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NEW SWEDEN, IOWA

By

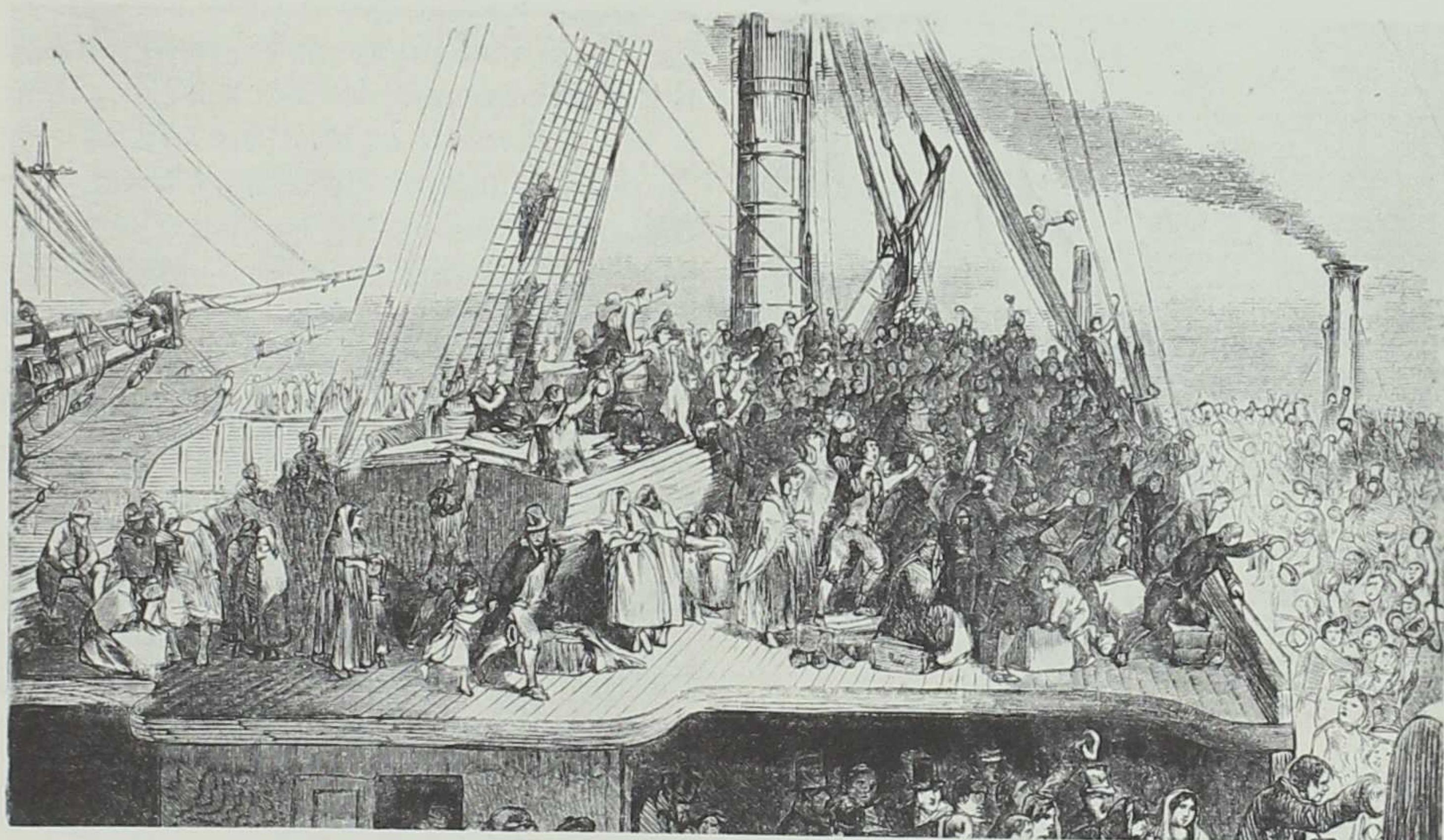
Ardith K. Melloh

In Jefferson County Iowa, in 1845, a group of Swedish immigrants led by Peter Cassel founded one of the first *lasting* Swedish settlements in the United States. Most Iowans have never heard of New Sweden, Iowa, and at least five settlements in the United States have been named New Sweden; yet the one in Iowa must take high place in the story of Swedish immigration to America. It was from the New Sweden in Iowa that letters about America sent back to relatives in Sweden kindled "The American Fever"--a rapidly spreading desire to immigrate. It was at the New Sweden in Iowa that immigrants founded the first church of the future Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod to which thousands of Swedish immigrants and their descendants have belonged. It was at the New Sweden in Iowa that the first Swedish Methodist Church west of the Mississippi was organized. And, it was at New Sweden in Iowa that Swedish Baptists established a church on the spot where a commemorative boulder now reads: "First House of Worship in America Erected by Swedish Baptists. Logs

Hewn From the Virgin Forests on These Hill-sides."

The Iowa immigrants were separated by 200 years and a thousand miles from the first New Sweden (at the site of present-day Wilmington, Delaware), founded by a Swedish chartered company as a commercial venture in 1638. In 1655, the Dutch captured its two forts, and nine years later, the English took over the colony. However, the Swedish settlers stayed, prospered, and spread into neighboring Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In time, all ties with the old country were broken, the language forgotten, and even the churches, first established by the Swedish State Lutheran Church, became Episcopalian.

After the colonial venture few Swedes came to this country to stay until after 1845. Immigration might have started earlier had not Sweden's strict regulations effectively prevented the common people (farmers and tradesmen) from leaving. In 1840, the regulations requiring the King's permission to leave, the listing of reliable guarantors, and a de-



An immigrant ship, bound for the New Land (Library of Congress).

posit of 100 *riksdollars* as security for return were revoked. "As far as I know we were the first to leave the country without the King's permission," wrote Gustav Unonius after he and his wife and about a dozen friends arrived at Pine Lake, Wisconsin in 1841. Neither Unonius nor his friends were prepared by training or experience to cope with the rigors and demands of the Wisconsin frontier, and his dream of establishing a colony soon faded. However, the letters he sent to Sweden were published in newspapers and influenced a few people to immigrate to Pine Lake. Among them were Peter Dahlberg, a sea captain from Stockholm, and Polycarpus von Schneidau, who wrote about the

new land and his experiences to his father in Kisa parish, Ostergotland, Sweden.

Peter Cassel, who lived in Kisa parish, had read the letters of Unonius, and he read those of Schneidau with even greater interest. Cassel, a highly respected farmer, millwright, and inventor, read and thought much about life in America because he was deeply troubled by Sweden's social and economic conditions and could see little hope for their improvement. After reading the letters of a man known to him, he was determined to organize a group of moderately well-to-do, hard-working, reliable farmers to go with him to Pine Lake, Wisconsin and make a better life for their children.



An iron-banded chest, made by a Swedish immigrant to Jefferson County, Iowa. The travelers packed all their belongings into such chests which often became household furniture in their new homes (courtesy Fairfield Public Library Museum).

Sweden was a rural country but had limited farmland and very little industry to absorb its rapidly-growing population. Therefore, the burden of supporting everyone fell almost entirely on the farmers. When adversity struck, their heavy and unfair taxes could ruin them. "We moved to Orssebo, the same spring Cassel moved here to America," wrote Oliver Swanson. "That was a year I shall never forget because we almost had to go to our knees. Poor crops and little rain and then came the potato blight so that none of them could be used." In addition, the common people deeply resented Sweden's class discrimination and the restriction of their civil rights because of economic and social status. Peter Cassel and Johannes Monson had been among those brave enough to sign a petition asking for a change in the government representation, a reform that would not come for another 20 years.

