

Swedes in the Twin Cities: Immigrant Life and Minnesota's Urban Frontier

Edited by Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001. 367 p. Cloth, \$34.95.)

SWEDES IN THE TWIN CITIES contains the editors' introduction and 22 essays originally presented as papers at a conference, "Swedish Life in the Twin Cities," held in St. Paul in October 1996. The event celebrated the 150th anniversary of nineteenth-century Swedish immigration to the United States, the arrival in the mid-1840s of "the prophet" Erik Jansson and his followers, and their founding in 1846 of the utopian Bishop Hill colony in Henry County, Illinois. This historic event is not mentioned in the book, which instead begins with the visit to Minnesota in 1850 of the celebrated Swedish author Fredrika Bremer and her prophetic vision that the state was destined to become "A Glorious New Scandinavia."

Bremer's visit, the arrival of Swedish immigrants to the frontier river towns of St. Paul and Minneapolis in the 1850s, and their continued migration to the area in large numbers is insightfully delineated in the introduction. By 1910 Swedish Americans were the largest ethnic group in Minneapolis and the second largest in St. Paul. A high degree of ethnic homogeneity has characterized the Twin Cities, as the Swedes united with Norwegians and Danes in what can be described as an urban Scandinavianism. This was especially obvious in nineteenth-century developments as these Nordic newcomers, a majority from peasant circumstances, jointly confronted the urban frontier.

In his conference keynote address, Rudolph Vecoli concluded that, in spite of a greater ethnic diversity created by new immigrants, the 1990 census data reveals that German, Norwegian, Irish, and Swedish ancestries together accounted for more than 90 percent of Minnesota's population. This dominance of northern European immigrant nationalities offers a central interpretive variable.

The essays that follow are divided thematically into four parts: Aspects of Urban Life; Institutional and Creative Life; the Language of Immigrant Experience; and Swedes in Religion and Politics. It is impossible in a brief review to evaluate each contribution. The collection exhibits some of the unevenness in quality common to

published conference proceedings; for example, a number of essays tend toward description rather than analysis or interpretation. Thematic cohesion, aside from the urban locale, is not consistently achieved but may be said to exist in the general theme of immigrant adjustment and the focus on the ethnic component of that process. The volume's limitations notwithstanding, its broad scope of topics and wealth of information can only be characterized as innovative and impressive.

Reading the volume gives a tantalizing sense of entering the multifaceted urban immigrant world of Swedish America. It presents subjects that previously have been inadequately studied or even ignored, such as Joy Lintelman's study of Swedish American inmates in the Minneapolis city workhouse. This essay suggests a current interest in the darker aspects of the immigrant experience. And there is the rare and thoughtful treatment by Lars Olsson of immigrant working women in the Northwestern Knitting Company founded by the Munsing family.

Other notable contributions are made by Anne-Charlotte Harvey on the role of Swedish theater as a creator of Swedish American identity as well as an artistic outlet; by Ulf Jonas Björk on *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* and the role of the immigrant press in the urban environment; by Michael Brook in his assessment of the influence of the politically radical newspaper *Forskaren*; by Kermit Westerberg in his intriguing presentation of the library system and the circulation of foreign-language literature, in particular Swedish, which had an impressively large readership; and by Mary Towley Swanson in her identification of the influences that connected Minnesota's Swedish American artists to their heritage. Essays by Mark Granquist and by Scott Erickson competently treat the role of religion; Philip Anderson looks at the controversy over the teachings of evolution and the role of Swedish-born David F. Swenson in the debate. Essays by Dag Blanck and Bruce Larson demonstrate Swedish political clout in the state.

The dean of Swedish American historians, H. Arnold Barton, poses the obvious question of why Swedes flocked to Minnesota and the Twin Cities and concludes that both heart and head determined their destination. David Lanegran views the Swedish neighborhoods and their legacy in a historical perspective.

The present volume is indeed a welcome and long overdue addition to Swedish American history in particu-

lar and to an understanding of ethnic urban life in general; furthermore, it lays the groundwork for more ambitious achievements. The next logical scholarship on Swedes in the Twin Cities would be an interpretive monograph that embodies much of the store of knowledge contained in this anthology. In his essay, Byron Nordstrom speculates that competing historical societies and academic exclusiveness were once major obstacles to accomplishing more in recording Swedish American history. The time now seems ripe to move forward with renewed vigor.

