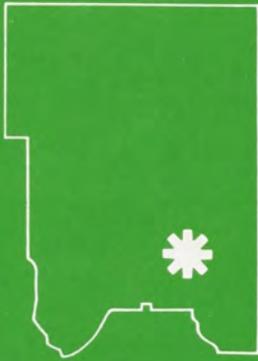


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ON THE COVER: St. Paul's Jackson Street Market about 1906. Located on Jackson between Tenth and Eleventh streets, the market, which opened in 1902, represented a major transformation in style and function reflecting new trends in transportation and economics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Photographs on the cover and on pages 5, 6, 7, 13, 15, and 19 are from the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. The photograph on page 16 is by Albert Munson, also from the Minnesota Historical Society collection. Photographs on pages 8, 9, and 10 are from the St. Paul Growers Association. The photograph on page 10 of the market demolition is by Rosemary J. Palmer, and those on pages 20 and 21 are from the collection of the Ramsey County Historical Society.

Swede Hollow: Sheltered Society For Immigrants to St. Paul

By Mollie Price

In 1849 the city of St. Paul was comprised of less than 900 residents. Eight years later the population had climbed to 10,000. This exceptional growth rate was not unusual for the late 19th century. It was paralleled in other thriving urban centers across the United States and was due to the tremendous influx of immigrants. With promises of wealth and land for the asking, railroad agents and immigration officials enticed Swedes, Poles, Irish, Italians, and others to emigrate to the land of opportunity. Europeans, dissatisfied with their homelands, were eager to believe assurances of a better life for themselves and their children, and thousands of them poured into American cities.

Upon arriving, many encountered a linguistic barrier instead. This barrier intensified nativist attitudes toward foreigners. Established city-dwellers resented the outsiders. Businesses promoted immigration as a source of cheap labor, yet ignored the newcomers socially. Recent historiography suggests that America, in proclaiming itself the "melting pot" of the world, took great pride in what was, in actuality, a myth. For many immigrants, adapting to a new culture became increasingly difficult. They sought security by associating themselves with others of their own cultural background. Well-defined and close-knit ethnic neighborhoods sprang up in every city with a large immigrant population.

His neighborhood was an immigrant's response to an impersonal society. It was a means to preserve the treasured values and traditions of his mother country. Sheltered by his neighborhood, an immigrant could make the transition to the American way of life at his leisure or adapt only to the extent

necessary to survive. For many families, cultural assimilation did not occur until the second or third generation.

SWEDE HOLLOW was an immigrant neighborhood in east St. Paul that was dominated by several ethnic groups throughout its more than 140 years of existence as a settlement. The history and lifestyle of the neighborhood's residents indicate that Swede Hollow was a true reflection of ethnic neighborhoods throughout the nation. Having difficulty in adapting to their new culture, immigrants were drawn to the little settlement with others of their own background. Living and working together, they maintained the values and traditions of their homeland. Many left Swede Hollow as soon as they accumulated some savings and a basic knowledge of the English language. By exposing them gradually to their new culture, the Hollow was a means of transition into American society. Others never left the neighborhood, content to let it isolate and protect them from the new land.

The history of the neighborhood and the ethnic groups which settled there begins at Lake Phalen where water flowing out of the lake forms Phalen Creek and Phalen Creek Valley. In the late 19th century the stream wound around swampland near Ames Creek, not far from Hazel Park. Continuing in and out of natural tunnels, it ran alongside the Omaha tracks heading west. After passing Hauser's field, where animals were kept, the stream traveled around Hamm's brewery near the corner of Payne and Minnehaha avenues. From there it dropped several feet and formed a pool. The overflow from the pool re-created the stream which coursed down through a large and narrow ravine, disappeared into the earth and eventually emptied into the Mississippi river. The ravine, with bluffs nearly seventy feet high at some points, was triangular in shape and bordered by Payne Avenue, East Seventh Street, and the St. Paul and Duluth railroad tracks. For almost 130 years, the ravine was the first home for many of St. Paul's immigrants, identified by the street address of "Phalen

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Mollie Price graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1978 with a B.A. in American History. She then worked for the Minnesota Historical Society coordinating the capitol tour program as historic site manager for the state capitol. Now corporate archivist for Control Data, she is responsible for preserving the firm's records and providing research and reference service for employees. Her paper on Swede Hollow was written as her senior thesis at the university. Her great-great-grandfather was a teamster for one of Hamm's brewery wagons.



Swede Hollow between 1912 and 1915. This photograph is looking north from East Seventh Street before Phalen Creek was enclosed.

Creek," the stream which flowed through the valley.

