

Minnesota Swedes

Those who believe that Swedish immigrants settled in Minnesota because it reminded them of the Old Country might be shocked to learn that some of these same immigrants left their recently established homes and farms and ventured to a place totally unlike either Sweden or Minnesota—the Caribbean island of Cuba. There, during the first decades of this century, they established a Swedish-American settlement that had direct ties to Minnesota. While the complete story of the colony's 15 or so years may never be entirely reconstructed, it is possible to piece together a mosaic from recollections, photographs, and other documents from the descendants of the original settlers.¹

A major portion of the mosaic pictures the founder of the settlement, an entrepreneurial doctor from Minneapolis named Alfred Lind. Visiting Cuba early in 1904, he became so enamored of the island that he began to envision a community there for his fellow Swedish Americans. In anticipation of that goal, he took an option on a tract of land in eastern Cuba located on the Cauto River at Bayate, midway between the ports of Santiago on the south and Antilla on the north.²

Lind was one of a number of North Americans who got caught up in “development fever” after Spain relinquished control of Cuba as a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898. Previously, U.S. influence had been concentrated in the island's central and western regions. After the war, efforts at developing Cuba's agricultural potential shifted to the easternmost provinces then referred to as Santa Clara, Camaguey, and Oriente. United Fruit Company had purchased 200,000 acres near Antilla by 1900 and established a sugar mill the following year. A second sugar mill in Oriente opened in 1901, this one under the aegis of Texas Congressman R. B. Hawley. To speed eastern Cuba's development,

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Raising Cane

MARILYN McGRIFF



Minnesota colonists at the hotel in Bayate, Cuba, flanked by prominently displayed Swedish and American flags, about 1908

Canadian magnate William Van Horne completed the Cuba Railroad in December 1902 connecting Santiago and Havana.³

Lind's rationale for the Swedish-American settlement stemmed from observations made during his years as a doctor. The largest part of his practice, he wrote, had dealt with "restoring his fellow countrymen who had become broken down through work and the harsh climate." He had often thought about finding a "utopia" where tired-out patients could benefit from a warm, healthful climate. He looked upon Cuba as a new frontier that offered, as well, an opportunity to acquire cheap, fertile land that was sure to appreciate greatly in value. The tropical climate would allow crops to be planted all year round, and the bountiful harvests could be easily sold to the United States. Lind admitted that the idea for such a settlement was an experiment, as "we Swedes are generally not interested in the South because we associate it with fevers, unbearable heat, poisonous snakes and every possible evil." The doctor was apparently unaware of a substantial Swedish settlement in Texas and of Swedish emigration to Brazil and Argentina.⁴

In appealing to Swedish Americans, Lind wanted to establish a settlement where the members' common cultural markers such as language, religion, and traditions would allow for an easier transition to a new milieu and offer the security of a shared heritage. At the same time, each settler could live independently on a parcel of land, cooperating with others as need be. To promote the settlement and facilitate land sales, Lind in 1904 established the Swedish Land and Colonization Company with headquarters in the Andrus Building on Nicollet Avenue in downtown Minneapolis, the same location as his doctor's office and his brother Erland's law office.⁵

These two men, along with another brother, August, a farmer in Winthrop, had come from the small village of Tråvad in Västergötland, Sweden. Alfred, the middle brother, born in 1862, had emigrated first, arriving in Minnesota in 1880. He first located at St. Peter, where he worked and lived for 10 years, earning enough money to attend Gustavus Adolphus College. He then enrolled in medical school at the University of Minnesota. In addition to establishing a private medical practice, he was one of the founders of the Swedish Hospital in Minneapolis.⁶

Active also in the Lutheran church, Lind appealed to the Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Synod for an endorsement of his colonization efforts in March 1904. This endorsement allowed him to promote the Cuban settlement as "Swedish Lutheran" in advertisements placed in the synod's weekly publication, *Augustana*. Despite the "Lutheran" tag, it does not appear that religious zeal was a motive for establishing the settlement. Lind simply said that he wanted "our people to feel at home both in respect to church and social life."⁷

Lind then convinced a number of personal friends and relatives to invest in the purchase of the tract that he had optioned. Among the 14 original subscribers were his brother August and his father-in-law Alfred J. Johnson of Axtell, Nebraska, who put up \$7,500 and \$12,500, respectively. Investors were assured that they would realize handsome profits once the land, purchased for \$2.50 an acre, was divided into parcels of 40 to 80 acres and sold to colonists at prices of \$20 to \$25 an acre. Nowhere is there any mention of who was selling the land to the colonization company, but accounts of Cuba's formative years indicate that many estates formerly held by Spanish land barons became available after the Spanish-American War.⁸

WHILE THE PHYSICAL LAYOUT of the settlement is difficult to reconstruct completely, it is clear that by the fall of 1905 the community of Bayate was beginning to take shape. Because of its location on Cuba's so-called frontier, conditions were quite primitive. Roads and bridges had to be built, houses erected, and commercial enterprises started—all in addition to developing the farmland. Within a few months Lind had a hotel-and-boarding house and a store built. He managed both while welcoming new settlers and handling the land transactions.⁹



Back in Minneapolis, the Swedish Land and Colonization Company continued to promote the enterprise through vigorous advertising efforts and by offering frequent excursions to Cuba. To reach the new Swedish-American colony, prospective colonists journeyed by train to New York and then by ship along the eastern seaboard to Santiago. Another short train ride brought the traveler to the railroad station at Bayate. The price of the excursions was listed as \$45.10 from Minneapolis, but if several persons joined to purchase more than 400 acres, the one chosen as the representative would get a free round trip.

An advertisement in *Augustana* for February 1906 indicates that there were “about 70 Swedes” in the colony, and one in the next month claimed that “about half of the land has been sold.” Promotional pamphlets and advertisements naturally gave glowing accounts of the settlement. Photographs showed lush vegetation ranging from pineapples to tobacco to tomatoes. The promotions also highlighted the contrasts to life in the North: Raising livestock—hogs, cattle and chickens—would be much more profitable, since the animals could forage outside all year and needed little shelter. In addition, there was a ready market for the meat. While land had to be cleared in Cuba, the method was declared simpler than in Minnesota. In Cuba one cut away the vines, bushes, and undergrowth with a machete, chopped down the trees, then burned everything where it fell and planted in between the stumps without even plowing. Houses could be built of “single board walls which are painted both inside and out so the house appears tidy.”¹⁰

Lind offered some caveats, however, regarding the need for hard work and a fair amount of ambition. The doctor, described in a biographical sketch as having a “seemingly inexhaustible fund of mental and physical energy,” advised those



