EXHIBITION

Telling America's Story in a Time of War:

The U.S. Office of War Information's STOCKHOLM OUTPOST 1942–1945

UNITED STATES EMBASSY STOCKHOLM

This exhibition is also available digitally, with additional material.
Please visit https://se.usembassy.gov/embassy/stockholm/cmr/office-of-war-information-exhibit/.

INTRODUCTION

In June 1942, the United States of America had been at war for six months. Its neutrality in the worldwide conflict that had raged since Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939 had been replaced in the wake of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor the previous December by a declaration of war, and a determination to preserve its liberties and defeat its foes. Unlike Denmark and Norway, Sweden had not been occupied by the Nazis, nor was it at war like Finland, but it had been surrounded and its more than a century old policy of neutrality was under grave pressure. Sweden's leaders feared the country could be attacked at any time.

It was at this moment that a new – and now largely forgotten – U.S. information agency, the Office of War Information, came into being. "Truth is our strength" was OWI's motto. Its Stockholm outpost would shape Swedish wartime views of the United States and its allies (commonly referred to then as the "United Nations") in a positive way and counter an aggressive and misleading Nazi propaganda onslaught. Arguably, however, OWI Stockolm's legacy was even greater. A case can be made that by giving Swedes confidence that the United States and its allies could win the war and by overcoming news shortfalls, the Stockholm outpost helped prevent an isolated Sweden from turning inward. In the process, it also contributed to making it a Western-oriented and integrated country with a global outlook after the war ended. OWI Stockholm's offices were located for the agency's entire three-year existence in Villa Åkerlund, which is today the residence of the U.S. Ambassador to Sweden. This exhibit represents the first major effort to tell "Outpost Stockholm's" important story.

Karl Jensen, head of OWI in Stockholm, who outmaneuvered the wily Goebbels, 1944.
Blair Bolles, "Outpost Stockholm," *Liberty Magazine*, August 5, 1944, p. 23, Liberty Magazine Historical Archive, 1924–1950,
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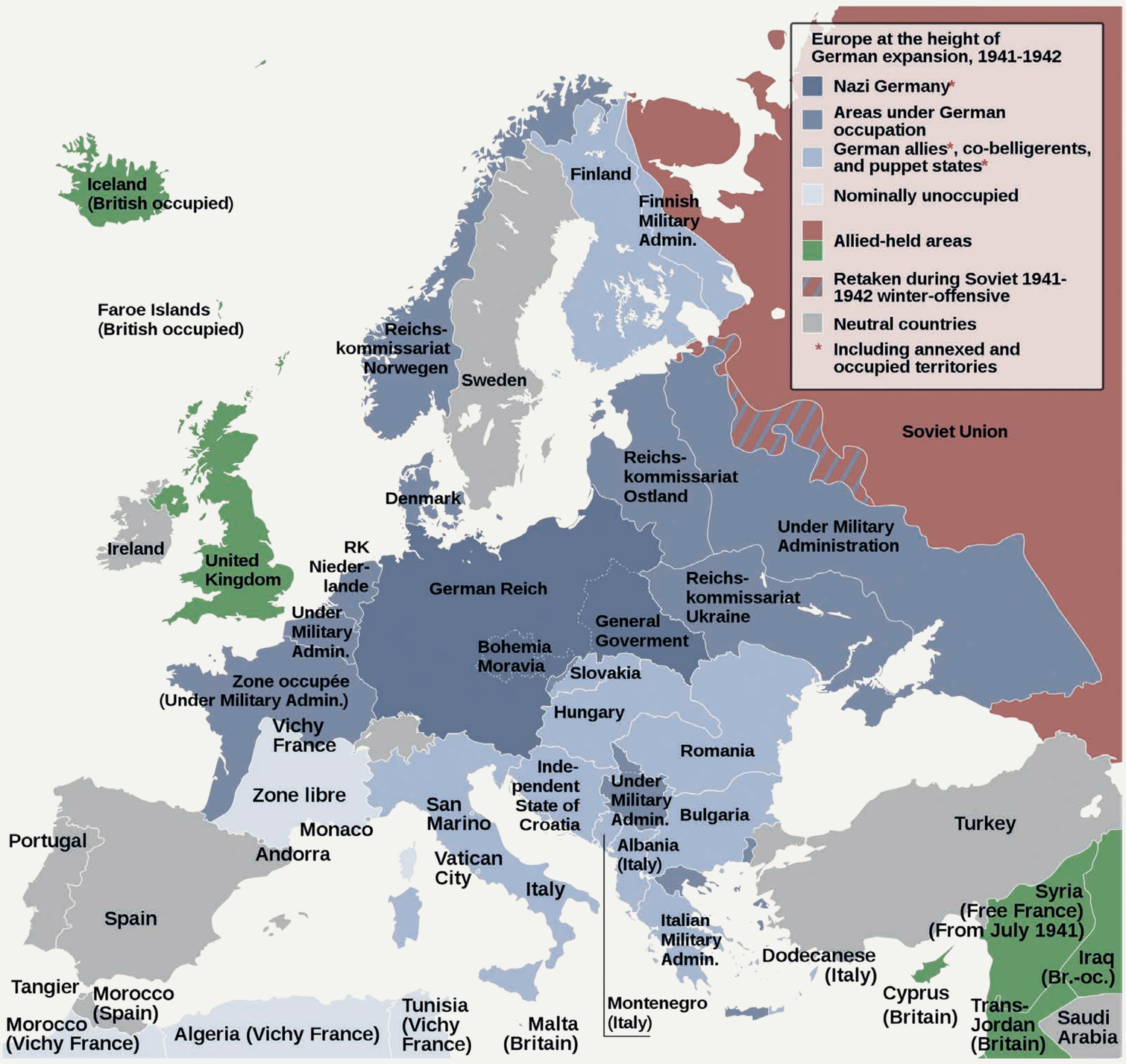


Image: Wikimedia

U.S. Embassy Stockholm Chargé d'Affaires ad interim Pamela M. Tremont.

Please scan the QR code below for a brief video welcome to the exhibit from CDA Tremont.

SELECTED DATES

1939

AUGUST 23
Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed

SEPTEMBER 1
Nazi Germany invades Poland; World War II begins in Europe

SEPTEMBER 17
USSR invades Poland

1940

Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson.
Image: Wikimedia

SEPTEMBER 15
Social Democratic Party wins the Swedish parliamentary election; Per Albin Hansson subsequently confirmed again as Prime Minister

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signs law establishing peacetime draft, September 16, 1940.
FDR Library Photograph Collection

NOVEMBER 5
Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) elected to a third term as U.S. President

1941

DECEMBER 7
Japan attacks Pearl Harbor; United States declares war on Japan

Minister Herschel Vespasian Johnson.

DECEMBER 11
Germany declares war on United States

DECEMBER 12
Career diplomat Herschel Johnson arrives in Stockholm from London to begin service as U.S. Minister

1942

MARCH 19
Danish-American Karl Jensen arrives in Stockholm to lead information effort

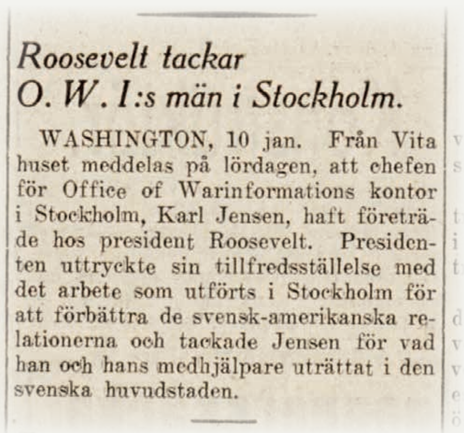
JUNE 13
FDR creates Office of War Information by Executive Order; CBS's Elmer Davis appointed director; playwright Robert Sherwood is appointed director of OWI's Overseas Branch

SUMMER
OWI Stockholm established; Karl Jensen appointed head

JUNE 28
Five Swedish newspapermen arrive in America on U.S. government-sponsored trip

DECEMBER 31
The U.S. government purchases Villa Åkerlund

1943


Roosevelt tackar O. W. I:s män i Stockholm.

WASHINGTON, 10 jan. Från Vita huset meddelas på lördagen, att chefen för Office of Warinformations kontor i Stockholm, Karl Jensen, haft företräde hos president Roosevelt. Presidenten uttryckte sin tillfredsställelse med det arbete som utförts i Stockholm för att förbättra de svensk-amerikanska relationerna och tackade Jensen för vad han och hans medhjälpare uträttat i den svenska huvudstaden.

Svenska Dagbladet, Jan. 11, 1943. p. 18.

