

My Ancestral Roots: A Look into Swedish Landscape Culture and Value.

My family roots come in the same form of many Americans. At the turn of the century into the 1900s a mass of immigrants found their way to America with the goal of a new and hopefully, better life. I come from a combination of European cultures. My father can trace the family roots to Germany, mixed in the process includes some English ties. To be completely honest, my beliefs and life as a botanist and soon Landscape Architect has been heavily influenced from the Krueger side of my family. The family tree has been being primarily urban since the arrival to the United States, with my ancestors living in cities rather than rural environments. My dad, Robert Krueger, has taught me more about plants and the field of botany than years in college ever could. My father is a plant enthusiast and the yard I grew up in was always teeming with interesting colors, textures, scents, and shapes because of my father's indoor, outdoor, and kitchen plant palate. But I can say that there are roots to his and my interest- literally, for 50+ years our family has been dividing and splitting an elephant ear begonia, lovingly called Ruby, as a tribute of the Krueger family's tough (can I simplify by stating German?) determination. I can't describe why I didn't want to explore this side of the family history for this project I can say it was not from lack of appreciation or disinterest of our roots.

The family line on my mother's side is completely Swedish. Truthfully, until my Dad tainted the bloodline we don't seem to have a drop of non-Swede blood in us. My grandparents (Bruno and Ellen Lindberg), were first generations of Swedish emigrants, destined by their culture to find each other in a Lutheran adult retreat weekend. The Lutheran religion, common to Swedes, is what brought two first generations to meet and create a fully Swedish second generation- my Mother and my Aunt Nancy.



Figure 2 Emil and Ida Lindberg with their children. Date of photo unknown.

Bruno Lindberg, my grandfather, was born in Connecticut to Bertha and Sven Lindberg. Bertha and Sven met and married in the United States, not much is known of Bertha's background, she passed after having three children, probably relatively young herself, I believe she passed before my grandfather reached his teenage years. From conversations from my Uncle, Aunt and Mother I know Sven came from a small town called Brevensbruk, about 90 miles west of Stockholm in the Swedish county of Sodermanland. Sven was born to Emil and Ida Lindberg, Emil having a job as a foreman to a now defunct ironworks in Brevensbruk.

From the pictures the family looks relatively affluent for the era, and from my understanding

Sven was the only Lindberg to leave for the United States. The family connection to Sweden still exists through the Lindberg family tree, my aunt has visited family there and I have met distant cousins through their visits to the United States.



Figure 1 My Aunt Nancy visiting the Redlund farm during her visit in the 1960s

Ellen Redlund, my grandmother, was born to Hjalmer and Anna Redlund. They found each other on the boat coming to America, some 10 to 13 years later they became married, spending the rest of their lives in Arlington Massachusetts. Like other emigrants, Hjalmer chose Arlington because of a close

family friend who also lived there. After Hjalmer came, Nancy and Mimi Redlund (his sisters) followed, leaving one son in Sweden to keep and tend the family farm in Svenljuga. Svenljuga is in

the southwestern province of Vastergotland. From what I can tell, the farm was family owned and operated for only a few years after the mass Redlund migration, my Aunt Nancy (mother's sister) went to visit Sweden in the 1960's and the farm was not owned by the Redlund family.

I find it disheartening that like many other people my family traces its roots through the male descendents. We know very little of the backgrounds of either Anna Redlund or Bertha (Swanson) Lindberg. I am not sure how this happens or where the loss of information occurs. Bertha died so young it was hard for her to pass her life and stories on to her children. Anna also passed younger than her husband Hjalmer, she passed 6 months before my mother was born, only a year after my Aunt Nancy was born, leaving no living member of the family to have gotten to know her. No family connections seem to exist from the women's ancestry either. We still keep in touch with, my now third cousins from the Hjalmer Redlund's sister and there are still distant cousins in Sweden and Norway from Sven Lindberg's family line. I don't have any information on these women.

For some reason, perhaps from the ideas listed above, I was drawn much more to the area in Sweden where my Grandmother's father came from. Perhaps it was to compile knowledge regarding a female ancestor in my family line, or perhaps it was because my ancestors, the Redlunds, were farmers and lived off the land; whichever the reason, I found myself searching much more into this area of Sweden. And it is with this information that I will base much of my paper from.

