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## Swedish-American Church Records Online

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# Swedish American church records online!

**An old dream has come true!**

BY JILL SEAHOLM  
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SWENSON CENTER

The Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center is pleased to announce that the Swedish-American and Swedish-Canadian church record microfilms have been scanned and indexed, and are now available on Ancestry.com.

The Swenson Center has been part of a group of U.S. archives representing the main Swedish-American church denominations, working to digitize their existing church microfilms and put them online. These archives include the Swenson Center, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Evangelical Covenant Church, the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA), and the Swedish Emigrant Institute in Växjö, Sweden.

## The old microfilms

Positive copies of these microfilms have been on deposit at the Swenson Center since we opened in 1981, along with Swedish-Methodist and Swedish-Baptist films. They were microfilmed largely in the 1960s and 1970s by the Swedish Emigrant Institute through Lennart Setterdahl. As longtime users and stewards of these microfilms, we are happy to be using and sharing this new source.

The ELCA, which owns the largest share of these microfilms, had previously successfully worked with Ancestry to scan their Danish, Norwegian, and German-American films.

Ancestry has released these Swedish-American church records as three separate collections, even keeping the Swedish-American ELCA records separate from the previously-scanned ELCA microfilms.

## How to find the films

You can reach them in a general search, or you can go straight to the three denominations on Ancestry: <[www.bitly.com/SSIRCSAKA](http://www.bitly.com/SSIRCSAKA)>. Another quick way to find them is to pull the Search menu down to

Results 1-3 of 3		Sort By	Date Added ▼
Title	Collection	Records	Activity
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Swedish American Church Records, 1800-1946	Birth, Marriage & Death	3,508,934	NEW
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Evangelical Covenant Church, Swedish American Church Records, 1868-1970	Birth, Marriage & Death	65,775	
<input type="checkbox"/> U.S., Evangelical Free Church of America, Swedish American Church Records, 1800-1946	Birth, Marriage & Death	7,794	

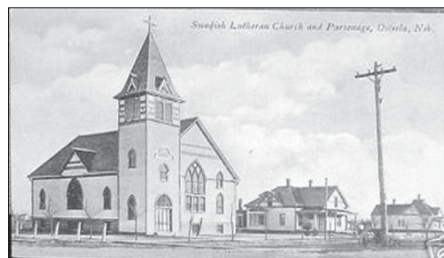
*Within the U.S. type just "Swedish American." Outside, type "U.S. Swedish American."*

the *Ancestry Card Catalog* (above), and in the Title box type in "U.S. Swedish American."

## Contents of the films

Setterdahl filled out inventory sheets for each church he microfilmed. These are often found at the beginning of the microfilms. The films primarily consist of business meeting minutes, member records, and ministerial acts (baptisms, confirmations, marriages, moving-in, moving-out, and funerals). Occasionally a church's anniversary booklet will be at the beginning of the film, in which one can sometimes find photos of church members or groups (but names in anniversary booklets do not seem to have been indexed).

Swedish-American church record books were modeled after Swedish parish record books. Swedish-American membership records are similar to parish household examination records (*husförhörslängder*).



*Swedish Lutheran Church, Osceola, NE.*

One big difference between Sweden and the U.S. was that Swedish immigrants were not required to join a U.S. church, where in Sweden the parish pastor kept track of the entire population.

## Did all Swedes join a church?

Many of us like to think that all of our immigrant ancestors were churchgoers, but according to Dag Blanck in *Becoming Swedish-American: the construction of an ethnic identity in the Augustana Synod, 1860-1917* (Dag Blanck, Uppsala: Studia historica Upsaliensia; 1997, p. 44), only about 20-40% of Swedish immigrants became members of Swedish-American churches at different times throughout the mass migration period.

However, thousands used the churches for baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and funerals without ever joining, so this source has the potential to help pinpoint people who had long ago been lost in the U.S. by their Swedish families. Perhaps they did not want to join a Swedish church but lived near enough to one that it was convenient to get married in it or have their children baptized or confirmed.

The indexes – use them with care

Ancestry has created indexes, but be vigilant for errors. Before the collections were launched, I tested the beta versions and was pleased to see a good degree of accuracy. If you think someone really should be in a given church's records and you cannot find him or her in the indexes, browse the images instead of using the index. Most of you will know that the Swedish alphabet has three extra vowels that fall at the end of the alphabet (...x, y, z, å, ä, ö).



Even though these church records were kept in the U.S., at least in the beginning the pastors keeping them still used Swedish name spellings. Åke vs. Oke, for example, and that spellings were not yet set in stone. We always recommend using diacritical marks where they belong in Swedish names and places, but Ancestry's search engine seems to be accepting of words spelled without them.

How to access those records

Ancestry is available by paid subscription. Within the United States, you can use these collections with the standard domestic Ancestry subscription. If you are outside the U.S., you will need your country's World Deluxe edition to view them. Or, if you are just interested in Americans, and no other nations, you can have a U.S. subscription (the SAG editor has that).