Dr. Alfred Lind, founder of the Swedish-American colony at Bayate

who were thinking of joining the colony: “One who never worked and never had good luck elsewhere will not be satisfied even in Cuba. One gets only rain, sunshine and fresh air free—and good land cheap. Then one has to shape his good fortune through work and thrift. Those who don’t want to work won’t progress in any area.”¹¹

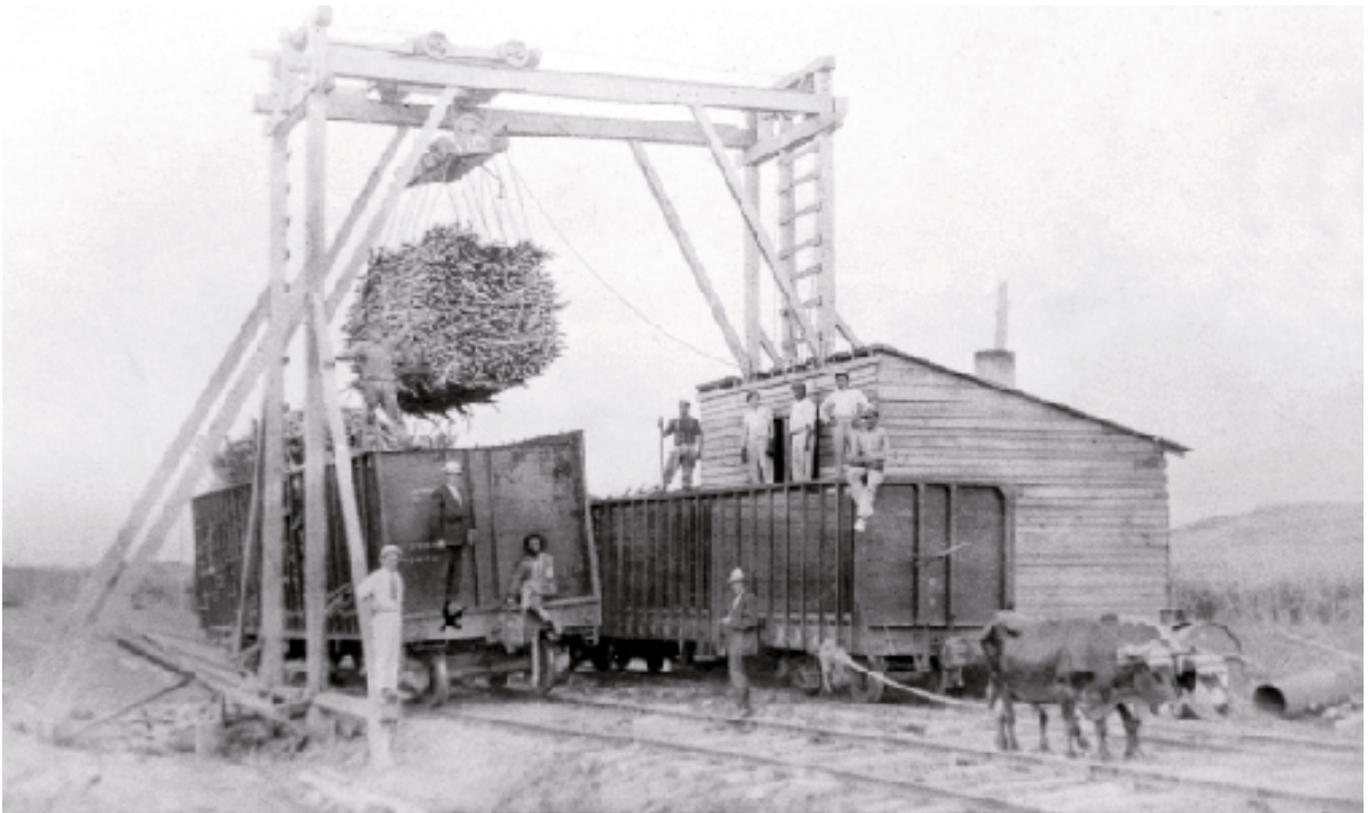
Lind contrasted such “work and thrift” to local practices: “One can have a lifestyle of the Cubans without any real work, and since it is more pleasant to sit in the shade and enjoy a good cigar than to work, so the native Cuban in general produces nothing for market.” Clearly, the Swedish-American colony was set to a different course. Producing commodities for the U.S. market was to be the main goal, but at the same time the colon-

ists could live well from the bountiful array of fruits and vegetables grown easily and continuously on their land.¹²

The information conveyed through 27 testimonial letters published in one of the colonization company’s promotional pamphlets reveals that the settlers represented a wide range of ages and backgrounds. There

In Cuba, Swedish Americans built dwellings raised slightly above ground and featuring generous verandas.





Crane devised by J. P. Johnson to facilitate loading sugar cane

were young single men, families with small children, and even retired people. Some had been well established in their endeavors in the United States and were looking for yet another adventure, and some, disillusioned with the lot that had been cast them in the “new land,” were eager to try their luck elsewhere. Others who were still transient in the United States looked upon Cuba as one more place to sample before they established permanent roots. With few exceptions, the participants were Swedish immigrants who had attained American citizenship. The few who went directly from Sweden to Cuba had a family member already there. Minnesota sent the largest representation to the settlement, but at least two families from South Dakota and several from North Dakota participated as well.¹³

In addition to Alfred Lind, a number of other leading characters have emerged from the accounts and recollections. One prominent colonist was J. P. Johnson, a farmer from Cambridge. One of a three-member scouting committee chosen by the original investors, he had traveled to Cuba in the summer of 1905 to

report on the area’s potential for settlement. His family was among the first group of colonists that Lind escorted to Bayate the following November.¹⁴

Johnson had been somewhat disillusioned with life in the “new land” of Minnesota. The winters there, he found, were even more severe than in his home province of Jämtland, and then his wife, Martha, became quite ill. Martha Johnson had met Dr. Lind when she underwent surgery at a Minneapolis hospital. After Lind’s suggestion that a warmer climate might help her and J. P.’s positive review of Bayate, the family of two adults and ten children, ranging in age from two to twenty, decided to give up their Minnesota farm and move to Cuba. Unfortunately, Mrs. Johnson died en route and was buried at Rochester, New York.¹⁵

Johnson prospered in Cuba. One of the stalwarts of the Bayate community, he was chosen chairman of the first town council. He set up a blacksmith shop and a sawmill and is credited with devising a crane for hoisting bundles of sugar cane into railroad cars for transport to the refinery. He was also an avid spokesperson for the colony, writing frequent letters to Swedish-

American newspapers extolling its virtues. As his children grew to adulthood, they married other colonists, thus linking the Johnsons to many of the other families.

