

Dedication of Swedenborg Room

In 1638 the first Swedish colonists in America sailed up the Delaware River. They settled on the west bank between present day Wilmington and Philadelphia. Their political ties with the mother country were severed when in 1655 the Dutch took over the settlements. Nine years later the Dutch were in turn conquered by the English. Though the Swedes henceforth remained under foreign rule politically, the ties with the church in Sweden continued and were strengthened considerably when Swedenborg's father, Bishop Jesper Swedberg, in 1696 became superintendent of the Swedish congregations in America. Under his fatherly guidance many excellent clergymen and teachers were sent out to aid the colonists. Among them was Swedenborg's step cousin, Rev. Andreas Hesselius who arrived in 1712 from London where he had spent some time together with Swedenborg. Later Swedenborg's younger brother, Jesper, came over and stayed for five years as a school teacher. It is likely that Swedenborg learned a good deal about the New World from his returning relatives.

What Swedenborg could not have foreseen at the time was that several decades later in the same area his name and theological works—not yet written—would for the first time be brought to the attention of the American public. This took place at Bell's book store in Philadelphia where James Glen in 1784 delivered a series of lectures on the teachings contained in Swedenborg's works. The Philadelphia area has been a center for New Church activity ever since.

A further link to Swedenborg and his work was established when on June 14, 1969, a room in the American Swedish Historical Museum in Philadelphia was dedicated to the memory of Emanuel Swedenborg. The Museum is situated on land known in the 1600's as New Sweden.

The Swedenborg Room was a gift of the Connecticut inventor and industrialist Dr. Karl W. Hallden and his wife. Dr. Hallden was born in Sweden and came to America as a small boy. His interest in mechanical engineering brought him in contact with the work of Christopher Polhem, "The Father of Swedish Technology," and Swedenborg. A deep admiration of these men prompted his sponsoring of an English translation of "*Christopher Polhem*," a memorial volume (1963), and later the gift of the Swedenborg Room.

The dedication ceremony began with an invocation offered by the Rev. John Craig Roak of Gloria Dei (Old Swedes) Church in Philadelphia. The Swedish Deputy Consul General Gunnar Campbell-Westlind then gave some glimpses from the life of Dr. Hallden. The speaker closed by pointing out that "Swedenborg was also . . . something of an engineering genius" and in this field "Dr. Hallden and Swedenborg have a lot in common."

It was now time for the master of ceremonies, Dr. Nils Y. Wessell to introduce the main speaker, Dr. William A. Johnson, Professor of Religion at Manhattan College, New York. Dr. Johnson was the translator of the above mentioned work about Polhem and author of an article entitled: "Swedenborg as a Modern Thinker: His Influence on American

Thought," published in the *American Swedish Historical Foundation Yearbook 1965-1966*.

In his address Dr. Johnson suggested that there is similarity of character between the heroes of the old Scandinavian Viking religion and Swedenborg. The heroes fought valiantly and fearlessly at the side of the gods against forces of chaos.

"I would like to talk about Swedenborg as one of those heroes. . . . I want to look at Swedenborg as a representative of something which I might call the Scandinavian character, and by that I mean certain indelible characteristics that pertain to the majority of the people now and in the past. . . . What we mean by the Scandinavian character . . . the Swedish character, has something to do with exuberance, the probing mind, perhaps the introverted personality . . . intensely rational and spiritual. Swedenborg, I want to suggest, belonged to that character.

"He lived at a time when man's mind . . . was beginning to be freed from both intellectual and religious bondage. Swedenborg was thereby permitted to explore his world as he found it . . . to let a discovery or an idea take him where he wanted to go. But such an enterprise implies a free man and a free spirit, which I am suggesting Swedenborg was. . . .

"In the history of Western civilization, some have been experimentists, others visionaries. These have been the explorers, the dreamers and mystics. But Swedenborg was all of them at once. . . . He was one of those few in the history of Western man who can never be characterized, and . . . as we meet this afternoon, were recognize the multiplicity of gifts which belonged to Swedenborg as a human being. Because all, whether it was physical or metaphysical, came under his scrutiny. Whether it was an expression of matter or of spirit, nothing was excluded from the province of Swedenborg's wisdom. . . . In this Swedenborg was truly the first modern man."

Dr. Johnson further pointed out Swedenborg's emphasis on a life of charity, consisting in acting sincerely and justly in every duty, engagement and work because that is a heavenly life, agreeable to Divine law.

In his presentation speech Dr. Hallden emphasized that "we are meeting here today to dedicate a room in memory of the greatest Scandinavian who ever lived. In fact, some call him the greatest scholar since Aristotle."

Mr. Donald E. Hogeland accepted the gift on behalf of the Foundation saying about the Swedenborg Room, "We intend to use it, we intend to fill it, and hope to make it available to other people who can study the works of this man who almost defies description . . . a tremendous individual."

Following the benediction by Dr. Roak, all were invited to inspect the room where an exhibit was arranged of original works and items connected with Swedenborg, among which were a model of his flying machine and a replica of Milles' "Swedenborg on the Zodiac." The pleasant design of the spacious room creates an atmosphere conducive to study and research. A beginning Swedenborg library was displayed on the as yet rather empty book shelves. This collection was donated by the Academy of the New Church, The Swedenborg Foundation and the Swedenborg Scientific Association.

L.O.A.