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# *Fostering the cultural heritage at the Åbo Akademi University Library*

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## **Introduction**

Collecting, organising and preserving various instances of expressions of Finland-Swedish culture is an important mission for the Åbo Akademi University Library today. This mission has existed right from the start in 1918 when Åbo Akademi University was founded and when plans were being made to establish a library. Already at that time, hopes were running high that the library would be something more than an ordinary university library: that it would develop into a national library for the Swedish-speaking population in Finland. What is interesting here is that this idea seems to have originated from the public and not from the founders of Åbo Akademi University. The thought, which at first seems to have been anonymously expressed in a newspaper, has later been attributed to the author and poet Arvid Mörne by Olof Mustelin, chief librarian from 1966 to 1980.

It is also interesting to note that, once expressed, the idea of having a national library for the Swedish-speaking population never died. It has been kept alive over the decades and although the Åbo Akademi University Library never received the status of a national library and perhaps never even made any serious claims in that direction, the thought has been powerful enough to influence the development and the activities of the Library.

This article is an attempt to explore briefly the influences and consequences of this idea.

## **Building collections for the new library**

National libraries have many important tasks that differ from those of other libraries but the hallmark of a national library is, of course, its responsibility for the preservation of the national heritage.

For the newly founded Åbo Akademi University Library, the building of the collections must have been very challenging. The task was to create a university library on a budget that constituted only a fraction of that granted

to other libraries of the same category. The privilege of becoming a legal deposit library in 1919 was of considerable value, as were also the large amounts of donated books and of complete collections which the library received at its inception. When the first issue of *Acta Academiae Aboensis* appeared in 1920, it enabled the library to acquire books also through the international exchange of publications.

The initial duty of the library was to serve the needs of the researchers, teachers and students of Åbo Akademi University, but there is no doubt that the acquisition policy of the first three decades aimed at making the library into an important national heritage institution in order to serve the needs of Finland's Swedish-speaking minority.

Eric Holmberg, who joined the library in 1919 and became chief librarian in 1927, became widely known as "the greatest beggar of books in Finland". He persuaded many collectors to give their treasures to the library, and he built up a network of sponsors and agents, in Finland and abroad, who hunted for books with the aid of long desiderata lists sent to them by the library. Holmberg made public appeals for the library on a grand scale through countless advertisements and interviews in the leading newspapers. "Never destroy anything published in Finland until you have asked the Åbo Akademi University Library. Perhaps you own a piece that the library wants" was at that time a well-known slogan. He is also reputed to have said: "It is forbidden to own books that are missing in the collections of Åbo Akademi University Library". By these means, Holmberg succeeded in making Finland's Swedish-speaking population conscious of the needs of the library, and what followed was a never-diminishing flood of donations to the library - single volumes and ephemera as well as greater and smaller collections. There were thousands of donors, rich and poor, from all social classes and from all parts of the Swedish-speaking regions and the Nordic countries. Holmberg retired in 1952, and it was considered nothing short of a miracle that the number of volumes had risen in his time to over 400,000 from 63,000 in 1927.

Of the donated, or sometimes acquired through purchase, collections, a few have been housed separately to this day. The Gadolin Library, which comprises over 3,600 volumes, is one of the most valuable special collections in the library, with material from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The library was owned by three generations of professors at the Royal Academy in Åbo: Johan Gadolin (1760-1852), a professor of chemistry, his father Jacob Gadolin (1719-1802), professor and bishop, and the father-in-law of the latter, Professor and Bishop Johan Browallius (1707-1755). It is one of the few private libraries of professors that have been housed separately in Finland. The Schauman collection, which was compiled by Counsellor

of Chamber Carl Schauman (1778-1852) and his son the well-known publicist August Schauman (1826-1896), comprises about 8,000 volumes covering a variety of subjects with an emphasis on Finnish and Swedish history and topography as well as law. State antiquarian Reinhold Hausen's (1850-1942) collection of literature about the Åland Islands and the Åland question constitutes the Alandica Collection, which is continuously growing. The Lapponica Collection of some 1,300 volumes is one of the special collections donated to the library by Arvid Sourander (1873-1945), as were his collections of first editions of a number of Finnish and Swedish authors. The incunabula collection, with its 25 different titles and two copies of the *Missale Aboense*, the oldest book printed specifically for Finland, is both a source of joy and usefulness for librarians, scholars interested in the history of books or the history of learning, and visiting bibliophiles.

