

SWEDEN'S BISHOP HILL SOCIETY CELEBRATES ITS 30TH YEAR, 2019.  
extracted from Bishop Hill Sällskapet's *BULLETINEN* nr. 1 2019.

(pg.4) It is 30 years since Sweden's Bishop Hill Society was established to tell the story of the Bishop Hill Colony, and Swedish emigration to America. The society promotes contacts and exchanges between Biskopskulla, Sweden, and Bishop Hill, Illinois, in cooperation with other associations and institutions in Sweden and the USA, that relate to their common cultural history. The Bishop Hill Museum and Olof Krans exhibit in Biskopskulla is managed as a free-will gesture, and by people supporting it in our area.

It began with researcher Gösta Gustafsson's interest in the local history of Biskopskulla, and developed into the Bishop Hill Society, a national association which began its first year with about 100 members, and today has some 250 individuals, families and organizations, spread across the entire country and USA.

During the 1980's, Gösta welcomed many visitors to Biskopskulla from Bishop Hill, often led by Bishop Hill son Bob Lindbom. Gösta had collected documents and books during many years about the Erik Janssonists and their emigration to America. In 1984 people began to celebrate an annual Bishop Hill Day in Biskopskulla on the day before Midsummer Eve. In the mid-1980's, Lutheran pastor Lars-Erik Sundin of Tärnsjö, (whose ancestors included Erik Janssonists) began researching and writing about the emigration from the Nora area to Bishop Hill. And in 1985, English teacher Stig Röjerås of Tärnsjö began dramatizing its history in his "Bishop Hill Play" presented at the Nora Local History Center (hembygdsgrd). In 1986 the Swedish Television Network's Channel One created an hour-long program titled "Bishop Hill - Swedish Dream on the Prairie," produced by Björn Fontander, a program director at Swedish Radio and Television, in cooperation with Gösta Gustafsson, narrator. Journalist Ulf Lundin of Swedish Radio Uppsala also created a radio program about Bishop Hill. Ulf, Lars-Erik Sundin and Gösta Gustafsson began meeting to discuss the possibility of organizing an association of persons with interest in the story of Bishop Hill and the early emigration.

As early as 1967, Dr. Olof Isaksson laid the foundation for interest in Bishop Hill. He was then chief of the Sundsvall Museum, and at that time, as he himself often said, he made his most important trip, to Bishop Hill. He and photographer Sören Hallgren together re-discovered for Sweden the remarkable colony founded in 1846 by the Erik Janssonists.

After defending his doctoral dissertation, Olof became head of Statens Historiska Museum (Sweden's Museum of National Antiquities) in Stockholm. This led to another trip to Bishop Hill. Olof's interviews of descendants, and the following research, plus Sören's remarkable photo documentation, resulted in a large exhibit at Statens Historical Museum, and publication of a book on Bishop Hill published in 1969, titled "*Bishop Hill, A Utopia on the Prairie*," co-authored by Olof Isaksson and Sören Hallgren. In 1995 a new book came, "*Historien om Bishop Hill*" and in 1996 "*Pionjärer på prärien*," both by Ólof Isaksson.

In 1983, Swedish Ambassador Gunnar Jarring wrote that during the 1960's there was generous economic aid from King Gustaf VI Adolf, providing important support in protecting the unique environment of Bishop Hill, which was threatened. During the following years, many buildings were restored by the State of (pg.7) Illinois and the local history organization "Bishop Hill Heritage Association." Despite major restoration efforts, Bishop Hill still remained in acute need. Reduced federal support and funding from the State of Illinois caused loss of key personnel. There was a clear risk that Bishop Hill might again fall into decline. To save the buildings and their remarkable environment, massive efforts from both Swedish- and American side were needed. The most acute needs reached \$198,000, plus future expenses of \$1,090,000. That was the background for creating Sweden's "Save Bishop Hill" committee. To this end, on 3 November 1983 the Swedish government authorized, SEK 100,000 from state lottery

proceeds, to be used in restoration of buildings in Bishop Hill. Gunnar Jarring wrote about it, as chair of the new committee. Its secretary was Dr. Olof Isaksson, then director of Statens Historiska Museum. The committee also included Dr. Ulf Beijbom, head of the Emigrant Institute, Sweden's Minister of Culture Bengt Göransson, Prof. Folke Hedblom, Prof. Sven B.F. Jansson, former National Antiquarian, and Provincial Governor Britt Mogård, chair of the National Antiquarian Organization and its national historic museums, National Antiquarian Roland Pålsson, Ambassador Tore Tallroth, Ambassador Arne Thorén, and Ambassador Wilhelm Wachtmeister were included.

