

THE EMIGRANTS FROM SMÅLAND, SWEDEN. THE AMERICAN DREAM

by Ken Sawyer, Halifax, England. 1999
from <http://www.swedesintexas.com>

Introduction

These are my collected notes about emigration from Sweden to the USA first became interested in this subject when I discovered that some of the Swedish emigrants traveled by train through my home area in West Yorkshire (England), en route from Hull to Liverpool. I had previously known a little about this great emigration and then I was further stimulated when we visited the Emigrants Museum in Växjö, Småland; this was a main province from which the emigrants departed and is the reason for emphasising Småland as representative of Sweden as a whole.

With the start of steam powered ships their voyage to the USA took 2-3 weeks and often included a crossing from Gothenburg to Hull on board the ships of the Wilson Line. This was followed by a train journey from Hull, through the Huddersfield/Halifax area, to Liverpool and then a crossing by the Inman Line or another company's ship to New York.

Did you know that in 1638, through a Government inspired emigration, the colony called New Sweden was established in Delaware, on America's East Coast? It was in Sweden's possession for almost twenty years, but was then lost to the Dutch.

Did you know that in the second half of the 19th Century and the early years of the 20th, more than a million Swedes, around 1/4 of the population, emigrated from Sweden and mainly to the USA?

Did you know that this was called the "American fever"? Even today, at least five million USA citizens are of Swedish extraction?

Vilhelm Moberg, storywriter about the emigrants.

The 20th Century Swedish writer from Småland, best sums up the story of these emigrants. He wrote the powerful epic novels, "The Emigrants", "Unto a New Land", "The Settlers" and "The Last Letter Home". The first of these moving novels relates a fictional journey of the main characters, Karl Oskar and Kristina, from Ljuder a parish in Småland to the New World. It represents the real life exodus of hundreds of thousands of people. I quote its' first words:

"This is the story of a group of people who in 1850 left their homes in Ljuder parish in the province of Småland, Sweden and emigrated to North America. They came from a land of small cottages and large families. They were people of the soil, an they came of a stock, which for thousands of years had tilled the ground they were leaving."

These few words set the background for the story, which is also the story of the first period of group emigration.

Småland forms most of the south eastern wedge of Sweden. It is an area of great natural beauty, with an unusual terrain; deep pine forests studded with glittering lakes. Even so, the thin, stony nature of the soil was a reason why a quarter of the region's population emigrated to America in the period from 1850 to 1920, in order to escape rural poverty. Historically Småland has had it tough. The simple rustic charm of today's pretty red painted cottages, "de röda stugorna", belies the intense misery endured by generations of local, simple peasants in the 19th century. Even the walls and piles of stones in the fields have a story to tell.

Sweden was predominantly agrarian in the early 19th century. Industry was largely limited to the unique, small forms of industrial settlement and organisation in the Swedish countryside called a bruk, often iron works. The owner was known as the Patron and he was a sort of local chieftain! Timber production was also a significant industry. So it was a static society with economic and social immobility and an isolated countryside but there were skilled workers in the land.

Yet, by the middle of the 1800's, all the explosive and revolutionary possibilities were gathering. The harmony of Sweden disrupted as truly radically as it did in the pages of Moberg's novel. A long series of developments threatened to become a revolution. Even though an isolated and seemingly backward place like Ljuder in Kronoberg County seemed immovable as a community, it became part of Sweden's most emigration-affected areas in the eventful second half of the 19th Century.

The emigrants' motives were not simple but rather a complex of evolutionary factors and fundamental changes in Sweden's life.

Population pressure in the 19th Century.

