

# The Saga of Swedesburg

By CARL A. ANDERSON

Mr. Anderson is a lifelong resident of Swedesburg, Iowa. Former Henry County representative in the state legislature, he has wide farm interests, and is very active in community affairs.

The local church records of the Iowa Conference indicate people of Swedish stock began entering the Territory of Iowa as early as 1840. By 1845 Swedish immigrants had begun settling on the rolling land around what is now Lockridge and New Sweden in Jefferson County. The first church of the Augustana Synod was established at New Sweden in 1848.

This church celebrated its centennial in 1948 with a one-day celebration which was attended by an estimated two thousand people. Five bus loads attending the Augustana Synod meeting held in Rock Island, Illinois that year, drove to New Sweden for the centennial. There were also a large number of people who made the trip from the Synod meeting in private cars. It was an impressive procession as it passed through Swedesburg and other cities and towns along the way. Church dignitaries from all over the United States and Canada were there. Programs of a historical nature were held throughout the day. Church leaders who addressed the meetings spoke in high praise of the men and women who took the lead in organizing the New Sweden congregation, and the great influence it has had upon the Augustana Synod everywhere.

The New Sweden Church is located about two and one-half miles northwest of Lockridge in Jefferson County, Iowa, and has been dedicated as a shrine by the Augustana Church Synod. The small white church on a hill is looked after by a caretaker, though services are still held in the building on special occasions. As long as the church stands it will be a memorial to those early settlers who built their homes near it because they felt that the church was the place where they could best

give common expression to their faith. To them the church represented the highest ideals of life.

The people who settled around New Sweden and Lockridge, Iowa were religious people. They believed in God. They came to America to establish homes and to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. Accumulating an estate was secondary. They knew they needed food, clothing and shelter and they were not afraid of work. They settled first at New Sweden because the land was rolling and drainage was no great problem. Water was plentiful. There was an abundance of trees for building needs and fuel. The soil was reasonably fertile. Luscious grass grew everywhere. Here was a place that beckoned and settlers moved in quite rapidly. They came mostly from Illinois or directly from Sweden. Many folk from Sweden appear to have settled for a time in Illinois, later moving on over into Iowa. It will be noted that 18 years elapsed from the founding of the New Sweden church until another church was organized here in what was then called Freeport, Iowa.

Later generations may wonder why these people passed up land in Wayne Township in preference to hilly country around New Sweden in Jefferson County. The answer is simple. The area around New Sweden appears much the same today as it did when it was settled in 1845. The region around our village is now one of the garden spots of the nation.

We have mentioned the origins of New Sweden because it was from this village that a man came to look over the prospects of establishing a similar settlement in Henry County, and especially Wayne Township in the northern part of the county. The emphasis of our story will be on this community, the first settlement of Swedish people in Henry County. Swedesburg was the first of three Swedish settlements that were made in Henry County to establish their church, only one that has continuously maintained itself up to the present day. Each of the three Swedish settlements organized a Swedish

Lutheran church under the provisions of the Augustana Lutheran Church Synod of North America.

The church at Swedesburg was organized very soon after the arrival of the first small group of Swedish immigrants who made up the charter members of our congregation. The honor of being the first Swedish family to settle near Swedesburg goes to the S. P. Swenson family who came here from New Sweden in Jefferson County. They arrived March 4, 1864 and took up land a little over two miles south of the present village. Two other families arrived a couple of days later. They were the John Tolander and Matthias Anderson families who came from Biggsville, Illinois. From this time on settlers began to arrive quite frequently so that by the spring of 1866 there appear to have been 22 families in the area besides a few unmarried men.

The pastor of the New Sweden congregation, Hakan Olson, and a few friends drove across country into northern Henry County in the spring of 1863, and were so impressed with its possibilities that they made a trip to Biggsville, Illinois in the fall, where they conferred with Swedish people in that area about starting a new Swedish community in Iowa. Gust Fridolph was one of the men contacted at Biggsville. He must have been impressed because the records show that within a few months he purchased a tract of land in Section 34 of Wayne Township. He obtained a deed for it in the spring of 1864, and moved onto it the following year. The tract, comprising 80 acres was located a mile and a quarter south of the village of Swedesburg.