Reviewed by Odd S. Lovoll, who recently retired from the King Olav V Chair of Scandinavian-American Studies at St. Olaf College and from the editorship of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. His most recent major publication is The Promise Fulfilled: A Portrait of Norwegian Americans Today (1998). In 1988 he published A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago before 1930.

We Grew Up Together: Brothers and Sisters in Nineteenth-Century America

By Annette Atkins

(Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001. 266 p. Cloth, \$29.95.)

BY PROVIDING A FRESH LOOK at nineteenth-century family dynamics, this study of sibling relationships counters some of the idealizations that have shaded our assumptions concerning American family life in previous centuries. Author Annette Atkins, professor of history at St. John's University in Minnesota, accomplishes this important work through close readings of letters exchanged by ten sets of siblings over the course of nearly a century (1840–1920).

“The letter is the artifact of the relationship,” Atkins explains. “In fact, sometimes the letter actually is the relationship.” Even so, she readily admits that since extensive correspondence between siblings occurred most often in “loving, connected families whose members were involved with each other,” basing a study of sibling relationships on letters risks giving short shrift to “disaffected and alienated” siblings, few of whom wrote letters—or preserved them. Atkins’s population is further limited by the sources used, for she looks only at letters found in such major repositories as the Library of Congress, the Huntington Library, and the Schlesinger Library, repositories tending to hold papers written, preserved, and donated by middle- and upper-class families, literate people with a sense of the importance of their lives and accomplishments.

These fully acknowledged methodological limitations aside, this thoughtful study casts light on a neglected area

of social history and provides a rare glimpse into the private lives of several fascinating American families: the son and daughter of Chester A. Arthur, twenty-first president; the 11 offspring of George Putnam, founder of the Putnam publishing empire; two generations of the Blair family, influential players in nineteenth-century American politics; and the five Christies, sons and daughter of a rural Minnesota family who had no claim to power or privilege and yet who prove to be the most interesting letter writers in this collection.

In interpreting the letters and the relationships, Atkins draws upon the theories of child psychologists like Alfred Adler, the works of feminists like Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and—perhaps most importantly—her own personal experiences as the sixth-born in a family of 12 children. From her opening chapter, “Family History: Theirs and Mine,” the author’s reminiscences and reflections enrich and illuminate the case studies she presents. “I knew who I was in part in relation to [my] siblings and was known [to others] in part by my relations with them,” she says. “They provided the comparisons and the contexts.” The conversational tone arising from such openness keeps the reader engaged, even when chapters seem vaguely repetitive—for instance, we are told too often that the Blair family dynamics centered on politics, that the gender roles of the Arthur children were blurred.

Such irritants aside, this is an important book. Many of the conclusions Atkins draws from her exploration of these letters attest to the role that sibling dynamics can play in shaping the personalities and charting the life course of individuals. Even readers who tend to minimize the influence their own siblings had upon their development cannot help but be struck by the author’s assertions that “the bond of siblingship” exists “outside particular feelings for one another . . . whether or not we stay in contact, even if we reject each other.”

Among the most important of the Atkins’s conclusions, four stand out: There is in all families a “family culture,” a set of rules reflecting the particular values and identity of the individual family; families living in different historical contexts seem remarkably similar over time; gender helps determine how family members experience life; and every family has its own story. Though these conclusions are drawn from an in-depth study of ten particular sets of letters, they might be seen as applicable to families across the ages and across the social scale. And therein lies both the value of this work and its appeal to an audience beyond academe.

Reviewed by Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, independent scholars currently living in Vermont, who have co-authored several books on women’s and family history, including Frontier Children, Pioneer Women, and Women in Waiting in the Westward Movement.

Keeping Christmas: Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land

By Kathleen Stokker

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000. 355 p.
Cloth, \$34.95; paper, \$19.95.)

