

6-1-2009

## News from the Swenson Center

Erika Jackson-Eckerly

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



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

---

### Recommended Citation

Jackson-Eckerly, Erika (2009) "News from the Swenson Center," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 29 : No. 2 , Article 4.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol29/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at 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](mailto:digitalcommons@augustana.edu).

# News from the Swenson Center

---

## The 2009 Olsson scholar

### — Erika Jackson-Eckerly

Erika Jackson-Eckerly of Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan has been named the Olsson Scholar for 2009.

Ms. Jackson-Eckerly is working on a project which she describes as follows:

The focus of my dissertation, titled “Scandinavian Preferred”: Nordic Ethnic Identity, Gender, and Work within Chicago, 1879-1933,” centers on the public and private representations of Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish women and men who navigated Chicago and transformed city spaces into their adopted homes. At the peak of migration from the Northern and Western European countries to America in the 1880s, several editorial commentators would create nativist dialogues that conceived of Nordic ethnicity as falling into the upper echelons of an imagined social pyramid.

Following these commentaries within newspapers, many Chicagoans began to form very specific social conceptions of the “typical” Scandinavian – images focused on both the physical and behavioral ideals of Nordic identity, equating Scandinavian women with fair beauty and men with a virile, yet gentle brand of masculine traits. The World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 would play a vital role in the transmission of such ideals, as Sweden’s and Norway’s pavilions represented their own as well-educated, poised, and culturally proud – even in the wake of nativist calls for acculturation into American society for all who wished to be “American.”

In this era, the urban elite of Chicago’s Prairie Avenue district and the North Shore regions would come to view Scandinavians as equally trustworthy and poised, and would not only seek the services of recruiting

agencies within the city, but would place advertisements in papers such as the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Daily News* which would note their preference for Swedish, Norwegian, or Danish women and men as workers in their palatial homes.

These combined social practices would create a vital public discourse focused on representations of how Americans perceived Scandinavians. Therefore, my dissertation links the importance of these urban and suburban spaces to the ways in which Scandinavians made use of such perceptions to meet their needs, as many were able to find success and eventually move into the suburban edges of the city.

The ultimate goal of my study is to create a narrative that employs the study of labor, immigration/emigration, ethnicity, women and gender, consumer culture, and sexuality in an effort to better understand the experiences of Scandinavian immigrants in Chicago. Within my research of Scandinavian immigrants, I hope to move past older frameworks and interpretive methods to incorporate more contemporary and analytical concepts, including the study of ethnic identity and cross-cultural contact; comparative study of the dichotomy between the urban and suburban experiences of Scandinavian immigrants within Chicago; interpretation of cultural symbols to explore the creation of spatial, physical, and emotional ties Scandinavians formed with their cities and neighborhoods; and gender analysis to investigate the identities and experiences of Scandinavians as men and women at work, home, and leisure.

For my dissertation, I am currently in the process of drafting my second and third chapters, which

focus on representations of Scandinavians in the media and in public dialogue, as well as the experiences of work within the urban sphere. At the Swenson Center, the source that appears to be the most vital to my study is journalist Inge Lund’s impressions of the working conditions of Swedish immigrant domestics in her work, *En Piga i U.S.A.: ett pennskafts äventyr* – this perspective of an outsider to the job but an insider to the culture would help to better contextualize my discussion of Swedish domestics at the turn of the century. There are a number of works that also appear to explore the historical dichotomy of work and home, including Allan T. Nilson’s book, *They Built Railway Cars* on the Swedish perspective of the Pullman experiment; documents from Chicago’s Immanuel Woman’s Home; and Per Nordahl’s *Weaving the Ethnic Fabric* on Swedish-American radicals in Chicago. Within my work, I am also looking to expand upon the evidence of immigrant voices by using Anna Larson’s recollections of Chicago’s suburban regions in the 1880s in *Mom’s Letters Home*, and by exploring additional archival collections held at the Swenson Center. For my final chapters that focus on the growth of Scandinavians in the middle- to upper-classes, I intend to compare the records of the Swedish Blue Books from 1927 through 1930 to a collection of sources I have located at North Park University in Chicago. In completing my dissertation research, I am eager to explore the archival and library holdings at the Swenson Center and am confident that these materials will be essential to my study of Scandinavians in Chicago.