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## Spring-to-Summer Celebration

### *Abundance and Redundancy*

EVERY JUNE SINCE 1985, ON A SATURDAY CLOSE to the summer solstice, a Midsummer pole has been raised on the lawn at Sealander Park, on the centennial farm established by Carl Sealander and still run by his grandson Dave. The park is a grassy oasis surrounded by Russian olive, cottonwood, and juniper trees among the sagebrush, lava beds, and irrigated fields of New Sweden, Idaho, just southwest of Idaho Falls. When I participated in the pole raising on June 23, 2001,<sup>1</sup> we had a perfect day at Sealander Park: pleasantly warm, windless, and bright with sunshine. On the edges of the park, we early arrivals got to work, our first step unwinding twine to strip off last year's dried greenery. Dave Sealander likes to leave the pole up throughout the year and bring it down the evening before or even the morning of the Midsummer gathering. In 2001, that happened precipitously—when one of the ropes securing the pole snapped in a windstorm a few weeks before. The pole toppled, worrying Dave and spurring him to design a new method for securing it. While the rest of us decorated and reassembled the pole, he spent the afternoon in his shop in the barn, welding a new cap for the top of the pole that would hold guy wires rather than rope.

We worked on through the afternoon: stripping the old materials, cutting fresh vegetation from areas along the park margins that needed pruning, gathering shasta daisies from a neighbor, braiding daisy chains, and wrapping the pole with the fresh greenery and flowers. Workers drifted in and out of the process, taking breaks for horse drawn wagon rides or conversations in the shade. On the wagon ride I joined, the riders sang rounds in English and German. Gradually more people arrived, including Dave Combs, accordionist in the group “Squeeze Play,” who strolled among the workers and spectators playing Nordic<sup>2</sup> music and chatting. Dave Combs

planned to leave the next day for Norway, where he and his family would be visiting relatives.

With Dave Sealander still busy in his shop, we carried the long mast to the site in the middle of the park where the pole would be raised. Those participants who had raised the pole before tried to remember how the pieces fit together. Where should the large rings be placed? The smaller ones? Even annual participants were puzzled. A runner was sent to consult with Dave. Further discussion ensued. Collective memory eventually produced a crosslike configuration with one large ring at the crossing, two smaller ones above it, and two large rings suspended by ropes in a skirt-like fashion below the crossing. On top, we placed the rooster, decked with flowers and feathers that Dave had fashioned as a decoration in imitation of poles he had seen elsewhere in the United States. Finally, the pole was ready, although without the ringed top piece needed for securing the pole with guy wires. We took a break to eat.

On his postcard invitations to Midsummer at Sealander Park, Dave always specifies times: pole decorating beginning at 1:00 p.m., pole raising and long dance at 5:00 p.m., and potluck to follow. In my experience, these times are hypothetical. When one enters the park and joins the work parties decorating the pole, one's sense of time shifts. Rather than consulting watches, we consulted the sun and our appetites. It was probably well after 5:00 p.m. and the pole wasn't ready, but we were ready to eat the food we had brought to share.

The potluck supper began with a blessing said by a participant who was asked, good-naturedly, because he "is a good Mormon"<sup>3</sup> and because others denied knowing how to say grace. Everyone joined in the potluck line, where, alongside American-style cold cuts, rolls, salads, cakes, and lemonade were enough distinctively Nordic dishes to fill a plate: flavored herring, hard bread, lingonberry jam, red beet salad, rice pudding, dipped rosette cookies, boiled potatoes with skins partially peeled, scalloped potatoes with cheese. No alcohol—Dave Sealander's mother Edith was a Latter-day Saint (LDS); her non-Mormon guests respectfully did not bring alcohol to the park. As we ate, Dave Combs continued to play, joined by another accordionist, a Danish American from Soda Springs—about three and a half hours' drive from New Sweden. Interspersed with the Nordic folk music was a varied repertoire of popular tunes. After eating, a Finnish immigrant from nearby Firth joined in on guitar. Those so inclined joined in song, puzzling out lyrics from a songbook that the Finnish immigrant had brought.

Diners and musicians lingered as dusk approached, until Dave Sealander emerged from his shop with the essential top piece, attaching



Figure 1.1. The Midsummer pole goes up at Sealander Park, New Sweden, Idaho, in June 2007. Courtesy of Susan Duncan, Idaho State University Photographic Services.

it to the assembled pole. Everyone gathered in the clearing for the pole raising. The only gender- and age-specific role was at the center, where the most physically able of us used crossed poles to push the Midsummer pole higher—with a “one-two-three-ho”—and higher yet, until it was erect and

ready to be lashed. Nearly everyone else helped with the three guy wires, holding them until Dave could securely fasten each one to poles at the edge of the clearing. Those few not working exclaimed at the sight: the pole suddenly taking on life as an upright focal point in the center of the park. "How lovely," the woman next to me exclaimed, and truly, it is hard not to be moved by a Midsummer pole's transformation as it rises to become a mast. It was 8:30 p.m., and light was beginning to fade as folk dancing around the Midsummer pole began.

### MIDSUMMER IN THE SPRING-TO-SUMMER SEASON

What could be more Swedish American than Midsummer? On June 24, or close to that date, Swedish Americans throughout the United States followed a process very similar to that at Sealander Farm. Along with St. Lucia's Day festivals, Midsummer can be used as an index of Swedish Americanness. Writing about Midsummer in Brevort, Michigan, Lynne Swanson (1996, 24) estimates that "nearly 95 percent of the 163 Swedish American organizations affiliated with the Swedish Council of America mark the holiday in some way." He characterizes Midsummer as "an activity strongly rooted in their [Swedish Americans'] collective identity" (Swanson 1996, 24).

The Midsummer holiday, located on the calendar either in relationship to the summer solstice or to the Catholic/Lutheran St. John's Day (June 24), is especially important to Scandinavians and to Scandinavian emigrants to North America and elsewhere. Although often thought of as the height or middle of summer, the holiday technically marks the beginning of summer and also, ironically, the beginning of the waning of daylight. Perhaps because this phenomenon is especially apparent in northern countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, Midsummer is heightened in their calendar customs as well as in the ethnic customs of those emigrating from the Scandinavian cultural region.

In celebratory activities, people elevate ideas that they especially value, making any holiday celebration worth our attention for the sake of probing the shared values of a community. Midsummer, along with the holidays that surround and influence it in America, is well worth our attention, then, not just for its intrinsic interest as a fascinating celebratory practice but also as a window into the values of an important nineteenth/twentieth-century ethnic group, Swedish Americans. The Swedish Americans of the Rocky Mountain West are of particular interest for their continuation and reinterpretation of Swedish customs in a region where they were also very successful in adapting to Western American cultural patterns. The Rocky

Mountain West's demographic complexity, with a population including Mormon enclaves, mining towns, urban centers, and farming communities, also allows us to explore some interesting contrasts in adaptations of ethnic culture.

The Mormon enclaves are of special interest in the ways their Swedish immigrant populations both reflect some of the patterns found throughout Swedish America and counter those patterns with customs peculiar to LDS immigrants. Furthermore, because most of the ethnic Mormon population immigrated close on the heels of conversion by missionaries, we see in this part of the Rocky Mountain population a syncretic religious-ethnic identity that is neither easy nor necessarily appropriate to disaggregate. Thus, the close relationship between Swedishness and Mormonness surfaces at several points throughout the chapters to come.

In this study, I will focus on the beginnings of Midsummer and the surrounding spring-to-summer seasonal celebrations in the Rocky Mountain West during the height of Swedish immigration to the Rockies (1880 to 1917). The passage from spring to summer was celebrated by Swedish Americans and the larger Scandinavian community alike with abundance and redundancy. Abundance was produced through observation of multiple celebrations drawn from both the Swedish and American cultures to heighten this time of year. These celebrations were redundantly meaningful through their expressing and re-expressing the turn in the season and its many associations, which could include national and ethnic patriotism. Abundance and redundancy resulted from many processes. With the Swedish Americans, what comes to mind most immediately is the process of ethnic recontextualization—immigrants reshaping their existing customs within a new context, negotiating their transition from immigrant to ethnic identity. But processes other than ethnicity were also important.