In 1984, Bishop Hill was designated by the President of the United States as a National Historic Landmark. Swedish Ambassador Wilhelm Wachtmeister in Washington, played a diplomatic role in that project.

During the Swedish-America Jubilee of 1988, memorializing the New Sweden Colony, founded in 1638 by the first Swedes who settled North America, the Swedish Postal Service published a series of six commemorative stamps. Of the two largest, one had a common theme published in Finland and the United States. It shows an historic world map with Sweden, Finland and America, plus a map of the Delaware River Valley. The other used Olov Krans' self-portrait with artist's palette in his hand, next to his overview of Bishop Hill and its hog farm, the "Steeple Building," shops, Church and steam mill on the Edwards River, as they appeared in 1855. It represents Sweden's "great migration" to the United States, which began in the 1840's with groups like the Erik Janssonists and Bishop Hill, Sweden's most important cultural monument to the Swedish emigration. The other stamps honored poet and author Carl Sandburg, and singer Jenny Lind, the trans-Atlantic flyer Charles Lindbergh, the landing on the moon, and the Hasselblad camera, plus Swedes in the National Hockey League (NHL).

Release of the Bishop Hill stamp was noted with a special event held there, in the presence of Swedish Postal Service General Director Bertil Zachrisson.

Olov Isaksson headed the Swedish National Committee for New Sweden, while I, your editor, was its full-time project leader for the Swedish Government.

"New Sweden" was a government project with the goal of encouraging trade with the Native Americans of North America, using Holland as a guide. Sweden was one of the five former colonial powers in North America. The others were Great Britain, France, Spain (p.8) and Holland. Foreign trade was an important source of income, and Sweden needed income to finance its expensive wars in Northern Germany, which during Sweden's time as a great power.

The cases of Bishop Hill and the "great migration" were something completely different, a populist project with other goals, begun in the early 1840's, about 200 years after New Sweden.

A small project by twelve artists from Uppland became part of the New Sweden celebration, and was placed at Bishop Hill. Princess Christina (Mrs. Magnusson) attended its opening, as part of a journey to various celebration sites in the United States. She opened the exhibit. Illinois Governor James R. Thompson participated, having encouraged it, so that by that summer the Illinois Bishop Hill Museum featuring Olov Krans' paintings was ready.

That exhibit project was sponsored by some 10 businesses. Jonas Norén of the Diös Property Corporation came over, and helped build the exhibit. He videotaped what needed to be done to restore buildings in Bishop Hill "from the viewpoint of a builder."

Through his Radio Uppland program, Ulf Lundin spread awareness in Sweden about Bishop Hill, the Erik Janssonists and the early migration. In 1988 he went to Bishop Hill and arranged a direct broadcast with

Radio Uppland in cooperation with Radio Västmanland, on the opening day of the Uppland art exhibit in the Illinois museum in Bishop Hill with its Olof Krans collection. In the Radio Uppland studio of Uppsala, Mats Åkerlund led a program with Gösta Gustafsson, Lars-Erik Sundin and me as participants. Lars-Erik told about his home area's celebrating Olof Krans 150th birthday. From Bishop Hill, they sent Princess Christina's and Governor Thompson's speeches, while several artists were interviewed. Stig Röjerås and Rune Forsberg of the Heby community were also in place at Bishop Hill, to make contact with the new museum. Stig Röjerås tested his role as Erik Jansson in the Bishop Hill Play.

As a contribution to the anniversary celebration, King Gustaf VI Adolf's Foundation donated SEK30,000, and the Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg Memorial Fund gave \$75,000 towards restoration of historic buildings in Bishop Hill.

