

# Vår Historia

## SMOKY VALLEY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

### ONE MONTH OF CHRISTMAS



1948 Bethany College  
St. Lucia and attendants



PUBLISHED  
BI-MONTHLY

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In true Swedish tradition, Lindsborg celebrates St. Lucia Fest "Luciadagen" every year as the start of the Christmas season, and ends it one month later on St. Knut's Day. So, just who are these Saints that became martyrs and their stories heavily influenced by folklore.

Lucia of Syracuse (aka Lucy) lived on the Italian island of Sicily in a pagan household. She was arranged to be married in pagan fashion but had found Christianity and wanted to devote her life to helping the poor instead. During this time Christianity was banned, and was not lifted until Emperor Constantine the Great did so in 313 AD. Legend states that she took her dowry intended for the future husband and used it to feed the poor. On December 13th, 304 AD, Lucia was ordered to be burned at the stake for being a Christian, but the wood would not burn, so she was executed with a dagger, or, she was accused of being a witch and burned at the stake like other folklore suggests.

Centuries later, St. Lucia appeared mysteriously to the starving people in Sweden, bringing food during the famine as she once did in Sicily. She was dressed in a white gown and had a halo around her head, similar to halos we associate with angels. Candles around current wreaths add the glow of a halo. The

eldest daughter of the house, or a chosen "Lucia Bride" wears a white robe, a red sash, and the wreath with lit candles and carries a tray of coffee, goat cookies and cat rolls to the parents of the house. This tradition started early in the morning, typically between 4 and 6 am, and they sang "Sankta Lucia" while offering treats. St. Lucia is heralded as the bearer of light on the darkest day of the year.

St. Knut, also known as Canute, was a Danish nobleman named Canute Lavard. Two of his cousins murdered him on January 7th, 1131, in order to prevent Knut from becoming king. Knut's wife had parents from Kiev (Ukraine) and Sweden, and they had four kids. Their only son, Valdemar I, fought a civil war that started out of Canute's death, which was won and resulted in Valdemar I becoming King of Denmark. He ordered the anniversary of his father's death to be Knutsdagen (feast day). Some years later Sweden changed the end of Christmas to January 13th, so St. Knut's Day changed with it.

There is some confusion as to which Saint or King represents this holiday, as King Cnut the Great (995-1035) has also been referenced in our history. King Cnut was a Danish Christian Viking who said Christmas feasting should prevail during the 20 days of Yuletide.

Either way, it was on this day that everyone "drove the Yule out". This meant taking down all Christmas decorations, opening all doors and windows and sweeping the dust and debris from the

## ONE MONTH OF CHRISTMAS {CON'T}

celebrations out of the house. It was also recommended to tap the walls with sticks in order to chase out Christmas ghosts, trolls, or tomtes hiding about. Some traditions say to throw the Christmas tree through the window, gather them up and burn them.

In Lindsborg, Bethany College started celebrating St. Lucia in 1943, a time when bringing light was



1950 Bethany College  
St. Lucia and attendants

much welcomed during very dark times of WWII. Instead of coffee and pastries, the girls would carry cider and cookies to all girls in Lane Hart Hall at 5:30 am. Because of the diversity of nationalities at Bethany, girls of Swedish descent were

excited about this while others might have been slightly alarmed. It became a big annual event and St. Lucia even had a float in the 1954 Hyllningsfest parade. As Bethany College grew, and more ladies' dorms (halls) built, each hall provided their own St. Lucia.

During the year SVHA was reorganized, 1963, the focus on history and tradition was at the forefront of conversations. One such tradition was creating a "Living Christmas Card", which gave a presentation of "The Night Before Christmas". This was one feature of the new pageant set out for Lindsborg's first "St. Lucia Day" event. Metal artist and historian Malcolm Esping made a crown designed to hold candles and his 14 year old daughter, Gretchen, was named St. Lucia. Her attendants were Elinar Jaderborg, Kathy and Paula Jaderborg, Margie Johnson, Beth Olson, Cecelia Opat, Ingrid Patrick, Sue Swanson, and Sandra Webster. The star boys were Jim Berggren and future SVHA President Chris Abercrombie. During this start of an annual event, St. Lucia and her attendants walked the streets of downtown Lindsborg, handing out coffee and cookies.

One month later, January 1964, the first celebration of St. (King) Knut took place on the sandbar south of the river at the Old Mill park. Boy Scouts gathered Christmas trees from around town and piled them high on the sandbar. Mark Esping played King Knut and Jeannie Berg was Queen, St. Lucia (Gretchen Esping) and her attendants, along with Swedish dancers, carolers, and the "tomtegubbar" all danced around the Christmas tree bonfire while

singing Christmas carols.

The next year Christmas season, 1964-'65, Elinar Jaderborg was selected as St. Lucia, though she was not the only Lindsborg girl portraying St. Lucia, Virgie Westblade was in Kansas City at the Trinity Lutheran Hospital Aux. to carry cookies and coffee to patients.

