Chapter 6
Deploying Heritage to Solve Today's Dilemmas: The Swedes of Rockford Illinois

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Locating Rockford in the Discourse

A cursory look at the contemporary landscape of Rockford, Illinois, suggests that it is the typical industrial city in postindustrial doldrums. Like other cities with an industrially prosperous history (Detroit and Flint, Michigan to name two), Rockford is challenged by its "blue-collar" past, economic disinvestment, and the physical infrastructure of vast empty buildings designed to house manufacturing enterprises that sprung up in the city between 1850 and 1940. Unfortunately for Rockford, this history underlies its current label, "America's Third Most Miserable City" (Forbes.com 2013). Rockford, Illinois, hit hard by three decades of decline in its manufacturing base, has an 11.2% unemployment rate and burdens its residents with exceptionally high taxes. However, within this context, there are a number of promising enterprises, grounded in Rockford's resilient Swedish heritage, that are being consciously and unconsciously deployed to reshape social, political, and economic realities in the city. This chapter explores these contemporary uses of heritage to address Rockford's current economic dilemmas and discusses ways that this heritage is managed with respect to ethnic and racial boundaries that remain a part of the city's landscape.

These contemporary uses of heritage to support development initiatives can be understood as a local extension of the global phenomenon analyzed by George Yúdice (2003) in *The Expediency of Culture*. Yúdice introduces the framework of "culture-as-a resource," noting that it is being employed on local, national, and international scales to address the contemporary failure of neoliberalism's trickle-down economic theory. Neoliberalism's failure to deliver an economic upswing has led to a shift toward investment in civil society with culture as the prime motivator of economic development in many contexts. In his role as president of the World

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Bank, James D. Wolfensohn (1999) has spoken of the importance of employing heritage to seed economic development in poor communities around the world.

Economic development efforts focused on culture and heritage often borrow indiscriminately from high culture, everyday life and popular culture, blurring distinctions among these, to spur economic growth through urban development projects, among other initiatives. "[Culture is] increasingly treated like any other resource" as powerful transnational institutions begin to understand culture as a crucial sphere for investment (Yúdice 2003, p. 13). In these efforts, activist-actors must integrate the voices of many and infuse those voices with their own intentions. They must also work within existing processes with models that they find most expedient within their societal context. In Rockford, several initiatives, linked to Swedish heritage consciously and unconsciously deployed, are working within Rockford's well-established civil society to reshape the city's social, economic, and physical landscape. As a precursor to the analysis of these initiatives, it is important to provide some historic and cultural background for the city.

Rockford's Early History

The City of Rockford, Illinois owes a large part of its rise as a Midwest industrial center to Swedish immigrants whose ingenuity, entrepreneurship, and hard labor underpinned numerous manufacturing enterprises in furniture, machine tools, and textiles, socks and stockings. The first Swedes arrived in Rockford in 1852, somewhat through an accident of history. Originally bound for Chicago, they were urged by Rev. Erland Carlsson, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Chicago, "to take the train as far as it went" (Hillary 2005, p. 2). At that time, Rockford, located 90 miles northwest of Chicago, was the terminus for the Galena and Chicago Union Rail Road, as no bridge, rail or other, existed to cross the Rock River.

Although there had been white settlement in the area since 1834, Rockford had only just incorporated as a city in 1852, while Chicago had been an incorporated city for only 15 years. In 1828, president Adams first opened to settlement the broader region surrounding Rockford. Word of opportunities in the fertile and scenic Rock River Valley spread by word of mouth from the soldiers who fought in the 1832 Black Hawk War (Olson 1908). The settlements that would become Rockford were located about halfway between Chicago and Galena (an early nucleus of frontier trade), at a popular fording location along the Rock River.

Migration to the point called Midway, because of its location halfway between Chicago and Galena, greatly increased between 1834 and 1835, resulting in two settlements. Germanicus Kent and Thatcher Blake settled Kentsville on the west side of the river, developing it around Kent's sawmill that drew power from the Rock River. In 1835, Daniel Haight Shaw settled in what became known as Haightsville, on the east side of the river. With the arrival of the first stagecoach from Chicago in 1838 and generally increasing numbers of settlers, the two villages grew and in 1939 they joined to incorporate as the town of Rockford, with a population of 235.

Upon its incorporation, Rockford was made the seat of Winnebago County (Nelson 1940). Several dams had been built, demolished by flood and rebuilt, to support small milling operations on the river, but not until 1844 did Rockford see the first, but short-lived, bridge built to replace the established ferry service connecting the east and west villages. Presaging Rockford's later industrial dominance, in 1854 Rockford's first industrial scale manufactury, Duncan Forbes and Son Foundry, became the first foundry west of Pittsburgh. It continued to be a part of the city's landscape, first as Rockford Malleable Ironworks and later as Gunite Foundries (Antelman et al. 2003).

