ISLAND PEOPLE:
TRANSNATIONAL IDENTIFICATION, MINORITY POLITICS,
AND ESTONIA’S SWEDISH POPULATION

DISSERTATION

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By

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Changes in borders and political jurisdictions in the Baltic region over the centuries have transformed the national and communal identities of the many different communities who call the region home. Nowhere was national identity more influenced by these geopolitical shifts than in the case of a small group of Swedes who lived in relative isolation for roughly 700 years along the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea in what is now Estonia. They were on the periphery of society in almost every aspect—geographically, economically, politically, linguistically, and culturally. Through tsarist Russian, independent Estonian, Soviet, and Nazi German rule, the Estonian-Swedes sought to define their community identification amidst each successive government’s minority policies.

The arrival of missionaries from Sweden in the 1870s reconnected these scattered Swedish-speaking communities with their ancient homeland and established new links between the various towns and islands. While religion provided a foundation for the communities, the missionaries also brought the promise of education and further contacts with Sweden. In the following 60 years, the Estonian-Swedes developed increased connections with Sweden, established cultural and political organizations, founded schools, and regularly published newspapers and calendars until the arrival of the Second
World War and the occupations by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. By 1944, the majority of the Swedish population relocated to Sweden.

This dissertation focuses on the identification of the Swedes in Estonia from the arrival of the missionaries until the departure of the Estonian-Swedes in 1944. A central question to be explored is the relationship between continental Swedish nationalist and religious movements and their outreach to Swedes abroad. Did the Estonian-Swedes develop a distinct identity, or were they a branch of a larger, international Swedish identity? This dissertation will explore four aspects of the history of Estonia’s Swedish minority: 1) the role of cultural development, 2) the relationship between minorities and those in power, 3) the relationship of a minority to a distant homeland, and 4) the geopolitical international relations between states. Intertwined in all four areas for the Swedes were the changing conceptions of “Swedishness” and their identification as “Swedes.” The domestic policies and local development of a regional identification will be compared to the transnational influences prevalent on the border region.

Domestic and international politics have a significant impact on identification, particularly among minority populations. The Estonian-Swedes are an important case study for minority policies in border regions, as they highlight the dual notions of nationality and citizenship as they saw themselves as Swedish by nationality and Estonian by citizenship. As a minority group living on the periphery of society the controlling government rarely singled out the Estonian-Swedes in the development of minority policies of the region, although such policies greatly impacted their development.
To “Morfar” from his “sprattlagubbe”

For laying the foundation in the search of my own Swedishness.
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This research project has taken numerous turns, and multiple directions since I stumbled across some Swedish-language Soviet propaganda while studying in Estonia back in 2001. The excitement over those newspapers sparked a greater interest in the Swedish population of Estonia. Each new discovery was like peeling off another layer of an onion, revealing yet another aspect and new directions to take. I cherished those rare moments as a scholar when coming across a line in a letter that makes me completely rethink my earlier research, or sole copies of a book, long forgotten in a library, whose pages as still sealed shut from the printing press.

As with life itself, though, it is not the destination that matters the most and provides the greatest joy, but rather the journey. And the journey has been wonderful – living and traveling all around the Baltic Sea region and following an incredible intellectual journey. All journeys must come to an eventual end, and the completion of this dissertation is one of those ends. But I also realize that there are many more exciting journeys just around the corner.

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Every state has minority populations. How a state defines and divides its people reflects the values and ideological background of that society. Perhaps we can best understand history and the changes in government policy by looking out to the periphery, to the islands and coastal regions often overlooked, and to the people residing there – the island people.
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INTRODUCTION

Mats Ekman was born in 1865 in a small village in Rickul in Estland Province, a region along the western periphery of the then tsarist Russian Empire. Afflicted with polio as a child and subsequently left with one arm immobile throughout his life, Ekman could not work as a farmer or fisherman as most of his Swedish neighbors did. Instead, he took on odd jobs, including delivering the mail. But everyone in “Aiboland” (the Swedish-speaking regions of what is today Estonia) knew of Ekman because of his stories and in particular his poetry. Throughout the twentieth century, many of the Estonian-Swedes expressed themselves through poetry, but they considered Ekman to be alone in a class far above the rest. They saw Ekman as their “skald” – along the lines of the ancient Nordic poets – who embraced and composed his poetry in the local dialect. Ingegerd Lindström, Ekman’s great-niece who collected and published his poetry in 2005 wrote, “His poems describe both his own life and how life in the Swedish districts appeared, in times of joy and sorrow, in the everyday and on festive occasions.”1

Ekman’s poems captured the life language of the “Aibofolk” (literally, the island people), as the Swedish-speakers in Estonia called themselves. Typical of Ekman’s poetry, the poem “Thanks” connects the people of Aiboland to their Swedish linguistic heritage and their homeland of Sweden, a place their forebearers had left centuries earlier.

1 Ingegerd Lindström, Prästen E Varagskall: Dikter av Mats Ekman (Sweden: Recreo Förlag, 2005), 11.
Our Aiboland along Estonia’s coast with very good looking white beaches.
Five islands lie outside
Which to Aiboland also belongs.
Here old Swedish is still spoken,
Which we inherited from ancient men;
Our Swedish language us makes proud.
A Svea2 our Mother also is,
a Svea extends a warm hand out here to our beloved Aiboland.

So loving our Mother thought and many libraries to us gave.
Our Birkas3 is largest and best.
Here we lie at Svea’s breast, here we are nourished by Svea’s milk and grow into good and wise, strong people
We should unite everyone and many thanks to Svea shout, who have done us so much good to proceed forward is our lot.

Surely we have had to endure, Surely has our language had to suffer.
To help for us came the great world war And shook us from the Russians free.
Now school we in our mother tongue, Our soldier no more a Russian-cabbage.
Up all you Swedes, side by side Then we are, will always be, free.

2 “Svea” is a female national symbol of Sweden, thought to have originated with Anders Leijonstedt in 1672, and which forms the basis of the country’s name: Sverige as a shortened version of Sveas Rike (the kingdom of Svea). Similar to the French “Marianne,” the German “Germania,” or the Finnish maiden, Svea was a frequent symbol in Swedish nationalist literature throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

3 Birkas, established in 1920, was one of the most culturally significant schools for the Estonian-Swedes. See chapters 2 and 3.

4 “Eitt tack” (Ett tack) by Mats Ekman, in Ingegerd Lindström, 106-107. The original text (which I’ve provided) is written in the local dialect, however, my translation is based on Lindström’s translation into proper Swedish. Ekman wrote the poem in 1927. Unless otherwise noted, all translations throughout this dissertation are my own.
Ekman’s poem raises questions about the connections between the Swedish population of Estonia and their distant homeland. How did the Estonian-Swedes come to see themselves as children of Svea and in what context did Ekman conceive of himself as a “Swede”? Why was their connection to the Swedish language so important in their conception of their community and their culture? What was the relationship between the people and the land? Ekman also mentions Russians, referencing the earlier period in his life, which raises the question, what is the relationship between the population and the governments controlling the region?

For close to seven centuries, a minority group of Swedish-speakers lived in relative isolation on islands and along the northwestern coast of present-day Estonia, on the periphery of those controlling the region and between the northern powers of Sweden and Russia. The arrival of missionaries from Sweden in the 1870s reconnected the Swedish communities with their ancient homeland (fädernesland), and established links between the previously isolated communities. At the same time, the Russian state was simultaneously attempting to assert a Russian and Orthodox influence across its empire. While religion provided a foundation for further cultural developments among the Swedes, the missionaries also brought the promise of Swedish-language education and further contacts with the homeland. In the following seven decades until the arrival of the Second World War and the occupations by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, the Estonian-Swedes developed stronger connections with Sweden, established cultural and political organizations, founded schools, and regularly published almanacs and
newspapers. By 1944, having lived through a dizzying array of different systems and nations of governance, the majority of the Estonian-Swedes relocated to Sweden.

This dissertation tells the story of the Swedish-speaking population in Estonia from 1860 until 1944. Using the Estonian-Swedes as a case study allows me to examine a minority population that was rarely addressed specifically by the minority policies of the state, although equally affected by such legislation. In particular, this dissertation focuses on four themes in the history of the Estonian-Swedes: internal development, connections to the government, the distant homeland, and geopolitical considerations.

The first theme is the internal development of the region. For much of their history, the Swedish villages and islands in the region were isolated, with different legal rights and privileges and distinct dialects. However, starting with the arrival of the missionaries and continuing until the 1940s, villages increasingly became interconnected and with a growing sense of shared identification. This community growth occurred internally through the movement of Swedish teachers to the various villages and the adoption of high Swedish in the schools (rather than the local dialect). Following the 1905 Russian Revolution, teachers and clergy in the region came together and created a cultural organization to further unify the people and strengthen the Swedish-language schools. Between the two world wars the Estonian-Swedes formed a political party to argue for minority protections and established a Swedish-language newspaper to more closely connect all of the people in Aiboland. Both the Soviet and Nazi occupations challenged the internal connections, limiting and controlling movement and communication. The Soviet Union viewed the Estonian-Swedish leaders as political,
cultural, and social threats and exiled them to Siberia or mobilized them into the military. As the Estonian-Swedes developed new forms of self-identification and engaged in community building projects, they consciously privileged print culture, formal education, and cultural institutions. Here they tended to believe the Swedish missionaries and ethnographers who saw their rural coastal ways as backward and their culture in need of improvement and modernization (which meant Swedification).

The second theme is the relationship of a minority population to those governing the region. The history of the Swedish population of Estonia, particularly from the 1860s through to the end of the Second World War, demonstrates the interplay between self-identification and how administrators of the region viewed and treated minority populations. The region passed through various systems of government, and minority policy shifted, from absolute monarchy, to constitutional monarchy (1905), a provisional government following revolution (1917-1920), parliamentary democracy (1920-1934), dictatorship (1934-1940), Soviet Communism (1940-1941), and Nazi occupation (1941-1944). Each government approached minorities based on distinct policy assumptions and goals, and applied different categories of identification to the population. The tsarist government, while classifying the Swedish-speaking population as peasants, also recognized the historical rights and protections the Swedes gained when Sweden controlled the region – rights that differentiated the Swedish peasants from their Estonian neighbors. The Estonian government offered legal protections for minorities, although as the Swedish communities were largely poor and could not afford to establish their own cultural autonomy institution (as the Baltic German and Jewish minorities did), the
Estonian-Swedes did not fully utilize the protections offered under the law. Additionally, in the mid- to late-1930s, the Estonian government increasingly favored the Estonian majority, placing limitations on minority populations. During the Soviet occupation (1940-1941), the Soviet Estonian Central Committee endorsed cultural, economic, and social advantages for the Estonian-Swedes. And during the Nazi occupation, the focus of race placed the Estonian-Swedes higher in a racial hierarchy, resulting in favorable treatment and even assistance in migrating to Sweden.

The third theme is the connection between the minority group and the distant homeland. Even before Lutheran missionaries arrived, Swedish-speakers felt a bond with Sweden – their legal rights originated from the Swedish monarchy, and they therefore viewed Sweden as a protector. The connections grew following the creation of a pan-Swedish movement in Sweden in the early twentieth century, which sought to protect and reinforce Swedish language and culture internationally against competing nationalities. Ethnographers, racial biologists, ethno-musicologists, clergy, teachers, and visitors to the region described the population as “Swedes” and sought to document what they believed were ancient Swedish dialects and traditions long since lost in Sweden. Through this period, the role of Sweden changed from indifference to active participation in the welfare of the Swedes in Estonia. The Estonian-Swedes looked to Sweden for financial and cultural support, and through their usage of proper Swedish in their publications and in the schools, sought to foster a Swedish identity. However, Swedes in both Sweden and Estonia repeatedly debated whether the Estonian-Swedes had a distinct identity, or if they were a branch of a larger, international Swedish identity. Throughout this period of study,
the Estonian-Swedes had a dual identity placed on them, first as “backwards” and in need of saving, and second as the holders of ancient traditions and cultures that had been lost to modernization in Sweden and which needed special treatment to preserve.

The fourth theme is the effects of a minority population on international politics and the geopolitics of the states in the region. Living in a border region, the Estonian-Swedes provided strong links between Sweden and whichever power controlled the region. The Estonian government looked to Sweden to establish legitimacy and to generate economic connections. Under international observation, the Estonian government drafted minority legislation that many at the time considered a model for others to emulate. Swedish diplomats, royalty, and bishops regularly incorporated visits to Estonian-Swedish communities when they visited Estonia, infusing official diplomatic visits with the observations of the minority population. Estonia’s Swedish community at times received greater consideration than other minority groups, oftentimes in an attempt to influence relations with Sweden. For example, Communist propaganda in Sweden used the Soviet policies toward the Estonian-Swedes as evidence of the advantages of the socialist system. And in the Nazi period, Sweden’s negotiations with Germany over the Estonian-Swedes centered on issues of race, allowing for the legal migration to Sweden of many individuals.

Theoretical Framework

At the heart of all four themes is the question of “Swedishness” (svenskhet), an evolving term concerning what it meant to be a “Swede.” There was an ongoing
argument over whether the Aiboland people were “Swedes.” How various groups and individuals defined the characteristics of a “Swede” varied. For the Estonian-Swedes, there were numerous layers of identity – including their strong connection to the village (which also often involved a distinct dialect), their eventual connection to the larger Estonian-Swedish population, their citizenship as Estonians, and their connection to the larger pan-Swedish movement. To make sense of these various layers of Swedishness, I utilize cultural geographer David Knight’s concept of identity to analyze the multiplicity of identities.

Multiple factors influence the formation of a people’s identity. Knight’s concept of identity extends from the individual outwards to ever-larger groups – from household, to village, to state, to international levels.5 According to Knight, one can simultaneously identify with a village and an international community.6 From the intrapersonal level outwards, what constitutes an identity is the extent to which a connection with others can be found, or what Benedict Anderson would later argue is the “imagined community.”7 Knight writes, “To be a large-scale society implies that the people are in conscious relations with one another, with a sense of identity that goes far beyond that of a small-scale society.”8 Knight places a high importance on connections with the land, although he does not stress political borders, as identities can transcend these political boundaries.

8 Knight, “Identity and Territory,” 515.
For Estonian-Swedes, the strong bond between the individual and the land was a defining characteristic of their identity, although as time progressed, and particularly once Estonia gained independence, leaders in the community sought to unite the villages into a larger Estonian-Swedish or Aiboland identity, which also established the population as loyal citizens of the new state. Simultaneously, individuals and organizations in Sweden sought to incorporate the Estonian-Swedes into the larger pan-Swedish movement that transcended political boundaries.

Using Knight’s approach allows for the study of identity across multiple layers. The various levels can also be used as a measure of identity formation, while at the same time accounting for apparent discrepancies and for the impact of overlapping identities. Indeed, the state itself can pull identities in varying directions, particularly when it applies pressure on groups in border regions. For the purposes of this paper, four levels in particular are of significance – communal, regional, national, and transnational. Nationalism scholar Eric Hobsbawm wrote,

Men and women did not choose collective identification as they chose shoes, knowing that one could only put on one pair at a time. They had, and still have, several attachments and loyalties simultaneously, including nationality, and are simultaneously concerned with various aspects of life, any of which may at any one time be foremost in their minds, as the occasion suggests.9

These various attachments can change over time and are affected by the role of the state and the development of identities on the various levels. According to Knight and

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Hobsbawm, one can simultaneously identify with a village and an international community.

While recognizing that the Estonian-Swedish community identified with multiple actors (village, regional, state, and international), I employ the term “identification” instead of “identity” in discussing concepts of self, based on the argument presented by Rogers Brubaker. By shifting the focus from identity to identification one can gain clarity in determining the actors classifying the population. The fluidity of “identity” is one of the reasons Brubaker argues that “identity” is a weak term for analysis; the terminology used by scholars varies considerably, making the terms irrelevant in scholarship. He suggests greater clarity in the language of academics, suggesting as one possibility shifting from “identity” to “identification” or “classification.” He states, “Identification – of oneself and of others – is intrinsic to social life… The modern state has been one of the most important agents of identification and categorization.”

Identification can be based on multiple factors, including among others religion, language, culture, economic and social standing, ethnicity, race, and nationality. Which factors governments, organizations, or individuals applied influenced the development of the group’s identity, and perhaps more importantly, how the state or organizations view the people and shape minority policies.

I will demonstrate the creation of an Estonian-Swedish identification and attempts to unify the region largely centered around the standardization of the language, including in the schools and through the publication of a newspaper, Kustbon (The Coastal

Resident). In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson stresses the function of “print-capitalism” in standardizing language to move beyond local dialects and establishing the imagined bonds to unite a far-flung population, to move beyond the village identity and establish a national identity.\(^{11}\) Within the Estonian-Swedish community, the editors of *Kustbon* made a decision to use proper Swedish (*rikssvenska*), rather than any of the local dialects, in a conscious effort to unify the region, and to promote greater connections to Sweden. Therefore, Anderson’s argument about the effect of printed sources in fostering an identification is of particular relevance in discussing the Estonian-Swedes.

**Historical Background**

Swedish settlement along the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea began during the Viking era when overpopulation in Sweden led to expansion and colonization (see illustration 1). Settlement occurred almost simultaneously in what is present-day Estonia and Finland along coastlines and island regions.\(^{12}\) While approximate dates of settlement remain a mystery to scholars, the 1294 town by-laws in Hapsal (a town in the northwest, and the bishopric) contained the first mention of Swedes in the region. The Swedish population primarily lived along the northwestern coast and island regions of Estonia. Colloquially referred to as Aiboland, there were large concentrations of Swedes on Wormsö, Odensholm, Rågö, Nuckö, Nargö, Rickul, and Runö (see illustration 2).

\(^{11}\) See Anderson, chapter 3.


The Swedes were often farmers, fishermen, or sailors – or a combination of the three. August Tammekann writes, “The Estonian-Swedes’ settlement area is characterized completely by its nearness to the sea. Remarkably there was also a considerable distance between the settlements.”\(^{13}\) While the various communities were

\(^{13}\) August Tammekann, “Estlandssvenskarnas bosättningsområde” in *En bok om Estlands svenskar*, 11.
isolated and remained on the periphery, they were linked into the broader Baltic Sea region through trade contacts, selling their catches and harvests. As a necessity of this trade, those that ventured out of their home ports typically spoke Swedish, Finnish, German, and Russian – or at least enough to complete their trade. The land along the Estonian coastline was typically poor in quality. Tammekann estimates the cultivated land in some of the Estonian-Swedish inhabited regions in 1934 as follows: Runö 19.3 percent, Wormsö 17.7 percent, Nuckö 13.2 percent, and Rickul (including Odensholm) 9.4 percent.¹⁴

The Swedes were one of a number of peoples to inhabit the region. The 1922 census for Estonia indicates a total population of 1.1 million people in the state. Of that, 87.7 percent were classified as Estonian, 8.2 percent as Russian, 1.7 percent as German, and other peoples (including the Swedes) as 2.4 percent.¹⁵ The Swedes were less than one percent of Estonia’s population, approximately 8,000 people, although the 1922 census demonstrates that in many areas where there were Swedes, they were in the majority. Across Läänemaa Province (the region in northwestern Estonia), for example, Swedes comprised 7 percent of the population. While many of the islands were the Swedes lived were entirely (or almost entirely) Swedish, some of the settlements on the Estonian mainland had mixed populations of Swedes and Estonians. The Russian minority largely lived in the eastern portion and capital of the country, while the Baltic Germans lived

¹⁴ Tammekann in En bok om Estlands svenskar, 52.
spread out across the state, a legacy of their role as the region’s nobility and landowner status.

There is evidence that Swedes were long considered separate from their Estonian neighbors, being classified under “Swedish Law” as early as 1341, which gave them limited financial responsibility and individual freedoms.\(^\text{16}\) These rights gave the Swedes protections in the areas of legal and social status, as well as rights as merchants. Scholars believe that “Swedish Law” related to the Swedes as having been Christianized, while the Estonians were still classified as pagans at that time.\(^\text{17}\) Sweden’s control over the region (1583-1710) brought some noble resettlement from other parts of the Swedish Empire, although after Russia took over the area, the Swedish nobility left. This left the peasants in Russian-held territory until the Russian Revolution in 1917. However, during the Swedish period, the Swedish-speaking peasants received royal Swedish rights and protections (which varied by village), including access to the land, limitations of daily labor to the landlord, and the right to petition the king. The Swedish-speakers maintained these documents, and even after control of the region passed to Russia, the Russian tsars conferred the legal standing of those privileges and the protections they guaranteed. However, as the legal status varied by village, there were few interactions between the villages of Aiboland, with traditions and dialects sharply demarcating the regional differences. There is no evidence to suggest the population saw themselves as part of a regional population of Swedes, although they did look to the Swedish king as a protector.

\(^\text{16}\) “Swedish Law” is first mentioned in a letter to the Bishop of Kuramaa in 1341.

\(^\text{17}\) See Blumfeldt in *En bok om Estlands svenskar*, 101.
Distinctions remained between the Swedes and other peasants in the region, later referred to as Estonians. While comparably speaking the Swedish-speakers were better off than the Estonian peasants in earlier periods, agricultural reform laws in 1816 liberated the Estonians from serfdom and led to economic and educational expansion among the Estonian peasantry. However, the agricultural reform law did not apply to the Swedes as they were not serfs, and the change in legal status led to a complete reversal of fortune: as the Estonian peasants improved and gained in status, the Swedes declined. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the economic standing of the Swedes began to improve, although even through to the Second World War, the Estonian-Swedish peasants remained economically and socially behind their Estonian counterparts.

Sources

This dissertation is based on research conducted in archives and libraries in Sweden, Estonia, Finland, and Russia. In addition to government reports and minutes of meetings, archival sources include memoirs, letters, and church documents. For example, organizations such as the Estonia Committee (see chapter 3) kept detailed minutes of their meetings. However, there were several shortcomings in the archival record. As the majority of Estonian-Swedes emigrated from Estonia to Sweden under the circumstance of wartime occupation (few could bring more than a single suitcase), many documents and artifacts from the communities themselves from earlier periods were lost. For

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example, I was unable to locate the complete minutes to the meetings of the cultural organization *Svenska Odlingens Vänner* (SOV). In some cases, I have found portions of documents, such as letters and minutes to meetings from the 1920s and 1930s, in Swedish archives – particularly in the records of the Estonia Committee, where they were included as appendices in reports and mentioned in minutes. In this respect, increased oversight from Sweden into the work in Aiboland also resulted in an increase in the preservation of sources from Estonia.

Another shortcoming in the sources is because of the destruction or disappearance of sources from Estonia, most likely occurring during the Second World War. As the region passed from one power to the other, numerous government documents went missing, presumably from the destruction of archival materials by the actors involved. Whereas the archival materials from the Soviet control post-1944 are well organized, materials from 1940-1941 seemed quite scattered, and often incomplete. I have attempted to locate documents to fill in any gaps, but in a few instances had to draw likely conclusions based on existing source materials.

I also place a heavy importance on the use of material culture such as almanacs and newspapers, including *Kustbon* (The Coastal Resident, 1918-1940 and 1944-present) and *Sovjet-Estland* (Soviet-Estonia, 1940-1941). I fully recognize that such sources do not represent a complete picture and contain a strong bias. However, these sources also provide significant insights into the community and how topics are framed by those controlling the newspaper. In neither case can the newspapers be used as an accurate
reflection of how the broader population received these materials. Where I have located such sources that address the response, I have attempted to highlight them.

Following the relocation of the Estonian-Swedish community to Sweden in the later portion of the Second World War was a catalyst for expanded scholarship of the community, their history, and their culture. While there were memoirs, travelogues, and ethnographic studies conducted prior to the relocation, the amount of attention and published sources increased considerably after 1945, with many of the sources written by Estonian-Swedes themselves, such as the four volume series En bok om Estlands svenskarne (A Book on Estonia’s Swedes). The newspaper Kustbon (based in Stockholm) resumed publication after the Second World War as a quarterly magazine and became an invaluable resource of scholarship and individual histories.

**Structure and Divisions**

In breaking up this topic into distinct chapters, there were a number of possibilities available to me. Perhaps the obvious choice would have been to break up this topic along the political divisions: tsarist Russia, independent democratic Estonia, authoritarian Estonian rule, Soviet occupation, and German occupation. However, this division would have ignored the developments internal to the Swedish population, which did not always follow the political changes. Therefore I decided to structure the chapters around what I see are the important transitional movements in the history of the people themselves. To highlight these divisions and developments, I have chosen an individual or individuals to represent each period.
The first chapter covers roughly 1860-1905. Lars Johan Österblom was a Swedish missionary sent to Estland province and, as such, he represents the start of uninterrupted contact between the Swedish-speakers and Sweden. These decades also saw transformations in Swedish nationalism, the origins of the pan-Swedish movement, and increased “Russification” within the Baltic region. The second chapter begins with the 1905 Russian Revolution, includes the First World War and 1917 Russian Revolutions, and ends in 1930. Hans Pöhl, an Estonian-Swede, was a cultural and political leader, serving as the first Swedish Folk Minister in Estland/Estonia. During this period, the Swedes established cultural and political organizations and established a Swedish-language newspaper. The third chapter covers the 1930s – the second decade of Estonian independence and the shift to an authoritarian government. Matthias Westerblom and Nikolai Blees were competing editors of Kustbon and repeatedly faced off against each other in a feud that lasted the entire decade. The decade also brought greater attention and supervision from organizations in Sweden, more closely linking the Estonian-Swedes to their homeland. The fourth and fifth chapters follow political divisions – Soviet and Nazi – but also parallel the developments of the community. Fridolf Isberg was the principal at the Birkas folk school throughout the Second World War. In the Soviet period he faced aspects of Sovietization at the school. Beginning in the months before the Soviet takeover of Estonia, we see a shift in mentality among the Estonian-Swedish population toward emigration to Sweden as the only viable way to survive. Chapter five focuses on the Nazi occupation and the mass relocation of the Estonian-Swedes, in large part under the direction and coordination of Sigurd Curman in Sweden.
Names and Terminology

The people in the border region considered in this dissertation spoke numerous languages. Terminology and names varied considerably. Place names varied depending on language, time period, and who controlled the region. Each place name had Swedish, German, Estonian, and Russian variations; the Swedish and German names were often similar. During the tsarist period, many of the Russian names were based on the German terms, while during the Soviet period many were based on the Estonian variant. Therefore I have distinguished between the variations and attempted to be consistent throughout this dissertation.

This dissertation focuses on the Swedish population of Estonia, so almost all place names will be given in Swedish, with two notable exceptions. The capital of Estonia has a Germanic name, Reval, and an Estonian name, Tallinn. The majority of sources used Reval until the 1930s, when Tallinn became more common internationally and diplomatically. In order to respect the sources, I will use Reval in the first two chapters and Tallinn in the later chapters. The second place name is the town of, and university in Tartu (the Estonian variant) – Dorpat in Swedish and German. Since I mention Tartu primarily after 1930, I will use the Estonian name throughout.

A few of the locations have multiple spellings in Swedish. Odensholm (Osmussaare in Estonian) is occasionally spelled Odinsholm, with some linguists linking the naming of the island to the Norse god, Odin. However, the majority of sources, including the enclosed map, use Odensholm, so I will also use that spelling. The most

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19 For an overview of the various place names, see Marianne Blomqvist, Svenska ortnamn i Estland med estniska motsvarigheter (Ekenäs, Finland: Svenska folkskolans vänner, 2000).
challenging place name is the island of Vormsi (in Estonian), as there are three Swedish variations for the island: Vormsö, Wormsö, and Ormsö. As there is no consensus for which spelling was preferred, I will use Wormsö, which also more closely resembles the German name, Worms. A few of the individuals also have multiple spellings, and I have attempted to note these differences in the footnotes.

Language and translation also poses a challenge in a few instances. In referring to the Swedish settlements in the region as a whole, I will use “Aiboland” primarily to refer to the regions where Swedish-speakers lived. The sources often wrote svenska bygder to mean any of these regions, although a direct English translation is awkward and cumbersome; the literal translation of “Swedish villages” is not always accurate, as some of the places had Estonian residents in addition to Swedes. Occasionally the sources refer to the entire region as “Aiboland,” building off the colloquial description of the Swedes as “aibofolk” (or eibofolke, as Russwurm spelled it), meaning island people, and therefore I feel Aiboland is an acceptable term to use throughout this dissertation.20

For the Swedish population of Estonia, identification took on various forms; some of the labels were geographical, some linguistic. Labels include: Swede, Estswede (estsvensk), Estonian-Swede, “aibofolk” (a colloquial expression meaning island or coastal people), coastal Swede (in Estonian, rannarootsi), Swedish-speaker, and Rågö-Swede, etc. (with the various village names). Additionally, some governments or organizations classified people under a broader category, such as social status (peasants)

20 Present-day descriptions of the region typically use Aiboland, including the name of the Estonian-Swedish museum in Hapsal, Aiboland Museum.
or religion (Lutheran or Protestant). The labels of identification used throughout this
dissertation follow the terminology at that time.

One difficulty in following the sources and terminology in English translation
arises from the geographical connection. The Swedish and German names for the region
is “Estland” in both pre-1918 and post-independence documents. Sources from the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries refer to the Swedes as Estland-Swedes
(estlandssvenskar), or Estland’s Swedes (estlands svenskar) – the same terms used in
later periods. However, in English it would be anachronistic to use “Estonia” prior to
1918. Therefore, I will use “Estland” prior to 1918 and “Estonia” thereafter. Prior to
1918, I will refer to the people as “Swedish-speakers” and after 1918 as “Estonian-
Swedes.” As the island of Runö was not located in Estland Province, scholars and clergy
typically considered the Runö-Swedes separate from the Estland-Swedes until the island
joined Estonia in 1918. In earlier periods, I will alternately refer to the people as
Swedish-speakers, Swedish peasants, or connect the people to their village, such as
Runö-Swede. After 1918, I will typically use Estonian-Swede unless the specific region
is significant, in which case I will specify, such as Rågö-Swede.
CHAPTER 1

THE MISSIONARIES: THE START OF TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

In 1873, Swedish missionary Lars Johan Österblom (1837-1932) arrived on the island of Wormsö, in Estland, a province on the northwestern periphery of the Russian Empire, for what would turn out to be a 13-year mission for the Evangelical Patriotic Society (Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelse, or EFS). EFS sent Österblom to serve the mostly Swedish-speaking community of peasants working for the Baltic German landlord Otto van Stackelberg, who owned the island of Wormsö. When he met the Swedish peasants, Österblom found what he believed to be a destitute population desperately in need of his saving. As he wrote in his 1894 memoirs, intended for an audience in Sweden:

Since 1721 when the Baltic provinces came under Russian domination, these wretched people have been left to their own fate. They have therefore sunk deep into all sorts of vices, such as drunkenness, thievery, and laziness… One used to talk about the curse of drunkenness, but here you could see a living illustration of it. The people walk clothed in rags. Filth, sorrow, sickness, and lice consumes them. Oh, how much nobler were the animals, then!1

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1 L.J. Österblom. Svenskarne i Östersjö-provincerna och missionen på de Estländska öarna: Minnen från min 13-åriga versksamhet som missionär på Wormsö (Stockholm: 1894), 8-16. Österblom revised and updated the 1894 version in 1927 (Karlhamn); the 1927 edition has slight differences in this text.
For Österblom, the degradation of the Swedish population on Wormsö was a clear result of Russian control of the region, echoing Swedish chauvinism and sentiments of Russian barbarism common in nineteenth century Sweden. Under the influence of such barbarians, Österblom believed, the Swedes had lost their civilized nature. It was therefore up to him to save these poor wretches, religiously and culturally, to raise them once more to civilization as proper Swedes (according to his definition).

Österblom’s focus was primarily religious, although he hoped to transform people in numerous other ways as well. In addition to teaching literacy, he introduced the Swedish-speakers to improved building techniques, hygiene, and temperance. Österblom’s arrival also marked the start of increased contact between the Swedish-speakers of Estland and various organizations and individuals in Sweden. He can be viewed as the first of many outsiders – self-proclaimed saviors of the Estonian-Swedes – with the shared intent of civilizing the population and preconceived idea of what it meant to be a “Swede.”² However, Österblom’s harsh tactics and evangelism alienated him from the region’s Lutheran clergy. Many of the peasants viewed him with fear, attempting to avoid his strong condemnation of their “sinful” behavior. Local courts and even his own missionary organization rebuked him and his methods on several occasions. Österblom’s contentious behavior, which became a particular problem in the context of a more assertive and aggressive Russian Orthodox church in the region (as part of the broader

² Other self-proclaimed saviors will be discussed in later chapters, but include Per Söderbäck (Chapter 3), Carl Mothander (Chapters 3 and 5), Sigurd Curman (Chapters 3 and 5), and Ludwig Lienhard (Chapter 5).
policies often called Russification\(^3\) led to his expulsion from the Russian Empire in 1886.

Österblom and the other missionaries sent by EFS left a lasting legacy and their arrival was a “turning point”\(^4\) in the history of the Estonian-Swedes. It marked a foundational moment in the long-term transformation of the Swedish speakers from isolated villages toward the creation of an Estonian-Swedish cultural movement with strong links to the Swedish homeland.\(^5\) The missionaries transformed the communities they lived and worked in, fostering a new form of cultural consciousness among the Swedish peasantry that included a common regional identity and introduced aspects of modernization. Much of this original foundation came through raising literacy levels and standardizing the Swedish-language across Aiboland to overcome the strong dialectal differences among the various villages. As a result, the missionaries can be seen as the initial instigators of the later cultural and educational development among the Estonian-Swedes – the children they educated would become the leaders in the community in years to come.

The Baltic Germans, who had cultural and political hegemony in the region, and tsarist administrators, who controlled overall governance, both played an important role in shaping the legal and cultural context of the missionaries’ work. The growing role of


\(^5\) Runö was the only Swedish-inhabited region in Livland; all the other islands and villages were in Estland. See Jörgen Hedman and Lars Åhlander, *Runö: Historien om Svenskön i Rigabukten* (Sweden: Dialogos, 2003).
nationalism, both among the Germans, which posed a potential nationalist threat within the Empire (particularly following German unification in 1871), as well as the growing Estonian nationalist movement, also defined the context in which the missionaries and the Swedish peasants interacted. For its part, Swedish nationalism further influenced the missionaries’ attitudes toward both the Swedish peasants and the greater Russian Empire. However, throughout this period ideas of Swedish nationalism held little influence among the Swedish-speaking peasants themselves. That said, one constant for the Swedish peasants was a continuation in seeing Sweden as a protector of their legal rights within the Russian Empire.

As a representation of this period (1860-1905), Österblom demonstrates the new connections between the various villages of Aiboland and Sweden. The increased emphasis on nationalism in Sweden shapes how Österblom viewed the minority population, framing what he perceived as their barbarity on Russian control of the region and a lack of proper civilization. He represents the transnational ties of the Swedish-speaking minority, who view themselves as having some connection to a homeland across the Baltic Sea. The missionaries transformed the communities, reflecting the role of religion (intertwined with nationalism) in shaping the identification of the Swedish minority. And the missionaries’ activities led to further internal connections across Aiboland.
The Baltic Provinces in the Russian Empire before the Missionaries

Russia’s multiethnic, multi-confessional empire underwent dramatic changes as it expanded and incorporated diverse populations, producing significant regional differences in minority policy in the process. The autocrats attempted to maintain domestic security and loyalty, while extracting resources, knowledge, and taxes from local populations. Geographic location, social and religious struggles, the motivations for and methods of incorporation, and the response of non-Russian populations all influenced the empire’s administration. Wanting to create greater uniformity and ease administration of diverse regions, the Russian state attempted in certain locations (such as the Baltic Provinces, Ukraine, Georgia, Poland) to incorporate the elites of new populations into the Russian social hierarchy. The transference of the Russian hierarchy was easier in the western provinces, where local elites such as Baltic Germans (or Swedes in Finland) and peasant populations of Estonians closely approximated the Russian social hierarchy.

In the Baltic Provinces, economic and security concerns overlapped. As the empire incorporated these regions, the tsar often granted privileges to local elites and relatively high degrees of autonomy to the regions in order to secure their loyalty and

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gain greater authority over new regions.\(^8\) Over time, the local elite considered these privileges as absolute, and challenged attempts by the tsar to circumvent what they felt was their authority – a view that can be seen in the unsuccessful Baltic German outcries against Alexander III’s interference in local administrative affairs.\(^9\) By the late nineteenth century, the Baltic provinces and Finland were important industrial and trade centers, to the point that Russian Finance Minister Witte was reluctant to force any social or ethnic changes that could disrupt economic output.\(^10\)

Moreover, these regions also had significant minority populations (Baltic Germans, Swedes) with strong connections to potential (and historical) enemies of tsarist Russia, leading the government and conservative public opinion to question their loyalty in the post-reform era.\(^11\) War Minister Kuropatkin, for instance, argued for greater incorporation of their economies and military into the empire, as Finnish Governor-General Bobrikov attempted in the 1890s.\(^12\) Rebellions, such as those in Poland in 1830 and especially 1863, highlighted local dissatisfaction with Russian rule. They threatened the empire’s domestic security, leading to greater restrictions on local autonomy and influencing policies across the empire.

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\(^8\) See Thaden, *Russification in the Baltic Provinces*. See also Thaden, with Forster Thaden, *Russia’s Western Borderlands, 1710-1870*.


\(^12\) See Tuomo Polvinen, *Imperial Borderland*. 
The Russian government generally saw the Baltic region as a zone of special opportunities with unique characteristics from other parts of the Empire. In the eighteenth century, Peter the Great and Catherine the Great had viewed the Western borderlands as more civilized than Russia, deeming it a region suitable for small-scale social and economic experimentation not yet appropriate for Russia. Baltic Germans held a disproportionate number of positions in the Russian bureaucracy relative to their population size in the empire, seeking out greater opportunities for themselves and bringing “Western” ideas into the administration. Poland (until 1830) and Finland both had their own constitutions with different government structures and a great deal of autonomy. Decades before Russia granted emancipation of their serfs, Estland and Livland provinces attempted a small-scale trial of emancipation under Alexander I (1811-1819).

Estland and Livland provinces saw significant changes in the nineteenth century, affecting the status of the Baltic German upper class, the mostly Estonian peasantry, and their social and political interactions. These changes also affected the Swedish peasantry, although largely indirectly. The Baltic Germans followed European trends, buying more luxury products and exotic foods, but they did so without restructuring the economic base of agricultural estates on which their income relied.\(^\text{13}\) Before granting loans to pay off the large debts the Baltic Germans had accrued, central authorities required agrarian reforms – first in Estland in 1802, and a more generous reform for the peasantry in Livland in 1804. However, these reforms only offered limited protections for the peasants, who,

\(^{13}\) See Whelan, *Adapting to Modernity*. 
suspecting that the laws went further than the Baltic Germans announced, erupted in unrest across Northern Estland in 1804. In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, Tsar Alexander I approved agrarian reform for the region, abolishing serfdom altogether – on 23 May 1816 in Estland and on 26 March 1819 in Livland. Ownership of the land remained with the Baltic German landlords, however, making the peasants renters, but also giving them certain personal freedoms. The lessons learned in the Baltic provinces helped shape the broader 1861 Russian emancipation under Alexander II. Additionally, the emancipation of the Estonian serfs was a vital early step in the formation of the Estonian national movement of the nineteenth century.

In nineteenth century tsarist Russia, central administrators classified the population on the basis of social position, religion, and language. The government classified the Swedes in Estland and Livland provinces as peasants, Lutherans, and Swedish-speakers. Each classification carried consequences and placed the Swedes in minority positions within the empire and within the Estland and Livland provinces.

While the common language they shared with Swedish-speaking Finns could have carried significant advantages in terms of education, religion, and publications, the different regional administrations of Finland as compared to Estland and Livland provinces meant there were no political connections between Swedes in Finland and the

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16 The Swedes were never serfs, which differentiated the Swedish populations from the Estonians and Latvians.
Swedish-speakers in Estland and Livland. Additionally, the Swedes in Finland dominated the nobility, making their legal categories distinct from the peasants in Estland. Similarly, Russian administrators viewed the two groups differently: they viewed the Swedish-Finns with suspicion, fearing a potential “fifth column” for Sweden, while they found the Swedes in Estland and Livland unthreatening, as these Swedes lacked any significant connection with Sweden and their peasant status meant they had few resources with which to pose any threat.

The Swedish minority in Estland and Livland provinces carried unique (although limited) legal protections inherited from Sweden’s rule of the region in the sixteenth century. Sten Westerholm writes with considerable hyperbole, “When the Russian troops came to Estland after 1710 the Swedish culture continued to live as before, and the coastal residents – the Estonian-Swedes – did not become serfs then either, but rather were directly below the Russian tsar, not any German baron!”

The limited privileges of the Swedish peasants had three consequences for the population. First, as non-serfs the protections differentiated the Swedish peasants from the Estonian peasants. While this gave the Swedish peasants a privileged position vis-à-vis the Estonians, after the abolition of the serfdom among the Estonian peasantry in

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17 See Max Engman, Lejonet och Dubbelornen: Finlands Imperiella Decennier 1830-1890 (Finland, 2000).
18 One notable difference between the Baltic Germans and the Swedes in Finland is that not all of the Swedes were part of the nobility; there were Swedes in all classes.
19 See, for example, Polvinen, Imperial Borderland.
20 As for the Baltic provinces, the Baltic Germans were the group identified as a potential “fifth column,” particularly after the unification of Germany.
21 Sten Westerholm, På vandring i Estlands svenskbysyder (Ekenäs, Finland: Svenska folkskolans vänner, 2003), 54.
1816, the Estonians had greater protections and advantages than the Swedes in terms of negotiations with the Baltic Germans, as articulated in the terms of emancipation. The changed legal status of the Estonians also led to expanded education and the start of the Estonian national movement by the mid-century. In contrast, the Estonian-Swedish cultural movement began several decades after that of their Estonian neighbors.

Second, each of the Swedish communities across Aiboland had unique sets of circumstances. They were isolated from each other geographically and linguistically, with five distinct dialects that were sometimes not mutually understandable. There were also only limited legal similarities between the villages. Consequently, the villages remained isolated from each other, as there was little legal overlap or arenas where the communities could join together. The different dialects made communication in Swedish difficult; oftentimes people of different regions would speak Estonian with each other. This was one of the hurdles the EFS missionaries sought to overcome, but it also was a primary reason why the communities remained isolated from each other.

Third, while Russian tsars might confer the privileges, the protections originated with the Swedish throne; the islanders on Rågö, for example, held the official letter from Queen Christina as proof of their rights. Rather than reissuing privileges or creating new legal categories for the Swedish peasants, it was the Swedish-era privileges that

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22 Stockholms Stadsarkiv SE/SSA/0815 EFS arkiv, FII:8 Handl. i blandade 1920-1939, Folder 1: Arbetet i Estland 1920-1921 (gl. nr. 42A). See the 1920 annual report from John Klasson. While the missionaries made significant strides in educating the Swedish population, in the 1920s the dialect differences still persisted. Klasson writes, “Every island and community has its own Swedish dialect, and the difference between the dialects is so great, that for example a Nuckö-Swede often does not understand a Risti-Swede if he speaks Swedish. When they meet, it often happens mostly in Estonian.”

23 During the Second World War, the islanders sent the original letter to Sweden and the Swedish National Archives with Per Söderbäck, out of fear that the Soviets would discover and destroy it.
remained in effect (up until Estonian independence), with each tsar from Peter to
Nicholas II reconfirming the privileges. These legal documents, therefore, led many
communities in Aiboland to view Sweden’s king as their protector. Whereas their
privileges gave the Swedes the right to appeal directly to the tsar, in practice it proved to
be difficult, if not impossible, to be heard in the tsar’s court.24

The Complaining Men

In the mid-nineteenth century, knowledge in Sweden of the Swedish-speakers in
Estland was limited to a few scholars and a handful of clergy. However, this familiarity
grew as a result of an expedition of five peasants from Wormsö to Stockholm and from
the writings of a few early ethnographers. In both contexts, descriptions of the Swedish-
speakers suggested that the population struggled to maintain their rights and their culture
against competing influences – whether legally from their Baltic German landlord or
culturally from their Estonian neighbors.

In the summer of 1861, five men from Wormsö sailed to Stockholm to petition
the Swedish king to intervene on their behalf with the Russian tsar regarding abuses by
their Baltic German landlord, Otto Fredrik Frombold von Stackelberg.25 Their arrival,
and the subsequent media coverage of their plight, brought knowledge of the Swedish
peasants in Estland to the attention of the greater Swedish population. Previously,
knowledge of these communities existed among only a handful of clergy and academics.

25 The men included Lars Lindström, Hans Solros, Johan Rönningberg, Anders Winquist, and Ado Jerikas. See
Two newspapers in particular, Fäderneslandet (“The Ancestral Land”) and Svenska Arbetaren (“The Swedish Worker”), picked up the story, reporting on it for several weeks, dubbing the group “the complaining men” (klagomännen). In their coverage, the newspapers identified the group alternatively as “island Swedes” (ösvenskar), “Swedish peasants” (svenska bönder), and members of the larger Swedish tribe (svensk stam), all of which marked a strong connection between the peasants and Swedes in Sweden.

Coverage of the Wormsö story by newspapers in Sweden carried significant nationalist overtones that were reflective of the nature of Swedish nationalism of the nineteenth century. The newspapers described von Stackelberg abusing the peasants, much to the horror of Swedish readers. The descriptions tapped into the perception of Russia was uncivilized (even though von Stackelberg was a Baltic German), presenting a clear military and cultural threat to Sweden.²⁶

The coverage of the “complaining men” from Wormsö came at a time when discussions in Sweden of the “Swedish nation” were intensifying. Identifying the peasants as “Swedes” positioned them as part of the larger Swedish population, emphasizing that Swedish nationalism transcended political borders. It seemed quite logical to the journalists that when the rights of Swedish peasants were being trampled, the king and the greater public should respond. In essence, they argued that the Swedish king was the protector of Swedes everywhere. The newspapers highlighted this connection by pointing to the numerous rights given to the Wormsö peasants by former

Swedish rulers, particularly King Karl IX’s 2 September 1600 declaration in Reval which defined the privileges and obligations of the Swedish peasants on Wormsö.

For Sweden, the nineteenth century brought a number of political changes, such as the new Bernadotte monarchy of French origin and shifts in borders with the loss of Finland and the addition of Norway. Additionally, the new Swedish constitution in 1809 emphasized an enlarged connection between the state and the people. During the nineteenth century, Swede also went through economic and social changes resulting from industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of the working class. It also had considerable demographic losses through wide-scale emigration. These changes led to evolving and competing views of Swedish identity and new conceptions of Swedishness. 

There were two distinct groups of Swedish nationalists in the nineteenth century. The first included Erik Gustaf Geijer (1783-1847) and Esias Tegnér (1782-1846), who were instrumental in fostering Swedish nationalism through the creation of the “Gothic Society” (Götiska Förbundet). The Gothic Society members led the major nationalist movement in the early nineteenth century. Calling for a Nordic renaissance, their vision focused on mythology and ancient history, creating an image of the virtuous citizen of earlier ages, with connections to the Gothicism movement of seventeenth century

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28 Many historians regard Geijer as the first Swedish nationalist. See Erik Gustaf Geijer, (J.H. Turner, trans.), The History of the Swedes (London: Whittaker and Company, 1845). See also Esias Tegnér’s poem “Svea: pro Patria” (Svea: For the Fatherland) which connects the Swedish nation to the Viking Age and offers a call to arms for the protection of the North.
Sweden. The status of Swedes outside Sweden’s political borders became a common theme for nationalists throughout the nineteenth century, starting with the loss of Finland in 1809, and expanding considerably later in the century with the massive wave of emigration to North America. Finland continued to play an important role in the Swedish nation, particularly because of the Swedish minority that was politically and culturally dominant in the region.

A second nationalist movement in Sweden developed in response to the perception of an increased Russian threat, particularly with the Russian takeover of Finland following the Russo-Swedish War in 1808-1809. This second nationalist movement sought to counter the Russian threat by arguing for the building of a glorious military to renew Sweden’s Great Power status of the seventeenth century. This perspective gained in popularity in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. These developments in notions of Swedishness and Swedish nationalism placed a high importance on Russia as an external catalyst, which certainly resonated with Swedish attention to the peasants from Wormsö.

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29 Some historians argue that Swedish nationalism has much earlier origins than the nineteenth century. Göran Hägg, a Swedish literature scholar, argues in Svenskhetens historia (Sweden: Wahlström & Widstrand, 2003) that the Swedish nation had its origins during the reigns of Gustav Vasa (1523-1560) when the language was solidified, largely through the publication of the Swedish language Bible, and Gustav II Adolf (1611-1632) who restructured Sweden’s educational system. (p.130-135) For a recent dissertation on the seventeenth century concepts of the Swedish nation, see Dean Bennett, “Gothic Justice: Sweden’s Myth of National Origin and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy, Legality, and Liberation, 1598-1632” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2004). See also Ingemar Stenroth. Sveriges rötter: En nations födelse (Sweden: Atlantis, 2005).


31 As a result of the 1809 Peace of Hamina, Sweden ceded Finland to Russia, and Finland became a Grand Duchy.
Newspaper articles covering “the complaining men” fed into this early stage of a pan-Swedish nationalist movement. The 20 July 1861 issue of Fäderneslandet included a poem written by “H.K.” about the Wormsö men and their troubles, entitled “Wormsöbönderna” (The Wormsö Peasants). The poem suggests a strong link between the Swedish peasants and Swedes in Sweden, expressing outrage at their “slavery” and abuse. Yet while the dispute largely centered around conflicts between the Swedes and their Baltic German landlord, the poem reflects Swedish chauvinist views of Russian “barbarism,” as Russia is the clear underlying threat and control the shackles of slavery:

A rocky isle exists along Estland’s coast,  
And Wormsö is its name.

It has defied many stormy clashes  
In the sea’s wrathful embrace,  
A pearl in the blueish belt,  
That surrounds Sweden’s free banks,  
In times past belonged to our land  
With mountains and heath and sand.

There lived then an old family tribe  
Of the same tribe as us,  
Who inherited their forefather’s rights:  
To be strong and free.  
Of the sea’s waves riches it took,  
Their reaping of their own plough  
As well as lived happily in valleys and forests,  
Their poverty it endured.

But the violence came from far in the east,  
An eagle in pitch-dark sky,  
With dark wings’ heavy rumbling  
And bloody conquest.  
All rights and law then shattered,  
In shackles the people’s freedoms were locked,  
Even harsher the captivity tightened,  
So many tears it caused.

The free man became a slave!
He owns nothing anymore:  
With distress his own land a grave  
Until sanctuary it gives him;  
The air he breathes is hardly his,  
Nor the sun’s light, its beauteous glare,  
Nor the field’s harvest, nor the billow’s dance,  
Not even his wedding wreath!

These people now have sent a message  
To us, through storm and sea,  
From their own breast a lamenting voice,  
A pleading sigh from their island.  
Oh, Svea! can you hear it  
And not help these men  
To children and home and rights again?  
You certainly hear God!

But these small tyrants’ name,  
That stain ancestral virtue,  
Must be embraced by forgetting  
To shame and scorn and timidly.  
A Rosen and a Stackelberg –  
These names had such glorious colors –  
Now they suck out the farmers’ marrow  
And plunder the fields and rocks.

The Wormsö peasants’ expedition to Stockholm had repercussions. It brought the plight of the Swedes in the Baltic provinces to the attention of the Swedish king and to the newspaper-reading Swedish public; King Karl XV raised the issue of the Swedish peasantry with the Russian tsar. Before 1861, previous attempts to involve Sweden in the protections of the Swedes in Estland had generally failed to motivate the Swedish king to act. Perhaps one can explain the remarkable nature of the 1861 incident because of the large press coverage it generated in Stockholm. The newspapers linked the Swedes from Estland to an expanded view of Swedish nationalism.

In response to the Swedish king’s intervention Baltic Governor-General Suvorov informed Estland Vice-Governor Rahden of the Wormsö group’s voyage and complaints against Stackelberg on 2 August 1861,\(^{33}\) in a notice marked “Confidential:”

Five Swedish peasants from the island of Wormsö, who departed for Sweden and reported to His Majesty the King of Sweden with a complaint about their landlord, Baron Stackelberg, in accordance with the notice I have received from the Ministry of Internal Affairs containing the most high Emperor’s permission, are to remain in Sweden and not return to their motherland \([rodina]\).\(^{34}\)

It is significant to note the usage of “motherland” to refer to the peasant’s home in the Baltic provinces. The communiqué also requested additional information about the peasants and their families. But regardless of the accusations against Stackelberg and the apparent diminishing of the protections of the Swedish peasantry, the most immediate reaction was the issuance of a decree from the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs on 10 September 1861\(^{35}\) in the name of Alexander II regarding the Wormsö peasants, which enabled the peasants to return to Wormsö without reprimand, so long as they agreed to fulfill their legal obligations to the landlord. However, the decree also stated that any others that left the region would not be permitted to return.\(^{36}\)

Besides the press coverage from the “complaining men,” knowledge in Sweden of the Swedish-speakers in Aiboland came from the work of two ethnographers: Finnish-Swede Herman Wendell and German Karl Russwurm. Herman Wendell published a

\(^{33}\) In the Julian calendar, 21 July 1861.


\(^{35}\) In the Julian calendar, 29 August 1861.

dictionary of the “Estland-Swedish” dialects in 1886.\textsuperscript{37} Russwurm documented the Runö population in 1855 and other Swedish regions in 1861, largely suspecting that the group was a dying minority.\textsuperscript{38} Russwurm followed the practice of a number of learned Baltic Germans, documenting the peasant culture of the region and publishing in German. Others, such as J.H. Rosenplänter, Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald, and Jakob Hurt greatly influenced the Estonian national movement, aiding in the standardization of the Estonian language and the collection of folklore.\textsuperscript{39}

As a result of Russwurm’s research, he developed contacts with learned individuals in Sweden and Swedish-speaking Finland. One such contact was Artur Hazelius, founder of the Skansen open-air museum and the Nordic Museum in Stockholm (both of which focused on collecting cultural artifacts reflecting “Swedishness”).\textsuperscript{40} Hazelius and Russwurm exchanged letters, information, contacts, and objects.\textsuperscript{41} The connection to Hazelius, an important figure in the development of the idea of “Swedishness” in Sweden, marked a significant inclusion of the Swedes in Estland

\textsuperscript{37} See publication notice in Nya Pressen (Finland), 25 March 1886, p. 3.


\textsuperscript{40} See Mats Rehnberg, \textit{The Nordiska Museet and Skansen, An Introduction to the History and Activities of a Famous Swedish Museum} (Stockholm: Esselte, 1957).

\textsuperscript{41} Nordiska Museets Arkiv, Artur Hazelius och NM:s tidiga arkiv E2B:27 (731-768). Folder 760, Russwurm, C. The collection includes letters from Russwurm from 1872-1881.
into the larger project of Swedish nationalism. From the turn of the century through the Second World War, the Nordic Museum maintained contact with the Swedish villages, sending ethnographers such as Ernst Gordon and Per Söderbäck to conduct studies and collect material culture. Skansen even inquired about transferring buildings from Runö to the open-air museum.\(^\text{42}\)

Connections between Aiboland and Swedes in Finland were also significant in the mid-nineteenth century. The majority of Swedish-language pastors came from Finland. Additionally, Fredric Joachim Ekman, a former pastor in Runö (1841-1842) wrote a series of four articles for the Finnish-Swedish newspaper, *Borgå Tidning*, in 1846. In the articles he documented among other aspects of the island’s culture, what he called a strong socialist-communist mentality. A few years later Ekman wrote a book about Runö, predating Russwurm by a few years. However, by publishing his book in Swedish rather than German, as Russwurm had, Ekman had a relatively small audience. Additionally, not a single one of the book’s subscribers was from Sweden – they were all Finland-Swedes.\(^\text{43}\)

\(^{42}\) The only building in Skansen not from within Sweden’s political borders is from northern Norway, acquired while Sweden and Norway shared a political union. If the plan to acquire and move a building from Runö succeeded, it would have been a significant statement on the role of the Estonian-Swedes within Swedish nationalism. However, the acquisition was cost-prohibitive and the plan abandoned. See Viktor Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskar 4: Kulturhistorisk översikt* (Stockholm: Kulturföreningen Svenska Odlingsens Vänner, 1992), 130.

