

The Torch Passed! Augustana after Esbjörn,
The Esbjörns after Augustana

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As we celebrate the 2010 Sesquicentennial of both the historic Augustana Synod and today's Augustana College in Rock Island, it is useful to look back on the events that brought their organization and development during the "pioneer years," as founder Lars Paul Esbjörn finished his 14-year North American mission and returned to serve the Church of Sweden at his original Östervåla Parish in Sweden.

The budding Augustana College and Synod were built in 1860 on 11 years of immigrant experience, and founded as a result of decisions reached first in Chicago, 23-28 April 1860, then at Jefferson Prairie, WI on 5 June 1860, when 18 Scandinavian clergy and 18 lay representatives from 36 Swedish- and 13 Norwegian congregations, voted to leave the Northern Illinois Synod, and create the Scandinavian Augustana Ev. Lutheran Synod. They chose to meet at the Norwegian congregation founded at Jefferson Prairie in 1846 as the home of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, or "Eielsen's Synod," a decidedly low-church, pietistic Lutheran body.

In Scandinavia, Swedes and Norwegians remained in an increasingly fragile political union brought by the Napoleonic wars, a union not broken until 1905. Their immigrant brethren on the Midwestern prairies found it initially expedient to work together, where possible, to build a strong Scandinavian Lutheran presence in their new land, faced with its religious freedom and intense sectarian competition. They hoped to maintain their faith, educate clergy to serve, and youth to thrive in their new homeland, using both their mother tongue and English. Their joint efforts within the new Scandinavian Augustana Synod continued until a peaceful separation by the Norwegians in 1870 at Andover, Illinois. Then, two Augustana Synods were created, one Swedish, the other Norwegian. The two synods collectively created a number of well-known institutions which continue to thrive today, including Augustana College in Rock Island, Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota, and the Norwegian institutions of Augsburg College in Minneapolis and Augustana College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Among those attending the Jefferson Prairie event was one of Augustana's earliest beneficiaries, Erik Norelius (1833-1916). He emigrated in 1850 as an 17-year-old from Hassela, Hälsingland, was then educated, with the guidance of Lars-Paul Esbjörn, at the Lutheran Capital University in Ohio, and later helped build the Augustana presence in Minnesota, first as an itinerant preacher and pastor, then as president of the Augustana Synod from 1874 to 1881 and from 1899 to 1911. He also founded Gustavus Adolphus College in 1862, published Minnesota's first Swedish newspaper, *Minnesotaposten* in 1857, then wrote one of the best histories of Swedish settlement in America, *De svenska lutherska församlingarnas och svenskarnes historia i Amerika* (vol. I 1890, vol. II 1916).

His description of Augustana's founding and rapid development after its pioneering days from 1846 to 1860 provides an excellent eye-witness account of happenings during that period, especially the transfer of leadership from founder Lars-Paul Esbjörn. Esbjörn came to Andover, Illinois in 1849, then returned from Chicago to Sweden in 1863. The torch was passed to the first president of the Augustana Synod, Tufve Nilsson Hasselquist. He had been ordained in the Church of Sweden in 1839, and left Kristianstads län in 1852, with 60 members of his congregation. He was among the first Swedish-educated clergy who worked with Esbjörn during those early Illinois years. A year after his arrival, in 1853, Hasselquist could bring to the Northern Illinois Synod four new congregations in the Galesburg area, with 191 members. Two years later, in 1855 he became editor of the first Swedish-language newspaper in the United States, *Hemlandet*, published in Galesburg. Five years later, he became head of the new Augustana Synod.

With Tufve Hasselquist as Synod President, Esbjörn developed its constitution, together with Rev. Erland Carlsson and Norwegian clergyman Paul Andersen. Esbjörn, recently resigned from the faculty of Illinois State University in Springfield, was also chosen to head the new Augustana Preparatory School (college) and Seminary, housed first on the lower floor of Andersen's Norwegian Lutheran Church in Chicago. While efforts were made to secure other faculty, Esbjörn remained its only professor, because of limited funds.

Fundraising for the new school had begun immediately after Esbjörn's leaving Springfield, with great hope of support from Sweden. A first effort in 1859 to secure a national collection within the Church of Sweden failed. Esbjörn also tried unsuccessfully to secure support from Capital University's recent Jenny Lind donation for Scandinavian students. The Synod recovered only some \$750.00 of the funds Esbjörn had raised for the Scandinavian professorship at Illinois State University in Springfield, for use in the new Augustana Seminary.

