Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, Augustana College

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Swenson Center News, 1989

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From the Director

By Dag Blanck

There is a great interest in the history of Swedish immigration to America among large numbers of people. During the past year, the Swenson Center has taken part in a number of events as a part of our mission to inform the interested public.

In mid-May, the annual conference of the National Genealogical Society took place in St. Paul, Minnesota. For four days, thousands of genealogists from all over the U.S. met to listen to lectures, visit exhibits, and share common genealogical interests with each other.

The Swenson Center was there too. In our booth we presented the extensive source materials for Swedish-American genealogical research available at the Center. Numerous interested people stopped by to learn about Swedish-American family history and how to find one's Swedish relatives. As a result of their visit to our booth many of them got started in the process of finding their Swedish roots.

Another public event took place on April 29, when the Swenson Center sponsored the second lecture in the O. Fritiof Ander lecture series in immigration history. A crowded Library Lecture Hall on the Augustana campus heard Dr. Robert Ostergren, Professor of Geography at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and a member of the Swenson Center Advisory Committee, address the topic of "Geographic Perspectives on Swedish Immigrant Settlement in North America."

In his presentation, Ostergren emphasized the significance of the links that existed between specific sending areas in Sweden and receiving areas in the U.S. for the coming of Swedish immigrants to America. This theme is discussed in detail in his recently published award-winning book, A Community Transplanted.

In 1910 more Swedes lived in Chicago than in any other city in the world except Stockholm. It was thus appropriate that the lives and times of the Swedes in Chicago was the topic of a major conference in October last year, an event which attracted over three hundred participants for three days. The Swenson Center was a co-arranger of this conference.

The emphasis, however, in the majority of the talks was on the cultural and social life of the Swedish ethnic community in Chicago. Topics included Swedish-American labor organizations, Swedish musical life, Swedish engineers, Swedish theater, and religious life among the Chicago Swedes.

Finally, it is with great pleasure that I note that Augustana College has received an endowment of $100,000 from Mr. Larry Plym of Delray Beach, Florida. The income from the endowment is to be used for Swedish-American historical studies, including the activities and programs of the Swenson Center.

Mr. Plym is a Board Member of the Swedish Council of America and has been a long-time supporter of Swedish-American historical research. His major gift will be of great significance for future work in this field.
Collection Update

Previous Collection Updates by the Center's archivist, Kermit Westerberg, have focused on microfilmed records and papers from a wide range of Swedish-American organizations and institutions. This installment gives attention to smaller manuscript collections of original records or derivative subject material from various organizations and institutions in Swedish America. These collections have been deposited or transferred to the Center since 1981. The illustrations used in this Update are based on original photographs found in several of these collections.


Astrid Lodge #9 (Ladies' Vikings, Past Presidents' Noonday Club, Omaha, Nebraska): records, 1941-1953. Minutes of luncheon meetings of one-time presidents of the Astrid Lodge #9 of the Independent Order of Vikings, founded in 1907.

Augustana Book Concern, Rock Island, Illinois: papers, ca. 1900-1950. The publishing house of the Augustana Lutheran Church was active in Rock Island from 1889 to 1962, when the Augustana Synod merged with other Lutheran bodies to form the Lutheran Church in America. The Book Concern was one of the major Swedish-language publishing firms in America. This composite collection consists of file photographs of Augustana Synod institutions (orphansages, old people's homes, hospitals, educational institutions, immigrant homes, women's homes, mission complexes, and some churches) and scrapbook compilations of Swedish and English-language tracts issued during the early years of this century. Some microfilmed catalogs from the 1870s, 1890s, and early 1900s for the predecessors of the Book Concern in Chicago, namely the Swedish Lutherska Tryckföreningen and Engberg-Holmberg, are also available as a separate collection unit.

First Scandinavian Methodist Episcopal Church, Chicago, Illinois: records, 1872. Land deed between church trustees and William B. Ogden (Chicago) for purchase of lots in Ogden's addition to the city, following the destruction of the first church structure (at Illinois and Orleans Streets) in the fire of 1871. This document might be called the birth certificate of Chicago's Second Swedish Methodist Episcopal Church, erected in 1872 on what was then called May Street.

"409 Social Club," Washington, D.C.: records, 1940-1969. Minutes, membership records, clippings, and one photograph pertaining to meetings and activities of an organization of older members of Augustana Lutheran Church (Washington, D.C.), designed to perpetuate friendships and ties formed during the years they attended services at 409 4th Street.

