

Swedish American Genealogist

Volume 37 | Number 1

Article 16

3-1-2017

Book Reviews

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Recommended Citation

(2017) "Book Reviews," *Swedish American Genealogist*. Vol. 37 : No. 1 , Article 16.

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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.

The reformer

Luther the Reformer – The Story of the Man and His Career, by James M. Kittelson. Published first in 1986 by Fortress Press Minneapolis - Softcover. 338 pages. Also available as an e-book.
ISBN-number: 978-0-8006-3597-8
Price: \$5.99 - \$25.52. May be purchased at: Christian Book.com, Textbook Underground.com, Barnes andnobles.com.

Although Martin Luther was not Swedish, I selected his biography to review as this year is the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Church, the official church of Sweden. Luther posted his 95 Theses on October 31, 1517, marking the beginning of his struggles with the Roman Catholic Church.

In his preface Mr. Kittletson describes his book as an all-encompassing story of Martin Luther from his birth to his death. He presents Luther as a multifaceted man, not just one who posted the 95 theses, attended the Diet of Worms, and then faded away.

The author begins his book with a brief description of Luther's early life. The family was rather poor during Luther's early years but as the family's fortunes

improved, his father made sure that his sons were well-educated. Hans Ludor (Luther), [Martin's father] wanted him to become a lawyer and eventually to advance to a counselor. However, about this same time Luther experienced a call to become a monk. After much thought, he entered the Observant Augustinians, an order whose main business was contemplation, prayer, and study. Following a trip to Rome on behalf of the order, he became involved in a split over obedience to the greater church and was sent to Wittenberg. Here he began what became an intense lifelong study of Biblical teachings. His professors constantly urged the students to ask, "What does this mean for me?" This simple question fed his appetite to understand what the Bible and church teachings really meant.

His searching for answers led to the posting of the 95 theses on the church door as a response to his inability to find any evidence in the Bible to justify or support the practice of the Roman Catholic Church selling indulgences. Over time the controversy grew and as he refused to back away

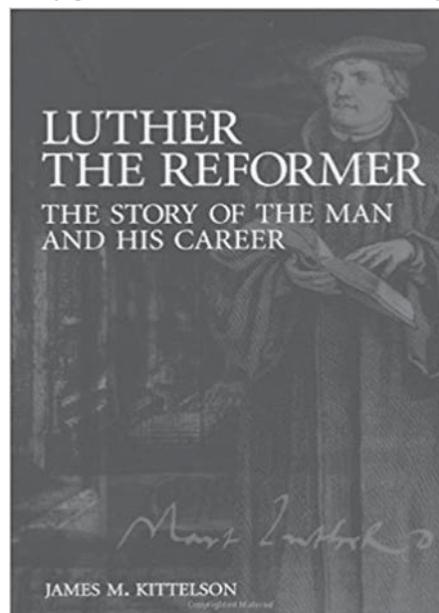
from his beliefs, he ran afoul of the church and was threatened with excommunication. The Edict of Worms declared him an "outlaw" and he spent many years in very real danger of being executed for his beliefs. His original intention was not to split with the Catholic Church but to sway it to his way of thinking which was that if the Bible did not support a teaching, it was of man, not of God.

Much of the book is given over to his struggles with the church, including his preparation for defending himself at the Diet of Worms, the many, many books that he wrote, and his interaction with his followers, supporters, and defenders. His supporters came and went over disagreements that arose among these learned men. Much of his time was devoted to writing literally dozens of books and his teaching. Often his books were in response to those written by others that he disagreed with over the issues of indulgences, Holy Communion, the authority of the church, and many other topics.

Mr. Kittelson spends much of the later portion of the book telling us of Luther's marriage to Katerina van Bora and their family, as well as discussions of how he drove himself in spite of his many health problems. He presents to us a man that was driven in his beliefs, one who did not back away from his deep conviction that all church teaching should be based on Biblical text. Many times during his life he risked his life, health, and freedom to defend his beliefs. We also see a man who could be quite profane in his statements even against the pope, and a man who loved his wife and family.

So this very complex man who simply set out to make a case for basing the church's teaching on the Bible ended up founding the Lutheran Church and starting the Reformation.

In addition, the book includes a timeline



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Book Reviews



of Luther's life, index of names, subjects, Luther's principal works, and maps of his travels, all of which allow a reader to use the book as a textbook in addition to a good but challenging read.

