

Swedish American Genealogist

Volume 38 | Number 3

Article 11

9-1-2018

Book Reviews

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag>



Part of the [Genealogy Commons](#), and the [Scandinavian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2018) "Book Reviews," *Swedish American Genealogist*. Vol. 38: No. 3, Article 11.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol38/iss3/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Swedish American Genealogist by an authorized editor of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.



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.

Stockholm – the city of dreams

The Stockholm Series, by Per Anders Fogelström, published in Swedish during the period 1960 – 1968. Available in English at Amazon.com

It was with enthusiastic pride when the staff of Stockholm's *Stadsmuseum* (city museum) and conservers of his archives celebrated the year 2017 as the centenary of the birth of famed author and activist Per Anders Fogelström. He was recognized for his body of literature and honored for his life-long dedication to the beloved city of his birth. In November of that year I was privileged to meet and confer with these staff associates, inspect the archives, tour Fogelström related sites on Södermalm around the Sofia kyrka on *Vita Bergen* with Kent Josefsson of the Fogelström Society, and later attend one of the sold-out performances of *Mina drömmars stad* (City of My Dreams) at *Kulturhuset* at Sergels torg in central Stockholm.

Fogelström published all five volumes of his series during a span of eight years: 1960-68. But it wasn't until late 2011, while perusing the book section of Chicago's Swedish-American Museum gift shop, that I found copies in English translation of the first three volumes of Fogelström's "*Stockholm Stads Serien*" (City Series) as translated by Jennifer Brown Bäverstam, Penfield Press, Iowa City, Iowa.

Before that time I was unaware of the person and the work of Per Anders Fogelström. Reading that first volume, *City of My Dreams*, (U.S. publication in 2000) sent me on my present journey. I want to bring to Americans, especially Swedish-Americans, in reviewer John Felstiner's words, "this clear, candid translation – the

taste, feel, and pace of another world – that of the Swedish working class (as) one well worth knowing."

I am always on the lookout for books with Swedish topics available in English. My home library reflects the usual titles of exploits that have been taken up by western historians. Figures such as Gustavus Adolphus (*Gustav II Adolf*), Queen Christina, and King Karl XII, are among other well-known Swedish biographies and histories that originated in English or are good translations of original Swedish works.

During my November 2017 trip to Sweden I found a wonderful book titled *De Vilda Vasarna* (The Savage Vasas) by Herman Lindquist. For genealogists interested in the Swedish royal family, this is a valuable addition. I bought the single volume work, even though my Swedish language skills are limited, because of its superior graphics which are outstanding, especially the detailed family tree on pages 414-415 titled *Gustav Vasas Ättlingar* 1523-2016. Did you know that Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom counts Gustav Vasa among her ancestors?

While I have great respect for readers who are dedicated followers of the now popular Swedish murder mystery genre that includes the late novelists Henning Mankell and Stieg Larsson, my personal preference leans toward biographies and historical events. But there also has been space and time in my schedule for the well-received *Hannah's Daughters* (*Hannas döttrar*) by Marianne Fredriksson and the more recent popular favorite *A Man Called Ove* (*En man som heter Ove*) by Fredrik Backman.

As with many other faithful Swedish-Americans, the four volumes of Vilhelm Moberg's *The Emigrants* occupy a central place on my bookshelf. However, it may surprise you that the Emigrant series was not the first books by Moberg in translation

that I acquired. That distinction belongs to *A History of the Swedish People* (*Min svenska historia, berättad för folket*. [1970]).

In 1976, and living in Malmö with my cousin Mikael and his wife Margareta, I found Moberg's *Min Svenska Historia* (Vol. I & II) at a local bookshop. It had been published only a few years earlier by P. A. Norstedt & Sons, Stockholm, 1970; English translation by Paul Britten Austin, 1971. The title Moberg gave to this two volume work deserves close attention as it directs the prospective reader to the intended subject of his history. The first page reveals his populist inclination; a focus equally familiar to our subject Per Anders Fogelström. To these authors, the people come first.