KATHLEEN STOKKER'S BOOK is an engaging exploration of how cultural identity is manifested through Christmas traditions, historically and today, in Norway and by Norwegian Americans. This is not your average Christmas heritage book. It is much more. In addition to telling the history and folklore of Christmas customs in exquisite and evocative detail, this book challenges readers to think about the broader context of immigration and assimilation, their own roles in traditional celebrations, and the dynamic nature of traditional culture.

Keeping Christmas is organized into two parts, a format that allows Stokker to frame a vast amount of information in historical and cultural contexts. The first part, "Christmas in Norway," tracks the origins of Norwegian Christmas from Viking Jøl celebrations, the early Christian church's recasting of the winter solstice, and the impact of the Reformation on celebrations to modern Norwegian Christmas observances that are a mix of ancient ritual and new renditions of old customs.

In the second part, "The Norwegian American Christmas," Stokker describes American Christmas at the time of Norwegian immigration, the impact of commercialism, the societal shift to a more child-centered holiday, and, finally, the emergence (and continued evolution) of Norwegian American Christmas customs.

Stokker's research is fresh and comprehensive, and it always includes the voice of the people. Demonstrating the best practices of historical and folklore research, she expertly used Norwegian-language sources and first-person accounts (diaries, letters, interviews, and email correspondence) to bring a deeper understanding to the traditions. Like a good documentary, the book gives readers a sense of being close enough to smell the spruce branches, taste the krumkake, or hear the julebukkers banging on the door. Recipes, photographs, illustrations, and text sidebars of letters, lore, and stories further document each chapter, drawing readers into the traditions—perhaps into their own traditions.

Three chapters delve even deeper into the Norwegian American experience: "*Jul i Vesterheimen: Mirroring the Norwegian American Experience*" examines the role of this annual publication in Norwegian American communities. *Jul i Vesterheimen* (Christmas in the Western Home), issued by Augsburg Publishing House from 1911 to 1957, featured English- and Norwegian-language fiction, poetry, and essays for its first 20 years; after 1931 it was published only in Norwegian. Stories portrayed the struggles and

sacrifices of pioneers and the generation gap between American-born children and their Norwegian-born parents. This chapter contributes important scholarship on using ethnic literary periodicals to gain understanding of the immigrant experience.

"Julebukking: Christmas Masquerading Norwegian Style" presents new research on this activity of "Christmas fooling" in America. Stokker recounts her own experience julebukking in Spring Grove, Minnesota, in 1985, as well as analyzes other historical and field research on the topic. Julebukking literally means "Christmas goat," so named because originally a goat-head mask was worn. Now, a variety of disguises are used as a group of adults goes door-to-door making noise, pushing inside houses, and demanding treats. Stokker found this tradition, related to mumming, Halloween trick and treating, and caroling, still practiced in Norwegian American communities.

The foodways of Christmas may be the most enduring of all traditions associated with Norwegians and Norwegian Americans. Stokker describes the foods, their origins, preparation, serving practices, and evolution in America. Curious about lutefisk? Stokker covers this and other Yuletide culinary treats in "Lutefisk, Lefse and Rommegrøt." Lutefisk, with its origins in the Middle Ages, had fallen out of favor in Norway by the early-twentieth century, but for immigrants this lye-preserved cod was an important connection to the Old Country. It continues to hold special meaning for Norwegian Americans, as evidenced by the popularity of lutefisk suppers still served at churches and Sons of Norway lodges during November and December. As the circle of tradition turns 360 degrees, lutefisk is experiencing a revival in Norway.

The closing chapter, "From Stagnation to Revival," sums up the dynamic nature of traditions. Stokker masterfully takes us back through the evidence of previous chapters and points to Christmas as the single best way to demonstrate the forces of cultural evolution, preservation, and assimilation. *Keeping Christmas* is an important resource for the scholar interested ethnic history, folk culture, and the process of immigrant assimilation. But, more importantly, this is a landmark book for Norwegian Americans seeking better understanding of their own traditions of keeping Christmas.

Reviewed by Peggy Korsmo-Kennon, who received an M.A. in American Folk Culture from the Cooperstown Graduate Program and is executive director of the Minnesota Center for Book Arts in Minneapolis. She has attended many lutefisk dinners but only ate the lefse and meatballs.