Another notable colonist was John August Nystrom, who had emigrated from Uppland, Sweden, in 1902 at the age of 26. He worked in Massachusetts until 1905 when, in company with two other Swedish Americans, he traveled to Cuba. They soon discovered the fledgling community of Bayate, where they found work constructing the roads and bridges. Nystrom married Johnson's oldest daughter, Christine.¹⁶

Nystrom had a variety of skills that were put to good use in Cuba. As a surveyor, he was assigned the task of dividing the land into 40-acre parcels. He was interested in beekeeping and by mid-1906 had already established 300 colonies of bees. (A testimonial letter credited him with introducing to Cuba the beekeeping system that utilizes hive boxes with removable frames.) Nystrom helped establish a cemetery when the first death occurred in the colony (one of his Massachusetts companions died from dysentery in 1906), and he was also instrumental in organizing a school. An avid photographer, he took most of the photographs that have been preserved of the colony. In later life he also wrote down his memories, which were published by the American Swedish Historical Foundation in the mid-1950s.

A fourth leading character is Fritz Peterson, who had emigrated from the Bergum parish in western Sweden in the 1880s. He settled first in North Dakota, where his wife died in childbirth. He heard about the new colony in Cuba while working at Fosston, Minnesota, and he traveled to Bayate with his friend Oscar Olson in 1905. Peterson first found work with a German engineer constructing a secondary railroad in the area, and from his earnings he was able to purchase a parcel of land. He also discovered one of J. P. Johnson's daughters, Bessie, and married her in 1910. They had five children in Cuba. By continually adding to their land holdings, the Petersons realized great financial success and became an example of what the colony hoped to accomplish.¹⁷

THE COLONISTS' EXPERIENCES, particularly their motives for moving to Cuba, indicate that these Swedish Americans were, in many ways, typical immigrants. "Push" and "pull" factors caused them to venture to a new milieu that contrasted dramatically with their previous residences. Their testimonial letters, published in promotional pamphlets, are akin to the so-called America letters written by immigrants to encourage friends, neighbors, and relatives to join them in a dis-

tant land. However, the colonists' move to Cuba contrasts with both their own earlier migrations and the typical immigrant experience, as well. They did not seek to become citizens of Cuba but, rather, retained their American citizenship. The proximity of Cuba to the United States allowed the colonists to travel back and forth more easily than they could between the United States and Sweden. Some of the younger people returned to Minnesota for their education, while others enlisted in the U.S. Army, particularly during World War I. Some made trips to the United States to purchase supplies, and at least one couple, S. P. and Anna Anderson, first spent winters only in Bayate, returning to their farm in Cambridge for the rest of the year.

Coinciding with Lind's efforts at Bayate were other colonization attempts in Cuba. A Lutheran pastor, Carl Henderson of Warren, Pennsylvania, was promoting a Swedish-Lutheran colony in the Mayarí River valley a few miles northeast of Bayate. His advertisements for the Palma Lutheran Colony were also published in *Augustana* in the fall and winter of 1905, but they disappeared after April 1906, and there is no evidence that his colony ever materialized.

At least three other Cuban settlements were promoted to Swedish Americans. Advertisements in Chicago's *Svenska Amerikaneren Tribunen* in late 1905 and throughout 1906 featured the San Claudio Land Company near Havana with Olof Zetterlund in charge. Also in 1905, the *Duluth Posten* carried ads for the Cuba Land Company, headquartered in the Torrey building in Duluth, and classified ads appeared in *Minnesota Stats Tidning* for an agent to sell five-acre plantations through the Cuba Colonial Company managed by D. E. Kerr in Camaguey. In addition, a Norwegian-American colony in eastern Cuba's Baracoa area had at least 80 participants. Another Norwegian, Andreas Lindelie, had emigrated from Norway to North Dakota before moving to Cuba where he farmed independently. He later joined the Swedish Americans at Bayate.¹⁸

Because of these other colonization efforts, the Minneapolis-based company's promotional literature urged Swedish Americans to investigate the Bayate settlement first. Its location was reported to be ideal—high and well-drained—it had firm financial footing, and it was represented by ethical developers.¹⁹

John Nystrom's testimonial of July 1906 gave some background to the efforts to establish colonies in Cuba.

The land seldom belongs to the Cubans who live on it, but to either a powerful city dweller or some American firm which has bought land here for

speculation. Then they sell it in small parcels and set up colonies on it. Our colony is different from those of the Americans in certain respects; it isn't built from one man's money or in the interest of a single "big shot," but we all work for the same goal—freedom and prosperity for us and our children.

That Nystrom, a U.S. citizen, differentiated himself from "the Americans" indicates that he was more comfortable identifying with his ethnic group. If, as he suggested, the Bayate colony had a more noble goal than other colonization efforts, it nevertheless played a role in bringing outside influence to a country that was struggling for autonomy.

Advertisement promising good farmland in Cuba, the land of eternal summer, from *Augustana*, June 14, 1906

BECAUSE THE BEGINNINGS of the colony coincided with Cuba's turbulent formative years as an independent republic, the political situation was certainly a concern for prospective colonists. Advertisements in *Augustana* in 1906 offered assurance that "our government has now showed that revolutions and disturbances won't happen in Cuba and that life and property is protected much like it is in the United States." This statement undoubtedly referred to the U.S. intervention earlier that year, when Cuban president Tomás Estrada Palma, recently elected to a second term, had requested American aid to quell the growing number of insurrectionists within the country. A clause in the so-called Platt Amendment, which Cuba was forced to accept in 1901, had granted the United States authority to intervene for the "preservation of Cuban independence and the maintenance of a stable government." In his testimon-

ial letter in 1907, Fritz Peterson wrote, "We find the [Cuban] people peaceful and entirely hospitable. . . . there are greater concerns in little towns in Minnesota on the day in the spring when the workers come in from the lumber camps than I have seen during the two and a half years I have been here."²⁰

Others expressed the view that Cuba would soon be annexed to the United States. Lind predicted that the island would then "experience a boom like America itself has never seen." He compared eastern Cuba to the Mississippi River valley during the 1850s, but he said that because of Cuba's small area, "development and increase in land values will happen much faster." As one who had already seen an increase in Bayate from \$25 an acre to \$50 (from 1905 to 1907), J. P. Johnson thought that prices could rise as high as \$500 an acre when Cuba was annexed to the United States. Colonists also believed that annexation would allow for the removal of the high taxes imposed on imports and exports—one of the main sources of income for Cuba's economy during the republic's formative years.²¹

While annexation never occurred and the overly optimistic predictions for Cuba's economic future were not realized, the Swedish-American population at Bayate did increase rather quickly. Promotional efforts were strongest when the colony was beginning, and the literature indicated that

