

SWEDES IN MOLINE, ILLINOIS

1847-2002

Lilly Setterdahl

*Swedes in Moline, Illinois: 1847-2002*

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## Foreword

Lilly Setterdahl and her late husband, Lennart, began their own “immigrant adventure” to the United States in 1959. They knew that around 1.2m of their countrymen had emigrated from Sweden before them, and had heard personal stories from returning relatives. After settling in Cleveland, Ohio, Lilly and Lennart began visiting with their countrymen and descendants of early immigrants, first as a hobby born of curiosity. They soon found themselves captured by those fascinating stories, ranging from ordinary life experiences to high adventure.

What began as a hobby, soon turned into a lifetime career for both. Lennart first tape-recorded some 800 interviews in his spare time, beginning in 1962, while Lilly cared for their young family. His work soon brought him to the attention of Sweden’s Emigrant Institute, founded in 1965 to record the story of the “great migration.” Its director, Dr. Ulf Beijbom, welcomed Lennart’s path-breaking efforts, and in 1969 the Institute began supporting a project to microfilm records of Swedish immigrant churches, a project which later came to include records of institutions, secular organizations, and businesses.

Since Illinois lay in the heart of early Swedish settlement areas, the Setterdahls moved from Cleveland, Ohio to the Quad Cities in 1971, simplifying the logistics of their challenging work. In the lifetime which followed, Lennart traveled coast-to-coast, microfilming some 1,600 church archives, and other records of about 1,000 organizations and communities like the “Prairie Utopia” of Bishop Hill, Illinois. Whenever possible, Lilly and the children accompanied and assisted Lennart. Lilly also carried out her own projects, such as inventorying and microfilming 140 Swedish-American newspapers held by Augustana College in Rock Island. Lennart recorded 2,000 additional interviews and added to his collections by taking about 20,000 photographs in Swedish-American communities, including Moline. Records of their work are now held on both sides of the Atlantic at institutions like Augustana College, the Vasa Archives in Bishop Hill, the Emigrant Institute in Växjö, the Royal Library in Stockholm, and the national archives of many church organizations. Lennart’s work earned him an honorary doctorate from the University of Gothenburg in 1990, plus the gratitude of several generations of migration researchers and organizations like the Swedish-American Historical Society, the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana College, and the Vasa Order of America. His premature death in 1995 brought Lilly’s decision to make his work more widely known by writing about it and also to continue her own research. She has now authored eleven publications, some in cooperation with Lennart and other migration researchers, and several by her own pen alone, including this work on the Swedes in Moline. It is unlike previous ethnic “vanity publications,” which required a subscription fee to be included in the book. The resulting stories were often only about those who could afford the subscription. Lilly instead looks at the everyday life of a

Swedish-American community in transition, in part through her narrative, and by the words of the families themselves. It is Lilly's tribute to not only Lennart's work, but to that of the thousands of Swedes who settled and lived here, making up more than a third of Moline's population by 1910. It records the history of their many churches— Lutheran, Covenant, Methodist, Baptist and Free— their hospital, their lodges and associations, their newspapers, their professions, businesses and workplaces. It is a wonderful, readable story of ethnic Moline.

John Norton  
Chair, Moline Swedish Friendship Association

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## Introduction

The first time I approached western Illinois by car from the east, I could not help reflecting on how long the road must have seemed for the immigrants who traveled by foot. The sky looked bigger than I had ever seen. With no forested areas to block the view, the eyes met the wide horizon. Except for the farms, the growing corn and soybeans, there was not much to observe along the road. How the early immigrants must have yearned to come upon even the smallest lake! In their time, the rolling prairie was not even broken, much less inhabited. It took a little more than three hours to drive from Chicago, but it must have taken the immigrants several days to walk. Having arrived in Moline, I noticed several store fronts with Swedish names. Since then, I have lived in East Moline for more than thirty years. Recently, I have learned much more about the businesses founded by Swedes in Moline and other immigrants from Sweden settling the area.

It began with Olaus Bengtsson and his wife, who walked from Chicago to Moline in about 1847. They had three children with them, and had to take turns carrying the youngest. Their belongings also had to be carried. There was a stagecoach from LaSalle, near Peru, where the canal ended, but the Swedish immigrants were either ignorant of the fact or could not afford the fare. The Bengtssons had been forced to leave one small son in Chicago. When the boy was reunited with his family three years later, he no longer knew to speak his mother tongue. In 1848, another Swedish couple came to Moline from Andover in Henry County, where they had settled the year before, namely, the tailor Carl Johansson and his wife from Kämpstad in Östergötland. It is not known where the Bengtssons came from in Sweden, but they, too, spent some time in Andover.