Addressing those other processes takes one into interesting territory. The key contexts within which the spring and summer celebrations can be understood range from everyday to sacred spheres of activity. Spheres of everyday activity, such as the routines of factory work or agricultural labor, shaped peoples' participation in seasonal holidays. The prime national holiday (the American Fourth of July) and a prime religious holiday for the Mormons (the Latter-day Saint Pioneer Day on July 24) competed and resonated with the Swedish idea of celebration. The nineteenth-century perceptions of sacred and secular spheres of activity frequently collapsed into each other when people enacted their holiday traditions. Another significant nineteenth-century pattern is the way in which activities like Midsummer were elevated through rhetorical culture. A redundancy of verbal activities,

such as orating and praying, surrounded customary activities to create a ritualized sense of space and time.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the season as a whole represented an embodiment of human-nature connections, interweaving eco-cultural meanings with Swedish patriotism.

Although these processes could well be addressed by focusing on Scandinavian groups in other American regions, I have taken up Swedish immigration to the five-state area of the northern Rocky Mountains—Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Colorado—as a means of expanding our understanding of ethnic culture in an understudied portion of the country. Swedish immigration was an important contributor to Anglo-European movement into the West. Swedish immigrants and westering Swedish Americans came into the northern Rocky Mountain region in significant numbers beginning in the 1880s in response to labor demands in the logging and lumber, mining and smelting, and railroad construction and maintenance industries. Subsequent growth of cities in the region encouraged single women to move to the region to work as domestic servants. These patterns replicated the trends of Swedish American settlement in the upper Midwest. The immigration of Latter-day Saint converts into Utah, however, stands in contrast to these familiar patterns. The Swedish LDS came mainly as families and established themselves on small family farms along the Wasatch Valley, stretching north and south from Salt Lake City.<sup>5</sup>

Today, the people of the American West tend to elide substantial ethnic imprints on Western culture. Along with the three other largest immigrant groups that could disappear into “whiteness,” (Jacobson 1998, 7–8, 69, 247, 256)<sup>6</sup> namely the Germans, Norwegians, and Irish, the Andersons and Johnsons of the West could go unmarked in the telling of Western local history, being instead collectively depicted as actors in “first white settlement” or “Mormon settlement” rather than ethnic settlement. The Swedish immigrants themselves helped create this impression by rapidly adopting English, explicitly claiming to be Americans and Westerners—especially in histories written during the World War I to World War II era—and leaving implicit their ongoing practice of ethnic traditions (Attebery 2001). In Utah, conversion to the LDS faith further complicated the development of a Swedish American ethnic culture, sometimes reinforcing ethnicity as religious practices that included mission work abroad permeated everyday activities and social life.<sup>7</sup> In spite of these claims to Westernness or Mormonness, Swedish American cultural activity can be found throughout the turn of the century period beginning in 1880 and, indeed, continuing throughout the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Documentation of much of this activity is often tucked away, though, in Swedish language sources preserved in specialized archives.

Within Swedish American culture, one might ordinarily focus on the winter holidays, St. Lucia Day and Christmas (*jul*). The winter season holidays have, indeed, been selected and intensified by Swedish Americans themselves. St. Lucia Day traditions practiced within the private space of family households have been developed into public St. Lucia festivals, often sponsored by towns, churches, or colleges with Swedish American roots. The annual festivals at Lindsborg, Kansas; Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church, Elgin, Illinois; and Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota, are representative of many such celebrations held on or near December 13 each year.<sup>9</sup>

Also selected and intensified is the idea of a “Swedish Christmas,” which was supported in nineteenth-century popular publications such as the Chicago magazine *Julgranen*, aimed at the Swedish American middle class as a part of a larger pattern of the nineteenth-century reinvention of Christmas that included Christmas annuals in nineteenth-century Scandinavian American and other literatures (Skårdal 1977, 238; Svensson, 1992, 157; Risley 2003, 58; Stokker 2000; Gradén 2004; Berry 1978).<sup>10</sup> This picture of the ongoing significance of Swedish Christmas customs is supported by evidence from a questionnaire for the Swedish Information Bureau in 1946–47. When Swedish Americans were asked, “Which holidays throughout the year do you celebrate?” Christmas, especially cited as the Swedish *jul*, was the most frequently cited observance, and 86 percent of those responding specified that Christmas was celebrated with *julgranen* (the candle-lit evergreen tree) and *julkakor* (cookies and baked goods). A few additionally cited *jultomten* (the Christmas brownie or elf), giving gifts, and serving special foods such as lutefisk, ham, and porridge as part of their holiday customs.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, the part of the year opposite the Christmas season offers an intriguingly complex pattern of celebrations that follow closely on each other’s heels, both Swedish American and American. From Swedish tradition, Walpurgis Night (*Valborgsmässoafton*, or *sista april*, the last day of April), the first of May (traditional beginning of summertime but also International Workers’ Day), and especially Midsummer (Swedish *midsommar*) mark and welcome the beginning and the apex of long days and warm weather in Sweden. This last tradition is elevated and elaborated as a high point in the yearly calendar, set at the summer solstice almost directly opposite Christmas. The Midsummer holiday experienced a renewal in the turn of the century period coincident with Swedish American settlement in the Rocky Mountain region. Therefore, as a pivotal celebration in the passage from spring to summer, Midsummer will take center stage in the chapters to come.

## MIDSUMMER IN SWEDEN

Prior to Rocky Mountain settlement, Swedish celebration of the Midsummer holiday has its roots in northern Europe and in the American Midwest. In Sweden today, Midsummer is celebrated with a cluster of outdoor activities—Midsummer pole raising, dancing and music, children’s games, and drinking and feasting out of doors—on the weekend closest to June 24 (Klein 1996; Swahn 1997, 26–27). But traditional observances at or near the summer solstice have also included bonfires, mumming by *lögubbarna* (leaf-covered men), mock weddings, processions with *Midsommarspiror* (handheld poles decorated similarly to Midsummer poles), decorating churches with *Midsommarstakar* (decorated stakes), wreath-making, and drinking spring water (perhaps a reference to St. John the Baptist) for health or luck (Bringéus 1976, 198–219; Tidholm and Lilja 2004, 22). Another important set of practices revolved around foretelling one’s future spouse, through, for example, sleeping with flowers under the pillow or holding a silent vigil (T. Wall 2007). Most of these practices have been eclipsed by the Midsummer pole raising tradition, which, according to Nils-Arvid Bringéus, has enjoyed organized support of various societies and governmental units and has been influenced by tourism (Bringéus 1976, 202–3). Also enjoying official support is the idea of the day as a national holiday. In 1935, Midsummer Eve became a bank holiday, and in 1953, its celebration on the Saturday closest to St. John’s Day was established (16).

Pole raisings, bonfires, and other Midsummer practices have a long lineage that can be traced to Early Modern Europe.<sup>12</sup> Celebrations that included bonfires, praise of civic leaders, and satirical song and dance were identified with St. John’s Day in Sweden as early as the sixteenth century and may have been a German import (Billington 2008, 50). Many of these customs were expressed regionally; for example, the practice of kindling celebratory bonfires at Midsummer has been documented as limited to the southern region of Skåne, Bohuslän (Gothenburg’s region) and the western Swedish-speaking region of Finland. Elsewhere, bonfires were set instead at Valborgsmåsafton (Walpurgis Night, April 30), the first of May, Easter, or other spring holidays (Campbell and Nyman 1976, 46–47, 104).

The Midsummer pole, now distinctive to the Scandinavian countries, is also credited to contact with the northern German Hanseatic League and, in Sweden, can be dated perhaps as early as the late fifteenth century, with widespread popularity by the seventeenth century (Bringéus 1976, 202; Klein 1996, 14; Swahn 1997, 27). Midsummer celebrations flourished in Sweden during the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in spite of resistance from the most Pietistic of Lutheran pastors, who

disapproved of dancing and excess (Bringéus 1976, 203–4; Klein 1996, 14). The tradition received even more opprobrium somewhat later and from another religious sector. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the tradition waned with the increasing popularity of the free religious movements that broke away from the national Lutheran church. With their chosen religious practices repressed by the national church, the members of many of these free churches eventually emigrated, taking their resistance to Midsummer with them. Consequently, according to folklorist Barbro Klein, “relatively few reports from early Scandinavian immigrant communities in the United States mention midsummer celebrations and maypoles” (Klein 1996, 15).