"about 200 Swedes" were living there in 1909. There was a fair amount of fluidity, however, with folks moving in and out, making it difficult to determine the exact number of participants. No census records exist in Cuba to offer more concrete documentation of the colony's numbers. From nonpromotional sources such as letters and reminiscences, it has been possible to document about 125 Swedes or Swedish Americans who lived at Bayate over the course of time. The colony no doubt had its largest population before 1912.²²

One distinctive impression of the colony that emerges from the mosaic is the tri-cultural nature of the settlers' experience, perhaps best demonstrated through their use of language. To communicate with the larger community, the colonists had learned English in the United States, but they retained their native Swedish for use among themselves. All of the



Colonists at the home of Cuban neighbors (at right), several miles from Bayate. Tobacco plants grow in the foreground and young orange trees are behind them; a typical Cuban house is at far right.

colony's promotional literature was written in Swedish with English and Americanisms creeping in for words that could not be easily translated (such as pineapple, banana, or acre). In Cuba they continued to speak Swedish—the language they were most comfortable with—but learned Spanish in order to communicate with their new neighbors. When a school was established in Bayate as early as 1907, the students learned both Spanish and English.²³

The technology and machinery that the colonists introduced to Cuba was further evidence of their adaptation to American ways. And, while those involved in agriculture initially worked as subsistence farmers, much as they had when they first settled in the United States, they intended to move quickly into a cash-crop economy, having adopted the American concept of growing for market.

At the same time, Bayate, with its largely homogeneous immigrant population now isolated from mainstream American culture, allowed the colonists to maintain their Swedish cultural identity, perhaps even more so than in Swedish-American communities in the United States. Yet the settlers were obliged to adapt to certain aspects of the Cubans' tropical lifestyle. They quickly discovered that an afternoon siesta was a beneficial custom. They learned techniques from the Cubans for growing and harvesting tropical crops. The children mimicked their Cuban counterparts and soon shed their shoes.

Despite these useful lessons, the promotional literature contains a number of prejudicial comments regarding Cubans. Lind advised against hiring "native Cubans," calling them undependable; he felt that Swedish-American farm workers from the North would



The warm climate made primitive living conditions easier when the Swedish Americans first moved to Cuba; here, men brew Cuban-grown coffee over an outdoor fire in what appears to be a typical Swedish copper kettle.

meet Cuba's labor needs. The Cubans' houses, hastily built structures covered with palm leaves, were considered primitive, and their "indecent" in letting their children run naked was noted.²⁴

If the Swedish Americans found the Cubans' customs and lifestyles foreign, the reverse was also true. A Cuban journalist, Jaime Sarusky, who has documented the Bayate settlement from the Cuban perspective, interviewed a number of his countrymen who remembered some of the Swedish-American customs. Among those that the Cubans considered strange were keeping potted plants inside houses, displaying albums of photographs of ancestors, and having separate houses for dogs. But Sarusky also noted that a blending of customs occurred, for example, when the celebration associated with the Swedish Midsummer eventually became incorporated into the Cuban Feast of San Juan.²⁵

In their new environment, the colonists discovered that Cubans were not a homogeneous group but instead represented a diversity of ethnic, economic, and social backgrounds. Some Cubans still lived as "squatters" on the land that the colonists had purchased. One of them had been a member of the Spanish Civil Guard who had reportedly "fled to the woods" following the Spanish-American War. His knowledge of the area proved valuable, as he coached the colonists about which crops would give the best yields. One publication stated that the colonization

company, "out of consideration for his unfortunate situation will sell the land to him below prevailing prices."

Another Cuban had a small coffee planting on a parcel of land purchased by one of the Swedish Americans. In exchange for being allowed to continue to live there and harvest the coffee, the man offered to pay the new owner \$30.00.²⁶

It is not clear how much interaction occurred between the colonists and the Cubans but, in spite of Lind's advice, Cubans were hired for farm work, particularly during the sugar-cane harvest, which required much hand labor. A photograph of school children in Bayate includes Cubans along with colonists.²⁷

INCORPORATED INTO the mosaic of the Bayate community are the milestones of births, marriages, and deaths. Several colonists' children, including three of J. P. Johnson's daughters (Christine, Hellen, and Bessie), married within the settlement and had their first babies in Cuba. Among the deaths were J. P. Johnson himself, who died in 1913 from a heart attack at age 58. S. P. Anderson, the Cambridge farmer who finally settled permanently in Bayate after spending the winters there for several years, also died in 1913. (Malaria was one of his ailments.) Other colonists, too, contracted malaria in Cuba in spite of the promoters' assurances that it was not a risk. One was Oscar Olson, who had traveled to Cuba with his friend Fritz Peterson. There, Olson had married J. P. Johnson's daughter Hellen. When he became ill, he decided to leave the tropical climate. He and his wife settled on a farm near Cambridge, and he was known as "Cube Olson" for the rest of his life.²⁸

A recollection written by Delbert Benson, describing the years he spent as a young boy with his family in Bayate, reveals that mosquitoes were a serious problem even though the promotional literature claimed that the tropical breezes blew them away. His family slept surrounded by mosquito netting. There were other pests, too, according to Benson—toads and frogs that slept "under the eaves all day and croaked all night." His father threw salt on them to chase them away.²⁹