Nyitta och Nöje, Rock Island, Illinois: records, 1900-1984. Minutes, correspondence, history sketches, and program materials from one of the oldest, still extant, Swedish social-cultural societies in the Quad Cities. Organized in 1900 by and for persons associated with Augustana College, Nyitta och Nöje holds programs of Swedish declamatory, song, lectures, and discussions with refreshments at the homes of individual members. Minutes of each meeting are still recorded in Swedish.

Scandinavian Temperance Union, Moline, Illinois: records and papers, 1914-1922. Minutes, correspondence, clippings, and some other printed matter regarding coordinated temperance activities by five churches in Moline and Rock Island, Illinois.

Svenska litteratursällskapet, Moline, Illinois: records, 1928-1960. Minutes, correspondence, anniversary history, and some financial records pertaining to a Swedish literary society established in 1928 by Swedish residents of Moline to read and discuss works by Swedish authors. Meetings were held regularly in private homes, where programs consisted of Swedish declamatory, music, and refreshments. Minutes are written exclusively in Swedish.

Swedish American Athletic Clubs (western Illinois): subject collection, ca. 1920-1960. Cassette tape interviews, typescript material, and photocopied newspaper clippings relating to the history and activities of various Swedish-American athletic clubs in west-
ern Illinois (Rock Island, Moline, Rio, and Andover). Taped interviews with athletes were made in 1984-1985 by Richard Holtman (Rock Island).

**Swedish American Old Settlers’ Association of Knox County, Illinois (Galesburg, Illinois):** records, 1890-1943. Minutes, membership records, constitution, historian’s reports, correspondence, and newspaper clippings documenting the activities of an organization for early Swedish settlers in Knox County. Membership was open to all persons of Swedish parentage who had lived in the county for thirty years.

**Swedish-American Republican League, Chicago, Illinois:** papers, 1912. Manuscript of signed greeting by Swedish King Gustav V, addressed to “Swedish Americans of Chicago” and dated January 4, 1912. This greeting was read aloud at a banquet held on that date to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the battle between the Monitor and Merrimac during the Civil War. The League itself was established in December, 1894, to represent Swedish-American voters of Illinois on a county basis.

**Swedish Colonization Company, Rock Island, Illinois:** records, 1884-1888. Minutes of annual stockholders’ and board of directors’ meetings of a land company organized at Augustana College in November, 1883, and at a similar meeting held in Chicago in February, 1888. This company was chartered under the laws of the state of Iowa for the purpose of purchasing tracts of land for sale to Swedish immigrants in Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Colorado, and California.

**Swedish Pioneer Centennial Association, Tri-City Local Committee, Moline, Illinois:** records and papers, 1946-1959. Minutes of the local committee, the Association, and its executive board; financial records; correspondence; clippings; programs; itineraries; banquet arrangements; and printed matter. The Association and its various local chapters were organized to prepare for

and carry out programs in observance of the Swedish pioneer centennial in the United States (1848-1948).

**Swedish Olive Lodge #583, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Moline, Illinois:** Over thirty cartons contain minutes, membership data, financial records, correspondence, and photographs relating to the history of the lodge and six merger lodges during the period 1872-1987. These records and papers are the largest and most recent additions to the Center’s holdings of original source materials from Swedish-American organizations.

The Center’s Assistant Researcher, Christina Johansson, has recently developed a computerized database of descriptive entries for all microfilmed records of Swedish-American churches and secular organizations; microfilmed collections of personal papers; microfilmed periodicals; and microfilmed subject collections. Future databases will be constructed for photographic materials and non-microfilmed manuscript collections.
The Making of an Immigrant City: Moline

One of the research projects at the Swenson Center deals with the ethnic history of Moline, Illinois. Moline was in many ways shaped by its immigrants, the Swedes, Belgians, Germans, Greeks, Mexicans, and other groups. This article presents some of the preliminary results from this ongoing study.

By Dag Blanck

Moline is a medium-sized industrial city in western Illinois, located on the banks of the Mississippi River on the border between Illinois and Iowa. The city is a part of the Quad Cities, consisting of Moline and Rock Island in Illinois and Davenport and Bettendorf in Iowa.

Like so many other cities in the American Midwest, large numbers of immigrants helped settle and build Moline, beginning around 1850. Prospects of employment and a good life attracted, among others, Swedes, Germans, Belgians, Greeks, and Mexicans to the city.

