THE
HOUSE
OF NURSES
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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the Swedish Society of Nursing, which was established in 1910, has had premises in several different parts of Stockholm.

In the early years the society rented premises in various places, among others from the Fredrika Bremer Association (an association working for gender equality). In 1917 the Society found a more permanent home at Brahegatan No. 56, which became known as “the House of Nurses”. Here, both active and retired members were offered accommodation, but the property also contained an assembly room and an information office, which helped to find work for nurses who did not belong to a nursing agency.

The next move took place in 1931, when Karlavägen No. 26 became the Society’s new home. In 1934 the Society also rented a building at Östermalmsgatan No. 33, which housed the rapidly growing secretariat as well as a large number of rooms for overnight accommodation for members. However, overcrowding became increasingly problematic in line with the growth of the Society and in 1956 a decision was made to purchase a 726 square metre property at Östermalmsgatan No. 19. The building, which had been a private residence, was converted into an office and inaugurated in 1957.

The Society remained at Östermalmsgatan No. 19 until 2005, when after 48 years it was time to move again. The building at No. 1, Baldersgatan was purchased and is the present House of Nurses. Although the address is relatively new, the building itself is filled with unique objects that serve as a reminder of the over 100-year history of the Society.

This brochure presents some of these objects, as well as taking the reader on a quick journey through the Society’s history. The point of departure is the book published to mark the Society’s 100 year anniversary in 2010, but also the series of portraits of its presidents that adorn the walls of the boardroom on the top floor. The portrait collection is unique, because how many boardrooms only have portraits of women?

For a long time the Society was an organisation managed by and for women with a succession of strong women at the helm, which is why it has played a very important role in Swedish history.

ANNA GÖTLIND
ORGANISATION

On the 14th of March 1910, around 30 nurses met in the premises of the KFUK (Young women’s Christian Association) in Stockholm to establish a society for nurses. According to the charter adopted, the aim of the Society was to:

... be a focal point for the Swedish corps of nurses, stimulate and maintain the sense of solidarity among trained nurses and promote the development of nurses and nursing care by organising discussions and providing lectures.

The initial membership in 1910 was 89 and ten years later it had increased to 550. The Society catered for an elite, i.e. educated nurses, and the membership criteria were high. To be eligible, applicants should be single or widowed, have undergone at least one and a half years of practical and theoretical training at one of the main educational institutions, followed by 12 to 18 months of nursing experience in a hospital or as a private nurse. The annual membership fee was three Swedish kronor for nurses based in Stockholm and two kronor for those employed outside the capital. Emmy Lindhagen (1862–1915) was elected president of the new society.

According to the charter, the board should include two representatives from each of the following; the Sophiahemmet, the Red Cross, the nursing departments of the Fredrika Bremer Association and the Nurses’ Homes of Southern Sweden.

In addition, there should be one representative of the ‘independent nurses’ who were not affiliated with any of the above-mentioned institutions and who constituted the majority of nurses in Sweden. The five groups represented on the board are symbolised by the five links in the society’s badge, which was adopted in 1922 and has served as the Society’s emblem for the past 90 years.

In the early days the new Society functioned first and foremost as a social meeting place for its members, but fairly soon various kinds of education were also provided. However, as early as 1911 a refresher course was held for practising nurses, after which the participants presented the board with an embellished chairperson’s gavel as a sign of their appreciation.

Emmy Lindhagen, president 1910–1914
When Emmy Lindhagen stepped down for health reasons in 1914, Bertha Wellin (1870–1951) took over as president. During her term of office, the Society underwent strong development. She was the editor of the *Svensk sjukskötersketidning*, a magazine for nurses, which was independent of the Society, as well as being politically active as a member of Stockholm city council. In 1921, she was one of the first five females to be elected to the Swedish Parliament. She sat in the second chamber as a conservative until 1936 and it is no surprise that her main interest was social and healthcare issues. She no doubt spent many hours at her own writing desk, which today stands in the entrance hall of the House of Nurses.