Mr. Fridolph very shortly sold the eastern half of his land to Matthias Anderson, a fellow settler from Biggsville, Illinois. It is interesting to note that the Fridolph and Anderson families spent their entire lives on these two adjoining 40 acre tracts. Both men were members of the first board of Deacons when the congregation was organized, Mr. Fridolph serving continuously for 35 years.

Fridolph became one of the leading figures in the history of the Swedes in Iowa. He arrived at Swedes-

burg only a year after the first settlement; but he soon became an active and ardent promoter of the settlement. He took charge of land sales and evidently was very active in locating desirable tracts for newcomers, lands that could be bought at prices which they could afford to pay and which would also produce a living for them while they were becoming settled in a new land. Mr. Fridolph was untiring in his efforts to bring in new Swedish settlers. A year after he came to Swedesburg the people banded together and decided to establish a church. Mr. Fridolph should be given the credit for getting a large number of Swedish people to come here, but he was not the prime mover in the organization of our congregation. This was largely the work of Hakan Olson. He was a well-known figure in early Swedish settlements, both in Iowa and Illinois. Olson had preached to the Swedish people around Biggsville, Illinois, before he became pastor of the New Sweden congregation in Jefferson County, Iowa. And as he was interested in the development of the country from the standpoint of the church, he was in his early days more or less a roving ambassador.

While the Swedish people settled and developed much of Wayne Township, others had already received early land patents direct from the government. It was 1850 before any such patent was issued for land in Wayne Township, Henry County. And it was 1852 before a patent was issued for land bordering the village of Swedesburg. Job Wright was given the patent December 1, 1852 for a 160 acre tract in section 21 of Wayne Township on which "Big Brown Church" is now located.

The quarter section directly across the highway to the east of the church was taken up by William B. Read on August 9, 1852 by and through an act of Congress approved September 28, 1850 entitled "an act granting bounty land to certain officers and soldiers who have been engaged in military service of the United States." Read was from the state of New York and is listed as having served as a lieutenant in Captain Watson's Com-

pany, United States Field Artillery, in the War of 1812. He kept his grant for two years and then disposed of it to a Sarah P. Lane, of Hudson County, New Jersey for \$240.00. This is a fair example of what happened to many land grants received by early settlers for military service. The grants were for tracts of wet prairie land, unfenced and unimproved. There was not much inducement for a former soldier to hold on to unproductive land when he could turn it to ready cash.

The tract of land where Swedesburg stands was purchased from the government at \$1.25 per acre by John Ryland on March 10, 1852. This was the regular price paid for government land.

The quarter section directly across the highway to the east of the town was patented to William D. Jones, November 1, 1852. Thus, we see that four tracts of land having a close relationship to our village were all taken up the same year, 1852.

The surveyors who dragged their chains over the area and erected corner stones described it as swampy marsh land, in many places covered with shallow pools known as buffalo wallows. Some of these surveyors wrote notes on the side of their work sheets stating that this part of the county might never be settled because of its swampy condition. It was 12 years from the time the first patents were issued until a permanent settlement was established here by Swedish people.

The early Swedes in Wayne Township came from east and west. Two of the first three families already mentioned as having arrived within a couple of days of each other were from the east while the third family had originally settled further west. It is quite certain that the folks who came from Illinois were more or less acquainted before they removed to Iowa. The original group that gathered together to form a congregation included the Rapp and Zarl families from near Okwauqka, Illinois; Alexander Johnson from Monmouth, Gust Carlson from Knoxville; and the Abrahamson and Nelson families who originally came from Illinois, though

they spent some time in Jefferson County before moving on to Swedesburg. The same was true of Matthias Anderson. He had done farm work in Jefferson County for three years, went back to Henderson County, Illinois for awhile, then returned to Iowa in the spring of 1864.

Oliver Stephenson was another of the charter members who came from Jefferson County and the New Sweden congregation. His father had come over from Sweden and settled in Jefferson County. Oliver Stephenson purchased 160 acres in Section 18 of Wayne Township in the summer of 1865, and became one of the most able leaders of the congregation in its early days.

