

Welcome to the 18th edition of the Svenska News – we are excited to bring you a newsletter published by the Swedish Heritage Center. Remember that our Newsletters are now being published every 4 months, due to the rise in printing costs.

Immigrants and their experiences

GETTING TO AMERICA

I recently gave a tour through the Center to a lady from Omaha. She told the story of her female relative who brought her five children to America – by herself – as her husband had been kicked in the head by a horse and died. She and her children rode in the bottom of the steamer and told of horrific conditions they went through on their way to America. This is some of the information I found when researching this story

How did immigrants afford their ticket across the Pacific Ocean?

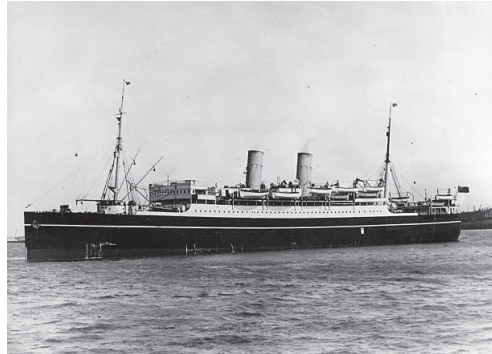
Immigrants undertook a Pacific Ocean journey of three weeks by ship. Many passengers could barely afford steerage class travel. Most had to borrow money from their relatives and neighbors.

In the 1840s, steamships began transporting wealthy passengers while the poor immigrants still made the voyage to America by sailing vessel. In the 1860s and 1870s, the size of steamships increased, and companies transported poor families in steerage at a low cost of \$30.

3rd class passengers were commonly referred to as “steerage.” These immigrants traveled in crowded and often unsanitary conditions near the bottom of steamships, often spending up to two weeks seasick in their bunks during rough Atlantic Ocean crossings.

What were the conditions onboard vessels crossing the Atlantic Ocean for immigrants?

The voyage took between 40 and 90 days, depending on the wind and weather. In steerage, ships were crowded (each passenger having about two square feet of space) and dirty (lice and rats abounded), and passengers had little food and ventilation. Between 10-20% of those who left Europe died on board.



In which part of the United States did most Swedish immigrants settle?

After the Civil War, the Swedish settlements spread further west to Kansas and Nebraska, and in 1870 almost 75 percent of the Swedish immigrants in the United States were found in Illinois, Minnesota, Kansas, Wisconsin, and Nebraska.

Swedish emigration to the United States reached its height in the 1870–1900 era.

The great Swedish famine of 1867 – 1869 caused by consecutive wet and dry years, followed by a year of mass epidemics, led to the migration to the US of 60,000 Swedes during that period--the start of the mass migration. Immigration peaked in 1869 and again in 1887. Most of this influx settled in the Northern U.S.

The great majority of them had been peasants in the old country, pushed away from Sweden by disastrous crop failures and pulled towards the United States by the cheap land resulting from the 1862 Homestead Act. Most immigrants became pioneers, clearing and cultivating the virgin land of the Midwest and extending the pre-Civil War settlements further west, into Kansas and Nebraska. Once sizable Swedish farming communities had formed on the prairie, the greatest impetus for further peasant migration came through personal contacts. The iconic "America-letter" to relatives and friends at home spoke directly from a position of trust and

shared background, carrying immediate conviction. At the height of migration, familial America-letters could lead to chain reactions which would all but depopulate some Swedish parishes, dissolving tightly knit communities which then re-assembled in the Midwest.

Single young women moved straight from field work in rural Sweden to jobs as live-in housemaids in the urban United States. "Literature and tradition have preserved the often tragic image of the pioneer immigrant wife and mother, bearing her burden of hardship, deprivation and longing on the untamed frontier. More characteristic among the newer arrivals, however, was the young, unmarried woman ... As domestic servants in America, they were treated as members of the families they worked for and like 'ladies' by American men, who showed them a courtesy and consideration to which they were quite unaccustomed at home. They found employment easily, as Scandinavian maids were in high demand, and learned the language and customs quickly. Working conditions were far better than in Sweden, in terms of wages, hours of work, benefits, and ability to change positions. In contrast, newly arrived Swedish men were often employed in all-Swedish work gangs. The young women usually married Swedish men and brought with them in marriage an enthusiasm for ladylike, American manners and middle-class refinements.

FIKA 

[fee-ka] • Swedish

(n.) a moment to slow down and appreciate the good things in life. "Coffee with friends".



150 YEAR OLD BREAD BASKET

When J. S. Bring immigrated to Nebraska from Sweden in 1887, they had to provide their own food on the ship. They loaded the basket with bread and had bread and soup on the ship. They were also able to sit on the basket on the deck.

The basket has to be at least 150 years old, if not older. It has been appraised by

Tom Basset, an auctioneer in Lincoln, NE, who said he had never seen anything like it and valued it at least \$1000.

This box might be used in Sweden as a potato basket that the farmers gathered their potatoes in. Oxen or mules would have been necessary to transport the basket back to their home.



As the seasons change and life starts to get busy, be sure to take a moment and appreciate the good things in life.

How are you going to do that this season?

Swedish Heritage Center

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Oakland, NE 68045

UPCOMING EVENTS

SUNDAY BRUNCH MENU

January 4 – Meatloaf dinner

February 1 – Chicken & biscuits

March 1 – Corned Beef & Cabbage

April 5 is our normal 1st Sunday – but enjoy Easter dinner w/ family

April 12 – Ham dinner

We encourage you to attend our Sunday meals. These brunches help pay our monthly utility and technology bills. The brunches are held each 1st Sunday of the month from 11:00 – 1:00 and the cost is a free will donation. You can order your meal(s) take out, if you wish. Just give us a call that morning.

And if you'd ever like a tour of the Center – or have company in town who would like to visit – we are more than happy to give you a tour. Hours and days of operation are:

Tuesdays & Thursdays
10:00 – 2:00
Saturdays 9:00 – noon

Or call 402-380-9744
if you want to stop in on an
alternate day and time.