

## Obituaries: Halvdan Koht and Lars Åhnebrink

*Halvdan Koht* died in 1965, at the age of ninetytwo. In his rich life, covering many fields of activity national and international, the United States was one of the main formative powers. As a young graduate in the 1890s he went to the University of Leipzig, and studied with two of the pioneers of modern American research in Germany, the historians Erich Marcks and Karl Lamprecht. He spent the year 1908—09 in America, — one of the first Scandinavians to go there for scholarly studies of American civilization. Upon his return, as professor of History at the University of Oslo, he made US history an obligatory part of the curriculum, at a time when such requirements were far from usual in Europe. And in teaching and scholarship he inaugurated in Norway that first epoch of American studies that in many countries followed the First World War.

He himself repeatedly taught the subject, and so did his younger colleagues whom he educated. Among his more than 180 books there are several on American History and Civilization. He visited the country again

and again as a scholar, and as Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, establishing wide contacts with American intellectual life. He spent the war years of exile 1941—45 in the States, and used them on writing, among others, his book on *The American Spirit in Europe*, the first attempt to outline the impact of America on this side of the Atlantic.

Halvdan Koht did not only *know* America: he loved it. His sober judgment of the less attractive sides of American development was never able to shake his faith in the youthful vigor and power of resilience in American society. By his death America lost one of its staunchest friends in Europe, and the study of America in the Scandinavian North one of its Founding Fathers.

Halvdan Koht passed away old and full of years. *Lars Åhnebrink's* death in 1966 at the age of only 51 interrupted a career that was still in its ascent. The more impressive is the contribution he was able to make.

He belonged to that phalanx of young and able men who after the Second World War carried American

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directed towards source material belonging to parishes, societies and other more official institutions, private archives and towards the studying of Scandinavian-American newspapers.

4. The importance of the local migration research ought to be further stressed, whereby the support of the county councils and the municipalities ought to be sought for concerning research within the

limits of their activities. Scandinavian-American organizations and associations ought to be activated, especially concerning the research in North America.

5. As a service institution the Emigration Institute ought to contribute by facilitating and registering that research in the Nordic countries and in North America, which bears upon Nordic migration.

*Ann-Sofie Källemark*

Studies to their final break-through in the Euroycan learned world. His work had its solid foundations in a highly respected scholarship, particularly devoted to American and European literary interrelations. But his most important work was done in teaching and organization. He could build on the early Uppsala efforts of S. B. Liljegreu, but Åhnebrink was the first full professor of the subject in Sweden. He built American requirements into the system of teaching and examinations. In his last years he created the American Summer School in Uppsala, another monument to his initiative. His efforts, together with those of his colleagues in History and Political Science, were instrumental in making his university one of the outstanding European centers of American research.

His initiative also spilled over into international organization. From its beginning he was active in the European Association for American Studies, and a member of its Board. He

Founded the Nordic Association for American Studies; he was its first President, and remained in that position as long as he lived. At his death one of the most important tasks of the Association, the first volume of its Union Catalog of American Periodicals in Scandinavian Libraries, was approaching its conclusion. He was the motive power behind our Nordic conferences. Their standard was set by his brilliant leadership of the Sigtuna meeting in 1961.

Lars Åhnebrink had ideas, and the power of strong conviction. But his dominant quality was his ability to cooperate, his cheerful optimism, and his human generosity. His contribution is enduring in many fields of that discipline to which he devoted his powers. And to everybody who knew him his memory is suffused with the warmth of a noble personality, which will remain with us long after he himself is no more.

*Sigmund Skard*

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