Migration Means Farewell
Migration to Better Lives

Terjärv Heimsjö, or “home place lake”, looks idyllic, but those ridges are granite. Between the years of 1870–1914, 1,467 left for Australia and North America. In one century (1860–1960) a total of 1,800 left. Records show that 164 draft age men never reported.

Emigrants tended to settle near others from their same birth parish. Rochester, Washington has Salem Lutheran Church where Swedish was spoken for years. Out of 100 farms, 99 were owned by Swedish Finns.
TWO FACTORS CAN COMPEL A PERSON TO MIGRATE: A PUSH OR A PULL.

A PUSH MIGHT BE THE THREAT OF BEING DRAFTED INTO THE TZAR’S ARMY TO FIGHT ON THE MANCHURIAN FRONT.

A PULL MIGHT BE THE PROMISE OF JOBS OR LAND TO THE YOUNGER SON WHO WILL NOT INHERIT THE FARM.

ONCE IN THE NEW LAND, HOMESICKNESS COULD SET IN. I REMEMBER TEARS IN THEIR EYES WHEN THE EMIGRANT SONG WAS SUNG: “Hälsa dem därhemma”. “Greet those at home.”
WHAT DID OUR ANCESTORS LEAVE BEHIND?

They left the known world, and moved to the unknown.
Leaving Swedish Behind

They left behind the Swedish language, their mother tongue. Most didn’t speak English.

Finland was part of the Swedish Kingdom from 1150–1809 AD. Åbo Castle was the center of Sweden’s authority in Finland for 650 years.
The emigrants left their homes, families, schoolmates and childhood haunts.
The Nordic countries were literate, their children learned to read in confirmation classes by the 8th grade. This gave them a leg up on the job market in which Europeans were competitors.

They left their church, the pastor who taught them to read, and their congregation.
They left a village in which skilled tradesmen lived, and social traditions supported the sense of belonging.
Finland was still an agricultural nation during the Great Wave of Emigration. Some farms had been worked for generations.
Most farms had wood lots for building, fencing, and firewood. Children early learned crafts like woodworking, textile production, and caring for cows, sheep, and horses.
Emigrants boarding for the first leg: Copenhagen or Hull.
WHERE DID SWEDISH FINNS SETTLE IN THE USA?
One source of information to where Swedish Finns settled are the records in churches and lodges.

Membership lists from lodges extant as late as 1968 are in the DEE database, available free of charge on the SFHS webpages.

In the 1870s and 1880s about 40 percent of all Finnish-Americans lived in Michigan. There were 18 different Swedish Finn lodges across Michigan. Minnesota’s Mesabi Iron Range and farming were other ways to make a living.

Many of the early lodges had disappeared before SFHS was established. Perhaps their lodge records are still out there somewhere?

We once contacted the great grandchild of a lodge officer. Her own daughter had found Lodge registers in a chicken coop she was remodeling. They are also now in the archive.