JANUARY 9
Karl Jensen meets with FDR who praises the work of OWI Stockholm

FEBRUARY
Seven regional divisions established within the Overseas Branch; Bjarne Braatoy serves as the chief of the Scandinavian Division, which covers Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and the Baltic States[1]

NOVEMBER 8
The OWI documentary "Swedes in America" with Ingrid Bergman makes its premiere

1944

JUNE 14
"Amerika bygger (America Builds)," which OWI Stockholm helped finance and organize, opens at National Museum

SEPTEMBER
Writer and former *Newsweek* editor Edward W. Barrett replaces Sherwood as director of the Overseas Branch, who resigns to work on Roosevelt's reelection campaign

NOVEMBER 7
FDR wins a fourth term as U.S. President

1 Joseph Barnes, "Fighting with Information: OWI Overseas," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1943), 40.

1945

Två vittnesmål om presidenten och pressen

Karl Jensen.

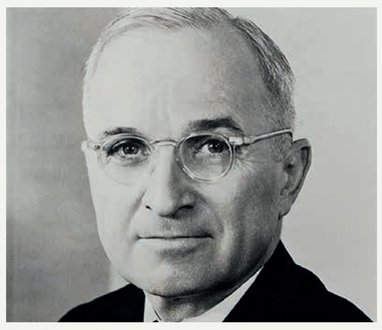
För miljoner unga amerikaner var Roosevelt presidenten — den ende de kände till, förklarar mr Karl Jensen, chef för amerikanska legationens pressavdelning. Mr Jensen beskriver sina intryck från Roosevelts pressconferenser, och det gör också Dagens Nyheters medarbetare redaktör Sten Hedman, vilken konstaterar att ingen som såg mannen vid det stora bordet, sprudlande av intelligens och vitalitet, kunde tro att han sedan många år var invalid genom barnförlamning.

— Värmen i hans personlighet, den svårdefinierbara charmen i hans väsen, hans personliga, alldeles okonventionella sätt att umgås med människor, det är vad man framför allt minns från ett sammanträffande med president

Forts. sista sidan, spalt ett.

Karl Jensen remembers FDR.
Dagens Nyheter, April 14, 1945, p. 1.

APRIL 12
FDR dies; Vice President Harry Truman becomes President


President Harry Truman.

MAY 8
Victory in Europe Day

SUMMER
OWI Stockholm closes

AUGUST 15
Victory over Japan Day

AUGUST 31
Pres. Truman abolishes the Office of War Information effective September 15

OWI Poster, no. 1; Artist: Eric Ericson, 1942.
Government & Geographic Information Collection, Northwestern University Libraries, World War II Poster Collection.

THE OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION

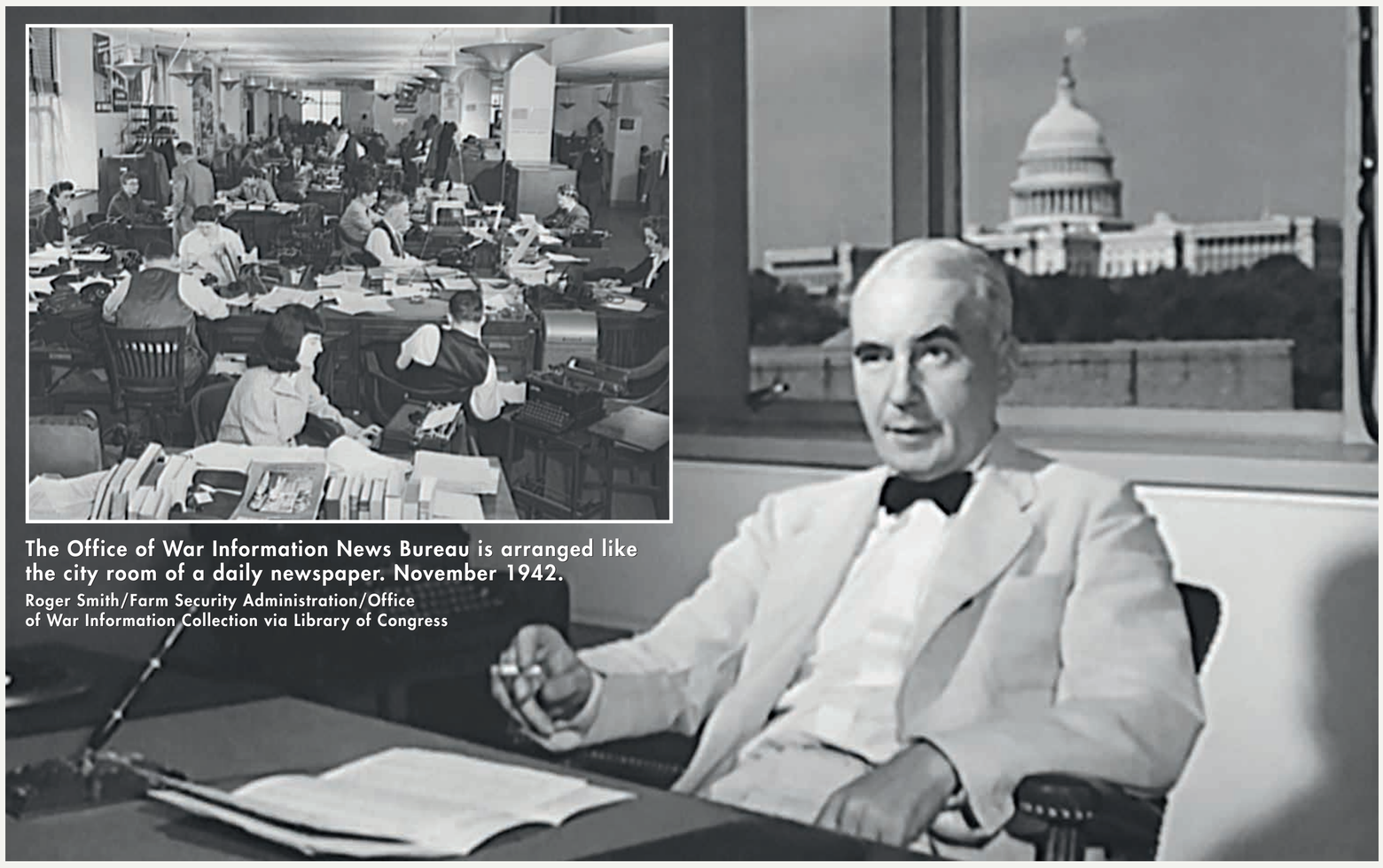
When World War II began in 1939, the United States was the only major power without a centralized information agency. In part due to dissatisfaction with America's WWI-era Committee on Public Information, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt failed early on to establish a single U.S. government organization to inform the American public and the world about U.S. aims and objectives. Instead, he created a handful of competing, overlapping agencies, none of them with a clear mandate.[1] By June 1942, however, the United States was at war, and after considerable debate within the U.S. government and among the public, the President became convinced a single coordinating body was needed.

FDR instituted the Office of War Information by executive order on June 13, 1942. The OWI was consolidated out of four existing agencies or parts of agencies.[2] The President appointed Elmer Davis, a highly respected journalist and radio commentator with a reputation for "accuracy, integrity, and simple good sense," as director of the agency, which was divided into a Domestic Branch and an Overseas Branch.[3]

Truth is Our Secret Weapon

Davis believed that the better Americans and their allies understood what the war was about, the harder they would work and fight to win it.[4] The basic directive of all units of the OWI was that the simple truth, offered in a friendly spirit, was the best possible propaganda.[5] The Overseas Branch of the OWI was led by playwright and Roosevelt speechwriter Robert Sherwood for the first two years. Its purpose was to convey information to the world at large that would contribute to victory. This was accomplished by its four divisions – Radio, News and Features, Publications, and Motion Pictures – which worked relentlessly to reach a diverse audience that included the enemy, allies in both the free and the occupied nations, neutral countries, and U.S. armed forces overseas.

The Overseas Branch established outposts in both allied and neutral countries, where local staff not only handled materials sent from the United States, but also supplemented those with materials prepared and distributed locally. From its headquarters in New York, the Overseas Branch eventually grew to include forty outposts. London was the first foreign office to be set up, followed by Stockholm. (London served in effect as a European OWI headquarters.) While overall policy originated in Washington, the outposts had the dual responsibility of accurately expressing OWI policy in all forms of media – film, radio, publications, photographs, exhibits, etc. – and supervising the operation of the equipment required for such diversified activities.[6]



The Office of War Information News Bureau is arranged like the city room of a daily newspaper. November 1942.
Roger Smith/Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Collection via Library of Congress

Elmer Davis, Director, Office of War Information (OWI).
Alfred T. Palmer/Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Collection via Library of Congress.