A funding committee headed by Rev. Erland Carlsson was asked at the 1860 Synod gathering to consider purchase of land and farms, whose later sale to immigrants would benefit the seminary....a clear precursor to the future move of Augustana from Chicago to Paxton, Illinois, with financial encouragement from the Illinois Central Railroad. This decision to become involved in land speculation brought disappointment for Esbjörn, who saw cosmopolitan Chicago as Augustana's future, while Hasselquist and Carlsson looked at the growing numbers of immigrants leaving Chicago, heading to the west and north.

Because of pressing financial needs, and lack of assets among the immigrants, it was decided to send Augustana representatives back to Sweden to personally seek support. Rev. O. C. T. Andrén went in 1861. He gathered some \$10,846.45 from a two-year government-approved national collection, plus a library gift of 5,000 volumes from the

King. He then decided to remain in Sweden, for health reasons, taking a pastorate there, and dying in 1870.

Gathering Civil War clouds brought uncertainty about the nation's future, but also confirmed the strong opposition of Augustana leaders to the institution of slavery. By April of 1861, the war had begun, even as the Synod was laying the groundwork for its own future. Military volunteer recruiting started among Scandinavian immigrants throughout the Midwest, creating Swedish units in the DeKalb, Galesburg, Andover, and Bishop Hill areas. Among the first to volunteer was Lars Paul Esbjörn's 24-year-old son Paul Wilhelm Esbjörn. He was also among the first to fall, at Lexington, MO in September 1861. Esbjörn's younger son, Josef, also volunteered, and survived the war, to become a prominent publisher and political figure in both Illinois and Minnesota. In 1880 he became the first director of the Augustana Oratorio Society.

By 1862, a tired and saddened Esbjörn, only 53 years old, went back in Sweden himself, also on a nationwide fundraising trip with royal sanction, while he examined options for his return to a congregation there. He launched an impressive lobbying effort within both the Church of Sweden and before the Crown. On 7 June 1862 he wrote his friend Peter Wieselgren from Uppsala, that he had called on both the King and Archbishop personally, and was assured that his request for consideration of securing a parish would be honored. King Carl XV gave his written permission on 13 June 1862.

The Synod, with Esbjörn's support, had already begun seeking his replacement before his departure for Sweden, by extending a call to P. P. Waldenström, carried to Sweden by Esbjörn, then hand-delivered by his old friend C. O. Rosenius. Though seriously considered by Waldenström, the call was rejected.

Esbjörn returned to the United States after his nationwide tour late in the summer of 1862, assured that he was a final candidate for his old "regal" parish at Östervåla, Uppland. It had lost its pastor, Esbjörn's friend and former mentor, Johannes Dillner to death on 21 January 1862, and the pastorate would become available as of 1 May 1864. Esbjörn's campaign for consideration was successful, despite intense competition, and he was accepted on 19 September 1862. He bade farewell to Augustana and his friends at commencement ceremonies on 22 June 1863, gave his final report to the Synod meeting in Chicago on 27 June, held his farewell sermon on 5 July, and sailed home to Sweden forever on 7 July 1863. He returned to the pulpit of his old congregation that fall, initially as vice-pastor, then gave his installation sermon as pastor of Östervåla on the First Sunday after Trinity, 1864.

Esbjörn, at home in Sweden

After years of pioneering hardship in the American Midwest, Esbjörn's new pastorate at Östervåla must have seemed a wonderful change. His was a large, class II parish, with

some 3,000 members on 108 homesteads (“mantal” tax units). His parsonage was the largest in northern Uppland, and his salary of 9,000 riksdalers, delivered primarily in farm produce, made him a relatively wealthy clergyman, at least during years of plentiful crops. The parsonage farmstead included a large pastor’s home, servant’s cottage, outhouse, coachhouse, storage barn and equipment shed, chickenhouse, grain crib, hoghouse, sheep- and goat-shed. There were a total of seven households, including four outfarms or “torp.” In all, some 50 buildings. His own parsonage household included his wife and family of four children, plus two or three maids, while his renter Lars Andersson’s household included wife, four daughters, mother, two farm hands and two maids, for a total of between 15 and 20 persons at the parsonage alone.