Alexander Johnson and his wife did not purchase their farm until February 8, 1866. It lay in the southeast quarter of Section 29 of the township. The Swedesburg congregation was organized April 13, 1866 with the following charter members:

John Z. Sandahl, his wife and children  
Gustaf Fridolph and wife  
Jonas Peter Sandahl and wife  
Jonas Peter Sandahl and wife  
Fred Olson and wife  
Matthias Anderson and wife  
Swen Peter Swenson, wife and children  
Anders J. Anderson and wife  
Alfred Louis and wife  
Johan Tolander and wife  
Alexander Johnson and wife  
Anders J. Zarl and wife  
Ola. Gust Carlson, wife and children  
Ola Gust Stephenson and wife  
A. M. Anderson and wife  
Otto Abrahamson and wife  
John Nelson and wife  
Germund Abrahamson  
Isak Overstrom, wife and children  
G. Nelson and wife  
L. M. Rapp, wife and children  
Sven Auguston  
Anders Erickson  
Fred Molin and wife  
Mans Anderson and wife  
Gust Carlson and wife

The minutes of this first meeting read as follows:<sup>1</sup>

Swedish Ev. Lutheran Church Filed for record 12-31-1880.  
Recorded 12-31-1880.

Translation of the first protocol of the Sw. Ev. Lutheran Congregation at Swedesburgh Henry County State of Iowa held at Swedesburgh Iowa the 13th. day of April 1866.

1st. After mutual consideration and after that Rev. J. C. Olson been elected chairman and L. M. Rapp secretary the following resolution was used.

Be it resolved that we at this plase being countryman do in the name of the Trinity God this the thirteenth day of April A.D. Eighteen hundred and sixty six organize us to one Christian body with the name of the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Congregation of Swedesburgh, Iowa

3rd. To deacon was elected Matthias Anderson and S. P. Swenson for one year, Mans Anderson and Otto Abrahamson for two years, and Gust Fridolph and Alexander Johnson for three years.

4th. To trustees was elected John Z. Sandahl for one year. L. M. Rapp for two years and Oliver Stephenson for three years.

The above instrument is read and approved by the congregation of Swedesburgh the 7th. day of May, 1866.

J. C. Olson, Chairman

L. M. Rapp, Secretary

That the above is a correct translation of the proceedings of the congregation at Swedesburgh, Iowa.

Charles Walleen, Ondf.

P. Liliedahl, Sec.

Now trustees of said congregation: Oliver Stephenson

S. P. Morgan

O. L. Lindeen

Deacons of sayd congregation: John Monson

G. A. Fridolph

John P. Peterson

Charles E. Hult

C. J. Anderson

Fourteen years elapsed from the time the congregation was organized until the board of administration took action to have the minutes of the meeting recorded. For almost four of those years there was no resident pastor; but they did have the services of a young student during the summers of 1868 and 1869, and the occasional

<sup>1</sup> Located in the Recorder's Office, Henry County Court House, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.

ministrations of Hakan Olson who came across country from Jefferson County.

The congregation was faced with another problem—finding a name for the settlement. It was decided to honor Gust Fridolph, an active promoter of the community, in this matter. “Fri” in Swedish has the same sound as “Free” in English. By adding the word “port” they coined the name Freeport. Why the latter was decided upon is not clear unless it was because of the pools of water everywhere. However, the name Freeport did not last long. On January 20, 1870 the name was changed to Swedesburgh. Later the “h” was dropped and since May 18, 1893 the name of the village has been Swedesburg. Around 1870 the settlement was sometimes called Swedeville or Swedeborough, evidently names of local application.

After the congregation organized, it had no meeting place. At first the members met in homes that were available. But most of such structures were small and could not take care of the folks who came. The Union school house which was three-fourths of a mile west of the Alexander Johnson home was offered to the congregation as a meeting place, and this offer was accepted.

The Liberty school house was built in 1867, and thereafter used for meetings as it was located two miles east of Union school, being more of a central meeting place for all concerned.

Pastor Hakan Olson came from New Sweden every third Sunday and preached to the small congregation. However, the people wanted a meeting place of their own—a church. They had talked of building a church the day the congregation was organized, but did not have the means with which to build at that time. Their numbers grew, and by 1868 they felt they could go ahead. Work on the church was begun and completed that same year. The congregation held its annual meeting in the new church January 2, 1869.

