

Ukrainian Swedes in Canada: Gammalsvenskby in the Swedish-Canadian Press 1929-1931

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ABSTRACT: In 1782, a group of Estonian Swedes were brought to southern Ukraine by Catherine II. There they set up a village called Gammalsvenskby. In 1929 the the overwhelming majority of these Ukrainian Swedes “returned” to their “native land” of Sweden, a shocking experience for a community which until that time had lived in cultural isolation in a largely pre-industrial environment. Swedish society was uncertain how to treat the newcomers. Bringing them out of Soviet Ukraine, and “back” to Sweden had been a triumph for the political conservatives. But once they arrived in Sweden many Gammalsvenskby Swedes were treated with disrespect. As a result while most of the Gammalsvenskby Swedes decided to stay in Sweden, one group returned to Soviet Ukraine, while another emigrated to Canada, attempting to recreate Gammalsvenskby on the prairies. This is the story of the exodus of the Ukrainian Swedes, as seen through the eyes of the Swedish Canadian Press.

RÉSUMÉ: En 1782, un groupe de Suédois estoniens, encouragés par Catherine II, ont aménagé dans le sud de l’Ukraine où ils ont fondé un village nommé Gammalsvenskby. En 1929, plusieurs de ces Suédois Ukrainiens sont « retournés » dans leur « pays d’origine », ce qui a eu comme effet d’ébranler sérieusement cette communauté qui avait vécu, jusqu’alors, dans l’isolement culturel presque total et dans un environnement quasi préindustriel. La population suédoise ne savait trop comment accueillir ces nouveaux venus. Ce rapatriement de l’Ukraine soviétique avait été un acte éclatant pour le parti conservateur, mais une fois arrivés en Suède, plusieurs ex-habitants de Gammalsvenskby ont été mal accueillis. Bien qu’il y ait eu plusieurs Suédois de Gammalsvenskby qui ont décidé de demeurer en Suède malgré cette réception, quelques-uns sont retournés en Ukraine soviétique alors que d’autres ont immigrés au Canada. Ceux-ci ont tenté de recréer Gammalsvenskby dans les prairies canadiennes. Voici donc l’histoire de l’exode de ces Suédois Ukrainiens, raconté par le biais de la presse suédoise-canadienne.

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In his classic study of the different varieties of European nationalism, Hans Kohn makes a distinction between “good” democratic / western / civic / liberal nationalism on one hand and “bad” authoritarian / eastern / ethnic / illiberal nationalism on the other (Anderson 5; Poole 40). These two forms of nationalism have their origins in the era of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. While the western form of nationalism grew out of the French revolution, “eastern” nationalism grew out of the resentment stirred up in many areas under French occupation (Eley and Suny 4). In contrast to the situation in France and Britain, nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe developed in areas which often lacked clear geographical borders. In addition, many Eastern European peoples lacked the experience of having states of their own. Therefore they often had difficulties establishing a historical continuity that could legitimize their claims to independence (Poole 41). Instead, Eastern European nationalisms came to base their concepts of nation on language, custom, ethnicity and blood (Poole 40).

German thought had also had a massive influence on the formation on Scandinavian nationalisms. Substantial emigration from Sweden helped fuel a strong nationalist trend within the political right. A sense of confusion and national humiliation followed the dissolution of the union with Norway in 1905. This confusion coincided with concerns over falling birth rates in Sweden. The result was the creation of organizations such as *Nationalföreningen mot emigrationen* [The National Anti-Emigration League] in 1907, which was aimed at stemming the emigration from Sweden (Kummel 11). Another consequence was the appearance of a pan-Swedish macro-nationalism, which transcended Sweden’s political borders. It modeled itself upon the pan-German movement and was oriented towards the Swedish irredenta in Finland and Estonia but also took an interest in the situation of Swedish minorities in North America, South America, South Africa and Australia (Kummel 19, 77-78). Like its pan-German and pan-Finnish counterparts, the pan-Swedish movement based its ideas on race and common nationality.¹ The pan-Swedish movement found support among the political conservatives in Sweden, but its ideas enjoyed little support in the Swedish irredenta, with the exception of Swedish minority in Estonia, which embraced the pan-Swedish movement “with open arms” (Kummel 258). The Gammalsvenskby Swedes, the subject of this paper, can be said to have embraced the pan-Swedish message as well.

This paper is a study of how the established Swedish-Canadian community reacted to and received the Ukrainian Swedes who arrived in Canada in 1930. It is based on a survey of news articles and material published in the Swedish-Canadian immigrant press on the prairies during the period of the exodus of this group of Swedes from Soviet Ukraine to Sweden and Canada.

The Swedish immigration to Canada came later than that to the United States with the result that at the time of the immigration of the Gammalsvenskby people to Canada in 1930 there was still a lively Swedish-language community in the prairie provinces. Although not immediately under the influence of the pan-Swedes, the Swedish-Canadian organs were deeply concerned about the issue of “Swedishness” and how to best preserve the Swedish language and culture in Canada. This was a new, alien environment, where the pressure to assimilate was strong (Ljungmark 110-118). The arrival of this little-known group of Ukrainian Swedes in Canada resulted in a meeting of two diasporic communities; but it also meant a meeting of rival concepts of what it meant to be Swedish. Canada in the 1920s was coloured by a different sort of nationalism. Even though at this time there was a clear ethnic dimension to Canadian nationalism, by Kahn’s definitions the Canadian form of nationalism would be largely “Western”: democratic, civic and political.

Historical background

In her wars with Turkey Catherine II conquered an area known as *Novorossia*, or New Russia, in what today is Southern Ukraine. In order to consolidate its claim to this territory, the Russian government encouraged colonization. Many of the colonists were ethnic Germans, a number of whom belonged to various religious sects. The first Germans to settle the area were Hutterites from Austria, who arrived via Transylvania in 1755 and Wallachia in 1767. These groups were followed by 228 families of Mennonites, who arrived in 1787. By 1845 there were about 100,000 Mennonites in the Ekaterinoslav, Kherson, and Tauria *gubernias* (Palij 48). At the time of the 1897 census there were 378,000 German-speakers living in this area (Sushko 34). The imperial authorities regarded them as model farmers and they were widely admired for their efficiency. About the same time an entire Swedish village was brought down to southern Ukraine from Estonia. These Estonian Swedes were descendants of settlers who had crossed the Baltic Sea in the early Middle Ages. This group left the island of Dagö in the fall of 1781. In the spring of 1782, a much-diminished group of settlers arrived on their new lands in the Kherson region. There they set up a Swedish village which came to be known as Gammalsvenskby.² The explanations given for the emigration differ, but a combination of intimidation and opportunity seems the likely cause.

There was a conflict between the Dagö Swedes and Count Karl Magnus Stenbock, who wanted serfdom extended to the free Swedish peasants. At the same time Grigorii Potemkin, Catherine II’s favourite, offered free land in southern Ukraine.

The Swedes made the journey to Ukraine by foot, through the Russian winter. These early Swedish colonists faced a very harsh life, struggling to make a living

in a new and unknown environment. The first years brought incredible hardship to the villagers; between 935 and 1207 people left Dagö in 1781, but only 535 arrived at their final destination in 1782. In March 1783, after various diseases had taken their toll, only 135 people remained, 71 men and 64 women (Hedman 13,17; Hedman and Åhlander 2003 46). To this number, another 31 Swedes, prisoners of war from Gustav III's war with Russia, were added in 1790. However, the impact of this latter group was marginal. By 1795, only five of these 31 individuals remained (Hedman 19; Hedman and Åhlander 2003 50; Bjelf 14-18).

In Ukraine, the Swedes were joined in 1804 by a group of German colonists. The Germans set up a number of colonies in their immediate neighbourhood, such as the Lutheran Mühlhausendorf (1804), Schlangendorf (1806), and the Catholic Klosterdorf (1805) (Kas'ianenko 187; Hedman 20-21). All in all, in the Kherson area between 1804 and 1883 German colonists founded 41 villages (Kas'ianenko 18). Some of the Swedes intermarried with their German neighbours, but despite the small size of the group, the Swedes managed to keep their culture and language alive in isolation. Much like their German-speaking neighbors, they were good farmers, and their standard of living was higher than that of the local Slavs. Lev Trotsky, who himself grew up in the Kherson province, pointed out the sharp differences between the efficiency of the neat German settlements and the rather backward agricultural practices of the local Slavic peasants (Weeks 89). The efficiency and relative prosperity of the Germans made many Slavic peasants look at them with envy and perceive them as something of a threat (Weeks 222). After the outbreak of World War I, the Russian empire became increasingly "nationalized." As national differences were emphasized, Germans were increasingly seen as "aliens" and outsiders. All German organizations were outlawed, along with all publications in German. Even public conversations in German were banned. Villages and settlements were given Russian names and, beginning in 1915, many Germans were deported to Siberia, the Ural mountains and the Volga region (Sushko 34). Imperial Decrees of February 2, 1915, forced farmers in settlements set up by former German, Austrian or Hungarian subjects or by immigrants of German descent in areas adjacent to the western border to register their properties and sell them within six months to two years (Lohr 100). This applied to an enormous area stretching 160 kilometers along the border of the Russian empire from Norway all the way down to Persia. Most of the Kherson *guberniia* was located in this zone, thus these laws applied to the vicinity of Gammalsvenskby (Lohr 101).

