

Eric Norelius, *The Pioneer Swedish Settlements and Swedish Lutheran Churches in America 1845-1860*. Selected Chapters of Volume I of Eric Norelius' *De svenska luterska församlingarnas och svenskarnes historia i Amerika* (1890) translated by Conrad Bergendoff. Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Historical Society, 1984. 419 pages.

Ecclesiastical history looms large in any account of the immigrants from the Nordic countries in the United States. One obvious reason for this is that the Church was such an important institution in the formative years of these ethnic communities. Indeed, except in the case of the later arriving and politically and ideologically divided Finns, the churches, more specifically the Lutheran churches, were the most influential institutions in the creation of an ethnic identity for these groups. There is, however, another important reason for the prominence of church history in the early history of the various Nordic ethnic groups in North America. The early Nordic migrations had a rural base; those who crossed the Atlantic and moved on to the Midwest were mostly small holders, crofters or otherwise members of the rural proletariat. Most of the few university graduates to venture out on the untilled prairies were idealistic young theologians who came to serve the religious needs of the immigrants. Their calling, their social standing, and their education made them natural leaders, in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of their parishioners. Furthermore, they kept records, published journals and proceedings of synodal conferences and in general saw to it that the doings of the Church were well documented. Moreover, they often published their memoirs and wrote histories of the churches in the New World. For no other institution among the immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century does the historian have as rich a supply of sources and documents as for the churches.

One such valuable source for Swedish-American history are the two volumes of the history of the Swedish Lutheran Church in the early years by Eric Norelius. Conrad Bergendoff's translated version stresses the memoir aspects of Norelius's work; sections based on second-hand material have largely been left out. The result is an extremely readable account, not only of the early

Swedish settlements and the establishment of congregations, but of the work of a dedicated clergyman.

A major theme in Norelius' history is the competition with other churches, the Episcopalians with the indefatigable Gustaf Unonius on the one side, and the crusading Methodists and Baptists on the other. Although Norelius can be harsh in his criticism of non-Lutheran Christians and their churches and often gives vent to the frustrations of competition with Swedish Methodists and Baptists, he obviously attempts to present an objective account and tries to be fair to his theological adversaries. For one who is well versed in the polemical squabbles and vituperative attacks so characteristic of the history of the Lutheran synods among the Norwegian immigrants, Norelius offers insight into a contrasting Swedish tradition, not necessarily more liberal in theology but certainly more liberal in its treatment of other factions and churches.

In making an edited version of Norelius available, Bergendoff has done immigration history a real service.