

In Search of Signe:
The Life and Times of a Swedish Immigrant

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Abstract

In the early 1900s, Swedish immigrant women in the United States created communities through socially engaged actions, particularly in support of temperance and labor movements. Through writing and reading, these highly literate Scandinavian women reported, educated, and encouraged one another, openly and honestly creating a record of their working-class immigrant experiences, largely overlooked until now. My dissertation focuses on a singular yet representative Scandinavian immigrant woman, Signe Aurell, a Swedish laundress, labor activist, poet, and translator. Her life and work in the United States and after returning to Sweden exemplify, chronicle, and reflect upon not only the lived experiences of fellow migrant women workers, but also the challenges confronting social critics and visionary activists.

The current body of research largely leaves unexplored the role of immigrant working-class women. This research situates Aurell as an emigrant in Sweden, an immigrant in the United States, and a Swedish woman actively engaging with social movements by working at the intersections of folklore studies, history, and literature, blending archival and library research with fieldwork and focusing on vernacular expressions—especially songs, poems, short stories, and images—in ephemeral sources like handwritten letters, personal accounts, and left-wing newspapers, combined with historical ethnographies and oral histories. As a folklorist, I have focused on laborlore and the study of identity and community formation. However, in order to contextualize that work, my research has intersected with both labor and immigrant history, often from a gendered perspective. Finally, because of Signe Aurell's propensity as a writer, I also draw from literary studies, specifically studies of working-class literature to present Aurell as a representative of the thousands of women like her who contributed in integral but often unseen ways to social movements. Because of her many interests and her engagement as an activist, writer, and immigrant, Signe Aurell provides an excellent case study in furthering our understanding of immigrant labor history. This work shows Signe Aurell as a representative, but at the same time exceptional, Swedish immigrant woman who left her mark in a small way on both sides of the Atlantic.

Introduction. *In Search of Signe*

Travel through Minnesota and you'll come across him eventually—Vilhelm Moberg. His books about Karl Oskar and Kristina, a family of Swedish immigrants who settle in Chisago County, led to the region's nickname: "Swedeland" or "Mobergland." Communities like Chisago City celebrate Karl Oskar Days every summer in honor of the series' hardworking male protagonist. There's even a statue of Karl Oskar and his wife, Kristina, in Lindstrom, Minnesota. Karl Oskar stares straight ahead, seeming to see only possibility. Kristina, though, looks back, as if homesick, longing for what once was. Both stereotypes—the industrious Swedish immigrant man and the homesick Swedish immigrant woman—have remained dominant in contemporary American understandings of Swedish immigration.

It was not only Karl Oskars and Kristinas that came to the United States from Sweden, however. In fact, the demographics changed drastically during the heaviest periods of Swedish immigration. In the 1850s, when widespread Swedish immigration to the United States began, nearly 70 percent of immigrants came as families. That number was inverted in the early 1900s with nearly 75 percent of immigrants arriving not as families, but as individuals (Brooks 1987, 142). Of those individuals immigrating to the United States alone, many were single women—some planned to stay forever, and others planned to stay for only a few years. Some were moving to start a new life, others to experience a new world. Their jobs, their isolation, their lack of published writing, all contribute to the erasure of women from many histories about Swedish immigration, leaving places like Chisago County to remember and honor the men and families, and forget the single women.

I stumbled across Signe Aurell's name in a book about songs of the American labor movement. Just a mention. Fleeting. She had translated a song by Joe Hill, another name that I

did not know. At least not at first. My impressions of Swedish immigrants to the United States were of Lutheran farmers, toiling away in the field. Of the Karl Oskars and Kristinas settling new land. Of my own family moving to Greeley, Colorado, from Täby, Sweden, in 1989. When I imagined Swedish immigrants, I did not think of labor activists traveling the country, organizing and agitating. I did not think of the women who tried to make a living by working unbearable hours in someone else's home, just because it was a little better in the United States than it was in Sweden. That began to change as I realized just how important many of these immigrant stories are, yet they had been ignored, even erased at times. They are stories of immigrants from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden who exhibit a burgeoning class-consciousness that would help shape the United States and the American labor movement. They are stories that show that Scandinavian immigration was not one homogenous monolith that simply resulted in millions of Scandinavians suddenly becoming Scandinavian-Americans. They are the stories that make America. Of course, one story cannot do all that. This story about Signe Aurell does not try to do all that. It is only a fragment of a much larger story. But as long as there are stories that are untold, the history of immigration is incomplete. Telling Signe Aurell's story means that history is a little less incomplete. More, by focusing on one individual and contextualizing her within a specific time period, we can see how vernacular culture is created and performed and circulated. As folklorist Edward Ives writes, "A specific item of folklore, a ballad for example, is created by an individual, and we can study not only the way that particular individual combined tradition and invention to bring that new item into being but also the way that ballad grew out of his own life and personality" (1976, 252). Replace "ballad" with "poem," or "short story," or "essay," or "letter," and replace "his" with "her," and Signe Aurell becomes that individual.

Having already written two common-man biographies about Larry Gorman and Lawrence Doyle, both folk poets and singers, Ives wrote a short article in 1976 titled “Common-Man Biography: Some Notes by the Way.” His article is an archeological field manual for folklorists who are digging for details often overlooked (or perhaps nonexistent), whether written or oral. “The problem,” Ives writes, “is clear: if the standard elitist biographer has usually a whole range of documents at his disposal—official records, letters, diaries, memoirs, and Lord knows what all else—the non-elitist biographer has very little” (1976, 251). His words rang true. Unfortunately for me, I came across Ives’ article long after I had begun my research. In fact, I first read his article after having returned from a year of research in Sweden. I had, at that point, made my own mistakes, figured out my own methods, and, luckily, dug up enough fragments to begin to piece together a story. But I dove into Ives’ work on Larry Gorman, Lawrence Doyle, and Joe Scott, reading aloud certain passages to anyone who would listen.¹ Ives writes beautifully, piecing together fragments into a coherent whole, yet still left many questions unanswered and unanswerable, all while telling a story that forced the reader to recognize the historical value of the common man. And woman. All of them common, but paradoxically uncommon, unique in their own way with skills that no one else had. Like Larry Gorman. Like Signe Aurell. Like most of us.

In 1983, Edward Ives wrote a letter to his fellow folklorist Jim Leary. It was tucked away in a copy of *Anna May: Eighty-Two Years in New England*, a book that Leary was using in a course he taught at the University of Kentucky, a copy that he loaned to me thirty years after the fact. In his letter, Ives expresses delight that Leary was using the book, but continues, “several people have told me it’s ‘too boring,’ and a few of these have been (God help us) folklorists. Anna May just ain’t folksy enough for them. She is for me.” He went on, sarcastically, “in folklore we study

the folk, don't we? And the folk ain't a us, it's a them. Yeesh!" (Ives March 30, 1983). Those few sentences say a lot. They reiterate the need for common-man and common-woman biographies as reminders that even as researchers and writers and readers, we *are* the folk, and that the experiences of those common men and women are our experiences as well.

But still it is "great-man" biographies that dominate. Generally, they speak of great men who built great things or accomplished great deeds. Sometimes, they speak of evil men who destroyed great things or accomplished evil deeds. Sometimes, albeit rarely, they speak of great women who built great things or accomplished great deeds. Fame and notoriety matter for women, too. Well-known labor activists like Mother Jones or Elizabeth Gurley Flynn have had biographies written about them. Political and social leaders like Hillary Clinton and Eleanor Roosevelt have had biographies written about them. But a long history of systemic gender imbalance in the United States and elsewhere has made famous women rarer than many semi-famous men. And so biographies, as we know them, generally describe great men. Yet even in the pages of those great-man biographies are mentioned, usually in passing, names you don't recognize. Names that don't have biographies written about them. Names that fill the pages of biographies of great men, because they are the people who helped make others great and, in doing so, were lost to the footnotes of history.

We all leave a mark though, sometimes only in fragments. There remain the stories told, passed down from one generation to the next. There are the little scraps of writings, tucked away in someone's book copy or obscure newspapers or letters home that tell of a life lived, now stored in a desk drawer somewhere. There are church records and government censuses and phone books, reminding us that people lived in specific times and places. Little bits of evidence can be pieced together to create a picture—not a complete one, perhaps never a

complete one, but a picture nonetheless. By examining the fragments of a life lived and allowing for incomplete pictures, we, counterintuitive as it may seem, create a more complete picture of the world we live in. By focusing on the men and women who do not have biographies written about them, we can better understand the world that the vast majority of people experience everyday. It is a world that is rich and artistic and fulfilling, but a world that is punctuated by poverty and boredom and want. It is a world that is never as simple as it seems. Telling those stories, telling that story, telling Signe Aurell's story is an attempt at ensuring that her story is not lost.

Of course, I am not the first person to delve into the life of a politically engaged woman who was also a poet. Hazel Dickens and Aunt Molly Jackson have been written about for decades, for example. These women may not fall into the category of elite as opposed to non-elite, as Ives chose to separate biographies. However, the scholars who wrote about these women had reams of "official records, letters, diaries, memoirs, and Lord knows what all else" available to them and were, in turn, able to create a more complete picture (Ives 1976, 251). My work on Signe Aurell is incomplete. It will remain incomplete, but, hopefully, by examining the life of one particular woman, this common woman biography will further our understanding of immigration by Swedish women to the United States in the early 1900s.

By the standards of many historians, Signe Aurell was born in obscurity and died in obscurity. Yet I have dedicated years of research and this entire body of work to her life. Why? I have asked myself that question more times than I care to admit. And have been asked that question by others more times than I care to admit. I think, first of all, that her obscurity was intriguing to me. For several years in the middle of her life, she lived publicly in the pages of the Swedish-American press, but she is unknown aside from passing mentions in old newspapers or

academic works of history. Like Ives and Leary and the many other folklorists who find value in the quotidian, I have aimed here to focus on the ordinary, the vernacular, the stories that are too often relegated to footnotes if they are mentioned at all.

My research has been conducted on both sides of the Atlantic, in Sweden on one side and in Illinois, in Michigan, in Minnesota, and in Wisconsin on the other. I've searched in archives, physical and digital. I've sent emails and letters and made phone calls to complete strangers in hopes of finding living relatives. I've written articles in newspapers looking for help from the public. I've learned to purposely misspell words to account for the errors that happen when transcribing old handwritten records. I've talked with librarians and archivists and professors and genealogists and local historians. What has emerged is, essentially, a common woman biography, in the spirit of Edward Ives, about Signe Aurell as folk poet, labor activist, and immigrant.

So who was she? Signe Aurell was a Swedish immigrant to Minnesota. In 1913, she left her home in Hässleholm, Sweden, a small town in the southern countryside to move to Minneapolis, Minnesota. As a Swedish immigrant in the United States, she joined a large number of her compatriots who had begun to turn entire swaths of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul into Swedish-American communities. While in Minneapolis, Aurell took part in the temperance movement through her membership in the International Order of Good Templars (IOGT). She engaged with the labor movement by joining the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). And she became a published author, writing poetry, short stories, and essays for various Swedish and Swedish-American newspapers.

But Aurell was different than many of the Scandinavian immigrants. Aurell moved back to Sweden. That's the second thing that grabbed my attention. Suddenly, this wasn't just a story

about an immigrant, but a story about an immigrant searching for something, working for something, moving for something, only to move again. Back home. What can Aurell and her search tell us about the lives of Swedish immigrants? The role of Swedish immigration in social movements? The role of Swedish immigrant women in the United States? And what can her life and her writing tell us about vernacular expressions and the intersection of work and immigration?

Of those individuals who immigrated to the United States, some names endure, many of them male. Some are recognizable to people throughout the United States, like that of Joe Hill, born Joel Emmanuel Hägglund in 1879 in Gävle, Sweden. Hägglund immigrated to the United States in 1902, changed his name to Hill and became, as labor historian Franklin Rosemont writes, “probably the best-known hobo in U.S. history,” becoming famous (and infamous) for his work in the IWW as an organizer, songwriter, and poet (2003, 38). In fact, Hill was known, and continues to be known, as one of the most popular IWW songwriters, whose eventual execution at the hands of a Utah firing squad in 1915 made him a martyr for the labor movement. The songs and poems that he wrote—which have since been preserved by artists across several generations—were inspired by and written for the IWW in English. However, as Rosemont points out, the IWW “was already a singing union when Hill joined it” (2003, 53).

Several immigrant or second-generation immigrant IWW poets, including the Finnish-American Matt Valentine Huhta, known as T-Bone Slim, wrote labor poetry and songs in English rather than in their native languages (Rosemont 2003, 63). However, because of the IWW’s openness to immigrants and non-English speakers, the songs that were sung in the IWW were sung in a variety of languages. Non-English Wobbly poems and songs abound. Archie Green, Franklin Rosemont, Jim Leary, and others have written about the lack of documented

non-English songs as well as the need for further research into the non-English work of IWW members. Franklin Rosemont specifically asks about Signe Aurell in his work on Joe Hill: “Why is the name of this obviously interesting and important character missing from books on Joe Hill and the Wobblies?” (2003, 442).

Rosemont’s question illuminates two important points. First, the obvious, why are there so many interesting and important characters missing from books about Joe Hill and the Wobblies? Second, why are there so many interesting and important characters missing from historical records of immigration, laborlore, and women’s history in general? Even Ives’ comments on the entertainment value and the folksiness of *Anna May* suggest something else, though not explicitly commented upon and perhaps not even implied by Ives, but something that I have come across as a male folklorist researching a female poet: women must be exceptional to be written about and, even so, they are written about in relation to men. I have done it myself. In fact, as you read this work, you’ll notice that I sometimes write about Signe Aurell in relation to the men in her life. To Joe Hill. To Sigfrid Stenberg. To Viking Aurell. Some of this is due to the materials available. History, and in turn historical preservation, has not been kind to women who write, like Signe Aurell for example, as Joanna Russ notes in her work *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983). Elizabeth Faue, in her book *Community of Suffering & Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915–1945*, argues that women are absent from books about the labor movement because the labor movement, as a whole, did not take seriously the role of women in the workplace, in the community, or in the economy. With few exceptions, men dominated the public face of the labor movement (Faue 1991). The IWW was not exempt to this line of thinking. The propaganda, major public voices, and, as historian Francis Shor argues, even the IWW’s use of direct action, was rooted in a masculine virility

(Shor 1999). Interesting and important characters like Signe Aurell are missing from books about Joe Hill and the Wobblies because they were women, because they were immigrants, because they did not write in English. While there are untold numbers of untold stories of untold men and women, I try to correct the lack of this one particular interesting and important character, Signe Aurell, as a response to Rosemont's question.

Scholars like Archie Green, Clark "Bucky" Halker, James Leary, and Franklin Rosemont have explored intersections of labor and expressive forms; Jennifer Eastman Attebery and H. Arnold Barton have focused on the intersections of Scandinavian ethnicity and immigration. Joy Lintelman's work, in particular, has been foundational in telling the story of Swedish immigrant women. Despite her efforts, much of the scholarship on immigration and the labor movement in Scandinavian America has focused on the role of immigrant men. Because of this lopsided approach, there is still much to be done in the field, including examining issues and intersections of literature, gender, labor, and return migration in the labor movements of both the United States and Sweden, not to mention other Nordic nations.

It is these intersections to which Archie Green alludes when he writes about heritage and tradition, about oral expression and a "corpus of expressive forms," and about the "interplay of two ancient words, *labor* and *lore*" (1993, 14–15, 21). Green argues that laborlore gives meaning to work. And much of that lore can be written by participants. Barbro Klein, writing about the importance and the difficulties of archival work observes that, "folklore can be counter-hegemonic also when it is written" (2007, 133). Green and Klein are advocating for similar ideas, that folklore—laborlore—whether orally transmitted or written and archived, is a critical part of folklore studies and one that broadens the field to include the voices of many who may have been forgotten. I believe that Aurell's voice—her writing, her laborlore—gives meaning to not

just her work, but to the work and the lives of the Scandinavian immigrants just like Aurell, who read her work, who wrote like her, who lived lives just like hers.

However, the current body of research largely leaves unexplored the role of immigrant working-class women. In an attempt to answer the questions I asked above, I had to situate Aurell as an emigrant in Sweden, an immigrant in the United States, and a Swedish woman actively engaging with social movements. I work at the intersections of folklore studies, history, and literature, blending archival and library research with fieldwork. Those intersections have been challenging at times, but ultimately rewarding as I have been able to delve into various subfields. As a folklorist, I have focused on laborlore and the study of identity and community formation.² However, in order to contextualize that work, my research has intersected with both labor and immigrant history, often from a gendered perspective.³ Finally, because of Signe Aurell's propensity as a writer, I also draw from literary studies, specifically studies of working-class literature.⁴

Within these various fields of study, I focus on vernacular expressions—especially songs, poems, short stories, and images—in ephemeral sources like handwritten letters, personal accounts, and left-wing newspapers, combined with historical ethnographies and oral histories. The vernacular is the everyday; it is culture created through informal and commonplace interactions between individuals. Vernacular culture in America letters is the immigrant experience in the words of the immigrant. To describe a piece of writing as vernacular is not a judgment of quality, nor is it to say that the writing is utterly unfiltered and a factual and unassailable account of the immigrant experience. Rather, vernacular expression in writing, as vernacular speech, mirrors the shared experiences and uses the common language of a given folk group.

Regina Bendix's work, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*, traces much of the history of American folklore studies as scholars in the field have grappled with how to best present folklore while maintaining responsibility to the people they work with and their audience. In it, she argues not for a definition of authenticity, but instead that authenticity should be viewed "as experiential, rather than static and lasting" (Bendix 1997, 198).

Transcribing and translating Signe Aurell's poetry, first published in the pages of Swedish-language newspapers surrounded by news about the America labor movement, has forced me to grapple with ideas of authenticity. In an effort to focus on the experiential, I have chosen to reproduce lengthy passages of text, giving the reader a chance to read Aurell's own words in full. The same can be said for the many America letters. I have transcribed them as faithfully as I can, retaining misspellings, Swedish-Americanisms, and punctuation (or a lack thereof). Your experience as a reader will, of course, differ from that of a working-class Swedish immigrant living in Minneapolis in 1916. That's unavoidable, but does not mean that the effort is wasted. Much of Signe Aurell's work is not readily available, unless you have access to century-old, obscure Swedish-language newspapers. The long quotes and entire poems are one way I hope to make her work just a bit more available. Translation is a difficult task and one that further calls into question the authenticity of a reproduced text, which is yet another reason for my choice to include lengthy quotations. For those who do not read Swedish, I have attempted as best I can to retain Signe Aurell's voice when translating her work. However, I have chosen to avoid word-for-word translations, instead retaining rhyme and meter when possible. When translating letters, I have inserted rudimentary punctuation when absent from the original to make reading a bit easier. Most importantly, though, I want to give space to Signe Aurell and the other women who wrote about their immigrant experiences. While I am the one writing this, it's not my story

to paraphrase, it's their story to tell, and they've done it in their own ways and I don't want to obscure their own voices.

While some of the quotes are lengthy, the majority of my research has seen me working with fragments. This isn't a new approach. James Deetz, inspired by folklorist Henry Glassie, wrote *In Small Things Forgotten* about the archeology of early American life. His work demonstrates the power of examining the overlooked small things, the "simple details of past existence, which escape historical mention," as a way to contextualize and explain the American past (Deetz 1996, 37). While Deetz wrote as an archeologist, I write as a folklorist, not unearthing the material culture of a time or place at an archeological site, but instead unearthing the vernacular expressions of a time and place and, in this case, a person in archives and libraries to be presented in written form. Folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes about the way ethnographic objects or fragments, as she refers to them, are presented in museums in which the fragment is taken from the whole and put on display. The ethnographer, by removing the object from its original context or displaying the object, has created an ethnographic fragment. She points out the paradox in displaying things "that were never meant to be displayed" and discusses, specifically, the display of vernacular culture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 2–25). Deetz refers to small things forgotten and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett to ethnographic fragments, but both are writing about how fragments relate to other fragments and how together they create meaning, whether in a museum exhibition or at an archaeological dig site or, most pertinently, in the everyday lives that people live.

Each chapter that follows begins with a fragment from Signe Aurell's life. Something that may not have been meant to be displayed is now the opening vignette of five different chapters. In choosing to display that which was not meant to be displayed and in choosing to

put it front and center in each chapter, I have attempted to use fragments as an introduction to something bigger, whether it's Aurell's life in Sweden, her experiences in the United States, or her legacy after her death.

Chapter One examines Signe Aurell's life in Sweden and the social world in which she lived. Temperance organizations like the IOGT were an important part of Sweden's transition to Social Democracy and engaged a range of vernacular performances, like poems and songs. IOGT members were also increasingly involved in the rise of the labor movement. Social movements went hand in hand with physical relocation—the widespread emigration from Sweden, for example, in which nearly twenty percent of Swedes left for the New World. Both social agitation and widespread migration changed Sweden forever. As an activist and contributor to temperance and labor newspapers in Sweden and the United States, Aurell engaged in social movements on two continents as part of a transnational community.

Chapter Two follows Signe Aurell across the Atlantic as she joins the ranks of hundreds of thousands of women just like her. Swedish immigrant women took part in the Swedish immigrant community in a variety of ways. Many, like Aurell, worked in domestic service at some point; some joined social movements like the temperance movement and labor movement. In doing so, they took an active part in creating Swedish America. That Swedish America was difficult though, and while the lives of many Swedish immigrants in the Twin Cities may have been better than their lives had been in Sweden, that does not mean they were good lives. This chapter shows the many difficulties that Swedish immigrants faced, including dangerous working conditions, unfair (and sometimes illegal) labor practices, and even systemic persecution by government organizations.

Chapter Three identifies Signe Aurell as an immigrant author and discusses her attempts to create both class consciousness and a working-class community, facilitated through the extensive North American Swedish-language press that published over 200 newspapers. Immigrant newspapers created a community and a sense of identity for Swedish immigrants regardless of their political leanings. However, Aurell wrote extensively for the labor press and this chapter demonstrates how working-class authors like Aurell were able to circumvent the upper classes to publish work intended to educate immigrants about class inequalities and the labor movement.

Chapter Four examines the Amerikabrev [America letters] sent by Swedish immigrant women. While the popular image of Swedish immigration to the United States is of families and young men farming the American Midwest, these letters describe the experiences of thousands of immigrants including single women working as domestic servants in urban centers, which isolated them from other immigrants. Letters created and maintained identities and communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Their letters give first-person accounts of what life was like for working women and demonstrates how they actively participated in their communities—both in the United States and in Sweden—through their letters. While only a fragment of a letter by Signe Aurell exists, it is a telling one, and one that shows how Aurell maintained and created her identity as a Swede and as a Swedish American.

Chapter Five focuses on Aurell's legacy as a radical woman and an immigrant writing in a language other than English, a combination of factors that make her erasure from the scholarly record not only possible, but also nearly inevitable. This chapter examines the legacy of a working-class author and how her work has been preserved, recorded, and sometimes carried on. I focus on Aurell as a representative of the thousands of women like her who contributed in

integral but often unseen ways to the labor movement. Because of her many interests and her engagement as an activist, writer, and immigrant, Signe Aurell provides an excellent case study in furthering our understanding of immigrant labor history. I hope that this work shows Signe Aurell as a representative, but at the same time exceptional, Swedish immigrant woman who left her mark in a small way on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Wisconsin–Madison Graduate School, and the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs. Those grants allowed me to conduct research in archives and libraries on both sides of the Atlantic.

¹ Amber Rose listened to me read the first sentence of Ives' 1964 book on Larry Gorman, "There was once a man named Larry Gorman," time and time again, patiently shaking her head. Thanks for obliging me.

² I came to laborlore through Archie Green. Actually, I came to Archie Green through James Leary, whose work has been inspirational because of its accessibility, Leary's focus on the working-class and the underrepresented, and his popular approach to folklore. This is especially on display in *Polkabilly: How the Goose Island Ramblers Redefined American Folk Music* and *So Ole Says to Lena: Folk Humor of the Upper Midwest*. Without Leary's work, I don't find Green's. And Green's work is foundational. I have yet to find an article, a preface, a book chapter, a book by Green that hasn't been useful or inspirational. *Wobblies, Pile Butts, and Other Heroes*, *Calf's Head and Union Tales: Labor Yarns at Work and Play*, *Torching the Fink Books & Other Essays on Vernacular Culture*, and *The Big Red Songbook* have featured heavily in my research, my writing, and in my approach to folklore. And then there is Edward Ives. His common man biographies have provided a model for this common woman biography.

Folklore has long examined the ways in which identities and communities are formed through traditions and ethnic heritage. Marcus Lee Hansen's *The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant*, while perhaps too simplified and even problematic nearly three generations after having first been written, is still an important text in understanding the historiography of immigration research. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* and Adrian Hastings's *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* are incredibly important in describing and understanding the intersections of community and nationhood and how they are created. Folklorists like Linda Dégh's work with Hungarians, Robert Klymasz's article "From Immigrant to Ethnic Folklore: A Canadian View of Process and Transition," and Stephen Stern's article "Ethnic Folklore and the Folklore of Ethnicity," helped to demonstrate how immigrants were active participants in the creation of their own identities and communities. Eric Hobsbawm later popularized the idea of the "invented tradition." Robert Baron, Ana Cara, and Nick Spitzer's work on the process of cultural creolization has shaped the way in which I research immigrant communities in the United States. Specifically in the realm of Swedish-American ethnic identity and communities, Barbro Klein's research on Swedish America has been foundational. Coupled with works written by Jennifer Eastman Attebery, Larry Danielson, Robert Ostergren, Steven Schnell, and, of course, Lizette Gradén's book *On Parade: Making Heritage in Lindsborg, Kansas*, I've attempted to add to the field with my own articles about Swedish-American Ethnicity and Swedish spaces in the Upper Midwest.

³ E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* is one of the more influential texts in labor history, as Thompson sought to legitimize the role of the worker in history. In Sweden, the

history of the labor movement has been recorded almost from its inception in Sweden thanks to efforts on the parts of activists and politicians to archive and preserve the history of the movement. Historians like Lars Olsson and Lars Ekdahl's *Klass i Rörelse: Arbetarrörelsen i Svensk Samhällsomvandling*, along with work by Lars Edgren, are excellent overviews of the history of the labor movement. In the United States, that history has not always been recorded. Historians like Franklin Rosemont and Joyce Kornbluh have delved into the lives and history of the Industrial Workers of the World, while others, like Nan Enstad and Elizabeth Faue have examined the history of labor through the perspective of the women who worked. Scholars like Margareta Matovic, Varpu Lindstrom-Best, and Joy Lintelman with her book *I Go to America: Swedish American Women and the Life of Mina Anderson* have been instrumental in writing history about Nordic women in the United States and, in the case of Matovic, in Sweden. Ulf Beijbom and Michael Brook have written extensively about the Swedish-American press, sometimes focusing on the labor movement within the press. And Henry Bengtson's *On the Left in America: Memoirs of the Scandinavian-American Labor Movement* is an incredible source of history and memoir of the American labor movement. Dag Blanck and Harald Runblom have written extensively on the history of Swedish immigration the United States. Their work is invaluable to the field of Scandinavian Studies, however, little of their work focuses on the experiences of women or workers and thus they are absent, to some extent, from my in-text citations. H. Arnold Barton has written foundational texts on the history of Swedish America and I have relied extensively on his work throughout my own research. His *Letters From The Promised Land: Swedes in America, 1840-1914* and *The Old Country and the New: Essays on Swedes and America* have been especially useful.

⁴ Paul Lauter's article, "Working-Class Women's Literature—An Introduction to Study," was an incredibly helpful and accessible entry into the research on not just working-class literature, but, as the title suggests, that of working-class women. Martha Vicinus's *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* was an excellent companion to Thompson's work and helped contextualize the literature within the history. Constance Coiner and Lillian Robinson's work on female authors from the working class are excellent in their discussions of the rise of female writers. Michael Denning further contextualize the literary movement in *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Magnus Nilsson's work, especially his article "Swedish Working Class Literature and the Class Politics of Heritage" and his monographs *Arbetarlitteratur* and *Literature and Class: Aesthetical-Political Strategies in Modern Swedish Working-Class Literature* examine the role of working-class literature from a Swedish perspective. Kati Launis, clearly inspired by Thompson, writes of the making of the Finnish working class in her article of the same title through the lens of three Finnish writers. From a Nordic-American perspective, Sally M. Miller's edited volume, *The Ethnic Press in the United States: A Historical Analysis and Handbook*, together with Dick Hoerder's edited volume, *The Immigrant Labor Press in North America, 1840s-1970s: An Annotated Bibliography*, and the work of Michael Brook is instrumental in exploring the role of newspapers in the working-class immigrant community.

Chapter 1. *Growing Up and Growing Apart: Signe Aurell's Life in and Emigration from Sweden*

Long a borderland between Sweden and Denmark, Skåne changed hands several times before finally becoming Swedish after the Treaty of Roskilde in 1658. In what is now Östra Göinge and Osby, groups of rebels loyal to Denmark and known by the derogatory term *snapphanar* [literally: men who steal] fought the Swedish throne in defiance of that treaty. Nearly two and a half centuries later, and just a few years after Joe Hill composed “The Rebel Girl,” a different rebel would come out of the region. Signe Aurell, a labor activist and poet, emigrated to the United States, joined the Industrial Workers of the World, and fought for the working class.

The book is weathered. The binding is peeling off, a water stain blots the cover, someone has drawn “x”s around the border of the title. It’s over 100 years old, so it’s not surprising that it should look so fragile. I can’t imagine too many people request that Kommunarkivet, Östra Göinge kommun [The municipality’s archive, Östra Göinge municipality] pull out this book. But here it is, a membership list for Hoppets gryning [Dawn of Hope] lodge no. 558 of the International Order of Good Templars (IOGT). Membership number ninety-seven lists Signe Aurell.

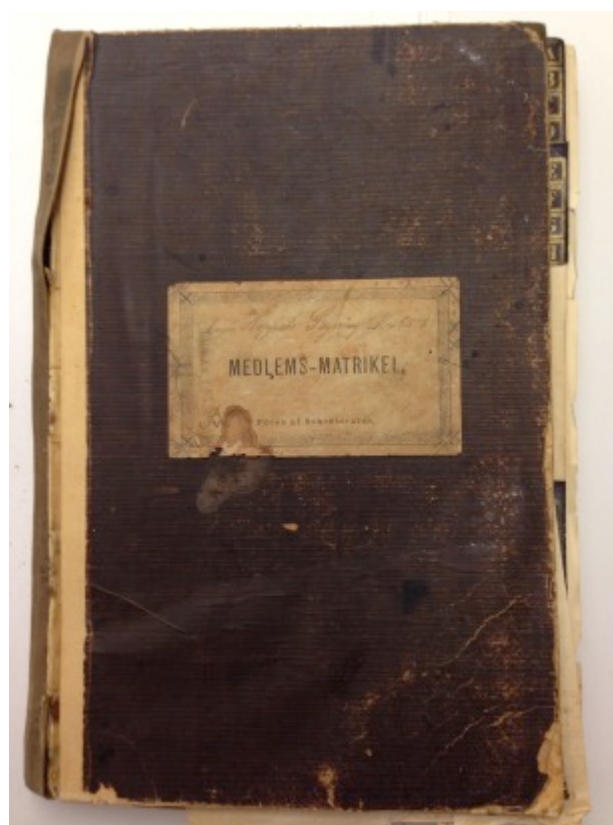


Fig. 1.1: Hoppets Gryning membership list (Kommunarkivet, Östra Göinge kommun).

Östra Göinge kommun is a small municipality in northern Skåne, about 15,000 people as of 2015. To the north is Osby kommun, another small municipality home to about 13,000 people (Statistiska centralbyrån 2015). It’s beautiful—sparsely populated, heavily forested, with

open swaths of agricultural land dotting the countryside. Since the 1800s, the people of Östra Göinge and Osby have mined for diabase, sometimes called Swedish black granite. It's not granite at all, but a subvolcanic rock, although that distinction doesn't necessarily matter. While the mining industry isn't what it used to be, Swedish black granite is in demand around the world, especially from this area of Skåne. The Empire State Building features Swedish black granite and the base of the US Marine Corps War Memorial near Arlington National Cemetery is made entirely of diabase from northern Skåne.

But getting that diabase from northern Skåne to the United States took labor—from the men who quarried the rock and laid the railroad to move that rock to the women who cleaned and cooked. In 1864, the railroad was expanded, connecting Stockholm with Malmö, in southern Sweden. Suddenly it was much easier to travel from Malmö to Stockholm, about 400 miles away. It wasn't until the 1880s though that the train tracks reached out to areas like Glimåkra, where Signe Aurell lived just before moving to the United States (Länsstyrelsen Skåne n.d.). Those railroads meant better export possibilities for the diabase that could be found in the countryside.⁵ As infrastructure improved, and the mining industry thrived, the Swedish working-class began to organize in response to unsafe working conditions and poor pay. By 1907, two years before the unsuccessful general strike that seriously hampered the Swedish labor movement, union membership approached 50% for industrial workers and craftworkers (Edgren and Olsson 1989, 72). But organization was not limited to unionization.

Political parties, especially the Social Democrats, and temperance organizations began to emerge. Alcoholism was rampant with some reports suggesting that unmarried Swedes were spending 14% of their income on beer and aquavit (Ambjörnsson 1988, 243).⁶ In response to the overconsumption of alcohol, social activists began rallying against drinking as the cause of

many of society's ills. In stepped temperance societies like the IOGT. Formed in 1851 in the United States and initially known as the Independent Order of Good Templars, the IOGT advocated for complete abstinence from alcohol and eventually made its way to Sweden in 1879. The IOGT gained popularity in Sweden in the late 1800s and early 1900s and lodges opened throughout the country. The organization believed that abstaining from alcohol would allow people to “förbättra både sin livssituation och samhället i stort” [improve both their lives and society in general] (IOGT-NTO n.d.).⁷ Despite being an apolitical organization, “IOGT kämpade för allmän rösträtt, och rörelsen var en skola i demokrati, eftersom medlemmar lärde sig mötesteknik och ett demokratiskt arbetssätt” [IOGT fought for universal suffrage, and the movement was a school of democracy, because members learned how to run meetings and learned a democratic way of working] (IOGT-NTO n.d.). The IOGT would go on to play an important role in the Swedish labor movement by teaching its members general tenets of democracy and encouraging social activism (Nordahl 1994, 60–61).

These social movements, the temperance movement, the labor movement, even the religious awakening known as the “frikyrkorörelse” [free church movement] were inextricably linked and for many workers played an integral role in the formation of what we now know as the Swedish welfare state. But these social movements also played an integral role in the formation of Swedish America. At the same time as workers were unionizing and joining organizations like the IOGT, more and more workers were leaving for the United States. In doing so, they took with them the ideals and lessons that they had learned, informing their own community building and identity formation in the New World. Young men and women like Signe Aurell took part in these social movements as part of a widespread network of individuals who hoped to change society for the better.

Home Sweet Home

Born February 14, 1889, in Gryt, Sweden, Signe Aurell was baptized on March 10 of the same year (Gryts kyrka 1862–1894, 100). Aurell was the third child to be officially registered in Gryt parish for the year 1889. She would spend the next twenty years of her life living at Västra Olinge No. 10, also known as Västra Olinge Skolhuset [The Västra Olinge Schoolhouse] (Gryts kyrka 1909–1927, 62).

The second-oldest child of Anna Nilsson and Andreas Aurell, who was a folkschool teacher in a small town just north of Kristianstad, Signe Aurell had four brothers, one of whom was older, and one younger sister.⁸ In 1890, Andreas and Anna employed a young woman by the name of Ingrid Svensdotter as a domestic servant in their home (Ragnarson 2007, 35). That was just a year after Signe was born. Twenty-five years later, Signe would be publishing essays and poetry advocating for women like Ingrid to unionize in the United States. But before she did that, she would learn to read and write in the local elementary school. Growing up the daughter of a schoolteacher probably ensured that Signe was raised in a home that valued education and in 1896 she matriculated at Solberga småskola. In her two years there, she only missed thirteen days out of 303 and received As for diligence and behavior. Based on her grades in writing, penmanship, Biblical history, and the catechism, for example, she was a decent student, but not an exemplary one (Solberga småskola 1896–1897, no. 119).

In 1842, *folkskolestadgan* [the elementary school law] was passed requiring that all Swedish parishes make an elementary school education available to all children. The law required that communities pay to build the school and also the teacher's salary. However, it wasn't until 1882 that it became compulsory for all students to attend. Todd Green notes that historians are

divided on the reasons as to why the law was enacted—it was either in response to a democratization of society and a way to respond to changes in the agrarian economy or because of proletarianization and an attempt by the ruling class to exert societal control over the people. Regardless of the reasons for the new law, its passage led to a greater demand for teachers that would take decades to meet and, eventually, a relatively well-educated group of Swedish citizens who would one day immigrate to the United States (Green 2008, 335–337). Perhaps it was for this reason that Andreas Aurell, born in 1853, chose to become a teacher.

Valfrid Nilsson recalls his time as a student of Andreas Aurell, Signe’s father, who he describes as a kind teacher that all the students liked. It was around 1912, and Valfrid would have been about four or five years old. He remembers that the entire Aurell family was very musical and that Andreas Aurell would often sing, or play the accordion, the organ, or wind instruments (Olsson 1992, 62–63). At Christmas time the students would all wish their teacher a Merry Christmas and “Lärarynjan ordnade sedan fest för oss. Då kastade vi ut alla bänkarna för att ha juldans” [The teacher’s family would organize a party for us. Then we got rid of all of the benches to have a Christmas dance] (Olsson 1992, 63). Signe was the only child still living at home with Andreas and Anna as of 1911 until her emigration to the United States in 1913 and would most likely have been involved in helping to organize the Christmas parties for the children (Glimåkra kyrka 1895–1914, 783). While she may not have been a teacher herself, Signe Aurell grew up surrounded by young students, seeing her father teach, and even helping out with activities like the annual Christmas party. One hundred years later, Signe’s warmth towards children was remembered by Inger Nilsson and Jan Alm, who both grew up as neighbors to Signe Aurell in 1930s and ‘40s Osby and referred to her as Tant Signe [Aunt Signe] (Nilsson 2015, Alm 2015).

It wasn't just Andreas who was musical, her uncle and grandfather were both cantors in the Swedish church, most likely playing the organ and supervising the musical accompaniment during worship (Olsson 1992, 47). Like most Swedes at the time, Aurell was confirmed in the Swedish Lutheran Church. She was fifteen when, on April 17, 1904, she passed the confirmation exam with an A and a week later took communion for the first time (Gryts kyrka 1895–1924, 10). The church had long played an important role in Swedish life, although some Swedes began to chafe under the control of the state church. By the mid- to late-1800s, frikyrkorörelsen [the Swedish Free Church Movement] had gained support as more and more Swedes advocated for religious liberty and a church that was free from the state.⁹ However, as Signe Aurell was growing up in Sweden, any proposed move had to be registered with the Church, which, in turn, gave permission to the individual to move. Those church records allow us to follow Signe Aurell from Gryt all the way to the United States and back again.

Interestingly, in 1908 Aurell registered and received permission to move to Knislinge, about two and half miles from Gryt. Three days later, on November 30, church records show that Signe returned her authorization (Gryts kyrka 1895–1906, 66; Gryts kyrka 1909–1927, 62). While some migrant workers returned their authorization to the church after returning from a season of labor elsewhere, three days does not imply that Aurell was working outside of Gryt for a season (Johansson 1976, 182–183). Unfortunately, there is no way to tell exactly why Aurell did not move to Knislinge, but we do know that five years later, she would register as an emigrant and leave for the United States.

So why did Signe Aurell move to the United States? I don't know. She came from a family very much rooted in the community. Those roots ran deep and still today people in the area remember Signe Aurell's brother Viking and the musical skills of many of the Aurells. Her

father was a well-respected teacher and while teaching in the area did not pay well, it seems that the Aurells were comfortable enough. The fact that Aurell was consistently registered as living with her parents suggests that she did not need to leave to seek work outside of the home. She did not have to work as a domestic servant herself, rather, her family was able to hire their own domestic servant. Instead, Aurell engaged with the local IOGT lodges, sowing the seeds of activism and eventually reaping what emerged in the United States.

That she left at all is a reminder that immigration can not be reduced to simple push and pull factors, the circumstances that at once encourage a person to leave one country and choose to immigrate to another. Instead, we must examine the social and cultural context of the place from which they left and the place to which they arrived (Harzig 1997, 4). Women left Sweden for the same reasons that men left Sweden—socioeconomic factors such as dangerous working conditions and poor wages led to people seeking employment elsewhere. However, those push and pull factors, the poor wages in Sweden and the better wages in the United States, for example, must be coupled with the cultural expectations of women in Sweden—namely that women were expected to find a husband and form families.

The average age of marriage for women in Sweden between 1901–1910 was 26.39 years and 26.45 years between 1911–1920 (Statistiska centralbyrån 1969, 103). In the time leading up to marriage, many women worked as domestic servants, which became a form of training for soon-to-be married women (Matovic 1997a, 113). However, the socioeconomic factors that led men to leave Sweden—poor wages, lack of available housing, lack of suitable spouse—also affected the decisions of women to emigrate due to these factors playing a direct role in whether or not women formed families (Harzig 1997, 12). If there was no land available, no employment offering a living wage available, no men who could provide a stable lifestyle available, women

left. Historian Christiane Harzig writes, “Emigration offered many new opportunities for women to determine their own fates. Women emigrated to escape gender constraints, to enhance their chances in the marriage market, and to fulfill family obligations” (1997, 4). And emigration did offer new opportunities. As it became more common, emigration also became a part of the youth culture, to move to the United States was a modern adventure that was attainable for many Swedes (Matovic 1997a, 138). The reasons women left were as varied as the women themselves.

Maybe Signe Aurell left Sweden because she wanted to see more of the world while she still had the chance, like Anna J. Olson who wrote in a short account of her immigration “Min önska var att jag ville se lite af verlden medan man var ung” [My wish was to see a little bit of the world while I was still young] (February 21, 1960, 1). She did and eventually got married and settled in the Bronx, New York (Olson February 21, 1960, 1–2). Or maybe she wanted to improve her economic situation so that she could one day return to Sweden and a better life, just like C.A. Olson who wrote, “Jag var femton år när jag lämnade Sverige i förtroende att förbättra min ekonomiska ställning så att jag en gång kunde tjäna pengar nog att återvända till Sverige och köpa ett litet hem till min mor å syster och på så vis förbättra tillvaron för oss alla” [I was fifteen years old when I left Sweden with confidence that I would improve my economic position so that one day I could earn enough money to return to Sweden and buy a little home for my mother and sister and in that way improve life for all of us] (Olson February 17, 1960, 1). Instead, she got married and made a home for herself in Superior, Wisconsin. Or maybe she moved because she watched as her neighbors, men and women alike, left and she missed her friends just as Ida Pettersson describes:

Det var året 1909 som Amerika febern härjade svårt i min hembygd, och den ene efter den andre, av mina kamrater och bästa vänner, lämnade sina hem, och gav sig iväg, till

det stora landet i väster. Jag saknade dem mycke, och så började jag att grubbla och fundera hur även jag skulle kunna komma dit (n.d., 1).

[It was the year 1909 when America fever wreaked havoc in my hometown and one after another of my friends and best friends left their homes and started off for the great country in the west. I missed them a lot and so I started mull over and think about how I could also get myself there.]

Interestingly, 1909 was also the year of the failed general strike in Sweden and resulted in many workers being blacklisted and leaving for the United States, perhaps contributing to the American fever that Pettersson notes. With help from a friend who bought her a ticket, Pettersson made it to Chicago, where she stayed for over four years before returning to Sweden (n.d., 1–6). Regardless of why so many women left, regardless of why Aurell left, when she did leave, she took with her years of social and cultural experiences, which informed the way she identified as an immigrant in the New World. The most obvious of those experiences is Aurell's time with the IOGT, which would have been filled with working-class temperance advocates.

