

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Swedish Texans

Most immigrants coming from Sweden to Texas arrived in a 60-year period, from 1848 to about 1910.

The first group of Swedes was recruited by Swen Magnus Swenson, who had come to Texas in 1838 and profited from a plantation in Ft. Bend County. Friend to Sam Houston, Swenson was convinced to help bring Swedish families to Texas. An initial group of 25 came in 1848.

Soon, Swenson's uncle, Swante Palm, had arrived, and the two became successful business partners. They operated an informal immigration company which paid travel expenses on credit or in return for indentured labor.

Other individuals and families, both in Sweden and the north-central United States, heard about Texas possibilities and came. By the turn of the century, more than 4,000 Swedes were in the state.

Swedish settlement was rural at first but near urban centers. Later settlement patterns were urban. Svenska kullen, or "Swedish hill," in downtown Austin was home to almost 50 Swedish families. Settlers located in and near Austin, Dallas, Ft. Worth, and Waco, as well as smaller towns. Some Texas place names indicate a Swedish origin or namesake, even though all did not become places of exclusive Swedish settlement: Lund, New Sweden, Swedonia, West Sweden, Palm Valley, Swensondale, Stockholm, Ericksdahl (Ericdale), and Govalle (dialect for "good grazing").

From 1896 to 1982, the *Texas-Posten* was the newspaper for Swedes in Texas. Two others, the *Södra Vecko-Posten* (1882) and the *Texas-Bladet* (1900–1909) had short but influential lives.

Swedish interests established Trinity Lutheran College in Round Rock and Texas Wesleyan College in Austin, but both ceased operations because of a lack of financial backing.



Swante Palm in his library, c. 1894



New Sweden Lutheran Church, 1920s

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Today, more than 160,000 individuals in Texas claim Swedish descent. In some locations, families still prepare “traditional” foods, and some individuals take pride in learning Swedish. In fact, Texas Swedish as a spoken (or read) language has been remarkably durable. Even though Swedish Lutheran and Methodist churches abandoned the language over a generation ago, the *Texas-Posten* published a quarter of its copy in Swedish until its end. In the 1980s the *SVEA Nytt*, a newsletter, was published by an organization of Swedish-speaking women.

For the most part, however, descendants today are almost completely assimilated into the host culture.

A number of cultural events were held in 1988 on the 150th anniversary of the first arrivals, including an official visit by King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden.

Quotations from Swante Palm

“The chief characteristic of weather in Texas is not variety, but surprise.”

“The human being is the only animal with the gift of self-deception.”