

## CHAPTER 4

A Community Created:  
Chicago Swedes, 1880-1950

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*We do not want to form a state within a state; but we want the Swedes to be a salt in America that has a savor.*

Vilhelm Lundstrom (1922)

By 1880 the presence of Swedish immigrants had been evident in the city of Chicago for nearly forty years. Countless early immigrants passed through Chicago on their way to the rich farmland in the Midwest, but an increasing number began to realize the opportunities that Chicago offered and remained in the city. As Chicago grew in population and in area, its Swedish population likewise increased. In 1880, Chicago — a city only forty-three years old — boasted half a million inhabitants, nearly thirteen thousand of whom were born in Sweden. Most of these Swedes lived in centralized enclaves, but this pattern of settlement changed in subsequent years. By 1920 the number of Swedish immigrants and their children in Chicago had reached 121,326.<sup>1</sup> As Swedish immigrants moved to Chicago's newly developing suburbs, they brought strong ethnic organization affiliations with them. These voluntary associations — both religious and secular — gave the city greater personal meaning and provided a means of uniting the immigrants' past in Sweden with the reality of living in urban Chicago.

Ulf Beijbom has provided the most comprehensive analysis of Swedish settlement in Chicago. His book *Swedes in Chicago*, delving into the early Swedish community in Chicago between 1846 and 1880, breaks down the settlement pattern of Swedes in Chicago into three distinct periods: the squatter period, the formation of three main enclaves, and the era of the suburb. During

1. Statistics drawn from *The People of Chicago: Who We Are and Where We Have Been* (Chicago: Department of Development and Planning, 1970).

the early squatter period, slum conditions predominated and life was marred by poverty and epidemics of cholera. By 1860, as Swedes became a bit more economically secure, they were moving to newly developing ethnic enclaves. The largest enclave became known as Swede Town and was located on the near North Side of the city. The other enclaves, numerically less significant, were found on Chicago's South and West sides. When Beijbom leaves the Swedes in 1880, they are living largely in these three main ethnic clusters.<sup>2</sup>

The era of Swedish suburbanization, however, was at hand. From 1880 to 1920, Swedes settled in suburban regions throughout the greater Chicago area. Better economic conditions and the changing ethnic composition of the city encouraged Swedes to move to these new regions, where they could build and own their own homes. And movement to suburban regions was accompanied by a proliferation of Swedish churches and clubs, institutions that provided the means for them to transfer their ethnic affiliations to new, scattered areas of Chicago, adding continuity to their lives and reaffirming their ethnicity.

The decade of the 1880s witnessed the merging of two separate trends: a surge in the number of people immigrating to the United States from Sweden and an explosive growth in the physical size and population of Chicago. Between 1879 and 1893, nearly half a million Swedes arrived in the United States, an average of over thirty-two thousand per year. A number of economic conditions created this mass exodus from the homeland, including crises in the timber and iron industries and the devastation of Sweden's agricultural sector.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, Chicago was a boomtown, offering jobs and plenty of space in which to live. During the 1880s alone, Chicago's population doubled, reaching a total of a million people; in that decade the number of Swedes living in the city more than tripled. This population explosion occurred simultaneously, with significant changes in the structure of the city of Chicago. The trend of population movement away from central Chicago, which had begun with the Chicago Fire in 1871, continued with the great influx of people during the 1880s and led to the ultimate annexation of these areas to the city in 1889. In this process, the size of the city grew by 125 square miles. Chicago's inhabitants lived in widely scattered areas, and population hubs remained interspersed with small truck farms often isolated from each other and removed from the city.<sup>4</sup>

The 1884 Chicago school census shows that Swedes were only beginning

2. Ulf Beijbom, *Swedes in Chicago. A Demographic and Social Study of the 1846-1880 Immigration* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1971).

3. Sten Carlsson, "Why Did They Leave?" in *Perspectives on Swedish Immigration*, ed. Nils Hasselmo (Chicago: Swedish Pioneer Historical Society, 1978), 25-35; Carlsson, "Chronology and Composition of Swedish Emigration to America," in *From Sweden to America: A History of the Migration*, ed. Harald Rumbom and Hans Norman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 114-29.

