



Willmar  
KAFFE FEST

JUNE  
21-22

You never  
outgrow your  
coffee

HILLS BROS  
COFFEE

# A Hot Heritage

## Swedish Americans and Coffee

Joy K. Lintelman



**"It always smells of coffee, it smells so svensk [Swedish],"** declared Ruth Peterson in a 1995 interview about her volunteer work in the Kaffestuga of Minneapolis's American Swedish Institute (ASI), where coffee, sweets, soup, and sandwiches were periodically available to visitors. She continued: "This is my heritage. I get such a good feeling when I come here." Peterson is hardly alone in associating coffee with Swedish heritage. The beverage appears in Swedish Americans' writings, activities, and attitudes from the early years of settlement in the United States to the present day. Though Americans of many cultural backgrounds and diverse native origins—including other Scandinavian countries—have long consumed coffee on a regular basis, it is Swedish America that has erected such cultural symbols as coffee-pot water towers and sponsored a coffee-based community festival. Examining how coffee has wafted its way along in Swedish America uniquely illustrates representative tastes and enduring values Swedes brought with them when they immigrated as well as the development of their ethnic identity in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

Coffee first made its appearance in Sweden in the seventeenth century, gaining popularity within the upper and middle classes by the early eighteenth. After a series of four government prohibitions between 1756 and 1822

*FACING: Shoulder to shoulder, men, women, and some children crowd around the metal coffee urns during Willmar's annual Kaffe Fest.*

(for various political and economic reasons), coffee use spread to the lower social classes and across the country's rural regions. By about 1850, around the time that the decades-long stream of immigration from Sweden to the United States began, coffee was a familiar and coveted beverage in much of the Swedish countryside as well as its towns and cities. Minnesotan Christopher Columbus Andrews, the American minister to Sweden from 1869 through 1877, remarked on Swedes' penchant for coffee: "Its use is excessive among a good many of the common class, especially among the women. It is most always well and strongly made." A subsequent American minister to Sweden, William Widgery Thomas, observed in his 1892 book, *Sweden and the Swedes*, "The Swedes are very fond of coffee; they are continually cooking it, and out in the country the peasants are not satisfied unless they are able to drink coffee at least five times a day."<sup>2</sup>

In spite of these observations, a coffee habit was hard to sustain in nineteenth-century Sweden, particularly for the lower classes. Unlike the other very popular drink

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## “Morning coffee, afternoon coffee, coffee at every meal . . . is the rule in Swedish American homes.”

among Swedes, *brännvin* (vodka), which could be home distilled, coffee was always an imported and expensive beverage (and still is). It was thus common to drink coffee substitutes made of roasted concoctions including chicory, grains mixed with syrup, or even a dough made of rye and potatoes—or to grind these ingredients along with coffee beans to make a household’s supply last longer. For many of the Swedes of the peasant classes who ultimately chose to seek their fortunes in the United States, coffee from coffee beans was a luxury reserved for special occasions. Recalling his life in Sweden before immigrating in 1886 to Chicago, Karl V. Anderson described how “coffee was seldom seen from one Christmas to the next.” John Edor Larson, who immigrated to Nebraska as a child in 1901 (and later became a Lutheran pastor in Minnesota and North Dakota), wrote, “Only on festive occasions, like Christmas, Easter, did we have imported coffee. Otherwise, roasted rye and barley supplied the ingredients for this drink.” Associations between special holiday and family times and drinking coffee in Sweden helped to link coffee consumption to heritage among Swedish Americans. Beda Erickson already exhibited nostalgia about Sweden and coffee as she waited in Gothenburg to board ship for her journey to Chicago, writing in her diary in 1902: “Now we are all sitting and waiting for the coffee we long for and it may be the last time we are offered this favorite drink in Sweden.”<sup>3</sup>

Swedish immigrants were discriminating coffee drinkers, despite limited opportunities to enjoy the beverage prepared with actual coffee beans. Their travel accounts often contained comments regarding the quality of coffee. When it was served on board ship or in England (where immigrants typically spent a day or two waiting to board ocean liners bound to a U.S. harbor), it was usually considered substandard. Though Matilda Johansson was satisfied with the food served aboard ship in 1892, she noted in her diary “the only thing that was bad tasting was their coffee. It was nauseating.” En route to Salt Lake City in 1907, Swen Magnus Swensson wrote about the poor coffee served to him in England, which he considered “a rather disguised hot water.” Anna Sand had better luck on her 1899 journey to meet her boyfriend in

Rhode Island. She and her traveling companions made friends with a ship steward who provided them with a coffee pot and ground coffee to prepare their own beverage on board. While Swedish immigrants did not directly state that a desire for good coffee motivated their decision to leave home, that aspiration was likely a part of the broader goal of improving socioeconomic status that drove many to emigrate. The habit of drinking coffee, along with the taste and desire for the real thing, were traits many Swedes brought with them to America.<sup>4</sup>

**Unfortunately for Swedish immigrants who** settled in rural areas, their distance from general stores, combined with limited amounts of cash or tradable farm products, meant that coffee was not always available to them. Settlers in the colony of Swede Point, Iowa, had purchased supplies for their first winter in 1846, including “salt, sugar, soda, and spices, flour, and coffee,” but resorted to making a coffee substitute from roasted corn when their supply ran out and the two-week journey to obtain more was not feasible. Describing life in the Wisconsin settlement he established in the late 1840s, Gustaf Unonius recalled walking 30 miles to Milwaukee to claim a letter he hoped contained money that he could then use to buy supplies. He remembered envisioning the pleasure of having “sugar instead of syrup [molasses] and real coffee instead of roasted wheat.” Emma Peterson’s son recalled that when his mother did not have enough money to purchase coffee in late-nineteenth-century Iowa, she “mixed cornmeal with molasses, parched it, and that was their coffee.”<sup>5</sup>

