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The Emigrant Institute Emigrates

Since 2008 the ongoing discussions regarding the incorporation of the *Swedish Emigrant Institute* (SEI) into the entity known as Småland's Cultural Park now seem to have reached an end. The Institute quite simply cannot accept the conditions which are based on the premise that the Institute should subordinate its mission and become a de facto wing of Småland's Museum. That many advantages would result from this cooperation is overshadowed by the fact that the Institute's board of directors would function as a powerless appendage of the Park's directorate and that the founding principles of the Institute would be eviscerated. Especially disturbing is the fact that the founding purpose of the SEI could no longer be guaranteed. It is particularly doubtful that the Institute's international activities could continue, given that this does not seem to interest the Cultural Park. At least as damaging is that the SEI under a locally acting chief can no longer maintain its standing as the Swedish national institution for emigration history.

That the situation has now reached such a point is mostly due to the SEI's finances collapsing due to decreased support from the muni-

cipality of Växjö and the county government of Kronoberg. It has not helped with a diminished state subsidy, contributions from the Friendship Association, or a generous grant from the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation and the Central Bank's Jubilee Fund. The financial capital is now gone, with the exception of the value represented by the property The House of Emigrants. After word that additional contributions at this time from the Cultural Park cannot be counted on, the SEI, together with the loan-giving bank, has decided to put the property up for sale and lay off the employees. The property's value prevents bankruptcy and will allow for the orderly transfer of the archives, library, exhibitions, etc., to a place and institution where the work hopefully can be re-established.

The abandonment of The House of Emigrants, dedicated in 1968 and designed purposely for its work, is a tragedy and a national scandal of great import. The blame falls on the unyielding stance taken by the owners of AB Kulturparken Småland. Surprisingly, the politicians, the tourist establishment, and the business community have shown great indifference towards a cultural insti-

tution that has, for 42 years, generated goodwill and attracted ca one million visitors to Växjö and Kronoberg County. An estimate of the opposition's attitude can be found in the blog comments of the Chairman of the Community Council Bo Frank in *Smålandsposten* April 15, 2010: "All parties in the community and the county council stand behind the Cultural Park's actions and invite the Emigrant Institute to continue to develop as part of the Cultural Park. If the Institute wishes instead to break off the activity, it may do so."

The importance of the Friendship Organization increases at this moment of need. More than ever, the Institute now needs its members' support, advice, and ideas. If it comes about that the Swedish Emigrant Institute moves from Växjö, the Friendship Association will naturally follow and perhaps even strengthen its work with new partners.

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Ed:s note: If you plan to go there this summer, check their web site
<www.utvandrararnashus.se/eng/>