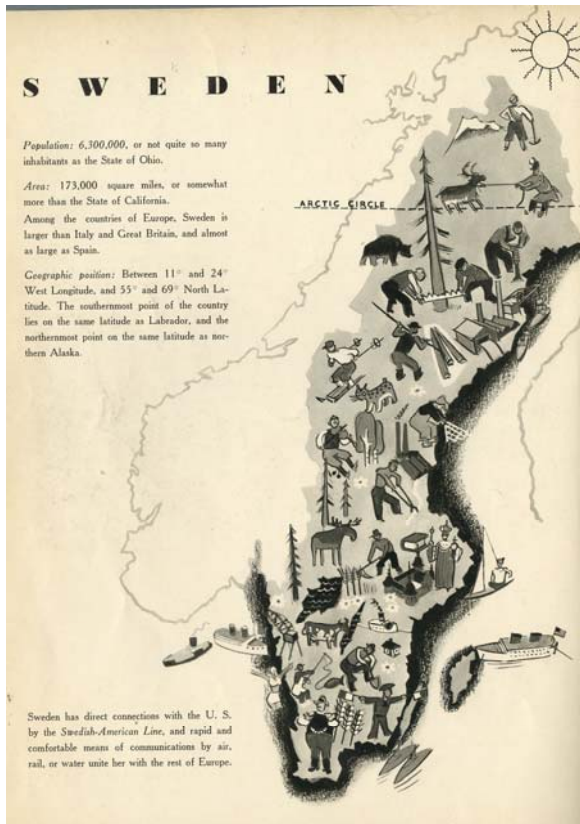


Figure 3: Map of Sweden depicting provinces and goods created, in the mid-southwestern area there is a cow showing the region of Vastergotland.

glaciers(Andersson pg. 278). The existence of the plains is what drove Vastergotland into agricultural importance. Sweden is known for a beautiful natural landscape, but as the plains turn into mountains the fertility of the soil becomes less and less (Andersson pg. 279).

We don't know exactly what was produced on the Redlund farm, but information from the region and information about Hjalmer do allude to a story. The region, historically, was known to grow oats, hay, and mixed fodder crops(Sweden Speaks pg. 34; Sundstrom). Oats were a primary grain in Sweden and an export in trade through the early 1900s. Hay and fodder is a source of food for cattle. Inevitably some cattle for slaughter, but historically meat was secondary in the diet for most peasant Swedes, dairy products through, were a daily food (Harzig pg. 101). We also know that Hjalmer settled in Arlington worked his whole life as a meat chief in an upscale Boston

Vastergotland is a province in southwestern Sweden that is dominated by plains. Much of southern Sweden has the same topography- flat and broad (Sundstrom). At the northern end of the province lies Sweden's largest inland lake, Vanen, the second largest inland lake, Vattern, lies on the eastern border. Vastergotland is a transition zone from the southern plains into northern Sweden, where hills turn to mountains(Sundstrom). From the fjords of the coast to the mountains in northern Lapland, all the land formations in

Sweden have been cut from the relatively recent (10,000 years ago) retreat of

restaurant. I think he took the information he knew from taking cattle to slaughter, as a boy in Sweden, and created a niche for himself when came to the United States. We can assume then that the Redlund family farm was probably a mix of cattle, fodder, and oats.

The story of the family coincides with the story of these crops as well. I was interested in why Hjalmer would have left Sweden. Being a boy in the family, with owned land, he had a stake in the world that surrounded him. I found out that he came from a family with two girls and two boys. Of the two boys, Hjalmer left for America and soon afterwards his sisters followed, leaving the farm to his other brother. One child kept the farm while everyone else left for America. Interestingly enough, Hjalmer's father, Johan Redlund (married to Olivia Andersdotter), traveled back and forth from the U.S. to Sweden in order to make money. His travels back and forth would have happened prior to the 1900s; we don't know where he went or what he did for work. Ultimately he did not like the U.S. enough to move his family permanently and so he finished his life in Sweden. How a person could make so much money to afford a transatlantic boat ride in the 1800s and come out ahead is really quite amazing;

Having four children in a family was not thought to be large in Sweden at the time. Sweden, like many European countries, as the 1800s turned to 1900s was experiencing a population boom (Olsson, pg. 154). Throughout the world, the turn to the 20th century brought about better sanitary practices and trusted vaccines, increasing the chances of children surviving to adulthood. At the same time two things happened to the oat crops in Sweden. In the late 1800s blight came through the country and destroyed the oat crop (Harzig pg. 102). It was during this time that Johan probably first started to travel to the United States for work. After the blight had passed, the oat crop got revenged again, this time destroyed by the cheaper crops being exported by the United States (Olsson, pg 156). I think the farm provided the Redlunds a sustained life

and a home, I don't believe it provided much money. According to my Mom, Hjalmer continued to send money back to Sweden throughout his life.