Although public appeals for book donations belong to the past, the library still accepts donations on a small scale as it is a form of keeping in touch with the Swedish-speaking public, a relationship that is valuable to the Åbo Akademi University.

In order to be a true heritage institution, however, types of material other than printed works are needed. The Åbo Nation student organization at the University of Helsinki donated its picture collection on local geography, history and folklore which had been compiled from 1911, to Åbo Akademi University at its inauguration. Today the library's picture collection comprises over 630,000 pictures the majority of which are photographic. It includes for instance, a representative collection of 19th century photographs in most photographic techniques and a considerable number of engravings and paintings. Most of the pictures have been acquired through donations. To mention two examples of its contents, there is a fine collection of views of Turku and a well-organised collection of portraits, primarily of Finland-Swedish families. Pictures can be searched for in the database *Bildsam*.

Manuscripts were donated as well. Among the first were the collections of letters of the af Schultén family and of Chancellor R.A. Wrede as well as the literary manuscripts of Mikael Lybeck, Jacob Tegengren and Henrik Hildén. Naturally, several people connected to Åbo Akademi University, such as Edvard Westermarck, Svante Dahlström, Otto Andersson and Alma Söderhjelm, donated their material to the library. Today the manuscript collections, the second largest collection of manuscripts in Finland, comprises almost 2,000 meters. Examples of authors who have donated their material are Hagar Ols-son, Gunnar Björling, Tove Jansson, Lars Huldén, Jörn Donner and Märta Tikkanen. The collections also include the archives of several estates, companies and organisations. The extensive archives of the agricultural society Finska hushållningssällskapet, founded in 1797, have also been donated to the library.

A large part of the manuscript material consists of the remaining documents of ordinary people. These documents, put into a larger context, are an important source for the study of personal and cultural history. Emigrant letters and wartime letters are fine examples of valuable source material for scholars. The collections can currently be browsed in the databases *Manusam* and *Brevsam*.

## **Housing the collections**

The rapid expansion of the collections led to difficult housing problems, but it was not until the year 1935 that the library received its first building, a storage tower that was later expanded. No story about the Åbo Akademi University Library would, however, be complete without mentioning the generous Branders family who donated the funds for the building and later for its enlargement in the 1950s. Their donation was quite unprecedented in the history of Nordic libraries.

With the building, the idea of a national library for the Swedish-speaking population gained a foothold. Carl-Rudolf Gardberg, chief librarian from 1953 to 1966, wrote articles about the library where he referred to the concept and pointed out in what sense it was justified. Besides referring to the collections of manuscripts and pictures, he argued that, within the framework of legal deposits, it was important to create a collection of Finland-Swedish publications and to strive to make it as complete as possible, not forgetting the publications from the time before legal deposits. Duplicates were important because they enable having, on the one hand, archival copies, and on the other hand, copies that could be borrowed or sent on interlibrary loan. Duplicates were, of course, crucial for such an arrangement. Duplicates were also important for compiling gift collections for foreign libraries and institutions with an interest in Finland-Swedish culture. These gift collections were built with the utmost care and consideration for the needs of the receiving libraries. Duplicates were also used for exchange purposes and donated to public and school libraries in the country. The exchange partners in the Nordic countries were of special importance because one of the goals of the library was to become a central library for Nordic literature.

Gardberg, who also was a book historian, claimed that the Åbo Akademi University Library was the only library in Finland which systematically collected so-called false duplicates, that is, works of the same edition with variations in the colour of the cover, in the number of enclosures etc. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was customary for a book or a brochure to be issued in half a dozen differently coloured covers or publisher's bindings. He emphasised that it was important to be able to study books as artifacts too. Today the special collection

of Finland-Swedish fiction is rich in duplicates and triplicates. Apart from the legal deposit copy, one copy is bought and for the third and subsequent copies the library relies on donations. Up to five copies of a work are accepted.