Temperance and the Swedish Worker

By 1900, various temperance organizations throughout Sweden boasted an impressive number of members. Across organizations like the IOGT and Sveriges Blåbandsförbund [Sweden's Blue Band Organization], part of the International Federation of the Blue Cross, membership had risen to about 200,000 people in 1900 and ten years later there were approximately 350,000 Swedes who had pledged sobriety (Ambjörnsson 1988, 235). Aurell became one of them when she joined Hoppets Gryning, lodge no. 598 of the Swedish branch of the IOGT on November 3, 1906. Aurell was clearly active in the organization rising to a second degree Templar and also registering at different lodges—Gustav Adolfs minnen [The Memory of Gustav Adolf] lodge in 1908 and Skogskällan [The Forest Spring] lodge in 1911—in conjunction with planned moves

around northern Skåne (IOGT n.d., no. 97). Her membership in the IOGT, whose lodge names blended nature and idealism as they worked for a Sweden that members could be proud of, is the first visible evidence of Aurell's interest in social activism and her signature can be found on the IOGT's constitution, pledging her sobriety (IOGT n.d.). Signe was not the only Aurell who joined the IOGT. Two months later, in December of 1906, her sister Nanna and her brother Knut appear in the same membership roll (IOGT n.d., no. 111 and 112).

While the IOGT advocated for complete sobriety, some lodges in northern Skåne were, according to Maria Södergård, archivist at Kommunarkivet, Östra Göinge kommun, less strict, leading to greater membership (2015). On the whole though, the organization demanded sobriety from its members with the hope of radically changing Swedish society for the better.

Historian Ronny Ambjörnsson, writing specifically about the intersections of the temperance movement and the labor movement in northern Sweden, argues that folk movements emerged as a reaction to the patriarchal society that dominated Sweden. These movements were led by Swedes, mostly men, who strove for the ideal of the “skötsamme arbetare,” the conscientious worker. The conscientious worker was someone who had control over their mind and their body, who educated themselves and had control over their words and their thoughts. In order to change society, according to the conscientious worker, you had to be educated and sober (Ambjörnsson 1988).

In response, IOGT meetings became places of education, not just schools in democracy, but schools in agitation. Ambjörnsson says that “Nykterhetskämparna måste lära sig att uppträda i polemiska situationer. Det gällde att kunna hitta de rätta argumenten mot motståndare till nykterhetssaken” [Temperance supporters had to learn to speak in polemic situations. That meant being able to find the right argument against opponents of the

temperance movement] (1988, 82). To do so, meetings sometimes involved mock debates as well as training in public speaking, skills that served IOGT members in debates about the temperance movement, and that would serve them well if they were involved in the labor movement. Lodges founded reading groups, libraries, and newspapers allowing members to take control of what they read and what they wrote, subverting the societal expectations of the ruling class and directly challenging their power. Ignorance was just as dangerous as alcohol and education would be the solution (Ambjörnsson 1988, 108).

The IOGT's focus on education was not just meant to prepare temperance activists for debates, but to prepare people for a new society. Ambjörnsson writes that "Logeaktivisten tar varken dagen som den kommer eller världen som den är. Han vill förändring, han ser fram emot en ny tid" [The activist doesn't take the day as it comes nor the world as it is. He wants change, he looks forward to a new age] (1988, 90). Of course, that "he" could also be a "she," since many women were active participants in the IOGT. But Ambjörnsson notes an important aspect of the temperance movement. It was a protest movement against society as it existed; a society that consisted of passive people who must stave off temptation. Temperance would deliver Swedish society from the ills of drink and the best way to do so was to ensure that the Swedish people worked together, that they read, debated, studied, that they changed society by educating and improving themselves (Ambjörnsson 1988, 90–95). It's an argument that temperance activists in Sweden would use in IOGT meetings well before Signe Aurell emigrated. It's an argument that Aurell surely would have been exposed to in the meetings she attended in her hometown. It's an argument that Aurell seemingly took to heart and would make years later in the pages of Swedish-language labor newspapers in the United States. Because just like the temperance movement, the labor movement in Sweden sought to educate its

members—Arbetarrörelsens arkiv [The Labor Movement's Archive], for example, was founded in 1902 and many unions established separate libraries (Olsson and Ekdahl 2002, 28). And just like the temperance movement, the labor movement served as an early social safety net in response to years of social inequality—the first union in Djupvik, Sweden, for example, was called “Trygg” [Secure], and early unions helped their sick coworkers through collections and donations (Ambjörnsson 1988, 96–97).

Labor and the Swedish Worker

When Signe Aurell left Sweden in 1913, she had witnessed the rise of the labor movement—between 1900 and 1907 the number of organized workers increased from 65,800 to 230,700 and female membership went from 1,000 to 17,000 (Olsson and Ekdahl 2002, 30–32). She had also witnessed the fall of the labor movement—in 1909 after the unsuccessful general strike involving nearly 300,000 workers, the labor movement's numbers decreased drastically as many workers who had taken part moved to the United States and South America (Olsson and Ekdahl 2002, 38–42). But that fall was only temporary. The workers who comprised that movement did not stop their activism, not those who moved to the United States and not those who stayed in Sweden.

Since the middle of the 1800s, Sweden had witnessed various spontaneous strikes and protests. As the 1900s neared, direct action was used at the workplace as well, with workers walking off the job in protest. Strikes were becoming more and more common outside of the big cities, although they were still, predominantly, organized by men. In the 1870s, women workers from Stockholm breweries organized the first all-female strike (Olsson and Ekdahl 2002, 13). Despite that, women were underrepresented as many men actively railed against

women joining unions. By the early 1900s, women comprised only about 5–7% of union members. In turn, employers sought to hire those women because they were viewed as a source of cheap labor without the protections of a union. The low pay meant those workers who were interested in joining a labor union were unable to pay dues. To encourage organization by women, unions began instituting half-dues for female workers, which provided them with membership and monetary support during a strike, although only half the monetary support that a male worker who paid full dues would receive (Olsson and Ekdahl 2002, 22, 32).

While the gender makeup of labor unions began to change, the societal makeup of Sweden was shifting from agricultural and rural to industrial and urban. In 1870, 72.4 percent of the Swedish population was considered agricultural, but by 1910 that number had fallen to 48.8 percent as more and more Swedes moved to urban and industrial centers, attracted by the supposed freedom and life in a big city (Barton 2000, 203). Many women joined this labor migration to larger cities.

The Servants Act of 1686, which was updated in 1805, 1833, and 1858, ensured that an employee had little to no rights. Servants were contracted for a year and could not quit until the last week of October, when they were forced to sign a new contract with their current employer or find a new employer. As emigration continued, conditions for some servants improved. By the 1890s, many employers included room and board and some even received cloth, which they could use to make their own clothes (Matovic 1997a, 115–116). But the fact remained that servants were expected to work long hours for little pay with almost no chance to seek better employment elsewhere.

The working conditions of these women were revealed to a wider audience by Ester Blenda Nordström in her 1914 book *En Piga Bland Pigor* [A maid among maids]. Nordström was

one of Sweden's first investigative journalists and in an attempt to demonstrate the working conditions of domestic servants in the Swedish countryside she placed an advertisement looking for employment. Due to the ongoing migration from rural to urban and from Sweden to the United States jobs were plentiful and Nordström received a flood of responses, one of which she accepted. Nordström, as an outsider, has the privilege of being able to leave whenever she wants, which she does after a month on the farm, but in the meantime, she describes the working conditions of a domestic servant in rural Sweden. Anna, a domestic servant whom Nordström befriends, makes just 180 SEK annually for a year full of 16-hour days that begin around 4:45am and continue until 9 or 9:30pm. Despite the long hours and low wages, Anna suggests that life on this particular farm isn't so bad—here they get to share an actual room to sleep in instead of sleeping in the kitchen, they have nice employers (albeit a farmer who is portrayed as quite lazy), and co-workers who are willing to help out in a pinch. And through it all, there is the Saturday night dance to look forward to, one of the few moments of respite that the domestic servants receive. Of course, that a 16-hour workday for less than 1SEK per day is considered to be better than some places of employment because they offer a room for the domestic servants to sleep in demonstrates just how bad the working conditions could be for some women. By the end of her stay, Nordström's words began to resemble the words that other women wrote about their experiences as domestic servants:

Och jag tänkte för mig själv, när jag överhuvudtaget hade hunnit så långt att jag orkade tänka, och det var minsann inte de första fjorton dagarna: jag skulle önska att alla små hemmafllickor uppe i Stockholm finge vara med om detta, finge se och begrunda vad allt de kunde ha att lära av denna bondpiga, när det gäller arbete och förnöjsamhet, att de en enda dag bleve satta att göra alla hennes hundra sysslor som i sig själva är så enkla och lite invecklade – jag skulle önska, att de bara en enda dag finge känna vad verkligt tungt och strävsamt arbete vill säga, och att de skulle förstå vad detta arbete betyder, hur viktigt och nödvändigt det är och hur stort i all sin ringhet. Men det kan ingen förstå om ej prövat på, tror jag. Varför skulle annars just denna del av kvinnoarbetet vara så lite värderad och så lågt betald? (Nordström 2012, 101–102)

[And I thought to myself—when I had gotten so far as to actually have enough energy to think—and it wasn't just those first fourteen days either: I wish that every young girl at home in Stockholm could be a part of this, could see and reflect upon everything they could learn from this farm girl about work and contentment, that for one day they had to do all of the hundreds of tasks which, by themselves, are so easy and not very intricate—I wish that for just one day they could feel how incredibly difficult and strenuous this work is, and that they could understand what this work means, how important and necessary it is and how big it is in all its lowliness. But no one can understand that if they haven't tried it themselves, I think. Why else would this particular women's work be valued so little and so poorly compensated?]

Nordström's account is not a perfect one. It's romanticized at times, it's biased at times, and it's written by a labor-tourist. Nordström can leave whenever she wants, and eventually does. Anna, who does not have that same type of mobility, is described by Nordström as a farm girl who goes to work every day content with what she has and is held up as an example for the ungrateful city girls. But many of those farm girls were already on their way to the cities, fleeing their undervalued and poorly compensated positions for opportunities elsewhere. *En Piga Bland Pigor* is an investigative journalistic piece that seeks to show just how bad things could be and the book struck a chord. In working for a month on the farm, Nordström inserts herself into the ongoing discussion about labor shortages due to emigration, something that she, at least implicitly, suggests is due to the long hours and low wages. Migration, whether it was from Sweden to the United States or from small towns to big cities, became a way for women to protest against the exploitation that they were subjected to by employers and take some control of where they lived and worked.

While city employment offered a semblance of freedom, including nights and Sundays off for some people, working conditions were tough, wages were still low, and there were few opportunities for single women. In 1903, *Arbetare-Tidningen* [The worker's newspaper], a newspaper published by Svenska Arbetareförbundet, the Swedish Worker's Federation, wrote

about the low wages of working women in Stockholm. The newspaper, on its mission of disseminating news about the labor movement, concluded that woman earned on average 5–9 SEK per week (or about 20–36 SEK per month), paid 6–7 SEK per month in rent, and spent 20–30 percent of their wages on clothes, shoes, and laundry (or about 7–11 SEK per month). Those women lucky enough to be earning closer to 36 SEK per month were left with between 18–23 SEK for food, savings, support of any family members, and any recreational activities that they might have time for. Those earning closer to 20 SEK per month were often left with 10 SEK or less. The newspaper, recognizing the difficulties in living such a life, called for women to organize to avoid ending up “på brottets och sedeslöshetens banor” [on the path of crime and immorality] (*Arbetare-Tidningen* 1903, 2).

Despite such calls to action, many of these women treated Stockholm as just a stop along the way to eventual emigration. As a result, even those women who might have been interested in organizing instead left for America. As historian H. Arnold Barton writes, “to emigrate was the normal expectation for large numbers of Swedes who had no very compelling reason to stay and for whom Chicago or Omaha seemed closer than Stockholm or Norrköping” (2000, 204). This was most likely due to the sheer number of men and women who had already emigrated. The letters, news reports, and advertisements made the United States seem like a logical destination as opposed to the Swedish capital. In fact, between 1881 and 1920, nearly 250,000 single women left Sweden for the United States (Lintelman 2009, 3). But many had no plans on settling permanently in the United States. Emigration, as we know it to be, began to change. No longer were these women planning on emigrating for good, instead the Swedes who left for the United States after the 1880s were increasingly labor migrants (Nordstrom 1980, 183). They left in search of better working conditions, better wages, but they left with the intentions of

returning home. And many, just like Signe Aurell, did return. Thanks to compulsory education and folk movements that encouraged reading and writing, the Swedish immigrants who left were increasingly literate. Some began to write, not just about their experiences as labor migrants or as immigrants, but as members of the working class. In doing so, they wrested power from the ruling class and took control of how their own experiences were portrayed.

Working-class literature began to emerge in Sweden just as Signe Aurell was coming of age. Initially comprised mostly of songs, poetry, and even short prose in the late 1800s, by the early 1900s, several working-class authors broke through to a broader public (Nilsson 2012, 49–50). Lars Olsson and Lars Ekdahl credit working-class writers with the eventual revival of the labor movement following the failed general strike of 1909 (2002, 45). Maria Sandel was one of them. Born in 1870, she moved to the United States in 1897, where she worked for several years in New York as a domestic servant. During her time in New York, she began publishing in *Nordstjernan* [The North Star], a Swedish-language newspaper that is still published today. She eventually returned to Sweden, where she published labor poetry for various newspapers before writing several novels (Furuland 2007). As a member of the working-class and as one who emigrated and then returned, Sandel is representative of the hundreds of thousands of women who left for Sweden and of the tens of thousands who returned. Signe Aurell, just a few decades later, would follow a similar path.

Living in Stockholm, Maria Sandel focused her writing on life as a working-class woman in urban centers. Literary scholar Beata Agrell writes that, “Sandels kvinnor är arbeterskor i fabriker och hemindustri, och därtill hustrur och mödrar; vi möter dem som sjuka, slagna, och allmänt förtrampade, och som arbetslösa, prostituerade, småkriminella” [Sandel’s women are workers in factories and private homes, they are wives and mothers; we meet them sick, beaten,

and generally downtrodden, and we meet them as unemployed, prostitutes, and petty criminals] (2011, 22). Sandel's depictions did not necessarily depict the life of every Swedish working-class woman in Stockholm, but her work absolutely described the lives of some of them who turned to crime or prostitution as a survival mechanism, just as *Arbetare-Tidningen* warned against. Importantly, a working-class woman wrote these depictions of the plight of the working class.

While the temperance movement and the labor movement intersected, as we've seen with the IOGT in places like northern Sweden, religion also played an important role in the everyday lives of Swedes, as well as the social movements taking hold. Agrell argues that, "Det kristna kulturarvet kunde användas till mycket, inte minst politisk agitation och klasskampsrhetorik" [The Christian cultural heritage could be used for many different purposes, not least as political agitation and rhetoric about class warfare] (2011, 31). Aurell, who before leaving Sweden had not yet begun publishing, would rely on the religious knowledge of Swedish readers as she went on to write short stories using Christian themes to show that the labor movement's political agitation, calls for class warfare, and support of the oppressed were all aligned with Christian values. While we can't be sure of what Aurell read while living in Sweden, her publications after her move to the United States suggest that she was well-aware of the social movements and trends in the labor movement and working-class literature.

Farväl, Sweden

Nearly 1.25 million Swedes immigrated to the United States between 1851 and 1930. Those numbers reached their peak between 1880 and 1900 (Ljungmark 1965, 178–180). Travel on oceangoing steamships, which had significantly reduced the time it took to cross the Atlantic, was affordable as wages in Sweden rose and the marketing efforts of shipping companies

heightened (Barton 2000, 204). On April 19, 1913, Gryt's parish registered Signe Aurell as an emigrant (Glimåkra kyrka 1895–1947, 84). She was on her way to Duluth, Minnesota, via Malmö, Sweden, to Copenhagen, Denmark, to Liverpool, England, arriving finally in Boston, Massachusetts. Like thousands of immigrants before her and thousands after her, Signe Aurell traveled with the Cunard Line to the United States. Many immigrants bought a ticket that guaranteed them passage from Sweden all the way to the United States and Aurell's ticket cost her 265.60 SEK. The railroad tracks that made it easier to export diabase to customers around the world, also made it easier for emigrants to travel from their homes in rural Sweden to port cities like Malmö. Aurell would have taken the train from the Glimåkra area to Malmö, where she was required to register with the police before crossing over to Copenhagen on April 25 (Polisen i Malmö 1913). Because she was twenty-four years old, Aurell was considered an adult by the Swedish government and would not have required permission from her father to leave the country. That wasn't the case for Linnéa Cederholm who left for the United States in 1916 before having turned twenty-one. In an excerpt from her diary archived at Nordiska museet [The Nordic museum], Cederholm writes that when she arrived at the shipping line's office in Göteborg she had to hand over several documents:

Han ville ha mina båda biljetter, en för båten och en för tåget från New York till Duquesne [Pennsylvania] samt en fullmakt av min pappa. Och så hade jag ju mina värdepapper på underkläderna. Tala om det för honom och han skickar in mej i ett annat stiligt rum innan för, och allt blev ordnat. (1916, 4)

[He wanted both of my tickets, one for the boat and one for the train from New York to Duquesne [Pennsylvania] as well as written permission from my father. And, of course, I had my valuable papers in my undergarments. Tell him that and he sends me into a different fancy room inside and everything got taken care of.]

It's no surprise that Cederholm, who received her ticket from an aunt in Pittsburgh, chose to carry her documents close to her body. In 1883, *Smålandsposten* reported that one young woman

in Göteborg was robbed of the 300SEK with which she planned to buy her ticket. It had taken her ten years to save those 300SEK, but she was undeterred by the theft and saved up enough for another ticket to the United States. This time it only took her eight years and when she finally made it to the United States, she was forty-one-years old (Smålandsposten, 2). The women and men who left, left for a variety of reasons, and while some left for just a while, they did not do so on a whim. Emigrating took money, time, and a lot of planning. There were tickets to buy, lives to pack, even vaccinations to be arranged, which usually occurred in the port cities.

The United States Immigration Act of 1891 was one of the first widespread immigration acts passed and, among other regulations, stipulated that any immigrant carrying a “loathsome or contagious disease” could be denied entry to the United States, that immigrants were subject to inspection upon arrival, and that the owner of the vessel which carried them was responsible for any costs associated with housing the immigrant on American soil, as well as the cost of the return trip (U.S. Congress, 1084–1087). In response, many immigrants either received vaccinations before boarding the ship or received vaccinations onboard. Some immigrants were vaccinated twice as shipping companies seemed unwilling to take any chances due to the potential financial sanctions. In 1892, two sisters in Denver, Colorado, wrote to their parents and siblings about their trip from Sweden describing the required vaccinations, “Vi blefva en dag undersökta af läkaren om vi voro vaccinerade de som ej syntes på måste undergå persen” [One day, we were examined by a doctor to determine if we were vaccinated, those who didn’t show any marks had to deal with the stress] (Hilda and Selma October 1, 1892, 4). Evelina Månsson reports a similar story about her trip to the United States in 1904 as the migrants, with arms bared, had to walk past a doctor to show evidence of a previous vaccination (1930, 79). In the

decades to follow, more and more nativist restrictions on immigration would be put into place, including an ever-expanding list of disease and ailments that could lead to a person being denied entry to the United States. By the time Signe Aurell arrived in 1913, laws restricted entry to specific classes of people including—and perhaps most notable to Signe Aurell and the labor movement—anarchists.

Despite the increasingly restrictive immigration policies, business was booming for steamships carrying immigrants to the United States. Because of the number of migrants moving from Sweden to the United States, many shipping companies in Liverpool hired Swedish-speaking agents. Doing so attracted more migrants to choose ships sailing through the United Kingdom rather than Germany, for example. Swedes like Aurell who arrived in Liverpool were met by a bustling port city, in which they would have to stay up to twelve-days while waiting for their ship to be ready to sail. The comfort of your stay depended on how much money you had and even your nationality—eastern and southern Europeans, along with the Irish, were offered accommodations in poorer quarters. While conditions weren't great for Swedes, the company with which immigrants had bought tickets was responsible for food, lodging, and even healthcare, meaning it was in their financial interest to at least have passable conditions and to try to get immigrants onto their outbound ship as soon as possible. The faster the Cunard Line could get healthy migrants onto the ship and out, the faster they could get another ship into port with another group of immigrants on their way to the New World (Beijbom 2006, 129–131). Aurell only had a few days in Liverpool, and no record exists of her time there.

Signe Aurell left Liverpool for Boston on April 29, 1913, on the SS *Franconia* (Board of Trade 1890–1960). In the midst of World War I, the SS *Franconia* was converted to a troopship in 1915 and a year later, on October 4, 1916 was sunk by a torpedo. Of the 324 on board, twelve

were killed (Hocking 1969, 254). Before that however, the SS *Franconia* safely arrived in Boston, Massachusetts, with Signe Aurell onboard on May 7, 1913, just eight days after leaving Liverpool and less than three weeks after Aurell left her home in Sweden (National Archives and Records Administration 1899–1940).



Fig. 1.2. S.S. Franconia passing Castle Island, Boston harbor sometime between 1910 and 1916 (Detroit Publishing Company Photograph Collection).

A 1912 pamphlet by the Cunard Line, owner of the *Franconia*, advertised the full suite of available third-class tickets aboard Cunard-owned ships traveling across the Atlantic, marketing the new ships, the short travel time, and also giving a list of nine travel tips. These tips ranged from the practical—arrive in Malmö one day prior to departure and be sure to have \$25 in cash for entrance into the United States—to marketing copy for the Cunard agent, W. Pehrsson in

Malmö—"Köpen Edra biljetter af mig då Ni erhålla fri resa från Malmö till Köpenhamn, fritt hotell och mat därstädes samt fri transport af resgods. Bättre förmåner kunna icke erhållas" [Buy your tickets from me and you'll receive a free ticket from Malmö to Copenhagen, free hotel and food in Copenhagen, as well as free transportation of your luggage. You won't find better benefits anywhere else] (Cunard-linien 1912, 4). The pamphlet is, for the most part, a sales tool. But the pamphlet gives us an idea as to what Signe Aurell and the many thousands of women like her would have been reading before their departure. They would have been faced with a choice of which ship to take—the *Lusitania* first started traveling in 1907 from Liverpool and is said to be the biggest and fastest passenger ship in the world, whereas the *Franconia* and *Laconia* are both newly built and also said to be the biggest and fastest passenger ship in the world. Traveling to Boston at least. They would have been faced with a decision on which port to enter. New York? Boston? Philadelphia? They would have been faced with the stark reality that saving money for the ticket was not enough, but that they would need \$25 at their port of entry to prove their ability to support themselves financially, plus 15SEK as an immigration tax, or head tax (Cunard-linien 1912, 2–4). Maybe it was the free ticket from Malmö to Copenhagen, or maybe it was the offer of free sheets and even a free vessel to store food aboard ship, but Signe Aurell chose the Cunard Line, and more specifically, the SS *Franconia*.

The SS *Franconia* made its maiden voyage between Liverpool and Boston on February 25, 1911 and could carry almost 3,000 passengers—300 in first class, 350 in second class, and 2,200 in third class (Ancestry 2007). The ship carried enough provisions for twenty-one days at sea, but by the time Aurell was on board, travel time across the Atlantic had decreased significantly (Board of Trade 1890–1960). In fact, the Cunard Line advertised that a trip with the *Franconia* would only take six days from Liverpool to Boston (1912, 3). Aurell traveled third class with 270

Swedes, the vast majority of whom traveled alone. There were only seven Swedish couples aboard, the rest were either single or not accompanied by their husband or wife (National Archives and Records Administration 1899–1940, 1022–1068). Only thirty-two Swedes were to be found in second class on the passenger list of the SS *Franconia*. Not a single Swede traveled in first class (National Archives and Records Administration 1899–1940, 1022–1068). Most of the non-British subjects aboard the SS *Franconia* were classified as transmigrants, “that is, alien passengers (other than first-class passengers) who arrived in the United Kingdom, having in their possession prepaid through tickets, and in respect of whom security has been given that they will proceed to places outside the United Kingdom” (National Archives and Records Administration 1899–1940, 1068). Aside from a few who planned on settling in Canada, the place outside the United Kingdom was the United States of America. It was here that these transmigrants—whether labor migrants or immigrants—would begin to create a new life for themselves after actively choosing to leave their homes.

Historian Margareta Matovic, in her profile of emigration from Dalsland to Chicago, argues that emigrants, just by leaving Sweden, made it possible for female laborers in Dalsland to demand better working conditions—higher wages and shorter hours, for example. With fewer and fewer female laborers available in Dalsland, farmers began complaining about the dwindling labor supply, giving some modicum of power to the laborer. The women who stayed behind were well aware of the opportunities they were foregoing in the United States (1997b, 295–296). Letters from friends and families kept them informed of the working conditions in cities like Chicago. Those letters carried good news and bad, complaints of poor pay, homesickness, and long hours (including having to do the laundry once a week rather than two or three times a year), as well as descriptions of work and wages (Matovic 1997b, 281). Detailed descriptions of a

typical workday, while mundane at times, ensured that everyone back home was better informed. In turn, the women of Dalsland began demanding better conditions. This did not necessarily take the form of strikes or even unionization. As Matovic notes, these women weren't rebels "trying to escape patriarchal control and submission. They were pragmatic and behaved as female servants usually did in Dalsland: they left employers who treated them badly, and they sought better employment at higher wages elsewhere" (1997b, 296). But, as Harzig writes, "emigrating required that they [women] overcome a variety of personal and social obstacles, including cultural conditioning" (1997, 4). Pragmatic actions, when taken in the face of prevailing power structures and social and cultural expectations, can be subversive. For a single woman to immigrate to the United States in search of a better job, for a single woman who did not immigrate to the United States but instead demanded better pay from the local landowner, pragmatism was subversive.

Emigration to the United States meant another opportunity to better their lives, another opportunity to protest the conditions they endured. Leaving could be a form of protest—a protest against the working conditions, the lack of opportunity, and the Swedish society as a whole. The women who emigrated subverted the prevailing social and cultural expectations and helped accelerate socioeconomic change in Sweden. These women did not settle for an extra piece of cloth to make a dress out of, but instead left their homes and their families and their friends to try to improve their lot in life. By emigrating, whether to the United States, to Norway, to Stockholm, or to a farm down the road, they showed their dissatisfaction with current labor conditions.

With over one million Swedes leaving home, Swedish society was forced to confront the reasons people left as the major social movements of the time gained support. Sweden

eventually did embrace the causes of the labor movement such as unionization, workers's rights, and social democracy. The Sweden that many left behind had become a social welfare state that few immigrants would have recognized. But it took over one million Swedes leaving the country before any of this would take hold. And those immigrants all had their own reason for leaving.

Signe Aurell did not make her way to a farm down the road, but all the way to Minneapolis, where she would live for several years. Her ticket said she was headed to Duluth, Minnesota, but she is listed in the Minneapolis city directory in 1914. It was in Minneapolis that she would join the Industrial Workers of the World and a Swedish-American IOGT lodge; it was in Minneapolis that she would begin publishing poetry, essays, and short stories in left-wing, labor, and temperance newspapers; it was in Minneapolis that she would publish a book of poetry from her apartment in the Franklin-Seward neighborhood; and it was in Minneapolis where she would leave at least a bit of her heart, calling it “min stad” [my town] in a conversation with Inger Nilsson just a few years before she passed away (Nilsson 2015). Those years clearly left a mark. Her working words help shed light on not just her own life, but also on the untold stories of so many Swedish-American immigrants. They are stories that create a fuller picture of what it means to be an immigrant to the United States.

⁵ Per Ragnarson, in an email to me, was the first to point out the importance of the railroad to the area. I'm indebted to him for his assistance and his expertise.

⁶ Ambjörnsson cites an unspecified report from 1899.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the work of the author.

⁸ Signe's siblings include: Nils Barthold Aurell (1886–1967), Nanna Ingeborg Aurell (1891–1971), Sven Erik Aurell (1895–1899), Knut Albert Aurell (1893–1950), and Sten Viking Aurell (1897–1991).

⁹ For a brief discussion on the history of religious liberty in Sweden see Jonas Alwall, “Religious Liberty in Sweden: An Overview,” *Journal of Church and State* 42.1 (2000): 147–153.

Chapter 2. *My Town: Working-Class Swedish America*

Bokstugan [The Book Cabin] published a picture of Signe Aurell in four different issues, starting in August of 1920 and ending in January of 1924. The image accompanies works by or about Signe Aurell. It's the same picture each time. Signe Aurell stands straight and tall in a blouse and long skirt, her hands behind her back, her back against a tree in front of a Minneapolis home. It's the only image I have been able to positively identify as Signe Aurell in the United States.

While in Sweden conducting research, I wrote a short article for a local Swedish newspaper looking for help in finding people who may have known Signe Aurell. I included the image from *Bokstugan*. It was that image that caught the eye of Inger Nilsson who lives in Osby, Sweden. She had grown up as Signe Aurell's neighbor and had seen that picture before, because Signe Aurell had given her a copy of one of her poems from *Bokstugan*. It was Inger who lovingly called Signe "Tant" [aunt], it was Inger who, after taking a trip to the United States visited Signe in the nursing home to tell her about all that she had seen, including Minneapolis, and it was Inger who told me that even late in life, Signe referred to Minneapolis as "min stad," my town (Nilsson 2015). That one picture has been incredibly helpful. It helped put me in contact with Inger, but it also served as a guide to an address in Minneapolis. Using the front porch of the house in the background, I've been able to, I think, identify the house behind Aurell in the image.

In February, March, and August of 1919, Signe Aurell wrote letters to fellow Industrial Worker of the World (IWW) member Carl Ahlteen at Leavenworth Penitentiary.¹⁰ Ahlteen had been arrested for his work on the Swedish-language IWW newspaper, *Allarm*. The address on file at Leavenworth for Signe Aurell, where all correspondences were tracked, lists 2213 29th Avenue in Minneapolis. Most likely, that address is actually 2213 29th Avenue South in the

Franklin-Seward neighborhood where many Swedish immigrants lived. It's one of at least twelve addresses that Aurell had in Minneapolis between 1913 and 1920 suggesting the unstable living conditions for many immigrants of the working class.

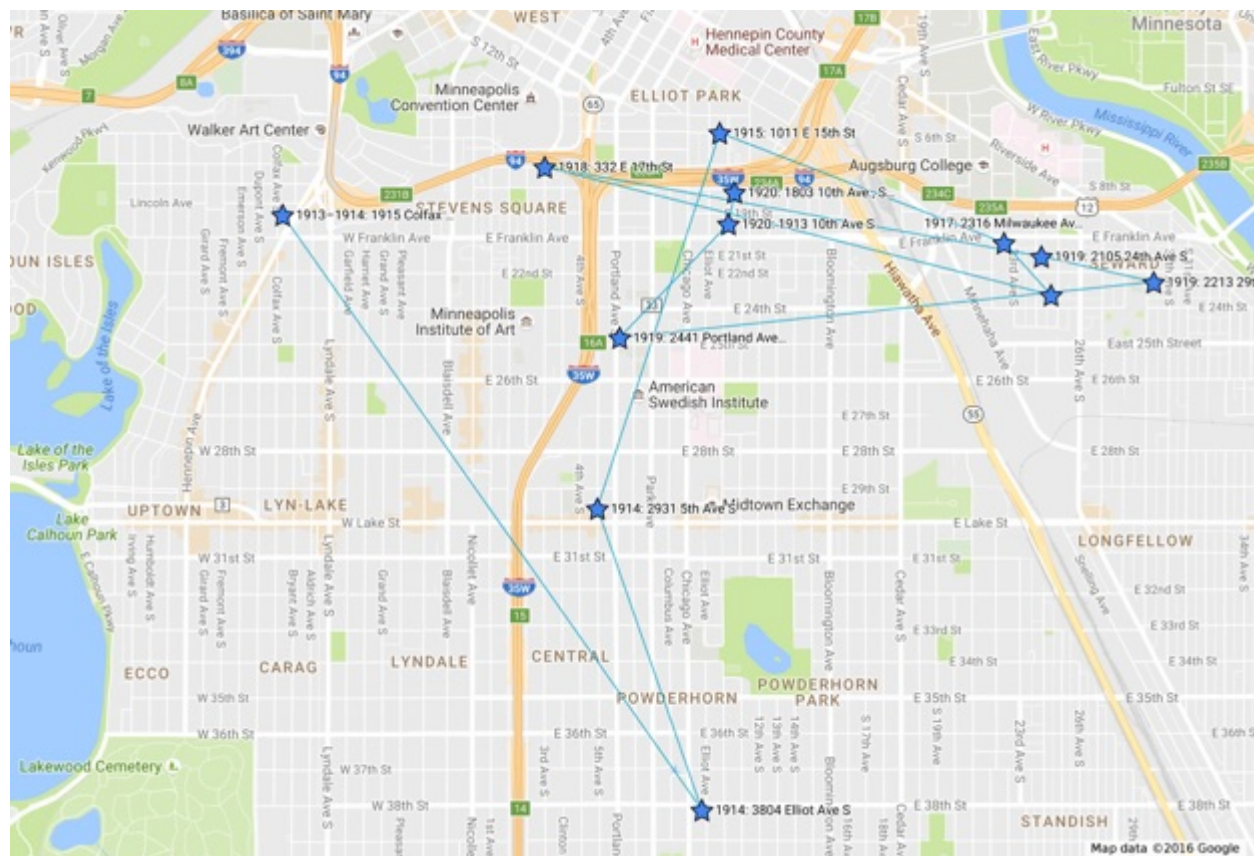


Fig. 2.1. Signe Aurell's known addresses in Minneapolis between 1913 and 1920 (Google Maps).

Using Google Street View, I began searching for all of Signe Aurell's old addresses. Many of the homes no longer exist. Many have clearly been heavily renovated, if not knocked down and rebuilt. But some remain. And as I combed through the images, one stood out. The house at 2213 29th Ave. S. in Minneapolis. The porch looked familiar. The sidewalk. The grassy area between the sidewalk and the curb looked to have an old tree stump. Even the roof of the home looked familiar. In an attempt to further ground Signe Aurell in Minneapolis, I compared the images side-by-side. I think it's the same home. I can't know for sure. But the house that stands there today was built in 1905, fourteen years before Signe would list it as an address.



Fig. 2.2 and fig. 2.3. Image of Signe Aurell in Minneapolis (page 26 of *Bokstugan*, issue #16, 1921) and 2213 29th Ave. S. in Minneapolis (photo by author).

During a research trip to the Twin Cities, I drove around to Aurell's different addresses, trying to get a sense of the area and the world that she lived in. There are still plenty of working-class neighborhoods around. There are still plenty of Scandinavian names on businesses. There are still plenty of immigrants who populate this particular part of Minneapolis. There's no tree out front of 2213 29th Ave. S. anymore and I'm sure there have been plenty of renovations. But it felt important. Like another fragment, this one physically much bigger than the rest, that placed Signe Aurell in context. Placed her in Minneapolis and in Swedish America. As I stood there on the sidewalk taking pictures, the owner was coming home after a walk with her dog. After explaining what, exactly, it was that I was doing, she invited me and my girlfriend in. Inside was a lovely home with a stairwell leading up to a second floor. She brought us upstairs and showed us around. The upstairs was smaller, with another set of stairs leading to a separate entrance in the back. There was a small bedroom and a small kitchen area. It looked like it had been built specifically for boarders, one of which could have very easily been Signe Aurell. Again, I can't know for sure. I can't know for sure that Signe Aurell lived upstairs there, slept in that room and used that kitchen, but someone did. And with as many Swedish immigrants who

were coming into Minneapolis at the time, and with as many Swedish immigrants who were living in the Franklin-Seward neighborhood at the time, there's a very good chance that that upstairs apartment was home to a Swedish immigrant.

As Swedes continued to move to the United States, they created communities and joined already existing ones, often seeking out groups of people who shared their language or nationality. It was because of this that when Signe Aurell moved to Minneapolis she had several Swedish-speaking International Order of Good Templars (IOGT) lodges to choose from. But it wasn't just the IOGT that attracted Swedes. The IWW saw an influx of Swedish immigrants join their ranks in the years following their founding in 1905. Of course, not all Swedes were socially active, or left-leaning radicals for that matter. That didn't stop them from seeking out communities of fellow Swedes. That's how ethnically Swedish neighborhoods started popping up in St. Paul and Minneapolis. In grouping themselves together, they did as so many immigrant groups had done before them and as so many immigrant groups have done after them. Eventually, many would become Americans. They would apply for naturalization and claim American citizenship. They would vote for Republicans and Democrats. For prohibition and against it. They would hyphenate their identities in the generation that followed and reclaim their Swedishness. But in those early years, many of the communities these Swedish immigrants joined were viewed as undesirable. The IWW was a group of radicals that threatened the American way of life. The IOGT was advocating for social change that struck at a longstanding alcohol culture and would have severe consequences on private industry. Even the ethnically Swedish neighborhoods like Swede Hollow in St. Paul or the Franklin-Seward neighborhood in Minneapolis were seen as places fit only for the working class. But these communities were so much more than that. They were places for Swedish immigrants, most of them working-class

immigrants, to take part in a community as they were introduced to a new country. For some, that first impression was a good one and they went on to settle in a country that became their home. Others, like Signe Aurell, struggled in those early years in the United States and chose to return to the home they had left behind. But while here, they left their marks. For Signe Aurell, her mark can be traced by small fragments—IWW newspaper clippings, an advertisement for a play in Willmar, Minnesota, meeting minutes from the IOGT, even friends who remembered her years after she had left Minneapolis—all of which serve to show what life was like for one particular Swedish immigrant who engaged with her community in a variety of ways.

Swedish America in the Twin Cities

Tens of thousands of Swedes moved to Minneapolis and St. Paul, where they settled in relatively homogenous ethnic communities. Some of this concentration was due to the sheer number of Swedes, the proximity to unskilled or low-skilled work, chain migration, and the fact that Minneapolis and especially St. Paul were on the way to Swedish enclaves in Chisago County, Minnesota (Lanegran 2001, 43). As more and more Swedes settled in the Twin Cities, they gave name to areas like Snoose Boulevard and Swede Hollow, still recognized today. Swede Hollow, in St. Paul, served as an entry point for many Swedes, due to cheap housing near the factories in which many immigrants worked. As new immigrants moved in from Ireland and Italy, for example, many Swedes eventually moved out, settling in areas with better housing options (Lanegran 2001, 44–46). While St. Paul was home to Swede Hollow, it was Minneapolis that was home to the largest number of Swedes. By 1920, the same year that Signe Aurell moved back to Sweden, the population peaked when 26,515 native-born Swedes lived in Minneapolis (Lanegran 2001, 50).

The Franklin and Seward areas, sometimes referred to as Ward 11, became home to the second-largest concentration of Scandinavians in Minneapolis; by 1900, nearly half of the area was Swedish or Norwegian. While that number fell in the following decades, still one fifth of the population was Swedish or Norwegian American in 1930 (Mauk 2012, 282–283). In fact, in 1910 first-generation and second-generation Swedes alone made up 17.8% of the entire city's population and by 1920, that percentage had only dropped to 17.3% (Mauk 2012, 280). Many of the Swedish immigrants who lived in ethnic enclaves like the Franklin and Seward areas belonged to the working class and it was here that Signe Aurell lived, along with her friend Sigfrid Stenberg and his family, in 1917 (Minneapolis Directory Company 1917, 223, 2051). By this point, Aurell was working as a seamstress and had already penned “En uppmaning” [An Appeal], which was published in the IWW newspaper *Allarm* [Alarm]. In it, she excoriated working as a domestic servant for the rich and reached out to the many Swedish women working as domestic servants in the United States.

For women working in the homes of wealthier, private families, engaging with a broader ethnic community could be difficult. In many cases, women only received one afternoon and evening off from work, usually Thursday or Sunday; for live-in domestic servants, the rest of the week was spent at the home of their employers, surrounded by only the family they served and a limited number of other employees of the house (Lintelman 2009, 111). Although organizations like the IOGT or the IWW often arranged activities such as dances and picnics on Thursday nights or Sunday afternoon, many domestic servants weren't able to participate. For those who could, the added social dimension doubtless broadened their appeal. Of course, not every dance or picnic could be held on a Thursday night or Sunday afternoon to accommodate the numerous Scandinavian domestic servants in the Twin Cities. On Tuesday, May 15, 1917, for

example, a group of Minneapolis domestic service workers organized a party at the IWW Hall on Western Avenue in Minneapolis. The program promised, for just 15 cents, “föredrag av en god kvinnlig talare, sång, musik, deklamation och därefter dans” [a lecture by a good female speaker, song, music, a reading, and after that, a dance] (Allarm 1917, 4). Of course, events like these often appealed to people already sympathetic to the host’s cause. The advertisement announcing the IWW party on May 15 goes on to say “alla som i någon mån känna sig klassmedvetna uppmanas att infinna sig på denna fäst och göra den till den mest successfulla tänkbar” [everyone who feels class conscious to some extent is encouraged to come to this party and make it as successful as imaginable] (Allarm 1917, 4). For those who were unable to attend such events, who couldn’t afford it, or who were not interested in a party hosted by a group of Wobblies, other forms of entertainment were readily available, especially the theater.

Just as in Sweden, where many migrants went from rural areas to urban centers, so too did many Swedish immigrants travel from rural Sweden to urban centers in the United States. The tension of migrating and immigrating from rural to urban was captured in the popularity of Swedish-American *bondkomikers* [peasant comedians] such as Olle i Skratthult [Olle from Laughtersville]. Hjalmar Peterson, a Swedish immigrant from Värmland, was a vaudeville comic and singer who, under the stage name Olle i Skratthult, toured Swedish America and recorded songs for Columbia and Victor Records, performing the songs in small towns and big cities, in concert venues and IOGT halls (Leary 2006, 211). Peterson’s act dramatized the shift from a rural life to an urban one and did so solely in Swedish. As folklorist James Leary notes, Olle i Skratthult’s characters weren’t just country bumpkins, they were “immigrant farm workers, lumberjacks, and hoboes struggling to sustain elements of their culture while adapting to a

relatively unfamiliar language and way of life,” which surely broadened the appeal to the Swedish immigrant working class (2014, 13).

Scholar Anne-Charlotte Harvey argues that Swedish-American theater served four primary purposes in the immigrant community: it promoted community, it boosted the ego of the immigrants by insulting others, it created and performed an identity, and it maintained the Swedish language, heritage, and culture (2001, 149). While some Swedish immigrants viewed the theater as frivolous, others social groups saw the theater as a way to connect with community members. Harvey writes that “[t]he most tendentious drama was that produced by labor groups and International Order of Good Templars (IOGT), which carefully selected their repertoire to educate and edify” (Harvey 1983, 496). Perhaps it should come as no surprise then that Hjalmar Peterson met his first wife, Olga Lindgren, at an IOGT meeting. Peterson, whose older brother Albin was an IOGT member in Los Angeles, met Olga Lindgren in the spring of 1916. Less than a week after the meeting, Lindgren was singing in Peterson’s troupe and on April 28, 1917, the two were married. Olga Lindgren and Hjalmar Peterson would eventually divorce, but during their time together toured the country performing Swedish plays for Swedish-American audiences (1983, 505–507).

