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Treasures in Rock Island

News and general information about the Swenson Center. Part I

BY JILL SEAHOLM

The Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center is an academic research library founded in 1981 by Birger and Lyal Swenson to collect information about and to promote the study of Swedish immigration to North America. Our center operations are divided into four areas: *academic, library, archives, and genealogy.*

Academic activities

One of our academic activities is to hold conferences here in Rock Island or in other cities, often in conjunction with other organizations. They are open to the public and usually free, and we try to have one every 2-3 years.

Our director, Dr. Dag Blanck, arranges for scholars to come and pre-

sent papers and answer any questions you may have about the topic. A recent conference we had at Augustana was in the fall of 2001 and was called "Being Swedish American Today." In 1996 we held a conference here called "O Pioneers! Swedes on the American Frontier." Its focus was on the early phase of the Swedish mass migration.



The main research room at the Swenson Center. From left: visiting researcher Jennifer Attebery, Idaho State University; Jill Seaholm, head genealogist; and Christina Johansson, archivist. Four microfilm readers are in the back. October 2004.

In October of 2004, we hosted a conference about immigrant letters called "I am alive and well," which was a conference about letters and diaries of Swedish immigrants in North America. The keynote address was given by Werner Sollors of Harvard University. The phrase "I am alive and well" is translated from the Swedish "*Jag lever och har hälsan,*" which was a rather typical way for Swedish immigrants to start their letters home. A short summary of this conference can be found on p.9.

For 2005 or 2006, we are in preliminary planning stages for a conference about Swedes in the American West. It will probably take place in Seattle and be co-sponsored by the Swenson Center, the Scandinavian Department of the University of Washington, and possibly others.

Publications

When we hold or take part in such a conference, the papers that are presented are usually published later, either in a book or in the *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*, which is published by the Swedish-American Historical Society in Chicago.

Lectures and scholarships

The conferences are only every 2-3 years, but every year, usually in October, we invite a scholar here to present a paper on specific topics related to our academic work. That public lecture series is called the *O. Fritiof Ander Lecture in Immigration History*. Many times when there is an academic conference going on here, the conference keynote address doubles as the year's Ander Lecture.

Another way that we promote academic research is to offer a stipendium called the *Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellowship*. This offers \$1,500 toward a 3-week stay to anyone pursuing academic research in any aspect of Swedish-American history. The deadline for applications is May 1st each year, so you have some time to get your applications in! The 2004 winner was *Joanna*

Daxell of Canada, who was here in November. The 2003 winner was *Paul Lubotina* of Saint Louis University in St. Louis, who was studying Swedes in the Iron Range region of Minnesota. A couple of previous winners were *Lars Nordström* of Oregon, who was studying the minister and poet, Samuel Magnus Hill, and *Malin Glimäng*, who was here to study Swedish immigrant women.

Visiting Scholars

Other scholars appear without the support of the Olsson Fellowship. Last spring, we welcomed *Mrs. Elinor Barr* of Thunder Bay, Ontario, who is in charge of the massive *Swedes in Canada* project and will eventually publish a book about it. She was here to look at any Canadian records we had. Her web site is www.swedesincanada.ca. Mrs. Barr says that she welcomes feedback, so if you have information about relatives from Sweden in Canada, please contact her.

A frequent visitor to the Swenson Center is *Reverend David Gustafson* of Moline, who is doing graduate work for Linköping University in Sweden. He is studying D.L. Moody, founder of the Moody Bible Institute.

Our academic newsletter, *Swenson Center News*, which comes out once a year, is available for free. We

would be happy to add you to the mailing list for *SC News* if you don't already receive it.

