



## 13 Taylors Falls, Minnesota

MP 53.0 (N45° 24.086', W092° 39.135')

The first Swedish settler to come to the small frontier community of Taylors Falls arrived in 1850 but did not stay. Erik Nordberg, instead, explored the unsettled, heavily wooded area to the west, hoping to find a site suitable for a Swedish colony. Impressed with the land around Chisago Lakes, he wrote Per Anderson, leader of a Swedish immigrant group in Moline, Illinois recommending the area and enclosing a crude map and directions on how to get there. In response, as soon as the Mississippi was free of ice in the spring of 1851, Anderson, Per Berg, and Peter Wicklund, with their families and several hired men, began the steamboat journey up river. The Anders Swenson family, a Swedish family from New Orleans, joined them during the journey. The steamboat took the four families as far as Stillwater where they built two flatboats, which they poled into Taylors Falls on June 24, 1851. While the women and children stayed in the small settlement, the men hacked a trail west to what is now the Center City area.

This pattern of Swedish immigrant families arriving at Taylors Falls and moving inland away from the river, and away from the town, would repeat through the 1850s and in successive waves of Swedish immigration. In his "History of the Swedish-Lutheran Churches in America" Eric Norelius, who came to Chisago Lake in 1854, commented that in Taylors Falls there were at the time very few horses and no Swedish families—but a short distance from the city there were numerous Swedish families carving homesteads out of the forest. Eventually a road to the Chisago Lakes area was blazed. The road was a very difficult one and could not be described as a normal transportation corridor in any respect. In fact, the road seemed to wander through the woods, turning left, then right, more in response to obstacles presented by the terrain than setting a straight line of travel. Early immigrants who did venture to the city for supplies were forced to make their way across the rough road and carry the burden on their backs or in their hands. The nine or ten miles that separated Taylors Falls from Swedish homesteads in the Chisago Lakes area could not have made for an easy shopping trip.

Eric Nordberg, who had led the first Swedish immigrant families to the Chisago Lakes area in early summer of 1851, went on to direct a stream of Swedish immigrants to Minnesota. In his letters from America and in newspaper correspondence he called the attention of his countrymen to the fertile soil that was awaiting willing hands to cultivate it and reap the abundant rewards for their labor. It is said that he received fifty dollars from the people of Taylors Falls for his efforts to bring Swedish settlers to Chisago County, and he certainly made good his promise.

There were many others who encouraged Swedish immigration to the wilderness communities of the St. Croix River valley, but however great the promises and however great the hope, the journey itself took many lives. Crossing the Atlantic could take nearly three months, sometimes with up to four or five hundred immigrants packed into the vessel—landing in New York they might have faced sailing across the Great Lakes to Chicago, boarding a train to reach the railroad on the Mississippi at Rock Island, Illinois, boarding a steamer bound for Stillwater, and boarding (or building) another boat to bring them upriver to Taylors Falls. And then there was cholera, which nearly brought immigration to a standstill for a time—Gustaf Hultquist, who made his way to Chicago in 1853 and then to the Chisago Lakes area in 1855, had a terrible ocean voyage—of 219 passengers 64 died from cholera.

Once immigrant families had made it to the St. Croix River valley, the first winter or two were the hardest—building a log shelter, clearing the land of trees, living on what they could produce by planting wheat, rye or potatoes between the huge stumps of trees, and finding any work they could to generate cash. Yet a continuous stream of Swedish immigrant families came to the St. Croix River valley and to communities throughout Minnesota—they heard about the place by word of mouth, by letter, and by newspaper articles. The result? In 1870 twenty thousand people spoke Swedish in Minnesota. In 1900, one hundred twenty thousand, one hundred sixty-four thousand in 1940 and, as the old generation began to die, seventy thousand in 1948. The arrival stories of Swedish immigrant families are stories of valor and hardship. Whether they disembarked at Marine, Franconia or Taylors Falls, their stories speak to a steadfast and unwavering optimism that a new life in America would be worth the risk.

The rewards of 19th century risk taking for modern communities along the Swedish Ring Historic Backway are many—an unspoken Swedish work and craft ethic and Swedish heritage, customs and traditions that have an appeal to people of all ethnic backgrounds.

### Ring Driving Directions to Franconia:

As you leave Taylors Falls, continue 3.2 miles west on US Hwy 8 to MN Hwy 95, then south 0.5 miles to Franconia Trail, then east on Franconia Trail 0.5 miles to the stop sign, turn east across the small bridge at Lawrence Creek 0.1 miles to the Franconia pioneer monument on your left (Placed in 1947 by the Franconia Old Settlers Association "In memory of the rugged pioneers, who by hard work and privations of frontier life, hewed from the wilderness this land of plenty. . ."), from the pioneer monument follow Summer Street east a quarter mile to reach the location of the historic steamboat landing on the St. Croix National Scenic River.