One thing that spurred the members in their desire to build was the offer of a building site by the Moses

Lemmon family who owned the southeast quarter of section 21 where the present church stands. The offer was gladly accepted. But before action could be taken in the matter, the Lemmon family sold their land to J. N. Beall, and forgot to reserve the tract that had been promised the congregation. Mr. Beall, however, corrected the matter. He gave it to the congregation by quit claim deed, whereupon the matter of building a church moved along smoothly. An additional one-half acre was later purchased from the Beall family. And at a still later date a full acre was purchased from the Andrew Lauger family who had purchased the farm from the Bealls. Thus, the site of "Big Brown Church" now totals three acres, part of which has been made into beautiful memorial gardens.

In the sixties, during the early years of the settlement, real estate taxes were quite low. But even so there were those who were unable to pay them. The 40 acre tract where Swedesburg stands was sold for taxes February 1, 1864 to H. C. Saunders of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa for \$7.59. This represented an accumulation of taxes and costs for two years. On November 16, 1867 Mr. Saunders assigned his tax certificate to Hakan Olson, who on presenting it to the County Treasurer, received a tax deed for the 40 acres, subject however, to the right of redemption. The land was never redeemed. In 1869 two other tracts in this same section sold for the taxes due which amounted to \$8.91 for each 40-acre tract. This amount likewise represented accumulated taxes for two years plus costs. These two adjoining forties make up the east half of the southeast one-fourth of the section on which the village is located. John Tolander came into possession of the north forty and Otto Abrahamson obtained the south forty.

In 1868 when building operations got under way for the new church, there were inquiries about building sites. Hakan Olson owned the 40 acres directly to the south of the church across the highway, the site of the village. He sold approximately two acres of this land

to Peter Larson September 29, 1868. They were in the very northeast corner of the tract, across the road from the church to the south. It was a very choice location, and a store was later built upon it.

The deed Hakan Olson gave to Peter Larson contains this valuable reservation:

This conveyance is to remain in full force and in good faith so long as the said Larson or his successor or assigns or any persons or person through his or their permission do not sell intoxicating liquors of any sort whatever, but if said condition is violated then this conveyance is to be void and null.

Given under our hands this 29th of Sept. A.D. 1868.

Hakan Olson  
her  
Petrunella X Olson  
mark

This stipulation illustrates Hakan Olson's value as a leader to the new community.

The little Swedish settlement grew rapidly in its early years. Its registered membership of 59 on its organization in 1866, reached 333 by 1870. And the figure was 570 at the 90th anniversary in September 1956. However, there have been no new arrivals from Sweden for more than 25 years. A new comer from the old country would definitely not feel at home in the community today. Old ties have all but disappeared.

The first Swedish settlers in 1864 were plagued with the almost hopeless task of trying to produce a crop from soil that contained too much water. But when drain tiles were introduced about 1880, farms responded with such bountiful returns it appeared as if someone had touched them with a magic wand. Tiling the land was not easy. It was all hand work. The ditch had to be dug one spade at a time, and then crumbed. And when the ditch was ready, the tile which were one foot in length, had to be laid one at a time. It took patience, strength and endurance to do ditching work. It also took skill. Even in our advanced state of agriculture,

many of the younger generation know nothing of how to drain a spout.

The family of only one of the original recipients of government land grants in Wayne Township has any connection with Swedesburg today. His name was Sam White. He purchased 40 acres in Section 19 on December 20, 1851, and farmed for several years about two miles southwest of the town. White also did team work on the grade for the proposed "Calico Rail Road" under construction between Keokuk and Iowa City. The planned right-of-way was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile west of Swedesburg, but the grade was never completed. White later built and operated a store in the village.

Four of the charter members of the settlement served in the Union army during the Civil War. They were John Nelson, Fred Molin, and the Abrahamson brothers, Otto and Germund. Otto was a member of the 10th Illinois Volunteer Infantry, and Germund enlisted in Co. K, 84th Illinois Infantry. John Nelson and Fred Molin served in Illinois regiments, but did not remain long at Swedesburg, and their military records are not available.

Otto Abrahamson first settled in Jefferson County. He decided to move to Swedesburg in 1865, and purchased a tract of land in section 34 just south of the Fridolph farm. His cabin in Jefferson County was dismantled, the logs hauled 18 miles across the prairie, and re-erected on the site of his new home in Wayne Township. Part of this tract of land is still in the Abrahamson name. It is the only piece of real property purchased by charter members of the congregation that still carries the original family name.