Some immigrants found coffee available at their workplace but not prepared or served to their liking. August Karlsson wrote home from Illinois, where he worked as a laborer in 1890: “You ask if I get good food. I get just as good food as a person of rank in Sweden. I eat four eggs every day but I do not get coffee as warm as I am accustomed to and wanted it at home because here they cook it in the morning and keep it in a pail. I drink it at midday.”<sup>6</sup>

As the immigrants’ economic status improved and the countryside grew more densely populated, coffee

beans became more affordable and accessible. For Swedish American farmers, as for most American farmers in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, coffee was considered a household staple and was consumed from three to six times a day. A common pattern was coffee with breakfast, again at midmorning, then immediately following noon dinner (typically the largest meal of the day), again at midafternoon, and after the evening meal (supper). Some also drank coffee before bedtime. Writing about Swedish settlers in Grove City, Minnesota, Elizabeth Youngquist stated, “Morning coffee, afternoon coffee, coffee at every meal . . . is the rule in Swedish American homes.” For Swedish Americans, coffee times were often sacrosanct. Axel W. Erickson related how the “Swedes clung to their coffee breaks.” When members of his threshing crew in rural Kansas suggested skipping the morning coffee break to lighten the tasks of the women preparing their food, “It almost broke up our gang.”<sup>7</sup>

In the early-nineteenth century, merchants sold only green (unroasted) coffee beans. Before grinding, the beans were roasted at home in the oven or in a pan on top of the stove. (Lacking a wood or coal stove, one could purchase a long-handled coffee-roasting pan for use over a fire.) It is likely that several days’ worth of beans were roasted at once but, just as in my own household today, the roasted beans were ground just before making the coffee to assure the best flavor.<sup>8</sup>

After the Civil War, roasted coffee beans became available for purchase, either from a local, commercial roaster or prepackaged, from afar. (Arbuckles of New York was one popular brand in Minnesota). Growing up in Minnesota in about 1900, Edith Blomquist recalled

“Coffee was always sold in the bean—It was always ground at home, and ground only as we used it, so it was always fresh.”

Grinding the beans was a chore that might be assigned to children. Linnea Swanson recalled enjoying the task during her childhood in Iowa: “It was fun to sit down with that square box [the coffee mill] gripped between your skinny knees and turn the handle and then peek into the little drawer below to make sure you had enough [ground coffee].” After helping with the grinding, Linnea may have shared in the fruits of her labor. Children were served coffee in many Swedish American households, though in some homes it was mixed with milk, with the proportion of milk to coffee decreasing over time. For example, Eric V. Youngquist recalled his home in Michigan, where “my sisters and I drank coffee, diluted with milk, from the time we could sit at the table with the adults.” Axel Erickson’s coffee was not diluted; he noted in his memoir, “We children were served coffee all the time.” Offering children coffee was a familiar



*Roasted coffee beans from the popular New York company, 1890s*



*Coffee mill*



and common habit from the homeland, though by the early-twentieth century some reformers there sought to limit consumption, concerned that children drank coffee instead of eating food (and drinking milk) in the morning or at noon. An early-twentieth-century Swedish educators' temperance group suggested forbidding coffee drinking until age 15.<sup>9</sup>

Contemporary Swedish American reflections about ancestors often include fond reminiscences of children sharing coffee with grandparents, a practice that socialized younger generations to enjoy the beverage as well as encouraged associations of coffee with Swedish heritage. The following comment from a fourth-generation Swedish American from Texas, included in an online forum about ancestry and Swedish food traditions, is typical.

I spent a great deal of time at my grandmother's house. Every day at 2:45 my grandmother put on the percolator and at 3:00 she would have me run tell everyone (uncles, aunts, parents, and anybody else around) that it was "kaffe dox," meaning coffee time. I guess those were my second Swedish words to learn (after *tack* [thank you]). Everyone would stop what they were doing and come to the kitchen table. . . . Same thing was done at 9:30 in the morning. . . . I can still remember the smell of those wonderful memories. BTW as I grew older, I got less and less milk in my coffee!<sup>10</sup>

**Considering the financial challenges many** immigrants faced before leaving Sweden and in their early months in the U.S., the ability to consume real coffee on a regular basis marked social and economic advancement. Having the means to share that favored beverage with friends, neighbors, or invited guests signaled hospitality as well as prosperity. It was not enough, though, to share just a cup of coffee. For Swedish Americans, having a baked good (preferably many) to accompany coffee was paramount. This practice of serving coffee with baked treats was, in Sweden as well as in Swedish America, called *kaffe med dopp*. The phrase, literally "coffee with dunk," originated in the earlier Swedish practice of dipping dry bread into breakfast porridge, and later, when coffee became available, into that. The term continued to be used even if the accompaniments, such as delicate cookies or tortes, were not intended for dipping. Among lower-class Swedes for whom coffee was a luxury, however, *kaffe med dopp* was not a regular practice. Only the upper class could afford fancy cookies and cakes, since

the price of wheat flour was prohibitive. Thus, as Swedish ethnologist Barbro Klein has noted, Swedish immigrants' habit of having *kaffe med dopp* was not a practice they carried with them from Sweden to America but, rather, a goal they achieved—a "fulfillment of a Swedish peasant dream."<sup>11</sup>

