

ASHM Acquires Exquisite Karl von Rydingsvärd

By Christopher Malone

In 2016, the American Swedish Historical Museum featured a collection of furniture by the Swedish-American woodworker, carver, and designer Karl von Rydingsvärd in the exhibition *Flowers and Monsters: The Hand-Carved Furniture by Karl von Rydingsvärd*. Though prolific in his day, von Rydingsvärd had become virtually unknown until the Museum's landmark exhibition brought together pieces made by von Rydingsvärd for clients and his family. In the Spring 2016 Newsletter, former curator Carrie Hogan described how she received a call about showcasing some of von Rydingsvärd's family pieces.

This past fall, I received a similar phone call from Rosemarie and Harold Rosenblum, who had in their possession a substantial carved bench inscribed "K von R." Little did we know that the Rosenblums would offer to sell the Museum one of the best pieces of furniture made by Karl von Rydingsvärd. The bench entered the collection this past winter through the generous donations of the Museum's Board of Governors.

Karl von Rydingsvärd (1861-1943) was born into a farming family in Färgelanda in the very rural province of Dalsland. Unlike other European countries, Sweden was

photo captions..

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Note from the Director

If you want to put a smile on someone's face, start a conversation with "What do you like most about summer?" Some answers are obvious--beautiful weather, sun on your face, the sound of the ocean, or taking a vacation. The passion for summer, sunlight, and nature may be one of the most unifying characteristics of the Nordic Countries! People are at their happiest at this time of year as they take a break from work, head out to the countryside and bask in the sunlight.

One of the things I treasure about summer is how it tends to be the time in the United States to connect with your neighbors. When the weather is nice, we emerge from our houses, and take time to chat with each other while gardening, washing cars, or walking the dog. We get together for barbecues or backyard fires, and catch up with each other.

This summer, the museum is continuing its focus on Finland, Sweden's closest neighbor. Did you know that Finland has over 180,000 lakes? Or that Finns spend on average 79 days per year at their summer cottages! Finland has the same "right to roam" as Sweden does, so whether you like islands, forests, or lakes, it's the perfect country to explore in the summertime. And while you are stateside, you can get a taste of Finland through *Radically Marimekko* and other ASHM programs this summer.

Whatever your summer plans involve this year, I hope they included a good dose of nature and sunlight!

Tracey Beck



Tracey Beck

Art for All continued from front cover

slow to industrialize, so farming remained a part of Swedes' everyday lives throughout the 1800s. Due to this, the production of household objects like furniture remained in the skillful hands of carpenters and other woodworkers. The rise of the *Slöjd* movement in Sweden coincided with von Rydingsvärd's education. The movement sought to teach children handicraft skills like woodworking and textile production as part of their schooling. The movement began in Finland in 1865 and quickly moved to other parts of Scandinavia and the United States simultaneously as the Arts and Crafts movement moved from Great Britain to America. Von Rydingsvärd and his siblings attended school until the eighth grade, when they were required to leave to help the family by making tools and other things the family could sell in their general store. During this time von Rydingsvärd began to carve furniture to sell to his family's customers. Karl became fascinated with Viking art, myths, and legends surrounding the valleys, lakes, and mountains of the Dalsland region. His furniture began to feature Viking iconography like dragons, birds, and ornate scrollwork. Dalsland had been home to Viking traders for thousands of years. They scoured the Norwegian borderlands and bay in Uddevalla and lived off the land. Farmers in this region regularly found ancient artifacts while children played among the protruding ruins of Sweden's past.

A series of famines and a lack of work in the rural areas of Sweden led many young men and women to relocate to Stockholm. Many emigrated to America almost immediately after arriving in the capital due to the lack of industry. Karl joined his brother Johan in Stockholm around 1874. The city introduced him to a rich antique scene where he worked alongside local woodcarvers and received training as a "decorative sculptor." The knowledge he acquired in Stockholm prepared him to enter the burgeoning furniture manufacturing market in America led by firms like Herter Brothers and A.H.

Davenport and Company. After arriving in America in 1883, Karl was hired by Herter Brothers to design and carve furniture. According to Karl in a letter to painter and future client Douglas Volk, firms like Herter Brothers and Davenport were primarily staffed by immigrant woodworkers, especially from Scandinavia. Their training in the *Slöjd* movement and Sweden's late industrialization primed them to be the best carpenters and craftsmen in America. Karl's knowledge of antique forms and shapes helped him create the beautiful furniture Herter Brothers sold. Their clients included J.P. Morgan, William Henry Vanderbilt, and President Ulysses S. Grant.

