



# Birka Banner

Birka Lodge, Vasa Order of America

November/December 2016

## Message from the Chair

Greetings to all Birka members. It's time again for Birka's biggest fund raising event of the year. The lodge needs your help and support to make the fair as successful as it always has been. If you have not yet signed up to help at the fair, the sign up sheet will be available at the November 18<sup>th</sup> meeting or you can call me. We will also need help setting up and decorating the Community House on **Friday evening, November 25, starting at 5:00 p.m.** The tables are always quite busy when the fair first opens and additional help is appreciated.

We are also requesting contributions for the **Grabs Table, valued at \$5.00 or more.** Items should be new and wrapped in holiday paper without its price. We need gifts labeled for boys, girls, men, or women. Home baked goods are also requested for the **Bake Table** and should be priced beforehand and labeled with the ingredients used, for the sake of our friends with food allergies.

**Please copy, post, and distribute to family, friends, and colleagues the enclosed flyer.** Many of our lodge members and table chairs have worked hard to prepare for the fair. We have imported gift items, linens, jewelry, books, Dala horses, candles and candleholders from Sweden as well as imported foods for your Christmas and holiday table. **The Lucia procession will take place at 12:00 noon.** Please mark the date and come and support your lodge. I look forward to seeing you there. It would be great if you have a folk costume or Scandinavian sweater to wear to the fair!

At the September 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, the Refreshment Committee chaired by Denise Esperson, provided delicious refreshments. Following the meeting, we had our annual Harvest Auction.

The October 29<sup>th</sup> Halloween Potluck Supper was well attended, and everyone enjoyed the delicious casseroles, salads, and desserts brought by the great cooks in the lodge. Thank you to Janet Muller and her committee for coordinating and setting up the hall. No one went home hungry! Thank you to everyone. We had a wonderful group of costumed members. Thank you to all who participated. Prizes were awarded for the best costumes.

Thank you to Ann-Marie Breuer for providing the prizes and to Gus and Roz Blomgren providing a large potted mum and a large pumpkin for the raffle. Also, thank you to our musician, Bob Landoni, for providing music.

The Activities Committee met on November 6 at Ron and Andrea Holmgren's home. We discussed the Jul Fair and upcoming events. The next Activities Committee meeting will be held in February 12, 2017, at 2:30 p.m. Marlys Mahajan will host us. The Auditors will also meet to audit the lodge financial books at this time.

Your annual dues for 2017 of **\$25** per person is due in January. Lodge dues should be paid by the end of April. Make your check payable to **Birka Lodge No. 732**, and mail it to our Financial Secretary, Linda Boylan at 12 Upton Lane, Boxford, MA 01921. (Phone: 978-887-3917).

**Early Bird Dues Drawing:** Anyone who pays their 2017 dues of \$25 before the end of 2016 will have his/her name entered in a drawing to receive an extra year of membership **FREE.** **PLEASE PAY DUES EARLY!** Thank you.

The **November 18th meeting** will be the final meeting for the year. Following the meeting, we will have a presentation about Castle Hill in Ipswich by Bob Purzyki, who is a former tour guide there. Thank you to Andrea and Mike Swanson and their committee, who will be providing the refreshments. Nomination and election of officers for the 2017 term will also be held. Please contact Mike Bagnulo if you do not plan on remaining in your current office. Thank you. The lodge needs your participation.

The **Lucia Rehearsal** will be held on **Sunday, November 20**, at 3:00 p.m. at the Community House. Lucia this year is Carolyn Conrad of Ipswich. New children are welcome. Please contact me if you are interested. Also on **Saturday, November 19, and Sunday, November 20**, Marlys Mahajan will host a Cookie Bake. Please contact Marlys (978-468-4423) if you would like help.

The first event for 2017 is our annual **Children's Tree Plundering Party**, which will be **Sunday, January 8 at 3:00 p.m. at the Community House.** Music, storytelling, dancing around the Christmas tree, gifts, refreshments, and a visit from Tomten are planned. More information will be mailed out in early December. A sign up sheet will be available at the November meeting.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the **November 18 meeting** as well as at the **Christmas Fair on Saturday, November 26**, and at the **January 8 Tree Plundering Party.** Your presence is requested to support and encourage your lodge and its officers.