Although the Swedish farms were not expropriated, largely due to the chaos and disintegration of the Russian Empire, it was clear that the political situation was changing rapidly. The relative stability of the nineteenth century was coming to an end. The political situation had become very uncertain.

The collapse of Russia in World War I was followed by a brutal Civil War, when German and Swedish villages were attacked and looted by all sides. Their

riches had made them attractive targets: “In the German villages there were more horses and hogs in the barns, more lard and hams in the pantries, more white flour and sunflower oil in their storerooms, more fur coats and carpets in the homes” (Peters 107). For long periods during the civil war the front stood along the Dnipro River. Neither the Reds, nor Denikin and Wrangel’s White armies had much love for these settlements of “aliens” and plundered them freely and with little, if any, risk of being punished. Particularly troublesome for the Gammalsvenskby Swedes were the activities of the “green” side in the conflict. *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* specifically mentioned Nestor Makhno’s anarchists, who disproportionately targeted the German settlements in the region (Peters 107).

[The] poor communities along the river had plenty of experience of all the horrors of war. Especially as a number of loose troop detachments, such as those standing under the command of the famous robber general Macknow [sic] did not behave as regular troops, but rather as—and indeed they were—pure hordes of bandits with murder, plundering and blackmail as their main ambition.
(*Svenska Canada-Tidningen*, September 26, 1929, 3)

Neither were Gammalsvenskby’s experiences of the provisional government particularly positive. Its weak rulers were unable to stabilize the situation:

When Kerinski [sic] came to power it was generally believed that things would get better. But pretty soon it turned out that Kerinski [sic] was just another well-meaning talker incapable of initiative or action. Any improvement in the existing poor conditions was impossible. At the so-called elections the people had to vote for the candidates approved by the government. If this was not done you lost your right to vote. It got worse and worse. Children were taken from their parents and put in public kindergartens. If their parents dared to voice opposition, they had their voting privileges taken away. This meant being sentenced to a slow but certain death, since necessities were only handed out to those with ration cards. If one lost the right to vote one also lost the ration cards and therefore any chance of surviving.
(*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* March 20, 1930, 2)

World War I, the Civil War and the Sovietization, which began in the late 1920s, meant hard times for the villagers. At the same period, the Soviet policies towards national minorities in the 1920s, meant that the Swedish character of the village was recognized and respected by the Soviet authorities. The Swedes received their own national village soviet in 1926, in which the Swedish language was used (Martin 38, 40; Mace 215). In this early period many of the peasants in Gammalsvenskby were sympathetic to Lenin’s policies (Runwall and Hagert 68). However, this political liberalization was short-lived, and after a few years of relative tranquility in 1928 Stalin initiated his revolution from above. Agriculture

was to be collectivized, five-year plans introduced and society reshaped to its foundations. While the revolutions of 1917 had fundamentally altered the system of government, the Stalinist revolution ten years later affected all aspects of everyday life for the people in the Soviet Union. As Sheila Fitzpatrick puts it:

In the most prosaic terms of everyday life, Russia had been changed by the First Five-Year Plan upheavals in a way that it had not been changed by the earlier revolutionary experience of 1917-1920. In 1924, during the NEP interlude, a Muscovite returning after ten years' absence could have picked up his city directory (immediately recognizable, because its old design and format had scarcely changed since the prewar years) and still have had a good chance of finding listings for his old doctor, lawyer, and even stockbroker, his favorite confectioner (still discreetly advertising the best imported chocolate), the local tavern and the parish priest, and the firms which had formerly repaired his clocks and supplied him with building materials or cash registers. Ten years later, in the mid 1930s, almost all these listings would have disappeared, and the returning traveler would have been further disoriented by the renaming of many Moscow streets and squares. If he looked hard enough, he might perhaps have discovered his old clock-repairer working for a co-operative or state trust, and his old doctor employed in a municipal health department or medical research institute. But only a part of prerevolutionary Moscow and old Russia remained by the mid 1930s, either visible or hidden behind a Soviet facade. Another part had disappeared forever.

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Although this is a description of Moscow, the centre of Soviet power, the changes in the countryside and in the provinces were equally enormous. For the majority of the Gammalsvenskby Swedes these were not welcome changes, and they followed fifteen years of hardship. The wars and infighting had taken such a horrendous toll on the population that by 1929 the people of Gammalsvenskby found the situation intolerable. They now saw no other solution than to leave the Soviet Union. Later that year the population of the colony received permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union and resettle in Sweden.

While the majority of the Gammalsvenskby Swedes seized this opportunity, their experiences in Sweden varied. For many villagers the change of environment was hard to accept. The differences between their conservative peasant life in their isolated village and the modern, industrialized and increasingly secular Sweden were sharp and hard to get used to. Few of them had seen a radio. Bikes were a rare sight in the village (Runwall and Hagert 99). There had only been one motorized vehicle, a truck, in Gammalsvenskby. The villagers referred to it by the Russian word *Samokat'* [the Self-perpetuator] (Interview with John Hoas, Meadows, MB, June 1, 2004). Others found it hard to accept the break-up of the communal lifestyle as the Gammalsvenskby people were separated and assigned

jobs in various parts of Sweden, often as underpaid hired hands, housemaids and even *statare*.³

As is often the case in immigrant narratives, homesickness and a sense of alienation tormented many of these Swedish settlers. Soon after their arrival in Sweden, a substantial number of the Gammalsvenskby people expressed a desire to return, and left for Soviet Ukraine in three waves within two years of their arrival in Sweden. Others were eager to set up a new Gammalsvenskby in Canada (Utas 230; Bjelf 21).

While several books have been dedicated to the community of Gammalsvenskby people in Sweden and the returnees to Soviet Ukraine, the story of the Canadian Gammalsvenskby Swedes has received considerably less attention (see Hedman and Åhlander 1993; Hedman and Åhlander 2003, Runwall and Hagert). Today, over 75 years after leaving Soviet Ukraine, only a handful of the original immigrants to Canada remain. Their story is a fascinating account of multiple—or chain—migrations, and about the desire of a small group to keep its unique culture alive. For many of them, this migratory process was an attempt to recreate a world they had lost.

After a year in Sweden a number of Gammalsvenskby Swedes set off for Canada and duly settled in and around Wetaskiwin, Alberta. The provinces of Alberta and British Columbia had witnessed two previous waves of Gammalsvenskby immigration in the 1880s and 1890s (Hedman 52; Hedman and Åhlander 1993 449-452). These waves of immigration had been triggered by imperial Russian policies such as mandatory military conscription for men but also by a shortage of arable land. The Gammalsvenskby people had followed in the footsteps of Mennonites from the same area who had begun emigrating to Canada in the 1880s (Hedman 29; Hedman and Åhlander 2003 449). Between 1885 and 1926 about 30 Gammalsvenskby families had settled in Alberta and British Columbia and in 1929 there were some 200 Gammalsvenskby Swedes in Canada, of whom no fewer than 170 lived in Alberta, the remainder living in British Columbia (Hedman and Åhlander 2003 176). The first of them had arrived as early as 1885. By 1930, many of them had become prosperous farmers (*Canada Posten* September 10, 1929, 5; Hedman 29). They had been among the “true” pioneers in Alberta, and made up a significant portion of the province’s Swedish population. Many of them remained in close contact with their relatives back in Ukraine.⁴ According to Helge Nelson, the Gammalsvenskby Swedes and their descendants made up 20 per cent of the Swedish farmers in Alberta by 1930 (359). The early Gammalsvenskby settlers in Alberta were soon followed by Swedish pioneers from the United States and Sweden proper. The area south of Edmonton has been referred to as the Minnesota of Canada, due to the strong Swedish presence (Beijbom 157). Place names such as Malmo, Thorsby, Calmar, Warburg and Falun reflect the Swedish heritage of the area.⁵ By 1930, this area had a lively Swedish community. The attraction of the “Scandinavian” areas of Alberta was strong on

Gammalsvenskby Swedes, alienated and dissatisfied as they were with their lot in Sweden.

