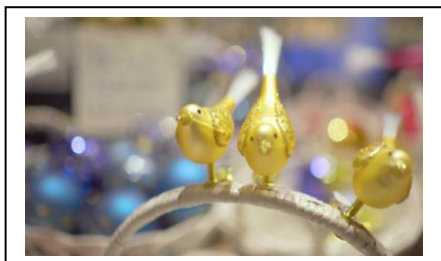


Swedish American Historical Society of Wisconsin, Inc.

CHRISTMAS 2024



COMING EVENTS

December 8, 2024, 2 - 4 PM Lucia Celebration

January 25, 2025-Swedish Authors

March 22, 2025-History and role of FÄBODAR
in Swedish Culture

SANTA LUCIA CELEBRATION 2024 -- December 8, 2024, 2-4 PM at Fox Point

Lutheran Church, 510 N Santa Monica Blvd, Fox Point, WI. Come and enjoy the Lucia program performed by children and young adults, directed by **Stina Lemery** with the help from **Amanda Balistreri**, and piano played by **Matt Byszynski** at the beautiful **Fox Point church**.

Welcome the Christmas season with a celebration of light in the darkness of winter. Hear the story and beautiful music of the Swedish celebration of Lucia. Lucia, crowned with candles and dressed in white will lead her procession of "tärnor" (attendants) each carrying a candle, "stjärngossar" (starboys), "pepparkaksgubbar" (gingerbread men) and "tomtenissar" (elves).



After the program join the traditional dancing around the Christmas tree while enjoying a cup of coffee or juice and sweets. Have your children visit with Santa!

Please note a change from previous years: **Coffee and Sweets are provided, do not bring a dish to share.**

HOLIDAY FOLK FAIR INTERNATIONAL—

The theme of the recent Folk Fair was “Celebrate the Culture of Traditional Art.” As part of the Nordic Council, SAHSWI and Linde Lodge were represented along with Norway, Denmark, and Finland. Jan Ehrengren and Liza Ekstrand were responsible for decorating the table and for coordinating the members who staffed the exhibit. Thanks to them and to everyone who worked to make our participation a success!

The Folk Fair is important in providing us with an opportunity to share our culture and history with others



JULSKYLTNINGEN—Taking place on the first Sunday of the Advent, Julskyltningen translates to the “Christmas Window.” The arrival of this celebration often marks the true beginning of the festive season for most Swedes, alongside the lighting of the Advent candle.

A month before Christmas, shops and stores set up their Christmas windows, featuring beautiful displays and amazing festive scenes.

Many charity organizations also go out into the street and hand fresh coffee to shoppers while markets and lotteries appear to raise money for great causes.

The Julskyltningen celebration is most common in small villages and towns, but many larger stores also get involved, often providing huge discounts on goods for those ready to start their Christmas shopping.

You might even get your hands on a free cookie or two from local cafes.

CHRISTMAS CARDS—



Julkort, the first Christmas card, debuted in 1843, three years after the British postal stamp was invented. The card, which was painted by an unknown Mason, was written by John Callcott Horsley. The price of each card was less than 1 shilling, and there were 1000 of them sold. The Christmas card was a staple of the holiday season by the 1860s. It spread over the globe, including Sweden, in the decades that followed, becoming a common means of communication.

Germany quickly started printing postcards with Swedish Christmas greetings for the Swedish market when the Swedish postal agency (Postverket) instituted a half-price

cut for shipping postcards in 1877. After founding an artistic publishing firm in 1890, Axel Eliasson started producing postcards and, later, Christmas cards in 1898. Jenny Nyström was employed by him as a graphic designer. She supposedly created more than five thousand postcards and a large number of them had holiday themes.

The gnomes, which she loved, quickly became the most popular design for Swedish Christmas cards; in fact, they became a hallmark that set them apart. The first Christmas stamp was issued by the Hungarian postal office in 1943; in 1972, the Swedish postal service adopted the concept and used Jenny Nyström’s artwork to great effect.

THE ADVENT STAR—Even after the Protestant Reformation, Christians continued to observe the Christian festival of Advent, which marks the beginning of their preparation for Christ's return. Among its messengers is the Advent star, or adventstjärna in Sweden. In the spirit of Christmas and to light up their houses throughout the winter season, Swedes hang Advent stars of many forms and colors every year. In one school in the German town of Herrnhut in the 1880s, pupils and instructors created the first Advent star using paper and internal lights.



After marrying German Julia Marx in 1912 Professor Sven Erik Aurelius brought the Advent star to Sweden. Herrnhut gave them an Advent star as a wedding present, and the newlyweds displayed it proudly in their Lund house. The Advent star was well-received by Lund families. The Swedish market began selling Advent stars imported from Germany in 1934, and that's when the name was given to them.

During the 1940s, a more basic version of the Advent stars started to be placed in windows all throughout Sweden. It has now grown in significance to the point that it rivals the Christmas tree as a central symbol of Swedish Christmas celebrations. It represents the [Star of Bethlehem](#), which allegedly guided the [three wise men](#) to the crib of the infant Jesus.

HOW JULBOCKEN TURNED INTO SANTA CLAUS



Today's Christmas traditions are a medley of various international rituals without any real cohesive thread but with strong Nordic influences. Santa Claus is primarily based upon the mythological St. Nicholas, an unproven 4th-century Christian bishop from Lycia (now in Turkey), but he is also strongly influenced by early Norse religion. St. Nicholas was known for giving gifts to the poor. Among early Germanic tribes, one of the major deities was Odin, the ruler of Asgard. A number of similarities exist between some of Odin's escapades and those of the character who became Santa Claus.