These two Swedish families found Moline to be a small hamlet with only a few shantylike buildings by the river. The town, which had been platted in 1843, had only the basic commodities. The power for the saw mill and the flour mill was provided by a wooden dam. A small furniture factory, a blacksmith shop, and a tailor shop had been established. The first schoolhouse had been erected in 1843 on 16<sup>th</sup> Street near 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. John Deere and his business partners began to make plows in Moline in the fall of 1848, and in 1849, 2,136 plows were made by an average work force of sixteen employees. Harnesses and wagons were made by others. A make-shift post office had opened in the home of one of Moline's businessmen. Some of the settlers, including Bengtsson, began to farm on the bluffs. The thick forest provided them with building material and firewood. Bishop Hill, Illinois, and New Sweden, Iowa, were already settled by Swedish immigrants, and their letters to Sweden encouraged friends and neighbors to come and obtain fertile prairie land. However, many Swedes preferred the wooded areas.

Following their long and strenuous journey, the immigrants were susceptible to disease. Many became infected with the ague, which caused chills and fever, and even death. Disease spread rapidly in the lowlying areas along the Mississippi. A cholera epidemic started in 1848, and, in 1849, every steamboat on the river carried infected passengers.

### **The work places in the 1850s**

Meanwhile, more Swedes arrived in Moline. No doubt, they were attracted to work places that employed other Swedes, such as the Deere Plow factory. John Deere actively recruited Swedish blacksmiths from the iron work districts in Sweden. Other places in Moline where the newcomers could find work in the 1850s included Dimock, Gould & Co, established in 1852 (furniture and lumber) and Williams & White, which started up in 1854 (steam engines and machinery). After the railroad had reached Moline in 1854, it became relatively easy to travel here from Chicago. When the train approached Moline, the conductor called out JOHN DEERE, and the Swedes knew that they had arrived at the right place. A Swedish blacksmith by the name of Andrew Freeberg (Anders Friberg) became the foreman at Deere in about 1853. In the mid-1860s, Freeberg began to make plows for another company, which later changed its name to Moline Plow Company. With Freeberg at the helm, the company attracted many Swedish workers. In 1859, when Moline had about 3,000 inhabitants, steam powered four of the factories, while water power was utilized by four flour mills and thirteen factories. Coal was abundant in the area.

### **The Pioneer Church**

In 1849, there were enough Swedes in Moline to organize the first congregation, the Swedish Methodist Church, now Bethel Wesley United Methodist Church. The Swedish Lutheran Church was founded in December 1850, now First Lutheran Church. The names of Olaus Bengtsson and Carl Johansson and their spouses can be found as charter members of both congregations. When Bengtsson had made up his mind as to where he wanted to belong, he chose the Swedish Methodist Church in Moline for himself and his family. Carl Johansson, on the other hand, became a staunch Baptist after the first Swedish Baptist congregation had been founded in Moline in 1852.

When emigrating, most Swedes carried a transfer paper from the home parish in Sweden that they usually turned over to a church in this country. In Moline, the Swedes who were Lutherans, and most were, presented it to the Swedish Lutheran Church at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 13<sup>th</sup> Street and became members. The exit paper from their church in Sweden listed the date and place of birth, as well as place and date of emigration. The pastor in Moline then transferred the information to his congregation's membership book. Thanks to that procedure, and the fact that the records have been microfilmed, descendants who wish to pursue family research can turn to Swedish-American church records and obtain important genealogical information.

Of the members joining First Lutheran in 1854 (the first year for which such records exist), the largest group came from the province of Halland. Six persons were listed as being born in Knäred, and twelve in other parishes in Halland. Eight were born in Karlskoga, Värmland, and three in nearby Bjurtjärn, Värmland. Eight came from Blekinge and Småland, respectively. Östergötland and Västergötland contributed four each. Two came from Skåne, and one each from Medelpad and Närke.

In 1853, the sewing society of First Lutheran Church decided to aid cholera victims. In 1854, 13 members died. Five were children, born in the years, 1852-1854. Children continued to die at an alarming rate. In 1857, twelve funerals for children were held. Deaths due to accidents in the work place were not uncommon. In 1861, 34-year old Ola Nelson died due to an accident in the paper mill. In 1862, of 14 deaths, twelve were children under six years of age. In 1863, three children died, while one man working in the woods was shot to death by accident. The paper mill accident was described by the pastor as follows: *The paper mill belonged to S. W. Wheelock. Lars Johansson was asked to work the night shift between Saturday and Sunday instead of Per Larsson, who was fired because he did not want to work during the Sabbath. Lars Johansson had started to work at the paper mill the Monday before, and was killed on the following weekend due to the accident in the mill.*

