

3-1-2016

Conditions in Minnesota and Iowa 1850s

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Recommended Citation

Andréen, Olof Christian Telemak and Norton, John E. (2016) "Conditions in Minnesota and Iowa 1850s," *Swedish American Genealogist*. Vol. 36 : No. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol36/iss1/5>

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Pastor O.C.T. Andréén reports in the journal *Wäktaren* on conditions in Minnesota and Iowa, as cited by the newspaper *Folkets Röst*, Stockholm, 5 Dec. 1860, p. 4.

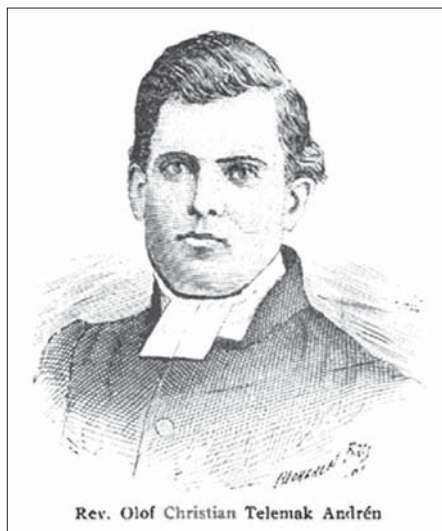
TRANSLATED BY
JOHN E. NORTON

The newspaper Wäktaren has provided this story, written by Pastor (O.C.T.) Andréén,¹ who recently returned from America to the homeland, from which we provide the following:

The poor immigrant, upon his arrival in America, must take the first work he can find, without it being his first choice of work in the profession for which he was most suited in Sweden. If he succeeds, he has to learn his profession all over again, according to American methods. The poorest Swedes mostly seek their way to industrial cities. Farm children prefer taking work in the country. Those with funds left over upon their arrival in the west have bought land, and, in general, the Swede hurries, as soon as he has earned something, to buy a bit of land, however little it may be.

Up until the fall of 1857, when the financial crisis² (ed: the Crimean Depression) swept like a destructive storm across America, yes, even across the ocean to Europe, where it was also felt in our homeland. There were ample work opportunities and salaries for the immigrant who avoided sickness or survived it, and those who were ambitious, well-ordered, and sober saw independence and well-being smile upon them in a not too distant future. Most who now own something in the city or in the country did well before 1858.

It is impossible for those who are not acquainted with conditions out there to grasp the many shortages, suffering, and hard work under the burning heat of summer and the biting cold of winter with which the immigrant has to deal, who by himself wishes to, and must, build his



own homestead, especially in the forested regions, if he wishes to have anything. While there are certainly those who quickly enough become successful, but in general, and among Swedes in particular, these are few.

The road to fortune goes there as elsewhere, through hard work and God's blessing. Even out there, the old law applies: "You shall work by the sweat of your brow," and there, perhaps more than elsewhere, a law applies to those who do not wish to work: "Nor shall ye eat." This is enlightening for those who believe they only need to go there to find everything they need, without applying greater effort than the minimum to get, by work and patience, what they shall eventually receive. There, work is an honor, and a worker's clothing often hides government employees and statesmen. Those who despise work, and are not prepared to take what work is offered, and then work hard, have no reason to head west.

Those who have visited the Swedish colonies here have had opportunity to see what unbelievable effort

it has cost to win bread from the soil, where forest once stood. One gains a sense of this in the founding of the colony at Chisago Lake in Minnesota.

It was in the spring of 1847 when a couple of families from Hälsingland, based on a letter from a certain Mr. N.³ then living up there in the forests, left Moline, Illinois, for Taylors Falls in Minnesota, a little city on the St. Croix River, 8 to 9 miles east of Chisago Lake. When they got there, there were only a few log cabins, all filled. N. was in his, and no one in Taylors Falls knew anything more about Chisago Lake than that it was west of there. With compass in hand and axes on their shoulders, these brave adventurers headed into the woods, looked and looked, but found no lake that first day.

After having spent the night under a tree, they finally found the lake the next day. It took 10 days work to cut a road so they could drive there, build a little cabin, move in with their families and household goods, and finally say they had reached their new home. This was the goal of their trip, but – certainly not any Land of Canaan – with forest everywhere so they could hardly see the sky, far, far away from everyone else, and with nothing to live on except what the lake and forest could offer. For about two years these families lived there in loneliness, cleared the forest, plowed, planted and sowed, and built themselves better houses, etc.