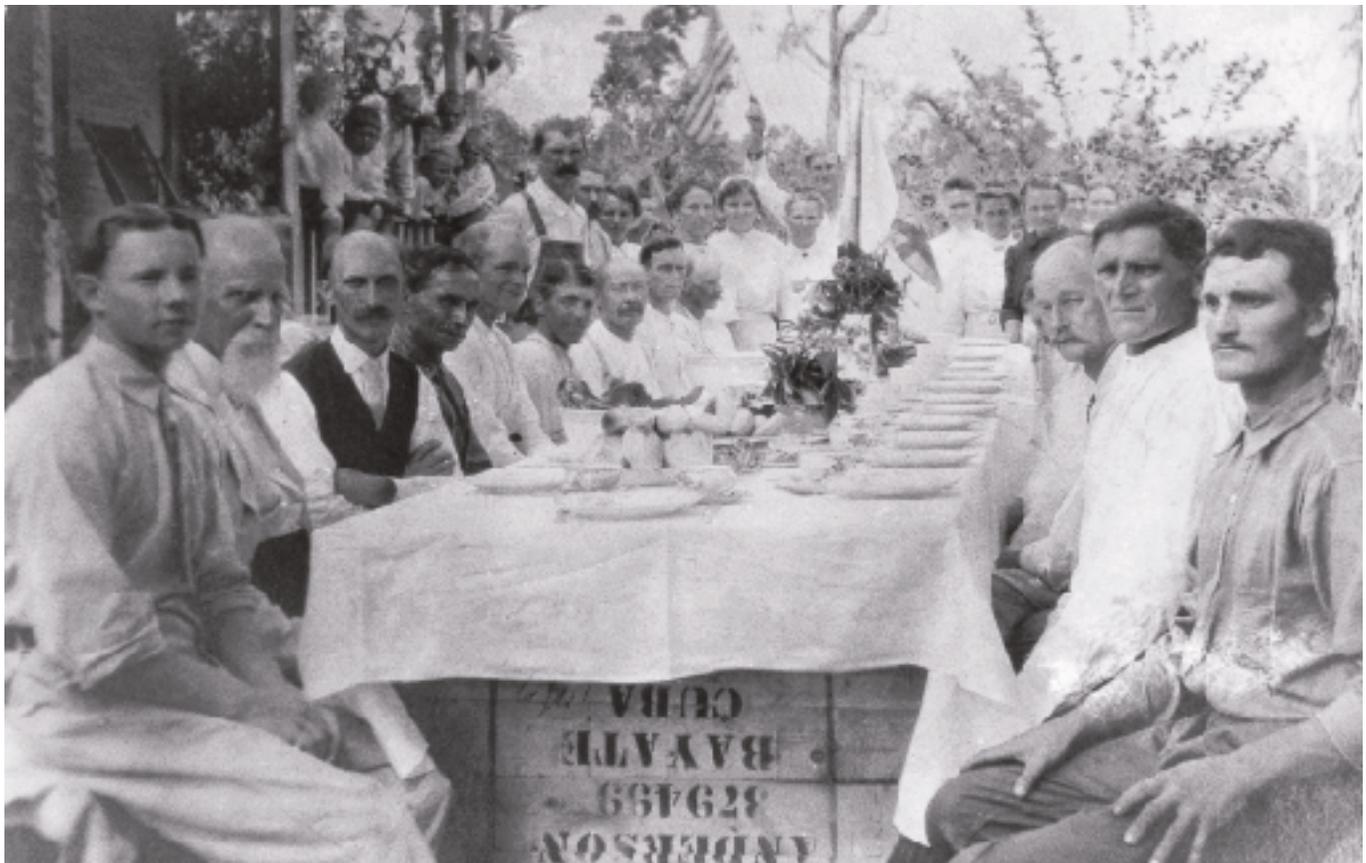
Since the settlement was billed as a Swedish-Lutheran colony, it is natural that a part of the mosaic would include a congregation. A retired pastor from the Augustana Synod, Aaron Lindholm, officiated at the organization of the First Lutheran Church in Bayate on Palm Sunday of 1907 in the lobby of the hotel. He

served the small parish for several years while taking advantage of the warm climate for relief from his arthritis. He was continually disappointed, however, that the offerings from the congregation were not sufficient to sustain his work, and he recorded his frustrations in letters to Dr. Eric Norelius, president of the synod. At first Lindholm was frustrated with the organization, as he felt that Bayate should be considered a mission field and therefore receive assistance from the synod's mission division—assistance that would also provide a stipend for Lindholm while he ministered to the fledgling group in his retirement. He claimed that the congregation, which began with 13 adults and 17 children, had good prospects to grow and a committee had already been chosen to plan for a church building and a parsonage. No stipend was forthcoming from the synod, however, as the Bayate congregation consisted of persons already baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran faith and therefore did not qualify as a "mission field."³⁰

As Lindholm's Cuban stay lengthened, he also communicated his frustrations concerning the spiritual state of the colonists. At one point he complained that "Peterson and Olson keep their store open on Sunday." Shortly before he returned to the U.S. in 1909, he commented to Norelius about the many unchurched people who were joining the colony, and he lamented that Christmas in Bayate was celebrated by drinking, playing cards, and dancing. While these impressions may be solely Lindholm's views, they may also indicate that the colonists' lifestyle was not compatible with the institutionalized structure of a typical Swedish-American Lutheran church. At any rate, once Lindholm was gone, the congregation floundered, and it dissolved soon afterward. No church was ever built.

IN 1908 A MAJOR land purchase by the Swedish Land and Colonization Company added a new dimension to Lind's colony scheme. He had arranged to buy the

S. P. Anderson (seated second, at right), whose crate served as a table for this festive occasion complete with linen and china, about 1910



several-thousand-acre Palmarito tract adjoining the Bayate settlement in order to erect a sugar refinery to serve the colonists. Lind was so sure of his success with this new venture that he resigned from his medical practice in Minneapolis.³¹

The Palmarito enterprise, with Lind as the resident manager, was conceived as a company town. Lind established a mercantile company, a colony house, and began construction of the refinery. It is somewhat difficult to piece together the intricacies of the finances for either this endeavor or for the Bayate settlement, but Minnesota investors were certainly involved. Besides Alfred Lind, the officers of the Swedish Land and Colonization Company were Edward G. Dahl, a clothing and dry goods merchant in Minneapolis; Peter P. Quist, Minnesota's state weighmaster; Erland Lind, Alfred's attorney-brother; and Carl G. Schulz, assistant superintendent of public education for the state of Minnesota.³²

Also included in the financial picture were two other entities, the Lind-Larson Company, conceived by Alfred Lind and G. E. Larson of Winthrop, and the Palmarito de Cauto Sugar Company, of which Edward Dahl was an officer. Clearly, there was considerable overlap between the officers and shareholders of these

three entwined entities, with Alfred Lind the common denominator. He was also the only one of the officers who had taken up residence in Cuba.³³

Helping Lind with the operation of the Palmarito Mercantile Company for a few years was his teenaged son, William. A younger son, Carl, also spent several years in Cuba. Their mother, Hannah Johnson Lind, had returned to Minneapolis after a short stay as she did not care for the climate and primitive living conditions. Furthermore, she was not happy with her assignment of cooking for the boarders in the hotel. The boys later returned to Minneapolis to attend Minnesota College, an institution near the University of Minnesota where young men and women could complete high school and take some preparatory college courses.

It appears that the Palmarito enterprise was ill fated from the beginning, and a series of events and circumstances throughout the next few years had dramatic effects not only on Lind and the financial underpinnings of the Swedish-American colony but also on the lives and destinies of the colonists. Lind was in financial trouble as early as 1909, judging from letters to his brother August in Winthrop that appealed for help in making payments on some promissory notes. During

the next three years the financial situation worsened. In addition to being in debt, some bad weather had resulted in a poor sugar yield. "The bad luck that had persecuted us so far had still another shock in store for us," Lind wrote.³⁴

That shock was the so-called Negro Revolution of 1912, in which armed bands, in defense of their Independent Colored Party, rebelled against the incumbent president, José Miguel Gómez, in various areas including Oriente province, where Palmarito was located. While the rebellion was quelled within a couple of months (with the help of U.S. Marines), all business and credit were paralyzed. A firm in Havana that had been considering purchasing the sugar company reneged on its offer, saying that acquiring property in a zone of revolution was too risky. The firm's surveyors had refused to work in the wooded areas around Palmarito, claiming that "Negroes with guns were plentiful there."

