



Top Photo: From 1909 to 1913, Althin's shop was located at 537 Albany Street, with the workshop upstairs and the showroom downstairs. The shop's proximity to South Bay made it a convenient location for shipping. Courtesy of the Joseph Downs Collection at the Winterthur Library.

Above: Olof Althin—presenting himself as a successful business-owner—posing within his workshop. Courtesy of the family.

American by Craft The Furniture of Olof Althin

by Trevor Brandt

This exhibition organized by the American Swedish Historical Museum reunites the workshop and wares of Olof Althin (1859-1920), an immigrant cabinetmaker and antiques restorer in turn-of-the-century Boston. Throughout his life, Althin navigated the intersections between immigrant and American, reproducer and restorer, and designer and maker. Poised between these identities, Althin reveals the challenges of a cabinetmaker balancing economic enterprise with adherence to ideal-driven craft movements in the early-20th century American furniture trade.

Coming of age at the onset of Sweden's industrialization, Olof Althin witnessed staggering social and economic trans-

formations as his home of Nöbbelöv (near Kristianstad) in southern Sweden transitioned from an agricultural to an industrial economy. As a young man, Althin participated in traditional guild training at a furniture shop in the nearby town of Simrishamn called Stenbergs Möbler. Yet even as Althin completed his apprenticeship, the ancient Swedish guilds were giving way to a system of de-regulated regional handicraft associations. In this era of great transitions, Olof Althin sought stability and fortune abroad.

Althin immigrated to Boston via Gothenburg in 1880, quickly finding work at the Evans & Toombs cabinetmaking firm. As Althin was the first in his family to move to America,

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Note from the Director

Growing up, I heard the story of Swedes who had come to America as part of a Christian movement that was persecuted in Sweden in the 1800s, and these immigrants formed their own church denominations in the United States. That was the immigrant story that I knew, even though, ironically, it wasn't my own family's immigrant story. And then, as a 20-year-old, I visited ASHM. I remember how surprised I was to learn about several centuries of Swedish-American history that I had no knowledge of. I was steeped in Swedish-American culture and community for my whole life, yet there were so many other stories I knew nothing about.

The exhibition *American By Craft: The Furniture of Olof Althin* is an immigrant story that doesn't fit neatly into the typical immigrant narratives. Olof was a skilled craftsman when he came to the U.S. and he found a wealthy American clientele in Boston who appreciated his skill. He built a small and successful business and walked a line between keeping his Swedishness by hiring primarily Swedish workers, while also working successfully in partnership with prominent American antique collectors. In the end, he was a key person in determining which furniture from the American colonial period would become the foundation of major museum collections, ultimately shaping a sense of American identity.

Individual stories usually challenge conventional narratives if you look at them in detail. That's true for history and it's still true today. Listening to people's stories is a broadening experience that I highly recommend. If we took more time to listen, I think we would find that American stories are rich and diverse.

Tracey Beck

Tracey Beck

American By Craft continued from front cover

his settling in Boston was probably an economic decision. Unlike most cities on the East Coast, Boston retained a strong local furniture market and supported a balanced distribution of businesses. These conditions attracted skilled immigrant labor from around Europe, including a proportionately large number of Swedish cabinetmakers who competed with other immigrants and native-born Americans for work.

By 1886, Althin had enough capital to open "O. Althin Art Furniture & Interior Fittings" in Boston's South End, which was known for its sophisticated reproductions of colonial-era furniture. Adapting to the demands of his wealthy clients, Althin's reproduction furniture represents a range of American furniture styles created prior to the industrialization of furniture manufacture, or the styles popular prior to 1830. Althin's better-known clients included Massachusetts State Senator George Crocker, industrialist Charles Sumner, and even John Wanamaker, who commissioned furniture for his home.



Althin (left) poses with his dog (wearing hat and glasses) and Carl Carlson (right), brother-in-law and fellow woodcarver. Courtesy of the family.

