

Swedish Space in Upper Midwestern Churches

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***Abstract:** This paper builds upon the intersection of ethnic identity and Swedish-American scholarship produced by Gradén, Klymasz, Schnell, et. al. Through an analysis of the ritualized culture of the community and the church, as well as through an analysis of reported cultural practices and forms of folklore, this paper demonstrates that the church in the Swedish-American community of the Upper Midwest acts as a space in which Swedish ethnicity, identity, even heritage and history are created.*

***Keywords:** Swedish Emigration—Swedish Immigration—Swedish America—Swedish-American Church—Swedish-American Folklore—Swedish-American Heritage—Swedish-American Identity—Swedish-American Traditions*

Traveling through the Upper Midwest, it is hard to ignore the many place names that inscribe Nordic heritage in signs, maps, and minds: Lindstrom and Finland in Minnesota; Norway and Toivola in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan; Stockholm and Denmark in Wisconsin. In each locale, Nordic heritage is further manifested as active community members make conscious choices to sustain such expressive forms and practices as family names, holiday traditions, and the creation and display of material culture. What emerges is neither Danish nor Finnish nor Norwegian nor Swedish nor thoroughly American but must instead be viewed as uniquely Nordic

American. Amanda Kolpin, writing about Lindstrom, Minnesota, suggests that “[c]ultural events and sites are often the locations where memory work takes place, which in turn serves to affirm the dominating themes of a shared identity apparent in a place’s narrative” (2011, 283). Just as Kolpin identifies the connection between these Nordic-American cultural events and a sense of shared identity, the church in Upper Midwestern communities has served as both a tangible and intangible space of Swedish identity for many Americans of Nordic descent. Indeed for many, the church has been the fundamental institution through which they have formed and performed an ethnic identity which at once distinguishes them from their non-Nordic Upper Midwestern neighbors and connects them with their immigrant and Old Country ancestors.

Swedish immigration and settlement in the Upper Midwest was accompanied by a proliferation of churches which, through their buildings and grounds, constitute distinct spaces that also extend beyond their physical boundaries, imaginatively encompassing parishes and communities. Despite the subsequent decline and consolidation of Swedish-American immigrant churches in the 1900s, many continue to manifest their Swedish-American character not only through connections with both Scandinavian Lutheranism and the various theological denominations but also through recurring place-making cultural practices which identify the church as a space of Swedishness. Swedish Americans congregate in churches not only to strengthen and preserve a sense of identity with Sweden, but also to strengthen and preserve relationships with other Swedish Americans.

When decisions are made to publicly display certain ethnic identity markers like folk costumes or foods, Swedish Americans are inferring the importance of those markers to the community as a whole (Gradén 2003, 12). Many of these displays of Swedishness in the Upper Midwest take place within the context of church life, and the organizations themselves then become creators and preservers of Swedish identity. Robert Klymasz claims that the process of examination, reexamination, discard, and revival is a process that helps to “perpetuate the community’s sense of ethnic loyalty and identity” (1973, 138), while Steven Schnell points out that “[a]ll traditions are inventions, selective reworkings of the past. They are attempts to lend current practices the imprimatur of historical precedent and to provide continuity with a past, whether real or invented” (2003, 8). Language and ethnic festivals allow Swedish Americans to claim and preserve an eth-

nic identity in the United States, but also to claim and preserve ties to an ethnic identity in Sweden.

The inclusion of both American and Swedish aspects of ethnic identity leads to an ever-changing idea of Swedishness (Gradén 2003, 20). This process of change occurred in early Swedish immigrant churches in the Midwest, and also in the Rocky Mountain region where the church played an important role in establishing communities that displayed ties to their Swedish past (Attebery 1995, 124). Today, the process continues in rural churches in the Upper Midwest through certain displays which explain what it means to be Swedish.

In this paper, I will examine Swedish-American cultural places created and sustained by Swedish-American churches—Immanuel Lutheran Church of Almelund, Minnesota; Chisago Lake Lutheran Church of Center City, Minnesota; and Bethlehem Covenant Church of Stephenson, Michigan—so as to demonstrate the importance of the church in rural areas of the Upper Midwest as a place of Swedish identity. In the course of my field work, two central elements in creating and maintaining this identity have emerged—language and festivals.¹ Before examining the way in which the interrelated phenomena of language and festivals contribute to such processes, it is necessary to sketch Swedish-American immigration history as it bears upon the churches under study.