Missionaries Arrive in Russia

There was a strong link between the Swedish peasants and religion, particularly through the Lutheran Church, which would continue to play an important aspect of the identification of the Estonian-Swedes through the first half of the twentieth century. While there were connections between the various congregations and individual pastors in earlier periods (prior to the late nineteenth-century, most came from Swedish parts of Finland), after 1873 religious organizations in Sweden, and later the Swedish Lutheran Church, formalized this relationship.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Russian Orthodox church made considerable inroads in the Baltic region, which caused concern in Sweden and across religious circles over the threat to Lutheranism. An 1832 law, characteristic of certain “Russification” measures during the reign of Nicholas I, eliminated the autonomy of the Lutheran Church in the Baltic provinces and placed limitations on Lutheran clergy’s interactions with members of the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church also expanded into the region, with some Estonians and Latvians converting from Lutheranism. Historian David Kirby writes, “Many who [later] became disillusioned with their new faith were thus left in limbo, and their fate became something of a cause célèbre for evangelical Protestants in Europe, as well as one of the most contentious issues in Baltic-Russian relations.”


45 See Kirby, The Baltic World, 102.
League (Evangeliska Alliansen), including four individuals from Sweden, made a formal protest in St. Petersburg in June 1871. In order to raise funds for the expedition to St. Petersburg, the League held a collection, raising 4,000 Swedish Crowns more than the delegation ultimately needed. The delegation decided to offer the additional money to the Swedish church in Reval to purchase Bibles. However, Pastor Mozelli, a pastor at the Swedish sailor’s congregation in Reval, replied that the Swedish peasants had plenty of Bibles but lacked the ability to read them. Instead, the delegation proposed turning the money over to the Evangelical Native Land Foundation (EFS) to fund missionary work to the region. The primary purpose of this work was to improve the literacy of the Swedish minority.

EFS initially selected two individuals for the mission – Lars Johan Österblom and Thure Emanuel Thorén. Both were trained at the same time at the missionary school in Johanneslund. Mozelli determined the locations for the first two missionaries. While Runö was considered a possible location, it was discounted in large part because of Ekman’s description of the socialist-communist mentality of the islanders.

The Russian government believed the primary goal of the missionaries to be education of the Swedish minority. The population lacked qualified Swedish-language instructors, and literacy rates were quite low – even lower than literacy rates among the

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46 See Ernst Newman, Evangeliska alliansen: en studie i protestantisk enhets- och frihetssträvan (Lund: Gleerup, 1937)
47 Österblom, Svenskarne i Östersjö-provincerna, 6.
48 For a history of EFS, see Inger Hägg, I detta tecken: Evangeliska fosterlands-stiftelsen 150 år (Uppsala: EFS Läser, 2006).
49 See Aman, 5-6.
Estonian peasants living in the same regions. While literacy remained an important goal, the missionaries’ primary goal was to bring the word of God to the region, to awaken people in a similar evangelical spirit that had swept through Sweden in the nineteenth century. Österblom heartily embraced this role. His biographer Aron Valentin writes, “Österblom’s duties on Wormsö became more than typical school work – it became work to awaken and tend to the souls of the people.”50 This dual role put Österblom on a collision course with religious authorities in the region, and eventually with government authorities as well.

Beginning during his stay in Estland, and continuing after his return to Sweden, Österblom also maintained a strained relationship with EFS.51 Because of this contentious relationship between Österblom and EFS, one must read his memoirs – the main source of information on the Swedish-speakers and their interactions with the missionaries – with a critical eye. A main goal of the memoir was to emphasize his role in the transformation of the Swedish peasantry from barbarians to fearful Christians, with the central argument that he alone – with God – succeeded in the task, and that the end result of saving numerous souls justified his tactics and countered any opposition to his methods.52


51 EFS found him a domestic assignment in Karlskrona, but again, conflict soon followed and EFS eventually turned Österblom away. Stockholms Stadsarkiv SE/SSA/0815 EFS arkiv, AIIa:10 Styrelseprotokoll 1885-1888. The minutes for 10 May 1887 point to his assignment in Karlskrona, Sweden. Minutes for 11 October 1887 §3 report complaints from Karlskrona concerning Österblom, while the minutes for 13 October 1887 §1 reporting that he would leave EFS following the disputes.

52 Österblom’s memoirs were not published by the printing house of EFS, highlighting the split. Additionally, Österblom includes an appendix with letters of support from the local Swedes and court documents from the regional court from his time in Estland.
When Österblom arrived on Wormsö, he – perhaps unknowingly – placed himself in the middle of a power struggle in the region among the Baltic German Lutheran clergy, Baltic German landowners, and the Swedish peasantry. Seeking lodging, Österblom turned to the landowner, Baron Otto Fredrik Frombold von Stackelberg, the same noble who had been at the heart of the complaining men incident. It was likely his only choice. Pastor Julius Alexander Nordgren, the Lutheran pastor on the island from 1870 until 1902, diverged from Österblom’s strong evangelical commitment. Österblom felt the peasants were far too uncivilized and lacked sufficient resources to house him. Stackelberg, on the other hand, had an estate and a higher-class lifestyle that suited Österblom, and later Österblom’s wife Ida. But Stackelberg and Pastor Nordgren were constantly at odds – an example of the power struggle throughout Estland province between clergy and aristocrats over influencing the peasantry. Additionally, the Swedish-speaking peasantry was also constantly in conflict with the Stackelberg family’s control. Although the 1861 dispute had been resolved, there was a deep, lingering resentment between peasants and landowner. When Österblom arrived on Wormsö, the peasants held hope that King Oscar II had sent him to safeguard their rights; they were certainly put off when he so obviously sided with the landowner. On several occasions, Stackelberg even successfully convinced Österblom to intervene to quell peasant unrest, including ending a strike.

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53 Österblom and his family would later move into a Missionary House that the community built for them.
54 See Whelan, *Adapting to Modernity*.
Within a couple years, Österblom overcame the doubts and uncertainty among the Swedish peasants, largely through his patient interaction with the children of the island. Once the Swedes began opening up to Österblom, he started drawing large crowds to his meetings. He held these at a specifically built meeting house since disputes with Nordgren meant that the church was not available. Österblom writes in his memoir that these meetings were so popular and the room so filled with eager listeners that he could hardly make his way to the front. To overcome this, he got into the habit of entering through the window. Shortly thereafter, Österblom relocated his meetings to the forest, where he stood on a stump.56

Part of Österblom’s success can be attributed to his willingness to adapt to local situations, while consistently speaking out against sin and promoting evangelical salvation. For example, the Swedish peasants spoke a dialect, making it difficult for the two sides to understand each other. Österblom writes, “All of these islands have a Swedish-speaking population that certainly does not speak a Swedish like we do.”57 Österblom learned local words and expressions, and incorporated the dialect into his preaching and interactions with the peasants.58 His first real success came with the first

56 He recounts that when another missionary, Thure Emmanuel Thorén, visited him, Österblom noticed that his friend was not with him in the front of the room. He looked back and noticed Thorén had not successfully made it through the window, but rather was stuck and needed the help of others. See Österblom, Svenskarne i Östersjö-provincerna, 25. In the 1930s, the Estonian-Swedes erected a monument to Österblom at the location of the stump in the forest to commemorate his influence on the development of the community, again demonstrating the link between religion and the Estonian-Swedish cultural development.

57 Österblom, Svenskarne i Östersjö-provincerna, 7.

58 Ibid., 22-23.
“awakening” on the island in 1876. Österblom’s letters to EFS throughout his mission regularly talked about saving the souls of children and adults as marking his continued success. In the coming years, the evangelical movement spread, and he led three more waves of awakenings among the peasantry – in 1878, 1879, and 1881. Even after he left, there were two more awakenings on Wormsö, one in 1894 and the other in 1914.

While Österblom’s focused heavily on religion, he also hoped to transform the peasants in numerous other ways. He made significant changes to Wormsö culture beyond religious awakenings, such as in construction techniques, hygiene practices, and even the design of the women’s folk costume. For Österblom, civilizing the population meant educating the peasants beyond just spiritual boundaries. Österblom linked behavior and customs he disapproved of to paganism and sought to eliminate this “sinful” behavior. He also equated his version of civilization with aspects of modernization. However, Österblom’s version of a modern, civilized (and reverent) people came at a cost – eliminating objects and old traditions on Wormsö such as musical instruments, traditional songs, old bridal crowns, and folk dances which he considered hedonistic. Sten Westerholm points to some of the aspects of the missionaries’ work with regards to folk culture:

59 One can certainly draw parallels between Österblom’s revivalism and the Great Awakening in the United States. There were also waves of awakenings across Sweden and Finland.


61 See for example Nordiska Museets Arkiv: Sv. Forndikt (på estniska) från Estniska folkminnesarkivet 10/1968:2. File E65476(3), Manfred Nyman. Nyman recalled that Österblom introduced the Christmas tree to Wormsö in 1872, and of many former Christmas traditions, Österblom only permitted the Christmas goose and the tradition of lying of straw at the doorstep to continue.
Both [Österblom and Thorén] certainly did much good during their time in the Estonian-Swedish villages. They meant a great deal for general education and a healthy way of life, but at the same time their Christian zeal went to extremes when they forced the people to, among other things, burn their old “sinful” instruments – bagpipes and horsehair harps, or talharpan as it was typically called here in Estonia’s Swedish villages.\(^{62}\)

The loss of these cultural artifacts and the strong condemnation by Österblom left some of the local population bitter toward the missionary.

One of the social practices Österblom encouraged, to accompany evangelical salvation, was temperance. The island went from having numerous pubs and breweries to having none. Traditions and celebrations, such as drinking alcohol at weddings, changed as temperance gained popularity. Stackelberg commented on the change this brought to the island in a letter to EFS, extolling the great benefits Österblom brought to the region. According to Österblom, “Baron Stackelberg stood completely on the side of the Christians. He did everything he could so that his people could hear God’s word, and was constantly prepared to defend me.”\(^{63}\)

Along with his religious training, Österblom had basic medical knowledge, and brought along a trusty reference book as an additional method to work against folk beliefs and encouraged people to make contact with him. One of the persistent health problems faced by the Swedish peasants was difficulty seeing and breathing. Österblom quickly realized that the construction of their houses was to blame, as they lacked a chimney to remove the smoke from the fireplace. In the cold months of winter, the door would remain closed, preventing any smoke from escaping. When he first proposed the

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\(^{63}\) Österblom, *Svenskarne i Östersjö-provincerna*, 40.
construction of a chimney, most were skeptical and resistant. He finally convinced one
man to attempt it, and as soon as others saw the results, most houses included chimneys.⁶⁴

Österblom made hygiene education an important aspect of his missionary work, following the huge breakthroughs in this regard across Europe. Österblom placed the household in the women’s sphere – using the metaphor of David versus Goliath in combating dirt in the home. Prior to his arrival on the island, Österblom claims cleaning the home was never performed; table scraps and dirt piled up on the floors, and the villages kept animals inside the home. When he approached the women, he gathered them in large groups and asked if they wished to join him in fighting “Goliath.” According to Österblom, they readily agreed, and he exclaimed that Goliath was the filth in their homes; they allowed sinful behavior to continue in their homes by failing to clean thoroughly. He asked them to be “David” in their diligence against the sins of dirt and filth. Österblom’s wife Ida held proper cleaning demonstrations, and he indicated that he would personally visit each household for an inspection to ensure the women properly cleaned their households.⁶⁵

Österblom also had a hand in modifying the dress the women on the island wore. The earlier version of the female’s dress worn in the summer months was sleeveless, which potentially revealed a little too much for Österblom’s modesty. After he again

⁶⁴ Österblom, Svenskarne i Östersjö-provincerna, 32-33.

chastised and shamed the women for what he exclaimed was sinful behavior, the women slightly modified their dress, adding a small jacket over the shirt.

Österblom’s sharp condemnations of sin and uncivilized behavior alienated many peasants, as well as the island’s Lutheran minister, who feared his evangelical methods. On several occasions, the local courts and even Österblom’s missionary organization rebuked him, as they were concerned that he followed too strong an evangelical tradition.\textsuperscript{66} However, these conflicts were all resolved, largely because of the tremendous support Österblom received from Stackelberg. On three occasions, he was taken to court in Estland, and in each case Stackelberg came to his aid.

In a 19 April 1882 letter to EFS, Österblom writes of the charges against his evangelical beliefs and methods, and his response.

In skipping over the introduction, which concerns Pastor Girgensohn’s accusation – which I have already answered – I will return to the church inspection, through which it is to be proven that on Wormsö I am a noxious influence. They, who had not seen Wormsö in its old state, can say and write such words. But Wormsö is a new place, and through my influence raised in moral respects, which can never be written off, no matter how capable the writer.\textsuperscript{67}

Österblom concluded his letter by stating that, regardless of how the court ruled, his actions would be judged by God, and that he would be found justified. His unwavering faith in doing the work of God justified any actions and any alienations.

\textsuperscript{66} Specifically, EFS and the pastors in Estland feared Österblom’s following of the (Paul Peter) Walderström evangelical movement, which had a greater emphasis on piety. Walderström had powerful (and some felt dangerous) influence within the evangelical movement in Sweden, was a leader of the pietistic movement, and a frequent traveler to Swedish settlers in the United States. See L. DeAne Lagerquist, \textit{The Lutherans} (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 100-101. H. Arnold Barton writes, “A determined controversialist with strong convictions and at times a cunningly sarcastic wit, Walderström had a penchant for making enemies.” See \textit{A Folk Divided: Homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840-1940} (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), 90.

EFS even visited the island to evaluate Österblom after learning of several complaints, but found the allegations insufficient to remove him from his post. Again, Stackelberg intervened to praise the transformation of the people – such as the rise in their productivity, the decrease in thefts – directly attributing the change to Österblom.68 Despite the criticism of his methods, Österblom never softened his attacks or changed his behavior.

The greatest threat to his continued stay in Estland was the arrival of the Orthodox Church in 1886. The Russian Orthodox Church held the primary religious position within the Russian Empire, and throughout the 1870s and 1880s the church greatly expanded into the Baltic region, part of the larger process often referred to as Russification.69 The Orthodox Church promised that peasants who converted would no longer be required to pay taxes to Stackelberg, while those who remained Lutheran would need to pay for their children to learn Russian.70 As a result of numerous threats and promises, approximately 500 Swedes on Wormsö converted to Orthodoxy, with Orthodox schools opening in the villages of Sviby, Fällarna, Hullo, and Förby on Wormsö and an Orthodox Church consecrated 22 September 1886.71

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68 To prove that the accusations were false, Österblom includes the accusers’ petition, and letters of support in his memoir, and counters the false claims.

69 See Thaden, *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914*. Russification policies in Finland, particularly after 1899, also caused a considerable concern for Sweden, with many fearing Russia might soon make a move on Sweden. See Barton, *A Folk Divided*, 82.

70 Österblom, *Svenskarne i Östersjö-provincerna*, 83-84.

With the rise of Orthodoxy, Österblom’s position on the island caused greater conflict. His opponents – new converts to Orthodoxy and Priests Nikolaus Poletajew and Nikolaus Orlow – argued in December 1886 that Österblom’s methods sought to separate parents from children and husbands from wives. Österblom includes a sample of their complaints in his memoir:

We hear that Österblom and his friends declare that our God is not merciful, that we sold our souls to the impure spirit. Österblom preaches more than before, and declares that he and his friends – who clap their hands, stamp their feet and insult the true [orthodox] church – alone have the holy Spirit.

Österblom argued that the Orthodox ministers tricked the Swedish peasants into signing the complaint, focusing on the illiterate peasants for their support. But it was too late; the Governor called Österblom to Reval to answer the charges.

Despite bringing letters from numerous supporters on the island and from Stackelberg, the Estland Governor arrested Österblom and tried him. Among numerous complaints, the accuser argued that Österblom claimed to be Christ and had twelve apostles, blasphemous behavior that the government could not tolerate. The Governor found him guilty and expelled him from Estland in late February 1884, forever prohibiting his return to the Russian Empire.

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73 Österblom, Svenskarne i Östersjö-provincerna, 86.

74 Ibid., 86.

75 Ibid., 92.
Österblom concluded his memoirs with excerpts from letters the peasants sent in the years after his expulsion. In letter after letter, the peasants remarked about the continued evangelical spirit in their community. Österblom wrote:

Almost every letter has an outpouring of the following content: “We could never forget the time we had together with Christ’s dear gospel, that was preached to us for our salvation and the forgiveness of our sins.” Neither can I forget my dear friends, my children on the Estonian islands. Österblom argues that he transformed the peasants from barbarians to civilized Swedes – emphasizing his role in the process by calling these peasants his children. Despite any criticism from the numerous enemies he made – within the Estland government, the local clergy, and even within EFS – when reading Österblom’s memoir, the only conclusion one could draw is to attribute their “salvation” and “civilization” to Österblom’s efforts. By emphasizing – perhaps even exaggerating – sinful and barbarous behavior at the onset, the contrast becomes even more striking. Österblom specifically takes credit for the creation of a “new Wormsö.” He writes:

No man can dispute that it became a new Wormsö, one that in many ways doesn’t even resemble the old island. Neither can anyone repudiate that the new one is much better, that the people have significantly raised their moral respects, that thievery, drunkenness, and so on, do not occur nearly as extensively as before.

While contentious, Österblom argues the end result of his missionary work justified the means, arguing that the methods – and even the conflicts he brought – were justifiable in

76 Ibid., 101.
77 Ibid., 20.
transforming and saving the Swedes. Yet even while justifying his missionary work, Österblom was humble enough to give full credit to God, who worked through him.  

In sharp contrast to Österblom, Thure Emanuel Thorén regularly cooperated with the local clergy. Thorén had a different role in the region; instead of teaching young children the basics and leading large-scale awakening movements, EFS chose Thorén to establish a Teacher’s Seminary in Paschlep, in the Nuckö area on the mainland. To promote a long-term legacy, Thorén taught promising students who would then become teachers in schools across the numerous Swedish-inhabited villages in Estland, making the regions self-sufficient for education. Compared to Österblom relatively little is written about Thorén. Historian Karl Hammarin argues, however, that through studying Thorén’s work, one can better understand the reasons for Österblom’s difficulties. Whereas Österblom was frequently in conflict with Pastor Girgensohn, the pastor who oversaw the region, Thorén and Girgensohn were largely friendly with each other and regularly cooperated. This was a result of Thorén’s work in establishing a Teaching Seminary, which Girgensohn helped coordinate.  

The Teaching Seminary opened 28 October 1873 with nine students ranging in age from 15 to 22. For 30 hours a week, Thorén taught the students the Bible, Biblical history, catechism, Swedish, geography, general history, writing, music, and singing. An assistant teacher taught Russian, Estonian, and mathematics. The seminary lasted for

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three years, and Girgensohn administered exams at the end of each semester. A second
group of twelve students began their studies in January 1877. Hammarin wrote, “The
education at the teacher’s seminary had a double purpose. The students were educated not
only to become school teachers, but also missionaries. Christian education occupied the
first position on the school schedule.”

Johan Kristiansson Nymann91 (1859-1933), one of the Swedish peasants born in
Nuckö (Klottorp) was among the first group in the Teaching Seminary. He recalled in his
unpublished memoirs, which he began writing in 1880, that his fellow Swedish peasants
in Estland had lived largely in ignorance, particularly in spiritual matters. Additionally,
even those with minimal literacy levels were unable to comprehend most written
materials. Nymann remarks that in terms of printed materials, the people knew of only
the Bible and their hymnals.82

Much like Österblom’s letters to EFS, Thorén’s were regularly infused with his
religious enthusiasm for the work he was doing. He wrote to EFS with numerous
examples of the change his presence and the Lord’s spirit had had on the people. In a 3
May 1875 letter, Thorén described a wedding in Nuckö, writing that previously weddings
involved considerable amounts of liquor and folk music. However, at this wedding, the
groom was so moved by love of God that instead of the schnapps and folk music, he

81 Nyman is sometimes also listed as Nymann. To be consistent, I will use Nymann throughout.
Kristiansson Nymans Lefnadshistoria. The memoir is handwritten, and pages unnumbered.
wanted Thorén to come with some of his students to preach, sing (religious hymns), and pray for them.83

Also like Österblom, Thorén faced linguistic challenges. However, unlike Österblom, Thorén’s letters never indicate that he learned and used the local dialect. In the 3 May 1875 letter he writes, “The people, who diligently visited us on Sunday afternoons all winter, see the Lord’s Spirit working hard, but it is difficult for them to understand our language; they need to come for a year and listen before it is completely clear for them.”84 Thorén had the same mentality in the classroom, where he taught only in High Swedish.

In 1876, Johan Nymann, at age 17 and still a student of Thorén, wrote a thank-you letter to EFS. The young Nymann praised his teacher and the religious knowledge he brought to the people. But he also pointed to some initial language difficulties interacting with Thorén:

In the fall of 1873 all of the people heard that a Swedish missionary arrived in Nuckö and would continue to stay here and teach adolescents to become school teachers... To start with it was quite difficult, because I could not understand the language; our language differs from Swedish quite a bit... Soon enough I began to understand so much, that I understood what was being said.85

Ultimately, Thorén’s poor health led to his return to Sweden. In the final years of his time in Nuckö, his wife Mathilda took over Thorén’s correspondence, as she considered her husband too weak to respond himself, and perhaps as a way to

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demonstrate the severity of his health problems. She appealed to EFS on his behalf in March 1880 for some recovery time at a seaside resort “in the homeland.” On some levels, it is strange that Thorén should need to return to Sweden to recover; Hapsal, only a few kilometers from where he lived in Estland, was a well-known spa resort, where Tchaikovsky and even members of the Russian court would come to visit. An exception to Mathilda’s letter-writing, Thorén himself responded to EFS on 3 May 1881: “I give a heartfelt thanks to the board whose benevolence allows me to return to Sweden. My health is considerably improved since the air became milder, but my eyes are so weak, that I find it difficult to read.”

With the exception of Thorén’s letters to EFS, and the insights raised in the memoirs of Nymann and oral histories, little is known of Thorén’s views of the region and his experience as a missionary in Nuckö; Thorén did not write a memoir of his experiences. After a short recovery back in Sweden, Thorén served as a missionary in Lübeck, an environment apparently better suited to his health. The lack of evidence makes it difficult to determine if Nuckö was indeed an unhealthy environment for Thorén, or whether he simply was unhappy there and wished relocation.

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88 Visitors included the tsar’s family for two months in 1871 and again in 1880. Tchaikovsky composed “Souvenir de Hapsal” while visiting the town in June-July 1867.
90 Perhaps one reason Thorén never wrote his memoirs is that he remained a missionary in EFS, and therefore had no need to justify his work or methodology, unlike Österblom who was kicked out of EFS shortly after his return to Sweden.
EFS also sent a third missionary to the region, although his influence was not as considerable as the other two. EFS initially sent J.A. Falk to the Rågö islands, where he arrived in 1877 with Österblom and Thorén. However, Falk did not have much success on Rågö. He later spent time in Rickul and Odensholm. In a 26 January 1880 letter to EFS, Falk wrote that so far in the winter there had not been a single awakening among the people, although they continued to attend his sermons.91 By April of the same year the Rågö islanders demonstrated their displeasure with Falk by hiring someone else to be their school teacher. He wrote to EFS, “Enmity has intensified to the inconceivable among these people.”92 Thorén commented on the decision (in a letter to EFS written by Mathilda), that it was the people’s decision to make, and that if they chose to hire and pay for a school teacher themselves rather than have Falk who received his pay from EFS – that alone was quite an indictment against Falk’s work.93

The missionaries can be seen as the foundation for later regional developments across Aiboland among the Estonian-Swedes. The missionaries from EFS established connections among the Swedish communities, placing a strong emphasis on the link between religion and the Swedish language, and between Swedes in Sweden and the Swedish peasantry living in Estland and Livland.94 The missionaries transformed the communities they lived and worked in, raising a cultural awareness among the Swedish

94 For an overview of Swedish Lutherans after the missionaries left Estland, see Alvin Isberg, Svensk Lutherdom i Österled: Relationer till ryska och baltiska diasporaförsamlingar och minoritetskyrkor 1883-1941 (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis Studia Historico-Ecclesiastica Upsaliensia, 1982).
peasantry, and raising literacy across the region. Future leaders in the community directly benefited from the work of Österblom and Thorén – particularly Nymann and Hans Pöhl, who taught first in Österby and later in Höbring.  

Österblom’s evangelical movement continued to spread after his departure from the region. It even spread from the Swedish communities to some of the Estonian communities, who referred to it as “rootsi usk,” or “Swedish belief.”  

Gustaf Berg writes, “This great awakening stretched itself not only to the Swedes, but also widely among the Estonians, who still with reverence say that the light came from Sweden, and came in to the pitch-black darkness and illuminated the masses with love’s light and warmth.” The Baptist movement in particular succeeded as a result of the revivalist work of the missionaries. In 1884, German pastor Reinhold Schiewe established the first Baptist church in Estland in Hapsal.  

In addition to the cultural changes of the missionary work, there were also meaningful socio-economic changes on Wormsö. Stackelberg died in 1887, and two years later the Russian state forcibly bought the island of Wormsö for 350,000 rubles, changing the relationship between the peasants and the state. The government turned the

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95 Riksarkivet SE/RA/730546 Nuckö församling, A1:1 Protokoll (1698-1901). Protokolli raamat Österby koolis 1898-[1902]. See the entry in the school records for 9 October 1901, which indicate Pöhl taught at the school from 12 October 1893 until 12 December 1901 when he attained a better position in Höbring.


99 Stockholms Stadsarkiv SE/SSA/0815 EFS arkiv, Alla:10 Styrelseprotokoll 1885-1888. The EFS minutes for 13 September 1887, §3, mark Stackelberg’s passing.
Magnushov estate into a sanitarium for children from St. Petersburg, and a new village appeared around the grounds. The state gave the peasants the possibility to buy their land, and many became small landowners for the first time.\textsuperscript{100} In gratitude, the Swedes sent a letter of thanks to Nicholas II, who answered in November 1905 (shortly after squelching the 1905 Revolution) by abolishing their debts (except for those of the peasants living on the grounds of the church).\textsuperscript{101} The islanders also received the right to leave the Orthodox Church, and the majority who converted in 1886 returned to the Lutheran Church.\textsuperscript{102} By the turn of the century, the majority of Swedish peasants were not living under the control of a Baltic German landowner, but had embraced the increased possibilities of being landowners themselves. The one exception to this was the Nuckö region, where Baltic German Rosen still maintained considerable control.

\textbf{Early Estonian-Swedish Organizations}

The Swedish minority across Aiboland made its first institutional steps toward the creation of a shared cultural identify in 1903 in two ways. First, in October, a group of Swedes established the Nuckö Temperance Society, which followed Österblom’s emphasis on not only spiritual matters, but also behavioral concerns.\textsuperscript{103} Although based in Nuckö, this was the first instance of individuals in Aiboland forging an officially recognized organization, and an important step toward the creation of a cultural

\textsuperscript{100} Svärd and Hammerman, Årtal och Notiser, 7.
\textsuperscript{101} See Aman, En bok om Estlands svenskar 4, 244.
\textsuperscript{102} Svärd and Hammerman, Årtal och Notiser, 7.
\textsuperscript{103} See SOV arkiv 63: Diverse dokument Rickul-Nuckö. Nuckö Nykterhetsförening.
organization a few years later in 1907. The Nuckö Temperance Society meetings included a choir and violin group, and the Society organized a small library. Temperance societies in Sweden corresponded with the Nuckö Society and sent books and periodicals for the library.

Hans Pöhl took a second big step, also in 1903 with the first publication of a Swedish-language almanac. It was designed for Swedes throughout the Russian empire but in practice it only reached those Swedes living in Estland and Livland. In addition to a calendar with holidays and dates of area markets, the almanac contained short articles about the community, praise about the Russian Tsar’s family, and recipes. There were also articles about farming techniques, the Lutheran religion, and hygiene.

As was the case with the temperance society, the almanac attempted to bridge the gap between the individual isolated communities of Aiboland. One way the almanac did so was through the use of continental Swedish (rikssvenska), rather than selecting one of the regional dialects. The almanac also demonstrates the emergence of an intelligentsia among the Swedish minority, even if this intelligentsia was only a handful or men.

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104 SOV arkiv: 63. Diverse document Rickul-Nuckö. The leadership of the Nuckö Temperance Society included Hans Pöhl (president), Joel Nyman (secretary), Johan Nyman (treasurer), Johan Wiksten (vice president), Alexander Blees (vice treasurer), and Johan Magnusson. See also Elmar Nyman, “En högre skola för Estlands svenskar” in Birkas: Svensk folkhögskola i Estland, Edvin Lagman, ed. (Stockholm: Svenska Odlingens Vänner, 1971), 16.

105 Temperance societies were not unique to the Swedish minority, however, and in the late 19th and early 20th centuries appeared throughout the Baltic Sea Region. See Jaan Tõnisson, “Nykterhetsrörelsen som utvecklande factor i de Nordiska ländernas kulturenhet,” in Eesti och den Skandinaviska Kulturen (Tartu/Helsinki, 1929). See also Patricia Herlihy, The Alcoholic Empire: Vodka and Politics in Late Imperial Russia (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

106 Årsbok eller Almanack 1903.
Conclusion: Legacy

From the mid-nineteenth century until the opening years of the twentieth century, the people across Aiboland saw a considerable increase in attention from the outside world. There were two groups in particular that showed marked interest in the Swedish-speaking people, often with seemingly contradictory aims. First, ethnographers sought to preserve the ancient culture and dialects before they died out or assimilated into the larger population. Second, missionaries sought to educate, “civilize,” and (re-) Christianize the population, making them “proper Swedes,” and starting the process of a standardization of the language. These outsiders came to Aiboland with the notion that this population was part of the larger Swedish people, at a time when Swedes in Sweden increasingly saw nationalism as a movement that transcended political borders.\textsuperscript{107} While ethnographers (and racial biologists) along with individuals affiliated with the Lutheran Church continued to visit Aiboland through the first half of the twentieth century, it was these early groups that laid the foundations for the development of a regional identification as “Estonian-Swedes” among the Swedish-speakers of Aiboland.

The nineteenth century was the time of great national awakenings in Europe.\textsuperscript{108} While the growth of Swedish nationalism increasingly drew connections between Sweden and the Swedes in Aiboland and justified intervention by Swedes, nationalist movements among Estonians, Germans, and Russians also influenced Aiboland. Russification policies played a role in the Swedish-speakers seeking to establish their

\textsuperscript{107} See Barton, \textit{A Folk Divided}, 140-141.

own cultural organizations. Russification policies accelerated the Estonian national
movement in the region. The Swedes in Estland viewed the rise of Estonian nationalism
as a significant threat, and feared the prospect of assimilation. While German nationalism
did not directly influence the Swedes, Russia’s response to the perceived threat of Baltic
Germans led to policies of Russification, which did influence them. These policies
brought greater scrutiny of the missionaries (Österblom in particular), placed greater
limitations and oversight of outsiders visiting Aiboland, and included a requirement for
Russian-language instruction in the schools.

The missionaries left numerous legacies. In addition to the improved literacy rates
and expansion of knowledge among the Swedish-speakers, Österblom and Thorén
brought their own preconceptions to what constituted acceptable cultural expressions, and
pushed aside anything they deemed un-Christian. However, it was in their role in the
education of the Swedish peasants that the missionaries left their greatest legacy. In 1920,
following Estonian independence, EFS sent Pastor John Klasson to Wormsö. His first
annual report to EFS demonstrated the legacy the missionaries left behind, which he still
found strong traces of more than 30 years later:

The foundation’s work in Estland in the 1870s-1880s have left deep
vestiges. In Nuckö and on Wormsö, perhaps even more so on the latter,
one gets a strong impression of the foundations of the power the gospel
possesses. The voluntary Christian activity appears not to have performed
less in moral and social respects than in religious. The people began to
gather around God’s word instead of around drinking establishments and
thievery, and in the households it has become even more cleanly
and orderly than before. A large part of the Swedish population have woken up
out of their tired slumber…. Many still remember the old workers,
Österblom, Thorén, and Falk and speak of them with gladness and gratitude.\textsuperscript{109}

Sven Danell, another pastor from Sweden in the interwar period, overheard some of the Swedes state that the missionaries brought Christianity to the region.\textsuperscript{110} Without the work of the missionaries and the foundations of a literate society, little progress could be made in unifying the Swedish minority in Estland and Livland through linguistic and cultural endeavors. By the time of the 1905 Revolution, the emerging Swedish intelligentsia took only the first few steps toward greater unity across the various Swedish-speaking communities. They demonstrated the means to organize, even on a minimal level, yet they still lacked a strong purpose or a call to action. That call would begin locally in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, transnationally in 1907 with the creation of the pan-Swedish movement in Gothenburg, and expand considerably with Estonian independence.


\textsuperscript{110} Danell, \textit{Guldstrand}, 92.
CHAPTER 2

THE POLITICIAN: THE UNIFICATION OF AIBOLAND

In a 1924 article, Estonian-Swedish leader Hans Gustafsson Pöhl¹ called on Estonian-Swedes in Aiboland to come together and cherish their common Swedish heritage. He expressed frustration at the challenges that the minority population faced from efforts to assimilate them into the Estonian majority. Despite enormous changes both culturally and politically within the community from 1903, Pöhl continued to believe that only by coming together across Aiboland, would the community’s potential to expand its cultural expressions and unify be fulfilled. Here he particularly emphasized the historical and cultural connections between Aiboland and Sweden.

Unity gives strength! Unity among us out here brings us ideally closer to the dear tribal kinsmen in the ancient homeland on the other side of the Baltic Sea. And the mother tongue is a bond that remains, even when there are political shortcomings. In order to better safeguard and further a genuine and healthy enlightenment of our nationalist foundations, we need to join together. Above all, we must love and further that which is our own. And the language that we have inherited, it is the most beloved that we own, and therefore we must call out in our districts, “Be Swedish.”²

From the 1905 Revolution to 1930, there were considerable changes in the Swedish regions of Estland and Livland provinces that strengthened connections among


the previously dispersed and disconnected Swedish villages by emphasizing their common language and cultural heritage. One of the emerging leaders of this period of change – arguably the most influential and perhaps the most educated Estonian-Swede throughout this 25-year period – was Hans Pöhl, born 15 August 1876 in Klottorp. Despite growing up in an overwhelmingly Swedish village and having a Swedish teacher, he began his education in Estonian. Pöhl continued at a three-year Russian school, and finished his education with a year of pedagogical study in Reval. In 1893, he went to Nuckö Parish Clerk Johan Nymann (a student of missionary Thorén) to study Swedish and religion, and eventually became a teacher in Österby and later in Höbring.\(^3\) He also took a six-week course in Sweden in 1903, studied at Oxford and Cambridge, and passed the secondary education teachers’ exam in 1912 in St. Petersburg.\(^4\)

As a founder and officer of the first cultural society, publisher of the first almanac and newspaper, leader of the first Swedish political party, the Swedish Folk Minister within the Estonian Provisional Government, chairman of the Swedish Teachers Association, and the first Swede elected to the Estonian parliament, Pöhl shaped Swedish cultural and political development across Aiboland. He also influenced the political structure of the new Estonian state. As a representative to the Estonian Constitutional Committee, he was an outspoken advocate for minority rights in the new republic.

\(^3\) See Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskar* 4, 92, 190-194. See also Riksarkivet SE/RA/730546 Nuckö församling, A1:1 Protokoll (1698-1901). Protokolli raamat Österby koolis 1898-[1902]. See the entry in the school records for 9 October 1901, which indicate Pöhl taught at the school from 12 October 1893 until 12 December 1901 when he attained a better position in Höbring.

Throughout his political career, Pöhl advocated among the Estonian-Swedes for a strong Swedish cultural identity with close links to Sweden, while stressing the importance of being loyal and active citizens of the new Estonian state. While it is difficult to measure his success in transforming the broader Estonian-Swedish population beyond the expanded legal protections, the history of Estonian-Swedish cultural institutions suggests the marked degree to which connections between Aiboland and Sweden strengthened during this period. A unified Swedish culture in Aiboland developed considerably during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Changing political situations and in particular the collapse of the Russian Empire and Estonian independence provided opportunities for cultural education and expression and enabled greater association among the Swedish communities. The new Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia feared losing their Swedish culture in the face of strengthening Estonian nationalism. Continuing the work of the missionaries, the emerging local leaders in Aiboland focused their efforts on the role of education in their communities, striving to ensure high-Swedish language instruction as the most important tool to combat rising Estonian nationalism, particularly in mixed communities. In this respect, Swedish-language schools and the publication of a regularly published Swedish newspaper were the cornerstones of this regional cultural program.

One can see a number of striking parallels with the earlier period, particularly in the emphasis that leaders, both within the community and abroad, placed on the civilizing nature of contacts between Aiboland and Sweden. The emerging Estonian-Swedish leaders, including Pöhl, saw the need to raise the economic standing of the Estonian-
Swedes across Aiboland and embrace their unique cultural heritage, and increasingly turned toward Sweden for support. Among the Estonian-Swedes, there was a continued perception of Sweden as a savior and protector.

From 1905 until 1930, Pöhl demonstrates the integration of the Swedish minority into Estonian politics and the establishment of a dual identification for the Estonian-Swedes: their identification as Swedes with a connection to their homeland and (after 1918) their identification as loyal citizens of the Estonian state. As a participant in the constitutional discussions, he represents the role the Estonian-Swedes played in the internal political debates. Additionally, Pöhl represents the continued connection between Aiboland and the homeland, particularly through the development of the pan-Swedish movement in Sweden and the inclusion of the Estonian-Swedes.

The Estonian-Swedes and the Pan-Swedish Movement

In parallel, individuals and groups in Sweden looked to Aiboland. Ethnographers and nationalists believed that the isolated, rural settlements of the Estonian-Swedes had preserved an ancient Swedish culture and language that had been lost in the urbanization of Sweden. As a pan-Swedish (allsvensk) movement developed in Sweden, interest in Aiboland escalated considerably among homeland Swedes and Swedish-speaking Finns in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Sociologist Sigrid Rausing connects this interest in the Estonian-Swedes to the rise of modernity in Sweden and among Swedish nationalists. Following the massive migration of Swedes to North America, the

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collapse of the Sweden-Norway Union, and changing political structures in Sweden, the struggle on the opposite shore of the Baltic Sea in Aiboland to preserve Swedish language and culture took on greater significance as a site where the pan-Swedish movement’s focused efforts could have tangible results.⁶

At the turn of the century, the pan-Swedish movement was in its infancy, developing in parallel with Swedish movements in Estonia. Vilhelm Lundström, the central figure in the pan-Swedish movement, first visited Aiboland in 1892. His trip created an awareness of the cultural and linguistic struggle for the Swedes in Estland, and spotlighted the need for greater interconnectedness among Swedes. As he wrote in his 1930 memoir:

It was first Reval, Nargõ, and Nuckö that would give my first sense of the national awakening… I saw houses where Estonians moved in and Swedes were wiped out, but I also saw others that preserved their Swedish dialect like their only great possession… But overall I saw poverty, ignorance, and an abandonment that left me hopeless.⁷

He found a community of Swedes that valued their heritage and held on to their culture and their language. The trip through Aiboland demonstrated for Lundström the need for a pan-Swedish movement to unite the larger Swedish community in supporting and preserving Swedish culture against competing influences, notably the rising threat posed by Estonian nationalism. In 1908 Lundström founded the National Association for the Preservation of Swedish Language and Culture Abroad (Riksföreningen för svenskhetens

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⁷ Vilhelm Lunström, Allsvenska Linjer (Göteborg: Riksföreningen för svenskhetens bevarande i utlandet, 1930), 6-9.
bevarande i utlandet, hereafter referred to as the National Association). Lundström took particular interest in Aiboland, arguing that it was one of the most important regions needing outside assistance to preserve, protect, and further Swedish language and culture against the constant pressure of assimilation. In doing so, he placed the Estonian-Swedes at the forefront of the pan-Swedish movement of the early twentieth century. Bengt Kummel, who wrote a history of the pan-Swedish movement in 1994, comments:

The pan-Swedish coalition movement can best be observed in their work for the national mobilization among Estonia’s Swedes. The reason is that the Swedes in Estonia constituted a small, relatively homogenous group, for whom the pan-Swedish movement’s efforts were of the utmost significance... The Estonian-Swedes [because of their small numbers, and poor economic standing] can therefore be seen like a special darling for the pan-Swedish coalition and the place where the movement could most freely put into practice their ideas and most clearly see the results.

In the decades to follow, the National Association played a vital role in connecting the Estonian-Swedes with individuals and organizations in Sweden. It also coordinated significant financial resources for the cultural development of Swedishness across Aiboland.

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8 The organization, still based in Gothenburg, changed its name to “Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt” in 1979. Although not a direct translation, the organization provides the name in English as “The Royal Society for Swedish Culture Abroad.”

9 The Swedes in Estland and other parts of the Russian Empire also influenced another Swedish nationalist. Carl Sundbeck had stronger ties with Swedes in America, and will therefore not be heavily discussed in this dissertation. Historian H. Arnold Barton writes, “Sundbeck had been deeply moved by the unshakable loyalty through the centuries of this ethnic minority, surrounded by alien peoples, to their ancestral language, religion, and culture. To him it seemed natural that the same sentiments must prevail among the far flung Swedish element across the Atlantic, especially if nurtured by understanding and encouragement from the old homeland.” See *A Folk Divided: Homeland Swedes and Swedish Americans, 1840-1940* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), 140.


The 1905 Revolution and After

The changing political conditions in Estland and across the Russian Empire in the early twentieth century created both threats and new opportunities for the Swedes. The eruption of revolution across the Empire in 1905 was characterized in the Baltic Provinces by strong ethnic overtones against the backdrop of social and economic grievances. Estonian peasants, still living off land held by Baltic German nobles, specifically targeted the Baltic Germans in violent uprisings. This rise in Estonian (and Latvian) nationalism caught many administrators off guard, and manor houses across the region went up in flames. By all accounts, the Swedes remained separate from the rising tide of revolution and any ethnic or social tension between the Swedes and the Baltic German landowners did not manifest itself in 1905. However, a few Swedes in Rickul used the occasion to request Swedish-language schooling. In response, the regional school inspector told teacher Joel Nyman, “The Swedes have always been a lawful people, ask them to wait a little longer.”

Tsar Nicholas II’s political response to the violence of 1905, the October Manifesto, created constitutional limits to his power through the creation of the elected Duma. The Duma allowed for participation by large ethnic groups from across the

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13 Described and quoted in Aman, En bok om Estlands svenskar 4, 242.
empire, including the Estonians. The Swedish intelligentsia of Estland viewed the October Manifesto as an opportunity for the various nationalities across the Empire to unite. Yet the Swedes also feared a loss of their culture and their language to Estonians, who, as the majority population in Estland, gained greater political and cultural opportunities in the post-1905 period. Historian Andres Kasekamp writes that “Although the 1905 Revolution failed, it marked a watershed for Estonians. Ordinary Estonians became engaged in active political debates for the first time, and Estonian social and political aims were radicalized.”14 Concerns among the Swedes grew further in 1906 when Estonians established private schools across the region with instruction in Estonian.15

The Swedes in Aiboland took the October Manifesto as justification to establish a cultural organization of their own as a buttress against the rising nationalist threat. Mindful of the small numbers of Swedes in Aiboland, the leaders in the community – initially school teachers and clergy, comprising an intelligentsia among the Estonian-Swedes – avoided politics. Instead, they wanted their new organization to expand Swedish culture and language and improve the region’s economic and hygienic conditions. In this regard, the intelligentsia expanded on and formalized the work of the missionaries of the 1870s. It did so, however, as a movement from within the community itself, rather than relying on outsiders, as had been the case with the missionaries. Nuckö

15 By 1910, there were 100 education societies and 36 private schools in Estland. See Aman, En bok om Estlands svenskar 4, 247.
perish clerk Johan Nymann remembers the conversation with Pastor Eduard August Maass that inspired the first meeting of this intelligentsia:

We had a conversation with the pastor about creating a Swedish school society, with the goal of establishing an upper level Swedish school for the Swedes living here, which in its turn has the task of protecting Swedish nationality and promoting Swedish education [culture, in Swedish, bildning]. After the society is created, we will turn to our Swedish brothers in Sweden with an appeal for help.\textsuperscript{16}

The result of this conversation was a meeting on 1 February 1907 in the Nuckö vicarage, organized by Pastor Einard (Eduard) August Maass and Wolfgang von Nocks – a Baltic German landowner with an interest in the Swedes. Forty representatives from across much of Aiboland (principally Nuckö, Wormsö, Reval, and Nargö) gathered to discuss the creation of a Swedish educational organization. The group elected Maass chairman and Hans Pöhl as secretary.\textsuperscript{17} The meeting laid the foundations for the creation of what was initially called the Swedish Enlightenment Society in Russia (\textit{Den svenska upplysningsföreningen i Ryssland}). The group decided to keep religion separate from the cultural society, and Pastor Franz Berg established a missionary society for the Swedes the following day in Paschlep.\textsuperscript{18}

The goals and aspirations of this early meeting were lofty. As the name suggests, those meeting in 1907 hoped to bring together all Swedes across the Russian Empire. As the Nuckö parish clerk later reminisced, “It was our intention to found a society to unite the scattered Swedes and foster in them nationalist feelings, that is to say love for their

\textsuperscript{16} Quoted in Aman, \textit{En bok om Estlands svenskar 4}, 247. Diary entry dated 4 January 1907.

\textsuperscript{17} SOV arkiv: “Svenska Odlinges Vänner” Avdelning Nukkö, Protokoll-bok 1909-. Minutes of the 1 February 1907 meeting.

\textsuperscript{18} Aman, \textit{En bok om Estlands svenskars 4}, 249.
mother tongue, and so on." While not specified, their ambition to unite the Swedes could extend the role of the new organization far outside Aiboland to include the population of Swedes in St. Petersburg, in the colony of Gammalsvenskby north of the Crimea,\(^{20}\) and on the island of Runö which, unlike the other regions of Aiboland, that were part of Estland Province, belonged to Livland Province.\(^{21}\)

Under the strict control of the regional government, the organization needed approval from Estland Governor Korostovetz. The name proved problematic, as did the goal of a connecting with Swedes outside Estland Province, which would have entailed additional bureaucratic difficulties in monitoring the organization for inappropriate political activity. The solution was to rename the society “Svenska Odlingens Vänner” (Friends of Swedish Culture, or SOV) and scale back to solely focus on Estland Province.\(^{22}\) Korostovetz formally approved the founding of SOV on 13 October 1908.\(^{23}\)

A constitutional committee gathered in Nuckö to formally approve the bylaws for SOV on 6 February 1909. This second meeting included a much larger gathering – approximately 80 participants came from Nuckö, Wormsö, Reval, and the Rågö islands.\(^{24}\)

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\(^{19}\) Quoted in Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskar 4*, 247. Diary entry dated 29 January 1907.


\(^{22}\) “Odling” could also have an agricultural interpretation, as in “cultivation,” making it a more tolerable name for the Russian government.

\(^{23}\) See Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskar 4*, 249.

\(^{24}\) SOV arkiv: “Svenska Odlingens Vänner” Avdelning Nukkö, Protokoll-bok 1909-. Minutes of the 6 February 1909 meeting.
The bylaws began with a clear purpose for SOV: “The society’s goal is to work for the education and culture among the Swedish population of Estland.” SOV sought to increase secular educational opportunities and protect Swedish culture. It would remain the main cultural organization for Estonian-Swedes (even after relocation to Sweden in 1944), largely shaping the Swedish identity in Estonia. Although neither SOV nor its earlier incarnation had political goals, imperial officials nonetheless kept a close watch over their activities for any political threats, as they did for any organization in tsarist Russia.

Significantly, the 6 February meeting concluded with the singing of “Our Land” (Vårt Land), a nationalistic song increasingly used as a national anthem in Finland. The lyrics were based on the 1846 poem from “The Tales of Ensign Stål” (Fänrik Ståhls Sänger) written by Johan Ludvig Runeberg – a Swedish-speaking Finn, and set to music in 1848 by Fredrik Pacius. The Swedish text makes no specific reference to Finland, but rather to a land in the north, and became widely sung in Sweden in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Our land, our land, our native land, Oh, let her name ring clear! No peaks against the heavens that stand, No gentle dales or foaming strand, Are loved as we our home revere, Vårt land, vårt land, vårt fosterland, ljud högt, o dyra ord! Ej lyfts en höjd mot himlens rand, ej sänks en dal, ej sköljs en strand, mer älskad än vår bygd i nord.

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25 SOV arkiv. Stadgar för “Swenska Odlingens Wänner.”


The earth our sires hold dear.
Our land is poor, and so must be
To him who covets gold.
Though others pass it scornfully:
And hardly note, we love it, we
Can prize its crags and headlands bold,
Its wealth of moor and wold.28

än våra fäders jord!
Vårt land är fattig, skall så bli
För den, som guld begär.
En främling far oss stolt förbi:
Men detta landet älska vi,
För oss med moar, fjäll och skär
Ett guldland dock det är.

The poem, as well as the other sixteen poems in the collection, drew distinct connections between the people and the native land—a land that Runeberg implies was neither Swedish nor Russian.29 Estonians used the same melody beginning at the 1869 Song Festival, with lyrics that parallel the Swedish/Finnish, written by Johann Voldemar Jannsen (Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm, My Fatherland, My Happiness and Joy). The Estonian version became a symbol of Estonian nationalism, and in 1920 the Estonian Republic adopted it as the national anthem.30 For the Swedes in Estland, “Vårt Land” was certainly a nationalist song; however, the sources do not indicate whether the Estonian-Swedes also viewed this song and the common melody as a connection to the Estonian nationalist movement. Their usage of “Vårt Land” does demonstrate, however, the connections between Aiboland and the Swedes in Finland.

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29 Interestingly, “Our Land” has no mention of “Finland” much as the Swedish national anthem has no mention of “Sweden.” The text to the Swedish national anthem was written by Richard Dybeck in 1845, and later set to the music from a Västmanland folksong and adopted as the national anthem in the 1890s. However, there is a clear connection to nature in the identity of both nations. See for example the poetry of Eric Gustav Geijer in Sweden and Edith Södergren (a Finnish-Swede) in Finland.

30 There are later notations from the Interwar period of singing “Vårt Land,” although it is unclear which text was used—the Swedish text found in the Finnish national anthem, or the Estonian text, or a combination. For example, the Estonian-Swedes sang “Vårt Land” at the conclusion of the 1932 Swedish Song and Folk Festival in Hapsal. See “Sång- och hembygdsfesten I Hapsal,” Kustbon, 12 July 1933.
SOV established local chapters in Nuckö, Reval, Wormsö, and the Rågö islands, with the top leadership coming from Reval: Pastor Johan Waldemar Gustafsson (a Finnish-Swede) as chairman, Hans Pöhl as secretary, and Swedish Consul Erik Gahlnbäck as treasurer.\textsuperscript{31} Otherwise, membership of the new society included all of the Swedish teachers across Aiboland (except on Runö, located in Livland Province), and representatives from a variety of occupations and social classes. The local chapters were to “unite Swedish men and women and foster the goal of the preservation of Swedishness in Estonia, as well as work for their benefit and enjoyment.”\textsuperscript{32} Following Estonian independence, Runö also established a local chapter. The organization began with 268 members, and after a dip down to 220 in 1914, by 1921 SOV had 538 members – 275 men and 263 women, or a little less than ten percent of the Estonian-Swedish population.\textsuperscript{33}

The economic conditions in Aiboland were of equal importance to education in the goals of SOV. The poor soil quality of the coastal and island regions limited economic capabilities and placed Aiboland at a lower economic level than its neighbors living further inland.\textsuperscript{34} The leadership saw the two progress hand-in-hand, and worked hard to bring new knowledge to improve agriculture. In this respect, the educational goal

\textsuperscript{31} Gustafsson was the chairman from 1909-1914, followed by Oscar Ingman from 1915-1919, and Hans Pöhl from 1920-1929.

\textsuperscript{32} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.11. Bylaws for the SOV clubs in Estonia, §1.

\textsuperscript{33} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.11. E.W. Riigi Statistika Keskbüroo aruande Seltsi “Rootsi Hariduse Sõbrad Eestis” tegevusest 1921 aastat; B. Organisatsioon liikmed.

of SOV focused on both children and adults. To complement the activities of SOV, the Estonian-Swedes also formed choral and folk dancing groups in villages across Aiboland.

**First World War**

The First World War brought significant obstacles for Aiboland – restrictions on movement, shortages of goods, requisition of livestock, and mobilizations. Situated along the western periphery of the Russian Empire, the islands and coastal regions became significant military concerns. The Russian government prohibited boat traffic, isolating the islands from goods and communication, though, once the water froze over in winter, traffic to Wormsö resumed using the ice road. The Russian government evacuated Nuckö (off the coast of Reval) at the start of the war and forbade the inhabitants of Runö (in the Bay of Riga) from leaving the island for the duration of the war.

The war brought a significant military presence across Aiboland. In August 1914, the German battleship Magdeburg and the Russian navy fought an extensive battle off of Odensholm. The Swedes sought shelter in cellars as shells pounded the island for hours. Little Rågö housed a Russian battery with barracks. Ormsö also had a battery, and

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35 Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskar* 4, 358.

36 Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskar* 4, 359. The other islands were further from the mainland, and the ice was not thick enough to create an ice road.

37 Nargö remained off limits for the Swedes, and used by the Russian military, for five years; the first Swedes were able to return in July 1919, finding the island in ruins. See N.B. “Minnen och intryck från Nargö” in *Kustbon*, 6 August 1919. See also Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4.

soldiers were quartered in the school house until a base could be built. The tsarist military built fortifications in Rickul, and a naval base in Hapsal.\textsuperscript{39} Runö became completely reliant on the Russian military – followed by the German military, when control of the region shifted between the powers – for necessary supplies (including food), as the island was not self-sufficient.\textsuperscript{40}

During the war the work of SOV diminished (the governments forbade meetings), and while the number of religious meetings increased, Aiboland soon faced a shortage of clergy. In the early stages of the war, the foreign pastors across Aiboland left for their homes in either Sweden or Finland.\textsuperscript{41} The parish clerks took over as much as they could, and in some instances educated peasants took to preaching.\textsuperscript{42} While a few of the educated Estonian-Swedes could fill some of the gaps, none were sufficiently fully qualified to lead the congregations, and the loss of the clergy across Aiboland thus demonstrates the Estonian-Swedes’ continued reliance on outsiders. Swedish men were among those conscripted into the Russian military, leaving women and the elderly to take care of the farming. Those conscripted included teachers in Aiboland, and women increasingly stepped in to continue the work of the schools.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39} Aman, \textit{En bok om Estlands svenskar} 4, 360.

\textsuperscript{40} See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. Letter from Paster Linderstam to the Swedish Folk Secretary dated 21 June 1919.

\textsuperscript{41} Already in 1914 Pastor Johan Waldemar Gustafsson left Reval for Finland, in 1915 Pastor August Zetterqvist left Runö for Sweden, in 1916 Pastor Oskar Sevelius left Nuckö for Finland, and in 1917 Pastor Väinö Melin left Ormsö for the Åland Islands.