The churches founded by Swedes became very important for the wellbeing of these immigrants. Not only did the congregations provide religious services in their native language and social opportunities to meet with fellow Swedes, the pioneer church also provided education for their children. First Lutheran Church started a school for Christian instruction in 1868, the same year that the congregation erected a school house, 24 by 30 feet. In 1870, attendance had increased so that two teachers were hired. In 1877, English classes were held, teaching bookkeeping, English, Swedish, and singing. An anniversary booklet published in 1900, reported that the congregation had made an effort to keep up the school for Christian education of children eight to nine months a year. Several children from outside the church attended. To begin with the school was held both in the city and out in the country. The report stated, *For the last seven years, the teaching took place on weekdays in the church as well as in the South Chapel. Between 100 and 150 children attended annually on a regular basis. In addition, private lessons were sometimes given to individuals during the summer months.* In 1869, Törnvall and Söderling became the first regular teachers. Many teachers were hired through the years until 1900.

### **Civil War and hard times**

Moline was settled largely by New Englanders and Europeans, who were abolitionists, while Rock Island was settled mostly by well-to-do pro-slavery Southerners. During the Civil War, almost every family in Moline had a soldier

enrolled in the Union Army. Moline also provided secret hiding places for run-away slaves. A house that was later occupied by Johnson's Tea Room on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 22<sup>nd</sup> Street is supposed to be one of those places on the "Underground railroad." See Businesses, Hulda Johnson's Tea Room.

Cash was scarce in the area. At one time in the early years, John Deere had to borrow money from a Swede. The first bank, Manufacturer's Bank, was organized in 1863 and was later renamed First Moline National Bank. The Moline Savings Bank started in 1869. John Fryxell noted that times were indescribably hard in 1869 when his wife's family arrived in Moline. Many Swedes came that year due to a two-year drought in Sweden that caused crop failures. The new immigrants crowded together, resulting in the rapid spreading of infectious disease. In the Moline area, cholera, malaria, pneumonia, ague, and typhoid fever took a deadly toll. John Fryxell's first job in Moline in 1878 was at Keator's Mill, where his beginning pay was \$1.00 a day for eleven hours from six in the morning to six at night with one hour off at noon. After four days he was put on a log carrier and earned \$1.25 a day. Keator's Mill employed between 150 and 200 men, nearly all of them Swedes, according to Fryxell. When the river froze in December, he was laid off. The next fall, he began to work at the Cornplanter shop. Here, he ground castings for \$1.00 a day. See Family Histories, 027.

### **Progress**

Deere & Company was first to install electric lights in their shops in 1881. The power was derived from a generator. During the next three years, the stores and the water works were equipped with electric lights. The City Water Works, the Fire Department, and the Merchant Electric Light Company were all organized in 1883. In 1886, 80 electric lights lit up the city. The electric street railway began operations in 1888. Before that, a horse-drawn railway provided transportation on the dirt streets between Moline and Rock Island and along 15<sup>th</sup> Street.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the main businesses were located along 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, then Main Street. There were hotels, theaters, banks, a tobacco factory (not Swedish), shops of all kinds, saloons, and service buildings. Besides the factories already mentioned, Deere & Mansur had started its Cornplanter Works, and there was also the large Moline Wagon Company. Malleable Iron, organized in 1872, operated a foundry. Its address later became East Moline. The Sylvan Steel Mills on Sylvan Island did not begin operation until 1894. Controlled by members of the Deere family, the mill was a rolling and forging mill that produced iron and steel bars. In 1925, it had been taken over by Republic Iron & Steel Company. P. C. Rasmussen was the superintendent, C. V. Hammer, chief clerk, and Benjamin W. Carlson, master mechanic.

### **Manufacturing companies founded by Swedes**

Of the businesses founded in Moline by Swedes, there were several manufacturers. To mention just a few, Borg-Warner Corporation had its beginnings here with Charles Borg, who was born in Sweden in 1861 and emigrated when he was 20 years old. Moline Consumers, still in business in Moline, was founded as Moline Channel Ice Company by three men, among them James P. Pearson, who was born 1868 in Halmstad, Sweden, and emigrated at the age of 17. Moline Organ Company was founded in 1877 by Peter Colseth, born in 1835 in Dalsland, Sweden, together with C. C. Seaberg and William Josephson. Moline Furniture Works was incorporated in 1898 by a group of Swedish-born and second-generation Swedes. The company employed 94 men in 1918. Swedish descendants founded the Strombeck-Becker Company in 1911.

### **Smaller businesses**

Among the smaller businesses operated by Swedish Americans were tailor shops, hardware stores, and groceries. E. A. Okerberg had his jewelry store in the Metropolitan Building at 1603 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue from 1885 to 1891 and at 1605 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue from 1892 to 1913. His father, Eric Okerberg, had started the business in 1853. Among the saloon owners were Rosen & Anderson, 1603 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, 1892-96, and Louis Anderson at the same address, 1897-1915. In 1888, there were six hotels along Main Street or 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, among them Peal's Hotel and Stockholm Hotel.

