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Swenson Center News, 1999

Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, Augustana College

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Swenson Center News

PUBLICATION OF THE SWENSON SWEDISH IMMIGRATION RESEARCH CENTER  NUMBER 13  1999

A Note from the Director...

The past year was a busy one at the Swenson Center. The number of visitors has continued to increase and our resources have expanded. We also hosted the major conference, "The Migration of Ideas: Sweden and the United States in the Twentieth Century," in October. The conference was a great success, and you can read more about it in this issue of *Swenson Center News*.

1998 was also another Swedish-American anniversary year, as it is fifty years since the so-called Swedish Pioneer Centennial was celebrated. During the summer of 1948 an official delegation from Sweden toured the American Midwest under the leadership of the late Prince Bertil, the current king's uncle. The group visited a number of places in the Midwest, helping to commemorate the beginnings of Swedish immigration to the U.S. in the 1840s. The celebrations culminated in June in Chicago, where thousands of people gathered to listen to the Prince and President Harry Truman.

The Pioneer Centennial was a great success, and one result of these celebrations was the establishment of the Swedish Pioneer Historical Society (today the Swedish-American Historical Society). Since 1950, the Society has published the historical journal *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*, as well as a number of books in the field of Swedish-American history. Over the past fifteen years, the Swenson Center and the Swedish-American Historical Society have worked together on a number of projects, and we send our warmest greetings to the Society at its 50th anniversary and look forward to many more years of stimulating cooperation.



▲ The Swedish Pioneer Centennial celebration at the Chicago Stadium, June 1948. From left to right: Vilas Johnson, Vice-President, Centennial Celebration; President Harry S. Truman; Prince Bertil of Sweden; Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, President, Augustana College and President, Centennial Celebration.

The vitality of organizations like the Swenson Center and the Swedish-American Historical Society suggests that interest in Swedish-American studies continues to be strong, even though Swedish mass immigration ended around the time of the Great Depression. During the past couple of decades a number of new Swedish-American organizations have also been founded, and the latest edition of *Swedish-American Handbook* lists close to 200 Swedish-American groups.

Given the passing of the era of the great nineteenth and early twentieth-century migrations, it has often been said that "Swedishness" in America was about to disappear. Yet, such a sense of distinctiveness nevertheless still exists. Although it has changed greatly in function and form, it seems likely that a sense of a Swedish-American ethnicity will continue to thrive.

— DAG BLANCK



The Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellowship

The Swenson Center is pleased to announce that it is once again soliciting applications for the Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellowship. The Fellowship, established by Nils William Olsson and his wife Dagmar, helps defray costs for one person doing research for an extended period of time at the Center.

The Fellowship, which is in the amount of \$1,500, is open to anyone doing academic research on any aspect of Swedish-American history. The Fellowship is not intended to be used for research on a person's individual family history. We particularly encourage graduate students and younger scholars to apply. The minimum stay required at the Swenson Center is three weeks, and the Fellowship must be used within one year of notification of the award.

Anyone interested in applying for the Fellowship should submit a two to three-page proposal to the Swenson Center outlining the proposed research topic. The proposal should also include a current *curriculum vitae*, as well as a statement showing how the resources of the Swenson Center are appropriate for the particular project. The deadline for application is April 1, 1999.

In 1998, the Fellowship was awarded to Mr. Christopher Mitchell, a doctoral student in the department of drama and theater at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Mr. Mitchell is writing a dissertation on the plays of August Strindberg, and his work at the Swenson Center focused on Strindberg in Swedish America. Mr. Mitchell researched the history of the Strindbergarne Club, an organization in Chicago from the 1910s devoted to the production of Strindberg plays.

Past recipients have included Dr. Roger Kvist of the history department at Umeå University, Sweden, for research on the history of the Swedes in the Civil War, and Mr. Edward Burton of the history department of Göteborg University, Sweden, who explored the relationship between Swedish America and Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s.