\textsuperscript{42} Aman, \textit{En bok om Estlands svenskar} 4, 360.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 360.
**Early Estonian Politics**

The Russian Revolution in 1917 – both the February and October Revolutions – brought considerable changes to Estland, and to the political position and opportunities of the Estonian-Swedes. The February Revolution led to the overthrow of the tsar; power in Petrograd split between a Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. Hans Pöhl “was attentive and quick,” and saw an opportunity to protect language and political rights for the Swedish minority in Estland. He appealed to the Russian Provisional Government for authority to develop Swedish culture and protect Swedish-language schools, and sought minority rights within Estland for the Swedes. The Russian Provisional Government gave its approval, and Pöhl soon after formed the Swedish People’s Alliance in the Baltic Provinces (*Swenska Folkförbundet i Östersjöprovincerna*) – the first political organization for the Swedes in Estland. A group of Estonian-Swedes met in Bergsby on 20 April 1917 to establish the party platform, which largely focused on protecting and furthering Swedish-language education, a reflection of the importance that they placed on education for the Swedish cultural agenda.

For their part, Estonian leaders also took the opportunity to pursue autonomy, a goal that had gone unrealized after the 1905 Revolution. They called for autonomy (but not complete independence) of Estland and the Estonian-inhabited portion of Livland. The Russian Provisional Government approved this measure 30 March 1917 and “required the Baltic German governing institutions to relinquish their authority to a temporary commissar and united the Estonians into a single administrative unit

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44 Ibid., 374.
corresponding to their ethnic boundaries for the first time in their history.”

Elections for the Estonian Provisional Government (Maapäev) in the new autonomous region took place in May and June.

Meanwhile, in January 1918 Pöhl began publishing an official party newspaper – the first Swedish-language newspaper in the region – *Kustbon* (“The Coastal Resident”) with the initial subtitle “Newspaper for the Swedes in the Baltic Provinces.” In the first issue of 1919, the editors explained the purpose of *Kustbon*:

The Swedish tribe [*folksstammen*] here has in particular many interests to exercise and protect now. In the struggle for existence, solidarity is the greatest necessity. *Kustbon* is published to further this objective. It is to be a harbinger for compatriots out here – to remind us of our obligations, promote our political and civic rights, and according to our capacity contribute to the greater public good and our individual needs.

Desiring *Kustbon* to play a prominent role across Aiboland with widespread support and appeal, the editors encouraged participation from all the villages. While initial issues focused on political changes and articulated the political posture of the Swedish People’s Alliance, the cultural and educational component of the Swedish-language newspaper dominated. As Nikolai Blees wrote, *Kustbon* should do everything possible to raise the Swedes “in spirit and in body.”

By the end of 1917 as the political situation in Russia deteriorated and the Bolsheviks claimed power, Estonian leaders increasingly turned to the idea of

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46 Beginning in 1919, a new subheading limited the focus to Estonia.

47 Redaktionen, “Kustbon” in *Kustbon*, 10 February 1919.

independence. According to a November article in the Estonian newspaper *Tallinna Teataja*,

We have finally buried all our hopes that the Russian nation can improve our situation – it is no longer even capable of governing itself... At present we have been left at the mercy of anarchic armed masses, in the future our life and death will be decided by the desires of the European great powers.49

In Estonia, Bolsheviks attempted to take power and dissolve the *Maapäev*. They never succeed in acquiring power, however, as the Estonian military remained loyal to the *Maapäev*. After a few months, Bolsheviks withdrew from the capital as German troops moved in.50 There was a single day – 24 February 1918 – between the Bolsheviks leaving and the German troops arriving, and a Salvation Committee (*Päästekomitee*) from the *Määpäev*, led by Konstantin Päts, declared Estonia an independent state.51 “The Salvation Committee’s declaration may have appeared as only a symbolic gesture, but the manifesto did yield results in the diplomatic arena. The German occupation made Estonia an international question, no longer just an internal Russian issue.”52 When Germany lost the war, Estonian independence seemed certain.

Minority issues were a concern for the Estonian Provisional Government, which sought to provide extensive rights in the hopes of generating increased loyalty to an Estonian state (and against the Bolsheviks). Within the *Maapäev*, the three largest


50 The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed 9 February 1918, gave Germany control over both Estland and Livland.

51 As the Russian army withdrew from Estland, they blew up all the newly constructed bases and barracks – including those built across Aiboland. See Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskar 4*, 364.

minority populations – the Russians, the Baltic Germans, and the Swedes each held a
cabinet level position – with Pöhl representing the Swedes as the Swedish Folk
Minister.\textsuperscript{53} The initial currency further reflected the status of minority rights: the 1919
Estonian Mark had Estonian text on the front, but the back was written in German,
Russian, and Swedish. Pöhl’s position within the Provisional Government led him to hire
the young and energetic Nikolai Blees as Swedish Folk Secretary. The Secretary
coordinated between the government and the Swedish population, principally in terms of
education. Blees remained in this position until 1940\textsuperscript{54}

The Alliance needed both to lobby for strong nationality rights, and, as citizens of
Estonia, to also support a viable democratic state.\textsuperscript{55} The Estonian-Swedes, and the leaders
of the Alliance in particular, saw themselves as both Swedes and Estonian citizens. From
its establishment in April 1917, the Swedish People’s Alliance aligned itself with
Estonians who sought the creation of an independent Estonian state and opposed the
Bolsheviks. Swedes also fought alongside Estonians in the War for Independence.\textsuperscript{56} At

\textsuperscript{53} The Jewish minority was not given a Ministerial position, perhaps because the Jewish population was
considered too small.

\textsuperscript{54} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.2. Blees applied for the position on 23 January 1919, and was hired on 27
February.

\textsuperscript{55} See, for example, “Estlands framtid?” in Kustbon, 10 February 1919.

\textsuperscript{56} In 1929, the Swedes on Wormsö raised a memorial marker for the three local Swedes that died in the
War of Independence. There was an intense discussion concerning the language to be used on the marker in
a joint meeting of the Wormsö church congregation and SOV. In the vote for Swedish only text, there were
13 votes for yes, 2 votes for no, and 2 neutral. In a vote for both Swedish and Estonian text, there were 2
votes for yes, 0 votes for no, and 15 neutral. Pastor Klasson and Communal Secretary Friberg then
successfully argued that since Estonian was the state language, that the men gave their lives for Estonia’s
independence, and considering that the island had numerous visitors that might not speak Swedish, the
memorial marker should contain both Swedish and Estonian text (although it was to be made clear that the
three men were Swedes). See Riksarkiv SE/RA/730542 Wormsö församling (1694-1944), A1:1 Protokoll
(1875-1939). Minutes for the 14 May 1929 meeting (§2 and 3).
times, the Alliance used dire language in *Kustbon* in the hopes of garnering greater support from and encouraging political solidarity within, the community. In the 1919 constitutional convention elections, for example, Nikolai Blees stated that the election would determine whether “our people will be fortunate or unfortunate” based on whether they succeeded in coming together as a community with sufficient votes for representation.57 The Alliance put up two candidates for the constitutional convention – Pöhl and Joel Nyman. For the election, the Alliance formed a coalition with the Christian People’s Party (*Kristlik rahvaerakond*), agreeing to hold a united position on the role of religion in education, but allowing the Swedish People’s Alliance to hold other political perspectives. Through this coalition, Pöhl participated in the constitutional convention, helping to shape the legal structure of the independent Estonian state and arguing for strong minority protection rights.

The primary objective for the Swedish leaders in the constitutional debates was protection for Swedish-language education. “It is for the youth that we must fight, for the coming generations’ success, whose foundation is now being laid, and no pains must be spared in that regard.”58 The Estonian-Swedes considered their educational system to be far behind that found in Sweden and Swedish-Finland in terms of quality and the number of grade levels, but also considerably behind neighboring Estonians. Joel Nyman argued that the Russian school system, with the emphasis on Russian-language education, was in part at fault, but also blamed the pitiful salaries that the communities paid their teachers.

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While the new Estonian state would pay teacher salaries, the local communities needed to pay for Swedish-language books and for the upkeep of schoolhouses.⁵⁹ A lack of financial resources across Aiboland, therefore, still hampered Swedish-language opportunities.

Despite the pleas from Pöhl and other minority representatives, the Constitutional Convention eliminated the cabinet-level positions for minorities.⁶⁰ The 16 July 1919 issue of *Kustbon* printed one of Pöhl’s speeches from the Constitutional Convention in which he articulated the need for increased minority cultural autonomy and protections, and lamented the loss of the ministry-level positions:

The fundamental principles of the new state are of vast importance, not only for the Estonian people in their endeavor for young independence. It is significant even for the little people, who have built and resided [here]. I speak as the Swedish representative, for the people that reside on Estonia’s islands and coasts. Together with the Estonians, we have long carried the same yoke, together struggled, together suffered, together waited for a better future….

Eesti⁶¹ is now in the process of constructing its “state building.” Will this building be a welcome home even for us? That is what the [Estonian-]Swedish citizens are asking in this important moment when the constitution is on the agenda.

In the manifesto to the Estonian population we received the promise of cultural autonomy. The departing Provisional Government has before this shown their willingness and given us the possibility to regulate nationalist questions ourselves. Gentlemen! We have identical experiences and you can understand me without me needing to explain those sentiments that develop in the heart of a free citizen after a long, dark slavery. Our people


⁶⁰ Additionally, from 1920 the new currency, the Estonian “kroon” contained text only in Estonian.

⁶¹ *Kustbon* initially uses this Estonian term (*Eesti*) in place of the Swedish term (*Estland*) for the new state, perhaps as a way to distinguish the new state from the small province of Estland. Or, this might possibly be a calculated way to show solidarity with Estonians and to voice the Estonian-Swedish desire to remain citizens of Estonia.
felt that they now were a free people in the land where they long felt like strangers. We had our own Folk Ministry, which established a bond between the people and the central board, to which the people also turned to in different matters. And with the exception of the local communal government, we lacked other officials to which the people could turn to in their mother tongue. It didn’t linger for long – only five months – when the Folk Ministry ceased its work and turned over its files to the Interior Ministry. I don’t know how to explain this changing situation, but it has been explained to me that no one intended to oppress us. I hope so – that the Estonian people, who themselves know what it is like to be a citizen of a larger state that does not intend to restrict their rights. Cultural autonomy is our vital question. Even we want to survive.

Dear representatives! Confirm even our rights in the Eesti constitution. In the earlier blows, these rights were too often restricted and reduced. We request that we can arrange our cultural affairs ourselves together with the possibility, with the Republic’s Board and the National Congregation, arrange our affairs ourselves.62

Despite Pöhl’s appeal, the Constitutional Committee did not reestablish the Folk Ministry. The Estonian constitution of 1920 offered restricted minority protections which included the right of any citizen to determine “nationality” at one’s own discretion, the right “to use their own language before the organs of local self-government in districts where they are in a majority, and to address petitions to the central authority in their own language.”63 Additionally, paragraph 21 reads: “The members of national minorities within the boundaries of Estonia are granted the right, for furtherance of their own cultural and welfare interests, to create autonomous institutions, provided it will not not

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62 See Pöhl’s speech, printed in “Kampen för svensketens bevarade” in Kustbon, 16 July 1919.

conflict with the interests of the state.” The issue of autonomous institutions led to further legislation a few years later.

On the whole, minorities in Estonia received unprecedented protections from the state as compared to minorities in other states that emerged from the First World War. However, while the Estonian constitution considered all citizen equal under the law, in practice the interests of the Estonian majority took precedence in any nationality-based conflict. The new cultural institutions for minorities were to be under the Education Ministry, and therefore not completely autonomous. And in the following two decades, no member of a minority held a cabinet position.65

Minority protections were only one aspect of the new constitution. Contemporary observers, such as R.T. Clark, considered the Estonian constitution with high regard. He wrote in 1921:

This is democracy of an advanced type… the Constitution carries into the printed text more of the implication of pure democratic theory than any other… The great advantage its framers had was that they began de novo, and were not cursed, or blessed, with a constitutional past. They have been able to incorporate freely the latest devices of democracy, and interpret in actual words much of the spirit underlying the older Constitutions.66

Minority issues persisted as a main theme of Estonian politics in the 1920s – domestically with the changing position of the Baltic Germans, and internationally as


65 Kasekamp notes, “The minority parties never played an important role in the Riigikogu and were never invited to participate in any cabinet. Nevertheless, they were quite active in Riigikogu committees.” See *The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia*, 20.

Estonia sought membership in the League of Nations. The Estonian state developed under intense international observation, perhaps more so than other emerging states because of the strong, vocal, and well-connected Baltic German minority. The Baltic Germans used these connections to protest the actions of the land reforms that took away most of their land for redistribution. The international community was interested in safeguarding minority rights within the new nations after the First World War. As a condition of its admittance into the League of Nations, Estonia needed to further extend minority protections. The international obligation to protect minorities was guaranteed by the League of Nations, although the Estonian government was frustrated about the inconsistencies in attempting to fulfill the requirements. In objecting to the League’s requirements, Estonia stated the government was not opposing minority protections, but rather argued that the 1920 constitution already outlined sufficient minority protections well beyond those found in other states, and therefore met the international obligations.


the League of Nations required.\textsuperscript{72} In a 1923 report on the protections of minorities in Estonia, League of Nations representative M. da Gama wrote: “Although the Esthonian [sic] Constitution at present in force provides all the necessary guarantees, it is not impossible that in the future the situation might be modified.”\textsuperscript{73} He argued that should the League accept provisions in the 1920 Constitution, it should be willing to take action against Estonia for any infringements.

The Swedish Foreign Ministry also closely monitored the development of minority protections in Estonia. The Consul in Reval sent regular updates back to Stockholm, including newspaper articles from \textit{Kustbon} and Baltic German newspapers such as \textit{Revaler Bote}, \textit{Revalshe Zeitung}, and \textit{Estländisch Zeitung}.\textsuperscript{74} The consulate’s reports illustrate a bond between the Estonian-Swedish minority and the Swedish government. However, the archive does not contain any suggestion that the Swedish government sought to move beyond just monitoring the situation to attempt political intervention for minority legislation on behalf of the Estonian-Swedes.

In part to further address minority protections to fulfill the League of Nation’s concerns, Estonia passed the Law on Cultural Self-Government and National Minorities


\textsuperscript{74} Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:12 (1921-1940). Folder entitled “Frågor rörande nationella minoriteters ställning (1923-1936).” See, for example, the 30 November 1930 report from Leo Sager summarizing the minority protections in the Estonian constitution. Sager noted that the Cultural Autonomy Law was more beneficial to dispersed minorities, rather than groups like the Swedish minority which were primarily a territorial minority.
on 12 February 1925 (Vähemusrahvuste Kultuur- omavalitsuse seadus). Written by the Baltic German parliamentarian Werner Hasselblatt, the law focused on “nationality” based on individual determinations, rather than defined by territorial designations. The international community heralded Estonia’s new Cultural Autonomy Law as a prime example of protecting the rights of minorities. Andres Kasekamp writes,

Cultural autonomy in such a form was unprecedented at that time, and its success was internationally recognized as one of the greatest achievements of the Republic of Estonia… The relative ethnic homogeneity of the population undoubtedly contributed to Estonian magnanimity towards the national minorities. However, commentators often overlooked that the new law passed by a margin of only a single vote, and even then passed largely because of a recently failed Communist coup. Thus, the law was a means to appease minority groups and prevent further uprisings that could threaten Estonian independence.

The Cultural Autonomy Law was far-reaching in some regards. It provided minority groups of at least 3,000 the right to establish state-supported governing councils for cultural affairs. According to the 1922 census report in Estonia, based on self-identification, the state was comprised of a 12.3 percent minority population, including Russians (8.2 percent), Baltic Germans (1.7 percent), Swedes (0.7 percent), and Jews (0.4 percent) – all above the 3,000 person threshold and eligible for the Cultural Autonomy

75 Riigi Teataja, 31/32, 1925. See also Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.1 Väljavõttad “Vähemusrahvuste Kultuur- omavalitsuse seadusest.”


77 Ibid., 20.

Law – and others (1.3 percent). The Baltic Germans were arguably in the most precarious position vis-à-vis the Estonian majority because of their historic rule over the region and perceptions from Estonians of oppression through control of the land and the Baltic Germans’ educational advantages. Over the following two decades, many of the restrictions placed on minorities were meant to restrict the Baltic Germans (although were equally applied to all minority groups).

Only the Baltic German and Jewish populations, however, later established the councils offered through the Cultural Autonomy Law – the Russians and the Swedes did not. There were two possible factors to explain why the Swedes did not utilize the full benefits of the new law. First, the Swedish population predominantly lived in concentrated areas, enabling them to establish local control, without needing governing councils. However, local government positions required a high school degree, which most Estonian-Swedes lacked, meaning that even in areas where the Estonian-Swedes were in the majority, Estonians might hold local office. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, to establish a cultural autonomy council those who identified as Swedish would need to pay additional taxes to fund the new council. The Swedish minority lacked the financial ability to pay an additional tax and implement the new right.

The Cultural Autonomy law received praise in the 11 February 1925 issue of *Kustbon* as a significant advancement in minority protection rights. The article commended the Estonians for taking such a step, but argued that for the moment the

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79 There were a total of 7,850 Swedes: 3,757 men and 4,093 women. See Riksarkivet SE/RA/721073 Prosten Erik Petzäll E2:14. Estonian census data dated 28 December 1922.

80 Sillaste, “Protection of Minorites in the Baltic States,” 57-60.
Swedes would be best not to take advantage of the new law to create a cultural council. The unsigned article stated, “For now it would perhaps be most prudent for us to take a wait-and-see policy, until we are economically and intellectually stronger and more mature for such self-governance; the basic rights in this new law are not lost, even if we do not utilize them for a long period.”81 Considering the magnitude of the legislation for minority populations, it seems surprising that the brief notice in Kustbon did not lead to further analysis or commentary on the new law.

The Swedish Folk Secretariat

The most important governmental position for the Swedish minority throughout the Interwar period was the Swedish Folk Secretary. The position was especially important because the minority lacked government representation either through a cabinet-level position, an autonomous institution, or a parliamentarian (except 1929-1934).82 The Estonian-Swedes considered Hans Pöhl to be their leader and elder of the Estonian-Swedish community, as well as of the Swedish People’s Alliance. Yet, after the removal of the cabinet level positions in 1919 that Pöhl had held, Swedish Folk Secretary Nikolai Blees became the most visible Estonian-Swede, not only within Estonia but also in the pan-Swedish movement. Blees also provided an important link between the

81 “Politiskt.” Kustbon, 11 February 1925.

82 Initially a division of the Interior Ministry, the Swedish Folk Secretary position relocated to the Cultural/Enlightenment Ministry (Kultusministeriet) on 12 August 1919. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. Letters from N. Blees dated 2 September 1919 to the Swedish municipalities, the Swedish Teachers’ Association, and SOV (letter numbers 191-204).
population and the various Estonian ministries – primarily education, but also agriculture, military, forestry, and even the customs agency.

The Folk Secretary had the primary task of ensuring and protecting the rights of the Swedes. Particularly in the progression from the Estonian Provisional Government to the early years of the Estonian Republic, the Swedish Folk Secretary worked extensively on the issue of rights and privileges. As the Estonian Constitution made nationality self-determined, it was up to the individual to assert his or her rights. In some cases, local Estonian officials classified individuals improperly. On several occasions, individuals or government representatives asked Blees to investigate the nationality of an individual, for example Johannes Hallman of Viljandi, who claimed both his parents were Swedish. The Viljandi officials classified Hallman as Estonian. Hallman initiated an inquiry with the Swedish Folk Secretary claiming he was Swedish (he initially wrote in Estonian, ironically). Blees confirmed that both of his parents were indeed Swedish, and had the Interior Ministry change his classification.\(^{83}\)

Blees periodically communicated with the local governments to articulate minority protection regulations and he occasionally intervened in cases of dispute. For example, early in his official capacity Blees sent a letter to the communal leaders of Rickholtz, Paschlep, Wormsö, and Rågö on 16 April 1919 concerning the obligations of public officials:

> Since there are frequent cases in pure-Swedish [rensvensk] or half-Swedish [halvsvensk] municipalities of hiring public officials that are not in command of the Swedish language, may the Swedish Folk Ministry bring to the municipal councils’ and to their public officials’ attention, that

\(^{83}\) See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.29. Letters dated 12 September, 13 September, and 6 October 1927.
language ordinances must not be violated under any condition. That is to say all public officials, including municipal heads, military officials, municipal secretaries, and others – in both pure-Swedish and half-Swedish municipalities – should understand Swedish, and the contents of important notices must use a good command of the language in both speech and writing.\(^84\)

Blees regularly communicated with schools to ensure that the curriculum complied with Estonian legislation, and coordinated the acquisition of books and other teaching aids.\(^85\) He contacted publishers in Sweden and Finland to secure considerable discounts for the Estonian-Swedish schools, often underscoring the significant financial destitution across Aiboland. Blees regularly toured through Aiboland as a school inspector, meeting teachers and conducting inquiries on the number of classes and students at each school.\(^86\)

Another important duty of the Folk Secretary was raising funds to support Swedish language education and cultural activities. The first donation to arrive came from the Royal Swedish Consulate in Reval on 20 February 1919, a donation of 1,000 marks for the Swedish minister to do as he saw fit. Hans Pöhl replied (the donation predated Pöhl’s hiring of Blees by a week), “This is the first gift our ministry has received, and as long as the Swedish language lights up our islands and coasts we will remember with the greatest gratitude the help and assistance this gift demonstrates for Swedish interests here in Estonia.”\(^87\) The Swedish Folk Ministry turned over the funds to

\(^{84}\) Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. Letters dated 16 April 1919 (nrs. 100, 102, 106, 107).

\(^{85}\) See for example Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1109.8.13. Letters from the Folk Secretary to the school teachers, dated 8 February 1921 (nrs. 945-964).

\(^{86}\) See for example the inventory of schools in 1919. Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.49.

\(^{87}\) Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. Letter from Pöhl to Consul Gahnbäck dated 28 February 1919.
SOV. Blees used his office to secure donations from abroad, which frequently connected him to the National Association.\textsuperscript{88} The majority of such donations – whether financial or in the form of gifts including medical supplies, food, and clothing – passed across his desk.\textsuperscript{89} Blees used his official status to push crates of materials through customs without duties, and he wanted to be informed of all such donations beforehand (including dates and shipping information). He also oversaw the distribution of resources.

Blees attempted to ensure that all of the Swedish regions had sufficient resources. For example, in 1926, he wrote to Ragnar Fleege of the National Association regarding the financial support for Odensholm coming from the Kalmar branch in Sweden. He stated that Odensholm received an overabundance of support – more than they needed – making their school significantly better than other schools in Aiboland. Blees inquired whether the Kalmar branch might be willing also to support another school, “that is to say Österby, which is among the most wretched and lacks everything.”\textsuperscript{90} Blees also coordinated regular relief aid arriving from Sweden, such as 109 sacks of wheat from the Swedish Red Cross in 1922 to be distributed among the poor Estonian-Swedes.\textsuperscript{91}

Blees took on a central role in connecting Aiboland to the larger pan-Swedish movement. As his correspondence indicates, Blees’ secretariat fielded queries from Estonian-Swedes on a full range of matters, and occasionally from Swedes abroad. There

\textsuperscript{88} In one example, Blees sought a donation from Swedish-American Ernst Benstrom of Salt Lake City to support \textit{Kustbon}. Blees used his official title and the Swedish Folk Secretary letterhead in his request. Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.19. Letter dated 23 November 1923 (nr. 9470).

\textsuperscript{89} The implications of this method, and the possibility of corruption, will be addressed in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{90} See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.71. Letter to Ragnar Fleege dated 16 June 1926.

\textsuperscript{91} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.16. Letter from Blees to Erik Green (Birkas) dated 9 November 1922 (nr. 9576).
was a misunderstanding among Swedes abroad on the role of the Swedish Folk Secretary, with some considering him more along the lines of a consultant for anything related to Swedes visiting the region. In a 1923 inquiry, for example, a man from Stockholm requested Blees acquire inexpensive housing for him, as he was recently unemployed and found living in Stockholm to be too expensive.\footnote{Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.19. Letter to the Swedish Folk Secretary from Konrad Gutke dated 18 October 1923.}

**Changing Rights and Privileges**

The shift from tsarist Russia to an independent Estonian republic also affected the legal status of the Swedish minority. The rights and privileges conferred by the Swedish royalty during the Swedish Empire had survived the entirety of Russian control, and in some regions of Aiboland, Swedes contended that certain of these privileges must be preserved even in the Estonian republic. However, in almost every instance, the new Estonian state invalidated these historic rights. Most contested was access to state-held land that passed from the tsar’s control to the Estonian state. Under Russian control Swedish peasants had negotiated usage of timber from crown land, particularly for peasants living on barren islands such as Odensholm.\footnote{See for example the 1921 conflict between the residents of Odensholm and the Agricultural Ministry (Põllutööministeerium), which oversaw state-held lands. The islanders pointed to their privileges from 1658 (transcribed in Carl Russworm’s book *Eibofolke*, p.211). See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.14. Letter from Odensholm dated 15 June 1921 and from the Agricultural Ministry dated 10 August 1921 (nr.3067).} Following Estonian independence, the Estonian government reduced access to state-held land considerably and required permission from the government for any usage, which was occasionally
denied. Nikolai Blees took frequent complaints from Odensholm, Wormsö, and the Rågö islands regarding access to state-held land and the economic ramifications there of, and investigated and negotiated changes in taxation policy. Runö faced different issues in the political transition because it arguably had the most permissive privileges in Aiboland during the tsarist era, including freedom from paying taxes and military service. However, Runö had a much stronger bargaining chip in negotiations with the Estonian republic. The establishment of political borders – particularly between Estonia and Latvia – was an important issue for the new state, and one with strategic military implications. The mainland border largely followed ethnic divisions, and since Runö was isolated in the Bay of Riga and inhabited entirely by Swedes, there was no clear ethnic or geographic dividing line. Estonia and Latvia left the decision to the islanders, which led to negotiations and expeditions by both sides. In this aspect, the Swedish-speaking minority played an important role in the international relations between Estonia and Latvia.

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94 Another area of complaint was land taken away from the Wormsö church. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.08.6. Letter from Wormsö Municipal Council dated 19 February 1919.

95 See, for example, the complaints from Rågö to Swedish Folk Minister Hans Pöhl in taxation changes. As part of his investigation, Pöhl collected a detailed overview of the summer and winter taxation of the islands (including the taxation on cheese, butter, eggs, fish, animals, and daily work obligations). See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.6. Letters dated 20 February and 23 February 1919.

96 Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. Letter dated 28 August 1919 from Runö to the Swedish Folk Secretary.

97 Runö was the only part of Aiboland outside of Estland Province, which contributed to a greater isolation of the islanders from other Swedes in the region in previous decades. In deciding the state borders, Livland Province split primarily along ethnic lines between Estonians and Latvians.
An Estonian delegation arrived to Runö on 14 June 1919 and brought Nikolai Blees along, allowing for discussions in Swedish. The Runö-Swedes, numbering 286 people, saw a definite advantage in joining the Estonian state, particularly considering its active Swedish minority, Folk Secretary, and SOV. The delegation included representatives of the ministries of trade and industry, and the military. They brought supplies, including 115 pounds of salt, and had a small ceremony involving the raising of the Estonian flag and the singing of the national anthem. However, Runö used the negotiations to guarantee additional protections – stipulations, rights, and privileges not available to other parts of Aiboland – including access to state-held land. The Estonian military also agreed to allow Runö men to fulfill their military service obligations on the island, rather than face deployment in other parts of Estonia.

The First World War had caused considerable difficulties for the island. In 1919 material support came from multiple sources, including Sweden which sent sugar, tobacco, flour, petroleum, and mittens. In June 1919, Runö Pastor Nils Linderstam sent a desperate message to Blees. Even though the war was over, the island population believed they still had to follow the restrictions on movements and residents had to remain on Runö. Throughout the war the Russian and German militaries had regularly

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98 SOV arkiv: 64. Diverse dokument Nargö-Runö. Ruhnu ekspoditsioni.


100 Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. Ruhno ekspoditsioni liikmete koosoleku aruanne 14 juunil 1919a. See also the 9 July 1919 report from Blees to the Interior Minister regarding the visit to the island.

101 SOV arkiv: 64 Diverse dokument Nargö-Runö. Message from Siseministeerium Sõjaministeerium, 10 July 1919 (Nr. 159). See also Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.7. Letter dated 25 September 1919 from the Swedish Folk Secretariat to the Runö Municipal Government (nr. 211).

102 See “Svenska-Estland” in Kustbon, 2 July 1919.
stocked the island with necessary supplies and food. As the military withdrew, no one supplied Runö – the Runö-Swedes lacked sufficient food and had no communication with the outside world. Blees replied that the ban on leaving the island no longer applied, and the residents were free to come to the mainland.\footnote{Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. Letter from Linderstam dated 21 June 1919.}

Ultimately, the Runö-Swedes preferred to join neither Estonia nor Latvia. Instead, they requested to join Sweden. In a letter to the Swedish King, dated 18 October 1920, the islanders petitioned for the protection of Sweden:

> The residents of the island of Runö in the Bay of Riga, driven by their long-time desire, wish to be reunited with the motherland, Sweden… For hundreds of years, Runö has been home to an entirely Swedish population… Even if other countries claim us, we have always felt ourselves to be Swedes in both heart and soul, and have never chosen to be anything other than Swedes. We have held onto our Swedish language and our Lutheran faith, and our yearning has always been, and our heart’s desire to belong, to Sweden… Our wish is to be neither Estonian nor Latvian subjects but rather Swedish. And now, if Runö is as they say a no-man’s-land, we feel it is the most appropriate time to express our desire… We are Swedes. That is what we want to be, and nothing more.\footnote{Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:12 (1921-1940). Folder entitled, “Nationella minoriteters ställning (Runöbornas skrivelse) 1921-1930.” Letter to the King of Sweden from Runö dated 18 October 1920.}

The islanders raised the issue of the other Estonian-Swedes in their appeal, noting that were they to join Estonia they would not be without connections. However, they noted that they had little in common with Estonia, and that their isolation in the Bay of Riga kept them independent from the other groups. The Runö-Swedes based their argument on
a nationalist position and a strong (if simulataneous) self-determination as Swedes, based on principles of self-determination.\textsuperscript{105}

Unfortunately for the islanders, Sweden did not see incorporating Runö into Sweden as a viable option. The Swedish Foreign Ministry decided it was best to not intervene in a border issue which it considered an internal Estonian political matter. However, the Foreign Ministry felt that since the Runö-Swedes were “of pure Swedish race” and had previously belonged to the Kingdom of Sweden, the government should improve its relations with Runö and secure the Runö-Swedes’ future through diplomatic relations with Estonia.\textsuperscript{106}

\textit{Kustbon}

In the decades that followed its founding, the editors of \textit{Kustbon} attempted to use the periodical as a catalyst to strengthen a Swedish identity and create a united Swedish community within Estonia. \textit{Kustbon} had a small-town feel more closely resembling a newsletter, with emphases on culture, education, language, religion, and politics, as well as advertisements to financially support the publication and announce deaths, births, weddings, and other events. \textit{Kustbon} was also the primary literary avenue for the Estonian-Swedes, often publishing poetry in addition to the news content. In 1939, ethnographer Per Söderbäck wrote of \textit{Kustbon}:


It is small in scope and only comes out but once a week, but it has had and continues to have an importance which is not to be underestimated. It has been and is a linguistic movement for the Swedes and an organizational link between them and their ethnic brethren in Sweden.”

Published by a political organization, political news and arguments frequently appeared in the newspaper. However, Kustbon also frequently published on the cultural and economic development of Aiboland, with considerable attention to Swedish-language schools and agriculture. The third dominant focus for Kustbon was connecting Aiboland to Sweden and the pan-Swedish movement, with the goal of demonstrating the Estonian-Swedes played in the larger international Swedish identity.

The primary focus of Kustbon, however, was national identity, based on ethnicity. Elmar Nyman writes:

It is above all Joel Nyman who takes to discuss the nationality question. He points out the new situation with Estonian [E. Nyman’s emphasis] as the land’s main language makes the position particularly grave for the Swedish language. The risk that Swedes change to the Estonian camp is now much greater than when the Russians and Germans were the dominant languages and Estonian was a minority language.  

In particular, the Estonian-Swedes feared that they would lose their Swedish language and become “Estonian.”

The Christmas 1923 issue underscored the nationality of the Estonian-Swedes. The newspaper masthead featured a sketch of a small cottage on one of many islands. There was also a flagpole, and a Swedish flag proudly blowing in the wind. Under the

107 Per Söderbäck, Estlands Svenskbygd (Stockholm: Bokförlags Aktiebolaget Thule, 1939), 42.

sketch was the phrase “Varer Svenske” – or “Be Swedish” (see illustration 3).109 There was no mention of the sketch in that issue; articles focused largely on the Christmas season, with poetry and portions of sermons, as well as the typical content of news items from around Aiboland. However, there was also one article that perhaps sheds some light on the sketch, Nikolai Blees’ commemorative piece on the fifteenth anniversary of SOV.110

Illustration 3. Masthead from Kustbon, 18 December 1923.

As a newspaper published by a political party in Estonia, Kustbon certainly tread a fine line. The editors and contributors long urged Estonian-Swedes to proudly proclaim their Swedish heritage and embrace the Swedish language, but also promoted the idea of active participation and civic responsibility as citizens of Estonia, creating a dual identification for the Estonian-Swedes. However, the new masthead challenged that dual identification.

109 See Kustbon, 18 December 1923.

identification by clearly flying the political flag of the Swedish state, and providing no discernable connection to Estonia.

The Swedish flag and the “Be Swedish” text subhead only lasted that one single issue.\textsuperscript{111} In the following issue, the basic sketch of the cottage and the base of the flagpole were the same. However, the top of the flagpole and the flag it was flying were absent, leaving it ambiguous whose flag it was flying (see illustration 4).\textsuperscript{112} The masthead replaced “\textit{Varer Svenske}” with the generic statement “Newspaper for the Swedes in Estonia,” making it more in line with the dual identification of the community. The rallying call to “Be Swedish” did not completely go away, however, and periodically emerged in commentary in later articles, such as the 1924 article by Hans Pöhl quoted at the start of the chapter.

\textbf{Illustration 4. Masthead from Kustbon, beginning 1924.}

\textsuperscript{111} There was no clear explanation for why the newspaper changed the design, either with the original 18 December 1923 issue or with subsequent issues that removed the Swedish flag.

\textsuperscript{112} At the end of the Second World War, \textit{Kustbon} reemerged as a publication for the Estonian-Swedes in Sweden, and used the same drawing of the cottage, adding a new Swedish flag in its masthead from 1944 until December 1949. In 1950 along with a redesign of the front page, the drawing moved to the second page above the editorial staff box, where it remains.
The newspaper demonstrated the close connections between the Swedish People’s Alliance and SOV, but also expanded into education in numerous other areas such as agriculture. In 1921, a letter by R.E. expressed some frustration with the wide focus of the newspaper: “Kustbon is first of all a political newspaper, which is why I think the sort of special issues [such as cow feed] should not receive a prominent placement.” He argued, unsuccessfully, that such information and discussions should be consolidated in other locations. However, Kustbon took the position that inclusion of such topics would make it more widespread and financially more accessible than the publication of books on those topics.

Kustbon played another, equally important role in connecting Aiboland to the larger pan-Swedish movement. More than a quarter of the subscriptions (accounting for half of the subscription income) came from abroad, as did the majority of advertisements in the newspaper. The National Association provided monetary support, such as a 50,000 Mark donation in 1923. It also encouraged its local affiliates around Sweden to subscribe to the publication. In terms of content, this connection was a two-way street. Kustbon included significant coverage of events of relevance in Estonia, but also covered news from Sweden, fostering among the Estonian-Swedes the idea of a pan-Swedish bond.

Throughout the 1920s, Kustbon struggled financially. Blees frequently combined (one could even argue exploited) his role as Swedish Folk Secretary with his position as

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113 See R.E. “Insända brev” in Kustbon, 23 March 1921.

114 Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.19. See the letter of gratitude from Blees to Vilhelm Lunström dated 5 February 1923 (nr. 958).
editor, particularly in securing financial resources from abroad to support the newspaper. One individual in particular, Folke Bökman of Stockholm, proved to be a significant benefactor of the newspaper, on several occasions making considerable donations to cover shortfalls in the budget.\textsuperscript{115} Blees also turned to the Estonian State, securing funding through cultural allocations.\textsuperscript{116}

**Religion**

While the voice provided by *Kustbon* hoped to unite the people, their identification was also largely shaped by their connections with religion and education – both of which used the Swedish mainland dialect (*rikssvenska*) rather than any of the regional dialects more commonly spoken among Estonia’s Swedish minority. Religion continued to play a prominent role across Aiboland, and provided an important link between the Estonian-Swedes and Sweden. After the First World War, pastors from abroad returned and took positions in most of the Swedish congregations. Many of the Estonian-Swedes placed great importance on being faithful Christians, as was demonstrated on the political level with an alliance with the Christian People’s Party. Sven Danell remembered an episode with a pastor on Ormsö who gave the impression, “To be a true Christian he also must be a true Swede.”\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.28. Letter from Blees to Bökman dated 15 May 1926. Blees’ letter expressed deep gratitude for the support Bökman gave, and then continued to outline the large printing expenses the newspaper faced.

\textsuperscript{116} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.26. Letter from Blees to the Estonian Head of State (*Riigivanem*) dated 14 March 1926 (nr. 968).

\textsuperscript{117} Sven Danell, *Guldstrand*, 74.
As the Estonian state established its political framework, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church also established itself, with a congress meeting on 10 September 1919. Hans Pöhl represented the Swedish congregations, and argued that one member of the Consistory should be able to understand Swedish, since there were four congregations that used only Swedish.\textsuperscript{118} While Wormsö pastor Karl Malm received a nomination, he did not receive enough votes to be elected to the Consistory. An overview in \textit{Kustbon} described the vote: “No one could deny our candidate’s capability, or our fair demand, but the nationalist viewpoints that predominated among the majority of the congress members did not have room for our just and above all practical need.”\textsuperscript{119} While the Estonian state sought to demonstrate the equality of all groups in society, in practice the nationalist sentiment within the church conveyed a different reality, which frustrated the Estonian-Swedes.\textsuperscript{120} The only Swede represented in the church leadership was N. Westerblom, on the 8-member tax commission.\textsuperscript{121}

However, while the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church contained strong elements of nationalistic behavior, it simultaneously sought important international and theological legitimacy by turning to Sweden and the Swedish Lutheran Church. The decision to contact the Swedish Lutheran Church was based largely out of a desire to

\textsuperscript{118} Aman, \textit{En bok om Estlands svenskar} 4, 377.

\textsuperscript{119} See “Kyrkokongressen” in \textit{Kustbon}, 24 September 1919.

\textsuperscript{120} For a thorough look at the nationalist policies within the church, see Mikko Ketola, \textit{The Nationality Question in the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1918-1939} (Helsinki: Finnish Society of Church History, 2000).

\textsuperscript{121} The Swedish congregations in Estonia were equally concerned about the strong German influence. See Riksarkiv SE/RA/730542 Wormsö församling (1694-1944), A1:1 Protokoll (1875-1939). See the minutes for 20 February 1926 (§3). The Wormsö congregation determined it would be better to more closely align with the Estonian congregations than the German congregations.
minimize the influence of the German Lutheran Clergy, who still dominated across Estonia. For its part, the Swedish Lutheran Church was equally interested in the Estonians, as Archbishop Nathan Söderblom promoted international ecumenical connections. Church historian Mikko Ketola writes that “The Swedish church was… actively observing the progress of its Estonian sister church” both on theological grounds, and from an international evangelical perspective. In an attempt to move Estonia away further from strong German influences, the Estonian Lutheran Church asked Söderblom to officiate at the ordination of Bishop Jakob Kukk on 5 June 1921 rather than turning to an archbishop from Germany. The following year, Söderblom travelled across Aiboland, one of his many trips to the region, visiting Wormsö, Nuckö, and Runö on his way to an ordination in Riga (and Odensholm, Rägö, and Nargö on the return trip). He was a strong advocate and supporter for the Estonian-Swedes, and at times personally suggested pastors for the Swedish congregations in Estonia and located funds for church renovations.

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122 Söderblom was a friend of Vilhelm Lundström from university. In addition to his position as Archbishop of the Swedish Lutheran Church, Söderblom attained widespread notoriety and influence through his organization and hosting the Stockholm Conference in 1925 to promote ecumenical connections between Anglicans, Protestants, and Orthodox Christians. He received the 1930 Nobel Peace Prize. See http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1930/soderblom-bio.html


124 For an overview of the ordination, see Ketola, 80-83. Despite the strong connections with Bishop Kukk, Söderblom side-stepped nationalist controversies within the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, despite pleas to intervene from Baltic Germans.

125 Söderblom became ill in 1921 and was unable to travel around Estonia. However, he planned a visit in July 1922, making a point to visit the Swedish regions. See Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskar* 4, 445-447. One of his stops was the congregation on Wormsö. See Riksarkivet SE/RA/730542 Wormsö församling (1694-1944), A1:1 Protokoll (1875-1939). See the minutes for 8 July 1922; the church council made Söderblom an honorary chairman for the meeting.
All of the clergy serving Estonian-Swedish congregations came from abroad, which required authorization and oversight from the Estonian government. In a February 1928 letter, Pastor John Klasson on Wormsö wrote to a fellow pastor that he had sent in his official papers to the Estonian government for civil registration, but indicates some irritation: “We will now see if the government is racist and deports me like every other foreigner.”¹²⁶ His comment suggests an increased nationalist fervor among the Estonians, at least from the Swedish perspective. However, the government did accept his paperwork.¹²⁷

Education and Birkas

The change from tsarist government to an independent Estonia also led to new opportunities for Swedish-language education, a continued goal for the Estonian-Swedes and the central purpose for SOV. At the end of the tsarist period, there were 13 Swedish-language elementary schools in Aiboland, with approximately 450 students; by 1936 there were 19 elementary schools with approximately 735 students.¹²⁸ Kustbon consistently championed the central role Swedish-language education played for the Estonian-Swedes. In a 1921 article, for example, the unnamed author wrote, “It is the schools that will engender a more prosperous society for us. All the citizens should see


¹²⁷ A few of Klasson’s other 1928 letters to Reval pastor Erik Petzäll demonstrate increased frustration with living in Estonia, and monetary conflicts with his Swedish congregation in particular, ultimately with him expressing relief in September that he would be leaving Wormsö. See Riksarkivet: SE/RA/721073 Prosten Erik Petzäll, E2:14. Letter to Petzäll dated 25.9.1928.

¹²⁸ See Aman, En bok om Estlands svenskar 4, 381 and 395.
that. But that is regrettably hidden from so many people.” The expansion of Swedish-language opportunities, the author argued, was the only method to improve the economic standing of the entire community.

To obtain more easily teaching materials, the Swedish schools in Estonia focused on teaching reading and writing in high Swedish (rikssvenska, or högsvenska) rather than the local dialects, as the missionaries had done in the late nineteenth century. On one of his early school inspection rounds, Blees found many of the teachers using the local dialect. In a 6 April 1921 letter to the Swedish schools, he chastised the use of local variants and stressed the importance of high Swedish. He wrote, “I have the utmost respect for our old dialects, they are a dear legacy, but in the schools the children must learn to speak proper Swedish. It is a reasonable demand to ask that the children speak the written language.” While he recognized that schoolchildren might not have previous exposure to high Swedish, he insisted that with continued contact, they would be much better off.

However, not all of the Estonian-Swedes approved of high Swedish in the schools and instead preferred a stronger communal identification. Teacher Katarina Hammerman from Vichterpal wrote to Blees in 1925 about two fathers from Large Rågö who wished to remove their children from the school. They did not see the need for their children to learn Estonian or proper Swedish, but should instead be taught “Aibo-Swedish.”

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129 See “Folkskolorna” in Kustbon, 23 March 1921.

130 See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.54. Letter dated 6 April 1921.
Hammerman stood her ground and would not allow the dialect in the school.\footnote{See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.67. Letter from Katarina Hammerman dated 28 August 1925.} While the protest was a rare occasion (at least as reported to Blees), it demonstrated the continued importance of the local culture, the pride in the local dialect, and a limited resistance to increased efforts at a unified Estonian-Swedish (or pan-Swedish) identification.

Other regions offered less resistance to proper Swedish in the schools, although some noticed a loss of some of the ancient culture in Aiboland. In 1930, a folklorist from the Nordic Museum in Stockholm asked teacher Carl Blees of Höbring Elementary School to document children’s songs from the community. Blees wrote back that unfortunately only a few of the local songs survived in the oral tradition, and that the children found it quite difficult to write in the local dialect (Nuckö-Swedish).\footnote{Nordiska Museets Arkiv: Sv. Forndikt (på estniska) från Estniska folkminnesarkivet 10/1968:2. Letter from C. Blees to Paul Ariste dated 21 November 1930.}

Throughout the 1920s Aiboland faced critical shortages both in qualified teachers and Swedish-language materials. According to the new Estonian law, all teachers were to be Estonian citizens, but allowed for exceptions when there were no qualified citizens.\footnote{Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.8. Notice from the Educational Ministry (Haridusministeerium) dated 3 September 1920 (nr. 12440).} Joel Nyman, head of the Swedish Teachers’ Association wrote a desperate plea to Blees in March 1920, “The shortage of Swedish teachers is great and a portion of the Swedish schools have therefore had to stop their activities.”\footnote{Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.50. Letter dated 17 March 1920. In a 5 July 1920 letter to Blees from the Wichterpal municipality, the townspeople said because of the teaching shortage they had to send their children to Estonian schools, despite their constitutional right to education in their native language.} One option, which Blees pursued at the time, was to free two of the Estonian-Swedish schoolteachers from their military
service.\textsuperscript{135} Beyond that, Blees looked abroad for qualified teachers. One of the weaknesses in Estonia in the training of Estonian-Swedes to be teachers was the lack of any teacher seminary. The Swedish Folk Secretary sought to overcome this weakness by locating government funds to send qualified Estonian-Swedes to further their education either in Sweden or Finland, with the intention that they would return to Aiboland and teach in the local schools, gradually replacing the teachers that came from abroad.\textsuperscript{136} Blees also organized summer teaching seminars, such as a summer 1920 course he coordinated for sixteen teachers from across Aiboland in Uppsala, Sweden, securing funds from the National Association to cover travel costs.\textsuperscript{137}

The Swedish-language schools received most of their teaching supplies and books through donations or discounted prices from publishers in Sweden and Finland.\textsuperscript{138} Based on a March 1920 decision, SOV gave Blees the role of coordinating the acquisition of

\textsuperscript{135} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.50. Letter from Joel Nyman dated 17 March 1920. Nyman suggested freeing Herman Timmerman and Anders Lindqvist from their military service.

\textsuperscript{136} See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. In particular, see the letters between the Swedish Teachers’ Association, the Swedish Folk Secretary, and the Department of Education. For example, Thomas Gärdsström received a scholarship from the Educational Ministry to study in Sweden. (Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.20. Letter dated 3 October 1923.) When Gärdsström finished his studies, he returned to Estonia and was a teacher on Wormsö. During the Soviet period, he oversaw the compilation of two Swedish-language textbooks before being deported (see chapter 4). In 1924 five Estonian-Swedes studied in Nykarleby (Finland), one in Ekenäs (Finland), and one in Uppsala (Sweden). See Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenska*, 385. See also Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.69.

\textsuperscript{137} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. In the teaching plan, courses were to include Christian knowledge, Swedish language, mathematics, sciences (biology, physics, chemistry), domestic work, gymnastics, and singing. Sometimes the Swedish Teachers’ Association arranged seminars at Birkas, such as in 1921. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.53.

\textsuperscript{138} See for example the discount from Bokförlaget Söderström och Co. in Finland. Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.15. Letter from the Folk Secretary to the Swedish schools, dated 15 May 1922 (nrs. 9153-9169). Blees also secured a 25-50\% discount on books from Nordstedt & Söner in Stockholm. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.30. Notice dated 22 August 1927.
Swedish-language literature from abroad, both for local libraries and the schools.\textsuperscript{139} Blees would contact the various schools, take book orders, secure the funds, and order the books.\textsuperscript{140} He also sought to have a few additional books translated and made available in Swedish, such as Matkur’s Estonian geography book, \textit{Estlands geografi}, published in 1923. However, in the case of the geography book, a few teachers complained about the high cost. The Swedish version, published in Sweden, cost 160 Marks compared to the 25 Marks for the Estonian version.\textsuperscript{141} Blees responded that costs could not be reduced, and some of the teachers played down the price because they believed that it was of great importance to be able to “read about our country in our mother tongue.”\textsuperscript{142} Other books were prepared specifically for the Estonian-Swedes, such as Jakob Blees’ 1924 history of the Estonian-Swedes, \textit{Estlandssvenskarnas historia},\textsuperscript{143} and Per Söderbäck’s “A Little Hygiene Instruction for Estonia’s Swedes” (\textit{En Liten Hälsolära Utgiven för Estlands Svenskar}) in 1927.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{139} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.10. Letter from SOV to the Swedish Folk Secretary (nr. 36) dated 29 March 1920. See also Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.54. Letter to the Swedish schools from Blees dated 12 February 1921. Blees instructed the teachers that while the National Association would seek the necessary resources, it would be best to send all inquires through the office of the Swedish Folk Secretary.

\textsuperscript{140} See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. Letter from Joel Nyman on behalf of the Swedish Teachers’ Association regarding books desired from Sweden.

\textsuperscript{141} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.18. See the 5 November 1923 letter from Blees to the various schools, and the letters of protest from Wormsö (November 14) and Norrby (November 24).

\textsuperscript{142} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.18. Letter to Blees from schoolteacher K. Hammerman dated 15 November 1923.

\textsuperscript{143} Jakob Blees was an Estonian-Swede who moved to Sweden in 1889, but worked extensively to improve connections between Sweden and Aiboland.

\textsuperscript{144} In addition to the books intended for use in the school, Mats Ekman published two literary books. See Mats Ekman, \textit{En bygdeskald blad den gamla svenska folkstammen i Estland} (1924). Mats Ekman, \textit{Ekon från österled / Sånger från Birkas} (1927).
The crown-jewel of Estonian-Swedish education opened on 6 November 1920: the Nuckö Folk High, Household, and Agricultural School – later renamed Birkas Folk High School and Agricultural School. The school used the former manor house Birkas, initially renting the buildings from the Estonian state.¹⁴⁵ Funds for the school came from the Estonian state (20,000 Marks), SOV (15,000 Marks), and the National Association (152,000 Marks). In his memoir, Sven Danell wrote: “Birkas is meant to give the Swedish regions new impulses and new vigor… We believed that the Swedes in Estonia had the mission to act as a bridge between two friendly nations.”¹⁴⁶ The founders of the school and those funding it hoped that the Estonian-Swedes could lead to stronger cultural exchanges between the two countries, but could also promote closer political connections.

With the funds from the National Association came a level of control and oversight over the school; the National Association selected Kaleb Andersson, from Uppsala, Sweden to assume the role of headmaster.¹⁴⁷ The remaining teaching staff included Dicken Axell, also from Uppsala, who oversaw household economy and was the

¹⁴⁵ See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.4. The Swedes originally considered locating the school in Hapsal. Blees suggested the Birkas manor house in a letter to the Swedish Teachers’ Association on 8 August 1919. The Teachers’ Association raised this matter at their 15 August 1919 meeting.

¹⁴⁶ Danell, Guldstrand, 72.

¹⁴⁷ Andersson left Birkas in 1925, replaced by Per Söderbäck, who had done extensive ethnographic studies of the Rågö islands the year before. Emil Adalberth became the agronomist (and later replaced Söderbäck as headmaster).
headmistress, and Erik Green from Ultuna, Sweden, an agronomist. Both Axell and Green had just finished their degrees.148

In the first academic year, the 40 students had a wide array of courses. The general education involved all students taking 129 hours of Swedish, 40 hours of Estonian and history, 60 hours of mathematics, 30 hours of chemistry, and 20 hours geography, physics, and botany. The students were divided along gender lines for more specialized coursework in either agricultural or domestic work. As Estonia lacked a similar school for Estonians, the government classified Birkas as an agricultural school, placing it under the authority of the Agricultural Ministry.

Maintenance of the school required significant amounts of fundraising, and Nikolai Blees coordinated the fundraising from the Estonian-Swedish side. The Estonian-Swedes sought donations from schools in Sweden, and Archbishop Nathan Söderblom also contributed heavily. In addition to the financial donations, material donations also came in from Swedish companies, including china from Gustavsberg, cooking utensils from Huskvarna, a stove from Norrahammarsbruk, and teaching material from Svanström.149 Beginning in 1923, the Swedish parliament also began contributing a yearly sum: 2,000 crowns in 1923, 4,000 crowns in 1924, and 5,000 crowns for each remaining year of the decade.150 While the sum was modest at first, over the next 17

148 See Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskar* 4, 398. It was a frequent occurrence to have new graduates (teachers and pastors) from Sweden and Swedish-regions in Finland to find short-term employment in Aiboland before returning home to continue their careers.

149 See Ibid., 400.

years it continually increased. The donations demonstrated growing knowledge of the Estonian-Swedes among individuals and organizations in Sweden and can be connected to the growing sentiment of the pan-Swedish movement, the activities of the National Association, and coverage of the Estonian-Swedes in the Swedish media.\footnote{Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet began a collection, sending 10,000 crowns to Birkas. See Aman, En bok om Estlands svenskar 4, 400.}

**Gustav Adolf Day-Swedish Day**

Beginning in 1919, the Swedish People’s Alliance began advocating for the commemoration of Gustav Adolf Day (also referred to as Swedish Day, or Svenska Dagen, for Swedes outside of Sweden) on November 6 – a day marking the 1632 death of King Gustav II Adolf in the battle of Lützen.\footnote{The schools and Swedish communities also took an active role in celebrating Estonian Independence Day, February 24. Following a directive from the Ministry of Education (dated 24 January 1920), all schools were to make February 24 an official day of celebration. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.9 (nr.2146). See also Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.62.}

The pan-Swedish movement increasingly emphasized November 6 as an occasion to celebrate Swedishness and the Swedish language. National Association founder Vilhelm Lundström saw important connections between Gustav II Adolf and Swedish nationalism, making him one of the most important symbols of the nationalist movement. Gustav II Adolf expanded the Swedish empire, spreading Swedish influence and fame, and emphasized education through the founding of Dorpat (Tartu) University in Estland. Lundström and others in the pan-Swedish movement viewed Gustav II Adolf’s reign as a period that highlighted the possibilities and obligations for Swedes in the larger world context.\footnote{See Kummel, Svenskar i all världen förenen eder!, 46-47.} Lundström
believed that November 6 should be a day when Swedes would proudly rise up with a unified voice “from all the corners of the earth, and find their way home to the motherland.”  

Across Aiboland, schools and community celebrations commemorated Swedish Day. Kustbon described the 1919 celebration in Reval’s Swedish school:

After singing “Vårt Land” headmaster [Uno] Stadius spoke on the occasion of the day’s meaning as a day of Swedishness in hearty words about the cultural struggle for Swedishness’s holy cause, for our spiritual Sweden. We should not only cultivate but also ennoble our Swedish tribe. We have a struggle with spiritual weapons, in the future it is that which will be decisive. We must stick together, and the mother tongue is what unites us. Let us today on “Swedish Day” make a promise to help each other! Let us form a ring of siblings around the Baltic Sea and hold each others’ hand! Then we can defy all perils.

November 6 became an officially recognized holiday for the Swedish minority in Estonia beginning in 1922. The celebration, according to a 1924 directive from Blees, was to include a full program of speeches emphasizing the importance of the day, songs, and declarations, and should not only include the schoolchildren but everyone in Aiboland.

