

# Swedish American Historical Society of Wisconsin



## COMING EVENTS--

January 24, 2026—Somewhere in England, presented by Sherry Engstrom

March 21—Swedish Film, by Cookie Anderson

April 4—Swedish Genealogy Research Group

## JANUARY 2026

**THE FIRST SAHSWI FIKA MEETING OF THE YEAR** is coming up on Saturday, January 24, starting at 1:30 pm. **Writer and Speaker Sherry Engstrom will present the program, a unique immigration story she titled “Somewhere in England.”** The program will be in the Fellowship Hall, Martin Luther Lutheran Church, 9235 W. Bluemound Road, Milwaukee, located just east of the Milwaukee Zoo.

We can then greet each other God Fortsättning. In Sweden, at this time of year the common greeting when seeing somebody is **“God Fortsättning”** meaning “Wishing you a good continuation of the new year.” (You wish people “Gott Nytt År” (Happy New Year) on New Year’s Day.)

After the presentation, enjoy traditional Fika the Swedish way. If you can, bring a dish to share, Do you have a favorite Swedish recipe you want to share? If so, bring it and we can add it to the website [Swedish Food Heritage page](#).

## 2025 LUCIA CHALLENGE—by Jan Ehrengren

It was the morning of **December 14**, temperatures outside were extremely cold, we looked forward to the Lucia celebration inside the beautiful Fox Point Lutheran Church. Then it happened, there was a gas leak at the church, the event had to be cancelled or rescheduled. Through quick actions from the church, Lucia Program Director **Stina Lemery**, and SAHSWI volunteers involved or invited were notified, and new plans had to be established for a new date.

On Sunday, **December 28**, Lucia could be celebrated without a hitch. Most of the participants in the Lucia program were able to join, and overall, about 80 people attended the event.

After a final rehearsal, the program could begin with the procession led by 2025 Lucia **Madeleine Franke**, followed by attendants, **Leighton Ehrengren, Kenzie Klagmann, Ida Knox\*, Ella and Emilia Lemery, Mila Leon, Thea Quealy, Villa Sjöberg, Layla Gallo, Starboys Camden Ehrengren, Joseph Kaltenberg\*, Olof Knox\*, Gingerbread men Arlo Ehrengren, Eli Kaltenberg\*, Nora, Isla and Wilam Thode-Edström** and Little Santas **Astrid and Oskar Erkander\***, and **Nova and Orion Balistreri**. (\* missing due to there-schedule). The Lucia program was directed by **Stina Lemery**, the Lucia Story and Song was introduced by **Swedish School teacher Amanda Balestreri**, and the piano was played by **Matt Byczynski**. The Lucia program included nine well-known Swedish Christmas songs, starting with Sankta Lucia and ending with Stille Natt sung both in Swedish and English.



(Lucia Challenge cont.)

After the program, Fika was served in the Fellowship Hall, including coffee, juices, cookies and pastries. The final activity of the day was the traditional Dance Around the Christmas Tree, based on Swedish song and dance.

We would like to thank everybody involved and coming to Lucia, ensuring this wonderful Swedish tradition is maintained. Our sincere thanks to Stina, Amanda and Matt and all the children for a beautiful, perfect Lucia program, to Pastor Bill and Operations Director Kelly Price for having us at the church and for all the help and support, Kerri for all the preparations of the Fika, Wendy Pelsis and Joann Kreimendahl for serving the welcome table, Bev Wenzel for preparing printed programs and sign-up sheets, and everybody who was helping with the setup, takedown and cleanup of the Fika.

*Note—More pictures and information are available on our website—SAHSWI.org.*

### **NEWS FLASH 12/28/25—GÄVLE GOAT COLLAPSES--**



The famous Christmas goat in Gävle was blown over on Saturday afternoon (December 28, 2025) and left lying there. It is unclear whether they will try to erect the goat again before the winter is over. "We need to see what can be done and what we should do if so," says municipal councilor Åsa Wiklund Lång to Gefle Dagblad.

