

Augustana Endowment Society
Historical Reflections from Nov. 2018
by Janet Moline

Mrs. O. N. Olson

Mrs. O. N. Olson was the President of the Augustana Endowment Society for the 1929-30 year. Her name was actually Ida Wilhelmina Peterson Olson.

For 34 years from 1830 to 1864 her grandparents and their children had lived in a "torp" on an estate in Småland, Sweden. A torp was a small household and a very small plot of land owned by the estate which was made available to poor families in exchange for their work on the estate. The conditions were about as close to slavery as one could get, but poor families had some guarantee of food and shelter during those tough economic times. In 1864 the family decided to go to America. On that journey the father and one son died from cholera and were buried at sea. Unbeknownst to immigrants, families whose members died of cholera on the ship had all their belongings, including trunks, confiscated by the U.S when they landed in New York. So when the mom and 4 living children arrived in New York, they only had train tickets to Andover, IL. The older daughters, Clara and Sophia worked for families taking care of their children. Sophia found a job working as a cook at the Deere home in Moline and got a job for Clara at the nearby Velie home. Both sisters would later move to western Iowa, where Clara met and married Carl Otto Peterson, who, too, had come from a "torp". Clara and Carl had five children including Nellie and Ida, both of whom would attend Augustana. Nellie came in 1896 and Ida Wilhelmina, who by then was called Minnie, came the following year to the Music Conservatory at Augustana and earned a certificate in 1899.

Minnie was talented vocally and as a pianist. For two years she sang in the ladies chorus which was founded in 1897 and the Handel Oratorio Society. She also was a player on the Augie women's basketball club. During her second year at the conservatory she met a man named Oscar N. Olson who was in his final year at the college. In the following years they kept in touch while Oscar continued his education. I will share more about him in December. For today I can note that they were married in June, 1906. In July 1907 they had their first child, Heloise, who later became the mother of Norm Moline, retired member of the faculty.

Oscar and Minnie returned to Rock Island in 1926 when he became associate editor of the Lutheran Companion, the magazine of the Augustana Lutheran Church. In 1927 Oscar joined the faculty at Augustana Theological Seminary. During that time Minnie Olson was selected to be the president of the Endowment Society. How pleased her immigrant grandparents and parents would have been about the success of this woman, Ida Wilhelmina, I mean Mrs. O. N. Olson.