

Stockholm Walkabout, a Walk in the City of My Youth.

Prelude...

Stockholm, Stockholm, the city of cities, the Venice of the north, the city of my youth. This story “Stockholm Walkabout” is told by a young man with a very bright view on life, his future and Swedish heritage.

I first became familiar with the text to Evert Taube’s “Stockholms Melodi” (Stockholm melody) when my grandfather sang the song from a small song book when I was very young and the text has been etched into my mind since then. Thus the context for the “Stockholm Walkabout” story.



Evert Taube (March 12, 1890-January 31, 1976) was a Swedish author, artist, composer and singer. He is best known for his folk songs, and is widely regarded as one of Sweden's most respected musicians

Se hur hela Uppland står i lågor.
Kvällssol brinner bortom Solna skog.
Grön som ärg mot violetta vågor,
Brunnsviksvassen står där gäddan slog.
Långt i syd mot bleknad himmel blänker
fönstrens rad som guld på Södermalm,
och på slottet vakten flaggan sänker
Stockholm svalkas efter dagens kvalm.

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See how the whole of Uppland is in flames.
Evening sun burning beyond the Solna forest.
Green verdigris against the violet waves,
Brunnsviksreed stands where the pike splashed.
Far in the South against the faded sky shining
windows shine with gold at Södermalm,
and the palace guard lowers the flag
Stockholm is cooled after today's suffocation.

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The City...

Stockholm was built mainly because of the waterways. The land was high in those days, making it impossible to travel by boat or ship between Lake Mälaren and the Baltic Sea. Instead, everything on the vessels, brought for the purpose of trade, had to be reloaded in Stockholm. The goods transported included iron, copper, tar and fur. Being located in a strategic spot, as it were, trade was an important factor, and, therefore, it became vital to fortify the islands of the inner city with a wall. Old Stockholm was located on Helgeandsholmen, and was established during the 13th century. It was not long, however, until the city expanded between the bridges, and today we know this part of the city as Gamla Stan (Old Town).



Old Town from Katarinahissen, ca 1900
Stockholm Stads Museum

Trade within Sweden, as well as between nearby countries in the Baltic Sea, grew immensely in only a short period of time and, the old settlements in Lake Mälaren, such as; Birka, Helgö and Sigtuna, were soon abandoned and the settlers moved into Gamla Stan (Old Town).



Birger Jarl in Varnhem Church

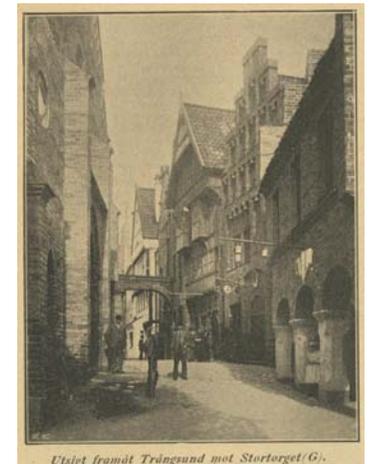
The name Stockholm was first recorded in the chronicle of Eric (Erikskrönikan), probably written between 1322 and 1332. According to this chronicle Stockholm was founded by Birger Jarl in 1252. It was named Stockholm, referring to the town in between the bridges.

The city houses were all rather simple, manufactured of wood, while the Storkyrkan (Stockholm Cathedral) and the tower named Three Crowns, on the other hand were majestic. It was an overcrowded city, and fires were common making life rather hazardous. The buildings surviving from these days are mostly churches, along with fragmentary pieces of the houses. However, the burnt down houses were soon replaced by houses built in a similar fashion, so, the narrow streets and high buildings still give a medieval impression.



Old Town 1897, view from Trångsund towards Stortorget

The 14th and 15th centuries meant rearrangements as well as enlargements to the city and Norrmalm and Södermalm grew up rather quickly. As most of the inhabitants were of German descent, the north German architecture is clearly shown in the Old Town. When Gustav Vasa entered the scene, drastic changes were at hand. He made Sweden an independent monarchy, and Stockholm the capital of Sweden. Officially, however, it was not until 1634 that Stockholm gained this status.



