

**Immanuel Lutheran Church, Evanston, a Microcosm of the Swedish Immigrant Experience**

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## **Immanuel Lutheran Church, Evanston, a Microcosm of the Swedish Immigrant Experience**

I was first introduced to Swedish culture when my husband and I came to Immanuel Lutheran Church in Evanston, Illinois in September, 1991. Up until that point, my knowledge of their traditions and customs was woefully lacking. As newcomers to the area, my husband and I went church shopping and found ourselves at Immanuel, the second stop on our list. One service and one choir rehearsal was all it took for us to throw the search list in the trash. We were immediately drawn to the congregation by its love of singing. We were amazed to find verses of hymns regularly sung a cappella. Most unusual! The resonant space and hearty participation captured our musical interest that day and later stole our heart. We'd met in the university wind ensemble and with our college days and playing opportunities behind us, we shared a lightbulb moment that perhaps we could sing together – and this was the place.

After our initial visit that Sunday morning, we boldly decided to attend the first choir rehearsal of the season that following Wednesday. Choir members were surprised to see us, but they took it in stride and gathered us in. Afterwards, we chatted with many people, but two stand out in my mind: Judy Hokenson and Mid Carlson. Both of these lovely ladies were warm, genuine, and welcoming - all things that would put strangers at ease and help them see a future for themselves in the tight knit community. As I would come to find out Judy and Mid, then about 70-75 years young, had been born and raised in the congregation. They were second generation Swedes like many of their cohort in the congregation. The history of the Swedish immigrant experience in Evanston is the story of Immanuel, the story of Judy and Mid, and the stories of their families.

## Early Evanston History

Evanston was incorporated in 1863. The Great Chicago Fire in 1871 caused a tremendous displacement of the population. Many with means moved northward to Evanston. As it was still considered countryside, there was a burgeoning need for infrastructure. Construction projects abounded to meet the needs of the new arrivals. The photo below of Simpson Street circa 1924 shows the rural nature of the area even then.



In an interview, historian and former Immanuel Pastor Frank Senn shared, "The town's population grew from 4,400 in 1880 to 13,059 in 1890. The town needed many working-class people to build and maintain these homes, and to work as maids. Working class Swedish immigrants flocked here to work as carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths, and housemaids." Given the plethora of opportunities for skilled labor, Swedish immigrants in the area did not have to start at the lowest rung of the social ladder. Unlike Irish immigrants who dug canals, new Swedes were able to put their trades to use for market wages.

### **Growth of Early Swedish Settlements and Institutions**

For perspective, Swedes had been coming to America for some time and to Illinois in particular. In his book, History of Swedes of Illinois, Ernest W. Olson (1908) records the energy of Swedish preacher Erik Jansson to bring a group of his followers to the US in the 1840's and their eventual establishment of the Bishop Hill Colony. Olson also tracks the early development of Swedish communities in Andover (Henry Country), Galesburg (Knox County), Moline (Rock Island County), and Chicago (Cook County).

Noting the growth of Swedish churches in the greater Chicago area, Olson (1908) states, "At the close of 1905, there were in Chicago and vicinity 41 Swedish Lutheran congregations having a total membership of 15,000 and owning property to the aggregate value of \$517,300. The Swedish Methodists had 18 congregations with 2,520 members and property valued at \$249,600" (p. 303).

While Methodists in the area had the Garret Evangelical Theological Seminary and the Bethany Home, Lutherans came together in education and social service as well. In 1882, the Augustana Hospital was founded by the Deaconess Society of the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church whose mission was to aid the "training of well qualified nurses, the establishment and support of hospitals, the care of the aged, the education of the young, and in general the exercise of mercy among the suffering" (Augustana Digital Commons, 2017). The facility became a respected hospital and educational center for nursing. Though the Augustana Hospital site was eventually lost to redevelopment, Lutheran General Hospital serves the same community today. Along similar lines, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois which now serves over

38,000 people a year began as an orphanage in 1867 to serve children who had lost their parents to cholera (Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, 2023).

