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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Here you will find information about interesting books on the immigration experience, genealogical manuals, books on Swedish customs, and much more. We welcome contacts with SAG readers, suggestions on books to review perhaps.

If you want to review a book yourself, please contact the SAG Editor, at <sag@etgenealogy.se> so we know what you are working on.

She found her Chinese family

Finding Samuel Lowe, by Paula Williams Madison. Hardcover or Kindle. 288 pages. Publisher: Amistad (April 14, 2015).

ISBN-13: 978-0062331632.

Available at Amazon.com.

Paula Williams Madison is a black American with roots in China. She always knew her maternal grandfather was a man from China but didn't know anything about him until recently. Her mother was Nell Vera Lowe, born in Jamaica with a Chinese father and a black Jamaican mother. They were never married and Nell grew up without her father Samuel Lowe.

But Paula found him, or rather his sons and daughters and their children, in China only some years ago. The search for Samuel Lowe and the reunion of the shattered family is what this book is all about. The reunion means that Paula now has an extended and large family and practically a new and whole identity, as she puts it in her book.

She is overwhelmed by the results of her genealogical research, a feeling that she passes on to the reader. It is very interesting and very moving to follow her on her journey. And a very good example of how to write your own genealogical story.

Samuel Lowe came to Jamaica as a teenager in the early 20th century. After laboring for some years, he started a shop, as many other men from China did. A 'Chiney' shop, common in Jamaica. In Kingston he met Nell's mother and Nell was born in 1918, his first child. He also had a relationship with another Jamaican woman, and had three children with her.

Some years later his family in China decided he should marry a Chinese girl and sent him their choice, a young woman called Ho Swee Yin. Because of this, Nell's mother took Nell away from her father and decided he would never see her again. Which he didn't. For many years he kept looking for his daughter but finally went home to China

with his other children. Among those was his daughter by the other Jamaican woman. They also had two boys, of which the oldest died young. The other one was called Derek and he was his father's oldest son. Samuel wanted to bring him to China but his wife said no, she wanted her own son to be the oldest son in the family, as this traditionally is the most important child.

With the help of friends, Paula could get in touch with Chinese people in Toronto who could find information about her grandfather. He was from the Hakka province in China and Hakka people have a conference every fourth year. In 2012 Paula attended this.

She also found her grandfather on an emigration list at Familysearch. In rather a short time she was in touch with a cousin in China and through him could finally meet three of her mother's siblings, the oldest still alive at age 94, in China. She has also visited the village where her grandfather was born and raised.

This is a heartwarming and wonderful success story about genealogy, lovely to read and very inspiring.

Eva Johansson

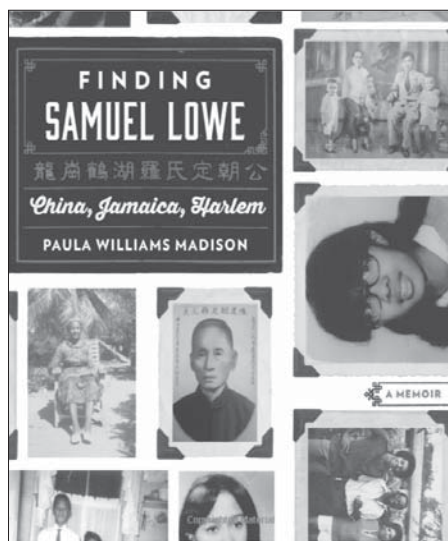
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Peter Cassel Family

A new book on Peter Cassel and his family came out at the end of 2015, co-authored by *Quarterly* editor Kevin Proescholdt and former Society board member Earl Check. Peter Cassel was the leader and founder of the New Sweden, Iowa, settlement in 1845, the first Swedish settlement in that state. *Peter Cassel and His Family: Faces of Swedish America* includes biographies of Cassel and his two wives, his children, and all of his grandchildren, as well as historical information on New Sweden and Swede Point (Madrid), Iowa, the state's second Swedish settlement to which Cassel's oldest son (Carl Johan Cassel) moved in 1849. The 315-page book also includes over 150 photographs of Cassel family members. The book is available for \$25 plus \$4 shipping from Earl Check, 2003 310th St., Madrid, IA 50156.

Book Reviews



A Bridge Disaster

The Halfway to Hell Club. In Search of Lindros and the Other Men who fell in the Gate, by Börje Lundvall. Publisher: Lundvall Konsult och Design (27 Feb. 2015). Paperback 260 pages. ISBN-13: 978-9163769566. Available from Bokus.com (a Swedish bookstore). Price 200 SEK + postage.

