



Ale's stones in Österlen on the southern coast of Sweden. The monument was erected around 600 AD.

HISTORY OF SWEDEN:

War, peace and progress

Fourteen thousand years ago, present-day Sweden was covered by a thick ice cap. As the ice retreated, humans came to Sweden. Their first known dwelling place, which was found in southern Sweden, dates from around 12000 BC.

From the period 8000 BC to 6000 BC, the country as a whole began to be populated by peoples who lived by hunting and fishing, and used simple stone tools. Dwelling places and graves dating from the Stone Age, lasting until about 1800 BC, are being found in increasing numbers. The Bronze Age was marked in the Nordic region, especially in Denmark but also in Sweden, by a high level of culture, as is shown by the artifacts found in graves. After 500 BC, such artifacts become increasingly rare as iron came into more general use. During the early Iron Age, the population of Sweden became settled, and agriculture came to form the basis of the economy and society.

The Viking Age and early Christianity

The Viking Age (800–1050) was characterized by a significant expansion, which in the case of Sweden was largely toward the east. Many Viking expeditions set off from Sweden with the dual purpose of plunder and trade along the coasts

of the Baltic Sea and the rivers that stretched deep into present-day Russia. The Vikings traveled as far as the Black and Caspian Seas, where they developed trading links with the Byzantine Empire and the Arab kingdoms. Christianity first reached Sweden with a mission led by Ansgar, who visited the country from the Carolingian Empire in the 9th century. However, it was not until the 11th century that Sweden was Christianized.

The founding of the kingdom

The various provinces of Sweden were absorbed around year 1000 into a single unit. But it was only during the late 13th century that the crown gained any significant measure of influence. In 1280 King Magnus Ladulås (1275–90) issued a statute authorizing the establishment of a temporal nobility and the organization of society on the feudal model.

The Hansa period

Trade grew during the 14th century, especially with the German towns grouped under the leadership of Lübeck

in the Hanseatic League. Until the mid-16th century the Hansa dominated Swedish trade, and many towns were founded as a result of lively commercial activity connected with the Hansa. However, the Black Death, which reached Sweden in 1350, led to a long period of economic decline marked by a smaller population.

The Kalmar Union

In 1389, through inheritance and family ties, the crowns of Denmark, Norway and Sweden were united under the rule of the Danish Queen Margareta. In 1397, the Kalmar Union was formed. It entailed a pledge by the three Scandinavian countries to have one and the same monarch. However, the union (1397–1521) was scarred by internal conflicts that culminated in the “Stockholm Bloodbath” in 1520, when 80 Swedish nobles were executed at the instigation of the Danish union king, Kristian II. The act provoked a rebellion, which in 1521 led to the deposition of Kristian II and the seizure of power by a Swedish

FAMOUS SWEDISH REGENTS

GUSTAV II ADOLF

ruled between 1611 and 1632. By intervening in the Thirty Years' War, he came to



PHOTO: AFG-IMAGES/CAMPPIX

assume great political importance and is internationally the best known of Sweden's kings. Under his rule, Sweden became a leading military power. Gustav II Adolf was killed in 1632 at the Battle of Lützen.

QUEEN KRISTINA

Excepting the short caretaker government of Queen Ulrika Eleonora in 1719–20,



PHOTO: NATIONALMUSEUM

Queen Kristina is the only female regent of the modern Swedish kingdom. She succeeded Gustav II Adolf in 1632, just before her sixth birthday, and ruled for 22 years. Kristina abdicated in 1654. She converted to Catholicism and settled in Rome, and was succeeded by her cousin, Karl Gustav. When he died in 1660, she traveled to Sweden in the hope of reclaiming the throne. However, her claim was rejected by parliament, and Kristina returned to Rome.

GUSTAV III

ruled between 1771 and 1792 and is usually called the Theater King. He



PHOTO: NATIONALMUSEUM

was a keen patron of the arts, and founded the first opera in Stockholm in 1782, the Swedish Academy and the Swedish Royal Academy of Music. Gustav III's reign was not popular with the high nobility. Opposition culminated in a conspiracy in 1792, when he was shot at a masked ball held at the opera. He died shortly after.



PHOTO: NATIONALMUSEUM

On the church green in Mora in 1520, Gustav Vasa urged residents of the town to take up arms and help free Sweden from Danish occupation.

nobleman, Gustav Vasa, who was elected king of Sweden in 1523.

The Vasa period

The foundations of the Swedish state were laid during the reign of Gustav Vasa (1523–60). The church was turned into a national institution, its estates were confiscated by the crown, and the Protestant Reformation was introduced. Power was concentrated in the hands of the king and in 1544 hereditary monarchy came into force.