So where would Hjalmer and his sisters gone to if they had stayed in Sweden? Whether Hjalmer had a choice to stay with the farm or not is unknown. If he left the farm Hjalmer chanced a life in a Swedish city, working in a more industrial fashion. In the province of Vastergotland lies one of Sweden's largest cities, Goteborg. The city is on the coast and was known for shipping and manufacturing (Sundstrom). Another option would have been to head north and work in mining or steel production. Iron and steel found in the northern mines of Sweden created a boom in industry in Sweden in the 17th and 18th centuries. Although the boom (historically called the "Age of Greatness" for Sweden (Anker pg. 92-98)) was at the time of Hjalmer's departure, being surpassed by steel production in England and the United States by cheaper and more efficient coal firing technology, Swedish steel production still existed (Anker pg. 92-98). I believe two things lead to Hjalmer deciding to leave the farm, the potential prosperity of the idealized United States over the understood likely hood of life in Sweden and the fact that ultimately, the farm could only been run by one brother.

Hjalmer was soon to be followed to the United States by both his sisters. A trip so long and demanding would have been a challenge for any women of this period to initiate. Why would these women have needed to leave Sweden? I found a book that explains life of women and men from the Dalsland province of Sweden. Bordering Vastergotland just to the north the Dalsland province was also heavily agricultural society; the province was naturally covered by more forests than plains leading more reliance on cattle and dairy production rather than oat and land cover crops. Traditions most likely being similar, assumptions can be made between one region and another. Women's prospects were not dismal in Sweden. Many women had been left to tend fields and farms while husbands were away, as was the case with my great-great-grandmother Anna Redlund when Johan left to find work in the United States. Women

were prized for their ability to act as both dairymaids to a farm and their initiatives as entrepreneurs in selling linens and woven cloth (Harzig pg. 121-129). It is important to understand though, that although women could earn their own income, rarely did they ever own land without a husband to share ownership (Harzig pg. 121-123). Hjalmer's sisters, Mimi and Nancy could have stayed in Sweden, finding a husband as a landowner or a tenant farmer to owned land. The other option for women was to become farmer's servants, as dairymaids or cattle tenders. Young girls could and would be trained in these jobs for the purpose of finding an income. To take the life of a servant (dairymaid or cattle tender) was to agree to a life with minimal pay, long work days, and few breaks. It also inhibited the ability to own anything- a house or land (Harzig 110-120). I have to think that Mimi and Nancy wished to take a chance on the opportunities of a new world instead of placing their future lives on well established traditions of the region.

Both the forested and open plain environments of Vastergotland seem vital to the inhabitants of this region both as a means of economical production and cultural



Figure 4: A pasture from western Sweden showing the mix of forest in pasture grounds. (Face of Sweden)

history. The economic importance of these plains is obvious, in a land where soil structure does not lend widely to agricultural practice these plains were relied on to produce grain for a growing population and for exports. The forests provided a means for the economy also. Timber production and pulp mills were found in the northern provinces (Sundstrom), but in the southwestern provinces it was also common in the summer to herd the livestock to the woods for feeding (Sundstrom). This seems quite foreign to an American

ideal of ranchers embracing the broad plains of the west to sustain large herds of cattle, but at the turn of the century when Swedish agriculture was still dominated by individual family production the forest could feed a

herd over the summer so that the fodder crops could be saved for the winter months(Sundstrom). To incorporate a need for forest with agricultural production caused land that could have been clear cut for field crops to be kept under canopy. As farming technology increased grain production some forest was cut so that pasture area increased, but early herding techniques involved forested feeding. When families owned cattle, the amount of animals was to be managed by a single herder. The job could either be done by a girl or boy, and the job entailed managing the herd, keeping predators away, and bringing the herd to water and feeding grounds (Harzig pg 112-114). A trained herder was a benefit to any farm.

But the forests also provided a greater role for the herders, a social gathering place. In the forests, where the shade was cool, groups of youth could gather and socialize while their herds fed. It was often in these woodland gatherings where youth were allowed to interact on many levels. It was in these meetings where prospective husbands and wives could first meet (Harzig 130-137).