Rockford's first formal census in 1850 documented the city's population of 2563 (Nelson 1968). In the early 1850s, a new and larger dam was constructed across the Rock River for the generation of waterpower for mechanical purposes. Saw mills were the first endeavors, but gradually various small industrial plants grew up as the humble antecedents of Rockford's later large manufacturing enterprises (Olson 1908). During this time the stagecoach route was the only mass transportation linking Rockford with Chicago. However, both a plank road and a railroad were contemplated as a means to transport farmers' produce to Chicago markets. The railroad won out and on August 2, 1952, the first wood-burning locomotive of the Galena and Chicago Union Rail Road arrived in Rockford (Carlson 2002). However, passengers and freight could go no further until the railroad bridge needed to cross the Rock River was completed in 1853.

Immigration that Fueled Rockford's Swedish Enclave

Three important factors pushed one-third of the Swedish population to emigrate from their homeland in the 1800s: Sweden's *Enclosure Movement*, desire for autonomy and freedom from Sweden's rigid hierarchal social order, and famine. As early as 1680, Swedish landholdings began to shift away from the medieval system of "common land." First, "the *reduction* blocked the transformation of Crown land and freehold land into noble land" (Bergenfeldt 2008, p. 11, italics in original). Over time the Crown also sold land to freeholders to increase its revenues and build Crown reserves after various wars. Eventually, it also became legal for freeholders to pass land on to their sons. While these transformations did much to improve Sweden's agricultural output, they led to social and economic upheaval that drove many to contemplate emigration.[1] Prior to enclosure, which had been fully implemented by the start of the nineteenth century, Swedish peasants had held their small farms free from the tenurial rights of feudal overlords since the settlement of Sweden by Teutonic tribes. Enclosure, technological advances such as the iron plough, and agricultural deregulation pushed many peasants from the land. These advances

[1] Definitions: Emigration—the act of an individual leaving Sweden to settle in the USA. Immigration—the act of an individual coming to the USA, where one is not a native, for permanent residence. Migration—the process of going from one country or region to another.

benefitted a small portion of the rural population. However many, including the younger sons of freeholders, became part of a large population of landless rural peasants without voting rights. As the landless population swelled, Sweden also experienced crop failures in 1867 and 1868 and a resulting 3-year famine (Lundin 2002). During this time period, many Swedes turned to emigration as the only alternative to starvation.

Swedes had been immigrating to North America since 1638 when they established the colony of New Sweden in what later became the mid-Atlantic United States. However, the immigrants of the 1800s who came from rural farming roots went west in search of the storied abundant North American farmland. They primarily settled in the Midwest, in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, where they were initially drawn to farming and forestry. Swedes of this era also clustered in urban enclaves in Chicago and Minneapolis-St. Paul (Lundin 2002). Landing in east-coast cities after harrowing 2- and 3-month sea voyages, early Swedish immigrants bought tickets for Chicago having no idea where that was. Swedes who arrived in Chicago in 1852, when the city was experiencing one of its earliest and most virulent cholera epidemics, were urged to keep moving west to farming communities; some landed in Rockford.

When the first small group of 24 Swedish pioneers arrived in the late summer of 1852 to make their permanent homes in Rockford, most had very few resources remaining. They lived where they could find affordable lodging, be it shanties made of boards stuck in the ground or common lodging near the railroad station on 4th Avenue between Kishwaukee and South 4th streets. Nearly all of Rockford's early Swedes lacked for food and work when they first arrived. But they were a determined group who bonded around their strong religious foundation. When an early Swedish Lutheran minister, Reverend Eric Norelius, stopped in Rockford in 1855, he noted of Rockford's Swedish immigrants,

> They were poor and lived in inferior houses. Most of them were to be found on the east side of the river, then heavily wooded. Still, they were full of hope and cheered by better times. They were eager to hear the Word of God and some of them were delightful Christians. We held a service in an old school house. (Hillary 2005, p. 2)

The Swedes as a group, soon gained a reputation among their American neighbors as, "honest, hardworking people, generally a God-fearing lot, with a passion for freedom and social righteousness" (Carlson 1975, p. 61). Members of the earliest immigrant group originated from the parish of Södra Ving, located in a section of Västergötland of Sweden, famous for its handicraft and textile production and were often employed as carpenters and craftspeople. Swedes generally were thrifty and able to save despite meager wages (Olson 1908). Their penchant for thrift and industry helped to move many families into Rockford's middle class and propelled numerous early Swedish immigrants into prominent positions as industrialists and businessmen.

