

Wienerbröd

In Search of a Pastry's Origin



**Is it Danish, French, Austrian,
American, or truly Swedish?**

Michael L. Sena

Wienerbröd

På jakt efter ett bakverks ursprung



Är det danskt, franskt, österri-
kiskt, amerikanskt, eller genuint
svenskt?

Michael L. Sena

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DEDICATION

To my dear wife, Britt Marie, who shared most of my *wienerbröd* experiences with me for the past forty-two years, and who encouraged me to put those experiences into words. Cancer took her before the book was finished.



Britt Marie Sena

14 August 1950 – 28 June 2025

Till min kära fru Britt Marie, som delat de flesta av mina wienerbrödsupplevelser med mig under de senaste fyrtiotvå åren, och som uppmuntrade mig att sätta ord på dessa upplevelser. Cancern tog henne innan boken var färdig.

PROLOGUE

WHAT DOES AN American—or any foreigner, for that matter—think he is doing writing about the most Swedish of Swedish pastries: *wienerbröd*? Isn't that like a Frenchman trying to describe the nuances of America's doughnuts, or a Mexican explaining how to make the perfect English steamed syrup sponge pudding? The principal qualification that I can offer for waxing lyrical (with enthusiasm and vigor) on *wienerbröd* is experience: I have been tasting, testing, and enjoying this delicacy for forty-nine years and counting, which is quite a bit more than one-half of my life at this writing.

I cannot speak for my British friends when it comes to allowing a foreigner to talk about their 'puddings', but as an American by birth and a Swede by choice, I would be perfectly comfortable with a foreign-born American, even a Frenchman, who had been a serious student of the doughnut for four or five decades, writing books, poems or songs about the fried dough bomb.

So, as a U.S.-born, naturalized Swede as of 1999, who began his love affair with *wienerbröd* during his first visit to Sweden in 1977, I will continue.

My main reason for writing this book, also as an American, is to correct a wrong that was done approximately one hundred years ago to Sweden and Swedes by two Americans and one Dane. They may not have done it consciously by conspiring and contriving, but the result was the same. *Wienerbröd* was attributed to the wrong

source, Denmark, and I believe it is time to correct that mistake and take *wienerbröd* back to where it belongs.

To find *wienerbröd*, I had to first find my way to the places where it was made and sold, which in Sweden are called *konditorier*, indefinite nominative plural of *konditori*. I wasn't looking for them. Visiting places where coffee and pastries were sold, and taking a casual, leisurely break during the day, was not something I was used to doing when I made my first visit to Sweden in the late winter of 1977. I grew up in the fifties and sixties in the City of Scranton, which was then Pennsylvania's third largest city after Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. (It has since fallen to seventh place.) The only fancy restaurants in Scranton were in the two hotels, the Casey, and the Jermyn; most restaurants were incorporated into bars (or beer gardens, as they were called). There were ice cream parlors, soda fountains, lunch counters in five-and-dime stores, sandwich shops in department stores, lunchrooms, and diners where the best pies and burgers could be eaten. This was before fast food chains, which did not arrive in Scranton until the mid-sixties. There were a few pastry shops where wedding and birthday cakes could be ordered, and Italian bakeries with brick, wood-fired ovens where the first-generation immigrants from Italy, like my grandparents, could buy their daily supper loaves. But there was nothing resembling a *patisserie* or a *konditori*, where rich and poor alike could enjoy a good, strong cup of coffee and choose from a selection of delicious pastries.

I might never have been looking for a place that served coffee, with or without pastries, if I had not taken a summer job in a lumberyard between my junior and senior

years in high school. That's where I drank my first cup of coffee, a beverage I had shown no interest in trying before that. It was not by choice or out of curiosity that I became a coffee drinker that summer. I had no choice, according to the yard manager. It was on my first day on the job, after the morning coffee break during which I had declined both the free coffee and the doughnuts that were offered by the owners, when Johnny, the yard manager, took me aside and explained that if I didn't drink the coffee and eat at least one doughnut, the owners might decide that we didn't need a coffee break, or that we didn't like the doughnuts they bought. Then, we would have to take our own coffee and food. So, he explained, it wasn't an option; it was an obligation and a gesture of solidarity with the other workers. "Put a lot of sugar and milk in it. You'll get used to it." And that's how I became a coffee drinker, eventually removing the sugar and then the milk.

How I arrived in Stockholm in the late winter of 1977 would take another book to explain. It was serendipity. It led to me working for a Swedish map-making company, eventually meeting my wife, Britt Marie, and after an attempt to resettle her in the United States, and with the offer of employment by the legendary Swedish vehicle manufacturer, Volvo, we decided to resettle Michael in Sweden. That was in 1990, many *wienerbröd* and many more cups of great Swedish coffee ago.

I've been thinking about writing a book on the topic of *wienerbröd* for a dozen-or-so years, but other projects took priority. There were three biographical novels about my family, a novel that combined a journey through Italy's political and culinary history combined with fly fishing in

Italy's trout waters, a book about coal mining in North-eastern Pennsylvania, and a story about how wars affect our lives, even if we never have to fight in one. In late 2023, when I finished my book about driverless cars and why they are a good idea if used for the right purpose, I decided that it was time to bring out the notes and the snippets of chapters I had been assembling for the *wienerbröd* book.¹ Is there really was a book worth writing that would be a book worth reading?

There are different definitions of what a book "worth reading" is. Some might say it is a book that is deemed worthy to be published. There are around 1.5 million books published every year. That number does not include books that are self-published, meaning the author has a book printed or placed online at his or her own cost. Seven of my nine books have been self-published for a limited readership, mostly family and friends. The two professionally published books are non-fiction for the academic and professional markets. In addition to the one on driverless cars, I have written about how to beat traffic congestion.

I wanted to write a book about a subject that would be interesting for people of all ages and interests, which would include a mixture of history, geography, language, and, most of all, food culture. And I have been both fascinated and confounded by the use of the word 'Danish' as the English translation of the Swedish word *wienerbröd*. I wanted to find out why. I definitely enjoyed the experience of writing it; I hope you enjoy reading it.

¹ Kornhauser, A., Sena, M. The Real Case for Driverless Mobility. Elsevier Publishing. (2024)

INTRODUCTION

IF YOU ARE what you eat, can you become what you eat? Can you become a Swede by eating a baked, mashed, or boiled and sliced swede?² This existentialist question does not appear to have been addressed by philosophical thinkers, and it may sound a bit esoteric, but it is serious business for us 2.1 million inhabitants of Sweden who have foreign backgrounds. That is 19.7% of the total population of 10,673,669 million at the end of 2024. Not insignificant. The question is important both for those of us who strive to attain Swedishness and for those others who do not. Some undefined portion of this group with non-Swedish ancestries, even those who were born in Sweden, have no desire to look, feel, act, or sound Swedish, so if by chance, partaking of the country's special foods or imbibing in the

² One definition of 'swede' from Oxford English Dictionary: *Brassica napobrassica* has many national and regional names used globally. *Rutabaga* is the common U.S. and Canadian term for the plant. It comes from the old Swedish word *Rotabagge*, meaning simply "root ram". In the U.S., the plant is also known as Swedish turnip or yellow turnip. The term 'Swede' is used instead of rutabaga in many Commonwealth Nations, including England, Wales, Australia, and New Zealand. In Scotland, it is known as turnip, tumshie or neep (from the Old English *næp*, Latin *napus*). The author encountered the term "Baked and mashed swede" for the first time when he thumbed through a cookbook he purchased while living in London in the early 1970s.

national drinks (e.g., *brännvin*, *punsch*, *julmust*, *glögg*, *Ramlösa*.) causes that transformation to occur, then these foods and drinks should be avoided by them at all cost.

What does it mean to be Swedish? A native Swedish acquaintance once said to me: “*If you were half a foot taller, had blonde hair—or no hair—and blue eyes, showed at least a faint trend toward having a potbelly and spoke Swedish without the hint of an American accent, you would pass for a Swede.*” He was describing a male Swede, of course, and he was commenting on my apparent acceptance of the way things are or the way things are not done in Sweden. In other words, I had all the traits of a Swede except looking and talking like one. I know several (real) Swedish men who are as tall (or as short) as I, have a thick head of dark hair (now mostly grey), brown eyes, and show no signs of a potbelly. Maybe their ancestors came to Sweden from the south to ply their trades. Italian masons came from Italy in the 1800s to build Sweden’s stone monuments and the brick buildings, and again in the 1950s to build its trucks and cars; tailors came from Belgium; printers came from Germany; and a Frenchman came from France in 1818 to become the country’s monarch—and his ancestors are still on the throne.

Descendants of all these people have assimilated, speak the local dialects without a trace of their ancestors’ origins, know all the songs by heart that accompany the *midsommar* festivities in June, the crayfish table (*kräftskiva*) in August, and the *julbord* at Christmas, and have an opinion on whether there should or should not be a royal family (I think there should) and whether Sweden should or should not join NATO (thankfully, we finally did). Some of us who have lived here for over a third of our lives still

cannot separate the meat of a crayfish from its shell and still stare with wonder at how grown men and women can quack and hop around with flower wreaths on their heads singing songs from their kindergarten days.

What is typical Swedish food? Are there ingredients and dishes that are purely Swedish so that it would be impossible to mix them up with what other ethnic groups eat, like the foods of the Finns, Danes, Norwegians, Germans, or good heavens, the Russians? And do children who are fed these foods at a very young age take on the typical characteristics of a Swede, whatever those characteristics are?



Those little meatballs (*köttbullar*) often eaten with mashed potatoes (*potatismos*) and lingonberry jam (*lingonsylt*) have neither the look nor the taste of my mother's or grandmother's meatballs that were fried and then popped into the *maccheroni* sauce along with the *salsiccia* and *bracciola*. When we went out to play with our friends after eating Sunday dinner, which was served around one o'clock after returning from mass, you could tell which part of Italy the kids' parents or grandparents came from by the strength of the garlic odor that followed them around for several hours. The Swedish meatballs definitely do not have the same kick as my mom's did. She added a modest amount of garlic. But my mom's were not

even close to the garlic explosive devices from the southernmost regions of Italy that my mother's sister was taught how to make by her *Calabrese* husband's mother.

For me, the quintessential Swedish food is not the *prinskorv* (prince sausage) served for breakfast at every Swedish hotel or which sits on the *smörgåsbord*³ at Christmas or Easter.



It is not one of the many versions of *sill* and *strömming* (both *Clupea harengus*; *strömming* is the Swedish name given to herring caught north of Kalmar in the Baltic Sea, and *sill* every other herring) that are the first course in every *smörgåsbord*.



And it is not *gravad lax* or *gravlax*, which is salmon that has been cured for between 12 and 48 hours using a mix of salt, sugar, and dill. The curing process uses osmosis to remove moisture from the fish and into the salt and sugar. The *gravad* salmon is cut into thin slices and is usually eaten as an appetizer or a first course with a mustard and dill sauce called *hovmästarsås* (headwaiter sauce).

³ Smörgåsbord – Literally, 'sandwich (smörgås) table (bord). A buffet-style meal or Swedish origin with hot and cold dishes, the contents of which vary with time of day and time of year.



My choice is Swedish *wienerbröd*, a delectable pastry with a mysterious name of uncertain origin, and an ambiguous place in the country's culinary future. My aim is to make its name less mysterious, its origin more certain, and its future in the hearts, minds, and stomachs of Swedes and non-Swedes alike much brighter.



We are going to have to dig deep to get to the bottom of *wienerbröd*. It is not like we are asking “Why is apple pie called apple pie?” The name of the pastry, *wienerbröd*, is made up of two words: *wiener* and *bröd*, which translate as ‘Viennese’ and ‘bread’. Where I come from, a ‘wiener’ is another name for a ‘hot dog’, or what are also called ‘frankfurters’. The original Vienna sausage, or *Wiener Würstchen*, is a thin, long, parboiled sausage traditionally made of pork and beef in a casing of sheep's intestine which is then given a low-temperature smoking. In Germany or Austria, a *Wiener Würstchen* would not be confused with a *Frankfurter Würstchen*, a sausage hailing from Frankfurt, but in the U.S., every variation of these two *würsts* could be called a hot dog, a wiener, a frankfurter or just a frank.

In Scranton, there are two establishments that serve a "Texas Wiener". They are more diners than restaurants. The Texas Wiener is a local invention and consists of a short, fat wiener par-cooked in vegetable oil and finished in a frying pan, cut in half, placed on a square bun, and topped with a spicy mustard, chopped onions, a chili sauce containing ground beef, onion, tomatoes, and a family secret blend of spices. People come to Scranton from far afield just to down a Texas Wiener or two (or three) at one, or both, of these establishments which are less than fifty meters from one another and share a common heritage.

If you look up the word *wienerbröd* in a Swedish/English printed dictionary, like my *Engelska Ordbok* (Swedish/English 1970; English/Swedish 1988), it is translated into English as the word 'Danish pastry'. If you turn to the English/Swedish section, 'Danish' is translated into a) *dansk* (a Dane); b) *danska* (Danish language); and c) *wienerbröd*. My *American College (English) Dictionary* (1963) defines 'Danish' as "of or pertaining to the Danes, their country (Denmark), or their language". There is no mention of pastry. The *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* adds 'a Danish pastry' to its definitions and then defines 'Danish pastry' as "a pastry made of rich raised dough". The word 'Vienna' is nowhere in sight.

We are going to study this topic together, you and I

I have chosen to use a dialectical method to better understand how *wienerbröd* came to be. One of the several definitions of 'dialectic' refers to "discussion and reasoning by dialogue between people who have different beliefs or points of view on a particular topic, but who have agreed

to find common ground through discussion and thoughtful argumentation". It is not a debate, where each party buttresses his or her viewpoint by appealing to emotions or with rhetoric. The word comes from the Greek *dialektikē*, which means the art of conversation or discussion, and was associated with the Socratic method of questioning and refuting opposing arguments to arrive at an agreed truth. The goal of the Socratic method was to "elicit a clear and consistent expression of something supposed to be implicitly known by all rational beings".⁴ Two positions or observations may seem contradictory, but both may still be true. For example, can bread be a pastry, or can something that is not made or sold in Vienna be called Viennese?

Then there is the Aristotelian dialectic. Aristotle, who studied under Plato, who, in turn was taught by Socrates, applied the Socratic method, but based his arguments on his empirical knowledge. "For the same thing to hold good and not to hold good simultaneously of the same thing and in the same respect is impossible," wrote Aristotle.⁵ In other words, if something is identified as being one thing, it cannot be something else. The Hegelian Dialectic, which is named after the 19th century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, proposes that all things have a contradiction between their opposites. A *thesis* (an initial

⁴ "Dialectic." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dialectic>. Accessed 5 May. 2024. Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary

⁵ Aristotle's Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC) <https://plato.stanford.edu/Entries/aristotle-noncontradiction/>

idea or proposition) has a contradiction, which is an *antithesis* (a conflicting idea or opposing viewpoint). Hegel said that any idea or concept can be understood through a *synthesis* of the two opposing propositions, which leads to a higher level of understanding.

Perhaps *wienerbröd* is something other than either bread or pastry, and whether it was once made or sold in Vienna has no bearing on its present condition. Or maybe it does?

Immanuel Kant was more nuanced. He stated that "experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play". On this point, he agreed with David Hume and other British empiricists like Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and George Berkeley, who rejected the existence of innate ideas and stated that all human knowledge originates solely from experience. They would all say that you cannot possibly know how a *wienerbröd* tastes until you've tasted it. But Kant went one step further. He claimed that we can only know the phenomenal world, the world of appearances, and we can know nothing of the noumenal world, the world behind appearances. He used the term *ding an sich*, the 'thing-in-itself', to refer to the essence of what we observe.

He wasn't finished, and his further ruminations have put more arrows in our quiver as we hunt for *wienerbröd's* secrets. Kant used a dialectical argument to turn philosophy on its head. According to Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason, philosophy had been at an impasse, with the Greeks—the Empiricists on the one side and the Transcendentalists on the other—still controlling the narrative.

Both contended that the *object* had priority. Kant asked, can't we reverse the priority? "Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to *objects*. If intuition must confirm the constitution of *objects*, I do not see how we could know anything of the latter a priori; but if the *object* (as the object of the senses) must confirm to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, I have no difficulty in conceiving such a possibility."

Intuition comes first. Things for us can be known by us, according to Kant, because they conform to our concepts. "Experience is itself a species of knowledge which involves understanding; and understanding has rules which I must presuppose as being in me prior to objects being given to me, and therefore as a priori," said Kant.⁶ I interpret this as saying that my first experience with *wienerbröd* would have been very different if I had not frequented the Coney Island Diner for its Texas Wieners, or we had not stopped off at Hot Dog Johnny's whenever I drove with my family from Scranton to New York City, or if I didn't make doughnuts a regular part of my calorie intake, and if every breakfast meeting in the U.S. didn't include Danish in all its forms.