Once the trolley route extended up the 15<sup>th</sup> Street hill, it became easier for people who lived on the bluff to reach the downtown businesses. The Moline Central Street Railway Company was incorporated in September 1884 to run a railway (horse-drawn until 1889) from 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 15<sup>th</sup> Street for one and one half mile to 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. (Stewartville, which was then outside the Moline city limits.) At the end of the 1890's, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue (then Henry Street) was becoming Moline's main business district. In the block facing First Lutheran Church, Swedes shopped at J. Swanson Grocery Store, Gustus & Strum Meat Market, and Charles Swanson's Flour & Feed store in the two-story building numbered 1223 and 1227. Many other Swedish merchants set up shops in this area.

The three-story IOOF building, erected in 1909 in the 1300<sup>th</sup> block of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, housed Swedish Olive Hall. Charles Ydeen opened his men's' clothing store on the street level. The Stockholm Café, followed by Svea Café, occupied 1309-1313 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, where the Uniform Den is located today. Next door, at 1315, Anders Fjelander had his tailor shop until 1902. William Peter's Bakery was located here in 1917. Charles Berglund opened his hardware store in the Berglund Building at 1317-1321 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The Carl G. Josephson Jewelry Store moved from 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue to the Reliance Building at 1514 and remained there for many years. The Charles Kneberg Wallpaper Store was located in the Kneberg Building, 1525-1531. Swanson & Lundquist Clothing and DeWolf &

Blomgren Clothing were also located there. The Lundell Building was constructed in the 1600<sup>th</sup> block.

### **Automobile manufacturers**

The factories that manufactured farm implements, carriages, and wagons, could easily have grown into automobile manufacturers, and some did, but the production did not continue. Charles R. Hoaglund of East Moline told me in an interview on April 3, 2002, that the largest carmaker in the Quad Cities was the Velie Automobile Company. Then there was the Moline Automobile Company located at the East End of Moline, which in 1902 became part of East Moline. Hoaglund says that Charles Deere, the son of John Deere, initiated the manufacturing of the Deere Automobile that was made in the years 1906-1908. When Charles Deere died, the production was discontinued and sold to Midland, which made the Midland Car until 1913. Willard Velie was the grandson of John Deere. The Velie Company made carriages for the government from 1902 until about 1918. Several Swedes worked at Velie's. Hoaglund's uncle, Arvid Hartzman, was the same age as Willard Velie, Jr. and they were good friends. Arvid worked at Velie's in the engineering department. Among Charles' uncles on his father's side, Reynold Hoaglund worked for the Velie Company as an upholsterer, and George Hoaglund as a mechanic test driver.

Swedes with a connection to Moline were also instrumental in the development of the automobile, as for instance, Charles W. Borg (See Businesses), who developed the disk clutch, Vincent Bendix (1872-1951), who invented the self-starter for automobiles, and Ernest C. Norton, who invented a special spring-loaded, high-compression automotive piston ring (See Family Histories). Bendix was born in Moline, but moved to Chicago. He was the son of Swedish immigrants (Reverend John Bendix from Färgaryd in Småland and his wife, who was from Östergötland).

Moline residents, who could afford to buy an automobile in the early 1900s, could choose between several cars that were made locally. The Deere 1907 Type B, 4 cylinders, 25/30 hp., 5 passenger automobile produced by Deere-Clark Motor Car Company at 108 Blackhawk Avenue in Moline, sold for \$2,500. The Meteor, 1909 Model D made by Meteor Motor Car Company in Davenport, sold for \$3,000 in 1909. The Moline car, Model D, produced by the Moline Automobile Company, sold for \$1,000, while its Model B, sold for for \$1,600. In 1915, the price of a two-seater, the Zip Car, manufactured in Davenport, Iowa, sold for as little as \$395. When Henry Ford had begun to mass produce his Model T on the assembly line in 1908, it became difficult for the small carmakers to stay competitive. In the Ford plant, one car was completed in 97 minutes. The first T-Ford, the 1909 open 4-passenger car, sold for \$850. In 1913, the price had come down to \$490, and in 1925, a new 4-seater sold for \$375, while a roadster sold for as little as \$260.

### **Population statistics**

The 1860 Federal Census for Moline shows mostly residents from the New England states and Pennsylvania, some Germans, but few Swedes. In 1870, the Swedes made up the largest ethnic group, followed by the Germans, many of whom were from Holstein. According to one source, the Swedish element made up about 50 percent of the population in the 1870s. A public school census taken in Moline in the 1870s showed 559 Swedish children, 554 US born, 203 German, and 38 Irish children. However, the number of children who graduated was low. From 1876 through 1885, only 94 children graduated. The figures excluded the school on the bluff and the Lutheran parochial school.

