

SWEDISH-AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Established to Record and Interpret the Swedish Presence in America

Newsletter / September 2022

***Signe Aurell: Irrbloss* with Maja Heurling and Ola Sandström**

2022 In-Person Fall Program

Saturday, October 8, 3:00–5:00 p.m.

Swedish American Museum in Chicago, tickets available online for \$20

Signe Aurell officially became a Swedish emigrant on April 19, 1913, when her home parish of Gryt registered her intention to leave for Duluth, Minnesota. Less than three weeks later, on May 7, 1913, Signe Aurell stepped off the SS *Franconia* in Boston, Massachusetts. Her trip to the United States had taken her from her home in Hässleholm to Malmö, to Copenhagen in Denmark, and finally Liverpool, England, before arriving at her final destination. Aurell was one of about 250,000 single Swedish women who traveled to the United States. Like so many before her, she traveled in third class across the Atlantic Ocean.

Aurell eventually made her way to Minnesota, settling in Minneapolis, not Duluth as originally planned. She would spend the next seven years of her life there working as a laundress and a seamstress. In those seven years, Aurell lived in at least twelve different homes, many of them in and around the Franklin-Seward neighborhood, home to a large population of Swedes. The numerous addresses and different jobs in such a short period of time is a stark reminder of the unstable living and working conditions of the Swedish-American working class.

While in Minnesota, Aurell began publishing poetry, short essays, and even a translation of Joe Hill's last will. Writing primarily in the radical press of *Swedish America*, Aurell began to make a name for herself as a lyrical poet capturing



the lived experiences of Swedish working women. Writing about love and loss and a longing for home, she spoke to the experiences of the many women like herself. In

addition, having joined the Industrial Workers of the World, Aurell also wrote labor poetry, encouraging organization, unionization, and a fight for a better tomorrow.

In 1919, just one year before she would return to Sweden, where she would live out the rest of her life, Aurell self-published a book of poetry. *Irrbloss* [Will-of-the-Wisp] features twenty-three poems about homesickness and Sweden, but also about the labor movement in the United States.

It is these poems that inspired Maja Heurling and Ola Sandström's upcoming performance. Heurling and Sandström set music to a selection of Aurell's poems from *Irrbloss*, blending folk stylings and the Swedish *visa* tradition together to amplify the importance and continued relevance of Aurell's words.



In October 2019, a hundred years after Aurell published her poems, the album based on their lyrics was released on Kakafon Records. In doing so, the band has interpreted not just Aurell's poetry, but also the migration histories of the over one million Swedes who came to the United States between 1850 and 1930 and brought them to today's audience, well familiar with contemporary challenges of migration.

On Saturday, October 8, along with the Swedish American Museum, the Society will be co-hosting Maja Heurling, Ola Sandström, and their band on their inaugural U.S. tour as part of our annual fall meeting. Join us in-person at the museum for this special musical event, which will feature songs based on the poetry of Aurell, as well as stories from her life in both Sweden and Minnesota.

Tickets are available online at the Swedish American Museum's website for \$20: <https://swedishamericanmuseum.org/event/signe-aurell-irrbloss-concert/>

Report on the Strategic Plan and 75th Anniversary

Established at the spring meeting in 2021 of the Board of Directors, the strategic planning committee has been meeting regularly, addressing a wide range of topics central to the Society's ongoing flourishing in its mission of studying, interpreting, and promoting the history and culture of Swedish immigrants and their descendants, as well the relationships between the United States and Sweden, through publication, preservation, and programs. This has involved assessing the present through a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), in the context of the Society's rich experience since 1948, and positioning the Society to live into its future with strength and resources to continue and expand its role as an historical society.

Among its tasks has been the revision of the Constitution and Bylaws, last accomplished in 2004. While there is overall consistency with the earlier documents, the revision incorporates a number of changes that bring them up to date, with some additions and clarifications that strengthen the functioning of the board and its committees in service of the mission and membership. At the Society's board meeting on October 8 in Chicago, the revisions will be reviewed for preliminary approval, and this will be followed by a mailing to the membership that requires a vote by ballot to approve a change necessary for the revised Constitution and Bylaws to be formally adopted by the board.

