

# Vår Historia

## SMOKY VALLEY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

### DR. CARL SWENSSON'S LAST SERMON



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It has been 120 years since Dr. Carl A. Swensson came to the end of his physical life, but his presence has yet to fade away.

Born in Sugar Grove, PA June 25th, 1857, Carl was the first-born to the Reverend Jonas and Maria Swensson. His father didn't believe in public schools, considered them inimical to Christianity, so Carl and his siblings were taught at home, sometimes by private teachers.

The fall of 1873 Carl attended his freshman year at Augustana College, which was located in Paxton, Ill. December of that year, his father passed away. Carl returned to school though and carried on. The next year saw the passing of his mother, who had spent several years as an invalid confined near her bed, Carl and his three siblings were left orphans in the care of the church.

During Carl's time at Augustana, the college moved from Paxton to Rock Island in 1875. Carl was in the first graduating class in the spring of 1877. That fall, Carl entered the Augustana Theological Seminary and graduated in the spring of 1879. At 22 years old, Carl was ordained and given the title of Dr.

Swensson. His first, and only charge was the Bethany Congregation in Lindsborg.

Dr. Swensson came to Lindsborg at an exciting time in Lindsborg history, the first railroad and incorporating as a city of the third class all happened within weeks of his arrival. This is where I jump ahead in time, as this story isn't about

his accomplishments while in Lindsborg.

In 1903, Bethany Lutheran Church was starting to plan for Dr. Swensson's upcoming 25 years of service, and besides his duties as pastor of the church and President of Bethany College (*which he founded*), Dr. Swensson was made Chairman of a committee comprised of 14 college presidents in Kansas; appointed by the Kansas Governor to a committee to aid in North Sweden's famine; was Chairman of a railroad committee in McPherson County; and was placed on St. Louis World Fair Swedish building committee. That December, the ground was dedicated in St. Louis, MO by placing a Swedish flag. Dr. Swensson gave the opening prayer for this ceremony.

During the summer of '03, Dr. Swensson took a ten-day lecture trip through Nebraska, Iowa, and South Dakota. He was not just spreading the gospel but constantly looking for new land to colonize on as part of the famine relief in Sweden. By the end of the year, Dr. Swensson had also published his final book "I Morgonstund".

Dr. Swensson had made several trips to California in the previous couple of years, for the sake of promoting Swedish colonies



L-R: Russell Stanhope, J.A. Ockerson, Dr. Swensson, C.W. Kohlsaat, Rev. G. Andreen, C.A. Smith, D.C. Nugent

### DR. SWENSSON'S LAST SERMON {CON'T}

in the San Joaquin Valley, and his final trip was no exception. The California State Board of Trade seemed to have taken full credit for getting Dr. Swensson to their state, but far more time was spent with local congregations with sermons and lectures.

February 2nd, 1904, Dr. Swensson traveled to Newton, KS where he met up with Rev. Abrahamson, President of the Augustana Hospital in Chicago and Abel Anderson, President of the Northwestern National Bank of Sioux City, IA. The three traveled to California for what was going to be a two week tour.

The first stop was San Francisco, where Swensson and Abrahamson participated in the Feb. 7th dedication of the laying of the corner stone for a new Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Ebenezer Church on the corner of 15th and Dolores Streets. A communion service was held in the morning, where Dr. Swensson gave a sermon in Swedish, followed by a luncheon. That afternoon the dedication moved to the church site, where Dr. Swensson and Dr. Abrahamson gave speeches in English. While in San Francisco, it was reported that Dr. Swensson got caught in a downpour and was drenched, which led to the onset of a cold. Nothing was thought of it though at the time.

The next few days included traveling to San Joaquin Valley to continue developing Swedish colonies, and then to Oakland for the annual California Swedish Lutheran Conference. Friday Feb. 12th., Dr. Swensson addressed the conference and preached a sermon. The sermon was focused on "Salvation through the Merits of the Vicarious Sufferings of Jesus." Little did anyone know that this would be Dr. Carl A. Swensson's last sermon. Later that evening he addressed the Young People's Society at the Ebenezer church back in San Francisco before retiring for the night.

Saturday morning Swensson and Abrahamson took the train to Los Angeles, Dr. Swensson appeared tired and complained of chest pain, so he slept much of the 480 mile trip. During meals and conversation he displayed his usual vigor though. They arrived in Los Angeles about 11 pm and went straight to Rev. J.A. Edlund's residence where they were lodging.

Two more friends of Dr. Swensson were already in L.A., staying at the Angelus Hotel, Albert Coleson of Omaha, NE who had been a friend since boyhood, and Lindsborg Mayor N.J. Thorstenberg, who was also one of the Bethany College directors.

The next morning, Feb. 14th, Abrahamson encouraged Swensson to stay in bed, and a doctor was called for. The diagnosis was pneumonia and it was suggested he go to the hospital, which he did early afternoon. Dr. Swensson was scheduled to give a sermon that morning, which Rev. Abrahamson filled in. At no time did

this condition warrant alarm, but Mayor Thorstenberg thought it best to contact Alma Swensson and arrange for her to make the trip to Los Angeles to be with her husband. The doctor had discovered that Swensson's heart was very weak, and was surprised he had lived even up to that point. The next day all seemed stable, but around 1:30 am Tuesday Feb. 16th he awoke, when the nurse asked how he felt he replied "just splendidly". Minutes later Dr. Carl Aaron Swensson passed away.

