

# SWEDISH HANDKNITS

A COLLECTION OF HEIRLOOM DESIGNS



**SUE FLANDERS AND JANINE KOSEL**

AUTHORS OF NORWEGIAN HANDKNITS





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Foreword by Nina Clark and Curt Pederson of the American Swedish Institute

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Carnegie Museum of Art  
Entrance to Museum  
and Museum Shop

THE CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

# Foreword

by Nina Clark and Curt Pederson of the American Swedish Institute

This book, *Swedish Handknits: A Collection of Heirloom Designs*, has as many layers as a warm bed on a cold winter's night. Authors Sue Flanders and Janine Kosel have artfully investigated the collections and environs of the American Swedish Institute (ASI) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to divine inspiration and create new life from old motifs. Through the patterns that appear on these pages, Sue and Janine honor the handwork of artists and artisans of years past while perpetuating their creativity and dedication. And with this book, they are cultivating a circle of followers who will gather around these patterns with joyful, busy hands—just as generations have gathered at the American Swedish Institute to care for this old mansion and serve untold cups of coffee, in companionship. Below is what we can share of their sources for inspiration.

## An Introduction to the American Swedish Institute

The American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis is an organization with a long memory and enduring community, tied up in the culture and craft of the Swedish Americans who have steered and supported it for more than eighty years. The institute was founded by a Swedish immigrant family who imagined an organization that would serve as a center for Swedish culture in the United States, and it stands true to that original vision today. But it is also a gathering place that invites and welcomes people of all backgrounds, interested in craft, the arts, migration, and the history of Minneapolis and Minnesota.



*Swan Turnblad family – Swan J., his wife, Christina, and their daughter, Lillian.*

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*Left: The American Swedish Institute at dawn, 2010.*

## The Turnblads

In 1868, eight-year-old Sven Johan Månsson left Sweden with his mother, father, sister, and brother. According to the ship's manifest, he landed in New York City as Swan J. Turnblad. This man, who would come to establish the American Swedish Institute with his wife, Christina, and daughter, Lillian, came to the United States during the peak years for emigration from Sweden—the so called “bark-bread years,” when meager grain supplies drove families to supplement flour with ground bark. In all, over one million people left Sweden for the United States from the 1850s to the 1940s. Swan's immediate family followed other Månssons, who also changed their names to Turnblad before continuing on to Vasa in Goodhue County, Minnesota. Swan's early interest in printing eventually put him on the road to Minneapolis, where in time he became owner of the largest Swedish language newspaper in the United States, the *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*. He met Christina Nilsson at a temperance dance; they married and had one daughter, Lillian Zenobia. Swan, an automobile enthusiast, purchased land on the city's first asphalt-paved street—Park Avenue. On these six city lots, the Turnblads had their mansion built.

## The Mansion

Completed in 1908, the Turnblads' thirty-three room mansion is a tribute to the craftsmanship that was then both remarkable and commonplace. Like many well-to-do people of their time, the Turnblads passed many summers in Europe and gathered ideas—even pattern books—that offered inspiration for their interiors. The house's two-story Grand Hall is distinguished by an ornately carved mahogany mantel. From any vantage point in the Hall, one can view the Visby Window, a stained-glass window depicting a classic painting in Sweden's National Museum. The decorations that adorn the plaster ceilings throughout the mansion bring to mind wedding cakes covered with elaborately piped frosting. And eleven different tile stoves—*kakelugnar* in Swedish—imported from Sweden offer new discoveries at the second, third, and fourth look. In 1908, Prairie School architecture was coming on strong, but the Turnblads' sensibilities embraced Old Europe. Lucky for us—it's the variety of detail, inside and out, that has offered inspiration for some of the patterns in this book.