I mention Moberg at this time because his perspective and observations are instructive to understanding the respective narratives he and Fogelström employed in the historical novels for which both gained the recognition they enjoy today.

In 1970, for his *Swedish People's* history, Moberg wrote in an introduction "...to anyone like myself who...is spellbound with curiosity as to what has happened on this earth before him, it is a task that exerts an irresistible fascination."

Further on, Moberg shares two principles that underlie his work: Firstly, "The history of Sweden is the history of her commons" meaning "my history's main theme is the Swedish common man...." The italics are Moberg's. His second working principle: "In my historical journey...comparisons and analogies with past times...can illuminate and explain our own age...." Finally, Moberg emphasizes that "men are indistinguishable from the age in which they live, and must not be considered outside its context."

Both authors begin their stories in rural Sweden before the mid-19th century. Mo-

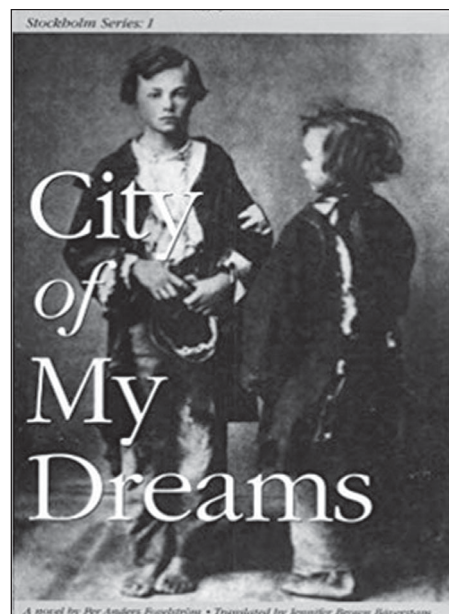


Book Reviews

berg takes his eleven or so characters from Småland to America. Fogelström walks with his main character Henning Nilsson, a barefoot fifteen-year-old, out of rural Uppland but not in the direction of a new world but through Stockholm's Norrtull and into a city on the cusp of transition.

Once inside the city – in five detailed volumes and to the delight of genealogists – we are introduced to seventeen other Nilssons over five generations and countless Lindgrens, Bodins, Karlssons, and Bergs. Their respective stories culminate around 1960. In this series it is essential for the reader to be provided a “score card” and the author/translator obliges on the last page with detailed genealogical information titled “Main Characters and Families in the Stockholm series in chronological order,” citing relationships (where they are required). Though absent in Volumes I and II, they thankfully appear with Volume III and continue updated to the last, Volume V.

Clearly, and in every instance, the novels of both Moberg and Fogelström are by masters of historical fiction. First, each uses



a very broad brush to fix the time in which their respective characters are set. For Moberg's prospective immigrants Karl Oskar & Kristina we see how they are shaped by the social and religious, cultural and historic upheavals; specifically the devastating droughts that affected rural Sweden in the 1860's. These in turn exerted a greater awareness on the increasingly viable option of emigration. Even at the risk of being branded with the unpatriotic label assigned those who had no choice but to abandon their native land, thousands of mostly peasant Swedes, both brave and desperate, and mostly by foot and cart, journeyed to the coasts and to the ships that would transport them to a vague new beginning.

Secondly, in Fogelström's use of certified historical events such as the political awakening, labor unrest, and trade union formation in the years leading up to 1900, the signature year. We follow Henning Nilsson's daughter Emelie, her extended family, and friends at their horse and cart village within a city, reacting to the daily dynamite blasting, joining greater Stockholm, the radically transformed city in the world, and the beginning of new possibilities in a new century.

Vilhelm Moberg and, later, Per Anders Fogelström, developed fictional characters to anchor a place and a time and to move their respective narratives along a preordained historical path. For Moberg it is a new world and for Fogelström it is a new city. Sometimes these are composites and sometimes not. In any event, molded by their circumstances, and as symbols of those preceding them – whether across the Atlantic or across the fields and through the city's gates – they and the tens of thousands who followed, each appears to us as incredibly real almost to the touch. It is through these characters and the microcosm of their individual lives that Fogelström fills his books with a warmth and generosity that is captivating.

