

SWEDISH-AMERICAN PARISHES – GREAT GENEALOGICAL SOURCE!

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INTRODUCTION

Many Swedes who immigrated to North America (United States and Canada) joined a Swedish-American church. While most of these congregations were Lutheran, there were Swedish Covenant, Swedish Baptist, Swedish Methodist, Swedish Free and other free churches. Not every immigrant joined a Swedish-American church but it is estimated by various scholars that between 20 to 40% of the immigrants became members of these churches during the mass migration period (1840-1930).

In the book, *Swedes in America, 1638-1938*, published by Yale University Press in 1938, the breakdown of Swedish-American churches and members was shown as follows:

Denomination	# of Churches	# of Members
Augustana Synod (Lutheran)	1,203	254,677
Swedish Baptist	300	36,820
Swedish Evangelical Free	150	9,000
Swedish Methodist	175	19,441
Mission Covenant	441	45,000

Many of these churches kept detailed church registers similar to the church books within Sweden. The Lutheran and Covenant records tend to be more detailed than the other denominations. These records can be very helpful in identifying where the Swedish immigrant came from in Sweden as well as providing often a good birth date so that one can jump the pond to research the family ancestry in the Swedish church books. The records also provide a nice complement to the state and federal census records in providing information about the immigrant's family movements.

SWEDISH-AMERICAN CHURCH BOOK RECORDS

The Swedish-American church books usually include the following types of records:

- Congregation records or church registers (*Församlingsböcker*)
- Birth and christening records (*Födelse- och dopböcker*)
- Marriage records (*Vigelsböcker*)
- Death and burial records (*Död- och begravningsböcker*)
- Member reception records (*Inflyttningslängder eller Intagna medlemmar*)
- Member dismissal records (*Utflyttningslängder eller Utträdde medlemmar*)
- Catechetical records (*Konfirmationsbok*)
- Protocols (*Protokoll*)
- Accountings (*Räkenskaper*)
- Anniversary documents (*Jubileumsskrift*)
- Other types of documents

CONGREGATION RECORDS

The congregation records or church registers include similar information to the Swedish household/congregation records. The type of information you may find includes: the names of the household members, birth date, birth place, baptismal date, marriage dates of the head of the household, arrival date in America and arrival date in the congregation. Some of these books have alphabetical name indexes. These records are very helpful in identifying where a person came from in Sweden. The Lutheran and Covenant church registers usually provide more detail than the other denominations.

BIRTH AND CHRISTENING RECORDS

The birth and christening records are somewhat similar to the Swedish birth and christening records. The contents do vary by congregation but they usually contain the child's name, birth date, baptismal date, names of parents and names of baptismal witnesses. Most of the time the mother's married name and not maiden name is presented. These records are organized in chronological order often by baptismal date. Occasionally, there is a cross reference to the family in the church register or congregation record.

MARRIAGE RECORDS

The marriage records are an important source because it is the one source where the female's maiden name is shown. The contents in the marriage record usually include the names of the groom and bride, date of the marriage and the places where the bride and groom are from. These records are organized in chronological order.

DEATH AND BURIAL RECORDS

The death and burial records show the deceased's name, death date, burial date, age, sometimes names of nearest relatives and cause of death. Unfortunately, abbreviations may be used in names such as "P. A. Swanson" versus the complete name and married women are often noted as "Mrs. Charles Eklund". These are organized in chronological order usually by the funeral date. Occasionally, there is a cross reference to the family in the church register or congregation record.

MEMBER RECEPTION RECORDS

These records record new members of the parish usually stating the name of the person, date of admission and the place where the person came from. Sometimes, these records can be helpful in following a person's movements in North America.

MEMBER DISMISSAL RECORDS

These records record the names of member who leave the parish. Usually, you will find the name of the person, departure date and where the person is going to. These records can be helpful in following a person's movements in North America.

CATECHETICAL OR CONFIRMATION RECORDS

The catechetical or confirmation records provide names of the confirmed. Most of the time, these are only list of names, but occasionally, the birth date and the names of the parents of the confirmed will be shown.

PROTOCOLS

The protocols are administrative records for the parish. They contain minutes of administrative meetings and decisions relating to parish matters.

ACCOUNTINGS

The account book will include records of financial transactions such as cash books, bookkeeping records and real estate transactions.

ANNIVERSARY DOCUMENTS

In many congregation archives you will find church anniversary documents celebrating a number of years in existence such as 25 years, 50 years, 75 years or 100 years. These documents usually present a short history of the church or a church organization such as a singing group or other group within the church. Sometimes in addition to the history of the church, biographical information and photos of members of the church are included.

OTHER DOCUMENTS

You may find other documents dependent upon the parish such as church school records, tomb or cemetery records, historical notes, church constitution, and attachments to migration records, newspaper clippings and other types of documents.

WHERE ARE THE RECORDS?

In many cases the original church books are preserved at the church. If the church is still active, one can contact the church to find about the availability of the records. Some original records can be found at county archives or museums, the church's headquarters such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (for Lutheran records) and sometimes in a church member's home.

MICROFILMS

The largest and most complete set of Swedish-American church books on microfilm is at the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois (<https://www.augustana.edu/swenson/collections/churchrecords>). These microfilms were created in the 1960's and 1970's by the Swedish Emigrant Institute through Lennart Setterdahl. These microfilms include church book records from the following archives:

- Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ECLA)
- Evangelical Covenant Church
- Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA)

In addition, there are Swedish-Methodist and Swedish-Baptist films. Records are from both the United States and Canada.

ONLINE

Today, many Swedish-American church books are available online at the following sites:

- Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/> - subscription site
- ArkivDigital.net - <https://www.arkivdigital.net/> - subscription site
- Swedish-American Archives of Greater Chicago – http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/npu_ansgar - Free

ANCESTRY.COM [HTTPS://WWW.ANCESTRY.COM/](https://www.ancestry.com/)

Ancestry has scanned and indexed the following microfilm collections:

- Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ECLA)
- Evangelical Covenant Church
- Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA)

You can find these collections by going to Ancestry.com and select “*Search the card catalog*” and enter “*U.S. Swedish-American*” in the title bar. These records have been indexed by name.

ARKIVDIGITAL.COM [HTTPS://WWW.ARKIVDIGITAL.NET/](https://www.arkivdigital.net/)

ArkivDigital has photographed the original Swedish-American church books for the following states: Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma and Wisconsin. The greatest number of records are in Kansas, Nebraska and Minnesota with a growing collection in Iowa. The denominations include Lutheran, Covenant, Free, Baptist and Methodist. You can find the church books by:

- Go to <https://app.arkivdigital.se>
- Select new archive search
- Select country, United States
- Select desired state

SWEDISH-AMERICAN ARCHIVES OF GREATER CHICAGO –

[HTTP://COLLECTIONS.CARLI.ILLINOIS.EDU/CDM/LANDINGPAGE/COLLECTION/NPU ANSGAR](http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/npu_ansgar)

On this site you will find images of the church records for St. Ansgarius Church in Chicago for the years 1849 to 1896. This church was founded in Chicago, Illinois and is the oldest Scandinavian American Church in Chicago. While the original church building was destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871, the church books were saved. This is a free site and can be helpful in locating early immigrants to Chicago.

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