Ted Poston, African American desk editor of the Office of War Information, discusses a letter from one of the 240 African American editors to which he sends war news from Washington with his assistants. March 1943.
Alfred T. Palmer/Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Collection via Library of Congress

"WORLD'S FASTEST FIGHTING PLANE." OWI used printed materials, such as posters and leaflets, to carry America's message abroad. This poster also came in Turkish, Portuguese, and Arabic.
National Archives and Records Administration

1 Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black, *Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Propaganda and Profit Shaped World War II Movies* (London: University of California Press, 2000), 50.

2 These agencies were: the Office of Government Reports (created in late 1939), the Division of Information of the Office for Emergency Management (May 1941), the Foreign Information Service of the former Office of the Coordinator of Information (July 1941), and the Office of Facts and Figures (October 1941). News and Features Bureau Training Desk, "Manual of Information, News and Features Bureau, Office of War Information, Overseas Branch," February 1, 1944.

3 Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1978), 31.

4 Elmer Davis and Byron Price, *War Information and Censorship* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1943), 9.

5 Joseph Barnes, "Fighting with Information: OWI Overseas," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1943), 43.

6 U.S. Office of War Information, "OWI in the ETO: A report on the activities of the Office of War Information in the European Theatre of Operations," January 1944 – January 1945.

A CLOSER LOOK AT OWI STOCKHOLM

OWI's Stockholm outpost occupied the basement and ground floor of Villa Åkerlund at Nobelgatan 2 in the city's *Diplomatstaden* (Diplomatic Quarter). The OWI workspace consisted of ten offices, a photography lab, and two printing rooms. Karl Jensen was the director.

The activities and accomplishments of OWI Stockholm are described in consecutive newspaper articles published by the American journalist Blair Bolles in *The Washington Sunday Star* and *The New York Times* in May 1943. The page two May 9 *Sunday Star* article reads in part:

> "Paul Joseph Goebbels [the Nazi propaganda minister] has been fighting a losing battle here, where American propaganda has slowly overwhelmed the Nazis' energetic and carefully planned effort to convince the Swedes that Germany has right on her side and is bound to win the war.
>
> [...] American official propaganda is spread though Sweden by a staff of 43 men and women, 14 of them Americans. Their `field headquarters' is a beautiful red brick house on the edge of Stockholm, overlooking a quiet lake and green park. The nature of the business going on in this retreat is revealed by a radio tower surmounting it.
>
> [...] For a long time, a population here, uninformed about the strength and determination of the United States and her Allies, thought a German triumph almost inevitable.
>
> [...] The American story is told here in close cooperation between the Office of War Information and State Department agents. The brick house in the park is officially listed in America as the Stockholm outpost of the OWI. The Swedes know it as the press division of the American Legation."

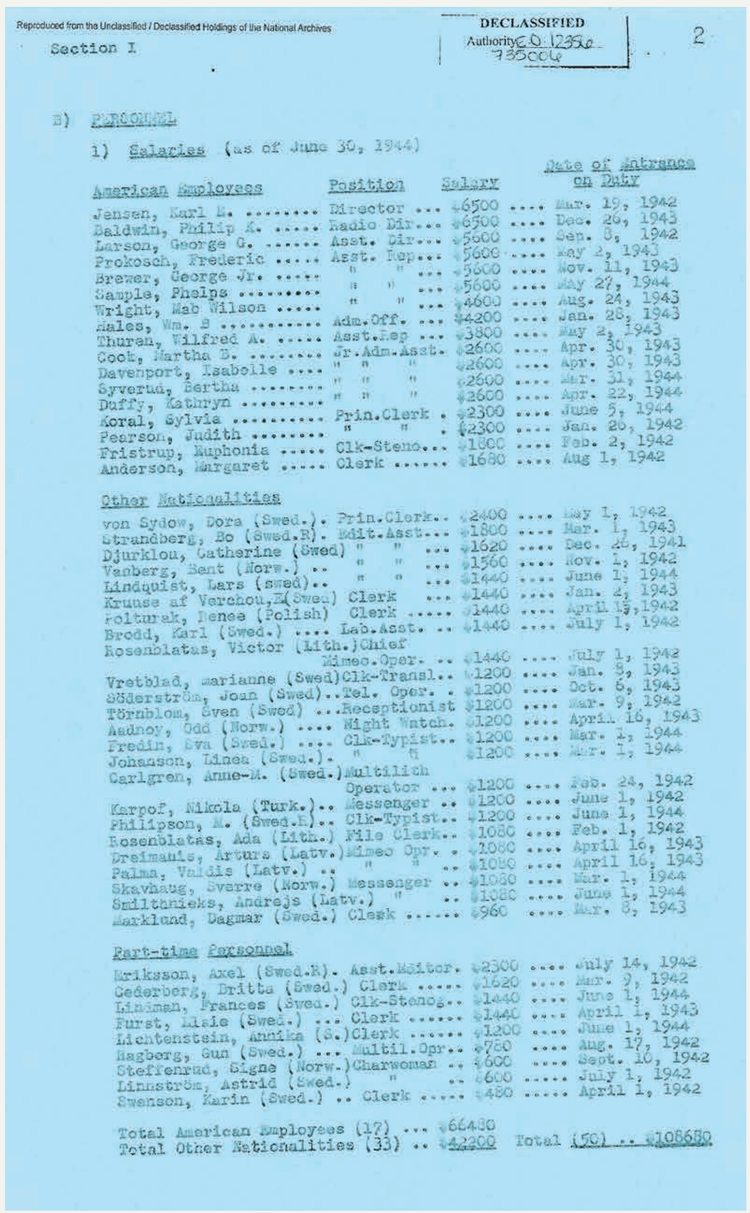
(Note: The "Legation" was the title of the U.S. diplomatic mission to Sweden until 1947.)

Nyheter tryckas i simbassängen.

Amerikanska staten har förvärvat den Åkerlundska villan, Nobelgatan 2 i Diplomatstaden, och där äro nu press- och informationsavdelningarna av legationen inrymda. Den eleganta lilla simhallen i källarvåningen är ombildad till tryckeri, där stå rader av dupliceringsapparater, som spotta amerikanska nyheter. Blomsterrummet är pressattachéns ämbetsrum, och skrivbord och skrivmaskiner ha trängt in i de gemak som husets herre och fru en gång hade till sovrum. Den översta bilden visar dupliceringsarbetet i simbassängen, och bilden till höger det charmanta sovrum som husets fru hade.

Se sidan åtta, spalt tre.

"News Printed in the Swimming Pool," ***Dagens Nyheter*****, January 3, 1943, p. 1.**



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Section I — 2

B) PERSONNEL

1) Salaries (as of June 30, 1944)

American Employees	Position	Salary	Date of Entrance on Duty
Jensen, Karl B.	Director	$6500	Mar. 19, 1942
Baldwin, Philip A.	Radio Dir.	$6500	Dec. 26, 1943
Larson, George G.	Asst. Dir.	$5600	Sep. 8, 1942
Prokosch, Frederic	Asst. Rep.	$5600	May 2, 1943
Brewer, George Jr.	" "	$5600	Nov. 11, 1943
Sauple, Phelps	" "	$5600	May 27, 1944
Wright, Mab Wilson	" "	$4600	Aug. 24, 1943
Hales, Wm. B	Adm.Off.	$4200	Jan. 28, 1943
Thuren, Wilfred A.	Asst.Rep	$3800	May 2, 1943
Cook, Martha B.	Jr.Adm.Asst.	$2600	Apr. 30, 1943
Davenport, Isabelle	" " "	$2600	Apr. 30, 1943
Syverud, Bertha	" " "	$2600	Mar. 31, 1944
Duffy, Kathryn	" " "	$2600	Apr. 22, 1944
Koral, Sylvia	Prin.Clerk	$2300	June 5, 1944
Pearson, Judith	" "	$2300	Jan. 20, 1942
Fristrup, Euphonia	Clk-Steno.	$1800	Feb. 2, 1942
Anderson, Margaret	Clerk	$1680	Aug 1, 1942

