Modernizing Architecture and Ornament on Mid-Nineteenth-Century Scandinavian Farms

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Historians have long looked upon railways and factories as the primary symbols of nineteenth-century modernization, yet contemporary sources reveal that farmsteads, too, were central to that process.¹ In mid-nineteenth-century Scandinavia, a small, liberal elite of agrarian and architectural reformers—comprising gentlemen farmers, owners of large estates, architects, and civil engineers—launched a vigorous campaign to improve farm architecture for the purposes of feeding a growing population and expanding industry and exports.² They published numerous plans for model farmsteads and encouraged peasants and rural laborers to craft wood decorations for their farm buildings. In Sweden and Finland, the reformers widely regarded farmhouses and their outbuildings as the most important types of structures through which to improve the national economies and promote a modern rural architecture. Wood carvings played a major role not only in the new aesthetic ideal but also in plans for more comprehensive social reform.

By contextualizing the promotion of architectural ornament within debates about rural architectural reform and the condition of the rural poor, I seek to show in this article that ornament served as a means of imagining and planning a model society. Elite Nordic reformers used ornament as a tool for improving the condition of rural inhabitants, increasing agricultural production, encouraging craft as a source of income for the rural poor, spreading civilization and well-being, and imposing order in the Scandinavian countryside. Focusing on Sweden and Finland, which the reformers viewed as a unified cultural sphere, I aim to shed light on efforts to promote a united Scandinavia through architecture and, specifically, through architectural ornament.

Nineteenth-century Sweden and Finland were predominantly rural societies. In 1850, 90 percent of Sweden’s 3.5 million inhabitants were rural; the proportions were similar in Finland, where in 1865 more than 93 percent of the 1.8 million inhabitants were rural dwellers. Peasant farmers and landless agricultural laborers constituted by far the largest part of the population, whereas the number of noble rural estates was quite small.³ Referring to the farm architecture of landowning peasants and their laborers, Charles Emil Löfvensköld, a Swedish amateur architect and tenant farmer descended from an impoverished noble family, wrote in 1869 that no one could deny the great national importance of the buildings of “these millions of people and their stock, on whose well-being depends the prosperity of Sweden.”⁴ Although several historians have examined Löfvensköld’s attempts to renew farm architecture in Sweden, little attention has been paid either to contemporary discussions of these reforms or to their transnational character.⁵ Meanwhile, while noting the abundance of wood carvings in mid-nineteenth-century Nordic architecture, historians for the most part have interpreted the carvings as merely decorative, connected to the so-called Swiss style, reflecting either the progress of industrialism or a growing interest in indigenous building traditions.⁶ Such interpretations fail to recognize the meanings of this type of ornament for nineteenth-century reformers, who saw it as capable of regenerating not only architecture but society more generally. Further, while many scholars have considered how the meanings of architectural ornament were changed by the advent of standardized, mechanical mass production and the marketing of prefabricated decorations in catalogues, handicraft and mechanical production were not...
seen as mutually exclusive in mid-nineteenth-century Scandinavia. Promoters of architectural ornament there aimed to combine the positive effects of mass production and handcraft and to show that the products of both were vital to building a civilized and prosperous modern society. Treatises on farm architecture and instructions for making wood ornament merged aesthetic and political aspirations, their texts promoting a modern, welfare society that would grow and benefit from wooden architectural ornament. These small and seemingly insignificant decorative details were thus loaded with political significance.

The Impoverished Countryside
Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Nordic rural communities experienced dramatic physical and organizational changes. In Sweden and Finland (at that time an eastern province of Sweden), a redistribution of land dispersed traditional villages and their once-clustered farmsteads. New farmsteads were built in remote rural areas where landowning peasants held separate parcels, each with its own farmhouse (Figure 1). A further reorganization of farm boundaries occurred in Sweden and Finland (the latter of which became an autonomous grand duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809) in the early nineteenth century. The aim of these reorganizations was to provide more land for cultivation so as to improve agricultural productivity and better feed growing populations. However, as a consequence of these policies, the number of landless rural poor increased considerably, while the number of peasant farmers, who usually owned the land they cultivated and had relatively high social and economic standing, remained more or less the same. In Finland especially, rural poverty became widespread as a result of dramatic population growth.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the growing numbers of landless rural laborers in these areas posed a serious problem. At a time when the traditional guild system still regulated industry and trade, and thus stifled the growth of commerce outside towns, agriculture was the main source of income for rural populations. The prospects of making a decent living from agriculture, however, were diminishing. Many owners of large estates replaced their tenant farmers with seasonal workforces, and, consequently, the social and economic gaps between landowners and the landless widened even further. The grinding poverty of the landless rural population was widely discussed in the press. Some landowners were convinced that alcohol was to blame. Others believed the problem was rooted in outdated employment contracts and the inadequate wages paid to agricultural workers. Many faulted the custom of paying wages in kind as opposed to cash. The rise of socialism beginning in the late 1840s gave special urgency to an already heated debate, although socialist ideas had as yet made few inroads among Nordic rural populations. Alarmed by the prospect of landless rural workers outnumbering landed peasants, many observers saw in the rural poor a threat to the established political and social order. The future of society thus depended on the well-being and good conduct of the laboring population. Scandinavian writers and politicians, like their counterparts almost everywhere in Europe, began devoting unprecedented attention to the masses.

In the context of these discussions, a new emphasis on modernizing rural societies arose. Such modernization was aimed at increasing agricultural production and improving the lot of the rural poor at a time when poverty was peaking. This activity—initiated by the owners of large estates—led to the launch of several specialized monthly and weekly magazines, the founding of regional agricultural societies and farming schools, and the first agricultural meetings and fairs.