Aristotle was writing in a time long before 'hot-dogs', 'ham-burgers', dough-nuts', lunch-meat, sweet-breads, head-cheese, spotted-dick, cat's-tongues, and 'Danish' were invented as foods for consumption. However, by the time Hegel and Kant were hypothesizing, the German *leberkäse* was most likely well known to them. *Leberkäse*

⁶ <https://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/2020/11/immanuel-kant-origin-dialectic/>

translates to 'liver-cheese', but it is not made from liver and is definitely not a cheese. The *ding an sich* of *leberkäse* for Kant was in the eating and not in the seeing or hearing. We have no information on whether he thought the taste was phenomenal or that he was disappointed because it had neither the taste of liver nor cheese.

What is the ding an sich we are trying to find?

In each of the chapters, I will attempt to arrive at the essence of one aspect of *wienerbröd* by looking at it from two diametrically opposed perspectives, represented by myself and you, my reader and alter ego. I have carefully chosen my topics for each of the dialogues. First up is the name. Why was it given the name that it has? Is it really a Viennese invention? Then there is the question of whether it belongs to the 'afternoon tea' time like scones, whether it is a breakfast staple like American Danish, or whether it can be eaten around the clock like Big Macs and Dunkin' Donuts whenever the spirit is moved by hunger or desire. Does a *wienerbröd* found in a convenience store, like 7-Eleven, count as a real *wienerbröd*, or are the real deals only available in *konditorier*? Is the sell-by date actually a sell-by time, within only a few hours after they are taken out of the oven? Is there only one shape for a *wienerbröd*, or is it only the imagination that is a limiting factor? Finally, can you eat a *wienerbröd* every day, or does that spoil the magic?

So, this is not going to be a cake walk,⁷ simply setting up straw men (theses and antitheses), knocking them

⁷ The American English term "cakewalk" was used as early as 1863 to indicate something that is very easy or effortless, although this metaphor may refer to the carnival game of the

down, and ending up with *Wienerbröd* being the Swedish equivalent of Danish (synthesis), and not a hot dog bun. A major part of the search for understanding will be in the eating, and I have visited *konditorier* up and down and across Sweden. For those of you who have never been to Sweden, or think it is the place on a map snuggled in between France, Germany, Austria, and Italy (it is often confused with Switzerland), it is the third largest country in land area within the EU after France and Spain and covers an area equivalent to the east coast of the United States from Augusta, Maine to Orlando, Florida with the width of Pennsylvania. My visits and conversations with the proprietors are included in my narrative, as are my meetings with organizations that represent all those who make and sell *wienerbröd*.

I hope you are still with me at the end of the last essay, and that you might even consider looking for a *konditori* when you come over to Sweden to experience the *Aura Borealis*, spend a long weekend at the Ice Hotel in Jukkasjärvi, or pick up your Volvo in Göteborg as part of their overseas delivery program. As it happens, one of the best *wienerbröd* (it is *wienerbröd* in both singular and plural in Swedish) I have tasted can be found at *konditorier* in Göteborg.



same name in referring to the fact that the winners obtain their prize (a cake) by doing no more than walking around in a circle. The phrase "takes the cake" also comes from this practice, as could "piece of cake". (*Harper, Douglas. "cakewalk". Online Etymology Dictionary.*)

ESSAY ONE

IT'S (DEFINITELY NOT) A DANISH

I UNDERSTAND YOUR question. With so many more important concerns that we have today, like wars and global warming, why should we spend any time at all on such a trivial subject as pastry? Of course, we are not discussing this to the exclusion of reading about or watching news clips about conflagrations, climate-related catastrophes, and the cancelling of DEI initiatives. Most people still set aside time to take part in their favorite pastime, like attending an opera, a sporting event, or a yoga class in between gluing themselves to roads or marching in a Pride parade, not to mention spending eight or ten hours a day on their primary occupation, performing their familial duties, and dabbling in their hobbies.

On the other hand, I will submit that in order to really get to the bottom of the topic of *wienerbröd*, we are going to have to make forays into many different fields of interest, including history, politics, economics, sociology, and psychology. You don't believe that this is relevant to people living outside of the Euro-American bubble. Maybe it wasn't before Colonel Sanders Kentucky Fried Chicken, or as we call it today, KFC, and 7-Elevens began showing up in India, Tokyo, and even China. We are living in a globalized world these days.

I can wait while you do a search on your preferred search engine for the definition of *wienerbröd*. You will see

that up pops line after line of “Danish pastry”. As I wrote earlier, the *Wiener* part translates as ‘Viennese’, and *bröd* part as ‘bread’. How do we get ‘Danish’ or ‘Danish pastry’ out of *Wienerbröd*, and how did it arrive in Sweden? This is as much a political, historical, economical, sociological, and a psychological question as a culinary one, don't you think?

Let's put the common, accepted narrative about the origin of *wienerbröd* into its historical context.⁸ As one story goes, bakers in Denmark went out on strike in 1850. Danish bakery owners, always resourceful, went to Vienna and brought back scab workers⁹ to replace the striking Danes. According to this tale, the Viennese took with them the art of making puff pastry (*smördeg*, literally “butter dough” in Swedish, or *butterdej* in Danish) consisting of flour, water, salt, and butter. In another variation of this story, an apprentice to the Austrian bakers forgot to add butter to a bread dough he was making. He tried to solve the problem before the master baker discovered his error by flattening

⁸ My source for the purported origin of Wienerbröd is *Kunskaps Kokboken* (The Knowledge Cookbook), described by its authors as “the world's largest gastronomic encyclopedia comprising all kinds of recipes, everything about cooking and food products, and also the world's most comprehensive gastronomic dictionary”. (<http://www.kunskapskokboken.se/3.22645/var-ufakta/om-wienerbrodsbakterer#:~:text=Dess%20uppkomst%20tillskrivs%20ofta%20den%20bagarstrejk%20som%20uppstod,som%20tog%20med%20sig%20konsten%20att%20laga%20sm%C3%B6rdeg>)

⁹ As used in this context, according to Merriam-Webster, a ‘scab worker’ is a worker who accepts employment or replaces a union worker during a strike.

the dough, adding a layer of butter, folding it over twice, flattening it out by rolling it out (*kavla* in Swedish), and repeating the process two more times. By doing this, the dough became twenty-seven (3 x 3 x 3) thin alternating layers of dough and butter. The head baker was exceedingly pleased with the result, compared to the simple rolls he had been intending to make, and the rest is history—or myth.

An obvious question is: Why did the Danish bakers in Copenhagen go to Vienna to find Austrian replacements for the striking Danes? What were the relations between Denmark and Austria in 1850, and how likely is it that Danish bakery magnates would turn to Austria, rather than Germany or France or anywhere else to supply their kneading needs? And if these imported workers had actually produced a prize-winning pastry for Denmark, would the Danes have shared it with their neighbors across the Kattegat? I lived for eighteen years on the Swedish side of the Kattegat, in an area that was once part of Denmark, and I can say without equivocation that relations between the Scandinavian cousins were still guarded.

When discussing geopolitical events in the first half of the 19th century, a good starting point is usually Napoleon, not just because there is a pastry named for him, but because everything that happened during the first half of the 19th century can somehow be traced to the self-proclaimed emperor. I made a little investigation of the origin of Napoleon pastry, and it might be worth taking a bit of a diversion to discuss it because it illustrates how things get names for reasons that are not so obvious.

There is no evidence that can be shown which definitively and conclusively explains how the *mille feuille* became known as the Napoleon. *Mille feuille* is French for 'a thousand sheets' or 'leaves', and it is a French dessert made with puff pastry layered with pastry cream.



Puff pastry is made with bread flour, salt, water, and butter. A *mille feuille* pastry is topped with a white icing and swirls of chocolate icing. The name *mille feuille* first appeared in 1733 in an English-language cookbook written by French chef Vincent La Chapelle. A cookbook written in 1749 by another Frenchman, Joseph Menon, contains what is believed to be the first mention of the *mille feuille* in a French cookbook. This was twenty years before the *Le Petit Caporal* was even born. And there is a very big difference between the puff pastry used in Napoleons and the dough used in *wienerbröd*. *Wienerbröd* dough has yeast, while puff pastry does not. Yeast was used in bread for a few thousand years, but not in pastry, and the yeast that was used in the 18th and early 19th century in bread in Europe was mostly left over from the beer brewing process. Puff pastry uses water instead of milk and does not use eggs.

There are two theories which I consider plausible for how the *mille feuille* became known as a Napoleon. The first is simply that Napoleon enjoyed eating the dessert, often to excess, so that it became known as 'Napoleon' in his honor. If the Emperor liked it, then anyone who was anyone should like it as well. During the Napoleon era, which spans from 1799 to 1815, there could not be an official event involving food in which the pastry did not have a central role. There is, however, one fact that argues against this direct connection to the great man, and that is there is no mention of 'Napoleons' in print until the 1890s. So, it may have been Napoleon-the-man's favorite, but it was still called *mille feuille*. A much more likely origin of the name is as a corruption of a pastry made by an Italian baker in Naples, which he called a *Napoletano*, the Italian word for any person, thing, or concept from Napoli.

Where were we? Yes, the influence of geopolitical events originating with Napoleon that might have had led Danish bakery owners to turn to Viennese bakers in 1850. Danes, like Swedes and Norwegians, are descendants of Vikings, who were known mostly for their tendency to fight first and talk later, if they talked at all. They wreaked havoc all over Europe and as far away as Newfoundland in North America until they became Christians and settled down after the turn of the Second Millennium. Denmark had managed to stay out of any conflicts since the 1720s, but then it was rudely forced into the Napoleonic Wars by Napoleon's principal foe, Great Britain. Britain's Royal Navy, commanded by Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson, had destroyed Napoleon's naval fleet, comprised of both French and Spanish ships, at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

Following this victory, British war strategists worried that if France could convince Denmark to join its continental alliance, Denmark's sizeable fleet could be used to attack Britain.

Therefore, in August 1807, in what was known as the Battle of Copenhagen, British troops invaded and occupied Zealand, the island on which Denmark's capital, Copenhagen, is located.¹⁰ British gunships then proceeded to bombard Copenhagen. Three quarters of the city was destroyed and up to 3,000 Danes were killed, of which two hundred were civilians, and an additional eight hundred were wounded. Denmark surrendered and turned over its entire fleet of vessels to the British. The British fleet left Copenhagen in October, but Denmark was now committed to revenge the loss of its lives and ships, and the destruction of its capital. Holding true to the ancient proverb, *Amicus meus, inimicus inimici mei* (The enemy of my enemy is my friend), Denmark joined France as an ally and remained an ally until the bitter end for Napoleon in 1815.

Austria had been soundly defeated by France at the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805. Austria's ally in this battle was Russia, and together 16,000 of their soldiers were killed or

¹⁰ If you are wondering whether there is any connection between Denmark and New Zealand, the answer is no, but there is a similarity between the English translating a name incorrectly. New Zealand was named by the Dutch who first sighted it in 1642 as *Nova Zeelandia* in Latin and *Nieuw Zeeland* in Dutch, after the Dutch province of Zeeland. It was the Englishman James Cook in 1770 who claimed the islands for Britain and changed the Zee to Zea, unknowingly giving it the same name as the island in which Copenhagen sits.

wounded, compared to 9,000 for France. With its defeat, Austria was thereby removed from France's field of opponents, but it was not an ally. Reworking the proverb, The friend of my enemy is my enemy, should have meant that Austria was not going to be on friendly terms with Denmark.

Over to Sweden. It had been a great power in Europe during most of the 17th and the early 18th century, what it calls its *stormaktstiden* (the Era of Great Power). Its period as a military force had waned by the time Napoleon's France was at its pinnacle, but Sweden's king at the time, Gustav IV Adolph, decided that Napoleon was a scourge who had to be stopped at all cost. Swedish troops engaged the French in 1805 in Pomerania, an area of land on the Baltic coast north of Berlin. Sweden was no match for the French. In 1807, defeated, Sweden left the Pomeranian stage.

In 1808, Napoleon urged Russia—yes, foe becomes friend—and Denmark (friend) to declare war on Sweden, and they were happy to oblige. On the 7th of July 1807, Emperor Napoleon met Czar Alexander I on a raft on the River Niemen that runs through what is now Lithuania. The two emperors decided to divide the world into two parts, one for each of them, and as a start toward this goal, Russia would force Sweden into the group of countries that would block all trade with Great Britain. In return, Russia would

gain control of Finland, which Sweden had controlled since 1150!¹¹

Sweden was defeated in less than a year, and the major blame for the loss was put down to the Swedish king's incompetency as a military leader. Sweden indeed had to relinquish Finland to Russia. This was a catastrophic loss. Finland had been part of Sweden for almost seven hundred years. Another result was that Gustav IV Adolph was deposed in a military coup by his army officers backed by the noble families. He and his entire family were deported to Germany, and Gustav's elderly and childless uncle, Karl XIII, was crowned king in 1809.

Do you feel I have strayed off the subject? It might seem so, but I was just about to tie a knot with two loose ends in our quest to determine Denmark's connection to Austria in the middle of the 19th century and why, or whether, it would have looked to Vienna for help with its baking. In an incredible twist of fate, those who had deposed Sweden's king and installed his uncle began to look for a more permanent solution for a monarch, and their search took them to—drum roll please—France. Their real objective was to have a king who would bring Sweden into Napoleon's sphere and use the power of his armies to regain control of Finland. They chose Jean Baptist Bernadotte, who had been a rising star as one of Napoleon's generals, as well as the husband of Napoleon's jilted fiancée, Desiree Clary, whose sister was married to Napoleon's

¹¹ Frilund, Göran. *The Union's Last War: The Russian-Swedish war of 1808-09.* (https://www.napoleon-series.org/military-info/battles/c_finnish.html)

brother, Joseph. Yes, it does sound like a tangled web, doesn't it? Bernadotte had made several major military blunders and was relieved of his commands by Napoleon, but he was saved from more serious punishment by his personal connections with the emperor.

In 1810, Bernadotte's military star had definitely fallen, and he was relegated to serve as governor of Rome when he found himself being elected in August to the position of Crown Prince of Sweden and Supreme Commander of the Swedish military forces. Napoleon was consulted, and while he appeared indifferent to the idea in public, privately he supported it. He asked his former general to swear that he would never take up arms against France, but Bernadotte refused. There was little more the two men could say to each other. Jean Baptist Bernadotte became Crown Prince Karl Johan (Charles John) in November 1810.

He took seriously his new role, both as crown prince and as the nation's military leader. Instead of allying Sweden with France, he joined the Allies against his former commander in the Sixth Coalition in 1813. Following victories of forces under his command, he was instrumental in the decisive battle of Leipzig, which resulted in Napoleon's defeat and retreat. He immediately turned his forces toward Denmark and attacked her from the south and prevailed. The Treaty of Kiel in January 1814 resulted in Denmark ceding Norway to Sweden. Losing Norway was as catastrophic for Denmark as losing Finland was for Sweden. Denmark and Norway had been in an alliance since 1380. This further destabilized Denmark's economy, which

had been severely battered by the disruption of trade during the Napoleonic wars. In 1813, the country had been forced into bankruptcy.

Bernadotte was crowned King Karl XIV Johan of Sweden in 1818. He was obviously no longer a favorite in his original homeland, nor an object of affection of the Danes. There is one more small detail about the new king that is relevant to our discussion about *wienerbröd* and its possible connection to Austria. In January 1798, Bernadotte was made ambassador to Vienna as a result of his troops' superlative performance in Italy to aid Napoleon in battle. In April of the the same year, he committed a serious diplomatic faux pas when he had the French flag hoisted over the embassy in Vienna. Riots ensued, and he was forced out of town. It was following this setback in his career that he married Clary and returned his star to the anointed.

Denmark limped along for the next twenty years, but things began to improve in the 1830s for the country's economy, especially its agricultural sector. Then, new difficulties started in its southern reaches. At the time, Schleswig and Holstein, lands in the neck connecting Denmark with Germany, were controlled by Denmark. Holstein was actually a member of the German Confederation, and Schleswig was linguistically and culturally divided between those who identified with Denmark and those who felt they were part of Germany. Troubles began brewing in 1848 and broke into a full boil in 1863. Denmark went to war with both Prussia and Austria to bring these southern regions firmly into Denmark, believing that it would be supported by Sweden. Karl XIV Johan had died in 1844 and his son Oscar I succeeded him. Oscar had died in 1859 and

his son Karl XV succeeded him. Karl XV, still feeling no great affinity for his neighbor for its complicity in his country's loss of Finland, declined the invitation, and Denmark lost. Denmark was forced to give up almost all of Schleswig and Holstein to Prussia and Austria.

What do you think? Does it sound like during this period of time, between the beginning of the 19th century until after its mid-point, that there would be an uninhibited flow of people and culture between Copenhagen and Vienna? And even if there were periods when the countries were not at war with each other directly, doesn't it seem more likely that there would be cultural exchanges between Denmark and France rather than between Denmark and Austria or Denmark and Sweden? Can we agree that the story about the baker's apprentice is very far-fetched?