The pan-Swedish movement also brought another song to the forefront: “Modersmålets sång” (Song of the Mother Tongue) composed by Johan Fridolf Hagfors

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154 Lundström, Allsvenska Linjer, 200.
155 See the notice “Svenska Estland” in Kustbon, 29 October 1919.
156 See “Svenska Estland” in Kustbon, 19 November 1919.
157 Nikolai Blees notified the Swedish schools in a letter dated 15 October 1922 of the Education Department’s decision (No. 24637) to make Swedish Day an official holiday, with no school for the Estonian-Swedes. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.56. As far as I have been able to determine, the Swedes were the only minority to gain an official holiday.
158 See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.62. The directive is not dated, however the entire file is from 1924.
in 1898. In addition to “Vårt Land,” it became something of a national anthem among the Estonian-Swedes:

1. How beautifully great songs ring
In our beloved mother tongue!
He comforts in times of grief,
He sharpens the mind.
We hear the song resound
In delightful childhood,
And sometime he will invite
Us to the grave in peace!

You beautiful song, our best legacy
From age to age,
Sound loud, sound free from shore to shore
In the land of a thousand lakes!

2. What noble forefathers thought,
What beauty they once dreamed,
All this they gave to us
In the song of the mother tongue.
How our fates dawn,
This song is dear to us.
In him our souls breathe,
He is our wealth

You beautiful song, our best legacy
From age to age,
Sound loud, sound free from shore to shore
In the land of a thousand lakes!

In 1927, in honor of Hagfors’ 70th birthday, many of the Estonian-Swedish schoolteachers organized a telegram to the composer on behalf of all of Aiboland, noting the importance of the song to the community.159

Conflicts between Swedes and Estonians

On the whole, relations between the Swedes and the Estonians were amicable. Most Estonian-Swedes lived in regions where they were in the majority, leaving them free to establish Swedish-language schools (although under the authority of the Estonian school authorities) and carry out Swedish cultural activities. The greatest tensions were in the spheres of education and religion, and primarily in the mixed communities where Estonians and Swedes shared schoolhouses and churches. However, despite such tensions, there is scant evidence to suggest examples of violence between the two groups. Blees, as the Swedish Folk Secretary, often sought to find solutions to any tensions, pushing the government to protect the minority population.

During the Provisional Government period (1918-1920), there was a level of uncertainty regarding minority protections. One small group in particular expressed frustration and grievances, or perhaps just seized the opportunity of the volatile environment to seek a better life abroad. Reminiscent of the 1860s voyage by the Complaining Men, eight (unidentified) Estonian-Swedes fled Estonia in the summer of 1919, undertaking a treacherous journey in an “extremely small and unsteady” boat across the Baltic. Reported in the 9 August issue of the Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet, the Estonian-Swedes sought refuge following years of what they described as horrifying treatment by Russians, Baltic Germans, and in particular Estonians. The eight suggested that conditions were considerably worse for the Estonian-Swedes under the Estonians than under the Russians. The article’s author claimed, “The Estonian people try in every

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160 See previous chapter for the description of the “Complaining Men.”
way to repress the Swedish culture and the Swedish language, and in certain places one is forbidden to speak Swedish. Throughout the whole war period, they [the Estonian-Swedes] have been treated unfairly by the Estonians.” The eight argued that a return to Estonia would lead to certain death, and they would likely be shot. Kustbon reprinted the Aftonbladet article, with a strong repudiation of the claims:

Even if the conditions in Estonia have been difficult, one cannot believe everything the participants of the risky journey recount. There are exaggerations and untruths in their tales. We are even compelled to say here that the adventurous voyage was not a result of horrid circumstances, but rather caused entirely by other reasons.

The episode and the exchange, however, demonstrate the continued connection between Sweden and the Estonian-Swedes, as well as the developing role of Kustbon as a self-appointed authentic voice of the Estonian-Swedes for those in Sweden. Unlike the 1860 voyage, however, the 1919 group received little attention in the Swedish media beyond that initial article in Aftonbladet. In part because of the allegations, though, the Swedish Consulate in Reval closely monitored the Swedish minority and minority protections in the developing Estonian state.

A number of communities faced difficulties and conflict between Estonian local officials and the Swedish minority. One such community was Wichterpal. Despite the number of Swedish families living in the region, the village initially had no Swedish-language school. The local administrator, an Estonian, told the Swedes that the lack of financial resources prevented the opening of the school, despite the legal responsibilities

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161 “Över Östersjön i en öppen båt,” reprinted from the 9 August 1919 issue of Aftonbladet in Kustbon, 27 August 1919.

162 See “Över Östersjön i en öppen båt,” in Kustbon, 27 August 1919.
of the state to offer education in the native language of the children. The Estonian-Swedes regarded this as a threat to the viability of the minority. A 19 January 1921 article in *Kustbon* described the struggle against Estonian teachers in this community, stating the teachers were the “cruelest enemy” of Swedishness. According to the article’s author:

> It was in the autumn when the thought of saving Wichterpal came forward, stronger than ever. Surrounded by Estonians, without Swedish books, forgotten and left to themselves, a dozen parents successfully brought the ancient Swedish descendants to the attention of the government, and thanks to our zealous efforts we succeeded in attaining permission to include the Swedish language in the town’s Estonian elementary school as a language of instruction for the 10 Swedish children.

But the actions of the parents did not end the conflict. In 1925, the issue came up again, compounded by intermarriages between Swedes and Estonians. The communal secretary, an Estonian, rebuked schoolteacher Katarina Hammerman for teaching some of the children in Swedish. In particular, he pointed to the Valp family, which he described as an Estonian family. Hammerman countered that it was a Swedish family (the mother’s maiden name was Engman), and that she had visited the household several times. The issue was problematic, however, because the father was Estonian. The communal secretary argued that the father spoke no Swedish, and that the mother apparently wore the pants in the family, teaching the children Swedish. He argued that the mother and the teacher were attempting to cause conflict in the household. This case demonstrates the dominant position the Estonian parent held in mixed marriages. The Estonian-Swedes

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165 See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.67, letter from Katarina Hammerman, dated 28 September 1925.
saw intermarriage as a considerable threat to the preservation of their language, particularly when Swedish was not the primary language spoken in the household, and when the Estonian government based the nationality of the children on whether or not one parent was Estonian.

The Valp family was not alone. In November 1925 the local Swedish-speaking townspeople learned to their surprise that the Wichterpal communal secretary had classified them all as Estonian. The classification reflects a tension between the individuals’ self-identification and the local administrator’s imposition of identification of the townspeople in the mixed community. The townspeople learned of the disjuncture when school inspectors determined there were too few Swedish-speaking students in the area and accordingly made plans to close the Swedish school. Students would need to attend the Estonian school in the town, as their classification as Estonian meant that they were not entitled to a Swedish-language education. In a letter to Swedish Folk Secretary Blees, Swedish schoolteacher Karl Hammerman wrote: “It is pleasant to see that they want to maintain their native heritage. They say the secretary listed them as Estonians without even asking them. When they later noticed that it was not correct, he told them that it was better to belong to the majority.”166 Blees filed the proper paperwork with the Interior Ministry to change their official designation from “Estonian” to “Swede.”167

In 1926, the selection of a new teacher for Wichterpal from Nargö invoked some curiosity and concern within the community. Karl Hammerman wrote to Blees:

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166 Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.25. Letter dated 18 November 1925.
Is she a real Swede? I am afraid that some Estonian will come here to teach Swedish and will therefore stifle our development here, and our beloved Swedish colony will be lost. I know that they try with both violence and trickery to get rid of the school here… But I am just as sure of our triumphant future here in Wichterpal, if we fight a few more years for Swedishness then it will be firmly established so that neither Estonians nor any other nation can shake it.\textsuperscript{168}

Österby village in Pasklep also saw conflict in 1925 between Swedish families and the local government (headed by Estonians). The Österby elementary school had a mixed population – seven children were Swedish, 13 were Estonian, and one mixed – and the teacher by law should have been able to offer courses in Estonian and Swedish. C. Aman wrote to Blees on 30 August to protest the communal secretary’s selection of Nadezda (Nadja) Kaav, who did not understand Swedish. Blees filed a formal complaint with the Education Ministry on 15 September and visited the region in person. In a 23 October report to the Education Minister, Blees stated that while he spoke Swedish with Kaav, she replied in Estonian, saying it was best to speak with her in Estonian.\textsuperscript{169}

Following repeated complaints of violations to their right to education in their native language, the Estonian-Swedes realized that the only solution to safeguard the Swedish-language schools in mixed regions was to establish independent, private schools. SOV sought the necessary funds and teaching staff for schools in Wichterpal and Reval – the two regions where there were not enough students to regularly ensure a Swedish education according to government regulations.

\textsuperscript{168} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.71. Letter from K. Hammerman, dated 27 July 1926.

\textsuperscript{169} Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.67. See letters dated 30 August 1925, 5 September 1925, and 23 October 1925.
The Estonian government had a practical reason for keeping the Estonian-Swedes happy about education: amicable relations with Sweden. Following independence, Estonia needed international recognition and needed to develop strong economic and cultural ties with foreign governments. Scandinavian governments provided early recognition to Estonian independence. Vilhelm Lundström of the National Association sent a telegram in early 1921 to the Estonian consulate in Stockholm in which he expressed his hope for a happy future even for Estonia’s faithful citizens of Swedish nationality.170

**Associations with the “Homeland”**

The pan-Swedish movement and SOV attempted to promote connections with Sweden early in childhood. For example, in 1922, Vilhelm Lundström organized a trip for up to 40 children between the ages of 10 and 14 to spend the summer in Sweden. Blees turned to the teachers, stating, “Poverty or wealth does not need to be factored into the decision. It is only to strengthen the bond [between Aiboland and Sweden].”171 The children were required to have sufficient grades and be healthy. In a last minute instruction from Folk Secretary Blees, the teachers were notified, “Upon arrival in Sweden they will naturally undergo a medical examination. It is important that the children are therefore clean and tidy, and should not be saddled with lice on their body or

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170 See “Svenskarna lyckönska Estland” in Kustbon, 17 February 1921.

171 Eesti Riigarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.16. Letter from the Folk Secretary to the teachers dated 5 May 1922 (nrs. 9136-9150).
their clothes.” Blees wanted to ensure that the Estonian-Swedes appeared “civilized” to the Swedes, and be a positive reflection of the community. In 1924, the National Association and several of the Estonian-Swedes, including Blees and schoolteacher Joel Nyman, attempted to organize a second trip to Sweden for a group of schoolchildren. In particular, they hoped to fund the trip for 25 children aged 10-12, with an emphasis on children from “threatened Swedish villages” – that is to say regions where Swedes and Estonians lived in close proximity (in particular, Wichterpal and Korkis) and city children from the capital who needed fresh air. Unfortunately, sufficient resources were not found to fund the trip, and instead they organized a summer colony at Birkas for eight children from Reval – funded in part by Swedish minister Östen Undén.

From the late 1890s through the 1930s a number of Swedes and Swedish-speaking Finns visited the Swedish areas of Estonia. When Estonia became independent, the number of Swedes increased considerably. Some of these individuals were tourists; one Swedish tourist, Gunnar Ljungvik, commented in 1927 in the guestbook of a bed-and-breakfast, “One feels at home here among the Swedes on Wormsö.” Many others came to conduct research – ethnographic as well as racial studies. The study of the Swedes in Estonia sought to illuminate the historical attributes of “Swedes.” However,

172 Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.16. Letter from the Folk Secretary to the teachers dated 19 June 1922 (nrs. 9277-9287).
173 See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.63.
175 SOV received a 6 June 1921 letter from Dr. Oskar Mustelin of Helsinki, informing them of his plans to visit Nuckö, Odensholm, Wormsö, and Rågö to undertake anthropological studies, including taking body measurements and photographing the population, to be compared with results from their racial brethren (stamförvanter) Sweden and Finland. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.14.
racial determinations on Runö from this period led researchers to conclude that the people comprised a mix of two racial groups: the dominant “Nordic” and elements of an “East Baltic” race.\textsuperscript{176} The Nordic Museum in Stockholm in particular took a strong interest in the Estonian-Swedes, sending ethnographers to Runö and the Rågö islands for extensive field work.\textsuperscript{177}

Scholars from Sweden were particularly interested in Runö, Estonia’s most isolated island in the Bay of Riga. Here, they thought, was a region where the Estonian-Swedes were the least influenced by outsiders – that is to say by the Baltic Germans, Estonians, or Russians.\textsuperscript{178} Scholars in Sweden, as well as newspaper and journal articles, romanticized Runö. Ethnographers flocked to the island, in greater numbers than to all the other Estonian-Swedish settlements combined.

The compilers of the encyclopedia \textit{Nordisk Familjebok} (the Swedish equivalent of the \textit{Encyclopedia Britannica}) included an entry of the Swedes in Estland in the second edition (volume 7, published in 1907), calling them “Estswedish” (\textit{estsvensk}). Written by Gideon Danell, the entry gives a brief overview of the size of the population, but also places a clear racial determination on the description and interactions of the people: “As


\textsuperscript{177} For example, J. Klein from the Nordic Museum in Stockholm visited Aiboland in September and October 1922 to collect artifacts for the museum and for a 1923 exhibit on the Estonian-Swedes in Gothenburg. Eesti Riigiarihiiv: ERA.1108.8.16. Letter from Blees to the Swedish municipalities dated 4 September 1922 (nr. 9410). Per Söderbäck spent considerable time doing ethnographic studies on Rågö, publishing his work in 1940. Interest in Runö continued in the post-Second World War period. Even today, Runö plays a larger role in the romanticized vision of the Estonian-Swedens, demonstrated with a new history of the island and its inhabitants by Jörgen Hedman and Lars Ahlander.

\textsuperscript{178} For example, Ernst Klein, \textit{Runö: Folklivet i ett gammalsvensk samhälle} (Uppsala: J.A. Lindblads Förlag, Nordiska Museet, 1924). See also Ernst Gordon, \textit{Runö: Svenskön i Rigaviken} (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelsens Bokförlag, 1921).
one can expect, the Estonian race, especially along the Estland coastal regions, is considerably mixed with Swedish blood. On the other hand, the Swedes in all the regions are certainly not free of Estonian racial markings.\textsuperscript{179} The encyclopedia entry places considerable emphasis on the threat the Swedes face from rising Estonian nationalism, but also notes the national awakening sentiments within Aiboland that began with the missionaries’ religious work and now focused on educational development.\textsuperscript{180}

The emphasis on race and national characteristics took an increasingly prominent position among Swedish (and other European) academics and politicians in the 1920s. Sweden, for instance, established the world’s first National Institute for Race Biology at Uppsala University in 1922. According to the 1914 Swedish government-sponsored report \textit{Sweden: Historical and Statistical Handbook, Land and People}:

\begin{quote}
The Swedish race is of pure Germanic origin, as is attested by the very appearance of the Swede… The art of reading has been general in Sweden for many generations; and hence a certain intellectual maturity has been attained by the people at large… The most deeply-seated feature of the Swedish character, the key to all the rest, is the passionate love of nature… But this feeling for nature has diverted attention from psychological spheres; hence the nature-loving Swede is too often a poor judge of character.\textsuperscript{181}
\end{quote}

While reflecting the growing racial views of the Swedish nation at the early twentieth century, these stereotypical descriptions were also applied to Swedes living outside the


\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Nordisk Familjebok} indicates a difference between the “Estswedes” and the Swedes on Runö; Runö has a separate entry in volume 23 (1224-1226).

Swedish political borders, and greatly influenced the work of the pan-Swedish movement.\textsuperscript{182}

**Culminations and Inner Unification**

The aftermath of the 1905 Revolution was an impetus for change for the Swedes in Estland. Leaders in the community saw the rise of Estonian nationalism as a real threat to the continued existence of Swedishness in Aiboland. In order to face this threat, they needed to move beyond their isolated villages and come together, uniting all of the Swedes in the region and to forge ties across the water to Sweden and its international power. They saw Swedish-language education as the backbone of their survival, placing it in the center of their goals as they established Svenska Odlingens Vänner. As the region erupted again in revolution in the wake of the First World War, the Swedes united politically through the Swedish People’s Alliance, seeking a single voice and a role in assuring the rights and protections for minority populations. The change in political structure – from tsarist Russia to independent Estonia – offered new opportunities for the Estonian-Swedes. The leaders that emerged from the community argued they could only achieve their goals if the numerous villages came together and the people saw themselves as part of a larger Estonian-Swedish community.

The objectives of SOV were a perfect match for the goals and aspiration of Vilhelm Lundström’s National Association for the Preservation of Swedish Language and Culture Abroad. Swedish interest in the Estonian-Swedes was inspired in part by a

\textsuperscript{182} As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the racial views in Sweden played a role in Swedish relations with Nazi Germany and in the mass migration of the Estonian-Swedes to Sweden in 1943 and 1944.
reaction to modernity and an increased focus on Swedish nationalism and the “Swedish race.” In addition, increased attention from Sweden also came with a civilizing mission to improve the lives of the peasantry, while simultaneously seeking to document and preserve the culture through the field work of ethnographers.

Instead of preserving their ancient culture, the new Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia now sought to become “Swedes”. Österblom and Thorén educated many of these new leaders who attempted to “update” Estonian-Swedish traditions, building techniques, farming methods, and even the Swedish language from within the communities themselves – continuing the missionaries’ work. And in this goal, contact with Sweden provided greater opportunities for success. Increased publicity in Sweden generated greater interest in Aiboland, and larger numbers of those interested in helping their cultural brethren in times of need, whatever that need may be.

The culmination of the period of unification across Aiboland occurred in the 1929 parliamentary elections. The Swedish People’s Alliance decided to split from their voting bloc with the Christian People’s Party and instead form a voting bloc with the Baltic Germans – a move that angered some in the Estonian-Swedish community. Yet, the new coalition offered conditions far more favorable to the Estonian-Swedes. Although the Swedish People’s Alliance maintained an almost decade-long voting bloc with the Christian People’s Party, it never resulted in the Swedes gaining a seat in the Riigikogu. In contrast, the Baltic Germans, and Werner Hasselblatt (author of the 1924 Cultural Autonomy Law) in particular, ensured that one of the parliamentarians would be Pöhl.
Pöhl’s position, however, was short-lived. On 22 January 1930, the uncontested leader of the Estonian-Swedes and the newly elected parliamentarian died of sepsis. In one of his final submissions to *Kustbon*, to commemorate the celebration of Swedish Day (Gustav Adolf Day), Pöhl wrote:

The Estonian-Swedes comprise a small portion of the Swedish family, and without a doubt, those that have gone through the most challenging fate, resulting in being worse off than their kinsmen, but now looking forward to better times. This new era that has dawned after the founding of the Estonian Republic has given us the possibility to progress, but also demands self-assured work in the cultural, national, spiritual, and social issue which constitute the foundation for the Swedish cultural standing and future development, even in our own country.

If we remain faithful to ourselves, our race, our language, the future is ours… May we always, in connection with Swedish Day, feel the inner strength which is always there, that we are not few, spread out, alone, and abandoned Swedes but rather members of a strong, lively nation that can confidently look toward the future. May we all feel the uplifting thoughts and ennobling power of Swedish Day.\(^{183}\)

In the decade after Pöhl’s death, the Estonian-Swedish community splintered and foundered, struggling to find a suitable heir that could live up to Pöhl’s legacy and leadership skills.

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\(^{183}\) H.P. “Svenska dagen,” *Kustbon*, 31 October 1929.
CHAPTER 3

THE EDITORS: FEUDING AND CELEBRATING SWEDISHNESS

In 1936 a surprising development took place in the cultural history of the Estonian-Swedes: two competing newspapers claimed to be the voice of Aiboland. Given the region’s slow rate of recovery from the Great Depression, it seemed inconceivable that its population, which could not support a single newspaper without outside funds, suddenly founded another newspaper. However, this development did not signify any meaningful financial changes in the community, but rather illustrated a split among the Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia. Following harsh back-handed criticism from *Kustbon* editor Mathias Westerblom, *Nya Kustbon* ("The New Coastal Resident") editor Nikolai Blees responded that the two newspapers had different objectives, but with the same ultimate goal. In a 17 January editorial, Blees wrote:

> It is a fact that we Estonian-Swedes now have two newspapers. We are not worse off than other minorities who have multiple newspapers. Even we can make a splash… May it now be “squabbling along the road” but rather may people from both newspapers be able to say: All roads lead to Rome.¹

However, Blees’ words did not betray that the emergence of two newspapers were just the latest incarnation of an on-going feud between himself and Westerblom over leadership in the country following the death of Hans Pöhl in 1930.

Pöhl’s sudden death brought about a complete generational shift in the Estonian-Swedish leadership. His legacy, however, lived on. Pöhl demonstrated the ability to unite and lead the Estonian-Swedes, but was equally successful at garnering immense respect from Estonian political leaders. For example, Estonian Riigikogu speaker Eenpalu and Minister Hünersson participated in Pöhl’s funeral. Numerous individuals invoked Pöhl’s memory and worked to support their positions after his death. For example, in a 20 February 1930 letter in Kustbon, Pastor Eskil Rydén commented that Pöhl intended to pursue greater healthcare issues in Rikull. He hoped that even with Pöhl’s passing this issue would be addressed.

In addition to Pöhl, the early years of the decade saw the deaths of a number of Swedes influential in transnational relations, including former missionaries Thure Emanuel Thorén (27 December 1930) and Lars Johan Österblom (August 1932), and Swedish Archbishop and Nobel Laureate Nathan Söderblom (July 1931). The deaths allowed Kustbon to look back at the history of the Estonian-Swedish community and reflect on the changes and their influences across Aiboland. Indeed, the early 1930s was a

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2 See Pöhl’s obituary, Kustbon, 24 January 1930. See also the numerous tributes from around Aiboland, Kustbon, 6 February 1930.

3 Reflecting the emphasis of Estonian nationalism in the Päts regime, Karl Einbund Estonianized his name to Kaarel Eenpalu in 1935. To avoid confusion, I will use the Estonianized form of the name throughout the dissertation.


5 See Kustbon, 20 February 1930.

6 See obituary, “Lars Johan Österblom död,” Kustbon, 1 September 1932.

moment of considerable collective-memory building and community development around the legacy of these individuals. However, the deaths also spurred the new generation of Estonian-Swedish leaders to build off the legacy of the earlier pioneers in seeking new opportunities in the Republic of Estonia.

The 1930s, from the death of Hans Pöhl to the emergence of the Second World War, was a period of immense change for the Estonian-Swedes, in addition to being a period of transition in the politics of Estonia and Sweden. The Estonian-Swedish community made significant improvements in educational opportunities, healthcare, and connections with the larger pan-Swedish movement. Funding from outside organizations and individuals (made possible by the pan-Swedish movement) increased significantly, allowing for greater cultural activity throughout Aiboland. A major factor in these new opportunities was a more concentrated effort by individuals in Sweden and within the Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia to engage in discussions about “nationality” and to focus on the position of the Estonian-Swedes within the larger Swedish family.

However, the decade also brought considerable challenges to the community – both from internal and external sources. Internal bickering among the top Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia inevitably weakened many possible efforts for the continued growth of regional identification among the Estonian-Swedes. The squabbling even spread from Tallinn and Aiboland throughout the international pan-Swedish movement. Changing political currents also brought challenges. A few short years after the Estonian-Swedes finally gained their first seat in parliament, a government coup by Konstantin Päts in Estonia altered the entire political scene. As the new government outlawed
political parties and restructured the Riigikogu, the Estonian-Swedes were once again the only minority group not represented in the government. The government coup also moved Estonian politics toward increased nationalist assimilation and Estonianization policies, with greater restrictions placed on all minority groups.

Throughout the 1930s, the Swedish government and the National Association\(^8\) both steadily increased their involvement in Aiboland. Amid accusations of embezzlement and financial incompetence by Swedish Folk Secretary Nikolai Blees, individuals in Sweden pushed for greater oversight of the Estonian-Swedish organizations and institutions they helped support. The oversight led to a larger presence of Sweden across Aiboland, especially with the creation in Sweden of an Estonia Committee (Estlandsutskottet) to oversee funding and coordinate connections between the Estonian-Swedes and Swedish organizations.

While the Estonian government pursued Estonianization policies that favored assimilation of minorities, connections between Aiboland and Sweden strengthened, expanding the opportunities for the Estonian-Swedes to assert their own national culture and their connections to Sweden. Conflicts within the Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia and the changes in Estonian politics tended to push the Estonian-Swedes to more readily stress their Swedish heritage and cultural legacy (even more than an Estonian-Swedish heritage). They strengthened the bond with the ancient homeland, even as they reaffirmed their commitments and loyalty as citizens of the Republic of Estonia.

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\(^8\) See previous chapter on the National Association for the Preservation of Swedish Language and Culture Abroad (Riksföreningen för svenskhetens bevarande i utlandet).
Many in Aiboland and in Sweden saw the 1930s as the highpoint for Aiboland and for Estonian-Swedish culture – an apex cut short by the approach of the Second World War. Pastor Sven Danell, for example, remembered the end of the 1930s by writing, “Something was irrevocably over: the golden years, those years when one really lived.” As war clouds gathered, the connections and strengthening bond with Sweden that developed in the 1930s would prove vital as the majority of Aiboland sought to relocate to Sweden.

The 1930s, and in particular Blees and Westerblom, represent the impact of internal discussions and debates within the Estonian-Swedish community. Their feud highlights the transnational connections of the Swedish population, with debates and bickering extending beyond Aiboland to others in the pan-Swedish movement. Additionally, Blees and Westerblom represent the continued importance of the dual identification of Swedish nationality and Estonian citizenship, which took on a new significance with the Estonianization policies of the mid- to late-1930s. In response to Blees and Westerblom’s differences, organizations and individuals in Sweden mobilized for greater control and oversight into the distribution of funds, representing the increased role of the distant homeland.

**Shifting Estonian Politics**

For much of the early 1930s, the Estonian political system struggled for stability, as the region suffered the effects of the Great Depression and rising dissatisfaction among

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9 Quoted in Aman, *En Bok om Estlands Svenskar 4*, 527.
the population.\footnote{For a detailed overview of the political developments, and in particular the role of the radical right, see Andres Kasekamp, The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).} Political parties in the Riigikogu fought to form and maintain coalition governments, while the Estonian Independence Veterans’ Central League (Eesti Vabadussõjalaste Keskliit), viewed as a threat by the political elite, gained in popularity across Estonia. The sharp decline in agricultural prices and the decrease in industrial work as a result of the Depression caused a crisis for all of Estonia’s political parties. The perceived threat led to a government \textit{coup} in 1934 and an authoritarian government that increasingly followed nationalist politics.

As insignificant players in Estonian politics, the Estonian-Swedes and the Swedish People’s Alliance avoided taking sharp positions. In 1932, for example, most of the parties in Estonia sought the Swedes as allies.\footnote{See “Svenskarna och de förestånde riksdagsvalen,” \textit{Kustbon}, 7 April 1932. Alar Schönberg suggests the Estonian-Swedish support in the Baltic German-Swedish People’s Alliance voting bloc to be between 3,000 and 4,000 votes, resulting in an extra seat in the Riigikogu in both the 1929 and 1932 elections. See Alar Schönberg, “Några inblickar i den Estlandssvenska identiteten i slutet av 1930-talet” (Master’s thesis, University of Tartu, 2001), 46-47.} In the 1932 election, the Farmer’s Party (Põllumeeste Kogu) convinced V. Schönberg from Nuckö to split from the Swedish People’s Alliance and run on their ticket.\footnote{See “Dyningar efter valen,” \textit{Kustbon}, 2 June 1932.} Schönberg’s low placement on the Farmer’s Party voting list meant that despite any support he might have brought to the party, he did not win a seat in the Riigikogu. In contrast, the Alliance argued for the need to have a Swedish parliamentarian who could look out for the needs of the minority population, which for the Alliance meant a voting alliance with the Baltic Germans. Other political
parties that hoped for Swedish support typically placed a Swedish candidate too far down on their voting list, almost assuring that the Swede would not make it into the parliament.

Until the 1934 coup, Mathias Westerblom was the sole parliamentarian representing the Swedes, a position resulting from the alliance with the Baltic Germans. In terms of party alliance and political disputes, Westerblom and the Alliance more often criticized the Estonian parties as being too focused on their petty politics and ignoring the wellbeing of the country. He was anguished by the tendency of the parties to place all the blame on political opponents, rather than work together to find a solution. For example, in the 28 March 1931 session, Westerblom argued that the infighting between parties further strained the economic recovery and prevented compromise, to the detriment of all.\(^\text{13}\)

Arguably the greatest factor in Estonian politics in the 1930s was the perceived threat from the Veterans of Estonia’s War of Independence. Veterans were among those that suffered from the Depression, and organized themselves in 1929 to try and improve their economic situation and rejuvenate the spirit of the Independence movement.\(^\text{14}\) The political crisis in Estonia continued through 1934, with numerous coalition governments collapsing in dispute; from 1932-1934, Estonia went through four cabinets as the parties continually split on decisions. Soon after organizing, the Estonian Independence Veterans’ Central League involved itself in the political crises. Estonian historian and expert on the rise of the Estonian radical right Andres Kasekamp writes:

\(^{13}\) See a summary of Westerblom’s speech in “Riksdagen,”\(^\text{Kustbon},\) 31 March 1931.

The deepening economic crisis in the early Thirties made it possible for the Veterans’ movement to obtain widespread popular support and to become a significant political force in Estonia. Increasing unemployment and a decline in living standards resulted in a loss of confidence in the parliamentary system and a willingness to accept panaceas such as constitutional reform, embodying strong leadership.\(^\text{15}\)

Political leaders began to question the guiding constitutional foundation of Estonia, and proposed significant restructuring to more adequately handle the economic crisis, namely the establishment of a strong presidency. The government held a national referendum in August 1932 for a new draft constitution, which was narrowly defeated (in part because of socialist and Veterans’ opposition).\(^\text{16}\) In June 1933, a second draft of the constitution was again put before a referendum, and again failed. In August, amid continued political crises, Prime Minister Jaan Tõnisson declared a state of emergency, and outlawed the Veterans’ League (among other organizations). However, the political climate continued to deteriorate. Finally, in October 1933, a third draft written by the Veterans’ League in 1932 passed. The new constitution established a strong president, elected by popular vote. Tõnisson’s government cancelled the state of emergency and resigned.\(^\text{17}\)

The constitutional reforms allowed the Veterans’ League to involve itself in the political direction of Estonia, despite lacking a parliamentary presence, by appealing

\(^{15}\) Kasekamp, *The Radical Right in Interwar Estonia*, 54.

\(^{16}\) Kustbon provided information about the 1932 referendum in the 4 August and 22 August 1932 issues. The proposal called for the creation of a Presidency and a weakened Riigikogu, reducing the number of parliamentarians from 100 to 80, which would have made it even more difficult for a Swedish representative to be elected.

directly to the population of Estonia. The League pursued broad public support, in part by drawing on the rising economic dissatisfaction. Kasekamp writes:

> The immaturity of the political parties, which were organized primarily along occupational rather than ideological lines, served to accentuate the instability of the political system... The League was unique among Estonian political parties in capturing support which crossed all class lines. Except for its relative weakness in the countryside, the League’s support was broadly based.\(^\text{18}\)

The overwhelming approval of the League’s constitutional draft by the voters demonstrated the ability of the organization to mobilize and concentrate the dissatisfaction of the broad population. Presidential elections were to be held in April 1934, with four candidates: Johan Laidoner from the Smallholders Association, Konstantin Päts from the Farmers Party, August Rei from the Socialists, and Andres Larka from the League of Estonian Veterans.

Fearful of the rising popularity of the Veterans’ League, on 12 March 1934 Päts and Laidoner staged a *coup d’état*, taking control of key government buildings and arresting members of the League. Historian Toivo Raun writes,

> Although the official justification for the emergency actions of March 1934 was the existence of an alleged plot by the League of Veterans for an armed coup, later investigation found no clear evidence of this. However, at the time the idea seemed plausible, given the vehement agitation by the league and widespread rumors of such a move. Päts and his followers could also claim, quite convincingly, that his actions averted civil war.\(^\text{19}\)


The Socialists also supported Päts, viewing him as the only politician able to counter the influences of the Veterans’ League. The new government cancelled the April elections. Päts assumed control of the Riigikogu and Laidoner assumed control of the armed forces. They appointed Kaarl Eenpalu as deputy prime minister and interior minister. Eenpalu disbanded the Riigikogu in October 1934, following parliamentary criticism of the government’s actions.

Under Eenpalu, the government increasingly championed and enacted nationalist policies favoring the Estonian majority. For example, a new law passed on 29 October 1934 that required the use of Estonian place names, effective 1 April 1935. Signs across Aiboland that were in both Estonian and Swedish were all replaced with Estonian-only signs. The Swedish names for the towns and villages across Aiboland were suddenly to be known only by their Estonian equivalents. The law also applied to publications, even non-Estonian-language publications such as Kustbon (or Nya Kustbon). In response, the newspaper oftentimes printed the Swedish place name in parentheses. However, the Swedish names were still used in referring to a person, such as stating “Rågöboarna”

20 Tannberg, History of Estonia, 238.
22 Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.43. Letter to Svenska Folksekretäreran from Vormsi Vallavalitsus dated 11 April 1935. The Swedes on Wormsö were unhappy with the new regulation, and turned to the Swedish Folk Secretary for greater clarification of the new law.
24 The 1935 Christmas publication Estlandssvensk Julhälsning also demonstrates the regulations of the new law. The publication included a chart with the different place names, indicating that the publication would use the Estonian names. (2) Also, see “Ruhnu (Runö) får ny sjuksyster,” Kustbon, 11 November 1938.
instead of “Pakriboarna” for a person from the Pakri islands – “Rågö” in Swedish.\textsuperscript{25} Moreover, the vernacular in the Swedish regions still employed the Swedish place names.\textsuperscript{26} A second law on 1 May 1938 went even further, Estonianizing not only town names but also the names of farmsteads.\textsuperscript{27} The new language law also applied to the mail service. Any letters not using Estonian names (for towns or street names) would not be delivered.

By the spring of 1935, the new government sought to further consolidate its power and prevent criticism, and banned all political parties except for the ruling Fatherland Union (\textit{Isamaaliit}). The ban also included the Swedish People’s Alliance. One consequence of the closing of the Estonian-Swedish political party was a prohibition against the continued publication of \textit{Kustbon}. Despite the largely apolitical stance of the newspaper in the early 1930s, officially the Alliance acted as the publisher, making it illegal under the new administration. \textit{Kustbon} suddenly shut down.

A wave of Estonian nationalism emerged with the new Päts government, which limited previous protections afforded to the minorities. In some aspects it entirely revoked protections, including the Cultural Autonomy Laws. However, as historian Toivo Raun argues, “In spite of the emphasis on nationalism in the Päts years of the

\textsuperscript{25} See, for example, “Ett besök hos en företagsam nucköbo,” \textit{Nya Kustbon}, 19 October 1935.

\textsuperscript{26} In some regions (principally in mixed communities), local Estonian officials pressured Estonian-Swedes to Estonianize their farm names, and in some cases even their family names. See Ann Grubbström, \textit{Sillar och mullvadar: Jordägande och etnicitet i Estlands svenskbys}dger 1816-1939 (Uppsala: Kulturgeografiska institutionen, Uppsala University, 2003), 59.

1930s, there was only a minor retreat from this liberal minority policy. Indeed, Päts reaffirmed the rights of minorities in the constitution adopted in 1937, which perhaps indicates that the Päts Government intended to maintain a liberal democratic form of government, including protections for the rights of minorities. However, the rights of minorities in the 1937 constitution were not as great as in earlier periods, including the areas of language laws, education, and even religion. Additionally, when the Päts government authorized the creation of a new legislative body, the Swedish minority once again became the only minority group in Estonia lacking a political representative.

Despite the change in minority policies and the favoring of Estonianization policies, the Päts government along with Prime Minister Kaarel Eenpalu periodically reached out to the Swedish minority. As before, both Sweden and Estonia viewed the Estonian-Swedes as an important link between the two states, and the demands of transnational relations affected the Estonian treatment of the Estonian-Swedish minority. In this case, however, Sweden was skeptical that the new Estonian government valued a strong cultural connection with Sweden. The Swedish Foreign Ministry sent an envoy let by B. Johansson to Estonia in November 1938. According to an internal memo before the visit:

> From the Swedish side, we have always been interested in developing cultural links between Sweden and Estonia, and the Swedish government has taken pains to promote it. Among other things, Sweden cannot avoid noticing that corresponding Estonian interest appears to have declined,

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30 Ibid., 53.
which is even expressed in the less-than-friendly treatment that the Swedish minority in Estonia now appears to receive.\textsuperscript{31}

The memo reflects the direct tie Sweden saw with the Estonian-Swedes. The Swedish government equated a reduction of minority protections for the Estonian-Swedes as evidence of a diminished Estonian interest in maintaining a strong relationship with Sweden. During Johansson’s visit, Estonian Foreign Minister Karl Selter took pains to change that perspective, expressing a deep appreciation for Estonian-Swedish relations, and for the Estonian-Swedish minority in particular. Selter even told Johansson that his brother-in-law was an Estonian-Swede. Johansson wrote of the exchange:

He also asked me to be convinced that the Estonian government’s position toward the Swedish minority was the most benevolent and that they never had any thoughts of changing that position... Mr. Selter also pointed out his opinion that generally speaking it would be ill-advised and futile for a country’s government to try and suppress a minority group.\textsuperscript{32}

The exchange, and Selter’s reassurances, demonstrates the important role the Swedish minority played in the geopolitical relations of these two states. Johansson ultimately was convinced of Selter’s sincerity in maintaining strong Swedish-Estonian relations, and in the Estonian government’s position towards the Estonian-Swedes.

The Estonian government made a public expression of the Estonian-Swedes’ position in August 1939, when Prime Minister Eenpalu visited Wormsö. In addition to meeting with the Estonian-Swedes, he also visited the gravesite of Hans Pöhl to pay his


respects. In his speech to the Wormsö-Swedes (given in Estonian, and translated into Swedish) Eenpalu commented on the close links between the Estonian majority and the Swedish minority. He told the audience:

> Both [our] people have stuck together here through thick and thin for centuries. Our mutual relationship is even tighter, therefore, because we stand in such a good friendship with the Swedish tribe, the Swedes on the other side of the Baltic Sea. Throughout the entire period of independence, we have not accosted or infringed on the Swedish minority’s rights, and we do not have thoughts of doing so in the future. The Estonian people, with their sentiments of justice, understand what interdependent understanding and mutual sympathy means for the people and the state’s cohabitation, and therefore may it be the most secure foundation for our common homeland.

The Estonian government clearly sought to maintain a strong relationship with Sweden, an important trade partner.

One can see exceptions the Estonian government made for the Estonian-Swedes to some of the newly enacted nationalist policies. For example, a 1934 law required all pastors to hold Estonian citizenship. Almost all of the pastors serving congregations in Aiboland were foreigners. Additionally, the Swedish Church paid the salaries of the Swedish pastors, and the communities in Aiboland had insufficient economic resources to financially support clergy on their own. If the Swedish pastors sought Estonian citizenship, they would lose their rights within the Swedish Church, and therefore be ineligible for their salary. The Estonian-Swedes also had no viable candidates to replace

33 See Uus Eesti, 15 August 1939.


35 “Kirikute ja usuühingute seadus,” Riigi Teataja 107, 1934.
the lost clergy, as the first few were still a few years away from completing their theological studies. In May 1936, the Swedish pastors received a notice from the Estonian government to seek Estonian citizenship within two weeks or be deported. The Estonian government initially rejected an appeal to remain in Estonia, although a compromise was ultimately allowed, which enabled them to remain temporarily until several Estonian-Swedes had finished their theological studies.

While the extension from the Estonian government enabled the Swedish pastors to remain a little longer, the government still required their eventual deportation. As the pastors began leaving, there was definite bitterness among the Estonian-Swedes. Religion continued to be an important foundation for the Estonian-Swedish community, a vital link between Aiboland and Sweden, and an aspect of their concept of Swedishness. In 1931 Pastor Sven Danell wrote an article in a Birkas student newspaper linking Christianity with both the concept of Swedishness and the idea of a strong civic responsibility as citizens of Estonia. A gifted linguist, Danell learned Estonian soon after his 1930 arrival in Estonia, and frequently asserted that the Estonian-Swedes must have both a strong Swedish grounding and be loyal to their country. Danell wrote, “The better Christian you are, the better Swede. The better Swede you are, the better Estonian [citizen].”

36 “Rikssvenska präster nekas arbetstillstångd i Estland,” Kustbon, 16 May 1936.
37 “Ljusning i prästfrågan?” Kustbon, 28 May 1936.
1934. He left Estonia in June 1937. In a 19 June 1936 article in *Kustbon*, Alexander Samberg lamented the loss of Danell:

A clergyman has gone. A cultural personage has left our rank… After seven years of devoted work, Pastor S. Danell thoroughly knew the lives of the congregation. He has alleviated the suffering of so many and with understanding and diligence zealously built up the congregation… The work of SOV was deep within his heart, and he was a warm friend to Estonia, the Estonian people, and the country’s sound development.39

Samberg mentioned the strong support Danell had from the Estonians in the region, too. Even after Danell left Estonia and returned home to Sweden, he continued to work to strengthen religious identity in Aiboland, for example securing the donation of 263 hymnals from the Swedish Church in 1939.40

In November 1938, Pastor K. Nilsson, the final Swedish pastor in Aiboland, left Estonia.41 Swedish consul Svante Hellstedt noted in a memo to the Swedish Foreign Ministry that with Nilsson’s departure, “a noteworthy chapter in the Sweden-Estonia religious connection is ended in a manner that the Swedes can hardly regard as encouraging, who have given some of their best years to the Estonian-Swedes.”42 The departure ended the strong connection between the Estonian-Swedes and the religious community in Sweden.

40 See Riksarkivet: SE/RA/730710 Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt Stockholms lokalförening Estlandsutskottet, A1:2. See the minutes from 27 April 1939 (§3a).
Internal Feuding in Aiboland

Hans Pöhl’s death left some confusion over who would be his heir – a single individual to lead Aiboland politically and culturally, and resolve any disputes. Two individuals seemed ideally suited to take on the role of leader: Nikolai Blees and Mathias Westerblom. Tartu University Professor of Swedish Per Wieselgren observed a few years into the decade, “The old leader died too soon, and his heirs were not rightly suited for their task.” Nikolai Blees held the prominent position among the Estonian-Swedes as Swedish Folk Secretary in the Education Ministry, as well as editor of Kustbon. Initially, he also assumed the role of SOV chairman. Blees was the heir-apparent for Aiboland, and yet many in the pan-Swedish movement outside Estonia strongly disliked him and actively sought to bypass him in their dealings with the Estonian-Swedes. Members of the National Association’s Stockholm division preferred Mathias Westerblom, who took over Hans Pöhl’s seat in the Riigikogu, serving until the government coup of 1934. Westerblom worked as director of the Estonian Oil Shale Company – a company owned

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43 Per Wieselgren, “Estlandssvenskarnas bildningsfråga,” in Svio-Estonica (1934), 17. Svio-Estonica was an academic journal originally published in Tartu, intended to link Estonia and Sweden together culturally and academically. Articles were published in either Swedish or Estonian, with short summaries in the other language.

44 See the summary of the SOV yearly meeting held on 27 April 1930 in Kustbon, 2 May 1930. The SOV bylaws limited the organization’s elite to the Reval area, which removed Pöhl’s eldest son from contention (Johannes Pöhl was a schoolteacher on Rägö).

45 Although Westerblom’s name was further down on the voting list, the Baltic Germans decided to replace Pöhl with Westerblom, ensuring Swedish representation in the Riigikogu. Kustbon commented that in making the switch, the Germans demonstrated that they were “complete gentlemen.” See “Riksdagen,” Kustbon, 6 February 1930.

46 Westerblom distinguished himself among the minorities in the Riigikogu by speaking in Estonian, whereas the Baltic German parliamentarians spoke German and the Russians spoke Russian.
by the wealthy Swedish Wallenberg family. Additionally, during the 1930s Westerblom would come to a prominent position in SOV and became editor of the reemerging *Kustbon* from 1936.

These two men and their supporters clashed over control of SOV, the distribution of funds from abroad, the operation of the Birkas folk school, and control of the community newspaper. Caught up in the power struggle to be Pöhl’s heir, Blees and Westerblom began a decade-long feud, originating with Westerblom’s accusations of missing funds (or at the least, sketchy bookkeeping) that passed through Blees in his capacity as Swedish Folk Secretary and his role in SOV. The resulting feud – at times stooping to pure petty bickering – weakened the ability of the community leaders to act independently of Sweden in shaping the direction of an Estonian-Swedish identity. However, the feud also allowed the pan-Swedish movement to develop a stronger role in Aiboland, embedding itself more deeply within the community. It shaped the identification of the population as Swedes with a strong connection to the ancient homeland. It also reinforced for the homeland Swedes that the Estonian-Swedes were an important group within the larger pan-Swedish movement that required a strong Swedish intervention to protect their nationality.

Nils Danell, headmaster at Birkas, raised the initial concerns over funds passing through the Swedish Folk Secretary in January 1931. Under increased attention, SOV

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47 For an economic history of Sweden, see Jerry Hagstrom, *To Be, Not to be Seen: The Mystery of Swedish Business* (Middleburg: The George Washington University School of Business and Public Management, 2001).

and Westerblom started to look through the financial records and raised the possibility that Blees either mishandled the money (possibly embezzling some funds), or maintained incomplete records. The initial accusations of missing funds led to Blees’ electoral loss in his re-election bid for the SOV board. Westerblom then became the SOV treasurer, a position that afforded him greater control over SOV spending.\(^\text{49}\) The allegations of misappropriation of funds ultimately led to a trial, though the court determined that there was insufficient evidence to determine guilt or innocence – a ruling that ensured that the war of words would continue.\(^\text{50}\) Anders Koskull of the Swedish Consulate, for example, continued for years to maintain that Blees failed to deposit all the funds meant for SOV, arguing they instead ended up “in his pocket.”\(^\text{51}\)

Carl Mothander, a Swede who married a Baltic German and lived in Tallinn, was arguably Blees’s most vocal supporter. In one exchange concerning Blees and Westerblom, Mothander wrote to Patrik Reuterswärd in the Swedish Legation in Riga regarding “the Blees case,” offering unwavering support. Mothander wrote:

> It can now be seen – and countless witnesses can attest – that Mr. V [Westerblom] has long worked to undermine Mr. Blees’ position. According to my conviction, the motive is Mr. V’s jealousy against Mr.

\(^{49}\) Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:52 Birkas. Letter from Koskull to Stockholms Lokalavdelning, dated 15 July 1933. Koskull wrote, “As you should already know, opposition against the previous chairman Mr. Blees has for a while significantly increased because of the management of the organization’s affairs.”

\(^{50}\) The Estonian courts issued their determination for case 589 on 31 August 1934. See Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:52 Birkas.

Blees, who following Hans Pöhl’s death is the tribe’s most gifted and most distinguished leader.52

Mothander’s intrusion into the feud and his unwavering support for Blees received sharp criticism, particularly from the Swedish Consulate. The Swedish Foreign Ministry was already familiar with Mothander, and strongly disliked him, consistently viewing his actions with deep suspicion. Beginning in 1929, the Swedish Foreign Ministry began monitoring Mothander after a Baltic German newspaper ran an article he wrote that lamented the poor Swedish treatment of the Finnish minority.53 The Foreign Ministry instigated a background check on Mothander, noting he had fought in the Finnish Civil War and had a police record dating from 1921 in Sweden.54 They also found that Mothander frequently involved himself in minority issues, and starting in 1930, they feared his eventual connection with the Estonian Swedes. Koskull commented:

Now he burns with desire to be some sort of apostle of Swedishness among the Estonian-Swedes… Neither [Consul] Reuterskiöld or the Swedes here want anything to do with him; his relatives among the Baltic nobility have tried to tolerate him for her [Mothander’s wife] sake, but are now finding it impossible to deal with him.55


53 Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:12 (1921-1940). Folder HP21 Ab/Af. Note from G. Reuterskiöld to the Minister of Foreign Affairs dated 5 April 1929. The Baltic German newspaper Revaler Bote published Mothander’s article, but also included a disclaimer which distanced themselves from Mothander’s viewpoint.

54 See Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:12 (1921-1940). Folder HP21 Ab/Af. Memo concerning Mothander dated 20 October 1930. Mothander maintained that the arrest and conviction was a misunderstanding.

According to numerous letters, members of the pan-Swedish movement such as Patrik Reuterswärd (Swedish Legation in Riga), Anders Koskull, Sigurd Curman (National Association, Stockholm Division), and Professor Per Wieselgren (Tartu University) disliked Mothander even more than they disliked Blees.\footnote{Numerous letters between these individuals betray a deep hatred for Mothander, and sought to sideline his position vis-à-vis the Estonian-Swedes at every opportunity. See, for example, letters in Riksarkivet SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:52 Birkas.} Koskull wrote to Professor Per Wieselgren in 1934:

Mr. Mothander has time and again besieged those two men [officials from the Swedish Foreign Ministry] and fortunately has shown everyone his unsympathetic side in such a high degree that they were disgusted, and seriously stated that under no circumstances would they want to cooperate with him. Two invitations for dinner at Mothander’s were declined politely but resolutely.\footnote{Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:52 Birkas. Letter from Anders Koskull to Per Wieselgren, dated 9 November 1934. As will be discussed in chapter 5, many of Mothander’s opponents ended up working closely with him during the Nazi occupation of Estonia.}

Blees’s friendship with Mothander certainly worsened his standing, and Mothander’s frequent interjections into the Westerblom-Blees feud on behalf of Blees only furthered resentment from the pan-Swedish movement and the Swedish Foreign Ministry.

Concerned over control of the finances and the potential for missing funds in 1931, the National Association streamlined the connections among the numerous regional and city divisions across Sweden. Since Estonian independence, individual branches of the National Association had responded to pleas for funding and resources directly. However, such a decentralized structure created little oversight or coordination, and it was possible for funds to completely get lost, as Westerblom and the Stockholm division argued. The Stockholm division thus created the Estonia Committee (Estlandsutskottet)
to consolidate into one body all communication and transfer of funds from Sweden to the Estonian-Swedes.\(^{58}\)

The restructuring of the relationship between Aiboland and the National Association was one of the major consequences of the Westerblom-Blees feud. Members of the National Association’s Stockholm division (led by Curman) were among those most critical of Blees, and the new committee increased the supervision of the Folk Secretary, and in some cases sought to completely sideline him altogether. The Estonia Committee established an extensive network of contacts across the Swedish government and numerous institutions in Sweden. This network spread knowledge of the Estonian-Swedes to a broader group in Sweden and led to a significant increase in fundraising.\(^{59}\) As will be demonstrated in the next two chapters, the network in Sweden established by the Estonia Committee proved to be extremely beneficial during the Second World War in transitioning the larger Estonian-Swedish population into Swedish society.

**Conflicts over Birkas**

The feud manifested itself through two central components of the Estonian-Swedish community: the Swedish-language newspaper *Kustbon* and the Birkas folk

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\(^{58}\) Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:51 Birkas. See the letter from Patrik Reuterswärd to Stockholms Lokalförening av Riksföreningen för svenskhetens bevarande i utlandet, dated 26 March 1931.

\(^{59}\) In a funding appeal to the Swedish Academy for a school library, for example, Curman argued that while Estonia offered great minority autonomy options, the Estonian-Swedes lacked sufficient financial resources to strengthen their culture. The appeal suggested that it was the Swedish Academy’s role to support Swedish language, even outside the current state borders of Sweden. Riksarkivet: SE/RA/730610 A1:1 Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt Stockholms lokalförening: Estlandsutskottet. Letter from Curman to Svenska Akademien dated 19 November 1937.
school. There were considerable changes in Swedish-language education in the 1930s, which built off the achievements of the previous decade and began to fulfill the hopes and goals of the earlier generations. These developments were only made possible with significant increases in support – morally and financially – from Sweden, and both Swedes and Estonian-Swedes realized that more money was necessary to continue Swedish educational opportunities. In a Christmas 1930 publication in Sweden, Pastor Erik Petzäll wrote about his service in Aiboland, commenting on the national expressions among the Estonian-Swedes and their attempts at preserving and strengthening their culture. He wrote, “If Swedishness in Estonia is to exist, for above all else an educational system to develop, financial support is required… The national consciousness [among the Estonian-Swedes] needs to be deepened and expanded.”60 Likewise, in 1934, Tartu University Professor of Swedish Per Wieselgren wrote an overview of Estonia’s Swedish-language education in which he also stressed the need for expanded funding. Wieselgren argued that the poor standard of living and poor quality Swedish-language educational opportunities across Aiboland resulted in a lack of “educated stock” (bildad stam). He wrote, “But it is of vital interest to obtain one. Otherwise [they] will eventually sink into an ethnographic sight of the most primitive degree or assimilate with the Estonian population.”61 Wieselgren articulated that it was the responsibility of Sweden to financially support the educational development of the Estonian-Swedes. As was a frequent comparison, Wieselgren pointed out that Sweden’s financial support was


miniscule compared to the financial support Germany gave to the Baltic Germans in Estonia – and the Baltic Germans were already significantly more financially secure than the Estonian-Swedes. He wrote,

As long as the Finnish-Swedes can manage on their own, Sweden needs to only think about Estonia… It would be a disgrace if Sweden, one of the world’s most well-to-do countries, does not assist seven or eight thousand people to attain a standard of living that by no means needs to be equal to our own, but rather to a level comparable with the Estonian majority’s simple, but healthy way of life.\footnote{Per Wieselgren, “Estlandssvenskarnas bildningsfråga,” in \textit{Svio-Estonica}, 1934, 15-16.}

Wieselgren further argued that by developing and supporting the Estonian-Swedish population, Sweden would also play a vital role in more closely linking Estonia to Scandinavia, which would be of benefit to all sides.

But financial support was not the only hindrance to expanding the educational opportunities in Aiboland. The greatest struggle, caught up in the middle of the Blees-Westerblom feud, was over Birkas, which held a unique and complicated place in Estonia. In many ways, Birkas was one of the greatest successes of the Estonian-Swedes – an institution of education in Swedish and a portal to improved agricultural techniques for the greater Estonian-Swedish communities, many of which used strip-farming until the mid-1930s. In a 1931 publication from Birkas, a student wrote:

When all is said and done, Birkas is essential for the Swedes. Although the school’s time of operation isn’t more than ten years, one already can note what has been achieved here and in the community. The worst is that Birkas, which is the center for Swedishness in Estonia, lies in a community where some have abandoned the Swedish language and instead speak Estonian. It would have been better if the school was on Wormsö or in Rickholtz. But we should now be glad that we possess such a treasure, and tend to it in the best manner. May Birkas have a bright
future and always have rooms filled with knowledge-seeking students, and raise them to be capable citizens in the free Estonian state.⁶³

Along with the Swedish-language *Kustbon*, Birkas played a significant role as the center of Swedishness in Aiboland. In particular, as a boarding school, the students came from all over Aiboland to study, and then returned to their hometowns with their new knowledge. According to another article in the same 1931 school publication, “One of those ideas [at Birkas] is to teach the Estonian-Swedish youth to love their home regions, and to make them young men and women that one can proudly call Swedes.”⁶⁴ In January 1931, Birkas Headmaster Nils Danell submitted an article for the National Association’s newspaper, *Allsvensk Samling* noting the annual Swedish Day celebration (6 November) and the tenth anniversary of the school. He wrote:

> At times one can feel fairly alone here. The school’s geographic location in a village with loose Swedish interest makes one dispirited, when you have people from the genuine Swedish regions all around you. [But] when the Swedish voices from Kärrslätt, Borby, Hullo, Bergsbyn, Höbring, and other towns are heard in our halls, then we gain new courage. Then we have an enhanced belief in the work for the protection of Swedishness in Estonia, and that the elevation of the Estonian-Swedes’ old, good culture is a task that has meaning and future prospects.⁶⁵

Danell commented that the Estonian-Swedes were tremendously grateful for the financial support Birkas received from Sweden, and for the central role Birkas played in furthering and protecting Swedish culture in Estonia.