4. *The People of Chicago: Historic City: Settlement of Chicago* (Chicago: Department of Development and Planning, 1976); *Residential Chicago: Chicago Land Use Survey* (Chicago: Chicago Planning Commission, Works Progress Administration, 1942).

to respond to this trend in outward migration. This census gives a comprehensive listing of population by ethnic group, making it possible to analyze the density of Swedes and other ethnic groups in wards and in smaller districts within those wards. According to the 1884 census, 23,755 Swedes lived in Chicago: 58 percent on the North Side, 26 percent on the West Side, and 16 percent on the South Side. On the North Side the Swedish population centered around the area designated as Swede Town, concentrating most heavily in the region bordered by Division, Superior, Franklin, and Larrabee streets, and the North Branch of the Chicago River. Other important areas of Swedish settlement on the North Side surrounded this core; only one ward district as far north as Lincoln Park reflected any significant Swedish settlement. On the West Side, no such tight clustering of the Swedish population existed. The heaviest density of Swedes occurred in the southeast portion of North Lawndale, with other significant areas located on the near West Side, and in German and Norwegian sections of West Town. On the South Side, no census district held more than three hundred Swedes; the largest concentration of Swedish population occurred in an east-west corridor through Armour Square, McKinley Park, Bridgeport, and Douglas. On the whole, in 1884, Swedes most often settled in regions of Chicago with other immigrants, usually those from Germany, Ireland, and Norway. No Swede could be sheltered from interacting with other ethnic groups in the city.<sup>5</sup>

After this time, both the Swedish population and the population of the city of Chicago continued to grow. In 1890, when the number of people in Chicago reached the million mark, Swedish-born inhabitants and their American-born children represented nearly 6 percent of Chicago's entire population, ranking as the third largest ethnic group — behind the Germans and the Irish. Although immigration from Sweden declined during the American economic problems in the 1890s, it resumed from 1900 until the beginning of World War I. During the 1890s, the *Swedish-born* population in Chicago increased 14 percent, and from 1900 to 1910 it grew another 30 percent, to a peak of sixty-three thousand people. By the end of the next decade, this pattern of growth reversed itself, as the Swedish-born population actually declined by 7 percent. In 1920, over fifty-eight thousand American-born Swedes lived in Chicago. By this time, Chicago's incorporated area was fully integrated into the

5. *Report of the School Census, City of Chicago* (Chicago: Board of Education, 1884). The neighborhood boundaries were determined by sociologists at the University of Chicago in the 1930s and published in Ernest W. Burgess, ed., *Community Factbook* (Chicago: Chicago Recreation Commission, 1938). The 1884 census lists the "Nationality of White Persons by Wards"; African Americans and Asians are not included in these population figures. The census categorizes "Americans" as a separate ethnic group, and thus includes native whites only. Nationalities are not given for inmates of orphan asylums, hospitals, "Homes for the Friendless," and penal institutions, but these people are included in total population figures.

metropolitan region by a public transportation network that linked the outlying neighborhoods to the central business district.<sup>6</sup>