The history of the Swedish-Canadian community has been covered in some detail by Lars Ljungmark, who based a 1994 study on a review of the major Swedish newspaper *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* and its predecessors.⁶ His study leaves out the other major Swedish paper in prairie Canada, *Canada Posten*, and makes no mention whatsoever of the plight of the Gammalsvenskby Swedes. From the very beginning *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* was connected to the Canadian Pacific Railroad and the Immigration Department, and was dedicated to attracting Scandinavian immigration to Canada. Often this promotional project was effected by the publishing of rosy accounts of successful Scandinavian immigrants to Canada (Ljungmark 82-83). Despite being a propaganda tool for CPR, the paper had considerable independence and pursued its own political line.

As far as I am aware, no study on the other major paper, *Canada Posten*, has been published. This paper was founded in 1904 by Swedish-Canadian religious groups, who intended it as a religious bi-monthly newspaper, the initiative to set up the paper having come from Swedish-Canadian religious groups.⁷

In terms of the politics of the time, both papers were centre-left, reflecting the views of a substantial number of the Scandinavian immigrants to Canada. They actively and strongly supported the Liberal Party of Canada, which traditionally had been the “immigrant” party. At the same time, however, they could take positions we today would associate with the extreme right. *Canada Posten* in particular was aggressively anti-Communist, occasionally pro-fascist and openly supported the Finnish *Lapua* movement.⁸ *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* published enthusiastic articles on the far-right German *Stahlhelm* movement, Hitler’s anti-democratic allies and coalition partners.⁹

Svenska Canada-Tidningen, while officially secular, was anti-Ukrainian, anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic and openly racist. It was preoccupied with the promotion of “Swedishness” and the preservation of the “purity” of Swedish culture in America (Ljungmark 156-158). To some extent, these attitudes were indicative of the *Zeitgeist*. Certainly, *Svenska Canada-Tidningen*’s enthusiastic support of forced sterilizations of the “weak-minded and mentally insane” reflects the attitudes of the time (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen*, April 16, 1931, 1).

Attempting to analyze the attitude of these two papers to the Gammalsvenskby people gives rise to a number of methodological concerns regarding how to interpret the articles. The initial attitude was one of fascination and good will. But the politics of the time soon had an impact. The Swedish-Canadian newspapers started to express doubt about the Ukrainian Swedes. The story of Gammalsvenskby was treated as one of the most important stories of the year, competing with stories on the “Match King” Ivar Kreuger and the disease and death of Queen Victoria of Sweden. The interest in the Gammalsvenskby Swedes peaked during the period 1929-1930. During this period,

61 articles on Gammalsvenskby were published in *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* and *Canada Posten*.¹⁰ Subsequently interest dropped off sharply. What were the reasons for this burst of interest, and what caused the interest to drop off so suddenly? What caught the interest and imagination of the Swedish-Canadian press? What aspects of the history of Gammalsvenskby intrigued the editors and readers? And why the subsequent alienation or disinterest?

During 1929 and the first few months of 1930 a number of articles sympathetic to the Gammalsvenskby Swedes appeared in the papers. The papers both emphasized character traits such as honesty, modesty, religiosity and hard work when describing the people of Gammalsvenskby.¹¹ During this year, many of the articles focused on the unique and dramatic history of Gammalsvenskby. Both papers promoted a form of “Swedishness” that was common in Sweden in the nineteenth century, but already out of fashion in Sweden by the 1930s, stressing Sweden’s glorious past and focusing on hero-kings and wartime exploits, particularly under Gustav II Adolf and Karl XII in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Ljungmark 197-198). Therefore it may not come as a surprise that the false claim was made repeatedly that the Gammalsvenskby Swedes were “proud” descendants of the “brave Carolinians”—Karl XII’s soldiers who fought and lost in Poltava in 1709 during the Great Nordic War (*Canada Posten* April 29, 1930, 4).¹² Such a claim associated Gammalsvenskby with what was commonly considered the most glorious episodes in Swedish history: the period of Sweden as a Great Power.

The first mention of Gammalsvenskby appeared in *Canada Posten* early 1929. At this time pastor Kristoffer Hoas, the leader of the Gammalsvenskby community was visiting Sweden, officially in order to participate in a study conducted by the National Archives of Swedish Dialects in Uppsala. While in Sweden, Hoas presented a request by the people of Gammalsvenskby to the Swedish government, expressing their desire to resettle in Sweden. This first article on the subject was written in a sympathetic tone, and presented the request as an expression of an age-old and long-standing desire to return to the land of their forefathers.

Gammalsvenskby is a tiny village of Swedes in the heart of Russia [sic] who has faithfully preserved the language and customs of the land of their forefathers. Through generations they have nurtured a desire to return to Sweden. The phenomenon is remarkable and moving, from a human perspective...The people [folket] have guarded their Swedish nationality as its great and precious possession. The Swedes in Gammalsvenskby came from Dagö. The year was 1782. By force and with the help of escorting Cossacks 1,200 Swedes were brought the 2,000-kilometer long way down to the land by the Black Sea, which the Russians had conquered from Turkey...During the exodus, terrible diseases took their toll. According to the tradition, in the tiny Russian village Roshetilavka the minister had to perform so many funerals that the Russian population learned both the words and melody of the Swedish funeral psalms. The mortality remained high after the arrival, and

it seemed as if Gammalsvenskby would die out. In May and June of 1782 no less than 220 people died. In 1790 the village received an addition of some thirty Swedish prisoners of war, but still in 1793 the village only counted 200 inhabitants. Already at the time, when the Dagö Swedes were brought down to Ukraine, they had started negotiations to be allowed back to Sweden. The idea of “returning home” can thus be traced far back in time.

(*Canada Posten* February 26, 1929, 3)

The sympathetic tone of the article reflected the attitude that this group of people were natural members of an organic Swedish nation, who had been detached from the larger community against their wishes and whose desire had always been to return and re-enter the “mother” nation. No doubt this feeling was rooted in genuine concern for the welfare of the Gammalsvenskby people. It appears that many Swedes and Swedish-Canadians felt a sense of community with the people of this distant colony, who had kept their identity and clearly associated themselves with Swedish culture, despite the long separation from the “mother country.” The papers were fascinated with the fact that this group had preserved their language and customs, despite the hundreds of years that had passed since the Gammalsvenskby Swedes left mainland Sweden. This cultural fidelity contrasted sharply with the situation in North America, where both Canadian and American Swedes were rapidly becoming Canadianized and Americanized. The Gammalsvenskby experience also proved that it was possible to preserve the Swedish language in the diaspora. “The arrival of the Gammalsvenskby people in the land of their forefathers on August 1, 1929, was considered a significant event in Sweden. When their ship docked at the port of Trelleborg in southern Sweden they were welcomed by a large crowd, headed by Prince Carl, who greeted them in the name of King Gustaf V. They were brought to Jönköping, where Prime Minister Arvid Lindman delivered a speech of welcome.” (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* August 15, 1929, 1)

The trip had started tragically, when 22 people, who were not considered “pure” Gammalsvenskby Swedes were forced to remain in Soviet Ukraine (*Canada Posten* August 20, 1929, 1).¹³ This was a shock to these people, who had already sold their properties. Now they were forcibly separated from friends and family.¹⁴ A woman, sick with tuberculosis, died soon after departure. In addition three people, suffering from typhoid fever, had to be left behind in Constanța, Romania. After leaving the Soviet Union, the refugees were treated well, particularly in Romania and Hungary. Only in Vienna were they received coldly (*Canada Posten* August 20, 1929, 1). Meanwhile Jews from neighboring colonies had taken over the houses vacated by the emigrants.¹⁵

Their arrival in Sweden appears to have been perceived as a major event by the Swedish-Canadian press. Both major papers carried an article by a C.H. Lager,

titled “The Tenacity of Swedish Culture,” interpreting Swedish culture as a part of a larger Germanic culture, in contrast with that of the Slavs.

The colony in GammelSvenskby [sic] in Southern Russia is certainly unique: it has been surrounded by an entirely different culture and an alien race, the Slavic race. That the Swedes under these circumstances should have held on to Swedish language, culture and worship is easily understood. But that they managed amidst such oppressive social conditions to retain their Swedishness during several centuries, proves that Germanic—like Greek—culture is actually immortal, if it is only given a chance to exist.