Smedjegatan in Old Town, 1897, Stockholm Stads Museum

By the end of the 17th century, Stockholm had changed once more. Knights, Royal emissaries, and merchants who were rich enough, had palaces and large castles constructed, such as the House of the Knights, and the Royal Palace. Stockholm now consisted of several neighborhoods, and immigration into the city increased.

During the 19th century, the city was rebuilt, old neighborhoods were updated. A number of public buildings were erected; hospitals, railway stations, and post offices. Trams became the main transportation system in Stockholm. Now, the working class moved out into the suburbs. Sundbyberg was the first, others followed rapidly. The elite, however, began moving out to Djursholm, where villas were erected.

During the 18th century, Stockholm was known as a cultural center and an important trade center. As the steamships and the railway had their centers here, it also became the very heart of trading on an international basis.

During the 20th century, the city was transformed into a large cosmopolitan city with several additional areas, all of them identified as the Greater Stockholm. However, in the following descriptions the inner city of Stockholm will be concentrated on and only in a somewhat concise manner.



Lundagatan 3, late 1800
Photo Nils Engström

Let's start our Stockholm Walkabout...(map on page 8)

The sun is barely more than squint over the Klara Church, to the east, and life swarming out of the old houses when I start my slow walk from Tegelhögen (the Brick Pile) at Fridhemsplan, where my grandmother lived, towards the Stockholm Old Town. I walk slowly along the Karlberg's Canal towards the City Town Hall. The sunlight is now glittering sharply into my eyes as I am approaching the City Town Hall, and as I walk along I can hear the thrushes singing in the bushes. A slight scent of jasmine and park roses are in the air.



City Town Hall and Karlberg Canal

Passing the City Town Hall I see a golden tomb on the east side of the building. The myth says this is the tomb of Birger Jarl, the founder of Stockholm, the knight who brought the Swedes together in the 13th century.



City Town Hall in evening attire

To the left of me is Klara Sjö (Lake Klara) which is now a canal in central Stockholm. Separating the island Kungsholmen from the northern city district Norrmalm, the canal connects Barnhusviken to Riddarfjärden. Together with Barnhusviken, Karlbergssjön, and Karlbergskanalen, it forms part of the nameless body of water which separates Kungsholmen from the mainland districts north and east of it, Norrmalm and Vasastaden. Four bridges stretch over the canal: Stadshusbron, Klarabergsviadukten, Kungsbron, and Blekholmsbron; the first of which limit the maximum height in the canal to 3.3 m (about 11ft).



The golden tomb of Birger Jarl

Several prominent buildings are located near the canal. Most notably the Stockholm City Town Hall south of it, but also the Serafimerlasarettet (Seraphim Hospital) on the western shore, in operation 1752-1990. The name of the canal is derived from the vicinity to the Klara district, in turn, named after a former monastery dedicated to Saint Clare. The canal is called a lake simply because it used to be a lake until continuous land fillings transformed it into a narrow strait during the 18th century. Several local streets and other structures are still named after the small island Blekholmen (Pitch Isle) once located here and today part of the eastern shore.

From the top of the City Town Hall tower I am able to see Riddarfjärden and Old Town. Riddarfjärden, literally the *Knight Firth*, is a bay of Lake Mälaren in central Stockholm, founded in 1252 by an island in the stream where Lake Mälaren (from the west) drains into the Baltic Sea (to the east). The island is today called Stadsholmen and constitutes Stockholm's Old Town. It is surrounded by land to the north Norrmalm, and south, Södermalm, and by water to the west Riddarfjärden and east Stockholms ström.