Rockford's Swedish immigrants continued to arrive from Västergötland, while other early arrivals came from Småland and the island of Öland in the Baltic

(Beijbom 1993). Despite difficult conditions, these early immigrants wrote to their friends, family, and neighbors urging them to come to the city. These early connections meant that by 1900 a majority of Rockford's Swedish population traced their roots to these three rural provinces in Southern Sweden (Beijbom 1993). The Swedes continued to settle east of the Rock River, near the railroad depot. By 1854, 1000 Swedes lived in the city, a number that was decimated both by Rockford's 1855 cholera outbreak and by Civil War service. By 1866, Rockford counted 2000 Swedes as residents (Olson 1917, p. 162). At the end of the nineteenth century, the Swedish colony engulfed all of East Rockford. Although the early Swedes were poor, they were thrifty and economical and were able to provide necessities but also were known as savers. While many of the Swedes who came to Rockford were not intending to stay, many did (Beijbom 1993). Enculturated in a peasant farming tradition, the Swedish settlers wanted land, and when able they purchased it on the outskirts of the city, farming the land. However, "when they had children, and an American education became important, they would often sell their land to another settler and move into the city to establish a "more civilized" home in the area around Kishwaukee Street and Seventh Street" (Swanson n.d.a, p. 2), the area that developed into Rockford's Swedetown.

Because they valued the opportunity for citizenship in their new country, Swedish and their clergy became involved in support of the Republican Party because its opposition, "Know-Nothings," had vowed to prevent immigrants from obtaining citizenship until they had lived in the USA for 21 years. Furthermore, Swedes firmly backed Abraham Lincoln because of his support for justice and freedom, ideals underlying their emigration; they also supported the Republican Party platform, as it promised to satisfy the immigrants' basic needs (Homer 1964). P.A. Peterson notes that, "the first 48 naturalized Swedes in Rockford marched in a body to the polling place to vote for Abraham Lincoln on Election Day in 1860" (1978, p. 48). And although they were relative new comers, the Rockford Swedes were among the first to sign up to preserve those values when Lincoln called for volunteers to serve the Union in the Civil War.

In part as a response to Sweden's famine years, mass immigration to the USA began following the end of the Civil War and continued through 1930. During this period, Rockford's Swedish ethos, as well as the city's growing commercial and industrial sectors, impelled many Swedish immigrants from Sweden directly to Rockford, bypassing Chicago. This influx swelled Rockford's Swedish-born population to 6000 by 1885. According to the 1900 US census, 22% of Rockford's 31,000 inhabitants had been born in Sweden and 40% claimed Swedish birth or parentage. By 1930, 26% of Rockford's population of 86,000 consisted of Swedish born and their children. A full 40% of the population at that time claimed Swedish ancestry, far larger than any other group in Rockford. At the centennial of the first Swedes' arrival in 1952, at least one-third of Rockford's 100,000 inhabitants professed Swedish ancestry (Beijbom 1993).

In speaking about Swedish–American[2] history and Rockford's place in it, Olson noted that "Although not a Swedish–American center of culture in the same sense as Chicago, Minneapolis, New York, and Rock Island," the city was a prominent location for Swedish–American advancement (1908, p. 328). Olson goes on to describe Rockford's early Swedish community as, "more culturally and politically homogeneous than most similar communities, making the Swedish characteristics more pronounced here than elsewhere" (1908, p. 328). Possibly in response to the insecurities of life in Sweden that prompted migration, many early Swedish immigrants to the USA were caught up in a fundamentalist religious revival in Sweden that prepared them to engage a similar revival on the US frontier (Homer 1964). For many of the earliest Swedish immigrants to Rockford, their Lutheran faith provided continuity between homeland and new world. Shortly after arrival they commenced laity-led worship, meeting in homes of participants.

Rockford's first Lutheran church, the Scandinavian Lutheran Church (renamed First Swedish Lutheran Church of Rockford in 1858 and later simply First Lutheran), was organized as the city's first Swedish religious establishment in 1854. However, the central position of this Lutheran church in Rockford's Swedish community was short-lived. Early on "new immigrants, looked to the church and its minister to find places to live, to secure jobs, to receive desperately needed aid in times of physical or financial need, and to gather with compatriots for fellowship" (Hillary 2005, p. 3). Despite inviting all Swedish immigrants to join, the strict disciplinary standards that the Swedish Lutheran Church enforced ensured that "only those with genuine faith and ethical lives would be admitted" (Hillary 2005, p. 4). In 1860, the church decided to join the newly created Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America (Beijbom 1993), with a conservative canon that avowed, "complete abstinence from alcoholic beverages and shunned such "questionable" public entertainments as plays and concerts" (Homer 1964, p. 150). Although this first Swedish Lutheran establishment enjoyed long-term success as a large urban church, its role as a focal point of the immigrant community was challenged by numerous other Swedish protestant churches and Swedish fraternal societies. As the initial cultural foundation for the Swedes, the influence of the conservative Lutheran worldview implanted a Republican and anti-Catholic perspective in these immigrants, creating a rift between Swedish immigrants and Rockford's Irish immigrants (Homer 1964). It also separated the growing population of Swedish immigrants from the large group of Italian immigrants that arrived at the start of the World War I (Beijbom 1993). More importantly, the conservative perspective of Rockford's early Swedish immigrants distinguished them from "socialist" Swedes who arrived in greater numbers after 1900 (Homer 1964; Beijbom 1993). However, particularly during and following the depression, common heritage expressed in customs, traditions and everyday life united residents of Swedetown.