## The Founding of the ASI

In 1929, after Christina Turnblad passed away, Swan and Lillian established what was initially called the American Institute of Swedish Arts, Literature, and Science, later renamed the American Swedish Institute. When the institute first opened, people streamed in to see the fantastic residence. Turnblad had envisioned the institute as a high-culture, erudite organization led by a national board of business and civic leaders. But these individuals weren't vested, and activities faltered. The mansion did not stay quiet for long. Swedes of all stripes recognized that the building was an excellent place to gather, and soon social and service clubs moved in to hold meetings, celebrations, and presentations. What had been the home for one family rapidly became a second home for an entire community. The “Institute” was such in name only, and those expecting a quiet, scholarly enterprise would be surprised. Pride in this special place multiplied and grew, and the castle that offered shelter was cared for in return.



*Women on a country road near Hällberg, Dalarne, Sweden, August 1, 1914.*

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## The Collections

From the ASI's earliest days, items were accrued for the collection. Over the years, the library, which began with books the Turnblads had collected during trips back to Sweden, grew with donations of more books, diaries, letters, photos, recordings, club records, and other items. At the same time, Swedish American families donated artifacts representing every imaginable item that may have been carried from Sweden to America by émigrés. Over the years, the American Swedish Institute has actively collected contemporary Swedish glass, and the institute is home to the nation's largest collection of Swedish figure carvings—more than six hundred in total. A high point in the history of the collection was the donation of the Värmland Gift in 1952. As a collective token of the friendship between the two lands, every parish in the province of Värmland donated items to be sent to the American Swedish Institute.

### Textiles in Sweden and Swedish America

Swedish textile crafts, including bed coverlets, loom-woven rugs, tablecloths, and runners, are particularly rewarding to study due to a wealth of accessible historical examples in both Sweden and Swedish America. In some areas of Sweden, successive craft traditions have never been broken, spanning centuries of transition from agrarian society to today's twenty-first-century technology. When 1800s industrialization consumed manpower from traditional households, Swedish textile crafts were generally those that survived. The Handcraft Movement, a reaction to extensive industrial production, redirected attention to home craft production. Textile crafts like loom-woven linen and rugs, spinning, embroidery, and knitting played an important role in the birth of the Handcraft Movement and remain among the strongest practiced handcraft traditions today in Sweden.

When Swedish immigrants came to America, they brought tools and knowledge of practices that provided linens and domestic textiles for families of settlers throughout the Midwest. The descendants of these immigrants have been instrumental in building the fiber collections at the American Swedish Institute. Today the collection exists as an historic record, but is equally



*Herr and Fru Petterson and family at Summermäla, Elneboda, Sweden, August 19, 1914.*

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important as a source of inspiration for twenty-first-century scholars and artists, which is exactly what Swedish immigrant Swan Turnblad envisioned when he established the American Swedish Institute.

The textile collection includes examples of traditional Swedish weave types, motifs, materials, and natural and commercially made dyes used during the immigration period. The patterns found on bed coverlets, pillows, runners, garments, and Swedish provincial costumes are sources of inspiration for the patterns in this book. The pieces reveal how Swedish traditions were continued in this country and how those traditions influenced textiles more generally in the Midwest.

### The Larsson/Lundin Family

The ASI collection includes a trunk, spinning wheel, wood bench—"Drag-Sossa"—loom, and textiles woven by Anna Olsdotter Lundin. Descendants of Anna and her husband, Lars Larsson, were inspired by the couple's great-granddaughter, Tess Henry, to donate these family heirlooms to the American Swedish Institute. This is the largest material collection from any single immigrant family in the collection. A written history of Lars and Anna and their descendants to this century accompanies the donation:



*Fru Anna Anderson in her home at Billa, Sweden, June 1914. Notice the woven rugs on the floor.*  
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*Lars Larsson and his wife, Anna Olsdotter Lundin, were Swedish immigrants who came to central Minnesota with a wood handmade trunk that bore its maker's name and destination, "L. Larsson/Cokato Minnesota, North Amerika." Lars and Anna cut trees and built a small log cabin. Next, using trees on their land, Lars built a loom and Anna rigged the warp for weaving, as she had learned in Sweden. Tess Henry's memories of her great-grandmother, Anna, include smoking a pipe filled with her home-grown tobacco and the annual fall ritual of laying clean straw on the wood floor of the farmhouse, covering it with Anna's beautiful woven rugs for insulation. This wall-to-wall carpet would stay in place until spring when the rugs would be taken up, the straw swept up and the floors washed.*