⁶⁴ Estlandssvenska, “Vad är att vara Birkasvän?” *Birkasvännernas Tidning*, Spring 1931. Underlining in the original text.

However, Birkas had a complicated governing system. Although one of the responsibilities of the Swedish Folk Secretary was oversight over Swedish education in Estonia, SOV controlled the day-to-day running of Birkas and the selection of instructors and headmaster. However, all foreigners working in Estonia required government authorization, which Blees coordinated. With a large percentage of funding coming from Sweden, the National Association (and later the Swedish State) wanted to ensure a certain level of quality, and placed Birkas under the authority of the Swedish School Board (Kungliga Skolöverstyrelsen). Representatives of the National Organization (which on at least one occasion included the Swedish ambassador) periodically visited and inspected the school on behalf of the Swedish school administration. In a 1930 inspection for the Swedish School Board, Patrik Reuterswärd reported:

It was even striking how well the students spoke Swedish… The spirit that dominates both the students and the teachers is the absolute best. It is characteristic of the students to show a warm love for everything Swedish and pride at hearing someone else of the Swedish race [stam], along with a deep love and allegiance for their native land ‘Eesti.’

Reuterswärd’s report also noted the importance of the different skills for the girls and boys that the school emphasized. He wrote that teaching domestic skills alongside the Swedish language and culture among the females would provide greater assurances that Swedish would be the primary language in the household. Additionally, as an agricultural school, the emphasis on spreading new knowledge to the males was a necessary step to maintain the economic viability of the region, which he said was still largely “backwards

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and primitive.” Reuterswärd maintained that without a continued and improved emphasis on such education, the Estonians would make further inroads into Aiboland, and the Estonian-Swedes would eventually disappear.\textsuperscript{67}

The Swedes were not the only ones with oversight of the school, however. To complicate matters further, the school fell under Estonian regulation, requiring a level of Estonian-language education as well as certification of foreign faculty and staff. Birkas was also an agricultural school, which placed it under the control of the Estonian Ministry of Agriculture.

While this widespread involvement and oversight could provide tremendous support when all were in agreement, in times of dispute there was no single group or individual with final decision-making powers. The confusion over which organization held greater control inevitably led to conflicts and disagreements, with behind-the-scenes dealings to circumvent the control by other parties. And to that end, the feud between Blees and Westerblom took center stage, particularly when Nils Danell left Birkas in spring 1931.

Fredrik Erlund, a Finnish-Swede, replaced Danell, and started his work as headmaster in autumn 1931, staying until 1935. The conflict over oversight came to a head in 1934 when the Swedish school authorities noticed a considerable decline in the

quality of the education at Birkas. Curman in particular placed the blame on Erlund, the headmaster, and sought to find a suitable replacement.

While the feud was not directly responsible for the decline in standards, it did make addressing and resolving those issues markedly more difficult. However, Blees and Erlund were close friends. Erlund also assisted Blees in securing donations for *Kustbon*, such as two considerable donations in 1933 and another sizable donation from Finnish-Swedes in 1935. In a report concerning the Birkas problem, Consul Anders Koskull wrote:

It certainly cannot be stressed enough that these differences by no means originated in the fight between Westerblom and Blees about the highest power in the Estonian-Swedish world. The battle concerns first and last about honorability and honesty with the handling of financial support set aside for SOV’s disposal from Sweden.

Without authorization from the National Association or SOV and with full knowledge of the growing dissatisfaction, Blees pushed through Erlund’s residency authorization from the Agricultural Ministry, which made it impossible to replace the headmaster.

Erlund took a more prominent position in the columns of *Kustbon* than his predecessors, in an attempt to spread knowledge of new agricultural techniques and improve the economic viability across Aiboland. He also frequently discussed Birkas,

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68 See Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskar* 4, 644.


framing any criticism of the school under the larger issue of economic shortcomings resulting from the depression.

In 1934, Sigurd Curman, clearly supporting SOV and Westerblom, proposed cutting Blees out altogether from Birkas’ finances and all other funding from Sweden, sending all finances directly from Sweden to SOV rather than giving the funds to the Swedish Folk Secretary for distribution. He wrote to Anders Koskull:

> It seems to me that we must now concentrate on supporting SOV both economically and morally, so that the organization’s leadership is able to fulfill their real and natural function. This devastating discord must end. It would be best to positively support SOV and ignore Blees for the present. His placement as Folk Secretary perhaps will not last much longer.”

Curman and other members of the Stockholm division continued to hope that Blees would be pushed out of his role as the Swedish Folk Secretary and be replaced by someone more favorable (although there was no indication who the new person would be). The Estonian government made no move to replace Blees, however. Professor Wieselgren concurred that the feud led to irreparable harm to the greater Estonian-Swedish community and recommended going even a step beyond Curman’s position. He suggested that as long as SOV and the Folk Secretary “are at loggerheads with each other” Sweden should make direct contact with the locales, and fund programs directly

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with the various institutions across Aiboland, rather than go through either the Folk Secretary or SOV.\textsuperscript{73}

The Estonia Committee, working alongside SOV, reasserted itself as the dominant power with regards to Birkas. In the summer of 1935, the Estonia Committee raised enough funds to completely pay off all of the Birkas debts, but with a condition: Headmaster Erlund had to go. The Committee found a new headmaster, Pelle Byström, who was to begin in the fall.\textsuperscript{74} Westerblom wrote, “Now I think Birkas is saved for a while. But those who have been involved in this struggle and are familiar with the circumstances know full well that it is not over.”\textsuperscript{75}

While the Estonia Committee took the lead on communication and funding between Sweden and Aiboland, there were still points of contention, even within the National Association. Soon after Byström replaced Erlund as headmaster, \textit{Allsvensk Samling}, the National Association newspaper, printed an article praising headmaster Erlund’s accomplishments while he was leading Birkas. The article, written by Mothander, infuriated the Estonia Committee, which saw Erlund as the cause of Birkas’s decline. Sigurd Curman complained that \textit{Allsvensk Samling} editor Ragnar Fleege (who


\textsuperscript{74} Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:52 Birkas. Letter from Sigurd Curman to Anders Koskull, dated 15 July 1935. See also the letter from Mathias Westerblom (SOV) to Anders Koskull, dated 18 September 1935.

was friends with both Blees and Mothander\textsuperscript{76}) deliberately attempted to circumvent the Estonia Committee and continued to divide the pan-Swedish community along the Blees-Westerblom split. In a letter to Anders Koskull, Curman wrote:

> The damned wretched management from the National Association in Gothenburg [the head office] and especially the impossible editorship of \textit{Allsvensk Samling}, Fleege, has played a new trick. In the previous issue there is an article by Mothander about headmaster Erlund. Can you imagine anything so infernal! We in the Estonia Committee are furious and will issue a sharp protest with the chairman in Gothenburg… However, it just shows that we still have a lot to clean up before we have a clean house on this front. But do not despair, for we \textit{will} be triumphant in the end! We continue to progress forward, even if it is slow at times.\textsuperscript{77}

Curman and Koskull quickly contacted the National Association, ensuring that Mothander would remain sidelined from \textit{Allsvensk Samling} in the future.

With Byström in place as the new headmaster, Mothander made a move to position himself in a role of authority at Birkas. He travelled to the school and presented Byström with official paperwork indicating that he, Mothander, was the National Association’s official representative in Estonia. The paperwork came from Fleege (Byström was unable to make out the second signature). Curman and Koskull were infuriated, as Mothander attempted to completely bypass the Estonia Committee’s new authority in overseeing connections with Aiboland. The Estonia Committee quickly reasserted itself and dismissed Mothander. Curman and Koskull obtained new

\textsuperscript{76} Following the 1934 court decision that determined there was not sufficient evidence to support or refute whether Blees had embezzled money, Fleege sent Blees a congratulatory note. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.41. Letter from Ragnar Fleege dated 29 October 1934.

\textsuperscript{77} Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 F1 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn vol. 52 (Birkas). Letter from Curman to Koskull dated 27 October 1935. Underlining from the original text.
documentation from the National Association’s chairman stating that Mothander had no official role within the National Association.\textsuperscript{78}

Byström had the full support of SOV and the Estonia Committee, and actively worked to improve Birkas during his stay as headmaster. The 1936 inspection report, pointing to Byström’s three-year plan to improve the school, praised the new direction at the school.\textsuperscript{79} Former headmaster Per Söderbäck (1924-1927) wrote, “Birkas has moved into brighter times. Erlund is gone. Mothander is dismissed. And Blees is moving in the same direction, although he plays the role of steadfast tin soldier all-too-well.”\textsuperscript{80} Unfortunately, the Estonian government was not as impressed. In an autumn 1937 visit, government representative Jaakson, expressed concern that Byström did not speak Estonian and stated that Byström must begin studying the language if he was to remain in his position.\textsuperscript{81}

In addition to the role the Estonia Committee took with regards to Birkas, it also promoted the belief that greater connections between Sweden and the Estonian-Swedes would encourage a stronger, more general link between Estonia and Sweden. In a 1937 appeal for funding, the Committee wrote, “The work for this minority is certainly only a

\textsuperscript{78} Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F:52 Birkas. Letter from Koskull to A. Rinman, dated 6 November 1935. See also the letter from Sigurd Curman to Anders Koskull, dated 7 November 1935.


\textsuperscript{81} Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F:52 Birkas. Letter from Per Wieselgren to Koskull, dated 11 October 1937.
route to advance the larger work between the Baltic and Nordic states in cultural and
economic respects.” The Estonia Committee strongly advocated the useful role the
Estonian-Swedes played in relations between Sweden and Estonia – a viewpoint that the
Swedish Government and Swedish royal family manifested by always including visits to
Aiboland, and meeting with Estonian-Swedes, on any official visit.

_Kustbon_

Since its founding in 1918, _Kustbon_ had played a vital role in connecting the
isolated villages to one another, and to the broader, transnational Swedish community. Beyond just presenting the news in Swedish, _Kustbon_ was the voice of Aiboland. Yet, the newspaper consistently struggled, particularly during the 1930s. Financial shortcomings, political changes, and the feud all shaped the content and limited the potential of the newspaper. The editors and representatives of the pan-Swedish movement frequently commented on these discouraging disadvantages and hoped for changes to improve the content.

Economic challenges from the Great Depression had an immediate effect on _Kustbon_, which had been on shaky financial ground since 1918. Blees referenced the lack

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83 See Benedict Anderson’s _Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism_ (New York: Verso, 1991) for the role print culture plays in the formation of a national identity, to get individuals to see beyond their village and feel a bond with others.
of sufficient funding in a May 1930 article that recognized the important role of a newspaper within their community, writing:

Our newspaper, Kustbon, was founded with the thought of being the Estonian-Swedes’ special newspaper, a paper that would show them the world’s workings and convey their cause… No cultural work is possible without a modern newspaper. The work for the Estonian-Swedish culture suffers enormously by not having an effective newspaper at its disposal. The editor is the first to understand how insufficient Kustbon is in its present condition.84

The May 2 issue was a special one – the editors changed the size and format of the newspaper from a newsletter to a broadsheet. The editors openly stated the issue was an example of what the newspaper could and should be, but because of a lack funds was impossible to maintain on a weekly basis. The cost, estimated by the editors to be an additional 5-6,000 crowns a year, was impeding their goals. The article continues, “The deficiencies could not all be remedied through this sum, but the newspaper could, however, be a news circulator, a true societal bond between Estonia’s Swedish elements.”85 Just as the Estonian-Swedes emphasized the role of education in improving their economic and cultural standing, the Swedish-language newspaper was designed to bring the community together. Blees believed that there was potential for greatness within the community, but that because of a lack of funds and the educational deficiencies within the community, that potential was wasted – an argument similar to those made about educational shortcomings in the region.

84 Redaktionen, “Den nya tiden,” Kustbon, 2 May 1930.
85 Redaktionen, “Den nya tiden,” Kustbon, 2 May 1930.
Outside observers were in agreement on the relative weakness of the newspaper. But they also recognized its importance for community development. In a letter to Patrik Reuterswärd in the Swedish Foreign Ministry, Swedish consul Koskull wrote, “Kustbon is a black sheep, which drains considerable money, but its continued publication should be a question of prestige, and one cannot think of discontinuing it.”86 The National Association encouraged its supporters in the pan-Swedish movement to subscribe to Kustbon as a demonstration of Swedish solidarity with the Swedish minority in Estonia.87 Approximately half of the subscriptions for Kustbon came from Swedes outside of Estonia.

The biggest challenge to keeping the newspaper in business was its week-to-week expenses, particularly as the cost of paper rose. By the end of 1932, continued economic difficulties led to the publishers’ decision to close the newspaper. They still saw the value of having the newspaper and regretted its loss, but saw no viable financial option. “The step is desperate and constitutes at the same time a deathblow for the work of ‘Swedishness’ with us,” they wrote, “because a people that lack a newspaper is like an animal whose eyes have been gouged out – it thrashes around helpless, however intense its physical strength may be.”88 However, the pan-Swedish community abroad gathered around the publication, and minimal funds were found – although the budget was still


87 See the notice encouraging support for Kustbon in the National Association’s newspaper, Allsvensk Samling, 10 February 1931.

tight – to allow the newspaper to resume publishing the following year. The near-end of *Kustbon* allowed the Swedish community to realize the important role the newspaper held for their national identity, and encouraged greater participation. Blees stepped up fundraising efforts to support the newspaper, turning to groups abroad, as well as the Estonian government. But the quality of the newspaper still suffered, and at times the editors backed away from publishing weekly in efforts to save funding.

In the early 1930s, the Swedish People’s Alliance – the newspaper’s official publisher – played a part in the content. *Kustbon* encouraged the Swedes to support the Alliance at the polls as a sign of solidarity. A May 1932 cover story about the upcoming election, for example, stated that voting was important “for our Swedish electorate to demonstrate that they are really Swedes, and that they understand the need to protect our Swedish interests.” However, *Kustbon* more often encouraged the Estonian-Swedes to be active participants in the political process; as faithful and loyal citizens of Estonia, it was their civic responsibility to participate.

While political participation remained a common theme around elections, beginning in 1933 *Kustbon* increasingly took an apolitical stance, simply reporting the news and strengthening the cultural direction of the newspaper, with a strong focus on education and religion. One possible explanation for the shift was the near-end of the newspaper in December 1932; publication continued only because of the support of the National Association. As a result, the focus of the newspaper stressed the larger role of

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89 Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.37. See in particular the letter dated 31 March 1933, Hariduse- ja sotsialministeeriumi Teaduse ja kunsti osakonnale.

Kustbon in furthering the Swedish identity in Aiboland and the need for continued support from abroad to keep progress moving. For example, Blees wrote in January 1933, “The work of Swedishness cannot carry on successfully without its own newspaper, because Kustbon is now, in a way, a kind of organizational link for the scattered Estonian-Swedes and without it the threads would be wiped clean.”91

A second explanation for the shift in focus is the changing political environment and a strong desire among the newspaper’s editors to remain outside party politics. In a 1934 article, the editor wrote that it was not worthwhile for the newspaper to take strong positions in discussing politics:

The Kustbon editorial staff cannot admit itself entitled or worthy to take a stand in the country’s political party struggles, because the task of Kustbon lies outside of and above party politics. It is first and foremost to uphold the Estonian-Swedes’ national cultural interests.92

Part of the justification the editor gave for avoiding party politics in the newspaper was that significant funding to support the publication came from foreign sources, and it would therefore be inappropriate to give the appearance that foreigners might comment on internal Estonian politics.93 The article continued, “As long as Kustbon’s economy is not secured from a legal working political organization here in this country, it will hold itself out of internal political debates. What the newspaper can do is encourage its readers

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91 “Till Kustbons läsare,” Kustbon, 11 January 1933.

92 “Kustbon och politiken,” Kustbon, 21 March 1934.

93 While I did not locate subscription information for 1934, the budget for 1938 indicates that there were 400 subscribers in Estonia and 200 subscribers abroad. See Riksarkivet: SE/RA/730610 A1:1 Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt Stockholms lokalförening: Estlandsutskottet. PM ångående Kustbon, M. Westerblom 12 February 1938.
to simply give their votes to a Swedish candidate.” Following this argument, *Kustbon* rarely criticized political leaders or legislation.

However, equally important (although left unsaid) was the impact of the feud between Blees and Westerblom. Starting in January 1933, Nikolai Blees took over the editorship from Andreas Stahl. As a result, there was a greater connection between the newspaper and the responsibilities and interests of the Swedish Folk Secretary. Westerblom, as the parliamentarian, was the head of the Swedish People’s Alliance. While coverage of SOV continued in *Kustbon* even after Blees was forced out, the newspaper seldom mentioned the names of the organization’s officers, as was typical in previous years. As a close friend of Blees, Carl Mothander also became a regular contributor to the newspaper, much to the anger of Curman and Koskull. Koskull informed Blees that as long as *Kustbon* opened its pages up to Mothander, the Swedish government or the Estonia Committee would cease all funding, but even that threat failed.

When the new Päts government outlawed political parties in March 1935, the newspaper again came close to disappearing. As the editor, Nikolai Blees quickly packed up the records of *Kustbon*, taking the subscriptions, mailing lists, and advertising contacts

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95 Koskull and Curman repeatedly argued that so long as Blees opened up the pages of the newspaper to Mothander, organizations in Sweden should withhold funding. See, for example, Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn, F1:52 Birkas. Letter from Koskull to Per Wieselgren, dated 9 November 1934.

and funding. He obtained government permission to issue a new newspaper under the name *Nya Kustbon*. Blees became the sole publisher, thereby bypassing the government restriction on activities of political parties. His opening editorial explained the reasons for *Kustbon*’s abrupt end and his sense of obligation to the community, the subscribers, and the advertisers to continue a newspaper for Aiboland.

Blees’s swift move took many by surprise. His opponents objected that the newspaper provided Blees with an unchecked bully pulpit, and that he could use it to speak to the larger pan-Swedish movement as though on behalf of the Estonian-Swedes. As the Blees-Westerblom feud intensified, Blees’s unfettered control of the newspaper gave the feud new momentum. Despite the strong, continued opposition from the Swedish consulate and members of the National Association in Stockholm, Mothander continued to help out his friend.

Concerned by Blees’s control of the newspaper, Westerblom applied for government permission in December 1935 for SOV to publish a newspaper, resurrecting the original name, *Kustbon*. The Päts government consented, and this time, Blees was caught off guard. SOV quickly sent out letters across Aiboland, seeking a broad representation of collaborators in the revived newspaper. The revised *Kustbon*, published by SOV, appeared first in January 1936. However Blees still had government authority and funding to continue publishing *Nya Kustbon*, meaning there would be two Swedish-language newspapers published in Estonia.

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97 Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.43. See the SOV letter to Carl Blees, Höbring, dated 17 December 1935.
With the re-launch of *Kustbon*, the new editorial board outlined their goal, and made its case for why *Kustbon* better served Aiboland (although not mentioning *Nya Kustbon* or Blees directly). In the opening letter on the front page, the editors suggested that it was long discussed to have SOV take control of the newspaper, regardless of the political situation in Estonia. In a slight to Blees and his solitary control of *Nya Kustbon*, they wrote, “For the majority of Estonian-Swedes it has been apparent that a newspaper claiming to be the official publication of the Estonian-Swedes should not be distributed by a one-sided political organization, and naturally even less so by a single person.”\(^{98}\) To highlight this expanded participation, the first issue also included a list of 27 participants (contributors, writers, and organizers) on the front page: professors, teachers, headmasters, and pastors from across Aiboland.

The shift in operation led to increased local participation, with the newspaper increasingly becoming a forum for discussion. Under the control of SOV, *Kustbon* drew on all of the local SOV branches for support and content, hoping that the newspaper would be a “reliable mouthpiece for the Swedes in Estonia.”\(^{99}\) The cultural organization used their extensive contacts in Aiboland to streamline local connections, subscription, and contributors. The editors also expressed the hope to have the new newspaper come out once a week to start with, but with the hope of increasing it to twice a week later on in order to be a more reliable news source.


Blees quickly responded to the veiled criticism offered by the first issue of *Kustbon*. In a January 17 editorial in *Nya Kustbon*, he challenged the claim that *Kustbon* was the official newspaper of the Estonian-Swedes. While SOV had resurrected the old name, he stressed that it was not the same newspaper as the previous incarnation, and that *Kustbon*’s new editorial board could therefore not claim the previous paper as its legacy. Furthermore, he argued that since SOV officially published the newspaper, *Kustbon* must maintain the exact same purpose as the founding principles of SOV. It was in this respect that Blees argued both newspapers could exist, since he argued they both had distinct goals.  

Blees was unwilling to cease publication, and throughout 1936 both newspapers competed, hoping to remain financially solvent enough to outlast the other.

As with the earlier disagreements between Blees and Westerblom, the pan-Swedish movement, and the Estonia Committee in particular, became involved in the continuing feud and the two newspapers. Curman argued that *Nya Kustbon* was a competing newspaper that demonstrated the splintering of the Estonian-Swedes, and that the Estonia Committee should take a clear side in the feud. He wrote a passionate plea to numerous subscribers in Sweden to only support *Kustbon* and to cancel subscriptions and advertisements with *Nya Kustbon*.  

By the end of 1936, Blees gave up and ended *Nya Kustbon*. The editorial board of *Kustbon* attempted to heal the rift and added him as a member of their board at the start

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of 1937. Blees wrote a short article in the 9 January 1937 issue of *Kustbon* explaining the termination of *Nya Kustbon*:

> At its meeting on the fourth of this month, the SOV board expressed their desire regarding the Estonian-Swedish newspaper question. Since to solve the question would be most successful with only a single newspaper, which had a greater potential to develop, the undersigned agreed with the board’s suggestion to actively cooperate on the *Kustbon* editorial board as long as time and means allow.

Blees articulated that he wished the newspaper well and that it was in the communities’ best interest to gather around only one newspaper.

The cover story for the January 9 issue also highlighted the twentieth year of *Kustbon*, and hinted at some of the previous difficulties and divisions. Although there is no direct mention of the termination of *Nya Kustbon* or of the feud, one can certainly see suggestions of the split:

> It is not a long history for *Kustbon* to look back over, but we can be glad about this unassuming messenger, this communication link among the Estonian-Swedes, that can ride out all the storms and shifting fates of the past two decades. The last twenty years have not been typical years in our land’s history, but rather have been a revolutionary and innovating time period for Estonia, and it is obvious that a small minority newspaper in such times has many difficulties to struggle against. But we do not complain, but are, on the contrary, rather thankful that even from the government we have won sympathy and recognition for our little newspaper, which the small support that now and again comes to the newspaper bears unchallengeable witness to.102

Throughout 1937, while Blees sat on the editorial board of *Kustbon*, he only rarely wrote articles (Mothander was entirely barred and published no articles).103 It is not clear if his

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103 The first article attributed to Blees after his 9 January notice was an overview of Vilhelm Lundström’s recent visit to Estonia in the March 6 issue. See N.B., “Prof. Vilhelm Lundström besöker Estland,” *Kustbon*, 6 March 1937.
lack of participation was his own decision or if the other editors sidelined him. However, the cooperation only lasted a few months; Blees’s name was conspicuously absent from the editorial board beginning with the 26 November 1937 issue.

There were some criticisms that *Kustbon* was inadequate as a newspaper. However, it was highly prized across Aiboland, and many of the Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia understood the importance of keeping the Swedish-language publication active. Alexander Samberg, a frequent contributor to the newspaper, put the criticism into context in a letter he wrote in March 1939:

Then came 1918; the Estonian-Swedes got their own newspaper, *Kustbon*. It was enormous. A newspaper, in Swedish, which would carry tidings and describe the state of things in yours’ and my hometown, which would unite and awaken, and which would be sent far, far out into the world… Twenty-one years later we stand here and complain that *Kustbon*’s content is too meager, that it is far too small. Completely right. But we should look and evaluate, back to a day in 1918, when *Kustbon* began, when we ourselves took off. Then we would notice the difference between then and now. We would notice how the isolation, the backwardness, the loneliness out there is less in many regions. From Nargö down to Runö and Wormsö, we have begun to reach one another, understand one another. Our children – the youth of Aiboland – have begun to meet and act like men. The haze has begun to disperse. 104

Samberg went on to describe the important role that the National Association played for the preservation and continuation of Swedishness in Estonia. He remarked how the Swedish language united the Estonian-Swedes with the proud Swedish race around the world.

Fostering Swedishness

Throughout the 1930s, numerous individuals and groups across Aiboland and within the larger pan-Swedish movement increasingly focused their efforts on fostering the Swedish nationality of the Estonian-Swedes. Discussions of “Swedishness” played a prominent role in Kustbon (and Nya Kustbon), particularly as the newspaper shifted away from a strong political stance. Articles in Kustbon, repeatedly emphasized the role of Sweden in the lives of the Estonian-Swedes – in education, healthcare, and religion. The newspaper also emphasized the regional connections in each of the Swedish communities, and the strong bond between the Estonian-Swedes and the land. However, expressions of Swedishness were not restricted to declarations in print, but also included the creation of a folk festival and the establishment of a museum.

For the Estonian-Swedes, there was a dual layer in their conceptions of Swedishness. On the one hand, Kustbon presented an image of a distinct national identity for the Swedes living in Estonia that differentiated the minority group from the other people of Estonia, but also normalized a place for these Swedes within the Estonian state. On the other hand, the newspaper also continually reaffirmed that the Estonian-Swedes were part of the larger Swedish people.

Outsiders also continued observing and documenting the Estonian-Swedish communities, and they offered their own visions of the place of Estonian-Swedes in “Swedishness.” Regular visits from individuals in the pan-Swedish movement, government officials from Sweden (and Tallinn), and Swedish royalty continued to strengthen the bond between the Estonian-Swedes and Sweden. Travellers to the region
commented that a visit to Aiboland was like stepping back in time a couple hundred years, reflecting a similar perspective to Österblom’s observations in the 1870s. However, the visitors also stressed the strong Swedish culture of the region, and unlike Österblom did not portray the community solely in negative terms as backwards or the people as barbarians. Rather, they viewed the Estonian-Swedes as commendable representatives of the Swedish race and preservers of cultural traditions long lost back in Sweden – here the Estonian-Swedish “backwardness” was a positive trait. The outsiders visiting the region felt a strong bond with the Estonian-Swedes as fellow Swedes – a bond that was equally felt by the Estonian-Swedes themselves. In one travelogue, Per Söderbäck recounts a conversation with an Estonian-Swedish boat pilot on his way to Odensholm:

Suddenly he asks us: “Are you Swedish?”
“Yes.”
“We are of the same race [stam]. God bless!” And he stretched out his hand to us. It was as if we had greeted one of our ancestors, ten generations back in time.¹⁰⁵

For his part, Mothander frequently wrote essays on Swedishness and the Swedish character. In one article in Nya Kustbon, he wrote:

Our national cultural work in Swedish-Estonia goes in a Swedish manner. We have Swedish elementary schools, Swedish churches, Swedish upper-secondary schools, and much more. We have organizations that work in their village schools for Swedish preservation and development. However, we always see the concept of ‘Swedishness’ in a fairly narrow point of view. We completely forget that Swedishness doesn’t merely consist of

¹⁰⁵ Per Söderbäck, Estlands Svenskbygder (Stockholm: Bokförlags Aktiebolaget Thule, 1939), 77.
Swedish language and Swedish schools, but also in disposition, character, and action.\textsuperscript{106}

While the primary focus of the Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia and members of the National Association was the preservation of Swedish language, particularly in education, Mothander argued that the Estonian-Swedes needed to move beyond just the linguistic emphasis.

While articles in \textit{Kustbon} commented on the character and disposition of a “Swede,” it is not clear if the connections carried a racial meaning or simply reflected a deep cultural, linguistic, and familial bond between the Estonian-Swedes and Swedes in other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{107} However, there are numerous examples of racial overtones in the National Association’s publication \textit{Allsvensk Samling}, such as a chart of the racial characteristics of Swedes across Sweden published in 1928.\textsuperscript{108} Considering the strong connections between the National Association and Aiboland, one can argue that there certainly was a racial component in the \textit{Kustbon} articles. None of the articles in \textit{Kustbon} suggest that the Swedes were superior to Estonians, though. Rather, the Estonian-Swedes argued that their efforts were intended to raise Aiboland economically and culturally to be equal to the Estonians.\textsuperscript{109}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{106} Carl Mothander, “Karaktärsuppostran,” \textit{Nya Kustbon}, 17 April 1935.

\textsuperscript{107} One of the difficulties in assessing this connection is the use of the Swedish word “stam,” which can be translated in a number of different ways, ranging from tribe, kin, or race.

\textsuperscript{108} “Rastyper i Sverige,” \textit{Allsvensk Samling}, 14 February 1928.

\textsuperscript{109} In arguing for Swedish support of the Estonian-Swedes before a concert by the visiting Cecilia Choir from Sweden, Pastor Erik Petzäl commented that the Estonian-Swedes were not attempting to surpass their Estonian neighbors, but rather struggled to keep up with their neighbors’ advances. Riksarkivet: SE/RA/721073 Prosten Erik Petzäll B1:1 Manuskript 1924-1950. Remarks for the Cecilia-kör concert dated 18 March 1936.
\end{flushleft}
Student activism and youth movements within Aiboland increased tremendously throughout the decade in an effort to further emphasize Swedishness among the Estonian-Swedes. Some of the organizations, such as *Framåt* (Forward) and *Evighet* (Eternity), emerged under the purview of SOV and demonstrate a conscious effort at involving the younger generation. Additional organizations emerged at the Swedish-language schools. For example, teachers at the schools on Wormsö established the “Wormsö Cultural Youth Organization” in 1931.\footnote{“Wormsö Kulturella Ungdomsförbund” officially registered with the Estonian government. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.14.3.1687, Wormsi Rootsi Noorsoo Ühing. Letter and organization bylaws dated 30 November 1931, submitted by Tomas Gårdström, Johan Ahlros, and Lars Broman.} Student organizations at both Birkas and Hapsal created publications, *Birkasvänner* and *Vårbrytning*, to showcase their achievements and demonstrate their Swedish nationality. In Hapsal, the students formed a student society (with all of the students joining) called “Aibo” – from “Aibofolk,” the old name for the Estonian-Swedes – with the purpose of strengthening a love for their homes and their mother tongue, and “to gather and protect the precious old Estonian-Swedish folk culture.”\footnote{See Sven Boräng, “Ur skollivet,” *Vårbrytning*, May 1937. *Vårbrytning* was the student publication at Hapsal High School.}

All of these organizations demonstrate a continued effort to expand Swedish-language education, particularly in communities with a mixed Swedish and Estonian population, and emphasized the central role students played at strengthening a Swedish identity among the population. It was hoped that when the students returned to their hometowns, they would bring their Swedish national identification, their love for the Swedish language and Swedish culture with them.
Besides the advances in educational opportunities, there were two additional projects among the Estonian-Swedes that focused on expressing and solidifying their Swedish nationality: the organization of a festival to celebrate the Swedish districts in Estonia and the establishment of an Estonian-Swedish museum. In 1931, the idea for a common, regional festival to bring all of Aiboland together to highlight Estonian-Swedish culture circulated among the Estonian-Swedes. Held in Hapsal on 2 July 1932 after a year of planning, the Swedish Song and Folk Festival (Sång- och hembygdsfesten) was an occasion to celebrate Swedishness in Estonia. The festival united choirs, theater groups, folk dancers, as well as arts and crafts in one location. The festival highlighted the distinct cultural variations of each region, and showcased the pride the Estonian-Swedes felt for their Swedish identity.

The Song and Folk Festival also demonstrated the interconnectedness in the community between Swedes and Estonians. The audience comprised both Swedes and Estonians, and while the majority of the participants were Swedes, several prominent Estonians also participated. Agricultural Minister J. Zimmermann, Hapsal mayor Alver, and Hapsal high school principal A. Üksti all gave presentations. Renowned Estonian composer Cyrillus Kreek (1889-1962) led a joint choir from across Aiboland for a song festival portion.\textsuperscript{112}Kustbon regarded Zimmermann’s speech with particular significance, writing:

\textsuperscript{112}Kreek is among the top Estonian nationalist composers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with his music still performed regularly at the Estonian Song Festivals. Kreek grew up in Läänemaa province, and spent a few years of his childhood living on Wormsö, before continuing his education in Hapsal and St. Petersburg. Among his hundreds of compositions and arrangements, Kreek set
This speech gave official recognition of a thoughtfulness about, and a sympathy for, the Swedish minority, which completely free from all chauvinism placed in the day a benevolence toward a minority, completely lacking a counterpart in European politics. The warm and simultaneously binding speech for the Swedes gave the impression of high esteem, not least of all with the foreign guests.  

One can also see the cooperation between Swedes and Estonians with Swedish Folk Secretary Nikolai Blees, who gave his remarks in both Swedish and Estonian. Demonstrating the dual nature of Swedish nationality and Estonian citizenship, the orchestra played the Estonian national anthem, while the music selections included “Modersmålets sång” and concluded with “Vårt Land.” The Estonian-Swedes held another Folk Festival in the summer of 1935 on Wormsö around the midsummer celebration.

The second project was the creation of a museum dedicated to preserving and displaying cultural artifacts from across Aiboland. SOV and the Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia had long discussed the creation of a museum. In the summer of 1934, two Estonian-Swedish melodies, “Jag längtar av allt hjärta” (1921) and “Min högsta skatt, O Jesus kär.” (1922). See Cyrillus Kreek, Två estlandssvenska andliga folkvisor (Sweden, 1989).

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113 “Sång- och hembygdsfesten I Hapsal,” Kustbon, 12 July 1933.

114 See the previous chapter for more details on these two songs. As mentioned before, “Vårt Land” shares the same melody as the Estonian national anthem. Since the newspaper description lists the national anthem as having been played earlier in the festival, I must assume that the Swedes sang the Swedish language text to “Vårt Land” written by Runeberg as opposed to the Estonian text for the national anthem. See “Sång- och hembygdsfesten I Hapsal,” Kustbon, 12 July 1933.

115 “Alla till midsommarafotionens hembygdsfest på Vormsö,” Nya Kustbon, 1 June 1935.

116 The open-air museum in Stockholm, Skansen, unsuccessfully sought to transport a building from Aiboland to the museum: Artur Hazelius contacted Jakob Blees to locate a suitable house and make the arrangements, although the high cost to relocate the building to Stockholm led to the scraping of the plan. See Aman, En Bok om Estlands Svenskar 4, 130. But the Nordic Museum, also in Stockholm and also founded by Hazelius, collected numerous artifacts from across the region, where they are still part of their collection. Hazelius demonstrated an interest in the Estonian-Swedes and exchanged letters regarding the population with Karl Russworm (see chapter 1).
former Birkas Headmaster and ethnologist Per Söderbäck visited the Rågö islands. He discovered that the last smoke house (rökstuga) left on the island was empty and felt it should form the basis of a regional museum to preserve the unique culture, architecture, and artifacts found across Aiboland. Based on his initiative, local residents formed a museum committee in August of the same year. The committee relocated the smoke house to communal land, and on 11 August 1935 officially inaugurated the first museum dedicated the Estonian-Swedes. More than a thousand visitors came to Lilla Rågö for the opening, including a men’s choir from Nuckö, a mixed choir from Rickul, and more than fifty people from Sweden. Söderbäck gave the opening talk. The establishment of a museum signified that the cultural artifacts of Aiboland – artifacts outsiders from Sweden, Finland, and Russia had collected since the nineteenth century – were worthy of display. Particularly as outside influences brought in new ideas and consumer goods, the collection of older artifacts preserved their unique history and instilled a pride in their heritage.

**Developments in Aiboland**

The 1930s involved considerable change across numerous aspects of Aiboland – changes in educational opportunities, cultural expressions such as a museum and a folk

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117 Throughout his years at Birkas (1924-1927), Söderbäck frequently visited Rågö and actively documented the local culture. He coordinated his research with the Nordic Museum in Stockholm, and published a book on the Rågö-Swedes in 1940 (ironically published just as Soviet military forced the evacuation of the island). See Per Söderbäck, *Rågöarna* (Stockholm: Fritzles Kungliga Hovbokhandel, 1940).

118 SOV arkiv, B-16 Hembygdsmuseet.
festival, student and youth organizations, and healthcare. Aspects of modernization also appeared – including the first automobiles in the community and a move away from strip farming. Yet, distinct village traditions within the household and the regional dialects persisted despite continued efforts to more closely unify and homogenize the region and the culture.

Many of the changes came as a result of an expanded financial and moral support from groups in Sweden, although they were initiated and put into action by the Estonian-Swedes. The primary focus of these changes was to further protect Swedishness throughout Aiboland, particularly as the Estonian government pursued policies of Estonianization, by strengthening Swedish language opportunities, furthering interactions across Aiboland, and instilling a sense of pride in the Swedish heritage of the Estonian-Swedes.

Education was vital in the formation and strengthening of a Swedish identification among the Estonian-Swedes, as evidenced in 1936 concerning the school on Runö, and the local pastor’s emphasis on nationality. At that time, the only school on the island was located on the first floor of the vicarage. Runö Pastor Carl Gustaf Grönberg wrote to the Estonia Committee, “The question is about the best method to protect Swedishness on the island and raise the people culturally… If the school is to fulfill its role in the service of Swedishness and cultural work in a sufficient manner, it needs its own building.”

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Sweden increasingly played a prominent role in Swedish education in Estonia in the 1930s, including the creation of a Swedish professorship at Tartu University. The position, funded by the Swedish government, led to a more formalized intellectual exchange between Sweden and Estonia. Professor Per Weiselgren created one of those exchanges with the establishment of the Swedish-Estonian Society (Svensk-Estnisk Samfund). Among its many activities, the society published a yearly journal, Svio-Estonica, which presented academic scholarship in both Swedish and Estonian on topics linking the two countries (and occasionally about Aiboland specifically).

The greatest advancement in Swedish-language education in the 1930s in Aiboland, however, was the founding of a high school (gymnasium). Throughout the 1920s, the lack of a Swedish-language high school severely limited the Estonian-Swedes. Anyone holding a political office in local government needed a high school diploma, and unless the Estonian-Swedes continued their education in an Estonian school (or left Estonia for their education), they were shut out of political office.120 One can see the limited possibilities available through the life of Bernhard Schmidt from Nargö, the most famous Estonian-Swede, who achieved international reknown in 1930 through the invention of the Bernhard Telescope – which became the standard at most large observatories around the world.121 Despite his inquisitive nature, Schmidt had few

120 Both Hans Pöhl and Nikolai Blees noticed the lack of higher educational opportunities in 1928 when they sought to enroll their children (Karin Pöhl and Signe Blees) in a German high school. The Education Ministry notified Pöhl and Blees that since their children were Swedish and not German, they could not attend the German high school, but would need to attend an Estonian high school. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.33. Notices dated 9 October and 23 October 1928.

121 See Bernhard Schmidt’s obituary in “En världsberömd Estlandssvensk död,” Nya Kustbon, 17 January 1936.
educational opportunities in Estonia, and instead headed first to Sweden and then to Germany, where he made his discoveries and perfected his telescope.\footnote{See Erik Schmidt, \textit{Optical Illusions: The Life Story of Bernhard Schmidt} (Tallinn: Estonian Academic Publishers, 1995).}

One of the first challenges in the establishment of the high school was its location. Some individuals in the Estonian-Swedish community argued for the creation of the school in Nuckö, next to Birkas. However, Birkas already strained the resources of the local community, and a second boarding school in the region would be almost impossible to support. The SOV board therefore decided to locate the school in Hapsal – primarily an Estonian town, but long regarded as the capital of Aiboland due to its central geographic location.\footnote{See Aman, \textit{En bok om Estlands svenskar 4}, 530.} The Estonian-Swedes acquired student housing, though largely through funding from Sweden, and in particular from Prince Folke Bernadotte.\footnote{Riksarkivet: SE/RA/730610 A1:1 Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt Stockholms lokalförening: Estlandsutskottet. See letter from Sigurd Curman dated 30 June 1937.}

The school opening also came with the support of local Estonians. The small number of Swedish students made the creation of a separate school difficult. However, the Estonian high school principal in Hapsal, Anton Üksti, welcomed the Swedish-language high school to run parallel to the Estonian school, with him presiding as principal over both.\footnote{Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1108.8.84. Letter dated 11 April 1931 from Blees to Julius Juhlin, Riksföreningen, Stockholm. Blees commented that Üksti happily agreed to support the Swedish school, was “favorably disposed toward the Swedes,” and would be a tremendous asset, as he was Estonian and had the confidence of the Estonian government.} Representing a significant cooperation between Swedes and
Estonians, Üksti made significant gestures to the new school and remained a firm supporter of the Swedish high school throughout his tenure.

Despite the troubles with Birkas and the burgeoning Blees-Westerblom feud, the first Swedish-language high school opened in Hapsal on 28 August 1931 with considerable fanfare. In addition to educating Estonian-Swedish youth, a central purpose of the school was to strengthen Swedish linguistic skills in Aiboland, and hopefully move a step closer to attaining cultural autonomy within the Estonian state, as outlined in the 1924 Cultural Autonomy Law (see previous chapter). By the mid-1930s, the Swedish government also directly supported the Hapsal high school, coordinated by the Estonia Committee. The Swedish Riksdag (Parliament) provided funding, increasing the allocations from 6,000 crowns in 1936 to 10,000 crowns in 1937 and 12,000 crowns in 1938. The increased funding from the Swedish government was a direct result of domestic Swedish political changes and the Social Democrats’ rise to power in 1933. With the new political party at the helm came changing views about the role of the government in the lives of the people, shifting toward the development of the Swedish welfare state.

The first class graduated from the Swedish Hapsal high school on 13 June 1936. The graduation of 5 girls and 6 boys was a moment of tremendous celebration for the entire Estonian-Swedish community. Numerous representatives from Sweden attended, including donors Folke Bernadotte and Folke Bökman, Sigurd Curman, and consul

Fagraeus. Kustbon devoted significant coverage of the graduation, heralding it as the high point in the progression of the community and looking towards the future with greater hope.

May it be said that this advantage is binding. The Estonian-Swedes consider it their right to expect something from these young men and women... A group of Estonian-Swedes have received a blast forward in life. May it also mean a blast forward for the Estonian-Swedes as a whole.

The newspaper’s coverage also focused on framing Hapsal (and Swedish-language in general) as the foundation of the Estonian-Swedish identity.

However, the high school brought a new issue of concern for Aiboland. Upon graduation, there were few economic or professional opportunities available to the graduates in Aiboland to use the newly acquired knowledge. The youth increasingly looked elsewhere, particularly toward Sweden, to make a living. Even younger Estonian-Swedes who lacked the higher education saw better opportunities outside of Aiboland. Young Estonian-Swedish girls in particular moved to Stockholm in greater numbers to work as housekeepers, and once there, many married Swedish men. For some, the move was only to be a temporary relocation. Yet, there was a growing fear among the Estonian-Swedish leaders that these individuals would remain abroad.

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129 “Till de första estlandssvenska studenterna,” Kustbon, 11 June 1936.

130 In a 1953 Kustbon article Elmar Nyman suggests, “If a relocation action committee had been created for example in the autumn of 1938, it would appear probable that a large portion of the Swedish villagers would have uprooted.” Throughout the 1930s, the Estonian-Swedes saw increased economic opportunities abroad than were available in their home districts. See “Då överflynningsanken väcktes.” Elmar Nyman. Kustbon, July 1953.
The Swedish elders on Runö in particular were concerned about the loss of the younger population. Many girls from Runö headed to Sweden for employment as housekeepers. Runö Pastor Grönberg implored the Estonia Committee to impose a 2-year limit on visa permits for these girls, requiring them to return to Runö at the end of that time. Grönberg viewed the loss of so many Runö girls to Sweden as a “great danger” to the future of the island and the Runö-Swedes.131 Kustbon regularly directed its attention on the loss of this important segment of the community, encouraging them to return after being abroad for a few years and not to forget the land of their forefathers.

Another demographic concern among Estonian-Swedish leaders was the rise in intermarriage between Swedes and Estonians. Estonian laws regarding intermarriage required children to be educated in Estonian, meaning there was a significantly higher potential of assimilation for the Swedes. One attempt by SOV to overcome the appeal of Sweden or the threat from intermarriage was an increased focus on the youth and a stronger effort to strengthen concepts of Swedishness and pride in Aiboland among the younger generation.

The physical health of the Estonian-Swedes was also an area that Estonian-Swedish elites believed was in need of improvements. Since the arrival of the missionaries in the nineteenth century, numerous outsiders brought knowledge and medical advancements to the Estonian-Swedes. However, one of the problems with healthcare in Aiboland was, like the shortages in education and religion, the community

lacked qualified individuals. The Estonian-Swedes were therefore reliant on either Estonians or Swedes from abroad to fill in the gaps. Oftentimes (as was the case with the missionaries), pastors from Sweden brought along basic medical books to be consulted in emergencies. However, sometimes this basic knowledge was not enough, and the isolated locations hampered quick responses. In February 1932, for example, Runö faced an outbreak of diphtheria, which eventually killed four children. Thankfully, the Estonian government had recently installed a radio on the island and the residents signaled for help, although even then it took two attempts for doctors and medical supplies to reach the island because of the deep ice that locked them in.

To help overcome this shortage, Swedish Archbishop Nathan Söderblom donated 1000 Swedish crowns for the establishment of a health clinic on Wormsö (which had the largest concentrated Swedish population), and the Uppsala Cathedral donated an additional 800 crowns. Wormsö parishioners volunteered their time to construct the clinic. The Estonian government required registration for the personnel, as the initial nurse, Maria Lindström, came from Sweden. The clinic officially opened on 29

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133 S-l., “Runö hemsökes av difteri,” Kustbon, 11 February 1932. The islanders originally thought the symptoms were a common cold, and took action after the first child died.
September 1935. While only in one region of Aiboland, it provided a valuable resource for the community, and was a source of tremendous pride.

**Conclusion**

As the decade came to a close, the feud between Blees and Westerblom once again surfaced over the issue of Birkas. Possibly instigated by Blees, in the autumn of 1939 the Estonian government sought to create an administrative board for Birkas (Stiftelsen Birkas), which would be independent of SOV and would in large part remove the oversight of the National Association (and the Estonia Committee). Leading Estonian-Swedes comprised the newly created board: three representatives from SOV (including Westerblom), two members of the Swedish Teachers’ Association, two Birkas students, the Birkas headmaster (now Fridolf Isberg), a representative from the local municipality, and the Swedish Folk Secretary (Blees). The final member of the board was the Education Minister, the only non-Swede. In a letter from Westerblom to Sigurd Curman about the establishment of the board, Westerblom indicates that both he and Blees expressed a positive desire to work well with each other. However, both Westerblom and Blees received nominations for the chairman position, which Blees won by a vote of six to five. Westerblom wrote:

> For me personally, and for the SOV board, the whole thing was a painful defeat. To have fought with and for Birkas for over twenty years in both good and bad times, and then in a moment to be forced to turn over the
whole operation to some more-or-less irresponsible people is not easy. The only solace is that the finances are in safe hands.136

Westerblom stated that SOV would remain involved with the board and help out where they could, but that they would keep a very close eye on the audits and complain about any wrong move.

The 1930s was a period of significant changes in the Estonian-Swedish community – and the highpoint of Estonian-Swedish culture. While there were numerous challenges, the decade also led to a shift in mentality that more closely linked the Estonian-Swedes to the pan-Swedish movement and included greater intervention from the Swedish government (and Swedish royalty). These connections would prove crucial in saving the Estonian-Swedish community during the Second World War, as will be seen in the next two chapters. However, despite the decade-long feud between Westerblom and Blees, when the Estonian-Swedes saw potential threats to Aiboland in the summer of 1940, they put aside their differences and worked closely together for the benefit of the entire community.

CHAPTER 4

THE SCHOOLTEACHER: SOVIETS AND THE BEGINNING OF THE END

In 1939 Fridolf Isberg became the first – and also the last – Estonian-Swedish headmaster of the Birkas Folk School,1 in part, as a consequence of the departure of Pelle Byström (headmaster from 1935) who left for Sweden, fearing the potential of war in the region.2 However, instead of a moment of tremendous celebration for the community’s cultural progress, it was the beginning of the end. Soon after Isberg assumed the title of headmaster, he realized the precarious position of the Swedes living along the coast of Estonia.

The political development in the country [from 1939-1943] clearly demonstrated that the Swedish people’s settlement in Estonia would soon be a closed chapter, and therefore I began in earnest to record everything that had to do with our people’s language and their characteristic manners and usage.3

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1 Eesti Riigiarhiiv: ERA.1098.3.409. Isberg, Fridolf Andreese 01.11.1939-01.04.1943. Notice to the Ministry of Education, dated 13 July 1940, that effective 1 August 1940 Isberg is the headmaster. Isberg’s name was mentioned as a possible headmaster in 1935, but was quickly dismissed by Sigurd Curman and Anders Koskull as part of the power struggle between Nikolai Blees and Mathias Westerblom mentioned in the previous chapter. See Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarkiv Tallinn F1:52 Birkas. 23 July 1936 letter from Advokaten Sven Hallström to Koskull, 29 July 1936 letter from Koskull to Curman, and 11 August 1936 letter from Koskull to Curman.

2 Byström’s resignation became effective 1 November 1939. See “Kring folkhög- och lantbruksskolan,” Kustbon, 30 October 1939.

The Soviet occupation of Estonia, beginning in June 1940, began a process that meant that the 700-plus years of Swedes living in the region would be soon over. The encroachment of the Red Army across Aiboland required relocation to the mainland for many Swedes and diminished the economic and cultural livelihood of the region. Isberg, and others in Aiboland, saw only two paths for the coming years: be assimilated into the larger Estonian population or emigrate to Sweden.

As Isberg assumed his new position, he immediately faced critical challenges, particularly the Soviet military control of the Birkas school buildings. Isberg struggled to keep the school open through the changing political situation. But his greatest legacy is the historical record he created. As a scholar he realized the end of this history could mean the loss of the unique cultural and linguistic heritage of the Estonian-Swedes. Isberg began what would be a momentous task of collecting and documenting as much of the culture – and especially family histories – in his region as he could before they disappeared. This research and collection work provided the material for his scholarly works in the following decades when he was based in Sweden – and acted as a significant addition to the post-war process of documenting and preserving the Estonian-Swedish culture.

Isberg was one of approximately 8,000 – almost the entire Estonian-Swedish population – to become disillusioned with events in Estonia during the Second World

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4 The Estonia Committee of the National Association, who coordinated funding of Birkas noted the Soviet take-over at their 27 October 1939 meeting. See Riksarkivet: SE/RA/730710: Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt Stockholms lokalförening Estlandsutskottet, A1:2. 27 October 1939 minutes. Kustbon also made reference to the loss of the Birkas location, indicating the temporary relocation of the school to Wormsö. See “Kring folkhög- och lantbruksskolan,” Kustbon, 30 October 1939.
War and to seek emigration to Sweden. Estonia’s geographical location placed it between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and left it helpless to avoid direct involvement in the war, with devastating consequences. The Soviet and Nazi occupations of Estonia were particularly influential for the region’s minority populations. During the Second World War, three of the main minority groups from the Interwar years almost entirely disappeared. Hitler repatriated the Baltic Germans in 1939, the Jews either fled east with the 1941 Soviet withdrawal or were killed by Nazi Germany (Estonia carried the designation of “Juden-frei”), and most of the Estonian-Swedes relocated to Sweden by 1944 (the few that remained largely assimilated into the larger population). The Russians were the only sizable minority group to remain after the war.

Daily life during the occupation varied depending on location and individual social status. As was the case in the First World War, the islands and coastal regions became possible security threats for the Soviet Union, resulting in greater military presence. The arriving military forces necessitated relocations of the Swedes and limited access to coastal regions. Although much of Soviet policy was designed to incorporate the Estonian-Swedes into the Soviet Union, intellectuals – which the Estonian-Swedes still had only a few of – became particular targets of government repression as possible sources of resistance. Heated discussions of survival or escape dominated family conversation, while public discourse became highly censored and shaped by those in power.
Sweden was the only country in northern Europe to avoid direct involvement in the Second World War,\(^5\) although the government pursued policies that hardly kept Sweden neutral. However, Sweden’s non-involvement in the war created opportunities for the Estonian-Swedes, particularly as the Swedish government was increasingly willing to take an active position of support for the population. Although the fate of the Estonian-Swedes largely relied, not unexpectedly, on their rulers – the Soviet Union (and later Nazi Germany) – the active role Sweden took in the war years was decisive for their relocation to their ancient homeland.

For decades, the Estonian-Swedish community acted within the confines of the laws of those controlling the region, while also working to further develop their language and cultural identity as a community of Swedes. However, of all the periods, the Second World War proved the most challenging with hardly any room or opportunity to freely exercise their culture – Soviet policy dictated nationalities construct their culture as socialist in content, national in form, and there was close oversight and censorship by government officials.

Isberg was not alone in believing it was the final chapter for the Swedes living in Estonia. Beginning in the summer of 1940, thoughts among the Estonian-Swedes moved from their survival in Estonia to desires to relocate to Sweden fairly quickly. But the journey from Estonia to Sweden proved difficult – whether working through the political

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\(^5\) Nazi Germany occupied both Norway and Denmark from 9 April 1940 until the end of the war. Finland and the Soviet Union fought the so-called Winter War; in connection with the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, Finland launched the Continuation War to reclaim lost territory from the Soviet Union.
structures to travel legally with the support of the government controlling the region or to locate a boat and make the journey illegally across open water battling storms and gunfire from passing military vessels, as many increasingly did.

During the first period of Soviet control of Estonia, 1940-1941, Isberg represents the position of minority populations in changing political circumstances and the connections between the Estonian-Swedes and the Soviet Estonian government. Unlike the other periods covered in this dissertation, the Soviet government severed contact between Aiboland and Sweden, although even without this connection Sweden continued to play an important function in the identification of the Estonian-Swedes and their reception to Soviet power controls. Isberg’s actions demonstrate the need to work with the government in power in order for a minority population to continue educational possibilities.

Start of the Second World War

As the threat of a war in Europe grew in the late 1930s, the position of the small states between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union became more precarious, as they would be powerless to prevent aggressive moves by their more powerful neighbors. The two great powers decided the fate of Eastern Europe on 23 August 1939, as Nazi Germany and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics signed a Non-Aggression Pact in Moscow, also referred to as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Pact held benefits for both
sides and enabled Nazi Germany to invade Poland. Vyacheslav Molotov and Joachim von Ribbentrop also signed an additional protocol, whose contents initially remained secret, dividing Eastern Europe into Soviet and German spheres of influence. The first article of this protocol divided up the Baltic States: “In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement in the areas belonging to the Baltic States (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), the northern boundary of Lithuania shall represent the boundary of the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R.” The two powers amended the pact to include all of Lithuania in the Soviet sphere in September 1939. Beginning with the August 1939 signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and in particular the secret protocols that placed Estonia within the Soviet sphere, Soviet pressure increased on the sovereignty of Estonia.

