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Swenson Center News, 1991

Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, Augustana College

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Ten Years with the Swenson Center

This past September marked the passage of ten years since the Swenson Center first opened its doors to the public. During these years the Center has grown significantly in many ways and has emerged as a leading archive and research institution in this country for the study of Swedish immigration to North America. Some observations on what we have done and where we are going seem appropriate.

In terms of acquisitions, our library holdings have increased by well over a third, including the significant Nils William Olsson collection of sueco-americana (Swedish-American imprints), acquired this past summer (see page 3). On the archival side, the Center has acquired the records of a number of significant organizations, including the American-Swedish News Exchange (New York), and sponsored a major microfilming project (1982-1984) to survey and preserve a wide range of archival materials across the United States and in Canada.

A more visible sign of the Center's growth are the new facilities in which the Center is housed. Thanks to the continued support of Augustana College and to special funding from three foundations in Sweden associated with the Wallenberg family, the Center now has spacious quarters in the recently renovated Denkmann Hall on the Augustana College campus.

Genealogy continues to be an important part of the Center's work. During the past decade thousands of persons have sought our assistance, both in person and by mail, and our patrons come from across the entire United States. In fact, the geographical distribution of our patrons reflects the continuous shift of Swedish Americans away from the "classic" Swedish-American states of the Midwest: today, many of our Associates now live in California and Florida.

In 1990, the genealogical work of the Center also took a major step forward when the Center became the North American representative of the Swedish National Archives. It is now possible, through the Swenson Center, to purchase microfiche cards of the entire collection of parish records for the Church of Sweden.

Academic researchers from North America and Sweden have also been frequent visitors to the Center. The work initiated by a group of Swedish scholars on Swedish-American literature and culture has been of particular interest, and several scholars from Sweden and the United States working on these topics have made repeated visits to the Center.

The Swenson Center has arranged or helped to arrange several conferences during the past decade. Conferences on resources and archival cooperation were held in 1982 and in 1985 in cooperation with the Swedish-American Historical Society (formerly the Swedish Pioneer Historical Society). In 1987, a three-day event, "The Ethnic Mosaic of the Quad Cities," was held, focusing on the history of immigration to the Quad City area. This also marked the fiftieth anniversary of the presentation of Marcus Lee Hansen's seminal address, "The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant," at Augustana College. The Center also co-arranged the 1988 conference, "Swedish-American Life in Chicago, 1838-1988," which examined Swedish ethnic life in the Windy City. Plans for future conferences are several: the Center will (continued page 3)
Progress in Financial Support

Major steps were taken during the past year to build a stronger financial base for the Swenson Center. While Augustana College provides important support services, the operating expenses of the Center are paid by income from the Center's endowment and gifts designated for the Center. The endowment was established in 1980 by the initial gift from Birger and Lyal Swenson. In the early days, the endowment they established was adequate to carry the program. As the services of the Center have increased, additional funding has been required. Fortunately, others are beginning to meet the challenge and are helping to build a larger endowment.

Of particular note is a gift totaling $300,000 recently received from Mr. Lawrence J. Plym of Niles, Michigan, and Delray Beach, Florida. Other than the original Swenson gift, this is the largest gift received for the benefit of the Center. In recognition of this gift, the central research room of the newly developed facilities has been named the Plym Research Room.

Other gifts to the endowment fund are encouraged. An endowment gift is the best way to ensure the Center's financial strength, as the fund produces a continuous flow of income for the operating budget. Major donors can be recognized through the naming of certain areas within the Center or through designated programs.

The other way in which the Center is supported is through annual gifts from those who believe in the importance of our work. Over 200 persons have now enrolled as Swenson Center Associates, each making contributions of at least $25.00 per year. A new level of annual support, the Swenson Center Circle, now has over 20 members, each of which contributes at least $250.00 per year. Associates and Circle members receive a discount on genealogical research and receive all mailings from the Center. Circle members also receive books published by the Center and a guest invitation to a special dinner given at the time of the annual Ander lecture.

Gifts of all sizes, either for the endowment fund or for annual support, are welcome and gratefully received.

All contributions are tax deductible.

Fourth Annual O. Fritiof Ander Lecture

In conjunction with its tenth anniversary and the rededication of Denkmann Hall, the Swenson Center held the fourth annual O. Fritiof Ander Lecture in immigration history. The lecture was presented by the well-known Swedish historian Dr. Harald Runblom, associate professor of history at Uppsala University and a member of the Swenson Center Advisory Committee.