This tradition meant not only having baked goods available for regular household coffee times but also when guests, even unexpected ones, stopped by. Gustav Andreen, president of the Swedish Lutheran Augustana College (Rock Island, Illinois) was quoted as observing of Swedish American women: "The good ladies put the coffee pot on the stove before they answer the door bell." Recalling her Swedish immigrant grandparents in Pennsylvania, Barbara Ann Hillman Jones described how "the coffee pot was always on at their home and there was always some freshly baked Swedish treat, ready for anyone who might drop in." Jones considered this practice to be part of her ancestors' Swedish heritage: "Whenever anyone came to either *Far Mor's* [father's mother's] or Grandma Tuline's home, they were invited to have *kaffe med dopp*. . . . There was always something freshly made and delicious to go with the coffee. It was a Swedish custom. It was their custom."<sup>12</sup>

Swedish American letters, diaries, and reminiscences frequently mention both coffee and *kaffe med dopp*, associated with a variety of occasions. Maria Magnusson's diary illustrates coffee as a marker of hospitality. In 1912 she and her family traveled from Chisago County to visit California, arriving at their destination at 1:00 A.M. Her diary entry indicated her pleasure that their host "had the coffee pot ready to serve, even though it was the middle of the night. Yes! It tasted good."<sup>13</sup>

For Swedish Americans, coffee could also represent an element of stability, of cultural familiarity and centeredness during crises. After her family survived a tornado in Chisago County in 1906, Edith Blomquist recalled how "people driving by kept stopping to see how we had fared, and to tell us what they had seen. The coffee pot stood ready all day, so did a tray of cookies and coffee breads." Describing the unfortunate death of her sibling, born prematurely on her family's farm in northwestern Minnesota in the early-twentieth century, Violet Johnson Sollie remembered, "I went to get Mrs. Rasmussen [the midwife] while Father put on the coffeepot—the automatic reaction in time of trouble."<sup>14</sup>

Connections among love, romance, and *kaffe* were evident in the correspondence of P. A. [Albin] Davidson and his wife, Nanni. Though the couple lived in the

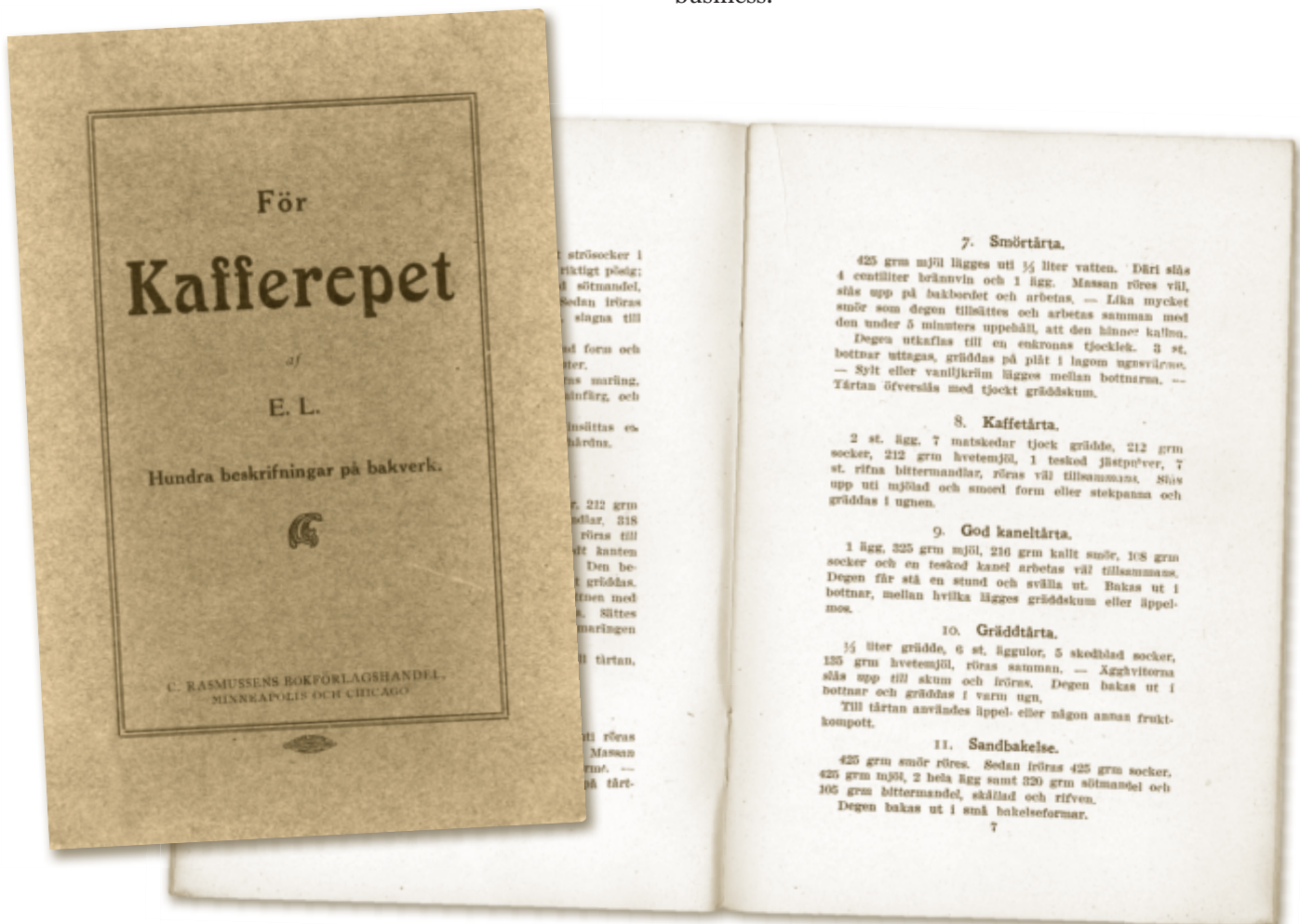
“The good ladies put the coffee pot on the stove before they answer the door bell.”