Figure 1 Saastamoinen Farmstead, Maaninka, Finland, as seen in 1927 (photo by Ahti Rytkönen; Ethnographic Picture Collections, The Finnish Heritage Agency).
where new ideas were discussed and information on modern farming was distributed among people of all classes.15

These measures proved insufficient in combating poverty, however. Finland’s Poor Aid Act of 1852, intended to prevent pauperism and vagrancy, introduced new controls on landless rural laborers, forcing them to submit to the legal guardianship of the landowners for whom they worked. The social and economic position of the rural poor was further weakened by reforms that redefined land-use rights, including restricting the rights of the landless to practice slash-and-burn agriculture. The harms caused by these policies were exacerbated by frequent crop failures, which resulted in the spread of extreme poverty among underemployed seasonal laborers.16

Many reformers claimed that legislation restricting the rural production and trade of handicrafts contributed substantially to the increase in rural poverty. Handicraft production, both private and commercial, was a common part-time occupation for peasants, tenant farmers, and landless agricultural laborers alike, especially during the long winter months. Most of this activity, however, was unofficial. Commercialization of rural craft by anyone other than authorized “parish craftsmen” was illegal, even though old laws allowed peasants and rural laborers to make handicrafts “of iron and wood” at home for local sale.17 By the 1840s, liberal reformers began calling for the abolition of these obsolete laws, recognizing that commercial craft could benefit a broad cross section of the rural population. They regarded commercial craft not only as a reasonable secondary occupation for peasant farmers but also as a new primary occupation for many of the rural poor.

As was often the case, reform came first in Sweden, where, in 1846, commercial craft became a legal occupation in the countryside. Finland followed suit in 1856. New legislation guaranteeing freedom of occupation and the encouragement of commercial handicraft production were seen as potentially potent solutions for widespread rural poverty.18 Even so, the challenges of improving conditions among the rural poor remained enormous. In one of the new journals dedicated to spreading information on technical and practical inventions, the Finnish gentleman farmer Konstantin von Fieandt spoke for many when he asked:

How can we undertake this reform especially in a country where frost is a daily visitor and stubbornness a national character? In a land where a farmer is isolated, even against his will, like Robinson was on his island, and where his peers don’t know much more than that they exist. It is absolutely impossible.19

Scandinavian “Agritecture”

Land reform and the rapid growth in rural populations led to the construction of numerous new farmsteads in nineteenth-century Scandinavia. There were no official guidelines for building modern farmsteads, but a small circle of large estate owners, architects, and civil engineers recognized the economic, social, and aesthetic opportunities offered by agrarian reform, and they stepped in to help. The publishing industry proved to be a valuable tool in their endeavors.

The need for reform in rural architecture, and in agricultural practices more generally, was a constant cry in the press. In 1850, an anonymous writer in a Finnish newspaper lamented, “Everywhere [in the countryside] one longs for calculation and plan, order and beauty, art in harmony with natural conditions, simplicity and modesty combined with utility and necessity. These observations concern, first of all, architecture.”20 Such action was one of the main objectives of the first Swedish architectural magazine, Tidsskrift för praktisk byggnadskonst och mekanik m.m. (Journal for Practical Architecture and Mechanics etc., hereafter JPAM), founded in Stockholm in 1850 with the aim of providing plans mainly for rural buildings. Its editors aspired to “ennoble and uplift” the rural environment.21

JPAM quickly became a showcase for modern Scandinavian architecture, and particularly for the ideas and plans of Charles Emil Löfvenskiöld, who devoted himself to modernizing Swedish agriculture through architecture. His close contacts with publishers helped him to become the most celebrated figure in the Swedish farm architecture reform movement. In 1854, JPAM editor in chief Carl Adolf Forsellius, who claimed that “the way of building in the countryside lacked insight and attention,” launched a separate publication featuring a series of Löfvenskiöld’s plans at low cost in order to disseminate them among a wider public.22 In 1868, Löfvenskiöld produced a further series of plans for farm buildings in collaboration with the architect Hjalmar Kumlin (Figure 2).23 Published in Swedish, all of these publications, along with other contemporary Nordic agricultural journals, addressed the upper strata of rural society—the landed peasants and gentlemen farmers—most of whom, even those living in Finland, read Swedish.

Löfvenskiöld offered a broad range of plans for modern rural buildings. His unassuming plan for a peasant’s or agricultural laborer’s farmstead included a dwelling and one outbuilding (Figures 3 and 4). Löfvenskiöld’s approach differed from traditional rural practice, particularly in the treatment of buildings for the lower classes. The use of board cladding, roof tiles, wood carvings above doors and windows, and finials on gables had previously been seen almost exclusively in dwellings for the upper classes. Most important, Löfvenskiöld proposed replacing the multiple outbuildings of traditional peasant farmsteads with a single structure designed to house farm animals, implements, and harvested crops alike. His humble, low-priced, moderately decorated plans were meant to improve efficiency and modernize both Scandinavian agriculture and rural architecture.
Löfvenskiöld’s program was a continuation of progressive efforts of the previous century, when Scandinavian gentlemen farmers first conceived of agrarian reform as a moral and patriotic duty. His work was a late product of “Agromania, or Farming-Phrenzy,” an eighteenth-century fashion invigorated by physiocratic ideas. This transnational movement, building on debates around the political and economic role of agricultural production, produced plans and instructions for building exemplary farmsteads; many of these were published in Sweden from the mid-eighteenth century onward. In 1797, the French architect François Cointeraux essentialized this reform, in which architecture and agriculture were combined, by coining the new term agritecture. Numerous “agritectural” publications appeared throughout Europe in the early decades of the nineteenth century, seeking to further the reform movement and market the services of individual architects to potential customers. Their point of departure was to criticize the present state of rural architecture. For instance, in 1805, in his Designs for Cottages, Cottage Farms and Other Rural Buildings, the English architect Joseph Gandy lamented the vile and almost barbarous taste still existing among Country Builders, which would certainly be improved and corrected, by scattering over the country specimens for imitation, of a superior kind. Good taste would thus be naturalized, and we should not be disgusted (as is so frequently the case) with the appearance of Country Buildings.

