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“What Did You Go Out to See?”

Anna Söderblom

Translated by John E. Norton*

Editor's note: The following article provides a glimpse of the unique perspective on Swedish-America held by Anna Söderblom, wife of Sweden's Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, and detailed in *En Amerikabok* (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bokförlag, 1925). Writing for a Swedish audience, Anna's self-proclaimed goal was “to show Swedish-America to Sweden...through the eyes of a woman.” John E. Norton has translated selected Midwestern segments from her book. Editorial interpolations, corrections, additions and/or comments have either been placed in brackets or footnotes.

oOo

Many “go out to see.” They come back having seen many different things, depending on their disposition and interests. If two people together go into the same room, and afterwards compare what they've seen, they've perhaps seen quite different things. One has gained a strongly unified impression of the whole; the other preserves a sure memory of certain details. One has seen people; the other perhaps their dress, etc.

Many travel to America to see, and see quite different things. They return and write about it. They generalize their limited surface impressions. They even write books about them. In this way, many contradictory, mixed descriptions have arisen, just as motley and contradictory as that mighty continent itself.

When my husband [Archbishop Nathan Söderblom], after repeated invitations and long preparation, went to America in September of 1923, he had at least three different tasks. He was to consult with those working for Christian unity in life and work, participate in a conference to that purpose, and speak of ecumenism in meetings and parish visits. He was also invited to hold talks on religious history at about ten American universities. And, finally, he was to visit the Church of Sweden's daughter organization, the Augustana Synod. If one asks him what he really went out to America to see, he'd probably answer: “Where the Swedes went.”

The Swedes in the United States of America, and their descendants, today number more than two million, fully as many as a third of those in Sweden. Those of us here at home who have had our eyes opened to that great “Swedish-America” have gained some perspective, and see it next to Sweden, as well as

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alongside the “melting pot” population in the New World. In “Swedish America” we find a manifestation, a revealing, of the soul of the Swedish people, which distance and proximity make it possible to study and consider.

Both of us saw that great America, but above all, the Swedes. It happens to one who has seen a sight, that their thoughts return to those sights, and they finally talk about them. Sometimes it has seemed to me that I’d been given a task, when I was offered the opportunity to see something of the New World in such a wonderfully well-prepared way. That task was to show “Swedish America” to Sweden. When I began to view the beginnings of Swedish-America, its early history and development, I felt a tug at my heart, and a sense of indebtedness. How could we have contented ourselves so long with our faulty knowledge? Most of us have simply smiled or shrugged our shoulders at that one-third of our people who left their homeland and, after trials and tribulations, built themselves a new life. Much has hidden those countrymen from us. First, the distance, which seventy-five years ago, when the Swedish emigration began, seemed endless and insurmountable. Across that distance came only a few, limited stories. They further hid us from each other. Those who came back, ostentatious and bragging, with their watch chains and gewgaws, hid from us what is important in ourselves.

A word about watch chains. One reads in letters, writings, and minutes from the 1850s and 1860s about the dangerous vanity that had begun to seize people of “lower estates.” The impossible sometimes happened, that hired men carried watches on watch chains. The watch chain became something of a symbol for a “law-abiding gentleman.” One may grant the returning Swedish-American, if he thought it fun, to show off his fine watch chain at home in Falköping or Kronoberg County. It had, after all, been honorably earned by hard work.

Those of us who have been comfortable and stayed at home in Sweden, have hidden Swedish-Americans from ourselves. We have been too complacent about ourselves in our quiet, dull comfort, or in our slightly somnolent “Swedishness.” We have disclaimed a little too much. Whatever our shortcomings, or more correctly, how large the shortcomings of others than ourselves, we were “naturally in any case much better than those who left their homeland and failed the call of Sweden. Especially, we were finer and more educated.”

Those who begin studying the migration from Sweden to North America, the history of the pioneers and their conditions today, will soon, after having been tempted to smile at their mixed language, their naive and boastful style, and their sometimes too stylish clothing, find enduring, hopeful, patient Swedes and be amazed at what they’ve accomplished. One discovers more, the fine and deeply cultivated soul, the soul of Sweden. That’s the task to which I felt called as I received all the greetings in words, looks, and handshakes; to show others what I saw—Sweden’s soul in the Swedes who live their lives and do their deeds within the huge population of the mighty North American continent.

That task is, however, too large and difficult. The following is only a simple description of what I, who got to follow along, saw. Much must thus remind you of what was written [by Nathan Söderblom] in *Från Uppsala till Rock Island*, seen through the eyes of a woman.

Rock Island and Augustana

Again, one of the usual night trips after a difficult day and yet another difficult day. As All Saints' Sunday dawned on 5 November 1923, our train was traveling along the Mississippi River approaching Rock Island, in one way the goal of our trip. It was with especially solemn feelings that we stepped off the train. We were received by the faculty of Augustana College and Theological Seminary, with their president at their head, by the president of the Augustana Synod, and others. The students sang! They were assembled with their chairman, and greeted the Archbishop as he took his first step onto the soil of Rock Island. This might be called “holy ground,” for it is the center of the largest Swedish spiritual creation outside Sweden's borders. It was not only the largest ceremony of our trip, but Rock Island was also the real answer to the question to which our trip sought an answer: Where did the Swedish immigrants go, what became of their ancient culture and Christian heritage they took with them?¹

Rock Island on the Mississippi, which gave the city its name and character, is a beautiful place. We were impressed upon our first look at the monumental buildings on the heights, where the school is located. It is a “city on the hill.” On the slopes around it are large, attractive homes, where professors and others live. In many such we were received with great warmth. While in Rock Island, we stayed with our travel planner and guide Dr. Abrahamson. After his long trip with us, he was now really home.

The All Saints' Sunday service was held in the church in Moline [First Lutheran]. Three cities have grown together around Rock Island, including Moline and Davenport. The transition from Moline to Rock Island is not noticeable. If you look closely, you see, right in the middle of a wide street, a hanging sign, saying “Welcome to Moline.” Coming from the other way, you see “Welcome to Rock Island....”

But, when lack of courage and fatigue surprise us, and we find our battle meaningless, bitterly turned and faithlessly complicated, then we lift our eyes up to “the great multitude, without number, of all peoples, tribes and languages, who stand before the throne....”

In Rock Island, much took place. That same Sunday they held a gathering in Augustana College's large gymnasium. A few days before they'd celebrated “Homecoming,” a beautiful tradition of the Americans, celebrating a return to

¹ For a more recent look at Augustana's role in education and religion in the Swedish immigrant community see “Aspects of Augustana and Swedish America: Essays in Honor of Dr. Conrad Bergendoff's 100th Year,” a special issue of *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* (formerly *The Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly*) XLVI (July 1995).

their school. It also marked the return of the students to a new term. And more. A victorious football team had won an important game against another university, bringing the victory home to Augustana. One needs to have been at an American college to appreciate what such a victory means. The gymnasium had been colorfully decorated with flags and garlands. Those decorations remained during our mass meeting, program, and banquet.