Other Nationalities			
von Sydow, Dora (Swed.)	Prin.Clerk	$2400	May 1, 1942
Strandberg, Bo (Swed.B)	Milt.Asst.	$1800	Mar. 1, 1943
Djurklou, Catherine (Swed)	" "	$1620	Dec. 28, 1941
Vanberg, Bent (Norw.)	" "	$1560	Nov. 1, 1942
Lindquist, Lars (swed)	" "	$1440	June 1, 1944
Kruuse af Verchou, E(Swed)	Clerk	$1440	Jan. 2, 1943
Poltorak, Renee (Polish)	Clerk	$1440	April 15, 1942
Brodd, Karl (Swed.)	Lab.Asst.	$1440	July 1, 1942
Rosenblatas, Victor (Lith.)	Chief Mimeo.Oper.	$1440	July 1, 1942
Vretblad, Marianne (Swed)	Clk-Transl.	$1200	Jan. 8, 1943
Söderström, Joan (Swed)	Tel. Oper.	$1200	Oct. 6, 1943
Törnblom, Sven (Swed)	Receptionist	$1200	Mar. 9, 1942
Aadnoy, Odd (Norw.)	Night Watch.	$1200	April 16, 1943
Fredin, Eva (Swed.)	Clk-Typist	$1200	Mar. 1, 1944
Johansson, Linea (Swed.)	" "	$1200	Mar. 1, 1944
Carlgren, Anne-M. (Swed.)	Multilith Operator	$1200	Feb. 24, 1942
Karpof, Nikola (Turk.)	Messenger	$1200	June 1, 1942
Philipson, M. (Swed.B)	Clk-Typist	$1200	June 1, 1944
Rosenblatas, Ada (Lith.)	File Clerk	$1080	Feb. 1, 1942
Dreimanis, Artur (Latv.)	Mimeo Opr.	$1080	April 16, 1943
Palma, Valdis (Latv.)	" "	$1080	April 16, 1943
Skavhaug, Sverre (Norw.)	Messenger	$1080	Mar. 1, 1944
Smilthnieks, Andrejs (Latv.)	"	$1080	June 1, 1944
Markland, Dagmar (Swed.)	Clerk	$960	Mar. 8, 1943

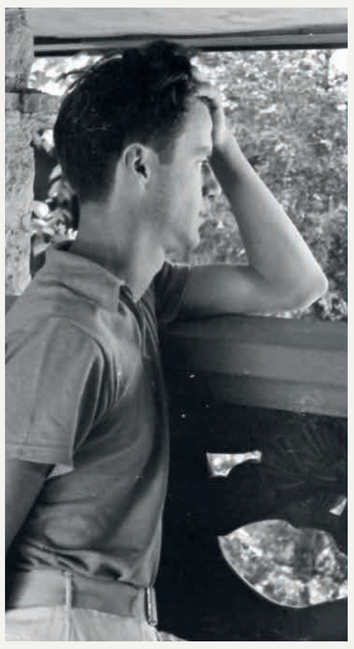
Part-time Personnel			
Eriksson, Axel (Swed.B)	Asst.Janitor.	$2300	July 14, 1942
Cederberg, Britta (Swed.)	Clerk	$1620	Mar. 9, 1942
Lindman, Frances (Swed.)	Clk-Steno.	$1440	June 1, 1944
Furst, Ilsie (Swed.)	Clerk	$1440	April 1, 1943
Lichtenstein, Annika (S.)	Clerk	$1200	June 1, 1944
Hagberg, Gun (Swed.)	Multil.Opr.	$780	Aug. 17, 1942
Steffenrud, Signe (Norw.)	Charwoman	$600	Sept. 10, 1942
Linnström, Astrid (Swed.)	"	$600	July 1, 1942
Swenson, Karin (Swed.)	Clerk	$480	April 1, 1942

Total American Employees (17) ... $66400
Total Other Nationalities (33) .. $42300 Total (50) .. $108680

Personnel List
Report on Activities of OWI, Sweden**, August 30, 1944, p. 2.**
National Archives and Records Administration

OWI STOCKHOLM
LEADERS AND SELECTED STAFF

KARL JENSEN (1907–?)



Karl Jensen at Taliesin.
Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE, Manuscripts and Archives Department, John Gordon Rideout papers.

Karl Edward Jensen was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, on May 8, 1907. At age eighteen, he immigrated to the United States, arriving in Detroit, Michigan, in December 1925.[1] By 1930, he was living in New York and working for *Architectural Record* as a photographer when Frank Lloyd Wright asked him to serve as his personal secretary at Taliesin, the architect's famed home and studio in Wisconsin.[2]

While working for Wright, Jensen developed a skill for exhibition planning. These were multimedia presentations, relying on photographs, models, and drawings, as well as more innovative technologies such as slides and film, to promote Wright's work and project his ideas.

Jensen left Taliesin in October 1934 and relocated to Washington, D.C., where from 1935 to 1941, he worked as a senior administrative assistant at the National Youth Administration (NYA), which was part of the Works Progress Administration.[3] Jensen, who had married Virginia Boyle in 1939, left the NYA in 1941 to join the Division of Information (DOI) within the Office for Emergency Management. The DOI's principal function was to explain the government's defense activities in response to the war in Europe.

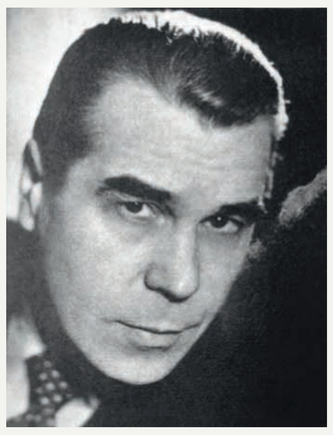
On March 19, 1942, Jensen arrived in Stockholm as an employee of the Coordinator of Information (like DOI, it was an OWI predecessor organization). When he was selected to head the new OWI outpost, he was the agency's first staffer assigned to an outpost other than London. In articles in the Swedish press he was described as the Legation's press attaché, an architect, and a Wright scholar.

1 Card Manifests, 1906–1954, Record Group 85, National Archives and Records Administration.

2 1930 United States Census; Frank Lloyd Wright Correspondence (Fiche ID J010D07), Getty Research Institute; "A Directory of Frank Lloyd Wright Associates: All Associated People, 1889-1959," available online at https://jgonwright.net/pdf-docs/142.pdf.

3 Frank Lloyd Wright Correspondence (Fiche ID J024A02), Getty Research Institute; Boyd's District of Columbia Directories, 1935-1939; Finding Aid for Record Group 119, National Archives and Records Administration.

GEORGE LARSON (1904–1977)



George Larson, 1950.
Courtesy Pamela Persson.

George Larson was born Göran Larsson in Söderfors near Uppsala on August 10, 1904. According to his daughter, Larsson emigrated to the United States in 1925 after training with his mother who owned two photo studios. He joined the U.S. Legation in Stockholm on September 8, 1942. By June 1944, he was the Assistant Director of OWI Stockholm. (After the OWI closed, he continued at the Legation as the press attaché for a time, marrying Ulla Collett, the daughter of a prominent Swedish architect in March 1946.)

FREDERIC PROKOSCH (1908–1989)

The celebrated writer Frederic Prokosch was born in Madison, Wisconsin on May 17, 1908. He graduated from Haverford College in 1925 (at 16) and received a PhD in English from Yale in 1932. He published his first novel, *The Asiatics*, in 1935. Prokosch joined the Legation on May 2, 1943, after turning down a posting OWI Overseas Branch Director Robert Sherwood offered him in Lisbon. He had lived there before joining the OWI, and Lisbon was the setting for his 1943 novel, *The Conspirators* (and a 1944 movie). As a cultural attaché, he frequently spoke about American literature to Swedish audiences. (Once OWI Stockholm closed, Prokosch stayed in Europe and continued his literary career. His 1983 work, *Voices: A Memoir*, devotes two chapters to his time in Stockholm.)

U. S. A:s diktare mest romantiker.

Frederic Prokosch.

— Amerika är framför allt det sällsamma och gåtfulla landet, ofärdigt, gränslöst, växande, det gäller för diktarna att fatta dess mystik, och de största av dem har varit romantiker, inte realister.

"U.S.A.'s Poets Mostly Romantics," *Dagens Nyheter*, May 21, 1943, p. 11.

skriver om
PROKOSCH
SKYAR ÖVER EUROPA

Prokosch in an ad for his 1941 novel *The Skies of Europe*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, Sept. 24, 1942, p. 6.

MAB WILSON (1909–1988)

Mab Wilson at the top of the steps leading from the garden of Villa Åkerlund toward the water. Likely Fall 1943.
Courtesy Alexandra Isles.

Mab Wilson was born on October 9, 1909 in San Francisco. After working in advertising for Saks Fifth Avenue, she was at *Vogue* for many years as a beauty and copy editor. Her first marriage was to William Wright. She joined the U.S. Legation on August 24, 1943. She married her second husband, Count Carl Adam Moltke, who was a member of the Danish resistance, in Stockholm on May 26, 1944. She appeared frequently in the Swedish press, often providing insights on women in America. (After the war, she eventually returned to *Vogue* in New York and was at Tiffany & Co and then Bergdorf Goodman. She retired to Ireland.)

CATHERINE DJURKLOU (1909–1977)

Catherine Djurklou and son Nils Djurklou, ca. 1943.
Courtesy Nils Djurklou Jr.

Catherine Djurklou (née Harrison) was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. She was a first cousin of Dillon Ripley, the 8th Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. She came to Sweden in 1932 to serve as a secretary at International Match Co. In 1936, she married Baron Gustaf Djurklou. In 1941 she was recruited to work as a cultural assistant at the U.S. Legation. She started on December 26. By June 1944, she was an editorial assistant at OWI Stockholm. (In 1952, when the Fulbright Commission was established in Sweden, she became its first executive director. She held the position until her retirement in 1973. From 1970, she was also a board member of the Sweden – America Foundation.)