Farm animals in the 1870 Esbjörn estate included two mares, six cows, a calf, eight ewes, eight lambs, two goats, a sow, three pigs, 13 hens and 14 chicks, plus 5 beehives. The 1870 accounting listed grain storage at the parsonage at 197 cubic feet of rye, 284 cubic feet of barley, $1\frac{1}{2}$ 1.5 cubic feet of wheat, 12 cubic feet of white beans, valued at a total of 797 Riksdalers.

While Esbjörn was not personally responsible for day-to-day farm operations, he was financially dependent on their successful outcome, and faced some lean years during the crop failures of 1866-67. In a letter to his son Constantine dated 17 March 1870, he wrote “...Here one has to take great care, to make ends meet....this year I will get 800 riksdalers less than last year for my grain.” He was also essentially alone in serving the parish, since his associate pastor was already 79 years old and blind when Esbjörn returned to the parish. His vice-associate pastor Gustaf Löfdahl served from 1864 to 1866, then Esbjörn was left alone in the parish, until his own failing health brought the assistance of Rev. Gustaf Björklund in 1870.

His responsibilities included maintaining all parish census records, while chairing meetings of the church council and heading the parish school board. It was responsible for educating some 489 children, at first with only two permanent teachers, in one permanent school for 137 children, and two ambulatory schools for remote areas. Between 50 and 60 children lacked schooling in permanent facilities. During Esbjörn’s tenure, he added another permanent school and one more ambulatory school. They were hardly luxurious. On an 1867 inspection tour of the ambulatory school at Horrskog, teacher Johan Åkerlund reported “..furniture is lacking, so the children had no choice but to use the benches for writing and mathematics, going down on their knees to do their work.”

Esbjörn also chaired municipality meetings and kept their minutes. Sunday services went from 10:00 to 12:30, preceded by catechism hearings and talks for about an hour. Communion was held every fifth or sixth week, and household examination hearings took place each fall. Most baptisms and weddings took place at home, requiring some 70 or 80 trips by buggy or sleigh for baptisms, and perhaps 20 a year for weddings. Each

year brought many shut-in visits, 40-45 deaths and funerals, and perhaps 40 first communions (1864), with confirmation classes starting early each year. The church remained the center of the village life, despite accelerating social change and continued emigration, especially during the lean years of 1866 and 1867.

With social change came also religious change. During the 1860s, mission associations and other populist organizations were growing, both within the established Lutheran church through *Evangeliska fosterlandsstiftelsen* (the Swedish National Evangelical Mission), and from other sources, like free churches, temperance associations and the budding labor movement. Esbjörn was a leading figure in creating the Northeastern Västmanland Mission Association in 1864, covering six parishes. Colporteurs were encouraged, but worked only with Esbjörn's permission. A girls' deaconess school was established in the Östervåla chapel, while a private school was occasionally held by a student from the Ahlberg's Mission School in Uppsala. That mission school also provided many young students and clergy to Augustana.

Esbjörn often expressed fear of that change and growing religious freedom in Sweden, motivated by his often painful experiences in the United States. In his 7 June 1862 letter to P. Wieselgren, he stated "Truly, Sweden is going through a process of renewal, bringing many sheaves into God's granary. May we not tear off its roof, with the thought of giving the sheaves more light and heat, and expose them to rain and snow, so they rot." During his visitation in Östervåla of May 1864, Archbishop Henrik Reuterdal stressed that "the true purpose of the colporteurs is to transport and read the Word, but not to present and explain it. In foreign lands, according to the resident pastor (Esbjörn), much confusion had resulted. The visitor wishes to warn of such danger here, and felt it desirable that presentation of the Word must be cared for by the clergy and preferably in church, at least during the lighter times of year. There was an improvement (reduction) in night wandering."

