Letters to Hilda

"SWEDE GIRLS," DOMESTIC SERVICE, AND LIFE AS A NEWCOMER IN MINNEAPOLIS, 1913–1914

LEANNA SWANSON

A Bundle of Letters

It was a rather small bundle of yellowed papers, carefully tied together with a remnant of nylon. Grandma had entrusted her mother's letters to me, a college student at the time. I thanked her and eagerly sat down to sort through the collection. I counted. Forty-five letters. Some envelopes were a bluish hue and bore a row of green stamps proudly displaying a heavily mustached King Gustaf V. These were from Sweden. Still others came from Ontario, Illinois, and Connecticut. Most were postmarked "Minneapolis, 1913." I read familiar addresses like "4621 Emerson Avenue South" and "2909 Knox Avenue South," both in Minneapolis, and "Cottagewood, Lake Minnetonka." I knew these places! I pictured Lake Harriet and Uptown in Minneapolis, and the many beautiful spots near Excelsior on Lake Minnetonka, where I had passed relaxing summer afternoons. I gently leafed through page after page of fluid, rolling, Edwardian script. Almost all of the letters took advantage of every inch of space. Margins were crowded with tiny cursive phrases, winding their way around the edges of the pages in splendid serpentine fashion.

I ached to know what these letters said, but the Swedish words eluded me. I knew these letters were precious to my great-grandmother Hilda Nyberg Sandstrom. She had received them during her pivotal first year in the United States as a newly arrived immigrant. I knew from my grandmother's stories that Hilda was born in Skön Parish near Sundsvall, Sweden, the second of 11 children. At her mother's urging, Hilda immigrated to

Letters to the author's great-grandmother offer insight into her early years in America, when she served as a "Swede girl" in Minneapolis.

Minnesota at age 22 to check on her older sister, Anna. To reach America, Hilda sailed on the famous ocean liner *Lusitania* in August of 1913. During her crossing, the great ship paused solemnly over the site of the recent *Titanic* sinking. Passengers and crew commemorated the tragedy by singing "Nearer My God to Thee."

Beyond these scant details, I knew frustratingly little about Hilda's transition to life in America. These letters were her tangible link to the past, to her home country, and to that first year of adjustment to life in Minnesota. They must have held great significance to be kept so carefully for nearly a century. Decades would pass before I had the letters professionally translated. Finally, I could read them for myself and "meet" this family heroine who was my great-grandmother. I discovered that Hilda's story was like that of many Swedish immigrant women. She was drawn to Minnesota, a home away from home for countless Swedes. She found employment as a "Swede girl," working as a domestic servant in south Minneapolis.

The letters were remarkably candid. I expected to find a generally positive account of higher wages, better working conditions, and greater opportunity. Instead, the letters placed a lot of focus on the immediate challenges of daily working life. Many of the letters are from Anna to Hilda and contain the intimacies that two sisters who are very close will share only with one another. Without hesitation, Anna lays out disputes with employers, complaints over working hours, and hopes for better employment. The letters left me with still more questions. I wanted to know about Anna and Hilda's world. Why were there so many problems with employers? Was the work really that hard? And what was a Swede girl's position in society? Didn't Anna and Hilda have it pretty good compared to their counterparts in Sweden?

I read and reread the letters. I combed through Minnesota newspapers for any mention of Swede girls and domestic servants. I read books about Swedish American women and the lives of Swedes in Minnesota. I even stumbled upon a recorded interview of Hilda's younger brother, Thure Nyberg, telling his immigration story to archivists at the American Swedish Institute. Together, all of these records began to form an insider's look into the daily life of a Swedish domestic servant in Minneapolis at the beginning of the twentieth century. I found that, yes, Swedish women who worked as domestics did have it better in Minnesota. In their first years of acculturation, however, Swede girls encountered economic, social, ethnic, and gender barriers. I was inspired by the way Anna and Hilda persevered. They made the best of their situation, leveraging the high demand for competent domestic servants to negotiate better positions. They balanced hard work with strong community connections to create a vibrant life for themselves.[1]

Hilda Nyberg's family and friends gathered to see her off at the train station in Sundsvall, Sweden, in 1913. Hilda is seated in the front row holding a bouquet of flowers.

