

The Swedes in Kansas

by

Emory Lindquist

Over a century ago, the movement westward brought emigrants to Kansas from older American states and from many foreign countries. Distant places with strange sounding names provided many future Kansans who spoke a variety of languages on the Kansas prairies. Amidst all their differences, they contributed their individual parts to what may be described as the great symphony of American Life.

When the census takers had completed their rolls in 1890, they reported that there were 147,838 foreign-born residents out of a total Kansas population of 1,428,108. This meant that 10.4% or approximately 1 out of 10 of all the people of Kansas were born abroad. The greatest number of foreign-born in Kansas was recorded in that year. The nations contributing the largest number of residents to Kansas in 1890 were Germany, England, Sweden, and Ireland, in that order. The census for 1960 shows in Kansas 33,268 persons whose birthplace was abroad. The reports of that census show, however, that twenty-six languages formed the mother tongue of these Kansans: Arabic, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Rumanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Ukrainian, and Yiddish.

The Swedes early found their way to Kansas from "the land of midnight sun." While the future state of Kansas was still a part of the Kansas-Nebraska Territory, a few Swedes had already arrived there; but in the census of 1860, one year before statehood, only 122 listed Sweden as the place of birth. The largest number of Swedish-born Kansans is found in the census of 1890, when the number was 17,096, or 11.6% of the foreign-born population of the state, exceeded only by immigrants from Germany and England. At the turn of the new century, there were 15,144 Swedes in Kansas, with only Germany providing more nationals for Kansas. There was a steady decline in immigration generally in the succeeding decades. In 1960, the records show only 1,120 Swedish-born people in Kansas. How-

ever, the number of Kansans in 1960 whose parents were born in Sweden was 14,362 and there was a much larger number of Kansans whose grandparents traced their origin to Sweden. Professor J. Neale Carman of the University of Kansas has pointed out the interesting fact that at the midpoint of the twentieth century, probably one-half of the people of Kansas had grandparents or great grandparents born in Europe.

REASONS FOR EMIGRATION

The Swedes came to Kansas for a variety of reasons. Changing economic conditions produced hardships for the people of a small nation like Sweden, and the problems were occasionally complicated in that essentially rural nation by crop failures. The desire for freedom of religious expression became particularly strong in the second half of the nineteenth century as evangelical dissenters appeared within the Lutheran State Church. Moreover, the lure of adventure brought restless spirits who were attracted by the promise of American life. After a sizeable number of Swedes had settled in America, the reports which they sent to relatives and friends at home were an important factor. These reports, referred to in the Swedish words, *Amerika brev*, or "America letters," were widely read, sometimes publicly on the church grounds after the morning church service, or printed as interesting items in the local newspapers. These letters often presented glowing accounts of life in the New World. There developed in certain provinces of Sweden at various times what was known in Swedish as *Amerika feber*, or "America fever," the acute urge to try a new way of life in "the great land in the West." Immigration companies were also organized to bring Swedes to Kansas and other states. The Kansas Pacific Railroad, now known as the Union Pacific Railroad, and the Santa Fe Railroad published interesting and complete pamphlets in the Swedish language describing the opportunities for a good life in Kansas. These pamphlets were distributed and read widely in Sweden.

The economic, religious, and personal factors were strengthened in the minds of the prospective immigrants by their vision of America as expressed in the meaningful Swedish word, *framtidlandet*, which translated into English means, "the land of the future." This certain feeling is found in many *Amerika brev*. The Rev. Olof Olsson, who came to the Smoky Valley in Central

Kansas in 1869 to share in the founding of Lindsborg, wrote to a friend in Sweden as follows: "I must truthfully say that I view the prospects here as much brighter than in Sweden I have already met many Americans, for whom I have the highest respect as men. Although the real American is in his manner forward and unceremonious, so is he nevertheless pleasant and friendly in his associations. I have already enjoyed with many an obliging hospitality."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF KANSAS

The first impression of the Swedes who came to Kansas was not always favorable. Ernst Skarstedt, who became a well-known literary figure among Swedish Americans, described in *Vagabond och Redaktör* (1914) the trip from Salina to Lindsborg in 1879 in the following words: "The weather was beautiful, the air mild and pleasant, but the landscape was terribly desolate. Hour after hour we rode through a boundless, barren prairie, where here and there stood a little hut like an island in an ocean. I found myself indescribably oppressed, lonely, and miserable. Tears came to my eyes. Was this the place that I had chosen for my home—this dismal, terrible wilderness—I who longed for something beautiful with woods and mountains and the sea? I learned only later that even the prairie possesses something magnificent in the midst of its loneliness and desolation."

A realistic account of the early life of the Swedes in Kansas will include experiences of joy and sorrow, victory and defeat. The Kansas countryside, with its vast reaches of unsettled land, often treeless, must have seemed strange to people who came from a land of miniatures, marked by groves of birch trees, well-tilled fields of modest size, and crystal clear streams. But life moved on, and soon the majority of immigrants became a part of life in the new surroundings. They found, at least most of them, that America was *framtidlandet*, the land of the future.

SWEDISH SETTLEMENTS IN KANSAS

The annals of Swedish immigrants to Kansas record at least fifty settlements of various size and duration in all parts of Kansas except the extreme southwestern area of the state. The census of 1890, the highest point in Swedish population in Kansas, shows a wide range from no persons of Swedish origin in several counties to the maximum of 2,680 in McPherson County. In addi-

tion to McPherson County, in 1890, Riley (1071) and Saline (1775) were in the classification with more than 1,000, and counties with more than 500 Swedes were Clay (577), Marshall (581), Osage (872), Pottawatomie (533), Republic (798), Shawnee (860), and Wyandotte (798).