The strategic planning committee has also begun planning for the Society's 75th anniversary commemoration and celebration in October 2023. It has established a steering committee to have responsibility for facilitating the work of more focused groups in specific planning and implementation of key components. At present, we are anticipating a symposium, archival exhibit, publications, membership initiatives, and fundraising campaign. The culmination will be a gala dinner and program in Chicago. To serve the many members and friends of the Society, online opportunities will also be made available.

The steering committee is comprised of Phil Anderson, Marcus Cederström, Lisa Huntsha, Anne Jenner, Andy Johnson, Kerstin Lane, Kevin Proescholdt, and Maria Ward.

We look forward to a great celebration of a worthy past and a hearty embrace of the future!

Message from the Board Chair

My work with the SAHS began in 2007 when hired as director of Archives and Special collections at North Park University, a position I held until 2012. Part of my charge was to oversee the records of the Society and the archival and library collection known as the Swedish American Archives of Greater Chicago. Like archivists before and after me (including our current archivist Andy Meyer),

I looked to information trends and tools to improve researcher access to the collections. During that time, we digitized the *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* and cataloged the library collection, using the internet to make the efforts of the Society accessible to more people.

When pandemic restrictions got in the way of our in-person meetings and public programs in 2020, I once again encouraged using online spaces to bring our work to more people. Like organizations around the world, the Society pivoted to Zoom, not only for our Board meetings, but also for our public programs. We have since offered four popular online programs with participants from around the country and across the water! While we were still trying to make sense of life during a pandemic shutdown, we featured a discussion with the directors of the major Swedish (and Nordic) museums in the U.S. in our fall 2020 online program. Then in 2021 we explored the work of archiving and preserving Swedish-American records history with archivists from North Park University and the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, and later that year were treated to the delightful work of Jim Leary who restored and reissued *Swede Home Chicago*, songs from an era when Swedish rang out all around Chicago's Lake View neighborhood, 1923-1927. Just last spring we learned about immigrant cookbooks, legends, and history and heritage in Bishop Hill, Illinois, from scholars who contributed to the recently published *Swedish-American Borderlands*, our most recent dividend book.

As restrictions lift and many return to in-person social settings, we are eager to resume our in-person meetings and programs but do so with new expectations to combine the best of in-person and online connections. The Society board of directors will convene for its first hybrid board meeting in October, joining many of our colleagues in Chicago while connecting with others through Zoom. Fall 2022 is also our first opportunity to offer an in-person program, which we are pleased to do in collaboration with the Swedish American Museum in Chicago on October 8 at

3:00 p.m., when musicians Maja Heurling and Ola Sandström perform their compositions of immigrant Signe Aurell's *Irrbloss* collection of poetry. And to continue our online programs, we will offer a virtual program on Swedish-American foodways on November 13 at 1:00 p.m. Central!

We anticipate our 2023 celebration of the Society's 75th anniversary offering ways for

everyone to participate, whether in-person or online. As in the word of ethnologist Barbro Klein, "*all tradition is change.*" We have experienced much change in the past three years of our work with the archives, publications, and programs of the Swedish-American Historical Society. Stick around for what's to come!

Anne Jenner, SAHS Board Chair



FALL ONLINE PROGRAM WITH PATRICE JOHNSON

Join us online on **Sunday, November 13, at 1:00pm Central** for “Swedish American Holiday Traditions” with Patrice Johnson, food historian and Nordic cooking instructor.

Many of us were raised in America's heartland with Nordic food traditions. We may not have understood the significance of our holiday julbord beyond the White Plate of lye-cod, butter or cream sauce, potatoes, rice pudding, and lefse. Perhaps someone thought to add color with a sprig of dill, pile of peas or pickled cucumbers, or a splash of red lingonberries. Still,



we understood that we honored the past when great grandma's meatballs were served.

We are bound by a legacy of meatballs and lutefisk. These foods tell a story of immigration: where we come from, who we are, and what we wish to become.

Where did the iconic meatball come from and how did an Italian Saint make her way to feed starving Swedes? Why do we eat lutefisk and what is the proper way to prepare

rice pudding? Patrice Johnson will present a discussion of Swedish American holiday food traditions as we explore everything from holiday baking to dopp-i-gryta, from Swedish sausage to Jolly Troll's infamous smörgåsbord.