Swedish Immigration to Minnesota

Hilda was part of a great migration of 1.25 million Swedes who came to the New World between 1845 and 1930. Almost a quarter of Swedes left their homeland during these years. The primary motive for most of these immigrants was economic. In Sweden, low wages made putting aside extra money nearly impossible, greatly hindering upward economic mobility in a highly stratified society. In a 1906 volume of the *North American Review*, writer Hrolf Wisby reflected on the Swedish predicament:

> Take the instance of a Swedish farm-hand who is earning very likely only 150 kroner a year above his board and bed, or a servant-girl in a Swedish town who may be getting still less than that. Even with the utmost economy, they could not possibly save more than twenty-five dollars a year each; so,

> by saving alone, there could be no future for them beyond servitude. They come here simply because the wages are higher, and because the chances of becoming independent seem to them more attractive than at home.

Swede girls were thought to be cleaner, more honest and polite, harder working, and more attractive than other immigrant groups.

Many immigrants hoped that better wages in America would help them break out of prescribed economic roles. The mechanization of agriculture also decreased available jobs in Sweden, leading many to seek work elsewhere.[2]

Swedish women, like Hilda and her sister Anna, immigrated for many reasons. Greater financial security was certainly high on the list. Domestic workers were in demand, so those with experience could be reasonably sure that higher wages and secure employment awaited them. A more exciting, fashionable lifestyle also drew them. A friend back in Sweden declared that Hilda would be too good for her now that she was in America: "You are probably so fine now that I would not even recognize you, out with your fiancé and having fun, of course. It would sure be nice if you sent what you promised to, but maybe you can't afford to, but I assume you earn pretty well."[3]

This tinge of envy colors a number of letters. Another friend wrote: "I see that you are well, and that you are enjoying yourself in the new country. . . . I am also well, but I have not had much fun. . . . You can imagine how boring things are, even more so with you gone. . . . You have it pretty good . . . you are almost making me jealous." As more friends and family made a safe entry into their new life in America, it became increasingly appealing to join them.[4]

Minnesota attracted many of these Swedes from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1930s. Minneapolis–St. Paul was a popular choice as one of the most accessible cities on the frontier. Railroads provided easy transportation for New York arrivals via Chicago. The first waves of Swedes in Minnesota tended to settle in rural areas, drawn by opportunities in agriculture and forestry. By the 1890s, however, more Swedes began to settle in the Twin Cities. Higher pay and an ever-growing Swedish American community made the Twin Cities a soft landing spot for newcomers. In the book *Swedes in Minnesota*, Anne Gillespie Lewis underscores this point: "By this time almost every young Swede had a relative somewhere in the United States whose tales of instant success were hard to resist." By 1905, the Twin Cities were home to the second-largest urban concentration of Swedes in the United States, as they made up 7.5 percent of the cities' total population. When Hilda arrived in 1913, Swedes were quickly outpacing Norwegians and Germans to become the largest foreign-born population in the Twin Cities.[5]

"Swede Girls"

Many of these Swedes were young single women like Anna and Hilda who supported themselves upon arrival. Swedish historian Lars Olsson observed in 2001 that embarrassingly little has been written about Swedish immigrant working women. One notable exception is the work of historian Joy K. Lintelman, who has written extensively on the topic. In her book *I Go to America: Swedish American Women and the Life of Mina Anderson*, Lintelman explains, "most single Swedish immigrant women found things better as a result of their immigration to the United States—and comparatively easier than for male migrants from Sweden." This enhanced status is largely due to the demand for qualified domestic servants—and the higher wages, better housing, and more free time typically available to domestic servants in America.[6]

Relatively little has been documented from the point of view of Swedish servants during their tenure as domestics. Most of what is known about day-to-day experiences of those who worked in domestic service has been gleaned from memoirs written later and from aggregate data. They became known as "Swede girls" and were often preferred by employers over other immigrant groups for their high-quality work. Swede girls were usually between the ages of 15 and 25. These single immigrant women worked and lived in the homes of middle- and upper-class families, especially in the Twin Cities. Being a Swede girl was often a stepping-stone between arrival and marriage.[7]

Swede girls were in high demand from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries. In an era influenced by social Darwinism—during which certain ethnicities were considered by the scientific community to be more evolved than others—many middle-class Americans preferred Swedish maids for what were believed to be inherent, positive ethnic qualities. Historian Erika K. Jackson explained the desire for Nordic workers in Chicago during the 1910s: "Middle-class Americans . . . employed Scandinavian women in their homes because they required less work to 'civilize.'. . . Scandinavian women possessed the racial and ethnic qualities they wished to represent outwardly as American consumers." Swede girls, specifically, were thought to be cleaner, more honest and polite, harder working, and more attractive than other immigrant groups. The Irish, by contrast, were viewed as less polished, unrestrained, and less feminine in appearance. Classified ads seeking domestics in Minneapolis sometimes explicitly stated their ethnic preference: "Wanted—Swede girl for chamber-work; come ready for work. 400 6th St S."[8]

