

SCANDINAVIAN
CONTACT

Newsletter of the American Scandinavian Society of New York, Inc.

EPICURES HEAD FOR HYDE PARK

Back in May, plans were made for a Gourmet's Trip to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. A.S.S. members headed for a double pleasure when they entered the tour bus in front of the Plaza on Saturday, October 10, at 10:00 a.m. for the two hour and twenty minute ride upstate New York – the view and the food.

Occasional rain only highlighted the vivid oranges, reds and yellows of the fall trees at their prideful best. Ms. Sirkka Ruottinen, Chef de Cuisine of the President of Finland was on board as the guide for the day. The mist seemed to recede and a cozy atmosphere reigned as Ms. Ruottinen served coffee and her home-made Tosca cake.

The chef entertained the group with a short history of the Culinary Institute, where she occasionally returns to brush up on her skills. She is currently on sabbatical, learning how to judge food competitions. She answered many questions, describing the typical day of a presidential chef. (There do not seem to be too many "typical" days.) Her favorite restaurant in New York is Trois Jean. In Helsinki, she favors Kanavaranta.



From left to right: Charles Rabus, Minna Rabus, Sirkka Ruottinen, Ritva Metso, Leena Scutt, Edward Lorenze. Photo: R. Metzo

By the time they reached their destination, and with all that talk about gourmet delights, the travelers were eager for lunch. Of the four restaurants, they chose either the Escoffier or the American Bounty, and were treated to delicious, innovative and beautifully presented fares.

No such occasion would be complete without a visit to the gift shop. A.S.S. members emerged with exotic kitchen gadgets, cookbooks and gifts. The trip received such a favorable review that another trip is planned for next year. Plan early, because this trip was overbooked.

A TREE GROWS IN HARLEM

On a lovely, early fall afternoon, Elfi von Kantzow Alvin guided a group of art enthusiasts on an excursion to Harlem, and the studio of the fabulously inventive and imaginative home of Lars Westvind and his wife, Gulsen Calik.

Lars, born in Sweden, but raised in Canada, became a corporate vice-president for a Canadian company. He built an architectural delight 53 miles north of Montreal which now serves as a music studio.

The artist discovered, in himself, a philosophy deep seeded in the belief that everyone should do what he/she is uniquely suitable for. Standing firm in this conviction, Lars immigrated to New York and found himself living with scarcely a roof over his head in the East Village, but sustained by his art and creativity.

It was in the East Village that he met his future bride. Determined to find a proper home for his growing family, he discovered an affordable house in Harlem. It was in a state of total disrepair, but Westvind saw its potential. This house, located on 130th Street was originally built by William Backhouse Astor in 1881.

Lars restored the home, and, in a miraculous way, transformed it into a virtual showcase where many of his inventive works can be seen. Most apparent is the innovative lighting everywhere. Mobiles consisting of functional wiring, strongly expressive paintings with upbeat designs and extremely expressive painting, and forcefully rendered representational images of New York are Lars's signature.

Gulsen Calik, born in Turkey, is a visual conceptualist. She enjoys working with themes and creates a series of each, often based on ideas of perception. She expresses variations on the art of seeing which take many shapes and forms that test our memory of reality. Mosaics consisting of egg shells attract our curiosity and are contrasted to her more realistic, yet mystical seascapes on an adjacent wall.

Westvind has bought other property behind the back garden. Here, on 129th Street, we find a delightful gallery, and he anticipates a library in another building.

It was an enlightening trip. Gulsen said, "Goodness spreads!" That aptly summarizes the theme of the day.

—Susan Florence Ullmann



The Westvind children at their Harlem Home and Gallery.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

In November, it will be 90 years since the American Scandinavian Society was founded in New York, and we are celebrating our anniversary at the Christmas Ball, Friday, December 4, 1998. The elegant Metropolitan Club will again be the venue with its 25 feet tall Christmas Tree. One of our favorite Lucias, Charlotte Dick, will perform. It's worth coming – just to hear her.



This year, our 90th year of keeping Nordic culture alive in New York, is the time to bring your family and friends to the only real ball celebrating Christmas the Scandinavian way.

The big stream of immigrants came through Ellis Island from the mid 1800's to the mid 1900's. However, the majority of our members were born and raised in one of the five Scandinavian countries and came here as adults – for education, work, or just to get "their American experience" – but stayed.