The only church permitted in Sweden was the Lutheran State Church into which all Swedes were born and from which all were buried. In the 1830s, a religious revival and reform movement based on Pietism spread rapidly among the common people. To a large extent it was a protest against the formal and worldly trends in the State Church, the misconduct and petty tyrannies of many pastors, and the do-nothing attitude of both government and church toward reform and the problem of alcoholism. Cassel, his friends, and most other early immigrants, belonged to this Pietistic movement.

There were other reasons as well for immigrating, but for many Swedes the idea that a farmer would think of selling his precious land, the basis of his civil rights and status, and move to another country was shocking. It is not surprising that it took Cassel two years to get his relatives and friends ready to leave. They sold their estates, even their personal effects except for what they would need on the journey and for the establishment of a new home. The men made iron-bound packing chests and special food boxes and arranged with ship brokers for passage from the Swedish port of Gothenberg to New York. To the women fell the difficult tasks of selecting the clothing, bedding, and household necessities they would need and preparing food for a journey of several months. Because the old sailing ships provided only sleeping space, rationed drinking water, a minimum of sanitary facilities, and a cook stove on deck for the use of passengers, the immigrants prepared rye bread with a hole in the center, dried or cured meat, and dry cereals for gruel. These would be the main diet during the voyage.

Before leaving, the head of each household obtained the church papers for the family from the parish pastor. Everyone leaving a parish had to have these. Then the chests with their belongings, their bundles, and food boxes were loaded onto hired wagons. Some women and small children rode, but the others walked the 50 miles north to Berg on the Gota Canal where they boarded a boat for the 300-mile journey to Gothenberg. So unusual and talked about was this departure that it received wide publicity in Swedish newspapers.

The 25 people who left Kisa parish in early May, 1845 were: Peter Cassel, age 54, his wife, Ingeborg Catharina Andersdotter, and children, Carl Johan, Andrew F., Maria Mathilda, Gustaf Albert and Catharina; his sister-in-law, Sara Lovisa Andersdotter, and his brother-in-law, Eric Peter Anderson; Johannes Monson, age 39, with his wife, Ingeborg Catharina Carlsdotter (sister of Peter Cassel) and their daughters, Greta Carolina, Gustava Maria and Louisa; Peter Anderson, age 28, with his wife, Christina Louisa, and children, Christina Sophia and Anders August; John Danielson, age 46, his wife, Lisa and their children, Johan August, Anders Victor, Frans Oscar, Maria Albertina and Sophia Mathilda.

They arrived at Gothenberg on May 21, 1845 to find that their ship had been declared unseaworthy, so arrangements were made for passage on the bark *Superb* scheduled to sail for New York on June 24 with a cargo of iron. The captain, Johan Erik Nisson, offered them camping space on his farm outside the city in return for their help in building his house, and he also did much to make the voyage pleasant. In the weeks aboard ship they



Artifacts of New Sweden: a hand-made table, a butter mold, a crystal goblet, and unique Swedish-style whisks made from single branches (courtesy Mrs. Everett Bogner and Marie Quick).

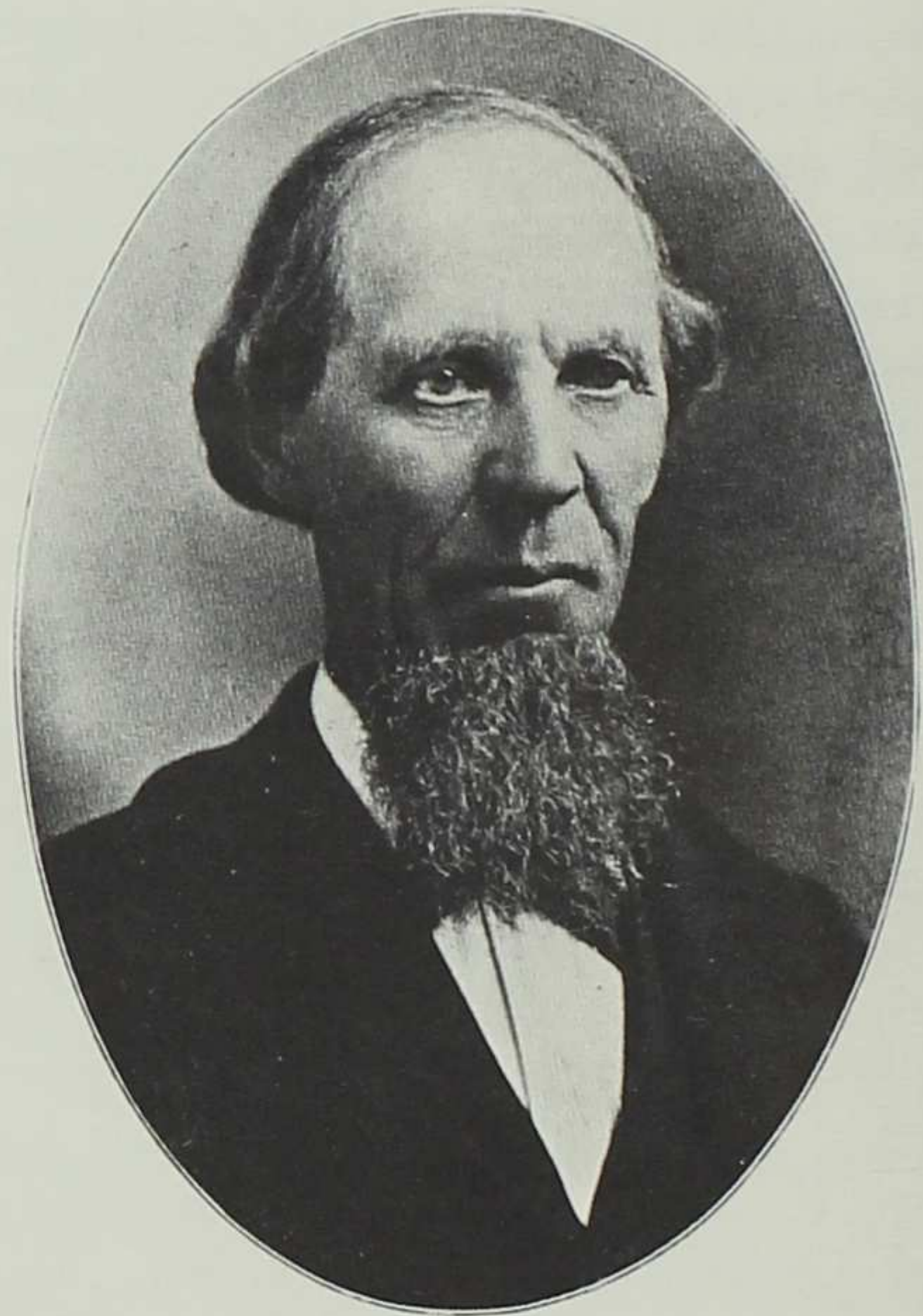


A small, handsome box, fashioned ingeniously by a New Sweden immigrant to carry family records. The body is made from one piece of wood, bent into a hollow rectangle and "laced" together. The top locks into place by means of an intricate wooden peg mechanism (courtesy Mrs. Clarence Smithburg).

became acquainted with Otto Okerman, who was returning to America, and he agreed to join the group as their interpreter.

Meanwhile, Peter Dahlberg had arrived at Pine Lake, Wisconsin. After visiting other parts of that state and also Illinois, he decided to remain in the United States, but to settle in Iowa. In August 1845, he was in New York to meet his wife and children who arrived from Stockholm on the *Carolina* the same day as the *Superb*. He met Cassel's group, and evidently his report on the situation at Pine Lake discouraged them from going there, as Cassel wrote: "We learned that the best land in Wisconsin had already been taken, and accordingly we decided to settle in Iowa." With the addition of Okerman and Dahlberg, his wife, Ingar, and children, Elsie, Cecelia, John, Robert H., Ellen, and Charlotta, plus a friend of Dahlberg's, Mr. Berg from Stockholm, the group totaled 36.