The upsurge in population in preindustrial Sweden was explained by a report of the Cathedral Chapter of Växjö. The Bishop of Växjö at the time was the famous poet Esaias Tegnér. The report rather sarcastically stated: "With the assistance of peace, vaccination, and potatoes the population has increased considerably. But since this development is not matched by new jobs the result is one-sided and a badly planned system has come forth all over the society. The land is filled with dugouts inhabited by people with no other capital than their hands." This theme of "peace, potatoes and vaccination" of the Cathedral Chapter's report underlines the reasons for the rapid population growth. Sweden's population, which was 1.8 million in 1750, rose from 2.3 million in 1800 to 3.5 million in 1850, to 4.6 million in 1880, more than twice that of the beginning of the century. The population explosion was primarily amongst the poorest section of the citizens. At the beginning of the century 90% lived in the countryside and by the mid 1850's 80% of the population was occupied in farming, which includes forestry. Even at the

end of the century 75% were still in the countryside. (Some statistics give 72% in agriculture in 1870. 55% in 1900.) Agriculture and its' related occupations was the mother trade of Sweden. Peace. Following the successful war against the Danes in 1814, Sweden was no longer involved in wars, as it had been for many decades in the 17th and 18th Centuries. When Pomerania, which included the old Hansa towns of Stralsund and Greifswald, was given up the last remnant of Sweden's once considerable empire on mainland Europe departed. Finland and the Åland Islands had been lost to Russia in 1809. Now Sweden was free from military involvement abroad. So soldiers were less needed and a source of diminution of population by slaughter disappeared, as Sweden entered into long lasting peace.

Potatoes

Signifies the improved food and nourishment for which the potatoes provided a better base than the previous poor bread, which often included such an ingredient as bark from the trees. State supported land reform began in 1827 and led to the change from the open field system and communal crofting villages to individual, enclosed farms. The reform was intended to gather the small parcels of land of Swedish rural communities into more efficient, economic units. The cultivated acreage dramatically increased – actually threefold between 1800 and 1875. The land reform had positive and negative effects. Better cultivation methods resulted in a growth in agricultural output and the availability of more food for some. The benefits came to those who owned land. Yet the changes also led to an increase in rural poverty and a backward social trend. Some of the benefits were minimized by the system of divided inheritances in the large families. This led to farms being fragmented into very small and often unviable holdings. The number of farmhands of both sexes dramatically increased.

Karl Oskar Nilsson, in Moberg's novel, inherited 1/16th of a homestead, which was considered enough for a smallholder in this stony Småland. His inheritors would then have inherited 1/32nd, if not less.

There was a social loss too. The farmers had usually worked together and there was a sense of co-operation and mutual support, especially at times of difficulty. Now there was unrest and the breaking of close links in the community.

By the reforms, the peasants were even denied access to the previous village common ground, which had helped them to eke out a living. If they could not clear more land and if they should fall into debt as crops failed or were insufficient, then they would have to sell up and move to a town, if they could find work, or go to America. In most cases they had come from independent farm families, but the "backward social trend" in an overpopulated rural society had brought them to the lowest rung of the social ladder. Many of this larger population were absorbed into the semi-dependent classes. Farm owners let small plots of land, known as a torp, tocrofters in return for a fixed number of days' labour on the farm. Even less secure were the dugout or hut dwellers/squatters or backstugsittare, who had no more than a very simple dwelling on a farm or in forest clearings, a potato patch and perhaps a goat. They had no guarantee of employment. Karl Oskar and his family at Korpamoen were relatively wealthy

compared to “the people in the forest”, these torpare and the backstugsittare. The old communities were split and families were separated from their neighbours and the neighbourhoods they had known for centuries. The spirit of togetherness and cooperation disappeared. Subsistence farming failed and people were starving. With a basic diet of potato, poor bread, soured milk and cranberry it was not surprising that many peasant folk should seek something better in the towns, or in this magic land they were increasingly hearing about. So there were large groups of people who were in a hopeless situation with little prospect of improvement in the immediate future. Whenever poor harvests and consequent hunger or even starvation came, then a choice had to be made. Starve and die, or move on, perhaps to America.

