

# Swedish American Genealogist

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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.

## The Vinland Saga goes on

*The Battle for Wineland* (book 2) and *The Last Viking in Wineland* (book 3), by Milton Norman Franson.

ISBN-13: 978-1530500833 (book 2) and ISBN-13: 978-1536809831 (book 3)

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

Pages: approx. 250 for each volume.

Book 2, *The Battle for Wineland*, begins in the year 1029. Leif Ericsson is dead and his son and nephew must now lead the Greenland Norse as well as the settlements in the New World. Arnar, a cousin of Leif the Lucky, has returned to Greenland from Vinland bringing a young sister and brother of the Algonquin tribe with him. The stories that he shares around the fire stir the heart and imagination of his nephew, Ari.

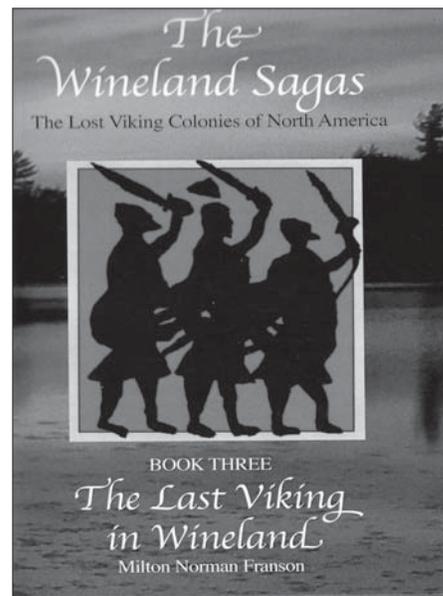
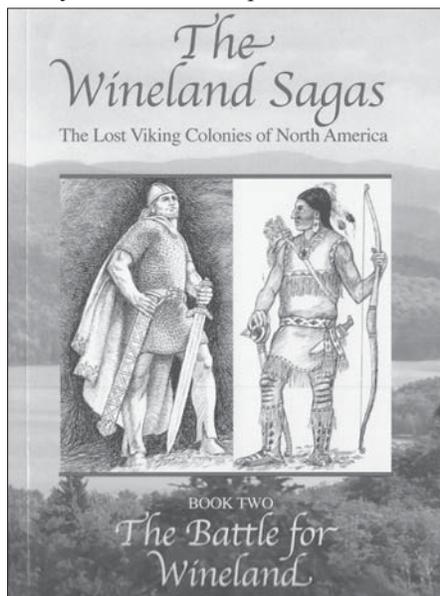
Ari marries and has four children, with whom he shares the stories that his uncle Arnar had told him as a boy. Erikur, the eldest, grew up to be a priest and eventually a bishop. His territory included Greenland, Markland, Helluland, and Vinland in the New World where he eventually traveled and spent his time trying to convert the

Narragansett tribe. He remained there many years, married one of the colonist's daughters, and had a family. After he was killed by the natives, his wife moved to Iceland to raise her family. She eventually remarried and had a son Sturlu who was vindictive, rich, and greedy. He spent much of his time and energy trying to destroy the farms and businesses of the Icelanders in order to enrich himself. After his death his son and foster son took over the family lands and business. Both sons were writers. Kjarten, the foster son, preferred to collect and write the legends and sagas of the Greenlanders. It was these sagas that made their way to Archbishop Helvegi who read them with great interest. His reading of these sagas brought him to the realization that the last visit by a Norwegian ship to the New World colonies had been nearly 100 years earlier. His primary focus became the lost souls in the New World as he felt a sense of God's mission to go to the colonies and minister to these Norse settlers. He put great effort into setting up an expedition to the colonies. Returning two years later he reported on the de-

plorable conditions at the colonies and of the need for colonists, supplies, and trade. This brought Iceland, Greenland, and the colonies under the rule of Norway.

Book 3, *The Last Viking in Wineland*, continues the story as it describes the various forces that eventually led to the demise of not only the Norse colonies in North America but to the final chapter of the settlements in Greenland. Mother Nature brought a mini-Ice Age to the northern hemisphere causing crop failures, decreased game, and froze the travel routes between Greenland and North America. It also prevented the trading ships from landing in Greenland for the increasingly scant trade goods that the Greenlanders had to offer. Bubonic plague wiped out one-third of the population of Europe and Iceland, again reducing potential settlers and trade goods from arriving in Greenland and North America. With the increased isolation from their native lands and people, the colonists began to assimilate more quickly into the native populations of North America and eventually disappeared.

