

Coming to America: Washington's Swedish Immigrants

May 2013 to January 12, 2014

This award-winning exhibition shared the little-known story of Swedish immigration to our small New England town. Known for their superior agricultural skills, 1.3 million Swedes emigrated to America during the 19th and 20th centuries, escaping conscription, famine, and poverty.

Washington, Connecticut became one of their new homes, where many found employment as laborers and servants on local farms and estates owned by wealthy New Yorkers. Beginning in 1870, over one hundred Swedish families settled in town and built two churches across the street from each other. One, the Salem Covenant Church, is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. Swedes made up 22% of Washington's population in 1910, and many of their descendants still reside in town today.

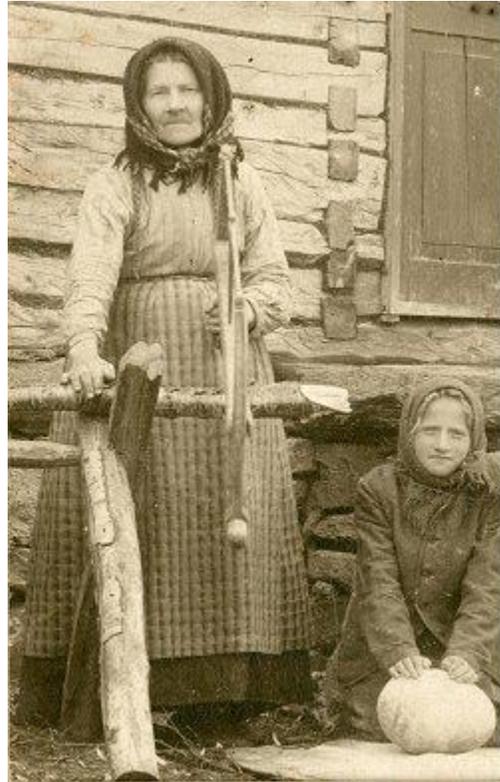
Artistic director Chris Zaima, designer Sandy Booth, and artist Keith Templeton, along with a team of other volunteers, created a visual masterpiece. Local history came alive as visitors stepped back in time and explored the lives of Washington's Swedish immigrants and their role in the community. Fascinating artifacts and photographs were on display from the Museum's collection, on loan from descendants, as well as local dealers [Dawn Hill Antiques](#) and [Eleish Van Breems Antiques](#). The exhibit and associated programs (see below) were funded in part by a grant from the Connecticut Community Foundation.

A Gunnery student started this [exhibit blog with pictures of the exhibits](#)

[An interactive map of Sweden](#) showing the home towns of Washington's immigrants.

Watch this introduction to the exhibit on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCLayj4X6Wk>

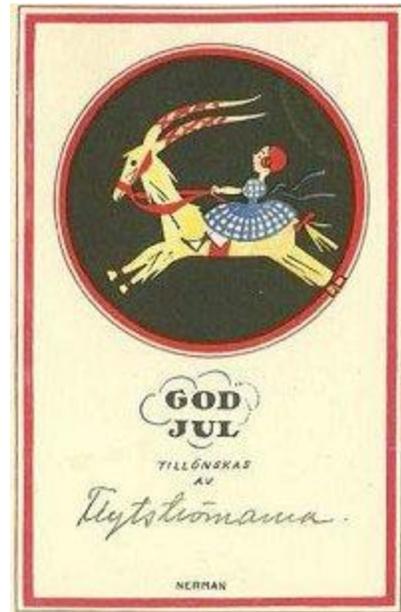


Unidentified Swedish ancestors
of Janice Sjonost Burnham



Past Programs and Special Events Related to Exhibit

[St. Knut's Day Exhibit Closing Reception](#) |
[New Year's Tea Party](#) | [St. Lucia's Day Swedish Fairytale](#) |
[Swedish Dala Horse Craft for Kids](#) |
[Swedish Music and Culture](#) |
[6th Annual Washington Green Cemetery Tour](#) |
[Holiday House History Hike](#) |
[Beginning Your Swedish Genealogy](#) |
[Elements of Swedish Design](#) |
[Book Discussion: Hanna's Daughters](#) | [Swedish Film Series](#) |
[History of the Vasa Order](#) | [Two Centuries of Swedish Music](#) |
[History of Sweden Lecture Series](#) |
[Walking Tour of Swede Street](#) |
[A History of Washington's Swedish Immigrants](#)



