



KONGEMØTET MALMØ

The Three Kings

Robert Alsaker

On December 18th and 19th, 1914, the Kings of Norway, Sweden and Denmark met and held a conference in Malmö, Sweden. The topic of their conversation in that "Dark December" was the outbreak of what soon would be referred to as World War I. This was a prestigious event for Haakon VII, King of Norway, for it signaled for the first time his participation in a major and critical international event. Norway had now achieved full official status and was recognized as a player on the international geopolitical stage. A picture of the three Kings was taken to commemorate this "Kings Meeting" and was widely circulated throughout Scandinavia and Northern Europe.

In the late 1970's, I found an oak-framed copy of this picture in the attic of the Chicago Norske Klub, then called Norway Center. No one seemed to know much about this picture except Irving Highland who said that it formerly hung in the stairwell of the Klub. He hadn't seen the picture

since the late 1930's. Irving and Alfred Newgard later agreed that it was a copy of the famous and well known picture taken during the "Nordic Kings Conference" in Malmö, Sweden. We re-hung it in the stairwell.

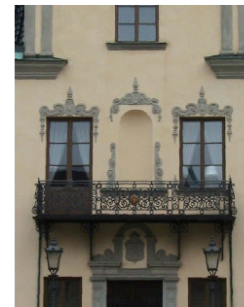
In March, 1988, at the closing of Norway Center, I bought the picture at auction. I was intrigued by the photograph and thought that one day I would learn more about it. That time finally arrived in June, 2006.

My wife, Evy, and I attended the Rotary International Convention held in Malmö and Copenhagen during the summer of 2006. I brought along a copy of the "Kongemøtet" picture. We decided to track down where the picture was taken and to learn more about the circumstances and events that it had commemorated. I had already e-mailed friends and relatives in Norway but no one



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seemed to know much about the picture or the conference. However, our good friend, Jan Vatn, President of the Rotary Club in Fredrikstad, Norway, followed up on my request with his friend Carl Henrik Amundsen. While we were in Malmö, Carl Henrik and Jan were able to provide us with a picture of the building where the Kings' picture was taken along with a short history of the conference. Once we had a picture of the location - now known as the Governor's House, we easily located the building in Malmö.



Lund. As we walked up the ornate winding staircase to the second floor, he told us that the actual conference had taken place several blocks away at the Wallenberg Bank, now the Skandinaviske Enskilda Banken. The conference was held in the "Kings Room" at the Bank. The Governor's House was where the receptions were held, photographs taken and where the three Kings had addressed the public and news reporters of the day. We stepped out onto the second floor iron-railed balcony from where these public meetings were held.

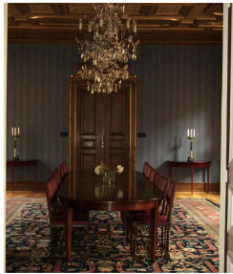
Early one morning we walked up the stairs and rang the doorbell at the Governor's House. A voice answered and we were asked to wait. In a few minutes a congenial gentleman appeared at the door. I showed him the picture. He examined it and smiled. "Yes, this is where this picture was taken. We don't have this particular picture, but we have others".

He introduced himself as the Governor's chauffeur and said he had about 20 minutes to show us around before he had to leave to pick up the Governor in

On the second floor of the Governor's House there were two magnificent rooms with a dining room adjoining one of them. As we walked through these rooms, there were other pictures commemorating the conference and pictures of the three Kings posing together and separately. I mentioned that I did not see where our particular picture had been taken. He smiled and said "wait here". He walked to where the two main rooms were joined and from each side pulled heavy wood-



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en hinged pocket doors out of the walls and joined them together.

Suddenly the scene in our picture was there right in front of us. "Now you see it", he said. "Give me your camera and I will take your picture". Quite an experience.



As we walked back down the cascading staircase and towards the front door we saw a picture of the Swedish

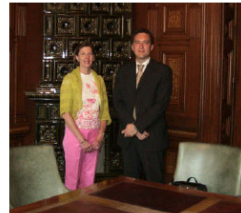
King Oskar II, who we were told, spent a great deal of time in Malmø, living in this house. A son of King Oskar II, Oskar III, J. W. F. Hansen, lived in Chicago for many years in the 1920's and '30's. He became a well



known sculptor and a family friend. Later, Oskar bought a part of Thomas Jefferson's estate in Charlottesville, West Virginia where I visited him in 1971, a year or two before he passed away. But that is another story.

We thanked our gracious host and proceeded to the Wallenberg Bank to take a look at the "Kings Room". Being in the beautiful lobby of the Wallenberg Bank had a special significance for Evy, a retired

banker. She had served on the Raoul Wallenberg Committee in Chicago where she had learned more about the Swedish Diplomat Raoul Wallenberg of the Wallenberg banking family. Raoul Wallenberg was credited with saving the lives of more than 100,000 Jews during World War II. Later, he was imprisoned in the Gulag and the Chicago Committee worked to determine the fate of Raoul as a Soviet prisoner. Each year the Wallenberg Committee awarded a prize to a person who had endured extreme hardship during the war years and had gone on to lead an exceptional life. One year this award was given to Viktor Aitay, the long time Concertmaster of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and someone that I had known for many years.



Presently, the general manager of the Bank greeted us and we were escorted up the stairs and into the "Kings Room". The room today is used for special meetings. Entering the room on one side there was a ceiling high, ornate ceramic stove in the old European style. In the center of the room, there was a large rectangular, beautiful conference table. At the end of the table in the center, inlaid in gold was the Royal Crest of the Swedish King, Gustaf V, who hosted the "Kings' Meeting", to his



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right the Royal Crest of Haakon VII and to his left the Royal Crest of Denmark's King Kristian X. The Kings Conference lasted the better part of two days in this historical room and here were debated the neutrality issues that were able to keep Norway, Sweden and Denmark out of World War I.

Our story, though, is not over yet. In a classic - how one thing leads to another - when the Rotary International Convention ended, we boarded the train to Fredrikstad via Gøteborg and Halden. In Fredrikstad we met up with Jan Vatn and asked him to thank his friend Amundsen for the assistance and material he provided that enabled us to locate the King's meeting place. Jan had arranged a lunch for us to meet him in the old fortress part of Fredrikstad called Gamlebyen.



In walks a most distinguished looking gentleman, Carl Henrik Amundsen whom we discover is the grandson of Roald Amundsen's brother, Gustav Amundsen. Carl Henrik told us that his grandfather had been Roald Amundsen's secretary for many years but ceded his position to his

son, Carl Henrik's father, Henrik Abel Amundsen. Roald Amundsen had given his South Pole compass to Gustav Amundsen and from there it had been passed down through the generations to Carl Henrik. "Would you like to see it?" Carl Henrik asked.



"Of course", we answered. We sat there somewhat in disbelief as Carl Henrik pulled out from his coat pocket the very same compass that Roald Amundsen had used to locate the South Pole in 1911. He placed it in my hand and showed me how it worked. The compass had been made in England in 1910. It was the same model that the ill-fated Robert Scott expedition had used in their quest to reach and return from the South Pole several weeks after Amundsen's historical journey.

Our journey now ended in a way that would have been impossible to predict simply by finding and dusting off a picture taken in 1914 and set aside in the attic of the Chicago Norske Klub.

*Author's note:
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