### **Causes of Immigration**

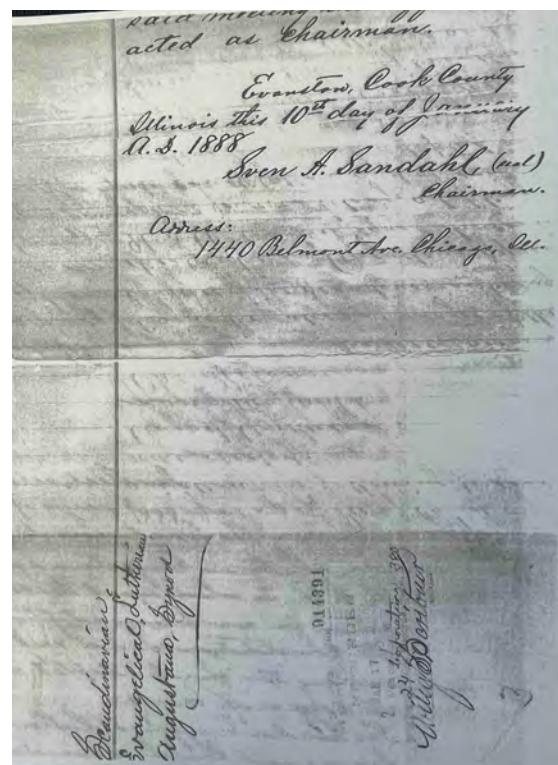
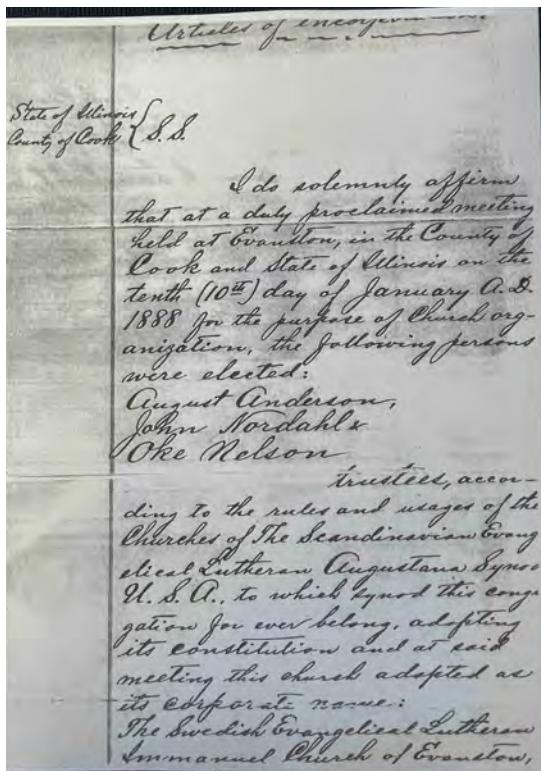
What was pulling all these Swedes to America? Immigration cannot be considered without also looking at the driving forces of emigration. Put simply, there was a lack of opportunity in Sweden at the time. The agrarian lifestyle that had been so attractive for years did not keep pace with strong population growth. Young people in particular became anxious to find a place to thrive. Emigrant guide books became popular listing tips and tricks for people making the voyage to America. The networks of Swedes began to grow as did their successes. Olson (1908) lists two lodges of Swedish fraternal societies, the “Svithiod” and “Vikingarne” with a total of 68 lodges and 30 corresponding ladies’ societies. Swedes were also active in the lodges of the Scandinavian Brotherhood of America, as well as the Free Masons and Odd Fellows (p.162).

Dr. Dag Blak (2009) in his online article, “Swedish Immigration to North America” reports that Swedes crossed the Atlantic going both ways, “Return migration was also a part of the Swedish patterns. Approximately one-fifth of the immigrants returned to their homeland. Re-migration was especially strong towards the end of the emigration era, and was more common among men, urbanites, and persons active in the American industrial sector.”