Interior of the Palmarito Mercantile Company; the clerk in the foreground is Alfred Lind's son William.



During this time of unrest, a bullet from the gun of an unseen assailant came through the wall of the Benson house and hit Albert Benson in the arm. Infection set in, and he died of blood poisoning a few weeks later. His widow, Bessie, and three young children soon left Cuba for Meeker County, where they had relatives.³⁵

To avoid bankruptcy, Lind next sent out a circular to 40 mortgage brokers in hopes that one would buy the existing mortgages. He then traveled to New York and paid personal visits to many of them. In a letter to E. G. Dahl of the Swedish Land and Colonization Company, Lind reported that a C. M. Warner had finally agreed to buy the mortgages and other indebtedness amounting to \$300,000. In return, Warner was to get two-thirds of the common stock, leaving one-third for Lind and the company. "Of course it is like a lottery, but we can hardly get into worse company or worse conditions than we are now," Lind wrote. An indication of his desperation is his request that Dahl wire him \$100 to pay for his return trip to Cuba. He also advised Dahl to sell the remaining \$1,000 of his (Lind's) Swedish Hospital stock and ended, "I hope we shall get out of hell and into purgatory at least if this goes through."³⁶

One of the stipulations in the Warner takeover was that his company would build another sugar mill in the Bayate area, and it was not long before that enterprise was offering more attractive contracts to the cane growers than Lind's smaller mill could afford. Then, during 1914, a new enterprise inspired by Lind entered the picture. Called the Oriente Sugar Company and incorporated "according to the laws of Cuba" but under the auspices of the Cleveland Trust Company, it was no doubt a reorganization of the Palmarito de Cauto Sugar Company. Several of the same Minnesotans who had initially invested in the Lind-Larson firm were listed as shareholders. G. E. Larson of Winthrop held more than 12,000 shares, and another major investor was O. N. Johnson from Gibbon. At one point Lind referred to Larson and Johnson as being "in charge." All was not harmonious, however, as Johnson was accused of absconding with several thousand dollars. Erland Lind vigorously pursued litigation that resulted in a guilty verdict for Johnson, who subsequently repaid a portion of what he had taken.³⁷

It is not clear how Lind's financial and operational crises affected the daily lives of the colonists, but a number of them had left Cuba by 1915. Those who remained continued in their endeavors to develop their farms and market their crops.

Another political skirmish in 1917, however, forced most of the remaining colonists to flee from Bayate,



Sugar mill that Lind developed at Palmarito de Cauto, serviced by rail

spelling the end of any intact Swedish-American settlement. What precipitated this skirmish, sometimes called *La Chambelona* (the jamboree) or the Revolution of February, was yet another controversial election in which Mario García Menocal became president. The rebels protesting the election were opposed by Menocal loyalists, supported by U.S. Marines. According to settler Nystrom's account, the colonists were caught between the two factions. The rebel commander, Major Rogoberto Fernandez, along with three of his companies, had stayed in the colony for two days during their guerrilla training. Nystrom called them "the best trained troops in the army" and said that two of the major's officers were "colonists from our district." Upon Fernandez's advice, the women and children were evacuated from Bayate in covered wagons and sent to Santiago before the rebels opened fire in the area. On the way to Santiago, the colonists met some of the loyalist forces, who finally let them through only after they showed their American passports.³⁸

The revolution lasted only a few months, with the Menocal forces claiming victory. Meanwhile, the war in Europe was causing further confusion over the future of the entire island of Cuba. This confusion, coupled with continued unrest and unstable economic conditions, provided the incentive for most of the colonists to return to the United States.

The Nystroms and the Fritz Petersons were among the few colonists who stayed in Cuba beyond 1917. The Petersons had acquired large land holdings and were among the wealthier colonists. In 1919, when Peterson



Victor Anderson's brother Frank posed proudly with his trophy alligator in 1916; at right is Swedish botanist Erick L. Ekman, who studied the island's flora.

refused to sell some of his property, he was shot just outside of his home, presumably by a hitman hired by the prospective buyer—who had close ties to Cuban president Menocal. Peterson was taken by train to San Luis, where he was treated for a serious gunshot wound that had penetrated one of his kidneys. Nystrom, Peterson's friend and brother-in-law, appealed to a doctor stationed there with the American troops to direct the surgery—an ironic twist, since Menocal was being supported by those same troops. Menocal himself had been a co-founder of the Cuban American Company with U.S. Congressman R. B. Hawley. The company's holdings had expanded to include land just across the Cauto River from the Bayate settlement.

Once Peterson recovered from his injuries, he moved his family to Havana. There, he had “one of the swellest offices,” according to Alfred Lind, who also remarked that he hoped Peterson would make more friends in Havana than in Oriente “where several more bullets were prepared for him.” The Petersons left Cuba in the late 1920s for Los Angeles, where their lifestyle did not indicate that they had any great wealth.³⁹

By the time of the shooting, Lind himself had moved to Havana. Financially weakened but apparently undaunted, he became involved in attempts to establish both a laundry and a cold-storage plant for fruit and vegetables to be shipped to the United States.

Neither were successful operations. Alfred Lind died in Havana on June 26, 1924, at the age of 62, and his body was returned to Minneapolis for burial in Lakewood Cemetery. Even though he had spent 20 years in Cuba, his obituary reads as though he had been a constant resident of Minneapolis, referring to his affiliation with Swedish Hospital and Minnesota College.

While letters from Lind in Cuba to his wife and sons in Minneapolis had referred to a visit to Tråvad, Sweden, to check on his ailing father and business trips to New York, Cleveland, and Montreal, there is no evidence that he ever made a return trip to Minneapolis. Furthermore, while Lind was in Cuba, his wife Hannah lived in near destitution, renting a room from her brother-in-law Erland in southeast Minneapolis.⁴⁰

After the Lind sons, Carl and William, completed their education in Minneapolis, they did not return to Cuba. Carl practiced law in the same Minneapolis building where his father had had his medical office. William's career path had a direct connection to his trilingual upbringing. The Swedish he remembered from his childhood and the Spanish he learned as an adolescent in Cuba were desirable qualifications when he applied for a job with the fledgling overseas division of the General Motors Corporation in the early 1920s. He was hired and advanced quickly in the company, eventually becoming president of the General Motors Overseas Corporation.

