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# The Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center of Rock Island

## A Guide to Resources and Holdings

Joel Lundeen, Lilly Setterdahl and Kermit Westerberg

### The Swenson Center's Origin

There has long been a need for a major American archives and research center devoted to preserving and interpreting the records of Swedish immigration to North America. In Sweden, progress had been made through establishment of the Emigrant Institute in Våxjö and the Emigrant Register in Karlstad. Yet, in America, the existing research facilities have been oriented to separate geographical regions, religious denominations and societies. The newly created center at Augustana is designed to supplement efforts of already established programs and to serve as a national archives and research center regarding the total impact of Sweden on American life and culture.

The Center became a reality when a Swedish immigrant named Birger Swenson and his wife Lyal decided that they wanted to do something to preserve the heritage which had been so meaningful to them. Birger Swenson never earned a large salary, nor did he inherit any money. He did, however, meet with some success in investments. Because they had no children of their own, Mr. and Mrs. Swenson wanted to help Augustana College, their alma mater, which enabled Birger to obtain a much-wanted education. They also wanted to do something to recognize the Swedish immigrants who came to America during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Birger Swenson came to this country at the age of 16, graduated from Augustana College, and devoted his career to the field of publishing, retiring

in 1963. He served as the last General Manager of the Augustana Book Concern before merger of that organization into a larger publishing firm. For nearly a century, the Augustana Book Concern was a leading publisher of Swedish language material in America. On December 31, 1980, Birger and Lyl Swenson established an endowment at Augustana College in support of the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, which opened on September 1, 1981.

### Aims and Objectives

The Swenson Center aims to be a national archives and research institute providing resources for study of the *total impact* of the Swedish immigrants on American life and culture. It will provide assistance to historians, social scientists, journalists, genealogists and others engaged in research of Swedish America. The Center is pledged to a program of co-operation with similar institutions in North America and Sweden.

Augustana College is a natural location for such a center. The College is located in the heart of the Midwest, readily accessible to areas with large populations of Swedish descent. It is the oldest college in America founded by Swedish immigrants and has since its earliest days gathered important Swedish-American collections, which now form the basis of the Center's holdings. These include the Swedish-American newspaper collection, the largest of its kind in the world.

The Center extends its collection development to all sectors of the Swedish-American community, irrespective of geography or religious affiliation. Since its inception it has sought to be a major archival repository for the records and papers of Swedish-American organizations, institutions and individuals. The Center's library holdings are rich in general immigration studies, settlement histories, immigrant literature and arts, records of Swedish travels and travelers in the Americas, Swedish-American biography and genealogy, as well as Swedish-American church life and social organizations.

### Use and Access

Although a relatively new institution, the Center is visited by persons from all walks of life and from all parts of the country. By virtue of its microfilmed records of Swedish-American churches and the columns of the Swedish-American press, the Center has become a "Mecca" for those researching their family histories or studying the immigrant roots of local communities. For many of these people the resources of the Center prove to be the best resource for gaining answers to questions about Sweden and Swedish America.

The Center is open to the research public on a *reference* basis only, because of the many rare and unique features of its collections. With the exception of the newspaper microfilms, available on interlibrary loan through Augustana College Library, all materials must be consulted on the premises. Copying facilities are available (from microfilm and hardcopy) for

material that is not restricted. Subject to the decision of the staff, limited photocopy requests will be accepted from interlibrary loan patrons.

Academic researchers from Swedish and American universities, as well as researchers from other American institutions, often consult the Center's library and archives in preparing doctoral dissertations and new publications. Augustana College faculty and students often turn to the Center for aid in the preparation of journal articles or academic term papers, while local newspaper reporters and even some grade school students find inspiration for a background story or in-class report on Swedish immigrant life and culture.

General outreach to the public is a daily task of the Center's staff. Close contacts are maintained with members of the immediate community, including a corps of dedicated volunteers; with prospective donors of library and archival material; with regional historical and genealogical societies; with professional groups and organizations; with libraries and archives devoted to the preservation and documentation of the Swedish immigrant heritage; with Augustana College faculty members and campus organizations; as well as with the columns of Swedish-American newspapers and organizational journals.