Moline was legally incorporated as a city in 1872, although there was continuous settlement from 1842. From the very beginning Moline was shaped by industrial development. The plow and farm implement industry which played an important role in the city’s history came to the area in the late 1840s. In 1847, John Deere decided to locate his plow factory in Moline; in 1854 the Moline Wagon Company was established; and 1864 saw the organization of the Moline Plow Company.

Industrial growth continued with even greater force after the Civil War, and during the 1870s Moline prospered, in part because of its foundries, machine shops, and boiler works. At least seven industries were founded during this decade, including the Union Malleable Iron Company in 1872 and the Moline Pump Company in 1873. In 1876, a history of Rock Island County proudly announced that in the thirty-year period of industrial growth in Moline, some $3 million had been invested in the various Moline manufacturing establishments. Towards the end of the century, the city had earned the nickname “the plow capital of the world.”

The population of the city also grew rapidly, increasing sixfold from 4,000 to 25,000 between 1870 and 1910. Of the people who moved to Moline, a large number were immigrants: in 1910, almost three fourths of Moline’s inhabitants were either foreign-born or had at least one parent born outside the U.S. This percentage of native to foreign-born inhabitants placed Moline at the same level as Minneapolis.

Who were the immigrants in Moline? Several immigrant groups lived in the city, although the largest group by far was the Swedes. Both in 1870 and in 1910 Swedes made up half of the city’s immigrant population. Another large group was the Germans, who in 1870 represented about a quarter of the Moline immigrants. By 1910, the number of Germans had declined, and their place had largely been taken by a new group, the Belgians. In that year twenty percent of the immigrants in Moline came from Belgium.

What was life like for these immigrants in Moline? For the majority, the most pressing issue once they had settled in Moline was, of course, to find a job. Many immigrants found employment in one of the many manufacturing industries in Moline. In 1910, about forty percent of the Swedes and a third of the Germans had jobs as laborers, and about two thirds of the more recently arrived Belgians were classified as semi-skilled or unskilled laborers.

Among the places of employment in Moline, the John Deere

Workers from one of the many ethnic businesses in Moline. Swedish-born Charles Anderson (first row, in suit) with his employees outside the family bakery along 16th Avenue. (Photo courtesy of Melvin Anderson).

Parades were important demonstrations of ethnic pride down Moline’s 15th Street, ca. 1910. (Belgian Culture of Western Illinois).
Company factories were very important, particularly for the Swedes. In 1912, a company survey noted that the Swedes had been the dominant group for a long time and that more than a third of the work force was of Swedish origin. The second largest ethnic group in 1912 was the Belgians. Deere company officials also commented that the immigrants played a significant role for the company. In an assessment of the different immigrant groups working at Deere, the superintendent of the plow department stated that "[t]he Swede possesses many very desirable characteristics... [and the Belgians] are found desirous of making good money and willing to return its equivalent in amount of work performed."

A number of ethnic businesses run by members of the ethnic communities also provided chances for employment. Here the different needs of growing immigrant communities can be detected, and German or Swedish butcher shops, grocery stores, and saloons were common sights in Moline at the turn of the century. The immigrants also started newspapers in their own language: in Moline two Swedish-language newspapers were published (Moline Tribun and Nya Pressen), as well as one in Flemish (Gazette van Moline) that catered to the Belgian population.

But life was not only work. The immigrants in Moline, like immigrants in other cities in America, quickly created many organizations and institutions which helped them make sense of their new life in a new world. Much of ethnic life in Moline centered around these immigrant organizations. Typically, the first institutions immigrants founded were churches. By the turn of the century, all the Swedish-American denominations—Lutheran, Covenant, Methodist, Evangelical Free, and Baptist—had established congregations in Moline. Germans could go to church in neighboring Rock Island, where there were German Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Catholic churches.

Other organizations also helped shape ethnic life in Moline. A number of mutual aid societies and purely social groups and clubs soon sprang up. Among the Swedes, there were local lodges of the Independent Order of Vikings, the Independent Order of Swithiod, as well as two International Order of Good Templars lodges. The Germans had an Arbeiter Kranken Unterstuetzung's Verein and two Turner societies; within the Belgian community, the Belgian club was one focal point.

These organizations, whether religious or secular, provided members of the various immigrant communities with a home away from home. In the groups there was an opportunity to speak one's native language, to participate in religious services which were rooted in the old country, or maybe just to meet fellow countrymen.

Gradually, the immigrants left their ethnic communities and made inroads in the surrounding Anglo-American society. One example is immigrant participation in local politics. It was not until the late nineteenth century that members of the immigrant communities managed to capture City Hall in Moline. The first foreign-born mayor of Moline was Martin Schillinger, a German who was elected in 1885. He only served for a two year period, however.

