

Walkabout Tour back to My Roots in Stockholm

Prelude...

During a late crisp, summer day I was visiting “Söders höjder” (Södermalm "suthraemalm" borough) in Stockholm, at the large island formerly called "Åsön", where my families roots are from.

*“Stockholm, in your womb I want to dream;
carefree, when your evening hours beats!
New visions, and old memories flow
smile at me where I go.*

*When your dark soft spring night may conclude
you in my arms, from the park's hidden plane
the echo fades than the Bellman's lute
and in the Great shadow play Pan...”*

From Stockholm's melody by Evert Taube

Evert Taube is painting the vision of a place greater than any other place. A significant place is not necessarily a big place, not a glorious place, not a place where you can see a beautiful sight, but it is a wonderful place. To me it is a simple place where my roots come from, that will remain in my hart wherever I live in the world.

The story...

The focus for this walkabout is in the area of Götgatan, Åsögatan, Åsöberget and Stigbergsgatan at Södermalm in Stockholm. To get there we start at Slussen (*the Locks*), an area in central Stockholm, connecting Södermalm and Gamla stan (Old Town). The area is named after the locks between Lake Mälaren and the Baltic Sea. The locks themselves allow passage between these two bodies of water of different levels (~2 meter).



Ryssgården square in front of the Slussen metro station.

At Ryssgården square we are able to buy the best “Strömmings

macka” consisting of crackerbread, stekt strömming (fried Baltic herring) which is one of hundreds of recipes based on the smaller-sized eastern relative of the North Sea herring.



“Strömming-shack”



“Strömmingsmacka”

After finishing my delicious Strömmingsmacka, I'm struggling, my heart pounding, uphill on Götgatsbacken towards Medborgarplatsen where a shadow of a tall building is following me wherever I go. This is where the taxation authority lives ("Skatteskrapan"), and where the tax money is going, which is a lot in Sweden. Many other social activities also take place on Medborgarplatsen open park area, such as playing chess.

I quickly proceed east on Götgatan where I turn north onto Åsögatan the street in Stockholm that starts in the west as a side street to Magnus Ladulåsgatan, crosses Götgatan and stretches then east to Broom Souses staircase on Åsöberget, a distance of about 1.6 kilometers. Now I'm able to feel deeper in my body that I'm coming closer and closer to my roots. My maternal grandfather, Hjalmar Norin, emigrated from this area to the United States in 1891, together with his brother Oscar Norin and a couple of cousins. They lived in Brooklyn and later in Los Angeles where they worked as circus artists in a group called the "Four Diving Norins" when my grandmother joined the group. The Circus performers Norins, according to hearsay, were the first in the world who jumped from a springboard trampoline into a small water-filled reservoir (from 120ft into 4ft of water). They performed mainly in the US and Great Britain. My grandfather returned to Stockholm in the 1920s and took up residence in the block "Strykjärnet" (the Iron) by Götgatan and Katarina Bangata.

I continue walking along the houses mainly from the 1800s, which ends at Pelarhuset Åsögatan #172. Åsögatan's east section has partially retained its 1700s buildings with small red wooden houses (stugor).

Walking north on Åsögatan I arrive at a set of house numbers pivotal for me to understand my roots. First #132, 1st floor where my mother Märta lived, secondly #158, 1st floor over the courtyard where my father Lennart lived and thirdly #132 3rd floor (window to the left) where my parents had their first apartment. I was born here and lived my first three years at this address.

This is also a very romantic place where my parent met and played as kids at the young age of twelve. Later in life they married and stayed together until my father passed away in the year 2000. This is where my family's roots are from, as well as my wife's family's. Her father's family lived in the same area a couple of blocks away and as kids, her father and my parents played in the same park, went to the same school (Katarina Norra Skola), had the same teachers but her father was three years younger so they didn't know each other then.



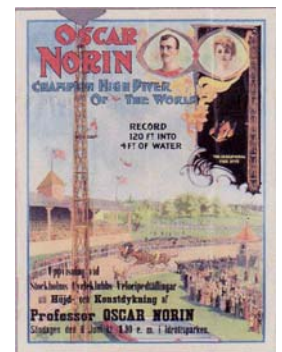
Skatteskrapan



Chess players 1957



Four diving Norins



Oscar Norin diving



Katarina Norra Skola



Åsögatan #132

The world known Swedish author Per Anders Fogelström also lived in this area. He is mostly known for his books; *Mina drömmars stad* (the city of my dreams), and the series of five books where we are able to follow Henning Nilsson and his children and family from 1860 to 1960. This series of books is often called “Stads-serien” (The city series) and includes “Barn av sin stad”, “Minns du den stad”, “I en förvandlad stad”. The series is included in the world library list.

In the house Åsögatan #197 we could also find the earlier studio of painter and interior designer Carl Larsson, and the home where “Svenne Berka”, the famous soccer goal keeper lived.

There were several other resident artists living in the east most area of Åsögatan. In the same house also lived Albert Engström, Swedish author and member of the Swedish Academy from 1922, in his “wigwam”.