Karl von Rydingsvärd's time with Herter Brothers was short. He quickly moved to A.H. Davenport and Company in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It's possible that Karl was introduced to and subsequently inspired by the designs of architect H.H. Richardson while at Davenport. The firm worked closely with Richardson on many of his projects including ornately carved furniture in the Byzantine-Romanesque style. Richardson developed a medieval-inspired style throughout his career. This style was influenced by the writings of the English art critic John Ruskin, the work of Arts and Crafts practitioner William Morris, and gothic-revivalist Viollet-le-Duc. Karl von Rydingsvärd would identify closely with the prevailing Arts and Crafts movement, going as far as opening his own Arts and Crafts school in Boston where he taught woodworking, primarily to women. In Sweden, the movement also served to fortify national identity. Swedish artisans adopted the Arts and Crafts movement's moral aesthetics, adherence to regionalism, and glorification of "the simple life." Sweden's revival of traditional handicrafts piqued the interest of artists and collectors worldwide. Karl von Rydingsvärd was fortunate to live, teach, and sell his furniture in America, where interest in Norse motifs grew. Snakes, dragons, mythical beasts, ancient symbols, and Viking life became the trademarks of his signature style.

The bench recently acquired by the Museum contains many of these motifs. The wings protruding from the top rail end in magnificently carved dragons made up of a series of carved ovals that reveal the sly grin of the dragon's bearded mouth. The wing is held up by a triangle inset with another small, winged beast, possibly a dragon or a griffin. The piece shows von Rydingsvärd's expertise in carving overlapping scrolls and banded frames, some of which turn into mythical birds guarding what appears to be a pinecone or pineapple in the middle of the top rail. Von Rydingsvärd's furniture is sturdy and heavy and highlights the beauty of the wood. In a 1907 article titled "Practical Points in Woodcarving" from *The International Studio Magazine*, Rydingsvärd lays out the perfect proportions for a bench. To be comfortable for the "average" person, it should be "thirty-nine inches high...with a top two inches thick, and about twenty inches wide, projecting three inches in front to allow space for clamps. The length depends on the amount of space available.

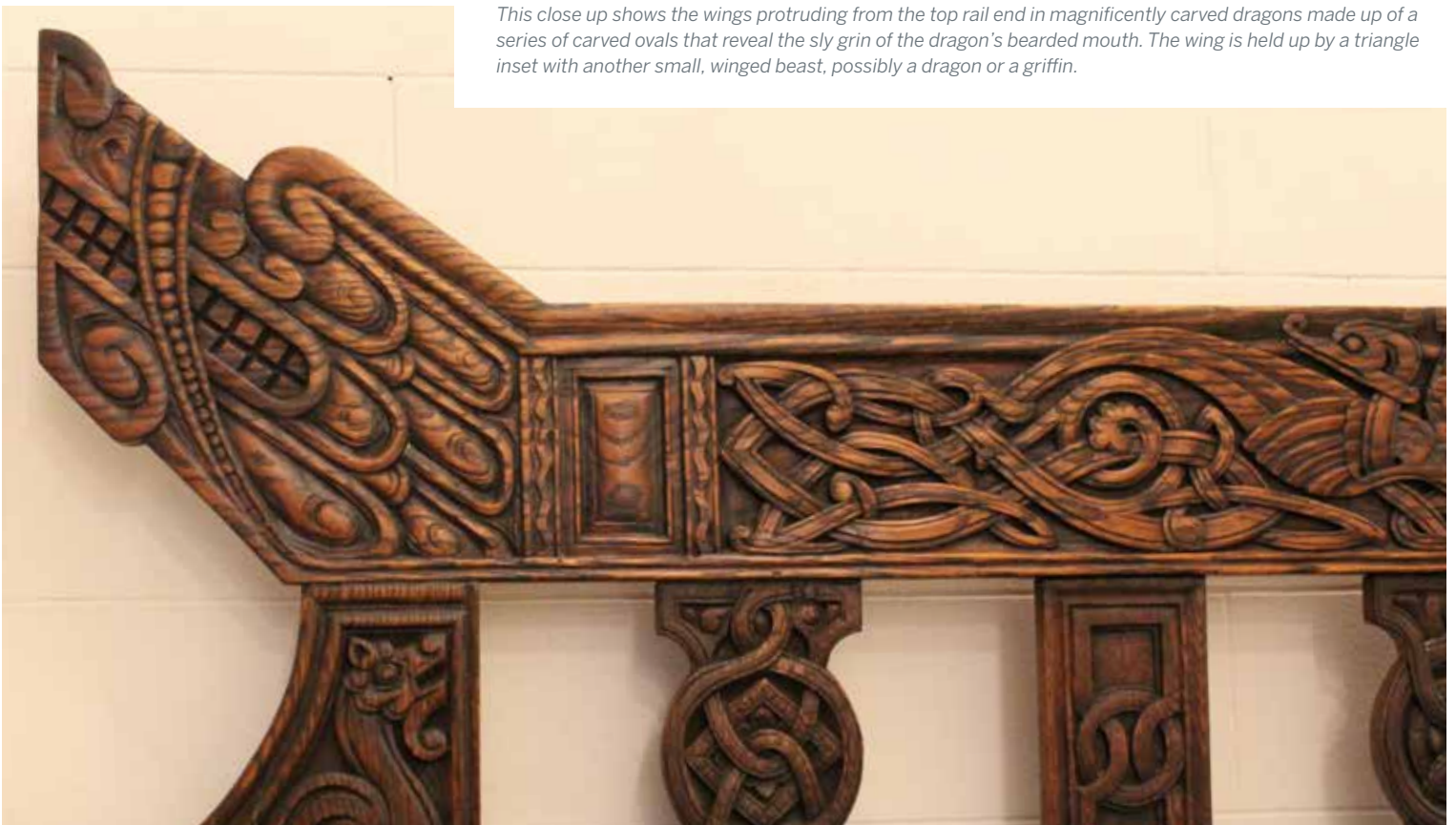
The bench need not be of hardwood. Spruce will answer every purpose; but it must be heavy enough not to tip, and the legs should be at least three inches square, in order to give sufficient solidity." The bench acquired by the Museum almost fits those standards perfectly.