Swenson Center New Acquisitions

The Swenson Center continues to acquire new materials. During the past year we have added to our collection of sources for Swedish-American history in two areas. The first area is that of Swedish church records. These church records are very inclusive and extend far back in time—in most cases to the 18th century, in some cases even earlier. In fact, the Swedish church records provide one of the most complete population registers in the world, making it possible to follow individuals chronologically, geographically, and socially. Because membership in the Church of Sweden was compulsory until the 1950s, the records also cover virtually the entire Swedish population.

Over the years, Swedish church records have been both microfilmed, and more recently, transferred to microfiche. Church records on microfiche are currently available for the entire country up to about 1920 through SVAR, a division of the Swedish National Archives. Since 1991 the Swenson Center has been SVAR's American agent, and anyone in North America interested in buying SVAR fiche can do so through the Center.

Over the past years, we have acquired significant holdings of Swedish church records from two counties (län), Kronobergs and Kopparbergs län.



How to reach the Swenson Center

The Swenson Center is located on the main floor of Denkmann Memorial Hall, 3520-7th Avenue, on the campus of Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

Office hours are 9:00 a.m. to noon and 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, except holidays. Hours may be limited during college vacation periods and in the summer.

If you plan to visit the Center, please make an appointment by calling or writing in advance.

SWENSON CENTER STAFF

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Recent Swedish Immigration

Contemporary Swedish immigration to the United States is small in comparison with the hundreds of thousands of persons who left Sweden for America during the decades around the turn of the century. The 1990 U.S. Census recorded some 58,000 Swedish-born individuals, and also noted that almost 100,000 persons claimed that they spoke at least some Swedish in their everyday life.

A minority of the Swedish-born in America living today can be said to be part of the great waves of Swedish immigration that ended in the 1920s. The majority of contemporary Swedish immigrants arrived in the U.S. after World War II, and almost a quarter of them came in the 1980s alone.

Although little systematic scholarly work has been done on these present-day Swedish immigrants in America, we can assume that they are quite different from their nineteenth-century predecessors. Many of these immigrants came to the U.S. originally on a temporary basis, and later decided to stay on. One often hears today's Swedish immigrants say that they first thought that they would stay in the U.S. for a couple of years, then for another two to three years, and so on. Suddenly, many realized that they had been in America much longer than they had originally planned, and that returning to Sweden seemed less pressing than it did earlier.

There seems to be no single reason behind contemporary Swedish migration to the U.S. Education is undoubtedly one important reason, as significant numbers of Swedes come to American colleges and universities each year to study.

Another important reason is work. Most of the Swedish immigrants today have good educational backgrounds and can find employment in the U.S. as professionals. A final motive behind the move to America is love. Many Swedes have found American spouses, and a large number of these couples have settled in the U.S., at least for a period of time.

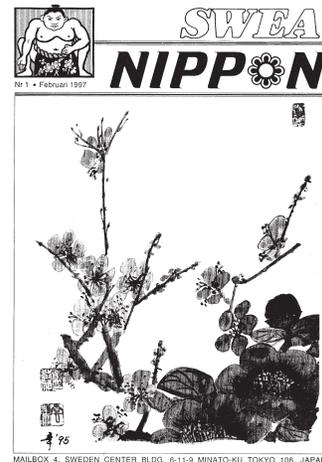
The typical Swedish immigrant today is thus professional and well educated—and female. Significantly more Swedish women than men have moved to the U.S. over the past decades, and the 1990 Census revealed that 60% of all Swedish-born in the U.S. today are women.

The significance of the Swedish female migration to the U.S. is also underscored by the establishment of SWEA—the Swedish Women's Educational Association. Following a successful Christmas bazaar, SWEA was founded in 1979 by a group of Swedish women in Los Angeles under the leadership of Agneta Nilsson. Its purpose is to support and maintain Swedish culture and traditions and to build a network among Swedish women. It does these things in a variety of ways, including meetings, dinners, bazaars, and other activities. SWEA also supports educational endeavors through a scholarship program.

Within two years of its founding three new chapters were established in southern California. By 1985, SWEA was represented on both coasts and in Canada. Today, SWEA has become a truly international organization with chapters all over the world, including Sweden. In the U.S. there are 22 chapters, with several thousand members.

