

Swedish American Historical Society of Wisconsin

March 2021 Newsletter

The signs of spring are very welcome as they lead us out of a difficult year. They give us assurance that we can look forward to having our meetings and events in person with the socialization we have all missed.



SVENSKA LÅTER!—SATURDAY, MARCH 13 AT 2:00 PM—VIA ZOOM

Carol Gustafson and Mary Stetson, artistic name “**Goda Vänner**”, will be presenting and performing this program about Swedish Folk Music. Being American, learning Swedish Musical Language goes beyond learning melodies. Carol and Mary will discuss and demonstrate how to sound Swedish in various types of Swedish folk tunes: Vals, Polska, Schottis, and Gånglåt.

They will also discuss the **Snoose Boulevard Festival** held in Minneapolis in the early '70s, and the early immigrant experience. This Scandinavian/ Swedish festival brought immigrant songs to life. **Be prepared to sing!!**



[Link to Svenska Låtar ZOOM meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 828 5961 0407

Passcode: 450129

If you have not joined our Zoom meetings yet and would like to try it, let Jan know and he will tell you what to download and what to do with the Meeting ID and Passcode. His phone is 262-695-8630. Our attendance has been growing as people find out that the presentations are great. You do have to provide your own fika! We hope to see you on screen!

Past programs—The last three programs that were all presented via Zoom are still available on our website. These are ‘Swedish Traits,’ ‘Christmas Lucia’ and ‘Christina Nilsson.’ Go to SAHSWI.org and look for the heading ‘UPDATES.’ Then arrow down and you will see the programs and the button marked ‘Download’ for each one. Enjoy!

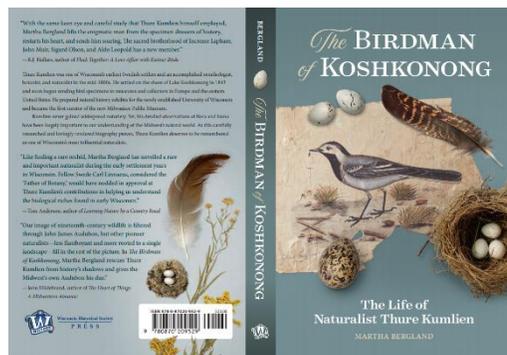


HAPPY BIRTHDAY! MARGE JOTHEN! Congratulations and best wishes to you on your 102nd!!

LOOKING AHEAD TO MAY—

SAHSWI Board member Martha Bergland is the author of a book soon to be released from the Wisconsin Historical Society Press--*The Birdman of Koshkonong: The Life of Naturalist Thure Kumlien*. In the SAHSWI May meeting she will present excerpts from her book. **Thure Kumlien** was one of Wisconsin's earliest Swedish settlers and an accomplished ornithologist, botanist, and naturalist in the mid-1800s. He settled on the shore of **Lake Koshkonong** in 1843 and soon began sending **bird** specimens to museums and collectors in Europe and the eastern United States, including the Smithsonian.

As we wait for this book Martha has provided a story about a Swedish immigrant, Otto Wilhelm Åkerman who Kumlien and Johan Olof Liedberg (Swedish immigrant who first settled in Wisconsin and then joined the Goldrush) met on the ship *Svea* in 1843.



Two Chance Meetings Martha Bergland

Having traveled north the length of Lake Huron, the steamship carrying Thure Kumlien and the other Swedes who crossed the Atlantic on the *Svea* stopped at Mackinac Island one day in August 1843. From the harbor below, the passengers looked up at Fort Mackinac where United States Army troops were garrisoned.

Swedish immigrant Johan Olof Liedberg, who had also been on the *Svea*, was there and told the story in his memoir: "Two soldiers from the fort came on board the steamship. One of the soldiers asked, "Is there any passenger here who is a Swede?"¹

"Yes," said Thure Kumlien. The soldier and Thure Kumlien began to talk.

They discovered that they had been students together when they were young boys and then at Uppsala University. The soldier told how soon after he arrived in New York he had been taken in by swindlers and had lost all his money. He said that he had neither the ability nor the training for hard labor and that he could not speak English.

"We Swedes were deeply moved by this experience," Liedberg remembered. But there was nothing they could do for this soldier.

"At that moment the ship's bell signaled farewell," Liedberg wrote.

As the ship steamed on, down the straits of Mackinac, on its way south on Lake Michigan, the Swedes must have wondered if they, too, would be "taken" by swindlers and lose all their money. Would they have the ability for hard labor? Would they learn to speak English? As Thure Kumlien

¹ Johan Liedberg, "A Memoir of the Journey from Gothenberg to Lake Koshkonong," *Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly*, Volume 23, Number 4, October 1972, pp. 221-232.

(Two Chance Meetings cont.)

and his friends were on the last leg of their journey from Sweden to Milwaukee, they may not have given that lonely soldier, their countryman, another thought.

But he was Otto Wilhelm Akerman who had arrived in New York on the *Odessa* from Gothenberg October 1, 1840.² Very likely he was swindled out of his money in New York, and, not knowing what to do next, seven weeks later he enlisted in the Army, as a bugler. The Army recorded that he was 5'6" tall, had blue eyes, and light hair.³

Akerman had been in the Army three years when he met the Swedes at Mackinac. He must have been able to understand English, but he was less confident in his speaking of English.

