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## Book Reviews

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# Book Reviews

**American-Swedish Handbook.** Edited by Christopher Olsson and Ruth McLaughlin. Published by Swedish Council of America 1992. ISBN 0-9609620-2-6. Revised and updated eleventh edition with approximately 35% additional material than the tenth edition. 209 pp. Paperback: \$8.50 plus \$1.50 postage and handling. MN residents add \$0.55 for state sales tax. Copies to foreign address cost \$12.00 (surface postage included) or \$15.00 (air postage included). Order from Swedish Council of America, 2600 Park Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55407.

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Swedish Council of America, a non-profit corporation with 121 affiliated Swedish-American and Scandinavian-American groups and organizations, was founded in 1972 "to bring into a cooperative relationship all organizations that work to celebrate the Swedish heritage in the United States and to strengthen the cultural relationship between Sweden and America" (p. 3). To that end, the Council has been involved in numerous projects, activities and programs during its nearly twenty-year history. This *Handbook* represents yet another of the Council's many publishing activities. Its stated purpose is "to be a handy reference guide for persons interested in the Swedish heritage in America and in the relations between the countries of Sweden and the United States" (p. 1). As such, it is intended to provide quick and easy access to a variety of basic information for individuals with such interests.

The current volume is conveniently divided into four major sections. The first section, Governmental and quasi-governmental agencies (pp. 10-27), lists information about Swedish diplomatic and consular representation, Swedish consulates, the Swedish Information Service (SIS), Swedish trade councils, and Swedish/Scandinavian tourist boards in the United States, American diplomatic and consular representation in Sweden is also treated.

The second and main section of the *Handbook* is entitled Non-governmental organizations (pp. 30-164). Its first 125 pages offer a comprehensive, alphabetical listing of Swedish-American and Scandinavian-American organizations and institutions - from the Agassiz Swedish Heritage Society of Warren, MN to Ölandsklubben of Shoreham, NY - which "promote the culture and heritage of Sweden and/or Scandinavia in the United States" (p. 30). For each listing, the *Handbook* includes information on the name of the contact person, address, telephone and fax numbers, name of the president (or equivalent), founding date, number of members, purpose, activities and publication(s). The final eight pages contain a similar listing of Swedish organizations that promote contact with the United States.

The third section of the *Handbook*, Educational organizations (pp. 166-185), lists the names, addresses, officers of administration, enrollments and descriptions of eleven U.S. educational institutions with Swedish roots. It subsequently lists the names

(arranged by state) and addresses of the institutions and organizations in the U.S. involved in the instruction of Swedish language and culture. The *Handbook's* fourth and final section, Resources (pp. 188-197), offers a listing of published materials on Sweden and Swedish America that runs the gamut from general interest to scholarly and includes newspapers and periodicals, magazines, organization periodicals, quarterly journals, and facsimile (fax) news. A brief, concluding article focuses on buying new books and finding old books from Sweden as well as on libraries, reference, and informational services that maintain collections related to Sweden and Swedish America. The section ends with a list of names and addresses of American bookstores and importers and Scandinavian booksellers. A particularly well-done and informative Geographical Index of Organizations concludes the book. It is alphabetically arranged first by state, then by city and finally by organization. This format is far superior to that of the previous edition.

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**Leafing Out Your Swedish Family Tree.** Julius G. "Pete" Peterson. Published by Vantage Press, Inc., 516 West 34th Street, New York, NY 10001, 1989. ISBN: 0-533-07736-2. xiii + 328 pp. Maps, illustrations and Index. Cloth. \$26.00.

"She made no answer to this outburst which, she felt,  
was only old Shanno blowing off steam.....'Back to your soap box,'  
she said briefly:" K. Tennant, *Ride on Stranger*

I know from firsthand experience as a professional biologist and amateur genealogist that research, regardless of the field of endeavor, requires meticulous and systematic study and investigation. It necessarily follows that a research guide needs to be authoritative, thorough, accurate and up-to-date. In addition, it must be easy to use (user friendly in computer parlance) and of potential value to either a novice or an expert. Thus, when I first perused *Leafing Out*, I was intrigued not only by the book's title but by the author's assertion that it was intended to be " a research guide particularly designed for the Swedish family historian..." (p. xii). After careful deliberation I have reached the conclusion, Peterson's assertion notwithstanding, that *Leafing Out* is neither a comprehensive research guide nor an effective how-to book on the research process. In fact, I can't shake the nagging suspicion that this book is, in many respects, nothing more than a soap box from which the author foists his pet peeves and considered beliefs upon unsuspecting readers.