During that Sunday gathering, there was beautiful music, performed by both a cappella choirs and instrumentalists. Much effort and interest is devoted to music at this school.

Monday was set aside for trips to see the memorials over the oldest Swedish settlements in the area, Andover and Bishop Hill. Unfortunately, the trips were canceled because of poor roads and our fatigue. Instead, we had opportunity to see the magnificent new library, a gift of the Denkmann and Davis families, in memory of their parents, the Denkmanns.

At several meals in the homes of leading men, we became acquainted in some small way with those who lead both church and school. The new president of the Augustana Synod, to be installed for four years, Dr. G. Brandelle, had recently visited Sweden. We knew him already as the wise and thoughtful man he was. A couple of times he showed clearly that he did not suffer from Swedish overconfidence, but quietly meets even excessive tactlessness. The President of Augustana College and Seminary, Dr. Andreen, had studied in Uppsala and later visited Sweden as representative of the Augustana Synod, trying to interest Swedes for a new professorship to be called the "King Oscar II Chair." We found in him someone we recognized. At his side as college secretary and right-hand man is Dr. Mauritzon, with good Scanian-Swedish pastoral roots, preserving in his character, his domestic life and his views much of the Swedish parson's valuable, trustworthy characteristics, along with Swedish academic background. The respected exegete, Professor Youngert, who visited Sweden a few years ago, continues his research into the *Book of Common Prayer*. He showed us his priceless library with its many unique books. I should also mention Professor Esbjörn, a son of the Augustana Synod's founder [Lars Paul Esbjörn], Dr. Forsander, the nestor of the faculty, Pastor Fahlund, leader of the synod's Sunday school program, pastors Benzon and Andersson, who direct the publishing house, other remarkable men who make important contributions to the life of the synod. Beside Dr. Abrahamson, who is in truth part of every line in this book, I got my deepest impression from the "grand old man" of the synod, dogma Professor Lindberg. His beautiful white-haired head spoke to a fine intellect. His dogma is that of the true Lutheran faith, and its concordance, which neither a changed view of the world nor historic research have been able to change. It is bone-hard, clear and pure as mathematics. But there is a deeper source of his piety, borne of a strong pathos. Their certainty of salvation is the deepest mystery of the soul, God's unspeakable gift. This man, in his younger days, was a spiritual care-giver and preacher as only few can be.

On 6 November, Sweden’s great memorial “Gustav Adolf’s Day,” the synod’s and college’s festivities took place. The day began at sunrise, as the students and others climbed to the top of “Zion’s hill,” to greet the day with song and prayer. It was called a “sunrise service.” Later in the morning, the seminary’s impressive new buildings and beautiful chapel were to be inaugurated. It was a ceremony with academic pomp at its best.

Invited ladies took their places in the corridors of the seminary building before arrival of the procession. From the windows, we saw the long procession come up along the hillside from the stately “Old Main,” to the chapel, as bells rang. In the New World, they enjoy processions at ceremonial occasions, and have adopted the academic attire of England. The various universities have their own colors on gowns and hoods. The procession came in colorful academic attire and black pastoral dress. The students, with their flags, couldn’t be forgotten. At the entrance to the seminary building, they sang, with brass accompaniment, “Now Thank We All Our God,” in English. The entire ceremony was in English....

The architect of the new building presented its keys to the president of the synod....The president accepted the keys, turned them over to the board chairman, Dr. Ekblad, a pastor in Superior, Wisconsin, who then gave them to the president of the seminary. Their acceptance speeches were printed in the program. Then, the doors were opened, and the procession entered the chapel. The first greeting inside the chapel was “Peace be unto this house,” and the answer, “And to all that enter therein.” A prayer was read. The president and archbishop stepped to the altar, followed by assistants. The dean of the faculty gave the Bible and Augsburg Confession to the president, who placed these symbolic books on the altar. The president’s speech was worthy of the occasion. The assistants read the Bible verses. The service followed a Swedish church dedication, translated into English.

Immediately after, the synod president was installed. A speech was given by the president of the Minnesota Conference, Dr. Mattson, who also carried out the installation, all in English. But behind it we recognized words and prayers from the Swedish Order of Service. The laying on of hands during the Lord’s Prayer was a beautiful symbol for the ties throughout time, whether or not one considers apostolic succession. This installation of the synod president, with participation of Sweden’s archbishop, was an expression of a still closer relationship between the old church in Sweden, and Swedish church in America. Finally, after a song by the choir, the first Swedish words heard in the new chapel were spoken: “*Sanningen skall göra eder fria*” (And the truth shall make you free).

Spiritual freedom is the noble symbol of research and the Christian life. But it is not won by conceit, but by yielding to the power of truth. We must not fall victim to temptation, usual within theology and philosophy and all worldly views, to deny what research has shown. Continued serious research will eventually reveal internal consistency and unity.

The 6th of November could not have been celebrated better than with such a ceremony. The great King Gustav Adolf eagerly supported knowledge and scientific research. With vision, he turned over his estate to his own university. And he gave his life that day at the Battle of Lützen for the freedom of evangelical truth.

The archbishop concluded with a double greeting.

As vice-chancellor for Uppsala University I express its best wishes. In true appreciation for what this place of higher education has accomplished in such a short time from such small beginnings, Uppsala University looks forward eagerly to the growth of the Augustana faculty to one in the best spirit of the university, bound by the high demands of scientific research.

Your faculty trains servants of the congregation. Empowered by my position as archbishop of the Kingdom of Sweden, I, with the Christian church and congregations in our homeland, ask the Almighty's blessing upon this newly-expanded, noble seat of learning and over the Augustana Synod and its newly installed president. May truth alone rule in this holy place and in its classrooms; may human weakness and vanity give way to the clarity of truth. And may we go from here, filled with the love of our Savior and belief in Him.

The ceremonies continued. After a festive lunch, hosted by the board, accompanied as usual by speeches, the afternoon was devoted to a ceremonial gathering in the gymnasium. Greetings were read from other universities and colleges. From Sweden, there were telegrams from the minister of education, the Royal Archivist Clason, from the bishopric of Uppsala and its theological faculty, in Latin, from the bishop and bishopric of Lund, also in Latin, from the senior librarian on the occasion of the enlargement of the seminary library, and from the bishop of Skara, "...may Luther's bold yet humble spirit rule in these new classrooms." Augustana sent a telegram to the king. And the archbishop gave an academic speech on "Our Evangelical Faith and Science."