Olof Mustelin wrote about “the Finland-Swedish National Library” as well, but he put the concept within quotes, emphasising that the concepts of “national library” and “national literature” were both under debate. In addition to what Gardberg pointed out, Mustelin argued for the acquisition of works published abroad by Finland-Swedish authors or about Finland or Finland-Swedes and Finland-Swedish culture. A point that he also stressed was important was interlibrary lending services which at that time were on the increase. He also entertained hopes that the education of librarians in Swedish would be placed at Åbo Akademi in close collaboration with its library. This we know came true some years later.

### **Preserving and making items available**

In the 1990s the library yet again faced severe housing problems. In order to remedy the situation and to allow for the optimum use of space, numerous currens shelving was introduced in the closed stacks, with one suite of numbers for domestic publications and one for foreign acquisitions. The special collections of the library were removed to a separate stack area which facilitated the recording of fluctuations of temperature and humidity. A new special collection was formed with books from the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that were removed from collections in heavy daily use. This RAR collection, which had over 10,000 volumes in the spring of 2011, is still growing as items are found and moved there.

Concerning preservation two important projects were initiated. A small-scale digitisation of pictures had started in 1990, but the first funding came from the governmental *Suomi tietoyhteiskunnaksi*-programme. Since 2001 the digitisation project has received funding from the Åbo Akademi University Endowment. The digitisation has been on the one hand targeted to give visibility to special collections with digitised pictures used as illustrations in instructive texts, and on the other hand entire works have been digitised either to spare fragile originals from use or by customer request. In the beginning, the digitised objects were placed on the webpage “Hereditas culturalis” and could be accessed only by browsing. For the last three years, in order to make the material more accessible, the work has focused on creating a database for the objects and on using Dublin Core metadata. The digital collection comprises over 30,000 digital objects.

The second project concerned conservation. In August 2000 a project was started, employing one conservator with funds from the Åbo Akademi

University Endowment. Later, a second conservator joined the team, working half-time at the library and half-time at the Maritime Institute at Åbo Akademi University. Both projects have enriched other activities of the library.

## **Other functions**

A national library is not only responsible for the acquisition and conservation of copies of all relevant documents in the country in which the library is located. According to most definitions a national library has the duty to perform other functions as well, such as producing a national bibliography, storing and maintaining a large and representative collection of foreign literature, including documents about the country; acting as a national bibliographic information centre; compiling union catalogues; supervising the administration of other libraries and/or promoting collaboration; coordinating a research and development service etc. In the mission statements of national libraries additional duties can be found, for instance, the National Library of Finland “also serves as a national service and development centre for the library sector and promotes national and international cooperation in the field”.

The interesting question is whether the Åbo Akademi University Library has performed any such functions. And the answer is yes, there are two examples of this kind of work.

In 1956, the Swedish National Bibliography started to record works issued in the Swedish language in Finland, partly because the National Library of Sweden was interested in acquiring these works. The records were provided by the Helsinki University Library, the National Library of Finland. However, in the summer of 1968 when the Helsinki University Library could no longer perform this task, the Åbo Akademi University Library was asked to take over. For about four decades the library’s Fennica department reported works to the Swedish National Bibliography, first by sending catalogue cards and later copies of title pages with added necessary notes.

The second example concerns thesaurus work. The Åbo Akademi University Library has cooperated since 1996 with the National Library of Finland in maintaining Allärs (the General Thesaurus in Swedish), which is the Swedish translation of YSA (the Finnish General Thesaurus). A similar cooperation has now been formed concerning YSO (the Finnish General Upper Ontology) and its Swedish counterpart ALLSO. The work at the library is performed and coordinated by an information specialist with the aid of a team of librarians.

## Conclusion

The Åbo Akademi University Library has been committed to fostering the cultural heritage of the Finland-Swedes ever since its inception. The idea of a national library for the Swedish-speaking population in Finland has influenced the activities of the library over the decades with the result that the collections are more comprehensive, the skills of the staff are probably more versatile and the customers are perhaps more heterogeneous than those of an ordinary university library. The story of a library in which the collections were built by the public and which is situated in a building that was donated by one family certainly deserves to be told, over and over again.

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