Dahlberg made the arrangements for them to go by boat and train to Philadelphia and then by railroad and the Pennsylvania Canal to Pittsburg. On the canal boat they experienced their first sorrow when the little son of Peter and Christine Anderson died. From Pittsburg they went by steamer to the Ohio River, down that to the Mississippi, and then to Burlington, Iowa. There they found lodging and temporary employment while Mr. Berg tried unsuccessfully to buy land for the group. With their goods piled in a hired wagon, the weary immigrants set out on foot for Jefferson County, the nearest place where government land was available. When they reached the Skunk River they followed it to Brush Creek which led them to Lockridge Township in Jefferson County. There,



Andrew F. Cassel (from *History of Jefferson Co.*, 207).

in mid-September, on the south side of Brush Creek in section 26, at an abandoned, roofless, log cabin, built by Henry Shephard in 1837, the long journey came to an end.

After a simple meal the immigrants prepared to spend the night in the cabin, and since every house in rural Sweden had a name, Dahlberg and his friend Berg christened this place "New Stockholm." "We cut brush for the roof of the cabin," wrote Andrew F. Cassel, "and soon found Ross's saw mill, got some boards and set posts in the ground and made a shanty. Next we commenced to make brick. To dry them we laid them on the roof of the shanty where we had put our goods. . . . [One night] it began to rain and poured hard all night. It was

lucky we were on high ground or the creek would have washed us away. We had a good ducking but the next day was bright and we aired and sunned our soaked clothes and other articles. Our board shanty lay level with the ground. All took courage and resolved to provide better quarters."

The Cassel and Monson families probably stayed at "New Stockholm" that winter. Eric Peter Anderson may have stayed in Burlington as he was working there later, while his sister Sara and Carl Johan Cassel found work in Fairfield. Mr. Berg must have departed as he was never mentioned again. Okerman made his way to Ft. Des Moines where he reenlisted in the army on January 19, 1846. Three years later he was killed during a skirmish with Indians in New Mexico. The Danielson, Anderson, and Dahlberg families must have built cabins nearby before winter storms arrived. They had very little money, but fortunately there was plenty of free wood for shelter and fuel and free water from springs, the creek, rain, and snow. In return for their labor they obtained most of their necessities locally, but for some things the men walked to Burlington where they found work and stayed until they could buy what their families needed. Then, with their supplies in bags on their backs, they walked home.

Despite the problems of establishing new homes on the Iowa frontier, Peter Cassel wrote home to Sweden enthusiastic letters describing the conditions the new settlers found in Jefferson County. He told of the abundance of wild game (meat for the table): geese, turkeys, partridge, prairie chickens, rabbits, deer, and millions of passenger pigeons that blackened the sky in huge

flocks. As he wrote: "The ease of making a living exceeds anything we anticipated. There is not a single stone on the surface. Small hills have limestone and sandstone at depths of four or five feet. Coal is found nearly everywhere along rivers and creeks....Livestock is allowed to roam the year around...pasturage is common property....Corn must be planted thin and various things are planted between the hills--cucumbers, beans, melon and pumpkins. The wooded land is rolling. The summer it is beautiful. There are treeless stretches, called prairies, covered with wild flowers and long grass."

Cassel was equally enthused about social conditions: "Freedom and equality are fundamental principles of the United States constitution." "There is no nobility or class distinction." "All enjoy personal liberty." "No beggars." "No locks on doors." "No direct federal taxes, but there is a state property tax for schools, government and buildings." "All trades and occupations are untaxed." I haven't seen a whiskey bottle on the tabel here."

This was the news people in Sweden had been waiting to hear. Cassel's letters were printed in newspapers, and even though some scoffed, the common people believed what one of their own reported. In the spring of 1846, 42 more people sailed for America on the brig *Augusta* and 75 others on the schooner *Virginia*. When the party from the *Augusta* arrived in Keokuk, Iowa they hired wagons and teams to haul their trunks and household goods while they set out on foot to find Cassel. In their ignorance of Iowa geography they followed the Des Moines River instead of the Skunk. After days of walking, mostly

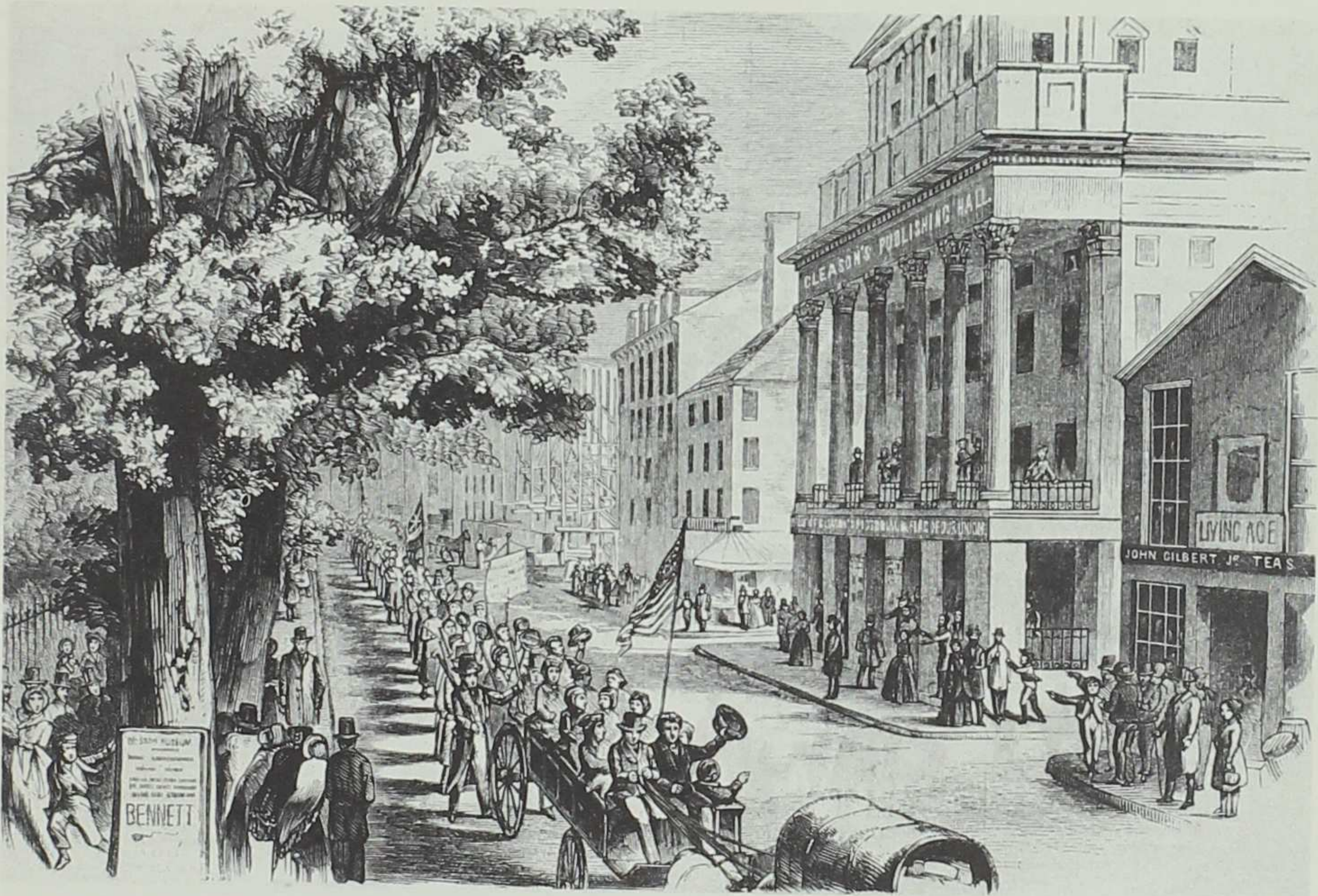
through unsettled country, they arrived at the cabin of the lone settler in Boone County, Charles W. Gaston. Four families decided to stay there. They started a second settlement, Swede Point, now Madrid, Iowa; the others found their way back to Cassel. Among them were the J. P. Andersons, the three Carlson brothers, the Schillerstroms, John Almgrens, and C. J. Lofgren, who is said to have "walked to Lockridge township with all his belongings in a sack on his back and afterwards turned the sack into a pair of pants."

