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Vestkusten Archives in San Francisco

An old Swedish-American newspaper lives on in a new format

BY ERICA OLSEN

The microfilm archives of the Swedish-American newspaper *Vestkusten* have a new home at the San Francisco Public Library.

At the library's San Francisco History Center, researchers can consult a nearly complete run of *Vestkusten*. The microfilm collection covers the newspaper from 1887 to 1967 and 1991 to 1998.

The West Coast's Swedish-American newspaper had a 121-year history before its 2007 merger with *Nordstjernen*, which has been published on the East Coast since 1872.

Historical newspaper is celebrated

On October 19, 2008, the Bay Area's Swedish-American community met at the library for a champagne reception to celebrate the *Vestkusten* legacy and the donation of the microfilm to the San Francisco History Center. The reception also honored the women who were the most recent force behind *Vestkusten*: *Barbro Osher*, publisher (and Consul General of Sweden in San Francisco); *Bridget Strömberg-Brink*, editor; and *Lena Sivik*, chief administrative officer.

Susan Goldstein, the city archivist of San Francisco, worked with *Vestkusten*'s archives committee to bring the microfilm collection to the library. When it comes to San Francisco's history, *Vestkusten* is "one of the few examples of an entire ethnic newspaper that has been preserved," Goldstein said.

In her remarks, Goldstein spoke of the importance of documenting San Francisco's ethnic heritage and described *Vestkusten* as a resource

not only for historians but also for families who want to learn about their heritage.

At the reception, lively conversations in English and Swedish took place against a backdrop of tables decorated with Swedish flags, while Afghani- and Swiss-themed exhibitions were on view in the adjacent library galleries. The intersection of cultures was typical of San Francisco, as was the cool, foggy weather.

Guests delved into the *Vestkusten* archives, reading about the great San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, which destroyed the newspaper's office. *Vestkusten* was up and running again just a week later.

The library brought out several books from its historical collection for the event. *California och dess Svenska Befolkning* (1910) by Ernst Skarstedt, a former editor of *Vestkusten*, is extensively illustrated with photographs of people and places. *Kalifornien och Guldfebern: Guldgräfvarnes, Mormonernas och Indianernas seder och bruk : antecknade under en resa i vestra Nordamerika*



The Vestkusten office in 1902.



Vestkusten printing shop 1902.



The Vestkusten office in 1906.

Photos belong to the collections of Swedish American Hall Library and Archives, San Francisco, California.



[The habits and customs of the gold-diggers, Mormons and Indians, recorded during a trip through the Western North America], by Carl Gottfrid Wilhelm Vollmer, translated from German and edited by J.E. Thingren, published in Stockholm in 1862, gives an idea of what Swedes in the 19th century thought of the Wild West.

The San Francisco Public Library's History Center is in the main branch at 100 Larkin Street, in the Civic Center neighborhood, across from City Hall and next to the Asian Art Museum. For more information, go to sfpl.lib.ca.us/librarylocations/sfhistory/sfhistory.htm.

Left to right: Lena Sivik, Bridget Strömberg-Brink, Barbro Osher.
Photo by Erica Olsen.

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The beginning of the great San Francisco fire, April 18th, 1906. Picture from California och dess Svenska Befolkning, by Ernst Skarstedt (1910).