## Legendary Textile Figures

In addition to the textiles used on a day-to-day basis in immigrant homes, the textile collection also includes the work of Swedish textile giants Märta Måås-Fjetterström and Helena Hernmarck. At a time when most rugs in Sweden were simple rag rugs, careful study of the Swedish countryside led artist Märta Måås Fjetterström (1873–1941) to design and produce rugs of high quality that reflected Swedish cultural traditions. Her carpets have been featured in exhibitions all over the world.

A master weaver, Helena Hernmarck's work encapsulates traditions and the outdoors in heroic scale. Her work has been selected for scores of public spaces and enjoyed by millions of viewers. In 2004, Helena was inspired by the folk textile collection at the ASI and was commissioned to create a 10x15-foot tapestry depicting the colorful woven and stitched elements of Swedish folk costumes from the collection. The tapestry hangs in ASI's Nelson Cultural Center.

But if there's a patron saint of textiles at ASI, it must be Hilma Berglund. Hilma Berglund studied weaving in Sweden and was a lifelong student, teacher, and innovator in textile and other arts. Countless accomplishments included extensive documentation of experiments using natural dyes on a variety of fibers, and design and manufacture of "the Minnesota loom," portable for instruction anywhere. Hilma left a lasting legacy as one of the founders of the Minnesota Weavers Guild and as a dedicated University of Minnesota teacher of weaving.

One of Hilma's weavings from the collection intertwines the shape of Minnesota's state flower, the Lady Slipper, to form a rectangular vertical wall hanging, using colors for the fall season. To make the Lady Slipper tapestry, Hilma used an inlay technique that she likely learned while studying weaving at a handcraft school in Stockholm, Sweden.

## Coming Together around Knitting

True to the spirit of this community, knitting is a social act—in the passing down of the craft, the doing together, and the sharing of the creative goods. This is what ASI has been engaged in since 1929—respect for history, working together, and sharing in celebrations and creative, cultural pursuits. In 2009, the exhibit *Radiant Knits* celebrated the Bohus knitting tradition, bringing together pieces from all over the United States and attracting knitters from far and wide for “knit-outs” in the mansion. At ASI, artistry and community are hand in hand.

For this reason, ASI staff and volunteers feel lucky to be an audience to the shaping of *Swedish Handknits*. The inspiration found on these pages has given new interest and life to the ASI collection. We began to anticipate the next visit from authors Sue Flanders and Janine Kosel, wondering what they would create next. While they studied ASI's textile collection, we were delighted at their attention to what is referred to as “the largest piece in the collection,” the mansion “castle” itself. They drew inspiration from architectural details or repeated decorative motifs. We were sometimes surprised to witness Sue and Janine's excitement at the smallest detail, like an embroidered motif on a Swedish embroidered table linen. On their next visit to ASI, sometimes as soon as the next day, these knitters/authors had already translated the detail into an actual knit piece.

How exciting to see a motif gleaned from an old piece, reinterpreted, sometimes in a different color, size, or perspective. One feels that our founders, the Turnblad family, would be smiling with delight—not overly joyous, of course, but with proper Nordic restraint.



*Using boards from her father's lumber yard, Hilma fabricated the first “Minnesota Multi-Use Loom” after World War II (it was produced until the early 1970s). This loom, designed to permit two or more weavers to work on their individual pieces interchangeably, was used extensively to provide occupational therapy to World War II veterans as they recovered from injuries. The loom is a four-shaft, 20-inch-wide jack (rising shed) table loom. A stand, with four treadles connecting to the hand levers, converts the table loom into a foot-powered loom. The heddle frames, reed, warp, and cloth beams can be removed and stored with the holding rack provided, allowing another set to be installed in the loom frame. AMERICAN SWEDISH INSTITUTE COLLECTION*



# Introduction

For us, the research for *Swedish Handknits: A Collection of Heirloom Designs* began years ago. As young girls, we each remember our first trip to the American Swedish Institute—crossing the threshold of the iron gates and peering up at the mansion was a magical experience. We were certain that a beautiful princess lived in this castle, and we could hardly believe that we would be allowed inside. With our mothers holding tight to our hands to keep us from touching anything, we looked with wide eyes and curious minds. While on the mansion tour, we took in its many beautiful sights—the porcelain stoves, the woodwork, the carpets, the staircases, the textiles, and the paintings. These first trips to the ASI left a lasting impression on both of us. Little did we know as young girls that years later our memories would be the foundation for this book you hold in your hands.

