

Augustana Endowment Society
Historical Reflections from March 2026
by Janet Moline

Who was Clarence Woodrow Sorensen? #2

Last month we shared with you with what the Augustana website stated about our 6th President Clarence Woodrow Sorensen. Using various sources, including Newspaper.com I share the following.

We noted that he was born in 1907 in Nebraska. It was at the Carr farm on Cobb Creek near the little village of Loup City. How little, you ask? Between 1900 and 1910 Loup City increased from 926 to 1,128. Today, its population has continued to drop. Loup City was platted in 1864 on what had been land belonging to the Skidi or Wolf Band of the Pawnee Nation. The Skidi lived along the Loup River which apparently was given the French word Loup meaning wolf by early trappers. The Pawnee were forced to cede their land and by 1876, they were sent to the present-day Oklahoma. When Sorensen was born in 1907, the mostly white population numbered somewhere around a thousand. For many years it has branded itself as the "Polish capital of Nebraska."

I was surprised to see on the Loup City website that they listed three notable men, one an ecologist and naturalist who taught at a city college in California, a news correspondent during the Vietnam War and the Middle East and a doctor who was an Undersecretary in the Department of Agriculture during the George W. Bush Administration. And not Clarence Woodrow Sorensen.

He was the 11th of 13 children, three dying very young, to Jens Christian Sorensen and Ane (Annie) Madsen Sorensen, both immigrants from Denmark. I don't know how long they lived in Loup City. Loup City was never mentioned again in newspapers. Twenty one miles from Loup City was Boleus and twenty nine miles was Dannebrog, both places mentioned often. Both Boleus and Dannebrog were small villages, 228 in Boleus in 1940 and 379 in Dannebrog. The name, Dannebrog, meaning the flag of Denmark, was started in 1871 by Danes coming from Milwaukee. Its Columbia Hall is a historic building of the Danish Brotherhood in America. Sorensen would return to Boleus and Dannebrog to visit family, give talks and preach at the Baptist churches.

I couldn't find any records of where he went to high school or did his undergraduate work. I don't know his college major. But in 1934, still part of the Depression, at the age of 27 he travelled for fourteen months visiting 22 countries. He represented the New York Times as an overseas correspondent. Wouldn't it be fascinating to ask him about that travel, and how he became a New York Times correspondent?

What happened in 1936 is a mystery but by 1937, the Rock Island Argus reported that he was speaking to the local Kiwanis about the Suez Canal and the possibility of it being a "trouble spot."

In 1937, he most likely could be found speaking at school assemblies in Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. The most used title was "Off the Beaten Path", which including visits to India, Baghdad, Arabia, Palestine, Egypt and the people of the Suez Canal region. Just imagine in 1937, twenty five years before becoming our President, he was showing students motion pictures of those unusual places.

He was a guest photographer for the crown Prince of Sweden and Princess Ingrid on their vacation trip to the Far East. He was honored by having received the name "El Hadj" Sorensen , meaning successful traveler or pilgrim, from the Iraqi when he visited the Holy City of Najaf, south of Baghdad in southern Iraq.

He had a notebook on which a king in Arabia had written an order giving him permission to go on a trip across the desert at night. He reported on methods of transportation, amusements and domestic habits of the people. He showed the contrast between the old methods used centuries ago, but still in use in these countries and the newer modern machines and methods in use.

Our Dr. Sorensen was described as a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, an author, scientist, world traveler and adventurer. And his presentations were highlighted as very educational, uplifting and humorous.

What were in these presentations? What can we look forward to in 1938 and later years. We'll hear about that next month.