

Skylands Report



The e-newsletter of the Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

No. 17

www.skylandsasatru.org

March 2018

Winter Outreach

One of the goals of Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship is outreach. We state in our Goals and Principles:

“We believe in a robust program of outreach. Letting people know we are here, being active in our communities, and providing an incentive to join us through our example, is appropriate and necessary for the growth and prosperity of the tribe. We don't proselytize, but neither do we hide ourselves away in isolation.”



Lisa C., Wick M., and Don V. at the Long Valley Brew Pub

While we have several events throughout the year that are specifically open to all including our *Ásatrú 101* series of classes and various hikes and festivals throughout the year, winter is an ideal time for gathering at local restaurants and pubs – to raise a glass of ale, dine on delicious cuisine, and to discuss Ásatrú.

Just such an event was held in February at the Long Valley Brew Pub. The Pub is a wonderful stone and wood structure filled with history dating back to the 18th century when the area was known as “German Valley.” Those in attendance enjoyed the fresh brewed beer and the Wild Boar Quesadillas as well as German soft

pretzels. Wick M. and Don V. couldn't resist the temptation of the bratwurst sandwich. To our surprise, the "sandwich" is actually two sandwiches that are accompanied with a side of hot German potato salad. Needless to say no one went hungry.

On March 31, we will be visiting the Ship Inn Restaurant and Brewery. The Ship Inn is a traditional style English Pub but has recently expanded their menu to include German and Polish dishes as well. The Inn is also steeped in history being the first to brew beer on the premises in New Jersey following the era of prohibition.

We hope to see many tribe members in attendance and look forward to greeting anyone interested in learning more about Ásatrú and our Fellowship. 

Wardruna at Town Hall in NYC

Unless you've really not been paying attention to heathen music, you already are aware of the Norwegian band Wardruna. The act formed back in 2003 and has released three albums since 2009 each based on a runic theme: *Gap Var Ginnunga*, *Yggdrasil*, and 2016's *Ragnarok*. Their name means "Guardian of the Runes." Part of their skyrocketing fame came from having various songs featured during episodes of History Channel's *Vikings*. Lead singer Einar Selvik even appeared during an episode in the 2015 season.

While no one is quite sure what period Viking music may have sounded like, Wardruna with their use of old and historical instruments including primitive deer-hide frame drums, Kraviklyra, tagelharpe, mouth harp, lur, and goat horn probably come as close as we can imagine. With lyrics written in Old Norse, it is no wonder that the heathen community has embraced their efforts.

When the band announced their first North American tour, many area heathens were quick to acquire tickets for the New York City show at the historic Town Hall theatre and members of Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship were no exception.

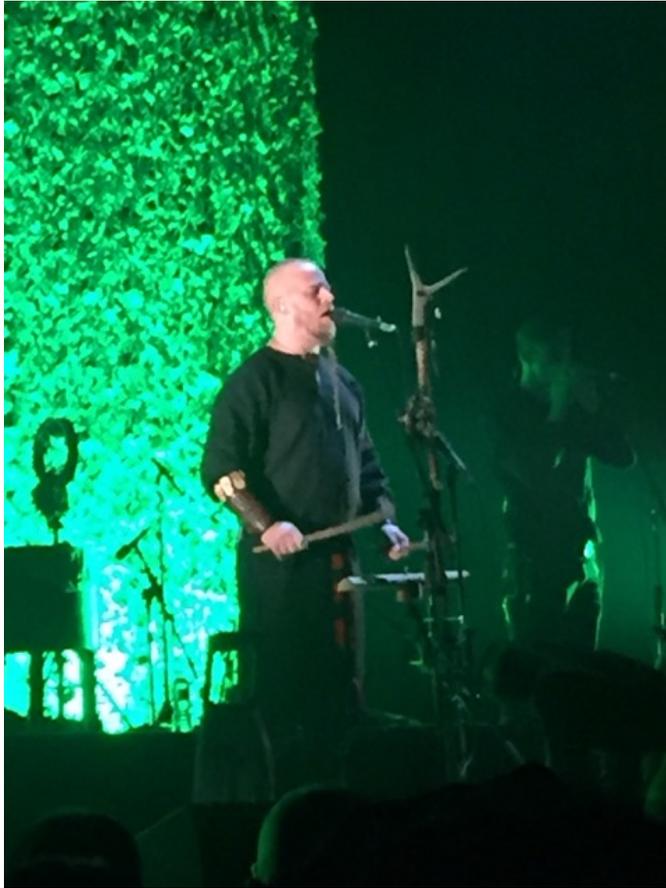
As soon as I left the Port Authority bus terminal, it was clear that something was amiss in midtown. People were walking the avenues adorned in Thor's hammers. As I arrived outside the theatre, it was like a reunion of various heathen tribes with members of the Svinfylkin