Not all perceptions of Swede girls were positive. In Wisby's thoughtful assessment of the Swede's status in 1906, he concluded that Swedish immigrants lost in social standing just as much as they gained financially. Well-read and sophisticated Swedes became comparatively simple creatures in the eyes of an American employer. Some of the more negative descriptors for Swede girls found in local newspapers from the time include "buxom" and "lummox."[9]

The Swede girl stereotype can be clearly seen in the character of Helma, a Swedish servant girl in the comedic play *What Happened to Jones*. Popular throughout the country, this classic farce was regularly performed in Minneapolis at the turn of the twentieth century. In it, a professor, a bishop, and a man named Jones are caught up in a succession of mistaken identities, disguises, and police searches. Helma's inability to understand English provides another layer of humor. Audiences found her accent hilarious; the *Hector (MN) Mirror* teased, "Helma wants to 'yump' her 'yob.'" The *Minneapolis Tribune* chided "Helma, the Swedish servant, who don't quite grasp the finer shades of meaning in the 'American' language." She is unable to understand the other characters' attempts to explain what is happening. The Minneapolis *Irish Standard* described her this way: "Helma, the stupid Swedish servant girl, whose blunders make the complex situation in which the characters involve themselves more tangled."[10]

The Swedish community was not laughing along with its critics. In an editorial published in the *Minneapolis Times*, the editor accused the stereotypical Swede girl of confusing the Fourth of July with Halloween, and therefore completely misinterpreting the meaning of Independence Day celebrations. The *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* offered this rebuke:

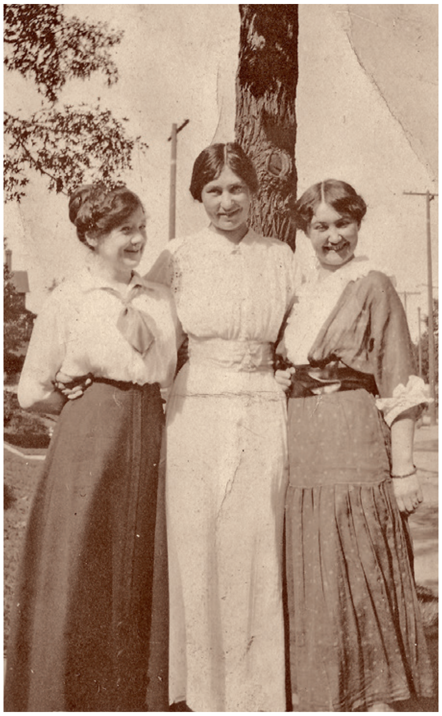
> Resolved, That we most earnestly resent the insult and denounce and condemn the singling out of the Scandinavians . . . we deplore and condemn the ignorance of malice of the writer of said editorial in the *Minneapolis Times*, as manifested by his ill-chosen subject of special attack on the "Swede hired girl in the kitchen." He ought to have known that through the system of compulsory education in Sweden the poor "newcomer girl" is, in a great many cases, better educated and more familiar with American history than even the members of the American family for which she works.

In addition to the support of the Swedish American press, Swede girls could rely on the strong connections of their social network and their ethnic community. When Hilda arrived in Minneapolis in 1913, she was immediately embraced by a thriving Swedish community.[11]