Maybe it's a lot simpler than strike breakers from Vienna

I have another theory that I would like you to consider. It is this: *wienerbröd* is a *viennoiserie*. The word is French for "a thing in the style of Vienna", or "a pastry of a type made with a leavened dough enriched with ingredients such as butter, milk, eggs, etc."¹² The key word in this definition is "leavened", which means contains yeast. The connection of Vienna to France which resulted in the word *viennoiserie* appear to be three Austria-related incidental facts. First, it began with a man named August Zang, an Austrian soldier who decided to open a bakery in Paris in 1839 called *Boulangerie Viennoise*. A *boulangerie* is a bakery making French bread. Second, Zang introduced the Viennese steam oven

¹² https://www.oed.com/dictionary/viennoiserie_n?tl=true

into France. And third, he used the steam oven to bake his new creation, the precursor of the modern *croissant*, inspired by the Austrian crescent-shaped biscuit called *vanillekipferl*. The steam oven injects steam into the oven while the bread is baking and delays the formation of a crust. The result is a light and airy crumb, and was critical for making the French *croissant*, which came seventy years later. So, I suppose a *boulangerie Viennoise* is a bakery in which a type of French bread is made by an Austrian using an Austrian steam oven.

The Austrian *vanillekipferl* is made with flour, sugar, ground walnuts, and butter, although an egg or an egg yolk might be added as well to make the dough more compact. Zang used *brioche* dough to make his crescents. *Brioche* is a yeasted bread enriched with butter, eggs, and a little sugar to create a soft crumbly texture. It is a French invention, not Austrian, Danish, or Swedish. The butter ratio is very high, one-half to three-quarters butter to flour, and butter is broken up with the flour. *Brioche* has a tender golden crumb and a slightly sweet flavor.

*A note on yeast: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7686800/#B7>

So, for around seventy years, the French were eating *croissants* made with *brioche* dough cooked in steam ovens that gave them a puffy, airy form and a shiny texture. The real revolution for the *croissant*, and I believe also *wienerbröd*, came in 1915 when Frenchman Sylvain Claudius Goy completely changed the recipe for *croissant* dough. He left out the eggs, which give *brioche* a denser texture, and he

used milk instead of water. He combined whole butter with the leavened dough, folding and rolling it multiple times, a process called ‘laminating’ to create thin layers of alternating butter and dough, and *voilà!* These are the true *croissants* Frenchmen eat today, and this is the dough and method of making it that was used to make the first *wienerbröd*—with one exception: *wienerbröd* dough does contain eggs. There was not a Dane or Austrian in sight.

It is the French, not the Austrians or the Danes, who invented puff pastry, and it is the French, not the Austrians or Danes, who added a layer of unbroken butter to make the layered croissant, which has strong similarities to *wienerbröd*. And it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that a Frenchman, and not an Austrian or a Dane, made that leap.

So, where does the term 'Danish' come from?

Now to the second question, and that is: Why has the word *wienerbröd* been translated into English as ‘Danish’, and, as a corollary, why are American Danish pastries called ‘Danishes’? Let’s take a trip down that rabbit hole to see if it offers us any hints. Is this just a case of the circular reasoning fallacy where an argument assumes the very thing it is trying to prove is true. Instead of offering evidence, it simply repeats the conclusion, rendering the argument logically incoherent. For example:

Parent: “It’s time to go to bed.”

Child: “Why?”

Parent: “Because this is your bedtime.”

As I said earlier, 'Danish' is the English word for something from Denmark, including the language. From what I have found in my investigations, the first time it is used with reference to pastry is 1915 when a Danish baker named Lauritz C. Klitteng made a pastry for the marriage of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson¹³ to his second wife, Edith Bolling Galt. Both were widowed, Wilson in 1914 and Galt in 1908. Their marriage took place in Edith's spacious home on Dupont Circle in Washington, not in the White House. The two were introduced to each other by Wilson's first cousin, Helen Woodrow Bones, who served as the official hostess for White House functions following the death of Wilson's wife. Wilson and Galt apparently hit it off, and Wilson proposed to her shortly after they met. Rumors started flying immediately that Wilson had cheated on his wife with Galt. Wilson suggested they call off their marriage completely, but Galt said they should wait for the formal year of mourning to pass and then have a private marriage ceremony and wedding in her home.

¹³ Woodrow Wilson was first elected President of the United States in 1912 and was re-elected for a second term in 1916.

Wilson married Galt on the 18th of December 1915. There were only forty guests. Apparently, according to a chronicler of Klitteng, Hakor Mielche, who in 1944 wrote a book about the man, Klitteng heard about the wedding, found out which bakery was catering the pastries, and showed up at the offices of the bakery with a briefcase full of his letters of recommendation. He convinced the owner of the bakery to allow him to bake a special pastry called



kringle just for the event. Mielche wrote that Klitteng baked “pretzels” for the reception. “Pretzel” is the English translation for the Danish word *kringle*. However, the English definition of ‘pretzel is: “a brittle or chewy glazed usually salted slender bread often shaped like a loose knot.”¹⁴ The word comes from the German *brezel*, with the Latin root *brachiatus*, meaning to have branches like arms. The *kringle*

¹⁴ Merriam-Webster.

Klitteng was definitely not a pretzel, although it had a loose knot shape.

Klitteng's *kringle* was sweet, extremely sweet. The dough is made with butter, but it is not layered like a croissant or *wienerbröd*. The filling consists of butter, sugar, and marzipan, which is made from ground almonds, sugar, egg whites that when mixed together create a smooth, moldable paste. The filling is spooned into a long ribbon of dough that is folded over to make a tube. The tube is formed into a pretzel shape and then brushed with egg yolk and topped with crushed hazelnuts. It is not clear whether the glazing made from sugar and water was used in the Wilson's *kringle*.

This is the original Danish *kringle* has been used as the symbol for Swedish and Danish *konditorier* for the past one hundred years. It is not a *wienerbröd*. In Denmark and in the U.S., it has been made as a ring or as a long loaf, and it looks like the Danish pastries which are sold as rings and loaves in America.

Security was very tight around the Wilson wedding. No press were admitted and photos were not allowed, so there is little to verify that Klitteng actually did serve his pastry, except for his stories afterward. However, enough people believed that he did participate in the wedding to give career a big boost. Following the Wilson wedding, Klitteng wrote a book titled "Home Baking of Pastry", opened a baking school in 1920 called the Danish Culinary Studio on Fifth Avenue in New York City, and managed to convince the owner of a string of Jewish delicatessens in New York, Herman Gertner, to add his "Danish pastry" to

Gertner's delicatessens' menus. It was listed on the menus as 'Danish' and they have been there ever since.

Were Klitteng's pastries *wienerbröd* as they are known in Sweden? No. Did his Danish pastries start out as something that were closer to Swedish *wienerbröd*, but then were bastardized over the course of the past century to end up being what they are now in America, which is not even close to Swedish *wienerbröd*? No. Although I did not grow up with *wienerbröd*, I did grow up with the American version of what is called Danish. According to the *MERRIAM-WEBSTER* online dictionary, it is capitalized, both when it is used on its own, as in "I had a cheese Danish for breakfast", or together with the word 'pastry', as in "I ate my Danish pastry too quickly to enjoy it." As someone who is experienced with the American version of 'Danish', I can say with no equivocation that Swedish *wienerbröd* is definitely not an American Danish, neither in taste nor appearance. Also, in the forty-eight years since I first set foot on Swedish soil, I have never once seen a cheese-filled *wienerbröd*. Cheese Danish, with the real or an ersatz version of Philadelphia Cream Cheese, is the most common variety found in America, although you can find them filled with just about anything, or filled with nothing at all.

One variety of *wienerbröd*, in its round form, may look vaguely like an American Danish when it is on its tray in the Swedish pastry shop's display case, but even before taking a bite, just picking it up and holding it in your hand tells you that you are about to experience something totally different. *Wienerbröd* is much lighter.



So, for an American, comparing *wienerbröd* to American Danish would be like comparing a true *croissant* to a Pillsbury croissant for a Frenchman, or a Thomas's English muffin to a scone for a Scotsman.

A wienerbröd by any other name

One thing seems certain: Klitteng called his pastries Danish because that is where he came from, that is, Denmark, and the word 'pretzel' was already taken. If the baker invited by the President of the United States had hailed from Sweden, Americans would have been asking for a Swedish-to-go for all these years.

The photos below are what are called Danish in America. The three on the right were what I ate for breakfast on



CheeseDanish

Raisen Swirl Danish

Raspberry Danish

Lemon Danish

three consecutive mornings during a trip to the U.S. in May 2024. They were sold at a convenience store in the lobby of the hotel where I was staying. The raisin swirl looks like the Danish Danish in the photo above. The rasp-

berry Danish looks like one of the round varieties of Swedish *wienerbröd*, which is called *spandauer*. It comes close in taste to a 7-Eleven or supermarket *spandauer* than anything else called a 'Danish' that I ate in America. The lemon Danish had a lemon-flavored, rubbery-textured, cheese-like filling. The cheese Danish, shown in the first photo, is one I bought in a delicatessen in central New Jersey. It looks like a croissant that is bursting at its ends with a cream-like filling, almost like an Italian *cannoli*. It was not croissant dough, and it was not a creamy *wienerbröd* filling.

In Princeton, New Jersey there is a French pastry shop called CHEZ ALICE. Its specialties are sweet dessert cakes and pastries and flaky croissants, along with salads and sandwiches. It, too, offers its variation of a Danish. I visited the CHEZ ALICE in early January 2026, specifically to try its Danish. It was labeled 'Cheese Danish' on the display shelf. It looked like a round *wienerbröd* or a *spandauer* on the display shelf, but as you can see in the photo, the filling does not have the creamy appearance of a *wienerbröd*. When I got a closer look at it on my plate, it appeared like it had been in the case for at least a day. When I bit into it, it tasted like a day-old product. Both the pastry and the filling were dense, not airy for the pastry and soft for the filling. The filling was the typical American Danish vanilla-flavored cream cheese concoction. The



pastry was similar to a croissant, but did not have the light, buttery texture, and taste of a good croissant.



There was one more “Danish” that I had to include. I bought it in the Mount Kisco, New York Starbucks. I took one bite of it and decided that I had tasted enough. Many of the pastries that Starbucks sells are reasonably good. I had never seen Danish in one of their display cases, so maybe this was a local attempt to give it the flavor of a New York deli.

In Austria, they have something they call *plundergebäck*, which they translate as ‘Danish pastry’. A literal translation is ‘plunder pastries’, which one can assume refers to the predisposition of the Vikings to pillage, loot, ransack, and lay waste. A *plundergebäck* is shown in the photo below. It looks like a variation on the theme of a croissant,

doesn't it? The dough is made with the same ingredients as the croissant, which is the same as that for *wienerbröd*.



Germans call their equivalent the *plundergebäck* a *Kopenhagener gebäck*, or the Copenhagen pastry. It includes jam and cream and looks like a *spandauer*. *Spandauer* in Sweden is simply an alternative way of forming the dough into a pastry while using exactly the same dough, fillings, and toppings as a *wienerbröd*. The name comes from a neighborhood in Berlin called Spandau. In Spandau, there is a prison which at one time was a simple square with the cells surrounding a courtyard and with a guard tower at each corner. The pastry starts out as a square and then the four corners are folded into the middle and pressed together. The filling or fillings are placed in the depression, which is the courtyard. Looking at photos of the Spandau prison after World War II, when Rudolf Hess, a convicted Nazi war criminal, was imprisoned there until he hung himself in his cell in 1987, there is no trace of the original square with four towers. The prison was demolished completely after Hess's death to prevent it from becoming a neo-Nazi shrine. Who said that pastries cannot be loaded with political symbolism?

I will leave this chapter with another misguided translation of a Swedish word into English. During my first visit to Sweden in the late winter of 1977, I was driving with the manager of the marketing director of the company I who had invited me, and we passed a large wooden sign over the door of what looked like a pharmacy. The sign had the carved image of a moose. I asked my host what the name of the animal in Swedish was, and he said *älg*, pronounced like 'elk' but with a 'g' and not a 'k' at the end. He said the animal is an elk. I said it looks just like a moose. He said that the elk is a European version of the moose, but

that it is a different animal, smaller or bigger. I said that we have an animal in the U.S. west of the Rocky Mountains called an elk. It looks like a big deer. He said that most Americans confuse the elk in Europe with the moose in the U.S., but they are different. I left it at that.

When I was back home, I visited the Boston Public Library (this was in 1977, before the Internet). I had to find out whether a Swedish moose was a European elk. It wasn't and isn't. Moose in Europe is the same species as a moose in North America, *Alces alces*. Genetically, they are the same species. There are subtle differences between the two because of their long separation. Nevertheless, European moose are not elks, they are moose.

I have another one. There is a Swedish pastry call a *munk*, which is a fried doughball with different types of filling. It is translated as 'doughnut' in the Swedish-to-English dictionaries. Something equivalent to a *munk* is a filled doughnut, which is a misnomer because the definition of a doughnut is "a small usually ring-shaped piece of sweet fried dough."



IT'S (NOT) A BREAKFAST FOOD

WHERE SHALL WE begin with this question? Is it or is it not a breakfast food—in Sweden, of course. I know what you are thinking. He's going to start with the basics: what is breakfast and when did it begin? You're right.

Eating breakfast is a relatively new idea

The Swedish word for 'breakfast' is *frukost*. It translates directly as 'wife food', but it didn't start out as a Swedish word. It comes from the old German word *vrokost*, meaning 'early food'. The word was first adopted in early Swedish as *frokoster*. Initially, it referred to a meal that was eaten after the day's first work shift, which was late morning. In Danish, the word *frokost* translates to English as 'lunch'. Until the end of the 1800s, the word *frukost* actually referred to lunch, like lunch was referred to as 'dinner' by the British and still is in some places. During my first fishing trip to New Brunswick, Canada I learned that 'dinner' was lunch and 'supper' was a meal eaten in the evening. On the morning of the first day of fishing, my guide told me that we would fish the pool we were on until dinner, and I prepared myself for a long day. To my relief, he announced at 11.30 a.m. that it was time to head in for dinner. I grew up with the idea that rich people referred to the evening meal as dinner and the rest of us ate supper.

Before the end of the 1800s, did Swedes eat anything just after they woke up and before they went to work at a time that we now eat breakfast? I can't imagine that they didn't, even if it was just a piece of bread or a bite of something left over from last evening's dinner or supper. I have to eat as soon as I wake up, but I have friends that just had a quick coffee for breakfast and did not eat anything until lunch. Some of the sources I have found on the subject say that it was uncommon for rich and poor alike to break their fast (i.e., eat breakfast) until later in the morning, after they had completed their first period of work in the fields or at their craft, or they attended mass. These sources said it had to do with fasting as a sacrifice to show one's holiness. They claim there were normally just two meals for most of the people, a midday meal, which, as I said, in Sweden was called *frukost*, and an evening meal. It was only the very young, the very old, or the infirm who took nourishment first thing in the morning.

At some point, people did start eating breakfast in the morning, before going to work in a factory or to school, where work or classes started at a specific time of the day. This seems to have coincided with the start of the Industrial Revolution, which began in the middle of the 18th century in Great Britain but eventually spread to the rest of Europe and North America during the 19th century. It began in the second half of the 19th century in Sweden, around 1870. We've concluded that *wienerbröd* didn't exist until the beginning of the 1900s, correct? But the question is whether it was created for or eaten at breakfast, like the croissant in France was made for their *le petit déjeuner*? Or

was *wienerbröd* intended to be part of the fare at the morning or afternoon *fika*?

You have heard of the word *fika*, haven't you? You've heard the word, but you are not sure what it means. Well, it started out as a slang word for a coffee break, and it's been in use for well over a century in Sweden. Swedes were never very self-conscious about the word, or gave it any special significance, but, like many terms that have been internationalized for social media by the so-called 'influencers', *fika* has been appropriated by the social media foodie crowd. It's talked about outside of Sweden like it is the Swedish equivalent of English afternoon tea, but with coffee instead of tea, and sandwiches, cakes, pastries, and cookies instead of scones with jam and clotted cream. That is not at all what *fika* is in Sweden.

Fika (pronounced 'fee-kah') and *kaffe*, Swedish for 'coffee', are joined at the figurative hip. The word *fika* is derived from a variation of *kaffe*. According to Lars-Gunnar Andersson, professor emeritus in modern Swedish at the University of Gothenburg and for many years the highly respected expert on the long-running Swedish radio program, *SPRÅKET*, the word *fika* was built by moving letters around in *kaffi*, which is an alternate slang spelling of *kaffe*, and removing one 'f': *kaf·fe* > *kaf·fi* > *ka·fi* > *fi·ka*. In the *WORDLIST OF THE SWEDISH ACADEMY*,¹⁵ the word *fika* is both a noun and a verb. As a noun it is defined as "coffee or tea with a snack; as a verb it is "to drink coffee or tea".

¹⁵ The Swedish Academy, founded in 1786 by King Gustav III, is an independent cultural institution whose purpose is to promote Swedish language and literature.

You say it sounds like a 'coffee klatch'. It is sort of. The term 'coffee klatch' comes from the German word *kaffeeklatsch*, which translates as 'coffee gossip'. That term refers to a group of friends getting together at someone's house and drinking coffee and eating cake and cookies. A coffee klatch is longer than a *fika*, more like what Swedes call a *kafferep*. This began in the 1700s. Women would meet at someone's house to chat about anything and everything, and maybe do something like tear up strips of rags for making rag carpets or bandages to wrap the wounds of soldiers fighting in endless wars. The practice started with overclass women, but by the end of the 1800s it had spread to all classes. It was the precursor to *fika*. There were *sju sorters kakor* (seven types of cookies)¹⁶ and all types of cakes.

