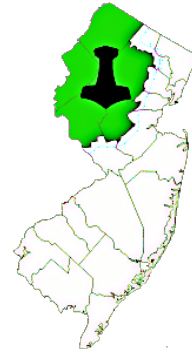


Skylands Report



The e-newsletter of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

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January 2018

2017: The Year That Was

As the new year approaches, it is useful to look back and consider the accomplishments and activities of the year that is coming to a close. While there certainly were emotional highs and lows and numerous challenges to overcome, there can be no doubt that 2017 was a very successful year for Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship. First and foremost, we gained five new associate members and witnessed the oath ceremony of one new full member.

After months of work and a pile of paperwork, Skylands received recognition from the IRS as a registered non-profit religious organization. As practitioners of the religion of Ásatrú, we celebrated the major religious holidays of the Heathen calendar: Yule, Sumarmál, Midsummer, and Winter Nights.

Skylands continued to place a high-value on education throughout the year. We conducted seven “Ásatrú 101” classes and five Rûna workshops. This year we secured a conference room at the Morristown Public Library to make our classes more accessible. Joseph goði and Don V. also taught workshops at the Irminfolk’s annual Folkish Summer Hallowing event.


In the area of outreach, we held two successful “Meet and Greets” and staffed an information booth at the Scandinavian Festival at Vasa Park. We published a hardcopy giveaway of the *Skylands Report* for those who expressed interest in Ásatrú or our Fellowship.

In addition there was our first-ever Movie




The burning sunwheel at Midsummer 2017

Night, two Nature Hikes (including one at the amazing Columcille Megalith park), a trip to the Kutztown Folk Festival, and Apple Picking in New York State.

It is overwhelmingly clear that we don't just live our faith once a week. For members of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship, our faith informs our lives every day. 

Krampus Snowed Out!

Skylands Krampusnacht was cancelled this year due to the snowstorm that hit on that date. But do not think that you have escaped the Krampus's wrath. It takes more than a bit of snow to curtail his wrath. He assures us that punishments shall be given at Yule! 



Tribal Milestones

Joseph B., Lisa C., Steve L., Wick M., Randi R., Don V., celebrate two years since their Oath of Membership January 2.

Karen B. and Erik G. celebrate one year as Associate members January 14.

Bill P. celebrates a Birthday on January 1. Happy Birthday Bill!



The Big Day: Yule (Part Two)

Now we move on to the second day of Yule.

As we saw last year when I compared the traditions surrounding the feast of St. Stephen as celebrated in the North, there are a number of connections between the figure and the god Freyr, specifically the connection to both boars and horses. In England, St. Stephen is the patron saint of horses, also echoing the association of Freyr with horses, and an English folk-ballad about Stephen reinforces his connection with the boar's head feast of Yule/Christmas:

“Stephen out of kitchen came,
With boar's head on hand,
He saw a star was fair and bright
Over Bethlehem stand.”

So on the one hand, we have the god Freyr, associated with a great Yuletide sacrifice and feast, associated with boars and horses. On the other hand, we have the “northern version” of St. Stephen, whose feast-day is during the Yuletide, and whose folk-tales are associated with boars and horses, which don't appear in accounts of the saint elsewhere. So it seems reasonable to bring in those practices associated with St. Stephen's Day in Scandinavia, on the assumption that the exclusively Northern attributes are, in fact, Heathen survivals of Freyr-cult activities associated with Yule.

Some interesting Swedish pieces of folklore from the 19th century conflate “St. Staffan” with the founder of the Archdiocese of Uppsala of the same name, where he is said to have been the first to preach the gospel there, and denounced its Heathen practices, only to be cast into prison and then escape to finally meet his fate as the Christian ur-martyr. While the echo of the association with Uppsala is interesting, much more so is this legend that clearly relates St. Stephen to the god Freyr:



THE BOAR'S HEAD AT CHRISTMAS.

“ With garlandes gay and rosemary.”

A saying is still common amongst the people, that once every week he visited them all, and proclaimed God's word. In the performance of this duty, he followed the course of the sun; so that in the morning he rode from Norrala, where he dwelt, passed the night at Arbrä, and from thence continued his journey to Järfös, and Ljusdal, Sundhede, and Nordanstigen, and returned home within the above-named time.*

Helsingland was in those days, as at present [1870] celebrated for its good horses, Staffan had a great love of horses, understood their treatment, and had always give with him wherever he went. When one was wearied he mounted another, and in this manner traversed the country. [He was killed by the Heathens and interred at Norrala.]

For a long time after the martyr's death, his friends and the Christians in the country were accustomed to meet at this his place of burial, which to them was looked on as holy, when they prayed together, and strengthened each other in faith and love. But when Christianity at a subsequent period began to lose its original simplicity and purity, the monks, profiting by the reverence the people entertained for the spot, seduced them by pretended miracles and prodigies to make offerings, and seek cures for diseased animals, especially horses, and also to worship St. Staffan, who, however, was never canonized, as their patron saint. (*Peasant Life in Sweden*, p. 204-6).