Yet Althin did not only reproduce American antique furniture. Beginning in the late-1880s, Althin began repairing and restoring antiques for collectors, most notably H. Eugene Bolles (1858-1910) and Charles Hitchcock Tyler (1863-1931). Cousins, law partners, and connoisseurs, Bolles and Tyler formed a decades-long partnership and friendship with Althin, who worked as their



One of Althin's workers poses with a finished desk reminiscent of furniture made in Boston between 1760 and 1780. Courtesy of the family.

on-call antiques agent and restorer. Nearly every piece of furniture the collectors acquired before 1920 went through Althin's shop for conservation, and many of these pieces later formed the core Americana collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Museum of Fine Art, Boston.

Employing a small staff of 6-10 fellow Scandinavian immigrants, Althin led his team to become a successful small-scale workshop which prioritized profit over the ideals of Boston's nascent design movements. Late-19th century Boston was at the center of the American craft revival movement, which saw prominent designers, educators, and historic preservationists promoting a return to traditional craftsmanship in manufacturing. A similar movement had spread from Sweden to Boston in the late-19th century. Sloyd (*slöjd*, or handcraft) was a Swedish educational system of manual training grounded in woodworking, especially wood carving. Educator and immigrant Gustav Larsson (1861-1919) had brought Sloyd to Boston from Gothenburg in 1888, founding the Sloyd Teacher Training School in 1890. Radiating from Boston, its teachers brought Sloyd's tenets of moral improvement through woodworking to hundreds of thousands of students throughout the country.

Althin himself seems to have remained strategically distanced from both movements, neither joining Arts-and-Craft interest groups in Boston nor subscribing to Boston's quarterly *Sloyd Record* publication. Althin's small-scale shop did not deliberately emulate these movements' ideals of handmade production or the lone master artisan executing an entire piece without the division of labor. Althin's motivation was profit-based, and he mechanized elements of the furniture-making process. And rather than Althin—the lead craftsman—laboring over individual projects, account books suggest that he often turned at the lathes, perhaps to market every product as having been worked on by the master craftsman. At its core, Althin's small-scale shop was a cost-efficient system and the one most familiar from his apprenticeship in Sweden.

While remaining aloof from contemporaries in the Arts-and-Crafts and Sloyd movements, Althin nonetheless wrote a remarkable manuscript in the first year of his retirement which situated an immigrant artisan's knowledge within the American furniture trade. This draft, the *Architect's Designer's and Draftsmen's Guide for the Designing of Woodwork and Furniture*, bridged the divide between academically trained designers and manually trained workers. In its introduction, Althin promised:

"I offer this book to fill the space as far as possible between theory and practice, in other words lead the draftsman with essential points of information along the lines in construction of woodwork as required by the nature of wood, known only to the one who has thoroughly learned the cabinet-maker's trade."

Althin suggested that his primary qualification for bridging the gap between the theory and practice of cabinetmaking was his intimate knowledge of the physical nature of wood. In seeking to educate aspiring American designers about the practice of woodworking, Althin redirected the language of the Sloyd and Arts and Crafts movements from their emphasis upon production techniques towards materiality—the materiality of the single element common to both business and design movements. In doing so, Althin carved his niche between the tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement, Sloyd, and the practical necessities of running a small cabinetmaking shop.

The exhibition, American by Craft: The Furniture of Olof Althin was co-curated by Erica Lome and Trevor Brandt and was generously supported in part by a Failey Grant from The Decorative Arts Trust. It will be on view at ASHM from July 23rd, 2021 through January 16th, 2022. Join us for a special members' preview in person or on-line July 22nd at 5 pm.

The Enduring Spirit of Midsommar

Celebrating the summer solstice has been a community tradition for centuries throughout Scandinavia. Communing with nature alongside friends and family on the longest day of the year nurtures the spirit and historically is meant to pay homage to the earth and ensure a bountiful harvest.