According to my own study of the 1880 Federal Census for Moline Township, the 1<sup>st</sup> Ward showed the heaviest concentration of Swedish-born. In this ward between 1<sup>st</sup> Street and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street along the canal and the railroad, the Swedish-born accounted for 38 percent of the population. When adding their children born in the United States, the figure reached 60 percent. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward, the percentage was 27.5 percent. Meanwhile, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward, the percentage of Swedish-born was less, namely 24.5. The next ward, not numbered in the Census, but probably the 4<sup>th</sup>, had even less Swedes. The borders for the wards did not remain the same through the years. In 1880, only a small number of native Swedes lived in South Moline Township. Some of its residents were farmers. A few Belgians are listed in the 1880 Census, but it was not until 1920 that the Belgians had outnumbered the Germans in Moline as the second largest ethnic group after the Swedes.

Since the 1<sup>st</sup> ward in Moline Township seemed the most interesting, I calculated the occupants two ways: 1) based on nationality and origin in the United States, and 2) based on occupations. According to the place of birth, the result was as follows: Sweden 551 (some of whom were children); Germany 127 (including such divisions as Holstein and Prussia), Ireland 20; England and Wales 11; Canada 5; Denmark 5; Norway 2; Other states than Illinois 159; Illinois, second generation Swedes, 321; Illinois, other than second generation Swedes, 234; Uncertain (illegible) 17. Gustaf Swenson, a native of Sweden, was the census taker. He noted that the total number of residents in the 1<sup>st</sup> Ward was 1,452. Swenson became the mayor of Moline in 1895.

Of the Swedish-born males, most worked "at the plow shop." It does not say which plow shop. Here are the occupations as listed in the census:

Worked at plow shop 72; laborers 40; servants/female 25; worked at saw mill 15; worked at wagon shop 16; carpenters 16; blacksmiths 10; foundry workers 6; teamsters 5; stone masons 5; machine-shop workers 4; painters 3; brick masons 3; molders 3; plasterers 2; shoemakers 2; tailors 2; grocers 2; ministers 2; and one each of the following: organ manufacturer, organ maker, foreman in plow shop, tinsmith, retail grocer, grocery clerk, mill worker, student, night watchman, foundry worker, corn-planter worker, tailor-shop worker, church janitor, foreman

at gas works, worker at gas works, paper-mill worker, ice dealer, bartender, broom maker, saloonkeeper, shoemaker worker, lamplighter, pattern maker, and butcher.

The total population of Moline in 1881 was 7,390. By 1910, it had grown to about 25,000, whereof an estimated 9,000 were Swedes of the first and second generation (36%). In 1920, that figure had reached 12,046 (40%). Others have researched the 1910 Federal Census for Moline, specifically regarding intermarriages. At that time intermarriages occurred between Swedes and Germans. In 1880, on the other hand, I saw only one intermarriage listed and that was between a Swede and a Norwegian. In cases where a Swedish-born had a spouse born in the United States, it was usually a second generation Swede.

The Swedish element has always been stronger in Moline than in Rock Island even though Augustana College, founded by Swedes, has been located in Rock Island since 1875. The concentration of Swedes to Moline is reflected in the number of Swedish-American churches, newspapers, organizations, and businesses. Moline published more Swedish-American periodicals than comparable Swede towns such as Rockford, Illinois, and Jamestown, New York, and had about as many churches founded by Swedes. Although the largest employer in Moline was not a company founded by Swedes, like National Lock in Rockford, John Deere has employed a large number of Swedes through the years, and so did the Moline Plow Company.

In 1850, only 1,123 natives of Sweden lived in the state of Illinois. By 1890, the number had increased to 128,897. Of those, 43,032 lived in Chicago, which showed the largest number of Swedish-born residents in any of the major American cities at the time. In 1890, however, Minnesota counted more Swedish-born inhabitants than Illinois, namely 155,089. The total number of native Swedes in the country in that year was 933,349. Naturally, many who arrived earlier had died. In that same year, statistics show that 145,503 Swedish immigrants had joined Swedish Lutheran churches affiliated with the Augustana Synod. When the mass emigration from Sweden had ebbed out in the late 1920s, more than one million Swedes had sought new homes in the United States.

### **Politics and the Charles Lindbergh Parade**

It is a known fact that Swedes did not participate much in politics in this country, and it was probably also true in Moline up to at least the 1890s. One exception would be that three Swedish trustees were elected before 1872, the year Moline was incorporated as a city. But between 1895 and 1981, Moline elected seven Swedish Americans to the post of mayor with four of them being born in Sweden. The city elected its first Swedish-born mayor, Gustaf Swenson, in 1895. Swenson was 29 years old when he arrived from Sweden and always spoke with an accent. He occupied the office of mayor until 1899. Three more Moline mayors were born in Sweden, but they had arrived as children with their parents.