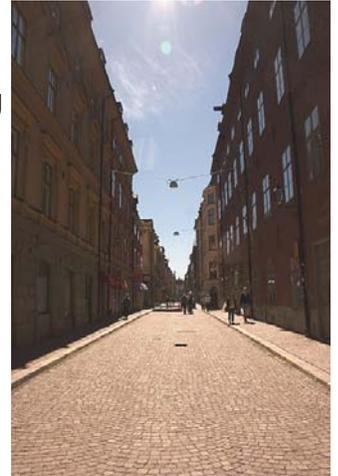
Old Town

Riddarholmskyrkan (the Knight Church) was inaugurated in 1300 and is one of Stockholm's oldest standing buildings, including the oldest brick walls. The Church is the burial church of the Swedish monarchs. It is located on the island of Riddarholmen (Knight Island), close to the Royal Palace in Stockholm. Many steamships ("Waxholms båtar") pass by in the bay at Riddarholmen.



Waxholmsbåt (Steam ship)

Now I approach the Gamla Stan (Old Town) and stroll along the cobbled street of Stora Nygatan (the New Big Street) towards Kornhamns Torg (Grain square). The street was created as part of a new town plan following the great fire of 1625, and probably dates back to about 1630. An official attempt to name the street Konungsgatan ("The Kings Street"), a name known from 1637, obviously failed. The southern part of the street dates back from before the fire.



Stora Nygatan

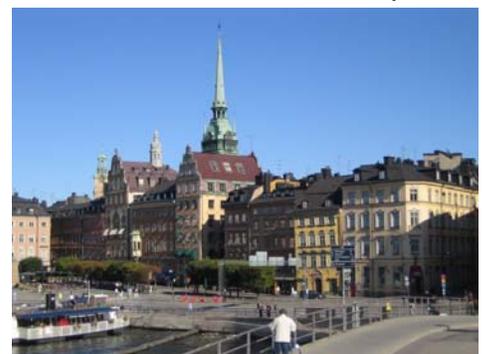
At number two is the Bergstrahl House, originally built in the 1640s by Erik Ryning, a member of the regency of Queen Christina, and designed by Simon de la Vallée. In the 18th century it was owned by Secretary Gottfried Sack who ran a tavern and a brothel there, frequently visited by the troubadour Carl Michael Bellman, and the authors and poets Karl Israel Hallman and Olof Kexél. When Sack died in 1774, Hallman delivered an oration to his memory which became the starting point for the order Par Bricole, a society still devoted to cultivating and preserving the Swedish cultural heritage, especially of the 18th century. The building was thereafter the location for newspapers and social clubs associated with the dawning Swedish democracy. Lately the address is used by state-level institutions such as the Supreme Court.

From Stora Nygatan I'm able to see across Västerlångatan towards the Royal Castle and Storkyrkan which is a majestic scene in the morning sun. Now I walk forward towards Kornhamns Torg passing by many interesting shops and restaurants.



View towards Storkyrkan

The square is named after the harbor Kornhamn where grain was delivered to the city by ships from the Lake Mälaren area during the Middle Ages. The grain was stored in an open space called Kornorget (Grain Square). At the time, however, the city looked entirely different, and the square in question was actually located where today the square known as Järntorget ("Iron Square") is found. The latter was renamed after the iron trade which grew in importance, and which also for a while gave Kornhamnstorg the name Järnbron (Iron Bridge). The square probably was a product of the city plan created for the western part of the old town in the 1620s, though the space was referred to as Åkaretorget (Carter Square) during that century, arguably because of the horse-drawn vehicles stationed there. Both historically and in modern times, the names Kornhamn and Kornhamnstorg have been used for the square, the harbor, and the present quay. In the early 1740s, the harbor and its quays were restored the canal separating Riddarholmen from the rest of the old town. Here I am able to see the interesting houses from 19th century.



Kornhamns Torg (Grain Square)

A soft perfume of new mown hay, from some island in Stockholm archipelago, touches my face as I slowly walk across the Grain Square deeper into Old Town. Perhaps it could be a piece of our history softly speaking to me about long gone glory times.