With the election of Gustav Swenson as mayor in 1895, a long period of Swedish dominance of

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New Books About Swedish Immigration

In conjunction with the New Sweden Year 1988, a number of books about Swedish immigration to the U.S. have been published. Many of them have, of course, dealt with the New Sweden colony, but the general history of Swedish immigration to the U.S. has also been covered. In this article we will present several books in English that might be of interest to readers of the Swenson Center News.

Three books about the New Sweden colony offer general overviews of the colony's history. They all provide well-rounded accounts of the colony, covering such topics as the voyage across the Atlantic, the founding of the colony and its various institutions, relationships with the Indians, and the last years of the colony. Some of the more prominent and colorful colonists, such as the Governor Johan Printz (named “Big Belly” by the Indians), play an important role in these books. The two first are written by Swedes: The People of New Sweden: Our Colony on the Delaware River, by Alf Åberg and New Sweden: The Dream of an Empire by Algot Mattsson. The third book, New Sweden on the Delaware 1638-1655, is written by the American historian C.A. Weslager. All three books read easily and are written in an accessible style, making them particularly useful for the general public.

One of the major publications to appear during the New Sweden year is a bilingual edition of the journal of the last Governor of New Sweden, Johan Risingh, The Rise and Fall of New Sweden. Risingh arrived in the colony only one year before the surrender to the Dutch, and the book includes a lively and interesting account of colony life, as well as the war with the Dutch. There are also two introductory essays by the editors, which place the colony in larger contexts, European as well as American.

The book also includes excellent illustrations.

Other books focus on more specific aspects of the New Sweden experience. The book Visions of Greatness: New Sweden in the New World 1638-1655, is a collection of essays on various aspects of the colony’s history, with both Swedish and American scholars among the authors. The religious life in New Sweden is discussed in Conrad Bergendoff’s study The Church of Sweden on the Delaware 1638-1831, originally published in 1937, but now revised and updated. This subject is also explored in a special issue of Lutheran Quarterly published under the title The Church in New Sweden.

Three books about the larger subject of Swedish immigration have also appeared during the last year. Transatlantic Connections: Nordic Migration to the New World after 1800 is a comprehensive overview and synthesis of much of the research done on Scandinavian immigration to North America in the past decades. The book is written by two of the leading Swedish scholars in the field, Uppsala historians Hans Norman and Harald Runblom.

Other recent books include a useful overview of Swedes in North American life. They are Swedes in North America 1638-1988 by Sten Carlsson, dean of Swedish emigration studies and professor emeritus at Uppsala, and the award-winning study of a specific migration from Dalarna in central Sweden to Minnesota, A Community Transplanted, by the geographer Robert Ostergren of the University of Wisconsin.


Ethnic Mosaic Book to be Published

In 1987, the Swenson Center arranged the conference “The Ethnic Mosaic of the Quad Cities.” One part of the conference was an assessment and commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Marcus Lee Hansen’s famous address, “The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant,” delivered at Augustana College in 1937.

The papers that were presented in this session will soon be published. Among the contributors are a number of the leading scholars in immigration studies, including Professors Nathan Glazer of Harvard University and John Higham of Johns Hopkins University.

The book will be called American Immigrants and Their Generations, and will be brought out by the University of Illinois Press.

Swenson Center Associates

Since last summer, it has been possible to become a Swenson Center Associate. If you wish to help us continue our work to document, preserve, and interpret the history of Swedish immi-
migration to America, one way is to become a Swenson Center Associate.

A Swenson Center Associate is also able to conduct research at the Swenson Center at a reduced rate. Our normal fee is $15 per hour, but as an Associate you pay only $10.

A great number of people have taken the opportunity to become Swenson Center Associates, something we are very grateful for. To give those of you who have not yet become Associates an opportunity to do so, we include a card in this Newsletter which you can fill out and return to us. Thank you for supporting the Center in this way.

**Swenson Center Visited by Swedish National Archives**

During the past year, the Swenson Center has been visited by representatives of SVAR (Svensk Arkivinformation), a unit of the National Archives of Sweden. SVAR is in the process of converting the entire corpus of Swedish church records, dating back to approximately 1700, onto microfiche.

SVAR is located in Ramsele in northern Sweden where genealogical research facilities have been established in the city’s old court house. It is also possible to do research through the mail using the SVAR resources.

The Swenson Center has further information about SVAR, including request forms for genealogical searches. We are also working closely with SVAR to make their records available in this country.

