

Swedish American Historical Society of Wisconsin, Inc.

OCTOBER, 2022

ANNUAL MEETING AND BERGGREN TILES

COMING EVENTS

Saturday, October 22, 1:30 – Annual General Meeting
Sunday, December 11, 5-7:00 -Lucia Program

Saturday, October 22, 2022, starting at 1:30 pm, Martin Luther Church, 9235 West Bluemound Road, (located just east of Milwaukee Zoo).



SAHSWI will hold its Annual General Meeting including Annual Reports and election of Board Directors. After the business meeting John Elliott, SAHSWI Vice President will present and discuss Swedish themed products marketed during the 1960's

including Berggren tiles decorated in Swedish folk tradition style known as 'Dalmalningar'. John will bring examples to show, and anyone owning any Berggren tiles or other items are encouraged to bring to the meeting for show and tell. After the program attendants are invited to join the traditional Fika with coffee and treats. The meeting is open to the public.

Berggren Trayner was founded by Arthur and Audrey Berggren in 1948. The company moved to 624 E. Park Avenue in Libertyville in 1953. The company created silk screen ceramic and enamelware decals in Swedish style – decorative cookware, cutting boards, porcelain, china, and ceramic tiles. Their wares were distributed at department stores like Carson Pirie Scott and Marshall Field. In 1986, Bergquist Imports, Inc. bought Berggren Trayner and moved to Cloquet, Minnesota in 1987. Bergquist Imports still sells items under the Berggren Trayner brand name.

A SPECIAL NOTE—On page 3, you will find a new feature. *Martha Bergland gives us new insight about a person who was one of our most important early settlers.*

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: An important part of our Annual Meeting is the election of Board Directors. This year, due to expiring terms, there are three three-years terms to be filled. In addition due to the passing of Barbara Froemming, this board position needs to be filled. The nominating committee, consisting of Karin Konrad, George Lofgren, and Janet Taylor will present the following slate of candidates to be voted on at the Annual Meeting:

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| Three-year term: | Jan Ehrengren |
| Three-year term: | John Elliott |
| Three-year term: | Martha Bergland |
| Remaining two-year term: | Irene Roberts |

ELECTION OF DIRECTORS: (continued):

According to the bylaws, an additional nomination may be made by two members who notify the secretary in writing before the start of the Annual Meeting. The nomination should include the nominee's consent to accept the office if elected. If you have questions, call Joann at 262-255-2127.

CARL STRANDLUND--

Many Swedes in the great stream of immigrants to North America were creative and energetic. Several businesses that were established by emigrants who left Sweden in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have grown to large, powerful companies operating across the North American continent.

Carl Strandlund, one of the creative engineers, had 150 patents from the time he worked at the Minneapolis Moline Tractor Company. It came with his DNA; his grandfather was a renowned engineer in Sweden, and his father, who worked for John Deere, was an esteemed technician.

Strandlund was a forerunner where prefab housing construction is concerned. His idea was to utilize the conveyer belt principle to build the house's components in the factory and then assemble them on a cement foundation at the construction site.

In 1946, when industry was to convert from manufacturing war equipment to civil production after WWII, Strandlund proposed building gas stations of steel plates. But the federal government controlled all use of steel after the war and refused to give him permission to build the stations; it would, however, make steel available for houses.

Strandlund learned that the authorities were concerned about the great housing shortage in the US and he seized the opportunity. He sought and received permission to build houses of enameled steel. He soon drafted blueprints for a complete building kit that could be loaded onto a trailer and transported by a single truck to the building site. He called it the "Lustron."



Strandlund was convinced that lower construction costs would be a success and put all his assets at stake. As the VP and CEO of Chicago Vitreous Enamel Product Co. with an excellent salary and was able to assume liability for a government loan of \$15,000,000. His vision was to deliver 30,000 houses a year, which would answer the need of new houses for the million Americans who returned from Europe after military duty.

His vision of 30,000 homes did not materialize, but the factory did produce over 2500 homes that sold for between \$8500 and \$9500. Many of these are still standing. Unfortunately, Strandlund defaulted on his RFC loan and was forced into bankruptcy. He and his wife, Clara, then moved several times and finally settled in Edina, MN where he died in 1974.

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There are about 42 Lustron homes still standing in Wisconsin; nine of them are in Madison and one in Milwaukee. With a computer list and a map, one can make an interesting road trip that gives testimony to the vision of Carl Strandlund.

First Night on the Erie Canal

Martha Bergland

We think of Gustaf Unonius as a serious and religious man, a determined settler—and he was all of these. But he was also an upper-class Swede who was a close observer of the sometimes rough American world around him.

The group travelling together from Sweden in the summer of 1841—Gustaf's wife and her friend, a young kinsman of his wife, and several friends and their dog—with their boxes and trunks and bags had taken up most of the cabin of the canal boat they boarded in Albany. Gustaf assumed that because the group and their 2,500 pounds of baggage seemed to fill the long narrow canal boat, they would have the boat to themselves for the 360-mile trip to Buffalo on the Erie Canal.

Gustaf's first impression of the boat was positive. It seemed clean and neat. He noticed the "tiny red curtains" in the windows, and a "rather comfortable sofa covered with red damask."

But then more and more passengers crowded onto the boat. "A curtain now cut off one end of the cabin," Gustaf wrote, "making a separate room for the women." They watched while the steward "through further scene shifting" changed the entire room "into the strangest and most compendious sleeping quarters for no less than twenty-four persons, not to speak of the number that might be accommodated on chairs and tables."

"On both sides of the walls half a dozen shelves, or bunks, or whatever they may be called, were hung." These shelves with their mats and blankets and linens had been taken by the steward from inside the sofas along the walls and attached by hooks and ropes above the sofas making "bed-shelves" three tiers deep along the walls.

Gustaf continues: "The contraption really looked very fragile and altogether risky, especially for those who were to occupy the lower beds. The places were given out by lots, and I was unfortunate enough to draw mine in the second tier, where I was unable to lift my head more than a few inches above the pillow without pushing the person above me." Gustaf was able to lift his head enough to see the "shadow pictures" that fell on the curtain between the men and the women, noting that two of the women were "not at all the slender and willowy type."

During the night, he wrote, "the crowded condition also made me frequently aware of the stirring of my neighbor on the sofa beneath." And three small children kept him and most passengers awake all night.

"I managed to fall asleep for a while," he wrote. "But my bed was very short." So he lay awake with his feet touching the women's room curtain.

Gustaf must have fallen asleep because during the night, his feet "unknown to me," he wrote, "strayed into forbidden regions" and poked some woman in the head—or at least poked her nightcap. The decorous Unonius was appalled to be awakened by a

woman gently tickling the soles of his feet. He wrote that he immediately pulled his feet back into “his own territory.”

Page 4

But there was a happy ending to this sleepless night. Right after the tickle on his feet, Gustaf saw that it was beginning to be light, so he went up on deck to wash, where he was rewarded for his early rising by getting to be the first passenger to use the one and only, clean, common towel.

From *A Pioneer in Northwest America, 1841-1858, The Memoirs of Gustaf Unonius*, Volume 1, Minneapolis: The Swedish Pioneer Historical Society, 1950, pages 60-65.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jan Ehrengren, President John Elliott, Vice President Joann Kreimendahl, Secretary
Directors: Martha Bergland George Lofgren Janet Taylor Karin Konrad

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