The poor state of rural architecture was a source of constant complaint in architectural magazines across Europe. In 1840, in the first issue of his Revue générale de l’architecture et des travaux publics, French architect César Daly bemoaned the deplorable conditions of the dwellings occupied by French farmers; although twenty-two million of them nourished the country and provided raw material for its industries, they...
themselves lived in miserable, ugly huts. Elevating agriculture and architecture above all other industries, Daly made it his mission to reform the French architectural landscape, of which farmsteads formed an essential part.\textsuperscript{29}

Swedish and Finnish agritectural reformers promoted not only the printing of plans for improved farm buildings but also their distribution to the peasantry at low or even no cost. These endeavors culminated in several ambitious projects of the late 1850s and the 1860s. For example, in 1859, the architect Adolf Wilhelm Edelsvärd submitted a proposal to the assembled representatives of Swedish estates concerning measures for enhancing the quality of rural architecture. He urged the establishment of official regulations and supervision and the publication of a series of drawings for farmers of little means. Edelsvärd argued that these plans should be lithographed at government expense, distributed in every school in Sweden for easy consultation by local peasants, sold at affordable prices, and revised regularly to meet constantly changing needs. The committee assigned to evaluate Edelsvärd’s proposal agreed that the quality of rural architecture was of utmost national importance, because it represented “the strength, the state of development, and the level of civilization of a nation.”\textsuperscript{30} Nevertheless, the proposal was rejected, one of the justifications being that circumstances varied too widely from one region to another for a single set of designs to be practical.\textsuperscript{31}

That same year, two architectural competitions were organized to solicit plans for farm buildings, one by the Swedish Agricultural Academy and the other by the Uusimaa and Häme Provincial Agricultural Society in Finland. Neither of these competitions attracted any architects, however, possibly because of the scant cash prizes offered.\textsuperscript{32} In 1862, the Provincial Agricultural Society sponsored a competition that offered more valuable prizes, and four entries were received. This competition’s organizing committee stressed that the cost of “an ordinary Finnish peasant’s farmstead” should not be higher than usual and that the ornamentation should be simple.\textsuperscript{33} The ultimate aim of the competition, deemed by
the Finnish Senate to be of utmost utility and national impor-
tance, was to encourage the printing of plans with bilingual
explanations—in Swedish and Finnish—so as to ensure broad
readership. The printing of the resulting plans was financed
in part by the state, and the plans were distributed free of
charge to the roughly one hundred peasant members of the
Provincial Agricultural Society.34

The governing board of the society, composed of gentle-
men farmers and owners of large estates, awarded the first
prize to Georg Theodor Chiewitz, a Swedish architect and
civil engineer who had lived and worked in Finland since the
early 1850s.35 His winning series of drawings included a
farmhouse with several outbuildings and a sauna (Figure 5).
The various structures were situated symmetrically around
a yard, with trees lining curved drives (Figure 6). Apart from
symmetry and order, Chiewitz devoted special attention to
ventilation, mechanical feeding of animals, and efficient
drainage to facilitate the production of fertilizers. The
farmhouse was a two-story timber structure with batten-
board cladding on the upper part of the gable end. This clad-
ding was decorated with holes cut in cross patterns, its lower
edges forming a scallop pattern across the top and center of
the façade. Further embellishment of this large farmhouse in-
cluded an overhanging roof supported by brackets, a carved
bargeboard under the eaves, two tall chimneys, and a finial at
the gable's peak.

Well received by Swedish-language journals in Finland,
Chiewitz's plans were seen by some as a viable solution to the
perceived lack of comfort, beauty, taste, and order in Finnish
rural architecture.36 The plans appear to have been entirely
ignored by the Finnish-language press, however, probably
because Chiewitz's unusual floor plan and use of ornament
were regarded as unsuitable for peasants of modest means.
The aim of the Provincial Agricultural Society had been to
publish plans for “an ordinary Finnish peasant's farmstead,”
but the winning entry's ideal peasant was untypically wealthy,
owning several horses and a dozen cows. At least some members of the competition jury must have recognized the problems posed by Chiewitz’s “ideal” farmhouse. This can be inferred from comments made about the unusual amount of time the construction of such a building would require, even though the amount of building materials would be the same as for more traditional houses. The society published plans for an alternative farmhouse alongside those by Chiewitz. This design, by Finnish architect Hugo Trapp, was for a one-story structure that followed more closely the traditional manner of building; it included almost no decorative elements (Figure 7). The brief accompanying text (“This plan is added, because if one wishes to follow it, he is allowed to do so”) suggests that while not preferred by the jury, Trapp’s plan may have been deemed preferable by more traditionally minded farmhouse occupants. The side-by-side publication of Chiewitz’s and Trapp’s plans indicates that the reformers were fully aware of the challenges of changing the habits of peasant builders. They offered traditional alternatives while advocating more modern, more decorative options.
Figure 6  Georg Theodor Chiewitz, site plan for a Finnish peasant farmstead, 1862 (Museum of Finnish Architecture).

Figure 7 Hugo Trapp, plan for a Finnish peasant farmhouse, 1862 (Museum of Finnish Architecture).
The Utility of Ornament

Here and elsewhere, decoration was seen as key to the modernization process. In the mid-nineteenth century, a plethora of articles promoting the use of wood carvings in farm buildings were published in Swedish magazines. In 1850, the editors of *JPAM* suggested that existing timber structures in the Swedish countryside could be substantially improved through the addition of new decorations. According to the journal, Swedish people were capable of high-level craft, as their finely decorated wood furniture attested, but for some unknown reason rural people, especially in southern Sweden, were disinterested in decorating the exteriors of their buildings. To help rectify this situation, the journal provided plans and detailed instructions for carving appropriate wooden ornaments (Figure 8). The editors claimed that “anyone accustomed to using a plane, a saw and a splendid Swedish knife could easily execute the designs.” They suggested that farmhands could craft the embellishments during long winter nights, while they had no other useful occupation. The amount of wood needed would be small and, even more important, would cost the peasant little or nothing.

