by Sally Barott and Barbara Young

1963, the Start of Karl Oskar Days!

Last year Karl Oskar Days was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Pauline Hinsch, the Karl Oskar Days coordinator at the City of Lindstrom is telling us that this year is a go. After 2020 we're all going to enjoy it. Did you know that Karl Oskar Days started in 1963? Who is Karl Oskar? Who is Moberg? We get asked these questions yearly...read on for the answers. Here is a poster of the first Karl Oskar Days in 1963.

The first Karl Oskar Days had a main street Grand Parade, a Kiddie Parade, a Coronation Ball for Miss Karl Oskar Days, a Stipes Show Carnival with plenty of rides for young and old, a Fireman's Water Fight, a Water Ski Show on the South Lindstrom Lake, plenty of food, and all in July's hot summer sun. I remember going to Karl Oskar Days every year with my family and will never forget seeing the first Miss Karl Oskar, Ginger Kirvida. She was so beautiful, like a live Barbie doll. I remember the carnival, the parade, the cotton candy and seeing the town of Lindstrom come alive with people. My parents would take all six of us and we'd have so much fun.

Karl Oskar Days was born as a result of Swedish author, Vilhelm Moberg coming to the Kichi-Saga, Chisago Lakes area in the summer of 1948. He wanted to understand why millions of Swedes emigrated here to Minnesota in the 1850s. Vilhelm had read about Per Andersson from Hassela, Sweden leaving with 100 Swedes in 1850. He had read the Eric Norelius diaries. And the minutes and membership records of the early days of Chisago Lake Evangelical Swedish Lutheran Church Center City. He met Ted Norelius (former editor of the Chisago County Press and relative to Eric Norelius) and Ted took him around to the historic Swedish places he knew of, i.e., Glader Cemetery in Lindstrom.

Moberg stayed in Chisago City at the Melander Hotel. He was surprised to know the local train service between Wyoming and Taylors Falls had their last run before he arrived! He didn't drive, so the drug store owner in Chisago City loaned him an old bicycle which Moberg used as his transportation. He rode it to local restaurants, churches and anywhere Swedish people gathered. He would ask them about their Swedish relatives and where they came from in Sweden. Moberg loved the old Småland dialect.

At first people were skeptical of him---a 50 year old Swedish man riding a bicycle and asking a lot of questions. Moberg returned to Sweden and wrote his first book, "The Emigrants" and Karl Oskar and Kristina Nilsson were 'born.' Karl Oskar and Kristina are fictional characters, based on the real people he met and read about. Ted and Moberg remained good friends throughout the years.

Moberg was a rugged man, much like his character Karl Oskar Nilsson. In 1996, his daughters were here in Chisago City for the dedication of the Moberg statue. They both recalled that their father created many of the characters in the books after real life people and/or people that he met while doing his research.

It's ironic that the new Swedish Immigrant Bicycle Trail runs on the former railroad track. You can now bike or hike on the trail between Shafer and Taylors Falls. Information kiosks and signage is there for the public. Moberg found the bicycle his preferred mode of transportation. He knew that the immigrants used the old emigrant trail between Taylors Falls and Center City to get to their new land.
In 1996 we organized a "Wagon-Walk Re-enactment" for the Swedish Jubilee. It was on June 21, just after the opening ceremony at the lower boat landing and downtown Taylors Falls. We drove our cars up the big hill (now County Rd. 37) and parked at the former Valley Graphics location. There waiting for us was Ralph Carlson with his team of draft horses and a hay wagon. Three other teams of horses and wagons joined the group.

We loaded up with re-enactment actors, local towns people, Swedish dignitaries and off we went by horse and wagon toward Center City, just like the immigrants did. We had a lunch stop in a hayfield in rural Shafer, a pioneer boxed lunch of bison jerky, hearty wheat bread, cheese, an apple and water. The horses had a water break before we continued to Center City and Chisago Lake Evangelical Swedish Lutheran Church. The whole journey took four hours and it rained the entire trip making us feel like immigrants on a journey. A hot meal and dry clothes were waiting for us at the church.

One other trip that I know of 'for sure' was a car trip to my place our home in Shafer. Yes, Vilhelm Moberg was in my house for coffee with my grandparents in 1948. It's a long story and I hope to write about it in an upcoming issue...take a look at this picture, it's my mother, Lois Anderson Barott. She was chosen as Miss Swedish America and was the cover girl on the Stockholm magazine *Folket i Bild* in 1946. Then, two years later, a wedding gift was delivered to her by Vilhelm Moberg.