Runblom's address, "We are all Swedish here aren't we, Mrs. O'Brien?": Swedes and other ethnic groups in American life," dealt with the relationship between Swedish immigrants and other ethnic groups. The history of Swedish immigration to North America cannot be viewed in isolation from that of other groups, Runblom emphasized, and he illustrated how Swedish immigrants have always interacted with other groups, frequently Scandinavians but also Germans and Irish. Over the years, contacts have perhaps been the closest with the Norwegians, who also were the most common non-Swedish marriage partners for Swedes and Swedish-Americans.

The lecture was presented in Wallenberg Hall to an audience of more than 150 persons. The Swenson Center looks forward to publishing this lecture in its new publication series, Occasional Papers.

Dr. Harald Runblom, Uppsala University, was this year's O. Fritiof Ander lecturer.
host a conference on Scandinavian immigrants and education, in April, 1992, and it will co-arrange the Midwest Archives Conference to be held in the Quad Cities in 1993.

We look toward the future with great optimism. Our collections have grown tremendously, and we have been in contact with and assisted thousands of individuals on both sides of the Atlantic who are interested in the history of Swedish immigration to North America. Admittedly, however, there is still much work to be done. In all of this, we have been very encouraged by the continuing support of Augustana College, and we are happy to be one part of the school's "Swedish profile." We also greatly appreciate the financial support that we have received from numerous individuals and organizations over the past decade.

Swenson Center Acquires Major Book Collection

Books and periodicals are a major source of information for anyone interested in Swedish-American research. Currently, the Swenson Center has a library of some 15,000 volumes, covering most aspects of the Swedish migration to North America. Some of these books have come from private collectors: the G.N. Swan and Oliver A. Linder collections, for example, were procured by Augustana College in the 1920's and 1930's and include many rare books that are very difficult to find today.

The Swenson Center has recently acquired another major book collection from a private collector, Dr. Nils William Olsson, of Winter Park, Florida. During his distinguished career as diplomat, scholar, and publisher in numerous Swedish-American endeavors, Dr. Olsson's personal library grew to become one of the most interesting and inclusive collections of sueco-americana in both the United States and Sweden. The Swenson Center is very happy to announce that a large part of this collection has become a permanent part of the Center's library. It will be called the Nils William Olsson Collection. The acquisition was made possible partly through a purchase arrangement funded by Mrs. Lyal Swenson and the late Dr. Birger Swenson and partially by a gift from Dr. Nils William Olsson.

The collection consists of some 3,500 volumes and includes a wide range of titles and subjects. It is particularly strong in Swedish and Swedish-American genealogy and local and regional history, all areas of particular interest to the genealogists and family history researchers at the Swenson Center. The collection includes most of the standard works on these topics as well as many elusive titles that are difficult to locate today, even in Sweden.

We feel that the Nils William Olsson Collection has found a good home at the Swenson Center, where it will be an important addition and complement to our current holdings. We know that Nils William Olsson himself is very eager to see that his collection is used by researchers, and therefore we encourage all interested persons to familiarize themselves with this new addition to the Center's growing resources.

Swenson Center Hosts Conference

Swedish and Scandinavian immigrants in North America showed a great concern for education. Many schools had been started by and for the immigrants within a few decades after their arrival to North America. In 1916, the Swedish-American author Vilhelm Berger observed that the Swedish-American institutions of higher learning constituted "the most significant achievements by the Swedes in America."

In April, 1992, the Swenson Center will host a conference called "Scandinavian Immigrants and Education in North America." This conference will examine how Scandinavian immigrants in the United States and Canada created and maintained educational institutions, such as seminaries, colleges, and academies, and how the immigrants and their children related to and interacted with American public schools and universities. Issues dealing with the immigrant community and immigrant schools will include the role played by the schools in their communities, the purposes behind the schools and the kinds of curricula developed at these schools.
Swenson Center Moves Into New Facilities

During the past summer the long-awaited move into our new facilities became a reality. As those of you know who visited us during the past year, the Center had been housed in temporary quarters during the extensive renovation of Denkmann Hall. The Center now occupies three levels in Denkmann Hall, the former College Library on the Augustana campus, located at the corner of 7th Avenue and 35th Street, Rock Island. The new facilities provide spacious and attractive space for our collections, staff and researchers. The archives, the library, and staff work areas are found on the upper and lower levels. The main floor houses staff offices and the research room, recently named the Plym Research Room in recognition of major support to the Center from Lawrence J. Plym of Niles, Michigan, and Delray Beach, Florida.

