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J. A. Udden

WVIK, Quad Cities NPR | By [Roald Tweet](#)

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This is Roald Tweet on Rock Island.

I wonder if the board of directors of the University of Texas ever paused to give thanks to Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. Had Augustana paid its professors a living wage at the turn of the century, Texas might not be the great university it is today.

On the campus of the University of Texas stands a monument to a Swedish-American, J. A. Udden, an Augustana graduate, class of 1881. Udden returned to Augustana in 1888 as the professor of natural sciences. For the next twenty-three years, Professor Udden taught botany, zoology, astronomy, physiology, meteorology, and geology.

While he may have engaged in some committee work in his spare time, most of that time was spent examining the geology of the Mississippi Valley. Long before automobiles and roads came to Rock Island, Udden had carefully mapped out the subsurface geology and artesian activity within a radius of thirty miles of the Augustana campus. He published pioneering treatises on prehistoric wind-blown deposits—eventually forty-six papers in *Popular Science Monthly*, and several geological journals.

It was these geological explorations that gained him fame beyond the Augustana

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Iowa geological surveys.

By 1911, his fame had reached Texas, just then getting into the oil business. The University of Texas offered him a position as geologist with the Bureau of Economic Geology and Technology, at a much higher salary than the \$1,500 Augustana was paying. The Augustana Board of Directors refused to budge, and Udden left for Texas.

It was J. A. Udden's explorations at the University of Texas that led to the discovery on the campus of one of Texas' richest oil fields—a permanent endowment for that university. When Udden died in 1932, he was ranked alongside Sam Houston as one of Texas' great heroes.

Even though Augustana played an important role in sending Professor Udden to Texas, the college has no illusions of sharing in the royalty payments, but don't you think it would be a neighborly gesture for Texas to cough up a modest finder's fee?

Rock Island Lines with Roald Tweet is underwritten by the Scott County Regional Authority, with additional funding from the Illinois Arts Council and Augustana College, Rock Island.

Community



Roald Tweet

Beginning 1995, historian and folklorist Dr. Roald Tweet spun his stories of the Mississippi Valley to a devoted audience on WVIK. Dr. Tweet published three books as well as numerous literary articles and recorded segments of "Rock Island Lines." His inspiration was that "kidney-shaped limestone island plunked down in the middle of the Mississippi River," a logical site for a storyteller like Dr. Tweet.

[See stories by Roald Tweet](#)



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