[2] Spacing and hyphenation throughout: SwedishAmerican Hospital – proper name; SwedishAmerican Health System – proper name; SwedishAmerican Heritage Center – proper name; SwedishAmerican Foundation – proper name; Swedish-American National Bank – proper name; Swedish-American when used as an adjective modifying for example community.

Rockford's Swedish population is often identified with the city's top ranking among midwestern industrial centers. Nascent in the 1850s, by 1900 Rockford boasted 246 industrialized businesses of various types, employing 5223 people, with annual production valued at $ 8.9 million (Olson 1908). At the start of the twentieth century, the chief products of Rockford's industries included furniture, hosiery, agricultural implements, pianos, sewing machines, and machinery and tools. And although Swedish immigrants formed the core of Rockford's working population between 1870 and 1900, between 1880 and 1900 Swedish–Americans had become leaders in Rockford's manufacturing and business. Olson describes the upward social process for many of Rockford's Swedes.

> They have generally worked in the employ of others until acquiring a competence, when they have combined into cooperative companies for the purpose of furniture manufacture or carrying on other lines of industry, thereby becoming employers and themselves reaping the profits…. they have made many practical inventions, thereby simplifying processes, reducing costs of production and increasing the efficiency of labor. (1908, p. 327)

The process outlined above and the fact that so many of Rockford's Swedes made notable industrial inventions and became pioneers of industry, led Beijbom to write, "it is questionable if Swedish immigrants in any other place have been credited with so much entrepreneurship and ability to create their own jobs" (1993, p. 9). Swedes like John Nelson, cabinet maker, creator of a dovetailing machine, and inventor of the automated machine for knitting seamless socks and hosiery, laid the foundation for Rockford's stocking industry that by 1950 produced many millions of seamless stockings and continued to fuel Rockford's economy through the 1970s.

Rockford's furniture industry illustrates another manufacturing business hub attributable to Swedish immigrants who planted its seeds in the early 1870s. In 1875, Andrew C. Johnson, "the father of Swedish furniture fabrication in Rockford" (Beijbom 1993, p. 11), helped form a cooperative venture, the Forest City Furniture Company, with 15 Swedish-laborer share holders. By 1880, this company had 100 employees and moved into its own brick building. Shortly after, some Forest City stockholders withdrew from that venture to form the Union Furniture Company. These were the first of 20 Swedish furniture fabrication establishments started by Rockford Swedes over the next decade. In the 1880s, the Swedes became prominent in machine tool industries specializing in agricultural implements and tools. Swedes also started other successful industries such as textiles, pianos, auto parts, office machines and locks, often employing a cooperative model to bring together enough capital for start up. Although many Swedes who worked in these industries contributed to Rockford's early civil society through personal assistance, and religious, aid-and-benefit, and fraternal societies, one giant of Rockford's industrial era, Peterson, can be singled out as an example that provides a foundation for contemporary uses of Swedish Heritage in Rockford.

Contemporary Swedish Heritage in Rockford

Peterson, a titan among Rockford's Swedish industrialists, helped to build and owned 25 of Rockford's major industrial businesses ranging from furniture, to shoes, to adding machines and pianos (Rockford Register Star 1993). Though many businesses he started during his 81 years are no longer operational, "numerous present Rockford machine tool and aerospace businesses operating today were started by P.A. Peterson" (Swanson n.d.b, p. 80); some of these contribute to Rockford's hope for an economic future in, "a quietly thriving aerospace and aviation industry" (Karp 2013). Peterson was a gifted business leader whose reputation for integrity was built by repaying all loans, including those that nearly caused his bankruptcy during the panic of 1893. He was a man of the people, who often ate his sack lunch with his workers in the lumberyard. Factories and businesses throughout Rockford closed to honor him, on the day of his funeral in 1927. While alive, Rockfordians knew well his personal philanthropy (Swanson n.d.b). His generosity is visible in two important contemporary Rockford establishments: Peterson Center for Health, which developed from his endowment for the Swedish old-age home (Lutheran Social Services of Illinois 2013), and the SwedishAmerican Hospital, where he served as president of the board of trustees and provided support through gifts, including his stately home. These enterprises, along with others using Rockford's tangible and intangible Swedish heritage discussed below, have built upon the ingenuity and culture of Swedish immigrants and are consciously and unconsciously deploying Swedish heritage to reshape social, political, and economic realities in the city.