This transformation means that the Center has more than doubled its space, and for the first time in ten years all of our holdings are under one roof. We are delighted to be in our new quarters and would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of those who helped us in the process, particularly Augustana College and the three foundations associated with the Wallenberg family in Sweden. The new quarters were officially opened on October 19: the pictures on these pages and elsewhere show the Center's new facilities and some of the highlights from the opening weekend.

Many friends of the Swenson Center were on hand during the weekend of celebration and rededication. In particular we would like to mention Erik Gustavson, Director of the Emigrant Register/Kinship Center in Karlstad, Sweden, who presented us with a computerized set of the passenger lists from the port of Göteborg (1869-1879), which will be of great value for the genealogical work of the Center. Nils William Olsson also presented us with a classic four-volume genealogical work, Johann Hübner's Genealogische Tabellen, printed in the mid-18th century in Germany, where certain families are traced back as far as Adam and Eve (!).

Above, right: From the rededication of Denkmann Hall; from left: Dr. Thomas Tredway, President, Augustana College; Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, President Emeritus; Martin Carver, President, Board of Directors; Jacob Wallenberg, representing the Wallenberg Foundations (Stockholm); and Dr. Nils Hasselmo, President, University of Minnesota.

Right: Erik Gustavson, Director, Emigrant Register/Kinship Center (Karlstad), conveys greetings and congratulations during the 10th anniversary celebration.
Top: A panoramic view of the Center's new reading room.

Center, left: Four members of the Swenson Center Circle; from left: Earl Brolander, Lyal Swenson, Erick Schonstedt and Bertil Winstrom.

Center, right: At the Center's 10th anniversary celebration; from left: Dr. Nils William Olsson, Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, Laurence J. Plym and Glen Brolander.

Right: Dag Blanck (Director), Laurence J. Plym and Kermit Westerberg (Archivist-Librarian) at the official opening of the Plym Research Room at the Center.
Recent Publications of Interest

Swedish immigration to the South has not attracted much attention in the past. This situation has now been rectified in a new major study of the Swedish immigration to Texas, which was by far the largest area of Swedish settlement in the South. The book is called The Swedish Texans and is written by Larry E. Scott, associate professor of Scandinavian at Augustana College and one of the Swenson Center Advisory Committee members. It is published by the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio in its series, The Texians and the Texans. Professor Scott made extensive use of resources at the Swenson Center in writing this book.

In the book, Larry Scott outlines the history of the Swedish immigration to Texas, where early pre-Civil War settlements became important magnets for future Swedish migration to the New World. The book also gives a rich picture of Swedish ethnic life in the Lone Star State, which included churches, schools and other organizations, one of the oldest Swedish-language newspapers in the country, as well as such exotic aspects of Swedish immigration history as Swedish cowboys and cotton ginners. Besides the stimulating text, the book includes many never before published pictures of Swedish life in Texas.

Larry E. Scott, The Swedish Texans (San Antonio, Texas: Institute of Texan Cultures, 1991)

A new reference book in American immigration history has appeared, called Dictionary of American Immigration History. The book consists of several hundred entries with data on most American ethnic groups, notable persons in immigration history, immigrant organizations of various kinds, as well as thematic essays on ethnicity, assimilation, pluralism, etc. Of particular interest are the entries on Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Finns, and Icelanders and many shorter contributions on Scandinavian-American organizations.


The first lecture in the O. Fritiof Ander Lecture Series by John Bodnar of Indiana University has now been published in the Swenson Center Occasional Papers series. The publication is Collective Memory and Ethnic Groups: The Case of Swedes, Mennonites, and Norwegians, and deals with the various ways that these groups have commemorated and shaped their histories in the New World. It can be ordered from the Swenson Center, for $3.00, including postage and handling.

John Bodnar, Collective Memory and Ethnic Groups: The Case of Swedes, Mennonites, and Norwegians (Rock Island: Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, 1991)

In 1988, the Swenson Center was a co-arranger of the conference "Swedish-American Life in Chicago, 1838-1988," held on the campus of North Park College in Chicago. For those who could not attend this major conference, a book has just been published which is based on the lectures given in Chicago. The book includes twenty-four articles on such varied topics as art, literature, theater, and the professional, religious, educational and organizational life of Swedish-Americans in Chicago. It is the first major examination of the rich and varied Swedish life in Chicago during almost one century.