To *fika* has become a Swedish social institution. It is understood as a relaxing and short pause that occurs either in the middle of the morning or afternoon, and can take place in a *kafé*, *konditori*, in a workplace, in a home or in an outdoor public place. Although it is possible to enjoy a *fika* all on one's own, it's associated with interpersonal socializing. It is a good time for a sandwich or *bulle*, and an excellent time for a *wienerbröd*.

It was coffee that was the spark for *kafferep* and *fika*, the main event, with the cookies, cakes, and pastries as the sideshow. When did coffee come to Sweden, and how did it get here? Many books have been written on the history of

¹⁶ The number seven is important. If you offered fewer than seven, you were considered to be stingy. If you offered more, you were thought to be ostentatious.

coffee and how it spread from its discovery in the Kaffa region of Ethiopia throughout the entire world. There is a legend that the Encyclopedia Britannica believed was worth spreading about a goatherd named Kaldi who noticed that after his goats ate the berries of the evergreen shrubs, they acted very strange. He tried the berries himself and he is quoted as saying that he "experienced a sense of exhilaration". I don't know how this event, which apparently took place in 850 A.D., could be known, reported by someone (especially the quote), and written in Encyclopedia Britannica, but that's how we think the story of coffee as a stimulating beverage started.

Somehow, coffee beans hopped over to Constantinople, today's Istanbul, which was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1453. The city became the center of coffee drinking in the beginning of the 16th century. Coffeehouses were created and became meeting places for only men, where they played chess or backgammon, listened to music, smoked, and discussed politics. Women were not excluded from coffee drinking, but the practice was restricted to women of money and rank, and the gatherings where coffee was served occurred in palace salons. Through Constantinople's trade with Venice, coffee, and the practice of drinking the beverage spread to Europe and eventually to the European colonies. Coffee growing also expanded from the Middle East to other regions, including Java in Indonesia, hence the slang name for coffee as 'java'.

There is general agreement among Swedish historians that coffee was literally brought to Sweden by its warrior king, Karl XII, when he returned home in 1715 from a five-year exile in Turkey. His army had lost a major battle

against Russia, fought in Poltava, Ukraine. He escaped capture and fled to Bender, in what is now Moldavia, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire. His expenses and those of his entourage while he was in Bender were paid for by the Ottoman state, and they were considerable. Not the least of these expenses was coffee, of which they consumed prodigious amounts, reportedly three-and-a-half kilograms (7.7 pounds) per day.

When the king finally decided to return to Sweden, he was accompanied by a group of businessmen to whom he had promised to repay his debts for the period he was in their country. Of course, they took with them a supply of coffee beans and the knowledge of how to turn the beans into their own and Karl XII's favorite beverage. It took a few years for the king to scrape together enough money to clear his debts, but he eventually did and the *Askerssons*, as they were all referred to, returned to their homes and business.¹⁷ During their stay, they passed on the knowledge of coffee brewing to the Swedes. Thirty years after Karl XII died of a bullet wound at the siege of Fredriksten Fortress in Norway, Carl von Linné commented that "The Turks taught us how we should dress ourselves at home and drink coffee."¹⁸

At first, coffee was a rich man's and woman's drink in Sweden. However, it did not take long for coffeehouses to open in Sweden's large cities. According to a reference in

¹⁷ Askersson was the surname given to the Muslims and Jews who accompanied King Karl XII to Sweden and who waited patiently to be paid the debts he owned. *Asker* is Turkish for 'soldier', so Askersson is literally 'soldier's son'.

¹⁸ Så blev kaffet Sveriges nationaldryck | popularhistoria.se

Stockholm's City Museum, there were fifteen coffeehouses in the city in 1728. It also did not take long for opinions in favor of and opposed to coffee to reach the country's governing body, the *Riksdag*. In 1733, a law was passed regulating the opening hours of coffeehouses. In 1756, a coalition of farmers in the parliament were able to pass a law totally forbidding the sale of coffee in any form. It was their revenge for another coalition passing a law against home distilling of alcohol due to a shortage of grain. No *brännvin* for us, no *kaffe* for you. The law forbidding the sale of coffee was rescinded in 1769, but further restrictions were placed on coffee, as well as other products classified as luxuries, principally to reduce the amount of money flowing out of the country on imports. It wasn't just the coffee beans Swedes were importing; it was all the porcelain that poured in from China—until Sweden decided to create its own porcelain industry, notably Rörstrand. The company was founded in 1726, and began manufacturing porcelain in 1770, coinciding with the surge in coffee drinking.

It wasn't until 1823 that the last restrictions on coffee were removed. That is when the market for coffee expanded beyond a pleasure for just the wealthy. Instead of men's coffeehouse clubs, a new institution was established, the *Schweizerier*, a 'Swiss cafe'. These were places where coffee was served with pastries and liqueurs. Some sources claim that the first ones were owned by Swiss immigrants, and that they had baking skills that were the wonder of Swedes. I put as much faith in that attestation as I do in the claimed connection between *wienerbröd* and

Austrians. Perhaps *Schweizerier* had a better ring for the entrepreneurs starting them than *Svenskarier*.

At the turn of the 19th and into the 20th century, the price of coffee had fallen to the point to make it affordable for most Swedes, and imports rose from 12,000 tons in 1881 to 37,000 by 1913. Coffee became the country's national drink, and the *Schweizerier* gave way to *konditorier*.

I was not much of a coffee drinker when I lived in America. I drank mostly instant coffee at home. The coffee served in restaurants, diners, even Dunkin' Donuts, had a bitter taste. I drank it with milk. I tried buying beans and grinding them myself. It was better, but still bitter. When I first tasted Swedish coffee, the experience was like the first time I ate fresh fish right out of the water. Not that the coffee tasted fishy, of course, but that it was really, really good. It—the Swedish coffee, not the fish—didn't need milk or sugar. It wasn't the coffee I was used to drinking in the U.S. I came to learn that the superior taste was the result of superior (and more expensive beans) and more careful roasting.

Ever since I began living in Sweden, drinking coffee in a *konditori* has always been as important to me as eating the *wienerbröd*, and I believe that is the case for most if not all of the Swedes who visit *konditorier* because they want what is special about *konditorier*, not because it is simply a convenient place to stop in for *fika*. Swedish coffee is special because it is made with the most expensive coffee beans that money can buy, and it is roasted to perfection by a cluster of companies that have been delivering the world's best tasting coffee, each for over one hundred

years. They include Gevalia, Zoega, Löfbergs, and Arvid Nordquist. A growing number of specialty roasters have been popping up, like the micro beer and ale breweries that started in the 1980s in the U.S. Some of these micro roasters are good, but none reach the deep, rich quality of the traditional roasters.

Yes, I know. I have gotten us off track again. It is so easy to do because *wienerbröd* touches so many different parts of our lives. We still have not answered the question of whether *wienerbröd* is eaten for breakfast in Sweden. But I promise you, we are closing in on the answer.

Winding back the breakfast history film to the beginning

Why don't we start at the other end. We eat breakfast today all over the world, and we have been doing so for over a hundred years. I never ate Danish for breakfast or knew anyone who did when I was growing up. I drank a glass of orange juice and ate cereal with cold milk every morning from as long back as I can remember until I went to college at the age of eighteen. Breakfast on weekdays had to be simple and take little time to prepare and eat. Both of my parents worked and had to punch in to work right on time. They could not dally over preparing breakfast. Even young kids could manage to put cereal in a bowl and pour milk over it. On rare occasions on weekends, my mother would make oatmeal or cream of wheat hot cereals, and sometimes pancakes or waffles, but never bacon and eggs. I did not eat toast for breakfast or drink coffee until the summer after I graduated from high school. The only time I drank tea was when I had a cold. One of my mother's favorite

home remedies for colds was hot tea with honey and lemon and a dash of whisky that she gave me before I went to bed.

Was my breakfast a typical American breakfast? For my generation, post-war baby boomers growing up in the 1950s, it probably was. It seemed like there were as many TV ads for breakfast cereals as there were for headache and indigestion remedies, and they all had catchy jingles that still pop into my head. My parents and their parents ate buttered toast and coffee. My mother's father, who was a coal miner, had an oversized cup in which he put a raw egg, hot milk, and coffee. He ate six slices of toasted bread every morning, which he dipped in his coffee mixture, and he munched on pieces of dried sausage which he made himself from the pig he and my grandmother had raised, which he slaughtered in the fall. But if you went to a diner, a restaurant serving breakfast, or a hotel with a restaurant, the menus were filled with all manner of food: egg specialties, including fried (sunny-side-up or over), scrambled, omelets (plain or with all kinds of fillings), hard boiled, soft boiled, poached, or coddled; pancakes, plain or with blueberries; waffles; sausage links or patties; bacon; hash brown potatoes; bread, including white, rye, pumpernickel, or whole wheat bread; English muffins; muffins, including corn, bran, plain, blueberry, or banana; all types of fruit; and, of course, Danish. Oh yes, and bagels. There were local specialties, like grits, which is served in the southern states and is made of ground corn, and scrapple, a Pennsylvania Dutch variation of a sausage patty made with ground pork scraps, cornmeal, buckwheat flour, and spices.

What do Swedes eat for breakfast? Well, until I met my wife, which was five years after I started travelling to Sweden, the only breakfasts I saw people eating were in the hotels where I stayed. They were all self-serve, even in the more expensive places. They had to cater to non-Swedes as well, so I was never really sure whether something that was on the buffet table was strictly Swedish, or had been added to satisfy guests from abroad, like me. The eggs were scrambled, hard- or soft-boiled. There was always *prinskorv*, *köttbullar*, bacon, lots of types of cereal, especially *muesli*.¹⁹ *Gröt* (hot oatmeal) was on the table during the winter months. One major difference with American restaurant breakfasts was the variety of cheeses, cold cuts, and spreadable *pâtés*²⁰ for making sandwiches. Another was the addition of pickled herring and smoked or raw salmon, called *gravad lax*. A third was the large variety of breads and rolls and a hard, flat rye bread called *knäckebröd* ('crack bread', maybe given that name because it's so hard you can crack a tooth when eating it—which I did once). A fourth was the addition to the milk and yogurt table of something called *filmjök*, which reminds me of a thicker version of buttermilk. There might be cookies or slices of braided cinnamon and cardamom bread in a corner near the coffee urns, and an elongated version of *wienerbröd* called *wienerlängd*, which is eaten in slices.

¹⁹ Muesli (müsli) is a cold Swiss breakfast cereal with rolled oats as its main ingredient.

²⁰ Pâté is French for a "culinary preparation consisting of minced meat or fish surrounded by dough and baked in an oven." By the 19th century, the pastry casing became optional. The word comes from the Latin *pasta* meaning 'paste' or 'dough'. (Oxford English Dictionary)

My wife ate the same breakfast every day. It consisted of an open-faced sandwich made with a slice of rye bread. A swirl of *Kalles caviar* was spread on the bread and then topped with several layers of *prästost*, or *grevé ost*, two of Sweden's many varieties of cheeses. She might have added a soft-boiled egg which she ate out of the shell with a small teaspoon. When we met in the early 1980s, I had been eating the same breakfast since I left college, which was yogurt with either muesli or granola. I had no problem finding these breakfast ingredients in the smallest of grocery stores. I have to admit that when I lived in the U.S. and worked in Boston, I picked up a coffee and either a donut or a muffin to-go at a deli or one of the new bake shops that started popping up in the city in the late '70s and had a second breakfast at my desk before starting work. No, I never chose a Danish or a bagel, but many of those standing in line with me did, and they were probably buying their first breakfast.

What were Swedes having for breakfast in the 1930s and 1920s. I asked my wife what her parents ate. They had porridge (*gröt*) made with oats (*havregrynsgröt*) or with durum wheat (*mannagrynsgröt*), along with one or two open faced sandwiches with slices of cheese and cold cuts. There was no *wienerbröd* or any other type of sweet breads in their first morning meal, but there was always fresh-brewed coffee. I found a survey that was taken by a YouGov on what Swedes eat for breakfast in an article.²¹ Here are the

²¹ Andersson, Karl. Swedish Breakfast Habits: A Complete Guide. Nordic Perspective (October 12, 2022). Swedish Breakfast Habits: A Complete Guide

top ten most popular foods and the percentage of those surveyed reported eating:

1. Sandwich 55 %
2. *Filmjöl*k (Buttermilk) or Yoghurt 34 %
3. Eggs 30%
4. Oatmeal 27%
5. Cereal 25%
6. Crispbread 24%
7. Fruit 17%
8. Smoothie or Shake 7%
9. Sausage 3%
10. Breakfast Cake 2%

In another survey made by Novus in 2021, here is a list of what Swedes put on their breakfast sandwiches, in order of popularity:

1. Butter
2. Hard cheese
3. Cold-cut meat
4. Vegetables
5. Margarine
6. Marmalade
7. Roe (*caviar*)
8. Liver *paté*
9. Soft cheese
10. Peanut butter



No *wienerbröd* in sight on either list.

My barber, whose maternal grandparents are Danish, told me that when he was growing up he spent part of his summer holidays in Denmark at his maternal grandparents' home. I asked him if they ate *wienerbröd* for breakfast. His answer was, "Yes, absolutely. Every morning." He said he thought at the time it was very unusual, but he learned that sweet pastries are part of the normal Danish breakfast. Maybe that explains why Lauritz C. Klitteng, the Danish baker who made a pastry for the President Woodrow Wilson and Edith Bolling Galt wedding reception in 1915 suggested to Herman Gertner that he place his pastry on his New York City delicatessens' breakfast menus.



ESSAY THREE

IT'S (NOT ONLY) FOUND IN A CLASSIC KONDITORI

YOU HAVE BEEN wondering what the difference is between a bakery and a *konditori*. I had the same question when I started thinking about the story of *wienerbröd*. Some bakery shops in Sweden are called *bageri*, some are called *konditori*, and some have both words in their names. In Sweden, a *bageri* is mainly, but not exclusively, a place where bread is made and sold. A *konditori* is mainly, but not exclusively, a place where all kinds of pastries are made and sold. *Bagerier* (remember, plural of *bageri*) generally do not have tables and chairs for customers to eat their products, while *konditorier* (plural again) do. A baker in Sweden is called a *bagare*, and a pastry maker or confectioner is called a *konditor*.

What about cafes, you ask. A *kafé* is a place where you can have a meal, usually breakfast or lunch. They might sell pastries and possibly bread, but baked goods are not generally made on the premises.

Swedish *konditorier* began to enter the stage in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They were a combination of *schweizerier* and *konditorei*. I mentioned the former earlier. They were a sort of *kafé* that served coffee, tea, chocolate, and liqueurs. The latter, *konditorei*, is the German word for a place where pastry and confectionery are sold, and it is the source for the Swedish word *konditori*. It is the German translation for *pâtisseries*, and is derived from the Latin

word *candire*, meaning 'candying of fruits' or another Latin word, *conditura*, meaning to 'concoct' or 'preserve'. Yes, I agree, it is fun to see how many of our words come from Latin. Shall we look at the French connection?

The French make a distinction between three different types of establishments selling baked goods. The *boulangerie* is where bread is sold. The word comes from the term *un pain boule*, meaning 'a ball of bread'. They specialize in the classic French breads, such as the *pain boule*, *baguette*, and the other traditional round and oblong loaves. In order to be classified as a *boulangerie*, a French bakery must bake all of its bread on the premises and should not use preservatives or freeze its products. The *pâtisserie* is where sweet delicacies are made and sold. They are where fancy, light, and often artful desserts can be found, both those made with a foundation of dough, like the *pâte à choux* or *petit fours*, or those that do not, like *crème brûlée*. The *viennoiserie*—as you remember, it means "a thing in the style of Vienna"—is where the flaky on the outside, soft, and buttery light on the inside baked goods are made. As we discussed earlier, this is where *croissant*, *brioche*, *pain au chocolat*, *chausson aux pommes* (apple turnovers), and other buttery baked goods can be found. If the French made *wienerbröd*, it would be found in a *viennoiserie*, but they don't.

The Swedish *konditori* might be seen as a combination of a *pâtisserie* and a *viennoiserie*, and the Swedish *bageri*, if it only made bread, could be compared to the French *boulangerie*. So, in Sweden, we have two trade groups, bakers and pastry makers. The organization representing these two trades is called *Sveriges bagare & konditorer*, the ASSOCIATION OF SWEDISH BAKERS AND CONFECTIONERS. It was

founded in 1900 and represents both artisanal and industrial bakeries. It has over four hundred-member companies, and these companies employ around 15,000 people. Its mission is to create better conditions to run bakery and *pâtisserie* businesses. It also organizes competitions that shine a spotlight on the highly skilled people who bake our daily bread and favorite festive treats.