(*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* August 8, 1929, 1; *Canada Posten* August 20, 1929, 2)

This perspective was typical of many Swedish newspapers in North America: much of the admiration for the tenacious Gammalsvenskby Swedes was due to their ability to preserve both language and culture under conditions, much more oppressive than those the North American Swedes had endured.

The Swedish colony by the Delaware River did not experience the same conditions as their fellow countrymen in Russia, but that colony too promised and developed a great and outstanding culture. It is only during the past few years, since the World War, when the United States began to develop an entirely new culture, that the sons of Svea started to feel ashamed for their mothers’ and fathers’ homeland and suddenly became “101 percent American.”

(*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* August 8, 1929, 1; *Canada Posten* August 20, 1929, 2)

Lager’s article gives a fairly good idea of the Swedish nationalism advocated in the Swedish-Canadian press. This might be seen as an expression of Kahn’s “eastern” form of ethnic nationalism: a resentment of Americanization and a definition of Swedishness based upon language, culture and blood. This nationalism often had sentimental undertones. Soon after the arrival of the Gammalsvenskby people to Sweden a poem, “Modersmålet” [The Mother Tongue], written by one of the recent arrivals from Soviet Ukraine, appeared in the pages of *Svenska Canada-Tidningen*:

Vi ha i tidens dunkla natt
En oförgätlig, dyrbar skatt
Att älska, vårda värna.
Det är vårt gamla modersmål, så
fritt,
så rent med klang av stål,
så skönt som himlens stjärna.

[We have, through the dark night of
the ages
An unforgettable, precious treasure
To love, nurture and protect.
It is our old mother tongue, so free,
so pure with sound of steel,
as beautiful as the star in the sky.

Det är en skatt, som kraft beskär,
 Som genom tidens dunkel bär,
 där trogen vård den röner.
 Det är det starka, ljusa band,
 med vilken Sveamoderns hand
 förenar sina söner.

Må svenskan ljuda vid vår härd
 och värna hjärtan på vår färd
 att älska fädrens minne.
 Lev evigt, dyra svenska ord,
 varhelst en svensk bor på vår jord,
 i hjärta, själ och sinne.
(Svenska Canada-Tidningen
September 19, 1929, 4)

It is a treasure, possessing force,
 carrying us through the darkness of
 time,
 nurtured by our tender care.
 It is the forceful, bright bond,
 the hand, through which Mother Svea
 unites her sons.

May Swedish sound in our homes
 and preserve in our hearts on our
 journey
 the love of the memory of our fathers.
 May you live forever, precious Swedish
 word,
 wherever a Swede lives on our earth,
 in heart, soul and mind.]

Linguistic nationalism, a German import and linked to identity concepts emphasizing race and blood,¹⁶ was a strong trend in contemporary Sweden. Language—as Herder argued—was seen as a carrier of nationality, as well as a reminder that the Swedes belonged to a larger, Germanic community. The retaining of language was associated with notions of preserving national—or racial characteristics.

This notion followed Kahn’s model of a civic, “western” nationalism, albeit illiberal. At the same time the “western” idea of civic nationalism also figured in the papers. Certainly, Swedishness was defined in terms of race, language, culture and history, categories, which transcended the political borders of Sweden (Kummel 8-9). But alongside this “organic” Swedishness there was also the notion, particularly among the Swedes in North America, that being Swedish involved a certain mindset and/or political allegiance. This civic nationalism was no less exclusive, and dependent on a strong “other” to define the “Swedish” ethics. Even if your race and blood were “pure,” your Swedish credentials could still be questioned. The Gammalsvenskby people were perceived to be racially and ethnically Swedish, and they had proven this by expressing a political and physical allegiance to their “mother nation.” Conversely, it was also possible to lose your Swedishness by demonstrating the “wrong” political allegiances. Being “Russian” in spirit could apparently cancel out purity of blood:

Nearly a thousand former Russian subjects, who are Swedish in heart and soul, are currently in the process of transferring from their homeland to the country with which they feel the greatest spiritual belonging. Would it not be an appropriate response then, if a corresponding number of Swedish subjects, who in heart and soul are Russians instead left their fatherland, with which they are so dissatisfied, and moved to the Soviet empire, with which they feel so intimately connected,

and the social conditions of which they never get tired of promoting as so incomparably superior to the Swedish...For the two countries it would be a benefit to get rid of bitterly dissatisfied citizens, and this benefit would be mutual.
(Editorial *Canada Posten* September 10, 1929, 4)

Thus, the hurdles to claiming Swedishness were set fairly high by the Swedish-Canadian press. There were ethnic, religious, ethical and political requirements to be met in order to qualify. During 1929, the Swedish-Canadian press considered the Gammalsvenskby Swedes to be meeting all these strict qualifying criteria. Soon, however, this perception was challenged by a number of controversies that shook the Gammalsvenskby community shortly after their arrival in Sweden.

The first controversy was the decision by a group of about 20 Gammalsvenskby Swedes, headed by the brothers Johan and Woldemar Utas and their brother-in-law Petter Knutas to return to Soviet Ukraine. The communist press in Sweden, which had been very negative, if not outright hostile to the Gammalsvenskby Swedes, now actively supported their decision to return. This group of returnees, however, was initially denied entrance to Soviet Ukraine, something that apparently puzzled the Swedish-Canadian press since they considered the returnees "Bolsheviks, or at least Bolshevik-minded."
(*Canada Posten* November 29, 1929, 1)

On New Years' Eve 1930, Woldemar Utas appeared on Moscow radio with a speech, in which he harshly criticized the way he had been treated in Sweden. The speech was aimed at foreign as well as domestic listeners, and delivered in Swedish, German and Russian. Even the central organ of the Communist Party, *Pravda*, published an article on the suffering of the Gammalsvenskby people in Sweden (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* January 30, 1930, 3; Hedman 47).

The Swedish-Canadian press had problems coming to terms with the fact that there were people who preferred a life under socialism in Soviet Ukraine. One short notice in *Canada Posten* informs the readers that the returnees had been allies of the Cheka (*Canada Posten* October 22, 1929, 7). The editor's tone towards those who wanted to stay in the West was forgiving and conciliatory, while the returnees were referred to as "Judases":

We cannot blame those who are looking for a refuge that a number of Russian-spirited individuals managed to slip in among them. They had been assigned the task of returning and uttering false testimony to return and carry false testimony against the emigrants and against Sweden. They carried out their Judas deed. No more than their teacher will they gain any enjoyment from their deed.
(A. Svantesson, editorial *Canada Posten* February 4, 1930, 4)

Svenska Canada-Tidningen likewise gave the returnees considerable attention:

Along with the applications for exit visas from the Gammalsvenskby people, the Soviet government received applications from other colonies in the enormous Soviet empire. How to counteract this less than flattering picture of the Soviets? Some cunning person found an answer. The Gammalsvenskby people would be allowed to leave, but accompanied by a number of families who were reliable Bolsheviks and who after some time in Sweden would return to Russia only to claim that the conditions in the new country were intolerable. There were three reliable Bolsheviks among the Gammalsvenskby people: the brothers Woldemar and Johan Utas and their brother-in-law Buskas. In Gammalsvenskby they served in the less than savoury role of agents for the Cheka. They were therefore chosen, and the rest of the story is only too well known to be retold here. It would be enough to establish that the “doubts” that the Soviet authorities appeared to be experiencing about letting them return was another play for the galleries. The whole point was that the Utas brothers and Knutas would, after the return to Russia, be used as prominent tools of Bolshevik propaganda. They would present Sweden in the darkest of colors and point out the bad treatment they had received. In case the *muzhiks* were complaining, they would only have to refer to Gammalsvenskby: “See how the peasants have it in other countries, the Gammalsvenskby people are returning!” They even know how to turn such an embarrassing event as the exodus of foreign colonists into a propaganda for themselves! As soon as the three returning Gammalsvenskby families were back on Russian territory, they started slinging mud at Sweden.