### **Beginnings of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Evanston**

Senn also detailed the early beginnings of Immanuel in the previously mentioned interview, “By 1886 there were enough Swedes here who wanted to worship in their own language that one of them, Miss Josephina Erickson, arranged for Rev. Sven A. Sandahl, of

Trinity Lutheran, then a Swedish Lutheran Church in Chicago, to conduct worship services in the home of A. Jacobson at 818 Lake Street and in rented quarters." On January 10, 1888, an organizational meeting was held with 60 persons present and Immanuel was born. The church was officially named "The Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Church of Evanston" and became part of the Scandinavian Augustana Synod.



Articles of Incorporation for the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Church of Evanston

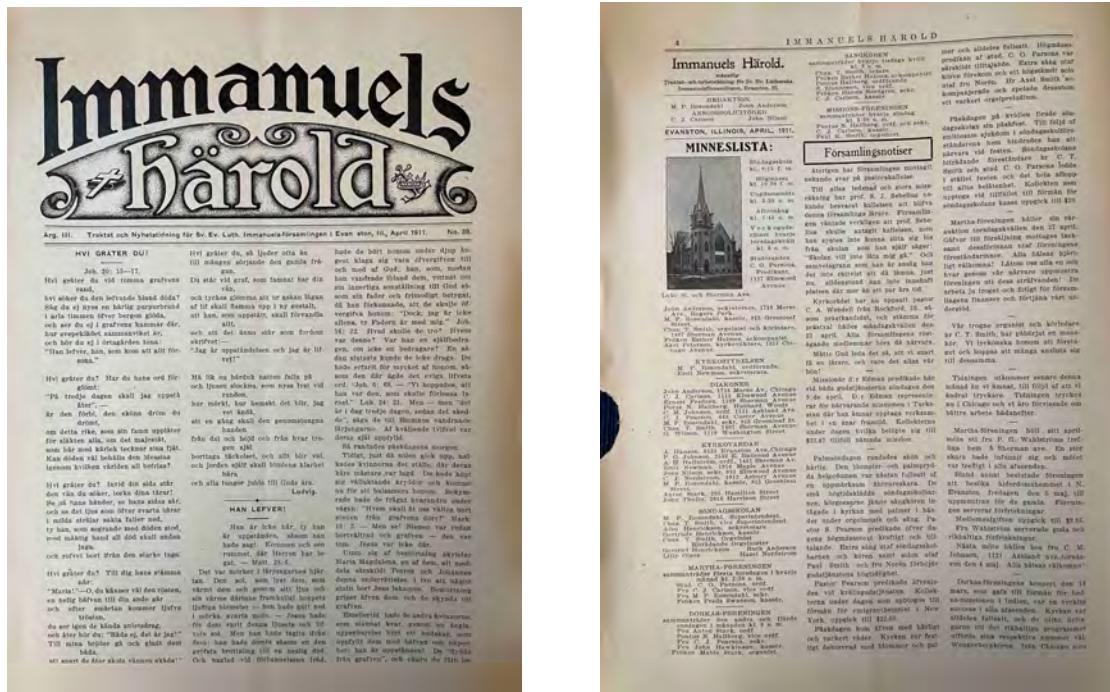
The Augustana Synod played a significant role in the movement of Swedes from one continent to the next. O. Fritiof Ander (1956) notes this impact in his book The Cultural Heritage of the Swedish Immigrant, "The large emigration from Sweden led to efforts not only by states, but also by church groups to channel the movement. The Augustana Synod sought to call the attention of emigrants as they left Sweden, as well as the immigrants upon their arrival

in America, to communities where the synod had organized congregations." (p. 62) When I joined Immanuel in 1991, the Augustana Synod had already merged with others to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), but vestiges remained. The congregation was incredibly proud of its history and displayed its Augustana Synod banners and paraments publicly for years.