Scandinavian Vital Records Index: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden

(Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001. 7 CD discs, \$16.50.)

PRESENT-DAY FAMILY HISTORY researchers are fortunate to have at their disposal an ever-growing number of powerful electronic indexes that provide quick and easy access to original records. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recently released an inexpensive and user-friendly Vital Record Index (VRI) on CD-ROM that should be of special interest to all researchers with Scandinavian ancestry. It contains data extracted by church volunteers from approximately 3.5 million birth/christening records and 1 million marriage records for Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden from the 1500s to 1905. Individual searches, parent searches, and collection searches are all possible in this new database.

The individual-search screen is divided into four sections that enable users to search in various ways for either a birth/christening or marriage record. Every search requires a minimum of two actions. You must first decide which record type—birth/christening or marriage—you want to search, and you must always type the individual's given name(s) and/or last name(s) in the fields provided. Searches can be further limited by year, country, county, city/town, or the names of the father and mother or spouse.

The VRI contains a number of very useful features. For example, an “erase” button on the search screen clears all information currently in a field, and an “options” button enables you to change default settings. In addition, the VRI automatically capitalizes the first letter of any name typed into the name fields. And you don't need to worry about the exact spelling of a name being searched, because the VRI automatically finds most variations of any name. For example, a search of Värmland, Sweden, for all females named Christina born in 1859 yielded Christina, Christine, Kristina, Kerstin, Kjerstin, and Stina. Similarly, a search of Danes with the surname Henriksen produced Henriksen, Henricksen, Henrichsen, Hinrichsen, Henricisen, Hendriksen, Hendrickson, Hendrichsen, Hindricksen, and Hindrichsen.

The parent-search and collection-search features are extremely important ancillary capabilities of the VRI. When an individual is located in a birth/christening record, the names of the parents are usually listed. You can then do a parent search, which locates all other children of this couple included in the database. This search feature, when used carefully, enables you to find an entire family quickly. For each search resulting in a match, the microfilm number at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City (the source of the specific record) is provided. This is of inestimable value for the researcher who wants to check the veracity of the information in the VRI with

the original record. In fact, the collection-search feature enables you to locate not only the microfilm number but also the time period covered and the exact number of records extracted from the film.

Two final comments—one a substantive criticism and the other merely a frustration—need to be made. First, I was surprised to discover that the extra letters found in various Scandinavian alphabets (for example, å, ä, ö, ø) do not appear in personal names and place names in this database. This omission—it is clearly not an oversight—is unacceptable and should be corrected in future versions.

Second, the church readily admits that the VRI for Scandinavia is “a partial collection of the records available from the countries and time periods represented.” So, in spite of the 4.5 million vital records (and the estimated 10 million total names) included, the database will prove frustrating or totally inadequate for a significant number of potential users. To begin with, the four countries are unequally represented in the database. Swedish, Danish, Norwegian, and Finnish records comprise 40 percent, 30 percent, 26 percent, and 4 percent, respectively, of the total. Furthermore, the database is, for all intents and purposes, in its infancy. For example, Swedish researchers will quickly discover that only 13 percent of Swedish parishes are represented, that 4 of the 24 Swedish counties (Jämtland, Norrbotten, Västernorrland, and Östergötland) are not represented at all, and that 8 of the 20 Swedish counties included in the database are represented by 3 or fewer parishes.

In spite of these reservations, this database is a significant first step in indexing vital records from Scandinavia. It is a powerful, albeit limited, research tool that can be purchased at a bargain price. No Scandinavian genealogist should be without it.

Reviewed by James E. Erickson, Ph.D., an instructor and department chair in biology at Normandale Community College, Bloomington, MN, and editor of Swedish American Genealogist, a quarterly journal devoted to biography, genealogy, and personal history, published by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL.

Minnesota Diary, 1942–1946

By Sinclair Lewis. Edited by George Killough

(Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 2000. 320 p. Cloth, \$39.95.)