Is there an annual "Best Wienerbröd in Sweden" contest? During the forty-seven years and counting since I tasted my first *wienerbröd*, I have never seen a contest for the best *wienerbröd* in Sweden or in any of the country's cities. There is a National Wienerbröd Day in Sweden on the 22nd of November, *Wienerbrödets dag*. It is sandwiched between Music-free Day and International Hat Day. I have never seen it advertised or promoted. What is heavily promoted with contests and advertising is the *semla*. There are contests for the best *semla* every year just before the Lenten fast, which is called *fastan* in Swedish. A *semla*, like the one pictured below, looks like a cream puff or large *profiterole*, but hardly tastes like one. It has a sweet *marzipan* (sugar and almond paste) and whipped cream filling, but the filling is encased in a dry, wheat flour bun, and the *semla* is often placed in a bowl of warm milk to make it more palatable. There is a folk tale that King Adolf Fredrik died in 1771 after consuming fourteen of them in one sitting—after finishing a five-course meal! Every year, just before the beginning of lent, national, and local newspapers report on the taste tests completed by their journalists, singing the *semla*'s praises, which I personally find are few, while scrumptious *wienerbröd* are ignored.



I've read that two million *semlor* are sold on one day alone in Sweden, the Tuesday before the beginning of lent, which is called *fettisdagen* (Shrove Tuesday), but often aptly translated as 'Fat Tuesday'. The *semla* is also called *fastlagsbulle* or *fettisdagsbulle* and has come to symbolize the excess before the fast. A total of forty million *semlor* are sold throughout the year in Sweden. I have not been able to find a statistic on the number of *wienerbröd* sold in Sweden each year. It must be far, far fewer than *semlor* or the most popular Swedish pastry, *kanelbulle* (cinnamon bun).

The 4th of October is *Kanelbullens dag*. On that day alone, nine million *kanelbullar* are consumed. My wife and I were usually responsible for only two of those nine million. We didn't eat them on any other day during the year unless one of our good friends gave us some of those they has baked. I did a little research and learned that the *kanelbulle*, Sweden's most popular *fikabröd*, was first baked after the Second World War, in 1946. Sweden had gone through many years of rationing, even though it was not a combatant, and there was still a shortage of whole milk products and spices. Instead of combining the butter and spices in

the dough, a smaller amount was spread on the dough strips before they were rolled into buns and baked.



There seem to be two reasons for the dichotomy between *wienerbröd* on one side and *semlor* and *kanelbullar* on the other, and they were explained to me by an experienced Stockholm *konditor*. First, and probably foremost, *wienerbröd* are time-consuming and more costly to make than *semlor*, *kanelbullar*, and most other cookies and pastries. The better the quality of the *wienerbröd*, the more costly and time-consuming they are to make. It takes a 100-gram stick of butter, around a quarter of a pound, to make four *wienerbröd*. If you follow all the steps for making *wienerbröd*, including the chilling of the dough in between rolling, it will take a minimum of two hours to deliver fresh-baked *wienerbröd* to the pastry cabinet or to expectant guests, and they should be eaten fresh for the best experience. Second, they look and taste like they contain a lot more calories than the simple *kanelbulle* or even the *semmla*. The difference is actually less than one might think. It is about two hundred calories more for *wienerbröd* than either of the other two, according to Swedish Food

Agency.²² That's a bit more than a 12-ounce can of Coca-Cola.

The *konditor* explained that during 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, his *konditori* was empty on most days and the customers who did come in were not the older clientele who ordered *wienerbröd* and brewed coffee but were younger and more interested in sandwiches and *caffè latte*. He continued to make *wienerbröd*, but he was throwing away more than he was selling. When the fear of COVID faded, more customers began coming in, but there were fewer of the old guard. So, after having sold one of the best *wieneråttor* (*wienerbröd* in the shape of an eight) in all of Sweden, he began to make a simpler version of the round variety, and filling the display cases with sandwiches and simple-to-make coffee buns. *Konditorier* are beginning to have the look, feel, and taste of *kaféer*, but for over a century, they were an important part of every city and town, large and small, in Sweden.

Sweden's konditorier have had a long and successful run

Conditori Garströms in Lidköping was founded in 1857 and is the earliest *konditori* I have been able to find in my journeys around Sweden. As you can see in the photo, *Konditori* is spelled with a 'K' on the big sign. If you look closely, you will see that it is spelled with a 'C' on the sign next to the door. *Conditori Nordpolen* in Vara, founded in 1903 and only thirty kilometers south of Lidköping, is also spelled

²² Livsmedelsverkets Livsmedelsdatabas, version 2015-01-19. Databasen finns tillgänglig på Livsmedelsverkets hemsida.

with a 'C'. It claims the honor of first, but *Garströms* beats it by half a century.



Why is a 'C' used instead of a 'K'? The best answer to that question I was able to find is that before what is called *stavningsreform* (spelling reform) in the beginning of the 1900s, 'C' and 'K' were used interchangeably. After that, it was mostly 'K' that was used.

During the first three decades of the 20th century, *konditorier* were established all over Sweden, from the tiniest villages to the largest cities. At their peak, there were around six thousand of them. Unlike the coffeehouses in the rest of Europe, they were not gathering places for only men but were open and welcoming to all: men and women, young and old, rich, and poor. Unlike the public houses (pubs) of Great Britain and Ireland, which centered around alcoholic beverages and pub food, like shepherd's pie or steak and kidney pie—and had separate entrances and sections for men and women—the Swedish *konditorier* were centered around coffee and *fika* food. *Kaféer*, *bagerier*, and *konditorier* shared space along village and city streets. They lived separate and complementary existences in the communities, and each fulfilled a particular role in filling up different holes in the citizens' stomachs. There was a

hearty breakfast of *stekt ägg och falukorv smörgås* (fried egg and bologna sandwich) in the *kafé*, a loaf of *surdegsbröd* (sourdough bread), *fulkornsbröd* (whole grain bread), and many more sorts of breads for all meals in the *bageri*, and a slice of *princess tårta* or a *wienerbröd* in the *konditori*.

Today, there are around one thousand *konditorier* in Sweden. No, it's not the Internet that has caused the numbers of establishments to drop so precipitously, although I believe it started around the same time that the Internet and the World Wide Web became available to the public in 1995. At that time, we were living in a town south of Göteborg, on Sweden's west coast, and I was working in the city. I started noticing that some of my favorite *konditorier* in Göteborg as well as in Stockholm began to close or convert their business to *kaféer*. *Wienerbröd* disappeared from the display cases and were replaced with sandwiches and industrial baked goods, like *Mazarin* and *damsugare* (marzipan treats that look like the old, round Electrolux vacuum cleaners). As the places changed ownership, they changed their names to *Kafé och konditori*, or *Kafé och bageri* or *Bageri och konditori*.

I'm not sure it was my fondness for *wienerbröd* and concern that it might be disappearing, or my affection for the places where *wienerbröd* was sold and my distaste for what were replacing them, but I began been making observations of the people who frequented the places, what they ordered, how long they stayed, and comparing what I was seeing now with how things were when I first began frequenting Swedish establishments almost fifty years ago. There is a noticeably big difference between then and now.

In their heydays, which they were still enjoying when I visited a Swedish map company headquartered in Stockholm in the late winter of 1977 and understood that Sweden was not Switzerland, *konditorier* were shops with a front room where people bought pastry products, and a back room where those products were made. Most of them were small establishments with the majority of the front room floorspace taken up with the display cases and a waiting area inside out of the cold and rain for customers to stand in line, order their goods, and then leave. That first business visit to Sweden resulted in my establishing Boston a branch office of the Swedish map company. When I visited Stockholm on business, I frequented a small *konditori* that was just around the corner from the company's office. Yes, that is where I ate my first *wienerbröd*. I went in there most mornings before going into the office. You could say it was the equivalent of my Boston pre-work doughnut. It had only a few tables.

While I ate my *wienerbröd* and drank my coffee in the early morning, customers came in to purchase a selection of what was on display, or something they had pre-ordered, and then left with their bags and boxes. I don't recall ever having to wait for a table to be free because almost all customers were not buying something to eat on the premises. It was too early for *fika*. Another important point: they were not buying coffee-to-go. That just was not done back then anywhere in Sweden, and it is still not particularly common today. When I passed by the same *konditori* in the late afternoon on my way back to my hotel, there was al-

ways a line of people waiting to buy cakes and pies, presumably to take home for dessert after dinner, or pick up what they had ordered in the morning.

That particular *konditori* is long gone. I went there in the '90s before it closed and it had become a *kafé* selling mostly sandwiches. But there is a similar one called *Tössebageriet* in a part of Stockholm called Östermalm. It was opened in 1920 by Helga (Tösse) Södermark. Tösse was the name of Helga's diocese in Dalsland where she grew up, and she was given the nickname by her classmates when she studied to become a teacher for school cooks. She opened her bake shop when she was thirty-two, and it has been there ever since. Today it is known mostly for its variation on the theme of *Semla*, the "semla wrap". As the photo below shows, customer seating is not now, and was not when it was opened, a priority.



Another difference was a change in the office culture. In the late 1970s, when I began coming to Sweden, and probably well before that, it was considered polite to have *wienerbröd*, *wienerlängd*, or other coffee bread on the table at a morning office meeting. If it was a lunch meeting, there was usually a *smörgåstårta* (sandwich cake), a Swedish invention composed of layers of bread with fillings and toppings of shrimp, salmon, cheese, meat balls, tomatoes, sliced hard-boiled eggs and cucumbers all held together with immense amounts of mayonnaise. It is served cold, sliced, and eaten like a layer cake. Size, form, and ingredients are limited only by the imagination of the *konditor* (or home baker) making it. It is a perfectly scrumptious, one-dish meal, and like the morning pastries, it was always bought at the local *konditori*. These office traditions continued well into the 1980s. Then, something happened. Sweden and Swedish society changed starting at the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, and it had a big effect on *konditorier*.

Sweden was not a combatant in either the First or Second World War. During the Second World War, Sweden wasn't invaded by the Soviet Union like Finland, and it wasn't occupied by Germany like Denmark and Norway. Because it had managed to become heavily industrialized by the end of the 19th century, it was in an exceptionally good position to provide the warring countries with the goods they needed to continue their battles in both wars. After the wars, with its industries and infrastructure intact, it could deliver products at profitable prices to markets around the world. By 1990, Sweden had a gross domestic product per capita that was 30% higher than the

United States. Where am I going with this? Bear with me for another minute.

The country's financial success helped to build the Swedish Model for a welfare state that was beyond comparison. It offered unparalleled public services in the form of education, health, and day care, and it expanded its social security programs for transfers to retirees and those who, for physical or mental reasons, are not able to work. Taxes were comparatively high and very progressive above a certain base, but most people (with the exception of the wealthy) felt that they were receiving extraordinary services for the taxes they paid. Both labor and capital markets were highly regulated so that growth was sustained and strikes were avoided. The result was an industrial society in which equality among the entire population was increased. It combined capitalism with socialism, what was called a "bridging policy".²³

It ran out of steam in the late 1980s. In the early 1990s, Sweden went through a deep economic recession, its first since the 1930s. By 1993, its gross domestic product per capita dropped below the U.S.'s. Unemployment rose to heights not experienced in many decades, and the government's budget deficit grew to unprecedented levels. Social welfare programs, the pride of Sweden, were severely cut back, and businesses were forced to curtail expenses that were not directly related to generating revenue and profit. *Wienerbröd* and *smörgåstårter* were the first casualties. Growth returned after a few years, but the old traditions

²³ Sweden – Economic Growth and Structural Change, 1800-2000 – Ehnes

were not resumed. Instead, with the *dot.com* revolution of the late 1990s, came a short era of gourmet cafeterias, bottomless fruit bowls, 24-hour snacks and beverages, along with on-site gyms and free massages, just like in the techno-nirvana called Silicon Valley. Most of that disappeared with the bursting of the *dot.com* bubble in 2000.

Wienerbröd and konditorier attracted competition

While the *konditori* star was waning, new, young stars were appearing in the heavens. One of these was Starbucks, which was founded in Seattle, Washington in 1971 by three young men whose business idea was selling upscale coffee beans and coffee brewing equipment.²⁴ Behind the beans and the equipment was a Netherlands-born American coffee roasting entrepreneur named Alfred Peet who developed the roasting technique and the equipment. Peet showed the young entrepreneurs how to roast the beans, and he sold them the equipment to do it. During its first fifteen years, Starbucks just sold coffee beans and the tools to make and drink coffee; it did not sell drinks to customers. Its name? The three founders just liked the sound of 'starbuck', which only coincidentally was the name of Captain Ahab's first mate in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*.

In 1986, it began to sell espresso, and the following year its former director of marketing, Howard Schultz, who had left to start his own cafe chain called *Il Giornale*

²⁴ The founding name narrative is that one of the original owners decided the name had to include the word 'star'. Another suggested 'Starbuck', which was the name of the first mate in the novel *Moby Dick*, written in 1851 by Herman Melville. The three agreed, added an 's' without an apostrophe, and that is it.

(The Newspaper) principally based around Italian versions of coffee, came back and bought Starbucks, rebranded his *Il Giornale* shops to Starbucks, and began the company's global expansion.

In 1987, Starbucks opened a shop in Vancouver, British Columbia, its first location outside of Seattle. That is where I had my first experience with Starbucks and its coffee. It was 1991, and I was in Vancouver with a business colleague who became and still is a good friend. We were on our way to a salmon fishing camp north of Vancouver, and we had an overnight stay in the city. My colleague had been to Vancouver on many occasions, and he made it a point to lead us to Starbucks as we wandered as tourists along the streets of the lovely city. He said I was going to be in for a real treat: coffee made with specially roasted coffee beans and brewed to perfection. I had been drinking coffee made with specially roasted coffee beans and brewed to perfection for fourteen years up to that point, and when I took my first sip of Starbucks coffee, I was not at all impressed. It was a bit better than most American coffee but tasted more like the coffee I had drunk in the U.K., Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Spain, Belgium, and especially The Netherlands. Italy has its bitter, teaspoon-sized portions of espresso, or its watered-down version called *caffè lungo*, neither of which appeal to my taste buds. The closest I have come to Swedish coffee outside of Sweden was in France. I did my best to cover my disappointment when I took my first gulp of Starbucks coffee.

Back in 1991, Starbucks wasn't selling coffee to Swedes who were used to paying the equivalent in Swedish

kronor of the \$2.00 per cup, which Starbucks was asking for its smallest size. Starbucks was selling coffee to Americans and Canadians who were used to paying twenty-five cents. Today, a cup of coffee in Sweden costs around \$3.50, while a Starbucks Short, the smallest size, costs \$2.15. Yes, coffee in Sweden is expensive, but there are two reasons for that. The coffee that is sold in Sweden is made from the world's best and most expensive beans. Second, Sweden has high taxes, including a value-added tax of up to 25%, although it is only 12% for coffee sold as a drink. For our \$3.50, we also get one free refill (*påtår*). Don't try asking for a free refill at a Starbucks, not even in Sweden.

When Starbucks began its rise to the top of the world's coffee chains, which it shares with Dunkin' (formerly Dunkin' Donuts) and Luckin Coffee (in China and Singapore), it was selling coffee to people who had never tasted a real cup of coffee in their lives, or who drank a Coca-Cola with breakfast, and Starbucks proved that if it improved the taste, even a little—or convinced customers that by paying ten times more than what had been used to paying, they were getting a much better cup of coffee—people would buy their product.

In 2010, Starbucks opened its first outlet in Sweden, located at Stockholm's Aranda Airport. I recall seeing it. My first thought was: "Carrying coals to Newcastle." You never heard that expression? Newcastle is a city in the northeast of England. It was a coal mining town. There was plenty of coal there, so the last thing you needed to bring with you when you went to Newcastle was coal. The last thing you need to bring to Sweden is coffee, especially

coffee that is not as good as anything you can find anywhere in the country. Today, there are only twelve Starbucks outlets in Sweden, mostly located in places where Americans or other tourists can drop in to get a little taste of home. Speaking of tastes, I dropped into a Starbucks in Stockholm recently, and the coffee tastes the same as the cup I drank in Vancouver in 1991. There are still not very many items to be consumed with the coffee. There is nothing resembling something one might find in a *konditori* or even a Swedish *kafé*, and there is definitely no *wienerbröd*.

So, Starbucks might be dismissed as a competitor to Sweden's traditional establishments. However, Starbucks is not primarily a place to sit and drink coffee or have something to eat. The real business idea behind Starbucks is the *milieu*, a French word meaning 'the physical and social setting in which something occurs'.²⁵ People pay to have a place to sit. Starbucks' coffee-colored interiors with small tables, sofa benches, and little nooks provide an ideal place where someone can nestle in for an hour in between flights, job interviews, or classes.²⁶ It has served as a model for hundreds of copycats that have popped up in every corner of the globe, including Sweden.

There are no wienerbröd in the Swedish coffeehouses

A few Swedish companies have copied the Starbucks coffeehouse model while attempting to meet Swedish quality standards. One is Wayne's, which was established

²⁵ Merriam-Webster.

²⁶ In January 2025, Starbucks announced a new policy that would begin to be enforced. There would be no loitering in their shops. "Buy something or leave."

in 1994. It claims on its website that its four founders were inspired by the "growing coffee shop culture" in the U.S. They felt Swedes, who "were beginning to be weary of brewed coffee and *princesstårta*," were ready for something new. They claim they served the first "Latte"—espresso with steamed milk—in the Nordic countries. "Wayne's" sounds more American than *Tosses*, don't you think. It was the name of one of the founder's husbands. It is basically a copy of Starbucks with one exception: it has *kanelbullar*.