In 1997 the Swenson Center became the official repository of the SWEA archives. By this time, the organization had become so large that it was no longer possible, as one of its leaders said, "to keep the records at home." The Swenson Center is happy to have become the home of the SWEA archives.

The SWEA records, which include minutes and newsletters from the different chapters, will in a significant way help to shed a very interesting light on this little-studied contemporary Swedish immigration to the United States.



SWEA's Tokyo newsletter suggests the organization's international scope.

The Migration of Ideas

On October 9-10, 1998 some eighty persons met in Wallenberg Hall on the Augustana campus to participate in the Swenson Center conference, "The Migration of Ideas: Sweden and the United States in the Twentieth Century." The Swenson Center arranges academic conferences on Swedish-American themes about every three years. For example, in 1996 we hosted "O Pioneers! Swedes on the American Frontier" as a part of the 1996 Swedish-American jubilee celebrations.

This time our focus was somewhat different than in the past. Participants examined ways in which ideas of different kinds have migrated between Sweden and America during this century. Sweden and the United States have experienced a close relationship, including a lively exchange of ideas between the two countries that have influenced both Sweden and the U.S. in varying ways. Our conference examined how these ideas have been perceived and received, how they have been transformed, and how they have influenced the respective receiving countries.

An International Response

Paper presenters came from both Sweden and the United States. The keynote address, which also served as the 1998 O. Fritiof Ander Lecture in Immigration History, was presented by H. Arnold Barton of Southern Illinois University. Professor Barton is the dean of Swedish-American studies in the U.S., and he spoke on "Crossings and Recrossings: America and Sweden in the Twentieth Century."

Other speakers and their topics included Walter Jackson, North Carolina State University on "Gunnar Myrdal's Social Democratic Critique of American Racial Inequality, 1938-1963"; John Logue, Kent State University on "The Swedish Model and American Social Science"; Erik Åsard, Uppsala University on "The Limits of

'Americanization' in Swedish Politics"; Larry Scott, Augustana College on "Woody Allen and Ingmar Bergman: The Comic Muse?"; Rolf Lundén, Uppsala University on "Influence or Inspiration? Resonances of American Authors in Swedish Literature"; and Rochelle Wright, University of Illinois on "From Strindberg to Ekman: Swedish Literature and the American Audience."

The final group of presenters included Michelle Facos, Indiana University on "The Dawning of 'Northern Light': An Exhibition and Its Influence"; Jonas Björk, Indiana University on "From Nick Carter to Perry Mason: A Historical Perspective on the American Media Presence in Sweden"; and Per Nordahl, Umeå University on "Very, Very Welcome Home Mr. Swanson: Transatlantic Diffusion of Ideas and Attitudes Through Swedish-American Returnees."

Surprisingly little scholarly work has been done on the topic of Swedish-American intellectual migrations. Because we thought that it was important to illuminate these processes from as many points of view as possible, we had papers dealing with politics, literature, cinema, art, and the media. Based on these talks, it seems possible to make some general observations about what we learned.

The Process of Americanization

The first deals with concepts and terms. American ideas making their way into Swedish society is often referred to as "Americanization." It is often said the Sweden is a very "Americanized" country; the well-known journalist Herman Lindqvist maintained in 1995 that "the Swedes are, without knowing or any longer noticing it, completely marinated in American culture."

To speak of the "Americanization" of Sweden in such general and often derogatory terms, as is often done, is not particularly useful. This imprecision means that we must first of all define

what we mean by "American" and what we mean by "Swedish." Such definitions, ones notoriously difficult to make, typically do not lead to any substantial results.

Instead, as several speakers at the conference suggested, it might be useful to realize that although many cultural elements have been exported from the United States to other countries, they have also been incorporated and adapted in numerous cultural contexts outside their country of origin. These cultural patterns are often called "American," but in reality they have also taken on characteristics of the receiving country.

Influences Transformed

In the case of Sweden we can thus say that it has not only received American cultural influences, but also accepted them and made them into its own. The American cultural elements—real or imagined—have been transformed and given a new meaning in their Swedish context. In this way they become emblems with local meanings and are used for specific cultural purposes in their new circumstances.

