



# Adjusting to America

by Lilly Setterdahl

"Up they go!" announces this May 1904 magazine cover, as American and Swedish flags are hoisted. Adjusting to America while valuing one's Swedish heritage was editor Ida Hansen's challenge to her readers in a unique magazine published in Cedar Rapids for Swedish-American women.



**D**URING one of the peak years of Scandinavian emigration, seventeen-year-old Ida Jensen arrived in America with her parents. In the years ahead, she would help the hundreds of thousands of other Scandinavian immigrant women adjust to America, at a time when the role of women was undergoing substantial change. For three decades she would serve as chief editor and part owner of *Qvinnan och Hemmet* (Woman and home), the only known Swedish-language women's magazine published in the United States.

Born in Ringsaker, Hedmark, Norway, Ida

All illustrations (including boxed letters) are from various issues of *Qvinnan och Hemmet* (1904-1906); microfilm loaned through the courtesy of the author.

Jensen and her parents left Norway in 1870. Five years later in Chicago she married Nels Fredrick Hansen, a Dane who had emigrated from Schleswig in 1872. They settled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where they would raise six sons and a daughter and build a publishing center of Scandinavian periodicals and books.

The couple's first publishing venture, however, was not particularly successful. In 1888, after three years and heavy financial losses, they ended publication of *Fra alle Lande*, a monthly Norwegian-language newspaper for which Ida Hansen had edited a section titled "Husmodern" (The house wife). That same year, however, Hansen, as editor, and her husband, as publisher, started a Norwegian-language magazine, *Qvinden og Hjemmet* (Woman and home). They added a Swedish supplement to the Norwegian magazine, and in 1893 this Swedish supplement, *Qvinnan och*

*Hemmet* (also translated as “woman and home”), became a separate eight-page periodical with its own identity.

Forty-five years later, Ida Hansen’s epitaph in the magazine would explain her motivation — to “‘build a bridge’ between the new country and the old, and this wish carried the company. She was driven by a burning desire to lessen some of the consuming homesickness which hits everyone who moves to new surroundings where strange customs are encountered on all fronts.”

As chief editor and part owner, Ida Hansen must have worked diligently on the two Scandinavian magazines. No Norwegian words appeared in the Swedish magazine, and no Swedish in the Norwegian edition. Any duplicate articles therefore had to be translated and typeset in both languages. In its early years, according to a 1903 article in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, the magazine had been produced completely by the Hansen family. No outside help had been hired, even for typesetting, although printing had been contracted out. In 1888 a thousand copies had been printed of the

first issue, which had more than covered the number of subscribers.

But subscriptions and staff grew rapidly. By 1903, the *Gazette* reported, the staff of thirty was headquartered on the entire third floor of the YMCA. Five presses and machines for typesetting, folding, and binding occupied a first-floor store room turned into the press room. The magazine had expanded from eight to forty-eight pages plus cover. Each month the presses churned out 78,500 copies, with “Cedar Rapids, Iowa” prominently on the cover as the place of publication.

Hansen’s husband also operated the N. Fr. Hansen Publishing Company and book stores in Cedar Rapids. This zeal for publishing extended to the next generation of Hansens. Two of the six Hansen sons would later publish a magazine called *Woman’s World*.



SAMPLING of issues of the Swedish *Qvinnan och Hemmet* from the 1890s through 1915 reveals that Ida Hansen and her editorial staff worked for a balance of articles that would appeal to readers ranging from domestic help to upper middle-class homemakers in

rural and urban settings. A look at the contents of many issues suggests that *Qvinnan och Hemmet* tried to imitate contemporary American women’s magazines such as the successful *Ladies’ Home Journal*. *Qvinnan och Hemmet* is filled with poems, short stories, serials, and text and music to Swedish and American songs; news stories, editorials, profiles of individuals, letters to the editor, and travel articles about Scandinavia, Canada, and the United States; sections for children; regular departments on needlework and sewing, cooking, flower gardening, health and child care; and several pages of advertisements. It also included various supplements such as “Our Library” and “Farm and Home.”

A typical cover presents a fashionably dressed woman with children on her knee in an elegantly appointed parlor or in a seasonal outdoor setting. But the similarities stop here in comparing Hansen’s magazines to the *Ladies’*

COURTESY THE AUTHOR



Through her magazine, editor Ida Hansen wanted to “lessen some of the consuming homesickness” of Scandinavian women immigrants in America.

The American middle class was an ideal often portrayed, although the editor recognized that many of her immigrant readers were laboring in factories and on farms.