A FEW REFLECTIONS ON OWI STOCKHOLM AND THE UK, GERMANY, AND SWEDEN

In order to better understand how OWI Stockholm operated, it is important to consider U.S. cooperation with its British ally in winning over Swedes. Defining more clearly how Germany attempted to sway the Swedish public is helpful. It is also useful to note two ways Swedish authorities chose to explain Swedish neutrality and Sweden to the American public – and later to the wider world – as well as the Swedish commission which signaled a new Swedish tack with the United States.

OWI Stockholm and the United Kingdom

U.S. wartime reporting on OWI Stockholm emphasized the role Americans played in defeating the Nazi propaganda campaign in Sweden. However, the British role was crucial, and not just in providing a secure bastion in London for the OWI to use as its European headquarters. With its Ministry of Information (MOI) and the BBC, the United Kingdom had a full range of information tools and programs at its disposal to shape public opinion in the rest of Europe, including Sweden. The OWI and MOI worked together at all levels, and in the United States as well.

The story of the cooperation between British Legation press attaché (and British Special Operations Executive man) Peter Tennant and U.S. Legation press attaché Karl Jensen has yet to be told. What is clear is that in some areas it was close. To cite one example, in April 1944 the two Legations launched a joint press service for London and Washington with "cables" (reports) co-signed by Tennant and Jensen five times a day containing summaries of Swedish news and editorials.[1]

When the war began, Swedes were more familiar with the United Kingdom than with the United States, and the OWI used that familiarity to elicit Swedish sympathy for the Allies. For instance, OWI Stockholm promoted the Academy Award-winning 1942 drama *Mrs. Miniver*, which portrayed how the war had shaped the life of a British housewife and her family in rural England.

1 Jensen, Report on Activities of OWI, Stockholm, August 30, 1944, Box 10, Entry 6G, Record Group 208, National Archives and Records Administration.

OWI Stockholm and Germany

In his August 1944 article for *Liberty Magazine*, Blair Bolles had this to report about German propaganda in Sweden:

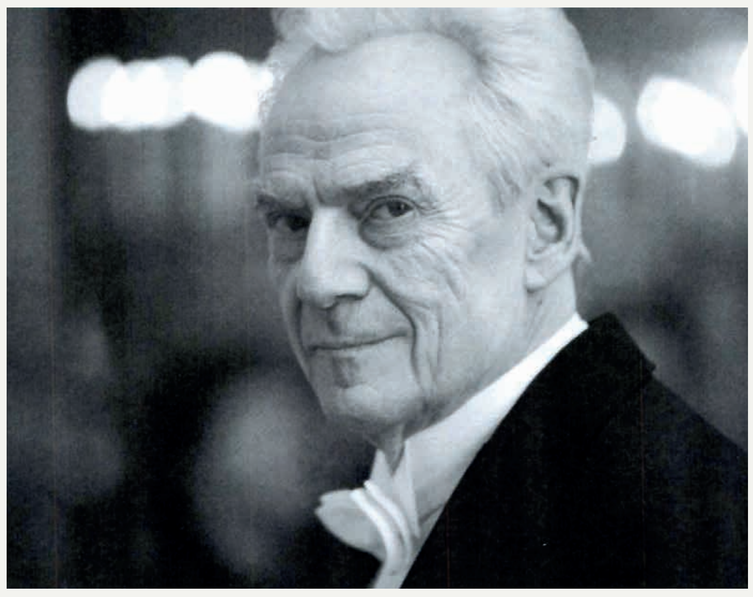
> "A hard fight confronted Jensen, the OWI's chief Scandinavian agent, upon his arrival in Stockholm. The Nazis were blanketing Sweden with their story. By cutting off Sweden from the world through their occupation of Norway and Denmark, the Germans had obtained a near monopoly over Sweden's import of news and information. The aim of the great Nazi campaign was to drag Sweden into the war on Germany's side without diverting any troops from military operations already under way.
>
> (...) When Jensen walked along the Stockholm streets ..., he found that many magazine kiosks were selling the Swedish language version of the Goebbels propaganda magazine, Signal. ... The air waves of Sweden were filled with German pronouncements from the Konigsberg and Weichsel radio stations.
>
> (...) Mailboxes were stuffed with German pamphlets. .... Societies were organized to spread the Nazi doctrine. Germany controlled five newspapers."

In his 2010 book, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish Experience in the Second World War*, the British scholar of Scandinavian Studies, John Gilmour, described German propaganda activity in Sweden in not dissimilar terms. He went on to note that: "Their onslaught targeted Swedish hearts as well as Swedish minds but although German propaganda was prolific, it was fundamentally unsuccessful."[2]

OWI Stockholm and Sweden

One of the ongoing challenges Sweden faced once the United States joined the war was to explain to the U.S. public what its neutrality meant. To this end, the Swedish government invited five prominent U.S. journalists to visit Sweden in 1943. Marquis Childs, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter and syndicated columnist who had made a name for himself with books

2 Gilmour, *Sweden, The Swastika, and Stalin* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 169.



Torgny Segerstedt, editor-in-chief of the Swedish newspaper *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, and the most outspoken Nazi critic, 1940.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

in the 1930s about Sweden, including *Sweden: The Middle Way*, was one. The others were: Blair Bolles of *The Washington Star*; the respected columnist and radio commentator Raymond Clapper; Charles Gratke of *The Christian Science Monitor*; and Nat Barrows, who was a foreign reporter for *The Chicago Daily News/Dayton* (Ohio) *Herald*. As the war progressed, it also became evident to Swedish leaders that more needed to be done to bolster Sweden's reputation and share information about Sweden abroad. In January 1945, a group of Swedish diplomats and businessmen created the Swedish Institute for that purpose.

The Swedish government remained concerned for much of the war that any false move by the Swedish government, its citizens, or foreigners in Sweden could be cited as a violation of Swedish neutrality and prompt a Nazi invasion. This concern in turn prompted the Swedish authorities, like other democratic wartime governments in other countries, to keep a close eye on the activities of all of the foreign missions in their capital. This included the U.S. Legation and its press office (OWI outpost) at Nobelgatan 2. This was despite Sweden's prevailing sympathies for its fellow democratic nations. In 1943, as the Nazis' victories on the battlefront, notably at Stalingrad, began to turn to defeat, the Swedish government moved to interpret its neutrality more liberally when it came to the United States and the Allies. This was reinforced by a decision of a Swedish public commission, that advised that Sweden should expand its cultural relations with the United States and end any attempt to restrict information efforts by the Allies.

OWI STOCKHOLM ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE SWEDEN

The leadership of the Office of War Information chose the capital of neutral Sweden as the location for its second outpost after London not only because they wanted to ensure that Swedes heard why the United States and the Allies (the "United Nations") were at war. The U.S. government was also keen to have a listening post in Scandinavia to learn what was going on in nearby Germany and the occupied nations of Europe. In addition, Sweden provided a useful and safe base from which the United States could convey news and information to the citizens of those countries.

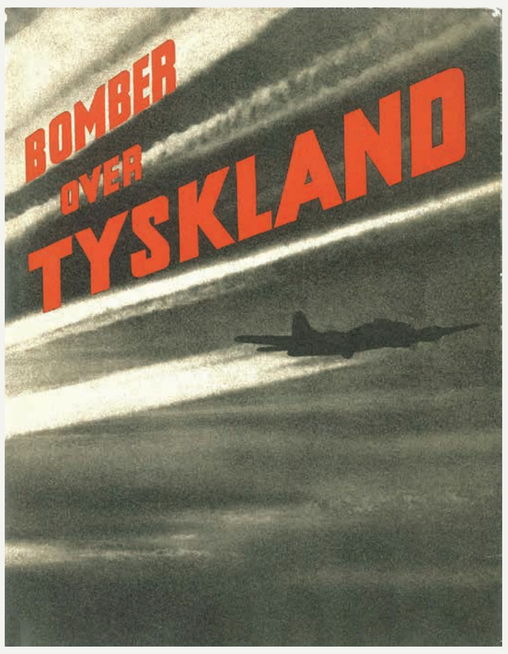
According to declassified reporting by the Stockholm outpost, one of its tasks was to collect information from inside Germany and other parts of Europe and convey it back to OWI Director Elmer Davis in a weekly intelligence report. Information came in various forms, but one of the more common ones were German newspapers, which were readily procured in the Swedish capital. Every week OWI Stockholm sent more than 20 German newspapers and magazines to its headquarters in Washington. Beginning in 1944, the outpost also sent the weekly German newsreel *Wochenschau* to Washington (via London). OWI Stockholm director Jensen stressed that this was the "[o]ne shown to the German people, not to be confused with the UFA reel which is made for export and is considerably toned down." The outpost also purchased German films of interest to be shipped back to the United States. OWI Stockholm was able as well to obtain interesting information from Denmark and Norway. Jensen noted in the same report that OWI Stockholm had sent Washington illegal newspapers from those two countries whenever it could obtain them.[1]