Espresso House, founded in 1996, advertises itself as a "more enjoyable *fika* experience". It has almost five hundred establishments in the four Nordic countries and Germany. All of its baked goods, including very tasty *croissants* and variations on *kanelbullar*—but no *wienerbröd*—are made in its bakery in Malmö in southern Sweden across Öresund (The Sound) from Copenhagen. The one below is in a small shopping center in the town of Mjölby. They all look the same everywhere you find one.



A few shops away in the same shopping center is an outlet of *Linds Bageri*, which was founded in Linköping in 1925. Linds delivers bread and pastry to stores, *kaféer*, restaurants, hotels, and government-run facilities within a 100-kilometer radius of its central bakery near Linköping.

It does sell *wienerbröd* as well, excellent *wienerbröd*. This leads us to the next competitor to the classic *konditorier*: factory bakeries.

Industrializing the artisanal baking process

While *konditorier* were being converted to *kaféer*, and American-inspired coffeehouses started popping up in Swedish cities, a version of *wienerbröd* showed up in two of the most unlikely spots, and a third slightly more likely location. The two unlikely places were petrol stations and 7-Eleven convenience stores, and the more likely place was the large grocery chains, including ICA and Coop.

Below, the photo on the left accompanies a recipe for *wienerbröd* on Coop's website.²⁷ To the right is a photo that I took of a *wienerbröd* and coffee I bought i Stockholm at the 7-Eleven around the corner from our apartment. They look identical, and the 7-Eleven version might well have come from Coop's or ICA's industrial bakeries.



Factory bakeries can automate the *wienerbröd*-making process and deliver them fresh or unbaked and frozen to be baked in on-site ovens. My 7-Eleven *wienerbröd* was warm when I ate it ten minutes after I bought it. It wasn't bad. It

²⁷ <https://www.coop.se/recept/wienerbrod/>

was better than any one of the Danishes I had for breakfast in the U.S. But it wasn't anything like the real *wienerbröd* prepared in the best *konditorier* in Sweden. If those *konditorier* disappear, it may be all we have left.

I believe it is time to change that, which is one reason for writing this book. We can start by visiting those places where *wienerbröd* is still offered as a specialty, Sweden's *konditorier*, and also visiting those places that are offering their alternate version of this specialty, convenience stores, and petrol stations.



ESSAY FOUR

SIZE AND SHAPE (DON'T) MATTER

IS THERE A perfect size, shape, and taste for a *wienerbröd*? Does a small eight taste better than a large round (*Smakar en liten åtta bättre än en stor runda?*), or vice versa? Is there a limit to how large or small a *wienerbröd* can or should be? When we made our taste tests in *konditorier* all around Sweden, we had to have some criteria for deciding whether A was better than B, and B was better than C, didn't we? What makes a *wienerbröd* "good"?

Ask anyone who eats *wienerbröd* what is the number one criterion for a "good" *wienerbröd*, give them some time to think it over, and you will usually get the answer that it has to be fresh. That is my number one criterion. Before we did our taste tests, we were not sure that 'fresh' meant just-out-of-the-oven fresh, or shortly-after-it-has-cooled-off fresh, or baked-the-same-day fresh? We couldn't put exact words to it, but we agreed that we could taste immediately whether a *wienerbröd* had gone over the line from fresh to stale. I recently visited my favorite *konditori* in Göteborg, *Ahlströms*, while I was there to visit my dentist (who has since retired and now I have one less reason to travel to Göteborg and make a stop at one of my absolute favorite *konditorier*, but we all have our crosses to bear). I arrived at 07.15 (at *Ahlströms*, not my dentist), fifteen minutes after it opened. There were no *wienerbröd* in the display case. My heart sank. When I asked the person behind the counter if there would be any *wienerbröd* on this day,

she said, “Of course!” and that a tray would soon be coming out, but that she would ask them to send one from the tray immediately. My heart leaped with joy. I sat down with a cup of coffee, and within minutes she placed the freshest *wienerbröd* I had ever eaten (until the day I watched *wienerbröd* being made in a special session just for me, but I will come to that) on my table. I was awed. I have to say that if every *wienerbröd* I ate were that fresh, life would be sublime.

Our next requirement was crispiness. It has to have a firm surface that is easily broken, like crisp toast. It has to be firm, not soft or wilted. If the baker has skimmed on the amount of butter used or used a poor substitute for butter instead of the real thing (e.g., margarine), it is here, in the crispiness, that it would show up. We took crispiness one step further: it has to be crispy on the outside and soft on the inside, not brittle all the way through, like an Italian bread stick, called *grissini*, or the Pennsylvania penny pretzels.



I'm not sure they still make penny pretzels. I've only ever seen them in Pennsylvania. They were a hard pretzel, about eight inches long and half an inch in diameter. They cost a penny at the candy store down the block from our grade school. Pennsylvania Dutch country is the center of the American pretzel industry. The German immigrants brought it with them when they settled in Pennsylvania before the American Revolutionary War. The texture of a hard pretzel is the

diametric opposite to *wienerbröd*. We used to eat half of one and then pretend that we were smoking a cigar, like Groucho Marx. Okay, back to *wienerbröd*.

The filling, whether it is vanilla or fruit jam or both, has to be special, not bland, just added to fill up a hole, like the concoction used in American cheese Danishes. The vanilla filling must be creamy, have a distinct vanilla taste, and have a rich yellow color. If jam (*sylt*) is used, it should be flavorful with recognizable fruit, not a jelly. An *åtta* has two holes for filling. Most *konditorier* fill both holes with vanilla, but we found two *konditorier* with vanilla in one hole and *sylt* the other, and one *konditori* with raspberry *sylt* in both. Most rounds, which are called *spandauer*, have just vanilla, but a few of the *konditorier* we visited had both *sylt* and vanilla in the single hole. When it is baked, the jam runs into the vanilla. I think it is a matter of personal taste if you want both vanilla and *sylt* mixed together in one hole. I don't. Do you have a preference? We'll wait for the taste tests.

What about the extras on the *wienerbröd*, like glazing (*glasyr*), sugar crystals (*pärsocker*), granulated sugar (*strösocker*), and almond flakes (*mandelflingor*). *Glasyr* is made with confectioners' sugar or powdered sugar, water, and a small amount of corn starch to keep it from caking or clumping. What do we say if everything else is absolutely terrific and there is no glazing? That's a very good question. One of the best *wienerbröd* I have eaten does not have glazing. We are going to have to talk with the *konditori's konditor* about that. Some *konditorer* sprinkle powdered sugar, sugar crystals, or almond flakes on their creations. In my opinion, the sugar crystals and almond flakes detract from the pure goodness of the *wienerbröd's* flaky dough. They are more for the eye than the taste buds in the tongue.

Now to the size. Should an *åtta* or *blondie wienerbröd*²⁸ be more than fifteen centimeters (6 inches) long? Can it be smaller? Is there a maximum or optimum diameter for a round, called a *spandauer*? Everything starts with the size of the dough that has been rolled and folded with butter to create twenty-seven layers of dough and butter in thin layers. *Åttas* and *blondies* are made with a strip of dough that is two centimeters (about three-quarters of an inch) wide. After the strips are cut from the dough, the *konditor* lays the strip horizontally on the baking table, places each hand at the end of the strip and moves them in opposite directions while slightly lengthening the strip. The result is a twisted strip, like a screw, which is then formed into the *åtta* or the *blondie*. Twisting gives the dough more structure so that it holds together and the finished *wienerbröd* doesn't flop over. You should be able to pick up a *wienerbröd* and eat it from start to finish without it flopping over, breaking up into pieces, and the filling dropping out. That is the reason for not making it too large.

Can you live without surprises

Do we want surprises? I read an essay by someone who offered his opinion about what makes a perfect doughnut. "Surprise" and "visual delight" were two of his five criteria. The surprise could be an unusual spice added to the recipe, like curry, and visual delight might be colored glazing and sprinkles. Can you imagine a curry-flavored doughnut? How about a curry-flavored *wienerbröd*? I can imagine such surprises, but

²⁸ I learned from the *konditor* who gave me the *wienerbröd* live lesson that *blondie* is an alternative name for an *åtta*, but one *konditori* has both an *åtta* and a *blondie*, and the *blondie* is a different shape.

I don't want to eat one. So, no surprises. We visited one of our favorite *konditorier* during the week of Sweden's national holiday on the 6th of June, and along with the usual *wienerbröd*, the *konditor* had made a special treat for the day. He had sprinkled it with powdered sugar, topped it with whipped cream, added marzipan decorations, and placed a Swedish flag on top. The *wienerbröd* underneath all the add-ons tasted as good as it usually tasted. The extras were just that—extra, and as a once-per-year experience, it was fun. But I'll take the simple version on any normal day of the year.



Time to make the wienerbröd

We couldn't possibly consider our exploration into the depths of *wienerbröd* complete without combining all of our intellectual wanderings with real-world experience. We will put our taste buds to the test in the next chapter, but first we have to experience the actual making of *wienerbröd*. How shall we go about finding a *konditor* who will open his or her bakery to a curious observer. Would it not be better to look for a school for aspiring *konditorier*, you ask. I investigated the academic route, looking for courses at adult education centers—which are plentiful in Sweden. I did find one course in a conveniently

located adult education center, but it had a duration of seventy-eight days.

On a late autumn day in 2024, my wife, Britt Marie, and I paid a visit to *Fröken Maräng* (Miss Meringue), which is a *kafé* and *konditori* located in the lobby of our town library. One of the owners is Johanna Lundvall Johansson, whom we learned to know when she worked as a *konditor* in a *bageri och konditori* just a few blocks away from *Fröken Maräng*. Britt Marie suggested that I ask Johanna if she knew of any short bakery courses that would include making *wienerbröd*. I explained to Johanna that I was writing a book on *wienerbröd*, and I asked her if she knew if there were any courses I could sign up for to learn how it is made. Her response was immediate: “I can show you.”



That was before the Christmas holidays, one of the busiest times for everyone and everything related to food. We booked a time on a Sunday afternoon in the middle of January

when all the Christmas and New Year's holiday celebrations were over. Both the *kafé* and the library are closed on Sundays, so Johanna met Britt Marie and me at the door and let us in. We walked into the kitchen where all the baked goods are made. It was even smaller than I had imagined. The photo on the previous page with Johanna on the left in the apron, and Britt Marie on the right, shows the baking galley.

The first lesson I learned was that it does not take very much space to make *wienerbröd*, less than the space my mother needed to make Sunday dinner's *fettuccine* or *ravioli*, which was enough to roll out the pasta to a size of an oval about 24" x 18" (61 cm x 46 cm). As the photo here shows, The dough, when it is rolled out, is around 18" x 12" (45 x 30 cm). It is rolled directly on the Formica/Corian surface. All the tools necessary for the job can be seen in the photo. There are two small rolling pins (Johanna only used the one with the knobs), a sharp knife, a dough scraper, and a dough mixer. Look closely and you will see a block of butter behind the mixer. It was used in the dough and it was out in order for it to reach room temperature. The dough is made with yeast (cold), whole milk (cold), flour (kept in freezer), butter (room temperature), and eggs (cold). All the ingredients are put into the mixing bowl and mixed for 3-4 minutes at a slow speed, and for 3-4 minutes at a fast speed.



Lesson two was that you should use as little flour as possible when rolling the dough. It is the temperature of the dough and the butter brick that will be laid on top of the dough

that keeps the dough from sticking to the counter and the rolling pin. Too much flour sprinkled on the rolling surface or on the dough dries out the dough. The mixed dough ball is taken from the mixing bowl and the flattening process begins with the hands and then with the rolling pin. The photo above shows the first rolling, just before the butter is added. The series of photos below shows the butter brick that had been prepared earlier and kept in the fridge on a sheet of baking paper. It is a bit smaller than one-half the size of the rolled-out dough, around 10" x 10".



The dough is wrapped around three edges of the butter, and the remaining dough is flopped over the butter, pinched along the edges, and then rolled out to a rectangle that is the size after the first rolling, about 18" x 12" as seen in the last photo in the series. After these steps, we have a sandwich with a layer of dough on the bottom, a layer of butter in the middle, and a layer of dough on top. Now, we are going to make those three layers nine by folding over one-third of the package from one of the long ends and folding over the other one-third from the other long end.



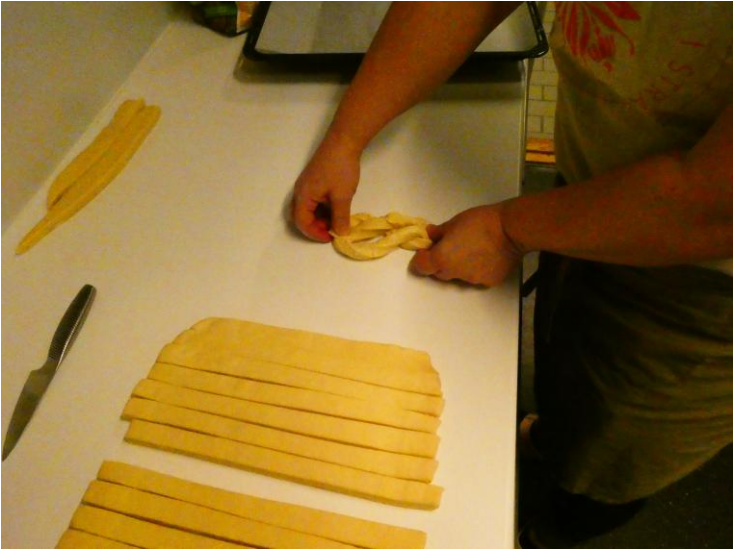
This is rolled again to the same size as the first rolling, around 18" x 12". The folding is repeated. At this point, before the last rolling, the dough is put into the freezer for about thirty minutes. It is taken out of the freezer and given one more rolling. Now there are twenty-seven layers of butter and dough, which Johanna shows in the last photo above after she has cut off one edge. Those twenty-seven layers are ready to be cut and formed into *wienerbröd*. Forget the pizza cutters, says Johanna. A small, sharp, stainless-steel knife is the best tool for the job of cutting the dough into strips, or squares for making *spandauers*.



Johanna cut the rectangle of dough into two equal pieces. She made *wienerbröd* from one of the pieces and *spandauers* from the other. She would bake three of the *wienerbröd* and three of the *spandauers* for us to taste and take home. The rest were going to be added to *Fröken Maräng's* assortment the following day. For the *wienerbröd*, the uneven edges were cut away so that the dough was a perfect rectangle. The "scrap" pieces would be used in a bread dough. Using the sharp knife and the rolling pin as a straightedge, Johanna cut 2 cm strips. It is important not to handle the strips except at their ends. Each



strip is twisted a few times, as shown in this photo. The secret of *wienerbröd*—that is, why it tastes so good—is the melting of the butter during the baking process, leaving the flaky dough layers floating in the space where the butter had been. By twisting the strips, the butter does not merely drip onto the baking pan, but is captured inside the pastry, blending with the filling.





Forming the strips into *wienerbröd* “eights” takes some practice. You form an ‘S’ by pushing both ends toward each other and then tucking one end under and one end over into the holes in the “eight”, turning it over, and pressing down on the dough in the hole. When the dough rises (a step before baking), the hole gets smaller, and the dough that has been pushed down forms the base for the filling.

When the *wienerbröd* are formed, they are placed on a baking sheet on a baking pan and left to raise. Johanna put the pan with the *wienerbröd* in an oven at a low temperature for twenty minutes to speed up the raising process, took them out, and put in the vanilla and raspberry fillings. The vanilla cream



filling is an important part of the total taste experience, and taking shortcuts will ruin even a perfectly made dough. It is made with powdered sugar, cornstarch, egg yolks, vanilla in the pod, whole milk, and room temperature butter. Mix the sugar and cornstarch in a saucepan. Stir in the egg yolks. Scrape the vanilla pod into the saucepan. Whisk in the milk and heat the mixture on a medium heat. Let the cream simmer gently while whisking and remove the saucepan from the heat when the cream has thickened a little. Place the saucepan in a cold-water bath and whisk in the butter. Remove the vanilla pod before using the cream.

“Why do most *wienerbröd* have only vanilla filling?” I asked Johanna. “It’s so much better when they have both.” She agreed, and did not have an answer to my question, except perhaps it was to save money. She put the three *wienerbröd* and *spandauer* in the oven and baked them for a little over 20 minutes at 200 degrees Celsius (392 Fahrenheit). Before taking them off the baking paper, she sprinkled pearl sugar and dripped a glazing made of powdered sugar and water on each of the *wienerbröd* (shown in photo on previous page).

Now for the taste test. We let them cool for a few minutes, but they were still quite warm when I could wait no longer. I bit into the end with the vanilla filling. The dough was perfectly flaky. I could taste the butter mixed with the creamy vanilla filling. There was no question that this was among the best *wienerbröd* I had ever eaten and confirmed my belief that a warm *wienerbröd* is to be preferred to a cold one, and a fresh *wienerbröd* is much tastier than one that has been sitting in the display case for several hours.