*Home Journal*, which had a male editor during this period and a quite conservative viewpoint on women's rights. As the masthead proclaimed, *Qvinnan och Hemmet* was "for the Swedish Women in America," and one of Ida Hansen's major purposes was to help her Scandinavian sisters face unfamiliar conditions in America and confront their duties as new citizens — which, in Hansen's mind, definitely included the issue of woman suffrage.

The magazine's policy was probably influenced by the women's movement and the temperance movement in the United States and Iowa. Ida Hansen, being of Norwegian birth, was also no doubt influenced by the women's movement in Norway. The 1880s were an important decade for feminist organizations and journals. There was a constant exchange of views between the Scandinavian countries and the United States. Literary fiction and feminist magazines played an important part in this interaction. Many literary immigrant women added strength from within the Scandinavian-

American community. The women's congresses gave the women's movement a big boost, and *Qvinnan och Hemmet* covered these events. Later on, influences from Scandinavia became even stronger as legislation gave women in those countries voting rights — which American women still lacked.

Perhaps Ida Hansen observed that other Scandinavian-American publications were paying little or no attention to the woman-suffrage movement or the many women's congresses held at the turn of the century. Hansen proudly reported the participation of Scandinavian leaders in the women's movement at these American congresses. In the first issue of *Qvinnan och Hemmet* (September 1893), Hansen published two articles on suffrage. One was a speech given by Kristine Fredriksen before the Congress of Women at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago that year; there Fredriksen had labeled the women's movement conservative (rather than revolutionary) because it advocated a return to a more equal relationship between men and women. The second article was by a woman who believed that gaining suffrage was essential to temperance work. With that first issue, the magazine became a forum for debate. Believing that each woman should be able to do what she wished to do, Hansen did not criticize women with opposing views. In the second issue, for instance, she published two contributions denouncing woman suffrage.

Hansen regularly reported on the progress of woman suffrage in Scandinavia, the United States, and other countries. There were several publications and organizations devoted to the women's movement in Scandinavia. Hansen was aware, no doubt, that Swedish women had been granted municipal suffrage in 1862 (the first country in Europe to do so), and that Finnish women received the same right in 1872. (In fact, Finland would be set up as the model country when it granted women full suffrage in 1906.) Women in Norway received restricted suffrage in 1907. When the reality of women's rights did not meet expectation, the discrepancy was pointed out — as in the Editor's Corner of February 1914: "The fact that women in the Nordic countries, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are more equal

with men than women in larger cultures has not gone unnoticed. Finland and Norway have granted full suffrage to its women, and if the signs are not completely misleading, it's only a matter of time when they get it in Denmark and Sweden . . . the foresightedness of men and women in the Nordic countries is commendable."

Hansen also reviewed or printed work of Scandinavian writers who shared her viewpoint on women's rights. The poems of Björnstjerne Björnson, who had lectured in the United States while attending women's congresses and who supported American feminist leaders, often appeared in *Qvinnan och Hemmet* — as did the writings of Swedish feminist author Elin Wägner.