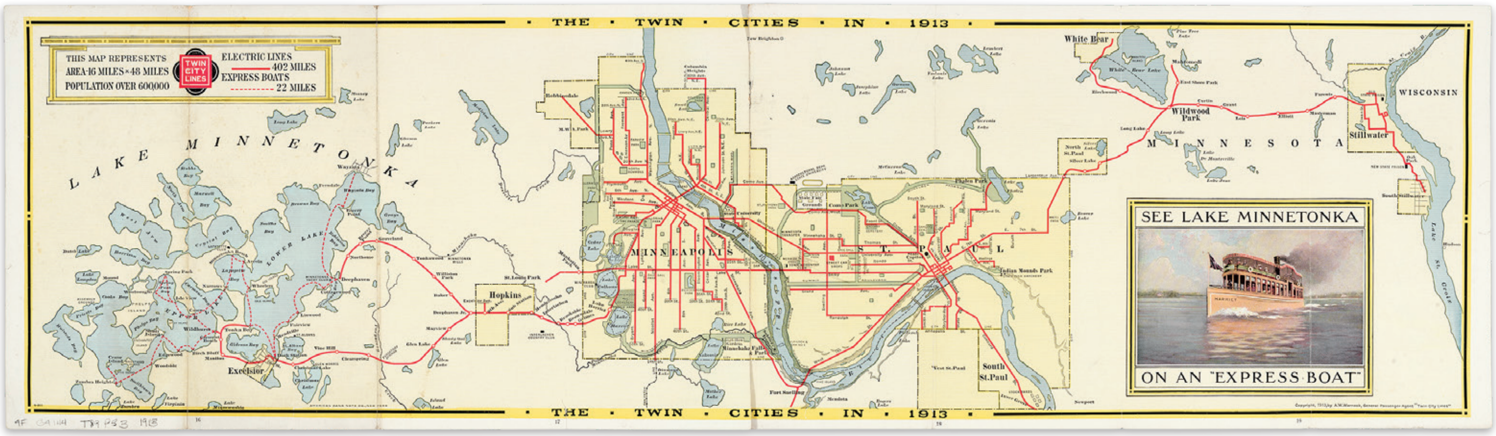
Hilda's Life in Minneapolis

Recent scholarship about female Swedish immigrants has often highlighted the long-term economic and social advantages of immigration. The collection of 45 letters to Hilda enhances this understanding, offering a close-up look at the day-to-day realities faced by a Swede girl. Both family and friends wrote these letters to Hilda. From Sweden, Hilda's mother and younger sister, Emma, kept Hilda informed about the news at home: Who was sick? Who was pregnant? Would the potato crop be good that year? Among the letters from friends, many came from acquaintances who were also recent arrivals and who had settled in Ontario, Illinois, or greater Minnesota. In addition, older sister Anna and a few other local Minneapolis friends wrote to Hilda. They also worked as domestic servants in and around Minneapolis. This last group formed Hilda's new social circle.

Anna wrote often to her younger sister. Her letters are the least formal. She wrote in haste, between tasks, as one might text a friend today. The two were very close, and they seemed to



Swede girls pose on a day off in Minneapolis, circa 1914. Hilda stands at center with sister Anna on the right.



Minneapolis's extensive and efficient streetcar system allowed Anna, Hilda, and their friends to visit one another regularly.

share everything with one another. Anna's letters reveal that they did enjoy higher wages, greater economic mobility, and more freedom than they would have had in Sweden; however, they also endured difficult working conditions and navigated a wide social gap between themselves and their employers. For Anna and Hilda, these challenges led to mistrust, conflict, and, ultimately, an exit from domestic service altogether.

When Hilda arrived in Minneapolis in late summer 1913, Anna was waiting for her at the train station. Their mother was relieved when she received word that the two sisters were safely reunited:

> I hope that you are still healthy and doing well, but things probably won't be that good to begin with, but things will get better when you become more familiar with manners and customs. It's good that you have Anna to give you advice, and that she is like a mother to you, so Hilda, I am so glad that you have arrived and that you can be together sometimes and talk. I know that is fun for you two. . . . How happy you must have been when you met Anna.[12]

Anna helped Hilda find her way through the city's extensive streetcar system to a boardinghouse in the heavily Swedish Camden neighborhood of north Minneapolis. Like many new arrivals, Hilda made use of existing family and social connections to find employment. She brought with her four letters of recommendation from former employers in Sweden. They vouched for her experience and capabilities as a maid and cook. Within a couple of months, she had secured a domestic service position and became a Swede girl. Her story mirrors the widely reported trend of high demand and easy employment for new Swedish arrivals who had domestic service experience.