Swedish Immigration and Swedish-American Churches

Between 1851 and 1930, approximately 1.25 million Swedes immigrated to the United States with numbers peaking between 1880 and 1900 (Ljungmark 1996, 10-11). The motives for leaving Sweden were as varied as the people themselves. In the 1800s, some left for economic reasons. A population boom resulting in a shortage of available land, coupled with crop failures, provided enough of a push for many Swedes to leave for the United States (Ljungmark 1996, 29-31). Several other reasons, such as required military service in Sweden, Swedish class structure, a lack of political freedom, labor unrest, and even religious dissent, played a secondary (or even tertiary) role in emigration; one of the most notable of these secondary mo-

1 Please see my article “Folkloristic Koinés and the Emergence of Swedish-American Ethnicity” in ARV: Nordic Yearbook of Folklore 68 (2012): 121-150 for further use of quotations and documents from my fieldwork in the Upper Midwest in an examination of Swedish-American ethnicity.

tivations was the pietist movement within the Lutheran church (Ljungmark 1996, 29-31, 35-43).

Due to this type of religious emigration, several Swedish-American denominations were formed in the United States. The largest was the Augustana Synod, which had a membership of 250,000 people across the United States at its peak in 1930 (Ljungmark 1996, 116-117). Today, the Augustana Synod is known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), and in 2010, it had over four million baptized members despite a negative trend in membership over the last decade (ELCA Membership from 1988-2010 2011).

The second largest Swedish-American denomination in the United States was the Evangelical Covenant Church (Ljungmark 1996, 117). The Covenant Church traces its roots back to the Lutheran Church in Sweden and the pietist movement of the 1800s. Many of the first members of the Covenant Church had originally been a part of the Augustana Synod but left to form separate congregations. In 1885, the Swedish Evangelical Mission Covenant of America was established, and by 1930 the Covenant Church had 30,000 members (Ljungmark 1996, 117-118). Even today, this denomination continues to play an important role in the Swedish-American communities of the Upper Midwest.

Swedish-American Churches and Communities in the Upper Midwest

Drawing on examples of three different churches from these two broad denominations, this paper will focus on the Immanuel Lutheran Church of Almelund, Minnesota, and the Chisago Lake Lutheran Church of Center City, Minnesota, as well as the Bethlehem Covenant Church of Stephenson, Michigan. Immanuel Lutheran and Chisago Lake Lutheran are both congregations in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and both have strong ties to the Swedish-American community in the Chisago County area. The Chisago County area is sometimes referred to as “Swedeland,” because of the Swedish immigrants who began arriving in the area in the 1850s, or “Mobergland,” because of the immigrant novels written by the Swede, Vilhelm Moberg, which were set in that area. This area is comprised of several towns heavily influenced by Swedish immigration and includes Chisago City and Lindstrom, as well as Almelund and Center City.²

2 For an extensive study of the area, in particular Lindstrom, Minnesota, see Kolpin 2011, pp. 4-10.

In Center City, Minnesota, the Chisago Lake Lutheran Church was founded on May 12, 1854, by the Reverend Erland Carlsson from Chicago with a congregation of approximately 100 members. In 1856, a frame church was built, which was eventually replaced by a brick church in 1882. In 1889, a new church was built after a fire destroyed the previous building, and this most recent construction still stands today (Chisago Lake Lutheran Church History n.d.). In nearby Almelund, the idea for the Immanuel Lutheran Church began in the home of Carl Gustaf Schander, an immigrant from Furuby, Sweden, at a meeting on January 31, 1887, and by the summer of that same year the church was open to the congregation (Immanuel Lutheran Church: 120 Years in 2007 n.d.). Over the years, 529 other Swedish-born immigrants became members of the Immanuel Lutheran Church of Almelund, most having immigrated to the Upper Midwest in the late 1800s (Bjorklund and Leaf 2001).³ These churches were physical spaces of Swedishness for Swedish immigrants to the Upper Midwest.