Meanwhile in Greenland the farmers



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were having an increasingly difficult time surviving on their farms. The colder and longer winters diminished the growing season, thus reducing crop production for both the humans and the animals. Most of the cattle died due to the severe weather and lack of fodder. Starvation and disease took its toll on the humans. Many families moved to Iceland where the weather and land were better until there was only one family left on the Western coast of Greenland: Solveig, Brynjolfur, and Olafur. Then Solveig and Brynjolfur died leaving only Olafur, a slow-witted man who buried his family members as best he could. Not long after this, Olafur died in an altercation with the Kallals, an indigenous people of the area. Olafur, the last of the Vikings died in 1541.

Mr. Franson takes the story of Leif Ericson and his journey to the Americas to new and intriguing depths by using known historical figures as well as fictional characters to draw a portrait of exploration, adventure, and daring from Greenland to Central America. He makes his story believable by drawing on sagas, legends, as well as fact-based accounts in developing his story. He cites the discovery of the Viking village in Newfoundland, L'anse aux Meadows, as the catalyst for him to write this series. He used the story of the conquistadors hailed by the Central American natives as returning "white gods" that had been prophesied in their ancient Mayan legends. Other factors in his stories look to recent DNA studies show that 20% of the Ojibways show European ancestry. Also, early French missionaries recorded that the Ojibway "practiced a secret religious ritual that contained Catholic elements." By skillfully weaving these legends and stories into a narrative of the succeeding generations of the family of Leif, Mr. Franson is able to portray the characters as real people with friends and

families as well as hopes, dreams, and ambitions.

I found this series an interesting read that sparked my imagination as to what might have been. Perhaps someday there will be more discoveries that will give credence to the legends.

*Janet Wahlberg*

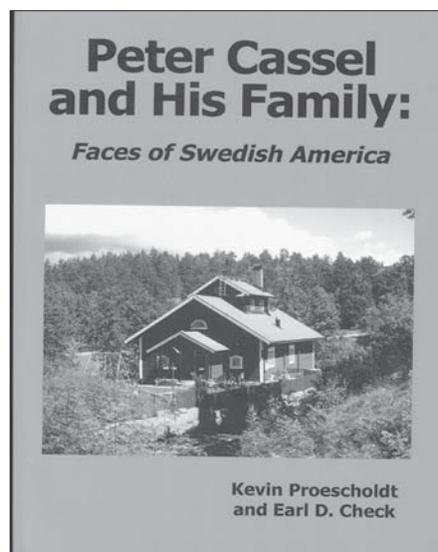
## A Swedish Pioneer Family

*Peter Cassel and His Family: Faces of Swedish America*, by Kevin Proescholdt and Earl D. Check.

Softcover, 315 pages, ill., name index.

Published by Swede Point Press  
2015. 2003 310th Street, Madrid, IA 50156.

If you are driving across Iowa on U.S. 34, be sure to stop in Lockridge in Jefferson County. Pass through the village and after a few turns you will see on a hill a white church and steeple. You have found New Sweden's Lutheran Church, built in 1850 by settlers led by Peter Cassel who arrived there in 1845. Wander through the cemetery and read all the Swedish names on the stones. I do this often when visiting my husband's cousins who farm only a mile away. It feels so special to stand there on the ground of the first permanent 19<sup>th</sup> century Swedish community in America.



It is that connection which led me to start reading this book, coupled with knowing the authors, Kevin and Earl, through our Swedish-American Historical Society board memberships. I knew they both descend from Peter Cassel and that their tie to the Cassel story runs deep. And – very importantly – that they never do anything halfway. So, no surprise, after only a few paragraphs into the introduction, I could see that I'd be reading their book cover to cover, all 303 pages. (Okay, I did quickly scan some pages that just list names of grandchildren and greatgrands.)

The book opens with a 7-page introduction, a discussion of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century emigration from Sweden of what turned out to be a quarter of that country's population. Pedantic? Boring? Not at all. It is inviting to read, conversational in tone (which happens to be true all the way to the last page). It is especially interesting when you get to the paragraphs about Peter Cassel's influence on Swedish emigration, starting with his letter home in September 1845, the first of many letters which were widely published in the Swedish press, causing considerable discussion and stimulating many Swedes to come to America. If you want to learn more, fear not: page 8 gives you endnotes with 17 references.

So who was Peter Cassel? He was born in 1790 at Redeby in Asby, (Östg.) son of Carl Börjesson<sup>1</sup> and his wife Catharina Svensdotter, with the patronymic name Peter Carlsson. He was first a miller and then a farmer (a landowner, a "bonde") in the southern part of Östergötland län. His roots have an unusual twist. The name Cassel, which our hero took as his surname, comes from his ancestor Peter Cassel (1540-1607), who might have come to Sweden from Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1592.<sup>2</sup> He became the stable master for Duke Karl of Sweden, who in 1607 was crowned King Karl IX. Doesn't that make you want to read more about the Cassel family?