The immigrants on the *Virginia* were less fortunate--the ship was overcrowded and its sanitary conditions deplorable. Two women and three children died during the long sea voyage; one child was born and lived. Reaching New York they were advised to take the Hudson River and Erie Canal route inland. On the canal boat they were robbed of all their money and stranded in Buffalo. Most of the group eventually settled at Sugar Grove, Pennsylvania, but one family, that of Johan Peter Jonsson (J. P. Farman) arrived at Cassel's settlement in September 1846.

This was the year Iowa became a state, and it was in this period that large groups of immigrants from northern Europe first began coming directly to Iowa. The Dutch came to Pella, Norwegians to Decorah and northeast Iowa, and Germans to northeastern Jefferson County. The Swedish settlement at Bishop Hill in Illinois also began in 1846. The next year, two more Swedish groups arrived at Brush Creek, and Peter Cassel became a land owner in Lockridge Township, rather than a squatter, when he filed a claim to 40 acres in section 20. Next John Danielson claimed 80 acres

in section 21. Peter Smithburg, one of those who immigrated in 1848 also bought a farm in section 21. Shortly thereafter he was drowned while crossing the rain-swollen Brush Creek with a wagon and yoke of oxen on his way to Ross's saw mill. Undaunted, his wife and sons continued clearing the land and started farming.

At first the Swedes, like the Americans, considered the timber land more fertile than the flat prairies. However, there may also have been an economic reason why it was chosen first. Cassel wrote that the timber land could be broken with a yoke of oxen at a cost of \$1.50 per acre, but the hard prairie needed four yoke of oxen at a cost of \$3.50 per acre. The price of a yoke of oxen was \$25 to \$35. Before they could buy or make a "bull plow" to break the sod many immigrants planted corn, potatoes, melons, and vegetables with the aid of spade and ax in order to have some food. Money was scarce. A farmer received only five cents for a pound of butter and three cents for a dozen eggs, but a yard of calico cost 25 cents and a yard of muslin 60 cents. Flour was both scarce and costly, and salt cost \$14 a barrel. Men were happy to work for American farmers. "A day's wages is equivalent to two bushels of corn meal.... Nobody furnishes his own food when he worked for others," and observed Cassel, "Americans have unusually good food." Sometimes a man arranged with an American neighbor to raise and thresh buckwheat on half shares, or his special trade or craft gave him work for which he was well paid. In one way or another they managed to feed their families, buy livestock, and start farming.



A company of Swedish immigrants passing through New York City on the way west (Library of Congress).

Faith in the future and a belief in God gave these immigrants strength to endure the hardships of the frontier such as the frequent loss of loved ones from cholera, typhoid, diphtheria and other common diseases. "In the worst of times He has supported me and my wife. I believe His hand will not be taken away," wrote Oliver Swanson. Ever since they came the people had held regular prayer meetings in homes, but they felt a great need for a church with a minister who could preach and conduct the holy rites in the language they all understood. In January 1848, a meeting was held at the home of John Danielson, and with Peter Cassel leading the

discussion, they decided to form a congregation and ask Magnus Frederick Hokanson, a shoemaker, to be their minister. Hokanson had been trained as a missionary in Sweden, but he had not been ordained. Since his arrival in New Sweden he had participated in the prayer meetings and had impressed everyone favorably. Later Cassel asked his brother in Sweden to send hymn-books and catechisms: "We are in need of these books, because we have used our old copies so much they are almost worn out. We need the catechisms for our children, as they will study them when they are preparing for confirmation, now that we have a Swedish Pastor.



The Swedish Lutheran church in Lockridge Township, Jefferson County, built in the 1860s. The building is a well-preserved and attractive landmark (Robert Ryan photo).

...During the past eleven months he has preached every Sunday and holiday; on week days he works the same as the rest of us....One Sunday I heard him preach for over two hours, and he was as fluent the second hour as the first. ...We are 13 families who contribute to the support of the pastor, and four families are privileged to belong to the congregation during the present year without contributing anything." This little congregation became the oldest one in the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America, the largest of the Swedish American churches.

From the beginning they were concerned about the quality of congregational singing. Cassel wrote, "We have

singing school two evenings each week, when young and old gather to sing by note and in harmony. At church services no one sings except those who can carry the tune." From this it appears that the psalmodikon, an almost forgotten instrument, was used in New Sweden. This was a monochord, devised by Pastor Dillner in the 1820's for his Swedish parishioners to use when they met in "singing schools" to learn the correct tunes and harmonies of the church hymns. The psalmodikon was so simple it could be made by any good carpenter and its numerical notation could be played by anyone, with a little practice. When it proved successful, Pastor Dillner transposed the music of the official Lutheran

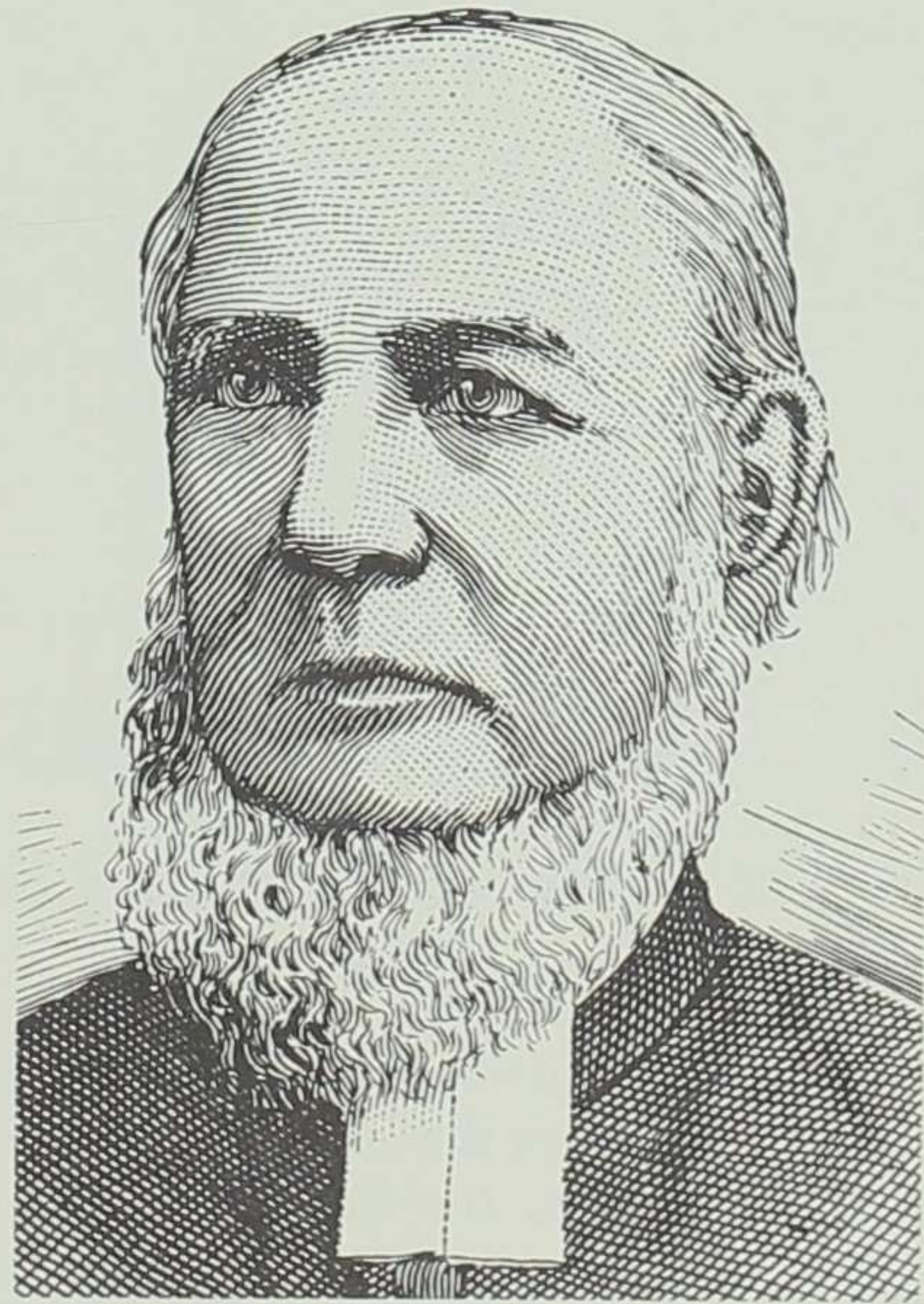
psalmbook into numerical notation and published his *Notebook* in 1830. The psalmodikon was used in Swedish schools, and it became popular with the Pietists in their home prayer meetings. Two song books with numerical notation, which belonged to a member of the New Sweden Lutheran church, survive today. One of these contains detailed instructions for making and playing the psalmodikon.