Lasse Holmquist and Britt Bass had moved to New York, from which they reported, among others things, about Bishop Hill and the Midwest, in their book "New Sweden - En liten bit av Amerika." Lasse and Britt had long-range plans to find a vacation place in Bishop Hill.

Interest in the history of Bishop Hill grew and spread across Sweden.

The Parish bakery cottage at Biskopskulla had been restored, and Gösta Gustafsson used it for some of the historic material he had gathered. He contacted Olov Isaksson. In 1988, Museum Director Olov Isaksson, now at Statens Historiska Museum (Museum of National Antiquities) in Stockholm, dedicated the building and its farmhand's bedroom as the "Bishop Hill Exhibit/Museum". (p.9)

Olov Isaksson gave his warm support to the thought of a larger gathering of interested people involved in the story of Bishop Hill.

On 11 March 1989 an organizational meeting was called at Biskopskulla. Some 70 persons attended, and an interim board selected unanimously, to develop proposals for naming, rules and logotype.

On 27 May 1989 some 30 persons gathered at the Parish Hall at Biskopskulla, and the proposal of the interim board's proposal was accepted unanimously. To its board were elected Gösta Gustafsson, chair, Ulf Lundin, Lars Erik Sundin, Marianne Haijlen and Tommy Andersson.

The Bishop Hill Society had been organized! The Society's Bishop Hill Museum was established, and "Bishop Hill Day" became part of its activities.

The board developed an information brochure, "*Biskopskulla-Bishop Hill*." It took root, and two larger editions were printed.

Members streamed in, and to everyone's joy, Princess Christina (fru Magnusson) became an honorary member.

"Bishop Hill Day" and the Bishop Hill Museum has since drawn many summer visitors to Biskopskulla.

I cite the following from its *Bulletin 2*, 2012, what Björn Fontander wrote in his 2011 book. "The Obedient Creatures in Bishop Hill: "In the little red museum at Sweden's Biskopskulla, north of Enköping, once housing a bakery in the 1700's near the church, today's interested visitors can quietly wander among photos, documents and books. When one goes through its entrance, one has to bend down to avoid hitting one's head, but that's part of its charm. I cannot think of any small museum with greater old-fashioned flavor than that at Biskopskulla, with windows looking out across grainfields, and its nearby white church with its Albertus Pictor wall paintings."

In 1991, the *Bulletin* took form, allowing members to follow happenings. The Bishop Hill Play was given that year, directed by Stig Röjerås and his players, directed by Emil Sjöblom. In the fall of that year, its 25 members took a trip to Bishop Hill and the Midwest. During the first ten years, there were other tours. But with time, support became limited, and demand dropped for group tours. It became easier to join other such arrangements. In 1992 they organized a fall festival at Halloween. Later something similar was asked for, and in 1994 they began their fall meetings, though not as harvest festivals celebrating Halloween.

At an auction in 1993, the estate of Alfhild Åberg and Alva Borg was auctioned. It included many items from the early history of Bishop Hill. Olov Isaksson, his son Finn Isaksson, and Ulf Lundin attended. Marcus and Amalia Wallenberg's Memorial Fund had kindly guaranteed economic support for buying by the Swedish State Archives of sound and pictures the unique Edison phonograph cylinders made by farmer-inventor Jonas Berggren at Bishop Hill, at the very beginning of the 1900's. And many other valuable books and documents could be purchased for the Bishop Hill Museum at Biskopskulla. In 1993 the Swedish government established the "Committee for Emigrants and Immigrants in Sweden's History 1846-1996." Provincial Governor Jan Erik Wikström became its chairman, and Olov Isaksson its Secretary General. Members of the committee were Hans Lindblad, Ulf Beibjom, Harald Runblom, Per Sörbom and Birgitta Ornbrant. The celebration was summarized in the book "Emigrants and Immigrants in Sweden's History, 1846-1996," with Olov Isaksson as editor. In the spring of 1994, the Bishop Hill Society created a Jubilee Committee to plan the approaching 150th year celebration. The Bishop Hill society was sponsored by a number of Swedish firms, and published the book "*Det blåser en vind*," (A Wind is Blowing), honoring the Migration Jubilee. Its committee developed a celebration trademark, published stamps, T-shirts, a Jubilee Lottery, etc. The Society arranged a larger group trip to the Midwest and Bishop Hill honoring the celebration, and decided to present a gift of significant value to Bishop Hill. Folkartist Gunnar Zetterqvist of Dala Floda, who had in 1988 constructed the New Sweden Farmstead Museum at Bridgeton, NJ, was asked to create two identical "liars' benches" of solid oak, for Bishop Hill. They were shipped and delivered to the Society at the 150th anniversary of Bishop Hill, held in the Bishop Hill Park. Some 45 members participated, most in the group, some as individuals.

