

Swedish American Historical Society of Wisconsin

MAY 2026



COMING EVENTS—

May 16—Bishop Hill by Martha Bergland

June 21—Midsommar-Heidelberg Park

August 28--SGRG

MAY FIKA MEETING: BISHOP HILL—Saturday, May 16—1:30 PM.

Come to the next Fika meeting on May 16, 2026 at 1:30 PM at Martin Luther Lutheran Church, 9235 West Bluemound Road, Milwaukee, located just east of Milwaukee Zoo. The program will center around Bishop Hill. **Martha Bergland and her husband Jim** will talk about why you should go to Bishop Hill and what's to see when you're there.

History of Bishop Hill: Erik Jansson, leader of the **Janssonist** religious sect in Sweden left Sweden in 1846 guiding his dedicated followers to America where he established the Swedish Colony of Bishop Hill in Illinois. For several decades, letters home to Sweden extolling the fertile agricultural land in the Midwest stimulated migration for more than 1000 of his followers. Bishop Hill Colony population increased and flourished as it grew, but the colorful and dramatic history of the colony ended in 1861. With the site presently preserved as Bishop Hill Historic District, the story of the colony of Bishop Hill is an intriguing history of a group of Swedish American immigrants to the Midwest.

MARCH MEETING REVIEW--FIKA AND SWEDISH FILM

27 members attended the SAHSWI Fika meeting held on March 21, 2026, at **Martin Luther Lutheran Church**, Milwaukee. The topic of the program at the meeting was **Swedish Film**. Member **Cookie Anderson** discussed famous **Swedish Film Directors and Movie Makers**, including information about the movies they directed. Her presentation focused on 5 directors

- **Ingmar Bergman** is the most famous Swedish Film Director. Best films include "The Seventh Seal", "Cries and Whispers", "Scenes from a Marriage", "Autumn Sonata", "Fanny and Alexander"
- **Lasse Hallström** is the second most famous Film Director. Best films include "My life as a dog", "Cider House Rules", "Chocolat", "What's Eating Gilbert Grape"
- **Tomas Alfredson** is best known internationally for directing the 2008 vampire film "Let the Right One In" and the 2011 espionage film "Tinker Taylor Soldier Spy".

- **Bo Widerberg** was the director of films such as “Raven’s End”, “Elvira Madigan”, “Joe Hill”, “The Man on the Roof”, “Victoria”, “The Man from Majorca”, “The Serpent’s Way”, and “All Things Fair”.
- **Jan Troell** filmmaker of modern Swedish films including “The Emigrants”, and “The New Land”

In addition, Cookie talked about Liv Ullman who is recognized as one of Europe’s greatest actresses of all time. Liv collaborated with Bergman and acted in many of his films.

SWEDISH AUTHORS OF CHILDREN’S BOOKS

What started to be an article about Swedish authors who were known for writing books for young adults proved to be too large for one newsletter. Therefore, it will turn into a series beginning with Jenny Nyström.

Going back to the start of books for young people in Sweden, a book was adapted from Germany—Konrad Portas’ homily on maidenhood for young women and published in 1591. During the next century, books for children were generally translations of religious texts, fables and books on courtesy—not written with small children in mind.

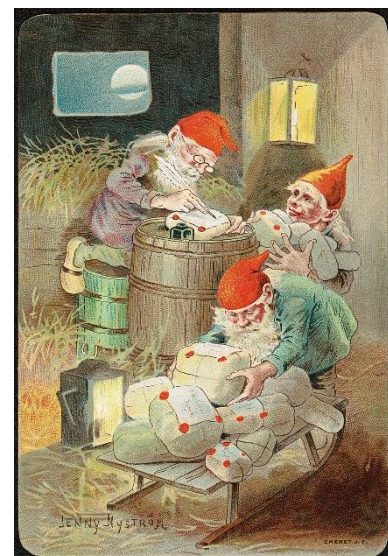


During the first half of the 19th century, common people embraced the story-telling tradition—passing along cultural heritage was important. And in 1882, *Barnkammeran*, a collection of nursery rhymes, became the first original picture book—our introduction to Jenny Nyström!

Born in 1854 in Kalmar, Jenny Nyström was the daughter of a school teacher. The family moved to Gothenburg when she was eight. She studied at Kjellbergsta flickskolan and what is now the Konsthögskolan Valand. She was admitted to the Royal Swedish Academy of Arts in 1873 and later studied in Paris.

Jenny Nyström found a growing market for postcards in Europe and tried to get the publishing house Bonnier interested; however, they declined. After she made drawings for Viktor Rydberg’s *Lille Viggs äventyr på julafton*, Rydberg approved them and had the book published in 1871—where it has become a Christmas classic. She became Sweden’s most productive painter and illustrator—particularly known for her drawing of tomten.

--Thanks to Wikipedia and especially to Virginia Follstad, who provided inspiration by sending several books including *Children’s literature in Sweden*, written by Boel Westin and published by the Swedish Institute.



SWEDEN'S DALA HORSE—THE STORY BEHIND THE ICONIC WOODEN SYMBOL—Contributed by Cookie Anderson.

The Dala Horse, or Dalecarlian horse, isn't just a wooden toy—it's a symbol of Swedish tradition, craftsmanship, and identity that has traveled across the world. Here's the fascinating history behind it.

Humble beginnings in Dalarna region in central Sweden. In the 17th century, local farmers started carving wooden toys during the long winters. Among the toys, the horse became the most popular, inspired by the horses used on farms and in daily life.



From Wood to Art

Initially simple and unpainted, Dala Horses gradually became brightly decorated with intricate patterns, often in red, white, green, and blue, using a traditional Swedish painting style called kurbits. Each horse became a unique piece of art, reflecting the artist's skill and local culture.

A National Symbol

By the 20th century, the Dala Horse had become a symbol of Sweden itself, representing honesty, strength, and Swedish heritage. Today, you'll see it in homes, tourist shops, and even official Swedish gifts.

Beyond a Toy

What started as a winter pastime became a cultural icon. The Dala Horse reminds Swedes—in the town of Mora, the world—of their connection to tradition, nature, and craftsmanship.

Fun Fact

In the town of Mora, the largest Dala Horse stands at over 13 meters high, welcoming visitors and proudly showing Sweden's love for this wooden legend.

The next time you see a small red wooden horse, remember: it's not just decoration—it's centuries of history, art, and Swedish pride carved into wood.

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*SWEDISH CLASSES*

If you are interested in learning Swedish you can sign up for virtual classes at Swenson Swedish Immigration Center at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. They provide classes on different levels. Find out more through this link:

**Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center (Augustana College, Rock Island, IL)**

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