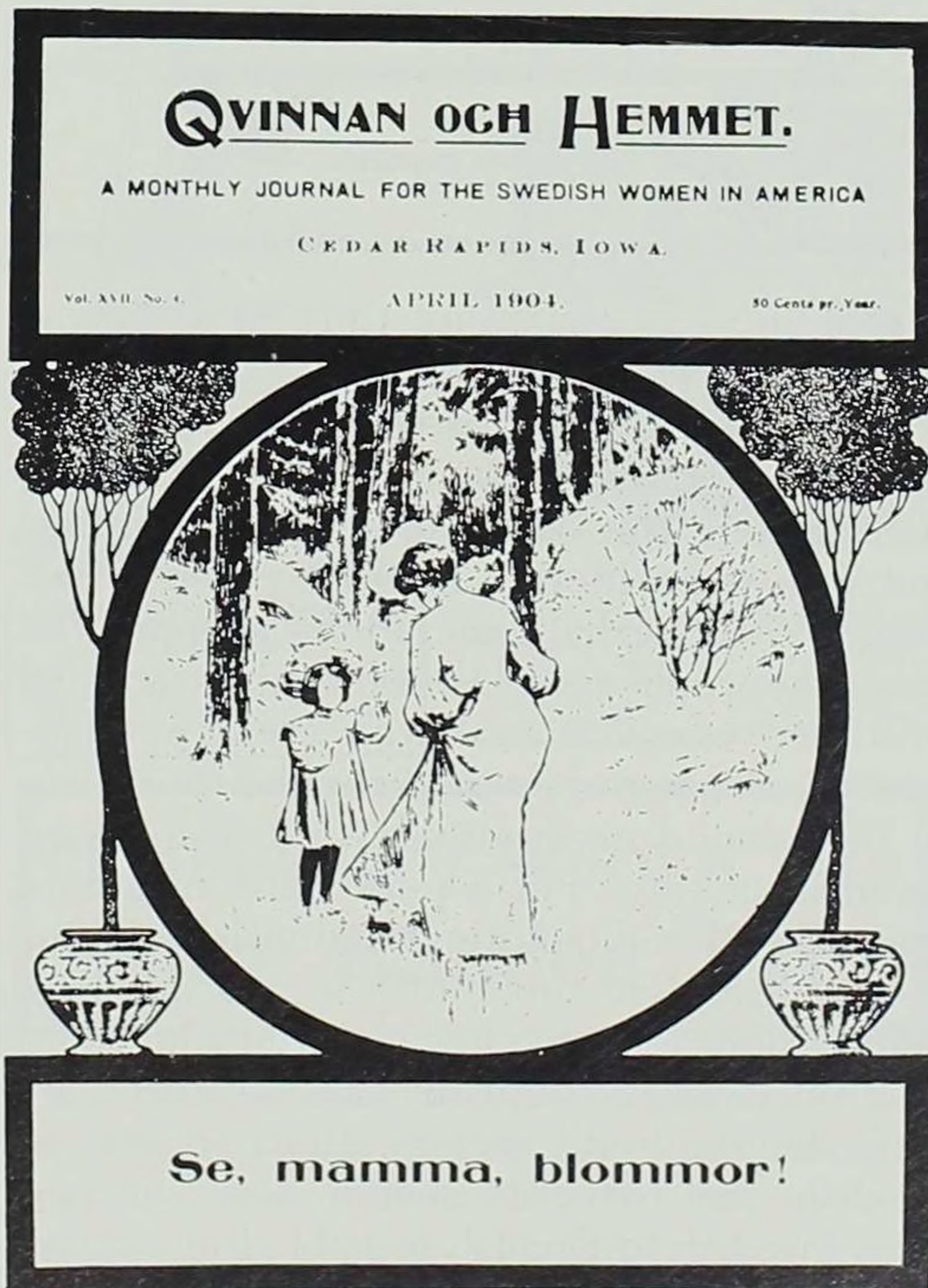
Basically Ida Hansen advocated education of women, social reform, and suffrage. The issue of suffrage was often tied to temperance work in the magazine. In 1894 a supporter of woman suffrage wrote that she believed women's votes would not be as easily swayed as men's, and that it was up to women to vote for temperance because they suffered the most when men in their families drank. The March 1904 issue reported that 10,000 women had moved to close all saloons in St. Louis in the daytime during the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. In 1908 a writer who likened temperance work to a "woman's military service" (*Kvinnans värnplikt*) warned that women could lose their husbands and sons to drunkenness as surely as to wars.



ABOUT the progress of women on different fronts, we will report truthfully," Hansen assured her readers in January 1908, "but we will not forget the other half of our journal's name, the Home." According to *Qvinnan och Hemmet*, the particular challenge confronting Scandinavian-American women was to appreciate both American and Scandinavian cultures and to incorporate both into family, church, and community — in other words, to be assimilated into American culture and still maintain

one's ethnicity. The vision of American middle-class life was represented in each issue in terms of clothes, furniture, family life, and food, at the same time that readers were urged to hold onto their ethnic heritage, particularly regarding their language, literature, and religion. In September 1907 Hansen commented, "It's apparent that those of the second generation look down on their parents' language and culture and that we don't appreciate our forefathers' country enough."

The editor advised readers not to compare a small place in their native Scandinavia with a metropolitan city in America. In a response to immigrants who had become critical of conditions in their native homeland, she reminded readers that just because something is big, it does not mean that it is better: "We have here in America much which is both beautiful and practical, and many of us have much to thank America for, but as the proverb says: *Spotta ej på det treppsteg du lämnat*' [Do not spit on the threshold you just left]. We can love our adop-



A woman's role as parent was often the subject of cover illustrations and regular departments.

Illustrations of Scandinavian customs (maypoles and midsummer's eve) no doubt brought comfort to immigrants an ocean away from their old homes.



tive country at the same time as we show appreciation for our fatherland.”