In the fall of 1916, Olga Lindgren was touring with the group and touted as the “noted soprano singer from Minneapolis” (“Olle i Skratthult” 1916a, 8). Lindgren, seven years younger than Aurell, came to Minneapolis from Sweden in the same year, 1913. Both were IOGT members. Both had a penchant for song. And both would go on to perform with Olle i Skratthult. Of course, Olga Lindgren married Hjalmar Peterson and would remain in the United States until her death. Aurell did not. While it’s unclear if the two shared an IOGT lodge, both had strong ties to the temperance community, and in the fall of 1916 their paths would cross as

Swedish immigrant performers. Signe Aurell joined Olle i Skratthult's vaudeville show in the fall of 1916 in Willmar, Minnesota, on September 21, 22, and 23, 1916, and later in Spicer, Minnesota, on October 5, 1916 (Willmar Tribune 1916b, 3; Willmar Tribune 1916d, 3). Both communities, about 100 miles west of Minneapolis, had large Scandinavian-American populations willing to pay the thirty-five cents (fifty cents at the door in Willmar, so get your tickets early!) to see the show featuring Olle, Miss Lindgren, and the Minneapolis troupe including Signe Aurell.

Aurell played the role of Susanna [Suzanne] in "En Brottslig Betjent" [A Criminal Footman; in the French original: Les forfaits de Pipermans] ("Olle i Skratthult" 1916a, 8). In an attempt to avoid his wife, Susanna, misconstruing his occasional drink as an alcohol problem, Chamel tells her that his drink is an elixir that keeps men young. Of course, the elixir is simply a liqueur, but hoping to stay young herself, Susanna sneaks off during the night to take a drink. Befitting the comedic nature of the play, hilarity ensues as misunderstanding upon misunderstanding leads to Susanna needing to drink every night, the eventual firing of the footman, and finally a promise from Chamel that "Hädanefter ska vi dricka tillsammans om du vill" [From here on out we'll drink together if you like] (Duru and Chivot, trans. Gustafsson 1869, 27).

While the short play ends with an offer from Chamel to his wife, Susanna, to drink together, it is drink that has caused the problems. Alcohol is the driving force of conflict in the play, leading to lies, false promises, uncontrollable urges, marital strife, and eventually the firing



Fig. 2.4.
Advertisement for
Olle i Skratthult
(page 2 of the
September 13, 1916
Willmar Tribune).

of the footman, Piperman, who never took a single sip of the liqueur. But despite the comedy and one-liners, there's an underlying message of temperance—if no one is drinking in the house, then no one will suffer the consequences that alcohol brings. Not only that, but the play is a reminder of the tenuous nature of domestic servants. Men and women both were disposable, easily fired for the slightest offense, or no offense at all. Amid the comedy, the audience would have seen a play, originally written in French, performed by a troupe of Swedish speakers in small-town Minnesota, which was surprisingly relevant to their lives as immigrants in the United States.

The theater could be educational in and of itself, as Aurell's foray into acting demonstrates. Plays also became subversive acts, ways for Swedes to create their identity and their community, while also maintaining their language and culture or, as Harvey writes, "Olle makes his Swedish audience more Swedish, strengthens them in their stand against the dominant culture" (2001, 149, 168). As a sometimes-actor herself performing in the Olle i Skratthult program, Signe Aurell found many different avenues to reach out to and engage with Swedish working-class immigrants.¹¹ Harvey argues that no matter what the content, performances like Peterson's, and in turn Aurell's, "were ethnically charged merely by being performed in America in Swedish" (2001, 161).

Reading, especially for the working class, also became a way to either subvert or embrace Americanization. Books could be used as markers of American-ness, as historian Nan Enstad argues in *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. Books could also be used as markers of independence. Women who bought dime novels did so with the money they had earned, participating in American society as independent workers (Enstad 1999, 50). It wasn't just English dime novels though that

immigrant working women were buying. Reading and writing offered an additional way for Swedes to engage with a broader Swedish-speaking community. As the number of Swedish-language newspapers and books in circulation would suggest, the Swedish immigrants to the United States, whether upper class or working class, read. For the working class, purchasing books could be prohibitively expensive. Even dime novels could be seen as frivolous, but they were readily available. Libraries, of course, offered books for free, but, as Enstad suggests, they required a cultural competency that many new immigrants lacked, whether because the libraries were too far from home or work, or just not seen as a legitimate option for the immigrant community (Enstad 1999, 55).

In 1904, the Minneapolis Public Library (MPL) began shelving Scandinavian books, as well as more than twelve periodicals, in a Franklin Avenue storefront in Ward 11, just a few blocks from where Signe Aurell would eventually live. With so many Scandinavians living in the area, the location made sense. The collections of Swedish literature were an ongoing civic concern and led to debates about whether or not Swedish-language publications should be purchased; those against the continued purchase of Swedish-language literature believed that the new immigrants should be spending their time learning English. Despite some backlash, 14,117 Swedish-language books were circulating in the MPL system by 1915—the most of any foreign language. Nearly half of those books came from the Franklin Avenue Branch (Westerberg 2001, 260–262).

Clearly, the Swedish-speaking community was also a Swedish-reading community and the library was offering a service that was greatly appreciated and even demanded by the people. Signe Aurell had a local library just down the street that was circulating thousands of Swedish-language books every year. It's no surprise then that she advocated for women in "En

uppmaning” to visit their local libraries to find books for free rather than spending all of their time at dances or the theater—books were an avenue to further one’s education, class consciousness, and community just as they had been in Sweden for temperance and labor activists (Aurell 1916, 2).

That Signe Aurell and the other working-class Swedes of Minneapolis had access to a wide array of books that appealed to their sensibilities is in part due to Emma Nilsson, Head Librarian and coordinator of Scandinavian work at the Franklin Avenue Branch from 1909-1914, as well as a known singer and actor in Swedish America. Nilsson recognized that many of the new immigrants were working-class, liberal, and members of various social and political movements—particularly the socialist and temperance movements. While the federal government was about to pass the Espionage and Sedition Acts, placing left-wing, and especially foreign-language left-wing materials on the margins of the law, Nilsson was advocating for the Franklin Avenue Branch of the Minneapolis Public Library to reflect the tastes of library patrons by purchasing modern books in the “realistic literature” style (Westerberg 2001, 251–269). In doing so, Nilsson gave thousands of Swedish immigrants access to a wide-range of materials that they could engage with, both privately and in the context of a larger community, allowing immigrant Swedes the opportunity to negotiate their identities as immigrants in their own language.

Similar to movements in Sweden, various temperance organizations, churches, and labor organizations all started their own libraries and study groups in the United States as a way to educate their members in the hopes of changing society (Nordahl 1994, 121). Reading happens within a cultural and social context and as a collective act within a temperance or labor organization, for example, plays an important role in identity formation as well as social

movements and activism (Long 1993, 192–205). Of course, Swedish immigrants were not alone in advocating for education through literacy within their social networks (Nordahl 1994, 128). Finnish immigrants created what came to be known as Finn Halls as places of education, entertainment, and community. Some, like the IWW Finn Halls, were decidedly more political than others, and became places, as Aaron Goings writes, “where working class theater was performed and watched, where concerts, dances, entertainments, and dinners were held, where a multi-lingual library was housed, and where workers of diverse races and ethnicities collectively formed a democratic syndicalist culture” (2010, 23). But regardless of the political leanings, the halls became centers of educational and cultural life for many Finnish immigrant communities (Niemisto 2013, 107). Education for the working class was very much a public endeavor. As compulsory schooling laws became more common, many people had at least a basic education. But the public aspects continued as people self-educated, from the speeches at places like Finn Halls to the soapboxes in parks, from the newspapers that were handed from person to person to the pamphlets that were printed and distributed. Historian Frank Tobias Higbie argues that “[t]he conjunction of social movements and cheap printing helped to create physical spaces in which workers encountered text and conversation together: workplaces, union libraries, street speaking venues, even boxcars, bunkhouses, and park benches” (2010, 104–105). In the Swedish-speaking community, immigrants encountered those texts and that conversation in temperance organizations like the IOGT, labor unions like the IWW, libraries like the one on Franklin Avenue, and even Studieförbundet Verdandi [the Verdandi Study Society].

Wallentin Wald, a Swedish immigrant to Chicago believed strongly in the role of the written word in social movements. Once settled in Chicago, Wald founded Studieförbundet Verdandi, which initially began as a temperance group, part of the Temperance Organization

Verdandi. In 1919, as prohibition became the law of the land in the United States, Wald shifted his focus and founded *Bokstugan*, a periodical to which Signe Aurell regularly contributed. However, prior to that, temperance activists from IOGT lodges in Chicago formed a temperance café, Café Idrott [Café Sport]. Café Idrott was founded in 1913 as a place for Swedes to gather outside of saloons. While not explicitly political, Café Idrott did support the labor movement by hosting parties and events that included speeches by activists. In October of 1913, for example, the café arranged a program which included speeches by labor activists and a resolution calling for the release of three men in Sweden who stood accused of bombing the *Amalthea* in Malmö harbor during a strike, as well as performances by an IOGT choir, a Swedish folkdance group, and Olle i Skratthult (Nordahl 1994, 123–124). In the ten years that followed, Wallentin Wald served on Café Idrott's Literary Committee, which was tasked with procuring newspapers, magazines, and books for the reading room and library. Bertha Waldén, a friend to Signe Aurell, also served alongside Wald on the Literary Committee (Nordahl 1994, 118–119). Waldén continued her work with Wald and took various roles at *Bokstugan*, including President and Treasurer. While the library's collection was not necessarily radical, the Literary Committee and Café Idrott's library worked to educate Swedes who came through their Chicago doors, many of them workers and activists.¹²

Meanwhile, back in Minneapolis, Emma Nilsson could not decide what was published, unlike Wald, who started his own periodical. Instead, Nilsson worked within the structure of the public library and thus decided what was circulated. Her commitment to Scandinavian-language books reflecting the times and lived experiences of Swedes in the United States came in the face of rising anti-immigrant sentiments in the shadow of World War I. That commitment was

subversive, and in doing so, she helped immigrant communities and marginalized community members to take control over what they read and what they wrote.

The International Order of Good Templars and Signe Aurell

Signe Aurell sailed into Boston, Massachusetts, in May of 1913 and by December of that same year she was living at 1915 Colfax Avenue South in Minneapolis, Minnesota (*I.O.G.T. Program Bok och Adress Kalender för Kvartalet Dec. 1913. Jan. och Feb. 1914*, 14). As a single woman in her early twenties, she was not alone in arriving in Minneapolis. From 1910 to 1930, single women between the ages of twenty and twenty-four coming to Minneapolis outnumbered men nearly two to one (Faue 1991, 23). After just a few months in her new home, she joined the Swedish-speaking International Order of Good Templars Lincoln Lodge No. 2 on October 2, 1913 (IOGT, no. 1492). Later that month, she was voted onto the programs committee (IOGT October 21, 1913, 230). Lincoln Lodge was the first Scandinavian IOGT lodge in Minneapolis when it was founded on June 20, 1886. The lodge's thirtieth anniversary coincided with the twenty-fifth anniversary of Minnesota's Scandinavian Grand Lodge and a 1914 compilation of portraits of Lincoln Lodge members is published prominently in a publication by the Scandinavian Grand Lodge celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary (Minnesota's Skandinaviska Storloge I.O.G.T. 1916, 17). While no names identify the individual members, Signe Aurell's thumbnail-sized portrait is most likely included.

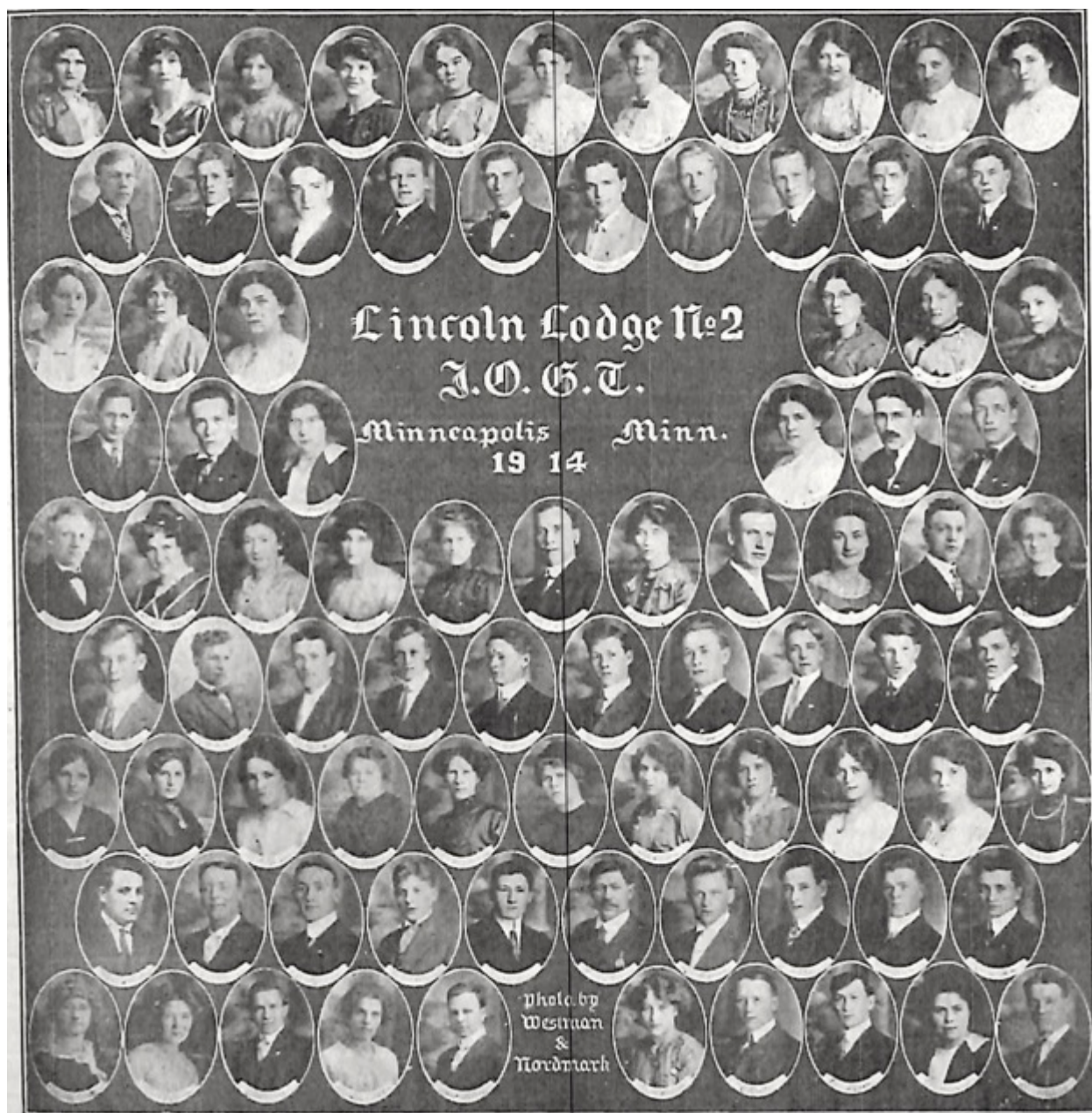


Fig. 2.5. Portraits from Signe Aurell's IOGT lodge, Lincoln Lodge #2, in 1914. While no names are included, Aurell may be one of the women in the third row from the bottom (page 17 of *Fästskrift med anledning av Minnesota's Skandinaviska Storloge I.O.G.T. Tjugufem-års-Jubileum*, 1916).

Clearly, Aurell was not alone as a Scandinavian in the temperance movement. In 1891, when Minnesota's Scandinavian Grand Lodge was founded, there were twenty-six lodges. Twenty-five years later, the number had risen to seventy-one lodges under Minnesota's Scandinavian Grand Lodge, which was home to 3,271 members, nine study circles, and two

traveling libraries (Wold 1916, 14). That same year, on April 30, 1916, the IOGT boasted 24,257 members in the United States; approximately 12,000 were thought to be Scandinavian (I.O. 1916, 72).

Some of the lodges helped newly arrived immigrants to find jobs, provided reading groups and libraries, and offered English-language courses to help ease immigrants' transitions from Sweden to the United States (Wendelius 1990, 38–45). As historian Per Nordahl notes, the trans-Atlantic exchange of these popular movements meant that the IOGT saw lodges founded that were an amalgamation of American, Swedish, and finally Swedish-American values as Swedish immigrants who had been members in Sweden, like Aurell, came to the United States with their own ideals. In fact, the Scandinavian lodges in Minneapolis actively recruited immigrants to their lodges by advertising their meetings in the Swedish IOGT publication *Reformatorn* [The reformer]. In doing so, they signaled to Swedish IOGT members that they would have a community of like-minded people waiting for them on the other side of the Atlantic (Lidström 1916, 73). That back-and-forth over the Atlantic meant that the IOGT support of labor in Sweden immigrated to the United States. One IOGT member wrote that “under arbetet på att undanröja en fiende till släktets lycka och välbefinnande—rusdryckshanteringen—har man stött på andra fiender, militarismen och fattigdomen” [while working to vanquish an enemy of our species' happiness and well-being—alcohol consumption—we have met other enemies, militarism and poverty] (Arne 1916, 35). Many Swedish-speaking lodges supported the labor movement by co-hosting speakers, protesting together, collecting money for defense funds, and renting space to workers' organizations (Nordahl 1994, 122). Even into the late 1930s, the IWW in Minneapolis was renting hall space from the IOGT Grand Lodge (IWW 1931, 1935–38).

Despite her refuge in the IOGT, Signe Aurell did not escape the *bundår* or “dog years” plaguing fellow Swedish immigrants (Lintelman 2009, 93–94). Her first December was especially difficult, as revealed in the minutes of the IOGT's Swedish-speaking Lincoln Lodge, No. 2:

Dec. 18, 1913: Rapporteras att Str. Signe Aurell var sjuk samt är på Svenska Hospitalet Sjuk-komiten anmodades att göra sin plikt,

Dec. 25, 1913: Systrer Signe Aurell rapporteras fortfarande vara sjuk, Sjukkomiten har sändt blommor samt att hon efter omständigheterna mår bra.

Jan. 1, 1914: Str. Signe Aurell rapporteras hava lämnat hospitalet samt mår bra efter omständigheterna bra (IOGT December 18, 1913–January 1, 1914, 244–249).

[Dec. 18, 1913: Reported that Sister Signe Aurell was sick and is at the Swedish Hospital. The Sick Benefits Committee has been urged to do its duty.

Dec. 25, 1913: Sister Signe Aurell is reported to still be sick. The Sick Benefits Committee has sent flowers and reports that, considering the circumstances, she is well.

Jan. 1, 1914: Sister Signe Aurell is reported to have left the hospital and, considering the circumstances, is feeling well.]

She spent over a week in the Swedish Hospital just down the street from the Swedish Mission Tabernacle. In fact, Aurell celebrated her first Christmas in the United States at the Swedish Hospital. The IOGT lodge that she had joined just a few months earlier sent her flowers. By the New Year, she had been released by the hospital (IOGT December 18, 1913–January 1, 1914, 244–249). Just a month after her release, Aurell joined the Sjukkomitté [Sick Benefits Committee], which checked in on members who were sick, sent flowers, and even provided financial support to members. While the committee clearly had good intentions, their recruitment in the IOGT program book from the second quarter of 1914 is a reminder of the challenges immigrants faced in the United States. In English, the advertisement proclaims that:

1. This association is composed entirely of one of the healthiest races on earth, the Scandinavian. You do not have to help take care of any foreign race that is oftener subject to sickness than your own.

2. The members are free from one of the most frequent causes of disease, the use of alcohol (*I.O.G.T. Program Bok och Adress Kalender för Kvartalet Mars, April och Maj 1914*, 5).

Clearly, racial tensions and blatant racism existed between immigrant communities. Finns, for example, were thought by many to be of Mongolian descent. In turn, Finnish immigrants could be subject to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. One prominent 1908 court case in Duluth, Minnesota, ruled on an attempt by district prosecutor John E. Sweet to deny citizenship to John Svan and sixteen fellow Finns on the grounds that they were of Mongolian descent and therefore not eligible to become American citizens. The court found in favor of Svan, ruling that Finns should be considered white (Holmio 2001, 23–24).¹³ Carl Ross argues that this attack on Finnish eligibility for American citizenship was a combination of the already racist attacks they faced along with backlash against the Finns penchant for labor activism (1977, 115).

Ideas of racial purity and superiority, whether IOGT endorsed or attempts to break labor organizations, were at odds with many left-leaning organizations. Socialist newspapers reacted to the 1908 court case with ambivalence in terms of the racial aspects and instead focused on the need to grant human rights to all people, regardless of ethnic background (Holmio 2001, 23–24). The IWW, similarly, aimed to organize all workers regardless of national origin. The juxtaposition between the racial tension described by the IOGT advertisement for the Sick Benefits Committee and the racial inclusion championed by the IWW again demonstrates the complexities of immigrant life. Groups that could so easily accept new immigrants and ease their transition to life in the United States, like the IOGT, could still hold racist ideas that specifically targeted other immigrants, creating a hierarchy within the immigrant community.

Despite these seeming contradictions, Aurell was a member of both organizations during her time in Minneapolis and on February 27, 1914, she was the recipient of \$26.90 from the Sick Benefits Committee, after once again falling ill (IOGT February 5, 1914, 12–17). Just like the Industrial Workers of the World, just like the unions in Sweden, just like religious and secular

Swedish-American groups, the IOGT provided a form of welfare or mutual aid that was member-driven in the face of sorely-lacking government assistance.¹⁴ In doing so, the organizations were able to recruit and retain membership, but also help immigrants during their *bundår*. Aurell's first half year in the United States seems to have been one beset by illness, but she found a community that she was familiar with by joining the IOGT.

Aurell, according to the meeting minutes, was quite active in the lodge throughout 1914, recommending new members, serving on various committees and in various leadership roles, and even singing a duet with another member as part of the meeting program on May 21.¹⁵ By August 13, she sent a letter of withdrawal. She wanted to leave the lodge. However, the minutes do not explain why she submitted a letter of withdrawal, but note that the matter would be taken up again at the next meeting on August 20. In the meantime, the lodge created a three-person special committee to visit Aurell. By August 20, Aurell had repealed her letter of withdrawal and opted to stay a member (IOGT August 13, 1914, and August 20, 1914, 69–73). Despite her apparent misgivings, Aurell did recommend a new member to the lodge in November of 1914 (IOGT November 18, 1914, 101). Not surprisingly, considering her attempt to leave the lodge, Aurell's involvement waned in the coming years and she does not appear at all in the 1915 minutes or the first half of 1916. By July of 1916 she once again served in a position of leadership and on various committees (IOGT July 27, 1916, 297–300).

When Aurell first joined in 1913, Lincoln Lodge had 116 members; by August 2, 1917 there were 80 members, 32 of them women (IOGT 1911–1914, 181; IOGT August 2, 1917, 4). That number would decrease by one, because after August of 1917, Aurell no longer appears in the membership book of IOGT Lincoln Lodge No. 2. By 1917, many members had left the IOGT lodges; the Scandinavian Grand Lodge's peak was in 1912 when 4,173 Minnesota

Scandinavians were members. The decline in membership was suspected to be because of slowing emigration from Scandinavia to Minnesota and the increasing number of prohibition laws in Minnesota (Wold 1916, 25). Prior to 1919 and the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment known as the Volstead Act after United States Representative Andrew Volstead from Minnesota, a “County Option” was signed into law in Minnesota in 1915 giving individual counties the opportunity to vote on prohibition and leading to a gradual adoption of prohibition across the state (Meyer 2015, 136–137). As prohibition gained ground in Minnesota, IOGT members were reminded by Edward Wavrinsky of Stockholm, Sweden, and International Chief of the IOGT, that the temperance movement had more work to do, including building a folkschool dedicated to IOGT ideals and advocating for peace, equality for women, animal rights, and a healthy and natural way of life for everyone (Wavrinsky 1916, 10–11).

No letters or diaries remain that give us Aurell’s own thoughts about the first few months and years in Minneapolis, so perhaps her *bundår* were more than just a stay in the hospital. While not having Aurell’s own words to describe what it must have been like to spend her first Christmas in the United States in the hospital is frustrating, the fragments that do remain, when coupled with the writing that Aurell left behind can tell us a lot about what it must have been like for her and for many of the Swedish immigrant women she identified with. And so, we are left with fragments, like the IOGT lodge minutes that in short sentences hint at what life was like for Aurell as she made Minneapolis her home. But even the minutes of the Lincoln Lodge are incomplete. We can’t know why Aurell was in the hospital that first Christmas. We can’t know why the lodge decided to give her \$26.90 in February of 1914 after she fell ill. We can’t know why Aurell sent a letter to the lodge informing them of her intent to leave and we can’t know why she decided to stay. However, the minutes do show that Aurell was an active

member for at least a year. They suggest that Aurell found a community of Swedish-speaking immigrants who shared her values and beliefs. They demonstrate how the IOGT helped ease the transition for immigrants into the New World by taking care of its members. The support of groups like the IOGT surely made Signe Aurell's transition to the United States easier, but that does not mean that the transition was easy.

Swedish Women at Work

In the early 1900s, many women coming from Sweden to the United States worked in the domestic service industry. Journalist and labor activist Eva McDonald Valesh estimated that there were 4,000 maids in Minneapolis around the turn of the century and that half were either Swedish or Norwegian (Söderström 1899, 90). The United States Congress Joint Immigration Commission, known as the Dillingham Commission, found that in 1910, 76% of Swedish-born immigrant women and 50.8% of American-born Swedish immigrant women worked in “Domestic and personal service jobs” and were the bread winners for their households (Dillingham 1911, 78). That last part is important. It wasn't just women working to supplement the income of their partners or families as so many people assumed; these women were supporting themselves and sometimes their families on the wages they brought home from their jobs as seamstress and laundresses and domestic servants.

Just as chain migration led to ethnic enclaves in the United States, occupational chain migration resulted in more Swedish maids arriving in the cities. Swedish women received a ticket prepaid for them from a friend or relative, immigrated to the United States, worked in domestic service to pay for the ticket, and sent a prepaid ticket to someone else who then immigrated and became a maid. As early as 1873 the Swedish-language press was debating whether or not

working as a maid in the United States was better than in Sweden. In Chicago, two rival newspapers took the debate to their readers with *Svenska Amerikanaren* [The Swedish American] arguing that while pay was certainly better in the United States, working conditions were better in Sweden; *Nya Werlden* [The New World], on the other hand, believed that the working conditions were better in the United States and that if anyone should emigrate from Sweden, it should be domestic servants (Beijbom 1993, 118–119). For some, domestic service was an improvement over what women had left behind. Moving to Swedish enclaves meant that they had a community that supported them as fellow expatriates and respected the jobs they performed as maids; the job and improved economic conditions allowed them to create better lives for themselves.¹⁶ No consensus was ever reached, but the civic debate about the benefits of domestic service also demonstrates the difficulties in forming community identity. Swedish Americans believed that working conditions were better in the United States. Swedish Americans also believed that working conditions were better in Sweden. Both, of course, can be true. Both, of course, are true. Newspapers like *Svenska Amerikanaren*, *Nya Werlden*, and the IWW publication *Allarm*, gave space to many different voices as Swedish Americans negotiated their immigrant identity as part of a broader community, albeit not a homogenous community. The writing women left behind about their time as domestic service workers confirm that. Whether working as a maid on one side of the Atlantic or on the other was better, it was a practical option for many women.

Historian Joy K. Lintelman writes in her book *I Go to America: Swedish American Women and the Life of Mina Anderson*, that most Swedish women improved their lives by migrating to the United States. They found higher wages, better accommodations, more time off, less physical labor, and could easily change jobs. In short order, according to Lintelman, “most single

Swedish immigrant women found things better as a result of their immigration to the United States—and comparatively easier than for male migrants from Sweden” (2009, 94). While things may have been better than they were in Sweden that does not necessarily mean that they were good. Nor does it mean that immigration to the United States and a subsequent job in domestic service meant a ticket to riches or even the middle class. Stina Hirsch, the daughter of a Swedish immigrant and herself a domestic servant for a time in Chicago, notes “The migration to America was not, however, an end in itself. Nor was domestic work the destiny that was sought, but only the means” (1985, 59). The means to seeking that destiny included long hours of arduous work. As Signe Aurell writes in her essay “En uppmaning,” there were no viable labor union options for most maids and domestic service workers and the labor conditions that prevailed were not always suitable or even legal, even if they were sometimes better than in Sweden.

Hirsch writes of her mother and four aunts, all of whom emigrated from Sweden and worked as domestic servants that “Domestic service has never encompassed anything but a small aspect of their lives. It was something they did, not something they were” (1985, 60). That didn’t stop some Americans from specifically seeking out Swedish women for domestic servant work. Ida Swanson, who arrived in Chicago in 1903 just two weeks before Christmas recalls the ease in which she found work, “Var inte svårt att få arbete i Engelk family Alla ville ha svenska flickor som de visste var vana att arbeta för liten betalning” [Wasn’t hard to find work with an English [speaking] family. Everyone wanted Swedish girls who they knew were used to working for little pay] (February 28, 1960, 1–2). As Lintelman shows, American views of Swedish workers were complicated—some Americans specifically sought out Swedes, because of their

reputation for hard work, others because of their reputation for working for little pay, and still others because it became a way to implicitly state their racial preferences (2009, 98–99).

Evelina Månsson's memoir, *Amerika-Minnen: Från en 6-årig vistelse i U.S.A. i 1900-talets början*, describes the lived experiences of one particular immigrant woman and demonstrates the sometimes contradictory nature of the immigrant experience. Månsson spent six years in Minnesota in the early 1900s and worked for some time in domestic service before eventually becoming a seamstress in Minneapolis.

Having arrived in Palmyra, Minnesota, in 1901, Månsson began working as a domestic service worker in a well-run home in a small community. However, she tired quickly of this life and left after four months to move to Minneapolis. Like many Swedes, she settled in a Swedish enclave with friends. Her first few weeks in Minneapolis were fraught. The laundress job for which she moved to Minneapolis had already been given to another woman. Luckily, she quickly found another job as a domestic service worker in a boarding house—only to quit after less than a day. This was followed by a series of jobs that she accepted and eventually left, sometimes after only half a day due to poor working conditions, unrealistic expectations by the employer, and poor pay. She finally found a job as a janitor, which paid her a dollar a day. Her janitorial job allowed her to save money and she arranged for her sister to work as a janitor in the same building and sent her a ticket from Sweden to the United States. In the years that followed, she saved enough money to move back to Sweden. Once back, however, she decided instead to immigrate to the United States, again. She returned to Minneapolis where she worked yet another job as a janitor, before she realized that she could earn more money as a seamstress. Finally, she began sewing for the Sterling Manufacturing Company (Månsson 1930).

Sewing was a common occupation for many women, and Swedish immigrants were no exception. Månsson worked at Weum Watt Co., a smaller company compared to the Northwestern Knitting Company, which produced Munsingwear. The Northwestern Knitting Company was the largest employer of women in Minneapolis and in 1914, 200 men and 1,500 women worked there. By 1918, the company employed 3,000 people—2,500 were women and over 400 had been born in Sweden or to Swedish parents (Olsson 2001, 81).

Life as a seamstress had its risks. For instance, women's hands and fingers were caught under the needle of the electric sewing machine. With the pressure to sew ever faster, accidents like this were common. Much of that pressure came from the pay structure. Rather than pay by the hour, women like Månsson received piecework rates. That is, they were paid for what they produced. For every dozen shirts she completed, she received eighteen cents. Twelve dozen shirts per day made for a wage of \$2.16. It wasn't a terrible wage for a single woman living with roommates like Månsson, but it very much depended on your ability to sew quickly and efficiently, something Månsson notes in what she describes as a humorous anecdote:

Men fastän jag, och väl även många med mig, förtjänade en vacker dagspenning, var det dock icke alla som nådde upp till den summan. Ett tämligen lustigt bevis härpå erhöj jag en dag då jag till föreståndaren avlämnade en bunt färdiga blusar för att av honom avtecknas. Härvid såg jag att han hade något på hjärtat, och det kom i form av en förklaring över att han nu insåg att priset på de här blusarna satts för högt – tjänade jag icke dagligen över 2 dollars, och det var verkligen icke meningen att vi skulle ha förtjänster motsvarande de flesta mäns, som väl i många fall hade familj att försörja. Han måste ofördröjligen sänka priset, slutade han.

Just som jag stod i begrepp att opponera mig mot detta i mitt tycke nedriga tilltag kom en annan av flickorna med en bunt färdiga blusar av samma slag som mina – det gällde i detta fall de arbetsammaste blusarna till ett pris av 45 cents pr dussin. Sedan hon avlämnat blusarna, började hon genast att beskärma sig över det myckna arbetet på dessa – man kom ju ingen vart med dem, och med den dåliga betalningen kunde hon knappast förtjäna en dollar om dagen. Antingen måste de vara hyggliga nog att höja priset, eller hon måste söka sig arbete på något annat ställe.

Jag måste skratta, ty situationen var verkligen komisk. Detta tyckte förmodligen också föreståndaren, som medgav att det var det märkvärdigaste han varit ute för på länge.

- Jag var nyss betänkt på att sänka priset, sade han, då flera av eder förtjäna över 2 dollar om dagen – och så kommer ni och säger att priset satts för lågt. Att somliga av eder förtjäna så mycket mindre beror icke på betalningen. Kläm i att sy av bara sjutton hädanefter, kära Frances – det hjälper.

Med detta besked fick hon gå. Och hotelsen till mig satte han, dess bättre, icke i verkställighet.

Av ovan anförda se vi således att arbetsförtjänsterna kunna vara mycket olika t.o.m. på samma fabrik och med samma arbete. Om det därför klagas över dåliga förtjänster må man icke strax tro att avlöningen är dålig, utan att orsaken fastmer har sin grund i bristande arbetslust och frånvaron av händighet för arbetets utförande. Många sakna, som vi veta, alldeles handlag för somliga arbeten, och i synnerhet sömnadsarbetet på elektriska maskiner fordrar snabba grepp och flinka fingrar. Dock, fränsett olika händighet, tycker jag likväl att de flesta med god vilja skulle kunna uppnå bättre resultat.

För min egen del kunde jag ej – som fattig självförsörjande – önska mig något bättre än detta sömnadsarbete. Jag ”likade” själva arbetet, och jag förtjänade bra med pengar (1930, 104–105).

[But even though I, and several others, earned a good daily wage, not everyone could earn as much. I witnessed a rather funny example of this one day when I went to the manager to drop off the bundle of shirts that I had finished for him to count. I could tell he had something on his mind and it came in the form of an explanation that he now realized that the price he had put on the shirts was too high—didn't I earn more than two dollars a day and women should definitely not earn a wage in line with most of the men's, who, of course, often had families to support. He had to immediately lower the price he was paying, he decided.

Just as I stood ready to defend myself against this horribly shameless claim, another of the girls came up with a bundle of shirts that she had finished, just like mine—in this case, it was the most labor-intensive shirts which were paid at forty-five cents per dozen. As she delivered the shirts, she began to immediately lament how much work went into these shirts—they were impossible to make progress on and with the terrible pay, she could barely make a dollar a day. Either they need to be kind enough to raise the price they were paying, or she would have to find employment elsewhere.

I had to laugh, because the situation was truly comical. The manager apparently also thought so and admitted that it was the strangest thing he had heard in quite some time.

- I was just about to lower the price, he said, since several of you earn more than two dollars per day, and then you come and say that the price is too low. That some of you

earn so much less has nothing to do with the wages. Work harder and just sew like heck from here on, dear Frances. It helps.

And with this, she was dismissed. Luckily, he didn't follow through on his threat to me of lowering the prices.

From the story above we can see that the wages we earned could be very different, even at the same factory for the same work. If people are complaining about poor wages, you shouldn't assume that the pay is poor, but that more than likely, the reason lies in the lack of motivation and lack of skills people have for the work they are doing. Many people, as we know, just don't have the skills for certain types of work, and sewing on electric machines especially requires a quick grip and deft fingers. However, aside from the skills, I think that most people with the right attitude could accomplish more.

Personally, as a poor self-sufficient women, I couldn't dream of anything better than working as a seamstress. I liked the work and I earned good money.]

Månsson's story demonstrates just how difficult life could be for immigrant women. That a manager could so easily lower wages, for no reason other than not wanting to pay a woman as much as a man, was a stark reality for many. The assumption that a woman was only working on the side, that she should have a family or husband at home to support her, ignored the lived reality of many immigrant women. According to the Dillingham Commission, 57,045 first-generation Swedish immigrants were identified as "White female bread winners of foreign parentage" in 1910 (Dillingham 1911, 70). Immigrant women like Evelina Månsson, Frances—the woman who struggled to make a dollar a day—and the tens of thousands of other single women who came to the United States with hopes of building a new life for themselves challenged the American ideals of a woman's place being in the home. How these women wrote about their experiences, however, differed.

While Månsson is initially insulted by the thought of her wage being lowered for no reason other than the fact that she is too good at her job and that she is not a man, this isn't what she focuses on. Instead, she takes to heart her version of the American Dream. Work hard and everything will be fine. And everything was fine for Månsson: she earned more than two

dollars a day as a seamstress, met a man whom she would later marry, and moved back to Sweden. Her memoir clearly presents her experience in a positive light. Even a threatened pay cut is just a lesson about hard work as an immigrant in a new country. But she never does say what happens to Frances.

It's here that we see the complexities of life for an immigrant woman in the city. At the same time as she describes the many different jobs she holds and the numerous positions she leaves due to poor working conditions or poor pay, she also subscribes to the idea that hard work pays off. And she works hard. But in her six years in the United States, Evelina Månsson held at least eight different jobs. Her ticket was paid for by a family member and she notes that “‘Skuldbelastad’ börjar man alltså sin bana i Amerika, något som visst är mycket vanligt” [You begin your life in America burdened with debt, something that is, of course, very common] (1930, 19). She played her own role in maintaining that chain migration that resulted in so many Swedish women working in the service industry by bringing her sister over to Minneapolis. Her life is very much representative of so many other Swedish immigrants to the United States and to Minneapolis in particular. Månsson even notes that she read a lot and borrowed books from the library on Franklin Avenue, the same library that Emma Nilsson stocked with Swedish books to reflect the growing Swedish population (1930, 46). But each individual experience is different. Signe Aurell, who worked hard, took a different approach when faced with unfair labor expectations.

Walfrid Engdahl—an IWW member, editor at *Allarm* in Minneapolis, and a friend to Signe Aurell—describes one moment of direct action by Aurell:

Det berättas att efter en välgjord tvätt och strykning kom hon i tvist med sin rika arbetsgiverska om lönen för sitt arbete. Som en skälig lön vägrades henne tog hon de strukna kläderna och kastade dem i de vattenfyllda tvättkaren och bad husmodern göra

sitt arbete själv. I trots att hon var ombedd att komma tillbaka, gick hon aldrig mera dit (Engdahl 1961, 8–9).

[It's said that after one particularly well-executed washing and ironing, she got into a dispute with her rich employer about what she should be paid for her work. Because she was denied a fair wage, she took the ironed clothes and threw them in the bathtubs full of water and told the woman of the house to do the work herself. Despite being asked to come back, she never again went to work there.]

So while Aurell, who lived in similar neighborhoods, who herself worked as a seamstress, who most likely visited the same library as Månsson, became a labor activist fighting for higher wages, Månsson did not. The reality of immigration to the United States was, and continues to be, complicated. The words of women like Månsson and the words of the women who wrote articles, poems, memoirs, and letters home further complicates that reality, but gives the reader a much better understanding of what immigration looked like for the women who actually lived it and how they understood themselves.

The Industrial Workers of the World and Signe Aurell

In June of 1905, over 200 unionists came together in Chicago, Illinois, and wrote “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life” (IWW 2016).¹⁷ Those two sentences introduced the preamble to the constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World and would later be translated into languages from around the globe as the IWW worked to spread labor unionism and anarcho-syndicalism internationally.

In the decade that followed, the IWW organized hundreds of thousands of workers, many of them immigrants, across the United States, earning the ire of employers as well as the United States government. IWW halls, where Wobblies met, became places to plan direct

actions, listen to speeches, meet new people, and join a larger community. Swedish immigrants, were joined by various other ethnic groups, especially the Finns in the Midwest, as active members of the IWW, writing songs and poems about the IWW, publishing newspapers, and organizing workers.

In 1917, Aurell lived at 2312 25th Ave S., Minneapolis, a three-story home built in 1900 (Minneapolis Directory Company 1917, 223). She shared the address with the Stenbergs in the Franklin-Seward neighborhood. It was a working-class Scandinavian neighborhood where, to save money, people often lived together or with other families as boarders. Aurell was working as a seamstress and writing labor poetry for IWW publications. Several of those newspapers gained enough notoriety to be deemed a threat to national security by the United States, including *Allarm*.¹⁸ Living in the same home were Sigfrid Stenberg, his wife, Gertrude, and their daughter Barbro. Stenberg was a friend as well as a fellow labor activist who managed the Swedish-language IWW newspaper *Allarm*, for which Aurell frequently wrote.

IWW Scandinavian Branch No. 3 first published the newspaper out of Seattle, Washington, in 1915 under the title *Solidaritet* [Solidarity], although the inaugural issue was actually printed on January 2, 1915, in Portland, Oregon, where printing was cheaper. The masthead initially read “Klasskamp, Direkt aktion, Frihet” [Class struggle, Direct action, Freedom], but “freedom” was soon replaced with “solidarity.” *Solidaritet* promised to be a mouthpiece for the revolutionary worker and to spread industrial unionism. At the same time the paper demanded that its readers get involved, that they “Agitera. Organisera! Emancipera!” [Agitate. Organize! Emancipate!]. Poems were often featured on the front page of the newspaper alongside news about the IWW, educational pieces about the benefits of unionization, and labor movement news from around the country. Hoping to find a place in the

home of every Swedish worker, *Solidaritet* debuted with lofty goals. Unfortunately for the newspaper, financial shortcomings forced a move and with the move, a change in name (Mattson 1916, 1). The Scandinavian Propaganda League of the IWW in Minneapolis took over publication from Scandinavian Branch No. 3 after only a few months and the title changed from *Solidaritet* to *Allarm*. In Seattle, the newspaper had been published monthly with the goal of eventually printing weekly, but it wasn't until May 1917 that *Allarm* began publishing issues twice monthly. The move to Minneapolis created a certain degree of financial stability; publication of the newspaper in the middle of the country near large Swedish immigrant populations such as Minneapolis and Chicago helped increase readership (Brook, Danielsen, Mikkelsen 1987, 89).

Soon after beginning to publish twice a month, on September 5, 1917, United States Government officials raided IWW headquarters in Chicago, the *Allarm* office in Minneapolis, as well as IWW halls and private residences in Minnesota and elsewhere around the country, seizing several tons of IWW papers. In the coming month, federal agents arrested 166 “Wobblies,” or IWW members. This raid was a culmination of years of targeted harassment of the IWW and resulted in a mass trial in Chicago, Illinois, in 1918. One hundred IWW members—several of them Swedes, Carl Ahlteen, Ragnar Johanson, and Sigfrid Stenberg, among them—were indicted in *United States v. William D. Haywood, et al.* for a variety of crimes, including violation of the 1917 Espionage Act. They were convicted, fined a total of over \$2.5 million, and sent to Leavenworth Penitentiary to serve prison sentences of between two and twenty years. The convictions were handed down using IWW literature such as letters, telegrams, and newspaper articles as evidence (U.S. District Court for the Eastern (Chicago) Division of the Northern District of Illinois 1917; Preston 1994, 118–151; Kohn 1994, 14–16; Taft 1962, 57–76).

Sometimes that evidence was so baseless as to be laughable if not for the devastating consequences the convictions had for many activists. As Carl Ahlteen, Ragnar Johanson, and Sigfrid Stenberg worked to have their sentences commuted, Charles F. Clyne, United States attorney for the Northern District of Illinois wrote several letters to the Secretary of State and the United States Attorney General claiming some variation of the following:

The newspaper “Allarm” had an extensive circulation in Minnesota and throughout the northwest and was the chief medium for disseminating I.W.W. propaganda among the Scandinavian people of this territory. Of all the foreign language papers of the organization, the “Allarm” was the most violent in its attitude toward the Government and the war (1921, 2–3).