At both the stately dinner at the Augustana president's and the seminary president's, the students marched by torchlight to honor them. First, for the newly-installed president, the second time for the archbishop. Both the singing and the speech by the president of the student body, Erik Wahlstrom, were of high quality. But here, as in St. Peter, Minnesota, and probably everywhere in America, there were those strange cheers, which seemed a bit grotesque. The talented young student body president's speech was in praiseworthy Swedish, as follows:

Honored doctor and archbishop! The students of Augustana College and Theological Seminary bring you this evening their greetings and welcome. The world and its people have come closer to each other during these days. There are many ties that bind us, so we feel that, even if we

build and live in a distant part of the world and foreign country, we yet are part of the same human family. We have learned to appreciate both our spiritual and material solidarity. We who have joined you tonight, Mr. Archbishop, are representatives of a new generation, which has, in a foreign country, broken land and built roads, and made their Swedish name honored and loved among our new countrymen. Our fathers did not leave their homeland as penniless children of a poor mother. They brought with them something of the Swedish honor and sense of justice, and above all, a child's faith in the God of their fathers, and warm love for the church of their fathers. They have tried to preserve these treasures for coming generations, and it is thus we who are here at Augustana to learn how to better appreciate that heritage and, if possible, make it still richer and more accessible. We thus welcome you Mr. Archbishop, as a representative of our heritage, and as a representative of the church loved by our fathers, and the faith for which they were willing to live and die....

The archbishop replied, speaking as an old Uppsala student body president who loved to give a talk on the 6th of November. The young Uppsala University representative who was with us also received a cheer, and presented his white student cap, getting a little green “freshman's cap” in return. During the first year, young students must wear this funny little cap, and may not go without it, as the older students.

On the 7th of November, the first lecture was given in the new seminary chapel. It was held in Swedish by the archbishop, and was about the “Universal Meaning of Luther.” That's how personalities are used in America. When my husband went to the lecture, led by the old dogma professor and dean, Professor Lindberg, he looked tired and depressed. When he came back, having talked himself warm on one of his favorite subjects, he seemed again young as an eagle.

After the celebrations in Rock Island, the archbishop continued to Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia, where the World's Alliance held its convention. This part of the trip was remarkable, and should have its own story told, but I wasn't along.

I remained in Rock Island, where I got a broader and deeper impression of Swedish-America. My thanks to all the dear Swedish homes, where I received so much hospitality and goodness, and where I got such deep impressions of important accomplishments!

I was asked several times to talk about Sweden. I tried to describe and tell, and I recognized how the simplest stories from “the old country” were accepted warmly. At Dr. Brandelle's I got to meet two lovely old “misses” who were both around eighty. One was Dr. Brandelle's mother, the other Mrs. Brandelle's sister. To sit between those two and listen to them tell about the difficult pioneer life, and everything they had seen grow out of those new beginnings of which their lives had been a part, was quite wonderful. Each of them had borne and

raised twelve children. One of them had come from Chicago to Rock Island to attend her oldest son's installation as synod president. She had unusually clear thoughts and willpower, and a remarkable memory. The other lived with her oldest daughter. She still retained, even at her age, something of an unusual beauty and charm. She was married at the age of fifteen. She'd worked hard since. When we met, she was still taking care of her aged husband, who had suffered paralysis from a stroke.

Once, when Mrs. Brandelle had invited a large group of women to tea, I read two Swedish poems: "My Mother" by Topelius and Siri Dahlquist's children's song "*Gud som haver barnen kär*" [Now I lay me down to sleep]. Afterwards, Dr. Brandelle's mother exclaimed energetically to everyone: "I didn't like the first. It was beautiful enough. But it wasn't true. To be a mother is nothing. We mothers only need forgiveness. But the other, it was true, with the right words."

One evening, I was invited out by the women students of Augustana. It was fun to be among these young working, interested, American women, and to get an impression of youth. Their president spoke well and from the heart, but in English. And when I was to "say a few words," I had to speak English to be understood. Once I had to try to answer the question, which was always asked of me: "What do you think of America?" "What do you think of young American women?" In my answer, I happened to say that I didn't think they were well combed, and that the forehead is an honorable part of the face, which doesn't need to be hidden. It's not even necessary to cover the ears. And why cut off long, soft hair, and bob it to stand out from the head. Afterwards, a little girl came up to me and said: "Oh, I am sorry you don't like my bobbed hair, because Mother doesn't either." I couldn't do anything but hug her and say "I don't like your short hair, but I like you." That's the way it was. I liked the young ladies for themselves, without artifice, energetic, goal-oriented young people, that's how they looked to me. And, it's the same for these youths as for most others. "When they are bad, they are very, very bad, and when they are good, they are very, very good."

There was a lot of music during the young ladies' party. I remember Augustana College thankfully, as well as the valuable souvenir gift I received, a silver plate, on which "Old Main" was engraved. When we left the party, I saw something in an adjacent room that seemed strange to European eyes. The male students stood there washing up after the girls' party. Some students whistled happily in their shirtsleeves and they washed about a hundred ice-cream dishes. Why not? But how would European students think this possible?...

I had, in advance of my trip, wanted to meet some people in America, among them the author Anna Olsson, who wrote the fine little book *En Prärieunges Funderingar*, the first which had given me a living feeling for the Swedish pioneers. Here in Rock Island, I got to meet her and her sisters, sensitive, fragile, poetic people, who live in, and for, their admired father's memory, the former president of Augustana, Dr. O. Olsson, the synod's perhaps

most spiritual man. Our time together with them gave a strong impulse to my interest for the strange beauty and greatness of pioneering times.

Yet another sensitive and delightful woman whom I met in Rock Island had a great capacity for opening eyes and heart. She was a woman in her fifties, wife of a respected doctor, and enjoying a good life. I have only seldom met a person with such an immediate, healthful spiritual life. She seemed completely filled with a great, simple joy in the fact that God lives. To speak with her was like a drink of fresh water. She told about her childhood and trip to America. Her parents and their many children lived in Småland, and eked out a precarious living by hard work. Like so many others, they decided to seek a better future in America. Their father went first. After a few years, he sent money so the others could come. Their mother and seven children, the youngest only a couple of years old, left their little home. You can understand what a task it was for a woman, alone with so many small children, to break up. The trip went via Göteborg, then to Liverpool, where they went aboard a huge emigrant steamer. Once aboard, their mother, worn out and anemic, became sick. She fell into a coma, and everyone thought she was dead. She was to be buried at sea. Everything was ready. Wrapped in a blanket, the mother lay on the deck, about to be committed to the sea. Around her stood the seven small, fearful, sorrowing, poor, speechless emigrant children, unable to make themselves understood! Finally, in the last second, a little four-year-old boy, driven by fear, summoned his courage. More than fifty years later, his sister told me that she'll never forget how her little brother, angrily stamped his foot on the deck, clenched his fists and screamed: “For Jesus' sake, don't throw my mother into the sea!” The child's despair brought attention. A doctor was called, and found that their mother was still alive. She was taken back to her bunk, and arrived in New York, very sick and weak. No one there could really help. They lost most of their baggage, but finally reached their destination. Other childhood memories had been lost by the one telling the story. But that one was etched into her memory, as was the sight of her father meeting them at their destination with a yellow telegram in his hand. Then, those anxious children's eyes didn't need to look further. They had their father.

