

Elinor Barr. 2015. *Swedes in Canada: Invisible Immigrants*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 554 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4426-4494-6.

This encyclopedic work carries the subtitle “Invisible Immigrants” and Elinor Barr well develops this theme in the 269 pages of the actual text. The additional 285 pages are well worth noting, with several appendices containing information that a researcher might need, copious notes supporting the text itself, and, following an extensive bibliography, there are two indices, one for personal names and another of a general nature.

The text itself is organized, not chronologically, but rather by various topics, each with its own chapter; these comprise “Under an Invisibility Cloak,” “Emigration from Sweden, Immigration to Canada,” “Immigrants,” “Settlement Patterns,” “Religion,” “World Wars,” “The Swedish Press,” “The Depression, Strikes and Unions,” “Earning a Living,” “A Woman’s Place,” “Swedishness in Canada,” and “Links with Sweden.” Following Charles Wilkins’ chapter, “The Swedes in Canada’s National Game,” Barr has three more: “Language, Discrimination, and Assimilation,” “Literature,” and “Emerging Visibility.”

While at first the lack of a chronological approach may seem strange, and the topical approach meant that some persons and events appear more than once in the narrative, the book is ultimately quite readable and keeps one’s interest. My interest was piqued even more, due to my own personal experiences with some of the persons or events described in this book. For instance, I was one of the 18,000 people who filled the old Chicago Stadium for the the Swedish Pioneer Centennial in 1948, about which she remarked that this event excited little interest in Canada (6).

In the chapter entitled “Literature” one is introduced to Louise de Kiriline Lawrence, who later in life became well known as a naturalist. This immigrant from Sweden served as the nurse to the famous Dionne quintuplets and wrote a book about that experience (258-59). Later, she became best known as a naturalist. That short but most interesting account of her life in and of itself would make this book worth reading. Reference in this chapter is also made to Byrna Barclay, who has written a number of novels and short stories. She came out of the congregation I once served as pastor and to which I still belong, Augustana Lutheran Church of Saskatoon. I had her mother as a parishioner. In one of Byrna’s short stories the author makes reference to the church; the protagonist of the story was baptized there.

“Swedishness in Canada” includes information about various lodges of which Swedes in Canada became a part. Having these details about the participation of Swedes in such organizations certainly adds to the breadth of this book. In the chapter entitled “Religion,” the author fairly includes the many various denominations that Swedes in Canada joined. While in any such work one might

be tempted to assert that the author left something out, in general I was pleased with this chapter that included, among other enterprises, the Covenant Bible Institute, which was the only Swedish Bible Institute in Canada.

The final chapter, “Emerging Visibility,” while brief (266-69) brings to light the interesting phenomena surrounding why the Swedes in Canada kept such a low profile over the many decades and, indeed, for about a century. Throughout the four waves of immigration, Swedes did not seemingly have the ethnic bonding experienced by other nationalities. However, Swedes in Canada, in the years following the fourth wave, began, according to Barr, to “reflect a relatively high ethnic consciousness” (268), and she thus concludes: “There is no need to be invisible any longer” (269). That sentence is an excellent conclusion to this monumental work.

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