An exciting genealogy trip is offered by Börje Lundvall in the richly illustrated book *The Halfway to Hell Club* with some clarification of the title despite the confusing subtitle: “*In Search of Lindros and the Other Men Who Fell in the Gate*.”

The story’s beginning is in the Småland cottage in Halltorp, just south of Kalmar, which the author first visited in 1964 in his grandmother’s company. Börje was then 10 years old and they came to celebrate that great-uncle (*gammelfarbrodern*) Karl Lindros had reached the age of 90. The meeting with the engaging birthday child was reinforced by what Börje heard about Karl Alfred Åke, the old man’s son’s emigration and his tragic death on 17 February 1937. He and nine other bridge builders were killed when a construction platform collapsed from the nearly completed Golden Gate Bridge, the era’s perhaps most acclaimed bridge construction project.

Charles Lindros, as he called himself in America, was born in 1906 in Söderköping, and had six years of elementary school and some easier jobs before his emigration in Novem-

ber 1925. The 19-year-old’s destination was California, due to three cousins who had already emigrated to San Francisco.

It went well for them and Albin and Fred’s construction company gave a job to the newcomer. But the Great Depression lurked behind the “roaring twenties” and Charles had to devote himself increasingly to seeking new jobs in various locations in California. The source material about the thoroughly optimistic man is far from rich, but thanks to the author’s research efforts fired by his indomitable energy, his ingenuity, and via long research trips in the U.S., Charles Lindros’s life path is shown in a fascinating way. The initial source are the letters home to his family, the first only a few weeks after landing in New York. Three letters from 1926 bear witness to the difficulties for a job-seeking immigrant, long before the start of the Depression.

According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Charles lives in the idyllic town of Eureka, in the middle of “Redwood

country.” He finds jobs in lumber camps and sawmills, and sends a series of photos from there home.

At the end of the year he is again without a job, but in a letter from the spring of 1931 he tells that he has escaped the perilous life as a hobo by finding a farming job up in the mountains. Life brightens for him when he met Marie Zimmerman, whom he married in December of 1934.

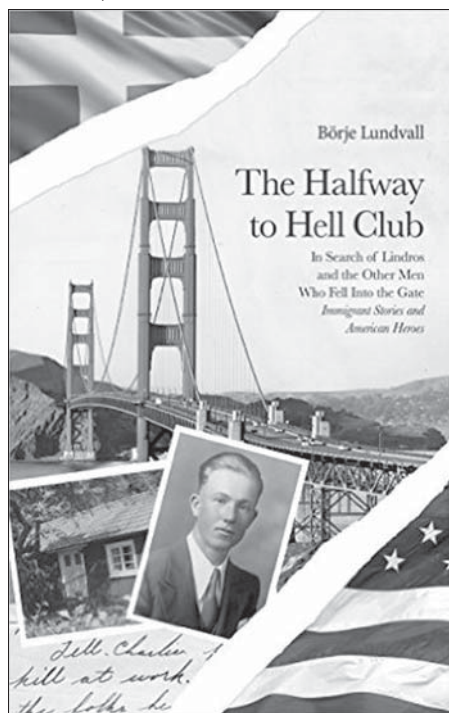
The sensational project of building the bridge over the “Golden Gate” been underway for about a year, when Charles got a job there as a construction worker. It was a stroke of luck the Lindros couple probably thought. But then came the fatal day in February 1937, which became the worst disaster in the history of the bridge construction, and was reported all over the U.S., but not mentioned in Sweden.

In her state of despair Marie felt that she had to inform the unknown family in Sweden. Her touching letter starts “I wish the person reading this letter will break this awful news as gently as possible to Charles’s people. It just about kills me to have to write it.”

Here ends the thread in Börje Lundvall’s chronicle. It has become multifaceted, thanks to the author adding knowledge about the immigrant country at large and long hours in the research field. The result is eminently commendable.

Ulf Beijbom

*(First published in Emigranten
2016/2, from the
Swedish Emigrant Institute)*



Book Reviews



An Åland girl in New York

My name is Sunny Now. A Scandinavian Emigrant's Story, by Hjördis M. Sundblom. Published by PQR-Kultur, 2005, 118 pages. Hardcover. Ill., ISBN 952-99631-0-6.