The Alexander Johnson farm home ranks next to the church as a site of historical interest because the small group of early Swedish settlers met in this house to organize a congregation. The Johnson farm is also remembered as the home of the Connor family who purchased it from the Johnsons. A son, Jacob E. Connor, later became United States Consul to Russia. As a young man,

Jake Connor was instrumental in getting a library established in Swedesburg. It was kept in Sam White's store, the books available to the public at a very small charge. It is said that young Connor read every book he could beg or borrow.

Swedesburg began to look more like a planned, well-organized village after Hakan Olson had it platted by the county engineer in 1875. It lies square with the world and is a most attractive little community center. The streets were made 50 feet wide, and the alleys 16 feet in width. Land for a public square was given to the community with the stipulation that it be used for a women's seminary or other school purposes. This provision has not been followed to the letter, but the square has been used for school purposes and public benefit.

Haken Olson accepted a call to become pastor of the church at Swedesburg in 1869, three years after he had helped to organize it. He re-moved there in the same year, immediately building himself a home in the new settlement. Olson occupied a unique position in the congregation. He not only served as pastor of the congregation and ministered to its needs, but was the moving force in the building of Swedesburg. Owner of the 40 acres comprising the village site, having obtained it by tax deed, he began to sell lots and acreages to others who wished to establish homes there. When he left in 1876, the church bought the house he had built, and since that day has provided a comfortable home for every pastor who has served the congregation.

The description of the property in one of the many deeds which Hakan Olson gave for lots or acreages that he sold may be of interest:

Hakan Olson and his wife Petrunella Olson, for a consideration of \$95.00 convey to Otto Abrahamson, Henry Co., State of Iowa. Commencing twenty-five rods south of the North East corner of section twenty eight Twp. Seventy three range six West running thence South to the North line of P. L. Anderson's tract of land, running thence west twelve and five eleventh rods. Thence North to the South line of Phar Larson's tract of land. Thence

East twelve and five elevenths rods to place of beginning.

H. Olson  
her  
Petrunella X Olson  
mark

The foregoing deed was notarized by A. McClure  
March 9th. 1871 Justice of the Peace

There is an interesting coincidence concerning the family of S. P. Swenson, the first Swede to settle at Swedesburg, March 4th, 1864. A son Charles was the last surviving member of the original congregation. He died May 2, 1943, and rests in Memorial Gardens adjoining the "Big Brown Church."

U. S. Highway 218 divides Wayne Township and passes through our village. A half mile south the traveler passes over flat lands that were once the wettest part of the entire region. Imprints made in the days of the buffalo can still be seen after a big June rain. Water collects in pools in a number of places that we call buffalo wallows. They were made by the tramping of buffalo gathering in large droves during the summer. The huge beasts carried away so much dirt from these places that some of them were as much as two feet deep in the early days. O. V. Abrahamson, now 82 years of age, and a direct descendant of Germund Abrahamson, recalls fishing in some of these pools as a boy, catching large bullheads in great numbers. The last wallow, located on forty acres belonging to John Tolerander, had water in it the year round, and was drained not too many years ago. A bridge had to be built across this pool for the early road through these marshy flats. Some of the piling is still in the ground beneath the pavement of Highway 218.

Those who finally solved the drainage problem perhaps recalled the poetic line: "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." Surplus water is now carried away through drains beneath the frost line leaving no unsightly scars to mar the beauty of the landscape.

The last log cabin in the area, situated on the John

Tolander farm, was taken down and rebuilt as a museum on the property of Dr. Harry Smith in Olds two miles to the north. It is one block west of the main highway through Olds, and can be seen from the street.

One of the concerns of the early Swedish settlers here was to establish a church where they could come together and worship God. The community, church and village are all interdependent. The same is true of the other two Swedish settlements in Henry County. The larger one at Mt. Pleasant organized a church and filed articles of incorporation, May 26, 1884, while the other was established at New London, November 23, 1898. Both these sister Swedish churches have long since disbanded, though there are still a few people of Swedish descent living in the Mt. Pleasant and the New London areas.