### **Immanuel's Harold**

The archives of Immanuel hold a treasure trove of historical documents. Thanks to the miracle of Google Translate which provides an adequate if not scholarly translation, their stories can now spring to life. Early issues of Immanuel's Harold, described as a monthly tract and news magazine, were published regularly by Immanuel and demonstrate Alder's observations. The 8-page publication, written nearly entirely in Swedish, included news and programming of the church, Bible verses, inspirational stories, giving records, and two pages of advertising by local businesses.

The masthead from issue 39 dated April 1911 lists the editor and advertising solicitor. A picture of the church along with information and times for activities directly follows (Sunday School 9:15 a.m., High Mass 10:30 a.m., Youth Meeting 5:30 p.m., Evensong 7:45 p.m.). Below that one can find the names and addresses of council leadership, deacons and clerks; Sunday School teachers and superintendents; choir directors, accompanists and organists; leaders of the ladies sewing circle known as the Martha Society and the leaders of the Dorcas Society tasked with raising funds on behalf of the church (p.4).



April 1911 Issue of Immanuel's Harold

Highlights from this issue includes the news that the Easter services were wonderful and

filled with special music, that collections of \$22.60 were taken up for the benefit of the

Emigrant Home in New York, and that the choir director just began a Men's Chorus. Clearly

things were hopping at Immanuel (p.1).

Issue 39 of the Immanuel's Harold also included two pages of advertising from local professionals and businesses including a dentist, an ear nose and throat specialist, a pharmacist, a boarding stable and livery, a real estate agent, a fish market, a bakery, book publishers with texts in Swedish, a restaurant specifically inviting congregational members to visit, and a Swedish Advocate. In addition, there were solicitations from various banks including the Svea Building and Loan Association (p. 6-8).



Advertising in the April 1911 Issue of Immanuel's Harold

Of particular interest was an ad from A.T. Carlson who was a realtor, sold insurance for the Scandia Life Insurance Company, as well as "Steamboat tickets to or from Europe on leading Atlantic lines, letters of credit, travelers checks, and money orders" (p.6).



Advertisement for A.T. Carlson in Immanuel's Harold

### The City Missionary

Folded into some of the copies of the Immanuel's Harold, I found issues of the Stadsmissionaren or The City Missionary which touted itself as the Official Organ of the Chicago Lutheran Inner Missionary Society. In the May 1911 issue, a daily accounting was offered recapping activities of the organization, some of which included: a mission grant received from a conference meeting in Galesburg, conversations with inmates in the county jail, assistance for an old man to return to the fatherland, aid given to a man who was turned away at the county hospital and sent by special permission to the Augustana Hospital, and a donor listing of those who gave clothing for distribution to others. The issue also notes a recent program given against Mormonism and the "abominable teachings and propaganda of this religious cult. May our people both in Sweden and America be saved from the curse of polygamy" (p. 1.)

Advertisements in the issue include offerings from a lawyer, launderer, shoe merchant, piano and furniture mover, coal and wood provider, tailor, contractor and builder, furnace and sheet metal worker, veterinary surgeon, and a firm of Swedish Advocates. Perhaps my favorite is the ad from The Salubrin Laboratory, "Recognized as the best of all home remedies, it heals wounds, relieves swelling and inflammation, cures hemorrhoids, relieves pain, and is of importance even in the most dangerous diseases as a first treatment before a doctor can be procured. Aromatic and extremely pleasant. (p. 8)"

## May 2011 Issue of Stadsmisionaren

Clearly the readers of Immanuel's Harold and the Stadsmissionaren were of enough

means to consider the services provided furthering the argument that local Swedish immigrants did not start at the bottom of the rungs of American society.

## Major Milestones in Immanuel’s First 50 Years

Immanuel's history can also be seen through building improvements and language

offerings. The congregation quickly began to grow and prosper. The timeline below outlines the first 50 years of milestones in Immanuel's history. From a meager start with a secondhand, wood frame building purchased from a neighboring congregation to a newly constructed sanctuary and ownership of adjacent properties, Immanuel grew as it supported its community initially in Swedish and later in English.