The Hansens' enterprise was dependent on a second generation of Americans of Scandinavian descent who valued their ethnic heritage and who were literate in their parents' language. Without that generation's support, the magazine would soon lose subscribers and fail to attract younger ones. Two sections of *Qvinnan och Hemmet* showed particular sensitivity to the second generation's shift away from Swedish culture. For a period the magazine regularly offered children's and girls' columns in Swedish, but apparently it was not long before there were too few children who could read the language to justify these features. By 1907 the children's section appeared only in English, and the girls' section also switched from Swedish to English in 1911. But readers wrote in, demanding that the columns return in Swedish. Women declared that they wanted their children, who were learning English at

school, to read Swedish as well, because sharing the language brought the family closer together. In August 1912 the columns were once again in Swedish. (Hansen's daughter, Anna, edited the girls' column from 1910 to 1912.) Although the less-frequent children's column stopped completely in 1915, the girls' column continued in Swedish until September 1922.

In its discussion of the adaptation process, the magazine emphasized that it was the immigrant mother who must teach her children about their heritage so that they would not become a generation without a past. Women were encouraged to be diplomatic in their new bilingual and bicultural settings — to delicately balance the need for assimilation against the second-generation syndrome of disavowing one's ethnicity. In April 1908 an editor addressed the difficulties Scandinavian-born mothers might have in recommending and providing American literature for their children: “School libraries are helpful, without digging into mothers' purses, but the desire of the young to have something truly American is irresistible,” she wrote. “Even though we believe that Scandinavian mothers ought to do everything to familiarize their children with the Scandinavian literature in the original language, the mothers must understand that their children need to get to know the people and the literature of the country which is going to give them a chance in life. One good does not negate another good. . . . Nothing leads so surely to revolt and argument as when parents ignore the taste of their children. We must be careful so that the young do not get the idea that everything that Father and Mother recommend is dull.”



ESPIE the magazine's emphasis on maintaining ethnic ties, the American middle class was the ideal portrayed in its pages. A multitude of paid advertisements (often of American products advertised in Swedish) suggest that with middle-class life came the desire for certain consumer goods. Several

advertisements imply, for instance, that to own and play the piano was enriching and well worth the money and effort. Newly arrived immigrant readers wrote in asking for the American word for common household items or for explanation of unfamiliar items first encountered on store shelves or in magazines and newspapers. The array of products advertised each month generally duplicated what was advertised in most other American newspapers or magazines — including Lydia Pinkham's tonics, furniture, land, snuff, farm equipment, corsets, railroad rates, and an occasional ethnic product, such as *sill* (herring).

The products advertised may have been similar to those in other magazines, but the editors maintained that their readers, Swedish-American women, were not included in the sometimes unflattering picture that major American magazines painted of women. Assistant editor Magnhild Anderson commented in the May 1907 issue that judging from such magazines, women's interests seemed limited to wardrobes and beauty. Contradicting that stereotype, Anderson pointed to the different skills a woman needed in managing a home; to women's efforts for the benefit of their families and communities; and to their work in high schools, business schools, and universities.

Particularly important were Swedish women's contributions to their churches. In January 1913 the editor wrote, "Anyone who has studied our people's church work in this country is surprised by the support from the women for a church in which their mother tongue is spoken and taught. One wonders how many churches would have been built and supported without the help of a united front of women. Surely not very many."

The short stories in *Qvinnan och Hemmet*, as well as news and editorial writing, were clearly directed to an immigrant audience. The fiction published often reflected the difficulties faced by immigrant girls and women, and often pointed toward the need to eliminate class structure and sex discrimination. Short stories end happily — even if the situation originally seems hopeless. The general themes were the need for social reform and the benefits of investing in a daughter's education (as well as a

A variety of American products were advertised in Swedish — from free Montgomery Ward catalogs to stylish children's shoes, from cream separators and seed to the material mark of success, a piano in the parlor.

För gossar

För flickor

**Mayes**  
**SKOL-SKODON**  
 Starka, varaktiga, tidsenliga.  
 Bed eller handla de att visa eller  
 Mayes-fabrikens märke på  
 valen  
 F. Mayes Boot  
 and Shoe Co.,  
 Milwaukee, Wis.

**SEGLITNA LIKT JERN**

**BÄTTRE ÄN FÖRENTA STATERNAS BONDS**  
**ARO GODA KOR OCH EN**  
**U. S. CREAM SEPARATOR**  
 De tillförsäkra egaren en årlig utdelning af  
 100 procent fria biarje kor.  
 Försök kombinationen och bevisa det!

