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## Swenson Center News, 2002

Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, Augustana College

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# Swenson Center News

PUBLICATION OF THE SWENSON SWEDISH IMMIGRATION RESEARCH CENTER  NUMBER 16  2002

## A Note from the Director...

Libraries and archives always confront challenges in preserving their valued holdings, and so librarians and archivists need to be on constant alert. Problems can occur especially in warm and humid climates, such as Rock Island's. The Center is happy to announce improvements to the conditions in which our collections are kept.

Late last year we were notified that the Center had once again received a grant from *Marianne och Marcus Wallenbergs Stiftelse* and *Stiftelsen Marcus och Amalia Wallenbergs Minnesfond*, both in Stockholm, this time in the amount of \$300,000.

Over the years, the Center has received several grants from foundations associated with the Wallenberg family in Sweden, and we acknowledge these significant contributions with great gratitude.

The most recent grant will be used to further fine-tune and expand the climate control systems in our library and archival stack areas. We expect the project to be finished by the beginning of winter. Expect a full report on the new facilities in the next issue of *Swenson Center News*.

Each year, the Swenson Center is fortunate to be able to award fellowships for research at the Center. Established by Dagmar and Nils William Olsson, the Olsson Fellowship has brought a number of scholars to the Center over the years. As noted on page three in this issue of the *News*, this year we mark with gratitude the



▲ *Delivery truck for the Augustana Book Concern, the largest publisher of Swedish-language printed materials in Swedish America, ca. 1928.*

fifth anniversary of the Olsson fellowship program. Last year's fellow, Dr. Gabriella Rundblad of the University of East Anglia in the U.K., devoted her research to the use and variations of the Swedish language among immigrants. Her intriguing article in this issue explores this question further.

The question of language was always a central one in immigrant communities. Discussions about whether and how the Swedish language could or should survive were intense in Swedish America and other ethnic communities as well. Eventually the shift to English occurred, and today Swedish Americans are by and large English speakers. However, the 2000 Census did record about 100,000 Swedish-speaking Americans.

As noted during our recent conference on contemporary meanings of Swedish-American identity, to learn the language of one's ancestors is one way an ethnic identity is affirmed today. Many Swedish Americans thus enroll in Swedish-language courses. A local example shows the persistence of the language. For two decades now, Augustana College has arranged an intensive Swedish-language summer school program in Grebbestad on the Swedish west coast, and a fair number of the students in this program have been of Swedish descent.

As we enter the summer season, all of us at the Swenson Center extend our best wishes to our readers for a pleasant and rewarding summer.

— DAG BLANCK



## How to reach the Swenson Center

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

Administrative 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.

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## Being Swedish-American Today

As we reported in the last *Swenson Center News*, the Swenson Center arranged a major conference on what it means to be Swedish in America today, held at Augustana College in November 2001. The conference, co-sponsored with the Swedish-American Historical Society, attracted a dozen scholars from the United States and Sweden and an audience of some hundred people. Scholars discussed many aspects of the contemporary meaning of Swedishness in America. Based on the papers and discussion, three aspects were particularly important—all of which can be summarized as three differences.

The first of these is the difference between the Swedish-American community in its heyday around 1910 and the Swedish-American community today. Contemporary Swedish Americans, by and large, constitute a middle-class segment of American society with a fairly high level of education, many working as professionals, and many being fairly well off economically. The great majority of Swedish Americans today are American-born and live in urban areas, characteristics not true for the Swedish-American community a century ago. Socially and economically they also differ significantly from their earlier compatriots; two-thirds of the group pursue white-collar and middle-class occupations, whereas farming and blue-collar jobs dominated among Swedish Americans around the turn of the century 1900.

For many Swedish Americans today a sense of Swedishness is still significant, encouraging them to support organizations, celebrations, and sometimes even political candidates. But it is a different kind of Swedishness than that of a century ago, serving the ethnic needs of a different kind of population group in a different social, cultural, and historical context.

A second contrast is the way in which cultural patterns in Sweden and Swedish America have developed in different directions. The influences that encouraged Swedish Americans to develop cultural traits and traditions different from those in the homeland

were already visible in the Swedish-American community a century ago, and they have continued ever since. The ethnic patterns of contemporary Swedish Americans exist in an American cultural context, and they have been a part of a process of adaptation to American society in which ethnicity and ethnic cultures play an important role.

