

Swedish-Americans around Turlock are subject of doctoral work

By: Alberta Anderson Finke

Jenny Lind Lodge #388, Turlock, California, has been fortunate to have a Swedish scholar as a member for a time. Before his return to Sweden recently, Henrik Tallgren, a social anthropologist, has been living in Turlock since September of 1994 while doing research for his doctoral degree at the University of Göteborg, Sweden. On leave from his lecturing duties in Göteborg, he has been affiliated with California State University, Stanislaus.

Tallgren's focus has been on the area's Swedish-Americans, who are descended from emigrants who settled in the Central Valley farmland region. In 1902, Turlock was a small town of about 300 people, but, within the next 15 months, 975 Swedes arrived and they kept coming for the following decades, although not in those great numbers.

None of the Swedes came directly from Sweden; they had lived in other Swedish settlements, mainly in the Midwest and the northeastern states, and had read about this settlement in sunny California in advertisements in the Covenant Church's *Missionsvännan* (The Mission Friend). Swedes were mainly Lutherans, but this new settlement came to be dominated by people belonging to the Swedish Mission Church, nowadays called the Covenant Church. The influence of these Swedes can still be seen in Turlock, as the major employer in Turlock is the Covenant Church, with more than 1,000 employees at the local hospital and retirement community.

Swedish traditions stronger here than in Sweden

Not much has escaped Tallgren's eagle-eyed investigation, and members in the Vasa Lodge have also been part of his study. During meeting, he always had his little green notebook at hand, jotting down everything he saw and heard! At the lodge's 75th anniversary last year, you could see Tallgren in animated discussions with both the Grand Master and the District Master.

When asked what he thought about us Swedes, Tallgren said in perfect English, but with an unmistakable Swedish accent: "In some ways the Swedish community in Turlock is invisible, mixed with all other ethnic groups, but the Swedish expressions can be heard here."



Social anthropologist Henrik Tallgren with Grand Master Eric Johnson at Jenny Lind's 75th anniversary. Photo: Alberta Finke.

"In my research on Swedish immigrants I found a curious distinction between first-generation immigrants and those who were descendents of earlier immigrants," Henrik Tallgren told Vestkusten. "First-generation immigrants never seem to call themselves Swedish-Americans today. The term they most often use is 'Swedes living abroad'."

ger than in Sweden. The impact of the Swedes is greater than their number would suggest and, since the city's incorporation in 1908, there have always been Swedes on the Turlock city council."

Tallgren could also tell that Swedes and Scandinavians have had a great impact on the agribusiness, especially in the poultry and dairy industries. In the 1950s, a Swede had a turkey hatchery, processing ten million eggs annually, and there are several Swedes involved in the well-known Hilmar Cheese Factory, the largest cheese manufacturer in California, aiming at becoming the biggest in America as well.

Millions claim Swedish ancestry

A major question in Tallgren's thesis is "what does it mean to be a Swedish American?" To that apparently easy (or naive?) ques-

tion, there might be as many answers as there are Swedish-Americans: some 4.6 million claimed Swedish ancestry in the 1990 census! Although Tallgren has been conducting interviews with people of Swedish descent mainly in the Turlock region, he has extended his research throughout northern California. He also spent considerable time at libraries as well as at the local newspaper, trying to find out just about everything written about the Swedes. Traveling around California, he also lectured at various festivals and universities and often was a guest speaker at local Vasa lodges and other organizations.

Jenny Lind Lodge feels proud of having been the host lodge for Tallgren and is looking forward to reading his thesis, which he hopes to have published by 1998!

Semlor ever

We bake over 30 kinds of
We are open Mon. to Fri.

Väl

Chris
Svensson

S
Volvo

Svens

1011 40th Ave.
Oakland 94601

Service • Sales

ELLIOT

ANTIQUES

18th an
Swedish

• AN
consign

706 SANSOME STREET • SF
415 362-414

Lena Hö

Tuesday through S

Tel (41

760 Market Street, Sui
(mitt emot Empo

NO SCANDINAVIA

Potato Sausage —
Everything in Scandinavi

3421 Telegraph

Open weekdays 9-5, Sund

Vestkusten 1976:8

P. 9