Persons desiring information and assistance with regard to family history or genealogy are encouraged to contact the Center's Researcher-Secretary. Those wishing to undertake other lines of research are encouraged to contact the Center's Archivist. Where questions cannot be answered, the staff is prepared to refer patrons to other libraries and archives, both in the United States and Sweden. Due to the limitations of time alone, the staff cannot accept requests for lengthy translations from Swedish to English.

### Collecting and Cataloging

Books, periodicals, newspapers and original manuscript collections constitute the backbone of the Center's resources and continue to grow in volume. A two-year microfilming project carried out by Lennart Setterdahl is currently adding a wealth of new documentation on the immigrant generations, their descendants and their institutions from all sectors of the country. When completed, this project will give the Center a unique collection of Swedish-American church records, representing congregations of originally Swedish denominations: Lutheran, Baptist, Mission Covenant, Methodist and Evangelical Free. A substantial array of data on Swedish-American cultural, fraternal, and benevolent organizations will also be available.

Current and retrospective cataloging of the Center's books, serials and periodicals is carried out in collaboration with the College Library, which utilizes OCLC terminals for bibliographic input and on-line searching. Subject classification incorporates both the Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress systems. At present the Center's card catalogs for printed materials provide access to main entries and shelf listings; basic *subject* access is

through the main card catalog, housed on the 2nd floor of the College Library. A combination of card catalogs, special indexes, accession records and unpublished inventories provide access to manuscript collections, maps, subject files, genealogical data, and otherwise uncataloged items. Complementing this bibliographic control are two recent publications, each of which addresses major components of the Center's collections:

Lilly Setterdahl, comp., *Swedish-American Newspapers*. A guide to the microfilms held by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois. Augustana Library Publications, No. 35. Rock Island: Augustana College Library, 1981.

*Guide to Swedish-American Archival and Manuscript Sources in the United States*. Chicago: Swedish-American Historical Society, 1983. This work lists the majority of the Center's church and organizational record collections as well as all personal manuscript collections received up to September, 1982. Nearly 1/3 of the *Guide's* listings fall under the Center heading, and 1/2 of the *Guide* contains repository listings for the State of Illinois.

## Resources

### I. Book Collections

*Immigration Collection*, around 2,000 catalogued volumes, was established as a special subject collection in the 1960s by Augustana College Library and is currently maintained by the Center as a major collection of printed source materials on Swedish immigration to North America and Swedish-American culture. Special concentration and emphases include: Swedish-American bibliography; background perspectives on Swedish and Scandinavian emigration; histories of Swedish settlements in the US and Canada; histories and publications of Swedish-American organizations and institutions; Swedish-American literature; Swedish-American publishing; Swedish-American fine arts and music; Swedish travelers and visitors on the North American continent; Swedish-American biography and family history; Swedish-American religious life, including denominational histories as well as anniversary booklets for many individual congregations.

*O.A. Linder Collection*, of about 600 volumes was donated to the Library in the late 1930s by Oliver A. Linder, a former editor of the Swedish-American weekly, *Svenska Amerikanaren* (Chicago). It complements the Immigration Collection by its holding of Swedish-American literature, general Swedish-American history, Swedish-American fine arts, Swedish-American journalism and press history, as well as Swedish-American religious life.

*G.N. Swan Collection*, of about 6,000 volumes was donated to the Library in the late 1920s by Gustav N. Swan, a key figure in Swedish-American cultural and literary circles. Besides involvement in local business interests and responsibilities to Augustana College and the Augustana Synod, Swan served as Swedish vice consul for Sweden and Norway (1899-1905) and for

Sweden (1905–1929) in Sioux City, Iowa. Emphases of this collection include bibliophilic rarities; general Swedish and Scandinavian literature up to the 1930s; Swedish literature in translation (English and other languages), particularly works of Tegnér; foreign literature classics, especially Shakespeare and Dante; general history and travel descriptions; biography and genealogy; church history and history of religions; and some Swedish-Americanana.

*Scandinaviana Collection*, around 750 volumes, a “hybrid” collection of books and some serial publications from older sections of the College Library dealing generally with background conditions and features of the Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden. Subject matter includes history, topography and local history, education, national literatures and fine arts, church history and religion.

## II. *Periodicals*

All four of the above collections contain periodical and serial publications, but those *currently* received are basically incorporated into the Immigration Collection.