Prior to the Christmas season, Malcolm's brother, Kenneth O. Esping, who was a high school principal in Downey, CA., had requested the crown for use in a television film about Swedish Christmas customs. K.O.'s daughter, Marla Ann, wore the crown in the film, and had embellished it with native California holly, berries, and holly from the Holy Land.

The second year of King Knut pageant, 1965, Frank Hammerstrom portrayed the King and once again Jeanie Berg was Queen. They led the path with torches and when thrown on to the tree pile flames climbed over 40 feet high, causing everyone to quickly back up on the riverbank. That year, Knut had a son, played by 5 year-old Paul Lundstrom, as part of the procession. Paul was chosen due to him bringing Malcolm Esping two cow horns for a Viking helmet to be made, like he had seen from the previous year.

In 1966, Alba Malm wrote a pantomime pageant called "Living Christmas Traditions—Little Sweden, USA" that was performed during St. Lucia Fest by the junior thespian high school group and directed by Clifton Christianson. The city had changed some things around, including moving the performances to the Farmer's State Bank (*now First Bank Kansas*) parking lot.

Two girls tied for the role of Lucia in 1968, Nancy Olson and Greta Swenson. Greta played her role in Wichita at a special pageant on the 13th, while she assisted Nancy in Lindsborg two days later on Saturday, which the festival moved to for convenience. At this time, the attendants were chosen by the Swedish Folk Dancers amongst themselves. It would be sometime during the 1970s that St Lucia herself came out of Swedish Folk Dancers senior class. A good example was 1975, when there were two Swedish Dancer seniors and they drew straws to see who would be St. Lucia.

Over the years, the Knut fire was deemed too dangerous and the celebration faded away. St. Lucia on the other hand, is well established and December 13th will once again celebrate the start of one month Christmas season.



### Want to help update the Lindsborg Business Directory?

SVHA has started the project of updating and expanding the Lindsborg Business Directory. This directory was created in 1994 by the Lindsborg 125th Anniversary Committee and updated by SVHA in 2005. At that time, many blanks were left for future updates, and more resources will lend to going even further back in time as well as filling in the past 20 years.

If you have ever owned a business (or commercial building) in Lindsborg, please scan this QR Code and take this quick survey. Our intent is to have this completed by the end of 2026. Thank you!

Ruth, Jean, Eldora

## UPCOMING SVHA PROGRAMS

Jan. 13th, 2026

### An Immigrant Saga: The Robert Muir Journey

The founding of Salina

*Gavin Doughty*



March 10th, 2026

### The Connection Between Lindsborg and Bucklin, MO.

*Gretchen Esping*



May 12th, 2026

### Women Instrumental in Developing Bethany College

*Ryon Carey and Denise Carson*



All programs  
start at:  
**7:30 pm**

Location:

**Messiah Lutheran Church—Fellowship Hall  
402 N. First Street—Lindsborg, KS.**

Please cut along the dotted line

**Smoky Valley Historical Association**  
**P.O. Box 255**  
**Lindsborg, KS. 67456**

☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Memberships are renewed in the first quarter of each year



Smoky Valley Historical Association is a non-profit organization and is registered under 501(c)3

All Membership Donations, Bequests, Trusts, and Legacy Donations are tax deductible.

Please mail to P.O. Box listed above.

Thank You!





## SMOKY VALLEY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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## VÅR HISTORIA FEATURES!

**ALL PREVIOUS NEWSLETTERS ARE POSTED TO OUR WEBSITE IN THE "NEWSLETTER" PAGE. ALSO, THE CURRENT ISSUE FEATURES PHOTOS AND NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS PERTINENT TO THAT ISSUE, AND SOMETIMES IS THE ONLY PLACE TO SEE THEM.**

[WWW.SMOKYVALLEY-HISTORY.ORG](http://WWW.SMOKYVALLEY-HISTORY.ORG)



## Funding

Membership contributions are the SVHA's major source of on-going funding. A free-will donation in any amount will secure your membership in the Association for the year.

**\*Memberships are renewed in the First quarter of each year!**

Grants, such as those awarded by the Kansas Humanities Council, are also available from time-to-time to further the mission of Smoky Valley Historical Association.

### Smoky Valley Historical Mission

*The purpose of this association shall be to collect and preserve historical photographs, manuscripts, and other items pertaining to the early history and settlement of our community in general and the City of Lindsborg in particular; to preserve and beautify places of historical interest in our city, its vicinity, and properties entrusted to the association; and to promote the study of history of our settlement and its cultural growth by lectures and other available means.*

### Contact info:

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[www.smokyvalley-history.org](http://www.smokyvalley-history.org)



TACK SÅ MYCKET!



SMOKY VALLEY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
LINDSBORG, KANSAS 67456

Smoky Valley Historical Association  
PO Box 255  
Lindsborg, KS 67456

*"History preservation and education"*



*Thank you for your contributions, and supporting the historical preservation of Lindsborg and the Smoky Valley of Central Kansas.*

*Our pioneers left their legacy long after they were gone, so can you. Managing estates, bequests, and gifts through retirement plans can help keep our preservation ongoing and long-lasting.*

**All donations are tax exempt, we are a 501-(c)3 organization.**