The story of the Swedes in Kansas is closely related to the formation of settlements which became centers for the life and culture of the people. Although individual and isolated immigrants and families have made significant contributions, the results were increased greatly when there was a concentration of people in consolidated areas. This meant two things: the newly arrived immigrants could establish themselves quite readily in the midst of strange surroundings by mutual help and encouragement and secondly, the most distinctive aspects of the worth of their tradition could be transmitted most effectively to American life through cooperative action. The former need, that of encouragement, was expressed in the oft-used Swedish word, *uppmuntra*—"to cheer up" or "to encourage." The latter result, that of transmitting certain qualities of Swedish culture, could be at least partially achieved as Swedish communities developed an identity.



"Smoky River," a lithograph by Birger Sandzén. (Courtesy of Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Lindsborg)

The pattern of Swedish settlement in Kansas emphasizes especially the role of the valleys fashioned by the Big Blue, Smoky Hill, and Republican rivers. It was only natural that the Swedes, accustomed to rivers and lakes in the homeland, would seek such places for settlement as might still be available in the plains country. It was in the area now known as the Tuttle Creek Reservoir north of Manhattan that the first significant settlement of Swedes had its origin when on June 20, 1855, John A. Johnson came to the Blue Valley in the area where Cleburne later was to be founded. Johnson and other members of his family had arrived in America in 1852. While at Andover, Illinois, Johnson read a prospectus distributed by Governor Andrew H. Reeder of the Kansas Territory, which described the advantages of settlement in that area. John was joined by his brother Peter and the latter's family in May, 1856. Approximately three years later, in September, 1859, Maria, the mother of the Johnson brothers already in Kansas, and seven other of her children, came to the Blue Valley from Smarap, Rumsquilla, Sweden. Additional Swedes joined in forming the community which was named Mariadahl, in honor of the mother of the Johnsons. When a Lutheran church was organized on October 13, 1863, it also was named Mariadahl. The Swedish element in Riley and Pottawatomie Counties, which included 715 people in 1870, owed much to the pioneers of Mariadahl.

The principal center of Swedish settlement in Kansas was in the valley fashioned by the Smoky Hill River as it winds its way from Marquette, through Lindsborg, and toward Salina, and in the region that adjoins the valley. Dr. Alfred Bergin, whose two excellent volumes in the Swedish language are splendid sources for the history of this settlement, points out that the first Swede to arrive in the valley was Anders Bengtson Carlgren who occupied a homestead in Section 30, Township 15, Range 2, Saline County, on February 15, 1864. In April, 1866, eight young Swedes left Junction City in the search for a permanent home in Kansas, and after visiting Anders Carlgren, they continued their exploration south and west along the valley formed by the Smoky Hill River. Their enthusiastic reports about the area caused seventeen Swedes to file claims for land in the future Lindsborg community on May 1, 1866.

A decisive event in the future achievement of the Swedes in Kansas was the organization of the First Swedish Agricultural

Company of McPherson County, Kansas, on April 17, 1868, at 190-192 Superior Street, Chicago. This company, founded upon the principle of assembling Swedes in one community with a strong religious emphasis, arranged for the purchase of 13,168 acres of land from the Kansas Pacific Railroad. This land was located in southern Saline County and in northern McPherson County. Soon company representatives came to Kansas to make the area ready for settlement while others shared in promoting Swedish immigration to the company's holdings in Kansas.

The great hope for a successful colony in the Smoky Valley received its most significant support when the Rev. Olof Olsson and his party of Swedish immigrants left Sunnemo, Ransätter, Nyed, and other places in Vermland, Sweden, in May, 1869, for Kansas. C. R. Carlson, a schoolteacher from Filipstad, Sweden, was already in Kansas, and in letters to his minister friend, he had urged immigration to this area. Although there were approximately 250 members of the original Olsson party, only about one-half of them came to Kansas; and due to a series of circumstances, the others settled in Linn County, Missouri. However, the presence of a large group under the leadership of the Rev. Olsson produced the setting for important developments.

Another land company, known as the Galesburg (Illinois) Land Company, was organizing for the settlement of Swedes in the Smoky Valley at approximately the same time as the Chicago Company. In the autumn of 1868, this group of Swedes in Illinois, under the leadership of the Rev. A. W. Dahlsten, acquired 14,080 acres of land in McPherson and Saline counties from the Kansas Pacific Railroad adjoining on the west the holdings of the First Swedish Agricultural Company founded in Chicago. Soon Swedes from Illinois and other states as well as others directly from Sweden came to the land company's holdings and established centers for the colony around the church sites of Freemount in McPherson and Salemsborg in Saline County. Swedish Lutheran churches were founded in Lindsborg, Freemount, and Salemsborg in 1869. The most important factor in the sizeable Swedish population in 1870 of 1,165 in McPherson and Saline counties was the colonizing activities of the two land companies described above.

A third land company, which shared in the settlement of Kansas by Swedes, was the Scandinavian Agricultural Society of Chicago founded in 1868 like the two companies described

earlier. The center of this colony in Kansas was New Scandinavia, now known as Scandia, established in the same year as the founding of the company. A store, hotel, and saw mill were soon constructed. Twelve sections of fine land in the Republican River valley furnished inviting opportunities for settlement. Scandia soon became an important center for Swedes in the area.

Although the settlements in the Mariadahl, Lindsborg, and Scandia areas have their direct origin on the basis of a formal or informal pattern of organized activity, many other areas of Kansas saw substantial Swedish immigration. Such communities are found south of Axtell in Marshall County, at Swedesburg (north of Clay Center) in Clay County, near Savonburg in Allen County, at Vilas in Wilson County, at Garfield in Pawnee County, at Burdick and White City in Morris County, in Osage County, and in several places in Western Kansas, especially in Wallace, Logan, Decatur, Trego, and Rawlins counties. Sizeable numbers of Swedes settled in Manhattan, Hutchinson, Topeka, Kansas City, and Salina.