As the Society’s chairperson, Bertha Wellin mainly pursued the issue of education and training. How could the different, often inferior types of nursing training all over the country be improved? A government commission appointed to examine the working conditions of nurses in 1912 presented its final report in 1916, which focused on the need to reform their education. According to Bertha Wellin, the Society should not devote time to issues such as wages, hours of work, working conditions and old-age pensions, which today are considered trade union matters.

Her definite view, which she defended to the last, was that nursing was not the same as any other profession. For her, being a nurse was a vocation that demanded a sacrifice on the part of the practitioner. The Swedish Society of Nursing should not be a “trade union” but an occupational association, and strengthening and improving the nursing education was paramount. In this work she and the Society were successful.

In 1920 a royal decree was introduced stipulating that all nursing education should be examined and approved by the State. And in order to be approved the education must comprise at least two years. A special nursing inspector was appointed by the Swedish Medical Board (today the National Board of Health and Welfare), who had the task of scrutinising whether the education met the agreed standards.
Over time, Bertha Wellin’s view that the Society should not involve itself in labour-related issues became untenable. An increasing number of members demanded the opposite and in 1933 Bertha Wellin resigned in protest when the Society decided to include nurses’ pay and employment terms in their programme. Elisabet Lind (1881–1968) was elected as her successor.

Elisabet Lind’s period as president was mainly influenced by the events of the Second World War and the strong international commitment that she and the Society exhibited in various situations. In her youth she had been part of a Red Cross “ambulance” (mobile field hospital) in the Balkans in 1914–1915. Perhaps it was the events of those years that made her an internationalist.

During the Second World War she was deeply involved in various solidarity campaigns for Scandinavian colleagues affected by the conflict. Immediately after the Winter War in Finland 1939/1940 and the German invasion of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, the Society launched the so-called “Nordiska hjälpen” (Nordic Aid), a fund-raising campaign that involved all its members, who were asked to contribute a few Swedish kronor. The money collected was, among other things, used to provide Finnish nurses with an opportunity to travel to Sweden for rest and rehabilitation.

Not only Elisabet Lind but also many other nurses throughout history have exhibited strong international commitment and an impressive solidarity with both colleagues and patients in other parts of the world. Nurses have always made use of the opportunity to work abroad. The reasons for this have varied, including religious or political conviction, sometimes pure love of adventure, but most of the internationally active nurses had one thing in common – the wish to help people in need, and their commitment was boundless.

Thus the nursing profession has always been international, something we are reminded of by Torsten Jurell’s large wooden sculpture *Den internationella sjuksköterskan* (*The international nurse*) that hangs in the entrance hall of the House of Nurses.

Elisabet Lind, president 1933–1945
A small porcelain figurine of a nurse wearing a blue and white uniform with bowed head stands on the mantelpiece over the fireplace in the conference area. She represents the old type of nursing ideal, which can be characterised as self-sacrificing, submissive and quiet. One hundred years ago, the nurse’s place in the care hierarchy was clear and involved totally and fully subordinating herself to the (male) physician. However, that image belongs to the past.

When Elisabet Lind took over as president in 1933, the Society was transformed into a real trade union and the struggle for better pay and working conditions began. In 1945 she was succeeded by Gerda Höjer (1893–1974) and during her 15 years as chairwoman, the Society developed into a very strong trade union organisation.

Gerda Höjer was elected to the post of secretary in 1933 and from that day she devoted herself wholeheartedly to the Society. Gerda Höjer was a member of Stockholm City Council and the hospital management committee between 1938 and 1949, from 1949 to 1960 she represented the Liberal Party in the Lower House of Parliament and from 1947 to 1960 sat on the board of The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees in addition to many other board assignments. Furthermore, she was President of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) from 1947 to 1953. In 1949 the Society hosted the ICN’s first major post-war event, a conference in Stockholm which gathered almost 4,000 nurses from all over the world.