John A. Nystrom, together with his wife and three children, remained in eastern Cuba until his death in the late 1950s. Nystrom worked at many different occupations during his five decades there, including inspector at a sugar mill, merchant, mechanic, and hotel owner. Although he adopted the Spanish form of his name, Juan Augusto, he also maintained connections to his background, writing in Swedish both his published memoir and a letter to a brother-in-law in Chicago as late as 1956. Christine Nystrom outlived her husband by more than a decade, dying in 1971. Their two daughters Sylvia and Linnea also remained in Cuba, but a younger son, Halvard, left for Florida in the early 1960s.⁴¹

Most of the colonists who returned to the United States resettled in the Upper Midwest, where they undoubtedly confronted some major cultural adjustments. Most of them had become trilingual and had been exposed to a diverse mix of people and cultures. Their experiences would seem exotic to their neighbors. The younger generation returned with few memories of their early homes in the Midwest, having spent their developing years in the tropics. Surely readjusting to midwestern winters and prairie life was as challeng-

ing, if not more so, than their initial adjustment to life in Cuba. Yet perhaps the same resilience, adaptability, and sense of adventure that they had demonstrated in their first two migrations served them well when they returned to the United States.

The Bayate colonists, as a whole, represent a unique twist in the study of human migrations. Return migration—the phenomenon of immigrants resettling in their homeland after some years in America—is well known to historians. But the three-stage migration with a return to the intermediate residence distinguishes the Bayate colonists from other migrants. And even within the Bayate group, some colonists' travel and settlement patterns varied from their peers'. For example, a widower named August Olson and his daughter Lovisa had emigrated from Sweden to Cuba to join his son Oscar ("Cube"), who had left Fosston for Bayate. In Cuba Lovisa married a colonist named Victor Anderson. When the colony dissipated, the Andersons returned to South Dakota, Victor's previous residence. Meanwhile August remigrated to Sweden, but a few years later he emigrated again, this time to Cambridge, Minnesota, where he died in 1924.⁴²

There are few remnants of the Swedish-American colony in Cuba today. The main street in Palmarito bore the name "Calle Alfredo Lind" until the 1950s. A dam built on the Cauto River in the 1970s completely inundated the area where the townsite of Bayate was located. According to Cuban journalist Sarusky, Sylvia

Nystrom, who died in 1991, was the last of those who had first-hand knowledge of the Bayate colony. Among second-generation residents that he located about 20 years ago, a few people maintained some knowledge of the Swedish language. Today, Sarusky occasionally finds someone with a Scandinavian-sounding surname.⁴³

Other traces of the colony may be found at a small cemetery just outside of the reservoir. There, a number of tombstones mark the final resting place for some of the colonists. Two of the stones with Swedish surnames list death dates of 1949 and 1956, indicating that Swedish Americans remained in the area well beyond the primary break-up of the colony.⁴⁴

Documenting the Swedish-American colony in Cuba is best considered a work in progress, but the pieces of the mosaic that have emerged so far tell a complex and compelling story. Historically, the colony illustrates a dimension of the immigration phenomenon; sociologically, it demonstrates the effects of sharing a common background with others in a new milieu; politically, it figures as a small piece in the events that have shaped relations between the United States and Cuba for the past 100 years; and economically, it illustrates how adapting to new agricultural products and markets is both necessary and fraught with difficulties. Furthermore, the story of Minnesota Swedes raising cane in Cuba contains sufficient drama, romance, and intrigue to entice a novelist, playwright, or cinematographer. □

NOTES

1. All published information contemporary with the settlement discovered to date is promotional: advertisements and occasional testimonial letters in Swedish-American newspapers, two pamphlets by the Swedish Land and Colonization Company in Minneapolis—*Cuba: Den Svenska Kolonien vid Bayate i Santiago Provinsen, Cuba* (Cuba: The Swedish Lutheran Colony at Bayate in the Santiago Province, Cuba), copy in Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, and *Omdömen om den Svenska Kolonien vid Bayate, Cuba, af personer som bosatt sig där eller besökt platsen* (Opinions of the Swedish Colony at Bayate, Cuba, by Persons who Settled There or Visited the Place), copy in author's possession—and the Jan. 1910 issue of *Cuba Magazine*, the organ of the Industrial Department of the Cuba Railroad. The pamphlets were reprinted from time to time with additional information; the copies used herein are from 1908 or 1909.

2. *Cuba: Den Svenska Kolonien*, 1.

3. Van Horne was the founder of the Canadian Pacific Railway. A Canadian, he evaded the Cuban law that prevented the granting of railroad concessions to U.S. citizens. Among the early shareholders in his Cuba Company was Minnesota's own railroad magnate, James J. Hill. Hugh Thomas, *Cuba, the Pursuit*

of Freedom (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 463–70.

4. *Cuba: Den Svenska Kolonien*, 32. The word *koloni* (colony), used throughout the Swedish-language materials, is best understood to mean settlers who remain closely associated with the parent country rather than a region politically controlled by a distant country. Unless otherwise indicated, translations of Swedish-language materials are by the author.

5. *Cuba: Den Svenska Kolonien*, inside front cover of an earlier edition, in possession of Carol Lind Dickey (Alfred Lind's granddaughter), Santa Barbara, Calif.

6. A. E. Strand, ed. *A History of the Swedish-Americans of Minnesota* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1910), 2: 636–39.

7. The endorsement, passed by the executive committee of the Minnesota branch of the synod, was printed on the inside front cover of the earlier edition of *Svenska Kolonien*.

8. Original typewritten document with investment details and list of subscribers, in Dickey's possession. Considerable discrepancies exist in the promotional literature regarding the total acreage; figures range from 7,000 to 13,000 and 21,000 acres.

9. Here and below, advertisements in *Augustana* (Rock Island, Ill.), Sept. 1905–July 1907 and in the 40-page promo-

tional pamphlet *Omdömen*.

10. *Svenska Kolonien*, 25; *Augustana*, Feb. 8, 1906, Mar. 22, 1906.

11. *Omdömen*, 23; *Svenska Kolonien*, 33; Strand, ed., *Swedish-Americans*, 2:636.

12. *Omdömen*, 33–36.

13. *Omdömen*, 3–33. Promotional literature and letters used the terms “Swede” and “Swedish-American” interchangeably.

14. The other two committee members were Andrew Peterson, a farmer from Isanti, and N. L. Pierson, a fruit and vegetable grower from Pierson, Florida. Their positive report was published in Minneapolis’s *Svenska Folkets Tidning* (Swedish People’s Newspaper), Aug. 2, 1905.