HOLIDAY CUSTOMS

The Swedish immigrants to Kansas brought with them the customs of the homeland. The calendar of most Kansans did not identify Midsummer Day, June 24, but in Sweden the day was marked by special festivities in the joyous expectation that the long winter was past and summer had arrived. On Midsummer Day, 1877, Mrs. Ida Nibelius Lindgren wrote these lines from her home, Lindesfrid, near Manhattan, to her mother in far away Sweden: "It is Midsummer today, the almanac says, but that is also all, since no Midsummer's Day preparations are seen and it is just another Saturday. Oh, how many happy Midsummer's Days I have experienced. How much fun it was in our childhood as we wandered out of the house into the fields and meadows and picked flowers and everyone struggled hard to get the most varieties Then we hurried home in order to be ready when the farm boys came and serenaded us." But among the Lindgrens and other Swedes in Kansas there was activity on Midsummer Day. The interior of the house was decorated with flowers and greens. The path or sidewalk leading to the dwelling place was swept spotlessly clean and branches of cottonwood, willow, boxelder, and other foliage were placed on the entrance way and porch. Special delicacies were served in *vardagsrummet* (living

room) with piping hot coffee made with egg, and served with *bitsocker* (cube sugar). There would be much talk about old friends and former times.

Christmas is a time of joyous expectation almost everywhere and among the Swedes of Kansas the rich traditions of the *Jul* (Christmas) Season were transplanted to the Kansas prairie. There were pleasant evenings when children helped their parents make Christmas candles as the coarse thread, serving as a wick, was repeatedly dipped in melted tallow and coated until a taper of the desired thickness was formed, to be placed later beside others in every window in the house. At 4 A.M. on *juldagsmorgon* (Christmas Day morning), these candles were lit to create a myriad of twinkling lights which dotted the vast expanse of the lonely Kansas landscape. There was the tedious process of soaking the three-foot lengths of dried codfish in a solution of water and wood ashes, followed by repeated rinsing, and then cutting this stored-up potential delight in small chunks to be cooked, creamed, and seasoned to create the culinary delight of *lutfisk*. There were the happy occasions of "cheese making" when farm women joined in the full day's effort to make the famous *bondost* with its delicious flavor and unusual texture. The kitchen took on a new importance as almond rings, *kringlor* (rolls), and Swedish *ragbröd* (rye bread) revealed the secrets of their contents to the observing inhabitant. Swedish delicacies, including *potatiskorv* (potato sausage), *sill* (a type of herring), *bruna bönor* (a special kind of brown beans), *köttbullar* (a form of small, round meat balls), *lingon* (lingon berries), *ostkaka* (a milk and cream pudding), *risgrynsgröt* (rice porridge), and other foods from homeland recipes furnished tasty Christmas dishes and many remembrances of former years.

A *julgran* (Christmas tree) stood expectantly in the homes of Kansas Swedes, but in early years it took a form quite different from the glimmering pine or spruce of the homeland. In contrast with such a special gift from nature, a branch, or preferably the top of a small cottonwood tree, was selected. The branches that once had given hospitality to leaves were carefully covered with white or colored tissue paper, if such a luxury item was available, or by plain white paper, or even by newsprint. Small home-made tallow candles were carefully tied to the branches. Strings of candy and other decorative items, often made in the family kitchen, were draped upon the branches of

the improved Christmas tree. Gifts were unwrapped on *julafton* (Christmas Eve) in Swedish families, following the reading of the beautiful Christmas story as recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The group would then join in singing traditional Christmas songs, including the distinctive Swedish hymn, *Glada julafton* (Joyous Christmas Eve).

Early on *julmorgon* (Christmas morning) the entire family joined their friends and relatives at the church to share in the festive *julotta* (Christmas matins) service, which usually started as the bells rang in the hour of 5 A.M. The congregation listened hopefully as the pastor read from the prophecy of Isaiah: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined," and the description of the birth of Jesus as recorded in the second chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke. There was a great quiet as the choir intoned the words of the celebrated Swedish Christmas anthem, *Hosianna*, David's son! Soon the worshippers joined in full voice to fill the stone or frame church with the beautiful Christmas hymn, *Var helsad sköna morgonstund* (All Hail to Thee, O Blessed Morn). When they filed out of the church after exchanging a cheerful "God Jul" (Merry Christmas) with fellow worshippers, the day had dawned outside in God's universe and a new spirit had been reborn within man.

DAILY LIFE AND CUSTOMS

One of the important aspects of Swedish settlement in Kansas was the fact that generally families came together so that not only adults but children shared in adapting themselves to living in a new country. An interesting account by Anna Olsson, daughter of the Rev. and Mrs. Olof Olsson, of a young girl's response is found in a small book, *I'm Scairt. Childhood Days on the Prairie* (1927), which describes pioneer life in the Smoky Valley. There were times of homesickness for Sweden as she wrote: "Mamma she cries and cries and wants to go back to Sweden. She says she longs for Sweden. I don't know what longs means, but when Mamma longs for Sweden, I am going to long there too. Papa he don't cry 'cause he longs for Sweden. He has no time, 'cause he has to stay here and preach. When we sit on Papa's bench high up in the tree, then Papa points with his finger and shows me where Sweden is. Far, far away, much

father than Salina [20 miles distant]. We have so much fun up in the tree. I bring my Dolly up there"

Anna enjoyed simple pleasures in the framework of pioneer life although the resources were limited: "My Dollhouse is only a grocery box. But I have two shelves in it, so I play that I have three rooms—one front room, and one bedroom, and one kitchen." However, the wonderful world of a child was not hedged in by economic limitations for Anna Olsson. She possessed her own, unique resources: "I play that I have a little Doll girl, and she is dressed in a pale blue silk dress. And she has a little white hat with blue flowers on her head, and she carries a little blue parasol over her head. And I play I have a little Doll boy too, and he is dressed in a little black velvet coat and velvet pants." Anna's vivid world of fantasy turned to the Kansas landscape as she wrote: "I have many little parasols too. I play they grow on the cottonwood trees. Blue parasols, and red parasols, and white ones, and yellow—many, many colors. Not black ones, 'cause I don't like black."