It is no coincidence that the major emigration areas of Sweden were the poor agricultural areas where the division of farmsteads was at the highest. Småland, Värmland, Dalsland, Bohuslän, Västergötland and Hälsingland were significant in proportion to their population in this respect. In the period 1750-1850 the number of dugout settlers, maids, hired hands, and dependent poor and old people multiplied three times. So the rural population was divided between a land owning class at various levels and a landless class, even by the beginning of the emigration period. Agricultural output went up due to farm schools and better farming methods – the potatoes of the phrase- so many people were better fed. Yet the old social fabric weakened and disappeared, scattering villagers to the cities and abroad. Vaccination. This represents the medical advances that were happening. The average family had 8 children, yet usually only 6 survived to be 15 years of age. Protective vaccination was introduced in 1801. Previously nearly 1/5th of the population died in a year of smallpox or other epidemics. This was especially so in the war years, for returning soldiers spread typhus and dysentery and deficient hygiene did the rest. In 1808-09 there were more deaths than births. Outbreaks of measles in 1829, smallpox in 1837-39 and dysentery and cholera in 1857 led to many deaths. However the improved health measures gradually reduced infant mortality.

Bad economic conditions and Famine.

The growing population in Småland made intensive use of the available land, as happened elsewhere including in Värmland.

Trees and underbrush were cleared to allow of ploughing as large, often very large, stones were cleared also. The distinctive Småland field walls are built from these cleared stones, but where the stones were too large to move they are piled up in the middle of the fields. Cultivation went on around them as they became part of the meadow land scene. They represent much hard labour in the 19th Century. Hay, mosses, herbs and berries were harvested. Bark for bread and leafy branches for animal food was collected from the trees. The axe was in constant use for fuel, tools and furniture. Many of these skills were to come in very useful for pioneer settler farming in America later.

Sweden balanced on a knife-edge between well being and starvation. If nature failed, then catastrophe was inevitable in spite of community grain stores and “household societies”.

There were crop failures in 1836 and 1837. Famine hit several areas of Sweden in 1848, including Småland where there was famine in summer, autumn and winter. This was the case again in 1867 and 1868, with major crop failures due to extreme weather conditions. 1867 was a wet year in which the grain rotted in the fields. 1868 was a very dry year and the fields became scorched. There was also late spring onset and early arrival of the winter's cold weather. 1869 was a year of severe epidemic. The last countrywide harvest failure, and the resulting severe hunger, provoked the first main mass emigration. In 1868 and 1869 54,000 emigrated. Another 50,000, mostly relatives of the recent wave, followed in the next four years. - So over 100,000 emigrated from 1868 to 1873. They were mainly from southern, western and central Sweden. A high proportion of these emigrants were from villages and areas from which the emigrants of the 1840's and 1850's had departed, so they already had some knowledge and hopes of America from letters.

The record of the emigrants comes from the annual reports submitted by the parish clergy, who acted as Registrars. The priest granted an emigrant's certificate. These figures were passed on through the County Governor to the Central Statistical Bureau. The records were supplemented by port statistics and much valuable information comes from ships' records of passengers. Some people did not report their intention of emigrating to the village priest. Perhaps they wished to avoid a stern and solicitous warning against their desire to emigrate. Some also left from Norwegian, Danish or German ports.

Intolerance of religious beliefs.

The national Church of Sweden had been very strong and the local clergyman, the präst or kyrkoherde, could exercise a powerful influence for good or ill over parishioners. Yet its influence was starting to wane as there was a growth in new thinking, both religious and secular. Many people sought greater freedom of religious expression. A revivalist (väckelserörelsen), Bible based movement grew in protest against what were seen as the limitations of the State Church, which was seen to side with the employers and the ruling classes. Those not being allowed to think what they wanted included the supporters in Dalarna and Hälsingland of the revivalist preacher, Erik Jansson from Uppland. His preaching was frequently directed against the Swedish Church and that was forbidden. These were people of inner strength, conviction and high ideals and, as a result, the first group of "Janssare emigrated in 1846 and went to their "Land of Canaan", Bishop Hill in Illinois. 1,326 people emigrated that year, twenty times greater than in any previous year. Yet Jansson himself eventually fell from grace as he became a dominating and wayward leader in the USA and lost support. A similar group called the Åkians appears in Moberg's "The Emigrants".

Intolerance of political beliefs.

As the number of industrial workers grew, the unbearable conditions gave rise to a folk labour movement of workers seeking improved working conditions and higher pay. The year 1879 saw the first strike in Sundsvall, and from then on

workers joined unions to try and get better working conditions and pay for themselves and their colleagues. The organizers of these movements were often strongly suppressed and the leaders persecuted, often with support from the government. Many unionists were forced to emigrate in fear of their lives. Associated with this was a strong temperance movement and a women's movement and both gained popularity.