Janet Wahlberg

Life in the Midwest

The Whole Town's Talking, by Fannie Flagg. Published by Random Books in 2016, 403 pages. ISBN 978-1-4000-6595-0.

This novel is set in a rural Midwestern town that was originally established by a Swedish immigrant named Lordor Nordstrom in 1889. The years count down to 2021.

While the chapters are short, the characters are well cast and memorable. One learns early on to pay attention to small details that may seem insignificant. It

always comes up later. Your questions will be answered as to the whys and hows.

The book is very readable, and you may identify with many of the townspeople and their life situations.

You may know many of them and how they handled their problems. You will recall many of the fashions, fads, customs, and news events of earlier times. I found myself smiling more than once and even shedding a tear or two.

Fannie Flagg is wonderful at capturing what it was and is like to live in a small town. She has a wonderful imagination and made the town come alive. If she is not Swedish, she certainly knows them well.

There is a twist to the story that is not compatible with a Swedish Lutheran background; however, it gives added charm and meaning to the story. It is really a tale of two towns that were begun by a Swedish dairy farmer and a Swedish mail-order bride and their offspring.

It is a delightful novel that keeps your interest from the first page to last.

Alice Johnson

Our story goes far back

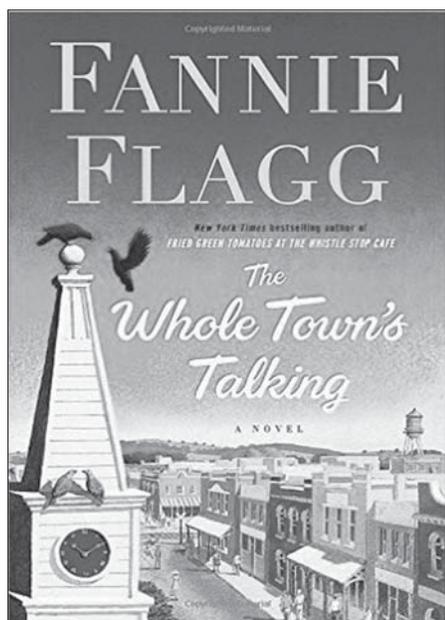
My European Family: The First 54000 Years, by Karin Bojs. Translation by Fiona Graham. 400 pages. Published in 2017 by Featherstone Education. ISBN 978-1472941462.

Karin Bojs is a Swedish author and journalist who formerly was the science editor of the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. After her mother died, she decided to pursue her interest in family history further into the deep history of Europe with DNA and archeology. This book describes that journey. The original Swedish version was awarded the distinguished August Prize in 2015. That literary prize was named for the noted Swedish author, playwright, and poet August Strindberg. The book has been translated into English and will be published in May 2017. This reviewer read an advanced copy of the English translation.

The book describes the history of Europeans through archeology and DNA from their arrival out of Africa into the Middle East 54,000 years ago, to the Iron Age in Europe, and to the Viking Age in Sweden. It is divided into three parts, based on the peoples who migrated into Europe over the last 54,000 years. The hunters are the earliest arrivals in Europe, followed by farmers who arrived several thousand years later. The final section describes the roots of the Indo-European languages, using DNA to trace the movement of the people speaking them as they moved into Europe. The author moves through European history with the human movement resulting from climate and topographic changes. She describes the different cultures that developed over the millennia, and the artifacts they created. At the end, she focuses on the last 1,500 years in Sweden.

The DNA the researchers used were mitochondrial and Y chromosomes, both of which are divided by scientists into haplogroups. The author has included a Q & A section on DNA at the end of the book and she defines a haplogroup as a group of individuals with the same set of mutations who share a common female or male ancestor back in time. The DNA mutates over time resulting in new haplogroups being developed. Women have mitochondrial DNA and pass it on to their daughters and sons, and men have the Y chromosome which they pass on only to their sons. Daughters pass their mitochondrial DNA to their children but the sons do not. A man passes his Y chromosome to his son, who passes it to his son, who passes it to his son for millennia. Scientists can trace migrations of people by looking at the haplogroups of the DNA remains at archeological sites.

When humans first left Africa they lived as hunters and arrived in the Middle East. They found Neanderthals living there. The two species coexisted, occasionally interbreeding, resulting in humans today having about 2% Neanderthal DNA. Eventually, the hunters split into three groups, one moving toward Asia, one to the Caucasus region, and one into Europe, about 42,000 years ago.