The children attended church meetings with their parents, but there were added and special benefits for children as described by Anna Olsson: "We runned around and played 'tag' under the peach trees too. It's so much fun to go to prayer meeting in the Land Company's House [a structure built by the First Swedish Agricultural Company a few miles northwest of Lindsborg in 1868], 'cause then we can play tag under the peach trees." There were times of great joy when the child received a gift. Anna describes the situation: "Frida Carlson she has a Noah's Ark just like mine. Mamma gave me my Noah's Ark, and I like it much. I am so careful of it. Noah and Mrs. Noah they have such funny hats on their heads. My Uncle he learnt me to sing a funny song about Noah."

The reference by Anna Olsson to a song about Noah recalls for most people of Swedish ancestry in Kansas their childhood days, when they sang that song, quite unimportant in text, but calling forth remembrances of former years.

Gubben Noak, gubben Noak,
Var en hedersman
När han gick ur arken,
Planterade han pa marken,
Gubben Noak, gubben Noak,
Var en hedersman.

The Swedish immigrant girl also recalled that her uncle "let me and Gerda sit on his boots and then he swings his foot up and down, and then we ride horseback." This again was a part of folklore among the Swedes in Kansas and elsewhere, about the joyous journey of the horse named Blanka, carrying his rider to see his beloved, Anna Margreta, described in these words:

Rida, rida, ranka
Hästen heter Blanka
Vart skall du rida
Till en liten piga
Vad skall hon heta
Anna Margreta
Den tjocka och feta.



Lindsborg school children dancing a traditional Swedish folk dance in traditional costumes during the 1963 Svensk Hyllnings Fest. (Courtesy of Lindsborg News-Record)

The parents and children among the Swedish immigrants loved to sing Lina Sandel Berg's famous hymn, "*Tryggare kan ingen vara.*" The words were set to the music of a Swedish folksong. Since this simple but spirit-filled hymn is the best known and most distinctive survival from the days of Swedish immigration and still deeply cherished in the temple of memory

by many people in our time, the first and last verses are printed below in the original Swedish and in English translation.

Tryggare kan ingen vara
An Guds lilla barnaskara,
Stjärnan ej på himlafästet,
Fågeln ej i kända nästet
Vad han tar och vad han giver,
Samme Fader han förbliver,
Och hans mal är blott det ena:
Barnets sanna väl allena.

Children of the heavenly Father
Safely in His bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven
Such a refuge e'er was given.
Though He giveth or He taketh,
God His children ne'er forsaketh,
His the loving purpose solely
To preserve them pure and holy.

Since religion played such an important role in immigration to Kansas, it was logical that the Swedes soon founded churches in their new homeland. Swedish Lutheran congregations were formed in many Kansas communities as well as a lesser number of congregations belonging to the Swedish Baptist, Methodist, and Mission Covenant denominations. The services were conducted in the Swedish language well into the twentieth century. Cherished Swedish hymns were heard on the Kansas prairies as worship services were conducted in the tradition of the old country. The church was exceedingly important as a source of comfort and inspiration in the midst of the hardships of pioneer life in a new and strange country. Moreover, religious devotion and commitment furnished the basic framework for the most distinguished contribution of the Swedes to Kansas.

LINDSBORG

Lindsborg, lying in the Smoky Valley below Coronado Heights to the northwest, became the center of Swedish life and culture in Kansas in the early stages of immigration. Several factors contributed to this important result. When the Rev. Olof Olsson came to the future Lindsborg community in June, 1869, he was accompanied by more than 100 men, women, and children from the same area in Sweden. They came as family units, de-



"Kansas Sunflowers," a linoleum cut by Birger Sandzén. (Courtesy of Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Lindsborg)

terminated to seek a new life in the New World. They were genuinely pious people who were disappointed with the religious pattern and spirit in the homeland. At the outset, the community possessed the resources of a dedicated group of people who had the Rev. Olof Olsson as their outstanding pastor and leader.

In August, 1869, this group of Swedes, largely from the province of Vermland, founded the Evangelical Bethany Lutheran Church. Soon a choir was organized and fine choral music, sung a capella at the outset, was heard in the Smoky Valley. A school was organized under church auspices. Moreover, a Swedish Lending Library was formed; and when the census taker made his report in 1875, he listed 300 volumes in the collection. N. P. Swenson was designated as the librarian. In April, 1873, less than four years after the founding of Lindsborg, the Rev. Olof Olsson wrote and edited at Lindsborg a religious journal in the Swedish language, *Nytt och Gammalt* (*New and Old*), which was printed in German type at Salina.

An important factor in the development of Lindsborg is related also to the fact that it was the center of a number of

Swedish communities within a radius of fifteen miles. Falun, Smolan, New Gottland, and Salemsborg, distinct Swedish place names, as well as other communities with a large Swedish population, like Freemount, Assaria, Marquette and McPherson, were oriented toward Lindsborg culturally and religiously. A community of interest and feeling characterized the Swedish people in the area as they united their efforts to enrich life.