St. Knut's Day Exhibit Closing Reception — January 12, 2014

A closing reception was held for the exhibit "Coming to America: Washington's Swedish Immigrants" in the Gunn Museum. Traditional Swedish holiday refreshments were served in this fitting end to our exhibit.

The Swedes, Finns, and Norwegians ritualize the end of Christmas with the honoring of St. Knut or Tjugondag Knut which translates into the 20th Day of Knut or the 20th day after Christmas Eve. On St. Knut's day, the Christmas tree is ransacked of all the edibles and after the lights and non-edible decorations are taken down and stored, the tree is literally kicked to the curb. Many set the tree ablaze for a great outdoor bonfire, and have one last round of singing and dancing.

The origin of St. Knut's begins in Denmark, where St. Knut, more commonly known as King Canute IV, ruled Denmark from 1080 to 1086 and claimed the throne of England. He issued laws to protect the weak, orphans, widows, and foreigners, tried to enforce the collection of tithes, and is honored as a saint for his virtue and generosity. Martyred in St. Albans Church in Jutland during a peasant uprising, his death is seen as the end of the Viking Age. King Knut proclaimed that Christmas should last for 20 days. In Sweden his feast day is the traditional day to discard the Christmas tree and end the season's festivities.



New Year's Tea Party — January 4, 2014

We rang in the New Year with an old-fashioned Victorian Tea Party at the Gunn Museum. The Museum was decorated for the holidays and visitors had the opportunity to view the spectacular exhibit, "Coming to America: Washington's Swedish Immigrants," and socialize with friends in a festive setting. Guests were asked to bring their favorite tea cup, and

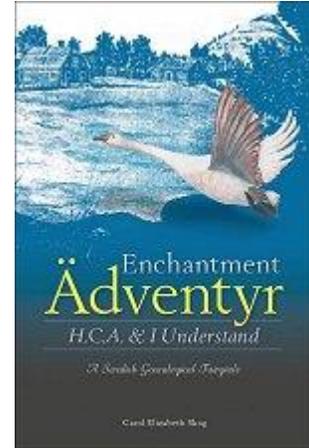
we provided the rest. The event was free and open to the public.

St. Lucia's Day Swedish Fairytale — December 29, 2013

This event kicked off with Christmas music, followed by a fairytale discussion and mini Lucia pageant.

Carol Skog, local author of Swedish descent, gave a presentation on and signed copies of her new book, *Enchantment Ädventyr, H.C.A. and I Understand*, in the Wykeham Room of the Library. Carol focused on Swedish Christmas customs and concluded with a mini Lucia pageant.

Lorraine Bergstrom, of Covenant Village in Cromwell and cousin to Leroy Anderson, the renowned composer of "Sleigh Ride," performed Swedish Christmas music on both piano and violin, before and during the event.



After Carol's book presentation, the fantasy journey continued with a miniature procession of Sankta Lucia. Carol's granddaughter Lily Wiedemann of Woodbury portrayed Lucia, joined by her friends Ella Viau and Fiona Pedro as attendants, Wylden Abraham and Isaac Brenneman as Starboys and Connor Viau as a young Tomte. Lucia invited all to enjoy the Swedish refreshments including Lucia buns and Pepparkakor.

"*Enchantment Ädventyr*", is a creative blending of Swedish folklore elements, into and around reality including a "genealogical" historical lifestyle within holiday customs. The appendix includes three holiday menus with select recipes enjoyed by the book's characters and Carol's tips on researching your heritage with Resource References. The Hickory Stick Bookshop sold the books, and Carol was available to sign them.