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A New Viking Saga

The author follows the Europeans. Changes in climate and topography affected the migrations of the animals and the humans around the continent. The humans followed their prey as it moved to new locations. Ice ages caused southern migration and warming caused northern migration. Sometimes land masses would appear or disappear, changing migration patterns. The humans were mobile as their food was either in the water, on four feet, or growing in trees.

Changes in the climate when the Ice Age ended caused the group that stayed in the Caucasus region, when the hunters moved to Europe, to begin cultivating grain and become farmers. Some of these farmers came to Europe about 6,700 years ago, bringing their farming culture with them. They joined their distant relatives who had come to Europe years earlier.

The last group Karin Bojs discusses are the people who brought the Indo-European languages into Europe. Their origins have

been under discussion for many years. One theory is that they came on horseback from the steppes near the Black Sea. Recently, an international team of researchers compared DNA from the dig sites in Russia and the rest of Europe. The results show that the DNA sequences were from the Yamnaya culture on the steppes of Russia migrating to central Europe about 4,800 years ago.

Finally, she discusses the Viking Age and her personal family history using the haplogroups that she and the members of her family share with the DNA sequences found in Swedish dig sites. She has endnotes at the back of the book giving a bibliography for each chapter so other researchers can review her sources for further information.

The book is dense with historical information and with many references back to previous periods. The published version is to have an index, six pages of color pictures, and black and white illustrations. The index will help when the author refers to previous topics. The illustrations and pictures should help in visualizing and understanding the descriptions given. With a long time-span, a timeline would have been helpful to get a broad picture of the relationship of events that were happening. Overall, the book will be of limited help in doing individual family history but it will help in understanding the differences among DNA testing companies' ethnic origins results. It will also be an interesting look into European history that wasn't covered in European history classes.

Jean Larson

The Saga of Leif the Lucky, by Milton Norman Franson.

ISBN13:978-1519692016

Publisher: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform North Charleston, South Carolina. 2016.

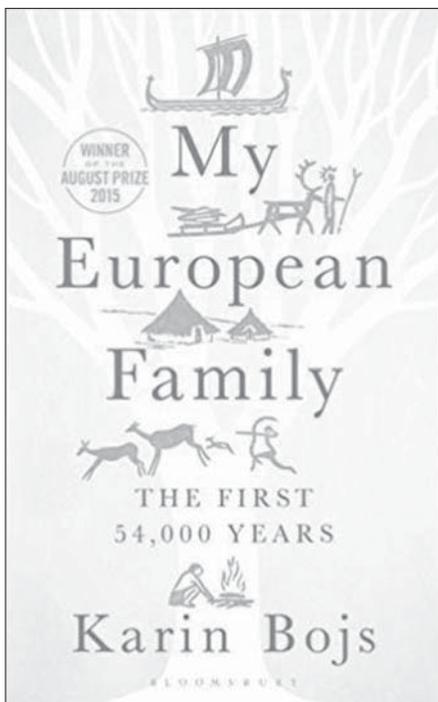
Pages: approx. 250 for each volume

The Wineland Sagas is a three volume set of which the first volume is titled *The Saga of Leif the Lucky*. I will review the other two volumes in future issues of SAG.

In *The Saga of Leif the Lucky*, Franson brings to life the ancient story of Leif Ericson and the discovery of Vinland. It is set in the 11th century in Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia, the islands of the North Atlantic, and the New Found Lands.

We begin with the young man Leif being entrusted by his father with the family ship on a trading voyage to Norway. Although Leif was the youngest son of Eric the Red, he was known to be intelligent and wise beyond his years and was therefore chosen by his father. Also threading its way through the story is the early rise of Christianity in Greenland. Franson gives detailed descriptions of the settings, ships, clothing, and trade alliances of the time. As Leif travels across the route to Norway, he makes a detour and stops at the Outer Hebrides where he meets and falls in love with Thorganna. She provides him with an heir, Thorgils, of whom we will hear more later in the book.

Over time Leif makes many voyages and eventually is drawn to the ancient sagas of a land to the east called Greater Ireland. He is eager to look for this land and to claim it for Greenland. At about this same time he was given a gift by the king of Norway called a *lodestone*. It was an early compass and would allow for navigation during foggy and overcast conditions when the sun and stars were not available to use. The lodestone made his voyages much more successful.



Blåsippa (Hepatica).