European-origin groups have been able to find cultural spaces in which their ethnicities can develop and flourish. In that way, the sense of Swedish ethnicity in America today is truly and literally Swedish-American. It is best studied on its own merits and interpreted as an expression of American ethnicity—and not, as our keynote speaker Barbro Klein pointed out, in terms of to what degree Swedish-American ethnicity today is “authentically Swedish.” From this perspective, the study of a Swedish-American midsummer celebration, replete with persons dancing around a Midsummer pole in 95-degree heat and 95-percent Midwestern humidity, should thus not focus on supposed deviations in the costumes from the “true” *Leksand* attire or how “genuinely” a certain *polska* is danced. Rather a scholar should ask why a group of Americans subject themselves to dancing in wool clothes in the middle of a Midwestern heat wave and what meaning this activity has for them.

The final difference deals with the contrast between the established Swedish-American community, with roots in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century migration, and those Swedes who have immigrated to the U.S. in recent decades. Contemporary Swedish immigrants to the U.S. are well-educated, professional, and at times only sojourning in America. Typically these newcomers have fairly little in common with the established Swedish-American community, and, with some important exceptions, many have chosen not to join existing Swedish-American organizations nor to participate in various Swedish-American celebrations or manifestations. Their needs and interests are, in most cases,

different from those of the third- or fourth-generation Swedish Americans, and many of the new immigrants probably associate with American professional compatriots rather than with ethnic ones.

Even so, ethnic priorities can be important for this group, as seen in new Swedish-American organizations that have been founded to serve the needs of this new Swedish-American community. One illustrative example is SWEA—the Swedish Women's Educational Association, founded in 1979 by a group of Swedish women in Los Angeles to support and maintain Swedish culture and traditions and to build a network among Swedish women. Today it has chapters all over the U.S. (and the rest of the world), and has become an important factor in maintaining an ethnic identity for modern immigrants from Sweden.

Studies of contemporary Swedish-American identity are not only important for those interested in Swedish America. They also help illuminate the role of ethnicity in contemporary American life. Scholars of American ethnicity today emphasize its malleability, suggesting that for European-American groups, at least, ethnicity has become one of several voluntary characteristics that groups and individuals may exhibit. Using the case of the Swedish Americans, scholars can analyze the changing nature of ethnic identity over a long period of time. In this way, examinations of contemporary Swedish-American identities will contribute yet another part of the answer to the classic question in American history, posed in 1782 by Hector St. John Crèvecoeur in his book *Letters from an American Farmer*: "What, then, is the American, this new man?"

## Recent Archival Acquisitions

The Swenson Center continues to receive archival materials dealing with aspects of Swedish immigration to North America. Important collections received during the past year include:

**Swedish Lutheran Augustana Home for the Aged in Brooklyn, New York:** This collection includes financial and membership records, minutes from meetings, photographs, and printed materials from 1908-1983.

**Letters addressed to Johannes Telleen 1904-1927:** The majority

of these letters concerns activities within the Augustana Synod and the specific churches with which Telleen, a pioneer minister in the Augustana Synod, was affiliated.

**Ölandsklubben in Rockford, Illinois:** The collection includes minutes, membership records, and some correspondence from 1929-1990.

**The Gustaf Adolf Magnusson papers:** A long-time employee of the Augustana Book Concern (A.B.C.), Rock Island, Illinois, Magnusson was the production manager between 1958-1962. The collection includes photographs from the A.B.C., which was the largest publishing house in Swedish America and played an important role in publishing Swedish-language materials in the U.S.



▲ Parlor scene from the Augustana Home for the Aged, 1933.

## Five Years of Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellows

It has now been five years since Dagmar and Nils William Olsson of Winter Park, Florida so generously established a research fellowship at the Swenson Center. The fellowship helps defray the costs for a researcher while he or she is at the Center using our resources. Over the years, seven fellowships have been awarded to a variety of scholars. The topics researched illustrate the diversity of the Center's resources.

In 1997, Roger Kvist, an associate professor of history at Umeå University in Sweden, came to the Center to study the involvement of Swedish immigrants in the American Civil War, while Edward Burton, a graduate student at Göteborg University, studied the reactions in the Swedish-American press to the Vietnam war. The following year, Christopher Mitchell, a graduate student at the University of Georgia, used our records to analyze performances of plays by Swedish dramatist August Strindberg in America, and in 1999 Barry Peterson of Tallahassee, Florida researched the topic of the contemporary meaning of a Swedish-American identity.