They were Andrew Olson, C. W. Sandstrom, and Hjalmar Oakleaf. See Civic Leaders.

Mayor C. W. Sandstrom had the honor of welcoming Colonel Charles Lindbergh to Moline on August 18, 1927, following Lindbergh's transatlantic flight in May the same year. The mayors of Moline, East Moline, Rock Island, and Davenport, along with Colonel King of the Rock Island Arsenal, welcomed Lindbergh at the Moline Airport as he arrived in his monoplane, *The Spirit of St. Louis*. The crowd at the airport was estimated to 15,000. Lindbergh rode in a brand new convertible through the Quad Cities of East Moline, Moline, Rock Island, and Davenport, waving to crowds on both sides. A dinner for about 60 people was held in his honor at the Arsenal Mess Hall. The Svea Male Chorus sang a song, *The Lindy Smile*, written by its leader, Dr. E. W. Olson of Rock Island. Dr. Gustav A. Andreen, president of Augustana College, gave the main address of the evening. Colonel Lindbergh spoke about his plane and his hopes for the future of aviation. He did not mention his own role.

### **The Great Depression**

The Great Depression, which followed the roaring 20s, was difficult for everyone, especially newly arrived immigrants, who were often the first to be laid off and the last to be hired. The oral histories in this book reveal that young single men could obtain work on farms. But the city boys, who had no farm experiences, had to stand in the soup line. One daybook provided me with details of the hardships suffered by Carl Roos (Rose), who emigrated from Sweden in 1903 and came to Moline at a later date. He was born in 1879. In February 1933, he was still paying interest on a loan. He cut his own firewood in the forest, and grew a garden, but on May 6, 1933, he needed help with food. His children were also out of work. On December 8, he obtained work for the Civil Works Administration, which saved Christmas for the family. His grandson has reported that Carl Rose lost his house in the end. See Documented Impressions.

### **Limitations of study**

This is not a scientific study. My intent has been to present information that sheds light on the lives of the Swedes residing in Moline whether they were politicians, businesspersons, professionals, builders, laborers, or homemakers. The resulting work shows that Swedes and their descendants have contributed a great deal to the progress of Moline. Swedish immigrants came here to find work in the factories; most had relatives here ahead of them. They banded together in churches and organizations. They founded factories and other businesses. Some even became inventors. To document smaller businesses, such as tailor shops and stores proved to be a difficult task. I have found more than 400, but could have missed many others. The City Directories are not always accurate and they contain much conflicting information. The spelling of both personal names and business names varied and addresses changed. Also, since many businesses were short-lived, I searched in vain for their continuation. The most difficult task, however, was to identify people with Swedish-sounding names. Older Swedish-

American literature has been helpful and so have the records of First Lutheran Church in Moline. Still, it was impossible to confirm the ethnic origin of all the Andersons, Johnsons, Nelsons, and Petersons. The listing is inconclusive.

I regret that space did not allow me to include prominent executives of Swedish heritage. They are mentioned only if they are part of Family Histories or Oral Histories. The same is true for educators. Many ministers, however, are listed as pastors of congregations in the chapter featuring Swedish-American churches. The plant employees get a fair representation in the family-and oral history sections. The women are underrepresented, due to the fact that they were most often homemakers. It is a consolation that homemakers and teachers make up the largest groups in the oral-history section. The information that I have included from the interviews is brief. However, almost all of the recordings are available at Vasa National Archives in Bishop Hill, Illinois, and copies can be purchased by relatives. I have made an effort to update the information with death dates for those who have passed away and the names of survivors. The family histories were submitted by descendants. Some of the early letters in Documented Impressions were obtained from Sweden. Information for the church histories were provided either by church members or the respective church offices.

Note: In the 1800s, married women living in Sweden kept their maiden names. The birthplaces in Sweden are generally listed as parishes (approx. the size of townships), or cities, as well as provinces. A *län* corresponds to a county.

### **Acknowledgments**

The institutions whose records I have researched include first of all Rock Island County Historical Society in Moline, where I have spent much time, the Moline Public Library, First Lutheran Church in Moline, The Dispatch, and Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center in Rock Island. My thanks to the staff for courteous cooperation. Institutions and individuals in Sweden have also assisted with research, especially Johan Godijn at the Swedish Emigrant Institute in Växjö, as well as volunteer researchers Sten Ostlund, Margaretha Hedblom, and Bo Olsson. Kjell Nordquist of Karlskoga sent me old letters from Moline to Sweden. Many local residents have been helpful, especially Charles Holmgren, a life-long member of First Lutheran Church, who recalled the names of many of the older businesses in Moline. Marilyn Galley provided invaluable assistance by proofreading the entire manuscript. I would also like to thank fellow members of Moline Swedish Friendship Association for special support and John Norton for writing the foreword. It has been a pleasure to get to know the Swedish descendants, who have submitted family histories and photographs, and I thank them for their willingness to share their family data and stories. Please be assured that everyone's cooperation is appreciated. I sincerely hope that any errors on my part are not serious enough to upset anyone.