Book Reviews



He eventually travelled to the new land where he established an outpost. Further exploration revealed a land with abundant forests, wild game, and grapes. They named the new land Vinland. The need for new land by the Icelanders and Greenlanders brought more settlers to this new world, leading to the inevitable contact with the native peoples. Over time there was cultural exchange, as well as drama and conflict.

In the final chapter we see Leif and his cousin Kjetil sitting by the fireside in Greenland discussing the future and wondering who will take on the respon-

sibility of administering the affairs of Greenland and its promising colony of Vinland. Leif's son Thorgils was the obvious choice but he was a studious young man and not inclined to be a leader.

Franson draws on ancient sagas and other clues as the basis for his fictional account of what may have happened to the Norsemen who came to the shores of the Americas: a Norwegian coin minted in 1065-1080 that was found on the coast of Maine, a report in the Icelandic Catholic Church annals that recorded a shipload of Norse Greenlanders that had been to *Markland* (Labrador), and recently analyzed grave garments of the Greenland Norse that reveal American Bison fibers mixed in with the local wool fibers. These and other clues are intriguing hints that draw you into this story. Franson's careful use of actual historical figures as well as

customs of the time serve as additional magnets that make this a great story of possibility for those of us enamored of the Vikings of Old.

Janet Wahlberg



The Norwegian "Maine Penny," supposedly found in 1957 in a dig in the Penobscot Bay area in Maine. See Wikipedia for more information.

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Book Reviews

An Odyssey in immigration history

Utvandringens mosaik, by Ulf Beijbom. 2016, hardcover, 125 pages, ill. (In Swedish). Published by the Friends of the Emigrant Institute as #17 in their series of publications. ISBN 978-91-977515-2-0.

In this book Professor Ulf Beijbom, former director of the Swedish Emigrant Institute in Växjö, gives an overview of certain vital points in the history of emigration from Sweden.

He starts with the story of New Sweden in 1638 when the first two ships left Sweden for the New World, a dream that did not work for any longer period. In 1655 the dream of a Swedish settlement was over, but the settlers stayed, first under Dutch rule, and then English.

During the 1700s there were only a few Swedes that came to America, among them

was Pehr Kalm, who was a scholar under Linnaeus in Uppsala, and who was the first to explore nature scientifically, which resulted in a famous book in the 1750s, *Travel to North America*, which started an interest within the whole of Europe for America.

During the 1840s the great emigration started, and people did not know too much about the country they travelled to. The curate Johan Bolin then published a book with information on the U.S., even though he had not been there himself, but had gathered information from other books...

Swedes also immigrated to South America, to Brazil, and to Argentina during the later half of the 1800s. This immigration was much smaller than the one to the U.S., but some small Swedish settlements still survive.

Next we may read about stories and traditions from the pioneering days, how the new settlers took out their tools and built their log cabins, how they handled the rattle snakes, grasshoppers, and other unknown perils in their new home.

Chicago had more Swedes, than Göteborg, and what did they do there? Many, perhaps most of them, were in the building trades and raised the skyscrapers. Ragnar Benson was a famous man from Älmhult, a successful builder with blue and yellow trucks and tools. There are interesting excerpts from an old interview with him. An interesting book!

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

New and Noteworthy

(Short notes on interesting books and articles)

The *December 2016* issue of the *Family Tree Magazine* has a good article, "The Swede Life," an article by David A. Fryxell. On seven pages he covers most of the basic needs for a beginner at Swedish research. He gives web addresses for various resources, lists some good books in English (except that he has omitted the huge amalgamated *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in the United States 1820–1850* by Nils William Olsson and Erik Wikén (1995). The patronymic name system is explained, as well as the procedure for leaving Sweden and entering the U.S.

The *January-February 2017* issue of the *Family Tree Magazine* contains comments on 25 genealogy websites, and tells you how to use them.

The *March-April 2017* issue of the *Family Tree Magazine* has 29 "Underused" web sites. Number 1 is Archaic Medical Terms, which might tell you what killed great-aunt Mathilda. Or study "Evidence Explained" that has helpful tools for your documenting of your genealogy. The site "GenDisasters" has information on train wrecks, fires, floods, and much more.

Finally the SAG editor and her friend Ulf Berggren (known from the SAG Workshop) have just released their new manual to reading Old Swedish Handwriting, called "*Vad står det?*" (What does it say?) in **Swedish**, and can be bought from the *Rötterbokhandeln*, see *link on p. 26*. (Beware though, postage is expensive.)