Best wishes for a peaceful and joyful holiday season. God Jul och Gott Nytt Ar! ( it simply means "Merry Christmas and a happy new year" in Swedish.).

In truth and unity,

Linda Christianson, PDM, Chairman



## Hearty Birka Birthday wishes to these members:

### ... in November

4 Linda Boylan            24 Ron Holmgren  
5 Joanne Emerson        25 Jane Atherton  
8 Andrea Holmgren       30 Maggie Starrak  
19 Sonja Prior

### ... in December

1 Bob Landoni            10 Richard Johnson  
3 Marilyn Seaberg        11 Alison Landoni  
5 Gus Blomgren          17 Cynthia Olsen  
9 Mary Anne Hawkes     19 Kari DeLacey  
9 Sharon Guidara        19 Andrea Swanson

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## REFRESHMENT COMMITTEES

### Behind the Scene at Crane Estate

#### November 18

Andrea and Mike Swanson,    co-chair  
Karin Caves  
Sharon and June Guidara  
Sheila and Richard Sunman

#### January 27

Judy Tanzer, chair  
Gus, Eric, Greg Blomgren  
Denise Esperson,  
Mary Anne Hawkes  
Mike and Andrea Swanson



## ... 'round the lodge

**For college age and soon-to-be college age members** The national lodge, Vasa Order of America, gives out eight \$1,000 scholarships each year. The deadline for applications this year is February 15. Check the Vasa website for details about this year's application process.

**Cookie Bake** Our fifth annual Cookie Bake will be held at Marlys Mahajan's home on November 19 and 20. Join us any time between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. and you can mix, mold, decorate, bag, or label cookies for as much time as you have available. Marlys will provide the basics – flour, butter, sugar, oven, mixer, etc. You can bring a favorite recipe or use one of ours. Just let Marlys know (978-468-4423) and we will put you to work!

**Website** Remember to check Birka Lodge's website. The web address is found below. The website is maintained by Richard Lilja. Thank you, Richard.

**Sick Benefit Fund** If you have been a Vasa member for five years or more and have paid your dues, you are entitled to receive assistance with medical expenses from the Grand Lodge. Each member is entitled to receive up to \$3,000. If you would like an application, please contact Recording Secretary, Judy Tanzer.

**Change of Address** Please notify Recording Secretary, Judy Tanzer, of any address changes, either in writing at 3 Anthony Road, Hamilton, MA 01982, or by phoning her at 978-468-7407. Thank you. \_\_\_\_\_

## Hexan Fun at the October Meeting

The October meeting was a howling success! The potluck dinner was sumptuous, and to celebrate the season, members came dressed in creative Halloween costumes. Anne-Marie Breuer judged the show and had prizes for all the wonderful costumes. Thank you, Anne-Marie!

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## Behind the Scene at Crane Estate

Hear Bob Purzyki talk about memorable experiences at the Crane Estate and what it takes to keep it a fresh experience for the public. Bob is currently the general manager for the Ipswich Historical Museum and a former tour guide at the Crane Estate. Oh, what the walls could tell us!

## Reminders . . .

**Table Chairs and Workers:** Please refrain from taking down your displays before the fair ends at 2:30 p.m., no matter how much traffic we have. Last minute shoppers find it distracting if we are closing down the displays rather than serving our customers. Thank you.

- Dues that are paid before December 31 are eligible to win free dues for 2018. Pay your dues early and be entered to win!
- Remember to sign up with Linda Boylan if you wish to join us for dinner after working your shift at the Jul Fair. The last time to sign up is at the lodge meeting on November 18th.
- We still have five cookbooks left. If you would like one, let Marlys Mahajan know. A suggested donation of \$2 is appreciated to pay for the cost of printing.

## Jul Marknad

You can help by;

- Lending a hand at set-up time, Friday, November 27, at 5 p.m.
- Contributing one to four \$5 gift grabs, labeled for men, women, boys, or girls,
- Donating baked goods for the bake table,
- Signing up to help at one of the tables on Saturday morning.