In Rock Island, I decided to collect what I had heard about the great migration from Sweden to America in the 1800s, and try to describe how common Swedish people built their church in North America.

Emigration from Sweden in the 1840s

In the 1830s and 1840s, the building and planting of the Indians' and buffalo hunters' Wild West, with its immeasurable area, had begun. In their path came the plow. At the same time came the gold rush, awakened by the discoveries in California, and wild enterprises like the Mexican War, drawing to those endless roads adventurers from the margins of society on both sides of the Atlantic. On streets, roads, paths, and squares in both the New World and the Old, people

hummed the little seaman's song "Oh Susanna, oh don't you cry for me, for I'm going to California with my banjo on my knee."

America needed people. Agents were sent out, newspaper stories and books were written, trying to encourage Europeans to emigrate. Seamen and other returning travelers told tempting, fantastic stories.

Both truth and romantic rumors were heard and believed. Those stories and rumors came also to Sweden of the 1840s. "A slow people, filled with impetuosity" was the way Gustav Vasa characterized his Swedish people. That statement, often quoted, is no longer attributed to Gustav Vasa, but contains some truth. Deep beneath that impetuosity and slowness is another feeling, characteristic of all the Northern peoples, including Sweden's—longing. Longing has been one of the driving forces that drew Swedes out to unknown fates and deeds, from the time of Viking journeys eastward, to the Crusaders who followed them....

Sweden of the 1840s and 1850s is thought by us to have been underdeveloped. Agriculture was practiced without much energy, following worn, old methods. Ore existed in our mountains. Hammermills thundered, smelters glowed, and charcoal piles smoked. But still it was so dark, dark far out in the woods, before intensive forestry began. Good access to cheap labor made life easy for the wealthy ruling classes. Estate and mill town life bloomed, with a lovely, fine culture and rich entertainment. People sang and dreamed in the poetry of the late romantic period. People danced...and drank. Brandy flowed freely during the era of home distilling. Drunkenness was tolerated not just at farm markets and parties, but in homes, even in the parish priest's, even in the sacristy. [Selma Lagerlöf's novel] *Gösta Berlings saga* was typical of that time. Today there is a very lively interest in the noble, self-effacing romantic cavaliers and the beautiful girls who danced, loved, and separated. More serious and remarkable things were happening in Sweden of the 1840s, as they waited for their Selma Lagerlöf. Small farmers lived sparingly and poorly. Among farm workers and cotters there was need; among smiths and mill workers, poverty. In many homes their daily food was potatoes dipped in fish brine and a bit of bread. "The milk was both sour and blue, cheese I saw little of, and butter I never tasted," according to the old farm folksong.

But down deep, the Swedish spirit lived.

Religious awakening had begun. Groups gathered seeking an inner pietism. The early "old-Lutheran" awakening, expressed in Moses' and Lambsen's songs and *Sions sånger*, the so-called readers' movement, lived in our people in several forms and places, long before it expanded into the great spiritual movement known mostly through the name of Rosenius. The strong spiritual longing and opposition to it from above only spread that spiritual movement more deeply in the spirit of the people. At the same time, temperance thoughts arose. Wieselgren's mighty preaching began to be heard, and results followed.

Among the weak or sickly, these religious awakenings caused passion and hysteria, as has always been the case in the history of religion, but also

encouraged deep, strong Christians, who acted to purify and sanctify their surroundings, and who raised the spiritual life of our people.

It was at that time when the siren song of America began to sound. In the great land on the other side of the ocean was a land, a good, rich land, available for little or nothing. People said that some had already gone west. Think, if I could too! The cotter in Småland looked at his seven boys. There was little space between the stones in Småland. Where could they get bread for all of them? Maybe mother and I will continue to be just as poor over there as here at home. But, it can be better for the boys. One, now a mature man in the Middle West, told it that way, when asked how they came to America. I think that in this case it was quite typical. Patient endurance for generations. But, then a door is opened. It's tempting and easily believed. Then, the impetuosity set in. If a Swede had come that far, it wasn't long before action. We have many historic examples of great, hasty and daring enterprises. In them one sees an optimism, which seems part of the Swedish people. One thinks of Fröding's poem about Lars from Kuja: "He picks and digs and works and drags, and his wife saves, he who saves has, they survive on birch meal. And the sheriff comes, the sheriff takes, and Lars he works and Stina saves, and though he has barely his shirt left on his back, he, Lars from Kuja, believes in better times, as does Lars from Kuja's wife." The cotter in Småland also believed in "better days." It will be better, if not for us, then for the children. It's lighter ahead, if we dare for the sake of our children. His optimism brought action, and he became one of the early emigrants.

Other, still clearer siren songs were heard from America. Over there was a godfearing people, a free people. The United States was founded by people who had suffered religious persecution. There, religious minorities who have had problems in their homelands, have found shelter. There you can't be harassed or persecuted because you join a fellowship of faithful in a warm spiritual life.

Characteristic is the fact that the first larger emigration from Sweden to America during the 1800s was the result of religious movement. It was certainly a fanatical, misdirected, and damaging spiritual storm, which pulled people along. But many righteous, innocent souls saw it, even if dimly and misdirected, as a Pentecostal wind of the Holy Spirit.

A Visit to Bishop Hill

We had celebrated the never-to-be-forgotten Swedish Memorial Day of 6 November in Rock Island, the spiritual center of Swedish-America. It had been celebrated with unusual church and academic ceremonies worthy of their description. The leadership of the Swedish college had chosen the day for both inauguration of the new seminary building with its beautiful chapel and, after that, the installation of the new president of the Augustana Synod.

A few days later, I got the chance to visit the Swedish colony of Bishop Hill, about eight Swedish miles from Rock Island. For those who somehow haven't

heard of that strange religious movement that began in Uppland in the 1840s and soon spread like a wildfire across Hälsingland and Dalarna, I'd like to briefly tell something about it.²

Erik Jansson, farmer's son and wheat flour salesman from Biskopskulla in Uppland, appeared first as a preacher in the beginning of the 1840s and was both heard and believed. He called, as have all reformers, real and imagined, for a return to the Bible. The biblical congregations with their communal nature and spiritual life should again be realized. He preached his movement primarily in Hälsingland and Dalarna. He was, in the beginning, surely an upright man. But ignorance and an overrating of himself drove him to dangerous excesses. The suggestive power he had over sensitive, easily-moved souls, along with the resistance, punishment, and persecution shown by authorities, resulted in sickly excesses. "The Apostle," as he called himself, saw himself as the Savior, and bound peoples' consciences to himself. Erik Jansson had also heard about the rich, free America, and decided to bring his faithful there to create a "pure congregation."