A few years ago, while on a trip to Norway and Sweden, we gathered momentum for this project. While in Sweden, we visited a number of textile museums, including the Jamtli museum in Östersund, the Dalarnas Museum in Falun, and the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm. During these visits, we learned of the extensive Swedish textile traditions. Being impressed by the variety of knitting techniques and styles, we thought it was important to write a book that gathered all of these Swedish knitting traditions under one cover.

In this collection of patterns, our follow-up to *Norwegian Handknits: Heirloom Designs from Vesterheim Museum*, we followed the same book concept, including personal histories, recipes, and bits of Swedish folklore and culture along with the knitting patterns. We have used elements of traditional immigrant items and Swedish American-made items, such as weavings, paintings, and other handwork, as inspiration. It is interesting to note that the ASI mission statement gives a well-deserved nod to the contributions of Swedish immigrants, yet has an eye on contemporary Sweden as well. In fact, one of the special exhibits we viewed during our research showcased work from modern Swedish women interior designers.

We have included regional knitting traditions such as the Swedish Mittens, made on the Island of Gotland, twined knitting from the Darlana area of Sweden, and the more famous Swedish knitting traditions of the Bohus knitting cooperative. In some cases, we have modified techniques to honor knitters who have come before us, and in other cases, we have created some of our own techniques.

So, from the big eyes of young girls to the grand ideas of two overwhelmed knitters, we present *Swedish Handknits: A Collection of Heirloom Designs*.



*A rustic Swedish gate at Jamtli Museum, Sweden.*

*Opposite: Girls in costume at Rättvik, Sweden, August 2, 1914. AMERICAN SWEDISH INSTITUTE COLLECTION*

## CHAPTER 1

# Basic Knitting Techniques



*Farbror Johan, Gösta, Faster Ingrid at Westragård, August 18, 1914.*

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Although these designs are basic in nature, completing them provides the satisfaction of a hearty, useful item worthy of a busy woman's time and a project well done. These items are examples of what a busy pioneer, immigrant woman may have knit for her family after first attending to numerous other chores. Notice the use of color and the simple beauty in each of these items.

# Everyday Leggings



We found these well-used, well-loved leggings in a beautiful built-in drawer in a storage room at the American Swedish Institute. We loved these simple but oh-so-wonderful leggings as soon as we saw them. In keeping with our goal to also feature an everyday item, we've given these leggings a bit of an update. It really is true: everything old is new again!

## Special Techniques

**Provisional Cast-On** (see Special Techniques Used, page 140)

## Instructions

### LEGGINGS (MAKE 2)

With waste yarn, using provisional cast-on method, CO 75 sts.

**Row 1:** With MC and larger needle k50, cont with MC and smaller needle k25. Turn.

## Size

Adult's Average

## Finished Measurements

Circumference: 8"/20.5cm at

ankle; 10"/25.5cm at knee

Length: 16"/40.5cm

## Materials



- Classy by Dream in Color Yarns, 100% Merino wool, 100g/3.5oz, 250yds/229m:
- Cinnamon Girl #VM 011 (MC) and Romeo Blue #VM 007 (CC), 1 skein each
- Size 8 (5mm) 24"/61cm long circular needle or size needed to obtain gauge
- Size 7 (4.5mm) 16"/40.5cm long circular needle
- Waste yarn
- Tapestry needle

## Gauge

18 sts and 10 rows = 4"/10cm  
in Garter st on larger needle.

*Adjust needle size as necessary to obtain correct gauge.*