BETHANY COLLEGE—THE CULTURAL CENTER

Just as the Rev. Olof Olsson was the key person in the earliest period of Lindsborg's history, so also were the dynamic qualities of the Rev. Carl Aaron Swensson the vital factor in the period when the cultural possibilities were translated into meaningful form by the founding of Bethany College and the Lindsborg "Messiah" Chorus, twin-born in the crucial year in Lindsborg's history, 1881. The background factors were described by Swensson as follows: "The plan of locating a school in our Swedish settlements is older than Bethany. Dr. Olsson and his beloved friends from Vermland were, as far as I know, the first to discuss this matter as something they hoped would be realized in the not too distant future. Furthermore, Bethany church of Lindsborg received its first church land as a gift 'for church and school purposes' from the First Swedish Agricultural Company." The records show that at the church meeting in December, 1879, it was decided that one-half of the income from the sale of church lands should go for the founding of a college.

Although Dr. Swensson gives generous acknowledgement to his predecessors, his own leadership provided the inspiration that saw the founding of Bethany College. Swensson has left a brief but informative account in these words: "After the meeting of the Synod [national convention of the Augustana Lutheran Church] at Lindsborg during the summer of 1881, I could not rid myself of the thought that the right time was at hand to make an attempt toward the upbuilding of a Lutheran high school or 'aircastle' as many called it. I saw how God had blessed our settlements in this beautiful, flourishing, and liberty-loving state. But how our children and youth should obtain the necessary Christian education was a question not easily answered. Without the elevating influence exerted by a good school to mould the character of students and people, we would evidently be in danger of sinking into the worship of the almighty dollar and

materialism. In addition, among our youth how many gifts that would otherwise be hidden and undeveloped, would not such a school disclose, gifts to benefit and gladden the community and the Church of God. Finally, after consulting the members in the vicinity, and laymen who were interested in the work, all of whom with one accord seconded the project, we ventured upon the undertaking." Bethany Academy, which became Bethany College, opened with eleven students on October 15, 1881. The basis of support for the college was widened greatly in 1884 when the Kansas Conference of the Swedish Lutheran Churches assumed ownership and responsibility for the institution.

The founding and development of Bethany College furnished the setting for the most distinctive contribution of the Swedes to Kansas. This unique achievement is related primarily to the music and art festival which is held annually at Lindsborg during Easter Week. Thousands of persons make a pilgrimage during that week to the Smoky Valley to listen to performances of "The Messiah" by George Frederic Handel and to view the art exhibitions. The present tradition has its roots deep in the past.

The Rev. Olof Olsson, Lindsborg's pioneer pastor, also furnishes the point of origin for *this* important development. The setting in the long chain of events was Exeter Hall, London, on April 4, 1879, when Olsson attended a rendition of "The Messiah" under the direction of Sir Michael Costa. In the volume, *Helsningar fran Fjerran. Minnen fran en resa genom England och Tyskland ar 1879*, written in 1879, describing his travels in Europe that year, Olsson recorded his enthusiastic response to the rendition in Exeter Hall that evening in the following words: "I will not even attempt to describe it all for that is beyond my power. At times I was so carried away that I scarcely knew myself. Let them smile. But I don't know what sort of a man he would be who had no feeling for beautiful spiritual music. Among other things sung were the names of our Saviour given in the ninth chapter of Isaiah: Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God. When the great chorus and full orchestra intoned those words, I was so enchanted that I feared that the shock would be too much for me. That evening in Exeter Hall will stand out, I can well say, as the most beautiful memory of the journey."

The Rev. Olsson had left Lindsborg in 1876 for a position on the faculty of Augustana College and Theological Seminary, Rock Island, Illinois. When Olsson returned to Rock Island after

his European trip, he inspired the people there to present "The Messiah." In the audience at the first rendition on April 12, 1881, was Dr. Carl Swensson of Lindsborg, Kansas.

Great dreams possessed Dr. Swensson about whom it could be said in the language of the Holy Scriptures, "Behold the dreamer cometh, Let us wait and see what will come of his dreams." Great things came from Swensson's dreams although his critics at the outset labelled them "aircastles." As indicated earlier, Bethany College was founded in October, 1881. Swensson also dreamed of presenting Handel's great oratorio in the Smoky Valley. Mrs. Swensson, an accomplished singer and organist, joined enthusiastically in the proposal. Some friends were informed of the plans and they responded favorably. On December 8, 1881, the *Smoky Valley News* at Lindsborg carried this item: "We understand that Rev. Swensson and lady and Mr. Hasselquist of this city are busily engaged in working up a 'Messiah' choir to comprise about 100 voices. Fifty dollars have already been raised for song books. This choir is to give concerts during Easter at the different churches in this vicinity for the benefit of the Swedish Academy [Bethany] of Lindsborg." The *Smoky Valley News* reported on December 15 that the "Messiah" choir had been organized the previous Sunday with thirty-eight members from Lindsborg and others from Freemount, Assaria, and Salemsborg.

Mrs. Swensson conducted the rehearsals of the choir. Part practices were held in the homes of members and general rehearsals in the Bethany Lutheran church. Dr. Swensson was often present to interpret the deep religious meaning of the oratorio. Explanations were presented in the Swedish language although the oratorio was sung in English. The first rendition occurred in the Bethany Lutheran Church at 7:30 P. M. on Sunday, March 28, 1882. Dr. Olof Olsson came from Rock Island, Illinois, to play the organ for his good friends during the presentation. Professor Joseph E. Osborn (Esbjorn), also from Rock Island, conducted the oratorio society in the first performance. The orchestra included guest members from the same city. The church was filled to capacity as the people shared in this great event.

The *McPherson Republican*, on March 30 described that first presentation enthusiastically in the following words: "It is impossible to give an adequate word picture of the performance. Anyone who would undertake to describe, say the 'Hallelujah

Chorus,' might as well attempt to imprison the rainbow and spread its colors on canvas. In short, to appreciate or to have any sort of conception of it, it must be heard and felt (for in some instances last night many were overcome and in tears)."