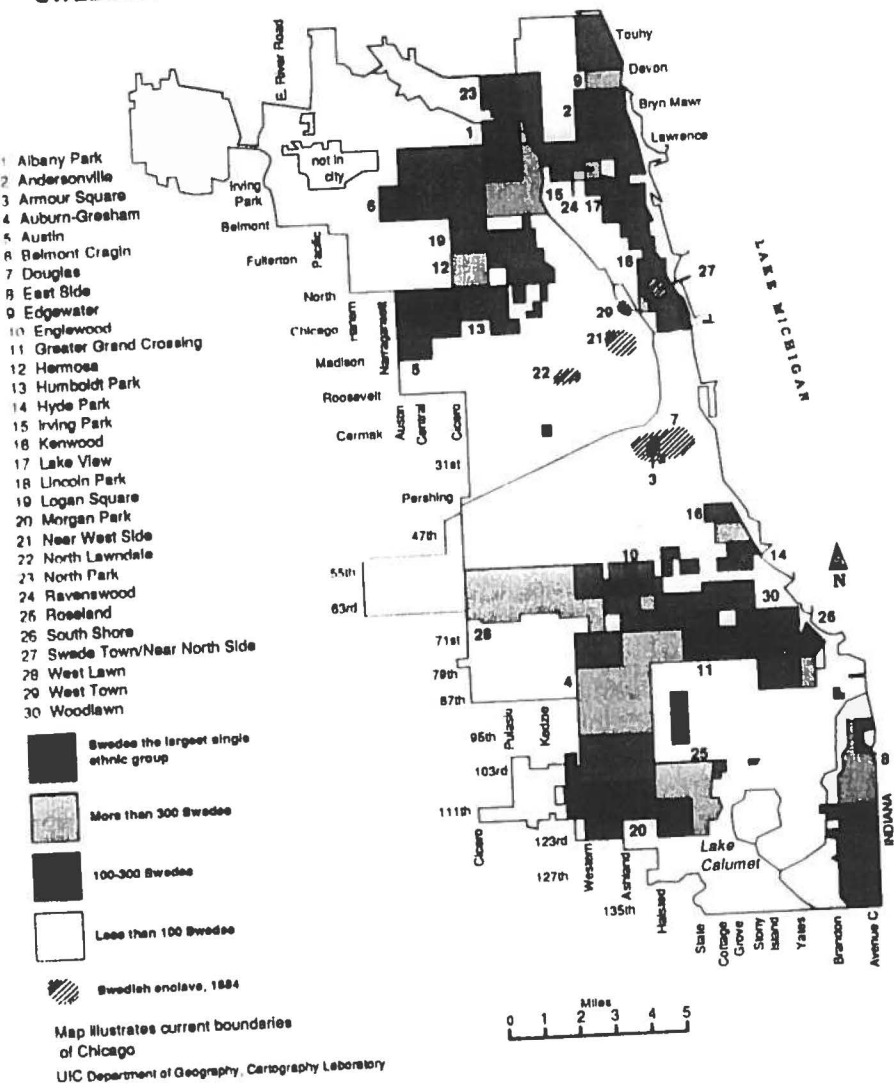
A look at the 1920 United States census reveals how the Swedes living in Chicago distributed themselves, reflecting an overall process of outward migration and population dispersal. Previously important regions of habitation, such as Swede Town, West Town, and the area on the South Side between 21st and 39th streets, reflected a remarkable decline in their importance to Swedish settlement. These areas came to be dominated largely by immigrant groups from southern and eastern Europe and by African Americans. By 1920 most Swedes lived in a ring outside the city's core, away from industrial areas along the North and South branches of the Chicago River. The primary areas where Swedes were the largest single ethnic group included the North Side neighborhoods of Lake View near Belmont Avenue and Clark Street, Andersonville at Clark Street and Foster Avenue, and North Park, located farther west on Foster Avenue. In western Chicago, Swedes dominated the Austin and Belmont-Cragin communities. In the southern part of Chicago, primary areas included one census tract in Armour Square — an old Swedish neighborhood — and several areas on the far South Side of Chicago: Hyde Park, Woodlawn, Englewood and West Englewood, South Shore, Greater Grand Crossing, East Side, Morgan Park, and Roseland. A number of other areas on the outskirts of the city held significant Swedish settlements. On the whole, despite the influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, Swedes were least likely to settle in census districts dominated by Greeks, Czechs, Hungarians, Russians, Poles, Yugoslavians, and Italians; instead, they continued to settle near Germans, Irish, and Norwegians.<sup>7</sup>

The creation of the Swedish community in Chicago occurred in the context of this outward movement of the Swedish population. Although clusters of Swedish people were a necessary ingredient of institutional life, the community itself went beyond the purely territorial dimension of enclave settlement patterns. The voluntary associations created by the immigrants in the form of churches and social organizations transcended neighborhood boundaries, creating a complex institutional web throughout the city. From 1880 to 1920, the Swedes built more than 72 churches and more than 130 secular clubs. The variety of churches established — Augustana Lutheran, Mission Covenant, Free Church, and the Swedish branches of the Methodist and Baptist churches, among others — reflected the particular denominational interest of the Swedish people. Secular societies tended to develop in neighborhoods after the estab-

6. Cf. Carlsson, "Why Did They Leave?" and "Chronology and Composition of Swedish Emigration to America." See also *The People of Chicago; Land Use Survey*, 5; and "From Intramural to I," Chicago Historical Society Pamphlet Collection, 1923.