Close by, I enter Järntorget (Iron Square) where I immediately find the statue of our friend and troubadour the Evert Taube. Nothing could be more Swedish or "Stockholmish" than Evert Taube.

From my position at Järntorget I face north towards one of the most remarkable streets, Mårten Trotzigs Gränd (Alley of Mårten Trotzig), an alley, leading from Västerlånggatan and Järntorget up to Prästgatan and Tyska Stallplan. The width of its 36 steps tapers down to a mere 90 cm (about 3 Ft), making the alley the narrowest street in Stockholm.

The alley is named after the German merchant and burgher Mårten Trotzig (1559-1617), who, born in Wittenberg, immigrated to Stockholm in 1581, and bought properties in the alley in 1597 and 1599, where he opened a shop. According to sources from the late 16th century, he dealt in iron and copper, and by 1595 had sworn his burgher oath. He later became one of the richest merchants in Stockholm. He was beaten to death during a trip to Kopparberg in the Bergslagen area in 1617.

Walking across the square I meet an old friend I haven't seen in many years and we stop to catch up on our lives. As I stand there I get a gleam from high in the South Hills through the narrow streets, which is a fascinating view. The sun is now delivering a wonderful backlight for a potential photograph.

I continue my walk on Västerlånggatan towards the Royal Castle. Västerlånggatan (Western Long Street) is a street stretching between the squares Myntorget and Järntorget, it follows the course of the city's now demolished 13th century defensive wall.

The blocks along the street are elongated but only a few meters in width; those on the eastern side oriented lengthwise, and those on the western crosswise. Only four blocks thus forms the eastern side of the street while some 20 are lined up along the western side. Most of the front doors of the buildings are located either on the quiet Prästgatan, the parallel street passing along the eastern side, or in one of the numerous alleys on the street's western side. The intact façades of the northernmost blocks are hiding the semi-detached offices of the Parliament. To the south are the remaining numerous and very narrow blocks and alleys which before the great fire of 1625 occupied the entire western side of the street.

Since the Middle Ages, the street, Storkyrkobrinken, and various sections of it appears under different names referring to various activities and prominent buildings. In medieval times, Storkyrkobrinken was the main route leading up to the village church at the top of Stadsholmen. The crossing street Västerlånggatan was the street passing outside the city wall on the city's western side, and there was a city gate which permitted Storkyrkobrinken to enter the city. In 1422 Storkyrkobrinken is referred to as Sancte Nicolause Port ("Gate of Saint Nicholas") while the section outside the city wall (west of Västerlånggatan) appears as St. Laurentii Gränd ("Alley of Saint Lawrence") in 1436, a name it retained throughout the second half of that century.



Evert Taube



Mårten Trotzig alley



View of South Hills



Västerlång gatan

From Storkyrkobrinken I turn onto Prästgatan (Priest's Street") a street stretching from a cul-de-sac west of the Royal Palace to the street Österlånggatan in the southern corner of the old town. Prästgatan forms a parallel street to Västerlånggatan.

What a joy! Remembering my grandfather happily singing the song "Serenad i Prästgatan" by Evert Taube and suddenly I'm full of joy and aware of the deep, deep soul of Stockholm streaming through me.



Prästgatan

Serenaden i Prästgatan

Ah, ah, haha! mina bröder!
Ett fönster står öppet åt söder!
Undan gardin! Fram min blondin!
Skynda, mitt hjärta förblöder!
Stjärnan på himlen den höga
sig speglar förtjust i ditt öga!
Är hon blondin? Ja, hon är fin!
Dock solosång batar oss föga.
Men stuprännan ger
en chans, kavaljer!
Jag klättrar opp och sedan ner!

Blondin med de rosende kinder
och gyllne böljande hår!
Med barm lätt beslöjad och trinder
du i ditt fönster står.
Prästinna i prästgatans vimmel
låt upp din port och sal,
ty längs stuprännan upp till din himmel
är vägen allt för hal.