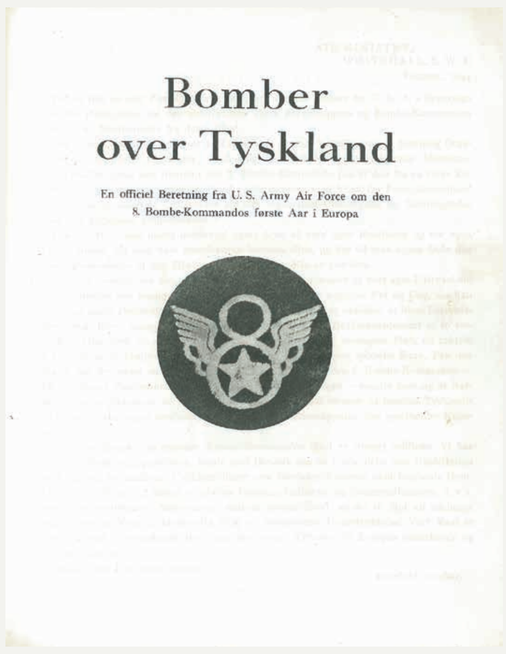
As the Swedish historian Harald Runblom has noted, Sweden was well-suited to serve as a "springboard" for news and information that the United States wished to pass to other Nordic countries. His 1992 article points out, for example, that, reportedly, in September 1943, some "18 Finnish newspapers received news" from OWI Stockholm by telephone. OWI Stockholm's Assistant Director George Larson was responsible for overseeing the flow of information into Norway and Denmark. While the Stockholm outpost did succeed at times in getting news and publications into Norway, due to the more repressive nature of the Nazi occupation there and what Runblom calls its "relative geographical inaccessibility," success came more readily in Denmark. Jensen himself confirmed this in his August 1944 report. He reported that due to OWI Stockholm's strong network, "There has been a continuous flow from this office of news, feature articles, photographs, American magazines, and books through several different lines." This included the production and distribution of *Nyt Over Atlanten*, or *News Across the Atlantic*, a four-page paper printed in Stockholm by the OWI. Initially the paper was smuggled into occupied Denmark and fed to the underground. Later issues of *Nyt* as well as the popular OWI magazine *foto revy* or *Photo Review* were printed clandestinely in Denmark.[2] OWI Stockholm also probably arranged to print and smuggle into Denmark a report on U.S. bombers that appeared to be the Danish railroad schedule.

1 Jensen, Report on Activities of OWI, Stockholm, August 30, 1944, pp. 171-173, Box 10, Entry 6G, Record Group 208, National Archives and Records Administration.

2 Ted Olson, "We Told the World," *Foreign Service Journal* (August 1968), 18.

Photo Review/foto revy 1/8, 1945.
Credit: *Historisk Samling fra Besættelsestiden/Museum of Southwest Jutland*





"Bombers over Germany" (trans. from Danish) with a fake cover of the timetable of the Danmarks Statsbaner (the Danish national railroad).
Credit: *Historisk Samling fra Besættelsestiden/Museum of Southwest Jutland*

OWI STOCKHOLM
NEWS, ADS, AND PUBLICATIONS

OWI Stockholm developed a close relationship with the Swedish press. It distributed thousands of feature materials, editorials, and photographs every month. (The outpost received three Morse news transmissions every day – one from OWI New York and two from London.) Newsreels were also important elements of the information effort. The office maintained contact with dozens of foreign correspondents and freelance journalists stationed in Stockholm, coordinated the exchange of information between the U.S. Legation and the press sections of other foreign legations, and monitored and reported on German propaganda in Sweden.[1]

Members of Jensen's staff facilitated the promotion of American manufacturers, such as the Ford Motor Company, U.S. Steel, and others, through local advertisements, and tracked the frequency of local ads for German-made products. In addition, the office maintained a library with an extensive collection of U.S. trade publications, technical journals, and scientific magazines, which were made available to local businessmen, manufacturers, and other specialists.

Kontakt, supplied by OWI Stockholm, and other magazines produced and distributed by OWI's overseas outposts were lushly illustrated, large-paged magazines modeled after *Life* and *Look*. These magazines were meant to demonstrate to people in Sweden, Europe, and elsewhere what a prosperous and vital nation the United States was.[2] OWI Stockholm also supplied American books to Swedish publishers for translation and publication and helped set up a library of American literature at Uppsala University.

Other activities included: conducting public opinion polls concerning the war, neighboring countries, Russia, and Swedish internal politics; preparing summaries of the Swedish press; and providing a weekly intelligence report to the OWI headquarters.

1 Memo titled "Outpost Stockholm," ca. 1944, Box 5, Entry 65, and Jensen, Report on Activities of OWI, Stockholm, August 30, 1944, Box 10, Entry 6G, Record Group 208, National Archives and Records Administration.

2 "We Speak to the World," An Exhibition of OWI Printing Under the Auspices of the American Institute of Graphic Arts at Low Library, Columbia University, New York, February-March 1946.

STEN HEDMAN:
På presskonferens hos Roosevelt.

Det råder en otwungen stämning vid Roosevelts presskonferenser. Här är en bild från en av presidentens mottagningar för tidningsmännen. Journalisterna hälsa Roosevelt välkommen då denne efter en semester återvänt till regeringsbestyren.

En presskonferens hos Roosevelt är en het dust för presidenten, som utsättes för ett veritabelt korsförhör av hundratalet journalister, berättar Dagens Nyheters utsände medarbetare

velt vet att hans ord fem minuter senare gå ut över en kontinent, kanske över världen, och med beundransvärd skicklighet ger han den finaste nyans åt sina svar. Av ett ja kan det bli ett par spalter, av en axel-

männen mötts av en ström av frågor från fyra hundra amerikanska kolleger om Sverige och svenska förhållanden. "Då vet ni hur det känns att vara president" sade Roosevelt då han hälsade de svenska journalisterna väl-

Sten Hedman: "At a Press Conference with Roosevelt," *Dagens Nyheter*, July 12, 1942. p. 1.

In June 1942, in order to give the Swedish public a clearer picture of the United States, the U.S. government sent five Swedish newspapermen on a six-month press tour to America (and Canada). The five were:

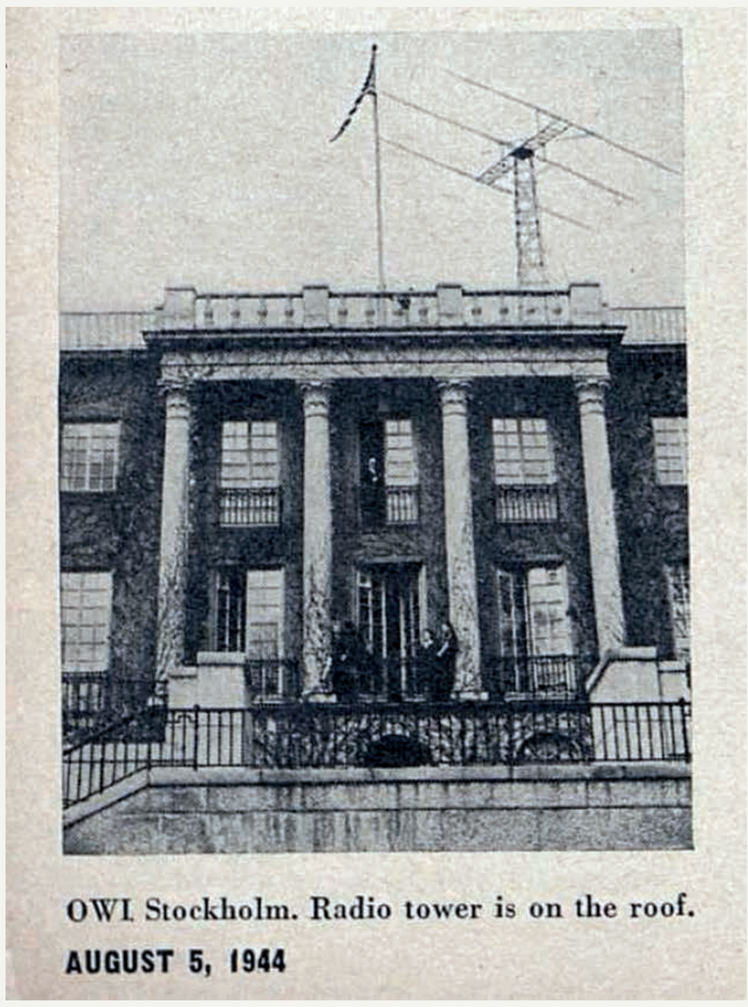
Sten Hedman, *Dagens Nyheter*

Nils Horney, *Social-Demokraten*

Gustaf Näsström, *Stockholms-Tidningen*

Vicktor Vinde, *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts Tidning* (the newspaper that was led by Torgny Segerstedt, the major anti-Nazi voice in Swedish media)

Alfred Öste, *Svenska Dagbladet*



OWI Stockholm. Radio tower is on the roof.
AUGUST 5, 1944

Blair Bolles, "Outpost Stockholm," *Liberty Magazine*, August 5, 1944, p. 23, Liberty Magazine Historical Archive, 1924–1950, © 2021 The Liberty Library Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

They arrived in London in mid-June 1942 and in the United States on Sunday, June 28.

