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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Norwegian Immigrants to the United States: A Biographical Directory, vol. 1, 1825-1843. By Gerhard B. Næseth. Madison, Wisconsin. Published by Gerhard B. Næseth, 1993. Pp. i-xii, 300.

This initial biographical directory in a series of five projected volumes covers the period from the first group migration of Norwegians to the United States in 1825 through 1843 and has a total of nearly 3,870 biographical entries. The second volume will cover the years 1844-1846, the third 1847-1848, the fourth the year 1849, and the final and fifth volume the year 1850. It is a truly impressive, not to say courageous, undertaking, as during this opening phase of the Norwegian overseas exodus, 1825-1850, no fewer than 18,200 Norwegians went to America.

Gerhard Næseth deserves our commendation and gratitude for envisioning and planning this ambitious project and for his stamina and tireless pursuit of historical documentation. As volume 1 amply demonstrates, the project represents an imaginative and innovative research effort; it goes beyond a mere register of names found in passenger arrival lists by giving in most instances a biographical sketch of each immigrant. The sources of information are clearly indicated. These include documentary evidence found in both Norway and the United States: secondary works on immigration, community and family histories, newspapers and magazines, letters and diaries, census polls and local public records, cemeteries, church protocols, as well as birth, confirmation, and marriage records of immigrants.

The directory is well designed for easy reference. The biographical entries are arranged by year of immigration; the name of the emigrant vessel and its arrival in an American port is given in each case; and there is an alphabetical index of names. A helpful bibliography directs the user to further research.

Glancing through the directory, familiar names stand out, beginning with "the father of Norwegian emigration" Cleng Peerson, who arrived as early as 1821 and served as a guide for the pioneer group, the so-called "Sloopers," who crossed on the much celebrated "Restauration" in 1825. But, as an example, we also get to know Harald Olsen Kilen from Kviteseid (p. 276), who together with his wife Birgit Frantzdatter Rui, crossed on board the vessel "Tecumseh" from Havre in 1843, landing in New York on August 17. The entry gives the names of their parents in Norway, and other vital information, such as when they were born, the date of their marriage, the date of birth and the names of their children, and movements within the United States, as well as the source for the information. In most other cases date of death and place of burial are given. This particular family came to Lagrange Township, Walworth County, Wisconsin, where they remained until about 1858, when they moved to Norway Township, Fillmore County, Minnesota.

In the preface, Næseth discloses that the book began as a family history when he shortly after World War II was elected family historian at a Næseth family reunion. And, indeed, the directory will perhaps most immediately appeal and be of value to the determined, and even to the more casual, genealogist and family historian. But quite obviously the academic scholar and anyone else interested in immigration history will discover in this excellent publication a wealth

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of valuable information for study and analysis. We wish Næseth well as we anticipate the completion of the subsequent four volumes in this meritorious enterprise.

Odd S. Lovoll, King Olav V Professor of
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Swanson Family History. By Earl R. Swanson (Urbana, IL 1993), 189 pp. in four parts. Cloth. Order from Earl R. Swanson, 1907 Harding Dr., Urbana, IL 61801.

As a sequel to Ancestor Table XXIX published in the March 1990 issue of *Swedish American Genealogist* (Vol. X, No. 1, pp. 31-39), Earl R. Swanson has written an excellent family history entitled *Swanson Family History*. As is often the case, this family history may be of more interest to *SAG* readers for its format than its content. The book is divided into four sections (59, 36, 50 and 44 pages, respectively), one for each of the author's four sets of great-grandparents. More specifically, the book describes the ancestors and descendants of the following individuals: 1) Sven Larsson (1819-1860) and Hanna Larsdotter (1830-1893) from Uppåkra Parish (Malm.), Sweden; 2) Hans Christensen (1811-1858) and Mette Jensdatter (1818-1880) from Venslev Parish (Sorø), Denmark; 3) Erik Gustaf E. Prakt (1812-1889) and Anna S. Magnidotter (1813-1855) from Järsnäs Parish (Jön.), Sweden; and 4) Gustaf A. Apelroth (1808-1880) and Anna C. Andersdotter (1818-1898) from Bälaryd Parish (Jön.), Sweden.