Twin Cities, Albin's trade as a bricklayer meant that he sometimes traveled for work. In the winter of 1912 a job took him to Winona while Nanni remained in Minneapolis, and the couple corresponded. In one letter Nanni shared: “My dearly beloved husband . . . I have been downtown today and when I came home I went to the bakery and bought cookies and so I had *kaffe och dopp* and of course wished that you could have been with dear and have coffee together with mama wouldn't it have been fun dear?” Albin responded: “My dear little friend . . . yes it would have been all right to get to be with you and drink coffee and dunk cookies, but we will get to enjoy it all the more when I come home my dear love.”

A few days later when Albin asked Nanni to meet his train upon his return to Minneapolis, she told him she would rather not go to the station and wondered if he minded if she stayed home and had “the coffee pot on instead.” (That was fine with him.)<sup>15</sup>

Coffee was also ubiquitous at formal occasions, public and private. Accepting a *kaffe med dopp* invitation in a private home for all intents and purposes meant attending a coffee party. Such an event might even be called a *kaffe kalas* (coffee party). Another term in the Swedish American coffee vocabulary was *kafferep*, also meaning coffee party or coffee klatsch, but used to designate a more formal event where numerous fancy baked goods were expected and gossip was often the main order of business.<sup>16</sup>



Coffee-party cookbook, about 1900, containing 100 recipes for baked goods



*Posing for a picture-perfect Swedish coffee party, 3201 Forty-Seventh Avenue South, Minneapolis, about 1935*

Birthdays or name days (each day on the Swedish calendar is associated with a given name) were common occasions for inviting friends and relatives for *kaffe med dopp*. Maria Magnusson celebrated her name day in 1913, 1917, and 1919 with coffee parties. Surprise parties (usually to commemorate anniversaries or birthdays) were also typical occasions for *kaffe med dopp*. One gathering that managed to include all three events was recorded in a Chicago newspaper in 1920, when about 100 people met at the home of Ludvig Larson for his wife Ida's birthday coffee party. Mr. Larson was intrigued at the number of men attending this celebration until it was revealed that the affair was also a surprise party for the couple's silver wedding anniversary.<sup>17</sup>

As the Larson festivities suggest, both men and women could (and did) participate in *kaffe med dopp*. For example, the meetings of the Minneapolis Svenska Kultur-förbundet (Swedish Cultural Society), which included both women and men, regularly concluded with *kaffe med dopp*. The custom, however, was often associated with women. The fact that they usually prepared the food—and coffee—in the home provides one explanation for this association. The frequency with which Swedish American women's organizations, especially church-related but also cultural ones, included *kaffe med dopp* in their meetings or events provides another. Swedish American *Kvinnoföreningar* (women's groups such as mission societies or ladies' aids) usually formed shortly after a church was established. They typically met at least once a month in members' homes; gatherings might include song, prayer, Bible reading, and some words from the pastor, followed by conversation over coffee and baked goods. Members paid small cash dues. Often groups sewed or did handcrafts at their meetings, producing items that would be sold at regular church fund-raising auctions or sales.<sup>18</sup>

Records and recollections of these organizations suggest that, in spite of their religious and philanthropic nature, they were also opportunities to display social



status by, for example, serving fancy baked goods. Gladys Westrum recalled that the Ladies' Aid meetings of her Moorhead church "were held in the house and it was a day to get ready for. If new curtains for the living room, or a new tablecloth, or a new piece of furniture were in order, that was the time of the year they were bought." While the pastor (often the lone male at such meetings) or church leaders likely disapproved of such ostentation and the competitiveness it might create, they had no way to prevent it and remained mindful of the significant financial contributions these groups made to maintain churches and missions.<sup>19</sup>

Although contemporary readers might most often associate Swedish or Scandinavian church fund-raising with lutefisk (or its Norwegian counterpart, lutefisk) dinners, Swedish American churches in their early decades often held coffee-centered events. From the 1890s through at least the 1910s, the Swedish Mission Covenant church of Winnipeg Junction, Minnesota, periodically hosted a *Kaffe Fest* (Coffee Festival), where attendees paid an entrance fee—usually 10 or 15 cents—for *kaffe med dopp*. Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century newspapers frequently included notices for coffee-centered fund-raisers—called "coffee socials" in English-language papers—at Swedish American churches.<sup>20</sup>

If ecclesiastical officials were leery of criticizing the status-related aspects of church women's coffee gatherings, the women themselves might take steps to disci-

pline each other. Regulations for these organizations sometimes specified what could be served and included fines for those who violated the rules. For example, the minutes of the first meeting of a women's group in Elim Covenant Church in Minneapolis (reprinted in an anniversary booklet) read:

We met for the first time April 7, 1903. The meeting opened with song and Bible reading. The provision was adopted that the society's name is Myran and that the group shall work for the [church] activity here in the south [of Minneapolis]. . . . It was decided to meet the second and last Thursday of every month and adopted that at the society's meetings no one shall provide more than coffee and two types of bread. Violation of this decision is a fine of \$1.00. Dues are 10 cents for every meeting.<sup>21</sup>

Women who served tortes, sandbakkelser, or spritz cookies rather than coffee breads paid for their transgressions!