Klein’s conclusion is verified in the diaries extant from mid-nineteenth-century Swedish America. The Swedish writer Albin Widén examined an Illinois farmer’s *dagbok* (diary) for 1865 for documentation of holiday celebrations. According to his diary, Johan Peter Lindstrom’s days during June were occupied with outdoor farm chores—plowing and planting—and Midsummer passed without mention. Yet Lindstrom’s workdays paused for Sundays, on which only the weather was noted (Widén 1966, 116–23). We see a similar pattern in the diaries that Peter S. Nelson kept for 1860–79 while he was working in logging and establishing a farmstead near Galesburg, Illinois. In the spring-to-summer season, the Fourth of July was the one day other than Sundays when he took a break from logging and planting to celebrate during this mid-century period.<sup>13</sup> In the case of farm laborer Lars Andersson Dahlquist, even time off for the American observances of Decoration Day and Independence Day are missing from his account book for work in Peoria, Illinois, during the 1885 spring-to-summer season.<sup>14</sup>

Swedish folklorists point out that Midsummer is one of the few holidays in Sweden with national significance, especially given that the Swedish Flag Day has generally had a low profile in Swedish national mentality (Bringéus 1976, 195; Gustavsson 2007, 199; Klein 1996), a pattern that may be shifting at the turn of the twenty-first century with increased immigration into Sweden. According to Klein, “as a symbol of Swedishness, the maypole becomes a guard against ideals and values that are not Swedish” (Klein 1996, 21). But Klein also notes that “the maypole appears capable of embracing a wide spectrum of meanings” that are oriented toward place and nature (20). Thus, the Swedish American holiday’s association with national values and its ability to reflect varied and complex meanings have analogues in the Old Country.

In Swedish America, Midsummer emerged as a popular Swedish American custom during the same late-nineteenth-century era in which the

tradition experienced a renewal in public celebrations in Sweden. This emergence can be tracked in Swedish American almanacs, in which the listing of Midsummer first occurs in the late 1880s or even later, depending upon the publication. In almanacs published by *Amerikanska Emigrant Kompaniet* [the American Emigrant Company] in New York, a listing for Midsummer appeared between 1884 and 1888, when it was noted as a holiday celebrated in Sweden. *Svensk-Amerikansk Almanacka och Kalendar* [Swedish-American almanac and calendar], also published in New York, noted numerous sacred and secular holidays in 1898 but not Midsummer. By 1901, Midsummer did appear, again noted as a Sweden-only observance, but from 1904 onward this almanac was silent about Midsummer. The Chicago newspaper *Svenska Amerikanaren* published an almanac focusing on the Lutheran church year; in this series, Midsummer didn't appear until 1919.<sup>15</sup>

Transatlantic contact was a major influence (Barton 1992, 10–11). According to H. Arnold Barton, Swedish Americans returning to visit relatives in Sweden during the 1890s came into contact with local and private Midsummer celebrations in their home districts and with large, public celebrations at sites such as Skansen, the outdoor folk arts museum on the Stockholm outskirts that had begun development in 1891. Several commented that the public celebrations outshone smaller and more private events in the districts, suggesting that the practice was becoming a more public, sponsored event during this period (Barton 1997). Visits to America by Swedes were also a factor, as with the East Coast and midwestern tour of a Skansen folk dance troupe during 1906–1907, after which many of the dancers remained in America to teach folk dance (Liman 1983).

Peter S. Nelson's diaries provide an excellent example of this transatlantic influence. Beginning in 1869, Nelson made periodic spring and summer trips to his homeland, visiting relatives there but also visiting a health resort where he took the waters, both bathing and drinking, in an attempt to treat chronic health problems, apparently arthritis. His first mention of Midsummer occurs during one of these trips, when he wrote on June 22, 1900, a Friday, "tomorrow is the midsummer Holiday Eve in Sweden; people are making great preparations to celebrate." During the weekend his observations continued. On June 23:

Today I went to the springs; had breakfast early; a bath at 9 o'clock so as to be ready for the afternoon celebration; the children with flags marched from the society building to the [word indistinct] hall, then danced around the may pole; the children's bicycle club also made a nice display of flowers.

And on Sunday, June 24, "This has been midsummer day; the young people of all classes has been out in their best attire, gay and happy. Yesterday I got acquainted with two young American ladies from St. Paul, Minnesota, who are here for their health and pleasure."<sup>16</sup>

This and subsequent visits in 1905 and 1907 appear to have revived Midsummer for Nelson. Prior to 1900, the ideas of celebration, outdoor recreation, and connection to Sweden in the late June season appeared only implicitly in his diaries. In 1879 he went fishing; in 1882, attended a Good Templars' sociable; in 1884, entertained visiting Swedish relatives with tours of the Galesburg area; in 1896, attended a concert presented by singers from Moline, Illinois; in 1897, read and fished.<sup>17</sup> If these days of leisure represented ethnic content, he leaves that meaning implicit in the diary. But in 1911, Nelson began to note Midsummer explicitly even when in America. On Saturday, June 24, 1911 he wrote, "this was midsummer day in Sweden. It is one day of great event," but it was the following Wednesday, June 28, when he attended a gathering and visited Swedish American friends, writing in an uncharacteristically reflective tone:

This has been one of the days when you feel like life was worth living. Weather cool and pleasant. I went this forenoon to Knoxville to a picnic. I was over to see Swan Peterson. Although he is feeble his head is clear and he likes to talk. I seen a few other old friends and had a good time generally. Got back home at 8:45 p.m.<sup>18</sup>

The following year he was again reflective: "Yesterday [Sunday, June 24] was midsummer day. I did not think of it until today. As a boy in Sweden I enjoyed midsummer Eve immensely." And on June 26, he again attended a Swedish American picnic held by a Lutheran Sunday School.<sup>19</sup>

What had changed for Nelson? Born in 1835, he had emigrated to Illinois in 1853, during the first major wave of Swedish immigration to the American Midwest.<sup>20</sup> By 1900, at the same time that ethnic renewal was occurring on both sides of the Atlantic, Nelson and his fellow mid-century immigrants were entering a new phase of life in which they could hand over to a second generation the hard labor required to maintain their farms or businesses. Nelson's diary becomes a record of visitations, with many of his visits to Swedish American men and their families. This also became his pattern for Decoration Day and Independence Day, which had been important holidays throughout Nelson's diaries. As we will see in the ensuing chapters, these patterns of ethnic renewal and increased participation in old age are factors that affect celebration of Midsummer as a part of the spring-to-summer holiday season among the Swedish Americans of the Rockies.

## MIDSUMMER IN NORTH AMERICA

Our knowledge of Midsummer traditions in North America is fragmentary, as scholarly documentation of the holiday has been sporadic and often limited to local studies. Even so, it is possible to conclude that the tradition is long-lived, widespread, and continuous in some localities. Most of our information comes from the fieldwork of Swedish scholars who visited North America during the twentieth century and the work of historians of Swedish America who have retrieved descriptions of Midsummer from Swedish language newspapers and contemporary documents like Nelson's diaries. These scholars have identified Midsummer traditions in the main concentrations of Swedish settlement—the Midwest, the northern plains, the Pacific Northwest, Utah, the Colorado Front Range, the Canadian plains, and the Northeast. Mentions of Midsummer in these documents date to the 1890s and continue throughout the twentieth century to the current day, even through periods of substantial change. Midsummer weathered the Lutheran Augustana Synod's gradual early twentieth-century shift from Swedish to English (also a pattern in other Swedish American churches) and the World War I Nativist movement's antagonism toward Germanic and Scandinavian peoples, which led to a muting of public displays of ethnicity (Blanck 1995, 67; Hanson 1996, 241; Henrichsen et al. 2010; Isaacson 2003, 129; C. Johnson 1982; N. Johnson 1992, 28; Klein 1989, 47–51; McMahan 1997, 36; Mulder 2000, 257; G. Scott 2005, 236; L. Swanson 1996; Trotzig 1977; Widén 1972, 203–6; Youngquist 2002, 254–55).