THE CREEK and the valley acquired their names from the first land claimant. In 1838 treaties with the Ojibway and Dakota Indians opened up land between the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers to white settlement. Edward Phelan, a recently discharged private from Fort Snelling, took advantage of the treaties and staked a claim near present-day Eagle and Kellogg Boulevard in downtown St. Paul. In the spring of 1838 he was joined by a fellow soldier, John Hays. Hays had some savings and the two men held personal property in common. Phelan, who was disliked by fellow soldiers, had a reputation for being avaricious and ruthless. Thus, when Hays' mutilated body was discovered in the river near Carver's Cave in September, 1839, Phelan was immediately charged with the murder.

After a brief stay at Fort Snelling, he was held for trial at Prairie du Chien, the county seat of Crawford County, Wisconsin territory, but a grand jury acquitted him due to insufficient evidence. Forsaking his earlier claim, Phelan staked a new claim on the site of the present Hamm's brewery. It proved to be a wise choice, for vegetation and wildlife were abundant, in addition to fresh water springs spouting from the sides of the bluffs.

Equally important, the ravine offered Phelan protection and isolation. In his reminiscence of the area, Nels M. Hokanson writes:

"When I try to imagine what the ravine looked like when Phelan first set foot in it, my mind always goes back to a little place in Wisconsin called Little Norway. Like Phalen Creek, it has a spring, stream, and high bluffs; its bluffs are covered with a luxuriant growth of trees and shrubs. Phalen Creek may have been just as beautiful."

The stream and the ravine soon came to be called Phalen Creek and Phalen Creek Valley, with the spelling corrupted over time. The advantages of the ravine soon became apparent to others. Hunters, trappers, and timber-scalers constructed cheap board shanties along the banks of the creek. Rabbit, squirrel, and partridge were readily available, as were wild duck, goose, and several varieties of fish. The inhabitants of the ravine kept in contact with other settlers by climbing the steep bluffs and making their way to Fort Snelling and the settlements around St. Paul's upper and lower steamboat landings.

In 1850 Phelan was charged with perjury

and escaped arrest by heading for California. Later, rumors reported that he was killed on the plains. Struck by gold fever, the remaining hunters and trappers made their way west in search of land and wealth. The rudely constructed shacks remained to form the foundation of a different type of settlement.

In the 1850s the landings along the river were crowded with steamboats as hundreds of immigrants disembarked in St. Paul. For many who were poor and spoke no English, facing a new country was a frightening experience. An article in an 1865 issue of the *St. Paul Daily* described the situation:

*"Three families of Swedes embracing thirteen persons in all, arrived in the city a few weeks ago, and are now in the most destitute circumstances. The baggage . . . belonging to them has been detained by certain railroad agents, for freight or passage, leaving them in a sad plight for weathering the storms of our rigorous winter . . . These distressed persons are all huddled in a vacant house on the other side of Trout Brook, and the charitably disposed should take measures to aid them during the coming winter."*²

Having no home awaiting them, many found the abandoned shacks in Phalen Creek Valley a quick and easy means of shelter. In addition, the ravine was a relatively inexpensive place to live. Residents were required to pay the city merely \$5 a month rent in lieu of land title and taxes.

The first ethnic group to establish themselves in Phalen Creek Valley, then, were the Swedes. They called their home "Svenska Dalen", or Swedish Dale or Valley, soon corrupted to Swede Hollow. Nels M. Hokanson lived in Swede Hollow as a boy. After several years, his family moved to Aitkin, Minn., yet he was old enough to remember the experience years later. His article, "I Remember St. Paul's Swede Hollow," is the best account of the neighborhood at the end of the 19th century, during Swedish settlement. The Swedes rehabilitated the old shanties and when necessary added extra rooms for children and relatives. Paying little regard to health and building regulations, they constructed outhouses set on stilts above the creek. As lumber was readily available, some residents built more substantial homes on the bluffs above the Hollow. Stilts supported the fronts of these houses, and the backs were built right into the slope. Several of these houses were large enough to shelter

two families. Sanborn's *Insurance Atlas* of 1885 and Donnelly's 1892 atlas show the Hollow as consisting of numerous one-story frame houses, with an occasional home which had one-and-a-half stories. Footbridges were built over the creek and a rough road was cleared to the streets above the bluffs.