Swedish American men drank a good deal of coffee, as well. For those who took seriously the religious prohibition on alcohol, coffee was a favored beverage in most social contexts. One Swedish American Augustana Synod Lutheran minister even wrote a poem entitled "Till Kaf-fets Ära" (In Praise of Coffee), celebrating its merits over the evils of "Spiritus Stimulus" (alcohol). From the late 1920s through the World War II era, a group of Willmar businessmen (eight Swedish Americans and one Danish American) met daily for what is probably best described as a coffee performance. The men all enjoyed a practice common enough in Sweden to have its own name: drinking *kaffe på fat* (coffee from the saucer). They formed the Willmar Saucer Drinking Society which, according to news reports, included a constitution "citing the great tradition of Swedes, Norwegians & Danes as coffee drinkers" and "perpetuating the old custom of drinking coffee from saucers." Well-known at least locally and regionally in their time, the society members met at 9:30 each weekday morning at Willmar's Lakeland Hotel Coffee Shop. Sitting on nine stools along the dining counter, the men would fill their saucers with coffee and drink in unison, following a set of commands given by an appointed "captain." According to one of the members, people came regularly to watch their performance. The group even inspired the creation of a second chapter in the 1930s by former Willmarites living in Minneapolis.<sup>22</sup>



*Synchronized drinking: Reenacting the Willmar Saucer Drinking Society's ritual for a Bicentennial television program, 1976*





## In reality, Swedish egg coffee is not particularly Swedish.



**The ubiquity of coffee—as centerpiece or accompaniment**—at Swedish American events, along with groups such as the Saucer Society, contributed to the popular association of Swedish American identity with coffee. One example appeared in 1936 at the Festival of Nations, put on by the International Institute of Minnesota, which strove (among other things) “to help preserve in America the aesthetic values in the cultural heritage of her foreign-born people.” Swedish Americans included in their booth a woman spinning, a woman weaving, and a woman pouring coffee. The exhibit not only associated coffee with Swedish heritage but also promoted this connection publicly. By the 1940s American popular culture was reinforcing this tie. The Swedish American character Katrin Holmstrom in the 1947 movie *The Farmer’s Daughter* (a role for which Loretta Young won an Oscar) was praised for her ability to make good coffee.<sup>23</sup>

Commercial activities also reinforced the idea of coffee consumption as valued Swedish heritage. In 1946, during an era when many small communities began developing festivals to draw tourism and invigorate economies, Willmar established its Kaffe Fest, sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce. The celebration was inspired in part by the Saucer Society but also by a *Willmar Daily Tribune* survey that revealed high levels of coffee consumption in the community. (A claim of Willmar as the “Coffee Capital of the World” followed.) During its roughly four-decade existence (it was absorbed into another community festival in 1987–88), the event included such features as a coffee-drinking contest, parades, the crowning of a Kaffe Fest Queen, and an outdoor coffee-bar at which thousands of cups of free coffee

and cookies or doughnuts were distributed. The most Swedish aspect of this festival was probably its name, a stark contrast to the numerous ethnic features of Svensk Hyllningsfest (Swedish Heritage Festival) in Lindsborg, Kansas, which began in 1941 and continues to the present day. Nevertheless, the publicity and memorabilia that Kaffe Fest created reinforced connections of Swedish ethnic heritage with coffee in the minds of Swedish Americans and non-Swedish Americans alike.<sup>24</sup>

In 1949 Salem Lutheran Church of north Minneapolis, founded by Swedish Americans in 1895, opened a food stand featuring “home cooking” as a fund-raiser at the Minnesota State Fair. Part of that home cooking was coffee—in this case, egg coffee, a menu item that was eventually called Swedish egg coffee. It became (and continues to be) the stand’s signature offering. In reality, Swedish egg coffee is not particularly Swedish. Mixing egg (a whole egg, the egg white, or the shell; recipes vary) with coffee grounds when boiling or steeping coffee helps to clear the grounds from the mixture and, some say, mellow the flavor. Before the advent of percolators and other automatic brewers, when coffee was prepared by



*The Swedish flag and—what else?—a coffeepot decorate the historic church booth at the Minnesota State Fair, 2011.*





## Coffee and Swedish heritage remain firmly connected in the twenty-first century.

boiling the grounds, this was a common practice. Nearly any nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century cookbook with a boiled-coffee recipe includes instructions for clearing it with egg. Swedish immigrant women working as domestic servants in middle-class American households would have learned to prepare coffee this way. Although the method was known in Sweden, it was more common there to clear coffee with a small piece of dried fish skin (*klarskinn*).<sup>25</sup>

