

SWEDEBORG ORIGINS

By Rachel Day Miller

The origin of the community of Swedeborg began in 1868 when the Frisco Railway decided to start a railroad through this part of the country. The train engines burned wood for fuel; and men and boys were employed by the railroad to cut and haul cord wood, which was piled along the right-of-way. Soon there were great piles of wood; and then the men began to build log cabins and a little village began to grow where there had been only forest. As it grew, it was given a name. Because of the piles of cord wood, it was called Woodend. Some of the original buildings are still standing and in use today, testimonies to the kind of work done by those early day settlers.

In order that the town might be their own and not the property of the railway, a company of men was formed, which was called Nelson and Company. The members were Torkel Nelson, Acel Skogg, N. O. Swedene, John Strom, John Anderson, John Helmester, and Magnus Anderson. From the center of 160 acres, Nelson and Company purchased 40 acres. This was laid out in town lots with a fraction of land left on each side of town. These fractions were sold, the one on the west to Nick Schneider, the one on the east (called Gander Town) to Jim Long,

the one on the north to Burgess, and the one on the south to Manes. They in turn laid these out in one acre lots and sold them.

In the early seventies work opened up on the railroad and Nick Schneider was the first section foreman in Woodend. In 1872 the first section house was torn down and one from the Dublin community was moved to town.

During these early years there were very few Swedish families in Woodend. But as time passed, they came in numbers and the names of Benson, Juernberg, Nelson, Sundquist, Eggelene, Jacobson, Johnson, Eckman, Larson and others became well known in the community. Some came directly from their native Sweden to begin a new life in a new land. John A. V. Johnson became the town shoe cobbler, Juernberg became one of the earlier merchants, and others were shopkeepers. Although they learned the language and customs of their neighbors, some never gave up the manner of dress of their native land, and continued to wear the quaint wooden shoes of Sweden. By 1883 there were more Swedes in the town than any other nationality and late in that year the little village of Woodend became the slightly larger town of Swedeborg.

In 1883 the first postoffice was established in the home of Torkel Nelson, who was the first postmaster. He held that office until his death in 1890. Frank Anderson was the second postmaster and held the office for a number of years.

In 1884 a railway depot was built and John Maney was the first ticket agent. There were no fences and no stock laws in those days. The depot was used as a dance hall and one night during watermelon season, the dancers carelessly tossed watermelon rinds onto the tracks and a fast freight train killed a number of hogs that had gathered to feed on the melons. The Frisco then forbid the use of the depot as a public dance hall. C. C. Vickers was the second ticket and express agent. In later years, John Maney opened a general store in partnership with Charley Flanagan.

In 1886 a fire destroyed some of the stores. When new ones were built, two new business places were added, the Skaggs drugstore and the Williams lumberyard. In 1887 McGregor was made the Justice of the Peace and Frank Anderson was elected Constable. The same year the Decker Blacksmith Shop was built.

In 1890 the Woodman Lodge was organized and the Odd Fellows Lodge in 1918.



The Old railroad depot in Swedeborg during its heyday.

(Photo courtesy of Flo Lercher)

Until 1890 there was no school building in Swedeborg. Then, a little log school was built on the corner of the Curtis farm, south of town, and was called the Curtis School. In 1891 an acre of land was purchased from the railway and a one room school was built closer to town. The building was sold in 1914 to Wesley Johnson and a two room school was built. This building is still in use, but has been remodeled into a three room building. And another, much newer building houses the kitchen

and the auditorium. The old building was used as a home by Johnson until it was destroyed by a tornado in 1937. Jack Gladden was the first teacher in the new school.

There were no churches until 1893. That year the Swedish Baptist and the Christian Church were built and services started. Later the Lutheran, the American Baptist and the Presbyterian churches were added. Reverend Jim Brown was the first pastor of the American Baptist Church, which was then located south

of town. Later a new building was erected on the present site and the present building was erected in 1939.

In 1894 a corncracker and grist mill was built and in 1901 the Traw drugstore was opened. In 1913 Fred Jacobson added a hardware store and the same year the bank was founded with Riles as the first banker. In 1916 Fred Miles and Evar Jacobson opened a feed store in a building that was built by Eggelene, one of the very first settlers.

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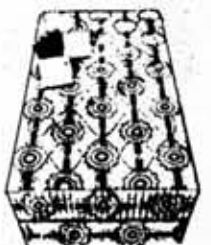


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SWEDEBORG (CONTINUED)

One night near the middle of the year 1921, a fire broke out in Dad Rouse's grocery store and rapidly spread until four stores were burning. The wind changed to the south and swept the flames north to the post office and all five places were destroyed. New stores were built and the postoffice was moved into a store. In 1922 the Frisco laid the double track and the first train went over it on April 7, 1924, followed by Bert Manes and his section crew.

In 1927 a tornado hit the town, destroying one home and the Lutheran and Presbyterian churches. No high school had yet been built. The students attended classes in the two front rooms of the Morrison home, just across the road from the grade school. In 1928 the high school building was started and was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, 1929. This building is no longer standing.

In 1929 the Carver grocery burned and in 1939 C. W. Lazenby built another on the site. In the early 1920's the old canning factory was reopened and gave employment to a great many people. Later a stove bolt company built a sawmill on that location but soon moved on to another community. In 1930 electricity came to town and in 1932 the bank and the only remaining hardware

store moved to Richland. In 1932-33, the highway to Richland and Crocker was built.

On the night of April 29, 1937, the town was hit by another tornado. Almost every house in the east end of town was unroofed and some were destroyed. Some people were seriously injured and Mrs. Wesley Johnson died later from her injuries.

A number of businesses have come through the years - a hotel, gas stations, barbershops, and garages - but have moved on to other towns. And, like the roving gypsy bands that once came this way, or the circus trains that stopped long enough to take on water, they all became a page of history. Life goes on pretty much the same in Swedeborg as it has these many years. This short history recalls many memories of the events and the people who had a part in the beginning and the building of the community of Swedeborg.

(This article, written by Rachel Day Miller to commemorate the Swedeborg centennial in 1968, appears with her gracious permission. There have been a few minor deletions where reference was given to buildings which were standing in 1968 but now no longer exist).



Students posing for a group photo in front of the Swedeborg High School building.

(Photo furnished by John Strom)

During the late 1940's and early 1950's, the prosperity brought to Swedeborg by the railroad began to wane. An improved highway system began to take over much of the railroad's business and,

as a result, the Swedeborg depot, section house, pump house and water tower were torn down.

By 1947 the Swedeborg community fell short of the

number of high school students to support a high school. This prompted the initiation of the current setup by which high school students from the Swedeborg school district

elect to attend school in Richland or in Crocker. The elementary school was retained and it continues to educate elementary students of the district.



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