

Swedish Educational League

*An Adult Education
Experiment In
Scandinavian Tradition*

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(Lake View Forum)

An Adult Education Experiment
in Scandinavian
Tradition

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F O R E W O R D

While many attempts have been made to transplant the ever popular Swedish lecture societies in American soil, the Swedish Educational League of Chicago seems to be the only organization of this kind which has met with more than temporary success. It has stood the test of time, serving its audiences without interruption for a generation. Because of this rather remarkable achievement the League feels justified, at this time, in presenting a historical review of its years of service. In so doing it wishes to underscore the fact that the organization has at all times tried to follow the Swedish pattern of treating the problems under discussion from a purely educational point of view. While subjects dealing with politics, labor, and even religion often are discussed, this is done only in order to acquaint the audience with the current views and trends in these fields. The organization as such never underwrites the opinion of its speakers. It limits itself to act as a clearing house for ideas of educational value.

Individual desire for information and willingness to share it with others is the foundation upon which the Swedish Educational League has been built, and it is in recognition of this worthy and truly constructive endeavor that these pages of review are presented.

The Editors.

Historical

Review



By Gunnar Adolfson



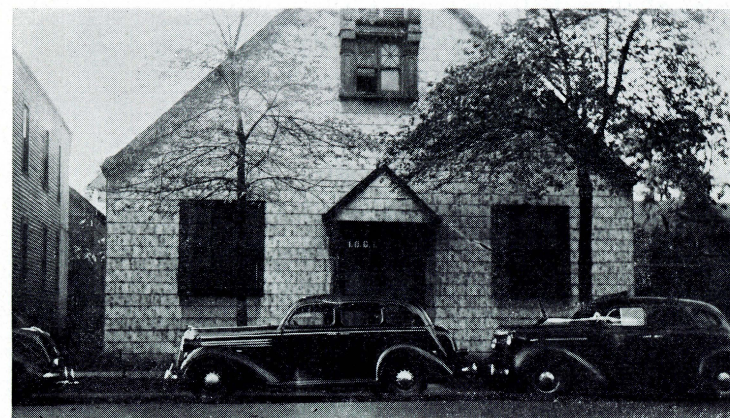
With the opening of its 1945-46 season the Swedish Educational League began its thirtieth consecutive year in the field of educational endeavors.

To write a history of its works and accomplishments presents several difficulties due to the scarcity or almost total lack of material in the form of records or correspondence. This fact can be traced to the lack of a permanent quarter for preserving records and other data. Practically all work has been carried on in various members' homes, and accumulated material, valuable to a historian, has been destroyed or lost.

However, some records are still available and a great fund of personal experiences and memories exist. It is mainly from a collection of these that the writer has to rely in shaping a short history of three decades, dedicated to the

furthering of education; an education aimed to give a better understanding of a world and its complexities, which we have the privilege of calling ours and of which we are a part.

The Swedish Educational League traces its origin to a small group of Swedish immigrants who, before their arrival in America, had experience in and had learned about the progressive thoughts and achievements in their homeland. They had learned and understood the value of knowledge and the necessity of a clearer understanding of the problems facing them before any efforts could be made to change old and worn out social patterns to comply with constantly new ideas, ideas more compatible to and more in accordance with new discoveries in science, ethics and related fields and the application of those ideas to the social structure. These pioneers also knew the importance of keeping their work and efforts free from imposing dogmas, and the dangers inherent in traditional thinking. They realized that this work must be kept free and unhampered from all forces that might cause it to stagnate in forms and fashions, dictated by rigid rules and regulations. Looking back after thirty years, we can clearly discern the wisdom of this fundamental rule, "Freedom." It is with great pride that we now can state, that, by following this rule of freedom, our organization has maintained its youth and vigor through all those years. In the kaleidoscopic picture presenting itself to the observer, who attempts to write a history of our work, this is the most refreshing and assuring evidence of the ultimate worth and value contained in a movement of this kind. It is also highly encouraging to note that a demand for freedom in thought and absence of fear in thinking and expression, has proven its worth as well as its unchallengable right throughout the world, where progress has made great strides as a result of great and fearlessly thinking pioneers.



I. O. G. T. Hall, S E L's first and present home.

It may be true that the men who initiated this work were mainly dreamers and visionaries, people who looked forward, but that combined with what they had seen and learned, prompted them on their way. A study of past activities, as well as the present, confirms the statement that all persons connected with maintaining this organization have been and are of the same type and quality.