Sigfrid Stenberg was sentenced to ten years in prison at Leavenworth and fined \$30,000 for his membership in the IWW and his role at *Allarm* and the Scandinavian Propaganda League. Henry Bengtson, editor of *Svenska Socialisten* [The Swedish Socialist] in Chicago, recalls that Stenberg was arrested for sending a telegram that read “Sänd Allarm” [Send *Allarm*] only to be interpreted by the prosecuting attorney as a call for armed insurrection meaning “Send all arms” (1999, 101). The Department of Justice in responding to Stenberg’s application for clemency, however, notes a different telegram, this one to William “Big Bill” Haywood who helped found the IWW, “Well, I am busy as hell now. We got to have the paper ready in a few days and they seized all the stuff for the next issue. Got to get something, however, in spite of the ‘law and order bunch’” (Daugherty 1922, 7). The prosecution used that telegram, along with a letter to the editor of the IWW newspaper *Solidarity*, the general content of *Allarm*, and his membership in the IWW, to find Stenberg guilty (Daugherty 1922, 6–8). With IWW members in prison, the organization gave money to the families of the men who were jailed to assist them due to their loss of income. Before and during the trial, the IWW in Chicago published the *Jail Bulletin*, which later became the *Daily Bulletin* and then the *Trial Bulletin*, with news about the prisoners and the

trial. In the February 14, 1918, issue, the *Jail Bulletin* notes that Sigfrid Stenberg's wife, Gertrude, received ten dollars on January 4, 12, 19, and 26, as assistance ("Disbursements" 1918).

Stenberg served thirty-three months, twenty-six of them at Cook County Jail, the remaining seven at Leavenworth, before his sentence was commuted and he was released in November of 1922 on the condition that he be deported to Sweden (Kohn 1994, 134). His fellow Swedish activists, Carl Ahlteen and Ragnar Johanson, were convicted on similarly questionable evidence. Ahlteen served time for writing articles in *Allarm* and for sending material through the mail that was deemed by the authorities to be revolutionary, Johanson for speaking at pro-IWW rallies. Like many IWW immigrants who had been convicted, Ahlteen, Johanson, and Stenberg had to agree to never enter the United States again, because as Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty wrote to President Warren G. Harding, "[s]o far as the records disclose, the applicants have been all along agitators and destructionists, not only antagonistic to this country but against any established form of government, and on the whole I believe the country would be better off without them" (1922, 11).

The harassment, arrests, and mass trials that resulted in convictions and sentences like that of Stenberg's had gone on for years. The Department of Justice noted the ease of conviction in various interdepartmental memos and eventually admitted that many of the cases against the IWW lacked enough evidence to justify the charges, let alone the convictions (Kohn 1994, 14–20). It was not until after World War I that the United States began releasing prisoners convicted under the Espionage Act, usually with commutations rather than pardons (Kohn 1994, 9–14). By then, the damage had already been done to organizations like the IWW. The targeted persecution of activists devastated many left-wing movements and separated families.

As early as 1914, before *Allarm* had even published its first issue, Joe Hill sat imprisoned in Utah, accused of murder. While fighting to have the accusation dismissed and then later the conviction overturned, Hill wrote letters to labor activists and IWW members around the United States. On November 29, 1914, less than a year before he was executed, Hill wrote to the editor of *Solidarity*:

There is one thing that is necessary in order to hold the old members and to get the would-be members interested in the class struggle and that is entertainment. The rebels of Sweden have realized that fact, and they have their blowouts regularly every week. And on account of that they have succeeded in organizing the female workers more extensively than any other nation in the world. The female workers are sadly neglected in the United States, especially on the West coast, and consequently we have created a kind of one-legged, freakish animal of a union, and our dances and blowouts are kind of stale and unnatural on account of being too much of a “buck” affair; they are too lacking the life and inspiration which the woman alone can produce.

The idea is to establish a kind of social feeling of good fellowship between the male and female workers, that would give them a little foretaste of our future society and make them more interested in the class struggle and the overthrow of the old system of corruption (Hill in Foner 1965, 16–17).

Hill’s letter and the numerous attempts to organize women suggest an understanding that for the One Big Union to be one big union, women had to be involved. In Minneapolis, for example, where so many Swedish women worked as the breadwinners, the IWW had the possibility of greatly increasing its ranks by organizing women. Hill’s ideas for organizing women, while laudable in the acknowledgement that women are neglected in the United States, are rooted in the predominantly male labor movement. Women need to be entertained. And it doesn’t hurt if men are entertained, but especially if they are entertained by women.

Elizabeth Faue argues in her book about women and the labor movement in Minneapolis that:

women workers, for the major portion of twentieth-century history, were either ignored or alienated by a labor movement that failed to acknowledge the connections between productive and reproductive labor and the importance of women’s work to the family economy. This failure was and is rooted first in the male dominance of the public arena

of the labor movement and second in labor theory which failed to acknowledge the connections between community and workplace (1991, xiv).

While the IWW did reach out to women and immigrants, attempting to make clear the connection between mistreatment and power disparities in the workplace with the same issues in the larger community outside of work, the IWW was not immune to the romanticization of the masculine worker, despite working to organize women (Faue 1991, 11). Pamphlets, songbooks, cartoons, even the masthead of *Allarm*, featured men, often shirtless, leading the way towards a better life through class warfare, direct action, and solidarity. One pamphlet in particular from 1933 titled “One Big Union of all the Workers” in the IWW Minneapolis Branch Collection at the Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, features Father Thomas J. Haggerty's Wheel describing the inclusive structure of the IWW. On the cover, however, stands a square-jawed man, shirtless, muscles rippling as he grips an IWW membership card in his left hand and a sledgehammer in his right. He towers over a dark cityscape as light seems to emanate from his body. It's a striking image. It's also an incredibly masculine image and one that seems to exclude the domestic service work that so many immigrant women toiled at when first arriving in the United States. But employers and even unions assumed that if a man was earning a fair wage, women workers did not need to worry about their own wages. A man's wage was supposed to pay for the entire family to survive, just as Evelina Månsson's manager stated when she was earning over two dollars per day as a seamstress. Of course, with so many single women coming to Minneapolis, with so many immigrant women like Signe Aurell coming to the United States, that assumption was condemning working women to poverty. That they often worked in isolation as domestic servants, further complicated efforts to organize women. Faue notes, however, that despite their isolation women still formed their own organizations, whether they

were informal support groups in their communities rather than at work, or more labor-oriented organizations like the Women's Trade Union League (1991, 10).

Signe Aurell, while clearly inspired by Joe Hill in many instances, did not agree with him in his suggestion that entertainment was the key to organizing women. Instead, she knew women to be capable unionists. She knew women could educate themselves and engage with the issues. She knew women could organize and fight for better pay and fair working conditions. She did not, however, dismiss the need for entertainment. As we will see in the next chapter, Signe Aurell's essay in *Allarm* titled "En uppmaning" was a call-to-action directed specifically at women in which she downplays the need to seek out entertainment in order to organize and instead focuses on education.

In 1918, 1,200 women did organize in Minneapolis as telephone operators went on strike for twelve weeks before a settlement was reached. However, the federal government did not allow the settlement because the women were deemed to be government workers due to the federal takeover of telephones and telegraphs during World War I. What followed was an increase in the number of women joining labor unions in Minneapolis—in 1916 there were 232 women in unions and by 1920, there were almost 1,600 (Faue 1991, 51). The rise in union membership in Minneapolis should not come as a total surprise. In 1916, Thomas Van Lear, a socialist, was elected mayor and he later appointed Lewis Harthmill, another socialist, as Chief of Police. But World War I and the federal crackdown on labor unions and socialist organizations with help from the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, the same organization that required all immigrants to complete an "Alien Registration and Declaration of Holdings" form in 1918, slowed the rise of socialist and radical organizations in Minneapolis. The innocuously titled

organization's mission was to protect Minnesotans from disloyal foreigners, union members, and other radicals, as defined by the commission itself (Millikan 2001, 100–142).

Aurell's 1916 incitement in *Allarm* for women to organize was not an aberration. In subsequent issues, other appeals appeared in the newspaper urging domestic service workers to join the burgeoning unionization effort. By March of 1917, *Allarm* had started publishing short articles, reminders, and essays about the unionization attempt, which Skandinaviska Propaganda Gruppen [The Scandinavian Propaganda League] of the IWW supported (Johanson 1917, 3). In the months that followed, a group of women organized The Domestic Workers Industrial Union No. 119 of the IWW. They held parties at the IWW Hall on 11 ½ Western Avenue in Minneapolis as well as twice-monthly meetings, which gave way to weekly meetings by February of 1918, at the same locale. Simultaneously, *Allarm* was publishing appeals to women to join the Domestic Workers Union in Seattle, Washington, demonstrating the reach of the newspaper.¹⁹ Not everyone supported the IWW though. Anna Kallander, who lived in Nooksack, WA, along with her husband wrote to a cousin in Sweden commenting on the Centralia Massacre²⁰: “My the IWW är just förskräckliga. De dödade 5 personer i denna Staten. Vi hade ett Bref från Henry. Han är i Tacoma, han sade, att di organiserate, så di måste driva dem ut från Tacoma” [My the IWW is just awful. They killed five people in this state. We received a letter from Henry. He is in Tacoma; he said that they organized there so they have to force them out of Tacoma] (Kallander and Kallander November 16, 1919, 13). Kallander, like many who opposed the IWW, including the government, saw the organization as a dangerous threat. Incidents like the one in Centralia fueled that fear.

Membership in the Industrial Workers of the World made you a radical, at least according to the government who was prosecuting the union members. Of course, Wobblies

were radicals. But first and foremost they were a bunch of workers, many of them immigrants, who took care of each other. That, in and of itself, was radical because the IWW served as a form of social welfare, just as the unions in Sweden provided a safety net to members who could not work and just as the IOGT took care of sick members like they had done for Signe Aurell. They helped each other's families when one of them was sick or injured or in jail. They provided strike funds and helped with legal aid. They worked together and for each other to try to create a more just society.

Aurell, far from southwest Washington, supported the direct action and organizing efforts of the IWW. While no extant evidence suggests that Aurell was involved in the unionization attempt in Minneapolis, she was living in Minneapolis at the time and her participation would hardly be surprising—in fact, it would be more surprising if she had *not* been involved considering how much she was publishing in the labor press. Despite the efforts of labor activists and organizers, state governments, sometimes with the aid of the federal government, continued efforts to dismantle the labor movement. As Signe Aurell's friends stood trial on spurious charges, she was witnessing the continued efforts of the Minnesota Public Safety Commission to eradicate any dissent, which they deemed unpatriotic. But despite these efforts to quash any perceived dissent, Signe Aurell continued to work for the labor movement, specifically writing for various left-leaning Swedish-language newspapers and publishing the majority of her work between 1918 and 1920.

¹⁰ Carl Ahlteen's last name is spelled differently depending on the source. I have chosen to use the spelling that he used as his byline in *Allarm* articles—Ahlteen. However, I have also seen his name spelled Altheen, Althén, and Altheén.

¹¹ The program in Willmar, Minnesota, was advertised in the *Willmar Tribune* on August 30 (page 8), September 6 (page 3), and September 13 (page 2) of 1916. The Spicer, Minnesota, program was advertised on page three of the *Willmar Tribune* on September 27, 1916.

¹² See Per Nordahl, *Weaving the Ethnic Fabric: Social Networks Among Swedish-American Radicals 1890-1940* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994) and Henry Bengtson, "Chicago's Swedish 'Book Cabin,'" *Swedish American Historical Quarterly*, 15.4 (1964): 149–166 for more on Wald and the founding of Bokstugan and Café Idrott.

¹³ Carl Ross points out in his book *The Finn Factor in American Labor, Culture and Society* that while the Judge found in favor of Svan, his reasoning was "probably no less racist" than the reasoning for bringing the case in the first place (115).

¹⁴ For more on Swedish-American organizations, see Ulf Beijbom, "Swedish-American Organizational Life," in ed. Harald Runblom and Dag Blanck, *Scandinavia Overseas: Patterns of Cultural Transformation in North America and Australia* (Uppsala: Centre for Multiethnic Research, 1990), 47–70.

¹⁵ Aurell appears several times in the meeting minutes from 1914. *Record* [No. 15 Minutes of Lincoln Lodge, Jan. 15th. 1914 July 12th. 1917], 7, 12, 35, 39, 41, 43, 63. Retrieved from the National IOGT Museum and Archive in Geneva, Illinois.

¹⁶ For more on how the Swedish community viewed Swedish domestic servants, see Joy K. Lintelman's articles "'America Is the Woman's Promised Land': Swedish Immigrant Women and American Domestic Service," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 8.2 (Spring 1989): 9-23; "'Our Serving Sisters': Swedish-American Domestic Servants and Their Ethnic Community," *Social Science History* 15.3 (1991): 381–395.

¹⁷ The preamble was amended in 1908, however, the first two sentences remained the same. For more see William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903–1933*, Second Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 39–40.

¹⁸ See *The Immigrant Labor Press in North America, 1840s-1970s: An Annotated Bibliography*, Dick Hoerder, ed., (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987) for an overview of the many different left-wing, labor, and radical Scandinavian-language newspapers.

¹⁹ These appeals can be found in several issues of *Allarm*, including the following: March 1917, p. 3; May 1917, p. 2 and 4; October 15, 1917, p. 4; November 1, 1917, p. 4; February 1, 1918, p. 4.

²⁰ On November 11, 1919, during an Armistice Day parade in Centralia, Washington, four American Legion members were killed and in the aftermath, one IWW member was taken from the prison and lynched by a Centralia mob and a deputy sheriff was later accidentally killed by a different Centralia mob. For more see John McClelland, Jr.'s *Wobbly War: The Centralia Story* (Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, 1987).

Chapter 3. *Don't Mourn, Educate: Signe Aurell and the Swedish-Language Press*

In December of 1915, Signe Aurell's first known publication appeared on the front page of the Minneapolis-based newspaper *Allarm* across from a large image of the executed labor activist, Joe Hill.

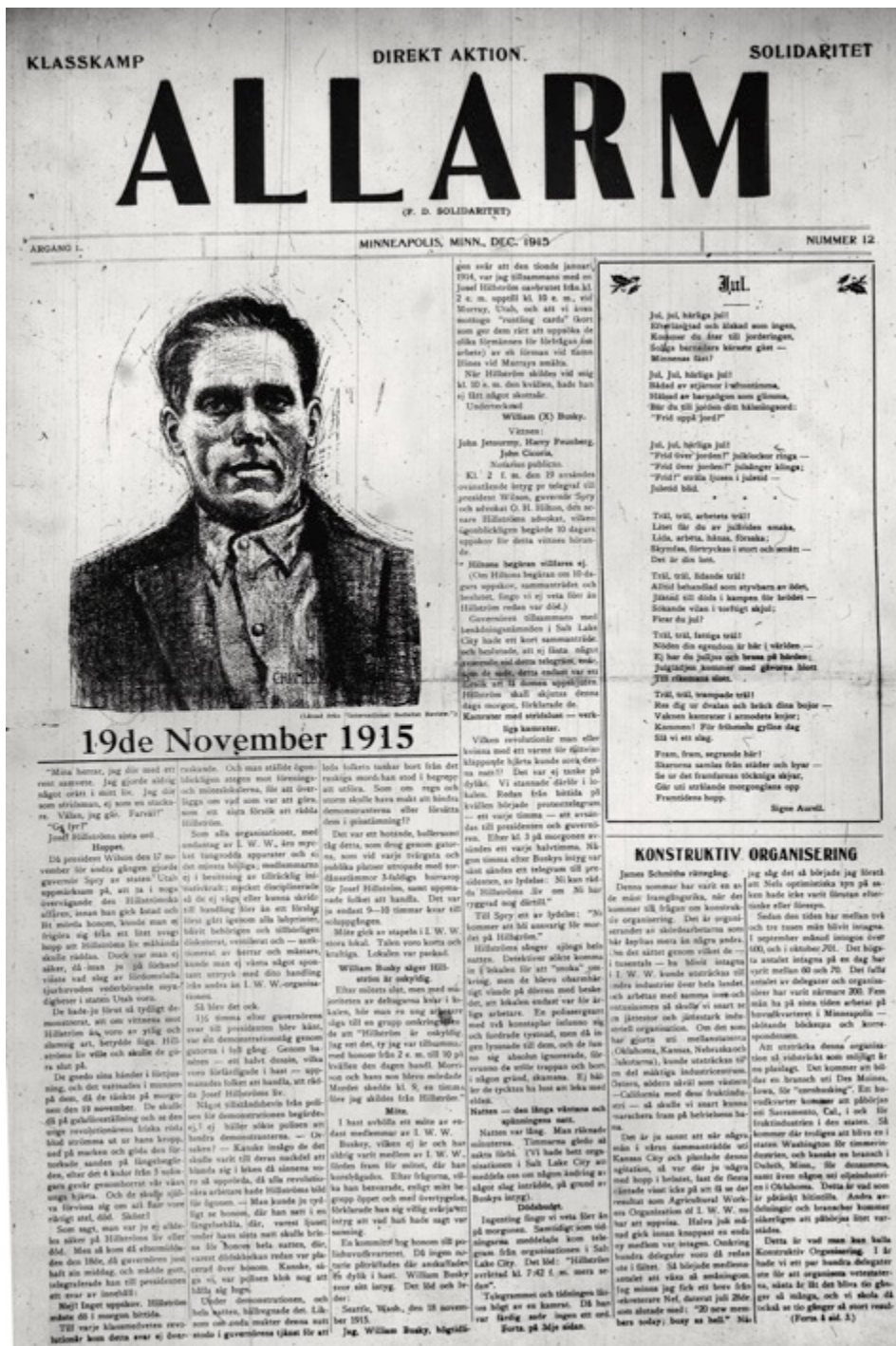


Fig. 3.1. Signe Aurell's first-known published poem, *Jul* (page 1 of *Allarm*, December 1915).

Just a few weeks prior, on November 19, 1915, at 7:42am, Joe Hill had yelled, defiantly, “Fire.” And the firing squad did just that. Hill died in Utah that day as a martyr, the troubadour of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), after a lengthy trial for a murder that he almost certainly did not commit. President Woodrow Wilson, the Swedish envoy to the United States, labor activists, and workers from around the world pleaded with Utah Governor William Spry to reconsider the impending execution. He did not. And so Joe Hill died. But his words live on. From his defiance in the face of the firing squad, to his request that his body not be buried in Utah, to his often-republished reminders to his fellow workers to organize, his words live on. His memory and his words inspired a young Signe Aurell.

The two would seem to be quite different, Joe Hill and Signe Aurell. Hill died young in the United States, an IWW martyr; Aurell died old, in Sweden and in obscurity. Hill wrote exclusively in English; Aurell wrote in Swedish. Hill eschewed his Swedishness, taking on a new identity and Anglicizing his name; Aurell embraced hers, eventually returning to live in Sweden. Hill’s name still resonates with many; Aurell’s name resonates with only a few. Nevertheless, though Signe Aurell may be significantly less known and her role in the labor movement may have differed from Hill’s, the two have much in common. They emigrated from Sweden in their early twenties near the turn of the century. They joined the IWW. They worked. They wrote. They suffered. They struggled. They published songs and poetry that appeared in the North American labor press and IWW songbooks. Maybe most important, they fought for the same ideals—a good life for workers and for immigrants, fair wages, safe working conditions, and the right to organize labor unions. They both worked within a tradition of labor poetry and song, engaging with a community of their peers to encourage the working class to unionize and also to expose inequality and promote the labor movement.

For Signe Aurell, that mission seems to have begun on the front page of *Allarm* in December of 1915. In the same issue, on page 3, her first translation from English to Swedish of “Joe Hill’s Last Will,” translated as “Mitt testamente” [My Will], appeared.²¹ Her Christmas-themed poem “Jul” [Christmas] occupied two columns above the fold, Joe Hill’s face staring out from across the page. The opening lines of Aurell’s poem about the holiday season are in stark contrast to the news dominating the paper that December. The leading article describes Hill’s final moments, last ditch efforts to save him, the reaction of his supporters, and, as reported by *Allarm*, his final words to his executioners: “Mina herrar, jag dör med ett rent samvete. Jag gjorde aldrig något orätt i mitt liv. Jag dör som stridsman, ej som en stackare. Välan, jag går. Farväl! Ge fyr!” [Gentlemen, I die with a clean conscience. I never did anything unjust in my life. I die as a rebel, not as a coward. Well, here I go. Farewell! Fire!] (Mattson 1915, 1).²² In a fitting tribute to Hill, just below the fold and directly under Aurell’s poem, an article titled “Konstruktiv Organisering” [Constructive Organizing] describes a successful summer of organizing workers in the Great Plains. The article continues on page 3, where Joe Hill’s final will—in fact a poetic incitement to labor activism—as translated by Aurell, complements Hill’s final words to his executioners from the first page. Hill’s will, in English, has become an essential part of labor history, reprinted, memorized, recited, and translated. Aurell’s translation would eventually be published in the Swedish IWW Songbook in the 1920s as “Joe Hills testamente” [Joe Hill’s Will].²³

Page 3 of the December issue of *Allarm*, like much of the rest of the issue, was dedicated to Hill’s execution. Filled with six columns of dense text, Aurell’s translation of “Joe Hill’s Last Will” breaks up the visual monotony and grabs the reader’s attention. It was an auspicious way for a labor activist to make her debut in the pages of a Swedish-language IWW organ, despite

the circumstances. The execution of Hill, his image dominating the fold, would surely have grabbed readers' attention and reached a wide audience interested in the Swedish-born songwriter of the IWW. In reading about Hill, they would have been introduced to Aurell as a poet and a translator. Despite the somber mood of the newspaper, Aurell did not disappoint, writing a poem that embodies the spirit of Hill by concluding in defiance and hope, while recognizing the travails of the working class, inequalities, and the need to fight for a better life. But more about that particular poem later.

Unlike Joe Hill, Signe Aurell wrote in her native language to fellow immigrants and especially to other women. While her poetry often spoke to the anonymous worker, Aurell also wrote about the role of women and mothers as educators in the labor movement, both explicitly and subtly. Her poems were a call to action for Swedish-speaking women in the United States, encouraging them to recognize systemic inequity and to break free from the oppressive working conditions they often faced. By publishing in the labor press, Aurell helped illuminate issues of class and gender to an array of audiences, from marginalized working women to women connected to the working class, and to Swedish immigrants more generally. In doing so, Aurell agitated for working-class women to seek out education while at the same time educating others.

During her time in the United States, Aurell's work as a laundress and seamstress made her intimately familiar with the life of a domestic worker. Her writing was a public affirmation of her position within the community that she sought to form: unionized Swedish immigrant women working as domestic servants. Poetry like Aurell's was frequently featured in the pages of the labor press—a medium that gave working-class authors a space in which to publish. Aurell published at least twenty-one poems (some of which appeared multiple times in different newspapers), two essays, two short stories, one translation, and one letter in six different

Swedish-American newspapers; simultaneously she published eight poems and one translation in two Swedish newspapers. In addition to her newspaper publications, Aurell self-published a collection of poems out of her Minneapolis home. Much of what Aurell wrote focused on the labor movement and class-consciousness from an IWW perspective. Aurell took part in what folklorist Archie Green called “laborlore,” which “covers expressivity by workers themselves and their allies: utterance, representation, symbol, code, artifact, belief, ritual. Such expressiveness cuts through conventional schemes that layer culture as well as divide it ideologically” (1993, 7). Writing as Aurell did was a political statement—she aligned herself with the labor movement, specifically the Industrial Workers of the World—and the laborlore she left us with “serves to bind people together and to give individuals a sense of dignity on the job and within the movement,” as Green suggests (2001, 50). Aurell’s writing is notable in that it contributes in a foreign language to an American tradition of laborlore.

Each poem, each short story, each essay that Signe Aurell wrote was an act of engagement in the cultural and political discussions ongoing in the Swedish-language press in the United States. That engagement was especially important because of the role of the foreign-language press in immigrant life. Between 1915 and 1920, Aurell used short stories, essays, and especially poetry to speak to a wide audience of people involved in, interested in, and friendly to the labor movement. But Aurell didn’t just publish in the labor press—she published widely throughout North America, including mainstream Swedish-language newspapers and temperance newspapers. However, by writing for periodicals that maintained close relationships with labor unions, Aurell and authors like her could subvert the mainstream publishing organs and ensure that their work went to print, further spreading their pro-labor message.

Community, Education, and Identity in the Nordic-American Press

Labor historian E.P. Thompson, on the first page of his preface in *The Making of the English Working Class*, writes “The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making” (1991, 8). That presence, that creation of culture and identity and community, that agency is an integral aspect of the role of working-class literature in the labor movement. Written by the working class, songs and poems, essays and articles, novels and short stories were all a part of the vibrant American working-class culture that ran parallel to that which Thompson describes in England. It was not, however, a monolithic working-class culture. The Industrial Workers of the World, for example, clashed publicly with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) over the need to organize not just skilled workers, but also unskilled workers. In doing so, songs, poems, even new vocabulary, were created to include IWW-members and exclude those who weren’t. Such sub-cultures within the labor movement had long-lasting effects on American culture and history, like the use of labor songs in direct action, and shorter-lasting effects, like the numerous Wobbly terms that have fallen by the wayside—the term “Wobbly” itself, for example, used to describe IWW members.

While the American working class was a vibrant one in creating culture, identity, and community, it was not created solely in English. In fact, authors such as Aurell, writing in Swedish in the Nordic-American language press, played an important role in helping to cultivate the emerging class identity of Scandinavian immigrant workers in the United States.

Although the community of Swedish immigrants may have been demographically narrow, thereby limiting the number of Swedish-language periodicals as compared to their more mainstream, English-language counterparts, the Nordic-American press was still a formidable institution, with papers in Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, and even Icelandic. These

newspapers helped readers assimilate to an American lifestyle while also allowing them to maintain connections to the communities they had left behind.²⁴

Just as Benedict Anderson and Adrian Hastings both argue that the written word was key in creating national community, newspapers and proletarian literature were key in creating community based on class consciousness.²⁵ In the Old World, Nordic proletarian authors in the early 1900s used their work to do both; literary scholar Kati Launis, for example, writes that Finnish working-class literature “offered a specific, cultural territory within which class distinctions and frontiers were made visible, and the cultural, historical meanings of class were constructed and analyzed” (Launis 2015, 30). The same is true of authors like Signe Aurell, who wrote in Swedish while abroad, for an immigrant audience. By writing in their native language, working-class authors in the pages of the Swedish-language press created a community of Swedish-speaking immigrants in the United States who may never have met one another, but still shared lived experiences as workers and immigrants. At the same time, these authors helped shed light on the difficulties of those shared experiences, pointing out, just as working-class writers in Scandinavia did, that class isn’t just economic but also cultural.

About 225 Swedish-language newspapers were founded during the period of large-scale Swedish immigration to the United States (Beijbom 1987, 384). Many of these publications were short-lived; newspapers tried to educate immigrants, to help them assimilate, and also allow them to maintain connections with the Old World, which was idealistic and ultimately unsustainable in most cases. The Swedish-American press consisted of hundreds of businesses, each trying to earn enough money to publish the next issue. Newspapers sold advertising space, relied on subscriptions, and, at times, accepted money for varied editorial support of positions on politicians and patent medicine reviews, as documented by Ulf Jonas Björk (2000, 275–276).

Given their limited market and the scale of the competition, however, more than half ceased publishing after less than five years (Beijbom 1987, 384).

The labor press followed a similar trajectory. For many members of the working class, periodicals played a significant role in their understanding of and participation in the labor movement. Because of compulsory education in Sweden, writers who published extensively in Swedish had access to a literate immigrant audience and, when publishing in working-class periodicals, an audience that understood and appreciated working-class literature. Consumption and production of such literature thus circulated through a relatively small ethnic community, but encouraged immigrants to identify themselves ethnically and also by class as laborers.

But getting published was not always easy due to what literary scholar Constance Coiner calls the “professional-managerial class—the class in which most literary agents, editors, reviewers, taste-making intellectuals, critics, and professors reside,” making the Swedish-language labor press an important option for immigrant writers. Because of these difficulties, the very publication of working-class art can be viewed as class conflict—and the lack of publication a form of erasure (Coiner 1995, 254). This erasure ensured that the literature of the working class was not read, discussed, or allowed to reach a wider audience. Periodicals, especially those supported by the IWW and other labor-friendly organizations, became a way for the working class to publish—to take part in class conflict—by circumventing the professional-managerial class; today they provide a glaring example of the lack of representation in other mediums. Michael Denning, Magnus Nilsson, and Lillian S. Robinson suggest, respectively, that working-class authors wrote to reinforce, educate, and even define various roles in the labor movement (Denning 1998, 211; Nilsson 2011, 185; Robinson 1986, 232). Nordic-language labor

newspapers provided an outlet and audience for early working-class writers, including Signe Aurell, to accomplish all three by publishing poetry, short stories, and essays.

While labor periodicals aimed to educate the immigrant working class through poetry, essays, and creative works—all early examples of proletarian literature—the newspapers had to stay in business. Forty-four Swedish-American labor periodicals were published in Swedish with a rather low rate of success; half of these publications were out of business before a year had passed—a lifetime significantly shorter than less political Swedish-American newspapers. Only two labor periodicals remained in print for more than twenty years (Hoerder 1987, 75).

When Aurell arrived in the United States in 1913, several Swedish-language labor newspapers had established themselves, including *Arbetaren* [The Worker], which had been published since 1894 and was written exclusively in Swedish from 1896 onward (Brook 1987, 149). During her time in the United States, additional left-wing Swedish-language periodicals were founded, such as *Allarm* [Alarm] in 1915 and *Bokstugan* [The Book Cabin] in 1919 (Brook, Danielsen, Mikkelsen 1987, 89; Brook 1987, 150). It wasn't long before Aurell began publishing poetry in *Allarm*, *Arbetaren*, and *Bokstugan* that focused on the challenges facing working immigrants. In no small part, the poems, essays, and other writings published in these and other newspapers helped birth Swedish-language proletarian literature in the United States—and this, of course, is true of authors like Signe Aurell just as it is for her better-known male counterparts.

Signe Aurell, Translator

Signe Aurell translated one poem by Joe Hill—the poem that appeared on page 3 of *Allarm* in December of 1915.

Joe Hill's Last Will My will is easy to decide,	Mitt testamente²⁶ Mitt testamente är helt kort,
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For there is nothing to divide. My kin don't need to fuss and moan— “Moss does not cling to a rolling stone.”	Ty intet finns att skifta bort; Sörj ef [ej] kamrater, blott gå på, “Rullande sten ej moss kan få.”
My body? Ah, if I could choose, I would to ashes it reduce, And let the merry breezes blow My dust to where some flowers grow.	Minn kropp till aska gör till slut Strö stoftet fritt för vinden ut På glättig lek i rymden blå Till nejderna där blommer stå.
Perhaps some fading flower then Would come to life and bloom again. This is my last and final will. Good luck to all of you. Joe Hill	En ros vars fågring kanske flytt Då blomma kan en gång på nytt Det är min vilja, samt därtill Jag önskar lycka, er Jo Hill. (övers. av Signe Aurell.)

It was Joe Hill's last will and Signe Aurell's only translation. At least it is her only *known* translation. Franklin Rosemont, in his book about Joe Hill notes that along with Ture Nerman, a well-known Swedish socialist activist and labor poet, Signe Aurell translated several songs by Hill (2003, 75, 441–442). Rosemont echoes that claim again in *The Big Red Songbook* (Green, Roediger, Rosemont, et al. 2007, 16). Yet, in the pages of Swedish-language IWW songbooks and Swedish-language newspapers, Signe Aurell's name only appears on one translation: “Joe Hill's Last Will.” That one poem does appear under three different titles as translated by Aurell—“Mitt testamente,” “Joe Hills testamente,” and “Joe Hills sista vilja”—published in the United States and later in the Swedish newspaper *Brand* on March 4, 1922, as well as several editions of *Sånger av Joe Hill (Josef Hillström)* [Songs of Joe Hill (Josef Hillström)] and *I.W.W.'s sångbok* [I.W.W.'s Songbook] by Stockholm Branch av Marintransportarbetarnas Industriella Union (MTAIU) no 510 av IWW [Stockholm Branch of Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union 510 of the IWW]. The three variations on the title may explain the misconception that Aurell translated several works. Whether Aurell translated the many Joe Hill songs that have no attribution is hard to say. And maybe it doesn't matter. What is clear is that Aurell, like many

Swedes and many labor activists, drew inspiration from Joe Hill's life and works. Especially his calls to organize.

Calls to action were familiar in the IWW and the labor movement, and no call to action has endured quite like Joe Hill's: "Don't mourn, organize." Of course, Hill didn't quite word it like that; the original telegram to William "Big Bill" Haywood of the IWW read "Don't waste any time in mourning. Organize" (Hill in Foner 1965, 84). That phrase, along with numerous songs and poems by Joe Hill, has been translated to Swedish. The intentions of his words remain the same, and today those words, slightly modified, adorn music collections, t-shirts, and protest banners, in both the United States and Sweden.



Fig. 3.2. May 1 celebration in Stockholm, Sweden on May 1, 2015, with banner reading "Sörj inte. Organisera!" [Don't mourn. Organize!] (photo by author).

Joel Emmanuel Hägglund immigrated to the United States in 1902. Better known as Joe Hill he became famous for his work in the Industrial Workers of the World as an organizer, songwriter, and poet. His execution would make him the man who never died and an international labor movement icon. With his execution approaching, he was asked by a friend to give his biography, and his reply was telling:

Biography do you say? No! We shall not ruin the fine letter paper in writing such trash-- The only time that exists for me is the present. I am a 'citizen of the world' and I was born on a planet called the Earth. On which side or edge of this planet I first saw the light means so little that it is not worth talking about (Hill in Foner 1965, 59).

His answer should not be surprising really. Hill changed his name and wrote his songs and poems in English, shunning his Swedish roots. For his labor songs, Hill was known, and continues to be known, as one of the most popular IWW songwriters, but the IWW used songs and poetry before Hill became a Wobbly (Rosemont 2003, 53).

Just as Hill was not necessarily the catalyst for IWW songwriting, neither was he the only IWW poet. Several immigrant or second-generation immigrant IWW poets, including the Finnish-American Matt Valentine Huhta, known as T-Bone Slim, wrote labor poetry and songs in English rather than in their native languages (Rosemont 2003, 63). Still others did write in their native language, but many of these IWW poets and songwriters have been ignored by American audiences (Green, Roediger, Rosemont, et al. 2007, 9). That neglect, unfortunately, leaves unacknowledged the contributions to the American labor movement of immigrants writing in their native tongues and the way that foreign language songs contextualized the creative, cultural, ideological, and political contexts in which the songs were written and performed and added important international voices to the American labor movement (Leary 2010, 15).

While Joe Hill turned to English to promote the IWW message, to truly reach an international audience befitting the message of the Industrial Workers of the World, Joe Hill's ideas and words needed to be translated—even into Joe Hill's native language. That's where poets and translators like Signe Aurell come in. Along with her translation of "Joe Hill's Last Will," Aurell wrote two poems inspired by Joe Hill. Two different poems, both bearing the title "Josef Hillström," appear in Aurell's collection of poetry, *Irrbloss*. Both also appeared in *Allarm*, the first in November of 1916, and the second in November of 1917 commemorating the anniversary of Hill's execution.²⁷ "Josef Hillström (1)" actually debuted in Sweden, just two months after Joe Hill's execution. *Syndikalisten* [The Syndicalist] was a weekly newspaper published by Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation [Central Organization of the Workers of Sweden] in Malmö, Sweden, in 1916 when Aurell published her poem about Joe Hill. Extremely supportive of the IWW, the newspaper first began publishing in 1911 and continued for nearly a decade, before becoming the daily *Arbetaren* [The Worker] in 1921. At the time of Joe Hill's impending execution though, Hill was still somewhat unknown in Sweden. In an open-letter by S.G.J from Seattle published in April of 1915, the writer explains that:

I.W.W. för för närvarande en strid för tre medlemmar som äro i Rättvisans klor. Den ene är Joe Hill, av svenskt ursprung, om han är född i Sverige vet jag icke. Han är författare av en mängd populära arbetarsånger på engelska språket. Sitter arresterad i mormonstaten Utah i avvaktan på dom. Han är dock icke arresterad i sammanhang med organisationens strider. Han är åtalad för att ha skjutit en handlande, för vilket inget som helst verkliga bevis eller antagliga bevis finnes. Det tros att han haft kärleksaffärer med någon gift mormonkvinna och icke kan bevisa sin oskuld utan att inblanda sin käreasta och komma i annat krångel (S.G.J. 1915, 4).

[The IWW is currently fighting for three members who are caught in Justice's claws. One of them is Joe Hill, of Swedish descent, whether he was born in Sweden or not, I don't know. He is the author of several popular labor songs in the English language. Arrested in the Mormon state of Utah awaiting his sentence. He was, however, not arrested in connection with any IWW fights. He's been accused of shooting a store-owner, for which there is absolutely no evidence. It's thought that he had an affair with a married

Mormon woman and cannot prove his innocence without involving his love and getting into more trouble.]

As Hill's execution neared, a few articles appeared about the case further familiarizing Hill to a Swedish audience, but it wasn't until after his death that Joe Hill began appearing regularly in the pages of *Syndikalist*. First came the news of his death, then in January of 1916, Signe Aurell published "Josef Hillströms död." The poem, which would eventually be renamed "Josef Hillström (1)," was well traveled. After debuting in Sweden, the poem was published later that year in the United States in *Allarm*, then *Nya Världen* on November 15, 1919, as well as *Irrbloss* in 1919, and then back to Sweden in *Brand* on September 27, 1919, and *Sånger av Joe Hill (Josef Hillström)*, *I.W.W.'s Sångbok* in 1928 and 1929, and finally back in the United States in *IWW Skandinavisk Sång Bok*, probably published around 1930.

Josef Hillströms död	Josef Hillström's Death
Så föll han för kulornas mördande stål I kampen mot våldet till slut De rika, de stora ha hunnit sitt mål Och segrat som alltid förut. Om liv eller frihet han tiggde dem ej, Han fordrade rättvisa blott, Och svaret var domarens stenhårda Nej! Och bössornas dödande skott. Den tystnat den stämma som manande ljöd I livsvarm och segerrik tro; Det hjärta som klappat med brinnande glöd Har stelnat i dödsfylans ro. Dock minnet skall leva i kommande tid. Hans sång, fast vi sångaren mist, Skall följa vår fana i sekellång strid, Till seger och lycka till sist. Och vinden med frihetens budskap en gång Skall susa kring länder och hav; Och sjunga sin mäktiga, jublande sång För blommor och gräs på hans grav. Den morgonsol, varom han diktat och drömt,	He fell to the cold bullet's murderous steel Fighting violence until the end The rich, the powerful, they've made their deal, Always they've won and did not bend. He did not beg for his life nor for freedom, But demanded only justice, The judge's response, a stone-cold no, did come With the rifle shot's deadly kiss. It silenced that voice which was urging us on With faith lively and triumphant. His heart, beating strongly with burning passion Has succumbed to death's contentment. But his memory shall forever endure. His song, while we singers will grieve, Shall follow our banner in battle, be sure, Triumph and joy we shall achieve. A message of freedom on the wind, one day Will blow across countries and seas And singing its great, joyous song all the way For flowers where he rests in peace. The morning sun, of which he wrote and dreamed

Skall säkert med löften och hopp, Ur skuggor och tårar som strålglansen gömt För kommande släkten gå opp. Signe Aurell.	Shall surely with promise and hope, Through shadows and tears hidden, fin'ly redeemed For the next generation rise up. Signe Aurell.
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Poems like Aurell's were part of a recovery of Joe Hill into a Swedish context. Coupled with translations of his own words into Swedish, Hill was introduced to a Swedish-speaking audience. Aurell translated not just the one poem, but with her poems about him, translated Hill as an ideal, as a labor activist worth knowing and even worth emulating. While labor activists at the time may not have known that Joe Hill was born in Sweden, his ideas and his words resonated with the labor movement in both the United States and Sweden. That he was of Swedish descent helped, but it was his calls to organize that have lived on. In fact, Aurell's own work about Hill demonstrates just how long lasting that resonance was. Nearly fifteen years after first publishing a poem about Joe Hill, her poetry was still appearing in IWW Songbooks in the United States and Sweden. Her work in translating Hill culturally and linguistically for a Swedish-speaking audience played an important role in turning Hill into a labor icon in Sweden as well as reinforcing a sense of solidarity between Swedish-speakers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Signe Aurell, Short Story Writer

On April 17, 1904, Signe Aurell was confirmed in the Church of Sweden and received an A for her confirmation grade (Gryts kyrka 1895–1924, 10). Born to a family of teachers and church musicians, it isn't surprising that Aurell passed with flying colors—her grandfather and uncle both served as cantors in the local church (Olsson 1992, 47). How the priest who confirmed her would have graded two of her later short stories is another question.

Both of the stories Aurell published shared religious themes: the first, “En saga om en saga” [A tale about a tale] appeared in *Allarm* on April 15, 1918, just one month before the newspaper ceased publication and just a few months after Sigfrid Stenberg and Carl Ahlteen—both IWW members working for the newspaper—were arrested; the second, “Bara en historia” [Just a story], appeared in *Nya Världen* on March 8, 1919, after Stenberg and Ahlteen had begun to serve their prison sentences at Leavenworth Penitentiary. *Nya Världen* was published weekly in Chicago from January 25, 1919, until December 20, 1919. Unlike every other Scandinavian-language IWW newspaper, the General Executive Board of the IWW, rather than a Scandinavian group, published *Nya Världen* under the IWW motto: “Orätt mot en är orätt mot alla” [An injury to one is an injury to all] (Brook 1987, 162). In the face of mounting losses, the newspaper was shuttered after less than a year. As an IWW organ, the newspaper did not spend too much time publishing religious-themed articles, poetry, or short stories, but that doesn’t mean the IWW stayed away from religion completely.

Songwriters in the labor movement had long used religion to advocate for social change, especially through song and poetry. Believing that God was a benevolent God and had imparted free will upon all people meant that the conditions that left the working class downtrodden were conditions that could be overcome. No one was fated to poverty, or to riches for that matter (Halker 1991, 138–139). Instead, as folklorist Bucky Halker writes, “Christianity demanded social change” (1984, 224). While Joe Hill appropriated hymns to create songs such as “The Preacher and the Slave” and “There is Power in a Union,” mocking the hypocrisy of many religious institutions, Signe Aurell used her knowledge of Christianity to appeal to God-fearing Swedish speakers of the labor movement. Perhaps her time as an IOGT member influenced her approach; temperance, labor, and Christianity movements all hoped society would change.

Activists like Aurell could change it. In both short stories, Aurell describes God as sympathetic to the IWW and labor activists—a reminder that the tenets of Christianity, at least the Christianity that Aurell believed in, were complementary to the goals of the labor movement. Her stories are part of a larger tradition of religiously inclined laborlore, which are worth discussing further.

Archie Green has written specifically about the “Heaven’s Gate” motif, in which a worker appears at the gates of heaven. The stories tend to be funny—in one, for example, a prospector from Alaska convinces St. Peter to follow him to Hell in search of gold—but they also carry with them an insider’s knowledge about work and working culture (Green 1996, 64–65). These jokes and stories are speaking to an already established community of workers; they make fun of themselves and their fellow workers, they recognize their own reasons for working (or not), and they incorporate other stories, jokes, and rumors. These are the tales that, as Green writes, “can be told anywhere workers gather, and laborlore abounds with such stories” (2001, 49). One such story by Ralph Winstead, also known as William Akers, collected in *Rebel Voices*, is titled “Tightline Johnson Goes to Heaven” and is representative of religious-themed laborlore (1988, 87–93).²⁸

Tightline Johnson falls asleep and dreams of his arrival in heaven. He is given an audience with God, who runs down the list of Tightline’s sins and denies him entrance to heaven. Jesus, though, appeals to his father and convinces God to allow Tightline to defend himself. And Tightline does. He tells the story of a Swede who dies smelting iron in Idaho and then he tells the story of his own life, his work, and his radicalization. He grows more and more agitated as he lists the oppression he has faced as a member of the working class. Finally, he bellows, “How would you act and what would you do? Just answer me that!” And God breaks

down in tears. We don't hear God's response; instead, suddenly, Tightline Johnson says "when I woke up it was mornin'" (Akers 1988, 93). God's tears suggest Tightline was a persuasive speaker and that Tightline is worthy of a place in heaven. Of course, we, along with Tightline, are jolted back to reality as he wakes from his dream and we cannot know God's final decision, but regardless, the message is clear—Christianity, God, Jesus, all of them can support the work of the IWW.