The SwedishAmerican Hospital

Rockford's SwedishAmerican Hospital, and the SwedishAmerican Health System that developed from it are two of the most visible legacies of the city's Swedish heritage of charity and cooperation. In 1911, the Swedish community incorporated the hospital association in response to a great need for healthcare services in the city. The fund drive for the hospital began with a $ 1 contribution and a letter to the editor of Rockford's Swedish newspaper challenging each Swede in the city to give $ 1 per year toward its development. Rockford's Swedish ministers took the challenge seriously and with the first donation, an account was opened at the Swedish–American National Bank. Later that year a hospital association was formed to move the project forward. Large picnic fundraisers solidified support of the city's Swedish community; factory membership aids helped to encourage membership among the community's industrial workers. In 1912, with $ 4000 in cash and $ 8000 in pledges, the association purchased a tranquil property on Charles Street that was easily accessible from the city's Swedish districts. Bylaws and a constitution were adopted allowing any person to become, "a member of the association by the payment of $ 1 annually. Life memberships were granted for a one-time fee of $ 100" (Greenland 2011, p. 8). The 55-bed hospital opened in July of 1918 and an associated nursing

school opened in 1919. In 1920, the Swedish–American community established the Jenny Lind society to fund care for the needy. Sweden's Prince Bertil presided over the hospital's celebration of 20 years of operation. The Prince noted, "This willingness [of Swedish immigrants] to help each other is a sure sign of strength and culture" (Greenland 2011, p. 11).

The need for patient care at SwedishAmerican grew as the Swedish community flourished and health care delivery increased in complexity. Between 1940 and 2000, the hospital embarked on an expansion and growth period. The hospital with 55 beds in 1918 has grown into a large regional hospital that ranks among the top 5% of hospitals nationally, in many specialties, for its delivery of patient-centered care. The hospital has specialized facilities to address everything from cardiac health, to breast health, to chronic headaches, to psychiatric care, to daycare for employees. The hospital acquired numerous independent medical practices and developed clinics and medical office buildings through the creation of the SwedishAmerican Health System. The SwedishAmerican Foundation has also embarked on a neighborhood housing improvement effort since 2000 in the 81-block area surrounding the hospital. Through this effort, the foundation constructed 26 new homes, renovated or improved 100 other properties, and renovated 24 units in a two-building apartment complex. The foundation, in cooperation with the City of Rockford, has developed a novel effort supporting collaborative education between Rockford high school students and those from Lidköping, Sweden. Through hands-on construction, this initiative seeks to transfer knowledge about energy-efficient building techniques between the two countries. The hospital also recently opened the SwedishAmerican Heritage Center that celebrates and commemorates the SwedishAmerican Health System's first 100 years of medical service to the northern Illinois community.

An Industrial Partnership: Rockford and Lidköping, Sweden

To connect the city with its strong Swedish heritage while promoting economic development, Rockford has joined in an industrial partnership with the city of Lidköping in Sweden. Through this relationship both cities promote economic development by creating an international business climate and employing an international business developer. This relationship also supports cultural and business exchanges for professionals and citizens, and educational exchanges for students and teachers. Possible tourism and retail opportunities are also promoted through the partnership (Bengtsson 2012). The economic-development focused relationship between Rockford and a city in Sweden is judicious given Rockford's history and the fact that 13% of the city's residents still claim Swedish ancestry, giving it the third largest concentration of people of Swedish ancestry per capita in the USA. There is also a strong relationship between Rockford's current high-tech manufacturing focus and Sweden's strengths in innovation and technology. The Rockford Area Economic Development Council (2013) believes these links of heritage and a potentially symbiotic economic development relationship will develop fruitful initiatives.

