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Swenson Center News, 2003

Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, Augustana College

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Swenson Center News

PUBLICATION OF THE SWENSON SWEDISH IMMIGRATION RESEARCH CENTER  NUMBER 17  2003

A Note from the Director...

Maintaining good facilities is important for a library and archives. The Swenson Center is fortunate in having facilities that are both functional and appropriate to our mission and at the same time beautiful, as visitors to the Center in our current offices in Denkmann Memorial Hall on the Augustana College campus can attest.

Climate control is a challenge that many archives and libraries face, especially those located in areas where heat and humidity are high. Our geographic location means that we have had to face such problems, but as we reported briefly in last year's *Swenson Center News*, in November 2002 the Center received a \$300,000 grant from two Swedish foundations related to the Wallenberg family to address the issue.

I am pleased to report that during the past summer and fall, a major renovation project of the Swenson Center library took place and that we now have up-to-date climate control in our library and archives. We extend our gratitude to the Wallenberg foundations in Stockholm for their financial support and to Augustana College for working with us on this important project. Christina Johansson, our head of library and archival services, admirably served as coordinator for this project, and you can learn more about it in her article in this issue of *Swenson Center News*. The new facilities will be an important factor in our ongoing mission to document and study the history of Swedish immigration to North America.

One aspect of Swedish-American studies that has received relatively little scholarly attention is



▲ *Success in the West: Swedish immigrant Nels B. Nelson was one of three partners in this successful Seattle department store, circa 1900. Later named Frederick & Nelson, the chain of stores was purchased by Marshall Field's & Co. in 1929, and remained open in the Northwest until 1992.*

the history of the Swedes in the American West. In recent years, however, this situation has been changing. One of our 2002 Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Research fellows, Dr. Lars Nordström of Beaver Creek, Oregon, is part of a group that has begun studying the history of the Swedes in Oregon. Dr. Jennifer Eastman Attebery of Idaho State University, a frequent visiting scholar at the Center, is working on the Swedes in the Inter-Mountain West, using, among other documents, the many letters written by Swedish immigrants in a new and exciting way.

By 1920 close to 20 percent of all Swedish Americans lived in the Mountain and Pacific States. The largest community was found in Washington State, followed by settlements in California and Oregon. The Swedish impact on Washington was significant, and Swedes constituted one of the leading immigrant groups in the state, active in both

urban and rural settings. By 1930, California had inched past Washington in number of Swedish immigrants. California's urban areas have held a great attraction for Swedes, and the rural colonies of Kingsburg and Turlock in the state's central valley also show the significance of agriculture in attracting Swedish immigrants. In Oregon, Swedish immigrants were attracted by the state's agricultural opportunities, but were also active in lumbering and fishing and as sailors. Although fewer than in California and Washington, Swedes' impact on the state was noticeable. In 1930, for example, they were only marginally smaller in number than the Germans and the Canadians.

Significant Swedish-American communities were also found in Colorado, Montana, Utah and Idaho. Mining and agriculture shaped much of the life of Swedish immigrants in the area. Many of the settlements

Continued on last page...



How to reach the Swenson Center

The Swenson Center is located on the main floor of Denkman Memorial Hall, 3520-7th Avenue, on the campus of Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois.

Administrative office hours are 9:00 a.m.-noon and 1:00 p.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, except holidays. The Center is closed to genealogical researchers on Mondays. Hours may be limited during college vacation periods and in the summer.

If you plan to visit the Center, please make an appointment by calling or writing in advance.

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Swedish Ambassador Visits the Center

On September 13, 2002, Jan Eliasson, the Swedish Ambassador to the U.S., visited the Swenson Center. Ambassador Eliasson was on the Augustana College campus as a part of the college's remembrance of the first anniversary of the 2001 September 11 terrorist attacks. In addition to visiting the Swenson Center, Mr. Eliasson presented a public lecture entitled "Sweden, Europe and the United States after 9/11" and met with students in an open forum.

During his visit to the Swenson Center, he toured our facility and became familiar with our holdings. Eliasson has a keen interest in history and showed great interest in our different record types and in the Center's work. He also had the opportunity to meet with Swenson Center staff members and with several of our researchers.