7. All 1920 census data extracted from Ernest W. Burgess and Charles Newcomb, eds., *Census Data of the City of Chicago, 1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931). In this census study, American born are considered separately, thus ethnic groups reflect only the foreign born. Americans dominated nearly all the census tracts.

## SWEDISH NEIGHBORHOODS IN CHICAGO, 1920



lishment of the mainline Swedish churches at a point when the Swedish population was large enough to sustain a variety of organizational interest. The result was the creation of diverse Swedish enclaves in widespread areas of Chicago.<sup>8</sup>

In 1880, thirteen Swedish churches existed in Chicago; all but one were located in Swedish enclaves in Swede Town, Douglas-Armour Square, and West Town. Since transportation networks in the city of Chicago were not fully developed, members of these older churches who moved to new suburbs of Chicago could not easily reach their old congregations, so they built new churches closer to their homes that reflected their particular denominational persuasion. Once built, these churches became magnets for first-time members. Swedes organized at least twenty-seven churches in Chicago during the 1880s alone, more than tripling the 1880 number. These churches were built in regions just beginning to show their importance to Swedish settlement: South Chicago, South Shore, Pullman, Roseland, and Englewood on the South Side; the Lower West Side, Austin, and Humboldt Park on the West Side; and Lake View, Logan Square, and Ravenswood on the North Side. Growth continued during the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century, when the number of Swedish churches grew by forty-two. Additional neighborhoods where Swedish churches were built included the Summerdale-Andersonville area, North Park, Irving Park, Edgewater, Portage Park, Hyde Park, and West Englewood. From 1910 to 1920, the number of new Swedish-speaking churches established in Chicago dropped sharply — only three new churches were founded. The era of rampant institutional expansion drew to a close as the number of native-born Swedes in Chicago dropped and an American-born, English-speaking generation took their place.<sup>9</sup>

Swedish organizational life, in its infancy in 1880, matured in the subsequent decades. According to Beijbom, forty Swedish organizations existed in Chicago prior to 1880, varying in purpose from general social interaction aimed at the middle class to trade societies and sports and recreation clubs.<sup>10</sup> Most of

8. Church addresses and listings derived from Tom Hutchinson, comp., *The Lakeside Annual Directory of Chicago* (Chicago: Chicago Directory Company, 1880, 1889, 1899, 1910, 1915, 1917).

9. Statistics and locations of Lutheran churches derived from *Protokoll hållet vid Skandinaviska Evangeliska Lutherska Synodens årsmöte (1880-94)*; *Referat öfver Evangelisk Lutherska Augustana-Synodens årsmöte (1895-1920)*; *Almanack* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1920). For Covenant Church statistics, see *Protokoll Svenska Evangeliska Missions Förbundet i Amerika* (Chicago, 1885-1920); for Baptist information, see *Arbok för Svenska Baptist församlingarna inom Amerika* (Chicago, 1908, 1909); for Methodist churches, see *Protokoll öfver förhandlingarna vid Nordvestra Svenska årskonferensen (1877-93)*; *Protokoll för det första arliga sammanträdet af Metodist Episkopal Kyrkans Svenska Central Konferens (1894-1920)*. Free Church information is found in *De första tjugo åren eller begynnelsen till Svenska Evangeliska Frikyrkan i Nord Amerikas Förenade Stater enligt protokoll införda i Chicago Bladet (1883-1903)*; *Protokoll öfver Svenska Evangeliska Fria Missionens årsmöte (1904-20)*.