In the year 2018, there is the advantage of more than half a century of digestion and reflection of Volume I of the Stockholm Series, published in 1960. In 1850, the population of Stockholm was 93,000;

while London was 2.2 million. By 1960, Stockholm had grown to 800,000, and Sweden to 6,000,000 and an incredible 25% (or 1.5 million) Swedes read *City of My Dreams* following publication. Such success of a novel was unprecedented. It was a national sensation in part due to an earlier Ingmar Bergman film *Summer with Monica* (1953) also based on a novel by Fogelström.

The *Stadserien* (City Series) became a national treasure and a must read in public schools throughout Sweden.

Fast-forward twenty-five years to the personal library of Jennifer Brown Bäverstam's Swedish mother-in-law whose favorite books were those authored by Per Anders Fogelström. American born and educated, Jennifer Bäverstam had begun Swedish language lessons in high school. Following university, as a skilled linguist and the new wife of a Swede, she couldn't wait to tackle the Stockholm series. Already busy as a wife and mother and with a career in music, her love for Fogelström's series led her to contact him in 1992 with the offer to work on an English translation. In an immediate response, he enthusiastically agreed.



Per Anders Fogelström and Jennifer Bäverstam.

By this time Fogelström was in declining health and died before publication but confident that Jennifer's alliance with Penfield Books was the winning formula to address a wider and equally appreciative audience in America. The first volume appeared in the year 2000.

Starting in 2000 with *Stockholm, City of My Dreams* to 2015 when the English



Book Reviews

translation of *City in the World*, Volume V, was published, the novels have been warmly received and critically acclaimed. A sample follows. From the publisher we read: "Powerfully written, '*City of My Dreams*' sweeps the reader along in a historic saga of fortune and love in a society experiencing great social and political upheaval." Kai Maristed wrote, "(It) is... a fascinating and unforgettable masterpiece of historical realism." Other comments suggest a "compelling" story with "good character development" where you "eat, sleep, smell, taste, and hear" enough to persuade the reader to "stick with it to the end."

Thinking of my own several dozen

lengthy excursions to Sweden over the last 50 years, I think reviewer David Ferry summed up the skillful English translation exactly how outsiders view Sweden and the Swedes: "This translation makes clear what the qualities of this book are: the sweetness and unsentimental directness of it, the clear-eyed truth-telling, the unswerving respectfulness towards these human beings. The translation is as lucid as winter light. By means of it a wonderful writer is brought over into English."

In closing, as I begin my fourth read of all five volumes of the Stockholm Series, a close cousin of mine has discovered the Swedish term *lagom*; meaning not too much, not too little, but just the right amount. I may be in strict violation of *lagom*, but, then again, I may not. You decide. Read and discover for yourself.

Robert L. Johnson

Reviewer's note:

If you would like more information on "historical fiction" read Susan Brantly's *Testing the Boundary Between History and Fiction: Per Anders Fogelström's "Stockholm Series,"* University of Wisconsin, Winter, 1993: see link to this article on p. 26.

Life on a "Fäbod"

Introduction:

A *Fäbod* can be described as a form of small-scale farms where the animals are sent to a pasture for summer grazing, consisting of a number of buildings with different functions in the outlying areas.

The *Fäbod* culture includes knowledge of animals and nature, forest grazing, buildings, food, stories, customs, tools, and music. The use of *Fäbodar* (plural) already existed in some form during the early

Add to your family history!

Learn what Sweden and America were like when your ancestors immigrated.

Join the Swedish-American Historical Society

Four issues a year of the *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*, plus dividend books.

The Society's latest book is *Conrad Bergendoff's Faith and Work: A Swedish-American Lutheran, 1895–1997*, by Thomas Tredway.

For more information, write:
Swedish-American Historical Society
3225 W. Foster, Box 48
Chicago, IL 60625

or see www.swedishamericanhist.org

Mention the *Swedish American Genealogist* when you join or order books.