The history of our church at Swedesburg may be divided into three periods. It was organized and services conducted entirely in Swedish during the pastorates of Hakan Olson, Walleen, Franzen, Bring and Sylvan. The transitional period began with Norrbom and continued under Pastors Fant, Ekholm, Johnson and Elmquist. A new era was beginning with the arrival of Rev. Elmquist upon the scene. The modern period includes the pastorates of Westerburg, Tinborg, Benander, Bexell and our present pastor, Rev. E. M. Lorimer. The change was gradual and orderly. The foundations were laid for the church in use today under the leadership of Dr. Ekholm. At this time the English language was adopted for teaching children beginning Sunday School. This has continued. The younger generation knows no other tongue today.

The early settlers depended upon the village to supply many of its needs. The following is a list of pioneer business establishments in Swedesburg:

Otto Abrahamson General Store

Lyman Bergh Hardware Store

Sam White General Store, later operated by Anderson & Nelson

Froid Shoe Repair Shop, later purchased by C. J. Anderson  
Liff Shoe Repair Shop  
Liliedahl Blacksmith Shop, later operated by J. C. Sandburg  
Restaurant and Barber Shop, with the Odd Fellows hall upstairs  
P. L. Anderson Carpenter Shop and Undertaking Business  
Race Horse Business Venture of Drs. Porter & Scheidler  
Drs. Porter & Scheidler  
Rug Weaver  
Wood Carver who made wooden shoes  
Svea Mutual Insurance So.  
Dress Making Shop  
Bank

The carpenter and undertaker, P. L. Anderson, was the last resident of Swedesburg to regularly wear wooden shoes. He wore them in almost every kind of weather, though it's safe to assume he did not do much running while wearing this unique type of footwear.

Swedesburg still has a Post Office and the Svea Mutual Insurance Co., with a general store and a garage also doing business here. The church and Parish Hall are the focal points of interest. The latter functions as a community center because many different groups and organizations hold meetings in it. Residents of the village itself are mostly retired farm folk with a few families of young people. Though the number of business establishments has declined over the years, and the proportion of older citizens has greatly increased, future prospects of the community have improved with the coming of the railroad two miles to the north.

We are well aware of the fact that many people other than the charter members of the church had a part in the development of Swedesburg. The large number of those who contributed to its success prohibits the publication of their names. There were always individuals willing to assist in projects to improve the church community at large. We respect the lasting work of those who came here after the spring of 1866 just as highly

as we do the successful labors of the founders of Swedesburg. The work of these later citizens speaks for itself.

The quotation from Shakespeare: "The man that hath no music in his soul and is not stirred by concord of sweet sounds . . ." did not apply to our church in 1874. Moved by the harmony of their natural surroundings men and women of the congregation in that year began meeting to practice singing. A choir was organized in 1879 to lead singing during services, giving expression in song to the greatness and majesty of God. Choruses have also been formed by our non-Swedish members. One of these groups was led by Will Crabtree, an able conductor who generously gave of his time and knowledge to promote local singing talent. Bands and orchestras were organized too, though the emphasis has continued to be upon singing and vocal groups.

The regular church choir was joined by past members to form a grand chorus of 75 voices for the celebration of our 90th Anniversary in 1956. A large junior chorus also took part in the program.

Local Swedesburg customs have been many and varied. During memorial services in the early days the church bell was tolled once for each year of the deceased person's life. But this practice did not last long. It is now tolled intermittently a few times as the procession nears the church. To the pioneer a sounding church bell signified a call to worship. The bell was rung an hour before service on Sunday morning, and since 1879 it has been customary to ring it at six o'clock on Saturday evenings as a reminder that the next day is Sunday.

Christmas has always been a joyous occasion as in many churches. The early morning service which now begins at six o'clock instead of at four A.M., has always attracted a large number of worshippers. The candle-lighted arch, candles in the windows, on the altar piece, and in two starry boxes on the wall representing the heavens, meant much to the church fathers on this festive occasion. The minister's message and the singing of the choir always seemed to have a special mean-

ing at Christmas. The childrens' program during the holidays was also well attended ,and it would be difficult to say who got the greater thrill from it, the parents or the children. The choir's march to their places carrying lighted candles and singing a traditional hymn has become an especially appealing reminder of the Christmas story in later years.