(*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* January 30, 1930, 3)

If a small number of returnees were easy to dismiss as rogue dissidents or traitors, it was harder to explain the following waves of returnees. On September 28, the evening edition of the Leningrad paper *Krasnaia Gazeta* reported that an additional group of 39 Gammalsvenskby returnees had arrived in Kherson on September 28. In turn, these returnees reported that 250 more Gammalsvenskby people in Sweden wished to go back to Soviet Ukraine. The paper also reported that the returning colonists were about to rename Gammalsvenskby *Nya Rödsvenskby/Novoe Krasnoshvedskoe*, that is, New Red Svenskby¹⁷ (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* 23 October 1930, 1). By late November, 1930, 23 families, with over one hundred individuals had signed petitions that they wanted to “return to Russia.” (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* November 27, 1930, 1, 3)

The ambivalent attitude toward immigration on part of many of the Gammalsvenskby people puzzled the Swedish-Canadian press. In an article of November 27, 1930, *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* quoted K. Kyhlberg, the chair of *Svenskbystiftelsen*, [The Gammalsvenskby Committee], to the effect that

The Gammalsvenskby people are very indecisive. Our experiences have shown, says president Kyhlberg, that the 150 or so Gammalsvenskby families can be divided

into three groups. One group of about 110 families consists of very hard-working and able people, who surely do not have any plans to emigrate. A second group consists of some 25 families that are hard-working and clever but more ambivalent and influenced by propaganda. Finally, there is a third group of about 15 families constituting the dissatisfied. They are dishonest and not fit for permanent settlement. This is the group that causes discord. They are a desirable and easy prey for communist propaganda.

(*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* November 27, 1930, 1, 3)

This last group would constitute the third, and largest wave of returnees. The Swedish Communist Party actively encouraged this group and assisted them in their desire to return to Soviet Ukraine. They set up their own Gammalsvenskby Committee, *Arbetarnas Svenskbykommitté*, or the Workers' Svenskby Committee, dedicated to assisting returning Gammalsvenskby people and even recruiting "Swedish" Swedes to New Red Svenskby. In March, 1931, this group requested government funding from Prime Minister Carl Ekman to provide for the return of 198 Gammalsvenskby Swedes (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* April 2, 1931, 4). In July of 1931 the Swedish government decided to allocate government funds for the approximately 200 Gammalsvenskby people who wished to return. However, funds was made available only to the Gammalsvenskby people who were naturalized Swedish citizens (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen*, July 9, 1931, 1).

Neither the pledges nor the prayers and tears of pastor Hoas could prevent this group from returning (Tysk 143; Hedman and Åhlander 2003 208). 180 Gammalsvenskby people arrived in the Soviet Union on August 19, 1931. A telegram from the Soviet News Agency in Leningrad of October 10, 1931, was published on the front page of *Canada Posten* under the headline "The Gammalsvenskby People Complain about Sweden."

The Soviet Russian press is delighted over the fiasco of the Gammalsvenskby people. Sweden is not one of the worst capitalist countries in the world, but nevertheless, see how the poor Russian emigrants were treated there. Terrible! Only listen to what they themselves have to say about this: According to a telegram from Leningrad of October 10 "180 Gammalsvenskby people, belonging to the group, which in 1929 departed for the land of their forefathers, Sweden, in order to settle and stay there for the rest of their lives, returned to Russia on August 19, exhausted by the conditions in Sweden and bitterly disappointed by everything in that land. They have now issued an open statement to all the people of Russia, particularly to the workers and peasants, about how thoroughly miserably they were treated by the large landholders of Sweden. How upsetting! Instead of receiving land and animals, as promised, they had to serve as farm servants and were subjected to lives of outright slavery. They expressed their heartfelt joy at returning to the care of the Soviet government."

(*Canada Posten* October 20, 1931, 1)

All in all, by the fall of 1931 40 families, or 243 individuals, had returned to the village, accompanied by two dedicated Swedish communists. Thus, including the handful of Gammalsvenskby Swedes who never left, the newly repopulated Gammalsvenskby had some 260 villagers of Swedish descent (Tysk 10; Hedman and Åhlander 2003 222).

Dissatisfaction with life in Sweden, in addition to the pull factor that the strong Gammalsvenskby community in Alberta exercised, led another group to seek settlement in Canada. Initially the interest in immigration to Canada was enormous: 62 families had signed up to immigrate (Utas 232). Economic concerns severely diminished this group. In the end twenty Gammalsvenskby families, a total of 97 persons, settled in Canada between 1930 and 1932 (Hedblom 40). Another reason why Canada appeared attractive seems to have been its geographical distance from the Soviet Union, a country some of the Gammalsvenskby people wanted to get as far away from as possible (Nels Buskas, interview February 21, 2005).

Despite being taken care of by their own people—Gammalsvenskby immigrants from a previous wave—many recent immigrants quickly became disillusioned with Canada and returned to Sweden. In the end, only about 70 people of the 1930's wave of Gammalsvenskby immigrants stayed in Canada (Hedblom 41; *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* April 3, 1930, 1).¹⁸

Much as in Sweden, where *Nationalinsamlingen för Svenskyborna* provided assistance, the Swedes in Canada set up their own aid committee in order to assist the Gammalsvenskby immigrants. It was organized by the Swedish Lutheran Canadian Conference of the Augustana Synod in association with the Canadian Colonization Association. It adopted the name the Swedish Lutheran Aid Association. Winnipeg-based *Svenska Canada-Posten* quoted an unidentified Swedish paper commenting before the emigration on the benefits of having Swedes from the Black Sea basin resettled on the Canadian prairies: apparently, the climate was believed to be more beneficial for them!

The conditions for agriculture are entirely different [in Sweden] than where [the Gammalsvenskby People] live now. I am certain, that it will *not* be possible to transplant the Gammalsvenskby people to Swedish soil and have them acclimatized here. The winters, for instance, will cause them much hardship, since they are hardly accustomed to cold, snow, and ice down there in the land across from the mild Crimea ... Their relatives in Canada are fully prepared to receive them. Over there, in Western Canada it seems as if the natural conditions for the Gammalsvenskby people to make it are good, at least if we were to judge by the successes of their previously emigrated relatives. Canada is—like Russia once was and can once more become—a wheat producing-country, and its climate appears more beneficial for the Gammalsvenskby People than those we can offer here in Sweden.

(*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* July 25, 1929, 1)

In addition to the supposed mild climate in Alberta, there were also historical reasons to settle there:

People [in Sweden] are not really aware that in Canada there is already a considerable group of emigrants from Gammalsvenskby, which has reached a good economic position. They have also longed for a larger number of their people to join them. These could also settle in adjacent areas...Ever since the late 1800s, when a number of inhabitants from Gammalsvenskby emigrated to Canada and were able to set up a good life there, and were able to attract even more people from their native village, the Gammalsvenskby issue has had a serious Canadian dimension...In Canada there already are the Buskas, Malmas, Utas, Hannas and other families from Gammalsvenskby. If the Buskases in Gammalsvenskby join the Buskas family in Canada, the Malmases in Gammalsvenskby join the Malmases in Canada, and so on, would this mean ending up as strangers in a strange land? If the Buskas, Malmas, Utas and Hannas families from Gammalsvenskby join the families with the same names in Canada, would that mean getting further away from "home" than being settled next to the Anderssons in Skåne, Petterssons in Småland and Svenssons in Östergötland? Do they have weaker blood bonds to the Buskas, Malmas, Utas, and Hannas families in Canada and stronger blood bonds to the Andersson, Pettersson, and Svensson families in Sweden?...And do we have any guarantees that the colonists from Gammalsvenskby, once they have worked the Swedish soil for a number of years and found it more meager and the conditions different from those they are used to from Southern Russia will not feel that the voice of the blood from the Canadian side will be impossible to resist?...The Swedes in Canada have an excellent chance to do something worthy of the Swedish name and character, something that coming generations should be able to describe as a cultural investment.

(*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* September 5, 1929, 4)

It appears that in addition to an influx of linguistically conscious Swedish immigrants to beef up the Swedish presence on the prairies, the editor felt that this would give the Swedish-Canadians a chance to shine, and prove their "Swedish" spirit. The continuity of blood, culture, and linguistic kinship ought not to be broken, but should rather should be preserved and strengthened further. However, this hope suffered a blow when it became clear that most Gammalsvenskby people did not wish to go to Canada. In September, 1929, *Canada Posten* reported that rather than 38 of a total of 172 families, only 12 now claimed that they were interested in emigrating to Canada (*Canada Posten* September 10, 1929, 4). Yet, later on that year, *Canada Posten* reported that the Swedish Lutheran Immigration Aid Society of Canada had been founded, and that it was about to assist 62 families interested in emigrating (*Canada Posten* December 3, 1929, 1).¹⁹ *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* strongly approved of the opportunities this created for the Lutheran congregations to expand their numbers (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* December 5, 1929, 4). During the winter of 1929-1930 both papers reported that

the CPR had sent an invitation and offered a loan of \$150,000 to the Gammalsvenskby people, who in turn chose a committee of four people to travel to Canada on a fact-finding mission. This committee was made up of pastor Kristoffer Hoas, John Buskas, Andreas Buskas and Andreas Malmas. (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* December 26, 1929, 1; *Canada Posten* January 14, 1930, 1).