I believe this blend of the very recent "settlers," the immigrants who have been here for generations, and the New Yorkers, with roots elsewhere, but with a keen interest in Scandinavia, make our Society as vibrant and exciting as it is today.

Remember, that our organization and its committees are run entirely by dedicated volunteers. If you feel that you should be one of them, please call our office and leave a message.

All good wishes... Vibeke Steineger, President

HERE AND THERE, THIS AND THAT...

Rolf Kristian Stang, actor/singer and beloved member of the American Scandinavian Society, will be inducted into the 1998 Scandinavian-American Hall of Fame at the renowned Norsk Høstfest in Minot, North Dakota. Ralph Engelstad (of Norwegian descent) owner of Las Vegas' Imperial Palace, and Dale Morrison (50% Icelandic) President and CEO of Campbell Soup Company, will receive the honor at the same time. Congratulations, Rolf!

Several members turned out to cheer athletes at the Norway Run, Grete's Great Gallop and The Troll Stroll on October 11, at the Central Park Mall.

It is with sorrow we report the passing away of long time, very active A.S.S. member Betten Pritzer in late September.

There will be a memorial service at the Norwegian Seamen's Church.

A.S.S. SECRETARY NEEDED

A person familiar with an IBM compatible computer, who would like to answer phones, return phone calls, write letters and do filing for 3 to 6 hours a week, on 1 or 2 days a week during the fall, winter and spring, please call Vibeke Steineger at (212) 534-1241. There will be some financial compensation.

AN EVENING WITH MOLANDER

The last time Johan Molander visited us was at the Cultural Grants Award party in June, at the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. At that time he accepted the "Sixten Ehrling Award," from the great Swedish conductor himself.

On Wednesday, October 7, we met again; it was like meeting an old friend. This time The Society of Illustrators was the location. One climbs two sets of stairs to a narrow room that runs the length of the building and spills out onto a city patio. The weather was such that the doors to the patio were left open, which lent an air of insouciance to the evening. The bar and refreshments were located at the street end of the room. The audience sat at round tables or on several rows of chairs which filled the main section. These walls are hung with illustrations from some of the "greats," such as Norman Rockwell.

Several steps led up to a small stage, holding the podium from which Molander spoke. Here the walls hold pictures or sketches of great illustrators. There was art in the air.



L. to R. Leena Scutt, Vibeke Steineger, Johan Molander, Harriet Nilsen, Marie-Louise HedLund.

Johan Molander is the Resident Stage Manager of the Swedish Royal Opera in Stockholm. With contagious enthusiasm, Molander, who comes from a long line of theatrical personalities, took us through the history of Swedish and Finnish opera. He explained that Verdi's, *The Masked Ball*, was originally the story of Gustav III, of Sweden, who was assassinated in 1792.

There were many asides, describing the romantic resurrection of the Drottningholm Theater, the many outstanding Scandinavian opera singers and several references to tenors, who are "always a nuisance." Molander described the procedure of producing an opera, which begins two years before the performance.

Continued on next page.

AN EVENING WITH MOLANDER

Continued from prior page.

The arrangements involving the conductor, stage director, stage designer, singers, costume designers, rehearsals, down to the details of how the stage floor is marked revealed a master teacher, one who can keep the audience engaged and attentive.

One technique he used was to refer to members in the audience, looking for acquiescence or disagreement. He opened the Q&A with the question, "Should opera be sung in the language in which it was written or in the language of the country in which it is performed?" This led to a lively debate with most of the audience disagreeing with Molander's preference for the language of the country in which the opera is appearing.

It was a lively evening, on a subject often regarded as "heavy." The setting lent itself to the delight of the event.

Dear Members and Friends of the American Scandinavian Society,

You are invited to be part of the celebration of the **90TH ANNIVERSARY OF OUR SOCIETY** by placing a greeting or an advertisement in the Christmas Gala Journal 1998. The total proceeds will go to the Cultural Awards to be given to talented Scandinavian and American artists with Scandinavian connection at the Annual Meeting in May 1999.

If you wish to place a personal Anniversary Greeting, which will cost \$100, or a quarter, half or full page ad, please contact...

Mrs. Ritva Metso at (212) 821-0201

or Mrs. Edith Warner at (609) 395-7110.

