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# The Old Mill Museum of Lindsborg, Kansas, and some more from Lindsborg

BY ELISABETH THORSELL

A group of Swedish immigrants arrived in the Smoky Valley of Kansas in the spring of 1869. Many of them came from the Sunnemo area of eastern Värmland. With them traveled the assistant pastor of Sunnemo, Olof Olsson and his family.

The group settled on the fertile soil and built sod houses and started to develop their farms. Soon the town of Lindsborg started to grow, and was incorporated in 1879. It is currently a city of the second class under Kansas State Statutes. It is located 20 miles south of the crossroads of Interstate 70 and Interstate 135 and has a population of 3,321.

The inhabitants are very proud of their Swedish heritage, which they celebrate every two years with the great "Svensk Hyllningsfest" in early October, and which I had the pleasure to visit in 2007.

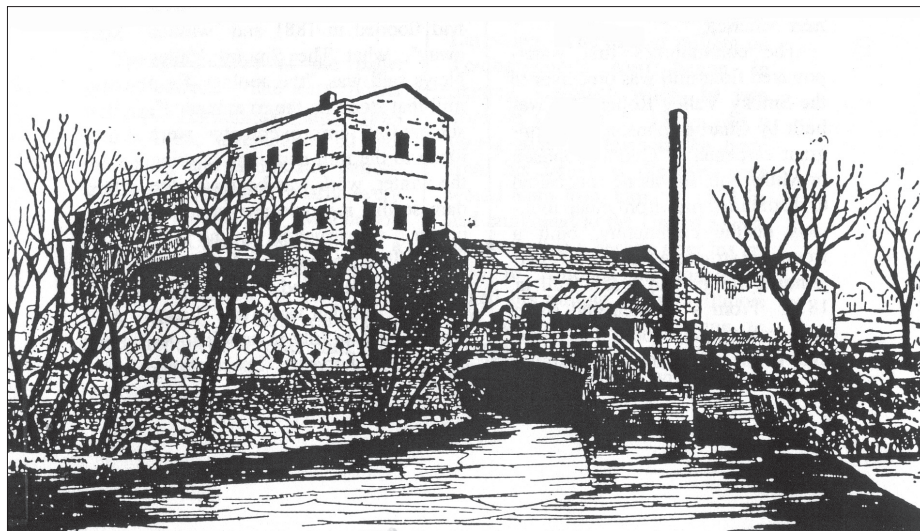
I enjoyed the *smörgåsbord* on Friday night and the great parade on Saturday, and was very impressed by all the marching bands, where the young musicians did a splendid job.

## An important place

The local museum is called the *McPherson County Old Mill Museum*, and is housed in the old roller mill on the Smoky Hill River. The first mill in this place was built in 1872 by Charlie Johnson, also known as "Qvarnjonsson" or "Miller Johnson," a Swedish immigrant, who worked the mill and an adjoining sawmill until 1882, when he sold his business. The present brick building was built in 1897–1898, and it remained in use as a mill until 1955. Afterwards it was restored and completed as a museum in 1981.

## The archives

In another building on the premises



*The Lindsborg Old Roller Mill. (Illustration by Lucille Runbeck.)*

you can find the genealogy and local history department, which has many resources for McPherson County. There is also a Swedish section and a Mennonite section. Many records are indexed and thus easy to search. There is, for instance, an *1890 List of McPherson County Residents*, based on the Tax assessment records, which gives some information on all residents above the age of 21. This list is online. It shows the name of a person, age, sex, and the homeplace: "Hagstrom, Axel, M[ale], 40, New Gottland," which somewhat makes up for the missing 1890 census.

For doing Swedish research the odds are good that you will find your people. The museum has the Swedish databases on CD:s and also a subscription to Genline. The staff is familiar with Swedish records.

## Exhibitions

There are also some exhibitions of old clothes and a peep into an 1890's home, and you can also tour the old mill itself.

Across the street you will see a huge yellow building, that is built in

the Swedish manorial style (*herrgårdsstil*), which is actually the Swedish pavilion from the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. It was designed by wellknown Swedish architect Ferdinand Boberg, assembled in Sundbyberg outside Stockholm, and then shipped to the U.S.

At the close of the Fair, the Swedish Pavilion was purchased by W.W. Thomas, U.S. Minister to Sweden and Norway, and presented to Bethany College in Lindsborg as a memorial to his friend Carl Swensson who had died very suddenly in February, 1904. It served as a classroom for domestic sciences, library, museum, and home to the art department for more than sixty years under Swedish born artist Birger Sandzén.

In 1969 the Swedish Pavilion was moved from Bethany College to the Old Mill Museum and a partial restoration was completed. The Pavilion is used for cultural heritage events several times throughout the year. The building was entered onto the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.

On both sides of the great lawn in front of the Swedish pavilion there

are a number of small buildings, each housing different activities: a school, a blacksmith's shop, a general store, a railroad depot, and much more.

### Contact Information

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Museum

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<http://www.oldmillmuseum.org/>

Open every day, except Thanks-  
giving, Christmas, and New  
Year's holidays

## Who was miller Charlie Johnson?

The *Lindsborg News-Record* had an article, published 26 Nov. 1970, with the headline "Old Timer was a darned good dam builder." In this article it is noted that a Swedish carpenter, named Carl J. Johansson, arrived in Chicago in June 1870, got his "first papers" and then set out for Lindsborg with his three brothers. Carl soon became Charlie and a little later Johnson. He built a dugout, and soon a wooden structure to contain two grinding stones and a sawmill. He married a widow, Christina Anderson, whose husband and his brother had set out from Illinois to find a homestead in the West, and

neither of them was ever heard from again. Charles and Christina raised eleven children and her two from her first marriage.