We took home the two uneaten *wienerbröd* and two *spandauer*, and I froze them individually in plastic bags. A few days later, I took out a *spandauer* from the freezer in the morning, let it thaw on the counter, and ate it later in day. Except for not being warm, it tasted as fresh and delicious as the one I ate just out of the oven. A few weeks later, I took one of the *wienerbröd* out of the freezer and put it directly into the microwave for one minute. It was not good. The dough was chewy and the fillings were runny. So, no microwaving. Let them thaw on their own.



FINDING THE BEST

OUR SEARCH FOR the best *wienerbröd* in the Swedish realm was a very enjoyable experience. Not only did we get to enjoy Sweden's most delicious pastry, but we met the people who make it in some of the most interesting and beautiful places in the country. Our sojourn into Denmark was also gratifying. We were able to see and taste first-hand the differences between Danish *wienerbrød* and Swedish *wienerbröd*.

They were all good in their own way. There's an old saying about fishing, that even if you don't catch fish, a day spent fishing is better than a day spent doing just about anything else. I think this can be said about visiting *konditorier* and eating *wienerbröd*. I have been visiting *konditorier* since 1977, and *wienerbröd* has always been my first choice if I find it in the display case. But my visits during all of those years were not with the purpose of conducting taste tests; I went, and still go, to *konditorier* and *kaféer* to *fika*. Tasting and comparing *wienerbröd* did not start until I decided to write this book. I did not make a list of the *konditorier* we would visit or a schedule of when we would visit them, like a Michelin Guide inspector. I did not intend this to be a competition with a blue ribbon for the winner, or one, two, or three stars like Michelin. A one Michelin star is awarded to a restaurant that is "worth a stop", two for one that is "worth a detour", and three for one that is "worth a special journey". What I have learned over the past forty-eight years from visiting *konditorier* in Sweden is that any *konditori* which serves *wienerbröd* is worth a special journey, so they all receive three stars.

I made a simple spreadsheet with six columns to make it easier to write down what I thought about what I had eaten. I used this spreadsheet for all of my visits.

Type	Filling	Dough	Size	Other	Points

Type was either an *åtta*, *spandauer*, or another variation on the *wienerbröd* theme. Filling was vanilla or jam. In the dough column I recorded whether the dough was flaky, light, airy, and buttery or something else. Size was either small, medium, large, or in between. In the other column I noted whether there was glazing, powdered sugar, pearl sugar, almonds, or another topping that had been sprinkled on the *wienerbröd*. In the points column I gave it my personal rating from one to ten, using pluses and minus to make the small differences between great and super.

I visited fourteen *konditorier* in Sweden, mostly with my wife, Britt Marie, and four in Denmark with my good friend, Alistair Dinwiddie. The map on page 115 shows all of them. There was something special about the experience in each of the places we visited, in addition to the *wienerbröd*. I will start with the first of my “official” visits, when, on the 28th of February 2024, I took my camera and notebook to **MEKKA KONDITORI** in Gnesta to begin recording what I tasted.

Gnesta is less than an hour’s drive from our home in Strängnäs, and it is in the same county, called *Södermanslands Län* (‘southern man’s land county’), or *Sörmland* as it is more commonly known. Gnesta is a *kommun* of less than 7,000 in-

habitants that is a stop along the main line of the railroad between Stockholm and points south. It grew from a cluster of houses to a thriving community in the 1500s when iron mines were opened. The iron was carried to a royal cannon foundry about halfway between Gnesta and Strängnäs in a lovely town called Åkers Styckebruk, which, unfortunately, does not have a *konditori*.

1. MEKKA KONDITORI was opened in 1948 and is situated in the middle of the small commercial center of Gnesta. I chose to go there because I had never before visited Gnesta and thought it would be good to begin my tasting visits in a place that was completely unknown to me. It is a small establishment with two sections, one where the pastries are sold with the bakery in the back, and the other where customers sit. I arrived around 11.00. I ordered an *åtta* and a small apple tart (I was hungry after the journey) and found a table at the back of the sitting room.



The *wienerbröd* was large, with vanilla filling on both sides. It had both pearl sugar and glazing. The vanilla filling was excellent, but the dough was compact, either because it was not fresh or because the *konditor* had used a substitute for butter. After seeing first-hand how *wienerbröd* should be made, and why butter is such an important ingredient, it was easy to tell when butter had been left out and margarine used in its stead.

2. AHLSTRÖMS KONDITORI is in Göteborg, on the west coast of Sweden at the place where *Göteälv* (Göte River) flows into the *Kattegat*, which is part of the North Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. Britt Marie and I lived for eighteen years in a town called Åsa, south of Göteborg. During that time, I was a regular visitor to AHLSTRÖMS, especially during the first four



years when I worked for Volvo. I often bought a dozen *wienerbröd* and other pastries at AHLSTRÖMS on my way from my office to weekly morning meetings in the center of the city, a gesture that was highly appreciated by my colleagues.

AHLSTRÖMS was founded in 1901, and it is Göteborg's oldest *konditori*. The bakery is on the second floor, above the *konditori*, and it is up there where everything sold in the store is made. It has the longest display case of any *konditorier* I have ever visited, and a customer who is there for a *fika* walks the entire length of the case to its end to place his or her tray on the rail and place an order.

I was in Göteborg for a meeting, staying at a hotel within a short walk of AHLSTRÖMS. I decided to arrive just after it opened at 07.00. When I walked along the display case, I did not see any *wienerbröd*. For a moment, my heart sank. "Have they stopped making it?" I wondered. I asked the woman



behind the counter, and her smiling response reassured me immediately. They were just coming down from the bakery, she said, and she would bring one over as soon as they arrived. A few minutes later I was biting into a warm, delicious *wienerbröd*. It was as good as the first AHLSTRÖMS *wienerbröd* I had eaten in 1993, maybe even better.

The dough was flaky, airy, and crispy with the delicate taste of the melted butter infused into every bite. Paper-thin almond flakes added a slight crunchiness to the soft vanilla cream, and the glazing gave it an extra touch of sweetness. Although it was both large and warm, it held its structure when I picked it up without flopping over and right to the end. Extraordinarily good.

While we are discussing AHLSTRÖMS, I have to mention another of my favorite Swedish pastries called *Danska wienerbröd* (*Danish wienerbröd*). AHLSTRÖMS is one of the few *konditorier* I have visited that makes it. If you look closely at the receipt on the tray you will see that it was taken on the 23rd of November 2017 at 7:45 a.m. I was in Göteborg on business and staying at the same hotel where I was seven years later. I went to AHLSTRÖMS for breakfast on that day as well, and since I had not had a *Danska wienerbröd* in quite a long time, I chose it instead of a *wienerbröd*.

Danska wienerbröd is also called *Danska falska wienerbröd*, or ‘Danish false wienerbröd’. It has similar ingredients as *wienerbröd*, but there is no layering of butter and dough. The



dough is divided into two halves. The first half is rolled out, placed on a sheet of oven paper, and a vanilla cream filling is spread evenly over it. The second half is rolled out, the butter is spread on top of it, and then it is placed over the first layer. The two layers, one with the vanilla and the other with butter, now combined into one, is rolled and then cut into one inch (2.5 cm) thick pieces. The pieces are placed next to each other in a baking pan, brushed with egg yolk, sprinkled with pearl sugar, left to raise for 35-40 minutes, and then baked at 250 C for 10-20 minutes. During the raising process, the circular pieces expand into the empty space, so it is one big sheet. When it has cooled a bit, it is cut into squares so that the original centers of the rolls are the centers of the squares. Simple and delicious.

3. SULTANS KONDITORI is in Katrineholm, a small city of 24,500 inhabitants located about an hour south of Strängnäs. We have been stopping there for the past fifteen years on our way to or back from our vacation apartment in Vadstena. It was established in 1896 by Ernst and Jenny Lindberg as a *bageri*. Eight years later, Anders Sultan took it over and changed its name to his own. He ran it until 1953 when Joseph Olsson, with his wife Karin and their four children, bought it and have run it since then, keeping the previous owner's name. What is sold in SULTAN'S KONDITORI is made in SULTAN'S KONDITORI. With its location just a few minutes walking distance from the Göteborg-Stockholm main line train station, it is a popular *fika* destination for locals and travelers alike. In fact, the first time I visited there was in between connecting trains on my way from Göteborg to Stockholm.

Their *wienerbröd åttor* are outstanding. The dough is flaky, airy, crisp on the outside and buttery on the inside. They are

simple, no almond flakes or powdered sugar, just a glaze. The vanilla cream is creamy. Their small-to-medium size makes them easy to pick up and eat without worrying that the pastry is going to flop over and end up in pieces on the plate. Another pleasant feature of SULTAN'S is that you are given a pot of coffee that contains two cups for each person. This is the *påtår* I mentioned earlier.



4. SVEAS WIENER and **5. FROSTH'S KONDITORI** are two konditorier in Lindesberg. They are a five-minute walk from each other along the main street running through the town of 23,000 inhabitants. I have had plenty of opportunities to visit both of these *konditorier* during the past six years because Lindesberg is the closest town to the river where I fly fish as a member of *Sverkestaåns Flugfiskeklubb*. It was a Sunday in the middle of March 2024 when I went to Lindesberg for our club's annual meeting that I did my test of SVEAS' *wienerbröd*. FROSTHS is where I normally start my fishing day after driving one-and-a-half hours from Strängnäs, arriving just after seven in the morning. SVEAS opens later on weekdays and is open on Sundays, while FROSTHS opens at seven on weekdays, and is not open on Sundays.

Until a few years ago, SVEAS was called WIENERKONDITORI. Then it became SVEAS WIENERKONDITORI when it was bought by SVEAS BAGERI & KONDITORI in 2021. In 2024 SVEAS filed for bankruptcy and WIENERKONDITORI was sold to VIVELS STOCKHOLM AG. The name SVEAS WIENERKONDITORI will continue to be used. One thing I have learned during my

journey in the world of Swedish *konditorier* is that they are dream factories. The great ones that last for many years are run by people who have a passion for baking but also have a mind for business. They are low-margin businesses and are extremely sensitive to the swings in the costs of their raw materials, principally flour, butter, and eggs. When they fail, there always seems to be someone waiting with a dream of their own, ready to take them over.

I arrived at SVEAS at noon, so the *wienerbröd* was not piping hot and just out of the oven. Nevertheless, it was a tasty treat. Small-to-medium in size, the vanilla cream was creamy, and the dough was perfectly flaky and crispy.



My test visit to **FROSTHS KONDITORI** was in the middle of June. I decided to make it a two-day fishing trip and stayed overnight at the classic Lindesberg Stadshotell, a short five-minute walk from FROSTHS. I arrived in Lindesberg at 7:45 a.m., and I expected the *wienerbröd* would still be warm, as it had always been in by pre-fishing visits, and delicious. It was neither. The vanilla cream was more liquid than cream, the dough was flaky and crispy, but tasteless, and it flopped when I picked it up. What happened? Had they run out of butter and had to use a substitute? Was the



konditor sick on that day? I was disappointed, but I returned the next day at 7:30 a.m., and order had been restored. This time, the *wienerbröd* was back to the super high quality it had always been, and it has stayed there every time I have returned since then.

6. HAGLUNDS KONDITORI is in the small and picturesque town of Gränna along the eastern shore of Lake Vättern. Gränna is a lively tourist destination all year round because it is there that dozens of establishments make and sell the red and white *polkagris* ('polka pig') that are known in English as 'candy canes'. The first *polkagris* were made in Gränna in 1859 by Amalia Eriksson, widowed after only a year of marriage with one newly born child to support. She applied for a license to run a bakery and sell the candy cane she had invented. Because she was a widow, she was given a special dispensation to operate a business at a time when membership in a guild was a requirement, and memberships in guilds were restricted to men. Her *polkagris*, with her secret ingredient, peppermint oil, greatly outsold her bread, so she stopped selling bread and concentrated on selling sweets. She was highly successful and was able to buy the house where she had once been a servant, started exporting her candy canes all over the world, and became one of Gränna's wealthiest citizens. There is a statue



of Amalia Eriksson in the center of Gränna.²⁹

HAGLUNDS has a wide selection of bread, pastries, pies, and cakes. They even have American pancakes for customers who have a yearning for them. We ordered them on one of our visits.



They were not quite up to the standard of the buttermilk pancakes I ate during my years of living in the Boston area, and the vital topping, maple syrup, was lacking, but they were good, nonetheless. I always order something to go with the *wienerbröd* because everything looks so good.

On this day, Palm Sunday in March 2024, it was a butter cookie with jam filling. The medium-sized *wienerbröd* was good, not in the very top class of the best, but good. There was only one fault that can be seen in the photo. Too much glazing had been put over the vanilla before baking so that the glazing mixed with the vanilla filling to the disadvantage of both. We

²⁹ Photo by Bengt Oberger - Own work - Lena Lervik's Amalia Eriksson, bronze, 1997, Södra Parken in Gränna, Sweden

did not manage to return to HAGLUNDS until August, and then the problem had been corrected.

7. UBBES BAGERI & CAFÉ in Motala. Just before noon on a



Thursday morning in March, four days after our visit to HAGLUNDS, Britt Marie and I visited , where we had been many times before. UBBES BAGERI AB, which owns UBBES BAGERI & CAFÉ, was established in 1995, so it is a young addition to an old industry. We began going there in 2011 after we made Vadstena our second home. One of its attractions was its 1950s retro décor, including everything from a small juke box console like the ones at tables in American diners to Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley movie posters.

The shop has a full assortment of baked goods, including cakes, cookies, breads, and all types of pastries, including and especially *wienerbröd*. Besides the *åttor*, it has *spandauers* with and without chocolate icing and *dansk wienerbröd*. Sitting on the plate with the *wienerbröd* is a *milanopinne*, a ‘Milan stick’. It looks like one of those ‘pigs in the blanket’ finger foods made

with a small frankfurter rolled in dough and baked. The *milanopinne* is an almond paste (*mandelmassa*) rolled in a butter cookie batter and garnished with almond flakes. Delicious.

UBBES makes one of the best.

It makes one of the best *wienerbröd* as well. They are large, so go there when you are hungry. The dough is light, flaky, and airy, the vanilla cream is rich, and the glaze is tasty.



8. PRINCESS KONDITORI is in Sundbyberg, a northwestern suburb of Stockholm. It is one of five *konditorier* with the same owner, all having ‘Princess’ in their name. It is quite new, only ten years old, but it has the feel of one that is much older. This was the first place among konditorier we visited that had both vanilla cream and jam. Raspberry jam, or *hallonsylt*, is one of my favorite toppings for waffles, and it is perfectly delicious in *wienerbröd*. Not only did it look picture-perfect in the display case, but it also tasted absolutely great when I took my first bites on each side, first the jam side and then the vanilla.



9. VÄDERSTAD CENTRALKONDITORI became my wife’s and my favorite konditori over the fifteen years that we had a vacation place in Vadstena. Väderstad is a small town of 544 people approximately halfway between Stockholm and Sweden’s

second largest town, Göteborg. It is best known for a company bearing its name which manufactures farming machinery. The town, with its relatively new (1840) church, which replaced a church built in the 12th century on the same site, and the CENTRALKONDITORI, are surrounded by farmland.

It was in 1914 that the building in which one of the best-tasting *wienerbröd* in

all of Sweden is baked was built. It was a house with a *kafé* in the basement. It has had just four owners during its lifetime. Its current owners, Helen and Thomas



Schwenke, took over in 1998 from Sören and Inger Joelsson, who had bought it in 1958. In addition to the *konditori*, they also run a restaurant just a few minutes away called VÄDERSTAD CENTRALKROG.

The first time I picked up a VÄDERSTAD CENTRALKONDITORI *wienerbröd* I knew I was in for an incredibly special treat. It was featherly light and crispy firm to the touch. Its creamy vanilla filling was the



best I had ever tasted. It has been the same every time we go there. The fact that Helen has greeted us when we arrived at the pastry counter is an indication of how often we made the short journey from Vadstena to Väderstad.

10. GUNNARSSONS SPECIALKONDITORI is on Södermalm in Stockholm. In 1946, a *konditor* named Sven Gunnarsson bought Carl Otto Nygren's *konditori* at Götgatan 92 on Södermalm in Stockholm. That was the start for Seventy-nine years later, it is still run by the Gunnarsson family. I visited there for the first time in 2012 when I went to Södermalm and Götgatan to meet my new barber, Jack. From then and up until the spring of 2025 when Jack and his partner closed their shop, a visit to my barber always began with a stop at Gunnarssons. I just worked it into the time plan.

When Sven bought the business, it was like many *bagerier* and *konditorier*, large enough to display the baked goods and accommodate a clump of people inside the door and out of the elements. It is said that Sven was a 'visionary' who saw where Swedish *fika* was headed. He bought the butcher shop next door and the dressmaker's ateljé above. It was now not only a place where people on Söder could buy the best baked goods; it was a place where they could sit down in a spacious setting and enjoy them. There is a long display case on the entrance floor with every imaginable bread and pastry on offer, and tables for customers on both floors. A wide staircase leads up to the second floor where tables along the windows opening to Götgatan below are always at a premium.