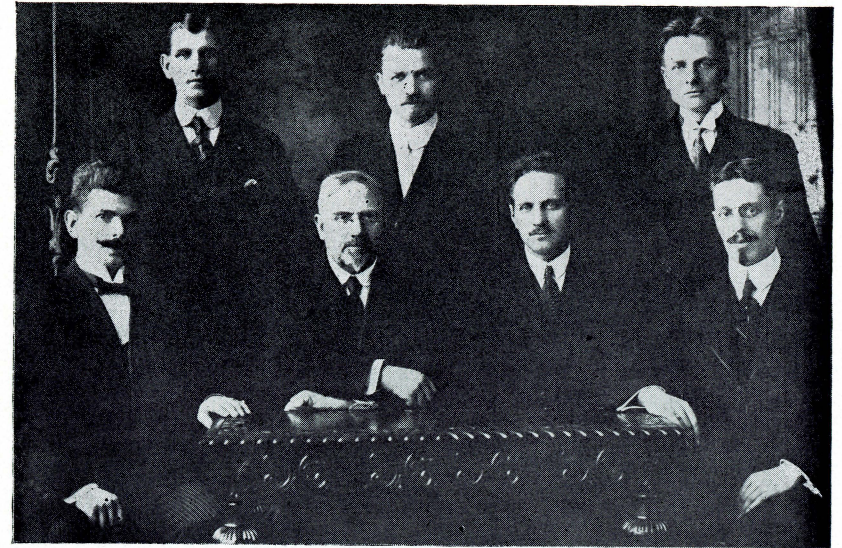
The first steps were taken within the International Order of Good Templars, the organization which originated the free and popular form of educational activities in Sweden at the beginning of this century. It was then only natural that attempts should be made to continue work here in the same direction, where many lodges were active with members transplanted from Sweden. Study circles existed in many lodges prior to 1915, which was the year when Lodge Jupiter's study circle announced its decision to enlarge its program with a series of lectures to be given at the Good Templars headquarters, 1041 Newport Avenue. The organ-

izers of these lectures were: Gust L. Larson, Ludvig Holmstrom, Nils Linnberg and Carl Person, with Dr. C. G. Wellenius as educational adviser.

Though this lecture series was organized within and under the sponsorship of the Good Templar Order, the lectures were open for the general public and attracted persons outside of that Order. The organizers were rewarded with a fair amount of success in their first attempt. With the addition of a number of sympathizers from outside their own lodges they decided to form a permanent and independent organization which they named *Svenska Studieförbundet*. The first officers were Aksel G. S. Josephson, librarian at the John Crearar Library, president; P. J. Berggren, inventor of the Spohr-Berggren movie camera, vice president; Gust L. Larson, secretary; and Ludvig Holmstrom, treasurer.

Encouraged by their initial success and endowed with a youthful spirit that acknowledged no difficulties too big for them, this new organization launched a rather ambitious program. They made contact with many colleges and other formal educational institutions in Chicago from which they obtained capable and popular speakers as well as advice when needed. Not even during the difficult years of the World War, and America's participation therein, did their efforts slacken. As the years went by, they soundly established themselves as a lecture forum with an important and challenging voice among people of Swedish descent in Chicago.

The real leader during these years was Gust L. Larson, the secretary of the organization. Besides his excellent performance as secretary he also established himself as a favored lecturer and teacher, particularly in his chosen field, literature. Besides Mr. Larson many of his fellow workers contributed both as lecturers and discussion leaders in addition to the willing and prompt execution of their duties as

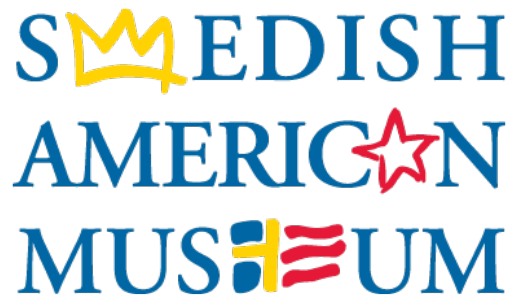


The first officers of Svenska Studieförbundet, now the Swedish Educational League, photographed thirty years ago. Left to right in the top row: Carl Swanson, director; Nils Linnberg, assistant secretary; Carl Person, director. Bottom row: Ludvig Holmstrom, treasurer; Aksel G. S. Josephson, president; the late G. L. Larson, secretary; P. J. Berggren, vice-president.

officers. Mr. Josephson, as president, proved to be an experienced pilot and a born diplomat in steering this young organization on its accepted course to freedom in thought and expression. Because of a physical affliction he was forced to step aside after four years of service.

Carl Skogsberg succeeded Josephson, and when his term ended John L. Andersson became president. He held the office in 1924-25.

Mr. Berggren followed him to the presidency and under his capable leadership for six years the organization became more stabilized both in its inner structure as well as in its growing reputation as a progressive forum.



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