

more candid views. Yet the exquisite reproduction of these photographic images makes their subjects come alive.

Ohrn's conclusion with a "further reading" list is appropriate to his brief foregoing introduction. Its effectiveness will engender a deeper appreciation and perhaps a more thorough study of Amana's folk art.

ILLINOIS HISTORIC PRESERVATION AGENCY

KEITH A. SCULLE

*American from Sweden: The Story of A. V. Swanson*, by Betty Swanson Cain. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987. ix, 99 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. \$15.95 cloth.

Betty Swanson Cain entitled her affectionate biography of her father's life *American from Sweden: The Story of A. V. Swanson* because to all who knew him "he seemed to be from the first the most American of Americans." Cain's account of her father's life is a reminder of the diversity of the immigrant experience in America. While many historians question assimilationist interpretations, Cain marvels at the "ease of my father's assimilation." He neither suffered the agony of a divided loyalty nor did he feel compelled to "keep two cultures in balance." Instead, as told by Cain, her father's life is a breezy success story, an immigrant Horatio Alger who seemed to have been born American.

The son of a poor hardworking coal miner, Axel Victor Svensson emigrated from Sweden in 1911 at the age of twenty. Upon his arrival he exchanged his old country name for A. V. Swanson, a change that anticipated a rapid abandonment of whatever cultural baggage he may have carried. Soon he spoke English with scarcely a trace of an accent and married an American woman. While most immigrants of Swanson's background remained workers, Swanson rapidly entered the ranks of the managerial middle class, embracing both that group's values and life-style. By 1925 he had found his niche as the manager of the J. C. Penney Company store in the college town of Ames, Iowa. He bought "the best built house" in Ames, counted himself among anyone who was anyone in Ames "high society," became a model manager-booster and a staunch Republican who enthusiastically entered into a social life of cookouts, country club, golf, and bridge. Immigrants who achieved middle-class status often did so within an ethnic community, but though Swanson was an active booster and joiner, he never belonged to any Swedish-American organizations. He rejected all religious affiliation for a "middle-class American creed of hard work, honesty, sexual purity, cleanliness, and economic independence (especially important)." High public service came when the local country

### Book Reviews

club teetered toward bankruptcy. As president of the board of the Ames Country Club, A. V. gladly helped "rescue the club where all of us had enjoyed good times." If not acquiring great wealth, Swanson nevertheless achieved substantial financial security and social acceptance among his Anglo-American neighbors.

The author supposes that Swanson's success in becoming an immigrant Babbitt sprang from his "thoroughly American confidence in himself," his ability to exploit opportunities that came his way, his quick grasp of the capitalist system, and his "ability to make friends easily and quickly." When the author seeks explanations beyond her father's American character, luck, and pluck, she argues a kind of cultural convergence—an American character forged in a Swedish childhood and youth. In his education, values, and ambitions Swanson was already a child of capitalism who needed only to leave behind the barriers and burdens of Sweden's rigid class structure to make good in the land of opportunity.

The author relies largely on personal memories to reconstruct her father's life. Beyond the clichés suggested there are few clues to help readers understand rapidly assimilated and upwardly mobile immigrants like A. V. Swanson. This biography appears to be more of an effort to legitimize the "Americanism" of the family than a search for Swedish origins. As such it may be of interest to historians interested in the family life and attitudes of the socially and geographically mobile, and in the mind of main street in the Midwest between the wars.

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

JANE M. PEDERSON

*Understanding Herbert Hoover: Ten Perspectives*, edited by Lee Nash. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987. xiii, 196 pp. Notes, index. \$21.95 cloth.

The essays in this anthology were the grist of three biennial symposia on Herbert Hoover at George Fox College, a propitious site considering the subject, between 1977 and 1982. Historians with unimpeachable qualifications are responsible for this eclectic collection of essays that spans Hoover's public life. It includes subjects as varied as the Quaker imprint on the "Chief" and the Indian policy of his presidency.

Half of the ten essays are represented as "handy distillations of central interpretations of Hoover's career," and the rest as "significant topical soundings that also contribute to an understanding of Hoover's major interests and commitments" (xi). Although not announced in the introduction, the collection has a definite revisionist cast with the writings of historians like Joan Hoff Wilson, David Burner, and Ellis W.

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