An advance scout [Olof Olsson], farmer from Söderala, Hälsingland, bought an area in western Illinois.³ Erik Jansson's followers from Hälsingland and Dalarna would follow him. Together, they were about 1,500 persons, mostly young people, who emigrated in various groups during 1846-50.⁴ From Alfta Parish in Hälsingland about three hundred left. In the church records of Alfta one can read, page after page, the names of those who went. Sometimes, it was whole families, who sold their farms and put their funds into a communal treasury. Among them was a rich farmer from Älvdalen, L. G. Larson. At his grandson's in Bishop Hill, I saw the beautifully painted Dala chest in which he carried 20,000 gold Swedish *Riksdalers*.

Many were young. From a rich farm in Alfta, two young siblings wanted to leave. "The father was strict and forbade them. But the mother wanted to mediate and just cried. They got to leave." A survivor told that story in those short, telling words. Wives left their homes in secret. Even children were taken by the fanaticism and wanted to leave. A little eleven-year-old girl wanted absolutely to follow two older siblings. A now-aged cousin of the eleven-year-old, who had heard the story from her youth and still lived it, told it this way: "Little Lena could sing so beautifully. She had a little silver thimble and was so happy. 'Here I can't think about Jesus,' she used to say, 'here there are so many other things to think about. But, in America I'll only think about Jesus.' And then she sang."

² See also Paul Elmen, *Wheat Flour Messiah. Eric Jansson of Bishop Hill* (Carbondale, IL & Edwardsville, IL, 1976) and John E. Norton, "Diplomat and Dissident: The Involvement of Chargé H. W. Ellsworth in the Janssonist Emigration," *Swedish American Genealogist* XIX (June/September 1999): 142-151.

³ For additional information on Olof Olsson, see Olsson and Wikén, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in the United States 1820-1850* [hereafter *SPAUS*] (Stockholm, 1995), No. 1000, 228.

⁴ Many Swedish immigrants who came to Bishop Hill are identified in Olsson and Wikén, *SPAUS*.

Fifteen hundred Swedes finally left, shipping out of Gävle, Stockholm, and Bergen in small groups aboard many sailing ships during a few years. Erik Jansson himself, now under threat of arrest, hid in Dalarna. His last night in Sweden, before crossing the border to Norway and meeting his followers in Bergen where the ship waited, he stayed in a farm in Älvdalen. Since then, no one has been able to sleep in that room. A woven, painted ceiling cover from that room was sent, when the cottage was torn down more than fifty years later, to Erik Jansson's relatives in America, where I saw it. As the Erik Janssonists were leaving, a young farmer from Forsa came with a load of timber from the forest to Hudiksvall. At a traders, he learned that his young wife had, during his absence, joined the Erik Janssonists on a boat to Stockholm. Without losing time, he went after her. He was a respected man, borrowed money for the trip, and hired horses. He rode night and day to reach Stockholm. Once there, he found that the Erik Janssonists had not yet boarded their ships to America, but were at a hotel in the Old City. There, he found his wife seated at a table. He went up to her and said: “Will you come home Brita?” “Yes,” she said, and got up. She followed him home. Nothing more was said. They never mentioned a word of it again. They lived a long, faithful life together. In her old age, she told the story herself. It can be called trust, sensitivity, and forgiveness. Noble Swedes!

What did they know about what awaited them? What did they know of the length of the trip, and its difficulties? They believed they would “...eat figs, wheat bread and pork.” They starved and suffered. They believed they would go to Paradise with song. It became a desert journey, long and heavy. They believed they would experience the wonders of Pentecost, and understand the language of the new people. But they lived through the isolation created by that unknown language. But they went forward with song and sighing. Crowding, miseries, and shortages during the long sailing voyage brought death to many and sickness to more. Off America's coast, two ships were lost with all aboard. In New York, many sick and dying had to be left. Up across the American Great Lakes, the voyage continued. From Chicago, they walked about thirty Swedish miles. Only the sick and babies got to ride in the oxcarts with their baggage. About half of those who left came in various groups to the area purchased for the settlement. It was a wilderness, a wide-open prairie, without buildings. They had no tools. They had to begin completely from the beginning. It was far to forests, and difficult to get timber. The easiest way to get a roof over their heads was in a ravine along a small stream, where they dug into the soft, firm clay. They put their spades to work.

It was a quiet, beautiful November day. The sun, still warm, shone over falling leaves and harvested fields of corn or wheat across the Mississippi's wide, gray waters. We drove out comfortably by car, which had come in to Rock Island to bring us out to Bishop Hill, through the same areas, which the “pilgrim fathers,” in this case the Swedish pioneers, had walked with such difficulty. No one counted their tired steps, their anguished questions, and heavy sighs. The

Mississippi, the Indians' "Father of Waters," is lined by thousands of acres of rich farmland, which the Swedes cultivated with such difficulty. We traveled to the northwest [actually southeast], and came after a couple of hours across the rich, cultivated prairies, to the little village of Bishop Hill, where between three and four hundred now live, all Swedish descendants, with the exception of one family.

My husband had been forced to travel to Philadelphia for a meeting. I thus had to travel to Bishop Hill without him. My party included Mrs. Abrahamson and her sister. We were invited to a prominent family in the colony, Mr. Linne Swenson, his wife and daughter. His father, Sven Svenson, had followed Erik Jansson as a young man, and had become one of the colony's leading men after Erik Jansson's death.⁵ He was from the village of Valla in Söderala Parish and a cousin of my father-in-law, Rev. Jonas Söderblom. Both these young cousins, related even in spiritual ways, were gripped in their early youth by the northern "readers' movement" in its strict, lawful form. One, Jon Jonsson from Orsta village, studied and became a learned and zealous preacher. "After being freed from the law," as an old man said, he became a conciliator as only a few have become, for souls in need. The other, Sven Svenson from Valla, was torn away from home and parish by the spiritual storms. But he rode them all out, and became one of those who could organize and lead, after many tragedies had struck the Swedish colony. Now we were guests of his son, descended on his mother's side from the wealthy Älvdal farmer who had left with his entire family and all that Swedish gold, the price of their impressive farmstead. At our host's and his brother's, I found that quiet worthiness and the sharply carved, fine characteristics, which one sees in Hälsingland farm people of the prominent old families.

After a meal in their hospitable home we went out to see the village. After those first spadefuls of the virgin soil, many men and women had joined in communal work. Among the sights was a whole gallery, well worth preserving and seeing, of naive paintings [by Olof Krans, now housed in the Bishop Hill Museum], portraits and pictures from pioneer life.⁶ There, we saw men and women in long rows, working in the fields with the most primitive methods, until they were able to buy modern tools and machines.