Midsommar in Sweden today means a mass exodus of people from the cities into the lush countryside or sea-side homes. There, Swedes share in a smörgåsbord of pickled herring, new potatoes, salmon, fresh strawberries and cream, and is often accompanied by the traditional Swedish spirit aquavit. While enjoying delicious food in an outdoor setting, Swedes make sure to observe the most important *Midsommar* traditional of all, dancing around the maypole. This is a time to enjoy the Swedish summer sunlight long into the evening and the company of family and friends.



For over 40 years, the American Swedish Historical Museum has continued this hallowed tradition right here in Philadelphia. While we did raise the maypole in 2020, the pandemic prohibited us from gathering together. We are excited to share that this year ASHM will be able to host an in-person *Midsommar* celebration! Please join us on Saturday June 26th at 4pm to raise the maypole, dance in celebration, and eat *smörgåstårter*! Admission to this fundraising event includes traditional folk music by the duo Last Chance, family

activities, and full access to the Museum. There will be traditional food and gorgeous fresh flower wreaths available for purchase. All Philadelphia COVID regulations will be followed. Pre-registration is strongly encouraged and tickets will be sold at the gate based on current capacity availability. For more information and to get your tickets please visit www.americanswedish.org/ events. We can't wait to celebrate with you! *Glad Midsommar!*

Summer 2021 Upcoming Events and Registration Info

There is always something going on at the American Swedish Historical Museum. See below for scheduled events. Please be aware that City and State regulations have altered rules around gatherings. In order to be in full compliance and ensure the best possible experience, we are asking event attendees to please register early. If your plans change and you cannot attend, notify the Museum. Refunds for cancellations may be granted up until the event to accommodate for unexpected illness or inability to attend.

Please check with the Museum to confirm dates and other details. To register for events by phone call (215) 389- 1776. Online registration is available through each event listing. (*Please note that in-person gatherings are subject to change based on Philadelphia and Pennsylvania COVID-19 regulations.)

Philadelphia Flower Show Saturday June 5 – Sunday June 13

This year the Philadelphia Flower Show will take place in FDR Park. ASHM members will have early access to the Flower Show with their purchase of a morning ticket. Be sure to stop by the Museum to see the displays, eat at Jeffrey Miller Catering's Swedish inspired Christina's Café on the Terrace, and visit the ASHM vendor tent in the Park. To learn more and purchase tickets go to phsonline.org. During the Flower Show, ASHM will only be open to Flower Show attendees.



National Day Sunday, June 6

Check out our Facebook page and Instagram for recommendations of the best virtual programming to celebrate all things Sweden!



Midsommarfest Saturday, June 26 4:00 – 7:00 pm

ASHM is thrilled to announce the return of our in-person *Midsommar* celebration!

Enjoy an afternoon of traditional Swedish folk music, food, family activities, and dancing around the iconic Maypole. All current city COVID regulations will be followed. Adults are \$6, children 12 and under are free. Online

pre-registration strongly encouraged, tickets also available at the gate.

ASHM Virtual Member's FIKA:

Meet the Curator Wednesday, July 14 6:00 – 7:00 pm

All ASHM members are invited to this exclusive new program series! Four times per year, Museum members will have the opportunity to gather as friends to socialize, learn more about the organization and staff, and get exclusive behind the scenes peek at collection objects and exhibits. Our first program will be an opportunity for members to meet our new Curator! This program is free for ASHM members and held over Zoom. Please visit our website to register for the program or become a member today!

Members Only Preview Exhibit Opening:

American by Craft: The Art Furniture of Olof Althin Thursday, July 22 5:00 – 7:30 pm



This exhibition explores the important legacy of turn-of-the-century Swedish immigrant cabinetmaker, Olof Althin. Curators, Erica Lome and Trevor Brandt, will

present new research into immigrant craft networks and their impact on an emerging American style in the decorative arts. A tour and Q&A session will be presented both in-person and virtually over Zoom, followed by an onsite reception. Pre-registration is required. For more information and to register, please visit the event section of the website. This event is free.