Lilly Setterdahl

## Civic Leaders of Swedish Origin



*Former City Hall. Rock Island Post Card Comp. Courtesy of Marilyn Galley, Rock Island.*



*Mayor Gustaf Swenson's home at Oakhill Park, looking from 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. Photo courtesy of Rock Island County Historical Society.*

### **Introduction**

Three Swedes served as trustees before the town was incorporated in 1872, namely, Eric Okerberg, Andrew Freeberg, and Swan Hanson. The latter served as alderman for the next two years. Okerberg served as alderman, 1875-1876, John Shallene, 1877-1878, followed by Peter H. Peterson, and Swan Hanson, 1878-1879. A. Källborg served as street commissioner for many years, and Gustaf Swenson as justice of the peace before becoming mayor in 1895. In 1906, Frank A. Landee was elected to the State Senate. Moline elected four Swedish-born mayors and three other mayors who were of Swedish heritage. I have been told that all of them were Republicans. However, Mayor Lorentsen, of Danish descent, in office from 1977 to 1981, was a Democrat. The second mayor of Moline was John Deere, 1873-75.

### **Gustaf Swenson, Mayor, 1895-99**

Moline's first Swedish-born mayor was Gustaf Swenson, born August 3, 1842 in Ryda, Skaraborgs län, Västergötland. He studied at a private school, and left his home at age 18 to become court secretary in Alingsås, Sweden. Between 1861 and 1871, he held positions as bookkeeper and freight forwarder, with the last position in Sweden being that of bookkeeper and comptroller for American Emigrant Company in Gothenburg. In 1869 he married Alida Josephine Stromberg, born in Gothenburg. Having stepped ashore in New York Oct. 3, 1871, he stayed at first in Page County, Iowa, and in Chicago before coming to Moline in 1872. Here he worked at first as an agent for Continental Life Insurance Company of Hartford, Con-

necticut, then opened a sewing machine store, which he kept until 1877. From 1877 to 1878, he published the Swedish newspaper, *Skandia*, in Moline. Magnus Elmblad, Herman Stockenström, and Prof. Melin were the editors. When the paper merged with other papers, Swenson started a real estate business on 15<sup>th</sup> Street, which he still owned in 1895. On October 3, 1876, exactly five years after his arrival he became an American citizen. One week later, he was appointed notary public. In the spring of 1877, he was elected justice of the peace, an office that he held for 18 years. In 1880, he was the census taker in the 1<sup>st</sup> Ward, Moline Township. In 1890, he was elected to serve on the school board, and in 1894 to represent his ward on the city council. In 1895 he was elected mayor of Moline with a large majority. He was a member of the Freja Society. See Organizations.

### **Andrew Olson, Mayor, 1905-11**

Andrew Olson was elected mayor three times in succession. In 1910, Olson favored the wheel tax. He also proposed the issuing of bonds for the purpose of building a city hall. He lost the election in 1911 to Martin R. Carlson by 1,000 votes. Olson was born in 1875 at Ingelstorp, Skåne, and arrived in America with his parents in 1879. (His father Nels Olson was a tailor.) Andrew Olson studied law at University of Michigan and became an attorney.



*Mayor Andrew Olson. Artist unknown. A Portfolio of Cartoons, as published by the Moline Daily Dispatch, 1913. Rock Island County Historical Society. Published by permission from The Dispatch.*

### **Martin R. Carlson, Mayor 1911-18**

Martin Carlson was born in 1888 in Moline, the son of G. F. Oscar Carlson, who was born in Sweden in 1857 and Olive M. nee Wickstrom, born in 1863 in Moline. Martin Carlson and his brother established the firm of Carlson Brothers Commercial Stationery at 417 15<sup>th</sup> Street. He was serving his second term as mayor when he married Dr. Hada Burkhard, a successful young physician, in the home of the groom's parents, Mr. & Mrs. G. F. Carlson, 317 Fourth Avenue. The assistant minister was Rev. J. F. Nelson of the Swedish Methodist Church. The newlyweds made their home at 1845 15<sup>th</sup> Street Place. The article stated that the groom had always resided in

Moline. He served seven years before resigning in 1918.