**En \$40 ko och en U.S. Separator kan tjena \$40 på ett år**

Vår katalog förklarar hvar för U. S. Separator  
 för år och fast. Skrif efter en.

Vår katalog förklarar hvar för U. S. Separator  
 för år och fast. Skrif efter en.

**VERMONT FARM MACHINE CO.,**  
 DELLOW'S FALLS, VT.

**Utsäde**  
 för farmen och trädgården, bästa kvalitet,  
 står rot alldeles säkert.

**STERLING SEEDS**

**NORTHROP, KING & CO.,**  
**SEEDSMEN,**  
**MINNEAPOLIS, - - MINN.**  
 KATALOG FRITT, om Ni nämner  
 "Qvinnan och Hemmet"

**CORNISH PIANOS**  
**AND**  
**ORGANS**

**TVÅ ÅRS KREDIT OM SÅ ÖNSKAS.**  
 Lätt och enkelt sätt att kunna vi för er ordert  
 leverera ett praktiskt, fina klass Cornish piano eller  
 orgel på betalningsvillkor, som passar er förhållan  
 den. Vi kunna till  
 framtiden erbjuda er  
 frakt och installation,  
 om er behöfven af hvad  
 ni får betala hos  
 agenter och piano  
 handlande. Hvar

**\$25** Första  
 betalningarna.  
 Betala efter råd och  
 lägenhet.

**Montgomery Ward & Co.s**  
**Stora Katalog Fritt.**

Den största prövningsbesparande köparens väledare, som någonsin utgafs.

son's) because daughters also could succeed in business and trade. Successful working women back in Scandinavia and in other nations were portrayed as models of what women could accomplish.

The editors believed that Scandinavian-American mothers had an important role in

their children's education — and often advised them how to fill that role. A writer in a 1906 issue declared, "I don't know of anything more useful for young people to diligently pursue than the reading of good books. Good books are, next to good and understanding people, the best and most agreeable company. Young girls with inadequate schooling are encouraged to enter one of the colleges organized by Scandinavians." Likewise, it was the mother's responsibility to introduce culture and the "finer things in life" to her children in the setting of the home. In November 1904, assistant editor Anderson wrote: "A home without books, newspapers, magazines, music, and the like is a shallow-minded and boring home regardless of expensive furniture and rugs."



ALTHOUGH the magazine's advertisements, departments, and illustrations suggest middle-class life as the ideal, the editor recognized that not all immigrants were living the good life. The Hansens gave free advertising in *Qvinnan och Hemmet* to welfare organizations.