The Lindsborg *Localist* carried the following account also on March 30: "After thorough preparation, the Bethania Chorus, numbering 75 performers, made their first public appearance at the Lutheran church on the evening of the 28th. The church was filled with a fine audience who enjoyed a rare musical treat. The performance on the whole was good, while some of it was excellent" The editor then concluded: "The concert is an event in the history of our town. This, together with the object of it all, makes its success gratifying to all lovers of the true, the beautiful, and the good."

There was great joy among the people of the Smoky Valley that March evening in 1882 as they filed out of the stone church with a glow in their hearts following the rendition of the "Messiah." This event marked a singular achievement for the Swedish immigrants in Kansas. Their devotion to high spiritual and cultural values had reached a point where there could be community-wide participation in them. These Swedish-born and Swedish-speaking people brought a rich treasure to Kansas in their love of sacred music and they translated it into action which in time became a glorious tradition across the years. More than 200 renditions of Handel's "Messiah" have been presented by the Bethany College Oratorio Society, as well as other great oratorios including an annual rendition of Johann Sebastian Bach's "The Passion of Our Lord According to St. Matthew," on the evening of each Good Friday.

The founding of Bethany College also provided the setting for a distinctive contribution by the Swedes of Kansas to art and art appreciation. The college was less than a decade old when the art department was established in 1890. Three Swedes—Olof Grafstrom, Carl Gustafson Lotave, and Birger Sandzén—shared in fashioning a tradition of distinction in art at Lindsborg although Birger Sandzén was by far the greatest influence. Grafstrom taught at the college from 1893 to 1897, and his successor, Lotave, served on the faculty between 1897 and 1899. A magnificent future for the cultural life of Bethany College and Kansas was heralded in 1894 when Birger Sandzén came to Lindsborg directly from Sweden to join the faculty of the Linds-

borg college. Sandzén had studied with the Swedish masters, including Anders Zorn, and with outstanding teachers in Paris.

Birger Sandzén brought to the Kansas locale distinctive technique; full appreciation of the intriguing resources of color; creative sensitivity to the light, topography, and spirit of his adopted country; and enthusiasm for the promise of American life. Versatility as well as sensitivity distinguished his handling of subject matter, including a grasp of the brooding quality of the Kansas prairie, sympathy with the accumulated evidence of the battle of a battered but victorious tree over the hardy forces of nature, the portrayal of the stately poise of rows of poplars, the inspiring beauty of the majestic peaks of the Rockies triumphantly piercing the sky, and the deep lines on the face of a dedicated Swedish pioneer. Sandzén's paintings and prints speak eloquently of integrity and imagination.

The life of Kansas was not only immensely enriched by Birger Sandzén's creative works, but he also developed appreciation for "the good, the true, and the beautiful" through the promotion of art exhibitions and by his wonderful success as a teacher. Leila Mecklin has written appropriately that "Birger Sandzén has lit little candles of art knowledge and appreciation all through the Middle West." His spirit still broods with a generous and loving benediction over the Smoky Valley and Kansas. The delightful Birger Sandzén Memorial Art Gallery on the campus of Bethany College, Lindsborg, is a tribute to a good and great man. It is also a present source of inspiration to the thousands of visitors who annually view the treasures housed within its walls.

In addition to the distinguished leadership that was such a precious asset for the Swedes in the Smoky Valley, other elements furnished the materials from which the interesting mosaic of culture could be woven. Leaders may sometimes be voices crying in the wilderness without listeners who are able and eager to respond to the new way of life. The situation was quite otherwise among these Swedes and their associates in the Smoky Valley: there was generally a heartening response. Professor M. L. Hansen has pointed in a report of the Augustana Historical Society (1938) the nature of the potential resources among people who traced their origin to Europe: "The immigrant brought with him European culture They [the immigrants] brought a popular though uncritical appreciation of art and

music; they felt at home in an environment where such aspects of culture were taken for granted If they did not come in loaded down with culture, at least they were plentifully supplied with the seeds of culture that, scattered in a fertile soil could



"The Pioneer," a lithograph by Birger Sandzén, 1922. (Courtesy of Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Lindsborg)

flourish mightily." This process of growth and development took place in the Smoky Valley as the Swedish immigrants responded to the leadership of Olof Olsson, Carl Swensson, Alma Swensson, Birger Sandzén, and others.

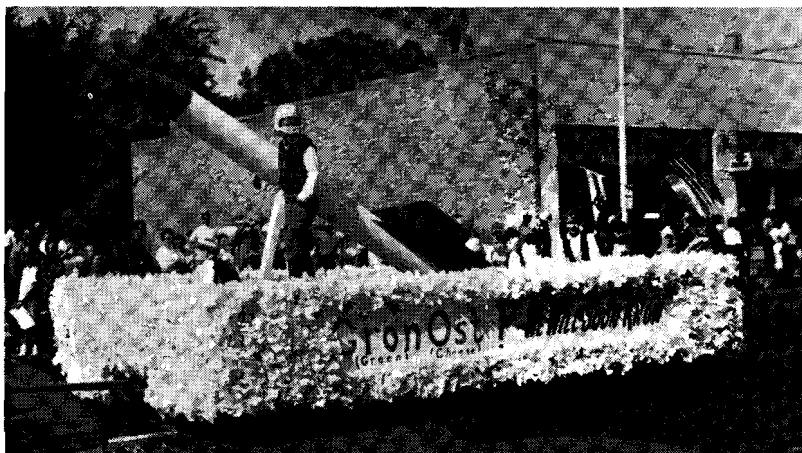
TWIN LOYALTIES OF THE SWEDES

The Swedes in Kansas adapted themselves readily to American life although this statement does not imply that they feverishly abandoned the old traditions and hastily adopted the new. Such a response would have been unwise. Dr. Carl Swenson, writing in *Luthersk Kvartalsskrift*, July, 1887, expressed the point of view which became a kind of guideline for later years when the full transition was in progress: "We do not wish, even if it were possible, which it is not, to build a little New Sweden in this country. That would be as childish as it would be wrong. But on the other hand, we do not wish to become Americanized at the turn of the hand. That which happens too rapidly turns out badly."