Contact The Åland Emigrant Institute at <emi.inst@aland.net>

The author is Hjördis M. Sundblom, born in 1920 on the island of Gol-

land, fairly close to Föglö church on the Åland Islands, between Sweden and Finland, belonging to Finland. Hjördis's parents were poor farming people, who had a total of four children, of which she was the third. The land consisted mainly of rocks, but the father Fredrik was a strong man and managed to break ground for two little fields for potatoes. His wife, Maria, kept a cow and some sheep, that were a problem to feed during the winter, but they managed, and did not know about any other way of life.

Hjördis went for four years to a nearby local school. To get there she had to walk for an hour and row a boat for some parts of the way. In those days it was still common to say that youngsters did not need to know

more than to plow and sow, and going to school made them lazy.

At age 15 she was confirmed, and thus an adult. A new stage of her life began. She traveled with a fishing boat to Stockholm and was met by an aunt, who took care of her and made her some new clothes, as she did not have many. Then she started her first job as a help in a well-to-do family, and was kept busy with cleaning and many other chores. For this she got 12 *kronor* each month, which she sent to her parents.

In the summer she went back home to help with the small farm, and in the fall, back to Stockholm and to an elderly couple who paid her 15 *kronor* each month.

By this time her parents had bought a larger farm in bad repair,

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Book Reviews



and to be able to do this they had borrowed money from Maria's sister Mathilda in New York.

Now Hjördis figured out that she should also go to New York and work so she could pay back that debt to her aunt Mathilda. So she wrote to her and asked if she would lend her money for the ticket, which she did.

On 21 April 1938 Hjördis left Göteborg on the *Gripsholm*. This was the largest boat she had ever seen. What worried her most was that she did not know English, did not have any idea about how to get work and had no money. But her aunt Mathilda was to meet her and care for her.

On 1st May she landed in New York, and was at once recognized by her aunt, who had been to Åland the year before. They took a cab to her apartment, and Hjördis was happy. Next morning her aunt woke her up with the words "Get up! You are going to your job!" She was going to be a kitchen help to the cook in a rich family on Park Avenue. The cook was named Aina Engblom, who was a distant relative and became a lifelong friend of Hjördis's. Next she and Aina were driven to the family's summer residence in Connecticut, where they stayed until the fall.

There were many new experiences for Hjördis, even buying readymade dresses. Her employers called her *Sunny* as they could not pronounce her real name. Her first wages were \$50, so now she could pay back the ticket money to her aunt. Later on it became possible for her to pay back the money for the farm, but it took several years.

Back in New York Hjördis started to take part in the social life of the

other young employees, and started to attend meetings at the Salvation Army, a Swedish Pentecost church, and the Swedish-American church on E. 48st. She enjoyed meeting other young people.

WWII started in 1939 in Finland as well, and Hjördis was worried about her family and kept sending them parcels with various items. She also knitted lots of socks for soldiers in her spare time.

After 5 years Hjördis now wanted a new situation. She did not do too well as a cook, but enjoyed serving, and wanted to become a waitress. That took a number of years before she became confident in her work, and in the 1950s got a job as a waitress in the family Vanderbilt Whitney on Long Island. There she saw many well-known personages as well as film stars.

In 1958 Hjördis wanted to change to a new profession and now she wanted to study to become a physical therapist, which was a bit hard for her with only four years of school, but she managed to pass the entrance exam, and was able to live with her friend Aina. Her course took a year and then she got her diploma. She also got a job offer from a clinic where she had practiced, and where she stayed for 27 years until her retirement. She had always wanted to be able to help people in need, and now her dream was fulfilled.

In 1945 she had married a sailor from Åland, but that ended later in a divorce.

After her retirement she had no relatives in the U.S., and on Åland she had a brother and sister with families, which would be some security, if she became ill. So in 1987 she moved back to Åland and the town of Mariehamn after 57 years in the U.S.

This is a very interesting book, which gives insights into many different social levels in New York.

Elisabeth Thorsell

SAG needs your help!

We regard the reviews as a very important part of SAG, as the readers are spread all over the U.S., Canada, and Sweden and a lone subscriber even in Australia.

For all of them it is very difficult to keep track of the many interesting books (and movies) that are published with a *Swedish* or *Swedish-American* theme.

We need you to keep your eyes open. And we are extremely pleased if you will write a review and send it to the SAG editor.

Family histories, church histories, local group histories, and lodge histories are among the things we would like to present in SAG. And all in English.

A good book review contains the full title of the book, name of author, year of printing, name of publisher, where it can be bought, and the price of the book.

Send all book reviews to the SAG editor!

Elisabeth Thorsell
SAG editor



Cover of the Swedish version of her book.