The Society was involved in many labour-related struggles in the first decade after the Second World War and a great deal was achieved. The most famous was the wage dispute in 1951, when the Society, after having forced parliament to cut short its summer recess, succeeded in obtaining a wage increase of two salary grades.

In a long-term perspective were two other events during the 1950s; a parliamentary decision. In 1951 the profession open up to men and from 1958 nurses could apply to the Swedish Medical Board for registration, a very important step towards the professional recondition for the trade.
Gerda Höjer retired as president in 1960 and was succeeded by Gerd Zetterström Lagervall (1916–2001). Her 19 year term of office witnessed major changes, both for the Society and for the nursing profession.

In 1965 the Swedish Society of Nursing, together with three other organisations, formed the Swedish Association of Health Professionals (SHSTF), a negotiation cartel linked to the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO). In the same year all registered nurses employed in the public sector gained the right to collective bargaining and industrial action.

During Gerd Zetterström Lagervall’s term of office, a series of important educational reforms in the nursing area were carried through. A new curriculum was introduced in 1965 followed by a more sweeping third level reform in 1977 that made nursing a university education governed by the Higher Education Act, Higher Education Ordinance and nationally established educational plans. This meant, among other things, that the education must be science-based, linked to research as well as the introduction of a specific subject, Nursing care.

During the 1960s and 70s the old boarding school system was phased out and nursing pupils now became students. Many of them were active and engaged in their education, not least within the framework of the Swedish Association of Student Nurses (SSEF), which existed between 1946 and 1995.

The students were among other things critical of the obligation to wear the little white nurse’s cap. When Gerd Zetterström Lagervall becam president, a nurse was still a woman in a blue and white starched uniform with a cap on her head. When she stepped down, the uniform had been replaced by standard county council working clothes and the cap so hated by many nurses had become a thing of the past.

The only feature of the old uniform that remained was the often richly decorated badge that most registered nurses still wear, which indicates where they were educated. There is a display cabinet in the entrance hall of the House of Nurses that contains an almost complete collection of nurses’ badges.
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In 1977 all of the Swedish Society of Nursing’s trade union activities were transferred to The Swedish Association of Health professionals, which became a trade union. This meant that the Society mainly focused on occupational issues and supporting individual nurses financially, in addition to working on an international level. In 1979, Ulrica Croné (1932–1989) succeeded Gerd Zetterström Lagervall as president and thus became responsible for shaping the ‘new’ society. During her term of office, leadership and responsibility issues were her main knowledge area.

In the 1980s, an increasing number of nurses were appointed care managers – not always without opposition. The power structure in health care is tenacious and based on class as well as gender. When a nurse challenged the status quo it sometimes gave rise to powerful resistance, not least from physicians. Today, however, many nurses hold managerial positions even at the very top level.

A small board with work schedules for nurses and student nurses hangs in the entrance hall of The House of Nurses. Until recent years, nurses’ work involved following such rigid schedules – obeying physician’s orders – hence the opportunity to assume personal responsibility and make independent decisions was extremely limited. However, during the decade that Ulrica Croné was chairwoman there was intense debate about how the organisation of nursing could be changed to enable registered nurses’ unique competence to be utilised in the best possible way.

The so-called rounds system and the associated rationalisation and efficiency approach, outlined in P. C. Jersild’s novel Babels hus, were experienced by many registered nurses as having resulted in a fragmentation of care and that registered nurses had become too distant from the patient. Ideas about care teams and what in the USA was termed Primary Nursing were tested in many different places. The traditional hierarchical mindset should be abandoned and replaced by collaboration between and respect for different areas of specialist nursing competence. Furthermore, greater value should be placed on registered nurses’ specific area of competence, nursing care.
PROFESSIONALISATION

In the entrance hall of the House of Nurses we encounter the pioneering figure of Florence Nightingale in the form of a small bust and two of her letters. The saint like image of “the lady with the lamp” has been strongly modified in recent years but there is agreement that she was way before her time in stressing the need for good care and a solid education for nurses, ideas that characterised a great deal of the society’s work in the 1990s.