The theatrical and music life was once again the subject of study in 2000, when drama professor Anne-Charlotte Harvey of San Diego State University spent time at the Center. That same year, Eva St. Jean, a graduate student at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver won an Olsson Fellowship to do research for her dissertation on Swedish laborers in Canada. Last year's recipient was Gabriella Rundblad of the University of East Anglia in the U.K. She is working on the linguistic developments among Swedish immigrants during the era of mass immigration. She discusses her project elsewhere in this issue of *Swenson Center News*.

The winners of the Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellowship for 2002 were recently named. We are pleased to welcome Dr. Lars Nordstrom of Beaver Creek, Oregon and Ms. Malin Glimang of the University of Hawaii to the Center. They will be researching the life and work of Samuel Magnus Hill, a pioneer educator and minister in Nebraska and Oregon, and the history of Swedish female immigration, respectively.

# Language Use in the Creation of a Swedish-American Identity

*Gabriella Rundblad of the University of East Anglia in the U.K. was the 2001 Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellow. She studied the language of the Swedish immigrants in America. In this article she tells us about her ongoing project.*

Ever since the first Swedes landed on American soil, their lives have remained a constant focus of attention. Many studies have aimed at explaining the ways Swedish immigrants created an American identity while to varying degrees maintaining a Swedish one. One of the most obvious sources of identity is the choice and use of languages, whether American English, Swedish, or both. In the summer 2001, using records at the Swenson Center, I began a study of the nature and use of language and its role in the creation of a Swedish-American identity.

The question of identity was most likely raised as early as the seventeenth century with the very first Swedish immigrants. But it is not until after the first major wave of Swedish settlers that we can see how the desire to preserve the old yet embrace the new came to guide the formation of a Swedish-American identity.

Immigration increased after 1867, peaking in 1882 and in 1888. At the beginning of the new century and throughout the duration of World War I, immigration came to a halt. The wave of immigrants following the end of World War I never reached the same heights as that of the earlier period, apart from a brief peak in 1923. The time period of my study covers this first immigrant wave up until the end of World War I—roughly 1870-1920—a time period when the Swedish-American community was formed and the need for a Swedish-American identity must have been particularly strong.

## A New Approach

Previous studies of Swedish-American cultural and ethnic identity usually tend to lack an in-depth linguistic dimension. While they discuss the immigrants' choice of language, they do not focus on the forms and features of that language (or languages). Language

studies, on the other hand, have tended to focus on the shift from Swedish to English, especially over time. Using interviews with Swedish immigrants that were taped after the immigrants had lived in the States for some 40 to 50 years, these studies concluded that the immigrants gradually moved toward English. We can find numerous signs of English influence upon the Swedish used by the immigrants. English pronouns, numerals, idiomatic expressions, temporal expressions, family terms, etc. are regularly used instead of their Swedish equivalents. Yet, when speaking of long-term influence of English on Swedish we need to remember that although the majority of the immigrants chose to stay in the U.S., many returned to Sweden, and past studies have focused almost exclusively on the Swedish of those who permanently stayed on in the U.S.

Despite the great number of language studies of American-Swedish, few have attempted to explain the roots and development of the English language's influence. The aim of the present study is to offer such an explanation. I will explore the variation—that is, the varying use of English and Swedish as well as a mix of both languages—present in the language of the immigrants during their early years in the U.S. I will relate the results to the social and cultural processes at play at this time. I will also draw on earlier studies of the long-term effects of English on Swedish to attempt to give a more comprehensive picture of the relation between language use and the social and cultural situation involved in immigration.

## Immigrants' Situations

The conditions facing the immigrants differed greatly from those they had left behind. One major difference lay in settlement patterns. At the end of the

eighteenth century, more than 90 percent of Swedes lived in the countryside. In the U.S., the level of urbanization was dramatically higher, with 61 percent of the immigrants choosing to reside in the cities. Though there are interesting parallels between the general nation-building processes at work in Europe and in the U.S. at the time, specific American circumstances also exist, such as the nature of American nationalism which allowed white European ethnic groups such as the Swedes to develop their own ethnic patterns within American culture. Clearly, urbanization and Americanization played important roles in the creation of the Swedish-American identity, and we can presume that the language of the immigrants will display traces of urbanization and Americanization.

