

## Religious and Cultural

A large number of the Swedes had affiliated with the Lutheran Church. They came from a country where that denomination was the State Church. There were also a considerable number of Methodists, Baptists, and other Protestants in the Iowa settlement. A Swedish Methodist Church was organized in the country five or six miles southeast of Stratford and has prospered since the country was settled. A Swedish Baptist Church has also been a part of the community since early times.

Swedish people were, for the most part, devoted to their churches. The Lutheran Church in Stratford, which was started with a small membership in 1895, celebrated its 105th birthday on Sunday, October 4, 1964. A new and larger church building was built in 1895 and it is still standing. For nearly half a century all services of the Stratford Lutheran Church were in Swedish, but around 1908 the minister began holding evening services in English. A decade later all Swedish services were discontinued.

Teen-age Lutherans usually spent a part of a year with church studies in preparation for confirmation. Many dropped out of public school

while engaged in what they referred to as "Reading for the Preacher." The classes were in Swedish, and it is presumed the children gained a fluency in the language while acquiring religious instruction.

The Lutherans of the community held an early church service on Christmas morning called *julotta* which began at 6 a.m. and continued to the break of dawn. Farm families from a radius of nearly six miles came regardless of road or weather conditions. Services usually closed with the congregation singing the hymn, "When Christmas Morn Is Dawning."

#### NAR JULDAGSMORGON GLIMMAR

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| 1. När juldagsmorgon glimmar,<br>Jag vill till stallet gaa,<br>Där Gud in nattens timmar<br>Re'n vilar uppaa straa.<br>Där Gud in nattens timmar<br>Re'n vilar uppaa straa. | 2. Hur god du var, som ville,<br>Till jorden komma ner!<br>Nu ej i synd jag spille<br>Min barndoms dagar mer!<br>Nu ej i synd jag spille<br>Min barndoms dagar mer! |
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At the conclusion of the service, the people returned to their homes. The men did their chores, and the women prepared the food.

Christmas time was referred to by the older generation in their native tongue as "jultiden," and it was a happy time for both old and young. Families not only gathered together in their churches for special services, but in their homes where many of the traditional customs of the old country were

observed. Games were played and immense quantities of food consumed.

One of the most distinctive items was lutfisk, which translated means leached or washed fish. This was usually codfish, caught and cured in Sweden. After the fisherman cleaned the cod, it was taken unsalted to a mountainside and frozen dry. These imported fish, as marketed in Iowa, were about 30 inches long, dry and very hard.

Preparation for Christmas use was begun about Thanksgiving when the fish was cut with an ax into three-inch lengths, packed with fresh wood ashes in a wooden pail, and covered with water. The container was placed where it would remain frozen for several weeks. The lye, that was formed from the wood ashes and water, was removed by repeated washing. The flesh was flaked off free from skin and nearly free from bones. The fish was put in a cheesecloth bag and cooked in salted water. A cream sauce was made with the fish liquor and was served over the fish in a large shallow bowl or platter. The supply of lutfisk was usually adequate for use well into the New Year.

Some of the accompanying foods included: prim ost, a home prepared solid product made by evaporating whey to a point, where on cooling, it formed a light brown cake. Imported lingonberries, somewhat like cranberries but smaller, were eaten. Knäckebröd was served. The usual dessert was a delicious rice porridge.

A characteristic breakfast dish was äggröra, which in English is egg gravy. It is like a very thin omelet but has more uniform texture. The following recipe is occasionally used in my family:

- 2 tablespoons fresh bacon fat
- 1 rounded tablespoon flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt, dash of pepper
- 2 eggs beaten lightly
- 1 cup of milk, or more for thin gravy

Mix fat, flour, salt, pepper, and milk; stir until the mixture begins to thicken — add beaten eggs, stir over low heat until cooked.