Jan Eliasson has had a long relation with the U.S. In 1957-58 he was an exchange student living in

Indiana. He has been Sweden's Ambassador to the U.S. since September 1, 2000. From 1988 through 1992 he served as Sweden's Ambassador to the United Nations, and was the U.N. Secretary General's personal representative on the Iran/Iraq conflict. Eliasson led the U.N. General Assembly's working group on emergency relief and was appointed Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs in 1992.



▲ Ambassador Eliasson examines microfilm records in the Swenson Center with volunteer Judy Mayer and Augustana student Josefina Holmberg.

Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellows

Every year the Swenson Center awards a fellowship that enables a scholar in Swedish-American history to spend time doing research at the Center. The fellowship is endowed by Dagmar and Nils William Olsson of Winter Park, Florida, and is named in their honor.

In 2002, we were able to fund two scholars, Malin Glimäng, a doctoral student at the University of Hawaii, who is working on the history of Swedish female immigration to the U.S., and Dr. Lars Nordström of Beaver-creek, Oregon, who is studying the writings of Samuel Magnus Hill.

Ms. Glimäng's and Dr. Nordström's articles later in the *News* illustrate the diverse kinds of sources available at the Swenson Center and how they can be used for very different kinds of research projects. The promotion of academic research in Swedish-American history is one of the Swenson Center's main objectives, and we are grateful to Dagmar and Nils William Olsson for helping us do this by bringing scholars to the Center.

Transatlantic Daughters: Swedish Maids in Urban America, 1890-1930

By Malin Glimäng

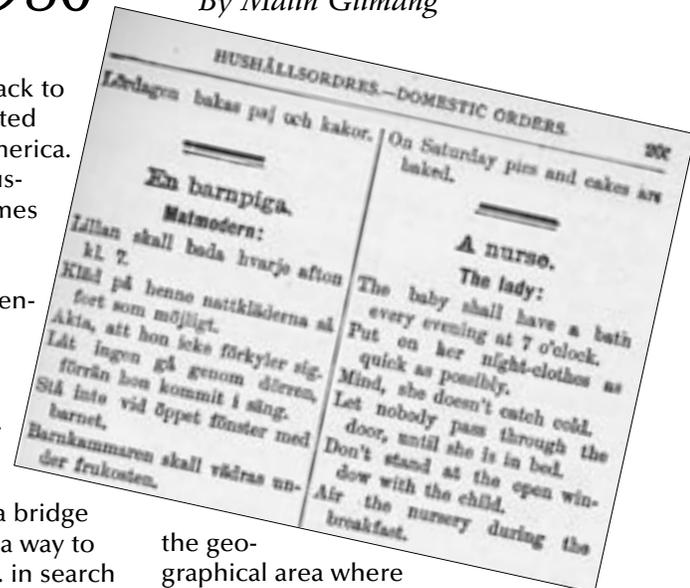
In 1912, a sixteen-year-old peasant girl in Karlskoga finally made her dream of going to America come true. For years Agnes had devoured every word in the letters sent from an older sister in Boston, anticipating the day when she would get to pack her own “America trunk.” When the older sister, Ellen, eventually returned for a visit she lent Agnes money for the ticket, and together with their friend, Othelia, the sisters boarded the train and began the long journey. As was the case for thousands of other young Swedish women they knew, on the other side of the Atlantic a particular job market was wide open for them: domestic service, a line of work most white American women despised and avoided. In a 1962 interview Agnes remembers: “You could always get housework, but it was not so good...we had to work far into the nights for the same pay, and your time off was always in jeopardy.”

After a couple of years as a maid in Boston, it was Agnes’ turn to visit the homeland. She was tempted to stay in Sweden for good. However, this time her youngest sister, Anna, and yet another childhood friend eagerly awaited the opportunity to go with her to America. Once again, three young women left their hometown for the “Promised Land.” The three sisters worked in Boston for a few years and then moved to Cleveland where they easily found new jobs in American private homes. Anna soon traveled on westward to search for domestic work in California, and further north on that same coast was Othelia, who had ventured to Seattle on her own a few years before. Agnes tells the interviewer that despite the many journeys back and forth to the homeland, both she and Anna continued to live in the U.S., while the other three women involved in this small

chain-migration moved back to Sweden. Ellen re-immigrated after nineteen years in America.