The usual argument in favor of architectural ornament on farm buildings was that the manufacture of such ornament would occupy landless agricultural workers in a morally upright way. Elite reformers assumed that rural laborers would otherwise waste their free time on drinking, gambling, and other “immoral” behaviors. Many Scandinavian farmers distilled spirits at home, both for their own consumption and as a way of earning extra money. Attacking this established custom, numerous educational publications pointed to the harmful effects of alcohol on both rural people and agricultural productivity. Handicraft and other subsidiary industries were encouraged as morally improving alternative practices. The same themes were circulating in other places. As early as 1828, the Frenchman Baron Dupin had insisted that some form of industrial activity must be introduced into every agricultural community in order to occupy rural laborers and keep them from “immoral behavior during those times when they were not performing their farming duties.”

While craft work was widely considered to be beneficial for rural laborers, many nineteenth-century writers nonetheless emphasized the inappropriateness of ornamentation
on buildings meant for the lower classes. Convenience and economy—“the two grand essentials,” as the English architect Thomas Downes Wilmot Dearn wrote—were the pre-eminent virtues in such architecture.42 “The Labourer’s Cottage cannot be too simple in its form,” wrote the architect Peter Frederick Robinson. His opinion was echoed by numerous contemporary authors, who likewise insisted that peasants’ buildings should be plain and simple.43 Reminding readers of the principles of fitness and propriety, the American architect Andrew Jackson Downing invoked the story of the jay who—ridiculously—borrowed the peacock’s plumes.44 Similarly, the planter James Henry Hammond claimed that ornament “would certainly be more appropriately applied to a martin-house, or a garden-seat, than to a barn.”45 Paradoxically, some writers simultaneously proscribed and promoted the use of ornament in farm buildings. Insisting that all rural buildings, dwellings included, “should be marked by plainness and simplicity,” and that decorations were “utterly senseless on a barn,” Hammond nevertheless recommended the use of decorative brackets in peasants’ farm buildings and published detailed plans for their fabrication.46

Such often contradictory pronouncements extended to Scandinavia, where several Swedish architects and architectural writers stressed simplicity and economy as the main characteristics of farm architecture while at the same time recommending the use of elaborate carved brackets, bargeboards, finials, and other wood carvings on rural buildings.47 In 1853, one anonymous writer insisted in *JPAM* that the exteriors of rural buildings must be “very simple, and all that is only ornamental must be avoided.”48 Others, meanwhile, argued for architectural ornament on economic and utilitarian grounds. The interconnectedness of beauty and utility, while hardly unique to Scandinavia, was a constant in public discussions of rural architecture.49 Encouraging rural laborers to build overhanging roofs on their dwellings and to pay particular attention to wood carvings, Löfvenskiöld claimed that this simple but “motivated, protecting roof decoration” was not only beautiful and useful but also cheap.50 On another occasion, referring to a small farmhouse he had designed (and failing to mention its wood carvings), he pointed to alternating vertical and horizontal board cladding as the dwelling’s only decoration; this cladding technique was practical, he said, because it allowed one to use surplus wood and thus avoid unnecessary waste of timber (see Figure 3).51 Löfvenskiöld’s argument in this case is understandable in the context of contemporary concerns in Scandinavia over deforestation, which was perceived as a serious threat. The conservation of wood was regarded as a patriotic duty.

In some instances, reformers offered functional justifications for architectural ornament that might seem far-fetched to modern-day observers. For example, while recommending the use of the then-fashionable Swiss style for Nordic farm buildings, Petter Georg Sundius—Chiewitz’s former student and associate—defended that style’s balconies as not only aesthetically pleasing but also useful for storing utensils such as buckets and scythes, and for drying fish and vegetables.52 Such attempts to justify the use of ornament on utilitarian grounds were common throughout Europe. The Frenchman Louis Bouchard-Huzard, who in his influential *Traité des constructions rurales* advertised the simplest of forms in farm buildings, argued that every dwelling should have a cornice, and that this ornament had the potential advantage of preventing the spread of fires.53

The often ambivalent and sometimes confusing discourse on ornament in farm buildings was a symptom of the controversial position of ornament in mid-nineteenth-century architectural culture. A flurry of publications on ornament and its role in the modern world appeared during these years. A wide spectrum of authors (including John Ruskin, Owen Jones, Ralph Wornum, and Gottfried Semper—to name the most obvious) debated the value and use of architectural ornament while commenting on the consequences of its unprecedented mass production.54 The term *ornament* was used interchangeably with *decoration* and *adornment*, which, as Alina Payne notes, allowed it to be applied to a broad field of objects of everyday use.55 There was widespread suspicion of ornament, especially in regard to buildings intended for the lower classes. These concerns were rooted in the principle of *bienséance*, or propriety, and the understanding that ornamentation was a mark of social distinction.56 For many the discourse on ornament remained tightly bound to ideals of propriety and social order.

Nordic reformers promoted the use of ornament in humble farm buildings while also condemning the unnecessary adornment of farmsteads. For most of them, it was of utmost importance that farmers’ use of ornamentation be modest. Recognizing that few farmers were willing or able to pay for decorations on their outbuildings, Löfvenskiöld nonetheless created a series of plans for cheap wood carvings for “all kinds of rural buildings” for farmers “who had some taste” (Figures 9 and 10). His detailed instructions on where to place the decorations emphasized the importance of decorum, warning that “to overload a building, especially an outbuilding, with too many gewgaws and trinkets is always tasteless.”57 Underlining the principle of “moderate simplicity,” Edelsvärd also encouraged the use of decorative wood carvings in rural buildings.58 Johan Theodor Bergelin, meanwhile, opined that “it is important to hold onto a certain moderation [lagom] in bargeboards and window and door frames so that these decorations do not overgrow into unmotivated bric-a-bracs or degenerate into a kind of confectioner’s style.”59

These discussions around the use and appropriateness of decorative wood carvings for Swedish and Finnish farm
buildings exposed tensions of the time between order and disorder, utility and futility, essence and frivolity, and moderation and excess. By promoting the carving of wooden ornaments in peasant farmsteads, Nordic reformers aimed to bring order to what they saw as a chaotic and volatile rural society, and to reorganize that society according to a novel aesthetic and political vision. In their utopian imaginings, beauty and well-being must belong to all social classes, not only the elite.