The dairy preparation ostkaka or cheese cake has continued to be a favorite in the community. It is neither cheese nor cake but has characteristics of both cheese and pudding. The following modernized recipe should satisfy a group of 10:

- 10 quarts of milk
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup flour
- 3 household rennet tablets
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup blanched almonds chopped.
- 8 eggs
- $\frac{1}{2}$  scant cup of sugar
- 1 pint of heavy cream

Dissolve rennet tablets in 3 tablespoons cold water, mix flour with milk while stirring, and heat until warm, add dissolved rennet tablets and stir for a few seconds. Pour into a strainer lined with cheesecloth, and press out as much whey as possible. Add eggs, sugar, almonds, cream, and stir until well blended. Pour into buttered casserole and bake in a slow 250°F. oven for 45 minutes or until set. Serve with lingonberries or jam.

In the hands of early settlers ostkaka was an all-farm product. The rennet was prepared too. On farms an unweaned calf, under three months of age, was occasionally slaughtered. A portion of the ruminant stomach was salvaged, cleaned, heavily salted, and dried behind a kitchen stove. For use this was sliced very thin and soaked in warm water. Rennet tablets have been used as a substitute for a good many years.

One cannot overlook our educational heritage! A one-room schoolhouse was usually located every two miles. A public road was laid out on nearly every alternate section line. This meant that no child need walk more than two miles. Around the turn of the century, the school that the author attended had a good enrollment, especially during the long winter term. One winter the number reached 32. Every seat was taken and every student seemed bent on doing his very best. The lessons learned were rarely forgotten.

Many of the teachers were poorly paid and also poorly prepared for their duties. Very few had finished high school. Some had not even attended high school, having gone only to country school or to the county Normal Institute held at the county seat for a period of a week or two once each year. It should be said, however, that most of the teachers had good personalities and a fine mental keenness. They were an inspiration to us boys and girls.

At least three-fourths of the pupils spoke the Swedish language. The men of the families had soon learned enough English to get along. The women, however, with more limited contacts, learned the language more slowly, picking it up from their children who went to school. One mother of several children remarked, "It makes me sweat to speak English."

Many families subscribed to a Swedish newspaper called *Hemlandet* (*The Homeland*). This was published first in Galesburg, Illinois, and later in Chicago. In 1914 it merged with *Svenska Amerikanaren*. Swedish Lutheran families often subscribed to a church publication classified as a magazine, and called *The Augustana*. It ceased publication in 1923.

Swedes are traditionally lovers of music. By the 1890's many farm homes had a five-octave reed organ upon which the children took music lessons from a local teacher, or from one who drove into the community once a week. Men played the Swedish folk songs with which they were familiar on the German-style accordion. Popular with all was the song entitled *Gubben Noak*, meaning "Old Man Noah." The song usually started with the story of the Ark and the Flood. The singers made up the verses as they went along—usually including Mrs. Noah in the last stanzas. One stanza which comes to my mind as I write this article runs like this:

*Swedish**English*

Gubben Noak, Gubben Noak, Var en hedersman.	Mr. Noah, Mr. Noah, Was an honorable man.
Gubben Noak, Gubben Noak, Var en hedersman.	Mr. Noah, Mr. Noah, Was an honorable man.
När han gick ur arken planterade han paa marken	When he left the ark He planted on the ground
Gubben Noak, Gubben Noak, Var en hedersman.	Mr. Noah, Mr. Noah, Was an honorable man.

Here is a little ditty that was sung or recited for the entertainment of small children while riding on the foot of an adult.

*Swedish**English*

Rida rida ranka Hästen heter Blanka. Vart skall du rida? Rida bort och fria. Vad skall hon heta? Anna Margareta.	Ride ride a broomstick The horse's name is Blanka. Where shall you ride? Ride away to woo. What shall her name be? Anna Margareta.
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The French harp or mouth organ was a great favorite, and local contests are held even at the present time.

Probably one of the greatest festivals in Sweden, particularly in the Dalecarlia area is *mid-sommarfirande* (mid-summer celebration). This occurs on June 24 and is a day for picnics and community folk dancing. Perhaps the Swedes are celebrating the return of sunlight after a period of long winter nights.

Many Swedes who came to Iowa followed the

custom of having picnics on June 24. With the passing of the first-generation Swedes, the custom has been abandoned. Parties were numerous in those days. They played games, talked, and ended with refreshments that included four-layer white cakes.

At work or at play, in church or in school, the Swedes of Iowa have demonstrated their ability to attain positions of leadership in the social, cultural and political life of the Hawkeye State.