Fig. 6.1 **a** The American Standard House. **b** The Swedish Influenced House. **c** The Swedish Standard House. (Photos by author)

The Swedish Standard House is one initiative that has developed out of the Rockford-Lidköping industrial partnership. With cooperation from the SwedishAmerican Foundation, as part of its Neighborhood Revitalization Program described above, the partnership has brought together students from Rockford's East High School and Lidköping's De la Gardiegymnasiet to build three different houses between 2009 and 2013. The collaboration is a way to exchange ideas about improving housing and to bring Swedish and American construction techniques together. The first house, called "The American Standard House," is shown in Fig. 6.1a. The construction of this house, built in 2009, follows standard US two-by-four, wood-frame construction and insulation techniques. The second house, built in 2010, is titled "The Swedish Influenced House." The construction of this house, as shown in Fig. 6.1b, follows some US wood-frame construction standards but also applies Swedish lessons about insulating and air sealing. The third house, shown in Fig. 6.1c, follows Swedish residential construction standards including a frost-protected Styrofoam foundation, in-floor radiant-heated floor, 8.5-in. wall construction (compared to 3.5-in. in US standard construction), triple-pane windows, and rock-based mineral fiber insulation. The "Swedish Standard House," applies all the lessons of energy-efficient residential construction and resembles a Swedish vernacular house (Bengtsson 2012). The 4 years of educational exchange involving high school students and teachers from the two cities have enabled the transfer of construction

Fig. 6.2 Erlander Home Museum. (Photo by author)

knowledge and contemporary energy-efficient building techniques and materials, facilitated development of friendships, and also linked students from both cities to contemporary Swedish and Swedish–American heritage as well as distant relatives (Linnea Bengtsson, personal interview, September 22, 2013).

The Swedish Historical Society (SHS)

A final example from Rockford of the conscious application of Swedish heritage to reshape contemporary realities comes from the city's SHS. After visiting a 1938 event in Delaware celebrating the 300th anniversary of the Swedes in North America, a group from Rockford was driven to establish SHS when they noted that the location supporting the earliest Swedish settlements no longer had a living Swedish heritage. In organizing SHS, the group sought to preserve the Swedish–American history and culture of Rockford. In recent years, SHS programming has promoted preservation of Swedish–American cultural traditions and education of the general public about Swedish–American history and heritage. In support of its mission, SHS operates the Erlander Home Museum, as shown in Fig. 6.2.

SHS is headquartered at the Erlander Home Museum, located at 404 S. 3rd Street in Rockford. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the building is situated within the Haight Village Historic District, a 13-block neighborhood near downtown Rockford. The home was built in 1871 by one of Rockford's earlier Swedish immigrants, John Erlander. It was Erlander's third residence in Rockford and the first brick house built by a Swede in the city (Haight 2013). John Erlander came to Rockford as a tailor in 1855. After success as a tailor, he eventually helped to organize the Union Furniture Company as well as several other industries in Rockford. He was among the main group who set up the Swedish Mutual Fire Insurance Company and held stock in the Manufacturers National Bank (SHS of Rockford IL 2013). He was among the richest Swedish immigrants in Rockford in his day. Upon the death of her parents, Mary Erlander, the youngest of six children, assumed ownership of the house. In 1951, at the age of 80, she sold the house and many of its contents to SHS so that it could be maintained as a museum. After a

Fig. 6.3 Erlander Home Museum Interior Collage. (Photos by author)

quick renovation of the first floor, the Swedish Prime Minister, Tage Erlander, dedicated the museum when it was opened to the public in 1952.

Through the operation of the Erlander Home Museum, SHS preserves Rockford's Swedish–American history and culture using conservation of artifacts, museum displays, and educational programs. The museum's first floor maintains the arrangement and contents of the Erlander family spaces illustrated in Fig. 6.3: the parlor, sitting room, dining room, music room, and clean-up kitchen (full kitchen was originally in the basement). The second floor, renovated and opened to the public more recently, houses the restored Mary Erlander bedroom, furnished with its original contents, as well as two galleries of artifacts and informational displays about Swedish–American culture in Rockford. The final gallery on the second floor holds the immigration exhibit, which tells the story of many of Rockford's Swedish–immigrant families. The Pleasant Company book, Kirsten's World, part of the American Girl Collection, features the contents of this exhibit (SHS of Rockford, IL n.d.). The nonfiction story chronicles the life of a young Swedish–American immigrant girl growing up in 1854. The book is an accessory, providing background for the American Girl doll, Kirsten, sold by American Girl Brands, LLC.

Through its programming, SHS promotes the preservation of cultural traditions and educates on Swedish–American history and heritage. The society holds a number of events throughout the year. Camp Sweden is a Scandinavian cultural adventure for children ages 6–12, hosted at the Erlander Home Museum for two, 1-week sessions each summer. The campers learn about Swedish customs, language and history, Swedish foods, and arts and craft. Campers also take local field trips and culminate the week with a short play. Each year the society sponsors three Swedish holiday traditions: Julmarknad—a 1-day Christmas market, celebrating traditional Swedish dancing, singing, and foods; Lucia Day—a festival of light on one of the darkest days of the year—celebrated with a concert of traditional Swedish Christmas music in the First Lutheran Church; Midsommar—a midsummer fest with May