Top photo: The St. Croix Dalles adjoining Wisconsin and Minnesota Interstate State Parks and the cities of Taylors Falls and St. Croix Falls, photographer Bill Neuman

Bottom photo: Bateaux, boat used by lumberjacks, on the St. Croix River near Taylors Falls, circa 1899, photographer John Runk, Minnesota Historical Society

## 14 Franconia

(N45° 22.533', W092° 42.243')

In 1852, Ansel Smith made a claim near the St. Croix River and platted the village of Franconia, clearing away the worst of the timber with his own hands. He was the first settler in the village, raised the first crops, operated the first store, and was the first postmaster (1854). On February 24, 1858, he recorded his plat for Franconia Township, became one of the first supervisors, and, more than 150 years later, his plat development is still the largest on record in the township. With a partner he built the first sawmill in the village in 1854 and helped logging and lumber to become the main business of the town. Smith also went on to represent his district in the fifth, sixth, and seventh legislatures following Minnesota statehood in 1858.

Smith had gotten Franconia off to an energetic start and the village soon developed into a thriving community. Farmers worked the soil of the highlands while industry boomed along the river. In this time Franconia drew settlers of Scottish, English, Irish, German and Swedish descent. A flourmill was started and a steamboat building business established. A hotel, saloon and various stores and shops were built to serve the needs of the townspeople and area farmers. One important need filled by business enterprises was to provide winter work for Swedish farmers who needed a cash income to purchase needed supplies. Many Swedes found work logging the great pine forests or hiring on in the sawmills.

A land boom in 1854 had resulted in the sale of much of the land in Chisago County. Migrants from throughout eastern America made most of the original land purchases, hoping to profit by reselling the land to immigrant settlers. A majority of Swedish immigrants, who would eventually dominate the county, arrived too late to take advantage of the public land sales. Only in the early settlement area around Chisago Lake does one find land that was pre-empted by Swedes.

Another form of speculation was town platting. Town sites were enthusiastically surveyed and promoted all over the county, although many of them never got beyond the planning stage. Anticipation of a railroad line connecting St. Paul and Duluth spurred many such projects—some only to be dashed when the railroad located elsewhere. Other projected towns were victims of the panic of 1857 that ruined many of the Chisago speculators. Following the panic, confidence was restored and property began to be sold at more realistic prices. During the period from 1858 through 1867, settlers moved into the county in a more or less steady stream of about 100 new arrivals a year. During this period settlement spread westward from Taylors Falls and Franconia village and eastward from the Chisago Lake area, bridging the gap between the lakes and the river landings.

The flow of settlers into the county swelled greatly from 1868 to 1872, due largely to a considerable upsurge in Swedish immigration resulting from agricultural failures in Sweden during 1868 and 1869. Any remaining land west of Franconia and east of Chisago Lake was quickly taken up. Overflow spilled across the frontier fringes

into Amador and Sunrise Townships in the northern part of the county. Even more instrumental in opening up the sparsely settled northern portion of the county was construction of the Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad along the west side of the county at the end of the 1860s. During this period railroad lands were sold to Swedish immigrants, and the easy transportation to remote areas around newly formed market towns, made possible by the railroad, attracted an increasing share of Swedish immigrants. The great influx of 1868-72 was followed by six years of relative stability. Then, from 1880 until about 1883, the county was inundated by a second great surge of newly arrived Swedish immigrants which was equal to, if not greater than, its predecessor. The phenomenon was once again related to an agricultural crisis in Sweden, this time during 1881 and 1882.

These conditions made Franconia important as a place of first arrival for hundreds of Swedish immigrant families. For a period of time Franconia had even become the major town site north of Marine on the river. During its most prosperous years in the 1870s, Franconia's population reached five hundred. However, in 1878 the railroad company, which had spurred growth in the remote northern part of the county, laid tracks and built a station a mile west of Franconia on top of the river bluff. This changed the river transportation patterns and seriously affected the economy of Franconia. Many businesses and private residences were taken down and moved to towns closer to the rail lines. The sawmill continued to operate, however, until the end of the century when all the timber had been cut. After 1900 the population of Franconia dropped significantly, and many of the houses were either moved out of the village or abandoned as year round residences.

Throughout the Washington and Chisago County regions that were accessible by boat, Swedish immigrants had not really preferred to settle in the towns. In 1880 only 13.5 per cent of the Swedish population lived in urban places. Swedes preferred a rural agricultural landscape and way of life. In contrast, 49 per cent of the British and Irish population dwelt in the towns. They were the dominant population in all of the major Chisago County towns except Rush City, where Germans were dominant. The Norwegians were also strongly inclined toward urban living. Another striking aspect of the immigrant ethnic pattern in Chisago County was the very marked segregation that existed between ethnic groups—not just between one or two ethnic groups, but between all of the groups. For Swedish communities in late 19th century there is good reason to believe they were organized around the local Swedish-American church. The church was the only spot in the county that could truly be called an exclusively Swedish place of social interaction. Other central places, such as the town hall or the local market town, did not serve an exclusively Swedish population—they were places of cross-cultural contact. In a trend immigrants may have found different from what they experienced in their native Sweden, Swedish-American churches were in

fact 'meeting houses,' and the phrase 'go to meeting' took on special relevance and meaning for Swedish immigrants, apart from attending services or becoming members of a congregation.

### Ring Driving Directions return to Scandia:

From the Franconia landing return to MN Hwy 95 the same way you entered the village, a distance of 0.8 miles, then take MN Hwy 95 south 9.8 miles to MN Hwy 97, finally, continue 1.6 miles west on MN Hwy 97 to Scandia, site of the first Swedish settlement in Minnesota. This completes your drive around the Swedish Ring Historic Backway.



St. Croix River bluffs in autumn, photographer Bill Neuman

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