The exhibit, **Coming to America: Washington's Swedish Immigrants**, was open for viewing.



Swedish Dala Horse Craft for Kids — November 23, 2013

Participants took a tour of the Museum's Swedish immigrant exhibit. After seeing all the beautifully decorated Dala Horses on display and learning about their significance, children decorated a dala horse ornament to take home.

A Dala Horse is a traditional carved, painted wooden horse statuette originating in the Swedish province Dalarna. In the old days the Dala horse was mostly used as a toy for children; in modern times it has become a symbol of Dalarna, as well as Sweden in general. Several different types of Dala horses are made, with distinguishing features common to the locality of the site where they are produced. The stoutly carved red horses

with a harness in white, green, yellow and blue have become much more common and widespread than others.

Swedish Music and Culture: A Musician's Journey Through Scandinavia — November 17, 2013

Katie Trautz, a native Vermont fiddler who has toured nationally and internationally sharing traditional music and original folk songs, gave a performance of Swedish music in the library's Wykeham Room.



Traditional Swedish music is known for the rich harmonies expressed by twin fiddles, lilting polska rhythms, and the thematic play on light and dark. These are the motifs that drew the Vermont-based fiddle player, Katie Trautz, to Scandinavia. Her travels landed her at an intensive musical immersion on a farm north of Stockholm, where traditional music and culture are still thriving. After a visit with one of the country's most renowned folk artists, a journey through the Fjordlands of Norway, and a stop at a small venue along the way to give a performance, Katie brought her travels to life with a demonstration of Swedish fiddling, storytelling and imagery.

Katie Trautz (www.katietrautz.com) has released numerous albums, two of which have won "best traditional album of the year" in the state of Vermont. Katie plays fiddle, guitar and banjo, crossing genres with her varying ensembles. Her bands include: Mayfly, Wooden Dinosaur, and Kick 'em Jenny Stringband. She has studied with some of the greatest fiddle players in the US, including Dirk Powell, Pete Sutherland, James Bryan, Jimmy Tripplett, and Bruce Molsky. Katie has played alongside and shared the stage with many well-known bands including: Aoife O'Donovan Band, Brittany Haas & Lauren Rioux, Dirk Powell and Riley Baugus, Deadly Gentlemen, Sheesham and Lotus, David Wax Museum, Matt and Shannon Heaton, Rusty Belle, Michael Chorney and Dollar General, Brown Bird, Devil Makes Three, 4tet, Pete Sutherland, Brown Bird, and many others. Katie is also the co-founder of the non-profit folk music school "The Summit School of Traditional Music and Culture" based in Montpelier, VT.

6th Annual Washington Green Cemetery Tour — October 25, 2013



Costumed guides led groups of visitors every ten minutes from the Gunn Museum to the Washington Green Cemetery where the town's departed citizens were stationed at their gravestones to tell their tales of tragedy and triumph. Tour groups followed a magical path of 1,000 luminaries spanning a quarter mile through the shadowy cemetery and heard the lively and dramatic stories of Washington's Swedish immigrants. The costumed character actors stationed at each gravestone shared the perilous tales of their travels to America, their work as domestics on estates in Washington owned by wealthy New Yorkers, and so much more.

Tours departed from the Museum in groups of fifteen people every 10 minutes between 6:30 and 8:30 p.m. and last approximately 45 minutes. Numbers for the tours were handed out at the Museum starting at 6:15pm. A Halloween themed movie was shown, and treats were served, in the library's Wykeham Room as tour groups waited to depart. The Museum was open for viewing of the exhibit, "Coming to America: Washington's Swedish Immigrants."

Holiday House History Hike — October 20, 2013

Gunn Museum Curator Stephen Bartkus led a hike to the ruins of the Holiday House in the Steep Rock Preserve. Meet at the Steep Rock parking lot near the riding ring on River Road.