One advantage of the format used in *Swanson Family History* is that it allows for flexibility in the distribution of information. Although the copy I have contains all four sections bound together with a hard cover, it is obvious that this work is meant to be split up and distributed by sections as requested by family members or other interested individuals. The concept of providing customized books for a diverse audience with specific interests and needs is a sound one. I applaud the author for his foresight in this regard. The utilitarian benefits derived from this format far outweigh the moderate amount of redundancy that is inherent to it.

Each of the four sections of *Swanson Family History* is subdivided into the following components: 1) ancestor tables (Ahnentafeln) for both great-grandparents; 2) a list of the children and grandchildren from the marriage of the great-grandparents, i.e. a three-generation descendants chart, accompanied by a narrative that discusses only descendants through the author's parents' generation; 3) family group sheets; 4) a complete list—up to eight generations—of the descendants (and spouses) of the marriage of the great-grandparents; 5) a list showing the geographical dispersion of descendants by generation; 6) a list showing the longevity of descendants by generation; 7) the names and addresses of those family members who provided information to the author; 8) an index sorted numerically by person number, which is arbitrarily assigned by the computer; and 9) an index sorted alphabetically by surname. With the exception of 1), the narrative portion of 2) and 7), the above components are generated from information the author entered into the computer program Family Reunion 3.3.1.

I was particularly impressed by the useful and informative lists of longevity (age in years at death) and geographic dispersal of descendants, both of which are grouped by generations. Information assembled in this fashion is much easier to assimilate. On the other hand, the author's decision to include both the numerical and alphabetical indexes in each section was, in my

opinion, unsound. The two indexes contain identical, albeit differently sorted, information and are thus redundant. I think that the numerically sorted index is superfluous, since a reader can easily determine the position of any individual in the family pedigree using just the surname index in conjunction with the descendants charts and/or family group sheets.

My final observation regarding *Swanson Family History* has to do with stylistic preference. The author uses both underlining and quotation marks to differentiate titles of books, journals and newspapers in the narrative portion of each section. However, when listed in the "Sources" area on family group sheets, such titles are simply set in roman. Although I prefer to see titles set in italic, what I am really criticizing is the author's lack of consistency in citing references, not the style. I would further argue that in the few instances where the author uses Swedish words, e.g. *häräd*, *hemmansägare*, *torp*, *bouppteckning*, etc., they, too, should be italicized.

The above minor criticisms notwithstanding, the author is to be commended for this well-written, nicely organized and relatively error free family history. It is a very handsome work that employs a format that others would do well to emulate.

James E. Erickson, Edina, MN

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Butter In The Well: A Scandinavian Woman's Tale of Life on the Prairie. By Linda K. Hubalek. (Hillsboro, KS 1992). xv + 128 pp. Soft cover. \$9.95 + \$2.00 shipping. Order from Hearth Publishing, 135 N. Main, P. O. Box L, Hillsboro, KS 67063. For autographed copy, send order to Linda K. Hubalek, 2380 S. Waco Ct., Aurora, CO 80013.

At a time when "we the people" are publicly debating the fate of unprotected old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest, we would be wise to recall the fate of another North American biome—the prairie. This vast, treeless, grass-covered ecosystem, which once dominated the central plains of North America and provided a home for bison, big bluestem and myriad tribes of native Americans, has all but disappeared from the landscape. This unique component of our nation's biological wealth, which once inspired such writers as James F. Cooper, Ole Rolvaag and Laura Ingalls Wilder, was forever changed by settlers, plows, barbed wire, and domestic crops and animals. It was destroyed for agricultural purposes; it was turned into the "Breadbasket of America." For all intents, it exists only in historical accounts and our collective memories.

