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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.

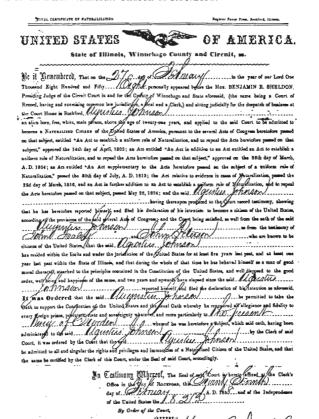
Sven August Johnson corresponded frequently with his parents and supported them financially, especially after the brothers had emigrated.

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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.

 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.



Sven August Johnson's U.S. Naturalization Certificate

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.