As in late-nineteenth-century Sweden, Midsummer in North America enjoyed sponsorship from associations of various sorts as a public event, but in the American setting these events could do double duty as fundraisers (Youngquist 2002, 254–55). The Vasa Order of America, local Swedish clubs, and other Swedish and Scandinavian American associations were important sponsors, but Lutheran and other Swedish-Protestant churches (having dropped antagonism against the custom) also held Midsummer events. A key feature of these occasions was holding the celebration out of doors, and descriptions include many of the components of the Swedish Midsummer as described by Bringeus, Klein, and others—a Midsummer pole, music, folk dance performance, social dancing, regional Swedish folk costume, games and races, parades, speeches, and an outdoor meal or picnic—but with some American additions and variations: the United States flag placed on the Midsummer pole (Blanck 1995, 67), reports from members who had traveled to Sweden (N. Johnson 1992, 28),<sup>21</sup> and the idea of honoring “royalty” in the guise of a Swedish American of the year or a Swedish American beauty queen (Klein 1989, 48–49).



Figure 1.2. Midsummer Queen (Linnea Osman) for the Phalen Park Midsummer, St. Paul, MN, 1923. Photograph courtesy of the American Swedish Institute.

One Swedish-born observer of celebrations in the heartland of Swedish America, the upper Midwest, during the 1930s and 1940s was Albin Widén, a writer with training in ethnology. He began his study of Swedish America with field trips in 1935 and 1939 (Barton 1984, 179;

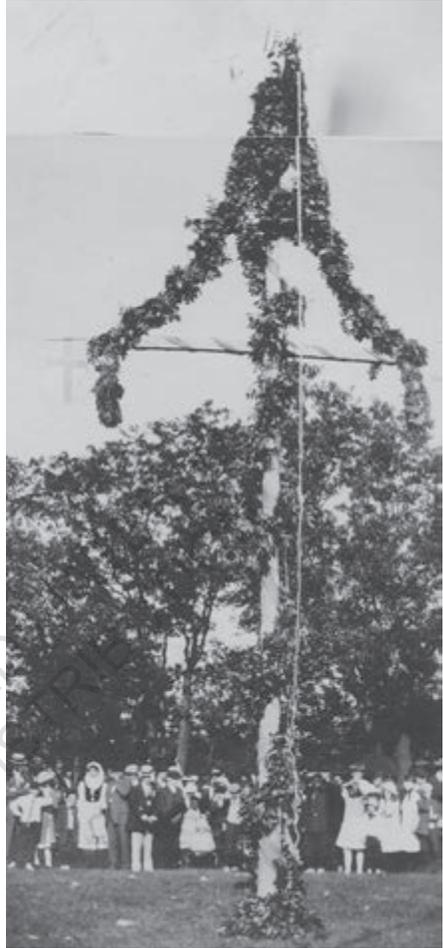


Figure 1.3. The Midsummer pole at Phalen Park, St. Paul, MN, 1915. Photograph courtesy of the American Swedish Institute.

Beijbom, 1985). While not attempting a detailed ethnography of Swedish American practices, Widén did offer some sweeping observations about how he perceived traditions as being adapted by the Swedish Americans of the between-the-wars era. During 1941–42, Widén served as director of an Augustana Institute of Swedish Culture in Rock Island, Illinois, and during 1942–47, he was director of the Swedish Information Bureau headquartered in Minneapolis (Barton 1984, 179; Beijbom 1985). In the latter position, he contacted Swedish Americans around North America with a request to complete a lengthy questionnaire concerning their immigration and adjustments to their new country.<sup>22</sup> The holiday section of Widén's questionnaire prompted some interesting responses from the ninety-one immigrants who took time to complete it, most of them men

and nearly all from the upper Midwest. Few responded that they celebrated only American or only Swedish holidays; rather, most displayed an inclusive attitude toward holiday celebrations, saying that they preserved and sometimes mixed traditions from both nations. One respondent wrote that he and his family were “American at Easter and Swedish at Midsummer.”<sup>23</sup> Most important to the respondents were *jul* (Christmas) and *påsk* (Easter), the former usually celebrated with Swedish customs and the latter sometimes so. New Year’s Day, Independence Day, Midsummer, and Thanksgiving were also volunteered as regularly celebrated holidays, although by fewer respondents.

Respondents’ comments provide clues as to why there were limitations on the development of Midsummer as a North American holiday. One respondent from a small Minnesota community explained that “Midsummer is seldom celebrated among the Swedes in this area, but in the large Swedish communities such as the cities of Duluth, Minneapolis, etc., large celebrations are held at Midsummer time.”<sup>24</sup> Part of the requirements for a Midsummer celebration, he implied, was a concentration of Swedish population. Another respondent saw the main problem with Midsummer as conflict with the American labor schedule: “Midsummer generally speaking [is] a work day.”<sup>25</sup> So, Midsummer does not emerge from Widén’s questionnaire as a holiday consistently practiced throughout Swedish America, but neither is it absent. And, given the obstacles posed by American society, its practice is revealed as especially important to those who did so.

One possibility that cannot be dismissed is that Widén’s own interest in Swedish American traditions could have reinvigorated and sustained their practice, especially in Minnesota. Even though he had received some ethnological training in his studies at Uppsala and Stockholm, Widén was scarcely removed from the peoples he studied. On the contrary, he took an active role as what H. Arnold Barton dubbed “an outstanding ambassador of goodwill between Sweden and America” (Barton 1984, 179). Today, we would characterize his activities as “public folklore,” his career paralleling similar efforts by the American folklorist Benjamin Botkin.<sup>26</sup> In addition to the Augustana Institute of Swedish Culture and the Swedish Information Bureau, Widén was active in the American Swedish Institute (Minneapolis) and Sweden’s program for selecting a Swedish American of the Year, all activities promoting the continuity of Swedish tradition in the United States (Barton 1984, 179–80; Beijbom 1985).

In *Svenska Som Erövrat Amerika* [Swedes Who “Conquered” America], Widén made clear his position as an ethnic culture advocate:

In [the periodical] *Svenska Nybyggaren* [the Swedish Settlers] of June 12th, 1873, we find an illuminating notice, an appeal to Scandinavians to celebrate the 4th of July, the big American holiday. Today, no appeals are needed to observe the American days of celebration; they are obvious to the Swedish Americans, as for other groups of Americans. Rather, one must work for a common Swedish American Day, because there now is great confusion. One celebrates “Vasa-Day” in connection with John Ericsson’s memory, local Scandinavian days, etc., and in the fall of 1935 for the first time Leif Eriksson Day was celebrated, since it has been officially admitted that he was America’s actual discoverer—that day naturally took care of the Norwegians, although it might be regarded as a general Scandinavian or Icelandic celebration. Norwegian Americans generally celebrate the 17th of May [Norwegian Constitution Day, celebrated as a day of independence]; perhaps the three-hundred year jubilee in Delaware will give rise to the beginnings of a special Swedish American day. (Widén 1937, 122)

Widén’s comments are significant in light of earlier efforts in Chicago, following on the New Sweden, Delaware, 1888 jubilee—the 250-year anniversary of Swedish colonial presence in North America—to create a day on which Swedish Americans would regularly assemble to recognize their common heritage. Lars Wendelius (1990) described “Our Forefathers’ Day” in Rockford, Illinois, 1890 as a festivity inspired by Chicago’s celebration, which was timed for the third Sunday in September. But this was an abortive effort, as Wendelius noted, “not tied to any particular Swedish celebration. This may have meant that the reasons for the event appeared to be vague and obscure—unlike, for example November 6 and midsummer—and that the fine idea never took root among the Swedish Americans” (Wendelius 1990, 60–61).<sup>27</sup>

The much later emergence of a Swedish American Day, located on or near Midsummer and especially in the Twin Cities, was in part Widén’s doing, making his later writings as much reports of his success as they are descriptions of Swedish America. Widén generalized that it was typical for Swedish Americans to celebrate a *sommarfest* (summer celebration) of some kind and compared the practice to those of other American ethnic groups with their own celebratory days, such as St. Patrick’s Day (Widén 1972, 203). The Americanized tradition of Midsummer, though, was sometimes celebrated at the solstice, sometimes shifted to the 4th of July, sometimes consolidated with a local pioneer recognition festival, and sometimes tied to June 6, the Swedish National Day (Widén 1972, 203–6). Widén wrote in 1948 that “during recent years there has been a notable tendency to arrange a *midsommarfest* as a sort of Swedish day or ‘*Svenskarnasdag*,’ in which all of an area’s groups and organizations take part, the largest being the one

celebrated in Minneapolis the last Sunday in June and bringing together around 50,000 people” (Widén 1948, 18). In chapter 8, we will examine this pattern as it was followed in Denver.