The *wienerbröd* that are sold daily are rounds, not *åttor* or *spandauer*. The dough is flaky, fluffy, and crispy on the outside. I am usually there early, before 8 a.m., so they are always fresh and warm when I eat them. The vanilla cream filling is rich, and the almond flakes add both a nutty taste and a little more crispness. With a generous amount of glaze drizzled over the pastry, there is an added sweetness the Gunnarssons *wienerbröd*. Theirs is definitely one of the top five.

I asked at the display case why they did not have *åttor* or *spandaurer* instead of or in addition to the rounds. “We will make them for you if you like,” was the answer I received from one of the two women



behind the counter. “Just make an order the day before for how many you would like, and we will have them for you.” She explained that they try to use the space they have for the pastries that are most in demand. *Wienerbröd* have become less popular in recent years, she said.

11. VETE-KATTEN is one of Sweden’s classic *konditorier*. It is located on Kungsgatan in Stockholm, a short distance from the city’s central railroad station. This is the original location for the *konditori* that was opened in 1928 by a woman named Ester Nordhammar. This was at a time when few women owned companies, and fewer still were *konditorer*. Ester was neither a baker nor a *konditor*. She just wanted to run a business and thought that selling baked goods and having a place where people could sit and enjoy them was a good business to run. Another part of Ester’s business idea was to employ only women, and she did exactly that until she died in 1961. She left the business to four employees. Two of them were still involved in the business when it was sold in 1979 to Agneta and Östen Brolin. In 1997, the Brolins hired Johan Sandelin as their head *konditor*, and in 2012, Johan became a part owner. Today, in addition to the original and sprawling *konditori*, there are eight other locations in Stockholm, including one right across the street from Gunnarssons.

What about the name? It seems that someone asked Ester what her place would be called, and she answered, “Ja, det vete katten (Yes, the cat knows),” which is a Swedish idiom for “I have no idea”.

Now to VETE-KATTEN’s *wienerbröd*. For me, between 1982 and 2020, they were the benchmark against which all other *wienerbröd* were measured. When I first bit into an AHLSTRÖMS’ or GUNNARSSONS’ or passed a VÄDERSTAD’s to my lips, the question I asked was, “Is it as good or better than VETE-KATTEN’s *wieneråtta*?” Back then, the answer was never better. Today, it is a hugely different story. The vanilla filling is tasteless, and the dough lacks the richness that comes from using real butter. The haphazard dripping of glaze and sprinkling of pearl sugar add little to the sensory impression or the tastiness of the pastry. According to the *konditor*, whom I talked to, the degradation of their *wienerbröd* was simply due to making a choice between having any *wienerbröd* at all or eliminating it from the display case altogether. Customers just were not buying them.



12. KONDITORI GARSTRÖMS is in Lidköping. It was a Läckö Castle Opera that brought us to Lidköping in July 2024. We had been there before for summer operas, but we had not taken the time to explore the city. With 40,000 residents, it is approximately the same size as our home community Strängnäs. Like Strängnäs, it is situated on the edge of a lake. In Lidköping’s case, the lake is Vänern, Sweden’s and the European Union’s largest inland body of water. In the center of Lidköping is a commercial area carefully laid out in a gridiron

pattern of streets with a large square bordered by the river Lidan that divides the city in two.



On one of the streets is KONDITORI GARSTRÖMS, one of Sweden's absolutely oldest *konditorier*. It was founded in 1857 by Reinhold Garström. The building shown above is from 1886 and replaced the original *konditori* that burned down in 1884. A Garström owned and ran the business until the 1960s. Little has changed inside or outside the *konditori*, and the baked goods must have been as good as they are today during the



one-and-a-half centuries that it has been there, otherwise it would have been gone long ago.

Inside, it is feast for the eyes. Walking into GARSTRÖMS is like traveling back more than one hundred years. It has been perfectly preserved and maintained. There are no threadbare cushions or wobbly chairs. We sat in one of the three seating areas, each with its own distinct style. The photo above Michael is of the founder's son, Erik Garström, who was born the year after the new building was built. In front of Michael are two *wienerbröd* eights, one with vanilla filling in both holes, and the other with raspberry jam in both holes. The plan was to eat half of each and take the other halves home to see how long they stayed fresh.

These were among the top five in the entire test, maybe the top three. It was 11.30 when we arrived, but the *wienerbröd* tasted like they were just taken out of the oven. The vanilla was perfect, the dough was puffy and light on the inside and crispy on the outside, and there was just enough glazing to add a bit of sweetness. I kept the two remaining halves in a paper bag and ate one the next morning. It was still quite fresh and exceptionally good. I ate the other half a day later, and the dough was just at the point of being a bit too chewy to enjoy. The filling, however, was still superb.



13. ÅSÖ KONDITORI OCH BAGERI is also on Södermalm in Stockholm, on Åsögatan. The first time I went there was in June 2024. There were no *wienerbröd*. I asked the women behind the counter if they ever made *wienerbröd*. “Oh, yes,” they

said. “We usually have it, but it is so close to the summer holidays when we close for a few weeks that we haven’t been making certain pastries. Come back after the summer and we will have them.” So, I did. I returned on the 25th of September, and there they were, but they didn’t look like any *wienerbröd* I had ever seen before. “What’s the filling,” I asked. “*Bigarrå körsbär.*” Bing cherry. I thought, “I will have to come back with Britt Marie. She loves *bigarråer.*”



Åsö *wienerbröd* were made as rounds, not *åttor* or *spandauer*. There were real cherries in the middle, almost whole, as if they had just been picked and pitted. The cherries were on top of a vanilla filling. One bite into the cherry and vanilla filling was enough to convince me that I was experiencing something unique. There was no need for pearl sugar or glazing. They would merely compete with the sweetness of the cherries and the creamy filling. The dough was perfect. What a treat!

14. FRANSKA CAFÉET is in the **NK Department** store in Stockholm. In January 2025, I went there with my nephew Michael, who lives with his family in Washington, DC, who was visiting Stockholm on his way back from a business trip to Lithuania. It was a very cold winter Saturday, and there was a covering of ice and snow on the city’s sidewalks. We took a walk nevertheless, past the castle and through the Old Town (*Gamla Stan*). It was early, and there were no *kaféer* or *konditorier* open. When we reached the King’s Garden, I could see on

the NK clock rotating above its roof that it was 10:00 a.m., the time it opens for business. “Let’s go into NK and see if their coffee place is open,” I said. It was, and for the first time in quite a long time, there was real *wienerbröd* on display.



We both ordered *wienerbröd*. Michael was curious. He had never tasted a *wienerbröd*, and he was quite amused that his uncle was writing a book about an exotic Swedish pastry when he knew I had grown up eating his Italian-American grandmother’s *cannoli* and *ciambelloni*, and that on all my visits to America I had to make a stop at the Dunkin’ Donuts. NK’s *wienerbröd* on that day in



January were *åttor* with vanilla and blueberry fillings! There was glazing and powdered sugar. It was one of the larger *wienerbröd* I have eaten, but it was perfectly constructed and baked so that it was firm from first bite to last. Excellent. It was a great way to round out the tests.

On to Denmark

In search of an answer to the question, “Is there Swedish *Wienerbröd* in Denmark?”, I travelled to Copenhagen at the end of January 2026 with my good friend, Alistair Dinwiddie. I have known Alistair since I first visited Sweden in 1977. He was working as a cartographer at the map company I would go on to work for. We became and remain good friends, as our wives did. He was my best man when Britt Marie and I married, and he too remained in Sweden for love. He produced the map in this book showing the locations of the *konditorier* and agreed to accompany me on my Danish excursion to verify my findings about the similarities and differences between the pastries on the opposite side of *Öresund* (‘gravel strait’).

The City’s name in Danish is *København*, and in Swedish it is *Köpenhamn*, both meaning ‘merchant’s harbor’. The English name, Copenhagen, is adapted from Old English *céap-mann* for ‘Copen’, meaning ‘dealer’ or ‘seller’, and Old German *hag* for ‘enclosure’ or ‘protected place’. So, the English ‘Copenhagen’ translated completely is ‘dealer’s protected place’, which is not quite the same as ‘merchant’s harbor’, is it?

We arrived by train from Stockholm at Copenhagen’s Central Station on a cold day at the end of January. The next day, a frigid wind was blowing and a light snow was falling. We had decided to visit six bakeries/*konditorier* during the day, between the time we left the hotel after breakfast and before we had to board our train at 4 p.m. to return home to Stockholm. It was a matter of pacing both our eating and our stays at each place. We had planned our



route and decided that we could reach all of them within our time window by using a combination of the bus and Copenhagen's metro.

We set off from our hotel for our first destination, **SANKT PEDERS BAGERI** on Sankt Peders Stræde. It is said to be the oldest bakery in Copenhagen and in the country, established in 1652. We were looking forward to soaking in its history and warming ourselves over a good cup of coffee and whatever we would find that was the Danish equivalent of Swedish *wienerbröd*. We were disappointed on the first score. It was a small and cramped space that was mostly a waiting area for ordering the bakery's products. Along the wall were a few small tables with chairs for those who wanted to eat what they bought. Coffee was served from an espresso machine, so the best we could do was to order an Americano, which is a watered-down espresso.

There was one pastry in the window display that looked like a *blondie* version of a *wienerbröd*. It was labeled *spandauer*. I asked if they had anything called *wienerbröd*, and the counter person pointed to a few pastries that looked more like cinnamon buns. I asked if the *spandaurers* were made with butter-layered dough, and she answered in the affirmative. When I bit into the pastry, I tasted a major difference compared to the best Swedish *wienerbröd*. It was not as airy, and maybe that was due to the the fact that there appeared to be fewer than the twenty-seven layers in the Swedish *wienerbröd*. I could see that the pastry was constructed with a flat rectangular base layer on top of which was placed a single string of dough around the four sides, which formed the container for the vanilla cream filling. The filling was tasty (nothing like the American Danish Philadelphia Cream Cheese filling), but it

was too thick and there was too much of it. It completely dominated the eating experience.

We walked to the closest bus stop that would take us out to our next spot, **LILLE BAKERY**, located in an old industrial area called Refshaleøen, in the same area as the new Danish opera house. This turned out to be a stop without any tasting. The counter person was truly kind and friendly, but there was nothing on display that was vaguely reminiscent of a *wienerbröd*. “Try Hart,” she said. “It’s just a few bus stops back toward the city.” So, we did.

HART HOLMEN BAGERI on Galionsvej is in a new building with a waterfront setting which in the summer would be a wonderful place to enjoy the good things to eat offered by Hart with a view of the royal palace across the water. It advertises itself as serving “reinterpretations of the Danish baking tradition”. Its *spandauer* certainly was a reinterpretation, and it was the best pastry we experienced during our tour. The simplest way to describe it is to say it is similar to a Swedish *spandauer* that has been pushed into a muffin round before it is baked. If it had not been placed in a muffin round, it would have passed for a Swedish *spandauer* in both form and taste. The vanilla filling was especially good. The main difference with a Swedish *spandauer* was that Hart’s was baked to a brown color, not to the blond color of the Swedish *spandauer* and *wienerbröd*. It was also a bit difficult to eat because the creamy filling leaked out with the first bite. The coffee was good. It was definitely the best coffee we had had thus far during our trip to Copenhagen and would have during the remaining few hours we were there. Denmark definitely does not have the knack of roasting coffee beans and brewing great-tasting coffee as its cousins across the sound.

What turned out to be our last stop was **JUNO THE BAKERY** located on Århusgade. It was started by Emil Glaser, a star cook and a Swede from NOMA, a Danish restaurant which had been a three-star Michelin recipient. We arrived there a bit after noontime, and there was a line outside the entrance. There was no seating inside, just a small counter and a large waiting area for people who were ordering fresh bread and pastry from the counter and picking packaged cakes and cookies from the shelves. There was nothing resembling or called a *wienerbröd*, but we ordered their version of a *spandauer*. “Can you recommend a place where we can take your pastry and buy a coffee?” I asked. Yes, they had a cooperation with a coffee shop called Prologic a short distance away. That is where we ate a black current custard tart that did taste somewhat like a New York City deli Danish.

Summing up the Danish Danish

Perhaps, somewhere in the Kingdom of Denmark there is a *konditori* that makes a pastry which looks and tastes like a Swedish *åtta*, a *wienerbröd* with two receptacles that can hold separate fillings of vanilla or jam. If that is the case, we would have expected someone we met in the bakeries we visited to at least have known what one was. They didn't.

My conclusion is *wienerbröd is Swedish*. The etymologists who translated the word as 'Danish' simply got it wrong, just like they got it wrong when they translated *älg* to 'elk', *munk* to 'doughnut', and *kringle* to 'pretzel'. It is time they admit to and correct their mistake. It is time to remove the silly stories about Danish baker strikes and imported Viennese replacements adding butter to bread dough. The exact story of how a Swedish pastry was given the name *wienerbröd* may have been

lost, but it most likely is a nod to the places in Sweden where it was first made and eaten, the *wienerkaféer*, which became *konditorier*. It appeared after the layered dough which is the basis of the French croissant was developed in France, and the steam ovens necessary to make proper croissants were developed in Austria. These occurred after the turn of the 20th century.



Map designed and produced by Alistair Dinwiddie



EPILOGUE

MUCH CAN HAPPEN during the time you are writing a book about *wienerbröd*, or any other subject. Coffee prices rose by 80% during 2024, and they were up by another 30% during the first quarter of 2025. Why such an increase, you wonder. They say it's a combination of climate change, supply chain disruptions, and market speculation. There were droughts, frosts, and heavy rains in Brazil, and lower yields in Vietnam because of unusual weather. Those are the two biggest coffee-producing countries. Yes, Vietnam.

Then, just when we thought we were getting inflation under control, a new President was elected in the United States who decided he was going raise import tariffs on everything for everybody. Of course, everybody decided to do the same thing to the United States. One day they were on, and the next day they weren't, but when the conditions of business are uncertain, like they were during all of 2025, both businesses and people hold on to their money.

Konditorier raised their prices, but the ones that I went to regularly didn't seem to have lost any business because of that. It felt like many of the customers were having coffee more often, if the lines at our local establishments were any indication. Like us, people want our *kaféer* and *konditorier* to be there after inflation subsides and after stability returns to the financial markets. If you don't use 'em, you lose 'em, the old saying goes.

When all of the chapters were in final draft form and Britt Marie and I were planning to make the trip to Copenhagen in early 2025 in order to complete the last chapter in the book, Britt Marie's health condition changed for the worse. She had been operated on for cancer in late 2019 and again early in 2020 and had been undergoing chemotherapy since the operations. Her doctors had told her in late February 2025 that the cancer treatments were having their intended effect, and she could take a break from her chemotherapy treatments. What the doctors had not seen was that her cancer had metastasized and spread to other parts of her body. From the beginning of March until her death in late June, she was in and out of the hospital where she stayed for weeks at a time.

I considered leaving our project unfinished following Britt Marie's death. Every time I opened the manuscript, I thought about how much she told me she was looking forward to reading it from start to finish. Then, I decided to take that trip to Copenhagen, to see and taste for myself and for Britt Marie the Danish versions of Danish. I had company. My good friend and best man at my wedding, Alistair Dinwiddie, joined me. He and his wife, Anna-Karin, read a draft of the book and offered their thoughts and edits. When Alistair read that I was going to make the trip to Copenhagen, he asked if he could join me. So not only did I have a travel companion, but I had someone who could verify that I wasn't going to "cook the books" on my claim that Swedish *wienerbröd* is just that: Swedish.³⁰ He

³⁰ Cooking the books is a slang expression meaning to alter official accounting records in order to deceive or mislead (Merriam-Webster).

also designed and produced the map showing the locations of all the *konditorier* I visited.

By the time Easter arrived in early April, I decided that I had reached the point when the book was finished. I had not found a publisher, although it was not because I had not contacted most of them in Sweden, filled in their web forms, sent them summaries, and waited for the letter or phone call that never came. So, it will join my other books on my own web site, and I will share it with anyone who has an interest in reading about the real history of Sweden's most delicious pastry.

Enjoy the book, and, most of all, if you have the chance to try a wienerbröd for the first time, do so. You never know where it can lead.



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I must start with the person who introduced me to my first *wienerbröd*, Rune Hermansson. He was the Chief Cartographer for Esselte Map Service, and the person who had the patience to teach a complete neophyte the basics of making maps and sharing both his considerable knowledge and the lore of cartography. It was at Esselte where I met Alistair Dinwiddie, who taught me the tricks of playing squash, was my best man when Britt Marie and I were married, and has been a great friend, along with his wife Anna-Karin, for going on fifty years. He is also responsible for designing and producing the map of *konditorier* in this book, and accompanied me on my reconnaissance trip to Copenhagen.

Johanna Lundvall Johansson gave me and Britt Marie a private lesson in making *wienerbröd*, from start to finish on a Sunday afternoon in Strängnäs. With all respect to all the *konditorer* who make wonderful *wienerbröd* all over Sweden, Johanna's *wienerbröd* on that Sunday afternoon was the best I have ever tasted. Maybe it was because of the joy I saw in Britt Marie's smile that never left her face during the hours we were there. Maybe it was the total engagement of Johanna in every little step that led to the three of us simultaneously taking a bite of her creations piping hot right out of the oven.