### Timeline

1888	Purchase of two lots where the church and Fellowship Hall now stand at 616 Lake Street in Evanston  Purchase and move of wood frame church from nearby Bethlehem Lutheran (German)
1898	Construction of current church sanctuary.  Existing wooden church structure sold to Trinity Lutheran (Norwegian) and moved back across the railroad tracks
1900	Parsonage built on existing land
1904	Decoration of church interior
1905	Installation of first pipe organ  Creation of the Dorcas Society composed of younger women to raise money for the church
1910	Church bell installed
1912	Sunday School in English introduced
1913	Occasional services in English began. The Dorcas and Martha Societies retire the church debt.
1915	An adjacent property is purchased for use as a Girls' Home
1916	<i>Judy Hokenson is born</i>
1920	New heating system installed, painting projects completed
1922	New carpeting and light fixtures installed <i>Mid Carlson is born</i>
1925	Basement in church and parsonage improved
1930	Despite the Great Depression, exterior of church bricked
1933	Council votes to change name officially to "The Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church" with English to be used almost exclusively in services and classes
1938	The church interior was refurbished

As the years passed, the focus on the Swedish language began to wane. From the timeline, we see that Sunday School in English was introduced in 1912. In 1913 occasional services began to be offered in English and by 1933 church leadership votes to make English the dominant language (Immanuel Lutheran Church, 1988).

## Immanuel Herald

This transfer of primary language can also be seen through the publications of the church. Immanuel Harold, published in Swedish for a generation, became the Immanuel Herald. Reformatted to a smaller size and 16 pages in length, the Jan-Feb issue from 1933 is primarily presented in English. It continues to report on the activities of the congregation and includes recommended daily Scripture meditations. The masthead now lists Church School at 9:30 a.m., Morning Worship at 10:45 a.m. and Evening Worship (Swedish) at 7:30 p.m. (p.2). Articles in Swedish begin on page 12 and continue through page 14.



**Pastoral Report.**  
In order to conserve space in our church paper we submit but a brief extract from the report submitted to the congregation at its annual meeting Jan. 12, 1933.

As we gathered in the church we used Psalm 46, 4, 5. These words tell us that we have in the city of God, a tabernacle of the Most High, who is Christ. Our church is built on God, who is the Rock of our salvation, and who, in His love of us, will help her in times of distress and trouble, and bring her safely through. When our earthly things have failed us and our human strength has been used up, it is well to know that God still lives and that now can take the reins away from him. Nothing can help and encourage us like God's love and strength handed down through His church.

We labor under difficult and peculiar conditions. As the Lord has never failed us, we must labor the harder in endeavoring to know that God is still with us.

Taking all things into consideration I am glad to report that we have had a very good year. We have been engaged in the same lines as last year. Morning services have been conducted every Sunday in the English language and the services were well attended. The full choir has been present at all of these services except during the summer months. The choir under the direction of Mrs. O. E. Lindholm has given services and has been a great help to the church. The organist has contributed much to the spirit of devotion at these as well as at other special services, and we are deeply grateful thereto. The evening services have been conducted in the Swedish language, with two or three exceptions, and have not been as well attended as we thought they ought to have been. Mid-week services have been held during the part of the year Thursday evenings and have not been well attended. Communion services have been held six times during the year. We regret to report that

this year also many members have not availed themselves of the blessings that the Sacrament of the Altar gives.

We are grateful to all the workers in our Church School for the faithful and efficient work they do there. With few exceptions they are on duty every Sunday throughout the year. Now can estimate the value of a team of experienced teachers, officers, superintendents, in our School. Mrs. Nils Lindholm has served as general superintendent, Miss Hildegard Judd as superintendent of the Primary Department, and on the first of October when she, at the annual meeting of the School, asked to be relieved for the coming year: Miss Astrid Lindholm, Mrs. Anna Lindholm, Mrs. Anna Lindholm, Mr. Alvin Peacock and Miss Margaret Lindholm have charge of the Bible Class.