Even Joe Hill uses the Heaven's Gate motif in his satirical song about "Mr. Block" who, according to Hill, wrongly supports the American Federation of Labor and the Socialist Party of America. Block, upon his arrival at the Pearly Gates says to Saint Peter "Oh, Mr. Peter, one word I'd like to tell,/I'd like to meet the Astorbilts and John D. Rockefeller,"²⁹ to which St. Peter responds "Is that so?/You'll meet them down below" (Green, Roediger, Rosemont, et al. 2007, 117). Similarly, in "Casey Jones—The Union Scab," Hill sends Casey Jones to Heaven, where St. Peter says "our musicians went on strike;/You can get a job a'scabbing any time you like," before Angels's Union No. 23 sends Jones down to Hell where the Devil tells the locomotive driver that he got what he deserved for scabbing (Green, Roediger, Rosemont, et al. 2007, 104). Both serve as reminders to workers of the importance of class-consciousness and solidarity. To break from the working-class and support the bosses by scabbing or by not supporting the IWW can damn a worker to Hell.

The intersections of Wobbly-lore and Christianity are not unique, however. Finnish-American singers perpetuated the "Bad Finn" as a stock character who often reveled in rebellion, speaking up and acting out against powerful institutions like the church. Mixing humor, sex, and politics, with a bit of radicalism, these singers subverted the expectations of the "Good Finn," the "good immigrant" and emphasized the hypocrisy of the American working-

class world that they were a part of (Frandy 2010, 29–45). Aurell’s stories are working within this same tradition. While humorous at times, Aurell mixes religion and labor to demonstrate the ways in which Christianity and the IWW overlap as they support, and even fight for, the rights of the oppressed. But it is here Aurell deviates a bit from tales like the one about Tightline Johnson. God, Saint Peter, and Abraham need no convincing of the benefits of the IWW and the labor movement in Aurell’s stories; rather they help to legitimize the labor movement, instead of forcing the labor movement to defend itself. The two short stories, both in IWW publications, create a community of workers by speaking to Swedish immigrants who would have, most likely, been confirmed in the Church of Sweden—in 1910 only 2.43% of children born in Sweden were either unbaptized or had not yet taken communion and by 1920 that number was still only 3.87% (Svenska kyrkan 1920–1984). These immigrants then would have been familiar with the Christian faith; they would have still carried that religious knowledge with them to the United States.

In “En saga om en saga” [A tale about a tale], Aurell falls asleep, just like Tightline Johnson. But instead of a worker heading up to heaven to speak with God, one of God’s representatives, Abraham, descends to earth with a story specifically for readers of *Allarm*. It’s a story of the creation of earth and humans—a story that Aurell and other Swedish immigrants would have known. In fact, Aurell tells Abraham that herself: “I begynnelsen skapade Gud himmel och jord. Den där gamla historien ha vi ju alla hört sedan urminnes tider, avbröt jag, men då började Abraham från början igen. I begynnelsen skapade Gud himmel och jord” [In the beginning, God created heaven and earth. We’ve all heard that old story since the dawn of time, I interrupted, but then Abraham just started from the beginning again. In the beginning, God created heaven and earth] (1918, 3). It turns out that the story Abraham delivers is just a

little bit different than the account found in Genesis, but by this early interruption Aurell gives a nod to her fellow Swedish immigrants, who were surely deeply familiar with the Bible and still remembered their religious education that would have made Genesis common knowledge.

In creating mankind, Abraham tells Aurell that God wanted everyone to have rights: “Det var inte hans mening att dela människorna i två klasser. Gud skapade aldrig en överklass lika litet som han skapade en arbetarklass” [It wasn’t His intention to divide people into two classes. God never created a ruling class just as he never created a working class] (Aurell 1918, 3). But Abraham reveals that the people on earth made things difficult for themselves. By not using the gifts God gave them, a ruling class was able to rise up and subjugate everyone else. Religion, taxes, even tithes all perpetuate the oppressive system. But it is here that Aurell differentiates her story from laborlore that relies on a religious motif. Rather than make fun of religion, or the workers, or even force the workers to appeal to God, Aurell’s God and Abraham recognize the power of the labor movement:

Det är allt synd om människorna, tyckte jag. Synd om dem, svarade Gud, det är allt så lagom synd om dem. Det är just rätt åt dem. Varför använda de inte sin hjärna som jag gav dem. Ville de bara göra det så skulle snart allt det där trasslet där nere på jorden vara klarat upp och skillnaden mellan fattiga och rika vara utjämnad. Men kunde vi inte göra något för att hjälpa dem, tyckte jag. Nehej du Abraham, sade Gud, det tror jag inte vi befattar oss med. Här hjälper ingenting, men ha människorna själva ställt till allt det där trasslet så få de själva klara upp det också. För resten ser jag att I.W.W. är där nere och regerar och då blir det nog snart bra i alla fall. Den organisationen begriper mer om den saken än både du och jag. Burrrrrrr lät allarmklockan och jag vaknade (1918, 3).

[Mankind is to be pitied, I thought. Pitied, answered God, don’t pity them. They got what they deserved. Why didn’t they use the brains that I gave them? If they just used their brains, that mess down there on Earth would be cleaned up in no time and the disparity between rich and poor would be evened out. But couldn’t we do something to help them, I wondered. No siree, Abraham, said God, that’s no concern of ours. Nothing we do will help, if the people themselves have created this mess then they’ll have to clean it up themselves also. And anyway, I see that the IWW is in charge down there so it will probably work out for the best. That organization understands more about that issue than both you and me. Riiiiing went the alarm clock and I woke up.]

Abraham's lament about pitying mankind seems to mirror August Strindberg's *Ett drömspel* [A Dream Play], in which the goddess Indra's daughter, Agnes, repeatedly says "Det är synd om människorna!" [Mankind is to be pitied] as she is introduced to the travails of mortal humans on Earth. Just like Abraham in Aurell's story, Indra's daughter descends from the heavens to interact with humans. Abraham, of course, only speaks with Signe Aurell, whereas Strindberg's play includes a scene in which Agnes meets several coalheavers who impress upon her the dangerous class inequalities that dominate their lives (1917, 79–84). Aurell would have most likely been familiar with Strindberg as a champion for the working class and by giving a slight nod to Strindberg's work, connected the Swedish literary scene with the Swedish-American labor movement.

As Abraham continues to explain God's views on the working class, the state of the labor movement, and the IWW, Aurell wakes from her dream, just like Tightline Johnson. Of course, Tightline Johnson never hears God's final judgment. Signe Aurell does. God supports the IWW, elevating the organization above even God Himself as experts on poverty and inequality. While Aurell places blame on the workers who did not use their brains, who did not stop a ruling class from subjugating others, who did not exercise their free will to the best of their God-given abilities, she also reconciles religion within the labor movement. Aurell's Christianity is one that recognizes the rights of the oppressed, just like the labor movement; it's one that acknowledges class inequality, just like the labor movement. Her short story reaches out to a religious audience, a Swedish-speaking audience deeply influenced by Christianity, to legitimize the IWW and to remind Swedish immigrants to live their religion by joining the IWW.

Archie Green writes that laborlore includes "short anecdotal tales told to reinforce philosophical positions and to build solidarity in times of stress" (2001, 47). In "Bara en

historia” [Just a story], Aurell adds her own story to the “Heaven’s Gate” motif at a time of great stress for IWW members. Rather than a messenger descending from heaven, a worker, specifically an American, ascends to heaven in search of help. God, surprised that an American is in heaven, asks St. Peter what the man wants. Keys, comes the answer. Keys to Leavenworth Penitentiary.

Leavenworth housed hundreds of prisoners convicted in violation of the 1917 Espionage Act, the 1917 Selective Service Act, and the 1918 Sedition Act. Many were Wobblies. Many were convicted with spurious evidence after years of targeted harassment by the United States government.³⁰ Several Swedes were among the hundreds of prisoners incarcerated at Leavenworth. These include Carl Altheen, who edited *Allarm* at the time of his arrest in 1917, Ragnar Johanson, who was responsible for organizing the Domestic Workers Industrial Union in Seattle, and Sigfrid Stenberg, who served as manager of *Allarm* when he was arrested in 1917. Aurell shared a residence with Stenberg in 1917 (Minneapolis Directory Company 1917, 223, 2051). Perhaps that made this short story a little more personal, although the message is similar to “En saga om en saga.” God is not impressed by the inability of the folks down on Earth to take care of things themselves, but there is still hope. In fact, God goes so far as to advocate for direct action in order to convince the ruling class to release the prisoners from Leavenworth:

“Det är just rätt åt honom”, sade Gud. “Här komma de fårskallarna långa vägar och fråga efter nycklar, och så glömma de alldeles bort att de ha ett medel rätt i händerna på sig, som öppnar fängelseportar bättre än några nycklar. Tänk till exempel om de skulle hitta på att bli sjuka, alla de tusen och tusen arbetarna där nere, alla på samma gång. Och tänk om kapitalisterna skulle få veta att enda medicinen och enda medlet att få dem friska och tillbaka till fabrikerna igen vore att släppa ut deras kamrater. Tror du inte att det skulle hjälpa bättre än några nycklar? Men det tänka de dumbommarna inte på. De bara tro att man skall hjälpa dem med allting. De springa där nere och svära och leva rövare och vilja ha nycklar. Jag blir så arg när jag tänker på allt besvär jag hade med att skapa de uslingarna. Jag till och med gav dem ett stycke hjärna var i skallen fast det ser ut som om de skulle ha slarvat bort den för länge sedan. Jag bryr mig inte om dem mer. Vi skola hålla ögonen på Europa ett tag i stället, för där går det muntert till. Det fröjdar mitt

gamla hjärta när jag ser hur bolschevikarna styra med det där nere. Det är folk som det är kläm i. Där står storgubbarna i arbetsbyxor och blåskjorta och sköta bälgen och släggan” (Aurell 1919, 2).

[“He got what he deserved,” God said. “Those blockheads come all this way to ask about keys, but they seem to completely forget that they have in their own hands means even more effective than keys to open the prison gates. Just imagine if they all decided to get sick, thousands and thousands of workers down there, all at the same time. And imagine if the capitalists realized that the only medicine and the only means to cure the workers and get them back in the factories again would be to release their comrades. Don’t you think that that would work better than any key? But those dummies don’t think about that. They just think that I’m supposed to help them with everything. They run around down there and swear and raise hell and just want keys. I get so mad when I think about all the trouble I went to in creating those wretches. I even gave each of them some brains in their heads, although it looks like they frittered away those long ago. I don’t even care about them anymore. We should keep an eye on Europe for a while instead; it’s going well there. It warms my old heart to see the Bolsheviks in charge down there. Those people know what they’re doing. In Europe the bosses are standing in workpants and blue shirts working the bellows and the hammer.]

Once again, God supports the labor movement. In fact, God calls for civil disobedience, a sickout to remind the ruling class who is in charge. God seems to even approve of the Bolsheviks in Russia and Finland, fighting for socialism and a working class revolution. Similar to the “Heaven’s Gate” motif stories that Green describes, there is insider knowledge here, not necessarily wisdom specific to a trade, but an acknowledgement of the power of the workers and the power of direct action. And just as those stories have humorous aspects, so does Aurell’s. When Saint Peter informs God that the person at the gates of heaven is from the United States, Aurell writes, “Är det möjligt?” tyckte Gud. ‘Det var länge sedan någon därifrån hittade vägen hit” [“Are you serious?” wondered God. ‘It’s been a long time since someone found their way up here from America’] (Aurell 1919, 2). It’s a simple slight—there aren’t many Americans in heaven—but written in Swedish it recognizes that there was a divide, a distinction between Americans and immigrants. God privileges the Swedish immigrant here, while appreciating the importance and potential power of the labor movement. “Bara en historia” demonstrates how

Aurell used working-class literature and Christianity to create the type of solidarity that was necessary as IWW-members continued to be harassed by the United States government and even imprisoned in Leavenworth. And just as in “En saga om en saga,” Aurell encourages Swedish immigrants to embrace the Christianity they grew up with by recognizing that the fight for rights for the working class can be both a Christian cause and a Wobbly cause.

Halker writes that “[t]he labor movement may have stood on the shoulders of the working class, but its crusade still could be considered a crusade in the name of universal brotherhood and the betterment of humanity” (1991, 135). In “Bara en historia” and “En saga om en saga,” Aurell describes how Christianity and the labor movement, together, can change the world. But it requires direct action. God has done what He can. Now it’s the workers that must do the rest. It’s clear that Aurell’s religious upbringing stayed with her as she moved to the United States. Her texts, though, suggest her Christianity was one that she tried to live, one that focused on social justice and equality, one that allowed for free will, one that accepted and even approved of the labor movement. In doing so, she nudged the labor movement to possibly accepting the complementary role of religion while nudging believing Swedes to the labor movement for the same reason.

Signe Aurell, Essayist

Aurell was living in Minneapolis, working, and obviously active on the left when, in 1915, she began writing for the Swedish-American labor newspaper *Allarm*. During World War I, *Allarm* was consistently harassed and targeted for federal suppression for its support of the labor movement and anti-war declarations. Left-wing newspapers risked confiscation for printing anything that might be in violation of the Espionage, Sedition, and Selective Service Acts.

Confiscation wasn't the only tool the United States government used in their targeting of radical newspapers, however. Many newspapers, especially IWW publications, were sent through the mail, and in response the Post Office Department played a leading role in the suppression of left-wing organizations. Alongside requirements that all non-English literature referencing the government, war, or any government involved in war be translated, the Post Office Department had the power to prohibit the delivery of incoming mail, declare outgoing mail to be indecent, declare outgoing mail to be in violation of the Espionage and Sedition Acts, and finally rescind second-class postage privileges in mailing out literature. The result was disastrous for many newspapers and placed added economic burdens on already stretched budgets (Preston 1994, 144–150). *Allarm* was one such newspaper that, following the arrests of Ahlteen and Stenberg, had its second-class mailing privileges revoked (Millikan 2001, 111). Despite the targeted harassment, as an IWW-supported publication, *Allarm* reached readers who supported the labor movement, or were at least interested in learning more, and encouraged further organization of Scandinavian branches of the IWW.

Of all of her publishers, *Allarm* featured the greatest number of Aurell's works, many of which either emphasize the terrible experiences of the working class or urge continued support of the IWW through calls to organize and appeals to solidarity. In the pages of *Allarm*, Aurell reached out to working-class women, women who may not have been workers but identified with the working-class, and Swedish immigrants who might not identify with the unionized working-class, but still identified with the immigrant experience. One particularly strident essay, "En uppmaning" [An Appeal], published in October of 1916, advocates for unionization and reads as an emphatic call to domestic workers to form a sense of class consciousness through education and organization (Aurell, 2–3). As literary scholar Janet Zandy observes, one of the

defining characteristics of working-class women's writings is the focus on solidarity and community over the individual (1995, 6). Works such as Aurell's suggest that she consciously sought to address Swedish-speaking women as a large and potentially powerful community of domestic service workers within the labor movement.

Swedish maids were highly sought after in some American cities and the Swedish-American community viewed domestic service work as a respectable career. Many Swedish women wrote home about the positive experiences of domestic service work in the United States—their wages were better, they were free to quit, they even had some time off and sometimes felt a part of the family (Lintelman 1992, 91–92). However, good wages, independence, leisure time, and respect did not materialize for everyone and domestic service workers often found themselves in isolated working conditions. Isolation—virtually the opposite of solidarity—made unionization and organization difficult, yet such domestic work was a common fate for single Swedish women: in 1900 over 61 percent of Swedish women working in the United States were employed as servants or waitresses (Lintelman 2009, 131, 228). Working conditions may have been better in the United States than in Sweden, but that did not mean that domestic service workers reliably—or even usually—earned a living wage or enjoyed fair working conditions. Aurell writes that workers in many occupations were organizing, but one group was conspicuously absent from the discussion: servant girls, whom she describes as “slavarna i de privata familjerna” [slaves to the private families] (1916, 2). As a domestic service worker herself, the plea to unionize was a personal one and presented an opportunity to educate other women in the same position, to develop the community necessary for solidarity.

The schoolteacher's daughter Aurell, in line with the IWW, encouraged unionization and education, playing the role of teacher herself in “En uppmaning.” Her essay is an explicit

attempt to encourage women to learn about the prevailing class inequalities that, in her view, could only be overcome through unionization. Aurell's essay suggests a litany of things that working-class women can do to improve their lot in life: borrow books from the library, attend public lectures and discussions, and, of course, organize. She writes:

En väg till upplysning står oss åtminstone alla till buds, böcker. Jag tror inte det finns många flickor som icke ha både tillfälle och råd att skaffa sig god litteratur, isynnerhet som denna under närvarande tid kan erhållas till jämförelsevis billigt pris. Man kan ju till och med få dem gratis, de publika biblioteken stå ju öppna för allmänheten, och goda föredrag och diskussionsmöten anordnas och avhållas allt som oftast. Men sådant är inte roligt. Tacka vet jag danser och teatrar, sådant kan man intressera sig för.

Nu är det inte min mening att fördöma och förkasta varken dans eller teatrar, tvärtom. Förströelser och nöjen behöva vi naturligtvis, och det skadar visst inte att någon gång komma ifrån allvaret, vardagsslitet och släpet. Men man skall inte för nöjena låta de stora, livsviktiga frågorna stå tillbaka, frågorna om förbättrade förhållanden, frihet och oberoende. Detta borde vara vårt mål, alla arbetares mål, och med detta mål för ögonen borde det inte vara svårt att uppoffra vare sig litet av sin tid eller sina så kallade nöjen.

Enda vägen till detta mål är organisation, enighet och samarbete. Genom att organisera oss skulle vi flickor vinna en massa fördelar. Vi skulle inte såsom nu är förhållandet vid tillträddandet av en plats behöva höra och ge vårt samtycke till en massa förhållningsorder av alla slag, utan vi skulle helt enkelt kunna diktera våra villkor själva. Vi skulle inte behöva förbinda oss till att arbeta tretton till fjorton timmar på dygnet för en dålig betalning, utan vi skulle själv kunna bestämma vår arbetstid och vår avlöning. Vi skulle inte behöva gå som lydiga slavar under en kvinna som i de flesta fall vet och begriper mindre än vi, och vi skulle kunna tala om våra rättigheter istället för att vi nu endast veta om våra skyldigheter (1916, 2–3).

[One road to enlightenment is available to all of us—books. I don't think there are many girls who don't have both the opportunity and the money to get their hands on good literature, especially because books can be found for a relatively cheap price. You can even get them for free, the public libraries are open to everyone, and good lectures and discussion meetings are organized and hosted every now and then. But stuff like that isn't fun. Give me dances and plays, that's something people can show interest in.

Now it isn't my intention to condemn and repudiate dance or theater, exactly the opposite. We obviously need recreation and amusement and it doesn't hurt to escape the reality of toil and daily drudgery every now and again. But we can't let amusement take precedence over the big, important questions, questions about improving our circumstances, freedom, and independence. This should be our goal, every worker's goal, and with this goal in sight it shouldn't be hard to sacrifice a little time and a little amusement.

The only way to accomplish this goal is through organization, unity, and cooperation. By organizing, us girls would obtain several benefits. We wouldn't have to be told and agree to every imaginable order like we do now when we accept a job, but

instead dictate our own terms. We wouldn't need to pledge to work thirteen to fourteen hours a day for poor pay, but instead decide our own working hours and our own pay. We wouldn't need to serve as submissive slaves under a woman who usually knows and understands less than we do, and we could speak about our rights instead of only knowing about our obligations.]

Read in conjunction with Aurell's poems "När himlen blir blå..." [When the sky turns blue...], "Det ringde till helg" [The church bells called us to Christmas service], and "Till min gosse" [To my boy], which will be discussed below, this essay is a reminder that women play an important role in the labor movement that requires them to educate themselves, but also to educate others. Aurell's exhortation to value education over entertainment flies in the face of Joe Hill's letter to the editor of *Solidarity*. But Aurell's essay speaks explicitly against the idea that women are just bodies to be exploited, which can only be organized through entertainment, as if they are not able to have the intellectual conversations that the men are engaging in.

Perhaps her most powerful argument for organization compares prostitution and domestic service as two forms of bodily exploitation:

Jag vet av egen erfarenhet att arbete i en privat familj under alla förhållanden menas att sälja sin kropp och sin själ, sin arbetskraft, sina intressen, sina tankar, sin självständighet, allt lägger arbetet beslag på. Och skulle man inte ha mjuk nog nacke, skulle man inte kunna helt och hållet stoppa sin egen vilja i säcken och knyta till om den, skulle man på något sätt försöka göra bruk av eller anspråk på sina individuella rättigheter, då får man nog tämligen snart reda på vad man duger till. I bästa fall blir man avskedad, i värsta får man stanna kvar och blir behandlad som en disktrasa. Och detta få vi flickor tåla från en kvinna som på inga villkor kan vara utan oss, som är absolut oduglig till allt vad kroppsarbete heter, och som i allmänhet använder sin tid och sina själsförmögenheter (om hon har några), uteslutande på toalettfrågan (1916, 3).

[I know from my own experience that working for private families under various conditions means selling your body and your soul, your labor, your interests, your thoughts, your independence, work claims everything. And if you aren't willing to bow your head low enough, if you aren't able to completely stick your free will into a bag and tie it off, if you were to somehow make use of or claim your individual rights, you'll soon find out exactly what you're good for. If you're lucky, you'll be fired, if you're not, you'll end up staying put being treated like a dog. This is what we girls have to put up with from a woman who, without a doubt, can't live without us, a woman who is completely

incompetent when it comes to manual labor, and who, in general, uses her time and her faculties (if she has any), solely on her appearance.]

From her own experience, she argues that working in domestic service is akin to “sälja sin kropp och sin själ, sin arbetskraft, sina intressen, sina tankar, sin självständighet” [selling your body and your soul, your labor, your interests, your thoughts, your independence]. It’s a bleak image and one that would have been recognizable to the essay’s implied audience—working women. Her comparison of domestic service to selling one’s body is a reminder of the male-dominated hierarchy in the workplace, even in the generally female-dominated world of domestic service. While sexual harassment and exploitation in early 1900s domestic service is difficult to research, the pages of radical newspapers like *Allarm* show that abuse, mistreatment, and manipulation did occur. Humorous films or even cartoons and jokes printed in newspapers were other ways in which the Scandinavian-American community shed light on these issues (Lintelman 1991, 385). One such joke, featuring Ole and Lena who are described interchangeably as Norwegian or Swedish, refers to Lena as a Norwegian maid. Lena asks Mrs. Johnson, the head of the household, for some time off because Lena’s boyfriend, Ole, is coming to town on furlough. Mrs. Johnson asks “How long is Ole’s furlough?” and Lena responds “Yust as long as Mr. Yonson’s, but not so quite t’ick” (Leary 2001, 69).³¹ Lena is portrayed as a promiscuous Scandinavian maid, clearly familiar with the intimate details of Mr. Johnson’s anatomy.³² While Lena casually announces to Mrs. Johnson that she has been sleeping with her husband, the joke suggests that Scandinavians were aware of the troubling power dynamics that sometimes resulted in maids sleeping with their employers.³³

The Swedish domestic service worker, especially the Swedish maid, became a stock character in American portrayals of Swedish immigrant women. Although Aurell does not specifically mention the movies of the 1910s as something to be avoided in her essay, she would

surely have been aware of the stereotypical Swedish maid represented on screen as *Sweedie*, *The Swedish Maid*. Sweedie was portrayed by Wallace Beery, a male actor dressed in the stereotypically provincial clothing of a naive immigrant. Only two of the Sweedie films survive, both from 1914, of the approximately thirty short films that were produced. Sweedie was portrayed as a bumpkin from the Swedish countryside newly arrived in the American city, a common path for many Swedish women immigrants. But despite her naiveté, Ann-Kristin Wallengren says of Sweedie that:

she is bright enough to fool the men who try to deceive her in various ways. There is a duality about Sweedie. Yes, she is unfeminine and provincial, which in the context of the films is taken to be a bad thing, but equally she defies gender notions and shows her independence of her employers... It was usual to make fun of America's new residents in early twentieth-century popular culture, but in the case of Sweedie there was an edge to it, because maids in reality challenged the American values that expected to see women remain in the bosom of their families. An independent working woman who had left her homeland was felt to some extent to be 'dangerous,' and one way to render her harmless was to use certain characteristics, such as her rusticity, to ridicule her (2014, 167).

This portrayal, one of ridicule but also of admiration for the maid's intelligence, speaks to the same issues that Aurell writes about in "En uppmaning" and recognizes the difficulties of domestic service work facing Swedish immigrants. Beery depicted a comedic individual and acknowledged the prejudices that Swedish immigrant women faced while subverting that prejudice by showing Sweedie outwitting the men. Aurell, on the other hand, avoided any comedic attempts, focusing on the community as a whole and spoke directly to the heart of the matter—Swedish maids were mistreated, expected to be submissive, and undervalued for their skills and knowledge—unionization was the way to improve their lives, she argues.

As a member of the working class, Aurell recognized the challenges women faced, whether it was the poor pay or a sense of bodily exploitation, and her appeals make clear that she was not writing solely *for* the working class, but as a member *of* the working class. While the

readers of *Allarm*, who may not have been working-class women, learn about the terrible conditions of the lives of domestic servants, Aurell addresses much of “En uppmaning” to the working women about whom she is writing. This is especially clear in her encouragement to read, to learn, and then to unionize. Swedish-language newspapers became a space in which women could access a community of fellow immigrants and read and write about their experience, away from English-speaking employers.

Signe Aurell, Poet

Just two years after leaving her homeland for a new life in the United States, Aurell began publishing poetry in the Swedish-American labor press. Eventually, she reached a wider audience than the labor press allowed, as her poetry also appeared in *Vestkusten* [The West Coast], a mainstream Swedish-language newspaper published in California between 1886 and 2007, and *Nya Sverige* [New Sweden], a temperance newspaper associated with the International Order of Good Templars published between 1915 and 1920. But Aurell published predominately in the labor press. Nine of Aurell’s poems appeared on the first page of *Allarm* over a period of three years, including the two separate poems titled “Josef Hillström.” Sometimes published with a decorative border, the verse that appears on the front pages of the newspaper is an eye-catching departure from the dense text that dominates the page and grabs the reader’s attention, much like images dominate front-page news today. These front-page poems are striking works, both visually and culturally, of working-class literature.

Just as Aurell works within a tradition of the Heaven's Gate motif in her short stories, so too does she work within a tradition of extant folk poetry. Aurell wrote as a member of the immigrant working class for the immigrant working class using traditional motifs that were familiar to her audience. Aurell is not a literary innovator. Her work does not break new ground or challenge already existing poetic forms. In fact, her work can be derivative at times, but those derivations engage with a broader community. Literary scholar Cassandra Parente, writing about Aunt Molly Jackson, argues that women used folksongs, or "traditional patterns of rhythm and rhyme," to spread subversive messages (2013, 160). Traditional rhythm and rhyme also appeared in folk poetry and the line between song and poem was often a blurry one. Aurell, later in life would write poems for which her brother set music, for example. In the United States though, as an immigrant woman, Aurell spread her subversive message using recognizable metaphors—ships, for example, are used to describe children leaving their home, embarking on their own, just as many immigrants left their homes to come to the United States via ship—and relying on tropes and clichés that an immigrant community would have readily understood. In doing so, she was able to focus not on breaking new ground as a literary figure, but instead on spreading a subversive message through the newspapers and her own collection of poetry. Aurell speaks directly to her community, emphasizing her message of class consciousness. For that message to take hold, to spread, to be remembered, the community had to accept the message as representative and valuable. Parente goes on to note that:

To be rhetorically effective and survive oral transmission, a song has to be selected by the community as representative of the collective experience and be deemed valuable enough to be committed to memory. In other words, each song needs to derive directly from its local context and to both draw from and impact communal beliefs in that moment (2013, 163).

While Parente is writing specifically about folksongs, the same can be said for the poetry that Aurell published. Her repeated publication in newspapers suggests that her poems were deemed valuable. As a member of the community for which she wrote and of which she wrote about, her experiences must have been viewed as representative of the experiences of so many other immigrant women. Importantly, her poetry met the expectations of her audience, and, like many IWW songs and poems, they served a purpose: they educated, they recruited, they inspired, and they were radical. Aurell was participating in her community through her poetry, especially as an IWW poet. As labor scholars Tara Forbes and Mikhail Bjorge point out, “By engaging its members...as workers and intellectuals, the IWW created a public space in which proletarians could establish their own songs and exert them *meaningfully and performatively* on the foundation of class struggle” (2013, 169).

Walter Dickson, writing about “Josef Hillström (2),” argues that Aurell was engaging with her community by focusing on the class struggle that she was a part of in the United States. By echoing Johan Ludvig Runeberg’s “Fänrik Ståls sägner” [The Tales of Ensign Stål], Dickson suggests that Aurell was while clearly inspired by “Fänrik Ståls sägner,” but goes on to say:

Runebergs diktning vansläktas inte i denna efterklang. Tvärtom blir det folkliga draget understruket, och den sociala grupp känsla, som Runebergsdikten knyter till den militära ’kohorten’, överflyttas meningsfullt till att gälla arbetarrörelsens demonstrations- och kamptropp i Nya Världen. Det folkliga grunddraget i Runebergsdikten internationaliseras (Dickson 1968, 24).

[Runeberg’s poem isn’t diminished in this derivation. On the contrary, the popular strain of the poem is emphasized, and the social sense of community, which Runeberg’s poem ties to the military cohort, is transferred meaningfully to the people who demonstrate and struggle for the labor movement in the New World. The fundamental national features in Runeberg’s poem are internationalized].

In other words, Aurell’s audience, mostly working class Swedish immigrants, would have easily been able to relate to the Swedish-American context presented in Aurell’s poetry despite the

echoes of Runeberg's nationalistic Old World poetry. Her book of poetry, *Irrbloss*—which includes “Josef Hillström (2)” and “Till min gosse,” examined below—received generally positive reviews in the Swedish-American press. In 1919, *Vestkusten* particularly praised Aurell for her use of language, evocations of home and nature, and even calls for a brighter future (8). Aurell is clearly working within a broader cultural movement, internalizing, or even consciously responding to classic Nordic poetry like that of Runeberg. In responding though, she demonstrates an ability to place herself and her work within the context of the Swedish-American working class.

It was in *Allarm* that Aurell got her start as a Swedish-language poet in the United States. In all, until the newspaper folded in 1918, Aurell published ten poems in *Allarm*, many of which describe the struggle of the working class and call for continued support of the labor movement. A poem published in October 1917 in *Allarm*, “Till min gosse” [To my boy], speaks from the perspective of a mother addressing her son, and thus provides an example of a woman as an educator, but also subtly advocates for connecting women to the working-class even if they were not working themselves (Aurell 1917, 1).

In fact, the poem seems to be a response to “Soldatgossen,” [The Soldier's Boy] by Johan Ludvig Runeberg, Finland's national poet and a Swedish speaker. Published originally in 1860, Runeberg's “Soldatgossen” describes a young boy who remembers his soldier father as a hero, a hero that dies at war in service to the King. The boy comes from a long line of soldiers who all died in battle and after his mother dies of grief, he is left homeless and alone, mired in poverty. As he proudly remembers his family history, he waits to turn fifteen so that he can join the army and follow in his father's footsteps. Folklorist Jason Schroeder has uncovered a different derivation of “Soldatgossen” called “Dräng-gossen,” [The Farmhand's Boy] copied

into the personal songbook of Karl Sigfrid Johansson in 1907. “Dräng-gossen,” rather than celebrate nationalism, soliders, and death, approaches life from the perspective of the working class, where death was not heroic and poverty was devastating. In turn, as Schroeder points out, the poem “asserts the dignity of the working class” (2016, 211–219).

Aurell’s poem writes from the perspective of the mother, the wife of the fallen soldier, and just like “Dräng-gossen,” acknowledges the worth of the working class. Her poem, seemingly building on the work of Runeberg works within an already extant tradition of poetry as satire, as protest, and connects her to a literate Swedish-American community of working class immigrants.

Till min gosse Gossen min. Kom sedan dag är all Moder en visa vill sjunga. Livet är dystert och världen kall Skuggorna mörka och tunga. Gossen min. Kom in min varma famn. Ännu dig räcker ej nöden. Moder snart hinner sin sista hamn Snart kommer vilan och döden. Fader tog kriget. Åstad han drog Skrudad i konungens trasor. Nu har han fallit. Ensam han dog Ensam med ångest och fasor. Gossen min. Vax och bliv stor och stark Frukta ej stormen som larmar Lär dig att bryta din egen mark Bryta med kraftiga armar. Böj ej din nacke för glans och prakt Icke för präster och kyrka Tro ej på Gudars och furstars makt Tro på din egen styrka. Lär dig att styra din farkost rätt Huru än bränningar möta	To my boy My boy. Come, as the day grows old, Mother will sing a song she knows. Life is dismal and the world is cold Dark and heavy are the shadows. My boy. Come to my warm embrace. Misfortune has yet to meet you. Mother will soon reach her resting place Coming soon, death and quietude. Father went to war. He left our home Dressed up in the rags of the king. Now he has fallen. He died alone Alone with his horror, dreading. My boy. Grow up to be big and strong Fear not storms that clamor loudly Learn to break the ground where you belong Break the ground with arms so mighty. Bow down not for glory and glamor Not for priests or the churchly rule Believe not Gods’ or sovereigns’ power Believe in the strength of you. Learn to guide your own ship straight and true No matter the waves you’ll reckon
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Lär dig att värna din egen rätt Lär dig att trotsa och hota.	Learn to defend the rights you accrue Learn to defy and to threaten.
Blicka mot målet med liv och lust Kämpa så länge du andas. Kanske din son då skall nå den kust Där rättvisans morgon rands. Signe Aurell.	With heart and soul, look always ahead As long as you're living, just fight. Maybe your son on that shore will tread Where justice is dawning bright. Signe Aurell

Here we see Aurell writing for women of the working class, but taking a different approach than in “En uppmaning.” The mother warns the son of the world that he will encounter and describes the injustice that the poor face. She tells him that he must learn to rely on himself, not priests and churches, not gods or regents, but on his own strength. Finally, in a moment of resignation and distant hope, she reminds him that he must look forward, always fighting, for a new dawn in which justice will prevail.

Instead of agitating directly for working women to unionize, this poem showcases the role of mother as teacher. There is a sense that even if the mother is not the wage earner, her participation in the labor movement is still vital as she foments solidarity. The fight for fair working conditions is not solely a fight for men. The fight for fair working conditions is a fight for the entire family. She acknowledges that though it may be too late for her generation and even for the next generation, women can still play an essential role in overcoming inequality by educating and encouraging young Swedish-Americans to identify as part of the working class.

In 1920, Aurell published two poems in *Arbetaren*, a Swedish-American newspaper printed by the Scandinavian Socialist Labor Federation of the Socialist Labor Party in New York. The periodical was originally founded in 1894 as a Danish-, Norwegian-, and Swedish-language newspaper titled *Skandinavisk Amerikanska Arbetaren* [The Scandinavian American Worker] and began publishing regularly in 1895. The newspaper targeted Scandinavian immigrant workers, but eventually divested the Danish and Norwegian sections in 1896 and

began publishing weekly rather than twice monthly, suggesting that the Swedish audience was more sustainable and allowed it the financial security necessary to continue publication. In 1899, *Skandinavisk Amerikanska Arbetaren* became *Arbetaren*, the name that it would carry until it ceased publication in 1928 (Brook 1969, 113–115). Like most Swedish-language newspapers, *Arbetaren* included general world news, news from Sweden, and news of the Scandinavian-American community, but was—as the name implies—first and foremost a labor newspaper. For the most part, the paper was ardently supportive of the Socialist Labor Party and included theoretical discussions, articles from the socialist press in Sweden, and reports about the Socialist Party (Brook 1987, 149). Like many left-wing newspapers at the time that showed support for pacifism and socialist ideas, including *Allarm*, the United States government put pressure on the publication during WWI, confiscating ten issues of *Arbetaren* between 1917 and 1919 (Brook 1987, 149).

Just before returning to Sweden, Aurell published “När himlen blir blå...” [When the sky turns blue...], which debuted in *Arbetaren* (1920, 8). Similarly to “Till min gosse,” “När himlen blir blå” reaches out to women who might not be laborers themselves, but can still contribute to the labor movement. Here, the narrator comes upon a mother and son at the grave of the boy’s father, in an area of the cemetery reserved for the poor. Even in death, Aurell notes that class distinctions persist. The narrator stops to listen as the mother describes the terrible conditions of the working class: the life that they must lead and the poverty that they must endure. The mother’s words—a lament about all that has been taken from the poor, from rest to blue skies to one’s own thoughts—are a lesson in injustice.

När himlen blir blå... Af Signe Aurell Jag såg dem. En gosse på tretton år	When the sky turns blue By Signe Aurell I saw them. A boy of thirteen
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med jackan i trasor fläkt, en moder, ej mer i sin ungdoms vår med blicken i tårar släckt. Ett aflägst hörn på en kyrkogård, de fattigas grafplats det var, en nyskottad graf och en enkel vård med det ensamma ordet: "Far". Och bitter den sörjandes stämma ljud, den tiggde om lindring och tröst. Det var som om hade all världens nöd fått stämma och toner och röst. Den ljud som de gulnade löfvens sång i frysande, frosthärjad skog, som höstliga vågors och vindars gång, som en bristande sträng som dog. "Min gosse, för oss är ej rosors glöd, för oss är ej sång eller skratt, för oss är det hunger och kval och nöd och sorger och klagan och natt. För oss är ej solstrålars gull och glans, för oss är ej tanken ens fri, för oss är ej lycka och dröm och dans. Vi föddes på skuggsidan, vi. Oss fattiga unnas ej rast eller ro, ej hvila till kropp eller själ. Vi föddes i grändernas mörker att bo att pinas och trampas ihjäl. Vi föddes i nattens och dimmornas land där kylande skuggorna stå, där synden och sorgen gå hand i hand och himlen aldrig blir blå." Då tändes i hågen på liten pilt af hat och af kärlek en brand, i storm slog hans hjärta och stolt och vilt knöts gossevarm brunbränd hand; och gossekinden brann röd och len som vildros i sommarens dar, och blicken var underbart djup och ren, och glänsande stor och klar. Han såg på sin fattiga mor som grät så tröstlös och trött i hans famn.	with a jacket of rags torn open, a mother, no older than the spring of her youth with her eyes extinguished by tears. A remote corner of the cemetery, the poor's burial ground it was, a newly dug grave and a simple memorial with the lonely word, "Father." And bitterly the grieving voice sounded, it begged for relief and comfort. It was as if all the world's troubles had turned to sound and tone and voice. It sounded like the song of the yellowing leaf in freezing, frost-ravaged forests, like the path of autumn's waves and winds, like a fraying string that died. "My boy, for us roses do not bloom, for us there is not laughter nor song, for us there is hunger and torment and need and sadness and laments and night. For us the sun does not glitter as gold, for us even our thoughts are not free, for us there is no happiness, no dreams, no dance. We were born in the shadows, we. Us poor are allowed neither recess nor repose, not rest for our body or our soul. We were born in the dark alleys to live to be tormented and trampled alive. We were born in the land of the night and the fog where freezing shadows stand where sin and sadness go hand in hand and the sky never turns blue." Then in the heart of that small child was lit a flame of hate and of love his heart beat like a storm and proud and wild his warm tanned boyish hand clenched in a fist and his boyish cheeks burned soft and red like wild roses on a summer's day, and his gaze was wonderfully deep and pure, and shone big and clear. He looked at his poor mother who cried inconsolable and exhausted, in his embrace.
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Hans innersta tankar nog ingen vet, de fingo ej ord eller namn. Han teg, men den blicken så varm ändå bar trösten till gråtande mor: ”En gång mor, en gång blir din himmel blå, en gång när din gosse blir stor.” Den blicken! Dess budskap jag tydde nog den gjorde mig lycklig och rik. Den var som en sång öfver grönnklädd skog, som vind öfver vågor och vik, som hvila och ro efter möda lång, som hamn efter stormar och strid, som strålande sol öfver väg och vång, som dagg öfver ängar och lid. Den blicken en värld utan löften bar till längtande hjärta och själ, om sommar och sol och om ljusa dar, om frihet för suckande träl, om ungdom som bräcker i vårvarmt lopp de fångslände fjättrarnas band, och lyfter de fattigas frusna tropp mot lyckans och rosornas land.	His innermost thoughts surely no one knew they were given neither name nor words. He kept silent, but his gaze was still so warm and carried comfort to his crying mother. “One day mother, one day your sky will turn blue one day when your boy grows up like you.” That gaze! That message I made out so clear It made me so happy and rich. It was like a song over green-clothed forests, like wind over waves and cove, like rest and repose after long hardships, like a port after storm and strife, like a beaming sun over roads and fields, like dew on meadows and hillsides. That gaze a world without promise carried to longing heart and soul, about summer and sun and lighter days, about freedom for sighing slaves, about youth that breaks during the warm spring the shackling bands of the imprisoned, and lifts the frozen legions of the poor towards the land of happiness and roses.³⁴
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While the mother intones her lament, the reader is privy to the boy's burgeoning class consciousness as a fire is lit inside him and his hands curl into fists. The boy embraces his mother and, as is so often the case with Aurell's poetry, the poem ends in defiance with a promise of a brighter future and blue skies. The mother is nameless, a representative of the working-family raising a child to understand the power of the worker. This mother, at least, has succeeded in inspiring her son to fight for a more just world. The poem serves as a call to rise up and to overcome, not an unusual theme in proletarian literature of the day, but Aurell speaks directly to women and mothers about their responsibility to their children, the next generation of labor activists. While not a mother herself, Aurell wrote for an audience and a community that was often underrepresented in unionization efforts. Aurell's poems present women as

educators and agitators in the home, not the workplace, and advocate for the creation of class consciousness and working-class identity early in life. Sometimes this takes the form of a mother explaining the injustices that the poor must face, as the mother in “När himlen blir blå...” does; elsewhere a mother specifically gives advice, as the mother in “Till min gosse” does. Rather than agitate in factories or mines, like many male workers did, Aurell seems to suggest that women agitate at home, making a new generation of labor activists class conscious. Both imply an audience that has a connection to the working class, but may not be strictly comprised of workplace activists.

Aurell’s first front-page poem, “Jul” [Christmas], is similar in that it implies a wider audience (1915). Here, Aurell, like the mothers in “När himlen blir blå...” and “Till min gosse,” describes the experiences of the working-class, but not before presenting a popular depiction of the holiday.

