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-- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE --

Come into a New World: Linnaeus & America
New exhibition at the American Swedish Historical Museum
February 15 – July 1, 2007

***Come into a New World: Linnaeus & America* opens at the American Swedish Historical Museum on Thursday, February 15, 2007, part of an international celebration marking the 300th birthday of the great Swedish scientist Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778). The opening reception begins at 6:00 pm and will include a 7:15 pm panel discussion, *Why Linnaeus Matters Today* featuring guest curator Dr. Karen Reeds.**

The exhibition offers visitors an exploration of the contributions of Carolus Linnaeus whose research, teaching and ideas transformed the realm of biology and medicine. Many visitors might be familiar with Linnaeus from high school biology – remember those Latin labels for plants and animals? Linnaeus started that system of scientific names and classification and gave all of us human beings the name of *Homo sapiens*.

At the American Swedish Historical Museum (ASHM), visitors will discover unexpected links between Linnaeus and America's national identity through 100-plus scientific specimens, drawings, manuscripts, books, and works of art—some being exhibited for the first time. The exhibition explores the ways Linnaeus has influenced how we organize information, respond to our environment, explain the natural world and define ourselves as human beings.

Linnaeus ranked second only to Isaac Newton in terms of scientific importance to the Enlightenment. The six sections of *Come into a New World* go far to illustrate why

Linnaeus loomed so large. Section one sets the scene of chaos that Linnaeus encountered as a young student of natural history in the early 18th century: he inherited a world where any plant or animal might be identified by a host of names and there was no standard system for identification upon which scientists could agree. By the time Linnaeus died, he had transformed that chaos into a rational order—the necessary foundation for progress in biology.

Section two, *Order from Confusion*, introduces Linnaeus's systems for naming and organizing every living thing. His oversized charts of the Animal, Plant, and Mineral Kingdoms (which gave rise to the guessing game, "Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral") and his eight-foot herbarium cabinet – a replica specially built following Linnaeus's own directions – give visitors a glimpse inside his highly organized mind. Visitors are invited to try their hand at filing reproductions of plant specimens in the cabinet according to Linnaeus's "sexual system" for classifying plants.

In his tireless effort to name everything living, Linnaeus sent two dozen of his best students out to explore the world on his behalf. Section three considers the wonders witnessed by Pehr Kalm, Linnaeus's direct link to America. Kalm was the first professionally trained scientist to observe the people, wildlife, and landscapes from the Delaware Valley to Canada, and he brought back sixty plant species new to European scientists. He also had the good luck to find support from Benjamin Franklin and other members of Philadelphia's scientific community. Through 18th century images of American creatures, natural history specimens, Kalm's words in his *Travels into North America*, and even his expense account (find out how much it cost to rent a horse in 1748), visitors come to understand how much effort and dedication it took to collect American natural history for Linnaeus. Visitors get a chance to "pack Kalm's bags" for themselves, using reproductions of some of the scientific equipment and everyday effects Kalm needed to explore the North American wilderness.

Section four, *Nature and the Emerging Nation*, shifts the emphasis to the Americans. It links Linnaeus's enthusiasm for the abundance of newly identified American flora and fauna with growing pride and independence expressed for the emerging nation. This pride manifested itself through distinctively American symbols such as Benjamin Franklin's use of the native rattlesnake in provocative political cartoons, "Join-or-Die" and "Don't Tread on Me". Thomas Jefferson studied Linnaeus passionately and insisted that Meriwether Lewis take a crash course in Linnaean natural history before the Lewis & Clark expedition set out for the American West. In section four visitors will also meet America's home-grown naturalists John Bartram, his son William Bartram, and their friend Jane Colden, the first Americans to adopt Linnaean systems as they cultivated, described, and illustrated our native flora.

Linnaeus's most controversial concept is explored in *Homo sapiens: A Revolutionary Idea* (section five). To many of his contemporaries, Linnaeus's views about the place of human beings in the natural order were considered a revolutionary departure. For Linnaeus, humans belonged squarely within the Animal Kingdom, not above or apart from it. Visitors come face to face with Linnaeus in a larger-than-life portrait; he is

shown at the age of 30, wearing Lapland dress, perhaps pondering his own place in nature's grand scheme. In this section visitors can ponder for themselves the interplay of science and society as they learn about the two very different consequences of Linnaeus's classification of human beings. His conviction that all humans belong to a single species, *Homo sapiens*, helped validate Jefferson's ringing declaration: *All men are created equal*. But Linnaeus's accounts of the differences among humans also perpetuated European cultural prejudices: his work was quickly used to justify racism.

Through his systems for naming, describing and classifying living things, Carolus Linnaeus remains central to modern biology, medicine, anthropology, horticulture and environmental science. *Linnaeus Lives*, the culminating section of *Come into a New World*, captures the continuing significance of Linnaean ideas in scientific exploration, evolutionary biology, biomedical research, and thinking about *Homo sapiens*. From the naming of new species to the protection of endangered habitats, Linnaeus lives on, not without controversy, but with an enduring vision of the earth's natural order.

***Come into a New World: Linnaeus and America* runs through July 1, 2007 at the American Swedish Historical Museum, 1900 Pattison Avenue, in Philadelphia. For more information about this exhibition and related programs go to www.americanswedish.org, call (215) 389-1776 or email info@americanswedish.org**

Planning for *Come into a New World: Linnaeus and America* was supported by a "We the People" Consultation Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The exhibition has been funded by generous gifts from Astra Zeneca, the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Robert Savage, SWEA New Jersey, and The Swedish Council of America.

The exhibition *Come into a New World: Linnaeus and America* is part of the ongoing mission of the American Swedish Historical Museum to promote awareness in America of the contributions of Swedish culture.

The American Swedish Historical Museum is open Tuesday-Friday, 10-4; Saturday and Sunday, noon-4. Admission is \$6 for adults; \$5 for students and senior citizens. Museum members and children under 12 are free. ASHM is located in scenic FDR Park at 1900 Pattison Avenue in South Philadelphia near the Sports Complex. Plenty of free parking is available. For those taking public transportation, the Broad Street Subway's Pattison Avenue stop is within walking distance, or SEPTA's Route 17 (Naval Base) can bring you right to the Museum.

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