



Nyhyttan Badanstalt, Sweden, 1905.  
Photo courtesy of the Swedish HASDA archive.

# Nyhyttan Health and Medical Centre

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Nyhyttan Health and Medical Centre was an Adventist health resort in the deep woods of an isolated region in Mid-Sweden. In 1898 when the Nyhyttan property was purchased, the Adventist church membership in the area was around 700, mostly people of lesser means. So it was indeed a venture in faith. It lasted for almost 100 years.

John G. Matteson spread the Adventist message and its health principles in Scandinavia in the 1880s. He launched a publication named *Information on Health*,<sup>1</sup> and established schools for evangelists and colporteurs. One of the earliest Adventist churches in Sweden was established in 1885 at Nyhyttan, 60 kilometers north of Örebro.<sup>2</sup> Close to the railway line between Kristiania (Oslo) in Norway and Stockholm in Sweden,<sup>3</sup> Nyhyttan was accessible. One member, Carolina Israelsson, sold her farm<sup>4</sup> in 1897 to the church for the establishment of Nyhyttan Mission School. The scenic hills, spruce forests, clean water, and fresh air proved ideal for a health resort.

As water treatment had a long tradition in Europe, in 1905 a “bath” (spa) named Nyhyttans Badanstalt opened during

summertime, providing students an opportunity to earn money for school fees.<sup>5</sup> The “baths” concept fit well with the natural remedies of the Adventist health message. In the beginning both treatment and accommodation for guests were very primitive. Guests had to bring their own bedclothes, wooden bathtubs were used, and entertainment consisted of outings in hay wagons. Some of the early advertisements mentioned electrical baths and a radioactive spring, which meant radon.<sup>6</sup> The first summer the number of guests was around 50, in 1910 75 guests, and in 1914 there were 150.<sup>7</sup>

Charles Kahlström was the main force behind the establishment. Originally a sailor, Kahlström had encountered Adventism when working in the American state of Oregon. At Battle Creek Sanitarium he learned hydrotherapy from Dr. John H Kellogg. He married a Swede, Lotten (Charlotta) Lundkvist, who was in the first graduating class of nursing at Battle Creek College. Kahlström, who also became an ordained minister, shared the Adventist health message all his life. He was a powerful witness to Adventist faith in Örebro, where he ran a health institute from 1904 until his death in 1959 at age 92. Without his and his wife’s professional and committed leadership during the first years, Nyhyttan as a health center would not have succeeded.<sup>8</sup>

In 1932 the mission school moved to another location, and Nyhyttan become a year-round health center. When the hydrotherapy building burned down a new one was built, with better facilities for a variety of treatments. A vegetarian diet was followed throughout Nyhyttan’s existence. In the 1930s there was growing interest in healthful living among the general population, an advantage for an Adventist health institution. The facility averaged around 30 patients, served by a staff of 15. A doctor visited regularly, but was not resident. In 1926 the church opened another health institution, Hultafors Sanitarium, in the vicinity of Gothenburg, with a larger and more modern facility in a populous area. The health periodical *Sundhetsbladet*<sup>9</sup> was edited by the doctors from Hultafors, and there were almost no advertisements or mentions of Nyhyttan over the years.

From 1954 a resident physician, Dr. Gunnar Smårs, Sr., was the medical manager as well as the director of the health center. During Dr. Smårs tenure an agreement was entered into with the regional councils of Örebro and Stockholm which guaranteed a specific number of referred patients. As private health care became less attractive because of the general health system provisions, this agreement grew in importance. However, it was to be a double-edged benefit.

In 1960, Nyhyttan commissioned a new church building in modern Scandinavian architecture. The church family was vibrant and provided different opportunities for guests to attend programs and music and worship services. These activities were seen as positive, even by traditionally secular “referred patients,” not least because the staff that treated them were accepting and friendly.

Nyhyttan continued to be an institution with a good reputation. In 1961 a new and modern building was added to the nineteenth century red wooden houses. The new building had equipment for guests and patients with special needs, as well as large treatment rooms.

The need for innovation, to secure both referred patients and attract a new category of those in need, led to launching a NewStart program in the 1980s. The program, directed by Dr. Leena Laitinen, and Dr. Carl Praestiin, a cardiologist, took inspiration both from Weimar Institute and the long and deep tradition of natural, outdoor living and traditional herbal remedies found in the Nordic countries. Nyhyttan’s heart program became a success, and the boom of positive reports in the health world press was quite surprising.