Like other Swede girls, Anna and Hilda embraced the freedom they experienced in their new country. Swede girls typically had Thursdays and Sundays off. Anna and Hilda rode streetcars to visit one another almost every week. Their mother noted in one of her letters: "I'm sure it is much more pleasant now that there are two of you. You can get together now and then and chat about this and that." Anna, Hilda, and their friends sent a flurry of brief notes to one another during the workweek. They often wrote a few rushed lines before making dinner or after washing up the last dishes of the day. These notes outlined plans for meeting up later in the week. Trips to the New Grand Theatre, picnics, automobile rides, and upcoming dances were regular diversions. Telephones were also becoming more popular. Hilda and Anna talked often on the phone to briefly confirm plans for the upcoming week. Because they were busy working, they seldom had time for long conversations. Plus, Anna's employer's telephone was in a prime location: "You see Hilda, the telephone is in the dining room and so you can understand that they want to eat in peace."[13]

Anna had the good fortune of working in a home in Cottagewood on the shores of Lake Minnetonka during the spring and summer of 1914. She relished the beauty of the lake and took advantage of her situation. She hosted her boyfriend, Waldemar, for boat rides, invited Hilda and friends out for woodland hikes on Sundays, and watched the sailboats glide across the lake on sunny summer days. She even had time for an occasional swim when all of her work was done. After arriving at the lake home for the summer season in April, Anna took her first dip in mid-June. She declared, "It was lovely."[14]

Dancing was also a popular pastime for many in Hilda's social circle. In early twentieth-century Minneapolis, enclaves where the

Hilda (left) and Anna (right) pose together in Minneapolis, circa 1914.

Hilda (left), Anna (center), and a friend relax together on a day off in Minneapolis as a streetcar glides by, circa 1914.

Anna (left), Hilda (center), and a friend enjoy al fresco refreshment in Minneapolis, circa 1914.

predominant language was Swedish were found at Cedar-Riverside—the largest Scandinavian immigrant neighborhood—and in Northeast and north Minneapolis. In these areas Swedes could find not only banks and hotels where staff spoke their native tongue but also dozens of dance halls—the focal point of social life. Swede girls were rather isolated during their workdays. Living with employers who were often strangers to them created a sense of loneliness for many Swede girls. No wonder they leapt at the chance to get together with other Swedes.[15]

Anna and Hilda attended these dances with their Swedish boyfriends, Waldemar and Victor. Within months of arrival, Hilda met Victor Sandstrom, who was also a recent immigrant. He worked as an elevator operator at the iconic Metropolitan Building in downtown Minneapolis. Anna's boyfriend, Waldemar, worked in a factory. He also played in a band, making dances a regular part of Anna's and Hilda's social calendars. Anna recalled that one night she danced until her toes hurt. The dance did not end until midnight:

> It was a lot of fun. I saw so many people I know there. . . . I came home at 9:30 this morning and changed clothes and began to do the wash. It was 2:45 by the time I was finished, but I am really not that tired today. Yesterday I thought that I would be completely worn out, but it seems like I am okay.[16]

Hilda's friend Ida, writing from Illinois, expressed a wish to join them at the dance hall: "It would be so nice to be in Minneapolis and have a dance with a Swede again. Here they only dance English-style, so it does not interest me very much. . . . If I were in Minneapolis, we could have gotten up to some mischief with the boys, I know quite a few." As they assimilated to their new culture, Hilda and her friends preferred to join fellow Swedes for dances rather than venturing out to meet non-Swedes. Anna and Hilda were able to lead active social lives in between the daily tasks of a Swede girl. They prioritized making time for fun and relationships, building bonds within the Swedish community that lasted a lifetime.[17]

The Work of a Swede Girl

Daily life for a Swede girl was very busy. Domestic service was a challenging position with long hours. Hilda and Anna regularly confided in one another about the difficulties of their jobs. Anna left her first employer because "it was so much work." She shared with her sister: "You are probably tired. I am doing very well, but I feel a bit sleepy. I have worked very hard today." Hilda's other sister, Emma, was well aware of the physical strain they experienced: "I hope that you and Anna keep your health so that you can keep up with your hard work." Anna and Hilda's mother disliked the sacrifice her daughters made for their family back in Sweden: "It is too bad that you have to work so hard and then send home so much." Almost all of Anna's letters to Hilda mention being tired from work.[18]

In an interview for the *Minneapolis Sunday Journal* in 1905, recent Swedish immigrant Emily explained the secret of success for young Scandinavian immigrants: "It is work, and more work, and more work yet." She clarified that there were often more servants in households back in Sweden. A domestic servant might have a couple of areas of responsibility, and washing was sent out once every three months, whereas a maid of "general housework" in Minneapolis was expected to do everything, including the wash every Monday, on her own. Anna recounted her own typical Monday morning in Cottagewood in this letter from May 19, 1914:

> Yes, today is Monday and I feel a bit tired, I'm sure it will pass. I did wash today of course. I suppose you have too. By twenty after twelve I had hung out the clothes, cleaned the laundry room, scrubbed the bathroom, and mopped the kitchen floor. Then I ate lunch and did the breakfast dishes. When I am done writing to you I will go and take in the clothes and sprinkle them, then I will change my clothes and then I will need to make a dessert.