This brief narrative illustrates some common themes in the migration patterns of single Swedish women around the turn of the twentieth century. Women as well as men often helped each other emigrate through chain-migrations. Many young women, however, tended to use domestic service, first as a bridge into the U.S., and then as a way to travel throughout the U.S. in search of better opportunities. Numerous Swedish working-class women participated in chain-migrations and constructed ethnic female networks facilitating mobility, transmitting information, and offering support in ways only possible through women’s active collaboration. Letters, diaries, and interviews reveal that when Swedish maids moved or sought new jobs, they continuously tapped into a vast web of sisters, friends, and acquaintances employed in private homes scattered all over the country.

In the process, this category of migrants created new spaces for inter-cultural exchanges as the “Swedish Maids”—workers at the “heart” of American middle-class society—frequently moved back and forth across social, cultural, and national boundaries. Domestic service was certainly no dream-job, but live-in maids were in high demand by the expanding American middle-class and, hence, even young immigrants who neither spoke English nor possessed any special skills could begin working immediately and get a place to live at the same time. Moreover, the availability of jobs bestowed maids with a great deal of agency when picking employers and choosing



the geographical area where they wanted to work. In 1914, Elisabeth Lindström, who had served several households in Brooklyn, wrote home to Sweden: “mother, now I wish I was in Chicago ... If you could get me the address of someone who works there I’d write and get myself a new job by Christmas, for example if I had Hilma Obrink’s address...or Alma Petersson’s or anyone else you think could help me...if I could get Anna Lindberg’s address I might try Boston too.”

The numbers of Swedish women working in American households, and their great mobility, contributed to making them culturally visible as a group. We know that the “Swedish Maid” emerged as a familiar and often stereotyped character in American popular culture during the first decades of the twentieth century. At the same time, Swedes in the homeland had mixed feelings as they witnessed visiting working-class daughters who self-confidently paraded old village streets in elaborate “America hats.” Describing the sight of an ostentatious Swedish-American maid who stirred up all sorts of reactions in her local marketplace in Småland, a female journalist for *Svenska Dagbladet*

Revisiting the Life and Writings of Samuel Magnus Hill

By Lars Nordström

I first ran across the poetry of Samuel Magnus Hill about 15 years ago while reading an anthology of Swedish-American poets called *Amerika-Svensk Lyrisk genom 100 år: 1848-1948*, a volume edited by Martin S. Allwood and published in 1949. I lived in Oregon and realized that S.M. Hill was the only Swedish poet representing that state. Hill had two poems in the book, and they were surprisingly good—traditional in form, but passionate and indignant about the inequality, the injustice, and the lack of democracy that he saw all around him.

Where could I find more of his poems to read? The author information at the end of the anthology was brief—a few lines about Hill's life in America, the title of his only book of poems, *Uggletoner i vargattider* (1916), and a note that he had died in 1921 in a place called Carlsborg, Oregon. This was intriguing, because Carlsborg (or Carlborg, Karlborg, or Karlsborg as I later also found it referred to) did not exist on any Oregon map; nor was it referred to in the standard reference work for the state, *Oregon Geographic Names*.

Over the next decade I gleaned just a few more pieces of information about Hill and his writing. There were a few more facts about him in Ernst Skarstedt's reference work on Swedish-American writers and journalists, *Pennfåktare*, and I learned that there was a copy of Hill's book of poems in the Special Collections at the University of Oregon library in Eugene.

Then in 1999 things suddenly started to happen. The non-profit research group called Swedish Roots in Oregon was formed, and its two main areas of inquiry were to be Swedish genealogy and history in the state of Oregon. The aim of the genealogy branch was to

develop a new database program in which Swedish-born individuals who had ended up in the state would be included and detailed in a manner similar to what was done by *folkbokföringen* (the national population registration) in Sweden. Compiling this information would eventually greatly enhance the ability to conduct genealogical research on both sides of the Atlantic. The historical research branch of Swedish Roots in Oregon, with which I became involved the following year, was defined as the attempt make the lives, experiences, and achievements of the Swedes of Oregon better known to the general public. And we would, of course, do all of this in English. Swedish Roots would attempt to republish existing material and translate texts originally written in Swedish, as well as write new articles on subjects that had not yet been covered. Eventually this material would be gathered and published as a book.