The link to your history

Digital Research Room

More than 171 million digitized pages of Swedish historical documents and over 30 million searchable database records.

- Swedish Church Books
- Census
- Military records
- Estate inventories
- and much more.



Visit <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/svar>

Shop online, DVDs and USBs

- Swedish Census 1880, 1910 and 1990
- Swedish Death Index 1860–2016 (prerelease)

Visit <https://webbutik.riksarkivet.se/en>





Book Reviews

Middle Ages in Sweden, and there is written evidence of this from the 1500s. Each farm had its form of *Fäbod* use, depending upon natural and economic conditions. The daily work on the *Fäbod* included a variety of activities, and was primarily carried out by women aged between 15 and 25. The cultural heritage includes a very old form of working music with instruments such as horns and pipes, and the vocal technique of *Kulning* or herding calls was an important working tool.

Fäbod were common in Värmland, Dalarna, Gästrikland, Härjedalen, Jämtland, Hälsingland, Medelpad, Ångermanland, northern Uppland, and southern Lappland.

Read more at the link on p. 26.

Walking on the paths of my ancestors (*Mina förfäders stigar*) (in Swedish) by Land Alice Gustafsson. Softcover, ca 200 pages, illustrated, ISBN: 978-91-87116-63-6. Available from <http://www.vagskal.se/Bokproduktion.htm>
Price: 200 SEK + postage.

This book is written by one of the few remaining operators of a *Fäbod*, Land Alice Gustafsson, of Skallskog in Leksand, Dalarna. In this book Land Alice tells about her life and her ancestors, all from Leksand, and their varied experiences.

She tells stories about her maternal grandfather's brother Land Per Larsson (b. 1869) who immigrated in 1888 and first lived with some aunts in Pomeroy, IA. Later he went to California, Australia, and New Zealand, and finally died in Zelzah, CA, in 1928. This is only one of the stories about the many immigrants among her relatives.

The main part of the book are stories about Land Alice's mother Klara's memories about her childhood in the very early 1900s, when life was so different from the 2010s. They all lived on the farm Land-



MINA FÖRFÄDERS STIGAR
av Land Alice Gustafsson

gården in Leksand, and to work on the farm was so important. Klara's mother Anna got married to Land Erik Larsson. Directly after the wedding they went out to work on the fields. Anna was used to that way of life, already as a small girl she had to milk the cows before going to school.

When Klara was born in June 1910 she came with her mother to the *Fäbod* at the young age of two weeks, carried on her mother's back in a leather knapsack. During the walk to the *Fäbod*, which took a couple of hours, Anna was always knitting while she walked. This was to make socks and other woollens for the family's needs. At the *Fäbod* the women had to milk the cows, and then make butter, cheese or

whey-cheese, (*mesost*). It was very important to make the best use of the milk, as the women stayed at the *Fäbod* until the end of the summer, and had no other way of preserving the dairy products.

The cows were let loose in the forests, after having walked the traditional *Fäbod* roads from the village, where they ate all kinds of herbs and grass, which enriched the taste of the butter. The sheep and the goats also came to the *Fäbod*, so there was always much activity there.

Spending the summer in the *Fäbod* with the cows was almost a summer vacation for the women. They did not have to help with the ordinary farming; that was the chores for the family's males.

When Land Klara started her own family, she kept the *Fäbod* traditions alive, and her daughter Land Alice learnt them. Then there was a period when many *Fäbod* in Leksand were no longer used, as the traditional way of life had changed to more modern ways. However, in the early 1990s Land Alice was asked to work at a *Fäbod* and show the old ways of life for children and tourists. The place, Ljusbodarna, became very popular.

Land Alice is still active, now at Skallskog, but on a lesser scale, as she is soon in her 80s.

Her remarkable book also contains recipes for *Fäbod* food. Her butter is still made in a churn. Her recipe for Juniper Draught requires 40 liters of boiling water.

Elisabeth Thorsell