THE SWEDES endeavored to make their neighborhood look as presentable as possible. Many houses were attractive homes, with porches, gardens, and white picket fences. Swedish families filled old discarded washtubs with dirt for planting flowers. The tubs were placed up against the hills to prevent erosion and served a decorative purpose. They were also placed around the outhouses to block the view. Swede Hollow was a difficult neighborhood to keep clean. The St. Paul and Duluth railroad roared along one edge of the ravine and the backs of tenements faced the opposite edge. It was not unusual for tenement residents to shake brooms and sweep refuse in the direction of the Hollow.

Living space became increasingly crowded as the immigrant population grew. Disregarding health measures, residents used Phalen Creek as a sewer, but visits by the health inspector were rare, and it was up to the Hollow to keep itself clean. Clean-up days were instituted from time to time. On a specified date, the men of the neighborhood worked together in attempts to improve the drinking water. Children were delegated the task of collecting broken glass, paper, and other debris, while women raked the garbage from the alleys.

In 1900 an issue of the *Svenska-Amerikanska Posten*, a popular Swedish-American newspaper published in Minneapolis, reported numerous complaints to the city health department of the stench emanating from Swede Hollow. The suggestion was made to construct a sewer from Minnehaha to Fifth Street, but an estimated cost of \$60,600, as reported by the paper, was seen as prohibitive. Before a second solution could be developed, rain washed away the accumulated dirt and improved the situation temporarily. However, the Hollow returned to its former unsanitary state in a short period of time.

UNABLE TO SPEAK the language and often unskilled, Swedish men were forced to take menial jobs doing pick and shovel work on the railroads. Of the men and women listed in R.L. Polk's 1885 *City Directory* as residing on Phalen Creek north of East



Four little girls on the railroad tracks that wound along above the Hollow. The Hamm mansion crowns the bluff in the background.

Seventh Street, 77 percent had the job classification of laborer; 14 percent were classified as having jobs requiring some skill and 8 percent had an occupation which did not fit into either category or had no occupation listed. This indicates the job limitations faced by Swedish immigrants who were notorious for being the "last hired and first fired."³ Although primarily housewives, Swedish women often supplemented the family income by taking in sewing or laundry. Nels Hokanson writes:

"Father climbed the long stairway each morning to work a ten-hour day on the streetcar tracks for one dollar. I understand he had obtained the job by bribing the Irish crew boss. Since additional income was needed, Mother too climbed those steps several times each week to do washing for families who lived in the big houses."⁴

Swede Hollow children were sent to a Swedish church for summer school. During the regular school year they were sent to Lincoln school on the corner of Collins and Bedford streets. When not in school, the children discovered their neighborhood had a number of amusements to offer. The pool formed by the creek below the brewery served as the local swimming hole. The caves which dotted the bluffs were not only fun to play in, but provided multi-colored sand which, when layered in glass bottles, could be sold for 1 to 5 cents a bottle. Boys would often hitch a ride on a slow-moving freight and take it all the way to Lake Phalen for a swim. Phalen Creek provided a place to wade and outhouses furnished a place to carve

one's initials.

Families were large and, although space was limited, many took in boarders. Most often boarders were family members: cousins, uncles, grandparents, bachelor brothers. Boarders generally paid 10 cents a day and shared in providing the meals. The 1885 *Polk City Directory* reports that 50 percent of all Swede Hollow wage-earners were boarders that year. However, Polk considered all working wives, sons, and daughters as "boarders" in a husband or father's household.

Records give no indication of any stores or businesses located within the Hollow. However, many existed along the streets overlooking the ravine. Alvin Johnson, an East-side resident, remembers Ted the Druggist, Miller the grocer, Erickson the butcher, McFadden's Confectionary, and Pete Larson's saloon. It is interesting to note that many of the private homes and businesses along these streets reserved their third floor for newly-arrived immigrants, illustrating the strong attitude of responsibility for others of similar backgrounds.

Perhaps the most influential business in the Hollow area was Theodore Hamm's brewing company. In earlier years, Hamm aged his beer in the hillside caves of Swede Hollow and peddled his product from place to place in a pushcart. Later the Hamm truck was pulled by a four-horse hitch of Percherons. The truck left the brewery at

four or five o'clock each morning and the sound of the hoofs on cobblestones served as a rude awakening for many of Swede Hollow's residents. In the years to come, men of the Hollow began working for the company as laborers and drivers.

