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## **Transatlantic Connections: Nordic Migration to the New World after 1800**

*by Hans Norman and Harald Runblom, Oslo,  
Norwegian University Press, 1988*

**Reviewed by GEORGE NIELSEN**

**Transatlantic Encounters** is actually two books in one. The first half of the study, written by Hans Norman, describes the conditions in Europe, while the second part, written by Harald Runblom, describes the immigrants in America. Instead of limiting the topic to Scandinavians (Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes), Norman and Runblom identify their subjects as Nordic, in order to include the Finns and Icelanders. Relying heavily on earlier research, and following the usual stages of migration history, the authors have produced a survey of the migration from these five countries to the United States.

Instead of beginning with the motives for migration, the opening pages contain a summary of the impressive research Nordic scholars have made of migrations within northern Europe. Citizens of 17th and 18th century Europe were a foot-loose lot, and leaving home was not a new or isolated phenomenon. Seasonal migration in search of employment, migration to cities, and migrations to other European countries were familiar aspects of life. For the Nordics, America became the destination of choice in the 19th century.

Denmark, of all the Nordic countries, experienced the lowest proportional loss of its population during the period from 1851 to 1910. Only four out of every thousand migrated annually from Denmark, compared to six out of every thousand for Finland, seven per thousand for Sweden, nine per thousand for Iceland, and ten per thousand for Norway. Compared to Nordic countries, Denmark was more urbanized and industrialized and could more readily absorb the surplus people from the countryside. The cities,

at the same time, provided a market for agricultural goods, just as Danish farmers were changing from grain production to the more labor intensive animal products. Danes also lacked the cohesiveness of the other Nordics. They migrated more readily to countries other than the United States, and those who came to America distributed themselves more widely.

The first half of the book, on Europe, is more successful in synthesizing the available literature than the second half. Quite possibly the Nordic setting contained more common elements than the American. Another factor may have been the decision to devote equal parts of the book to each continent, even though materials from American settlements were more extensive and the adjustments of the migrants more varied.

In both halves, the authors generally identified a topic and then examined that aspect for each of the five nationalities. Too often in the American half, they introduced the topic but then gave disproportionate space to one country. For example, the Swedes received the focus in the section on churches, the Norwegians in the section of organizations, and the Finns in the chapter on labor unions.

The book is carefully organized, although excessive use of the passive voice handicaps the style. The primary contribution of the book is its breadth in viewing as a unit the migration of kindred people. It does not replace the monographs on each of the Nordic groups, nor is that the intention, but it does provide a perspective that gives meaning to the previous studies.