The Swedish empire

Since the dissolution of the Kalmar Union, Swedish foreign policy had been aimed at gaining domination of the Baltic Sea, and this led to repeated wars with Denmark from the 1560s onward. After Sweden intervened in 1630 with great success in the Thirty Years' War on the side of the German Protestants and Gustav II Adolf became one of Europe's most powerful monarchs, Sweden defeated Denmark in the two wars of 1643–45 and 1657–58. Finland, as well as a number of provinces in northern Germany and the present-day Baltic republics, also belonged to Sweden, and after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and the Peace of Roskilde with Denmark in 1658, Sweden was a great power in northern Europe. The country even founded a short-lived colony in what is now Delaware in North America. However, Sweden was an agrarian-based country and lacked the resources to maintain its position as a great power in the long run.

After its defeat in the Great Northern War (1700–21) against the combined forces of Denmark, Poland and Russia,

Sweden lost most of its provinces on the other side of the Baltic Sea and was reduced to essentially the same frontiers as present-day Sweden and Finland. During the Napoleonic Wars, Finland was surrendered to Russia. As compensation the French marshal Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, who had been elected heir to the Swedish throne in 1810, succeeded in obtaining Norway, which was forced into a union with Sweden in 1814. This union was peacefully dissolved in 1905 after many internal disputes.

18th- and 19th-century Sweden

After the death of the warrior king Karl XII in 1718 and Sweden's defeat in the Great Northern War, the Swedish parliament (Riksdag) and council were strong enough to introduce a new constitution that abolished royal absolutism and put power in the hands of parliament.

Eighteenth-century Sweden was characterized by rapid cultural development, partly through close contact with France. Overseas trade was hard hit by the Napoleonic Wars, which led to general stagnation and economic crisis in Sweden during the early 19th century. In the late 19th century, 90 percent of the people still earned their livelihood from agriculture. One consequence was emigration, mainly to North America. From the mid-19th century to 1930, about 1.5 million Swedes emigrated, out of a population of 3.5 million in 1850 and slightly more than 6 million in 1930. Industry did not begin to grow until the 1890s, although it then developed rapidly between 1900 and 1930 and transformed Sweden into one of Europe's leading industrial nations after World War II. ■

**WELL-KNOWN
FIGURES IN HISTORY****SAINT BIRGITTA**

(1303–73)

After being widowed, Birgitta made her way to Rome, where she spent the rest of her life. She embarked a number of pilgrimages, including to Jerusalem. Birgitta was known for her “heavenly revelations,” visions and prophetic messages, which she relayed to popes and princes. Birgitta was canonized in 1491 and since 2000 has been considered one of Europe’s patron saints.



PHOTO: HISTORISKA MUSEET

ALFRED NOBEL

(1833–96)

The inventor, chemist and benefactor received his first patent in 1863 for a method that made it possible to handle nitroglycerin by mixing it with black powder and lighting the mixture with a fuse. Nobel went on to produce dynamite and other explosives. The Nobel Prizes were a bequest from Alfred Nobel for achievements in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature and peace.



PHOTO: NOBELMUSEET

**DAG
HAMMARSKJÖLD**

(1905–61)

was an economist and government official. In 1953 he was made United Nations Secretary-General. He quickly became associated with the strategy of “quiet diplomacy,” which in 1955 resulted in the release of American prisoners of war in China. En route to a meeting during the Congo Crisis, Hammarskjöld died in an airplane accident in northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). The same year, he was posthumously awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.



PHOTO: UN



PHOTO: LEIF ENGBERG/SCANPIX

On September 3, 1967, Sweden switched from driving on the left-hand side of the road to the right. The result was chaos in the streets.

The 20th century – a century of reforms

Late 19th-century Sweden was marked by the emergence of strong popular movements that included the free churches, the temperance and women’s movements, and above all the labor movement.

The labor movement, whose growth kept pace with industrialization in the late 19th century, was reformist in outlook after the turn of the 20th century.

The first Social Democrats entered government in 1917. Universal suffrage was introduced for men in 1909 and for women in 1921. Plans for a welfare state were drawn up during the 1930s after the Social Democrats rose to power and put into effect after World War II.

The postwar era

During World War II, a coalition government of Sweden’s four “democratic” parties (excluding the Communists) was formed. After the war ended, a purely Social Democratic government resumed office under Per Albin Hansson. Under Social Democratic leadership, but in close cooperation with the other democratic parties, a number of

reforms were carried out in the 1940s and 1950s that together laid the foundations of the Swedish welfare state.