Salem church members were likely serving egg coffee because that was how they prepared it in large quantities for church events—boiled in big enamel-coated metal coffee pots. When their fair customers liked the flavor and were intrigued by the use of egg—a practice that by the midtwentieth century was no longer common—Salem’s workers discovered they had a good thing going. While signage on the stand in its early years emphasized home cooking, in recent decades it has highlighted “Swedish Egg Coffee” and currently includes a large coffeepot, further cementing the relationship between Swedish heritage and coffee.<sup>26</sup>

The linkage was strengthened even more in the 1960s when Proctor & Gamble created an advertising campaign featuring the motherly Swedish American character, Mrs. Olson, whose job it was to save marriages by teaching young housewives to make good coffee for their husbands. (Naturally, only “Mountain Grown” Folgers would do.) Virginia Christine, who played Mrs. Olson, was actually of Swedish American heritage (her maternal grandparents emigrated from Sweden); she was born Virginia Ricketts in Stanton, Iowa, a community founded by Swedish immigrants. In 1971 Stanton chose to honor Christine as well as capitalize on her fame by dedicating a

water tower to her, a Swedish coffee pot complete with handle and spout and painted with floral-style Swedish folk decorations. In the year 2000 Stanton added a coffee-cup water tower. Water-tower homage to Swedish Americans and coffee was repeated in the heavily Swedish-heritage communities of Kingsburg, California (1985) and Lindstrom, Minnesota (1992) as well.<sup>27</sup>

Coffee and Swedish heritage remain firmly connected in the twenty-first century. In 2010 I purchased a coffee mug in Cloquet that proclaims “*Bland alla jordiska drycker, Ju kaffetåren den bästa är*” (Of all the drinks in the world, coffee is the very best), a line from a nineteenth-century Swedish song in praise of the beverage. A cookie business called Sweet Seven recently opened in Denver, selling cookies made from traditional Swedish recipes for goodies to be served at a *kafferep*. For the uninformed, the company website explains the *kafferep*



and the *sju sorter*—seven sorts of cookies a hostess was expected to provide. And in the name of research for this article, I sampled Salem Lutheran’s Swedish egg coffee at the 2011 Minnesota State Fair.<sup>28</sup>

**As Hasia Diner noted in her now-classic book** investigating Italian, Irish, and Jewish foodways, “What and how people eat reveals a dense world of behavior and belief that extends far beyond mundane details of ingredients, equipment, responsibilities, and meal formats.” Against such quotidian detail, the association of Swedes, Swedish Americans, and coffee reveals a rich and complex mixture of meaning, memory, and myth.

Coffee wafts through the Swedish American experience in both expected and surprising ways. A brew also infused by differences of social class, gender, family, and religion, it flavored the formation of Swedish American identities and memories. Above all, coffee insinuated itself unassumingly into everyday practice by its familiarity, availability, conviviality, and enjoyability. As one northern Minnesota Swedish American mother had it, “A cup of coffee and a warm Pepperkaka (ginger snap) is the closest thing to heaven in West Duluth.” And who could argue? As invitation, her words of simple pleasure, warmth, hospitality, and community point to a lesser remarked—but surprisingly hot—locus of heritage in the making.<sup>29</sup> □

## Notes

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1. Anne Gillespie Lewis, “Volunteer Spotlight on Ruth Peterson,” *ASI Posten*, Nov. 1995, 10. The Kaffestuga room, now called the Stuga, is used for meetings. It is open for public view when available, but coffee and food are no longer served there. Instead, visitors can now enjoy a variety of Nordic-inspired foods, including coffee and treats, in the institute’s Nelson Cultural Center café, *Fika* (a term that refers to the daily practice in Sweden of taking time out for coffee and something sweet).

2. Lars Elgklou, *Kaffeboken* (Höganäs: Wiken, 1993), 184–90; Sigfrid Svensson, “Kaffe,” *Svenska kulturbilder* 5 (1936): 154; Andrews quoted in Evadene Burriss Swanson, “A New Hampshire Yankee in King Oscar’s Court,” *Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* (SPHQ) 16 (Jan. 1965): 24; William Widgery Thomas, *Sweden and the Swedes* (Chicago: Rand, McNally, 1892), 147.

3. Elgklou, *Kaffeboken*, 184–90; Svensson, “Kaffe,” 154; Karl Victor Anderson, “Autobiography of Karl Victor Anderson,” 2, Karl Victor Anderson Papers, American Swedish Institute (ASI), Minneapolis (Anderson also lived in Iowa, Wyoming, and California); John Edor Larson Papers, folder 1, p. 3, General/Multiethnic Collection, Immigration History Research Center (IHRC), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; Beda Erickson, “Beda Erickson’s Journey to Chicago, 1902,” *SPHQ* 32 (Jan. 1981): 9.

4. Matilda (Johansson) Holmberg Lind-

gren, *Diary of Journey to America, 1892*, 12, Matilda (Johansson) Holmberg Lindgren Papers, ASI; Swen Magnus Swensson, “An Emigrant’s Journey to America in 1907,” *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* (SAHQ) 40 (Oct. 1989): 185; Anna Sand to her mother, father, and siblings, Oct. 10, 1899, RS 14/0, box 5, folder 1, Covenant Archives and Historical Library, North Park University, Chicago.

5. Roberta Anderson Smith, “Pioneer Homes at Swede Point, Iowa,” *SPHQ* 31 (Jan. 1980): 14; Gustaf Unonius, *Minnen från en sjuttonårig vistelse i nordvästra Amerika* (Uppsala: W. Schultz, 1862), 1: 299–301; Elmer T. Peterson, “The Century of Sven and Emma,” in *Stories of Swedish Pioneers in North America*, ed. Hilmer G. Lundbeck (n.p., 1948), 4: 6.