Swedish ethnologist Orvar Lövgren has talked about this process with regard to the 1950s, a period often said to have been a high point for American influences in Sweden. "If Sweden was Americanized at this time," Lövgren writes, "it happened in a very Swedish way." American influences were, in his words, "domesticated." That is to say, America, American products, American ways of organizing production of goods, and American life styles were perceived as highly "modern," and thus fit well into the construction of the new, modern and efficient Swedish welfare state that was taking place right at this time. "People could dream about American refrigerators, a subscription to the Swedish edition of *Readers' Digest* or a glass of ice-cold Coca Cola, but in reality the end result was rather a homogenization of Swedish life forms," Lövgren concludes.

Another related observation that emerged from the discussions deals with what could perhaps be called “latent” and “manifest” influences.

Manifest influences are cultural elements that are visible on the “surface” of Swedish society, turning up in music, film, jargon, or in the presence of Pizza Hut restaurants. Criticism of the “Americanization” of Sweden is often directed against these manifest influences. The latent influences, however, are those influences which much more successfully and without storms of criticism have been incorporated into Swedish society and been, to use Lövgren’s word, “domesticated” and

accepted as “Swedish,” or at least not seen as typically “American.” For example, McDonald’s in Sweden deliberately emphasizes its “Swedishness,” especially in terms of its corporate culture, and many Swedes today probably perceive the company as Swedish rather than American.

Sweden’s Effect on the U.S.

The conference also showed that there are certain areas in which Swedish influences in America are particularly noticeable. For example, certain Swedish political ideas associated with the building of the modern Swedish welfare state from the 1930s and beyond have played a role in the American social mind. An early example was Marquis Childs’ influential 1936 book about contemporary Sweden, *Sweden: The Middle Way*, which presented a highly positive picture of Sweden. Not all American commentary about Swedish social and political experience has been positive—at other times Sweden has been used as an example of what was to be

avoided, with critics suggesting, for example, that the welfare state leads to complacency and less individual initiative.



Larry Scott, professor of Scandinavian at Augustana College, explored the relationship between Woody Allen’s and Ingmar Bergman’s films.

Another area in which there have been visible Swedish influences in America is the arts, such as Swedish cinema, exemplified by such names as Ingmar Bergman, Greta Garbo, and Ingrid Bergman. Swedish, and Scandinavian, influences in design have also been evident in the United States. “Scandinavian design” has become a fairly well-known concept in the American mind particularly for furniture or planning and

decorating homes. The success of the Swedish furniture store IKEA in the U.S. in recent years attests to this.

Reverse Migrations

A final lesson that emerges from our conference deals directly with the immigration of Swedes to North America and its relation to the general migration of ideas between the two countries. One fundamental lesson of the study of human migrations is that any migratory movement also creates a reverse movement of people and ideas. About twenty percent of the immigrants eventually returned to Sweden. In addition, intricate networks of contacts were established between the Swedes in America and their compatriots back home. In this way, information about America, American goods and products, American ideas, and American dollars reached Sweden through returnees, letters, newspapers, and personal visits.

In the 1930s, one of the early students of Swedish migration to the U.S., E.H. Thörnberg, coined the

phrase “*Ida för ut, idé kom hem*” (Ida left Sweden, ideas came back) to illustrate this point. It is likely that the mass migration of Swedes to America and the ensuing thousands of contacts across the Atlantic made Sweden particularly receptive to American ideas. Sweden was one of the European countries that experienced a very high rate of emigration in terms of its total population. Only Ireland and Norway sent more sons and daughters to America relative to their population size, and it is interesting to note that the American presence in and contacts with the U.S. in these two countries are still very important.

Connections Today

The varied, personal contacts between Sweden and America have thus been strong during the twentieth century. The mass migration of over 1.2 million Swedes still plays an important role for Swedish-American contacts, as many Swedes and Americans still retain and establish significant connections with their relatives on each side of the Atlantic. To others, contemporary aspects of the two countries themselves are more important for understanding the exchange of ideas between Sweden and the U.S. In this context, Ingmar Bergman, the Swedish welfare state, Ernest Hemingway, or Perry Mason have been significant elements in the flow of ideas and impulses back and forth across the Atlantic.