10. Beijbom, *Swedes in Chicago*; Beijbom, "Swedish-American Organizational Life," in *Scandinavia Overseas: Patterns of Cultural Transformation in North America and Australia*, Harald Runblom and Dag Blanck, eds. (Uppsala: Centre for Multi-ethnic Research, 1986), 57f.

these associations were loosely organized and few survived beyond 1880. None exerted positions of leadership in Swedish associational life after that date. The newer organizations differed significantly from their predecessors. Functionally, many of them served purposes of social interaction, much like earlier associations. In the case of fraternal societies, however, that social agenda was balanced with a beneficiary system that provided sick and death benefits to workers and their families who were unprotected in their American work environment. This social insurance program broadened the appeal of many benevolent societies beyond the middle class to include many working-class individuals. Structurally, the new associations departed widely from earlier models, as groups such as the Svithiod and Viking orders created overarching grand lodges, with smaller, neighborhood lodges functioning as subordinated clubs. Upon moving to new areas of Chicago, many Swedish settlers laid the foundation of new associations in their neighborhoods. This expansion under the guise of central grand lodges created an umbrella effect that kept the structure of large organizations intact while allowing for branch lodges to follow the Swedish population into dispersed areas throughout the city.<sup>11</sup>

As Swedes abandoned their older ethnic enclaves for new neighborhoods, the neighborhoods themselves underwent a transformation from farmland to subdivision to ethnic enclave. Both small and large Swedish hubs that had begun as outlying farming regions subdivided into urban settlements on the outskirts of the city. New settlers moved to these areas to build their own homes and improve their living conditions. For example, Swedes living in Armour Square in the 1880s worried about their health: the factories springing up in the area, as well as the stockyards, polluted the air. When they had the opportunity to move farther south to new suburbs such as Englewood, many did so. Some economic stability was needed to afford a new home in Englewood, but as one son of Swedish immigrants remembered, "It was just as cheap in the long run to go to the newer sections and build a new home" as it was to upgrade an older home in Armour Square.<sup>12</sup> To Swedes who had any intention of staying in Chicago, conditions in Armour Square were not acceptable. This same man observed that "there were lawns and gardens to be found in the new places, whereas down in the old settlement the houses were built to the sidewalks, and no chance was given for any beautification. The people down there began to be nothing but foreigners who cared nothing for making the neighborhood attractive."<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that this comment came from a second-generation Swede, who apparently considered his family to be quite Americanized.

11. Axel Hulten, ed., *Swedish-American Participation in "A Century of Progress"* (Chicago: A.V.S.S. Festcommittee, 1933), in the Swedish American Archives of Greater Chicago, North Park College; *Runnistningar: Independent Order of Vikings 1890-1915* (Chicago: Martenson, 1915).

12. Chicago Historical Society, *Documents: History of . . . Communities, Chicago*, research under the direction of Vivian Palmer, Chicago, 1925-30, vol. 6, part 1, doc. 9e.

Swede Town continued to be the largest single hub of Swedish population during the 1880s, after which time its relative importance to Swedish settlement began to decline. Church membership in that region peaked during 1887 at Immanuel Lutheran Church and in 1892 and 1893 in the Covenant and Methodist churches respectively.<sup>14</sup> A German grocer living in the district during this period noted that "it was an Irish, German and Swedish neighborhood then. The people didn't live in segregated groups but did live altogether harmoniously."<sup>15</sup> The nature of Swede Town, however, soon began to change. A Jewish business leader observed that the coming of the elevated train (the "L") changed the neighborhood dramatically: "It became a poorer district and more commercialized. The 'L' was noisy and people did not like to live near it, consequently, rents decreased."<sup>16</sup> A Swedish woman attributed falling rents to "the factories [that] have been encroaching upon the district."<sup>17</sup> Swedes were also unhappy with demographic changes, as Italians and African Americans moved into the area. "Before the Italians came," claimed this same Swedish woman, "the district was much better and cleaner." She noted that the "Swedish people sold two of their churches to the Negroes very cheaply."<sup>18</sup> The Free church and Baptist church moved to new locations on the North Side in 1910 and 1911, and Immanuel Lutheran relocated in Edgewater in 1920. A number of people believed that the "coming of Italians has . . . caused the Swedish and Irish to move north."<sup>19</sup> This may have been partially true, but to many Swedes the possibility of building new homes in attractive neighborhoods proved to be the most powerful incentive for moving to new areas of the city.