Wherever the Swede goes, he builds. We saw that especially in Bishop Hill. We first visited the old church, the first house built, and completed in 1848. The upper story was occupied by a very large sanctuary, where services were held three times a day during the first years. It is equipped with a lectern and type of altar, where the Bible lies as both symbol and object. Around the altar is a white wooden railing, as in many rural Swedish churches. The railing, as the pews, are made of walnut. Only the best was good enough for their sanctuary. But the walnut was painted white, so it would look like a church at home in Sweden!

⁵ For additional information on Sven Svensson, see Olsson and Wikén, *SPAUS*, No. 1673, 271.

⁶ For additional information on Olof Krans, see Olsson and Wikén, *SPAUS*, No. 4878, 452.

Besides the church building, there are many other large buildings. One for the large communal kitchen and dining room, where 700 to 800 people were fed during the colony period. Many large “barracks” existed, where the colonists slept, some for men and some for women.

Finally there was the huge, beautiful house [the Steeple Building], a hotel or hostel, whose use wasn’t made clear to me. There, debates took place, and decisions made. Perhaps there were even apartments there earlier. Now, the building stood as a beautiful memorial to the early pioneers’ artistic views and skill. On a Swedish farm, there should always be a room or chamber, tidied and fine. There stood that beautiful old house in the oldest Swedish pioneer community in the west; “fine” it seemed to me. The nameless builders certainly had in their minds’ eye a Swedish city or estate from the time of King Karl Johan or earlier. That’s how it looked by its facade and pillars. They had looked long for sandstone blocks from which they could cut the massive pillars. The building was crowned by a campanile, including a clock with hammered copper numbers, like church towers in Sweden, which was shown with justifiable pride. There must have been skilled, patient craftsmen and artists of many kinds among the Erik Jansare.

Brides were married with a gold ring, as at home. But it was far, and difficult, to come to a place where one could buy a ring. Someone found a solution. They took a gold coin and made a ring. Thus a ten dollar gold piece became a bride’s ring.

Children should get a baptismal silver spoon. That’s how it was at home, if the father was prosperous. But it was just as far and difficult to buy a baptismal spoon as a gold ring. They took a silver dollar and hammered it into a spoon. I got one as a gift, made from several silver dollars.

All these simple memorials speak a moving language of quiet, patient, brave conquering of difficulties, which pioneers face at every turn. One was the difficulty of getting grain milled. It was many miles across deserted prairies to the Mississippi, civilization and mills. The pioneers ground what they could with a hand mill, turned by women with great difficulty. But the course cornmeal that resulted was hard to cook and digest. They built a water wheel in the stream. But the supply of water ran out. If you’re not without a solution, you’re not without bread, even in a pioneering prairie settlement. Twelve young men, who were seen as especially talented, had been set aside for training as teachers. They could also do good in other ways. To that purpose, they were put inside the waterwheel, where they stood and walked it around, while they studied Bible verse and Erik Jansson’s dogma. It is said that the young students in this peripatetic school were finally replaced by a horse!

The first economic success of the colony came from raising flax, and the skill of women from Hälsingland and Dalarna in preparing, spinning, and weaving linen. Swedish *hälsinglärft* was sold in Illinois in the 1840s! And with the resulting income, they could buy their first modern agricultural tools.

The little settlement was shaken several times by difficult tests. First was Erik Jansson's death under such romantic and shaking circumstances that, if it had been told in fiction or film, it would have been described as too fantastic. But it's a reality. I have both read and heard many versions of how it happened. No wonder!

When I made my trip across the American continent to the Middle West, I followed in the path of [author] Fredrika Bremer.⁷ It was unusually interesting to read and think about her wonderfully sharp, accurate impressions and predictions. During her trip along the Mississippi River, she passed that beautiful island, Rock Island. But she couldn't know that one day there would be a castle built there, with spires and towers, for Swedish spiritual education.

However, in Rock Island, she met a couple of people who told her about the tragic happenings among the pioneers at Bishop Hill. The story is best told in her own words.

2 November 1850 on the Mississippi

We're lying off Rock Island, and I was glad to collect much about the condition of the Swedes in the Erik Janssonist colony.

Since their "bishop" [as Erik Jansson was called by them] is now dead, things seem to be going better. But he, through unwise management, had put them heavily in debt [\$10,000 or \$11,000], and some of them have now gone to California to seek gold and earn funds to pay off their debt. Since the Swedes in Bishop Hill have always shown themselves to be an honest, godfearing, and industrious people, they have the confidence of citizens in Rock Island, and are given credit to buy those things for which they cannot immediately pay. They have built many beautiful brick structures, and manage their agriculture well. They have begun to cultivate flax and weave linen, generating income from the linen yarn which they sell. They remain faithful to their religious practices, their prayers and their faith, even in Erik Jansson, who appears to have had power over their minds, of an almost demonic sort. When they became sick and didn't get better as a result of Erik Jansson's methods or prayers, he said it was for lack of faith, and that they were outcast sinners. Many died, victims of climate-related illness and lack of care.

The honorable, decent gentleman who knew much about the Swedish colony, didn't wish to say anything special against Erik Jansson, but distrusted him. Erik Jansson's wife, on the other hand, praised him as quite good and worthy of respect. Even she died during one of the fevers that struck the colony. And four days after her death, Erik Jansson arose during a church service and announced that "the Spirit had told him to take a new wife"! A woman among those present then stood up, saying that "the Spirit

⁷ For additional information on Fredrika Bremer, see Olsson and Wikén, *SPAUS*, No. 3560, 378-79.

had told her she was to be that wife.”⁸ That was four days after the death of the first, good wife. Such speaks for the spirit that led Erik Jansson.

His assassin, a Swede named Rooth, was to be judged by a jury tomorrow. People thought he would be found innocent, since the reason for his act was such that it might reasonably bring on insanity. Rooth had married, against Jansson’s will, a girl in the Swedish colony. [Actually Jansson’s niece, who stood under his care]. Persecuted by Jansson’s ill will, they decided to leave the place, and Rooth had secretly, during the night, let his wife and their child [a little boy] get away in a carriage. Erik Jansson had them recaptured and put them on a boat along the Mississippi, some said to St. Louis. [She was actually taken to Chicago by the colonists, where she was cared for by Janssonist friends. Jansson himself fled to St. Louis, returning in early May to attend an unrelated court session in Cambridge, IL]. Captain Schneidau had seen Rooth the morning of the day he had found out about her departure. He was deathly pale, and nearly beside himself. In that state, he sought out Erik Jansson, who he met as he was going to church, among his faithful. [Jansson was actually in the Cambridge Courthouse]. Rooth said to him: ‘You have taken away my wife and my child, I don’t know where. Maybe they’re dead, and I’ll never see them again. I don’t want to live any longer, but you’re going to die first!’ [Court records show a different exchange of words, but with the same result for Jansson]. And he pulled out a pistol and shot Jansson in the chest. Erik Jansson died almost instantly. Rooth didn’t attempt to flee, but let himself be jailed by the angry populace.