The significance of the Non-Aggression Pact on the Baltic States remained unclear to many in the region. Kustbon made no mention at all of the signing of the Pact, unaware of the significance for the Estonian-Swedes even though international affairs, particularly those related to either Germany or the Soviet Union, received regular attention in the newspaper. A look at coverage in Kustbon as the war began demonstrates

6 The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact caused concern in Sweden regarding the delicate balance of power in the Baltic Sea region. See United States Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch. Sweden and the USSR: The Swedish Attitude and Policy. R&A No. 2972. 30 June 1945. 8. According to the report: “Sweden in the past has regarded Germany as the natural great power balance to the USSR by virtue of Germany’s geographic position and military power. The most satisfactory solution of the German-Russian problem from the Swedish viewpoint would be an equilibrium of their power so that neither would be able to exercise a dominant role in northern Europe.”

the knowledge and concerns within the Estonian-Swedish community. The 1 September 1939 issue of Kustbon – prepared and sent to press before the German invasion of Poland – had an opening article on the prospects of war between Germany and Poland, indicating that like the earlier world war, a war would not remain localized but spread rapidly to include many states. The article, by A. Stahl, goes on to say, “A new world war would have even more catastrophic consequences than the earlier one.”

While the possibility of war appears throughout the issue, there is no indication of any perceived threat to Estonia, with the exception of one small notice on the last page: “Swedes flee from the Baltic region.” The notice stated that tourists visiting the region from Sweden had in the previous few days quickly packed their bags and taken the first boat or airplane back to Sweden. The notice concluded, “The latest political incidents first cause a panicked mood that has since died down.”

The most immediate threat from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact for Estonia came when the Soviet Union argued that Estonia could not defend its borders against attack, which in turn would make the Soviet Union vulnerable. In September 1939, the Polish submarine “Orzel” entered Estonian waters, and according to Estonia’s neutrality, should have been captured. However, the Estonians took their time and on 18 September, the submarine escaped. The Soviet navy took the incident as an excuse to repeatedly enter

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8 A.S. “Krig eller Fred?” Kustbon, 1 September 1939.
9 N.D.A. “Svensk flykt från Balticum.” Kustbon, 1 September 1939.
Estonian waters to look for the submarine.\textsuperscript{10} Six days later, on 24 September, Molotov proposed a pact of mutual assistance between Estonia and the Soviet Union that would allow the Soviet Union to establish military bases on Estonian territory – on Saaremaa, Hiiumaa, and in the Paldiski area.\textsuperscript{11}

The Estonian government had nowhere to turn for assistance, and as officials in Tallinn discussed the proposal, Soviet military planes circled above and the Red Army amassed large numbers of troops on the Estonian-Soviet Union border.\textsuperscript{12} The government had to agree to the terms, and in final negotiations in Moscow succeeded only in reducing the number of Soviet soldiers to be stationed on the bases. Estonian Foreign Minister Karl Selter and Molotov signed the pact of mutual assistance on 28 September. The agreement (as well as a secret protocol with the limit of 25,000 Soviet troops) specified that both sides would need to provide assistance if the other were attacked or in danger of an attack, that the Soviet Union would sell Estonia weapons, and that assistance would only be given when the partner requested it. Additionally, the Soviet Union gave a verbal agreement to respect Estonian sovereignty and domestic affairs.\textsuperscript{13} A Soviet military delegation arrived in Tallinn on 2 October to conclude specific details, including locations for the bases. Soviet troops began arriving 18 October.


\textsuperscript{11} The 30 September 1939 issue of \textit{Kustbon} includes the agreement on its first page – publishing a translation of the agreement – however, there is no analysis of this agreement and its potential impact for the Estonian-Swedes. There were numerous Swedish villages in the Paldiski area, however.

\textsuperscript{12} Tannberg, \textit{History of Estonia}, 260.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 260-261.
In the 13 October 1939 issue of *Kustbon*, the editors published assurances from Estonian Propaganda Minister Oidermaa that there was no reason to be nervous about the military base agreement or the arrival of Soviet armed forces. Oidermaa told representatives from Estonian newspapers that the exact location for the bases was still under discussion, and that the public would be notified long before the Soviet troops were to arrive. The article states, “In those districts where the Russian troops are to be located, there are rumors circulating that the local population will be forced to evacuate their farms, leave their possessions, or that it will be completely taken from them. One does not need to fear something like that.”

Another visible sign of the approaching war for Estonia appeared on 7 October 1939 when the German government issued a call to all Germans living in the Baltic region to relocate to their ancient homeland. Seven months later, 14,000 people left Estonia – Baltic Germans and “Germanized” Estonians. The repatriation of the Baltic Germans caused considerable concern among the Estonian-Swedes. Many saw the Baltic Germans’ departure as a sign of the impending war coming to Estonia. However, *Kustbon* reflected a different position, perhaps attempting to calm the population, or to avoid potential conflicts with the Estonian government, whose position *Kustbon* took

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15 Similar calls were made for Germans living in the Soviet Union and Italy. See Tannberg, *History of Estonia*, 261-262.

without criticism. An article by A. Stahl in the 13 October issue presented minority questions and problems, but completely dismissed these concerns as not a suitable reason for emigration to Sweden. He writes, “But Estonia’s majority population have settled the issue so that this minority problem does not cause any notable sources of irritation, and if such are revealed someplace, the public at large has with good intentions tried to liquidate [the sources of conflict].”

In recollections after the war, however, a different picture emerges. Numerous memoirs indicate that some of the Estonian-Swedes felt that Sweden would soon follow Germany’s lead and would issue a similar call, although nothing ever came. School teacher Viktor Aman, born 1912 in Nuckö, quickly married his girlfriend Linda, anticipating a full-scale relocation of the Estonian-Swedes. Linda was Estonian, meaning she would not have been able to leave with Aman unless they were married. Carl Mothander reflected ten years after the war, “But no petition came from Sweden. For a great number of days, the Estonian-Swedes sat ready, their suitcases packed, waiting for an offer from Sweden. But Sweden was cowardly. The reason why has never been known.” For his part, however, Mothander had two advantages over the Estonian-

20 “För tio år sen: En återblick på det förgångna.” Major Carl Mothander. Kustbon, July 1953. Mothander, discussed in the previous chapter, was the Swedish-born outspoken friend of Nikolai Blees in the 1930s, and occasional journalist who moved to Estonia during the War of Independence.
Swedes. First, he was a Swedish citizen, and second, his wife was a Baltic German, either of which enabled Mothander to leave the region easily. Mothander and his wife relocated to Sweden for the duration of the war.\textsuperscript{21}

While Germany and the Soviet Union came to an agreement on the fate of the Baltic Germans and their relocation, the Swedish government was not in a position to make an equivalent request for the Estonian-Swedes. There was sufficient antagonism between the Baltic Germans and the Estonians, as well as the historical legacy of the Baltic German domination throughout tsarist Russian control, to justify to the Estonian government the benefit of relocation for the Baltic Germans. The Estonian-Swedes, on the other hand, had a neutral history with hardly any antagonism toward the Estonians.

Additionally, after the Soviet annexation of Estonia, Sweden’s connection to Finland – Sweden unofficially supported Finland with the outbreak of the Winter War (sometimes also referred to as the Russo-Finnish War) in November 1939 – hampered negotiations with the Soviet Union over the fate of the Estonian-Swedes.\textsuperscript{22}

By at least autumn 1939, the diplomatic relationship between Sweden and the Soviet Union was tenuous, compounded by the Winter War, and to a lesser extent, Sweden’s close relationship with Germany. In December 1939 Sweden formed a

\textsuperscript{21} As will be discussed in the next chapter, Mothander played a significant role in reestablishing contact with the Estonian-Swedes, and acting as an intermediary between the Swedish and German governments during the Nazi occupation of the region.

Coalition Government (Samlingsregering) under the leadership of the Social Democratic party. The new government comprised representatives of all of the political parties except the Communists in a conscious effort to present a united front for their policy to remain out of the war and to avoid political dissent.23 Throughout the Second World War, Sweden was hardly a neutral country. Official policy was non-involvement at whatever cost, which at times favored Nazi Germany and late in the war favored the Allied powers. However, Sweden also displayed anti-Soviet sentiments – unofficially.

Sweden’s connection to Finland was fairly well known by the Soviet Union. While the official policy of the Coalition Government was to remain neutral, large numbers of Swedish civilians volunteered in the Finnish army. The Swedish military even permitted leaves of absence, enabling soldiers to participate in fighting against the Soviet Union.24 Throughout the Winter War, Sweden continued to send ammunition supplies to aid in the fighting in Finland, with many Swedes calling out “Finland’s cause is our cause” (Finlands sak är vår), wanting the government to take a more active and official role to support Finland. Swedish historian Steven Koblik states: “There was broad public sympathy for Finland as it fought alone against the Russian aggressor…. The heart of the [Swedish] government’s policy was to end the war as quickly as possible

23 Christian Günther, a political neutral, replaced Rikard Sandler as the foreign minister largely because Sandler had openly argued for Swedish aid to Finland in the event of a Soviet attack. See Erik Lönnroth, “Sweden’s Ambiguous Neutrality” in Scandinavian Journal of History, 2 (1977), p.99. As the war continued, the Communist Party in Sweden, excluded from the Coalition Government, was the only party in vocal opposition to official policy. This resulted in a significant increase in the 1944 election.

and to try to avoid further great power complications.”

The Swedish government sent signs of support for Finland’s cause and attempted to work in diplomatic arenas to end the conflict, but also informed the Finnish government not to count on any Swedish military support. Swedish ambassador Assarsson recalls numerous tense meetings with Molotov, principally stemming from Sweden’s support of Finland. This tense relationship therefore limited the ability of the Swedish government to intervene on behalf of the Estonian-Swedes.

**Military Base Relocations**

The military base agreement between Estonia and the Soviet Union initially allowed for the creation of military bases on the islands of Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, and on the mainland around Paldiski (the Rågö islands were off the coast of Paldiski). As discussions continued on the exact locations of bases, a few other islands were also affected. Of consequence for the Estonian-Swedish community, the Soviet military was to take control of the Swedish-populated islands of Odensholm, both Rågö islands, and

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26 See W.M. Carlgren, *Swedish Foreign Policy During the Second World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 24. This support for Finland even continued in the Continuation War (1941-1944); an American intelligence report dated 26 June 1942 reported the Soviets sinking a Swedish ship loaded with ammunition, escorted by Finnish torpedo-boats, near the Åland Islands. See United States Department of State, *Swedish Shipping Losses in the Baltic*, 319-831/42. Sweden: 26 June 1942.

27 Assarsson, *I Skuggan Av Stalin*. 201
Nargö beginning in July 1940. Approximately 600 Estonian-Swedes (7.5 percent of the Swedish population) were to lose their homes and be relocated.

With relocation imminent, the Swedes on Rågö, Nargö, and Odensholm were unsure of what awaited them. Sigrid Öström, born 1921 on Small Rågö, remembers the period of the relocation, and the difficulty for the people to understand the implications of the base agreements: “Most people remembered the First World War, when one had to live peacefully with both German and Russian [soldiers]. No one understood that we would be forced to move this time.” At best, they could relocate to the mainland and live in other villages of Aiboland, but these Swedish areas were already overcrowded. Another proposal from the Estonian government called for the few hundred Estonians living on Wormsö to relocate to the mainland and be replaced with Swedes, which would have made the island completely Swedish. However, when the Soviet Union argued for the use of additional regions for military bases and support staff, including apartments in Tallinn, the Estonian government deemed the Wormsö proposal unfeasible. Considering the impracticality of a double relocation (Swedes to Wormsö and Estonians to other locations), they argued that the increased strain on the Estonian government prevented adequate and quick relocation of the people.

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28 Odensholm, together with the Hankö peninsula in Finland were to act as protection for the Bay of Finland.


The worst possibility in the opinion of the Estonian-Swedish elite, and the most likely scenario, was for the Swedes to be relocated to the mainland and live in predominantly Estonian regions. Despite the legal protections afforded a minority population, living in Estonian villages would make Swedish-language education or church services difficult, raising the definite possibility of a rapid assimilation of the minority. Additionally, those who had made their living fishing would most likely have no access to the water, forcing them to learn a new trade. Therefore, the evacuation of the islands could result in significant cultural and economic threats to the Estonian-Swedish communities.

There was one additional possibility, however, which grew in popularity among the Estonian-Swedes as the evacuation date neared: turn to Sweden and appeal for support. Specifically, relocate the displaced Estonian-Swedes to Sweden rather than to the Estonian mainland. Some Nargö fishermen acted independently rather than seek any government decision, and used their own boats to simply take their families to Sweden before the Soviet navy increased patrols of the coastline.\(^{31}\)

On 11 February 1940, Swedish ambassador in Estonia Svante Hellstedt wrote to the Swedish Foreign Ministry concerning the eventual evacuation of the Rågö-Swedes, which would affect 380 people. He stated that while the populations of the other islands could more readily relocate to other parts of Aiboland, the Rågö-Swedes had been slated to relocate to Estonian regions. Hellstedt forcefully advocated for the relocation of those

affected to Sweden – the first such appeal coming from the Swedish consulate. He argued that it was not an easy decision: “The Estonian-Swedes feel a great affinity with us and are proud of their origins and their language, but forsaking their paternal land and relocating to Sweden is certainly only seen by them as the last resort.” The ties between the people and their land was just as important to their identification as was their affection for their language. Hellstedt became an outspoken advocate within the Swedish Foreign Ministry for the relocation of the displaced Estonian-Swedes.

Using the extensive connections developed throughout the 1930s, Mathias Westerblom and Nikolai Blees, as the head of SOV and the Swedish Folk Secretary respectively, communicated on behalf of the affected regions with the Swedish embassy in Tallinn and directly with Stockholm. Despite their decade-long feud (see the previous chapter), Westerblom and Blees presented a united front in addressing this issue, highlighting the cultural and economic threats in their appeals. They argued that the evacuations would lead to assimilation into the Estonian communities and economic ruin. Pointedly, Westerblom denied that the relocation request reflected any political misgivings about the Estonian-Swedes’ position within the Estonian state, even after the Estonianization policies of the late 1930s, or even the suggestion of an increased Soviet presence in the region. He wrote in June 1940:

If this Swedish folk-branch [svenshetens folkspillra], that for hundreds of years protected their national character, language, and culture, with such a change now express a desire to emigrate to Sweden, it is not for cowardice

over the political situation or with a hope for a more comfortable and sorrow-free life, rather solely to be able to continue the struggle for their existence as Swedes for future generations.33 Westerblom argued that if not for the economic and cultural threats the community now faced, the displaced Swedes would not be looking to leave Estonia. Such an appeal reaffirmed Hellstedt’s argument to the Swedish Foreign Ministry that those seeking to emigrate only did so because of cultural and economic conditions, appealing directly to Sweden’s role as a protector of Swedes and Swedish nationalist sentiments.

Adding to the cultural threat facing the community by relocation to the Estonian mainland, Hellstedt reported to Stockholm on the inability of the Swedish minority to put pressure on, or have their voices heard by, the Estonian government (in contrast to the German or Russian minorities). He wrote that the Swedes had no representative in the Riigikogu, SOV was a “meek” organization with limited resources, and their newspaper, Kustbon, was “insignificant” in shaping opinion among the government.34 He implied, therefore, that it was up to Sweden to speak up for and protect the Estonian-Swedes.

In preparation for the June 1940 evacuation of the islands, Estonian government representatives and Red Army officials visited each household, documenting the buildings, equipment, farm animals, and household goods which were to be abandoned. In the military base negotiations, the Soviet Union agreed to reimburse those displaced – although reimbursement never occurred. A few months earlier, Per Söderback, a former...

Birkas headmaster and an ethnographer for the Nordic Museum in Stockholm, visited the region, seeking artifacts that he feared would be lost with the Red Army occupation. Söderbäck brought numerous artifacts and documents – including the 1650 letter from Queen Christina that documented the islanders’ legal rights and protections – back to Stockholm for safe keeping.35

As the evacuation of the islands neared, the contents of the Rågö Museum required relocation. Officials from the Estonian Folk Museum visited the island, inventoried the collection, and finally relocated the artifacts to Tartu.36 The Rågö Museum’s guestbook (which ended up in the SOV collection in Stockholm) reflects these final visitors to the museum – the Estonian Folk Museum officials, as well as a Red Army officer who officially oversaw the transfer.37

Estonian ethnographers also visited the islands in the final days to make last minute documentation of the culture and take numerous photographs as the Swedes packed up their households, transported everything to the dock, and loaded the waiting vessels to carry them to the mainland. The ethnographers even witnessed and

35 Throughout the Second World War, individuals and groups took numerous artifacts and documents from the history of the Estonian-Swedes and brought them to Sweden – depositing them into collections of the Nordic Museum, the History Museum, or the collection of SOV. In 2006, Sweden returned a number of these artifacts – the religious artifacts and the altar from the church on Wormsö – to Estonia. See Calle Pauli, “Estland får tillbaka kyrkoskatter,” Dagens Nyheter, 27 September 2006.

36 See A.S., “Var placera Rågö bygdemuseum?” Kustbon, 7 June 1940. Beginning in December 1939, there were early discussions over the creation of a museum on Wormsö. See “Hembygdsmuseum på Wormsö”, Kustbon, 1 December 1939, and Hj. Pöhl, “Vormsö får bygdemuseum,” Kustbon, 20 December 1939. The idea of a Wormsö museum apparently never materialized, and discussions over the relocation of the Rågö museum never included a move to Wormsö.

37 SOV arkiv. Rågömuseets gästbok.
documented the final wedding celebration on Odensholm – a double wedding of Sigfrid Erkas and Elvine Brus, Fredrik Brus and Meta Marks in June 1940. The wedding ceremony joined the two couples, but equally marked a solemn occasion as the final community celebration on Odensholm after hundreds of years.³⁸

The transfer of the islands to the Red Army also involved extensive construction. Estonian-Swede Valter Erkas, born 1921 on Odensholm, remembers the preparation for the military bases on the island:

I was big enough that I could drive a freighter. I drove between Odensholm and the mainland and carried out both Russian servicemen and a little bit of everything, and even workers... There was certainly a lot of work to be done, they would fortify and build bunkers and make landing platforms, and for those large cannons that were built, so they were pressed for time.³⁹

But while the preparations for the military takeover where under way, it was still uncertain where the Estonian government would relocate the displaced Estonian-Swedes.

In the summer of 1940, the Estonian-Swedes also began to call publically for emigration to Sweden. A group of 56 Estonian-Swedish men from the Rågö islands, on behalf of their families, sent a petition to Sweden. It read:

We the undersigned Small and Large Rågö-Swedes, who soon will be evacuated from our home islands, have thoroughly examined the possibilities that exist for our settlement on our country’s mainland coast, and we have in that respect found that there is no manner to support ourselves in those new conditions. The land allotments are too small and the fishing possibilities severely restricted; if we start our new paths in life

³⁸ Ethnographer E. Koern photographed the wedding and the final days on Odensholm. See Eesti Rahvamuuseum, Foto kataloog 64: Rongkäigudaar Osmussaare.

under these conditions we will die out. Our prayer is for Mother Svea to take care of us.\(^{40}\)

The appeal to “Mother Svea” was an effort to manipulate connections to Swedish nationalism, and reinforced the idea that the Estonian-Swedes required assistance from Sweden, as they had in previous periods. The Rågö petition did not fall on deaf ears (particularly as Sweden saw the effects of war and occupation on neighboring Denmark and Norway), and the Swedish government began debating the feasibility of relocation to Sweden.

Following an exchange of several reports and dispatches between Tallinn and Stockholm, Sweden communicated to Estonian officials its willingness to accept the displaced Swedes.\(^{41}\) However, Estonia did not welcome the suggestion from Sweden that their government could not adequately handle the relocation process. Estonian Foreign Minister Piip met with Hellstedt and indicated that the Estonian government could solve the problem themselves, and assured Hellstedt that the government valued the Swedish minority, remarking that their patriotism and loyalty had never been in question, and that they were good citizens of Estonia.\(^{42}\)

\(^{40}\) Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 F1:12. Rågö petition (not dated). “Svea” is the mythical and poetic female representation of Sweden, similar to Marianne in France or Germania in Germany.

\(^{41}\) Sweden had taken a similar position in 1929 with the Ukrainian-Swedes, although with considerably negative consequences, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

While discussions continued regarding possible relocation to Sweden, the islanders evacuated to the mainland in June. Arnold Lindgren, born 1931 on Large Rågö, remembers moving inland when he was a child:

“We moved to the mainland; the closest mainland region, that was Vippal village where there were indeed also Estonian-Swedes, but they lived in coastal villages and we moved further inland. The village that we lived in had only an Estonian-speaking population... So it was that we had to search where we could, to relatives or acquaintances, if they had a small room to shelter people in.”

Despite efforts by the Estonian government to coordinate the evacuation, memoirs and oral histories of the time (such as Lindgren’s) indicate that individual displaced families largely looked for suitable places to live on their own.

As the evacuation date neared, Estonia faced greater relocation demands to accommodate incoming Soviet soldiers. The government eventually approved the joint or group visa application for 110 Rågö-Swedes. While more individuals on Rågö wished to emigrate, as well as Swedes on other islands, only these 110 formally applied for a joint travel visa. However, the decision came too late: the Soviet Union charged that Estonia proved incapable of maintaining the integrity of its borders and assumed complete control over border issues, including the issuance of travel visas. This meant that the joint visa now required Moscow’s approval.

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44 The Soviet Union also forced the Estonian government to place restrictions on international communication. From October 1939, the government restricted international telephone and telegraph service, placed limitations on radio broadcasts, and outlawed all letters and telegraph messages written in languages other than Estonian, Russian, German, English, or French. Additionally, all foreigners required
With the international community preoccupied with the German invasion of France in the spring of 1940, the Soviet Union made her move on the Baltic States. On 16 June 1940, the Soviet government presented Estonia with an ultimatum: immediately replace the Estonian government and allow the Red Army to enter Estonian territory or the Soviet Union would launch an attack.\textsuperscript{45} The government had eight hours to respond and it saw no other option but to give in. The following day, 17 June 1940, more than 80,000 Red Army soldiers crossed into Estonia, completely overrunning the region and securing prominent locations throughout the country. Estonian historians Mati Laur, et. al. describes the events as follows:

The occupation had actually already taken place when, on 17 June, General Laidoner signed the ‘Narva decree’ at the railway station of Narva. According to this, control over all communications passed to the Red Army, political demonstrations and public meetings were prohibited, and civilians had to surrender their arms... The brief period of independence of the Estonian Republic was replaced by occupation.\textsuperscript{46}

A Soviet puppet government was established on 21 June, the same day as the Odensholm evacuation. The new government held elections on 14 July, although only Soviet-approved candidates could run. The newly “elected” government applied for Estonia to

\textsuperscript{45} Lithuania faced a similar ultimatum on 14 June.

\textsuperscript{46} Tannberg, \textit{The History of Estonia}, 263.
join the Soviet Union, and the Supreme Soviet Council accepted the “annexation” on 6 August.\footnote{According to the Soviet historiography, the Estonian people themselves instigated a revolution, taking the “bourgeois” government out of power and electing the communist party into office. For the Soviet interpretation of the events, see O. Kuuli, Revolutsioon Eestis 1940 (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1980).}

In late July, Mathias Westerblom, Nikolai Blees, and Viktor Pöhl wrote a joint memo to the Swedish Foreign Ministry articulating the desperate state of affairs for the displaced Swedes, but also articulating fears for the larger Estonian-Swedish community.

In this serious situation, the island residents turn to Sweden with a fervent appeal: can’t Sweden’s government deliver effective and quick assistance by making a direct proposal about this to the Estonian and Russian governments and ask to transfer these Swedes to Sweden. As it stands now, these Swedes are facing precipitous extinction. Beyond these 500 homeless, there are, as you know, approximately 7,000 Swedish farmers and fishermen on Wormsö, Nuckö, Rikull, and Runö. You can certainly declare that these Swedes will soon face the same fate. So that this Swedish tribe does not need to follow the path of those in Gammalsvenskby, it would be high time that something is done to protect his Swedish folk group. From the perspective of Swedishness, the motherland has a mission to fulfill.\footnote{Riksarkivet: SE/RA/230/23032 Beskickningsarvik Tallinn, F1:12. Memo from M. Westerblom, N. Blees, and V. Pöhl dated 22 July 1940.}

The three Estonian-Swedes’ reference to Gammalsvenskby demonstrates a change in their argument, emphasizing that the Swedish government must act based on a nationalist argument. The Gammalsvenskby-Swedes lived in the Ukraine and suffered repeated economic hardship and famine until successfully relocating to Sweden in 1929.

With the change in political authority in the region, Sweden shifted negotiations regarding the Estonian-Swedes from Tallinn to Moscow. Stockholm sent a dispatch to Swedish ambassador Vilhelm Assarsson in Moscow on 6 August 1940, detailing the
circumstances of the Estonian-Swedes and requested that the embassy now pursue the proper approval of the joint visa of the Rågö-Swedes. Assarsson turned over the request at a 13 August 1940 meeting with Soviet Vice Foreign Minister Salomon Abramovich Lozovskii. Assarson also met Foreign Minister Molotov on several occasions, but noted that the relationship was tense over Sweden’s relationship with Finland during the Winter War. Nonetheless, the Soviet Union accepted the visa application. The Politburo Central Committee discussed the Rågö-Swedes on October 8, detailing specifics for the emigration of the 110 Swedes and limitations on what they were permitted to bring with them. The 110 Rågö-Swedes legally emigrated from Soviet-controlled Estonia, arriving in Sweden on 17 October 1940.

The Soviet take-over of Estonia – which lasted until the arrival of the Germans in the summer of 1941 – was quick and resulted in an abrupt shift of power. Maria Tammgren, born 1918 on Wormsö, remembers, “No, no, they just came… Oh, it was pretty rough. It was horrible, that war… It was only the Russians who marched in. And then we certainly understood that now we are Russians.” Throughout the occupation, the Soviet government almost completely cut off communication between Aiboland and

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50 Assarsson, I Skuggan Av Stalin, 33-34.
51 RGASPI, Fond 17, opis’162, delo 29, l.129 and 165.
52 SOV Arkiv. Första omgången estlandssvenska interjuer. Interview of Maria Tammgren by Agneta Ring, 5 October 1995.
Sweden, except for instances where the Soviet Union used news about Aiboland as propaganda.

The Switch to Soviet Power

The year of Soviet occupation marked a period of rapid change in all aspects of society in Estonia through incorporation into the Soviet system (often referred as Sovietization), including education, the people’s relationship with the land, the position of the church, and the expressions of culture. The new government closed all organizations and publications not officially sanctioned, and opened new, or replacement, ones under the central control of the communist party. The intense process of Sovietization touched all of the people in Estonia, regardless of nationality, location, occupation, or previous political affiliation. In essence, it was a process to bring the socialist system that had been developing and adapting in the Soviet Union since the October Revolution to Estonia as quickly as possible. The Sovietization involved changes within the administrative, political, and cultural life of Estonia, but also sought to change the mindset within of population through propaganda campaigns.53

*Kustbon* published two final issues after the Soviet take-over before the Soviet government closed the publication down. These last issues of *Kustbon* – published on 21 June and 20 July 1940 – serve as interesting examples of this transition period, when the Estonian-Swedes still held control of the newspaper, even under the close eyes of Soviet

censorship. The 21 June issue focused heavily on Odensholm, with only minimal references to political changes, as the issue appeared on the same day as the communist party came to power, and was therefore already prepared before the political takeover.\textsuperscript{54} One article mentions an increase in the number of Soviet troops, following the continued role of the Pact of Mutual Assistance, indicating that the march in was orderly and without disturbances.\textsuperscript{55} The issue also indicated that all public gatherings now required police permission, and that all civilians were to turn over weapons and ammunition.\textsuperscript{56} The 20 July issue, still under the same editorial staff, suggests greater attention from the new government, with an expanded focus on politics – in particular, criticizing the minority policies of the second half of the 1930s and praising the events of 21 June.\textsuperscript{57} There was no suggestion in the newspaper that it could be the final issue of \textit{Kustbon}, and one article indicated a continuation in the next issue. However, no further issues of \textit{Kustbon} appeared in Estonia. A few months later, a Soviet-produced Swedish-language newspaper, \textit{Sovjet-Estland} (“Soviet Estonia”), appeared instead.\textsuperscript{58}

A Soviet propaganda campaign aimed at the Estonian-Swedes, with \textit{Sovjet-Estland} as the primary instrument, actively encouraged the development of socialism

\textsuperscript{54} The previous issue, 7 June 1939, focused primarily on Rågö.
\textsuperscript{55} “Ytterligare rysk miljö till Estland,” \textit{Kustbon}, 21 June 1940.
\textsuperscript{56} “Av överbefälhavaren utfärda förordningar,” \textit{Kustbon}, 21 June 1940.
\textsuperscript{57} See “Nationalitet och skola” and “Den 21 juni 1940,” \textit{Kustbon}, 20 July 1940.
through the guise of a Swedish national identity. The government-directed large-scale propaganda effort aimed at the Estonian-Swedes suggests that the Swedish minority was of particular interest to the Soviet Estonian leaders. The campaign attempted to focus efforts largely around national identity and Soviet ideology, stressing the equal standing the Swedes held with all other nationalities in the Soviet Union. As an official organ of the Estonian Communist (Bolshevik) Party in the Läänemaa province, Sovjet-Estland only presented the views of the communist government. Anton Vaarandi, an Estonian who spoke Swedish, acted as the editor of the newly created newspaper. The weekly publication continued until 13 August 1941 when it was discontinued by the German advance into Estonia after 43 issues – missing only a single week, in mid-July 1941. While the content is clearly propaganda, a closer look reveals the attention the new government paid to the Estonian-Swedish community, and how the new government sought to frame their sales pitch.

59 In a February Estonian Central Committee report from the Administration of Propaganda and Agitation (V Upravenie Propagandi i Agitatsii), Neeme Ruus wrote that there were 800 copies of the newspaper sent out each week to the Swedes. The number Ruus provided could be elevated, though, as the report being sent to Moscow also states that among the Estonian-Swedes there is a “great interest for Marxism-Leninism,” however, this assertion was undoubtedly an exaggeration. See Eesti Riigiarhiiv Filaal: ERAF.1.1.256, ÜK(b) KK jt.-ga parteihariduse finatseerimise, politiilise kirjanduse väljaandmise, usuvastase propaganda jt. küsimustes, p.12-13.

60 Vaarandi was also the editor of a few Estonian-language newspapers, including Rahva Hääl. Although a publication for Läänemaa province, Sovjet-Estland was edited in Tallinn at the offices of the ESSR National Publication Center’s Newspaper Publishing House (ENSV Riikliku Kirjastuskeskuse Ajalehtede Kirjastus). The “Punane Täht” (Red Star) printing house, also located in Tallinn published the newspaper. Sovjet-Estland was the sole publication representing Läänemaa until the arrival of Töötav Läänlane (The Läänlane Worker) in December 1940, also identified as an official publication of the Läänemaa Communists, although this publication had editorial offices in Läänemaa.

61 Stalin’s elements of what constitutes a nation – living in communities primarily of the same ethnicity sharing a common language and economic standing, and with a common history and culture – perfectly meshed with the Estonian-Swedes as a minority group, perhaps suggesting the primary focus of the
Perhaps the long-term goal of the Swedish-language propaganda was also the encouragement of communist ideology in Sweden.62 This possibility can supported by the distribution, on a small scale, of Sovjet-Estland to Sweden and the republication of news articles in Swedish communist newspapers such as Ny Dag.63 Per Wieselgren, the Swedish professor at the University of Tartu, mentions two examples of such reception in Sweden of the propaganda in his memoir. In the first instance, he mentions a letter Sovjet-Estland received from 40 workers in Gothenburg who expressed a desire to live in “prosperous Soviet-Estonia” and berated the ungrateful Rågö-Swedes who had legally immigrated to Sweden. The second instance caused Wieselgren greater concern, suggesting that Swedes in Sweden did not always realize the newspaper was propaganda: “Even among the Estonia-interested cultural elite in Sweden, one didn’t always understand how the newspaper should be judged. I received a letter from a professor who expressed grave concern over the Estonian-Swedes’ conversion to communism.”64

One of the difficulties Soviet agitators faced was a lack of sufficient books and pamphlets available in the Swedish language, making Sovjet-Estland the primary means

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63 The Soviet government invited the editor of Ny Dag to travel through the Baltic region for a series of articles.

of propaganda. The newspaper, therefore, needed to provide background information on communist ideology, such as was found in the “What is socialism” series from the first few issues of the newspaper. Anticipating an expansion of propaganda efforts towards the Estonian-Swedes, Estonian Central Committee member Neeme Ruus placed a request with Moscow in February 1941 for Swedish-language translations of numerous books, featuring works by Lenin, Stalin, Marx, and Molotov. His request was for 50 copies of each book for distribution in the schools, culture houses, and libraries and for an additional 200 copies to be made available to be sold.65

However, there is little evidence to suggest any wide-spread acceptance of the newspaper or its message among the Estonian-Swedes.66 Many in the community read Sovjet-Estland with a high degree of skepticism. Per Wieselgren wrote that the newspaper was “a profitable, pleasurable joke” and “naïve Bolshevik propaganda.” He comments in his memoir, “The newspaper was read by everyone as a jest newspaper, but the humorless communists didn’t understand that and were properly pleased with the editorial efforts.”67 In an attempt to give the articles credibility and legitimacy, particularly in foreign news, Sovjet-Estland frequently cited foreign newspapers (especially from Sweden and Finland, as well as Britain and America). Despite the

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65 Eesti Riigiarhiiv Filaal: ERAF.1.1.256 ÜK(b)P KK jt.-ga parteihariduse finatseerimise, politilise kirjanduse väljaandmise, usuvastase propaganda jt. küsimustes, p.12-13. By the end of the first Soviet occupation, Moscow had not sent any of the books Ruus requested.

66 During my research trips in Sweden and Estonia from 2006-2007, I gave a few lectures to the Estonian-Swedes and discussed Sovjet-Estland. Despite evidence that the newspaper was used in the schools, only one of the audience members remembered ever seeing the newspaper during that period.

67 Wieselgren, Från Hammaren till Hakkorset, 155.
repeated promises of a better life in Soviet Estonia as compared to either the previous “bourgeois” Estonia or neighboring capitalist countries, large numbers of the Estonian-Swedes turned to thoughts of emigration, hoping for wide-scale relocation to Sweden.\textsuperscript{68}

In addition to the closure of \textit{Kustbon}, the new Soviet government also banned organizations including SOV. The government required any organization within Soviet Estonia to directly support the new government ideology, and be government controlled. However, a community accounting book for SOV membership dues suggests that while the upper levels of the organization disbanded, an unofficial gathering continued throughout the Soviet period. After the first few months of Soviet-occupation, the accounting book stopped recording members’ names, although still registered the collection of annual dues.\textsuperscript{69}

The Soviet occupation brought numerous changes to the daily life of the Estonian-Swedes, many of which restricted the economic development of the region. The Soviet military considered much of Aiboland as a military region because of the islands and coastline, which resulted in increased limitations on movement. Boats and even bicycles were removed from many villages. Maria Tammgren of Wormsö remembers, “They took all the boats and locked them with large chains around the telephone poles…so that no

\textsuperscript{68} See Eesti Riigiarhiiv Filaal: ERAF.1.1.6, EK(b) P Läänenaa Komitee koosolekute ja maakond parteiaktiivi nõupidamise protokollid (äarikirjad). See also Eesti Riigiarhiiv Filaal: ERAF.1.1.48, EK(b) P Läänenaa Komitee Informatioonid.

\textsuperscript{69} The accounting book, now located in the SOV archives in Stockholm, does not specify which community. However, an earlier entry in the book includes Fridolf Isberg, suggesting that the community is likely his hometown, Klottorp. See SOV arkiv: Medlems avgifter för Estlandssvenskarnas förening 1938-1944.
one could run away or go off to sea.”\textsuperscript{70} The restrictions placed significant economic hurdles on the Estonian-Swedes who made their living through fishing and trade. The military bases continued to affect the Estonian-Swedish communities, and rumors persisted for months after the Soviets came to power of further forced evacuations – including a rumor that the military would evacuate all of Wormsö.

Interactions between the Estonian-Swedes and the Soviet troops varied across Aiboland. Some individuals remarked how polite the soldiers were, knocking on doors and asking for food and supplies, always maintaining a level of civility. Irene Weinerhall, born 1924 on Odensholm, remembers friendly interactions with the soldiers before the evacuation. She first encountered the Red Army soldiers as they arrived in Hapsal in large numbers, and then later when they arrived on Odensholm.

But then when we were alone on Odensholm a lot of servicemen also came... We were more like friends, then. We taught them to play volleyball. There were twenty soldiers that first came, when the village had moved closer together. I was 16 years old then and didn’t think about how dangerous it was, but rather that something new arrived, new people... We were like a big family, they invited us for food and we played volleyball.\textsuperscript{71}

Although none of the youth on Odensholm spoke Russian, the initial period involved friendly exchanges. Irene’s parents were not as open to the interactions, though. Rudolf Zeisig, born 1921 in Nuckö, takes a tempered view of the soldiers, contrasting the group as a whole with the individuals.

\textsuperscript{70} SOV Arkiv. Första omgången estlandssvenska interjuer. Interview of Maria Tammgren by Agneta Ring, 5 October 1995.

Russians, it is certain... that there were many fine people also, because you know Russia is a colossus, or the Soviet Union as it was called then, it is a colossally large territory. And there are many different races [folkrazer] of different people and different religions, and so on. So some were certainly purely, purely barbaric and some were as nice as can be.\(^{72}\)

However, others remember a much harsher interaction, with the soldiers storming in and taking anything they wanted. Although out to sea at the time of transition, Frans Herm, born 1921 in Nargö later heard stories of the occupation from family members. “There was certainly an ingrained hatred of Russians, so one was absolutely not happy about it [the Soviet occupation], and that was one of the reasons I didn’t want to stay there. That still remains; I cannot be around them even today.”\(^{73}\)

**Education in Soviet Estonia**

The Soviet Union highly valued education, seeing the introduction of Soviet ideology to children as a long-term investment in communism. Communist officials evaluated each school across Estonia to determine if it was needed before being reopened, utilizing the Soviet school system and Soviet educational standards. However, the initial arrival of Red Army soldiers threatened the continuation of upper-level education for the Estonian-Swedes, and in particular the Birkas Folk School. The school buildings initially housed soldiers until mid-June 1940. The building was heavily

\(^{72}\) SOV Arkiv. Första omgången estlandssvenska interjuer. Interview of Rudolf Zeisig by Liselott Blombäck, 6 October 1995.

\(^{73}\) SOV Arkiv. Första omgången estlandssvenska interjuer. Interview of Frans Herm by Nille Kristiansson, 9 October 1995. Herm indicates that he was a sailor and was out to sea when the Soviets moved in. He resettled in Sweden, rather than return to Soviet-controlled Estonia, although his mother and sister could not leave until 1943.
damaged and garbage was left everywhere.\textsuperscript{74} Border-guards moved in shortly afterwards, but only temporarily. According to Isberg, the government initially determined that Birkas would remain closed. As the headmaster, he objected to the decision and pled the Soviet officials to reconsider:

\begin{quote}
We poor Swedish farmers and fishermen here in Estonia have hoped that the new socialist government would help us to have an increased education in our own language. And therefore, I find it difficult to understand that we suddenly should have it worse than we have had it before.\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

Isberg’s protest worked, and officials permitted Birkas to reopen. The authorities moved the border-guards and returned the building to the Swedes. The headmaster went about locating funds from the government to renovate the building before trying to encourage students to come. The 31 October \textit{Sovjet-Estland} published an announcement for the start of Birkas’ twenty-first school year, with an enrollment of 23 students.\textsuperscript{76}

It is possible that Isberg’s protest made the new Soviet leadership aware of the Swedish minority, and may have been a factor in the establishment of the Swedish-language publication, \textit{Sovjet-Estland}. And the reopening of Birkas appeared to come at a cost to Isberg: he participated in \textit{Sovjet-Estland} as a regular contributor, and one of the only authors identified by their full name, suggesting a level of accommodation and

\textsuperscript{74} Fridolf Isberg, in \textit{Birkas: Svensk folkhögskola i Estland}, Edvin Lagman, ed., 167.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 170.

\textsuperscript{76} Fr. Isberg, “Birkas lantmannskola börjar sin verksamhet som statens skola,” \textit{Sovjet-Estland}, 31 October 1940.
collaboration with the Soviets. In one of the only articles by Isberg to reference Soviet ideology, the 31 October article stated that the school had to overcome considerable difficulties in the previous year, including the temporary forced relocation to Wormsö. “With the new, socialist regime now in place in the country, the school’s premises could, with the present government authorities’ friendly aid and understanding for the cause, be set free and moved back to its old location of Birkas in Nuckö.” In the article, Isberg pays tribute to Soviet policies, favorably comparing Soviet ideology with the difficulties Estonian-Swedes faced under the Eenpalu government. He wrote, “When we here at the school now begin a new school year, we come to do it in a whole new spirit and with great expectations for the future, knowing that we now are a free people in a free socialistic land, where all are equal.” According to Isberg, while students had previously been taught the Estonian language, geography, and history, they were now taking five hours of Russian language and two hours of Stalinist government, suggesting a decline in the importance of the Estonian language for the Swedish minority.

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77 Any accusation of collaboration on the part of Isberg needs to be balanced by his role as the headmaster; the Birkas headmaster had always participated in the newspaper, whether Kustbon or now Sovjet-Estland, as an extension of their duties as headmaster to inform the larger Swedish population of new agricultural techniques and updates in the education at the school. Isberg’s primary goal was the resumption of the school year and the return of the Birkas school buildings for the Estonian-Swedish education, and in this he was successful. His relationship with the Soviet officials probably also helped him avoid deportation or mobilization in 1941, a fate that awaited most of the other Swedish teachers in Estonia.

78 Fr. Isberg, “Birkas lantmannskola börjar sin verksamhet som statens skola,” Sovjet-Estland, 31 October 1940.

79 Ibid.

80 Fridolf Isberg, in Birkas: Svensk folkhögskola i Estland, 174.
As was the case throughout Estonia, books needed to receive approval by the state, particularly books used in schools. Soviet officials collected and burned religious books, Estonian history books since 1918, and children’s literature, deeming them incompatible with socialist ideology.\(^{81}\) New literature, translations, artwork, theater, and music were all subject to state approval and had certain criteria. The policy heavily affected the Swedish-language schools, as no textbooks in Swedish were approved or available for use in the 1940-1941 school year. This meant that the schools had to make substitutions with other materials, including the use of *Sovjet-Estland* as teaching materials.\(^{82}\)

Wieselgren was highly critical of *Sovjet-Estland* in his memoir, most notably for linguistic reasons. “The first issue of this publication was, however, drawn up in hair-raising Swedish, because the editor, an Estonian communist who indeed understood Norwegian, Comrade Vaarandi, stuffed the newspaper with absolute literal translations from Russian and Estonian.”\(^{83}\) Wieselgren’s memoir berates the grammatical mistakes, particularly the use of improper articles, and he noted his concern from a linguistic perspective that the schools used *Sovjet-Estland*. He took action to remedy the language, sending Vaarandi a former student as a translator.\(^{84}\) The student had limited success in

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\(^{82}\) See Wieselgren, *Från Hammaren till Hakkorset*, 154.

\(^{83}\) Ibid.

\(^{84}\) Wieselgren does not name this former female student.
changing content: “Comrade Vaarandi’s suspicions against every free translation made an actual language improvement difficult to carry out. One had to be content with the good language in the original articles, which the Estonian-Swedes’ own scribes wrote.”

Rita Holmberg, born 1925 in Tallinn, remembers working at the newspaper as a volunteer, and remembers the content being closely censored by the Soviets. “I don’t know if it was called Kustbon even then… But maybe it had a different name under during the Soviet time, I don’t really remember. I worked with the editorial staff together with a few other Estonian-Swedes. We tried to tone down the content a little.”

In spring 1941, the Soviet Estonian government published two textbooks in Swedish to meet the demand for Swedish-language materials in the schools: Läsebok för Folkskolan (Elementary School Reader) and Läsebok för Mellanskolan (Intermediate School Reader). Wormsö school teacher Tomas Gärdsström compiled both books (overseen by Anton Vaarandi, the editor of Sovjet-Estland). Because of the war against Germany and the approaching frontline, the books were never distributed, and thus never

85 Wieselgren, Från hammaren till hakkorset, 155.

86 SOV Arkiv. Första omgången estlandssvenska interjuer. Interview of Rita Holmberg by Evali Seth, October 1995. It is interesting to note that Holmberg does not remember the name of the newspaper; in my presentations of Sovjet-Estland in both Sweden and Estonia in 2007, only one of the former residents of Aiboland remembered the newspaper.


89 The books’ anticipated arrival was announced in the 11 June issue of Sovjet-Estland, after the 1940-1941 school year had been completed. The article highlights the devotion of the communists to provide the Swedes with the opportunities to develop their culture with a socialist viewpoint, and points to the Soviet government’s support of Swedish-language education for the minority.
used in the schools. However, the two textbooks demonstrate the propaganda effort directed at the Estonian-Swedes.\textsuperscript{90}

*Läsebok för Folkskolan* is a collection of 76 short stories and poems. Many entries feature nature themes; some are fiction, others are non-fiction. There are clear examples of propaganda throughout the book. The table of contents provides an indication of the origin of the stories: some were written by Swedes (well-known figures such as August Strindberg and Pär Lagerkvist, as well as those in the Estonian-Swedish community such as Gärdström himself), some texts were written and translated from Estonian, and some were from Russian (including a story by Leo Tolstoy). The majority of the stories, though, do not list an author, simply stating that they were translated. Most likely, these were translated from Russian.

One of the more overt examples of propaganda – in parable form – is chapter 13 in *Läsebok för Folkskolan*, “The Children Build a Collective.” In the short story, a group of children are given some land. Each child owns a different farm implement. None of the children want to let the others borrow their implement, nor do they want to work the others’ crop. As a result, they fight and nothing is harvested. Father then comes along and suggests they build a collective. The children don’t know what a collective is, so Father explains it to them, extolling the benefits. The children do so, and when Father next visits, he sees that their land is flourishing and they are all sharing in the success. The

\textsuperscript{90} Even though the print run – 1150 copies – was smaller than their Estonian-language counterparts, the books would cost the same price, 2 rubels 50 kopek. See N.R., “Den första svenskspråkiga lär oboken för sovjet-folkskolorna har utkommit,” *Sovjet-Estland*, 11 June 1941.
children are appreciative of Father showing them the way, and offer him some of their crops. The collective is seen as the only logical solution in such a situation. Once it is implemented, the children are happy and their farm is successful. The story can be viewed as a parable to the Soviet’s collectivization of Estonian land, with a clear reference to Stalin acting as the Father. Since Father (Stalin) had shown them the way to work the land most effectively, they are more than willing to offer him part of their crops to thank him.91

In contrast to Läsebok för Folkskolan, Läsebok för Mellanskolan does not list the authors nor indicate if stories were translated. The book contained 45 chapters. While there were short stories, there was an increased focus on Soviet history and ideology, presenting historical figures and leaders of the Soviet Union. In particular, stories about Lenin and Stalin dominate, but there are also chapters relating to Soviet celebrations. This collection for the middle schools focused less on parables and more on overt propaganda.

Soviet Ideology and the Estonian-Swedes

The Soviet agitation emphasized nationality and the position of the Estonian-Swedes within the Soviet Union. In targeting the Estonian-Swedes, the propaganda often stressed that Soviet actions and ideology saved the Estonian-Swedes. As the argument went, without the Soviet Union’s arrival, the Estonian-Swedes would still be poor and

oppressed under the capitalistic Estonian government’s nationalist and discriminatory policies. A late November 1940 article proclaimed, “Soviet order was Estonia’s salvation. With it opened wide views for the future for Estonia’s economical and cultural development.”92 The Estonian-Swedes were to benefit from this development through a new land reform and support for cultural organizations. Coverage in Sovjet-Estland repeatedly stressed that all nationalities were equal within the Soviet Union.

Beginning in the first issue of Sovjet-Estland, Soviet Estonian leaders compared Soviet nationality policy with previous governments controlling the region. Estonian Central Committee Secretary Neeme Ruus described the history of the Estonian-Swedes in terms of oppression and the second-class status the minority held in the Republic of Estonia. He wrote, “The cultural development of the Estonian-Swedes was prevented, on the one hand by difficult economic situations and on the other hand by the bourgeois Estonian chauvinistic cultural politics. They wanted to hold the Estonian-Swedes in spiritual darkness.”93 Ruus, a periodic visitor to the Swedish-speaking regions, spoke fluent Swedish himself – a fact promoted by the Soviets as a sign of their openness of and support to Swedish concerns. He stated that the Soviet government wanted to change the Estonian-Swedes’ position, economically and culturally, away from oppression.

The Soviet government shall take decisive steps towards the improvement of the sanitary conditions among the Estonian-Swedes. In the cultural-work field, the Estonian-Swedes must begin in earnest their own action as

92 “Medel av stor betydelse som använts inom vårt politiska och ekonomiska liv,” Sovjet-Estland, 28 November 1940.

soon as possible. In view of that, the publication of the newspaper *Sovjet-Estland* should create favorable conditions.\(^9^4\)

Ruus’ vision of the Soviet government offers a striking parallel to the work of nineteenth century missionary Lars Johan Österblom and arguments from SOV throughout the Interwar period, emphasizing the need for advancements in hygiene, education, and culture within Aiboland to raise the standard of living. However, while Österblom placed his emphasis on religion and connections with Sweden, Ruus argued that only through socialism could the Estonian-Swedes develop economically and culturally.

The Soviets made clear their intentions to encourage the development of the Swedish national identity in Estonia. According to Ruus, the Estonian-Swedes were to work with various regional and national government agencies, “so that a nationalist form, but socialist cultural work may blossom among the Estonian-Swedes.”\(^9^5\) The following week Oskas Cher, the Läänemaa region communist party secretary, echoed Ruus’ comments, placing the Estonian-Swedes as a group on an equal standing with other nationalities. “In the socialist society, all nations are equal, in which particular attention is directed at precisely the development of minorities’ culture and at the improvement of their economic circumstances.”\(^9^6\) Cher wanted the Estonian-Swedes to be included in the communist party, and to gather around the Soviet newspaper.

\(^9^4\) Ibid.

\(^9^5\) Ibid.

\(^9^6\) Oskar Cher, “Estlandsvenskarna är nu likställda med andra minoriteter,” *Sovjet-Estland*, 24 October 1940.
Sovjet-Estland frequently drew comparisons between Soviet ideology of equality and the nationalist policies of the Eenpalu government in the late 1930s. This can be seen in a 4 January 1941 article entitled “What the Socialist government has given Estonia’s Swedes.”

The new regime has given us back our linguistic and cultural rights, and we no longer need to go and feel that we are some sort of second-class citizens, like we did under Eenpalu’s regime, rather we know with feelings of pride, equality with our fellow workers of other nationalities within the Soviet-republic’s wide borders.97

The newspaper also attempted to portray the Soviet policies as being particularly friendly towards the Estonian-Swedes. For example, the newspaper encouraged the usage of Swedish place-names over Estonian names in the publication – a stark contrast to the Estonian government’s nationalist tendencies in the late 1930s.98

The use of Swedish-language propaganda was not limited to Sovjet-Estland. Soviet agitators also used Swedish in radio programs, and in election materials, the first time such efforts had been undertaken for the Estonian-Swedes by the regional government.99 Ruus’ visits to Aiboland were a further example of the government...

97 “Vad den socialistiska regeringen get Estlands svenskar,” Sovjet-Estland, 4 January, 1941.

98 Sovjet-Estland used almost exclusively the Swedish names, with the main exceptions being the usage of “Tallinn” over “Reval” and “Läänmää” over “Vik.” There are occasions where Sovjet-Estland is inconsistent, varying, for example, between using the Swedish “Hapsal” (see, for example, Sovjet-Estland, 28 November 1940) and the Estonian “Haapsalu” (see, for example, Sovjet-Estland, 4 January 1941). Also, a large error was made translating Noarootsi (in Swedish “Nuckö”) as “Nargö” (in Estonian “Naissaar”) in the 17 October 1940 issue, Nargö having already been evacuated to allow for a Soviet military base. A 20 March 1940 article in Sovjet-Estland concerned the various town names. The author, “Astolf,” states that one of the injustices of the Eenpalu government was the Estonianization of the Swedish place names, which had existed for as long as the Swedes had lived along Estonia’s coast. See Astolf, “Våra ortnamn,” Sovjet-Estland, 20 March 1941.

reaching out to the Swedish minority. In early January Ruus went on a speaking tour through Aiboland that included Nuckö, Rickull, and Wormsö. An article in *Soviet-Estland* after the visit commented:

> While one sat there and listened to comrade Ruus’ speech, one could not avoid but do a comparison between the old and the new regime... Now our leaders come here from Tallinn and hold talks in fluent Swedish and through that demonstrate that all nations in the Soviet Union have equally great rights.

Ruus’ visits, as a member of the Estonian Central Committee, were in stark contrast to previous visits by government representatives, such as the 1939 visit by Prime Minister Kaarl Eenpalu, who spoke to the population only in Estonian.  

An additional component to the transfer of Soviet authority in the region was the redistribution of land and nationalization of resources. Land reform had perhaps one of the biggest effects on the population – Estonian and Swedish alike. Under the Soviet system, the government nationalized all land over 30 hectares. Land was given to those without, although at a maximum of 12 hectares. Houses larger than 170 square meters were nationalized in November. All bank accounts over 800 Estonian crowns became state property, and large industries and boats over 20 tons were also nationalized. Priests and business-owners were heavily taxed and had to pay triple the amount for rent.

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101 See previous chapter.

Numerous Swedish households benefited from the Soviet land reform, which frequently distributed previously-held state land, reducing the size of larger farms. For example, in Nuckö, 43 small farms received additional land and there were 66 new farms. On Wormsö, where the land committee noted that the land was “barren” (karg), they created several new farms and 86 households received additional land. The land reform committee on Runö took land away from the church to create three new farms.

On 24 October, Sovjet-Estland drew comparisons to the 1919 Estonian land reform. According to the article, the Estonian land reform had given the best land to previous estate holders, generals that had fought for the enslavement of the working people, and politicians. The working farmers were thus left with either poor quality land or no land at all. This injustice to the working farmers was to be overturned by the socialists.

Our goal is clear – to wipe out man’s exploitation of other men, to obliterate the possibility that one can be directed to do another’s work. This guarantees a huge success in all areas. The new land reform is one of the more important steps towards the working people’s liberation from the remnants of the capitalistic slavery.

A second article focused on the land reform was printed on the same page, accompanied by photographs of the Nuckö committee at work and a group of people gathered outside

103 “Agrarreformens genomförande: i Nuckö,” Sovjet-Estland, 31 October 1940.
104 A.T., “Agrarreformens genomförande: i Vormsö,” Sovjet-Estland, 31 October 1940. The article did not indicate how many new farms the committee created.
105 “Agrarreformens genomförande: i Runö,” Sovjet-Estland, 31 October 1940.
the parish house. *Sovjet-Estland* depicted the committee’s work as being praised by the local farmers:

The quick realization of the land reform delights those requesting land in Läänemaa. One is very pleased with the new farms. Farmers without land and with little land, that up to now dragged themselves through life working for large landowners, now begin to create a new and happier life on their new farms.\(^\text{107}\)

The article does not mention any of those who lost land, or any additional reasons why one would lose all or part of their land. It was mentioned that on the islands, land was tight, although the committees were able to satisfy almost all requests. On all the islands, the committees took land away from the church and the priest for distribution to local farmers.