Depending on where the immigrants chose to settle, ranging from farms and villages to metropolitan cities, their lives varied dramatically. Assuming that urbanization is a relevant factor, the study focuses on two urban areas settled by Swedes that are almost opposites of each other. First is the State of Illinois, excluding greater Chicago, which is largely rural but where we can also find agriculture-related industries. Most of the Swedish settlements are found in the northwestern parts of the state, for example, in Rock Island, Bishop Hill, Galva, and Rockford. I have chosen Illinois because of the presence of Augustana College, the first college founded by Swedish immigrants, and the settlement in Bishop Hill, one of the oldest and most linguistically cohesive Swedish settlements in the U.S. The second area I am studying is Connecticut and the greater New York City area. The Swedes who immigrated there found themselves in a well-populated

area settled by many different immigrant groups. In New York City in particular, the Swedes faced the problem of dealing with an environment of many cultures, ethnicities, and languages, as the area grew into a megalopolis with multiple dependant suburbs.

### Organizational Influences

Although each immigrant created his or her own identity, pressure for conformity and unity came from a much higher and much less individual level. Many Swedish organizations in the U.S. were the main instigators, implementers, and foundations for the Swedish-American identity. The aim of the Swedish organizations for their members was twofold, to help them develop skill in English and become American, and to maintain skill in Swedish and stay Swedish. This dual goal was passed on to subsequent generations, often in a new shape as the need to maintain Swedish was replaced with the need to learn Swedish. It should be noted that maintaining Swedish generally meant giving up one's natural and non-standard dialect in favor of standard Swedish or some other "better" form of Swedish. The Swedish colleges took great pride in providing their students with "correct" Swedish.

Records and minutes from such Swedish organizations illustrate well the sometimes confused linguistic efforts of the immigrants. College records and minutes were often written in English, although we can safely presume that meetings were held in Swedish, at least during the initial years. Other organizations, such as church congregations and sewing circles, had a much clearer and tenacious Swedish orientation, judging from the language chosen for public documents. We can find intriguing patterns in private documents. Whereas some immigrants had previously made use of diary writing to record events of their lives in Sweden, others felt no such need until they dramatically altered their lives by leaving their homes and embarking on a long journey across the Atlantic. We can find diaries and journals written in Swedish as well as in English. It is interesting to learn that

many immigrants who were not skilled or accustomed to writing seem to have chosen English rather than Swedish.

Using public documents, we can see how the Swedish-Americans chose to portray themselves and their identity to an "audience" which could be Swedish-American, American, or Swedish depending on context. Factors particularly important include occupation, education, religious affiliation, and domestic conditions. In Illinois, for example, the records of the Svea Mutual Insurance Company can be drawn on to learn about language use in working life. Materials from the Augustana Lutheran Church tell us about language use and religion, and sources from Augustana College can be used to analyze the sphere of education.

The preceding paragraphs suggest the richness and complexity of the Swedish immigrants' linguistic environment. The aim of my study is to investigate, describe, and explain the language used by Swedish immigrants in the creation of a Swedish-American identity. Given this complexity, the study will explore the subject from multiple points of view. To establish the nature of the immigrants' language, I will look at: 1) their choice of language, including between English and Swedish, as well as a choice between Standard Swedish and Swedish dialects, and 2) the structure of the chosen language. I will here look at the lexicon, endings (e.g. plural and verb endings), vocabulary (especially loan words), changes in the meanings of words (e.g. Swedish *gå* means "to walk" but is often used to mean "to travel" due to the similarity between *gå* and English *go*), word

▲ Advertisement, Moline Tribune, 1911. The use of both Swedish and English may have addressed a dual audience.

order, and spelling. By exploring the two geographical regions mentioned above, I will be able to investigate if there are differences and/or similarities between the language choices and language structure used in different areas. In general, the need for an American identity seems to have been the strongest and most striking in the occupational and educational domains, whereas church and home seem to have allowed a higher degree of use and preservation of Swedish.

Thanks to the 2001 Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellowship, I was able to stay at the Swenson Center to search its archives and the Special Collections at the Augustana College Library for suitable material. I have now completed the search for material for Illinois, but am still looking for materials for Connecticut and New York.



## From the Genealogy Department

The Swenson Center has excellent resources for anyone interested in doing family history. The technological developments of the last decade, including the coming of the Internet and the introduction of new media such as CD ROMs, have had a significant impact on genealogical research.