Ah, ah, haha! my brothers!
A window is open to the south!
Put aside the curtain! Come my blonde!
Hurry, my heart bleeds to death!
The star high in the sky
reflecst keenly in your eye!
Is she blonde? Yes, she is fine!
However, solo singing affect us little.
But the drain-pipe gives
a chance, cavalier!
I climb up and then down!

Blondin with the rosy cheeks
and golden flowing hair!
With thinly veiled bosom and voluptuous
you stand in your window.
Priestess of the priest street crowd
open up your door and hall,
because along the drainpipe up to your heaven
the path is too slippery.

Due to Copyright only the first part of the song is recited here.

In the corner of Prästgatan and Kåkbrinken is a runestone in the wall, carrying the inscription "Torsten and Frögunn had this stone erected in memory of their son." The stone was probably brought to Stockholm to be used as building material, from where is not known. As the female name Frögunn is known as a pagan name, the stone is believed to be from around 1000, thus being about 200 years older than the city.

I continue my walk along the narrow cobble stone covered street towards Tyska kyrkan (the German Church), sometimes called St. Gertrude's Church, considered to be one of the most beautiful churches in Stockholm. I cross a couple of streets over and continue my walk on Österlånggatan towards the Royal Castle.



German Church

Österlånggatan is a street stretching northward from Järntorget to Slottsbacken by the Royal Castle. Major sights include the statue of Saint George and the Dragon on Köpmanbrinken and the restaurant Den Gyllene Freden a number 51, established in 1722, and mentioned in Guinness Book of Records as one of the oldest restaurants with an unaltered interior.

I immediately recognize that the street tempo is much slower in this part of Old Town, giving me more space and more time in shops and cafés.

Now I see the statue of Saint George and the Dragon. The helgonbiografi (hagiography) of Saint George is Eastern in origin, brought back with the Crusaders and retold with the courtly appurtenances belonging to the genre of Romance. The earliest known depictions of the motif are from tenth- or eleventh-century Cappadocia and eleventh-century Georgia and Armenia. In the iconografi (iconography) of Eastern Orthodoxy, George had been depicted as a soldier since at least the seventh century. The earliest known surviving narrative of the dragon episode is an eleventh-century Georgian text.

Whether I'm a believer in the old text or not I must express my admiration for the artistry involved in making such a beautiful statue.

After walking along for a while I arrive at the Royal Castle from the east at Slottsbacken, and I stroll along over Norrbro to Kungsträdgården (the Royal Garden) where I sit down at one of the cafés to have a soft drink. It is early afternoon and the sky is blue, warm and nice. There, in front of me is a very famous statue, the one of Karl XII with his arm raised pointing east.

He had some unfinished business with the Russians at the time, that I think did him in at the Poltava battle during his Russian campaigns 1707 - 1709. Nothing has really been the same since I suppose.

Oh, it is so nice to see Stockholm when it is dressed in its beautiful summer attire, the birds are singing, and I'm able to sense the best of the best and then slowly start walking again.

I could remain in the area enjoying the afternoon sun or I could hop on a tram and go to Djurgården and Skansen, but that is an entirely different story.