At the Old Mill Museum they have a typed family history of Carl J. Johansson and his brothers, where their birthdates are mentioned, which made it possible to find Carl and his brothers August and Otto in *Emibas*.

Carl was born 7 April 1836 in the parish of Linneryd in Kronobergs län, and left from the farm of Hästaskalla in Linneryd on 17 April 1868.

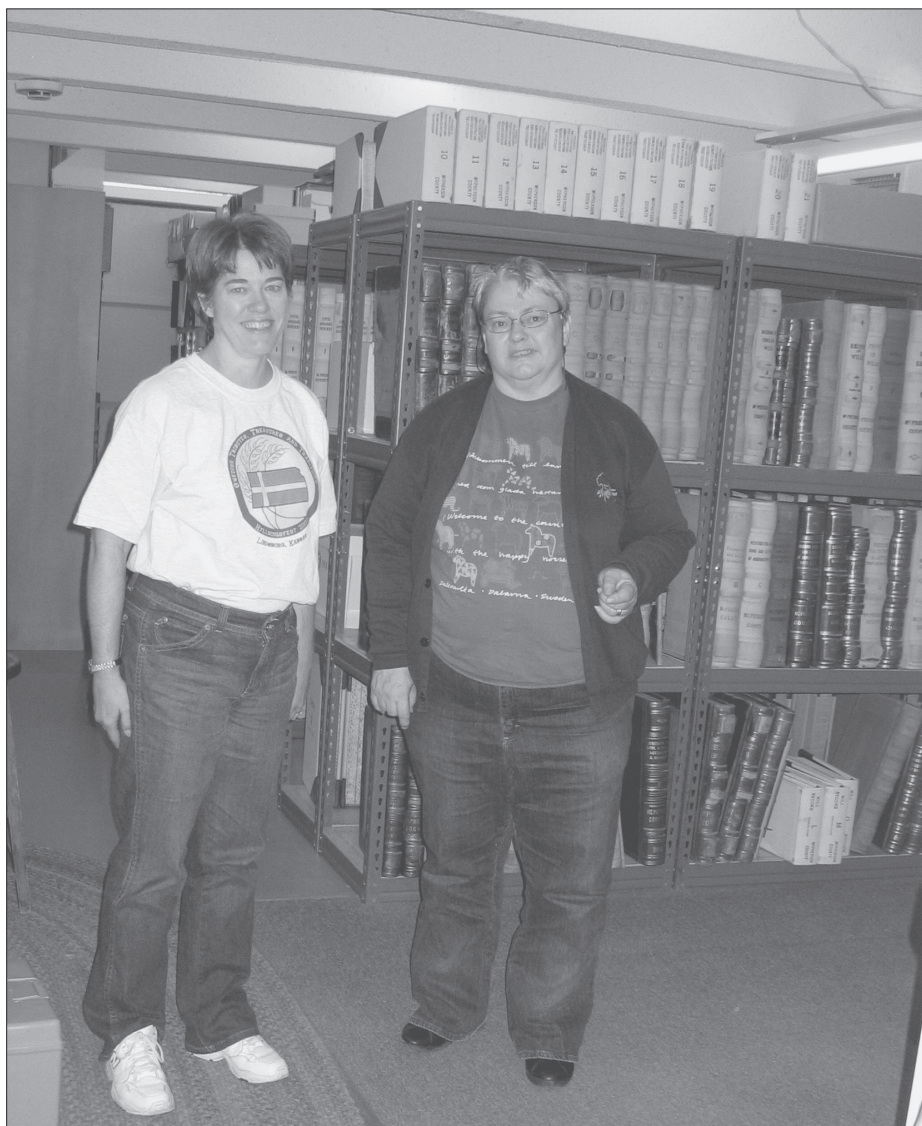
This information made it possible to find Carl's parents and siblings in the Linneryd clerical survey for 1861–1870 (AI:20:624).

The father of the family was Johannes Svensson, born 26 Sep. 1804 in Linneryd, committed suicide at Hästaskalla 31 May 1858. His wife Ingrid Catharina Carlsdotter, born 26 March 1819 in Linneryd, was left alone with many children: Carl Johan (b. 7 Apr. 1836); Nils Peter (b. 28 Dec. 1837); Frans Johan (b. 4 May 1841); Gustaf (b. 25 March 1845); August (b. 5 July 1848); Otto (b. 16 Sep. 1851) and Johanna Christina (b. 29 June 1856).

Carl Johan and August left for "Norra Amerika" 17 April 1868. Brother Otto came along 8 May 1870. Brother Frans Johan moved in 1871 to Schleswig-Holstein in Germany, which was common for youngsters from southern Småland. He is said in the above-mentioned family history to have remained in Germany, married, and had several children, but nothing exact seems to be known.

Widow Ingrid Catharina was recorded as an *inhyses fattig* (lodging poor person) at Hästaskalla until her death 19 Sep. 1891. However, she seems to have spent her last years in Blekinge, where her daughter Johanna Christina lived.

One wonders if the parents would have been able to imagine that their grownup children would live in such different places as they finally did?



Lenora Lynam of the Old Mill Museum and the SAG editor among the McPherson County Tax books. (Photo: Bengt Thorsell).