

6 TIME PERIODS DEFINE SWEDISH IMMIGRATION;

MINNESOTA WAS POISED TO GET LARGEST NUMBER

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Body

For the better part of a century, beginning in 1845 and ending in the late 1920s, more than 1.25 million Swedes left their Scandinavian homeland for an uncertain future in the New World.

More of these immigrants settled in Minnesota than in any other state - though the reasons for the incoming migration had more to do with timing than with any inherent attractiveness of the Upper Midwest. When the first wave of Swedes arrived, Minnesota Territory had a population of about 6,000 and was primed for rapid settlement.

The Swedes, one of several ethnic groups that flooded the state, were fleeing difficult times: famine brought on by years of drought, inheritance laws that had fractured family farms, military conscription and some odious entanglements between church and state.

Historian John Rice, a University of Minnesota geography professor, divides the Swedish invasion into six periods:

*The Pioneer Period, 1845-54: Only about 14,500 Swedes crossed the Atlantic during this decade, and many of them settled in Illinois. The first sizable group arrived in Minnesota in 1851 and settled in the Chisago Lake-Center City-Lindstrom area. They were lured by glowing descriptions from Erik Norberg, who had journeyed from Moline, Ill., to the St. Croix Valley the previous year.

By 1854, the migration of Swedes to Minnesota increased when land shortages in western Illinois made it less attractive to new arrivals. A key player was Hans Mattson, who arrived in 1853 and would eventually head the state board of immigration in the 1870s.

*Expansion From the Core, 1854-63: Swedish immigration declined significantly because of financial panics, the Civil War and American Indian disputes. Nevertheless, new settlements sprang up near Cannon Falls, Waconia, Bernadotte and Cambridge.

Laws that allowed individuals to stake claims on government land before it was offered for sale - which amounted to a policy of "farm now, pay later" - prompted Swedish settlers to travel west to Litchfield in Meeker County and to areas in Kandiyohi County. The lumber industry also attracted Swedes to the St. Croix River valley, then up the Snake River to Kanabec County.

*Flight From Famine, 1863-77: During this period, 135,000 Swedes left their famine-plagued homes for the United States. Millions of acres were available in Minnesota under the Homestead Act of 1862 and millions more became available as part of railroad expansions in the state.

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As railroads plunged into the prairies, **Swedish** communities sprang up at Sveadahl in Watonwan County, Comfrey in Brown County, Dunnell in Martin County, Louriston in Chippewa County, Balaton in Lyon County and Worthington in Nobles County.

The main thrust of settlement, however, was in central and north-central **Minnesota**, where the prairies bordered the forests. Mattson, who simultaneously served as a railroad land agent and a state **immigration** official, lured thousands of Swedes to **Minnesota**. He later became editor of the **Minnesota** Stats Tidning (the State **Times**) and used the newspaper to advertise **Minnesota** as a haven for Swedes.

*Mass Emigration, 1880-93: After an **immigration** slump in the 1870s, an agricultural crisis in Sweden prompted a third wave that quickly turned into a flood. During this **period**, 475,000 Swedes entered the United States, many of them single adults instead of families. By the 1890s, the typical **Swedish** immigrant was a city-dweller, not a farmer.

This **period** placed the heaviest **Swedish** stamp on the North Star State; by 1890, **Minnesota's** **Swedish** population was 60,000, the **largest** of any state in the nation. Nearly half of them lived in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Young **Swedish** men also became the first workers in the Soudan Mine near Tower and on the Duluth and Iron Range Railroad. By the early 1890s, Swedes were working on the newly opened mines of the giant Mesabi Range, though they quickly moved into the mining industry hierarchy or took skilled jobs in Iron Range cities.

*The Fourth Wave, 1900-13: By 1905, **Minnesota's** Swedes were more urban than rural. About 280,000 Swedes arrived during this **period**, totaling 7.5 percent of the population of the Twin Cities. Swede Hollow in St. Paul and the Seven Corners neighborhood of South Minneapolis became **Swedish** enclaves.

*End of an Era, 1920-30: After a lull caused by World War I, **Swedish immigration** rose again. About 100,000 Swedes arrived during this **period**, but those coming to **Minnesota** essentially replaced the losses by death of the state's **Swedish**-born population. By the end of World War II, **Swedish** Americans were so thoroughly integrated into American society that a new emphasis - the re-discovery and celebration of **Swedish** heritage - became the central element of **Minnesota's** **Swedish** communities.

Graphic

history immigrant statistic

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