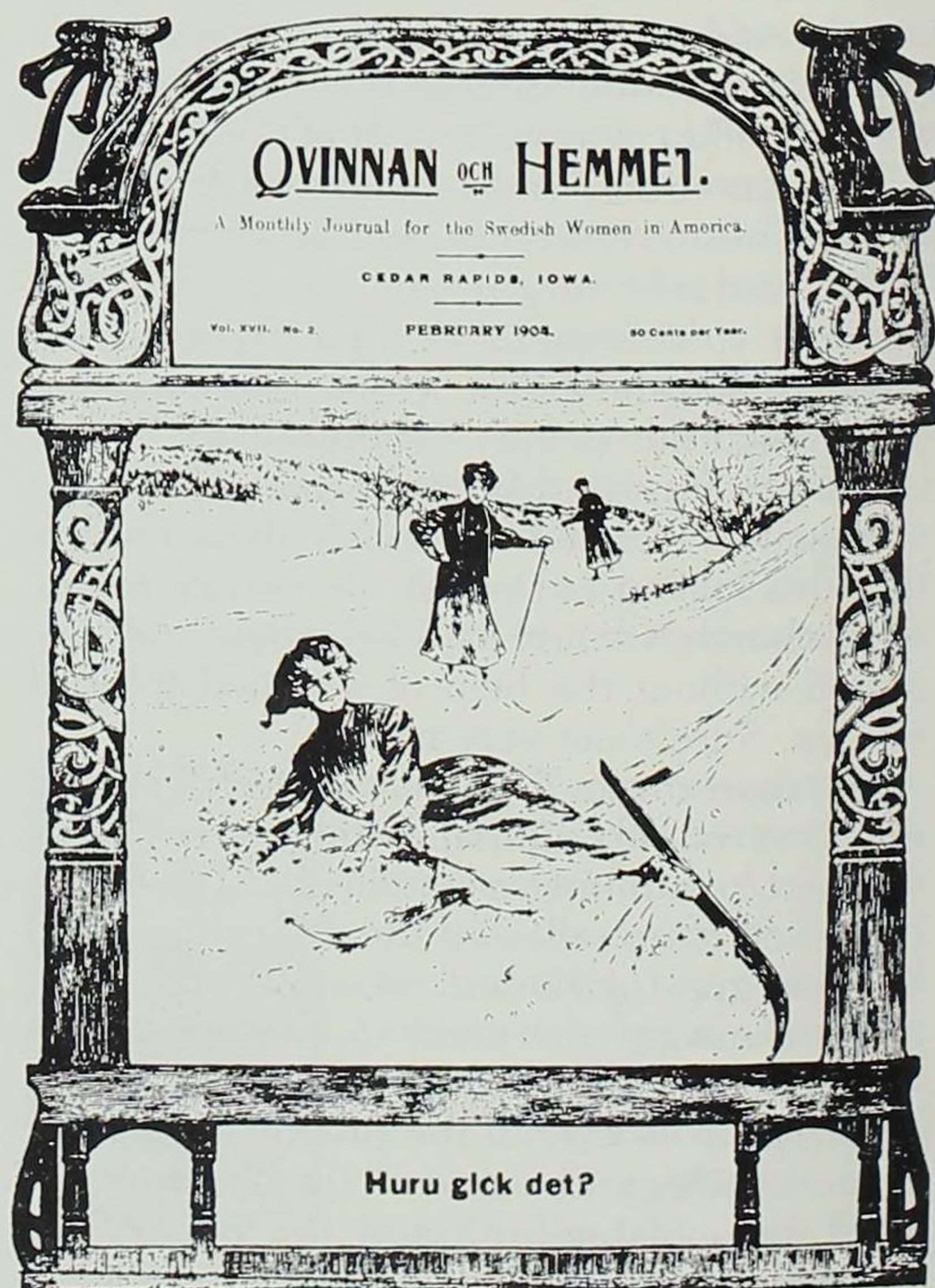
The goal of one such organization, called Freja, was to unite Scandinavian women in the United States and Canada for the purpose of founding homes for orphans and the elderly, providing funeral funds, and assisting needy Scandinavians. The first Freja Society began in Cedar Rapids in 1902, and Ida Hansen served as president.

The magazine staff also acknowledged that a large number of women of all nationalities worked outside the home — over 3.5 million in American factories in 1907, according to one writer. Hansen reprinted speeches and articles about factory work: "Newly invented machines have simply deprived us of our work in the home," stated one speaker. "We no longer have to spin and weave. Instead of the cottage industry, we now have big businesses. We have to work in large, smoky, unhealthy factories and become apathetic appendages to the

machines that produce more in one day than we could in a year."

The debate between women's role in the home and their entrance into conventionally male occupations was frequently played out on the pages of *Qvinnan och Hemmet*. "Could married women become storekeepers?" for instance, was a topic addressed in May 1905, in a reprinted article from *Woman's Home Companion* by Margaret E. Sangster. She wrote, "It seems that a housewife would have enough to do at home . . . and yet there are hundreds of married women who long for an opportunity to make some pin money for welfare, art or music lessons for their daughters. They miss the time before marriage when they were paid a weekly or monthly salary and always had money to spend. The thought has an undermining effect of making their lives miserable."