American by Craft: The Art Furniture of Olof Althin Exhibition opens Friday, July 23 10:00 – 4:00 pm

The new exhibit is included with Museum admission. Be sure to stop by during open hours to explore! Tuesday – Friday 10am – 4pm and weekends 12pm – 4pm.

SmörgåsBeer in Your Backyard! Thursday, July 29 7:00 – 8:30 pm



ASHM will host our annual SmörgåsBeer event virtually again this year and look forward to continuing in-person next summer. This event package for two

features a fun filled evening of games, music, and a live Zoom Tutored Tasting experience! Brew Masters and representatives from select companies will discuss their brands, flavors, and inspiration in real time as you sample. Tickets to the event come with an event bag which includes a six pack of assorted beverages, two collectible SmörgåsBeer tasting glasses, an assortment from Sweetish candy store, and a Scandinavian pub trivia game, all in a reusable Museum tote bag! Event tickets are \$45 for members and \$50 for nonmembers with an optional \$10 delivery Fee (conditions apply). Please check the ASHM events website for additional details and to register. *Skål!*

"The Park, the Prince, and the Plan" Virtual Talk with Thomas Keels Wednesday, August 11 6:30 pm

Historian and author Tom Keels explores the history of FDR. Park in this illustrated lecture. League Island Park transformed the swamps of South Philadelphia into a natural wonder designed by the Olmsted Brothers. In the 1920s, it was the site of the ill-fated Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition, where Swedish Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf laid the cornerstone for the American Swedish Historical Museum. Today, a Master Plan is being launched to give FDR Park a new lease on life! Don't miss this fascinating origin story held over Zoom, \$5 for ASHM & FDR Park members and \$10 for nonmembers.

Crayfish Party Friday, August 20



6:30 pm

Enjoy a summer evening on the Museum terrace while indulging in Swedish favorites including dill seasoned crayfish, Swedish meatballs,

fingerling potatoes, Swedish cheese pie, an assortment of salads, crispbread and cheese, and seasonal desserts. In order to provide a safe and enjoyable environment, we will be selling individual tables spaced appropriately apart throughout our outdoor tent, PHL COVID regulations apply. Individual table: \$60, table for 2: \$120, table for 4: \$224, table for 6: \$330, registration deadline Aug. 6th.

Virtual Field Trip Friday Series 12:15 – 1:00 pm

Take a break from your day, whether at home or work, to be immersed in a Scandinavian cultural experience. Each field trip experience is 45 minutes long and presented over Zoom. \$5 for members and \$10 for nonmembers, registration is required.

To Register For Events

call 215-389-1776, or visit online at
www.americanswedish.org/calendar.htm

Upcoming locations and dates to be announced, please check www.americanswedish.org/events

August 27
Museum of Cultural History, Norway

September 10
The National Museum of Finland

Date TBD
Skokloster Castle, Sweden

Date TBD
Ateneum Finnish National Gallery

Annual Meeting
Sunday, September 12
3:00 pm

ASHM members are welcome to join us for our annual meeting, where we will present the Amandus Johnson Volunteer Service Award and elect members to the Board of Governors.

Danish Kranssekake Virtual Baking Demonstration

Sunday, September 26
2:00 – 3:00 pm

The traditional Danish Kranssekake is a showstopping dessert for sure! This multitiered cake is often reserved for milestone birthdays, weddings, and anniversaries. Danish baker Torben Christiansen will demonstrate how best to prepare and assemble celebration confection while sharing cultural connections. The demonstration will be held over Zoom. Registration required, \$10 for ASHM and Danish Lodge members, \$15 for nonmembers.

Save the dates!

Be sure to mark calendars for these exciting upcoming events:

October 2:
 Virtual Wood Spoon Carving Workshop

October 23: New Sweden History Conference at Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library

November 6: Felting Workshop with Christina Ahlseen

December 3: Julbord

December 4: Lucia Fest & Christmas Market

Images from Recent Events

Photographs by
 ASHM Staff



▲ Finished painted Dala horses from the workshop.