To Swedes in the southwestern region of Sweden these daily meetings in the forest could also lead to nighttime parties and even to nighttime courting rituals (Harzig 130-137). The forest now, acted more as a social gathering place where youth of the region could go in the evenings, socialize, and have a few hours away from the daily workload. It was not hidden from the parents or landowners who the youth worked for; it was even encouraged by allowing youth to bring food and brandy into the forest for gathering. An ongoing theme, this love for the forest and its associated imagery leads to many exploratory paths for interpreting not only Swedish landscape but also the culture.

I love myths and legends, the fairytale story approach with attempted logistical answers to vexing questions. Where does the world end? What is at the eye of the storm? Questions that modern science explains too simply are described in outrageous

fashion in mythology. I won't lie- I never remember stories or yarns told by my grandparents. We would chat, all day into the evening, with coffee and sweet snacks, often there were card games. But beyond these simple greetings and lifestyle lie some pretty outrageous Nordic tales. The forest is a sacred, enchanting, often dangerous but ultimately beneficial, environment that legends are based on. Trolls, the most common antagonist of these tales live and reside in the forests, but so do the people. Trolls are a leftover from early pagan myths, trolls were the evil forces, who took children's lives away in the middle of the night or could cast the evil eye onto a young couple's household leading to ill consequences (Abjornsen pg 97-102, 81-83). When Sweden Christianized, the trolls stayed living in the forests, changing their appetites from mere men to Christian men (Abjornsen pg 137-139). The menacing trolls and their forests were a needed place for food and survival for humans. It is juxtaposition: Forests are the homes of evil trolls, but man needs the forest to survive. So the myths often describe scenarios where humans outsmart and destroy the trolls, the person ultimately returning with the bounty of the forest. In the end the myths teach us that forests are a safe place for man and woman.



Figure 5: A cottage in western Sweden showing the proximity to the forest. (Faces of Sweden)

hard to think that humans sprouted from trees but to incorporate this idea into a creationism myth really speaks to how important the forest is to the entire Nordic culture.

The most obvious connection between the forests and the myths lies in the explanation of creation. In middle earth grew a massive ash tree named Yggdrasil, from her branches grew the first man (Ask) and the first woman (Embala), the mother tree caring for her "seedlings" until they are ready to ascend to our world. The names of the first man and woman can even be linked to the modern terms for the Ash (Ask) tree and the Elm (Embala) tree (Andersson pg 281). It is



Figure 6: Another Swedish home tucked into a corner of forest. (Picturesque Sweden)

To embrace the forest as a provider of food, a place of social gathering and a mother to all life commands that the forest much always exist. Where in America farm homes seem isolated from the field, homes in rural regions of Sweden are often tucked into whatever forest exists on property.

Swedes seem to want to invite the forest to their front doors, allowing for shade around the house and the yard. In my research I found a weak number of references to some type of 'kitchen garden' or familiar cottage garden of the English countryside. I have no doubt that on any family farm something akin to an edible garden must have existed, but they are not reflected on. Idyllic images of berry hunting and gathering flowers from the forest are much more explained for life and pastime pleasures.

Although man has a seemingly limitless ability to alter plants for his betterment, there are some rules that do apply. When homes are covered in shade for most of the day, the large, boldly colored, and heavily bread annuals and perennials will not grow too well. We can see this easily in a Gertrude Jekyll perennial path, there is rarely any prominent shade. So it should be of no surprise that the Swedes do not seem to embrace the idea of a walled paradise garden or a garden that is bursting with cultivated plants. Attempts at this style of gardening do exist in southern Sweden, where the proximity to the Danish culture and the urban environment lend to better conditions (less shade, warmer climate, and overall style of urban context) for the plantings to exist (Andersson pg 283-285). To the south the Danes embrace walled gardens filled with brightly colored cultivated and bred perennial flowers.