Wardruna perform "Algir" and form the Stadha posture

and the Irminfolk waiting to enter the auditorium. Other personalities like Annabel Lee of the bands Blood Axis and Knotwork and Colin Cleary, author of *Summoning the Gods* were also reportedly in attendance.

As the band took the stage, shouts of “Hail Odin” echoed from various voices all throughout the theatre. Wardruna did not disappoint. They rolled from song to song as the music and the



Einar Selvik at Town Hall

lights show worked together to convey the meaning of the Rune featured in each song. The band played multiple encores and seemed overwhelmed by the reaction of the New York City crowd.

Following the show Lisa C., Randi R., and Don V. grabbed a drink (or two) at the nearby Heartland Brewery and talked about the amazing show that we had just witnessed. As the evening was drawing to a close, Randi R. wandered back past the Town Hall only to run into three members of the band including Einar Selvik. Randi used the opportunity to speak to the band about Ásatrú here in the Northeast. This was an amazing end to otherwise wonderful evening. Based on the response the band received, I'm quite sure that they will be planning a return trip to the area. If you missed them on this tour, I strongly recommend that you catch the next one. 



Struck by Lightning

This month's feature article comes from the blog Tales from the Iron Wood (talesfromtheironwood.blogspot.com) written by Skylands member Don V. In this article Don explains the power of the ritual known as blót. –Ed.

At the heart of almost all heathen events is the ritual known as blót (blessing). Historically heathen rituals were bloody affairs. Oftentimes an animal was sacrificed to the Gods or to a specific God in order to win favor for a good crop or perhaps victory in battle. Other types of food were also used as offerings; these could be various crops or even an offering of ale or mead. It is said that there were even human sacrifices, most famously offered to Odin and that such offerings may have occurred at the temple at Uppsala in Sweden.

For those who, like me, were raised on pop culture, the thought of a heathen sacrifice makes our minds leap to Christopher Lee and the classic cult film *The Wicker Man* with its imagery of a fiery sacrifice by a Pagan cult. Fans of the History channel series *The Vikings* may also recall an early episode when Lagertha,



Christopher Lee as Lord Summerisle in the 1973 film The Wicker Man

the shield-maiden spouse of Ragnar Loðbrok, leads a sacrifice to the God Freyr for the coming harvest. An animal is slaughtered and the blood is poured over Lagertha to the dismay of the Christian onlookers. Such were the thoughts that coursed through my head as I navigated the turns on the dirt road leading to my first Ásatrú event.



Lagertha offers a sacrifice to Freyr in Vikings

There is nervousness and a sense of excitement when one gets to participate in a blót. My first blót occurred during the event known as Winter Nights. As dusk fell, around 50 people formed a circle around a medium-sized fire in the coolness of the late autumn air. The ritual began with a hammer hallowing of the space. I heard a horn blow from the north. The leader of the ritual, often called the Goði (Priest) or if it is led by a female the Gyðia (Priestess) faced the north raised a hammer over his head and proclaimed in a loud voice, "*Hamarr í Norðri, helga vé þetta ok hald*

vörð!” (Hammer in the north, hallow and hold this holy stead!) Next a horn blew in the east and the verse was repeated, “*Hamarr í Austri, helga vé þetta ok hald vörð!*” This continued for all four of the major directions of the compass and then once over us and once under us. The Goði spoke a number of words about the Disir, female spirits of our ancestral line who look over us from the Otherworld. Mead, a type of honey-wine that often takes the place of the blood of animals, was poured from a special vessel set aside for the ritual into a wooden blessing bowl. The Goði walked around the gathered circle with a tine cut from a local evergreen tree. He dipped the tine in the mead bowl, made the sign of the hammer of Thor and splashed each person who was gathered in the name of Odin, Thor, Freya, and Freyr. The power of the ritual was evident and I could imagine being splashed as my ancestors once had with the blood of a sacrificed animal. As the ritual came to a close the remaining mead was poured into the ritual fire.