The Holiday House was a magnificent hotel overlooking the Shepaug River that once stood on the hillside above the riding ring at Steep Rock Preserve. Owned by Edward Van Ingen, and staffed by several Swedish immigrants, Holiday House was conceived as a vacation retreat for working class women from New York City. During this historical trip back in time, we explored the grandeur of this philanthropic retreat and examined how it impacted the lives of so many visitors. The hike was approximately 0.75-mile round-trip.

Beginning Your Swedish Genealogy —October 12, 2013



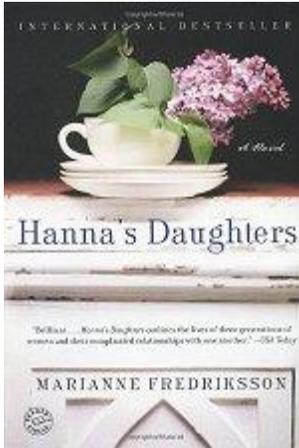
Dr. William B. Fagerstrom, of the University of Delaware, presented this program in the library's Wykeham Room. This program was geared toward both beginners, thinking about starting to investigate their family tree, and experts who have hit a roadblock in their research. Participants learned how to start a search and the best genealogy resources available to research ancestors in Sweden from a professional genealogist. For the past seventeen years Dr. Fagerstrom has been the President or Secretary of the Swedish Genealogy Club of the American Swedish Historical Society in Philadelphia. He is also the author of *A Beginners Guide to Swedish Genealogy*. He has presented the program Beginning Scandinavian Genealogy at the Scanfest in Budd Lake, NJ for the last 16 years.

The Elements of Swedish Design — October 6, 2013

Rhonda Eleish and Edie van Breems, noted Scandinavian style experts, gave a lecture and signed copies of their new book, *Reflections on Swedish Interiors*, in the library's Wykeham Room. Rhonda and Edie discussed the fundamentals of Swedish design, touching upon functionality, light, preservation, art, eclecticism, color, sense of place and a deep reverence for nature. They also explored how Swedish interior design expresses a community of ideas that is no longer bound by simple nationalistic borders and is being embraced in today's homes.



Rhonda Eleish and Edie van Breems are the founders of Eleish van Breems Ltd., suppliers of fine Scandinavian furniture, antiques and custom interior design services. They started their company in 1998 with a mission to, wherever possible, introduce a clean, elegant, and fresh approach to interiors, all with a Scandinavian essence. Eleish and van Breems are the authors of two bestselling Scandinavian interior design books, *Swedish Interiors* (2006, Gibbs Smith Publishing) and *Swedish Country Interiors* (2009, Gibbs Smith Publishing), with their third book, *Reflections on Swedish Interiors* (2013, Gibbs Smith) just released this Fall. The work of Eleish van Breems, Ltd has been featured in House Beautiful, Elle Decor, Veranda, Glamour, Country Living, Gods & Goddar, The New York Times, among others. They have appeared on This Old House, Martha Stewart Living and HGTV-Canada.



***Hanna's Daughters* Book Discussion — September 26, 2013**

A discussion of the book, *Hanna's Daughters* by Marianne Fredriksson, led by local Swedish descendant Jennifer (Johnson) Whittlesey, took place in the library's Wykeham Room. Books were available to pick up and read from the Gunn Library.