Industries.

The Industrial Revolution affected Sweden later and much more slowly than in most Western European countries. Consequently the cities and larger towns remained few and small. No real industrial revolution occurred and developments such as mechanization and the introduction of railways, were piecemeal. Sweden had vast resources in talented people, the mountains of metal ores, the enormous forests and the powerful rivers. These resources were relatively dormant until a breakthrough of the timber industry in the 1850's, when the wilderness became very valuable. As steam power developed, the sawmill was freed from dependence on rapids. Huge sawmill areas grew up around river outlets such as at Sundsvall and in the Ådalen district in Norrland. Intensive railway building shortened the long distances between the Lapland ore mining areas and the export harbours such as at Luleå. Industrial centres were created around the railways. So Norrland was transformed into a pioneer America type area within Sweden. Many were attracted to the north by the timber and pulp industry.

The Industrial Age came to Sweden in the 1870's, with the main industries in timber, iron and steel, textiles and glass. Glass making became very important in Småland. Its' Kingdom of Glass or Crystal, or Glasriket, in places such as Kosta, Boda and Orrefors is a popular and significant part of the economy today. Small-scale workshop industry in the previously mentioned bruks developed into modern industrial concerns. The Swedish companies ASEA, Ericsson, SKF and AGA were all founded in this time. Inventors such as John Ericsson and Alfred Nobel (dynamite and later benefactor of the Nobel prizes) thrived. New industrial districts generated large internal migration, as in Britain. So by 1870 15% of the population worked in mining, construction, manufacturing etc., and this was 28% at the turn of the century. This seemed to be powerful industrial progress, but it was never strong enough to satisfy the very basic needs of many people. Sweden was not stagnant economically, but if industrialization had come earlier, the industrial areas would have absorbed the population pressure. The slow growth of industry could not create the ideal society and urban life was not always attractive. When times got worse there was no social security. Therefore, an average of two men emigrated for each man occupied by industry.

A literate people.

Another significant factor was the Act of 1842, establishing compulsory elementary education. The folkskolan -a basic primary school- virtually erased illiteracy and also enabled people to read about America!

Where did the idea of emigration come from?

When there seemed to be no chance of moving from the difficulties the idea of leaving Sweden arose.

“When one may not think what one wishes.

When the food runs out.

When a maid may be a maid forever.

When the senses are numbed by indolence.

Then a possibility opens up.

To travel to America.

One can make something of one's life.

(From Smålandsposten - Glimtar ur Kronobergs historia. Juni 1996)

The emigration which started in the mid 1840's was mostly of people seeking to escape from something, as in the above lines. They usually travelled in groups. The mass emigration started with the so-called famine years in the late 1860's. Folk travelled to something new and hopefully better, a United States economically expanding after the Civil War. How did they get their knowledge about America? Part of the answer was that those who had emigrated wrote glowing accounts of their lives in letters to their home districts, sending news of the job possibilities. These letters were known as the “Amerika brev”. They told of fertile land, amazing railroad builders' wages, excellent forestry jobs and success, even if it was not always true! These letters were treated not so much as private communications and were circulated around, sometimes being published in the countless local newspapers or being collected in a whole book.

Newspapers, such as “Barometern” in Småland, also published articles about America, which were avidly read and passed from hand to hand. The settlers also sent a great deal of money to support those left behind at home. Some emigrants came back to Sweden on visits, with undreamed of wealth in their pockets and taking fabulous gifts for their families. Not all these letters told the truth. Failure was covered up by fictitious accounts of relative success. The recipients were not to know this and these signs of relative prosperity encouraged others. In this way an impulse to go to a better life developed. This was “the America Dream”.

The new railway companies in America needed hard working construction employees. They engaged new workers from Sweden through the agents in New York and Gothenburg. They offered land close to their lines and made it possible for a potential emigrant employee to buy a ticket from their home to wherever they were needed, such as Jamestown in New York State.

When were the main emigration periods?

