

**Augustana Endowment Society**  
**Historical Reflections from May 2026**  
**by Janet Moline**

**Who was Clarence Woodrow Sorensen? #4**

Using various sources, including Newspaper.com I share the following. For the last three months we have been learning about our 6th President Clarence Woodrow Sorensen.

In the 1940's he continued to give lectures around the country on the use of Propaganda and the "Clashing Empires in Arabia." In the summer of 1940 he studied Spanish at the University of Mexico. He served as the CBS correspondent in Mexico City, broadcasting regularly on the program, "The World Today." The election of 1940 involved violence, and his reports were censored. He was in intimate contact with the leaders of the political parties and the events leading up to the Presidential elections. His experience became a topic for autumn lectures about Mexico.

Much of Dr. Sorensen's focus in 1941 shifted to South America, where he visited every country south of Panama, some more than once. He said our country did not offer enough courses focusing on South America, including teaching Spanish. We had inadequate highways for transportation and little trade. He thought student exchanges between the US and Latin America would build a good neighbor policy. Newspapers.com has some lengthy articles about these lectures that continued through 1947. Many of his talks were sponsored by and given to over 600 Rotary Clubs at its Institute of Understanding.

He spent the spring and summer of 1942 at the University of Chicago engaged in graduate study and research in geopolitics and world geography in the Department of Geography.

From 1943-1947, some of his lecture titles were "We Re-Map the World", "Trouble Brews for Palestine" and "The Constructive Use of Air Travel."

By 1946, Dr. Sorensen, along with two professors from the University of Chicago published two volumes of the textbook, "Man in His World," a postwar series of geography textbooks in American schools. A third volume came in 1947. Dr. Sorensen was the sole author in 1948 of the fourth volume in the "Man and His World" series. By 1949 his writing schedule called for one new book each year until 1951. These textbooks were used in thousands of American high schools. Perhaps you many have been one of the students using his textbooks. Critics hailed them as a notable contribution to education and world understanding.

In September of 1949 he joined the Illinois State Normal University in the Geography Department in teacher training. In 1951 he received his PhD from the U. of Chicago.

In 1952 he had served for nearly a year in Pakistan as an advisor to the ministry of education, directing and assisting in writing textbooks. This was an effort to make textbooks more accessible and cheaper to school children. Written in English, they were translated into Urdu for publication.

The newspaper, the Pantagraph in Bloomington, Illinois has a descriptive array of articles from 1949 to 1962 about his and Edna's travels and his professional leadership.

In 1959 he was selected to be the Dean of the graduate school at Illinois State. In 1961 he was a delegate of the Augustana Lutheran Church to the World Council of Churches meeting in New Delhi, India. By then he had travelled to more than 50 countries.

And finally we come to Augustana. Dr. Sorensen was elected the 6<sup>th</sup> President of Augustana College and was inaugurated November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1962. He was the first layman to head the college and succeeded Dr. Conrad Bergendoff. He would serve until 1975. He died in Rhinelander, WI August 17, 1882 and is buried in Glen Ellen, IL.

Under his guidance, a development office would raise \$3 million in private funds for capital improvements. The Roy J. Carver Center for Physical Education and the John Deere Planetarium were built. The Augustana Theological Seminary buildings would be purchased and become what is now the Fryxell Geology Museum, the Swenson Hall of Geosciences, the Bahls Center, Ascension Chapel, Admissions, and Seminary Hall. Also purchased was the former Augustana Book Concern, now called Sorensen Hall.

Augustana joined the Illinois State Scholarship program. From 1962 to 1975, enrollment went from 1305 to 2187. The size of the full-time faculty grew and included an improvement in Faculty pay and academic credentials. The Faculty Senate was established, and the academic calendar was changed from semesters to quarters, allowing the establishment of successful Fall Quarters Abroad. He encouraged the formation of the Augustana Campus Church, the first student-administered congregation at a Lutheran College. Foreign Language majors were strengthened, and Japanese was added. Two Masters' programs were created: an M.A. in Regional Studies and an M.S. in Applied Science. Four new Department were created: Accounting, Business Administration, Social Work and Speech Therapy. New to the college was Computer Science as well as summer language programs and the establishment of internships.

In 1966-67 from his commitment to international studies he initiated an effort by the presidents of five Lutheran colleges (Augustana, Gettysburg, Gustavus Adolphus, Muhlenberg, and Wittenberg) to develop curriculum and programs related to Asia. This led to the beginning of Asian Studies at Augustana, a program we heard about last October.

An excellent source of information about the Sorensen years can be found in Thomas Tredway's book, *Coming of Age A History of Augustana College, 1935-75* copyright 2010 Augustana College.

The University of Milwaukee has the Edna Schaus and Clarence Woodrow Sorensen photo inventory with over 15,000 contact prints, 16,000 negatives and more than 60,000 slides.

Some of his still pictures appeared in the National Geographic Magazine. His exclusive stories appeared in the New York Times and the London Illustrated News.

The 1960's were turbulent times for colleges and universities and Augustana was no exception. Clarence Woodrow Sorensen, who lectured as part of the Rotary Institute of Understanding kept Augustana on an even keel. He saw the world "not through the eyes of a provincial American but with the breath of view that only a world-wide experience can produce."

As a student at Augustana in the Sorensen years, I wish I would have realized how extraordinary he was.

My notes for these last four history reports for the Augustana Endowment Society will be given to the Special Collections at the Tredway Library.