Anna further explained that she routinely woke at 6:15 in the morning and worked, at least sometimes, until after 10 at night. She added, "It felt so good to crawl into bed."[19]

Hilda's fiancé, Victor Karl Sandstrom, circa 1914. He worked as an elevator conductor at the iconic Metropolitan Building in downtown Minneapolis.

Anna and Hilda dealt with more than the physical strain of hard work. They also wrote about recurring conflicts with their employers in the midst of their "dog years" of assimilation. The term *dog years* refers to the struggle most Swedish immigrants experienced between arrival and assimilation, when they struggled to learn English, find employment, and overcome various barriers to success in their new country. During this time, Swede girls lived under someone else's roof and in close quarters with their "old man" and "old lady," as they called their employers. The social and economic gulf between servant and employer created a tension that ultimately made Swede girls like Anna and Hilda more self-reliant. Because of either wages or poor working conditions, Hilda left her first job within a few months of arrival. Her sister Emma applauded this decision: "You did the right thing to leave that job. Do you have a new job now? It is good? Well, you are on your feet now. That was probably the first thing you learned over there, to look out for yourself." If tensions developed between employer and servant, a Swede girl was quick to move on to a better position.[20]

Disdain toward domestic servants in general, and immigrants in particular, can account for some of the conflicts. Historian Eric W. Sager suggests that young women entered into domestic service as a last resort, citing long hours, social stigma, isolation, and vulnerability to exploitation as some of the reasons for the decline of domestic service in the long term. In this letter from Anna to Hilda, one can sense this struggle: "From now on, things will be better Hilda. If only you can find your way out here to me, we can meet more often. And you can leave there earlier and take a trip out here when you have time. . . . I hope you are not having a dull Thursday evening. I am going to stay in. I don't have any desire to go out after all of the work and drudgery of the week." In supporting one another emotionally, Anna and Hilda were able to maintain a sense of family.[21]

Hilda held at least three different domestic service jobs during her first year in Minnesota. At her second job, she worked for the Frank M. Gates family in south Minneapolis. There, at 4621 Emerson Avenue South, she was employed as cook and maid. After working for the Gates family for several months, she mustered up enough courage to ask for a raise. She carefully rehearsed the new words over and over. Finally, she uttered in English, "I want a raise!" Hilda learned English with a lot of help from Anna. Anna had immigrated in 1909, so she was already familiar with the language by the time Hilda arrived. One benefit of working as a live-in domestic servant was an accelerated assimilation process. Being immersed in an American household, Swede girls rapidly learned English and American customs. Hilda's bold request was

KEEWAYDIN
COTTAGEWOOD, LAKE MINNETONKA, MINN.

Anna worked for the Bigelow family in Cottagewood on Lake Minnetonka: "I hope you will come here soon when the boats begin to sail" (Anna to Hilda, May 19, 1914).

rewarded. The Gates family agreed to raise her pay to $4.50 per week.[22]

This agreement, however, was short-lived. A few months later, Anna comforted Hilda after an apparent criticism: "Your old lady was [not] very understanding when she complained about your work while you were ironing. I think that she is quite unreasonable." By the end of the summer, Mrs. Gates told Hilda she was not worth $4.50 a week, so Hilda found a third job. Anna encouraged her: "I hope it is better. I think it is terrible that you work for that gossiping woman there. I hope you have nice people to work for. It is also nice that you will have good wages." The interpersonal dynamics of sharing a home with a domestic servant were complex and ripe for misunderstanding, resulting in a high turnover rate for Swede girls and domestic servants in general. An 1891 article titled "The Lack of Good Servants" lamented, "The great demand for domestic servants teaches them that, if they leave a place on Monday, they can get another before Saturday." By September of 1914, Hilda announced her upcoming marriage to Victor Sandstrom, making her own exit from domestic service and entrance into married life.[23]

Being immersed in an American household, Swede girls rapidly learned English and American customs.

