

Getting Ahead: A Swedish Immigrant's Reminiscences, 1834-1887, by Charles J. Hoflund, edited by H. Arnold Barton. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989. xvi, 127 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$15.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DAG BLANCK, SWENSON SWEDISH IMMIGRATION RESEARCH CENTER, AUGUSTANA COLLEGE

Toward the end of their lives, many immigrants in the United States seem to have felt a need to put pen to paper and give an account of their life histories, in both the old and new worlds. This is perhaps not surprising, as the act of immigration meant that life took an entirely different course and that the immigrant was confronted with a completely new set of circumstances.

The present book is such an account of the life of Swedish immigrant Charles Hoflund, who left his native Småland in southern Sweden and sought out a new life on the American frontier in 1850. The book includes chapters on Hoflund's childhood in the old country, the journey across the Atlantic, and his new life in western Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The story is most detailed up to 1860, the year of Hoflund's marriage, and ends in 1887 when he moved from Illinois to Nebraska. Editor H. Arnold Barton of Southern Illinois University provides a useful introduction and helpful annotations throughout the text.

Charles Hoflund was a perceptive observer of life in both Sweden and America. The background chapter provides a good introduction to life in rural Sweden during the first decades of the nineteenth century. We learn not only about the geography, habits, and customs in Hoflund's native Djursdala, but also about the circumstances that eventually would drive many people across the Atlantic to the United States.

Once in the New World, Hoflund provides a vivid and interesting account of life and work on the American frontier. We learn about the conditions in the 1850s in some pioneer Swedish settlements in western Illinois, such as Andover in Henry County and Moline and Rock Island, areas that have been called "the cradle of Swedish America," for they played a highly significant role in the future course of Swedish mass immigration to the United States. Hoflund's description of his work as a lumberjack in Wisconsin and Minnesota and his encounters with Indians—according to Barton most likely from the Chippewa (Ojibwa) tribe—are also of great interest.

Getting Ahead will appeal to readers interested in the history of Swedish immigration to America, but also to anyone wishing to know more about life in the upper Mississippi Valley area at the time it was

the frontier. It also serves as a reminder of the significance of the young men and women from humble backgrounds who helped settle and transform the prairies and forests of this part of the country.

Servants of the Land: God, Family and Farm, The Trinity of Belgian Economic Folkways in Southwestern Minnesota, by Joseph A. Amato. Marshall, MN: Crossings Press, 1990. vii, 69 pp. Illustrations, graphs, maps, tables, notes, bibliography.

REVIEWED BY FRANK YODER, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

As his title indicates, Joseph Amato's short description of a Belgian farming community in southwestern Minnesota touches on important intertwining themes of religion, ethnicity, families, and land. Drawn from the stories of families who live there today, Amato's narrative outlines the years of change as Belgian immigrants jostled for space with other immigrant groups and with the American-born farmers who preceded them.

Amato argues that Belgian families were particularly well-suited to make a remarkable adaptation to an increasingly capitalistic mid-western farming environment. Instead of retarding movement, their Old World ethnic values of work, land, religion, and family pushed them to the top of the local socioeconomic hierarchy. Sticking to the land, rejecting individual opportunities and happiness for the sake of the community good, the Belgians capitalized on the fusion of family and religion.

To the student of midwestern rural change, Amato tells an interesting story. However, his tendency to make sweeping general statements about ethnicity and religion leaves the impression that such forces were monolithic and omnipotent. By focusing on only one Belgian family, Amato runs the risk of overgeneralizing from a narrow body of evidence. His important characterization of the Belgians as "peasant-capitalists" (9) does offer an interesting insight into the "transition to capitalism" debate. However, Amato supports his argument mostly with anecdotes; local lore substitutes too often for empirical data. Many of Amato's general statements appear to have elements of truth but are seldom verified with equally general evidence. Stylistically, the choppy prose and the abrupt thematic shifts would have benefited from a thorough editing. The book blazes no new theoretical trails but it might have.

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