In addition to the continuities in tradition that have been observed in the American Midwest, early- to mid-century continuities in Swedish American Midsummer celebrations have been documented in the Northeast, specifically in Worcester, Massachusetts, and Huntington, New York, on Long Island. For Worcester, photographic evidence exists from 1912, 1945, and throughout the 1950s. While the annual celebration at Worcester included many activities in the ordinary inventory for Midsummer—national flags, sports competitions, music, dance—it also incorporated a less usual parade. Distinctive features of the Midsummer parade in 1912 were floats depicting the Monitor (Swedish American John Ericsson’s ship) and a Viking ship (Salomonsson, Hultgren, and Becker 2005, 85, 116). These float designs dated much earlier, to a Viking float created by the Swedish American organization Svea Gille for an 1892 Independence Day parade and an 1898 Monitor float created by Svea Gille for a parade celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Worcester’s founding.<sup>28</sup> The latter parade was held near Midsummer, on June 22 (Nilsson and Knutson 1898, 53–54). According to Salomonsson, Hultgren, and Becker, “parades . . . were staples of the Midsummer celebration until the 1920s. Midsummer is still celebrated by Scandinavian American organizations throughout the region” (Salomonsson, Hultgren, and Becker 2005, 85).

The Long Island Midsummer event may represent a continuous tradition from the late 1930s through the late 1970s, when a Long Island celebration was observed by Barbro Klein (described in her later publication “Den Gamla Hembygden,” Klein 1989), although it is unclear whether this was the same community observed by Albin Widén in the mid-1930s. Widén wrote *Svenskar Som Erövrat Amerika* after his first trip to America. In it, he briefly refers to observations of Midsummer celebrations in Detroit, Michigan; New Jersey; and New York during the mid-1930s. He photographed Swedish Americans in New York dancing in folk costume around a somewhat diminutive Midsummer pole (Widén 1937, 96ff, 122, 132ff). As described by Klein, the Long Island celebration of the 1970s, held the last Sunday in June, was organized by the combined Swedish American associations of the larger New York area as an outing to Lindbergh Park near Huntington, on land owned by the Vasa Order. Huntington’s proximity to New York City drew an unusually large attendance to this event, including in addition to the older generation of Swedish immigrants a cosmopolitan crowd accustomed to the festive ethnic celebrations of the city. This made

Midsummer in Huntington “multifaceted” (Klein 1989, 47). The celebration included a short Lutheran service, performance of Swedish songs, singing of the Swedish and American national anthems, sales of Swedish foods, picnicking, folk dance performance, and presentation of the Swedish American of the year, but not the erection of the Midsummer pole nor dancing around it; the pole had been put in place before attendees arrived. Instead of the Midsummer pole as the day’s high point, the focuses of the day on Long Island, as observed by Klein, were a Miss Sweden beauty contest and an evening social dance (Klein 1989, 47–51).

### MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY ETHNIC RENEWAL

Whether or not continuously practiced, Midsummer has been identified in several other mid-twentieth-century communities, and there appears to have been a second mid-to-late-twentieth century Swedish renewal of interest in ethnicity that informed the celebration. Dave Sealander’s New Sweden pole raising is an example. There is very limited evidence for an old Midsummer tradition in New Sweden, Idaho: people remember Midsummer picnics dating back to 1904, and there is a Midsummer photograph from 1910, but there is also a lack of evidence after that time. The 1910 photograph records an annual Fourth of July picnic at which a Midsummer pole was present. However, Dave Sealander’s father Clause never mentioned having seen a Midsummer pole raising during his lifetime (he died in 1982), suggesting a break in the tradition.

The owner of the 1910 photograph, Anna Margaret Nygaard Cobb, who was a young girl when it was taken, characterized the picnic as a secular event, not supported by members of the New Sweden (Mission) church. But, she said, the church members who were uninterested in Midsummer as a tradition did hold summer picnics. The New Sweden settlement began in 1894 with creation of an irrigation and land improvement company by Swedish Americans from the Midwest. Families from Nebraska and Iowa made up the first trainloads of settlers, and they very soon after began holding Mission services in private homes, building a church in 1895 (Attebery 1995). The community eventually formed a New Sweden Pioneer Association that held an annual picnic in early July, beginning in 1919. Sealander Park has been its location since 1954. In the 1950s, Dave’s father Clause built a stage at the park to accommodate the programs for the picnic. Musical performances became the expected tradition at the picnics, with Clause and Dave playing accordion duets and other musicians performing as well (Cannon 1985).



Figure 1.4. A 1910 photograph depicts an Independence Day picnic at New Sweden, Idaho, at which a Midsummer pole was present. Photograph courtesy of David A. Sealander; preserved and gifted to Sealander by Anna Margareta Nygaard Cobb.

In comparison to this long tradition of pioneer picnics in New Sweden, the Midsummer pole raising at Sealander Park is quite recent. As Dave Sealander tells the story, he became aware of the national folk music and folk dance movements when folklorist Hal Cannon invited Clause and Dave to play at the Northern Rockies Folk Festival in 1979. From fellow musicians at the festival, Dave learned about the Poulsbo Skandia Folk Dance Society in Seattle, where he attended a festival in 1981. Since then, he has returned many times over the years to the Seattle area to play and meet with fellow musicians at Midsummer and the Skandia Ball.

In 1983, Dave attended his first local Midsummer event when he was invited to a backyard pole raising in Idaho Falls hosted by an American couple who had lived in Sweden. Two years later, Dave and a Swedish immigrant joined forces to invite friends to Sealander Park for the first pole raising there. The local Sons of Norway chapter was one source of attendees. About a hundred people attended that first year, most of them invited directly by phone calls. Dave has since maintained the Midsummer pole raising tradition in New Sweden, accommodating his own continued travels to national events by holding the local event a week earlier or later than Midsummer proper (Sealander 2001).

This story of ethnic renewal at New Sweden has mid-twentieth-century counterparts throughout the United States, part of a larger trend toward

increased interest in ethnicity among European Americans, as noted by Matthew Frye Jacobson in *Roots Too* (Jacobson 2006).<sup>29</sup> This renewal included a turn toward public demonstration of ethnic heritage through organizing festivals. Larry Danielson identifies “the 1960s as a decade of Swedish American cultural revivalism in Lindsborg,” the particularly well-studied Swedish American community in Kansas’ Smoky Valley (Danielson 1972, 296). Ethnic activities included the highly publicized and nationally imitated Hyllnings Fest, a festival celebrating the Swedish American pioneers, held biennially in October, to which we will return in chapter 8. Lindsborg also publically observed St. Lucia, a King Knut (after Christmas) celebration, and Valborgsmässoafton. Midsummer, though, is described by Danielson, and later by Lizette Gradén, who did fieldwork in Lindsborg in 1997–98 with follow-up visits in 1999 and 2001, as remaining a more inward-directed, community event. According to Danielson and Gradén, Midsummer was observed in the nineteenth century, allowed to languish in the 1950s, and revived in the 1970s, somewhat after the institution of the other festivals in Lindsborg. Today it is overshadowed by the festivals organized for public audiences and intended to promote the town’s economy (Danielson 1972, 293–96; 1974, 13–14; Gradén 2003, 4).