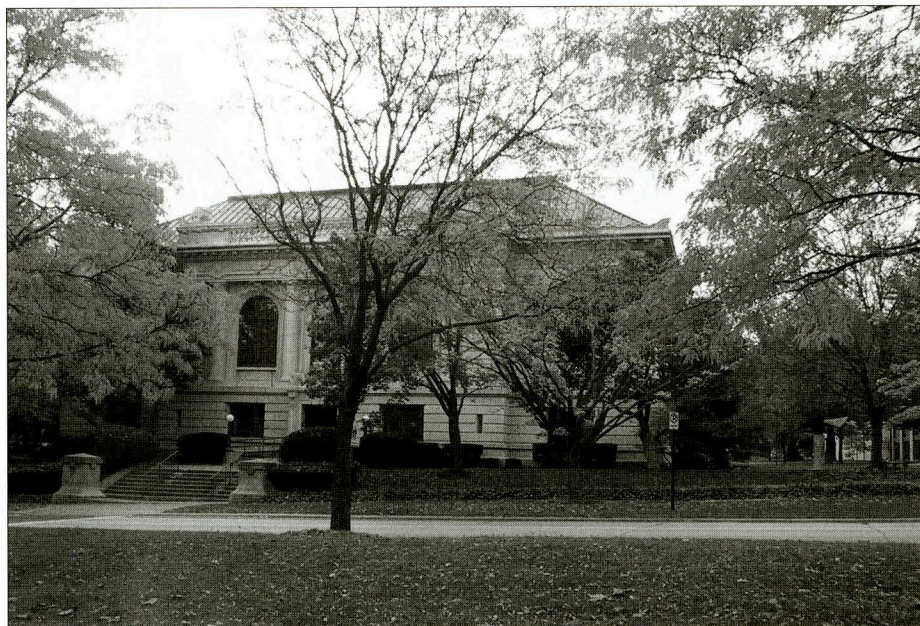
The Library

In the library area of our work, we have several book collections, some of which are already established and closed to new titles, and other collections are constantly being added to as relevant titles appear in the field. One example is the *Immigration Book Collection*, which contains books by and about Swedish organizations in the U.S. and Canada, local histories of Swedish-American settlements, and other Swedish-American and immigration-related topics.

My co-worker, *Anne Jenner*, is constantly on the lookout for new titles to purchase for the Swenson Center.

We also have inherited Dr. Nils William Olsson's personal library and we have named it the *Nils William Olsson Book Collection*, or "NWO" for short. The NWO Collection is filled with books on Swedish genealogy and many local histories from Sweden.

In 2001 we determined that the environmental control system in our basement stacks was no longer sufficient to keep the library and archives as cool and dry as they needed to be. The Chairman of our



The Denkmann Memorial Building at Augustana College, which houses The Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center. October 2004.

Advisory Board, Glen E. Brolander, sought and received for us a grant from two of the Wallenberg foundations in Sweden to pay for a new environmental system. It was installed in the summer of 2002 and now our books and archives are kept at a much more reliable and constant 60 degrees and 30-40% humidity, which is necessary to prevent moisture and inhibit the growth of mold. Sixty degrees may not sound very cold, but if we need to spend any amount of time in there, we wear sweaters or coats – that dry cold goes straight to the bone. In addition to the new climate system, we also enclosed one more basement room to become a part of the stacks, so now even more of our materials are well-protected.

The Nils William Olsson Room

We dedicated that newly-enclosed room to the *Nils William Olsson Collection* and named the room after him, the Nils William Olsson Room. He spent many years in the foreign service living in Iceland, Sweden, and Norway, and has published many books, such as *Swedish Passenger Arrivals to U.S. Ports 1820-1850* (with Erik Wikén) and *Swedish Voters in Chicago 1888*. He founded this journal, *Swedish American Genealogist* or *SAG*, and he still writes articles for it. He turned 95 this year and still is a figurehead of Swedish and Swedish-American family history research.

Contacts with “Augie”

We are not in the same building as they are, but we are well-connected to the Augustana College Library. Last year the Augustana Library stopped being a member of the Quad Cities’ local online library computer system, “QuadLinc,” and instead joined a consortium of Illinois College and University Library Computer Systems. The Swenson Center is therefore also a part of this consortium. This means that there are bigger opportunities for more people to have access to our books and

periodicals and to be able to see what we have and, we hope, make interlibrary loan requests. Anne has been on top of all of those changes and sees that everything is accurate in our online catalog, using Augustana student workers for some of the more time-consuming and repetitive tasks whenever possible.

Interlibrary Loans

Our books cannot be checked out, but if you find that we own a book that you want to spend some time reading and you can’t make it here during our open hours, you can go to your local public library, even here in the Quad Cities, and have them request it for you via interlibrary loan through the Augustana library.

If your library does a nationwide search for it, it might also come from any other library in the country that owns it and is willing to lend it. When one of our books arrives for you at your library, you won’t be able to take it out of the library, but you will still have a more ample opportunity to use it. Not all of our books are available on interlibrary loan because perhaps they are too old, out of print, or maybe we’re the only library we know of in the country that owns it.

The Archives

Our archives area of work consists of clipping collections, personal papers, letters, and organizational records. It takes a lot of time and money to process a collection and make it presentable and useful to the public. Some collections that have a lot of Swedish language materials in them will require some knowledge of the language. We employees can usually handle the language, but there is usually a lot of busy-work involved, so when possible, we seek out Augustana’s Swedish exchange students to work for us, as well as Americans who are Scandinavian Studies majors or minors. Sometimes not all of those factors come together at the same time and it can take some years before a donated collection is processed.

Part of processing a collection involves removing staples and any metal clips and fasteners that can potentially rust onto the papers, sorting and classifying the information, and entering it into a database so that we know what is in the collection. Materials are placed in acid-free plastic sleeves or envelopes or between sheets of acid-free paper and into archival boxes. If the original is very frail, we’ll also photocopy it onto acid-free paper and store that copy with it.

Upsala College

Currently my co-worker *Christina Johansson* is working on a few different archival collections that are not yet ready for the public eye. One of the largest collections is the archives of Upsala College in East Orange, NJ.

In the spring of 1995, Upsala College was forced to close its doors and file for bankruptcy. Upsala was founded as a Swedish-Lutheran college in 1893 in Brooklyn, NY. It was *the* Swedish college in the eastern U.S. and was a sister-college to Augustana. In fact, its organizational meeting took place in a classroom in Augustana’s Old Main building in Rock Island. Upsala moved once or twice and eventually found its way to East Orange, NJ.