On to Chapter 1: "Peter Cassel and His Wives." Some chapter subheadings tell you the direction of Peter Cassel's life: "Miller, investor, master builder, writer, pioneer,



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church founder and pastor.” From Kisa Parish (Östg.) to Jefferson County, Iowa, in 1845. The amount of detailed descriptions of peoples, places, and things with photographs of Cassel’s mills and homes in Sweden grab your attention, as does the step-by-step account of the trip from Sweden to the hills of southeastern Iowa territory.

We meet his two wives, both of whom he married in Sweden: Anna Svendsdotter, and after her death in 1829, Ingeborg Catharina Andersdotter, who came to America with Peter and outlived him by 20 years. There were 11 children, but only 6 survived childhood. Anna lost 4 of her 5, Ingeborg only 1 of her 6. Of the 11, all but the last 2 were born in Sweden.

But before leaving Chapter 1 and getting into any discussion of Cassel family descendants, be sure to read “Peter Cassel’s American Letters,” pages 80-100 including 39 extensive endnotes. They read like relaxed personal journals, full of reports of daily life both wonderful and less so, descriptions of the weather, plants, animals, the ups and downs of farming, plans for the future. You feel you are there in Jefferson County in the 1840’s – the letters are infinitely more engaging to read than any American history textbook.

Chapter 2, all 89 pages, is about Anna’s



Kevin Proescholdt and Earl Check in Kisa, (Östg.) Sweden in 1995. (Photo by E.Thorsell).

only surviving child, Carl Johan, and his descendants. Carl Johan was born in 1821 in Kisa parish, came to Iowa with his father in 1845, married in 1848, and in 1849 moved to Swede Point (Madrid) in Boone County, Iowa. Many of his descendants remain there today, including author Earl Check. Interested in the story of a settlement in central Iowa (or almost anywhere else)? You get to read a dozen pages describing Swede Point’s early days.

The chapter is filled with photos on almost every page, and there are descriptions of family members’ relationships, jobs, life



New Sweden Lutheran Church.

history, extracts from letters. Everyone becomes a person, not just a name on a genealogical chart. And of course there are endnotes, too many to count. It is remarkable how much material going back several generations family members have saved and made available.

Carl Johan’s clan is much larger than that of his half-sisters and half-brother who married and had children – Andrew Frederick, Maria Mathilda, and Carrie Sofia. The remaining two who never married, Gustaf Albert and Peter Edward, have interesting chapters of their own. We learn, for example, that Gustaf died in 1862 while a soldier in the Civil War.

We all have read genealogical family presentations of varying length and detail. Interesting to the family (maybe), but usually boring to everyone else. “Peter Cassel and His Family” is an exception. The extent of the authors’ research and the care with which they wove it all together is amazing. I can’t imagine the time it took. In short: my wholehearted congratulations to Kevin and Earl.

P.S.: If you are in the area, you should visit the *Swedish Heritage Society’s* museum and gift shop on U.S. 218 in Swedesburg, Iowa. It’s about 20 miles northeast

of Lockridge. You can’t miss it – there’s a large red Dala horse outside waiting to greet you.

For open hours info: (319) 254-2317  
email: swedish@iowatelecom.net

Ellen Rye

## Editor’s note:

1) Carl Börjesson Cassel, father of Peter Cassel, the emigrant, died on 16 July 1834 at Redeby in Asby parish (Östg.). His estate inventory is dated 28 July 1834. Among his heirs is mentioned his son, the miller *Petter Cassel* of Qvarnstugan in Kisa. The others were *Johan Cassel* of Brokind, in Vårdnäs, married daughters *Stina*, *Maja*, and *Catharina*. The widow of Carl (his second wife) *Greta Larsdotter* gave information on the estate. The estate inventory is found in Ydre *häradsrätt* (E) FIIIa:43 (1834-1834) Image 100 / page 195 (AID: v77457. b100.s195, NAD: SE/VALA/01637). (*Arkiv Digital*).

2) According to modern research, the story about the first Peter Cassel being a stable master to Duke Karl has not been possible to verify, even after extensive research at the War Archives in Stockholm. The first member of the family that is mentioned in court records was named *Mårten Persson Cassel*, who is mentioned in 1622 as an “old lame Englishman.” From his patronymic the older Peter Cassel seems to be constructed.

It is not known how long the “tradition” about Peter “the stable master” has been going around, but it was a general trend during the 1600s and 1700s to try to glorify an unknown ancestor.

There are many descendants of *Mårten* still around, (the SAG editor is one of them) and some are trying to verify the old stories, but the early 1600 is a long time ago, and not many records still exist.

The name Cassel may be a Swedish variation of the English “Castle.” Another theory is that the family has its origins in the German city of Kassel.

Thanks to Bo Lindwall, Södertälje, Sweden, for the information on Carl Börjesson and family.