The life and writings of Samuel Magnus Hill soon became one of the ideas for the proposed volume. Hill was, after all, the only known author of a book of poems in Swedish ever to have been published in Oregon. We soon learned that even though S.M. Hill had indeed passed away in Oregon's only organized Swedish colony, Carlsborg (known to the rest of the world by its post office name, Colton), his descendants had not remained in the state. Neither had his papers. Except for his gravestone in the Pioneer Lutheran Cemetery in

Colton, Samuel Magnus Hill, the man of letters, had vanished from the state without much of a trace, and in the world of Oregon literary history he was completely unknown. Fortunately, his

papers had not been lost, but donated in the early 1960s by one of his daughters, Cordelia Hill Barnes, to his alma mater, Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, from which Hill had graduated in 1879.

In December of 2002 I arrived at Augustana College to spend the next three weeks going through the papers donated to the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center. Head librarian Christina Johansson had brought everything up from the archive and reserved a table for my research.

There were six boxes of material that had sat virtually untouched for 40 years. Someone had gone through the boxes, typed out a general inventory list of the contents and inserted protective sheets of paper to prevent old photographs from bleeding and destroying whatever was next to them. I also found a note stating that a personal letter from Selma Lagerlöf to Hill had been removed (without leaving a copy of the original), but other than this shortcoming, the materials were new, exciting, and uncharted territory. And it was a gold mine. Hill's bilingual literary estate contained correspondence; speeches from his early student days and all throughout his career; various



material from his year as a missionary among the Mormons in Salt Lake City; lectures from his 30 years at Luther Academy in Wahoo, Nebraska; sermons from his final years as Pastor in Colton, Oregon; a great number of poems; a few songs and translations; a long, but unfortunately incomplete typescript account of his only trip back to his native land in 1901, as well as various newspaper cuttings and other odd pieces.

But as often happens with research projects, new discoveries inevitably lead to new questions. For example, one could see that around 1912 Hill had acquired a typewriter with Swedish characters, and started typing up some of his older texts and most of his new compositions. It took me a few days to notice it, but I realized that almost every single typewritten page in the archive folders was a carbon copy. Where were all the originals — sent out to editors or friends? Or distributed to other family members? And why was there a big section missing from the manuscript detailing his Swedish journey? Where was the copy of the translation of Virgil (into English hexameter) that Hill had worked so hard on, but was never able to find a publisher for? And where was that unpublished Hill memoir (as well as various other written sources) that James Iverne Dowie obviously had access to and listed as references in his 1959 book, *Prairie Grass Dividing*? Could it possibly be that Dowie still had some of these materials in his possession? And what had happened to the things that Hill had left behind at Luther Academy in Wahoo, Nebraska, where he had taught for so long, and where he had been the acting principal for about 15 years? As far as I knew from a few cursory Internet searches, Luther Academy had ceased to exist.

Here I have to mention that a lead developed on the last of these questions during my Augustana visit, because Christina Johansson discovered that Luther Academy

had not simply closed, but had merged with another Nebraska junior college called Midland. After a series of phone calls and emails, she learned that an archive of the original Luther Academy papers (all in Swedish) had indeed been preserved, but since no one at the college now spoke Swedish, it was not immediately clear what was in the collection. It is very exciting to think that another infusion of material related to Hill's career in America—as well as many other things—might be coming to the Swenson Center some time in the future.

Still, if the Swenson Center had only contained the six boxes of S.M. Hill material, I would have considered my research visit greatly rewarded. But as it turned out, the Swenson Center library also held a number of publications in which Hill had continuously published over the years. I found poems, reports on the situation of the Swedish colleges in the United States, and an entire series of short biographies on prominent Swedish authors and intellectuals from the turn of the previous century. By simply leafing through the Swenson Center copies of the magazine *Ungdomsvännan*, I discovered that Hill had served on the editorial board for at least five years. In addition, there were so many other unexpected nuggets of information gleaned from the wealth of resources at the Swenson Center that my ability to digest it all was put to a critical test. I had found so much more than I had ever hoped for, made so many photocopies of interesting texts, and had made so many new friends with the library staff and college faculty, that it all still seems a bit overwhelming as I sort through the piles and work on the article on the life and writings of Samuel Magnus Hill. 