Jul. Jul, jul, härliga jul! Efterlängtd och älskad som ingen, Kommer du åter till jorderingen, Soliga barnadars käraste gäst — Minnenas fäst? Jul, Jul, härliga jul! Bådad av stjärnor i aftontimma, Hälsad av barnaögon som glimma, Bär du till jorden ditt hälsningsord: ”Frid uppå jord?” Jul, jul, härliga jul! ”Frid över jorden!” julklockor ringa — ”Frid över jorden!” julsånger klinga; ”Frid!” stråla ljusen i juletid — Juletid blid. * * * Träl, träl, arbetets träl! Litet får du av julfriden smaka,	Yule. Yule, Yule, wonderful Yule! Always longed for and loved like no other, Will you return here to earth, our mother, As all of our children’s most cherished guest — Memories’ fest?³⁵ Yule, Yule, wonderful Yule! Bathed by all the stars in the evening light, Welcomed by children’s eyes shining so bright, Do you carry this message of worth: “Peace here on Earth?” Yule, Yule, wonderful Yule! “Peace on Earth!” the Christmas bells are ringing — “Peace on Earth! the Christmas songs are singing; “Peace!” from the flickering candles shine — Gentle Yuletide. * * * Slave, slave, working class slave! Christmas cheer you’ll never here get to make,
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Lida, arbeta, hånas, försaka; Skymfas, förtryckas i stort och smått — Det är din lott. Träl, träl, lidande träl! Alltid behandlad som styvbarn av ödet, Jäktad till döds i kampen för brödet — Sökande vilan i torftigt skjul; Firar du jul? Träl, träl, fattiga träl! Nöden din egendom är här i världen — Ej har du julljus och brasa på härden; Julglädjen kommer med gåvorna blott Till rikemans slott. Träl, träl, trampade träl! Res dig ur dvalan och bräck dina bojor — Vaknen kamrater i armodets kojor; Kommen! För frihetens gyllne dag Slå vi ett slag. Fram, fram, segrande här! Skarorna samlas från städer och byar — Se ur det framfarnas töckniga skyar, Går uti strålände morgonglans opp Framtidens hopp. Signe Aurell	Suffer and work, you'll be mocked, and forsake; Insulted, oppressed both day and night, That is your plight. Slave, slave, suffering slave! Always treated poorly like a dog by fate, Driven to death putting food on your plate — Seeking respite at home, penniless; Is this Christmas? Slave, slave, destitute slave! Poverty, your place is right here on this earth — No fireplace, candles, or fine Christmas mirth; Yuletide gifts and glad tidings only go To a rich man's home. Slave, slave, downtrodden slave! Awake from your trance and break from your shackles Vigilant comrades in poverty's shambles; Come! For the day of freedom's gold glow We'll strike a blow. On, on, conq'ring army! Crowds gather from towns and villages at last Gaze out from behind hazy skies of the past Out to the morning's beaming sun to lope. Our future's hope. Signe Aurell
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The poem begins by celebrating the season and describing the joy and anticipation of children. Six years after Aurell published her poem, Gustaf Nordqvist wrote and published “Jul, jul, strålände jul!” which would go on to become a classic Swedish Christmas carol (Levandemusikarv n.d.). The opening line is reminiscent of “Jul,” but Aurell’s poem abruptly reminds the reader that Christmas is not a luxury that the working class can afford: “Träl, träl, arbetets träl!/Litet får du av julfriden smaka” [Slave, slave, working class slave/Christmas cheer you do not make] (1915, 1). Even before the transition, Aurell’s use of the question mark suggests an ironic approach to the holiday. In “Jul,” she contrasts the assumed happiness of the holiday with the bleak alternative that was the reality for the working class, especially for working-class immigrants. The poem continues, describing the effects of class inequalities on the

home at Christmastime: there is no fireplace to sit by, there are no Christmas candles, and Christmas gifts are exclusive to the rich. Finally, as is common in many of Aurell's poems, she calls for action—"Res dig ur dvalan och bräck dina bojor" [Awake from your trance and break from your shackles] (1915, 1). That juxtaposition is not unusual in folk poetry of this sort. Parente notes Aunt Molly Jackson's similar uses of contrasting the upper class with the working class as a way to connect with those who may not be of the working class but are sympathetic to its plight (2013, 169). This provocative poem speaks not just to laborers, but to anyone who assumes that Christmas is a holiday for everyone. The working-class readers who live this life do not need a reminder of their everyday conditions, but the comparison between the assumed joy of the holiday season and its lived inequality serves as a reason to fight for better and fairer working conditions.

In 1919, Aurell began working closely with *Bokstugan*, which was published irregularly until 1928 by the Verdandi Study League in Chicago, formerly a chapter of the Verdandi Temperance Order. *Bokstugan* featured works by leftist authors, including communists and syndicalists (Brook 1987, 150). These works were not solely political in nature and included non-fiction as well as poetry and plays, scientific articles, and even reproductions of artwork. Founded by left-leaning activists, the main purpose of the publication was to educate its readers in radical thought (Bengtson 1964, 159–162). Works by contributors like Signe Aurell blended art and culture with a radical political consciousness; the result was a periodical that presented the labor movement in a favorable light, without any explicit ties to political organizations or labor unions.

In the forty-four issues of *Bokstugan*, the periodical published four poems, one essay, and one letter by Aurell, as well as excerpts from and positive reviews of *Irrbloss* [Will-o'-the-Wisp],

her self-published book of poetry. *Bokstugan* consistently listed her as a regular contributor, even including her name in issues in which she did not publish and listing her as “skald” [poet] (Bokstugan 1921 (19), 33). A large picture of Aurell accompanied many of her published works. When she left the United States, the magazine printed a farewell, in which it promised that Aurell would be a monthly contributor despite living in Sweden (Bokstugan 1920 (8), 17). While this did not turn out to be the case, Aurell did continue to contribute to the publication sporadically and her last poem was published in 1924, four years after returning to Sweden.



Fig. 3.4. Image of Signe Aurell in Minneapolis (page 26 of *Bokstugan*, issue #16, 1921).

“Det ringde till helg” [The church bells called us to Christmas service] appeared in *Bokstugan* in 1921 (Aurell, 2). Interestingly, this poem describes a nascent class consciousness in a group other than the poor Swedish immigrants that Aurell often wrote about. Just like “Jul,” this poem uses Christmastime to describe the conditions of the working class, but here she more explicitly invites the upper classes to participate with the working class in the battle against inequality.

Det ringde till helg. Av Signe Aurell Det ringde till helg! under mörknad sky flög budet om julens frid, och julsnön föll över byggd och by så vänlig och vit och blid som ville den, lydande julens röst, ge sorgen och dunklet sin vita tröst och gömma all brist vid sitt mjuka bröst	The church bells called us to Christmas service By Signe Aurell The church bells called! Under darkened sky flew the message of Christmastime's peace and Christmas snow fell over building and town so friendly and white and gentle that wanted, listening to Yule's voice, to give comfort to the sadness and gloom and hide all that lacked in it's soft bosom
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i julens signade tid. Jag stod vid min grind. Över väg och vång låg julkvällen mörk och tyst, men inom mig sjöng det av sol en sång, som lyckan ur hjärtat kysst; en visa om gränsljus och sagors makt, om regnbågsskimmer och trollgulls prakt, om gyllene minnen dem tiden lagt till vila där julen lyst. Då kom där på vägen med trötta steg en tös nedför backens brant, hon stannade skyggt vid min grind och neg och tiggde lågt om en slant. Den trådslitna koftan i trasor var, och kinden var frusen och foten bar, och liksom hon väntade ett slag till svar hon kröp bort till dikets kant. Jag tog hennes hand. Den var späd och tård, dock bar den min lyckas dom. Vad rätt hade jag till min ljusa värld när hennes var mörk och tom? Jag mötte en undrande, frågfylld blick— sen drog hon sin hand ur min och gick, och tyngd under frågan som svar jag fick; hon svunnit så tyst som hon kom. Det skymde i hast! Där den lilla stått grät yrsnön sin frusna tår, den lade sig mjukt på den led hon gått och kysste bort väg och spår. Nyss blommade lyckan i fagert rött, nu blombladen blekts av den blick jag mött och allting låg kallt på min väg och dött, fast nyss det var knopp och vår. Det ljöd som en suck, som ett sakta sus, därrupe i lindens topp, en danande stjärnstråles blida ljus föll blekt över frusen knopp. Den lyste ett ögonblick vänlig och öm, sen gömdes den åter av molnens ström. Mig tycktes den kom som en vacker dröm och byggde en väg för mitt hopp.	at Christmas's holy time. I stood at my gate. Over roads and fields Christmas evening lay dark and quiet but inside of me sang a song of sunshine, like happiness kissed by my heart; a song of Yule candlelight and the power of stories of rainbow's shimmer and troll's gold's splendor of golden memories that time has laid to rest where Christmas shone. Then came along she rode with tired steps a girl down the steep hillside she stopped timidly by my gate and curtsied and begged quietly for a coin. The threadbare cardigan was in rags and her cheeks were frozen and her feet bare and as she waited a bit for an answer she crept back to the edge of the ditch. I took her hand. It was slender and worn, but it carried my happiness's judgment. What right did I have to my world so bright when hers was so dark and empty? I met a wondering, questioning gaze— then she pulled her hand from mine and went and weighted by the question, an answer I received, she disappeared as quietly as she came. It quickly got dark. Where the little one had stood the drift snow cried its frozen tears, it lay down softly on the path she had walked and kissed away tracks and traces. A short time ago happiness bloomed in fair red, Now petals were bleached by the gaze that I met And everything laid cold on my path and dead, Although just recently there were buds and spring. It sounded like a sigh, like a careful whisper, up there in the tops of the linden, a formative starbeam's gentle light fell pale over frozen buds It shone for a moment, friendly and fond, then it was hidden again by the flow of the clouds. I thought it came like a beautiful dream and built a road for my hope.
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Jag drömde att fjärran från sorg och strid jag gick över stup och prång, att vårvinden drog över världen vid och sjöng över fält och vång, mig höllo ej bojar, jag kände ej band, jag gick mot det härliga solskenets land, dit vägen var röjd, och dit hand i hand vi fattiga drogo med sång – –. Och solskenets land låg i strålgrans klar i livets och vårens prakt. Vi drogo dit in under röda standar i sjungande, trotsig takt. Framför oss låg världen i blomning ny. Det ringde till hälg³⁶ över byggd och by, och klockklangen flög emot klarblå sky med frihetens väldiga makt.	I dreamed that far from sorrow and strife I walked through precipices and passages, that the spring winds blew over the entire world and sang over range and field, I didn't have shackles, I didn't feel bands, I walked toward the wonderful land of sunshine, there the road was cleared, and your hand in mine we poor went with song – –. And the land of sunshine laid in clear radiance in the splendor of life and spring. We went there under red banners in defiant pace, singing. In front of us laid the world blooming new. The church bells called over building and town, and the clang of the bells flew against clear blue sky with freedom's mighty power.³⁷
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That the narrator of the poem stands near the gate to her home thinking to herself about the joys of the Christmas season, suggests at least a modicum of wealth. Especially in contrast to the poverty-stricken girl who approaches and asks for money. Rather than recoil, the narrator takes the young girl's hand only to watch as she silently walks away. In a moment of contemplation, the narrator's mood shifts, no longer reminiscing about Christmases past, but instead reflecting on the poverty affecting so many. But the dark mood is fleeting. Defiantly, the narrator quickly dreams of a world in which the poor, hand-in-hand with the narrator, walk towards a land of freedom. They sing, unshackled, under red banners.

Despite this difference in perspective, the poem, similar to "När himlen blir blå..." depicts a moment of enlightenment brought about by the injustices of poverty. Here it is a child—a girl so impoverished that she walks barefoot through the cold Swedish winter, her sweater in rags—who inspires the narrator to recognize class inequality. Even after having moved back to Sweden, the message of Aurell's poetry is unmistakable: in a tone of defiance it

emphasizes the importance of women in the labor movement. Of the many poems that Aurell wrote for, about, and as a member of the working class to raise class consciousness, “Det ringde till helg” seems aimed at a higher socioeconomic class, those who are rich enough to celebrate Christmas, in contrast to the poor described in her 1915 poem “Jul.” This approach may be an example of Aurell’s attempts to inform a broader audience about inequality. Or it may simply describe a change in her own class identity after returning to her parents’ home in Osby, Sweden.

Aurell had begun to establish herself as a contributor to various Swedish-American language newspapers that gave her access to an immigrant community during her time in Minneapolis. However, she clearly harbored desires to expand her audience beyond that of the newspapers. Aurell produced a collection of twenty-three of her poems under the title *Irrbloss* [Will-o’-the-Wisp] in 1919, which she sold from her home for twenty-five cents (*Bokstugan* 1920 (4), 18). Sixteen of the poems in *Irrbloss* also appeared—sometimes with slight alterations to word choice or punctuation—in *Allarm*, *Arbetaren*, *Bokstugan*, *Nya Sverige*, *Nya Världen*, and *Vestkusten* in the United States; *Brand* and *Syndikalisterna* in Sweden; and three different IWW-produced songbooks.

Irrbloss, a departure from her usual medium of publication, provided an avenue to reach a broader audience in both Sweden and the United States. Newspaper advertisements for *Irrbloss* could be found in American periodicals, such as *Bokstugan*, as well as in Swedish socialist newspapers, such as *Stormklockan* [The Warning Bell], where interested parties could contact Signe Aurell’s brother, Nils, and purchase a copy for one Swedish krona (*Bokstugan* 1920 (4), 18; *Stormklockan* 1920, 8). While *Irrbloss* received several positive reviews in labor newspapers and mainstream Swedish-language newspapers, *Bokstugan* laments the lack of American interest

in *Irrbloss*, yet notes the commercial success near Aurell's hometown as she moved back to Sweden:

Hennes vackra diktsamling 'Irrbloss' rönt härute i likhet med så mycket annat av mänsklighetens vackraste och djupaste tankar, föga uppmärksamhet. Som en glädjande motsats har å en plats, Glimåkra, i Skåne, sålts ett tusen exemplar under cirka två månader.

Aurell tillhörde I.W.W., men ej ens bland våra närmaste kamrater fanns den förståelse som man haft rätt fordra vid 'Irrbloss' tillkomst.

Ensam, åtminstone i det allra närmaste, fick hon själv ombesörja tryckning etc. och därav följande ekonomiska svårigheter. Men i likhet med Schopenhauer,³⁸ kan hon vara förvissad om att de pärlor som finnas i 'Irrbloss' skola leva och långt fram i tiderna hos många individer finna förståelse och skänka glädje (1920, 17).

[Her beautiful collection of poetry, *Irrbloss*, was met with little attention, just like so much of humanity's most beautiful and profound thoughts. A pleasant exception has been one place, Glimåkra in Skåne, which has sold 1000 copies in about two months time.

Aurell belonged to the I.W.W., but even our closest comrades did not have the appreciation for *Irrbloss* that it deserved upon publication.

Alone, in terms of an intimate relationship, she was responsible for the printing costs, etc. and in turn the economic difficulties that followed. But, like Schopenhauer, she can be assured that the pearls that can be found in *Irrbloss* will live on and in the future bring understanding and joy to many.]

Bokstugan's comparison to Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), a German philosopher whose work only became widely known after his death, most likely came as scant consolation to Aurell, and the periodical's support did not pay the bills. Despite the lack of widespread success, by appropriating a form familiar to the dominant culture in which she lived and worked, Aurell further spread her pro-labor message with *Irrbloss*.

In 1980, literary scholar Paul Lauter presented a broad but foundational definition of working-class literature, describing it simply as work written “by and about working people”(16).³⁹ In other words, working-class literature must be *by* and *about* the working class, but not necessarily *for* the working class, an important distinction that opens the genre to a wider audience. As Coiner points out, “working-class writings can variously interrogate, emulate, challenge, and appropriate the forms of the dominant culture while straining beyond them”

(1995, 251). Therefore, working-class authors can write for the working class, yet, by appropriating literary conventions or other forms of the dominant culture, still make their writing available and recognizable to other audiences.

By stepping outside of the boundaries of the Swedish-language press and by self-publishing, Aurell circumvented the professional-managerial class that Coiner identifies as cultural tastemakers who may not have published her collection; at the same time, she steps outside of the traditional readership of the labor press to reach a wider audience. Books of poetry like Aurell's, or songbooks and chapbooks that were self-published would allow workers to wrest control from the ruling class. Self-publishing, just like publishing in the labor press, was a form of class conflict, in which workers created, recorded, and disseminated their own experiences in their own voices.

For Aurell, a book of poetry made it possible to reach Swedish immigrants who might not have gravitated towards the labor and socialist newspapers that published Aurell's work. Aurell, having worked as a domestic servant, having toiled long hours for low wages, having lived the life of a Swedish immigrant, depicted immigrants' lives as they lived them. In her writings, such descriptions are often followed by a call to action—a cry to break free from the chains that enslave them—and while such clarion calls were common in labor rhetoric, Aurell clearly sought to engage middle and upper class Swedish-Americans, urging them to recognize the inequality that enslaved their fellow immigrants. Her poetic instigations in *Irrbloss*, familiar from her publications in the labor press, were not simply incitements but were also instructive: women can change society, immigrants can improve their lot through unionization, and everybody has a role to play—not just the working poor.

In her younger days, Aurell had published predominantly in the Swedish-American labor press in newspapers like *Allarm*, “hatad av den amerikanska herreklassen” [hated by the American upper class] as she would write thirty years later (1955, 7). Those papers allowed her to circumvent traditional publishing methods and reach a wide audience receptive to her message, urging women to recognize that they were an integral part of the class struggle and to galvanize them to action, while also reaching out to immigrants who may have been only tangentially connected to the labor movement. Aurell, as a working-class immigrant author, provided a voice that differed from the many men who wrote in the labor press. Periodicals became a way for Aurell to publish her poetry, but more than that, they became a conduit for her pro-labor message, her attempts to inform her community about the fight against inequality. Though largely overlooked by labor scholars, Signe Aurell and others like her worked to educate, and indeed create, an immigrant, working-class community. Her work in the pages of the Swedish-American labor press is an important addition to the history of the labor movement and one that gave voice to the hundreds of thousands of women who left their homes to seek work in the United States.

²¹ Two other translations of the same poem with minor variations appeared in later years as “Joe Hills sista vilja” in the March 4 issue of *Brand* and as “Joe Hills testament” in songbooks published by the Industrial Workers of the World in Sweden.

²² These are Joe Hill’s last words as reported by Edward Mattson in his article about Hill’s execution.

²³ Aurell’s translation of “Joe Hill’s Last Will” as “Joe Hills Testamente” appears in at least two editions of *Sånger av Joe Hill (Josef Hillström)*—the third edition and an unnumbered edition, both of which were published in 1924. The translation also appears in the 1928 and 1929 editions of *I.W.W:s sångbok*. All five songbooks were published by the Stockholm Branch av Marintransportarbetarnas Industriella Union (MTAIU) no 510 av IWW, although the 1929 songbook was published in Borlänge, not Stockholm.

²⁴ For more about the role of Scandinavian-language newspapers as institutions of assimilation and ethnic identity maintenance see: Odd S. Lovoll, *Norwegian Newspapers in America: Connecting Norway and the New Land*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009); Ulf Beijbom, "The Swedish Press," in Sally M. Miller, ed., *The Ethnic Press in the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); Ulf Jonas Björk, "The Swedish-American Press as an Immigrant Institution," *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2000); Marion Tuttle Marzolf, "The Danish Press," in Sally M. Miller, ed., *The Ethnic Press in the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

²⁵ See Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* and Adrian Hastings's *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* for more on the construction of community and nationhood.

²⁶ I have transcribed this text precisely, including all typographical deviations.

²⁷ To differentiate from the two poems I will number them "Josef Hillström (1)" and "Josef Hillström (2)" based on their date of first publication (November 1916 and November 1917, respectively). The first poem begins with the line "Han föll för de mördande kulornas stål..." (He fell to the bullet's murderous steel...), and the second poem begins "Mot våld och svek med sannings stål..." (Against violence and deceit with the steel of truth...).

²⁸ William Akers was the penname of Ralph Winstead, who wrote short stories and worked as the editor for *Industrial Worker*.

²⁹ The Astorbilts refer to the Astor family and the Vanderbilts, two prominent families during the 1900s.

³⁰ It was not just the federal government who participated in targeted harassment of radicals. In Minnesota, the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety also placed radicals under surveillance, including Carl Ahlteen. In his book, *Watchdog of Loyalty: The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety during World War I*, Carl Henry Chrislock writes on page 128: "Surviving reports on the comings and goings of these persons throw some light on their life-styles—one learns, for example, that Carl Ahlteen, the radical Swedish-language editor, shopped carefully for watermelons—but reveal no plots to subvert the republic."

³¹ Told by George Russell to James P. Leary on July 8, 1975, and published in *So Ole Says to Lena: Folk Humor of the Upper Midwest*.

³² Leary notes that a similar joke is found about an Irish maid in Larry Wilde's *The Official Irish Joke Book* on page 8.

³³ Interestingly, work is similarly compared to selling one's body in the male-dominated sphere of farming. In a humorous letter originally written in *Valdris helsing* (December 1906), 45–46, and analyzed by Einar Haugen in *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study in Bilingual Behavior* (1969), 66–68, a Norwegian farmer writes about his crop being too small, but that once he

breaks more of the field, he'll be able to sell more of his crop and make enough money to survive. Haugen notes, though, that the farmer uses the word *krøpp*, Norwegian for body, as a homophone to the English word, *crop*. While the joke clearly focuses on the bilingual humor of Norwegian Americans, the mixing of *krøpp* and *crop* does suggest an awareness of the great toll farming took on the immigrant's body.

³⁴ This translation is a preliminary translation that does not retain rhyme or meter.

³⁵ The translation of "fäst" is uncertain. Due to ongoing Swedish spelling reforms in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the word could be "fäst" [attached to, fond of] or "fest" [party]. Aurell published "Jul" three times: the first publication was in *Allarm* in December of 1915; in January of 1916 she published the poem in the Swedish newspaper *Brand*, and in 1919 she included the poem in her self-published collection of poetry *Irrbloss*. In *Allarm* and *Irrbloss*, the word is spelled "fäst," in *Brand*, it is spelled "fest."

³⁶ "Hälg" is, most likely, "helg" [holiday] due to the same spelling reforms that are mentioned above.

³⁷ This translation is a preliminary translation that does not retain rhyme or meter.

³⁸ Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) was a German philosopher whose work only became widely known after his death.

³⁹ See Constance Coiner's article "U.S. Working-Class Women's Fiction: Notes Toward an Overview" in *Women's Studies Quarterly* pp. 250–253 for a more detailed discussion of the various definitions of working-class literature.

Chapter 4. *A String of Nows: Letters from the United States to Sweden*

Her hands are clasped in front of his necktie, her arms draped around his neck, her cheek gently touching his temple. A giant bow sits atop her head as she stares ahead at the camera. He's staring at us too. A young father, his hair swept up and to his right. He's wearing a jacket to go with his tie. They're dressed up for the picture in the middle of page twenty-six of the 1921 April–May issue of *Bokstugan*. Her name is Ester Barbara Harriet Jonsson Stenberg, born 1916 in Minnesota to Sigfrid and Gertrude Stenberg (U.S. Census Bureau 1920). Barbro, as Signe Aurell called her, is probably about four years old in the picture. Just below the image the staff of *Bokstugan* included a short note:

Sigfrid Stenberg, som tillsammans med Ragnar Johanson gått tillbaka att avtjäna sina 10 års fängelsestraff. Varit ute mot borgen. För en tredje kamrat, Carl Altheén, dömd till 20 år, var det oss omöjligt anskaffa borgen. Alla tre lärjungar av Hinke⁴⁰ [Bergegren] (*Bokstugan* (16), 26).

[Sigfrid Stenberg, who along with Ragnar Johanson, has returned to serve his 10-year prison sentence. Had been released on bail. We were unable to secure Carl Ahlteen's, sentenced to 20 years, release on bail. All three are disciples of Hinke [Bergegren].]

The image and caption are followed by a poem, written by Signe Aurell to Barbro. In the bottom right-hand corner of the page, following the poem, *Bokstugan* published an image of Aurell. It was an image that appeared in four other issues of *Bokstugan*, but in this case the two images put Signe, Sigfrid, and Barbro together, giving a visual depiction of the poem.

In response to Sigfrid Stenberg's conviction for his work at *Allarm* and being sent to Leavenworth Penitentiary, Signe Aurell wrote "Lilla Barbro" [Little Barbro] (1921, 26). The poem was not to Sigfrid, who sat in prison, but to Barbro, the future of the labor movement, the next generation of activists, the second-generation immigrant born to two Swedish parents in

the United States. Serving as an open letter to Barbro Stenberg, Aurell's epistolary poem is more than just a labor poem optimistic about a bright future for the working class. It's a poem about home and community and work. Aurell weaves the three themes into the poem as different stages in Barbro's life and uses imagery that resonates for both the immigrant and the second-generation.

Lilla Barbro. Tillegnad Stenbergs lilla flicka. Av SIGNE AURELL. Lilla Barbro. Medan kvällen svinner Ser jag dig, när aftonbrasan brinner, Syssla med din lek och med din docka, Glad och munter i den tysta kväll, Ser två blåa ögon le och leka, Känner mjuka, varma händer smeka, Hör en ivrig stämma be och tigga: "Tala om en saga, är du snäll." Lilla Barbro. Tysta timmar ila, Jorden sover och dess sorger vila Och jag sjunger om den gamla visan, Sjungen förr så mången, mången gång, Sjunger medan nattens dimmor falla. Men i fjärran hör jag röster kalla, Livets röster, stora, allvarsfulla, Kalla Barbro från min famn och sång. Lilla Barbro. Snart från hemmets armar Styr du färden ut där världen larmar, Ror din egen farkost mellan skären, Stakar ut din egen levnads mål. Rik på jubel, kanske ock på klagan, Bjuder livet dig den bästa sagan, Sömmad med ditt eget hjärtas trådar, Formad av din egen viljas stål. Lilla Barbro. Snart där sjöar brusa Och där friska frihetsvindar susa Står du mitt i stolta stormars brottning. Trygg och trotsande som skogens ek, Lyfts av strömmen över vantrons bankar,	Little Barbro. Dedicated to Stenberg's little girl By SIGNE AURELL. Little Barbro. As the night turns I see you, while the evening fire burns, Playing your games and with your doll, In the quiet night, happy and at ease See two blue eyes smile and dance Feel the caress of soft, warm hands Hear an eager voice ask and beg: "Tell me a story, please." Little Barbro. Quiet hours fly past, The earth sleeps, sorrows lie there holding fast And I sing once again that old song Sung so many, many times before, I sing while the fog of evening does fall. But in the distance, I hear voices call, Life's voices, so grand and so serious, Calling you from my arms and song, Barbro. Little Barbro. Soon from home's safe walls You'll steer your ship into the world that calls Row your own boat between the rocks, Determine what makes your life purposeful. Rich in joy, maybe also in tragedies, Life will offer you the best of stories, Sewn with the threads from your own heart, Formed with the steel from your own will. Little Barbro. Soon, where waters roar And where winds of freedom soar You'll stand proud in the middle of the storm. Confident and defiant like an oak in the wood, Carried by the river over banks of doubt,
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Vaknar för det nys stora tankar, Skådar ljusa, aldrig drömda vidder, Gör din insats uti livets lek.	Awake to a future with great ideas about, Behold bright, never-dreamed of expanses, You'll make your mark in life, as you should.
Lilla Barbro. Sist där fältrop ljuda Och där sista stridens vågor sjuda Riktat du och vårens ljusa härar Mot det mörkas murar slag på slag, Och när nattens sista skuggor svunnit När du vad vi andra aldrig hunnit, Målet, sagolandet, solskenslandet, Som vi trott på, far och mor och jag.	Little Barbro. Finally where cries of war resound And where the last battle's waves hit the ground You and spring's bright army will turn, Blow by blow, where dark walls be, And as the last shadows of night fade You'll reach what the rest of us never made, The end, the land of fairytales and sunshine That we believed in, your mom and dad and me.

Aurell imagines her time with Barbro, their evenings by the fire, the stories she told, and the songs she sang for the young child. It's an idyllic scene, but punctured by the lack of Barbro's father, imprisoned for his activism. It's a nostalgic one also, of a warm and happy childhood in a loving home. But life and the wider world calls. Aurell begins to imagine the young girl out of the home. Barbro leaves, but she does not leave by train or even the emerging transportation of the day, the car. Instead, Aurell suggests that Barbro use the same mode of transportation that she and the Stenbergs used to leave their childhood homes—the ship. Barbro steers her own ship, she rows her own boat into a new community. That community requires work though, and Aurell deftly includes examples of the labor of the working class, when she suggests that Barbro's stories will be “Sömmad med ditt eget hjärtas trådar,/Formad av din egen viljas stål” [Sewn with the threads from your own heart,/Formed with the steel from your own will] (1921, 26). She'll join that community of workers, seamstresses and steel workers included, and fight for the working-class. Aurell recognizes the challenges Barbro will face, but also the joys and excitements, the agency and power she will have in determining her own life.

Just like “När himlen blir blå...” [When the sky turns blue...], “Till min gosse” [To my boy], and “Jul” [Christmas], which were discussed in the previous chapter, “Lilla Barbro” ends with a message of hope. A class war is coming, but the working class, the class that Sigfrid

Stenberg, Gertrude Stenberg, Signe Aurell, and, one day, Barbro Stenberg fight for will prevail. And the poem is reminiscent of a form that nearly every Swedish immigrant would recognize—a letter. The final stanza admits what many already realized, the class war that Aurell and the IWW hoped for would most likely not take place in their lifetimes. Yet it is optimistic nonetheless. Aurell had already left the United States at this point and watched from afar as her friend served prison time, exchanging several letters with both Stenberg and Carl Ahlteen during their time in Leavenworth Penitentiary (U.S. Penitentiary 1918–1922).⁴¹ But this poem, this “letter,” is one way for Aurell to create a sense of community with her imprisoned friend, his wife, and his daughter. In doing so, she reinforces her own identity as a labor activist. Letters, like the epistolary poem, or more traditional immigrant letters from the New World to the Old, allowed writers to exercise their authority and create or reinforce their identity. As Swedes in the United States, their first-hand perspective gave them authoritative knowledge of the immigrant experience, which they could then pass on and share with others through their writing. In sharing that knowledge, they identified themselves as members of various communities based on the audience they were writing for—sometimes Swedish, sometimes Swedish American.

Vernacular writing like labor songs and poems can offer us a different perspective, one that furthers our understanding of what it meant to be a Swedish immigrant living in early twentieth-century North America, negotiating an identity as a working Swedish woman in the United States. While no full letter by Signe Aurell exists, a fragment was published in *Bokstugan* after her return to Sweden. That fragment, in conjunction with the previous chapter on Swedish-language newspapers and coupled with the immigrant letters, personal accounts, oral histories, and memoirs of other immigrant women presented here, can give a fuller understanding of the lives that immigrants lived. More specifically, women’s writings give us a

glimpse of the often-hidden lives of women immigrants in their own words, not in the words of their fathers or husbands or in the words of politicians, journalists, or other members of a perceived cultural elite. Instead, what emerge are the voices of immigrant women, voices that have often gone unheard, but voices that describe and add nuance to the immigrant experience. These words demonstrate that women were active participants in the migration between the Old World and the New and that they maintained and recreated their identities within those communities through their writing.

Amerikabrev

Mamma skall tro att det kändes svårt att lemna er mina kära älskade föräldrar och syskon jag så nog glad ut vid tåget men ytan kan bedra, hvarför kunde icke jag som alla andra, få finna min lycka i mitt hemland och fått vara nära mina föräldrar, men det var mitt öde, hvad som nu kommer att bli målet för vårt arbete är att tjäna o spara dollar, för att om några år få återkomma till er (Bergström June 13, 1907, 1–2).

[Mamma should know that it was hard to leave you my dear parents and siblings I probably looked happy at the train but looks can be deceiving, why couldn't I like everyone else find happiness in my own country and be near my parents, but it was my fate, now the goal is to work and earn and save dollars so that I can return to you in a few years.]

Handwritten letters, like the excerpt from Ellen Bergström's letter above, are reminders of the immense distance between families as sons and daughters left home. Her letter, sent to her parents just days after arriving in New York in 1907, tells the story of her passage from Sweden to Norway to Scotland, and finally, to the United States. Bergström's tale is familiar to many letter writers and letter readers. She writes home, assuring her family that she is safe and that all is well, yet she writes home to tell them that she will be back, that the United States is not her home; it is a stop along the way to a better life. Such letters are reminders that not all who crossed the Atlantic intended to stay and that not all immigrants identified as such.

The immigrant story is not just about immigration, but also about labor migration. Many Swedes traveled to the United States in hopes of earning enough money to better their situation—not in the New World, but in the Old. In the meantime, these immigrants and labor migrants wrote letters home. Those letters tell stories of love and family, of homesickness and adventure, of success and failure. They tell stories of the immigrant experience that resonate today. Easily lost, forgotten, or simply thrown away after having been read, not many letters survive from the years between 1851 and 1930, when over one million Swedes left their homeland to travel to the United States. Those that survive are filled with the intimate and mundane, the truths and the lies, the news and the gossip that make up everyday life. These letters were exchanged across the Atlantic for years. For many immigrants to the United States, these letters served as their only connection to friends and family back home.

Unfortunately for later generations, these *Amerikabrev* or America letters—letters sent by Swedish immigrants from North and South America back to Sweden—are hard to come by. In fact, H. Arnold Barton estimates that of the millions of letters that were written and sent back home to Sweden, only thousands survive (2000, 4). Even fewer of these letters are available to the interested reader; however, these letters provide a glimpse into the lives of the writers in their own words, especially important in the immigrant history and folklore of single women because, as folklorist Jennifer Eastman Attebery explains, immigrant letters display a form of vernacular writing that is “everyday and routine—and uses language that is similarly everyday, pragmatic, and, most importantly, traditional” (2007, 1). Of course, sometimes, the traditional, everyday, and pragmatic are one and the same and it is the everyday and pragmatic that can shed new light on what life was like for Swedish immigrants.

In 1938 and again in 1960, Nordiska museet [The Nordic Museum] in Stockholm solicited Amerikabrev from immigrants and the families of immigrants in Sweden and the United States. The museum worked together with *Stockholms tidningen* [Stockholm's Newspaper] and *Året runt* [Year Round] to host a contest collecting hundreds of original letters, personal accounts written by those who had returned to Sweden after years in the United States, and accounts written by family members and descendants of Swedes who had emigrated.⁴² The collections housed at archives like Nordiska museet are valuable for the letters and depictions of immigrant life in the United States but they are also valuable for the commentary that sometimes accompanies the collections. These collections often include short letters from the owner of the Amerikabrev—sometimes the letter-writer themselves, sometimes a family member, and in one case, a homeowner who happened to find the letters in the walls of an old house that she had just purchased (Karlsson February 11, 1960, 1). These letters-about-letters can include important biographical information about the letter writer, humble doubts about the worth and usefulness of the letter, and also thoughtful reflections about the letter writer, the time period, or immigration. They offer further insight into the ways in which the families, friends, or strangers living in Sweden read Amerikabrev as vernacular, ephemeral examples of written stories that describe the immigrant experience of Swedish women in the United States. The Amerikabrev—pages upon pages upon pages of vernacular writing—give insight into the everyday lives of Swedish immigrants separate from the newspapers, advertisements, and full-on propaganda that were used in Sweden to dissuade people from emigrating and in the United States to entice people to immigrate. Nordiska museet's decision to collect immigrant letters came on the heels of a larger movement recognizing the importance of these ephemeral sources.

As early as the 1920s William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* recognized the importance of vernacular sources to describe the immigrant experience (1927). At the same time, taking a similar grassroots approach, Theodore Blegen began collecting letters from Norwegian immigrants, which he would later curate and publish. In the 1970s, H. Arnold Barton did the same for Swedish immigrants. Blegen and Barton built on Thomas and Znaniecki's work to continue to legitimize and elevate the voices of marginalized immigrant communities.

However, the stories told and written by women, especially in letters, are underrepresented in published collections. There are several potential reasons for the underrepresentation of women in letter collections. In some areas of the country, like the Rocky Mountains where mining jobs were common, there were simply fewer female immigrants. In the late nineteenth century, immigration to the United States from Sweden was dominated by families; it wasn't until the 1900s that emigrants from Sweden began arriving as individuals (Brook 1987, 142). Because the male members of the household often took responsibility for letter-writing, there are fewer letters written primarily by women that have found their way to archives (Gerber 2006, 6). Even literacy rates may have varied for women as compared to men. But the fact remains that Swedish immigrant women wrote letters, and that those letters still exist.

Of the seventy letters Barton includes in his collection of letters from 1890–1914, only fourteen are signed by women. Barton chose letters not because their authors represented a demographic sample, but because they seemed readable and interesting for a general public. The exclusion of certain letters implicitly suggests that those letters are not interesting and not worth

publishing, saving, or introducing to a general public. In describing his rationale for including some letters and excluding others, he writes:

Those given here have, moreover, been selected with an eye to variety, interest, and appeal to the reader. Many have been chosen for colorful and exciting episodes, keen observation, sensitive feeling, the writer's attractive personality. Most immigrant letters have in fact little of interest to relate. They are often filled with clichés, concerned with mundane matters and local news from the old home parish. Many consist largely of religious platitudes, hearsay information, accounts culled from newspapers, comments on the weather, reports on wages and the prices of commodities, news of family affairs, and greetings to long lists of relatives and friends at home (Barton 2000, 4–5).

While the “colorful and exciting episodes” of these letters make Barton’s book an easy read, not every letter of the millions sent included an exciting episode. Instead, the fact that people had crossed the Atlantic and wrote letters to friends and family back home was exciting. For many Swedish immigrants, their America letters documented the adventure of a lifetime. That adventure included not just excitement, but also “mundane matters and local news,” and was not only documented by writers who presented an “attractive personality” in writing, but everyday people who had made a choice that would forever change their lives. The outright dismissal of most letters as having nothing of interest ignores the routine happenings that make up an individual’s life and identity. To ignore the greetings to family and friends is to ignore the way in which these immigrants wrote home as a way of maintaining their communities through personal relationships. By asking for and writing about the “mundane matters and local news from the old parish,” the immigrants were able to maintain some connection to a world they had left behind, a world that some would never return to. Literate immigrants filled millions of pages with history written in their own hand about the things that mattered to them as individuals.

Folklorists have long been interested in immigrant letters, notably Robert Klymasz and Linda Dégh, and more recently Jennifer Eastman Attebery have examined the structure and purpose of letters sent home to family and friends. Klymasz notes that letters replaced the face-

to-face communication that many immigrants had always had as the main, if not only, form of communication in their home countries and “that the letter alone could replace the casual, everyday verbal contacts once enjoyed with friends, relatives and loved ones back in the Old Country” (1969, 40). Instead of glossing over the intimate and seemingly unimportant details, immigrant letters should be recognized as pieces of delayed and drawn-out conversations.

Linda Dégh recognized early on that letters written to and by immigrants developed a traditional structure noting the formulaic way in which the letter is organized, an observation that Attebery expands upon greatly (Dégh 1978, 812; Attebery 2007). Building on Dégh and Klymasz, Attebery argues that *Amerikabrev* were a form of “folk practice” and “an extension of the oral culture left behind in Sweden.” Echoing Klymasz, she argues that letters substituted for the oral communication that had been lost by moving across the Atlantic (Attebery 2007, 7). Immigrant letters, then, can be viewed as part of a greater genre and can thus be used to examine not just personal relationships, but also “larger cultural communities,” specifically the communities in which the immigrant lived and worked—the community that they became a part of (Attebery 2007, 11). Although women letter writers are often underrepresented, they used letters to write home about their everyday—the good and the bad—and to allow us to see just how they negotiated their identities as part of a greater community of Swedish immigrant women (Attebery 2007, 157–171).

Old Homes, New Worlds: Swedish-American Women and their Communities

Some of these letter writers emigrated at a young age, like Carin Nordström’s sister who left for Chicago, Illinois, at the age of seventeen to live with family in 1902. While her occupation is never specifically mentioned, or her name for that matter, it seems that in November of 1903,

when she wrote her letter, she was working as a domestic servant. Two years later, the unnamed sister had died. In a letter to Nordiska museet, Nordström's explanation for her sister's early death is a simple and telling one: her sister died of "hemlängtan," homesickness, perhaps the opposite of the "America fever" that led so many Swedes to the United States in the first place. Nordström describes how, because her family was poor, they were unable to pay for her sister to return to Sweden and so she remained in the United States, never to see her family again (March 14, 1938).

Nordström does not explain if her sister moved to the United States as a labor migrant with plans to return home or if she moved with intentions of settling. However, the letter from her unnamed sister suggests that she had, in fact, always been planning to return to Sweden. In this single letter, only four pages long, the writer reveals such an intention twice and in doing so, just as Attebery suggests, Nordström's sister situates herself firmly in the Swedish community that she left behind, despite being in the United States. She looks forward to seeing little Bärnt and notes that "han vänta hem mig snart, men han hinner bli några år äldre först" [he's waiting for me to come home soon, but he'll end up getting a few years older first] (November 26, 1903, 3). She imagines visiting a friend's mother, if she is alive, when she returns "Jag tycker det var roligt att ni har talat vid Hjalles mamma och ni tycker om henne, ja lefver hon, när jag kommer till Sveden så skall jag allt hälsa på henne, vara hur dant det vill!" [I think it's nice that you have spoken with Hjalles mother and that you like her, well, if she's still alive when I come back to Sweden, I'm going to visit her, no matter what] (November 26, 1903, 3). Clearly, Nordström's homesick sister understands the realities of her choice. When she does return home, much will have changed. Children will have grown older, parents will have died, siblings will have moved away from home. This is clearly on the young woman's mind as she writes to her family, but

while travel between Sweden and the United States became faster, easier, and more affordable, the reality was that some women, like this unnamed author, simply could not afford the ticket home.

Life as a labor migrant was not easy. The seventeen-year old woman above describes the toll that manual labor had on her body—a toll that must have contributed to her emotional and mental distress. It must have contributed also to her homesickness; she mentions the difficulties of waiting for letters and news:

Men jag undrar hvad det är fel att jag ej får bref från min Hjalle jag är så ledsen ibland, så jag måste gråta ett tag det är leggesedan jag skicka det sista brefvet, och sedan skicka jag ett som ej kom fram eftersom min broder Georg skref om. Helsa Hjalle från mig att jag väntar bref det är ledsamt att vänta så länge (November 26, 1903, 3–4).

[But I wonder what is wrong since I haven't received a letter from my Hjalle; I am so sad sometimes that I have to cry for a little while; it's been a long time since I sent the last letter and then I sent another that didn't arrive, because my brother Georg wrote me. Tell Hjalle for me that I am waiting for his letter; it is sad to wait so long.]

While the letter may have replaced face-to-face communication, the transition was not easy, nor were letters perfect substitutes. Instead, it seems that the imperfection of the substitution, the delays in responses, the worries over letters not delivered, the homesickness that enveloped many immigrants, encouraged people to write. They could report about the challenges of work or the sadness in missing a Swedish Christmas, as Nordström's sister does. Importantly, the letter provides her with a way to be a part of the community she left behind via her memories and her imagination. She asks that her family “Helsa alla bekanta från mig” [say hello to everyone I know from me] and she gives her own greeting when she writes that “Jag ska helsa från Källmans jag var där i går afton att han har fått bref från Edvard men hans gumma har varit sjuk” [I want to tell you from the Källmans that, I was there last evening, he has received a letter from Edvard, but his wife has been sick] (November 26, 1903, 4). In doing so, she ensures that

her family understands that she is still part of a Swedish community and, specifically, a Swedish community that has ties to her home. This one letter that leaves us with more questions than answers shows how the mundane details of the everyday helps the letter writer to identify as part of the community she left behind, by imagining herself at home and even recreating that identity by preparing herself for changes that are sure to come in her absence.

Immigrant letters offer a sense of the now, by reporting on the state of the letter writer at the very moment of writing—the news that they wish to convey, their health, their work, their life with little to no evaluation of the past as a greater whole (Djupedal 1989, 55). But letters could take weeks, even months, before they arrived and some never did. Instead of giving immigrants a direct connection with their friends and family by creating a sense of now as in a face-to-face conversation, letters created a string of nows from the past. This delay, whether because it was a reminder of the disconnect between Sweden and the United States or because of pressure (implicit or otherwise) to maintain correspondence, was often remarked upon in the letters. As it was for Carin Nordström's sister, this could be a point of consternation and stress or just a reminder to friends and family that they were thinking of them and looking forward to continuing the conversation in the next letter.

