Telling America’s Story in a Time of War:
The U.S. Office of War Information’s
STOCKHOLM OUTPOST
1942–1945

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

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

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

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

1943

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

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

1945

APRIL 12
FDR dies; Vice President Harry Truman becomes President

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

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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. \(^2\)

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. \(^3\) 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. \(^4\)

**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. \(^5\) The basic directive of all units of the OWI was that the simple truth, offered in a friendly spirit, was the best possible propaganda. \(^6\) 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. \(^7\)

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\(^{2}\) 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 3, 1944.


\(^{5}\) Joseph Barnes, “Fighting with Information: OWI Overseas,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1943), 43.

OWI’s Stockholm outpost occupied the basement and ground floor of Villa Åkerlund at Nobelpatan 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.
KARL JENSEN (1907–?)

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. 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.

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. 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 for Emergency Management. The DOI’s principal function was to explain the government’s defense activities in response to the war in Europe.

GEORGE LARSON (1904–1977)

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 Atriacs, in 1935. Prokosch joined the Legation on May 2, 1943, after turning down a posting OWI Overseas Program 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.)

CATHERINE DJURKLÖU (1909–1977)

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 attaché with the Swedish 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.)

MAB WILSON (1909–1988)

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.)
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 Sweden. 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.

**DWI 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 Sweden. 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.”

**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 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 Gratké 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 Nobelsgatan 2. This was despite Sweden's prevailing sympathies for its fellow democratic nations. In 1943, as the Nazis' victories on the battlefield, 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.

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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]one 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.

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. 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.


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.

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
- Viktor 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

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.”

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 65, 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.
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.”

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.” His OWI films, such as the Projections of America series, were distributed both as part of commercial packages and through official government channels.

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. 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.” The British Ministry of Information was so impressed by the film that it requested 400 copies to show audiences in the United Kingdom.

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.

1 “OWI Foreign Heads Say Our Films Lead,” Film Daily, January 8, 1943.
4 Scott, “From Toscanini to Tennessee,” 354.
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.

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.”
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. 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.”

Finally, from the perspective of a present-day U.S. Embassy 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.

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 Sakslo, 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 (Gödland) 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), Helene Kåberg (Amerika bygger), Martin Libytroen (Dagnes 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 Lille 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 honored 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


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.

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.

For more information and a video about Villa Åkerlund and its history, please visit https://se.usembassy.gov/embassy/stockholm/cmr/.
Telling America’s Story in a Time of War:

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

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