► Families playing games during our Easter Family Day event.

▼ Tyler Graybeal, owner of Sweetish Candy, talking during the candy tasting event.



▲ Education Manager, Rachel, giving the Virtual Tenggren Tour.



▲ Participants of the Dala Horse Workshop showing off their finished horses.

► Museum of Danish America curator, Diya, during a Virtual Field Trip tour.



▲ Finished waffle with recipe from the Waffle Cook A Long with Amy von Sydow Green.

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.

Contributions to the Collection

As winter has turned to spring, we have gratefully continued to grow our collections. David and Ingrid Beery donated a number of Swedish children's books, which compliment a number we currently have in our library. Carol Ryan donated a small doll dresser from 1797 that her ancestors crafted and brought with them to America after they immigrated from Höganäs, Sweden. Our collection of Swedish Traditional Costumes grew the past few months as well, with a donation from Ann Unbehaun, we added two outfits owned by her aunts.



Doll dresser from 1797 donated by Carol Ryan.

New Members

February 1, 2021 – April 15, 2021

Friend

Johan Pfeiffer

Household

Rosana Anchondo
Lena Clarissa Crain-Pugh
Carl Hamilton
Hans Holter
Christina Loeftgren
Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Strengberg
James Wolfe

Individual

Laurel G. Lee
Matt Rader

Seniors/Students

Rolf Gren
Bente Konge Bladt
Joe Mijuliak
Beverly Sue Palaia
Ingemar Svala

Annual Giving and Contributions

February 1, 2021 – April 15, 2021

Serafimer

Paul Muther & Dr. Ulla Dagert-Muther

Silver

Jens & Allison Clausen
Brigitta Wilson
Abby Shaw

Bronze

Anonymous
In memory of John Holstrom
Kristina & John Antoniadis
In memory of Leonard Beck & Jim Seagers
John & Kristina O'Doherty
Linda Raffa
Kristina H. Smith
Patricia Spampinato
Fanny Warren
In memory of Peter Davenport

Friends

Christer & Patty Baeckstrom
Marianne Baeskstrom
William & Tracey Beck
Elisabeth Jönsson Brown
In memory of Leonard Beck
Karin Kornaga
In memory of Leonard Beck
Jan Thompson Newstrom
Selma Olson Tepper
Edish Rohrman
Mark & Johnette Turner-Davies
Fanny Warren
In memory of Leonard Beck

Spring Into Auction

This year's on-line auction was a huge success due to the combined efforts of a fantastic committee, generous sponsors, amazing item donors and all of our bidders! Together we raised over \$28,000 to support the museum's programs and exhibitions.

Auction sponsors:

Anonymous (3)
Bo Bergqvist
Biddle & Company
Leonard Busby
Margaret Copeland
Jill D'Andrea
John & Carin Foster
Goshen Mechanical
Ulla Heinicke
Tom Hudson
Earl & Sylvia Seppala
Ginny Swedberg
Margaretha Talerman
Pop's Water Ice
Fanny Warren

Auction Committee:

Anna-Lena Bromberg, Chair
Kristina Antoniadis
Tracey Beck
Elin Jeantet
Rachel Kiskaddon
Monica Kruse
MaryAnne Carlson Morgan
Kristina O'Doherty
Sandra Pfaff
MaryAnne Powell
Caroline Rossy
Fanny Warren

Membership

Please print all information as you wish it to appear on the membership roster.

Return this form to:

American Swedish Historical Museum
Attn: Membership
1900 Pattison Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19145-5901

Among the benefits of membership are:

- free admission to the Museum and library
- use of the ASHM Swedish Film Library borrowing system
- guest passes
- subscription to the newsletter
- 10% discount in the Museum Store
- discounts on admission to most events, workshops and Swedish language classes

For more information, please call 215-389-1776.

