

Gammalsvenskby – Swedes of Meadows

On April 17, 1931 a very long and trying journey finally brought the families to a place they could farm, own their own land, and live in houses they could call their own. The ancestral journey started out from Dago, an island near Estonia, to Moscow, then to an area north of the Black Sea along the Dnieper River. There they would settle and build up a village with their own church and school, houses and lots laid out in neat rows. They lived here for 148 years, and were happy in their village of Gammalsvenskby.

After the Russian Revolution broke out around 1917, violence and hunger caused huge problems and life changed dramatically for the Swedish Village. Finally, with the help of the Swedish Government, they were able to escape the chaos in 1929. By freighters, by train and by German boats they finally arrived in Sweden on August 1, 1929 at Jonkoping. They did casual work, but farmland was scarce.

In 1930 they met agents of Canadian Pacific Railway, who were looking for people to emigrate to Canada. Fortunately, families who left the Swedish Community in the 1800's were able to sign for them at Wetaskiwin, Alberta. Two groups of families left, arriving in Quebec and went by train to Wetaskiwin, where they remained for a year, again working for others, while searching for land of their own. Through the Colonization Board of Manitoba, they were able to locate a 3750-acre tract of land which they rented for a year. In 1932, their second year, the nine families agreed to purchase the land. They agreed to cooperatively and collectively farm this land for 22 years and then divided it into the farm and house sites we see today. They were greeted by the people who lived at Meadows, and were welcomed to the community.

The Meadows Community Hall was built and opened in 1928, and the "Camp families fully supported the Community Centre and took part in many of the events held there. The hall was moved and renovated in 1970. On one special occasion we were treated to songs by the Swedish families, the Mennonite families and the Dutch families. It was an evening to remember. The friendships and social evenings, where all people would gather, support one another and enjoy each others' company, were always memorable and truly Canadian.

Their church always held a special place in their hearts. When they left Gammalsvenskby they took their church bells with them. They are housed at the Roma Church in Gotland where the bells ring every year, on August 1st, the anniversary of their arrival to Sweden. The church bells may be housed in Sweden, but their Lutheran faith remained in their hearts. They held many services at the settlement, with a pastor from Winnipeg travelling out by train or car, depending on road conditions, to hold services every second Sunday.

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In later years, they travelled to Zion Lutheran Church in Winnipeg, which later became St. Mark's Lutheran Church. Here they made many special friends in their congregation.

Their rights to vote freely, and be politically involved, federally, provincially and municipally was a gift of freedom that was very precious to them.

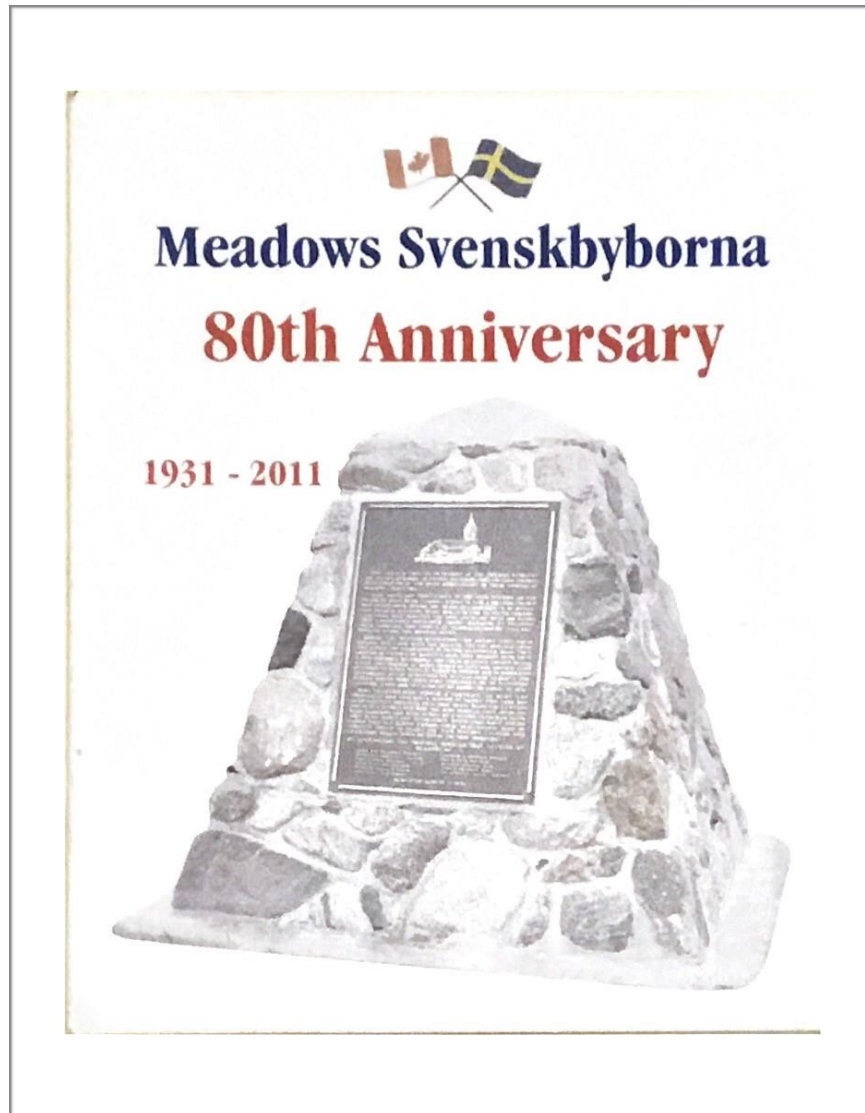


Over the years they celebrated many birthdays and anniversaries, always with tasty food, music and singing. In later years, they presented folk dancing and singing at the Scandinavian Pavilion at Folklorama in Winnipeg. Many helped to prepare food and often worked to support the pavilion as well.

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Stories and records of their unusual history are recorded in the Meadows Book, 70th Anniversary of Manitoba, the Rosser Municipal Book, The First 100 Years, and probably recorded and kept by the many families' generations.

In closing, we know the aroma and mouth-watering taste of a roaster of holopchi, served at many Meadows smörgåsbords and dinners, reminds us of a grateful people, who have after many miles travelled, with many trials along the way, found their home farms at last.



This cairn made from stones found on their farms, was built on the 80th year of their arrival in Meadows. It stands at the entrance way to the Camp Lane, just off highway 221. This cairn is engraved with a short history and remembers the original families who settled here.

by D. Norberg