HARRY SINCLAIR LEWIS brought the glib, fractious public personality that had toured with him the world over and made him famous and wealthy after three decades of novel-writing home to Minnesota in April 1942. Settling in Minneapolis that summer and fall, he did something that no one expected him to do—move offstage and take

up a considerably quieter and more contemplative life in which his primary occupation was to rediscover his midwestern roots and reunite the loud public side of himself with its long-hidden, quiet, second self content to meditate on the times of sunrise, the falling of cattle prices, and the mawkishness of the parades of Burma Shave signs seen while canvassing the countryside by automobile.

Lewis meticulously preserved the record of this Thoreauvian interlude in a brief typescript folio that he consigned to Yale University's collection of American literary manuscripts with his other personal and professional papers. Editor Killough reclaimed it from the black void into which earlier, myopic critics of Lewis had carelessly dropped it and now restores it for us in a full and lovingly annotated edition that deserves attention by scholars and lay readers alike. The effort Lewis made in keeping this chronicle must have been enormous, so diligent was he in recording the minutiae of the lives that he observed all around him.

The entries are no Bloomsburyish musings on the inner life. The emphasis is always on what's outside—the external world of humans and machines and animals. It is a record of the mind of a novelist, to be sure, particularly a novelist like Lewis, ever fond of sociohistorical data—names and dates and the exact building materials that went into the construction of Minnesota's rural byways and bridges. Yet it seems less a stockpiling of “dope,” as Lewis called it, for new novels and more a reaching out by the writer to reconnect himself with the world around him.

It is at bottom a kind of romance with the commonplace, unapologetically banal at times, and even bathetic. Yet he loves it in all its detail. The hopscotch of laconic and verbose descriptions that skip back and forth through

the diary's pages suggest that Lewis may have gotten giddy taking in the sights around him and had to restrain himself lest he plunge forward, freefalling in a frothy excess of words. For so voluble a person as Lewis, this must have been a test of mythic requirements. It's actually the glib facticity of the entries that make the book such compelling reading: “You can see the tower of the Mayo Clinic from the East 9 miles away across prairie. I don't know how many stories it is—the coupola is tricky.” “Evening with LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR ELMER ANDERSON, aged 30, 1st elected 4 yrs ago, newsdealer at Brainerd, Lutheran, no cge [college], looks like a kindly young Laval.” Or this priceless pinpointing of a little anomaly in everyday life: “Kensington Rune Stone kept in vault, Alex Chamber of Commerce. Inscription seems too shallow to last. Where did they get chisel?” A question only a novelist could ask.

Perhaps the ultimate value of Lewis's *Minnesota Diary* is this: decades have passed and much hard effort has been spent at penetrating the finely filamented scrim that Lewis veiled himself with, baiting his audience with the false conceit that his arrogant and showy public self was the same thing as his private one. I know of no finer document for revealing the “real” Harry Lewis—if there is such a thing—than this diary. It is a record of Lewis himself, masked behind the impersonal data of temperatures and wind speeds, that is, like the weather he so precisely recorded, “exasperatingly human in its moods.”

Reviewed by James M. Hutchisson, professor of English at The Citadel, who has written widely about Sinclair Lewis and his contemporaries and is the author of The Rise of Sinclair Lewis, 1920–1930.

NEWS & NOTES

IN MARCH 1857 Inkpaduta's small band of Dakota Indians, likely driven by bad weather and encroaching white settlement, attacked communities at Spirit Lake, Iowa, and Springfield, Minnesota Territory. By the end of what became known as the Spirit Lake Massacre, 41 settlers were dead, 4 women were taken captive, and the estimate of Indians killed ranged from a few to more than 20.

Legends, Letters, and Lies: Readings on the Spirit Lake Massacre of 1857, compiled and edited by Mary Hawker Bakeman (Roseville, MN: Park Genealogical Books, 2001, 234 p., paper, \$28.95 plus

\$3.00 shipping) gathers contemporary and later accounts of the affair and adds maps, illustrations, lists of those involved, and a comprehensive index. The documents, in chronological chapters from background through the attack, rescue of captives, fruitless chase of Inkpaduta, and aftermath, range from first-person reminiscences and newspaper atrocity accounts to speeches and Bureau of Indian Affairs reports. They are left to speak for themselves, although the book's introduction (and title) set the scene and caution the reader to evaluate the texts as documents of their time. The volume can be

ordered from the publisher, P.O. Box 130968, Roseville, MN 55113-0968 or on the web at www.parkbooks.com.