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## Calendar of Events November

- 6        Activities meeting at Ron and Andrea Holmgren's home, 2:00 p.m.  
18        Lodge meeting, "Behind the Scene at Crane Estate", 7:30 p.m.  
19        Cookie Bake at Mahajan's, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.  
20        Lucia Practice, 3 p.m.  
          More Cookie Baking at Mahajan's, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
25        Setup for Jul Fair, 5 p.m.  
26        Jul Fair, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

## December

God Jul!

## January

- 10        Tree Plundering, 3 p.m.  
22        Lodge meeting, 7:30 p.m.

Birka Banner is a bi-monthly newsletter, published by Birka Lodge 32, Vasa Order of America, and on the web at [www.birka732.com](http://www.birka732.com)

Linda Christianson, Chairperson

Marlys Mahajan, Editor

Richard Lilja, Webmaster

## Julgransplundring'

*Tjugondag Knut, January 13, is traditionally the day when Christmas is 'thrown out' ..literally, since you usually want to throw out a Christmas tree that is shedding needles badly..*

The tradition in Sweden and in Finland to plunder the Christmas tree is on Tjugondag Knut or St. Knut's Day on January 13. This is the day when Christmas is 'thrown out.' It is literally the case these days as this is the date when you usually throw out a Christmas tree that is shedding needles badly and seems to have done its part to enhance the Christmas season

## Trettondedag Jul, Tjugonedag Knut?

*Thirteenth day of Christmas, Epiphany – what used to be similar to today's Halloween in the 19th century..*

With *Trettondagen* - Epiphany (January 6) over and *Tjugonedag Knut* 'Twentieth Day Knut' coming up on January 13, Christmas is over even in Sweden. Costumes, ghosts, and wild parties. No, it's not a description of Halloween but rather Epiphany celebrations in the old days. Today, *Trettondagen* or Epiphany in English, is a fairly tame holiday in Sweden, but it wasn't always like that – in the old days, January 6th was celebrated with great hullabaloo. Still a holiday in Sweden most people also take the previous day, the Twelfth Night (*Trettondagsafton*) off from work.

“That was the day when the Three Wise men visited baby Jesus in Bethlehem and gave their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh,” says Lena Kättström Höök, superintendent at Nordiska museet. According to Swedish folklore, the dead came visiting from their graves for Christmas and had to return on the 6th of January. Most of these traditions went to their graves during the 19th century, too. Today the only one remaining is, perhaps, the so-called *julgransplundring* (a children's party at which the Christmas tree was stripped of its decorations, which in the old days consisted of apples, candy and other edibles).

“But on the island of Möja, it's just like old times. They sing medieval songs and walk around with a great, shining star,” Kättström Höök explains. *Stjärnsångare*, Singers to the star, on Möja dress up similar to the star boys of Lucia or the *lussegubbar* of west Sweden of olden times [Lesser known about Lucia celebrations](#).

According to the Bible Epiphany actually marks two events in Jesus Christ's life. The first event was when the three wise men, or kings, visited infant Jesus. The second event was when St John the Baptist baptized Jesus.

In many countries, Twelfth Night leading into Epiphany marks the absolute end of Christmas celebrations. But the Swedes and Finns, and some parts of Norway, feel it's a pity to finish that early, and stretch Christmas another week. That gives the final date of January 13th, which in Sweden is the name day of Knut, hence the expression *tjugonedag Knut* ("twentieth day Knut").

According to renowned folklore professor Jan-Öjvind Swahn it's not clear why Swedes stretch the Christmas celebration so far into January. However, there's a lot to suggest that the notorious Midwinter Sacrifice (*Midvinterblot*) of the Viking era, with its human sacrifices and great feasting, took place on January 13. It is believed that the early Christian Church in the Nordic countries sought to exterminate the abomination by bringing the Midwinter celebration into the fold of Christmas.

It is on *tjugonedag Knut* that Swedish families throw a *julgransplundring*, "plunder the Christmas tree," as friends and family gather to strip the tree of decorations, play games, eat cake, then - often literally - throw out the Christmas tree.