The NewStart program offered special emphases on heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. The three-week course gave good results. The non-fat vegetarian meals, exercise in fresh air, walks, and physiotherapy treatments gave many a “new start.” The leading national health magazine wrote, *Unique diet heals your heart.*<sup>10</sup> The timing was excellent, as many people in the Swedish welfare state had lapsed into the consequences of comfortable, sedate living with the modern tendency to use fast foods and indulge in affordable sweets.

Yet as most health institutions in Sweden are state-run, the idea of a private institution is viewed as a niche for the rich. This view led to suspicion in the Swedish egalitarian society. There was and is both a general and a political nervousness regarding an institution run by a free-church. The very thought that such a place might give undue religious-sect influence is detrimental to its reputation in the corridors of political power. Simply put, a private free-church run health center is anathema in Swedish society. In this society being the pioneers in treatment of lifestyle maladies had its cost. Other institutions copied and competed. Suspicion regarding a privately owned Christian institution appeared to lead to referrals from the regional councils ending, while they started up similar programs of their own. In this way Nyhyttan’s health program was a success that spread. But, as the referrals stopped, it became increasingly difficult to finance a privately owned institution in a country with extremely high taxes that pay for free health care. In 1998, Nyhyttan had to file for bankruptcy. The Adventist church lost a health institution in a beautiful and unlikely place, that had been established for over ninety years. For a short period, a group of staff tried to run it as a co-operative, but too many difficulties prevented a continuation.<sup>11</sup>

## Legacy

Nyhyttan Health & Rehabilitation Centre lived on despite its closure, not long after a joyous 90-year anniversary. The local Adventist church carried on and eventually increased its outreach to the surrounding community. It had been the largest employer in the parish, and many lost their jobs when the center closed.

But Nyhyttan was a name. Scouting, a high-quality choir, activities which were open to everyone, plus the continuous

health programs run by the church became instrumental in establishing the church as an integral part of the community. A new era dawned in the 2010s. In 2015 many Syrian refugees moved into the empty center buildings, no longer owned by the church. The Adventists at Nyhyttan, long used to serving others at the health center, poured their efforts into support programs for the refugees.

Pastor Lars Gille and his wife Margareta, a nurse, as well as choir director Kersti Esselvall-Smårs, were in the forefront in outreach to the community. A catastrophe has turned into a new start for the Adventist presence in the area. The Adventists of Nyhyttan have become known for being part of the community, rather than apart from it.

## Medical Directors

O. Björkquist (1946-19460); Gunnar Smårs Sr (1954-1981); Carl Praestiin (1981-1984; 1989-1990; 1993–1995); Eila Jutila-Jansson (1984-1987); Leena Laitinen (1987-1989; 1990-1993); Kenneth Sandström (1996-1998).

## Business Managers/Administrators

Nils Zerne (1946-1956); Olle Eriksson (1956-1968); Gösta Ulltjärn (1977-1979); Erling Berg (1979-1984); Raymond Delding (1984-1988); Helmuth Pohl (1989-1998).

### SOURCES

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### NOTES

1. Olof Johnson (editor), *Meddelande för Helso-och Sjukvård* (Stockholm: Skandinaviska förlagsexpeditionen, 1882-1892).?
2. G. Wiklander, *I Herrens tjänst* (Stockholm: Adventistsamfundet, 2000), 135.?
3. Norway and Sweden were in union between 1814 and 1905.?
4. Bergsmansgård: a farm with forest, and mining.?
5. Motzi Eklöf, *Kurkulturer* (Carlsson Bokförlag, Stockholm 2008), 11-22; 59, 76, 78.?
6. Advert in the Swedish Adventist health magazine *Sundhetsbladet*, April 1929, 89.?
7. *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1966), s.v. "Nyhyttan Health and Rehabilitation Center."?
8. G. Wiklander, "Kahlström, Charles: Under Guds ledning," *I vår Herres tjänst* (Stockholm: Adventistsamfundet, 2000), 53-54.?
9. *Sundhetsbladet* (Stockholm: Skandinaviska Bokförlaget, 1926-1967).?
10. Arne Algard, "Unique diet heals your heart," *Hälsa*, November 1987, 18-21.?
11. Per Bolling, "Ingen nystart på Nyhyttan i samfundets regi," *Missionären*, December 1997, 14.?