Here we see not only the association of “Staffan” with horses, but also an echo of the passage from *Ynglingatal*, which describes Freyr's establishment of Uppsala as a cult center, and the continued worship he enjoyed at his burial mound after his death:

Frey built a great temple at Upsal, made it his chief seat, and gave it all his taxes, his land, and goods. Then began the Upsal domains, which have remained ever since. Then began in his days the Frode- peace; and then there were good seasons,



Blessing horses on St. Stephen's Day

in all the land, which the Swedes ascribed to Frey, so that he was more worshiped than the other gods, as the people became much richer in his days by reason of the peace and good seasons. His wife was called Gerd, daughter of Gymis, and their son was called Fjolne. Frey was called by another name, Yngve; and this name Yngve was considered long after in his race as a name of honor, so that his descendants have since been called Ynglinger. Frey fell into a sickness; and as his illness took the upper hand, his men took the plan of letting few approach him. In the meantime they raised a great mound, in which they placed a door with three holes in it. Now when Frey died they bore him secretly into the mound, but told the Swedes he was alive; and they kept watch over him for three years. They brought all the taxes into the mound, and through the one hole they put in the gold, through the other the silver, and through the third the copper money that was paid. Peace and good seasons continued.

(*Ynglingatal* chapter 11)

The key elements being the worship of Freyr/Staffan at his grave, specifically connected with the offering of money (the monks' profit in the Staffan legend, and the taxes in the mound in Ynglingatal).

And there is also the tradition (as written in *Ögmundar þáttur dytts*) of the god Freyr going about on a peregrination, with a statue of the god being carried about in a wagon throughout the district, drawn by horses. Originally, the god Freyr traveled about in a horse-drawn wagon, and later on Staffan traveled about on horseback.

Suffice to say, I think the identification of the Northern Staffan/Steven with the Heathen Freyr is sound. That said, what does it mean? What sorts of practices do we see on St. Steven's Day that might be applicable to Heathen worship? It turns out, there are quite a few, mostly involving horses, as one might expect.



One cares for the horses of some stranger in some not-close village, or even another parish; grooming, feeding, watering, rubbing down, etc. The deed is expected to be repaid with a fine breakfast.

Horses are given the leftover ale from the previous night, and bled in order to make them healthy (bleeding was regarded as a healing practice at the time).

A procession, known as *Staffanskede*, is also undertaken, where mounted youths take off before dawn and go from village to village in a sort of race, singing the *Staffansvisa* from house to house, in return for which they are to be treated to ale.

The custom recalls other visiting traditions, such as caroling, wassailing and the like. The Swedish lyrics of the carol can be found here (<http://www.xn--julsnger-d0a.se/luciasanger/sankt-staffans-visa-fran-norrland/>). I must say I like the music; it's quite haunting in this rendition.


On the evening of St. Staffan's Day, there are games, music, dancing, and of course more feasting. Lloyd also tells us of a custom involving bringing in a *Jul Baske*; what we now know as a Christmas Tree.

This, then, is the second of the three days of Yule. Horse-racing, visiting and caroling, feasting and dancing and music.

And the third? I think we found the third day of Yule in our exploration of St. Knut's Day. The last of the food is eaten and drink is guzzled, the decorations are taken down, there is guising in spirit-costume to scare the neighbors, and a ritual drama is enacted to cap the celebration.

When the Yule celebration was merged with the Christmas holiday, it necessarily lost two of its three days (but Christmas itself was extended to twelve, to match the Christian obsession with the number, between Christmas and Epiphany, and since become our Twelve Days of Christmas). What was Knut's Day, until it was moved yet again to prevent confusion with the “more important” dates of the Christian calendar. The third day of Yule.

And there we have the cycle of holidays leading up to Yule. I may well have a few more articles on specific topics (because even with all this, I've only scratched the surface), but I think we have a very solid foundation for a plethora of celebrations designed to discourage disobedient children and reward the good, mark the triumph of the sun over the longest night of the year, the changing of the year itself, and the middle of the winter season as people experienced it.

I personally think that's a whole lot more worthy of celebration than cramming everything into a single day. Our gods and ancestors deserve a lot more. 

** It should be noted that all the places named are in or near Gävleborg County, Sweden, just north of Uppsala, which largely overlaps Halsingland. We're talking about a very small district within modern Sweden, which just happens to be just north of the highest concentration of Freyr-related place-names in Sweden, around Uppsala.*


By Joseph godi 19 December 2016

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News from the Board

On December 18, the Skylands Board of Directors held their annual meeting. Don V. was confirmed as Vice-President and Randi R. was confirmed as Secretary for the next two years.

