instrumental music and song and the taking of food and drink were practiced together as "a demonstration of Christian love between brethren."

The weakest part of the book is that it falls short of giving a synthesis of the settlement's social and political life. Although the author shows that the settlers supported populist causes and sent men into the Union Army, no feeling emerges from the text as a whole that these were immediate issues for the community at Lake Waconia. This is primarily due to the shift of focus in the last three chapters, entitled "The Song of Småland," "Tribute," and "Today." Here Mihelich leaves off her documentation of the joys, increasing prosperity, and obvious ills of the individual families. In the final three chapters Ms. Mihelich might well have attempted a more critical summary of the settlers' attitudes about social and political issues, especially when she had already gone so far in explaining their way of life.

Despite this shortcoming, Ms. Mihelich has done for her topic what no one has done before. The result is a handsomely bound and pricelessly well-illustrated book that may be read by scholars and general readers alike. Like a Brigadoon, it is a whole community brought back to life after a hundred years in the mists. I wonder why the book has not attracted the attention of publishers of ethnic or local history texts.

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"The Yocums of Aronameck in Philadelphia, 1648-1702". A Study of the First Families Living in the Northern-Most Settlement in New Sweden—including the Sons of Peter Jochimson (Yocum), Hans Mansson (Steelman), Jonas Nilsson (Jones) and Sven Gunnarsson (Swanson) By Peter Stebbins Craig and Henry Wesley Yocom. Reprint from **National Genealogical Society Quarterly**, Vol. 71, No. 4, Dec. 1983, pp. 243-279 + two pp. of name index.

The 350th anniversary celebration of the 1638 founding of the New Sweden Colony, which spread over parts of present-day Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, is not far off. We would hope that exceptional historical and genealogical attention will be brought to bear on this generally neglected area of study. Peter Stebbins Craig and Henry Wesley Yocom have done their part.

Studies such as this are vitally needed, both from historical as well as genealogical points of view. The probing of the lives of the Yocum forebears of Craig and Yocom during the New Sweden days, and the centuries that followed is long overdue. The relentless scholarly effort of the authors in pulling together the information of the Yocums and New Sweden is a tribute to their academic integrity and zeal. Their sources are thorough and impeccable, although one would have wished that they had pursued more data on the seventeenth century immigrants in their home parishes in Sweden, where known.

The settlers of New Sweden have come alive once more. In this work one may pursue their lives through those of the early Yocums, their allied families and descendants.

This work is valuable as a demonstration of what diligent research can accomplish, and what can be produced through a careful blending of historical and genealogical research.

—John Robert Anderson
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