A symbol of the two loyalties, Swedish and American, is found in the twin towers of the beautiful Salemsborg Lutheran church in rural Saline County. An inscription is clearly carved in the stone work of each tower and each tower has, appropriately, the same inscription—the first line of Martin Luther's great Reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." These



A group of Lindsborg girls in Swedish costume perform a Swedish folk dance on Lindsborg's Main Street during the Svensk Hyllnings Fest, 1963. (Courtesy of Lindsborg News-Record)



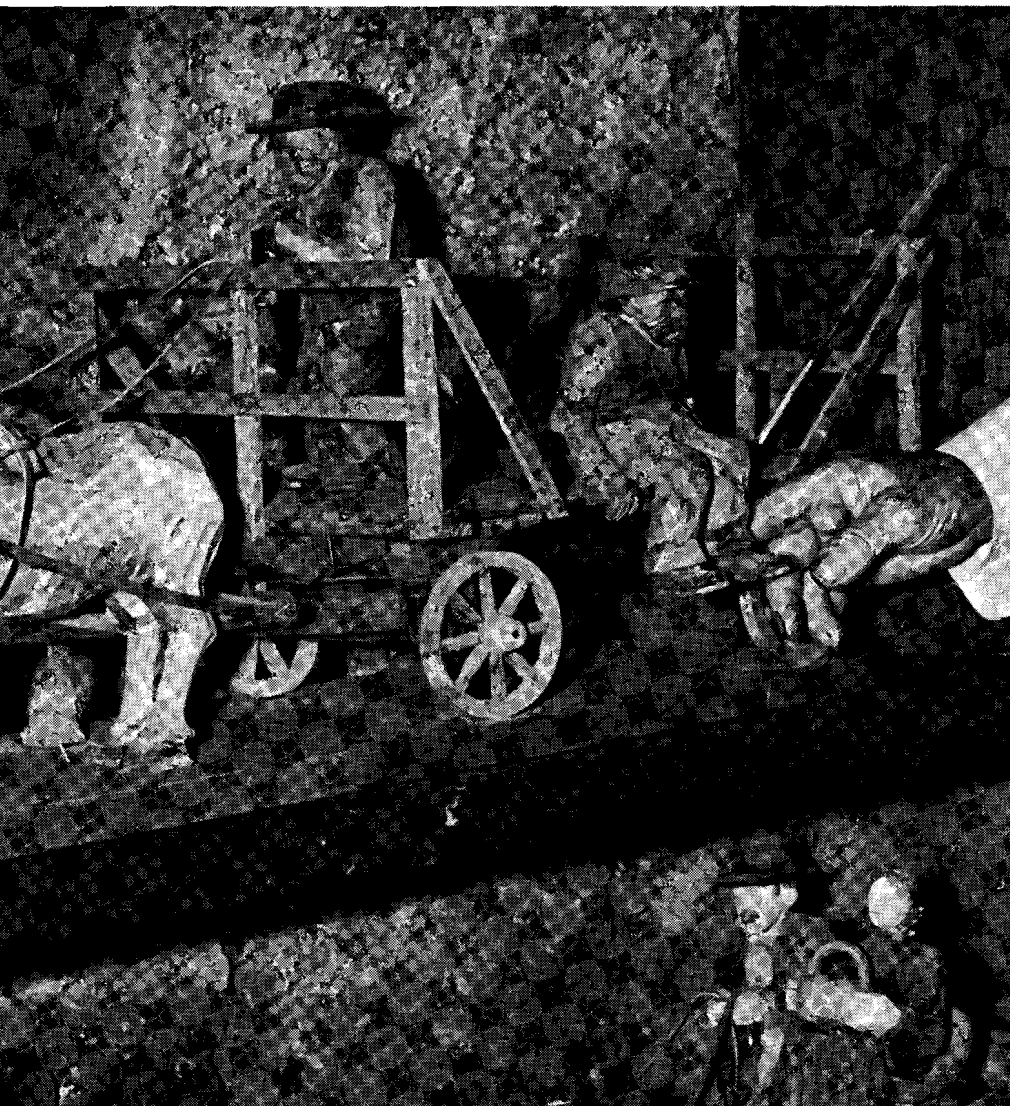
A combination of a traditional belief with modern scientific advances: "Is the moon really made of grön ost?" inquires one of the floats in the Svensk Hyllnings Fest parade held in Lindsborg, October 11, 1963. (Courtesy of Lindsborg News-Record)

words are spelled out in Swedish on one tower and in English on the companion tower. A new generation, the third in the unflinching march of time, may not fully understand that the symbol itself now belongs to history as the past retreats steadily before the present to be hidden too often in the unturned pages of the annals of another era.