Even before the arrival of the commission, a number of articles started to question some of the Swedish credentials of the Gammalsvenskby people. This change in attitude echoed a similar development in Sweden, where editorials on the communist left as well as the conservative right considered Hoas's plans for emigration to Canada an act of disloyal ingratitude (Hedman and Åhlander 2003 204). The editor of *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* quoted the conservative *Svenska Dagbladet* of Stockholm, which claimed that

The racial type of these people is not clearly Swedish. It is likely that their forefathers left Sweden in the 1100s or 1200s, and it is also likely that they mixed with alien elements, particularly in the 1700s. Neither do [Swedish] traditions seem to have been particularly alive in Gammalsvenskby. Indicative of this is a letter, mailed from the village during the summer of 1849, which reads: "We do know that our forefathers are from dago [sic], but of the trek here we know nothing; the old are all dead." It would be unreasonable of us a couple of generations later to demand that the Gammalsvenskby people would have an immediate feeling for Sweden as their only true home on earth. Other than that, it is indubitable that the Gammalsvenskby people historically, linguistically, and ethnographically made up an alien group in a foreign land. With admirable tenacity this small group of people has preserved its Swedish language and customs in a new land for 150 years. (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* February 13, 1930, 4)

At this time, the discussion regarding the Gammalsvenskby people was intensifying in Sweden. The editorial in *Svenska Dagbladet* reflected the growing impatience with the Gammalsvenskby Swedes in Sweden, and *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* wondered whether the words of *Svenska Dagbladet* were sufficient to mute the discussion regarding the behavior of the Gammalsvenskby people. The English-language dailies in Canada received many letters to the editor claiming that the Swedish press had warned the Gammalsvenskby people against going to Canada (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* February 13, 1930, 4). The Swedish-Canadian press found these reports frustrating, since they portrayed Sweden as anti-Canadian, and reflected poorly on the Swedish community in Canada.

Therefore, the arrival of the leaders of the Gammalsvenskby people to Canada became a major news story, which dominated both of the major Swedish-Canadian newspapers. *Canada Posten* emphasized that the Gammalsvenskby people could easily "outdo" the Swedish-Canadians in terms of "Swedishness" and in their sense of community. Also, it was never questioned that that they were good settlers, and that they would never have left their village in the first place had it

not been for the Bolsheviks, whose policies “forced these Gammalsvenskby People to leave the land of their forefathers in order to seek rescue in Sweden, Canada or even in the darkest Africa.” (*Canada Posten* March 11, 1930, 1, 8) *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* had argued the same point a few weeks earlier:

Had Stalin and his henchmen not undermined the economic position of the villagers, taken away all rights, banned free thought and action, making his goal the total annihilation of culture, no propaganda, no promises or bribes could have made the Gammalsvenskby People leave their nest and abandon their beautiful village.

(*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* January 23, 1930, 1)

This view utterly contradicted the position of *Canada Posten*, expressed less than a year earlier, when the paper argued that the desire to return to Sweden was centuries old (*Canada Posten* February 26, 1929, 4).

But once in Canada, pastor Hoas seemed to become increasingly aware of the enormous difficulties connected with a large-scale immigration to Canada. He started to waiver. When he returned to Sweden he seemed convinced that it would not be possible to recreate Gammalsvenskby in Canada, at least not on a large scale. There was a lot of speculation in the Swedish-Canadian press about the hesitations Hoas began to feel during his mission to Canada. The religious *Canada Posten* tried to dispel rumors that a split within the Scandinavian protestant sects could have been the reason for the change of attitudes. Andreas Malmas reportedly stated that Hoas had met opposition from non-Lutheran Swedish protestants, who apparently disliked the fact that the Lutheran Augustana Synod had sponsored their immigration.

In the discussion about why the Gammalsvenskby People have been advised not to go to Canada we have heard much of a surprising nature. Most surprisingly, at least for us, was that Malmas should have claimed that pastor Hoas partly had been influenced by by ‘protestant’ congregations outside the Lutheran Church of Sweden²⁰ which he claims have opposed the project because the transportation of the immigrants was guaranteed by the Lutheran Augustana Synod.” The study commission was reportedly also the object of a ruthless propaganda from anti-immigration circles...As far as pastor Hoas is concerned he himself has given a clear answer regarding the reasons why the Gammalsvenskby People were discouraged from traveling for the moment. Asked...about the claim that the delegation would have been subjected to pressure from anti-immigration circles, pastor Hoas [answered] “That is only loose talk, as is so much else that has been said and written during our trip to Canada. We have not been subjected to pressure from any side. We have been able to travel and see what we wanted, and have not noticed any propaganda from any side.”...“The main factor was that we were promised a loan which never existed.” Hoas answered firmly...that “The Lutheran

Synod in Canada is not controlling the Swedish Lutheran Aid Association — absolutely not. Any such talk is pure nonsense.”

(*Canada Posten* June 3, 1930, 4)

The economic conditions were less beneficial than had first been thought. In addition, the Depression, which meant uncertain times for Canada, posed still greater difficulties for immigrants who had already immigrated once. The cancelled Canadian plans became something of an embarrassment for the Swedish community. The editorials in the Swedish-Canadian press reflected this frustration:

Suddenly there has been an abrupt change in the extensive colonization plans to place several hundred Gammalsvenskby People in Canada. The committee, headed by pastor Hoas, which has arrived in Canada in order to arrange and prepare for the arrival of their fellow countrymen, is now returning with “Drottningholm” [to Sweden]. The idea was that they would stay here for a year, if needed. It is clear that at least in Sweden this change of heart has been given plenty of attention. In large headlines the papers have proclaimed that “Canada is not good for the Gammalsvenskby People. No land, no work.” Anyone reading these headlines may think that suddenly we ran out of land in Canada. But that is a very false idea. As far as we have been able to tell it is not space that is lacking in Canada. Neither can we say that the perspectives are more frightening than they are attractive...And we are convinced that Canada is just as good for the Gammalsvenskby people as for any other entrepreneurial Scandinavians. The single largest reason for the change of heart is probably to be found in misunderstandings about what the contracts and promises really mean. The source for this misunderstanding needs to be found, and the Swedish government ought to demand a full account...It is clear, however, that this change of heart has caused some unpleasantness for the Gammalsvenskby People, the Canadian Pacific Railroads as well as the Swedish Lutheran Aid Association.

(*Canada Posten* April 29, 1930, 4))

Much publicity has been given to the temporarily stranded colonization plans. This has given unexpected publicity to Canada—publicity which has been negative and unfair. While this has occasioned big headlines in the Swedish press there has also been another sensation added to this story: some of the Gammalsvenskby people, much like the Israelites of the past, apparently wish to go back to the land of slavery and to the dangers, which they have escaped...The Gammalsvenskby Committee faces more than one problem with these [people] who do not seem to know what they want.

(F. G. Gustafson, *Canada Posten* May 20, 1930, 4)

More than anything else, the main reason for Hoas’s change of heart came down to financial concerns. The Canadian Pacific Railway could not give Pastor Hoas concrete answers to his questions regarding the land issue (Utas 233). Already

in January 1930 it was clear that the Gammalsvenskby people desiring to emigrate to Canada would not be getting the assistance they needed from the Swedish government. That meant that every family who wanted to go to Canada would start their new life with a debt of \$17,000. The fact that the Study Commission under Hoas was nevertheless sent to Canada appears merely to have been a show, intended to prevent more people from returning to Soviet Ukraine (Hedman 49, Hedman and Åhlander 2003 201, 449). When the committee returned after a little over a month the majority of the members agreed that it would not be possible to recreate a new Gammalsvenskby in Canada (Hedman 50, Hedman and Åhlander 2003 202). Of the members in the Gammalsvenskby Study Commission only Andreas Malmas disagreed. He decided to stay in Canada and assisted the Gammalsvenskby people who, despite the hardships, had decided to emigrate to Canada (*Canada Posten* April 29, 1930, 4). A total of a dozen Gammalsvenskby families arrived in Canada in 1930. Mostly, they had to take care of themselves, and never benefited from the assistance they had been promised (*Canada Posten* June 3, 1930, 4). It appears that most of the people who decided to emigrate to Canada after Hoas returned to Sweden already had family connections in Canada, primarily among the first wave of Gammalsvenskby immigrants that had arrived there in the 1880s and 1890s. Most of them soon became members of a larger community with a mixed population. Wetaskiwin, Alberta, had a large Swedish population, and the Gammalsvenskby people were able to participate in many of the activities in that Scandinavian community. There was, however, one smaller group that did not want to give up their dream of a Canadian Gammalsvenskby. Led by Andreas Malmas, a group of nine families decided to move to Meadows, Manitoba. (*Svenska Canada-Tidningen* April 6, 1931, 1; Hedman and Åhlander 2003 459.)