At present, we do not know who the bench was made for. Rydingsvärd made furniture like this for much of his life, especially after he "retired" from teaching to make furniture for private homes. People like social reformer Dr. Felix Adler, textile factory mogul William Sloane, collector Florence Sloane, and the manufacturing magnate Theodore Swann commissioned his work. Von Rydingsvärd's style inspired many of his students, including his second wife, Ida W. (Simpson) Jackson. A chest with a hinged lid by Ida von Rydingsvärd in the collection of Historic New England features some of the same motifs seen on this bench. Ida used winged dragons and ornately carved scrolls on the lid and panels of the chest that are almost identical to the ones Karl used.

The Museum is proud to have this bench enter the collection to represent the prodigious work of Karl von Rydingsvärd. While more research needs to be done into Karl von Rydingsvärd's work, the 2016 exhibition laid the groundwork for the wider world to know and appreciate the art and ingenuity of Karl von Rydingsvärd's whimsical world of winged beasts and mythical dragons, along with his contributions to the material culture of the American Arts and Crafts movement. We invite you to view the bench, now located on the Museum's balcony.

I want to thank my predecessor Carrie Hogan whose research on Karl von Rydingsvärd greatly contributed to the information in this article. Information on ASHM's 2016 exhibition *Flowers and Monsters: Hand-Carved Furniture by Karl von Rydingsvärd* is on our website under past exhibitions.

This close up shows the wings protruding from the top rail end in magnificently carved dragons made up of a series of carved ovals that reveal the sly grin of the dragon's bearded mouth. The wing is held up by a triangle inset with another small, winged beast, possibly a dragon or a griffin.



Summer 2023 Upcoming Events and Registration Info

There is always something going on at the American Swedish Historical Museum. See below for scheduled events. Please check with the Museum to confirm dates and other details. Refunds will not be granted for cancellations after the registration deadline. To register for events by phone call (215) 389- 1776. Online registration is available through each event listing on the website. ASHM follows the City of Philadelphia COVID-19 regulations.

Monthly Programs:



Toddler Time 10:30 am – 11:30 am

The third Tuesday of each month ASHM offers specially designed programs to introduce

Swedish culture through art, science, and literature in uniquely fun and creative ways to children ages 2 to 5 years old.

Tuesday, June 20th – Celebrate Sweden!