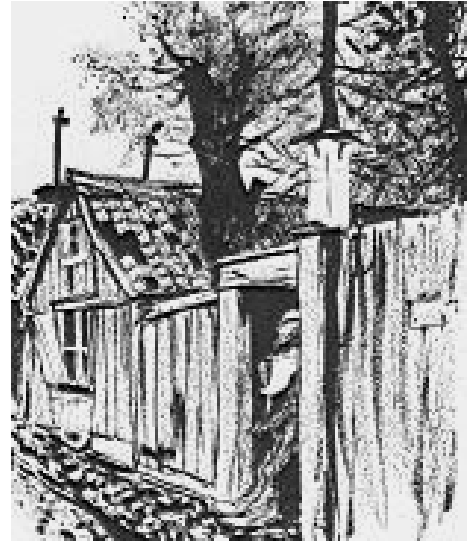
Little further along I’m able to imagine a not too clean and proper individual called “Kolingen”. Imagine Albert Engström saying “I invite you to come and visit Söder in Stockholm where Kolingen has his simple residence. He stands in the doorway to his wigwam where he is living with his friend Fula Filip (ugly Filip), who in his turn is living together with lady Feta”. With these characters Albert Engström described the people that lived in this area in his magazine for jokes called STRIX. They were in most cases poor people and worked as seamen, and shipyard workers from Södra Varvet (South Shipyard).

I continue my walking along the houses, all of them from the late 1800s, which ends at Pelarhust Åsögatan #172, designed by architect Emil Adolf Melander, 1886. Åsögatan’s east most section has partially retained its 1700s buildings with small red wooden houses that are protected today as historical buildings.

At this point I am making a right turn and am walking along Bondegatan providing me with more structures of small red houses that symbolize this area. The red paint is called “Falu Rödfärg”, Falu red, or Falun red (pronounced "FAH-loo", in Swedish, is the name of a Swedish, deep red paint well known for its use on wooden cottages and barns). The paint originated from the copper mine at Falun in Dalarna, Sweden. The traditional color remains popular today due to its effectiveness in preserving wood.

It’s a hope that the small red houses will be maintained, and continued to be lived in, and kept for future generations as they represent so much history for the Swedish people.

Åsöberget/Åsögatan and their wooden houses have appeared in several Swedish films, such as “Jack” from 1976, and “Mina drömmars stad” (City of my dreams) also from 1976.



Kolingen in the doorway



Kolingen and Fula Filip



Bondegatan

Upon a small hill in front of us I see a small red cottage which was “Hasse & Tage’s writers’ quarter”. The cottage belonged to the comedians Hasse Alfredsson and Tage Danielsson, or AB Svenska Ord (Swedish Word Inc.), one of the most productive and funny set of characters for the cabaret and radio entertainment in Sweden. More information available at Hasse och Tage - Wikipedia.



AB Svenska Ord writing quarter

I slowly walk along the streets and digesting the impressions of this section of Stockholm that have so many important memories to me. Time is passing by too fast and I must hurry up to reach Stigbergsgatan which is a street in Stockholm, that stretches south of Hilly Road from Little Erstagatan to the east and ends abruptly at the high hills (Åsöberget) east of the intersection Renstiernas street.



Stigbergsgatan westward

Stigbergsgatan (Stig Berg Street) red cottages are now modernized and carefully renovated homes. One of the houses, #No 21, has been preserved as a museum. It’s the Pulley Block Maker’s house that was decorated by the Stockholm Stads Museum to show an interior relating to the early 1900s.



Pulley-Block makers house, #21

In this small log house lived the pulley-block maker Gustav Andersson and his family between 1917-1923. He was employed by the marine Shipyard at Skeppsholmen turning pulleys for the sail ship rigs. He was working in his workshop at home, and they lived on the second floor in the building. A widow, Emilia Gustavsson, and five children lived in a small apartment in the back of the building. A family of four would typically live in a small apartment like this with one or two room 45 kvm (484sqft) and a height of 1.98 m (6,53 ft), none with electricity, running water or indoor facilities.

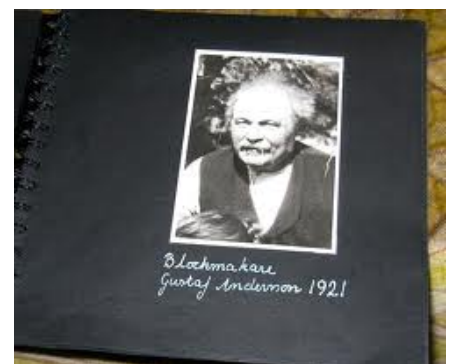
The house is fully restored as it looked in early 1900s, allowing guests to view how the life could be for families at this time. This place is a must for a visitor to Stockholm to see.



Pulley-Block maker workshop



Pulley-Block maker living room



Pulley-Block maker Andersson

On my way back to Slussen I take the way of Sista Styverns trappor which are long wooden stairs from Stigbergsgatan to Fjällgatan, from which I have an overwhelming panoramic view over Stockholm's Old Town and the island of Djurgården.



Sista Styverns stairs 1923



Sista Styverns stairs 2010



Fjällgatan westwards to Katarinavägen 1926
Stockholms Stads Museum

The name “Sista Styvern” was adopted from an Inn situated at Stadsgården. The name for the Inn belong to the same category such as Pungpinan in Skarpnäck and Fördärvet (the blight) at Långholmen, thus places where you could lose your money as well as your health. Sista Styverns stairs appears in the novel “Flickan i Stadsgården” by the author August Blanche.

I continue walking west on Fjällgatan towards Katarina vägen where I take the buss #53 on my way back home. Through the buss window I have fabulous panoramic view of central Stockholm.



Walkabout Map

Written by Leif Rosqvist, editor for New Sweden Cultural Heritage Society and SRIO newsletters in Portland, Oregon.

More information for the curious reader:

- The Swedish author, artist, composer and singer Evert Taube’s burial site at Maria Magdalena Church, is adorned with a bust created by the artists wife Astri Taube.
- Go to Google search and type in:

Åsögatan, Åsöberget, Slussen, or any other name you see in the text and more information is available.