Most of the New Sweden settlers shared a common background in the Swedish church and most had leanings toward Pietism, yet in Iowa the community soon split over religion. Swedish Methodist and Swedish Baptist missionaries visited New Sweden, raising issues that touched off debate and animosity. In 1850, a Swedish Methodist contingent broke away from the original Lutheran congregation. Peter Cassel himself led his family and the families of several other prominent early Swedish settlers into the Methodist fold. Four years later, a Swedish Baptist congregation was formed.

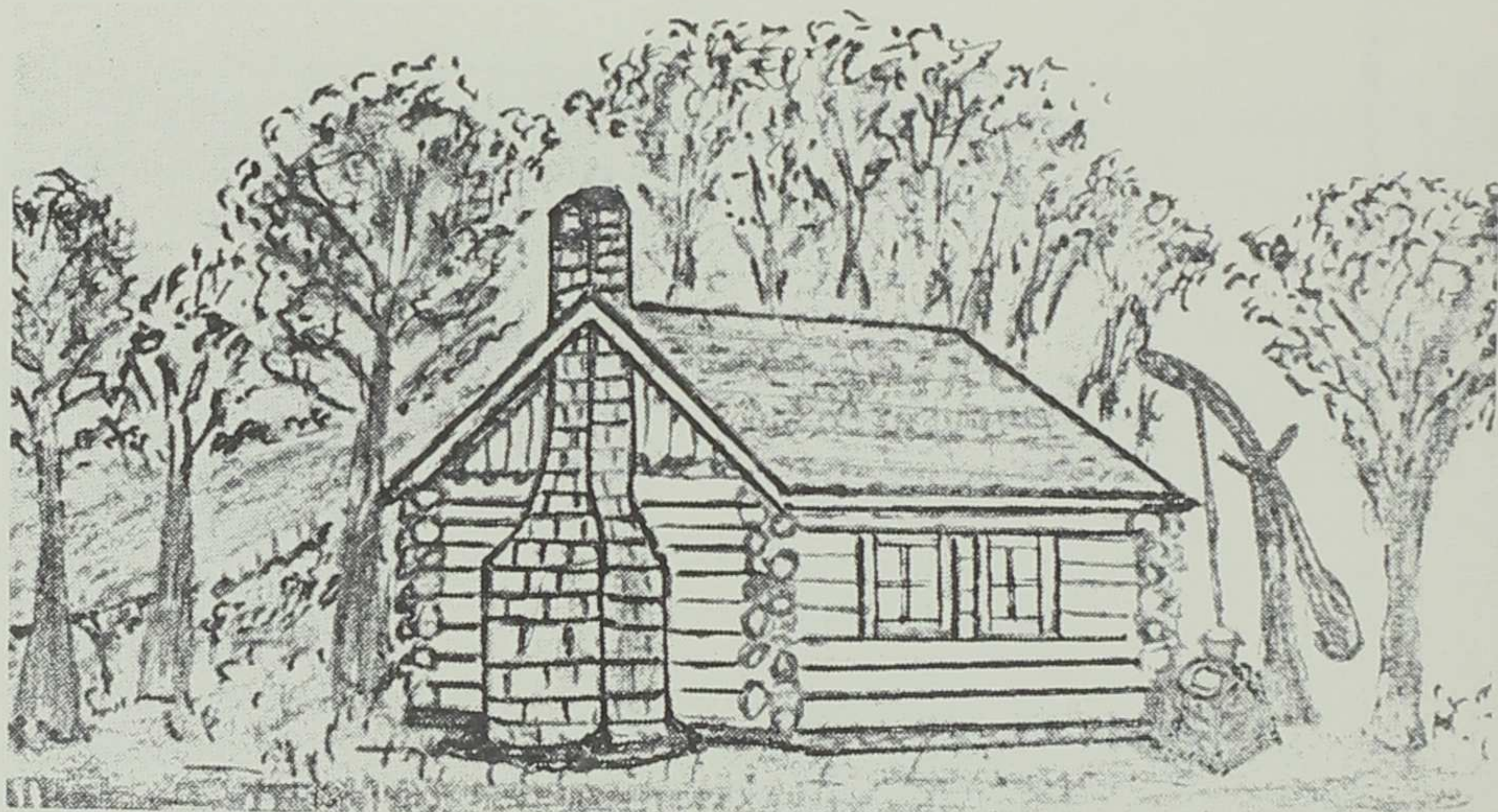
Meanwhile, a gift of \$300 from the "Jenny Lind Fund," named for the famous Swedish soprano, enabled the Lutherans in 1851 to buy a building lot for \$6 and construct a 32 x 24 foot log church. Three years later they bought two more acres just west of the church and built a log parsonage with a tiny loft reached by a ladder. The church was replaced in 1860 by a larger frame building which still stands. In 1855, the Methodists built their log church a quarter of a mile west, and the Baptists built a quarter mile east of the Lutherans but on the opposite side of the road. The ill feeling between the members of the three churches soon lessened, but there was

a more lasting effect on the community. For the early immigrants their church was not just a house of worship--it was the center of their lives, in a social as well as a religious sense. So, while the members of the three churches were friendly, they did not, as a Swede would say, have much to do with each other for some time.

The Baptist congregation was small and did not remain active very long. The Swedish Methodists, however, formed close ties with their American brethren and readily adopted American customs. Alberta Smithburg, daughter of Peter Smithburg, met her future husband, Rev. Lewis Mendenhall, at a Free Methodist Camp meeting. She helped him in his work and later received a license to preach. Marie Danielson married Ward Lamson of Fairfield, and her sister, Ma-



Rev. M. F. Hokanson, the first pastor of the New Sweden Lutheran congregation (from Emil Lund, Iowa-Konferens, 650).



A log house in New Sweden where the first Baptist congregation was organized (from L. J. Ahlstrom, *Eighty Years of Swedish Baptist Work in Iowa*, 111).

thilda, married John Stephenson, son of the American settler who had befriended the first immigrants.

The years 1856 and 1857 may be considered the end of the pioneer period. Rev. Hokanson, who had been ordained in 1854, left to serve the new settlement at Bergholm, leaving behind a congregation now united and growing rapidly. Peter Cassel died on March 4, 1857, having accomplished what he had set out to do when he left Sweden.

Several descriptions of New Sweden from this time still survive. John Z. Sandall, who immigrated in 1858, wrote, "There is such an abundance of pasturage and prairies that we could have as many head of cattle as we could desire. In spite of the fact that we have harvested hay, the grass reaches to the bellies of the grazing cattle." He described the wild game, but did not mention passenger pigeons. Those huge flocks had evidently disappeared some years before.