Tuesday, July 18th – The Ways We Go

Tuesday, August 15th –

Meet Pippi Longstocking

Tuesday, September 19th –

ABCs & 123s Svenska Style

Scandinavian Celebration Day

Sunday, June 4th

12 – 4 pm

Explore Scandinavia with ASHM at our first-ever Scandinavian Celebration Day! Learn about the traditions of each country through food, music, games, language conversation tables, a quiz walk through the exhibitions, and meet and greet opportunities with local Honorary Consuls. Don't miss this free day at the museum to learn and explore! Introductory Museum tours at 1 pm and 3 pm. Be sure to dress up and show off your cultural heritage!



Midsommarfest Saturday, June 24th 4 pm – 7 pm

Celebrate summer at our annual Midsommarfest, complete with food, drinks, homemade Swedish pastries, music, crafts, games and maypole dancing. This event is fun for the whole family \$5 per person, and children under 5 are free. Pre-register online or pay at the door.



Wawa Welcomes America Free Museum Day Friday, June 30th 10 am – 4 pm

ASHM is proud to participate again in WAWA

Welcome's America Free Museum Day.

ASHM will be open to the public on Friday, June 30th from 10:00am- 4:00pm with free admission to all visitors.

Summer Concert by Sofia Talvik Thursday, July 6th 6 – 7:30 pm

Prepare yourself for an intimate musical evening with Sofia Talvik. Unmistakably Nordic in flavor, Sofia Talvik somehow still conforms to American interpretations of her own original music, a North Sea siren blending sparkle and melancholy, creating a special niche of folk music. Food and bar will be open for purchase at 6 pm and the performance is from 6:30 – 7:30 pm in the Museum's Terrace Tent. Tickets are \$10 for members and \$15 for nonmembers, pre-registration is appreciated but tickets will be available at the door.

Design Date Night! Thursday, July 13th, 7 – 9 pm

Take inspiration from *Radically Marimekko* and create your own set of custom-designed screen-printed cloth dinner napkins, a true conversation piece for your next dinner party! The evening includes a tour of the exhibition, a step-by-step screen-printing project led by the Fabric Workshop and Museum, and a sample flight of Scandinavian chocolate! Space is extremely limited, pre-register online. Sponsored by Sweetish Candy and Goods.

To Register For Events

call 215-389-1776, or visit online at

www.americanswedish.org/calendar.htm



SmörgåsBeer Saturday, July 29th 6 pm – 9 pm

Spend a summer evening sampling local Philly and international lagers, ales, stouts, and more paired alongside a spread of Swedish-inspired eats. Tickets are \$45 in advance, \$55 at the door, with a special designated driver price of \$15. Register online or by phone.



Crayfish Party Friday, August 18th 6:30 pm

Get a taste of Swedish summer at our annual Crayfish Party! Enjoy a buffet of crayfish, Swedish meatballs, along with crisp bread, cheese, potatoes, cheese pie, and a glass of aquavit under our beautifully decorated tent. \$50 for ASHM and SACC Philadelphia members, \$60 for non-members. Register by phone or online by August 14th.



SAVE THE DATE ASHM Bus Trip to New England September 18th - 22nd

Calling all Scandinavian textile lovers! ASHM

is currently planning a bus trip to the New England area in the third week of September. Highlights of the experience will include a private tour of world-renowned tapestry weaver Helena Hernmarck's studio in Connecticut. We will also visit the Vävstuga Weaving School in Massachusetts to learn about Swedish and Scandinavian textile traditions with founder Becky Ashenden. Details for the trip are still being formalized but the dates will be or during the week of September 18th-22nd. If you are interested in joining this textile journey, email Lauren Burnham at lburnham@americnaswedish.org to get updates and save your spot!

Images from Recent Events

Photographs by ASHM Staff



▲ Children collecting eggs at Easter Family Day.



▲ Screen-printing craft with Fabric Workshop and Museum at Radically Marimekko opening.



▲ Radically Marimekko lenders at exhibition opening.



▲ Families at March Toddler Time: Five Senses.



▲ Guests at the Spring Ting Dinner and Auction.



▲ Bidders at Spring Ting Dinner and Auction.



▲ Party goes at ExtrABBAganza!



▲ Dancing Queens at ExtraBBAGanza!

Contributions

Do you want to make a contribution? There are several easy ways to support us. Visit our web page americanswedish.org/support or call **215-389-1776** for more information.