Transatlantic Daughters, continued...

exclaimed in an article: “That creates emigration if anything!”

The wave of single women seeking new opportunities in urban America peaked in the decades around the turn of the century—a time when the U.S. as well as Sweden underwent dramatic social and cultural transformations that challenged traditional gender roles and brought forth vibrant debates regarding the “woman question.” Young Swedish women who decided to take a step into the world on their own were an intricate part of this progressive era. In what ways and to what extent did these migrants affect the societies they participated in? How were they perceived by the dominant cultures? How did they conceive of themselves as Swedish-American working women? Did women consciously utilize domestic service and female networks as instruments to gain mobility, increased independence, and new cultural experiences?

These are some of the overarching questions I am examining in my research for a dissertation under the working title *Transatlantic Daughters: Swedish Maids in Urban America, 1890-1930*. The dissertation focuses on the link between domestic service and single Swedish women's migration movement to U.S. cities from 1890-1930. The study analyzes several aspects of this gender-specific and highly embodied form of labor-migration. Specifically, I intend to illuminate the transnational aspects of women's migration processes by looking at their constructions of informal networks and chain-migrations across national boundaries as well as within the U.S. I will also explore cultural impacts of this migration movement on both sides of the Atlantic by analyzing popular perceptions of the “Swedish Maid” in the U.S. and in Sweden.

I am grateful that I was selected for the 2002 Dagmar and Nils William Olsson Fellowship. It enabled me to spend an extended research period at the Swenson Center and to study the extensive holdings of the Swedish American press. My stay also gave me an opportunity to explore the Quad Cities—once a popular “hub” for domestic servants from Sweden.

Swenson Center Remodels Stacks

In November of 2002, the Swenson Center received another generous grant from *Marianne och Marcus Wallenbergs Stiftelse* and *Stiftelsen Marcus och Amalia Wallenbergs Minnesfond* in Stockholm, totaling \$300,000. The grant has been used to install a new efficient, custom-built HVAC (Humidity, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) unit in our stacks. The new HVAC unit will assure that the stacks are kept at approximately 60 degrees Fahrenheit and 30-percent relative humidity 24 hours a day. The cool air and low humidity will ensure proper preservation of library and archival materials and slow down the deterioration of especially old materials.

Construction began in June 2002 and was completed with the installation of the HVAC unit in September 2002. The construction involved extensive ductwork in the stacks, electrical wiring, drilling, and partial demolition of walls. An office space in the basement adjacent to the stacks had to be sacrificed for a machine room, as an enclosed space was absolutely necessary to accommodate the large and noisy HVAC unit. Even though some valuable space was lost, we were able to expand our stacks by enclosing an area next to our workroom. This new room gave us another approximately 700 linear feet of shelving space in the new environmentally controlled area.

The Swenson Center remained open during the entire construction period despite the temporary conversion of our workroom and stacks into "work zones." Our workroom quickly became the tool and equipment storage room as well as an office and drawing room for the work crew. Books and archival material in the stacks were covered with protective plastic sheeting to prevent excessive build-up of dust and other possible damage. Even though accessibility and retrieval of certain materials was an issue at times, the

staff fulfilled all reference questions requiring library and archival research.

The new HVAC system immediately improved the environment in our stacks, and we are confident that this system will slow down the deterioration of older materials, preserving our valuable resources for generations to come.

The new room created in the stack area will house the Nils William Olsson collection—one of the Center's most valuable book collections. This unique collection of books was assembled during a half century of work on both sides of the Atlantic and deals with both Swedish and Swedish-American history. It is now completely cataloged and accessible to scholars. We are certain that patrons and other friends of the Center will be pleased when they see this fine collection of books on the shelves in its new location, the Nils William Olsson Room.

The Swenson Center extends its sincere gratitude to the two Wallenberg Foundations in Sweden for the generous grants that made this project possible. We also thank Augustana College Director of Facilities Management, Sharon Cramer, and her staff for coordination of this project; engineer Nila Comly at the Stanley Group of Muscatine for the design and overseeing of the project; and Climate River Valley of Rock Island, which was responsible for the construction and the installation of the HVAC.