U.S. correspondent Blair Bolles claimed in May 1943 that "[t]he tide turned" after the tour in terms of Swedish knowledge of the United States. That is probably an overstatement, but the many reports the Swedish journalists filed undoubtedly contributed to a much better understanding of "American power and spirit."

Wireless [radio] receiving room. Operator at work.
OWI Stockholm, date unknown. Still from *Sweden's Middle Road*, March of Time Collection, 1934–1951, National Archives and Records Administration. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/149269483.

OWI STOCKHOLM AND FILM

Movies – from Hollywood feature films to newsreels – played a significant role in the United States' information effort at home and abroad. Recognizing the extraordinary power movies had to mobilize public opinion, the OWI Stockholm director ensured U.S. films were widely distributed across Sweden. By early 1943, they accounted for from 75 to 80 percent of all features shown in the county. "The first importance of American films," according to Jensen, "was to block, by very weight of numbers, frequent showing of Axis productions."[1]

Within the Domestic Branch, the Bureau of Motion Pictures was the OWI's movie liaison office. The bureau reviewed Hollywood scripts, supervised the production of government propaganda shorts, and, in some instances, coordinated with the Office of Censorship to bar the export of racist films or films that portrayed America or Americans in a bad light.

The Overseas Branch of the OWI had the Bureau of Overseas Motion Pictures, directed by producer Robert Riskin. This group approved and also produced movies destined for Europe and other theaters of war. Riskin was interested in showing films to the rest of the world that "emphasized a spiritual and cultural vibrancy within the U.S."[2] His OWI films, such as the *Projections of America* series, were distributed both as part of commercial packages and through official government channels.

1 "OWI Foreign Heads Say Our Films Lead," *Film Daily*, January 8, 1943.

2 Ian Scott, "From Toscanini to Tennessee: Robert Riskin, the OWI and the Construction of American Propaganda in World War II," *Journal of American Studies* 40, no. 2 (August 2006), 349.

Ingrid Bergman, Still from the 1943 OWI film *Swedes in America*.
Record Group 59, National Archives and Records Administration. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FK6T4aaJoto&t=14s.

The first film in the *Projections* series was the 1943 short documentary *Swedes in America*, which had its premiere in Sweden. *Swedes in America* was narrated by and starred the Swedish actress Ingrid Bergman; the director was Irving Lerner, a politically engaged, independent filmmaker. The film honored the cultural, economic, and societal contributions of Swedish immigrant communities and demonstrated a respect for their traditions. Under Lerner's direction, the film treated a Minnesota dairy farmer and his family with the same reverence given to Carl Sandberg, Jenny Lind, and other famous Swedish Americans and Swedes.

Swedes in America was well received both in the United States and in Sweden; in 1943 it was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Short. After viewing *Swedes in America* along with several other OWI documentaries, the *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther wrote, "Noticeable in all these films is a lack of passion and punch. They narrate their stories simply and in a straight reportorial style.

Advertisement for *Swedes in America*. *Dagens Nyheter*, November 8, 1943, p. 24.

Nobody harangues or lectures…this, according to Mr. Riskin, is by very careful design. The psychological method of the American is to lay things factually on the line."[3] The British Ministry of Information was so impressed by the film that it requested 400 copies to show audiences in the United Kingdom.[4]

OWI Stockholm distributed dozens of films following the success of *Swedes in America*. In the fall of 1944, Jensen arranged for the widespread noncommercial distribution of five films from Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series, as well as "Toscanini," from the *Projections* series. Attendance in Sweden at OWI-distributed films from January through July 1944 numbered over one million.

Ingrid Bergman visiting a Minnesota farm, Still from the film *Swedes in America*.
Record Group 59, National Archives and Records Administration.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FK6T4aaJoto&t=14s.

3 Bosley Crowther, "Destination Abroad: Something about the Pictures Which the OWI is Sending Overseas," *New York Times*, August 29, 1943.

4 Scott, "From Toscanini to Tennessee," 354.

OWI STOCKHOLM AND THE ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE

OWI Stockholm used various forms of cultural activities to promote positive perceptions of the United States and the American way of life. Jensen's office organized and supported a steady stream of lectures, concerts, and exhibits that were specifically tailored to Swedish audiences.

In the summer of 1944, the OWI outpost financed and co-sponsored with Scandinavian-American groups in both Sweden and New York an exhibition titled *Amerika bygger* (*America Builds)*, which was the first architectural exhibition held at the National Museum in Stockholm. (Sverige-Amerika Stiftelsen – the Sweden-America Foundation – which was celebrating its 25th anniversary and the American Scandinavian Foundation were two of the groups.) Using skills learned in the studio of Frank Lloyd Wright, Jensen produced a world-class exhibition that was enthusiastically received by the public and critics alike. Featuring some 500 photographs and plans, the show occupied the entire main floor of the museum. It included books, magazines, moving pictures, and samples of building materials and fabrics. The material was divided into four principal sections: Pioneers of Modern Architecture, Outstanding Buildings of the Past Ten Years, U.S. Housing in War and Peace, and Planning in the USA. In addition, the exhibit included a section around the theme of "Historical American Buildings," with an additional fifty-five photographs.

***America Builds* exhibition hall, National Museum, Stockholm, 1944.** Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Prints and Photographs Division, Lot 9736.

Staff from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, including the Director of MOMA's Department of Architecture and Design, Elizabeth Bauer Mock, and the Supervisor of Circulating Exhibitions, Janet Hendrick O'Connell, assisted Jensen in preparing the exhibition.

A review in the American architectural journal *Pencil Points* pronounced the *America Builds* exhibition "brilliant." According to a cabled outpost report, the exhibition "received smash play in all Stockholm newspapers, literally crowding the war headlines to one side." After the formal opening on June 14, 1944, over 7,000 people visited the exhibition. Following a ten-week showing in Stockholm, the exhibit was sent on a countrywide tour.

The OWI organized musical performances as well as four lectures in connection with the exhibition. The lecture speakers included architects Alvar Aalto and Anders Tengbom, whose topic was Louis Sullivan. Karl Jensen aptly gave a lecture titled, "Frank Lloyd Wright and Organic Architecture."

***America Builds* exhibition advertised outside the National Museum. Photo by Karl Sandels. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Lot 9736.**

Crown Princess Louise and Crown Prince Gustaf Adolf of Sweden with the designer Anders Beckman at the opening of the exhibition. Marcel Breuer Papers, Syracuse University Library.

OWI STOCKHOLM AND ITS LEGACY

In his pioneering 1992 study about the Office of War Information and the Nordic countries, the Swedish historian Harald Runblom focused on "the aims of American propaganda." His emphasis was on the OWI's plans and strategies, not the implementation of those plans or evaluating their effects.[1] While Runblom was hesitant to assess the influence the Stockholm outpost had on Sweden, others, even during the war, were not.

The wartime American correspondent Blair Bolles wrote in *Liberty Magazine* in August 1944 that in the propaganda "Battle of Sweden" between the United States and Nazi Germany, America had won. But he then went on to state this about the Swedes' rejection of the Nazis: "What ultimately made possible the defeat of Goebbels was the fact that Sweden did not want to fall into the Germans' net. The country was waiting to hear the American story." In that same article Bolles chronicles the news shortfalls among Swedes that OWI Stockholm helped overcome, working with its U.S. and British counterparts.

Outpost director Karl Jensen and his staff also helped Swedes keep their faith in the Allied cause. As Runblom reports in his essay, a U.S. Legation survey a few months before the outpost opened revealed that Swedes feared the Allies were not strong enough to prevail. This would explain why, according to Bolles, Jensen "consistently stressed … the Allies will win."