Other regions and localities with renewed, revived, or invented mid-twentieth-century Swedish celebrations include multiple towns in Nebraska; Turlock, California; Junction City, Oregon; and Denver, Colorado. Henrik Tallgren mentions that the Turlock Skandi-Fest, a festival very similar to Hyllnings Fest and also held in the autumn, was patterned after a Scandinavian festival held since 1961 in Junction City, Oregon (Tallgren 1999, 34). In the Nebraska towns visited by Swedish dialectologist Folke Hedblom during his 1964 tour recording Swedish speakers, Hedblom noted Midsummer celebrations (Hedblom 1965, 150). In Denver, the annual Midsummer celebration held by the Vasa, Valhalla, and Vikings lodges was given renewed life by the Swedish Club of Denver in 1962—a renewal of an event with a continuous history but now for a larger, more public audience.<sup>30</sup>

Survey work by the Swedish sociologist Carl-Erik Måwe places these scattered mid-century observations in some perspective. Måwe traveled throughout twenty-eight states and two Canadian provinces during 1960, interviewing Swedish Americans with connections to the region of Värmland concerning a number of topics that he considered indicative of their cultural adjustments to life in America. Both Memorial (formerly Decoration) Day and Midsummer appeared in his survey, with the interesting result that Memorial Day was ordinarily celebrated by more of his

informants (80 percent) than was Midsummer (32 percent). One of the “key people among his interviewees” explained the American milieu for the holiday: “Most Americans do not know what one means by Midsummer Day” (Måwe 1971, 299). Måwe’s anecdotal evidence suggests that Midsummer was a stronger practice among first-generation Swedish Americans and in communities that experienced waves of renewed Swedish contact through ongoing immigration.<sup>31</sup> In addition, we should note that Memorial Day would have received heightened attention in this post-World War II era.

Carl Isaacson sees Swedish American ethnic practices like Midsummer as having become “codified” and “frozen in time” by the middle of the twentieth century through their promotion via organizations, which in addition to sponsoring events also published instructive books laying out ethnic traditions (Isaacson 2003, 130). Nonetheless, in the many practices described by folklorists and historians we do see variations linked to the specific historical contexts within which each celebration emerged. Måwe interprets these changes as “Americanization” that could take different forms: “private Midsummer celebrations among friends and acquaintances,” “Midsummer celebrations organized by churches,” and “large, public celebrations” (Måwe 1971, 300). But Måwe’s categories are a bit too neat. The late twentieth-century/early twenty-first-century Sealander Park celebration, for example, fits somewhere midway on the private-to-public continuum. It reflects not just the history of New Sweden but also the Sealander family’s enthusiasm for heritage music and in particular Dave Sealander’s inclusivity—his ability to reach across the perceived barriers of ethnicity, religion, and locality to include a wide spectrum of participants.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, especially with the sesquicentennial of Bishop Hill, Illinois, in 1996, and the centennial of the Vasa Order in the same year, many Midsummer celebrations also commemorated the history of Swedish immigration to localities across the country. This was the case in Bishop Hill itself as well as Chicago, several Washington state communities, and communities with a heavy Swedish imprint in Maine, Kansas, Minnesota, and South Dakota (Jarvi 1996, 43–47). Similarly, the Historical Society of Stanton, Iowa, chose Midsummer 1995 as the vehicle for launching its Halland project, a study and series of interpretive displays regarding Swedish settlement in southwestern Iowa (“News” 1995, 155).

### **PATTERNS IN THE SWEDISH AMERICAN CALENDAR**

Significant patterns emerge in the evidence we have for the North American practice of Midsummer. Midsummer celebrations existed on a

public-to-private continuum, with public displays elaborating on the symbols of at least two phases of ethnic renewal, at the turn of and in the middle of the twentieth century. The popularity of celebrating Midsummer waned and then waxed in response to immigration patterns, American Nativism, religious ideas, and contact with Sweden. And, while networks throughout Swedish America helped develop some practices that can be regarded as standardizations, regional and local communities did develop their own patterns for Midsummer.

One overarching trend is that the spring-to-summer passage was celebrated by Swedish Americans with abundance and redundancy, evident in the way the seasonal passage was celebrated in multiple events in which traditional practices were freely intermingled and conflated. This occurred as the Swedish import of Midsummer became amalgamated with the series of extant American holidays and holidays being established during the late nineteenth-century period.<sup>32</sup> American observances in the spring-to-summer season included the Anglo-influenced May Day, Decoration Day (now Memorial Day), Flag Day, Independence Day, and, for the Latter-day Saints of Utah and southeastern Idaho, Pioneer Day (July 24), and other closely contiguous spring/summer days marking points in LDS history. As we shall see in the chapters to come, the pull of these mainly patriotic holidays may have influenced the ways in which the seasonal connotations of Midsummer merged with celebration of Swedish American heritage. In the West, this merging was also expressed as the Swedes' part in settlement—that is, the Swedes as pioneers.

In mapping out the yearly cycle of American holidays, folklorist Jack Santino distinguishes cultural perceptions from the more precise markers of equinox and solstice. Americans perceive the beginning of a long season called summertime not with the solstice in June but with the “transitional month” of May (Santino 1994, 118). Summertime, according to Santino, is a single long season that begins on Memorial Day, at the end of May, and extends through August to Labor Day, at the beginning of another transitional month, September. Throughout May, June, July, and August, then, Americans express a welcoming of sunshine and warmth, marking their many celebrations with flowers as a key symbol and with activities that “celebrate *being* outside” (140). Many of the American holidays are, additionally, civic, expressing national patriotism with the predominant symbol, the American flag (112–41).

A recurring theme in the scholarship concerning both the American Christmas season and the spring-to-summer American holidays is the idea of paired secularization and sacralization.<sup>33</sup> Several recent studies of

Christmas tend to agree with the common wisdom that the holiday has been secularized through commercialization (Lavin 2004; Schmidt 1995). Even the interpretation of Thanksgiving has been pulled into this secularization theory. In her study of Thanksgiving over a hundred year span between 1905 and 2005, media scholar Bonnie Brennan identifies a pattern of secularization and commercialization of the originally religious holiday during the latter half of the twentieth century, paired with a “ubiquity of advertising [that] often made it difficult to determine where news ended and advertising began” (Brennan 2008, 32). To this common critique of American holidays, Santino provides a refreshing reminder that commercialized popular culture is still culture with expressive power. He notes that “the common wisdom is that contemporary calendrical celebrations are debased by commercialism,” but, he adds, however much embedded within a capitalist society, American holidays, “continu[e] to possess great significance and power” (Santino 1996, 151).

While Brennan and others are able to point to specific evidence from mass media sources, especially advertising, for the influence of commercialism on American celebration of the winter holidays, their focus on secularization-cum-commodification reflects a larger pattern in thinking about American culture, broadly conceiving of the sweep of American history as a “secularization narrative” (Kaufmann 2007) in which Americans have gradually and inevitably shifted away from the religious orientation brought to North America beginning with the seventeenth century Protestant Separatists and toward a Capitalist-influenced secular society. This secularization narrative has been questioned by numerous scholars who see religious ideas as persistent throughout American history.<sup>34</sup>

Ideas embedded in this secularization theory have also been important in shaping the interpretation of the patriotic American holidays of the spring-to-summer season: Memorial Day, Independence Day, and the Confederate Memorial Day (variable, but held on May 10 in many places). But while Christmas has been seen as secularized, these holidays have been seen as sacralized, revering and ritualizing national symbols such as the flag. Robert N. Bellah saw Memorial Day, Independence Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, and Washington’s and Lincoln’s birthdays as “an annual ritual calendar for the civil religion” of America, basing his interpretation in part on W. Lloyd Warner’s interpretation of Memorial Day and other national days such as Veteran’s Day as “rituals of a sacred symbol system which functions periodically to unify the whole community,” which is otherwise divided into religious groups and affiliations with various social organizations (Bellah 1967, 11; Warner 1962 [1953], 8).<sup>35</sup>

But as we will see in the chapters to come, the story of Midsummer and other spring-to-summer holidays is more complex than is accounted for by a simple sacralization narrative.

In the chapters that follow, I will examine Midsummer and the nearby holidays in the spring-to-summer season as they were celebrated in four nodes of Swedish settlement in the northern Rockies and the communities for which they became cultural centers: Denver in the Front Range of Colorado, Salt Lake City in the Mormon-influenced culture area that includes southeastern Idaho, Butte-Helena and the Montana communities for which they were centers in the late nineteenth-century mining/smelting era, and the northern Washington/Idaho Palouse farming country. In addition to describing how the spring-to-summer transition was marked by the Swedes in these communities, I will explore a series of contexts within which the meaning of Midsummer and its season can be understood: the contexts of nineteenth century rhetorical culture, sacralization and secularization, Scandinavianism, and modalities of holiday expression. At several points in our story, the study necessarily broadens to include the other Scandinavian groups that immigrated to this region. Evidence from these Scandinavian groups may include some Swedish-speaking Finns who were involved in Swedish settlement but did not self-identify as Finno-Swedes. However, this study does not otherwise seek to include all of the Nordic and Baltic immigrants to the Rocky Mountain area.