LIFE CONTINUED in Swede Hollow very much the way it would have been lived in a small village in Sweden. A strong sense of community developed, based on Swedish values and traditions. Swedish was the predominant language spoken in the settlement. Residents continued to enjoy a favorite diet of potato sausage, pickled herring, flat bröd, and coffee. Coffee was a staple and a means of getting acquainted. Swedish women would call up to the brakemen of the St. Paul and Duluth Railroad: "skalle ha litte kaffe?" (would you like a little coffee?). This resulted in the railroad nickname of the "Skalle Line." Fresh water for drinking and household needs came from springs in the bluffs. Vegetables were peddled by a vegetable seller who pushed his wagon down into the Hollow on a daily basis. In the winter families would stay in at night, close to the wood-burning stove. Hokanson remembers:

"Sometimes he (father) sang folk tunes accompanied by his dragspel (accordion) which he kept under the bed. In the evenings friends often came to

*share the warmth, drink coffee, take snuff or smoke their curved Swedish pipes. Mother spun wool or knitted and listened to the talk from her place in a corner under a picture of King Oscar II of Sweden."*⁵

Discussion would follow on news issued by the *Svenska-Amerikanska Posten*.

A conscious effort was made to preserve tradition. All records and remembrances describe Swedish customs as being an integral part of daily life in the Hollow. On the other hand, history of the neighborhood leaves little mention of endeavors to adapt to the new society. Hokanson remembers his father and other men of the neighborhood having frequent discussions concerning better places to live and work. Those who wished to succeed in the new society attended night classes at Lincoln School to improve their knowledge of the English language. Once having conquered the linguistic barrier, they left the Hollow for better jobs or better homes.

AS THE DECADES passed, the population of Swede Hollow shifted. Census figures collected by the St. Paul Office of Elementary Education reveal that most of the Swedish residents moved from the Hollow be-

Swede Hollow about 1910, with Hamm's brewery in the background.



tween 1900-1910. By comparing the city directories of 1885 and 1895, one discovers that the majority of those who left the Hollow in that ten-year period moved to streets above the ravine: Bradley, Payne, Fauquier, York, Bedford. These streets made up an area which was predominantly Swedish. This indicates that although many moved on to better jobs they preferred to continue living in a neighborhood with others of similar background.

Sources which have stated that the first group of Irish moved into the Hollow in 1881, have confused the Hollow with nearby "Connemara Patch." Nels Hokanson writes of encounters with Irish boys but does not state that the Irish were his immediate neighbors. The settlers of "Connemara Patch" were a different group of Irish immigrants altogether, refugees from an experimental settlement in western Minnesota.

*"They were not directly immigrating to St. Paul, but instead were part of the radical, but ill-fated Connemara settlement of Bishop Ireland of St. Paul. Seeking to escape the famine and general overcrowding of their homeland, although none were farmers, all 'agreed' to come to the western prairie to attempt farming."*⁶

Bishop — later Archbishop — John Ireland's experiment failed due to the type of people he recruited from the Connemara district of Galway, Ireland. Maintaining the belief that the 300 Connemaras were thrifty, industrious, and farmers by nature, Bishop Ireland was convinced no problems would occur in settling the Connemaras on the prairies of western Minnesota. Much to his dismay, Ireland and other sponsors of the experiment soon discovered that the Irish they had recruited had no knowledge of farming whatsoever. The failure of the Connemara experiment was a great embarrassment for promoters of Irish colonization. Everything was done to assist the Irish families who became impoverished as a result of the project. In his study of the Connemara settlement, James P. Shannon writes,

"Ireland turned to the task of providing further help for the Connemara settlers. Since these unfortunate people had shown some eagerness to work for daily wages, and since the city of St. Paul was growing rapidly, it was agreed that they should give up their farms and look for work in the city. The bishop paid their transportation to St. Paul,

*and secured jobs for some of them with the railroad . . . Most of these settlers took up residence in what came to be known as the 'Connemara Patch' in St. Mary's parish on the flats along Phalen Creek."*⁷

Shannon's article includes a photograph entitled "The Connemara Patch." This same photograph is reprinted in Hokanson's article as "A northward view of the Hollow." It is necessary to point out that not a single wage-earner with an Irish surname is listed in the city directories as residing on "Phalen Creek north of Seventh"⁸ in the years 1885 or 1895. This suggests that the Irish never lived in the Hollow.

An explanation can perhaps be found in a letter written by Ernest Stromwell in the possession of Nels Hokanson. The letter mentions a "3rd and Commercial: Connemara Patch,"⁹ as being accessible to the Hollow. Third and Commercial refers to an intersection bordering on Phalen Creek, approximately four blocks south of Swede Hollow. Close proximity to the Hollow explains records of interaction between the Swedes and Irish. Third and Commercial, as the location of the Irish settlement, substantiates information reported in Polk's city directories.