In the 1870s, Lake View was largely a rural community where truck farming and livestock trading dominated local affairs. Gradually, the area began to assume the characteristics of an urban neighborhood. In the next decade — known as the "Golden Years" in Lake View — building boomed and the population soared. *The Chicago Land Use Survey*, conducted in 1940 and published in 1942, estimated that 43 percent of all homes in Lake View were built between 1880 and 1894.<sup>20</sup> Churches of a variety of denominations and ethnic persuasions were established in Lake View during this time, including five Swedish churches. From 1890 to 1919, Swedes established eleven lodges in the area. Although the Trinity Lutheran Church continued to grow after 1920, membership in Lake View's Methodist church peaked in 1908, and in the Covenant church in 1913. By this time, a University of Chicago student observed that "the

14. *Protokoll* from Lutheran, Mission Covenant, and Methodist denominations.

15. Palmer, vol. 3, part 2, doc. 18.

16. *Ibid.*, doc. 21.

17. *Ibid.*, doc. 22.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, doc. 23, interview conducted by Mr. Zorbaugh, 1923.

20. *Land Use Survey*; Stephen Bedel Clark and Patrick Butler, *The Lake View Saga, 1837-1985* (Chicago: Lakeview Trust and Savings Bank of Chicago, 1985), pamphlet collection, Chicago Historical Society.

Belmont Avenue-Clark Street neighborhood had definitely taken on the aspect of a temporary stopping place for immigrants. Since then the older residents have moved farther north."<sup>21</sup> Lake View continued to be an important Swedish enclave, but it was beginning to relinquish its prominence to Andersonville, its neighbor to the north.

The development of a Swedish enclave in the Summerdale-Andersonville area demonstrates the persistence of ethnicity in a new suburb. Before 1890, this region was mostly rural, inhabited by a handful of American, German, and Swedish settlers who operated truck farms, blacksmith shops, or earned some kind of livelihood from the traffic passing through on its way to the city. Developers subdivided the land in 1890, but the boom in settlement came after 1908, when transportation links to the city improved and made Andersonville a viable residential option for those people who commuted to work. Fred Nelson, a Swede who moved to Summerdale in 1892, observed that at the time only a few Swedish families lived there, most of them arriving after 1890: "The influx [of Swedes] was always gradual. . . . I would say the reason Swedish people came here was because lots were cheap. They came from Swedish settlements further south."<sup>22</sup>

The Ebenezer Lutheran Church, formed in 1892, was the first Swedish church in Andersonville. Before that time, Swedes had not migrated to the area in any significant numbers, and the Swedish population could not sustain ethnic institutions. Many of the earliest Swedish settlers, therefore, attended American churches since no ethnic options existed. A pastor of the Summerdale Congregational Church reminisced about the time when his church was truly a community church, drawing in its neighbors regardless of their ethnic persuasion. "There were some Scandinavians in the locality when the church was started in 1890. . . . But after 1900 with the increase in the Scandinavian element in our population, the membership decreased, for the Scandinavians very naturally and properly went to their own religious organizations as they were organized. In 1914, then, when the Swedish influx assumed its largest proportions, our little church was nearly in a state of insolvency."<sup>23</sup> A member of another Congregational church in the area remembered that "when the Swedish churches came and took the Swedish members away from us we couldn't make the church pay."<sup>24</sup> Swedes who had had no alternative but to join American churches attended their own ethnic institutions once they were built, demonstrating the strength of Swedish affiliations even after a period of interaction with non-Swedes.

By 1920, Swedish arrivals in Chicago were greeted by a complex ethnic community fundamentally different from the community of 1880. The city of

21. Palmer, vol. 3, part 1, doc. 10.

22. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, part 1, doc. 19, 1.

23. *Ibid.*, doc. 28, 1, interview with Rev. Silas Meckel.

24. *Ibid.*, doc. 6, 4, interview with Walter H. Baxter.