A little more than a year later, Akerman was discharged from the Army at Fort Scott, Kansas. He returned to Sweden.

But on June 6, 1845 in Gothenberg, Akerman again applied for a passport to New York. He arrived on the Swedish brig *Superb* August 11, 1845.

On board the *Superb* was Peter Cassel, his large family and a group of farmers—all from Ostergotland. They were on their way, they thought, to Pine Lake to farm, having read in *Aftonbladet* the letters Gustave Unonius wrote extolling that part of Wisconsin. But Akerman, who was headed west with a friend, recommended that they go together to Iowa. Akerman by then could speak English. He and others recommended that Cassel and his group not go to Pine Lake, but to Iowa where the farm land was richer. One of the Cassel group wrote that, "Akerman had been in this country before and then also in Iowa, being as he had served as a soldier at Fort Des Moines...[H]e remained with the party and served as its interpreter. He also helped his countrymen the best he could and came along all the way to Jefferson County [Iowa]."⁴

Akerman stayed with Cassel's group at New Sweden for a time. Cassel wrote that these "two educated countrymen,' now identified as Otto Akerman and Gustaf F. Jochnick, planned early in 1846 to start a colony farther west. Serious illness, two deaths, lack of money, and the re-enlistment of Akerman and Jochnick in the army put an end to these plans."⁵

In 1846 Akerman had again enlisted in the Army, this time at Fort Des Moines, Iowa in Company 1 of the First U.S. Dragoon Regiment. Again he was a bugler.

Three years later, in a skirmish with the Ute and Kiowa Indians in New Mexico, the Swedish-American Otto Wilhelm Akerman was killed. This was March 13, 1849 at a place called El Cero del Oza.⁶

² Nils William Olsson, *Swedish Passenger Arrivals in New York, 1820-1850* (Chicago: The Swedish Pioneer Historical Society, 1967), pp. 34-35.

³ U. S. Army records.

⁴ H. Arnold Barton, editor, *Peter Cassel and Iowa's New Sweden* (Chicago: Swedish American Historical Society, 1995), pages 14-15.

⁵ Peter Cassel quoted in Barton, page 34.

⁶ *Swedish Passenger Arrivals*, 34-35.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIR--

Bev Wenzel received this invitation from the Swedish Historical Society in Rockford, IL. It was in response to Bev's invitation to join us in our Zoom meetings. The invitation we received in return features a meeting with Cecilia Widegren who is a member of the Swedish Parliament. The information needed to join the meeting via Zoom is listed below.

"Please feel free to also share our digital fika March 18th at 8:30 a.m. via Zoom with Cecilia Widegren, member of the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag). Cecilia is a Swedish politician of the Moderate Party. She has been a member of the Riksdag since 2002.

"Information can be found here: <https://www.swedishhistorical.org/fika> The registration link is here: <http://bit.ly/3smaD1w>. The event is free!"

A LOOK AT THE PAST – WHAT WAS IN SWEDEN & AMERICA IN 2011?

What is the relationship between Swedish identity and language in America? There was fear that if the language died out, the Swedish identity would die with it.

Reasons for the loss of Swedish language are: Swedes came by choice and were always welcome in America. They didn't need to keep their language as a defense. English was easy for them to learn because it was also related to the German language; many parents wanted their homes to be English-speaking. Furthermore, it was easy for Swedes to assimilate—basic values were much the same as most Americans. More recently, Swedes coming to America already speak English having studied it in school.

Does loss of the Swedish language doom the identity? The 2000 Census seems to indicate 'no' – four and a half million Americans claimed Swedish ancestry. Groups such as ours were formed with the goal of remembering the history of immigrants and keeping the customs and traditions including serving the foods they grew up with. Case in point: our program on March 13 features Swedish folk music. The author of the article concludes by saying that even though we may be surrounded by things of Swedish origin but that are not dependent on language, if we want to get below the surface, we need to study Swedish!

--Thanks to H. Arnold Barton.

Charles A. Lindberg also known as 'Lucky Lindy' is featured in another article in Sweden & America. The Missouri History Museum in St. Louis has an exhibit showcasing his life and legacy. The son of a Swedish-born congressman from Minnesota, he was best known for his non-stop flight from the U. S. to Paris. While one has to go to the Smithsonian in Washington DC to see his plane, The Spirit of St. Louis, the exhibit includes his flight suit and other paraphernalia from the famous flight.

Wisconsin also a museum dedicated to a flying ace. Major Richard I. Bong was a highly-decorated pilot in WWII, having flown more than 200 missions – a record that has never been beaten. His many decorations include the Medal of Honor that was awarded by Gen. Douglas MacArthur. Born in 1920, he was the son of an immigrant Swedish father and an American-born mother and was regarded as the ideal all-American boy. After Dick Bong's death, funds were raised and the American Legion Post named for him acquired a P-38 from the Air Force. It was meticulously restored and is on display at the museum.

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