



NEWS RELEASE
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To Sweden and Back: Journey Stories in Lindsborg

Lindsborg, KS - "You have a cousin in Iowa looking for you!" A fateful 2004 phone call sent LaVern Lyon, a member of Central Kansas's Swedish community, on a journey across the ocean to discover a family he had never known. Lyon's journey to connect with long-lost relatives represents the many great American stories featured as part of the Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition *Journey Stories* on display June 26 – August 9, 2009 at the McPherson County Old Mill Museum, 120 Mill Street in Lindsborg.

Lyon's father, Gustaf, emigrated from Sweden to north central Kansas in 1906. The elder Lyon came to America nursing a broken heart and ready to start a new life. Like many Swedish-settled Kansans, the Lyons did not have much contact with their Swedish relatives. Lyon knew little about his father's family until the 2004 phone call connected him with Diane Esperson of Iowa. Esperson was a descendent of Lyon's great uncle and family research led her to Lyon and to Roland Svensson of Sweden. She put Lyon in contact with Svensson, his first cousin, once removed, and Lyon's journey story began to take shape.

Lyon began to communicate with Svensson about their shared family history over email. In 2005, Lyon traveled to Sweden for the first time. "We arrived in Gothenburg, Sweden and were met by Roland and his wife," recalled Lyon. "The next ten days were some of the most rewarding days of my life." In addition to visiting the house where his father was born, Lyon met five first cousins for the first time. After Lyon's visit to Sweden, Svensson visited Kansas in 2006 and 2007.

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“Words cannot describe the emotions involved when I met my Swedish relatives,” recalled Lyon. “A hug was worth a thousand words. It was beyond my wildest dreams that I would get to know and see my relatives in Sweden and have them visit in the United States.”

Lyon and Svensson feel as close as brothers and communicate several times a week via web cam and instant message. Their only regret? “Not finding one another sooner,” said Lyon. Their advice to those interested in family history is to “get busy now – your family adventure awaits you!”

“While LaVern Lyon’s story is a dramatic one, many Swedish Americans here have had positive experiences when they embark on family journeys,” said Lorna Nelson, director of the McPherson County Old Mill Museum. “People enjoy sharing their stories as we prepare for the *Journey Stories* exhibit.”

To learn about similar stories of immigration and travel, make the trip to the McPherson County Old Mill Museum in Lindsborg for the *Journey Stories* exhibition. Journey stories – tales of how we got here – are as American as apple pie. Why did our ancestors come to America? Why did our families choose Kansas as home? The exhibition explores four centuries of American history through images, audio clips, music, maps, and artifacts. Visitors will listen to stories of travelers and trace their route on an interactive map; read harrowing accounts of escaped slaves on the road to freedom; and use an 1859 guidebook to prepare for a westward trip on an overland trail.

Journey stories are at the core of McPherson County’s history. Lindsborg is the cultural heart of the Swedish community in Kansas and a large Mennonite population resides in McPherson County. The local exhibit, produced by the McPherson County Old Mill Museum, examines the Swedish and Mennonite journeys to Kansas and how the immigrants shaped the county’s history. The efforts of new generations to preserve their ancestors’ heritage are also featured in the exhibit.

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The McPherson County Old Mill Museum is one of six Kansas community cultural organizations to host *Journey Stories*. Other Kansas hosts include the Glasco Community Foundation, Geary County Historical Society and Museums in Junction City, the Parsons Public Library, the Prairie Museum of Art and History in Colby, and the Atchison County Historical Society.

The *Journey Stories* exhibition is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution, the Kansas Humanities Council, and the Federation of State Humanities Councils. Support for Museum on Main Street has been provided by the United States Congress.

The Kansas Humanities Council sponsors the Kansas tour of *Journey Stories*. A non-profit organization, the Kansas Humanities Council conducts and supports community-based programs, serves as a financial resource through an active grant-making program, and encourages Kansans to participate in their communities.

For more information about *Journey Stories* and related exhibits and events in Lindsborg contact the McPherson County Old Mill Museum at 785/227-3595 or www.oldmillmuseum.org or the Kansas Humanities Council at 785/357-0359 or www.kansashumanities.org.

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