The Swenson Center's genealogy department does its best to try to stay abreast of these developments. During the past year we have acquired a number of CD ROMs which are of particular interest to persons involved in Swedish-American genealogical research. Some of these recent acquisitions are listed below.

### Scandinavians in the 1870 U.S.

**Census.** This CD ROM is based on the Federal Census of 1870 and is an index of the heads of households for Scandinavian-born individuals. It is published and sold by Heritage Quest (<http://www.heritagequest.com/> or 1-800-760-2455).

### Scandinavia Vital Records Index.

This is an eight-CD set including birth/christening and marriage records for Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Not every parish is represented. Records for Sweden cover the time period 1610-1888. Published and sold by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), the CD set can be ordered from <http://www.familysearch.org/> or 1-800-537-5971. The Scandinavia Vital Records Index also is available to search for free on the LDS web site at [familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) when you follow the link called "Search for your ancestors in our vast record collections" and click on the Scandinavian country of your choice.

**The 1880 U.S. Census.** This set of more than 50 CDs provides a complete transcription of the original 1880 United States Census. It includes more than 50 million names and is published and sold by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Order from <http://www.familysearch.org/> or 1-800-537-5971.

**The Swedish Emigrant** (English version of *Emigranten*-2001). This is a two-CD set, containing seven databases. Included here is *Emihamn*, the Swedish passenger index database, providing detailed information about emigrants as they left Swedish ports. Published jointly by the Swedish Emigrant Institute in Växjö, the Emigrant Register/Kinship Center in Karlstad, and the Gothenburg Emigrant in Gothenburg, it can be ordered from Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt, Box 53066, SE 400 14 Göteborg, Sweden or <http://www.goteborgs-emigranten.com>.

**Sveriges Dödbok** (in Swedish). This is a CD ROM of Sweden's "Death Book," which includes personal data on all deceased individuals in Sweden 1950-1999. Recently updated, it is sold by Sveriges Släktforskarförbund, Box 30222, SE 104 25 Stockholm, Sweden or <http://www.genealogi.se/>.

The Swenson Center has a copy of each of these sources for staff and patron use. The Center does not have any copies to sell.

## 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 over twenty years ago from Birger and Lyl Swenson was vital in establishing 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 this can be done. Another way to help is by joining one of our three annual support groups.

We appreciate greatly your support for the Swenson Center.



# Gifts *We gratefully acknowledge the gifts received between October 1, 2000 and September 30, 2001*

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## Swenson Center Annual Support Groups

Nearly 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 book in the field of Swedish-American studies.

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.



## How you can support the Swenson Center

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## *In Brief...*

*Volunteers* play an important role in the Swenson Center. During the past year, Pastor Robert L. Pearson of East Moline has continued his work with the Upsala College archives, and we extend a special thank you to him. Dr. Ross Paulson, professor emeritus of history at Augustana College and a member of the Swenson Center Advisory Committee, has also been one of our volunteers, working with the Charles and Sofia Haag papers. Anyone interested in doing volunteer work at the Center should contact the office at 309-794-7204.

*Swenson Center News* is distributed free of charge to interested individuals and organizations. We are happy that many people seem to read and enjoy the *News*. However, if you are no longer interested in receiving our publication, please contact Jill Seaholm at 309-794-7204 or at [sag@augustana.edu](mailto:sag@augustana.edu), and we will remove you from the mailing list.

## Swenson Center Staff Changes

In the beginning of May, **Avis Paulson**, who has been with the Swenson Center as a librarian/researcher for three years, spent her last day at the Center. Avis worked in several of our areas, including the library and genealogy, and made outstanding contributions. She played a very important role in the ongoing cataloging projects at the Center, helping us bring a number of our important collections to completion online. As she and her husband Ross, a member of the Swenson Center Advisory Committee, now move to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, we extend our heartfelt thanks to both of them for their many contributions and wish them all the best for the future.

The Center is happy to announce the addition of a new staff member, **Anne Jenner**, who began working as a researcher in the beginning of January. Anne has spent her first months at the Center familiarizing herself with our various spheres of activities, and will continue to concentrate her work within the library and genealogy departments. Educated at North Park University and the University of Washington from which she holds an M.A. in Scandinavian Studies, Anne has previously worked as a Lecturer and Director of the Swedish Program at the University of Pennsylvania and at the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia. She also has lived, studied, and worked in Sweden. We welcome Anne Jenner to the Swenson Center!



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