Following the death of Ulrica Croné in 1989, Anne-Marie Wohlin (born in 1944) became the new president. She soon became involved in both the Swedish Society of Nursing and the Swedish Association of Health professionals, and as president she worked, among other things, with quality issues.

In 1999, towards the end of her term of office, a decision was made to abolish the requirement on joint membership of the Society and SHSTF, which meant that they became completely separate. The decision was in line with the development during the 1990s, when the Society underwent a transition towards the purely occupational organisation that it is today. The notion that the nursing profession is a vocation is very remote to most of the current members of the Society.

As a result of the academisation of the nursing education and the development of nursing research, the nursing profession today meets all the requirements normally placed on a profession. This means that the education should be scientific knowledge, that the profession should control the labour market (registration of nurses and protection of the professional title), that the practitioners should belong to a professional organisation and that a common code of ethics exists.

The latter requirement was met at an early stage. In 1912 the Society issued Ur sjukvårdens etik (From the ethics of nursing) by Estrid Rodhe. In 1953 the International Council of Nurses (ICN) adopted a professional code of ethics, an up-dated version of which is still valid. And in 1995, the Swedish Society of Nursing established the Ethics Advisory Council.
The Swedish Society of Nursing and its premises have always been an important meeting place for registered nurses. A century ago, its members met regularly to listen to lectures with tea or for needlework or choir practice (the Society had its own choir until the mid 1950s). At the beginning of the 20th century, the Society’s social function was probably the most important, because nurses lived alone. The reason was that if they got married and started a family they had to leave the profession.

When nurses were permitted to have a family and a social life, the Society’s premises continued to function as a meeting place, mainly for courses and conferences. Throughout its history, the Society has provided extensive in-service for life-long education.

In 2002, Birgitta Engström (born 1941) took over as president. In 1986, she became the sixteenth doctor of nursing in Sweden and as chairperson she worked proactively to establish meeting places for research and knowledge development. An important forum for dissemination of knowledge was Omvårdnadsmagasinet, the Society’s new magazine, first issued in 2003 (the magazine had several predecessors), in which the growing number of nursing researchers have been able to present their research in popular science format.

It was during Birgitta Engström’s term of office that the decision was made that the Society should move to a newly purchased property at Baldersgatan No. 1, where the House of Nurses is still located.

A growing number of sections and networks, today numbering around fifty, representing the different specialisations within the profession, are associated with the Society. And each week some of them hold meetings in the House of Nurses, which includes a well-equipped modern conference room for up to fifty people, a large conference kitchen and beautiful reception rooms, where the decor reflects the Society’s long history.
A central feature of the professionalisation process has been the growth of the nurses’ specific knowledge area: Nursing care. The first steps towards encouraging nurses to initiate their own research project took place as early as the 1960s and in 1967 a specific research committee was established. Since then, the commitment and efforts to develop nursing research have accelerated. The first doctoral theses produced by nurses appeared in the 1970s and 80s. Today more than one thousand nurses have acquired a doctorate and the top floor of the House of Nurses contains the most complete collection of nurses’ theses in Sweden.

Many postdoctoral nurses have subsequently succeeded in making an academic career and today there are some 60 professors of nursing care. One of them is Ania Willman (born 1950) who was elected president in 2006 after Birgitta Engström. Ania Willman was the first professor to be appointed president, which is in line with the development seen over the one hundred years of the Society’s existence.

One of the Society’s main objectives is knowledge development within the profession. Since 1995 the Society has a science advisory council, publishes literature and arranges courses as well as conferences, the most important of which is the Nurse’s day, regular days attended by some thousand registered nurses, researchers and teachers. In addition, the Society awards scholarships to nurses who pursue research or development work.