Patrice Johnson is a self-described Nordic Food Geek and meatball historian. Johnson has written and presented on a wide variety of topics, including on the intersections of Swedish immigration and foodways. She is the author of *Jul: Swedish American Holiday Traditions* and *Land of 10,000 Plates: Stories and recipes from Minnesota*. Her weekly food and culture column appears in her hometown newspaper, and she is a cooking instructor with American Swedish Institute and Vesterheim Museum. She lives in the Twin Cities with her husband and three cats.

For more details, including registration, see our website (www.swedishamericanhist.org) and Facebook page, or contact Maria Ward at the Society's office.

High School Student Membership Initiative

Chad Eric Bergman

Sjölunden in Minnesota is the Swedish-language and cultural immersion program of Concordia Language Villages, associated with Concordia College (Moorhead), which began in 1975 initially for children ages eight to seventeen. One of its signature distinctions is that

Sjölunden is the *only* organization that grants high-school credit for the Swedish language in the United States. Ten to thirty high schoolers arrive each summer to study intensively the language and culture of Sweden for four weeks, and while academically rigorous, the friendships that are made during the

summer are lifelong and speak to the power of community.

Several SAHS members have deep connections with Sjölunden and have an interest in building a lasting relationship with the next generation of those interested in Sweden, both past and present. This past summer, SAHS board members successfully sponsored twenty-one high school students with a student membership. Continuing this tradition, we are planning to do the same in 2023, and interested Society members are encouraged to make a designated gift in support of the membership initiative. Our vision is to help create an interest in the Swedish language for this next generation, who will continue the work that we do at the Society. And it is our hope that their interest will continue to grow as they get older. Thank you!



"I had the wonderful experience of attending Sjölunden for two years as a camper when I was in my teens. It was fantastic. Friendships that I formed there have lasted through the years, and I loved all the cultural activities we participated in. Being exposed to a new language, traditions, food, and music is so incredibly beneficial for young people to broaden their sense of the world, and it encourages inclusion and global awareness."

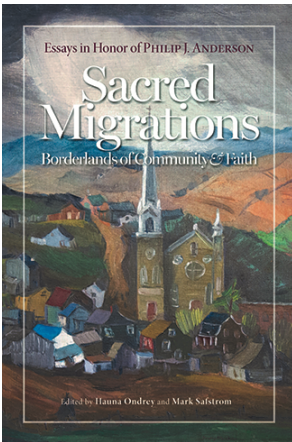
Ellen Harvey (1979, 1980), actress.

Newsletter editor: Phil Anderson
Production: Grace Lund

Society Historians Receive Publication Awards

Members of the Board of Directors were honored recently in recognition of their research and writing advancing scholarship in Swedish America.

The **Concordia Historical Institute** in St. Louis has had an awards program since 1974 that “recognizes the significant contributions to literature and research in the field of Lutheran archives and history in North America.” The Society’s recent publication and dividend book, *Sacred Migrations: Borderlands of Community & Faith, Essays in Honor of Philip J. Anderson* (Swedish-American Historical Society, 2020), edited by **Hauna Ondrey** and **Mark Safstrom**, was recognized by granting awards to the following authors:



• **Mark Safstrom**, “C.O. Rosenius and the Reading Culture of the Mission Friends” (Award of Commendation).

• **Joy Lintelman**, “Glimpses of Hope: A Swedish Lutheran Academy in Moorhead, Minnesota” (Honorable Mention).

Also receiving an Honorable Mention award from CHI was **Mark A. Granquist**, “American Lutheran Colleges and The Influenza Epidemic of 1918,” *Journal of the Lutheran Historical Conference*, 2019 (2021).

The **Historical Society of the United Methodist Church** at its annual conference in Epworth by the Sea on



St. Simon’s Island, Georgia, 28 July 2022, presented the “Saddleback Selection” for the best work in Methodist history for 2021 to **Carol Norén** for her book, *On to Perfection: Nels O. Westergreen and the Swedish Methodist Church* (Wipf and Stock, 2021).

Congratulations to all recipients!

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