There they purchased an abandoned industrial farmstead called Camp 1, about 25 miles from Winnipeg, where they—ironically enough—set up a collective farm (Hedblom 1999 43; Hedman 50; Hedman and Åhlander 2003 458-459). The reason for this decision was primarily economical, since the absence of financial support from Sweden meant that they had to pay back the debts from the purchase of the farmstead over a period of 22 years. Andreas Malmas remained the leader of this group until his death (Hedblom 44). An additional three families accompanied them within a year, but did not stay long. Two more families arrived in 1932, only to return to Sweden in a few years (Hedman 50). But the settlers who stayed were successful in re-establishing something resembling the world they had left behind. They called the homestead Lilla Svenskby [Little Swedish Village] and maintained the old traditions of Gammalsvenskby (Hedman 50; Hedman and Åhlander 2003 458). The sanctity of the Sabbath was strictly honoured, and every other Sunday until 1953 a Lutheran Minister came out to Lilla Svenskby to conduct services in Swedish (Hedblom 45; Hedman and Åhlander 2003 460). A favourite pastime was singing. The group sang psalms from the Old Swedish Hymnals of 1695 and 1819 in addition to songs in the Gammalsvenskby

dialect (Hedblom 46).²¹ The collective farm was dissolved in 1953, and the land and equipment were divided among the colonists. By then, they had planted over 25,000 trees, and turned Meadows into a modern farming community (Hedblom 45). The Depression years were hard for the community. Yet even if it was not profitable to sell wheat or hogs on the market during these years, Lilla Svenskby was self-sustaining. They had plenty of eggs, meat and milk.

Pastor Hoas never really gave up on his plans to resettle a substantial part of the Gammalsvenskby Swedes in Canada. Around 1933, as the economy began improve somewhat, he once again attempted to arrange an exodus to Canada. But by then, the Gammalsvenskby people had started to feel at home on their farms in Sweden, and his efforts elicited little response from the community. On the contrary, Sweden appealed to the Gammalsvenskby people in Canada, and six families returned to Sweden (Hedman 50).

Despite the remarkable achievements of the hard-working colonists, in one respect Lilla Svenskby failed. The Gammalsvenskby Swedish dialect began dying out after the first generation of pioneers. In this respect, the situation in Manitoba was very different from what it had been in Ukraine. The children of the immigrants grew up as Canadians, and used English as their first language. By the 1960s, there was a new pastor at Zion Lutheran Church, who did not know Swedish, and the language of the service now became English. This development was a disappointment to the pioneers of Lilla Svenskby, who felt their language was taken away from them (Hedblom 45). In 2004, John Hoas, born in 1913, is one of the very last surviving Gammalsvenskby Swedish speakers in Meadows. “We kept our language for hundreds of years in Estonia and Ukraine. But here in Canada the Swedes lost their language after one generation.” (Personal interview with John Hoas, June 1, 2004) The language of communication in Lilla Svenskby is now almost exclusively English. Already in the 1960s, when the original settlers spoke to their children in the Gammalsvenskby dialect, they answered in English (Hedblom 43).

Conclusions:

The history of the immigration from Gammalsvenskby provides an insight into a small but lively immigrant community, which was trying to maintain its traditional identity in the midst of rapid social and economic change. The pressure on the Scandinavians to assimilate was strong. They were seen as a “preferred” group of immigrants, similar in customs, religion and appearance to the dominant Anglo-Saxon majority. The campaigns to assimilate the Scandinavian immigrants were largely successful, as most Scandinavian immigrants quickly adopted the English language. This in turn led to a sense of desperation on the part of some of the first generation immigrants, who were dismayed by the fact that they were

often unable to pass on the Swedish language to their children. The discussion in the Swedish language press in Canada was centred on the issues of how to retain the “Swedishness,” and, yet more troublingly, how to find a proper definition of what being Swedish meant in the diaspora. The arrival of the Gammalsvenskby Swedes to Sweden and, to a lesser extent, in Canada was largely received as good news by Swedish nationalists/patriots in Canada. Here was a living example of a community that despite hardships, worse than those encountered in Canada, had preserved their unique language and culture throughout centuries of isolation from the mother country. They became a symbol of cultural purity and an example of a successful alternative to the pervasive pushes for Canadianization. The Gammalsvensky Swedes were seen as carriers of an elusive and hard-to-define Swedish “spirit” that some Swedish-Canadians felt had been lost in their own more recent diaspora. The old-fashioned Lutheranism, tightly knit community, and anti-Communism of the Gammalsvenskby people came to symbolize the traditional values that the Swedish-Canadian community feared it was losing due to secularization and political radicalism. Thus they were welcomed with open arms not only by many Swedes in Sweden but also by Canadian Swedes, many of whom even saw them as role models.

However, this image was soon challenged by a number of events. Perhaps most disturbing for many Swedish and Swedish-Canadian observers was the fact that a significant number of the Gammalsvenskby people, after experiencing life in Sweden, preferred to return to life in Soviet Ukraine. Three groups of returnees, or close to 20% of the original emigrants, returned to the Soviet Union, where they were pressured to publicly denounce Sweden.

The Gammalsvenskby immigrants encountered many obstacles that prevented a wholesale emigration to Canada. The ultimate cancellation of large-scale immigration plans to Canada were perceived by Swedish-Canadians as tainting the image of Canada in Sweden. This was something on which both Swedish- and English-language papers in Canada commented. It became a source of embarrassment for Swedish-Canadians who felt that their credentials as good Canadians were called into question by association with their unappreciative brethren. The fact that the bulk of the Gammalsvenskby people rejected the Canadian option hurt their pride as Swedish-Canadians. It was also an awkward situation for a newspaper, such as *Svenska Canada-Tidningen*, which was funded by the CPR and partly dedicated to attracting Swedish immigrants to the new country. The return of many of the people to Soviet Ukraine appeared to be an improper response to the generosity of the Swedish government. Perhaps the Swedish credentials of the Gammalsvenskby people were not so authentic after all? Their culture, race and political affiliations were questioned, echoing the similarly negative reactions of the more conservative circles in Sweden. As for the Gammalsvenskby immigrants to Canada, the generation that grew up in

Canada during the twentieth century became increasingly Canadianized. Much like the Gammalsvenskby people who stayed in Sweden they assimilated into mainstream society. It turned out that deportation, political repression, war and terror actually acted as preservatives of language and culture; the real threat came from inclusive, democratic institutions. The Gammalsvenskby people in Canada reluctantly followed in the footsteps of the other Swedish-Canadians as their children and grandchildren became Canadians.