Our busy organizations have kept bravely on during the year 1932 as in past years. Despite the conditions of economy, atmospheric conditions of the time the spirit of service has moved right along. This is as it should be and blessed is every church where every organization is a true expression of the spirit of the Church. Everyone has a given task. We need them all, the younger as well as the older, the Master as well as the Man. Every organization has been a great help to the church. The choir, the Councils for the coming year need all the financial assistance that our organizations can give.

The Board of Administration has not the past year as in previous years. Due to the conditions of the times the trustees have had a more trying year than in previous years. Mr. William Peterson has served as chairman and financial secretary. Mrs. Alice Ericson as treasurer, Mr. Oscar Newman as recording secretary of the Board; Mr. Andrew Newman, associated by his wife, as sexton. Mr. Newman has also served as manager of the IMMANUEL HERALD, of which the pastor has been the

**IMMANUEL HERALD**

IMMANUEL HERALD published monthly except in summer by the Immanuel Lutheran Church, Sherman Ave. and Lake St., Evanston, Ill.

Rev. Oscar E. Lindholm, Editor.

M. F. Rosenthal, Asst. Editor.

Emily Newman, Mgr.

**CHURCH DIRECTORY:**

Pastor: Rev. Oscar E. Lindholm, 416 Lake St., Evanston, Ill. 1932.

Organist and Choir Director: Mrs. O. E. Lindholm, Church of the Immanuel, Sherman Ave. and Lake St., Evanston, Ill. 1932.

Treasurer: Mr. Oscar H. Peterson, 615 Burton Ave., Skokie, Ill. 1932.

Financial Secretary: Andrew Carlson, Sherman Ave. and Lake St., Evanston, Ill. 1932.

Record Secretary: Andrew Nelson, 1113 Waukegan Ave., Skokie, Ill. 1932.

Chairman of the Trustees: William Peterson.

**SERVICES:**

Church School: 9:30 A. M.  
Morning Worship (Swedish): 10:45 A. M.  
Evening Worship (Swedish): 7:30 P. M.

editor. To them and others we express our thanks for faithful service.

**Pastoral Acts:** Baptized, 12 children; two of these children of members; confirmed 13; five of members; married 12 couples; buried 10; one child born; one child buried, two of whom were members.

Three members, Mrs. Edward Nelson, Mrs. Christine Strom, and Mrs. P. G. Jensen, died during the year. The church new members were received during the year, five of whom are children. Six communions have been dimissed.

We are grateful for the many blessings that the Lord has bestowed upon us, and for the fine cooperation that the congregation has given the past year. These services, both to the poor and people who have been unable to get together to the best of our ability and pray that God may lead and guide us in the days that are to come. We wish to thank our dear pastor and his wife, shown us as well as our family.

Reportedly submitted  
Oscar E. Laxew, Pastor,  
Evanston, Ill., Jan. 13, 1933.

