

6-1-2015

My work at the Swenson Center

Philipp Gollner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag>



Part of the [Genealogy Commons](#), and the [Scandinavian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gollner, Philipp (2015) "My work at the Swenson Center," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 35 : No. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol35/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Swedish American Genealogist by an authorized editor of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

News from the Swenson Center

My work at the Swenson Center

BY PHILLIP GOLLNER

In 1885, Josiah Strong charted the course for the white Protestant future of a United States on the move. Among the eight perils on the journey that he identified in his famous *Our Country* were non-English-speaking immigrants and Mormons.

By then, of course, neither migration nor the rise of the Latter Day Saints were specifically American phenomena anymore: the Latter Day Saints had sent missionaries to Sweden as early as 1850, with the city of Gävle as an early hub. Many of the converted moved to the American Promised Land, complementing an already massive Swedish wave across the Atlantic. By 1910, Utah was home to almost 20,000 ethnic Swedes, and even more Danes. In the early 1880s, as Strong prepared his manuscript, a single woman from Hälsingland in Sweden also claimed *her country* – by moving from Sweden to Salt Lake City, Utah – as an anti-Mormon. Barely able to speak English or afford her trip, Ellen Modin, the single woman who preached the evils of polygamy to fellow newcomers around the salty lake, became an icon among Swedes and their Anglo-Protestant allies.

Here, finally, was proof that the religious import of Scandinavian immigrants more than matched the promise of their white, “Nordic” race. This is a story of how Swedish immigrants’ use of religion could be more crucial to their transculturation than socioeconomic factors. More importantly, it is a story of how out-

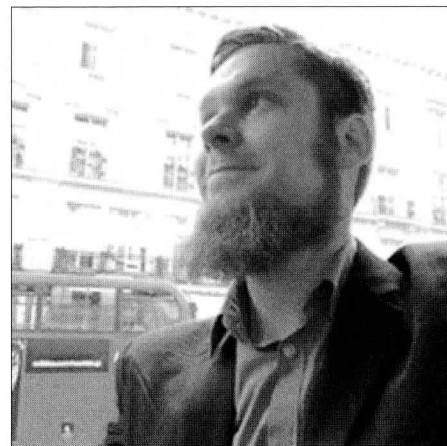
running and out-preaching, and othering the Latter Day Saints provided an avenue for immigrants to prove their racial credibility, physical mobility, and the ability to cross American religious hierarchies.

My project, then, inserts Swedish migration history and Swedish religious history into current historical conversations beyond classic ethnic history. To that end, the resources of the Swenson Center have allowed me to tell a much more detailed story. The Dagmar and Nils William Olsson fellowship has allowed me access to numerous rare and undigitized newspapers of Swedish migrants, especially *Pietisten*, *Missions-Vännen*, the *Chicago Bladet*, the *Augustana*, the *Swenska Kristna Härelden* and the *Minneapolis Veckoblad*. I also worked through relevant material from various congregational records collected at Augustana, particularly of Evangelical-Free and Swedish Covenant congregations in Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa. These records continue to function as departure points for some more in-depth research of census and neighborhood records that I am able to conduct online and through digitized materials.

In addition, I was able to use original-language books and the personal collections of other Swedish missionaries to Utah such as Lutheran Samuel Magnus Hill, comparing the experience of religious Swedes who sought to continue the heritage of the church of their upbringing in a new world with those of Ellen Modin, who

closely aligned with Anglo-Protestant powers to lift her work above less activist Swedes.

Spending part of the spring of 2015 in Rock Island and enjoying the professional help and warm hospitality of Swenson Center staff provided me not only with a boost of research to my work, but also with an impressive look on the careful and forward-looking work among historians of Swedish-American narratives. Most of all, the Olsson fellowship gave me a ground-level view of how anti-Mormon rhetoric functioned along lines of gender and race to work out a space in which some Swedish immigrants could see themselves as making a valuable contribution for the better of their new American homeland.



Philipp Gollner's e-mail is:

<pgollner@nd.edu>