Chicago had grown and expanded, and its population had become more ethnically diverse. The Swedish enclaves, no longer as centralized as they had been in 1880, spread throughout the city. Swedes coped with this dispersion by creating institutions that allowed for continuity of expression in terms of their ideological, religious, and social values, and which mitigated the possible dislocating and alienating effects of migration. Instead of shaping Swedish American behavior by loosening ethnic ties, the newly developing suburban regions allowed Swedish immigrants to exert power over their environment and recreate their community affiliations. While reflecting the diversity within the Swedish community, the existence of these institutions strengthened ethnic consciousness in areas removed from central Chicago and asserted the Swedish presence in the city.

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After 1920, the Swedish-born population of Chicago diminished dramatically, from 65,735 in 1930 to 7,005 in 1970. The population of Swedes and their American-born children dropped during these same years from 140,913 to 26,988. Between 1930 and 1950, Swedish immigrants and their children still ranked as the city's fifth largest group, behind Poles, Germans, Russians, and Italians; but the *Swedish-born* proportion of Chicago's population had shrunk considerably, from 1.95% in 1930 to only 0.86% in 1950. The decade of the 1960s marked a turning point in the ethnic composition of the city: Swedes went from the seventh largest group in 1960 to the fourteenth in 1970, only 0.21% of Chicago's population. By that time, many more groups had surpassed the Swedes, including those from Mexico, Greece, Yugoslavia, Ireland, Lithuania, Cuba, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and the Philippines.<sup>25</sup>

The primary reason for the decline in the Swedish population in Chicago was the overall drop in the number of Swedish immigrants arriving to American shores. Swedish immigration never again reached the levels of the 1880s, and after a brief surge in the 1920s, it flattened out during the Depression. Despite the declining numbers, Chicago itself remained a favorite destination of American-bound Swedish immigrants well into the 20th century: in 1940, Chicago was still the largest Swedish-American city in the United States, with nearly twice as many inhabitants of Swedish stock as the second largest city, Minneapolis.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, as Harald Runblom points out, the Swedish population in Chicago was younger than in most other American cities, thus Chicago "received much stronger impulses from Sweden during the last phase of mass migration," resulting in a strong Swedish cultural life.<sup>27</sup>

25. *The People of Chicago*.

26. Sture Lindmark, *Swedish America, 1914-1931: Studies in Ethnicity with Emphasis on Illinois and Minnesota* (Upsala: Studia Historica Upsaliensia, 1971), p. 31; also see Lars Ljungmark, *Swedish Exodus* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979).

27. Harald Runblom, "Chicago Compared: Swedes and Other Ethnic Groups in American

After 1920, social organizations continued to serve as important centers of Swedish ethnicity. Mirroring the decline in Chicago's Swedish population, organizational membership also diminished, particularly after 1930. Membership in the Svithiod lodges, for example, reached its peak in 1927, and after that time the lodges began to struggle with their role within the Swedish American community. As different generations of immigrants grew older, became well-adapted to life in Chicago, and were not replaced by as many new immigrants from Sweden, older fraternal orders no longer filled a necessary function of helping the newcomers adapt to the city. Instead, they served as a means of promoting ethnic identity within the city of Chicago.<sup>28</sup>

Membership in the two largest Swedish denominations, the Augustana Lutheran and Covenant churches, continued to grow after 1920. Perhaps more than any other organizations, the churches realized the importance of reaching out to a largely English-speaking second generation. The Swedish churches gradually converted their official language to English, a task that was hotly debated but was officially complete by the end of the 1920s. After that time, many churches supported only one Swedish-language service a month in order to satisfy the older immigrant generation. Even as these ethnic institutions embraced the English language, they continued to serve as important cultural centers for the Swedish American community in Chicago by perpetuating their Swedish ethnic heritage through forms of worship, music, and traditional celebrations.<sup>29</sup>