✂ Please detach here and return.

ASHM Summer Outreach

This summer ASHM's education department is proud to serve both Philadelphia and regional families with two different outreach opportunities. Through both virtual and in person programming look out for ASHM visiting a community space near you!

Sweden's Wild Animals

Each summer the ASHM partners with libraries for the Collaborative Summer Reading Theme. This year's theme is Tails & Tales, and ASHM will be teaching the magic and mystery of Scandinavian wildlife during our virtual program! During this one hour live Zoom program families will learn about animal tracks and facts, explore the world of Swedish fauna including the national animal– the moose and learn about enchanted creatures like the Dala horse. We will also discuss the relationship between the Scandinavian people and their indigenous wildlife throughout history in folk art and stories. Kids will get to identify animals, color in their own Dala horse and create their own folk tale.

Application & Renewal Form

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Telephone _____

Email _____

- ☐ **\$35:** Senior/Student ☐ **\$75:** Organizational (Non-profit only) ☐ **\$500:** Patron
☐ **\$50:** Individual ☐ **\$125:** Friend ☐ **\$1,000:** Key Contributor
☐ **\$65:** Household ☐ **\$250:** Sustaining ☐ **\$2,500:** Life

Make check payable to ASHM or ☐ Charge my: VISA | MasterCard | Discover

Account # _____

Exp Date _____

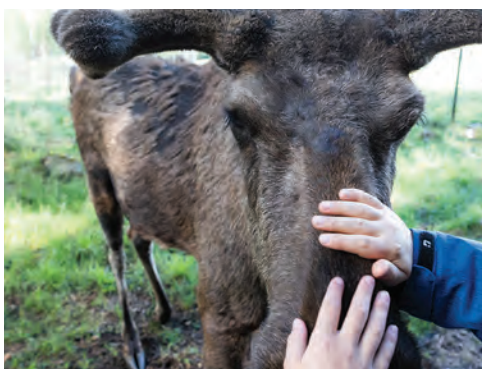
The official registration and financial information of ASHM may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

Your membership contribution to the American Swedish Historical Museum is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.



Students trying on Viking clothing and armor.

This year we hope to have greater participation by providing craft kits to the library that they can hand out to families. This program is integral to reaching regional communities and spreading awareness of the Museum and our cultural mission. If you want to see this program at your local library ask them to reach out to Rachel Kiskaddon at rkiskaddon@americanswedish.org.



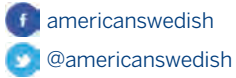
Voyaging Vikings at Philly Summer Camps

This summer we are partnering again with CraftNOW and other Philadelphia institutions to provide free educational programming across the city. In partnership with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation we will be visiting several summer camp locations to present our Voyaging Vikings outreach program. During this program kids will learn who the Vikings were, where they came from, and their way of life. They will also discover the runic language of the Vikings and make their own rune stones! With plenty of sanitizer in tow students will also get to touch our replica Viking armor and feel their clothing. We are excited to share this fun program with the Philadelphia community and remind them to come visit.

◀ *Petting a moose in Sweden. Image courtesy of Alexander Hall from imagebank.sweden.se*



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www.americanswedish.org



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Connecting
Cultures and
Community

ASHM IS TURNING 95!

Join us in celebrating our birthday with these fun facts about ASHM:

To learn more about all ASHM has to offer
go to www.americanswedish.org

- Founded in 1926 ASHM was incorporated as the American Sons and Daughters of Sweden.
- The ASHM building was built from 1926-28 but our Grand Opening was in 1938!
- We have displayed over 230 temporary exhibitions celebrating Scandinavian art, culture, and history.



In 2013 their Royal Highnesses King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden visited ASHM.



ASHM has honored 18 people with our Outstanding Achievement Award. They include; artist Claes Oldenburg (left), author Henning Mankell, athlete Pia Sundhage, and fashion designer Gudrun Sjödén!