

Scandinavian Immigration

By Erickson

This undated photograph of a group in Scandinavian costumes was taken in Portland by a photographer documented only as "Erickson."

Between 1820 and 1920, more than 2.1 million Scandinavians immigrated to America. A little more than half were Swedes, almost a third Norwegians, and a seventh Danes. While approximately 125,000 Scandinavians came to the United States before the Civil War, the majority arrived between 1865 and World War I. Despite industrialization and economic growth in Scandinavia, many young emigrants were motivated to leave by political events, such as conscription laws that forced Finns to fight in and for Russia. Some Danes were similarly drawn into World War I to fight with the Germans ■ notwithstanding anti-German sentiments. Many Scandinavians were lured to the United States after receiving "American letters" from friends and family that described fruitful land and employment opportunities. Prepaid transportation tickets from relatives and friends often helped finance the trip to the New World.

Scandinavians settled predominantly in rural areas of the Midwest and Great Plains ■ particularly in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Prior to the 1870s, few Scandinavians made their way to the West Coast. One survey reported 65 Norwegians in Washington Territory and 47 in Oregon in 1870. By the 1880s, however, the railroads had reached the Pacific Northwest and within a decade, a significant number of Scandinavian organizations and churches had been established in Tacoma, Astoria, the Yakima Valley, and other areas environmentally familiar to the Nordic immigrants. Evidence suggests that Scandinavians felt a kinship with the natural surroundings and economic opportunities in the Pacific Northwest. More than 150,000 Scandinavians settled in the region between 1890 and 1910 ■ many attracted to the fishing, logging, and farming industries.

Further Reading: Rasmussen, Janet E. *New Land, New Lives: Scandinavian Immigrants to the Pacific Northwest*. Seattle, Wash., 1993.

Daniels, Roger. *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*. New York, N.Y., 2002.

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