The Estonian land reform in 1919, the Soviet propaganda asserted, did not help the individual farmers and workers, but rather rewarded those who had fought in the capitalistic war and strengthened the power of the land holders. A 27 February article in *Sovjet-Estland* described the Estonian attempt as the following:

When the capitalistic government, shortly after the first imperialistic world war, came to power in Estonia, a land reform was carried out in the country. The intention of this land reform was to take from the Baltic landowners, who for centuries took the life and marrow out of the working people in the country, and gave the land to the country’s own inhabitants. When this land was given out, it became quickly evident that those in power took less regard of the poor farmers’ land needs and gave the new farms to those from the class war’s domestic officers and the like, who did even need, or even consider to begin to cultivate the obtained land. The poor, former farmers of the manors, who really had a need for farms once losing their work on the large estates, were later able to buy the land at a high expense from the new estate owners. Such was the capitalistic

\(^{107}\)“Agrarreformens genomförande i Läänemaa,” *Sovjet-Estland*, 24 October 1940.
system’s land reform!... The reform [under the Soviets] was realized in accordance to the principle that the farmers do not need larger farms than what they themselves can work with. One would thereby move away from the exploitation of farmers that the largest landowners customarily pursued on a larger or smaller scale.\textsuperscript{108}

In contrast to the 1919 Estonian land reform, \textit{Sovjet-Estland} portrayed the Soviet land reform as an equal redistribution to the workers and away from oppressors.

The land reform committees based the size of farms on Soviet standards, but did not take into account the poor quality of the land in the Swedish regions. As a result, despite a greater number of individuals gained access to land, many of the Estonian-Swedes saw a severe decline in their economic standings.

Estonian Soviet officials also approached Sovietization through the creation of cultural organizations, particularly in the later stages of the occupation. While the government suspended the activities of SOV, they also sought to create new opportunities to expand the cultural expressions of the Estonian-Swedes, under the close scrutiny of the communists. The government encouraged Estonian-Swedish participation in larger festivals, for example at an art festival in Tallinn and a festival in Moscow, which was another way the Soviet Union attempted to demonstrate that the Swedes were on an equal standing with other nationalities. The festivals also included Soviet music translated into Swedish.\textsuperscript{109} The government authorized and encouraged the creation of a committee to

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\textsuperscript{109} The 22 May 1940 issue of \textit{Sovjet-Estland} reported the translation of popular Soviet songs for an upcoming song festival into Swedish by Hjalmar Pöhl, a luminary in the Estonian-Swedish community, and son of Hans Pöhl, the former political leader of the Estonian-Swedes. See “Sånger för dekaden på svenska,” \textit{Sovjet-Estland}, 22 May 1941.
oversee Swedish participation in various festivals, and included many prominent names within the Estonian-Swedish community. While it was intended that this cultural growth would be socialist in content, many of those on the committee had been largely involved in the Estonian-Swedish culture in the “bourgeois” Estonian period. In regards to their 18 May meeting, *Sovjet-Estland* reported: “All agreed that the Estonian-Swedes were for the first time now properly able to demonstrate what they were capable of producing in the areas of singing, music, and folk dancing.”

*Sovjet-Estland* reported in the 18 June issue on an upcoming joint meeting of the “Estonian-Swedes’ circles for cultural activities” (*Estlandssvenska självverksamma cirklarna*). The meeting was to be held at the Birkas school on 22 June, with the program to include choral singing, and folk dancing, and would be a preparation for the cultural exposition in Moscow. To accommodate the anticipated high turnout, an additional ferry ran from Wormsö. The article states, “The festivities are the first of its type in the Swedish region, and so it is hoped that the Estonian-Swedes numerously participate in them.” The article clearly ignored previous cultural activities run by SOV since 1909 and the Folk Festivals organized in the 1930s, but the June 22 gathering was the largest for the Estonian-Swedes in Soviet Estonia.


111 “Svenskbygden rustar sig för konstdekaden,” *Sovjet-Estland*, 22 May 1941.

112 “Sammanträde av estlandssvenska självverksamma cirklarna,” *Sovjet-Estland*, 18 June 1941.
Discontent and Opposition

Throughout the Soviet occupation, large numbers of Estonian-Swedes sought emigration to Sweden. The dissatisfaction escalated as a result of the forced relocations, the Rågö-Swedes’ successful emigration, and a general unhappiness with Soviet policies. News of the legal departure of the Rågö-Swedes spread throughout Aiboland, opening the door to the possibility of a more widespread emigration. Soviet propaganda attempted to counter these sentiments.

Local communist party officials regularly discussed dissatisfaction among the Estonian-Swedes, and the rise in emigration thoughts. Oskar Cher, the Läänemaa communist party secretary, prepared information on 8 October 1940 indicating that 10 of the approximately 20 families that had been displaced from Odensholm and sent to Wormsö were demanding new farms, or they would depart for Sweden. L. Malmre, a local communist official, reported on the situation on Wormsö in a 6 December report for the local party. He indicated that the Estonian-Swedes were signing lists indicating their desire to emigrate – 90 percent of the Swedes in Borrby and 100 percent in Diby and Norrby. Malmre listed four reasons for their emigration thoughts:

1. There is no certainty about the possibility for survival in the future.
2. The taxes are unbearable if it will be per hectare.
3. They have heard from Russian soldiers, that Wormsö will be evacuated for the establishment of military bases.

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113 See, for example: ERAF [Eesti Riigiarhiivi Filial] 1-1-6, EK(b)P Läänemaa Komitee koosolekute ja maakond parteiaktiivi nõupidamise protokollid (ärikirjad). See also: ERAF 1-1-48, EK(b)P Läänemaa Komitee Informatsioonid.

114 ERAF 1-1-48, EK(b)P Läänemaa Komitee Informatsioonid, 1.

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4. Without fishing, the owners of the smaller farms have no possibilities to earn a living.\textsuperscript{115} Malmre does mention some hesitation over leaving their homes. Agitators also noted that some Estonian-Swedes did not want to leave their farmland, but indicated that if the children left, there would be no reason for them to remain.\textsuperscript{116} By 20 February 1941, in the opinion of the Läänemaa committee, thoughts of emigration were not based on economic considerations, but rather a question of nationality, and that many of the local school teachers in Rickul advocated emigration.\textsuperscript{117}

Sweden also learned of the discontent, and continued to raise the issue of a mass relocation of the Estonian-Swedes to Sweden with Soviet officials. A 23 January 1941 memo at the Swedish Foreign Ministry indicated that 5,000 Estonian-Swedes expressed a desire to emigrate.\textsuperscript{118} Swedish Ambassador to Moscow Vilhelm Assarsson brought up concern over the Estonian-Swedes in a conversation with Soviet Vice Foreign Minister Lozovskii on 24 January 1941, suggesting the relocation. According to Assarsson’s memoir, Lozavskii replied, “I think we can ignore such things for now. You certainly have people in your own country, and the Estonians are needed where they are.”\textsuperscript{119} It is enlightening to note that Lozavskii referred to the Estonian-Swedes as “Estonian.”

\textsuperscript{115} ERAF 1-1-77, \textit{L. Malmre kirjad ja A. Klingbergi aruanne olukorrast eestirootslastega valdades ning tölge ajalehes ’Västmanlands Läns Tidning’ ilmunud artiklist}, 1.

\textsuperscript{116} ERAF 1-1-48, \textit{EK(b)P Läänemaa Komitee Informatsoonid}, p.49.

\textsuperscript{117} ERAF 1-1-48, \textit{EK(b)P Läänemaa Komitee Informatsoonid}, p.52.


\textsuperscript{119} Assarsson, \textit{I Skuggan av Stalin}, 55.
dismissal angered Assarsson, but his memoirs do not mention bringing up the topic again with Lozovskii. However, Assarsson approached the topic with Foreign Minister Molotov on 5 June 1941. Molotov dismissed the proposal, arguing that the 110 Rågö-Swedes were having difficulty in Sweden – a reference to articles that appeared in communist newspapers in Sweden.\textsuperscript{120}

One of the common themes throughout \textit{Sovjet-Estland} was an attempt to dispel emigration thoughts. This was done in a number of ways. First, the newspaper attempted to contrast the economic possibilities available in the Soviet Union with the economic declines and uncertainty in capitalist countries. Second, the newspaper stressed the strong connections between the Estonian-Swedes and their hometowns. And third, the newspaper attempted to isolate emigration thoughts by saying it was only a minority viewpoint.

\textit{Sovjet-Estland} included numerous articles touting economic improvements planned for the regions and new job opportunities. For example, the first issue proclaimed plans to expand Tallinn into a large, modern city with a significant population increase within five years to make it “a considerable port and industrial city.”\textsuperscript{121} Closer to Aiboland, Hapsal was also to see infrastructure improvements to make it a premier


\textsuperscript{121} “Tallinn skall bli modern storstad,” \textit{Sovjet-Estland}, 17 October 1940.
treatment center and seaside resort town for the working people of the Soviet Union. A 28 December article expressed the need for thousands of woodsmen across Estonia, promising higher wages and improved living conditions.

Foreign news, in contrast, attempted to portray uncertainty, instability, and economic collapse. While coverage of the war – described as capitalist aggression – added to this picture, numerous articles focused on economics, housing, food shortages and rationing, and declining healthcare. However, while many of the difficulties could be explained by the effects of the war, Sovjet-Estland never made this connection. For example, the newspaper reported that trade and cargo passing through Sweden dropped considerably from 7.2 million tons in 1939 to 2.6 million tons in 1940, pointing to a severely weakening Swedish economy, but not mentioning that the harbor was blockaded as a result of the war, accounting for the steep decline in trade. In combination, these two images – Soviet successes and foreign uncertainty – arguably had the same goal: create an unconscious belief among the readers of Sovjet-Estland that life would be better for them by remaining in Estonia within the socialist system, and dispel emigration thoughts.

A second objective of the foreign news coverage was to shift focus of the Estonian-Swedes away from Stockholm towards Moscow. The image in Sovjet-Estland

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122 “Haapsalu blir det arbetande folkets kur- och badort,” Sovjet-Estland, 4 January 1941.

123 “Tusentals skogsarbetare behövs,” Sovjet-Estland, 28 December 1940.

124 See for example, “Europas låga skörd,” Sovjet-Estland, 17 October 1940.

125 H.L. “Sverige på tröskeln till det nya året,” Sovjet-Estland, 30 Januari 1941.
attempted to portray Sweden as a land in crisis – in the economy, lack of food and employment, and no end in sight to difficulties. The paper depicted supposed reformers as being ignored so that capitalist elites could continue to exploit workers. A June 4 1941 article states:

The crisis within Sweden’s inner life moves towards a catastrophic decrease in exports, industry, and their working people’s prosperity. This goes still deeper. Every sort of reformer and opportunist is losing their influence and the belief in a high-placed theory or “the co-development of socialism and capitalism” fades even more.126

A clear criticism of Sweden’s “middle way” of the 1930s, Sovjet-Estland attempted to portray the system as irreparably flawed and susceptible to oppression and corruption.

The Soviet propaganda also sought to reinforce the connection Estonian-Swedes felt with their village, suggesting how difficult it would be to leave their homes. In the first issue of Sovjet-Estland, an unnamed author stresses the strong connection the Swedes had to their home:

When I bicycled back towards Rikull [sic] colony I think: Home? Though the old woman was Swedish, she didn’t want to leave Estonia, her home. It is not easy to leave the native country, to leave the soil that your forefathers have cultivated. The soil is unproductive and stony and still one loves it. It is the soil of the native country. It is impossible to replant an old tree – then it languishes away. Those that propagate moving away to “the old native country” should remember that.127

The newspaper also sought to strengthen the village identification with a series of articles beginning in March 1941 that gave short profiles of regions of Aiboland. It is striking that the profiles lack any sort of ideology or mentions of the Soviet Union.

126 A.L. “Sverige av i dag,” Sovjet-Estland, 4 Juni 1941.
127 “Stämningsbilder från Lännemaas kustbyar i Rikull,” Sovjet-Estland, 17 October 1940.
Although none of the author’s names appeared alongside the article, the language used suggests they were written by native-Swedish speakers, demonstrating a sharp contrast to other articles in the newspaper. The profiles described the nature surrounding the region, daily life for the residents, and the region’s unique position within the Estonian-Swedish community. With an almost poetic quality, the profiles provide a glimpse into the different regions and the pride of the inhabitants. Runö was the first village profiled, under the headline “Spring winds over Runö”:

Far down in the Bay of Riga lies Runö, “the Bay of Riga’s pearl.” Its unparalleled forest and sandy beach have awoken nothing but admiration with tourists. The forest is thick and in many places impenetrable. It creates a half-circle protection towards the north and east, behind which the small idyllic village lies protected against the coldest of winds.

There live a people, which one would not easily forget when one has lived among them. They are people full of vitality, who take life as it comes. Being accustomed to everything, feeling uncomfortable nowhere, they are content with their lot, whatever it may be.

The people of Runö do not live, like one would believe, in a far-removed world, an isolated life, but on the contrary – they follow the happenings out in the far world just as good as everyone else, thanks to the radio. Around ten apparatuses are on the island. In the evenings, most of the people gather at the farms with a radio to listen to the daily news. After the so-called “radio time” current events are discussed.

When everyone has gone to rest at night, the peace is absolute over the island. Only the lighthouse beacon’s light sweeps over the sleeping forest. The silence is broken only by the ice flows’ crashing against the beach, and far-off one can hear the ships’ machines thumping.\footnote{“Vårvindar över Runö,” Sovjet-Estland, 20 March 1941.}

The descriptions of other towns were equally poetic, switching between natural beauty and the mentality of the people. The people of Spithamn have “the wave’s restlessness in
their blood. They belong on the sea. It is only the love for the native district that binds them, which forces them to sooner or later return to the barren land at home.”

In Roslep, “every young man has spent some years on the world’s seas. They are a little romantic, full of vitality and enterprising people, who neither shrink from breaking the stone-bound turf nor flinch from an autumn storm on the sea.”

The profile of Nuckö (where Birkas was located) attempted to bring out not only the unique qualities of the people of the region, but added the importance of the region to Estonian-Swedish culture and identity, placing themselves as the guardians and continuers of that national spirit. For the people of Nuckö, their greatness lay not within the natural surroundings, but within themselves:

Gray and poor are the villages that lie scattered about over the Nuckö plain. The stranger would get an impression of poverty and backwardness. But in reality, the resident of Nuckö moves ahead, awake, tending to firmly seize new ideas and struggling to get the most out of the scant possibilities that the hometown offers.

Whereas the other region profiles sought to define the people positively through the nature, Nuckö described the setting in harsh terms and contrasted it to a number of the other Estonian-Swedish regions.

While Nuckö was referred to as the cradle of the Estonian-Swedish culture, Wormsö was referred to as the heart of Aiboland. The article stated that many of the older Estonian-Swedish traditions and folksongs had been preserved on Wormsö.

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130 “Roslep – flera sjömäns hemmahamn,” Sovjet-Estland, 3 April 1941.
131 “Nuckö – aibokulturens vagga,” Sovjet-Estland, 10 April 1941.
(including those that had been prohibited by pastors in other Swedish areas), which instilled a sense of pride and unfailing love for their island among the population.

With its many sides – farmers, fishermen, sailors, carpenters – it succeeds in winning the people over, despite the difficult working conditions, and often live better than their neighbors on the mainland. As far as the home culture is concerned, one can certainly say that not in many places in Estonia can present such beautifully painted farms, embedded in thickly wooded gardens.132

According to the profile, the residents of Wormsö viewed their island, despite difficulties, as a haven to be cherished, and no matter where in the world its residents would find themselves, they would fondly recall their homes.

A sixth article can very loosely be placed in this category: an article highlighting Klottorp in the 8 May issue. The profile begins in a similar fashion to the other regional profiles, highlighting the surrounding nature and the hard working nature of the inhabitants. However, the final two paragraphs reference Soviet control of the region and Soviet ideology, making it quite different from the structure of the previous profiles.

The Soviet structure has already done much for their benefit. Among other things, the government provided the farmers with animal feed, corn seed, fertilizer, and more. The people of Klottorp anticipate much from the Soviet order and are ready to help in all possible ways so that our homeland goes towards a bright and happy future.133

Whereas none of the previous profiles had even the slightest hint of Soviet ideology, the profile of Klottorp overtly expressed its support for the new Soviet presence. The profile echoes many of the themes previously raised in ideological articles, attributing them to


133 “Klottop – gammal svenskby,” Sovjet-Estland, 8 May 1941.
the sentiments of the inhabitants. Additionally, the article makes a stronger connection to emigration thoughts, stating that if someone were to leave the region, they would certainly feel homesick.

The regional profiles attempted to foster a strong sense of identification between the Estonian-Swedes and their land and community. This certainly had the added intention of displacing emigration thoughts without an overt appearance of ideology. The final profile, if one places the Klottorp profile in the same category, moved the line of debate, though, illuminating this ulterior motive in the articles.

Despite the high numbers that had indicated a desire to leave, Sovjet-Estland published statements to the contrary, making it appear that those with emigration thoughts were only a small minority. An article appeared in the newspaper on 6 March 1941 under the headline “Why I Don’t Leave For Sweden” written by “J.L.” Among the reasons provided for not leaving Estonia were a love of their hometowns, uncertainty of healthcare coverage in Sweden, the need abroad to overwork to pay for basic necessities such as food, and because life in Sweden was not as peaceful as in Estonia. Clearly, the writer was referencing foreign news portraying Sweden as a land in distress. Following these reasons was a letter, supposedly from an Estonian-Swede living in Wormsö, identified only by the initials “T.L.” He writes:

We that have been pushed around, who have been tread on without rights in the capitalistic power’s misery, have had our eyes opened with the advantages that the Soviet power brought for us. Yes, all of us Swedes can

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now understand and see that it is the Soviet Union that comes to help and save us from the phases of the war. The Soviet power has created work and bread for thousands who in the capitalistic Estonia wandered around unemployed, broken and worn out, seeking work that was almost impossible to find. Estonia’s joining the Soviet Union made our economic life independent from the capitalist powers and transformed it into blooming. The Soviet Union furnished these rights to us Estonian-Swedes, which we lacked previously. I believe, for my part, that all Swedes living along Soviet Estonia’s coast have understood which advantages the Soviet power has brought us. I believe that we Estonian-Swedes already all are so clear of the circumstances in the capitalistic lands, that we will not be fooled in the capitalistic empire, although there are possibilities to travel to the motherland. I believe that I interpret all the Estonian-Swedes’ condition correctly, if I state that the Soviet Union strengthens our national independence and helps with our free national development, with our land’s economy and our culture’s growth, promotes for us a strong material and cultural upswing and that our native region begins a new blooming.¹³⁵

There are several interesting points that the writer raises in the article, which was clearly intended represent the thoughts of the Estonian-Swedish community. He attempted to isolate and convert those who disagreed, pointing to the advantages the Soviets had brought and highlighting the misery that had previously existed. The author refers to employment and food, both of which were frequent topics of shortages in the western world throughout Sovjet-Estland’s publication. It is intriguing that he mentions there were possibilities to go to Sweden, considering the only groups to do so were the 110 from the Rågö-Swedes and those who had left illegally. Others who requested permission to emigrate never received responses. However, his use of the term “motherland” in referring to Sweden would seem to run counter to other propaganda around the Soviet Union which was attempting to depict Stalin as the father-figure for the motherland, the

Soviet Union.\footnote{See Brooks, Thank You Comrade Stalin!} The following week, another article appeared, claiming that the people of Wormsö (with the largest concentration of Estonian-Swedes) were against the idea of leaving Estonia for Sweden.\footnote{L. Malmre, “Bland vormsöborna,” Sovjet-Estland, 13 March 1941.}

At first sight, these articles can be seen as a reflection of the general opinion of the public – which is exactly how it was interpreted by the communist newspaper Ny Dag in Stockholm when they were reprinted.\footnote{“Vi estlandssvenskar har först nu fått nationella rättigheter,” Ny Dag, 21 April 1941.} However, these articles are some of the more overt attempts in Sovjet-Estland to convince the Swedish minority to not continue thoughts of emigration. By publishing these articles, the communists hoped to portray those among the Estonian-Swedes with thoughts of emigration as isolated, and convince them that they were alone, realizing that life in Estonia was better than before, and better than the uncertainty of living in Sweden.

The May Report

Despite the propaganda efforts, thoughts of emigration persisted across Aiboland. Läänemaa communist leaders presented a report to the Estonian Central Committee in late May on the work done among the Swedes. After hearing the report, the Central Committee determined “that both political mass-work and economic-cultural work has
been unsatisfactory” resulting in expanded emigration thoughts.\textsuperscript{139} The Central Committee outlined a series of changes to improve the situation for the Estonian-Swedes and to redirect the communist agitation across Aiboland.

In some of the recommendations, the need for more agitators speaking Swedish was expressed, particularly targeting the youth, increasing the subscription and expanding the content of \textit{Sovjet-Estland}, improving the Swedish-language radio programs, and to prepare more translations of literature and movies into Swedish. The shortcomings of the Swedish-language offerings needed to be solved, largely because of concerns among the Central Committee over the predominance of emigration thoughts among the Estonian-Swedes.\textsuperscript{140}

The report also pointed to certain areas where the Estonian-Swedes should, in theory, receive extra protections or attention not available to Estonians. The report specifically mentioned the poor land quality on the islands of Saaremaa, Wormsö, Runö, Kihnu, Prangli, and Hiiumaa and the communities of Nuckö, Rickul, and Neve. The committee recommended the lowering of agricultural production norms in these areas. The Central Committee also wanted to explore the possibilities of reducing or eliminating the debts of all farmers owning more than 5 hectares of land.\textsuperscript{141} Additionally, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{139} Eesti Riigiarhiiv Filaal: ERAF.1.4.71, \textit{Tsentral’ni Komitet KP (b) Estonii Osobyi Sector}, 36-39. Minutes no. 8 of the Seating of the Central Committee, dated 15, 21, and 22 May 1941.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Eesti Riigiarhiiv Filaal: ERAF.1.4.71, \textit{Tsentral’ni Komitet KP (b) Estonii Osobyi Sector}, 36-39. Minutes no. 8 of the Seating of the Central Committee, dated 15, 21, and 22 May 1941. §4, 6-8, 10.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Eesti Riigiarhiiv Filaal: ERAF.1.4.71, \textit{Tsentral’ni Komitet KP (b) Estonii Osobyi Sector}, 36-39. Minutes no. 8 of the Seating of the Central Committee, dated 15, 21, and 22 May 1941. §12 and 13.
\end{itemize}
displaced Swedes from Odensholm and Rågö were to receive funds to build new houses and land allotments equivalent to what they had before. And the Central Committee suggested delaying any mobilization efforts among the Swedes for a year.

The recommendations also drew attention to political work among the Estonian-Swedish children. The Committee wanted to strengthen and engage the youth into the Komsomol movement, and particularly into the Pioneers. In addition, the Committee suggested increasing Sovjet-Estland to six pages in order to incorporate a youth-section (perhaps equating it to the work of the Estonian-language youth newspaper Noorte Hääl).

The May Central Committee report mentions cultural shortcomings and the need for more cultural events for the Estonian-Swedes. These were to include choirs, orchestras, dramatic groups, and dancing groups, and that the government should ensure the availability of adequate equipment and repertoire. The Central Committee also wanted the Estonian-Swedes to participate in the Estonian art Olympiad to encourage amateur art groups. The emphasis on culture occurred in the newspaper immediately. For several issues, the cultural reporting increased in Sovjet-Estland, and the Estonian-

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142 Eesti Riigiarhiiv Filaal: ERAF.1.4.71, Tsentr'al'ni Komitet KP (b) Estonii Osobyi Sector, 36-39. Minutes no. 8 of the Seating of the Central Committee, dated 15, 21, and 22 May 1941, §15.

143 Eesti Riigiarhiiv Filaal: ERAF.1.4.71, Tsentr'al'ni Komitet KP (b) Estonii Osobyi Sector, 36-39. Minutes no. 8 of the Seating of the Central Committee, dated 15, 21, and 22 May 1941. §11 and 12.

144 Eesti Riigiarhiiv Filaal: ERAF.1.4.71, Tsentr'al'ni Komitet KP (b) Estonii Osobyi Sector, 36-39. Minutes no. 8 of the Seating of the Central Committee, dated 15, 21, and 22 May 1941. §3.

Swedes participated in the art festival soon after in Tallinn. Also, the lead article in the 22 May issue focused on the Estonian-Swedes’ culture independence.

The majority of the suggestions in the May Report were never given a chance to be put into action. On 22 June 1941 Germany declared war against the Soviet Union and the Soviets shifted from the development of socialism among the Estonian-Swedes to the mobilization of the entire society for the war effort.

**Mass Arrests**

Beginning in the spring of 1941, before the invasion, the Soviet Union moved beyond propaganda efforts and began large-scale arrests, instilling fear across the region. While this occurred on a smaller scale throughout the first year of Soviet occupation, the pace increased dramatically on 14 June 1941, when the largest mass deportations occurred all across the Baltic States. Done on a Saturday late at night, approximately 10,000 people in Estonia (of all nationalities) were deported to Siberia. Historian Mati Laur writes, “People belonging to different layers of society were arrested, including workers and even Soviet activists. Nobody could be sure of tomorrow. Officially nothing was said about the arrests, which increased the fear even more.”

The deportations also affected the Swedish population, with the loss of 36 people. Those deported included a

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147 Aman, “Andra världskriget och överflytningen till Sverige” in *En bok om Estlands svenskar*, 202. A 10 June 1949 letter to the Committee for the Estonian-Swedes identifies the locations of origin and numbers of the deportees: 15 from Wormsö, 5 from Rikull, 7 from Nuckö, 2 from Vippal, and 7 from Reval. See SOV arkiv, 53A: Forteckning över Estlandssvenskar som blivit kvar i Estland. See also Uppsala universitetsbiblioteket, *Svenskarna i Estland Fram Till År 1944*, 42.
A large number of what can best be described as the Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia – teachers and leaders in the former cultural organization, including Nikolai Blees (removed from his government position at the start of the occupation, he then became a teacher at Birkas), Mathias Westerblom (the former Estonian parliamentarian and leader of SOV), Major Anders Lindkvist (from SOV), Anders Nyman (a leader of SOV), and A. Vesterblom. The Soviets also deported Tomas Gärdström, even though days earlier Sovjet-Estland announced the publication of his two textbooks for use in the schools. Frans Herm from Nargö recalled the Soviets arrested his father, who was never heard from again. “They picked up everyone that they thought could offer resistance.”

German Declaration of War and Soviet Mobilization

The structure and tone of Sovjet-Estland changed dramatically with the 25 June 1941 issue. The German declaration of war against the Soviet Union on 22 June meant an end to the image of the Soviet Union being a land of peace and meant direct involvement in a war that had previously been portrayed as restricted to the capitalist countries. The newspaper had to shift from its propaganda campaign of strengthening the communistic culture among the Estonian-Swedes to a propaganda campaign to mobilize the population against the German war effort. The minority and cultural development was nearly lost in the shuffle in the redirected propaganda campaign.

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148 See the notice in Sovjet-Estland, 11 June 1941.

The Soviets also mobilized men into the military. Although the Swedish minority avoided the first wave of mobilization, 314 Swedes were mobilized the second time around, including Viktor Pöhl (Birkas) and A. Lindström. Many attempted to escape mobilization by hiding in the forests or other locations at night, when the roundups typically occurred. Sovjet-Estland reported of men voluntarily joining the war effort against the fascists, and suggested for more people to report to mobilization points. Mobilized men were sent to the forest region of Archangel, where large numbers died of starvation or from the cold. Of those Swedes mobilized or deported, only 129 eventually returned. The others all presumably died.

As the Nazi military advanced across the Baltic region, the islanders on Runö were arguably among the most proactive in Aiboland to strike back against the Soviets. With the Red Army distracted elsewhere, the Runö-Swedes recaptured their island from the small garrison of soldiers left to maintain the island. Tomas Lorenz remembers:

It is mentioned in history books that the Runö residents had their own little revolution, in 1941, in the middle of the summer. When we heard that the Germans were on their way, we imprisoned the Russian garrison, pushing them back to the mainland. But the week after, a much larger Russian

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150 Aman, 202. A 10 June 1949 letter to the Committee for the Estonian-Swedes identifies the locations of origin and numbers of those mobilized: 102 from Wormsö, 73 from Rikull, 63 from Nuckö, 13 from Rågö, 13 from Korkis, 25 from Vippal, 18 from Reval, and 7 from Nargö. See SOV arkiv, 53A: Forteckning over Estlandssvenskar som blivit kvar i Estland.


152 “Estlandssvenskarna enhälligt vid mobilisationspunkterna,” Sovjet-Estland, 30 July 1941.

153 Uppsala universitetsbiblioteket, 26.
force came to the shore of Runö and imprisoned the Runö residents that led that revolution and five of our leaders faced a firing squad.\textsuperscript{154}

The island’s strategic location in the Bay of Riga brought the Soviets back to regain control. But the episode – the only example of the Swedes joining the fight to push the Soviets out – demonstrates the widespread dissatisfaction with Soviet power.

German forces advanced quickly into Estonia, with many Red Army soldiers fleeing. Some communities in Aiboland saw several days of intense fighting, particularly on Wormsö where there was a military presence in close proximity to civilians. Maria Tammgren of Wormsö remembers being caught in the middle of the two military forces:

\begin{quote}
When the Germans came and landed on the island, the Russians were certainly there. We were in between the exchange of shots. The war was certainly horrible that night. It began a quarter to four, then began the strikes right over us. And the airplanes. Oh, oh, oh. Yes, the same day, this was early in the morning. By night we were Germans.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

The Estonian-Swedes caught in the middle did their best to hide for cover from the two armies – either in cellars or by running into the nearby forest. Axel Lindstrom spent the later part of the Soviet occupation in hiding in a barn on Wormsö to prevent being mobilized. He remembered the summer of 1941:

\begin{quote}
In the very beginning of September, we knew the Germans were preparing to invade the island. On the ninth of September at 3:45 a.m., the eruption of heavy gunfire woke me. In a few moments, my brain went into full gear. In my mind, I tried to liberate myself from the fetters that had paralyzed me for so long [continually hiding from the Soviets from fear of forced military mobilization]. One moment my body felt like jelly, the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{154} SOV Arkiv. Första omgången estlandssvenska interjuer. Interview of Tomas Lorenz by Elin Dahlberg, October 1995.

\textsuperscript{155} SOV Arkiv. Första omgången estlandssvenska interjuer. Interview of Maria Tammgren by Agneta Ring, 5 October 1995.
next moment, it felt like a steel spring... There were 500 plus Russians facing 150 Germans. The Russians had a few attack airplanes on mainland Estonia, but the Germans didn’t seem to care, declining to counter attack by their Luftwaffe. It was clear that the fighting had to be short and fierce if the Germans were to win... I tried to distract my mind from the explosions and gunfire, now increasing in intensity, spreading across the island... On the afternoon of September 13, 1941, the explosions and gunfire suddenly ceased.\textsuperscript{156}

Other communities saw little direct action from either military force. Arnold Lindgren of Rågö remarked on the quick change:

My parents had bought a farmstead in Vippal that we had moved to; we were a short distance from the coast, but those that lived down by the coast noticed that something was happening. That the Russians had gone away. So they went over by motorboat and saw that they had left the island. They [the Soviets] didn’t have time to take much with them, they had evidently just shot the animals like pigs, and laid them in large piles. There were also some animals that just ran around loose – horses and cows.\textsuperscript{157}

As the Soviet military withdrew and the Soviet Estonian government fled east, many Estonians and Estonian-Swedes thought Estonia would regain its independence and many Estonian-Swedes moved back to their islands. Franz Herm, of Nargö reflected that:

[The Estonian-Swedes] were certainly happy and thankful that the Germans came, because in the beginning they gave them more freedom. The Germans are of course of a completely different mentality than the Russians. The Russians are certainly easier to fool, but the Germans are not as adaptable as the Russians.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{156} Axel Lindström. \textit{Once Upon An Island: Memories of a Swedish Boy} (Gig Harbor, Washington: Ravenwood, 2003), 118-119.

\textsuperscript{157} SOV Arkiv. Första omgången estlandssvenska interjuer. Interview of Arnold Lindgren by Marie Hansson, October 1995.

\textsuperscript{158} SOV Arkiv. Första omgången estlandssvenska interjuer. Interview of Frans Herm by Nille Kristiansson, 9 October 1995.
Conclusion

The start of the Second World War brought considerable changes to the Estonian-Swedes. The war disrupted the cultural and economic advancements the community made in the 1930s, and the political shift from an independent Estonia to a Soviet-controlled Estonia involved considerable changes in the leadership of the community. While political changes affected the community in earlier periods – such as the 1905 revolution, the Russian revolution, and the 1935 coup – the change to Soviet control placed severe limitations on the Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia. As was seen in the deportations, the new government specifically targeted teachers and former political and cultural leaders in the community. The change to Soviet control also removed the connections the Estonian-Swedes had with groups and individuals in Sweden.

However, despite the impact the Estonian-Swedish community faced under the new political system, there were numerous positive shifts. Viktor Aman, one of the school teachers who narrowly escaped deportation and later emigrated to Sweden during the Nazi occupation, states that as a group, the Soviet government treated the Estonian-Swedes far better than any previous government.\textsuperscript{159} The Soviet government provided financial resources to the minority group to cover healthcare, education, cultural gatherings, and a weekly newspaper – even at its highpoint, \textit{Kustbon} never successfully attained its goal of consistently coming out weekly. In previous periods, the Estonian-Swedes had sought funding for these activities from Swedes abroad, as funding from the

\textsuperscript{159} Aman, 196.
Estonian government was insufficient to meet the need. Additionally, through Neeme Ruus, the Estonian-Swedes had a direct connection to the Estonian Soviet Central Committee – a representative who spoke Swedish and regularly visited their communities. The Soviet Estonian government clearly indicated through its actions that Aiboland was not an isolated part of the country, and that the people were to be appreciated and supported.

Despite the best efforts, though, the Soviet Estonian government failed to gain widespread support among the Estonian-Swedish community. As Fridolf Isberg noted, the change in government meant the history of Swedes in Estonia was nearing its end. Either the population would be assimilated into the majority population, or the group would relocate to Sweden. Isberg, and increasingly others across Aiboland, saw no third option – there was no possibility to remain in Estonia and continue to develop an Estonian-Swedish community. Beginning with the evacuation of the islands, and furthered by the Soviet government’s issuance of the joint travel visa for the 110 Rågö-Swedes, Estonian-Swedes increasingly looked to Sweden as a savior – no longer as a protector and benefactor, but as a place for asylum. While the Soviet government rejected appeals for a mass migration of the Swedish minority, the Nazi German occupation allowed greater numbers the opportunity to emigrate.
CHAPTER 5

THE SAVIORS: MASS MIGRATION TO SWEDEN DURING THE NAZI PERIOD

In June 1944, Sigurd Curman officially closed the final chapter on the history of the Swedes in Estonia and opened a new one on the history of the Estonian-Swedes in Sweden. Resurrecting the newspaper Kustbon, now as an official publication for the Estonian-Swedes in Sweden (with the same masthead drawing of a cabin along the water’s edge, and once again flying a Swedish flag\(^1\)), Curman sought to welcome the refugee community to their new homeland. In his opening message, he wrote:

To pull up roots from the land your forefathers cultivated and worked since ancient times, to once and for all leave the coastal villages where so many spent a long and laborious life and where everyone had their happy childhood and youthful memories, to abandon all of that which previously was the object of one’s ambition, work and desire – it doesn’t happen without agony and pain. We here in Sweden completely understand that… Welcome to Sweden, which will come to be your own homeland. May it become a substitute for what you have left behind in the land of your forefathers.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) See Chapter 2 for the first appearance of the new masthead drawing, and the sole previous occasion when the Swedish flag flew. While the drawing of the cottage is the same, the Swedish flag is slightly different than the earlier version, suggesting it was added to the later masthead, when the flag had been erased. Elmar Nyman referenced the change, noting the symbolic value of resurrecting the name Kustbon and to now see the top of the flagpole with the Swedish flag flying in his editorial “En återblick” in Kustbon, December 1953.

\(^2\) Sigurd Curman, “Hälsning till Estlandssvenskarna,” Kustbon, June 1944.

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Curman’s statement, as well as the re-emergence of Kustbon, came at the tail end of the Second World War. It came as the Soviet Red Army pushed its way back into Estonia, and at the end of the mass migration of almost the entire Aiboland population to the shores of Sweden. Swedes outside Aiboland played a more prominent position during the three year German occupation. They coordinated minority protections and assistance, but more importantly organized a mass-migration of the Estonian-Swedes to Sweden. For the majority of these outsiders (including Curman), they built their wartime work on the history of cultural and economic connections with Aiboland from the 1930s. These individuals also encouraged and supported action by the Swedish government, which expressed its willingness to accept the Estonian-Swedes – either through legal channels by negotiating with German or in receiving the Estonian-Swedes that took their own initiative to escape illegally.

It was a long journey for the almost 8,000 Estonian-Swedes, and involved the support and dedication of numerous individuals and organizations in Sweden to transition them into Swedish society. The utmost success of this migration was, in large part, a result of the repeated emphasis by these organizations that the Estonian-Swedes were part of the larger Swedish people, and it was therefore the responsibility of Sweden to protect them.

Throughout the Nazi occupation of Estonia, from the summer of 1941 through early autumn of 1944, attention across Aiboland focused on resettlement to Sweden because the Soviet occupation had severely diminished their economic viability and
nationalist ambitions. With the loss of many political and cultural leaders (including clergy and teachers) as a result of the Soviet occupation, there were relatively little regional cultural expressions such as newspapers or folk festivals with the Estonian-Swedes, and few leaders able to unite the entire population. Previous editors and writers for Kustbon were among those now gone, and without a strong determination by the German officials to establish a newspaper (as the Soviets had done in creating Sovjet-Estland), the Estonian-Swedes lacked a newspaper for the community; the sole official publication was a 1942 calendar, published in connection with the German officials.

However, the Nazi government placed a higher significance on race than the Soviets, and racial determinations influenced politics and treatment of populations. By identifying as Swedes and stressing the relationship with Sweden, the Estonian-Swedes attempted to use the Nazi racial classification to their advantage. Large numbers of Estonian-Swedes joined SOV as an expression of their identity as Swedes, but also as a means for inclusion in the legal migration of the Estonian-Swedes to Sweden.

But Swedish agitation for resettlement would likely have been unsuccessful without the support and encouragement of a Nazi SS official assigned to the region – Dr. Ludwig Lienhard, who spoke fluent Swedish and immediately took a special interest in the Estonian-Swedes. Lienhard, born in 1910, was from South Schleswig, a region of historical contention between Denmark and Germany, and he grew up in a Danish-Frisian household. Belonging to a minority group himself, his educational background demonstrates an early interest in Scandinavia and minority issues, making him
particularly suited to working with the Estonian-Swedes. Lienhard’s 1945 petition for asylum in Sweden after the war emphasized that he was never an active member in any political organization, although his doctoral studies in German philology and history in 1937 required expressions of loyalty to the German state, his Aryan heritage, and an application for the Nazi party.\(^3\) Prior to his arrival in Estonia, Lienhard fought in the frontlines against Britain, and was promoted to “Sonderführer” upon arrival in Estonia.

In the face of Nazi ideology, the Estonian-Swedish community embraced racial determinations that privileged the population as a means to migrate to Sweden. For many in the Baltic region, the Nazi occupation demonstrates a more complicated picture than simply black and white, with many supporting Nazi actions in attempt to fight against the Soviet Union. As the Second World War ended and the Soviet Union moved back into the region, tens of thousands of people from the Baltic States fled with the retreating German military. The Nazi racial ideology enabled many of the Estonian-Swedes to legally relocate to Sweden, framing the Nazis, in that case, in a role as saviors.

Like the first chapter, the final chapter focuses on an individual from Sweden who greatly affected the Swedish population in Estonia. Curman represents the strong position of Sweden (both the government and organizations) in negotiating with Nazi German for the mass-relocation of the Estonian-Swedes, demonstrating the role of the minority in

\(^3\) In May 1945, Lienhard applied to the Swedish Foreign Ministry for asylum. Lienhard’s petition outlined his activities both before and during the Second World War, basing his petition on the role he played in the Estonian-Swedish migration. While such a petition is quite self-serving and obviously biased, and should be read with skepticism, I have found no evidence to refute what Lienhard writes. It is worth noting, however, that the Swedish government still rejected his petition on 6 August 1946. Lienhard and his family fled to Argentina; he moved back to Germany in 1966 and died there in 1980. See SOV arkiv, Dr. Ludwig Lienhards promemoria.
international and diplomatic relations. With strong feelings of discontent, the majority of the Swedish minority sought emigration – working with local government officials and representatives from Sweden to emigrate legally, or acting on their own to emigrate illegally. However, there were few organized activities within the Aiboland region, with the population focused on emigration and reliant on outside support.

**From the Hammer to the Swastika**

The German declaration of war against the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 quickly brought an end to the Soviet control of the region. Historians Romuald Misiunas and Rein Taagepera comment on the impressive speed in the transfer of control from the Soviets to the Germans, which took only 17 days from the German attack of East Prussia until they reached Pskov:

> If the goal of Soviet diplomatic pressure on the Baltic states since 1937 and military action in 1939-40 was to ensure the immunity of its northern flank to German attack, the results were counterproductive. The speed of the initial German thrust through the Baltic states… surpassed that of most German offensives during the Second World War… The unusual speed of the German thrust is at least partly explained by the Stalinist feat of making the Baltic populations friendly toward the Germans.⁴

Indeed, many in the Baltic states hoped the German arrival would result in regaining their independence, a hope that the Germans quickly dashed. Baltic German Alfred Rosenberg became Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories (which included all of the Baltic states), referred to as *Ostland.*

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Connections between Estonia and Sweden, cut off almost entirely during the Soviet occupation, quickly resumed once the Germans come into the region. Headlines in Swedish newspapers, including “Immediate help needed for the Estonian-Swedes”\(^5\) and “Kinsmen in distress,”\(^6\) stressed the immediacy of the Estonian-Swedes’ need for food. At the same time, they reinforced the sentiment that those in need were “Swedes.” However, these calls to action were also principally directed at the larger Swedish population, rather than an attempt to push for intervention by the Swedish government. An editorial in *Norrköpings Tidningen* emphasized that Estonia was “the theater of a bloody war;” while it was unclear what the post-war (post-Soviet) situation would be for the region, the editorial stressed that the Estonian-Swedes couldn’t wait to find out:

> The Swedes in Estonia will bear their portion of the difficulties [ahead]. It is therefore our country’s duty to lend a helping hand… Starvation and need is a daily occurrence in many parts of the world. But here it involves people of our own race [*stam*] on the other side of the Baltic Sea… Here exists a national obligation.\(^7\)

Throughout the Soviet occupation, the Soviet government filtered and censored news from Aiboland.\(^8\) With the withdrawal of the Soviet military, Swedish newspapers quickly focused on reporting what the living conditions were like under Soviet occupation, adding to earlier Swedish fears of the Soviet Union.

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5 “Snar hjälp behövs åt Estlandssvenskarna,” *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 16 September 1941.

6 “Fränder i nöd,” *Uppsala Tidningen*, 12 September 1941.


8 As mentioned in Chapter 4, news from Soviet-occupied Estonia typically came through Moscow and the TASS news agency. Only sporadic news came from Aiboland directly.
However, the coverage was notably different from earlier periods when the Swedish media covered the Estonian-Swedes, which focused on the ability of the folk group to maintain their distinct culture. Instead, the 1941 coverage portrayed the Swedish minority in Estonia as fellow “Swedes” facing desperate circumstances and under a very real threat to survive the effects of war. Amid the individual stories of loss of life and property were pleas for the Swedish public to donate necessaries – food, clothing, medical supplies, and money. An article in Dagens Nyheter, under the headline “Help from Sweden the only hope for Est-Swedes” asked, “Can you spare a crown – a crown to lend a hand to alleviate the starvation of our kinsmen on the other side of the Baltic?” The appeals clearly stressed the kinsmen bond and drew on ideas of Swedish nationalism. An editorial in Östgöten admitted that most Swedes probably only had a faint knowledge of Swedes in Estonia, but that the Estonian-Swedes continued to maintain a strong affinity for the motherland. The editorial continued:

It is not a rash of excessive nationalism when the Swedish people are called upon to help their destitute tribal kinsmen in the previously Swedish Baltic provinces. It is only a question of the very natural duty to help one’s own. It perhaps doesn’t hurt either to remember that the Estonian-Swedes currently probably couldn’t count on any sort of help from anyone other than tribesmen in Sweden.  

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9 Compare, for example, with the coverage of the “Complaining Men” in Chapter 1 and the 1919 escapade in Chapter 2.

10 One article suggested that the Estonian-Swedes needed at least 5 tons of clothing. See “Estsvenskarna behöva minst 5 ton kläder,” Svenska Morgonbladet, 21 October 1941. See also “Kläder åt Estlandssvenskarna,” Aftonbladet, 20 October 1941.

11 “Sverigehjälp enda hopp för estsvensk,” Dagens Nyheter, 26 September 1941.

12 “Estlandssvenskarna,” Östgöten, 7 October 1941.
Most of the coverage in the first months of German occupation focused on the past – telling their stories of life under Soviet occupation and the numerous individuals whose fates were unknown. Newspapers interviewed many Swedes in preparing their stories, and individuals who had previous connections to the Estonian-Swedes dominated the coverage and included Carl Mothander and former Wormsö priest John Klasson.

Pastor Hjalmar Pöhl toured around Sweden in the fall of 1941, coordinated with the help of Lienhard, making numerous appeals at churches for support, and sitting down for individual interviews with the local newspaper. His wife was among those taken by the Soviets. Pöhl told Malmö newspaper *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, “Many are just like me, they don’t know where their relatives are: shot, dragged away to the Soviet Union, in prison transports; Russia is a big place.” Pöhl’s tour was a great success in fundraising material aid, with large numbers of Swedes in Sweden directly working for the improvement of the Estonian-Swedes.

**Organizations in Sweden**

The almost-decade long feud among the Estonian-Swedish leadership in the 1930s had an unforeseen benefit. With the consolidation of resources and oversight

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13 See, for example, “Mycket mörka utsikter för bortförda estlandssvenskarna,” *Stockholms Tidningen*, 27 September 1941, which brought attention to Magnus (Mattias) Westerblom, Nikolaus Blees, and Anders Lindquist. See also “Ryssarna ha bortfört 500 Estlandssvenskar,” *Dagens Nyheter*, 10 October 1941. See also “Estlandssvenskarnas hårda år,” *Göteborgs Morgenpost*, 15 October 1941.

14 See “En Kalix-präst i estlandssvenska bygder,” *Norrbottens-Kuriren*, 10 October 1941.

15 SOV arkiv, Dr. Ludwig Lienhards promemoria.

16 See “Ohygglig rysk terror i Estland under kriget,” *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, 10 October 1941.
through the creation of the Estonia Committee (from the National Association’s Stockholm division), an organization was already in place in Sweden with intimate knowledge of Aiboland, and it could assist in coordinating aid and necessities to the region. Comprised of renowned and well-connected officers, the Estonia Committee leadership used their connections with representatives in the Swedish government, the Swedish royal family, and numerous organizations and institutions in Sweden to represent and argue for the mass relocation of the Estonian-Swedes to Sweden. Additionally, they arranged diplomatic negotiations between Germany and Sweden, coordinated visits to Aiboland, and oversaw the eventual “colonization” of the Estonian-Swedes in Sweden.

Following the news that the Soviet military occupied the Birkas school buildings, the Estonia Committee secretly began work in October 1939 on coordination for an eventual evacuation of the Swedish regions of Estonia. They created a committee “in order to prepare the reception of the Estonian-Swedes that with an eventual evacuation of the Swedish villages could be expected to arrive in Sweden”. The Estonia Committee clearly looked at the Baltic German repatriation in 1939 as a model of Sweden’s actions, questioning the viability of a minority group to resist assimilation. The Estonia Committee saw the repatriation of the Estonian-Swedes as inevitable. However, the Estonia Committee also realized the sensitive nature of their work, and with the establishment of their new committee determined that “the committee should pursue their
work under strict consideration with an extraordinarily delicate nature so that no information comes to outside knowledge.”

The acceptance of the 110 Rågö-Swedes by the Stockholm Foreign Ministry in 1940 set in motion a number of officially sanctioned programs. King Gustav V decreed the formation of a Rågö Committee (Rågökommitte) on 13 September 1940 to organize and coordinate the necessary services and government agencies for the acceptance and transition of the people from Rågö of “Swedish ancestry” (svensk härstämning) into residents and Swedish citizens. In the decree and in the committee’s actions, there was no distinction between the Swedes living on Rågö or elsewhere in Estonia – all of the Estonian-Swedes fell under the purview of the Rågö Committee.

In addition to the Rågö Committee, the Estonia Committee contributed 100,000 crowns in November 1940 for the establishment of the Rågö Foundation (Rågöstiftelsen) to fund the relocation and transition in Sweden. The bylaws, as determined by the Estonia Committee, stated, “The Rågö Foundation has the mission to support and assist those persons of Swedish heritage or their descendants, hereafter jointly named the

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18 In 1944 the Rågö Committee became the Committee for the Estonian-Swedes (Kommittee för Estlandssvenskarna). For the sake of clarity, I will use Rågö Committee throughout this chapter.


Estonian-Swedes, from Estonia’s Swedish regions who relocate to Sweden.” The foundation was to provide financial resources in terms of gifts or loans as all the refugees would arrive with little or no resources – money, clothing, and household goods. Through the organization of the Foundation’s financial resources and the network of their leadership, they arranged to buy farms in the Stockholm archipelago and located boats that the refugees could rent. They also purchased Swedish flags for the new arrivals. As the Soviet occupation turned to the German occupation and there was movement toward a massive relocation of the Estonian Swedes, the foundation compiled reports on what they referred as the “colonization” (kolonisation), identifying the professions of the refugees, and overseeing funds as loans for housing, fishing or agricultural equipment, and student loans.

There was considerable overlap between the Estonia Committee, the Rågö Committee, and the Rågö Foundation, enabling each organization to coordinate their activities and to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and resources between the groups. Additionally, each of the individuals brought considerable clout and connections, reflecting the importance of these organizations and their mission. One of the main individuals was the well-connected and highly respected Sigurd Curman, national antiquarian (Riksantikvarie) and head of the National Antiquities Office.


23 Riksarkivet SE/RA/780032 Rågöstiftelsens arkiv A1:1 Protokoll 1941-1945. See in particular the 4 okt. 1944 report to the King.
(Riksantikvarieämbetet) that oversaw historical preservation across Sweden, since 1923. Through the Estonia Committee, Curman took an active role with the Estonian-Swedes throughout the 1930s (and a leading role throughout the Second World War). Curman was the foundation’s chairman through its establishment, later serving as vice-chairman. Gerhard Hafström, a legal scholar, served as the foundation’s secretary, and was also active in the National Association. Additionally, Hafström was the chairman of the Rågö Committee (later renamed the Committee for the Estonian-Swedes). Emil Sandström, the foundation’s chairman since January 1941, was a justice in Sweden’s Supreme Court. Other members of the foundation included lawyers, corporate directors, a county governor, an agronomist, and the director of a housing organization (Egnahem).

When the Rågö-Swedes arrived in Stockholm on 17 October 1940, the government organizations went to work, easing them into life in Sweden. This was a considerable improvement over Sweden’s previous attempt at repatriation in 1929, when approximately 900 Swedes from the Ukrainian village of Gammalsvenskby (also known as Verbivka, in the Zmejovka district) arrived in Sweden. Despite extensive promises on what awaited them in Sweden, nothing had been put in place by the time they arrived in August. The government formed a Gammalsvenskby Committee and sought to assimilate the population as quickly as possible. As a result, 70 continued on to Meadows, Manitoba in Canada following a promise of 150,000 Canadian dollars from the Canadian Pacific

24 See Chapter 3.

Railroad Company to cover expenses, and 19 even returned to Ukraine following promises from the Soviet Union, with an additional 224 returning the following year. The repatriation effort was seen as a failure, for the individuals and families involved, but also for the Swedish government. The effort involved a huge cost for Sweden – even more so when the Soviet government required the Swedish government to pay for the return trip and resettlement expenses of those who returned to Ukraine. More than one and a half million crowns were spent in the Gammalsvenskby case. The repatriation attempt and failure angered not only the Ukrainian-Swedes, but also the Swedish public, leading to initial reluctance to repatriate the entire Estonian-Swedish population. But the failed repatriation also demonstrated the need for extensive preparation and coordination with the government structures to receive the population.26

In comparing the work of the Estonia Committee, the Rågö Committee, and the Rågö Foundation to the activities in the repatriation of the Ukrainian-Swedes one can see a clear learning curve. There were much greater plans put in place to adequately receive and place the Estonian-Swedes, and to coordinate numerous government agencies in Sweden. And compared to the failures of the Ukrainian-Swedes’ resettlement, the Estonian-Swedes’ colonization had far greater success at integration and satisfaction.

26 See Jörgen Hedman and Lars Åhlander, Historien om Gammalsvenskby och Svenskarna i Ukraina (Sweden: Dialogos, 2003).
Swedish-German Relations

Swedish foreign policy during the Second World War was intended to avoid direct involvement in the war. While often seen as “neutral” – Sweden, along with the other Nordic countries, declared its neutrality on September 3, 1939 – many of the decisions put Sweden in a gray-zone. In the early stages of the war, and largely continuing until Nazi dominance started to decline, policies typically favored Nazi Germany. To reassure Nazi Germany, Sweden arranged trade agreements (including the highly valuable iron ore) and censored the Swedish media. Perhaps one of the more controversial concessions Sweden made was to permit the transport of German military personnel and equipment through Sweden’s railways on their way to Norway. Sweden’s Coalition Government granted the transit agreement on 6 July 1940 (it lasted until 5 August 1943). According to the agreement, the troops were not to be sent as reinforcements and the soldiers were to travel unarmed. Sweden also allowed the use of Swedish waterways and airspace for the Germans. The second major concession Sweden made to Germany was the permission to transport troops across Northern Sweden and the use of Swedish waterways and airspace for Germans on the way to

27 For an overview of Swedish Second World War foreign policy, see W.M. Carlgren, Swedish Foreign Policy During the Second World War (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977). See also Maria-Pia Boëthius, Heder och Samvete: Sverige och Andra Världskriget (Sweden: Ordfront Förlag, 2001).

Finland. Permission for the transportation through Sweden of the “Engelbrecht Division,” comprising 14,712 armed German soldiers, was granted by the Coalition Government on 26 June 1941, five days after Germany attacked the Soviet Union.

Sweden and Germany were historically close; they were important trade partners with Germany taking between 50 and 75 percent of Swedish exports. There was a definite pro-German sentiment in many quarters in Sweden, although the desire to avoid war at all costs prevented any extensive pro-German policies that could have dragged Sweden into the war. However, an American State Department analysis of Sweden at the end of 1941: “The Swedes are not so much anti-Nazi or pro-British, as they are increasingly pro-Swedish with certain pan-Scandinavian overtones.”

Sweden’s avoidance of direct war, and in particular the positive relationship with Germany, allowed Sweden greater access to German diplomats and officials to discuss the Estonian-Swedes and raise the possibility of mass-relocation. Lienhard suggested the

29 The government denied requests from Britain and France during the Winter War to transport troops through Sweden to Finland.

