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Ulf Beijbom

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Some news about the Swedish Emigrant Institute

On September 15, 2010, the former director of the Swedish Emigrant Institute (SEI) in Växjö, Professor Ulf Beijbom contacted SAG and told us the following news:

The House itself was sold in the spring of 2010 to the Växjö Fastighets AB [Vöfab] (a real estate company owned by Växjö city) for a sum of 9 million SEK (half the cost of building the house). The Kulturparken Småland (a company that is to run the Växjö Museum and the Kronoberg Archives) is renting the building. Vöfab will take over the building on Nov. 1st. The SEI is to pay a minimal rent of 6000 SEK/month for the next 5 years.

The SEI has been closed to the public since the spring and will not open until 2011 (maybe).

The SEI has dismissed the majority of the staff, and is reorganizing the library for the much smaller area that the SEI will have to rent from the new owners.

It is said that SEI in the future will concentrate on its core work, which is supposed to be research. The reading room and the archives will supposedly continue to function as usual.

An agreement has been signed by the SEI and Kulturparken Småland that the latter will continue to work with the exhibitions in the house and keep them open. It does seem a bit doubtful if they have the competence and finances to do this.

This dismantling of the SEI has unfortunately been mostly regarded as a local matter, and has not generated much interest in countrywide media or at the Department of Culture. The loss of one of the foremost places for visits by American tourists seems to be of no concern to anyone except the SEI itself.

SAG editor’s comment: This is so sad, and really a shame for Växjö city and the Kronoberg county government.

It is amazing that they do not understand the value of keeping the contacts between Sweden and all the Swedish descendants in other countries open and growing; instead they close the doors in the face of our visitors, who then go elsewhere and spend their money. They do get a bad impression of the area, and leave. I experienced that myself this summer.