The paradise gardens are highly decorated and obviously man made, and the embrace of Europeans to man-sculptured landscapes is something that is lost on the Swedes. In his article "Appearances and beyond: time and change in Swedish landscape architecture" Thorbjorn Andersson describes that the landscape architecture of Sweden is based on three main qualities. The first of these qualities, or traits, is clear light. Being set so far north Sweden has a seemingly big sky that we, as Americans recognized in the far western states. The light from the sky (being sun or moon) also has a multitude of water bodies and crag formations to play off. A scientific description of this phenomenon is that the low water temperature reduces atmospheric humidity and causes the air to become more translucent. The second quality of landscape architecture comes from a historically austere approach to altering the land. Whether this comes from the more scientific explanations of rough terrain and poor soils to grow gardens in could be debated against the cultural love and respect to the natural forests and formations that surround them. Either argument, Swedes tend to have a simple approach to land design, with simple but strong lines; almost more Asian in look than European. The final quality to design is the embrace of the land as it exists- a glacial terrain with many lakes, gorges, and plains. Again, this quality comes from a need to view the land as it is, to not wall and alter views that already exist.



Figure 7: An image from inside the woodland cemetery by artist Leonard Frank.

How do these traits act together to form a design? This could lead into a thesis in itself, so I will only describe these traits, as I see them; against one of the most well know Swedish designed landscapes: the Woodland Cemetery or Skogskyrkogården. This place designed by Gunnar Asplund and Sigur Lewerentz in 1914 is incredibly vast, there are many chapels, a meditation grove, burial grounds, and open space (Anker

pg. 53-64). Light as a quality of the landscape is found in so many places in the Woodland Cemetery. The most obvious comes from the burying ground surrounding the Woodland Chapel. Pine trees tower above and below lie numerous grave sites. The form of the massive pines lacking any significant undergrowth allow for light to cut through in lines causing a dramatic shade and sun contrast. The same effect can be seen in the Monument Hall, where pillars hold up a modernistic flat roof. The light through the rectangular pillars seems to be the same as the light in the forested burial ground. Interestingly, the theme for this design is based on a premise of guiding light; the land and the architecture are meant to take the visitor through a progress from darkness to light and resurrection(Anker pg. 55). The austere approach to the design is almost difficult to discern from the modernistic design. But I believe I see it in the entrance to the Grove of Meditation. The entrance is long and commands focus to the Grove, visitors walk a long path, void of any canopy cover this path is surrounded by mowed turf. At the top of this gentle hill is a ring of Elm trees. The trees command focus from a long way away, and rather than use sculpture or man-made decoration the deliquescent form of the tree is the only form seen. The final trait, embracing the land as it exists, is also difficult to discern because it is a man-made park. But the park has many natural elements including bodies of water and paths constructed out of stone from the north. The designer's built this park on an abandoned quarry, but they brought the nature of the Swedish landscape into the park.



Figure 8: From the tourism book created for the World's Fair 1932 this image is not uncommon in its composition. (Sweden Speaks pg.13)

Depicting the landscape in an iconic manner is presented in both literature and social practices for Swedes. It is also quite common in the visual photography that is used to promote Sweden as a destination. Pictures are often framed with towering pines along a rocky ridges and idyllic country scenes. The

beauty of these images both attracts tourists to

the country and promotes Swedes to venture outside of the urban landscape and escape to the fresh, clean rural environments. Often both rural and urban dwellers own cottages in the country for holiday escape (Sweden Speaks pg. 62-63). This is a country where the rural lands are used not only for preserves or agriculture but for human interaction. This need for the population to have access to the countryside is reason why Swedes do not strive for an overly cultivated, man-altered landscape.

It is this appreciation of the need for both urban and natural spaces to be prioritized that has led me to respect Swedish culture and values. These traditions have led to a theory of landscape design that seems quite appealing to the modern world. It is a theory of designing spaces where the natural and human world are meant to interact. The theory also expands to hold a high respect for the rugged landscape, teaching people that the natural world can be enjoyed as it is. The land doesn't need to be smoothed and planted with a host of brightly colored flowers; the land as it stands should be appreciated as it is with the human footprint minimized. It is easy to write this about the Swedish landscape when it is filled with romantic crags and tall trees and breathtaking topography. But why can't we understand this appreciation for what is and take it to other ecosystems to find the beauty in an existing wetland or a swath of prairie. If we could take the attitude of the Swedes and educate all people on the subtle beauty of the existing conditions I think we would be able to preserve the land to a greater degree of what it actually is, rather than finding design solutions to alter. I am not advocating losing the design to the landscape, I am advocating understanding and accepting the beauty of any place so that the environment of place can be respected in a design.