The little colony, consisting of 700 to 800 people, is now led by a couple of men [actually, a board] who they chose and apparently continue in their belief of sinlessness, as they did during the life of their first leader. In an abstract sense, their faith isn’t deviant. The born-again don’t sin. But they forget that the old is never completely removed from mankind’s hearts here on earth, and that we will always remain sinful people until we are changed. The Erik Janssonists’ greatest heresy lies in their blind belief in the sinner Erik Jansson, and the sinners which they themselves are.”

So much for Fredrika Bremer. In *Svenskarna i Illinois* [*The Swedes in Illinois*] the story is told somewhat differently. Rooth, who had been an adventurer and come to Bishop Hill from the Mexican War, had married a girl in the colony, against Erik Jansson’s will. After Rooth and his wife had secretly left Bishop Hill, possibly against the young wife’s will, Erik Jansson sent people, dressed as Indians so as to not arouse suspicions, to find and recapture the young woman and her child. Rooth brought charges against Erik Jansson for theft of his wife but, when the opponents met in court, Rooth lost his senses, and

⁸ See Erik Wikén, “Erik Jansson’s Second Wife Anna Sophia,” *Swedish American Genealogist* (March 1991): 89-91.

shot down Erik Jansson in the courtroom itself. [He was actually shot from outside the courthouse window, after a heated exchange of words].⁹

The act created tremendous anger in Bishop Hill. They expected that their apostle would arise again from the dead on the third day, or that at least some miracle would take place. But the silence of death was not broken, and the storms finally abated. I visited the small cemetery in Bishop Hill. With great emotion, I read the many Swedish names on the gravestones and crosses, Swedish family names, village names, and parish names: Söderala, Forsa, Alfta, Malung, Lima, Älvdalen, etc. In the middle, on a raised hill, is a large stone with the inscription: "Erik Jansson, born in Biskopskulla, Sweden, 1808. Murdered 1850." It creates an awful impression, and disturbs the peace of the cemetery, to see a gravestone branded with the word "murdered."

After Erik Jansson's death the colony's interests were cared for by trustees. Finally, communism and other separatist ideas died. The cholera epidemic of 1854 [and other years, e.g., 1849] struck hard, even in the Swedish settlements, and reduced their numbers greatly. Economic crises, the result of unconscionable middlemen who were supposed to help them with the American language and judicial system in their relations to the state, shook the colony. Many left Bishop Hill. Gold fever took a number to California. But some of the industrious and highly skilled populace stuck together and developed considerable prosperity. The land was wonderful, giving rich harvests when it was well tended. One understands what a hearty people they were, who could be gripped so strongly of a religious movement, even if it was in many ways fanatical and misdirected, and one understands what fiber was in those who suffered through all the pain and suffering.

Then came the American Civil War in 1861. Here, as everywhere, the Swedes gave their sympathies and votes to Lincoln. Many participated honorably in the war. A monument [in the Bishop Hill Colony Park] witnesses to those who fell.¹⁰

Only two of the old pioneers still remained in Bishop Hill during my visit last year. I met one. She was a ninety-four-year-old woman from Alfta parish, Hälsingland. That old woman was the only one I saw in America who had completely retained fashion and folk costume of her homeland of that time. She had also preserved a great dignity. She wore a black scarf on her head; a little cardigan with narrow tuck; a long, pleated dress; and an apron that hung wide around her thin hips. I saw her walk over a farmyard to a woodshed. She might just as well have been going across the yard of her childhood in Alfta, this remaining playmate of the little girl with silver thimble. She was very deaf, and

⁹ For additional information on the identity of John Root[h] see Börje Östberg, "Who Was John Root?" *Swedish American Genealogist* VIII (June 1988): 73-79 and Erik Wikén, "John Root Once More," *Swedish American Genealogist* X (December 1990): 178-185.

¹⁰ For a photograph of the monument and a roster of officers and men of Company D, 57th Illinois Volunteer Infantry see Roger Kvist, "The Swedish Union Guards of Bishop Hill during the Civil War," *Swedish American Genealogist* (September 1996): 193-218.

found it difficult to understand who I was and why I was there. Maybe I was too eager, and shouted too hard. In any case, she pulled me to herself with a comfortable gesture, stepping close to me, while she said in a pure Hälsingland dialect, “Stand there and talk a little louder, then maybe I’ll hear.”

What had those now-clouded and tired eyes seen, since she had last looked across the endlessly beautiful shores of the wild Voxnan River, the blue forests, the grand, rich farms, the white, shining church? How many tears had those eyes cried during those silent tribulations, at the death of friends, and the pain of homesickness? What will she see and experience with her inner senses, before her long pilgrim’s journey on earth is finished? Maybe the heavenly Jerusalem, which she and other emigrants once dreamed of as being so close. Maybe, at the close of her journey, a touch of her childhood home and the shining beauty of her homeland.

When Swedish Farmers Started Churches in North America

Even before the Erik Janssonists left for America, other groups of Swedes had left. Fredrika Bremer describes her visit to the Swedish colony at Pine Lake, Wisconsin. Among those who settled here was Gustaf Unonius, a many-sided man with strong religious interests.¹¹ He left farming, which did not pay well, studied, and became a priest in the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Church’s daughter in America. Its structure has much in common with the Church of Sweden, especially through the episcopate. Unonius founded a small congregation among the first Swedes in Chicago, and even built a church.¹² Unonius was a good, zealous man, who left a blessed memory of himself. But the Episcopal Church was a foreign one for the Swedes, especially for the so-called “readers.” These had found salvation in a decidedly Lutheran teaching of sin and grace, and had suffered persecution in their homeland for their free meetings. It’s no wonder that according to their beliefs, they found an Episcopal Church so foreign, since it, according to those beliefs, did not put sufficient emphasis on God’s grace. Unonius’s creation simply did not grow into the future.

More and more groups assembled in various parts of our country, and left. The very first, which left as an organized group, came from Haurida Parish, Småland.¹³ Another group worth remembering was one from Kisa in Östergötland, which left in 1845 led by a man named Peter Cassel, pious and talented. From their area came Schneidau, mentioned earlier, to Pine Lake,

¹¹ For additional information on Gustaf Elias Marius Unonius, see Olsson and Wikén, *SPAUS*, No. 640, 190.

¹² For a brief history of St. Ansgarius Protestant Episcopal Church, see Nils William Olsson, “St. Ansgarius (Chicago) Marriages 1867-1879,” *Swedish American Genealogist* (September 1987): 113-135.

¹³ For additional information see Nils William Olsson, “Who Was Daniel Larsson of Haurida?,” *Swedish American Genealogist* II (September 1982): 110-117.