Minor emigration happened in the early part of the century. From 1820 to 1844 only 209 Swedes arrived at New York.

From 1845 to 1854 15,000 followed and these early groups were the pioneers.

Their reasons for emigration varied, but usually included farming failure and the consequent foreclosure of the debt, religious persecution or even a combination of these. They travelled in family groups, usually from the same village. So the

fictional Karl Oskar left a Småland impoverished from the '48 disaster. Many of this first wave were farmers who took their relatives and servants. There were also craftsmen and some middle class urban people. Group travel, often with a strong leader, gave security on the way and on arrival, for in America they knew no one. A ticket from Göteborg to Chicago cost about 200 Kr at this time. This first wave developed a tradition of emigration. Statistically the emigration had three peaks:

1868-72, the famine emigration with about 100,000 emigrants. In the Linneryd parish in southern Småland, the sheriff foreclosed 300 farms through debt in 2 months. Children begged in droves. Bread was made from varying ingredients, mainly white moss, other lichen, chaff.

1880-93 with about 350,000 persons leaving; One hundred years ago precisely, in 1899, 11,842 Swedes emigrated to America and of them 685 were from Kronoberg County in Småland, whilst 787 were from Jönköpings Län.

1901-10. After the 1st World War, the USA passed strict immigration laws and mass emigration ceased. There was however a further, but less sizeable, temporary peak resulting from the Swedish economic depression in the 1920's.

From Jönköpings Län significant figures are:

1845-1854. - under 2.000.

1868-1872. -about 15.000.

1880-1893. -about 30.000.

1918-1930. -about 5.000

Who did the organization?

Early emigrants, be they individuals, families or small groups often sailed “on top of the cargo”. They had makeshift and cramped sleeping quarters, on board a sailing bark or brig from a Swedish harbour such as Karlshamn or Karlskrona in Blekinge, spending 3 months at sea. These vessels carried their regular cargo, such as pig iron, for this was a major export to the USA. It was as big as the exports to Teesside's newly developing iron works in England. Later the movement became very business like. A network of emigration agents co-operated with shipping companies to recruit new settlers and organize the trips, which mainly started from Gothenburg. These agents were usually trusted people in the villages and small towns, such as the teacher or a shopkeeper. The shipping companies introduced a system of pre-paid tickets for emigrants to send home for younger family members or even a widowed mother. With the start of steam powered ships the voyage took 2-3 weeks and often included a crossing from Gothenburg to Hull on board the ships of the Wilson Line. This was followed by a train journey from Hull, through the Huddersfield area, to Liverpool and then a crossing by the Inman Line or another company's ship to New York. Conditions on board were often dire. Some emigrants from southern Sweden travelled by way of Denmark and/or Germany.

·The steamer “Hero” left Gothenburg in 1866 with 500 emigrants, nearly 400 oxen, 900 pigs, calves and sheep sharing the accommodation. Some agents were

rogues and some newcomers were robbed and cheated when they arrived in New York. Yet most of the emigrants prospered in comparison with the life they had left behind in Sweden.

Swedish emigration history.

It has not been unusual for us to be asked to take photographs when we have met visitors from the USA, who are descendants of the emigrants, as they visit Utvandranas Hus (the House of the Emigrants) in Växjö. Perhaps they have come to trace their ancestry. This is the Swedish Emigrant Institute, founded in 1965 and since 1968 located in the House of Emigrants. It promotes emigration research at all levels and facilitates contacts between Sweden and its' emigrants and their descendents

There is a research room and service, with Europe's largest collection of books and documents on emigration history, including microfilmed old church registers and inventories, and ships' passenger lists from ten harbours. Here visitors may trace their family roots at a charge of 100kr per day. There is an excellent main exhibition, "The Dream of America" about the background, development and consequences of the emigration. It is possible to follow the migrants' journey on fully laden horse drawn carts or carriages with their "America trunks" to a port such as Karlskrona or Gothenburg. It has about 30,000 visitors a year with many Swedish-Americans coming, especially for Minnesota Day, celebrated on the second Sunday of August

Arrival at New York.