In the culture of the people of Vastergotland and Southwestern Sweden I see an appreciation for the land as a social and community place. I respect this greatly because it is also in many ways similar to how I grew up. I have been born and raised in the same house my parents own now in the small town of Big Rapids, Michigan. Big Rapids lies on

the edge of the Manistee National Forest, which covers most of the area of the Northwestern corner of the Lower Peninsula. I grew up playing outside and was often doing yard work and chores on our property. I also spent nights of my adolescence in the woods at bonfires and campouts, a modern, but probably quite similar situation to the 'night-courting' rituals of the Swedes. I grew up in fresh air in a rural environment- I have rich memories of the rolling forests and the battle scars to prove I attempted living in it as it was before people began to overly worrying that the outdoors can be a liability. I have grown up to love urban cities; I want to be in the thick of it right now- Ann Arbor is just no Chicago or Philadelphia. But when I have children I think I will be drawn back to the small rural environment. As a place to grow up, in my mind, there seems to be no better. Whether that idea is in some way a cultural genetic coding from my ancestors or from my personal experience growing up I can't answer. I do know that right now I feel quite Swedish, reminiscing about the picturesque Muskegon river, the vast Manistee National Forest, and the soft shorelines of the myriads of lakes that were surrounding my youth.

When I think of the Redlunds I see their diligent work on the land ultimately led them to find another life; specifically a life that lead them to an urban environment. I don't know if Hjalmer ever returned for a visit to Sweden. I know my grandmother and grandfather never visited. I wonder if Hjalmer had romantic thoughts and yearning for his home. Anna, his wife, did something I now recognize as partially Swedish that has become a tradition that will last for many future generations in my family. About 80 years ago, Anna, took my grandmother to a small ocean side community in Southern Maine called Ocean Park. It was a settlement of Baptists, something completely foreign to Lutherans. More importantly through, it was a northern environment, close to the water with towering pine trees, lots of fresh air, and although the beach is sand covered, throughout Maine there exists rocky outcroppings. I wonder if this reminded her, and Hjalmer, of their far off Swedish homeland. I wonder if this was a substitution for missing summers in Sweden. I can't ever answer this question but what Anna did

was start a tradition. Four generations later my mother and father own one cottage, right next to the cottage my grandmother and grandfather built (now owned by my Aunt and Uncle). We aren't in Sweden, we aren't in Lutheran country, but when my family descends upon Ocean Park, I feel we are more Sweden than at any other time of the year. We sit drink lots of coffee and chat into the evening hours. We enjoy the natural scene, both cottages are surrounded still by pine forests, and they will probably stay that way far into the future.

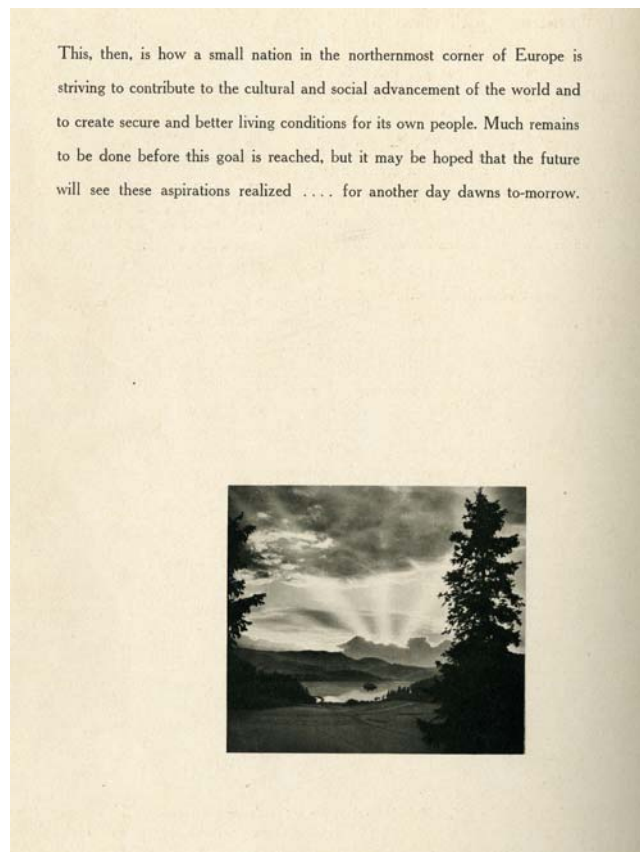


Figure 9: For all that I have learned about Swedish culture this page seems to sum up my impression pretty clearly. (Swedish Speaks pg. 104)