For women who intended to move home, it must have been critical to maintain relationships with their families and friends. Yet the lack of daily contact, the poor working conditions, and the difficult life of an isolated immigrant made it difficult for these single women to ever feel at home. These were the women that Aurell was writing for in “En uppmaning” [An appeal] as she encouraged them to unionize and to join a community of Swedish working women. With few options to communicate daily with family and friends left behind, it shouldn't be surprising that some women, like Carin Nordström's sister, seemed to

have died of homesickness. For others, Amerikabrev provided enough of a connection to the Old World. Hilda Emanuelsson, who left Sweden in 1892 and soon found work as a domestic servant in Grand Valley, Pennsylvania, writes as much to her friend on May 10 of 1893, “jag tänker alltid på dig och önskar att jag muntligen fingo tala med dig jag skulle ha mycket att berätta i förtroende för dig min vän” [I think about you always and wish that I could actually speak with you, I would have so much to tell you in confidence my friend] (1).⁴³ Just like oral communication could be passed on, Emanuelsson understood that her letters, or at least the contents of those letters, would be passed on and thus censored herself to some extent. She continues this line of thought in a letter sent in September of that same year when she writes:

Hjärtlig tack för ditt kärkomna brev det gläder mig riktigt att få tala med dig min kära vän Jag kommer [ihåg] hur roligt du var alltid naturlig och munterlig en få tala med dig Och ej mindre nu fast med tysta ord och därtill längre väntade svar Men de kommer ändå (Emanuelsson September 22, 1893, 1).

[Many thanks for your long-awaited letter, it makes me so happy to be able to talk with you my dear friend. I remember how funny you were, always natural and a happy person to talk with. And you're not any less now, although with quiet words and a longer wait between responses. But they still come.]

For Emanuelsson, letters were clearly taking the place of oral communication. Emanuelsson describes the quality of her friend's words, her humor, her naturalness, her joy and juxtaposes that to the “tysta ord,” the quiet words of a letter. Her friend is still natural, funny, and full of joy, but. That but is important. “Although with quiet words,” “but they still come.” With those two phrases, Emanuelsson acknowledges the vast distance between them and that there is, in fact, a difference between oral and written communication between the two old friends. In writing to her friend, she apologizes for being slow to send the first letter, and begins to describe her trip to the United States “...alt gick krytt bra jag kom i väg ty som du väl ~~vet~~ har fått veta så gick resan gott för sig och nu är jag framme” [everything went well, I managed to leave as I'm sure

you've heard; the trip went well and now I've arrived] (September 22, 1893, 1–2). While she may not feel as comfortable writing down very private matters and doesn't necessarily feel the need to rehash all of the details of her trip—she obviously knows that America letters like hers were only semi-private and could be read aloud to others or even published—she explicitly compares the letters she and her friend exchange as part of an ongoing conversation, albeit a silent one.

Just like Emanuelsson and Nordström, Anna Sjören used her letters to inform her family in Sweden about her new life, but at the same time recognized the reality of maintaining relationships across the Atlantic—gossip and news about an upcoming marriage, for example, travels fast; and settling down with a husband in the New World can mean never seeing your family in the Old World again. Sjören writes:

jag skall nu gifta mig som du har nog hört så skall det vara med Lars Svenssen från Essestorp du tjennar honom väl icke men kanhända att Nils [Anna's brother-in-law] tjenner honom, vi skall gifta oss i New york sedan skall vi resa mycke långt inåt landet, kanhända länge än till kallefornien, så nu tror jag aldrig att vi träffas mera här i lifvet, men det vet allena Gud i himmelen, för honom är ingenting omöjligt (June 17, 1883, 2).

[I am going to get married. As you've probably heard it is going to be to Lars Svenssen from Essestorp. You probably don't know him but it could be that Nils [Anna's brother-in-law] knows him. We are going to get married in New York and then we're going to travel very far across the country, perhaps all the way to California. So now I think that we will never meet again in this life, but only God in Heaven knows, because for Him nothing is impossible]

For Sjören, the letter demonstrates her ties back home, despite the distance. That her brother-in-law may know her new husband acknowledges the uncertainty that family members must have felt when their siblings married in a new country while also reinforcing a sense of community. Just like Carin Nordström's sister reminds her family that she is part of a Swedish community in the United States that is familiar to her community back home, so too does Sjören when she points out that her husband may be a familiar face, or in this case, name, to folks back home. In

just two sentences, Sjören captures the tension between maintaining relationships with those who were left behind and the reality that they will most likely never meet again.

That reality made adjusting to the New World increasingly important. Linda Dégh suggests “the letter remains for the foreign-born generation (and in many cases for their children), a key channel to reinforce ethnicity throughout the process of adjustment and integration into the American ethnic minority groups, as well as into the mainstream culture” (1978, 810). Immigrants maintained or strengthened relationships with the people back home through their letters, while at the same time presenting themselves in their new environment to family and friends in their old environment (Attebery 2007, 157–171). This was especially important as immigrants moved to ethnic enclaves, as Aurell and the Stenbergs did to the Franklin-Seward neighborhood of Minneapolis.

However, not everyone found themselves surrounded by Swedes, and even if they did move to a Swedish area, working as domestic servants often isolated women from other workers, friends, and simply the opportunity to meet new people, severely restricting their ability to interact with a broader community (Katzman 1981, 233). For Anna Sjören, that isolation came after she moved from New York to Westport, Connecticut, in 1881. She wrote to her sister that:

det är en stor gård och jag tycker bra om det här jag har 16 dollar i månaden jag lida icke vid här vi äro två svenska så tiden går ju till lättare, men vi har ingen svensk kyrka här och ingen stans att gå för här är inga svenska här om kring (January 18, 1882, 2).

[it's a big farm and I like it here. I get paid \$16 a month. I'm not suffering here because we are two Swedes so the time goes by a little faster, but we don't have a Swedish church here and nowhere to go because there are no Swedes in the area]

Sjören's letter is a reminder to her sister that she is working to retain her Swedish ethnicity and that she is able to spend time with her co-worker, another Swede, while also lamenting the lack

of a Swedish church and other Swedes in the area. Just as Dégh suggests, the letter becomes a way for Sjören to maintain her Swedishness while adjusting to the United States.

Immigrant letter writers were acutely aware of their audience and used the letter to create a sense of self by maintaining personal ties with the people back home—the families and friends they left behind. The writer could present a specific identity depending on their audience, an identity of their own choosing, an identity over which they had complete control through the written word. The daughter writing home to her mother may present a different identity than she would if she were writing to a friend or if she were writing to a local newspaper, by including or excluding, emphasizing or de-emphasizing, certain bits of information. In doing so, immigrant letters often include what historian David Gerber refers to as untruths, the little (and sometimes big) lies we tell ourselves and each other, as well as omissions of truth. Yet those untruths and omissions are guided by a different set of priorities: “the commitment to maintain correspondence, to preserve a tie, rather than truth telling as such, may be considered the mark of faithfulness between correspondents” (Gerber 2005, 321). In fact, Gerber argues that “the immigrant letter was concerned more with personal identities and private relationships” (2006, 28). Letters, then, did not have to bear important news across the ocean; they just had to make it across the ocean. In this way, those letters maintained personal relationships and created identities through their interactions with folk groups across the Atlantic. By maintaining contact through letters, immigrants were able to maintain a sense of belonging. The letters brought with them news and gossip, perhaps easing their homesickness or easing their homecoming if they returned.

Many letter writers chose to present a happy and successful immigrant experience, avoiding any mention of hard times. For some, this was undoubtedly the case. For other letter

writers, the optimism of their letters may have been because they were guarding their reputation by omitting anything that might cause worry or embarrassment for the people back home (Djupedal 1989, 57–59). Many wrote, for example, on the one hand about an American society seemingly devoid of social class, in which they did not have to remove their hats in the presence of the rich or powerful, a gesture of deference to the upper class that was expected in Sweden. On the other hand, complaints about work are not as common, perhaps because to complain about the working conditions of a place that you had chosen to go to could be seen as dismissive of the class structure to which many Swedes had grown accustomed. A job was a job and something to be grateful for, not something to complain about (Attebery 2007, 81). Despite the rise of the labor movement in Sweden, rigid class structures were still in place in the late 1800s and early 1900s so to many readers back home, this supposed lack of a class system must have seemed incredibly attractive. Of course, Aurell as an IWW member, and even many of the letter writers in this chapter, told a different story.

Barton argues that immigrant letters “express enthusiasm, satisfaction, a dogged cheerfulness, and optimism in the new land, despite disappointments that if mentioned at all are characteristically dismissed with stoic, wry humor” (2007, 134). He does, however, acknowledge a shift in attitudes (and an improvement in Swedish public education and, in turn, literacy) in later generations of Swedish immigrants noting that many were better informed about the United States and thus had a more realistic view of the country, which was expressed in their letters home. Despite this slight shift in later periods of immigration, Barton notes that Swedes maintain their optimistic view of the new country (2000, 207). This optimism was sometimes parodied, such as Ruben Nilsson’s “Amerikabrevet.” The letter-as-song in the Scandihoovian dialect—a mix of Swedish and English—mimics the structure and themes of America letters

that Attebery describes so well; “Ja nu ska jag rita hem to you, ett litet letters brev,/för att tala om hur very well jag mår./Men det är rätt länge sen you see, som ja med pennan skrev,/så jag hoppas att du understand, förstår” [Yes now I write home *to you*, a little *letters* letter/to tell you how *very well* I am./But it was quite some time ago *you see*, that I wrote with my pen,/so I hope that you *understand* understand] (Nilsson n.d.). That the parody exists at all suggests that maybe things weren’t quite as good as the letter-writers would have their friends and family believe. As we see with the many letters written by women, there were many disappointments in the United States that were not dismissed at all. Gerber’s discussion of untruths and omissions may help to explain the general optimism of the America letter that Barton notes.

But the written word is tricky. It can tell us that the writer is healthy and happy. That she has a job and is earning more money than she would have earned in Sweden. It can tell us about homes and partners and children. The written word can tell us what the writers want us to know—good or bad. Sometimes the unwritten word is just as important, although difficult, if not impossible, to provide concrete examples of. By *not* writing something, the letter writer is taking part in a community via the written word. They are acknowledging that which is acceptable and pleasing to the people back home and ignoring that which is embarrassing or taboo, or at least that which they *believe* to be acceptable, or embarrassing, to the people back home (Djupedal 1989, 58–59). By including certain types of information or omitting others, the writer actively takes part in the community from afar.

For many women, writing became a tool to combat homesickness and a way to seek support in a new country. While reading connected women to a broader community—libraries provided free access and sometimes study groups or lectures and newspapers were a place to find out what was going on in the local community, for example—writing connected women to

a broader community as well. Letters home became a space for them to seek solace in friends and family despite the physical distance separating them. They became places to question their decisions, lament their working conditions, and complain about homesickness. They became, simply, a drawn-out conversation about the everyday travails of life as an immigrant.

In a letter to the editor of *Qvinnan och Hemmet* [The woman and the home], a Swedish-language newspaper published out of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Mathilda Wellander captures the isolation and difficulties of immigration as she writes “I ett land der man ingen känner, långt från släkt och vänner, har det mången gång varit värdefullt att kunna rådfråga och sällskapa med min kära, lilla tidning” [In a country where I don’t know anyone, far from friends and family, many times it’s been worthwhile to consult and be kept company by my dear little newspaper] (1903, 308). The newspapers and people who wrote for and to the newspapers provided Wellander with a community she could relate to as she negotiated her identity in a foreign place.

Most letters that were published in periodicals were addressed specifically to the newspaper or the general public, as with Wellander’s, and in direct contrast to Aurell’s letter, which will be discussed later. Attebery argues that letters display a sense of authority by the author as the voice speaking to *the* immigrant experience (2007, 14). For women like Mathilda Wellander, the letter is a personal thank you to the newspaper for speaking to the immigrant experience. Others, like Anna Johnson below, wrote letters describing their own very individualized experiences. While these newspaper letters may have been edited and published for hundreds or thousands to read, when published in the small Swedish-language newspapers of the United States, we should still read them as a form of vernacular literature due to the smaller, more familiar, intended audience (Klein 1993, 85–97). The women who wrote letters to local newspapers did so not to connect with the community that they left, but to connect with

the community they had joined. For example, Anna Johnson from Waterloo, Wisconsin, writes a letter to the editor in the same issue of *Qvinnan och Hemmet*:

Detta är det första bref jag någonsin skrivit till en tidning, hvarför det torde ursäktas, om det icke är så bra Men jag ville gerna skriva några ord, ty jag tycker om min tidning. När nästan hela min familj var sjuk och alla människor syntes ha glömt mig var Gud och denna lilla tidning min tröst. Vår ende son dog. Det var en stor sorg. Min man blef sjuk några dagar efter och låg sjuk länge. Sjelf var jag mycket dålig, men Gud styrkte mina små krafter, så att jag kunde sköta de sjuka. När min gosse låg som värst sjuk i feber, mindes han ändå sina ”julfeststycken.” Dem läste han ständigt. Så kommer den goda säden åter, när vi minst ana det. Vänlig helsning (1903, 321).

[This is the first letter I have ever written to a newspaper, which is why I hope you can excuse me if it is not so good. But I certainly want to write a few words, because I like my newspaper. When almost my entire family was sick and everyone seemed to have forgotten me, God and this little newspaper were my comfort. Our only son died. That was a great loss. My husband became sick a few days later and was sick for a long time. I was also very sick, but God strengthened my weakened vigor so that I could take care of the sick. When my son was at his worst with fever, he still remembered his “Christmas passages.” He read them constantly. And thus the good seed sprouts again when we least expect it. Yours sincerely.]

The simple act of sending a letter to a newspaper to be published suggests that the writer is claiming some form of authority (Attebery 2007, 14). But to do so does not change the vernacular aspects of the letter. Anna Johnson above writes a short letter in which she describes the terrible illnesses that strike her family. That letter claims an immigrant experience that was hers and hers alone, but one that many women and families could relate to—death could take away your loved ones, immigration could mean isolation. For Anna and many other women, newspapers and letters provided an escape and a way to be a part of a larger community. She writes to a group of strangers who do not seem like strangers because she knows that they will recognize and respect her experiences as a form of authority. Claiming authority as part of a marginalized community—whether an immigrant woman or an IWW activist, or both—was an act of subversion that challenged the popular stereotypes of immigrants to the New World. Women like Anna Johnson and Mathilda Wellander were claiming their space as immigrants

with a voice, and doing so in a form they were familiar with—the letter. Taking space in the newspapers gave readers a first-person account of what life was like as the writer cultivated their own identity in written form. They chose what to write about and what not to write about. The same can be said of the readers who chose to read, or ignore, the letters printed in newspapers.

Surely the authors accommodated for the different audiences—a letter written home to family may present a different level of candor than a letter to a good friend. But some *Amerikabrev* were not explicitly written for publication and were written to friends and family, only to eventually appear in the pages of a local newspaper. Editors of the newspapers played a role in what was printed as well, either by choosing which letters to include or editing the letters that they did include (Björk 2005, 195). Of course, the editing process requires the careful reader to question the authority of the account. The editor may have excised segments of the letter depending on the story they wished to tell, removing a sense of agency from the letter writer. Or the editor may have left the letter as it was received, retaining any potential spelling or grammar or even dialectical markers.⁴⁴

Regardless, there is much to be gained from examining these public letters that appeared in the pages of Swedish-language newspapers in the United States. These writers attempted to speak for a larger community—Swedish immigrants—and did so by addressing other Swedish immigrants. In fact, because the individuals of the newspaper audience were Swedes in the United States, the letter writer could share experiences and feelings that other immigrants could relate to, but which they might be hesitant to bring up with their family and friends back home (Björk 2005, 195). The *Amerikabrev* in Swedish-language American newspapers discussed the everyday experiences of immigrants in the United States, surely still filled with untruths and omissions, but because of the perceived audience—a community of Swedes who understand life

in the New World—slightly different. Because of that shared experience, these letters can be read as supplemental to the letters to family and friends as a way to better understand how people negotiated their identity as immigrants.

Swedish-American Women and their Work

While some immigrants lived the American Dream, others lived a nightmare. For women working in urban centers, like Signe Aurell in Minneapolis, working conditions and quality of life were sometimes—literally—nothing to write home about. Still, letters went back and forth, often glorifying the new country and the new clothes and the new money associated with a new job. Others, of course, were less impressed and sent letters complaining instead of the homesickness, the terrible pay, and the awful working conditions. Swedish immigrants to the United States wrote letters from every corner of the country describing their employment. From Washington to New York. From Texas to Minnesota. Each immigrant and each letter has an individual story to tell contributing their own stories to a trans-Atlantic laborlore. In telling their stories about working conditions, these women letter-writers further took control of their identities as Swedes in the United States and, in writing first-hand accounts, demonstrated their authority as immigrant workers.

In what seems to be her first letter to her sister back in Sweden, Anna Sjören writes about life in the United States and describes the freedom that so many Swedish women sought when changing jobs:

jag är fri hverje eftermidag och får gå ut hverje qväll om jag vill och ibland när klockan är två på eftermidagen och vara ute till 9 på qvällen om söndagarna går jag ut klockan 8 på morgonnen och är ute hela dagen jag går till moster när jag är fri för det är liksom mitt hem, jag har 10 dollar i månaden det nära 40 kronor i svenska pängar men när hon kommer hem och jag får lärt språget litet bättre så får jag mer i månaden (July 21, 1881, 2).

[I am free every afternoon and can go out every evening if I want to, and sometimes when it is two in the afternoon, and be out until 9 in the evening. On Sundays I go out at 8 in the morning and am out all day. I go to our aunt when I am free because it is like my home. I earn 10 dollars a month, which is almost 40 kronor in Swedish money, but when she [the woman of the house] comes home and I learn the language a little bit better, I'll earn more per month]

The immigrant experience included the good, as Sjören writes, but also the perils of work such as the physical demands and long hours required to work as a domestic servant. Writing in mid-January after her first Christmas in the New World, Sjören describes the work involved:

jag får säga dig att jag har då aldrig lefvatt sådan jul det skulle väl kallas för att vi firade juldag och nyårsdag men för vår räkning så jorde vi det vist icke för vi hade främmande så att vi hade nog att sköta, trettondedag så bakad jag om morgonnen sedan strök jag hela dagen, man får nog arbeta här så väl som i sverge fastän det icke är di samme göromålen och här sätter di värde på den som kan arbeta (January 18, 1882, 3–4).

[I must say that I have never experienced such a Christmas. I suppose you could say that we celebrated Christmas and New Year's Day, but as for us, we of course did not celebrate because we had guests and we had enough to take care of. On the Epiphany I baked in the morning and then I ironed the whole day. You probably have to work just as much here as in Sweden, although it's not the same tasks and here they put more value on the people who can work.]

Sjören explicitly compares the working conditions in the United States to those in Sweden; her first-hand account is an authoritative one for her family and friends back in Sweden. As someone who has lived both, she is in a unique position to be able to speak to their similarities and differences. In a letter just a few months later, on September 16, 1882, Sjören writes similarly that “jag har en bra plats för di äro beskedliga, men jag har så mycket att sköta här om sommaren så jag har nog så strängt som någon piga i Sverge hvad det beträffar inom hus” [I have a good place here because they are good-tempered, but I have so much to take care of here during the summer so I probably have it just as hard as any domestic servant in Sweden when it comes to taking care of things inside] (2–3). In both letters, she identifies with the working conditions not just of the immigrants in the United States, but with the working conditions of

the domestic servants who stayed behind in Sweden. However, even when implying that she wasn't given the holidays off and was expected to work Christmas and New Year's Day, she points out that in the United States, what you do is what matters, perhaps in contrast to the class-driven society that she had left behind in Sweden. Work hard and you'll be just fine, she seems to suggest when she writes that Americans value people who can work.

Two years later, Sjören's views are less a suggestion and more a statement. After marriage and a move across the country to California, Anna Sjören, now Anna Svensson wrote to her sister on June 20, 1884, about the many immigrants leaving for the United States:

för den som vill och kan arbeta så kan den bättre taga sig fram här än i sverige, men den som icke vill arbeta så har den icke här att göra för america föder inga lata men det gör Sverige förfärliga många, jag önskar aldrig att gå till Sverige mer (3).

[for those who want to and can work, they will be better able to succeed here than in Sweden, but for those who don't want to work, they don't have any business here, because America doesn't raise any lazy people, but Sweden raises a tremendous number of lazy people. I have no desire to ever go back to Sweden again]

It's an interesting shift. Her first few letters home suggest that job expectations were just as demanding in Sweden as in the United States. But as the years go by in her new country and as she starts a family and moves west, her attitude changes. The letter above raises some interesting questions about immigrant stereotypes: Swedes are lazy and Americans are not. But are the Swedes who are now coming to the United States lazy? Surely she would not have counted herself as a lazy Swede. Or are the Swedes who remain in Sweden lazy? Her suggestion that she never wants to return may hint at a disdain for the Swedes who do not have the supposed work ethic to start a new life in the United States.

Carin Nordström's sister, on the other hand, wanted nothing more than to return to Sweden. In her letter, Nordström's sister paints a bleak picture of her life in the United States.

She describes her health, a common theme in Swedish immigrant letters, as well as her work (Attebery 2007, 26).⁴⁵ She writes to her family that:

Nu är det mycket jag vill skrifva men har ej tid, för klockan är mycket på aftonnen, och sedan är jag ej riktigt frisk, men jag har väl förskuld mig för det är så smällande kalt nu. Jag har ondt i halsen och rätt öfver ryggen, men det är ej godt att veta hvad det är, men hoppas att det blir bra och det i morgon, för a arbeta och sedan vara sjuk det är inte det bästa. Jag ~~var~~ tvätta i går och i dag strykit hela dagen, så mina ben kröker sig nästan när jag går (November 26, 1903, 1–2).

[There's a lot that I want to write now, but I don't have time because it is late in the evening and I'm not really feeling well, I have probably gotten myself sick since it is so bitterly cold now. My throat hurts and all through my back, but I don't know what it is, but I hope it gets better and by tomorrow, because to work and then be sick, that's not the best. I did the wash yesterday and then ironed all day today so my legs are almost crooked when I walk]

In writing in such detail about her ailments and her work, this young immigrant woman is not just complaining, but engaging in her community back home, ensuring that her family is aware of her situation and, despite the difficult situation, reminding her family and friends that she is a hard worker. Life in the New World is hard and she is a literal embodiment of the difficulties that some women faced. She's sick and tired and overworked. Her body aches and she acknowledges that tomorrow could be worse if she doesn't feel better, because no matter how she's feeling, she'll still have to work. But her letter also serves to inform her family that she does not intend to stay—she is not an immigrant; she is a labor migrant. Just like labor migrants today, Carin Nordström's sister sent money back home to her family—25 SEK as a Christmas present, of which 15 SEK went to her father, 5 SEK to her mother, and the rest to be split between her siblings, including her sister Carin (November 26, 1903, 2–3). While she does not write what she is earning in Chicago, 25 SEK was not an insignificant amount of money to her family back home, considering that in 1903 women working in Stockholm earned only 5–9 SEK per week (Arbetare-Tidningen 1903, 2).

Hilda Emanuelsson writes early in her first letter to her friend in Sweden that she is happy to be in the United States:

Du vet att jag länge nog längtade efter att få komma hit och att jag till slut fick min vilja igen fram och allt är därmed gott och väl jag trifs och tycker riktigt bra om det här ty här är mycket gladlynt eller vad jag skall säga (June 10, 1892, 2).

[You know that I longed to come here for so long and finally I got my way and with that everything is good and well; I am doing well and really like it here because it is very cheerful here or whatever it's called.]

But as she describes the work that is expected of her, she voices skepticism about the decision to move and whether the potential benefits of migration are worth washing and cooking for six people:

Jag har så mycket att göra så jag kan ej förstå var för att man kom hit och som de bruka säga Sveden Bliva lat nå jag får ha det riktigt bråttom alltjämt... de är 6 perssoner vilka jag har att vaska och laga mat för diska sopa skura och hålla damfritt (Emanuelsson June 10, 1892, 4).

[I have so much to do that I can't understand why I came here and as they say: Sweden's becoming lazy. So I have to always be in a hurry. ... they are six people who I have to wash and cook for, do the dishes, sweep, scrub, and keep everything dust-free.]

Emanuelsson's comment about the lazy Swede is unclear, but seems to mirror Sjören's. Perhaps the family that she works for has taken to calling her "Sveden," which would explain the Anglicization of the word. Or perhaps Emanuelsson is familiar with a folk belief that describes immigrants as lazy, specifically in this case, lazy Swedish immigrants in contrast to the diligent American worker. Interestingly, some employers preferred Swedes, specifically because of their work ethic (Lintelman 2009, 96–98). Or perhaps because they were willing to work for low wages (Swanson February 28, 1960, 1–2). Sjören's judgment of Sweden's workers subscribes to this belief, but regardless of the laziness or diligence of Swedish immigrants, Emanuelsson clearly describes the work that was expected of immigrants and weighs that against her decision to immigrate.

The enthusiasm that Barton identifies was tempered by the reality that life as an immigrant woman was, simply, really hard with little to no guarantee of improvement. The work that awaited Swedish women in the United States was often thankless and demanded a lot from the immigrant women, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Many women changed jobs, and addresses, regularly. Signe Aurell worked as a seamstress, a laundress, and a domestic servant in the home of a private family all while living at at least twelve different addresses during her seven years in Minneapolis. Of course men faced challenging circumstances as immigrants as well. Working in the lumber camps of northern Minnesota, for example, was dangerous and provided little pay or security. But perhaps women were more willing to write about their personal experiences because of their sometimes isolated working conditions. With fewer coworkers came fewer opportunities to talk after work, to make friends, and to find confidants. In turn, the letters that women wrote and sent become even more important in describing the immigrant experience while showing how women participated actively in community building and identity formation.

While life in the United States did offer some women a chance at a better life than what they could expect in Sweden, there was no guarantee that life would be good. Signe Aurell compared working in someone's home to selling one's body, once again an embodiment of the working woman's immigrant experience (Bokstugan 1920 (8), 17). Carin Nordström describes her sister dying of homesickness. Even Evelina Månsson, who writes about her positive experience earning a living as a seamstress in Minneapolis, explains how she hid her injured finger after she caught it under a sewing machine and tells of other women who were forced to enlist doctors to remove broken bits of fingernails after accidents (1930, 83). The immigrant experience could and did break people physically, mentally, and emotionally. Aurell recognized

the concerns about work that many of these women voiced in their letters and called for women to unionize in order to preserve their sense of selves (1916, 3). Stina Hirsch, who worked as a domestic servant in 1930s Chicago must have recognized a similar risk as she recounted that “I was paid for hours of hard work, but gave as little as possible of myself” (1985, 61).

Despite the exhaustion and physical ailments, they continued to write. They wrote mundane, everyday letters to friends and family back in Sweden, taking control of their histories. That they did so demonstrates just how important it was for them to retain that connection to the community they had left behind while becoming a part of their new community all while maintaining their own identities. As we read these letters, we are presented with a fuller understanding of the immigrant experience. While America letters do not present a simple and universal description of what life was like for Swedish immigrants, they do demonstrate just how varied the experience could be as immigrants tried to negotiate the threshold between the Old World and the New.

Signe Aurell's Homes

On July 21, 1920, Signe Aurell stepped onto the SS *Drottningholm* for her return voyage to Sweden. Seven years had passed since she came to the United States on the SS *Franconia* (Bokstugan 1920 (8), 17). She had accomplished a great deal in Minnesota, but she was moving back to her parents' home in Osby, Sweden. By October 29 of the same year, she was officially registered as living at Osby No. 6 along with her parents and youngest brother (Osby kyrka 1895–1914, 919). Sometime in August of 1920, shortly after arriving back in Sweden, Aurell wrote a letter to her friend Bertha Waldén, who also served in various roles on the board of directors for *Bokstugan*, where excerpts of Aurell's letter were published in September of that

same year. Her letter to Waldén provides a nuanced look at the challenges of returning home after so many years abroad. In this letter, in contrast to the America letters sent back to the United States, Signe Aurell describes trying to negotiate the threshold between the New World and the Old.

Aurell wrestles with these challenges in what was, initially at least, a private letter to a friend. The magazine published the letter as a replacement to a scheduled contribution by Aurell that was received after the magazine had gone to press. By broadcasting Aurell's letter to a wider audience, the lines of public and private are blurred and demonstrate one way in which Swedish vernacular immigrant culture was transmitted. Aurell's letter gives us one such perspective of a returning migrant. Her letter, written soon after she had moved back to Sweden, describes the conflicting emotions she feels as she returns to Sweden.

Ja, nu är jag hemma hos mor och far, och att jag är glad behöver jag väl inte säga. Det är så lugnt och skönt att jag riktigt behöver tid att vänja mig vid stillheten. Far har blivit litet mera grå och mor har kanske fått några fler rynkor i pannan. Men annars är allt sig likt och skogen susar och sjunger som förr i världen, lövkojorna och resedan blomma i trädgården, solrosorna växa högt upp till taket på stugan vår och ljungen doftar på heden.

Livet är underligt i alla fall Bertha. Minns du att du trodde att jag, nu när jag nådde min längtans mål inte skulle ha något mer att skriva om. Men om du tror mig eller inte, så är jag inte glad fast jag är hemma. Inte vet jag vad jag sörjer över och längtar efter. Tänk om man kunde leva för ögonblicket, vara lycklig i dag och inte bry sig om morgondagen. För rästen är det kanske mer gårdagen som vi människor gräma oss över, kanske det är just obeständigheten i livet som gör oss osäkra och olyckliga.

Den gamla olösta gåtan vart allt det flydda tagit vägen, kanske den ängslar oss mer än något annat. Och då blir det väl ljust och lugnt för oss alla en gång när lösningen på gåtan kommer till oss. Emellertid behöver du inte vara rädd att min skrivning skall taga slut, det skall nog räcka till med något åt din välsignade Bokstuga, och något riktigt från mitt hjärta som skall vara för dig ensam (Aurell 1920, 27).

[Well, I'm home at mother and father's now, and I suppose I don't need to tell you that I'm happy. It's so peaceful and calm here that I really need time to get used to the tranquility. Father has a little more gray and mother has maybe a few more wrinkles on her forehead. But otherwise everything is the same and the forest sighs and sings as it always has, the stock and mignonettes are blooming in the garden, the sunflowers are

growing high up towards the roof of our cottage and I can smell the heather on the moor.

Life is strange nonetheless, Bertha. Do you remember that you thought that I wouldn't have anything to write about when I finally reached what I'd been longing for. But whether you believe me or not, I'm not happy, despite being home. I don't know what I'm mourning or what I'm longing for. Imagine if you could just live for the moment, be happy today and not worry about tomorrow. But maybe it's more yesterday that we humans worry about, maybe it is the uncertainty in life that makes us unsure and unhappy.

That old, unsolved mystery about where everything that has passed has gone, maybe that's what worries us more than anything else. And then one day, everything will be clear and calm for us when we solve that mystery. In the meantime, you don't need to worry that my writing will stop, there's probably enough for me to write something for your blessed *Bokstuga*, and something straight from my heart that will be just for you.]

Like many who live abroad for several years and return to their country of birth, Aurell expresses conflicting emotions about her return. She was leaving one home for another—a home where her parents still lived, albeit a bit older, where the flowers still bloomed, and the forest still sang. But despite the familiarity, she was not happy, clearly reminiscing about the past. Yet, to some extent, she embraces that longing as a reason to write. Carin Nordström's sister suffered dearly due to her longing and as a result sent letters home, describing the hurt and the pain. Writing, whether poetry like Signe Aurell or letters like Carin Nordström's sister was a way for immigrant women to maintain their relationships, to identify who they were and who they wanted to be. For Aurell, there was no clear answer, although she would spend the rest of her life in Sweden in the same house that she returned to in 1920. By noting the physical separation from Sweden as Aurell does in her letter to Waldén, she has claimed her identity as an immigrant, or more specifically due to her desire to return, as a migrant. Yet that identity as a migrant is written after the fact; Aurell has already returned to Sweden, to a place of Swedishness that she calls home. Understanding the conflicting nature of her emotions, Aurell addresses the challenge of remigration head on “om du tror mig eller inte, så är jag inte glad fast jag är hemma. Inte vet jag vad jag sörjer över och längtar efter” [whether you believe me or not,

I'm not happy, despite being home. I don't know what I'm mourning or what I'm longing for.] (1920, 27). The threshold that Aurell crosses, the liminality that she is wrestling with as she re-enters a society that she left seven years prior seems to define her remigration experience.

Similarly, Carin Nordström's sister's experience in the United States was one of liminality that left her mourning and longing for what she had left behind. She began to immediately reject her identity as an immigrant and instead focused on ways to return. Because of her family's economic situation, she never had the chance to remigrate, to face those challenges like Signe Aurell did. She never got to experience what Signe describes as she sailed into Swedish waters:

Att havet kan ligga så där glittrande blått och stilla många dagar å rad trodde jag inte. Och när vi komma in i svenska farvatten blev det ännu vackrare. Då nändes jag inte gå ner i min hytt en enda minut, bara stod uppe på däck med gråten i halsen och tittade på båtarna med svenska flaggan på masttopparna (1920, 27).

[I didn't believe that the ocean could lie there glittering blue and calm several days in a row. And when we arrived in Swedish waters it was even more beautiful. I didn't have the heart to go down to my cabin for even a minute, just stood up there on deck with a lump in my throat and looked at the boats with the Swedish flag on the mastheads.]

But the choices that women made when writing about their experiences as immigrants in the United States, whether it was extolling the virtues of hard work, lamenting the poor pay and terrible working conditions, or yearning to be home with family and friends, all show the complexities of the immigrant experience.

As I have demonstrated in my chapter about Swedish-language periodicals in the United States, newspapers, especially the left-leaning communist, socialist, and labor movement newspapers, were an important part of vernacular culture and conduit for the maintenance and creation of political and social identity in the New World. The letters that women wrote, whether in the pages of newspapers or the personal and semi-public letters sent by individuals to their friends and family, played an important part in reinforcing and questioning the role and

identity of the immigrant in their community. These women took control of their identities, defining themselves within the context of the communities they chose to be a part of. The letters are significant in that they allow us to see, over one hundred years after the fact, just how they chose to actively engage with their communities, whether they stayed or left.

Signe Aurell was one who did leave and she was not alone in moving home. By 1921, Gertrude and Barbro Stenberg had moved to Borlänge, Sweden, as Sigfrid faced several years in Leavenworth Penitentiary (U.S. Penitentiary 1918–1922). In 1923, Sigfrid Stenberg returned to Sweden after his release and subsequent deportation; he continued his work as an activist for Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation, SAC–Syndikalisterna [Central Organization of the Workers of Sweden, SAC–Syndicalists] and also worked for *Arbetaren* [The Worker] a syndicalist newspaper run by SAC–Syndikalisterna. He died in Sweden, four days after his fiftieth birthday in 1942 (SAC n.d.).

Aurell and the Stenbergs were just a few of the thousands of Swedish immigrants who returned to their place of birth. The Sweden that she and other migrants returned to had changed notably: it had become a Social Democracy, instituting policies and reforms conducive to many of the causes that Aurell had advocated for on both continents. This political transformation was in stark contrast to the United States, where borders were closing, new laws established immigration quotas, and labor activists were being jailed. In turn, many Swedes—many Scandinavians—left immigrating back to their home and cementing their legacies as return migrants.

⁴⁰ Hinke Bergegren was a Swedish radical who was a member of the Social Democrats and then, eventually, the communist party in Sweden.

⁴¹ Unfortunately, I have not been able to track down any surviving copies of those letters. According to Stephen Spence, archives specialist at the National Archives and Records Administration Kansas City branch: “As long as the prisoner followed the rules for correspondence, the letters they received were theirs to keep. The only letters in the files we have were the ones that were confiscated.” Email to the author. January 25, 2016.

⁴² Jennifer Eastman Attebery rightfully points out that there should be more detail about the collections here. I have contacted the archive in hopes of finding that information, but they do not have the number of letters in the collection, the number of letters written by women in the collection, or the full range of dates that the letters cover. I hope to get that information on my next research trip to Stockholm.

⁴³ Hilda Emanuelsson, in a letter to Lotten Karlsson on June 10, 1892, signs her last name “Emanuelsson.” Nordiska museets arkiv has spelled her name with one s, “Emanuelson.” I have chosen to spell her name as she signed it.

⁴⁴ Barbro Klein notes that the editor of “Folkets röst” [The voice of the people] in *Svenska Amerikanaren Tribunen* [The Swedish-American Tribune] in the 1960s avoided making editorial changes to the letters, hoping to maintain the “charm” of the letters. For more, see her article “Folkets Röst: Svensk-Amerikanska Insändarbrev och Folklorens Betydelser,” *Nord Nytt* 52 (1993): 88.

⁴⁵ For a more detailed description of the formula of Swedish immigrant letters, see pp. 21-43 in Attebery’s *Up in the Rocky Mountains*.

Chapter 5. *A Parade of Small Things: Signe Aurell's Legacy*

On January 25, 1985, Sten Viking Aurell sat down with Christer Lundh to record several songs. Viking was eighty-seven at the time and Lundh, a folksinger and storyteller, was collecting songs from around Skåne, capturing the many different dialects of the region. It was not the first time they had worked together. In fact, the two had recorded an interview on February 2, 1980, during which Viking spoke about his life as a musician and sang a few songs. But 1985 was different. In 1985, Viking sang three songs that had been written by his sister, Signe. Two of the songs, *Göingevisa* [Göinge song], *Nu är det vår* [It's springtime] were published in a songbook titled *Signes visor* [Signe's songs]. The songbook sold for 40 SEK and Kersti Mårtensson, who bought the home where Signe Aurell spent most of her life in Sweden, remembers the book being sold sometime in the 1960s (Mårtensson 2015).

Signe and Viking had collaborated on the songs decades before; Signe wrote the lyrics and Viking set music to the lyrics for all three: *Göingevisa*, *Nu är det vår*, and *Trollaschottis* [Magic Schottische]. From 1985, his voice rings out, no music accompanying him, the slight buzzing of the recording equipment the only other sound as Viking brings Signe Aurell's words back to life, ensuring that her words would live on even after she passed away. The songs are a far cry from the labor poetry she wrote while living in the United States; instead, the works are reminiscent of the first half of her book *Irrbloss*, filled with songs about nature and her homeland. Still though, there's a sense of pride, of support for the working class as Viking gives voice to the words Signe wrote dedicated to her home in Göinge:

Vi ha granit i våra berg Hurra! Hurra! Hurra!
 Och själva ha vi must och mærg Hurra! Hurra! Hurra!
 Ett land med branta backar, ett folk med styva nackar
 Att knusa oss blir nog ett snärj Hurra! Hurra! Hurra! (n.d., 13–14)

[There's granite in our mountain's veins. Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!
 And we've got courage, heart, and brains. Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!
 A land with steep, stark hillsides, folks with heads held high with pride.
 To crush us would just be a pain. Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!]

The granite that she mentions is diabase, the Swedish black granite that has been exported around the world for generations. The miners and railroad workers who quarried and transported that diabase were there when Signe Aurell left for the United States and they were there when she returned. They were still there in the mid-1900s when Aurell wrote this song. While she may not have been calling for the people of Göinge to rise up and fight the class war under the red banner, it's no surprise that a woman who regularly called for people to break free from their shackles would write of the strength of the people she returned to, would write of the granite in the countryside that to the men and women of her home labored for, would write of the courage of the working Swede.

Signe Aurell died April 29, 1975, in Osby. She was buried with Nils Aurell, her oldest brother, in the Osby cemetery. The death announcement was printed in the May 2 issue of *Norra Skåne* [Northern Skåne]. On the front page of the newspaper in which Signe Aurell's death was announced, above the fold (and above an article about the king of Sweden's birthday), was an article and accompanying image of the First of May demonstrations in Sösdala, a small community about thirty miles south of Osby (*Norra Skåne* May 2, 1975, 1). But in those pages, the death announcement failed to mention her activism. Instead, at the age of eighty-six, Signe Aurell was remembered for having taken care of her parents after her return from the United States and, it was noted, "[h]ennes hobby var att skriva dikter vilka hon även fått en del publicerade. Hon var också flitig inom sy och handarbete" [Her hobby was writing poetry and she even had a few published. She was also a diligent seamstress and embroiderer] (*Norra Skåne* May 2, 1975, 8). A week later at her burial in Osby's churchyard, some of Aurell's own poems

were read aloud to a small group of friends and family, including her brother Viking and Inger Nilsson, who after the service went for coffee at the Fenix Café (Nilsson 2015). Unfortunately the obituary does not mention which of Aurell's poems were read (*Norra Skåne* May 9, 1975, 8).

In the summer of 2013, I made my way to Osby church, a beautiful building, rising up into a blue Swedish summer sky dotted with clouds in the middle of an immaculately cared-for cemetery with row after row of headstones. I wandered through those rows looking for her name. Aurell. I found nothing. I came to her plot located in a section of the cemetery known as “hyllan” [the shelf] because that particular area is slightly raised (Nilsson 2015). But instead, a different name stared back at me. I was lucky, though. The caretaker was in his office, just finishing his lunch. He pulled up a database that included seemingly every burial in Sweden. Apparently, after years of neglect, Aurell's gravestone had been removed. As had her parents' marker.

But decades after her death, her legacy remains. Not in a giant biography or a pored-over collection of her work, but in the fragments of her life that still resonate. It's those little pieces that remain long after a person is gone that make a legacy. Although Aurell's headstone was not preserved, her writing is still here, in newspapers and on microfilm in Sweden and the United States, and in the songs sung by her brother, Viking. Fragments can be found in books about Swedish-American literature, poetry, even a dictionary. And one handwritten poem can be found on the inside cover of a book given to Inger when she was seven. Some photographs remain, kept by friends who knew her. They all remind us that Signe Aurell was here. That Signe Aurell made a difference. Of course, there are more fragments. Fragments from her time in Sweden before her emigration, fragments from her time in the United States as a social activist,

fragments from her time in Sweden after her remigration. Those fragments might never be found, and so Signe Aurell's story will remain incomplete.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who writes about exhibiting ethnographic objects in museums, argues in "Objects of Ethnography" that those objects are best described as ethnographic fragments; her essay "explores the paradox of showing things that were never meant to be displayed" (1998, 2). That paradox is especially evident when working with vernacular culture. She goes on to write, "the very ubiquity of the kinds of objects that interest ethnographers contributes to their ephemerality. Commonplace things are worn to oblivion and replaced with new objects, or are viewed as too trivial in their own time to be removed from circulation" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 25). Signe Aurell's poems, those ethnographic fragments, were meant to be displayed in the sense that they were published in newspapers distributed to thousands of people around the United States. Yet, were it not for archivists and librarians who took an interest in Swedish-language newspapers, the poems would have been lost. The letters that so many immigrant women sent home to family and friends in Sweden are examples of the ordinary. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of letters crossed the Atlantic, an everyday occurrence that a hundred years later has been all but forgotten. The majority of those letters have been lost to oblivion, except for the few that were donated, again, to libraries and archives. In doing so, the everyday—the letters, poems, and fragments—have become rare because they are collected (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 25). As fragments, though, they serve a purpose. They allow us to see the commonplace, a vernacular history that can be written about and presented, or displayed as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett may say, to explore the history of the people who lived their everyday lives with these fragments.

Barbro Klein, writing about the Nordic Museums archive (where I did much of my research while in Stockholm), discusses the ways in which folklorists present the written word:

We are speaking about uses of control and freedom of expression: a dead writer has no say about the ways in which his words are used. One could also add that social class is an issue here; in the case of statements composed by uneducated or poor writers, scholars, not least folklore scholars, have often taken a kind of editorial freedom they would not take with established authors (2007, 132).

