

# THE LINDSBORG SWEDISH FOLK DANCERS HISTORY

Written for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LSFd at Hyllningsfest 2013

The story of the founding of the Lindsborg Swedish Folk Dancers involves two unrelated needs that came together to establish the group.

The first need was members of the Lindsborg Chamber of Commerce looking for a way to attract shoppers downtown on special nights to do their 1963 Christmas Shopping. Lindsborg artesian Malcolm Esping suggested having St. Lucia, accompanied by girl attendants and star boys, roaming the business district serving traditional ginger cookies and coffee.

Esping's daughter Gretchen was a natural choice to be St. Lucia. She recruited classmates from her freshman class at Lindsborg High School to act as her attendants and a couple of star boys. Their ranks were supplemented by students from Soderstrom Elementary.

The second was the need for a high school Swedish dance group. Lindsborg grade school kids had been dancing in the Svensk Hyllningsfest since its beginning in 1941. When these students entered high school, however, there was no more organized dancing for them until they became eligible to join the post-high school adult dancer's group.

Four LHS freshman girls who had participated in the St. Lucia Christmas promotion saw it as an opportunity to start a high school dance group. But Gretchen Esping, Beth Olson, Ingrid Patrick, and Elly Jaderborg (using their maiden names) were only 14-years-old. They knew they needed adult sponsorship.

The girls approached Mrs. Einar (Elizabeth) Jaderborg. Mrs. "J", the name she became known as, was reluctant at first. She was a non-Swede from New England and knew nothing about Swedish folk dancing. She finally relented and told the girls that if they could find a boy partner for each girl she would do it.

In January 1964 the Lindsborg Swedish Dancers (later the word Folk was added to the name) became a reality and rehearsals began. Membership was limited to students enrolled at Lindsborg (now Smoky Valley) High School.

Soon some interested upper classmen joined the group, and it wasn't long before the dancers made their first out-of-state trip to the 1964 Mid-Summers' Festival in Stromsburg, Nebraska. Word of this enthusiastic group of high school dancers was spreading throughout Kansas and the Mid-West.

The first international trip for the Dancers was to Montreal, Canada for Expo '67 (basically a world's fair). Their performances were quite well received by the Canadians and people of other nationalities fair, including the Swedes. Now the reputation of the Lindsborg Swedish Dancers had become international.

Unfortunately the Swedish Dancers weren't as well accepted in Lindsborg. In the early years the Svensk Hyllningsfest Committee refused to place performances by the group on the official schedule of events. So Mrs. "J" and her dancers had to improvise. In 1967, when no other activities were scheduled downtown during the Bethany College football game, the Swedish Dancers put on their own show complete with printed programs. In fact, according to Mrs. Jaderborg, the community didn't take the high school group for real until they returned from the first of their quadrennial trips to Sweden in 1974.

This writer was one of the star boys who nearly froze to death while accompanying St. Lucia on the streets of Lindsborg at Christmastime, 1963, and one of the original Lindsborg Swedish Dancers in 1964. For those of us who were there in the beginning it's very gratifying to see the group is still going strong 50 years later.