

Augustana Endowment Society
Historical Reflections from Feb. 2024
by Janet Moline

The Swedish Crowns at Augustana

In February our Endowment table decorations are a reflection of the upcoming Valentine Day. Augustana continues to celebrate love and marriage with the tradition of the Swedish Crown.

An article entitled "Swedish Crowns Bring Royal Tradition" by Doug Meyer appeared in the The Observer on Jan. 17, 1973 that had some background about our college crowns. He wrote:

In Sweden it has been considered a mark of honor for a woman to wear a crown at her wedding. The custom governing the use of crowns appears to date back to the 16th century. Many churches loan the crown to their members for use at their weddings.

The Gold Swedish crown at Augie arrived in 1962. Gretchen Holm, Class of '60 was visiting relatives in Stockholm and saw the crowns in the window of Torndahls Jewelers. The crowns were very expensive and sold mainly to churches. She mentioned to the jeweler the Swedish traditions at Augustana and the jeweler decided to present the crown to Augustana as a gift. Ms. Holm selected a delicately hand-tooled gold crown valued at several hundred dollars. It was two inches in diameter at the base and slightly more than three inches high with seven gold leaves extending upward from the base and flaring outward at the top. An elegant design. Miss Holm presented it to President Conrad Bergendoff, who placed it in the care of Dr. Louis Almen, dean of the Ascension Chapel, Augustana Theological Seminary on the campus. The first to wear the crown was Marilyn Vollrath when she married Kent Carlander in August 1962 in Ascension Chapel. Since then the crown has traveled around the United States to be worn by Augustana alumna. Ms. Holm would be the 33rd bride to wear the gold crown in December 1964.

How did the silver Swedish crown come to Augustana? In 1964 the Managing Director of the Sweden-America Foundation, Stockholm Sweden named Adele Heliborn was invited to campus to receive an honorary degree. During her visit she was shown the Gold Crown and was impressed with the tradition, then very new to Augustana. Upon returning to Sweden she arranged for a second crown to come to Augie in June of 1965, this one sterling silver. Approximately 3 ³/₈" in diameter at the base, this crown is over 2" high and has seven points, each with a cultured pearl and brilliant white gemstones. The Silver Swedish Crown would be worn a week after arriving by Kristin Magnuson at her wedding to Russel Wheeler.

When this Obs article was written in 1973, the two crowns were in the care of Barbara Levander of the Alumni Office. To this day both crowns are available to borrow. Initially, at Augie the Gold Crown could be used only in Ascension Chapel or the Quad-Cities. By the time the silver crown arrived, both could be used

anywhere in the U.S. The major requirement is that the bride or groom be a graduate or former student at Augie, presently enrolled at the College or for a wedding in Ascension Chapel.

I have some photos of brides wearing the silver crown. I hope you enjoy seeing these Augustana treasures, both brides and their crowns.

Some of our members wearing the Augustana Swedish crowns:

- Ruth Anne Erickson Hartman wore the gold Augustana crown on December 21, 1963
- Barbara Steigman did not wear the crown, but her daughter Sara Peterson Nelson wore it on August 16, 1975.
- Caran Johnson wore the white gold crown at her wedding on December 28, 1968 in Providence, Rhode Island.
- Marcia Wetzel wore the silver Augustana Crown at her wedding June 28, 1969 in Rock Island.
- Janet Moline wore the silver crown on June 18, 1966 in Rockford.