6. August Karlsson to Parents and Siblings, June 1, 1890, August Karlsson Papers, ASI.

7. See, for example, Amy Erickson, interview by Gerald D. Anderson, Apr. 27, 1976, tape recording, Northwest Minnesota Historical Center, Minnesota State University—Moorhead (NWMHC); Elizabeth Youngquist, “Surviving Influence of Minnesota’s Swedish Settlers,” in *Stories of Swedish Pioneers*, 2: 12–13; Axel W. Erickson, *Endgate Telescopes: Or Memories from Five Going on Six to Eighty-Five Going on Eighty-Six* (Bellevue, WA: the author, 1967), 90.

8. Here and below, Mark Pendergast, *Uncommon Grounds* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 50–53; Edith Sylvania Blomquist, questionnaire response, 9, John Blomquist Papers, 1867–1912, ASI.

9. Linnea Swanson Sonquist, “Nea Recalls,” *SAHQ* 39 (Apr. 1988): 35–36; Eric V. Youngquist, “Growing Up Swedish,” *SAHQ* 53 (Oct. 2002): 255; Erickson, *Endgate*

*Telescopes*, 76; Elgklou, *Kaffeboken*, 202; Rene Valeri, “Kom så tar vi en kopp!”: Svenskarna och deras kaffedrickande,” in *Svenska vanor och ovanor*, ed. Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1991), 75. The habit continued beyond the turn of the century, however. For example, both the well-known late Swedish author Stieg Larsson and his partner, Eva Gabriellsson, were taught by their grandmothers to drink coffee by the age of five; Eva Gabriellsson with Marie-Françoise Colombani and Linda Coverdale, “*There are Things I Want You to Know*” about *Stieg Larsson and Me* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2011), 3.

10. “Kaffe dox” is likely what the writer heard when her grandparents said “kaffe dags”; “dags” refers to time. Carolyn to Sweden-L list, Dec. 4, 1999, <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/SWEDEN/1999-12/0944326004> (accessed Jan. 9, 2013). See also Sharon Kingan Young, “Coffee Talk,” in *Chicken Soup for the Coffee Lover’s Soul: Celebrating the Perfect Blend*, ed. Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and Theresa Peluso (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2007), 203; Lee Beck, “Addiction of Choice,” *Log Home Design* 11 (July 2004): 144; Karen Berg Douglas, *Coffee with Mama: A Collection of Scandinavian Recipes and Others* (Lansing, MI: Suomi-Sverige Pub., 1994), 5.

11. Elgklou, *Kaffeboken*, 208–09; Barbro Sklute Klein, “Legends and Folk Beliefs in a Swedish American Community: A Study of Folklore and Acculturation” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1971), 79.

12. Andreen quoted in Youngquist, “Surviving Influences,” 13; Barbara Ann Hillman Jones, *Cameos: Taking Time to Smell the Roses* (XLibris, 2011), 26, 77.

13. *Diary of Maria Magnusson Translated*



by her Granddaughter Aina Abrahamson, folder 3, p. 13, Christina Maria Stendahl Magnusson, *Memoirs and Diaries*, ASI.

14. Edith Sylvania Blomquist Vanden Bergh, "A Minnesota Cyclone," 2, Blomquist papers, ASI; Violet Johnson Sollie, "Life for One Woman in the Twentieth Century," 114, book collection, Hennepin History Museum, Minneapolis.

15. Letters between P. A. and Nanni Davidson, Nov. 7, 8, 13, 16, and 18, 1912, Helen Peterson Collection, Letters 1899–1915, ASI. Coffee did not always contribute to marital bliss; Johanna Lindberg's attack on her husband was blamed on an addiction to coffee. See Peg Meier, *Coffee Made Her Insane and Other Nuggets from Old Minnesota Newspapers* (Minneapolis: Neighbors Publishing, 1988), 157–59.

16. E. L., *För Kafferepet* (Minneapolis: C. Rasmussens bokförlagshandel, 1900). This cookbook (For the Coffee Party) includes 100 recipes for baked goods. See also Bo Eriksson, *Den magiska bönan* (Stockholm: Bilda Förlag, 2007), 51, 58–64. An 1884 magazine criticized the gossiping that could often occur at a *kafferep*: "Kafferepet," *Ungdoms Vänner* (Youth's Companion), Sept. 17, 1884, 280–81.

17. Magnusson, Diary, entries for Feb. 28 in years mentioned; "Ludvig Larson," *Svenska Kuriren*, Jan. 1, 1920, Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey, Newberry Library, <http://flps.newberry.org/group/swedish/?page=247> (accessed Jan. 9, 2013).

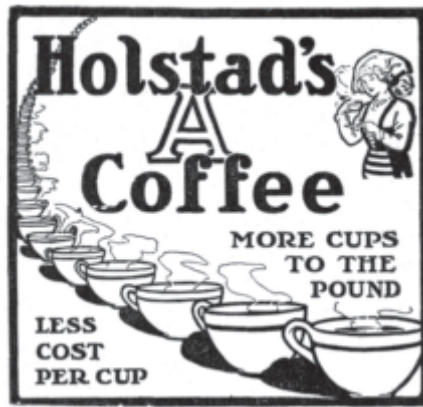
18. Ledger/minutes, 41, 67, Svenska Kultur-förbundet Records, 1924–40, ASI; DeAne L. Lagerquist, *The Lutherans: Student Edition* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 109–11.