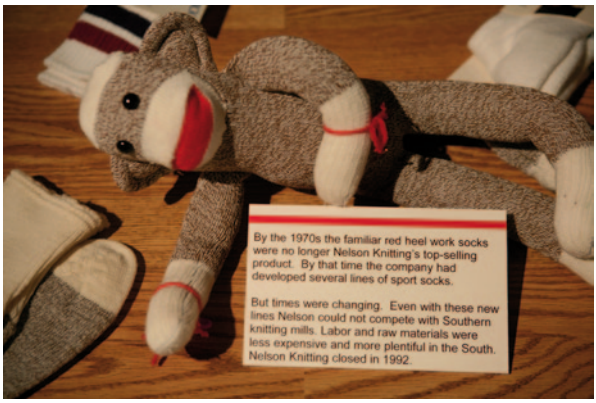

Fig. 6.4 Sock monkey on display at Rockford's Midway Village Museum. (Photo by Ruth E Hendricks, posted online at Ruth E. Hendricks Photography http://rutheh.com/2010/10/05/sock-monkey-signage-in-museum-exhibit/#comments, used with permission)

Pole celebration, and traditional Swedish dancing, music, and crafts. SHS also hosts the annual Midwest Kubb Championship (Kubb is a Swedish lawn game that can be likened to a combination of bowling and horseshoes). Through its efforts, SHS seeks to increase economic opportunities that benefit the Rockford community and beyond (Linnea Bengtsson, personal interview, September 22, 2013).

Swedish–American Heritage Unconsciously Deployed Through Popular Culture

Several authors have noted that the ingenuity displayed by Swedish immigrants in Rockford is unparalleled in any other Swedish–American Community in the USA (Olson 1908; Nelson 1943; Beijbom 1993). The ability of these immigrants to perfect and then deploy their inventions in service of large-scale manufacturing is likewise unprecedented among other US immigrant enclaves (Nelson 1943). The invention of one Swede, John Nelson, mentioned earlier as having laid the foundation for Rockford's sock and stocking industry, forms the basis for a North American popular culture craze, the sock monkey—a homemade toy crafted from socks fashioned in the likeness of a monkey, as shown in Fig. 6.4.

Imitation stuffed animals probably originated during the late Victorian era when tales such as Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* and *Just So Stories* heightened the general public's familiarity with unusual species. And while there are claims of individuals making sock monkeys as early as 1919, these early stuffed monkeys lacked the characteristic red lips of sock monkeys popular today. John Nelson's son Franklin improved on his father's invention, creating a loom that enabled socks to be manufactured without seams in the heel; this provided Nelson's company with its market niche in the 1880s (Olson 1917; Carlson 1975). These seamless work socks became so popular that the market eventually was flooded with imitators. Socks of this type became generically labeled "Rockfords." In 1932, Nelson Knitting added the red

Fig. 6.5 Life-sized sock monkey statue in Swedish American Hospital's front entrance hall. (Photo by author)

heel "de-tec-tip" to assure its customers that they were buying "original Rockfords" (Midway Village and Museum Center n.d.). Hence, the earliest possible emergence of the modern popular sock monkey with its iconic big red lips was in 1932. While the earliest verifiable claim for the existence of a contemporary red-lipped sock monkey is 1949, Nelson knitting learned of the dolls in 1951 (Connelly 2007). As a result of a 1955 sock monkey patent settlement, which awarded Nelson Knitting the patent for the sock monkey, the company began including the pattern for the homemade toy with every pair of socks sold (Midway Village and Museum Center). While these toys were very popular during the mid-1950s and mid-1970s, they are currently enjoying resurgence in popularity. "Original sock monkeys" made from "authentic Rockfords" address the intangible Swedish heritage of ingenuity. They underpin such popular culture happenings as Midway Village Museum's annual "sock monkey madness event." As Fig. 6.5 (taken in the front entry of Swedish

American Hospital) illustrates, likenesses referencing the sock monkey can also be found in various Rockford establishments with roots in Swedish heritage, referencing, for the informed, the heritage of Swedish ingenuity.

Conclusion: Gambling on Heritage in Community Development

The Swedes were only one of many immigrant groups that settled in Rockford. In We, the People… of Winnebago County (Nelson 1975), the chapters chronicle the various histories of the county's diverse ethnic groups: Native American, English, Scottish and Irish, Swedish, Norwegian and Danish, German and Dutch, Italian, Polish and Lithuanian, African American, Jewish, Greek, Mexican, and Asian. The chapters are arranged in chronological order of primary immigration into Rockford and surrounding communities. Thus, this book, in particular, illustrates the ethnic patchwork that is Rockford, even today. Most of these ethnic groups still have a presence in the city and African American, Hispanic, Irish, Italian, Lithuanian, and Polish are represented in the six ethnic galleries of Rockford's contemporary Ethnic Heritage Museum at 1129 South Main Street, west of the Rock River.