The busyness of the harbour, with its' mass of ships and forest of masts and spread of buildings, must have been an overwhelming experience for the mainly country folk. Strange languages and the activities of the "runners" bidding for their services will have been bewildering and nerve racking. Often these "runners" were earlier immigrants and earned their money by helping the new immigrants through their problems with officials and with first housing.

These runners or other agents were contracted to plan, arrange the transport and then accompany the immigrant groups on a major stage of their journey inland. A typical contract is set out in Moberg's "Unto a Good Land".

Contract for Transportation of Immigrants.

The undersigned agrees to carry the immigrants, who have arrived on the brig Charlotta of Karlshamn, from New York to Chicago, on the following conditions:

1. From New York to Albany by steamer, from Albany to Buffalo by steam wagon, and from Buffalo to Chicago by steamer.
2. For every adult person the fare is 8 dollars, children under 3 years free, children between 3 years and 12 years half fare.
3. The same fare entitles the traveler to 100 lbs. Baggage free and 150 lbs. On the

steam wagon.

4. The baggage of the passengers is transferred free of charge from the vessel in New York to the steamer, and likewise in Albany and Buffalo, the whole way through to Chicago.

New York,
June 26, 1850.

New York then was just another stage of their journey, unless criminal agents cheated them of their little money. As shown by the above contract, the immigrants needed to arrange to travel on by steamer up the Hudson River to Albany, the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes. The further journey to the homestead lands was carried out by horse carts and walking. Later the railroads made these stages relatively simple. Whether in town or countryside, most immigrants, even the skilled artisans, started from the lowest level of society.

Where did they go?

In the earlier periods most of the emigrants were from the countryside, and sought a farming life in the Mid-West. They were land hungry people. The possibility of wide open opportunities and of getting huge unspoiled land areas to settle on almost free, if they dared to travel west, played a large part. The terms of President Lincoln's 1862 Homestead Act indirectly made the northern part of the areas between the rivers Mississippi and Missouri very attractive for Swedish settlers. The land there was very fertile. Emigrants who were prepared to become American citizens could have 160 acres of virgin land to develop. The only requirement was to clear, build on and cultivate the land in the first 5 years, and then it became their own. These emigrants took with them traditional virtues of hard work, thrift and honesty.

From New York many moved on to Chicago, where they either stayed or its' railway station became a staging post as they headed for lands similar to the ones they had left behind. Many went on to the well-forested Minnesota and, as it was so popular with folk from Sweden's forested areas, it became known as the Swede State of America. Many went also to Nebraska, Illinois, Iowa, Dakota and Kansas. The everyday reality of the pioneer's life was different to the glamour of the dream. The first home was a cabin as simple and as primitive as a poor torpstuga [hamlet hut] in Småland. Clearing the ground of stones in Småland was replaced by the rooting out of stumps. Some were hesitant about settling on the prairie because the landscape was so different. Be it prairie or hill land all Swedish communities were formed, where only or mainly Swedish was spoken.

Increasingly Swedish emigrants went further west to California and Texas and here Swedish colonies developed also. There is still a significant Swedish-American culture in parts of these states.

These pioneers had a tough task and had to work hard by day and into the night. It is well illustrated in Moberg's books. A basic house for shelter had to be built.

Ground had to be cleared and prepared for cultivation. Cattle had to be purchased and fed. Many had economic problems in their early days in the USA. They had little spare money after paying for their journey. There were hard winters and the family could be close to starvation before everything was up and running. Language was a problem for many, although in later emigrations town dwellers went to evening classes in English. Soon many unmarried men became lumberjacks or railway or construction workers in the rapidly growing towns. Actually every fourth Swedish immigrant came from a town so the former Swede rural prototype immigrant picture is far from true.

Moberg's picture is true of the 1850's but not of later. The Swedes were renowned as carpenters, bricklayers and building contractors. The savings from a few years' hard work in the big city were often used to buy land for a new farm or settlement in Minnesota or Iowa. "The Swedes built Chicago", was a saying and by 1910 this city was in effect Sweden's second city. There were more Swedes in Chicago than there were inhabitants in Gothenburg! They formed 11% of the population. It was the leading Swedish metropolis in North America. It became a cultural and economic centre of Swedish-America, with newspapers like "Hemlandet" and "Svenska Amerikanaren" published in the area and circulated in the emigrant areas.