The Agency of Ornament

As with contemporary programs of architectural reform in England, the United States, and elsewhere, the Nordic movement to reform rural architecture was based on the assumption that aesthetic improvement of the built environment could affirmatively shape ideas, behavior, and emotions. In his essay *Hints on the Construction of Farm-Houses* (1846), the American Downing wrote that a farmhouse “must necessarily—if it be true to itself—give a character of moral and physical beauty to the whole rural scenery.” A farmhouse embodied the moral condition of a peasant, and thus the moral standing of the nation. Echoing an established topos in European architectural writings, Downing asserted that farm architecture was most agreeable when “expressing in its leading forms the strength, simplicity, honesty, frankness, and sterling goodness of the farmer’s character.” Similarly, Swedish architect P. G. Sundius believed that peasants’ houses in Switzerland could serve as aesthetic and ethical exemplars for Swedish and Finnish farmers’ dwellings. Comfort and architectural quality did not depend on personal wealth. Rural architecture—and especially architectural ornamentation—revealed a people’s innate sense of beauty, not the state of the nation’s economy.

Löfvenskiöld insisted that beautiful forms and a pleasing environment were “uplifting for the soul” and that a badly designed environment could lead to damaging consequences for “the moral strength” of society. He considered well-designed farmsteads, with carefully planted trees and

Figure 9 Charles Emil Löfvenskiöld, wood carvings for “all kinds of rural buildings,” 1854 (C. E. Löfvenskiöld, *Landmanna-byggnader* [Stockholm: C. A. Forsell, 1854]; Museum of Finnish Architecture).
gardens, to be vital for promoting “virtuous behavior, order and well-being in general.” In addition, he contended that pleasant dwellings had a significantly positive influence on laborers’ productivity and efficiency. In this regard, architectural ornamentation was presented as a vehicle for the well-being of all rural inhabitants.

At a time of rapid population growth and widespread rural poverty, an increase in agricultural productivity was thought to be of crucial importance. Swedish publications, in particular, gave scrupulous attention to efficiency and productivity and connected them to the aesthetic qualities of the built environment. Several writers emphasized the effects of beauty on the emotional well-being and material productivity not only of farmers but also of farm animals. Löfvenskiöld, an ardent advocate of animal rights, lamented that beautiful piggeries were extremely rare in Sweden. To address this lack, he proposed a plan for a moderately decorated hog house—a log structure with board siding, an unusually high stone foundation, carved door and window frames, and finials crowning the overhanging roof (Figure 11). As this structure resembled his dwelling for an agricultural laborer, Löfvenskiöld linked the farmer to his animals, treating them in effect as productive partners with comparable material and emotional needs (see Figure 3). He further supposed that a farmer who possessed “pretty and pleasant” outbuildings would want to see beautiful animals in those buildings. Because more pleasant outbuildings would encourage more frequent visits by the farmer, aesthetic improvements would result in better care of the animals. In short, well-ordered and beautiful outbuildings would contribute to increased productivity, prosperity, and well-being in both humans and animals, and—by showing a good example to the neighbors—prove beneficial for the whole of rural society.

Agrarian reformers promoted both cattle breeding and dairy farming as profitable industries for Nordic farmers, and so relevant reform-minded publications devoted special attention to designs for modern cattle barns. The low, dark, humid outbuildings found on typical farms were to be transformed. Sundius, who published a comprehensive series of plans for farm buildings in 1858–59, incorporated a
modern rail feeder in his well-ventilated barn as well as a system of subterranean drains, pumps, and reservoirs for the capture and storage of manure, which could be used as fertilizer (Figure 12). Sundius called his cattle barn “a milk and fertilizer factory”; in doing so, he linked cows to both machines and their fuel. Yet he acknowledged that cows were also living, emotional beings who felt joy and suffering much as did humans. Accordingly, they deserved rest, fresh air, sunlight, and all things necessary for a good life in compensation for the nourishment and pleasure they provided to humans. In encouraging an emotional attachment between humans and animals, Sundius hoped to foster a culture of care that would extend to the broader built and natural environments.

Wooden architectural ornament could also contribute to this culture of care. Reformers deemed wood handicraft beneficial for rural society in multiple ways. Craft was promoted as an activity that was both creative and physical, connecting the carver’s mind and body to the materiality of wood. Encouraging the use of ornament in poor peasants’ buildings, Sundius argued that if peasants devoted some winter nights to making decorations for their farm buildings, they would become more emotionally attached to those buildings. Reformers assumed that the efforts and thoughts of the peasant carver would be incorporated into each object by the act of its making, creating an indelible bond between the carver and the work. Even a small investment in ornamentation would lead to improvements in the built environment and agricultural productivity, as well as in the ongoing maintenance of buildings. In Edelsvärd’s mind, “the crowning, standing ornaments” placed on eaves and openings, especially, required regular upkeep: if the homeowner was not willing to keep them in good shape, it was better not to use them at all. Therefore, by urging peasants toward good housekeeping, architectural ornament served as a vehicle for order and emotional well-being in Scandinavian rural society writ large.
Detailed instructions on how to make architectural ornaments from wood were published in many Swedish magazines (Figure 13). Some included full-scale drawings to demonstrate best practices for sawing and carving (Figure 14). Illustrations drew on imagery circulating in contemporary architectural publications, particularly journals and pattern books of the German-speaking world. One widely used source was Ludwig Degen’s *Motive zu ornamentalen Zimmerwerken*, published in 1857 (Figure 15). Several Swedish architects followed Degen’s model, offering variations on his decorations that fused elements from many historical periods and sources—classical, medieval, vernacular. These Nordic decorations, such as the ones by Löfvensköld, were simplified versions of Degen’s and other German models, indicative of a deep and widespread interest in ornament and its potential to affect the modern mind.