He concluded with, "There is such an abundance here that if I attempted to tell you about it, many would doubt my word--and I would not blame them--but this is the system of farming in this country, and God's blessing rests upon everyone who is willing to work." An article in the Swedish-American periodical *Hemlandet* said: "At this time this place (New Sweden) has about 100 families with a population of 500 in all... Eighty-six families own not less than 5056 acres with 1788 acres of this under cultivation. Only 350 acres had been bought as government land at \$1.25 per acre. The rest was acquired at prices ranging from \$2.00 to \$24.00 per acre. . . . The Swedes live close to each other, surrounded by open, cultivated fields. This, together with isolated groves of trees, gives the land a Swedish look."

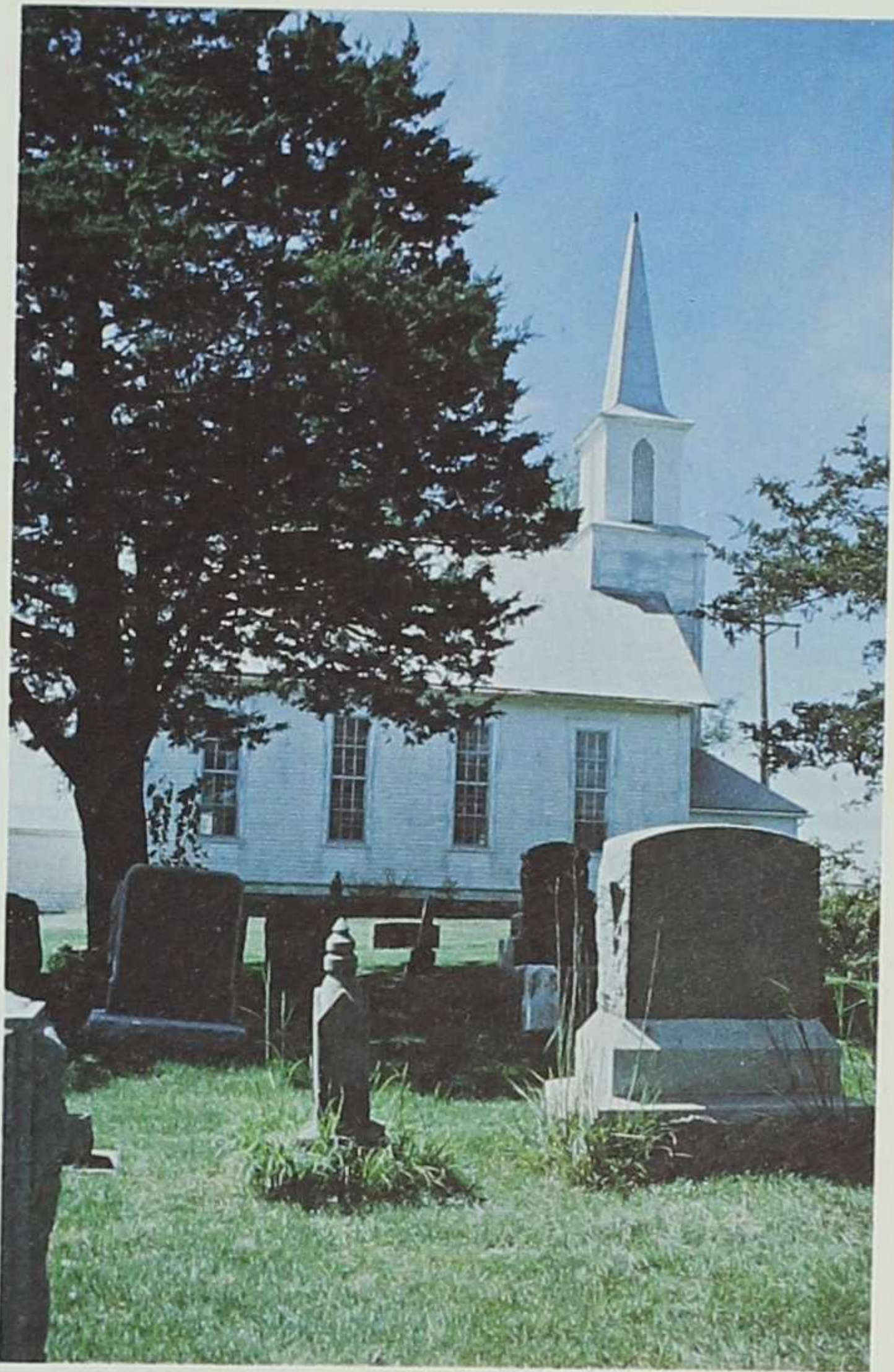
In their homeland Swedes had lived together in small, self-governing peasant villages for hundreds of years. It was natural for them to do the same in Iowa,

especially as it gave them companionship and a feeling of security in a strange land. It was also natural for them to set up a *byalag* or village communal association with a council to enforce protection of community interests, as had been done in Sweden for centuries. That they did this is implied in what Andrew F. Cassel wrote:

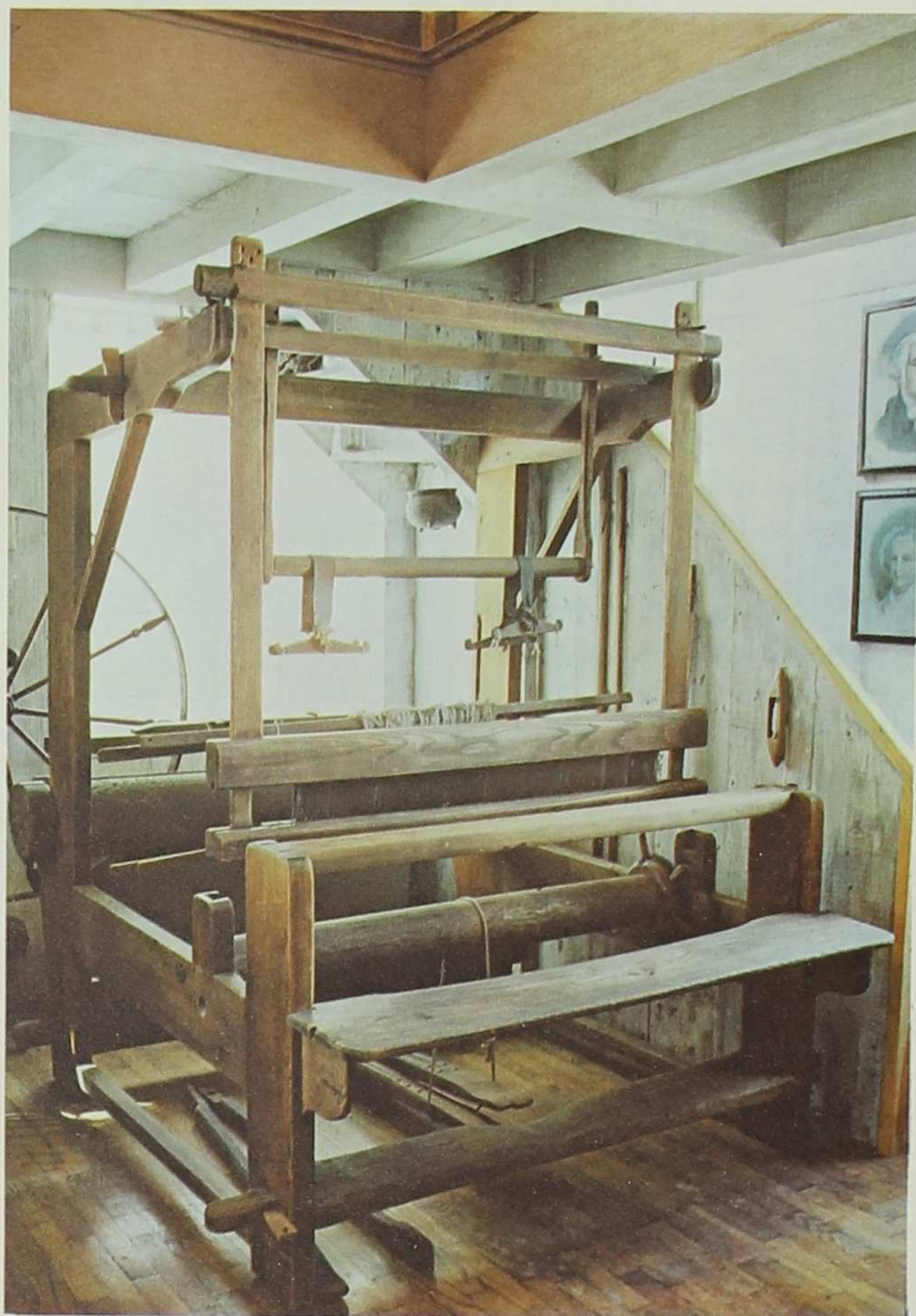
The early settlers adopted by-laws and rules which they considered very sacred and seldom abandoned. They stood by each other if speculators tried to enter the settlers' land. It was not very healthy for speculators to show themselves. Arbitration was the highest court. It was not uncommon for a few men to decide what to do with a man who did not do as he ought. I will mention one who did not want to work. A day was set to decide what to do with him. He tried to escape, but was cornered, and, after a moment's deliberation, it was decided to auction him off to the highest bidder for one year's work. He was bid off for \$16, but escaped after two days. Another man would not plow and plant. A strong man was selected to go and use hickory oil as a medicine, and it worked finely.