Pastor (Erland) Carlson⁴ has told how he, during one of his many mission trips to Minnesota several years ago, soaked through after a whole day of traveling in the rain, and had to be satisfied with spending the



Pastor Erland Carlson. (Courtesy by Swenson Center Photo Collection.)

night in a bed under a roof that did not give much more protection than the clouds that had been his roof during the day. I myself, during my trips, have seen, in the middle of a cold winter, small houses with no windows or doors other than blankets or similar hangings. During the first years there were many sickbeds in many Swedish huts through which winter winds blew without hinder, snow piled up around the freezing spouse of the sick person, and their children gathered around the fireplace.

Now, with Swedes in the thousands, it is easier almost everywhere for the immigrant to find a warm home, warm hearts, and, in the event of need and illness, caring hands.

With few exceptions, Swedes enjoy a well-deserved reputation for energy, faithfulness, and work ethic, and while many love brandy, and drown their understanding, work skills, and reputation in it, these have not succeeded in destroying the respect given to date for the Northerners who come here to build their homes, and are welcomed as the flesh and bones of their state.

The more the immigrant is Americanized, the more his skill become a precious pearl. It remains so in the

Swedish colonies. May it remain there, protected. I am convinced of this in other places, even in the colony of New Sweden, Iowa, named in honor of their fatherland. And a more beautiful area in the state of Iowa can hardly be found, once one gets beyond some swampy lowlands.

With axe in hand, these devoted colonists have chopped their way through, and built homesteads across an area of about 6 x 4 English miles. A few Americans live there amicably among the Swedes. In every cottage I visited, and I visited not a few during the days I was there, I found the Swedish spinning wheel and loom, with women weaving clothing material for the winter for their husbands and children.

The main town in New Sweden is called Stockholm, on a couple of dominating heights, and though water is lacking close by New Sweden's main town, there is a small stream that winds playfully between the hills, and is quite beautiful. When the moon in this country, on moonlit nights, spreads its silver across the forests and plains, imagination can quickly transform the moonlit, fog-covered valleys into seas.

During the three years that followed the 1857 financial crisis rested heavily upon the west, many factories closed or reduced their activities, and many owners themselves did what work they could; when the farmer reduced his workforce, and wages were reduced; when hard money became rare and high-priced, yes, in Minnesota it went up 36% or more; here, for the Swede, it was not a question of becoming rich, but of maintaining life.

Most now expect better times to begin over. While, after an abundant harvest, the horizon is brightening for the people in the West, and there is some more life in factories and in sales; it may, in the best case, be years before the results will be generally realized.

Most of the Swedes, upon immigration, belonged to the Lutheran Church. While not a few of them have been unaware of the main tenets of our Confession, which showed itself

especially when they arrived here and the winds of all kinds of faiths blew around their ears. There has still been, and is, a remarkable faithfulness to the Lutheran Church, and a willingness to have their souls cared for by clergy, yes, and offer their poverty in support of their clergy, the building of churches, etc., even though all this is offered to them at no cost by other faiths, if they simply join one of them.

Endnotes:

- 1) *Olof Christian Telemak Andreen* (1824-1870) was ordained in Lund in 1847, immigrated to serve the young congregation of First Lutheran Church of Moline, IL, and nearby churches, from 1856-1860. He became one of the first Augustana clergy to return to their homeland, where he served Church of Sweden congregations at Billinge, Röstånga, and Asarum, 1860-70.
- 2) The Crimean Depression of 1857, an international financial panic brought on by the Crimean War.
- 3) Probably *Erik Ulrik Norberg*, who had lived in Bishop Hill, then Andover, IL, where he had joined the Augustana Ev. Lutheran Church before moving to Minnesota, and there a historic monument still lists him as a founder of the Swedish community around Taylors Falls.
- 4) *Erland Carlson* (1822-1893) was ordained at Växjö, Sweden, in 1849, after studies in Lund 1843-1848. He immigrated in 1853, and served as a pastor in Immanuel Lutheran Church in Chicago 1853-75, then Augustana Ev. Lutheran Church in Andover 1875-87, and became treasurer of Augustana College and Seminary 1886-89.

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