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Social networking aids the genealogist!

BY JILL SEAHOLM

This is a story about how social networking can aid in genealogy. My experience is in Facebook. Sure, there are genealogical query web sites, email lists, and even Facebook pages for Swedish genealogy where one can post queries. However, sometimes we need to think outside the obvious.

In the spring of 2012 at the Swenson Center we received an email from a woman in Sweden named Christina F., who was looking for some lost relatives in the U.S. She had met them when they visited Sweden in the 1950s, and wanted to reconnect. Specifically she was looking for the daughters of someone named *Ewald Lawson*. Strangely, Christina had sent her query directly to the president of Augustana College, who sent it on to the Swenson Center's employee email group. I replied to Christina with our usual answer, that we did not have access to records to look for people after 1930, and sent her to our Swedish-language web page that has suggestions for Swedes.

Within an hour, I heard from our director, Dag Blanck, who asked "You know that Lawson was president of Upsala College, right?" Upsala was a Swedish-American college in East Orange, New Jersey, until it closed its doors and filed for bankruptcy in 1995. I did not know that Lawson was an Upsala president, and was quite relieved that our director had also received the query email. Blanck added that Lawson may also have been a Lutheran minister ordained in the Augustana Synod. Knowing both of those things about him gave me some real hope of finding something in our records. Christina's email did not mention Upsala College, but perhaps she found out that the Swenson Center had received their administrative archives when

Upsala closed in 1995. She must have thought it fitting to write to Augustana's president, since Lawson had been an Upsala president. We also have a number of resources related to Augustana Synod ministers. I wrote right back to Christina saying that there was some hope after all.

Lawson had been president 1938-1965, but had died in 1965. I started with our Augustana Synod resources and exhausted them right away. Our records tend to stop before he died. I thought about consulting Augustana College's special collections, but they were closed and under construction, and had no access to their materials until autumn of 2012.

We do not have Upsala student or alumni records, but I looked at our plentiful online listings of Upsala College archives, and found that Ewald Lawson's presidential papers consisted of 64 archival boxes divided into over 1,000 folders. I selected a dozen or so folders to check. Unfortunately, because 1965 was Lawson's last year as president and in life, all of our information by him and about him stopped in 1965.

There was a family tree among his papers, but it also stopped at 1965 with the then unmarried daughters. We have an entire set of Upsala student yearbooks in our library, and Law-

son's daughters were in them, graduating in the 1960s, but that was where it stopped for the Lawsons. There was very little information about any specific alumni in our collection, but we did have one Upsala Alumni Directory, a book published in 1980. Only one of the daughters was in the directory, but it gave me her married name and address, at least as she was in 1980. Internet searches did not yield anything after that.

Facebook to the rescue!

I am on Facebook and maintain our Swenson Center page, so I looked for this Lawson daughter's account on Facebook, and found too many with the same names, but then I had another idea. I had started a Facebook page for former students of my Moline, Illinois, elementary school,



Upsala College Alumni Om Evenemang Foton

Öppen grupp

This group is open to anyone who attended or graduated from Upsala College of East Orange, NJ, as well as former faculty and administrators. Upsala closed its doors in 1995 after more than 100 years of educating students in northern NJ and beyond. This group was founded by Bill Cerynik, a member of the final graduating class of May 1995, to provide alumni and faculty on Facebook with a way to keep in touch.

Janice Putnoky Krako
Any people graduate in 1980 or 1981?
Visa översättning
onsdag kl. 23:13 via Blackberry

Bruce Degerdon gillar detta.
Visa alla 4 kommentarer

Elizabeth Haugen Faulkner 1981
För 12 timmar sedan

Mike Eze Elam Class of 82
För 12 timmar sedan via mobilen

The Facebook page for the Upsala College Alumni.

which closed and was razed in a citywide downsizing in the 1980s. It was a beautiful, brick neighborhood school for which people felt great nostalgia; but maybe not for all of the teachers. This reminded me that there must be a Facebook page for alumni of Upsala College that would have a similar nostalgic draw, since that school had also closed.

There was one and I joined it right away. First I looked at the names of the members of the Upsala alumni Facebook group and determined that Lawson's daughters were not in it. Most of the posts were things like "What was your favorite meal in the cafeteria?" and "Who was your favorite professor?" I posted a query to see if anyone knew what happened to President Lawson's daughters. One person responded right away that she had known one of the Lawson daughters in college and that the daughter had been active in their sorority alumni group. The woman said she would check her sorority alumni materials to see if there was a current address for the Lawson daughter. This is where the story goes downhill for a while; a few weeks went by and the responder did not follow through with her offer, and these months later, she still has not. So, this idea did not pan out, but it definitely could have, and I thought it important enough to write an

article about. After I posted my query, others followed suit and started asking whether anyone had heard from so-and-so from the class of 1975 or "Whatever happened to so-and-so from the Theta sorority?"

I had been updating Christina every week or so only with bad news it seemed, but now felt I had to stop stringing her along. I told her that I had tried everything I was able to do for her, and gave her a few suggestions that I did not think would pan out. One suggestion I gave was to sign up for a Facebook account and search for Lawson's daughters' accounts, contact people with the right names, and even join the Upsala alumni Facebook group in case one of the daughters would show up in the group later.

Over a month after giving Christina my bad news, she wrote to me saying that she had found one of Lawson's daughters! (I must interject to say how happy it makes me to hear when something I've done has resulted in a connection across the Atlantic.) Christina had started a Facebook account and written to a few people with the right names, and eventually heard back from her Lawson cousin after almost 60 years. She was ecstatic and so thankful for the Facebook idea.

Social networking can lead to all types of connections with the past! Give it a try!



Ewald B. Lawson ca 1950. SSIRC collection.

LAWSON, EVALD BENJAMIN, ordained June 10, 1928, Des Moines, Ia. b. July 24, 1904, Brockton, Mass., Benjamin Lawson & Ellie P. (Johanson). Upsala Coll., B.A., 1925; Aug. Sem., B.D., 1928; Bibl. Sem., N.Y., Th.D. White Plains, Pleasantville, N.Y., 1928-31; Pres. Upsala Coll., 1938-65. Litt D., Aug. Coll., 1956, LL.D., Wagner, 1965, Dickinson, 1959; R.V.O., 1943; K.N.O., 1963. m. Ruth Esther Marie Selander, Dec. 27, 1940, 2 children. d. Sept. 22, 1965.

Information from The Augustana Ministerium, by Conrad Bergendoff (1980).


Web sites mentioned in this article:

Augustana online listings of Upsala College:
www.augustana.edu/x14858.xml

Swenson Center Facebook Group:
www.facebook.com/SwensonCenter [please like us!]

Upsala College Facebook Group:
www.facebook.com/groups/2355638947/

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