IN 1882 a significant change occurred in the nature of immigration into St. Paul. Formerly, arrivals from southern and eastern Europe had numbered one-tenth of the total immigrant population. By 1882 eight-tenths of all incoming immigrants were Italians, Russians, Poles, Greeks, etc. The Poles were attracted by available railroad jobs and settled originally on the Upper Levee. A small number of families joined the Swedish and a few Italians in Swede Hollow at the turn of the century. Unfortunately, little is known of these families, as no records remain. By 1920 these Polish families appear to have left the Hollow and settled near the Swedes on streets above the bluffs.

In the early 20th century the Italians replaced the Swedes as predominant residents of the Hollow. Hundreds arrived by train rather than by steamboat, as had the earlier immigrants. Seeking relief from the tenements of New York, Italians traveled to Minnesota in the hopes of finding jobs and a small bit of land.

"It was a period when thousands of Italian immigrants got off the train in St. Paul. They all had tags on their

lapels and on each tag was written Joseph Yarusso, No. 2 Swede Hollow. My grandfather was often there to meet them, for he felt an obligation to see that these people should have a place to stay."¹⁰

In studying Swede Hollow during the years of Swedish settlement, one gains a sense of day to day life in the Hollow. In comparison, accounts of the neighborhood when Italian give one a sense of the spirit and vitality of the people. Gentile Yarusso, an East-side resident of St. Paul, has taken upon himself the task of historian for this period in Swede Hollow's history. Yarusso was a boy when he first experienced life in the Hollow. His grandfather, Joseph Yarusso, was one of the first Italian residents, living there as early as 1895. In several articles, Yarusso presents the "Italian" Hollow in nostalgic terms. His memories express an obvious love and a large degree of sentimentality. One learns only of the good, never the evil.

THE ITALIANS found Swede Hollow a comfortable place to live. Jobs were nearby and they were close to others from their homeland. They moved into the little homes vacated by the Swedes, adding on when necessary. Although residents did not own the land and continued to pay \$5 a month rent to the city, picket fences were put up around every home, set along imaginary property lines. The neighborhood took on an Italian flavor as vegetable gardens of zucchini, tomatoes, egg plant, and peppers were planted. Grape arbors were constructed, as were outdoor ovens for baking bread.

Families were quite large and in the manner of the Swedes took in boarders. Men were day laborers, some working for Hamm's. In contrast to Swedish women, Italian women yielded to tradition and rarely worked outside the home, despite a need for money. The children of the Hollow continued to attend Lincoln school up on the street. The school was as dilapidated as the area. In 1930 the St. Paul Welfare Council reported:

*"Lack of physical cleanliness. No backing from Dept. of Education on this. School building is oldest in city and has no gym, no auditorium, the roof leaks. There is no nearby playground, no nearby skating rink. It is a neglected area."*¹¹

An opposing viewpoint of Lincoln school is provided by Gentile Yarusso:

*"Lincoln School was located on a hill, it overlooked the many little streets in our small Eastside community and the old school acted as a sentinel, keeping watch over the little homes located in Swede Hollow . . . Our old school was not a work of art, it was not a building of great artistic integrity or charm, yet we people who attended the school were struck by a feeling of reverence for the old structure."*¹²

The city ignored Swede Hollow just as it ignored the school. Maintenance of the neighborhood was left to the concern of the residents and they managed as best they could without the conveniences enjoyed by people living in homes overlooking the Hollow.

Water was carried from the little streams which flowed from the bluffs. It was heated in large copper tubs placed on the hot lids of the old-fashioned kitchen stove. Ashes from the stove were placed in a metal container in the chicken house for the chickens to dust in during the winter, a harsh season for the Hollow. The settlement was often isolated from the rest of the world when the only road leading out of the Hollow was blocked by snow. Prior to winter's arrival, wood was chopped and piled against the family's out-house. Shelves were stocked with homemade preserves and canned vegetables. The potato bins were filled and sausage was prepared. The grape harvest was never plentiful, for not enough sun filtered down into the ravine. However, a few batches were produced and enjoyed by men during games of boccia or moda.

The neighborhood grocery store, the church, and the settlement house were the social centers of the community. Yarusso writes:

*"Very few of our people participated in outside neighborhood activities. Very few families in the neighborhood had automobiles so most of our people remained closely attached to community sponsored activities, and all nationalities got along very well together."*¹³

For a deeply religious people, the church was a mainstay. Festivals were a frequent occurrence and held on church grounds. A band of neighborhood musicians played continuously, as neighbors took their chance at games and booths. Children feasted on the usual carnival fare of popcorn, hot dogs, ice cream and, at these festivals, spaghetti. Money raised from numerous festivals enabled Italians from Swede Hollow and the



The Sixth Street bridge over Swede Hollow and Phalen Creek about 1900.

surrounding streets to purchase St. Ambrose Catholic Church for \$2,700 in 1918. Parades were held on religious holy days. A religious statue carried by six to eight men led the parade as it wound around the streets, ending at the front of the church for mass and benediction.