Nordic reformers wrote little about their preferred forms for wood ornament. Instead, they focused on materiality, crafting processes, and, particularly, the presumed aesthetic, moral, and societal benefits of these elements. In doing so, they often conflated ornament and its objects. As Alina Payne has demonstrated, mid-nineteenth-century design was marked by a gradual shift from “the explicating and rhetorical function traditionally shouldered by ornament to the objects of daily use.” A new emphasis on ornament as material culture (*Sachkultur*) gave it meaning and relevance only in relation to the objects it decorated. Nordic wood farm decorations were exemplary of this objectification, wherein ornament and object were equalized and, ultimately, merged.

Reinterpreting and simplifying continental models, Swedish architects offered a range of floral and abstract geometrical motifs. These were meant to provide starting points for peasant craftsmen, who were expected to imitate or modify the designs to their liking; at the same time, strict limits were imposed on invention. Löfvensköld encouraged experienced woodworkers to alter the forms provided and to create their own designs, yet he stressed that a farmstead, including any ornament, must be aesthetically unified. Fostering creativity within the confines of an aesthetic ideal, Löfvensköld and his ilk were at the threshold of an emerging practice. They offered compendiums, collections of motifs from which users could choose the most suitable forms for their purposes or develop their own within limited frameworks. The model ornaments in published pattern guides were intended to educate and uplift skillful and decent laborers.

Like their counterparts elsewhere, Nordic reformers emphasized the moral virtue of handicraft and its potential as an agent for social progress. Löfvensköld and others promoted craft, home industry, and moral education in all sectors of rural life. The Swedish Society of Handicraft (Svenska Slöjdförbiningen), founded in 1845, sought not only to increase local production and use of craft goods—in the face of rising imports of manufactured goods—but also to nurture native intelligence and skill, and to highlight the belief that “order, simplicity, and thrift in home life were the necessary prerequisites for comfort, independence and improvement.” Yet the Scandinavian reform movement differed from similar movements in more industrialized countries such as England, where mechanical production and handmade crafts were often seen as being in conflict. In the Nordic countries, craft promotion was closely linked to the promotion of manufacturing in general, and it was ultimately thought to matter little whether items were produced by hand or by machine. Promoters of architectural ornament encouraged the
display of both handmade and machine-made products. The carving knife remained the most important tool for woodworkers, but reformers also recommended the domestic use of mechanical saws and other modern tools. As Löfvenskiöld wrote, the saw was both easy to use and cheap to buy. Although farmers could commission mechanically produced wood carvings from manufactories in Stockholm and Gothenburg, their use of their own “time was less expensive.” As Edelsvärd suggested, rural craftsmen could easily make decorations during the long winter nights, preferably with pedal- or crank-driven saws. Nordic reformers saw in handicraft and related occupations a pragmatic solution for the growing problem of rural underemployment. In 1846, an anonymous writer in a progressive Finnish journal stated that “it would be highly desirable if the landless, in particular” were to start producing handicrafts or otherwise devoting themselves to industry, “through which their economy could be considerably improved.” Further, he claimed:

Encouraging household craft is one of the most powerful tools to eradicate begging and immorality; because diligence and constant activity brings well-being and decency. Those who buy handicrafts and thus encourage craft do a great favor for their country. For sure, there is less poverty and vagrancy in those parishes in which the poor have an opportunity to earn their living by work.

The benefits to be derived from freedom of industry and trade were being hotly debated at this time in Swedish and Finnish newspapers and other publications. “Handicraft and the freedom of industry are the foundations of well-being,” declared an anonymous Finnish writer in 1847. He deplored the fact that, because of the long Nordic winters, agricultural laborers had no steady employment for much of the year. These conditions favored the production of handcrafted household goods of all kinds, but, as already noted, laws were in place that prohibited rural laborers from manufacturing goods for profit. The writer advocated the abolition of these outdated laws and urged landowning farmers to support the poor by establishing craft workshops on their farmsteads. By providing agricultural work and craft industry (the former in
summer, the latter in winter), the patrons would have laborers at their disposal year-round. This, the writer argued, would be beneficial for everyone.\footnote{81}

**Imagining Modern Scandinavia**

Most of the Swedish-language architectural publications of the mid-nineteenth century were distributed in both Sweden and Finland, where Swedish architects like Chiewitz and Sundius worked in the 1850s, and where the language of gentlemen farmers was Swedish. These publications promoted the idea of a unified Scandinavian sphere across national borders, one with its own distinctive unitary culture, language, and architecture. One objective of the reformers was to express through architecture their ideal of the Nordic peasant, whom they believed to be humble, civilized, efficient, and skillful in both farming and craft work. The modern farm architecture they envisioned was meant to create a positive image of Scandinavia and its people, one characterized by moderation and plain beauty.

Reformers believed that wood carving, an essential part of their pan-Scandinavian architectural ideal, was central to their project of regenerating rural society. Through standardized plans and architectural wood carvings, the archaic local building “type”—the poor peasant’s hut—could be developed, embellished, elevated, and made suitable for modern needs.\footnote{82} Improving the Scandinavian rural built environment—which most reformers deemed largely deplorable—with ornamentation originating in German publications meant connecting the remote countryside to the broader realm of Western civilization. These decorations were viewed as part of a shared European heritage, objects whose use would help bring together the “civilized” world.\footnote{83}

The ultimate aim of these liberal reformers, who promoted freedom of industry and welfare for every social class, was a well-ordered rural environment that made significant,
salutary contributions to society as a whole. In their agritectural publications, they directed special attention to the dwellings of the rapidly growing numbers of landless rural laborers and tenant farmers. For economic and social reasons, some of their model designs were for single farmhouses meant to be occupied by two or more families, who would share a kitchen (Figure 16). Moderately decorated and constructed according to standardized plans, these buildings were themselves conceived of as part of a “mass ornament,” the individual features of which would disappear into an immense pattern spread across Scandinavia. As Löfvenskiöld wrote:

How appealing would it be, how uplifting, if these dwellings, even the most insignificant, were built purposefully and dressed with these light and pleasant forms, exerting such beneficial effect on the soul? Imagine this change, and all the advantages and comfort it would bring. . . . Who could not wish, from the bottom of his heart, for this future for the fatherland?

