

9-1-2011

Swedish American Heritage Online

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Recommended Citation

Borg, David (2011) "Swedish American Heritage Online," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 31 : No. 3 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol31/iss3/9>

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Swedish America Heritage Online (SweAme)

The new frontier in family genealogy research

BY DAVID BORG

Why a new organization?

Do you remember how it was when you got started – learning about your family history? You had heard that one of your aunts had put together a book many years ago. But, whatever happened to it? To make things worse, she was deceased, as also were most if not all of her siblings and other family old-timers. Back in those old days (pre-Internet) those issues (and others) imposed a difficult problem for getting started with researching and documenting your ancestors. It was all a very manually intensive and paper-oriented process.

In my case, my mother (Thelma Carlson Borg, who lived in Williamson County, Texas) had been the one who documented her family tree and helped me understand a few research techniques. But, it required a lot of family communication and waiting for the return of snail mail letters which was not efficient and was not very exciting to me.

We who do family research in Texas had one of the most important Swedish American family documents (in my opinion) that has ever been published. In the 1910s, our fellow Swedish cousins (so to speak – most were immigrants themselves) joined together and worked on a very significant project of collecting family information on more than 1,200 immigrant families. The result was a book *Svenskarne i Texas i ord och bild*, which was published in Swedish in 1918 and later translated into English, in 1994. This was great for all of

us “Johnnies come lately” to the genealogy research table, but the book was not well distributed due to its hardbound nature and limited publication. So, what could we do to help? How can we share this wealth of Swedish Texas information with new generations of researchers who also did not know that the book ever existed?

The internet explosion

Of course, the solution came to us as the Internet. To start with, we scanned the book and made it available online. But, we also utilized a genealogy software package that allows connecting families together without duplicating records. The Internet and software not only present the information online to anyone anywhere, but it also allows Registered Users the chance to make their own updates and additions to their records at no cost.

That was the easy part. We next realized that by looking at the U.S. census records, the original *Swedes In Texas* book only included about 25% of the total Swedish-born Texans in the 1900 census records. Would it not be of help and value to document online the other known 75% of the Swedes in Texas? No problem. It took us 3 years but now the families of all Texas Swedish immigrants are documented online as part of our SweAme website data base.

Our next thought was - why stop there? Why not include the data for all Swedish immigrants to America? The census records as viewed via

ancestry.com indicated that there were nearly 600,000 Swedish-born individuals living in the U.S. in the year 1900. No problem. Wait, let's think about that. In calculating the keying time for 600,000 individuals and their families, it was estimated to require one person 100 years - not very good. But, that also means that it will only take 100 people one year to complete the effort – that's not bad. That's a doable project. So, how can we do that?

Starting a new organization

It became obvious that we would need a lot of help. We would also need a nonprofit organization that could request and receive funds from donors and funding institutions who were interested in supporting online Swedish American projects. We would need an organization that could maintain a website that would be available for access to everyone at any time for no fee.

We therefore merged the original Swedes In Texas data into a new website called *SweAme* (link on p. 29) In October, 2010, we completed the process of becoming a nonprofit in the State of Missouri. In February, 2011, we received our 501(c)(3) status letter from the Internal Revenue Service.

This was accomplished with the help of an all-volunteer management team scattered from New Jersey to Arizona: Doug Anderson, Lissa Bengtson, Larry Blomquist, Elin Criswell, Jason Eckhardt, and Pam

Hicks. This year John Norton (2010 Swedish American of the Year) has joined our team as an organization advisor.

The SweAme organization has no assets and no overhead expenses. All organizational and technical expenses are covered by management donations. One hundred percent of all other donations are paid to the Registered Users who are performing the keying of the records to the online data base.

Growing an organization

We are now in our 5th year with this project and we are nearing the 120,000 records mark for individuals. Our current data base documents only about 25,000 Swedish immigrants. The other individuals are ancestors and descendants of the immigrants, from data that has been contributed by our 640-plus Registered Users on both sides of the Atlantic. These numbers change daily as ongoing efforts continue.

Our vision for SweAme is more than genealogy and connecting family trees together. It is a strong vision of preserving our past and present for future generations. Anything that can be captured by a digital camera can become an artifact image on the SweAme website. In addition, the item can be linked directly to a person or family which then becomes part of their family digital records.

The SweAme website has already demonstrated one of its key benefits – that is – connecting living cousins together from the different sides of the immigrant bridge. And, by expanding the scope to include all America, immigrants once lost by misspelled names and unknown locations, SweAme can now greatly increase the odds of a successful search for a “lost” ancestor.

The SweAme website data base is hosted on a modern and always transitioning technological platform that will evolve into future platforms and processes. The benefits of SweAme will continue to be enjoyed by many generations in the future.

Funding and current status

Our overall funding objective is to solicit funds from as many sources as can be identified. These sources include foundations, public organizations and individuals who have an interest in promoting the preservation of our common Swedish American heritage.

Swedish Council of America has become our first major contributor. For more detail you can visit our Contributors and Donors page (link on p. 29).

The funds awarded SweAme will be utilized to compensate individuals working from their homes (from anywhere in the world) who will:

- ◆ view selected online U.S. Census records,
- ◆ access the SweAme website, and
- ◆ update the data base utilizing The Next Generation (TNG) genealogy software.

At this point in time, SweAme has accumulated over:

- ◆ 91,000 Individuals (immigrants, family members and descendants)
- ◆ 23,000 Family units
- ◆ 16,000 Media documents (histories, photos, headstones, etc.)
- ◆ 560 Registered Users

The Swedish immigrants (from the 1900 census) have now been documented for the following geographic areas:

Alabama
Arkansas
Arizona
Delaware
District of Columbia
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii
Indian Territory
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maryland
Mississippi
Missouri
Nevada
New Mexico
North Carolina
Oklahoma
South Carolina
Tennessee
Texas
Vermont
Virginia
West Virginia

We have a very long ways to go to reach our primary objective, we can get there one step at a time – or, so to speak – one immigrant at a time.

If you are interested in contributing to the SweAme organization, please contact us via our website or send us an email:

<dborg@centurytel.net>



A Swedish shop in Elgin, Texas. Picture from Amerikabreven, by Otto Rob. Landelius (1957).