NORDIC EXPLORERS AND THE MILLENNIUM

Just the name, "The Explorer's Club," stirs the Nordic breast. On Monday, October 5, The American Scandinavian Society of New York and the Explorer's Club hosted an evening investigating the history of Scandinavians and their forays into regions of magic and danger.

A spirit of conviviality and expectation filled the reception room as members and friends enjoyed hors d'oeuvres (the tiny, delicate quiches were especially tasty) and libations.

Guests strolled into the lecture hall. Soon all the places were taken, and some found alternate seating along the back of the room. Vibeke Steineger, President of the A.S.S., stepped to the podium and introduced the first speaker of the evening, President and Director of the Explorer's Club and noted arctic explorer, Dr. Alfred Scott McLaren, Captain, U.S. Navy (ret).

Dr. McLaren investigated the exploration and navigation of Scandinavian explorers of the arctic regions. The mysteries of the polar areas have attracted Scandinavians from Viking times, in spite of the brutal weather and terrain and the difficulties of navigation, making it a science for survival. These realities seem to have made the adventure even more enticing. Vibeke thanked Dr. McLaren, expressing a great interest in joining the next expedition to the North Pole.

This event was originally arranged as a reception for his Excellency, Olafur Ragnar Grimsson, President of Iceland. However, his wife, the First Lady of Iceland is seriously ill and he

was unable to attend. The Honorable Jon Baldvin Hannibalsson, the Ambassador from Iceland, represented the President. He opened his speech in Icelandic, and informed us that it is a

language that has remained unchanged since Viking times. He pointed out that, under other circumstances, had Leifur Eiriksson decided to settle here, the audience would have understood every word.

Ambassador Hannibalsson's witty talk charmed the audience. Did you know that Gudridur Thorbjarnardottir, sister-in-law of Leifur the Lucky (or unlucky depending on your point of view) arrived in America 500 years before Columbus? The first European mother in America, she bore a son named Snorri. A film is in preparation for the celebration of the millennium, featuring Gudridur, Snorri and their saga.

Evelyn Stefannsson, the widow of the renowned arctic explorer, Vilhjalmur Steffannsson, had just returned from Akureyri, Iceland and informed us that a museum, devoted to the explorations of the northern regions, has just been opened in that city.

Many of the guests left discussing elements brought out in both entertaining and informational speeches. Our prayers are with the President of Iceland and his wife during this difficult time.

Susan Florence Ullmann

We are sad to announce that Gudrun Katrin Thorbergsdottir, wife of President Grimsson, has passed away. The American Scandinavian Society extends its condolences.



L. to R. Alfred McLaren, *President, Explorers Club*,
Vibeke Steineger, *President the American Scandinavian Society*,
John Balwin Hannibalsson, *Ambassador of Iceland to the United States*,
Edda Magnusson, *Stefan Stefansson, Consul General of Iceland to N.Y.*

Photo by Donald V. Mehus

FIRST CLASS MAIL

The American Scandinavian Society
of New York, Inc.
317 East 52nd Street
New York, NY 10022



A.S.S. ALMANAC

- 1998
September 27 at 4:00 p.m.
VISIT TO THE HOME AND STUDIO OF LARS WESTVIND
& GULSEN CALIK (See "A Tree Grows in Harlem,")
- October 5 at 6:00 p.m. (See article in this issue)
NORDIC EXPLORERS AND THE MILLENNIUM
The Explorer's Club, 46 East 70th Street, N.Y.C.
- October 7 at 7:00 p.m. (See article in this issue)
AN EVENING WITH JOHAN MOLANDER
The Society of Illustrators, 128 East 63rd Street, N.Y.C.
- October 10 at 10:00 a.m. (See "Epicures Head for Hyde Park")
GOURMET'S TRIP TO THE CULINARY INSTITUTE OF AMERICA
Hyde Park, New York, Meet at the Plaza Hotel at 10:00 a.m.
- November 10 at 7:00 p.m.
AN EVENING OF CLASSICAL MUSIC
Steinway Hall, 109 West 57th Street, N.Y.C.

DECEMBER 4 AT 7:00 P.M.

- THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY CHRISTMAS BALL
The Metropolitan Club, One East 60th Street, N.Y.C.



- 1999
February 4 - Time to be announced
CONCERT AT ST. PETER'S CHURCH WITH THE SIBELIUS SOCIETY
- February - Date and Time to be announced
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