This highly stimulating book can be ordered either through the Swedish-American Historical Society in Chicago (5125 N. Spaulding Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60625) or directly from the publisher, University of Illinois Press, 54 East Gregory Drive, Champaign, Illinois, 61820.

Swedes in Cuba

Around the turn of the century, some Swedish Americans left the Midwest and settled in Cuba. A land company in Minneapolis, the Swedish Land and Colonization Company, under the leadership of Dr. Lind, was active in promoting the sale of Cuban land, and it even published a small booklet which, in glowing terms, described the advantages of the sunny island.

In 1910, it was reported that about 200 Swedes lived in or around Bayate on the Cuban north coast and that new settlements were being planned. A Swedish Lutheran congregation seems to have existed, served perhaps by pastor Anders Gustaf Linden, who died on the island in 1912. Eventually most of the Swedish Cubans returned to the United States or Sweden, but to this day a few descendants of the Swedish settlers still live on Cuba, and some even speak some Swedish.

The source of this information about Swedish migration to Cuba is a Cuban journalist and author, Jaime Sarutsky, who is currently writing the history of the Swedish-Cuban community. Mr. Sarutsky is very interested in getting in touch with anyone who may have some information about individuals who spent time in the Swedish settlements in Cuba. On a recent visit to Sweden Mr. Sarutsky made many contacts, and he is now hoping to reach persons in the U.S. and Canada. Mr. Sarutsky can be reached c/o the Swenson Center.

SVAR

As we announced in the last issue of the Swenson Center News, the Swenson Center is now the North American agent for SVAR, a division of the Swedish National Archives, and is selling microfiche cards of the Swedish parish records (Church of Sweden). These records are very extensive and of crucial importance for anyone interested in tracing family roots in Sweden. They are now available for purchase in North America for the first time.

We started selling the cards in April, and currently we have interested customers throughout the United States and Canada. Anyone who is interested in buying microfiche cards of specific types of records, covering individual Swedish parishes for particular points in time, should contact the Center to consult our detailed catalogs and listings of the available microfiche cards. Christina Johansson is the person responsible for SVAR at the Center; she can be reached at (309) 794-7204.

Augustana Summer School in Sweden

Do you want to improve your Swedish language skills and spend six weeks in Sweden at the same time? Now is your chance to do so! The Department of Scandinavian Studies at Augustana College announces its 10th Summer School in Sweden. Five weeks of intensive Swedish language instruction (one year of college credit) on the beginning, intermediate and advanced levels will be offered at Grebbestad folk high school in picturesque Grebbestad, a favorite summer resort on the Swedish west coast. Classes meet from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Afternoons are devoted to studying; field-trips and two weekend trips to Oslo and Gothenburg are planned. The sixth week is spent in Stockholm, where students get acquainted with the city and have opportunities to visit the nearby university city of Uppsala. The cost of the program is $2,250.00 which includes tuition, room, board and most field-trips in Grebbestad plus room and breakfast in Stockholm. Arrangements are being made for special air fares from Chicago. For further information write to Dr. Lars Scott, Department of Scandinavian, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL, 61201.

Swenson Center Fax

The Swenson Center has recently acquired a fax machine. Our fax number is (309) 794-7443.

Research Fees at the Swenson Center

Effective January 1, 1992, the research fee at the Swenson Center will be $20 per hour. Swenson Center Associates who make an annual contribution of $25 receive a discount and pay only $10 per hour. There is still no cost for research done by individuals on the premises.

Translating Service

Do you need your old documents, diaries, journals, or family letters translated? If so, contact Christina Johansson for more information, including rates, at (309) 794-7204, or write to: Swenson Center, Box 175, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois 61201.
How to Reach
the Swenson Center

The Swenson Center is located on the
main floor of Denkmann Memorial Hall,
3520 Seventh Avenue, on the campus of
Augustana College.

Office hours are 8:30 a.m. to noon, and
1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Monday through
Friday, except for holidays. Hours may
be limited during college vacation
periods.

If you plan to visit the Center, we
encourage you to make an appointment
by calling or writing in advance.

Staff members of the Center are
Dag Blanck, director; Kermit
Westerberg, archivist/librarian;
Vicky Oliver, administrative assistant;
and Christina Johansson, researcher.

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