Anna also reported discomfort in the servant-employer relationship. A former boss had once purposely withheld a letter. Anna's mother remembered, "She was so nasty, your former employer who could not arrange so that you got the letter . . . she did that purely from meanness, I am so glad you are working in a better place." Things were better but not ideal for Anna when she was employed in Cottagewood. She hinted to Hilda that something uncomfortable had transpired between her and her boss, Mr. Bigelow. She disclosed in one of her letters, urging discretion, "The old man has been alright since I came back. You must not tell anyone about what I told you on Thursday. Maybe they will go to Duluth." By the end of the summer in 1914, Anna gave her notice to the Bigelow family. She hoped to find a job in town, closer to her sister, her fiancé, and her friends.[24]

Legacy and Lessons

From dancing to drudgery, Anna's and Hilda's stories help to bring the experiences of Swede girls to life. Like many others, they left domestic service to marry. The two sisters built houses down the street from one another on Girard Avenue in north Minneapolis and started families of their own. Over the next 15 years, all but one of the Nyberg siblings joined them in the United States. Their parents' living room back in Sundsvall became a memorial to their children overseas. Photos of each of their American children and grandchildren graced the shelves of the farmhouse walls. In Minneapolis, Anna, Hilda, and their siblings helped to build a robust Swedish American community in the Camden neighborhood. Their brother Thure reported that in the 1920s, "Everybody, all the stores up in Camden were run by Swedes. It was just like coming to another province in Sweden."[25]

Today, Swedish meatballs and an occasional pilgrimage to the American Swedish Institute are the hallmarks of Swedish ancestry for many Minnesotans. Most have forgotten all about the "dog years" that so many of their ancestors endured. This collection of letters reminds us that Swede girls like Anna and Hilda were not immediately accepted into mainstream society. Instead, they worked very hard to learn English, make money, and establish a new life for themselves. They faced an economic divide from their more established employers and were at times stereotyped for being different and new. Through it all, they held tight to the bonds of community. Innovations like the streetcar and telephone allowed their social network to grow and thrive. They danced, picnicked, laughed, and visited until their Swedish American community became a new sort of family. They remained positive and stuck together. Anna summed it up well when she spoke to Hilda about her upcoming marriage and future: "I think it will be fun Hilda. We all need to do our best."[26] ▣

The farmhouse in Skön Parish near Sundsvall, Sweden. In addition to farming, father Nils Johann Nyberg worked as a chemical engineer at the local sawmill. The older children also worked in order to make ends meet.

Notes

All letters were translated from the original Swedish by Cynthia Wentland and are in the author's possession.

1. Thure E. Nyberg, interview by Lawrence Hammerstrom, *Minnesota's Immigrants: American Swedish Institute*, Feb. 2, 1990, https://collection.mndigital.org/catalog/p16022coll548:1130.

2. John G. Rice, "The Swedes," in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, ed. June Drenning Holmquist (St. Paul: MNHS Press, 1981), 248; Hrolf Wisby, "The Scandinavian-American: His Status," *North American Review* 183, no. 2 (Aug. 1906): 215; H. Arnold Barton, ed., *Letters from the Promised Land: Swedes in America, 1840–1914* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), 203. See also Lars Ljungmark, *Swedish Exodus*, trans. Kermit B. Westerberg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979).

3. Rut Westlund to Hilda Nyberg, Oct. 5, 1913.

4. Lilly and Tessan to Hilda Nyberg, Nov. 4, 1913.

5. In 1905, 163,000 Swedes lived in Chicago, forming the largest urban population of Swedes in the United States. Anne Gillespie Lewis, *Swedes in Minnesota* (St. Paul: MNHS Press, 2004), 14, 26, 28; Dag Blanck, "On Being Swedish in America: The Search for Identity," *Scandinavian Review* 84, no. 2 (Autumn 1996): 11–16; Rice, "The Swedes," 248.

6. Lars Olsson, "Textile Workers and Munsingwear," in *Swedes in the Twin Cities: Immigrant Life and Minnesota's Urban Frontier*, ed. Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck (St. Paul: MNHS Press, 2001): 77–90; Joy K. Lintelman, *I Go to America: Swedish American Women and the Life of Mina Anderson* (St. Paul: MNHS Press, 2009), 94. See also Joy Lintelman, "'America Is the Woman's Promised Land': Swedish Immigrant Women and American Domestic Service," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 8, no. 2, Immigrant Women (Spring 1989): 9–23; "'Our Serving Sisters': Swedish-American Domestic Servants and Their Ethnic Community," *Social Science History* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 381–95; and "A Hot Heritage: Swedish Americans and Coffee," *Minnesota History* 65, no. 5 (Spring 2013): 190–202.