At present the Center subscribes to 20 periodicals in the fields of immigration history, Swedish-American cultural organizations, genealogy, and the professions of librarianship and archives. Other, smaller publications from Swedish-American organizations are filed in special subject files. The Immigration Collection also contains the bulk of now defunct periodicals relating to general Swedish-American cultural and literary enterprises as well as significant journals and annuals of Swedish-American churches and organizations. The Center is a subscriber to three *currently* published Swedish-American biweeklies and one weekly newspaper, as well as one Swedish-Canadian monthly, one Swedish-Finnish monthly and one Swedish news digest (*Sverige-Nytt*).

The Center has many quarterlies and monthlies published in the United States or Sweden, mostly from the late 1800s and early 1900s, the majority in the original, with a few on microfilm. Many are denominational, including papers published by individual congregations; papers for young people and children; missionary journals; Sunday School papers; and Swedish-American and Scandinavian-American family magazines.

## III. *Microfilms*

1. *Swedish-American Newspapers*: Currently 1,540 reels of microfilmed newspapers published in 21 states and Canada. A guide is available, as noted above.

2. *Swedish-American Church Records*: Nearly 2,000 reels of microfilm containing minutes, membership records and ministerial acts for most congregations of all major denominations founded by Swedes in the United States and Canada. These records include a few Norwegian, Danish and Finnish immigrants. The denominations represented are: former Augustana Lutheran

churches (now Lutheran Church in America); The Evangelical Covenant Church; Swedish Baptist General Conference; former Swedish Methodist churches; Evangelical Free Church; American Lutheran Church (3 originally Swedish in Iowa); St. Ansgarius Episcopal Church (Chicago); Bishop Hill Colony Church and Church on the Hill (Adventist), Bishop Hill, IL; also some conference and district records.

3. *Swedish-American Organizations*: A growing collection of microfilms containing records of the Independent Order of Svithiod, Independent Order of Good Templars, Independent Order of Vikings, Scandinavian Fraternity of America, and the Swedish Cultural Society. Also included are records of music and singing societies, provincial clubs, religious organizations, occupational clubs, athletic associations, hospitals, old people's homes, children's homes, educational institutions, insurance and land companies, as well as businesses founded by Swedes.

4. *Bishop Hill Colony and Post Colony Papers*: 13 reels comprising materials held by other depositories in Illinois or in private hands pertaining to the history of the Bishop Hill Colony and the Bishop Hill community.

5. *Personal Papers*. Some significant manuscript collections have been microfilmed in the past and deserve special mention. In some cases the original manuscripts are held by other institutions. Included here are the personal and professional papers of Augustana College presidents T.N. Hasselquist and Olof Olsson; the papers of Augustana Synod pastor and pioneer Chicago churchman Erland Carlsson; correspondence between Swedish-American authors and journalists J.G.R. Banér and J.O. Viking; papers of former Augustana professor Josua Lindahl; and the diary of the early Chicago Swede, Olof Gottfrid Lange. The personal and professional papers of Lars Paul Esbjörn, pioneer Augustana Synod pastor as well as founder and first president of Augustana College, are partially microfilmed. The entire collection, which includes papers and memorabilia for members of the Esbjörn family, is being prepared for microfilming at a later date. Recent additions to the Center's holdings of microfilmed manuscripts include private letter collections and diaries for J.O. Lindh, Hans Rask, Axel Berg, Olof Liljegen and Eric Norelius.

6. *Passenger Indexes*: 27 reels of microfilmed embarkation records (name indexes) from the Swedish ports of Göteborg (1869–1893) and Malmö (1874–1891). The Göteborg material includes data on Finnish emigrants for the years 1869–1884.