The Society’s history spanning more than one hundred years as well as the nursing profession exhibit both continuity and change. However, its aim remains the same as that formulated in the statutes of 1910, although the wording is different. The Society’s web site – www.swenurse.se – states:

The Swedish Society of Nursing is the professional society that brings registered nurses together on professional issues. The society constitutes an arena and meeting place for clinical, educational, scientific and ethical discussions and decisions. The Swedish Society of Nursing thereby contributes to a high standard of nursing.

Ania Willman, current president, elected 2006
The House of Nurses is located in the Sånglärkan district of Östermalm. A characteristic feature of this part of Stockholm is the magnificent stone houses dating from the turn of the last century. Before this time, the area was called Ladugårdslandet and dominated by military camps as well as single-storey wooden or stone houses. However, when the city expanded, many wealthy people chose to build their residences outside what at that time was the centre.

One of them was Paul Urban Bergström, founder of the PUB department store, who built the house on Baldersgatan No. 1 in 1909–1910. The architect was E. Lindquist. The ground floor of the five story building comprised a kitchen, pantry, garage and craft room. The first floor contained a hall, drawing-room, dining-room, parlour and smoking room (where PUB’s safe was kept in a wardrobe). The bedrooms were on the top floor. The Bergström family only resided there for four years as Mrs. Bergström considered that the house was too far from the city centre!

The property was sold in 1914 and used as a private residence by different families until 1970, when Stikkan Andersson purchased it for his production company Polar Music. He made the top floor, previously used as a laundry, into his private residence. This is where the Society’s board room and staff rooms are situated today. During the 1970s, the pop group ABBA worked in the house.

The property belonged to the Swedish Police Union from 1980 until 2004, when it was acquired by the Society and extensively but carefully restored. The Society took possession on May 15, 2005.

Great efforts have been made to preserve as much as possible of the building’s original character while at the same time creating modern and purpose-built rooms. The original dark paintwork has been replaced by much brighter colours but many beautiful Art Nouveau details remain from the era in which the house was built, for example the windows in the stairwell.

The decor and furnishings, primarily in the public rooms, are mainly gifts presented to the Society over the years; carpets, portraits, furniture, lamps and ornaments, which recall its history.
On March 14, 2010, the Swedish Society of Nursing celebrated its one hundredth anniversary, which was marked, among other things, by the publication of the book *Svensk sjuksköterskeförening, Bilder av sjuksköterskan*, by Anna Götlind, professor of history at Stockholm University. It depicts the Society’s history from a comprehensive and societal perspective, its establishment, development and transition and the areas in which it has operated.

The book also describes the way in which the nursing profession has changed over time and the reader encounters a number of individual men and women who are members of this large corps of nurses. The nurses themselves, both famous and unknown, are given a voice and presented by means of text and pictures.

Each chapter contains a separate theme in chronological order and the chapters are grouped into five sections.

The first, *Organisation*, describes the Society and its work in relation to its members, the labour-related area and various international contexts. The second section, *Diversity*, outlines the increasing breadth as well as specialisation within the profession.

Section three, *Roles*, discusses the registered nurse’s position and responsibility in a care organisation characterised by constant change, where hierarchical thinking based on gender and class is dominant.

In the fourth section, *Professionalisation*, the fundamental changes in the nursing profession, which can be summarised by the very concept of professionalisation are outlined. In this process, education and research are perhaps the most prioritised areas. At the same time, there is an image of the nurse that conflicts with the self-image cultivated by the profession. This is discussed in the fifth and final section, *Pictures*, where an attempt is made to connect the threads from the previous sections.

The book can be purchased from the Swedish Society of Nursing’s web shop: http://ssf.ekvist.se/ or directly when you visit the House of Nurses.
THE HOUSE OF NURSES

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