When representatives of the New Sweden Farmstead Museum in Bridgeton, NJ, six or seven years after the New Sweden Anniversary, asked for professional help in maintaining their reconstructed log house from New Sweden of the 1640's, and since there was no opportunity for Gunnar Zetterqvist to come, I contacted the Swedish-American Historical Museum in Philadelphia, and Bishop Hill's antiquarian Ron Nelson. Ron was given the task by the Museum in Philadelphia and Gunnar Zetterqvist provided advice and instructions to Ron. His competence from Bishop Hill restorations thus helped preserve the memory of the New Sweden Colony.

Sören Hallgren, during the Migration Year in Sweden, produced a traveling exhibit of Olov Krans reproductions, with portraits of colonists and motifs from Bishop Hill. It was shown many places in Sweden. After its closing, Olov Isaksson and Sören Hallgren delivered it as a gift to the Bishop Hill Society. Since then, the Olov Krans exhibit has been set up in the warehouse at Biskopskulla, an old 18th century building between the church and museum.

In 1996, documentary film producer Göran Gunér produced a half-hour long Bishop Hill film "*The Painter from Bishop Hill*". In 1997 the homepage of Bishop Hill Sällskapet began. Olov Isaksson died in 1998, and in 1999 Bishop Hill Sällskapet created its annual cultural history award, "Olov Isaksson Prize" and produced a Jubilee Bulletin. In 2006 Gösta Gustafson died. He had been the society's first chairperson, and later its emeritus chair. In 2008 Bishop Hill Sällskapet reproduced "*Bishop Hill Kolonins Historia*," an extract of "*Svenskarna i Illinois*," by Eric Johnson and C.F. Peterson, Chicago, IL. In 2008, Provincial Governor Christer Eirefelt of Gävle took the initiative of establishing Swedish events

recognizing the 200th year of both Rev. Lars-Paul Esbjörn's and Erik Jansson's birth in 1808. Bishop Hill Sällskapet, Olof Krans-museet and Bishop Hill Play of Tärnsjö the local history farm "Erik Anders" at Söderala, Emigrantmuseum and the House of Emigrants in Alfta, and (p.11) Alfta Local History Association, Sweden's Prison Museum in Gävle, and others, cooperated in the event. The participants produced a joint Jubilee folder "*Utvandrarnas pionjärer,*" plus a more permanent tour program relating to Erik Jansson, "*Discover our Emigrant history-a Tour through Biskopskulla, Tärnsjö, Gävle, Söderala and Alfta.*" In 2010 Bishop Hill-sällskapet turned over the Bishop Hill Day and Biskopskulla Midsummer Celebration to the local Parish Council, and the Bishop Hill Day was changed to "Biskopskulladagen." In 2011, author Britt Isaksson died. The Isaksson family donated Olov's and Britt's research- and archive materials concerning Bishop Hill, the "Olov Isaksson Collection," to the Bishop Hill Sällskapet. To assure best possible care, the Bishop Hill Sällskapet donated its archive of voice recordings from Olov Isaksson's interviews in Bishop Hill to the Swedish State Ljud och Bild-arkiv,(Sound and Light Archive) in exchange for a later digital copy. Ljud och Bild Arkivet became part of the Royal Library, and in December 2016, the Royal Library, in cooperation with Bishop Hill Sällskapet held a joint evening of sound from Bishop Hill, at the Library's auditorium, and built around the wax cylinder recordings from Bishop Hill, "The Unique Voice Recordings from Bishop Hill - how they got to the Royal Library." Some hundred listeners attended! A number of the attendees became members of Bishop Hill Sällskapet.

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