**Sloyd Furniture**
Pyrography Pieces by
Birger Sandzén
Amalia Maria Rabenius
& G. N. Malm

Amalia Maria Rabenius was hired in 1900 to teach in the Model School at Bethany College. More specifically, she started a new program in Sloyd, a curriculum of manual training that teaches the use of a sloyd knife to make a variety of structured projects, usually in wood. The early Bethany catalogs show that she was the teacher of Sloyd, Pyrography, and Embroidery and was the “Lady Principal.” Upon completion of the Sloyd objects, it was thought a young person would have learned a wide variety of skills in working with their hands.

Amalia was born in Kaleby, Sweden, in 1868 and immigrated to the United States in 1898 with her brother, Karl Rabenius, who later became a Lutheran pastor and state representative in Rhode Island.

She attended the teacher’s college at Nääs, Sweden, in 1897 to learn the Sloyd methods. Nääs was the major school that offered this training. It was established in the 1870’s and led by Otto Saloman, with financial backing of his uncle, August Abrahamson. The training was named Educational Sloyd, which is based on a strong educational philosophy focused on the “moral, mental, and physical development of the pupil, the mental development being secured by help of the physical.” (G. Larsson, 1902)

Many teachers from around the world were trained at Nääs and brought Sloyd methods to the educational systems in their countries. Through the efforts of Saloman, there were a number of Swedes who brought the Sloyd philosophy and methods to the United States as well.
Ms. Rabenius taught many students in her Sloyd classes, as it was required of all Model School students. In addition to the Sloyd classes, she taught Pyrography, which is also called pokerwork or woodburning. One of the notable students in her 1900 class was Birger Sandzén.

In addition to her regular teaching in the Model school, in 1903 she began teaching Bible in the Swedish School during the 6 week summer class sessions at Bethany Lutheran Church. She was active with the women of Lindsborg in doing handwork, and was a close friend to Minne Brase, wife of Dr. Hagbard Brase, Bethany’s organ instructor and Messiah Chorus director. She participated as a Swedish dancer in a group directed by G.N. Malm.

Amalia Rabenius left Lindsborg in 1907 to accept a position as superintendent of the Orphan’s Home of the New York Lutheran Conference in Avon, Massachusetts. When she left Bethany, Lydia Sohlberg Deere took her position and continued to teach embroidery and sewing. The Sloyd and Pyrography classes were no longer offered. She died in 1954 at the age of 86 and is buried in Rhode Island.

Dr. Marlysue Holmquist