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SVAR's U.S. Operation at Swenson Center

By Dag Blanck*

Sweden is perhaps the country that has the most exhaustive population records in the world. Sometimes one hears Swedes complain of the fact that the people are too well kept track of, but for genealogists, this centuries-old tradition is a boon, as it makes it possible to trace one's family backwards in time, often at least a couple of centuries. The completeness and usefulness of the various record groups which make up the core material for Swedish genealogical research—the Swedish parish records—are well-known to the readers of this journal. In addition, other important Swedish records can be found in the military records, in court records, at the Swedish National Bureau of Statistics, at the various genealogical societies, as well as many other institutions.

In order to minimize the "wear and tear" on the original records, as well as to facilitate the use of these unique and frequently utilized archival materials, the Swedish National Archives (*Riksarkivet*) has taken upon itself to make these record groups, so crucial to the genealogical researcher, available on microfiche, a process which goes back to the early 1980's. A special division of the National Archives called SVAR (*Svensk Arkivinformation*—Swedish Archives Information) is located in the town of Ramsele in northern Sweden. Here a staff has been assembled to convert to microfiche the microfilms produced by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah, of the various Swedish parish records. SVAR has also microphotographed various other record groups not included in the so-called "Mormon films."¹ The conversion process in Ramsele has recently been completed, which means that all of the previously microfilmed Swedish parish records now are available on microfiche.

This wealth of information is now accessible also to researchers in North America. In the fall of 1990, SVAR and the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, concluded an agreement by which the Swenson Center has been designated by SVAR as its official representative for North America. This means that interested individuals, as well as institutions, now may purchase through the Swenson Center any and all of the microfiche that SVAR has produced. Persons doing Swedish family research will not need to journey to the various Swedish regional archives. Instead, by contacting the Swenson Center in Rock Island they can order on microfiche the most important source materials for their research.

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Exact information can be obtained from the Swenson Center concerning the types of records, the specific areas in Sweden, as well as relevant time periods available on the SVAR microfiche. For the parish records such crucial sources as births, marriages, deaths and baptisms, as well as household examination rolls and migration registers, are all included in the microfiche collection for the entire country up to ca. 1890. Some record types for certain parts of the country end in 1860. These converted microfiche of parish records correspond to about 16,000 rolls of microfilm and roughly 30 million pages of original parish records.

Other record types which are available through the SVAR system are the extracts from the civil registration records of the National Bureau of Statistics; muster rolls for the army up until the 1880's, as well as promotion and discharge records from the Royal Military Archives (*Krigsarkivet*) in Stockholm; tax records from 1517 and 1613; and other types of genealogical information. SVAR has also produced microfiche of the materials having a bearing on the New Sweden colony on the Delaware.

It is important to realize that these microfiche are copied from the original Swedish records. This means that all of the material is in the Swedish language and most of it written by hand in the 17th and 18th century calligraphy. Due to the condition of the original records some microfiche may be difficult to read. The Swenson Center will, however, be able to provide useful tips as to how to use these microfiche.

The Swenson Center, which began its activity in 1981, has become the central archives and research institution in the United States for Swedish American family research.² Its massive resources include microfilms of the parish records of all major Swedish American religious denominations, the most complete collection of microfilmed Swedish American newspapers, Swedish passenger lists, as well as many other important sources. It is, therefore, quite appropriate that the Center, from September 1991 housed in new and expanded quarters on the Augustana College campus in Rock Island, Illinois, has become SVAR's official representative in North America. The possibility of purchasing SVAR's microfiche means that the genealogical materials covering both the United States and Sweden are thus available through the Swenson Center.

Currently, each microfiche costs \$4.00. Since parishes vary greatly in size, it is difficult to say how many fiche cover each parish. Purchase of the fiche for an entire parish is not necessary, since patrons may only wish to acquire a certain type of record for a certain period of time. Detailed catalogs will be available at the Center to aid those looking for a certain village or farm within the parish. Researchers interested in acquiring microfiche are encouraged to write the Swenson Center for more detailed information. The possibility of renting microfiche is being discussed at this time and may present another viable method to make use of these documents.

At the present time the parish records run until ca. 1890, except in a few cases where the terminal date is 1860. However, SVAR is planning to microphotograph

materials after 1890. As these plans are being implemented, interested researchers will be informed by means of occasional SVAR Updates. For further information as to availability of certain parish records, costs, and other details, please contact SVAR Microfiche, Swenson Center, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL 61201, or call (309) 794-7204.

Notes

¹For an overview of this project, see Lars Otto Berg, "Swedish Parish Records on Microfiche," *Swedish American Genealogist*, Vol. V (September 1985), pp. 97-100.

²For a presentation of the Center, see "Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center of Rock Island," *Swedish American Genealogist*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (March 1984), pp. 1-10.

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