NOTES

1. "Like pan-Germanism, pan-Slavism and pan-Finnism, pan-Swedishness was based upon a concept of nationality and race. But here one has to be very careful with classification and conclusions. The same term can have several different meanings. Race in a pan-German context stood for a biological supremacy, which we in retrospect know under its distorted form as the theory of a "Aryan Master Race." The pan-Slavists talked about race in a non-specific, mystical, and culturally motivated way long before the Russian slavophilism formed its program of political action. The pan-Finnish ideology (*frändefolksideologin*) had components of language, culture and race. However, the pan-Swedish racial thinking was not biological in its nature. It was based upon ideas by (Swedish writer) Viktor Rydberg. Rydberg's ideas, in turn was a compilation of myths of origin and migration to the Nordic lands. *Aryan* was at this time a linguistic term, which could be used synonymously with *Indo-European*. The Germanic people constituted one people [*folk*], of which the Swedes were a part and the least miscegenated." (Kummel 248)
2. In English, Old Swedish Village, in Ukrainian Staroshved's'ka, since 1915 Zmiiivka.
3. *Statare* were farm laborers, receiving payment in kind, and who were tied to the landowner. They were only allowed to move once a year. This much-outdated system was not abolished until 1945. (Hedblom 38)
4. The emigration continued sporadically from 1886 until the break out of World War I. Until 1913, 27 Gammalsvenskby People, many of them with families, emigrated to America, nine to Alberta, sixteen to British Columbia, one to California, and one to New York. Between 1913 and 1929 the only Gammalsvenskby person to emigrate was Anders Matsson Utas (Barkvall), who immigrated to Toronto with his daughter and sister in 1926. (Hedman 30; Hedman and Åhlander 2003 454).
5. This was somewhat unusual, since as a general rule, new settlements were often named after politicians or functionaries in the Canadian Pacific Railway. The CPR and the Canadian government preferred names that sounded Anglo-Saxon. Even French was preferred to "foreign-sounding" names. In comparison, despite their massive presence on the Canadian prairies, there are very few settlements with Ukrainian names.
6. The paper changed name a number of times. From 1887 to 1892 it was known as *Den Skandinaviske Canadiensaren*, 1892 to 1895 as *Skandinaviske Canadiensaren*. After a period as a monthly, in 1907 it merged with *Väktaren*, the paper of the Missionary Covenant, under the name *Canada: the Swedish weekly*, which it retained until 1907. It was

supposed to be a “general and secular newspaper” with a Swedish profile. (Ljungmark, 1994 82-83, 113)

7. “During the winter of 1904 a number of people had been invited by pastor J.M. Forsell in order to discuss the starting up of a small newspaper company in Winnipeg... resulted in a small, Swedish eight page missionary newsletter, to be published twice a month. It was supposed to be Christian with religious stories, correspondences and, as far as the space allowed, contain news.” By 1929, it was published weekly. (*Canada Posten*. November 5, 1929)
8. “It is as an echo of the burning patriotic love, the heroic spirit which distinguished the bleeding forefathers of these Lapua men during the memorable days of [von] Döbeln. The silent Kosola somewhat resembles ‘the man with the band around his forehead,’ who could lead but also command as few—perhaps indeed no one else—during his time. ‘With these troops one can defy the world,’ General Döbeln said. ‘One does not wait, with them we attack.’” (*Canada Posten* July 29, 1930, 5) For a discussion of the Finnish fascist movement, see (Kasekamp 587-600).
9. “Stahlhelm is an organization outside, and above political parties. It was formed a little more than 12 years ago, when Imperial Germany collapsed and the German people blindly subordinated itself to the promises of their enemies and accepted the conditions of the victors ...Stahlhelm also works for the internal and external liberation of contemporary Germany. The cross and the sword are its symbols, its slogan is ‘Sacrifice and weapons alone bring victory.’...The instinct of defence must be retained and strengthened in opposition to the disarmament, which the Versailles treaty forced upon Germany...Stahlhelm wants to nurture the memory of their fathers’ heroism and the memory of their fallen comrades. It claims that the achievements of German monarchs in past times can never be undone by revolutions and constitutional changes...The young generation should be hardened into willpower and love of Fatherland in order to contribute to the liberation of the German race from the foreign yoke and for the resurrection of the Reich of Wilhelm I and Bismarck.” (Carl Patric Ossbahr, *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* August 5, 1931 4)
10. Judging by the sheer quantity of articles, the interest seems to be about the same in both papers. *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* dedicated 31 articles to the Gammalsvenskby issue, while *Canada Posten* 30. In some cases, the articles published were identical.
11. See for example *Canada Posten* March 18, 1930 1.
12. “In our time, no other tiny ethnic group or tribe in the whole world has received such a reputation as the Svenskbyborna who are the proud descendants of the brave Carolins” [Ingen liten folkgrupp eller stam i hela världen i vår tid är så beryktad som Svenskbyborna vilka med stolthet räkna sin härstamning från de modiga karolinerna] (*Canada Posten* May 20, 1930, 4)
13. However, about one month later, *Canada Posten* reported this group, supposedly not “of pure Swedish origin” to be somewhat larger, some 30 persons. They had to stay behind in Kherson. (*Canada Posten* September 24, 1929, 1)
14. *Ibid.* This cruelty was bitterly lamented in the Swedish-Canadian press. (*Canada Posten* September 24, 1929, 1) This is somewhat ironical, since both leading newspapers liked to appear as defenders of the “purity” of the Swedish culture. Incidentally, the concept

of preserving national and linguistic particularism was something shared by Swedish nationalists and Soviet authorities at the time. The various nationalities in the Soviet Union were encouraged, sometimes even forced against their wishes, to develop “national cultures” and to conduct business in their respective “national” languages. On the treatment of Roman Rite Catholics in Soviet Ukraine, officially designated as “Poles” by the authorities, see Weiner 254-255. Similarly, on the policy towards Jews, see Martin 49-50.

15. *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* could not resist the temptation to take an anti-Semitic jab at the Soviets. “Since a Jewish colony has bought both the new and the old village, they would probably have to convert the houses of worship to synagogues.” (Wilhelm Annér in *Svenska Canada-Tidningen*, September 26, 1929, 3).
16. “There is no definite clear-cut distinction between linguistic and racial nationalism. Originally, the doctrine emphasized language as the test of nationality, because language was an outward sign of a group’s peculiar identity and a significant means of ensuring its continuity. But a nation’s language was peculiar to that nation only because such a nation constituted a racial stock distinct from that of other nations...It was then no accident that the Nazis distinguished the members of the German Aryan race scattered in Central and Eastern Europe by a linguistic criterion. In doing this, the Nazis only simplified and debased the ideas implicit in the writings of Herder and others.” (Kedourie 1993 66)
17. “Gammalsvenskby blir Nya Rödsvenskby: De återvändande byborna berätta om ‘exploateringen’ i Sverige.” [Gammalsvenskby becomes Nya Rödsvenskby: The Returnees report on “exploitation” in Sweden], *Svenska Canada-Tidningen*, 23 October, 1930, 1. The return of the Gammalsvenskby people was merely given a short notice in the evening edition in one of the major papers.

Kherson, September 28. A second party, consisting of 39 colonists have returned from Sweden. The colonists explain that they had become victims of pastors Hoas’s and Kulakova’s propaganda. These men convinced them to emigrate to Sweden. When the colonists arrived in Sweden, they were placed out as tenant workers on the farms of Swedish landowners. The landowners exploited them in many ways; they did not pay them for the hours worked, explained to them that they were only there “to learn how to work”, fed them disgustingly, etc. After that, the colonists decided to return to Soviet Ukraine. A second group sent a delegation to Canada in order to find out whether it would be possible to settle there. These delegates returned after three months, bringing the message that the same kind of exploitation exists in Canada as in Sweden. The colonists explained that another 250 colonists want to return from Sweden. From Kherson the colonists left for their village Staroshvedskoe, which they have decided to rename Novoe Krosnoshvedskoe.

“Prozreli: Shvedskie kolonisty vernulis’ obratno v SSSR” [They Saw it Through: Swedish Colonists have Returned to the USSR], *Krasnaia Gazeta, Vechernii Vypusk*, No. 230 (2588), September 28, 1930.

18. There were also a few families that were interested in emigrating to Canada, but who were forced to stay in Sweden after a medical examination by a Canadian doctor found that they suffered from an unspecified eye disease. Canadian immigration law specified that if one member suffered from the disease, the whole family would be ineligible for immigration. This disease may have been trachoma, a disease some of the Gammalsvenskby people suffered from and which would prevent Andreas Buskas of the Gammalsvenskby study commission from traveling to Canada. (Hedman and Åhlander, 2003 201, 458)
19. By October of 1930, *Canada Posten* reported that some 60 people had emigrated to Canada, and 30 to Russia [sic], while 28 heads of families stayed on as landowning peasants in Sweden, 22 of them on the island of Gotland. ("Svenskby utflyttningen var ej så misslyckad ändå" [The Gammalsvenskby Migration Was Not Such A Failure After All], *Canada Posten*, October 14, 1930, 1.) On March 14, 1931, another 28 Gammalsvenskby families received their own farms, purchased by the Gammalsvenskby committee, mainly in the northern part of the provinces of Småland and Skaraborg. ("28 Svenskbyfamiljer få gårdar" [28 Svenskby families receive farms], *Canada Posten*, April 7, 1931, 1).
20. The word used here is *frikyrklig*, i.e. belonging to a *frikyrka*, or "free church," such as the Missionary Covenant, Baptists and Pentecostals, as opposed to Lutherans.
21. For a discussion of the Swedish Hymnal of 1695, known as "the Svedbergian hymnal," see Rystad 351-355.

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