This ethnic patchwork has provided one among many challenges for the city throughout its history. Ethnic and racial divides have been part of Rockford's landscape since the first Swedes stepped off the Galena and Chicago Union Rail train in 1852. Swedes settled in the area around the railroad depot in the east part of Rockford. Over time a very large Swedish enclave engulfed much of the area east of the Rock River. In 1943, noting the Swedes "remarkable economic success," Helge Nelson described the Swedish geography in Rockford.

> The Swedish population is concentrated in the eastern section of Rockford. The Swedes constitute the majority in three of the four districts—wards—east of the Rock River and constitute nearly half of the population in the fourth one. Here are located most of the Swedish factories that impress through their practical planning and the cleanness and orderliness that there prevail. In the southern section of the city the Swedish shops are also most numerous, even if business men with Swedish names are to be found also elsewhere. In Seventh Street and 14th Avenue, which are business streets, Swedish names dominate on the signs. And round about in the eastern section of Rockford one can walk up one street and down another and find Swedish homes side by side in unbroken rows. The Swede loves his home, and makes every effort to get a home of his own. There are hundreds and hundreds of Swedish homes along the tree planted streets. That it has been possible here to form a veritable "Swedish city" depends on the foresight shown by P.A. Peterson and other leading Swedes in acquiring considerable tracts for the erection of factories and homes, which has enabled the Swedes to settle not too far from the manufactories. (1943, p. 159)

This description of Swedetown explains why as late as 1940 Rockford had, "one of the most dense Swedish settlement concentrations in urban America" (Lundin 2002, p. 3). For the most part, the Swedish maintained a very conservative worldview centered on the Lutheran canon, a Republican political perspective, and an anti-Catholic leaning. This set of characteristics played out in the landscape of the city

with the Irish, Rockford's other large, early immigrant group, concentrated on the west side of the Rock River. Swedes looked down upon the Irish. But despite greater numbers, the Swedes controlled fewer electoral districts. All these characteristics bred tensions between Irish and Swedes that often, "exploded into gang fights on the bridges across the river" (Beijbom 1993, p. 24) prior to 1900.

The ethnic divide between the Swedes and the Irish remained and was exacerbated by Italian immigrants who arrived in the 1910s and 1920s and settled on the west side of the Rock River. Swedes, whether from early immigrant families or later immigrant "socialist Swedes," coalesced around their common heritage, which proved a strong bond in overcoming social and political differences among those of Swedish descent. A common Swedish heritage maintained an us–them mentality in the city. By the 1940s, this divide had shifted to Caucasian versus African American discrimination, a divide that remains physically imprinted in Rockford's east versus west landscape. Even now, east Rockford is economically more prosperous and very Caucasian as it has been since early days. West Rockford is economically challenged and primarily African American.

The Swedes took the roles of innovators and industrial entrepreneurs in Rockford in a way that did not happen to the same degree in any other place in the USA. These positions propelled Swedes to the upper levels of the city's society and put them in positions of power. As time went on most of the population of Swedish ancestry moved solidly into the middle and upper middle classes of the city. Not only were the Swedes leaders of industry and business, but they became active in politics at the local, state, and national levels (Carlson 1975).

Swedish heritage in Rockford remains vital. It has been deployed in numerous ways in attempts to reverse the city's economic and physical decline. In the SwedishAmerican Foundation's Neighborhood Revitalization Program and the Industrial Partnership with the city of Lidköping, and even in the anchoring influence of the historical Erlander Home Museum in the Haight Village Historic District, one can see the capacity offered by calling on this heritage. However, given the historic animosity between ethnic groups and the power exercised by Rockford's Swedes, one can question to what extent such efforts would be deemed acceptable by Rockford's population at large.

Working closely with organizations in Rockford, it becomes clear to an outsider that the divide pronounced by the Rock River remains a threat to the city's economic renaissance. Strong institutions such as the Swedish American Foundation and the SHS are working to address the decline. However, because of their connection to Rockford's Swedish history and heritage, these institutions are still embedded in the east side of the city. This heretofore unexamined bias has caused the city to support some arguably unwise large-scale infrastructure alterations on the west side of the river, the West State Street Corridor project among them. A more reasonable strategy might be to examine heritage-popular culture overlaps that are not necessarily place-bound and perhaps have less overt ties to Swedish heritage and thus hold broader potential. The opportunities presented by heritage-popular culture overlaps such as the transfer of energy-efficient building technology and practices, in the Swedish Standard House project, and the Rockford Sock Monkey

Madness events show promise to more equitably address Rockford's community development dilemmas.

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