♦♦♦

**About the Parish.**

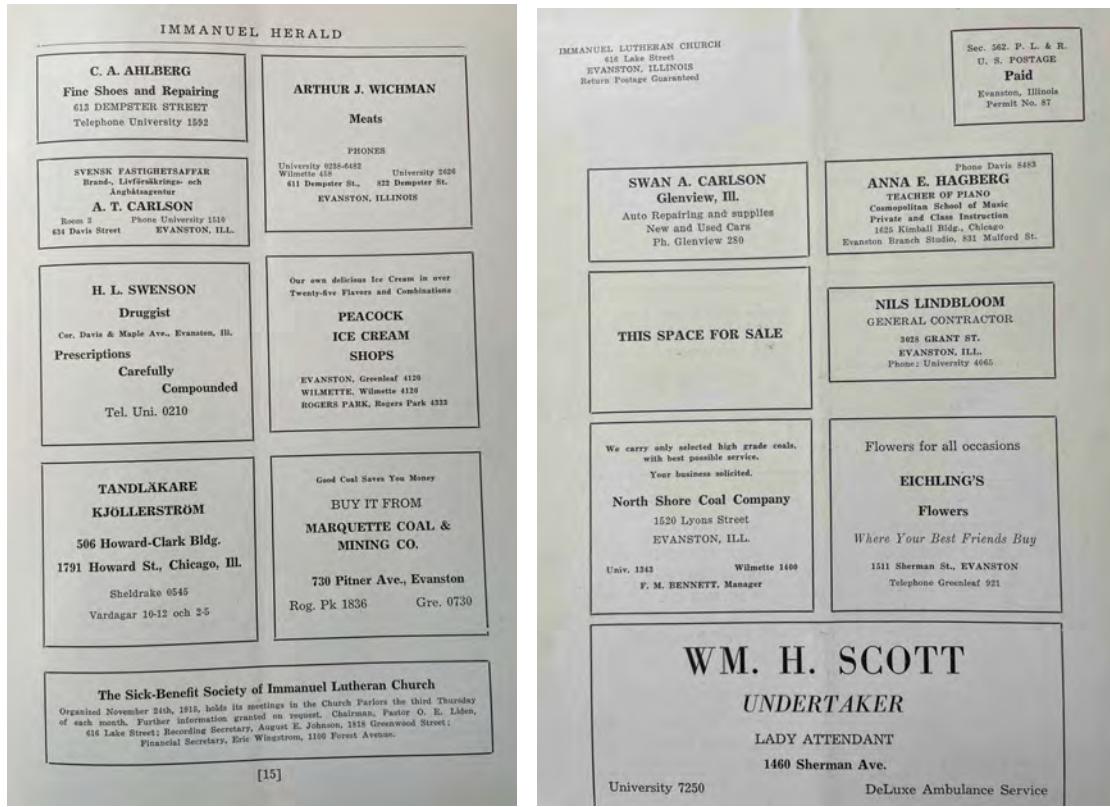
The Christmas season may bring to the past. It was fittingly ushered in Sunday evening, December 1932, when the Choir gave a beautiful rendition of the

Jan.-Feb. 1933 Issue of Immanuel Herald

Advertisements in the back of the publication are listed mostly in English, though some in

Swedish. Ads listed include A.T. Carlson still in the insurance business, a piano teacher, general contractor, butcher, druggist, coal provider, and dentist. It is interesting to note the decrease in

the number of advertisers versus the 1911 edition, underscoring the financial times of the early 1930's (p. 16)



Advertisements in the Immanuel Herald

Perhaps this shift from Swedish to English is not so surprising. Given the Naturalization Act of 1920 which mandated that citizens learn English in order to be nationalized, the push for English, particularly in schools, was amplified. I recall from talking with Judy and Mid that "many years ago" Swedish classes were offered at the church. They both said that they spoke English at school, but Swedish at home. Later, when English became more dominant in society, a Swedish Language Club was formed among Judy and Mid's peers at Immanuel. Club meetings carried on informally in homes until the two of them were well into their 90's.

### Enduring Swedish Traditions

In the late 1950s the Dorcas and Martha Societies merged into the Immanuel Church Women which presented annual Swedish programs like the Santa Lucia Festival for decades. Mid is pictured in the newspaper clipping from 1959. My daughter served as a Lucia in 2014.



Santa Lucia Fest 1959 with Mid



Santa Lucia Fest in 2014 with Eliza

Swedish traditions and foods popped up even during my years at Immanuel, multiple generations after its inception and several after Judy and Mid were young women. This suggests that the ethnic traditions of Swedes were not seen as harmful or threatening, unlike the German traditions in my own heritage. Though my father spoke German, he often chose to keep that to himself. He did not seek out others and there were no German clubs in my girlhood church or town despite large numbers of Germans in the area. Because the Swedes were not persecuted for celebrations like Santa Lucia, they lived on to be shared for decades by Swedes and others.