**Co-operation with the Emigrant Register**

As one part of the continuing relationship between the Swenson Center and the Emigrant Register in Karlstad, Sweden, the Swenson Center’s researcher Stephanie Lawrence spent June and July at the Emigrant Register. Stephanie worked in the family research department at the Emigrant Register, helping visitors do research in both Swedish and Swedish-American sources.

**Just in Time for Christmas: New Augustana Choir Tape**

Rave reviews followed the Augustana Choir of 1985-86 when they sang their way through the churches and cathedrals of Scandinavia. The critically acclaimed choir tour culminated in a concert for King Carl Gustaf XVI and Queen Silvia and 150 invited guests in the White Sea Room, Royal Palace in Stockholm. The College’s 70-voice ensemble is directed by Donald Morrison.

Music lovers can enjoy the best of those memorable performances now in a newly-produced cassette tape that combines selections recorded at various tour locations. Each was chosen for the tape because it represented the best single performance of each program selection. The Augustana Choir 1985 Tour of Scandinavia is a double-length, Dolby B tape expertly recorded and engineered by Michael Morrison and contains the entire concert program. It can be ordered from the Office of Cultural Events at Augustana College. Cost is $15 and proceeds will be used toward the Choir’s 1990 Scandinavian tour.

**Moline: Immigrant City**

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Moline politics began. Swenson served as mayor until 1899, and between 1905 and 1919 two other Swedes served as mayors of Moline, Andrew Olson and Martin Carlson. In 1923, C.W. Sandstrom was elected, and he remained Moline mayor throughout the 1920s. The Moline Swedes thus came to exercise a considerable political power during the first decades of this century. They were clearly able to use their ethnic group’s size to their advantage.

Moline is thus a city which like so many others in the Midwest has been shaped by immigration and immigrants. People came to Moline from different countries in search of a better life. Many may have found it—jobs were certainly plentiful in the city. The immigrant groups built communities and neighborhoods in which they could live, work, and preserve a sense of identity. But they also lived in and interacted with the surrounding American society. In this way, immigrants and their children often lived in dual worlds—one family and community centered where the ethnic heritage was central, the other outwardly oriented, focused on work, schooling, and politics.

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Support for the Swenson Center

We would like to express heartfelt thanks to those donors who have made significant contributions to the preservation of the history of Swedish immigrants in America.

While the Swenson endowment provides a large part of the financial support for the Swenson Center, it does not cover all costs. Gifts from friends are extremely important to the Center as it works to preserve and interpret the records of Swedish immigration to North America. We welcome gifts of any size.

For an annual contribution of $25, you can become a Swenson Center Associate, which in addition to helping us in our future work entitles you to a reduced research rate and all our mailings. (Please see the inserted card.) We greatly appreciate the financial support of all who value the Swedish heritage in America and the work being done by the Center.

Materials

If you have materials that you think could be of interest to the Center, we encourage you to contact our archivist Kermit Westerberg to discuss ways you can share these materials with us. We are especially interested in the following items:

- Personal papers of Swedish immigrants and their families: letters, diaries, certificates, photographs, family histories, and genealogies
- Organizational papers from Swedish-American fraternal and labor associations, societies, and clubs
- Minutes, correspondence, and other records from business firms started by Swedish immigrants
- All types of printed and unpublished material related to Swedish immigration and Swedes in America.

GIFTS

The following major gifts received since July 1, 1988 are acknowledged with gratitude:

$1,000 and over
- Drs. Richard and Paula Arnell
- Larry Plym
- Dr. and Mrs. Birger Swenson

$100-$999
- Mildred E. Nelson
- Dr. Milford Nelson
- Marie A. Peterson
- Rock Island Kiwanis Club
- Drott Lodge 168,
  Vasa Order of America

A gift to strengthen the Center's endowment fund is an excellent way to perpetuate your concern for preserving the Swedish heritage in America. A number of memorial and naming opportunities are available. Please contact Glen Brolander, Augustana College, chairman of the Center's advisory committee, for details.

How to Reach the Center

The Swenson Center is located on the third floor of Denkmann Memorial Library on the campus of Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois.

Office hours are 8:30 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, except for holidays. Hours may be restricted during college vacation periods.

If you plan to visit the Center, we encourage you to make an appointment by calling or writing in advance.

Staff members of the Center are Dag Blanck, director; Kermit Westerberg, archivist; librarian; Stephanie Lawrence, researcher; and Christina Johansson, assistant researcher. Direct all correspondence to:

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