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Finding Teaching Inspiration at the Swenson Center

Dr. Kimberly La Palm

Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois

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Finding Teaching Inspiration at the Swenson Center
Kimberly La Palm, Assistant Professor
World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures

I spent a week working with the Swenson Center's collections. My original goal was to find material that I could use in my course on Scandinavian Folklore but I found much more material than I realized I would and now I have a list of ideas and inspiration for nearly all of the courses in the catalogue.

I began by looking at the letters written by and about the Bishop Hill community as well as the letters by and about the foundation of Augustana College. This inspired me to develop a final project for my folklore students that involves bridging the Scandinavian folklore that we are reading in class with local lore, helping them to understand how traditions grow and spread as they are carried with people to new places and new lives. The students will visit the Swenson Center this fall to learn about the resources available and will use the collections to aid in their research.

On the suggestion of Lisa Huntsha, I looked at the materials related to Augustana's Haag Collection - a body of documents and art works from the Swedish-American sculptor Charles Haag. I discovered a fantastic collection of folklore-inspired art right here on campus and documentation from the artist himself - a rare luxury for a researcher. Haag's work will be one of the research options for my folklore students.

Meanwhile, as I was discovering subjects for my folklore students, I realized that the Swenson Center offers a rich collection of material for beginning and advanced language students. The hand-written letters as well as the large collection of printed materials from the nineteenth century are excellent for teaching language students - and in particular my students of translation - about colloquial Swedish. It allows us an opportunity to work with the language of actual speakers, rather than the simplified language of the textbook, as well as an opportunity to explore the types of linguistic change that have happened in the past century. Students in my translation course will now be devoting a week to working on materials from the Swenson Center's collections - and leaving behind English translations of a few letters, enriching the collection for future researchers.

I truly appreciate the guidance and patience that I received from the Swenson Center staff. They were invaluable in this process and provide a fantastic resource to Augustana and the larger community. I will be revisiting the Swenson Center regularly to prepare for future courses with the goal of bringing every class to the Swenson Center at least once to learn about the primary sources available right here on campus.