The Board has developed an application for membership for new members to be implemented following Yule 2018. The application will help us to collect useful information about prospective members and will be a key input to the membership acceptance process.

In addition, the Board has been busy developing the detailed 2018 Calendar of events. We plan to share the details with the Fellowship at Yule. It looks like we have a very exciting year ahead! 



Skylands January Calendar

Yule Celebration

Join us as we celebrate a traditional Germanic Yule at our vé (sacred space) in Stanhope, NJ. For those wishing to drink alcohol, we ask that you BYOB, but we ask all adult (18+) guests to donate \$15 to help offset the costs of food, soft drinks, and other expenses. Donations will be accepted at the door.

If you have not been at one of our other events in the past, please contact us before RSVPing. Newcomers will not be admitted to Yule as their first event.

Yule was one of the three great sacrificial feasts mentioned in Snorri Sturluson's Ynglinga Saga, where he said that Odin ordained a sacrifice be done "for a good crop." Many pre-Christian Yule and New Year's customs were later incorporated into Christmas celebrations, and we will be incorporating a variety of customs into our celebration.

Date: Saturday, January 13, 2018
Time: 01:00 PM to 10:00 PM
Location: Stanhope, NJ

Ásatrú 101

Ásatrú 101 classes are designed for both the beginner who wants to learn the very basics, to the advanced Ásatrúar who is interested in hearing new perspectives, and learning how we at the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship do things.

The subject of this week's class is The Afterlife. What does the lore say happens to us after we die? Everyone knows about Valhalla, but the reality is a lot more complicated, with numerous different afterlife conceptions, including reincarnation.

Date: Sunday, January 7, 2018
Time: 02:00 PM to 04:00 PM
Location: Morris County Library, 30 E. Hanover Ave., Whippany, NJ

Full Moon Offering

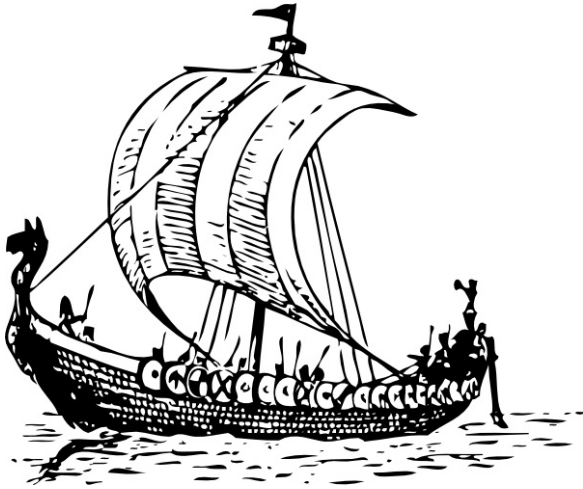
Date: January 1, 2018
Date: January 31, 2018

New Moon Offering

Date: January 16, 2018

Everyone is encouraged to make an offering to his or her local land-spirits. By making regular offerings, we increase our bonds of friendship with the spirits of the earth. Such offerings may be made on the Full Moon or the New Moon.

Save the Date!



- **Yule Celebration** – Saturday, Jan. 13
- **Meet & Greet** – Saturday, Feb 10
- **Sumarmál** – Saturday, Apr. 21
- **Midsummer** – Saturday, Jun. 23
- **Winter Nights** – Friday-Sunday, Oct. 12-14
- **Krampusnacht** – Saturday, Dec. 8

Help Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship runs both *Ásatrú 101* classes and *Rúna Workshops*. We hold celebrations for the major holidays in the heathen calendar. We run several on-line sites and produce this newsletter. All of this is possible through donations from members and friends. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship.

Donate today! http://www.skylandsasatru.org/?page_id=183

Follow Skylands On-line!

For more information about our tribe and upcoming events, please visit our website at www.skylandsasatru.org

Don't forget to *friend* us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/skylandsasatru/>

Remember to sign up for our events on our Meetup page: <http://www.meetup.com/NJ-Asatru/>

Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship is also on Twitter. Follow us at: https://twitter.com/Skylands_Asatru

About Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

The Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship is a recognized 501(c)(3) religious organization based in northwest New Jersey. We practice the religion called Ásatrú, which is the modern expression of the ancient religion of the people of northern and western Europe before they converted to Christianity. We hold regular gatherings, some religious, some educational, and some social.

We encourage anyone whose ancestors once worshiped the Gods and Goddesses of the North to “come home” to Ásatrú. You're welcome here!

Skylands Report is the official newsletter of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship (SAF). It is a celebration of the accomplishments, the activities, and the plans of the SAF.

We welcome submissions of essays, short stories, poetry, and artwork. Write to us at fellowship@skylandsasatru.org. We would love to hear from you.

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