30 David Arter, Scandinavian Politics Today (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 272.

31 United States Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, Neutral Sweden and the Belligerants in the Third Year of the War, R&A No. 208, Memorandum No. 8. Washington: 27 December 1941. 2-4. The analysis states that early in the Nazi period the trade heavily favored Germany, however, beginning in 1939 the balance shifted, with Sweden being favored in the trade agreements. The report also indicates that the trade figures do not include the exports of Swedish iron ore, iron, and steel, as this information was not published at the time.


mass-evacuation of the Estonian-Swedes early in the Nazi period, raising the issue with Stockholm in autumn 1941, basing his suggestion on the similar relocation of the Baltic Germans. But moving from suggestion to reality required extensive preparation and coordination, not to mention approval from Germans in higher positions.\textsuperscript{34} The Swedish government was receptive to the relocation, having already agreed to it during the Soviet occupation, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Swedish-German connections were also influenced by the Nazi racial ideology, which placed the Nordic race at the top of the racial hierarchy. Ideas of racial superiority were nothing new to Swedes. Since the turn of the century, numerous scholars in Sweden (as well as Finnish-Swedes) studied issues of race.\textsuperscript{35} In 1922, Herman Lundborg founded the State Institute for Race Biology (the first of its kind in the world) at Uppsala University – one of the top Swedish schools.\textsuperscript{36} While Sweden never took the policies to the radical extreme as Germany did under Hitler and Himmler, race played a significant role in determining Sweden’s refugee policies throughout the 1920s and 1930s, only

\textsuperscript{34} After the end of the war, Lienhard petitioned the Swedish government for permission to remain in Sweden. While the government rejected the petition, the application provides a deep insight into Lienhard’s work and his motivation.

\textsuperscript{35} In recent years, numerous Swedish scholars have explored the role of race, Nazi ideology in Sweden, and connections between Sweden and Nazi Germany. See for example, Birgitta Almgren, \textit{Drömmen om Norden: Nazistisk infiltration 1933-1945} (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2005); Håkan Blomqvist, \textit{Nation, ras och civilisation i svensk arbetarrörelse före nazismen} (Stockholm: Carlssons Bokförlag, 2006); Stig Ekman and Klas Åmark, eds., \textit{Sweden’s relations with Nazism, Nazi Germany and the Holocaust} (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003); and Heléne Lööw, \textit{Hakkorset och Wasakärven: En studie av nationalsocialismen i Sverige 1924-1950} (Göteborg: Historiska institutionen, 1990).

\textsuperscript{36} In 1958, the State Institute for Race Biology (\textit{Statens institut för rasbiologi}) changed its name to the Institute for Medical Genetics (\textit{Institutionen för medicinsk genetik}).

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shifting in the later stages of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{37} It also made negotiations with Germany concerning the Estonian-Swedes easier.

As the German military assumed control of the region, the fate of the Estonian-Swedes seemed to improve. Several officers acted favorably toward the minority, particularly Ludwig Lienhard. In December 1941, a German delegation, including Dr. Lienhard visited Birkas; several of the students and faculty were stripped and body measurements were taken. They were later notified that the Estonian-Swedes were Germanic with certain Baltic features.\textsuperscript{38} Those findings paralleled the results of Swedish racial biologists from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but would prove necessary in placing the Estonian-Swedes high up in the Nazi racial hierarchy, and therefore more applicable for relocation to Sweden later in the war.

From 18 January to 14 February 1942, a committee from Sweden visited the Estonian-Swedes, coming via Berlin. Among the delegation were parliamentarian James Dickson, Doctor Gerhard Hafström, and Carl Mothander.\textsuperscript{39} Once in Estonia, they met and toured around Aiboland with Lienhard, Werner Hasselblatt,\textsuperscript{40} and Estonian-Swedish


\textsuperscript{39} Mothander, discussed heavily in Chapter 3, relocated to Sweden with his wife when Hitler recalled the Baltic Germans in 1939.

\textsuperscript{40} Hasselblatt was a prominent Baltic German and former parliamentarian in the Estonian \textit{Rügikogu}; among his other accomplishments, he authored the Cultural Autonomy Law, discussed in Chapter 2.
Pastor Hjalmar Pöhl. The delegation observed, “Among the Estonian-Swedish population exists a constant and very widespread desire to immigrate to Sweden. It is expressed publically as well as more privately.” Following their return to Sweden, the Committee for Aid Expeditions to Estonian-Swedes was founded under the leadership of C. Lindhagen.

Through the Committee, the Swedish Red Cross visited the Estonian-Swedish regions in the second half of June 1942. They brought with them two tractors, 50 boat-motors, clothing, farming supplies, books, an automobile for transporting the sick, medical supplies, and two nurses. Ultimately, many of these boat-motors were later used by the Estonian-Swedes to emigrate illegally. The visits from Sweden invigorated discussions of flight to Sweden among the Estonian-Swedes.

Daily Life

Following the consolidation of German power in Estonia, the new government administrators sought to restore Swedish-language education. The Hapsal Gymnasium

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44 Ibid.

45 Aman, En bok om Estlands svenskar, 207.


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suffered a minimal delay, first resuming classes in January 1942. The school needed a new location (the former building now served as military barracks), but more importantly needed new teachers. Headmaster Anton Üksti and teachers Alexander Berggren, Aurelia Üksti, and Kaarel Karus all disappeared during the Soviet occupation. There were 50 students that returned to the school at the start of 1942. However, emigration thoughts plagued the 1942-1943 school year. The Germans arrested teachers Anders Stenholm and Leander Gjärdman, although when no replacement could be found for the school, the Germans released them. In May 1943, the school closed for good because of a lack of students, as many Estonian-Swedish families already emigrated or anticipated emigration to Sweden.47 Birkas also initially resumed, with Fridolf Isberg remaining as the headmaster. Like Hapsal, the school closed after 1943; Isberg emigrated to Sweden in summer 1943.

Throughout the German period, there was no regular Swedish-language newspaper publication, making mass communication across Aiboland difficult and isolating the spreadout villages. Obviously Sovjet-Estland stopped publication, and with both of the former newspaper editors sent in exile by the Soviets, there were no Estonian-Swedes with experience to undertake a full-scale newspaper. Elmar Nyman mentions that German agitation sought to emphasize the prominent role the Estonian-Swedes (as part of the larger Germanic race) would play in the post-war Baltic region.48

47 See Edvin Lagman, ”Svenska gymnasiet 1940-1943,” Kustbon, Oktober 1951.
One of the best examples of the German propaganda to survive the war was an almanac for 1943 (the only Swedish-language almanac published during the Nazi occupation), compiled by A. Stahl. The calendar pointed to anniversaries of significance for Nazi Germany. However, there were also dates of significance for the Estonian-Swedes: the anniversary of Hans Pöhl’s death (January 22, 1930), Swedish King Gustav V’s birthday (16 June 1858), Reval’s liberation by German troops (28 August 1941), German troops arrive on Wormsö (9 September 1941), the battle of Narva (20 October 1700), and the anniversary of Gustav II Adolf’s death (6 November 1632). These dates emphasized Swedish nationalism, but also framed the Germans as liberators of Estonia.

The almanac also included a new hymn, “Home Defense March” (Odalvärnets Marsh), published in the first pages of the calendar, with music composed by Hjalmar Pöhl and text by Ludwig Lienhard (written on 10 September 1941 during the assault on Wormsö). The hymn includes a strong germanic racial overtone, linking the Estonian-Swedes to the germanic race:

Yes, I will defend the ancestral land,

Ja, Dig vill vi värna vår fädernejord,

Our home and our villages and our islands and our fjords.

Vårt hem och vår bygd och vår ö och vår fjord.

49 Dates included: German unification (18 January 1871), the founding of the Third Reich (30 January 1933), Hitler’s announcement of the Nazi party platform (24 February 1924), the re-establishment of control of the Saar region (1 March 1935), the Austrian annexation, (13 March 1938), Hitler’s birthday (20 April 1889), the outbreak of the Second World War (1 September 1939), England and France declare war on Germany (3 September 1939), and the liberation of Sudetenland (1 October 1938).

50 The Swedish language makes a distinction between Germans (tyskar) and german (germaner), which includes others in the Germanic languages, such as the Scandinavians. The almanac uses the later word choice.
Strike weapons in thought, strike weapons of iron
Smid vapen i tanke, smid vapen av järn
And stand as the Nordic Home Defense!
Och stå som det nordiska odalvärn!

Against storms from the sea we have many times stood,
Mot storm ifrån havet vi mången gång stod,
But storms from the East have waves of blood.
Men stormen från Östern har vågor av blod.
Strike weapons in thought, strike weapons of iron
Smid vapen i tanke, smid vapen av järn
And stand as the Nordic Home Defense!
Och stå som det nordiska odalvärn!

Against warring powers the germans stand,
Mot ofredens makter germanerna står,
To fight for our freedom now calling out.
Till kamp för vår frihet nu härropet går.
Strike weapons in thought, strike weapons of iron
Smid vapen i tanke, smid vapen av järn
And stand as the Nordic Home Defense!
Och stå som det nordiska odalvärn!

So we end the way in struggle for our cause,
Så sluter vi ledet i kamp för vår sak,
And move toward a brighter day.
Och så går det fram till en ljusare dag.
Strike weapons in thought, strike weapons of iron
Smid vapen i tanke, smid vapen av järn
And stand as the Nordic Home Defense!
Och stå som det nordiska odalvärn!51

The hymn’s reference to the blood from the East clearly referenced the Soviet Union, encouraging all the Germanic people to unite together. One can see links between this view of the East and missionary Österblom’s view of Russia as barbarians. Lienhard intended for the hymn to be an anthem for an Estonian-Swedish pro-Nazi cultural

51 See Årsbok ock Kalender 1943, p.4.
organization, the Home Guard (*Odalvärvnet*), which first met in Hapsal in 1942.\(^{52}\) However, the organization found few Estonian-Swedes wishing to join.\(^{53}\)

The 1943 calendar was the largest almanac published for the Estonian-Swedes, and contained numerous essays.\(^{54}\) Lienhard wrote an article, drawing heavily on the Estonian-Swedish culture and history. He clearly drew on his expertise in Nordic culture, making numerous literary and cultural references to Swedish and Scandinavian languages. However, Lienhard also closely articulated the Nazi German ideas and interpretation of the Interwar period. He concludes by stating: “We primarily seek for the Vikings in the Nordic people, and we know that this Viking, despite all, still exists in our and your blood! And we will succeed in the future.”\(^{55}\)

Pastor Hjalmar Pöhl also published an article in the almanac which heavily criticized the Soviet occupation, but more broadly articulated the position of the Estonian-Swedes under German control. He wrote that Estonia’s General Commissioner, Obergruppenführer Lietzmann, announced a list of rights available to the Estonian-Swedes, including rights previously available under the Estonian state. These rights, originally announced 27 June 1942, included:

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\(^{52}\) Riksarkivet SE/RA/730546 Nuckö församling Ö1:5, Johan Lindströms papper. See the minutes of the 27 June 1942 minutes of the meeting in Hapsal. The minutes indicate that Lienhard was in attendance.

\(^{53}\) I have not been able to locate any membership information for the Home Guard.

\(^{54}\) Stahl wrote an overview of events since the last almanac (he completely ignores the Soviet-produced almanac for the Estonian-Swedes), with an unsurprising heavy criticism of the Bolsheviks. A. Stahl, “Estlandssvenskarnas öden sedan den senaste svenska almanackan,” *Årsbok och Kalender 1943*, p.58-60.

\(^{55}\) Ludwig Lienhard, “Hur våra öden randas,” *Årsbok och Kalender 1943*, p.67-85. Lienhard even proposed the creation of an Estonian-Swedish flag, bearing the design of a Runö-style Viking ship and a Wormsö-style cross on the sail.
To establish the cultural organization Home Guard,
To sanction the present session of the Estonian-Swedes’ official representatives,
To render as a unifying link between the individual villages through a weekly newspaper,
To arrange our education after nationalist principles,
To practice body- and youth education in individual associations through the framework of the Home Guard,
To give the speaker the right to present their wishes directly to the General Commissioner without intermediaries.56

Along with these rights, Pöhl emphasized the loyalty of the Estonian-Swedes to the government, and the commitment of the people to maintain their unique culture, language, and names, echoing the dual identification of the Estonian-Swedes in the 1930s as part of the Swedish nation and citizens of Estonia.57

Although Pöhl’s article suggested the intent for a Swedish-language newspaper during the Nazi period, a publication never materialized. Despite the support of the German authorities, the lack of a newspaper suggests other priorities for the Estonian-Swedes, and the difficulty for the Home Guard to gain widespread membership in Aiboland.

Besides the almanac, there were unofficial and unauthorized periodicals. Continuing in the tradition of the school newspapers from the Estonian period, six school boys born in Roslep between 1925 and 1928 created a hand-written newspaper centered


57 Rounding out the articles in the calendar were articles by Lars Lindström on aid from Sweden, an overview of Swedish-language education in Estonia by A. Vesterberg, a second article by Lienhard on the battle for Wormsö, an overview of Birkas by headmaster Fridolf Isberg, an article on Hapsal Gymnasium by E. Lagman, reflections on visits to Germany by A. Nyman and Johannes Lindström, a poem entitled “Aiboland,” and a list of Nordic names.
around sports. Sandhamn, named after the sports field where they held “mini-Olympics” on Saturdays and Sundays throughout the summer, had four issues – May, June, and December 1942, and April 1943. Editor Albert Vesterby wrote in the first issue of the modest ambitions of their effort: “Sandhamn does not refuse anything, it will take anything offered… Sandhamn will not be a ‘distinguished newspaper.’ It will be good if it can come out 3-4 times a year.”

It is not clear how many copies of Sandhamn the boys produced, and was probably little more than individual distractions and childhood fun. However, the newspaper demonstrates the sentiments of the children in Aiboland during the war. One notable article by Albert Vesterby alluded to the volatile status, extolling the new year, with a bit of uncertainty about what the future would bring.

We move forward in the unobstructed progression of time toward a new year. What lies ahead we do not know. We do know that the coming days will be interrupted by nights, which in turn become glorious morning hours. We cannot judge the year’s character before it even comes to an end. The saying goes that we cannot praise the day before the sun is harvested [Vi konna icka prisa dag förrän sol är bärgad]. We enter into the new year without any idea of what will happen. One thing is certain. It will bring both happy and bitter moments. Strive for that. Enjoy the

58 The SOV archive collection of the newspaper states there were an additional two issues written by the boys after they arrived in Sweden, although the archive collection did not include copies of these two issues.

59 “Sandhamns’ födelse.” Sandhamn, 9 May 1942. The content of Sandhamn mostly kept to the theme of sports, and rarely strayed into articles of a political nature. The issues contained their latest exploits, detailed commentary on their competitions, and previews of the next planned race. However, periodically, the articles gave some insight into the boys’ lives and experiences. One such experience was an article by Rafael Brunberg that recounts the very first time the young boy was photographed, and his terror over what the camera would do to him. See Sandhamn, 25 April 1943.
gladness and take the bitter as it comes... May we reject all the nightmares and let in a bright gleam of hope in the future!"60

While never mentioning the German occupation or directly referencing specific events, Vesterberg’s essay references the challenges the new year would likely bring and the need to persevere. In issue 4, Einar Hamberg reflected, “Sandhamn has taught us so much, to not fear fatigue and other difficulties… Imagine what delight one can feel inside when you are free as a bird.”61

Concepts of “Swedishness” appeared periodically in Sandhamn. One article in particular, written by Einar Hamberg in the third issue, extols praises for the motherland and Swedishness.

Show your deference for the motherland and Swedishness! Don’t forget the language your mother taught you. Never abandon it for another, for the Swedes are not stupid, but rather the opposite. Wherever one goes you can hear the ringing language, most likely better than anything else. During these times Sweden stands close in all objectives and for this reason we should rejoice. “If you have been Swedish, so shall you remain!”62

Hamberg, like the Estonian-Swedish intelligentsia of the 1930s, placed considerable value on the maintenance of their Swedish language as the central component of their identification as Swedes.

The shift from Soviet to German occupation also resulted in a return of the church and religious ceremonies, as can be seen with the dramatic rise in baptisms from the Soviet to the German period. For example, in Roslep, whereas the baptisms dipped to 16

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60 “Friska tag.” Sandhamn. 25 December 1942.
61 “Ferier.” Sandhamn. 25 April 1943.
in 1940 and 15 in 1941, by 1942 the numbers returned to pre-war levels: 24 in 1942 and 29 in 1943. Additionally, there was a mass confirmation ceremony on 9 May 1943, led by Pastor Ivar Pöhl, confirming 44 boys and 52 girls. The baptismal numbers declined again in 1944, as people left for Sweden; only 9 children were baptized in 1944. The decline in 1944 is also reflected in a drop to only 9 burials in the church, with the final burial taking place on 17 August. The decline also reflects the increase in the medical evacuations of the elderly and sick. The marriage book for Roslep lists a continued drop in the number, from a high of 12 in 1936, 8 in 1940, 5 in both 1941 and 1942, and only one in both 1943 and 1944.

However, the primary focus for most of the Estonian-Swedes throughout the German occupation was how to get to Sweden. The uncertainty of the progression of the war and anticipation of the mass relocation to Sweden pervaded all aspects of life. Elmar Nyman remembers, “For me, like many other Estonian-Swedes, Christmas 1942 was the last one in our old villages. I would have rather celebrated it in our dreamland, Sweden.” Bad weather thwarted a November attempt for Nyman to escape. “But Christmas Eve

65 Riksarkivet: SE/RA/730546 Nuckö församling, F1:3 Roslep födelse- och dopbok, död och begravningsbok (1936-1944). Matmise raamat 1936-1944. The burials in Roslep remained around the same level as during the Soviet period: 23 in 1940, 22 in 1941, 20 in 1942, and 17 in 1943. As remained constant during the pre-war and Soviet periods, all deaths are listed as illness or “old-age weakness”, with the exception of a triple burial of three boys (Elmar-Sanfred Broman, born 1928; Knut-Torsten Tegelberg, born 1928; and Hjalmar-Gotfrid Vesterby, born 1926) on 14 March 1943 resulting from a mine explosion.
was completely serious. Friends were now gone, silence prevailed, and there was a heavy atmosphere. The Christmas beer was indeed saved, but there were a lot of other things missing… There were rumors of forced mobilizations.”

**Negotiations**

In spring 1942, the Swedish Foreign Ministry began negotiating with Berlin over the fate of the Estonian-Swedes and their legal migration to Sweden. While the discussions suggested a willingness (in theory) for the relocation, permission moved slowly, initially focused on small numbers. As a result of their negotiations, the German government approved a limited migration for the elderly and the sick. The medical ship “Seagull II” traveled to Estonia in May 1943 and returned with 42 sick or elderly Estonian-Swedes who had relatives living in Sweden.

Carl Mothander in particular played a prominent position in the negotiations, meeting with officials in Berlin on several occasions before and after visits to Estonia. After returning from one such visit in September 1943, Mothander reported to the Rågö Committee German willingness to allow 500 elderly and ill Estonian-Swedes to relocate. The Germans indicated that a full-scale relocation was not currently possible, but could be discussed later. Mothander reported that the Germans linked the possibility for mass-

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68 See Mothander’s memoir of his role throughout the period, *Svenska Kungens Vita Skepp* (1949). Mothander prefers to give himself full credit for originating the idea of a mass transport of the sick and elderly and working as a private individual (without any sort of government approval) making it a reality. See Carl Mothander, “För tio år sen,” *Kustbon*, July 1953.
migration to the fate of the war with the Soviet Union: should the Soviets start regaining Estonia, the German government would give the Swedish government all the protection necessary for the mass-migration of the Estonian-Swedes. According to the minutes of the Rågö Committee’s 28 September 1943 meeting, “Major Mothander thought the flight does not depend on fear for German mobilization, but rather on the threat of the Russians returning.” A few weeks later, the committee gave Mothander the authority to oversee the relocation of the 500 sick and elderly.

The Swedish ship “Odin” made three similar trips in November and December of the same year, returning with an additional 736 Estonian-Swedes. Additionally, 60 Estonian-Swedes were transported during this period via Finland. Once onboard “Odin”, the Estonian-Swedes received a letter from the captain, M. Cronvall, welcoming them onboard and preparing them for what awaited them in Stockholm. He wrote:

Since it is impossible for me to assemble all of you here at one time, I would like to greet all of you on behalf of the Committee for Rågö-Swedes in this manner. All of you are warmly welcomed onboard this Swedish keel, and within a few days you will be home in the motherland.

The boat will take you to Stockholm, where you all will stay for a week for medical examinations, passport formalities, and the like. After these

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70 Riksarkivet SE/RA/420136 Kommittén för estlandssvenskarna, A:1 Protokoll. Minutes for the 8 October 1943 meeting, §1. Considering the extensive dispute Mothander had with the Estonia Committee throughout the 1930s (see Chapter 3), their confidence in his ability and willingness to work with him demonstrates how all disagreements were now set aside to work towards common goals.

formalities are concluded, each and every one of you that will not be staying with relatives will prepare for your employment placement.72

Ellen Lindström was a young woman from Wormsö who arrived in Stockholm with her mother aboard “Odin” on 27 November 1943 along with 300 others (232 from Wormsö). Upon arrival in Sweden, mother and daughter lived in an attic in a house filled with refugees.73 Her two brothers had fled to Sweden illegally earlier, although her father Lars remained in Estonia (he was onboard the 7 December 1943 “Odin” journey).74

Swedish diplomacy regarding the Estonian-Swedes had greater success in negotiations with Berlin up until Stalingrad, when the tides of the war started turning against Germany. As the war turned against Germany, the Nazis were reluctant to relocate men who could be mobilized for the war effort. However, once the process of relocation and resettlement begun, it became easier to maintain. As the situation took turns for the worse for Germany, local officials in Estonia like Lienhard were more willing to cooperate on their own in an attempt to gain favor with the West, in case Germany eventually lost.

In January 1944 as the chances for a German victory increasingly seemed dim, the Swedish Foreign Ministry attempted to negotiate for all of the remaining Estonian-


74 Lars Lindström wrote his own account of life in Estonia and the relocation to Sweden in Stormar over Ormsö: svenskt ödesdra ma i österled (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1960).
SOV was put in charge of determining race, and SOV membership quickly soared. SOV issued membership cards which served as proof of their belonging to the Swedish race (see illustration 5). For many, membership in the organization was viewed as a guarantee of their ability to leave, and in some instances, Estonians successfully emigrated through this process.

Illustration 5. SOV membership card, 1944. The card includes the person’s name, place and date of birth, occupation, and the address. Source: SOV arkiv.

The agreement reached between the Germans and the Swedes included a press black-out of the action. The Committee for Rågö-Swedes issued a communiqué to the Swedish news agency (TT) with specific guidelines:

1. No criticism is to be directed towards the German or Russian governments or about the circumstances.
2. The issue should not be portrayed so that the transport can be viewed as a prelude of German evacuation of Estonia.
3. The issue should also not suggest that the transport is interpreted as a prelude to a complete evacuation of the Estonian-Swedes.
4. It is not to be suggested that the terms “sick and elderly” are used as camouflage even for other people.
5. There should be no explanation given that Estonian-Swedes already arrived to Sweden as refugees.
6. No interviews may occur with the arrivals.\textsuperscript{76}

The report stated that the guidelines were necessary so as to not risk later transports. As a committee officially authorized by the King, and in an atmosphere of intense media censorship and scrutiny, the press obeyed the guidelines.

Lienhard organized transportation in cooperation with the Committee for Aid Expeditions to Estonian-Swedes and the Swedish Red Cross aboard the cargo ship “Juhan.” This resulted in nine voyages flying under the Nazi flag between 21 June and 11 September 1944 and the transportation of 3,335 Estonian-Swedes to Stockholm. An additional 70 Estonian-Swedes traveled aboard the Estonian boat “Triina” on 22 September.\textsuperscript{77} The Swedish State paid the 50 kronor passage cost per passenger.\textsuperscript{78}

Beginning in January 1944, the Soviets began advancing towards Estonia again. In February, the strategic importance of the islands once again reappeared and the

\textsuperscript{76} Riksarkivet SE/RA/420136 Kommittén för estlandssvenskarna, A:1 Protokoll. The report, included in the 25 January 1944 minutes, is dated 26 November 1943.

\textsuperscript{77} “Kommittén för estlandssvenskarna: Redogörelse över dess verksamhet 1940-1950,” Kustbön, February 1951.

\textsuperscript{78} Persson, “Flykten Över Östersjön,” 16.
Germans evacuated Nargö, Rågö, and Odinsholm. The pace was relatively slow until September. As the Red Army moved closer, the pace of the mass relocation of the Estonian-Swedes increased; “Juhan” had the final transport in September. On 22 September 1944, the Soviets recaptured Tallinn. By the time the Soviets completely regained control of Estonia, 4,357 Estonian-Swedes had legally relocated to Sweden.

Herman Marcus was on the dock in Tallinn and watched as “Triina” departed for the last voyage to Sweden. He, along with a group of Estonian-Swedes had gathered, waiting for their name to be called, and waiting to board the ship. But there was not enough room on the ship, and they never heard their names.

With that, the last hope of being saved disappeared. They had left [us] behind on the dock among a swarm of suitcases, crates, muffles, and baby carriages that couldn’t fit on the boat. All hope of a brighter future in freedom and peace in their forefathers’ land, Swede, were dashed.

With the Red Army on the outskirts of Tallinn, the remaining Swedes in the capital gathered at the Swedish church for a final Swedish-language service. The next day, they sought to escape by any means possible, including either locating a small boat and heading across the Gulf of Finland or retreating with the Germans. Throughout the German occupation, and the final months in particular, there were thousands of Estonian-Swedes that fled the region illegally, defying the German attempts to control the migration – and more importantly, to prevent able-bodied men who could be mobilized from leaving. These illegal journeys involved bypassing and evading German soldiers

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79 Aman, *En bok om Estlands svenskarna*, 238.

patrolling the shores, procuring a boat (and hopefully a motor), and then traveling across waters patrolled by both German and Soviet military ships. The journey in summer was more dangerous, since it remained light, however winter was more prone to bad weather.

Agneta Vallins from Wormsö was one of those that fled illegally. Her uncle woke her up in the middle of the night in April 1944 to head to the beach in search of a boat. She came across a group who offered her a place in their boat. She recalled, “It was windy and raining, and the waves were high. Those that picked us up explained that there were too many onboard for such weather and that a few must leave the boat.” Vallins, along with five others were left on a small deserted island, finding refuge in the island’s only cabin, although they lacked food or fresh water. “We were not prepared to live on an uninhabited island.” Three days later, after convincing the Finnish authorities that they must return, the boat came back to the island and took them to Hangö, Finland; they then travelled to Stockholm, where they joined the other Estonian-Swedes.  

Following the final voyages of “Juhan” the Rågö Committee attempted to ease the ability of remaining Estonian-Swedes to come to Sweden via other countries, particularly from Germany. Approximately 300 Estonian-Swedes were able to make it to Sweden as a result of this.  

81 As told to by Sven Ahlström, “Hamnade på öde ö under flykten från Ormsö,” Kustbon, June 2007.

Resettlement of the Estonian-Swedes

By the end of the war, 6,947 Estonian-Swedes had successfully relocated to Sweden, with tremendous relief. Johan Landman of Wormsö recalled his feelings on arriving in Sweden: “How shall we say... one was certainly glad, in any case; no more fear in the body. Earlier, you were tense all the time. But we made it – all of us.” Upon their arrival in Sweden, the Estonian-Swedes were first placed in Stockholm until work could be located. Each family was given a loan of 300 crowns for clothes and household goods. The Rågö Committee, which took over the responsibility of all the Estonian-Swedes, organized the purchase of 51 fishing places and 83 farms. In total, the Committee spent 4,418,000 crowns, or approximately 557 crowns per person. Sweden, which had an abundance of jobs at the end of the war, was able to accommodate the work needs of the new arrivals. The Committee resurrected Kustbon in June 1944 after a four-year hiatus. This time, however, it was published in Sweden. As a community, the Estonian-Swedes grew stronger following the immigration, with the experience uniting them, regardless of where they were placed in Sweden.

Following arrival in Stockholm, various Swedish agencies processed the emigrants, including health inspections and a temporary quarantine, before being relocated either in Stockholm or in the surrounding areas. While Sweden typically sent other refugee groups to specific camps, the government and the Rågö Committee worked together to incorporate the Estonian-Swedes into the larger Swedish society directly after

initial processing. The Rågö Committee coordinated all of the necessary agencies, and assumed the task of monitoring and overseeing the complete integration process. In an 11 January 1944 letter to the Royal National Board of Education (Kungl. Skolöverstyrelsen), the Committee described the Estonian-Swedes and their position in Swedish society: “Since the Estonian-Swedes are of a healthy and sound stock, which will make them a valuable addition to the Swedish race (folkstammen), it is important that they be helped and receive the same benefits as other Swedes.”

Regardless of their actual citizenship, the Estonian-Swedes were to be treated like Swedish citizens by government institutions, including for applicability to rations.

Not everyone agreed, however. On several occasions, there were protests from Swedes that the refugees were Estonians, not Swedes, and were therefore not eligible to services and privileges available to Swedes. For example, a group of Swedish fishermen argued that only Swedish citizens should be permitted to fish in Swedish waters. Complaints over services provided to the Estonian-Swedes, in part, helped accelerate the citizenship process – an advantage not given to other refugee groups. King Gustav V personally requested the government to waive the five-year residency requirement; in

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85 Riksarkivet SE/RA/420136 Kommittén för estlandssvenskarna, A:1 Protokoll. See, for example, a letter to Statens Livsmedelskommission dated 20 May 1944, included with the 4 July 1944 minutes.

86 Riksarkivet SE/RA/420136 Kommittén för estlandssvenskarna, A:1 Protokoll. See minutes for the 25 November 1944 meeting, and the letter to Kungl. Lantbruksstyrelsen dated October 1944, which stated that the fishermen were Estonian-Swedes and not Estonians (underlining from the original).

87 See Gerhard Haftröm, “Medborgarskapsfrågan,” Kustbon, October 1944.
some cases, Estonian-Swedes received Swedish citizenship a few months after their arrival.88

Conclusion

The Second World War migration of the Estonian-Swedes to Sweden – whether through the legal channels or by fleeing illegally – marked an end of the more than 700 years of Swedish settlement on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea. The migration succeeded because Sweden and Nazi Germany both viewed the population as part of the larger Swedish people. However, it was also a success because there was a motivated core group of highly connected Swedes working in Stockholm, forming numerous organizations and foundations to oversee the migration, reception, and “colonization” of the thousands of refugees. These individuals had personal connections with Sweden – through the efforts of the Estonia Committee in the 1930s, or through periods of residency among the Estonian-Swedes (such as teachers or clergy). It was also a success for the Estonian-Swedes who sought to emigrate, and did so either through the legal channels those in Sweden negotiated or found their own way illegally.

Sweden’s refugee policy also shifted throughout the Second World War; the Estonian-Swedes were a small portion of a total refugee population that also included

88 Riksarkivet SE/RA/420136 Kommittén för estlandssvenskarna, A:1 Protokoll. See, for example, the minutes to the 25 November 1944 meeting, which included proof of Swedish citizenship for Fridolf Isberg (former headmaster at Birkas), authorized on 6 October 1944; Isberg arrived in Sweden in the summer of 1943.
Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians, as well as Jews from Norway and Denmark. In total, Sweden accepted upwards of 70,000 refugees by the end of the war – a demographic shift that greatly influenced Sweden’s post-war political structure. Post-war Sweden became increasingly focused on humanitarian aid, with one of the most liberal refugee policies in Europe.  

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89 For an overview of Swedish policies regarding Jews, see Koblik, *The Stones Cry Out*.

90 One can also argue that part of the humanitarian focus of the post-war Sweden was to compensate for some of the more questionable wartime policies (such as initial refusal of Jews, or permitting German military transports to use the Swedish railways).
CONCLUSION

MEMORY AND PRESERVATION AMONG
ESTONIAN-SWEDISH REFUGEES IN SWEDEN

In 2006 while attending a friend’s wedding in Sweden, I struck up a conversation with the man seated across from me. When I told him the topic of my research, he interjected that his grandmother was an Estonian-Swede who immigrated to Sweden in 1944. But that was all he knew about her experiences and her background. She never talked with her grandson about her hometown or even about her journey to Sweden at the end of the Second World War. She married a Swede and completely assimilated into Swedish society.

The conversation at the wedding raised questions for me about the decision of the Estonian-Swedish migrants to remember or to forget. When the Estonian-Swedes arrived to Sweden, they had to decide to what degree they would assimilate into Swedish society. Some individuals choose to forget their experiences and sought to blend into the larger Swedish population. However, others choose to remember and embrace their Estonian-Swedish background. The act of memory (and preserving) or forgetting, however, reframed what Estonian-Swedish identity was all about.

One of the primary goals of the Committee for the Estonian-Swedes (formerly the Rågö Committee) – the committee that coordinated and monitored the relocation of the approximately 7,900 Estonian-Swedes to Sweden between 1940 and 1944 – was the
colonization and integration of the refugees into Swedish society. As the Estonian-Swedes arrived, the Committee oversaw their processing, health inspections, housing, employment, citizenship, and education. The Committee bought farmland, fishing boats, and secured student loans to integrate the Estonian-Swedes into the commercial and educational aspects of Swedish society. Concluding their activities, the Committee’s 1950 report stated, “The committee has the pleasure to verify, that the majority of the relocated Estonian-Swedes acclimated fairly quickly and settled into Swedish society and their work.” The committee commented that the tribe was “physically healthy and sound… hardworking, unpretentious, and honorable.”

Internal Development

For centuries, the Swedes in Estland Province (and later, the Republic of Estonia) looked to Sweden as a protector and defender of their rights. During the Swedish Empire, the monarchs issued declarations of their rights, which the Russian tsars continued to recognize when Russia moved into the region, and the Swedish peasants viewed their rights as originating from Sweden. The relationship between the Swedish peasants and Sweden changed in 1873 with the arrival of missionaries, who focused on improving Swedish-language education and strengthening their Lutheran faith.

The Estonian-Swedes sought to unite the various villages in Aiboland through their emphasis on Swedish-language education and by developing organizations to unify the region. The first cultural organization, Svenska Odlingens Vänner, made education

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throughout Aiboland their top priority. Their greatest successes came with the creation of
the Birkas Folk and Agricultural School in 1920 and the Hapsal High School in 1930,
bringing students from across Aiboland together and strengthening the connections
between the previously isolated villages and islands. As the students completed their
education, the Estonian-Swedish leaders and instructors hoped that the students would
bring their new skills and ideas back to their home communities, solidifying the
connections across Aiboland.

The schools and SOV fostered a strong sense of Swedish nationalism and pride in
Aiboland, representing the dual identification of the Estonian-Swedes. First, they were
members of the larger Swedish nation, and were to embrace their Swedish heritage and
language against competing influences. Second, they were loyal citizens of the Republic
of Estonia who valued their civic responsibility. These were not necessarily competing
aspects, but rather complementary. The first was based on heritage (and carried a cultural
and biological component), while the second was based on geography and politics.

One of the problems the Soviet Union faced in incorporating the Swedish
minority was the dramatic shift required in their identification. Soviet identity challenged
both of the dual components of the Estonian-Swedish identity. First, although the Soviets
allowed, and even encouraged, Swedish cultural expressions, with Swedish-language
education and a pride in their cultural heritage, the Soviet Union severed ties between the
Estonian-Swedes and Sweden. Second, the shift in political structures and the military-
induced forced relocations alienated much of the population. While Estonian-Swedes
maintained a strong identification as citizens of Estonia, they never supported the idea of
Soviet citizenship. The mobilizations and deportations targeted the leaders of the community – from leaders of the cultural organization, newspaper editors, teachers from the schools, and political leaders. Early in the Soviet occupation, the majority of the Estonian-Swedes indicated their desire to emigrate, and Sweden agreed to accept them. While the Soviet Union would not permit this relocation (with the exception of the first 110 from Rågö that applied for a joint visa in 1940), the Nazi German officers in the region were willing to negotiate and assist.

The Second World War ended the final chapter of Swedes living in Estonia. When the Soviets arrived Fridolf Isberg feared the Estonian-Swedes faced two choices: assimilate or emigrate. The majority chose the later. They were Swedes – or had become Swedes – and the Swedish government and numerous agencies and foundations aided in their “colonization” in Sweden and transition into Swedish society, coordinated by the Committee for the Estonian-Swedes, whose members were all active in the pan-Swedish movement.

However, it was easy for the Estonian-Swedes to claim a “Swedish” identification when they lived in Estonia. It was more difficult for them to be “Swedish” in Sweden, particularly when the Committee for the Estonian-Swedes transplanted entire communities together. In 1954, Arthur Johansson reflected on the major changes he and other Estonian-Swedes faced during the Second World War:

During the difficult political storms that have moved all over the world, many folk groups had to sit tight. This also applies to our Estonian-Swedish tribe [folkstam]. Due to the precarious position of Estonia, along with all of the so-called coastal states, the people of the Baltic could not avoid the difficult trials of the 1940s. The harsh political climate prevailing at the time made it impossible for smaller folk groups to hold
their own against the larger ones. The only possibility to stay alive was escape.\textsuperscript{2}

And yet the movement of these “Swedes” from the coast of Estonia (the land of their forefathers) to Sweden (their ancestral homeland) ultimately demonstrated that they were, in fact, different. They were not really “Swedes” after all, but rather “Estonian-Swedes” with their own unique dialects and culture. When the Estonian-Swedish newspaper \textit{Kustbon} reappeared in Stockholm in 1944, it carried the subhead “For Estonian-Swedes in Sweden.”

The first five years of the new \textit{Kustbon} largely focused on the transition of the refugees into Swedish society. The Committee for Estonian-Swedes oversaw the publication, using it to fulfill its own goals and objectives, with the publication being the easiest method to reach the entire community. Articles in \textit{Kustbon} offered details of citizenship, healthcare, education, and housing, answering questions and presenting reports of the Committee’s activities. As the Committee completed its royal objectives, the publishers turned over the publication to SOV. However, if one considers the primary, and completed, objective of the Committee the successful transitioning of the Swedes from Estonia into Swedish society, why was SOV or \textit{Kustbon} needed after 1949?

Despite the completed goal of swift assimilation, one of the basic premises of ongoing SOV and \textit{Kustbon} was the realization that the Estonian-Swedes were different from the larger Swedish population, a perspective many had noted in earlier periods, dating back to Österblom. However, following emigration to Sweden it was the Estonian-Swedes themselves that saw the difference between being “Estonian-Swedes” and

“Swedes.” In fact, their colonization in Sweden brought a far-greater threat to the preservation of the Estonian-Swedish language and culture than any of the previous periods in their history, and arrival in Sweden meant an even greater threat of assimilation.

Elmar Nyman dismissed such pessimism about assimilation in a *Kustbon* article in 1954. He argued that both Russwurm and Lundström overplayed the desperate state of the Estonian-Swedes in earlier periods, arguing that similar comments in the 1950s were equally overplayed. He concluded:

> Of course Russwurm and Lundström were not the only ones pessimistically evaluating the Estonian-Swedes’ future. There have always been such doomsayers. Even today pessimists prophesize about our immediate extinction as a distinct ethnographic group. And you may find that they have good reason for doing so. But I, however, would gladly represent the “old woman going against the stream” [*käringen mot strömmen*] in this context – the one that doubts that Armageddon is near. For decades, the people from the barren villages will be able to speak their inherited dialect [*tungomål*], if not everyday than perhaps on festive occasions.³

It is certainly noteworthy that Nyman sees the Estonian-Swedes as a distinct ethnographic group, reflecting that there was something to differentiate the Estonian-Swedes from other Swedes. However, whether or not the Estonian-Swedes could maintain their distinctiveness would rely on individual choices.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Estonian-Swedish identity was based not only on their connections to Sweden, the Swedish language, and their Lutheran religion, but also their associations with their land, their community, and their role as citizens of Estonia. The relocation to Sweden brought significant difficulties, therefore. The

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Committee for the Estonian-Swedes attempted to relocate entire villages together to similar landscapes and socio-economic niches. For example, the Committee divided the island of Ormön in the Stockholm archipelago – the northern portion of the island was for the Nargö-Swedes and the southern portion for the Odensholm-Swedes.4

_Kustbon_ and SOV increasingly took the role of documenting and spotlighting the uniqueness of the Estonian-Swedes, their history and culture, emphasizing their difference from “Swedes.” Instead of mainly being the focus of outsiders visiting Aiboland to document their culture, numerous Estonian-Swedes explored and studied their own history, culture, and language.

Scholars both within the Estonian-Swedish community and other interested Swedes collected documents and artifacts from the new arrivals. Individuals, including active members of SOV’s younger generation, conducted oral histories and recorded the distinct dialects for further study and analysis – hoping to document the dialects before they disappeared.5 SOV published several books, including a four-volume series, _En bok om Estlands Svenskar_ (A Book on Estonia’s Swedes), and created an archive and a museum in Stockholm.

SOV also organized an annual celebration for the Estonian-Swedes, resurrecting the Folk Festival [Hembygdsdag] from the 1930s that celebrated the community of Aiboland. In anticipation of the 1951 Festival, Elmar Nyman postulated on whether they could celebrate their homeland festival when they no longer had their homeland. He

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wrote, “The homeland consists of not only the land we owned or the paths we trod. It also includes the spiritual heritage our forefathers left us, and each and every one of us has this part of the homeland wherever they go.” Nyman commented that for many, pride in their Estonian-Swedish heritage began only after they left and understood the worth of what was lost. He concluded, “It is, however, our forefathers’ struggle in trying times that has enabled us to build. Their strength should be our model if difficult times are again at hand.”

The great difficulty in remaining a distinct group was that the Estonian-Swedish community was not forward looking, but rather remained united through nostalgia and preserving their long-held traditions. As can also be seen among other immigrant communities, cultural unity and preservation only lasts for a limited time. Like elsewhere, generational shifts and assimilation continue to challenge the ability of the Estonian-Swedish immigrant communities to remain distinct.

**Government Oversight**

Throughout the period under study, the Estonian-Swedes encountered numerous forms of governments and various forms of classifications. Governments, organizations, and individuals classify populations in a variety of methods, including social class, language, nationality, ethnicity, or race. Regardless of the form of government, classification influences minority policies. Yet as the development of the Estonian-Swedes demonstrates, none of these policies eliminated or assimilated the minority

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population. The minority worked within the parameters that each government offered while attempting to further their own identification and cultural development.

During the tsarist period, government officials classified the population on the basis of social status, religion, and language. After 1920, the Estonian government classified the population according to “culture,” primarily through linguistic identification, but in the late 1930s, it increasingly pushed for assimilation. The most trying time for the Estonian-Swedes was arguably the Second World War, and principally the Soviet government whose economic restructuring threatened the viability of their communities. The Soviet government classified the population based on “nationality,” promising the Swedes greater cultural and economic possibilities than other nationalities. In contrast, the Nazi administrators classified the people based on race, placing the Estonian-Swedes in a higher category than their Estonian neighbors.

At the same time, groups in Sweden started to view the Estonian-Swedes first from a linguistic and religious stand-point, but later with an ethnic and racial bond among scholars and ministers. Attention from Sweden continued to increase during the interwar period, with ethnographers, linguists, and racial scientists investigating the population, and culminating in the 1930s with financial resources from the Swedish government. During the Second World War, Swedes increasingly viewed the Estonian-Swedes as being of Swedish descent, and individuals and government committees worked on the emigration and resettlement of the population in the ancient homeland.
The Distant Homeland

The Estonian-Swedes maintained multiple loyalties. Their identifications were based on their strong connection to the Swedish language, devotion to Lutheranism, the love of their hometown. The identification also combined their status as residents of Aiboland, citizens of Estonia, and part of the larger Swedish nation through the pan-Swedish movement.

Additionally, outsiders viewed the Estonian-Swedes in a variety of ways. For more than 700 years, the Swedish-speaking population on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea lived in relative isolation on the periphery of the various powers that controlled the region. Beginning in the 1860s, contact with Sweden resumed, and Swedish visitors heralded the population as part of the larger Swedish nation. The role of the distant homeland greatly influenced the development of religious services, educational opportunities, and cultural organizations to strengthen the identification of the Estonian-Swedes as “Swedes.” Over the following eighty years, missionaries such as Lars Johan Österblom, ethnographers such as Per Söderback, racial biologists such as Oskar Mustelin, ethnomusicologist such as Olof Andersson, and numerous tourists flocked to the region to study, document, and explore the ancient traditions of this long-forgotten Swedish tribe. Some argued that the isolation of this population preserved the ancient Swedish culture that was lost in Sweden due to modernization, urbanization, and industrialization. Others saw them as desperately backward and in need of salvation.

At the same time, the pan-Swedish movement, with the founding of the National Association for the Preservation of Swedish Language and Culture Abroad, continually
emphasized that these Swedish-speakers were “Swedes” threatened by assimilation by Russians, Estonians, or Baltic Germans. Leaders in the pan-Swedish movement argued that the Estonian-Swedes should be at the forefront of their mission in protecting Swedish language and culture. Such protection required direct involvement from individuals, organizations, and the government in Sweden against the rising tides of Estonian, German, and Russian nationalism, and Soviet socialism. They were Swedes, after all.

A few key individuals pursued the idea that the Estonian-Swedes needed to be saved from extinction, that without their attention, aid and assistance, this Swedish tribe would die out. German folklorist Carl Russworm documented the community and its traditions in 1855, believing that within a hundred years, there would be no trace of them left. From 1873 to 1886, Swedish missionary Lars Johan Österblom considered the population lost heathens, corrupted by Russian control of the region, and desperately in need of his saving to make them proper “Swedes” and Christians. In 1907, National Association for the Preservation of Swedish Language and Culture Abroad founder Vilhelm Lundström feared rapid assimilation of the population because of expanded Estonian nationalism. In the 1930s Swede Carl Mothander made it his mission to fight for expanded minority protections and the development of “Swedishness.” And during the Second World War, Nazi officer Ludwig Lienhard feared the loss of the Estonian-Swedes if the Soviet Union returned to the region. Each of these individuals believed they could either observe and document the Estonian-Swedes or they could work to protect and transform this population, or both. Many of these men developed a savior-complex, where they believed that their actions alone saved the Estonian-Swedes from whatever
perceived danger. The arguments and actions of these individuals are similar to European colonist views of the “noble savage.” Like other colonial regions, including Russian views of the populations in Siberia, outsiders looked at the Estonian-Swedes as holding a distinct culture while simultaneously needing help to modernize.7

International Relations

Throughout the period covered in this dissertation, the Swedish minority increasingly played a role in international relations – between Sweden and whatever political authority controlled the region at any given moment. During the tsarist period, the Swedish minority in Estland and Livland provinces infrequently led to international discussions between the Sweden and Russia. The rare exception was the case of the Complaining Men in 1861, when Swedish peasants on Wormsö petitioned the Swedish king to safeguard their rights against threats from their Baltic German landlord. The episode led the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs to intervene and resolve the conflict.

Following the Russian Revolution and into the early stages of Estonian independence, Sweden monitored the Swedish minority but chose to not intervene in the case of the border discussions when the Swedish-inhabited islanders of Runö indicated their desire to join Sweden instead of either Estonia or Latvia. However, as the new Estonian state was formed and sought legitimacy – as well as international political, economic, and religious connections – the government’s treatment of the Swedish

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minority played a significant factor, although not a major factor in Swedish-Estonian relations.

While the mid- to late-1930s led to nationalist policies in Estonia, the Swedish minority still played a factor in determining international relations between the two states. Sweden viewed Estonia’s treatment of the Estonian-Swedes as evidence of Estonia’s commitment toward cultural and political exchanges, and raised serious concerns at new limitations and restrictions. In response, members of the Estonian government reached out to both the Estonian-Swedes and the Swedish government and stressed the positive interactions between the majority population and the Swedish minority.

Throughout the Second World War, the Estonian-Swedes factored into diplomatic relations between Sweden and the Estonian government, Sweden and the Soviet Union, and later Sweden and Nazi Germany as Sweden sought the legal migration of the Swedish minority to Sweden. The first aspect of these negotiations followed the forced relocation of several Estonian-Swedish islands to make way for Soviet military bases. Sweden negotiated with both the Estonian government and the Soviet government for the legal emigration to Sweden of the 110 Swedes on Rågö. Following the Soviet Union’s annexation of Estonia, the Swedish Foreign Ministry continued to raise the possibility with the Soviet Foreign Ministry for a mass-relocation of the entire minority population, although the Soviet Union was unwilling.

Nazi Germany, on the other hand, was more willing to discuss the possibility, a benefit of the relatively positive diplomatic and political connection between Sweden and
Nazi Germany. The Swedish government continued to raise the issue of mass-emigration, and by 1943 succeeded in getting permission for the relocation of portions of the Estonian-Swedish population – the elderly and sick, initially. More than half of the Estonian-Swedes legally emigrated to Sweden during the Nazi occupation of Estonia as a result of these diplomatic negotiations.

**New Directions**

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the Swedish population from Estonia among a newer generation of scholars, including Bengt Kummel (connections to the pan-Swedish movement), Ann Grubbström (ethnicity and the land distribution in Aiboland), Felicia Markus (archeology and ethnicity), Kristina Malmberg (lacework), and Sigrid Hedin (reclaiming land in post-Soviet Estonia). Perhaps one can connect the resurgence of interest to the re-independence of Estonia and the integration of the Baltic states into regional politics. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, politicians and scholars around the Baltic Sea increasingly discuss the concept of a “Baltic Sea

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Region” – a concept that encourages a regional perspective and stresses cross-regional connections. In that context, the Estonian-Swedes are a prime example of transnational identification as a population with bonds in that transgressed political, economic, linguistic, and cultural borders around the Baltic Sea.

The history of the Estonian-Swedes demonstrates many pan-European processes of this time period. While the Estonian-Swedes were isolated communities, they were also part of broader social developments, including the transformation of isolated rural, peasant communities to integrated populations. Their history also speaks to the effects of political changes on minority populations, as power in the regions shifted from absolute monarchy to democratic forms of government and occupation by communist and fascist regimes. The Estonian-Swedes are also part of the massive relocation of populations that occurred throughout the twentieth century as they relocated to Sweden during the later portion of the Second World War. For the Estonian-Swedes, the relocation resulted from both war and ideas of nationalism and the nation-state.

But Estonia’s re-independence has also led to changes among the Estonian-Swedes. Independence meant it was easier to travel back to Aiboland – to visit or to reclaim their land. The Soviet occupation significantly altered the landscape of these villages, and in many locales Soviet buildings or military sites erased all evidence of the Swedish villages. Some regions, including Odensholm, had significant ecological damage, and ammunition and mines littered the coastline. While many Estonian-Swedish families reclaimed land or houses, few relocated back to Estonia. Instead, Aiboland is filled with vacation homes. But there is also a generational split, with many of the
younger generation feeling no attachment to Aiboland – the land of their ancestors, but no longer their homeland.

As Svenska Odlingens Vänner gets ready to celebrate its centennial anniversary in the summer of 2009, there are serious questions about how much longer the organization can remain in existence. Membership is down and the core group of active participants, comprised largely of those born in Aiboland before the Second World War, are slowly dying off. Russwurm and Lundström, it seems, were correct in seeing the Estonian-Swedes as a dying population, although they were both off in their calculations of when this would occur. They were also wrong about where the greatest threat came from – it was not from rising nationalism among the Germans, Russians, or Estonians, but ironically from Swedes.

For decades, the Estonian-Swedes looked to Sweden as their protector and defender of their rights. They embraced the attention Swedes gave their community and the support Aiboland received to establish educational and cultural organizations. After 1944, the Estonian-Swedes could only look back at their history and the land of their ancestors with nostalgia. Alexander Samberg wrote a poem in 1949, fittingly entitled “Prologue,” which reflected on Aiboland and the changing nature of the Estonian-Swedes in their new home. Samberg’s poem illustrates the strong connection the Estonian-Swedes maintained for their hometowns, but also the deep nationalist pride the community held for Sweden, representing the multiple layers of the Estonian-Swedish identification. And the poem reflects the deep appreciation to Sweden, their homeland, for rescuing the Estonian-Swedes in their time of need.
Like a mirage rising out of the eastern [Baltic] sea’s haze
the land of memories, you last saw sinking in the distance.
That was home. From Nargö in the east to Runö in the south
it was there on the coasts and islands...

Såsom en häring östanhavs stiger ur diset
landet i minnenas värld, du sist såg sjunka i fjärran.
Detta var hemmet. Från Nargö i öster till Runö i söder
det fanns där på kuster och öar.
Körsången likt jag önskade namnen på orter där hem-
ifrån brusade fram i ditt minne...

The hometown I have sung. This is no more, you say.
Everything is in the past. We cannot return to time lost!
– But still I linger. I know your language and your heart.
The hometown you loved, and that has honored your memory.

Hembygd jag sjungit. Detta är intet, du säger.
Allt är förflutet. För oss ej åter till tid som försvunnit!
Hembygd du älskat, och detta har hedrat ditt minne.

The freedom you love, and which resounded with kings!
Letter upon letter they wrote to protect the people in Aibo.
The Karls’ [Swedish kings] time was itself a saga, but throughout times however
the writings in Aibo would not forget.
Words of freedom and rights and of salvation resounded in the soul:
in times of trouble and oppression it incites courage and Swedishness.

Frihet du älskat, och detta gav eko hos kungar!
brev uppå brev de skrevo till skydd för folket i Aibo.
Karlarnas tid blev själv en saga, men tiderna ut dock
de skrifter i Aibo ej skulle förgätas.
Orden om frihet och rätt och om frälse gav eko i själen:
i tider av nöd och förtryck de manat till livsmod och svenskhet.

Alone and defenseless was the tribe. The memory of Sweden
glided away further and further.
Surely it would die and disappear, the obstinate tribe
from Sweden.

Ensam och värnlös blev stammen. Minnet av Sverige
gled undan allt längre och längre.
Visst skulle den dö och försvinna, den trotsiga stammen
från Sverige.
Didn’t it go under? you ask. Was the Swedish silenced then in the tougher times?
Oh no, it didn’t go under. It would live. These words should ring and engross books.

\[ \text{Gick den ej under? du frågar. Tystnade svenskan då icke i hårdnande tider?} \]
\[ \text{Nej då, den gick icke under. Den skulle leva. Dess ord skulle klinga och pråntas i böcker.} \]

Now you are again in Sweden. We welcome the Sweden, who courageously salvaged us!
We welcome the Aibo, who taught us to dream!
We welcome the departed brave, who struggled for work in hopeless times!
They moved from home to home. And certainly it can happen,

\[ \text{Nu är du åter i Sverige. Vi hälsa det Sverige, som modigt oss bärgat!} \]
\[ \text{Vi hälsa det Aibo, som lärde oss drömma!} \]
\[ \text{Vi hälsa de hänsovne tappre, som kämpat för verket i hopplösa tider!} \]
\[ \text{De flyttat hemifrån hem. Och dock kan det hända,} \]

that in lonely moments you sneak away to ancient-yards in your mind,
linger in reverence along the row of houses, measuring their length and delighted over hours and half-timbered joists.
Your hand gently on the doorknob of the kiln and the barn door.
– And yet – you are again in Sweden.

\[ \text{att du i ensamma stunder smyger dig undan till forminnesgårdar,} \]
\[ \text{dröjer i andakt vid längornas resning, mäter dess långd och gläds över timmer och korsvirkesknutar.} \]
\[ \text{Du handen för varligt på handtag till ridörr och logdörr.} \]
\[ \text{– Och dock – du är åter i Sverige.} \]

Is the task now finished for Aibo? you ask. – The spiritual Aibo has a right to live!
Its time has not yet passed. Even in Sweden Aibo will live and act and say to Sweden, that Aibo surely did not disappear. A thousand-year limb from Sweden does not go under in the storm – to Sweden’s honor.

\[ \text{Är uppgiften fyllt nu för Aibo? du frågar. – Det andliga Aibo har rätt till att leva!} \]

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Dess tid är ej gången. Ännu i Sverige skall Aibo leva och verka och säga till Sverige, att Aibo visst icke gick under. En tusenårig gren utav Sverige gick icke under i stormen – Sverige till heder.⁹

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1 In order to best incorporate the Swedish and Estonian alphabets which both contain additional letters, the bibliography will place the following letters at the end of the English alphabet: Å, Ä, Ö, Ö, Ü.
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