

Reviews

Elinor Barr, *Swedes in Canada. Invisible Immigrants*. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2015. 555 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4426-1374-4.

Swedes in Canada is the product of more than a decade's research by the Thunder Bay historian Elinor Barr. 29 boxes of research, now housed at the University of Manitoba Archives in Winnipeg, form the base of this comprehensive study of a much-neglected feature of Canadian history, namely the immigration of Swedes to Canada. The process from the initiation of the project to the publication of *Swedes in Canada* can be followed at <http://www.swedesincanada.ca/>.

Why, asks Elinor Barr, have Swedish immigrants to Canada been invisible? One major factor is the perceived need for Anglo-conformity: Swedish immigrants were anxious to conform to the language and customs of the English-speaking majority. When they encountered ethnic discrimination during World War I as a result of Sweden's pro-German sympathies, many suppressed their Swedish identity. In addition, strong differences of opinion regarding religion, politics and temperance weakened the Swedish immigrants' impact on Canadian society. Elinor Barr also suggests that Swedish humility played a role; Jante's law (first launched by the Danish author Aksel Sandemose in 1933) encouraged a belief in social equality: no one should be at a higher social or financial level than her or his neighbour. Blending in was the order of the day.

Approximately 100,000 Swedes immigrated to Canada. The *Swedes in Canada* project compiled a database of 6,164 immigrants up to 1979, approximately 6 per cent of all Swedish immigrants to Canada. 56 per cent were males and 23 per cent females, with 21 per cent children. 5,834 were born in Sweden while 330 were born outside the country. Only 67 per cent of the 95 per cent born in Sweden specified their province of birth but of these, 45 per cent came from northern Sweden, 36 per cent from southern Sweden and 19 per cent from central Sweden.

Why did Swedes immigrate to Canada? Elinor Barr suggests that the main reasons were economic: many emigrants came from the countryside, where poverty and hunger were rife during the nineteenth century. As the pace of industrialisation accelerated from the 1870s onwards, so did industrial unrest as workers became increasingly dissatisfied with their pay and working conditions. From the 1900s legal action against demonstrators became more common. At the same time, Swedes were increasingly tempted by the promise of free land on the Prairies under the 'Dominion Lands Act' of 1872. The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1886 was also a factor in encouraging Swedes to immigrate to Canada.

Four waves of immigration can be distinguished: 1776 to 1900; 1900 to 1914; the 1920s; and after the end of World War II (1945). The first wave comprised primarily couples with children and single men; the second added Swedish maids; the third consisted of mainly young men seeking work and adventure; the fourth included a substantial number from the middle class, including refugees, transferred employees from Swedish companies, and those looking for opportunities not available in Sweden.

What was it like for newly-arrived Swedish immigrants? In the first wave, homesickness was common; letters were the only links with friends and family at home. It was necessary to learn the English language fast, to become acquainted with and obey Canadian laws, and to conform to the customs of the resident majority; they were, however "given little help to do so" (239). The second generation of Swedish immigrants lost contact with the homeland and did not speak Swedish. Only a few parents, such as O.P. Olsson and his wife Alma, taught their children Swedish. The Swedish church promoted Swedish, but not all Swedes attended church or even followed the same religion. As Elinor Barr notes, "[c]hildren who did attend church learned hymns and prayers and took confirmation classes, but English soon began to infiltrate the various programs for young people" (243). Until recently, the Swedish language has been neglected by Canadian universities. Early attempts to offer courses in Swedish failed but in 1974, the University of British Columbia (UBC) started to offer beginner and intermediate courses; these are still offered by UBC. The University of Alberta offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in Scandinavian and a Bachelor of Commerce degree with a major in European-Scandinavian.

Despite their relative invisibility, Swedish immigrants have made significant contributions to the political, social and economic life of their adopted country. They fought beside other Canadians in two world wars and

a number have been honoured with local, provincial and national awards. Elinor Barr concludes that “Swedes in Canada today, both immigrants and descendants, are living in an era in which they can be openly proud of their heritage. There is no need to be invisible any longer” (269).

Swedes in Canada combines passion with academic stringency. Its fifteen chapters cover topics as diverse as the history of emigration from Sweden, the two world wars, earning a living, “Swedishness” in Canada, language, discrimination and assimilation, and emerging visibility. One half of the study comprises detailed endnotes and appendices, a comprehensive bibliography, and two indexes (personal names and a general index). *Swedes in Canada* contains photographs from archives and personal collections, as well as extracts from personal letters and published sources such as novels and short stories written by immigrants in their own language as well as in English.

Elinor Barr’s study is the first of its kind. It is eloquently written, beautifully illustrated and an important source of inspiration for all interested in what it meant to be a Swede in Canada in the early days of the country’s existence and up to the 1970s. The universities of Canada and the various Swedish societies in different parts of the country have an important role to play in ensuring that the Swedish presence remains not only strong but also clearly visible. Elinor Barr’s study is an important step in this direction.

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Thomas Fleming, *The Great Divide: The Conflict between Washington and Jefferson that Defined a Nation*. Da Capo Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0306821271

A book about the conflict between George Washington and Thomas Jefferson is overdue, says Thomas Fleming. “Numerous historians have explored Jefferson’s clash with Alexander Hamilton. But little has been written about the differences that developed between the two most famous founding fathers” (1). Those differences, as the subtitle states, “defined a nation.”

Washington, we are told, was “first, last, and always a realist.” He admixed his realism with a strong faith in America’s destiny. Jefferson, in contrast, saw things through “the lens of a pervasive idealism.” Men, freed of the yoke of coercive government, would invariably find good government, if only given inspirational “visionary words” (2).