

3-1-2018

News from the Swenson Center: The Volunteers

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Recommended Citation

Seaholm, Jill; Leaf, Helene; and Mayer, Judy (2018) "News from the Swenson Center: The Volunteers," *Swedish American Genealogist*. Vol. 38: No. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol38/iss1/5>

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News from the Swenson Center

Many organizations rely on assistance from volunteers, and the Swenson Center is no different. In conjunction with *National Volunteer Week, April 15-21, 2018*, this article features the Swenson Center's two genealogy volunteers, *Helene Leaf* and *Judy Ahlqvist Mayer*, who mostly assist patrons in the use of Swedish parish records, but willingly do anything we ask of them without complaint. Many thanks to them for their hours and hours of service to the Swenson Center!

Jill Seaholm, Head of Genealogical Services!

Helene's story

My name is *Helene Norlin Leaf*. I volunteer at the Swenson Center on Tuesdays. Mainly I help people search Swedish records, but also help with Swedish-American records that are available at the Center. Occasionally Jill throws a few other projects my way. I love the research, but I am happy to send people on their way with tons of new information to ponder and organize!

I was born in Chicago and raised there. On my mother's side of the family, all my great-grandparents came to the U.S. during the years 1865-1869, and most of them went to Chicago; one great-grandparent went to Hobart, Indiana, which is about 40 miles from Chicago. My father and all his siblings were born in Sweden. My father immigrated in 1916 with his mother and

three sisters, but his father came in 1902 and three brothers and the other two sisters came in the years 1908 to 1923. All of them settled in Chicago.

In 1999 I was living in Yorkville, Illinois, southwest of Chicago. When I was taking my son to Valparaiso University, we drove through Hobart, Indiana, and I saw a sign for Augustana Lutheran Church. I thought that must be the church where my grandparents were married. A few months later I visited that church, and read that my great-great-grandfather and great-grandfather had built the original church building. That was the start of my genealogy researches. While living close to both Chicago and Hobart, I visited the places my ancestors had lived; I visited libraries, historical societies, The National Archives Records Administration (NARA), and other repositories of genealogical information. I went to the Swenson Center; I graduated from Augustana College, and I remember the Denkmann Library. Now that I am living in Moline, Illinois, I get back on the campus frequently; I enjoy the Swedish activities.

My husband is also Swedish, and his ancestors immigrated from the years 1853-1872. They went to some of the hot spots of Swedish immigration: Andover, Illinois; Lindsborg, Kansas; Carver County, Minnesota; and Salt Lake City, Utah. I have researched those areas also.

Judy's story

My name is *Judy Ahlqvist Mayer* and I volunteer at the Swenson Center on Wednesdays. My genealogy study has led to learning a great deal about Swedish history and geography, but also to learning about those American events that affected my ancestors: the Chicago Fire, the Civil War, the Dakota War, the Depression, and the Homestead Act. I regret that I did not start earlier and also ask questions of parents and other relatives. I am grateful for those who have helped me along the way and also for those who did ask questions and saved pictures and information.

Come visit the Swenson Center - a great place for research!

I grew up in Central Minnesota (St. Cloud) always loving history which might be genetic thanks to my director ancestor, Abraham Ahlqvist (1794 - 1844). Actually, my grandparents or great-grandparents all immigrated from various parts of Sweden between 1869 and 1902 to the Midwest (Dakota Territory and Minnesota). I loved hearing them tell family stories and reading about family histories. My usual question about anything was "how come?" Seeking answers, I found I loved doing research, especially using original documents to verify those stories. Thus, early on I had the genealogy bug. Discovering the Swenson Center in its early days in the attic, I found resources that helped me solve some family mysteries which years later opened the way to discovering living Swedish cousins with whom we visit and communicate with almost daily at times. Finding and reconnecting various branches to the family tree has been a life-long project for me.

Knowing how visiting the places where my ancestors were born and raised in Sweden made me feel and the thrill of finding them in the records back in Sweden and wanting to help others find their Swedish roots is one reason that I joyfully volunteer at the Swenson Center. It really combines so many of the things I enjoy and I am thankful to be given the opportunity to help there.



The nice volunteers: from left Helene Norlin Leaf and Judy Ahlqvist Mayer.