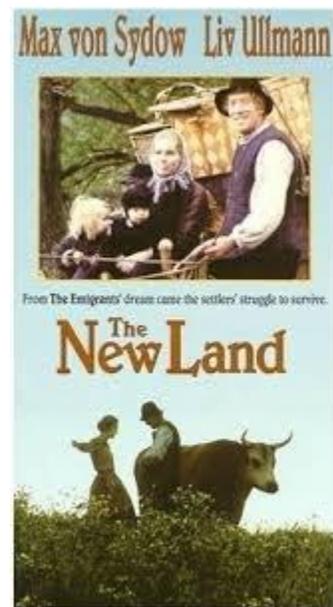
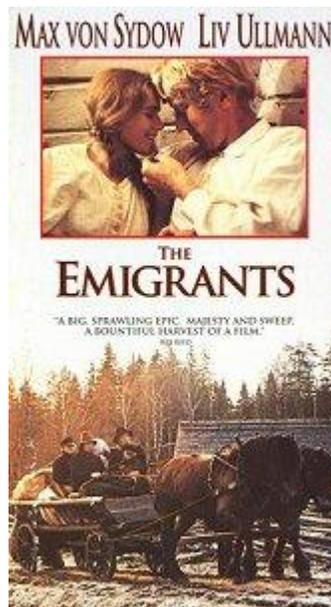
Set against the backdrop of the 1870s Swedish-Norwegian Union this luminous story follows three generations of Swedish women — a grandmother, a mother, and a daughter — whose lives are linked through a century of great love and great loss. Resonating with truth and revelation, this moving novel deftly explores the often difficult but enduring ties between mothers and daughters; the sacrifices, compromises, and rewards in the relationships between men and women; and the patterns of emotion that repeat themselves through generations. If you have ever wanted to connect with the past, or rediscover family, *Hanna's Daughters* will strike a chord with you.

Swedish Film Series: *The Emigrants* — September 23, 2013 & *The New Land* — September 30, 2013

The epic film, *The Emigrants*, and its sequel *The New Land*, are Swedish films based on Vilhelm Moberg's novels and were shown in the library's Wykeham Room. Both are English language version films, without subtitles. *The Emigrants* tells the story of a Swedish group that emigrates from Smaland, a small rural farming community in southern Sweden, to

Minnesota, United States in the 19th century. The film follows the hardships the group faces in Sweden and on their difficult ten-week journey to America. *The Emigrants*, starring Max von Sydow and Liv Ullmann, was nominated for 5 Academy Awards and won for best Foreign Language Film and Best Actress at the Golden Globes.

The New Land chronicles the Swedish immigrants struggle to start a new life in America, marked by courage, faith, and determination, as they are confronted with many threats and challenges, including the start of the Civil War and the uprising of the Indians.



A History of the Vasa Order of America — September 15, 2013

Paul W. Ljunggren gave a talk on the history of the Vasa Order of America in the library's Wykeham Room. The Vasa Order of America, originally a fraternal organization for Swedish immigrants, was founded in Connecticut in 1896 and now has lodges across North America. The Vasa now has six local lodges in Connecticut, located in New Haven, Hartford, New Britain, Manchester, Stamford and Danbury, and a park in Meriden which serves as the focal point for their cultural events. The former Vasa Order Local Lodge Ankaret (Anchor) #380, of New Milford, CT, at one point totaled 133 members, some of whom were Swedes from Washington, CT. Today the Vasa Order welcomes men and women of Scandinavian roots and their spouses, who would like to rediscover the traditions of their forefathers and promote Swedish heritage and culture.



Paul also discussed the contributions of Swedish Americans from the northeastern USA, the patronymic family naming system in Sweden, and the Swedish Army naming system which has resulted in names such as Ljunggren.

Paul W. Ljunggren is Past District Master of the Vasa Order of America District Lodge Connecticut #1 having served as District Master from 2005 to 2011. Paul grew up in a Swedish American household in the New Haven area. His father's parents were from the provinces of Smaland and Skane. His father was born in Vaxsjo Smaland. His mother's parents were from the city of Varberg in the province of Halland. The Swedish language and traditions, as well as the Vasa Order of America and Vasa Park in Meriden, CT were present in his life at a young age. It was upon returning to Connecticut after military assignments and work that took him around the USA for over 20 years that he returned to his Swedish American Heritage and Vasa. After return to Connecticut he joined Local Lodge Diana Birger Jarl #3 eventually becoming the lodge chairman. He presently serves as Chairman of Local Lodge Diana Birger Jarl #3.

Two Centuries of Swedish Music — June 23, 2013

To celebrate Midsummer, Kendall and Ellen Svengalis gave a performance of traditional Swedish dance and folk music in the Wykeham Room of the Gunn Library. This multi-media presentation included Bellman, Taube, Björling, Alice Babs, choral singing, ABBA, folk music, along with Swedish-American humor. The exhibit "Coming to America: Washington's Swedish Immigrants" was open for viewing in the Gunn Museum before and after this performance.