Österlånggatan



St George and the Dragon



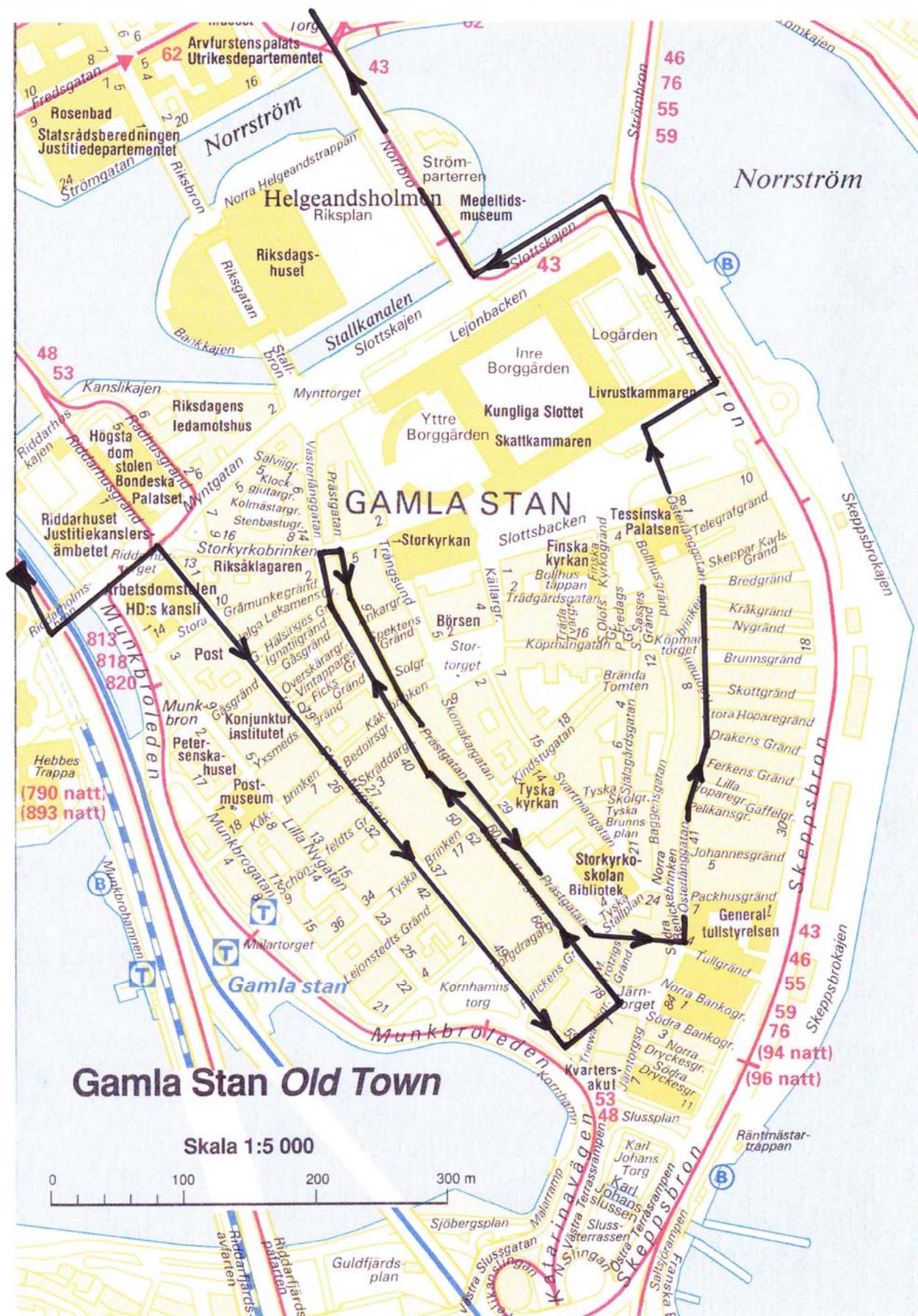
Royal Castle seen from the Royal Garden



Karl XII in the Royal Garden

Street Tram in Stockholm,
Line 7, Norrmalms Torg to Skansen, Djurgården





Stockholm Walkabout Map, Gamla Stan

Written by Leif Rosqvist, the editor of New Sweden Heritage Society newsletter. The story is based on information from my own experience in Stockholm as a young man.

References and more reading and information:

About Evert Taube, go to Google Search and type in Evert Taube.

About Stockholm history, go to Google Search and type in Stockholm Hstory.

About Stockholm Stads Museum, go to Google Search and type in Faktarummet - Stockholm Stads Museum (provider of the old pictures)

About Mårten Trotzig, go to Google Search and type in, Mårten Trotzig

About Old Town Churches, go to Google Search and type in Stockholm Churches

About Erik's krönikan (chronicle of Erik), go to Google Search and type Erik's krönikan