

Ambassador Peter Hammarström

In what has become a tradition of sorts, Sweden & America has begun each of the past two years with interviews. In 1987 we interviewed Ambassador Wilhelm Wachtmeister, Sweden's "Mr. Washington"; last year it was U.S. Ambassador to Sweden Gregory Newell's turn. To begin 1989 S&A runs this interview done last summer with the Secretary General of the New Sweden '88 Swedish National Committee, Ambassador Peter Hammarström.

Sweden & America: We are now about half way through New Sweden '88. Can we say that it has been a success?

Ambassador Peter Hammarström: The full answer we will be able to give in January, 1989, but so far, yes, it has been a success. I can qualify it by saying that the visit of their majesties in the United States was, from our point of view, a great success. We were impressed by the cordiality with which they were received everywhere and by the great amount of people who showed up and by the press coverage. In other aspects we have had great success too, more than we expected, and I am particularly thinking about the series of seminars we have held all over the country. The interest for those has been overwhelming. We found it a very good instrument to stimulate a discussion on topics of mutual interest.

When we talk about success, we have to talk about goals. What were the goals of New Sweden '88 and where do you think the programs have been most successful and where do you think you still have work to do?

The overall ambitions of the whole jubilee, from our point of view, have



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been to commemorate the fact that there has been 350 years of Swedish settlement in North America; also to honor all Swedes and Swedish-Americans who, during these 350 years, have in some way or other contributed to the building of the great nation of the United States and who have furthered the relationship between our two countries. A third aspect was added this time: an effort to — what we would call — “place Sweden on the map”; in other words, to make Sweden better known to a broader public than the traditional Swedish-American groups in the United States. These three ambitions are quite disparate in

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the sense that they appeal to various kinds of people, but with these three ambitions, you can always, when you look at any of our activities, justify why we did it.

Now you wonder what was perhaps less successful, or as you put it, where more could be done. Of course when it comes to the third aspect of “putting Sweden on the map” in the awareness of the American public, the sky's the limit of (our) efforts. You really never get full success there. On the other hand, I think we have been successful in the sense that high-ranking politicians, industrialists, journalists, etc. have noticed that Sweden is making an effort to promote itself in the United States, and this is something that we are very encouraged by and, of course, there we will continue, not only this year but further on. But I think this year has been a very good milestone in our efforts to promote Swedish-American relations in all these fields I have mentioned.

How do you plan to evaluate formally at the end of the year so that you know whether or not your efforts were successful in attaining these goals?

A jubilee like this cannot really be evaluated in factual terms. You can make estimates and when it comes to information you can, perhaps, say that it was a success when you count the amount of (newspaper) clippings but we are not doing any kind of traditional evaluation in the sense of “is Sweden better known to America now or not?” because we do not consider that our task and because there are so many other people interested in what we in Sweden call “the image of Sweden in America” that it would be too difficult, and wouldn't serve any purpose, for us to do any evaluation of that kind. We would rather do the

following: we are collecting all material on what has been said and written about us in the United States during the year, and then we will try to see if we have succeeded with our three ambitions that I mentioned previously, and try to find out if any of these efforts is worthwhile pursuing more intensely, perhaps in another way, in the future. We were trying to draw some kind of lesson from what we have done so far, because if we don't do that it could easily be, as many pessimists have said, like a firework (that) dies out and next year it will be some other country doing the same thing and Sweden will be forgotten.

A great deal of time and effort went into the successful tour of the king and queen in April. Do you think that there was too much emphasis put on the royal tour or do you think it brought the kind of public relations success that you needed to make New Sweden '88 successful?

Yes. The answer is definitely yes. The efforts were very worthwhile. You cannot find better ambassadors than their majesties, the king and queen. They are "door openers" in many senses. There is a curiosity about royalty in the United States that gives us easier access to people we want to reach. The amount of effort put into touring is always worthwhile when it comes to a royal visit, from our point of view, and as I mentioned previously, we were overwhelmed by the reception they received. And I know that they themselves felt very happy about the tour.

Can you give us two or three highlights of the 17 days that they were here?

Well, of course, the reception and dinner given by the President and First Lady in the White House was a highlight. It demonstrated the good relations between our two countries on the highest possible level. I know that their majesties enjoyed tremendously the entrance of the Swedish ship *Carlskrona* when she approached New York harbor.

... I know, for example, that the king enjoyed tremendously all the seminars that the Royal Academy of Science held in five cities. Those were

all well attended and we hope also that what was said was of interest to the audiences. Another spectacular event was, of course, the rodeo in Dallas and the ice show in Minneapolis with 10,000 people attending and with their majesties as honored guests. And another was the visit to Disneyland, very good from a pictorial point of view. Then of course the reception by the crowds was overwhelming. No one expected that there would be such a reception. There were great crowds and cheers wherever they appeared. I think that the king and queen's impression of the whole tour was that it ran very smoothly and that they got the time that they needed for all the events. That, of course, was always a big concern of ours, whether we had a program that we had to rush through. But we found out afterwards that it was exactly the right timing for every event and we are very happy about that.

How do you think Sweden will exploit the attention and good will that has been generated by New Sweden '88 in the United States? In other words, what comes in 1989?

More tourists, more interest in Swedish products, more curiosity about Swedish society in various aspects. The fortunate weather during the broadcasting of the "Good Morning, America" program in May probably helped a lot to stimulate the interest of

travelers to come to Sweden, perhaps in 1989 or later on.

Finally, if you had to do it all over again, would you? And what would you do differently?

Well the ambitions would be the same: to promote and strengthen our relations. Maybe we should start a little bit earlier than we did this time. Our American counterparts had organized themselves quite a bit earlier than we did. We lived under a constant stress and a little more time would have helped.

No I don't think I would have done things differently. We would have, if we had more time, had an opportunity to listen to the experiences of others, but on the other hand, we learned quickly through the trial and error method. I can honestly say that we have found satisfaction within all fields of interests here in Sweden on what we have done. We can find people in industry and trade who are satisfied with what we did. Also people from the cultural sector and the governmental sector. You also find critics there. And of course in the details we would perhaps do it differently. The hardest group to satisfy is, of course, the industrial group because they have, after all, "paid the fiddlers" for us, as we say ... but so far, my feeling is that we have gone a long way to meet their requirements.

Thank you very much.



Peter Hammarström and his wife Görel are flanked by Elsa-Maria and Karl-Erik Andersson at the Midsummer Music Festival held last June in Bloomington, Minnesota.

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