Today, these churches are still physical spaces of Swedishness, although their role within the community has evolved. Very few Swedish events are held at Immanuel Lutheran Church, although Swedish hymns are sometimes sung at funerals (A. Mortenson 2011). On the other hand, the Chisago Lake Lutheran Church does hold a number of Swedish events such as *Sankta Lucia*, *julgransplundring*, and *våffeldagen*.⁴ The church embraces other aspects of Swedishness and in January of 2012 advertised a folk art exhibition of Swedish immigrant art by Mamie Falk as well as an organ concert recorded by Woody Bernas at *Sankt Jacobs kyrka* in Stockholm (Chisago Lake Lutheran Church History n.d.). The two churches have a symbiotic relationship in that both are congregations under the ELCA, yet one, Chisago Lake Lutheran Church, acts as a place of Swedishness, while the other, Immanuel Lutheran Church, does not.

This symbiotic relationship may be due to the close proximity to the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, and the abundance of secular organizations there which provide alternative opportunities for Swedish Americans who wish to connect with their Swedishness outside of the Chisa-

3 This document was given to the author by Alice Mortenson in Chisago City, Minnesota, during a personal interview conducted on May 12, 2011.

4 *Sankta Lucia* [St Lucy's Day] is celebrated on December 13; *julgransplundring* is traditionally the day on which the Christmas tree is stripped of decorations and is celebrated on January 13; *våffeldagen* [waffle day], originally *vårfrudagen* [the Annunciation] is celebrated on March 25.

go County community. Because of this, it is not necessary that both churches act as spaces of Swedishness; instead, one suffices to meet the demand of the Swedish-American community in the region. Thus Chisago Lake Lutheran has taken it upon itself to present the church as a space of Swedishness, a place where Swedish songs are sung, Swedish festivals held, and visiting Swedish ministers hold services. The conscious decisions by the church community to take part in these public displays of ethnicity suggest implicit claims by the church on its role as a space of Swedishness, heightened by a corresponding lack of such displays at Immanuel Lutheran. Community members in turn make conscious decisions to participate in displays, thereby reinforcing the church's role as an established and easily recognizable space of Swedishness in the historically Swedish-American community.

Around the same time that the Immanuel Lutheran and Chisago Lake Lutheran Churches were founded, the Bethlehem Covenant Church was established in Stephenson, Michigan. While a group of Swedish and Norwegian settlers to the Palestine, Michigan, area began holding prayer meetings, bible study, and church services as early as 1879, it was not until January 1, 1883, that the congregation was formally organized as the Swedish Mission Church (Koller and Wikstrom 2008, 6). Today, the church continues to make strong claims to its Swedish past. The churchyard of Bethlehem Covenant Church in Stephenson, Michigan, has consistently been, and continues to be, dominated by Swedish family names. A large painting titled "The Good Shepherd" by the renowned Swedish-American artist Warner Sallman hangs in the sanctuary; Swedish songs and festivals are still a part of the church's calendar; and an annual Soup and Sandwich fundraiser night is held in which *fruktsoppa* [fruit soup] is served and identified as traditionally Swedish.

A member of the Bethlehem Covenant Church in Stephenson, Chris Koller, grew up in Chicago, Illinois, but now lives in Daggett, Michigan. Chris's grandparents and great-grandparents emigrated from Östergötland and Västergötland and initially settled in the Galesburg, Illinois, area before moving to Iowa. Before the church's annual Soup and Sandwich night, Chris told me that in all her years attending, she had never been early enough to get to taste the *fruktsoppa*, because it was so popular that it was quickly eaten (C. Koller 2011). With me in tow, we arrived early enough for both of us to sample the *fruktsoppa*. It was delicious, and more importantly for the members of the church, Swedish. Of course, not every member of Bethlehem Covenant claims Swedish ancestry, but this does not stop anyone from enjoying the soup. Swedishness as it is viewed today in

many Swedish-American communities has been expanded to allow even those who do not claim Swedish ancestry to partake (Gradén 2003, 20). Particularly Swedish aspects, such as *fruktsoppa*, are embraced, or in this case eaten, as a symbolic part of the Swedishness of the church by Swedish Americans and non-Swedish Americans alike.

Over 100 years have passed since these three churches were founded by Swedish immigrants to the United States. While all have undergone significant changes since then, two of these churches continue to act as spaces to which Swedish Americans can go to confirm and maintain their Swedish identity. Community members come to the church not only to connect with their Swedish heritage, but also to connect with other Swedish Americans who share that common bond—namely that their ancestors once crossed the Atlantic to immigrate to the United States.