*Leafing Out* doesn't live up to my expectations for a serious research guide in several respects. In the first place, it clearly lacks a focus. Even a cursory glance of the table of contents reveals that this book is an unwieldy collection of incongruous themes - a potpourri. For example, Peterson takes the reader through discourses ranging from research technique and record keeping to molecular genetics; from Swedish traditions to homespun philosophical ramblings; from his families' history in Fliseryd Parish (Kalm.) to artificial insemination. Simply put, the author tries to cover too much, and, subsequently, much of the information is, in the words of the incomparable Perry Mason, "incompetent, irrelevant and immaterial." Does a Swedish family historian really care about Peterson's views on scientists, religions, the ERA, media types,

animal righters, the unemployed, liberal Democrats, pro-lifers, freezers, peaceniks, anti-nukers, Indians, Russians, etc. ? Of what merit is a 3 1/2- page chapter on New Sweden or a 3-page chapter on computers for genealogists? Should anyone take seriously a discussion of human genetics for which the most current reference cited is 10 years older than the copyright date of the book?

Comments such as "... I edged off into this seemingly boundless entity" (p. 63) or "the relevance of the above to the thesis herein will no doubt seem remote to some" (p. 62), while admittedly taken out of context, are indicative of the numerous, unnecessary digressions found within this book. I would contend that *Leafing Out* functions not so much as a research guide as it does a catharsis for the author. He suggests as much with the statement that this is a book "that needed to be written" (p. 104). Indeed, the author seems to fulfill his own prophecy (p. 89) in that this work truly is a "self-portrait." It provided me more insight into the psyche of the author that it did into the substance of Swedish family history research!

My second concern about using *Leafing Out* as a research guide centers on its lack of accuracy. There are innumerable mistakes in this book, ranging from misspelled words to misinterpreted documents, that seem to be the results of both poor editing and proofreading. The following short list should suffice to convey my misgivings in this regard:

1. p. 10, paragraph 2: Exhibit 46 (on p. 26) indicates that Emma Sofia Karlsdotter was born 11 November 1852, not 19 November as indicated in the text. She was christened on 19 November! The year listed should be 1821 not 1921.

2. p. 21, para. 4: The text refers to MAP 2, but on p. 49 it is labeled as MAP 11.

3. p. 27: The text refers to an index card on p. 45, which is actually on p. 46. The text refers to Stine Svensson, whereas Exhibit 37 on the same page clearly says Stina Svends(otte)r.

4. p. 28, para. 4: The text suggests that Peter was christened 1 February, whereas Exhibit 23 indicates 30 January.

5. p. 34: Äspebo is twice misspelled Åspebo..

6. pp. 34-35: Månsdotter and Månsson are misspelled Måsdotter and Måsson.

7. p. 41, para. 2: The text discusses the birth of Arfwid Eriksson on 7 March 1669, yet refers to Exhibit 80, which lists births (christenings?) for 20 and 24 January 1669.

8. p. 47, para. 2: The words *fältkarta* and *över* are both misspelled, and *eman* should be *Emån*.

A number of commendable thoughts and noteworthy ideas are scattered throughout this book, and it is truly regrettable that they are so overshadowed by the weaknesses noted above. In the final analysis, however, I cannot recommend *Leafing Out* as a research guide. I would suggest that if one is looking for a basic guide to Swedish family history research, one should stick to Carl-Erik Johansson's *Cradled in Sweden*. If it's Swedish history that one needs, turn to Franklin D. Scott's *Sweden: The Nation's History*. If one wants to learn more about Swedish traditions and customs, read *Of Swedish Ways* by Lily Lorénzen. If, however, one is like the individual who enjoys going to garage sales, picking through someone else's "stuff" in the hope of finding an occasional treasure, *Leafing Out* may be the book just for you.

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