Butter In The Well is a delightful little book that forces the reader to go back in time and remember the Kansas prairie of the 1870s and 1880s. Because I personally struggle with the question, "What is the proper role of humans in the area of environmental stewardship?" I must confess that this book tweaked both extremes of my emotional spectrum. On the one hand, it chronicles the classic struggle of humans against nature, and one can't help but admire the gutsy determination and tenacity that characterized settlers who survived against innumerable odds. Yet it also chronicles, albeit more subtly, the remorseless (and inevitable?) march of progress that produced farms and towns but also subdued and destroyed the prairie as a natural ecosystem.

The setting for *Butter In The Well* is the current Smoky Valley region of Saline County, Kansas during the roughly two and one-half decades following the end of the Civil War. This colorful period in the history of Kansas—the quintessence of western frontier life—is famous for cattle trails and cattle towns as well as cowboys and lawmen. It is also a time when railroad lines

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(built into the state during the late 1860s and 1870s) were used to ship cattle to eastern markets and bring settlers (Civil War veterans, freed slaves, and European immigrants) from the East to Kansas. Against this backdrop, the author has taken a historical character, Maja Kajsa Johansdotter, and produced a fictionalized account "as seen through her eyes, as though she were writing in her journal" (p. ix). It describes the first twenty years on her farm near Assaria, KS.

Maja Kajsa was born 15 June 1844 in Klevmarken (Älvs.), Sweden. She married Carl Johan Svensson and, after the birth of their first child, the family emigrated to the United States and settled in Jacksonville, IL in 1867. They moved to Kansas in 1868. Hubalek reveals to us the woof and warp of this family's life on the Kansas prairies—what birth, marriage and death was like; how natural forces (living and nonliving) shaped their existence; how cultural, social and spiritual forces united them in community. Here are snakes, fleas and grasshoppers; blizzards and tornadoes; hail, fire and lightning; stifling heat and unrelenting wind; drought and disease. Here are sod dugouts and school houses; *Julotta* and *ljus krona*; privation and perseverance; disillusionment and devastation; land and livelihood; tradition and novelty.

This book should be of interest to *SAG* readers for at least two reasons. First, it is an interesting and compelling story about one specific Swedish immigrant family, and I wholeheartedly agree with the author that Kajsa's story "ought to be told" (p. xii). Secondly, the literary genre employed by the author—historical fiction in the form of a first-person journal—seems to me to be a style worth serious consideration by those of you who are contemplating writing your own family history. Linda Hubalek assembled the historical facts surrounding Kajsa's life from a variety of typical sources (cemetery, church, and county records as well as books and unpublished manuscripts) and proceeded to weave them into a fictionalized, but nonetheless plausible, scenario. I highly recommend this very readable and enjoyable book and commend the author for a job well done.

James E. Erickson, Edina, MN



Prärieblomman: The Prairie Blossoms for an Emigrant's Daughter. By Linda K. Hubalek. (Hillsboro, KS 1993). xii + 132 pp. Soft cover. \$9.95 + \$2.00 shipping. Order from Hearth Publishing, 135 N. Main, P.O. Box L, Hillsboro, KS 67603.

The legacy of the Swedish immigrant family portrayed in *Butter in the Well* is resumed in this sequel, which features Maja Kajsa Swenson Runeberg's third child, Alma Swenson Runneberg, as the protagonist. Hubalek once again skillfully utilizes the fictionalized diary genre to depict Alma's life on the farm homestead in the Smoky Valley region of central Kansas from 1889-1900. The author likens Alma's unfolding and maturation during a rather formative eleven-year period (from her sixteenth birthday until her marriage at age twenty-seven) "to the word *prärieblomman*, the Swedish name for prairie flower. Through her thoughts in her diary we watch this immigrant's daughter blossom into a new life of her own" (p. x). *Prärieblomman*, like its predecessor *Butter in the Well*, provides a unique perspective on the Swedish immigrant experience in Kansas and is a must for all Swedish-Americans with such interests.

James E. Erickson, Edina, MN