#### IV. *Manuscripts*

At present the manuscript holdings have an extent of some 120 linear feet; they are organized into two basic categories, a) personal or family-related documents; b) organizational and institutional records. Included are a wide range of individual and family papers, diaries and journals, literary



manuscripts and the like, all representative of early Swedish settlers, clergy and laymen, business people and educators, as well as what might be termed the common stream of Swedish immigrant life. Although the main geographical concentration is the Midwest and Great Plains, there are materials of relevance to Swedes on the East and West Coasts. The more prominent collections are the following:

A. *Personal Papers*

1. *G.N. Swan* (1856–1938): at present 90 boxes of personal and professional papers of significance for study of Swedish-American literature and press history, Swedish-American cultural organizations and individual biographies.
2. *O.A. Linder* (1862–1939): 24 boxes of general clippings and obituary files as well as manuscripts for newspaper articles concerning all aspects of Swedish-American life and culture. All material has been indexed on cards, ca. 17,000 author/title/subject entries.
3. *Eric Norelius* (1833–1916): 16 boxes of indexed correspondence and papers from his years as an early Augustana Synod pastor and as synod president. A key collection to understanding the beginnings of Swedish Lutheranism in the United States and the Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Synod.
4. *Erland Carlsson* (1822–1893): 10 boxes of correspondence and papers relating to his years as a pioneer Augustana Synod pastor (Chicago and Andover), synod president and college administrator.
5. *Samuel Magnus Hill* (1851–1921): 6 boxes of personal, business and literary papers relating to his work as Lutheran missionary, educator, and college president (Luther College, Wahoo, NE), songwriter and poet. Of significance for study of Lutheran missions among Utah Swedes.
6. *John Olof Viking* (1874–1947): 4 boxes and 7 volumes of correspondence and clippings relating to his literary career and studies of American Indian languages and folklore. Of importance for research into Swedish-American literature and the poetry of such individuals as Johan Gustav Runesköld Banér, Viking's friend.
7. *Oscar W. Anderson* (1863–1900): 1 box of literary notebooks, autobiographical accounts and scrapbook materials relating to the career of this Swedish American journalist who served as editor of *Vårt Land* (Jamestown, New York) in 1892–1894.
8. *Arthur Helge Swan* (1885–1916): 29 boxes of personal papers and literary manuscripts of the only child of Gustav N. Swan, whose aspiring career as a playwright and drama critic was snuffed out before its time. Of importance for students of the American and European theater around the turn of the century.



9. *Philip John Stoneberg* (1875–1919): 3 boxes of correspondence, personal papers, literary manuscripts and documentary material largely relating to the settlement and colonists of Bishop Hill, Illinois. This collection is also available on microfilm, as part of the 13 reel collection of Bishop Hill Colony and Post-Colony Papers.

10. *Birger Swenson* (1895– ): 12 boxes of personal and professional papers relating to his career as a Lutheran layman and civic leader but primarily his general managership of the Augustana Book Concern up to 1963. Dr. Swenson and his wife, Lyal, are the founders of the Center.

11. *Ernst Wilhelm Olson* (1870–1958): 4 boxes of personal and professional papers of this Swedish-American journalist, author, poet and hymn writer, who served as editor for the Engberg-Holmberg Publishing Company in Chicago and the Augustana Book Concern in Rock Island.

12. *Johan Edvard Liljeholm* (1823–1887): a handwritten volume of reminiscences from the travels of a Swedish bookkeeper in America during the early westward migration, 1846–1850. Of importance to research of the Bishop Hill Colony's earliest years.

13. *Ernst Teofil Skarstedt* (1857–1929): 42 volumes of scrapbooks documenting the writings, thoughts, tastes and opinions of this key figure in Swedish-American journalism and literary circles. Included here are scrapbook collections of articles, pictures and engravings that Skarstedt assembled for his own pleasure or edification.

14. *Sven T. Olson* (1838–1911) and family: 3 boxes containing a total of 70 folders of correspondence between members of this Swedish immigrant family from Blekinge province in Sweden. A good source of documentation on the westward movement from states such as Illinois to Kansas and Nebraska.

#### B. *Organizational and Institutional records*

Some of the more prominent organizational record collections are the following:

1. *Nytta och Nöje Sällskap*, Rock Island, IL. 3 boxes of papers and records, dating from 1900, of one of the oldest and still existing cultural societies for Swedes at or around Augustana College.

2. *Scandinavian Temperance Union*, Moline, IL. 1 box of minutes, correspondence and other papers relating to the organization's temperance campaign in the Quad Cities area between 1914 and 1922 (formed by five different churches in Moline and Rock Island).

3. *St. Ansgar Academy*, Carver, MN. A small collection of material for the years 1860–1865 (annual reports and the will of a student-turned Union soldier) from the predecessor of Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN.

