

U.S. Hwy. 8 Swedish Sister-City Signs and How They Came to Be

—By Sally Barott and Barbara Young

If you've lived in the greater Chisago Lakes Kichi-Saga area all or most of your lives like we have, the story of the mass migration of Swedish emigrants to Chisago County, c. 1846, has been handed down from generation to generation, and taught through local county historians. Last summer we had a phone call from Lloyd Hackl asking us to retell the story of how the U.S. Hwy. 8 Swedish Sister-City Signs began. We're happy to share the story with you.

The idea of sister-city connections began through the work of Thelma A. Johnson of Lindström, former County Auditor, Chisago County. A friendship society between Tingsryd, Sweden, and Chisago County was built through Arnold Johansson's first immigrant tour to the U.S. from Långasjö, Sweden, in 1962. The Tingsryd Club of History USA Tour in 1965 improved the contact when new friends with Swedish backgrounds met. The leading contact in Chisago County was Thelma Johnson, farmer Eric Lilijengren and Myrtle Berglund, Lindström, all three with roots to Långasjö. On April 4, 1966, the city of Tingsryd sent an invitation to Chisago County to be a friendship society connection. This invitation was joyfully received by Chisago County and signed on 20, October 6, 1966, by Thelma A. Johnson, County Auditor of Chisago County.

Former resident and Swedish teacher, Helen Fosdick, now living in Fresno, CA, was also instrumental in helping the connections solidify. She connected with a group from Tingsryd, Sweden and through written letters Tingsryd became the sister-city to Lindström. Many Swedes knew of that connection—one of them was Sally's cousin, Carl-Werner Pettersson from Åseda, Sweden. He's the Swedish pilot who found Lois and Budd Barott (Sally's parent's) and many other new relatives in the Chisago Lakes Area back in 1972. Carl-Werner helped choose sister cities in Sweden that would connect to Vilhelm Moberg's roots. The Swedish author of *The Emigrants*, Moberg stayed in Chisago City in 1948. Thus, we chose Algutsboda, Sweden, the birthplace of Vilhelm Moberg, for the Chisago City sister-city. Then another man, Anders Åhslund from Hassela, Sweden helped connect not only the city of Center City, but the Hassela Church as sister-church to Chisago Lake Ev. Lutheran Church in Center City. That historic connection being the Per Andersson party who left Sweden in 1950 and settled here in 1951 and founded Chisago Lake Ev. Swedish Lutheran Church. Another man from Växjö, Ivan Nilsson helped to secure the Shafer sister-city of Nöbbele, Sweden. Ivan has been the leader of The American Club in the Växjö area since it began.

You may remember the Greater Chisago Lakes Area was highlighted during the 1996 Swedish Immigration Jubilee because of its direct ties to the mass migration of Swedish emigrants to America. Over a million Swedes emigrated, many of who came to this area because of the new lands which were made available from the 1837 Indian Treaty. On September 13, 1996, the Chisago Lakes area was honored with a Royal Visit from Their Majesties King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden. They first stopped in Chisago City at Moberg Park to rename the park as Moberg Park and to view the new Vilhelm Moberg Statue designed and sculpted by Ian Dudley, Lindström. Large crowds were on hand to greet

them and formal presentations were made. The next stop was at Nya Duvemåla, also known as the Karl Oskar House, in Lindström. Their Majesties looked out onto a large crowd—they loved the opportunity to visit and greet so many Swedish-Americans. Thelma Johnson was one of four Swedish/American women honored that day with the Charlotta Medal for their Swedish connections and historical work. Others honored were Jane Videen, Violet Norelius and Helen Fosdick who, dressed in her Swedish costume, rode in the limo with the King and Queen during their one hour tour.

Former ABBA (Swedish Band of the 1970s) members Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus also visited that fall, October 12, 13, 1996 and honored us with the concert version of their hit musical "Kristina från Duvemåla" at Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis and our Chisago Lakes High School Auditorium. That's another whole story in itself! Last month, September 23, 2009, the English version of the musical premiered at Carnegie Hall in New York City. Hopes are to have it come to Minnesota next! This is the musical version of Moberg's emigrant family Karl Oskar Nilsson's wife Kristina. The musical is Kristina's viewpoint of their journey and hardships to America. An exceptional production!

Now, back to the signage story. We wanted to have all the U.S. Hwy. 8 signs created first and we wanted to get them done by the Royal Visit in 1996. But after finding out the details and the work involved, we knew we would be working with the MN Department of Transportation on a one-at-a-time basis for as long it takes. So, Chisago City was first. I called my contact at MNDOT and began working out the layout of the sign, (size, shape, location, etc.). They were very helpful in generating a computer layout that we brought before the Chisago City Council. We asked for permission, and asked the city to pay for the special signs. All was approved and the signs were completed and put up by MNDOT. Next, it was Center City, same process, going before the Center City Council for permission, showing the sign design, worked the plans with MNDOT and that was done. And so on for the Lindström/Tingsryd connection and the Shafer/Nöbbele connection. Each sister city also provided a proclamation to each other which agreed to the sister-city connections. Lindström Mayor Keith Carlson made the trip to Tingsryd, Sweden, in 2004 and presented the people of Tingsryd with the proclamation from Lindström. He also found time to travel to Hassela and brought greetings from Center City.

Four of the eight sister-city signs have been completed. We are now working on Scandia, Almelund, North Branch and Taylors Falls. Keep watching for them, as we're not stopping until they're completed. When completed, the signs will honor the eight towns who participated in the 1996 Swedish Immigration Jubilee celebration: Chisago City, Lindström, Center City, Shafer, Taylors Falls, Almelund, North Branch and Scandia. We hope you enjoyed reading the history of the signs. We know the efforts of creating these signs have helped the local Swedish tourism. It's a benefit Barb and I want to give back to the community, as we do yearly with the Swedish Circle brochure (1997 to present). You can also visit our website: www.swedishcircletours.com Tack så mycket till alla.