When it closed in 1995, our director made arrangements with the college and he and a colleague drove to New Jersey in a moving van. With a very limited amount of time, they packed the archives and contents of filing cabinets into moving boxes, and rescued as much of the college archives as they could fit into that truck.

There was very much material from the college archives, and it had been hurriedly packed into boxes on graduation day, not necessarily in any order, and quickly loaded into our basement stacks. It has been a multi-year process to sort and inventory it, and it still goes on. We owe many thanks to our volunteer, Pastor *Robert Pearson* of East Moline, who is a graduate of Upsala College. (See *SAG* 3/04, p. 11 for more infor-

mation on Pastor Pearson. [Editor's note]).

For the past few years he has been coming one afternoon a week and has so far processed over 165 linear feet of material from the College's founding up to its closing.

Pastor Pearson and a student assistant processed almost 100 boxes of Upsala College records this past year. The Upsala archives do not include student records. However, the Presidential papers, files from the Dean's office, other administrative records, photos, faculty publications, student honor theses, commencement addresses, and personnel files are now sorted and inventoried. They remove staples and clips, and sort and enter the information into a database. Pastor Pearson also reminisces about his college days because as a student he had worked in the administrative offices and knew a few of the people whose letters he is handling. It's unfortunate that the school had to close, but Pastor Pearson is having a wonderful time with the archives, and we are extremely glad to have the opportunity to preserve them, and grateful for the hundreds of hours that he has put into it for us. Their alumni web site is at www.upsala.org

SWEA

The archives of SWEA – the Swedish Women's Educational Association – were donated to us in 1996. They are almost entirely in Swedish, and last year we used the hired help of Swedish student *Ida Hallin* from Stockholm. SWEA was started in 1979 and today has more than 8,000 members in 76 local chapters in 34 countries around the world.

The purpose of SWEA is to promote Swedish culture and the language and serve as a network for Swedish women living abroad. This is accomplished with a wide variety of cultural programs such as lectures, exhibits, musical performances, and Swedish holiday celebrations, and, at the international level, by awarding annual scholarships to graduate students. SWEA International pub-

lishes a biannual newsletter that is available online and sent to all members. Most local chapters also have a website and a newsletter.

The SWEA material that has so far been donated to the Swenson Center includes: minutes from meetings, newsletters, financial papers and statements, and correspondence. To become a member of SWEA, you must be at least 18 years of age, have lived abroad for at least one year, and speak Swedish. Visit their web site at www.swea.org

Allan Kastrup

The *Allan Kastrup Collection* has now been processed. It consists of the personal archives of Allan Kastrup, a big name in the American-Swedish New Exchange of New York. He was born, raised, and educated in Sweden and then got a job at the Swedish news agency TT. In 1943, he moved to New York City and joined the staff at the American-Swedish News Exchange. Three years later he became the director, a position he held until his retirement in 1964, when the News Exchange ceased to exist and its functions were assumed by the Swedish Information Service.

After his retirement, Kastrup contributed significantly to the field of Swedish-American history with his book *The Swedish Heritage in America* in 1975.

Kastrup's collection spans from the early 1920s to the 1980s and includes correspondence, press releases, publicity material, photos from the *1948 Swedish Pioneer Centennial*, and an extensive collection on Swedish culture, foreign policy, and politics as covered in the American press in that time. Special attention and coverage appear to have been given to Prince Bertil's numerous official U.S. visits, Sweden and its neutrality during WWII, the Swedish Pioneer Centennial in 1948, Sweden and socialism, and Swedish criticism toward the Vietnam War.

Two Smaller Collections

Two smaller, but equally interesting collections that have recently been

processed are the *Sune Lundberg Collection* and the papers from *Luther College* in Wahoo, Nebraska.

Sune Lundberg

Sune Lundberg had gathered materials to write a book about American pilots in Sweden in World War II. Unfortunately, he passed away unexpectedly in 2002, but his widow donated his papers to the Swenson Center. The extensive collection documents American pilots who were either forced to land or crashed in Sweden during WWII, and research includes personal accounts and correspondence with American internees in Sweden, newspaper clippings, and official documents from both Washington, DC, and the Royal Swedish Military Archives in Stockholm.

Luther College

The papers from Luther College, also known as the Luther Academy, were donated in 2003 by Midland Lutheran College in Fremont, Nebraska. The material includes executive meeting minutes from Luther, minutes from various student literary societies, and letters and reports sent to the Nebraska conference. Augustana Professor Emeritus James Dowie based his dissertation on this material. The dissertation was republished in 1959 by the Augustana Historical Society with the title *Prairie Grass Dividing*.

Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.)

Augustana College student intern and Scandinavian Studies major *David Wise* has cleaned, processed, and described a total of 51 linear feet of records from the Swedish Olive Lodge and Rebekha Lodge in Moline, Illinois, and other smaller, local I.O.O.F. lodges. This material was donated to the Swenson Center in the early 1990s, when the Swedish Olive Lodge ceased to exist.

To be continued