Studies conducted by the Office of Elementary Education in 1962 conclude that Italians began moving into the Hollow in the years 1905-1915. They remained throughout the 1920s, then began leaving toward the end of the decade. Yarusso remembers:

"Our little community, however, was not typical of most 'little Italys'... We were not crowded in large tenement houses, we had no pushcarts, we had no clothes lines extended from building to building... We people were happy, we dressed the same, spoke the same language, ate practically the same kinds of food, we were very emotional, we sang almost continuously, and yet, we cried, too."¹⁴

In such a neighborhood, traditions and customs were a way of life and easily preserved. The Italians reacted to American culture much as the Swedes had. Yarusso remembers his parents learning the English language only to satisfy the minimum requirements. It was of greater importance to learn how to count, rather than how to read or write. Drawing up the budget was a family affair. As the Italians left Swede Hollow they followed the trail left by the Swedes, and moved up the hill to Payne Avenue and other streets.

The last ethnic group to inhabit Swede Hollow were the Mexicans. In the 1920s, a lack of laborers willing to work the sugar

beet crop forced the industry to import Mexicans. The 1930 St. Paul census listed 628 Mexican residents. By 1935 this number had increased to 1,500 and it had reached 2,000 by 1940. "Dozens of destitute families rapidly filled all that was left of the very worst houses in the city."¹⁵ From 1930 to 1956, Swede Hollow was the home of many Mexican families. Beyond this, little is known of this era in the history of the neighborhood.

A PROJECT TO redevelop St. Paul's East-side was proposed in the early 1950s. It resulted in the 1956 investigation of Swede Hollow. Health officials were amazed to find a situation which had been ignored for a hundred years. Sixteen families made up of eighty-five persons lived in thirteen houses. These homes had no sewer or water facilities. Water obtained from the springs was found to be contaminated and the outhouses which had lined Phalen Creek for years were declared a health hazard. It is of interest to note that the *St. Paul Dispatch* described the health department as astonished that residents lived in Swede Hollow because they liked it, not because of the cheap rent of \$5 a month.

Five of the sixteen families moved on to buy \$16,000 homes. On December 11, 1956, the St. Paul Fire Department dumped gasoline into the ravine and set Swede Hollow afire. What remained of the original shacks, grape arbors, and white picket fences blazed out of existence.

Memories of a place once lived in is the best history of any neighborhood. Written accounts by former residents describe in

detail people, customs, events, and a way of life, something strict historical data cannot provide. However, in researching the history of a neighborhood, fact must accompany reminiscence to make a complete study. Difficulties arise at this point, for fact is often hard to come by. When available, it often contradicts the remembrances of former residents. Such is the case with Swede Hollow, a neighborhood especially difficult to study, since it was officially ignored by the city.

PLAT MAPS of St. Paul offer the first approach to historical fact. The stream running through the ravine was called McCloud's Creek, according to Nichol's *Map of the City of St. Paul — 1851*. In 1857 it appears as Phalen's Creek in the *Map of the City of St. Paul*, published by Goodrich and Somers. The *Sanborn Insurance Atlas of St. Paul — 1885*, lists the creek as Trout Brook, in reality a separate stream running through the same area but west of Phalen Creek and roughly parallel to it. Finally Donnelly's 1892 *Atlas of the City of St. Paul* lists it as Phalen Creek, with the surrounding area labeled in capital letters as Swede Hollow.

Nels Hokanson remembers approximately thirty to forty families living in the Hollow in 1885. Sanborn's atlas shows only fifteen frame structures, while Polk's 1885 *City Directory* lists approximately 200 wage-earners (excluding non-working wives, children, and other family members) dwelling in fifty-five numbered houses "from Seventh n. to Payne av. between St. P. & D. R.R. and Hoffman av."¹⁶ Donnelly's atlas shows 108 structures, while Polk's 1895 *City Directory* lists 180 wage-earners living in eighty-two numbered houses.

THE PROBLEM OF accuracy is compounded when one realizes that the numbering system in Swede Hollow followed no logical pattern. House numbers were assigned randomly, with the lower numbers at the south end of the Hollow near Seventh street and the high numbers near the north end at Payne. In addition, house numbers often changed from year to year. The problems involved become obvious when studying this data. It is difficult to come to any conclusions concerning number of residents and number of dwelling places when faced with these inconsistencies.

