

Book Reviews



A Swedish city: Chicago

Chicago's Swedes, *They spoke from the heart*, Lilly Setterdahl, Publisher not given, 234 pages, illustrated, softcover, Amazon.com, \$19.95 plus shipping.

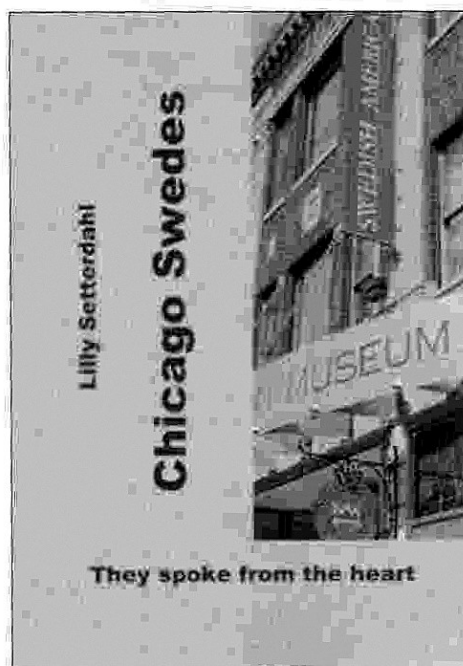
In her thirteenth non-fiction book, Lilly Setterdahl continues to add to the literature about Swedes and Swedish-Americans in the U.S. This volume is a collection of 340 oral histories and 300 photographs about Swedes in Chicago, the American city with the largest number of persons of Swedish descent in the U.S. Mrs. Setterdahl's late husband, Lennart, was an avid collector of oral histories from Swedish immigrants throughout the U.S. from the 1960's to the mid-1990's, mostly for the Emigrant Institute in Växjö, Sweden. Lilly has collected and organized her book around the materials Lennart collected about Swedes in Chicago.

The book presents these materials in six sections, based on the year of birth in Sweden of the individual being described, beginning with the period 1873-1899, then 1900-1909, 1910-1929, 1930-1965, and finally those who were born in the U.S. of Swedish parents in two groups, 1883-1919 and 1920-1943. Included also is a name index at the rear to assist readers or researchers in locating persons of interest to them. The common theme is the residence in Chicago or nearby suburbs of the individuals discussed. A photo section at the beginning illustrates many well-

known Swedish Chicago landmarks, churches, lodge halls, and other buildings including the first home of the Swedish-American museum and the present home of the same Museum.

In her introduction, the author tells a brief history of the settlement of Chicago by Swedes beginning in the 1840's, some originally headed for Wisconsin or for Bishop Hill in Illinois. The largest numbers of Swedes to settle in Chicago were born between 1890 and 1909, and came to Chicago seeking work in that city, a fast-growing town where jobs for newcomers were plentiful in the years from 1890 through the beginning of the Great Depression at the end of the 1920's.

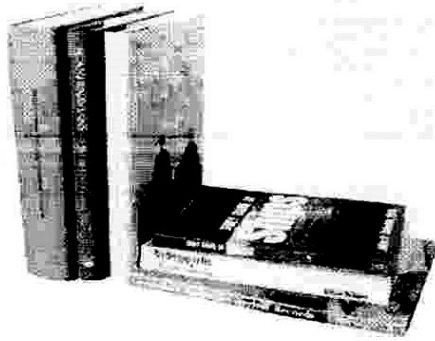
Large numbers of Swedes came to the U.S. earlier, in the period 1860-1890, but most of these immigrants headed for farm states such as Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Dakotas in search of land. Some of these also settled in Chicago but the claiming of most good farm lands and the coming of the Industrial Revolution caused later Swedes to head for the larger cities and urban jobs.



The book presents profiles of each of the persons in alphabetical order by surname in the groups by year of their birth described above. Spouses are sometimes included next to their husband, or sometimes separately. Each profile first provides a few quotations from their oral history about their lives in Sweden and their experiences as an immigrant or child of immigrants. The last paragraph in each profile gives the person's primary or current place of residence in the U.S., their place of birth and, usually, of their parents in Sweden and a few facts about their families, the ship on which they traveled, and their occupation in the U.S. Where available, information about their spouse and children is added. (Many of those giving interviews some years ago are now deceased.) There is a photograph of almost all of those included, and a reference is given with each of the profiles to enable a researcher to locate and listen to the oral history on file, either at the Vasa archives at Bishop Hill, Ill., or at the Emigrant Institute in Sweden.

Reading this collection of interviews as a whole gives the reader a fascinating view of the extraordinary variety of circumstances these Swedes encountered in their lives. Many planned to stay in the U.S. only a few years, and then return home, but most did not. Often those who went back to Sweden found themselves dissatisfied and returned again to the U.S. Reasons for leaving were lack of opportunity in Sweden, encouragement, and often free tickets, sent by family members or siblings who had already come to America. Many were born into very large families in Sweden, with as many as twelve or more children, yet in Chicago few had more than one or two or, occasionally, three children.

Few of the Swedes had any advanced education when they arrived, but nearly all could read and write. Women most frequently worked as



Book

introduction and opening to the tracing of your own family tree and family history in Sweden.

Dennis L. Johnson

maids until they married and became homemakers, but others worked as teachers, cooks, waitresses, and nurses. Men were frequently carpenters, tailors, and builders, or engaged in the building trades. A few became pastors, artists, writers, musicians, or joined a profession after obtaining more education.

The most common church affiliation was Lutheran, followed by Mission Covenant, Methodist, Baptist, and several other denominations. Most belonged to various societies and clubs including Svithiod, Vikings, Vasa, and others. Other activities included singing clubs, Daughters of Sweden, Odd Fellows, Swedish Guild, and Svea. Their Swedish origins included nearly all provinces, although the most numerous seemed to be Småland, Dalsland, and Dalarna. Most came directly to Chicago, but some made Chicago their second destination after first trying various other locations from upper Michigan to Minnesota.

Coincidentally, my wife's family were also Chicago Swedes between 1929 and 1943, but left too early to be interviewed by Lennart Setterdahl. Her father, Elmer Stonefelt [Stenfelt], was an engineer with Western Electric Company, having been born in 1896 in South Dakota to a family of Swedish immigrants. They later moved to Wisconsin and Minnesota.

To the general reader of Swedish-American history, this book adds another interesting facet to the Swedish immigrant experience in one important city in America. If your own family member is included in this collection of profiles of Swedes in Chicago, this book may give you an