4. *Svenska Litteratursällskapet*, Moline, IL. 1 box of correspondence and minutes, 1928–1960, for this literary discussion group and reading circle.
5. *Swedish Colonization Society*, Rock Island, IL. 1 volume of minutes, 1884–1888, for stockholders and Board of Directors of this society, chartered under the laws of the state of Iowa for the purpose of purchasing tracts of land for sale to Swedish immigrants.
6. *Augustana Book Concern*, Rock Island, IL. 2 boxes of file photographs of Augustana Synod institutions, all used for the purpose of illustrating publications of the ABC. Filed with these are scrapbook compilations of Swedish and English-language tracts issued by the ABC during the early years of this century.
7. *Adelphia College*, Seattle, WA. An undated collection of three manuscript histories of the College and its faculty members by various individuals. The College had been started by Swedish Baptists in 1905, but was forced to close in 1918.

#### V. *Maps*

The Center is the repository for the Thorsten Hanson Collection of Swedish topographical maps, donated to Augustana College in the 1970s. Produced by the General Map Agency of Sweden (*Rikets allmänna kartverk*), these detailed maps show individual farms and homesteads and cover nearly all settled areas of Sweden. In 1982 the Center purchased additional and updated map sheets to complete this standing collection. Maps such as these help to locate and visualize the areas, villages and farms from which Swedish immigrants left for America. Maps of the parishes of the Church of Sweden are also available. These are often of considerable help in locating parish boundaries.

#### VI. *Source Material for Family History and Genealogy.*

The primary sources are the extensive microfilm copies of Swedish-American church and society records, as well as the passenger indexes listed above. In addition, biographical articles and obituaries can be found in such church annuals as *Korsbaneret* (Augustana Lutheran Church), 1880–1950, with cumulative indexes in 1929 and 1950; *My Church* (Augustana Lutheran Church), 1915–1946; and *Vinterrosor* (Swedish Methodist), 1903–1931. Equivalent material can be found in the O.A. Linder clipping files, which include a special obituary segment for the years 1941–1947 (most material from *Svenska Amerikanaren-Tribunen*, Chicago).

Also available are a register of parishes of the Church of Sweden with current names and addresses; photocopies of some Illinois cemetery records; files of indexed biographical documents; as well as family histories and genealogies.

It is hoped that a complete biographical index of all publications of the former Augustana Lutheran Church can be added soon.

## VI. *Photographs*

Photographs currently received as part of manuscript collections or distinct creator units are left intact. Prior to the formation of the Center a special photograph collection had been established under the name of "Scandinavian-American Portraits." This is a fully name-indexed collection of photographic prints and printed photographs relating to Swedish immigration, Augustana College, pastors of the Augustana Synod, and various professional people in what was once known as Swedish America.

### Family Research Guidelines

If you are doing Swedish-American family research; it would be to your advantage to collect as much information as possible before contacting us:

- 1) Talk to older relatives. Ask them where the immigrants' children were baptized and confirmed (denomination and location of church).
- 2) Search for old letters and other documents from Sweden. Look for flyleaf notations in family Bibles and name and place of studio on portraits.
- 3) If possible, obtain copies of naturalization records, marriage licenses, deeds, and death certificates (in county courthouses), census records and city directories (inquire at local library). The documents will provide you with your ancestors' addresses which can help you determine which church they might have belonged to. A pastor's name on an official church document is also helpful.

The place of birth in Sweden, or place of emigration, are the only aspects of your search, where the Center can be of service. When you have assembled your records, we would appreciate a copy of your family tree. Please remember to list the immigrants' place of birth, year of emigration, date and place of marriage, name and data of spouse, place of settlement, number of children, and place and date of death. Your family history will be part of the permanent collection and the Swedish immigrants will be registered for future generations.

The Center is located in the Denkmann Memorial Library of Augustana College, 3520 Seventh Avenue, Rock Island, IL 61201. The mailing address is c/o Augustana College, Box 175, College Center, Rock Island, IL 61201. The Researcher-Secretary can be reached by telephone at (309) 794-7204 and the Archivist-Librarian at (309) 794-7221. The Center is open to the general public from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. every day, except Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. There may be some restricted hours during school vacation periods.

The acting director at the present time is Dr. Joel Lundeen; the Researcher-Secretary is Lilly Setterdahl and the Archivist-Librarian is Kermit Westerberg.