15. Here and below, Eda Johnson Boomer, “John Peter Johnson Family History” (unpublished), in possession of Eleanor Olson Carlson (daughter of Oscar Olson and Hellen Johnson), Cambridge, Minn.; Eleanor Olson Carlson, interview by author, Cambridge, Apr. 1997, notes in author’s possession. Boomer was one of the Johnsons’ daughters.

16. Here and below, Nystrom, “The Swedish Colony in Bayate, Cuba, 1905–1952,” *The Chronicle* (Philadelphia), Autumn/Winter 1955, p. 7–16; *Omdömen*, 7; Jaime Sarusky, “La Aventura de los Suecos en Cuba” (The Adventure of the Swedes in Cuba), *Los Fantasmas de Omaja* (The Ghosts of Omaha) (Havana: UNEAC, 1986), n21.

17. Here and below, “Johnson Family History”; *North Star* (Cambridge, Minn.), Dec. 26, 1913.

18. For information on colonies, the author perused Swedish-American newspapers at the Swedish-Emigrant Institute in Växjö, Sweden, including *Duluth Posten* (Duluth Post), July 21–Oct. 13, 1905; *Hemlandet* (The Homeland), Chicago and Galesburg, Oct. 10, 1905, and July 31, 1906; *Minnesota Stats Tidning* (Minnesota’s State Newspaper), St. Paul, July 4, 1906–Aug. 28, 1907; *Rockford Posten* (Rockford Post), Rockford, Ill., May 11–Oct. 12, 1906; *Svenska Amerikaneren Tribunen* (Swedish American Tribune), Chicago, Sept. 5–Dec. 15, 1906; *Svenska Folkets Tidning* (Swedish People’s Newspaper), Minneapolis, June 28–Dec. 27, 1905. Information on the Norwegian-American colony is from researcher Helge Stenerson, Brandbu, Norway.

19. Here and below, *Omdömen*, 6, 7, 10.

20. *Omdömen*, 13, 20. The amendment, authored by Senator Orville H. Platt, chairman of the Committee on Relations with Cuba, was passed by the U.S. Congress on June 12, 1901, and subsequently added to the Cuban constitution. It also permitted the U.S. to establish naval bases in Cuba.

21. *Omdömen*, 9–10, 36.

22. *Svenska Kolonien*, 9.

23. Here and two paragraphs below, “Johnson Family History”; Benson recollection in family archives, shown to the author by Delbert’s son Alton Benson, Shoreview, Minn.; Sarusky, “Aventura”; Carol Lind Dickey, tape-recorded interview by author, Santa Barbara, Calif., Oct. 11, 1997, tape in author’s possession. See also testimonial letters in *Omdömen*.

24. *Omdömen*, 33; *Svenska Kolonien*, 26.

25. Jaime Sarusky, interview by author, Havana, Cuba, Mar. 19, 1997, notes in author’s possession; Sarusky, “Aventura.”

26. “Palmarito de Cauto, a Sugar Cane Plantation in the Making,” *Cuba Magazine*, Jan. 1910, p. 5–7, copy in Dickey’s possession; *Svenska Kolonien*, 14–15.

27. Benson recollection; photo in possession of Serie Getz, Brookings, So. Dak., whose parents were married in Bayate.

28. Carlson interview; *North Star*, Dec. 26, 1913.

29. Benson recollection.

30. Here and below, see Lindholm’s letters to Norelius from Cuba, Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, Rock Island, Ill. Lindholm’s first parish was at Marine, Minn. in 1864–66; his last was in Big Rapids, Mich.

31. Strand, ed., *Swedish-Americans*, 2:639.

32. *Svenska Kolonien*, inside front cover. The Dahls had emigrated from Dalsland in 1871 when Edward was two and settled near Rush Point in Chisago Co. Later he and two of his brothers, Charles and J. Hans, became business partners in Minneapolis. All three were active in the colonization company. Quist, from Skåne, Sweden, had emigrated to Nicollet Co. in 1865. He owned a hardware and implement business in Winthrop for 18 years before being appointed state weighmaster in 1901. Schulz, born in Nicollet Co. of Swedish parents, became state superintendent in 1909 and served on the board of directors of Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter. See Strand, ed., *Swedish-Americans*, 2:577, 613–14, 3:871.

33. Here and below, Dickey interview; stock certificates for Lind-Larson Co. and letters from A. Lind to E. Dahl, Aug. 1912, in Dickey’s possession.

34. Here and below, Alfred Lind to the president and shareholders of the Palmarito de Cauto Sugar Company, undated, probably 1914, in Dickey’s possession.

35. Benson recollection. With Albert and his family in Cuba were his brother Alfred, who also returned to Meeker Co. in about 1915, and an uncle, Olof, and his wife, Betsy, who had lived in Meeker Co. for 22 years before going to Cuba in 1905. Alfred and Albert had been born at Maiden Rock, Wis., but Olof was an immigrant from the Swedish province of Värmland.

36. Lind to Dahl, Aug. 17, 1912, in Dickey’s possession.

37. Legal documents outlining the settlement in possession of retired Winthrop attorney Sheldon Larson, nephew of G. E. Larson and Mrs. O. N. Johnson.

38. Here and two paragraphs below, Nystrom, “Swedish Colony in Bayate,” 11–14. On Hawley, see Thomas, *Cuba*, 467–68; for an overview of *La Chambelona’s* effect on Cuba, see Leland H. Jenks, *Our Cuban Colony, a Study in Sugar* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1928), 176–95.

39. Here and below, Alfred Lind to William Lind, Sept. 28, 1919; William Lind to E. G. Dahl, undated but sometime after 1921, in Dickey’s possession; *Minnesota College Messenger*, Aug. 1924, p. 1. Information on the Petersons’ financial condition in the U.S. from Carlson interview.

40. Here and below, Dickey interview. The Cuban influence remained throughout William Lind’s life in his fondness for foods he associated with the island—daiquiris, chicken with rice, black beans, and guava jelly.

41. Carlson interview.

42. Carlson interview.

43. Carl Lind to Mimi Lind (niece), Nov. 15, 1951, in possession of Mimi Lind Shane, So. Salem, N.Y.; Sarusky interview.

44. Information about the tombstones from photographs taken in 1998 by Max Rittgers, Chiefland, Fla.

The photographs on p. 286–87, 289 (top), 293, 296, 297, and 298 are used courtesy of Carol Lind Dickey; p. 289 (bottom), Eleanor Carlson; p. 294, 295, Dale Anderson; and p. 290, is a copy of a photo sent to relatives in Älvdalen, Sweden, by colonist S. P. Anderson. The map of Cuba was made by Lois Stanfield.



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