In June of 1865, Esbjörn delivered a report on the state of the Augustana Synod before Church of Sweden clergy assembled at Uppsala. It may be considered his religious testament to his work to build Augustana in the United States. The report was clearly intended to increase support of Augustana from the Church of Sweden, and to heal any wounds brought by pioneering struggles and compromises. He noted that the Synod had grown from its original 36 Swedish congregations with 3,747 communicants, 17 clergy, and 21 churches, plus 13 Norwegian congregations with 1,220 communicants, 27 clergy and 29 churches, to an 1863 total of 68 congregations, 7,009 communicants, 33 clergy and 42 churches. He estimated 1865 communicants at 9,000. He also listed by name his closest clergy associates, Prof. Tufve Hasselquist, and pastors Erland Carlsson, Jonas Svenson, Erik Norelius, Andrew Jackson and O.C.T. André. He closed his report by saying "...And may the ties of our common confession, faith and love more firmly bind the young daughter on the other side of the ocean with its beloved old mother church in the far north, and may their special experiences and struggles bring them both

enlightenment in our holy faith, based on the Apostles and Prophets, where Jesus Christ is the highest cornerstone.”

While busy with parish duties at Östervåla, Esbjörn did not lose interest in developments in the Augustana Synod, and maintained a lively letter exchange with associates in America. He was especially happy to welcome Eric Norelius in 1868, whose close friendship Esbjörn's son C.M. Esbjörn recalled was like that of Paul and Timothy. Esbjörn had written Norelius in 1862, as he was contemplating his own return to Sweden, advising him not to leave Minnesota, saying "...while I leave, the others having less reason to, must not."

At Esbjörn's death in 1870, his net estate was about 9,984 riksdalers, plus silver service valued at 211 riksdalers, scientific instruments including a microscope, compass, sextant, magnet, sun glass, equipment for chemical studies, plus books and maps. Pending income included 2,229 riksdalers, plus his pastor's pay of 2,500 riksdalers.

The Esbjörn Family's Return to America 1872

Because of the size of Esbjörn's estate, his widow was not entitled to financial help from the Church of Sweden, though she was given two years after his death before she and her six children had to leave the parsonage. The still-young Gustava Albertina Magnusson Esbjörn thus had to depart on 1 May 1872. For most of the family, America was their choice. They were assisted in that move by son Josef Osborn, who had returned to Sweden at his father's death in 1870, as an agent of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and Burlington & Northern Railroad Companies, advertising Iowa and Nebraska land to Scandinavian emigrants. He held that position until coming back to America with the entire family in 1872.

Esbjörn left his young third wife, Gustafva Albertina Magnusson, born in 1833, with six living children who accompanied her back to America. Constantin Magnus, born at Princeton, Illinois in 1858, studied first in Sweden, then graduated from Augustana in 1877, becoming an Augustana faculty member as professor in 1883, and was ordained at Galesburg in 1888. Gustaf Adolf Luther was born in Chicago in 1860, but died in his 20s. Carl Linus Eugen was also born in Chicago in 1862, graduated from Augustana in 1880, and became a professor of modern languages at the College in 1887, where he spent a total of 65 years, as both student and faculty member. Maria Esbjörn, born at Hille in 1841, married an American clergyman, George Henry Schnur, in 1860, but died the next year. Her half sister, Maria Rediviva, was born at Östervåla in 1864, married, moved to Salt Lake City then to Antioch, California, and became the first female delegate to the Augustana synodical meeting of 1910. Hanna Dorothea, born in 1866 at Östervåla, studied at Bethany College, became organist and singer, and served at Augustana Lutheran Church in Denver. Lars Paul Oscar was born at Östervåla in 1870 just three weeks after his father's death, and also studied at Augustana, then became a physician,

dying early, in 1910. Alfred Johannes Esbjörn, born at Hille in 1839, remained in Sweden and became a graduate engineer, working in Karlskrona.

Home again in America, Esbjörn's widow Gustava befriended a recently-widowed Augustana clergyman from Swedona, Andreas Andréén, who had been left with 9 children at the death of his wife Hilda Esping. Gustava again took up the role of "mater familias," only to again be widowed in February of 1880, when her still-grieving 52-year-old husband committed suicide. Among the children left in her care was a young Gustav Andréén, who became fourth president of Augustana College. Thus Gustafva was not only the wife of the first President of Augustana, but step-mother of its fourth president. Thus, the Esbjörn legacy continued at Augustana long after Lars Paul Esbjörn's return to Sweden, thanks in large part to the love and concern his wife Gustafva showed for not only their own children, but also those of Andreas Andréén.

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