"Hemlandet" was published originally in Galesburg, Illinois but later in Chicago. There were important schools, hospitals, societies, libraries and theatres. When the mass emigration ended in the beginning of the 1930's 70% of Swedish emigrants lived in towns. This may be explained by the fact that the factories and big workshops could pay respectable wages even to a Swedish crofter who had no further education, but who was hard working.

Not only did the Swedish emigrants send letters. They showed their success by sending a newly taken studio photograph with the letter. The girls paraded in nice new American ladies' hats and could even borrow some beautiful clothes from the photographer! Even houses were "borrowed" to be photographed in front of as a boast to the folks back at home!

As more Swedes emigrated it gradually became easier for others to follow. In 1920 the total area of Swedish owned farmland in the USA corresponded to 2/3 of all the arable land in Sweden. Swedes in American towns and cities.

Swedish people kept together, often in order to survive in the early hard years. As already stated, some places became "Sweden towns". As well as Chicago there were great Swedish housing areas in Rockford, Worcester, Minneapolis and Jamestown. The main street of such towns was often christened "Snoose Boulevard" from the Swedish predilection for snuff. Many Swedish stores imported Swedish specialties.

The towns became cradles of a Swedish-American culture, somehow shaping its own framework different from both Sweden and America. With their own churches, clubs, schools and newspapers, it was possible to live and die in Chicago or Minnesota without speaking anything other than Swedish. The main

Swedish traditional festivals, such as Midsummer, were maintained. Large numbers of Swedes gathered for some festivals, and it is said that there were sometimes up to 100,000 people gathered on big occasions in Chicago and Minneapolis.

Most marriages took place within the national group. In 1910, almost 3/4 of second generation Swedes were of unmixed origin.

Only men at first – but the women then worked hard.

At first it seemed that it would be a case of men only, except when families travelled together, but the girls' time came later, towards the end of the 1800's. During the time of social and economic change in Sweden the girls left the rural areas to be maids with well to do families in the towns, particularly in Stockholm, but their conditions were often poor.

America was the solution for them also. They certainly became maids too in New York, Chicago or Minneapolis, but with much more pay, free days off and personal freedom to choose what they wanted to do with their lives. If the woman worked in a "good" American family she could be better off than her male fellow immigrant. One piece of research shows that in 1900, no less than 62% of the USA's 57,000 Swedish born working women were in domestic service. If they did not obtain a maid's position then they became seamstresses in the cities' "sweat shops". Young women could support themselves and also their husband when they found one. The women worked all the year round, whereas the men were often unemployed during the low season of work or if their factory failed. The girls kept in touch with old comrades back at home in Sweden and often saved money so that they too could emigrate.

Making good or?

The great majority overcame difficulties and made their own place. Many became thriving farmers by dint of their hard pioneering work. Some made careers as bankers, businessmen, professional men, artists or politicians. Many made their fortunes. One emigrant known as "Lucky Swede" became America's most successful gold prospector in the Klondike, before losing his fortune to his chorus girl wife.

Charles Lindbergh was the first man to fly across the Atlantic. Eric Wickman became the organizer of the Greyhound Company. Glenn Seaburg became a Nobel Prize winner in Physics, John Ericsson the inventor of the propellor and constructor of America's first battleship the "Monitor" of the Civil War.

In all, about one fifth of emigrants eventually returned to Sweden, bringing their new riches which were often invested in industry and businesses in the poorer areas. At Långasjö in Småland, 1/3 of local farms was bought by returning Swedes, using money earned in the USA.

Early in the 20th Century Sweden's Parliament, the Riksdag, realized that Sweden was losing too many of its' best and youngest citizens. A survey of what had brought about the exodus was compiled and this revealed a sorry tale of oppression, poverty and discontent. The ills and indignities of a system that was far from egalitarian alerted the nation's rulers, and many of Sweden's later sweeping democratic reforms, which changed the country for ever, owed much to the insights provided by the 19th Century emigrants who sought the better life in the USA.