*Mayor Martin R. Carlson, Moline. Artist unknown. See previous reference. Published by permission.*

### **Claud W. Sandstrom, Mayor 1922-1929**

Sandstrom won the first election by only a few hundred votes but was handily re-elected in 1925.

He was born in Sweden, the son of Mr. & Mrs. John Sandstrom. His father died in St. Paul and his mother in Red Wing, Minnesota. In the records for First Lutheran Church in Red Wing, I found Claus W. Sandstrom, born November 18, 1872, in Rinna, Östergötland. He had emigrated in 1880, apparently with his parents, who were recorded on another page. They were Johan Wilhelm Sandstrom, born in 1842 in Rök and Charlotta Josefina

nee Sand, born in 1846 in Rinna, both places located in Östergötland.



*Mayor C. W. Sandstrom  
Reproduction, 1929.  
(Former Sandstrom Studio)*

In 1995, Claud married Marie Boone of Kansas City, Missouri. They lived at 612 20<sup>th</sup> Street in Moline. He owned the Sandstrom Studio and was a resident of Moline for 31 years. His memberships included the Vikings and the Svithiod Club, and many other organizations. He was a Republican.

#### **Hjalmar Oakleaf, Mayor 1949-51**

Hjalmar Oakleaf was born March 12, 1892 in Jönköping (city and county), Sweden, and came to Moline with his parents, Axel and Hilda Oakleaf, when he was one year old. The family lived at 162 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Moline. (No relation to the Oakleafs who were attorneys.) As a young man he worked for Deere and Mansur. He was active in the Republican Party even before seeking election as an alderman. He then moved to California, where he entered the Coast Artillery during World War I, serving two years. After the war, he enrolled at Colorado

School of Mines, graduating as a mining engineer. Having worked in several mines in the Rocky Mountain region, he returned to Moline, where he resumed employment at Deere.

Oakleaf's memberships included the fraternal lodges, Thor, Nobel, and Olive. He was single and lived with his brother, Ernest, in the parental home. He died August 24, 1951, following a car crash three weeks earlier near Walnut, Illinois, while still in office as mayor. He was 59 years old. The funeral was at First Lutheran in Moline. The place of burial is Riverside Cemetery in Moline.

#### **Paul C. Johnson, Mayor 1951-57**

Paul C. Johnson served as mayor-pro-tem upon the death of Mayor Oakleaf before being elected to the office. He was born November 14, 1907 in Fulton, Illinois, to Charles and Myrtle Mae Johnson. In 1937, he married Marguerite Althea Eastman.

During his term of office, the city was equipped with storm drains, street lights, parking meters and parking lots. There was a hospital expansion; City Hall was remodeled, and dial telephones were installed.

Johnson belonged to the Scandinavian Fraternity of America. He and his wife resided in California for several years. Their daughter and son-in-law lived in Malibu. Paul Johnson died in California December 27, 1997.

#### **Robert W. Anderson, Mayor 1981-1989**

Mayor Anderson was born February 2, 1927 in Moline, the son of Oscar and Frances Anderson. He was a World War II Veteran. After the war, he enrolled at Augustana College and gra-

duated in 1951. In 1955, he married Patricia A. Hartzell.



*Mayor Robert W. Anderson Photo courtesy of Mrs. R. W. Anderson.*

Before he was elected mayor, Anderson served as alderman, 1973-1981. During his terms as mayor he had to face skyrocketing unemployment. Mr. Anderson was instrumental in making the civic center a reality.

Anderson owned and operated R. W. Anderson Company, a bicycle store in Moline for many years. He died in 1997.

#### **O. F. Anderson, City Treasurer 1893-94**

Otto Fredrik Anderson was born in 1866 at Trehörna, Sweden. Having arrived in this country with his family at the age of three, he later attended Davenport Business College, whereupon he secured employment at Moline National Bank as a bookkeeper. In 1891

he became a teller and assistant treasurer for Moline State Savings Bank. Having served as city treasurer, 1893-1894, he became chairman of the finance committee in 1895. He belonged to the Swedish Republican Club, the Moline Art Association, and the Swedish Olive Lodge.

#### **G. A. Shallberg, City Attorney**



*G. A. Shallberg, Moline. Artist unknown. See previous reference. Published by permission.*

Gustavus A. Shallberg was elected city attorney in 1905. He was born in 1876 in Moline, the son of Andrew and Hanna S. Shallberg (Falk), both born in Sweden. His father, Andrew Shallberg, served as city commissioner. See also Borg & Beck Company under Businesses.

**City clerks:** C. G. Carlson was elected City Clerk the first time in 1889. Before that he served as assistant to Mayor Gustaf Swenson. Carlson was born in 1854 in Östergötland and emigrated with his parents in 1868, settling at first in Swedona, Illinois.