New Members

January 1 – April 30, 2023

Organizational

Free Library of New Hope and Solebury

Household

Lynn Brogren
Morgan Cheshire
Rob Donaghy
Jennifer Eubanks
Marcus Grasso
Anissa Haney
Amy Hunnicut
Elizabeth Kelly-Griswold
Niev Lindbloom
Christer Peltomaa
Linda Reider
Mark Rosstedt
Robert Snedden & Britta Penman

Individual

Carol Comegno
Stephanie DeRosa
Will Donovan
Kirby Kean
Shaye Lankford
John Nordlof
Kelly Paluch
Lisa Ruth

Seniors/Students

Nancy J. Balz
Patricia Bellingham
Eha Brownell
Maureen Carman
Jane Douglas
Richard Golden
Leevi Kiil
Jill Pearson-Reider
Rachel S Schade
William Steagall
Ann Topjon
Linda Vizi

Annual Giving and Contributions

January 1 – April 30, 2023

Serafimer

Anonymous
Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation
Rosenlund Family Foundation

Vasa

American-Scandinavian Foundation
Kristina and Charles Kalb,
in memory of Virginia Swedberg
Merck Foundation
Carl D. Rapp
Timken Company Charitable &
Educational Fund
SWEA Philadelphia

Gold

Finnish-American Society of the
Delaware Valley
Evert & Ashley Christensen,
in memory of Marna Feldt
John and Carin Foster
Kristina and Charles Kalb
Margot Patterson
Sandra Pfaff
Fanny Warren

Silver

Karin Bergqvist
Jens & Allison Clausen
Paul & Janet Engstrom
Christina Hagman Odlander
Ken Nelson

Bronze

Kristina and John Antoniadis, *in memory of
Agneta Bailey and Doriney Seagers*
William & Tracey Beck
Adrienne Bolinder
William Eaton
John & Carin Foster
Margaret M. Friel
LaVonne & Eric Johnson
Karin Kornaga
Gunhild Ljung, *in memory of Marna Feldt*
John & Kristina O'Doherty
Kjerstin & Dominic Sama
Susan Satkowski
Abby Shaw
Patricia Spampinato
Ann-Charlotte Storer

Friends

Caroline Brady
Anna-Lena Bromberg
Hilma Cooper
Nancy & Richard Cox
Downtown Area Education Association,
in memory of Doriney Seagers
Barbara E. Good
Margaret & James Lynch,
in memory of Virginia Swedberg
Rosemary & Jeffery Moller
Elsa Orescan, *in memory of Virginia Swedberg*
Maud Palmer
Christian Roden & Norman Lawrence
Ian Samways
Amy & Harry Verngren

*The following donors have given gifts in
memory of Roy Johnson:*

Richard & Elaine Bell
Görel Bengtzon & Roman Hrycushko
Kristin Burns
Greta Edwards
Patricia Hall
Fred & Janice Jurash
Deena & Brian O'Neil
Elsa Orescan
Rebecca Rebalsky
Steven & Barbara Speece

Lisa Schoppe
Julie Tobias
Kim-Eric Williams

In Memoriam

*The ASHM community lost some very special
members in the last few months.
We send our condolences to their friends and family.*

Marna Feldt
Roy Johnson
Doriney Seagers

Spring Ting Thank You

Thank you to everyone who joined us at our 2023 Spring Ting Dinner and supported the museum through the online auction. With your help ASHM was able to raise \$29,000 to support our exhibitions and programs. We would also like to thank Jeffrey A. Miller Catering for the delightful dinner, the string trio of Brooke Beazley, Tamae Lee, and Sarah Sutton for the wonderful performance, and our Spring Ting Committee for making it all happen!

Thank you to all the supporters below:

Benefactors

Jeffrey A. Miller Catering
Carl A. Rapp

Sponsors

Leonard Busby & Ruth Lindeborg
Margaret Copeland
Goshen Mechanical Contractors

Patrons

Kristina & John Antoniadis
Gregory Brown & Linton Stables
John & Carin Foster
Roberta Johnson & Dominic DiMarzio
Sandra Pfaff
Margaretha Talerma
Fanny Warren