## METHODS

Reaching back to the turn-of-the-century period to describe and interpret holiday practices requires an interdisciplinary method that incorporates historical sources and methods within a folkloristic understanding of the structures and meaning-making strategies of celebratory activities. Many sources exist to document the practice of holidays during 1880–1917. Lacking observations by ethnographers (to date, I have not discovered a Rocky Mountain ethnographer who turned his/her attention to groups other than the American Indian groups during this period), the most direct source is the diary. During this period many people regularly recorded a few lines per day in pocket books designed for this purpose. As Jennifer Sinor notes in her study of diaries, it was typical to record the weather, one's daily work, and contacts with friends and family members (Sinor 2002). A typical entry reads like this one from Carl Otto Holm's diary of June 23, 1914, written at his farm in Ammon, near Idaho Falls, Idaho: "I

watering wheat and lucern. Henry gone to the hills.”<sup>36</sup> This typically terse entry leaves us wondering whether the trip “to the hills” was in any way a Midsummer observance.

A second category similar to the diary is the memorandum book, kept by working men for whom recording the number of hours that they labored was critically important, even though they might ultimately be disappointed by not receiving full pay for the recorded work. Even though these records are more numeric than verbal, they nonetheless provide some monthly tracking throughout the year. For example, in Axel T. Nelson’s memorandum book entry for July 4, 1891, when he was working as a farm laborer in Parma, Idaho, we see two *x*’s, a code he used to indicate a work day.<sup>37</sup> For him, Independence Day was not a holiday.

Longer prose manuscript sources such as letters occasionally provide direct evidence of the spring-to-summer season, although typically they do not note specific holidays but rather describe the season more generally. One example is John Swanson’s letter to his parents, written in July 1906, in which he describes his summer outdoor activities when given a week free from his work at the Argo smelter.<sup>38</sup> Rarely, we find longer manuscripts devoted more fully to holidays. An especially valuable manuscript, for example, is the 1912 Midsummer speech delivered by Dr. Charles E. Bundsen at a Vasa Order-sponsored Midsummer celebration in Denver, which will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

The popular press is also a good source for documentation of the many celebrations that were sponsored by social and religious groups. In the Rockies, several Swedish and Scandinavian newspapers served the Swedish American population. In them we find advertisements for upcoming events and correspondents’ columns in which events are described and critiqued. Direct sources also include occasional photographic documentation, although photographs are nearly as rare as speech scripts like Bundsen’s. Photographs are ambiguous sources, as they are typically posed rather than candid. For example, a Salt Lake City area photograph depicts Scandinavians at a celebration labeled as Swedish and ostensibly performing an old Swedish bridal custom, leaving us many questions about the nature of the celebration (Henrichsen et al. 2010, 19). Was this an actual wedding in which the couple attempted to recapture Old World custom, or was it merely an enactment? If the latter, are we seeing a tableau or a still representation of a longer performance? Reminiscences and oral histories recorded in the mid-twentieth century also help us reach back to the turn-of-the-century period, although these sources are less direct in the sense that they present memories, often generalized and nostalgic.

We can bring to these historical sources perspectives from folkloristics. Folklorists look at holiday customs as devised by and shared among people to express identifications with abstractions of importance to them, abstract ideals such as “individualism” that may connote for them their common nationality, regional heritage, or ethnic heritage. Folklorists attempt to fathom this *emic* point of view—that is, the view of the custom from within the folk group or community that shares the practice—in addition to the perspectives offered by the complementary *etic* comparative study of cultures from an external view. Also from folkloristics and other fields studying cultural phenomena comes the idea that cultural practice is not just “constructed” by people but also “performed” by them. Performance theory uses the not-so-metaphorical analogy of performing for an audience in a “performance arena,” whether one is studying a fiddler literally on the stage at the Weiser, Idaho, Fiddle Festival or a log cabin builder whose “audience” may be remote both in place and time. The celebratory behaviors exhibited in holidays naturally suggest performance in contemporary examples where the celebration is public and publicized. Lisa Gabbert’s (2011) study of the annual McCall, Idaho, Winter Carnival examines one example in which local participants can be seen as performing for outsiders who visit specifically to admire the ice sculptures and observe the carnival’s parades. Yet, even in this example performance is complicated, Gabbert demonstrates, by the many ways in which local participants perform for each other throughout the carnival (Gabbert 2011). As we shall see throughout our analysis of the spring-to-summer celebrations in the Rockies, an event such as a Midsummer pole raising allows participants to assume both performer and audience roles. After the pole is raised, those raising it can assume the roles of speech maker, singer, or dancer. Singing, orating, or dancing, they can admire their handiwork and observe their fellow participants as they fill their chosen roles.

In interpreting folk custom with this mutual process of performance and audience observation, folklorists have, in recent scholarship, typically shied away from asking whether replications and variations of culture for which performance is a vehicle are also unconscious processes. The notion that folklore resides in the unconscious mind and is therefore both deeply significant and inaccessible to rational analysis, has seemed unverifiable and therefore has been treated as yielding no enlightenment. But the hands-off approach to consciousness is being critiqued by social science scholars inspired by the new neurosciences. Writing from the perspective of *neuropolitics*, a political science that takes into account new discoveries about the brain, William E. Connolly argues that, “it is not only pertinent to see

that life is culturally constituted, it is also important to come to terms with the *layered* character of culture itself” (Connolly 2002, 6–7). Culture can be observed, outwardly, but where does culture reside inwardly, in the body? Based on his understanding of neuroscience, Connolly answers, “at several levels of being, with each level both interacting with the others and marked by different speeds, capacities, and degrees of linguistic sophistication” (Connolly 2002, 6–7). What a folklorist observes as she joins Midsummer participants to dismantle, decorate, and assemble the Midsummer pole, debating the process, conversing as they share a meal, singing, and dancing, involves these many layers of bodily engagement. This engagement goes beyond the merely linguistic to incorporate multiple modes of expression. It is perhaps the combination of parallel and redundant layers, conscious and unconscious, incorporating the multimodality of movement, taste, smell, sound, and sight with conscious thought that creates our sense of a festival’s deep meaning.

As I’ve participated in Midsummer at Sealander Park, I have been struck by its contrast to the workaday world: I’ve already noted that on entering the park one leaves behind day planners and even, if one is willing, timepieces. Also left behind are hierarchical structures of command and supervision. The pole decorating would not happen were it not for cooperation among the participants. The work has to be negotiated. Around one at the pole raising, one hears, “I’ll do [this task].” “Can you help with [that task].” “Perhaps you could do this.” No one in particular is in charge, although Dave Sealander is available for advice. The shape of the event—its structuring of human relationships—is that of a rural work party. The workers come together for a set task, often one that can be broken down into components in which workers form teams, and when the task is completed, the workers dance and eat together. This is the structure of barn raisings, harvest crews, and quilting bees.

Work parties exist in the rural West into the twenty-first century, but the opportunities that most Westerners have to participate in them have shrunk considerably. As a girl in the late 1950s, I visited my grandfather’s farm in eastern Oregon for the potato harvest. My arduous task at age five was to ride on the wagon, observing as the men loaded gunny sacks of potatoes onto the wagon bed. But as a town girl, I had only this brief glimpse into the kind of work parties that were common experience a generation before mine and that continued among those who still had family farms. At Midsummer, this pattern is reconstructed for me nostalgically. Participants come to the pole raising for the satisfaction of cooperative labor, they dance around the pole once it is erected, and they join in a meal together, although

the male/female and age-specific roles have been shattered—or at least bent. The Midsummer pole raising at New Sweden is, in fact, very much like the contra and other folk dancing practiced by many Midsummer participants throughout the remainder of the year, requiring cooperative movement in patterns that are associated in the participants' minds either with older times or with internationalism: as Amy Brunvand notes, such events are an alternative to American popular culture (Brunvand 2000a; 2000b).