The effort to reform local building traditions through modern farm designs was ambitious, and it was not successful on all counts. Although aimed at peasants living throughout Sweden and Finland, the project’s core literature reached only the upper strata of agrarian society—gentlemen farmers and owners of large estates. In fact, the landless may have encountered the new ideas only while working on manorial estates. Nevertheless, in the long run, the movement contributed significantly to reforms in farm planning—in Sweden, at least. There, the use of wood carvings became widespread, especially on the most affluent farmsteads.

In Finland, agritectural reform reached only a small number of farmsteads during the mid-nineteenth century,
and those were almost exclusively prosperous and progressive manorial estates. The circulation and impact of plans published by the Uusimaa and Häme Provincial Agricultural Society, in particular, remained limited.\textsuperscript{89} By and large, Finnish peasants and rural laborers did not embrace the use of published plans and carved wooden ornament; traditional building methods persisted among those groups well into the next century. Even so, this period saw the emergence of a genuine interest in local ornamental traditions. In the 1840s, one anonymous writer praised the traditional ornamentation found on old peasant buildings in eastern Finland and recommended its use in modern buildings. According to this author, traditional decorations were a cultural treasure, “inherited from our fathers, just like our cultivated land, our language, and customs.”\textsuperscript{90} It was not until some decades later, however, that architects started to study local traditional architecture and Sackkultur, which by the 1890s became a source of inspiration for the young national romantic generation of artists, architects, composers, writers, and others.\textsuperscript{91}

**Agritecture, Ornament, and Politics**

In the mid-nineteenth century, a range of Swedish-language publications disseminated an ideology of reform, progress, and welfare throughout the Scandinavian countryside. In their discussions of architectural ornament, reformers outlined aesthetic and political agendas with broad implications for the future of Scandinavian rural societies. They advocated the use of wood carvings in farm buildings, asserting that the creation of such ornament could bring about substantial benefits—not least, an increase in agricultural productivity and the provision of employment and extra income for rural laborers during long northern winters. Before the rise of a modern forest industry later in the nineteenth century, the production of handicraft was widely regarded as a key to prosperity in rural areas. Wood carvings would elevate humble farm buildings and the people who occupied them, radiating well-being into the surrounding countryside. Requiring skill and good taste from the craftsmen and the constant care of the farmers who owned them, reformed buildings and their decorative embellishments would be morally uplifting,
and thus genuinely useful components in the construction of an ideal modern society.

Despite some success, the mid-nineteenth-century reform efforts discussed here could not prevent the severe agricultural crisis that hit both Sweden and Finland in the 1860s. Following several years of crop failures, famine became widespread, especially in Finland, where it resulted in the deaths of almost 10 percent of the national population in 1867–68. Most of these deaths were concentrated in the countryside. Once again, the modernization of agriculture became an urgent political issue.

The agricultural reform movement of the mid-nineteenth century had aimed to bring order to an environment and society that reformers saw as chaotic and in crisis. They believed that carved wooden ornamentation would complete and correct both the Scandinavian built environment and Scandinavian society as a whole.92 Architectural ornament became the frame for an envisioned ideal future society—sometimes quite literally (see Figure 2). Although they might appear insignificant to modern eyes, the details that these reformers inscribed onto the roofs, windows, and doorways of their model buildings signified well-being and civilization as defined by the Swedish cultural elite, a definition they hoped would extend its influence across the Scandinavian countryside.

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Notes

1. This article is a part of my postdoctoral research project, supported by the Kone Foundation. My deepest gratitude goes to the following persons: Nina Aspinen, Matthew Growhoski, Martha Howell, Rainer Knapas, Ville Lukkarinen, Riitta Nikula, Markku Peltonen, and my colleagues at the Finnish Literature Society, where I conducted most of the research. I would also like to thank the anonymous reader and JSAH editor Keith Eggger for their helpful comments and refinements, and the wonderful librarians and other staff at the Museum of Finnish Architecture, the National Library of Sweden, and the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry for their invaluable assistance.

2. I use the term Scandinavia in its nineteenth-century sense, which is synonymous with the so-called Nordic countries: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland. In the middle of the nineteenth century, use of the term was encouraged by proponents of “Scandinavinism,” a cultural and political movement that cherished the idea of a united Scandinavia. Finland is now often excluded from “Scandinavia,” but historically and culturally it was seen as part of that region. See Kari Haarler Ekman, “Mitt bemu gränsver välgårde”. En studie i den kulturella skandinaviamen under 1800-talet (Gothenburg: Makadam Förlag, 2010), 11.


4. C. E. Löfvenskold, ”Nägra ord om landbyggnadskonstens utveckling i landet under de sista 30 åren,” Kungl. Landbrukars-Akademins Tidskrift, no. 3 (1869), 132, my translation. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.


9. In nineteenth-century Sweden and Finland, a peasant (in Swedish bonde, in Finnish talouksija) was a farmer who occupied an officially registered homestead (in Swedish hemman, in Finnish maatila), either as a landowner or as a tenant on land owned by the state or the nobility. Having both high social and economic status and political standing as one of the four estates represented in the Diet, Nordic peasants formed a specific social class, distinct from noble gentlemen farmers and landless agricultural workers. I use the term peasant here to refer to this class. See Gadd, “Agricultural Revolution in Sweden,” 122.


11. In Sweden, especially in the region of Svealand, the mining industry and charcoal burning provided extra income for rural inhabitants. Gadd, “Agricultural Revolution in Sweden,” 120.