The Swedish Language: Church Services and Songs

At their founding, these denominations used Swedish as their official language in the church (Ljungmark 1996, 117-118). Because of this decision, churches became a physical place for Swedes to worship in their native tongue and retain the culture which they had left behind, especially since the splintering of the Swedish religious landscape made it easier for Swedes to assimilate into the American culture of the Upper Midwest (Hale 2002, 34-35). While these immigrants used Swedish less and less in secular life, the Swedish immigrant church offered a place in which they could continue to use their native language on a regular basis. Community churches attempted to counterbalance the instruction in English used in public schools in the early 1900s (Ostergren 1990, 31). Students were sometimes reprimanded for speaking Swedish in school, as we see with John Mortenson, an American-born Swedish-speaker currently living in Chisago City, Minnesota, who was born in Chisago County in 1925. Both of his parents emigrated from Kivik in Skåne to Shafer, Minnesota, early in the 1900s. John grew up speaking Swedish at home and did not learn English until he began attending public school. Recounting an incident in which his brother spoke Swedish in school, John recalls:

När vi gick till skolan min bror, han var som mig och talade mycket svensk och det var en dag läraren sade till honom. Di hade en höna där och han sade att hönan hade en näbb. *Nej nej nej* she says, you can't. You talk English here. (2010)

[When we went to school, my brother, he was like me and spoke a lot of Swedish and one day the teacher scolded him. They had a hen there and he said that the hen had a *näbb* [beak]. No, no, no, she says, you can't. You talk English here.]⁵

However, just as in the public schools, the churches were unable to resist the use of the English language, and by the end of the 1920s the Covenant Church had adopted English as its official language; the Augustana Synod followed suit in the mid-1930s (Ljungmark 1996, 119).

Chris Koller's grandmother and grandfather, a Swedish immigrant and a first generation Swedish American respectively, left the Galesburg, Illinois, area and moved to Iowa where they became part of a larger Swedish community. Part of their integration into that community included attendance of the Covenant Church in Ottumwa, Iowa. Chris explains that her grandparents' church suffered from the language shift. She recalls that "the church did die out. For one thing because of their persistence in keeping the Swedish language, because services and all were held in Swedish and that stopped in about the 1920s" (C. Koller 2011). The Covenant Church in Ottumwa, Iowa, was unable to maintain its membership due to rapidly changing language demands; however, by attempting to keep Swedish as the official language of the church, the church members demonstrated a desire that the church be viewed as a place of Swedishness in the community. Other churches, notably Chisago Lake Lutheran and Bethlehem Covenant Church, did survive the language shift in the community and were able to position themselves as spaces in which Swedish Americans could form and preserve relationships with Sweden and other Swedish immigrants, no matter how many generations removed from emigration and no matter what the language used.

At Bethlehem Covenant Church, the continuation and creation of a Swedish-American community can be seen in the experience of Jon Bruemmer. Jon's grandmother and grandfather both immigrated to the United States in 1881 from Värmland. In fact, the two traveled on the same ship together, although they did not know each other at the time. Jon frequently attended Bethlehem Covenant Church as the grandson of the church's second pastor, John Hendrickson, an immigrant who left Sweden at the age of 21 for religious reasons. Jon's grandparents did not speak English, and Jon's mother

5 All translations are the work of the author unless otherwise noted.

did not learn English until she went to school. As Jon was growing up, the Swedish-American churches had already abandoned Swedish in favor of English as the official language; however, the church continued to maintain ties to the Swedish language. Jon recalls that the church used Swedish hymns despite many members not being fluent in the language: “[W]e would go to the *Julotta* service and there, of course, we would sing in Swedish. Now we didn’t always know what we were singing, but we could read the words and we sang them because my mother sang and she enjoyed singing because she was so familiar [with the hymns]” (Bruemmer 2011). That familiarity is an important aspect of the church as a place of Swedishness in the Upper Midwest. While many church members may not speak Swedish, the language carries with it a sense of familiarity which allows churchgoers to actively connect with their Old Country ancestry and maintain their sense of Swedishness by singing Swedish hymns.

While Jon actively sang the Swedish hymns, the simple act of listening to the language is also an important ethnic identity marker. Just like Jon Bruemmer’s mother, Chris Koller’s mother did not learn English until she began attending public school and just like Jon, Chris never learned Swedish from her mother. Instead, she attended North Park University and studied the language there. Chris attends Bethlehem Covenant Church and recounts a similar story about the use of Swedish in the church, though she goes on to add that Swedish was also used at funerals: “I got commissioned up here to sing at funerals so they wanted ‘Children of the Heavenly Father’ [*Tryggare kan ingen vara*] sung in Swedish for some of these old timers” (C. Koller 2011). Chris’ audience may not understand the words, but the hymn carries symbolic meaning, not only religious, but also as a reminder of their Swedish identity. The church members play an integral role in maintaining Bethlehem Covenant as a place of Swedishness by explicitly demanding that a Swedish hymn be sung at funeral services.