Wisconsin.¹⁴ He, like Unonius, left pioneering life and eventually became Swedish Consul in Chicago. Cassel and his party intended to find Schneidau, whose letters home were the immediate reason for their emigration from Kisa. They never made it to Pine Lake, but settled in Iowa, where they founded a very important Swedish colony, New Sweden.¹⁵

Somewhat later another emigrant group, also from Östergötland, were on their way to Cassel's settlement, but were instead directed to Illinois by a Swedish-born Methodist pastor, as had been the Erik Janssonists at the same time.¹⁶ Others from Östergötland and a few from north Scania who left at the same time, founded the Swedish settlement of Andover in Illinois, which came to be memorialized in Swedish history.¹⁷

We thus see how, during the latter half of the 1840s, groups assembled in various parts of our country—Östergötland, Småland, Skåne and Norrland—and left. Fifty, sixty, a hundred or more people, relatives, fellow parishioners or at least from the same home area, joined together to form a travel group, and in most cases tried to stick together and build a community in the new land. This situation became very important for the later building of their congregations. Only somewhat later did the *Västgötar* and *Värmlänningar* [natives from the provinces of Västergötland and Värmland, respectively] come, whose numbers became greatest.

They sold their homes, or their part of their inheritance, quit their cottages, sold their goods, and gathered the necessary equipment and funds. Those who had no property, and couldn't fund their trip any other way, bound/indentured themselves, one might say. They drew up contracts to work for a certain period of time, to repay travel funds advanced by agents. Those agents, often Swedes, hired out the inexperienced immigrants to employers of many kinds, farmers, builders, industrialists. Many came to build railroads. There are unnumbered hours of Swedish labor in the Union Pacific network, which ties the Atlantic with the Pacific coast.

Among other groups who readied themselves for emigration were farmers from Gästrikland and Hälsingland. The uneasiness brought by the Erik Janssonists still remained. And many of those who planned to emigrate had been

¹⁴ For additional information on Carl Johan Fredrik Polycarpus von Schneidau, see Olsson and Wikén, *SPAUS*, No. 689, 196.

¹⁵ For additional information on Peter Cassel, see Olsson and Wikén, *SPAUS*, No. 952, 224; H. Arnold Barton, ed., *Peter Cassel and Iowa's New Sweden* (Carbondale, Ill., 1995); George Bernard Hanson, "How the Peter Cassel Party Crossed Pennsylvania," *Swedish American Genealogist* (December 1995): 172-178; and Kevin Proescholdt, "The Varied Careers of Peter Cassel," *Swedish American Genealogist* XIX (June/September 1999): 125-141.

¹⁶ This is a reference to a group of emigrants led by Rev. Carl Petter Agrelius, who was sent by Olof Gustaf Hedström, head of the Methodist mission on the Bethel Ship *John Wesley* in New York, to assist his brother, the Methodist preacher Jonas Hedström, in Victoria, IL. For additional information see Olsson and Wikén, *SPAUS*, No. 2562, 326; No. 232, 158; and No. 233, 159 and Henry C. Whyman, *The Hedstroms and the Bethel Ship Saga: Methodist Influence on Swedish Religious Life*.

¹⁷ Many Swedish immigrants who came to Andover, IL, are identified in Olsson and Wikén, *SPAUS*.

captured by the deeper and more serious awakening of the readers' movement in Norrland.

Then, something happened.

The greatest things come out of hidden places. Life is born in darkness. Here, it was a decision, taken in the depths of a human soul, then carried out. It was a man who saw God's calling and followed it. It was no more or less. Then, something great began.

Lars Paul Esbjörn was the mill pastor at Oslättfors Mill, Hille Parish, Gästrikland in 1849. He was born in Delsbo Parish, Hälsingland, where his father was a shoemaker. His mother was a farmer's daughter from Jämtland. Lars Esbjörn, left without parents at an early age, had followed the way of poor, yet talented, youth to education. He went to Hudiksvall's School and Gävle Gymnasium, became a student in Uppsala in 1828, was ordained in 1832 and took his pastoral exams in 1839. As a young pastor, he had been influenced by the English Wesleyan preacher George Scott, who at that time was working in Sweden, and by his preaching awakened many to a livelier spiritual life. He became an eager revival preacher, and took up the early temperance movement. Peter Wieselgren became a personal friend. But being a [low church] *läsarpräst* and temperance preacher was no way to promotion at that time but, rather, a hindrance. Esbjörn had majority support for the pastorates in both Los and Söderhamn. But others got the job. People joined him. Those whose brandy he had thrown out on the parish roads had certainly laid traps for him along the way, but others stuck with him faithfully. Now, he saw that a hundred or more persons from his own parish and neighboring communities were preparing themselves for the long, uncertain voyage to America. Could he see them leave? What would become of them? Would they be scattered out there and still preserve their faith, or would they be pulled into the many other religious movements that existed in America and, perhaps, fall away? Had not Erik Jansson torn folk blindly away to unspeakable suffering? How would it go for his own? People turned to the reserved teacher: “Follow us to America. We'll feel safer.” But, could he leave the clean, quiet, if simple, home, and take his wife and four small children towards uncertainty and toil? His wife was Amalia Maria Lovisa Planting-Gyllenboga, a fine, frail, and deeply pious woman. But that sickly wife had a strong soul.

And she saw his calling clearly, more than Esbjörn himself. The pastor and his wife decided to leave home and security and follow those who were leaving. There is a remarkable difference between the fanatic leader, Erik Jansson, and the faithful parish servant, Lars Esbjörn. One pulled people blindly along with him and promised both earthly joy and heavenly blessings on the way. The other simply followed those parishioners entrusted to him, to care and hold them together. Naturally, he also had a strong feeling that his little congregation out there should be able to join in a pious life. They embarked from Gävle around midsummer 1849...one hundred forty *Gästrikar* and *Hälsingar* [natives of the provinces of Gästrikland and Hälsingland, respectively] in a sailing vessel,

including Esbjörn and his family. From the new Swedish Mission Society he had gotten 400 *Riksdalers* for the trip. That was all he had with which to begin. Hardships began while still in the Baltic. Two of Esbjörn's youngest children were infant twin boys. One died even before leaving the Swedish coast. The ship reached Helsingör. In Hälsingborg, where Esbjörn's close friend Peter Wieselgren was pastor, the child was buried. One can imagine the conversation of those two men, and Wieselgren's warm heart must have comforted his sorrowing friend. But neither certainly thought that one would forever be marked as leader of the mighty struggle, temperance, in the fight against drinking, and that the other left to found Sweden's greatest spiritual creation outside the homeland.¹⁸

¹⁸ For additional information on Lars Paul Esbjörn, see Olsson and Wikén, *SPAUS*, No. 3377, 367.