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## New book on Old Script

*Vad står det? Handbok i handskriftsläsning*, by Ulf Berggren and Elisabeth Thorsell. 2017, 104 pages, illustrated, hardcover. In **Swedish**. Published by the Swedish Federation of Genealogical Societies. ISBN: 9789188341082. Can be bought from <<https://www.rotterbokhandeln.se>>

This book is the first new book on Swedish handwriting in about 40 years, and has

a number of new features: full color photos and source information for most of the documents that open access to online archives (if you have a subscription to *Arkiv Digital*). There is also a Latin word list, a literature list, an authentic 1700s alphabet, and more.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part gives examples of common church records, starting with a fairly young one, followed by older examples. In this part the documents have a transcription nearby.

For the other parts, the transcriptions are found in the back of the book.

Part two gives examples of less often used church records, like church accounts and moving-in and -out records.

Part three gives examples of estate inventories, court records, military rolls, and much more.

Part four contains more modern records, as many younger researchers have prob-



lems with reading cursive script. There is a letter from a just-arrived immigrant, a story about an absconding husband, a copy of the birth record for author Vilhelm Moberg, a clerical survey from 1911, and much more.

Even though this book is in Swedish, we hope that it will be useful for our transatlantic friends also! *Elisabeth Thorsell*

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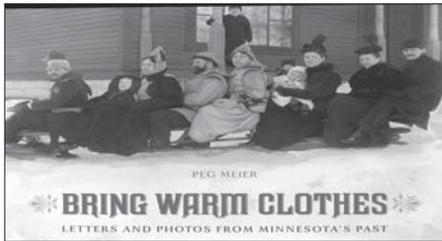


## Good old days in Minnesota

*Bring warm clothes. Letters and photos from Minnesota's past*, by Peg Meier. 1981, 328 pages, landscape form, softcover. Published by the Minnesota Historical Press. ISBN 978-0-87351-639-6.

This book is not new, but new to me, and the title sounded interesting. I have not yet read the whole book but glanced at the pages that mentioned Swedes.

The material is organized first by longer



periods, then from 1820 by decades.

Here you may read the heartbreaking letter from a man, who had lost his job, to Governor Floyd B. Olson, asking for help, but receiving none. You may read parts of Andrew Peterson's (of Vilhelm Moberg fame) diaries. You may make the acquaintance of Hugo Nisbeth, who travelled for two years in Minnesota, and then wrote a book about his experiences.

In 1893 *Annie Hedstrom* was in court charged with having broken the law by appearing in male attire. She passed under the name of Charles Parker and did a man's work at a farm near St. Paul for a period of more than a year without her true sex being discovered. She said that she did not know that it was unlawful to be dressed in a man's clothing. She disliked housework and made more money as a man.

In 1901 a young man, *Horace Glen*, started to work in a lumber camp near Two Harbors. He was educated and saw himself as a better man than others. His opinions on his fellow Swedish workers was low: "the most disgusting, dirty, lousy reprobates that I ever saw. I want to hit them everytime I look at them."

A fun book with lots of photos.

*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 Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* is always a good read, and the January 2017 issue is filled with interesting articles. I liked *Journey of a Farm Photo from Malung, Sweden, to an Olof Krans Painting*, by Mass Elisabet Larsson, in which the author tells about the connection between her paternal grandparents from the Linjo farm in Malung and the Bishop Hill early settlers, among whom members of the Linjo family were vital in forming the colony. In 1913 a photo was taken of the original farm in Malung, and someone sent a copy to the relatives in Bishop Hill, and the next year Olof Krans made a painting of the house, which is shown in full color in the journal.

*Tidningen* is the name of the Swedish Genealogical Society of Minnesota's quarterly journal. In the summer issue of 2017 there is an informative article on the Twin City Linnea Society in Minneapolis-St. Paul, run by Swedish women, by Ann Derr. The society started in 1904 with the goal of raising enough money to buy land and open a home for old, destitute women. To do this they charged a small fee at every meeting and also organized a Mayfest, a lutefisk supper, and ice cream socials, and much more. The Twin City Linnea Home opened around 1920 at Como Avenue, St. Anthony Park, and after a few years they accepted "guests" of Scandinavian descent, not just Swedes. In 2005 the home closed.

*Family Tree Magazine*, July/August 2017 has an article by David A. Fryxell on bathtubs and plumbing from Roman times onwards. These are things we take for granted, necessary in our day, but they also have history and inventors. Sunny Jane Morton tells about *Becoming American*, and explains many of the records that can help find the immigrant like church records, foreign-language newspapers, ethnic societies, and draft registrations. One can also learn that from the 1860s honorably discharged noncitizen veterans, age 21 or over, could petition for naturalization without the required "first papers."