

12-1-1982

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Recommended Citation

Setterdahl, Lilly (1982) "An Early Rockford Swede," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 2 : No. 4 , Article 6.

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An Early Rockford Swede

Lilly Setterdahl*

In the article on *Declarations of Intention by Swedes in Rockford 1859–1870*, published in SAG (Vol. I, No. 1, p. 8), there is a reference to Augustus Johnson, who was naturalized a U.S. citizen in the Circuit Court of Winnebago County, IL on Feb. 27, 1858. It might be of interest to the readers of SAG that Augustus Johnson was born Sven August Johannesson in the parish of Ving (Skar.) Nov. 12, 1831,¹ the son of Johannes Romwall and Annika Pettersdotter. He early learned the tailor's trade, but soon left for America, arriving in Rockford, IL in 1852. At first he worked for others, but in 1862 he formed the Merchant Tailor Company of Rockford together with another Swede, John Erlander. In 1879 Johnson became president of the newly organized Central Furniture Company of Rockford. He ultimately became one of the most successful businessmen of that city.²

He was one of the first members of the First Lutheran Church of Rockford, which he joined in 1855. On March 9, 1862 he married Emilie Peterson, who was born in Kumla Parish (Ög.) Aug. 25, 1843, the daughter of Carl Magnus Persson, a former judge of the assizes (*nämndeman*) in Sweden, who emigrated to the U.S. in 1854 with his wife, one son and five daughters.³ Emilie had been confirmed in the First Lutheran Church in Rockford June 19, 1859. A total of nine children were born in the marriage, all in Rockford — Hilma Otilia Aug. 22, 1863; Amanda Eleonora June 22, 1865; Ada Davidia Oct. 23, 1867; Armour Eugene April 6, 1870; Victor Magnus Icilius April 7, 1872; Cora Vendella Sept. 17, 1875; Edmund Laurentius Sept. 14, 1878 and twins Linius Emanuel and Maud Evangelina Oct. 20, 1882. Sven August Johnson died in Rockford April 23, 1921 and his wife Feb. 13, 1937.⁴

One sister, Eva Cajsa Johannesdotter and two brothers, Andreas and Gustaf, who used the father's surname of Romwall, emigrated to the United States as a result of Sven August's letters home. The brothers settled in Minnesota. The sister married twice, the first time to Gustaf Jacobson, the second time to a clergyman, whose name is not known.

Sven August Johnson corresponded frequently with his parents and supported them financially, especially after the brothers had emigrated.

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In 1976 the Special Collections of the Augustana College Library was given a collection of approximately fifty letters written to Sven August Johnson from 1853 to 1878, mostly by his parents in Sweden, as well as his brothers from the time they were living in Sweden and after they arrived in this country. The letters were given to Augustana College by the Lutheran Church in America Archives in Chicago, IL. The earlier provenance of the letters is not known.

Today the Sven August Johnson Collection of Swedish letters is housed in the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana College, where it may be consulted and used by scholars.

- ¹ The microfilm of the First Lutheran Church records in Rockford, IL shows his birth date as Nov. 11, 1831.
- ² Eric Johnson and Carl Fredrik Peterson, *Svenskarne i Illinois* (Chicago, 1880), p. 382.
- ³ *Personregister till Statistiska Centralbyråns i Stockholm förteckningar över emigranter 1851-1860* (Copy in the Provincial Archives in Göteborg, Sweden with the signum A 118).
- ⁴ The microfilm of the First Lutheran Church of Rockford.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
 DIVISION OF NATURALIZATION Register Form No. 54, Revised, 12-20-06

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

State of Illinois, Winnebago County and Circuit, ss.

It is Remembered, That on the 27th day of February in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Fifty..... 1856 personally appeared before the Hon. BENJAMIN R. SHELTON, Presiding Judge of the Circuit Court in and for the County of Winnebago and State aforesaid, (the same being a Court of Record, having and exercising common law jurisdiction, legal and a Clerk,) and sitting judicially for the despatch of business at the Court House in Rockford, Augustus Johnson.....

an alien born, free, white, male person, above the age of twenty-one year, and applied to the said Court to be admitted to become a NATURALIZED CITIZEN of the United States of America, pursuant to the several Acts of Congress heretofore passed on that subject, entitled "An Act to establish a uniform rule of Naturalization, and to repeal the Acts heretofore passed on that subject," approved the 14th day of April, 1802; an Act entitled "An Act in addition to an Act entitled an Act to establish a uniform rule of Naturalization, and to repeal the Acts heretofore passed on that subject," approved on the 26th day of March, A. D. 1804; an Act entitled "An Act supplementary to the Acts heretofore passed on the subject of a uniform rule of Naturalization," passed the 30th day of July, A. D. 1813; the Act relative to evidence in cases of Naturalization, passed the 23d day of March, 1816, and an Act in further addition to an Act to establish a uniform rule of Naturalization, and to repeal the Acts heretofore passed on that subject, passed May 22, 1824; and the said Augustus Johnson.....

.....having thereupon produced to the Court record testimony, showing that he has heretofore reported himself and filed his declaration of his intention to become a citizen of the United States, according to the provisions of the said several Acts of Congress; and the Court being satisfied, as well from the oath of the said Augustus Johnson..... as from the testimony of John H. H. H...... who are known to be citizens of the United States, that the said Augustus Johnson..... has resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for at least five years last past, and at least one year last past within the State of Illinois, and that during the whole of that time he has behaved himself as a man of good moral character, according to the principles contained in the Constitution of the United States, and well disposed to the good order, well being and happiness of the same, and two years and upwards have elapsed since the said Augustus Johnson..... reported himself and filed his declaration of his intention as aforesaid.

It was Ordered that the said Augustus Johnson..... be permitted to take the Oath to support the Constitution of the United States and the usual Oath whereby he renounced all allegiance and fidelity to every foreign prince, potentate, state and sovereignty whatever, and more particularly to the present.....

Augustus Johnson..... whereof he was heretofore a subject, which said oath, having been administered to the said Augustus Johnson..... by the Clerk of said Court, it was ordered by the Court that the said Augustus Johnson..... be admitted to all and singular the rights and privileges and immunities of a Naturalized Citizen of the United States, and that the same be certified by the Clerk of this Court, under the Seal of said Court, accordingly.

In Testimony Whereof, The Seal of said Court is hereunto affixed by the Clerk's Office in the City of Rockford, this 27th day of February A. D. 1856 and of the Independence of the United States the 27th day of February 1856

By Order of the Court,
 (ATTEST)
Morris B. Derrick
 Clerk of the Winnebago County Circuit Court.

Sven August Johnson's U.S. Naturalization Certificate