Since the establishment of the Swenson Center, the Wallenberg Foundations have made grants to the Center totaling over \$1 million. A 1986 grant of approximately \$600,000 made possible the development of space within Denkman Hall for the Center's facilities. The Wallenberg Foundations' support has been crucial in the Center's growth into the premier institution for Swedish-American research.

2003 O. Fritiof Ander Lecture in Immigration History

The 2003 Fritiof Ander Lecture in Immigration History will be given by Dr. Jon Gjerde, Professor of History at the University of California at Berkeley.

Dr. Gjerde is one of the leading historians of American immigration today. He has written extensively on both the history of Scandinavian immigration, as well as on European immigration in general. His publications include *From Peasants to Farmers: The Migration from Balestrand, Norway, to the Upper Middle West* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997) and *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History: Documents and Essays* (Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

A native of Iowa, Dr. Gjerde was educated at the University of Northern Iowa and at the University of Minnesota, where he studied with Rudolph Vecoli, the 1990 Fritiof Ander Lecturer in Immigration History. He has also spent two years at Lund University in Sweden, serving as the Director of the University of California study program there. Dr. Gjerde's lecture, "European Immigrants and The Myth of Freedom," will take place at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, October 11, 2003 in Wallenberg Hall in Denkman Memorial Hall on the Augustana campus. We hope that many of you will be able to join us for this lecture, which promises to be very interesting!

Gifts *We gratefully acknowledge the gifts received between October 1, 2001 and September 30, 2002*

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Swenson Center Annual Support Groups

The Swenson Center is supported entirely by gifts—both endowments and annual gifts from friends. More than 600 persons have enrolled as supporting members of the Swenson Center. **Swenson Center Associates** make an annual contribution of \$25. In addition to supporting the work of the Swenson Center, Associates receive a discount on research fees and a reduced subscription rate to *Swedish American Genealogist*.

For an annual contribution of at least \$100, donors are designated as **Swenson Center Scholars**. In addition to the benefits provided to Associates, Swenson Center Scholars receive *Swedish American Genealogist* free of charge.

A support group of major importance is the **Swenson Center Circle**. Members of this group support the Center's work through an annual contribution of at least \$250. In addition to the benefits provided to Associates and Scholars, members of the Circle receive an annual book in the field of Swedish-American studies.

We thank those who have become Associates, Scholars, and members of the Circle, and we encourage those who are not yet members to join.

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...Continued from page 1

were small or scattered, meaning that many immigrants lived in isolation from fellow Swedes. Swedish immigration to Utah was largely shaped by a significant Mormon migration from Sweden in the late 19th century.

Swedish immigration to the West is an ongoing process. The most recent U.S. Census suggests that a quarter of all Swedish Americans live in the region, many of whom have arrived in recent decades. States like California and Washington continue to attract Swedish immigrants who have come to work at, for example, Boeing in Seattle or in the computer industry in California. The attraction of American higher education is also visible as one examines Swedish migration patterns to the West Coast.

Swedish immigration to the U.S. is thus quite varied, both in terms of geography and chronology. Because the Swenson Center has a clear national focus in its activities, it is important to remind ourselves of the full geographic scope of Swedish immigration to North America and to remind our readers that we are always ready to receive materials from new areas of the country.

— DAG BLANCK



Co-founder of Swenson Center Dies

Lyal Swenson, who together with her husband, Birger, founded the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center in 1981, died on July 3, 2002 at the age of 98.

Lyal was born October 14, 1903 in Orion, Illinois. She attended Augustana College from 1921 to 1924 and the University of Illinois in 1925, where she received her BA degree. In 1939, she earned an MA in Regional Studies at Northwestern University.

Lyal was an English teacher, retiring after teaching 25 years at Rock Island Senior High School.

She married Birger Swenson August 14, 1943. He preceded her in death January 18, 1990.

A member of St. John's Lutheran Church, Rock Island, Lyal was active in many church and community organizations. She was a past president of Church Women United, the Rock Island YWCA, the Augustana Endowment Society, and Chapter GQ of PEO, Rock Island.

Lyal and Birger shared many interests, including world travel. They both shared a strong concern for preserving the record of Swedish immigration to America, and she retained a keen interest in the program of the Swenson Center until her death.



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