18. See Jacob Lundell, *Om handverkskrän, näringsfrivet och arbetsorganisation* (Lund, 1846).


21. Editoriell, *Tidkriter* för praktisk byggnadskonst och mekanik m.m. 1 (1850), “Några ord om byggnadsväsendet i landsorten,” *Tidkriter* för praktisk byggnadskonst och mekanik m.m. 2 (1851), 55.


31. The Swedish competition received one entry, which was disqualified, and the Finnish competition received no entries. On the Swedish competition, see Ulrich Lange, *Experimentalplatsen: Kungl. Lantbruksakademins experimenter- och förskövarkombination på Norra Djurgården i Stockholm 1816–1907* (Stockholm: Kungl. Skogs- och Lantbruksakademien, 2000), 269; Lange, *Ladugården*, 122. In Sweden, similar competitions were held in the early 1860s. See, for example, ”Förslags-rättningar till större och mindre bondgårdar,” *Tidkriter* för byggnadskonst och ingeniörvetenskap (1864), 82.

32. ”Helsingfors,” *Helsingfors Dagblad*, 21 June 1862, 1.


34. Chiewitz died in December 1862. The society required some changes to his drawings, and Chiewitz’s widow assigned the task to architect Carl Johan von Heideken. Annual Report and Minutes of the Uusimaa och Hämä Provincial Agricultural Society 26.1., 29.1., 7.4., and 29.6.1863, Archive of the Uusimaa och Hämä Provincial Agricultural Society, National Archives, Helsinki.

35. ””Plan- och fasadrättningar till landtmannabyggnader,” *Åbo Underrättelser*, 11 June 1863, 3; ”Rättningar till landmannabyggnader,” 1.


37. ””Decoration for redan byggda stugar å landet,” *Tidkriter* för praktisk byggnadskonst och mekanik m.m. 1 (1850), 17–18. The same argument was repeated in other publications, such as P. G. Sundius, ”Notiser i praktisk byggnadskonst,” *i Landbruksarkitekten: En samling af till en del redan utförda byggnader på landet* (Stockholm: J. Theol. Bergelin, 1858–59), 10.

38. See, for example, ”Om vigen af landtmanna biniärningars alfvarliga idkande,” *Teknologen*, no. 11 (14 Mar. 1846); A. P. von Sydow, ”Något om husbehovsbrännings skadligheden ur ekonomiskt hänseende,” *Teknologen*, no. 4 (23 Jan. 1847), 25; ”Om bränningsbrännings skadligheden inflytande på landbruken och boskapsetsliden,” *Teknologen*, no. 46 (4 Nov. 1848), 361; C. E. Löfvenskiöld, ”Meijeri,” *i Landtmanna-byggnader* (Stockholm: C.A. Forsius, 1854), 35.

78. Löfvenskiöld, “Ornamenter m.m.,” 42.
80. “Att uppmuntra husfliten är ett af de kraftigaste medlen att utrotta tigge-
riet och seselslösheten i sin grund; ty flit och ständig sysselsättning föda väl-
maga och sedlighet. De personer som genom afsättning af hemslöjds
produkter, uppmuntra den, gora derföre sitt land en stor tjänst. Och säkert är,
att de socknar der den fattige har tillfälle att genom arbete försörja sig, der
finnas och mindre fattighjon och lösfirware.” “Om vigten af landtmanna bi-
näringars allvarliga idkande,” 90.
81. “Husflit och näringsfrihet äro grunderne till Wålstand,” Teknologen, no. 6
(6 Feb. 1847), 41–43.
82. Hvattum, Heinrich Ernst Schirmer, 110–35; Hvattum, “Panoramas of Style.”
83. César Daly was explicit about this. In 1841, describing the plans of Orna-
sstugan, a wooden building in Sweden, he claimed that its decorative barge-
boards and finials were found on every medieval wooden house in Europe.
César Daly, “Maison suédoise en bois (XVe s.),” Revue générale de l’architecture
et des travaux publics, no. 8 (1841), 405.
84. For example, see the design for a double house by Edelsvärn in Löfven-
skiöld, Landtmannabyggnader buffuddukningen för mindre jordbruk, 13.
86. “Men hur intagande den än är, huru mycket skulle den ej vinna, om
dessa bostäder, åfven de obetydligaste, allstädés uppfördes ändamålsenligt
och ikläddes dessa lätta och behagliga former, som verka så välgörande på
sinnen? — Vid föreställningen om en sådan allmän förändring och all den
nyta och trefnad den skulle medföra . . . , hvem kan underlåta att af var-
maste hjerta önska fäderneslandet en sådan framtid!” Löfvenskiöld, Land-
tmannabyggnader buffuddukningen för mindre jordbruk, 10.
87. Fernlund, “‘The Demands of the New Age,’” 283.
88. C. E. Löfvenskiöld, “Några ord om landbyggnadskonstens utveckling i
landet under de sista 30 åren,” in Edelsvärn, Landbyggnadskonstens utveckling
i Sverige, 16; Svala, Lantbruksarkitekten Charles Emil Löfvenskiöld, 198; Lange,
Ladugården, 106–7.
89. Kim Björklund, Nylands Svenska Lantbruksällskap 1856–2006 (Helsinki:
Nylands Svenska Lantbruksällskap, 2005), 101.
90. “Huoneen rakennuksesta talonpoikaisilla tiloilla,” Lukemisia Maamiehille
1, no. 6 (1849), 265.
91. See, for example, Barbara Miller Lane, National Romanticism and Modern
Architecture in Germany and the Scandinavian Countries (Cambridge: Cam-
bridge University Press, 2000).
92. On the notion of kosmos—often translated as ornament—as an artifact
completing and correcting the world in convenient ways, see Michel
Constantini, “Kοσμός au ‘sicle’ de Periclès,” in Histoires d’ornement, ed.
Patrice Ceccarini, Jean Loup Charet, Frédéric Cousinée, and Christophe
Leribault (Paris: Klincksieck/Rome: Académie de France à Rome Villa
Medicis, 2000), 35–50.