A similar tradition can be found at the Chisago Lake Lutheran Church Lucia celebration where John Mortenson notes that “det ska vara en Sankta Lucia kvinna där och en grupp där. Och di kan sjunga svensk men di kan inte tala det ... men det var fint ändå” [there will be a woman as *Sankta Lucia* there and a group there. And they can sing Swedish, but they can’t speak it ... but it was still nice] (J. Mortenson 2010). John acknowledges the difference between being able to speak the language and being able to perform a song in Swedish, while at the same time acknowledging that just being able to hear that performance is nice. Once again, the language becomes

an important marker of ethnic identity, even if the audience members, or performers for that matter, do not speak or even understand Swedish. Just like the hymns sung at Bethlehem Covenant Church, the Lucia festival and Swedish songs carry symbolic meaning for the audience members and allow people to connect with their Swedish heritage.

Despite the language shift in Swedish-American churches in the 1920s and 1930s, Chisago Lake Lutheran does occasionally welcome Swedish ministers who hold services in Swedish (Ericson and Ramsten 1981, 16). In 1975, a church service held in Swedish was recorded at Chisago Lake Lutheran and was eventually broadcast on Swedish Radio. From that service, "*Tryggare kan ingen vara*," was disseminated on an LP and CD titled "From Sweden to America: Emigrant and Immigrant Songs" and made available in the United States. While many members of these communities and congregations may not speak Swedish, the language is still used in conjunction with church functions and certain festivals as a way of consciously maintaining a relationship with Sweden and Swedish identity.

Community members recognize Swedish church services and hymns like "*Tryggare kan ingen vara*" as a way to maintain ties with their Swedish heritage and embrace the language despite not understanding it. The Swedish songs become significant forms which are learned by community members, even if the individual words are not a part of their vocabulary. For non-Swedish speakers, the Swedish words act as non-lexical vocables. They serve a purpose and convey meaning, albeit not always the direct semantic meaning that would be expected in a translation from Swedish to English. Swedish hymns such as "*Tryggare kan ingen vara*" become a sort of sacred speech—an intensification of language and culture which carries its own meaning separate from the semantic purpose of the words themselves. Barre Toelken writes about dance in Native American powwow culture in a similar way, explaining that the powwow strengthens shared attitudes "that exist outside language and ritual" and also "intensif[ies] and solidif[ies] an occasion through which they can celebrate the continued existence of Indian ways of life" (1991, 154-155). Swedish hymns in Swedish-American churches serve a similar purpose of allowing participants to intensify an occasion in which they solidify their connection with their immigrant past and uphold their Swedish identity.

As ideas of Swedishness evolved and American culture and the English language grew more prevalent in Swedish-American communities, the church became a place to which Swedish immigrants went for the familiar.

While children might have been reprimanded for speaking Swedish in public schools, they were at the same time encouraged to embrace that Swedishness in Sunday school as a means of offsetting the prevalence of English elsewhere in their communities. Sunday school allowed parents to instill the familiar in their children. As Anita Olson notes, “Sunday school for children became an important way for immigrants to transmit Swedish values to their American-born children. Interestingly enough, Sunday school itself had no Swedish precedent” (1991, 80). The emergence of Sunday school in Swedish churches became a byproduct of many Swedish immigrants’ desire to retain their cultural and ethnic identity. By introducing their children to Swedish values in an American setting at an early age, Swedish immigrants were able to once again construct a sense of community through the church. This community included the Swedish Americans of the region and was strengthened by their cultural ties to Swedish identity despite the eventual assimilation of Swedish immigrants to American culture. By introducing their children to Swedish values, parents instilled a sense of community in the younger generation in hopes of perpetuating and continuing the traditions and values they themselves practiced. This was as much about the continuing of the Swedish-American community as about its creation.