Those who were unable to attend the conference will be happy to learn that plans are currently underway for a publication based on the papers presented. Check future issues of *Swenson Center News* for further information. We also express our thanks to the Swedish Council of America, Minneapolis and the Swedish Institute, Stockholm, for providing major funding for this conference.

1999 Augustana Summer School in Sweden

For those with a genuine curiosity to learn more about Sweden and the Swedes, Swedish culture, or one's Swedish roots, a knowledge of Swedish is essential. Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois announces its fourteenth Summer School in Sweden, a program that provides an excellent opportunity to learn Swedish in Sweden. Well into its second decade, this six-week program offers five weeks of intensive college-level Swedish language study at the folkhögskola (folk high school) in beautiful Grebbestad on the Swedish

west coast and one week in Stockholm. The program will run from May 28 to July 12, 1999.

The program is designed for anyone from 16 years of age to 90 who is interested in intensive study of Swedish. Three levels of language instruction—beginning, intermediate, and advanced—will be offered. Each level corresponds to one year of college or university-level study and may be taken for credit granted through Augustana College. Each course meets separately from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. daily, and

small groups, conversation drills, and lectures on Swedish cultural history complement the basic classroom materials.

The first five weeks will be held in at the folkhögskola in Grebbestad, a small, idyllic fishing village and popular summer resort in northern Bohuslän on the Swedish west coast, located midway between Göteborg (Gothenburg) and Oslo. There will be weekend excursions to Oslo and Göteborg, field trips, visits to areas of local color, as well as opportunities to meet with Swedish families. Following the five weeks in Grebbestad, the group will travel to Stockholm, where one week will be spent exploring the capital and surrounding areas.

The cost of the program is set at \$3,150 (with reservation for major exchange rate fluctuations). This price covers all books; ground transportation; meals and lodging in Grebbestad; and room and breakfast for the week in Stockholm. Arrangements are being made for a special airfare from Chicago.

For further information and application forms, please contact Dr. Larry E. Scott, Department of Scandinavian, Augustana College, 639-38th Street, Rock Island, IL 61201. Phone: (309) 794-7329; fax: (309) 794-7443; e-mail: scscott@augustana.edu.

About Our Finances

Sometimes we are asked about how the Swenson Center is financed. Many assume that all expenses are paid by income from the Swenson endowment.

The fact is that the gift received more than fifteen years ago from Birger and Lyal Swenson was vital in the establishment of the Center and in financing it during the early years. Another fact, however, is that the program of the Center soon outgrew the support received from that initial fund and that other sources of income were needed.

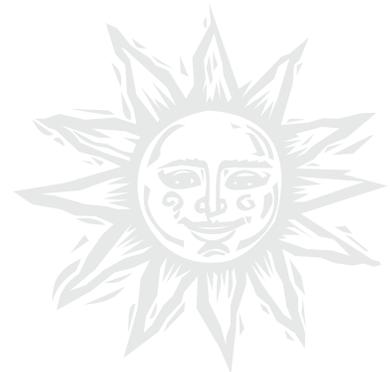
Fortunately, support has come in two ways—by additional endowments and by annual gifts and grants. The original endowment has now more than doubled as a result of the generosity of friends. Endowment income still provides most of the Center's support. In addition, more than 600 persons have joined one of the annual support groups. From time to time, we have also been able to secure grants in support of special projects, such as those recently received from the Wallenberg foundations in Sweden.

The Center's program is greatly enhanced by its location at Augustana College, and this relationship continues in many ways to be an important benefit. The Center's annual expense budget, however, is supported entirely by separate endowment income and annual gifts.

Although program expense must be limited to the funds available, more work needs to be done. As the Center attempts to meet increasing demands in its efforts to serve as a national center for preserving and interpreting the record of Swedish immigration to North America, more financial resources are needed.

You can help in this effort. By establishing an endowment with the income restricted for the Center's use, you can create a permanent recognition of your interest in preserving the Swedish heritage in America, or you can memorialize an immigrant of your choice. We will be happy to provide suggestions regarding how either of these can be done.