7. For more on Swede girls, see David A. Lanegran, "Swedish Neighborhoods," in *Swedes in the Twin Cities: Immigrant Life and Minnesota's Urban Frontier*, ed. Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck (St. Paul: MNHS Press, 2001), 41.

8. Wisby, "The Scandinavian-American," 213; Erika K. Jackson, "The 'Swedish Maid': 'Strong' Nordic Workers in an Elite American World," in *Scandinavians in Chicago: The Origins of White Privilege in Modern America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 79, 82; advertisement, *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, June 30, 1910, p. 14.

9. Wisby, "The Scandinavian-American," 218. Wisby provides Norwegian author Knut Hamsun as an example of the loss in status for Scandinavian immigrants: Hamsun went from acclaimed author in Scandinavia to streetcar conductor in Minneapolis. *Minnesota Stats Tidning*, Nov. 2, 1898; *Minneapolis Journal*, Nov. 15, 1905.

10. *Hector (MN) Mirror*, May 4, 1916, p. 1; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Mar. 31, 1907, p. 24; (Minneapolis) *Irish Standard*, Mar. 30, 1907, p. 5.

11. Johan L. Hallstrom, Lena Sahlstrom, J. A. Elner, *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*, July 12, 1898, p. 4; Lintelman, "Our Serving Sisters."

12. Mathilda Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Sept. 21, 1913.

13. Mathilda Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Nov. 5, 1913; Anna Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Aug. 11, 1914.

14. Anna Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, June 17, 1914.

15. Ida Martinson to Hilda Nyberg, Nov. 8, 1913; Lewis, *Swedes in Minnesota*, 43.

16. Anna Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Sept. 15, 1914.

17. Ida Martinson to Hilda Nyberg, Nov. 8, 1913.

18. Mathilda Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Nov. 5, 1913; Anna Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Apr. 29, 1914; Emma Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Nov. 17, 1913; Mathilda Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Jan. 1, 1914.

19. Frances R. Sterrett, "How Emily Gets Along: A True Story of Domestic Thrift and Development," *Minneapolis Sunday Journal*, Oct. 22, 1905, p. 1; Anna Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, May 19, 1914.

20. Ljungmark, *Swedish Exodus*; Emma Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Jan. 20, 1914.

21. Eric W. Sager, "The Transformation of the Canadian Servant, 1871–1931," *Social Science History* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 510; Anna Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Aug. 11, 1914.

22. Barbara Tilsen, email message to author, July 22, 2020; Anna Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Aug. 5, 1914.

23. Anna Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Aug. 5, 1914; Sager, "The Transformation of the Canadian Servant"; *North American Review* 153, no. 420 (Nov. 1891): 553.

24. Mathilda Nyberg to Anna Nyberg, Apr. 4, 1914; Anna Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Apr. 29, 1914. Although it is not clear exactly what happened between Anna and Mr. Bigelow, it is important to note that Swede girls were in a vulnerable position. Minneapolis newspapers mentioned several violent assaults toward Swede girls during this time.

25. Thure E. Nyberg interview.

26. Anna Nyberg to Hilda Nyberg, Sept. 15, 1914.

Images on p. 348 and p. 351 from MNHS Collections. All others courtesy the author.

Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society, and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or users or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission: **contact us**.

Individuals may print or download articles for personal use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, **contact us**. Include the author's name and article title in the body of your message. But first--

If you think you may need permission, here are some guidelines:

Students and researchers

- You **do not** need permission to quote or paraphrase portions of an article, as long as your work falls within the fair use provision of copyright law. Using information from an article to develop an argument is fair use. Quoting brief pieces of text in an unpublished paper or thesis is fair use. Even quoting in a work to be published can be fair use, depending on the amount quoted. Read about fair use here: http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html
- You **should**, however, always credit the article as a source for your work.

Teachers

- You **do not** need permission to incorporate parts of an article into a lesson.
- You **do** need permission to assign an article, either by downloading multiple copies or by sending students to the online pdf. There is a small per-copy use fee for assigned reading. **Contact us** for more information.

About Illustrations

- **Minnesota History** credits the sources for illustrations at the end of each article. **Minnesota History** itself does not hold copyright on images and therefore cannot grant permission to reproduce them.
- For information on using illustrations owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, see **MHS Library FAQ**.

www.mnhs.org/mnhistory