The Gävle Goat is erected every year on the first day of [Advent](#), which according to Western Christian tradition is in late November or early December, depending on the [calendar year](#). In 1966, an advertising

consultant, Stig Gavlén (1927–2018),<sup>[4]</sup> came up with the idea of making a giant version of the traditional Swedish [Yule goat](#) and placing it in the square.<sup>[5]</sup> The design of the first goat was assigned to the then chief of the Gävle fire department, Gavlén's brother Jörgen Gavlén. The construction of the goat was carried out by the fire department, and they erected the goat each year from 1966 to 1970 and from 1986 to 2002. The first goat was financed by Harry Ström. On 1 December 1966, a 13-metre (43 ft) tall, 7-metre (23 ft) long, 3-tonne goat was erected in the square. On [New Year's Eve](#), the goat was burnt down,<sup>[6][7]</sup> and the perpetrator was found and convicted of [vandalism](#). The goat was insured, and Ström got all of his money back.<sup>[7][8][9]</sup>

A group of businessmen known as the Southern Merchants (*Söders köpmän*) financed the building of the goat in subsequent years. In 1971, the Southern Merchants stopped building the goats. The Natural Science Club (*Naturvetenskapliga föreningen*) of the School of Vasa (*Vasaskolan*) began building the structure. Their goat was around 2 metres (6.6 ft). Due to the positive reaction their Yule Goat received that year, they built another one the following year and from then on.<sup>[10]</sup> The Southern Merchants began building their own goats again in 1986.<sup>[7]</sup>

The cost for the 1966 goat was 10,000 [Swedish kronor](#) (SEK) (equivalent to SEK 84,355 in 2009).<sup>[11]</sup> The price tag for constructing the goat in 2005 was around SEK 100,000. The city pays one-third of the cost while the Southern Merchants pay the remaining sum.

The Goat gets most attention when it is set on fire or otherwise attacked annually. In 2023, the straw was eaten by birds; the last time it burned down was in 2021. In 1976, a garbage truck ran over the Goat. Of the 60 years the Goat has been erected, it has only been left standing more or less unharmed 20 times.

(GÄVLE GOAT cont.)

Lucia Day on 13 December, the goat is rebuilt. Its skeleton is then treated and repaired, and the goat reconstructed over it, using straw which the Goat Committee has pre-ordered.<sup>[11]</sup> As of 2005, four people had been caught or convicted for vandalizing the goat.<sup>[13]</sup> In 2001, the goat was burned down by a 51-year-old American visitor from Cleveland, Ohio, who spent 18 days in jail and was subsequently convicted and ordered to pay SEK 100,000 (US\$9,681.35; equivalent to US\$20,697 in 2024) in damages. The court confiscated his cigarette lighter with the argument that he was not able to handle it. He stated in court that he was no "goat burner" and believed that he was taking part in a completely legal goat-burning tradition. After he was released from jail he returned to the US without paying his fine.<sup>[8][14][15][16][17]</sup>

The Christmas season of 2006 marked the 40th anniversary of the Gävle Goat, and the city held a large celebration in honor of the goat on 3 December. The Goat Committee fireproofed the goat with "Fiber ProTector Fireproof", a fireproofing substance used in airplanes. In earlier years, when the goat had been fireproofed, the dew had made the liquid drip off the goat. To prevent this from happening, "Fireproof ProTector Solvent Base" was applied to the goat.<sup>[8][21][22][23]</sup>

Despite their efforts, the goat has been damaged or destroyed a total of 43 times. On 27 November 2016, an arsonist equipped with petrol burned it down just hours after its inauguration.<sup>[24][25]</sup> After a few flame-free years under 24-hour security, the goat was again burned on 17 December 2021.<sup>[26]</sup> In 2023, it was severely pecked at for grain by jackdaws, due to the straw used to construct the goat containing higher than usual amounts of seeds. In 2025, it was blown over by strong winds from Storm Johannes.