Another way to help is by joining one of our three annual support groups. Your participation in helping to support the Center is much appreciated. We hope it will also give you satisfaction in being a partner in making sure that the Swedish record in America is available to future generations.



Gifts We acknowledge with gratitude the following gifts received between October 1, 1997 and September 30, 1998:

\$1,000 AND OVER

Earl Brolander
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The Swedish Council of America
The Swedish Institute of Stockholm
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John M. and Kari Telleen
Doris Wehr
Bob and Marcia Youngberg

Swenson Center Annual Support Groups

Almost 600 persons have enrolled as Swenson Center Associates, each making an annual contribution of \$25. In addition to supporting the work of the Swenson Center, Associates receive a discount on research fees and a reduced subscription rate to *Swedish American Genealogist*.

For an annual contribution of at least \$100, donors are designated as Swenson Center Scholars. In addition to the benefits provided to Associates, Swenson Center Scholars receive *Swedish American Genealogist* free of charge.

A support group of major importance is the Swenson Center Circle. Members of this group support the Center's work through an annual contribution of at least \$250. In addition to the benefits provided to Associates and Scholars, members of the Circle receive an annual gift.

We thank those who have become Associates, Scholars, and members of the Circle, and we encourage those who are not yet members to join. By participating as a donor you are in a very important way helping us realize our goals. As an added convenience, you can now make your contribution with VISA or Mastercard.

Both Lutheran fraternal organizations, Aid Association for Lutherans and Lutheran Brotherhood, now offer matching gift programs of up to \$100 per year to Lutheran educational institutions, including Augustana College and college-related organizations such as the Swenson Center. Members of AAL and LB may take advantage of this program by enclosing the appropriate forms when sending their contributions to the Swenson Center. Forms are available from AAL and LB representatives or from the Augustana College Development Office.



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Swedish American Genealogist *Salt Lake City Tour*

During the week of October 25-November 1, 1998, nearly 60 subscribers to the journal *Swedish American Genealogist* took part in a week-long genealogy tour in Salt Lake City, Utah. The tour was led by Dr. Nils William Olsson, editor emeritus of the journal.

Most of the annual tour took place in the Mormon Family History Library, beginning each day with a 90-minute lecture exploring which records to use and how to use them. The rest of the days were spent doing research in the abundant resources with the aid of Dr. Olsson and his tour staff members (including SAG editor Dr. James Erickson; Ms. Elizabeth Thorsell, a well-known genealogist from Sweden; and the Swenson Center's Jill Seaholm) and the knowledgeable staff of the Family History Library.

This tour gives a group of people who are all interested in their Swedish background—both beginners and seasoned family historians—a chance not only to do research, but also to meet and share research backgrounds.

The next tour is scheduled for October 24-31, 1999. Check future issues of *Swedish American Genealogist* for details.



In brief...

 The July 1998 issue of *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* was recently published. Guest-edited by Dag Blanck and Michael Nolan of Augustana College, the issue includes most of the papers presented at the Center's 1996 conference, "O Pioneers! Swedes on the American Frontier." Those interested in a copy should contact the publisher, The Swedish-American Historical Society, 5125 N. Spaulding Ave, Chicago, IL 60625; (773) 583-5722.

 Volunteers play an important role at the Swenson Center. During the past year Avis Paulson of Moline, Illinois and Inez Törnblom of Bettendorf, Iowa have given generously of their time and talent to the Center, and we extend a special thank you to Avis and Inez. Anyone who is interested in doing volunteer work at the Center is encouraged to call (309) 794-7204.

 Vicky Oliver Kvist left the Swenson Center at the end of November 1998, moving to Madison, Wisconsin with her husband Roger Kvist. Vicky started working at the Swenson Center in 1982, while she was an undergraduate at Augustana. She has since been employed as Secretary/Researcher, and most recently as Head of Library Services at the Center. We thank her for her services to the Center, and wish her the best for the future.

 The Swenson Center Web Address has changed. Please visit us at <http://www.augustana.edu/administration/swenson/>. Our general e-mail address is also new: sag@augustana.edu.



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