In studying a ten-year period, using the Polk directories for 1885 and 1895, changes can be seen regarding residents and boarders. Half the 200 wage-earners listed in 1885 were residents of the Hollow, and half were listed

as boarding there. In 1895, the percentage of boarders had decreased to 40 percent, in comparison with the total number of wage-earners. This perhaps indicates a trend toward increased reliance and self-sufficiency, to the extent that wage-earners, once having established themselves in a job and accumulated a small amount of capital, could take on the responsibility of rent and "reside" in a house, rather than "board."

A rough estimate can be made of the rate of mobility within the Hollow. In the ten-year period from 1885 to 1895, Swede Hollow was filled with Johnsons, Olsons, Petersons, etc. Polk's directory often lists ten John Johnsons, without an identifying initial after the first name. Some names can be directly traced ten years later. Other, more common names, present a problem. Clues cannot be found in house numbers, as they were unpredictable. When comparing the more common names a solution can possibly be found in the number of each name listed for a given year. For example, if five John Johnsons were listed in 1885 and only two in 1895, this suggests that three John Johnsons left the Hollow. If the two J. Johnsons listed in 1895 match two of the five J. Johnsons listed in 1885 in occupation and in close proximity of housing, one can assume that two John Johnsons remained in the neighborhood. This method does not take into account death or retirement of an 1885 wage-earner whose children are listed in the 1895 directory. Using these haphazard calculations and allowing for error, one still arrives at surprising results. In 1895 fifty-three out of an 1885 total of 200 wage-earners remained in Swede Hollow. In other words, in a ten-year period Swede Hollow experienced a high rate of mobility of approximately 74 percent.

IN 1962 THE OFFICE of Elementary Education conducted a study which resulted in the publication of a book entitled, *Essential Information about St. Paul*, and a valuable source for anyone researching immigration history. Maps of St. Paul are included which use census data to pinpoint dominant ethnic groups throughout the city. There are three maps, prepared at ten-year intervals: 1910, 1920, and 1930.

These maps are useful tools in determining the changing ethnicity of Swede Hollow, the rate of mobility, and the path of movement residents took. By using additional sources in conjunction with these maps, one can identify a change when it occurred in the neighborhood. Information suggests that the Swedes

occupied the settlement from the 1850s to approximately 1910. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries a small number of Polish and Italian families moved into the neighborhood. The Poles arrived earlier and in larger numbers than the Italians. From 1910 to 1915 a change began to occur as the Swedes began leaving and more Italians moved in. Polish families stayed for some years. About 1920 Swede Hollow had reached a point where the Italians dominated. This continued for a decade. Toward the end of this period, the Italian residents began leaving and another change occurred as Mexican families, the last ethnic group to inhabit the ravine, moved in.

The maps are also valuable in determining the direction ethnic groups took, once they reached the top of the bluffs. Census figures indicate that most settled on streets overlooking the Hollow. As each subsequent group moved from Swede Hollow, the established group was pushed farther out and away from the ravine. It is essential to note that the majority of Swede Hollow residents continued to settle with each other and others

of similar cultural background, once leaving the Hollow.

IN THE 1960s the ravine was ignored and allowed to grow wild. Although the creek had been piped underground, the appearance of the Hollow reflected a time when Edward Phelan's shack sat on the northern hill. In the early 1970s many found the ravine an ideal place for dumping trash, including the state highway department which dumped 300 discarded concrete pillars from the old lights on



The Hollow today, now a nature center created through the efforts of Eastside residents, the city of St. Paul, and the St. Paul Garden Club. At right, railroad-tie steps climb the steep bluff.



1-94. Angered Eastside residents forced the issue on the city and the city (facing upcoming elections) responded. Through the efforts of Eastside residents, the city, and the St. Paul Garden Club, Swede Hollow was dedicated as a nature center in October, 1976. Nels Hokanson, now in his eighties, arrived from California to celebrate with other Eastside residents.

Swede Hollow existed as a settlement for almost 150 years. Its shacks and little cottages were inhabited in a time when more comfortable and modern homes were being constructed on the streets up on the bluffs. Bread was baked in outdoor ovens and vegetables grown in backyard gardens, when a grocery store was within walking distance. The creek served as sewer, springs furnished drinking water, and electricity was unknown, in a time when such conveniences were taken for granted elsewhere. Why did Swede Hollow and other immigrant settlements across the country continue to exist when competing against American comforts and invention? Gentile Yarusso provides his own answer:

"We children often wondered why our people chose this enchanted place to settle in. Why not somewhere else? As we got older we knew; they chose this place because they were with their own countrymen, with familiar faces, family noises, gestures, facial expressions. They selected this enchanted landscape because it resembled the place they had left behind. They loved the hills, the trees, the stream, the security of friends and relatives."¹⁷

Tradition was a way of life in Swede Hollow. It was the basis for existence. Immigrants of similar background banded together in forming a community which preserved the values and customs of their homeland. In doing so they gave each other a sense of security; a sense of belonging in a new society which often was less than hospitable.