There are no historic books from the Pagan era that provide step-by-step instructions for conducting a blót. This results in the fact that there is significant variation on how such rituals are performed. It is fairly typical that participants will be asked to provide an offering to the Gods. At one of the first blóts that I attended, a man offered a wooden cuckoo clock to the flames. It had belonged to his recently departed



Spirits dancing in the flames at FSH 2017 (photo courtesy of the Irminfolk Odinist Community)

father. It was a particularly touching moment. There is no doubt however that the most powerful blót that I ever witnessed was when a Viking-ship that had been built by the organizing group was filled with offerings from all of the participants and delivered to the flames. The blót had been made to the thunder-God Thor. As the fire consumed the ship, we could see the flames taking the form of spirits and dancing on the ship's bow (this was captured in numerous photos taken at the event). As if that weren't enough, the sky began to light up with lightning. At first someone asked if there were fireworks in the distance. All were struck with amazement as the entire night sky was illuminated with flashes of lightning. But never was there a drop of rain on our proceedings. Not even a cloud appeared over our heads.

Stephen McNallen explains the power of the blót in this way:

“The blessing is governed by the principle of exchange: ‘a gift calls for a gift.’ Giving gifts was a vital part of Germanic society. [...] The giving of gifts, then, creates a bond between the giver and the receiver. The Holy Powers [...] are our friends and our kin – so it is only right that we give them gifts to maintain the relationship...”

There can be little doubt about the power of the blót. Once one has stood in a circle surrounded by friends and family, heard the exuberant “hails” to the Gods and felt the connection to those Holy Powers, one’s perspective and life is indeed changed.

"A gift for a gift" is indeed a vital concept to understand and appreciate the blót. When we offer gifts of ourselves, of our loyalty to the Gods, they will indeed respond in kind. Sometimes that gift may fulfill our greatest need.

And sometimes it may come in the form of a magical display of lightning in the night sky. ⚡

By Don van den Andel 7 January 2018

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Tribal Milestones

Wick W. celebrates a Birthday on 11 March. Happy Birthday Wick!



Skylands March Calendar

Meet and Greet

Join us for an informal meet-and-greet at the Ship Inn Restaurant and Brewery. The Ship Inn was the first to brew beer on its premises following prohibition. The restaurant features a mix of traditional English, German, and Polish dishes and fresh-brewed English-style ales.

This is a perfect opportunity to get to know us, learn a little about what Ásatrú is (and isn't), and in general have a good time in a relaxed atmosphere.

Date: Saturday, 31 March 2018

Time: 06:00 PM to 8:30 PM

Location: 61 Bridge St., Milford, 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, 11 March 2018

Time: 02:00 PM to 03:30 PM

Location: Morris County Library, 30 E. Hanover Ave., Whippany, NJ

Full Moon Offering

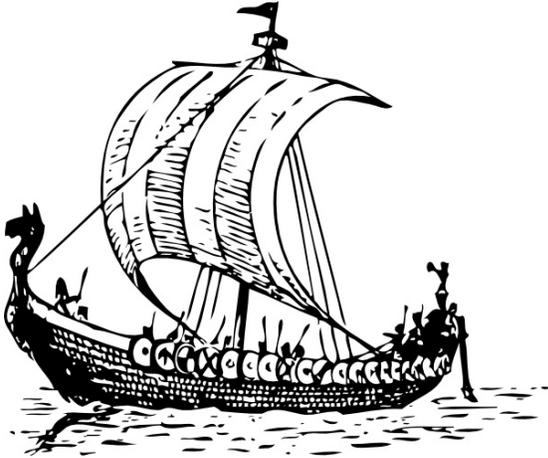
Date: 1 March 2018

New Moon Offering

Date: 17 March 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!



- **Meet & Greet** – Sat., 31 Mar.
- **Sumarmál** – Sat., 21 Apr.
- **Columcille Hike** – Sat., 19 May
- **Midsummer** – Sat., 23 Jun.
- **Kutztown Folk Festival** – Sat., 30 Jun.
- **Haustblot** – Sat., 22 Sep.
- **Winter Nights** – Fri.-Sun., 12-14 Oct.
- **Krampusnacht** – Sat., 8 Dec.

Help Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship

Skylands Ásatrú Fellowship teaches a variety of classes including our popular *Ásatrú 101* series. 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.

Published by Sigurd Press
Edited by Donald van den Anandel

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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