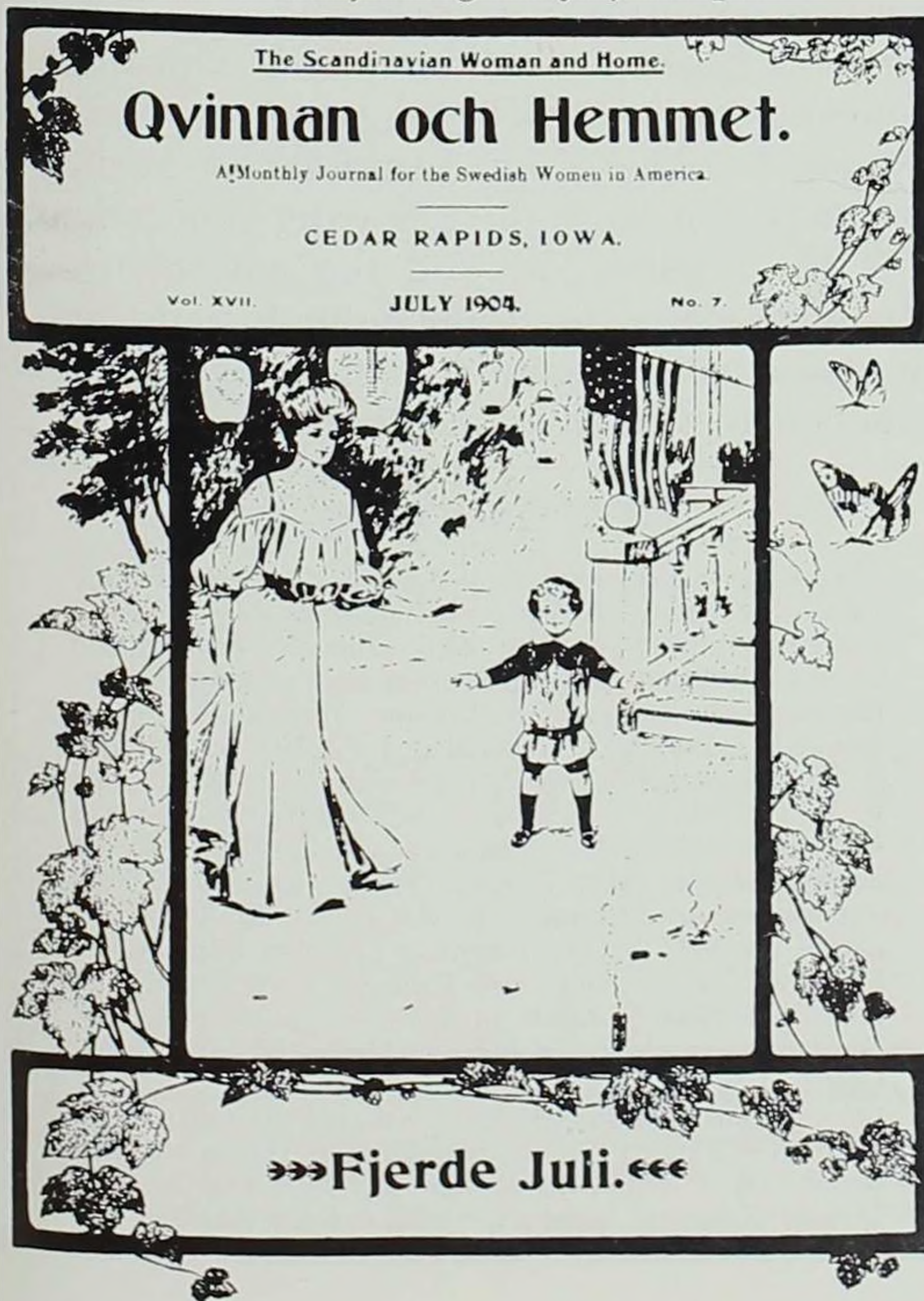
In October 1906 the new assistant editor, Ellen Lindström, tackled more aspects of the conflict between women's roles in the home and industry's effect on those roles. Lindström argued that the role of women in the oldest



institution, the home, had not been modified when work done in the home had been shifted into large factories. Her writing hints at a belief prevalent in Swedish periodicals, too, that women would never again spin, weave, sew, or make anything in the home that could be made in factories. Lindström lamented this change because it meant the home would never again serve as a school of life for children. Only cooking, she said, could still be taught at home — even though city housewives bought cutlets, steak, and ground beef at butcher shops. Yet Lindström recognized that times were changing, and so must a child's education. "If the homes are going to continue to be a primary school for the young, our children have to be prepared to face a new way of life," Lindström relented, "and they must get to know this world as well as the previous generation knew theirs. The world is going to need female workers now as in the days of our mothers and grandmothers, but the work has to be *with* the times and not against it."

Men entered *Qvinnan och Hemmet's* debate

Elaborate seasonal or holiday covers graced the magazine. Here: February skiing and July independence.



over women's place in the working world, too. The Reverend John B. A. Idstrom, an Augustana Synod pastor, asked this question in August 1905: "Wouldn't women lose some of their femininity and real purpose in life if they step into the fields that really belong to men?" Idstrom believed that women were indispensable in the homes but not in the working places. Women in the job market made it harder for men to find jobs, he claimed, making it difficult for men to know if they could support wives and families. He advised women not to boast too much about their progress, because "*hogmod går före fall*" (pride will have a fall).