The continuation and creation of the familiarity of Swedishness continues today in churches such as Chisago Lake Lutheran in Center City, Minnesota, or Bethlehem Covenant Church in Stephenson, Michigan. Swedish Americans go to these places of Swedishness to experience what they deem to be a familiar language, even if it is a language that they do not speak. In doing so, a uniquely Swedish-American identity emerges which connects their contemporary ideas of Swedish identity with their immigrant Swedish ancestry through language and song, and, as we will see below, holidays and traditions.

Swedish-American Festivals: Identity and Intensification

Not only was the church a place to preserve ties to a language used less and less often in daily life, but it also became a place for Swedish immigrants to display Swedish identity through various holidays and cultural traditions. From Lucia celebrations to weddings, the Swedish-American churches of the Upper Midwest became places of Swedishness where identity was not only maintained but also developed through the various festivals celebrated within their walls. Jon Bruemmer describes this sense of identity arising

from specifically Swedish cultural events as something that was prevalent while his mother was still alive and as something that continues to this day: “My mother’s affiliations, as well as my two sisters and my brother, have been almost exclusively within the Evangelical Covenant Church, and there of course, the tradition of carrying on some of the Swedish festivals and traditions is very strong” (Bruemmer 2011).

Jon explicitly connects the maintenance of Swedish traditions to his family’s involvement in the church and recounts that his mother, and subsequently he himself, celebrated many Swedish holidays in conjunction with the church: “Well of course, Christmas, and you know, *Julotta*, *Sankta Lucia*’s Day, Midsummer Fest, Easter, all celebrations which have been carried on in the Covenant Church in some way, shape, or form” (Bruemmer 2011). By carrying on these traditions, the Covenant Church positions itself as a place of Swedishness—a place where Swedish Americans go to participate in traditionally Swedish festivals, thereby connecting them with their Swedish identity and the Swedish identity which older generations had retained.

As John Mortenson described when discussing the Lucia celebration at Chisago Lake Lutheran, these various holiday traditions sometimes incorporate the Swedish language. Chris Koller recalls that Swedish was used during the Christmas season in the Covenant Church for certain celebrations, albeit primarily in traditional Christmas songs: “Some of those songs were incorporated in the church service, ‘*Nu är det jul igen*’ and there’s one [called] ‘*Tusen juleljus*’ [‘*Nu tändas tusen juleljus*’]” (C. Koller 2011). The church maintained a sense of Swedishness through holiday traditions and strengthened this connection with traditions that incorporated the Swedish language. At the height of Swedish immigration to the United States, immigrants sought out ways to maintain their Swedishness. Olson notes that “[t]hrough their church, these immigrants created concrete networks of affiliation that gave many of them a much-needed sense of relationship with other Swedish immigrants” (1991, 73), much like the Swedish Americans descended from those immigrants do today.

Coming together at churches like Bethlehem Covenant to celebrate holidays such as Christmas with traditional Swedish songs allows Swedish Americans to create social networks that share the common bond of Swedishness, despite having been born in the United States. Swedish festivals serve as a continued heritage, albeit a changing one. They are viewed as having been practiced both in the United States and, more importantly, in

Sweden for generations, and thus these practitioners inscribe themselves in the Swedish narrative. Regardless of the language used, Swedish Americans create and continue the narrative that connects their sense of Swedish identity to the Swedish identity of the immigrants who first came to the Upper Midwest.

In the Chisago County area, some community members participate in events at both Chisago Lake Lutheran and Immanuel Lutheran. John Mortenson, who has lived in the area all his life, attends services at Immanuel Lutheran Church of Almelund, Minnesota, and explains that he was married in the church to his wife, Alice, a non-Swedish speaker but a woman of Swedish descent: “vi gifte oss där, nästan sextio år sedan,” [we got married there nearly 60 years ago] (J. Mortenson 2010). As mentioned previously, aside from Swedish hymns at funerals, Immanuel Lutheran does not serve as the primary place of Swedishness in the Chisago County community. While both were founded at Swedish-American churches, today, members of Immanuel Lutheran, as well as the greater Chisago County community, can attend the many Swedish festivals and events held at the nearby Chisago Lake Lutheran Church.

Common community celebrations at Chisago Lake Lutheran Church include Midsummer, *Våffeldagen*, and Lucia celebrations. In December 2011, a notice was included in the Chisago Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce Newsletter advertising the Lucia celebration at the Chisago Lake Lutheran Church:

‘SANKTA LUCIA’ PROGRAM

Saturday, December 10 - 9:00am

Coffee and treats served - 8:30am

The Ki Chi Saga Swedish Club presents their version of the traditional Sankta Lucia festival. Local youth will participate in the program. A freewill offering will be taken to benefit the club’s scholarship fund.