In the chapters that preceded this one, I have laid bare much of Signe Aurell's life through the ethnographic fragments I have collected, some of them public, some of them private. Aurell, who died before I was even born, did not consent to having her life written about, or having her poetry examined, or to having a writer analyze and contextualize her work. That's a strange sentence to write, to recognize that this person who I have come to know quite well, who has been dead for nearly fifty years, did not have a chance to control her own story, did not consent to this. Obviously much of her work is public in the sense that it was published in newspapers on two continents for any Swedish-reader to see. But what of her grades from school? Or her hospital stay that first Christmas in Minneapolis? What of the poems she wrote to Inger? Or the pictures of her on her front lawn in Osby? Much of what I found resides in public archives, there for anyone willing to find it. Everyone I have spoken to has consented to being involved as well. They have given me permission to use their images, to interview them and use their words, to share with you Signe Aurell's life. What has emerged is, I hope, a cohesive story about Aurell, pieced together with the many fragments. There are more fragments that did not make it into the previous chapters. I did not reproduce every poem that she published. I did not include every grade she earned in every class she took. I did not transcribe the minutes of every International Order of Good Templar meeting minute that Aurell attended. Like Klein suggests, as a folklore scholar I have taken editorial freedoms. I hope, however, that despite these editorial

freedoms, Aurell's voice comes through, that her life is placed within a broader context that shines light on the immigrant history of foreign women in the United States.

I'm not the only one to have noticed Aurell and worked to preserve her memory. Her brother, of course, has done his part in the recordings that open this chapter, but others have pursued her. Historians like Franklin Rosemont have noted her role in the Swedish-American labor movement. Literary scholars like Martin Allwood have written about her importance as a Swedish-American poet. Authors like Walter Dickson have examined her legacy as a Swedish writer in an American context. And even today, journalists like Göran Greider have celebrated, and perhaps exaggerated, her role as a labor activist. Yet so many questions about her life remain. The title of Aurell's self-published collection of poetry, *Irrbloss* [Will-of-the-Wisp], seems especially fitting for the people who have wondered about her and written about her. She is herself a will-of-the-wisp, an elusive and fleeting figure.

Aurell's voice is one of hundreds of thousands of the lost or ignored voices from young Swedish immigrant women workers. Yet it is a voice that has much to say about immigration and remigration, of the intersections of literature and oral tradition and of class and gender, of the labor movement in Sweden and the United States. The legacy of those voices is scattered, but it is one that helps us piece together the story of Swedish immigration to the United States and return migration to Sweden. By examining those fragments that do remain, from the official documents to the old newspapers to the handwritten poem on the cover of an old children's book, we can begin to understand the ways that people understand themselves and their community. That understanding helps open a window on the past and lets us better understand people and places in a historical context, which official historical documents sometimes overlook. This chapter will look at some of the fragments and describe Signe Aurell's life after

her return to Sweden. There's not much that remains and it seems she stopped publishing not long after her return to Osby, but fragments appear in the decades after her return, even continuing on after her death. This parade of seemingly small, disconnected things, can help express Signe Aurell's life and legacy.

Signe Aurell and Return Migration

In 1917, with World War I raging and anti-immigrant sentiments rising, Minnesota created the Commission of Public Safety to, as the name suggests, keep the public safe. While Minnesotans were dying abroad in the Great War and laborers were dying at home due to unsafe working conditions, the Commission was more concerned with keeping the public safe from immigrants, radicals, and union members. Signe Aurell was all three, as were many of the immigrants that came to the United States. The protection that the Commission offered, however, necessitated disregarding civil rights as the organization expanded its extrajudicial power. In the same year as its formation, the Commission required all Minnesota schoolteachers to teach in English; the following year, it required all immigrants to comply with the Alien Registration Act of 1918, which required not just registration, but also a declaration of holdings (Chrislock 1991, 276–284).

While the federal government was suppressing some forms of writing, including confiscating issues of *Allarm*, for example, the Minnesota State Government was forcing other documentation, such as the “Alien Registration and Declaration of Holdings.” The survey required sworn statements by immigrants in Minnesota and answers to a wide range of questions. As immigrants filed in to fill in the surveys, they were met with a list of English-language questions asking why they had not applied for naturalization—a rather blunt reminder

that naturalization was necessary to remove any questions of loyalty to the United States. On March 1, 1918, Signe Aurell registered as serial number 3962 and responded to a variety of questions (Public Safety Commission). The form asked, “To which country do you declare allegiance?” To which she replied: “Sweden.” It asked about her marital status. She was not married. Interestingly, the form asks “Married?” with two follow-up questions, “Is Wife living?” and “Residence of wife, if living?” There seems to be no acknowledgement by the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety that the immigrants that they hoped to register could be heterosexual women. The form continues: “Do you speak and write English?” “Yes.” She goes on to list her occupation as “laundry worker” and more specifically to be employed in “hand ironing.” She owned no farmlands, no city lots, no real estate in Minnesota. She owned no land holdings outside of Minnesota. She owned no stocks, bonds, securities, or trusts. She owned no personal property of note (Public Safety Commission 1918). She had no safety deposit box. She was a laundress, a seamstress, a poet, a Wobbly. But she was also a Swede. Tellingly, and in contrast to *Bokstugan*’s suggestions that Aurell moved back to Sweden due to financial hardships after bearing the costs of self-publishing her book in 1919, Aurell seems to have already had plans to return to Sweden (Bokstugan 1920 (8), 17). In response to question number twenty-four, “If you have never taken out first papers of naturalization, why have you not done so?” She responded, in English, “Intend to return to Sweden” (Public Safety Commission 1918). First papers of naturalization could be filed after two years of living in the United States as a declaration of intent (National Archives 2016). By 1918, Aurell had already been in the United States for five years, long enough to have begun the naturalization process, but the five words she wrote in response are simple and straightforward. They can be read as just that—a simple and straightforward answer. They can also be read as a protest. A rejection of an America that

pressured immigrants in Minnesota to naturalize and declare allegiance to the United States or face potential persecution and suspicion. Aurell chose to return to Sweden rather than take those first steps to becoming an American citizen.

The story of return migration, remigration, is one that is often ignored in the history of immigration to the United States. That hundreds of thousands, even millions of people would come to the United States only to leave flies in the face of the American mythos. But of the millions of immigrants who came from the Old World to the New, millions returned. Exact numbers for returning immigrants are difficult to come by, as Mark Wyman explains. Records were not always kept, some immigrants who returned to Europe only did so on vacation and were not permanently returning to their homelands, and others entered their home countries through different ports. All that is to say that the numbers that do exist are, for the most part, well-researched and educated, but estimates nonetheless. Those statistics, though, show a staggering number of return migrants: approximately 25 percent of migrants returned to Europe between 1900 and 1930 and estimates for Scandinavian migrants suggest that somewhere between 18 and 22 percent returned (Wyman 1993, 80). Looking more specifically at Sweden during the period that Signe Aurell lived in the United States, 81,537 Swedes emigrated and 37,153 returned to Sweden between 1911 and 1920—a stunning 45.6 percent remigration, particularly considering the wartime turmoil in Europe (Tedebrand 1976, 209). Even with the war, men were more likely to return to Sweden than women. Many Swedes returned to their home parishes, and of the tens of thousands of returning Swedish emigrants an historian Lars-Göran Tedebrand estimates that approximately 70% of Swedes returned within about four years and notes that for most who returned, their stay in the United States had not helped them climb into a higher social class (1976, 223–227).

Wyman argues that immigrants left the United States for a variety of reasons; there were those who found success and returned triumphantly to their homelands, while others failed to make a living in the United States, whether it was because of economic downturn or poor working conditions that left them sick or injured and unable to work. Still others were homesick for family and friends. And then there were those who explicitly rejected the United States. They rejected the economics, the politics, or the religious aspects of American life and culture (Wyman 1993, 86). In the wake of World War I, the rejection of American life may have arisen as a direct result of the nativist attitudes and even legislation that made life as an immigrant even more difficult. Wyman's categories are blunt instruments but do help to give a general idea as to why people left. It's important, however, to remember that the reasons people left are just as unique as the reasons people came and just as unique as the people themselves.

In 1921, after the end of World War I and the return of regular ocean travel across the Atlantic, a reporter for *The Atlantic Monthly*, S. Miles Bouton, interviewed almost 200 returning immigrants, seeking to understand why they were leaving. The men and women he spoke with were, for the most part, naturalized American citizens of Norwegian descent. Some were Swedish and Danish as well. Of the 200 he spoke with (all traveling in third class), only nine were planning on returning to the United States. Their reasons for leaving their adopted home showed a frustration that still resonates today. Some prickled at prohibition, while others left saying, as Bouton quotes them, "Vi ha haft nog" [We've had enough]; others recoiled at the leadership of the nation, stating that "America is all right except for the people that run it" (1921, 41). Interestingly, Bouton comments specifically on the political leanings of the returning migrants, noting that while very few identified strictly as socialists, many would have voted for Eugene Debs and the Socialist ticket in the 1922 United States general election (1921, 40–41).

Clearly, the Scandinavian immigrants who Bouton interviewed were feeling the effects of wartime persecution of foreigners in the United States. Several Norwegians remarked that settling in Norway meant settling in “a free country” and one even commented, “human beings have some rights. It isn’t the old America any more. That was a fine country, a real freedom’s land, but not any more” (Bouton 1921, 41–42). One man, whether Norwegian or Swedish or Danish is not mentioned by Bouton, summed up his experience in the United States thusly:

I have been an American citizen for twelve years, but I’m just a damned foreigner, nevertheless. Look at my children. They don’t understand a word of Norwegian. That’s how good an American I was. And then this prohibition law came. That settled it. I’m going back to a country where I won’t be a damned foreigner (1921, 43).

The decision to leave was not one that was taken lightly. Many return migrants had been in the United States for quite some time and had even become American citizens, as Bouton notes. But the country they had settled in had changed over time—just like the countries they would be returning to had changed.

Signe Aurell’s reason for leaving is not recorded anywhere. It’s unlikely that prohibition drove her away, considering her membership in the International Order of Good Templars. But it would not be hard to argue that she left because she struggled financially to support herself as a domestic servant in Minneapolis. Being separated from her friends and family in Sweden may have led to homesickness—she writes as much in her letter to her friend Bertha Waldén (Aurell 1920, 27). Or maybe she considered her time in Minneapolis a success. By the time she returned to Sweden, Aurell had published poetry in six different Swedish-language newspapers in the United States and two newspapers in Sweden. She’d been a part of a temperance movement that saw the enactment of prohibition. While she never seems to have reached financial success, it was in the United States that Signe Aurell first became a published writer.

More likely, perhaps, a combination of several factors contributed to Aurell's decision to return, including a rejection of the American way of life. Her activism in the Industrial Workers of the World suggests that she worked against the capitalist economic structure of the United States and her writing in Socialist newspapers would suggest that she was far to the left of the major American political parties. Her connections to *Allarm*, both through her writing and her friendship with Sigfrid Stenberg and Carl Ahlteen, suggest that she may have stood in opposition to American involvement in World War I. In her 1955 article for *Ny Dag*, she tells of the struggles of the working class while she lived in the United States, noting the difficulties during World War I:

Till kontrasterna mellan fattiga och rika kom så den falska patriotism som blåstes fram, som förberedelse för Förenta staternas inträde i kriget. Ännu värre blev det när landet kom in i kriget. Hette man inte Persson eller Svensson så misstänktes man för att vara tysk spion (Aurell 1955, 7).

[In addition to the contrast between the poor and the rich came a wave of false patriotism, as if in preparation for the United States' entry into the war. It became even worse when the country entered the war. If your name wasn't Persson or Svensson, you were accused of being a German spy.]

Considering Aurell was one of thousands of immigrants in Minnesota to fill out the "Alien Registration and Declaration of Holdings," her comments in 1955 are telling. The name "Aurell," not necessarily easily identifiable as Swedish, must have added to a sense of being, as the return migrant Bouton quoted above suggests, a "damned foreigner." She was a Swedish immigrant woman, a member of the working class, and a Wobbly. And to top it all off, she and other Swedes, may have been mistaken for German spies.

Signe in Sweden

Just a couple of days before Aurell boarded the SS *Franconia* on July 21, 1920, she purchased or was given a small gold ring. Inscribed inside the ring is her name and a date. It reads “Signe 07-17 [possibly 19]-1920.” One month later, Signe was living with her parents and youngest brother, Viking (Osby kyrka 1895–1914, 919). The family had moved to Osby in the years that she was abroad. Years later, after having settled into her life in Osby, Signe Aurell would give that ring to Inger Nilsson still inside a box from a jeweler in Minneapolis. Inger grew up in Osby, Sweden, and in 1933, her parents built a home near Signe. She was only five at the time, but spent a lot of time at Signe’s house. In March of 2015, I sat down with Inger at her home in Osby to talk about Signe.

Inger was Signe’s neighbor for over fifteen years and she remembers her as a tall woman, a bit masculine in her appearance, and as someone who loved children. She was generous with her time and always had candy for the kids in the neighborhood (Mårtensson 2015). She says:

Hon skötte hushållet till sina föräldrar... och hon bakade och hon, hon kunde allting, faktiskt. Och trädgård hade hon... hon hade massa av växter och det var perfekt skött överallt. Och så fanns det en liten backe precis bakom huset och där hade hon, på sommaren hade hon hängmatta. Och den älskade jag, och hon brukade själv ligga där en och annan gång. Och sedan odlade hon grönsaker också (Nilsson 2015).

[She took care of the household for her parents... and she baked and she, she could do everything, actually. And she had a garden... she had lots of plants and everything was perfectly manicured. And then there was a little hill right behind her house and she had, during the summer she had a hammock. And I loved that thing, and she used to lie there herself every now and again. And she grew vegetables also.]

What emerges from Inger’s reminiscences is an image of a woman who is incredibly self-sufficient. She went to the forest to collect wood to heat her home, carrying it home in bundles on her back. In that same forest, Signe would go to pick berries, using them to make preserves and juices. She could knit, embroider, and crochet. She was known to work in her front yard; a picture of her with a large bow saw shows her sawing wood placed atop a trestle. Jan Alm, who

as a child was a neighbor to Signe between 1940 and 1947, describes the wood as “utveden som blir när man sågar. Det är det hon har fått hem som hon står och sågar. Det var ju billigt ved förr i tiden. Vid sågverken fick man komma och köpa sådant” [the outer wood that remains after sawing. That’s what she’s gotten home there and is standing and sawing. It was cheap wood back then. You could come and buy that stuff at the sawmill].⁴⁶ She even raised rabbits for slaughter, as Jan recalls: “Sedan hade hon kaniner, det hade hon. Och det var ju som en hade till att äta. Det hade man mycket under kriget, ju” [Then she had rabbits, she did. And people did that so they had something to eat. That was common during the war, of course] (Alm 2015). Jan continues, recollecting that “så var hon så där för sig själv, va? Och redade sig själv, och tystlåten, och så där liksom störde inte en människa, utan gick sin egen väg” [she kind of kept to herself, you know? And took care of herself, and quiet, and really didn’t bother anyone, but instead went her own way] (Alm 2015). It’s an interesting juxtaposition. The woman who wrote poems about a coming class war was living frugally in Sweden, harvesting her own food and buying scrap wood from the sawmill, twenty years after having left Minneapolis. After seven years of financial insecurity in the United States, she may have been used to this sort of self-sufficiency. Of course, it wouldn’t have been uncommon for women of the day to bake and grow vegetables and knit and crochet. But Inger remembers her more as someone who could do everything. She was also a reader. A writer. A poet. A teacher. She taught Inger to play the organ when Inger was just six years old, for example (Nilsson 2015).

Despite everything she knew about Signe, despite keeping sporadic contact with Signe until her death in 1975, Inger did not know what she did to earn a living, if anything. Neither did Jan. In fact, no one I spoke with knew exactly how she supported herself financially. Per Ragnarsson, who grew up in Glimåkra where Signe’s sister Nanna had a small store, remembers

that Signe sometimes worked at the store (Ragnarson 2015). But Inger isn't so sure; she remembers that Signe never learned to ride a bicycle. She walked everywhere, whether it was into the woods to pick berries or the store to buy groceries. It would have been a ten-mile walk from Osby to Glimåkra, so if she did work with Nanna, she must have relied on other modes of transportation. Local population records between 1938 and 1941 list her as a single woman, a "hemmadotter" [an adult daughter who lives at home] (Broby fögderi 1938–1941, 1760). In 1982, *Göinge-Bladet* republished an essay Signe wrote for the November–December 1920 issue of *Bokstugan* as well as a poem out of her collection *Irrbloss*. Viking, who had given permission to *Göinge-Bladet* to publish his sister's work, also noted that she was her parents' "stöd på ålderns höst" [support in their autumn years] (*Göinge-Bladet* 1 1982, 10). Her father, Andreas, died in 1936 and her mother, Ana, died in 1951. Signe continued living in Osby No. 6 until the early 1970s, when she moved to a small retirement community in Glimåkra where her brother Viking was also living. She died a few years later, in 1975, not in Glimåkra, but at the nursing home in Osby where Kersti Mårtensson, who bought Signe's home from her brother Viking, worked (Mårtensson 2015).

Aurell's life in Sweden was a pretty normal, apparently uneventful one. Her activism seems to have waned upon her return, as did her publishing, despite *Bokstugan's* promise to its readers that Aurell would be writing once a month for the magazine (*Bokstugan* 1920 (8), 17). Having returned to Sweden, Aurell's letter to Bertha Waldén, which was discussed earlier, included a note about her own writing: "Emellertid behöver du inte vara rädd att min skrivning skall taga slut, det skall nog räcka till med något åt din välsignade Bokstuga, och något riktigt från mitt hjärta som skall vara för dig ensam" [In the meantime, you don't need to worry that my writing will stop, there's probably enough for me to write something for your blessed

Bokstuga [Book Cabin], and something straight from my heart that will be just for you.] (Aurell 1920, 27). Early on, it seems Aurell did continue to write. Just a few weeks after leaving Minneapolis, Aurell composed a funeral poem for a local poet named Bengta Olaidotter Lind, sometimes referred to as Blinda Bengta, who died on August 9, 1920, and was buried on August 15 (Krusevall 1976, 15).

Her publication record after her return, though, is sparse. *Bokstugan* published one essay and three poems, the last one coming out in 1924. Two Swedish newspapers published Aurell's work in 1920, 1921, and 1922: three poems appeared in *Syndikalisten* [The Syndicalist] and Aurell's translation of "Joe Hill's Last Will" appeared in *Brand* [Fire]. The Swedish branch of the IWW reissued a few of her previously published poems in various songbooks during the 1920s. And in 1965, when she was seventy-six years old, an acrostic she wrote for a contest in *Svenska Dagbladet* [The Swedish Daily] was published (Aurell 1965).

In 1955, she wrote a brief article about Joe Hill, forty years after his execution, for *Ny Dag* [New Day], a communist daily newspaper based in Stockholm. When *Ny Dag* found Aurell living in her home in Osby, they did not ask about her own labor poetry and writing. They asked about her memories of Joe Hill and his role as a symbol for the labor movement. And Aurell answered. She also told of working with *Allarm*, not of her own writing, but instead of her comrades and the role of the newspaper in the labor struggle:

Jag minns så väl vårt arbete för tidningen Alarm. Den var innerligt hatad av den amerikanska herreklassen. Denna tidning var ofta föremål för beslag eller indragning och fick byta namn flera gånger. Förutom beslag på tidningen dömdes våra ledande kamrater till fleråriga fängelsestraff. Sådant har ju förekommit även på senare år. På detta sätt dömdes bl. a. Sigfrid Stenberg och Ragnar Johnsson⁴⁷ till 10 års fängelse medan Carl Altin fick hela 20 års fängelse (Aurell 1955, 7).

[I remember our work for the newspaper *Allarm* so well. It was genuinely hated by the American upper class. The newspaper was often the subject of confiscation and suspension and was forced to change names several times. Along with the newspaper

being confiscated, our comrades in leadership roles were sentenced to multiple years in prison. That sort of thing still happens today. This was how people like Sigfrid Stenberg and Ragnar Johanson were sentenced to ten years in prison while Carl Ahlteen got twenty years in prison.]

While Joe Hill clearly played an outsized role in Aurell's life, even inspiring two poems, Aurell was not an activist because of or for Joe Hill.⁴⁸ Aurell was an activist in her own right—a Swedish immigrant who saw societal injustice and a way to address that injustice through unionization. A woman who thirty-five years after leaving the United States still recalled the work she did for a movement she believed in and the people she worked alongside. Clearly, Aurell was still aware of the issues that labor activists faced in the 1950s, drawing parallels to the confiscation and prison sentences of her comrades from *Allarm*.

While Aurell may have stopped publishing poetry, she did not stop writing poetry. And although for a much smaller audience, those poems are remembered still today. Signe wrote several poems for the little neighbor girl, Inger, including one on Christmas Eve, 1935. On the inside cover of *Farbror Axels Barnvisor*, a children's songbook first published in 1926, is a simple poem:

Till Inger Julafton 1935	To Inger, Christmas Eve 1935
Det var en tant som satt och frös I mörkret många gånger Då kom en liten solskenstös Och sjöng så glada sånger Hon kvittrade så klart och glatt Som kvinten på fiolen För tanten som i mörker satt Var hon en glimt av solen.	An old lady sat there so cold Many times in darkened rooms Then came a girl of sunshine gold And singing such joyful tunes She chirped so happily, so clear Like the fiddle's pleasing string For the lady sitting in drear To her sunshine she did bring.
Nu när i vårens tid jag ser Att allt blir grönt i hagen När vårens lilla sippen ler Med ögon blå mot dagen Och när jag hör en fågeldrill I skogens gröna sköte Då är det som om Inger lill	Now during the springtime I see That the pastures turn to green When spring's flowers smile at me To the day with eyes marine And when I hear a bird's fine trill In the forest's green embrace Then it's as if my Inger lil'

Själv kommit mig till möte (Aurell 1935).	Has herself come to my place.
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The Christmas poem paints a picture of a woman who is lonely, sitting in the dark, sitting in the cold. But little Inger is the sunshine that brightens Aurell's day, a voice reminiscent of the woods where she spends her time picking berries. Aurell's epistolary poem, written to Barbro Stenberg, echoes in this poem to Inger. The final stanza of "Lilla Barbro" reads:

Lilla Barbro. Sist där fältrop ljuda Och där sista stridens vågor sjuda Riktat du och vårens ljusa härar Mot det mörkas murar slag på slag, Och när nattens sista skuggor svunnit När du vad vi andra aldrig hunnit, Målet, sagolandet, solskenslandet, Som vi trott på, far och mor och jag (Aurell 1921, 26).	Little Barbro. Finally where cries of war resound And where the last battle's waves hit the ground You and spring's bright army will turn, Blow by blow, where dark walls be, And as the last shadows of night fade You'll reach what the rest of us never made, The end, the land of fairytales and sunshine That we believed in, your mom and dad and me.
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The untitled Christmas poem to Inger seems to pick up where "Lilla Barbro" leaves off. Inger is the sunshine, the light that comes into Aurell's world, "The end, the land of fairytales and sunshine" that she writes of in "Lilla Barbro." Perhaps the Sweden that Aurell came home to, and by the time she wrote this poem had lived in for fifteen years, had met many of the goals she had been fighting for back in the United States. Sweden was, after all, a social democracy by 1935.

The poem to Inger was never published. In fact, it was probably only read by a handful of people: Inger, maybe Inger's parents, and maybe even Aurell's own parents, who were both still alive in 1935. That book was not the only thing Signe gave to Inger over the years. Inger also had a copy of her short story "En liten pys" [A little lad] from the November–December 1920 issue of *Bokstugan*. On that copy, Inger had written a small note about Signe, which she read aloud to me: "På sidan nitton har min, har *min* tant Signe skrivit en liten story" [On page

nineteen my, *my* aunt Signe has written a little story] (Nilsson 2015). As she read the note aloud, the very first sentence tripped up Inger a bit. She went back and repeated herself, emphasizing “min,” “my” aunt Signe. She went on: “Hade varit i Amerika några år. Min familj blev granne med Aurells 1933 och var mycket hos henne under barndomen. Lärde mig mycket bland annat att handarbete, spela på hennes orgel. Har senare insett att hon betydde mycket för mig som barn” [Had been in America for a few years. My family moved next door to the Aurells in 1933 and was over there a lot during my childhood. Learned a lot, including needlework, play her organ. Have later realized that she meant a lot to me as a child] (Nilsson 2015).

Eighty years later, Inger still owned the book with the poem from Signe and she still had a copy of the story from *Bokstugan*. In our interview, she read the poem and her notes about the story aloud. The note that Inger wrote tells a story of a woman who meant a lot to the children in the neighborhood. The poem tells a story of a woman who recognized just how much those children meant to her. Signe went from being a radical labor activist in the United States to a loving neighbor and friend to the children of the neighborhood in Sweden.

Signe didn’t just know the children in the neighborhood though. In the middle of one of the recordings that Christer Lundh made with Viking Aurell and Nils Johansson is a short anecdote about Borringen. Borringen seems to be an itinerant, wandering around Skåne just getting by. He’s a religious man, Viking and Nils say, and one day he’s accosted by a group of young men who threaten him if he doesn’t admit that there is no God. Eventually they start bribing him, offering him more and more money, before finally he admits to it. Kind of. “Det är som ni säger,” [It’s like you say] he responds, and grabs the money. He manages to find a way to not explicitly admit to renouncing his God, while still walking away with the money. But more important to this story is that Signe knew him and he knew Signe. Viking describes a day at his

parent's home with Signe and his wife, Anna. Their father, Andreas, was away and Borringen stops by. Signe feeds him and gives him 25 öre. Not a lot, and Borringen remarks that had Signe's father been around, he would have gotten more. It's a fun little story and one that took place sometime before 1927, when Borringen died (Aurell and Johnsson 1980). It's especially interesting considering Aurell had been back in Sweden for several years at this point. She comes off as a bit miserly. Not willing to give more than 25 öre to a man who needed it. Perhaps the comment, which Viking does not expand on, is meant to point out that his sister, herself not working, was just not able to give more than 25 öre. Or perhaps it was meant to show that his sister was hypocritical—writing about the working class, calling for equality. Signe Aurell cooked for Borringen and had clearly done so in the past, but when faced with an opportunity to help financially she was not willing to give enough to make a difference.

Viking and Nils speak with a strong southern accent. When I first heard the recording, I struggled to understand what, exactly, Nils was saying. Viking was easier, speaking in broad Skånsk accent rather than Nils' Göinge accent. Signe had clearly given Borringen money, but at the end comes a punch line, the two men laugh knowingly, but never explain exactly why. The laugh, the dialect, the two friends talking with each other obscures the recording a bit. Makes it hard to understand at first. I wanted so badly, when I first heard it, to hear a story about Signe wanting to give more money. Of her wanting to help those in need. Instead, after listening to the recording more times than I care to admit and enlisting my father, born and raised in Skåne himself, to listen to the recording I couldn't deny it anymore. The two men laugh as Viking relays the words of Borringen "hade någon annan varit hemma så hade jag fått någon krona" [if anyone else had been home, I would have gotten a crown] (Aurell and Johnsson 1980). Having read so much of her own work, I have seen the world through Signe Aurell's perspective. The

way she saw the world and the way she wanted the world to be. Or tried to at least. Viking's story is a reminder that each story can be complicated. People are complex and not always consistent. That's what a legacy is. It's not the great men who make history or even the great women, but the people who work and write and leave and return. They are complicated and contradictory and hold views that we can glorify and they hold views that we can vilify.

The Legacy of Signe Aurell

AURELL, SIGNE.

Har i Amerika varit bosatt i Minneapolis, Minnesota. Utgav 1919 på eget förlag i Minneapolis dikt samlingen »Irrbloss«. Övriga uppgifter saknas.

[“Has lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the United States. Self-published a collection of poetry, *Irrbloss*, in Minneapolis in 1919. Additional information is lacking.”]

In 1949, Martin S. Allwood wrote *Amerika-Svensk Lyrisk Genom 100 År: 1848-1948* [100 years of American-Swedish lyric poetry: 1848–1948]. In it, Allwood attempts to capture a snapshot of Swedish-language poetry written by Swedes in the United States, which he argues helps to describe the ways in which Swedes identified as Swedish or American (1949, XIII–XIV). He, for reasons that he does not explain, identifies ninety-six poets as important voices in demonstrating the Swedish-American lyric poetry tradition. Of those ninety-six, only nine are women, one of whom is Signe Aurell. The biographical information about Signe Aurell, which is quoted above, leaves much to be desired. Especially considering that Aurell was living in southern Sweden at the time and had been at the same address for nearly thirty years. Nevertheless, despite the lack of biographical information, Aurell is one of just a handful of names considered to be an important voice in 100 years of Swedish-American poetry.

The dates, while convenient, are not completely insignificant according to Allwood, because they capture a century of Swedish migration to the United States as well as the end of

Swedish-American literature. As Swedish immigration slowed significantly, Allwood claims that the Swedish language could not and would not sustain itself more than thirty or forty years, so that by 1948, Swedish, and in turn Swedish-American literature in the United States, was dead (1949 VII–VIII). However, newspapers like *Nordstjernan* and *Vestkusten* continued publishing in Swedish late into the 1900s, decades after Allwood's claim that Swedish-American literature was dead. While Allwood's prediction may not have been completely accurate, his book remains an interesting snapshot of Swedish-American poetry through World War II, as curated by Allwood himself.

Focusing heavily on the effects of immigration on poetry, Allwood argues that immigrants born in Sweden hold on to their Swedish values. He writes:

De förvånas över mycket, som är självklart för äldre amerikaner; de lider av den amerikanska kapitalismens brutala förtryck av de fattiga; de protesterar mot kyrklig och social humbug; de avslöjar den vitt sprida korruptionen i det amerikanska samhället (Allwood 1949, XIV).

[They are surprised by many things, which are obvious to older Americans; they suffer under American capitalism's brutal oppression of the poor; they protest against religious and social humbug; they reveal the wide-spread corruption in American society].

Allwood describes very clearly the reasons why many immigrants rejected American culture and eventually returned to Sweden, just as Wyman suggests. Swedish immigrants always had a measuring stick, Sweden, to which the United States could not compare. But the Sweden that immigrants left in 1848, or even 1908, was not the Sweden of 1948. It was a Sweden beset by social ills, poverty, and religious persecution. It was a Sweden that over one million people had left in search of something better. As those Swedes emigrated, the labor movement was gaining momentum and the groundwork for what would become Swedish Social Democracy was being laid and even expedited due to the mass migration.

Despite his argument that Swedish immigrants routinely compared, unfavorably, the United States to Sweden, Allwood argues that most Swedish-American poetry is indifferent to the social ills of American society. Interestingly, Allwood writes briefly about *Allarm* as a publication that emerges as a place of social engagement and names several poets whom he describes as having a socialist view on society, one of them being Signe Aurell. Allwood's description of the newspaper is in direct contrast to letters by Charles Clyne, United States attorney for the Northern District of Illinois to the Secretary of State and the United States Attorney General about *Allarm's* propaganda (1921, 2–3). Rather than a publication focused on violent dissent, Allwood writes, “>>Allarm<< ger över huvud taget intryck av att företräda den mest moderna och upplysta syn på Amerika som förekommer bland svensk-amerikanerna” [*Allarm*, on the whole, gives the impression of representing the most modern and enlightened view of America that exists among Swedish Americans] (1949, XIX). He goes on, however, “trots den ljusglimt som >>Allarm<<-kretsen utgör, blir ändå huvudintrycket av social likgiltighet i den svenskamerikanska dikten bestående” [despite the glimmer of light that the *Allarm* poets represent, the main impression one gets in Swedish-American poetry is of social indifference] (Allwood 1949, XIX). The poetry found in the pages of Swedish-language newspapers would suggest that Allwood's argument is not entirely accurate, but despite his own misgivings about the lack of social commentary by Swedish-American poets, his book includes an entire section on politics, in which Aurell's poem about Joe Hill, titled “Joseph Hillström,” appears (1949, 91). A note accompanies the poem, reminding readers that Hill was sentenced to death despite his innocence. However, there are no notes about the poem, nothing that gives context about the publication of the poem, or how it first appeared on the front page of *Allarm* commemorating the two-year anniversary of Hill's execution (Aurell 1917, 1). But still, Aurell's

name and poetry is included thirty years after first publishing in a small labor movement newspaper in Minneapolis.

Her legacy as a poet is evident elsewhere. A dictionary from 1938 reproduces a line from Signe's poem "Framåt," published in *Irrblöss*: "sedan i seger vårt röda standar/plantats på våldets ruiner" [then in victory our red banners/are planted in the ruins of violence] as an example of an uncommon figurative use of the word "planta," to plant (Östergren 1939, 169). Clearly someone was familiar enough with her work to include this particular example in the dictionary. Thirty years later, Walter Dickson would write about Signe Aurell's poetry in the context of Swedish-American poetry about freedom. Dickson titles his article "Efterklang," which can translate as "derivative," but also "echo." Fitting, considering the faint echo that Aurell's poetry sounds one hundred years after first beginning to publish in the pages of a labor newspaper.

Dickson writes that Aurell's poetry echoes the Romantic Nationalism of Johan Ludvig Runeberg, but Aurell frames her work within the context of the New World and her political ideology, "Man förvånas och gläds åt denna svensk-amerikanska arbetarediktningens livskraft i brytningstiden mellan gammalt och nytt, dess starka och rena uppsåt att vända upp en ny sida, bryta en ny väg, i den traditionella bildningsgrund, som man fotat på från början därhemma" [One is surprised and pleased with the vitality of this Swedish-American labor poetry during the transition from old to new, with this strong and clear intent to turn over a new leaf, break new ground, in the traditional educational foundation, which one has built on from the beginning back at home] (Dickson 1968, 24). Aurell's work within an already existing tradition clearly struck a chord with her audience in the United States and continued to echo, all the way back over the Atlantic, thirty years later, when Dickson praised her work.

Even today, Signe Aurell's name appears occasionally. In his 2015 book about Joe Hill, Göran Greider supposes that a letter in support of Joe Hill and signed by a group of laundry workers to the Swedish Envoy to the United States, Wilhelm August Ekengren, is penned by Aurell (2015, 323). The letter, originally written in English, is however from a group of laundry workers at Model Steam Laundry in Thief River Falls, Minnesota, about 300 miles north of Minneapolis, where Aurell was living and working at the time. Not only that, the letter is signed by twelve different people, none of them Aurell (Model Steam Laundry Workers September 24, 1915). We may thus find Greider's research into Aurell lacking (in addition, he gives the wrong immigration date for Aurell and credits her with translating "Joe Hill's Last Will" in 1924 instead of 1915) (2015, 131). However, while it's unfortunate that the biographical information about Aurell is incorrect and that she is credited with a letter that she did not write, it is interesting to note that Aurell's legacy lives on. Greider devotes time to a little-known poet and imagines her role to be even larger, crediting her with things she did not do and inflating her role in the labor movement and efforts to free Joe Hill. What we do know is what Aurell tells us herself in an article from 1955:

Jag kände inte personligen Joe Hill men han blev något av en symbol för oss alla arbetande i kampen mot orättvisorna. Hur sjöng vi inte hans sånger! Hur arbetade vi inte för hans frigivning! Vi samlade in pengar för hans försvar. Jag minns som vore det i går den stora demonstrationen i Minneapolis som krävde hans frigivning. Jag minns hur vi in i det sista kämpade och hoppades att guvernören Spey [Spry] i Utah skulle benåda honom men ingenting hjälpte. De maktägande trodde att de genom detta justitiemord skulle kunna skära av rötterna för vår organisation som det starkaste vapnet i vår kamp (1955, 7).

[I didn't know Joe Hill personally, but he became a sort of symbol for all of us workers in the struggle against injustice. How we sang his songs! How we worked for his release! We collected money for his defense. I remember the big rally in Minneapolis that demanded his release as if it were yesterday. I remember how we fought and hoped until the very end that Governor Spry in Utah would pardon him, but nothing helped. The powers-that-be thought that with this miscarriage of justice they could cut the roots of our organization, which was the strongest weapon in our struggle.]

Rallies, fundraising, organizing demands of the people in power, even singing Wobbly songs: Signe Aurell took part in the everyday activities of the labor movement, a movement she defines as a struggle against injustice. She recognized Hill as a symbol for the labor movement as a whole, representative of the daily fight for better working conditions and the challenges that they faced. She says as much in the quote above, understanding that their tireless efforts were in vain. One man held the fate of Joe Hill in his hands and, try as they might, nothing could sway Governor Spry. Still, those efforts left a mark, historically as well as on Signe Aurell:

Denna natt glömmar jag aldrig. Jag glömmar inte en pojke som hette Frej. Han grät med knutna händer. Hur hade vi inte arbetat för att samla in pengar för Joe Hills försvar, hur hade vi inte arbetat för att stärka den opinionen som överallt krävde hans frigivande! När meddelandet om hans avrättning kom kände vi oss slagna och desorienterade men fortsatte ändå vårt organisationsarbete som Joe Hill så många gånger sagt var nödvändigt. Han blev nu symbolen i vår kamp för rättvisa, frihet och fred (1955, 7).

[I'll never forget that night. I'll never forget a boy named Frej. He cried, his hands balled into a fist. We had worked so hard to collect money for Joe Hill's defense fund; we had worked so hard to strengthen public opinion everywhere to demand his release! When word came about his execution, we all felt beaten and disoriented, but we kept going in our organization efforts, which Joe Hill had said was necessary so many times. He became the symbol in our fight for justice, freedom, and peace.]

Frej's reaction, crying with clenched fists, is reminiscent of the boy in "När himlen blir blå..."

[When the sky turns blue...] whose mother describes the perils of the world to him, as the young boy, his cheeks flushed red, clenches his fist (Aurell 1920, 8).

There are many ways to organize. Signe Aurell may have never stood on a soapbox in Minnehaha Park where, for example, the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety feared Swedish socialists were holding picnics (Chrislock 1991, 128). She may have never participated in a strike—though she did exercise her power as a worker with acts of sabotage, as documented by Walfrid Engdahl (1961, 8–9). More importantly, Signe Aurell continued to organize workers in her own way. Her lasting legacy as an organizer is in her use of the written word. Her poetry,

short stories, essays, even her translation of “Joe Hill’s Last Will” encouraged Swedish immigrants, Swedish women, Swedish workers, to unionize. Her publications reached thousands of people. Aurell’s legacy doesn’t need to be exaggerated; it just needs to be recognized.

That can be difficult at times, not least because Aurell was writing in Swedish. Archie Green, in the preface to *The Big Red Songbook*, specifically notes that Wobbly songbooks were printed in Sweden and in the United States, in Swedish and in English. However, *The Big Red Songbook* only includes songs in English, and knowledge about foreign-language Wobbly work is sorely lacking. Green writes, “These gaps in documentation are especially ironic in that Wobblies were far ahead of rival trade unionists in organizing immigrants regardless of race or speech” (2007, 9). Later in that same book, Green’s co-editor, Franklin Rosemont notes that none of Aurell’s work has ever appeared in English and claims that Aurell had a propensity for translating IWW songs into Swedish. He includes Aurell with Ture Nerman, a political activist and poet, as translators of lyrics by Joe Hill, T-Bone Slim, and other IWW songwriters (Rosemont 2007, 16). While I have been unable to verify any translations by Aurell other than “Joe Hill’s Last Will,” Rosemont is right in recognizing the disconnect between the English-language songs of the IWW and the native-language songs of immigrants in the IWW. Many of the IWW songs and poems written in a language other than English have not been translated. I have tried to remedy that to some extent with some translations in this research.

Bucky Halker—a scholar of working-class history, a folklorist, and a musician—has also worked to answer Rosemont and Green’s call to fill some of those gaps. Halker’s most recent album, titled *Anywhere But Utah – The Songs of Joe Hill*, includes several Joe Hill songs in both Swedish and English, including a spoken rendition in Swedish of “Joe Hill’s testament,” translated by Signe Aurell, followed by an English rendition of “Joe Hill’s Last Will” (Hill and

Aurell 2015). In doing so, Halker reminds the listener of the international aspects of the Industrial Workers of the World. He reminds listeners of the many styles, instruments, and voices that must have sung these songs one hundred years ago and that still sing some of them today. While Halker brings Joe Hill's songs back in a variety of forms in both Swedish and English, Maja Heurling, a singer-songwriter living in Stockholm, Sweden, has begun working with Signe Aurell's poems in an effort to revive the works for a Swedish audience. Heurling's previous work includes an album of songs inspired by Moa Martinson's life and work, focusing on the author's proletarian literature. With Aurell's work, Heurling is able to continue reviving working-class literature, specifically that of early twentieth century women, but explore how immigration intersects with the working class. The experiences that Aurell wrote about were not unique. They were the experiences of hundreds of thousands of immigrants over one hundred years ago. They are the experiences of hundreds of thousands of immigrants today. The work of Bucky Halker and Maja Heurling to revive these songs is an important reminder that while the working conditions of laborers, whether immigrant or not, may be better for many, there is still much room for improvement.

I've played an active role in this. I've written about Signe Aurell for newspapers in Sweden in search of help and information. I've published academic articles about her work. I've even recited her translation of "Joe Hill's Last Will" for Halker's album. I've introduced Aurell's work to Heurling and am working with her to organize an album recording, and potentially a concert series and small exhibition. I feel a sense of responsibility to Aurell and to keeping her work and memory alive after one hundred years. The words she wrote and the life she led mattered in 1913 and in 1920, in 1935 and in 1955, in 1975 and in 2015, and still today. Her

poems and songs and the work by musicians like Halker and Heurling can help other people discover her, something that I am unabashedly in favor of.

Signe Aurell was at once exceptional and representative. She was an immigrant woman who came alone to the United States. Hundreds of thousands of women just like her traveled across the Atlantic in search of something. Their reasons for coming are as numerous as the women themselves, but they took an active role in the decision to emigrate from their home countries. They also took an active role in the decision to return to their home countries, as many did. Aurell was a Swede who worked as a domestic servant and as a seamstress. But unlike many of her fellow immigrants, she wrote and published poems, short stories, essays, and a translation. Yet despite being representative of so many other immigrants, and despite being exceptional in her publishing and work in the labor movement, Signe Aurell and the hundreds of thousands of women just like her are too often lost to history. Their stories are, however, out there. In private collections, in archives, in newspapers. In small things forgotten. As readers and writers and researchers, it's our job to ensure that those stories are brought to light, not to give them voice—since they've already made their voices heard in their own time—but to “create space” where those voices are listened to today.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Picture courtesy of Jan Alm, which was given to the author during an interview conducted by the author on March 24, 2015, in Osby, Sweden.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, David Sund, who attempted to resurrect the IWW in Stockholm, in a letter to the General Secretary and Treasurer of the IWW, Walter H. Westman, on November 20, 1955, writes “Fellow worker Ragnar Johanson held a very good speech about Joe Hill, but the audience was too small.” Johanson, according to Sund, joined the Syndicalists in Sweden, and was also clearly inspired by Hill.

⁴⁸ Aurell's poems can be found in at least two editions of *Sånger av Joe Hill (Josef Hillström)*, the third edition and an unnumbered edition both published in 1924 in Stockholm; *Sånger of Joe Hill och till hans minne*, published in 1926 in Stockholm; and the 1928 and 1929 editions of *I.W.W.'s*

sångbok, published in Borlänge and Stockholm respectively. The five songbooks were all published by the Stockholm Branch av Marintransportarbetarnas Industriella Union (MTAIU) no 510 av IWW.

⁴⁹ Jamila Lyiscott writes about this in reference to students of color and the often paternalistic approach that many educators take when working with students. “If You Think You’re Giving Students of Color a Voice, Get Over Yourself.” *Black(ness) in Bold: Black Professors, Black Experiences and Black Magic*. March 25, accessed March 29, 2016.

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