DA and Nels Fredrick Hansen had moved to California in 1904, but continued to publish *Qvinnan och Hemmet* and its Norwegian counterpart in Cedar Rapids. In 1905 the magazine listed offices in Chicago, New York, and Minneapolis, and in 1910 in Flensburg, Germany. In 1908 circulation peaked at 83,000. An office in Oceanside, California, was opened in 1912. Hansen employed an assistant or co-editor and other *medarbetare* (co-workers).

By the end of World War I, the editorial staff recognized that some of the goals shared with other American women were taking shape. In January 1919 Lindström noted, "We truly believe that the woman's role in the working place has improved and that it will continue to improve if we seriously devote our energy to what we have set out to do. We believe that women have a better chance than ever to receive equal pay for equal work."

In April of that year Swedish feminist Elin Wägner reported that Sweden had finally granted full suffrage to women. Just before American women gained suffrage in 1920, Lindström again wrote, "Now that we have won full citizenship rights after years of struggle by many energetic women, it's only proper that we carry out our duty as citizens. We must show that we do not lack initiative and willpower." But after the suffrage battle had been fought and won, *Qvinnan och Hemmet*





## JANE ADDAMS OCH HULL HOUSE.



became less involved in the debate about women's rights, though not less concerned. In January 1930, the title of an article was, significantly, "The Woman's Place Is No Longer in the Home."

In January 1938 the name of Ida W. Howard-Manville, who had served as co-editor since 1922, appeared as chief editor of *Kvinnan och Hemmet* (in 1926 the spelling had been changed from *Qvinnan* to *Kvinnan*). Ida Hansen was listed as assistant editor. In April 1938, at the age of 85, Ida Hansen died, two years after her husband. *Kvinnan och Hemmet* continued publication for another nine years. The final issue was August 1947.



OR Hansen's sixty-fifth birthday in 1918, assistant editor Ellen Lindström had written a tribute to her that clearly described Hansen's mission: "Mrs. Hansen wanted to give her Scandinavian-born sisters a paper for the home, which gave them, in their own lan-

guage, knowledge of what the American home required of those who settle and live in this land." For researchers today, the magazine sheds light on many different aspects of Swedish-American culture — the language and how it changed; the clothes people wore, the food they ate, the books they read; what their houses and furniture were like; how they decorated their homes and what they planted in their gardens; how they reared their children; what songs they enjoyed; and what they believed about women's political rights.

Yet perhaps the magazine tells us more about Ida Hansen and the other professional women who edited it than about its eighty thousand readers, who remain largely anonymous except for signed letters to the editors. The magazine's success was evident in its high circulation figures, its pages of advertising from nationally established businesses, its offices

Through frequent articles on social reform, the magazine championed role models such as Jane Addams and her pioneering work at Hull House in the Chicago slums.

throughout the United States. Readers wrote that they were pleased with the magazine and did not want to be without it. Its message to immigrant women was important and complex: there is much to value in the nation of your past, and there is much to value in the nation of your future; choose the best of each. The magazine channeled Scandinavian news and literature to a reading audience probably eager to maintain some connections with their home country. In its vigilant news reports of the women's movement, social reform, and women's employment, it goaded the American political system to match suffrage advances made in Scandinavia and offered role models of politically active and gainfully employed women. In its idealization of the American middle class, it gave women a material goal towards which to strive and advice on how to create a healthy, aesthetic, and educational home environment. The magazine encouraged women to value their Scandinavian heritage and to pass it on to the following generations.

If the readers followed the advice in Ida Hansen's magazine, their difficult transitional positions as immigrants or children of immigrants may well have been eased. □

## NOTE ON SOURCES

This article was developed from a paper presented at the 1984 conference of the International Association for Scandinavian Studies (University of Washington, Seattle), and incorporates material from another article by the author, "Kvinnan och Hemmet: A Woman's Journal Written in Swedish, Edited by a Norwegian, Published by a Dane," in *Scandinavians in America: Literary Life*, edited by J. R. Christiansen (Decorah, 1985). Details about the expansion of *Qvinnan och Hemmet* appeared in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, May 7, 1903. The magazine has been microfilmed by Microfilm Services, East Moline. Film copies are held by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center (Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois) and three libraries in Sweden and Norway; the Norwegian version is at Rolvaag Memorial Library (St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota). English translations appearing in this article were done by the author. An annotated copy of the manuscript is on file in the Palimpsest office, SHSI, Iowa City. Editorial work by John Melvin (Editorial Assistant, SHSI) is acknowledged.