For many, adapting to American society was a difficult step. By rejecting modern American conveniences, Swede Hollow residents were, to a degree, rejecting the culture which promoted them. Records suggest that the first generation rarely made the transition. Most acquired only a minimum knowledge of the English language and many had jobs which did not require its usage. Community activities were confined to the neighborhood, with minimal contact with the surrounding city. Hokanson admits he knew

little of what the world was like behind the brewery.

The second and third generations adapted where their parents could or did not. Educated as children at Lincoln school in the ways of their new country, they grew up to achieve better jobs than their parents. Desiring the American comforts their parents avoided, they moved from the Hollow, only to be replaced by others. Yet, census figures indicate that the move was not a significant one. Residents left one ethnic community to form another on the streets bordering the bluffs.

Gentile Yarusso writes: "Too many don't know the legacy of the past. When this happens we lose a source of memories."¹⁸ Memories of Swede Hollow survive today. Its legacy is the Eastside community of people, varied in background, but common in their commitment to a past begun along a swift-moving stream, in a deep and narrow ravine.

Footnotes

1. Nels M. Hokanson, "I Remember St. Paul's Swede Hollow," *Minnesota History* 41 (Winter 1969): 363.
2. "Distressed Families," *St. Paul Daily Press*, 14 October 1865.
3. "Swede Hollow Stands Proud Again," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 16 October 1976.
4. Hokanson, *op. cit.*, p. 368.
5. Hokanson, *op. cit.*, p. 371.
6. Polly Nyberg and Jerome Betts, "Swede Hollow: A Community's Love Affair With Its Past," *Common Ground* 3 (Fall 1974): p. 6.
7. James P. Shannon, "Bishop Ireland's Connemara Experiment," *Minnesota History* 35 (March 1957): p. 213.
8. *St. Paul City Directory — 1885-1886*, R.L. Polk, ed., p. 160.
9. Ernest Stromwell to Nels M. Hokanson, 1968, Nels M. Hokanson Papers, Minnesota Historical Society: Archives and Manuscript Division, St. Paul, Minn.
10. Nyberg and Betts, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
11. Nyberg and Betts, *op. cit.*, p. 7-8.
12. Gentile Yarusso, "La Scola Lincoln," unpublished manuscript, 1973, Minnesota Historical Society: Archives and Manuscripts Division, p. 1.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
14. "An American Newcomer — The Italians," unpublished manuscript, 1973, Minnesota Historical Society: Archives and Manuscripts Division, p. 2.
15. Office of Elementary Education, *Essential Information about St. Paul*, Publications no. 90, 1962, p. 52.
16. R.L. Polk, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
17. Nyberg and Betts, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
18. Yarusso, *op. cit.*, "La Scola Lincoln," p. 1.



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THE GIBBS HOUSE

at 2097 West Larpenteur Avenue, Falcon Heights, is owned and maintained by the Ramsey County Historical Society as a restored farm house of the mid-nineteenth century period.

The Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. Its chief function is to collect and preserve the history of the city and the county and share that history with the people who live here. The Society is the county's historian. It preserves those things from the past that are the community's treasures — its written records through the Society's library; its historic sites through establishment of the Irvine Park Historic District and its successful efforts to help prevent destruction of the Old Federal Courts Building, now Landmark Center. It shares these records through the publishing of its magazine, brochures, pamphlets, and prints; through conducting historic sites tours of the city, teaching classes, producing exhibits on the history of the city, and maintaining its museum on rural county history. The Gibbs Farm Museum, the oldest remaining farm home in Ramsey County, was acquired by the Society in 1949 and opened to the public in 1954 as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler. In 1966 the Society moved onto the property a one-room rural country schoolhouse dating from the 1870s. Now restored to the period of the late 1890s, the school is used for classes, meetings, and as the center for a summer schoolhouse program for children.

Society headquarters are located in Landmark Center, an historic Richardsonian Romanesque structure in downtown St. Paul, where it maintains the center's only permanent exhibit, a history of the building during the seventy-five years it was the federal government's headquarters in St. Paul.

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