A UNIQUE NEW HISTORY, house tour, and museum guide, *Progressive Design in the Midwest: The Purcell-Cutts House and the Prairie School Collection at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts* by Jennifer Komar Olivarez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 200 p., paper, \$19.95) offers an informative introduction to the once-again popular architecture and design of early-twentieth century Minnesota. Departing from nineteenth-century for-



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mality, Prairie School architects William Gray Purcell and George Elmslie built the revolutionary flat-roofed, open-floor-plan Minneapolis house in 1913 in the belief that organic forms would facilitate intelligent everyday living. Thankfully, their artful Purcell-Cutts House (the Cutts family purchased the dwelling in 1919) is intact and open to visitors today, restored and maintained by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Following the book's detailed house history and visual tour is a catalog that showcases the MIA's outstanding collection of Prairie School and Arts and Crafts furnishings. Included (with background information and historical photos) are nearly 50 lovely works including elevator grilles, windows, chairs, tableware, art glass, light fixtures, urns, and friezes by Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Purcell, and Elmslie. A thoughtful introductory essay by Roger F. Kennedy assesses the high quality of the era's progressive clients and concludes with a call for educated, respectful clients such as those Purcell and Elmslie found in the 1895–1915 generation.

The volume's artful design and rare black-and-white and 178 color photos successfully convey a sense of the movement's interest in warmth and spare, organic simplicity. Financial subsidies for the book make it a genuine "best buy."

LAW PROFESSOR Ann Juergens has published a fascinating and informative article on an important Minnesotan, "Lena Olive Smith: A Minnesota Civil Rights Pioneer" in *William Mitchell Law Review*, volume 28, number 1 (2001). In 1921, when women lawyers were a rarity, Smith became the first African American woman licensed to practice law in the state. While supporting herself handling divorce, probate, and other mundane cases, she was a tireless worker for social justice. Becoming a leader of the Minneapolis NAACP, Smith collaborated with community organizations to work for change, using the power of the press and taking her cases directly to actors on the local scene who could make a difference, rather than pursuing slow, costly, and risky litigations or arguments before state and federal courts. Juergens focuses on five civil rights stories, the "tip of the iceberg": state-sponsored discrimina-

tion in education; hate speech and the racist film *Birth of a Nation*; housing segregation; equal treatment in public places; and racism in the criminal-justice system, exemplified by the trial of the Scottsboro Boys and police brutality toward African Americans. The article concludes with a discussion of what lawyers today can learn from Lena Olive Smith about the effective pursuit of social justice.

DRAWING ON probate records, census data, newspapers, and archives, as well as published sources, Gene H. Rosenblum's *Jewish Pioneers of St. Paul, 1849–1874* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2001, 128 p., paper, \$19.99) is as much a community genealogy as it is a history. Beginning with the first known Jewish settlers (after grappling with the question of how to determine who was Jewish), the book describes migration, marriages, offspring, businesses and business partnerships, and the founding and maintenance of Jewish organizations. It all adds up to a web of community, seen mostly through the actions and successes of prominent community leaders. Numerous photographs of people and places illustrate the volume, which also includes an appendix, "Where They Did Business" (merchants, including peddlers, their business names, and addresses), and a list, "These Were the Pioneers," (with spouses' names in parentheses).

IN THE *Journal of Policy History*, Thomas R. Huffman analyzes a contentious legal proceeding in "Exploring the Legacy of Reserve Mining: What Does the Longest Environmental Trial in History Tell Us About the Meaning of American Environmentalism?" (volume 12, number 3, 2000). After a concise summary of the water-pollution case against the taconite-processing firm, Huffman assesses the long-running "imbroglio" in terms of legal precedent; the connections between politics, economics, and natural resources (political economy); environmental-health science; political culture; and ecological symbolism. A chronology beginning with the development of taconite processing in 1913 and stretching to cancer-surveillance reports in 1999 is a helpful aid to readers following the complex case.



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