19. Gladys Westrum, "I Remember," (1949), 15–16, Gladys Westrum Papers, NWMHC.

20. Swedish Missionsförsamling, Winnipeg Junction, congregational minutes and record books, 1890s–1910s, Historical and Cultural Society of Clay Co., Moorhead (HCSCC). One of these events raised \$30; *Hawley Herald*, Oct. 28, 1904, 8. For sample "coffee social" notices, see *St. Paul Globe*, May 8, 1898, 20; *Bemidji Daily Pioneer*, Oct. 28, 1916, 3.

21. Svenska Kristna Elimsförsamlingen, *Minnesskrift, 1904–1929: Historik över Svenska Kristna Elimsförsamlingen* (Minneapolis: the church, 1929), 7. See also First Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Congregation (St. Paul), *Jubel-Album: med en kort historik, utgifvet af Första Svenska Evangeliskt Lutherska Församlingen . . .* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1904), 109; Swedish Missionsförsamling, "Protokoll för församlingen i Winnipeg Junction," 64, HCSCC.

22. Ludvig Holmes, "Till Kaffets Ära," *Prärieblomman; Kalendrar . . . utgifven af vännerhetens vänner* (Rock Island, IL: Lutheran Augustana Book Concern, 1902), 37.



*A woman in folk costume sips grade-A coffee; ad, Lutheran Inner Mission League of Minnesota's 1926 church directory and cookbook.*

Swedish American men fond of coffee and less concerned about temperance might enjoy *kaffegök*, a mixture of coffee and alcohol—usually aquavit or brandy. Information on the Willmar group from "Willmar Saucer Club" folder, Kandiyohi Co. Historical Society, Willmar, including *West Central Tribune*, Nov. 2, 1978, 18. On the Minneapolis branch, see *Hawley Herald*, Apr. 13, 1939, 4.

23. International Institute of Minnesota Festival of Nations, St. Paul, *Annual: 1936*, 7, serials, IHRC.

24. *Centennial History of Kandiyohi County, Minnesota, 1870–1970* (Willmar: Color Press, 1970), 218, 279–80. I also examined the *Willmar Daily Tribune* (later, *West Central Tribune*) for the months surrounding Kaffe Fest. "Kaffe Fest Lures 35,000 Visitors to 'Coffee Drinking Capital of the World,'" *Tea and Coffee Trade Journal* 94–95 (1948): 38; *West Central Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1978, 18. For Svensk Hyllningsfest see Lizette Gradén, *On Parade: Making Heritage in Lindsborg, Kansas* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2003).

25. Salem Lutheran Church, "Seventy-fifth Anniversary 1895–1970" (n.p., 1970). I examined several hundred cookbooks in researching egg coffee, ranging from Jennie A. Hansey and N. T. Oliver, *Dr. N. T. Oliver's Treasured Secrets: The Century Cook Book, a Carefully Selected List of Household Recipes* (Chicago: Laird & Lee, 1894), 174, to Fannie Merritt Farmer, *The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1912), 37. *Praktisk, illustrerad kok-bok för Svenskarnas i Amerika* (Practical Illustrated Cookbook for Swedes in America) included instructions for making coffee with egg whites, not *klarskinn*; (Chicago: Svenska Tribunens, 1899), 72.

26. Photographs of the fair stand from various years viewed at Salem Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, courtesy of Mary Helfinstine, church secretary.

27. *Tampa Tribune*, Mar. 17, 1996, 7; Dick Vosburgh, "Obituary: Virginia Christine," *Independent* (London), July 30, 1996; Claus L. Anderson, *Gracious Bounty* (Stanton, IA: Viking Printing Co., 1952); Swedish heritage verified through *ancestry.com* search for Virginia Ossian Ricketts. Proctor & Gamble and Smuckers, past and present owners of Folgers Coffee, were unwilling to share any information about the history of the ad campaign. Carol Dahlquist, "Karl Oskar & Kristina—40 Years on Lindstrom's Main Street," *Chisago Heritage Journal*, Feb.–Apr. 2010, 6; Pauline Peterson Mathes, *Bit of Sweden in the Desert: A History of Kingsburg, California, from the 1850's to the Early 1940's* (Fresno, CA: Pioneer Pub. Co., 1991), 50.

28. The mug was purchased at Bergquist Imports, which now produces the product line in the U.S. Its motif was created by Berggren Trayner Corp., a Swedish American company established in 1950 that made kitchen decor items, including metal coffee pots with the "Kaffetären" phrase. On the cookie shop and Swedish traditions, see "The Kafferep and Sweet Seven Swedish Cookie Story—Denver Colorado," <http://sweetseven.com/story.html> (accessed Jan. 9, 2013).

29. Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 226–27; Henry John Robertz and William George Robertz, *Robert & Erna: A Summary of the Oral History of the Lives of Two Swedish Immigrants Who We Remember As Our Parents* (Chicago, IL: Robertz Affirms Design, 2003), 48.

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*The photos on p. 190, 193 (right), 197, and 198 are courtesy Kandiyohi Co. Historical Society (artifact photography by the author); p. 199 by author; p. 200 by Carl Erickson, courtesy Chisago Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce. All others are in MHS collections; coffee bag photographed by Jason Onerheim.*



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