Odin was depicted leading a hunting party through the skies, riding his eight-legged horse Sleipnir. The 13th-century Poetic Edda

described how Sleipnir leaped great distances, which some scholars have compared to the legends of Santa's reindeer. Odin was portrayed as an old man with a long, white beard — just like St. Nicholas himself.

During the mid-1800s in Sweden, the streets were full of dressed-up masked characters for Christmas. Servants dressed as kings, queens, sailors, soldiers and harlequins marched in small groups laughing and singing and bearing large baskets with Christmas presents for their friends.

The very special duty to hand out Christmas presents became a new phenomenon in the Swedish Christmas tradition. The common attribution of Tomten's forebears has fallen to Victor Rydberg as author and Jenny Nyström as graphic artist. Rydberg's *TomteGoblin* may have originated in the American Santa Claus who over time changed his attire from fur coats to a dark red coat with fur trim. Later, Julbocken pretty much got scrapped. But was he really? Even today, most Swedes decorate their homes with a Julbock, and every year in central Gävle a very large Julbock is erected which gets burned down at regular intervals, most likely because of its devilish origin.

Over time, the Santa Claus mythology has built up an invisible old man handing out presents on Christmas Eve — a phenomenon who eventually gets a whole Christmas gift factory going at the North Pole with small elves as workers, along with a wife and a reindeer named Rudolf. But while Rydberg's Tomte fails, the fat jolly white-bearded Santa Claus becomes unbelievably popular in the US.

The Jultomten who got a foothold in Sweden in the late 1800s was different. He arrived on foot in the evening of December 24th, banged on the door, and was invited in to hand out presents before he disappeared in the dark. Who made the presents and where he spent the rest of the year remained a mystery.

Today the Swedish Jultomte seems to be a mix of St. Nikolaus and the Tomte who guards farm animals. So Rydberg may have had some influence after all. To sum up, Jultomten has his origins in the Christmas Goat, from the coat, mask, sack, door banging, the slightly threatening look, to the mandatory "Are there any good children here?"

-- Thanks to *Swedish Press* and Birgitta Laure

The following is a reprint of one of Harry Anderson's 'Bits and Pieces of Swedish American History.' We hope you enjoy it as a great story of our heritage and a remembrance of Harry.

Wisconsin's Swedish Pioneers Observe the Holidays

By Harry Anderson

From a few surviving written records some insights are possible today on how the often financially strapped Swedish immigrants to Wisconsin celebrated the Christmas and New Year's holidays that had been so significant in their lives before they left the mother country. One of the richest sources of this information is the writings of Gustaf Unonius, leader of the Pine Lake settlement in today's Waukesha County, where he and his immediate following settled in 1841. In particular the Unonius memoirs of his pioneer years in Wisconsin describe the manner in which central themes of Swedish holiday observances were continued in the New World—the importance of the family circle; gift giving; the dependence upon extensive use of candle light; serving of special foods; and the reading of the Biblical Christmas story in the home. These practices were all part of the Pine Lake observances in December, 1841. That year Christine Sodergren, the family maid, prepared a splendid rice pudding ("risgrynsgrot") for the holiday morning meal; extra candles were obtained to brighten the otherwise gloomy interior of their log cabin residence; and for Julotta, Charlotte Unonius received a gift of a homemade oak dining table, her husband observing that this very welcome present no longer made it necessary to serve the traditional rice pudding meal on a trunk lid. After their family devotional service, the household traveled to nearby Delafield town, where they were surprised to see sawmills in full operation in spite of the religious holy day. They not only missed hearing the signing of familiar hymns (including of course "Var Hålsad Sköne Morgonstund" (All Hail to Thee O blessed Morn) but also found that a number of Protestant churches did not hold worship services at all and only the Roman Catholic Congregations did so.

Several years later, after children became part of the Unonius household, more candles were added to brighten the cabin's interior; bread served with Christmas meals was whiter in color than usual; ginger cookies (undoubtedly the beloved "pepparkakor") were served for dessert; and economical but imaginative gifts of raisins and candy were distributed to all present.

At another pioneer Swedish colony near Lake Koshkonong in Jefferson County (the nucleus of this settlement had arrived from Sweden in 1843), one prominent member kept a diary which described other traditional practices of Swedish observances brought to frontier Wisconsin. On December 25, 1845 Thure Kumlien wrote in his diary: "I hauled the womenfolk to [Carl] Reuterskold's; then to [Gustaf] Melberg's [and at each] I read Hagberg's Christmas dissertation." [Hagberg's writing was from a widely known Swedish Book of Christmas sermons. Two years later Kumlien's entry for January 6, 1848 described his visits to friends' homes still played a traditional role in the New Year's observances. "I call on all Swedes [in the neighborhood] and greeted them all and helped them celebrate New Year's Day." A year later, 1849, Kumlien described a different dimension to the day's activity, writing that he had invited to his home "All my countrymen here" for a celebration.

And, if the Wisconsin pioneer Swedes looked forward to special foods and the enjoyment of a unique menu for Christmas dinner they sometimes utilized unusual methods to provide the meat dish for their celebration. The household of the celebrated Friman family, the first Swedes known to have settled in Wisconsin near Genoa City in Walworth County, offer one example of this. In August, 1841 one of the Friman sons wrote home to relatives in Sweden that during a wind storm, a fallen tree trunk had badly injured the back of one of their oxen. The animal survived but was unable to perform farm work. The letter writer added they they planned to nurse it along "but we intend to butcher him for Christmas."

Christmas gifts apparently came in many forms, especially for imaginative Swedes, in that time period!