Välkommen!

(‘Sankta Lucia’ Program 2011)

Notable, of course, is the use of Swedish in the advertisement, suggesting that while Swedish may not be used in the community, there is a cultural knowledge of common words and phrases such as *välkommen* [welcome] and that, as previously discussed, the use of the language is a way to publicly display Swedishness. Perhaps more important though is the acknowledgment that the Kichi Saga Swedish Club will be presenting “their version” of a traditional Lucia celebration. Here the Kichi Saga Swedish Club

explicitly lays claim to the tradition of the celebration, presumably one that has connections to Sweden, but in claiming ownership of the tradition, also acknowledges the aspects of the tradition that have been maintained and created as uniquely Swedish American.

In that same newsletter, a second advertisement is printed announcing a Lucia celebration at the old church, Gammelkyrkan, in Gammelgården, a museum in Scandia, Minnesota. The advertisement declares that:

Gammelgården continues the tradition with a brief Swedish prayer service in the Gammel Krykan (*sic*). The service is perhaps as authentic as they come—done by candlelight only, the service is spoken and sung all in Swedish in the unheated Gammelgarden church, with men and women traditionally segregated and in traditional garb. (Lucia Dagen Sunday, December 11th 2011)⁶

Again, a church uses the Swedish language and bills itself as a place of traditional Swedishness in its celebration of a traditionally Swedish holiday. In the service at Gammelkyrkan, the notice takes special care to mention the tradition behind the celebration and that the service is by candlelight and will be held in an unheated church. Lucia has been celebrated for over 20 years at Gammelgården, and in 2008 it was reported that Anne-Marie Bjornson, a Swedish immigrant who moved to Minnesota in 1952, had made it a family tradition to attend the service: “‘This little celebration here is the most Swedish thing I have gone to in Minnesota,’ Bjornson said. ‘This is exactly the way it would be in Sweden’” (Weaver 2007). Of course, such a traditional celebration in an unheated church in present day Sweden would be rare indeed. However, the focus of the celebration is not so much on contemporary Swedish tradition, but instead on a tradition that is not tied to any one specific era—a timeless tradition. This timelessness harkens back to what may have once been; whether the traditions are real or imagined is irrelevant (Schnell 2003, 8). The traditional Lucia festivities at Gammelkyrkan have become authentic in the community which celebrates this form of Swedishness, and the church has become a place in which to celebrate that identity.

Even today, some Swedish immigrants make their way to the church as a place to celebrate their Swedish ethnicity and culture. In the case of Gammelkyrkan, there is an intensification of the Lucia tradition, complete

6 The original spelling from the advertisement has not been changed.

with antiquated traditions such as segregated pews and a lack of heat. Just as Swedish songs are used as an intensified form of the language, festivals such as Lucia can be intensified as well by celebrating an ideal of Swedishness. The service at the church becomes, for the Swedish immigrant above, the manifestation of Swedishness. It is at church that “the most Swedish thing” plays itself out. As Toelken writes about the powwow, it

functions as a way of bringing people symbolically back together for the encouragement and nurturing of their ethnic lives and their continued existence as sane people. In this sense, the new way of life does not replace the old; the old survives by rising to the new demand, by adapting and intensifying. (1991, 155)

The Lucia celebration at Gammelgården is an instance in which Swedish Americans symbolically come together to form and maintain their Swedish identity and demonstrates how that identity, which recalls a Sweden that was left behind by the original immigrants, is passed down from generation to generation. Gammelgården is an open-air museum in the same vein as Skansen in Stockholm, and the Lucia service intensifies the ideal of a timeless Swedish tradition and thus intensifies ideas of Swedishness in Swedish America. Similarly, Skansen holds church services at *Seglora kyrka* and their website reminds potential church-goers that “I dagens hets och stress kan det vara gott för själen att få stilla sig” [In today’s hustle and bustle, it can be good to calm your soul] (*Seglora kyrka på Skansen* n.d.). Just as Gammelgården intensifies the tradition of what once was, Skansen intensifies the past by contrasting the hustle and bustle of contemporary society with an implied timeless quality that *Seglora kyrka* can offer.