In the years it has been allowed to stand throughout Christmas, the goat has been disassembled a few days before or after New Year's Day, with the straw discarded and the frame structure stored for next year.

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Membership invoices for 2026 are enclosed with this January newsletter along with an envelope addressed to Irene Roberts, our Treasurer. To update our current membership records, please return to Irene with your check by February 15, 2026 or bring to our January 24<sup>th</sup> Fika Meeting.

If you wish to renew your membership with a credit or debit card on line, go to our website at [www.sahswi.org/aboutus/membershiprenewal](http://www.sahswi.org/aboutus/membershiprenewal).

SAHSWI activities are all planned and presented by volunteers within our membership organization. Your assistance is welcomed and any offers to help which you have listed on your returned invoice will be directed to the committee or person involved. For further information or explanations, contact Bev Wenzel, Membership Secretary, at 262-781-6113 or email to [wenz113@outlook.com](mailto:wenz113@outlook.com). We need your guidance and assistance.

## SWENSON CENTER SWEDISH LESSONS—



Are you interested in learning Swedish? Are you planning a trip to Sweden and would like to learn some of the language before you go? Do you want to watch all of those fabulous Swedish noir television series and not have to use the subtitles?

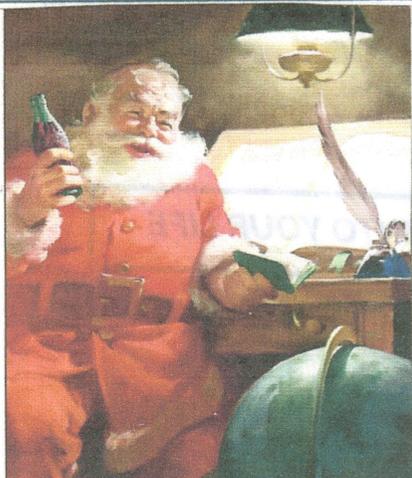
The Swenson Center offers [four sequential courses](#) designed for community members to learn the Swedish language, wherever they are in the world. Classes meet once per week via Zoom for 60 minutes over 6 weeks per course. Students will learn skills in reading, writing, listening comprehension, and speaking. Virtual classes in Swedish 1 and Swedish 2 are now starting—for information, this link will take you to the Swenson website—[Swedish Language Classes | Swenson Center](#).

The Swenson Center also offers hour-long Swedish language individual tutoring sessions with our instructor, Alex K. Hart!

These sessions are designed for students to receive targeted instruction in the areas that they need most as individual learners, away from the larger group setting found in our four sequential courses. Sessions are booked by the student as needed, on a first-come-first-serve basis. Please RSVP at least 48 hours in advance!

For more information, please visit the [tutoring section of our Swedish Language Learning webpage](#).

## MUSINGS FROM THE HOLIDAYS—



What would Christmas be without the jolly, fat man in a red suit? Haddon Sundblom, who was born of Swedish-Finnish parents in Muskegon, MI, had started an ad agency with two friends and Coca-Cola became one of their clients. To boost winter sales, Coca-Cola decided to focus on Christmas—in 1931, the Santa we know today had his debut. Sundblom's Santa has a face that is a composite of his friend's and Sundblom's own. In his red suit, he was a huge success—what most people think Santa should look like. Haddon Sundblom painted new Santa pictures for more than 30 years.

time to enjoy the Christmas tree and other decorations, but also gives another reason to be with friends and have a party. The day is named after Canute Lavard, a Danish duke who was assassinated on January 7, 1131, and later declared a saint. Initially, his feast day was observed on January 7, but in 1680, it was moved to January 13, aligning it with the end of the Christmas season. One of the most notable customs is the julgransplundring (Christmas tree plundering), where families take down their Christmas trees and consume the candies and cookies that were used as decorations.



**St. Knut's Day**—celebrated on January 13, marks the end of the Christmas season in Sweden and Finland. It not only gives us more

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