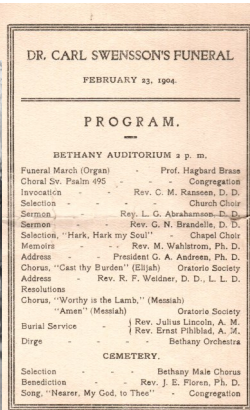
The news spread not just nationwide, but even to Sweden of this death. Swensson was the only American born Swede to have received the Order of the North Star a few years earlier. The body was placed in the care of Pierce Bros., undertakers who prepared it for the Santa Fe RR trip back to Kansas. Both Abrahamson and Anderson, along with Anderson's daughter Norma, escorted Dr. Swensson to McPherson. Mayor W. J. Krehbiel of McPherson proclaimed this: *"Out of respect to the memory of Dr. Carl Swensson, whose life work has been for higher education in this country, and will stand as an enduring monument to his personality, it is befitting that we, the beneficiaries of his labors, assemble and meet the remains and assist in conveying them to the Union Pacific depot. Therefore, I, as mayor of the city of McPherson request the citizens of the city to assemble at the Santa Fe depot to show the respect due to the deceased; and to escort the remains to the Union Pacific depot, I further recommend that all places of business be closed between the hours of 11:30 am and 2:30 pm, Friday, February 19, 1904."*

The first services were held Wed. Feb. 17th at the college chapel before students and faculty. On the 19th when the train arrived to Lindsborg, more than 3,000 people were waiting at the depot. The morning of the service on Tuesday the 23rd, there was a brief service at the home, the body was brought to Bethany auditorium where members of the senior class and faculty stood guard as thousands of people came through to pay respects. The day was filled with prayer, sermons, and singing, as the 500 strong Oratorio Society sang throughout the service. The services concluded at Elmwood Cemetery.

King Oscar II of Sweden wired Lindsborg to consign a bust of Swensson to be exhibited at the St. Louis world fair pavilion, then be sent to the royal palace to be placed in one of the King's rooms.

President Roosevelt wrote to Dr. Philblad: *"I deeply regret to learn of the sad news you have telegraphed me, please express my sympathies to President Swensson's bereaved family."*

120 years passed and the Swensson name is still spoken daily by someone in Lindsborg. That, is a legacy.



## Upcoming SVHA Programs

April 9th, 2024

History as Muse—the Stories Behind the Sculptures

*Susan Whitfield*

May 14th, 2024

Camp Phillips—It's History and Impact

*Dr. Merle "Boo" Hodges*

July 9th, 2024

Pioneers On The Prairie—A History of Marquette, KS

*Allen Lindfors*

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

Location:

**Messiah Lutheran Church—Fellowship Hall**  
402 N. 1st 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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Memberships are renewed in the first quarter of each year



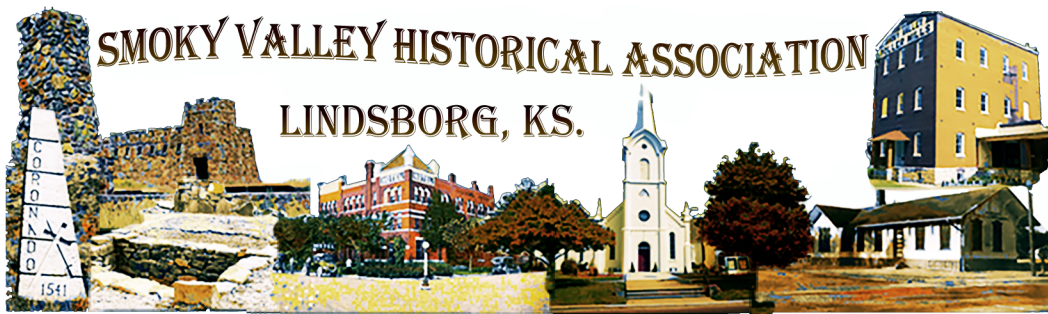
Smoky Valley Historical Association is a non-profit organization and is registered under 501(c)3

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

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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### Smoky Valley Historical Mission

*The purpose of this association shall be to collect, arrange and preserve historical data, books, pamphlets and manuscripts 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:

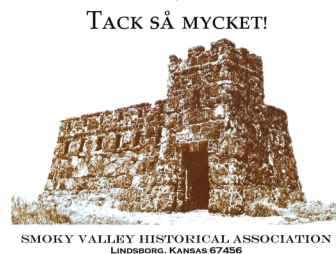
email us at:

[info@lindsborghistory.org](mailto:info@lindsborghistory.org)

or mail to:

**SMOKY VALLEY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION**  
 PO BOX 255  
 LINDSBORG, KS 67456

**WWW.SMOKYVALLEYHISTORY.ORG**



**Bumper Stickers**  
**Available at Old Mill!**

### Meetings/Programs

Smoky Valley Historical Association hosts bi-monthly meetings on the odd months, held on the second Tuesday, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 7:30 pm with topics of local historical interest. Location is listed on page three along with schedule.

**Come join us!**



### 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 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 the SVHA.

*Check our Facebook page for the most up to date information concerning the Smoky Valley Historical Association.*



*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*