*Sources: Nordiska Museet, Jan-Öjvind Swahn*

Möja is an island in the Stockholm archipelago, only accessible by boat [Möja tourist information \(in Swedish\)](#)

## Lesser known about Lucia celebrations

*In western Sweden it was also customary that the autumn work should be finished the night before Lucia.*

Lesser known about Lucia celebrations

In western Sweden it was also customary that the autumn work should be finished the night before Lucia.

Lucia, December 13 [Swedish Lucia, the Queen of Light](#) coincides with many other seasonal customs and habits in Sweden of older times. Among other things one symbolically finished the threshing and then butchered the pigs. "Seven in the early morning of the day" one should also get up and get oneself a bit of food and something to drink. Not only the animals but also humankind should have a real "Lucia bite." This could many times take extensive forms. One spoke of "Lucia drinking" for that morning one should consume a really especially large amount of liquids.

Often it could be a question of getting up in the middle of the night and get a square meal and then tumble into bed. Then one slept a little while in order to get up peppy and happy and fill up on another breakfast. In Värmland and Dalsland that was called having a breakfast in every corner of the room - in every room in the house! It is possible that this gluttony can have its basis in the fact that during the Catholic Middle Ages the Christmas fast started after Lucia Day.

It is interesting to note that Lucia morning seems to have been a celebration for men. In a diary from the 1790's it was recounted that the men in the house "were up and celebrated Lucia in the usual manner, but Eva and I lay in bed until 8 o'clock". It also said that they "ate the fat and drank the sweetness the whole day".

Enjoy some of our recent films from Lucia celebrations in Swedish America: <http://www.youtube.com/nordstjernen> or at [www.vimeo.com/nordstjernen](http://www.vimeo.com/nordstjernen) and [Swedish Christmas - the Season of Light](#)

### "Lussegubbar" - Lucia Guys

There were also men who made themselves look frightening in costumes, blackened their faces and went out as "Lucia guys" to amuse themselves and also or perhaps just take the opportunity to make a little mischief.

This is a custom that has entirely disappeared today but which remains in men's memory and occurred a couple of generations

ago.

Even if there is no connection, it can be of interest to know that in several places, among others in the German and Austrian alpine regions it happened that young people on Lucia morning dressed up in fright costumes and masks and went from house to house. The concept of Lucia combined with fright and evil is not entirely strange for us Swedes either. First there are the corruptions of the name of the day's saint, which has led to that. It has been connected to the evil Lucifer and to lice and other vermin.

"The day before Lucia it was best to be nice, for on Lucia eve the Lucia witch could come. She was both wicked and dangerous. She could take the children away with her". Thus it was told in Värmlandsnäs as late as in the 1950's.

#### **A man's celebration**

It is primarily in the western part of Sweden that the celebration of Lucia morning has its strongest roots. There it has always been a man's celebration. It was also the western Swedish students (male also naturally at that time), which in the beginning of the 1800's took with them the traditions and established them in Uppsala, Stockholm and Lund. Primarily Värmlanders and Dalslanders but also those from Västergötland and Gothenburg saw to it that students up to our present day in ritual form observed Lucia breakfast in their "nations" just as the venerable Wermländska Sällskapet (Värmland Society) in Stockholm has held its major celebration on Lucia Day since 1816.

In many places in northern Sweden Lucia was according to tradition Adam's first wife. She was of underground origin and someone to watch out for. If the children were not kept inside during the evenings before Christmas, they could risk being kidnapped by Lucia.

**SWEDISH YULE FAIR**  
(Traditional Jul Marknad)  
**Saturday, November 26<sup>th</sup>**  
**9:00am-2:30pm**

**Hamilton/Wenham Community House**  
(Bay Road Route 1-A)  
**FREE ADMISSION**

**Lucia (Bride of Light) 12:00 noon**  
Scandinavian & American HOLIDAY MUSIC (all day)  
LUNCH AT NOON: Assorted, Open-Face Sandwiches

Coffee & Coffee Bread, Glögg & Pepparkakor (all day)  
Gifts, Handcrafts, Imported Linens, Ornaments, Jewelry  
Cards, Wrapping Paper, Candles, Candle Holders & Rings  
Dala Horses, Straw Goats, Jul Tomtes (gnomes) etc.

VALKOMMEN!  
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