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Augustana Seniors Fall 1884 : Introduction

Thomas E. Bengtson

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The series of papers “Augustana Seniors Fall 1884” represent the work of students in FYI 102 Practical Genealogy, taught by me for the first time in the winter term of the 2016–2017 academic year. The course is part of a three-term sequence of First Year Inquiry courses that all first-year students at Augustana take. The students in my class worked in small teams to investigate the family history and genealogy of an Augustana alum. The alums were taken from the members of the senior class as listed in the Augustana College catalog of 1884–1885.¹ The resulting papers were part of the requirements of the course.

Somewhat remarkably by modern standards, the catalogs in the 1880s listed every student at the college. Although the exact information given varied from year to year, it typically included not only each student’s name but also where they were born, the year they were born, whether or not they received financial aid, when they started their studies at Augustana, and where they had been living just prior to coming to Augustana.

The catalog of 1884–1885 listed eighteen students in the senior class. They proved to be a remarkable bunch. Thirteen became pastors. Several went to do graduate work and a few earned PhDs. Yale was a popular choice. At least two became college professors. One became a leading expert on ferns.

Augustana Library Special Collections was a good starting point. Academic records from the 1880s are not protected by privacy laws. For many of the alums, there was a record card signed by the alum himself. (All of these alums were men.) The card had more detailed information about the student and his family, often giving such details as the occupation of his father. Other resources from Special Collections were also highly informative.

Many of the alums were immigrants from Sweden or had parents who had immigrated from Sweden. Armed with the knowledge of what parish in Sweden the student or his family had emigrated from, it was in most cases possible to find that family in Swedish parish records. The Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, via *ArkivDigital*, was able to provide access to these Swedish records. Much of the work on the ancestors of each alum was done here.

The Swenson Center also is a repository for microfilm copies of Swedish American church records. As the seniors of 1884 were a religious lot, they went to church in this country. Quite often they could be found in these American records. Sometimes information about their descendants showed up.

Another common source for many teams was Conrad Bergendoff’s *Augustana Ministerium*.² Although compiled from other sources, it is generally reliable and gives information about the career of each pastor ordained in the Augustana Lutheran Church.

The research teams were encouraged to consult a wide variety of sources. Some of the more frequently used sources included the Augustana student newspaper, *Augustana Observer*, records in genealogical website *FamilySearch.org*, and various census records in the United States.

1 *Augustana College Catalog 1884–1885*, p. 12–13, volume bound in *Augustana College Catalogue 1871–1891*, Aug. Inst., LD 271, A6651, C3, 1871–1891; Augustana College, Special Collections, Rock Island, Illinois.

2 Conrad Bergendoff, *The Augustana Ministerium* (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Historical Society, 1980), page 90.

Each paper has several sections. The first is a biography of the Augustana alum himself. For some much is known, while for others there isn't a lot to say. Next comes an ancestors report (ahnantafel). In almost all cases, a more complete report would have been possible if time permitted. The next section is a descendants report. For some alums there is quite a bit to say, but for others there is almost nothing. Descendants who might still be alive are indicated only as "living" even when the research team know the names of the descendants. (Citations may provide the reader with sources as to who these living people might be.)

Time was short, and so each report has some open questions suitable for further research. Interested readers are invited to pick up the trail and fill in the gaps. The teams created records for their subjects on the Family Tree on *FamilySearch*. The report gives the record locator on *FamilySearch* and readers can use this locator to find the Augustana alum in this big and growing tree.

The final section for each report is a list of sources. We have tried to follow good genealogical practice in creating citations as footnotes and then listing our sources at the end. In the few instances where an image of the alum was available, credits for the photograph are given at the very end.

Acknowledgments

My students and I are especially grateful to Special Collections librarian Samantha Crisp, who gave much useful guidance on what materials were available and was generous with her time.

Many thanks go to the staff of the Swenson Center, including Jill Seaholm, Susanne Titus, and Lisa Huntsha, who were patient and generous as they first helped the teams locate these old Swedish records and then translate them into English.

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Sources

Augustana College Catalog 1884-1885. Augustana College. Special Collections. Rock Island, Illinois.

Bergendoff, Conrad. *The Augustana Ministerium: A Study of the Careers of the 2,504 Pastors of the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Synod/Church 1850-1962*. Rock island, Illinois, Augustana Historical Society, 1980.