“Emigrants Country” in Småland.

To travel, as we have done, along Emigrants' Country's winding roads, many of them still gravel roads, is to revisit the past. Ljuder is a real place. The cross roads at Åkerby was once the meeting place for families setting out on their long journey west and a commemorative stone bears an inscription about those who left. Nearby is the church built sacrificially in 1843. Visitors find it difficult to separate fact from fiction. A clergyman was asked if the church still possessed “the wedding crown” presented to it by a local good time girl when she became a posh pastor's wife in America. Neither the reformed donor nor the crown actually existed, of course, outside Moberg's books.

About a kilometer away is a tiny red cottage signposted ”Korpamoen”, the name Moberg gave to Karl Oskar and Kristina's home. It is fictional too!

Near Långasjö is a 200-year-old peasant small holding used in the film. It is now a local tourist attraction.

Determined Moberg fans may travel local unmetalled roads to the isolated community of Moshultmåla in Algutsboda parish. Moberg was born here in 1898 and an inscribed stone mark his birthplace. His childhood school building is preserved nearby.

BARKERYD – as an example.

Lies 15km from Nässjö in northern Småland and has an excellent agricultural museum and folk museum (hembygdsgrd). A feature of the latter is interesting documentation about emigration from the area. It tells of Sven Magnus Swensson who went to the USA and was then followed by 700 local folk. He was born in 1816 and emigrated in 1836, spending 2 years in New York. So he went before the major waves of emigration. He went to Texas, at that time a free state.

He prospered, building up a whole empire of farms and became so rich that he could develop his own Bank on Wall Street and became a confidant of President Andrew Johnson. When Swensson needed more farm workers he knew that Swedish workers from his home parish could be the best. He made arrangements through his brother Johan in Langåsa in Barkeryd parish and paid for the emigrants' travel on the basis that they would work on his farms for two years in exchange. It was cheap labour, for the emigrants could not perceive that their work contract was worth more than

the cost of their ticket. In 1848 61 travelled, in the period 1866-74 186 and then in 1875 94! These earlier journeys took 3 weeks from England, shortened by the 1880's to 14 days and later to ten days. An Hembygdsgårds festival is held on the first Sunday in August annually and in 1998 there were 98 visitors from Texas. The church choir from Barkeryd has visited San Antonio in Texas during an USA tour, some 160 years after Sven Magnus.

Värmland.

Swedish-American days are also held in the last weekend of July in Värmland, with visits to John Ericssons' mausoleum in Filipstad's cemetery. This gifted engineer and inventor designed the warship "Monitor" and invented the ship's rotary propeller. His brother Nils was almost as equally talented. They were born at Långban Herrgård near Filipstad. Special events are held at Filipstad and Långban. The emigration from Värmland is permanently recognized with a very fine and large stone "Friendship Monument" on high ground near Sunne. It serves the dual purpose of honoring the emigrants to the USA and the considerable numbers of Finnish immigrants who settled in many of north and west Värmland's outback areas in the 17th and 18th centuries. The monument is in the somewhat triangular shape of the province and is surmounted by a winged eagle. I first saw this monument in 1953.

The emigrants who returned to Sweden.

For a variety of reasons 185,000 Swedish emigrants returned to their homeland between 1875 and 1925. For some it was homesickness, whilst for some others family needs called them back. Some, but not all, returned financially strong and were able to buy land, homes, property or businesses. The Långasjö farms situation is not untypical.

Emigration figures 1851-1920.

USA 1,030,390.

Canada 6,653.

Norway 78,388.

Germany 30,126.

Denmark 94,114.

Some statistics from Kalmar län (county) - emigrants to America.

1866 188 men and 141 women =329 persons

1867 423 men and 307 women =730 persons

1868 1,270 men and 989 women =2,259 persons

1869 1,625 men and 1,286 women =1,114 persons

Total 4,118 men and 3,225 women =7,343 persons

Moberg's books were turned into two films by the Swedish filmmaker Jan Troell, with Liv Ullmann and Max von Sydow in the title roles. These films were very popular in Sweden and the USA and have been shown on British TV.