Easter with its message of hope, followed by Pentecost and Trinity, have a special place on our church calendar. The beauty and joy shared on these occasions can best be appraised by those whose own church affiliations closely correlate with these long established traditions.

Several anniversary celebrations have been held beginning with the fortieth in 1906, the fiftieth in 1916, the sixtieth in 1926, the seventy-fifth in 1941 and the ninetieth in 1956. There have also been smaller observances held between these dates. The congregation now looks forward to its centennial in 1966.

Three churches have been built at Swedesburg since its beginnings ninety years ago. The first was built in 1868. A fire resulting from an overheated stove destroyed this structure January 19, 1883. A second church was begun and completed in 1883. It was much larger than the first, seating between four and five hundred people. It had a 110-foot tower and was a landmark that could be seen for miles, becoming known as "The Big White Church In the Little White Town." A fire started by lightning burned this church the night of June 11, 1927. A pipe organ installed in 1911 and the church bell whose beautiful tone could be heard for miles when the weather was favorable were also destroyed. The bell cracked when it fell from its fifty-foot perch in the tower.

A new church was begun in 1927, and dedicated in 1928. This brown brick church, larger than the one it replaced, has a full basement which has since been remodeled for an expanded Sunday school. It has a chapel and a number of class rooms. The main auditorium contains three manual pipe organs and chimes

which add to the beauty and impressiveness of the regular worship service. But the building is already beginning to be somewhat crowded. The picture may some day change, but for more than half a century visitors and travelers passing through "The Little White Town With the Big Brown Church," have spoken in admiration of its beauty and setting among the gently rolling hills of Henry County.

Hakon Olson completed his own parsonage a year after the original church was completed. A new parsonage was built in 1890, a third in 1901 and a fourth in 1931, the latter being a most modern and comfortable residence.

The Parish Hall is located on what was originally called the Public Square. The certification regarding the plat and survey of Swedesburg by Hakon Olson stated ". . . and the public square is hereby dedicated for a female seminary and other schools." It was 1893 before any action was taken to erect a building that would comply with the stipulation of the donor. It has since undergone extensive remodeling. A kitchen was added in 1903, which was enlarged together with the auditorium in 1916. A new kitchen was installed in 1941, the dining room enlarged, and a basement constructed to provide rest rooms and space for the furnace and fuel. The "hall" has become an important community center. The use of its facilities are provided free to any number of groups both within and outside the community regardless of whether they are members of the church.

Three annual events held at the Parish Hall are of special interest, and always attract attendance from far beyond the community. They are the men's oyster stew usually held in February, the fair in August, and the "Smorgasbord" in late November or early December. The oyster stew is largely a sporting event, and a good crowd is always assured to hear a well-known guest speaker. About 275 men attended last year to hear a most interesting program that included Bud Suter of the University of Iowa's public relations department and

Ken Ploen, famed Iowa athlete, who courteously answered many questions on football from the audience. And everyone enjoyed a color film of the Rose Bowl Game.

The annual one-day fair in August opens with a "kiddie" parade led by a grand marshal all dressed up for the occasion on a beautiful pony. Prizes are awarded for the best attractions. Exhibits range from the antique to the most modern. Dinner is served for all, and there is music by the local band, singing, speeches, games and a social hour when the refreshment stand does a thriving business. The youngsters are especially attracted by a live pony merry-go-round, and needless to say, everyone has a good time.

The "Smorgasbord" during the winter has grown to such proportions it has become necessary to limit it to 500 guests who look forward to enjoying the rare and pleasant experience of partaking of many varieties of delicious food that represents the most skillful blending of Scandinavian dishes. The "Smorgasbord" is something out of this world for old timers who remember the thrill of eating "Johnny cakes."

The success of these gatherings in adding to the wholesome influence of the "Little White Town with the Big Brown Church" is a source of pride to those of us who have a special interest in this small Iowa community.

---

### Bigger and Fewer Iowa Farms

Figures from the office of the state secretary of agriculture show a continued decline in the number of Iowa farms. There were 193,000 farms in operation in the state in 1958, compared to the record 228,622 in 1900. The decline in recent years has averaged 2,000 per year. The average size of the Iowa farm, 181 acres in 1958, has been increasing, with tremendous advances in the mechanization of the work since 1940. The modern farmer has become a businessman with a large capital investment.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.