At the same time, there were calls for a modernization of the 1809 constitution. A new Instrument of Government was adopted in 1974. First and foremost, all public power is derived from the people, who are to select the members of parliament in free elections. The king is still the head of state, but in name only. In 1980, an amendment to the order of succession gave male and female heirs an equal claim to the throne. Accordingly, Princess Victoria is next in line to the throne not her younger brother, Carl Philip.

Foreign policy

Since the short war against Norway in 1814 in conjunction with the creation of the union, Sweden has not been involved in any war. Since

LEARN MORE



PHOTO: ERIK G SWEINSSON/SCANPIX

The Vasa.

THE SHIP THAT SURFACED AFTER 300 YEARS

The battleship *Vasa* was commissioned by King Gustav II Adolf in 1625. On August 10, 1628, the *Vasa* weighed anchor in Stockholm, but its maiden voyage ended in disaster. The *Vasa* sank after only 20 minutes. After a lengthy search, the *Vasa* was re-discovered in 1956 and salvaged in 1961. Today the *Vasa*, by far the best preserved example of ship construction and naval warfare of that era, can be seen at the Vasa Museum in Stockholm.

MEMENTOS IN STONE

There are more than 2,500 rune stones in Sweden with messages dating from the 5th century until the mid-12th century. They are the oldest preserved documents in Swedish. It was often the case that one or more relatives had the rune stone erected in memory of a dead family member. Sometimes the stone tells of journeys made by the dead person. Rune stones were often erected alongside roads, bridges or meeting places where they could be seen and read by many.

World War I, Sweden has pursued a foreign policy of nonalignment in peacetime and neutrality in wartime, basing its security on a strong national defense. Nonetheless, Sweden joined the League of Nations in 1920 and the United Nations in 1946. Within the framework of these organizations, Sweden has been involved in numerous international peacekeeping missions. In 1995, Sweden became a member of the European Union.

New governments

The economic crisis of the early 1970s broke the long hegemony of the Social Democrats and since the parliamentary elections of 1976 power has changed hands more often.

- **1976** Non-socialist coalition government under the leadership of Center Party chairman Thorbjörn Fälldin.
- **1982** Social Democratic Party, with Olof Palme as prime minister. The murder of Olof Palme on February 28, 1986, came as a shock to the Swedish people, who had been spared this kind of political violence for almost 200 years. Palme's successor as

prime minister was Ingvar Carlsson.

- **1991** Non-socialist coalition government, with Moderate Party leader Carl Bildt as prime minister.
- **1994** A minority government was formed with Social Democrat Ingvar Carlsson as prime minister. In 1996, Carlsson stepped down and was replaced by his finance minister, Göran Persson, who kept the position as prime minister for 10 years.
- **2006** The Moderate Party emerged as the main victor. Together with the Center Party, the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats, it formed a coalition government headed by Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt.

EU presidency

Sweden's role in the European Union has been identified as an important issue for the country's future by the center-right coalition government. Sweden has held the EU presidency on two occasions: January 1 – June 30, 2001, and June 30 – December 31, 2009. During the second presidency, priority was given to economic, unemployment and climate issues. ■

Useful links

- www.center.kva.se – Center for History of Science
- www.ekohist.su.se – Department of Economic History, Stockholm University
- www.hist.lu.se – Department of History, Lund University
- www.historicalstatistics.org – Portal for Historical Statistics
- www.historiska.se – The Museum of National Antiquities
- www.hist.uu.se – Department of History, Uppsala University
- www.levandehistoria.se – The Living History Forum
- www.raa.se – The Swedish National Heritage Board
- www.riksbank.se – Sweden's central bank
- www.royalcourt.se – The Swedish Royal Court
- www.skansen.se – Skansen open-air museum
- www.statsvet.su.se – Department of Political Science, Stockholm University
- www.tacitus.nu – Historical atlas

Published by the Swedish Institute
June 2010 FS 17
More facts can be found on
www.sweden.se

SI.
Swedish Institute.

Copyright: Published by the Swedish Institute on www.sweden.se. All content is protected by Swedish copyright law. The text may be reproduced, transmitted, displayed, published or broadcast in any media for non-commercial use with reference to www.sweden.se. But never photographs or illustrations.

The Swedish Institute (SI) is a public agency that promotes interest and confidence in Sweden around the world. SI seeks to establish cooperation and lasting relations with other countries through strategic communication and exchange in the fields of culture, education, science and business.

Further information about Sweden:
www.sweden.se, the Swedish embassy or consulate in your country, or the Swedish Institute, Box 7434, SE-103 91 Stockholm, Sweden
Phone: +46 8 453 78 00 Mail: si@si.se
www.si.se, www.swedenbookshop.com