The Swedish pioneers rest from their labors in quiet cemeteries on the slopes of Coronado Heights northwest of Lindsborg, on a wind swept hill near Falun, in rural New Gottland, on the High Plains of Western Kansas in the Stockholm community in Wallace County, in unmarked graves in what was once known as Lake Sibley in Cloud County, and elsewhere. Many of their children and their children's children bear patronymic Swedish names like Anderson, Carlson, Johnson, Nelson, Olson, Peterson, and Swenson. Swedish place names like Falun, Smolan, Olsburg, Walsburg, Swedesburg, New Gottland, and Lindsborg are still found on the map of Kansas. More than eighty churches (predominantly Lutheran, but including also the Mission Covenant, Baptist, and Methodist denominations) trace their antecedents to the piety and devotion of the Swedish pioneers. Bethany College, the "Messiah" Chorus, and the creative achievement of Birger Sandzén and other artists form at Lindsborg a cherished legacy of the immigrants from Vermland and Smaland, Skane

and Blekinge, and other Swedish provinces. Periodically, an October weekend in Lindsborg is devoted to the *Svensk Hyllningsfest* (Tribute to the Swedish Pioneers), when the rich heritage of the years is recalled.

The real meaning of the contribution of the Swedes to Kansas cannot be chronicled in newspaper headlines, nor in historical articles, nor in institutional forms; the nature of that contribution is an intimate personal resource. The real meaning evades the chronicler; it is found only in the lives of the people who shared it and in the sure knowledge of God.



Some Swedish Christmas Customs

One of the most interesting complexes of traditions of any national group (in the Christian world) is connected with the Christmas season. As Dr. Lindquist suggested, the Christmas customs of the Swedes are no exception. Florence (Engstrom) Lemley, who did some field work for Heritage of Kansas on the Swedes in the vicinity of Dwight and Morris Counties, wrote the following accounts of some of the customs as they were explained to her:

Christmas foods and Christmas customs seem to have survived most strongly of all the Swedish traditions. The Christmas celebration begins with Lucia Day, the first Sunday in Advent. In some homes it was customary for the eldest daughter to prepare breakfast of coffee and rolls. Then dressed in a white Lucia robe and wearing a crown of lights, she would serve breakfast to members of the family in bed.

[Irma M. Jones reports this variation from Assaria: "The Christmas season really begins at midnight on December 12. Usually the mother dresses in a white robe and puts a green wreath with seven lighted candles on her head. At midnight, she gives the rest of the family refreshments of hot fruit juices and small wafers. This, they call honoring Saint Lucia."]

As Christmas nears there is *dan före dan före dopparedan* (the day before the day before the dipping day). When my interviewee, Anna Pierson, explained this expression to me I exclaimed, "Oh, now I see!"

"*Ett ljus gick up en hele paket,*" she laughed. Translated, she had said, "A light went up, a whole package of light." [More commonly the expression we hear for this situation of suddenly understanding something is, "Ah! The light dawns!"]

But to return to the "dipping day": As Christmas neared and the women became busier and busier with their preparations, who had time to cook the usual meals for the family? If anyone wanted to eat on Christmas Eve Day, he could take his bread and dip it in the broth of the meat being cooked in the huge kettle! [One Swedish descendant in Lindsborg explained that this was

Woodcarvings by Lindsborg craftsman Anton Pearson, who very often carves figures representing Swedish pioneers at their daily tasks. His work is in a style typical of Old Country folk craft. (Courtesy of Lindsborg News-Record)

her favorite custom of the season, that the "dipping" meant Christmas to her and her family.]

Preparations for Christmas were made outdoors as well as indoors. Barns and animals had to be as well tended as the humans, with clean bedding and quarters, because didn't the animals know about the Savior as soon as did the people?

A *ljuskrona* (crown of lights) was traditional in some homes but unfamiliar in others around Dwight. Some "crowns" were constructed to sit on a table. Candles were mounted on the arms and the top, all of which had been decorated with colored papers.

Mrs. Vic Johnson described the *ljuskrona* made in her childhood home: "Father took a big hoop and we always took paper and frilled it to fasten to this hoop. Then he would cut candleholders from tin and fasten them so they would stand up. Then we warmed tallow and made candles by dipping a string in the tallow and cooling it and dipping it and cooling it until it was the size of the candleholder. There were about twelve candleholders altogether, and the candles were eight to twelve inches long.

"The *ljuskrona* was hung from our low ceiling by strings tied from the rim of the hoop. The hoop was only about an inch and a half wide and about two feet across. The paper we decorated it with was a soft paper similar to tissue paper. We cut it into strips, fringed it, and curled the fringes. It was beautiful, all wrapped around the wheel.

"At church we always had a cedar tree decorated with soft paper and candles. That had to be watched, believe you me! That was a real fire hazard! The paper was usually red and green."

Swedish Christmas customs are often very different from the customs of other groups, yet often very much alike. All in all, it might be said that the practices of the Christmas season are cherished traditions among all Christian groups, and not the least among the Swedes.

Heritage of Kansas does not presume to imagine that in thirty-two pages, it can give any kind of total picture of the Swedes in Kansas! Yet, perhaps this brief glimpse will give Kansans in general a better appreciation of a specific cultural group which has been very important to the state, to its growth, and to its proud heritage.

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- "Dr. Birger Swenson, manager, the Augustana Book Concern, Rock Island, Illinois, has generously granted permission to quote from the following: Anna Olsson, *"I'm Scairt."* *Childhood Days on the Prairie* (1927), *Hemlandssanger* (1892), and *The Hymnal* (1925). Our thanks also go to Dr. Charles Pelham Greenough III, curator, Birger Sandzén Memorial Art Gallery, Lindsborg, Kansas, for providing photographs of Dr. Sandzén and his works and to Professor E. Gustav Johnson, editor of the *Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* (Chicago, Illinois) for assistance with the manuscript." (—Emory Lindquist)
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"Some Swedish Customs:"

Special recognition should be given to Florence Lemley, upon whose work this section on customs is almost entirely based. She and her Swedish interviewees have contributed greatly to this issue. Other reports in the K.S.T.C. files on Kansas Swedes which were consulted were those by Irma M. Jones, Eunice Michael, Norma J. North, and Sonia Swenson.

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