Friends

Anna-Lena Bromberg
Earl & Sylvia Seppala

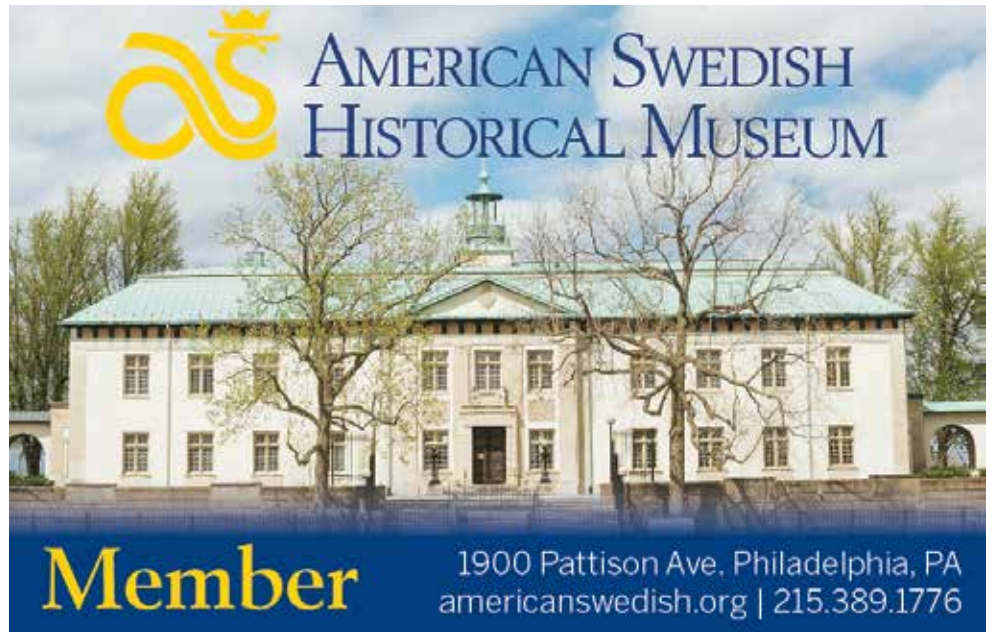
Exciting Updates to the Member Experience at ASHM!

We are excited to announce that ASHM is implementing some much-needed updates to our Point of Sale (POS) system in June! Our current failing hardware is over 15 years old and the company behind the technology has been out of business for over a year. After extensive research we are pleased to onboard a new POS company that can better serve the needs of our museum visitors, shoppers, and members.

What does this mean for you? All current ASHM members will be issued a new membership card when renewing. This new plastic member card will have a bar code on the back which you will be asked to present at Admissions and in the Gift Shop. You will still receive free regular museum admission when visiting. To help streamline the check-in process we will scan your card. If you forget your membership card, no worries, we will be able to look you up in the database with ease. An added advantage of the new system is that it will automatically

track your benefits. You will no longer have to track paper guest passes or discount coupons. When you scan your membership card we can instantly see any benefits you have for that year.

Be sure to renew your membership when it expires and your new membership card will arrive in the mail!



ASHM Spreads Kindness this Summer!



ASHM will present a pertinent outreach program about friendship, unity, and kindness this summer. ASHM education staff will travel around PA, DE, and NJ to deliver programming at libraries and community centers. We will also partner with CraftNOW and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation to bring programming to summer camps in Philadelphia.

This year, families will explore the theme of community and friendship during the program "Gemenskap Games: Making Friends the Nordic Way!" *Gemenskap* means community in Swedish, and children will learn about Nordic communities through team-building STEAM activities. Participants will play Viking games, make a paper heart craft, repair a fishing net like a

Sami village, and build models of the Sara Cultural Center in Sweden, one of the tallest wooden buildings in the world! Kids will learn what it means to be a *vän* (friend) in Sweden.

Check with your local library to see if they have booked a program!





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**Connecting
Cultures and
Community**

Scandinavian Celebration Day

Explore Scandinavia with ASHM at our first-ever Scandinavian Celebration Day on Sunday, June 4, from 12 – 4 pm! Many Scandinavian nations mark their national days in May or June, so we are coming together as a community to celebrate the history and culture of each country at the Museum.

Learn about Scandinavian traditions through food, music, games, language conversation tables, a tips promenade (quiz walk), and meet and greet opportunities with local Honorary Consuls. An introductory half-hour guided Museum tour will be offered at 1 pm and 3 pm. Don't miss this Free Day at the Museum to learn and explore Scandinavian cultures! Be sure to dress up and show off your cultural heritage.

This is a free event, but RSVP online.



See you then!

Ser deg da!

Nähdään silloin!

Vi ses!

Vi ses då!

Sjáumst þá!