The Swenson Center has Ancestry subscriptions for public use (by appointment). Many public libraries also have Ancestry subscriptions for free use by their patrons. Latter-Day Saint FamilySearch Centers also have Ancestry subscriptions for public use.

We are glad that these records are at last available in digital format, complementing the online *Swedish-American newspapers*, another project the Swenson Center was involved in. [www.augustana.edu/swenson/newspapers](http://www.augustana.edu/swenson/newspapers)

How to find a specific congregation

After you have found the denomination you want, you will see this box to the right.

**Browse this collection**

To browse this image set, select from the options below.

**Country**

Choose... ▾

**State or Province**

▾

**City**

▾

**Church**

**Browse this collection**

To browse this image set, select from the options below.

**Country**

USA ▾

**State or Province**

Michigan ▾

**City**

Ishpeming ▾

**Church**

Bethany Lutheran Church

Fill in the fields you know about the church. And then you will see the microfilm of the records for that church.

Inventory of Swedish American Church Archives in the U.S.A.						
Name of Congregation (församlingens namn)			Founded (grundad)	1870		
Bethany Lutheran Church 715 Mather						
County: Marquette	City or town: Ishpeming	Year (år)	Number of pages	Common (arm.)		
State: Michigan	Post-office: " 49649					
A. Minutes (protokollböcker)						
<u>Diamond Jubilee</u>		1870-1945	77	F		
<u>Annual meetings</u>		1870-1907	404	F		
" "	" (buildingcomm. Svensk-Norska kyrkan)	1907-1928	500	F		
" "	"	1872-1885	56	F		
" "	"	1929-1942	1 vol.	not filmed		
<u>Deacon</u>		1883-1895	144	F		
" "	" (starting on page 154 combined Deacon-Trustees)	1895-1912	200	F		
B. Church Member Records (medlemslängder)						
<u>Register Book</u>		1870-1883	200	F		
" "	"	1870-1926	440	F		
C. Records of Ministerial Acts						
Baptism (dop), Confirmation (konfirmation)						
Marriages (vigslar), Reception of members (antagande av medlemmar), Dismissal of members (utgångna medlemmar), Funerals (begravningar)						
<u>Ministerial Acts</u>		1873-1880	65	F		
" "	"	1879-1890	140	F		
" "	"	1891-1927	256	F		
D. Books concerning other Church activities (böcker för övrig kyrklig verksamhet)						
Betania-föreningen		1927-1941	1 vol.			
Betania Sick-and-Benefit Soc.		1895-1932	2 vol.			
Luther League		1917-1929	1 vol.			
Junior mission						
Sunday School						
Young Ladies		1912-1932	2 vol.			
Young People		1907-1913	2 vol.			

The microfilm usually starts with an "Inventory page," recorded at the time of filming. If there is an F in the right column those books are filmed. It gives an overview of what kinds of records you will see on this microfilm, and they all list the time period filmed. Series A. are more general matters about the development of the congregation. Here is also where you may find publications written at the time of various jubilees. Series B. is the Register of the members of the congregation, hopefully starting with an alphabetical index, so you easily can find your relatives. Series C. Ministerial acts (baptisms, marriages, and burials). As mentioned, earlier people that were not members of this church could still use it for the important ceremonies of life. Series D. are records of other church activities. Here is information about Sick-and-Benefit Society, Junior League, Sunday School, etc.

## Searching directly for an individual

On 1 August 1873 a boy, *Carl Johan*, was born to laborer Peter Magnus Geist and his wife Maria Palm in Jönköping Sofia parish in Småland. In 1894 he immigrated to Quincy, MA. But what happened then?

A search in the Swedish-Lutheran Church records was tried:

☐ Match all terms exactly

First & Middle Name(s)

Last Name

Geist

☐ Exact...

Birth

Day

▼

Month

▼

Year

Location

Sweden

☒ Exact to country

This resulted in:

View	Carl Johan	Member	1 Aug	Edla
Record	Geist	List	1873	Josefina

Clicking on “View records” resulted in this:

Name:	Carl Johan Geist
Gender:	Male
Marriage Age:	23
Event Type:	Member List
Birth Date:	1 Aug 1873
Birth Place:	Jönköpings Förs
Departure Place:	Jönköping
Arrival date:	1894
Marriage Date:	23 Jan 1897
Spouse:	Edla Josefina Geist
Relation to Head:	Head
Church:	Salem Lutheran Church

Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Elk Grove Village, IL, USA; Parish: Salem Lutheran Church; ELCA Film Number: S129; SSIRC Film Number: S-129.

But seeing the original page was the best experience:

CHURCH		REGISTER.		15	
No.	RESIDENCE	NAME	WOMEN	WOMEN TO	REMARKS
142		Carl Johan Geist			
144		Edla Josefina (Palm)			
					Edla Josefina Geist 1894

rience: