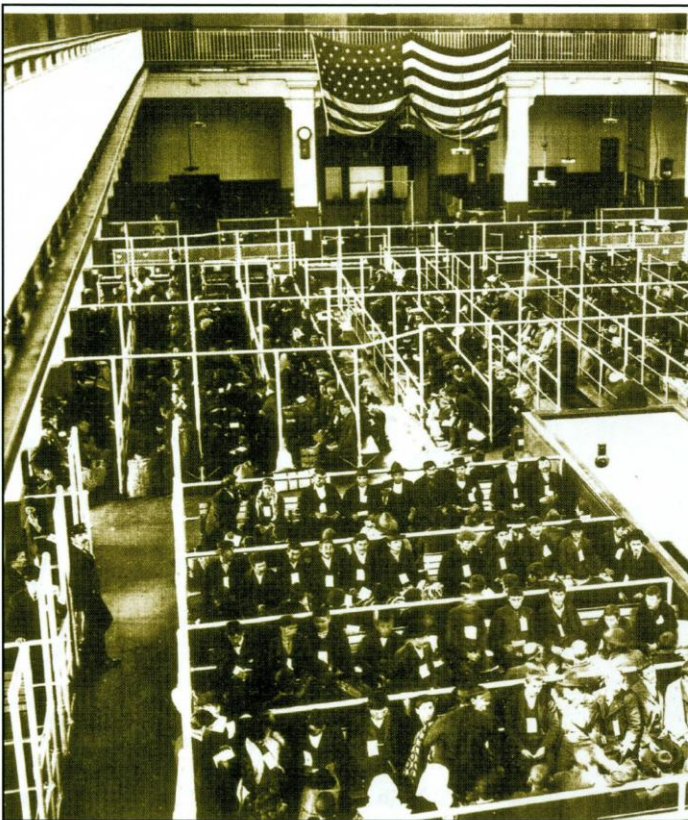
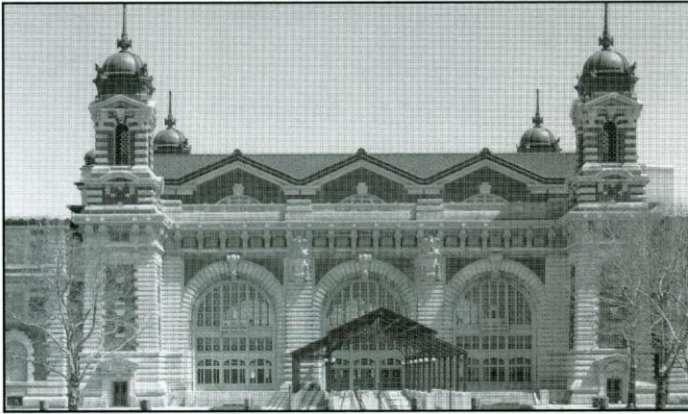


The new country



Ellis Island - The island of hope and tears

Ellis Island, a small island just outside of Manhattan in New York, and only a stone's throw from the Statue of Liberty, holds an important place in the history of the European mass migration. From 1892 Ellis Island was the reception station for millions of European immigrants. The reception of immigrants was executed on an industrial scale and the immigrants were lined up in long queues through the reception hall. Ellis Island was closed in 1954, long after the mass migration from Europe had ceased. By then 12 million immigrants had passed the impressive building in the New York harbor.

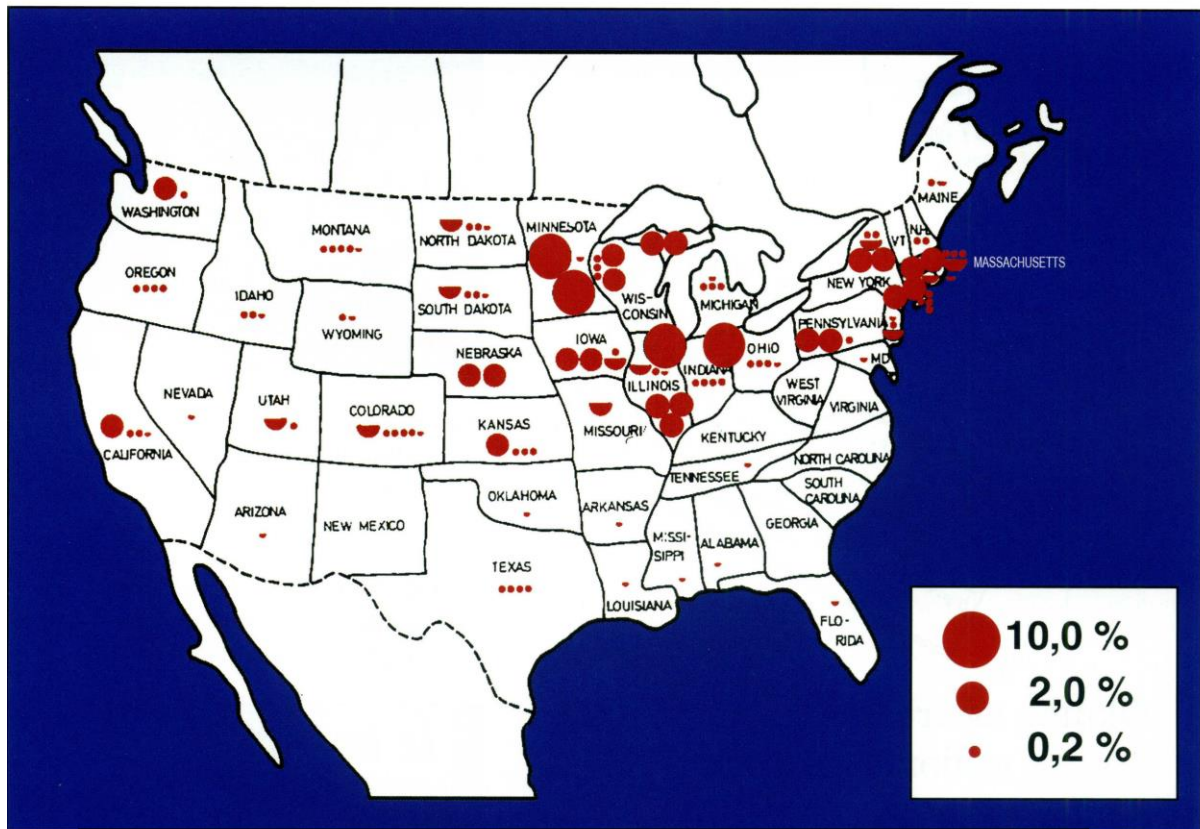
Some were sent back home

On Ellis Island every immigrant underwent a medical examination. The doctor had 6 seconds to examine each individual. Later a test was added to determine the immigrant's mental abilities before they were let into the new country. It was important to control whether each immigrant was able to provide for themselves or not, when let in. Those deemed too poor, or unable in body or soul, were sent back to their home country with the first returning boat. All immigrants were not sent through Ellis Island's control machinery though; those who could afford first class tickets were let in to the new country without having to endure any control procedures.



Many immigrant stories testify to the degrading treatment at Ellis Island. There's a story about an Eastern European immigrant woman who was subjected to a test. An immigration civil servant asked her whether she would begin to scrub a stair from the top or from the bottom? She replied that she hadn't come to America to scrub stairs!

Map showing Swedish settlements



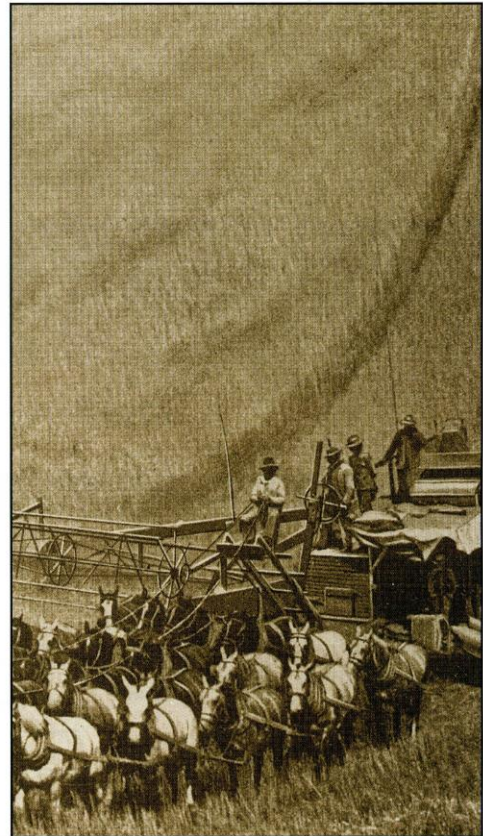
The Swedish born immigrant's distribution in USA, in percent according to census, year 1900.



The Swedes, like other immigrant groups, went to areas where they could find work or land to farm. Fellow countrymen were an important factor, for all immigrants, determining where they would settle down. So the early Swedish settlements became important for later Swedish immigrants.

Free land attracted many farmers

Farmers were tempted by the promise of free land in the "Homestead Act", a law that was implemented in 1862. The law stipulated that the American state would provide settlers with free farmland; it provided 160 acres of land to those who were prepared to stay and cultivate it for 5 years. For many European emigrants the longing for a farm of their own was very strong, but during the mass immigration the American industry was growing fast and demanded an ever increasing part of the new work force. More and more immigrants found themselves employed in the American industrial sector instead.



The Europeans came to a country that was in rapid development. The many immigrants were an indispensable ingredient in the American expansion. The frontier (farming border) was steadily moving westwards and USA attracted the necessary work force from Europe with rising wages.

The work force is growing; 24 millions are added in 40 years

By the year 1870 it is estimated that USA had a work force of 13 million people in work. 1910 that figure had grown to 37 million. The increase was almost exclusively due to immigration and the children of immigrants.

The situation that the immigrants met with in 1870 and the situation in 1910 differed in significant ways. The proportion of farmers in the economy decreased while workers within industry, commerce and administration increased. This set the frame for what work there were to be found for newly arrived immigrants. Often the new immigrants, whether they were Swedes, Irish or Italian, had to stay content with poorly paid heavy labor.

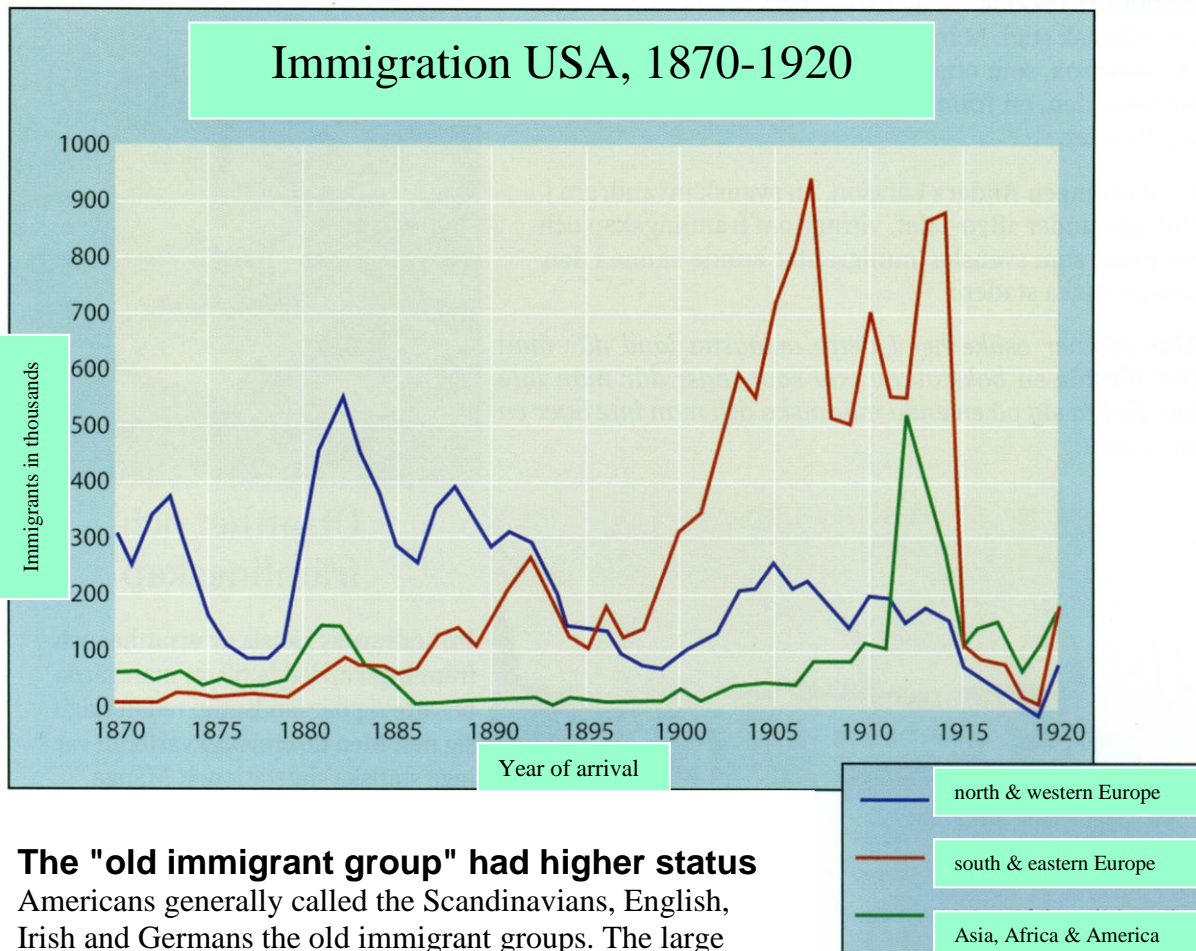
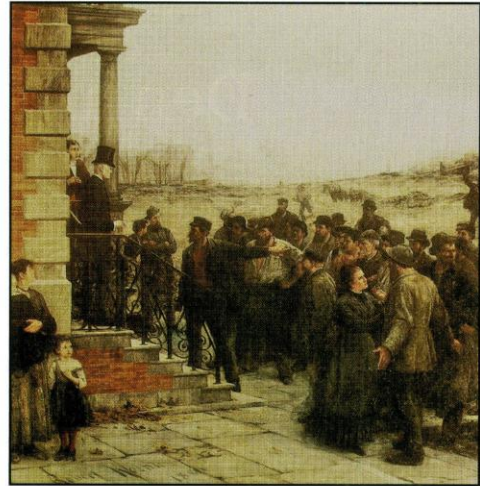
Är du familjförsörjare

så är det af vikt för dig att veta, hvarest du kan finna ett hem för dig och dina efterkommande. I Red Riverdalen kan du blifva en sjelfständig man och bygga dig ett hem, som du kan kalla ditt eget och som kan gå i arf till dina barn. Beskrifningar med kartor sändas fritt till en hvar, som uppgifver sin adress.

A. E. JOHNSON,
Commissioner of Emigration.
St Paul, Minn., U. S. A.
(G. 1587×1.)

Large social differences

Many immigrants left their home countries because of large economic and social inequalities. But even in the USA the immigrant could encounter social gorges. The 1,2 million Swedes that emigrated, within a hundred year period, came to an expanding society filled with opportunities, but also a society with economic growth pains and large social differences. The emigration from different parts of Europe took place during a time when the American continent experienced economic changes. During the period up 'til 1880 most immigrants were West- or North Europeans, but after 1880 an increasing part came from Italy and Eastern Europe.



The "old immigrant group" had higher status

Americans generally called the Scandinavians, English, Irish and Germans the old immigrant groups. The large groups of Southern- and Eastern Europeans that arrived later became the "new" immigrants. The "old group", of Western European immigrants, in general enjoyed a higher status than the Catholic, Jewish and Orthodox immigrants from Eastern Europe. But all immigrants could encounter hostility towards foreigners.

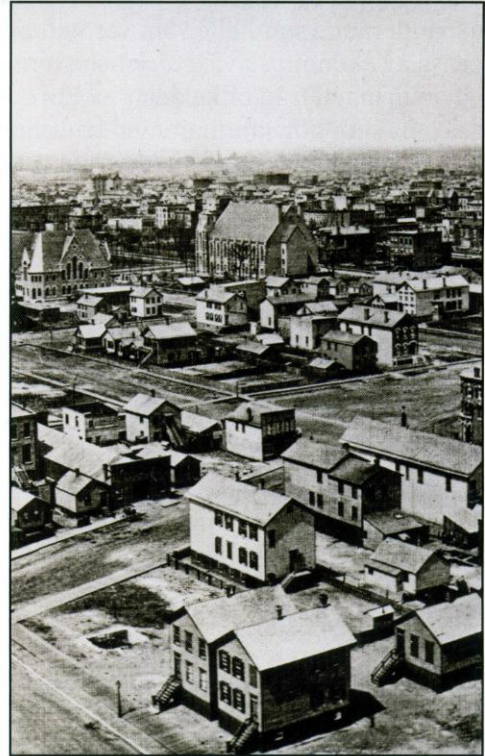
The American city

The majority of the Swedish immigrants settled in cities

American cities grew rapidly under the influence of the aggressive industrialization process that USA underwent during the period between 1870 and 1940. Many Swedish immigrants, as a result, came to settle in American cities. Already by the year 1910 two out of three Swedish immigrants lived in an American city. The Swedish immigrants, often with their roots in the Swedish countryside, probably felt estranged by the modernity in the new country.

Anders Larsson from Uppland, Sweden, a Swedish immigrant in Chicago during the 1870's testifies to the alienation and rootlessness felt by the Swedish immigrants in the American city.

"You feel uncertainty in this remote land where you can't understand a single letter of what is said; where you can not trust a single person and where you don't own a single cent."

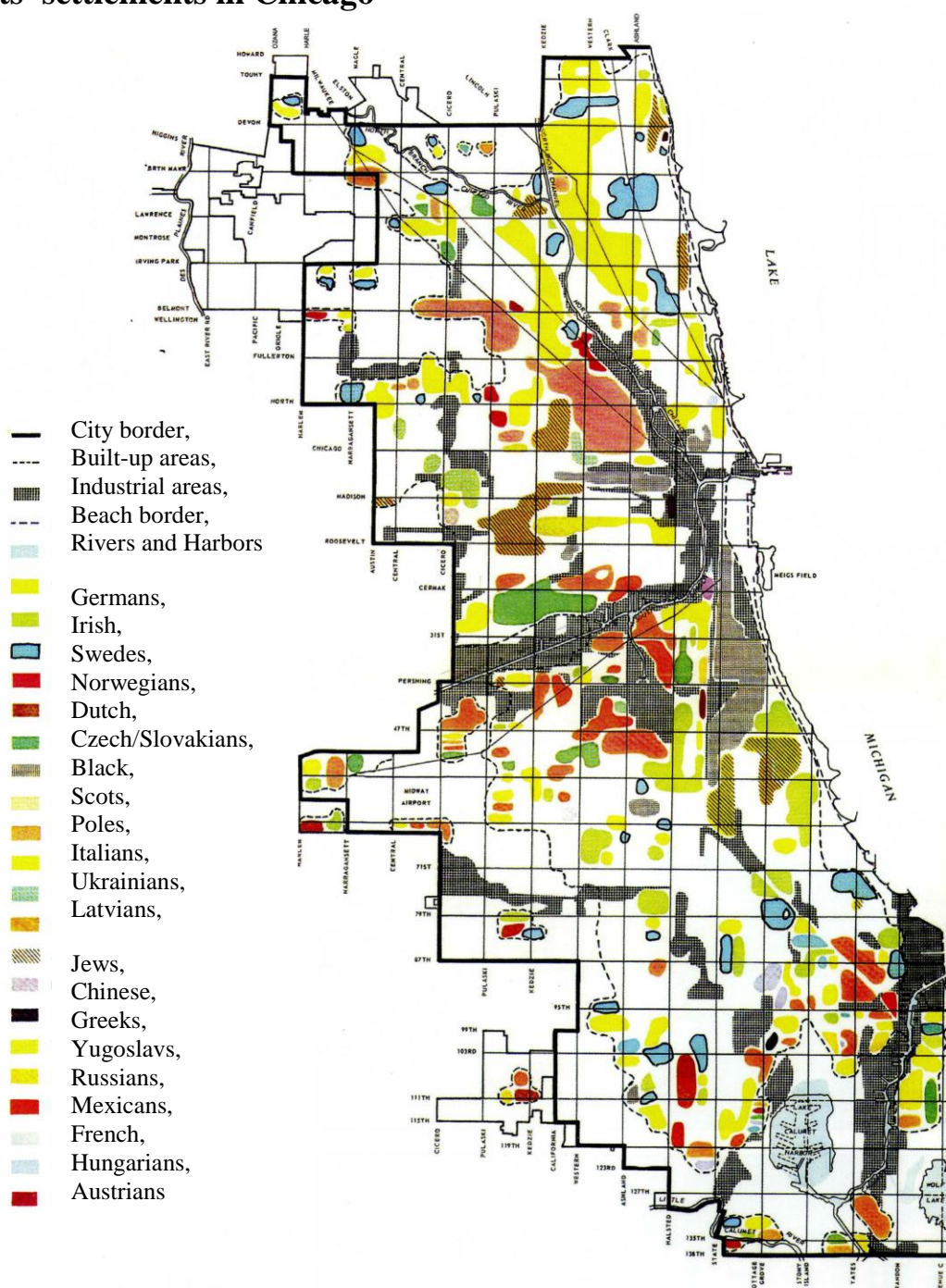


Vulnerability and estrangement

The immigrants' feeling of exposure and alienation led immigrants to choose to settle in areas where their fellow countrymen were already living. But these ethnic quarters were no permanent end stations. Many immigrants moved a lot. Hence the ethnic quarters often had an ever changing character over time.

What originally was called "Swede town" in Chicago, in reference to the many Swedes living there during the period up 'til 1870, saw in the beginning of the 20th century people from Southern Europe moving in, and during WW1, black people from the southern states migrating for work to the industry in the north.

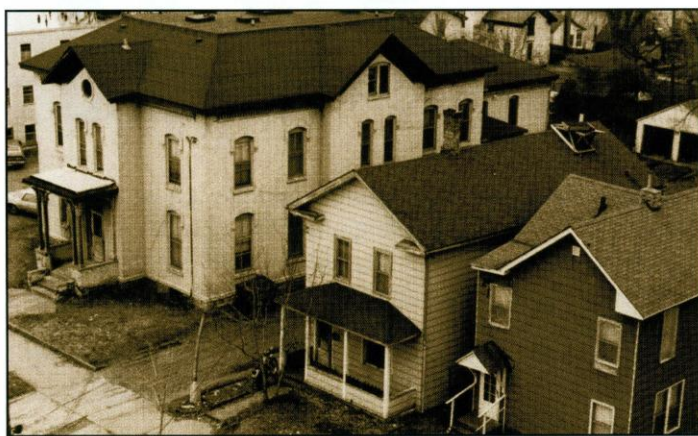
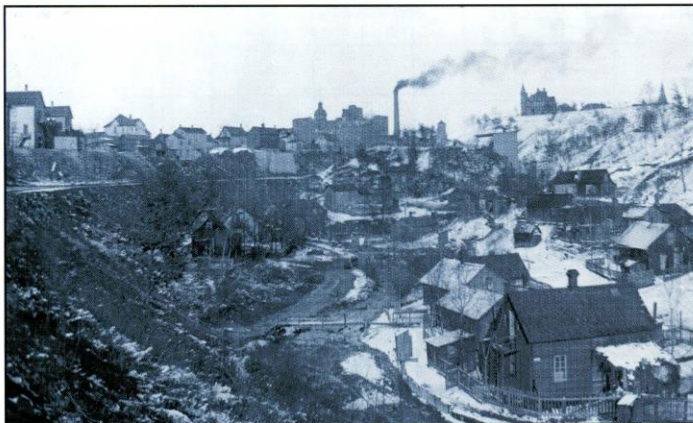
Immigrants' settlements in Chicago



Besides the rich commercial life that developed in cities like Seattle, Chicago and Minneapolis there were a variety of other needs that would have to be met among the Swedish immigrants. The glue keeping the Swedes together in the American cities was the social life in the ethnic community, but also churches, non-profit associations and newspapers were important parts of many Swedish immigrants everyday life.

Completely Swedish quarters were not unusual in the multicultural American city. Swedes in cities like Chicago preferred to live in the vicinity of other Swedes and close to their work places. The Swedish quarters often bordered to quarters where other immigrant groups, similarly, had established themselves.

Snuff street, Chicago

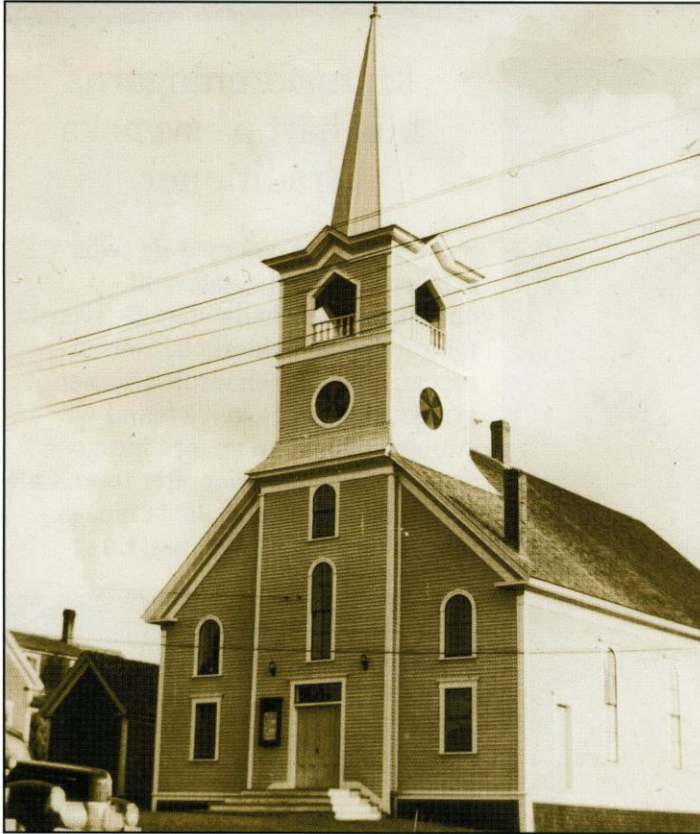


"Snuff Street" went through the Swedish quarters

The Swedish quarters were sometimes called "Snuff Street". In the quarter you generally could find a Swedish-American church, stores where you could buy ethnic food specialties like stockfish and potato sausage, or Swedish newspapers. There were also Swedish owned cafés, saloons and restaurants where Swedes went to meet fellow countrymen and get to speak Swedish for a while. You could also find Swedish bakeries, laundry shops and even print shops.

The quarters that the earliest Swedish immigrants arrived to, up 'til 1880, were practically no more than pure slum quarters; while in the beginning of the 20th century they could hope to move in to working class quarters where fellow Swedes were already living. The pictures to the left show two different immigration quarters.

Swedish-American organizations



The church was a meeting point for many Swedes

The churches became the earliest meeting points for Swedes in America. They were together the largest Swedish organization, organizing 1/3 of the Swedish immigrants all over USA. The church's mission didn't end with religious ceremonies but equally important was the work to help people who became ill or penniless. The church also provided social gatherings where you could meet with other Swedes. The church often helped people who weren't members, but support for a longer period of time required a church membership.

The church community didn't suit everybody and alternative kinds of associations arose within Swedish America, e.g. sick and funeral funds, but also other types where language, culture and memories would unite the members



Swedish organizations and lodges helped Swedes when ill and at death

Immigrants didn't have many places to turn to when they became ill. That's why the ethnic group and the ethnic quarters became a foundation for work associations who organized the Swedish immigrants. In the Swedish sick- and funeral funds the members paid a sum of money to the fund and in return they got economic assistance in the event of illness or death.



Nordic society around 1910

Cultural associations were an important ingredient in the Swedish-American life of entertainment. They had a variety of different aims. Some associations arranged social activities like song and dance in which the Swedish heritage was an important element. Cultural associations also arranged Christmas celebrations and midsummer fests. Choirs and orchestral associations were also common.



Cultural associations stuck to their cultural heritage

The Swedes often brought customs that became adjusted to the American way of life. The Swedish associations regarding soberness, work and sports made significant marks among the Swedes, in cities like Chicago, in the decades beginning the 20th century. Café idrott, run by a Swedish association, became a very popular meeting point for Swedish-Americans.



Sports associations were important during the 1920's and 1930's. The football team "Viking" played in the New York series during a couple of decades. The Swedish players became notorious for their rough play, and they were often in dispute with the referees.



Vasa Orden, Amerika Seattle:s barnklubb