For Albin Widen, the author of an article on September 7, 1944 in the San Francisco-based, Swedish-language weekly *Vestkusten* (commenting on Bolles's piece in *Liberty*), OWI Stockholm's legacy lay elsewhere. He wrote: "As far as the Swedes are concerned, the OWI activities have above all contributed to breaking the feeling of isolation." After that he added: "Because the focus to such a large extent [of the OWI's efforts] has been put on the purely cultural level, it has undoubtedly contributed to establish in Sweden a better knowledge and deeper understanding of America."[2]

Finally, from the perspective of a present-day U.S. Embassy Stockholm official, it is immediately apparent in reviewing the history of OWI Stockholm that America's public diplomacy in Sweden today owes a great debt to that band of talented men and women. As the United States and Sweden strive today as partners to uphold the cause of democracy in the face of rising authoritarian challenges, we can no doubt draw useful lessons from another troubled time when our liberties and freedom were on the line.

OWI poster, no. 79; Artist: Leslie Ragan, 1943.
Government & Geographic Information Collection, Northwestern University Libraries, World War II Poster Collection.

1 Runblom, Harald, "*American Propaganda in Scandinavia During the Second World War,*" in Networks of Americanization. Aspects of the American Influence in Sweden. Ed. by Rolf Lundén and Eric Åsard, Almqvist Och Wiksell, 1992.

2 Albin Widen, *Vestkusten*, Issue 36, September 7, 1944, p. 6; https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=VEST19440907&e=-------en--20--1--txt-txIN--------1; U.S. Embassy translation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people and organizations helped make this exhibition possible. First and foremost, I must thank Daria Gasparini of Robinson & Associates without whose collaboration and foundational research on OWI Stockholm and related topics this exhibit would not exist. She wrote the first exhibit text and collected much of the imagery. I would also like to single out the designer Ulrica Sasko, who caught the vision and stuck with the project to its realization. Several scholars have gone above and beyond on various topics and issues. John Gilmour of Edinburgh University helped me in myriad ways, including finding important documents, putting the outpost in the larger Swedish and European context, and reviewing part of the exhibit text. Michael Scholz of Uppsala University (Gotland) provided important early encouragement and guidance. Other scholars I would like to recognize are: Emil Stjernholm of Lund University, Nick Cull of USC, Ian Scott of the University of Manchester, and Harald Runblom and Dag Blanck of Uppsala University. Several people assisted with specific research questions: Indira Berndtson (Frank Lloyd Wright and Karl Jensen), Henrik Lundtofte (OWI Stockholm and the Danish resistance), Helena Kåberg (Amerika bygger), Martin Libytroein (*Dagens Nyheter* archives) and Ann-Kristin Wallengren of Lund University (*Swedes in America*). The children and grandchildren of Americans and Swedes at the U.S. Legation, and OWI Stockholm in particular, have been generous. Pat DiGeorge's wonderful memoir about her parents helped me understand what life was like for official Americans during the war. Alexandra Isles, Pamela Larsson Persson, and Lilie Djurklou and Nils Djurklou Jr. shared memories, photos, and other materials that enriched the exhibit. Likewise Blair Bolles Jr. deserves thanks. Tobin Tracey of the State Department's Bureau of Overseas Building Operations, Office of Cultural Heritage, commissioned a Historic Structures Report in 2019 on the U.S. Ambassador's Residence in Stockholm and enlisted Daria to research OWI Stockholm for it. That work formed the kernel and inspiration for this project. Kjell Åkerlund has been a key source on the history of the Residence. Embassy Copenhagen Public Diplomacy honed in on the Danish connection and an important Swedish-American article. Then Ambassador Ken Howery encouraged and approved this project as did then Deputy Chief of Mission/now Chargé d'Affaires Pam Tremont. Finally, I would like to thank my Embassy Stockholm colleagues Keith Sousa, Mike Howard, and the entire Public Diplomacy Section for their invaluable assistance, including Ann-Charlotte Olofsson (whose idea it was to hold the exhibit in the public green space). It is my hope this glimpse into the past of U.S.-Swedish relations will strengthen U.S.-Swedish relations for the future.

June 18, 2021

Williams S. ("Bill") Martin
Counselor for Public Affairs, U.S. Embassy Stockholm

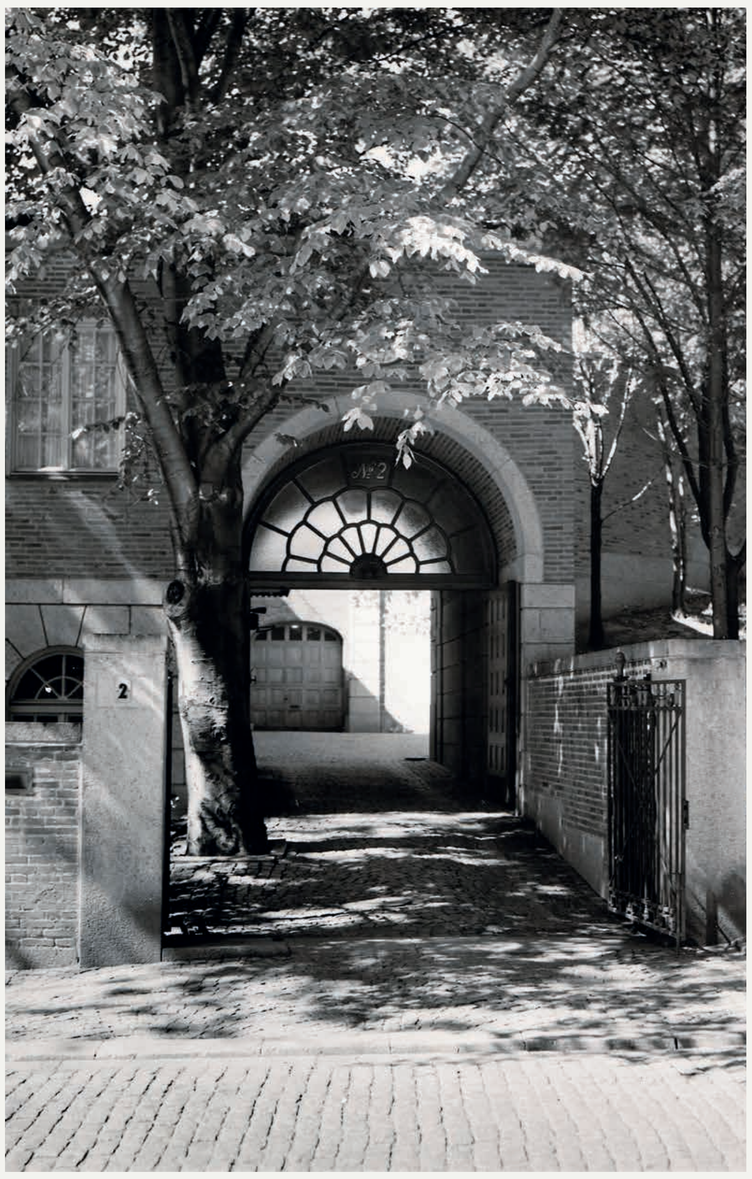
VILLA ÅKERLUND
BEYOND OWI STOCKHOLM

The U.S. Ambassador's Residence in Stockholm has been a part of the life of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Sweden for almost 90 years. Constructed in 1930-32 for the Swedish publisher and industrialist Erik Åkerlund by the Swedish architect Knut Perno, this magnificent villa in the Diplomatic Quarter is inspired by Italian architecture and is a fine example of Nordic Classicism – also known as Swedish Grace. U.S. Minister Laurence Steinhardt rented Villa Åkerlund from the family beginning in September 1933 as his residence. In February 1940 U.S. Minister Frederick Sterling rented it as a residence and for offices. During World War II, the villa served as the Stockholm outpost of the U.S. Office of War Information. In December 1942, the U.S. government purchased the house. Since 1947, it has been the residence of the U.S. Ambassador to Sweden.

On July 7, 2020, Villa Åkerlund was added to the Secretary of State's Register of Culturally Significant Property.

Villa Åkerlund, ca. 1932. National Archives and Records Administration.

This historical structure, however, is far more than an ambassadorial residence. It is the hub around which much of the work of the U.S. Embassy to Sweden revolves, regularly hosting Swedes from all walks of life as we seek to strengthen further the close ties between the United States and Sweden.



View from Nobelgatan of Villa Åkerlund's entrance gate and porte-cochère. ca. 1942. Overseas Buildings Operations Archive, US Department of State.

Villa Åkerlund, 2016.

For more information and a video about Villa Åkerlund and its history, please visit https://se.usembassy.gov/embassy/stockholm/cmr/.

EXHIBITION

Telling America's Story in a Time of War:

The U.S. Office of War Information's STOCKHOLM OUTPOST 1942–1945

UNITED STATES EMBASSY STOCKHOLM

This exhibition is also available digitally, with additional material.
Please visit https://se.usembassy.gov/embassy/stockholm/cmr/office-of-war-information-exhibit/.