In the chapters to come, we will see Midsummer and the other spring-to-summer holidays in various garb. In the Rockies, the spring-to-summer holidays function as multiply meaningful observances. They represent and reconsider ethnicity and panethnicity, sacred and secular relationships, and the rural and the urban. These interpretations of the season's significance might seem contradictory on first blush, but we can regard them, rather, as demonstrating how very flexible and complex traditional celebrations can be.

## NOTES

1. I have been a participant observer of the Sealander midsummer celebration in 1994, 2001, and 2007. This description focuses on 2001 but is also informed by observations in other years and interviews with Dave Sealander in July 2001.

2. In describing this late-twentieth century example of Midsummer, I use the term *Nordic* rather than *Scandinavian* because the broad community of participants invited by Dave Sealander included Finns as well as Scandinavians, making this particular celebration pan-Nordic.

3. I use the terms *Mormon*, *LDS*, and *Latter-day Saint* interchangeably to refer to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members.

4. Here I use *ritual* in the sense used by Jack Santino, “dramatic social enactments that are thought by the participants to have some transformational or confirmatory agency” (Santino 2004, 364).

5. A historical context for Swedish settlement in the northern Rockies is established in my *Up in the Rocky Mountains: Writing the Swedish Immigrant Experience* (Attebery 2007, chapter 3).

6. For more recent thoughtful reconsiderations of whiteness, see also Kolchin 2002 and Guglielmo 2003, 8–9, 73–74, concerning Italians in the turn of the twentieth century, but also addressing the larger population of immigrants.

7. Swedish dialectologist Folke Hedblom, visiting Utah to record spoken American Swedish in 1966 was astonished to encounter Utahans who were fully fluent in a contemporary Swedish that had been reinforced through recent immigration and on-going contact via the missions to Scandinavia (Hedblom 1967, 88–89).

8. An excellent example is the mid-twentieth century creation of a Swedish Club of Denver, which is well documented in the club's minutes and scrapbooks, deposited in the Denver Public Library, WH1976 (Swedish Club of Denver Papers).

9. Välkommen to Lindsborg, Kansas (2012); Bethlehem Lutheran Church (“Sancta Lucia Festival” 2014); and Gustavus Adolphus College (“The Festival of Saint Lucia” 2014).

10. Dag Blanck places Christmas annuals in the context of the Augustana Book Concern's “creation of a sense of Swedishness” (Blanck 2006, 137–39). Franklin Scott includes the

Swedish American Christmas annual as part of the ordinary literature against which socialist Swedish American periodicals defined themselves (Scott 1965, 194).

11. Widén collection (Beijbom 1985), boxes 15: 7: 10–13.

12. This parallels the Early Modern emergence of customs such as mumming in England (Hutton 1994).

13. P. Nelson Papers, box 1. Diaries extant from 1860–79 are 1860, 1861, 1862, 1863, 1869, and 1879. Nelson records celebrating the Fourth of July all of those years except 1860. The 1869 diary is the first extant in which he wrote in English.

14. Dahlquist, Lars Andersson Collection, account book entries for 1885.

15. The Swedish American almanacs consulted for this study are deposited at the Swenson Swedish Immigration Center, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois. The Swedish Emigrant Company's publication was *Svenske Almanack för År* (1883, 1884, 1888–93, 1895). Other almanacs included *Svenske-Amerikanska Kalendern* (1911, 1912), published in Worcester, Massachusetts, in which Midsummer did not appear in 1911 and 1912; *Svenska Monitorens Almanacka* (1911–15), published in Sioux City, Iowa, in which the summer solstice was noted, 1911–15; and *Svenska Postens Almanack och Kalender* (1912), published in Rockford, Illinois, in which the summer solstice was noted, 1912.

16. P. Nelson Papers, box 2. Nelson observed Midsummer during visits to Sweden again in 1905 and 1907, mentioning especially that the young people danced; boxes 2 and 3.

17. *Ibid.*, boxes 1 and 2.

18. *Ibid.*, box 3.

19. *Ibid.*, box 3. A subsequent mention of an old-timers' picnic at Midsummer appears in 1914. Nelson died in 1916.

20. *Ibid.*, box 1; Peter S. Nelson was born on February 15, 1835, in Gammalstorp parish, Blekinge, Sweden. He emigrated on July 15, 1853. In Illinois he worked as a logger, a flour merchant, a ditch digger, a farmer-rancher, and an assessor, and he was active in local politics. Nelson married Nellie Gibson in Chicago in 1863. Demographics of the Swedish emigration are set forth by Norman and Runblom 1988.

21. In chapters 4 and 5 we will see an excellent example of one such report delivered as a 1912 speech by Charles A. Bundsen of Denver.

22. The questionnaires are preserved in the Widén Collection (Beijbom 1985), boxes 10–13.

23. Widén Collection (Beijbom 1985), box 10, response from a male immigrant of 1891 who had lived in Genoa, Nebraska. At the time of answering the questionnaire this respondent was in his mid-seventies, living in Spokane, Washington. "Americanskt om påsk, Svenskt om Midsommar."

24. Widén Collection (Beijbom 1985), box 13, response from a male immigrant of 1902 who lived in Worthington, Minnesota. At the time of answering the questionnaire this respondent was in his mid-sixties. "midsommar firas sällan bland svenskarna I dessa trakter, men i store svenska samhällen såsom städerna Duluth, Minneapolis m.fl. avhållas stora festligheter vid midsommartiden."

25. Widén Collection (Beijbom 1985), box 13, response from a male immigrant of 1896 who had lived in Minnesota, California, and Canada. At the time of answering the questionnaire this respondent was in his late sixties. "midsommar i allmänhet en arbetsdag"

26. See Rodgers and Hirsch 2010 for Botkin's career.

27. Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus died on November 6, 1632. The day is now Finnish Swedish Heritage Day, established in 1908.

28. *Svea*, referring to the central Swedish region of Svealand, was also used in this era to refer to the nation as *Moder Svea*, Mother Sweden. *Gille* translates as guild.

29. See my comments in chapter 8 regarding the inappropriateness of “revival” in a context that included many continuities of practice.

30. Denver *Westerns Nyheter* and *Western News* issues from 1924 through 1961 document the continuity of the Denver Midsummer celebrations. For more on the Swedish Club of Denver and its activities in relationship to Midsummer, see chapter 8.

31. Måwe’s fieldnotes and taped interviews, deposited at The Swedish American Center, Karlstad, Sweden, are well worth further exploration for their documentation of mid-twentieth-century Swedish American culture and the Swedish study of Swedish America. <http://www.swedenamerica.se/index-en.htm>.

32. Ellen M. Litwicky describes the period 1865 to 1917 as characterized by a “tremendous rush of holiday invention,” (Litwicky 2003, 2).

33. Selected studies of Christmas include Davison 1964; Gaudet 1990; Kimball 2001; Monnett 1987; Nissenbaum 1997; Restad 1995; Waits 1993. Of the spring-to-summer holidays, Barrows 1986; Cohn 1976; Cohn 1977; Dennis 2002; Gowers 2001; 2005; Kinney 1998; and Lamm 1983.

34. According to Fessenden (2007), *Culture and Redemption*, America only gives the appearance of secularization through religion’s having been restricted to sacred physical and social spaces, but its implicit and pervasive influence in public and everyday life still exists, however unremarked. European historians also question this secularization narrative, maintaining that in America, religion has remained important while Europe is a region of secularization. See Lehmann 1998; and Lenhammar 1998 (critiqued by Hutchison 1998). According to Milich 2004, Europeans stand out worldwide for their secularism (424).

35. Warner also influenced Måwe’s work with Swedish American celebration of Memorial Day (Måwe 1971, 293–94). The idea of civil religion also appears in Cohn 1976; Kinney 1998; and Bitton’s (1975) interpretation of Mormon history-related celebrations, “The Ritualization of Mormon History.”

36. Holm Papers, box 4, folder 15.

37. A. Nelson Papers, box 2. The doubling of the x may have indicated overtime work on a holiday.

38. Swanson Papers, Letter C17, 28 July 1906.