Ken and Ellen (Haffling) Svengalis perform traditional Swedish folk songs and ballads, with voice, guitar, and violin. Together, they have performed for a number of Swedish and Scandinavian organizations and festivals in CT, NJ, NY, and RI, including the SAHS Midsummer Celebration, ScandJam, the Scandinavian Folk Festival in Jamestown, NY, Scandinavian Fest in NJ, and the Swedish Welfare Association annual dinner in CT, and numerous R.I. Swedish Heritage Association (RISHA), American Union of Swedish Singers (AUSS), and Scandinavian Club events.



Ellen, who is of Swedish descent, has been performing as a soloist at Scandinavian events for two decades. She is a soloist with the Northern Lights Singers of Fairfield, CT and of the American Union of Swedish Singers (AUSS). She is a past national secretary of the American Union of Swedish Singers.

Ken, who is of Swedish and Lithuanian descent, sang with the Verdandi Male Chorus of Providence, RI (AUSS) from 1996 to 2010, and now sings with the North Star Singers of Fairfield, CT. Ken is Vice-President of the Jussi Björling Society - USA, which was organized in 1998 to honor the career of the 20th century's greatest operatic tenor. He also serves as President of the Rhode Island Swedish Heritage Association.

History of Sweden Lecture Series with Carol Skog:

- **The Viking Era — June 11, 2013**
- **The Swedish Empire — June 18, 2013**
- **Swedish Immigrants and their Culture — June 25, 2013**

Scandinavian scholar, Carol Skog, presented a three-part lecture series on the history of Sweden on Tuesdays June 11, 18 and 25 in the Wykeham Room of the Gunn Library. The June 11 lecture focused on the Glacial Age to the Vikings; June 18 covered the development of the Swedish Empire and the royal family; and June 25 focused on the Swedish immigrant period and Swedish culture, customs, and traditions. Traditional Swedish refreshments were served after each lecture. The exhibit "Coming to America: Washington's Swedish Immigrants" was open for viewing in the Gunn Museum before these lectures.



Carol Skog is of Swedish heritage and was raised in Fairfield. She studied with The Scandinavian Seminar program at Väst kustens Ungdomsskolan, Ljungskile, Sweden focusing on Swedish language, culture, history, religion, social issues. Carol received her degree in Scandinavian Studies from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington and worked as Director's Assistant of the Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle, WA. She is also a former Board member, at P.L.U.'s, Scandinavian Cultural Center in Tacoma, WA, a former active member of SWEA, (Swedish Women's Educational Association) in Seattle, the former President and Program Chairman of The Rhode Island Swedish Heritage Association, and the former Board Chairman of The Scandinavian Club in Fairfield, CT.



Agnes Bengston and other Swedish Gunnery Servants

Walking Tour of Swede Street in Washington Depot — June 8, 2013

Gunn Museum Curator Stephen Bartkus led a walking tour of "Swede Street", also known as School Street, as part of the 9th Annual Connecticut Open House Day. The majority of Washington's Swedish immigrants settled on or near Swede Street in Washington Depot. This walking tour shared the history of the Swedish families and the buildings along Swede Street, beginning with the two Swedish Churches and ending at the former Swedish Hall. The exhibit

"Coming to America: Washington's Swedish Immigrants" was open for viewing in the Gunn Museum before and after the walking tour. Attendees met at the Washington Primary School parking lot at 11 School Street.

A History of Washington's Swedish Immigrants — May 16, 2013

Gunn Museum Curator Stephen Bartkus gave a powerpoint presentation in the Wykeham Room of the Gunn Library as part of the "History Bites" Lecture Series. This program will share the fascinating, little-known story of Washington's Swedish immigrants. The exhibit "Coming to America: Washington's Swedish Immigrants" was open for viewing in the Gunn Museum before and after this presentation. Refreshments were provided.