Discussing the continuation of traditions passed down for over a hundred years by Swedish immigrants in the Bethlehem Covenant Church, Jon Bruemmer explains: “it is interesting the way these traditions have come from Sweden and are still operative in this very modern America” (2011). These traditions, which the church and its community celebrate as Swedish, are viewed and identified as being Swedish despite being performed in the United States. As such, they join the narrative of what it means to be Swedish American and create a link between the Swedish immigrants who came to the United States in the 1800s and the Swedish Americans who have been born and raised in the Upper Midwest.

Conclusion: The Church as a Place of Swedishness

It is generally accepted that early churches in Swedish America worked to maintain the culture, traditions, and values which the immigrating Swedes believed most important. However, interviews and field recordings from Swedish Americans in the Upper Midwest today suggest that the organizational structure that helped to sustain Swedishness in the late 1800s and early 1900s still exists. While the Swedish language is not the official language of the church, the traditions and values which are thought to be most important in terms of Swedishness are continued and even created anew.

The creation of these new cultural traditions demonstrates an interesting process of cultural contact that is ongoing in Swedish America. Graden writes that Swedish Americans traveling from Lindsborg, Kansas, to Sweden are shocked to see what Swedishness is like in Sweden; likewise, Swedes traveling to Lindsborg have a similar reaction. Neither group accepts the other as being authentically Swedish (2003, 230). Similar reactions can be found with regards to *lutfisk*, a dish popular in Scandinavian America and often associated with Lutheran church dinners (Klein 2001, 70-71). The churches discussed above are no exception to this phenomenon. The Kichi Saga Swedish club holds an annual våffeldag celebration and in March of 2012 celebrated våffeldagen in the basement of Chisago Lake Lutheran. For dinner, the members of the club were served waffles with strawberries and whipped cream—decidedly Swedish toppings. Along with the strawberries and whipped cream, though, were maple syrup and link sausages—decidedly American. Several young children wearing traditional Swedish folk costumes helped to serve milk and water. The evening was a display of a Swedish tradition transplanted to the American Midwest. While visiting Swedes might not recognize the celebration as a quintessential våffeldag, the celebration is no less authentic for that. In fact, it is uniquely Swedish American—the outcome of cultural contact over several generations often times facilitated by Swedish-American churches like Chisago Lake Lutheran.

It is important to note that ethnicity and identity are not static. Instead, they evolve as certain aspects of culture, tradition, and values are deemed to be more important than others. How those decisions are made must be further explored, but the outcome must be viewed as an authentic manifestation of cultural contact and change. That the process was occurring in Swedish-American immigrant churches in the late 1800s and early 1900s cannot be denied. In fact, as the Swedish Americans in Minnesota and

Michigan interviewed above have demonstrated, that process is still ongoing and results in changing forms of Swedishness in the United States.

Through their involvement in the church, community members make conscious decisions to display certain aspects of Swedishness. Sometimes, this is interpreted through public displays of symbolism such as church dinners with *fruktsoppa*, or Midsummer and Lucia celebrations, all of which serve to identify the participant as Swedish. Other times the Swedish language is used to perform Swedish songs from a person's childhood as a way to reconnect with an immigrant past—a type of sacred speech that does not require semantic meaning, but instead symbolic. One does not need to be Swedish to partake in these events, as we saw with the *fruktsoppa* at Bethlehem Covenant, or speak Swedish, as we saw with the singing of “*Tryggare kan ingen vara*”; however, there is a sense of cultural pride in those who take an active role in performing these displays of Swedishness.

Not only does this display of ethnicity allow the displayer to identify as Swedish, but it also allows other community members and even outsiders looking in to make a similar identification. The church, by hosting Swedish events, is implicitly claiming its role as a place of Swedishness. Community members reciprocate by attending those Swedish events, thereby reinforcing the church's role as that place of Swedishness. In a sentiment echoed by Jon Bruemmer above, Chris Koller says that “I think a lot of where my Swedishness, so to speak, was perpetuated was through the church and the denomination” (C. Koller 2011). The process that Gradén, Klymasz, and Schnell all describe is occurring in these traditionally Swedish-American churches of the Upper Midwest. The church, both implicitly and explicitly, displays certain markers which people identify as Swedish. Community members reciprocate by attending and acknowledging the church's role as both Jon and Chris do above. By acknowledging Swedish-American churches as a place of Swedishness, Swedish immigrants and Swedish Americans are able to construct a sense of continuity between the Swedish identity that they had left behind, whether real or invented, and the Swedish identity they have since created.

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