### **Hardships and Successes**

That's not to say that the transition to America was an easy one. Returning to Ander (1956), he writes, "The preference for the literature of the home country placed the immigrant writer of prose and poetry in a difficult position, even though his literary efforts grew directly out of the environment. Frequently it sounded a note of melancholy and loneliness as it mirrored the adjustments to American life. Sometimes it expressed that belief in the future resting upon progress and the triumph of democracy based upon individual freedom that was so typically American of the 19th century" (p. 140).

Even so, Swedes experienced success in Evanston and beyond. Consider the celebration of Swedish Day on July 20<sup>th</sup> at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. In his book, Olson (1908) devotes three pages of coverage to the spectacle which included a lengthy parade complete with dignitaries, decorated carriages and floats; a concert given by the American Union of Swedish Singers featuring three celebrated guests from the Royal Opera at Stokholm; a medley of Swedish tunes played on the chimes in Machinery Hall; a grand chorus of 400 male voices; culminating with a telegram to his majesty King Oscar II sending "greetings from fifty thousand Swedish Americans" (p. 163).

Perhaps most notable within the walls of Immanuel are two people, Pastor Gustaf F. Stark, and LeRoy Carlson. Olson (1908) profiled Pastor Gustaf F. Stark who shepherded the flock at Immanuel from 1901 to 1907, preaching in both Swedish and English. During his time with the congregation many advancements were made. His wife, Anna Stark, dedicated her life to raising funds for mission work. At her death in 1970, she bequeathed \$100,000 to the congregation to be designated into a special fund with earnings to be used to support mission

projects outside the scope of regular budgets. Gifts from the Stark Fund continue to this day. Also notable was the fact that Pastor Stark served as the president and secretary of the North Chicago Mission district of the Illinois Conference and as secretary of the Swedish Lutheran Ministers' Association of Chicago. He was also a member and secretary of the board of directors of the Anti-Saloon League of Illinois and the Chicago Law and Order League. These appointments were very much in keeping with the times, particularly in Evanston where the work Francis Willard and the Women's Christian Temperance Union prospered (Cook County (Outside Chicago) p. 253)

LeRoy Carlson provides a more contemporary example. Mr. Carlson was a lifetime member of Immanuel and his four children attended Sunday School at Immanuel. From humble beginnings with a small telephone company serving rural Wisconsin known as Telephone and Data Service (TDS), Mr. Carlson went on to found U.S. Cellular. Carlson, along with his wife, have created several professorships at colleges and universities including the Margaret D. and LeRoy T. Carlson Fellowship at Harvard Business School. The Carlson family is the funding behind Immanuel's Organ Scholar program which this year hosted contestants from Eastman, St. Olaf, and Notre Dame among others.

### **Immanuel's Lasting Impact**

The overarching role of the church in the life of newly arrived immigrants was significant. While I did not participate in Immanuel's earliest days, I did see many of the outcomes Miss Josephina Erickson might only have dreamed of. Immanuel did become a thriving cultural center growing to a height of 700 confirmed members in 1961. The congregation built an administrative and classroom building in the 1950s which is where I sit

typing this very paper. The congregation sponsored classes, bowling leagues, social events, Maypole dances, and had delicious cardamom bread at every festival. The Sewing Group, still active since Josephina went looking for a Pastor in 1886, warmly invited Eliza as a child to learn to sew.



*Eliza with Mid learning to quilt*

The light and energy of the Immanuel community drew my husband and I like moths to the flame. I am glad we did not continue church shopping. We quickly met other couples at similar life stages and raised our families here. It has been a good choice.

Now though, it is beyond heartbreaking to see that average Sunday attendance is around 40 people. I feel the weight of being given a rich and generous gift that is going to lie fallow. Such a poor steward am I! I'm so fearful that I'll be part of the crew that will shut the doors. The very thought makes me weep openly.

I know that organized religion has a checkered past and I would never want to dismiss or overlook hurts that have been caused. Immanuel isn't perfect, but it has gotten an awful lot right over time. I agree with Ander who says, "The church with its many institutions of learning and mercy is by far the mightiest monument built by the immigrants in America" (p. 102).

For that I remain humbly grateful.

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