Here was the ancient Swedish *byalag* protecting the settlement against outside forces and enforcing the ancient peasant commandment: "He who won't work shan't eat." As the immigrants came to understand American local and state government and American property and individual rights, the customs of the *byalag* were dropped.

The mud in wet weather, the lack of bridges over the many rivers and streams, and the distances over which slow-



The Swedish Baptist church in Jefferson County (Robert Ryan photo).



A loom made by a New Sweden immigrant (Robert Ryan photo, courtesy Fairfield Public Library Museum).

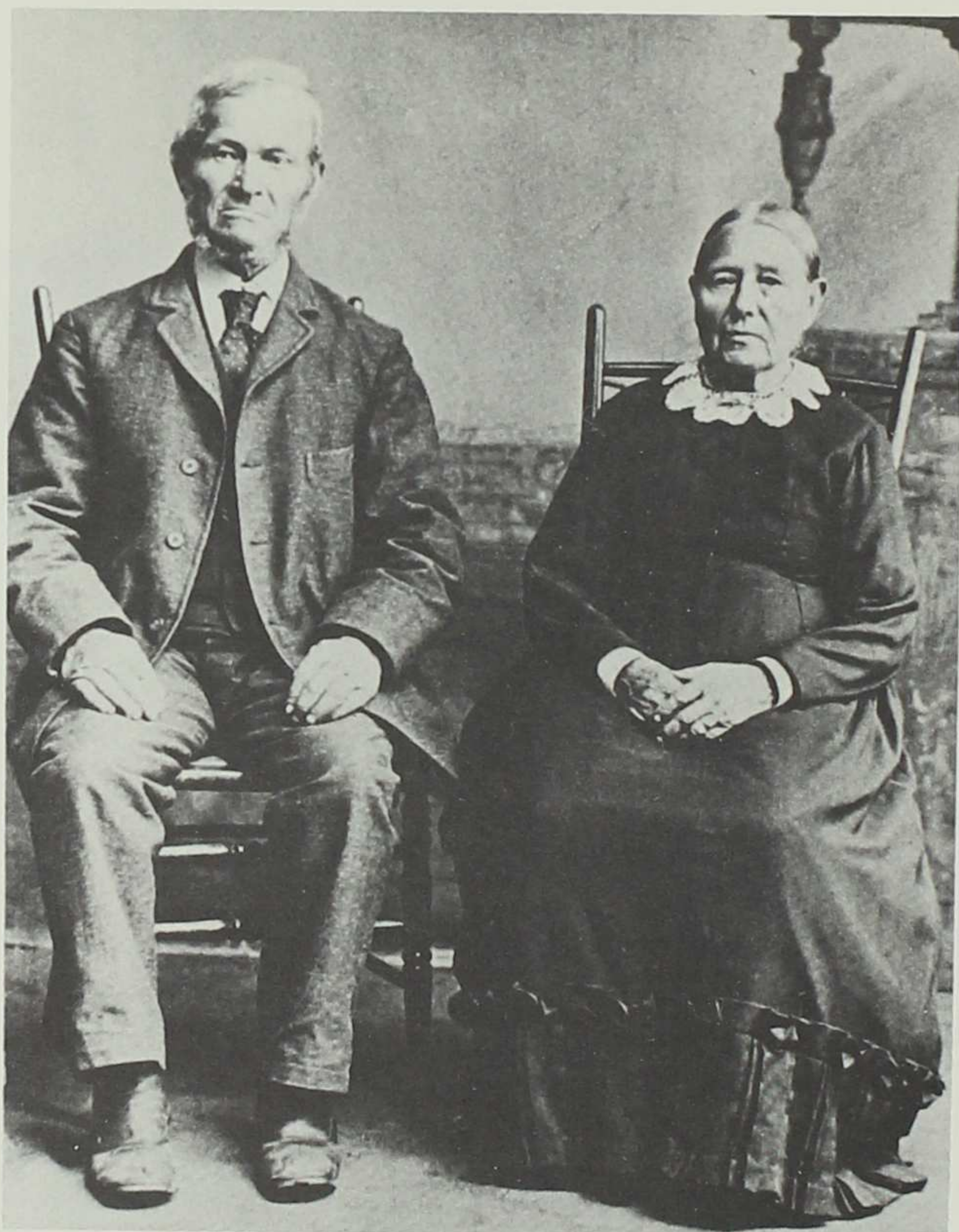
moving oxen had to transport loads or a man had to walk, made it inevitable that New Sweden would grow into a self-contained community much like the old villages in Sweden. The first domestic animals acquired, besides cows, chickens, and hogs, were sheep which were more important for their wool than their meat. The women carded and spun wool and then wove it into cloth on handmade looms. The yarn, and sometimes the cloth, was dyed with natural colors made from butternut hulls, various tree barks, and wild plants. The women sewed the clothes for the family, except for a man's good suit. John M. Nelson recalled: "When a suit of clothes was to be made the tailor was sent for. He came to the home, took measurements with a string, on which the different measurements were recorded by knots, which he expertly tied with the thumb and index finger of his left hand while taking the measure. The cloth was cut and the suit completed while he remained there." Shoemakers also went to the home to make shoes for the family from hides tanned by the farmer himself. All the men could build log cabins, make crude furniture, and do simple blacksmithing. Except for a few, the immigrants were farmers, but many also had a professional trade they had learned in Sweden. Census records and old accounts list shoemakers, tailors, stone masons, furniture makers, blacksmiths, a coopersmith, carpenters, cabinet makers, a lime maker, and even a basket maker. Practically all Swedish

men took snuff. "To supply this," said Nelson, "One of the first settlers, named Swan, devised a mill in which he ground tobacco which he had raised for the purpose...and flavored it to suit...his customers...a favorite flavor was peppermint."

Swedes regarded Abe Lincoln as a great hero. In Fairfield's huge 1860 Republican "Wide Awake" rally and parade, New Sweden representatives had banners with the slogan, "We are for Abe. We did not come here for slavery but for freedom." Young men joined the "Coalport Army," and, armed with scythes, pitchforks, axes, and a few guns, they hastily set out on August 4, 1861 to



An unusual object: an immigrant-made beehive, constructed of straw rope, wrapped around a wooden frame (Robert Ryan photo, courtesy Fairfield Public Library Museum).



Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Nelson (courtesy Fairfield Public Library Museum).

repulse a reported band of guerillas from Missouri. Fortunately, they were gone only five days and saw no action. August (Gustaf) Cassel was the first lieutenant in this "army," and Swan Swanson was one of the volunteers. Both of them later joined the Union army as did John M. Nelson and many others. "It is very noticeable in church that the men's side is sparsely occupied," wrote Mary Helena Stephenson, "but the side where the women sit is full and at assemblies of young people the girls outnumber the boys five or six to one. It is terrible how many have been killed and wounded."

Among these were August Cassel, killed on December 26, 1862 and John A. Danielson, wounded at the Battle of Shiloh. The youngest Danielson boy was in most of the heavy fighting in the war, and Gus A. Smithberg served throughout the Civil War in the Fourth Iowa Cavalry.

Ironically, the Stephenson letters reveal the war brought prosperity as well as grief to New Sweden. By 1861 wartime demand pushed prices high--wheat was 75 cents a bushel, a cow was worth \$20, a horse \$100, and a hog \$8. Because of a dry summer prices were higher the next year. Wheat sold for \$1 a bushel, and

prices of textiles were four times what they had been before. Hired men received 75 cents a day and girls earned \$2 a week as maids. However, land prices were down because so many men were in the army and others were going west to take homesteads and buy cheap land. As a result many New Sweden farmers expanded their holdings during or shortly after the war. In 1868 the *Burlington Hawkeye* reported: "There are now large cultivated fields where before were brush and thickets; instead of small log houses one finds now splendid frame houses. Some have large and splendid fruit orchards and vineyards, and what is best to find in this world, most of them have paid their debts." At the crossroads east of the churches, Four Corners grew up --a little hamlet around a general store with a post office. Its blacksmith shop, creamery, and school served the community for many years.

Letters from America brought news of the Homestead Act to farmers in Sweden who were suffering from both an economic depression and a serious crop failure which brought starvation to many. All who could emigrated. Even when conditions improved during the 1870s and '80s, the advertising campaigns of railroad and steamship companies and of mid-western states (along with lowered fares) brought Swedes to America by the thousands. Just how many immigrants came to New Sweden between 1865 and 1910 it is impossible to say. "There is a constant coming and going," wrote one person. As early as 1864 there was little unoccupied land left, so Rev. Hakan Olson promoted a new Swedish settlement, Swedesburg, in neighboring Henry county. A dozen or more families and some from Illinois

moved there in 1865-66. Young married couples and single men left New Sweden for the cheaper land and homesteads in western Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska. Their places were taken by newcomers. In 1868 the Lutheran church had a membership of over 200 adults. Ten years later, 82 members in northern Round Prairie township received permission to withdraw and with others built their own church named Upland. By the late 1880s the New Sweden church reached a peak membership of 423. In

Note on Sources

The proper names in this article are the new names taken by Swedish immigrants after their arrival or their Swedish names spelled as they were in this country. Swedish place names have the Swedish spelling, but without the special marks over three vowels.

The scholarly authority on Swedish settlements in North America is Helge Nelson's *The Swedes and the Swedish Settlements in North America* (N.Y.: Bonnier, 1943). The claim that New Sweden, Iowa was the first Swedish settlement is made by George T. Flom in "Scandinavian Factor in the American Population," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 3 (January 1905), 57-91, and in "Early Swedish Immigration to Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 3 (October 1905), 583-615, as well as by Helge Nelson.

Helpful sources include: L. J. Ahlstrom, *Eighty Years of Swedish Baptist Work in Iowa* (Des Moines: Swedish Baptist Conference, June 1933); B. E. Bengston, *Pen Portraits of Pioneers*, 1 (Holdridge, Neb.: 1926), 23-5; Charles Leonard Dahlberg and Robert Nelson Dahlberg, "Pehr Dahlberg and the First Swedish Settlement in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa*, (Third Series), 16 (July 1928), 323-30; H. Heaton, "Jefferson County Pioneers," *Iowa Historical Record*, 15 (July 1899), 509-11; George M. Stephenson (trans. and ed.), "Documents Relating to Peter Cassel and the Settlement at New Sweden," *Swedish-American Historical Bulletin*, 2 (February 1929) 1-28, and "Typical American Letters," *Swedish-American Historical Bulletin*, Yearbook, 7 (1921-1922), 53-97; Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York, 1820-1850* (Swedish Pioneer History Society, 1967); *History of the First Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Centennial Observation Edition, 1948); *History of the New Sweden Lutheran Church* (*Lockridge Times*, September 16, 1923).

The author also consulted *The Fairfield Ledger*, May 6, 1903 for its account of an address read by Hon. A. F. Cassel to the Jefferson County Historical Society entitled, "Jefferson County History: Settlement and History of Lockridge Township, and the Jefferson County Historical Association," and the *Iowa Records* compiled by Mary Barnes Prill for the D.A.R., Log Cabin Chapter, Fairfield, Iowa (volume 7), as well as a taped interview with Marie Quick.

Finally, the author relied on her own translations from the Swedish of Olaus Svenson's *An Autobiography* and Pastor C. A. Anderson's "A Short History of the Swedish Methodist Congregation in New Sweden, Iowa (1891-92)."



A painting by Pat Shriner of Claus Lindquist's blacksmith shop at the Four Corners (courtesy Fairfield Public Library Museum).

1892, the members living around the little town of Salina organized their own church as did those in Fairfield in 1903. Records of the Swedish Methodist church show the same trends.

People in New Sweden helped the newcomers as much as they could. Relatives and even strangers were given shelter in homes. Farmers rented, leased, and even sold them small acreages so they could start farming. More little cabins were put up to provide housing. Oldtime residents called New Sweden a "depot" where new immigrants stopped to rest and earn enough money to continue their journey.

The early immigration had been characterized by family groups, but this new mass immigration had many young single men and women. The men found

work on farms and in coal mines at Coalport until they could move on, and the girls worked as maids until they married. Since the lot of these poor girls had been very hard in Sweden, they loved Iowa, and especially the American attitude toward women. They had private rooms, time off, and they did not have to wait on the men or polish their shoes. "Women never work in the fields, not even milking cows," wrote Sandall. "We men must do that. When I first began to milk, most of it went into my coat sleeves, but that didn't bother me. I emptied them when they became full."

The young women loved American clothes, and as soon as they could afford it they wore the latest styles. The farm wife's work was confined to the house and the children, to raising chick-

ens and doing whatever gardening she wished. The money she received when she sold eggs and butter was hers to spend as she wished. When her husband talked about going back to Sweden, Marie Helena Steffanson wrote: "I don't favor it, as I have things as good as I could wish. . . I do not believe I can leave this place until death takes me away. We live better than the people in Sweden and we are not wanting in spiritual food. When I compare conditions here with those in Sweden, we are fortunate."

From 1845 on Swedish immigrants came with the intention of staying and becoming citizens. Only a few returned to the old country to stay. Most of them had read something about America before they came, and they knew what it meant to vote, as that was a highly prized right in their home land and they became citizens as soon as possible. None of the Swedish churches advocated loyalty to the old country, in fact, quite the opposite. The editor of *The Augustana*, the influential Lutheran

periodical wrote: "In this country we are Americans and nothing else, regardless of where the cradles of our ancestors may have stood."

The end of this phase of New Sweden's history came with the lessening of immigration after 1900. The third phase of its history started with the organization of the all English Lutheran church in Lockridge in 1912. At the same time the Model T Ford signaled the end of the old community life.

Today Swedish is no longer spoken in New Sweden. Only the old 1860 Lutheran church, with a boulder marking it as a historical shrine of the Augustana Synod, remains as it was more than a hundred years ago. Only the commemorative boulders for Peter Cassel and John Danielson at the Methodist church and the boulder at the site of the Baptist log church stand to tell a stranger that Swedish immigrants lived here. Yet many people living today in the Lockridge area are descendants of the early New Sweden immigrants, and they still remember their heritage. □