I'm writing this article in April for the May-June-July issue of the County newsletter, it is difficult to confirm all of the plans. Just know that many people are behind the effort and I want to name them now and say, "Tack sa mycket!":

- Friends of the Karl Oskar House
- Chisago County Press
- City of Lindstrom - Karl Oskar Days Committee
- Chisago Lakes Chamber of Commerce
- Harmony in the Parks, Park Board
- Swedish Immigrant Bicycle Trail
- Vaxjo, Sweden Karl Oskar Days
- Chisago County Historical Society
- and many more

A complete calendar of events will be listed in The Chisago County Press and website, the Lindstrom City website the Chisago Lakes Chamber of Commerce website, and social media connections. So start spreading the news...Karl Oskar Days is on.

**Will Karl Oskar and Kristina be there?** Yes! We will once again be greeted by Karl Oskar and Kristina at the 2021 fest. Watch for them at a number of events. Especially at Nya Duve-måla ready to give you a "Välkommen" greeting.

**Did you know that Sweden also Celebrates Karl Oskar Days?** Yes, the city of Växjö, Sweden in Småland, has their own Karl Oskar Days every August. I'm hoping to have a very big surprise for all of town. Hint: Something from Växjö's Karl Oskar Days to our Lindstrom Karl Oskar Days!

**"Kristina" Displays at The Chisago County History Center:**
It is also the 25th Anniversary of Benny and Bjorn Visit with "Kristina" Musical. Were you there at the Chisago Lakes High School when they turned the gym into Orchestra Hall? What a special event. Former ABBA members Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus from Stockholm brought the four main characters from their hit musical to Minnesota.

It was a sunny afternoon on Sunday, October 13, 1996. The four stars of the musical sang the concert version of the hit musical. You are invited to come to the History Center on Main Street and view the photo display Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, July 8, 9, 10.

The musical "Kristina" is based on Kristina's thoughts and how terribly hard it was for her to leave her beloved Duve-måla and come to Amerika. The beautiful musical will be playing inside the research center for you to listen as you view the displays of "Kristina" and the Royal Visit of by The King and Queen of Sweden. Swedish goodies will also be served.
Note: We will also have photos of the October 11, 1996 day trip we took with Benny & Bjorn and the four cast members. We visited Swedish sites in the county and took a beautiful St. Croix River scenic boat trip. Helen Sjoholm who played Kristina in the musical noted after the boat trip, "Now I feel like Kristina!"

Karl Oskar House/Nya Duvemåla plans for Karl Oskar Days from Carla Norelius:
25 years have passed since the King and Queen of Sweden’s visit. We remember the hard work and financial support provided by many community members and volunteers and all the work that went into moving and restoring the Linn house. We have enjoyed 25 years of visitors from all over the United States and many European countries as they travel through our area seeking to discover the mystery of emigration.

To commemorate the anniversary the Karl Oskar House will be open extended hours during Karl Oskar Days. Karl Oskar and Kristina (a.k.a. Sven Sjöstedt and Marilyn Wahlstrom) plan to greet visitors at the house. Plans for the weekend include: a picture display of the royal visit, Swedish language mini courses, special music; FIKA, inviting attendees to share memories of the King and Queen’s visit, Swedish/English readings from the Emigrant series and more. Watch the Karl Oskar Events calendar for more information.

In the spring of 2020 a Moberg Emigrant Book Club was scheduled to begin, but was postponed due to COVID. Please watch for dates for this to resume. You are invited to check out the Friends of the Karl Oskar House when you are on Facebook.

"Get On Board" and mark your calendars now...you are invited to see the 25th Anniversary Displays of the 1996 Royal Visit of The King and Queen of Sweden and the "Kristina från Duvemåla" Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus Musical Display at the Chisago County History Center, Main Street, Lindstrom. Karl Oskar Days, July 8, 9, 10. Come and enjoy the Swedish goodies too. Just one of the 'goodies' Swedish Cardamom Bread. (above)

Please join us during Karl Oskar Days!
Since 1997, Barb and I have produced the Swedish Circle brochure yearly for the greater Chisago Lakes area with donations from local businesses. Last year we adapted that to a business card size. There is now a QR graphic on it...just click your smart phone on it and get to our Swedish Circle website.

Our new business card is available at the Chisago Lakes Chamber of Commerce in Lindstrom and many other local businesses. It is a wealth of Swedish information that was gained from our 1996 Swedish Immigration Jubilee year. Some 2019 paper brochures are still available at locations.

Our Swedish Circle website: www.swedishcircletours.com
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