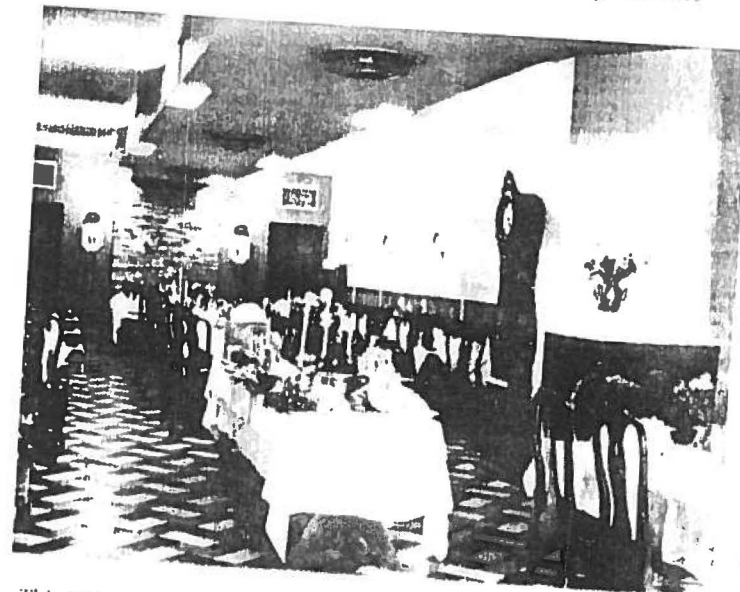
As the Swedish neighborhoods of the 1920s diversified, diminishing in their Swedish character, ethnic organizations continued to serve as important sources of identity and pride. In fact, the Swedish Americans themselves were strongly aware of the importance of preserving their own particular heritage — not only their Swedish roots, but their Swedish American legacy. The Swedish presence in Chicago had reached its centennial year when the Swedish Pioneer Historical Society was formed in 1948 to “record the achievements of the Swedish pioneers and to stimulate and promote interest in Swedish and Swedish-American contributions to the development and life of the United States of America. . . .”<sup>30</sup> In the first issue of the *Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* that appeared in 1950, Vilas Johnson, the society's president, noted: “The Americans of Swedish background hold the keys to unlock the doors to a full appreciation of the achievements of the Swedish pioneers, the Swedish immigrants and their descendants. This vital chapter in the history of America

cities,” in Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck, eds., *Swedish American Life in Chicago: Cultural and Urban Aspects of an Immigrant People, 1850-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 71-72.

28. Timothy J. Johnson, “The Independent Order of Svithiod: A Swedish-American Lodge in Chicago,” in *Swedish American Life in Chicago*, 343-363. See also Lindmark, pp. 304-320.

29. See Lindmark.

30. Christopher Olsson and Ruth McLaughlin, eds., *American Swedish Handbook* (Minneapolis: Swedish Council of America, Eleventh Edition, 1992), p. 115.



## SWEDEN HOUSE

To Dine In  
the  
Swedish  
Tradition

This Chicago Swedish restaurant advertised authentic Swedish smorgasbord dinners for 90 cents and luncheons for 75 cents in 1912. Courtesy Perry Durso collection.

that concerns the Swedes must be written without delay before priceless records are forever lost; before the memory of our many leaders and their great accomplishments have dimmed.”<sup>31</sup>

By the 1950s, Sweden-born Chicagoans lacked the numerical strength to dominate Chicago's Swedish American community and no longer numbered among the city's largest ethnic groups. Although the Andersonville neighborhood remained an important Swedish American center, with shops, churches, and nearby North Park College and Swedish Covenant Hospital, it lacked the dense clustering of Swedish residents of an earlier time. Other ethnics and Americans were moving in. But even today some Swedish flavor can be experienced there. As third- and fourth-generation Swedes dispersed residentially, the work of Swedish fraternal, churches, and foundations such as the Swedish Pioneer Historical Society, which did not depend upon residential clustering, became even more important in reminding Chicagoans of a Swedish American presence in Chicago. By mid-century and after, the ethnic identity of Chicago's Swedes was decidedly Swedish American. The descendants of the immigrants and pioneer settlers saw themselves as Americans, but with a unique Swedish-American heritage.

31. Vilas Johnson, “The Challenge to Americans of Swedish Background,” *Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* 1 (1950), 5-6.